

himself, in his garb of frieze and girdle of hemp, were to preach amongst us in Hyde Park to-day, too many of us would listen awhile, and then straightway go about our business with a smile. But John Ruskin is not simply a man of the Thirteenth Century; he is a poet, a mystic, a missionary of the Thirteenth Century—such a poet as was the young Dante in the days of his love and his chivalrous youth, and his Florentine rapture for all beautiful things, or as was the young Petrarch in the lifetime of his Laura, or the young Francis beginning to dream of a regeneration of Christendom through the teaching of his barefoot Friars.

But this being so, it is inevitable that much of his teaching—all the teaching for which he cares most in his heart—must be in our day the voice of one preaching in the wilderness.

The Nineteenth Century has been too strong for him. Iron, steam, science, democracy, have thrust him aside, and have left him in his old age little but a solitary and most pathetic Prophet, such as a John the Baptist by Mantegna, unbending, undismayed, still crying out to a scanty band around him, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'!

Ruskin's genius, as most men admit, will carry him at times into fabulous extravagances, and his exquisite tenderness of soul will oftentimes seem to be but a second childhood in the eyes of the world. Thus it has come to pass that the grotesque side of this noble Evangel of his has been perpetually thrust into the forefront of the fight; and those who have professed or expounded the Gospel of Ruskin have been for the most part such lads and lasses as the world in its grossness regards with impatience, and turns from with a smile.

As one of the oldest and most

fervent believers in his genius and the noble uses to which he has devoted it, I long to say a word or two in support of my belief:—not that I have the shadow of a claim to speak as his disciple, to defend his utterances, or to represent his thoughts.

The world has long been of one mind, I have said, as to the beauty of Ruskin's writing; but I venture to think that even yet full justice has not been rendered to his consummate mastery over our English tongue—that it has not been put high enough, and some of its unique qualities have not been perceived. Now I hold that in certain qualities, in given ways, and in some rarer passages of his, Ruskin not only surpasses every contemporary writer of prose, (which indeed is obvious enough), but he calls out of our glorious English tongue notes more strangely beautiful and inspiring than any ever yet issued from that instrument. No writer of prose before or since has ever rolled forth such mighty fantasias, or reached such pathetic melodies in words, or composed long books in one sustained strain of limpid grace.

It is indeed very far from a perfect style: much less is it in any sense a model style, or one to be cultivated, studied, or followed. If any young aspirant were to think it could be imitated, better were a millstone round his neck and he were cast into the sea. No man can bend the bow of Ulysses: and if he dared to take down from its long rest the terrible weapon, such an one might give himself an ugly wound. Ulysses himself has shot with it wildly, madly, with preposterous overflying of the mark, and blind aiming at the wrong target.

It cannot be denied that Ruskin, especially in his earlier works, is too often obtrusively luscious,