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THE CROWN OF WILD OLIVE, ETC. WITH INTRODUCTION BY CLIFFORD BAX

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LONDON: J. M. DENT & SONS, LTD.
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.

INTRODUCTION

ALREADY to idealists of the younger generation the sombre years in which Ruskin wrote have begun to be touched with beauty, and even with romance. The imagination delights to inhabit, as far as it may, that era when the great poets were building up the Elizabethan drama, and now we begin to recall, almost in the same way, the period when Rossetti, Morris, and Burne-Jones were creating in the least romantic of ages the most romantic of all poems or paintings in the story of English art.

Much of their earliest impulse was due to the influence of Ruskin, and all through the time when they were painting and writing he was labouring to evoke, in the English people, a reverence for beauty and a more intelligent religious interest in art. He was never wearied of demonstrating the high position which ought to be given to the arts in the life of a civilised people, for he knew that when a nation adds nothing to the beauty of the world, it is remembered neither clearly nor with affection by the men of after-times. And as we read the lectures in this book it is not easy to realise that their author is no more living, so real and so passionately felt are the words that were spoken half a century ago. Nor in truth for any but those who "make their dullard's distinction between life and books" is Ruskin an influence of the past. His words are the living reflection of a spirit beautiful and fearless. Every page still burns with an unrelenting sincerity, and we cannot put aside the truth if it disturbs us by the assurance that the writer really cares but little for what he declares. Ruskin did not fear to strike boldly at the rotten roots of a nation, and he took up his position without any

thought of escape. To do this great courage was needed, since such work immediately provokes conservative criticism and the resistance of those who only live by tradition.

The root-quality of Ruskin's nature was a profound admiration for order; it was this that led him to seek out and enunciate broad principles or theories whether in ethics or in art. In the statement of these principles he often displays a striking dramatic sense. His lectures open with some astonishing statement which holds fast the attention by rousing that feeling of suspense which is the secret of dramatic effect. When he addresses an audience of young soldiers, he wins their attention at the outset by declaring that in a warless nation the arts inevitably wane! Under the imminence of war men live intensely, he tells them, and this quickening of energy, being magnetic, imparts a new virility to craftsmen and thinkers, and kindles a fresh fire. It is only when thus he has won their sympathy that he qualifies the statement and shows his audience that the soldiers' duty is not merely to obey, but to obey the right, and that war which is wrongly undertaken can never have any beneficial result. Perhaps no better illustration of this dramatic treatment may be found than in the famous lecture in *The Two Paths* where he compares the elaborate art of India with the artlessness of Scotland, for the comparison threatens to destroy utterly the principle which opens the discourse. He delights in this way to confront himself with difficulties, and to go forth to battle with Goliath.

But apart from the method of his argument, and the rightness or wrongness of his thought, there is here, as in every one of Ruskin's books, the particular element of his style to be considered. Lecturing or writing, he spoke or wrote when he was most inspired, with a faultless ear for music, and with a strength, a suppleness and a variety that are lacking in the pages of the greatest of his contemporaries. Two among them have especially

been compared with him: Walter Pater and Matthew Arnold. But Pater's style remains monotonous because it lies unchangingly at the same level, or it is too bewilderingly ornate; and Arnold's style, while it has a classic power, lacks that rarer grace of prose when a thought like a dancer moves apparently careless but really lost in her own delight. The style of Walter Pater, though too minutely stippled, is that of a great artist in words; Matthew Arnold wrote as an architect may build. But the style of John Ruskin is that of a poet before whom words are obedient, who moulds them entirely at will to shapes of lightness or of strength, illuminating the scheme of the builder with glowing colour.

Yet fervour of feeling and beauty of phrase can hardly of itself give greatness to poetry or prose; for this the architectural element, the subservience of the parts to the whole, a sacrifice from which they gain so much, is fundamentally needed, and Ruskin (perhaps on account of his long and profound study of architecture) possessed in a large measure the sense of unity and structure. In the lecture on "Traffic" he speaks of the three great European styles, the Grecian, the Gothic and the Renaissance, remarking of the second how it is "conceived in a mingled sentiment of melancholy and aspiration, partly severe, partly luxuriant, which will lend itself to every one of our needs and every one of our fancies." "Partly severe, partly luxuriant" are words that apply well to his own style, and of this the Introduction to the *Crown of Wild Olive* affords a fine example.

It may be that his ear was too often caught by the trick of antithesis, and sometimes there is a tendency to play with words of a similar sound in a manner that reminds us of the serious puns which mar certain passages of Egyptian poetry. But these are insignificant blemishes. In an essay elsewhere he speaks of the disappointment he felt when the beauty of his expression was praised and the meaning behind it either

ignored or rejected, for as he continually asserted, "the life is more than the meat and the body than the raiment."

There is at present a curious reaction against Ruskin. It is due to several causes, but firstly it falls to the lot of every writer who has won a general acceptance during his lifetime that when he dies he should be largely and suddenly forsaken. In the ten years that follow the death of a prominent man his achievements undergo the severest of all criticism. People imagine that the works he has left must somehow have lost a portion at least of their original life. The new generation is eager for new influences, for something that is not yet finished, that possesses the magnetism of all expanding things. There is the sense of uncertainty, of suspense, which appeals irresistibly to those who are dazzled by the present. To most men the living hour seems ever more weighty and more real than the past, and it is few indeed—only those that are dreaming of the future and are overshadowed by the sense of eternity—who can realise the transience of their own time, regarding the present excitement as they regard the struggles of ended lives.

And thus it is that a writer who has addressed himself to his contemporaries inevitably passes through a period of neglect. He is too complete for the curious multitude and at the same time he is too modern to secure the attention of the studious few. Such is the momentary position of Ruskin. There was an impatience, apparently childish, in some of his utterances, and at certain times he followed his thoughts to the point of exaggeration. It is these qualities, and an unhesitating assurance, which appear to repulse a large number of people who have not gone far enough to discern the grandeur of his main structure. Objections of such a kind are unworthy of consideration; but the main contemporary distrust of Ruskin as a guide would seem to be due to a larger cause. Throughout his life he in-

sisted that the highest art is the outcome of good thought, and even, in one passage, declares that the deficiences or defects of certain painters can be detected in the style of their pictures. He was interested not only in the fineness of perception and the skill of hand exhibited in a painting, but quite equally in the quality of the chosen theme. The little schools of the hour disdain the consideration of subject-matter, and cry with much insistence that beauty of expression alone can constitute the artistic value of poem or picture. Beauty of art, they repeat with much vehemence, need have no connection with beauty of life and loftiness of aim. To-day, and ever since the powerful influence of Rossetti was first felt, the artist has taken the place of the poet. We read that any mood which has existed has therefore won the right of artistic embodiment. Perhaps this is true, but unless the mood have something of aspiration and nobility it cannot be genuine poetry. There are those who seek for beauty of treatment and ignore the selection of theme: others who appreciate poem or picture regardless of inadequate workmanship, only caring for the mood or thought beyond it. Both are at fault, for the latter prove themselves to be void of a sense for art, and the former of a sense for poetry. The pure artist has nothing to express but his own perception of beauty; the poet has in addition to this the whole range of pity, and wonder, tragedy, worship and joy. The true poet will never be limited by national and impermanent standards of right and wrong, but will glory to bind himself by his own perception or instinct of what is noble and what is base. Art is in truth unmoral; poetry is the loftiest morality of man.

Now, this is assuredly what Ruskin means when he says in the lecture on "Traffic"—"Tell me what you like and I'll tell you what you are," for "taste is the only morality." Art, he declares, ought to lead men to love and desire the good, and when the good is discerned as the beautiful and joyous, as it is in the

poetry of Shelley, how swiftly and with what ardour do we also desire and believe it! The repression of what is unworthy forms but the basis for spiritual beauty. The spirit of man destroys, but it also creates and never destroys the old so completely as when it creates the new. The soul flies up to a fresh ideal and the earth of itself recedes.

The same desire for harmony and order permeates the whole of Ruskin's thought. He knew that beauty is energy controlled, he felt that the principles of art are exactly applicable to the conduct of life. In the paper on "Work," when he makes but two classes of all men, the workers and the idlers, we find him teaching what is closely allied to Socialism. But his ideals are touched with a sense of moral beauty that few practical Socialists have included in their systems. In all this part of his work he shows his kinship with William Morris; both divine the value of art in a movement that seeks to unchain the multitude. For it is art which can best refine and restrain a people that is brought to sudden freedom, and that would otherwise threaten to demolish all culture in adapting the world to their sensual and selfish aims. But Ruskin evolved his own economic system, and having some intuition of "what thing cometh after death," was able to root his reforms in the spiritual nature of man. He believed in the goodness of humankind; he believed that men would quickly respond if their duty were made clear and they themselves no longer enslaved by circumstance. "Work," he says, "must be honest, useful, and cheerful," and all that is done without joy can only be thought of as toil. In these three fathomless words, and the phrase "all evil is traceable to wealth," he has epitomised his economic philosophy. Charity, he declares, ought hardly to exist; for if men were just there would be no place for charity. And again in *The Cestus of Aglaia*, those papers that gave an inestimable value to the old *Art Journals* of 1865 and 1866, we discern how deeply

he desired that all activities might combine in one great social harmony. There again he states emphatically that the aim of art is more than to amuse, and that art is only justified when it is of service to the best in man, when beauty of form is given to beauty of thought alone.

There are men so "practical" that in art they can see no social value, but Ruskin sought continually to establish the position of art in the scheme of life. He showed how in art the nations have written, unconsciously perhaps, their spiritual histories. But so fierce has become the struggle of man with man, so nearly has national consciousness become obliterated, that artists of to-day are driven more and more to take refuge in themselves, and all but they have so far lost the desire for beauty that they cannot associate themselves any longer with the spirit of their age. Art has become individual, for national aspirations are not now worthy of expression in sculpture, picture, or poem. Ruskin saw this clearly and laboured unflaggingly to awaken, in a larger number of people, some social and moral ideal that might be fair enough to kindle the praise of the artist, and in this way remain imperishably recorded.

In latter life he devoted himself especially to the rousing of a demand for art rather than to a stimulation of the supply. The intricacies of art in which he had so deep an interest he designated "trifles," for he felt perhaps that until the tyranny of relentless toil be lifted from "misery's multitude," it is vain to hope for a national aspiration to beauty. There would seem to be two reasons why the social ideals that he taught have not yet received an enthusiastic support. In the first place his life, as he admits, was to some degree "sheltered," and he did not perhaps quite realise the complexity of the world. Sometimes, indeed, from this very simplicity, he seems to approach mere sentimentality as when in this book he speaks of the necessity for men to become as little children. He wished them

to be gentle as doves, but hardly saw the necessity for the serpent's wisdom.

People therefore imagine that the principles he preaches are inapplicable to a busy and unmeditative life. It certainly seems likely that had Ruskin lived more in the world of action he would have modified many of his more exaggerated statements, but in their main tendency he would assuredly have left them as they stand; for in him aspiration was unquenchable.

The real cause of his neglect, we conclude, lies in his greatness. Most men are born with a spiritual inertness, a bias in the direction of the average; they find no joy in the culture of the will, which, after love, is the noblest principle of the soul; they weave the subtlest of all possible excuses for the refusal of a great ideal, for they know that if they should accept it there must follow an entire transformation of the self. Of this they are afraid, for between the new day and the old there is night and a period of solitude, and they do not remember that "the soul is its own refuge and its own witness." A glimpse of the ideal which Ruskin held may be found in the majestic and peerless passage which at the end of the second lecture he quotes from Plato. His dream was largely influenced by the best of mediæval chivalry, which in its turn has been said to have risen from Plato's doctrine of love. In the days to come when "the world is a water at rest," and the heart of man shall have grown to wisdom, surely the figure of Ruskin will shine with something of a seer's glory, and the men of those days will marvel perhaps that one so powerful was able to achieve so little. But he really achieved more than appears on the surface, seeing that he spoke only to the highest nature of men. "For they must be told that they possess at all times, as a gift from the gods, a divine gold and silver in the soul, and have no need of the human,"

CLIFFORD BAX.

May 1908.

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. Selections from "Modern Painters" have been published under the titles of "Frondes Agrestes," 1875; "In Montibus Sanctis," 1884; "Cœli 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; "Of 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 Engand," 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 Fésole" (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), 1844–5; "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; Library Edition, edited by E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 1903, etc.

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

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PREFACE

TWENTY years ago, there was no lovelier piece of lowland scenery in South England, nor any more pathetic, in the world, by its expression of sweet human character and life, than that immediately bordering on the sources of the Wandle, and including the lower moors of Addington, and the villages of Beddington and Carshalton, with all their pools and streams. No clearer or diviner waters ever sang with constant lips of the hand which "giveth rain from heaven;" no pastures ever lightened in spring time with more passionate blossoming; no sweeter homes ever hallowed the heart of the passer-by with their pride of peaceful gladness——fain-hidden—yet full-confessed. The place remains, or, until a few months ago, remained, nearly unchanged in its larger features; but, with deliberate mind I say, that I have never seen anything so ghastly in its inner tragic meaning,—not in Pisan Maremma,—not by Campagna tomb,—not by the sand-isles of the Torcellan shore,—as the slow stealing of aspects of reckless, indolent, animal neglect, over the delicate sweetness of that English scene: nor is any blasphemy or impiety—any frantic saying or godless thought—more appalling to me, using the best power of judgment I have to discern its sense and scope, than the insolent defiling of those springs by the human herds that drink of them. Just where the welling of stainless water, trembling and pure, like a body of light, enters the pool of Carshalton, cutting itself a radiant channel down to the gravel, through warp of feathery weeds, all waving, which it traverses with its deep threads of clearness, like the chalcedony in moss-agate, starred here and

there with the white grenouillette; just in the very rush and murmur of the first spreading currents, the human wretches of the place cast their street and house foulness; heaps of dust and slime, and broken shreds of old metal, and rags of putrid clothes; they having neither energy to cart it away, nor decency enough to dig it into the ground, thus shed into the stream, to diffuse what venom of it will float and melt, far away, in all places where God meant those waters to bring joy and health. And, in a little pool, behind some houses farther in the village, where another spring rises, the shattered stones of the well, and of the little fretted channel which was long ago built and traced for it by gentler hands, lie scattered, each from each, under a ragged bank of mortar, and scoria; and bricklayers' refuse, on one side, which the clean water nevertheless chastises to purity; but it cannot conquer the dead earth beyond; and there, circled and coiled under festering scum, the stagnant edge of the pool effaces itself into a slope of black slime, the accumulation of indolent years. Half-a-dozen men, with one day's work, could cleanse those pools, and trim the flowers about their banks, and make every breath of summer air above them rich with cool balm; and every glittering wave medicinal, as if it ran, troubled of angels, from the porch of Bethesda. But that day's work is never given, nor will be; nor will any joy be possible to heart of man, for evermore, about those wells of English waters.

When I last left them, I walked up slowly through the back streets of Croydon, from the old church to the hospital; and, just on the left, before coming up to the crossing of the High Street, there was a new public-house built. And the front of it was built in so wise manner, that a recess of two feet was left below its front windows, between them and the street-pavement—a recess too narrow for any possible use, (for even if it had been occupied by a seat, as in old time it might have

been, everybody walking along the street would have fallen over the legs of the reposing wayfarers). But, by way of making this two feet depth of freehold land more expressive of the dignity of an establishment for the sale of spirituous liquors, it was fenced from the pavement by an imposing iron railing, having four or five spear-heads to the yard of it, and six feet high; containing as much iron and iron-work, indeed, as could well be put into the space; and by this stately arrangement, the little piece of dead ground within, between wall and street, became a protective receptacle of refuse; cigar ends, and oyster shells, and the like, such as an open-handed English street-populace habitually scatters from its presence, and was thus left, unsweepable by any ordinary methods. Now the iron bars which, uselessly, (or in great degree worse than uselessly) enclosed this bit of ground, and made it pestilent, represented a quantity of work which would have cleansed the Carshalton pools three times over;—of work, partly cramped and deadly, in the mine; partly fierce[1] and exhaustive, at the furnace; partly foolish and sedentary, of ill-taught students making bad designs: work from the beginning to the last fruits of it, and in all the branches of it, venomous, deathful, and miserable. Now, how did it come to pass that this work was done instead of the other; that the strength and life of the

[1] "A fearful occurrence took place a few days since, near Wolverhampton. Thomas Snape, aged nineteen, was on duty as the 'keeper' of a blast furnace at Deepfield, assisted by John Gardner, aged eighteen, and Joseph Swift, aged thirty-seven. The furnace contained four tons of molten iron, and an equal amount of cinders, and ought to have been run out at 7.30 P.M. But Snape and his mates, engaged in talking and drinking, neglected their duty, and, in the meantime, the iron rose in the furnace until it reached a pipe wherein water was contained. Just as the men had stripped, and were proceeding to tap the furnace, the water in the pipe, converted into steam, burst down its front and let loose on them the molten metal, which instantaneously consumed Gardner; Snape, terribly burnt, and mad with pain, leaped into the canal and then ran home and fell dead on the threshold; Swift survived to reach the hospital, where he died too."