

**FRONDES AGRESTES: READINGS IN
'MODERN PAINTERS', CHOSEN AT HER
PLEASURES; MORNINGS IN FLORENCE:
BEING SIMPLE STUDIES OF CHRISTIAN
ART, FOR ENGLISH TRAVELLERS**

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Frondes Agrestes: Readings in 'Modern Painters', Chosen at Her Pleasures; Mornings in Florence: Being Simple Studies of Christian Art, for English Travellers by John Ruskin

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JOHN RUSKIN

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FRONDES AGRESTES.

READINGS IN "MODERN PAINTERS,"

CHOSEN AT HER PLEASURE,
BY THE AUTHOR'S FRIEND,
THE YOUNGER LADY OF THE THWAITE,
CONISTON.

"Spargit agrestes tibi silva frondes."

NEW YORK:
JOHN WILEY & SON, 15 ASTOR PLACE.

1875.

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PREFACE.

I HAVE been often asked to republish the first book of mine which the public noticed, and which, hitherto, remains their favourite, in a more easily attainable form than that of its existing editions. I am, however, resolved never to republish the book as a whole; some parts of it being, by the established fame of Turner, rendered unnecessary; and others having been always useless, in their praise of excellence which the public will never give the labour necessary to discern. But, finding lately that one of my dearest friends, who, in advanced age, retains the cheerfulness and easily delighted temper of bright youth, had written out, for her own pleasure, a large number of passages from "Modern Painters," it seemed to me certain that what such a person felt to be useful to herself, could not but be useful also to a class of readers whom I much desired to please, and who would sometimes enjoy, in my early writings, what I never should myself have offered them. I asked my friend therefore, to add to her own already chosen series, any other passages she thought likely to be of permanent

interest to general readers; and I have printed her selections in absolute submission to her judgment, merely arranging the pieces she sent me in the order which seemed most convenient for the reciprocal bearing of their fragmentary meanings, and adding here and there an explanatory note; or, it may be, a deprecatory one, in cases where my mind had changed. That she did me the grace to write every word with her own hand, adds, in my eyes, and will, I trust, in the readers' also, to the possible claims of the little book on their sympathy; and although I hope to publish some of the scientific and technical portions of the original volumes in my own large editions, the selections here made by my friend under her quiet woods at Coniston—the Unter-Walden of England—will, I doubt not, bring within better reach of many readers, for whom I am not now able myself to judge or choose, such service as the book was ever capable of rendering, in the illustration of the powers of nature, and intercession for her now too often despised and broken peace

HERNE HILL, *5th December, 1874.*

FRONDES AGRESTES.

SECTION I.

PRINCIPLES OF ART.

1. PERFECT taste is the faculty of receiving the greatest possible pleasure from those material sources which are attractive to our moral nature in its purity and perfection; but why we receive pleasure from some forms and colours and not from others, is no more to be asked or answered than why we like sugar and dislike wormwood.

2. The temper by which right taste is formed is characteristically patient. It dwells upon what is submitted to it. It does not trample upon it,—lest it should be pearls, even though it looks like husks. It is good ground, penetrable, retentive; it does not send up thorns of unkind thoughts, to choke the weak seed; it is hungry and thirsty too, and drinks all the dew that falls on it. It is an honest and good heart, that shows no too ready springing before the sun be up, but fails not afterwards; it is distrustful of itself, so as to be ready to believe and

to try all things, and yet so trustful of itself, that it will neither quit what it has tried, nor take anything without trying. And the pleasure which it has in things that it finds true and good, is so great, that it cannot possibly be led aside by any tricks of fashion, or diseases of vanity; it cannot be cramped in its conclusions by partialities and hypocrisies; its visions and its delights are too penetrating,—too living,—for any white-washed object or shallow fountain long to endure or supply. It clasps all that it loves so hard that it crushes it if it be hollow

3. It is the common consent of men that whatever branch of any pursuit ministers to the bodily comforts, and regards material uses, is ignoble, and whatever part is addressed to the mind only, is noble; and that geology does better in reclothing dry bones and revealing lost creations, than in tracing veins of lead and beds of iron; astronomy better in opening to us the houses of heaven, than in teaching navigation; botany better in displaying structure than in expressing juices; surgery better in investigating organization than in setting limbs.—Only it is ordained that, for our encouragement, every step we make in the more exalted range of science adds something also to its practical applicabilities; that all the great phenomena of nature, the knowledge of which is desired by the angels only, by us partly, as it reveals to farther vision the being and the glory of Him in whom they rejoice and we live, dispense yet such kind influences and so much of material blessing as to be joyfully felt by all inferior

creatures, and to be desired by them with such single desire as the imperfection of their nature may admit; that the strong torrents, which, in their own gladness, fill the hills with hollow thunder, and the vales with winding light, have yet their bounden charge of field to feed, and barge to bear; that the fierce flames to which the Alp owes its upheaval and the volcano its terror, temper for us the metal vein, and warm the quickening spring; and that for our incitement, I say, not our reward,—for knowledge is its own reward,—herbs have their healing, stones their preciousness, and stars their times.

4. Had it been ordained by the Almighty* that the highest pleasure of sight should be those of most difficult attainment, and that to arrive at them it should be necessary to accumulate gilded palaces, tower over tower, and pile artificial mountains around insinuated lakes, there would never have been a direct contradiction between the unselfish duties and the inherent desires of every individual. But no such contradiction exists in the system of Divine Providence; which, leaving it open to us if we will, as creatures in probation, to abuse this sense like every other, and pamper it with selfish and thoughtless vanities, as we pamper the palate with deadly meats, until the appetite of tasteful cruelty is lost in its sickened

* The reader must observe, that having been thoroughly disciplined in the Evangelical schools, I supposed myself, at four-and-twenty, to know all about the ordinances of the Almighty. Nevertheless, the practical contents of the sentence are good: if only they are intelligible, which I doubt.

satiety, incapable of pleasure unless, Caligula like, it concentrates the labour of a million of lives into the sensation of an hour, leaves it also open to us,—by humble and loving ways, to make ourselves susceptible of deep delight, which shall not separate us from our fellows, nor require the sacrifice of any duty or occupation, but which shall bind us closer to men and to God, and be with us always, harmonized with every action, consistent with every claim, unchanging and eternal.

5. A great Idealist never can be egotistic. The whole of his power depends upon his losing sight and feeling of his own existence, and becoming a mere witness and mirror of truth, and a scribe of visions—always passive in sight, passive in utterance, lamenting continually that he cannot completely reflect nor clearly utter all he has seen—not by any means a proud state for a man to be in. But the man who has no invention is always setting things in order,* and putting the world to rights, and mending, and beautifying, and pluming himself on his doings, as supreme in all ways.

6. So far as education does indeed tend to make the senses delicate, and the preceptions accurate, and thus enables people to be pleased with quiet instead of gaudy colour, and with graceful instead of coarse form; and by long acquaintance with the best things, to discern quickly what

* I am now a comic illustration of this sentence, myself. I have not a ray of invention in all my brains; but am intensely rational and orderly, and have resolutely begun to set the world to rights.