

# RUSKIN JOHN

LECTURES ON ART,  
DELIVERED BEFORE THE  
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD  
IN HILARY TERM, 1870

John Ruskin

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# John Ruskin

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### PREFACE TO THE EDITION OF 1887

The following lectures were the most important piece of my literary work done with unabated power, best motive, and happiest concurrence of circumstance. They were written and delivered while my mother yet lived, and had vividest sympathy in all I was attempting;—while also my friends put unbroken trust in me, and the course of study I had followed seemed to fit me for the acceptance of noble tasks and graver responsibilities than those only of a curious traveler, or casual teacher.

Men of the present world may smile at the sanguine utterances of the first four lectures: but it has not been wholly my own fault that they have remained unfulfilled; nor do I retract one word of hope for the success of other masters, nor a single promise made to the sincerity of the student's labor, on the lines here indicated. It would have been necessary to my success, that I should have accepted permanent residence in Oxford, and scattered none of my energy in other tasks. But I chose to spend half my time at Coniston Waterhead; and to use half my force in attempts to form a new social organization,—the St. George's Guild,—which made all my Oxford colleagues distrustful of me, and many of my Oxford hearers contemptuous. My mother's death in 1871, and that of a dear friend in 1875, took away the personal joy I had in anything I wrote or designed: and in 1876, feeling unable for Oxford duty, I obtained a year's leave of rest, and, by the kind and wise counsel of Prince Leopold, went to Venice, to reconsider the form into which I had cast her history in the abstract of it given in the "Stones of Venice."

The more true and close view of that history, begun in "St. Mark's Rest," and the fresh architectural drawings made under the stimulus of it, led me forward into new fields of thought, inconsistent with the daily attendance needed by my Oxford classes; and in my discontent with the state I saw them in, and my inability to return to their guidance without abandonment of all my designs of Venetian and Italian history, began the series of vexations which ended in the very nearly mortal illness of 1878.

Since, therefore, the period of my effective action in Oxford was only from 1870 to 1875, it can scarcely be matter of surprise or reproof that I could not in that time obtain general trust in a system of teaching which, though founded on that of Da Vinci and Reynolds, was at variance with the practice of all recent European academy schools; nor establish—on the unassisted resources of the Slade Professorship—the schools of Sculpture, Architecture, Metal-work, and manuscript Illumination, of which the design is confidently traced in the four inaugural lectures.

In revising the book, I have indicated as in the last edition of the "Seven Lamps," passages which the student will find generally applicable, and in all their bearings useful, as distinguished from those regarding only their immediate subject. The relative importance of these broader statements, I again indicate by the use of capitals or italics; and if the reader will index the sentences he finds useful for his own work, in the blank pages left for that purpose at the close of the volume, he will certainly get more good of them than if they had been grouped for him according to the author's notion of their contents.

Sandgate, *10th January, 1888.*

## LECTURE I INAUGURAL

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

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

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

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

Rich, in the way and measure in which it is well for them to be so, they may, without doubt, *all* become. There is indeed a land of Havilah open to them, of which the wonderful sentence is literally true—"The gold of *that* land is good." But they must first understand, that education, in its deepest sense, is not the equaliser, but the discerner, of men;<sup>1</sup> and that, so far from being instruments for the collection of riches, the first lesson of wisdom is to disdain them, and of gentleness, to diffuse.

It is not therefore, as far as we can judge, yet possible for all men to be gentlemen and scholars. Even under the best training some will remain too selfish to refuse wealth, and some too dull to desire leisure. But many more might be so than are now; nay, perhaps all men in England might one day be

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<sup>1</sup> The full meaning of this sentence, and of that which closes the paragraph, can only be understood by reference to my more developed statements on the subject of Education in "Modern Painters" and in "Time and Tide." The following fourth paragraph is the most pregnant summary of my political and social principles I have ever been able to give.

so, if England truly desired her supremacy among the nations to be in kindness and in learning. To which good end, it will indeed contribute that we add some practice of the lower arts to our scheme of University education; but the thing which is vitally necessary is, that we should extend the spirit of University education to the practice of the lower arts.

4. And, above all, it is needful that we do this by redeeming them from their present pain of self-contempt, and by giving them *rest*. It has been too long boasted as the pride of England, that out of a vast multitude of men, confessed to be in evil case, it was possible for individuals, by strenuous effort, and rare good fortune, occasionally to emerge into the light, and look back with self-gratulatory scorn upon the occupations of their parents, and the circumstances of their infancy. Ought we not rather to aim at an ideal of national life, when, of the employments of Englishmen, though each shall be distinct, none shall be unhappy or ignoble; when mechanical operations, acknowledged to be debasing in their tendency,<sup>2</sup> shall be deputed to less fortunate and more covetous races; when advance from rank to rank, though possible to all men, may be rather shunned than desired by the best; and the chief object in the mind of every citizen may not be extrication from a condition admitted to be disgraceful, but fulfilment of a duty which shall be also a birthright?

5. And then, the training of all these distinct classes will not be by Universities of general knowledge, but by distinct schools of such knowledge as shall be most useful for every class: in which, first the principles of their special business may be perfectly taught, and whatever higher learning, and cultivation of the faculties for receiving and giving pleasure, may be properly joined with that labour, taught in connection with it. Thus, I do not despair of seeing a School of Agriculture, with its fully-endowed institutes of zoology, botany, and chemistry; and a School of Mercantile Seamanship, with its institutes of astronomy, meteorology, and natural history of the sea: and, to name only one of the finer, I do not say higher, arts, we shall, I hope, in a little time, have a perfect school of Metal-work, at the head of which will be, not the ironmasters, but the goldsmiths: and therein, I believe, that artists, being taught how to deal wisely with the most precious of metals, will take into due government the uses of all others.

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

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

Now, whatever efforts we make, with a true desire to produce, and possess, things that are intrinsically beautiful, have in them at least one of the essential elements of success. But efforts having origin only in the hope of enriching ourselves by the sale of our productions, are *assuredly* condemned to dishonourable failure; not because, ultimately, a well-trained nation is forbidden to profit by the exercise of its peculiar art-skill; but because that peculiar art-skill can never be developed *with a view* to profit. The right fulfilment of national power in art depends always on the direction of its aim by the experience of ages. Self-knowledge is not less difficult, nor less necessary for the direction of its genius, to a people than to an individual; and it is neither to be acquired by the eagerness of unpractised pride, nor during the anxieties of improvident distress. No nation ever had, or will have,

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<sup>2</sup> "τέχνην" "ἐπίρρητοι," compare page 81. "τέχνην ἐπίρρητοι,"\*\*\*\*\*

the power of suddenly developing, under the pressure of necessity, faculties it had neglected when it was at ease; nor of teaching itself in poverty, the skill to produce, what it has never, in opulence, had the sense to admire.

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

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

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

You will not expect me, within the compass of this lecture, to give you any analysis of the many kinds of excellent art (in all the three great divisions) which the complex demands of modern life, and yet more varied instincts of modern genius, have developed for pleasure or service. It must be my endeavour, in conjunction with my colleagues in the other Universities, hereafter to enable you to appreciate these worthily; in the hope that also the members of the Royal Academy, and those of the Institute of British Architects, may be induced to assist, and guide, the efforts of the Universities, by organising such a system of art-education for their own students, as shall in future prevent the waste of genius in any mistaken endeavours; especially removing doubt as to the proper substance and use of materials; and requiring compliance with certain elementary principles of right, in every picture and design exhibited with their sanction. It is not indeed possible for talent so varied as that of English artists to be compelled into the formalities of a determined school; but it must certainly be the function of every academical body to see that their younger students are guarded from what must in every school be error; and that they are practised in the best methods of work hitherto known, before their ingenuity is directed to the invention of others.

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

10. Lastly, there is a continually increasing demand for popular art, multipliable by the printing-press, illustrative of daily events, of general literature, and of natural science. Admirable skill, and some of the best talent of modern times, are occupied in supplying this want; and there is no limit to the good which may be effected by rightly taking advantage of the powers we now possess of placing good and lovely art within the reach of the poorest classes. Much has been already accomplished; but great harm has been done also,—first, by forms of art definitely addressed to depraved tastes; and, secondly, in a more subtle way, by really beautiful and useful engravings which are yet not good enough to retain their influence on the public mind;—which weary it by redundant quantity of monotonous average excellence, and diminish or destroy its power of accurate attention to work of a higher order.

Especially this is to be regretted in the effect produced on the schools of line engraving, which had reached in England an executive skill of a kind before unexampled, and which of late have lost much of their more sterling and legitimate methods. Still, I have seen plates produced quite recently, more beautiful, I think, in some qualities than anything ever before attained by the burin: and I have not the slightest fear that photography, or any other adverse or competitive operation, will in the least ultimately diminish,—I believe they will, on the contrary, stimulate and exalt—the grand old powers of the wood and the steel.

11. Such are, I think, briefly the present conditions of art with which we have to deal; and I conceive it to be the function of this Professorship, with respect to them, to establish both a practical and critical school of fine art for English gentlemen: practical, so that if they draw at all, they may draw rightly; and critical, so that being first directed to such works of existing art as will best reward their study, they may afterwards make their patronage of living artists delightful to themselves in their consciousness of its justice, and, to the utmost, beneficial to their country, by being given to the men who deserve it; in the early period of their lives, when they both need it most, and can be influenced by it to the best advantage.

12. And especially with reference to this function of patronage, I believe myself justified in taking into account future probabilities as to the character and range of art in England: and I shall endeavour at once to organise with you a system of study calculated to develop chiefly the knowledge of those branches in which the English schools have shown, and are likely to show, peculiar excellence.

Now, in asking your sanction both for the nature of the general plans I wish to adopt, and for what I conceive to be necessary limitations of them, I wish you to be fully aware of my reasons for both: and I will therefore risk the burdening of your patience while I state the directions of effort in which I think English artists are liable to failure, and those also in which past experience has shown they are secure of success.

13. I referred, but now, to the effort we are making to improve the designs of our manufactures. Within certain limits I believe this improvement may indeed take effect: so that we may no more humour momentary fashions by ugly results of chance instead of design; and may produce both good tissues, of harmonious colours, and good forms and substance of pottery and glass. But we shall never excel in decorative design. Such design is usually produced by people of great natural powers of mind, who have no variety of subjects to employ themselves on, no oppressive anxieties, and are in circumstances either of natural scenery or of daily life, which cause pleasurable excitement. *We*

cannot design, because we have too much to think of, and we think of it too anxiously. It has long been observed how little real anxiety exists in the minds of the partly savage races which excel in decorative art; and we must not suppose that the temper of the Middle Ages was a troubled one, because every day brought its danger or its change. The very eventfulness of the life rendered it careless, as generally is still the case with soldiers and sailors. Now, when there are great powers of thought, and little to think of, all the waste energy and fancy are thrown into the manual work, and you have so much intellect as would direct the affairs of a large mercantile concern for a day, spent all at once, quite unconsciously, in drawing an ingenious spiral.

Also, powers of doing fine ornamental work are only to be reached by a perpetual discipline of the hand as well as of the fancy; discipline as attentive and painful as that which a juggler has to put himself through, to overcome the more palpable difficulties of his profession. The execution of the best artists is always a splendid *tour-de-force*; and much that in painting is supposed to be dependent on material is indeed only a lovely and quite inimitable *legerdemain*. Now, when powers of fancy, stimulated by this triumphant precision of manual dexterity, descend uninterruptedly from generation to generation, you have at last, what is not so much a trained artist, as a new species of animal, with whose instinctive gifts you have no chance of contending. And thus all our imitations of other people's work are futile. We must learn first to make honest English wares, and afterwards to decorate them as may please the then approving Graces.

14. Secondly—and this is an incapacity of a graver kind, yet having its own good in it also—we shall never be successful in the highest fields of ideal or theological art.

For there is one strange, but quite essential, character in us: ever since the Conquest, if not earlier:—a delight in the forms of burlesque which are connected in some degree with the foulness of evil. I think the most perfect type of a true English mind in its best possible temper, is that of Chaucer; and you will find that, while it is for the most part full of thoughts of beauty, pure and wild like that of an April morning, there are even in the midst of this, sometimes momentarily jesting passages which stoop to play with evil—while the power of listening to and enjoying the jesting of entirely gross persons, whatever the feeling may be which permits it, afterwards degenerates into forms of humour which render some of quite the greatest, wisest, and most moral of English writers now almost useless for our youth. And yet you will find that whenever Englishmen are wholly without this instinct, their genius is comparatively weak and restricted.

15. Now, the first necessity for the doing of any great work in ideal art, is the looking upon all foulness with horror, as a contemptible though dreadful enemy. You may easily understand what I mean, by comparing the feelings with which Dante regards any form of obscenity or of base jest, with the temper in which the same things are regarded by Shakespeare. And this strange earthly instinct of ours, coupled as it is, in our good men, with great simplicity and common sense, renders them shrewd and perfect observers and delineators of actual nature, low or high; but precludes them from that specialty of art which is properly called sublime. If ever we try anything in the manner of Michael Angelo or of Dante, we catch a fall, even in literature, as Milton in the battle of the angels, spoiled from Hesiod; while in art, every attempt in this style has hitherto been the sign either of the presumptuous egotism of persons who had never really learned to be workmen, or it has been connected with very tragic forms of the contemplation of death,—it has always been partly insane, and never once wholly successful.

But we need not feel any discomfort in these limitations of our capacity. We can do much that others cannot, and more than we have ever yet ourselves completely done. Our first great gift is in the portraiture of living people—a power already so accomplished in both Reynolds and Gainsborough that nothing is left for future masters but to add the calm of perfect workmanship to their vigour and felicity of perception. And of what value a true school of portraiture may become in the future, when worthy men will desire only to be known, and others will not fear to know them, for what they truly were, we cannot from any past records of art influence yet conceive. But in my next address it will be

partly my endeavour to show you how much more useful, because more humble, the labour of great masters might have been, had they been content to bear record of the souls that were dwelling with them on earth, instead of striving to give a deceptive glory to those they dreamed of in heaven.

16. Secondly, we have an intense power of invention and expression in domestic drama; (King Lear and Hamlet being essentially domestic in their strongest motives of interest). There is a tendency at this moment towards a noble development of our art in this direction, checked by many adverse conditions, which may be summed in one,—the insufficiency of generous civic or patriotic passion in the heart of the English people; a fault which makes its domestic affection selfish, contracted, and, therefore, frivolous.

17. Thirdly, in connection with our simplicity and good-humour, and partly with that very love of the grotesque which debases our ideal, we have a sympathy with the lower animals which is peculiarly our own; and which, though it has already found some exquisite expression in the works of Bewick and Landseer, is yet quite undeveloped. This sympathy, with the aid of our now authoritative science of physiology, and in association with our British love of adventure, will, I hope, enable us to give to the future inhabitants of the globe an almost perfect record of the present forms of animal life upon it, of which many are on the point of being extinguished.

Lastly, but not as the least important of our special powers, I have to note our skill in landscape, of which I will presently speak more particularly.

18. Such I conceive to be the directions in which, principally, we have the power to excel; and you must at once see how the consideration of them must modify the advisable methods of our art study. For if our professional painters were likely to produce pieces of art loftily ideal in their character, it would be desirable to form the taste of the students here by setting before them only the purest examples of Greek, and the mightiest of Italian, art. But I do not think you will yet find a single instance of a school directed exclusively to these higher branches of study in England, which has strongly, or even definitely, made impression on its younger scholars. While, therefore, I shall endeavour to point out clearly the characters to be looked for and admired in the great masters of imaginative design, I shall make no special effort to stimulate the imitation of them; and above all things, I shall try to probe in you, and to prevent, the affectation into which it is easy to fall, even through modesty,—of either endeavouring to admire a grandeur with which we have no natural sympathy, or losing the pleasure we might take in the study of familiar things, by considering it a sign of refinement to look for what is of higher class, or rarer occurrence.

19. Again, if our artisans were likely to attain any distinguished skill in ornamental design, it would be incumbent upon me to make my class here accurately acquainted with the principles of earth and metal work, and to accustom them to take pleasure in conventional arrangements of colour and form. I hope, indeed, to do this, so far as to enable them to discern the real merit of many styles of art which are at present neglected; and, above all, to read the minds of semi-barbaric nations in the only language by which their feelings were capable of expression; and those members of my class whose temper inclines them to take pleasure in the interpretation of mythic symbols, will not probably be induced to quit the profound fields of investigation which early art, examined carefully, will open to them, and which belong to it alone: for this is a general law, that supposing the intellect of the workman the same, the more imitatively complete his art, the less he will mean by it; and the ruder the symbol, the deeper is its intention. Nevertheless, when I have once sufficiently pointed out the nature and value of this conventional work, and vindicated it from the contempt with which it is too generally regarded, I shall leave the student to his own pleasure in its pursuit; and even, so far as I may, discourage all admiration founded on quaintness or peculiarity of style; and repress any other modes of feeling which are likely to lead rather to fastidious collection of curiosities, than to the intelligent appreciation of work which, being executed in compliance with constant laws of right, cannot be singular, and must be distinguished only by excellence in what is always desirable.

20. While, therefore, in these and such other directions, I shall endeavour to put every adequate means of advance within reach of the members of my class, I shall use my own best energy to show them what is consummately beautiful and well done, by men who have passed through the symbolic or suggestive stage of design, and have enabled themselves to comply, by truth of representation, with the strictest or most eager demands of accurate science, and of disciplined passion. I shall therefore direct your observation, during the greater part of the time you may spare to me, to what is indisputably best, both in painting and sculpture; trusting that you will afterwards recognise the nascent and partial skill of former days both with greater interest and greater respect, when you know the full difficulty of what it attempted, and the complete range of what it foretold.

21. And with this view, I shall at once endeavour to do what has for many years been in my thoughts, and now, with the advice and assistance of the curators of the University Galleries, I do not doubt may be accomplished here in Oxford, just where it will be preëminently useful—namely, to arrange an educational series of examples of excellent art, standards to which you may at once refer on any questionable point, and by the study of which you may gradually attain an instinctive sense of right, which will afterwards be liable to no serious error. Such a collection may be formed, both more perfectly, and more easily, than would commonly be supposed. For the real utility of the series will depend on its restricted extent,—on the severe exclusion of all second-rate, superfluous, or even attractively varied examples,—and On the confining the students' attention to a few types of what is insuperably good. More progress in power of judgment may be made in a limited time by the examination of one work, than by the review of many; and a certain degree of vitality is given to the impressiveness of every characteristic, by its being exhibited in clear contrast, and without repetition.

The greater number of the examples I shall choose will be only engravings or photographs: they shall be arranged so as to be easily accessible, and I will prepare a catalogue, pointing out my purpose in the selection of each. But in process of time, I have good hope that assistance will be given me by the English public in making the series here no less splendid than serviceable; and in placing minor collections, arranged on a similar principle, at the command also of the students in our public schools.

22. In the second place, I shall endeavour to prevail upon all the younger members of the University who wish to attend the art lectures, to give at least so much time to manual practice as may enable them to understand the nature and difficulty of executive skill. The time so spent will not be lost, even as regards their other studies at the University, for I will prepare the practical exercises in a double series, one illustrative of history, the other of natural science. And whether you are drawing a piece of Greek armour, or a hawk's beak, or a lion's paw, you will find that the mere necessity of using the hand compels attention to circumstances which would otherwise have escaped notice, and fastens them in the memory without farther effort. But were it even otherwise, and this practical training did really involve some sacrifice of your time, I do not fear but that it will be justified to you by its felt results: and I think that general public feeling is also tending to the admission that accomplished education must include, not only full command of expression by language, but command of true musical sound by the voice, and of true form by the hand.

23. While I myself hold this professorship, I shall direct you in these exercises very definitely to natural history, and to landscape; not only because in these two branches I am probably able to show you truths which might be despised by my successors: but because I think the vital and joyful study of natural history quite the principal element requiring introduction, not only into University, but into national, education, from highest to lowest; and I even will risk incurring your ridicule by confessing one of my fondest dreams, that I may succeed in making some of you English youths like better to look at a bird than to shoot it; and even desire to make wild creatures tame, instead of tame creatures wild. And for the study of landscape, it is, I think, now calculated to be of use in deeper, if not more important modes, than that of natural science, for reasons which I will ask you to let me state at some length.

24. Observe first;—no race of men which is entirely bred in wild country, far from cities, ever enjoys landscape. They may enjoy the beauty of animals, but scarcely even that: a true peasant cannot see the beauty of cattle; but only qualities expressive of their serviceableness. I waive discussion of this to-day; permit my assertion of it, under my confident guarantee of future proof. Landscape can only be enjoyed by cultivated persons; and it is only by music, literature, and painting, that cultivation can be given. Also, the faculties which are thus received are hereditary; so that the child of an educated race has an innate instinct for beauty, derived from arts practised hundreds of years before its birth. Now farther note this, one of the loveliest things in human nature. In the children of noble races, trained by surrounding art, and at the same time in the practice of great deeds, there is an intense delight in the landscape of their country as *memorial*; a sense not taught to them, nor teachable to any others; but, in them, innate; and the seal and reward of persistence in great national life;—the obedience and the peace of ages having extended gradually the glory of the revered ancestors also to the ancestral land; until the Motherhood of the dust, the mystery of the Demeter from whose bosom we came, and to whose bosom we return, surrounds and inspires, everywhere, the local awe of field and fountain; the sacredness of landmark that none may remove, and of wave that none may pollute; while records of proud days, and of dear persons, make every rock monumental with ghostly inscription, and every path lovely with noble desolateness.

25. Now, however checked by lightness of temperament, the instinctive love of landscape in us has this deep root, which, in your minds, I will pray you to disencumber from whatever may oppress or mortify it, and to strive to feel with all the strength of your youth that a nation is only worthy of the soil and the scenes that it has inherited, when, by all its acts and arts, it is making them more lovely for its children.

And now, I trust, you will feel that it is not in mere yielding to my own fancies that I have chosen, for the first three subjects in your educational series, landscape scenes;—two in England, and one in France,—the association of these being not without purpose:—and for the fourth Albert Dürer's dream of the Spirit of Labour. And of the landscape subjects, I must tell you this much. The first is an engraving only; the original drawing by Turner was destroyed by fire twenty years ago. For which loss I wish you to be sorry, and to remember, in connection with this first example, that whatever remains to us of possession in the arts is, compared to what we might have had if we had cared for them, just what that engraving is to the lost drawing. You will find also that its subject has meaning in it which will not be harmful to you. The second example is a real drawing by Turner, in the same series, and very nearly of the same place; the two scenes are within a quarter of a mile of each other. It will show you the character of the work that was destroyed. It will show you, in process of time, much more; but chiefly, and this is my main reason for choosing both, it will be a permanent expression to you of what English landscape was once;—and must, if we are to remain a nation, be again.

I think it farther right to tell you, for otherwise you might hardly pay regard enough to work apparently so simple, that by a chance which is not altogether displeasing to me, this drawing, which it has become, for these reasons, necessary for me to give you, is—not indeed the best I have, (I have several as good, though none better)—but, of all I have, the one I had least mind to part with.

The third example is also a Turner drawing—a scene on the Loire—never engraved. It is an introduction to the series of the Loire, which you have already; it has in its present place a due concurrence with the expressional purpose of its companions; and though small, it is very precious, being a faultless, and, I believe, unsurpassable example of water-colour painting.

Chiefly, however, remember the object of these three first examples is to give you an index to your truest feelings about European, and especially about your native landscape, as it is pensive and historical; and so far as you yourselves make any effort at its representation, to give you a motive for fidelity in handwork more animating than any connected with mere success in the art itself.

26. With respect to actual methods of practice, I will not incur the responsibility of determining them for you. We will take Lionardo's treatise on painting for our first text-book; and I think you need not fear being misled by me if I ask you to do only what Lionardo bids, or what will be necessary to enable you to do his bidding. But you need not possess the book, nor read it through. I will translate the pieces to the authority of which I shall appeal; and, in process of time, by analysis of this fragmentary treatise, show you some characters not usually understood of the simplicity as well as subtlety common to most great workmen of that age. Afterwards we will collect the instructions of other undisputed masters, till we have obtained a code of laws clearly resting on the consent of antiquity.

While, however, I thus in some measure limit for the present the methods of your practice, I shall endeavour to make the courses of my University lectures as wide in their range as my knowledge will permit. The range so conceded will be narrow enough; but I believe that my proper function is not to acquaint you with the general history, but with the essential principles of art; and with its history only when it has been both great and good, or where some special excellence of it requires examination of the causes to which it must be ascribed.

27. But if either our work, or our enquiries, are to be indeed successful in their own field, they must be connected with others of a sterner character. Now listen to me, if I have in these past details lost or burdened your attention; for this is what I have chiefly to say to you. The art of any country is *the exponent of its social and political virtues*. I will show you that it is so in some detail, in the second of my subsequent course of lectures; meantime accept this as one of the things, and the most important of all things, I can positively declare to you. The art, or general productive and formative energy, of any country, is an exact exponent of its ethical life. You can have noble art only from noble persons, associated under laws fitted to their time and circumstances. And the best skill that any teacher of art could spend here in your help, would not end in enabling you even so much as rightly to draw the water-lilies in the Cherwell (and though it did, the work when done would not be worth the lilies themselves) unless both he and you were seeking, as I trust we shall together seek, in the laws which regulate the finest industries, the clue to the laws which regulate *all* industries, and in better obedience to which we shall actually have henceforward to live: not merely in compliance with our own sense of what is right, but under the weight of quite literal necessity. For the trades by which the British people has believed it to be the highest of destinies to maintain itself, cannot now long remain undisputed in its hands; its unemployed poor are daily becoming more violently criminal; and a certain distress in the middle classes, arising, *partly from their vanity in living always up to their incomes, and partly from their folly in imagining that they can subsist in idleness upon usury*, will at last compel the sons and daughters of English families to acquaint themselves with the principles of providential economy; and to learn that food can only be got out of the ground, and competence only secured by frugality; and that although it is not possible for all to be occupied in the highest arts, nor for any, guiltlessly, to pass their days in a succession of pleasures, the most perfect mental culture possible to men is founded on their useful energies, and their best arts and brightest happiness are consistent, and consistent only, with their virtue.

28. This, I repeat, gentlemen, will soon become manifest to those among us, and there are yet many, who are honest-hearted. And the future fate of England depends upon the position they then take, and on their courage in maintaining it.

There is a destiny now possible to us—the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood. We are not yet dissolute in temper, but still have the firmness to govern, and the grace to obey. We have been taught a religion of pure mercy, which we must either now betray, or learn to defend by fulfilling. And we are rich in an inheritance of honour, bequeathed to us through a thousand years of noble history, which it should be our daily thirst to increase with splendid avarice, so that Englishmen, if it be a sin to covet honour, should be the most offending souls alive. Within the last few years we have had the laws of natural science opened to us with a rapidity which has been blinding by its brightness; and

means of transit and communication given to us, which have made but one kingdom of the habitable globe. One kingdom;—but who is to be its king? Is there to be no king in it, think you, and every man to do that which is right in his own eyes? Or only kings of terror, and the obscene empires of Mammon and Belial? Or will you, youths of England, make your country again a royal throne of kings; a sceptred isle, for all the world a source of light, a centre of peace; mistress of Learning and of the Arts;—faithful guardian of great memories in the midst of irreverent and ephemeral visions;—faithful servant of time-tried principles, under temptation from fond experiments and licentious desires; and amidst the cruel and clamorous jealousies of the nations, worshipped in her strange valour of goodwill towards men?

29. "Vexilla regis prodeunt." Yes, but of which king? There are the two oriflammes; which shall we plant on the farthest islands,—the one that floats in heavenly fire, or that hangs heavy with foul tissue of terrestrial gold? There is indeed a course of beneficent glory open to us, such as never was yet offered to any poor group of mortal souls. But it must be—it *is* with us, now, "Reign or Die." And if it shall be said of this country, "Fece per viltate, il gran rifiuto;" that refusal of the crown will be, of all yet recorded in history, the shamefullest and most untimely.

And this is what she must either do, or perish: she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men;—seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists that their chief virtue is to be fidelity to their country, and that their first aim is to be to advance the power of England by land and sea: and that, though they live on a distant plot of ground, they are no more to consider themselves therefore disfranchised from their native land, than the sailors of her fleets do, because they float on distant waves. So that literally, these colonies must be fastened fleets; and every man of them must be under authority of captains and officers, whose better command is to be over fields and streets instead of ships of the line; and England, in these her motionless navies (or, in the true and mightiest sense, motionless *churches*, ruled by pilots on the Galilean lake of all the world), is to "expect every man to do his duty;" recognising that duty is indeed possible no less in peace than war; and that if we can get men, for little pay, to cast themselves against cannon-mouths for love of England, we may find men also who will plough and sow for her, who will behave kindly and righteously for her, who will bring up their children to love her, and who will gladden themselves in the brightness of her glory, more than in all the light of tropic skies.

But that they may be able to do this, she must make her own majesty stainless; she must give them thoughts of their home of which they can be proud. The England who is to be mistress of half the earth, cannot remain herself a heap of cinders, trampled by contending and miserable crowds; she must yet again become the England she was once, and in all beautiful ways,—more: so happy, so secluded, and so pure, that in her sky—polluted by no unholy clouds—she may be able to spell rightly of every star that heaven doth show; and in her fields, ordered and wide and fair, of every herb that sips the dew; and under the green avenues of her enchanted garden, a sacred Circe, true Daughter of the Sun, she must guide the human arts, and gather the divine knowledge, of distant nations, transformed from savageness to manhood, and redeemed from despairing into peace.

30. You think that an impossible ideal. Be it so; refuse to accept it if you will; but see that you form your own in its stead. All that I ask of you is to have a fixed purpose of some kind for your country and yourselves; no matter how restricted, so that it be fixed and unselfish. I know what stout hearts are in you, to answer acknowledged need: but it is the fatallest form of error in English youths to hide their hardihood till it fades for lack of sunshine, and to act in disdain of purpose, till all purpose is vain. It is not by deliberate, but by careless selfishness; not by compromise with evil, but by dull following of good, that the weight of national evil increases upon us daily. Break through at least this pretence of existence; determine what you will be, and what you would win. You will not decide wrongly if you will resolve to decide at all. Were even the choice between lawless pleasure and loyal suffering, you would not, I believe, choose basely. But your trial is not so sharp.

It is between drifting in confused wreck among the castaways of Fortune, who condemns to assured ruin those who know not either how to resist her, or obey; between this, I say, and the taking of your appointed part in the heroism of Rest; the resolving to share in the victory which is to the weak rather than the strong; and the binding yourselves by that law, which, thought on through lingering night and labouring day, makes a man's life to be as a tree planted by the water-side, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season;—

"ET FOLIUM EJUS NON DEFLUET,  
ET OMNIA, QUÆCUNQUE FACIET, PROSPERABUNTUR."

## LECTURE II

### THE RELATION OF ART TO RELIGION

31. It was stated, and I trust partly with your acceptance, in my opening lecture, that the study on which we are about to enter cannot be rightly undertaken except in furtherance of the grave purposes of life with respect to which the rest of the scheme of your education here is designed. But you can scarcely have at once felt all that I intended in saying so;—you cannot but be still partly under the impression that the so-called fine arts are merely modes of graceful recreation, and a new resource for your times of rest. Let me ask you, forthwith, so far as you can trust me, to change your thoughts in this matter. All the great arts have for their object either the support or exaltation of human life, —usually both; and their dignity, and ultimately their very existence, depend on their being "μετὰ λόγου ἀληθοῦς," that is to say, apprehending, with right reason, the nature of the materials they work with, of the things they relate or represent, and of the faculties to which they are addressed. And farther, they form one united system from which it is impossible to remove any part without harm to the rest. They are founded first in mastery, by strength of *arm*, of the earth and sea, in agriculture and seamanship; then their inventive power begins, with the clay in the hand of the potter, whose art is the humblest but truest type of the forming of the human body and spirit; and in the carpenter's work, which probably was the early employment of the Founder of our religion. And until men have perfectly learned the laws of art in clay and wood, they can consummately know no others. Nor is it without the strange significance which you will find in what at first seems chance, in all noble histories, as soon as you can read them rightly,—that the statue of Athena Polias was of olive-wood, and that the Greek temple and Gothic spire are both merely the permanent representations of useful wooden structures. On these two first arts follow building in stone,—sculpture,—metal work,—and painting; every art being properly called "fine" which demands the exercise of the full faculties of heart and intellect. For though the fine arts are not necessarily imitative or representative, for their essence is in being *περὶ περὶ γένεσιν* —occupied in the actual *production* of beautiful form or colour, —still, the highest of them are appointed also to relate to us the utmost ascertainable truth respecting visible things and moral feelings: and this pursuit of *fact* is the vital *element* of the art power;—that in which alone it can develop itself to its utmost. And I will anticipate by an assertion which you will at present think too bold, but which I am willing that you should think so, in order that you may well remember it,—the highest thing that art can do is to set before you the true image of the presence of a noble human being. it has never done more than this, and it ought not to do less.

32. The great arts—forming thus one perfect scheme of human skill, of which it is not right to call one division more honourable, though it may be more subtle, than another—have had, and can have, but three principal directions of purpose:—first, that of enforcing the religion of men; secondly, that of perfecting their ethical state; thirdly, that of doing them material service.

33. I do not doubt but that you are surprised at my saying the arts can in their second function only be directed to the perfecting of ethical state, it being our usual impression that they are often destructive of morality. But it is impossible to direct fine art to an immoral end, except by giving it characters unconnected with its fineness, or by addressing it to persons who cannot perceive it to be fine. Whosoever recognises it is exalted by it. On the other hand, it has been commonly thought that art was a most fitting means for the enforcement of religious doctrines and emotions; whereas there is, as I must presently try to show you, room for grave doubt whether it has not in this function hitherto done evil rather than good.

34. In this and the two next following lectures, I shall endeavour therefore to show you the grave relations of human art, in these three functions, to human life. I can do this but roughly, as you may well suppose—since each of these subjects would require for its right treatment years instead of hours.

Only, remember, *I* have already given years, not a few, to each of them; and what I try to tell *you* now will be only so much as is absolutely necessary to set our work on a clear foundation. You may not, at present, see the necessity for *any* foundation, and may think that I ought to put pencil and paper in your hands at once. On that point I must simply answer, "Trust me a little while," asking you however also to remember, that—irrespective of any consideration of last or first—my true function here is not that of your master in painting, or sculpture, or pottery; but to show you what it is that makes any of these arts *fine*, or the contrary of *fine*: essentially *good*, or essentially *base*. You need not fear my not being practical enough for you; all the industry you choose to give me, I will take; but far the better part of what you may gain by such industry would be lost, if I did not first lead you to see what every form of art-industry intends, and why some of it is justly called right, and some wrong.

35. It would be well if you were to look over, with respect to this matter, the end of the second, and what interests you of the third, book of Plato's Republic; noting therein these two principal things, of which I have to speak in this and my next lecture: first, the power which Plato so frankly, and quite justly, attributes to art, of *falsifying* our conceptions of Deity: which power he by fatal error partly implies may be used wisely for good, and that the feigning is only wrong when it is of evil, "ἐάν τις μὴ καλῶς ψεύδῃται;" and you may trace through all that follows the beginning of the change of Greek ideal art into a beautiful expediency, instead of what it was in the days of Pindar, the statement of what "could not be otherwise than so." But, in the second place, you will find in those books of the Polity, stated with far greater accuracy of expression than our English language admits, the essential relations of art to morality; the sum of these being given in one lovely sentence, which, considering that we have to-day grace done us by fair companionship,<sup>3</sup> you will pardon me for translating. "*Must it be then only with our poets that we insist they shall either create for us the image of a noble morality, or among us create none? or shall we not also keep guard over all other workers for the people, and forbid them to make what is ill-customed, and unrestrained, and ungentle, and without order or shape, either in likeness of living things, or in buildings, or in any other thing whatsoever that is made for the people? and shall we not rather seek for workers who can track the inner nature of all that may be sweetly schemed; so that the young men, as living in a wholesome place, may be profited by everything that, in work fairly wrought, may touch them through hearing or sight—as if it were a breeze bringing health to them from places strong for life?*"

36. And now—but one word, before we enter on our task, as to the way you must understand what I may endeavour to tell you.

Let me beg you—now and always—not to think that I mean more than I say. In all probability, I mean just what I say, and only that. At all events I do fully mean *that*; and if there is anything reserved in my mind, it will be probably different from what you would guess. You are perfectly welcome to know all that I think, as soon as I have put before you all my grounds for thinking it; but by the time I have done so, you will be able to form an opinion of your own; and mine will then be of no consequence to you.

37. I use then to-day, as I shall in future use, the word "Religion" as signifying the feelings of love, reverence, or dread with which the human mind is affected by its conceptions of spiritual being; and you know well how necessary it is, both to the rightness of our own life, and to the understanding the lives of others, that we should always keep clearly distinguished our ideas of Religion, as thus defined, and of Morality, as the law of rightness in human conduct. For there are many religions, but there is only one morality. There are moral and immoral religions, which differ as much in precept as in emotion; but there is only one morality, which has been, is, and must be for ever, an instinct in the hearts of all civilised men, as certain and unalterable as their outward bodily form, and which receives from religion neither law, nor place; but only hope, and felicity.

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<sup>3</sup> There were, in fact, a great many more girls than University men at the lectures.

38. The pure forms or states of religion hitherto known, are those in which a healthy humanity, finding in itself many foibles and sins, has imagined, or been made conscious of, the existence of higher spiritual personality, liable to no such fault or stain; and has been assisted in effort, and consoled in pain, by reference to the will or sympathy of such purer spirits, whether imagined or real. I am compelled to use these painful latitudes of expression, because no analysis has hitherto sufficed to distinguish accurately, in historical narrative, the difference between impressions resulting from the imagination of the worshipper, and those made, if any, by the actually local and temporary presence of another spirit. For instance, take the vision, which of all others has been since made most frequently the subject of physical representation—the appearance to Ezekiel and St. John of the four living creatures, which throughout Christendom have been used to symbolise the Evangelists.<sup>4</sup> Supposing such interpretation just, one of those figures was either the mere symbol to St. John of himself, or it was the power which inspired him, manifesting itself in an independent form. Which of these it was, or whether neither of these, but a vision of other powers, or a dream, of which neither the prophet himself knew, nor can any other person yet know, the interpretation,—I suppose no modestly-minded and accurate thinker would now take upon himself to decide. Nor is it therefore anywise necessary for you to decide on that, or any other such question; but it is necessary that you should be bold enough to look every opposing question steadily in its face; and modest enough, having done so, to know when it is too hard for you. But above all things, see that you be modest in your thoughts, for of this one thing we may be absolutely sure, that all our thoughts are but degrees of darkness. And in these days you have to guard against the fatallest darkness of the two opposite Prides;—the Pride of Faith, which imagines that the nature of the Deity can be defined by its convictions; and the Pride of Science, which imagines that the energy of Deity can be explained by its analysis.

39. Of these, the first, the Pride of Faith, is now, as it has been always, the most deadly, because the most complacent and subtle;—because it invests every evil passion of our nature with the aspect of an angel of light, and enables the self-love, which might otherwise have been put to wholesome shame, and the cruel carelessness of the ruin of our fellow-men, which might otherwise have been warmed into human love, or at least checked by human intelligence, to congeal themselves into the mortal intellectual disease of imagining that myriads of the inhabitants of the world for four thousand years have been left to wander and perish, many of them everlastingly, in order that, in fulness of time, divine truth might be preached sufficiently to ourselves: with this farther ineffable mischief for direct result, that multitudes of kindly-disposed, gentle, and submissive persons, who might else by their true patience have alloyed the hardness of the common crowd, and by their activity for good balanced its misdoing, are withdrawn from all such true services of man, that they may pass the best part of their lives in what they are told is the service of God; *namely, desiring what they cannot obtain, lamenting what they cannot avoid, and reflecting on what they cannot understand.*<sup>5</sup>

40. This, I repeat, is the deadliest, but for you, under existing circumstances, it is becoming daily, almost hourly, the least probable form of Pride. That which you have chiefly to guard against consists in the overvaluing of minute though correct discovery; the groundless denial of all that seems to you to have been groundlessly affirmed; and the interesting yourselves too curiously in the progress of some scientific minds, which in their judgment of the universe can be compared to nothing so accurately as to the woodworms in the panel of a picture by some great painter, if we may conceive them as tasting with discrimination of the wood, and with repugnance of the colour, and declaring that even this unlooked-for and undesirable combination is a normal result of the action of molecular Forces.

41. Now, I must very earnestly warn you, in the beginning of my work with you here, against allowing either of these forms of egotism to interfere with your judgment or practice of art. On the

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<sup>4</sup> Only the Gospels, "IV Evangelia," according to St. Jerome.

<sup>5</sup> This concentrated definition of monastic life is of course to be understood only of its more enthusiastic forms.

one hand, you must not allow the expression of your own favourite religious feelings by any particular form of art to modify your judgment of its absolute merit; nor allow the art itself to become an illegitimate means of deepening and confirming your convictions, by realising to your eyes what you dimly conceive with the brain; as if the greater clearness of the image were a stronger proof of its truth. On the other hand, you must not allow your scientific habit of trusting nothing but what you have ascertained, to prevent you from appreciating, or at least endeavouring to qualify yourselves to appreciate, the work of the highest faculty of the human mind,—its imagination,—when it is toiling in the presence of things that cannot be dealt with by any other power.

42. These are both vital conditions of your healthy progress. On the one hand, observe that you do not wilfully use the realistic power of art to convince yourselves of historical or theological statements which you cannot otherwise prove; and which you wish to prove:—on the other hand, that you do not check your imagination and conscience while seizing the truths of which they alone are cognizant, because you value too highly the scientific interest which attaches to the investigation of second causes.

For instance, it may be quite possible to show the conditions in water and electricity which necessarily produce the craggy outline, the apparently self-contained silvery light, and the sulphurous blue shadow of a thunder-cloud, and which separate these from the depth of the golden peace in the dawn of a summer morning. Similarly, it may be possible to show the necessities of structure which groove the fangs and depress the brow of the asp, and which distinguish the character of its head from that of the face of a young girl. But it is the function of the rightly-trained imagination to recognise, in these, and such other relative aspects, the unity of teaching which impresses, alike on our senses and our conscience, the eternal difference between good and evil: and the rule, over the clouds of heaven and over the creatures in the earth, of the same Spirit which teaches to our own hearts the bitterness of death, and strength of love.

43. Now, therefore, approaching our subject in this balanced temper, which will neither resolve to see only what it would desire, nor expect to see only what it can explain, we shall find our enquiry into the relation of Art to Religion is distinctly threefold: first, we have to ask how far art may have been literally directed by spiritual powers; secondly, how far, if not inspired, it may have been exalted by them; lastly, how far, in any of its agencies, it has advanced the cause of the creeds it has been used to recommend.

44. First: What ground have we for thinking that art has ever been inspired as a message or revelation? What internal evidence is there in the work of great artists of their having been under the authoritative guidance of supernatural powers?

It is true that the answer to so mysterious a question cannot rest alone upon internal evidence; but it is well that you should know what might, from that evidence alone, be concluded. And the more impartially you examine the phenomena of imagination, the more firmly you will be led to conclude that they are the result of the influence of the common and vital, but not, therefore, less Divine, spirit, of which some portion is given to all living creatures in such manner as may be adapted to their rank in creation; and that everything which men rightly accomplish is indeed done by Divine help, but under a consistent law which is never departed from.

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