RUSKIN JOHN

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN RIVER

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Содержание

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PREFACE

"The King of the Golden River" is a delightful fairy tale told with all Ruskin's charm of style, his appreciation of mountain scenery, and with his usual insistence upon drawing a moral. None the less, it is quite unlike his other writings. All his life long his pen was busy interpreting nature and pictures and architecture, or persuading to better views those whom he believed to be in error, or arousing, with the white heat of a prophet's zeal, those whom he knew to be unawakened. There is indeed a good deal of the prophet about John Ruskin. Though essentially an interpreter with a singularly fine appreciation of beauty, no man of the nineteenth century felt more keenly that he had a mission, and none was more loyal to what he believed that mission to be.

While still in college, what seemed a chance incident gave occasion and direction to this mission. A certain English reviewer had ridiculed the work of the artist Turner. Now Ruskin held Turner to be the greatest landscape painter the world had seen, and he immediately wrote a notable article in his defense. Slowly this article grew into a pamphlet, and the pamphlet into a book,

the first volume of "Modern Painters." The young man awoke to find himself famous. In the next few years four more volumes were added to "Modern Painters," and the other notable series upon art, "The Stones of Venice" and "The Seven Lamps of Architecture," were sent forth.

Then, in 1860, when Ruskin was about forty years old, there came a great change. His heaven-born genius for making the appreciation of beauty a common possession was deflected from its true field. He had been asking himself what are the conditions that produce great art, and the answer he found declared that art cannot be separated from life, nor life from industry and industrial conditions. A civilization founded upon unrestricted competition therefore seemed to him necessarily feeble in appreciation of the beautiful, and unequal to its creation. In this way loyalty to his mission bred apparent disloyalty. Delightful discourses upon art gave way to fervid pleas for humanity. For the rest of his life he became a very earnest, if not always very wise, social reformer and a passionate pleader for what he believed to be true economic ideals.

There is nothing of all this in "The King of the Golden River." Unlike his other works, it was written merely to entertain. Scarcely that, since it was not written for publication at all, but to meet a challenge set him by a young girl.

The circumstance is interesting. After taking his degree at Oxford, Ruskin was threatened with consumption and hurried away from the chill and damp of England to the south of

Europe. After two years of fruitful travel and study he came back improved in health but not strong, and often depressed in spirit. It was at this time that the Guys, Scotch friends of his father and mother, came for a visit to his home near London, and with them their little daughter Euphemia. The coming of this beautiful, vivacious, light-hearted child opened a new chapter in Ruskin's life. Though but twelve years old, she sought to enliven the melancholy student, absorbed in art and geology, and bade him leave these and write for her a fairy tale. He accepted, and after but two sittings, presented her with this charming story. The incident proved to have awakened in him a greater interest than at first appeared, for a few years later "Effie" Grey became John Ruskin's wife. Meantime she had given the manuscript to a friend. Nine years after it was written, this friend, with John Ruskin's permission, gave the story to the world.

It was published in London in 1851, with illustrations by the celebrated Richard Doyle, and at once became a favorite. Three editions were printed the first year, and soon it had found its way into German, Italian, and Welsh. Since then countless children have had cause to be grateful for the young girl's challenge that won the story of Gluck's golden mug and the highly satisfactory handling of the Black Brothers by Southwest Wind, Esquire.

For this edition new drawings have been prepared by Mr. Hiram P. Barnes. They very successfully preserve the spirit of Doyle's illustrations, which unfortunately are not technically suitable for reproduction here.

In the original manuscript there was an epilogue bearing the heading "Charitie"—a morning hymn of Treasure Valley, whither Gluck had returned to dwell, and where the inheritance lost by cruelty was regained by love:

The beams of morning are renewed The valley laughs their light to see And earth is bright with gratitude And heaven with charitie.

R. H. COE

CHAPTER I
HOW THE AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM OF THE BLACK BROTHERS WAS INTERFERED WITH BY SOUTHWEST WIND, ESQUIRE

In a secluded and mountainous part of Stiria there was in old time a valley of the most surprising and luxuriant fertility. It was surrounded on all sides by steep and rocky mountains rising into peaks which were always covered with snow and from which a number of torrents descended in constant cataracts. One of these fell westward over the face of a crag so high that when the sun had set to everything else, and all below was darkness, his beams still shone full upon this waterfall, so that it looked like a shower of gold. It was therefore called by the people of the neighborhood the Golden River. It was strange that none of these streams fell into the valley itself. They all descended on the other side of the mountains and wound away through broad plains and by populous cities. But the clouds were drawn so constantly to the snowy hills, and rested so softly in the circular hollow, that in time of drought and heat, when all the country round was burned

up, there was still rain in the little valley; and its crops were so heavy, and its hay so high, and its apples so red, and its grapes so blue, and its wine so rich, and its honey so sweet, that it was a marvel to everyone who beheld it and was commonly called the Treasure Valley.

The whole of this little valley belonged to three brothers, called Schwartz, Hans, and Gluck. Schwartz and Hans, the two elder brothers, were very ugly men, with overhanging eyebrows and small, dull eyes which were always half shut, so that you couldn't see into THEM and always fancied they saw very far into YOU. They lived by farming the Treasure Valley, and very good farmers they were. They killed everything that did not pay for its eating. They shot the blackbirds because they pecked the fruit, and killed the hedgehogs lest they should suck the cows; they poisoned the crickets for eating the crumbs in the kitchen, and smothered the cicadas which used to sing all summer in the lime trees. They worked their servants without any wages till they would not work any more, and then quarreled with them and turned them out of doors without paying them. It would have been very odd if with such a farm and such a system of farming they hadn't got very rich; and very rich they DID get. They generally contrived to keep their corn by them till it was very dear, and then sell it for twice its value; they had heaps of gold lying about on their floors, yet it was never known that they had given so much as a penny or a crust in charity; they never went to Mass, grumbled perpetually at paying tithes, and were,

in a word, of so cruel and grinding a temper as to receive from all those with whom they had any dealings the nickname of the "Black Brothers."

The youngest brother, Gluck, was as completely opposed, in both appearance and character, to his seniors as could possibly be imagined or desired. He was not above twelve years old, fair, blue-eyed, and kind in temper to every living thing. He did not, of course, agree particularly well with his brothers, or, rather, they did not agree with HIM. He was usually appointed to the honorable office of turnspit, when there was anything to roast, which was not often, for, to do the brothers justice, they were hardly less sparing upon themselves than upon other people. At other times he used to clean the shoes, floors, and sometimes the plates, occasionally getting what was left on them, by way of encouragement, and a wholesome quantity of dry blows by way of education.

Things went on in this manner for a long time. At last came a very wet summer, and everything went wrong in the country round. The hay had hardly been got in when the haystacks were floated bodily down to the sea by an inundation; the vines were cut to pieces with the hail; the corn was all killed by a black blight. Only in the Treasure Valley, as usual, all was safe. As it had rain when there was rain nowhere else, so it had sun when there was sun nowhere else. Everybody came to buy corn at the farm and went away pouring maledictions on the Black Brothers. They asked what they liked and got it, except from the poor

people, who could only beg, and several of whom were starved at their very door without the slightest regard or notice.

It was drawing towards winter, and very cold weather, when one day the two elder brothers had gone out, with their usual warning to little Gluck, who was left to mind the roast, that he was to let nobody in and give nothing out. Gluck sat down quite close to the fire, for it was raining very hard and the kitchen walls were by no means dry or comfortable-looking. He turned and turned, and the roast got nice and brown. "What a pity," thought Gluck, "my brothers never ask anybody to dinner. I'm sure, when they've got such a nice piece of mutton as this, and nobody else has got so much as a piece of dry bread, it would do their hearts good to have somebody to eat it with them."

Just as he spoke there came a double knock at the house door, yet heavy and dull, as though the knocker had been tied up—more like a puff than a knock.

"It must be the wind," said Gluck; "nobody else would venture to knock double knocks at our door."

No, it wasn't the wind; there it came again very hard, and, what was particularly astounding, the knocker seemed to be in a hurry and not to be in the least afraid of the consequences. Gluck went to the window, opened it, and put his head out to see who it was.

It was the most extraordinary-looking little gentleman he had ever seen in his life. He had a very large nose, slightly brass-colored; his cheeks were very round and very red, and might have warranted a supposition that he had been blowing a refractory

fire for the last eight-and-forty hours; his eyes twinkled merrily through long, silky eyelashes; his mustaches curled twice round like a corkscrew on each side of his mouth; and his hair, of a curious mixed pepper-and-salt color, descended far over his shoulders. He was about four feet six in height and wore a conical pointed cap of nearly the same altitude, decorated with a black feather some three feet long. His doublet was prolonged behind into something resembling a violent exaggeration of what is now termed a "swallowtail," but was much obscured by the swelling folds of an enormous black, glossy-looking cloak, which must have been very much too long in calm weather, as the wind, whistling round the old house, carried it clear out from the wearer's shoulders to about four times his own length.

Gluck was so perfectly paralyzed by the singular appearance of his visitor that he remained fixed without uttering a word, until the old gentleman, having performed another and a more energetic concerto on the knocker, turned round to look after his flyaway cloak. In so doing he caught sight of Gluck's little yellow head jammed in the window, with its mouth and eyes very wide open indeed.

"Hollo!" said the little gentleman; "that's not the way to answer the door. I'm wet; let me in."

To do the little gentleman justice, he WAS wet. His feather hung down between his legs like a beaten puppy's tail, dripping like an umbrella, and from the ends of his mustaches the water was running into his waistcoat pockets and out again like a mill

stream.

"I beg pardon, sir," said Gluck, "I'm very sorry, but, I really can't."

"Can't what?" said the old gentleman.

"I can't let you in, sir—I can't, indeed; my brothers would beat me to death, sir, if I thought of such a thing. What do you want, sir?"

"Want?" said the old gentleman petulantly. "I want fire and shelter, and there's your great fire there blazing, crackling, and dancing on the walls with nobody to feel it. Let me in, I say; I only want to warm myself."

Gluck had had his head, by this time, so long out of the window that he began to feel it was really unpleasantly cold, and when he turned and saw the beautiful fire rustling and roaring and throwing long, bright tongues up the chimney, as if it were licking its chops at the savory smell of the leg of mutton, his heart melted within him that it should be burning away for nothing. "He does look very wet," said little Gluck; "I'll just let him in for a quarter of an hour." Round he went to the door and opened it; and as the little gentleman walked in, there came a gust of wind through the house that made the old chimneys totter.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.