

RUSKIN JOHN

SAINT URSULA: I. THE
STORY OF ST. URSULA. II.
THE DREAM OF ST.
URSULA

John Ruskin

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Ursula. II. The Dream of St. Ursula**

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PREFACE

Fors Clavigera!—to the ignorant a stumbling-stone, to the Philistines a laughing-stock, but to the Initiate a sweet remembrance of many a happy hour passed in informal chat with the Master.

The real Ruskin enthusiast has read every word of *Fors*, and reckons it not least among the precious treasures of the Master's pen. But it remains a fact that to the vast majority of those who have heard of *Fors Clavigera*, it is but an excellent example of Ruskin's eccentric seeking after curious titles; and the beauties of these letters are as effectually buried as if they had appeared in a country journal.

It is in the desire of rescuing one of the choicest bits in all *Fors* that the present little booklet is offered to the clients of the "Celestial Lily" as Mother Church names the noble Martyr, St. Ursula. Though, of course, a life of this royal maiden has an interest for me apart from its authorship by Ruskin.

As one dedicated to the cause for which the little Princess

and her "legions" lost their lives, as one tenderly devoted to her and as privileged to be sheltered beneath her protecting mantle, I look upon this story as one of the sweetest relics of the "Age of Faith." It makes no difference to me, as it made none to John Ruskin (and thank God there are many like him), what learned Bollandists and others tell us of the legendary character of the Princess of Over-sea. The essential thing, as Ruskin remarked, is that a great people chose so to represent their highest aspirations. It will remain eternally true, to use his words, that "we see the Saints better through a nimbus of religious enthusiasm than a fog of contemptuous rationalism."

To all who, like Ursula, love holy living and unselfish dedication to a noble cause, greeting—

An Ursuline of New Orleans.

I

THE STORY OF ST. URSULA

There was once a just and most Christian King of Britain, called Maurus. To him and to his wife Daria was born a little girl, the fairest creature that this earth ever saw. She came into the world wrapped in a hairy mantle, and all men wondered greatly what this might mean. Then the King gathered together his wise men to inquire of them. But they could not make known the thing to him, for only God in Heaven knew how the rough robe signified that she should follow holiness and purity all her days, and the wisdom of St. John the Baptist. And because of the mantle, they called her Ursula, 'Little Bear.'

Now Ursula grew day by day in grace and loveliness, and in such wisdom that all men marvelled. Yet should they not have marvelled, since with God all things are possible. And when she was fifteen years old she was a light of all wisdom, and a glass of all beauty, and a fountain of Scripture and of sweet ways. Lovelier woman there was not alive. Her speech was so full of all delight that it seemed as though an angel of Paradise had taken human flesh. And in all the kingdom no weighty thing was done without counsel of Ursula.

So her fame was carried through the earth, and a King of England, a heathen of Over-sea, hearing, was taken with the love

of her. And he set all his heart on having her for wife to his son Æther, and for daughter in his home. So he sent a mighty and honourable embassy, of earls and marquesses, with goodly company of knights and ladies and philosophers; bidding them, with all courtesy and discretion, pray King Maurus to give Ursula in marriage to Æther.

"But," he said, "if Maurus will not hear your gentle words, open to him all my heart, and tell him that I will ravage his land with fire, and slay his people, and make himself die a cruel death, and will, after, lead Ursula away with me. Give him but three days to answer, for I am wasted with desire to finish the matter and hold Ursula in my ward."

But when the ambassadors came to King Maurus, he would not have his daughter wed a heathen; so, since prayers and gifts did not move him, they spoke out all the threats. Now the land of Britain was little, and its soldiers few, while the heathen was a mighty king and a conqueror; so Maurus and his Queen and his councillors, and all the people, were in sore distress.

But on the evening of the second day Ursula went into her chamber and shut close the doors, and before the image of the Father, who is very pitiful, prayed all night with tears, telling how she had vowed in her heart to live a holy maiden all her days, having Christ alone for spouse. But if His will were that she should wed the son of the heathen King, she prayed that wisdom might be given her to turn the hearts of all that people who knew not faith or holiness, and power to comfort her father and mother, and all

the people of her fatherland.

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