GRAHAM JOHN WILLIAM

THE HARVEST OF RUSKIN

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Содержание

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PREFACE

T HIS book is concerned with Ruskin's teaching in the departments of Religion and Economics only, including his social reforms and educational schemes. It leaves out all his work on Art and in Natural History and Mineralogy. His thoughts on Beauty in Landscape are treated only so far as that Beauty is damaged by Industrialism or by War. Nor has any attempt been made to produce an analysis of his literary style or styles. The long extracts which the plan of the book requires, however, afford sufficient examples of his artistry in words.

My aim is to give a critical estimate in a reverent spirit of Ruskin's teaching in these two departments, and to apply it to the needs of our own time.

The development of Ruskin's religious faith and its final outcome have not, I believe, been fully worked out before, and the reconciliation which I have attempted in the region of Economics is long overdue. These parts of the book have been delivered as lectures in past years under the Manchester and Liverpool University Extension Committees, at Summer Schools, and elsewhere.

I am indebted to Ruskin's literary executors for permission to quote freely from his works.

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CHAPTER I
THE SIGNS OF A PROPHET

N OW that one hundred years have gone by since their one precious boy was born in London to a Scottish wine merchant and his wife, it may be well to ask how much of Ruskin's teaching has proved to be chaff which the wind driveth away, and how much has been precious seed. Ruskin is just now suffering from the time of comparative neglect which intervenes between an author's contemporaries and posterity, the years when the immediate appropriateness of his message may have lapsed, when it is no longer fresh and startling, but its permanent value has not yet been settled by the verdict of several generations. All or nearly all the great Victorians are in like case.

Ruskin's art criticism is, as a matter of fact, not only ignored but resolutely rejected nowadays among critical writers. He loved beauty and charm in subject; he rejected scenes of horror and torture, and also subjects of mere Dutch commonplace. He loved delicate and accurately minute drawing, and the realistic detail of the Preraphælites. He desired that a tree in a picture should be recognized as an oak or a birch; and he loved above all fine drawing of mosses, leaves, and peacocks' wings. This is the day of impressionism, super-impressionism and impression of impressionism, and so on, through ever greater abandonment

of drawing and significance, to cubism, futurism and other weird follies. I am not wishful to dogmatize on these matters; I incline to the sage and wonderful conclusion that all styles are good provided they are good styles; that conscientiousness in the portrayal of what the artist really sees will not lead him astray; that originality, or at any rate a marked individual gift, is a necessity; and that there is no one orthodox school. As in everything else, the letter killeth, convention blocks progress, and slovenliness includes a multitude of sins.

But this book is not concerned with art criticism, but with the teaching about human duty and happiness, to which Ruskin's art interests led him. The characteristic note he contributed to art criticism was to regard art as a revelation of God and of Man. He was a prophet of Beauty from his birth. Concerning his susceptibility in childhood to the power of natural Beauty, he writes in the third volume of *Modern Painters*,[1] in words which throw light upon his special gifts of temperament: "Although there was no definite religious sentiment mingled with it, there was a continual perception of sanctity in the whole of Nature, from the slightest thing to the vastest; an instinctive awe, mixed with delight; an indefinable thrill, such as we sometimes imagine to indicate the presence of a disembodied spirit. I could only feel this perfectly when I was alone; and then it would often make me shiver from head to foot from the joy and fear of it, when, after being some time away from the hills, I first got to the shore

[1] Chap. xiv. § 19.

of a mountain river, where the brown water circled among the pebbles, or when I first saw the swell of distant land against the sunset, or the first low broken wall covered with mountain moss. I cannot in the least describe the feeling; but I do not think this is my fault, nor that of the English language, for I am afraid no feeling is describable. If we had to explain even the sense of bodily hunger to a person who had never felt it, we should be hard put to it for words; and the joy in nature seemed to me to come of a sort of heart-hunger, satisfied with the presence of a Great and Holy Spirit. These feelings remained in their full intensity till I was eighteen or twenty, and then, as the reflective and practical power increased, and the 'cares of the world' gained upon me, faded gradually away, in the manner described by Wordsworth in his *Intimations of Immortality*."

The fact is that we are dealing with a man who belongs to the prophetic order: and this book is written in the belief that he was not only a prophet for the nineteenth, but also for the twentieth century. He has all the prophetic signs. Right or wrong, fantastic or terribly truthful, we feel that he is coining his soul into golden words. The stress and strain of his cry against priesthoods, modern business, false teaching of economics as he thought it, wore him out, and left him subject to attacks of inflammation of the brain. Rightly he spoke of *Fors Clavigera* as the book of his life; "best worth calling a book," he said, of anything he had written. With it his serious work ended in 1884. Only the chatty reminiscences of *Præterita* were to be written after that.

He had, besides a dreadful sincerity, another mark of the true afflatus. Never, as he pleaded, had he written a line for money or for the glory of self. It was the wrong done to Turner that drove him to write *Modern Painters*; the necessity of character in a nation was the lesson he had to teach in tracing the history of Venice in her monuments; the cry of the poor, and indignation over the wrecking of humanity in the name of business, drove him to write *Unto This Last*, and all his social and economic works. He had the single-mindedness of the seer.

Again, he inspired love and discipleship in hearts ready for his message, as prophets do. The Master he was called, and the Master he remains. His loss was a personal loss. The event of January 20, 1900, was to many of us a real bereavement. The strong personal note which caused the prophets Isaiah and Hosea to do in their own persons emblematic acts for a sign, caused Ruskin also to tell his readers more about himself than anyone would who did not identify himself with his message. To the unseeing eye this looks like egotism, but it is far from that.

His life, too, was such as a prophet's ought to be. He gave away the greater part of a fortune of £157,000, and some house property, and chose to do without advertising his books. In love and in the loss of love he suffered, but did nothing base, everything that was kind and true. As a prophet whose burden was wealth and poverty, social tyranny and human wreckage, he was able to speak as a rich man to members of his own class. A poor man who prophesies on this subject is apt to be discounted

by blunt humanity, who think that he may be merely an envious grumbler.

And, once again, he has that characteristic of the messengers of the Truth, that their message is too new and strange to be acceptable at once to their contemporaries. They are accepted by the few: the world smiles or curses and passes by, but gradually it bends round in one of its great curves, and round its spiral path revolves as it approaches the centre of attraction. I shall try to show that much of Ruskin's social and economic teaching is just such a centre of our constant approximation, though we are apparently always going nearly at right angles to it.

Here, then, we have every sign of the prophetic character: fidelity to the deepest motives of the soul, an inevitable and generally unconscious selflessness, the loyalty of his followers, his frank openness to the world, his consecrated life and holy sorrow, the antagonisms he evoked and the contempt of the proud, and the clear influence he is exerting – these, all together, are prophetic.

Let us examine his outward qualifications. Ruskin's judgment was at times erratic; his playfulness and his petulance prevent our taking everything he said with prosaic seriousness; he was not always able to speak in measured tones of sober exactness, but gave way to exaggeration. But his intellectual equipment was of the best. He was heir both to Greece and to Judæa. The Bible was his text-book and Plato was his political teacher. All culture was at his command. Oxford, Geneva, Rome, Venice, the Alps, the

Apennines and the Lake of Coniston had yielded up their best to him. He prophesied from no street corner – from the Sheldonian Theatre in the University of Oxford his message was uttered.

So much for the signs and for the outward qualifications of the seer. The prophet's fire is recognizably there. The tabernacle of God is with men, as of old; and if He is to speak with a clear Word to our hasting age, to preach righteousness, purity, work to the idle and rest to the weary, clean cities, and clean hearts, how else would He preach than with the text of Ruskin: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you that your millionaires in all their glory of machines cannot supply to us the loss of these."

At the age of forty-one, about the time when the mind reaches maturity, begin the social teachings of John Ruskin in full completeness – not to be much changed, except in one particular, for the quarter of a century of writing that was left him. The live coal from off the altar came to him as he was wandering in restless suffering among the valleys of Savoy, and his first "Thus saith the Lord" was written at Chamonix. Not that all this came at once. The growth can be traced; but before 1860 he was chiefly an art critic, and in that year the last volume of *Modern Painters* appeared.

Let us look at the advantages of the delay. They were manifold. A man should do something else besides prophesy. He should win his position, take his rank among men, in some walk of life, before he is quite qualified to tell others how to order their

steps. He has a degree to take in something besides homiletics. It was from the pulpit of a great literary reputation that the author of *Modern Painters* opened his mouth to preach. That reputation he was content utterly to throw away; to tread on it, step upon it as upon a ladder, that from the top of it he might be heard when he spoke the words the Spirit taught him. That was the great renunciation of his literary life. What a refusal of a call it would have been had he hugged his reputation, been careful of his influence, that last temptation of noble minds. It is politicians who do that, not prophets. But these know the glorious liberty into which they come.

No doubt any other professional career would have ended with a message. What an explosion might have occurred in the Church had his mother's wish been fulfilled, and he become a clergyman, with a Bishop to look after him. As it was, his father's art tastes and preoccupation with pictures and with picturesque scenery, and the boy's own early skill both as writer and draughtsman, led him, after an attempt at poetry, to become by profession a writer on Art. There he had the opportunity of elaborating his mighty implement, that superb, facile, plastic instrument of music and voice of thunder, his inimitable style. It is that which ensures the preservation of his work. Noble style is the antiseptic which preserves from decay the written words of men. Books without style are not read long.

In classifying the books in our libraries, under what head shall we place the seventy volumes of John Ruskin? There

is much temptation to fall back helplessly upon the heading "Miscellaneous"; for he wrote on Art, including Sculpture, Engraving, Architecture and Heraldry; on Economics, History and constructive Politics; on Botany, Meteorology, Ornithology, Geology, and Mineralogy; he wrote Guide-books, Poems, Autobiography, Literary Criticism; he treated Theology, Ethics, Education, Music and Mythology; he brought out regularly for seven years a monthly periodical *de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*; he edited Biography, German stories and translations from the Greek and the Italian: he wrote Dialogue and Fairy Tale.

Where shall we seek for unity in this manifold outpouring of a versatile genius, who touched none of these subjects without irradiating it? In that fact lies our key. With what did he irradiate this comprehensive list of human interests? The answer cannot be doubtful in the mind of any careful student. He told us how it seemed to him that all these things looked to the eye of God. He tried to solve all questions by the flashlight of the Eternal. He worked at agate and crystal that it might reveal the beauty of the Lord; he fought his social crusade for the sake of the dim disinherited multitude who had no eyes for the Divine loveliness, and no glory to behold: and for the sake of justice and of love which wealth and luxury denied. He was a messenger of the Most High to modern needs; and his eager soul found a service throughout this wide range of science and art.

Not one of his writings is called a sermon, yet we have found his class, for he belongs to the class of Divines, ordained in a

temple more Metropolitan and more Catholic than Canterbury or Rome, and not made with hands. Through nearly half a century of active authorship he consecrated his every gift to the service of men. He never looked back in any unfaithfulness that we know of. I wish first to make clear that all his life the gates between the soul and the Divine Source were open: that he was truly a religious man under every form of faith and doubt; and that no one need hesitate about this at any tight place in his career. Keep this as a sure clue, and we shall fearlessly follow his story.

The childish sensibility to landscape beauty I take to be an early manifestation of the gift of the seer, a significant token of native nearness to the Unseen. For many years he never climbed a mountain, alone, without instinctively dropping on his knees on the summit, in thankful reverence. As the careless foot of an engrossing industrialism stamped into ashes more and more of the land whose fairness had been his life's passion, it seemed to him to be indeed sacrilege and desecration, a reckless destruction of Divine things. Art he only valued as a form of expression, a language whose subject was Nature and Man. In the latter half of his life more emphatically, but more or less from the beginning, he regarded Man as the object for whose welfare Nature, in the landscape sense, existed; and he rested not till he had brought Man into due relation with God, up to whom in the end came all things.

He was devout by training. Morning and evening he read his chapter out of the Bible; and the fourteenth century manuscript

he used in later years occupied a prominent and handy place in the study at Brantwood. In Swiss and Italian villages in his early journeys he read the service through on Sunday to his servant, when there was no Protestant Church. From the Biblical references in the indexes to his works, you would suppose they were a theological library. In his Oxford Lectures Art was the illustration, but conduct the theme, and Art was chosen as an illustration because in it the artist shows what manner of Man he is, in a way that cannot be dissembled.

What are the qualifications which fit a man to be a religious researcher, a mountain-top gazer into heaven?

He must know from his own experience the meaning of holiness, thereby gaining a practical knowledge of God. He must, in Pauline words, be crucified with Christ, though he may not care for such an expression; he must preach not himself and please not himself. Such a man John Ruskin was. Among the many wayward and impulsive men who have been "dear to the Muses and to the nymphs not unbeloved," not all like him have been also masters of themselves, and kept on their foreheads the white stone, with the new name written. Ruskin was himself noble and sweet in his life, a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief endured in silence, with nothing ignoble in his eighty years of generous charity and lonely service. He had passed, too, through that experience which seems essential to the wielding of spiritual power. He had had his great renunciation, he had heard some hard call, and had obeyed. The prophets have all gone

on the Via Crucis: they have all lost their lives that they might find them. As Whittier abandoned a hopeful political career and remained poor till he was sixty that he might help to free the slave, and gained his spiritual power thereby, so Ruskin in 1860 went boldly out to do battle with the Society that loved and honoured him.

Further, such a man must greatly dare. He must face the demon of the study first; then, too probably, the resentment of organized religion. One cannot succeed as a researcher without discovering something new; and that is bound to modify or overthrow something old and established.

Nor can such a man usually present a heart of iron and a front of brass to the darts of controversy. He must be a sensitive man, by the very nature of his research. He may or may not be privileged to feel strong in the strength of his cause; but even if he does the shrinking of the nerves remains. This daring and suffering were pre-eminently the lot of Ruskin; and it was this which finally broke down his mind. "He was beside himself for others' sakes." It was the neglect with which the St. George's Guild and allied reform work were treated by those who were otherwise his friends, which contributed to drive him into inflammation of the brain in 1878, and again several times afterwards. "Wounded in the house of my friends."

Besides these essential qualifications Ruskin had his very unusual gifts, which it may be long before we find again combined with the religious faculty – his long lifetime free from

the need of earning money, his early popularity, his wonderful style, the vantage ground of his Professorial chair, his penetrating mind, his wit and his fire. It may be long before we see his like again.

I am far from claiming infallibility for Ruskin. Infallibility is an out-of-date conception altogether. There is no such thing on earth. To be infallible you must know everything; you must be infinite. The infallibility of a finite creature is an inhuman, even an inorganic conception. Organic life means growth, and growth means imperfection; but growth is Nature's way of making things. Infallibility is a tyrant born of ecclesiasticism, and bred on human laziness and fear. It has become the attribute of the quack pill, and there let it abide.

But, beyond this safe generality, Ruskin had human weaknesses of an obvious kind. He loved paradox; he played with his thunderbolts a little, and rather liked to shock people. He was a humorist as well as a divine. It is difficult to put down some of his derivations to anything but sheer fooling; a man who will put the English *Force* and Latin *Fors* down to the same root, will do anything in that line. Again, when he was in thunderous action he allowed volcanoes of vituperation to erupt, which one would have wished otherwise. He sadly lacked restraint, but, like the strong language of the old Prophets, his had its root in love of man.

We know more of his intimacies and his foibles, which he loves humorously to exaggerate, than are generally given to the public. He has taken means to prevent any artificial pedestal, in

idealized aloofness, ever being raised to him. His utter frankness led him to give the public his private accounts, which people generally keep to themselves; and such correspondence as that painful one with Octavia Hill.[2] But when the faults of others were in question he was silent as the grave, to his own hurt. He was "kind even to the unthankful and the evil." As for many of us, how much more vulgar and base would the world have been without that noble and lovely soul. Many are those who owe him an irredeemable debt. His life was not, as he sadly thought, the story of baffled strife. Of him, as of Dr. Arnold, it could be said that not alone was he saved.[3]

[2] *Fors*, Letter LXXXVI.

[3] *Rugby Chapel*, by M. Arnold.

CHAPTER II
THE PILGRIM'S WAY

H AVING now stated our conviction that Ruskin was always essentially religious, we will trace the history of his beliefs.

He began life in 1819, under the strong influence of his mother, as a Calvinistic Protestant, of the narrow type then current. The Ruskins were properly Scottish Presbyterians, living in London. A Low Church or Spurgeon's Tabernacle was equally acceptable. His mother made him read with her daily portions of the Bible, two or three chapters, undiluted and unselected. They accomplished the journey from Genesis to Revelation in about a year, and then began at Genesis again next day, "hard names, numbers, Levitical Law and all." They went through it at least six times together.

She also taught him, "complete and sure," twenty-six chapters of the Bible, including the 119th Psalm, and all the Scottish Paraphrases of the Psalms.[4]

This did not make him vitally religious; he was not "converted." The Bible was, for the present, a rather tiresome task, and to chapel he and his father went submissively, feeling

[4] The passages were: Exod. xv, xx; 2 Sam. i. 17; 1 Kings viii; Ps. xxiii, xxxii, xc, xci, ciii, cxii, cxix, cxxxix; Prov. ii, iii, viii, xii; Is. lviii; Matt. v, vi, vii; Acts xxvi; 1 Cor. xiii, xv; James iv; Rev. v, vi. See *Præterita* for all this.

their sad inferiority to the mother in these matters. His mother's creed he dutifully imbibed, without question or strong feeling of any kind. He had the proper antipathy to Rome, and the habit of outward prayer.[5] His real religion was born at Friar's Crag, Derwentwater, at four years old, when he looked with awe into the dark lake over the mossy tree roots, and felt himself in the Presence.

He was, as an only child, a protected treasure, the pride of and a great responsibility to his wealthy parents. He never went to a Public School, and when he went to Oxford to be made into a Bishop his parents came with him, lived in the High, and his mother saw him every day. With them, far into mid-life, he went on all his foreign journeys but two, those of 1845 and 1858. The parental ideas remained potent with him to an extent hardly realizable by this generation, which often finds it so difficult to bring their parents up properly.

His earlier works are written with the questionless devoutness of the untried mind. They were narrow in theology, fiercely Protestant, earnest enough; and on their positive side, still sound and valuable. The first two volumes of *Modern Painters*, the whole of the *Stones of Venice* and the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and the Edinburgh *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* belong to this period. So, broadly, do the Manchester Lectures on the *Political Economy of Art* in 1857; but they are

[5] For his actual experience of prayer, see the incident of 1845 in *Præterita*, vol. ii. pp. 260, 261.

the herald of the next epoch.

He resisted the new Geology of Lyell, declared indignantly that God had created the Alpine valleys, and put the rivers to flow along them, denying that the rivers had worn their own valleys out. Somewhere in the later fifties we find him scandalized by the statement of Frederick Denison Maurice that Jael's treacherous murder of Sisera was a wicked deed. The fact that Deborah the Prophetess sang a sacred song over it was enough to justify it to Ruskin, then over thirty-five.[6]

Just before this incident, however, his moral sense was beginning to revolt from certain parts of his creed. He was, he says, invited to a "fashionable séance of Evangelical doctrine, at the Earl of Ducie's, presided over by Mr. Molyneux, then a divine of celebrity in that sect, who sat with one leg over his other knee, in the attitude always given to Herod at the Massacre of the Innocents in mediæval sculpture, and discoursed in tones of consummate assurance and satisfaction, and to the entire comfort and consent of his Belgravian audience, on the beautiful parable of the Prodigal Son. Which, or how many, of his hearers he meant to describe as having personally lived on husks, and devoured their father's property, did not of course appear; but that something of the sort was necessary to the completeness of the joy in heaven over them, now in Belgrave Square, at the feet, or one foot, of Mr. Molyneux, could not be questioned. Waiting my time, till the raptures of the converted

[6] *Præterita*, iii. 28.

company had begun to flag a little, I ventured, from a back seat, to enquire of Mr. Molyneux what we were to learn from the example of the other son, not prodigal, who was, his father said, 'ever with me and all that I have, thine.' A sudden horror and unanimous feeling of the serpent having somehow got over the wall into their Garden of Eden, fell on the whole company; and some of them, I thought, looked at the candles, as if they expected them to burn blue. After a pause of a minute, gathering himself into an expression of pity and indulgence, withholding latent thunder, Mr. Molyneux explained to me that the home-staying son was merely a picturesque figure introduced to fill the background of the parable agreeably, and contained no instruction or example for the well-disposed scriptural student, but on the contrary, rather, a snare for the unwary, and a temptation to self-righteousness – which was, of all sins, the most offensive to God. Under the fulmination of which answer, I retired from the séance in silence, nor ever attended another of the kind from that day to this."[7]

It was just this lack of feeling for righteousness as such, the idea that you needed first to be a "most sinful sinner" if you wished to become a "most Christian Christian," and a want of recognition that forgiveness was a spiritual and inward process, which caused the contemptuous references to his early form of doctrine which are scattered thickly throughout Ruskin's later writings.

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[7] *Præterita*, III. i. 32-34. Also referred to in *Munera Pulveris*, App. V.

The experiences which make epochs in men's lives are indeed strangely various and unexpected. Three events stand out as the destroyers of his Protestantism and of much of his outward edifice of faith. Their year was 1858. One was the discovery that the Puritan Sabbath of his youth had no Scriptural authority, but based itself, without confessing it, on the Jewish Sabbath Day, by erroneous interpretation. "If they have deceived me in this, they have deceived me in everything," he said. His faith in his mother's religious guides was gone.[8] In 1858 for the first time he broke the Sabbath by drawing some flowers on Sunday. That act, in him, stood for emancipation.[9] He had been finding that Catholic Psalters were lovely things, that Catholic peasants in Tuscany led sweet and patient lives, and that "Presbyterian prayers against time by people who never expected to be any the better for them, were unlovely and wrong."[10] The same year he turned in at Turin to hear a Waldensian pastor. This was the second event. "To an audience of about seventeen gray-haired women and a few men, the preacher, a somewhat stunted figure with a cracked voice, put his utmost zeal into a consolatory discourse on the wickedness of the wide world, more especially of the plain of Piedmont and the city of Turin, and on the exclusive favour with God enjoyed by the between nineteen and twenty-four elect members of his congregation, in the streets of Admah and Zeboim." "Myself

[8] *Præterita*, vol. iii. p. 39.

[9] Id. p. 41.

[10] Id. p. 48.

neither cheered nor greatly alarmed by this doctrine, I walked back into the condemned city, and up into the gallery where Paul Veronese's 'Solomon and the Queen of Sheba' glowed in full afternoon light." And in that hour's meditation his "evangelical beliefs were put away, to be debated of no more."[11]

But the solvent influences did not stop there. They seldom fail to proceed. Rebuilding rather than repair is generally necessary to a broken down system of thought. But that which left him in great darkness was an experience which could have so affected no one but Ruskin. This was the third event. It was the discovery at Venice that the best work was done by irreligious painters. He found that "Tintoret only occasionally forgot himself into religion," and that Titian had no religion at all, and yet had to be given as the standard of perfection in painting. Ruskin concluded, first, and quite truly, that "human work must be done honourably and thoroughly, because we are now men; whether we expect to be angels, or ever were slugs, being practically no matter. That by the work we have done and not by our belief we shall be judged."[12] He went on, by generalizing, to a further conclusion in that year, afterwards to be corrected. The conclusion and the correction divide the periods of Ruskin's life. He concluded that the group of great worldly painters of various nations, Turner, Titian, Velasquez, Sir Joshua, Gainsborough, Tintoret, and Paul Veronese, did more perfect and stronger work

[11] *Præterita*, vol. iii. pp. 44-6. *Fors*, Letter LXXVI.

[12] *Fors*, Letter LXXVI.

than the sacred army of obedient Catholics headed by Cimabue, Giotto and Angelico, who worked under the guidance of a heavenly vision.

This seems a strange reason for losing faith. It can only be understood when we remember that Ruskin regarded art as the expression of the painter's whole nature, especially the soul of him; and if the endowment from heaven were really potent, it should inspire the artist to do work that is clearly supreme. That it did not do so was Ruskin's stumbling-block. I will not anticipate the ultimate solution; but only pause to mourn over the many stumbling-blocks which our theories put in our way. Because the lot decided unfairly, Silas Marner, the wronged of heaven, lost his faith. How many have been and are unable to see through pain and poverty to God. How many have bound their faith to the accuracy of a record or the fidelity of a frail fellow-creature.

Of the religious utterances of this first period, which ended in 1858, the second volume of *Modern Painters* is the most typical. To me, it was the door by which in 1882 I entered into my love of Ruskin the author, as *Fors* led me to love and reverence the man. The subject is an analysis of Beauty as a various expression of the mind of God. It is published separately; it is not a long book; and it might be read for a second time along with the Author's notes of 1883. These give us the verdict of age upon the enthusiasm of its own youth, and are vastly entertaining. Even as Tennyson, in his "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," puts his quietus upon the ebullitions of the most rhythmic and moving utterance of

his youth, so does Ruskin, with mocking self-blame, speak with fatherly candour to the Oxford Graduate of 1845.

To this period, too, belongs his avowedly theological pamphlet, *Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds*. It is of 1851, attacks ecclesiastical pretensions on Scriptural grounds, and in spite of its sectarian limitations was considered so sound in its main drift that the author reissued it in his mature period.

He states that all his works up to 1853 are marred by his narrow Protestant dogmatism. Now 1858, as we have seen, was his year of freedom from it, and from much that was more precious. Between 1853 and 1858 came out volumes iii and iv of *Modern Painters*, the *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* at Edinburgh, and the lectures at Manchester on the *Political Economy of Art*. The last marks transition. It is the forerunner of the next period; it shows us how his way of treating Art led him on to Economics. But it is of great interest to study his position in these two volumes of *Modern Painters*. They are as religious as ever, and as devout; but between Catholic and Protestant, frequently brought into contrast, they hold the scales of judgment. The author casts the lantern of criticism impartially upon both, but his own faith in the great verities still holds. It is plain, however, that conduct was rising to the chief place in his mind. The Sermon on the Mount was becoming, what it ever afterwards remained to him, the central teaching of the Christian faith.

If we omit the Poems of his boyhood and youth, and his early

minor scientific contributions to journals, and begin his career as a writer for the public with the year 1842, when he wrote the first volume of *Modern Painters*, published next year, we have sixteen years of authorship for the Early Period. We have also, oddly enough, sixteen years of authorship, 1858 to 1874, for his Middle Period, shortly to be described; and if we give sixteen years for the mature period also, that brings us to 1890, only a few months after the last number of *Præterita* struggled into the light from his failing pen. He wrote no more. We thus have three periods, Early, Middle, and Mature, each of sixteen years, not difficult to remember, 1842-1858, 1858-1874, and 1874-1890. It is a testimony to his utter frankness and undimmed candour that we are able thus to map out the growth of his convictions.

For a growth it was, all the time, though apparently 1858 was a year of wreck and ruin. We cannot put new wine into old wineskins. His middle period was the time for the analytical tendency of his mind to have its way. Mazzini had already said that Ruskin had the most analytic mind in Europe; and now that searching analysis which had discovered Luini and placed Tintoretto, and had penetrated, by a way of its own, far into the hidden secret of Beauty, could not be denied when it faced the stronghold of the Christian revelation, even though his own heart and every fibre of his sensitive nature was within the fortress attacked.

His economic crusade began in 1860; and on his spiritually desolated heart was piled the sorrow of the social system.

Hermit and heretic he became, in religion and economics alike. Victorious in his championship of Turner and the Pre-raphaelites, whom single-handed he had placed on the pinnacle they have never lost, he had the literary and artistic world at his feet. This great position he cast aside to enter on a sterner battle. The recognized leader of taste, the arbiter of reputations, turned aside to abuse so good a man as John Stuart Mill, to say the most shocking things about the clergy and the clergy's wives, to testify against rent and interest, to blaspheme that steam power by which England was conquering the world, and to utter strange hesitating sayings which showed that he was not sure of a life to come. Nor could he brave the storm with the self-confident dogmatism of youth. "I seldom now feel sure of anything," he wrote in the first Christmas issue of *Fors*, "still seldomer, however, do I feel sure of the contrary of anything."[13] When we add that this period was marked by the loss of his parents, who had been everything to him, and by a grievous disappointment in love – for the girl who loved him would not marry him because he was not orthodox, so far as reasons can ever be given for such decisions, but died of a decline instead – we shall see how heavy was the lonely task set before him to do. Nor had the veneration of disciples and the growing recognition of all good men come to him yet; it came afterwards, built the prophet's shrine, in his lifetime certainly,[14]

[13] Letter XII, p. 3.

[14] Notably in the address and Turner drawing presented by distinguished men on his 80th birthday.

but only after the world's neglect, and his failure even to carry his own friends with him, had helped to break the powers of his mind and set his brain reeling in recurring attacks of delirious inflammation. He was, in that madness, being offered upon the sacrifice and service of our faith.

During this middle period of prime mental power, he wrote nineteen volumes, and numerous catalogues and pamphlets. They are, in order of time: *The Two Paths*, *Modern Painters*, vol. v., *Unto This Last*, *Munera Pulveris*, *Sesame and Lilies*, *The Ethics of the Dust*, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, *Time and Tide*, *The Queen of the Air*, *Lectures on Art at Oxford*, the first half of *Flors Clavigera*, *Aratra Pentelici*, *The Eagle's Nest*, *Love's Meinie*, *Ariadne Florentina*, *Val D'Arno*, and most of the papers reprinted in *On the Old Road*. As an author he was in his full strength.

The significance of the period is that under the most painful uncertainties of doctrine, true religion shone still, blazed beaconlike, in fact: blazed as a beacon blazes when blown by tempest. But few readers ever thought of the writer as a heretic. He preached all the time the simple eternal sanction for right conduct which the nature of man, akin to the Divine, provides. He recognized the ineradicable claim which the teaching of the New Testament has upon our obedience. He attacked the Churches, not for being too Christian, but for not being anything like Christian enough. Referring to his mother's gift of twenty-six chapters learnt by heart, he says in 1874: —

"The chapters became, indeed, strictly conclusive and

protective to me in all modes of thought; and the body of divinity they contain, acceptable through all fear or doubt; nor, through any fear or doubt or fault have I ever lost my loyalty to them, nor betrayed the first command in the one I was made to repeat oftenest: 'Let not Mercy and Truth forsake thee.' And at my present age of fifty-five, in spite of some enlarged observations of what modern philosophers call the Reign of Law, I perceive more distinctly than ever the Reign of a Spirit of Mercy and Truth – infinite in pardon and purification for its wandering and faultful children, who have yet Love in their hearts; and altogether adverse and implacable to its perverse and lying enemies, who have resolute hatred in their hearts, and resolute falsehood on their lips."[15]

The classical passage, as I should esteem it, for this period is in *The Eagle's Nest*,[16] the Oxford Lectures of 1872; which contain some of his most careful religious writing:

"All of you who have ever read your Gospels carefully must have wondered sometimes, what could be the meaning of those words, 'If any speak against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven; but if against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the next.' The passage may have many meanings which I do not know; but one meaning I know positively, and I tell you so just as frankly as I would that I knew the meaning of a verse in Homer. Those of you who still go to Chapel say every

[15] *Fors*, Letter XLII.

[16] Pp. 189-190.

day your creed; and, I suppose, too often, less and less every day believing it. Now, you may cease to believe two articles of it, and – admitting Christianity to be true – still be forgiven. But I can tell you, you must not cease to believe the third!

"You begin by saying that you believe in an Almighty Father. Well, you may entirely lose the sense of that Fatherhood and yet be forgiven.

"You go on to say that you believe in a Saviour Son. You may entirely lose the sense of that Sonship and yet be forgiven.

"But the third article – disbelieve if you dare! 'I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life.' Disbelieve that! and your own being is degraded into the state of dust driven by the wind; and the elements of dissolution have entered your very heart and soul.

"All Nature, with one voice – with one glory – is set to teach you reverence for the life communicated to you from the Father of Spirits. The song of birds, and their plumage, the scent of flowers, their colour, their very existence, are in direct connection with the mystery of that communicated life: and all the strength, and all the arts of men, are measured by and founded upon their reverence for the passion, and their guardianship of the purity, of Love."

Such is the utmost asceticism of the soul; the most careful and determined assimilation of the least quantity of the bread of life. We may sum his creed in the words: Happy are the pure in heart, for they yet in their flesh shall see the light of Heaven and know

the will of God.

Perhaps the question of Divine Personality may be felt even in our most audacious moments to be beyond our analysis. I do not count the word Personality a very helpful one, one way or the other. It is clearly on the human plane, must be imperfect, and may seriously limit our thought of God. Tennyson's favourite prayer was "O Thou Infinite, Amen." And with this much of personal address or aspiration our souls may surely rest. Take this as a satisfying account of the Creative Logos of the Greeks, written in the light of evolution, in 1869 (*Queen of the Air*, pp. 124-6):

"With respect to all these divisions and powers of plants – it does not matter in the least by what concurrences of circumstance or necessity they may gradually have been developed: the concurrence of circumstance is itself the supreme and inexplicable fact. We always come at last to a formative cause, which directs the circumstance, and mode of meeting it. If you ask an ordinary botanist the reason of the form of a leaf, he will tell you it is 'a developed tubercle,' and that 'its ultimate form is owing to the directions of its vascular threads.' But what directs its vascular threads? 'They are seeking for something they want' he will probably answer. What makes them want that? What made them seek for it thus? Seek for it, in five fibres or in three? Seek for it, in serration, or in sweeping curves? Seek for it, in servile tendrils, or impetuous spray? Seek for it, in woollen wrinkles rough with stings, or in glossy surfaces, green with pure

strength, and winterless delight?

"There is no answer. But, the sum of all is, that over the entire surface of the earth and its waters, as influenced by the power of the air under solar light, there is developed a series of changing forms, in clouds, plants and animals, all of which have reference in their action or nature, to the human intelligence that perceives them; and on which, in their aspects of horror and beauty, and their qualities of good and evil, there is engraved a series of myths or words of the forming power, which, according to the true passion and energy of the human race, they have been enabled to read into religion. And this forming power has been by all nations partly confused with the breath of air through which it acts, and partly understood as a creative wisdom, proceeding from the Supreme Deity; but entering into and inspiring all intelligences that work in harmony with Him. And whatever intellectual results may be in modern days obtained by regarding this effluence only as a motion or vibration, every formative human art hitherto, and the best states of human happiness and order, have depended on the apprehension of its mystery (which is certain), and of its personality (which is probable)."

He concludes that lecture, the second in *The Queen of the Air*, with these words:

"This only we may discern assuredly; this, every true light of science, every mercifully granted power, every wisely restricted thought, teach us more clearly day by day, that in the heaven above, and the earth beneath, there is one continual and

omnipotent presence of help, and of peace, for all men who know that they Live, and remember that they Die."

To quote from the religious teaching of these fruitful years would be an endless task; I must only refer, I fear, without quoting any of it, to *The Mystery of Life and its Arts*, printed in the complete edition of *Sesame and Lilies*; a characteristic and pathetic exhortation, and chiefly perhaps, to § 10-16 of the Introduction to *The Crown of Wild Olive*.

So much for his constructive teaching. But he was a destroyer too. The peculiarity of his position and the cause of his loneliness was that he was always throwing his darts not only into the camp of the business men and their allies the economists, but also into the two religious camps, generally opposed to one another, held, one by the clergy, the other by the materialistic men of science. He rebuked both parties for their assumptions, and he smote them with all the artillery of sarcasm, wit and indignation. "You have to guard against the fatalest darkness of the two opposite Prides: the Pride of Faith, which imagines that the nature of the Deity can be defined by its convictions; and the Pride of Science, which imagines that the energy of Deity can be explained by its analysis."[17] As sword-play it is fine. He gives what purports to be a scientific account of Shakespeare: so much water, so much carbo-hydrate and phosphorus, and thus you build up your organism called William Shakespeare – with, of course, something left out. He was ever dwelling on the realities

[17] *Lectures on Art*, p. 50.

of the spirit which chemistry omits. The fashionable scientific materialism of the seventies he utterly abhorred: he behaved to it as St. George to the Dragon. He loathed anatomy, mocked at the idea that you understood a creature by cutting up its remains; and when the men of science at Oxford proceeded to vivisection he threw up his professorship in flaming wrath, sick at heart; every sentiment of mercy, every safe doctrine of science violated in unholy cruelty and impatience.

He describes the limitations of "some scientific minds, which in their judgment of the Universe can be compared to nothing so accurately as to the woodworms in the panel of a picture by some great painter, if we may conceive them as tasting with discrimination of the wood, and with repugnance of the colour, and declaring that even this unlooked for and undesirable combination is a normal result of the action of molecular Forces."[18]

We pass on to the third period of sixteen years, the Mature Period as I call it, from 1874 to 1890, when his productive life ended. He now came to know more fully the fullness of faith. Here he entered into his reward, I say. The revelation of God to him became clearer, sweeter, mightier. As in 1858, the time of crisis was marked by two events which occurred that year, one in things spiritual and one in things artistic.[19]

The artistic event of 1874 was a reversal of the puzzling

[18] *Lectures on Art*, p. 52.

[19] See *Fors*, LXXVI, March 1877, vol. iv. p. 69.

judgment of 1858 to the effect that the worldly painters excelled the devout ones. It came about through his copying one of Giotto's frescoes on the roof of the Lower Church at Assisi. He was allowed to erect a platform in that dark church over the High Altar, that he might see the picture. There he discovered that Giotto was only beaten by Tintoret in mere science, technique, laws of perspective, composition and light and shade, and that religion had solemnized and developed every faculty of Giotto's heart and hand. The Franciscan monastery at Assisi is one of the most sacred places on earth anyhow, but 1874 saw one more gift of light there vouchsafed, and a haunting problem solved. Art was to Ruskin a visible manifestation of life's full faculties, in a department he specially understood; and religion, which is the source of strength and the support of character, he thought should be judged by its output.

Now we turn to the second event. His hopes of the reality of a Spirit world received unexpected and potent confirmation from the fact that in December, 1875, he had, at the house of Lord Mount Temple, at Broadlands, Romsey, some psychic experience so definite that he was convinced that he had true communication with her whom he had lately lost, the "Rosie" of *Præterita*, No. XXVII.[20] It was a confirmation to his faith. He became an Honorary Member of the Society for Psychical Research the year after its formation in 1882, joining in that well-grounded hope that a true science of human Personality

[20] See Epilogue.

might be built up by its patient experimental methods. To Lady Mount Temple, *née* Tollemache, the Egeria of the winter of 1840 in Rome, we owe much for the help she was to Ruskin all through life; and much also that from her came the stimulus to Frederick W. H. Myers and Edmund Gurney to begin the Society for Psychical Research. Two of Ruskin's stories of Death wraiths may be found in *Fors*,[21] also a dream in Letter LXV. He never took to ordinary spiritualism; it is indeed from an attack upon it that he turns to a note describing the happiness of his own experience. "I leave this passage as it was written; though as it passes through the press, it is ordered by Atropos that I should hear a piece of evidence on this matter no less clear as to the present ministry of such powers as that which led Peter out of prison, than all the former, or nearly all the former, evidence examined by me was of the presence of the legion which ruled among the tombs of Gennesaret."[22] He allows the contradiction to stand; indeed, in this puzzling and partially known subject, a consistent position is beyond the knowledge of most. He returns to the attack on Spiritualism, however, in his 1883 note to the second volume of *Modern Painters*, p. 244.

In the following year, 1876, at Venice at Christmas, he had vouchsafed to himself the inward assurance of an immortal life; he entered into a singular happiness; *Fors* became the organ of a mysticism truly Johannine; he loved to expound universal

[21] Letter LXIII, vol. vi. p. 89.

[22] *Fors*, Letter LXI, p. 7, note.

Christian truth, so catholic indeed in the true sense that Cardinal Manning aspired to turn him to Rome. That was a vain hope. He still retained his analytical faculty. He says that he would "give up Moses" if criticism demanded it.[23] Concerning his lectures of 1877 at Oxford he writes to Miss Beever in the "hortus inclusus" at Coniston that he has been able for the first time to speak boldly to the students of immortal life. The concluding passage of the last lecture is this:[24]

"But obey the word in its simplicity, in wholeness of purpose and with severity of sacrifice, like this of the Venetian Maids', and truly you shall receive sevenfold into your bosom in this present life, as in the world to come, life everlasting." "He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." It came to be true of himself that "if life be led under heaven's law, the sense of heaven's nearness only deepens with advancing years, and is assured in death."[25]

"The faith of the saints and prophets rising into serenity of knowledge, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' is a state of mind of which ordinary men cannot reason; but which, in the practical power of it, has always governed the world, and must for ever. No dynamite will ever be invented that can rule – it can but dissolve

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[23] See also *Fors*, Letter LXVI, vol. vi. p. 172.

[24] *On the Old Road*, vol. ii. p. 388.

[25] *Fors*, XCII, 1883.

and destroy. Only the Word of God and the heart of man can govern."[26]

We cannot conclude this analysis better than by quoting from the last number of *Fors* in 1884:

"Looking back upon my efforts for the last twenty years, I believe that their failure has been in great part owing to my compromise with the infidelity of this outer world, and my endeavours to base my pleading upon motives of ordinary prudence and kindness, instead of on the primary duty of loving God; foundation other than which no man can lay. I thought myself speaking to a crowd which could only be influenced by visible utility; nor was I the least aware how many entirely good and holy persons were living in the faith and love of God as vividly and practically now as ever in the early enthusiasm of Christendom. These have shown me, with lovely initiation, in how many secret places the prayer was made which I had foolishly listened for at the corners of the streets, and on how many hills which I had thought left desolate, the hosts of heaven still moved in chariots of fire."[27] These passages show that F. W. H. Myers, in the beautiful obituary which I am permitted to print as an Epilogue, was not correct in describing the experience with the medium at Broadlands, as Ruskin's one brief season of blissful trust in the Unseen. It is true of his temporary belief in

[26] Id. XCII, vol. viii. p. 205.

[27] This reference is known to refer chiefly to Francesca Alexander and her mother at Florence. Not improbably, also, to the Misses Beever at Coniston.

spiritualism.

I trust it will have become clear that Ruskin's spiritual history is not a story of arbitrary and fanciful changes without connected significance. It is the orderly development of a research, by a man singularly qualified to hold a religious Research Fellowship.

He may be said to have matriculated in religion at his mother's knee. There he learnt his Bible. He took a degree with the second volume of *Modern Painters* and the works allied to it in spirit. He then became a Master of Arts, qualified to teach, a recognized religious authority among many authorities. Had he never gone to Venice and seen Tintoret he might have built, so he says, a Catholic archiepiscopal palace at York instead of a museum at Sheffield; or he might have been such a man as Dean Church or John Henry Newman, on Calvinistic Protestant lines. But Ruskin proceeded to a higher status. He must needs penetrate deeper; and in the crisis of 1858 he took his Fellowship by a thesis on the Irreducible Minimum of the Religious Outfit. Thenceforth he carried on a research, he was a "seeker after God," often wrote "in much darkness and sorrow of heart"; and in sixteen years the conclusions were ready, the convictions matured, the saint perfected.

CHAPTER III
TO WHAT FOLD?

T O what school of thought or to which among our denominations, if to any, can Ruskin be said to belong? He did not actively, in mature life, belong to any, or attend Church or Chapel. Let us examine his doctrines in this connection.

The first point which strikes the inquirer is Ruskin's strong hostility to professionalism in religion, to payment for preaching. Against a separate order of clergy, maintained for that object, and claiming a certain position by reason of their ministration, he was the most poignant voice of his time, from inside Christianity. Letters XXXVIII, XLIX, and LXII of *Fors Clavigera* are full of the most unrestrained expression of this testimony. We will quote:

"The particular kinds of folly also which lead youths to become clergymen, uncalled, are specially intractable. That a lad just out of his teens, and not under the influence of any deep religious enthusiasm, should ever contemplate the possibility of his being set up in the middle of a mixed company of men and women of the world, to instruct the aged, encourage the valiant, support the weak, reprove the guilty, and set an example to all; and not feel what a ridiculous and blasphemous business it would be, if he only pretended to do it for hire; and what a ghastly and

murderous business it would be if he did it strenuously wrong; and what a marvellous and all but incredible thing the Church and its power must be, if it were possible for him, with all the good meaning in the world, to do it rightly – that any youth, I say, should ever have got himself into the state of recklessness or conceit, required to become a clergyman at all, under existing circumstances, must put him quite out of the pale of those whom one appeals to on any reasonable or moral question, in serious writing… There is certainly no Bishop now in the Church of England who would either dare in a full drawing-room to attribute to himself the gift of prophecy, in so many words; or to write at the head of any of his sermons, 'On such and such a day, of such and such a month, in such and such a place, the Word of the Lord came unto me, saying': – Nevertheless he claims to have received the Holy Ghost himself by laying on of hands; and to be able to communicate the Holy Ghost to other men in the same manner. And he knows that the office of the prophet is as simply recognized in the enumeration of the powers of the ancient church, as that of the apostle or evangelist or doctor. And yet he can neither point out in the Church the true prophets, to whose number he dares not say that he himself belongs, nor the false prophets, who are casting out devils in the name of Christ without being known by him… But the word 'Priest' is one which he finds it convenient to assume himself, and to give to his fellow clergymen. He knows, just as well as he knows prophecy to be a gift attributed to the Christian minister, that

priesthood is a function expressly taken away from the Christian minister (as distinguished, that is to say, from other members of the Church). He dares not say in the open drawing-room that he offers sacrifice for any soul there; and he knows that he cannot give authority for calling himself a priest from any canonical book of the New Testament. So he equivocates on the sound of the word 'Presybter.' …"[28]

"This preaching of Christ has, nevertheless, become an acknowledged profession and means of livelihood for gentlemen: and the simony of to-day differs only from that of apostolic times, in that, while the elder Simon thought the gift of the Holy Ghost worth a considerable offer in ready money, the modern Simon would on the whole refuse to accept the same gift of the Third Person of the Trinity, without a nice little attached income, a pretty church, with a steeple restored by Mr. Scott, and an eligible neighbourhood."[29]

And, in soberer vein: "No way will ever be found of rightly ordaining men who have taken up the trade of preaching as a means of livelihood, and to whom it is a matter of personal interest whether they preach in one place or another; only those who have left their means of living, that they may preach, and whose peace follows them as they wander, and abides where they enter in, are of God's ordaining; and practically until the Church insists that every one of her ministers shall either have

[28] Letter XLIX.

[29] Letter LV.

an independent income, or support himself for his ministry on Sunday by true bodily toil during the week, no word of the living Gospel will ever be spoken from her pulpits. How many of those who now occupy them have verily been invited to such office by the Holy Ghost may be easily judged by observing how many the Holy Ghost has similarly invited of religious persons already in prosperous business or desirable position."[30]

Another passage from another place runs: "Take the desire of teaching – the entirely unselfish and noble instinct for telling to those who are ignorant the truth we know, and guarding them from the errors we see them in danger of – there is no nobler, no more constant instinct in honourable breasts; but let the Devil formalise it, and mix the pride of a profession with it – get foolish people entrusted with the business of instruction, and make their giddy heads giddier by putting them up in pulpits above a submissive crowd – and you have it instantly corrupted into its own reverse; you have an alliance against the light (saying) 'Light is in us only. Shut your eyes close and fast and we will lead you.' "[31]

In another place he says the difficult question is not, why workmen don't go to church, but – why other people do. He asks,[32] "What Scripture warrant there is for the offices and authority of the clergy, and defies anyone to find any." Their

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[30] *Fors*, Letter LXXV, § 21. Notes and Correspondence.

[31] *Time and Tide*, p. 71.

[32] *Sheepfolds*, p. 269.

functions, he says, must depend on the needs of the time. "Robinson Crusoe, on his island, wants no Bishop, and makes a thunderstorm do for an evangelist. The University of Oxford would do ill without its Bishop, but wants an evangelist besides, and that forthwith."

He says that by yielding to the impression that the most sacred calling is that of the clergy, "the sacred character of the layman himself is forgotten, and his own ministerial duty is neglected," and so laymen wrongly "devote their whole time and energy to the business of this world. No mistake can possibly be greater. Every member of the Church is equally bound to the service of the Head of the Church, and that service is pre-eminently the saving of souls. There is not a moment of a man's active life in which he may not be indirectly preaching, and throughout a great part of his life he ought to be directly preaching, and teaching both strangers and friends." This is from the *Sheepfolds* pamphlet of 1851; at that time he nevertheless contemplates church officers of a sort, as organizers, deacons, or visitors, and thinks they may be maintained for their special work, and includes religious instruction and exhortation among these duties. But this last advice he supersedes in *Fors* of 1873 and later dates, when he places preaching on a purely amateur basis, in the passages quoted already, and similar ones.

"All good judging, and all good preaching, must be given gratis. Look back to what I have incidentally said of lawyers and clergy, as professional – that is to say, as living by their

judgment, and sermons. You will perhaps now be able to receive my conclusive statement, that all such professional sale of justice and mercy is a deadly sin. A man may sell the work of his hands, but not his equity, nor his piety. Let him live by his spade, and if his neighbours find him wise enough to decide a dispute between them, or if he is in modesty and simplicity able to give them a piece of pious advice, let him do so, in Heaven's name, but not take a fee for it."[33]

In Letter XIII of *Time and Tide* and in *Sesame and Lilies* § 22 he explains the sort of functions he would give to his Bishops, as described in Chapter V.

We have incidentally alluded to Ruskin's teaching on the Priesthood of all Believers. He asserts that all members of the Universal Church are Priests,[34] that the exclusive priestly claim of the Clergy is "blasphemous," and has no shadow of excuse, "because it has been ordained by the Holy Spirit that no Christian minister shall once call himself a Priest as distinguished from his flock from one end of the New Testament to the other."

Schools of religious thought are discriminated by nothing so decisively as by their attitude to the Bible. They are classed at once if they call the Bible the Word of God. This bad and quite unauthorized habit has blinded many eyes. Ruskin attacks it again and again. "The error consists, first, in declaring a bad translation of a group of books of various qualities, accidentally

[33] *Fors*, Letter XXXI, § 18, and also Letter LXVII, § 10.

[34] *Sheepfolds*, p. 271.

associated, to be the Word of God. Secondly, reading of this singular Word of God, only the bits they like, and never taking any pains to understand even those. Thirdly, resolutely refusing to practise even the small bits they do understand, if such practice happen to go against their own worldly – especially money – interests."[35]

Compare this severe passage with one from *The Ethics of the Dust*, V § 59: "The way in which common people read their Bibles is just like the way that the old monks thought hedgehogs ate grapes. They rolled themselves (it was said), over and over, where the grapes lay on the ground: what fruit stuck to their spines, they carried off and ate. So your hedgehoggy readers roll themselves over and over their Bibles, and declare that whatever sticks to their own spines is Scripture, and that nothing else is."[36]

But Ruskin is not satisfied with negative teaching on this great subject. He tells us what the Word of God is, as well as what it is not:

"By that Word, or Voice, or Breath, or Spirit, the heavens and earth, and all the host of them, were made, and in it they exist. It is your life; and speaks to you always, so long as you live nobly; dies out of you as you refuse to obey it; leaves you to hear, and be slain by, the word of an evil spirit, instead. It may come to

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[35] *Fors*, Letter XXXV, § 3.

[36] See also *Fors*, Letter LXV and Letter XLIV, also Letter XL for an amusing account of the edifying Bible story of Joab and Abner; and very numerous other passages.

you in books – come to you in clouds – come to you in the voices of men – come to you in the stillness of deserts. You must be strong in evil, if you have quenched it wholly; – very desolate in this Christian land, if you have never heard it at all."[37]

Much may be gleaned from a man's use of the word Church. Is it a building, or a select and limited outward community or more than either? Ruskin, interpreting Scripture in his *Sheepfolds*,[38] finds a Low Church divine giving the meaning of the word Church to be an "external institution of certain forms of worship." He therefore suggests the following emendations: "Unto the angel of the external institution of certain forms of worship at Ephesus write," and "Salute the brethren which are at Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the external institution of certain forms of worship which is in his house."

"I continually see subscriptions of ten, fifteen, or twenty thousand pounds for new churches. Now a good clergyman never wants a church. He can say all that his congregation essentially need to hear in any of his parishioners' best parlours, or upper chambers, or in the ball-room at the Nag's Head; or if these are not large enough, in the market-place, or the harvest field. And until every soul in the parish is cared for, and saved from such sorrow of body or mind as alms can give comfort in, no clergyman, but in sin or heresy, can ask for a church at all. What does he want with altars? Was the Lord's Supper eaten on one?

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[37] *Fors*, Letter XXXVI, § 3.

[38] *On the Old Road*, vol. ii. p. 253.

What with pews? – unless rents for the pride of them? What with font and pulpit? – that the next wayside brook, or mossy bank, cannot give him? The temple of Christ is in His people – His order, to feed them – His throne, alike of audience and of judgment, in Heaven: were it otherwise, even the churches which we have already are not always open for prayer."[39]

He suggests that we can decide "who are Christ's sheep, not by their being in any definite fold, for many are lost sheep sometimes; but by their sheeplike behaviour; and a great many are indeed sheep which, on the far mountain side, in their peacefulness, we take for stones."[40] This is a delightful expression of the feeling that you may be a child of God, without having heard of the Christian Revelation of Him.

To make Baptism a sign of admission into the visible Church he says is absurd; "for we know that half the baptized people in the world are very visible rogues. Also the Holy Ghost is sometimes given before Baptism, and it would be absurdity to call a man on whom the Holy Ghost had fallen, an invisible Christian."[41]

On the Sacrament he declared to a correspondent in 1888 that he would take it from anybody's hand, the Pope's, the Queen's or a hedgeside gipsy's, and quoted Longfellow's lines:

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[39] *General Statement as to the Nature and Purpose of the St. George's Guild*, p. 12, 1882.

[40] *Sheepfolds*: in *On the Old Road*, vol. ii. p. 259.

[41] *Sheepfolds*, p. 259.

"A holy family, that makes
Each meal a supper of the Lord."

He is drastic in his rejection of all Prayer Books. Prayers out of a book are no prayers to him; he cannot think that varying needs are met by routine prayer. These statements are in his *Letters to the Clergy on the Lord's Prayer and the Church* (1879), reprinted in *On the Old Road*, p. 325, and he comments on the distrust in the efficacy of prayer likely to be produced by having to ask one day "that the rest of our lives hereafter may be pure and holy," knowing that next day, or at least next Sunday, we shall be expected to confess that "there is no health in us." He seriously suspects the effect of the Liturgy on the truthfulness of the English mind.

When he discusses the vital problem of the seat of Authority in religion he declares that it ultimately resides within, not in an outward Church or Book. He is absolutely uncompromising about this.

"There is, therefore, in matters of doctrine, no such thing as the authority of the Church. We might as well talk of the authority of a morning cloud. There may be light in it, but the light is not of it; and it diminishes the light that it gets; and lets less of it through than it receives, Christ being its sun. Or, we might as well talk of the authority of a flock of sheep – for the Church is a body to be taught and fed, not to teach and feed;

and of all sheep that are fed on the earth, Christ's sheep are the most simple," likely to die in the bramble thickets; "but for their Shepherd, who is for ever finding them and bearing them back, with torn fleeces and eyes full of fear."[42]

There is also an interesting passage in *The Eagle's Nest* (p. 135) on "The Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

By way of Church discipline he advises a process of excommunication by a jury of laymen.[43]

What of religious decorative art? Surely here the great art critic and apostle of the Beautiful will be found on the ritualist side? Not so. He says that Church art, pictures, images, and so on, "make us believe what we would not otherwise have believed; and, secondly, make us think of subjects we should not otherwise have thought of, intruding them amidst our ordinary thoughts in a confusing and familiar manner." "This art," he says, "is misapplied, and in most cases, very dangerously so. Our duty is to believe in the existence of Divine, or any other, persons, only upon rational proofs of their existence; and not because we have seen pictures of them."

"But I nevertheless believe that he who trusts much to such helps (as 'Rafaelesque and other sacred paintings of a high order') will find them fail him at his need; and that the dependence, in any great degree, on the presence or power of a picture, indicates

[42] *Sheepfolds*, p. 267.

[43] *Sheepfolds*, p. 283.

a wonderfully feeble sense of the presence and power of God. I do not think that any man, who is thoroughly certain that Christ is in the room, will care what sort of picture of Christ he has on its walls and, in the plurality of cases, the delight taken in art of this kind is, in reality, nothing more than a form of graceful indulgence of those sensibilities which the habits of a disciplined life restrain in other directions. Such art is, in a word, the opera and drama of the monk. Sometimes it is worse than this, and the love of it is the mask under which a general thirst for morbid excitement will pass itself off for religion. The young lady who rises in the middle of the day, jaded by her last night's ball, and utterly incapable of any simple or wholesome religious exercise, can still gaze into the dark eyes of the Madonna di San Sisto, or dream over the whiteness of an ivory crucifix, and returns to the course of her daily life in full persuasion that her morning's feverishness has atoned for her evening's folly. And, all the while, the art which possesses these very doubtful advantages is acting for undoubtful detriment, in the various ways above examined (in a previous passage), on the inmost fastnesses of faith; it is throwing subtle endearments round foolish traditions, confusing sweet fancies with sound doctrines, and enforcing false assertions with pleasant circumstantiality, until, to the usual, and assuredly sufficient, difficulties standing in the way of belief, its votaries have added a habit of sentimentally changing what they know to be true, and of dearly loving what they confess to be false."

"Has there then (the reader asks emphatically) been no true

religious ideal? Has religious art never been of any service to mankind? I fear, on the whole, not.

"More, I think, has always been done for God by few words than many pictures, and more by few acts than many words."

"And for us all there is in this matter even a deeper danger than that of indulgence. There is the danger of Artistical Pharisaism. Of all the forms of pride and vanity, as there are none more subtle, so I believe there are none more sinful, than those which are manifested by the Pharisees of art. To be proud of birth, of place, of wit, of bodily beauty, is comparatively innocent, just because such pride is more natural, and more easily detected. But to be proud of our sanctities; to pour contempt upon our fellows because, forsooth, we like to look at Madonnas in bowers of roses, better than at plain pictures of plain things; and to make this religious art of ours the expression of our own perpetual self-complacency – congratulating ourselves, day by day, on our purities, proprieties, elevations, and inspirations, as above the reach of common mortals, this I believe to be one of the wickedest and foolishest forms of human egotism."[44]

These clear-sounding testimonies form a coherent whole. Is there any religious body in England which holds all, or even most of these positions? Remarkably enough, there is one which holds them all; indeed, whose separate existence depends on holding just these positions, positive and negative alike. This one is the Society of Friends. We find to our surprise that, without knowing

[44] *Modern Painters*, vol. iii. p. 57 (iv. 4) (1856).

it, Ruskin was a real and very completely furnished Quaker.

The testimony against a paid or professional clergy, against all clerical claims, is the very heart of Quaker practice; and the *raison d'être* of their separate meetings. The Priesthood of all Believers is at the heart of their official statements, and the implication in their ministry. They say that there should be no laity among them, exactly as Ruskin does. They decline all forms of fixed or routine prayer, and never practise them. Their meeting houses are plain, and their worship is ascetically devoid of sensuous attraction in glowing glass or carven stone or in the odour of incense.

It is one of their central historical testimonies, dating from the seventeenth century, that the Bible should not be called the Word of God. For this they were called atheists by the clergy of Charles II. The controversies of that time rarely avoided touching on this sore point. For them, as for Ruskin, the seat of authority is The Light Within, and, like Ruskin, they are willing to "give up Moses" if history demands it.

The attitude of Ruskin to Baptism and the Lord's Supper is a thoroughly Quaker one. Both hold that they are unnecessary and have no "Validity." The only "Church" they recognize is the Universal Church composed of all faithful men everywhere; and as Ruskin speaks of sheep on distant mountains who look like stones, so Friends have always held that the heathen were or could be saints of the household of God, and that knowledge of the historical Jesus Christ was not essential to salvation here or

hereafter.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.