

RUSKIN JOHN

SELECTIONS FROM THE
WORKS OF JOHN
RUSKIN

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John Ruskin

Selections From the Works of John Ruskin

PREFACE

In making the following selections, I have tried to avoid the appearance of such a volume as used to be entitled *Elegant Extracts*. Wherever practicable, entire chapters or lectures are given, or at least passages of sufficient length to insure a correct notion of the general complexion of Ruskin's work. The text is in all cases that of the first editions, unless these were later revised by Ruskin himself. The original spelling and punctuation are preserved, but a few minor changes have been made for the sake of uniformity among the various extracts. For similar reasons, Ruskin's numbering of paragraphs is dispensed with.

I have aimed not to multiply notes. Practically all Ruskin's own annotation is given, with the exception of one or two very long and somewhat irrelevant notes from *Stones of Venice*. It has not been deemed necessary to give the dates of every painter or to explain every geographical reference. On the other hand, the sources of most of the quotations are indicated. In the preparation of these notes, the magnificent library edition of Messrs. Cook and Wedderburn has inevitably been of considerable assistance; but all their references have been verified, many errors have been corrected, and much has of course been added.

In closing I wish to express my obligation to my former colleague, Dr. Lucius H. Holt, without whose assistance this volume would never have appeared. He wrote a number of the notes, including the short prefaces to the various selections, and prepared the manuscript for the printer.

C.B.T.

September, 1908.

Introduction

Two conflicting tendencies in Ruskin

It is distinctive of the nineteenth century that in its passion for criticising everything in heaven and earth it by no means spared to criticise itself. Alike in Carlyle's fulminations against its insincerity, in Arnold's nice ridicule of Philistinism, and in Ruskin's repudiation of everything modern, we detect that fine dissatisfaction with the age which is perhaps only proof of its idealistic trend. For the various ills of society, each of these men had his panacea. What Carlyle had found in hero-worship and Arnold in Hellenic culture, Ruskin sought in the study of art; and it is of the last importance to remember that throughout his work he regarded himself not merely as a writer on painting or buildings or myths or landscape, but as the appointed critic of the age. For there existed in him, side by side with his consuming love of the beautiful, a rigorous Puritanism which was constantly correcting any tendency toward a mere cult of the aesthetic. It is with the interaction of these two forces that any study of the life and writings of Ruskin should be primarily concerned.

I

THE LIFE OF RUSKIN

Ancestry

It is easy to trace in the life of Ruskin these two forces tending respectively toward the love of beauty and toward the contempt of mere beauty. They are, indeed, present from the beginning. He inherited from his Scotch parents that upright fearlessness which has always characterized the race. His stern mother "devoted him to God before he was born,"¹ and she guarded her gift with unremitting but perhaps misguided caution. The child was early taught to find most of his entertainment within himself, and when he did not, he was whipped. He had no playmates and few toys. His chief story-book was the Bible, which he read many times from cover to cover at his mother's knee. His father, the "perfectly honest wine-merchant," seems to have been the one to foster the boy's aesthetic sense; he was in the habit of reading aloud to his little family, and his son's apparently genuine appreciation of Scott, Pope, and Homer dates from the incredibly early age of five. It was his father, also, to whom he owed his early acquaintance with the finest landscape, for the boy was his companion in yearly business trips about Britain, and later visited, in his parents' company, Belgium, western Germany, and the Alps.

Early education

All this of course developed the child's precocity. He was early suffered and even encouraged to compose verses;² by ten he had written a play, which has unfortunately been preserved. The hot-house rearing which his parents believed in, and his facility in teaching himself, tended to make a regular course of schooling a mere annoyance; such schooling as he had did not begin till he was fifteen, and lasted less than two years, and was broken by illness. But the chief effect of the sheltered life and advanced education to which he was subjected was to endow him with depth at the expense of breadth, and to deprive him of a possibly vulgar, but certainly healthy, contact with his kind, which, one must believe, would have checked a certain disposition in him to egotism, sentimentality, and dogmatic vehemence. "The bridle and blinkers were never taken off me," he writes.³

Student at Oxford

Traveling in Europe

At Oxford—whither his cautious mother pursued him—Ruskin seems to have been impressed in no very essential manner by curriculum or college mates. With learning *per se* he was always dissatisfied and never had much to do; his course was distinguished not so much by erudition as by culture. He easily won the Newdigate prize in poetry; his rooms in Christ Church were hung with excellent examples of Turner's landscapes,—the gift of his art-loving father,—of which he had

¹ *Præterita*. He was born February 8, 1819.

² Ruskin himself quotes a not very brilliant specimen in *Modern Painters*, III, in "Moral of Landscape."

³ *Præterita*, § 53.

been an intimate student ever since the age of thirteen. But his course was interrupted by an illness, apparently of a tuberculous nature, which necessitated total relaxation and various trips in Italy and Switzerland, where he seems to have been healed by walking among his beloved Alps. For many years thereafter he passed months of his time in these two countries, accompanied sometimes by his parents and sometimes rather luxuriously, it seems, by valet and guide.

Career as an author begins

Meanwhile he had commenced his career as author with the first volume of *Modern Painters*, begun, the world knows, as a short defense of Turner, originally intended for nothing more than a magazine article. But the role of art-critic and law-giver pleased the youth,—he was only twenty-four when the volume appeared,—and having no desire to realize the ambition of his parents and become a bishop, and even less to duplicate his father's career as vintner, he gladly seized the opportunity thus offered him to develop his aesthetic vein and to redeem the public mind from its vulgar apathy thereby. He continued his work on *Modern Painters*, with some intermissions, for eighteen years, and supplemented it with the equally famous *Seven Lamps of Architecture* in 1849, and *The Stones of Venice* in 1853.

Domestic troubles

This life of zealous work and brilliant recognition was interrupted in 1848 by Ruskin's amazing marriage to Miss Euphemia Gray, a union into which he entered at the desire of his parents with a docility as stupid as it was stupendous. Five years later the couple were quietly divorced, that Mrs. Ruskin might marry Millais. All the author's biographers maintain an indiscreet reserve in discussing the affair, but there can be no concealment of the fact that its effect upon Ruskin was profound in its depression. Experiences like this and his later sad passion for Miss La Touche at once presage and indicate his mental disorder, and no doubt had their share—a large one—in causing Ruskin's dissatisfaction with everything, and above all with his own life and work. Be this as it may, it is at this time in the life of Ruskin that we must begin to reckon with the decline of his aesthetic and the rise of his ethical impulse; his interest passes from art to conduct. It is also the period in which he began his career as lecturer, his chief interest being the social life of his age.

Ruskin's increasing interest in social questions

By 1860, he was publishing the papers on political economy, later called *Unto this Last*, which roused so great a storm of protest when they appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* that their publication had to be suspended. The attitude of the public toward such works as these,—its alternate excitement and apathy,—the death of his parents, combined with the distressing events mentioned above, darkened Ruskin's life and spoiled his interest in everything that did not tend to make the national life more thoughtfully solemn.

"It seems to me that now ... the thoughts of the true nature of our life, and of its powers and responsibilities should present themselves with absolute sadness and sternness."⁴

His lectures as Slade Professor of Art at Oxford, a post which he held at various times from 1870 to 1883, failed to re-establish his undistracted interest in things beautiful.

⁴ *The Mystery of Life.*

Triumph of the reformer over the art-critic

The complete triumph of the reformer over the art-critic is marked by *Fors Clavigera*, a series of letters to workingmen, begun New Year's Day, 1871, in which it was proposed to establish a model colony of peasants, whose lives should be made simple, honest, happy, and even cultured, by a return to more primitive methods of tilling the soil and of making useful and beautiful objects. The Guild of St. George, established to "slay the dragon of industrialism," to dispose of machinery, slums, and discontent, consumed a large part of Ruskin's time and money. He had inherited a fortune of approximately a million dollars, and he now began to dispose of it in various charitable schemes, —establishing tea-shops, supporting young painters, planning model tenements, but, above all, in elaborating his ideas for the Guild. The result of it all—whatever particular reforms were effected or manual industries established—was, to Ruskin's view, failure, and his mind, weakening under the strain of its profound disappointments, at last crashed in ruin.

Death in 1900

It is needless to follow the broken author through the desolation of his closing years to his death in 1900. Save for his charming reminiscences, *Præterita*, his work was done; the long struggle was over, the struggle of one man to reduce the complexities of a national life to an apostolic simplicity, to make it beautiful and good,

Till the high God behold it from beyond,
And enter it.

II THE UNITY OF RUSKIN'S WRITINGS

Diversity of his writings

Ruskin is often described as an author of bewildering variety, whose mind drifted waywardly from topic to topic—from painting to political economy, from architecture to agriculture—with a license as illogical as it was indiscriminating. To this impression, Ruskin himself sometimes gave currency. He was, for illustration, once announced to lecture on crystallography, but, as we are informed by one present,⁵ he opened by asserting that he was really about to lecture on Cistercian architecture; nor did it greatly matter what the title was; "for," said he, "if I had begun to speak about Cistercian abbeys, I should have been sure to get on crystals presently; and if I had begun upon crystals, I should soon have drifted into architecture." Those who conceive of Ruskin as being thus a kind of literary Proteus like to point to the year 1860, that of the publication of his tracts on economics, as witnessing the greatest and suddenest of his changes, that from reforming art to reforming society; and it is true that this year affords a simple dividing-line between Ruskin's earlier work, which is sufficiently described by the three titles, *Modern Painters*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and *The Stones of Venice*, and his later work, chiefly on social subjects such as are discussed in *Unto This Last*, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, and *Fors Clavigera*. And yet we cannot insist too often on the essential unity of this work, for, viewed in the large, it betrays one continuous development. The seeds of *Fors* are in *The Stones of Venice*.

Underlying idea in all his works

The governing idea of Ruskin's first published work, *Modern Painters, Volume I*, was a moral idea. The book was dedicated to the principle that that art is greatest which deals with the greatest number of greatest ideas,—those, we learn presently, which reveal divine truth; the office of the painter, we are told,⁶ is the same as that of the preacher, for "the duty of both is to take for each discourse one essential truth." As if recalling this argument that the painter is a preacher, Carlyle described *The Stones of Venice* as a "sermon in stones." In the idea that all art, when we have taken due account of technique and training, springs from a moral character, we find the unifying principle of Ruskin's strangely diversified work. The very title *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, with its chapters headed "Sacrifice," "Obedience," etc., is a sufficient illustration of Ruskin's identification of moral principles with aesthetic principles. A glance at the following pages of this book will show how Ruskin is for ever halting himself to demand the moral significance of some fair landscape, gorgeous painting, heaven-aspiring cathedral. In "Mountain Glory," for example, he refers to the mountains as "kindly in simple lessons to the workman," and inquires later at what times mankind has offered worship in these mountain churches; of the English cathedral he says, "Weigh the influence of those dark towers on all who have passed through the lonely square at their feet for centuries";⁷ of St. Mark's, "And what effect has this splendour on those who pass beneath it?"—and it will be noticed on referring to "The Two Boyhoods," that, in seeking to define the difference between Giorgione and Turner, the author instinctively has recourse to distinguishing the *religious* influences exerted on the two in youth.

⁵ See Harrison's *Life*, p. 111. Cf. the opening of *The Mystery of Life*.

⁶ Part 2, sec. 1, chap. 4.

⁷ See p. 159.

Underlying idea a moral one

Now it is clear that a student of the relation of art to life, of work to the character of the workman and of his nation, may, and in fact inevitably must, be led in time to attend to the producer rather than to the product, to the cause rather than to the effect; and if we grant, with Ruskin, that the sources of art, namely, the national life, are denied, it will obviously be the part, not only of humanity but of common sense, for such a student to set about purifying the social life of the nation. Whether the reformation proposed by Ruskin be the proper method of attack is not the question we are here concerned with; our only object at present being to call attention to the fact that such a lecture as that on "Traffic" in *The Crown of Wild Olive* is the logical outgrowth of such a chapter as "Ideas of Beauty" in the first volume of *Modern Painters*. Between the author who wrote in 1842, of the necessity of revealing new truths in painting, "This, if it be an honest work of art, it must have done, for no man ever yet worked honestly without giving some such help to his race. God appoints to every one of his creatures a separate mission, and if they discharge it honourably ... there will assuredly come of it such burning as, in its appointed mode and measure, shall shine before men, and be of service constant and holy,"⁸ and the author who wrote, "That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings,"⁹ or, "The beginning of art is in getting our country clean, and our people beautiful,"¹⁰—between these two, I say, there is no essential difference. They are not contradictory but consistent.

Art dependent upon personal and national greatness

Amidst the maze of subjects, then, which Ruskin, with kaleidoscopic suddenness and variety, brings before the astonished gaze of his readers, let them confidently hold this guiding clue. They will find that Ruskin's "facts" are often not facts at all; they will discover that many of Ruskin's choicest theories have been dismissed to the limbo of exploded hypotheses; but they will seek long before they find a more eloquent and convincing plea for the proposition that all great art reposes upon a foundation of personal and national greatness. Critics of Ruskin will show you that he began *Modern Painters* while he was yet ignorant of the classic Italians; that he wrote *The Stones of Venice* without realizing the full indebtedness of the Venetian to the Byzantine architecture; that he proposed to unify the various religious sects although he had no knowledge of theology; that he attempted a reconstruction of society though he had had no scientific training in political economy; but in all this neglect of mere fact the sympathetic reader will discover that contempt for the letter of the law which was characteristic of the nineteenth-century prophet,—of Carlyle, of Arnold, and of Emerson,—and which, if it be blindness, is that produced by an excess of light.

⁸ *Modern Painters*, vol. 1, part 2, sec. 1, chap. 7.

⁹ *Unto This Last*.

¹⁰ See p. 262.

III RUSKIN'S STYLE

Sensuousness of his style

Many people regard the style of Ruskin as his chief claim to greatness. If the time ever come when men no longer study him for sermons in stones, they will nevertheless turn to his pages to enjoy one of the most gorgeous prose styles of the nineteenth century. For a parallel to the sensuous beauties of Ruskin's essays on art, one turns instinctively to poetry; and of all the poets Ruskin is perhaps likest Keats. His sentences, like the poet's, are thick-set with jeweled phrases; they are full of subtle harmonies that respond, like a Stradivarius, to the player's every mood. In its ornateness Ruskin's style is like his favorite cathedral of Amiens, in the large stately, in detail exquisite, profuse, and not without a touch of the grotesque. It is the style of an artist.

Ruskin's method of construction in description

A critical fancy may even discover in the construction of his finest descriptions a method not unlike that of a painter at work upon his canvas. He blocks them out in large masses, then sketches and colors rapidly for general effects, treating detail at first more or less vaguely and collectively, but passing in the end to the elaboration of detail in the concrete, touching the whole with an imaginative gleam that lends a momentary semblance of life to the thing described, after the manner of the "pathetic fallacy." Thus it is in the famous description of St. Mark's:¹¹ we are given first the largest general impression, the "long, low pyramid of coloured light," which the artist proceeds to "hollow beneath into five great vaulted porches," whence he leads the eye slowly upwards amidst a mass of bewildering detail—"a confusion of delight"—from which there slowly emerge those concrete details with which the author particularly wishes to impress us, "the breasts of the Greek horses blazing in their breadth of golden strength and St. Mark's lion lifted on a blue field covered with stars." In lesser compass we are shown the environs of Venice,¹² the general impression of the "long, low, sad-coloured line," being presently broken by the enumeration of unanalyzed detail, "tufted irregularly with brushwood and willows," and passing to concrete detail in the hills of Arqua, "a dark cluster of purple pyramids." In the still more miniature description of the original site of Venice¹³ we have the same method:

"The black desert of their shore lies in its nakedness beneath the night, pathless, comfortless, infirm, lost in dark languor and fearful silence, except where the salt runlets splash into the tideless pools and the sea-birds flit from their margins with a questioning cry."

His love of color

Equally characteristic of the painter is the ever-present use of color. It is interesting merely to count the number and variety of colors used in the descriptions. It will serve at least to call the

¹¹ See p. 162.

¹² See p. 139.

¹³ See p. 147.

reader's attention to the felicitous choice of words used in describing the opalescence of St. Mark's or the skillful combination of the colors characteristic of the great Venetians in such a sentence as, "the low bronzed gleaming of sea-rusted armor shot angrily under their blood-red mantle-folds"¹⁴— a glimpse of a Giorgione.

His love of prose rhythm

He is even more attentive to the ear than to the eye. He loves the sentence of stately rhythms and long-drawn harmonies, and he omits no poetic device that can heighten the charm of sound,— alliteration, as in the famous description of the streets of Venice,

"Far as the eye could reach, still the soft moving of stainless waters proudly pure; as not the flower, so neither the thorn nor the thistle could grow in those glancing fields";¹⁵

the balanced close for some long period,

"to write her history on the white scrolls of the sea-surges and to word it in their thunder, and to gather and give forth, in the world-wide pulsation, the glory of the West and of the East, from the burning heart of her Fortitude and splendour";¹⁶

and the tendency, almost a mannerism, to add to the music of his own rhythm, the deep organ-notes of Biblical text and paraphrase. But if we wish to see how aptly Ruskin's style responds to the tone of his subject, we need but remark the rich liquid sentence descriptive of Giorgione's home,

"brightness out of the north and balm from the south, and the stars of evening and morning clear in the limitless light of arched heaven and circling sea,"¹⁷

which he has set over against the harsh explosiveness of

"Near the south-west corner of Covent Garden, a square brick pit or wall is formed by a close-set block of house to the back windows of which it admits a few rays of light—"

the birthplace of Turner.

His beauty of style often distracts from the thought

But none knew better than Ruskin that a style so stiff with ornament was likely to produce all manner of faults. In overloading his sentences with jewelry he frequently obscures the sense; his beauties often degenerate into mere prettiness; his sweetness cloy. His free indulgence of the emotions, often at the expense of the intellect, leads to a riotous extravagance of superlative. But, above all, his richness distracts attention from matter to manner. In the case of an author so profoundly in earnest, this could not but be unfortunate; nothing enraged him more than to have people look upon the beauties of his style rather than ponder the substance of his book. In a passage of complacent self-scourging he says:

"For I have had what, in many respects, I boldly call the misfortune, to set my words sometimes prettily together; not without a foolish vanity in the poor knack that I had of doing so, until I was heavily punished for this pride by finding

¹⁴ See p. 121.

¹⁵ See p. 122.

¹⁶ See p. 149.

¹⁷ See p. 122.

that many people thought of the words only, and cared nothing for their meaning. Happily, therefore, the power of using such language—if indeed it ever were mine—is passing away from me; and whatever I am now able to say at all I find myself forced to say with great plainness."¹⁸

His picturesque extravagance of style

But Ruskin's decision to speak with "great plainness" by no means made the people of England attend to what he said rather than the way he said it. He could be, and in his later work he usually was, strong and clear; but the old picturesqueness and exuberance of passion were with him still. The public discovered that it enjoyed Ruskin's denunciations of machinery much as it had enjoyed his descriptions of mountains, and, without obviously mending its ways, called loudly for more. Lecture-rooms were crowded and editions exhausted by the ladies and gentlemen of England, whose nerves were pleasantly thrilled with a gentle surprise on being told that they had despised literature, art, science, nature, and compassion, and that what they thought upon any subject was "a matter of no serious importance"; that they could not be said to have any thoughts at all—indeed, no right to think.¹⁹ The fiercer his anathemas, the greater the applause; the louder he shouted, the better he pleased. Let him split the ears of the groundlings, let him out-Herod Herod,—the judicious might grieve, but all would be excitedly attentive. Their Jeremiah seemed at times like to become a jester,—there was a suggestion of the ludicrous in the sudden passage from birds to Greek coins, to mills, to Walter Scott, to millionaire malefactors,—a suggestion of acrobatic tumbling and somersault; but he always got a hearing. In lecturing to the students of a military academy he had the pleasing audacity to begin:

"Young soldiers, I do not doubt but that many of you came unwillingly to-night, and many of you in merely contemptuous curiosity, to hear what a writer on painting could possibly say, or would venture to say, respecting your great art of war";²⁰

after which stinging challenge, one has no doubt, any feeling of offense was swallowed up in admiration of the speaker's physical courage.

Influence of Carlyle upon Ruskin

The unity of Ruskin's style

There can be little doubt that this later manner in which Ruskin allowed his Puritan instincts to defeat his aestheticism, and indulged to an alarming degree his gift of vituperation, was profoundly influenced by his "master," Carlyle, who had long since passed into his later and raucous manner. Carlyle's delight in the disciple's diatribes probably encouraged the younger man in a vehemence of invective to which his love of dogmatic assertion already rendered him too prone. At his best, Ruskin, like Carlyle, reminds us of a major prophet; at his worst he shrieks and heats the air. His high indignations lead him into all manner of absurdity and self-contradiction. An amusing instance of this may be given from *Sesame and Lilies*. In the first lecture, which, it will be recalled, was given in

¹⁸ *The Mystery of Life*.

¹⁹ *Sesame and Lilies*, "Kings' Treasuries," §§ 25, 31.

²⁰ *The Crown of Wild Olive*, "War."

aid of a library fund, we find²¹ the remark, "We are filthy and foolish enough to thumb one another's books out of circulating libraries." His friends and his enemies, the clergy (who "teach a false gospel for hire") and the scientists, the merchants and the universities, Darwin and Dante, all had their share in the indignant lecturer's indiscriminate abuse. And yet in all the tropical luxuriance of his inconsistency, one can never doubt the man's sincerity. He never wrote for effect. He may dazzle us, but his fire is never pyrotechnical; it always springs from the deep volcanic heart of him. His was a fervor too easily stirred and often ill-directed, but its wild brilliance cannot long be mistaken for the sky-rocket's; it flares madly in all directions, now beautifying, now appalling, the night, the fine ardor of the painter passing into the fierce invective of the prophet. But in the end it is seen that Ruskin's style, like his subject-matter, is a unity,—an emanation from a divine enthusiasm making for "whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report."

²¹ "Kings' Treasuries," § 32.

Selections from Modern Painters

The five volumes of *Modern Painters* appeared at various intervals between 1843 and 1860, from the time Ruskin was twenty-four until he was forty. The first volume was published in May, 1843; the second, in April, 1846; the third, January 15, 1856; the fourth, April 14, 1856; the last, in June, 1860. As his knowledge of his subject broadened and deepened, we find the later volumes differing greatly in viewpoint and style from the earlier; but, as stated in the preface to the last volume, "in the main aim and principle of the book there is no variation, from its first syllable to its last." Ruskin himself maintained that the most important influence upon his thought in preparation for his work in *Modern Painters* was not from his "love of art, but of mountains and seas"; and all the power of judgment he had obtained in art, he ascribed to his "steady habit of always looking for the subject principally, and for the art only as the means of expressing it." The first volume was published as the work of "a graduate of Oxford," Ruskin "fearing that I might not obtain fair hearing if the reader knew my youth." The author's proud father did not allow the secret to be kept long. The title Ruskin originally chose for the volume was *Turner and the Ancients*. To this Smith, Elder & Co., his publishers, objected, and the substitution of *Modern Painters* was their suggestion. The following is the title-page of the first volume in the original edition:

MODERN PAINTERS:

Their Superiority

In the Art of Landscape Painting

To all

The Ancient Masters

proved by examples of

The True, the Beautiful, and the Intellectual,

From the

Works of Modern Artists, especially

From those of J.M.W. Turner, Esq., R.A

By a Graduate of Oxford

(Quotation from Wordsworth)

London: Smith, Elder & Co., 65 Cornhill

1843

THE EARTH-VEIL VOLUME V, CHAPTER I

"To dress it and to keep it."²²

That, then, was to be our work. Alas! what work have we set ourselves upon instead! How have we ravaged the garden instead of kept it—feeding our war-horses with its flowers, and splintering its trees into spear-shafts!

"And at the East a flaming sword."²³

Is its flame quenchless? and are those gates that keep the way indeed passable no more? or is it not rather that we no more desire to enter? For what can we conceive of that first Eden which we might not yet win back, if we chose? It was a place full of flowers, we say. Well: the flowers are always striving to grow wherever we suffer them; and the fairer, the closer. There may, indeed, have been a Fall of Flowers, as a Fall of Man; but assuredly creatures such as we are can now fancy nothing lovelier than roses and lilies, which would grow for us side by side, leaf overlapping leaf, till the Earth was white and red with them, if we cared to have it so. And Paradise was full of pleasant shades and fruitful avenues. Well: what hinders us from covering as much of the world as we like with pleasant shade, and pure blossom, and goodly fruit? Who forbids its valleys to be covered over with corn till they laugh and sing? Who prevents its dark forests, ghostly and uninhabitable, from being changed into infinite orchards, wreathing the hills with frail-floreted snow, far away to the half-lighted horizon of April, and flushing the face of all the autumnal earth with glow of clustered food? But Paradise was a place of peace, we say, and all the animals were gentle servants to us. Well: the world would yet be a place of peace if we were all peacemakers, and gentle service should we have of its creatures if we gave them gentle mastery. But so long as we make sport of slaying bird and beast, so long as we choose to contend rather with our fellows than with our faults, and make battlefield of our meadows instead of pasture—so long, truly, the Flaming Sword will still turn every way, and the gates of Eden remain barred close enough, till we have sheathed the sharper flame of our own passions, and broken down the closer gates of our own hearts.

I have been led to see and feel this more and more, as I consider the service which the flowers and trees, which man was at first appointed to keep, were intended to render to him in return for his care; and the services they still render to him, as far as he allows their influence, or fulfils his own task towards them. For what infinite wonderfulness there is in this vegetation, considered, as indeed it is, as the means by which the earth becomes the companion of man—his friend and his teacher! In the conditions which we have traced in its rocks, there could only be seen preparation for his existence;—the characters which enable him to live on it safely, and to work with it easily—in all these it has been inanimate and passive; but vegetation is to it as an imperfect soul, given to meet the soul of man. The earth in its depths must remain dead and cold, incapable except of slow crystalline change; but at its surface, which human beings look upon and deal with, it ministers to them through a veil of strange intermediate being: which breathes, but has no voice; moves, but cannot leave its appointed place; passes through life without consciousness, to death without bitterness; wears the beauty of youth, without its passion; and declines to the weakness of age, without its regret.

And in this mystery of intermediate being, entirely subordinate to us, with which we can deal as we choose, having just the greater power as we have the less responsibility for our treatment of the unsuffering creature, most of the pleasures which we need from the external world are gathered, and most of the lessons we need are written, all kinds of precious grace and teaching being united in this link between the Earth and Man; wonderful in universal adaptation to his need, desire, and discipline;

²² *Genesis* ii, 15; iii 24.

²³ *Genesis* ii, 15; iii 24.

God's daily preparation of the earth for him, with beautiful means of life. First, a carpet to make it soft for him; then, a coloured fantasy of embroidery thereon; then, tall spreading of foliage to shade him from sun heat, and shade also the fallen rain; that it may not dry quickly back into the clouds, but stay to nourish the springs among the moss. Stout wood to bear this leafage: easily to be cut, yet tough and light, to make houses for him, or instruments (lance-shaft, or plough-handle, according to his temper); useless, it had been, if harder; useless, if less fibrous; useless, if less elastic. Winter comes, and the shade of leafage falls away, to let the sun warm the earth; the strong boughs remain, breaking the strength of winter winds. The seeds which are to prolong the race, innumerable according to the need, are made beautiful and palatable, varied into infinitude of appeal to the fancy of man, or provision for his service: cold juice, or glowing spice, or balm, or incense, softening oil, preserving resin, medicine of styptic, febrifuge, or lulling charm: and all these presented in forms of endless change. Fragility or force, softness and strength, in all degrees and aspects; unerring uprightness, as of temple pillars, or unguided wandering of feeble tendrils on the ground; mighty resistances of rigid arm and limb to the storms of ages, or wavings to and fro with faintest pulse of summer streamlet. Roots cleaving the strength of rock, or binding the transience of the sand; crests basking in sunshine of the desert, or hiding by dripping spring and lightless cave; foliage far tossing in entangled fields beneath every wave of ocean—clothing, with variegated, everlasting films, the peaks of the trackless mountains, or ministering at cottage doors to every gentlest passion and simplest joy of humanity.

Being thus prepared for us in all ways, and made beautiful, and good for food, and for building, and for instruments in our hands, this race of plants, deserving boundless affection and admiration from us, becomes, in proportion to their obtaining it, a nearly perfect test of our being in right temper of mind and way of life; so that no one can be far wrong in either who loves the trees enough, and every one is assuredly wrong in both who does not love them, if his life has brought them in his way. It is clearly possible to do without them, for the great companionship of the sea and sky are all that sailors need; and many a noble heart has been taught the best it had to learn between dark stone walls. Still if human life be cast among trees at all, the love borne to them is a sure test of its purity. And it is a sorrowful proof of the mistaken ways of the world that the "country," in the simple sense of a place of fields and trees, has hitherto been the source of reproach to its inhabitants, and that the words "countryman, rustic, clown, paysan, villager," still signify a rude and untaught person, as opposed to the words "townsman" and "citizen". We accept this usage of words, or the evil which it signifies, somewhat too quietly; as if it were quite necessary and natural that country-people should be rude, and townspeople gentle. Whereas I believe that the result of each mode of life may, in some stages of the world's progress, be the exact reverse; and that another use of words may be forced upon us by a new aspect of facts, so that we may find ourselves saying: "Such and such a person is very gentle and kind—he is quite rustic; and such and such another person is very rude and ill-taught—he is quite urbane."

At all events, cities have hitherto gained the better part of their good report through our evil ways of going on in the world generally; chiefly and eminently through our bad habit of fighting with each other. No field, in the Middle Ages, being safe from devastation, and every country lane yielding easier passage to the marauders, peacefully-minded men necessarily congregated in cities, and walled themselves in, making as few cross-country roads as possible: while the men who sowed and reaped the harvests of Europe were only the servants or slaves of the barons. The disdain of all agricultural pursuits by the nobility, and of all plain facts by the monks, kept educated Europe in a state of mind over which natural phenomena could have no power; body and intellect being lost in the practice of war without purpose, and the meditation of words without meaning. Men learned the dexterity with sword and syllogism, which they mistook for education, within cloister and tilt-yard; and looked on all the broad space of the world of God mainly as a place for exercise of horses, or for growth of food.

There is a beautiful type of this neglect of the perfectness of the Earth's beauty, by reason of the passions of men, in that picture of Paul Uccello's of the battle of Sant' Egidio,²⁴ in which the armies meet on a country road beside a hedge of wild roses; the tender red flowers tossing above the helmets, and glowing beneath the lowered lances. For in like manner the whole of Nature only shone hitherto for man between the tossing of helmet-crests; and sometimes I cannot but think of the trees of the earth as capable of a kind of sorrow, in that imperfect life of theirs, as they opened their innocent leaves in the warm springtime, in vain for men; and all along the dells of England her beeches cast their dappled shade only where the outlaw drew his bow, and the king rode his careless chase; and by the sweet French rivers their long ranks of poplar waved in the twilight, only to show the flames of burning cities on the horizon, through the tracery of their stems; amidst the fair defiles of the Apennines, the twisted olive-trunks hid the ambushes of treachery; and on their valley meadows, day by day, the lilies which were white at the dawn were washed with crimson at sunset.

And indeed I had once purposed, in this work, to show what kind of evidence existed respecting the possible influence of country life on men; it seeming to me, then, likely that here and there a reader would perceive this to be a grave question, more than most which we contend about, political or social, and might care to follow it out with me earnestly.

The day will assuredly come when men will see that it *is* a grave question; at which period, also, I doubt not, there will arise persons able to investigate it. For the present, the movements of the world seem little likely to be influenced by botanical law; or by any other considerations respecting trees, than the probable price of timber. I shall limit myself, therefore, to my own simple woodman's work, and try to hew this book into its final shape, with the limited and humble aim that I had in beginning it, namely, to prove how far the idle and peaceable persons, who have hitherto cared about leaves and clouds, have rightly seen, or faithfully reported of them.

²⁴ "In our own National Gallery. It is quaint and imperfect, but of great interest." [Ruskin.] Paolo Uccello (c. 1397-1475), a Florentine painter of the Renaissance, the first of the naturalists. His real name was Paolo di Dono, but he was called Uccello from his fondness for birds.

THE MOUNTAIN GLORY VOLUME IV, CHAPTER 20

I have dwelt, in the foregoing chapter, on the sadness of the hills with the greater insistence that I feared my own excessive love for them might lead me into too favourable interpretation of their influences over the human heart; or, at least, that the reader might accuse me of fond prejudice, in the conclusions to which, finally, I desire to lead him concerning them. For, to myself, mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery; in them, and in the forms of inferior landscape that lead to them, my affections are wholly bound up; and though I can look with happy admiration at the lowland flowers, and woods, and open skies, the happiness is tranquil and cold, like that of examining detached flowers in a conservatory, or reading a pleasant book; and if the scenery be resolutely level, insisting upon the declaration of its own flatness in all the detail of it, as in Holland, or Lincolnshire, or Central Lombardy, it appears to me like a prison, and I cannot long endure it. But the slightest rise and fall in the road,—a mossy bank at the side of a crag of chalk, with brambles at its brow, overhanging it,—a ripple over three or four stones in the stream by the bridge,—above all, a wild bit of ferny ground under a fir or two, looking as if, possibly, one might see a hill if one got to the other side of the trees, will instantly give me intense delight, because the shadow, or the hope, of the hills is in them.

And thus, although there are few districts of Northern Europe, however apparently dull or tame, in which I cannot find pleasure, though the whole of Northern France (except Champagne), dull as it seems to most travellers, is to me a perpetual Paradise; and, putting Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, and one or two such other perfectly flat districts aside, there is not an English county which I should not find entertainment in exploring the cross-roads of, foot by foot; yet all my best enjoyment would be owing to the imagination of the hills, colouring, with their far-away memories, every lowland stone and herb. The pleasant French coteau, green in the sunshine, delights me, either by what real mountain character it has in itself (for in extent and succession of promontory the flanks of the French valleys have quite the sublimity of true mountain distances), or by its broken ground and rugged steps among the vines, and rise of the leafage above, against the blue sky, as it might rise at Vevay or Como. There is not a wave of the Seine but is associated in my mind with the first rise of the sandstones and forest pines of Fontaine-bleau; and with the hope of the Alps, as one leaves Paris with the horses' heads to the south-west, the morning sun flashing on the bright waves at Charenton. If there be *no* hope or association of this kind, and if I cannot deceive myself into fancying that perhaps at the next rise of the road there may be seen the film of a blue hill in the gleam of sky at the horizon, the landscape, however beautiful, produces in me even a kind of sickness and pain; and the whole view from Richmond Hill or Windsor Terrace,—nay, the gardens of Alcinous, with their perpetual summer,—or of the Hesperides (if they were flat, and not close to Atlas), golden apples and all,—I would give away in an instant, for one mossy granite stone a foot broad, and two leaves of lady-fern.²⁵

I know that this is in great part idiosyncrasy; and that I must not trust to my own feelings, in this respect, as representative of the modern landscape instinct: yet I know it is not idiosyncrasy, in so far as there may be proved to be indeed an increase of the absolute beauty of all scenery in

²⁵ In tracing the *whole* of the deep enjoyment to mountain association, I of course except whatever feelings are connected with the observance of rural life, or with that of architecture. None of these feelings arise out of the landscape properly so called: the pleasure with which we see a peasant's garden fairly kept, or a ploughman doing his work well, or a group of children playing at a cottage door, being wholly separate from that which we find in the fields or commons around them; and the beauty of architecture, or the associations connected with it, in like manner often ennobling the most tame scenery;—yet not so but that we may always distinguish between the abstract character of the unassisted landscape, and the charm which it derives from the architecture. Much of the majesty of French landscape consists in its grand and grey village churches and turreted farmhouses, not to speak of its cathedrals, castles, and beautifully placed cities. [Ruskin.]

exact proportion to its mountainous character, providing that character be *healthily* mountainous. I do not mean to take the Col de Bonhomme as representative of hills, any more than I would take Romney Marsh as representative of plains; but putting Leicestershire or Staffordshire fairly beside Westmoreland, and Lombardy or Champagne fairly beside the Pays de Vaud or the Canton Berne, I find the increase in the calculable sum of elements of beauty to be steadily in proportion to the increase of mountainous character; and that the best image which the world can give of Paradise is in the slope of the meadows, orchards, and corn-fields on the sides of a great Alp, with its purple rocks and eternal snows above; this excellence not being in any wise a matter referable to feeling, or individual preferences, but demonstrable by calm enumeration of the number of lovely colours on the rocks, the varied grouping of the trees, and quantity of noble incidents in stream, crag, or cloud, presented to the eye at any given moment.

For consider, first, the difference produced in the whole tone of landscape colour by the introductions of purple, violet, and deep ultramarine blue, which we owe to mountains. In an ordinary lowland landscape we have the blue of the sky; the green of grass, which I will suppose (and this is an unnecessary concession to the lowlands) entirely fresh and bright; the green of trees; and certain elements of purple, far more rich and beautiful than we generally should think, in their bark and shadows (bare hedges and thickets, or tops of trees, in subdued afternoon sunshine, are nearly perfect purple, and of an exquisite tone), as well as in ploughed fields, and dark ground in general. But among mountains, in *addition* to all this, large unbroken spaces of pure violet and purple are introduced in their distances; and even near, by films of cloud passing over the darkness of ravines or forests, blues are produced of the most subtle tenderness; these azures and purples²⁶ passing into rose-colour of otherwise wholly unattainable delicacy among the upper summits, the blue of the sky being at the same time purer and deeper than in the plains. Nay, in some sense, a person who has never seen the rose-colour of the rays of dawn crossing a blue mountain twelve or fifteen miles away, can hardly be said to know what *tenderness* in colour means at all; *bright* tenderness he may, indeed, see in the sky or in a flower, but this grave tenderness of the far-away hill-purples he cannot conceive.

Together with this great source of pre-eminence in *mass* of colour, we have to estimate the influence of the finished inlaying and enamel-work of the colour-jewellery on every stone; and that of the continual variety in species of flower; most of the mountain flowers being, besides, separately lovelier than the lowland ones. The wood hyacinth and wild rose are, indeed, the only *supreme* flowers that the lowlands can generally show; and the wild rose is also a mountaineer, and more fragrant in the hills, while the wood hyacinth, or grape hyacinth, at its best cannot match even the dark bell-gentian, leaving the light-blue star-gentian in its uncontested queenliness, and the Alpine rose and Highland heather wholly without similitude. The violet, lily of the valley, crocus, and wood anemone are, I suppose, claimable partly by the plains as well as the hills; but the large orange lily and narcissus I have never seen but on hill pastures, and the exquisite oxalis pre-eminently a mountaineer.²⁷

To this supremacy in mosses and flowers we have next to add an inestimable gain in the continual presence and power of water. Neither in its clearness, its colour, its fantasy of motion, its calmness of space, depth, and reflection, or its wrath, can water be conceived by a lowlander, out of sight of sea. A sea wave is far grander than any torrent—but of the sea and its influences we are not now speaking; and the sea itself, though it *can* be clear, is never calm, among our shores, in the sense that a mountain lake can be calm. The sea seems only to pause; the mountain lake to sleep,

²⁶ One of the principal reasons for the false supposition that Switzerland is not picturesque, is the error of most sketchers and painters in representing pine forest in middle distance as dark green, or grey green, whereas its true colour is always purple, at distances of even two or three miles. Let any traveller coming down the Montanvert look for an aperture, three or four inches wide, between the near pine branches, through which, standing eight or ten feet from it, he can see the opposite forests on the Breven or Flegère. Those forests are not above two or two and a half miles from him; but he will find the aperture is filled by a tint of nearly pure azure or purple, not by green. [Ruskin.]

²⁷ The Savoyard's name for its flower, "Pain du Bon Dieu," is very beautiful; from, I believe, the supposed resemblance of its white and scattered blossom to the fallen manna, [Ruskin.]

and to dream. Out of sight of the ocean a lowlander cannot be considered ever to have seen water at all. The mantling of the pools in the rock shadows, with the golden flakes of light sinking down through them like falling leaves, the ringing of the thin currents among the shallows, the flash and the cloud of the cascade, the earthquake and foam-fire of the cataract, the long lines of alternate mirror and mist that lull the imagery of the hills reversed in the blue of morning,—all these things belong to those hills as their undivided inheritance.

To this supremacy in wave and stream is joined a no less manifest pre-eminence in the character of trees. It is possible among plains, in the species of trees which properly belong to them, the poplars of Amiens, for instance, to obtain a serene simplicity of grace, which, as I said, is a better help to the study of gracefulness, as such, than any of the wilder groupings of the hills; so, also, there are certain conditions of symmetrical luxuriance developed in the park and avenue, rarely rivalled in their way among mountains; and yet the mountain superiority in foliage is, on the whole, nearly as complete as it is in water: for exactly as there are some expressions in the broad reaches of a navigable lowland river, such as the Loire or Thames, not, in their way, to be matched among the rock rivers, and yet for all that a lowlander cannot be said to have truly seen the element of water at all; so even in the richest parks and avenues he cannot be said to have truly seen trees. For the resources of trees are not developed until they have difficulty to contend with; neither their tenderness of brotherly love and harmony, till they are forced to choose their ways of various life where there is contracted room for them, talking to each other with their restrained branches. The various action of trees rooting themselves in inhospitable rocks, stooping to look into ravines, hiding from the search of glacier winds, reaching forth to the rays of rare sunshine, crowding down together to drink at sweetest streams, climbing hand in hand among the difficult slopes, opening in sudden dances round the mossy knolls, gathering into companies at rest among the fragrant fields, gliding in grave procession over the heavenward ridges—nothing of this can be conceived among the unvexed and unvaried felicities of the lowland forest: while to all these direct sources of greater beauty are added, first the power of redundance,—the mere quantity of foliage visible in the folds and on the promontories of a single Alp being greater than that of an entire lowland landscape (unless a view from some cathedral tower); and to this charm of redundance, that of clearer *visibility*,—tree after tree being constantly shown in successive height, one behind another, instead of the mere tops and flanks of masses, as in the plains; and the forms of multitudes of them continually defined against the clear sky, near and above, or against white clouds entangled among their branches, instead of being confused in dimness of distance.

Finally, to this supremacy in foliage we have to add the still less questionable supremacy in clouds. There is no effect of sky possible in the lowlands which may not in equal perfection be seen among the hills; but there are effects by tens of thousands, for ever invisible and inconceivable to the inhabitant of the plains, manifested among the hills in the course of one day. The mere power of familiarity with the clouds, of walking with them and above them, alters and renders clear our whole conception of the baseless architecture of the sky; and for the beauty of it, there is more in a single wreath of early cloud, pacing its way up an avenue of pines, or pausing among the points of their fringes, than in all the white heaps that fill the arched sky of the plains from one horizon to the other. And of the nobler cloud manifestations,—the breaking of their troublous seas against the crags, their black spray sparkling with lightning; or the going forth of the morning²⁸ along their pavements of moving marble, level-laid between dome and dome of snow;—of these things there can be as little imagination or understanding in an inhabitant of the plains as of the scenery of another planet than his own.

And, observe, all these superiorities are matters plainly measurable and calculable, not in any wise to be referred to estimate of *sensation*. Of the grandeur or expression of the hills I have not spoken; how far they are great, or strong, or terrible, I do not for the moment consider, because

²⁸ *Ezekiel vii, 10; Hosea vi, 3.*

vastness, and strength, and terror, are not to all minds subjects of desired contemplation. It may make no difference to some men whether a natural object be large or small, whether it be strong or feeble. But loveliness of colour, perfectness of form, endlessness of change, wonderfulness of structure, are precious to all undiseased human minds; and the superiority of the mountains in all these things to the lowland is, I repeat, as measurable as the richness of a painted window matched with a white one, or the wealth of a museum compared with that of a simply furnished chamber. They seem to have been built for the human race, as at once their schools and cathedrals; full of treasures of illuminated manuscript for the scholar, kindly in simple lessons to the worker, quiet in pale cloisters for the thinker, glorious in holiness for the worshipper. And of these great cathedrals of the earth, with their gates of rock, pavements of cloud, choirs of stream and stone, altars of snow, and vaults of purple traversed by the continual stars,—of these, as we have seen,²⁹ it was written, nor long ago, by one of the best of the poor human race for whom they were built, wondering in himself for whom their Creator *could* have made them, and thinking to have entirely discerned the Divine intent in them —"They are inhabited by the Beasts."³⁰

Was it then indeed thus with us, and so lately? Had mankind offered no worship in their mountain churches? Was all that granite sculpture and floral painting done by the angels in vain?

Not so. It will need no prolonged thought to convince us that in the hills the purposes of their Maker have indeed been accomplished in such measure as, through the sin or folly of men, He ever permits them to be accomplished. It may not seem, from the general language held concerning them, or from any directly traceable results, that mountains have had serious influence on human intellect; but it will not, I think, be difficult to show that their occult influence has been both constant and essential to the progress of the race.

²⁹ In "The Mountain Gloom," the chapter immediately preceding.

³⁰ Ruskin refers to *The Fulfilling of the Scripture*, a book by Robert Fleming [1630-94].

SUNRISE ON THE ALPS ³¹

VOLUME I, SECTION 3, PART 2, CHAPTER 4

Stand upon the peak of some isolated mountain at daybreak, when the night mists first rise from off the plains, and watch their white and lake-like fields, as they float in level bays and winding gulfs about the islanded summits of the lower hills, untouched yet by more than dawn, colder and more quiet than a windless sea under the moon of midnight; watch when the first sunbeam is sent upon the silver channels, how the foam of their undulating surface parts and passes away, and down under their depths the glittering city and green pasture lie like Atlantis,³² between the white paths of winding rivers; the flakes of light falling every moment faster and broader among the starry spires, as the wreathed surges break and vanish above them, and the confused crests and ridges of the dark hills shorten their grey shadows upon the plain.... Wait a little longer, and you shall see those scattered mists rallying in the ravines, and floating up towards you, along the winding valleys, till they crouch in quiet masses, iridescent with the morning light,³³ upon the broad breasts of the higher hills, whose leagues of massy undulation will melt back and back into that robe of material light, until they fade away, lost in its lustre, to appear again above, in the serene heaven, like a wild, bright, impossible dream, foundationless and inaccessible, their very bases vanishing in the unsubstantial and mocking blue of the deep lake below.³⁴... Wait yet a little longer, and you shall see those mists gather themselves into white towers, and stand like fortresses along the promontories, massy and motionless, only piled with every instant higher and higher into the sky, and casting longer shadows athwart the rocks; and out of the pale blue of the horizon you will see forming and advancing a troop of narrow, dark, pointed vapours, which will cover the sky, inch by inch, with their grey network, and take the light off the landscape with an eclipse which will stop the singing of the birds and the motion of the leaves, together; and then you will see horizontal bars of black shadow forming under them, and lurid wreaths create themselves, you know not how, along the shoulders of the hills; you never see them form, but when you look back to a place which was clear an instant ago, there is a cloud on it, hanging by the precipices, as a hawk pauses over his prey.... And then you will hear the sudden rush of the awakened wind, and you will see those watch-towers of vapour swept away from their foundations, and waving curtains of opaque rain let down to the valleys, swinging from the burdened clouds in black bending fringes, or pacing in pale columns along the lake level, grazing its surface into foam as they go. And then, as the sun sinks, you shall see the storm drift for an instant, from off the hills, leaving their broad sides smoking, and loaded yet with snow-white, torn, steam-like rags of capricious vapour, now gone, now gathered again; while the smouldering sun, seeming not far away, but burning like a red-hot ball beside you, and as if you could reach it, plunges through the rushing wind and rolling cloud with headlong fall, as if it meant to rise no more, dyeing all the air about it with blood.... And then you shall hear the fainting tempest die in the hollow of the night, and you shall see a green halo kindling on the summit of the eastern hills, brighter—brighter yet, till the large white circle of the slow moon is lifted up among the barred clouds, step by step, line by line; star after star she quenches with her kindling light, setting in their stead an army of pale, penetrable, fleecy wreaths in the heaven, to give light upon the earth, which move together, hand in hand, company by company, troop by troop, so

³¹ Some sentences of an argumentative nature have been omitted from this selection.

³² A mythical island in the Atlantic.

³³ I have often seen the white, thin, morning cloud, edged with the seven colours of the prism. I am not aware of the cause of this phenomenon, for it takes place not when we stand with our backs to the sun, but in clouds near the sun itself, irregularly and over indefinite spaces, sometimes taking place in the body of the cloud. The colours are distinct and vivid, but have a kind of metallic lustre upon them. [Ruskin.]

³⁴ Lake Lucerne. [Ruskin.]

measured in their unity of motion, that the whole heaven seems to roll with them, and the earth to reel under them.... And then wait yet for one hour, until the east again becomes purple, and the heaving mountains, rolling against it in darkness, like waves of a wild sea, are drowned one by one in the glory of its burning: watch the white glaciers blaze in their winding paths about the mountains, like mighty serpents with scales of fire: watch the columnar peaks of solitary snow, kindling downwards, chasm by chasm, each in itself a new morning; their long avalanches cast down in keen streams brighter than the lightning, sending each his tribute of driven snow, like altar-smoke, up to the heaven; the rose-light of their silent domes flushing that heaven about them and above them, piercing with purer light through its purple lines of lifted cloud, casting a new glory on every wreath as it passes by, until the whole heaven, one scarlet canopy, is interwoven with a roof of waving flame, and tossing, vault beyond vault, as with the drifted wings of many companies of angels: and then, when you can look no more for gladness, and when you are bowed down with fear and love of the Maker and Doer of this, tell me who has best delivered this His message unto men!³⁵

³⁵ The implication is that Turner has best delivered it.

THE GRAND STYLE ³⁶

VOLUME III, CHAPTER I

In taking up the clue of an inquiry, now intermitted for nearly ten years, it may be well to do as a traveller would, who had to recommence an interrupted journey in a guideless country; and, ascending, as it were, some little hill beside our road, note how far we have already advanced, and what pleasantest ways we may choose for farther progress.

I endeavoured, in the beginning of the first volume, to divide the sources of pleasure open to us in Art into certain groups, which might conveniently be studied in succession. After some preliminary discussion, it was concluded that these groups were, in the main, three; consisting, first, of the pleasures taken in perceiving simple resemblance to Nature (Ideas of Truth); secondly, of the pleasures taken in the beauty of the things chosen to be painted (Ideas of Beauty); and, lastly, of pleasures taken in the meanings and relations of these things (Ideas of Relation).

The first volume, treating of the ideas of Truth, was chiefly occupied with an inquiry into the various success with which different artists had represented the facts of Nature,—an inquiry necessarily conducted very imperfectly, owing to the want of pictorial illustration.

The second volume merely opened the inquiry into the nature of ideas of Beauty and Relation, by analysing (as far as I was able to do so) the two faculties of the human mind which mainly seized such ideas; namely, the contemplative and imaginative faculties.

It remains for us to examine the various success of artists, especially of the great landscape-painter whose works have been throughout our principal subject, in addressing these faculties of the human mind, and to consider who among them has conveyed the noblest ideas of beauty, and touched the deepest sources of thought.

I do not intend, however, now to pursue the inquiry in a method so laboriously systematic; for the subject may, it seems to me, be more usefully treated by pursuing the different questions which rise out of it just as they occur to us, without too great scrupulousness in marking connections, or insisting on sequences. Much time is wasted by human beings, in general, on establishment of systems; and it often takes more labour to master the intricacies of an artificial connection, than to remember the separate facts which are so carefully connected. I suspect that system-makers, in general, are not of much more use, each in his own domain, than, in that of Pomona, the old women who tie cherries upon sticks, for the more convenient portableness of the same. To cultivate well, and choose well, your cherries, is of some importance; but if they can be had in their own wild way of clustering about their crabbed stalk, it is a better connection for them than any other; and, if they cannot, then, so that they be not bruised, it makes to a boy of a practical disposition not much difference whether he gets them by handfuls, or in beaded symmetry on the exalting stick. I purpose, therefore, henceforward to trouble myself little with sticks or twine, but to arrange my chapters with a view to convenient reference, rather than to any careful division of subjects, and to follow out, in any by-ways that may open, on right hand or left, whatever question it seems useful at any moment to settle.

And, in the outset, I find myself met by one which I ought to have touched upon before—one of especial interest in the present state of the Arts. I have said that the art is greatest which includes the greatest ideas; but I have not endeavoured to define the nature of this greatness in the ideas themselves. We speak of great truths, of great beauties, great thoughts. What is it which makes one truth greater than another, one thought greater than another? This question is, I repeat, of peculiar importance at the present time; for, during a period now of some hundred and fifty years, all writers on Art who have pretended to eminence, have insisted much on a supposed distinction between what

³⁶ The full title of this chapter is "Of the Received Opinions touching the 'Grand Style.'"

they call the Great and the Low Schools; using the terms "High Art," "Great or Ideal Style," and other such, as descriptive of a certain noble manner of painting, which it was desirable that all students of Art should be early led to reverence and adopt; and characterizing as "vulgar," or "low," or "realist," another manner of painting and conceiving, which it was equally necessary that all students should be taught to avoid.

But lately this established teaching, never very intelligible, has been gravely called in question. The advocates and self-supposed practisers of "High Art" are beginning to be looked upon with doubt, and their peculiar phraseology to be treated with even a certain degree of ridicule. And other forms of Art are partly developed among us, which do not pretend to be high, but rather to be strong, healthy, and humble. This matter of "highness" in Art, therefore, deserves our most careful consideration. Has it been, or is it, a true highness, a true princeliness, or only a show of it, consisting in courtly manners and robes of state? Is it rocky height or cloudy height, adamant or vapour, on which the sun of praise so long has risen and set? It will be well at once to consider this.

And first, let us get, as quickly as may be, at the exact meaning with which the advocates of "High Art" use that somewhat obscure and figurative term.

I do not know that the principles in question are anywhere more distinctly expressed than in two papers in the *Idler*, written by Sir Joshua Reynolds, of course under the immediate sanction of Johnson; and which may thus be considered as the utterance of the views then held upon the subject by the artists of chief skill, and critics of most sense, arranged in a form so brief and clear as to admit of their being brought before the public for a morning's entertainment. I cannot, therefore, it seems to me, do better than quote these two letters, or at least the important parts of them, examining the exact meaning of each passage as it occurs. There are, in all, in the *Idler* three letters on painting, Nos. 76, 79, and 82; of these, the first is directed only against the impertinences of pretended connoisseurs, and is as notable for its faithfulness as for its wit in the description of the several modes of criticism in an artificial and ignorant state of society: it is only, therefore, in the two last papers that we find the expression of the doctrines which it is our business to examine.

No. 79 (Saturday, October 20, 1759) begins, after a short preamble, with the following passage:

—
"Amongst the Painters, and the writers on Painting, there is one maxim universally admitted and continually inculcated. *Imitate nature* is the invariable rule; but I know none who have explained in what manner this rule is to be understood; the consequence of which is, that everyone takes it in the most obvious sense—that objects are represented naturally, when they have such relief that they seem real. It may appear strange, perhaps, to hear this sense of the rule disputed; but it must be considered, that, if the excellency of a Painter consisted only in this kind of imitation, Painting must lose its rank, and be no longer considered as a liberal art, and sister to Poetry: this imitation being merely mechanical, in which the slowest intellect is always sure to succeed best; for the Painter of genius cannot stoop to drudgery, in which the understanding has no part; and what pretence has the Art to claim kindred with Poetry but by its power over the imagination? To this power the Painter of genius directs him; in this sense he studies Nature, and often arrives at his end, even by being unnatural in the confined sense of the word.

"The grand style of Painting requires this minute attention to be carefully avoided, and must be kept as separate from it as the style of Poetry from that of History. (Poetical ornaments destroy that air of truth and plainness which ought to characterize History; but the very being of Poetry consists in departing from this plain narrative, and adopting every ornament that will warm the imagination.)³⁷

³⁷ I have put this sentence in a parenthesis, because it is inconsistent with the rest of the statement, and with the general teaching of the paper; since that which "attends only to the invariable" cannot certainly adopt "every ornament that will warm the imagination." [Ruskin.]

To desire to see the excellences of each style united—to mingle the Dutch with the Italian school, is to join contrarieties which cannot subsist together, and which destroy the efficacy of each other."

We find, first, from this interesting passage, that the writer considers the Dutch and Italian masters as severally representative of the low and high schools; next, that he considers the Dutch painters as excelling in a mechanical imitation, "in which the slowest intellect is always sure to succeed best"; and, thirdly, that he considers the Italian painters as excelling in a style which corresponds to that of imaginative poetry in literature, and which has an exclusive right to be called the grand style.

I wish that it were in my power entirely to concur with the writer, and to enforce this opinion thus distinctly stated. I have never been a zealous partisan of the Dutch School, and should rejoice in claiming Reynolds's authority for the assertion, that their manner was one "in which the slowest intellect is always sure to succeed best." But before his authority can be so claimed, we must observe exactly the meaning of the assertion itself, and separate it from the company of some others not perhaps so admissible. First, I say, we must observe Reynolds's exact meaning, for (though the assertion may at first appear singular) a man who uses accurate language is always more liable to misinterpretation than one who is careless in his expressions. We may assume that the latter means very nearly what we at first suppose him to mean, for words which have been uttered without thought may be received without examination. But when a writer or speaker may be fairly supposed to have considered his expressions carefully, and, after having revolved a number of terms in his mind, to have chosen the one which *exactly* means the thing he intends to say, we may be assured that what costs him time to select, will require from us time to understand, and that we shall do him wrong, unless we pause to reflect how the word which he has actually employed differs from other words which it seems he *might* have employed. It thus constantly happens that persons themselves unaccustomed to think clearly, or speak correctly, misunderstand a logical and careful writer, and are actually in more danger of being misled by language which is measured and precise, than by that which is loose and inaccurate.

Now, in the instance before us, a person not accustomed to good writing might very rashly conclude that when Reynolds spoke of the Dutch School as one "in which the slowest intellect was sure to succeed best," he meant to say that every successful Dutch painter was a fool. We have no right to take his assertion in that sense. He says, the *slowest* intellect. We have no right to assume that he meant the *weakest*. For it is true, that in order to succeed in the Dutch style, a man has need of qualities of mind eminently deliberate and sustained. He must be possessed of patience rather than of power; and must feel no weariness in contemplating the expression of a single thought for several months together. As opposed to the changeful energies of the imagination, these mental characters may be properly spoken of as under the general term—slowness of intellect. But it by no means follows that they are necessarily those of weak or foolish men.

We observe, however, farther, that the imitation which Reynolds supposes to be characteristic of the Dutch School is that which gives to objects such relief that they seem real, and that he then speaks of this art of realistic imitation as corresponding to *history* in literature.

Reynolds, therefore, seems to class these dull works of the Dutch School under a general head, to which they are not commonly referred—that of *historical* painting; while he speaks of the works of the Italian School not as historical, but as *poetical* painting. His next sentence will farther manifest his meaning.

"The Italian attends only to the invariable, the great and general ideas which are fixed and inherent in universal Nature; the Dutch, on the contrary, to literal truth and a minute exactness in the detail, as I may say, of Nature modified by accident. The attention to these petty peculiarities is the very cause of this naturalness so much admired in the Dutch pictures, which, if we suppose it to be a beauty, is certainly of a lower order, which ought to give place to a beauty of a superior kind, since one cannot be obtained but by departing from the other.

"If my opinion was asked concerning the works of Michael Angelo, whether they would receive any advantage from possessing this mechanical merit, I should not scruple to say, they would not only receive no advantage, but would lose, in a great measure, the effect which they now have on every mind susceptible of great and noble ideas. His works may be said to be all genius and soul; and why should they be loaded with heavy matter, which can only counteract his purpose by retarding the progress of the imagination?"

Examining carefully this and the preceding passage, we find the author's unmistakable meaning to be, that Dutch painting is *history*; attending to literal truth and "minute exactness in the details of nature modified by accident." That Italian painting is *poetry*, attending only to the invariable; and that works which attend only to the invariable are full of genius and soul; but that literal truth and exact detail are "heavy matter which retards the progress of the imagination."

This being then indisputably what Reynolds means to tell us, let us think a little whether he is in all respects right. And first, as he compares his two kinds of painting to history and poetry, let us see how poetry and history themselves differ, in their use of *variable* and *invariable* details. I am writing at a window which commands a view of the head of the Lake of Geneva; and as I look up from my paper, to consider this point, I see, beyond it, a blue breadth of softly moving water, and the outline of the mountains above Chillon, bathed in morning mist. The first verses which naturally come into my mind are—

A thousand feet in depth below
The massy waters meet and flow;
So far the fathom line was sent
From Chillon's snow-white battlement.³⁸

Let us see in what manner this poetical statement is distinguished from a historical one.

It is distinguished from a truly historical statement, first, in being simply false. The water under the Castle of Chillon is not a thousand feet deep, nor anything like it.³⁹ Herein, certainly, these lines fulfil Reynolds's first requirement in poetry, "that it should be inattentive to literal truth and minute exactness in detail." In order, however, to make our comparison more closely in other points, let us assume that what is stated is indeed a fact, and that it was to be recorded, first historically, and then poetically.

Historically stating it, then, we should say: "The lake was sounded from the walls of the Castle of Chillon, and found to be a thousand feet deep."

Now, if Reynolds be right in his idea of the difference between history and poetry, we shall find that Byron leaves out of this statement certain *unnecessary* details, and retains only the invariable,—that is to say, the points which the Lake of Geneva and Castle of Chillon have in common with all other lakes and castles.

Let us hear, therefore.

A thousand feet in depth below.

"Below"? Here is, at all events, a word added (instead of anything being taken away); invariable, certainly in the case of lakes, but not absolutely necessary.

The massy waters meet and flow.

³⁸ Stanza 6 of Byron's *Prisoner of Chillon*, quoted with a slight inaccuracy.

³⁹ "Messrs. Mallet and Pictet, being on the lake, in front of the Castle of Chillon, on August 6, 1774, sunk a thermometer to the depth of 312 feet." . . . —SAUSSURE, *Voyages dans les Alpes*, chap. ii, § 33. It appears from the next paragraph, that the thermometer was at the bottom of the lake. [Ruskin, altered.]

"Massy"! why massy? Because deep water is heavy. The word is a good word, but it is assuredly an added detail, and expresses a character, not which the Lake of Geneva has in common with all other lakes, but which it has in distinction from those which are narrow, or shallow.

"Meet and flow." Why meet and flow? Partly to make up a rhyme; partly to tell us that the waters are forceful as well as massy, and changeful as well as deep. Observe, a farther addition of details, and of details more or less peculiar to the spot, or, according to Reynolds's definition, of "heavy matter, retarding the progress of the imagination."

So far the fathom line was sent.

Why fathom line? All lines for sounding are not fathom lines. If the lake was ever sounded from Chillon, it was probably sounded in mètres, not fathoms. This is an addition of another particular detail, in which the only compliance with Reynolds's requirement is, that there is some chance of its being an inaccurate one.

From Chillon's snow-white battlement.

Why snow-white? Because castle battlements are not usually snow-white. This is another added detail, and a detail quite peculiar to Chillon, and therefore exactly the most striking word in the whole passage.

"Battlement"! Why battlement? Because all walls have not battlements, and the addition of the term marks the castle to be not merely a prison, but a fortress.

This is a curious result. Instead of finding, as we expected, the poetry distinguished from the history by the omission of details, we find it consist entirely in the *addition* of details; and instead of being characterized by regard only of the invariable, we find its whole power to consist in the clear expression of what is singular and particular!

The reader may pursue the investigation for himself in other instances. He will find in every case that a poetical is distinguished from a merely historical statement, not by being more vague, but more specific; and it might, therefore, at first appear that our author's comparison should be simply reversed, and that the Dutch School should be called poetical, and the Italian historical. But the term poetical does not appear very applicable to the generality of Dutch painting; and a little reflection will show us, that if the Italians represent only the invariable, they cannot be properly compared even to historians. For that which is incapable of change has no history, and records which state only the invariable need not be written, and could not be read.

It is evident, therefore, that our author has entangled himself in some grave fallacy, by introducing this idea of invariableness as forming a distinction between poetical and historical art. What the fallacy is, we shall discover as we proceed; but as an invading army should not leave an untaken fortress in its rear, we must not go on with our inquiry into the views of Reynolds until we have settled satisfactorily the question already suggested to us, in what the essence of poetical treatment really consists. For though, as we have seen, it certainly involves the addition of specific details, it cannot be simply that addition which turns the history into poetry. For it is perfectly possible to add any number of details to a historical statement, and to make it more prosaic with every added word. As, for instance, "The lake was sounded out of a flat-bottomed boat, near the crab-tree at the corner of the kitchen-garden, and was found to be a thousand feet nine inches deep, with a muddy bottom." It thus appears that it is not the multiplication of details which constitutes poetry; nor their subtraction which constitutes history, but that there must be something either in the nature of the details themselves, or the method of using them, which invests them with poetical power or historical propriety.

It seems to me, and may seem to the reader, strange that we should need to ask the question, "What is poetry?" Here is a word we have been using all our lives, and, I suppose, with a very distinct idea attached to it; and when I am now called upon to give a definition of this idea, I find myself at a pause. What is more singular, I do not at present recollect hearing the question often asked, though surely it is a very natural one; and I never recollect hearing it answered, or even attempted to be answered. In general, people shelter themselves under metaphors, and while we hear poetry described as an utterance of the soul, an effusion of Divinity, or voice of nature, or in other terms equally elevated and obscure, we never attain anything like a definite explanation of the character which actually distinguishes it from prose.

I come, after some embarrassment, to the conclusion, that poetry is "the suggestion, by the imagination, of noble grounds for the noble emotions."⁴⁰ I mean, by the noble emotions, those four principal sacred passions—Love, Veneration, Admiration, and Joy (this latter especially, if unselfish); and their opposites—Hatred, Indignation (or Scorn), Horror, and Grief,—this last, when unselfish, becoming Compassion. These passions in their various combinations constitute what is called "poetical feeling," when they are felt on noble grounds, that is, on great and true grounds. Indignation, for instance, is a poetical feeling, if excited by serious injury; but it is not a poetical feeling if entertained on being cheated out of a small sum of money. It is very possible the manner of the cheat may have been such as to justify considerable indignation; but the feeling is nevertheless not poetical unless the grounds of it be large as well as just. In like manner, energetic admiration may be excited in certain minds by a display of fireworks, or a street of handsome shops; but the feeling is not poetical, because the grounds of it are false, and therefore ignoble. There is in reality nothing to deserve admiration either in the firing of packets of gunpowder, or in the display of the stocks of warehouses. But admiration excited by the budding of a flower is a poetical feeling, because it is impossible that this manifestation of spiritual power and vital beauty can ever be enough admired.

Farther, it is necessary to the existence of poetry that the grounds of these feelings should be *furnished by the imagination*. Poetical feeling, that is to say, mere noble emotion, is not poetry. It is happily inherent in all human nature deserving the name, and is found often to be purest in the least sophisticated. But the power of assembling, by *the help of the imagination*, such images as will excite these feelings, is the power of the poet or literally of the "Maker."⁴¹

Now this power of exciting the emotions depends of course on the richness of the imagination, and on its choice of those images which, in combination, will be most effective, or, for the particular work to be done, most fit. And it is altogether impossible for a writer not endowed with invention to conceive what tools a true poet will make use of, or in what way he will apply them, or what unexpected results he will bring out by them; so that it is vain to say that the details of poetry ought

⁴⁰ Ruskin later wrote: "It leaves out rhythm, which I now consider a defect in said definition; otherwise good."

⁴¹ Take, for instance, the beautiful stanza in the *Affliction of Margaret*: I look for ghosts, but none will force
Their way to me. 'T is falsely said
That ever there was intercourse
Between the living and the dead;
For, surely, then, I should have sight
Of him I wait for, day and night.
With love and longing infinite.
This we call Poetry, because it is invented or *made* by the writer, entering into the mind of a supposed person. Next, take an instance of the actual feeling truly experienced and simply expressed by a real person. "Nothing surprised me more than a woman of Argentière, whose cottage I went into to ask for milk, as I came down from the glacier of Argentière, in the month of March, 1764. An epidemic dysentery had prevailed in the village, and, a few months before, had taken away from her, her father, her husband, and her brothers, so that she was left alone, with three children in the cradle. Her face had something noble in it, and its expression bore the seal of a calm and profound sorrow. After having given me milk, she asked me whence I came, and what I came there to do, so early in the year. When she knew that I was of Geneva, she said to me, 'she could not believe that all Protestants were lost souls; that there were many honest people among us, and that God was too good and too great to condemn all without distinction.' Then, after a moment of reflection, she added, in shaking her head, 'But that which is very strange is that of so many who have gone away, none have ever returned. I,' she added, with an expression of grief, 'who have so mourned my husband and my brothers, who have never ceased to think of them, who every night conjure them with beseechings to tell me where they are, and in what state they are! Ah, surely, if they lived anywhere, they would not leave me thus! But, perhaps,' she added, 'I am not worthy of this kindness, perhaps the pure and innocent spirits of these children,' and she looked at the cradle, 'may have their presence, and the joy which is denied to *me*.'"—SAUSSURE, *Voyages dans les Alpes*, chap. xxiv. This we do not call Poetry, merely because it is not invented, but the true utterance of a real person. [Ruskin.]

to possess, or ever do possess, any *definite* character. Generally speaking, poetry runs into finer and more delicate details than prose; but the details are not poetical because they are more delicate, but because they are employed so as to bring out an affecting result. For instance, no one but a true poet would have thought of exciting our pity for a bereaved father by describing his way of locking the door of his house:

Perhaps to himself at that moment he said,
The key I must take, for my Ellen is dead;
But of this in my ears not a word did he speak;
And he went to the chase with a tear on his cheek.⁴²

In like manner, in painting, it is altogether impossible to say beforehand what details a great painter may make poetical by his use of them to excite noble emotions: and we shall, therefore, find presently that a painting is to be classed in the great or inferior schools, not according to the kind of details which it represents, but according to the uses for which it employs them.

It is only farther to be noticed, that infinite confusion has been introduced into this subject by the careless and illogical custom of opposing painting to poetry, instead of regarding poetry as consisting in a noble use, whether of colours or words. Painting is properly to be opposed to *speaking* or *writing*, but not to *poetry*. Both painting and speaking are methods of expression. Poetry is the employment of either for the noblest purposes.

This question being thus far determined, we may proceed with our paper in the *Idler*.

"It is very difficult to determine the exact degree of enthusiasm that the arts of Painting and Poetry may admit. There may, perhaps, be too great indulgence as well as too great a restraint of imagination; if the one produces incoherent monsters, the other produces what is full as bad, lifeless insipidity. An intimate knowledge of the passions, and good sense, but not common sense, must at last determine its limits. It has been thought, and I believe with reason, that Michael Angelo sometimes transgressed those limits; and, I think, I have seen figures of him of which it was very difficult to determine whether they were in the highest degree sublime or extremely ridiculous. Such faults may be said to be the ebullitions of genius; but at least he had this merit, that he never was insipid; and whatever passion his works may excite, they will always escape contempt.

"What I have had under consideration is the sublimest style, particularly that of Michael Angelo, the Homer of painting. Other kinds may admit of this naturalness, which of the lowest kind is the chief merit; but in painting, as in poetry, the highest style has the least of common nature."

From this passage we gather three important indications of the supposed nature of the Great Style. That it is the work of men in a state of enthusiasm. That it is like the writing of Homer; and that it has as little as possible of "common nature" in it.

First, it is produced by men in a state of enthusiasm. That is, by men who feel *strongly* and *nobly*; for we do not call a strong feeling of envy, jealousy, or ambition, enthusiasm. That is, therefore, by men who feel poetically. This much we may admit, I think, with perfect safety. Great art is produced by men who feel acutely and nobly; and it is in some sort an expression of this personal feeling. We can easily conceive that there may be a sufficiently marked distinction between such art, and that which is produced by men who do not feel at all, but who reproduce, though ever so accurately, yet coldly, like human mirrors, the scenes which pass before their eyes.

Secondly, Great Art is like the writing of Homer, and this chiefly because it has little of "common nature" in it. We are not clearly informed what is meant by common nature in this passage. Homer seems to describe a great deal of what is common:—cooking, for instance, very carefully in

⁴² The closing lines of Wordsworth's *Childless Father*.

all its processes.⁴³ I suppose the passage in the *Iliad* which, on the whole, has excited most admiration, is that which describes a wife's sorrow at parting from her husband, and a child's fright at its father's helmet;⁴⁴ and I hope, at least, the former feeling may be considered "common nature." But the true greatness of Homer's style is, doubtless, held by our author to consist in his imaginations of things not only uncommon but impossible (such as spirits in brazen armour, or monsters with heads of men and bodies of beasts), and in his occasional delineations of the human character and form in their utmost, or heroic, strength and beauty. We gather then on the whole, that a painter in the Great Style must be enthusiastic, or full of emotion, and must paint the human form in its utmost strength and beauty, and perhaps certain impossible forms besides, liable by persons not in an equally enthusiastic state of mind to be looked upon as in some degree absurd. This I presume to be Reynolds's meaning, and to be all that he intends us to gather from his comparison of the Great Style with the writings of Homer. But if that comparison be a just one in all respects, surely two other corollaries ought to be drawn from it, namely,—first, that these Heroic or Impossible images are to be mingled with others very unheroic and very possible; and, secondly, that in the representation of the Heroic or Impossible forms, the greatest care must be taken in *finishing the details*, so that a painter must not be satisfied with painting well the countenance and the body of his hero, but ought to spend the greatest part of his time (as Homer the greatest number of verses) in elaborating the sculptured pattern on his shield.

Let us, however, proceed with our paper.

"One may very safely recommend a little more enthusiasm to the modern Painters; too much is certainly not the vice of the present age. The Italians seem to have been continually declining in this respect, from the time of Michael Angelo to that of Carlo Maratti,⁴⁵ and from thence to the very bathos of insipidity to which they are now sunk; so that there is no need of remarking, that where I mentioned the Italian painters in opposition to the Dutch, I mean not the moderns, but the heads of the old Roman and Bolognian schools; nor did I mean to include, in my idea of an Italian painter, the Venetian school, *which may be said to be the Dutch part of the Italian genius*. I have only to add a word of advice to the Painters,—that, however excellent they may be in painting naturally, they would not flatter themselves very much upon it; and to the Connoisseurs, that when they see a cat or a fiddle painted so finely, that, as the phrase is, it looks as if you could take it up, they would not for that reason immediately compare the Painter to Raffaele and Michael Angelo."

In this passage there are four points chiefly to be remarked. The first, that in the year 1759 the Italian painters were, in our author's opinion, sunk in the very bathos of insipidity. The second, that the Venetian painters, *i.e.* Titian, Tintoret, and Veronese, are, in our author's opinion, to be classed with the Dutch; that is to say, are painters in a style "in which the slowest intellect is always sure to succeed best." Thirdly, that painting naturally is not a difficult thing, nor one on which a painter should pride himself. And, finally, that connoisseurs, seeing a cat or a fiddle successfully painted, ought not therefore immediately to compare the painter to Raphael or Michael Angelo.

Yet Raphael painted fiddles very carefully in the foreground of his St. Cecilia,—so carefully, that they quite look as if they might be taken up. So carefully, that I never yet looked at the picture without wishing that somebody *would* take them up, and out of the way. And I am under a very strong persuasion that Raphael did not think painting "naturally" an easy thing. It will be well to examine into this point a little; and for the present, with the reader's permission, we will pass over the first two statements in this passage (touching the character of Italian art in 1759, and of Venetian art in general), and immediately examine some of the evidence existing as to the real dignity of "natural" painting—that is to say, of painting carried to the point at which it reaches a deceptive appearance of reality.

⁴³ *Iliad*, 1. 463 ff., 2. 425 ff.; *Odyssey*, 3. 455 ff., etc.

⁴⁴ *Iliad*, 6. 468 ff.

⁴⁵ 1625-1713. Known also as Carlo delle Madonne.

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In the outset of this inquiry, the reader must thoroughly understand that we are not now considering *what* is to be painted, but *how far* it is to be painted. Not whether Raphael does right in representing angels playing upon violins, or whether Veronese does right in allowing cats and monkeys to join the company of kings: but whether, supposing the subjects rightly chosen, they ought on the canvas to look like real angels with real violins, and substantial cats looking at veritable kings; or only like imaginary angels with soundless violins, ideal cats, and unsubstantial kings.

Now, from the first moment when painting began to be a subject of literary inquiry and general criticism, I cannot remember any writer, not professedly artistical, who has not, more or less, in one part of his book or another, countenanced the idea that the great end of art is to produce a deceptive resemblance of reality. It may be, indeed, that we shall find the writers, through many pages, explaining principles of ideal beauty, and professing great delight in the evidences of imagination. But whenever a picture is to be definitely described,—whenever the writer desires to convey to others some impression of an extraordinary excellence, all praise is wound up with some such statements as these: "It was so exquisitely painted that you expected the figures to move and speak; you approached the flowers to enjoy their smell, and stretched your hand towards the fruit which had fallen from the branches. You shrunk back lest the sword of the warrior should indeed descend, and turned away your head that you might not witness the agonies of the expiring martyr."

In a large number of instances, language such as this will be found to be merely a clumsy effort to convey to others a sense of the admiration, of which the writer does not understand the real cause in himself. A person is attracted to a picture by the beauty of its colour, interested by the liveliness of its story, and touched by certain countenances or details which remind him of friends whom he loved, or scenes in which he delighted. He naturally supposes that what gives him so much pleasure must be a notable example of the painter's skill; but he is ashamed to confess, or perhaps does not know, that he is so much a child as to be fond of bright colours and amusing incidents; and he is quite unconscious of the associations which have so secret and inevitable a power over his heart. He casts about for the cause of his delight, and can discover no other than that he thought the picture like reality.

In another, perhaps, a still larger number of cases, such language will be found to be that of simple ignorance—the ignorance of persons whose position in life compels them to speak of art, without having any real enjoyment of it. It is inexcusably required from people of the world, that they should see merit in Claudes⁴⁶ and Titians; and the only merit which many persons can either see or conceive in them is, that they must be "like nature."

In other cases, the deceptive power of the art is really felt to be a source of interest and amusement. This is the case with a large number of the collectors of Dutch pictures. They enjoy seeing what is flat made to look round, exactly as a child enjoys a trick of legerdemain: they rejoice in flies which the spectator vainly attempts to brush away,⁴⁷ and in dew which he endeavours to dry by putting the picture in the sun. They take it for the greatest compliment to their treasures that they should be mistaken for windows; and think the parting of Abraham and Hagar adequately represented if Hagar seems to be really crying.⁴⁸

It is against critics and connoisseurs of this latter stamp (of whom, in the year 1759, the juries of art were for the most part composed) that the essay of Reynolds, which we have been examining,

⁴⁶ Claude Gelée [1600-82], usually called Claude Lorrain, a French landscape painter and etcher.

⁴⁷ Vasari, in his *Lives of the Painters*, tells how Giotto, when a student under Cimabue, once painted a fly on the nose of a figure on which the master was working, the fly being so realistic that Cimabue on returning to the painting attempted to brush it away.

⁴⁸ Guercino's Hagar in the Brera gallery in Milan.

was justly directed. But Reynolds had not sufficiently considered that neither the men of this class, nor of the two other classes above described, constitute the entire body of those who praise Art for its realization; and that the holding of this apparently shallow and vulgar opinion cannot, in all cases, be attributed to the want either of penetration, sincerity, or sense. The collectors of Gerard Dows and Hobbimas may be passed by with a smile; and the affectations of Walpole and simplicities of Vasari⁴⁹ dismissed with contempt or with compassion. But very different men from these have held precisely the same language; and, one amongst the rest, whose authority is absolutely, and in all points, overwhelming.

There was probably never a period in which the influence of art over the minds of men seemed to depend less on its merely *imitative* power, than the close of the thirteenth century. No painting or sculpture at that time reached more than a rude resemblance of reality. Its despised perspective, imperfect chiaroscuro, and unrestrained flights of fantastic imagination, separated the artist's work from nature by an interval which there was no attempt to disguise, and little to diminish. And yet, at this very period, the greatest poet of that, or perhaps of any other age, and the attached friend of its greatest painter,⁵⁰ who must over and over again have held full and free conversation with him respecting the objects of his art, speaks in the following terms of painting, supposed to be carried to its highest perfection:

Qual di pannel fu maestro, e di stile
 Che ritraesse l'ombra, e i tratti, chi' ivi
 Mirar farieno uno ingegno sottile?
 Morti li morti, e i vivi parean vivi:
 Non vide me' di me, chi vide il vero,
 Quant' io calcai, fin che chinato givi.

DANTE, Purgatorio, canto xii. 1. 64.

What master of the pencil, or the style,
 Had traced the shades and lines that might have made
 The subtlest workman wonder? *Dead, the dead,*
The living seemed alive; with clearer view
His eye beheld not, who beheld the truth,
 Than mine what I did tread on, while I went
 Low bending.

—CARY.

Dante has here clearly no other idea of the highest art than that it should bring back, as in a mirror or vision, the aspect of things passed or absent. The scenes of which he speaks are, on the pavement, for ever represented by angelic power, so that the souls which traverse this circle of the rock may see them, as if the years of the world had been rolled back, and they again stood beside the actors in the moment of action. Nor do I think that Dante's authority is absolutely necessary to compel us to admit that such art as this *might*, indeed, be the highest possible. Whatever delight we may have been in the habit of taking in pictures, if it were but truly offered to us, to remove at our will the canvas from the frame, and in lieu of it to behold, fixed for ever, the image of some of those mighty scenes which it has been our way to make mere themes for the artist's fancy; if, for instance,

⁴⁹ Gerard Dow [1613-75], a Dutch genre painter; Hobbima [1638-1709], a Dutch landscape painter; Walpole [1717-97], a famous English litterateur; Vasari [1511-74], an Italian painter, now considered full of mannerisms and without originality, mainly famous as author of *The Lives of the Painters*.

⁵⁰ Giotto.

we could again behold the Magdalene receiving her pardon at Christ's feet, or the disciples sitting with Him at the table of Emmaus; and this not feebly nor fancifully, but as if some silver mirror that had leaned against the wall of the chamber, had been miraculously commanded to retain for ever the colours that had flashed upon it for an instant,—would we not part with our picture—Titian's or Veronese's though it might be?

Yes, the reader answers, in the instance of such scenes as these, but not if the scene represented were uninteresting. Not, indeed, if it were utterly vulgar or painful; but we are not yet certain that the art which represents what is vulgar or painful is itself of much value; and with respect to the art whose aim is beauty, even of an inferior order, it seems that Dante's idea of its perfection has still much evidence in its favour. For among persons of native good sense, and courage enough to speak their minds, we shall often find a considerable degree of doubt as to the use of art, in consequence of their habitual comparison of it with reality. "What is the use, to me, of the painted landscape?" they will ask: "I see more beautiful and perfect landscapes every day of my life in my forenoon walk." "What is the use, to me, of the painted effigy of hero or beauty? I can see a stamp of higher heroism, and light of purer beauty, on the faces round me, utterly inexpressible by the highest human skill." Now, it is evident that to persons of this temper the only valuable picture would, indeed, be *mirrors*, reflecting permanently the images of the things in which they took delight, and of the faces that they loved. "Nay," but the reader interrupts (if he is of the Idealist school), "I deny that more beautiful things are to be seen in nature than in art; on the contrary, everything in nature is faulty, and art represents nature as perfected." Be it so. Must, therefore, this perfected nature be imperfectly represented? Is it absolutely required of the painter, who has conceived perfection, that he should so paint it as to look only like a picture? Or is not Dante's view of the matter right even here, and would it not be well that the perfect conception of Pallas should be so given as to look like Pallas herself, rather than merely like the picture of Pallas?⁵¹

It is not easy for us to answer this question rightly, owing to the difficulty of imagining any art which should reach the perfection supposed. Our actual powers of imitation are so feeble that wherever deception is attempted, a subject of a comparatively low or confined order must be chosen. I do not enter at present into the inquiry how far the powers of imitation extend; but assuredly up to the present period they have been so limited that it is hardly possible for us to conceive a deceptive art embracing a high range of subject. But let the reader make the effort, and consider seriously what he would give at any moment to have the power of arresting the fairest scenes, those which so often rise before him only to vanish; to stay the cloud in its fading, the leaf in its trembling, and the shadows in their changing; to bid the fitful foam be fixed upon the river, and the ripples be everlasting upon the lake; and then to bear away with him no darkened or feeble sun-stain (though even that is beautiful), but a counterfeit which should seem no counterfeit—the true and perfect image of life indeed. Or rather (for the full majesty of such a power is not thus sufficiently expressed) let him consider that it would be in effect nothing else than a capacity of transporting himself at any moment into any scene—a gift as great as can be possessed by a disembodied spirit: and suppose, also, this necromancy embracing not only the present but the past, and enabling us seemingly to enter into the very bodily presence of men long since gathered to the dust; to behold them in act as they lived, but—with greater privilege than ever was granted to the companions of those transient acts of life—to see them fastened at our will in the gesture and expression of an instant, and stayed, on the eve of some great deed, in immortality of burning purpose. Conceive, so far as it is possible, such power as this, and then say whether the art which conferred it is to be spoken lightly of, or whether we should not rather reverence, as half divine, a gift which would go so far as to raise us into the rank, and invest us with the felicities, of angels?

⁵¹ *Purgatorio*, 12. 31.

Yet such would imitative art be in its perfection. Not by any means an easy thing, as Reynolds supposes it. Far from being easy, it is so utterly beyond all human power that we have difficulty even in conceiving its nature or results—the best art we as yet possess comes so far short of it.

But we must not rashly come to the conclusion that such art would, indeed, be the highest possible. There is much to be considered hereafter on the other side; the only conclusion we are as yet warranted in forming is, that Reynolds had no right to speak lightly or contemptuously of imitative art; that in fact, when he did so, he had not conceived its entire nature, but was thinking of some vulgar conditions of it, which were the only ones known to him, and that, therefore, his whole endeavour to explain the difference between great and mean art has been disappointed; that he has involved himself in a crowd of theories, whose issue he had not foreseen, and committed himself to conclusions which, he never intended. There is an instinctive consciousness in his own mind of the difference between high and low art; but he is utterly incapable of explaining it, and every effort which he makes to do so involves him in unexpected fallacy and absurdity. It is *not* true that Poetry does not concern herself with minute details. It is *not* true that high art seeks only the Invariable. It is *not* true that imitative art is an easy thing. It is *not* true that the faithful rendering of nature is an employment in which "the slowest intellect is likely to succeed best." All these successive assertions are utterly false and untenable, while the plain truth, a truth lying at the very door, has all the while escaped him,—that which was incidentally stated in the preceding chapter,—namely, that the difference between great and mean art lies, not in definable methods of handling, or styles of representation, or choices of subjects, but wholly in the nobleness of the end to which the effort of the painter is addressed. We cannot say that a painter is great because he paints boldly, or paints delicately; because he generalizes or particularizes; because he loves detail, or because he disdains it. He is great if, by any of these means, he has laid open noble truths, or aroused noble emotions. It does not matter whether he paint the petal of a rose, or the chasms of a precipice, so that Love and Admiration attend him as he labours, and wait for ever upon his work. It does not matter whether he toil for months upon a few inches of his canvas, or cover a palace front with colour in a day, so only that it be with a solemn purpose that he has filled his heart with patience, or urged his hand to haste. And it does not matter whether he seek for his subjects among peasants or nobles, among the heroic or the simple, in courts or in fields, so only that he behold all things with a thirst for beauty, and a hatred of meanness and vice. There are, indeed, certain methods of representation which are usually adopted by the most active minds, and certain characters of subject usually delighted in by the noblest hearts; but it is quite possible, quite easy, to adopt the manner of painting without sharing the activity of mind, and to imitate the choice of subject without possessing the nobility of spirit; while, on the other hand, it is altogether impossible to foretell on what strange objects the strength of a great man will sometimes be concentrated, or by what strange means he will sometimes express himself. So that true criticism of art never can consist in the mere application of rules; it can be just only when it is founded on quick sympathy with the innumerable instincts and changeful efforts of human nature, chastened and guided by unchanging love of all things that God has created to be beautiful, and pronounced to be good.

OF THE NOVELTY OF LANDSCAPE VOLUME III, CHAPTER II

Having now obtained, I trust, clear ideas, up to a certain point, of what is generally right and wrong in all art, both in conception and in workmanship, we have to apply these laws of right to the particular branch of art which is the subject of our present inquiry, namely, landscape-painting. Respecting which, after the various meditations into which we have been led on the high duties and ideals of art, it may not improbably occur to us first to ask,—whether it be worth inquiring about at all.

That question, perhaps the reader thinks, should have been asked and answered before I had written, or he read, two volumes and a half about it. So I *had* answered it, in my own mind; but it seems time now to give the grounds for this answer. If, indeed, the reader has never suspected that landscape-painting was anything but good, right, and healthy work, I should be sorry to put any doubt of its being so into his mind; but if, as seems to me more likely, he, living in this busy and perhaps somewhat calamitous age, has some suspicion that landscape-painting is but an idle and empty business, not worth all our long talk about it, then, perhaps, he will be pleased to have such suspicion done away, before troubling himself farther with these disquisitions.

I should rather be glad, than otherwise, that he *had* formed some suspicion on this matter. If he has at all admitted the truth of anything hitherto said respecting great art, and its choices of subject, it seems to me he ought, by this time, to be questioning with himself whether road-side weeds, old cottages, broken stones, and such other materials, be worthy matters for grave men to busy themselves in the imitation of. And I should like him to probe this doubt to the deep of it, and bring all his misgivings out to the broad light, that we may see how we are to deal with them, or ascertain if indeed they are too well founded to be dealt with.

And to this end I would ask him now to imagine himself entering, for the first time in his life, the room of the Old Water-Colour Society:⁵² and to suppose that he has entered it, not for the sake of a quiet examination of the paintings one by one, but in order to seize such ideas as it may generally suggest respecting the state and meaning of modern, as compared with elder, art. I suppose him, of course, that he may be capable of such a comparison, to be in some degree familiar with the different forms in which art has developed itself within the periods historically known to us; but never, till that moment, to have seen any completely modern work. So prepared, and so unprepared, he would, as his ideas began to arrange themselves, be first struck by the number of paintings representing blue mountains, clear lakes, and ruined castles or cathedrals, and he would say to himself: "There is something strange in the mind of these modern people! Nobody ever cared about blue mountains before, or tried to paint the broken stones of old walls." And the more he considered the subject, the more he would feel the peculiarity; and, as he thought over the art of Greeks and Romans, he would still repeat, with increasing certainty of conviction: "Mountains! I remember none. The Greeks did not seem, as artists, to know that such things were in the world. They carved, or variously represented, men, and horses, and beasts, and birds, and all kinds of living creatures,—yes, even down to cuttle-fish; and trees, in a sort of way; but not so much as the outline of a mountain; and as for lakes, they merely showed they knew the difference between salt and fresh water by the fish they put into each." Then he would pass on to mediæval art; and still he would be obliged to repeat: "Mountains! I remember none. Some careless and jagged arrangements of blue spires or spikes on the horizon, and, here and there, an attempt at representing an overhanging rock with a hole through it; but merely in order to divide the light behind some human figure. Lakes! No, nothing of the kind,—only blue bays of sea put in to fill up the background when the painter could not think of anything else. Broken-

⁵² The Society of Painters in Water-Colours, often referred to as the Old Water-Colour Society. Ruskin was elected an honorary member in 1873.

down buildings! No; for the most part very complete and well-appointed buildings, if any; and never buildings at all, but to give place or explanation to some circumstance of human conduct." And then he would look up again to the modern pictures, observing, with an increasing astonishment, that here the human interest had, in many cases, altogether disappeared. That mountains, instead of being used only as a blue ground for the relief of the heads of saints, were themselves the exclusive subjects of reverent contemplation; that their ravines, and peaks, and forests, were all painted with an appearance of as much enthusiasm as had formerly been devoted to the dimple of beauty, or the frowns of asceticism; and that all the living interest which was still supposed necessary to the scene, might be supplied by a traveller in a slouched hat, a beggar in a scarlet cloak, or, in default of these, even by a heron or a wild duck.

And if he could entirely divest himself of his own modern habits of thought, and regard the subjects in question with the feelings of a knight or monk of the Middle Ages, it might be a question whether those feelings would not rapidly verge towards contempt. "What!" he might perhaps mutter to himself, "here are human beings spending the whole of their lives in making pictures of bits of stone and runlets of water, withered sticks and flying fogs, and actually not a picture of the gods or the heroes! none of the saints or the martyrs! none of the angels and demons! none of councils or battles, or any other single thing worth the thought of a man! Trees and clouds indeed! as if I should not see as many trees as I cared to see, and more, in the first half of my day's journey to-morrow, or as if it mattered to any man whether the sky were clear or cloudy, so long as his armour did not get too hot in the sun!"

There can be no question that this would have been somewhat the tone of thought with which either a Lacedæmonian, a soldier of Rome in her strength, or a knight of the thirteenth century, would have been apt to regard these particular forms of our present art. Nor can there be any question that, in many respects, their judgment would have been just. It is true that the indignation of the Spartan or Roman would have been equally excited against any appearance of luxurious industry; but the mediæval knight would, to the full, have admitted the nobleness of art; only he would have had it employed in decorating his church or his prayer-book, not in imitating moors and clouds. And the feelings of all the three would have agreed in this,—that their main ground of offence must have been the want of *seriousness* and *purpose* in what they saw. They would all have admitted the nobleness of whatever conduced to the honour of the gods, or the power of the nation; but they would not have understood how the skill of human life could be wisely spent in that which did no honour either to Jupiter or to the Virgin; and which in no wise tended, apparently, either to the accumulation of wealth, the excitement of patriotism, or the advancement of morality.

And exactly so far forth their judgment would be just, as the landscape-painting could indeed be shown, for others as well as for them, to be art of this nugatory kind; and so far forth unjust, as that painting could be shown to depend upon, or cultivate, certain sensibilities which neither the Greek nor mediæval knight possessed, and which have resulted from some extraordinary change in human nature since their time. We have no right to assume, without very accurate examination of it, that this change has been an ennobling one. The simple fact, that we are, in some strange way, different from all the great races that have existed before us, cannot at once be received as the proof of our own greatness; nor can it be granted, without any question, that we have a legitimate subject of complacency in being under the influence of feelings, with which neither Miltiades nor the Black Prince, neither Homer nor Dante, neither Socrates nor St. Francis, could for an instant have sympathized.

Whether, however, this fact be one to excite our pride or not, it is assuredly one to excite our deepest interest. The fact itself is certain. For nearly six thousand years the energies of man have pursued certain beaten paths, manifesting some constancy of feeling throughout all that period, and involving some fellowship at heart, among the various nations who by turns succeeded or surpassed each other in the several aims of art or policy. So that, for these thousands of years, the whole human race might be to some extent described in general terms. Man was a creature separated from all others

by his instinctive sense of an Existence superior to his own, invariably manifesting this sense of the being of a God more strongly in proportion to his own perfectness of mind and body; and making enormous and self-denying efforts, in order to obtain some persuasion of the immediate presence or approval of the Divinity. So that, on the whole, the best things he did were done as in the presence, or for the honour, of his gods; and, whether in statues, to help him to imagine them, or temples raised to their honour, or acts of self-sacrifice done in the hope of their love, he brought whatever was best and skilfullest in him into their service, and lived in a perpetual subjection to their unseen power. Also, he was always anxious to know something definite about them; and his chief books, songs, and pictures were filled with legends about them, or specially devoted to illustration of their lives and nature.

Next to these gods, he was always anxious to know something about his human ancestors; fond of exalting the memory, and telling or painting the history of old rulers and benefactors; yet full of an enthusiastic confidence in himself, as having in many ways advanced beyond the best efforts of past time; and eager to record his own doings for future fame. He was a creature eminently warlike, placing his principal pride in dominion; eminently beautiful, and having great delight in his own beauty; setting forth this beauty by every species of invention in dress, and rendering his arms and accoutrements superbly decorative of his form. He took, however, very little interest in anything but what belonged to humanity; caring in no wise for the external world, except as it influenced his own destiny; honouring the lightning because it could strike him, the sea because it could drown him, the fountains because they gave him drink, and the grass because it yielded him seed; but utterly incapable of feeling any special happiness in the love of such things, or any earnest emotion about them, considered as separate from man; therefore giving no time to the study of them;—knowing little of herbs, except only which were hurtful and which healing; of stones, only which would glitter brightest in a crown, or last the longest in a wall: of the wild beasts, which were best for food, and which the stoutest quarry for the hunter;—thus spending only on the lower creatures and inanimate things his waste energy, his dullest thoughts, his most languid emotions, and reserving all his acuter intellect for researches into his own nature and that of the gods; all his strength of will for the acquirement of political or moral power; all his sense of beauty for things immediately connected with his own person and life; and all his deep affections for domestic or divine companionship.

Such, in broad light and brief terms, was man for five thousand years. Such he is no longer. Let us consider what he is now, comparing the descriptions clause by clause.

I. He *was* invariably sensible of the existence of gods, and went about all his speculations or works holding this as an acknowledged fact, making his best efforts in their service. *Now* he is capable of going through life with hardly any positive idea on this subject,—doubting, fearing, suspecting, analyzing,—doing everything, in fact, *but* believing; hardly ever getting quite up to that point which hitherto was wont to be the starting-point for all generations. And human work has accordingly hardly any reference to spiritual beings, but is done either from a patriotic or personal interest,—either to benefit mankind, or reach some selfish end, not (I speak of human work in the broad sense) to please the gods.

II. He *was* a beautiful creature, setting forth this beauty by all means in his power, and depending upon it for much of his authority over his fellows. So that the ruddy cheek of David, and the ivory skin of Atrides, and the towering presence of Saul, and the blue eyes of Coeur de Lion, were among chief reasons why they should be kings; and it was one of the aims of all education, and of all dress, to make the presence of the human form stately and lovely. *Now* it has become the task of grave philosophy partly to depreciate or conceal this bodily beauty; and even by those who esteem it in their hearts, it is not made one of the great ends of education; man has become, upon the whole, an ugly animal, and is not ashamed of his ugliness.

III. He *was* eminently warlike. He is *now* gradually becoming more and more ashamed of all the arts and aims of battle. So that the desire of dominion, which was once frankly confessed or boasted of as a heroic passion, is now sternly reprobated or cunningly disclaimed.

IV. He *used* to take no interest in anything but what immediately concerned himself. *Now*, he has deep interest in the abstract nature of things, inquires as eagerly into the laws which regulate the economy of the material world, as into those of his own being, and manifests a passionate admiration of inanimate objects, closely resembling, in its elevation and tenderness, the affection which he bears to those living souls with which he is brought into the nearest fellowship.

It is this last change only which is to be the subject of our present inquiry; but it cannot be doubted that it is closely connected with all the others, and that we can only thoroughly understand its nature by considering it in this connection. For, regarded by itself, we might perhaps, too rashly assume it to be a natural consequence of the progress of the race. There appears to be a diminution of selfishness in it, and a more extended and heartfelt desire of understanding the manner of God's working; and this the more, because one of the permanent characters of this change is a greater accuracy in the statement of external facts. When the eyes of men were fixed first upon themselves, and upon nature solely and secondarily as bearing upon their interests, it was of less consequence to them what the ultimate laws of nature were, than what their immediate effects were upon human beings. Hence they could rest satisfied with phenomena instead of principles, and accepted without scrutiny every fable which seemed sufficiently or gracefully to account for those phenomena. But so far as the eyes of men are now withdrawn from themselves, and turned upon the inanimate things about them, the results cease to be of importance, and the laws become essential.

In these respects, it might easily appear to us that this change was assuredly one of steady and natural advance. But when we contemplate the others above noted, of which it is clearly one of the branches or consequences, we may suspect ourselves of over-rashness in our self-congratulation, and admit the necessity of a scrupulous analysis both of the feeling itself and of its tendencies.

Of course a complete analysis, or anything like it, would involve a treatise on the whole history of the world. I shall merely endeavour to note some of the leading and more interesting circumstances bearing on the subject, and to show sufficient practical ground for the conclusion, that landscape-painting is indeed a noble and useful art, though one not long known by man. I shall therefore examine, as best I can, the effect of landscape, 1st, on the Classical mind; 2dly, on the Mediæval mind; and lastly, on the Modern mind. But there is one point of some interest respecting the effect of it on *any mind*, which must be settled first; and this I will endeavour to do in the next chapter.

OF THE PATHETIC FALLACY VOLUME III, CHAPTER 12

Now, therefore, putting these tiresome and absurd words⁵³ quite out of our way, we may go on at our ease to examine the point in question,—namely, the difference between the ordinary, proper, and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy; false appearances, I say, as being entirely unconnected with any real power or character in the object, and only imputed to it by us.

For instance—

The spendthrift crocus, bursting through the mould
Naked and shivering, with his cup of gold.⁵⁴

This is very beautiful, and yet very untrue. The crocus is not a spendthrift, but a hardy plant; its yellow is not gold, but saffron. How is it that we enjoy so much the having it put into our heads that it is anything else than a plain crocus?

It is an important question. For, throughout our past reasonings about art, we have always found that nothing could be good or useful, or ultimately pleasurable, which was untrue. But here is something pleasurable in written poetry which is nevertheless *untrue*. And what is more, if we think over our favourite poetry, we shall find it full of this kind of fallacy, and that we like it all the more for being so.

It will appear also, on consideration of the matter, that this fallacy is of two principal kinds. Either, as in this case of the crocus, it is the fallacy of wilful fancy, which involves no real expectation that it will be believed; or else it is a fallacy caused by an excited state of the feelings, making us, for the time, more or less irrational. Of the cheating of the fancy we shall have to speak presently; but, in this chapter, I want to examine the nature of the other error, that which the mind admits when affected strongly by emotion. Thus, for instance, in *Alton Locke*,—

They rowed her in across the rolling foam—
The cruel, crawling foam.⁵⁵

The foam is not cruel, neither does it crawl. The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in which the reason is unhinged by grief. All violent feelings have the same effect. They produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the "pathetic fallacy."

Now we are in the habit of considering this fallacy as eminently a character of poetical description, and the temper of mind in which we allow it, as one eminently poetical, because passionate. But I believe, if we look well into the matter, that we shall find the greatest poets do not often admit this kind of falseness,—that it is only the second order of poets who much delight in it.⁵⁶

⁵³ Three short sections discussing the use of the terms "Objective" and "Subjective" have been omitted from the beginning of this chapter.

⁵⁴ Holmes (Oliver Wendell), quoted by Miss Mitford in her *Recollections of a Literary Life*. [Ruskin.] From *Astræa, a Poem delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Yale College*. The passage in which these lines are found was later published as *Spring*.

⁵⁵ Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, chap. 26.

⁵⁶ I admit two orders of poets, but no third; and by these two orders I mean the creative (Shakspeare, Homer, Dante), and Reflective or Perceptive (Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson). But both of these must be *first-rate* in their range, though their range is different; and with poetry second-rate in *quality* no one ought to be allowed to trouble mankind. There is quite enough of the best,—much more than we can ever read or enjoy in the length of a life; and it is a literal wrong or sin in any person to encumber us with inferior work. I have

Thus, when Dante describes the spirits falling from the bank of Acheron "as dead leaves flutter from a bough,"⁵⁷ he gives the most perfect image possible of their utter lightness, feebleness, passiveness, and scattering agony of despair, without, however, for an instant losing his own clear perception that *these* are souls, and *those* are leaves; he makes no confusion of one with the other. But when Coleridge speaks of

The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,⁵⁸

he has a morbid, that is to say, a so far false, idea about the leaf; he fancies a life in it, and will, which there are not; confuses its powerlessness with choice, its fading death with merriment, and the wind that shakes it with music. Here, however, there is some beauty, even in the morbid passage; but take an instance in Homer and Pope. Without the knowledge of Ulysses, Elpenor, his youngest follower, has fallen from an upper chamber in the Circean palace, and has been left dead, unmissed by his leader or companions, in the haste of their departure. They cross the sea to the Cimmerian land; and Ulysses summons the shades from Tartarus. The first which appears is that of the lost Elpenor. Ulysses, amazed, and in exactly the spirit of bitter and terrified lightness which is seen in Hamlet,⁵⁹ addresses the spirit with the simple, startled words:—

"Elpenor! How camest thou under the shadowy darkness? Hast thou come faster on foot than I in my black ship?"⁶⁰

Which Pope renders thus:—

O, say, what angry power Elpenor led
To glide in shades, and wander with the dead?
How could thy soul, by realms and seas disjoined,
Outfly the nimble sail, and leave the lagging wind?

I sincerely hope the reader finds no pleasure here, either in the nimbleness of the sail, or the laziness of the wind! And yet how is it that these conceits are so painful now, when they have been pleasant to us in the other instances?

For a very simple reason. They are not a *pathetic* fallacy at all, for they are put into the mouth of the wrong passion—a passion which never could possibly have spoken them—agonized curiosity. Ulysses wants to know the facts of the matter; and the very last thing his mind could do at the moment would be to pause, or suggest in anywise what was *not* a fact. The delay in the first three lines, and conceit in the last, jar upon us instantly like the most frightful discord in music. No poet of true imaginative power could possibly have written the passage.⁶¹

no patience with apologies made by young pseudo-poets, "that they believe there is *some* good in what they have written: that they hope to do better in time," etc. *Some* good! If there is not *all* good, there is no good. If they ever hope to do better, why do they trouble us now? Let them rather courageously burn all they have done, and wait for the better days. There are few men, ordinarily educated, who in moments of strong feeling could not strike out a poetical thought, and afterwards polish it so as to be presentable. But men of sense know better than so to waste their time; and those who sincerely love poetry, know the touch of the master's hand on the chords too well to fumble among them after him. Nay, more than this, all inferior poetry is an injury to the good, inasmuch as it takes away the freshness of rhymes, blunders upon and gives a wretched commonalty to good thoughts; and, in general, adds to the weight of human weariness in a most woful and culpable manner. There are few thoughts likely to come across ordinary men, which have not already been expressed by greater men in the best possible way; and it is a wiser, more generous, more noble thing to remember and point out the perfect words, than to invent poorer ones, wherewith to encumber temporarily the world. [Ruskin.]

⁵⁷ *Inferno*, 3. 112.

⁵⁸ *Christabel*, 1. 49-50.

⁵⁹ "Well said, old mole! can'st work i' the ground so fast?"—[Ruskin.]

⁶⁰ *Odyssey*, 11. 57-58.

⁶¹ It is worth while comparing the way a similar question is put by the exquisite sincerity of Keats:—He wept, and his bright

Therefore we see that the spirit of truth must guide us in some sort, even in our enjoyment of fallacy. Coleridge's fallacy has no discord in it, but Pope's has set our teeth on edge. Without farther questioning, I will endeavour to state the main bearings of this matter.

The temperament which admits the pathetic fallacy, is, as I said above, that of a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them; borne away, or overclouded, or over-dazzled by emotion; and it is a more or less noble state, according to the force of the emotion which has induced it. For it is no credit to a man that he is not morbid or inaccurate in his perceptions, when he has no strength of feeling to warp them; and it is in general a sign of higher capacity and stand in the ranks of being, that the emotions should be strong enough to vanquish, partly, the intellect, and make it believe what they choose. But it is still a grander condition when the intellect also rises, till it is strong enough to assert its rule against, or together with, the utmost efforts of the passions; and the whole man stands in an iron glow, white hot, perhaps, but still strong, and in no wise evaporating; even if he melts, losing none of his weight.

So, then, we have the three ranks: the man who perceives rightly, because he does not feel, and to whom the primrose is very accurately the primrose,⁶² because he does not love it. Then, secondly, the man who perceives wrongly, because he feels, and to whom the primrose is anything else than a primrose: a star, or a sun, or a fairy's shield, or a forsaken maiden. And then, lastly, there is the man who perceives rightly in spite of his feelings, and to whom the primrose is for ever nothing else than itself—a little flower apprehended in the very plain and leafy fact of it, whatever and how many soever the associations and passions may be that crowd around it. And, in general, these three classes may be rated in comparative order, as the men who are not poets at all, and the poets of the second order, and the poets of the first; only however great a man may be, there are always some subjects which *ought* to throw him off his balance; some, by which his poor human capacity of thought should be conquered, and brought into the inaccurate and vague state of perception, so that the language of the highest inspiration becomes broken, obscure, and wild in metaphor, resembling that of the weaker man, overborne by weaker things.

And thus, in full, there are four classes: the men who feel nothing, and therefore see truly; the men who feel strongly, think weakly, and see untruly (second order of poets); the men who feel strongly, think strongly, and see truly (first order of poets); and the men who, strong as human creatures can be, are yet submitted to influences stronger than they, and see in a sort untruly, because what they see is inconceivably above them. This last is the usual condition of prophetic inspiration.

I separate these classes, in order that their character may be clearly understood; but of course they are united each to the other by imperceptible transitions, and the same mind, according to the influences to which it is subjected, passes at different times into the various states. Still, the difference between the great and less man is, on the whole, chiefly in this point of *alterability*. That is to say, the one knows too much, and perceives and feels too much of the past and future, and of all things beside and around that which immediately affects him, to be in any wise shaken by it. His mind is made up; his thoughts have an accustomed current; his ways are steadfast; it is not this or that new sight which will at once unbalance him. He is tender to impression at the surface, like a rock with deep moss upon it; but there is too much mass of him to be moved. The smaller man, with the same degree of sensibility, is at once carried off his feet; he wants to do something he did not want to do before; he views all the universe in a new light through his tears; he is gay or enthusiastic, melancholy or passionate, as things come and go to him. Therefore the high creative poet might even be thought, to a great extent, impassive (as shallow people think Dante stern), receiving indeed all feelings to the

tearsWent trickling down the golden bow he held.Thus, with half-shut, suffused eyes, he stood;While from beneath some cumbrous boughs hard byWith solemn step an awful goddess came,And there was purport in her looks for him,Which he with eager guess began to readPerplex'd, the while melodiously he said,"How cam'st thou over the unfooted sea?" Hyperion, 3. 42.—[Ruskin.]

⁶² See Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*, Part I:—A primrose by a river's brimA yellow primrose was to him,And it was nothing more.

full, but having a great centre of reflection and knowledge in which he stands serene, and watches the feeling, as it were, from far off.

Dante, in his most intense moods, has entire command of himself, and can look around calmly, at all moments, for the image or the word that will best tell what he sees to the upper or lower world. But Keats and Tennyson, and the poets of the second order, are generally themselves subdued by the feelings under which they write, or, at least, write as choosing to be so; and therefore admit certain expressions and modes of thought which are in some sort diseased or false.

Now so long as we see that the *feeling* is true, we pardon, or are even pleased by, the confessed fallacy of sight which it induces: we are pleased, for instance, with those lines of Kingsley's above quoted, not because they fallaciously describe foam, but because they faithfully describe sorrow. But the moment the mind of the speaker becomes cold, that moment every such expression becomes untrue, as being for ever untrue in the external facts. And there is no greater baseness in literature than the habit of using these metaphorical expressions in cool blood. An inspired writer, in full impetuosity of passion, may speak wisely and truly of "raging waves of the sea foaming out their own shame";⁶³ but it is only the basest writer who cannot speak of the sea without talking of "raging waves," "remorseless floods," "ravenous billows," etc.; and it is one of the signs of the highest power in a writer to check all such habits of thought, and to keep his eyes fixed firmly on the *pure fact*, out of which if any feeling conies to him or his reader, he knows it must be a true one.

To keep to the waves, I forget who it is who represents a man in despair desiring that his body may be cast into the sea,

*Whose changing mound, and foam that passed away,
Might mock the eye that questioned where I lay.*

Observe, there is not a single false, or even overcharged, expression. "Mound" of the sea wave is perfectly simple and true; "changing" is as familiar as may be; "foam that passed away," strictly literal; and the whole line descriptive of the reality with a degree of accuracy which I know not any other verse, in the range of poetry, that altogether equals. For most people have not a distinct idea of the clumsiness and massiveness of a large wave. The word "wave" is used too generally of ripples and breakers, and bendings in light drapery or grass: it does not by itself convey a perfect image. But the word "mound" is heavy, large, dark, definite; there is no mistaking the kind of wave meant, nor missing the sight of it. Then the term "changing" has a peculiar force also. Most people think of waves as rising and falling. But if they look at the sea carefully, they will perceive that the waves do not rise and fall. They change. Change both place and form, but they do not fall; one wave goes on, and on, and still on; now lower, now higher, now tossing its mane like a horse, now building itself together like a wall, now shaking, now steady, but still the same wave, till at last it seems struck by something, and changes, one knows not how,—becomes another wave.

The close of the line insists on this image, and paints it still more perfectly,—"foam that passed away." Not merely melting, disappearing, but passing on, out of sight, on the career of the wave. Then, having put the absolute ocean fact as far as he may before our eyes, the poet leaves us to feel about it as we may, and to trace for ourselves the opposite fact,—the image of the green mounds that do not change, and the white and written stones that do not pass away; and thence to follow out also the associated images of the calm life with the quiet grave, and the despairing life with the fading foam—

Let no man move his bones.

⁶³ *Jude* 13.

As for Samaria, her king is cut off like the foam upon the water.⁶⁴

But nothing of this is actually told or pointed out, and the expressions, as they stand, are perfectly severe and accurate, utterly uninfluenced by the firmly governed emotion of the writer. Even the word "mock" is hardly an exception, as it may stand merely for "deceive" or "defeat," without implying any impersonation of the waves.

It may be well, perhaps, to give one or two more instances to show the peculiar dignity possessed by all passages, which thus limit their expression to the pure fact, and leave the hearer to gather what he can from it. Here is a notable one from the *Iliad*. Helen, looking from the Scæan gate of Troy over the Grecian host, and telling Priam the names of its captains, says at last:—

"I see all the other dark-eyed Greeks; but two I cannot see,—Castor and Pollux,—whom one mother bore with me. Have they not followed from fair Lacedæmon, or have they indeed come in their sea-wandering ships, but now will not enter into the battle of men, fearing the shame and the scorn that is in Me?"

Then Homer:—

"So she spoke. But them, already, the life-giving earth possessed, there in Lacedæmon, in the dear fatherland."⁶⁵

Note, here, the high poetical truth carried to the extreme. The poet has to speak of the earth in sadness, but he will not let that sadness affect or change his thoughts of it. No; though Castor and Pollux be dead, yet the earth is our mother still, fruitful, life-giving. These are the facts of the thing. I see nothing else than these. Make what you will of them.

Take another very notable instance from Casimir de la Vigne's terrible ballad, "La Toilette de Constance." I must quote a few lines out of it here and there, to enable the reader who has not the book by him, to understand its close.

"Vite, Anna! vite; au miroir!
Plus vite, Anna. L'heure s'avance,
Et je vais au bal ce soir
Chez l'ambassadeur de France.

"Y pensez-vous? ils sont fanés, ces noeuds;
Ils sont d'hier; mon Dieu, comme tout passe!
Que du réseau qui retient mes cheveux
Les glands d'azur retombent avec grâce.
Plus haut! Plus bas! Vous ne comprenez rien!
Que sur mon front ce saphir étincelle:
Vous me piquez, maladroite. Ah, c'est bien,
Bien,—chère Anna! Je t'aime, je suis belle."

"Celui qu'en vain je voudrais oublier ...
(Anna, ma robe) il y sera, j'espère.

⁶⁴ *Kings* xxiii, 18, and *Hosea* x, 7.

⁶⁵ *Iliad*, 3. 243. In the MS. Ruskin notes, "The unsurpassably tender irony in the epithet—'life-giving earth'—of the grave"; and then adds another illustration:—"Compare the hammer-stroke at the close of the [32d] chapter of *Vanity Fair*—"The darkness came down on the field and city, and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart. A great deal might have been said about it. The writer is very sorry for Amelia, neither does he want faith in prayer. He knows as well as any of us that prayer must be answered in some sort; but those are the facts. The man and woman sixteen miles apart—one on her knees on the floor, the other on his face in the clay. So much love in her heart, so much lead in his. Make what you can of it." [Cook and Wedderburn.]

(Ah, fi! profane, est-ce là mon collier?
Quoi! ces grains d'or bénits par le Saint-Père!)
Il y sera; Dieu, s'il pressait ma main,
En y pensant à peine je respire:
Frère Anselmo doit m'entendre demain,
Comment ferai-je, Anna, pour tout lui dire?...

"Vite! un coup d'oeil au miroir,
Le dernier.—J'ai l'assurance
Qu'on va m'adorer ce soir
Chez l'ambassadeur de France."

Pres du foyer, Constance s'admirait.
Dieu! sur sa robe il vole une étincelle!
Au feu! Courez! Quand l'espoir l'enivrait,
Tout perdre ainsi! Quoi! Mourir,—et si belle!
L'horrible feu ronge avec volupté
Ses bras, son sein, et l'entoure, et s'élève,
Et sans pitié dévore sa beauté,
Ses dix-huit ans, hélas, et son doux rêve!

Adieu, bal, plaisir, amour!
On disait, Pauvre Constance!
Et l'on dansa, jusqu'au jour,
Chez l'ambassadeur de France.⁶⁶

Yes, that is the fact of it. Right or wrong, the poet does not say. What you may think about it, he does not know. He has nothing to do with that. There lie the ashes of the dead girl in her chamber. There they danced, till the morning, at the Ambassador's of France. Make what you will of it.

If the reader will look through the ballad, of which I have quoted only about the third part, he will find that there is not, from beginning to end of it, a single poetical (so called) expression, except in one stanza. The girl speaks as simple prose as may be; there is not a word she would not have actually used as she was dressing. The poet stands by, impassive as a statue, recording her words just as they come. At last the doom seizes her, and in the very presence of death, for an instant, his own emotions conquer him. He records no longer the facts only, but the facts as they seem to him. The fire gnaws with *voluptuousness*—*without pity*. It is soon past. The fate is fixed for ever; and he retires into his pale and crystalline atmosphere of truth. He closes all with the calm veracity,

They said, "Poor Constance!"

⁶⁶ The poem may be crudely paraphrased as follows:—"Quick, Anna, quick! to the mirror! It is late, and I'm to dance at the ambassador's ... I'm going to the ball ... "They're faded, see, these ribbons—they belong to yesterday. Heavens, how all things pass! Now gracefully hang the blue tassels from the net that holds my hair." Higher!—no, lower!—you get nothing right! ... Now let this sapphire sparkle on my brow. You're pricking me, you careless thing! That's good! I love you, Anna dear. How fair I am.... "I hope he'll be there, too—the one I've tried to forget! no use! (Anna, my gown!) he too ... necklace, this? These golden beads the Holy Father blessed?" He'll be there—Heavens! suppose he takes my hand—I scarce can draw my breath for thinking of it! And I confess to Father Anselmo To-morrow—how can I ever tell him all?... One last glance at the mirror. O, I'm sure that they'll adore me at the ball to-night." Before the fire she stands admiringly. O God! a spark has leapt into her gown. Fire, fire!—O run!—Lost thus when mad with hope? What, die? and she so fair? The hideous flames rage greedily about her arms and breast, envelop her, and leaping ever higher, swallow up all her beauty, pitiless—Her eighteen years, alas! and her sweet dream. Adieu to ball, to pleasure, and to love! "Poor Constance!" said the dancers at the ball, "Poor Constance!"—and they danced till break of day.

Now in this there is the exact type of the consummate poetical temperament. For, be it clearly and constantly remembered, that the greatness of a poet depends upon the two faculties, acuteness of feeling, and command of it. A poet is great, first in proportion to the strength of his passion, and then, that strength being granted, in proportion to his government of it; there being, however, always a point beyond which it would be inhuman and monstrous if he pushed this government, and, therefore, a point at which all feverish and wild fancy becomes just and true. Thus the destruction of the kingdom of Assyria cannot be contemplated firmly by a prophet of Israel. The fact is too great, too wonderful. It overthrows him, dashes him into a confused element of dreams. All the world is, to his stunned thought, full of strange voices. "Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, 'Since thou art gone down to the grave, no feller is come up against us.'"⁶⁷ So, still more, the thought of the presence of Deity cannot be borne without this great astonishment. "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."⁶⁸

But by how much this feeling is noble when it is justified by the strength of its cause, by so much it is ignoble when there is not cause enough for it; and beyond all other ignobleness is the mere affectation of it, in hardness of heart. Simply bad writing may almost always, as above noticed, be known by its adoption of these fanciful metaphorical expressions as a sort of current coin; yet there is even a worse, at least a more harmful condition of writing than this, in which such expressions are not ignorantly and feelinglessly caught up, but, by some master, skilful in handling, yet insincere, deliberately wrought out with chill and studied fancy; as if we should try to make an old lava-stream look red-hot again, by covering it with dead leaves, or white-hot, with hoar-frost.

When Young is lost in veneration, as he dwells on the character of a truly good and holy man, he permits himself for a moment to be overborne by the feeling so far as to exclaim—

Where shall I find him? angels, tell me where.
You know him; he is near you; point him out.
Shall I see glories beaming from his brow,
Or trace his footsteps by the rising flowers?⁶⁹

This emotion has a worthy cause, and is thus true and right. But now hear the cold-hearted Pope say to a shepherd girl—

Where'er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade;
Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade;
Your praise the birds shall chant in every grove,
And winds shall waft it to the powers above.
But would you sing, and rival Orpheus' strain,
The wondering forests soon should dance again;
The moving mountains hear the powerful call,
And headlong streams hang, listening, in their fall.⁷⁰

This is not, nor could it for a moment be mistaken for, the language of passion. It is simple falsehood, uttered by hypocrisy; definite absurdity, rooted in affectation, and coldly asserted in the teeth of nature and fact. Passion will indeed go far in deceiving itself; but it must be a strong passion,

⁶⁷ *Isaiah* xiv, 8.

⁶⁸ *Isaiah* lv, 12.

⁶⁹ *Night Thoughts*, 2. 345.

⁷⁰ Pastorals: *Summer*, or *Alexis*, 73 ff., with the omission of two couplets after the first.

not the simple wish of a lover to tempt his mistress to sing. Compare a very closely parallel passage in Wordsworth, in which the lover has lost his mistress:—

Three years had Barbara in her grave been laid,
When thus his moan he made:—

"Oh, move, thou cottage, from behind yon oak,
Or let the ancient tree uprooted lie,
That in some other way yon smoke
May mount into the sky.
If still behind yon pine-tree's ragged bough,
Headlong, the waterfall must come,
Oh, let it, then, be dumb—
Be anything, sweet stream, but that which thou art now."⁷¹

Here is a cottage to be moved, if not a mountain, and a water-fall to be silent, if it is not to hang listening: but with what different relation to the mind that contemplates them! Here, in the extremity of its agony, the soul cries out wildly for relief, which at the same moment it partly knows to be impossible, but partly believes possible, in a vague impression that a miracle *might* be wrought to give relief even to a less sore distress,—that nature is kind, and God is kind, and that grief is strong; it knows not well what *is* possible to such grief. To silence a stream, to move a cottage wall,—one might think it could do as much as that!

I believe these instances are enough to illustrate the main point I insist upon respecting the pathetic fallacy,—that so far as it is a fallacy, it is always the sign of a morbid state of mind, and comparatively of a weak one. Even in the most inspired prophet it is a sign of the incapacity of his human sight or thought to bear what has been revealed to it. In ordinary poetry, if it is found in the thoughts of the poet himself, it is at once a sign of his belonging to the inferior school; if in the thoughts of the characters imagined by him, it is right or wrong according to the genuineness of the emotion from which it springs; always, however, implying necessarily *some* degree of weakness in the character.

Take two most exquisite instances from master hands. The Jessy of Shenstone, and the Ellen of Wordsworth, have both been betrayed and deserted. Jessy, in the course of her most touching complaint says:—

If through the garden's flowery tribes I stray,
Where bloom the jasmines that could once allure,
"Hope not to find delight in us," they say,
"For we are spotless, Jessy; we are pure."⁷²

Compare with this some of the words of Ellen:—

"Ah, why," said Ellen, sighing to herself,
"Why do not words, and kiss, and solemn pledge,
And nature, that is kind in woman's breast,
And reason, that in man is wise and good,

⁷¹ From the poem beginning *'T is said that some have died for love*, Ruskin evidently quoted from memory, for there are several verbal slips in the passage quoted.

⁷² Stanza 16, of Shenstone's twenty-sixth Elegy.

And fear of Him who is a righteous Judge,—
Why do not these prevail for human life,
To keep two hearts together, that began
Their springtime with one love, and that have need
Of mutual pity and forgiveness sweet
To grant, or be received; while that poor bird—
O, come and hear him! Thou who hast to me
Been faithless, hear him;—though a lowly creature,
One of God's simple children that yet know not
The Universal Parent, *how* he sings!
As if he wished the firmament of heaven
Should listen, and give back to him the voice
Of his triumphant constancy and love;
The proclamation that he makes, how far
His darkness doth transcend our fickle light."⁷³

The perfection of both these passages, as far as regards truth and tenderness of imagination in the two poets, is quite insuperable. But of the two characters imagined, Jessy is weaker than Ellen, exactly in so far as something appears to her to be in nature which is not. The flowers do not really reproach her. God meant them to comfort her, not to taunt her; they would do so if she saw them rightly.

Ellen, on the other hand, is quite above the slightest erring emotion. There is not the barest film of fallacy in all her thoughts. She reasons as calmly as if she did not feel. And, although the singing of the bird suggests to her the idea of its desiring to be heard in heaven, she does not for an instant admit any veracity in the thought. "As if," she says,— "I know he means nothing of the kind; but it does verily seem as if." The reader will find, by examining the rest of the poem, that Ellen's character is throughout consistent in this clear though passionate strength.⁷⁴

It then being, I hope, now made clear to the reader in all respects that the pathetic fallacy is powerful only so far as it is pathetic, feeble so far as it is fallacious, and, therefore, that the dominion of Truth is entire, over this, as over every other natural and just state of the human mind, we may go on to the subject for the dealing with which this prefatory inquiry became necessary; and why necessary, we shall see forthwith.

⁷³ *The Excursion*, 6. 869 ff.

⁷⁴ I cannot quit this subject without giving two more instances, both exquisite, of the pathetic fallacy, which I have just come upon, in Maud:—For a great speculation had fail'd;And ever he mutter'd and madden'd, and ever wann'd with despair;And out he walk'd, when the wind like a broken worldling wail'd,And the flying gold of the ruin'd woodlands drove thro' the air. There has fallen a splendid tearFrom the passion-flower at the gate.The red rose cries, "She is near, she is near!"And the white rose weeps, "She is late."The larkspur listens, "I hear, I hear!" And the lily whispers, "I wait." [Ruskin.]

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