THE SEVEN LAMPS

The singular and non-committal titles given by Ruskin to his lectures and books are still a frequent subject of comment among well-informed persons. For although they are always pertinent, yet their relations to the subject-matter are not such as would be readily perceived even by the careful and the imaginative. They are elaborately prepared, and the work of a scholar, who drew them from ancient, or mediaeval sources of history, philosophy or language. Among the most attractive and appropriate of these titles is that of "The Seven Lamps of Architecture." To explain it, we must go back to the great Jewish symbol of Light and Law: the Menorah, or seven-branched candlestick, which is so sacred and significant in the history of the Hebrews, and which acquired a new value when it was associated by the historic Church with the rite of baptism; coming then to signify the acceptance of the illumination and of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This figure, as was most natural, attracted Ruskin, for whom art was ever a faith and a religion. He adapted and extended its meaning until it stood in his mind for the perfect expression of the builder's art, wherein lay, as in the solar spectrum, seven distinct but harmonious elements.

These elements, lamps, or spirits, as he variously names them, are familiar principles treated in Ruskin's own superlative way.

The Lamp of Sacrifice would seem, if reduced to its lowest terms, to be that spirit of self-denial and self-forgetfulness which is felt by the true artist or craftsman, who sinks his personality into his work, and works not for gain, or even fame, but solely to express in visible form what his brain has conceived.

The Lamp of Truth is that spirit of honesty in building which resists falsity of asser-
tion in the nature of the material used, and the quantity of labor exercised.

The Lamps of Power and Beauty represent the constructive and decorative elements in architecture: the first showing the power of the human mind to gather, co-ordinate and govern principles discovered at large; the second imitating and reflecting the loveliness found in Nature: as for example, the Gothic system of ornament which is based upon plant-forms.

The Lamp of Life is the expression of vital energy: the impress of the mind of the master left upon his work.

The Lamp of Memory is the creative spirit of all truly great architecture: that is, the monumental, which conquers the forgetfulness of men by perpetuating the story of some great cause, leader, or victory.

Finally, the Lamp of Obedience is a wise observance of fixed principles which results in enduring work; it is the opposite of that license which builds but for a day, and is the slave of its own vagaries.

The title of the “Fors Charigera” has proven itself a crux to many. And this not without reason, since the work is numbered among the later writings of Ruskin, and is much less easy of access than the “Lamps” or the “Stones.” It is a series of letters addressed to workingmen, and first published periodically; the series beginning in 1871. The imaginative title was suggested to the master from an old print, and is ingeniously explained by him at the outset. “Fors Charigera is the Fate who bears the club, key or nail:” the instrument representing strength, as the club, or nail, and wisdom as the key; the whole device symbolising the guiding or compelling forces of human life.
The "Aratra Pentelici" is a treatise on the principles of sculpture: the title attracting the lover of ancient art by its suggestions of the soil of Greece, teeming with the splendid remains of antique beauty, and with the marble which hides within itself lovely conceptions denied to all save the creative artist. "Aratra Pentelici," the plough of Pentelicus, is a title of which the imaginative power sustains the interest of the reader as he turns the pages of a somewhat technical and quite dogmatic argument.

An equal power lies in the choice of the descriptive title: "The Laws of Fesule," which points to the mountain suburb of Florence as to the generating-point and focus of the Italian renascence of art.

"The Queen of the Air" is an exposition of the Greek myths of cloud and storm; while "The Ethics of the Dust" are a series of lectures upon crystallization. Other semi-scientific writings bear the titles of "Proserpina," which is a study of wayside flowers; "Deucalion," the name of the Greek representative of the biblical Noah, applied by Ruskin to his own observations upon the lapse of the waves and the life of the stars; "Frondes Agrestes," boughs from the fields, are extracts selected from "Modern Painters" by the author himself. And so it would be possible for us to pass on through a literary product of three hundred works, everywhere met by suggestions of that fertile chaos of ideas and impulses which represent for us the most unique personality of Victorian England.
Smokers' cabinet and chair in dark oak; chair cushion in United Crafts soft leather with laced edges.
Another view of the same exhibit.
Small writing desk in green oak; desk chair in same wood, with rush seat.
"The Thornden" rocker in fumed oak with rush seat.
Breakfast table in dark oak.