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978-1-108-00856-3 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 8: The Seven Lamps of Architecture

John Ruskin

Excerpt

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THE  
SEVEN LAMPS OF ARCHITECTURE

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[More information](#)PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION<sup>1</sup>

[1849]

§ 1. THE memoranda which form the basis of the following Essay have been thrown together during the preparation of one of the sections of the third volume of *Modern Painters*.<sup>\*</sup> I once thought of giving them a more expanded form; but their utility, such as it may be, would probably be diminished by farther delay in their publication, more than it would be increased by greater care in their arrangement. Obtained in every case by personal observation, there may be among them some details valuable even to the experienced architect; but with respect to the opinions founded upon them I must be prepared to bear the charge of impertinence which can hardly but attach to the writer who assumes a dogmatical tone in speaking of an art he has never practised. There are, however, cases in which men feel too keenly to be silent, and perhaps too strongly to be wrong; I have been forced into this impertinence; and have suffered too much from the

\* The inordinate delay in the appearance of that supplementary volume has, indeed, been chiefly owing to the necessity under which the writer felt himself, of obtaining as many memoranda as possible of mediæval buildings in Italy and Normandy,<sup>2</sup> now in process of destruction, before that destruction should be consummated by the Restorer, or Revolutionist. His whole time has been lately occupied in taking drawings from one side of buildings, of which masons were knocking down the other; nor can he yet pledge himself to any time for the publication of the conclusion of *Modern Painters*; he can only promise that its delay shall not be owing to any indolence on his part.

<sup>1</sup> [For various drafts of this preface collated from the MSS., and containing some additional information with regard to the preparation of the book, see Appendix ii., pp. 278–281. The Preface was reprinted in the second and later editions. The paragraphs are here numbered for purposes of reference.]

<sup>2</sup> [For Ruskin's tour of 1848 in Normandy,<sup>3</sup> see above, Introduction, p. xxix.]

## 4 PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

destruction or neglect of the architecture I best loved, and from the erection of that which I cannot love, to reason cautiously respecting the modesty of my opposition to the principles which have induced the scorn of the one, or directed the design of the other. And I have been the less careful to modify the confidence of my statements of principles, because, in the midst of the opposition and uncertainty of our architectural systems, it seems to me that there is something grateful in any *positive* opinion, though in many points wrong, as even weeds are useful that grow on a bank of sand.

§ 2. Every apology is, however, due to the reader for the hasty and imperfect execution of the plates.<sup>1</sup> Having much more serious work in hand, and desiring merely to render them illustrative of my meaning, I have sometimes very completely failed even of that humble aim; and the text, being generally written before the illustration was completed, sometimes naïvely describes as sublime or beautiful, features which the plate represents by a blot. I shall be grateful if the reader will in such cases refer the expressions of praise to the Architecture, and not to the illustration.

§ 3. So far, however, as their coarseness and rudeness admit, the plates are valuable; being either copies of memoranda made upon the spot, or (Plates IX. and XI.) enlarged and adapted from Daguerreotypes,<sup>2</sup> taken under my own superintendence. Unfortunately, the great distance from the ground of the window which is the subject of Plate IX. renders even the Daguerreotype indistinct; and I cannot answer for the accuracy of any of the mosaic details, more especially of those surrounding the window, which I rather imagine, in the original, to be sculptured in relief. The general proportions are, however, studiously preserved; the spirals of the shafts are counted, and the effect of the whole

<sup>1</sup> [See, however, the letter to the publisher, in Appendix i., p. 276, where Ruskin says that he had been "a little too modest in the Preface." For particulars of the Plates, see above, Introduction, pp. xxxv., xlv., xlix., and below, Appendix ii., p. 279.]

<sup>2</sup> [For a note on Ruskin's interest in the then new art of photography, see Vol. III. p. 210; and *cf.* below, p. 13.]

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION 5

is as near that of the thing itself, as is necessary for the purposes of illustration for which the plate is given.<sup>1</sup> For the accuracy of the rest I can answer, even to the cracks in the stones, and the number of them; and though the looseness of the drawing, and the picturesque character which is necessarily given by an endeavour to draw old buildings as they actually appear, may perhaps diminish their credit for architectural veracity, they will do so unjustly.

§ 4. The system of lettering adopted in the few instances in which sections have been given, appears somewhat obscure in the references, but it is convenient upon the whole. The line which marks the direction of any section is noted, if the section be symmetrical, by a single letter, as *a*; and the section itself by the same letter with a line over it,—*ā*. But if the section be unsymmetrical, its direction is noted by two letters, *a*, *a*<sub>2</sub>, at its extremities; and the actual section by the same letters with lines over them, *ā*, *ā*<sub>2</sub>, at the correspondent extremities.

§ 5. The reader will perhaps be surprised by the small number of buildings to which reference has been made. But it is to be remembered that the following chapters pretend only to be a statement of principles, illustrated each by one or two examples; not an Essay on European architecture; and those examples I have generally taken either from the buildings which I love best, or from the schools of architecture which, it appeared to me, have been less carefully described than they deserved. I could as fully, though not with the accuracy and certainty derived from personal observation, have illustrated the principles subsequently advanced, from the architecture of Egypt, India, or Spain, as from that to which the reader will find his attention chiefly directed, the Italian Romanesque and Gothic. But my affections, as well as my experience, led me to that line of richly varied and magnificently intellectual schools, which reaches, like a high watershed of Christian

<sup>1</sup> [The Plate IX. above referred to is, it must be remembered, the original Plate so numbered, not the frontispiece afterwards substituted for it; a second version of the original Plate IX., more distinct than that used in the first edition, is here given (p. 138): see above, Introduction, p. xlix.]

## 6 PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

architecture, from the Adriatic<sup>1</sup> to the Northumbrian seas, bordered by the impure schools of Spain on the one hand, and of Germany on the other: and as culminating points and centres of this chain, I have considered, first, the cities of the Val d'Arno,<sup>2</sup> as representing the Italian Romanesque and pure Italian Gothic; Venice and Verona as representing the Italian Gothic coloured by Byzantine elements; and Rouen, with the associated Norman cities, Caen, Bayeux, and Coutances, as representing the entire range of Northern architecture from the Romanesque to Flamboyant.

§ 6. I could have wished to have given more examples from our early English Gothic; but I have always found it impossible to work in the cold interiors of our cathedrals; while the daily services, lamps, and fumigation of those upon the Continent, render them perfectly safe. In the course of last summer I undertook a pilgrimage to the English Shrines,<sup>3</sup> and began with Salisbury, where the consequence of a few days' work was a state of weakened health, which I may be permitted to name among the causes of the slightness and imperfection of the present Essay.

<sup>1</sup> [The MS. has "Mediterranean."]

<sup>2</sup> [Later (1874) the title of Ruskin's book on Tuscan art.]

<sup>3</sup> [See above, Introduction, p. xxviii.]

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION<sup>1</sup>

[1855]

§ 1. SINCE the publication of the First Edition of this work, the pursuit of the inquiries I then proposed to myself has enabled me to speak with certainty upon some subjects, which at the time when the following pages were first arranged, I was obliged to approach with hesitation.

I have not, however, except in unimportant particulars, altered the body of the text or added to it. I would only request the reader not to regard it as a complete exponent of the views I am at present engaged in advocating, but rather as an introduction to the more considered and careful statements of those views given in the *Stones of Venice*, and in my Lectures delivered at Edinburgh.<sup>2</sup>

§ 2. I cannot, however, allow this work to pass a second time through the press, without stating in its preface the most important of all the ultimate principles which I have been able subsequently to ascertain.

I found, after carefully investigating the character of the emotions which were generally felt by well-educated people respecting various forms of good architecture, that these emotions might be separated into four general heads:<sup>3</sup>—

(1.) Sentimental Admiration.—The kind of feeling which most travellers experience on first entering a cathedral by

<sup>1</sup> [Not reprinted as such in the edition of 1880; but see Note 3 below. The paragraphs are here numbered for purposes of reference.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, delivered at Edinburgh in November 1853.]

<sup>3</sup> [Cf. *Modern Painters*, vol. v. pt. viii. ch. iii. § 3, where this statement is referred to and further illustrated. The portion of this preface—beginning, “I found after carefully investigating . . .” and ending at “The architectural Museum at Westminster is

## 8 PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

torchlight, and hearing a chant from concealed choristers; or in visiting a ruined abbey by moonlight, or any building with which interesting associations are connected, at any time when they can hardly see it.

(2.) Proud Admiration.—The delight which most worldly people take in showy, large, or complete buildings, for the sake of the importance which such buildings confer on themselves, as their possessors, or admirers.

(3.) Workmanly Admiration.—The delight of seeing good and neat masonry, together with that belonging to incipient developments of taste; as, for instance, a perception of proportion in lines, masses, and mouldings.

(4.) Artistical and rational Admiration.—The delight taken in reading the sculpture or painting on walls, capitals, friezes, &c.

§ 3. Of these four kinds of feeling I found, on farther inquiry, that the first, or sentimental kind, was instinctive and simple; excitable in nearly all persons, by a certain amount of darkness and slow music in a minor key. That it had good uses, and was of a dignified character in some minds; but that on the whole it was apt to rest in theatrical effect, and to be as well satisfied with the incantation scene in “Robert le Diable,” provided there were enough gauze and feux-follets, as by the Cathedral of Rheims. That it might generally be appealed to with advantage as a judge of the relative impressiveness of two styles of art, but was wholly unable to distinguish truth from affectation in the style it preferred. Even in its highest manifestation, in the great mind of Scott, while it indeed led him to lay his scenes in Melrose

one of the institutions which it appears to me most desirable to enrich in this manner” —was, in the edition of 1880, printed as Appendix I., with the addition of the following preliminary sentences:—

“THE FOUR MODES OF ADMIRATION.—(This piece of analysis, which I find to be entirely accurate, was given in the preface to the second edition. I now place it, without interference from other topics, at the close of the volume, where it may be read, I hope, with clearer understanding than it could have been at the beginning,—and to better purpose.)” ]

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION 9

Abbey and Glasgow Cathedral,<sup>1</sup> rather than in St. Paul's or St. Peter's, it did not enable him to see the difference between true Gothic at Glasgow, and false Gothic at Abbotsford.<sup>2</sup> As a critical faculty, I found it was hardly to be taken into consideration in any reasoning on the higher merits of architecture.

§ 4. (2.) Proud Admiration.—This kind of applause, so far from being courted, I found ought altogether to be deprecated by the noble architect, and that no building could be really admirable which was not admirable to the poor. So that there was an essential baseness in the Renaissance (*i.e.* the modern Italian and Greek style), and an essential nobleness in the Gothic, consisting simply in the pride of the one, and the humility of the other. I found the love of largeness, and especially of *symmetry*, invariably associated with vulgarity and narrowness of mind, so that the person most intimately acquainted with the mind of the monarch to whom the Renaissance architecture owed its principal impulse, describing his principles of religion, states that he “was shocked to be told that Jesus Christ spoke the language of the humble and the poor;” and, describing his taste in architecture, says that he “thought of nothing but grandeur, magnificence, and symmetry.”\*

§ 5. (3.) Workmanly Admiration.—This, of course, though right within certain limits, is wholly uncritical, being as easily satisfied with the worst as with the best building, so that the mortar be laid smoothly. As to the feeling with which it is usually united, namely, a delight in the intelligent observance of the proportions of masses, it is good in all the affairs of life, whether regulating the disposition of dishes at a dinner table,†

\* Madame de Maintenon, quoted in *Quarterly Review*, March, 1855, pp. 423–428. She says, afterwards, “He prefers to endure all the draughts from the doors, in order that they may be opposite one another—you must perish in symmetry.”

† “At the château of Madame V., the white-headed butler begged madame to apologise for the central flower-basket on the table: ‘He had not had time to study the composition.’”—*Mrs. Stowe's “Sunny Memories,”* lett. 44.

<sup>1</sup> [*Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Rob Roy.*]

<sup>2</sup> [See Vol. I. p. 163, and *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 92.]

## 10 PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

of ornaments on a dress, or of pillars in a portico. But it no more constitutes the true power of an architect, than the possession of a good ear for metre constitutes a poet; and every building whose excellence consists merely in the proportion of masses is to be considered as nothing more than an architectural doggerel, or rhyming exercise.

§ 6. (4.) Artistical and rational Admiration. — I found, finally, that this, the only admiration worth having, attached itself *wholly* to the meaning of the sculpture and colour on the building. That it was very regardless of general form and size; but intensely observant of the statuary, floral mouldings, mosaics, and other decorations. Upon which, little by little, it gradually became manifest to me that the sculpture and painting were, in fact, the all in all of the thing to be done; that these, which I had long been in the careless habit of thinking subordinate to the architecture, were in fact the entire masters of the architecture; and that the architect who was not a sculptor or a painter,<sup>1</sup> was nothing better than a frame-maker on a large scale. Having once got this clue to the truth, every question about architecture immediately settled itself without farther difficulty. I saw that the idea of an independent architectural profession was a mere modern fallacy, the thought of which had never so much as entered the heads of the great nations of earlier times; but that it had always, till lately, been understood, that in order to have a Parthenon, one had to get a preliminary Phidias; and to have a Cathedral of Florence, a preliminary Giotto; and to have even a Saint Peter's at Rome, a preliminary Michael Angelo. And as, with this new light, I examined the nobler examples of our Gothic cathedrals, it became apparent to me that the master workman must have been the person who carved the bas-reliefs in the porches; that to him all others must have been subordinate, and by him all the rest of the cathedral essentially arranged; but that in fact the whole company of builders, always large, were more or less divided into two great flocks of stone-layers,

<sup>1</sup> [The point of view here had already been taken [by Ruskin in the earliest of his published essays: see *Poetry of Architecture*, § 1, and the note at Vol. I. p. 5.]

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION 11

and sculptors; and that the number of sculptors was so great, and their average talent so considerable, that it would no more have been thought necessary to state respecting the master builder that he could carve a statue, than that he could measure an angle, or strike a curve.\*

§ 7. If the reader will think over this statement carefully he will find that it is indeed true, and a key to many things. The fact is, there are only two fine arts possible to the human race, sculpture and painting. What we call architecture is only the association of these in noble masses, or the placing them in fit places. All architecture other than this is, in fact, mere *building*; and though it may sometimes be graceful, as in the groinings of an abbey roof; or sublime, as in the battlements of a border tower; there is, in such examples of it, no more exertion of the powers of high art, than in the gracefulness of a well-ordered chamber, or the nobleness of a well-built ship of war.

All high art consists in the carving or painting natural objects, chiefly figures:<sup>1</sup> it has always subject and meaning, never consisting solely in arrangement of lines, or even of colours. It always paints or carves something that it sees or believes in; nothing ideal or uncredited.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, it paints and carves the men and things that are visible around it. And as soon as we possess a body of sculptors able, and willing, and having leave from the English public, to carve on

\* The name by which the architect of Cologne Cathedral is designated in the contracts for the work, is "magister lapicida," the "master stone-cutter;" and I believe this was the usual Latin term throughout the middle ages. The architect of the fourteenth century portions of Notre-Dame, Paris, is styled in French, merely "premier masson."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [In his copy for correction, Ruskin here noted in the margin:—

"Introductory Aphorism. 'All great art is either Truth or Praise.'" With which aphorism, *cf.* the heading of *The Laws of Fésole*, ch. i., "All Great Art is Praise."]

<sup>2</sup> [Cf. *Modern Painters*, vol. iii. ch. vii. § 5, where this passage is referred to and further illustrated.]

<sup>3</sup> [So in English documents the architect is often called the *latomus* or *cementarius* (mason). The architect of Winchester College, for instance, seems to have been William Winford, chief mason. See on this subject Mr. Wyatt Papworth's *Notes on the Superintendents of English Buildings in the Middle Ages*, 1860 (republished in the *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, vol. iii. 1887), and Mr. A. F. Leach's *History of Winchester College*, 1899, pp. 106–109.]