RUSKIN’S WORK

A Few of the Things Accomplished or Attempted by Ruskin, in the Interests of Art, the Workingman and Humanity.

At Brantwood, Coniston, in the lake region of England, he devised a costly engineering scheme, involving the reclamation of large tracts of land, in order to attract laborers from the surrounding towns.

In the belief that the taste for art must be spread among the masses, he assisted his friend Rossetti in teaching drawing, at the evening classes of the Workingman’s College, London, during the years 1854-58.

He became widely popular as a speaker upon economic and art subjects, and delivered courses which were freely given and enthusiastically received, at the South Kensington Museum, Manchester, Bradford, and Tunbridge Wells.

He was Slade Professor at Oxford from 1869 to 1879. At the latter date he retired, owing to a long and dangerous illness; but being re-appointed on his recovery in 1883, he found his audiences so greatly increased that he was forced to lecture in the theatre of the museum. Later, even this auditorium was crowded to the doors by students, graduates and women, and it then became his custom to give each lecture twice. Finally, having followed too freely the vagaries of his genius, the master was persuaded by his friends to retire.
from his chair. In doing this, he sent a characteristic letter to the vice-chancellor, in which he attributed the reasons for his action to the facts that the University refused to buy Turner’s picture: “The Crook of Lune,” and that, by a recent vote, it had sanctioned vivisection.

He endowed richly from his own fortune, a mastership for the Art School, at Oxford, and presented it with a series of valuable educational drawings. He made similar gifts to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge; while to other causes and objects his donations were generous and frequent. He inherited £175,000, and died comparatively poor.

He founded an art museum at Walkley, which, in 1890, was transferred to Sheffield, the city of artisans and cutlery. To this museum he presented an authentic and fine example of Verrocchio; which gift he considered peculiarly fitting, as the Italian master was himself a noted worker in iron.

Among his efforts for the diffusion of art knowledge, the most important and successful was, no doubt, the great enlargement of the collection and the classification of the works of the Early Italian Painters in the National Gallery, London.

He founded Saint George’s Guild, or Order, which was intended to be a return to a primitive agricultural life; all modern machines and manufactures to be banished therefrom. The object of
the association was to promote good and honest work. The vows of the initiates, based upon belief in the goodness of God and the dignity of human nature, inculcated honor, honesty, industry, frugality and obedience. The scheme, benevolent in idea, was ill-suited to the times in which its execution was attempted, and Ruskin, blind to the causes of its failure, became more and more bitter in his detestation of the art, manners, trade, commerce, impulse and movements that he saw about him.