

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-00885-3 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 37
 John Ruskin
 Excerpt
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THE
 LETTERS OF JOHN RUSKIN
 1870–1889

*(Except where otherwise stated, the letters are here printed
 for the first time)*

1870

[In February and March of this year Ruskin delivered his Inaugural Course of Lectures as Professor of Fine Art at Oxford. He also began the arrangement and cataloguing of a Collection of Examples there (see pp. 3, 5). At the end of April he went abroad with Miss Agnew and Mrs. and Miss Hilliard (Vol. XX. p. xlix.), returning at the end of July. Some letters written from Italy and Switzerland are given in that volume, pp. l.–lv. On his return, he prepared a second course of lectures (*Aratra Pentelici*), which were delivered in November and December.]

To Miss JOAN AGNEW¹

DENMARK HILL, 1st January, 1870.

I write to you first of all people this year, and shall next write to Norton.

I trust that you will have more happiness this year than you can at present hope, or even imagine, though you will have to make it out of more serious matters than happiness is usually contrived from. I have many plans—resolved upon in their general directions and objects, not yet in detail—which you will have to help and encourage me in, and of which you will share with me—a little perhaps of the self-denial—and much of the pleasure of feeling that one is doing one's best—in ways which, if *at all* successful, will be productive of much good, and in which even failure is nobler than not attempting anything.

You will find many good and dear people more and more every day loving and honouring you. And, in being a mother to the motherless, and (for this also would be a blessed duty, if we knew any of

¹ [Written on the death of her sister, Kate (Mrs. Simson). "William and Mary," mentioned at the end of the letter, are Miss Agnew's sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Milroy.]

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our duties rightly) sister to the sisterless, you may in a solemn and yet not less precious way, regain in your heart the opening of the well of love which Death has now so bitterly restrained.

Give my love to William and Mary, and with all good thoughts and wishes for you all, believe me ever, your devoted cousin,
 St. C.

To CHARLES ELIOT NORTON¹

1 January, 1870.

. . . I have been thrown a little out of calculation by finding that Professorship-years are from summer to summer, not winter to winter, so I have to give twelve lectures this spring,² the third of the entire necessary course. I have been forced, therefore, to throw up the botany for this winter, and I take up Oxford with what strength I have. The twelve lectures are to be (I think I shall not now change³):—

1. Introduction.
2. Relation of Art to Religion.
3. Relation of Art to Morality.
4. Relation of Art to (material) Use. (Household Furniture, Arms, Dress, Lodging, Medium of Exchange.)
5. Line.
6. Light and Shade.
7. Colour.
8. Schools of Sculpture, Clay (including glass), Wood, Metal, Stone.
9. Schools of Architecture—Clay, Wood, Stone, Glass in windows.
10. Schools of Painting (Material indifferent⁴) considered with reference to immediate study and practice—
 - A. of Natural History.
 11. B. of Landscape.
 12. C. of the Human Figure.

I've no more time to-day.—Ever your affectionate J. RUSKIN.

To DEAN LIDDELL⁵

January, 1870.

I was very grateful for your letter. I was beginning to feel great discomfort in the sense of inability to do—not indeed (for that I never hoped) what I would wish to do—but what with more deliberation I

¹ [No. 85 in *Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton*, Boston and New York, 1904 (hereafter referred to as *Norton*); vol. i. pp. 256-257.]

² [This requirement was waived: see the next letter.]

³ [The scheme was adhered to in the case of the first seven lectures, which formed the Inaugural course, but was greatly changed thereafter: see Vol. XX. p. lv.]

⁴ [On this point, compare *Lectures on Art*, § 128 (Vol. XX. p. 119).]

⁵ [From *Henry George Liddell: A Memoir*, by the Rev. H. L. Thompson, 1899, pp. 228-229.]

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might be able to do. Your permission to give only seven lectures this spring will give me ease of mind, and, I hope, better power of thinking. I am happy in the general thoughts of what may be possible to me; clear enough, for all practical purposes, as to what I have to say; and a *little* sanguine (yet not so as to be hurt by disappointment) respecting the effect of carefully chosen examples of more or less elementary art, put within the daily reach of all students, with notes enough to enable them to look at once for their main qualities. It is pardonable to be sanguine when I have you and Henry Acland to advise me and help me. I am well assured you know that I will do my best, and that not in any personal vanity.

To Miss JOAN AGNEW¹

DENMARK HILL, 21st January, 1870.

Has Isola got Morris's last—3rd book of the *Earthly Paradise*?² I can't understand how a man who, on the whole, enjoys dinner—and breakfast—and supper—to that extent of fat—can write such lovely poems about Misery. . . . There's such lovely, lovely misery in this Paradise. In fact, I think it's—the other place—made pretty, only I can't fancy any Paradise to-day but a Paradise of rug. But only hear this:—

“Hast thou not cast thine arms round Love
At least, thy weary heart to move,
To make thy wakening strange and new,
And dull life false, and old tales, true;
Yea, and a tale to make thy life
To speed the others in the strife,
To quicken thee with wondrous fire,
And make thee fairer with desire?
Wilt thou, then, think it all in vain,
The restless longing and the pain,
Lightened by hope that shall not die?
For thou shalt hope still certainly,
And well may'st deem that thou hast part,
Somewhat, at least, in this my heart,
Whatever else therein may be.”

It's not one of the best bits at all, but it's nice.

Mind you write me nice long letters, or I can't possibly let you stay.

¹ [Staying with Mrs. Cowper-Temple (“Isola”) at Broadlands.]

² [*The Earthly Paradise, Part III*. (“September,” “October,” and “November”); the title-page bears the date “1870,” but the volume was issued in November 1869. The lines which Ruskin quotes are from “The Land East of the Sun.”]

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To Miss JOAN AGNEW

DENMARK HILL, *Saturday* [Jan. 22, '70].

. . . Perhaps, on the whole, it would be well to stop grumbling and mewing all day long. It may be that, a little, that makes the Gods so angry. Let me see what I can say that's nice.

First. Auntie's¹ behaving beautifully, and let me run ever so often up and down stairs without calling out.

I've written some nice bits of lecture, and the worst work's over now.

I can do no end of good—nearly every day—if I like.

I'm 51, not 61. You know I might have been 61, mightn't I? Some people *are* 61. Poor People. To think of that!

I'm humpbacked.² All humpbacked people are remarkable people—intellectually.

Though I'm humpbacked, I'm not Richard III.

I've got such a lovely piece of green flint on the table. Bloodstone.

I've got two hundred pounds odd—at the bank.

I've got some Turner drawings—about eighty or ninety, I suppose.

I've got a Pussie.

I've got an Isola.

Now I think a good many people would like to be me.

Oh me—there's Sunday coming. (If I wasn't just going to grumble again!) That delicious Sunday. It's so cheerful and nice, keeping out of church and thinking how many unlucky people are in it!

To Miss JOAN AGNEW

DENMARK HILL [Jan. 25, 1870].

. . . The lectures³ are coming nice; though they're giving me sad trouble—and, in fact, I oughtn't to be teased to talk any more at my time of life, but should be left to paint snail-shells—and live in a big one. . . .

Has Isola read *Realmah* carefully? What a delicious book it is in its dialogues—containing everything one wants to say, and ever so much besides—better than one ever wanted to say.⁴

¹ [Ruskin's mother.]

² [A playful exaggeration of the student's stoop.]

³ [The Inaugural Oxford *Lectures on Art* (Vol. XX.).]

⁴ [For a quotation from one of the dialogues in this book by Sir Arthur Helps, see Vol. XIX. p. 266.]

1870]

OXFORD LECTURES

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To CHARLES ELIOT NORTON¹

26 March, 1870.

. . . I should only have made you anxious if I had written. Just as I had set myself to my Oxford work (I began on the New Year's day properly), on the 7th of January I met with an experience which made me ill for a month, so that all I wrote was bad; and in the first days of February I had to re-write almost the whole of the inaugural lecture to be given on the 8th, being thrown full a month behind with everything, and with all my brain and stomach wrong. . . .

My lectures have pleased the people well enough, but they're all so far below what I thought to make them, and they were all done against time,—not half put in that I wanted to say,—and I caught a violent cold besides, and could not go out to take exercise, so that I was very near breaking down at one time; also, making the drawings for them [the students] to copy has taken me three times the trouble I expected.

But I think it will be well done at last. I have started them on a totally new and defiantly difficult principle; drawing all with the brush, as on Greek vases, and I'm choosing a whole series of the Greek gods, old and young, for them to draw every detail of with the brush, as the Greeks did;² and if they don't understand something more about Apelles and Protogenes than English draughtsmen ever did yet, I shall resign my chair.

I've had to give up everything else; botany, Chaucer, *Cent Ballades*,³ friends, and Fortune, for she has set herself to thwart me and to torment me like a Fury. But I've given the last lecture for this spring, and now I hope I shall never more be so far behindhand with my work. . . .

To his MOTHER⁴

MARTIGNY, Friday, 13th May, 1870.

I am enjoying my rest here very much, though after the hard Oxford work, I find the reaction considerable, and that I am very languid and unwilling for the least mental exertion. I see much that

¹ [No. 86 in *Norton*; vol. i. pp. 258–259.]

² [On "learning to draw with the brush," see *Lectures on Art*, § 145 (Vol. XX. p. 136): for the series of vase-paintings, see the illustrations in that volume and the Catalogues in Vol. XXI.]

³ [See Vol. XXXVI. pp. 588, 597.]

⁴ [Some words from this letter have already been printed in Vol. XX. p. 1., and Vol. XXIX. p. 475 n. See the latter place for other references to the inn at Martigny.]

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I should like to draw, but cannot venture. So I saunter about among the rocks and woods and listen to the nightingales, who are very happy. It is exceedingly pretty to see the swallows flying in and out of the corridor here, without minding anybody. They come in at the open arches, and satisfy me that the air is better than is usually thought. I am also examining the mountains with a view to my plan for the redemption of their barren slopes.¹ There is just difficulty enough to make it a sublime piece of manual work.

To CHARLES ELIOT NORTON²

VENICE, 11th June, 1870.

MY DEAREST CHARLES,—Your letter reached me this afternoon, and I reply before 12 of the midnight. Stay—there *is* the earliest clock striking,—with full moon like morning. . . .

Day by day passes, and finds me more helpless; coming back here makes me unspeakably sad. I am doing, I hope, useful work—I can only breathe freely when I *am* at work. I send you a few proof-sheets which may interest you and show you what I am trying to do.

12th June, Morning.

My absurd fault is that I never take a minute or two of the pleasure of saying nothing worth, yet you would be glad of the worthlessness.

My hand shakes more than usual, but I am not worse than usual. I have been standing since 7 o'clock on a chair, stretching up to see the lizard that carries the signature under the elbow of St. Jerome's dead body,³ and drawing it for Oxford zoological class; it is as bad as drawing from life, the thing is so subtle; it is worse than motion.

Send me a line to the Due Torri, Verona. I shall have left Venice, and I am going into the Alps for a little rest. I don't know what it will be to do, whether Alpine Roses, or if I shall come back here to work on Tintoret.

“There *is* none like him—*none*.”⁴

Love to you all.—Ever your affectionate

J. RUSKIN.

¹ [See Vol. XXXVI. pp. 567, 569, 577.]

² [No. 87 in *Norton*; vol. i. pp. 259–261.]

³ [“Here a sketch of the lizard and Carpaccio's signature” (C. E. N.). The drawing is now at Oxford: see Vol. XXI. p. 152.]

⁴ [Fennyson: *Maud*.]

1870]

CHARLES DICKENS

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To CHARLES ELIOT NORTON¹

VENICE, Saturday, 17th June [1870].

MY DEAREST CHARLES,—I have just got your letter; yes, I will come to Siena.² I have to go for a fortnight up into Switzerland with Joanna and our friends to see Alpine roses. Then I'll run straight south to you. I cannot write more to-day, but will this evening. It seems to me as if every saving power was at present being paralyzed, or stupefied, or killed. I know, too well, the truth of what Dickens told you³ of the coming evil.—Ever your affectionate J. RUSKIN.

To CHARLES ELIOT NORTON⁴

VENICE, 19th June.

MY DEAREST CHARLES,—I knew you would deeply feel the death of Dickens. It is very frightful to me—among the blows struck by the fates at worthy men, while all mischievous ones have ceaseless strength. The literary loss is infinite—the political one I care less for than you do. Dickens was a pure modernist—a leader of the steam-whistle party *par excellence*—and he had no understanding of any power of antiquity except a sort of jackdaw sentiment for cathedral towers. He knew nothing of the nobler power of superstition—was essentially a stage manager, and used everything for effect on the pit. His Christmas meant mistletoe and pudding—neither resurrection from dead, nor rising of new stars, nor teaching of wise men, nor shepherds. His hero is essentially the ironmaster; in spite of *Hard Times*,⁵ he has advanced by his influence every principle that makes them harder—the love of excitement, in all classes, and the fury of business competition, and the distrust both of nobility and clergy which, wide enough and fatal enough, and too justly founded, needed no apostle to the mob, but a grave teacher of priests and nobles themselves, for whom Dickens had essentially no word. . . .

Please send me a line to post office, Lugano, saying how long you stay, and I will do my best to come as soon as I can, if your “summer” means not quite into the hot months. My faithful love to you all.—
 Ever your affectionate J. RUSKIN.

¹ [No. 88 in *Norton*; vol. ii. p. 4.]

² [For Professor Norton's account of Ruskin's visit to him at Siena, see Vol. XX. p. liii.]

³ [For Dickens's friendship with Professor Norton, see Forster's *Life*, vol. iii. pp. 189, 411.]

⁴ [No. 89 in *Norton*; vol. ii. pp. 4–6.]

⁵ [Which Ruskin accounted “in several respects the greatest” of Dickens's books: Vol. XVII. p. 31 n.]

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[More information](#)*To CHARLES ELIOT NORTON*¹*Monday, 20th June [1870].*

MY DEAREST CHARLES,—I have changed my purpose, suddenly, and am going to make sure of seeing you at once—though I cannot at present stay—but for many reasons, chiefly the danger of losing hold of what I have just been learning here, it is better for me not to stay in Italy, but to go home quietly and write down what I have got—else I should learn too much, and get nothing said.

Yes, necessarily, there is a difference in manner between writing intended for a professor's class and that meant to amuse a popular audience;² also, I hope at fifty I *am* mentally stronger than at twenty-five. But the pain has not done anything for me. Indignation has sometimes—but always more harm than good, the now quite morbid dislike of talking being one result of it very inconvenient at Oxford.

I shall have to trespass on you (ultimately I do not doubt you will be glad I have) by bringing not only J. and C.,³ but C.'s good and sweet (and infinitely sensitive in all right ways) mother, for whom, mainly, I made all the plans of this journey; a most refined English gentlewoman, who had never seen Italy. But, alas, I can't stay more than three days at the utmost. I must be three days in Florence for my own work. I shall take those at once, at the Grande Bretagne, before coming to you.—Ever your loving
JOHN RUSKIN.

I am very glad the Medusa is not Leonardo's,⁴ but I speak of his temper from general examination of his drawings. I never remember seeing his signature, except as "Lionardo." Why do you like "e" better?

¹ [No. 90 in *Norton*; vol. ii. pp. 6–8.]

² [This must be in reply to remarks made by Professor Norton on reading "an advance copy" of the first volume of Ruskin's Oxford lectures—the *Lectures on Art*, issued to the public in July 1870.]

³ ["Joanie" (Mrs. Arthur Severn) and Miss Constance Hilliard.]

⁴ [Ruskin had referred to the head of Medusa in *Lectures on Art*, § 150 (see Vol. XX. p. 142). On the vexed question of the authenticity of this famous picture in the Uffizi, M. Eugène Müntz writes in his *Leonardo da Vinci* (vol. i. p. 49, Eng. ed.): "The oracles of art have now decided that this could not have been produced till long after the death of da Vinci, and that it is the work of some cinquecentist, painting from Vasari's description. We know, however, from the testimony of an anonymous biographer that a Medusa painted by Leonardo was included in the collections of Cosimo de' Medici about the middle of the sixteenth century. Cosimo's inventory is not less precise; it mentions 'un quadro con una Furia infernale del Vinci semplice.'"]

1870]

FRA FILIPPO LIPPI

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*To his MOTHER*¹SIENA, *Monday, 27th June.*

I never in my life knew any weather so superb or so delicious as the three days we have past here—cloudless and pure, and cool in morning like exquisitest spring. We leave to-day for Florence and the north. But I have learned *so* much.

The fire-flies are almost awful in the twilight, as bright as candles, flying in and out among the dark cypresses.² The people are *so* good, too—I mean the country people.

*To CHARLES ELIOT NORTON*³

[FLORENCE] 29 June, 1870.

MY DEAREST CHARLES,—It's no use trying to write thanks, or good-byes, but here's what I wrote yesterday for heads of talk about Lippi—for J.'s satisfaction if any may be, out of me, just now:—

1. Laying on of gold as paint, for light, all exquisite—none lost.
2. Chiaroscuro perfect, when permitted.
3. Faces all in equal daylight—conventional.
4. No unquiet splendour in accessories.
5. Essential colour as fine as Correggio.
6. Expressional character the best in the world—individual character feeble, but lovely.
7. Essential painting as good as Titian in his early time.
8. Form, in invention, perfect; in knowledge and anatomy, false.
9. Colour in invention very feeble; in sentiment exquisite.

There—and I've seen the Strozzi Titian⁴—and it's Beyond everything, and I'm ever yours,
J. R.

*To CHARLES ELIOT NORTON*⁵BELLINZONA, *Thursday, 8th July* [1870].

MY DEAREST CHARLES,—I find here your long and interesting letter of June 20th. . . .

I quite feel all that you say of Dickens; and of his genius, or

¹ [A few words of this letter have been given in Vol. XX. p. liv.]

² [The memory of these fire-flies at Siena returned to Ruskin in the last passage that he wrote for the press: see the end of *Præterita* (Vol. XXXV. p. 562).]

³ [No. 91 in *Norton*; vol. ii. pp. 8–9.]

⁴ [Then at Florence, now at Berlin; for Ruskin's description of it, see Vol. XXII. pp. 223–224 (Plate XIX).]

⁵ [No. 92 in *Norton*; vol. ii. pp. 9–11.]

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benevolence, no one, I believe, ever has spoken, or will speak, more strongly than I. You will acquit me, I know, of jealousy; you will not agree with me in my acknowledgment of his entire superiority to me in every mental quality but one—the desire of truth without exaggeration. It is my stern desire to get at the pure fact and nothing less or more, which gives me whatever power I have; it is Dickens's delight in grotesque and rich exaggeration which has made him, I think, nearly useless in the present day. I do not believe he has made *any* one more good-natured. I think all his finest touches of sympathy are absolutely undiscovered by the British public; but his mere caricature, his liberalism, and his calling the Crystal Palace "Fairyland"¹ have had fatal effect—and profound. . . .

I believe Dickens to be as little understood as Cervantes, and almost as mischievous.

We had a lovely day at Padua, and I see Mantegna with ever-increasing admiration.² (By the way, on the 4th we all drank to the prosperity of America—I recommending Mrs. H. to put her good wishes for it into the form of the prayer in the Litany for "fatherless children and widows, and all that are desolate and oppressed.") Then some Luini study at Milan, Como, and Lugano,³ and such a drive from Lugano here as I think never was driven by mortal before, for beauty.

I fear I must close this before I get yours—if there is one, but will write again from the Giessbach. Love to you all from all of us.—
Ever your loving
J. RUSKIN.

To CHARLES ELIOT NORTON⁴

GISSBACH, 12th July, 1870.

MY DEAREST CHARLES,—We have been travelling so fast that I have had no time to look at anything in my folios. I have now been examining your present of the "Mantegnas" very carefully, and must again thank you for it most earnestly. I have never seen more wonderful or instructive work—the richness of its life and strength, and utter masterfulness of hand, surpass all I know of this kind. What a strange hardness and gloom pervades it all, nevertheless,

¹ [See *Ethics of the Dust*, § 32 (Vol. XVIII. p. 243).]

² [Ruskin placed in his Oxford school several studies from Mantegna's fresco in the Church of the Eremitani at Padua: see Vol. XXI. p. 24.]

³ [For a tourist's note upon "Ruskin on Luini at Lugano," see Vol. XXXIV. p. 725.]

⁴ [No. 93 in *Norton*; vol. ii. pp. 11-12.]