

that his images are often lyrical, set in too profuse and gorgeous a mosaic. Be it so. But he is always perfectly, transparently clear, absolutely free from affected euphuism, never laboriously "precious," never grotesque, never eccentric. His besetting sins as a master of speech may be summed up in his passion for profuse imagery, and delight in an almost audible melody of words. When Ruskin bursts the bounds of fine taste, and pelts us with perfumed flowers till we almost faint under their odour and their blaze of colour, it is because he is himself intoxicated with the joy of his blossoming thoughts, and would force some of his divine afflatus into our souls.

Ruskin is almost always in an ecstasy of admiration, or in a fervour of sympathy, or in a grand burst of prophetic warning. It is his mission, his nature, his happiness so to be. And it is inevitable that such passion and eagerness should be clothed in language more remote from the language of conversation than is that of Swift or Hume. The language of the preacher is not, nor ought it to be, the language of the critic, the philosopher, the historian. Ruskin is a preacher: right or wrong he has to deliver his message, whether men will stay to hear it or not; and we can no more require him to limit his pace to the plain foot-plodding of unimpassioned prose than we can ask this of Saint Bernard, or of Bossuet, or of Jeremy Taylor, or Thomas Carlyle.

We know that the sentence is too long, preposterously, impossibly sustained—200 words and more—250, nay, 280 words without a single pause—each sentence with 40, 50, 60 commas, colons, and semicolons—and yet the whole symphony flows on with such just modulation, the images melt so

naturally into each other, the harmony of tone and the ease of words is so complete, that we hasten through the passage in a rapture of admiration. Milton began, and once or twice completed, such a resounding voluntary on his glorious organ. But neither Milton, nor Browne, nor Jeremy Taylor, was yet quite master of the mighty instrument. Ruskin, who comes after two centuries of further and continuous progress in this art, is master of the subtle instrument of prose. He has achieved in this rare and perilous art some amazing triumphs of mastery over language, such as the whole history of our literature cannot match.

Lovers of Ruskin (that is, all who read good English books) can recall, and many of them can repeat, hundreds of such passages, and they will grumble at an attempt to select any passage at all. But, to make my meaning clear, I will turn to one or two very famous bits, not at all asserting that they are the most truly noble passages that Ruskin ever wrote, but as specimens of his more lyrical mood.

I take first a well-known piece of an early book (*Modern Painters*, vol. iv. c. i., 1856), the old Tower of Calais Church, a piece which has haunted my memory for nearly forty years:

The large neglect, the noble unsightliness of it; the record of its years written so visibly, yet without sign of weakness or decay; its stern wasteness and gloom, eaten away by the Channel winds, and overgrown with the bitter sea-grasses; its slates and tiles all shaken and rent, and yet not falling; its desert of brickwork, full of bolts, and holes, and ugly fissures, and yet strong, like a bare, brown rock; its carelessness of what any one thinks or feels about it; putting forth no claim, having no beauty, nor desirableness, pride, nor grace; yet neither asking for pity; not, as ruins are, useless and pitiful, feebly or fondly garrulous of better days; but useful still, going through its