

RUSKIN JOHN

HORTUS

INCLUSUS

John Ruskin
Hortus Inclusus

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John Ruskin
Hortus Inclusus / Messages from the Wood
to the Garden, Sent in Happy Days / to
the Sister Ladies of the Thwaite, Coniston

PREFACE

The ladies to whom these letters were written have been, throughout their brightly tranquil lives, at once sources and loadstones of all good to the village in which they had their home, and to all loving people who cared for the village and its vale and secluded lake, and whatever remained in them or around of the former peace, beauty, and pride of English Shepherd Land.

Sources they have been of good, like one of its mountain springs, ever to be found at need. They did not travel; they did not go up to London in its season; they did not receive idle visitors to jar or waste their leisure in the waning year. The poor and the sick could find them always; or rather, they watched for and prevented all poverty and pain that care or tenderness could relieve or heal. Loadstones they were, as steadily bringing the light of gentle and wise souls about them as the crest of their guardian mountain gives pause to the morning clouds: in themselves, they were types of perfect womanhood in its constant happiness, queens alike of their own hearts and of a Paradise in which they knew the names and sympathized with the spirits of every living creature that God had made to play therein, or to blossom in its sunshine or shade.

They had lost their dearly-loved younger sister, Margaret, before I knew them. Mary and Susie, alike in benevolence, serenity, and practical judgment, were yet widely different, nay, almost contrary, in tone and impulse of intellect. Both of them capable of understanding whatever women should know, the elder was yet chiefly interested in the course of immediate English business, policy, and progressive science, while Susie lived an aerial and enchanted life, possessing all the highest joys of imagination, while she yielded to none of its deceits, sicknesses, or errors. She saw, and felt, and believed all good, as it had ever been, and was to be, in the reality and eternity of its goodness, with the acceptance and the hope of a child; the least things were treasures to her, and her moments fuller of joy than some people's days.

What she had been to me, in the days and years when other friendship has been failing, and others' "loving, mere folly," the reader will enough see from these letters, written certainly for her only, but from which she has permitted my Master of the Rural Industries at Loughrigg, Albert Fleming, to choose what he thinks, among the tendrils of clinging thought, and mossy cups for dew in the Garden of Herbs where Love is, may be trusted to the memorial sympathy of the readers of "Fronde Agrestes."

J. R.

Brantwood,
June, 1887.

INTRODUCTION

Often during those visits to the Thwaite which have grown to be the best-spent hours of my later years, I have urged my dear friend Miss Beever to open to the larger world the pleasant paths of this her Garden Inclosed. The inner circle of her friends knew that she had a goodly store of Mr. Ruskin's letters, extending over many years. She for her part had long desired to share with others the pleasure these letters had given her, but she shrank from the fatigue of selecting and arranging them. It was, therefore, with no small feeling of satisfaction that I drove home from the Thwaite one day in February last with a parcel containing nearly two thousand of these treasured letters. I was gladdened also by generous permission, both from Brantwood and the Thwaite, to choose what I liked best for publication. The letters themselves are the fruit of the most beautiful friendship I have ever been permitted to witness, a friendship so unique in some aspects of it, so sacred in all, that I may only give it the praise of silence. I count myself happy to have been allowed to throw open to all wise and quiet souls the portals of this Armida's Garden, where there are no spells save those woven by love, and no magic save that of grace and kindliness. Here my pleasant share in this little book would have ended, but Mr. Ruskin has desired me to add a few words, giving my own description of Susie, and speaking of my relationship to them both. To him I owe the guidance of my life,—all its best impulses, all its worthiest efforts; to her some of its happiest hours, and the blessings alike of incentive and reproof. In reading over Mr. Ruskin's Preface, I note that, either by grace of purpose or happy chance, he has left me one point untouched in our dear friend's character. Her letters inserted here give some evidence of it, but I should like to place on record how her intense delight in sweet and simple things has blossomed into a kind of mental frolic and dainty wit, so that even now in the calm autumn of her days, her friends are not only lessoned by her ripened wisdom, but cheered and recreated by her quaint and sprightly humor.

In the Royal Order of Gardens, as Bacon puts it, there was always a quiet resting-place called the Pleasaunce; there the daisies grew unchecked, and the grass was ever the greenest. Such a Pleasaunce do these Letters seem to me. Here and there, indeed, there are shadows on the grass, but no shadow ever falls between the two dear friends who walk together hand in hand along its pleasant paths. So may they walk in peace till they stand at the gate of another Garden, where

"Co' fiori eterni, eterno il frutto dura."

A. F.

Neaum Crag,
Loughrigg,
Ambleside.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

Since these letters were published fourteen years ago, both Mr. Ruskin and Miss Beever have passed to the country he longed to find, "where the flowers do not fade." In this new Edition some of the earlier letters have been withdrawn, and others, of possibly wider interest, are inserted in their place. I have also added a reproduction of Mr. Ruskin's last letter to Miss Beever. It was written about the 20th October, 1893, and was read to her on her death-bed. He was then himself in broken health, and it took him three weary hours to write this little note of eight lines. I believe this to be the last complete letter that ever came from his pen. Miss Beever sent it to me with the wish "that some day I might use it," and I now fulfill that wish by inserting it here as the pathetic close to a correspondence, in which there was so much of a gay and playful nature; commending it to the "memorial sympathy" claimed by him for his earlier letters. The word "Phoca" is a signature often used by him in writing to his old friend.

I have been asked to add illustrations to this Edition; and some fresh explanatory notes and dates will also be found.

A. F.

Neaum Crag,
Ambleside,
1902.

HORTUS INCLUSUS

Brantwood, *16th March, 1874.*

My dearest Susie,—

In a state of great defeat and torment, this morning—having much to do with the weather and—not living on milk, I have been greatly helped by—one of my own books! ¹ It is the best I ever wrote—the last which I took thorough loving pains with—and the first which I did with full knowledge of sorrow.

Will you please read in it—first—from 65 at the bottom of page 79 ² as far as and not farther than, 67 in page 81. That is what helped me this morning.

Then, if you want to know precisely the state I am in, read the account of the Myth of Tantalus, beginning at 20—p. 24 and going on to 25—page 31.

It is a hard task to set you, my dear little Susie; but when you get old, you will be glad to have done it, and another day, you must look at page 94, and then you must return me my book, for it's my noted copy and I'm using it.

The life of Tantalus doesn't often admit of crying: but I had a real cry—with quite wet tears yesterday morning, over what—to me is the prettiest bit in all Shakespeare

"Pray, be content;
Mother, I am going to the market-place—
Chide me no more." ³

And almost next to it, comes (to me, always I mean in my own fancy) Virgilia, "Yes, certain; there's a letter for you; I saw it." ⁴

Ever your loving *J. R.*

¹ "The Queen of the Air." See [page 70](#).

² Cf. contemporary edition.

³ "Coriolanus", Act iii. scene 2.

⁴ "Coriolanus", Act ii. scene 1.

THE SACRISTAN'S CELL

Assisi, 14th April, 1874.

I got to-day your lovely letter of the 6th, but I never knew my Susie *could* be such a naughty little girl before; to burn her pretty story ⁵ instead of sending it to me. It would have come to me so exactly in the right place here, where St. Francis made the grasshopper (cicada, at least) sing to him upon his hand, and preached to the birds, and made the wolf go its rounds every day as regularly as any Franciscan friar, to ask for a little contribution to its modest dinner. The Bee and Narcissus would have delighted to talk in this enchanted air.

Yes, that *is* really very pretty of Dr. John Brown to inscribe your books so, and it's so like him. How these kind people understand things! And that bit of his about the child is wholly lovely; I am so glad you copied it.

I often think of you, and of Coniston and Brantwood. You will see, in the May Fors, reflections upon the temptations to the life of a Franciscan.

There are two monks here, one the sacristan who has charge of the entire church, and is responsible for its treasures; the other exercising what authority is left to the convent among the people of the town. They are both so good and innocent and sweet, one can't pity them enough. For this time in Italy is just like the Reformation in Scotland, with only the difference that the Reform movement is carried on here simply for the sake of what money can be got by Church confiscation. And these two brothers are living by indulgence, as the Abbot in the Monastery of St. Mary's in the Regent Moray's time.

The people of the village, however, are all true to their faith; it is only the governing body which is modern-infidel and radical. The population is quite charming,—a word of kindness makes them as bright as if you brought them news of a friend. All the same, it does not do to offend them; Monsieur Cavalcasella, who is expecting the Government order to take the Tabernacle from the Sanctuary of St. Francis, cannot, it is said, go out at night with safety. He decamped the day before I came, having some notion, I fancy, that I would make his life a burden to him, if he didn't, by day, as much as it was in peril by night. I promise myself a month of very happy time here (happy for *me*, I mean) when I return in May.

The sacristan gives me my coffee for lunch, in his own little cell, looking out on the olive woods; then he tells me stories of conversions and miracles, and then perhaps we go into the Sacristy and have a reverent little poke out of relics. Fancy a great carved cupboard in a vaulted chamber full of most precious things (the box which the Holy Virgin's veil used to be kept in, to begin with), and leave to rummage in it at will! Things that are only shown twice in the year or so, with fumigation! all the congregation on their knees; and the sacristan and I having a great heap of them on the table at once, like a dinner service! I really looked with great respect at St. Francis's old camel-hair dress.

I am obliged to go to Rome to-morrow, however, and to Naples on Saturday. My witch of Sicily⁶ expects me this day week, and she's going to take me such lovely drives, and talks of "excursions" which I see by the map are thirty miles away. I wonder if she thinks me so horribly old that it's quite proper. It will be very nice if she does, but not flattering. I know her mother can't go with her, I suppose her maid will. If she wants any other chaperon I won't go.

She's really very beautiful, I believe, to some people's tastes, (I shall be horribly disappointed if she isn't, in her own dark style,) and she writes, next to Susie, the loveliest letters I ever get.

⁵ "The Bee and Narcissus."

⁶ Miss Amy Yule. See "Præterita", Vol. III., Chap. vii.

Now, Susie, mind, you're to be a very good child while I'm away, and never to burn any more stories; and above all, you're to write me just what comes into your head, and ever to believe me your loving

J. R.

Naples, 2d May, 1874.

I heard of your great sorrow⁷ from Joan six days ago, and have not been able to write since. Nothing silences me so much as sorrow, and for this of yours I have no comfort. I write only that you may know that I am thinking of you, and would help you if I could. And I write to-day because your lovely letters and your lovely old age have been forced into my thoughts often by dreadful contrast during these days in Italy. You who are so purely and brightly happy in all natural and simple things, seem now to belong to another and a younger world. And your letters have been to me like the pure air of Yewdale Crags breathed among the Pontine Marshes; but you must not think I am ungrateful for them when I can't answer. You can have no idea how impossible it is for me to do all the work necessary even for memory of the things I came here to see; how much escapes me, how much is done in a broken and weary way. I am the only author on art who does the work of illustration with his own hand; the only one therefore—and I am not insolent in saying this—who has learned his business thoroughly; but after a day's drawing I assure you one cannot sit down to write unless it be the merest nonsense to please Joanie. Believe it or not, there is no one of my friends whom I write so scrupulously to as to you. You may be vexed at this, but indeed I can't but try to write carefully in answer to all your kind words, and so sometimes I can't at all. I *must* tell you, however, to-day, what I saw in the Pompeian frescoes—the great characteristic of falling Rome, in her furious desire of pleasure, and brutal incapability of it. The walls of Pompeii are covered with paintings meant only to give pleasure, but nothing they represent is beautiful or delightful, and yesterday, among other calumniated and caricatured birds, I saw one of my Susie's pets, a peacock; and he had only eleven eyes in his tail. Fancy the feverish wretchedness of the humanity which in mere pursuit of pleasure or power had reduced itself to see no more than eleven eyes in a peacock's tail! What were the Cyclops to this?

I hope to get to Rome this evening, and to be there settled for some time, and to have quieter hours for my letters.

Rome, Hôtel de Russie, 8th May, '74.

I have your sweet letter about Ulysses, the leaves, and the Robins. I have been feeling so wearily on this journey, the want of what—when I had it, I used—how often! to feel a burden—the claim of my mother for at least a *word*, every day. Happy, poor mother, with two lines—and I—sometimes—nay—often—thinking it hard to have to stay five minutes from what I wanted to do—to write them.

I am despising, now, in like senseless way, the privilege of being able to write to you and of knowing that it will please you to hear—even that I can't tell you anything! which I cannot, this morning—but only, it is a little peace and rest to me to write to my Susie.

Rome, 23d May, 1874.

A number of business letters and the increasing instinct for work here as time shortens, have kept me too long from even writing a mere mamma-note to you; though not without thought of you daily.

I have your last most lovely line about your sister—and giving me that most touching fact about poor Dr. John Brown, which I am grieved and yet thankful to know, that I may better still reverence his unflinching kindness and quick sympathy. I have a quite wonderful letter from him about you; but I will not tell you what he says, only it is so *very*, very true, and so very, very pretty, you can't think.

⁷ The death of Miss Margaret Beever.

I have written to my bookseller to find for you, and send a complete edition of "Modern Painters," if findable. If not, I will make my assistant send you down my own fourth and fifth volumes, which you can keep till I come for them in the autumn.

There is nothing now in the year but autumn and winter. I really begin to think there is some terrible change of climate coming upon the world for its sin, like another deluge. It will have its rainbow, I suppose, after its manner—promising not to darken the world again, and then not to drown.

Rome, 24th May, 1874 (*Whit-Sunday*).

I have to-day, to make the day whiter for me, your lovely letter of the 15th,⁸ telling me your age. I am so glad it is no more; you are only thirteen years older than I, and much more able to be my sister than mamma, and I hope you will have many years of youth yet. I think I *must* tell you in return for this letter what Dr. John Brown said, or part of it at least. He said you had the playfulness of a lamb without its selfishness. I think that perfect as far as it goes. Of course my Susie's wise and grave gifts must be told of afterwards. There is no one I know, or have known, so well able as you are to be in a degree what my mother was to me. In this chief way (as well as many other ways) (the puzzlement I have had to force that sentence into grammar!), that I have had the same certainty of giving you pleasure by a few words and by any little account of what I am doing. But then you know I have just got out of the way of doing as I am bid, and unless you can scold me back into that, you can't give me the sense of support.

Tell me more about yourself first, and how those years came to be "lost." I am not sure that they were; though I am very far from holding the empty theory of compensation; but much of the slighter pleasure you lost then is evidently still open to you, fresh all the more from having been for a time withdrawn.

The Roman peasants are very gay to-day, with roses in their hair; legitimately and honorably decorated, and looking lovely. Oh me, if they had a few Susies to take human care of them what a glorious people they would be!

⁸ See [page 99](#).

THE LOST CHURCH IN THE CAMPAGNA

Rome, 2d June, 1874.

Ah if you were but among the marbles here, though there are none finer than that you so strangely discerned in my study; but they are as a white company innumerable, ghost after ghost. And how you would rejoice in them and in a thousand things besides, to which I am dead, from having seen too much or worked too painfully—or, worst of all, lost the hope which gives all life.

Last Sunday I was in a lost church found again,—a church of the second or third century, dug in a green hill of the Campagna, built underground;—its secret entrance like a sand-martin's nest. Such the temple of the Lord, as the King Solomon of that time had to build it; not "the mountains of the Lord's house shall be established above the hills," but the cave of the Lord's house as the fox's hole, beneath them.

And here, now lighted by the sun for the first time (for they are still digging the earth from the steps), are the marbles of those early Christian days; the first efforts of their new hope to show itself in enduring record, the new hope of a Good Shepherd:—there they carved Him, with a spring flowing at His feet, and round Him the cattle of the Campagna in which they had dug their church, the very self-same goats which this morning have been trotting past my window through the most populous streets of Rome, innocently following their shepherd, tinkling their bells, and shaking their long spiral horns and white beards; the very same dew-lapped cattle which were that Sunday morning feeding on the hillside above, carved on the tomb-marbles sixteen hundred years ago.

How you would have liked to see it, Susie!

And now to-day I am going to work in an eleventh century church of quite proud and victorious Christianity, with its grand bishops and saints lording it over Italy. The bishop's throne all marble and mosaic of precious colors and of gold, high under the vaulted roof at the end behind the altar; and line upon line of pillars of massive porphyry and marble, gathered out of the ruins of the temples of the great race who had persecuted them, till they had said to the hills, Cover us, like the wicked. And then *their* proud time came, and their enthronement on the seven hills; and now, what is to be their fate once more?—of pope and cardinal and dome, Peter's or Paul's by name only,—"My house, no more a house of prayer, but a den of thieves."

I can't write any more this morning. Oh me, if one could only write and draw all one wanted, and have our Susies and be young again, oneself and they! (As if there were two Susies, or *could* be!)

Ever my one Susie's very loving

J. Ruskin.

REGRETS

Assisi, *June 9th* (1874).

Yes, I am a little oppressed just now with overwork, nor is this avoidable. I am obliged to leave all my drawings unfinished as the last days come, and the point possible of approximate completion fatally contracts, every hour to a more ludicrous and warped mockery of the hope in which one began. It is impossible not to work against time, and *that* is killing. It is not labor itself, but competitive, anxious, disappointed labor that dries one's soul out.

But don't be frightened about me, you sweet Susie. I know when I *must* stop; forgive and pity me only, because sometimes, nay often my letter (or word) to Susie must be sacrificed to the last effort on one's drawing.

The letter to one's Susie should be a rest, do you think? It is always more or less comforting, but not rest; it means further employment of the already extremely strained sensational power. What one really wants! I believe the only true restorative is the natural one, the actual presence of one's "helpmeet." The far worse than absence of mine *reverses* rest, and what is more, destroys one's power of receiving from others or giving.

How much love of mine have *others* lost, because that poor sick child would not have the part of love that belonged to her!

I am very anxious about your eyes too. For any favor don't write more extracts just now. The books are yours forever and a day—no loan; enjoy any bits that you find enjoyable, but don't copy just now.

I left Rome yesterday, and am on my way home; but, alas! might as well be on my way home from Cochin China, for any chance I have of speedily arriving. Meantime your letters will reach me here with speed, and will be a great comfort to me, if they don't fatigue *you*.

"FRONDES AGRESTES."

Perugia, *12th June* (1874).

I am more and more pleased at the thought of this gathering of yours, and soon expect to tell you what the bookseller says.

Meantime I want you to think of the form the collection should take with reference to my proposed re-publication. I mean to take the botany, the geology, the Turner defense, and the general art criticism of "Modern Painters," as four separate books, cutting out nearly all the preaching, and a good deal of the sentiment. Now what you find pleasant and helpful to you of general maxim or reflection, *must* be of some value; and I think therefore that your selection will just do for me what no other reader could have done, least of all I myself; keep together, that is to say, what may be right and true of those youthful thoughts. I should like you to add anything that specially pleases you, of whatever kind; but to keep the notion of your book being the didactic one as opposed to the other picturesque and scientific volumes, will I think help you in choosing between passages when one or other is to be rejected.

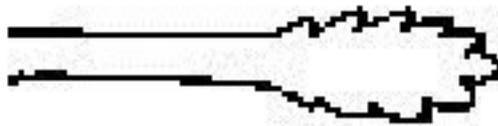
HOW HE FELL AMONG THIEVES

Assisi, 17th June (1874).

I have been having a bad time lately, and have no heart to write to you. Very difficult and melancholy work, deciphering what remains of a great painter⁹ among stains of ruin and blotches of repair, of five hundred years' gathering. It makes me sadder than idleness, which is saying much.

I was greatly flattered and petted by a saying in one of your last letters, about the difficulty I had in unpacking my mind. That is true; one of my chief troubles at present is with the quantity of things I want to say at once. But you don't know how I find things I laid by carefully in it, all moldy and moth-eaten when I take them out; and what a lot of mending and airing they need, and what a wearisome and bothering business it is compared to the early packing,—one used to be so proud to get things into the corners neatly!

I have been failing in my drawings, too, and I'm in a horrible inn kept by a Garibaldian bandit; and the various sorts of disgusting dishes sent up to look like a dinner, and to be charged for, are a daily increasing horror and amazement to me. They succeed in getting *everything* bad; no exertion, no invention, could produce such badness, I believe, anywhere else. The hills are covered for leagues with olive trees, and the oil's bad; there are no such lovely cattle elsewhere in the world, and the butter's bad; half the country people are shepherds, but there's no mutton; half the old women walk about with a pig tied to their waists, but there's no pork; the vine grows wild anywhere, and the wine would make my teeth drop out of my head if I took a glass of it; there are no strawberries, no oranges, no melons, the cherries are as hard as their stones, the beans only good for horses, or Jack and the beanstalk, and this is the size of the biggest asparagus—



I live here in a narrow street ten feet wide only, winding up a hill, and it was full this morning of sheep as close as they could pack, at least a thousand, as far as the eye could reach,—tinkle tinkle, bleat bleat, for a quarter of an hour.

⁹ Cimabue.

IN PARADISE

Assisi, Sacristan's Cell,
25th June (1874).

This letter is all upside down, and this first page written last; for I didn't like something I had written about myself last night when I was tired, and have torn it off.

That star you saw beat like a heart must have been a dog star. A planet would not have twinkled. Far mightier, he, than any planet; burning with his own planetary host doubtless round him; and, on some speckiest of the specks of them, evangelical persons thinking our sun was made for *them*.

Ah, Susie, I do not pass, unthought of, the many sorrows of which you kindly tell me, to show me—for that is in your heart—how others have suffered also.

But, Susie, *you* expect to see your Margaret again, and you will be happy with her in heaven. I wanted my Rosie *here*. In heaven I mean to go and talk to Pythagoras and Socrates and Valerius Publicola. I shan't care a bit for Rosie there, she needn't think it. What will gray eyes and red cheeks be good for *there*?

These pious sentiments are all written in my sacristan's cell.

This extract book¹⁰ of yours will be most precious in its help to me, provided it is kept within somewhat narrow limits. As soon as it is done I mean to have it published in a strong and pretty but *cheap* form, and it must not be too bulky. Consider, therefore, not only what you like, but how far and with whom each bit is likely to find consent and service. You will have to choose perhaps, after a little while, among what you have already chosen. I mean to leave it *wholly* in your hands; it is to be Susie's choice of my writings.

Don't get into a flurry of responsibility, but don't at once write down all you have a mind to; I know you'll find a good deal! for you are exactly in sympathy with me in all things.

Assisi, 9th July, 1874.

Your lovely letters are always a comfort to me; and not least when you tell me you are sad. You would be far less in sympathy with me if you were not, and in the "everything right" humor of some, even of some really good and kind persons, whose own matters are to their mind, and who understand by "Providence" the power which particularly takes care of *them*. This favoritism which goes so sweetly and pleasantly down with so many pious people is the chief of all stumbling-blocks to *me*. I must pray for everybody or nobody, and can't get into any conceptions of relation between Heaven and *me*, if not also between Heaven and earth, (and why Heaven should allow hairs in pens I can't think).

I take great care of myself, be quite sure of that, Susie; the worst of it is, here in Assisi everybody else wants me to take care of them.

Catharine brought me up as a great treat yesterday at dinner, ham dressed with as much garlic as could be stewed into it, and a plate of raw figs, telling me I was to eat them together!

The sun is changing the entire mountains of Assisi into a hot bottle with no flannel round it; but I can't get a ripe plum, peach, or cherry. All the milk turns sour, and one has to eat one's meat at its toughest or the thunder gets into it next day.

¹⁰ "Frondes Agrestes."

FOAM OF TIBER

Perugia, *17th July* (1874).

I am made anxious by your sweet letter of the 6th saying you have been ill and are "not much better."

The letter is all like yours, but I suppose however ill you were you would always write prettily, so that's little comfort.

About the Narcissus, please. I want them for my fishpond stream rather than for the bee-house one. The fishpond stream is very doleful, and wants to dance with daffodils if they would come and teach it. How happy we are in our native streams. A thunder-storm swelled the Tiber yesterday, and it rolled over its mill weirs in heaps, literally, of tossed water, the size of haycocks, but black brown like coffee with the grounds in it, mixed with a very little yellow milk. In some lights the foam flew like cast handfuls of heavy gravel. The chief flowers here are only broom and bindweed, and I begin to weary for my heather and for my Susie; but oh dear, the ways are long and the days few.

Lucca, *29th July* (1874).

I'm not going to be devoured when I come, by anybody, unless *you* like to. I shall come to your window with the birds, to be fed myself.

And please at present always complain to me whenever you like. It is the over boisterous cheerfulness of common people that hurts me; your sadness is a help to me.

You shall have whatever name you like for your book provided you continue to like it after thinking over it long enough. You will not like "Gleanings," because you know one only gleaners refuse—dropped ears—that other people don't care for. *You* go into the garden and gather with choice the flowers you like best. That is not gleanings!

Lucca, *10th August* (1874).

I have been grieved not to write to you; but the number of things that vex me are so great just now, that unless by false effort I could write you nothing nice. It is very dreadful to live in Italy, and more dreadful to see one's England and one's English friends, all but a field or two, and a stream or two, and a one Susie and one Dr. Brown, fast becoming like Italy and the Italians.

I have too *much sympathy* with your sorrow to write to you of it. What I have not sympathy with, is your hope; and how cruel it is to say this! But I am driven more and more to think there is to be no more good for a time, but a reign of terror of men and the elements alike; and yet it is so like what is foretold before the coming of the Son of man that perhaps in the extremest evil of it I may some day read the sign that our redemption draws nigh.

Now, Susie, invent a nice cluster of titles for the book and send them to me to choose from, to Hôtel de l'Arno, Florence. I must get that out before the day of judgment, if I can. I'm so glad of your sweet flatteries in this note received to-day.

Florence, *25th August* (1874).

I have not been able to write to you, or any one lately, whom I don't want to tease, except Dr. Brown, whom I write to for counsel. My time is passed in a fierce steady struggle to save all I can every day, as a fireman from a smoldering ruin, of history or aspect. To-day, for instance, I've been just in time to ascertain the form of the cross of the Emperor, representing the power of the State in the greatest *political* fresco of old times—fourteenth century. By next year, it may be next month, it will have dropped from the wall with the vibration of the railway outside, and be touched up with new gilding for the mob.

I am keeping well, but am in a terrible spell (literally, "spell," enchanted maze, that I can't get out of) of work.

I *was* a little scandalized at the idea of your calling the book "word-painting." My dearest Susie, it is the chief provocation of my life to be called a "word-painter" instead of a thinker. I hope you haven't filled your book with descriptions. I thought it was the thoughts you were looking for?

"Posie" would be pretty. If you ask Joanie she will tell you perhaps *too* pretty for *me*, and I can't think a bit to-night, for instead of robins singing I hear only blaspheming gamesters on the other side of the narrow street.

Florence, *1st September* (1874).

Don't be in despair about your book. I am sure it will be lovely. I'll see to it the moment I get home, but I've got into an entirely unexpected piece of business here, the interpretation of a large chapel ¹¹ full of misunderstood, or not at all understood, frescoes; and I'm terribly afraid of breaking down, so much drawing has to be done at the same time. It has stranded botany and everything.

I was kept awake half of last night by drunken blackguards howling on the bridge of the Holy Trinity in the pure half-moonlight. This is the kind of discord I have to bear, corresponding to your uncongenial company. But, alas! Susie, you ought at ten years old to have more firmness, and to resolve that you won't be bored. I think I shall try to enforce it on you as a very solemn duty not to *lie* to people as the vulgar public do. If they bore you, say so, and they'll go away. That is the right state of things.

How am I to know that *I* don't bore you, when *I* come, when you're so civil to people you hate? Pass of Bocchetta, *1st October* (1874).

All that is lovely and wonderful in the Alps may be seen without the slightest danger, in general, and it is especially good for little girls of eleven who can't climb, to know this—all the best views of hills are at the bottom of them. I know one or two places indeed where there is a grand peeping over precipices, one or two where the mountain seclusion and strength are worth climbing to see. But all the entirely beautiful things I could show you, Susie; only for the very highest sublime of them sometimes asking you to endure half an hour of *chaise à porteurs*, but mostly from a post-chaise or smoothest of turnpike roads.

But, Susie, do you know, I'm greatly horrified at the penwipers of peacocks' feathers! *I* always use my left-hand coat-tail, indeed, and if only I were a peacock and a pet of yours, how you'd scold me!

Sun just coming out over sea (at Sestri), which is sighing in towards the window, within your drive, round before the door's breadth of it, ¹² seen between two masses of acacia copse and two orange trees at the side of the inn courtyard.

Geneva, *19th October* (1874).

How I have been neglecting you! Perhaps Joanie may have told you that just at my last gasp of hand-work, I had to write quite an unexpected number of letters. But poor Joanie will think herself neglected now, for I have been stopped among the Alps by a state of their glaciers entirely unexampled, and shall be a week after my "latest possible" day, in getting home. It is eleven years since I was here, and very sad to me to return, yet delightful with a moonlight paleness of the past, precious of its kind.

I shall be at home with Joan in ten days now, God willing. I have much to tell you, which will give you pleasure and pain; but I don't know how much it will be—to tell you—for a little while yet, so I don't begin.

Oxford, *26th October* (1874).

Home at last with your lovely, most lovely, letter in my breast pocket.

I am so very grateful to you for not writing on black paper.

Oh, dear Susie, why should we ever wear black for the guests of God?

¹¹ Spanish chapel in S. Maria Novella.

¹² That is, within that distance of the window.—J. R.

WHARFE IN FLOOD

Bolton Abbey,
24th January, 1875.

The black rain, much as I growled at it, has let me see Wharfe in flood; and I would have borne many days in prison to see that.

No one need go to the Alps to see wild water. Seldom unless in the Rhine or Rhone themselves at their rapids, have I seen anything much grander. An Alpine stream, besides, nearly always has its bed full of loose stones, and becomes a series of humps and dumps of water wherever it is shallow; while the Wharfe swept round its curves of shore like a black Damascus saber, coiled into eddies of steel. At the Strid, it had risen eight feet vertical since yesterday, sheeting the flat rocks with foam from side to side, while the treacherous mid-channel was filled with a succession of boiling domes of water, charged through and through with churning white, and rolling out into the broader stream, each like a vast sea wave bursting on a beach.

There is something in the soft and comparatively unbroken slopes of these Yorkshire shales which must give the water a peculiar sweeping power, for I have seen Tay and Tummel and Ness, and many a big stream besides, savage enough, but I don't remember anything so grim as this.

I came home to quiet tea and a black kitten called Sweep, who lapped half my cream jugful (and yet I had plenty) sitting on my shoulder,—and *Life of Sir Walter Scott*. I was reading his great Scottish history tour, when he was twenty-three, and got his materials for everything nearly, but especially for *Waverley*, though not used till long afterwards.

Do you recollect Gibbie Gellatly? I was thinking over that question of yours, "What did I think?"¹³ But, my dear Susie, you might as well ask Gibbie Gellatly what *he* thought. What does it matter what any of us think? We are but simpletons, the best of us, and I am a very inconsistent and wayward simpleton. I know how to roast eggs, in the ashes, perhaps—but for the next world! Why don't you ask your squirrel what *he* thinks too? The great point—the one for all of us—is, not to take false words in our mouths, and to crack our nuts innocently through winter and rough weather.

I shall post this to-morrow as I pass through Skipton or any post-worthy place on my way to Wakefield. Write to Warwick. Oh me, what places England had, when she was herself! Now, rail stations mostly. But I never can make out how Warwick Castle got built by that dull bit of river.

¹³ Of the things that shall be, hereafter.—J. R.

"FRONDES."

Wakefield, *25th January*, 1875.

Here's our book in form at last, and it seems to me just a nice size, and on the whole very taking. I've put a touch or two more to the preface, and I'm sadly afraid there's a naughty note somewhere. I hope you won't find it, and that you will like the order the things are put in.

Such ill roads as we came over to-day, I never thought to see in England.

Castleton, *26th January*, 1875.

Here I have your long dear letter. I am very thankful I can be so much to you. Of all the people I have yet known, you are the only one I can find complete sympathy in; you are so nice and young without the hardness of youth, and may be the best of sisters to me. I am not so sure about letting you be an elder one; I am not going to be lectured when I'm naughty.

I've been so busy at *wasps* all day coming along, having got a nice book about them. It tells me, too, of a delightful German doctor who kept tame hornets,—a whole nest in his study! They knew him perfectly, and would let him do anything with them, even pull bits off their nest to look in at it.

Wasps, too, my author says, are really much more amiable than bees, and never get angry without cause. All the same, they have a tiresome way of inspecting one, too closely, sometimes, I think.

I'm immensely struck with the Peak Cavern, but it was in twilight.

I'm going to stay here all to-morrow, the place is so entirely unspoiled. I've not seen such a primitive village, rock, or stream, this twenty years; Langdale is as sophisticated as Pall Mall in comparison.

WASP STINGS

Bolton Bridge, *Saturday*.

I never was more thankful than for your sweet note, being stopped here by bad weather again; the worst of posting is that one has to think of one's servant outside, and so lose a day.

It was bitter wind and snow this morning, too bad to send any human creature to sit idle in. Black enough still, and I more than usual, because it is just that point of distinction from brutes which I truly say is our only one,¹⁴ of which I have now so little hold.

The bee Fors¹⁵ will be got quickly into proof, but I must add a good deal to it. I can't get into good humor for natural history in this weather.

I've got a good book on wasps which says they are our chief protectors against flies. In Cumberland the wet cold spring is so bad for the wasps that I partly think this may be so, and the terrible plague of flies in August might perhaps be checked by our teaching our little Agneses to keep wasps' nests instead of bees.

Yes, that is a pretty bit of mine about Hamlet, and I think I must surely be a little pathetic sometimes, in a doggish way.

"You're so dreadfully faithful!" said Arthur Severn to me, fretting over the way I was being ill-treated the other day by R.

Oh dear, I wish I were at Brantwood again, now, and could send you my wasp book! *It* is pathetic, and yet so dreadful,—the wasp bringing in the caterpillar for its young wasp, stinging each enough to paralyze but not to kill, and so laying them up in the cupboard.

I wonder how the clergymen's wives will feel after the next Fors or two! I've done a bit to-day which I think will go in with a shiver. Do you recollect the curious *thrill* there is—the cold *tingle* of the pang of a nice deep wasp sting?

Well, I'm not in a fit temper to write to Susie to-day, clearly.

¹⁴ I've forgotten what it was, and don't feel now as if I had 'got hold' of *any* one.—J. R.

¹⁵ See "Fors Clavigera," Letter LI.

BOLTON STRID

I stopped here to see the Strid again—not seen these many years. It is curious that life is embittered to me, now, by its former pleasantness; while *you* have of these same places painful recollections, but you could enjoy them now with your whole heart.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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