

RUSKIN JOHN

TIME AND TIDE

BY WEARE

AND TYNE

John Ruskin

Time and Tide by Weare and Tyne

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John Ruskin
Time and Tide by Weare and Tyne /
Twenty-five Letters to a Working Man
of Sunderland on the Laws of Work

PREFACE

The following Letters were written to Mr. Thomas Dixon, a working cork-cutter of Sunderland, during the agitation for Reform in the spring of the present year. They contain, in the plainest terms I could use, the substance of what I then desired to say to our English workmen, which was briefly this:—"The reform you desire may give you more influence in Parliament; but your influence there will of course be useless to you,—perhaps worse than useless, until you have wisely made up your minds what you wish Parliament to do for you; and when you *have* made up your minds about that, you will find, not only that you can do it for yourselves, without the intervention of Parliament; but that eventually nobody *but* yourselves can do it. And to help you, as far as one of your old friends may, in so making up your minds, such and such things are what it seems to me you should ask for, and, moreover, strive for with your heart and might."

The letters now published relate only to one division of the laws which I desired to recommend to the consideration of our operatives,—those, namely, bearing upon honesty of work, and honesty of exchange. I hope in the course of next year that I may be able to complete the second part of the series, [I could not; but 'Fors Clavigera' is now (1872) answering the same end:] which will relate to the possible comforts and wholesome laws, of familiar household life, and the share which a laboring nation may attain in the skill, and the treasures, of the higher arts.

The letters are republished as they were written, with, here and there, correction of a phrase, and omission of one or two passages of merely personal or temporary interest; the headings only are added, in order to give the reader some clue to the general aim of necessarily desultory discussion; and the portions of Mr. Dixon's letters in reply, referred to in the text, are added in the Appendix, and will be found well deserving of attention.

Denmark Hill,
December 14, 1867.

LETTER I. THE TWO KINDS OF CO-OPERATION.—IN ITS HIGHEST SENSE IT IS NOT YET THOUGHT OF

Denmark Hill, February 4, 1867.

My Dear Friend,

1. You have now everything I have yet published on political economy; but there are several points in these books of mine which I intended to add notes to, and it seems little likely I shall get that soon done. So I think the best way of making up for the want of these is to write you a few simple letters, which you can read to other people, or send to be printed, if you like, in any of your journals where you think they may be useful.

I especially want you, for one thing, to understand the sense in which the word "co-operation" is used in my books. You will find I am always pleading for it; and yet I don't at all mean the co-operation of partnership (as opposed to the system of wages) which is now so gradually extending itself among our great firms. I am glad to see it doing so, yet not altogether glad: for none of you who are engaged in the immediate struggle between the system of co-operation and the system of mastership know how much the dispute involves; and none of us know the results to which it may finally lead. For the alternative is not, in reality, only between two modes of conducting business—it is between two different states of society. It is not the question whether an amount of wages, no greater in the end than that at present received by the men, may be paid to them in a way which shall give them share in the risks and interest in the prosperity of the business. The question is, really, whether the profits which are at present taken, as his own right, by the person whose capital, or energy, or ingenuity, has made him head of the firm, are not in some proportion to be divided among the subordinates of it.

2. I do not wish, for the moment, to enter into any inquiry as to the just claims of capital, or as to the proportions in which profits ought to be, or are in actually existing firms, divided. I merely take the one assured and essential condition, that a somewhat larger income will be in co-operative firms secured to the subordinates, by the diminution of the income of the chief. And the general tendency of such a system is to increase the facilities of advancement among the subordinates; to stimulate their ambition; to enable them to lay by, if they are provident, more ample and more early provision for declining years; and to form in the end a vast class of persons wholly different from the existing operative:—members of society, possessing each a moderate competence; able to procure, therefore, not indeed many of the luxuries, but all the comforts of life; and to devote some leisure to the attainments of liberal education, and to the other objects of free life. On the other hand, by the exact sum which is divided among them, more than their present wages, the fortune of the man who, under the present system, takes all the profits of the business, will be diminished; and the acquirement of large private fortune by regular means, and all the conditions of life belonging to such fortune, will be rendered impossible in the mercantile community.

3. Now, the magnitude of the social change hereby involved, and the consequent differences in the moral relations between individuals, have not as yet been thought of,—much less estimated,—by any of your writers on commercial subjects; and it is because I do not yet feel able to grapple with them that I have left untouched, in the books I send you, the question of co-operative labor. When I use the word "co-operation," it is not meant to refer to these new constitutions of firms at all. I use the word in a far wider sense, as opposed, not to masterhood, but to *competition*. I do not mean, for instance, by co-operation, that all the master bakers in a town are to give a share of their profits to the men who go out with the bread; but that the masters are not to try to undersell each other, nor seek each to get the other's business, but are all to form one society, selling to the public under a common

law of severe penalty for unjust dealing, and at an established price. I do not mean that all bankers' clerks should be partners in the bank; but I do mean that all bankers should be members of a great national body, answerable as a society for all deposits; and that the private business of speculating with other people's money should take another name than that of "banking." And, for final instance, I mean by "co-operation" not only fellowships between trading *firms*, but between trading *nations*; so that it shall no more be thought (as it is now, with ludicrous and vain selfishness) an advantage for one nation to undersell another; and take its occupation away from it; but that the primal and eternal law of vital commerce shall be of all men understood—namely, that every nation is fitted by its character, and the nature of its territories, for some particular employments or manufactures; and that it is the true interest of every other nation to encourage it in such speciality, and by no means to interfere with, but in all ways forward and protect, its efforts, ceasing all rivalry with it, so soon as it is strong enough to occupy its proper place. You see, therefore, that the idea of co-operation, in the sense in which I employ it, has hardly yet entered into the minds of political inquirers; and I will not pursue it at present; but return to that system which is beginning to obtain credence and practice among us. This, however, must be in a following letter.

LETTER II. CO-OPERATION, AS HITHERTO UNDERSTOOD, IS PERHAPS NOT EXPEDIENT

February 4, 1867.

4. Limiting the inquiry, then, for the present, as proposed in the close of my last letter, to the form of co-operation which is now upon its trial in practice, I would beg of you to observe that the points at issue, in the comparison of this system with that of mastership, are by no means hitherto frankly stated; still less can they as yet be fairly brought to test. For all mastership is not alike in principle; there are just and unjust masterships; and while, on the one hand, there can be no question but that co-operation is better than unjust and tyrannous mastership, there is very great room for doubt whether it be better than a just and benignant mastership.

5. At present you—every one of you—speak, and act, as if there were only one alternative; namely, between a system in which profits shall be divided in due proportion among all; and the present one, in which the workman is paid the least wages he will take, under the pressure of competition in the labor-market. But an intermediate method is conceivable; a method which appears to me more prudent, and in its ultimate results more just, than the co-operative one. An arrangement may be supposed, and I have good hope also may one day be effected, by which every subordinate shall be paid sufficient and regular wages, according to his rank; by which due provision shall be made out of the profits of the business for sick and superannuated workers; and by which the master, *being held responsible, as a minor king or governor, for the conduct as well as the comfort of all those under his rule*, shall, on that condition, be permitted to retain to his own use the surplus profits of the business which the fact of his being its master may be assumed to prove that he has organized by superior intellect and energy. And I think this principle of regular wage-paying, whether it be in the abstract more just, or not, is at all events the more prudent; for this reason mainly, that in spite of all the cant which is continually talked by cruel, foolish, or designing persons about "the duty of remaining content in the position in which Providence has placed you," there is a root of the very deepest and holiest truth in the saying, which gives to it such power as it still retains, even uttered by unkind and unwise lips, and received into doubtful and embittered hearts.

6. If, indeed, no effort be made to discover, in the course of their early training, for what services the youths of a nation are individually qualified; nor any care taken to place those who have unquestionably proved their fitness for certain functions, in the offices they could best fulfil,—then, to call the confused wreck of social order and life brought about by malicious collision and competition, an arrangement of Providence, is quite one of the most insolent and wicked ways in which it is possible to take the name of God in vain. But if, at the proper time, some earnest effort be made to place youths, according to their capacities, in the occupations for which they are fitted, I think the system of organization will be finally found the best, which gives the least encouragement to thoughts of any great future advance in social life.

7. The healthy sense of progress, which is necessary to the strength and happiness of men, does not consist in the anxiety of a struggle to attain higher place, or rank, but in gradually perfecting the manner, and accomplishing the ends, of the life which we have chosen, or which circumstances have determined for us. Thus, I think the object of a workman's ambition should not be to become a master; but to attain daily more subtle and exemplary skill in his own craft, to save from his wages enough to enrich and complete his home gradually with more delicate and substantial comforts; and to lay by such store as shall be sufficient for the happy maintenance of his old age (rendering him independent of the help provided for the sick and indigent by the arrangement pre-supposed), and

sufficient also for the starting of his children in a rank of life equal to his own. If his wages are not enough to enable him to do this, they are unjustly low; if they are once raised to this adequate standard, I do not think that by the possible increase of his gains under contingencies of trade, or by divisions of profits with his master, he should be enticed into feverish hope of an entire change of condition; and as an almost necessary consequence, pass his days in an anxious discontent with immediate circumstances, and a comfortless scorn of his daily life, for which no subsequent success could indemnify him. And I am the more confident in this belief, because, even supposing a gradual rise in social rank possible for all well-conducted persons, my experience does not lead me to think the elevation itself, when attained, would be conducive to their happiness.

8. The grounds of this opinion I will give you in a future letter; in the present one, I must pass to a more important point—namely, that if this stability of condition be indeed desirable for those in whom existing circumstances might seem to justify discontent, much more must it be good and desirable for those who already possess everything which can be conceived necessary to happiness. It is the merest insolence of selfishness to preach contentment to a laborer who gets thirty shillings a week, while we suppose an active and plotting covetousness to be meritorious in a man who has three thousand a year. In this, as in all other points of mental discipline, it is the duty of the upper classes to set an example to the lower; and to recommend and justify the restraint of the ambition of their inferiors, chiefly by severe and timely limitation of their own. And, without at present inquiring into the greater or less convenience of the possible methods of accomplishing such an object, (every detail in suggestions of this kind necessarily furnishing separate matter of dispute,) I will merely state my long-fixed conviction, that one of the most important conditions of a healthful system of social economy, would be the restraint of the properties and incomes of the upper classes within certain fixed limits. The temptation to use every energy in the accumulation of wealth being thus removed, another, and a higher ideal of the duties of advanced life would be necessarily created in the national mind; by withdrawal of those who had attained the prescribed limits of wealth from commercial competition, earlier worldly success, and earlier marriage, with all its beneficent moral results, would become possible to the young; while the older men of active intellect, whose sagacity is now lost or warped in the furtherance of their own meanest interests, would be induced unselfishly to occupy themselves in the superintendence of public institutions, or furtherance of public advantage. And out of this class it would be found natural and prudent always to choose the members of the legislative body of the Commons; and to attach to the order also some peculiar honors, in the possession of which such complacency would be felt as would more than replace the unworthy satisfaction of being supposed richer than others, which to many men is the principal charm of their wealth. And although no law of this purport would ever be imposed on themselves by the actual upper classes, there is no hindrance to its being gradually brought into force from beneath, without any violent or impatient proceedings; and this I will endeavor to show you in my next letter.

LETTER III. OF TRUE LEGISLATION. THAT EVERY MAN MAY BE A LAW TO HIMSELF

February 17, 1867.

9. No, I have not been much worse in health; but I was asked by a friend to look over some work in which you will all be deeply interested one day, so that I could not write again till now. I was the more sorry, because there were several things I wished to note in your last letter; one especially leads me directly to what I in any case was desirous of urging upon you. You say, "In vol. 6th of 'Frederick the Great' I find a great deal that I feel quite certain, if our Queen or Government could make law, thousands of our English workmen would hail with a shout of joy and gladness." I do not remember to what you especially allude, but whatever the rules you speak of may be, unless there be anything in them contrary to the rights of present English property, why should you care whether the Government makes them law or not? Can you not, you thousands of English workmen, simply make them a law to yourselves, by practising them?

It is now some five or six years since I first had occasion to speak to the members of the London Working Men's College on the subject of Reform, and the substance of what I said to them was this: "You are all agape, my friends, for this mighty privilege of having your opinions represented in Parliament. The concession might be desirable,—at all events courteous,—if only it were quite certain you had got any opinions to represent. But have you? Are you agreed on any single thing you systematically want? Less work and more wages, of course; but how much lessening of work do you suppose is possible? Do you think the time will ever come for everybody to have *no* work and *all* wages? Or have you yet taken the trouble so much as to think out the nature of the true connection between wages and work, and to determine, even approximately, the real quantity of the one, that can, according to the laws of God and nature, be given for the other; for, rely on it, make what laws you like, that quantity only can you at last get.

10. "Do you know how many mouths can be fed on an acre of land, or how fast those mouths multiply? and have you considered what is to be done finally with unfeedable mouths? 'Send them to be fed elsewhere,' do you say? Have you, then, formed any opinion as to the time at which emigration should begin, or the countries to which it should preferably take place, or the kind of population which should be left at home? Have you planned the permanent state which you would wish England to hold, emigrating over her edges, like a full well, constantly? How full would you have her be of people, first? and of what sort of people? Do you want her to be nothing but a large workshop and forge, so that the name of 'Englishman' shall be synonymous with 'ironmonger,' all over the world? or would you like to keep some of your lords and landed gentry still, and a few green fields and trees?

11. "You know well enough that there is not one of these questions, I do not say which you can answer, but which you have ever *thought* of answering; and yet you want to have voices in Parliament! Your voices are not worth a rat's squeak, either in Parliament or out of it, till you have some ideas to utter with them; and when you have the thoughts, you will not want to utter them, for you will see that your way to the fulfilling of them does not lie through speech. You think such matters need debating about? By all means debate about them; but debate among yourselves, and with such honest helpers of your thoughts as you can find; if by that way you cannot get at the truth, do you suppose you could get at it sooner in the House of Commons, where the only aim of many of the members would be to refute every word uttered in your favor; and where the settlement of any question whatever depends merely on the perturbations of the balance of conflicting interests?"

12. That was, in main particulars, what I then said to the men of the Working Men's College; and in this recurrent agitation about Reform, that is what I would steadfastly say again. Do you think it is only under the lacquered splendors of Westminster,—you working men of England,—that your affairs can be rationally talked over? You have perfect liberty and power to talk over, and establish for yourselves, whatever laws you please; so long as you do not interfere with other people's liberties or properties. Elect a parliament of your own. Choose the best men among you, the best at least you can find, by whatever system of election you think likeliest to secure such desirable result. Invite trustworthy persons of other classes to join your council; appoint time and place for its stated sittings, and let this parliament, chosen after your own hearts, deliberate upon the possible modes of the regulation of industry, and advisabest schemes for helpful discipline of life; and so lay before you the best laws they can devise, which such of you as were wise might submit to, and teach their children to obey. And if any of the laws thus determined appear to be inconsistent with the present circumstances or customs of trade, do not make a noise about them, nor try to enforce them suddenly on others, nor embroider them on flags, nor call meetings in parks about them, in spite of railings and police; but keep them in your thoughts and sight, as objects of patient purpose and future achievement by peaceful strength.

13. For you need not think that even if you obtained a majority of representatives in the existing parliament, you could immediately compel any system of business, broadly contrary to that now established by custom. If you could pass laws to-morrow, wholly favorable to yourselves, as you might think, because unfavorable to your masters, and to the upper classes of society,—the only result would be that the riches of the country would at once leave it, and you would perish in riot and famine. Be assured that no great change for the better can ever be easily accomplished, or quickly; nor by impulsive, ill-regulated effort, nor by bad men; nor even by good men, without much suffering. The suffering must, indeed, come, one way or another, in all greatly critical periods; the only question, for us, is whether we will reach our ends (if we ever reach them) through a chain of involuntary miseries, many of them useless, and all ignoble; or whether we will know the worst at once, and deal with it by the wisely sharp methods of Godsped courage.

14. This, I repeat to you, it is wholly in your own power to do, but it is in your power on one condition only, that of steadfast truth to yourselves, and to all men. If there is not, in the sum of it, honesty enough among you to teach you to frame, and strengthen you to obey, *just* laws of trade, there is no hope left for you. No political constitution can ennoble knaves; no privileges can assist them; no possessions enrich them. Their gains are occult curses; comfortless loss their truest blessing; failure and pain Nature's only mercy to them. Look to it, therefore, first that you get some wholesome honesty for the foundation of all things. Without the resolution in your hearts to do good work, so long as your right hands have motion in them; and to do it whether the issue be that you die or live, no life worthy the name will ever be possible to you, while, in once forming the resolution that your work is to be well done, life is really won, here and for ever. And to make your children capable of such resolution, is the beginning of all true education, of which I have more to say in a future letter.

LETTER IV. THE EXPENSES FOR ART AND FOR WAR

February 19, 1867.

15. In the 'Pall Mall Gazette' of yesterday, second column of second page, you will find, close to each other, two sentences which bear closely on matters in hand. The first of these is the statement, that in the debate on the grant for the Blacas collection, "Mr. Bernal Osborne got an assenting cheer, when he said that 'whenever science and art were mentioned it was a sign to look after the national pockets.'" I want you to notice this fact, *i. e.*, (the debate in question being on a *total* grant of 164,000*l.*, of which 48,000*l.* only were truly for art's sake, and the rest for shop's sake,) in illustration of a passage in my 'Sesame and Lilies' (pp. 69, 70 of the small edition, and pp. 46, 47 of Vol. I. of the Revised Series of the Entire Works),^[1] to which I shall have again to refer you, with some further comments, in the sequel of these letters. The second passage is to the effect that "The Trades' Union Bill was read a second time, after a claim from Mr. Hadfield, Mr. Osborne, and Mr. Samuelson, to admit working men into the commission; to which Mr. Watkin answered 'that the working men's friend was too conspicuous in the body;' and Mr. Roebuck, 'that when a butcher was tried for murder it was not necessary to have butchers on the jury.'"

16. Note this second passage with respect to what I said in my last letter, as to the impossibility of the laws of work being investigated in the House of Commons. What admixture of elements, think you, would avail to obtain so much as decent hearing (how should we then speak of impartial judgment?) of the cause of working men, in an assembly which permits to one of its principal members this insolent discourtesy of language, in dealing with a preliminary question of the highest importance; and permits it as so far expressive of the whole color and tone of its own thoughts, that the sentence is quoted by one of the most temperate and accurate of our daily journals, as representing the total answer of the opposite side in the debate? No! be assured you can do nothing yet at Westminster. You must have your own parliament, and if you cannot detect enough honesty among you to constitute a justly minded one, for the present matters must take their course, and that will be, yet awhile, to the worse.

17. I meant to have continued this subject, but I see two other statements in the 'Pall Mall Gazette' of to-day, with which, and a single remark upon them, I think it will be well to close my present letter.

(1) "The total sum asked for in the army estimates, published this morning, is 14,752,200*l.*, being an increase of 412,000*l.* over the previous year."

(2) "Yesterday the annual account of the navy receipts and expenditure for the year ending 31st March, 1866, was issued from the Admiralty. The expenditure was 10,268,115*l.* 7*s.*"

Omitting the seven shillings, and even the odd hundred-thousands of pounds, the net annual expenditure for army and navy appears to be twenty-four millions.

The "grant in science and art," two-thirds of which was not in reality for either, but for amusement and shop interests in the Paris Exhibition—the grant which the House of Commons feels to be indicative of general danger to the national pockets—is, as above stated, 164,000*l.* Now, I believe the three additional ciphers which turn thousands into millions produce on the intelligent English mind usually the effect of—three ciphers. But calculate the proportion of these two sums, and then imagine to yourself the beautiful state of rationality of any private gentleman, who, having regretfully spent 164*l.* on pictures for his walls, paid willingly 24,000*l.* annually to the policeman who looked after his shutters! You practical English!—will you ever unbar the shutters of your brains, and hang a picture or two in those state-chambers?

LETTER V. THE CORRUPTION OF MODERN PLEASURE. —(COVENT GARDEN PANTOMIME.)

February 25, 1867.

18. There is this great advantage in the writing real letters, that the direct correspondence is a sufficient reason for saying, in or out of order, everything that the chances of the day bring into one's head, in connection with the matter in hand; and as such things very usually go out of one's head again, after they get tired of their lodging, they would otherwise never get said at all. And thus to-day, quite out of order, but in very close connection with another part of our subject, I am going to tell you what I was thinking on Friday evening last, in Covent Garden Theater, as I was looking, and not laughing, at the pantomime of 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.'

When you begin seriously to consider the question referred to in my second letter, of the essential, and in the outcome inviolable, connection between quantity of wages, and quantity of work, you will see that "wages" in the full sense don't mean "pay" merely, but the reward, whatever it may be, of pleasure as well as profit, and of various other advantages, which a man is meant by Providence to get during life, for work well done. Even limiting the idea to "pay," the question is not so much what quantity of coin you get, as—what you can get for it when you have it. Whether a shilling a day be good pay or not, depends wholly on what a "shilling's worth" is; that is to say, what quantity of the things you want may be had for a shilling. And that again depends, and a great deal more than that depends, on what you *do* want. If only drink, and foul clothes, such and such pay may be enough for you; if you want good meat and good clothes, you must have larger wage; if clean rooms and fresh air, larger still, and so on. You say, perhaps, "every one wants these better things." So far from that, a wholesome taste for cleanliness and fresh air is one of the final attainments of humanity. There are now not many European gentlemen, even in the highest classes, who have a pure and right love of fresh air. They would put the filth of tobacco even into the first breeze of a May morning.

19. But there are better things even than these, which one may want. Grant that one has good food, clothes, lodging, and breathing, is that all the pay one ought to have for one's work? Wholesome means of existence and nothing more? Enough, perhaps, you think, if everybody could get these. It may be so; I will not, at this moment, dispute it; nevertheless, I will boldly say that you should sometimes want more than these; and for one of many things more, you should want occasionally to be amused!

You know, the upper classes, most of them, want to be amused all day long. They think

"One moment *unamused* a misery
Not made for feeble men."

Perhaps you have been in the habit of despising them for this; and thinking how much worthier and nobler it was to work all day, and care at night only for food and rest, than to do no useful thing all day, eat unearned food, and spend the evening, as the morning, in "change of follies and relays of joy." No, my good friend, that is one of the fatalest deceptions. It is not a noble thing, in sum and issue of it, not to care to be amused. It is indeed a far higher *moral* state, but is a much lower *creature* state, than that of the upper classes.

20. Yonder poor horse, calm slave in daily chains at the railroad siding, who drags the detached rear of the train to the front again, and slips aside so deftly as the buffers meet; and, within eighteen inches of death every ten minutes, fulfils his changeless duty all day long, content, for eternal reward,

with his night's rest, and his champed mouthful of hay;—anything more earnestly moral and beautiful one cannot image—I never see the creature without a kind of worship. And yonder musician, who used the greatest power which (in the art he knew) the Father of spirits ever yet breathed into the clay of this world;—who used it, I say, to follow and fit with perfect sound the words of the 'Zauberflöte' and of 'Don Giovanni'—foolishest and most monstrous of conceivable human words and subjects of thought—for the future "amusement" of his race!—No such spectacle of unconscious (and in that unconsciousness all the more fearful) moral degradation of the highest faculty to the lowest purpose can be found in history. But Mozart is nevertheless a nobler creature than the horse at the siding; nor would it be the least nearer the purpose of his Maker that he, and all his frivolous audiences, should evade the degradation of the profitless piping, only by living, like horses, in daily physical labor for daily bread.

21. There are three things to which man is born¹—labor, and sorrow, and joy. Each of these three things has its baseness and its nobleness. There is base labor, and noble labor. There is base sorrow, and noble sorrow. There is base joy, and noble joy. But you must not think to avoid the corruption of these things by doing without the things themselves. Nor can any life be right that has not all three. Labor without joy is base. Labor without sorrow is base. Sorrow without labor is base. Joy without labor is base.

22. I dare say you think I am a long time in coming to the pantomime; I am not ready to come to it yet in due course, for we ought to go and see the Japanese jugglers first, in order to let me fully explain to you what I mean. But I can't write much more to-day; so I shall merely tell you what part of the play set me thinking of all this, and leave you to consider of it yourself, till I can send you another letter. The pantomime was, as I said, 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.' The forty thieves were girls. The forty thieves had forty companions, who were girls. The forty thieves and their forty companions were in some way mixed up with about four hundred and forty fairies, who were girls. There was an Oxford and Cambridge boat-race, in which the Oxford and Cambridge men were girls. There was a transformation scene, with a forest, in which the flowers were girls, and a chandelier, in which the lamps were girls, and a great rainbow which was all of girls.

23. Mingled incongruously with these seraphic, and, as far as my boyish experience extends, novel, elements of pantomime, there were yet some of its old and fast-expiring elements. There were, in speciality, two thoroughly good pantomime actors—Mr. W. H. Payne and Mr. Frederick Payne. All that these two did, was done admirably. There were two subordinate actors, who played, subordinately well, the fore and hind legs of a donkey. And there was a little actress of whom I have chiefly to speak, who played exquisitely the little part she had to play. The scene in which she appeared was the only one in the whole pantomime in which there was any dramatic effort, or, with a few rare exceptions, any dramatic possibility. It was the home scene, in which Ali Baba's wife, on washing day, is called upon by butcher, baker, and milkman, with unpaid bills; and in the extremity of her distress hears her husband's knock at the door, and opens it for him to drive in his donkey, laden with gold. The children who have been beaten instead of getting breakfast, presently share in the raptures of their father and mother; and the little lady I spoke of, eight or nine years old,—dances a *pas-de-deux* with the donkey.

24. She did it beautifully and simply, as a child ought to dance. She was not an infant prodigy; there was no evidence, in the finish or strength of her motion, that she had been put to continual torture through half her eight or nine years. She did nothing more than any child well taught, but painlessly, might easily do. She caricatured no older person,—attempted no curious or fantastic skill. She was dressed decently,—she moved decently,—she looked and behaved innocently,—and she danced her joyful dance with perfect grace, spirit, sweetness, and self-forgetfulness. And through all the vast theater, full of English fathers and mothers and children, there was not one hand lifted to give her sign of praise but mine.

¹ I ask the reader's thoughtful attention to this paragraph, on which much of what else I have to say depends.

Presently after this, came on the forty thieves, who, as I told you, were girls; and, there being no thieving to be presently done, and time hanging heavy on their hands, arms, and legs, the forty thief-girls proceeded to light forty cigars. Whereupon the British public gave them a round of applause. Whereupon I fell a thinking; and saw little more of the piece, except as an ugly and disturbing dream.

LETTER VI. THE CORRUPTION OF MODERN PLEASURE.—(THE JAPANESE JUGGLERS.)

February 28, 1867.

25. I have your pleasant letter with references to Frederick. I will look at them carefully. [\[III\]](#) Mr. Carlyle himself will be pleased to hear this letter when he comes home. I heard from him last week at Mentone. He is well, and glad of the light and calm of Italy. I must get back to the evil light and uncalm, of the places I was taking you through.

(Parenthetically, did you see the article in the 'Times' of yesterday on bribery, and the conclusion of the commission—"No one sold any opinions, for no one had any opinions to sell"?)

Both on Thursday and Friday last I had been tormented by many things, and wanted to disturb my course of thought any way I could. I have told you what entertainment I got on Friday, first, for it was then that I began meditating over these letters; let me tell you now what entertainment I found on Thursday.

26. You may have heard that a company of Japanese jugglers has come over to exhibit in London. There has long been an increasing interest in Japanese art, which has been very harmful to many of our own painters, and I greatly desired to see what these people were, and what they did. Well, I have seen Blondin, and various English and French circus work, but never yet anything that surprised me so much as one of these men's exercises on a suspended pole. Its special character was a close approximation to the action and power of the monkey; even to the prehensile power in the foot; so that I asked a sculptor-friend who sat in front of me, whether he thought such a grasp could be acquired by practice, or indicated difference in race. He said he thought it might be got by practice. There was also much inconceivably dexterous work in spinning of tops,—making them pass in balanced motion along the edge of a sword, and along a level string, and the like;—the father performing in the presence of his two children, who encouraged him continually with short, sharp cries, like those of animals. Then there was some fairly good sleight-of-hand juggling of little interest; ending with a dance by the juggler, first as an animal, and then as a goblin. Now, there was this great difference between the Japanese masks used in this dance and our common pantomime masks for beasts and demons,—that our English masks are only stupidly and loathsomely ugly, by exaggeration of feature, or of defect of feature. But the Japanese masks (like the frequent monsters of Japanese art) were inventively frightful, like fearful dreams; and whatever power it is that acts on human minds, enabling them to invent such, appears to me not only to deserve the term "demoniacal," as the only word expressive of its character; but to be logically capable of no other definition.

27. The impression, therefore, produced upon me by the whole scene, was that of being in the presence of human creatures of a partially inferior race, but not without great human gentleness, domestic affection, and ingenious intellect; who were, nevertheless, as a nation, afflicted by an evil spirit, and driven by it to recreate themselves in achieving, or beholding the achievement, through years of patience, of a certain correspondence with the nature of the lower animals.

28. These, then, were the two forms of diversion or recreation of my mind possible to me, in two days, when I needed such help, in this metropolis of England. I might, as a rich man, have had better music, if I had so chosen, though, even so, not rational or helpful; but a poor man could only have these, or worse than these, if he cared for any manner of spectacle. (I am not at present, observe, speaking of pure acting, which is a study, and recreative only as a noble book is; but of means of *mere* amusement.)

Now, lastly, in illustration of the effect of these and other such "amusements," and of the desire to obtain them, on the minds of our youth, read the 'Times' correspondent's letter from Paris, in the tenth page of the paper, to-day;[\[III\]](#) and that will be quite enough for you to read, for the present, I believe.

LETTER VII. OF THE VARIOUS EXPRESSIONS OF NATIONAL FESTIVITY

March 4, 1867.

29. The subject which I want to bring before you is now branched, and worse than branched, reticulated, in so many directions, that I hardly know which shoot of it to trace, or which knot to lay hold of first.

I had intended to return to those Japanese jugglers, after a visit to a theater in Paris; but I had better, perhaps, at once tell you the piece of the performance which, in connection with the scene in the English pantomime, bears most on matters in hand.

It was also a dance by a little girl—though one older than Ali Baba's daughter, (I suppose a girl of twelve or fourteen). A dance, so called, which consisted only in a series of short, sharp contractions and jerks of the body and limbs, resulting in attitudes of distorted and quaint ugliness, such as might be produced in a puppet by sharp twitching of strings at its joints: these movements being made to the sound of two instruments, which between them accomplished only a quick vibratory beating and strumming, in nearly the time of a hearth-cricket's song, but much harsher, and of course louder, and without any sweetness; only in the monotony and unintended aimless construction of it, reminding one of various other insect and reptile cries or warnings: partly of the cicada's hiss; partly of the little melancholy German frog which says "Mu, mu, mu," all summer-day long, with its nose out of the pools by Dresden and Leipsic; and partly of the deadened quivering and intense continuousness of the alarm of the rattlesnake.

While this was going on, there was a Bible text repeating itself over and over again in my head, whether I would or no:—"And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." To which text and some others, I shall ask your attention presently; but I must go to Paris first.

30. Not at once, however, to the theater, but to a bookseller's shop, No. 4, Rue Voltaire, where, in the year 1858, was published the fifth edition of Balzac's 'Contes Drôlatiques,' illustrated by 425 designs by Gustave Doré.

Both text and illustrations are as powerful as it is ever in the nature of evil things to be (there is no *final* strength but in rightness). Nothing more witty, nor more inventively horrible, has yet been produced in the evil literature, or by the evil art, of man: nor can I conceive it possible to go beyond either in their specialities of corruption. The text is full of blasphemies, subtle, tremendous, hideous in shamelessness, some put into the mouths of priests; the illustrations are, in a word, one continuous revelry in the most loathsome and monstrous aspects of death and sin, enlarged into fantastic ghastliness of caricature, as if seen through the distortion and trembling of the hot smoke of the mouth of hell. Take this following for a general type of what they seek in death: one of the most labored designs is of a man cut in two, downwards, by the sweep of a sword—one half of him falls toward the spectator; the other half is elaborately drawn in its section—giving the profile of the divided nose and lips; cleft jaw—breast—and entrails; and this is done with farther pollution and horror of intent in the circumstances, which I do not choose to describe—still less some other of the designs which seek for fantastic extreme of sin, as this for the utmost horror of death. But of all the 425, there is not one, which does not violate every instinct of decency and law of virtue or life, written in the human soul.

31. Now, my friend, among the many "Signs of the Times" the production of a book like this is a significant one: but it becomes more significant still when connected with the farther fact, that

M. Gustave Doré, the designer of this series of plates, has just been received with loud acclaim by the British Evangelical Public, as the fittest and most able person whom they could at present find to illustrate, to their minds, and recommend with grace of sacred art, their hitherto unadorned Bible for them.

Of which Bible, and of the use we at present make of it in England, having a grave word or two to say in my next letter (preparatory to the examination of that verse which haunted me through the Japanese juggling, and of some others also), I leave you first this sign of the public esteem of it to consider at your leisure.

LETTER VIII. THE FOUR POSSIBLE THEORIES RESPECTING THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

March 7, 1867.

32. I have your yesterday's letter, but must not allow myself to be diverted from the business in hand for this once, for it is the most important of which I have to write to you.

You must have seen long ago that the essential difference between the political economy I am trying to teach, and the popular science, is, that mine is based on *presumably attainable honesty* in men, and conceivable respect in them for the interests of others, while the popular science founds itself wholly on their supposed constant regard for their own, and on their honesty only so far as thereby likely to be secured.

It becomes, therefore, for me, and for all who believe anything I say, a great primal question on what this presumably attainable honesty is to be based.

33. "Is it to be based on religion?" you may ask. "Are we to be honest for fear of losing heaven if we are dishonest, or (to put it as generously as we may) for fear of displeasing God? Or, are we to be honest on speculation, because honesty is the best policy; and to invest in virtue as in an undepreciable stock?"

And my answer is—not in any hesitating or diffident way (and you know, my friend, that whatever people may say of me, I often do speak diffidently; though, when I am diffident of things, I like to avoid speaking of them, if it may be; but here I say with no shadow of doubt)—your honesty is *not* to be based either on religion or policy. Both your religion and policy must be based on *it*. Your honesty must be based, as the sun is, in vacant heaven; poised, as the lights in the firmament, which have rule over the day and over the night. If you ask why you are to be honest—you are, in the question itself, dishonored. "Because you are a man," is the only answer; and therefore I said in a former letter that to make your children *capable of honesty* is the beginning of education. Make them men first, and religious men afterwards, and all will be sound; but a knave's religion is always the rottenest thing about him.

34. It is not, therefore, because I am endeavoring to lay down a foundation of religious concrete, on which to build piers of policy, that you so often find me quoting Bible texts in defense of this or that principle or assertion. But the fact that such references are an offense, as I know them to be, to many of the readers of these political essays, is one among many others, which I would desire you to reflect upon (whether you are yourself one of the offended or not), as expressive of the singular position which the mind of the British public has at present taken with respect to its worshiped Book. The positions, honestly tenable, before I use any more of its texts, I must try to define for you.

35. All the theories possible to theological disputants respecting the Bible are resolvable into four, and four only.

(1.) The first is that of the illiterate modern religious world, that every word of the book known to them as "The Bible" was dictated by the Supreme Being, and is in every syllable of it His "Word."

This theory is of course tenable by no ordinarily well-educated person.

(2.) The second theory is, that, although admitting verbal error, the substance of the whole collection of books called the Bible is absolutely true, and furnished to man by Divine inspiration of the speakers and writers of it; and that every one who honestly and prayerfully seeks for such truth in it as is necessary for his salvation, will infallibly find it there.

This theory is that held by most of our good and upright clergymen, and the better class of the professedly religious laity.

(3.) The third theory is that the group of books which we call the Bible were neither written nor collected under any Divine guidance, securing them from substantial error; and that they contain, like all other human writings, false statements mixed with true, and erring thoughts mixed with just thoughts; but that they nevertheless relate, on the whole, faithfully, the dealings of the one God with the first races of man, and His dealings with them in aftertime through Christ: that they record true miracles, and bear true witness to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

This is a theory held by many of the active leaders of modern thought.

(4.) The fourth, and last possible, theory is that the mass of religious Scripture contains merely the best efforts which we hitherto know to have been made by any of the races of men towards the discovery of some relations with the spiritual world; that they are only trustworthy as expressions of the enthusiastic visions or beliefs of earnest men oppressed by the world's darkness, and have no more authoritative claim on our faith than the religious speculations and histories of the Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, and Indians; but are, in common with all these, to be reverently studied, as containing a portion, divinely appointed, of the best wisdom which human intellect, earnestly seeking for help from God, has hitherto been able to gather between birth and death.

This has been, for the last half-century, the theory of the soundest scholars and thinkers of Europe.

36. There is yet indeed one farther condition of incredulity attainable, and sorrowfully attained, by many men of powerful intellect—the incredulity, namely, of inspiration in any sense, or of help given by any Divine power to the thoughts of men. But this form of infidelity merely indicates a natural incapacity for receiving certain emotions; though many honest and good men belong to this insentient class.

37. The educated men, therefore, who may be seriously appealed to, in these days, on questions of moral responsibility, as modified by Scripture, are broadly divisible into three classes, severally holding the last three theories above stated.

Now, whatever power a passage from the statedly authoritative portions of the Bible may have over the mind of a person holding the fourth theory, it will have a proportionately greater over that of persons holding the third or the second. I, therefore, always imagine myself speaking to the fourth class of theorists. If I can persuade or influence *them*, I am logically sure of the others. I say "logically," for the actual fact, strange as it may seem, is that no persons are so little likely to submit to a passage of Scripture not to their fancy, as those who are most positive on the subject of its general inspiration.

38. Addressing, then, this fourth class of thinkers, I would say to them, when asking them to enter on any subject of importance to national morals, or conduct, "This book, which has been the accepted guide of the moral intelligence of Europe for some fifteen hundred years, enforces certain simple laws of human conduct which you know have also been agreed upon, in every main point, by all the religious, and by all the greatest profane writers, of every age and country. This book primarily forbids pride, lasciviousness, and covetousness; and you know that all great thinkers, in every nation of mankind, have similarly forbidden these mortal vices. This book enjoins truth, temperance, charity, and equity; and you know that every great Egyptian, Greek, and Indian, enjoins these also. You know besides, that through all the mysteries of human fate and history, this one great law of fate is written on the walls of cities, or in their dust; written in letters of light, and letters of blood,—that where truth, temperance, and equity have been preserved, all strength, and peace, and joy have been preserved also;—that where lying, lasciviousness, and covetousness have been practised, there has followed an infallible, and, for centuries, irrecoverable ruin. And you know, lastly, that the observance of this common law of righteousness, commending itself to all the pure instincts of men, and fruitful in their temporal good, is by the religious writers of every nation, and chiefly in this venerated Scripture of ours, connected with some distinct hope of better life, and righteousness, to come.

39. "Let it not then offend you if, deducing principles of action first from the laws and facts of nature, I nevertheless fortify them also by appliance of the precepts, or suggestive and probable

teachings of this Book, of which the authority is over many around you, more distinctly than over you, and which, confessing to be divine, *they*, at least, can only disobey at their moral peril."

On these grounds, and in this temper, I am in the habit of appealing to passages of Scripture in my writings on political economy; and in this temper I will ask you to consider with me some conclusions which appear to me derivable from that text about Miriam, which haunted me through the jugglery; and from certain others.

LETTER IX.

THE USE OF MUSIC AND DANCING UNDER THE JEWISH THEOCRACY, COMPARED WITH THEIR USE BY THE MODERN FRENCH

March 10, 1867.

40. Having, I hope, made you now clearly understand with what feeling I would use the authority of the book which the British public, professing to consider sacred, have lately adorned for themselves with the work of the boldest violator of the instincts of human honor and decency known yet in art-history, I will pursue by the help of that verse about Miriam, and some others, the subject which occupied my mind at both theaters, and to which, though in so apparently desultory manner, I have been nevertheless very earnestly endeavoring to lead you.

41. The going forth of the women of Israel after Miriam with timbrels and with dances, was, as you doubtless remember, their expression of passionate triumph and thankfulness, after the full accomplishment of their deliverance from the Egyptians. That deliverance had been by the utter death of their enemies, and accompanied by stupendous miracle; no human creatures could in an hour of triumph be surrounded by circumstances more solemn. I am not going to try to excite your feelings about them. Consider only for yourself what that seeing of the Egyptians "dead upon the sea-shore" meant to every soul that saw it. And then reflect that these intense emotions of mingled horror, triumph, and gratitude were expressed, in the visible presence of the Deity, by music and dancing. If you answer that you do not believe the Egyptians so perished, or that God ever appeared in a pillar of cloud, I reply, "Be it so—believe or disbelieve, as you choose;—This is yet assuredly the fact, that the author of the poem or fable of the Exodus supposed that, under such circumstances of Divine interposition as he had invented, the triumph of the Israelitish women would have been, and ought to have been, under the direction of a prophetess, expressed by music and dancing."

42. Nor was it possible that he should think otherwise, at whatever period he wrote; both music and dancing being, among all great ancient nations, an appointed and very principal part of the worship of the gods.

And that very theatrical entertainment at which I sate thinking over these things for you—that pantomime, which depended throughout for its success on an appeal to the vices of the lower London populace, was, in itself, nothing but a corrupt remnant of the religious ceremonies which guided the most serious faiths of the Greek mind, and laid the foundation of their gravest moral and didactic—more forcibly so because at the same time dramatic—literature.

43. Returning to the Jewish history, you find soon afterwards this enthusiastic religious dance and song employed, in their more common and habitual manner, in the idolatries under Sinai; but beautifully again and tenderly, after the triumph of Jephthah, "And behold his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances." Again, still more notably, at the triumph of David with Saul, "the women came out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing to meet King Saul with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music." And you have this joyful song and dance of the virgins of Israel not only incidentally alluded to in the most solemn passages of Hebrew religious poetry (as in Psalm lxviii. 24, 25, and Psalm cxlix. 2, 3), but approved, and the restoration of it promised as a sign of God's perfect blessing, most earnestly by the saddest of the Hebrew prophets, and in one of the most beautiful of all his sayings.

"The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, 'Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.—I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O Virgin of Israel; thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and thou shalt go forth in dances with

them that make merry," (Jer. xxxi. 3, 4; and compare v. 13). And finally, you have in two of quite the most important passages in the whole series of Scripture (one in the Old Testament, one in the New), the rejoicing in the repentance from, and remission of, sins, expressed by means of music and dancing, namely, in the rapturous dancing of David before the returning ark; and in the joy of the father's household at the repentance of the prodigal son.

44. I could put all this much better, and more convincingly, before you, if I were able to take any pains in writing at present; but I am not, as I told you; being weary and ill; neither do I much care now to use what, in the very truth, are but tricks of literary art, in dealing with this so grave subject. You see I write you my letter straightforward, and let you see all my scratchings out and puttings in; and if the way I say things shocks you, or any other reader of these letters, I cannot help it; this only I know, that what I tell you is true, and written more earnestly than anything I ever wrote with my best literary care; and that you will find it useful to think upon, however it be said. Now, therefore, to draw towards our conclusion. Supposing the Bible inspired, in any of the senses above defined, you have in these passages a positively Divine authority for the use of song and dance, as a means of religious service, and expression of national thanksgiving. Supposing it not inspired, you have (taking the passages for as slightly authoritative as you choose) record in them, nevertheless, of a state of mind in a great nation, producing the most beautiful religious poetry and perfect moral law hitherto known to us, yet only expressible by them, to the fulfilment of their joyful passion, by means of professional dance and choral song.

45. Now I want you to contrast this state of religious rapture with some of our modern phases of mind in parallel circumstances. You see that the promise of Jeremiah's, "Thou shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry," is immediately followed by this, "Thou shalt yet *plant vines* upon the mountains of Samaria." And again, at the yearly feast to the Lord in Shiloh, the dancing of the virgins was in the midst of the vineyards (Judges xxi. 21), the feast of the vintage being in the south, as our harvest home in the north, a peculiar occasion of joy and thanksgiving. I happened to pass the autumn of 1863 in one of the great vine districts of Switzerland, under the slopes of the outlying branch of the Jura which limits the arable plain of the Canton Zurich, some fifteen miles north of Zurich itself. That city has always been a renowned, stronghold of Swiss Protestantism, next in importance only to Geneva; and its evangelical zeal for the conversion of the Catholics of Uri, and endeavors to bring about that spiritual result by stopping the supplies of salt they needed to make their cheeses with, brought on (the Uri men reading their Matt. v. 13, in a different sense) the battle of Keppel, and the death of the reformer Zwinglius. The town itself shows the most gratifying signs of progress in all the modern arts and sciences of life. It is nearly as black as Newcastle—has a railroad station larger than the London terminus of the Chatham and Dover—fouls the stream of the Limmat as soon as it issues from the lake, so that you might even venture to compare the formerly simple and innocent Swiss river (I remember it thirty years ago—a current of pale green crystal) with the highly educated English streams of Weare or Tyne; and, finally, has as many French prints of dissolute tendency in its principal shop windows as if they had the privilege of opening on the Parisian Boulevards.

46. I was somewhat anxious to see what species of thanksgiving or exultation would be expressed at *their* vintage, by the peasantry in the neighborhood of this much enlightened, evangelical, and commercial society. It consisted in two ceremonies only. During the day, the servants of the farms where the grapes had been gathered, collected in knots about the vineyards, and slowly fired horse-pistols, from morning to evening. At night they got drunk, and staggered up and down the hill paths, uttering, at short intervals, yells and shrieks, differing only from the howling of wild animals by a certain intended and insolent discordance, only attainable by the malignity of debased human creatures.

47. I must not do the injustice to the Zurich peasantry of implying that this manner of festivity is peculiar to them. A year before, in 1862, I had formed the intention of living some years in the

neighborhood of Geneva, and had established myself experimentally on the eastern slope of the Mont Salève; but I was forced to abandon my purpose at last, because I could not endure the rabid howling, on Sunday evenings, of the holiday-makers who came out from Geneva to get drunk in the mountain village. By the way, your last letter, with its extracts about our traffic in gin, is very valuable. I will come to that part of the business in a little while. Meantime, my friend, note this, respecting what I have told you, that in the very center of Europe, in a country which is visited for their chief pleasure by the most refined and thoughtful persons among all Christian nations—a country made by God's hand the most beautiful in the temperate regions of the earth, and inhabited by a race once capable of the sternest patriotism and simplest purity of life, your modern religion, in the very stronghold of it, has reduced the song and dance of ancient virginal thanksgiving to the howlings and staggerings of men betraying, in intoxication, a nature sunk more than half-way towards the beasts; and you will begin to understand why the Bible should have been "illustrated" by Gustave Doré.

48. One word more is needful, though this letter is long already. The peculiar ghastliness of this Swiss mode of festivity is in its utter failure of joy; the paralysis and helplessness of a vice in which there is neither pleasure, nor art. But we are not, throughout Europe, wholly thus. There is such a thing, yet, as rapturous song and dance among us, though not indicative, by any means, of joy over repentant sinners. You must come back to Paris with me again. I had an evening to spare there, last summer, for investigation of theaters; and as there was nothing at any of them that I cared much about seeing, I asked a valet-de-place at Meurice's what people were generally going to. He said, "All the English went to see the *Lanterne Magique*." I do not care to tell you what general entertainment I received in following, for once, the lead of my countrymen; but it closed with the representation of the characteristic dancing of all ages of the world; and the dance given as characteristic of modern time was the Cancan, which you will see alluded to in the extract given in the note at page 80 of 'Sesame and Lilies' (the small edition; and page 54 of Vol. I. of the Revised Series of the Entire Works). "The ball terminated with a Devilish Chain and a Cancan of Hell, at seven in the morning." It was led by four principal dancers (who have since appeared in London in the *Huguenot Captain*

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