

SESAME & LILIES
THE TWO PATHS
& THE KING *of the*
GOLDEN RIVER
by JOHN RUSKIN



LONDON & TORONTO
PUBLISHED BY J. M. DENT
& SONS LTD & IN NEW YORK
BY E. P. DUTTON & CO

FIRST ISSUE OF THIS EDITION . 1907
REPRINTED . . . 1909, 1911, 1913, 1916

INTRODUCTION

“Whatever bit of a wise man’s work is honestly and benevolently done, that bit is his book or his piece of art.”—J. R. 1864.

To introduce writings of John Ruskin to any class of English readers ought to be absurdly unnecessary, notwithstanding the fact that they have been beyond the recognized means of many persons : who nevertheless have, some of them, spent an equal amount in ephemeral or less worthy literature. Others have determined to possess them at any cost ; thereby showing the appreciative and discriminating spirit desired and contemplated by their author in fixing the price high ; for he wished his writings to be bought and used by people who would appreciate them, not bought only, nor yet obtained easily without any sacrifice.

Undoubtedly, however, the price of the books has made them actually if not theoretically unknown to the greater number of the populace ; and so, now that they have become easily accessible, a preface of the most simple character may be a temporary help to new readers.

Such alone shall be the aim of this introduction : it shall make no attempt to re-word anything which the author has already perfectly said ; nor shall it attempt to speak to scholars ; it shall merely give initial information sufficient to introduce another selection from these great writings to the unlearned and the simple.

“Sesame” is a lecture on reading, and the right use of books. It was originally given under the title “Kings’ Treasuries” : the idea being that in the silent storehouse of a row of volumes a reader is privileged to hold communion with the Kings and Prophets of all ages ; who are, as it were, awaiting audience—craving it rather than granting it,—and who are ready to share their best thoughts with any

one who comes into their presence bringing with him an intelligent and sympathetic mind.

Incidentally the lecture contains a discourse on the accurate and careful employment of words ; wherein the importance of this branch of culture is forcibly and luminously emphasized, with illustrations from great writers, and notably from Milton. Language is so much the instrument of thinking, that probably no training, not even mathematics, conduces to accuracy of thought so effectively as does the constantly cultivated precision of expression here advocated and illustrated.

But the lecture does not conclude in a literary and intellectual atmosphere : it enters with profound emotion and disquiet into the condition of public and private life in England at the time—not so very different then from what it is to-day,—it calls attention to the mistaken aims and misguided sympathies which are rampant in the land, and while denouncing with prophetic assurance it exhorts with inspired fervour.

Incidentally it may be permissible to explain to young readers that “sesame” is a three-syllabled word, and that it signifies a kind of corn or grain—“that old enchanted Arabian grain” which in the legend was supposed to open doors.

“Lilies,” also called “Queens’ Gardens,” is a lecture on the ideal of womanhood and on the vital education of girls. In places its treatment is probably too direct and didactic to exert the maximum of influence, in the wider outlook of to-day : some patience, and a willingness to supply or to detect indirect qualifications, may be required ; but a discriminating and appreciative reader will be richly rewarded. The lecture is illustrated by the women of Shakespeare, of Scott, and other poets, and by the atmosphere of chivalry ; it appeals to the women of to-day to see that their country is kept beautiful, and that the children in it are given a fair chance ; it appeals to them also to exercise their power and cause unnecessary wars to cease ; it holds up a lofty ideal of service and influence, to be exercised in the most natural and peaceful ways ; it emphasizes the true function of the

Lady amid the rough and tumble activities of men ; and it closes in passages of the utmost eloquence.

Mr. Ruskin says that these lectures cost him much thought and much strong emotion, and that he found it difficult to rouse his audience into sympathy with the temper into which he had brought himself by years of thinking over subjects full of pain. The moral which he finally draws is that the two most heinous sins are Idleness and Cruelty,—two vices which, as he shows, penetrate much deeper than may at first sight be supposed ; and he quotes as two of the most forcible commands—

“Work while you have light.”

and

“Be merciful while you have mercy.”

Mr. Ruskin explains his meaning in his own preface to the 1871 edition, where he convicts of both these sins many who would be horrified at the idea that they could for a moment be really cruel. It may be remembered that the form of torture called “sweating” is not extinct ; nor have purchasers learnt, as yet, how effectively to discourage it. Young readers would do well to refer to this preface if they can get the opportunity. Another form of torture—a form operating chiefly on the mind, and called imprisonment—is still enforced among us ; possibly because few are able keenly to realize what it means. It seems to be a form of punishment which does not forcibly arouse the imagination beforehand, and, therefore, is but slightly deterrent ; but it will soon become a question whether, as a punishment, and except as an opportunity for reformation, confinement is a penalty we have any right to inflict on free and responsible beings—whether in fact a more frankly brutal and bodily form of torment might not righteously be substituted for it, and be more legitimate. The particular phase of cruelty involved in prolonged removal of liberty and suspension of will is not indeed referred to by Mr. Ruskin in the text, but the general utterances of a prophet must be held capable of wide specific application.

"The Two Paths" is the name given to a short collection of lectures on Art, and its application to Decoration and Manufacture. They recall the artist and designer of every kind to the importance of following organic form, and of learning to utilize and represent truly, in architecture as well as in all other constructive arts, the truths of simple natural beauty. These lectures insist that Art is not for the select few alone : that it should be accessible to all : that it should be made in fact by the people for the people, and applied to the most homely and every-day uses, as representing the conscious joy of the maker and increasing the unconscious pleasure of the user.

Lastly there is incorporated in this small volume that remarkable fairy tale—the only one, so far as we know, that Ruskin ever attempted—called "The King of the Golden River." To some people it has seemed one of the best fairy tales that ever was written. It is not nearly so widely known as it ought to be, perhaps because it is barely simple enough for small children ; but it is a beautiful allegory, and it has the advantage of not having become so hackneyed as to be utilized for purposes of parody. It ought to appear with Doyle's illustrations : and it might well be issued in still cheaper form separately.

The parable is in two halves, a sort of Paradise Lost and a Paradise Regained—lost by selfishness, regained by love. The definition of "holy water" may be quoted as typical of its central theme—

"The water which has been refused to the cry of the weary and dying, is unholy, though it had been blessed by every saint in heaven ; and the water which is found in the vessel of mercy is holy, though it had been defiled with corpses."

And the restoration of wealth to Treasure Valley, by restoring the fertility of its soil instead of by metalliferous undertakings, is entirely in harmony with the author's consistent teaching that all true material increase must come from the soil. For land is a means of receiving and utilizing the energy of the sun ; and to that energy every terrestrial activity

is necessarily due. Upon the surface of the planet the solar energy falls, and thereby the earth is enabled to bring forth all her increase. Ownership of the earth's surface is therefore lordship over man ; and it used to be accompanied by the openly-admitted slavery or serfdom of those who, being born without such traditional possession, were unable to receive directly and independently any of the sun's rays except those which fell upon their bodies or upon the king's highway.

It may be that private and individual ownership of a large tract of country is the system best adapted to develop its usefulness and beauty for the good of all. It may be so,—this is not the place to discuss questions of economics ; but whatever be the recognized condition of tenure, whereby the earth's surface is parcelled out among the generation living on it at any given moment, it is clearly a human arrangement, and is properly subject to reconsideration from time to time. It is not a matter in which the future is necessarily dominated and controlled by the past.

OLIVER LODGE

1907.

The following is a list of Ruskin's published works :—

Ruskin's first printed writings were contributions to the "Magazine of Natural History," 1834-6, and Poems in "Friendship's Offering," 1835, Oxford prize poem, "Salsette and Elephanta," 1839.

"Modern Painters," Vol. I. 1843; 2nd ed., 1844; 3rd ed., 1846—later ones followed; Vol. II., 1846; Vol. III., 1856; Vol. IV., 1856; Vol. V., 1860. Complete revised with Bibliography, Notes, etc. (6 vols.), 1888. Selections from "Modern Painters" include "Frondes Agrestes," 1875; "In Montibus Sanctis," 1884; "Coeli Enarrant," 1885.

"Seven Lamps of Architecture," 1849; second edition, 1855.

"The Scythian Guest," 1849 (from "Friendship's Offering");

"Poems," 1850 (from "Friendship's Offering," "Amaranth,"

"London Monthly Miscellany," "Keepsake," Heath's "Book of Beauty," with others not previously printed). "Stones of Venice," Vol. I., 1851; second edition, 1858; Vol. II., 1853; second edition, 1867; Vol. III., 1853; second edition, 1867.

"The King of the Golden River," 1851; "Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds," 1851; "Examples of the Architecture of Venice," 1851; "Pre-Raphaelitism," 1851; "The National Gallery," 1852; "Giotto and his works in Padua," 3 parts, 1853, 1854, 1860; "Lectures on Architecture and Painting," 1854, 1855;

"The Opening of the Crystal Palace," 1854; Pamphlet for the preservation of Ancient Buildings and Landmarks, 1854; "Notes on the Royal Academy," No. I., 1855 (three editions); No. II., 1856 (six editions); No. III. (four editions), 1857 (two editions); Nos. IV., V. and VI., 1858, 1859, 1875; "The Harbours of England," 1856, 1857, 1859; "Notes on the Turner Gallery at Marlborough House," 1856-7 (several editions in 1857); "Catalogue of the Turner Sketches in the National Gallery," 1857 (two editions); "Catalogue of Turner's Drawings," 1857-8;

"The Elements of Drawing," 1857 (two editions); "The Political Economy of Art," 1857, published in 1880 as "A Joy for Ever"; "Inaugural Addresses at the Cambridge School of Art," 1858; "The Geology of Chamouni," 1858; "The Oxford Museum," 1859; "The Unity of Art," 1859; "The Two Paths," 1859; "Elements of Perspective," 1859; "Tree Twigs," 1861;

"Catalogue of Turner Drawings presented to the Fitzwilliam Museum," 1861; "Unto this Last," 1862 (from the "Cornhill Magazine"); "Forms of the Stratified Alps of Savoy," 1863; "The Queen's Gardens," 1864; "Sesame and Lilies," 1865 (two editions); "The Ethics of the Dust," 1866; "The Crown of Wild Olive," 1866 (two editions); "War," 1866; "Time and Tide," 1867;

"Leoni, a legend of Italy," 1868 (from "Friendship's Offering"); "Notes on the Employment of the Destitute and Criminal Classes," 1868; "References to Paintings in illustration of Flamboyant Architecture," 1869; "The Mystery of Life and its Arts" (afternoon lectures), 1869; "The Queen of the Air," 1869 (two editions); "The Future of England," 1870; "Samuel Prout,"

1870 (from "The Art Journal"); "Verona and its Rivers," 1870; "Lectures on Art," 1870; "Drawings and Photographs illustrative of the Architecture of Verona," 1870; "Fors Clavigera," 1871-84; "Munera Pulveris," 1872; "Aratra Pentelici," 1872; "Instructions in Elementary Drawing," 1872; "The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret," 1872; "The Eagle's Nest," 1872; "Monuments of the Cavalli Family," 1872; "The Nature and Authority of Miracle" (from the "Contemporary Review"), 1873; "Val D'Arno," 1874; "Mornings in Florence" (in parts), 1875-7; "Proserpina" (in parts), 1875-86; Vol. I., 1879; "Deucalion" (in parts), 1875-83; Vol. I., 1879; Vol. II. (two parts only), 1880, 1883; "Ariadne Florentina," 1876; "Letters to the 'Times' on Pre-Raphaelite Pictures in the Exhibition of 1854," 1876; "Yewdale and its Streamlets," 1877; "St. Mark's Rest" (3 parts), 1877-9, 1884; "Guide to Pictures in the Academy of Arts, Venice," 1877; "Notes on the Turner Exhibition," 1878; "The Laws of Fésolé" (four parts, 1877-8), 1879; "Notes on the Prout and Hunt Exhibition," 1879-80; "Circular respecting the Memorial Studies at St. Mark's," 1879-80; "Letters to the Clergy" (Lord's Prayer and the Church), 1879, 1880; "Arrows of the Chace," 2 vols., 1880; "Elements of English Prosody," 1880; "The Bible of Amiens," 1884 (first published in parts); "Love's Meinie" (Lectures delivered at Oxford, 1873-81), 1881; "Catalogue of Drawings and Sketches by Turner in the National Gallery," 1881; "Catalogue of Silicious Minerals at St. David's School, Reigate," 1883; "The Art of England," 1884 (originally published as separate lectures); "The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century," 1884; "Catalogue of Specimens of Silica in the British Museum," 1884; "Catalogue of Minerals given to Kirkcudbright Museum," 1884; "The Pleasures of England" (Lectures delivered), 1884-5; "On the Old Road," contributions to Periodical Literature, 2 vols., 1885; "Præterita," 3 vols., 1885-9; "Dilecta," 1886-87; "Hortus Inclusus," 1887; "Ruskiniana," 1890-92; "Poems" (Complete edition), 1891; "Poetry of Architecture," 1892 (from the "Architectural Magazine").

"Stray Letters to a London Bibliophile," 1892; "Letters upon Subjects of General Interest to various Correspondents," 1892; "Letters to William Ward," 1893; "Letters addressed to a College Friend," 1894; Separate Collections of Letters, edited by T. J. Wise, were published 1894, 1895, 1896, and 1897; "Letters to Charles Eliot Norton," edited by C. E. Norton, 1897; "Lectures on Landscape," 1897; "Letters to Mary and Helen Gladstone," 1903.

Works, in eleven volumes, 1871-83; "The Life and Letters and Complete Works," Library Edition, edited by E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 1903, etc., in about 38 volumes.

For Life, see also W. G. Collingwood: "John Ruskin, a Biographical Outline," 1889; "Life and Work of John Ruskin," 1893; "Life of John Ruskin," 1900; Frederic Harrison: "English Men of Letters," 1902.

SESAME AND LILIES

TWO LECTURES

DELIVERED AT MANCHESTER IN 1864

By JOHN RUSKIN

I. OF KINGS' TREASURIES

II. OF QUEENS' GARDENS

“ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς αὐτοῦ ὑπάγει, καὶ ἀγοράζει τὸν ἀγρὸν ἐκεῖνον.”

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SESAME AND LILIES

LECTURE I.—SESAME

OF KINGS' TREASURIES

ἐξ αὐτῆς ἐξελεύσεται ἄρτος, . . . καὶ χῶμα χρυσίον.¹

I BELIEVE, ladies and gentlemen, that my first duty this evening is to ask your pardon for the ambiguity of title under which the subject of lecture has been announced; and for having endeavoured, as you may ultimately think, to obtain your audience under false pretences. For indeed I am not going to talk of kings, known as regnant, nor of treasuries, understood to contain wealth; but of quite another order of royalty, and material of riches, than those usually acknowledged. And I had even intended to ask your attention for a little while on trust, and (as sometimes one contrives in taking a friend to see a favourite piece of scenery) to hide what I wanted most to show, with such imperfect cunning as I might, until we had unexpectedly reached the best point of view by winding paths. But since my good plain-spoken friend, Canon Anson, has already partly anticipated my reserved "trot for the avenue" in his first advertised title of subject, "How and What to Read;"—and as also I have heard it said, by men practised in public address, that hearers are never so much fatigued as by the endeavour to follow a speaker who gives them no clue to his purpose, I will take the slight mask off at once, and tell you plainly that I want to speak to you about books; and about the way we read them, and could, or should read them. A grave subject, you will say; and a wide one! Yes; so wide that I shall make

¹ Job xxviii. 5, 6.

no effort to touch the compass of it. I will try only to bring before you a few simple thoughts about reading, which press themselves upon me every day more deeply, as I watch the course of the public mind with respect to our daily enlarging means of education, and the answeringly wider spreading, on the levels, of the irrigation of literature. It happens that I have practically some connexion with schools for different classes of youth; and I receive many letters from parents respecting the education of their children. In the mass of these letters, I am always struck by the precedence which the idea of a "position in life" takes above all other thoughts in the parents'—more especially in the mothers'—minds. "The education befitting such and such a *station in life*"—this is the phrase, this the object, always. They never seek, as far as I can make out, an education good in itself: the conception of abstract rightness in training rarely seems reached by the writers. But an education "which shall keep a good coat on my son's back;—an education which shall enable him to ring with confidence the visitors' bell at double-belled doors;—education which shall result ultimately in establishment of a double-belled door to his own house; in a word, which shall lead to advancement in life." It never seems to occur to the parents that there may be an education which, in itself, *is* advancement in Life;—that any other than that may perhaps be advancement in Death;—and that this essential education might be more easily got, or given, than they fancy, if they set about it in the right way; while it is for no price, and by no favour, to be got, if they set about it in the wrong.

Indeed, among the ideas most prevalent and effective in the mind of this busiest of countries, I suppose the first—at least that which is confessed with the greatest frankness, and put forward as the fittest stimulus to youthful exertion—is this of "Advancement in life." My main purpose this evening is to determine, with you, what this idea practically includes, and what it should include.

Practically, then, at present, "advancement in life" means becoming conspicuous in life;—obtaining a posi-

tion which shall be acknowledged by others to be respectable or honourable. We do not understand by this advancement, in general, the mere making of money, but the being known to have made it ; not the accomplishment of any great aim, but the being seen to have accomplished it. In a word, we mean the gratification of our thirst for applause. That thirst, if the last infirmity of noble minds, is also the first infirmity of weak ones ; and, on the whole, the strongest impulsive influence of average humanity : the greatest efforts of the race have always been traceable to the love of praise, as its greatest catastrophes to the love of pleasure.

I am not about to attack or defend this impulse. I want you only to feel how it lies at the root of effort ; especially of all modern effort. It is the gratification of vanity which is, with us, the stimulus of toil, and balm of repose ; so closely does it touch the very springs of life that the wounding of our vanity is always spoken of (and truly) as in its measure *mortal* ; we call it "mortification," using the same expression which we should apply to a gangrenous and incurable bodily hurt. And although few of us may be physicians enough to recognise the various effect of this passion upon health and energy, I believe most honest men know, and would at once acknowledge, its leading power with them as a motive. The seaman does not commonly desire to be made captain only because he knows he can manage the ship better than any other sailor on board. He wants to be made captain that he may be *called* captain. The clergyman does not usually want to be made a bishop only because he believes that no other hand can, as firmly as his, direct the diocese through its difficulties. He wants to be made bishop primarily that he may be called "My Lord." And a prince does not usually desire to enlarge, or a subject to gain, a kingdom because he believes that no one else can as well serve the state upon the throne ; but, briefly, because he wishes to be addressed as "Your Majesty," by as many lips as may be brought to such utterance.

This, then, being the main idea of advancement in life, the force of it applies, for all of us, according to our station, particularly to that secondary result of such advancement which we call "getting into good society." We want to get into good society, not that we may have it, but that we may be seen in it; and our notion of its goodness depends primarily on its conspicuousness.

Will you pardon me if I pause for a moment to put what I fear you may think an impertinent question? I never can go on with an address unless I feel, or know, that my audience are either with me or against me: (I do not much care which, in beginning); but I must know where they are; and I would fain find out, at this instant, whether you think I am putting the motives of popular action too low. I am resolved, to-night, to state them low enough to be admitted as probable; for whenever, in my writings on Political Economy, I assume that a little honesty, or generosity,—or what used to be called "virtue"—may be calculated upon as a human motive of action, people always answer me, saying, "You must not calculate on that: that is not in human nature: you must not assume anything to be common to men but acquisitiveness and jealousy; no other feeling ever has influence on them, except accidentally, and in matters out of the way of business." I begin accordingly to-night low down in the scale of motives; but I must know if you think me right in doing so. Therefore, let me ask those who admit the love of praise to be usually the strongest motive in men's minds in seeking advancement, and the honest desire of doing any kind of duty to be an entirely secondary one, to hold up their hands. (*About a dozen of hands held up—the audience partly not being sure the lecturer is serious, and partly shy of expressing opinion.*) I am quite serious—I really do want to know what you think; however, I can judge by putting the reverse question. Will those who think that duty is generally the first, and love of praise the second, motive, hold up their hands? (*One hand reported to have been held up, behind the lecturer.*) Very good: I see you are with me, and

that you think I have not begun too near the ground. Now, without teasing you by putting farther question, I venture to assume that you will admit duty as at least a secondary or tertiary motive. You think that the desire of doing something useful, or obtaining some real good, is indeed an existent collateral idea, though a secondary one, in most men's desire of advancement. You will grant that moderately honest men desire place and office, at least in some measure for the sake of their beneficent power ; and would wish to associate rather with sensible and well-informed persons than with fools and ignorant persons, whether they are seen in the company of the sensible ones or not. And finally, without being troubled by repetition of any common truisms about the preciousness of friends, and the influence of companions, you will admit, doubtless, that according to the sincerity of our desire that our friends may be true, and our companions wise,—and in proportion to the earnestness and discretion with which we choose both, will be the general chances of our happiness and usefulness.

But, granting that we had both the will and the sense to choose our friends well, how few of us have the power ! or, at least, how limited, for most, is the sphere of choice ! Nearly all our associations are determined by chance, or necessity ; and restricted within a narrow circle. We cannot know whom we would ; and those whom we know, we cannot have at our side when we most need them. All the higher circles of human intelligence are, to those beneath, only momentarily and partially open. We may, by good fortune, obtain a glimpse of a great poet, and hear the sound of his voice ; or put a question to a man of science, and be answered good-humouredly. We may intrude ten minutes' talk on a cabinet minister, answered probably with words worse than silence, being deceptive ; or snatch, once or twice in our lives, the privilege of throwing a bouquet in the path of a Princess, or arresting the kind glance of a Queen. And yet these momentary chances we covet ; and spend our years, and passions, and powers in pursuit of little more than

these; while, meantime, there is a society continually open to us, of people who will talk to us as long as we like, whatever our rank or occupation;—talk to us in the best words they can choose, and with thanks if we listen to them. And this society, because it is so numerous and so gentle,—and can be kept waiting round us all day long, not to grant audience, but to gain it;—kings and statesmen lingering patiently in those plainly furnished and narrow anterooms, our bookcase shelves,—we make no account of that company,—perhaps never listen to a word they would say, all day long!

You may tell me, perhaps, or think within yourselves, that the apathy with which we regard this company of the noble, who are praying us to listen to them, and the passion with which we pursue the company, probably of the ignoble, who despise us, or who have nothing to teach us, are grounded in this,—that we can see the faces of the living men, and it is themselves, and not their sayings, with which we desire to become familiar. But it is not so. Suppose you never were to see their faces;—suppose you could be put behind a screen in the statesman's cabinet, or the prince's chamber, would you not be glad to listen to their words, though you were forbidden to advance beyond the screen? And when the screen is only a little less, folded in two, instead of four, and you can be hidden behind the cover of the two boards that bind a book, and listen, all day long, not to the casual talk, but to the studied, determined, chosen addresses of the wisest of men;—this station of audience, and honourable privy council, you despise!

But perhaps you will say that it is because the living people talk of things that are passing, and are of immediate interest to you, that you desire to hear them. Nay; that cannot be so, for the living people will themselves tell you about passing matters, much better in their writings than in their careless talk. But I admit that this motive does influence you, so far as you prefer those rapid and ephemeral writings to slow and enduring writings—books, properly so called. For all books are