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John Ruskin

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The influence of John Ruskin (1819–1900), both on his own time and on artistic and social developments in the twentieth century, cannot be over-stated. He changed Victorian perceptions of art, and was the main influence behind ‘Gothic revival’ architecture. As a social critic, he argued for the improvement of the condition of the poor, and against the increasing mechanisation of work in factories, which he believed was dull and soul-destroying. The thirty-nine volumes of the Library Edition of his works, published between 1903 and 1912, are themselves a remarkable achievement, in which his books and essays – almost all highly illustrated – are given a biographical and critical context in extended introductory essays and in the ‘Minor Ruskiniana’ – extracts from letters, articles and reminiscences both by and about Ruskin. This thirtieth volume contains writings on the Guild of St George and the Ruskin Museum.

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The Works of John Ruskin

VOLUME 30: THE GUILD AND MUSEUM OF
ST GEORGE

JOHN RUSKIN
EDITED BY EDWARD TYAS COOK
AND ALEXANDER WEDDERBURN



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JOHN RUSKIN

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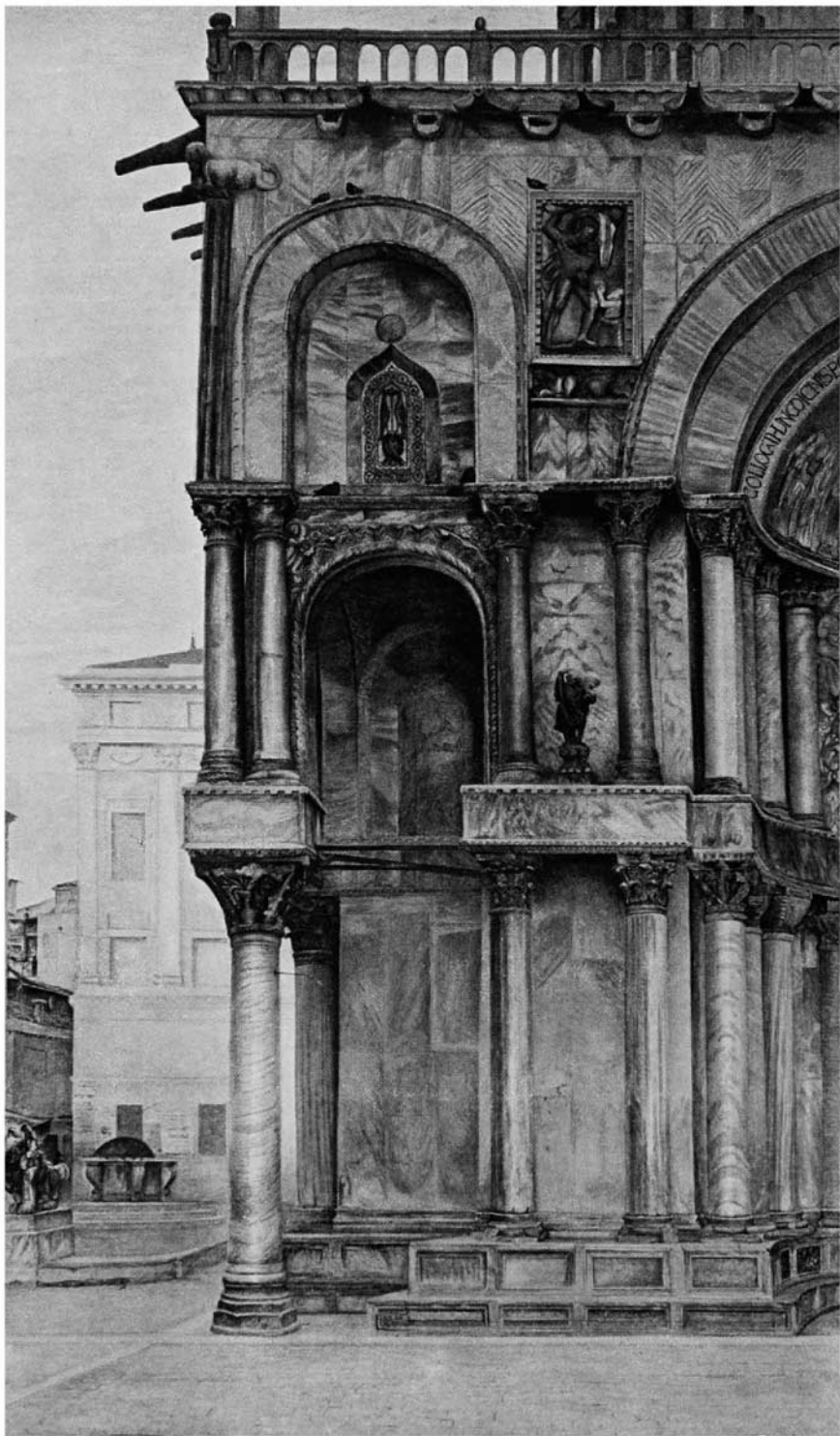
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JOHN RUSKIN

EDITED BY
E. T. COOK
AND
ALEXANDER WEDDERBURN



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GEORGE ALLEN, 156, CHARING CROSS ROAD
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VOLUME XXX

THE GUILD AND MUSEUM
OF
ST. GEORGE

THE GUILD AND MUSEUM
OF
ST. GEORGE

REPORTS, CATALOGUES, AND
OTHER PAPERS

BY
JOHN RUSKIN

LONDON
GEORGE ALLEN, 156, CHARING CROSS ROAD
NEW YORK: LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1907

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Note.—Of the 41 Plates in this volume, 19 have in one form or another appeared before.

The subject of the *frontispiece*, given in photogravure, was Plate IV. (p. 237) in William White's *Principles of Art as illustrated by Examples in the Ruskin Museum* (1895).

The two drawings on Plate I. were given on p. 31, and as the frontispiece, respectively, in Blanche Atkinson's *Ruskin's Social Experiment at Barmouth* (1899).

Plates II. and IV., the upper subject on Plate V., Plates XXXVIII. and XXXIX., and the second subject on Plate XL., appeared in E. T. Cook's *Studies in Ruskin* (1890): pp. 146, 148, 158, 159, 160, 166, 168, 171, 175, 129.

A half-tone block from Mr. Creswick's bust (Plate III.) appeared on p. 120 of M. H. Spielmann's *John Ruskin* (1900).

The lower subject on Plate V. appeared (half-tone block) on Plate I. in the *Popular Illustrated Handbook to the Ruskin Museum* (1900), and (similarly, but on a larger scale) on p. 28 of the *Vorberichte für die XII. Konferenz in Mannheim* (1903).

The upper subject on Plate VI. appeared (half-tone block) on p. 34 of the *Vorberichte*; the lower (half-tone) on Plate VIII. of the *Popular Illustrated Handbook*, and again (similarly, but on a larger scale) on p. 35 of the *Vorberichte*.

Plates VII. and VIII. were Plates II. and III. (half-tone blocks) in the *Popular Illustrated Handbook*.

The "Verrocchio" on Plate XI. was Plate II. (p. 72) in *Principles of Art*, where, however, the photogravure was made from the picture after restoration.

Plate XIII. was on Plate VI. (half-tone) in the *Popular Illustrated Handbook*.

The portrait of Turner (Plate XXX.) appeared (half-tone) in Lionel Cust's

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Plate XXXI. was on Plate VII. (half-tone) of the *Popular Illustrated Handbook*.

Plate XXXII. was Plate V. (photogravure), p. 501, in *Principles of Art*.

The subject on Plate XXXIII. appeared (half-tone) in the *Magazine of Art*, April 1900.

Plate XXXVII. appeared (small half-tone blocks) in M. H. Spielmann’s “John Ruskin as an Artist” in *Scribner’s Magazine*, December 1898.

The “May Queen” on Plate XL. was shown (woodcut) in J. P. Faunthorpe’s “Professor Ruskin’s May-day Festival” in *The Girl’s Own Paper*, April 20, 1889, and again as a Plate facing p. 49, vol. i. of the privately-printed *Letters from John Ruskin to Rev. J. P. Faunthorpe*, 1895, where also (vol. i. p. 60) the gold cross is shown.

INTRODUCTION TO VOL. XXX

THIS volume contains (I.) various Memoranda, Reports, Accounts, and other Papers relating to St. George's Guild; (II.) Catalogues of the Museum at Sheffield, formed in connexion with the Guild; and, in an Appendix, various Letters, Reports, Speeches, and other matter relating to one or other of the foregoing subjects. Ruskin's writings in connexion with the Guild have never before been brought together; whilst the principal contents of the Museum are now for the first time catalogued in a complete form, and a large number of the works of art are reproduced. The catalogue includes notes by Ruskin hitherto unpublished.

I

The story of St. George's Guild is, in part, a study in Utopia, and, in part, a record of things actually done. This double aspect of the Guild has already been noted in the Introduction to *Fors Clavigera*,¹ and it should be borne in mind by readers of the present volume. Ruskin, as we have seen, disclaimed any idea of founding a model community under his personal direction.² He threw out suggestions which he hoped to see taken up by others, and he amused himself by elaborating details for such an ideal community as he had conceived in his mind.

In these respects Ruskin's schemes, like those of other builders of Utopia, were large and picturesque. St. George's Company, or Guild, was to embrace all holy and humble men of heart. Its main effort was designed to show "how much food-producing land might be recovered by well-applied labour from the barren or neglected districts of nominally cultivated countries."³ It was to purchase land and to employ labourers upon it "under the carefulest supervision and

¹ See Vol. XXVII. p. lvii.

² Letter 49, § 2 (Vol. XXVIII. p. 236).

³ *General Statement*, § 1 (below, p. 45).

with every proper means of mental instruction.”¹ Other lands, not purchased by the Guild, would be cultivated and managed by its “Companions” in the same way. Manufactures would not cease, but agriculture would be revived and extended. The Guild, under the name of the Society of Mont Rose,² was to “extend its operations over the continent of Europe, and number its members ultimately by myriads.”³ On the lands of the Guild there were to be no machines moved by artificial fire;⁴ but machinery, moved by natural forces, was to be employed on the largest scale. Floods were to be averted; fens to be drained; sea-erosion to be checked. The landlords were to be “men of independent fortune, devoting gifts and ingenuity to the service of the Guild, and owing their lordship to the fact that they could work as much better than their labourers as a good knight than his soldiers.”⁵ The labourers were to be “young people bred on old estates”; the commandants over them, “veteran soldiers”;⁶ for Ruskin had “observed constantly in historical readings the beneficence of strict military order in peace, and the justice, sense, and kindness of good officers acting unrestrictedly in civil capacities.”⁷ There would be no absentee landlords, and no squandering of treasure obtained from the earth upon the vicious pleasures of great cities. There were to be fixed rents, which, however, would for the most part be put back into the land in the form of improvements. Cultivation would thus be intensive; but all natural beauties would be religiously protected, and at chosen spots there would be parks in which all harmless animals would be preserved in the beauty of wild life.⁸ The organisation of the Society was to depend on the Master as its head, who was to be invested with supreme and dictatorial powers. Under him were to come the “Marshals”—officers, like Roman Pro-Consuls, having great districts subject to them. Next in order came the Landlords, selected as aforesaid. “Marshals” and “Landlords” were to be called “Comites Ministrantes”—Companions of the Guild who spent themselves in public service. Under them would come “Comites Militantes”—Companions of the rank and file, working on the Company’s lands as land-agents, tenant farmers, hired labourers,

¹ *Master’s Report*, 1879, § 4 (below, p. 17).

² *Fors*, Letter 17 (Vol. XXVII. p. 296).

³ *Master’s Report*, 1881, § 1 (below, p. 32).

⁴ *Fors*, Letter 58 (Vol. XXVIII. p. 423).

⁵ *Fors*, Letter 58 (Vol. XXVIII. p. 424).

⁶ *Fors*, Letter 37 (Vol. XXVIII. p. 21).

⁷ *General Statement*, § 2 (below, p. 46).

⁸ *Master’s Report*, 1879, § 5 (below, p. 18).

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or tradesmen. And last of all would be the “Comites Consilii” (“Friends in Council”)—Companions pledged to St. George’s Vow and giving tenths of their income to the Guild, but living their own lives and not resident on St. George’s lands.¹ There were also, it seems, to be “outside adherents,” looked upon as friends, hoped for as Companions, and distinguished by badges of “square bits of gold.”² Dress in all classes would be as determined as the heraldry of coronets. There would be no idle rich, and no oppressed poor. Luxury would be realised for all, but luxury exquisite and refined. Landladies would wear beautiful frocks, and peasant women would carry their wealth, like girls of the Alpine valleys, on gold and silver ornaments in their hair. The agricultural life was to be combined with refinement, and with knowledge of all useful crafts.³ The boys were to be carpenters and to make good household furniture; the girls, to cook the finest of Yorkshire pies.⁴ There would be model schools and museums on every estate, and each cottage would have its Shepherd’s Library and selected pictures, ordained for it by the Master. Currency was to be based on staples of food and clothing, and to be stamped with Florentine designs. The golden age and mild Saturnian reign were to return among men as the result of St. George’s labours for Merrie England.

Such was the ideal. The actual realisation was a Master who, when wanted to discuss legal deeds, was often drawing leaves of anagallis tenella;⁵ a society of Companions, few and unimportant; some cottages in Wales; twenty acres of partly cleared woodland in Worcestershire; a few bleak acres in Yorkshire; and a single museum. The large schemes for the reclamation of waste land and the novel use on a great scale of tides and streams shrunk into some minute gardening experiments at Brantwood.⁶ The descent from the ideal to the real is long and steep, and it is easily explained. In the first place, it should not be supposed that Ruskin gravely intended to institute forthwith everything that he suggested. It is necessary to remember, in reading his writings on these subjects, that “St. George” stands for an ideal, as well as for practical counsels. Thus, as has been pointed out already,⁷

¹ See for all this *Fors*, Letters 58 and 63 (Vol. XXVIII.).

² See, in a later volume of this edition, a letter to the Rev. J. P. Fawcett of October 18, 1881.

³ Letter 48, § 9 (Vol. XXVIII. pp. 209, 210).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁵ See Vol. XXIX. p. 208.

⁶ See *Report*, 1881, § 11, and *General Statement*, § 8 (below, pp. 39, 50); and compare Vol. XXV. pp. xxxvii.-xxxviii.

⁷ See Vol. XXVII. p. lvii.

when Ruskin amuses himself with designs and legends for “St. George’s” ducats, it is not to be imagined that he intended to infringe the royal prerogative by which the coining of money is the right of the Crown alone. That is obvious; but the distinction between his visionary Utopia and his schemes for an actual Guild of St. George was not always clear, and, as Ruskin himself suspected,¹ the confusion deterred many people from answering to his call.

The main scheme of the Guild was in itself perfectly practical. His first proposal was simply that men and women should league themselves together, under a pledge to give a tenth of their possessions to definite public service. He set the example himself, and proposed that the “St. George’s Fund” should primarily be expended in the purchase of land for settlement. Again a very practical, and a very much needed, purpose. Ruskin recognised a little earlier than the rest of the world a social need which everybody now perceives. He knew what was wanted; but he knew also that he was not the man to carry it through. His knowledge “did not qualify him, nor did the nature of his general occupations permit him, to undertake the personal direction of any farming operations.”² He was perfectly aware that his strength did not lie in such directions. “My own gifts,” he says in one place, “lie more in the way of cataloguing minerals than of managing men.”³ “For my own part,” he says in another, “I entirely hate the whole business; I dislike having either power or responsibility.” He held on only until he found “somebody else to take up the matter in the same mind, and with a better heart.”⁴ His Company was but “a raft”; and he only “a makeshift Master.”⁵ His purpose was to point the way; his hope, that others would be found to take the lead in walking in it.

He continued, therefore, his “makeshift” work. The Fund was started, as we have seen, in 1871. A first gift of land came to him in 1875. His first draft for the constitution of the Company was published in July 1875. The legal difficulties, however, were many, and Ruskin complains copiously of them in *Fors*.⁶ He had the advice of one of the ablest conveyancers of the day, the late Mr. William Barber, Q.C. Ruskin liked him, and both he and the solicitors were

¹ See *Fors*, Letter 85 (Vol. XXIX. p. 316). Compare the *Master’s Report*, 1885, § 3 (below, p. 95), where he speaks of the “aspect of romance” in *Fors Clavigera*.

² *Master’s Report*, 1879, § 7 (below, p. 18).

³ *Fors*, Letter 81 (Vol. XXIX. p. 216 n.).

⁴ *Fors*, Letter 37 (Vol. XXVIII. p. 23).

⁵ *Fors*, Letters 50, 67, 81 (Vol. XXVIII. pp. 264, 644; Vol. XXIX. p. 197).

⁶ See Vol. XXVIII. p. 268; Vol. XXIX. pp. 27, 47, 325, 350.

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sympathetic and desirous of meeting their client's wishes. But the idea was new, and probably no Association of the kind had ever been started before. The lawyers began on the lines of assimilating the Company to a commercial undertaking, but these were found not to adapt themselves to Ruskin's requirements. After a time the idea occurred to them of proceeding under the 23rd section of the Companies Act of 1867. The latent capacities of that Act for covering various kinds of limited-liability associations for philanthropic or semi-philanthropic purposes had at the time been little explored. Ultimately this idea was found to meet all the requirements of the case. The necessary notice of "Application for a License of the Board of Trade" was given in the public press on August 6, 1878. This is printed, as somewhat of a curiosity in such matters, in the present volume (p. 12). The Memorandum and Articles of Association, dated October 14, 1878, were duly filed; and a Licence to the Guild of St. George to hold lands was granted on October 22 by "the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council appointed for the consideration of matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations." The Memorandum and Articles, in which the requirements of legal form did not suffice to obliterate all traces of Ruskin's style, form the first section of this volume, together with an abstract of them prepared by him (pp. 1-11). In this, as in other practical matters, Ruskin was a pioneer. The Memorandum and Articles have given hints to more than one legal firm entrusted with the task of forming "Companies" on somewhat similar lines.

The constitution of the Guild of St. George had taken three years. A correspondence with his solicitors is extant, showing how much time, thought, and trouble Ruskin had expended on the task; though it is also the case that sometimes, when his instructions were wanted, he was not found accessible. But at the very time when all the initial difficulties seemed to be surmounted Ruskin was stricken down. He had already suffered a grievous disappointment in 1877, when his friends, Sir Thomas Acland and Mr. Cowper-Temple (afterwards Lord Mount-Temple) resigned their joint-trusteeship of St. George's Fund. He knew not, he says, until then "whether some noble of England might not hear and understand in time, and take upon himself Mastership and Captaincy in this sacred war."¹ He received a further disappointment, later in the same year, when another friend had been the means of diverting some intended help from the Fund. A few months later, at the critical moment, when the legal

¹ *Fors*, Letter 78 (Vol. XXIX, p. 137).

constitution was complete and the order should have been “full steam ahead,” the Master of the Guild fell very seriously ill. He gradually recovered health, but his energies were to be much dissipated, and again after a few years, his days were clouded over, so that the Guild fell into a state of suspended animation. If any one be tempted to smile or to wonder at the contrast between its promise and performance, he should not forget that at the very moment when Ruskin’s active co-operation was most needed he was disabled by illness, and that the little vessel which he had set afloat on the waves of a rough world was thus deprived of its captain.

Yet something was accomplished, and more attempted, on the agricultural side of St. George’s Guild. Records of the work will be found, partly in *Fors*, and partly in the various Reports by Ruskin which are collected in this volume. First, however, it may be helpful to readers both of *Fors* and of the present volume to give a succinct account of the properties of the Guild (other than the Museum, which is the subject of a separate part of this Introduction). The properties, then, in the order of their acquisition, were these:—

(1) A cottage at *Walkley*, near Sheffield, with about an acre of ground (referred to in *Fors*, Letters 56, 59, 60, 62, 67, etc.;¹ and below, pp. 19, 71).—The cottage, the first home of the Museum, was sold by the Guild in 1895, when the Museum had been moved (see below, p. xlviii.), and four small plots of land near the Museum were sold in 1905. It has been rebuilt as a training home for girls, and is called “Ruskin House.”

(2) Eight cottages, on freehold land, at *Barmouth* (referred to below, pp. 20, 49).—This was the first acquisition of the Guild; presented in 1875, as related in Letters 50 and 56 of *Fors*, by Mrs. Talbot.² The cottages remain in possession of the Guild, and will presently be described (p. xxviii.).

(3) Twenty acres of woodland at *Bewdley* in Worcestershire, the gift of Mr. George Baker, the present Master of the Guild (referred to below, pp. 20, 50, 71).—This land, adjoining Beaucastle Farm, is often referred to in *Fors*,³ and Ruskin at one time intended to build a Museum upon it. This plan, however, was abandoned; though the land was partly cleared.⁴ The Guild has recently built a good farm-cottage on the land, for the purpose of letting it as a fruit farm.

¹ Vol. XXVIII. pp. 395, 449, 468, 529, 658.

² Vol. XXVIII. pp. 268, 395, 424.

³ See Vol. XXVIII. pp. 629, 630; Vol. XXIX. pp. 164, 171.

⁴ Vol. XXVIII. p. 606.

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(4) Thirteen acres of garden and fields, with farmhouse and buildings, at *Totley* in Derbyshire, on the outskirts of Sheffield (referred to below, pp. 40, 49, 71).—This land, bought by Ruskin for the Guild at a cost of £2200 in 1877,¹ is in the parish of *Mickley*; but *Totley* is the postal address, and *Abbeylea* is not far off. Ruskin, somewhat to the confusion of his readers, calls the property by all these different names in different writings.² In *Fors*, he preferred “Abbeylea”; he liked to think that St. George’s properties had pretty names.³ The land was bought by Ruskin in response, as he relates in *Fors*,⁴ to a request from some of the working men of Sheffield for allotments. Some of the men, it seems, were shoemakers, and Ruskin looked forward to the experiment with hopeful interest.⁵ He was not able, however, to give it personal direction at the start,⁶ and the shoemakers seem to have had ideas of “vote of the majority” which gave him uneasiness.⁷ The proposed allotments had a short and, I believe, somewhat stormy career, and Ruskin fell back upon a favourite resource on occasions of this kind; that is to say, he called his old gardener, David Downs, to the rescue. Already in the *Report* for 1879 a new purpose for the Totley estate is announced: it was to be put “under cultivation, with the object of showing the best methods of managing fruit-trees in the climate of northern England; with attached green-houses and botanic garden for the orderly display of all interesting European plants” (p. 20). But “the climate of northern England” had views of its own, antagonistic to Ruskin’s schemes. The rare plants and the fruit-trees remained only a beautiful vision; but the land was “brought into heart” to supply strawberries, currants, and gooseberries to the Sheffield markets “at a price both moderate and fixed” (p. 49). Two years later the estate is dismissed curtly as “very poor land” (p. 71).⁸ It is in very truth a cold, bleak spot; but the tenant, to whom it is now let, makes, it is believed, a fair living out of the land.

(5) A small plot, about three-quarters of an acre, with a cottage, at *Cloughton*, near Scarborough (referred to below, pp. 19, 71).—This plot was bought by Ruskin in order “to establish in useful work” a member of the Guild, Mr. John Guy, who had put himself into

¹ *Fors*, Letter 80 (Vol. XXIX. p. 183).

² It appears also in one place as *Abbey Vale* (Vol. XXIX. p. 211).

³ See Letter 80 (Vol. XXIX. p. 173).

⁴ Letter 76, § 15 (Vol. XXIX. p. 98).

⁵ Vol. XXIX. p. 208.

⁶ Vol. XXIX. p. 112.

⁷ Vol. XXIX. p. 273.

⁸ “Suppose we sell all that good-for-nothing land at Totley,” he wrote to Downs (April 24, 1881), “and take somebody else in, for once—if we can—instead of being always taken in ourselves, for a change?”

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communication with Ruskin through *Fors Clavigera*.¹ “A brave and gentle Companion,” as Ruskin calls him, he was to set an example with his wife of “practical and patient country economy.” He left, however, in 1882, and emigrated some twenty years ago; the cottage formerly occupied by him is let to another tenant.

Of other property, the Guild holds some investments, now (1907) bringing in about £75 per annum.

Of the property in land and houses, the most interesting of St. George’s Estates is the one at Barmouth. “On the shores of Cardigan Bay, swept by the warm current of the Gulf Stream, a steep, rugged cliff juts boldly out from the mountain range which rises above the broad estuary of the River Mawddach. Perched on narrow ledges of this cliff, wherever they can find foothold, are the rough stone-built cottages of the Welsh fishing village of Abermaw, better known to-day as the modern watering-place of Barmouth. It is pleasant to forget, and from some points of view it is possible not to see, the ugly new buildings; and the old town climbing up the face of the rock in utmost irregularity of outline, with the fine mass of the mountain grandly uplifted high above, is as picturesque as ever. . . . Into every cranny blows the sweet salt air from the sea; every cottage is steeped in sunshine during the greater part of the day, and from every window can be seen either the long soft line of mountains across the estuary, or the sea glimmering to the far horizon.”² It was in this part of old Barmouth—“on noble crystalline rock,” Ruskin was thankful to say³—that he received the first gift of land for St. George’s Guild. The gift was of eight cottages and a piece of ground; the donor was Mrs. G. T. Talbot, to whom he wrote the following letter of thanks:⁴—

“HERNE HILL, LONDON, S.E.,
 “December 15, ’74.

“MY DEAR MADAM,—Again I have been, to my great vexation, prevented from at once replying to your most kind and important letter. The ground and houses which you offer me are exactly the kind of property I most wish to obtain for the St. George’s Company. I accept them at once with very glad thanks, and will endeavour soon to come and see them, and thank you and your son in person.

¹ See the letters from him in Vol. XXIX. pp. 145, 326.

² *Ruskin’s Social Experiment at Barmouth*, by Blanche Atkinson (1900), pp. 9–11.

³ *Fors*, Letter 69 (Vol. XXVIII. p. 687).

⁴ Here reprinted from p. 18 of Miss Atkinson’s pamphlet. Some other letters included in the same pamphlet are given in Appendix I., below, p. 300.