

bcurs of England" was published nearly forty years ago in 1856 (ætat. 37), and it has now been happily reprinted in a cheap and smaller form, 1895. It is, I believe, as an education in art, as true and as masterly as anything Ruskin ever wrote. But I wish now to treat it only from the point of view of English literature. And I make bold to say that no book in our language shows more varied resources over prose-writing, or an English more pure, more vigorous, more enchanting. It contains hardly any of those tirades with which the preacher loves to drench his hearers—torrents from the fountains of his ecstasy or his indignation. The book is full of enthusiasm and of poetry: but it also contains a body of critical and expository matter simple, lucid, graceful, incisive as anything ever set down by the hand of John Ruskin—or indeed of any other master of our English prose.

Every one remembers the striking sentence with which it opens—a sentence, it may be, exaggerated in meaning, but how melodious, how impressive—"Of all things, living or lifeless, upon this strange earth, there is but one which, having reached the mid-term of appointed human endurance on it, I still regard with unmitigated amazement." This object is the bow of a boat,—“the blunt head of a common, bluff, undecked sea-boat lying aside in its furrow of beach sand.” . . .

The sum of Navigation is in that. You may magnify it or decorate it as you will: you will not add to the wonder of it. Lengthen it into hatchet-like edge of iron,—strengthen it with complex tracery of ribs of oak,—carve it and gild it till a column of light moves beneath it on the sea,—you have made no more of it than it was at first. That rude simplicity of bent plank, that [ *! should be 'which'* ] can breast its way through the death that is in the deep sea, has in it the soul of

shipping. Beyond this, we may have more work, more men, more money; we cannot have more miracle.

The whole passage is loaded with imagery, with fancy, but hardly with conceits; it is wonderfully ingenious, impressive, suggestive, so that a boat is never quite the same thing to any one who has read this passage in early life. The ever-changing curves of the boat recall “the image of a sea-shell.” “Every plank is a Fate, and has men's lives wreathed in the knots of it.” This bow of the boat is “the gift of another world.” Without it, we should be “chained to our rocks.” The very nails that fasten the planks are “the rivets of the fellowship of the world.” “Their iron does more than draw lightning out of heaven, it leads love round the earth.” It is possible to call this fantastic, over-wrought, lyrical: it is not possible to dispute its beauty, charm, and enthusiasm. It seems to me to carry imaginative prose exactly to that limit which to pass would cease to be fitting in prose; to carry fancy to the very verge of that which, if less sincere, less true, less pathetic—would justly be regarded as euphuistic conceit.

And so this splendid hymn to the sea-boat rolls on to that piece which I take to be as fine and as true as anything ever said about the sea, even by our sea poets, Byron or Shelley:

Then, also, it is wonderful on account of the greatness of the enemy that it does battle with. To lift dead weight; to overcome length of languid space; to multiply or systematize a given force; this we may see done by the bar, or beam, or wheel, without wonder. But to war with that living fury of waters, to bare its breast, moment after moment, against the unwearied enmity of ocean,—the subtle, fitful, implacable smiting of the black waves, provoking each other on, endlessly, all the infinite march of the Atlantic rolling on behind them to their help, and still to strike them back into a wreath of smoke