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THE COMMUNISM
OF JOHN RUSKIN**

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The Social Science Library. The Communism of John Ruskin by John Ruskin & W. D. P. Bliss

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JOHN RUSKIN & W. D. P. BLISS

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OF

JOHN RUSKIN

OR

“UNTO THIS LAST”; TWO LECTURES FROM
“THE CROWN OF WILD OLIVE”;
AND SELECTIONS FROM
“FORS CLAVIGERA.”

EDITED BY

W. D. P. BLISS.

“For indeed I am myself a Communist of the old school—reddest also of the red.”—“FORS CLAVIGERA.”

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR, - - -	vii
BOOK I.—UNTO THIS LAST, - - -	1
PREFACE, - - - - -	3
ESSAY I.—THE ROOTS OF HONOR, - - -	11
II.—THE VEINS OF WEALTH, - - -	31
III.—QUI JUDICATIS TERRAM, - - -	46
IV.—AD VALOREM, - - - - -	66
BOOK II.—TWO LECTURES FROM THE CROWN OF WILD OLIVE, - - - - -	103
PREFACE, - - - - -	105
LECTURE I.—WORK, - - - - -	119
II.—TRAFFIC, - - - - -	131
BOOK III.—SELECTIONS FROM FORS CLAVI- GERA, - - - - -	177
PREFACE BY THE EDITOR, - - - - -	179
I.—COMMUNISM, - - - - -	183
II.—FREEDOM AND SLAVERY, - - - - -	188
III.—MACHINERY, - - - - -	189
IV.—TAXES, - - - - -	191
V.—CLERGYMEN, - - - - -	195
VI.—CARLYLE, - - - - -	197
VII.—EXPECTANTS OF TURNIPS, - - - - -	198
VIII.—RICH? - - - - -	199
IX.—INTEREST, - - - - -	201
X.—ST. GEORGE'S COMPANY, - - - - -	213
XI.—THE END OF THE WHOLE MATTER, - - -	225

INTRODUCTION.

“DO you read Ruskin’s *Fors Clavigera*?” Carlyle asked of Emerson, “there is nothing going on among us so notable to me.” “I venerate him as one of the greatest teachers of the age; . . . he teaches with the inspiration of a Hebrew Prophet”—such was George Eliot’s estimate of Ruskin. Surely Ruskin needs no introduction to the world. The verdict of these two grand-jurymen in the court of letters is borne out by the testimony of witnesses from every portion of the globe. But of Ruskin’s social teaching, of his message to society, of his gospel of the life in common,—of this we would say a word—not that *he* needs this either, but that *we* need it,—we need it to rightly appreciate and take home his message to our hearts.

The production of a true social form has been the supreme task given to the nineteenth century. What is Ruskin’s place; what his message; what his contribution to the century?

Ruskin is first and foremost a Teacher. He has not originated. He is not the originator of a new system, of a new order, even of a new philosophy. He says somewhere

of himself: "I have never applied myself to discover anything, being content to praise what had already been discovered, so that no true disciple of mine will ever be a Ruskinian." He will be something better, his disciples add; he will be one of God's men, with truer, deeper, joy, seeing higher, diviner beauty in the world because Ruskin has shown it to him. Ruskin's Gospel, says one of those whom Ruskin has clung to, is a gospel not of a "news" but "like that of Jesus, a gospel of glad tidings."

And let us not think it a disparagement to Ruskin that he was not an originator. Was Jesus Christ an originator? Did Christ establish a new order? Was Christianity aught but the simple flowering of old Jewish faith? Did Christ come to destroy or to fulfill? Fulfillment is the higher task. Many a man can see a truth, who cannot live it. Jesus Christ lived the truth. His new commandment was more literally a new *command*, the reissuing of old orders. Before Christ came men knew that they should love one another. The secret of Jesus was that he led men in the loving of their neighbors. Is not this the secret too of John Ruskin, not so much that he created Beauty, but that he leads men to love it, helps them to live it—true life, the beauty of Truth, the grace of Sincerity, the Gospel of Noble Things? In this high function of the Teacher, Ruskin, in his line, stands unapproached.

But *how* does he do this? "There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. . . . To one is given by the