Ruskin

Prophet of the Good Life

Edited by

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Hon. M.A. Oxford

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CONTENTS

NOTE BY THE EDITOR

THIS book contains the remarkable tributes paid to Ruskin at a luncheon of the Ruskin Society in February 1948—remarkable because of the unanimity of speakers representing many aspects of public life. They included the Minister for Education, Viscount Samuel, Robertson Scott, Sir Arthur Salter, M.P., and D. R. Hardman, M.P., the Secretary to the Ministry of Education.

These, and others, dealt with many aspects of Ruskin's life and teaching but a great unity was shown in all the addresses. It was common ground that time had not weakened his message but had shown its truth. But there was also visible, in the attitude of all who were present, not only gratitude for his message but for the nobility of his character. He taught the Good Life, not only for the individual but for nations.

J. H. W.

May 1948

I

J. HOWARD WHITEHOUSE

PRESIDENT OF THE RUSKIN SOCIETY

I RISE to propose the toast to the Immortal Memory of John Ruskin.

I wish first to refer to one who was our guest of honour two years ago, Mr. Winant, the American Ambassador. We had no greater friend than Mr. Winant, and it meant a great deal to us that he was the American Ambassador during the war. At the meeting to which I refer he spoke of the influence of Ruskin in the United States; he also spoke of the influence which John Ruskin had had upon his own life, and he paid a great tribute to him. I express the deep regret that we all feel at his tragic death.

I want also to refer to one who was, I suppose I could say, without exaggeration, the most dearly loved man in the world—Mr. Gandhi. I am reminded that once, when he was going on a long journey, he was given a copy of *Unto This Last*, and he used these words about it: 'The book was an inspiration: it was a gospel of life.' I am sure I speak for everyone here to-day when I express our deep regret at his tragic death.

Then it is only right that I should say a word about Brantwood, because, quite a number of years ago, it was presented to the University of Oxford. The Vice-Chancellor who received it was my friend Sir David Ross, the Vice-Chancellor who looked after the subsequent arrangements was another dear friend, Sir Richard Livingstone, and the Vice-Chancellor who now overlooks the preparations for its return is Dr. Stallybrass. The story is briefly this: the University decided that they were too far from Coniston to administer Brantwood properly. Negotiations with the Lancashire Education Committee for building a college for adult education had fallen through, and they found it impossible to carry out those things which they had undertaken to do in the Trust Deed. They therefore suggested to me that the wiser policy would be to return it to

the donor. That decision I saw was inevitable and I accepted it, and we are now engaged in arranging for it to be the property of the Education Trust, which is the Trust that owns Bembridge School and has undertaken to do all those things which the University would have carried out. Ruskin's pictures and other treasures will be on exhibition, there will be facilities for University Reading Parties, there will be lectures, and in fact there will be no limit to what can be undertaken to advance the cause of education and to preserve Brantwood as a memorial to the great man we honour to-day.

I should like to say that there has been no quarrel between myself and the University of Oxford. I have been treated with the utmost courtesy by all the Vice-Chancellors who have taken part in any of the negotiations now so long continued and by many other representatives of the University, and our friendship is unimpaired. Their co-operation is still promised in every way possible.

Now, it is right that I should refer to a book which has occasioned a great deal of discussion and has been widely reviewed. I refer to the book entitled *The Order of Release*, by Admiral James. It is a painful book to read. I feel great regret that it was ever published, and I will tell you why. First of all, let me point out that Admiral James was born in 1881; Lady Millais, formerly Ruskin's wife, died in 1897. Admiral James, therefore, as a glance at those dates will show, had no personal knowledge of the events which he describes in the book, for Ruskin's marriage took place thirty-three years before the Admiral was born. And I would express the hope that the conclusions arrived at in this book will not be accepted as truth, for the book is a very partial statement, and the case for Ruskin has not been put.

I will just mention one or two points which render the book valueless as a contribution to the understanding of Ruskin. Out of many hundred letters, only comparatively few are quoted; some are just extracts torn from their context; the letters are not always given in the order in which they were written, and occasionally it is difficult to follow them. But from the beginning to the end of the book the case for Ruskin is not put. The Admiral's own statements are contradicted by letters printed in part in this book from

Effie Gray, written after her marriage, showing how happy she was. She spoke of Ruskin as doing everything possible that a mortal man could do for her happiness, she spoke of the reception she received from his father and mother, the beautiful flowers presented to her by the servants on her arrival, and so on. Yet, years later, Lady Millais was to accuse Ruskin of gross cruelty on the marriage night.

Now, I am not going to make any attack upon Effie Gray. I think we are in the presence of a tragedy, and now that a part of it has been dragged into public light we should try to be just about the matter, and the conclusions I reach are these: the tragedy arose from the fact that Ruskin and his wife had different interests altogether and that after the first novelty of their married life had worn off, both became aware that there was no real sympathy between them. I could quote letters to the late Dr. Furnival in which Ruskin described the life which existed between them. And the great criticism of the book which I have is that it pronounces judgement without attempting to put Ruskin's case.

As a further example of this, when the proceedings for the annulment of the marriage took place, Ruskin submitted a statement in his own defence. That statement is in existence and was accessible to the author of the book, but it is not printed. Instead, the author dismisses it with the words: 'It is a statement which only discredits the man who made it.' *We* should judge of that. The statement is evidence in his favour. It should be published.

Again, there are some statements which quite frankly I do not believe. One is to the effect that Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin, Senior, the parents of John Ruskin, invited Effie Gray's younger sister, a child of about ten, to stay with them, and that they tried to make her spy upon the actions of her sister. There is not a tittle of evidence in support of that allegation, and I regard it as wholly untrue.

Sir John Millais was, as you know, one of the great pre-Raphaelite painters who was helped very much by Ruskin, and I make no attack upon him. He and Effie Gray fell in love with each other and ultimately married. Millais really acted later with some generosity towards Ruskin, because he denied the rumours that had been circulated and to which

he had given some support that Ruskin had invited him to join them on a sketching tour in Scotland in order that he might make love to Ruskin's wife. He denied that, and throughout his lifetime, after his marriage to Effie Gray, he made no attack on Ruskin.

I therefore hope very much that opinions put forth in this book will not be accepted. The truth has not been revealed. When it is, our love for Ruskin will be as high as ever. If it were not for the sensation that this book has caused, I should not trouble to refer to it.

I would like to add this: I think that the question of the ethics of reviewing merits consideration in such a case. I was much struck by the fact that Robert Lynd, the distinguished man of letters, in a review of this book did not blame Ruskin. He said that the truth was not known and opinion ought to be withheld until the case for Ruskin had been stated. I regret that many of the reviews which have appeared have not waited for the case for Ruskin to appear, and apparently have not noticed that it has not been given, and I regret the injustice that has been done to the memory of Ruskin.

We honour to-day a man who gave us a true philosophy of life and a political economy that has stood the test of time. He revealed to us the meaning of beauty and he wanted it to be something that would affect us in every aspect of our lives. No man has done more for any country not his own than Ruskin did for Italy. He made the treasures of Italy known to the world. In education (I speak in the presence, to my very great pleasure, of the Minister of Education) Ruskin was a great pioneer; above all, he urged the place for creative education in all forms; music, art, craftsmanship, all these things he would have made essential to all forms of education; further, he wanted schools to be places of beauty. His message, with its exposition of the Good Life, was given to us in prose that is imperishable and stands with the greatest our language has produced. I feel it a great privilege to propose the toast to his memory.

2

THE RIGHT HON. LORD SAMUEL, P.C.

I WELL remember the luncheon of two years ago which I had the pleasure of attending. At this table was the American Ambassador, Mr. Winant, and I had the privilege of sitting next to him and having a most interesting and valuable conversation. Here in the same place, and on a similar occasion, my mind, like the President's, naturally turns back to him, and I join in the expression of regret that we all feel at his tragic end.

I do not propose, Sir, to follow you in speaking of the recent book, for I have not the knowledge either of that book or of the circumstances that would entitle me to do so. But I would say a word about Brantwood, Coniston, to which you have referred.

We all of us rejoiced at the generous gift that Mr. Whitehouse had made of Ruskin's house at Coniston to Oxford University, and looked forward to its utilization to the full under those auspices, and we sympathize with the disappointment that he must feel that the original plan has miscarried and that the University does not feel able to take advantage of his beneficent intentions. At the same time, I learn from him that he has every hope and intention that, although in a slightly different form, his benefaction is to take effect and that the house will be preserved for the purpose of a permanent memorial to Ruskin, and will be put substantially to the same uses as he had intended that it should be put. So our gratitude to him remains undiminished, and we express our best wishes for the full fruition of his enterprise.

I anticipate that we may be on the eve of a Ruskin Revival. Samuel Butler wrote in his Notebooks that he looked forward to a good average immortality of three-score years and ten. Well, I think he was wrong in thinking that literary works, if they are successful, would have that kind of immortality, because experience shows that as a rule there is an interval between the death of an author of distinction and the full recognition of the value of his work, and indeed most authors fall into abeyance for forty or fifty years after their

death, when their writings give an impression of being out of date and old-fashioned, before a later generation has rediscovered the eminent value in them which first burst upon their contemporaries. We are now, it seems from many signs, on the eve of a Meredith Revival, and I rejoice in it, since I am one of the very few people who have been reading Meredith constantly ever since my youth. The younger generation hardly knows that he existed. But if now he is recognized to be the greatest of all our intellectual novelists and one of the most brilliant writers in the whole galaxy of English literature, it will be a great advantage for the generation which is to come next.

Well, Ruskin died in 1900, and the period of fifty years is nearly up, and we may expect that some bright young men will suddenly say: 'After all, Ruskin had a great deal to say and he wrote very finely,' and there will be a vogue in Ruskin, as there is likely to be a vogue in Meredith, as there has lately been a vogue in a very much lesser man than either, Anthony Trollope; and, as we see all through the history of literature, there is a kind of delayed action before the full blaze of true immortality bursts forth.

The reason why I think that certain factors will contribute to such a revival are these:

In the first place, there is, I think, in the present generation, a great reaction against materialistic tendencies. The leaders of thought, the philosophers, have for some time past in great majority entirely rejected the materialistic trend which prevailed for the best part of a hundred years, owing mainly to the triumphs of science in chemistry and physics and their extension to biology through Darwinism. One hundred years ago the advanced thought of the time tended in a materialistic direction, and there was a strong tendency away from religion and all forms of the more idealistic (not in the technical sense) philosophy. But during the present century that tendency in philosophy has been entirely reversed, and hardly any philosophers of the present generation would accept such books, which had a great vogue in an earlier generation, as Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* and other literature of that character, and it is rather pathetic to see that in Russia, which has been cut off for so long from

the intellectual currents of the world, they still imagine that the materialism of Karl Marx, which originated in the epoch when these earlier tendencies were strong, still represents the last word in the advanced thought of modern mankind. As a matter of fact they are going about in the intellectual fashions of a hundred years ago, and to the rest of mankind it is as if they went about dressed in frock coats, top hats, and wearing whiskers.

The other reason why I think it is likely that the spirit of Ruskin will attract a greater following than it has done during the period since his life, is this: that the economic conditions that prevailed in an earlier generation are now being rapidly overcome. We are passing through great difficulties due, not to the main currents of economics, but to international commercial and industrial difficulties which obscure the fact that in the main the more acute economic problems of a hundred years ago, or even in my own youth, have been overcome. When I entered politics, fifty or sixty years ago, we all had to bend our utmost energies to overcome the extreme poverty, the long hours, the hateful environment which had been inherited from the earlier years of the Industrial Revolution. Now the whole condition of the masses of the people has been immensely raised, through higher wages, shorter hours, more holidays, better education, and there no longer exists the dreadful proletariat, slum-dwelling and living in slave conditions, which marked Britain and other countries in the generation of which I speak and in protest of which Marx raised a voice of such great eloquence. Those problems have not, indeed, been wholly solved, but have been in the main overcome and the working classes in general live at a much higher level than they did at that time.

And now it seems to me that our politics in general is likely to take a turn, and instead of concentrating upon the economic aspect (we still have our housing problems to solve, but all this may be got rid of in a few years after our present international difficulties are overcome) it turns to the other aspect of civilization, the cultural aspect, the amenities, the relation between art and life which was Ruskin's chief theme and occupation, and, in general, the economic aspect is likely

to give place to the cultural. You can see many signs of it. The nation, for example, has established an Arts Council which is extremely active, is supported by an immense volume of public opinion and is likely to achieve great results; the Government has appointed a Royal Fine Arts Commission to deal with any controversial matter with regard to those aspects of affairs; Mr. Tomlinson has every reason, I think, to feel proud that his Government has introduced and carried into law already two or three very fine pieces of legislation which may affect the environment of the urban and rural population in a marked degree. The Town and Country Planning Act is one of the best pieces of legislation of our time and is likely to do rapidly immeasurable good in improving the whole aspect of our towns. The New Towns Act is another valuable measure. The National Parks Act is a third. All these may effect a revolutionary change in the aspect of this country.

We see that the people at large, or at all events great classes of them, are taking a keener interest in art matters, in music, in painting, than ever before, partly through the educational work of the B.B.C. and the possibilities that are given by this marvellous new medium of communication, the radio, and partly through the greater facilities which are now offered through museums and galleries and in other ways. It is a most striking thing that the van Gogh Exhibition was attended in a few weeks by 150,000 people. We read in the histories of the Renaissance how the whole population of Florence turned out to welcome a great picture by Cimabue. Well, the 150,000 Londoners who made a queue nearly half a mile long in the neighbourhood of the Tate Gallery is an example of the same spirit, greatly to the credit of the nation. You have a controversy in the press over the cleaning of pictures which brings thousands of people thronging to the National Gallery and expressing the most vehement views on one side or the other. And if you see the same curiosity over the Picasso Exhibition, which I regard as a melancholy exhibition of decadence, that, however, is also a sign of healthy curiosity on the part of the young; and a great many of those went to see but did not, by any means, leave with acceptance.

So, on the whole, our generation need not be altogether so ashamed of being Philistine and materialistic and utilitarian as it is inclined to be.

The Exhibition of 1851, of which we heard an excellent account on the radio, I think it was last night, from Mr. Woodward, was the apotheosis of things. It has not been possible to have a Centenary Exhibition, as I and many others would have desired, in 1951, because of the present physical conditions which make it impossible, but instead of it there is going to be a Cultural Festival, so the Government have announced, artistic, philosophic, scientific, in the art of design, and other matters, not concentrated in a single building or group of buildings but in various places, all co-operating, which I am convinced will bring an immense response from the public. We saw that the small beginning in that manner in Edinburgh recently was received with enthusiasm and with great success, and I feel convinced that if this plan is carried out in 1951, as it will be, it will invoke an almost immeasurable response from the public, and that immense crowds will throng all these presentations of whatever branch of art there may be.

Well, all this is really Ruskinism applied, and he would rejoice in this more idealistic, artistic, one might say religious spirit now prevailing in the nation, compared with the hostile atmosphere in which he carried on his work. So it would be with good heart that to-day, thanks to the kind hospitality of Mr. Whitehouse and the Ruskin Society, we are able to meet together to drink to the immortal memory of John Ruskin.

3

THE RIGHT HON. GEORGE TOMLINSON, M.P.

MINISTER OF EDUCATION

THIS is the first time I have had the privilege of being present at a gathering of the Ruskin Society, although I do remember as a youngster memorizing long passages of Ruskin in order that I might slay my political opponents and leave them speechless. Anything that I could say, of course,

mattered little, but if one could listen to what John Ruskin said, well, to me at any rate, there was no answer that was capable of standing up—certainly in the factory—to any of the propositions that were put forward.

When you were speaking, Sir, at the beginning of your remarks on that book which has been published, which I have not read, another quotation was going through my mind of another great writer, in which he said: 'The evil that men do lives after them: the good is oft interred with their bones.' And it struck me as being maybe another characteristic of our present age, in addition to the one of which Viscount Samuel has spoken, that there has, somehow or other, developed a feeling that the good that a man does has got to be put in the background and, if he has enjoyed some appreciation for that good, then somehow, in some way, somebody has to dig into a cupboard and find something that will be detrimental or show some influence to the contrary direction.

I am interested in Ruskin because he was one of those people who spoke about the things of the future in his day which we have lived to see come to pass. That which he desired so long ago is now being desired by others and is being appreciated. My father was not a learned man, but he read John Ruskin, and he read the *Manchester Guardian* every morning; that will give you his background. He used to say to me sometimes, in his broad Lancashire: 'You know, the fellow that says what I'm thinking has got some sense!' Now, time and time again, John Ruskin, in his writings, expresses in a wonderful way the things that *I* am thinking, that I believe the best people are thinking, and I find that he was not only a philosopher, and had something to say with regard to the right type of education, but that he also had a conception well in front of his time as to how men should be paid. In my last job at the Ministry of Works we had long discussions about payment by results. I was much interested when I came across this in the writings of John Ruskin: 'Some day assuredly we shall pay people not quite so much for talking in Parliament and doing nothing as for holding their tongues out of it and doing something.' That is the first time I have found a quotation which showed

that somebody so many years ago was thinking of paying politicians according to the results. Payment by results in many fields of life has been advocated, but this is the first time I have seen it advocated so far as politicians are concerned. I would like to take it a stage or two farther and apply it to parsons and several others in the same category. But right down I am convinced in my own mind that what he was trying to portray in his own inimitable way was the fact that doing things was what mattered, and doing them in the right way.

Another quotation I got from him, which expresses what I have been trying to tell our people in Lancashire for a long time—not, I am afraid, with all the success I would desire—is this: 'I am always struck by the precedence which the idea of a position in life takes above all other thoughts in the parents', more especially in the mothers', minds: the education befitting such and such a station in life. This is the phrase, this is the object, always. They never seek, as far as I can make out, an education good in itself. It never seems to occur to them that there may be an education which in itself is advancement in life—that any other than that may perhaps be advancement in death.' It is many years ago since Ruskin wrote that. There is still a good deal of truth in it, you know. I find in going about the country one of my greatest difficulties is to convince people that education in itself is the thing that matters and is well worth while, that even if it had no economic advantage, even if it did not bring anything in the way of better jobs, which is what has been the motivating power behind a great deal of it in the past, it is still the greatest thing in life, for the simple reason that it is the only thing that can interpret life. It is not easy to get that across. It is becoming easier to-day, thanks, as Lord Samuel said, to a beneficent Government! But the fact remains that it is not easy. And yet it is important; for, unless we do get it across, then it seems to me that that for which Ruskin had lived will have to wait longer and longer for its real achievement.

Some few weeks ago, speaking in this strain at a Youth Conference, when I was taken to task in the *Daily Telegraph* for having attempted to divorce or dissociate this idea of

making a living and life itself, I did not quite realize—because I had not been invited to the Ruskin Luncheon and had not looked it up—that I had such a great man on my side as John Ruskin, otherwise, perhaps, I would have written to the *Daily Telegraph*—which is a thing Ministers ought never to do.

Then again, I find that Ruskin says that every parish school should have a garden, playground, and cultivable land round it or belonging to it, spacious enough to employ the scholars in fine weather mostly out of doors. You know, I think next time we have a Debate in the House of Commons and people are suggesting that we are spending too much money—as sometimes they do—on our school buildings and the rest of it, it might be worth while (I don't know how popular it would be to quote John Ruskin in the House of Commons), but it might be worth while to remind them that we are not the first people who have sought these desirable things and realized the value which comes from them.

I was glad Lord Samuel referred to the van Gogh pictures and the change which is taking place in the desires of our people. There are some people who would suggest to you that this is just a phase, maybe a reaction from the years of war. I do not believe it is. I believe it is not only a desire for something more but a capacity for appreciation when that something more comes. I am strengthened in that faith or belief by what took place during the war. I at that time was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and was responsible, amongst other things, for seeking to improve the welfare arrangements, not only in connexion with the Merchant Service but of industrial organizations generally. In 1940–1, when we were providing concerts for the industrialists as well as for the troops, the demand was for the cheap entertainer and the comic singer. Then, more and more, we brought C.E.M.A. into the picture, the organization which preceded the Arts Council, and whereas at the beginning of the war, in 1940–1, the demand was five to one against the artistic and the better type of entertainment, before the end of the war the figures had been reversed and the demand for the better type of music, the better type of

concert, for the work of C.E.M.A., now the Arts Council, superseded altogether the demand for the cheap music-hall entertainment of the beginning of the war. I think we should rejoice in this for it is a revelation of the fact that we are all capable of appreciating the best when we see it. We may need some tuition in the appreciation of it, and maybe something of that beauty which Ruskin advocated as an essential of the perfect study is one of the things we have been lacking.

Somewhere he suggested that maybe the bareness of the class-room was regarded by the people of his day as being one of the necessities of the scholars getting down to their work—the old idea of the Puritans that they could not worship God if they had an organ because they would be concentrating on the organ instead of on the Almighty! The association of the Almighty and music had never crossed their minds. I am strengthened in this view by my own lack of appreciation of art. I sometimes wonder how it is and why it is that some people find pleasure much more in pictures than I can find. Then I am reminded of the school-room in which I was brought up. I sat in that room day after day, week after week, for some eight or nine years. It was a square room, with four class-rooms at the corners, each one of which was constructed so that the headmaster sitting in the centre of the room could keep his eye on the six classes in the school-room and also on the four class-rooms. There was just one picture on the wall. Most of you remember that poster during the 1914–18 war where Kitchener is pointing and saying 'Your country needs you' and his eyes follow you wherever you go. Well, this picture in my school followed me, from Standard I to Standard VII. I could see it all the time. It was called 'The Landing of the Danes'. There were five men getting out of a cattle-boat, each with a sword and shield. Is there any wonder I have a perverted conception of art. The influence of one's surroundings and environment lasts a long time. Just before the war I went to Denmark and I found that not only had I a perverted conception of art but I had been doing the Danes an injustice all the time, because they were not a bit like the folk in that picture.

I think this desire for the beautiful, this desire for the best, which is inherent in all the writings of Ruskin, is that which we need to cultivate. I believe that, whether we grow out of it, or whether we imagine we have not approached it, as Lord Samuel says, sooner or later we shall come back to it. And we shall come back to it for this reason: that it is the only thing that satisfies. We are so made that we cannot do without it.

And it is because I believe that Ruskin points to those things which are inherently essential to our everyday life, because I believe therefore not only in honouring his name but in keeping bright his memory and stressing the good things he wanted to do and we want to keep on doing, that I am glad to be here to-day at this anniversary luncheon.

4

SIR ARTHUR SALTER, M.P.

You began, Mr. President, by a fitting tribute to Mr. Winant whom we remember as having been with us here two years ago. I would only say, as regards Mr. Winant, whom I knew well and intimately, that, as some, but perhaps not all of you, may know, he had in his home at Concord, New Hampshire, in his library a very remarkable collection of Ruskin literature and Ruskin First Editions, probably unique in America.

As regards the next two subjects to which you referred, Sir, I feel in something of a handicap.

As regards Brantwood, as one who is in some sense a representative, at least elsewhere, at least for the present, of Oxford University, I am somewhat embarrassed in saying anything, and I will say nothing about a decision which I profoundly regret.

With regard to the next question, *The Order of Release*, I say, neither as a confession nor in boasting, that I have not, or at any rate not yet, read that book. Heaven forfend that I should ever object to the publication of all truth about any great man, so long as it is the truth and nothing but the truth and all the relevant truth, and so long as there is some

sense of proportion in its exposition. A very great number of people are at present reading a one-sided account of one aspect of six years in a lifetime of eighty of John Ruskin; six years which, even in that period, witnessed such not altogether ephemeral events as the publication of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and the *Stones of Venice*. I think it is very right and proper that one who has, for example, studied the whole of Shakespeare and desires to know everything about Shakespeare should also incidentally learn something about Anne Hathaway; but I have very little sympathy with those who spend a great deal of time reading either romantic fiction or exaggerated bits of the truth about Anne Hathaway, and break down at the First Act of *Hamlet*. I wonder how many who are reading in this book about one bit of John Ruskin have ever read John Ruskin I suggest not a very big proportion.

Well, it is, after all, for other things that we, our predecessors, and our successors have honoured and will honour John Ruskin. As a great writer of English, as a pioneer and a prophet in economics, in education, in sociology, as an artist, and the greatest kind of critic of art, the critic who does not just find defects but makes living and real the value of great art to those who would otherwise be partially blind to it, it is for those things that we honour and will honour Ruskin.

I may perhaps be allowed to recall to you for a moment that John Ruskin came from the professional middle classes of this country, and I commend to the Minister of Education, who says that he has searched with great success for quotations from John Ruskin in order to smite his political opponents hip and thigh, that it is well that this, too, should be remembered at this time, and that we should recall what is, in fact, the consequence, if and when the professional and middle classes are destroyed and eliminated from a country, either by the processes of inflation as in pre-Hitler Germany, or by even more brutal physical methods which we have observed in other countries. Well, I will not develop that point, which I obviously might illustrate at considerable length—provoked, but not beyond restraint, by the incidental remark of the Minister of Education.

Sir, I would only add this: I come from Oxford where we have memories and a visible and enduring reflection of what John Ruskin has meant to this country and, as a microcosm of this country, in Oxford we have seen, and we still see. We remember both his achievements and some of his mistakes. No one who keeps in touch with the traditions of Oxford will fail to regard the memory of John Ruskin's lectures during his greatest period in Oxford as one of the great memories of Oxford University. When we hear also of his experiments in economics we realize that there were perhaps defects also in this great man. There are spots upon the sun—though sometimes it may require darkened, or perhaps I should say biliously green, spectacles to see them. But what are spots upon the sun for the race of men who draw life and strength and happiness from the radiance of its glory?

5

D. R. HARDMAN, M.P.

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

I OWE a very great deal to John Ruskin, for I was brought up as a Scottish Presbyterian in Ulster, and in our chapel and our school services we had no musical accompaniment! So, when coming to England in 1918 and living not very far from Brantwood, it was John Ruskin who entered most into my young manhood.

When, in preparation for this talk yesterday, I looked through my bookshelves and looked up one or two indexes, I discovered that John Ruskin was the greatest of all Victorians in the mass of literary output. I discovered, as a matter of mathematical computation, that he had, in fact, over a period of fifty years, written and lectured so that those works and those words are now compiled in some eighty distinct volumes. Moreover—something I had forgotten—John Ruskin was in his day and among all the Victorians the most famous international figure from this country, not only in Europe but also in the northern continent of America.

But one's personal interest in Ruskin is that close affinity with the Lake country which one has learned to love so much and loves even more abundantly and passionately as the years roll on, because one discovers that Ruskin was, first and foremost, a prose poet of nature. Whatever he had to say about economics, or whatever he had to say about geology, or about history, or about mythology, or about socialism, he was first a poet of nature; and I would remind Viscount Samuel that it was John Ruskin who championed a then extremely ultra-modern artist. He championed Turner, because Turner was a painter of natural scenes—just as to-day, perhaps alone in this gathering, I would certainly champion Picasso. Viscount Samuel must also remember that the very staid *Quarterly Review* once described Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' as 'the ravings of a lunatic'. It is now set for school examinations, and is therefore quite respectable.

I am not going to enter into any controversy about this particular book to which many references have been made to-day. I have not read the book, and I do not expect I will read it. I have read all about it in the press and it is not—I say this in no boastful way—the kind of book, of biography, which I ever read. But I would remind you of a well-known quotation which Lord Samuel himself knows very well, that there are 'those whose virtues consist in condemning the vices of other people', and that would seem to be written large upon the pages of this book. That quotation Lord Samuel knows so well because I believe it is one of his own.

Ruskin does insist somewhere—I am sorry to say that in my book of quotations I have lost the clue—that the spirit needs several sorts of food, of which knowledge is only one, and I like to think that, in what little I have done in education, Ruskin brought to my notice one great thing which I had never known in my schooldays at all, and which apparently my Minister did not know either, and that is appreciation of the visual arts. In this respect, as in so many other things, Ruskin has been a prophet, and so to-day we have Local Authorities actually hiring at half-time and paying to them a good salary those who paint pictures or sculpt in one-half of the week to go round schools the other half. And

so we have Local Authorities and Principals of Training Colleges buying modern pictures—though not by Picasso, as they are now too expensive!—buying modern pictures by English artists and hanging them upon their school walls. One owes that to Ruskin, and certainly in education Ruskin was a great pioneer and a great prophet. But above all, for me, he was a man who loved nature. Above all he loved the crags, he loved the forces and the gills of the Lake District; he loved the great crystalline heights of the Alps; and he was an artist not only with his pencil but, above all, in words. We remember how successful he was as a lecturer on all manner of subjects, so successful indeed that his father (and I would certainly not have liked him as my father) had a coat of arms put upon his carriage with a boar's head as the chosen emblem, and it was *Punch* which gave expression to this rhyme:

I paints and paints,
Hears no complaints,
  And sells before I'm dry,
Till savage Ruskin
Sticks his tusk in,
  And nobody will buy.

Ruskin could paint with pencil and he could paint with words:

'August 23 (1840)—Rained all day—note the intense scarletty purple of the shattered larch stems, wet, opposed with yellow from decomposing turpentine; the alder stems looking much like birch, covered with the white branchy moss that looks like coral.'

That is not the way most of your Alpine tourists look, nor those who go in their cars or on bicycles or on foot along the main roads of the Lake District. But Ruskin, like all artists, was first and foremost accurate, and he was secondly, in his use of that accurate prose, efficient. I think that link of accuracy and efficiency with beauty can be shown to be the hall-mark of all our artists.

He prints this very revealing passage in *Fors Clavigera* in 1875:

'What am I to claim leadership, infirm and old? But I have found no other man in England, none in Europe, ready

to receive it. Such as I am, to my own amazement, I stand—so far as I can discern—alone in conviction, in hope, and in resolution, in the wilderness of this modern world. Bred in luxury, which I perceive to have been unjust to others and destructive to myself; vacillating, foolish, and miserably failing in all my own conduct in life—and blown about hopelessly by storms of passion—I, a man clothed in soft raiment; I, a reed shaken with the wind, have yet this message to all men again intrusted to me. Behold, the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Whatsoever tree bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.'

It may well be that it was not only the Lake District and the Alps which inspired Ruskin's pen as the poet of the Alps and the author of those superb essays on Mont Blanc. It may be—and I am sure of it—that, like Milton and other great writers before him, his inspiration was the glorious Authorized Version of the Old and New Testaments.

One last glimpse. It is a glimpse into the world of colour which we are trying to create in education. The world of colour which the English, in particular, seem to have forgotten for perhaps two hundred years, which once again we want to see back in our national life, this world of colour one glimpses in Ruskin's own end. There was that simple village funeral—and there was one like it the other day, when the farm horses pulled the body of Lord Derby in the haycart—there was, for Ruskin, that simple village funeral, with the gathering of relations and intimates, a funeral such as Thomas Hardy also knew. And there he was laid to rest in Coniston churchyard. But there was one unusual feature about this simple village service in that most glorious country-side; it was the presence of rich colours. How Ruskin hated black! All else beside, I thank Ruskin for that. The pall upon his coffin was of crimson silk, embroidered with his favourite wild roses and inscribed with the motto UNTO THIS LAST.

So, Lord Samuel, there are even those of a younger generation who have admired and taken much from Ruskin. I can think of few members of the House of Commons known to me, at least on our benches, who have not taken much from William Morris and from John Ruskin above all. He still

endures. He endures in so much that has been done to-day. With all the mistakes and weaknesses of any government, and which we may find in this government to-day, at least UNTO THIS LAST still lives and the colour is being reborn.

6

J. G. WILSON

I AM the first to speak from the body of the kirk, but the brief remarks I have to make will not be in any way critical. What I have in mind is more in the nature of recollection, something in the nature of John Ruskin's books as a selling commodity.

For nearly fifty years before Ruskin's active life began, the book trade was in a turmoil with the method of selling books. Retailers had been competing with each other in enticing public buyers by lowering prices against each other. Some booksellers joined together to combat the danger, and many eminent public men, including famous authors, were called upon to state their views.

Carlyle, for instance, differed seriously from the combination of booksellers. He could see 'no issue but absolute "Free trade" in all branches of bookselling and book-publishing'.

When Ruskin came on the scene, he, as I think, saw what was happening then and what might happen in the future if the selling price of books continued to be competitive, and his view was confirmed by the event. The discounts blight proved the destruction of good bookselling in every part of the country, and during the eighties and nineties every long-established book business went down in ruin; only those firms which conducted a miscellaneous trade in commodities other than books carried through.

George Smith, his publisher, said of Ruskin that he was a man of surprises—it was uncertain what he would do or say next. Smith tells how one evening Ruskin volunteered to sing a nigger song, and did it with great energy, to everyone's astonishment. But away from Art, his conversational powers, so we are told, when he had taken up his writing

on social economy, lost a good deal of their charm. When Ruskin tried to apply his principles to his published books as a cure for the trouble, he fell foul of the booksellers, who objected to a fixed cost-price, leaving them to add their profit. In 1878, to carry out his ideas he became his own publisher, and he transferred all his works, some twenty-five of them, from Smith Elder to George Allen.

I imagine it was his personal contacts with booksellers, through George Allen, that made Ruskin change his mind about book prices. He realized that those readers who, after all, were his chief interest, were unable to afford his prices. So down they came, and they became fixed, and on that fixed price he gave a discount to the retailers.

That Ruskin's ideas were commercially sound may be gathered from the fact that during the last fifteen years of his life he earned some £60,000 on his published works.

But it was only in 1900 that the publishers and booksellers made successful efforts to overcome *their* difficulties, and the work that Ruskin had done had, as I think, much to do with the settlement then made. It is at this stage in his career as a writer that my own experience began. At the end of the eighties my work as a collector of books for my shop took me to the bookseller who was privileged to carry Ruskin's books. The thing that impressed me even as a young boy was that supplies were not on open view; every book was tied in paper, and had to be undone before passing it over—for cash. At that time there was an active group of Ruskin enthusiasts who flourished in Glasgow, my native town; that was during the nineties. There was great enthusiasm, much talk of The Master, and a great deal of indiscriminate idolatry, if I remember rightly. I learned to look on the familiar green cloth bindings with reverence, and to this day when I handle one of those books I feel a thrill that is partly admiration and partly happiness in remembering how I first came to read the books. I may be wrong, but I seem to think that those Ruskins were the best specimens of popular book-making of the period; and that tradition has had a lasting effect on book-production during my sixty years in the trade. Not only did Ruskin's personal publishing methods raise the standard of ordinary output, but the

example as adopted by William Morris brought about the movement in modern fine printing and the modern Private Press.

For me, his influence was the best in my young life. Particularly do I owe him a lasting debt of gratitude for his analysis of some lines of Milton's 'Lycidas' in *Sesame and Lilies*. My mind was captured by the meaning and values of words, and I have never forgotten the lesson.

If in later years the immense sales of Ruskin's popular titles have diminished, I can recall the many, many hundreds I have myself sold.

Will you allow me one quotation, which expresses one of the writer's great ideas? I am sure it will be well known to you:

'I would urge upon every young man, as the beginning of his due and wise provision for his household, to obtain as soon as he can, by the severest economy, a restricted, serviceable, and steadily—however slowly—increasing series of books for use through life; making his little library, of all the furniture in his room, the most studied and decorative piece; every volume having its assigned place, like a little statue in its niche, and one of the earliest and strictest lessons to the children of the house being how to turn the pages of their own literary possessions lightly and deliberately, with no chance of tearing or dog's ears.'

Yes, Ruskin was a prophet of the times he lived in. I sometimes wonder if to-day we have his like. Maybe, when we are hearing, as we are now, of the great Victorians, and how we can benefit by avoiding their faults and shortcomings, we might be told something more of their virtues, which were great indeed. We could be told of those inspiring messages which stirred the imaginations of men like William Morris, H. G. Wells, and Bernard Shaw. Then we could salute, as we do this day, the name of John Ruskin and the great contribution he made to the world of books and of reading.

7

J. W. ROBERTSON SCOTT, C.H.

AFTER the sextagenarians and the septuagenarians it might be as well, perhaps, if an octogenarian, an advanced octogenarian, had a few words to say: but I feel, at this stage of the afternoon, and after the really excellent speaking we have had, that I can let you escape from these notes that I have.

I should, however, like to make four points.

I am one of the few persons, apparently, in this room who has read this book, *Order of Release*, and I have read it carefully. Also, at the beginning of the year, I supplemented my collection of Ruskin books by being unable to resist the temptation of the thirty-nine volume set in a second-hand bookseller's catalogue, paying £20 for the set, and I have been spending most agreeable evenings for some weeks past in cutting the Introductions of my old editor, E. T. Cook. It is a particular pleasure to go through, with a paper-knife, that wonderful hand-made paper, with, facing you every now and then, the water-mark, Ruskin's motto: 'To-day—to-day—to-day.'

Well, now, as a Cumberland man, when I think of the Lake District, I wonder very much what exactly will happen a century hence—we are looking back a century—what will happen a century hence in the summing-up, if one may say so, of our social history? Who will be found to have done really most for us among those men in the North, Wordsworth or Ruskin? I have my own view.

Well, as I say, I have read this book, *Order of Release*, and, in turning over those great volumes of Cooks & Wedderburns I came upon not only a letter from Ruskin to myself when I was twenty, but upon something which Ruskin writes about Carlyle, and I wondered, when I read it, whether John Ruskin may not have been thinking of himself when he wrote this sentence about Carlyle: 'What can you say of Carlyle but that he was born in the clouds and struck by lightning, not meant for happiness but for other purposes?' I wonder whether that was in Ruskin's mind. When you get well on in your eighties you begin to think of the treasure

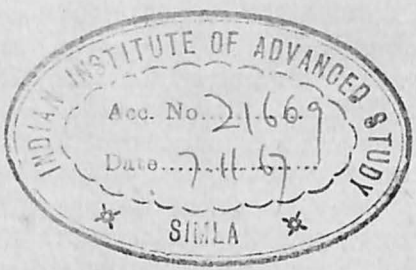
that the world has gladly accepted in earthen vessels. From the time of Burns, from the time of the author of *Faust*, from the time of Wordsworth's *Episodes in France* we have been grateful for this treasure.

As for the future, I feel that science, and the development of our minds and hearts, and the new and blessed outspokenness of our time and of the time to come about things that matter will save those who come after us from some of the sorrows that beset John Ruskin and Effie Gray.

I like to think of our hero—yes, our hero—in the words of a little-known poet, a girl, who wrote these two lines in the middle of a long poem:

> Thou yet shalt leave thine own enduring token
> For earth is not as though thou ne'er hadst been.

The toast to the Immortal Memory of Ruskin was then drunk with enthusiasm.



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