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The Works of John Ruskin

VOLUME 9: THE STONES OF VENICE I

JOHN RUSKIN
EDITED BY EDWARD TYAS COOK
AND ALEXANDER WEDDERBURN



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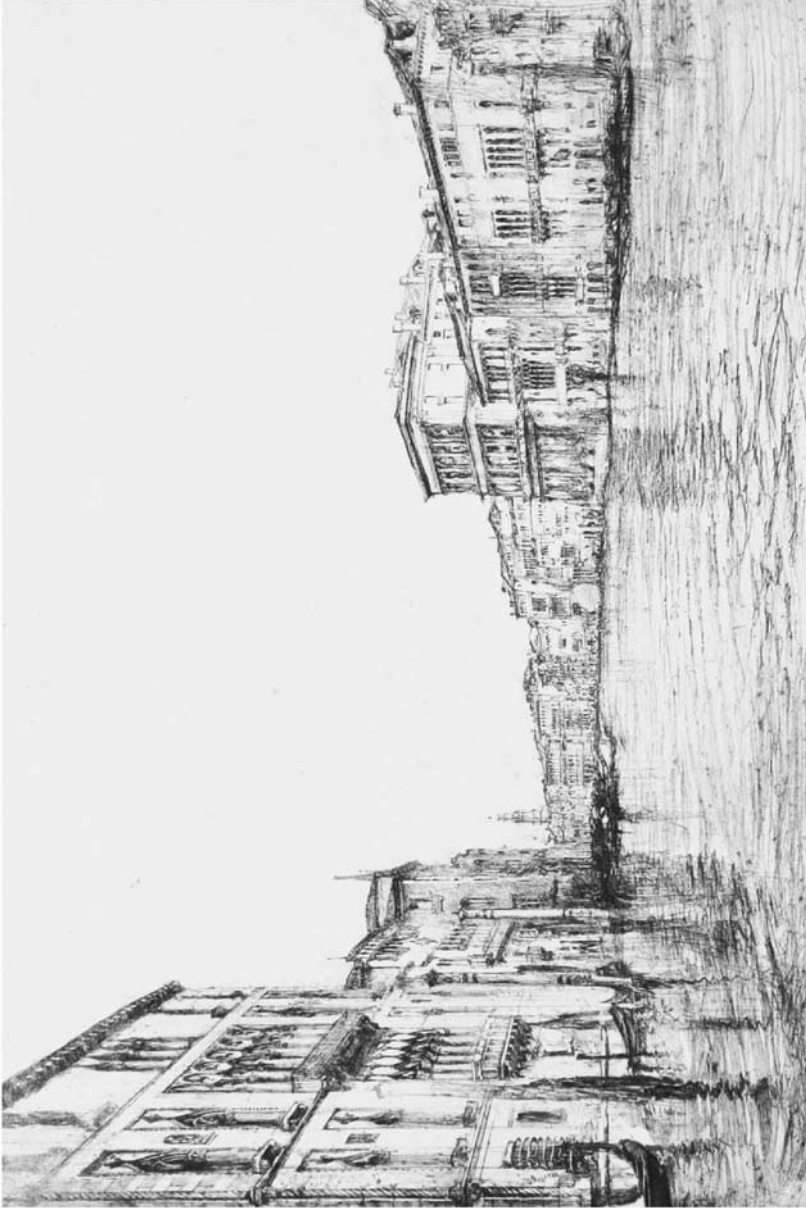
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THE
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VOLUME I

THE FOUNDATIONS

BY

JOHN RUSKIN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR

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Of the additional illustrations, the following have appeared before: the *frontispiece* in the *Art Journal* (August 1882); Plate C (in separated pieces and by line blocks) in *Literature* (August 24, 1901); Plate D, in *Studies in Both Arts* (1895, Plate 5); facsimile No. 1, in the *Strand Magazine* (December 1895); facsimile No. 2, in the *Strand Magazine* (December 1902).

The drawing of the *frontispiece* was No. 81 in the Ruskin Exhibition at the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours, 1901; Plate D was No. 92, and Plate E No. 246 in the same Exhibition.

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INTRODUCTION TO VOL. IX

The Stones of Venice (contained in Vols. IX.–XI.) is the sequel, chronologically and in subject-matter, to *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. At the time when the earlier book was published, Ruskin had the later already in his mind, and had pledged himself to its production, by announcing it as “in preparation.”¹ He subsequently requested his readers to regard *The Seven Lamps* as only “an introduction” to the later and larger work.² In *The Seven Lamps* he defined certain states of moral temper which were necessary, as he maintained, to the production of good architecture. In *The Stones of Venice* his central theme was to illustrate from the rise and fall of Venetian architecture the working of moral and spiritual forces. “He had,” he says,³ “from beginning to end, no other aim than to show that the Gothic architecture of Venice had arisen out of, and indicated in all its features, a state of pure national faith, and of domestic virtue; and that its Renaissance architecture had arisen out of, and in all its features indicated, a state of concealed national infidelity, and of domestic corruption.” The later book may thus be said to be a particular illustration of general principles laid down in the earlier one. This is a view which Ruskin himself incidentally presents in the preface to the second edition of *The Seven Lamps*. He devoted his more elaborate essay to Venice, not because he desired to put forward Venetian Gothic as “the most noble of the schools of Gothic,” but because the architecture of Venice “exemplifies, in the smallest compass, the most interesting facts of architectural history.”⁴ The first volume of *The Stones of Venice*, entitled “The Foundations,” was concerned—after a prelude setting forth the dominant motives of the whole book—with establishing fundamental principles of criticism—gathered in the main from consideration of architectural construction—which were indeed largely illustrated from the schools of Venice, but which are also applicable to works of architecture generally.

¹ See Vol. VIII. p. li.² Preface to 2nd edition of *Seven Lamps*, Vol. VIII. p. 7.³ *Crown of Wild Olive*, § 65.⁴ See Vol. VIII. p. 13.

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The leading ideas in the author's mind were, then, the same in both books. The same also was the impulse which led to the production of the one close upon the other. We have seen¹ how he hurried himself into *The Seven Lamps*, under pressure of the destructive forces of Neglect and "Restoration"; and so now it was his feeling that the charm of Venice was evanescent, his sight of the daily mouldering or rending of its walls, that drove him to postpone the completion of *Modern Painters* once more, until he had deciphered and imparted the lessons of the Stones of Venice. The title—as was often the case with Ruskin—had a double meaning. He hoped to make those Stones touchstones²—tests of the good and the bad in all architecture; crucial examples, too, of the connection between national feeling and national architecture. And, secondly, it was from a city fast falling into ruin that his teaching was to be drawn: "Thy servants think upon their stones, and it pitieth them to see her in the dust."³ The prophet had no time to lose in uttering his message, for the waves were gaining fast against the STONES OF VENICE.⁴

There was destined, however—as not unusually with Ruskin's eager undertakings—to be some delay. *The Seven Lamps* was published in May 1849; *The Stones of Venice* was not completed till October 1853. The principal cause of the delay was the unexpected difficulty and complexity of the task, as explained in the Preface to this Volume,⁵ to which may be added, as we shall see, the conscientious minuteness of the author's studies. At the outset, however, Ruskin felt the need of a holiday, after the strain of finishing *The Seven Lamps*. On the completion of that book, he went abroad, as we have seen,⁶ with his parents. As he had turned to architecture in relief from studies on *Modern Painters*, so now he sought relaxation from architecture for a while in resuming studies in painting and natural scenery. He went accordingly on his old road by Champagne and Geneva to the Alps. At Chamouni he felt once more at home, and the sense of rest and relief was strong within him, as this extract from his diary shows:—

August 15.— . . . I never saw the valley look so lovely as it did to-night, with its noble quiet slopes of deep, deep green and grey; and above them the rich orange of the Aiguilles. I know not where else [one sees]

¹ Introduction to Vol. VIII. p. xx.

² See below, ch. i. § 49, p. 57.

³ Quoted in *Stones of Venice*, vol. iii. ch. v. (added in the "Travellers' Edition").

⁴ See below, ch. i. § 1, p. 17.

⁵ See below, p. 3.

⁶ Vol. VIII. p. xxxv.

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this green and orange, united by purple, as they are at the time when the sun has left the pines and stays on the granite. The great fall was bounding as it did, now with wilder crashes, I thought, as the wind brought its roar to me across the fields—the sweet level fields—all the tenderness of the forest lowland, with the calm and freshness of the mountain, not the hillocky wilderness of Zermatt, nor the ruined desolation of Courmayeur, but all full of peace and joy and power. I was almost in tears as I watched the light declining behind the grand pines' sweep and rugged crest of the noble Breven once more.

It is unnecessary in this introduction to follow him upon this tour, for he has himself elsewhere described it in some detail.¹ Such supplementary particulars as diaries and letters supply are given, not here, but in the introduction to vols. iii. and iv. of *Modern Painters*, because they refer to studies and impressions which made their mark in that work. It was now once more the turn of geology and the varying aspects of field and sky to take first place in his attention. On this tour also he spent several days in the galleries of the Louvre, and wrote elaborate notes on many of the pictures there (printed in a later volume of this edition). His general reading was diligently continued. The diaries and notebooks show, besides his constant study (close and minute) of the Bible, that he was deep in Dante and Aristophanes during this tour; he was also reading Carlyle with particular attention, and among other books which impressed him was the *Nouvelle Héloïse* of Rousseau; it “has given me,” he says, “as much pleasure as surprise considering the way it is abused, but I must read more ere I judge.”² Perhaps it was the reading of Rousseau that suggested to him an essay which he began to write at Chamouni (July 1, 1849), but did not carry very far, on “Principles of Virtue.” At Courmayeur (July 29) he began another on a different subject—“The Uses of Ignorance.” It had occurred to him, he notes, owing to “the diminution which my knowledge of the Alps had made in my sublime impressions of them, and by the way in which the investigation of strata and structure reduces all mountain sublimity to mere debris and wall-building.”³ The wall-building of the Matterhorn supplied him, however, with materials for some effective pages in this volume (ch. v.); and though his principal interests on this summer tour of 1849 were mountains, clouds and pictures, he did not omit the

¹ *Præterita*, ii. ch. xi. See also *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 90.

² Further study did not altogether alter his view of Rousseau's influence: see *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, §§ 92, 93, and compare, at a later date and in a different connection, *Catalogue of the Educational Series*, No. 59. See also *Præterita*, i. ch. vi. § 134; ii. ch. v. §§ 84, 210; *Fiction, Fair and Foul*, § 73.

³ Compare the letter to Mr. C. E. Norton, cited below, p. xxvii.

opportunity, when at Amiens and Dijon, of making minute studies of the architecture in those cities. An occasional passage in his miscellaneous reading shows that the Stones of Venice, and their lessons, were still before his mind. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, he notes after reading her letters,¹ “does not say a word of the buildings, or beauty or history of the place,” but much of its gaieties and pageants; of the heavy play carried on far into the night; of the easy morals and gorgeous spectacles of that “centre of pleasure.” “There is something bitterly melancholy to me,” he adds, “in reading the short sentences which tell so much of pomp, pride and thoughtlessness of what was to come upon them. I had no idea that the magnificence of Venice had endured so long.”

Ruskin had no sooner returned to England with his parents after their Alpine journey than he set out again with his wife, bound for Venice. He showed her Chamouni on the way, and they went slowly through North Italy, arriving in November in Venice, where they established themselves at the Hotel Danieli for the winter.² This sojourn lasted from November to March, and like another sojourn two years later (Sept. 1, 1851–June 29, 1852), was a period of unremitting toil. Ruskin said at a later time that he “gave three years’ close and incessant labour to the examination of the chronology of the architecture of Venice,” and spent “two long winters in the drawing of details on the spot.”³ That this is no exaggeration, his diaries, note-books, sketches, and other graphic memoranda abundantly testify. The labour was fourfold; he read, he observed, he noted and measured, and he drew. He had already gone through, as he elsewhere says,⁴ a “steady course of historical reading”—in Sismondi, Alison, Daru, among other authors—in preparation for *The Stones of Venice*. At Venice itself he delved, with guiding help from Rawdon Brown,⁵ into the archives of the city and into the works of sundry local writers on its art and topography. Such reading may have given him a ground plan, and furnished him with hypotheses *pour servir*; but the conflict of authorities on the chronology of the Ducal Palace, and the absence of trustworthy data or established conclusions in the case of

¹ See *Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, edited by Lord Wharncliffe, 3 vols., 1837. She was at Venice at various times between 1739 and 1761.

² The itinerary of the tour of 1849–1850 was as follows: Dijon (Oct. 6), Chamouni (Oct. 17), Milan (Oct. 27), Monza, Lecco (Nov. 1), Verona (Nov. 7), Venice (Nov. 1849–March 1850), Padua (March 7), Vicenza, Verona (March 11), Pavia, Cremona, Genoa, Avignon (March 31), Orange, Valence, Vienne, Lyons, Bourges (April 10). The dates are those which happen to be given in the diary.

³ *A Joy for Ever*, § 141 n.

⁴ *Præterita*, iii. ch. i. § 7.

⁵ For whom see below, p. 420 n.

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A.



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other buildings,¹ speedily threw him back on his own resources; he must take nothing, he perceived, for granted or at second-hand. During this winter of 1849–1850, therefore, and similarly two years later, he devoted himself to close study of all the remaining edifices of the city. The “Venetian Index” (Vol. XI.) covers a great deal of ground, and the book itself bears emphatic evidence to the minuteness of his study; but the results that he garnered for publication, the conclusions at which he ultimately arrived, convey but a faint idea of his preparatory studies. Elsewhere referring to *The Stones of Venice* and his work upon the spot, he says,² “six hundred quarto pages of notes for it, fairly and closely written, now useless. Drawings as many—of a sort; useless too.” This is an under-estimate, and it may be interesting to give an account, from an inspection of the materials still extant, of his method of work.

The greater part of each day, so long as light availed, seems to have been spent out of doors, in measuring and examining the buildings, or in making drawings. He carried with him little square note-books, of a size easily pocketable, in which he entered measurements, contours of mouldings, and the like, with occasionally slight notes of colour. A large number of these books, evidently those in which he made his first notes for *The Stones of Venice*, are preserved at Brantwood. In the evening Ruskin entered up his memoranda and impressions in larger note-books. These are the “quarto pages” mentioned above, and are referred to in this edition as “the diary.” In them, all important measurements were entered; distinctive or remarkable features of each building examined during the day were fully noted; and suggestions or impressions were written out. He avoided foregone conclusions. He often notes such and such an observation as provisional, requiring further examination or subsequent comparison with other buildings.³ As the work progressed, cross-references were supplied, and at the end, each volume of the Venetian diary was fully indexed. Ruskin, when he came to write the ultimate treatise, spoke by the book.⁴

These written materials represent, however, but half of his preliminary

¹ See Preface below, p. 3.

² *Præterita*, iii. ch. i. § 10.

³ For an instance of “a conclusion” altered on further study, see below, p. 292.

⁴ A passage in T. A. Trollope’s *Autobiography* gives the evidence of one who followed in Ruskin’s footsteps: “I spent several mornings in carefully hunting out all the specimens of Byzantine architecture which Ruskin registers as still existing in Venice, and can testify to the absolute exactitude of his topographical and architectural statements. I carefully examined also the examples which he cites as indications of subtle design on the part of the old architects in cases where abnormality and carelessness might be suspected. His facts and measurements I found invariably correct, but am disposed to think that he lets his hobby somewhat run away with him in the imputation of far-fetched and subtle design” (*What I Remember*, vol. iii. p. 217).

toil. To the plates illustrating the book, reference is made presently (p. xlix.); but the drawings which were engraved are only a few of those that were made. The woodcuts similarly represent only a small number of hundreds of careful diagrams, figures, and sketches of architectural details, which the author drew during the preparation of this book.¹ Sheets with pen drawings on them or with sketches in pencil and wash attached to them, are no doubt fair copies of the author's first graphic memoranda, just as the diaries were of his written notes.

Pre-occupied though Ruskin was with architectural detail, he found time to note also in his diary the broader effects of sea and sky, to which Venice owes no small portion of her charm:—

Tuesday, Nov. 20.—I got chilled to-day as I was drawing in the arcade of Doge's Palace, and ran away to the Rialto to warm myself, . . . [and then on] to the quay of Murano. It was a grey day; the sky lay in calm horizontal bars far to the northern horizon; then it suddenly broke to an open, long gulph of amber green; and against this, clear in rainy air, rose the chains of the Tyrolese Alps—one gloomy, serrated rank of purple grey, so clear that every field of snow was seen on their summits, though untouched by light, and all grim and wild against the sky. But at the end of the range, right over Murano—we being on the quay of the Jesuiti—burning crests of snow were seen mingled among bars of cloud and gaps of sky, relieved against grey sea cloud behind. The sun was seen setting, the calm space of sky changed not—the clouds, as motionless as the hills, and as defined—held up their waved curtain from off the field of gold; and the dark mountain chain, countless in its serration, and gathering together of pointed peaks, lay as sharp and shattered against the amber air, as if it had been a mass of near Highland hills.

Sunday, December 30.—I was to-day rambling, or rather running, among the quiet and melancholy canals which extend between the Madonna dell' Orto and Sta. Fosca:—the winter sun glowing on the deep red brick, and the canal beneath turned into a chasm of light—divided into sharp squares of blue and vermilion, as if the houses were standing on a scarlet carpet. They are lonely and stagnant canals, bordered for the most part by the dead walls of gardens, now waste ground; or by patches of dark mud, with decayed black gondolas lying keel upmost, sinking into the putrid and black ground gradually; or by remnant of palace wall, never finished, of which the doors and the angle shafts alone remain. Farther on, one comes to detached groups of low and filthy houses, with mud paths trodden hard between

¹ Several such sheets covered with notes and drawings and diagrams still remain. There are 166 at Brantwood, and others in the possession of Mr. Wedderburn and Mr. Allen.