

THE MORALS OF RUSKIN'S ART.*

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IN responding to an invitation to read a paper before your Young Ladies Alumni Association, I have been actuated in my choice of a subject by two considerations: a desire to present to you something beautiful and therefore worthy of your attention and admiration, and a concurrent desire that the something beautiful should have within itself a mission other than its mere beauty, an echo of itself fraught with a deeper purpose, rendering it worthy also of your esteem and love. Therefore it is that I have chosen the name of John Ruskin, as the sun of inspirations, by the reflected beams of whose transcendent lustre I, myself, "swim into your ken" an humble satellite this evening, for I can think of no other name in English prose literature in whose work is so exquisitely blended the qualities that charm by their grace of form and instruct by their spirit of high emprise.

Furthermore, I conceive that no other man has ever had a loftier conception of womanhood and woman's mission on earth. In his own words, he has "honoured all women with a solemn worship," and his testimony to their mission and example is unimpeachable. Here it is from *Sesame and Lilies*, he is speaking of Shakespeare's heroines: "Such, in broad light, is Shakespeare's testimony to the position and character of women in human life. He represents them as infallibly faithful and wise counsellors—incorruptibly just

and pure examples—strong always to sanctify, even when they cannot save." He proceeds to an estimate of Scott's heroines: "So that in all cases, with Scott as with Shakespeare, it is the woman who watches over, teaches, and guides the youth; it is never, by any chance, the youth who watches over or educates his mistress." He sums up for himself, speaking of woman's mission in the home as wife: "And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her. The stars only may be over her head: The glow-worm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot; but home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar, or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet light far, for those who else were homeless."

Does woman deserve this high estimate, this poet-worship? Many women do I know, thank God! All may. Let it be the endeavour of each so to live that this lofty ideal may not be a mere poet's dream, whether of Shakespeare, Scott or Ruskin, but a very and ever present reality, the embodiment of the vision of a perfection, consistent with the limitations of fallible human nature: Sister of charity, daughter of filial tenderness, partner of fidelity, mother of a changeless and imperishable devotion, so that each may attain to the crown and perfection of all righteous womanhood, the grace and glory of a pure and incorruptible love and trust.

Ruskin is the verbal delineator of the physically beautiful. Not that the verbal delineation of the physi-

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