

RUSKIN

—
ESSAY
ON
LITERATURE
AND
LETTERS
1836-1841

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THREE LETTERS AND AN ESSAY

THREE LETTERS AND
AN ESSAY. BY JOHN RUSKIN.
1836-1841. FOUND IN HIS TUTOR'S
DESK.

“And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

PUBLISHED BY GEORGE ALLEN,
LONDON & ORPINGTON. MDCCCXCIII.

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for the benefit of Malling Abbey and the
preservation of its ancient buildings.*

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

IN the days when the Rev. Thomas Dale had a school in Grove Lane, Camberwell, he was, as well as a schoolmaster, a poet, author, and preacher. In 1835 he was presented to the living of St. Bride's, Fleet Street; in 1843, to a Canonry of St. Paul's; and he died in 1870, shortly after accepting the Deanery of Rochester.

Amongst his papers were some writings of John Ruskin, his pupil in Grove Lane and, later, at King's College. The earliest of these is an essay written the year before Mr. Ruskin went to Oxford; the others are letters from Rome, Lausanne, and Leamington. The interest of these papers is great. They belong to that period when Mr. Ruskin was trying his powers, when "Modern Painters" was taking form, and when some of the most perfect pieces of prose ever written were given to English readers. The hand of the master is very visible in all these papers, though the earliest of them belongs to the days of boyhood.

Mr. Ruskin has given us in "Præterita" a history of himself and of all the influences which aided in the development of his powers. There is about these recollections a calm clearness, an acceptance of facts as they were, without either railing against them or gilding them. The writer is amused as he looks back down the vista of years and recalls what the little boy in the blue shoes thought; what most appealed to the mind of the schoolboy carrying his bag of books; how the devotion of his parents and the traditions of their mode of life fenced him round; how his mind kept its own tendencies amongst all the training, and went steadily forward, accumulating knowledge, and growing towards the light. His was a mind that never altered violently either its faith or its opinions; the matured fruit is not so dissimilar to the bud and flower but that the process of growth can be clearly traced without need of dissection or twisting of logic.

He writes of his schooldays in "Præterita" as follows:—

"Meantime it having been perceived by my father and mother that Dr. Andrews could neither prepare me for the University nor for the duties of a bishopric, I was sent as a day-scholar to the private school kept by the Rev. Thomas Dale in Grove Lane, within a walking distance of Herne Hill. Walking

down with my father after breakfast, carrying my blue bag of books, I came home to half-past one dinner, and prepared my lesson in the evening for the next day. Under these conditions I saw little of my fellow scholars, the two sons of Mr. Dale, Tom and James, and three boarders. . . . I have already described in the first chapter of 'Fiction, Fair and Foul,' Mr. Dale's rejection of my clearly known grammar as a 'Scotch thing.' In that one action he rejected himself from being my master; and I thenceforward learnt all he taught me only because I had to do it."

The master, who, with the authority of his kind, thus wounded his pupil's feelings, was short, with thick hair, fair probably in those days, blue eyes, and firm square features. He was stern and impressive in manner. He was a man of power, an Evangelical leader, very much respected and admired by his following, but somewhat unbending in manner, austere to younger people, but withal generous and charitable beyond his means. He had also a keen sense of humour, though no one could have held "practical joking" in greater detestation.

This essay was either written for or submitted by the author to him in 1836, when Mr. Ruskin was sixteen or seventeen years old. To quote again from "Præterita":—

"Some little effort was made to pull me together in 1836 by sending me to hear Mr. Dale's lectures at King's College, where I explained to Mr. Dale, on meeting him one day in the court of entrance, that porticoes should not be carried on the top of arches; and considered myself exalted because I went in at the same door with boys who had square caps on. The lectures were on early English Literature, of which, though I had never read a word of any before Pope, I thought myself already a much better judge than Mr. Dale. His quotation of 'Knut the king went sailing by' stayed with me, and I think that was all I learnt during the summer."

As the essay is not on early English Literature and has not been annotated or marked by the master, it was not apparently done as work for the course of lectures. It is, in fact, a glowing defence of the writer's favourite authors, Walter Scott, Bulwer Lytton, and Byron. It begins logically and calmly, but as soon as the defence begins the champion draws his sword and falls fiercely on his opponents. He is a most gloriously enthusiastic partisan; but the religious schools of that day dealt more hardly with the novelists, poets, and playwrights than they do now. In spite of his strong Evangelical bias, Mr. Dale was not among the decriers of fiction and poetry. Walter Scott was a favourite in his household; there are no records of his feelings about Lytton's work, but Byron was an acknowledged great poet, sullied by the authorship of "Don Juan," a position the poet still holds in the majority of opinions. As soon as he could

read, Mr. Ruskin tells us, Pope's Homer and the Waverley Novels became his regular week-day books, so his dictum on Sir Walter was the result of a considerable course of study taken by a small boy in his little chair in his own corner. Byron was also an old friend. The poems, including "Don Juan," were read by the elder Mr. Ruskin to his wife and son. He was a beautiful reader, and did justice to the music of the verse. There are not many who, writing at sixteen, can look back on so long and so cultivated an acquaintance with their favourite authors.

Mr. Ruskin matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford, in October 1836, and went into residence the following January. At the end of three years came a period of great disappointment and anxiety for himself and his friends. His health broke down and he was threatened with consumption. He went abroad for the winter of 1840-41, travelling with his parents and visiting Italy for the first time. His "severest and chiefly antagonist master" shared in the anxiety, and the two long letters from Rome and Lausanne were written to inform him of the state of his pupil's health. Perhaps the severity and antagonism revived in future discussions: certainly these letters are most friendly and confidential in tone: the regret for the exemplary goodness of his college days seems meant for sympathetic eyes. The writer's rapid, forcible description of the country he passes through, his impression of Chartres Cathedral, are all in the masterly style we connect with his name, wonderfully picturesque and vivid without ever being stiff or stilted. Not forgetful of the principal interest of his correspondent, he describes his impressions of the religious life of the country he travels through, writing from the Evangelical standpoint, from whence Mr. Ruskin has since moved, but which at that time was a subject of agreement between him and Mr. Dale. This is, therefore, a more correct description of his opinions at this time than any reminiscence can offer us, for the gradual alteration of opinions naturally softens the outline in retrospection, as the blue distance softens the mountains on the horizon.

His opinion of St. Peter's at Rome has not altered since this first impression more than fifty years ago, when the magnificence and barbarism of the great building is so forcibly expressed. Then comes a wonderfully vivid passage; the description of that "strange horror" that to him overlay the whole city. One cannot but be thankful that it was not this paragraph that was mutilated in breaking the seal.

The cloud of ill-health and anxiety never left the travellers; its shadow is in the next letter of six months after. During all this time that possible fatal development overhung the daily life of the parents and their only son. Still, in spite of the enforced care and seclusion, the time was by no means wasted. He saw and enjoyed Pompeii and went up Vesuvius, all his impressions and

opinions being very similar to those he still expresses. The remarks on the Oxford Movement are particularly valuable, because one feels a natural curiosity as to how so powerful an influence affected the various thinkers then at the University. They are all the more interesting for the very reason that they do not contain a statement of opinion, but a simple account of the impression the men and their teaching made upon one who was at the same time tenacious of his views and unusually bold in facing difficulties. At this time, when a dreaded disease threatened him, his mind was evidently set on serious themes. The third letter, written from Leamington, discusses a question of conscience. The writer sets himself to argue out his difficulty with the evident intention of taking holy orders if he should be assured that such was the duty of a man in his position, bound by no necessity to work for his bread, and having the responsibility of preaching the gospel for the saving of souls. What the answer was we do not know, but we know the result. This is the last of the long letters. The others are short notes of no interest, though showing evidence that the discussions were not at an end.

Sydney Smith was a canon with Mr. Dale at St. Paul's, and, speaking of "Modern Painters," Mr. Ruskin tells us:—"In the literary world, attention was first directed to the book by Sydney Smith, in the hearing of my severest and chiefly antagonist master, the Rev. Thomas Dale, who, with candid kindness, sent the following note of the matter to my father:—

“‘You will not be uninterested to hear that Mr. Sydney Smith (no mean authority in such cases) spoke in the highest terms of your son's work, on a public occasion, and in presence of several distinguished literary characters. He said it was a work of transcendent talent, presented the most original views and the most elegant and powerful language, and would work a complete revolution in the world of taste. He did not know when he said this how much I was interested in the author!’”

HELEN PELHAM DALE.

June, 1893.

PUBLISHER'S NOTES

FOR the convenience of the reader—whether or not he be already in touch with Mr. Ruskin's matured writings, of which this little volume contains assuredly some of the earliest-recorded germs of thought emanating from the author's boyish mind—it has been deemed expedient to append a list of those works of Mr. Ruskin's which contain the expansion of the various axioms laid down and arguments brought forward in these Juvenilia, which, as the editor's preface tells us, were addressed to the man whose influence, especially in literary matters, had some considerable part in the formation of his pupil's mind.

In connection with the essay "Does the perusal of works of fiction act favourably, or unfavourably, on the moral character?" references should be made to Mr. Ruskin's amplifications of the subject, as well as his desultory allusions in such works as "Modern Painters," "Fors Clavigera," "On the Old Road" (more particularly the articles on "Fiction, Fair and Foul"), "Elements of Drawing" (in the appendix on "Things to be Studied"), "Munera Pulveris" (the chapter on "Government"), "Sesame and Lilies," "Arrows of the Chace," "Præterita," "Love's Meinie," and "The Queen of the Air."

With regard to the various subjects touched upon in the first of the letters, dated from Rome, Dec. 31 (written in 1840), the reader will find it useful to refer to the following works:—

"The Two Paths," "Lectures on Art, 1870," "The Bible of Amiens," "Fors Clavigera," "Modern Painters," and works dealing more particularly with Italian art, such as "Val d'Arno," "Ariadne Florentina," and "Mornings in Florence." To pick out special portions of the letter for remark would be making invidious distinctions; but there are noteworthy points in the writer's description of the Mediterranean coast—his impressions of Rome, and the Italian peasantry ("neither fish nor flesh, neither noble nor fisherman," as he described the population of Venice later on in "Fors Clavigera," vol. v. letter 49)—and the expression of his strong sense of the evils of "cramming" for University honours, afterwards endorsed more emphatically in the appeal to parents, in the closing sentences of the Lecture on Serpents ("Deucalion," pt. 7).

The second letter (dated six months later) contains, *inter alia*, what—to

readers of Mr. Ruskin's later eulogiums of Italy—will come as an astounding piece of news—his assertion that “the climate of Italy never did agree with me;” also a remark, by the way, on the submission of Newman (the late Cardinal Newman) “to his Bishop in the affair of the Tracts,” which leads to a dissertation on the then burning question of the day and the various classes of disputants—interesting for its evidence of the young writer's growing doubts of the infallibility of that Evangelical school in whose dogmas he had been brought up. His remarks on his parents' experiences, as well as his own, of the Protestant churches in Italy, remind one of the crisis in his life—upon which he has dwelt so strongly and repeatedly in “Præterita,” “Fors Clavigera,” and elsewhere—on that Sunday in 1858 when he turned from the little Waldensian chapel in Turin, for an hour's meditation in the gallery “where Paul Veronese's ‘Solomon and the Queen of Sheba’ glowed in full afternoon light,” and felt that “that day my Evangelical beliefs were put away, to be debated of no more” (“Præterita,” vol. iii. chap. i.).

In the third letter, written from Leamington in Sept. 1841, we have the embryo of ideas which expanded later on into the “Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds”; the “Letters on the Lord's Prayer”; the politico-economical question raised in “Fors Clavigera,” with its passionate appeal (vol. v. letter 58)—“What am I myself, then, infirm and old, who take, or claim, leadership even of these lords? God forbid that I should claim it; it is thrust and compelled on me—utterly against my will, utterly to my distress, utterly—in many things—to my shame. But I have found no other man in England, none in Europe, ready to receive it, or even desiring to make himself capable of receiving 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 school. 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 entrusted to me: ‘Behold, the axe is laid to the root of the tree. Whatsoever tree therefore bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.’” And the later protest for leisure to pursue the line of work which is peculiarly his own—“Here is a little grey cockle-shell lying beside me, which I gathered, the other evening, out of the dust of the island of St. Helena, and a brightly spotted snail-shell, from the thirsty sands of Lido; and I want to set myself to draw these, and describe them, in peace. Yes! all my friends say, ‘that is my business; why can't I mind it, and be happy?’ Well, good friends, I would fain please you, and myself with you; and live here in my Venetian palace, luxurious; scrutinant of dome, cloud, and cockle-shell. . . . But, alas! my prudent friends, little enough of all that I have a mind

to may be permitted me. For this green tide that eddies by my threshold is full of floating corpses, and I must leave my dinner to bury them, since I cannot save; and put my cockle-shell in cap, and take my staff in hand, to seek an unencumbered shore” (“Fors Clavigera,” vol. vi. letter 72). Also the sense of greater responsibility that there should be in the “highly bred and trained English, French, Austrian, or Italian gentleman (much more a lady),” who “will have some duties to do in return—duties of living belfry and rampart” (“Sesame and Lilies,” Lecture I.), and, lastly, the foundation of the ethical part of his art teaching upon the formulæ, “Man’s use and function are, to be the witness of the glory of God and to advance that glory by his reasonable obedience and resultant happiness,” and “All great art is praise,” constantly dwelt upon throughout such works as “Modern Painters,” “The Laws of Fésole,” “Aratra Pentilici,” “The Eagle’s Nest,” “Lectures on Art, 1870,” and “The Art of England.”

ESSAY ON LITERATURE

ESSAY ON LITERATURE—1836

*Does the perusal of works of fiction act
favourably or unfavourably on the
moral character?*

IT is necessary, in the consideration of such a question as this, to be particularly careful to permit our judgment to be altogether unbiassed by our feelings, and to divest ourselves entirely of that weakness of mind which disposes us to yield to our wishes rather than our reason, to believe in the existence of that which we desire to exist, in the validity of the arguments which we desire to be valid, and in the fallacy of the statements which we hope may be false. For our feelings naturally incline us to hope that we may not be able to prove that writings from which we have derived incalculable enjoyment are injurious and immoral, and our wishes rise up in opposition to our judgment; they remonstrate against the investigation, they deprecate the decision, they beseech, they implore, that employments so delightful may not be condemned for the past nor forbidden for the future; and that hours whose wings were loaded with odours so soft, and tinted with colours so gay, may not be pronounced to have left darkness in the eyes they have dazzled, or pestilence in the air they have enchanted.

But it is necessary that such feelings should have no voice in our inquiry after truth, and that our wishes, as they have no influence over facts, should have none over our opinions. Our judgment must be armed with despotic power, and not a syllable of remonstrance be permitted, even if we think that power tyrannically or unjustly directed.

Yet, on the other hand, we hope, gentle reader, that you are gentle—that you are not one of those philosophers, falsely so named, who assert, in the teeth of reason, and to the injury of the cause of religion, that whatever is amusing must be criminal; that a grave countenance and severe demeanour are the true signs of sanctity of mind and consequent morality of conduct; that austerity is the companion of innocence, and gloom of religion. We have been taught a different lesson by a higher authority: we know that morality may be

radiant with smiles and robed in rejoicing; and we do not deprecate, because we despise, the objections of those who affirm that all pleasure is necessarily evil, and all enjoyment inevitably crime.

Mental recreation is felt to be sometimes necessary by the best and the wisest. Whatever be the rapidity of the race in the path of right, breath must be sometimes taken; whatever be the ardour of the search after knowledge, repose must be sometimes courted. When the brain is confused with the intricacy of investigation, and the reason fatigued with the labour of argument; when the brilliancy of thought is darkened, and the energies of the mind failing, and the strength of the judgment impaired, what recreation can be more exhilarating or delightful than to enwreath ourselves with the imagination of the poet, or mingle amongst the creations of the romancer? The mind is released from the severity of confinement without being lost in the infinity of useless reverie, and invigorated by a moving repose, not weakened by a drowsy and unthinking inanity.

We may therefore pronounce such productions to be useful if we can prove them not to be injurious, and we have some slight hope of being able to claim for them at least this small advantage.

But we do begin to feel nervous in our optics, for lo, fearful visions arise upon our sight, and terrified in our tympanum, for awful sounds are bursting upon our ears. We behold through a mist of awe, through an atmosphere of consternation, Quaker ladies shaking their heads at us, old maids their sticks at us, crabbed old gentlemen their fists at us, and ugly (by courtesy plain) young ladies their tongues at us. Here's a pretty mess we have got into! Gruff, shrill, squeaking, whistling—the voices of multitudinous discord astonish our nerves: "How false! how untenable! how shocking! how immoral! how impious!" Here's a climax! We have raised the wind, we think we have untied the bags of Ulysses; we have called spirits from the vasty deep. Oh, ye poor works of fiction, verily ye are in a woeful plight, for overwhelming is the number and inveterate the hostility of your enemies. There is the old maid of jaundiced eye and acidulated lip, whose malice-inwoven mind looks on all feelings of affection and joy as the blight looks on the blossom; whose sweetest food is the disappointment, whose greatest delight is in the grief, whose highest exultation is in the crime of the younger and happier; who masks malice of heart under sanctification of countenance, and makes amends for the follies of her youth by making her parrot say "Amen" to her prayers. There is the haughty and uncharitable sectarian who stalks through the world with scorn in his eye and damnation on his tongue. There are home-bred misses who have set up for being pious because they have been set down as being ugly (on the principle which makes nunneries the scarecrow depositories of Catholic

countries), and enrapture their pa's and ma's by becoming "occasional contributors" to some very moral and excellent juvenile miscellany, of which they regularly favour the January number with some very sagacious remarks on "The Rapid Flight of Time," in which they give their readers the very valuable, interesting, and novel information that 1835 came before 1836, and that the next year to 1836 will be 1837, concluding, by way of pathos, with the very original idea that all mortals are mortal, and that as soon as people are born it becomes likely that, some time or other, they will die. Or else, by way of being philosophical, they indulge us with essays on "Novel Reading"—precious pieces of business, quite gems in their way—consisting of amiable dialogues between good boys and girls—Fanny and Emmy, William and George—in which every sentence is composed of very fine, wise-looking words, sought for with much care through the pages of the well-thumbed dictionary. We do remember us of some of these most exquisite compositions, and we own that a tremor ran through us as we did peruse, that our spectacles shook upon our nose, and our hairs, quitting the recumbent position upon our forehead to which age and wisdom had long inclined them, began to assume, through fear for the reputations of Scott and Bulwer, the semblance of that spruce, upward inclination which rendered us in our youth so irresistible. For great, indeed, was our terror lest the names of these unfortunate authors should be overwhelmed by the weight of such authority, and their fame withered for ever by the force of such rhetoric and the severity of such criticism.

We were much too humble, in the first stun of our astonishment, to venture into combat with champions of such prowess, but on time being given us to breathe, we began to opine that there might be some points of weakness open to our attack—some feeble syllogisms which might be invalidated. We therefore beg thee, gentle reader, to submit to a recapitulation of some of these most exquisite arguments.

One of the first which we remember was a remark that, as all such works were confessedly fictitious, it was quite shocking to sit down deliberately to the perusal of a continued tissue of falsehoods. We should like to know from what flinty numskull this most brilliant spark of witticism has been elicited. We hope that this most puissant upholder of truth is convinced that the existence of his own veritable codshead is no "tissue of falsehood." We might take the trouble (and with a person of so bright an intellect it might not be inconsiderable) to teach him the difference between falsehood and imagination. (Indeed, as it is certain that no one can form an idea of sights he has not seen, or feelings he has not felt, and as, in all probability, this specimen of human sagacity might have his total allowance of brains chopped up, washed, pickled, and evaporated, without one drop of imagination being

distilled from the *caput mortuum*, it might be almost impossible to hammer into him the slightest idea of what this impalpable property might be.) We might inform his simplicity that the characters in works of fiction are representatives of men in general, are persons who have existed and will exist again, modified only by the manners prevailing at certain periods, doing what has been done, feeling what has been felt, thinking what has been thought, and will be done, felt, and thought again. We might, by way of example, hold up before his nose the decidedly and professedly moral fictions of the Edgeworth and Sherwood school, and we could bring up the overwhelming examples of fictions and fables being used in pages of a very different character. But we will not insult our readers by appearing to think it necessary to prove to them the absurdity of such an objection. We shall proceed to his next argument, in which Master Slender ventures to particularise upon us, to enunciate by name the “bears i’ the town,” which the dogs, he himself included, make such a howling about. As Scott, then, has been named by our antagonists, we will take him and Bulwer as the heads of two different lines of fiction, and to them will we apply in succession, and by their works will we try the arguments of our opponents.

We have heard it said that Scott’s historical romances gave false ideas of history. Now we maintain, on the contrary, that a more better and distinct idea, not only of historical events, but of national feeling at the time, will be gained, and has been gained, by most persons, from Scott’s novels than from any dry and circumstantial history. For history can only detail the principal events of the time (accompanied, perhaps, with imperfect, though masterly, sketches of character); it gives us only the skeleton of past times, which the works of the great novelist clothe for us with flesh and blood, and endow with life and motion; he gives us the various minute traits by which party feeling was exhibited, and the delicate distinctions of character which were observable in the men of the day, and he does so in the only manner in which, effectually, it can be done, by exhibiting them under everyday circumstances, and he does this invariably with truth—truth ascertained by his laborious research and almost illimitable historical knowledge. Take “Woodstock” for an example—we are certain that a person who had once read it with care would have clearer ideas of the characters of Charles and Cromwell, of the degrees of party feeling prevalent at the time, of the manner in which they were exhibited by the members of the opposing factions, and of the general state of the country and the people, than could be obtained by the most laborious research into all the volumes of history that ever were or will be written, and what is more, he might depend upon his ideas being true, for Scott never suffers his party feeling to have much to do with the representation of his historical characters. We would likewise ask the readers of the “Last Days of Pompeii” if they have

not a clearer idea of the manners prevailing at the period than they ever obtained from their classical studies. We wish we had space and time to detail and illustrate this advantage of historical novels more fully, and urge it more weightily; but as it refers only to their utility, and has nothing to do with the question in discussion, namely, their morality, we are compelled to pass on to another objection of our opponents, which at the first glance appears a little more weighty than any they have hitherto advanced. We have frequently heard it said that Scott held up to ridicule the religious principles of the Puritans and Covenanters of old times, and exhibited them as absurd, ridiculous, and despicable in their fanaticism. Now we assert, that nothing could prove more certainly than such an objection the bad hearts and weak judgments of those by whom it is advanced. In the very first pages of "Old Mortality" we are prejudiced in favour of the Covenanters by the beautiful description of the character and occupation of the good old man from whom the work is named, and through the whole of the novel we are certain that, although the expressions and habits of the Covenanters may occasionally excite a smile, their characters and feelings will always induce respect in the mind of a man of either judgment or feeling. It has been said that Scott misrepresented them, but there is no misrepresentation in the case; they were in reality such as they are exhibited in the romance; and those persons who consider them ridiculous there, would have considered them equally so had they held actual intercourse with them. For the man who could treat with contempt or mockery the character of Mause Hedrigg is one whose limited faculties and despicable judgment enable him only to perceive the laughable misapplication of her religious language and the dangerous folly of her mistaken zeal, and who is not capable of either perceiving, or appreciating if he did perceive, the inward beauty of character, the holiness of mind, the fervour of devotion, which separate her heart so entirely from the earth, and enable her, with a high and enduring heroism, to despise its good and welcome its evil. The worldly man and the weak man may cry out against Scott for representing the Covenanters as characters which appear fools—to the one because he cannot appreciate, to the other because he cannot fathom, the motives by which they are actuated. Let them know that Scott has represented the Covenanters as they were, and that what appears folly to the worldly wisdom of the one and the short-sighted intellect of the other, was felt by the author, and is felt by the readers who can understand him, to be fervid heroism and venerable piety.

The last argument against works of fiction which we remember is the weightiest, and because it is so, we put it in the forefront of the battle, for we wish to employ no artful concealments, no tricks of logic, no dexterities of disputation in our search after truth. It is said that the perusal of works of fiction induces a morbid state of mind, a desire for excitement, and a languor if

it be withheld, which is highly detrimental both to its intellectual powers and its morality. Now intoxication is detrimental to the health, but a moderate use of wine is beneficial to it; and voracity in works of fiction is detrimental to the mind, but moderation, we hope to prove, is beneficial to it, and much better than total confinement to the thick water-gruel of sapient, logical and interminable folios.

We will endeavour, therefore, to trace the effect of the works of Scott upon the mind, and we affirm, first, that they humanize it; secondly, that they cultivate and polish it; and thirdly, and consequently, improve its moral feelings.

First, they humanize it. The descriptions of scene and character in Scott are so vivid that they have the same effect upon us as if we actually passed through them. We hold intercourse with an infinite variety of characters, and that under peculiarly favourable circumstances, for their thoughts and the motives of their actions are laid open to us by the author; we perceive where they mistake and where they do wrong, we behold the workings of their feelings and the operation of their reason, and we see that according to the justice and wisdom of the means pursued is the success obtained. For Scott is beautifully just in his awards of misfortune and success, and throughout all his works there is no instance of any evil happening to any character which has not been incurred by his own fault or folly. Again, all our good feelings are brought into play; no one ever envies the hero of a romance; selfishness is put entirely out of the question; we feel as if we were the air, or the wind, or the light, or the heaven, or some omnipresent, invisible thing that had no interests of its own. We become, for the time, spirits altogether benevolent, altogether just, hating vice, loving virtue, weeping over the crime, exulting in the just conduct, lamenting the misfortune, rejoicing in the welfare of others. Is this no advance in morality? Have we not for the time overcome, or, rather, driven away our great enemy, Self? Have we not become more like the angels? Are not our emotions sweeter, our hopes purer, our tears holier, when they are felt for others, nourished for others, wept for others? Every one must acknowledge that a continuance of such utterly unselfish feelings of love and universal benevolence must be beneficial, must be humanizing, to the mind by which they are experienced.

Secondly, they cultivate and polish the mind. Not only are we made to know the world, as it is called, by passing through an infinite variety of scenes and circumstances, but we are endowed, in acquiring this knowledge, with a transcendent and infinitely superior intellect—that of the author. For he who carries us through the scenes, gives us his remarks upon them as he goes on, yet in such a way that we fancy they are originally, what they eventually

become, our own thoughts upon the subject. We thus look at things with an eye whose glance is far more lynx-like, whose speculation far more fiercely brilliant than our own; our opinions are sculptured into more accurate forms, our judgment is guided, our reason directed, our intellect made more keen. We are thus rendered fit to hold intercourse with the characters of the tale, and this, we should remember, is both an honour and an advantage, for those persons, when represented in a favourable light, are endowed with all the superior mind of him whose imaginings they are. Luminous in their thoughts, quick in their wits, delightful in their conversation, brave in their hearts, moral in their feelings, their society is an advantage which would be sought with the utmost avidity in the world of reality, and must be productive of the greatest benefit in that of fiction. We do not insist upon the benefit to be derived, in the shape of knowledge of the world, from our intercourse in such works with all sorts of men, for we are not speaking of the acquisition of worldly wisdom, but of the improvement of the mind, which, thirdly, we affirmed to be the result of the perusal of Scott's works. We have proved it to be humanized, we have proved it to be cultivated, polished, and refined; it is therefore improved. Its moral principles and benevolent feelings have been as much encouraged as its selfishness has been neutralized. This effect has been accompanied with a sharpening of intellect and an accession of ideas, and this has been accomplished, not by severe study, or intense thought, but by the repose of a wearied brain and the relaxation of a leisure hour.

We have not spoken of Scott's poetical fiction, because we are about to review the dangers and the benefits of this species of composition as united in the works of a poet of more meteorical talent and more evil fame. Let us, however, before leaving the works of Scott, remark that their tendency is always moral: guilt is always punished and virtue always rewarded, and, *vice versâ*, virtue never suffers and guilt never prospers. His characters are perfect examples. Those of women are, in particular, beautifully drawn; indeed, they are, with few exceptions, so prudent and exemplary as to be detrimental to his novels in two ways: they render them, first, less interesting and, secondly, less natural. They render them less interesting, because we have not the slightest fear for such sage, amiable creatures—such faultless paragons; we see they never have got into a scrape, and we are sure they never will. Whether, by making his heroines so prudent, he has rendered his tales less natural, we leave to the judgment of those who have more knowledge of the sex than our bachelor experience can boast of, but we are certain that the influence of such beautiful examples must be highly beneficial to those who attempt to imitate them.

We will next endeavour to trace the effect upon the mind of the works of

another author who is at the head of the modern metaphysical and sentimental school of fiction. But we shudder at our own temerity, for we feel that by the enunciation of the last adjective we have raised up in opposition to us another and a more awful regiment of enemies—the anti-sentimentalists. We shall have fashionable tailors, *à la mode* snips, snapping their shears and kicking their cross legs in our faces; we shall have 'prentice barbers stropping their saponaceous intellects to come to the brush with us. Every small wit that ever fancied himself sage, every goose that ever cackled with an air, every blind owl that has ever attempted to look wise, has thought fit to signalise his sagacity by turning up his snub nose at sentiment. A kind of running giggle echoes in our ears whenever we pronounce the word—goosified and idiotical enough, but yet meant to testify the wisdom of the gigglers. We have seen grave sneers, too, always of course from persons who had not soul enough in their mutton and beef bodies to make a pennyweight of sentiment. We remember a moral essayist, who, after a few very interesting truisms, began the subject-matter of his discourse with, "I am no sentimentalist." We could have told him so from the first stupidities of his pen. We knew he had not one gleam of idea bright enough to enable him even to understand—much less to be—a sentimentalist. He and his brother abusers of sentiment put us in mind of the toad who, having been immured in a block of sandstone for 3000 years, was found on its liberation engaged in writing its autobiography, in which it had very satisfactorily proved the absurdity of supposing that light and colour were either useful or beautiful.

Yet we are not speaking in defence of the boarding-school misses' rural, romantic, "La Ma!" and "Gracious Pa!" sort of sentiment, nor of that of the poetical haberdashers, who having been captivated by the slender fingers and radiant smile of some nymph of the counter engaged in measuring out a yard of tape, go down to Margate or Ramsgate to eat shrimps, read "Romeo and Juliet," do the despairing lover, and get the colic; nor of that of elegant lawyers' clerks, who, having obtained a fortnight's leave of absence, are brought down (nearly bringing themselves up on the way) per steamer to Edinburgh, and then, the "Lady of the Lake" in their pocket and a brand new silk umbrella in their hand, perambulate, with open mouth and upturned eyes, the "hawful shoeblimities" of the Scotch Highlands.

Nor are we defending the sentiment of poetasters who bore Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter with interminable sonneteering, and never see the moon without putting "thou" before it, thus compounding the pretty piece of sentiment "Thou Moon."

Nor, finally, are we defending the Charlotte and Werther, bread-and-butter sort of sentiment. But we are speaking of what we may call, translating the

Latin derivative into English, real, refined feeling, such as that which is so conspicuous in the works of the author we are about to bring forward—Mr. Bulwer.

The sentiment of this author is as philosophical as that of Adam Smith, but the latter writer gives us only the mechanics of feeling. In the works of Bulwer we have their life and poetry; the one gives us the automaton of feeling, the other its soul. His writings are full of an entangled richness of moving mind, glittering with innumerable drops of rosy and balmy and quivering dew, instinct with a soft, low, thrilling whisper of thought, like that which the young fairies hear from the green grass and kind flowers as they grow, and change, and sigh, beneath the hushed light of the star-inwoven noon of night, and we listen to the low voice of his musing until it melts away into our spirit, as if its sweet harp-like music rose up out of our own mind, as if its mysterious flowing were from the deep fountains of our own heart. Bulwer's descriptions are always beautiful; he not only sees, himself, but he teaches us to see like him. The language in which he describes is burning, because every word has its own half hinted, deep laid, beautiful thought, which he leaves us, as he floats on amidst the calm but beaming æther of his own imagination, to follow, and follow afar, until we are lost in a wilderness of sweet dreaming. He gives Nature a spirit that she had not before. The earth, and the air, and the leaves, and the waves, and the clouds, are all endowed by him with voices; he makes us feel them with our eyes like visible emotions; he makes them each touch a chord in our heart with their gentle fingers, and then lifts up the weak melody, and follows its tremulous vibration till he arouses deeper tones and melancholy memories, and visions half sad but most beautiful. He has not one-fifth of the invention of Scott, but he has, in one respect, more imagination, yet a kind of imagination which it is difficult to explain. He endows inanimate things with more life, more spirit, and he revels in the deep waters of the human heart, where all is seen misty and dim, but most beautiful, by the pale motion of the half lost light of the outward sun through the softly sobbing waves of our thoughts. The perusal of his works, or of works like them, must always refine the mind to a great degree, and improve us in the science of metaphysics. The general movements of the mind may be explained in theories and investigated by philosophers, but there are deep-rooted, closely entangled fibres which no eye can trace, no thought can find, yet they may be felt if touched by a skilful hand.

Whether the increase of our delicacy of feeling improves the mind in a moral point of view, is a difficult question, but we are inclined to think that it does. The more we can feel, the more beauty we shall perceive in this universal frame. No man knows how lovely Nature is who has not entwined her with his

heart, and caused parts of her glory to be capable of awakening peculiar, associated lines of thought in his own mind, and the feeling of her beauty is a decidedly moral feeling, and very beneficial to the mind. It might be thought that what we have been saying of Bulwer's works might have been said of all poetry, but this is not the case; it could only have been said of poetical prose, and we will let him tell the reason in his own words. "Verse cannot contain the refining and subtle thoughts which a great prose writer embodies: the rhyme eternally cripples it; it properly deals with the common problems of human nature which are now hackneyed, and not with the nice and philosophising corollaries which may be drawn from them: thus, though it would seem at first a paradox, commonplace is more the element of poetry than of prose" ("Pilgrims of the Rhine").

Yet although prose is thus more refined, poetry is the most inspiring, and our task would not be completed unless we endeavoured also to trace the effect of poetical fiction on the mind. But our time is nearly exhausted, we are fatigued of the subject; we feel as if we had been uttering nothing but truisms, convicting of absurdity objections which no one ever supposed to be reasonable, proving the truth of reasons whose truth was never doubted, and the beneficial influence of that whose beneficial influence was never disputed. We feel as if we had been beating the air—contending, but with no opponent—struggling, but with no impediment. But when we pronounce the name of "The Bride of Abydos," we feel that the case is altered. The dust and ashes of criticism become living before our eyes, and a murmur of indignation arises from the multitudes of crawling things. But the name hath touched us with its finger, and our brain is burning, our heart is quivering, our soul is full of light. Oh, the voice, the glory, the life, that breathes through the bursts of melody which fall upon our ear! Oh, what a heaven of agonised spirit was that, whose night was so meteored with the rush of its inspiration, glorious with the melancholy light of its cold stars and its pale planets, soft with the gentleness of its dew, terrible in the boundless eternity of its darkness! We have known minds, and great ones too, which were filled with such a horror of Byron's occasional immorality, as to be unable to separate his wheat from his chaff—unable to bask themselves in the light of his glory, without fearing to be scorched by his sin. These we have pitied, and they deserve pity, for they are debarred from one of the noblest feasts that ever fed the human intellect. We do not hesitate to affirm that, with the sole exception of Shakespeare, Byron was the greatest poet that ever lived, because he was perhaps the most miserable man. His mind was from its very mightiness capable of experiencing greater agony than lower intellects, and his poetry was wrung out of his spirit by that agony. We have said that he was the greatest poet that ever lived, because his talent was the most universal. Excelled by Milton and Homer only

in the vastness of their epic imaginations, he was excelled in nothing else by any man. He was overwhelming in his satire, irresistible in the brilliancy of the coruscations of his wit, unequalled in depth of pathos, or in the melancholy of moralising contemplation. We may challenge every satirist and every comic poet that ever lived to produce specimens of wit or of comic power at all equal to some that might be selected from "Don Juan." We might challenge every lyric poet that ever existed to produce such a piece of lyric poetry as the

"long, low island song
Of ancient days, ere tyranny grew strong,"

which soothes the dying hour of Haidée. Take (and we name them at random) the death of Haidée, the dirge at the end of "The Bride of Abydos," and "The Dream," and match their deep, their agonising pathos, if it be possible, from the works of any other poet. Take his female characters from his tragedies—and Shakespeare will not more than match them—take his moralising stanzas from "Childe Harold." What other moralist ever felt so deeply? In every branch of poetry he is supereminent; there is no heart whose peculiar tone of feeling he does not touch. We have not words mighty enough to express our astonishment—our admiration. Tell us not that such writing is immoral; we know, for we have felt, what a light of illimitable loveliness, what a sickness of hushed awe, what a fire of resistless inspiration, what a glory of expansive mind fills the heart and soul, as we listen to the swell of such numbers; there is a river of rushing music that sweeps through our thoughts, resistless as a whirlwind, yet whose waves sing, as they pass onward, so softly, so lowly, so holily, half-maddening with their beauty of sweet sound, until we are clasped in the arms of the poetry as if borne away on the wings of an archangel, and our rapture is illimitable, and we are elevated and purified and ennobled by the mightiness of the influence that overshadows us. There is not, there cannot be, a human being "of soul so dead" as not to feel that he is a better man, that his ideas are higher, his heart purer, his feelings nobler, his spirit less bound by his body, after feeding on such poetry. But our enthusiasm has drawn us into a false inference. There *are* animals who neither have felt this inspiration themselves nor believe that others can feel it. They talk about Byron's immorality as if he were altogether immoral, and they actually appear to imagine that *they! they!! yes, they!!!* will be able to wipe away his memory from the earth. Our risibility has been excited by the Laird of Balmawhapple's humorous assertion of his dignity by discharging his horse-pistol against the crags of Stirling Castle; but this is but typical of the audacity of these pismires, these dogs that bay the moon, these foul snails that crawl on in their despicable malice, leaving their spume and filth on the fairest flowers of literature, but are inferior to the slug in this respect, that their slime can neither shine nor injure. It has been said that there is never anger where there is no fear; but who does

not feel indignation mingled with his scorn of these Grub Street reptiles, even although the dust of a single year will overwhelm them for ever, and the impotence of their life be equalled by the oblivion of their death!

EARLY LETTERS

EARLY LETTERS

ROME, *December 31 (1840).*

MY DEAR SIR,

I have delayed writing from day to day, first that I might have something to tell you of my health and, secondly, that I might not speak of this place under early and false impressions. For myself, I am certainly better, though much checked in all my pursuits from a little inconvenient roughness about the chest, which renders it improper for me to read or draw to any extent, or to do anything that requires stooping, and equally so to take violent or prolonged exercise, or to go out at night, or to saunter in cold galleries, or to talk much, or walk much, or do anything “much,” so that I am subject to perpetual mortification in taking care of an absolute nothing, as far as it goes at present. Still I am better here than I should be at home, and there is a great deal of information and pleasure to be picked up bit by bit, if one is on the watch for it. We sauntered leisurely enough through France, taking some six weeks from Calais to Nice, and passing over most of the characteristic portions of French landscape, the chalk downs and fertile pasture valleys of Normandy, the poplar plains and turreted banks of the Loire, as far as Tours, then the volcanic cliffs and black lavas of Auvergne, the vineyards and fortresses of the Rhone, the limestone peaks of Vaucluse, and finally the loveliest fragment of all France, where the Basses Alpes throw out their promontories, clothed from base to summit with an unbroken thicket of blossoming myrtle, arbutus, and orange, into the blue of the Mediterranean. In general, through France, as the landscape rises the architecture declines. The noblest thing I have yet seen in the way of Gothic, is seen rising twelve miles off, over a desolate and ill-cultivated plain (Chartres Cathedral), while among the noble southern scenery there is excessively little to interest in the way of ecclesiastical architecture, and little appearance of religion among the people. The ignorance of the lower classes seems about equal everywhere; but in the north it is active, energetic, feeling and enthusiastic, in the south dull, degraded and slothful. La Vierge Noire, the presiding Deity of Chartres Cathedral, is a little black lady about three feet high. The devotion of the whole city to her is quite inexpressible; they are perpetually changing her petticoats, making her presents of pink pincushions, silk reticules, and tallow “dips” by the hundredweight, with occasional silver

or plated hearts in cases of especial ingratiating. The group of her worshippers never leaves the cathedral solitary for an instant; she has a priest devoted constantly to her service, who never leaves her altar, and the aisles above her are black with the constant ascent of incense. But in the south they are content with a Mass or two in the course of the day, half said and unheard. The worshippers stagger dreamily into the church, generally lame or weak with some chronic disease, mutter their prayers in the mere fulfilment of peremptory habit, kneel, seemingly without a desire, and rise, seemingly without a hope. At Orleans and Avignon we found small congregations of French Protestants struggling to maintain themselves as congregations against every imaginable disadvantage. If two or three can get together and produce sufficient money to hire a room or build a low chapel, I believe they receive a pittance from the French Government, enough just to maintain a single minister. This poor fellow, who must be both zealous and devoted ever to enter on such a duty, preaches, lectures, prays, and sings, is clerk, reader, and preacher, Sunday after Sunday, to a congregation of perhaps six adults and as many children. A Romanist sometimes saunters in out of curiosity; he has to do penance for it next time he confesses, and avoids the door in future, while the Protestant is so utterly powerless in the way of funds that he cannot contend with the Romanist priests with the only argument they are reluctant to use. Now and then, nevertheless, he is joined by a stray sheep or two, and were he well supported, able to enter into charities of any, even the slightest extent, or to maintain a tolerably respectable appearance in the eyes of the lower classes, he might with real zeal and good head knowledge, which he almost always possesses, do much against the ignorance and laziness of the people and the priests; but with just enough for himself to pay for a clean shirt and decent coat on Sundays, and a congregation whose utmost exertion can hardly, in money matters, whitewash their chapel and clean its windows, what can he possibly do against the sweeping invective and well-supported power of the established Church? It seems to me that we should be doing far more to advance the cause of truth, by giving a little support to these struggling churches, than by using all our power among howling savages, and that one of these groups, crushed and scattered by the Romanist Church, is more to be lamented than the continued heathenism of a thousand Red Indians. For he who trusts to the prayers of a black doll for his salvation, seems to me equally in danger whether it be called Vishnu or la Vierge; but it is surely easier to lead the worshipper from the Mother to the Son, in whom he already believes, than to raise the conception of the savage from his rock idol to an infinite God.

From Nice we went on to Genoa and Pisa. The coast of the Mediterranean from Nice to La Spezzia (near which Shelley was drowned), a run of some 180 miles, is the most glorious combination of scenery I ever passed through.

Exposed only to the south wind—which is warm to the hand like the air from a heated pipe—the palms and aloes wave over the sea-beach, and rise in blossoming plumes up the promontories of black marble—crested with white convents and frescoed churches—which the Maritime Alps fling forward into the sea; the valleys are each one grove of orange, the hill sides shaded with masses of olive and a wild brushwood of myrtle and arbutus, and up every chasm in the hills the eye retires on the inaccessible peaks of the higher Alps and Apennines. We passed some of this scenery in a storm of south wind. Imagine a heavy and wild gale of warm wind, the sea rising in masses twelve and fifteen feet before they broke, and flinging its foam through the stems of the palm-trees or fifty feet up on the rocks. It tore down three bridges on the road, and some parts of the road itself, and we had great difficulty in getting past. We stayed a fortnight at Florence, which, as a city, disappointed me dreadfully, especially in its churches. Its works of art can disappoint no one, and its population are engaged in active and effective industry, not perhaps in the most profitable industry either to themselves or any one else, being chiefly in cutting precious stones for the Florentine mosaic, about the most costly unison of valuable material with immense human labour that the world produces. We saw a table some three feet across—circular—which had occupied some four men for six years. Still it is industry, and the place looks prosperous, and is so, I believe, and anything is better than the *far niente* of Rome. We arrived here a month ago, passing, all the way from Siena, through some of the ugliest country I ever saw or smelt in my life, being a compound of volcanic mud, sulphur, and bilgewater.

St. Peter's I expected to be *disappointed* in. I was *disgusted*. The Italians think Gothic architecture barbarous. I think Greek heathenish. Greek, by-the-by, it is not, but has all its weight and clumsiness, without its dignity or simplicity. As a whole, St. Peter's is fit for nothing but a ball-room, and it is a little too gaudy even for that, (inside I mean, of course). But the overwhelming vastness of every detail, and the magnificent solidity and splendour of material are such that, in walking through it, you think of St. Paul's as of a pasteboard model—a child's toy—that the wind may blow away like a pack of cards and nobody the wiser. And the exquisite feeling and glorious art brought out in every *part* and *detail* are so impressive that, were St. Peter's dashed into fifty fragments, I would give our St. Paul's—and Ludgate Hill into the bargain—for any one of them. As a whole, I repeat, it is meagre outside and offensive within. In the city, if you take a carriage and drive to express points of lionisation, I believe that most people of good taste would expect little and find less. The Capitol is a melancholy rubbishy square of average Palladian-modern; the Forum, a good group of smashed columns, just what, if it were got up, as it very easily might be, at Virginia Water, we should call a piece of

humbug—the kind of thing that one is sick to death of in “compositions;” the Coliseum I have always considered a public nuisance, like Jim Crow; and the rest of the ruins are mere mountains of shattered, shapeless brick, covering miles of ground with a Babylon-like weight of red tiles. But if, instead of driving, with excited expectation, to particular points, you saunter leisurely up one street and down another, yielding to every impulse, peeping into every corner, and keeping your observation active, the impression is exceedingly changed. There is not a fragment, a stone, or a chimney, ancient or modern, that is not in itself a study, not an inch of ground that can be passed over without its claim of admiration and offer of instruction, and you return home in hopeless conviction that were you to substitute years for the days of your appointed stay, they would not be enough for the estimation or examination of Rome. Yet the impression of this perpetual beauty is more painful than pleasing, for there is a strange horror lying over the whole city, which I can neither describe nor account for; it is a shadow of death, possessing and penetrating all things. The sunlight is lurid and ghastly, though so intense that neither the eye nor the body can bear it long; the shadows are cold and sepulchral; you feel like an artist in a fever, haunted by every dream of beauty that his imagination ever dwelt upon, but all mixed with the fever fear. I am certain this is not imagination, for I am not given to such nonsense, and, even in illness, never remember feeling anything approaching to the horror with which some objects here can affect me. It is all like a vast churchyard, with a diseased and dying population living in the shade of its tombstones. And in fact all the soil round is black, heavy, and moist; the dew lies on it like a sweat. Wherever there is a tuft of grass to shade it, if you take it up in your hand it will not dry, it seems one mass of accumulated human corruption. The population seem degraded, diseased, unprincipled, and *good*-natured in the extreme. Their utmost aim is to obtain the capability of idleness, their highest pleasure to lie basking in the sun, coiled in their filth, like lizards. They will cheat you, lie to you, rob you, to any extent, without a thought of its being “incorrect;” but they will get wildly fond of you if you treat them well, and their affection will prevent what their conscience cannot. Their address is agreeable in the highest degree, they have all *l’air noble* (unless broken^[A] which one-half of them are) and a perfect specimen of them, especially if the^[B] very magnificent in the^[B] way of human nature. Their intellectual powers are^[C] highest quality, but *nothing* will induce their exertion. In order, if possible^[D] my kindly feeling towards Rome, I took a slight fever a week ago; some say from sketching in a damp place, others from a course of Italian dinners; but the fever came and went, and I have been out again and am all right, only obliged to be excessively cautious,—in fact I can hardly venture anywhere, or do anything, though I am so used

to perpetual checks in all I wish to do that I feel it less than others would. It is not without considerable bitterness that I can look back on the three years I spent at the University—three years of such vigorous life as I may never know again, sacrificed to a childish vanity, and not only lost themselves, but breaking down my powers of enjoyment or exertion, for I know not how long. If I ever wished to see the towers of Oxford again, the wish is found only in conjunction with another—Rosalind’s—that I had “a thunderbolt in mine eye.”

Is it not odd that *I*, whose university life was absurdly, ridiculously exemplary, and who can safely say that I never, during those three years, did or said what I would not have done or said with the head of my college beside me, should have this benevolent feeling to my Alma Mater? Had I devoted a few of the evening hours which were spent over Plato to breaking windows in quad or lamps in the High Street; had I driven tandem to Woodstock now and then, instead of attending lecture, and devoted a little of the money which used to go for soup tickets and the missionary fund to paying for the consequent impositions, I might now have been a respectable B.A., with clear eyesight, free chest and strong limbs, and liberty and power to go and do where and what I chose. However, it is perhaps better to lay the blame on my folly than on my innocence. I should like, nevertheless, to see the class system abolished at Oxford. For those who obtain honours are usually such as would have been high in scholarship without any such inducement, who are, in fact, above their trial and take their position as a matter of course and a thing of no consequence. To these the honour is a matter of little gratification and of less utility. But the flock of lower standard men of my stamp, and men below me, who look to the honour at the end, and strain their faculties to the utmost to obtain it, not only have to sustain hours of ponderous anxiety and burning disappointment, such as I have seen in some, enough to eat their life away, but sustain a bodily and intellectual injury, which nothing can ever do away with or compensate for. In this number one may reckon many of the second class men, who, had they not been tempted to their own destruction, might have risen afterwards to a high standard of intellectual power; but, just in the hottest moment of boyish ambition, the University honour is set before them; and how shall the University answer for the destruction of intellect, and even life, consequent on the sudden struggle? I know several advantages of the class system, but I do not think *one* which could for a moment be set against the desolation of a single year. All this comes badly from me, because I have been apparently disappointed in the honours I am abusing; but were they all that I have lost, I believe the utmost chagrin the loss could cause, would not have power here to darken the shadow of a single cypress.

I should have put a date of January 1 in the middle of the last page. All join

with me in kindest and sincerest wishes for your health and happiness, and that of all your family. I have particularly to thank you for the loan of the “Pilgrim’s Staff,” which we found the most valuable travelling companion of any inmate of the green bag. My mother is especially pleased with it, and it is almost the only book of a devotional character I ever could enjoy. I cannot endure books full of sentences beginning “How” and terminating in a note of admiration.

If you *could* find time to send us a line, informing us of your health and that of Mrs. Dale and your family, you cannot doubt our gratitude. It will be best to send it to Billiter Street, whence it will be forwarded, as I don’t know where we are going and not going. I know when I get to Naples I shall have a strong fancy for Athens, but it will be of no use. Best love to Tom and James and Lawford, and all wishes of the season. They make a great fuss about it in St. Peter’s—dressing and undressing the Pope all day—and I heard a noble farewell service in one of the parish churches yesterday, and an hour and a half of magnificent organ and chorus—three organs answering each other and the whole congregation joining—as Italians can do always—in perfect melody in parts; the church, a favourable specimen, one blaze of oriental alabaster and gold; the altar with pillars of lapis lazuli running up fifty feet, more than a foot in diameter, at a guinea an inch in mere material, with groups of white marble flying round and above them, and the roof rising in an apparent infinite height of glorious fresco; and every possible power of music used to its fullest extent—the best pieces of melody chosen out of standard *operas* and every variety of style, exciting, tender, or sublime—given with ceaseless and overwhelming effect, one solo unimaginally perfect, by a chosen voice thrilling through darkness. All music *should* be heard in obscurity.

I have said nothing of the *art* of Italy, but have bored you quite enough for one while. I will venture to intrude on you again from Naples.—I remain, my dear sir, ever most respectfully yours,

J. RUSKIN.

[A] Space left is where paper was torn under seal.

[B] See footnote A.

[C] See footnote A.

[D] See footnote A.

LAUSANNE, June 9 (1841).

MY DEAR SIR,

Partly in fear of occupying your time, and partly because there has been little change in my own health, which I could flatter myself would give you any pleasure, I have allowed a long interval to pass since I wrote, during which I have indeed seen much of the external world, but have been altogether prevented by necessary precautions from going into society, or obtaining any knowledge respecting the present state of Italy at all likely to interest you. We spent the early part of the year at Naples, escaping, I hear, a most severe English winter, and coming in for one in Italy which, if less biting and violent in actual cold, confined us almost altogether to the house for day after day of crashing rain. The Neapolitan gutters grew dangerously ferocious, nearly carrying away their bridges, and the explosions of steam from Vesuvius were constant and glorious. In calm weather the smoke is amber-coloured, and except at sunrise or sunset, slightly dull and manufactory-like, but during rain it is as white as snow, elastic, voluminous, and dazzling. We had one or two fine days in the beginning of March for Pompeii and Paestum. The first is of course the most *interesting* thing in Italy, and particularly pleased me, because I expected a street and found a city large enough to lose one's way in. It has been more knocked about than people are generally led to suppose: the houses much injured by earthquake before they were buried, the roofs almost always carried in, and walls shaken and cracked by the weight of the ashes. Modern earthquakes, shiftings of the soil, vineroots from above splitting and displacing the brickwork, and last and worst of all, the carelessness of the excavators, have reduced the city to a complete ruin; but it is a ruin with all its parts fresh and undecayed, and even at the worst, not far differing in aspect from most of the inferior towns of modern Italy, except in the want of their filth and their beggar inhabitants. It is better to talk about Paestum than to see it; a cork model on a good wide mahogany table is about as impressive. I ventured up Vesuvius, for all mountain rides do me good, and found the lava of 1839 still *red* hot to the eye in the daytime, in its hollows, setting wood on fire, and contributing greatly to the intellectual enjoyment of the English by its capabilities in "roasting of eggs." The crater is at present a beautifully formed and perfectly regular funnel, about 300 feet deep, with a circular hole at the

bottom about twenty or thirty feet over (a rude guess, for I could not get down to it), as neatly formed as a well, out of which the sulphurous smoke springs in discharges at intervals of about a minute, with a low murmuring, rising when the air is still to a height of about 1500 to 2000 feet above the crater in a bright white column. The whole mass of the crater, a circle of ashes two miles round, is warm to the hand, in places painfully so, and pierced with small holes like rat-holes, each sending up its small puffs of smoke. The enormous mass of sulphurous vapour constantly forced down on Naples has a marked effect on the climate, turning healthy people into hypochondriacs and *vice versâ*. It half killed my father, and did not do me much good, for on the way back to Rome I had the most serious attack of the chest affection I have had at all, blood coming three days running, and once afterwards, and I have been threatened with it at intervals ever since, but still, I think, with some improvement of general health. I was just able to see the Roman festivities, now got up in assistance of the attractions of the rabbit-eating boas in the Surrey zoologicals, and humorously described in the *Times* as occurring on a Festival, of which I fear infallibility itself would confess ignorance, "St. Peter's day at Easter." At Easter they certainly do take place, and on St. Peter's day in June or July, and very pretty things they are in their way. The "Girandole" has got its reputation, and is performing somewhat shabbily under the protection of past years, people still giving it the preference over far finer explosions bestowed constantly on the populace of Paris, but the whole effect of the twenty minutes' burst of changing fire, taking place, as it does, among architectural outlines of the noblest scale and character, and assisted by the roar of the artillery of the fortress, is still unequalled, and I never expect to see any piece of mere spectacle produced by human art fit to be named in the same day with the illumination of St. Peter's.

We left Rome immediately after Easter, and with a little lingering about Venice and Milan to let the snow melt on the Cenis, are now on our road home as fast as I can travel, so that we hope to be in England in about a fortnight.

Since my last attack of blood I have not studied at all. Doctors and my own feelings agree in one point—that hard mental labour of any kind hurts me instantly. I ascribe this to the simple physical fact that during laborious thought the breath is involuntarily held and the chest contracted for minutes together. Whatever causes it, I am obliged, for the present, to give up thought of University or anything else; but I hope when I get home, to be able to get into steady but easy occupation and constant exercise, which may restore my health without entirely wasting the coming years. It is true that neither air nor exercise have as yet done much good, but the climate of Italy never did agree with me, and I have been subject to many causes of slight but constant

vexation from the privations and incapacities of ill-health hitherto quite unknown to me, which have in no small degree contributed to the increase of their cause. I have little doubt that perfectly regular habits of life, the direct contrary of those necessarily induced by travelling, with fresh air and easy occupation, will soon restore me. I have great resources in my drawing—which, on an easel, requires neither stooping nor labour of mind—and a little geology and chemistry may be got on with without danger, just enough of Greek to give some steadiness to the day and keep me ready for taking my degree when I choose. My sight caused me at first more anxiety than anything else, but as that is not, on the whole, worse, though much tried by glaring sun and a good deal of sketching, I do not trouble myself more about it.

I was very glad to see how instantly Newman submitted to his Bishop in the affair of the Tracts; however wrong he may be, it is well that he is thus far consistent. I am surprised there has been no more discussion about it, though, by-the-bye, I can hardly judge by the silence of the newspapers, as I hear from Oxford that they are running short of printer's ink, "everybody misunderstanding everybody, and everybody else endeavouring to set them right."

I am sorry they are going so far, for almost every one at Oxford whom I have had any cause to respect or regard, has been more or less inclined to favour their views. Men of high taste and intellect seem particularly likely to be led away on their side, while among their opponents I have found numbers of the most limited in knowledge and degraded in feeling, who keep right only because they do not think enough to get wrong, and are too conceited and obstinate to let any one else think for them. Of course, I am speaking only of the ordinary disputants of society, among whom it is somewhat vexatious to find those who force their religion down your throat on all occasions, at all times, with the most confined views, the most uncharitable opinions, the worst possible taste, and the most confirmed, pig-headed self-conceit, generally in the main right in what they hold, and the gentle, the spiritual, the high-toned in thought and feeling, unworthy of the surrender of your faith to them for an instant. One may go back, certainly, to the old text, "I have hid these things;" but it is an unsatisfactory thing for a person beginning a course of divinity to observe that an old woman who can just read has in general more certainty and correctness of faith, and is in far less danger of being led wrong, than the possessor of the most extended knowledge and cultivated mind, to see that intellect in religion is danger, that knowledge is useless, and an hour of reflection well got over if it has introduced no doubt.

By all reports the French Protestant churches are on the increase. At Rome and Naples there are, of course, extensive English congregations during the

winter, but quite independent of the inhabitants. They would be the better of a good clergyman in both places. At Naples they sit under one of the coldest dispensers of commonplace moralities that ever was puzzled to get over his half-hour, and at Rome under one of the most intense coxcombs that ever wore dyed whiskers or improved the grammar of the Lord's Prayer. By-the-bye, we heard a new reading from the Naples incumbent: "And lead us! (*not into temptation*)"—a case of comprehensive punctuation worthy of Mattrevis.^[E] Both reverend gentlemen are, I believe, what people call "good creatures," and are certainly quite good enough for their fashionable congregations, but utterly incapable of doing any service among the native population—a population, at Naples, whose high intellect and kind disposition are susceptible of almost any degree of improvement, and are woefully in want of it. At Venice the British ambassador has service in his own house, whenever there is a clergyman ready to undertake it, but I believe there is no incumbent; we were fortunate enough to hear two excellent flying sermons. There is a French Protestant service at Turin of the *Vaudois* Churches, still, I believe, much oppressed by the King of Sardinia; they are compelled not to work on all Romanist saints' days, can buy no land out of their own three mountain valleys, and are only suffered to remain there because under the protection of England and Prussia.

There is still the same striking difference between the Catholic and Romanist cantons of Switzerland, but on the whole, I think, the industry and neatness of the Protestants seem extending beyond their territories. The cleanliness and beauty of Swiss architecture and agriculture is thoroughly exhilarating after the indolence and desolation of Italy. I am sorry to say, however, that neither industry nor Protestantism seem capable of making the Swiss an agreeable people. Knavish in their dealings and brutal in their manners, they often make us regret the loss of the ill-taught but kindly feeling Italian; and were a stranger to the differences of religion to be introduced successively into one of the churches of Naples and a Protestant Swiss chapel, there can be little doubt which service he would think most acceptable to the Deity—the bowed reverence and brotherly courtesy of the one, or the insolent freedom and animal selfishness of the other. It is but fair to set against this that roads and postmasters seem, beyond all other things and creatures, to be susceptible of the corruptions of Papacy, for the Pope's dominions may be known through all Italy by the roughness of the one and the rascality of the other.

I sincerely hope to find you all in good health when I get to England, when, of course, I shall take the first opportunity of calling, and glad shall I be, after the coldness of foreign services, to find myself again in the pew of St. Bride's, not the same, by-the-bye. I have not been in the church since its reparation. I

hope I may not be as much disappointed with it as I was with St. Peter's. It certainly was heavy before, and will be much the better of its lighter colours.

All join in kind regards and best wishes for you and your family. Remember me kindly to Tom and James and Lawford, respectfully to Mrs. Dale.—Ever, my dear sir, most respectfully yours,

J. RUSKIN.

[\[E\]](#) An allusion to Literature Lectures. See Marlowe's "Edward the Second," act v. scene 5 (Editor's Note).

LEAMINGTON, *Wednesday, Sept. 22 (1841).*

MY DEAR SIR,

I have just received your most kind letter and sit down instantly to reply, with sincere thanks for your permission to write to you at length. Scripture, of course, must be the ultimate appeal, but what I have to say at present is, I think, founded on no solitary passages, but on the broadest and first doctrines of our religion.

I have often wondered, in listening to what are called “practical” discourses from the pulpit, to hear a preacher dividing the duty of *love* into the various minor virtues which affect the present state of men—into gentleness, meekness, sympathy, compassion, almsgiving, and such like—without ever insisting on the certain and most important truth, that as long as we are doubtful of the state of *one* human soul of those among whom we dwell, the duty of love claims that every effort of our existence should be directed to save that soul, and that in the present circumstances of humanity, under which we have every reason for supposing that the far greater part of those who die daily in our sight depart into eternal torment, any direction of our energies to any one end or object whatsoever except the saving of souls, is a merciless and execrable crime.

Nor can any distinction be made between laymen and churchmen with regard to the claims of this duty, but every one who believes in the name of Christ is called upon to become a full and perfect priest. Our daily bread once gained, every faculty of mind and body must be called into full action for this end only, nor can I think that any one can rightly believe, or be himself in a state of salvation, without holding himself bound, foot, hand, and brain, by this overpowering necessity. Nero’s choice of time and opportunity for the pursuit of his musical studies has been much execrated, but is guiltless in comparison to the conduct of the man who occupies himself for a single hour with any earthly pursuit of whatever importance, believing, as he must, if he believe the Bible, that souls which human exertion might save, are meanwhile dropping minute by minute into hell. This being fully granted, the question comes—Are there different means by which such an end can be attained? or must we—all who believe—at once go forth like Paul, tent-making and preaching for bread

and love—I mean, as far as such sacrifices are consistent with the organisation of society? There must be soldiers, merchants, physicians, members of various necessary professions, but all these are the representatives in the life of the whole human species of the hours in the life of an individual which would be occupied in obtaining food and raiment. Concerning these there can be no question. The doubt is, under what responsibility those individuals who have leisure lie for its employment, and how those who have it in their power to choose their employment are to be regulated in their choice.

They have two questions to ask: “What means are there by which the salvation of souls can be attained?” and “How are we to choose among them?” For instance, does the pursuit of any art or science, for the mere sake of the resultant beauty or knowledge, tend to forward this end? That such pursuits are beneficial and ennobling to our nature is self-evident, but have we leisure for them in our perilous circumstances? Is it a time to be spelling of letters, or touching of strings, counting stars or crystallising dewdrops, while the earth is failing under our feet, and our fellows are departing every instant into eternal pain? Or, on the other hand, is not the character and kind of intellect which is likely to be drawn into these occupations, employed in the fullest measure and to the best advantage in them? Would not great part of it be useless and inactive if otherwise directed? Do not the results of its labour remain, exercising an influence, if not directly spiritual, yet ennobling and purifying, on all humanity to all time? Was not the energy of Galileo, Newton, Davy, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Handel, employed more effectively to the glory of God in the results and lessons it has left, than if it had been occupied all their lifetime in direct priestly exertion, for which, in all probability, it was less adapted and in which it would have been comparatively less effectual?

Yet if the labours of men like these, who spread the very foundations of human knowledge to twice their compass, may be considered as tending to the great end of salvation, can the same be said of those who follow their footsteps, with the average intellect of humanity? Are not the lives of the greater number of men employed in the arts and sciences, as regards their chief duty, wasted? And is it right for any one deliberately to choose such a pursuit as the chief occupation of his life, and abandon the plain duties in which *all* can be of effective service on the very slender chance of becoming a Galileo or a Raphael?

Much more may be said in behalf of general literature, poetry and philosophy, but even here they are only the greatest who can be said to have done any real good, and it may again be doubted how far it is right for any man to devote himself to such pursuits on the chance of becoming a Wordsworth or a Bacon.

Is an individual, then, who has the power of choice, in any degree to yield to his predilections in so important a matter? I myself have little pleasure in the idea of entering the Church, and have been attached to the pursuits of art and science, not by a flying fancy, but as long as I can remember, with settled and steady desire. How far am I justified in following them up? Is it right for any person to enter the Church without any intention of taking active duties upon himself, but that he may be able to preach or minister with authority on any occasion when such ministries may be of immediate and important service?

In all these points I have the more difficulty in coming to a conclusion because I suspect every opinion of being biassed by inclinations. I therefore trouble you, not with a question of mere speculative interest, but with one your answer to which may have much influence in determining my present studies and future course of exertion. I feel, therefore, that under the circumstances, you will think no apology necessary for occupying your time.

I think I am gradually gaining in strength and health. I receive constant testimonies to Jephson's skill and knowledge, and the confidence of the language he holds has at least the good effect of setting my mind at ease. With respectful regards to Mrs. Dale and all your family, believe me ever, my dear sir, most respectfully yours,

J. RUSKIN.

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[The end of *Three Letters and an Essay by John Ruskin 1836-1841. Found in his tutor's desk.* by John Ruskin]