

## John Ruskin as Educator and Friend.

RUSKIN was devoted to both the principles and practice of education at the Village School at Coniston. He became one of the Managers and took his duties seriously. He was a frequent visitor and gave simple interesting addresses to the children, asking and answering many questions. He clothed the bare walls of the school with facsimile pictures of famous specimens of architecture. In the school yard he placed a large orrery showing the principal constellations of the heavens, for the study of astronomy. With the little ones of the Infants' Department he was on very friendly and familiar terms, like his Great Master. He would pick up the tiny scholars and press them to his loving heart, particularly if he found any of them to be in trouble, entering into their childish woes and restoring a sunny smile to their faces.

For some years on a Saturday afternoon he had an appointment with girls of ten to fourteen years of age. He called them Mountain Lassies. They came to his home for lessons and then tea. He discussed a variety of topics: the shapes of fir cones, or Italian and Greek coins. Sometimes he would read Shakespeare. But whatever else was included, the *Bible* and some Botany formed part of the lesson. After the lesson they had tea in his study, laying it themselves with much laughter and clatter.

After tea he cleared the tables himself, giving up the room to them entirely for that afternoon. Then they had community singing and games. Some of the songs were written by Ruskin himself, and also the quaint liltng tunes. Here is one:

Ho, ho, the Cocks Crow!  
Little girls—get up:  
Little girls to bed must go,  
When the Robins sup.

Heigh, heigh, the nags neigh!  
Up, boys, and afield.  
Ere the sun through yonder grey  
Raise his russet shield.

He spared neither himself nor his possessions to give pleasure to his guests. His hearty laugh was infectious. One of the girls who was a bit of a character, once said in the local

dialect: "Meester Rooskin is a foony man, boot he likes oos to take a good tea."

He was always interested in young people, and aimed at cultivating their physical, intellectual, aesthetic and moral faculties. His sincere desire was to enrich their minds by instruction and discipline, and he looked on education more as an ethical rather than an intellectual process. Knowledge based on goodness and expressed in right behaviour, free from all envious or anxious effort in relation to our neighbour, was one of Ruskin's main principles in the training of youth.

Through his literary work Ruskin became acquainted with the Rev. J. P. Faunthorpe, Principal of the Whitelands Training College for Girls at Chelsea, and there he was given an opportunity for an educational experiment, and introduced what his biographer calls a system of "May Queens."

The Queen was chosen by the students of the College for her virtues and moral worth. Maids of honour were selected to attend her because of the same qualities of character. The festivals were times of graceful mirth. Beauty and joy were expressed in the lives of the young people. Processions, songs, flowers, pretty frocks, happy hearts, gaiety and hilarity abounded. The day of coronation, Ruskin hoped would be one of consecration, and he advised the Queen to think deeply of life and its opportunities of noble living in the service of others. Be yourself, he would tell her, without affectation, sincere and simple.

When the Queen was crowned, she was presented with a Gold Cross, given by Ruskin each year and designed by his friend Burne Jones, the artist. A symbol of deep significance, it reminded the Queen of Him who wore a crown of thorns, not flowers, and in a moment of sublime consecration, laid down His precious life, in a lowly act of redeeming service. Ruskin wanted the coronation of the Queen to be a memorable and public act of dedication. Each of the Maids also received one of his books as a memento of the day which influenced all who took part in the ceremonies. As the Queens and students went out into the world afterwards to take up appointments as teachers, they were inspired by his character and lofty ideals. His deepest desires were that they might go forth in their life's work clad in the beautiful garments of Hope and Love, carrying in their right hand the burning torch of goodness and in their left the lamp of knowledge.

In the training of young people Ruskin makes the following suggestions:

(1) *Education* regulated by natural endowment. "True justice in education consists in granting aid in the development of such faculties as he possesses for action and enjoyment."

Education can discover and develop, it cannot create. The gold is a fixed quantity which can be sifted, melted, hammered, purified, but never created.

(2) *Develop the faculties of Worship.*

Cultivate a sense of submission, reverence and respect, with unlimited admiration and adoration. "No day's schooling is complete which has not done something to develop a child's capacity in Admiration, Hope and Love. There is life in these three immaterial things." Draw the attention of children to beauty in nature. "A quiet glade of forest glows with splendour and the nook of a lake shore is a scene of exquisite loveliness, they are worth all the schools in Christendom." The destruction of beautiful scenery to Ruskin was the destruction of one of the best means of education.

(3) Attract the minds of children to the study of noble persons. *Suggest to the mind noble objects of action.*

At the close of one of his lectures, he said to his students, "Now you have heard my message, put into practice in your daily life the principles I have been enunciating. Let them not only be in your mind but translated into service for the comfort and uplifting of any who may be in distress. Watch that your life is not detached from the world. Keep in close touch with it and respond to its many needs. Do not let mere theory satisfy you, but contemplate and copy the unselfish deeds of righteous men and women, reproduce also in your life, by a continuous service of going about doing good."

Ruskin was fond of trying his hands at Arts and Crafts. "I like to do things with my own hands till I know its difficulty." He wanted to learn how a workman felt at his daily work, and had a keen desire to come close to him in sympathy and experience, and so to impress him and his friends not only as a thinker but as a practical man. In the building of the Museum at Oxford he designed some of the windows, and built a column. He also assisted Dr. Acland, his tutor, in the building of a new study, and took lessons as a carpenter until he could take an even shaving off a board six feet long. After spending some time with a house painter and decorator, he became efficient enough to feel the master's superiority in the use of a blunt brush. He admits he found it difficult to be a bricklayer, and says, "What I built yesterday of my tutor's study, he pulled down, but the work I did today, he allowed it to stand." He finally abandoned all hope, however, of obtaining the least skill in building or bricklaying. Legend relates that the column he built for the Museum workmen found it necessary to demolish. Ruskin was, however, no idle sentimentalist, but was ever seeking for some practical expression

of his feelings. In after years he used to make a joke and say: "I might have been a Civil Engineer and a second Telford."

When spending his holidays in Switzerland he interviewed engineers and capitalists and tried to persuade them to build reservoirs in the valleys, keep the water under control, curb the Alpine torrents, and so on. Then, he said, the Alps would become a garden and inundations, a source of suffering and disease, need never recur. His principle was, every field a pond and every ravine its reservoir. He was never able to carry out this scheme, but was ultimately successful in a smaller way.

In the village of Fulking in Sussex, where he sometimes spent holidays with friends, there was a difficulty in finding good drinking water, and Ruskin devised a scheme and carried it out. Beside the well which now supplies their wants, there is a marble tablet with this inscription: "To the glory of God and in honour of John Ruskin. That they might set their hope in God and not forget to keep His Commandments who also brought streams out of the rock."

Ruskin was fond of quiet walks in the country and while at Oxford he often made his way to Ferry Hincksey, which was then an unspoiled village with a rustic Church. To the south of the village was a road which always annoyed Ruskin. It was soft, swampy, low lying and had deep ruts cut by cart wheels, which held stagnant water. It was ugly, and unhealthy. Ruskin made up his mind to make it pleasant for people to use and easy for carts to pass over. Having got permission from the owner, he decided to engage a company of undergraduates to dig and lay a new road. In the Spring term of 1874, Ruskin, therefore, invited a number of Balliol men to breakfast at Corpus and discussed the project with them. Hospitality was one of his outstanding characteristics. He was also a brilliant conversationalist and an enthusiast for an ideal state. They were all young, and though he was fifty-five years of age, he was young in heart and youthful in outlook. So after a good breakfast and happy interchange of opinions, they set out for Hincksey to begin digging for the day in good and gay form. Breakfasts of this kind continued. All in flannels, the men set out with picks, spades and barrows day after day. Ruskin visited them from time to time and applauded them at their task. The breakfasts were a method of contact and influence, prayerfully, carefully, cunningly and tactfully arranged. He made all who came partners and personal friends, influencing many of the men for a life of high and holy service, morally, politically and socially. Two of the undergraduates among the diggers were Alfred Milner (1854-1925), who filled many offices of state and was High Commissioner of South Africa in 1897, and Arnold Toynbee (1852-83), the

foreman of the gang, a rare and beautiful spirit, most persuasive of talkers, most devoted of workers, whose name cannot be mentioned by any of his friends, without some word of affectionate recollection.

Toynbee appeared frequently at breakfast, and intercourse with Ruskin had a stimulating effect on his life. He often differed from Ruskin, but regarded him with reverence and affection. After graduating at Oxford, Toynbee devoted himself to practical philanthropy and social reform. He founded the Settlement in East London, now Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel. He gave his life for the poor and died, comparatively young, through overstrain in this self-denying service.

The undergraduate road makers and diggers were the objects of much ridicule. Many people laughed at them, but Ruskin and his friends took it all good-naturedly, their sense of humour being as alert as that of their revilers. Perhaps it was here that the seeds of University settlements were first sown. The *Spectator* approved of the work, and *Punch* was on Ruskin's side.

"Pity for the man who thinks he  
Proves Ruskin fool for work like this,  
Why shouldn't young Oxford lend hands to Hincksey  
Though Doctrinaries may take it amiss?  
Careless wholly of Critics menace  
Scholars of Ruskin to him be true;  
The truth he has writ in the stones of Venice  
May be taught by the stones of Hincksey too."

Ruskin found an opening for personal service which was just to his mind as a teacher and lecturer at the Working Men's College situated first in Red Lion Square and later in Great Ormond Street. Here he taught drawing and other subjects from 1854 to 1858 and during a term in 1860, with occasional lectures in which he showed that working men could and should be allowed an opportunity to have their chosen representative in Parliament to deliberate upon the possible modes of the regulation of industry. "Get your ideas and say what you want."

Ruskin exercised a very powerful influence over working men. In 1906, to the great surprise of many, the Liberal Party had an overwhelming majority in that Election; but there was another surprise. Forty Labour Members were elected. Hitherto they had worked in conjunction with the Liberals, but now they refused and took steps to found a party of their own. An ingenious London journalist sent circulars to this large contingent of Labour Members asking them to state which were the books that had influenced them? Some said one, and some another, but the book which appeared in the greatest number of lists was Ruskin's *Unto This Last*.

Ruskin's Socialism was a great ideal. His mind was constantly filled with the thoughts and visions of a perfect brotherhood, which would produce a model state. This made him careful that his conduct should be in accord with what he preached. He was not a perfect man, but the principles of self-sacrificial service, of true patriotism, of reverence and respect for others, and of deep inward piety found expression in all that he did.

WILLIAM KIRK BRYCE.

*Fuller Church, Kettering. 1696-1946*, by Gladys M. Barrett, M.A., B.Litt.

The story of one of our best known provincial churches is told by the wife of its present minister in twenty-six readable pages. "Fuller" had its beginnings in the secession of two groups from the Kettering Independent Church and their fusion in c. 1729. It is a heartening thing to find that the writer, after reviewing its subsequent history, can say of the future that "Much depends on the Church's vigorously pursuing the course indicated by its history and tradition." The booklet contains five photographic reproductions. There is no indication as to its cost.

*Design for Rescue*, by R. C. Walton. (S.C.M. 1s. 6d.)

This book by the Secretary of the Student Christian Movement in Schools is based upon a course of lectures delivered in 1945 at two summer conferences for sixth-form boys and girls. It may be of some assistance to others who are trying to teach this sort of audience. In the course of his argument the writer attempts to trace affinities between the form of the Gospel story (up to the death of our Lord) and the threefold development (exposition, conflict, catastrophe) in Shakespearean tragedy. He also finds "significant parallels of meaning."

G. W. RUSLING.