CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information

# LECTURES ON ART

## LECTURE I[1]

### INAUGURAL

1. The duty which is to-day laid on me, of introducing, among the elements of education appointed in this great University, one not only new, but such as to involve in its possible results some modification of the rest, is, as you well feel, so grave, that no man could undertake it without laying himself open to the imputation of a kind of insolence; and no man could undertake it rightly, without being in danger of having his hands shortened by dread of his task, and mistrust of himself.

And it has chanced to me, of late, to be so little acquainted either with pride or hope, that I can scarcely recover so much as I now need, of the one for strength, and of the other for foresight, except by remembering that noble persons, and friends of the high temper that judges most clearly where it loves best, have desired that this trust should be given me; and by resting also in the conviction that the goodly tree whose roots, by God's help, we set in earth to-day, will not fail of its height because the planting of it is under poor auspices, or the first shoots of it enfeebled by ill gardening.

2. The munificence of the English gentleman to whom we owe the founding of this Professorship[2] at once in our three great Universities,[3] has accomplished the first great

[1] [Delivered on February 8, 1870.]
[2] [See above, Introduction, p. xix.]
[3] [The Slade Chairs of Fine Arts were founded in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and in University College, London.]



© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information



group of a series of changes now taking gradual effect in our system of public education; which, as you well know, are the sign of a vital change in the national mind, respecting both the principles on which that education should be conducted, and the ranks of society to which it should extend. For, whereas it was formerly thought that the discipline necessary to form the character of youth was best given in the study of abstract branches of literature and philosophy, it is now thought that the same, or a better, discipline may be given by informing men in early years of the things it will be of chief practical advantage to them afterwards to know; and by permitting to them the choice of any field of study which they may feel to be best adapted to their personal dispositions. I have always used what poor influence I possessed in advancing this change;[1] nor can any one rejoice more than I in its practical results. But the completion—I will not venture to say, correction—of a system established by the highest wisdom of noble ancestors, cannot be too reverently undertaken: and it is necessary for the English people, who are sometimes violent in change in proportion to the reluctance with which they admit its necessity, to be now, oftener than at other times, reminded that the object of instruction here is not primarily attainment, but discipline;[2] and that a youth is sent to our Universities, not (hitherto at least) to be apprenticed to a trade, nor even always to be advanced in a profession; but, always, to be made a gentleman and a scholar.[3]

[1] [See especially Appendix 7 in *Stones of Venice*, vol. iii. (Vol. XI. pp. 258 *seq.*).]
[2] [On education as an ethical process, compare Vol. XIX. p. 171.]
[3] [In one of the MS. drafts of the lecture there is here the following passage on "Gentlemen and Scholars" (compare *Aratra Pentelici*, § 236; below, p. 366):—

"Now it is probable that by the Laws of Heaven it may be determined that every man shall live by doing his proper duty, or *devoir*, and no otherwise. Let us, therefore, first define the characters of the gentleman and scholar, and ascertain the proper work of each.

"A Gentleman is a person trained so as to be full of mercy and desirous of honour; that is to say, the praise of good men, especially of his children and their descendants, and the praise of God. This fulness of mercy and desire of praise are so inseparably connected with purity of race that in the transition from the language which will without doubt remain as the means of intercourse between educated persons of all nations to that which

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information



3. To be made these,—if there is in him the making of either. The populaces of civilized countries have lately been under a feverish impression that it is possible for all men to be both; and that having once become, by passing through certain mechanical processes of instruction, gentle

will certainly become the expression of the activity of their dominant power, *gentilis* and *generosus* become expressive of moral dispositions as they change into *gentle* and *generous;* and *notabilis* gradually contrasts and intensifies itself into *nobilis* and *noble.* Now, gentlemen, for the sake of continuity of statement, I must permit myself to repeat to you what you well know, that one of the chief uses, if not the chief use, of the study of letters is to discern in the language of great nations the central ideas by which they lived; for it is certain that the thoughts which led them to their greatness must be founded on an unfailing truth. And, therefore, not as the curious tradition of a barbaric time, but as indicating the root of a power which is to last through all time, you must remember always the first meaning of the words Lord and Lady, as Givers or dividers of bread. For in that word is summed the *devoir* of the governing race. Their Mercy and their Honour are both in this, that they are givers of bread, not takers of it, and replenishers of earth, not devastators of it. Full of mercy, observe; that is to say, occupied in aiding and protecting the life of men upon the earth; and as throughout nature the corruption of any good is for the most part into a contrary form of evil, we may read in the very madness of the war which has been the delight and sustenance of kings, the corruption of their true function to its contrary, and perceive also that their true strength and all possibility of their continuance lay not in that, but in the reverse of that in whatever true care and help to the people was given by those who were in any wise true kings. And it is in maintaining contention with all forms of evil and death, and rightly ordering the natural elements favourable to man's existence—above all, in justly governing the energies of Life itself, and extending the civilization which is the making of civil persons, that the purest happiness of humanity is to be reached, and the phases of its intelligence which are certainly highest, whether terminating in themselves, or fitting us, if that be conceivable, for companionship with spiritual natures greater and kinder than our own.

"Practically, therefore, the first school which youths have to enter at the University is that of Gentleness; in which they may both learn how to take, and recognize it for their duty to take, such captaincy over the Poor as shall enable them to feed and clothe them by leading them in disciplined troops to fruitful labour by land and sea, by being first in adventure, last in endurance, strongest in war with adverse element and circumstance, and above all things just in magistracy by watchful reward of virtue, and fearless quenching of crime. This is the work of the Knights and Lords of England, to become Knights Templars of the Temple of God, which is the Body and Spirit of His poor.

"Thus, then, of the character and work of Gentlemen. Next, we have to ask what is the farther character and work of the Scholar, who must be this and more. We may be sure that in this case also the true nature of both has been corrupted and superseded largely by a false one which takes its name, and is its exact contrary; so that, as you have a malignant and destroying, instead of a healing, Authority, so you have a turbulent and deceiving, instead of a peaceful and instructing Scholarship, and that as the power of the king has passed from him because he used it to slay,

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

Cambridge

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information



and learned, they are sure to attain in the sequel the consummate beatitude of being rich.[1]

Rich, in the way and measure in which it is well for them to be so, they may, without doubt, *all* become. There is indeed a land of Havilah open to them, of which the wonderful sentence is literally true—"The gold of *that* land is good."[2] But they must first understand, that education, in its deepest sense, is not the equalizer, but the discerner, of men;* and that, so far from being instruments for the collection of riches, the first lesson of wisdom is to disdain them, and of gentleness, to diffuse.

It is not therefore, as far as we can judge, yet possible

* The full meaning of this sentence, and of that which closes the paragraph, can only be understood by reference to my more developed statements on the subject of Education in *Modern Painters* and in *Time and Tide*.[3] The following fourth paragraph is the most pregnant summary of my political and social principles I have ever been able to give. [1887.]

---

> so the power of the teacher has passed from him because he has used it to deceive and has taken away the Key of Knowledge, and entering not in himself, them that would enter in he, under religious pretext, has also hindered. And we may be sure that the true scholar, being the exact contrary of this, will be one who by resolute withdrawal of himself from all pursuit of the objects of vulgar anxiety and avarice, obtains such rest of body and peace of heart as may enable him at last to enter into the shade of the Avenues that encompass the Acropolis of Heaven, and into the Leschai that lead to the temple of its Light, therein to be taught by Nature and by the Lord of Nature, and by all the dead who rest with him."

For "the first meaning of the words Lord and Lady," see *Sesame and Lilies*, § 88 (Vol. XVIII. p. 138 and *n.*). For the Bible reference, see Matthew xxiii. 13. In "the Leschai that lead to the temple of its Light," Ruskin refers to the arcades or corridors (λέσχαι), usually dedicated to Apollo, which were used as centres of reunion and discussion.]

[1] [In one of the early drafts this passage stood as follows:—

> ". . . of being rich. But the dream of this discoverable Eden, filled with forests of trees of knowledge whose fruit is good for food, and traversed by rivers of life whose sands are good for coinage, will soon be painfully dispelled; and it will be comfortlessly, but surely, apprehended by them that education is not the equalizer, but the discerner and separator of men; and that, so far from being instruments for the attainment of riches, the first lesson of wisdom is to despise them, and of gentleness, to diffuse."

For the Bible reference here, see Genesis ii. 9, 10; and for education as the discerner of men, *Time and Tide*, § 171 (Vol. XVII. pp. 456–457).]

[2] [Genesis ii. 11, 12.]

[3] [Vol. VI. pp. 482–485; Vol. VII. pp. 427–429; and Vol. XVIII. pp. 456–457. See also General Index, *s.* Education.]

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information



for all men to be gentlemen and scholars. Even under the best training some will remain too selfish to refuse wealth, and some too dull to desire leisure. But many more might be so than are now; nay, perhaps all men in England might one day be so, if England truly desired her supremacy among the nations to be in kindness and in learning. To which good end, it will indeed contribute that we add some practice of the lower arts to our scheme of University education; but the thing which is vitally necessary is, that we should extend the spirit of University education to the practice of the lower arts.

4. And, above all, it is needful that we do this by redeeming them from their present pain of self-contempt, and by giving them *rest*. It has been too long boasted as the pride of England, that out of a vast multitude of men, confessed to be in evil case, it was possible for individuals, by strenuous effort, and rare good fortune, occasionally to emerge into the light, and look back with self-gratulatory scorn upon the occupations of their parents, and the circumstances of their infancy. Ought we not rather to aim at an ideal of national life, when, of the employments of Englishmen, though each shall be distinct, none shall be unhappy or ignoble; when mechanical operations, acknowledged to be debasing in their tendency,* shall be deputed to less fortunate and more covetous races; when advance from rank to rank, though possible to all men, may be rather shunned than desired by the best; and the chief object in the mind of every citizen may not be extrication from a condition admitted to be disgraceful, but fulfilment of a duty which shall be also a birthright?

5. And then, the training of all these distinct classes will not be by Universities of general knowledge, but by distinct schools of such knowledge as shall be most useful for every class: in which, first the principles of their special business may be perfectly taught, and whatever higher learning, and cultivation of the faculties for receiving

* "τέχναι ἐπίρρητοι," compare page 113.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information



and giving pleasure, may be properly joined with that labour, taught in connection with it. Thus, I do not despair of seeing a School of Agriculture,[1] with its fully-endowed institutes of zoology, botany, and chemistry; and a School of Mercantile Seamanship, with its institutes of astronomy, meteorology, and natural history of the sea: and, to name only one of the finer, I do not say higher, arts, we shall, I hope, in a little time, have a perfect school of Metal-work, at the head of which will be, not the ironmasters, but the goldsmiths; and therein, I believe, that artists, being taught how to deal wisely with the most precious of metals, will take into due government the uses of all others.[2]

But I must not permit myself to fail in the estimate of my immediate duty, while I debate what that duty may hereafter become in the hands of others; and I will therefore now, so far as I am able, lay before you a brief general view of the existing state of the arts in England, and of the influence which her Universities, through these newly-founded lectureships, may, I hope, bring to bear upon it for good.

6. We have first to consider the impulse which has been given to the practice of all the arts[3] by the extension of our commerce, and enlarged means of intercourse with foreign nations, by which we now become more familiarly acquainted with their works in past and in present times. The immediate result of these new opportunities, I regret to say, has been to make us more jealous of the genius of others, than conscious of the limitations of our own; and

[1] [A School of Agriculture was established in Cambridge in 1899, and a School of Forestry (transferred from Cooper's Hill) at Oxford in 1905.]

[2] [Eds. 1-3 added here:—

> ". . . all others; having in connection with their practical work splendid institutes of chemistry and mineralogy, and of ethical and imaginative literature.
>
> "And thus I confess myself more interested in the final issue of the change in our system of central education, which is to-day consummated by the admission of the manual arts into its scheme, than in any direct effect likely to result upon ourselves from the innovation. But I must not . . ."]

[3] [Eds. 1-3 add: "of which the object is the production of beautiful things."]

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

Cambridge
Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information



to make us rather desire to enlarge our wealth by the sale of art, than to elevate our enjoyments by its acquisition.

Now, whatever efforts we make, with a true desire to produce, and possess, things that are intrinsically beautiful, have in them at least one of the essential elements of success. But efforts having origin only in the hope of enriching ourselves by the sale of our productions, are *assuredly* condemned to dishonourable failure; not because, ultimately, a well-trained nation is forbidden to profit by the exercise of its peculiar art-skill; but because that peculiar art-skill can never be developed *with a view* to profit.[1] The right fulfilment of national power in art depends always on the direction of its aim by the experience of ages.[2] Self-knowledge is not less difficult, nor less necessary for the direction of its genius, to a people than to an individual; and it is neither to be acquired by the

[1] [One of the early drafts has an additional passage in this connexion:—

"All good work is done by a company of poor men. This law is a very stern and singular one, but inevitable. Agriculture, by which the world lives, has been done either by the hands of slaves, or of labourers who only obtained such share of the produce as was sufficient for their life, and happy those who can get of it so much. The good building of the world has been done by poor and nameless builders, mason and master mason working together. The good painting, for low fixed salaries; Mantegna's, for thirty pounds a year; Titian's, John Bellini's, and Carpaccio's for five ducats a month. The best poetry has been done for no salary at all; but for casual alms, as the *Iliad;* or bitter bread, as the *Divina Commedia.* Chaucer, indeed,—"well of English undefiled"—had salary, thirteen pounds a year and a pitcher of wine daily; but when he was seventy years old, was borrowing a few shillings from week to week in advance of his pension. The sweet songs of Scotland were written for small pay beside the plough furrow; and if ever silver and gold were prized by the country lover of Ann Hathaway, it was but in the lilies of Avon. In science, calculate the pay of Galileo, Kepler, Linnæus, and Newton; and set the sum beside what estimate you can make of the wages that the world gives ignorance. In war, count the pay that Marathon was fought for, Sempach and Marston Moor; and then set beside that, some example of the wages the world pays to its robbers. You may sometimes have imagined that all this was wrong, and to be amended in these wiser days. But not so. This is eternally right, and may never be changed."

Compare Vol. XVI. pp. 83 and *nn.*, 183–185. For the references to Italian painters and their salaries, see *Guide to the Venetian Academy;* for the bitter bread of Dante's exile, see *Paradiso,* xvii. 59; particulars about the pension of Chaucer (the description of whom Ruskin quotes from Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* iv. 2, 32) may be found in any life of the poet (see, *e.g.,* vol. i. p. 31 of Chaucer's Works in "Bohn's Standard Library"); for the rewards of Kepler and other pioneers of science, see Vol. VII. p. 449.]

[2] [The words "the direction . . . ages" were put into capitals in 1887.]

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information



eagerness of unpractised pride, nor during the anxieties of improvident distress. No nation ever had, or will have, the power of suddenly developing, under the pressure of necessity, faculties it had neglected when it was at ease; nor of teaching itself, in poverty, the skill to produce what it has never, in opulence, had the sense to admire.

7. Connected also with some of the worst parts of our social system, but capable of being directed to better result than this commercial endeavour, we see lately a most powerful impulse given to the production of costly works of art, by the various causes which promote the sudden accumulation of wealth in the hands of private persons. We have thus a vast and new patronage, which, in its present agency, is injurious to our schools; but which is nevertheless in a great degree earnest and conscientious, and far from being influenced chiefly by motives of ostentation. Most of our rich men would be glad to promote the true interests of art in this country: and even those who buy for vanity, found their vanity on the possession of what they suppose to be best.

It is therefore in a great measure the fault of artists themselves if they suffer from this partly unintelligent, but thoroughly well-intended, patronage. If they seek to attract it by eccentricity, to deceive it by superficial qualities, or take advantage of it by thoughtless and facile production, they necessarily degrade themselves and it together, and have no right to complain afterwards that it will not acknowledge better-grounded claims. But if every painter of real power would do only what he knew to be worthy of himself, and refuse to be involved in the contention for undeserved or accidental success, there is indeed, whatever may have been thought or said to the contrary, true instinct enough in the public mind to follow such firm guidance. It is one of the facts which the experience of thirty years enables me to assert without qualification, that a really good picture is ultimately always approved and bought, unless it is wilfully rendered offensive to the public by faults

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information



which the artist has been either too proud to abandon or too weak to correct.

8. The development of whatever is healthful and serviceable in the two modes of impulse which we have been considering, depends however, ultimately, on the direction taken by the true interest in art which has lately been aroused by the great and active genius of many of our living, or but lately lost, painters, sculptors, and architects. It may perhaps surprise, but I think it will please you to hear me, or (if you will forgive me, in my own Oxford, the presumption of fancying that some may recognize me by an old name) to hear the author of *Modern Painters*[1] say, that his chief error in earlier days was not in over estimating, but in too slightly acknowledging the merit of living men. The great painter whose power, while he was yet among us, I was able to perceive, was the first to reprove me for my disregard of the skill of his fellow-artists;[2] and, with this inauguration of the study of the art of all time,—a study which can only by true modesty end in wise admiration, —it is surely well that I connect the record of these words of his, spoken then too truly to myself, and true always more or less for all who are untrained in that toil,— "You don't know how difficult it is."

You will not expect me, within the compass of this lecture, to give you any analysis of the many kinds of excellent art (in all the three great divisions) which the complex demands of modern life, and yet more varied instincts of modern genius, have developed for pleasure or service. It must be my endeavour, in conjunction with my colleagues in the other Universities,[3] hereafter to enable you to appreciate these worthily; in the hope that also the

[1] [*Modern Painters*, it will be remembered, was published as "by a Graduate of Oxford," the author's name being first given on the title-page of *Seven Lamps* (1849), which was described as being by "John Ruskin, author of 'Modern Painters'" (see Vol. VIII. p. li.]

[2] [Compare Vol. XII. p. 129 and *n*.]

[3] [The first Slade Professor at Cambridge was Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt (succeeded in 1873 by Mr. Sidney Colvin); and at University College, London, Sir Edward Poynter.]

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00868-6 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 20
John Ruskin
Excerpt
More information



members of the Royal Academy, and those of the Institute of British Architects, may be induced to assist, and guide, the efforts of the Universities, by organizing such a system of art-education for their own students, as shall in future prevent the waste of genius in any mistaken endeavours; especially removing doubt as to the proper substance and use of materials;[1] and requiring compliance with certain elementary principles of right, in every picture and design exhibited with their sanction. It is not indeed possible for talent so varied as that of English artists to be compelled into the formalities of a determined school; but it must certainly be the function of every academical body to see that their younger students are guarded from what must in every school be error; and that they are practised in the best methods of work hitherto known, before their ingenuity is directed to the invention of others.

9. I need scarcely refer, except for the sake of completeness in my statement, to one form of demand for art which is wholly unenlightened, and powerful only for evil;—namely, the demand of the classes occupied solely in the pursuit of pleasure, for objects and modes of art that can amuse indolence or excite passion.[2] There is no need for any discussion of these requirements, or of their forms of influence, though they are very deadly at present in their operation on sculpture, and on jewellers' work. They cannot be checked by blame, nor guided by instruction; they are merely the necessary result of whatever defects exist in the temper and principles of a luxurious society; and it is only by moral changes, not by art-criticism, that their action can be modified.

10. Lastly, there is a continually increasing demand for popular art, multipliable by the printing-press, illustrative of daily events, of general literature, and of natural science. Admirable skill, and some of the best talent of modern times, are occupied in supplying this want; and there is

[1] [Compare Vol. XVI. p. 44.]
[2] [Eds. 1–3 read "satisfy sensibility" for "excite passion."]

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org