

INTRODUCTION.

JOHN RUSKIN : HIS LIFE AND WORK.

The life of a great man is of perennial interest. In him we see not only the struggles and failures and triumphs of the individual, but also, presented in their most concrete and intelligible form, the struggles of his age, upon whose surges he is, as it were, the crest of a mighty wave. When this great man, pure in life, rich in thought, perfect in style, himself tells the story of his life, as Ruskin does in *Præterita*, our interest is vastly increased and vastly more serviceable to us. His thoughts and actions have their wisest and most sympathetic interpreter, and, set forth by our sure knowledge of the general purposes and habits of thought of the author, each one of his works acquires for us new and increased significance. As one of the tenderest and most thoughtful of English writers, at one who has added a new realm to English literature—the criticism of art, as one who has strengthened English faith in what is pure and beautiful and true, the author of *Sesame and Lilies* is a personality of peculiar interest, whom to know is an entirely worthy and profitable study.

Herne Hill, when Ruskin was a boy, was reached from London by a pleasant suburban road overhung with apple-trees and chestnuts and lilacs. To the north, London; to the east and south, the circling Norwood hills; while Windsor, Harrow, and the valley of the Thames with its stretches of varying woods, formed its western horizon. On Herne Hill stands the house of which Ruskin's father, John Ruskin, of Ruskin, Telford, and Domecq, wine merchants of London, took a lease when the sherry from M. Domecq's Spanish plantation had given prosperity to the firm. A roomy place it is, three storeys and more, with front garden set with evergreens, lilac, and laburnum, and back garden whose walls encircled pear and cherry and apple-trees, and luscious gooseberries and currants—an Eden to the boy's eyes, except that *all* fruit was forbidden.