

THE STORY OF IDA

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The Story of Ida by John Ruskin & Francesca

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JOHN RUSKIN & FRANCESCA

**THE
STORY OF IDA**



In the last ray of Sunset,
And the last day of the Year.

1872.

THE
STORY OF IDA.

BY
FRANCESCA.

EDITED, WITH PREFACE,
BY JOHN RUSKIN, D.C.L.

BOSTON:
CUPPLES, UPHAM AND COMPANY,
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1883.

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PREFACE.

FOR now some ten or twelve years I have been asking every good writer whom I knew to write some part of what was exactly true, in the greatest of the sciences, that of Humanity. It seemed to me time that the Poet and Romance-writer should become now the strict historian of days which, professing the openest proclamation of themselves, kept yet in secrecy all that was most beautiful, all that was most woful, in the multitude of their unshepherded souls. And, during these years of unanswered petitioning, I have become more and more convinced that the wholesomest antagonism to whatever is dangerous in the temper, or foolish in the extravagance, of modern Fiction, would be found in sometimes substituting for the artfully combined improbability, the careful record of providentially ordered Fact.

Providentially, I mean, not in the fitting together of evil so as to produce visible good — but in the enforcement, though under shadows which mean but the difference between finite and infinite knowledge, of certain laws of moral retribution which enough indicate for our guidance, the Will, and for our comfort the Presence, of the Judge and Father of men.

It might be thought that the function of such domestic history was enough fulfilled by the frequency and full detail of modern biography. But lives in which the public are interested are scarcely ever worth writing. For the most part compulsorily artificial, often affectedly so — on the whole, fortunate beyond ordinary rule — and, so far as the men are really greater than others, unintelligible to the common reader — the lives of statesmen, soldiers, authors, artists, or any one habitually set in the sight of many, tell us at last little more than what sort of people they dealt with, and of pens they wrote with; the personal life is inscrutably broken up — often contemptibly, and the external aspect of it merely a husk at the best. The lives we need to have written for us are of the people whom the world has not thought of — far less heard of — who are yet

doing the most of its work, and of whom we may learn how it can best be done.

The following story of a young Florentine girl's too short life is absolutely and simply true : it was written only for memorial of her among her friends, by the one of them that loved her best, and who knew her perfectly. That it was *not* written for publication will be felt after reading a few sentences ; and I have had a certain feeling of desecrating its humility of affection ever since I asked leave to publish it.

In the close of the first lecture given on my return to my duties in Oxford will be found all that I am minded at present to tell concerning the writer and her friends among the Italian poor ; and perhaps I, even thus, have told more than I ought, though not in the least enough to express my true regard and respect for her, or my admiration of her powers of rendering, with the severe industry of an engraver, the most pathetic instants of action and expression in the person she loves. Her drawing of Ida, as she lay asleep in the evening of the last day of the year 1872, has been very beautifully and attentively, yet not without necessary loss, reduced in the frontispiece, by

Mr. W. Roffe, from its own size, three-quarters larger; and thus, strangely, and again let me say, providentially, I can show, in the same book, examples of the purest truth, both in history and picture. Of invented effects of light and shade on imaginary scenes, it seems to me we have admired too many. Here is a real passage of human life seen in the light that Heaven sent for it.

One earnest word only I have to add here, for the reader's sake — let it be noted with thankful reverence that this is the story of a Catholic girl written by a Protestant one, yet the two of them so united in the Truth of the Christian Faith, and in the joy of its Love that they are absolutely unconscious of any difference in the forms or letter of their religion.

J. RUSKIN.

BRANTWOOD, 14th April, 1883.