

John Ruskin's Message  
for  
Our Time

by  
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## PART 1

## CHAPTER 1

The Aim of the Thesis

The history books of the future will certainly devote a great deal of space to the period through which the world is at present passing. The insight of a genius is not required to see that humanity is fast accumulating a series of ills which can seemingly only lead to total exhaustion with its ensuing total collapse.

Economic, social and political problems have become of more than academic interest. It is no longer a matter of the illness of a distant relative; it is an epidemic which threatens the security of all. Nor is this worldwide feverish state a matter of spontaneous combustion. Through the last few centuries the symptoms have all increased. Consciousness has lagged behind reality and we seem to have awakened to discover that we are about to be engulfed. Surrounding us are confusion and disillusion. The rapid march of changing events has obliterated cherished dreams and favourite dogmas. Many of these beliefs have been put to the test and have succumbed. Our papers, when not all inked up about imminent war, tell the sad tale of starving millions. Unemployment has become an ever-present threat. True, at the moment, there is a demand for labour, but this boom may be merely temporary relief and after this abnormal period unemployment may still exist, a persistent malign

growth on the body politic. Strikes, riots, general fiscal dilapidation and a huge industrial proletarian agglomeration crying against social injustice must not continue.

Politicians have erected a system of dikes to keep out the treacherous and all-enveloping waters of economic chaos. Today these barriers find themselves breasting the tide of tremendous oceanic movement. Solitary fingers no longer can hold off the incoming waters of social upheaval and economic confusion. The ever widening fissures in the wall of defence are symptomatic of deep-rooted evils afflicting our society which is on the verge of a breakdown. The rising tide cannot be withheld by minor repairs, temporary measures and haphazard resistance. We must combat the forces working behind the facade of events. Our whole philosophy of life must needs be revised. We must sweep away much of the ineffectual system of political economy. Based on uncertain principles we have created a Frankenstein monster which threatens our very existence.

However, blanket condemnations serve little purpose by themselves. Our methods must change, not our ideals embodying peace, freedom and justice for all. We must write finis to a chapter in our history; we must leave the ivory tower and enter the field of battle. Man has too long refused to confront coming events. Having buried our heads in the sands of unreality like ostriches, it is imperative that we clear our sight and identify the foe before attacking. Instead of applying the litmus test to all radicals it

might be better to attack that which they react against. On a larger scale we cannot save our cherished ideals by simply going to war against other peoples. If we do not better our civilization there will be no use trying to save it by fighting.

It is an old military adage that successes at the periphery are often dangerous because they may divert attention and resources from the centre. John Ruskin says: " No measures are practical except those which touch the source of the evil opposed."(1) The preliminary skirmishes have ended and the main battle has been reached. Humanity has a job on its hands.

Like Churchill, we need the tools to finish the job. Where are they to be found ? There are those who, being under the dominion of optimism, believe the knowledge which can produce a better world order is already available. The writer is of this opinion, believing new material need not be invented if only the unused possibilities of old knowledge be utilized. Books occasionally appear containing solutions for future problems. It is the aim of this thesis to prove the books of John Ruskin answer this description.

Ruskin believed that industry should be directed by the motive of social good, not of individual gain. The principle that the few ought to have power over the

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L. Ruskin, J. Fors Clavigera Letter 10 ,parag.22.

many and ought to use it for their own benefit was, to Ruskin, repugnant. Throughout his life he was a great force against utilitarianism and materialism. His pen was backed by a fund of knowledge and a passion for justice. That his message belongs to the order of great utterances that are for all time, that the seeds he planted and which have mostly lain buried for many years will grow and ripen to his greater glory, is what this thesis is meant to establish.

It is not intended to deny that Ruskin was severely criticized. He was repudiated and attacked by every circle and school. Artists of high renown and low degree heaped abuse upon his theories of art. Cornhill Magazine was forced to cease printing his articles on economics. Ruskin was no prophet in his time or country. He was one of a very small group. But one comforting thought consoled him. The working classes were not among his opponents.

For a man openly taunted by arm-chair economists and the intelligentsia as a fanatical ignoramus, he has succeeded in having an amazing number of his proposals carried out since in the letter and in the spirit.

**M**ight there not be other suggestions of his that could be used today? We believe there are.

To solve the problems of a complicated world, Ruskin built up his doctrine. Unfortunately, it exists only in isolated blocks scattered throughout his works. Ruskin

did not systematize his teachings by throwing them into that orderly form commonly adopted by those who address the intellect alone. They lie broadcast in all parts of his writings. This frightens many people away from him. Overcome that fright, ferret out his purple patches, and among his teachings will be found the answers to many of our problems. That is our claim. That is what we seek to prove. No more.

Lest the reader expect too much we stress the following. We DO NOT MEAN to set him upon a pedestal and glorify him as a paragon of all virtues. This appreciation of Ruskin is to be free of extravagant claims and hawkish adulation. It would be gratifying to have discovered in Ruskin a panacea for all troubles in this vale of tears. But to assert that he has attained complete success in advancing a program for perfect economic and social stabilization would be to prefer a foolish claim. In his puzzling medley of suggestions and plans for a better world there are absurdities. But in with the chaff are seeds which need only be found and planted "to take root and spring forth anew to throng with stately blooms the breathing spring of Hope and Youth." (1) He has pointed the way. It would be naively sanguine to hope for more. Admittedly, Ruskin often dealt with some issue of the moment which has at best an historical interest for our generation. Part of his work is irrelevant today. He has written much that has been



paraded with a pretense at wisdom and has proven to be singularly sterile, a masquerade of confused terminology.

When Ruskin becomes involved in some intangibles, he contributes nothing to practical economic and social reform. Some of his political conceptions were on the way to becoming anachronisms even as they were set down. But there are two sides to the medal. And it is the other side of which we wish to speak. At times Ruskin assumed the mantle of the seer and in a prophetic strain saw into our age, saw the evils, saw the problems and ,in some cases, saw the solutions.

If the reader upon having read this thesis agrees that it is not to be gainsaid that Ruskin on some points could be our guide, the thesis will have succeeded in realizing its aim.

## CHAPTER 2

Ruskin's Life and Works

The why and the wherefore of a man's actions and philosophy are oftentimes linked with his personal and national background. It is the purpose of this chapter to outline Ruskin's family life, his works and his evolution from art critic to social reformer i.e. his personal background. In the following chapter we shall sketch a picture of the nineteenth century England which influenced Ruskin i.e. his national background.

While we are not primarily interested in his biography nor in his philosophy of art as such, we, nevertheless, touch upon them because they serve as a necessary prelude to his social teaching.

Ruskin was born in 1819 with a silver spoon in his mouth. His father, a prosperous wine merchant, was the type of man Matthew Arnold admired and wrote of as ideal. He was a man of cultured tastes. He knew, appreciated and practised painting. He had a taste for Byron's poetry and was not blind to the merits of Dickens. The elder Ruskin's business made it necessary for him to travel throughout the British Isles and parts of the continent. European architecture interested him always and delighted him often. John Ruskin, as a boy, travelled much with his father and, needless to say, inherited much of his father's enthusiasm.

His mother, who has been described as a stupid bigot and bully, was one of those persons who sets a high standard for herself and is determined that the members of the family will attain it too. Her love for her son was akin to that of Lady Macbeth for the thane of Glamis. She urged him on. She directed his reading. Her Puritan background inspired her to have him read the Bible every day and memorize long passages. In later years Ruskin often expressed his conviction that the Bible should be made required reading for everyone. Said he:

" My endeavour has been uniformly to make them trust it more deeply than they do: trust it, not in their own favourite verses only, but in the sum of all; trust it, not as a fetish or talisman, which they are to be saved by daily repetitions of; but as a Captain's order, to be heard and obeyed at their peril." (1)

By the age of twelve John Ruskin had been through the Bible six times. It is probably uncharitable and untrue to describe her as the " bete-noire " of his life. That her love for him was a possessive one there can be little doubt, but that she spoiled his chances for happiness is a moot question.

Ruskin saw much of rural England as a boy. His father's summer business journeys became annual family tours. The elder Ruskin may have had in mind Bacon's aphorism about travel being part of education in the younger ones. In any case, John

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1. Ruskin, J. Crown of Olives, Introduction, Sect. 12

Ruskin's informal education gave him a remarkably fine grounding in art and architecture. His formal education went along apace and in time he entered Christ Church College, Oxford. In 1842 he graduated with a B.A. degree.

As had other illustrious predecessors before him, such as Milton and Burke, Ruskin disappointed his parents upon graduating by refusing to enter the ministry. Instead he drifted into the precarious field of writing. In his case, however, there was no starving and no living in a garret because of the financial security he enjoyed from his father's sherry trade.

Thanks to the above-mentioned informal education, Ruskin had become an enthusiastic admirer of Turner's landscape art. When the latter was adversely criticized, Ruskin came forward in his defense. The year following his graduation Ruskin published the volume "Modern Painters" anonymously. His career as an art critic had begun.

The second volume of "Modern Painters" appeared in 1846. In 1851 he published the first volume of "The Stones of Venice". Two years later the second and third of this work appeared. His support of the Pre-Raphaelites led him to write to the Times. A pamphlet on the same subject appeared soon after. His interest in painting and architecture in time prompted him to add other volumes to these.

Ruskin's physical and mental health, during youthful years, was far from good. In 1816 his grandfather had lost his mind. Ruskin's own parents were first cousins which probably did not help matters. During his 'teens and after Ruskin was threatened by tuberculosis. His occasional fits of depression were relieved for a while when in 1848 he married Euphemia Gray. What promised to be a happy wedded life failed rather miserably and a few years later led to an annulment. This catastrophe has hitherto been " examined almost exclusively from Ruskin's and from his parent's standpoint ".(1) Only recently the John Ruskin-Effie Gray correspondence has come to light and much of this marital unhappiness can now be attributed to a combination of mother-in-law trouble and Ruskin's distressing periodic mental illness.

Ruskin's happiness suffered an additional blow in the public's indifference to his pronouncements on art and architecture. Nor did artists and architects appreciate his writings any more than did the public. He was looked upon as a dilettante and by some as a pretentious and malevolent amateur. The self-appointed Art-Dictator did not take kindly to the fact that he had failed to create much of an impression. His disappointment turned to defiance and, like the fox in the fable, he sullenly and sulkingly decided

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L. Quennell, P. "Ruskin and the Women",  
Atlantic Monthly, Feb., 1947.

to waste no more effort on those who were unworthy of his attention.

At about this time — 1860 is the date usually given— Ruskin began to pay much more attention to ideas he had toyed with in his earlier writings. It had been Ruskin's claim that the rise and fall of Gothic architecture in Venice could be traced in the rise of domestic virtue and national worthiness there and in its later decline. This interest in the social scene of a foreign city with its economic and political ramifications, led Ruskin to an intenser preoccupation with similar matters in England. And so Ruskin began to turn from art criticism to social reform.

This evolution —for evolution it was, in spite of those critics who mistakenly assume that there were two Ruskins —saw the reformer develop out of the art critic as effect follows cause. The devolution of beauty in architecture, he felt, mirrored a similar decline of social harmony. And so the vileness of man became his chief interest. Ugliness in art and architecture became for him a symptom of disease in society.

And, logically enough, he believed that an improvement in these fields could only follow betterment of the social scene. And Ruskin ( as we shall see in the next chapter ) shared Arnold's, Newman's, Carlyle's etc. conviction that all was not well in nineteenth century industrial England.

He felt that people who were not properly taken care

of socially, economically and politically could not appreciate art. Admiration of painting and appreciation of architecture stood a much better chance when people were well fed, well housed and happily employed. When brought face to face with the criminal exploitation of the poor during the heyday of the industrial revolution, Ruskin himself could not think of art but only of reform. Said he:

" I cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, and the very light of the morning sky has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly. Therefore I will endure it no longer quietly; but henceforward, with any few or many who will help, do my poor best to abate this misery." (1)

Hence the evolution of John Ruskin the art critic to John Ruskin the social reformer.

This interest in the welfare of his fellow-man brings to mind Ruskin's charitable nature. He loved his less fortunate brothers and translated that love into action. Let it be noted, in fairness to a sometimes maligned mother, that Ruskin's charity was probably inherited from his home life. The number of old servants around Denmark Hill, Ruskin's home, suggested an Old People's Home. When a visitor once asked Mrs. Ruskin what one of the ancient maids did, Mrs. Ruskin replied: " She my dear, puts out the dessert." Ruskin himself spent

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1. Ruskin, J. Fors Clavigera, I, p. 4.

seven eighths of the two hundred thousand pound fortune he inherited on philanthropic works. Anne Ritchie (1) tells the following story:

" Another legend begins with a dream in which Ruskin dreamt himself a Fransiscan friar. Now I am told that when he was at Rome there was a beggar on the steps of the Pincio who begged of Mr. Ruskin every day as he passed, and who always received something. On one occasion the grateful beggar suddenly caught the outstretched hand and kissed it. Mr. Ruskin stopped short, drew his hand hastily away, and then with a sudden impulse, bending forward, kissed the beggar's cheek. The next day the man came to Mr. Ruskin's lodging to find him, bringing a gift, which he offered with tears in his eyes. It was a relic, he said, a shred of brown cloth which had once formed part of the robe of St. Francis. Mr. Ruskin remembered his dream when the poor beggar brought forth his relic, and thence, so I am told, came his pilgrimage to the convent of St. Francis of Assisi.....I personally should like to believe that the mendicant was himself St. Francis appearing in the garb of a beggar to his great disciple, to whom also has been granted the gift of interpreting the voices of nature."

From this time of transition on Ruskin became more and more devoted to the betterment of the poorest of mankind. In 1860 there appeared four articles on Social and Political Economy in Cornhill Magazine. Two years later these essays were republished as a volume entitled " Unto This Last ". Another four articles on the same subject appeared in Fraser's Magazine in 1862-63 and were later republished as " Munera Pulveris ". Along with occasional works

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1. Ritchie, A. Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning



and lectures on mineralogy, art and architecture, Ruskin continued his social work. " Letters on the Ideal State " appeared later. Between 1870 and 1884 Ruskin wrote and published almost one hundred letters to workmen and labourers under the general title " Fors Clavigera ".

Nor did Ruskin limit himself to the written word. He practised what he preached. He had financed Rossetti, the Pre-Raphaelite, earlier and he now began to finance all sorts of utopian schemes in the economic sphere. He helped found the Working Men's College where he taught for some time. He founded St. George's Guild in 1871 and poured a lot of money into it. He led a group of Oxford undergraduates in building roads in 1874.

All this while, Ruskin's personal life continued to be unhappy. What he considered to be his failure as an art critic extended into his life as a reformer. An unfortunate love affair with a child of eleven, Rose LaTouche did not help matters. The girl who was so much younger than Ruskin could not return his love and this additional failure on his part contributed to his depression, languor and listlessness. When Rose died Ruskin came to believe that she was sending him messages. This mental confusion grew until 1818 when he suffered his first attack of madness. Other attacks followed in 1881, 1882, 1885, 1886, 1889. He died, sane, from influenza on January 21, 1900.

The Victorian Background

As it was pointed out at the beginning of the last chapter our purpose here is to show how Ruskin as a social reformer fits into the general scheme of nineteenth century reform.

In the early years of the century some of the English intellectuals were very greatly influenced by the philosophy of the French Revolution. It was their belief that heaven could be taken by storm. They felt that social betterment could best be brought about by catastrophic upheaval. Revolution was the great cure-all. However, utopia did not come. The Napoleonic Wars did, though. This meant rearmament and foreign mart for implements of war and debt in England. And in France the democratic ideals of the revolution suffered a set-back. The English dreamers became despondent.

As the nineteenth century went on, their conception of progress changed. Evolution as a means of social betterment came to be relied upon instead of revolution. This new philosophy of change was strengthened by the Reform Bills and by the progress of the Industrial Revolution. Darwin's theory of evolution, which may or may not have been true in the organic world, became the thing to believe in the social and political world.

Events lent weight to this new conception of progress. Reform was in the air. In spite of a post-war depression, the " hungry forties ", crushing taxes and widespread unemployment there did seem to be an over-all progress. The " Corn Laws " which had caused enormous suffering, were repealed in 1846. The Reform Bills extended the vote beyond the privileged classes. Gladstone improved matters in the field of education. The postal system was reorganized for the better. The criminal element in the population was checked by a new and efficient police system. Women and children were slowly taken out of the mines and the factories.

But all this came about terribly slowly and there remained much to be done. The golden age of the industrial revolution was a scientific achievement; it was also a social outrage and moral disgrace. Conditions in the mines and factories were deplorable according to our standards. Sweatshops and child labour lingered on. Long hours, low pay, unhealthy and unsanitary working conditions prevailed. All the evils against which our labour movements have directed their efforts existed then in unabated form and force. There was little or no security, unemployment insurance or collective bargaining. Labour was not organized and there was tyranny in management because there was no labour party in existence to emply its voice in parliament as a political influence.

In many Victorian writers there appeared a kind of double vision. They saw the improvements and the promise the future held ; they also saw the abuses and evils of their own time. When Tennyson (1), for instance, " dipped into the future, far as human eye could see " he saw utopia; when he looked about him he spoke in disillusioned tones:

" Cursed be the social wants that sin against  
the strength of youth !  
Cursed be the social lies that warp us  
from the living truth !"

(2)

When Carlyle saw the materialistic and utilitarian philosophy so widespread, he wrote:

" To such readers as have reflected,  
what can be called reflecting, on  
men's life, and happily discovered,  
in contradiction to much Profit-and-  
-loss Philosophy, speculative and  
practical, that Soul is not synony-  
-mous with Stomach....."

According to Alonzo Myers, in his History of English Literature, Carlyle also said:

" I do not want cheaper cotton, swifter  
railways; I want God, Freedom,  
Immortality."

Arnold is said to have summed up his own opinion of nineteenth century England in something like these words:

" Industry has materialized the upper  
classes, vulgarized the middle  
classes and brutalized the lower  
classes."

Thomas Hood (3) exclaimed in anguish:

" Oh God, that bread should be so dear  
And flesh and blood so cheap."

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1. Tennyson, A. Locksley Hall.
  2. Carlyle, T. Sartor Resartus, Bk. II, Ch. 7.
  3. Hood, T. The Song of the Shirt.



## PART II

Introduction

Having outlined the aim of this thesis and having sketched Ruskin's own history as well as that of the Victorian Age, we now come to some of Ruskin's teachings. While part of his message was negatively critical he was no barren prophet of denunciation. Much of his thought and criticism was constructive. Moreover, he was not a mere parlor agitator. He had practical measures in mind. He envisaged a scheme or program and did not merely confine himself to a doctrine or ideology or theory. The Guild of St. George was a social and industrial experiment, a philanthropic project, designed as a practical remedy. The fortune which he inherited from his father enabled him to indulge in many charitable and beneficent activities. He was a pioneer social worker.

Ruskin was a man of various interests. And he has left us wise maxims and thoughts in the fields of education, reading, religion, industry, politics, domestic policy, capitalism and materialism, the enjoyment of luxury in time of war, the press and propaganda, criminology, population and many other branches of human learning and experience.

It is the aim of these chapters to prove that Ruskin's teachings in some of the above-mentioned fields might well serve as a starting-off point in our desire for reform and improvement.

## CHAPTER 4

Education

a) What it is :

America, which spends millions and millions of dollars on education, has of recent years witnessed the strange spectacle of eminent and non-eminent critics finding fault with what is taught in the schools of the land. Today everyone wants an education but not everyone agrees as to what constitutes an education.

Before discussing the content of education and the curricula of colleges there is a previous question to answer. What are you trying to educate ? What is man ? Has he a soul ? Now, while the vast majority of educators will answer the last question affirmatively for the record, they draw up their curricula with a complete disregard for that soul. Because they forget that man is made in the image and likeness of God and that souls are an important part of men, they fail to educate the " whole man ". And their failure is reflected in our civilization which Sir Richard Livingstone (1) describes in these terms:

" If you want a description of our age, here is one. The civilization of means without ends; rich in means beyond any other epoch, and almost beyond human needs; squandering and misusing them, because it has no overruling ideal, an ample body with a meagre soul."

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1. Livingstone, R. The Future in Education, p.118.

John Ruskin preached the primacy of moral education and the dependence of all other education on it.

" All education must be moral first, intellectual secondarily. Intellectual, before — much more without — moral education, is in completeness impossible; and in incompleteness, a calamity." (1)

In a letter dated 23rd Nov. 1881, he continued in this strain:

" Without..(moral education)...no man can be educated humanly. He may be made a calculating machine — a walking dictionary — a painter of dead bodies — a twangler or scratcher on keys or cat-gut — a discoverer of new forms of worms in mud. But a properly so-called human being — never.....See first that ..( a child's )...realities are heavenly."

In his masterpiece " Unto This Last " Ruskin speaks of the...

"..ossifiant theory of progress on the negation of a soul." (2)

In our so-called progressive education when so much talk is heard of a better world for our children to live in, religion, when not totally ignored, is relegated to a minor position. In many of our schools everything under the sun is taught, but not religion. It is argued that the child's mind is not ready for the deep thought and philosophical niceties of religious teaching. The answer to this objection is that the child need not be given the more difficult aspects of the matter. It is not necessary to introduce the highly controversial and subtle distinctions dividing Christian churches to the child. There is enough in the Bible

1. Ruskin, J. Fors Clavigera , 67.
2. Ruskin, J. Unto This Last, Essay: The Roots of Honour, paragraph 4.



to start him off on the right foot. He will at least know of Christ and His Church." These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life through His name." ( John)

It need hardly be mentioned that the above is not written with Catholic schools in mind. But, the public or non-sectarian schools should be able to teach that much of Christianity without stepping on anyone's toes. Our democratic system, which in good part is predicated and built upon Christian principles, cannot continue unless these fundamentals are the guiding light of our behaviour. To borrow Tom Paine's words " These are times that try men's souls." These souls will be found wanting — and in too many cases they have been found wanting — if we continue to produce what Matthew Arnold described as " light half-believers of casual creeds." There must be a philosophy of life and there must be faith in that philosophy. People whose outlook is purely negative cannot create. It might almost be said that where there is nothing positive there can be nothing possible.

During World War II many commentators pointed with alarm to the fact that Nazi youth had a faith where Allied youth had none. The young Nazi knew what he was fighting for. Whether he was right or wrong is beside the point at the moment. That which strikes us is that his fanatical support of Naziism indicated a philosophy

of life. These same analysts went on to claim that the youth of America did not know what they were fighting for. Admittedly, they knew that Hitler was to be defeated, but that's a negative aim. These young men could not defend the democratic way. They had hardly understood it before they were called upon to defend it. Had they had a suitable training in the teaching of Christianity matters might well have been quite different.

Ruskin preached in favour of moral education. Time has proven him to be right. Might we not practise what he preached ?

#### **b) Science Overemphasized**

Ruskin lived during the Victorian Age. They were momentous days in the struggle between Science and Religion. Echoes of that fight are still heard. Darwin's bulldog, Huxley, fought for science against the Church's spokesman, Wilberforce. The Anglican Church began this fight as a defender of a literal interpretation of the Bible. Science devastated the Church's stand and the latter split into the two groups, the Modernists and the Fundamentalists. This victory for science caused many to abandon the Church and make science the new religion. In the field of education this same shift was reflected. The more " progressive " element began to look upon science as the great cure-all. This is still going on in educational circles.

Ruskin claimed that much too much importance was being attached to the teaching of science. Let it be clearly

understood at the outset that Ruskin was no narrow-minded anti-science bigot. On the contrary, he recognized its importance and fought for a fuller recognition of it at Oxford. But, at the same time, he believed in the wise old saw about first things coming first. He believed in forming character.

" Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know. It means teaching them to behave as they do not behave." (1)

He was not one for accumulating facts and making a student a warehouse of information. He preferred appreciation to annotation and enjoyment to cataloguing.

Said Ruskin:

" The tree of knowledge is not the tree of life. We have to realize that to live is to contemplate, enjoy, act, adore, and we may know all that is to be known without being able to do any of these." (2)

Ruskin appreciated the limitations of science, He recognized it as something subordinate to ethics. Science, he felt, should not be pursued as an end in itself.

In a great number of American schools education has become a synonym for science. The result is that we have produced a race of specialists going their separate ways, ignorant of what is going on outside their own fields, and too often indifferent to their duties to country and to God. Why not ? They never received any worthwhile training in these fields. They limited themselves to one thing and are inarticulate in anything beyond that. The physicist and the historian are poles

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1. Ruskin, J. The Crown of Olives, Lecture IV,  
The Future of England, Section 144.  
2. Ruskin, J. Praeterita, ii, 336.

apart because they speak different languages. This Babel of tongues is more widespread and more serious than one would at first suppose.

Sam Johnson's advice to Boswell about learning evrything about something and something about everything has been forgotten. Ruskin did not forget it. He believed it and preached it. Ruskin and another great Victorian ,Arnold, recognized the smug, self-complacency of the insular Englishman. They fought for a more general culture. That fight is still going on and we who are waging it now need the help of all those of former times who stressed the value of culture. Ruskin was one of them.

### c) Discipline

There is much that is well-nigh insane about modern education's theory of discipline. The child is given the maximum of liberty and too often that liberty becomes license. The educator will say: " Do not interfere with the child. Let him do what he wants to do. He is expressing his individuality. His character is being formed! Malformed would describe it more accurately. There is much to be said for our parents' stern discipline. Juvenile delinquency was no problem then.

Ruskin was an eloquent opponent of the " laissez-faire " attitude in education:

" Make your educational laws strict, and your criminal ones may be gentle; but, leave youth its liberty, and you will

have to dig dungeons for age." (1)

Having seen the abuses that followed a relaxation of discipline, the twentieth century educator must heartily agree with Ruskin !

Under this general heading of discipline Ruskin's advice concerning the perfect curriculum is worthy of note.

When Eliot introduced the free elective system at Harvard, he probably had no idea that it would in time become one of the great weaknesses in North American education. Under this system the student chose the subjects he wanted to study ( or pass without studying). The result was the creation of the aforementioned race of specialists. It was also an admission on the part of educators that there were no things the student had to know. It was a denial of the existence of a philosophy of life — the philosophy of life which gave birth to western democracy. It did away with the three R's principle i.e. that there exists a core of subjects that constitute a " must " in education.

Ruskin, who championed the introduction of science into Oxford, was at the same time a believer in a broader education. His views on the moral content of the curriculum have already been mentioned. Ruskin would also have included courses on art in addition to the classics of the liberal arts college.

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1. Ruskin, J. Essays on Political Economy,  
 Essay IV - Laws and Governments; Labour  
 and Riches. parag.16

It took time but today we are witnessing a return to the Ruskin plan of education. The much publicized Harvard Report favours a core of subjects that the student would have to study and then leaves the scholar free to choose three or four additional fields of investigation. Hutchins and Adler of Chicago as well as the St. John's, Annapolis, educators are advocating the same return to what Catholic institutions never abandoned — a basic training in moral, linguistic, historical and philosophical fundamentals. Schools which still permit the student to pick his own subjects and do not insist upon his taking a group of basic courses might well turn to Ruskin for sound advice and guidance.

Education, to Ruskin, meant work and hard work. His students were not coddled. They studied. He did not believe in taking them by the hand and kissing the delight of learning into them. Nor did he believe in attaching too great an importance to sports. In a letter to Dr. W. C. Bennett, written in 1873, he wrote of 'our damned athletics which have made schoolboys of all our public men'. He likened the students at Oxford to children interested only in bats, balls and oars. When one thinks of our average university need any more be said ?

d) Those to be educated :

Ruskin was a great man for etymology. Before

discussing a matter he defined his terms. And, therefore, when writing of education he kept in mind the fact that the word means "to draw out", from the Latin word "educere". He knew that the aim of education was to draw out what was worthwhile.

He firmly believed that this drawing out should not be limited to youth. Believers in adult education will find a kindred soul in Ruskin. Said he, in "Fors Clavigera" :

" The first duty of government is to see that people have food, fuel and clothes. The second, that they have means of moral and intellectual education." (1)

Ruskin realized that this would mean additional governmental expense, but felt that it would be worthwhile:

" You are to spend on National Education and to be spent for it, and to make by it, not more money, but better men;— to get into this British Island the greatest possible number of good and brave Englishmen. They are to be your 'money's worth'." (2)

And in the following paragraph he wrote:

" It appears that of our public moneys, for every pound that we spend on education we spend twelve either in charity or punishment; ten millions a year in pauperism and crime and eight hundred thousand in instruction."

He felt very strongly about this because he looked upon education as the preparation for the sacred right and responsibility of citizenship. Were the

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1. Ruskin, J. Fors Clavigera, Letter 67, p. 246.  
 2. Ruskin, J. The Crown of Olives, Lecture IV - The Future of England, Paragraphs or sections 145 and 146.

Canadian government to encourage adult education by grants to the universities based upon the number of students attending lectures, we might not be so familiar with the story of traitors handing over vital information to foreign powers because of " a higher loyalty ". With this in mind, Ruskin's plan does not sound so utopian.

Now, be it noted, that Ruskin realized that a complete understanding of the duties of citizenship is not within the reach of all. Intellectual ability varies with individuals. He taught that once the more promising minds were discovered, they ought to be concentrated upon and given special training.

" Take most pains with the best material...Never waste pains on bad ground; let it remain rough, though properly looked after and cared for; it will be of best service so; but spare no labour on the good or what has in it capacity of good." (1)

It was Ruskin's conviction that God sends us the leaders we need in times of national and international crisis. These potential leaders are not always given the opportunity to guide the destinies of millions. They are often ignored, rejected, stifled, buried and forgotten. Yet.....

" Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid  
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;  
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,  
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page,  
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll:

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1. Mather, M.-John Ruskin, Life and Teaching, p.108.



Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,  
And froze the genial current of their soul."(1)

Ruskin wanted to unroll the ample page of knowledge to those people who showed promise. He felt that genius was born and that when found it should be made the most of:

" You can't manufacture man, any more than you can manufacture gold. You can find him, and refine him; you can dig him out as he lies nugget-fashion in the mountain stream; you bring him home; and you make him into current coin, or household plate, but not one grain of him can you originally produce." (2)

Ruskin's proposed method of discovering painters could be extended to other fields. He advocated having a "school of trial" in every important town.(3) This school would be the equivalent of what is known today as vocational guidance. Now, it is true that we have this method in operation today. But, it could be and should be extended. There are too many people doing the wrong thing. The psychiatrists list them under the general heading of "maladjustment ". Ruskin compared mankind's waste of talent to the millions of seeds that are never brought to bear because of the failure of the husbandman to care for them properly.

Our universities are overcrowded and the result is that the general ~~low~~ level of scholarship has dropped. Sir Richard Livingstone is reported to have said something to the effect that education prospers by exclusion. That overcrowding in education, as in housing, turns the school into an intellectual slum.

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1. Gray, T. Elegy in a Country Churchyard.

2. Ruskin, J. Political Economy of Art, Subsection: Discover

3. Ruskin, J. *ibid.* (para. 1 )

The weak student should be weeded out to give the brighter student the opportunity he deserves and the opportunity his country will profit by.

Ruskin's plan is as good as any and probably better than most. The success achieved in vocational guidance in our time lends weight to the latter claim.

In conclusion, therefore, it is our claim that Ruskin's theories about the content of education, the primacy of moral teaching, the necessary but not exclusive teaching of science, the need for discipline, adult education and the desirability of separating the grain from the chaff entitle him to our recognition as a prophet and our implementation of his recommendations.

## CHAPTER 5

Reading

Ruskin's views on reading and on great books lie broad-cast throughout his works. However, in letters to the Pall Mall Gazette and in the lecture "King's Treasuries", contained in the volume entitled "Sesame and the Lilies", there can be found a reasonably complete exposition of his opinions.

In the last chapter Ruskin's teaching concerning education was discussed. The treatment of 'reading' here is but a transitory step in the direction of that general culture which he admired so much. Said Ruskin:

"The first use of education was to enable us to consult with the wisest and the greatest men on all points of earnest difficulty. That to use books rightly was to go to them for help: to appeal to them when our own knowledge and power of thought failed: to be led by them into wider sight, purer conception,—than our own, and receive from them the united sentence of the judges and councils of all time, against our solitary and unstable opinion." (1)

Because of this great respect of his for the written wisdom of former greats he planned to form a library of standard books which could serve as a guide or reference.

Ruskin knew the classics well. In his works he is constantly referring to Homer, Dante, Chaucer, Goethe,

Shakespeare and especially Plato of whom he wrote:

"I'm doing the LAWS of Plato thoroughly. Jowett's translation is a disgrace to Oxford and to Plato." (2)

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1. Ruskin, J. Sesame and Lilies, Lecture II, parag. 3.  
2. Ruskin, J. Letter to C. F. Norton, July 9, 1870.

This enthusiasm for the past's great works and his conviction that a well-grounded philosophy of life could be built upon such a solid foundation find an echo in the " 100 Great Books " movement of today. To read many of our modern periodicals and reviews one would imagine that Robert Maynard Hutchins of Chicago University and the St. Johns, Annapolis, enthusiasts had been the originators of this idea. The truth is that Ruskin preached the same gospel and actually used the same expression —the 100 Great Books !

This is the situation today: the University of Chicago's extension school is trying to spread this " 100 Great Books " movement throughout the United States as an experiment in adult education. In various cities classes are being organized from all strata of society. They meet weekly or monthly and under the chairmanship of two instructors ( usually professors from a nearby university) discuss the book of the week. The books are a catholic representation of genius. For instance, here are the fifteen authors the extension school has picked to start with:

Plato: Apology, Crito, Gorgias  
 Thucydides: History  
 Aristophanes: Lysistrata, Clouds  
 Aristotle: Ethics, Politics  
 Plutarch: Lives  
 St. Augustine: Confessions  
 St. Thomas: Treatise on Law  
 Machiavelli: The Prince  
 Montaigne: Essays

Shakespeare: Hamlet  
 Locke: Of Civil Government  
 Rousseau: The Social Contract  
 Madison et al: Federalist Papers  
 Smith: The Wealth of Nations  
 Marx: Communist Manifesto. (1)

This conviction of Ruskin's we believe to be an excellent idea. Hutchins and company are enthusiastically spreading it. It should be extended farther and farther afield. We sincerely believe that the University of Ottawa should and could introduce it to Canada and this part of Canada especially. The chairmen could be changed with the fields covered by the book of the week. And in a capital city experts are at hand in almost all fields. For instance, to lead the discussion of St. Thomas' "Treatise on Law" a personable professor of the Department of Philosophy of the University might well team up with one of the brighter legal lights of the city. The mayor and a member of the Board of Control would be the logical choices to analyse and discuss Locke's "Of Civil Government". A professor of English and a representative of the Drama League might direct the discussion of "Hamlet", etc. Ruskin would approve.

There were some things in books of which Ruskin did not approve. For instance, filth. We who live in an age of immoral writing, an age whose literature has been described by Paul Elmer More as "romanticism on all fours", can find much profit in reviewing what Ruskin had to say on the matter:

"...the young reader...should be confirmed in the assurance...that there is such a thing as essential good, and as essential evil, in books, in art, and in character; — that this

essential goodness and badness  
are independent of epochs,  
fashions, opinions, or revolutions." (1)

Someone should carve these words over the portals of our libraries and paint them on the walls of our classrooms. The words give the lie direct to the stupid excuse for immoral writing, " but this is the twentieth century ! " One might as well say that something was immoral at three o'clock in the afternoon but moral two hours later.

Ruskin's views were not purely negative on this subject. He did not want writings to be free from evil only; he wanted them to possess good. Said he:

" Art is valuable or otherwise,  
only as it expresses the  
personality, activity and living  
perception of a good and great  
human soul." (2)

He was not one to believe in the theory of art for art's sake, which theory usually means that art is independent of right and wrong, in short, of morals. Ruskin went further and claimed that truly great art could not portray evil, sordid, or ignoble persons or scenes. (3)

" All art is great according to  
the greatness of the ideas it  
conveys, not according to the  
perfection of the means adopted  
for conveying them." (3)

He felt that the art-for-art's-sake school gave

only partial beauty or partial nobility and that

1. Ruskin, J. *Sesame and Lilies*, Preface (1882)

2. Ruskin, J. *Stones of Venice*, iii. 169.

3. Ruskin, J. *Life*, i. 341.

or *Modern Painters*, I, Part I, Sec. I, Chap. II, part. 9.

the alliance of moral ugliness with visual loveliness leaves much to be desired. It is not the highest kind of art. Ruskin objected to the introduction of evil and ugliness because it was an affront to the spiritual nature of man. Writing can be a powerful influence for good. Ruskin insisted that it be just that.

Our novelists —Steinbeck, Hemingway, Maugham, Wilson, etc.—have sold their talents to a depraved audience. The triumph of realism over romance has meant the glorification of the career bed, boozing heroes, sadism and sex perversions. Realism in literature is bankrupt. There was a time when, however bad, realism served a purpose. It aroused the ire of the reading public concerning social and economic injustices. Nowadays realism is divorced from purpose and is being made an end in itself. One would almost imagine that the reading public was composed of twisted mentalities and nasty-minded adolescents.

Ruskin did not want to go to the other extreme and have literature become nothing but religious tracts and pious platitude. But, he did draw the line when the liberty of realism became licence.

Our governments or rulers should draw that line too. There are government-appointed investigating bodies whose function it is to protect the public's bodily health from harmful ingredients in foods, cosmetics, drugs, etc. There should be similar bodies to protect the health of the mind. We do not advocate censorship

as we know it today. It is too late when a book has to be banned. Was it not Heywood Brown who said: " To forbid is to underline." ? The publicity that follows usually trebles the sale. The books should be reviewed by the censor when they are in manuscript form. A drastic remedy ? Granted, but it is a deadly ill !

And so, once more, it is our claim that Ruskin does not belong to the dead past but, on the contrary, is alive with ideas for the betterment of society.



## CHAPTER VI

Religion

The question of religion has already been touched upon in a preceding chapter when we considered the religious aspect of education. The purpose of this chapter is to prove that Ruskin's general religious teaching had much in it that was good then and is good now.

As has already been implied, Ruskin's philosophy of life was thoroughly and fundamentally Christian. He recognized and appreciated the value of the human soul, the dignity of man and the importance of the individual:

" Perhaps it may even appear after some consideration, that the persons themselves are the wealth... In fact, it may be discovered that the true veins of wealth are purple —and not in Rock, but in Flesh—perhaps even that the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures." (1)

One of Ruskin's most frequently quoted aphorisms is:

" There is no wealth but life." (2)

He did not judge the wealth of a country by the amount of gold it had buried in the ground, nor by its industrial output, nor by its imports and exports. He claimed that the greater the number of noble and happy human beings in a country, the greater the country's wealth.

Ruskin had some profoundly wise things to say about money. Money as the summum bonum of existence was one of the betes noires of his teaching. To those who made

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1. Ruskin, J. Unto This Last ,Essay II, parag.36.  
2. Ruskin, J. Unto This Last ,Essay IV, parag.64.

money-grabbing a religion, he said:

" You cannot serve two masters:— you must serve one or other. If your work is first with you, and your fee second, work is your master, and the lord of work, who is God. But if your fee is first with you, and your work second, fee is your master, and the lord of fee, who is the Devil: but the lowest of devils — the 'least erected fiend that fell'. So there you have it in brief terms; work first — you are God's servants; fee first — you are the Fiend's." (1)

As one of modern English socialism's spiritual ancestors he felt strongly about the abuses of the capitalistic system. In one of his most eloquent and imaginative passages, Ruskin wrote:

" Nay, but ( it is asked ) how is that an unfair advantage ? Has not the man who has worked for the money a right to use it as he best can ? No, in this respect, money is now exactly what mountain promontories over public roads were in old times. The barons fought for them fairly: -the strongest and cunningest got them; then they fortified them, and made every one who passed below pay toll. Well, capital now is exactly what crags were then. Men fight fairly ( we will, at least, grant so much, though it is more than we ought ) for their money; but, once having got it, the fortified millionaire can make everybody who passes below pay toll to his million, and build another tower of his money castle. And I can tell you, the poor vagrants by the roadside suffer now quite as much from the bag-baron, as ever they did from the crag-baron. Bags and crags have just the same result on rags." (2)

If this materialistic, money-mad, birth-control practicing world could be made to understand the wisdom of Ruskin's teaching on the domestic as well as the national front, much domestic heartbreak and national jitters might be avoided. Religious leaders have tried

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1. Ruskin, J. Crown of Wild Olives, Lecture I, Work, Sec. 32.
  2. Ruskin, J. Crown of Wild Olives, Lecture I, Work, Sec. 34.

and tried to make the faithful (?) see the folly of their ways. Possibly the Ruskinian approach to the problem might supply them with additional ammunition.

Ruskin admired the French for their gospel of brotherhood, but found it strange and sad that they did not extend their belief to its logical conclusion — the acceptance of a common fatherhood. The immediate father of the nation, he considered to be the government which he defined as

"..the executive fulfillment, by formal human methods, of the will of the Father of mankind respecting His children." (1)

And the most important thing about the children was their soul's happiness and not their body's comfort. While he recognized the importance of and fought for their material, economic, industrial and technical improvement and progress he very definitely relegated these to a secondary position.

In keeping with his belief in the brotherhood of man Ruskin answered the question — ' Am I my brother's keeper ?' — with a resounding ' yes ' ! With his biblical readings probably in mind, he looked upon money as the root of all evil. When the question of riches arose, he asked the very pertinent question:

" ...precisely in what manner was the correlative poverty produced; that is to say, was it a matter of surpassing only, or of depressing also ? " (2)

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1. Ruskin, J. Political Economy of Art, Addenda 1, parag. 1.  
 2. Ruskin, J. Pol. Ec. of Art, Section 3-Riches, Parag. 2.

In these days of Community Chests, Feed Europe Campaigns and other charitable movements and organizations, many eloquent pleas for help for our less fortunate brethren have been written. We challenge anyone to produce a more affecting passage than the following by Ruskin:

" As long as there are cold and nakedness in the land around you, so long there can be no question but that splendour of dress is a crime...they who wear it have literally entered into partnership with Death; and dressed themselves in its spoils. Yes, if the veil could be lifted not only from your thoughts, but from your human sight, you would see — the angels do see — on those gay white dresses of yours, strange dark spots, and crimson patterns that you knew not of — spots of the inextinguishable red that all the seas cannot wash away; yes, and among the pleasant flowers that crown your fair heads, and glow on your wreathed hair, you would see that one weed was always twisted which no one thought of — the grass that grows on graves." (1)

It is our feeling that such an approach to the feeding of starving Europe and to other charitable enterprises would succeed where weak petitions for help often fail. Ruskin did not flatter, he did not coax, he did not fawn. He challenged, he accused, he attacked. He makes his reader feel guilty. He kills all desire for luxury by showing the suffering which accompanies it in the world. Certainly the starving European looks upon our smug fatness as criminal and sinful. Only when Ruskin's words are broadcast to the people will an overwhelming sense of guilt make those who " have " shamefully see eye to eye with those who " have not ".

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1. Ruskin, J. Political Economy of Art, Lecture I, Sect. 2, parag. 27.



## CHAPTER 7

Overpopulated Industrial Cities

In the third chapter of this thesis a sketch of the Victorian background was drawn. One aspect of the picture was the industrial revolution and the evils it brought. As Goldsmith had predicted in his poem "The Deserted Village" , written in the eighteenth century, the population of the English cities increased beyond all-reason and cheap labour, exploitation and unemployment followed. Cities like Liverpool and Manchester trebled their population in fifty years. The result was local over-population, or, as Ruskin described it,

" a degree of population locally unmanageable under existing circumstances." (1)

So that, while the villages and the countryside were being foolishly abandoned , in the cities the availability of employment decreased. Ruskin described the existence of the people as

" diminished lives in the midst of noise, of darkness, and of deadly exhalation." (2) '

While he was not a machino-clast, Ruskin, nevertheless saw the evils that came with the machine. Admitting the increase of English manufactured products, English exports and English wealth, Ruskin pointed out the decrease in the number of happy human beings. Men, who

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1. Ruskin,J. Unto This Last,Essay III,Parag. 25  
2. Ruskin,J. Unto This Last,Essay IV ,Parag. 76

were not machines, were being used as such. The operative was being degraded into a machine — and was being made unhappy. Ruskin showed how in the case of a machine. . .

" the motive power is steam, magnetism, gravitation, or any other agent of calculable force", (1)

whereas in the case of man . . .

" the motive power is a Soul." (2)

Because the soul and the intellect are of such importance in man, Ruskin abhorred the severance of thought from labour. In all men, however simple or rude, he saw seeds of betterment and these he wished to cultivate and see grow. He did not want men to be animated tools.

" You must either make a tool of the creature or a man of him." (3)

Ruskin wanted to make a man of him. And recognizing the dignity of man, he wanted him to enjoy a certain leisure, a certain peace and quiet. Ruskin's was no unthinking exultation in mechanical achievement:

" No changing of place at a hundred miles an hour, nor making of stuffs a thousand yards a minute, will make us one whit stronger, happier or wiser. There was always more in the world than men could see, walked they ever so slowly; they will see it no better for going fast.... As for being able to talk from place to place, that is, indeed, well and convenient; but suppose you have, originally, nothing to say ! We shall be obliged at last to confess what we should long ago have known, that the really precious things are thought and sight, not pace. It does a bullet no good to go fast; and a man, if he be truly a man, no harm to go slow; for his glory is not at all in going, but in being."

(4)

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1. and 2. Ruskin, J. Unto This Last, Essay I, Parag. 13  
 3. Ruskin, J. Stones of Venice, ii, 178  
 4. Ruskin, J. Munera Pulveris, iii, 320

What food for thought for us ! If ever there was an age of hustle and bustle, of running to and fro, this is it. We are all in a hurry. We don't know where we're going but we're hurrying there. Our highways are death-traps where speed-intoxicated drivers make every week-end a holocaust of horror and our Monday morning papers gazettes of blood. People no longer stay around the home. The automobile has replaced the verandah and radio the family sing-song. We're enamoured of labour-saving and time-saving gadgets and don't know what to do with the time saved.

Feeling as he did about big cities, Ruskin had various remedial plans. He advocated garden cities, the recovery of waste lands and government action if necessary to bring these things about. He felt that the big cities of England were too big. In a giant city problems are brobdingnagian too. Transportation, food distribution, community enterprises, government, etc. are of such major proportions that much time and effort are wasted in the minutiae of planning, not to mention the difficulties of execution. Ruskin preferred five smaller well-nigh self-sufficient towns to one big city. He was one of the early critics of overpopulation in cities:

" . . . you get some curious laying out of ground: that beautiful arrangement of dwelling-house for man and beast, by which we have grouse and blackcock—



so many brace to the acre, and men and women — so many brace to the garret. I often wonder what the angelic builders and surveyors — the angelic builders who build the 'many mansions' up above there; and the angelic surveyors who measured that foursquare city with their measuring reeds — I wonder what they think of the laying out of ground by this nation." (1)

Today we read of Clement Attlee's Labour Government's plan to take the overflow of population from the big cities. The practice is to limit their populations to 30,000 or 50,000 persons. These "satellite" towns relieve the big city of its growing and grown pains. It is recommended that new towns should have only twelve persons an acre, with built-up area of 4,200 acres and total area of almost 10,000 acres — 16 square miles — for a town of 60,000. Usually a central "ring" road is built around the centre of the town, into which all radial roads run, to keep all through traffic out of the business area. (2)

These smaller towns Ruskin and Morris called " garden cities ". While Canada's landscape is not blighted by too many giant cities, the evil is with us in its embryonic form. In the United States, of course, the problem is a major one.

Why couldn't we profit by Ruskin's theory of population distribution ? A few years ago such suggestions were made and widely discussed. It was pointed out that instead of having half a million people jammed into a mad, scrambling metropolis, they might well be broken up

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1. Ruskin, J. Crown of Wild Olives, Lecture I, Work, Sec. 20.  
2. Ottawa Journal, Aug. 30, 1946.

into ten smaller towns where life would be more leisurely, happier and longer.

World War II has brought these problems to the fore once more. Immigration barriers are being lowered and the displaced persons from Europe are entering our country. To let them settle in our over-populated cities simply adds to the burdens of administration. Newly-built smaller towns a short distance from the big cities would solve the problem. World War II has not only made such population dispersal desirable but grimly necessary. The atom-bomb looms large on the horizon of the future. In Volume I of Scientific Information, Bernard Baruch's report to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission, we read:

" War with this weapon will not be completely unendurable in a country adequately prepared and strong enough to withstand the first onslaught. The length of the war would certainly be increased by adequate dispersion of great industrial areas and the construction of subterranean factories." (1)

Another partial solution to this problem of over-population advanced by Ruskin was the recovery of waste lands:

" All land that is waste and ugly, you must redeem into ordered fruitfulness; all ruin, desolateness, imperfectness of hut or habitation, you must do away with; and throughout every village and city of your English dominion, there must not be a hand that cannot find a helper, nor a heart that cannot find a comforter." (2)

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1. TIME, September 9, 1946, p.19

2. Ruskin, J. Crown of Wild Olives, Lecture IV, The Future of England, sect. 157.

In another volume he wrote:

" For centuries after centuries, great districts of the world, rich in soil, and favoured in climate, have lain desert under the rage of their own rivers; not only desert, but plaguw-struck. The stream which, rightly directed, would have flowed in soft irrigation from field to field — would have purified the air, given food to man and beast, and carried their burdens for them on its bosom — now overwhelms the plain, and poisons the wind; its breath pestilence, and its work famine." (1)

A closer examination of these sentences will reveal that Ruskin paints the evil and suggests the remedy. The evil — waste lands tyrannized by eroding streams which have stolen away the precious mantle or top-soil. The remedy — a "rightly directed" stream which would bless the surrounding countryside with prosperity.

Now, when Ruskin speaks of a " rightly directed " stream, he is not merely giving expression to the reform generalizations of the parlour expert. Ruskin was a geologist and as such was familiar with fluvial cycles, stream regimens, degrading and aggrading rivers and erosion. He knew that, in many streams, a very high percentage of the entire flow is discharged in May, June and July. He knew that, uncontrolled, this water would gouge, tear, serape, push and batter all obstacles. And, therefore, by " rightly directed " he meant the building of dams, the retiring of marginal lands, contour ploughing, strip and seasonal crops.

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1. Ruskin, J. Unto This Last, Essay III, Parag. 7

The evil Ruskin saw in England in the nineteenth century has reached colossal proportions in America in the twentieth. Large sections of this continent have become desert, dry, treeless and windswept. The over-exploitation of the topsoil is explained by greed, ignorance, laziness and, paradoxically enough, by charity. In its role of granary of the world and arsenal of democracy America has, upon occasion, bled its earth to feed its neighbour. Whatever the cause for this loss of soil, the terrifying fact is that this most precious national resource cannot be recovered for centuries. It is gone. The only thing we can do is save what we have left.

Ruskin's advice has already been followed and profited by in the case of the much-publicized Tennessee Valley Authority. The Tennessee river was notorious in the United States for its destructive floods. It had robbed the valley of much of its rich soil. The farmers were wont to say that the waters of the river were too thick to drink and too thin to plough. While the river grew fat with mud the people grew thin without food. The farmers were made poor. They lost their land. They became share-croppers and worse. Finally the government stepped in, mapped the area, collected adequate weather data in the region, built a series of dams, introduced strip-cropping, contour ploughing, the retiring of marginal lands, etc. It meant an educational program

to make the people realize what was being done and why. It meant a great initial expenditure. But, today, the Tennessee valley is a picture of prosperity, a haven of happiness, and a source of electrical power, a cradle of industry and a source of revenue for the government.

What has been done by the Tennessee Valley Authority can be done with other rivers. In Canada floods are less disastrous than in the United States but they are not unheard of. While we have few if any migrant farmers and share-croppers, there is a trend toward the renting of farms and away from ownership. These are the first steps. The next step is a downward one. Now is the time to harness the streams that prove troublesome in the spring of the year. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure; a reading of Ruskin is worth a library of " after-the-disaster " reports.

In addition to his advocacy of garden cities and recovery of waste lands, Ruskin championed government action to implement these plans. In our society the mention of government action is met with the cry of government interference. Whenever the government assumes the direction of some enterprise the hysterical cry of dictatorship, totalitarianism, etc., etc. goes up. Ruskin answered this charge in a very sensible and satisfying way:

" It is continually assumed that every kind of Government interference takes away liberty....Whereas liberty is lost only when interference hinders, not when it helps. You do not take

away a man's freedom by showing him his road — nor by making it smoother for him: nor even by fencing it for him, if there is an open ditch at the side of it." (1)

If more people realized that our system of government means government of the people, for the people and by the people, we would not have to quote the above from Ruskin.

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1. Ruskin, J. Essays on Political Economy,  
Essay II, Nature of Wealth and Labour, para. 13, footnote.

## CHAPTER 8

The Press and Advertising

Ruskin, who was very vehement in the expression of his likes and dislikes, once described the press as:

" square leagues of dirtily-printed falsehood." (1)

His aesthetic sense was probably offended by the poor workmanship of the English printer. That fault has long since been corrected. What of his accusation of falsehood, though ? Have our newspapers so improved that they can plead 'not guilty' to that charge ? For the most part, yes. There is, however, still room for improvement.

How often do we read of serious charges against individuals in large and heavy print on the front pages of our newspapers ? When these charges prove to be false, how often do we see the denial or the retraction on the same page. Most of the time a lengthy search is required before the truth is found hidden away on some inside page.

Most of the falsehood today is found in the realm of advertising. Ruskin once quoted a wise Jew as saying:

" The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death...." (2)

The first eight words of this sentence describe the high-pressure advertising of our time. The majority

1. Cook, E.T. The Life of John Ruskin ,ii,302.
2. Ruskin,J. Unto This Last,Essay III, parag.2.

of the so-called necessities existing today are imaginary. But when dishonest advertising repeats and repeats from newspaper, radio, circular and screen that these things are necessary the 'we-must-keep-up-with-the-Joneses' spirit prevails and the purchase is made. Then there are the products which are not only unnecessary but sometimes valueless if not harmful.

In 1947 the University of Chicago published a volume entitled " A Free and Responsible Press ". It was the work of educators, philosophers, lawyers and other intellectuals. It contained the opinions of such men as Robert Maynard Hutchins, chancellor of the University of Chicago; Zechariah Chafee Jr., professor of law, Harvard; Reinhold Niebuhr, professor of ethics and philosophy of religion, Union Theological Seminary; George N. Chuster, president of Hunter College. Said the report:

" These agencies can facilitate thought and discussion. They can stifle it. . They can debase and vulgarize mankind. They can endanger the peace of the world; they can do so accidentally, in a fit of absence of mind. They can play up or down the news and its significance, foster and feed emotions, create complacent fictions and blind spots, misuse the great words and uphold empty slogans. ( They ) . . can spread lies faster and farther than our forefathers dreamed. . ."

The Commission claimed these things were done. Do Ruskin's words sound so exaggerated after that ? Before condemning the foreign presses, we had better clean up our own back yard.



## CHAPTER 9

Aspects of  
Political and Economic Thought

For every man who approved of their teachings and paid tribute to their foresight reformers have always found ten who were only too willing to ridicule them and brand them as visionaries. Such was Ruskin's fate. The vast majority of his fellow-Victorians refused to listen to him and thought of his theories as of the unbalanced extravagances of a fanatic. A minority, however, saw in him a true prophet. In a letter to Emerson, Thomas Carlyle saw clearly and said plainly:

" There is nothing going on among us as notable to me as those fierce lightning-bolts Ruskin is copiously and desperately pouring into the black world of Anarchy all around him. No other man in England that I meet has in him the divine rage against iniquity, falsity and baseness that Ruskin has." (1)

Another tribute came from Friedrich Engels who said that

" Ruskin has never written anything worthless or unimportant." (2)

When we read his books today we are amazed at the number of his proposals which have since been written into our statutes and laws and introduced into our economic and political machinery. We are even more amazed at the poor reception these same proposals received at that time.

In capitalistic and industrial nineteenth century England Ruskin saw the exploitation of one class by another. On

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1. Correspondence of T. Carlyle and R.W. Emerson, 1834-72, (Charles Norton, ed. 3d. ed., 2 vols., Boston 1883) II, 352
  2. Outline History of Eng. Lit.-Needleman & Otis- p. 331.

the one hand were the employers — greedy, dishonest and insensible; on the other were the employees — hungry, lazy and ignorant.

As mentioned above, many of his remedial plans have been adopted in this century. Such things as a minimum wage, better housing conditions, the back-to-the-farm movement and fewer working hours are commonplace today. They were not in his day. He pioneered these and many other reforms.

When we read his nineteenth century pages we feel ourselves transported in time to the twentieth century. With the help of our imaginations we might well think we were reading the plans, promises and achievements of Clement Attlee's Labour Government. Indeed, the Webbs, Shaw and the early Fabian Socialists in England looked upon Ruskin as a fellow — almost a "comrade" !

( A separate and different " Ruskin " thesis could be written to prove the paternal role played by him towards today's British Socialism, just as his fellow-Londoner Karl Marx planted the seeds of Russian Communism.)

Lest this tribute to Ruskin assume the proportions of a panegyric, let it be soberly added that there does exist a more prosaic part to his story of reform. We have, naturally enough, emphasized and praised the worthwhile elements. There were others. Some of his suggestions are worthless today — although they were not then. We read long, dreary paragraphs wherein he defines his terms. His definitions and niceties of

thought have long since been adopted and made part and parcel of our economic thought. When, therefore, we read them today they seem pointless, however scholarly, learned and erudite. When he waxes indignant about something which has long disappeared from the wrangling council tables and found its way into the textbooks of economic fundamentals we think of the overworked but pertinent remark — much ado about nothing.

Then too, unfortunately, there are his suggested remedies which we think would do more harm than good. Of these we shall write in later paragraphs.

The reader has by now probably wondered what Ruskin's political affiliations were. It is not an easy question to answer. Ruskin, himself, said:

" I am, and my father was before me,  
a violent Tory of the old school,  
Walter Scott's school, that is to  
say, and Homer's." (1)

And, yet, later on, when those who championed the same principles he had long espoused called themselves Socialists, he said that he too was a Socialist. Bernard Shaw, in his usual categorical way, says:

" It goes without saying, of course,  
that he was a Communist." (2)

His strong disbelief in equality and his views on liberty bring frowns to the brows of true democrats. He was a watered-down Carlyle in this.

In spite of his professed Toryism, his bitter

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1. Ruskin, J. *Præterita*, Fors Clavigera, Letter X.  
2. Shaw, G.B. Ruskin's Politics (1921) p.22.

opposition to unrestricted competition and acquisitiveness give the lie direct to that claim.

" He was a republican as against institutions or laws which oppressed the poor, and a conservative as against theories and reforms which were based on doctrines of liberty and equality." (1)

Again, what was he ? Was he anything in particular or were his politics a hodge-podge of what he liked in various philosophies of government ? Probably the latter. We believe he borrowed from one group, neared a second, admired a third, leaned on a fourth, and belonged to none.

Speaking generally, however, he was essentially a Radical. In some ways Shaw was not far from the truth. To describe him as a Socialist probably comes as close to the truth as any label will. The advantage to such a description lies in the fact that Socialism as a term is as comprehensive and many-sided as religion. The mention of religion here brings to mind the fact that he has been named among those who move on the borderland of Social Christianity. There was an aristocratic overtone to his Socialism. He believed in the voluntary conversion or enlightenment of the upper classes. Thus his new Feudalism with its hierarchic structure or social stratification has been described as a socialism from above. He rejected both pure Democracy and abstract Equality and favoured the subjection of the individual to the State.

Having noted the variety of ingredients making up his highly personal political creed, let us proceed to an

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1. Cook, T., Ed. The Life of John Ruskin, I, 273.

examination of some of his beliefs —both right and wrong.

One of Ruskin's greatest contributions to the development of economic thought was branding the postulate of the 'Economic Man' as absurd. At that time orthodox political economists thought of the labourer as of a machine costing such and such an amount and worth such and such an amount. These economists ignored the incommensurables. The body was all; the soul nothing. Including human and moral considerations in economic calculations was not, in Ruskin's mind, sentimental bosh but practical economics. And he fought for such inclusion.

While in America major strides have been taken to remedy this inhuman treatment of labour, there are other parts of the world where the labourer is a slave and not much better off than the beast of burden. There is still work to be done before Ruskin's fight can be said to be completely won.

Another economic evil which Ruskin vehemently condemned was the doctrine of laissez-faire economics which closed its eyes to rugged individualism and unfettered competition.

Protagonists of capitalism glorify free enterprise, initiative, ambition, the profit motive and competition. These things are not intrinsically bad or immoral but rugged individualism ( to use Hoover's phrase ) is a trait of the few which often means rugged individualism for the many. It creates a situation in which dog-eats-dog, every-man-for-himself, and the

survival-of-the-fittest are the prevailing code of ethics. This social Darwinism is a law of the jungle and man's dream is to return to the garden of Eden, the civitas dei !

Ruskin wanted men to help one another and not to prey upon one another. He favoured free trade because it made destructive trade competition between nations unnecessary. He summed up his principles of Political Economy in a single sentence:

" Government and co-operation are  
in all things the Laws of Life;  
Anarchy and competition the Laws  
of Death." (1)

The discussion of the doctrine of laissez-faire economics and dog-eat-dog competition is not purely academic. While not much is heard of them in these years of prosperity, they were very much in evidence during the depression years — and some observers of the social scene predict another depression ! A cynic once described America as the land where the citizenry wanted a government which would not steal, but which would not interfere with those who did. There is the laissez-faire policy in a nut-shell. In Maxwell Anderson's "Winterset" — a play of the 1929 depression vintage—a character named Mio described the civilization of powerful interests in these words:

" It's like a chess game. If you think  
long enough there's always a way out.  
—For one or the other.—I wonder  
why white always wins and black always  
loses in the problems, White to move  
and mate in three moves. But what if

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1. Ruskin, J. Unto This Last, Essay III, THIRD LAST PARAG.

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white were to lose — ah, what then? Why, in that case, obviously black would be white and white would be black.— As it often is.—As we often are.—Might makes white. Losers turn black." (1)

There it is again. Might makes white ! It is power politics on the domestic scene. It is rugged individualism, the profit motive and competition.

Ruskin favoured government interference for the protection of the little fellow and the welfare of the whole. There is still a need for this parental form of government. When brother is at brother's throat an interfering parent is needed; when citizen is at citizen's throat an interfering government is needed. Economic or business fratricide — often called cut-throat competition — is not dead. Neither should Ruskin's remedy be considered dead.

In an earlier paragraph in this chapter mention was made of Ruskin's New Feudalism. His utopian design for an ideal society went something like this: (1)

1. Servile labourers- manual occupations at the base of the industrial fabric—brutal, degrading, inferior work—indispensable class which should be minimized.
2. Skilled crafts-the producers—workshops—21 classes organized in guilds.
3. Peasants and farmers-Ruskin glorified them like the agrarians of today.
4. Ruling class-a)landlords,b)men of money and commerce, c)professional men."

Ruskin had a plan concerning the servile labourers that we might well give some consideration to. He realized that while some work was brutal and degrading it had to

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1. Anderson, M. Winterset, Act III, lines 32-38  
2. Hobson, A. John Ruskin, Social Reformer ; p.185.

be done. In former times slaves were forced to do such work. Slaves, in the usual sense of the word, no longer exist. Therefore today such foul employment should be the lot of citizens who are foul themselves. Ruskin suggested that . . .

" all criminals should at once be set to the most dangerous and painful forms of it, especially to work in mines and at furnaces, so as to relieve the innocent population as far as possible. . ." (1)

The work done by criminals in our penal institutions does not do the community any good. Their effort — and at times it is considerable—is wasted. Prison reform receives a fair amount of publicity. But the reform is usually confined to the more humane treatment of the prisoners. This is as it should be in a Christian civilization, but we must not lose sight of the fact that these people are criminals. In the language of the courts " they all owe a debt to society ". Under the present system that debt is not paid. They do nothing positive or constructive. The whole question of the treatment and use of prisoners is negative. Inspired by Ruskin, we suggest that they be used for worthwhile purposes. Airdromes, for instance, are to be built in the arctic regions and free men are not easily found to volunteer for such employment. Why not use prisoners ? They would not be a burden on the tax-payer in that way. They would " pay their debt to society". There are many other forms of degrading labour where they might

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L. Ruskin, J. Essays on Political Economy, Lecture IV, Laws and Governments: Labour and Riches, paragraph 11.



be used to advantage. We give this as one more example of a positive and constructive Ruskinian theory.

Ruskin was a great believer in production for use, instead of production for profit. Today many serious and sincere planners recommend this as the prime function of industrial enterprise. In these post-war years we are going through times of shortages. Many of these are in essential products. Foodstuffs are scarce. Clothing is too expensive. Building materials for the homeless cannot be had. Many things that can be used are not being produced; but many things which can bring someone a profit are being produced. Driving through our cities we see theatres, breweries and other non-essential buildings going up. We also see people living in slums and crowded into inadequate quarters with other large families. Too often production in our civilization is for profit; not often enough is it for use. In his masterpiece "Unto This Last", Ruskin advocated righteousness as against self-interest. Said he:

" Make not more of money but  
much of it." (1)

Ruskin had a very great reverence for the law. He felt that it was better to honour a bad law than to live lawlessly. He does not mean that a bad law should continue to be enforced. Ruskin thought that such a law should be struck off the books — but that this should be brought about by legal methods according to parliamentary procedure. However, as long as it is a law it should be

1. Ruskin, J. Unto This Last, Essay IV, second last parag.

obeyed. This is sound because the stability of our whole social structure depends upon observance of the law. In recent years a serious, alarming and dangerous course of action has raised its ugly head. Unions such as the C.I.O. and the A.F.of L. have not only ignored but actually broken laws they did not like. If this continues and does not lead to anarchy, nothing will. Ruskin's thought on this was sound. If we do not share his reverence for the law, we may end up with too little law or even no law at all.

To conclude this chapter we will mention briefly a few of the false and unimportant theories advanced by Ruskin. Our reason is to make clear that we are not blind Ruskin worshippers. He had his weaknesses and his faults. We admit them. He also had his good points.

Two or three examples will prove only too clearly that Ruskin could be profoundly foolish at times. For instance in his essay on the " Maintenance of Life " he writes:

" No physical error can be more profound, no moral error more dangerous, than that involved in the monkish doctrine of the opposition of body to soul. No soul can be perfect in an imperfect body; no body perfect without perfect soul." (1)

Let us in a spirit of charity, say of such drivel that it is a highly debatable point and let it go at that.

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1. Ruskin, J. Essays on Political Economy, Essay I , parag. 7.

A few lines further on Ruskin writes:

" Nevertheless, the face of a consistently just, and of a consistently unjust person, may always be rightly discerned at a glance." (1)

According to Shakespeare:

" There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face." (2)

We fear that Shakespeare is right !

Ruskin's Carlyle-like theories of democracy cannot be reconciled with our political thought on the subject. Said he:

" ...that treacherous phantom which men call Liberty." (3)

Such an opinion is so far removed from our idea of liberty. When he claims that the word ' death ' is a synonym for liberty, we part company.

There were also his ideas which, while superficially attractive, were not practical. Ruskin wanted labour to be artistic, and he longed to see the artisan again become the artist. This is probably a very fine and noble thought, but in an age of mass production it smacks of the utopian.

And so, having outlined these few worthwhile and worthless aspects of his political and economic thought we go on and continue our search for nuggets of wisdom.

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1. Ruskin, J. Essays on Political Economy, Essay I, para. 7.

2. Shakespeare, Macbeth, Act I, Scene 4, Line 12.

3. Ruskin, J. Seven Lamps of Architecture, Ch. 7, Sect. 21

PART III  
CHAPTER 10

Predecessors and Contemporaries

While in many fields there was something of the trail-blazer about Ruskin, it is nevertheless true that he had his predecessors who inspired him, his contemporaries who agreed with him and his fellow Victorians who disagreed with him. ( The last chapter of this thesis will deal with a few of those who came later and agreed with him with special emphasis upon papal encyclicals.)

Ruskin never posed as an original genius. On page after page of his writings we find references and tributes to the great men of the past in and outside of England who served as guides for him. The predecessor who probably inspired him most was Plato. When we think of the philosophy of Beauty on a world-wide scale the Greek name almost immediately comes to mind. When we think of the influence of Beauty in English literature we think of such writers as Shelley and Keats. John Ruskin belongs to the latter group, too. Ruskin did not limit himself to an appreciation of the beautiful; he also preached the necessity of the beautiful. Ruskin's was not a quantitative but a qualitative economy; that is to say, the philosopher in the man discarded the superficialities of material comfort and thought deeply of the essentials.

It was because Ruskin appreciated the importance of the essentials that he left aside his art crusading and turned to social reform. Ruskin wanted the worker to be happy. He wanted him to be of noble character. And he felt that degrading toil amidst squalid surroundings made this impossible. The ugliness Ruskin saw in the industrial towns seemed to him to be a symptom of something far uglier in our civilization. Because he was a Platonist he believed, with the master, that to love universal beauty ( and be happy ) one must pass from love first of one beautiful form to love of many beautiful forms. What England needed, therefore, was more beauty and social reform was the only way to bring it about. To do this very thing, Ruskin dedicated his powers..

When we read in Book V of The Laws by Plato:

" For, after the Gods, a man's soul is the most divine of all his possessions, as being his most intimate property," (1)

we are made

to realize that Ruskin too insisted upon the primacy of the soul.

When we read in Book VII of The Laws by Plato:

" That a proper education, therefore, appears to be capable of rendering both souls and bodies most beautiful and excellent, has been rightly asserted by us," (2)

we are reminded of Ruskin's

views concerning the importance of the soul in education.

It is not too difficult to trace many of Ruskin's views on wealth to Plato. For instance, Ruskin wrote:

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1.& 2. The Works of Plato - printed for Thomas Taylor, by R. Wilks, Chancery Lane, 1804, Vol. 2.

" There is no Wealth but Life." (1)

and:

" That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings." (2)

Plato wrote:

" But there are two kinds of goods, one human, and the other divine; and the former is suspended from the latter. And if any city receives the greater goods, it also possesses the lesser; but if not, it is deprived of both. But the lesser goods are those of which health is the leader, beauty the second in order, and strength for the course, and all other motions pertaining to the body, the third. But riches rank in the fourth place. . . ." (3)

In quoting from Plato we have limited ourselves to The Laws because Ruskin translated them for himself. Plato's " Republic " influenced Ruskin to a lesser degree.

Let it not be thought that the two men just happened to write the same things in isolated cases. It was much more than that. Ruskin applied to nineteenth century England what Plato wrote of ancient Greece.

Nor did Ruskin confine his imitation of the old Greek to the field of theory. He acted as well. For that matter, so did Plato. The two men were reformers in deed as well as in word. They were dreamers who abandoned their ivory towers for the plains of action. Just as Plato was the official adviser of Dionysius of Syracuse, so Ruskin translated thought into action in the Guild of St. George.

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1. Ruskin, J. Unto This Last, Section 77.  
 2. Ruskin, J. Unto This Last, Section 77.  
 3. Plato, The Laws, Book I.

The list of Ruskin's contemporaries who agreed with him in part is a lengthy and impressive one. Among those who shared his anti-materialistic and anti-utilitarian philosophy were such writers as Carlyle, Arnold, Dickens, Hood, Elizabeth Browning, Newman, and Morris. And then there were men like Karl Marx who resembled Ruskin in some of the things they opposed.

The name which is probably most closely associated with that of Ruskin is Carlyle's. They shared many gloomy views. We prefer Ruskin because his gloom is lessened by occasional beams of hope, whereas Carlyle's despair admits no ray. Whether good or bad Ruskin advanced plans for the betterment of society. Carlyle did not. His faith was in individual reform.

" If thou ask again....What is to be done ? allow me to reply: By thee, for the present, almost nothing....Thou shalt descend into thy inner man, and see if there be any traces of a soul there; till then there can be nothing done ! ....Then shall we discern, not one thing, but, in clearer or dimmer sequence, a whole endless host of things that can be done. Do the first of these." (1)

Carlyle thought very highly of Ruskin. In a letter to Emerson, he wrote:

" There is nothing going on among us as notable to me as those fierce lightning bolts Ruskin is copiously and desperately pouring into the black world of Anarchy all around him. No other man in England that I meet has in him the divine rage against iniquity, falsity and baseness that Ruskin has, and that every man ought to have." (2)

Ruskin and Carlyle found fault with that abstract creation, the economic man. The two men insisted upon the importance of man's soul. We have already written

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1. Carlyle, T. Past and Present, Book I, Chapter 4.  
2. Ritchie, Anne. Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning - p. 145.

of Ruskin's views on the subject. This one sentence from Carlyle should suffice to prove that he entertained similar thoughts:

" I do not want cheaper cotton, swifter railways; I want what Novalis calls ' God, Freedom, Immortality.'" (1)

Then, too, both men denounced laissez-faire as a social philosophy. Ruskin's opposition to it has been outlined.

In Carlyle's CHARTISM we read that celebrated passage:

" It ( Political Economy ) sounds with Philosophico-Politico-Economic plummet the deep dark sea of troubles, and having taught us rightly what an infinite sea of troubles it is sums up with the practical inference and use of consolation that nothing whatever can be done in it by man, who has simply to sit still and look wistfully to ' time and general laws ', and there-upon without so much as recommending suicide coldly takes its leave of us." (2)

Let us conclude this Ruskin-Carlyle story by recalling that the two men shared a love of books. Ruskin advocated free public libraries and worked to found them. Carlyle was the founder of the London Library.

Matthew Arnold was another great crusader in this aesthetic fight against industry. Arnold's great epigram about industry materializing the upper class, vulgarizing the middle class and brutalizing the lower class finds its echoes in Ruskin. The social consciousness in Hood's " The Song of the Shirt " and in its companion piece " The Cry of the Children" by Mrs. Browning aroused a feeling of sympathy in these authors for the exploited workers. This same social consciousness prompted Ruskin

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1. Myers & Myers, A Short History of Eng.Lit., p.94.  
2. Carlyle, T. Collected Works, Vol.5, Chap.10, para.3.



to plan for a better world. The social novels of Dickens, wherein the novelist depicted one industrial and social evil after another, also brought the problems of the day to the attention of the people of England. In other words, Dickens did in the field of fiction what Ruskin, with his analysis and statistics, did in the field of non-fiction. To bring the matter up to our own times, Dickens is to Steinbeck what Ruskin is to Carey McWilliams.(1)

Ruskin was not the only Victorian to break with the conventions of his caste. Newman reminded the age that men had souls and therein placed himself on the side of Ruskin who preached the same belief. Morris was another. He fought as a disciple of Ruskin's for the ill-clad worker against the princelings of privilege. Addressing an audience at University College, Oxford — the title of the address was changed from " Art Under Democracy " to " Art Under Plutocracy " — with John Ruskin in the chair, Morris spoke these notable words:

" One man with an idea in his head is in danger of being considered a madman. . . A hundred draw attention as fanatics. . . a thousand and society begins to tremble. . . why not a hundred million and peace upon earth ? " (2)

Such words and the enthusiasm they are apt to provoke often make for revolution. In London, living within four miles of Ruskin and unknown to him, another reformer worked quietly in the British Museum. Although

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1. The non-fiction work "Factories in the Field" by McWilliams tells, with graphs, charts and statistics, the same story of migrant farmers etc. told by Steinbeck in his novel " The Grapes of Wrath ".
  2. N.Y. Times, Nov. 3/40, review of Eshleman's "A Victorian Rebel" by P.W. Wilson.

Ruskin did not know him, he knew Ruskin. He was Karl Marx. The writings of the two men were, in some ways, similar. It is the opinion of many that the seminal nature of Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' gave birth to twentieth century British Socialism. It is accepted fact that the spark of Marx's 'Das Kapital' flamed into bloody and successful revolution in Russia. The Communistic flames are now licking at capitalistic straw structures in other lands. Just as British Socialism and Russian Communism are fundamentally opposed today, so were Ruskin and Marx. But, it is interesting to note that the two men were one in their criticism of the principles of capitalism. From somewhat the same premises they reached different conclusions.

Finally, there were those Victorians whom Ruskin fought. Many times in this thesis Ruskin's opposition to utilitarianism, the laissez-faire policy and the evils of free enterprise have been mentioned. Another way of expressing the same thought would be to say that he fought against Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Bentham and Mill.

Most of these men subscribed to the thesis of Mandeville that " private vices are public benefits ", that " The more vicious the individual, the more prosperous the state." Speaking of Mandeville's " Fable of the Bees ", Joseph H. Fichter, S.J. wrote:

" Mandeville is to economic laissez-faire what Rousseau is to modern democracy; he is the root from which has grown the foul flora of liberal economics, the sperm from which has developed the omniverous fauna of modern capitalistic skulduggery." (1)

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1. Fichter, J.H., Roots of Change, p.25.

The afore-mentioned economists stressed the merely quantitative or pecuniary aspects of economics. They looked upon production for profit as the all-important thing. Ruskin stressed production for use i.e. he emphasized consumption. Ruskin's aesthetic and ethical mind did not think in terms of how much for how many at what profit. Rather did he stress the intrinsic value, the inherent quality. He did not ask whether a thing was useful only. He qualified the question — useful for what ? for whom ? etc. Ruskin wanted to know whether production of something was conducive to the happiness of the many. He didn't care whether it led to the enrichment of the few. Ruskin protested against the evils of industrialism and the gospel of individualism as expounded by Adam Smith, Ricardo and Mill.

There has been no attempt in this chapter to prove that Ruskin and his fellows were right or that his opponents were wrong. The point of the whole was simply to mention or call to mind some of the other leaders of thought who, in one way or another, come into the Ruskin story.

## CHAPTER 11

Encyclicals

In Part II of this thesis Ruskin's views on education, reading, religion, overpopulation, the press and advertising, politics and economics were outlined. It is the purpose of this chapter to prove that many of the reforms suggested by Ruskin are to be found in papal encyclicals and in other papal pronouncements.

a) On Education

In 1929 Pope Pius XI published his encyclical letter on "Christian Education of Youth". In writing of the reasons for treating of Christian education, His Holiness referred to the profane or secular character of our system in these words:

" But many of them with, it would seem, too great insistence on the etymological meaning of the word, pretend to draw education out of human nature itself and evolve it by its own unaided powers. Such easily fall into error, because, instead of fixing their gaze on God, first principle and last end of the whole universe, they fall back upon themselves, becoming attached exclusively to passing things of earth; and thus their restlessness will never cease till they direct their attention and their efforts to God, the goal of all perfection . . . ." (1)

His Holiness goes on to discuss the importance of Christian education. This same subject occupied Ruskin's thoughts and many of his suggestions are gratifyingly similar to those expressed in the encyclical. Ruskin's views about religious training in education have been treated in chapter four.

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1. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Education of Youth, parag.6.

Pius XI, in his encyclical, goes on to outline the rights and obligations of the state in these lines:

" These rights have been conferred upon civil society by the Author of Nature Himself, not by title of fatherhood, as in the case of the Church and of the family, but in virtue of the authority which it possesses to promote the common temporal welfare, which is precisely the purpose of its existence." (1)

It was for the promotion of man's temporal welfare that Ruskin abandoned his work in the field of art. Surely, Ruskin's insistence upon government-sponsored schools and government scholarships indicated similarity of opinion with the words of the encyclical just quoted.

When His Holiness insists upon the fact that man has a soul as well as a body, and that this soul must be taken account of in education, he is repeating what Ruskin preached. It is not our claim that the latter inspired the former. We simply want to prove that they agreed. The following words leave no doubt in our minds about the Church's stand:

" Any training of young minds which neglects or repudiates the feeling and the spirit of the Christian religion is a crime of high treason against Him who is " King of Kings and Lord of Lords." (2)

As has been pointed out in the chapter on education, Ruskin felt that the people — minors and adults — should be given some fundamentals of social education and be made to realize that the law of man is based upon the law of God. With this in mind Ruskin insisted upon teaching religion in schools. Here are a few similar papal pronouncements:

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1. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Education of Youth, parag. 43.
  2. Pius XII, Encyclical Summi Pontificatus, Section 4, Autonomous State and the Evils it Brings, parag. 15.

" It is of the utmost importance to foster in all classes of society an intensive program of social education adapted to the varying degrees of intellectual culture. It is necessary with all care and diligence to procure the widest possible diffusion of the teachings of the Church, even among the working-classes." (1)

" In general, then, it is the right and duty of the State to protect, according to the rules of right reason and faith, the moral and religious education of youth, by removing public impediments that stand in the way." (2)

The reader will remember the outline of Ruskin's views about overemphasizing science. Pius XII is at one with the nineteenth century writer concerning this question.

" The Church, the mother of so many European universities, attracts today, as she always did, the most prominent scientists; but she is well aware that man can use every good entrusted to him, even the freedom of will, either for good or for evil. Science has been misused for destruction, and, in fact, today it destroys the very buildings that it yesterday proudly erected." (3)

Speaking of Leo XIII, Pius XI, in his Encyclical on Atheistic Communism says:

" With clear intuition he pointed out that the atheistic movements existing among the masses of the Machine Age had their origin in that school of philosophy which for centuries had sought to divorce science from the life of the Faith and of the Church." (4)

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1. Pius XI, Encyclical Divini Redemptoris on Atheistic Communism, March 19, 1927, parag. 49.
  2. Pius XI, Encyc. Rappresentanti in Terra on Christian Education of Youth, Dec. 31, 1929, parag. 7.
  3. Pius XII, (radio message) Hell 'Alba, to the 'Whole World, Dec. 24, 1941, parag. 12.
  4. Pius XI on Atheistic Communism, parag. 4.

b) On Reading

The views of the Catholic Church on immoral writing is well known. Roman pontiffs in their encyclicals, personal interviews with literary people and sermons have repeatedly stressed the evils of impure novels. The existence of the Index of Forbidden Books is well known to all Catholics.

This opposition to immorality in poetry and prose is merely a specific application of the general condemnation of evil and sin in the world. It is what one would expect from the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. In fact nearly all Christian churches are in agreement upon this subject.

The reason a special point is being made of it here is that many literary folk are always ready to excuse filth in literature on the ground that the author was striving for realism. The Church feels differently. And Ruskin refused to lay that flattering unction to their souls. Proof of this can be found in chapter five.

c) Religion

In chapter six a few aspects of Ruskin's religious views were discussed. For instance, it was pointed out that he stressed the importance and the care of the soul, and relegated the pursuit of wealth to a secondary position. He also emphasized the duty of the rich to come to the aid of the poor. Ruskin's views concerning the necessity of charity almost had a Spartan touch they seemed so extreme. Finally

Ruskin fulminated against the materialistic conception of life which was so notable during the Victorian Age. The following quotations from papal encyclicals prove that the Roman pontiffs agree with Ruskin upon these three questions. The importance of the soul, of course, has always been of cardinal importance to the Church which has not had such a high opinion of the pursuit of gold. Benedict XV wrote:

" When Godless schools, moulding as wax the tender hearts of the young, when an unscrupulous Press, continually playing upon the inexperienced minds of the multitude, when those other agencies that form public opinion have succeeded in propagating the deadly error that man ought not to look for a happy eternity; that it is only here that happiness is to be found, in the riches, the honors, the pleasures of this life; it is not surprising that men, with their inextinguishable desire of happiness, should attack what stands in the way of that happiness with all the impelling force of their desire." (1)

Pius XI wrote:

" The perfect order —for which all of us now are longing—places, as its first and supreme purpose, God; all the rest, all the good things and values of this life, it regards simply as means by the right use of which we may attain to God. Unless men are prepared to recognize this, and to act accordingly, the new order will be faulty and imperfect. . . Man must learn anew ' to seek first the kingdom of God and His justice' ". (2)

From the days of Christ Himself, the Church has preached charity:

" The happy results we all long for must be chiefly brought about by the plenteous outpouring of the true Christian Charity. . . . When what necessity demands has been supplied, and one's standing fairly taken thought for, it becomes a duty to give to the needy out of what remains over." (3)

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1. Encyclical Ad Beatissimi on World War I, parag 12.
  2. Quadregesimo Anno, Sect. IV: Root of Social Disorder
  3. Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum, Sect. III: Church's Social Message



Speaking of mutual charity as an essential need

Pius XI wrote:

" ....the international hatred which is the war's sad legacy is proving a misfortune even to the victor nations and is preparing a terrible future for the whole world; it must never be forgotten that the best security for peace is not a forest of bayonets, but mutual friendship and confidence." (1)

We shall let one quotation suffice to indicate the Church's opinion of our money-mad, materialistic world:

" So far indeed are riches and glory and pleasure from bringing happiness to man, that if he really wishes to be happy he must rather for God's sake renounce them all." (2)

#### d) Overpopulation

In chapter seven were outlined Ruskin's views on the evils of overpopulation in industrial cities. His solution for the problem was also mentioned. Ruskin wanted the working man to have space in which to breathe and feel free.

The Church has expressed similar convictions:

" The variety of classes composing the social body has been the object of deep study, especially during the course of the last century, at a time when the doctrines of Liberalism and the development of "machinism" were bound to give a very characteristic impress to the world of labor, but an impress so little human, so little Christian." (3)

His Holiness Pope Leo XIII wrote:

" Justice demands that being housed, clothed and bodily fit, they (the working classes) may find their life less hard and more endurable." (4)

1. Con Vivo Piacere (letter), 7 Apr. '22, to Archb. of Genoa
2. Benedict XV, Ad Beatissimi, Subsection: Fever for Riches
3. Cardinal Maglione to Semaine Sociale in Bordeaux, 1922
4. Rerum Novarum, Sect. II: Solution Found in Cath. Teaching

Pius XI had this to say:

" Is it not deplorable that the right of private property defended by the Church should so often have been abused to defraud the working man of his wages and his social rights ?" (1)

#### e) Press and Advertising

A glance at chapter eight of this thesis will remind the reader of Ruskin's views of the press and falsehood and of the " lying tongue " in business matters.

The Catholic Church in its war against the forces of evil has good reason to know of the power of the press and of its use by the instruments of darkness. In the early days propaganda was a Catholic means whereby the word of God was spread throughout the world. In time the technique of propaganda improved. And, unfortunately, this evolution in technique was accompanied by a devolution in the matter propagated.

Pius XI wrote:

" A third powerful factor in the diffusion of Communism is the conspiracy of silence on the part of a large section of the non-Catholic press of the world." (2)

With dishonest advertising in mind, this same pontiff wrote:

" We must not omit to mention those crafty men who, absolutely indifferent as to whether their trade provides anything really useful, do not hesitate to stimulate human desires, and, when these have been aroused, make use of them for their own profit." (3)

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1. Encyc. Divini Redemptoris, Sec.4:Christian Reconst-
  2. Encyc. Atheistic Communism- parag. 18. (-ruction
  3. Quadragesimo Anno,(V)-Root of Social Disorder.

Here are even more powerful words from Pius XII :

" But a publicist aware of his mission and responsibility who has published error, should feel himself obliged to re-establish truth. . .It has been said that the tongue kills more people than the sword. In the same manner lying literature can be just as deadly as armored cars and bombing airplanes." (1)

f) Political and Economic Thought

Included among the odds and ends of Ruskin's political and economic thought as outlined in chapter nine were his opposition to the evils of capitalism and the ' laissez-faire ' spirit in economics. There was also mention made of Ruskin's veneration for the law.

Ruskin's words about the " crag barons " and the " bag barons " find an echo in these lines from Pius XI:

" This concentration of power and might.... is the fruit that the unlimited freedom of struggle among competitors has of its own nature produced, and which lets only the strongest survive, which is often the same as saying, those who fight the most violently, those who give least heed to their conscience." (2)

" Just as the unity of human society cannot be founded on an opposition of classes, so also the right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces. For from this source, as from a poisoned spring, have originated and spread all the errors of individualistic economic teaching." (3)

And here is a papal equivalent for Ruskin's respect for the law :

" At the present time, when respect for law is diminished by the regard being paid to such considerations as utility, interest, might and wealth, it is fitting that the

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1. Discourse Quando sotto il Sole (to Newly-beds) 1940.  
 2. Quad. Anno on the Social Order, May 15/31, parag. 67.  
 3. Ibid, parag. 74.

law of the Church should shine forth as an example of a law that never changes its principles to suit the interests of the day, and ever advances faithfully in the fulfillment of its divine purpose." (1)

It would be more tiring than difficult to go on quoting passages from encyclicals that are in agreement with Ruskinian views. Ruskin may have had his silly notions and his faults but he also had his worthwhile ideas.

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1. Pius XII, Address Gia per la Terza Volta , to the members of the Sacred Roman Rota, Oct.8/41.

Envoy

Ruskin was, among other things, a popular lecturer at Oxford. Henry Nevinson writes of him:

" I well remember how in the last lecture of one course he so overwhelmed us with solemn awe, that when he closed his book no one moved or spoke. We sat there absolutely silent. We no more thought of the usual thunder of applause than we should have thought of clapping an angel's song that makes the heavens be mute.

After a few seconds, Ruskin looked up as though surprised at the unusual silence. Then he turned to the drawings, made a few casual remarks about them, bringing us back to this present world, and disappeared. The applause broke like a storm." (1)

Could it not be that his works in their entirety have done to us what that one lecture did to that few admirers? Some day soon recognition of his tremendous work may come. This thesis was meant to prove that such recognition is not impossible. Ruskin sank into oblivion for a while it is true, but he may well reappear in all his glory.

" So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky." (2)

THE END

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1. Nevinson, H.W., Some Memories of Ruskin, p.151.  
2. Milton, John, Lycidas, lines 168-171.

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