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With acknowledgments to Collingwood's Biography.

Ask almost anyone the question, "Who was John Ruskin?" and the reply will be given, glibly and unhesitatingly, "Why, to be sure, a famous art-critic."

So far as it goes, this answer is quite correct, but at this stage of the world's history it should be more generally recognized that Ruskin was much more than this; that he was a man ahead of his time, sometimes mistaken, perhaps, yet a modern prophet, criticized, repudiated, vilified in his own day, as prophets invariably are, for the very principles and teachings which often gain them most honor in an era to come. Ruskin's teachings do not seem as bizarre, as visionary, to-day as they did thirty years ago. To-morrow they may be more readily accepted than to-day. We must acknowledge this, for, whether we agree with his conclusions or not, we must, if we face facts clearly, recognize that many of the principles for which he fought have come to be, perhaps in the natural growth of things, the most powerful forces in the world to-day. In America, looking beneath the surface, we see those principles working; in Germany, in France, in Russia (greatly under the teaching of Tolstoi), in Britain itself, where the beginning has been made powerfully by the drastic measures introduced by Lloyd-George and the Liberal Government.

May we repeat that clause—"whether we agree with his conclusions, or not"? In these sketches, dealing with many men of many minds, we must necessarily touch upon thoughts and quote passages which may not recommend themselves to people who have sat under all teachings, reached widely different conclusions, and yielded, in some instances, to as widely differing prejudices. We shall, however, have accomplished an object if, by ever so little, we lead men to examine fearlessly, and with liberal mind, all sides of any question that may present itself; if we induce them to think and form their own conclusions, instead of accepting blindly the teachings of any man whatever. So only shall men be men, not sheep. And we appeal to those of our readers who may, stimulated by these brief and necessarily vague sketches,

be led to read the works themselves of the men of whom they treat, that they read with an open mind, rejecting such portions as they may reasonably reject, accepting such conclusions and sentiments as they can reasonably accept. In this way only can reading be of profit, for profit there is, even in the matter of rejecting, since the mind, to reject, must work.

Upon the other hand, be sure that in the works of every writer who has won permanent place in the ranks of literature there is much to commend, to enlighten, to stimulate. Do not throw down a writer of eminence because he has said something which does not coincide with your views. Examine into the matter. It is quite possible that you may be wrong, or prejudiced. If not, it will do you no harm to know what this man, who has won a pedestal in the House of Fame, has thought. Throw that pronouncement with which you cannot agree aside, and go forward with anticipation of pleasure to those things which must commend themselves to you, which must broaden you, give you something of strength or culture which you did not possess before. For you may be sure enough that this man has given of his best to the world, and in that best there must be much that is good. Do not accept Tolstoi in toto, nor Ruskin, nor any other man, unless you clearly can to your own heart and your own soul; yet, read the best thought, balance, think, for thinking, judging, accepting, rejecting, can alone develop the highest type of man and woman, such as it is the duty of every reader who chances upon this to strive to be.

To return, however, to John Ruskin, we have noted that he was art-critic, prophet, social reformer. A few words in regard to his life:

He was born in London, February 8th, 1819, the son of a wine merchant of Scottish origin. Indeed, the influences, teachers and early friends of the future author were chiefly Scottish.

His mother was his first teacher, and it is recorded that, from his infancy, she was astounded at his wonderful memory. From her, perhaps, he inherited the strongly religious bent of his nature, although his love for art, whether in painting, architecture, or literature, undoubtedly came from his father.

In "Præterita," the somewhat garrulous but wholly charming autobiography, written in his old age, he has told us in detail of those early years, and truly never did child experience a more unnatural childhood. At Herne Hill, Dulwich, to which the family removed when he was but four years of age, he began his long, early years of solitude and subjection, for, although babied, even to an astonishing extent when he had long since passed the threshold of manhood, he was, on the other hand, brought up according to the most strictly Puritan ideals. No playmate brightened the lawns at Herne Hill, no sweetmeats nor dainties were permitted, no toys, except a few building blocks. If he cried, he was whipped, and pathetic, indeed, are the accounts of the expedients to which he resorted to amuse himself. "The carpet, and what patterns I could find in bed-covers, dresses or wall-papers to be examined, were," he says, "my chief resources," and later, the watching of "sky, leaves, pebbles, flowers, some nests of ants

in the yard which the gardener would persist in disturbing," and a few birds which, when he managed to get them trustful, the cat usually got.

Doubtless, this plainness of living in the midst of luxury was a source of childish grief to him—he records it as an event that his mother once gave him "three raisins in a forenoon"—but his chief calamity was that he had "nothing to love." His parents, it appears, were too distant toward this one child entrusted to them. They were, he says, but "visible powers of Nature" to him; he had for long enough not even a dog for love and companionship, and he "did not love God" because he "found His service disagreeable"—a result inevitable enough (however beneficial to his manhood, thinking and style of writing), because of the laboriousness with which he was drilled in that service. "My mother forced me," he says, "by steady, daily toil, to learn long chapters of the Bible by heart, as well as to read it, every syllable, through, aloud, hard names and all, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, about once a year." His attendance at church was also, as may be judged, compulsory, and no doubt the mother would have been horrified had she known that in the quiet little man sitting dutifully beside her in the high pew, existed none other than a little rebel, to whom "the horror of Sunday" used even to cast its prescient gloom as far back in the week as Friday." It was against the length and incomprehensibility of the service, however, not the spirit of the worship, that the childish heart rebelled.

As may be imagined, then, Ruskin was thrown early upon books as his chief amusement. To be precise, he was a "bookworm at five," and already sending to the circulating library for his "second volumes." At seven, he began to write books for himself, printing and illustrating them with infinite care, with pen and pencil. His first attempt was a poem, the "Tale of a Mouse," but later he essayed continued stories in prose. In art, his first production was a complete copy of a set of etchings to Grimm's Fairy Tales.

These early years were not, however, all of loneliness and self-resourcefulness. His father chose to be his own travelling agent for the business, and many are the tales which Ruskin tells of happy trips by post-chaise, even up into Scotland, when Mrs. Ruskin accompanied her husband for the sheer pleasure of going, while the little lad sat high between the two, on the small box containing his clothes. There were happy visits, too, to the home of an aunt who had married a baker at Croydon, where there was, for the small boy's chief companion, "Aunt's dog, Towzer, whom she had taken pity on when he was a snappish, starved vagrant, and made a brave and affectionate dog of; which was the kind of thing she did for every living creature that came in her way, all her life long."

While on these trips, too, he saw the mountains, and developed the germ of that affection for them that so marked his life. Indeed, it is told that, when in his fourth year he was asked by the artist commissioned to paint his portrait (James Northcote, R. A.), what he would choose for a background, he immediately answered, "blue hills."

At ten he was put under a tutor, and at twelve began drawing under a master, but no inconsiderable portion of his education was still informally gained from his parents. It was the habit of Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin to read aloud, of evenings, portions of the best literature, and the boy would listen, quietly, and wide-eyed, forming tastes and opinions which were to direct him all the more surely into his subsequent career in life.

It was, however, a gift presented to him when he was fourteen years of age, that marked out for him the especial way by which he was to enter that career—a volume of Roger's "Italy," illustrated by J. M. W. Turner. Almost immediately, it appears, the lad became enamored of Turner. Henceforth, he watched for Turner paintings, copied them, bought them at all hazards, and thus unconsciously prepared himself for the writing of the most remarkable eulogy, perhaps, ever penned, that eulogy of Turner and the conception of art for which he stood, occupying five long volumes, whose writing extended over twenty years of the author's life. And yet, with the writing of "Modern Painters," but a very small portion of the life-work of John Ruskin was accomplished.

It had always been the hope of Mrs. Ruskin that this one son should enter the church. She wanted to make him, he says, in his quietly humorous way, "an ecclesiastical gentleman, with the superfinest of manners, and access to the highest circles of fleshly and spiritual society," but in his case, again, the child proved "father of the man." Even at fifteen, at which time he first went to school, he was scribbling enough for the Architectural Magazine and other journals to earn his pocket-money. When he went up to Oxford, entered as a "gentleman-commoner" at Christ Church, he still kept up this desultory contributing, and with such promise that his letters, then published under the nom-de-plume, "Kata Phusin," were popularly believed to be written by an Oxford Don, and, in this ignorance of the fact that they were the work of a lad of eighteen and thereabouts, were quoted not infrequently as authoritative on matters of art, architecture, and natural history. Those who knew the identity of the writer were astounded. "Your son," wrote Loudon, to Mr. J. J. Ruskin, "is certainly the greatest genius it has been my fortune to become acquainted with; and I cannot but feel proud to think that, at some future period, when both you and I are under the turf, it will be stated in the literary history of your son's life, that the first article of his which was published was in Loudon's Magazine of Natural History."

It does not appear, however, that the young prodigy's sojourn at Oxford was ever a source of very great pleasure, or even of very great profit to him. In "Præterita" he gives us some interesting glimpses of it. He tells, with delightful simplicity, of his awe and awkwardness on first entering the great dining-hall, where "the change from our front parlor at Herne Hill, some fifteen feet by eighteen, and meat and pudding with my mother and Mary (a cousin), to a hall about as big as the nave of Canterbury Cathedral, with its extremity lost in mist, its roof in darkness, and its company an innumerable, unmeasuring vision in vanishing perspective, was in itself more appal-