

**PRÆTERITA: OUTLINES OF  
SCENES AND THOUGHTS  
PERHAPS WORTHY OF MEMORY  
IN MY PAST LIFE. VOLUME III**

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Præterita: Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts Perhaps Worthy of Memory in my Past Life.  
Volume III by John Ruskin

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**JOHN RUSKIN**

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PRÆTERITA.

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OUTLINES OF  
*SCENES AND THOUGHTS*

PERHAPS  
WORTHY OF MEMORY  
IN MY PAST LIFE.

BY  
JOHN RUSKIN, LL.D.,

HONORARY STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH,  
AND HONORARY FELLOW OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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VOLUME III.

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CHAPTER I.  
THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE.

GEORGE ALLEN,  
SUNNYSIDE, ORPINGTON, KENT.  
1888.

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# PRÆTERITA.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE.

#### MONT BLANC REVISITED.

*(Written at Nyon in 1845.)*

O Mount beloved, mine eyes again  
Behold the twilight's sanguine stain  
Along thy peaks expire.

O Mount beloved, thy frontier waste  
I seek with a religious haste  
And reverent desire.

They meet me, 'midst thy shadows cold,—  
Such thoughts as holy men of old  
Amid the desert found;—  
Such gladness, as in Him they felt  
Who with them through the darkness dwelt,  
And compassed all around.

Ah, happy, if His will were so,  
To give me manna here for snow,  
And by the torrent side  
To lead me as He leads His flocks  
Of wild deer through the lonely rocks  
In peace, unterrified;

2 I. THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE.

Since, from the things that trustful rest,  
The partridge on her purple nest,  
The marmot in his den,  
God wins a worship more resigned,  
A purer praise than He can find  
Upon the lips of men.

Alas for man ! who hath no sense  
Of gratefulness nor confidence,  
But still regrets and raves,  
Till all God's love can scarcely win  
One soul from taking pride in sin,  
And pleasure over graves.

Yet teach me, God, a milder thought,  
Lest I, of all Thy blood has bought,  
Least honourable be ;  
And this, that leads me to condemn,  
Be rather want of love for them  
Than jealousy for Thee.

THESE verses, above noticed (ii., 193), with one following sonnet, as the last rhymes I attempted in any seriousness, were nevertheless themselves extremely earnest, and express, with more boldness and simplicity than I feel able to use now with my readers, the real temper in which I began the best work of my life. My mother at once found fault with the words 'sanguine stain,' as painful, and



untrue of the rose-colour on snow at sunset; but they had their meaning to myself,—the too common Evangelical phrase, ‘washed in the blood of Christ,’ being, it seemed to me, if true at all, true of the earth and her purest snow, as well as of her purest creatures; and the claim of being able to find among the rock-shadows thoughts such as hermits of old found in the desert, whether it seem immodest or not, was wholly true. Whatever might be my common faults or weaknesses, they were rebuked among the hills; and the only days I can look back to as, according to the powers given me, rightly or wisely in entireness spent, have been in sight of Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa, or the Jungfrau.

When I was most strongly under this influence, I tried to trace,—and I think have traced rightly, so far as I was then able,—in the last chapter of ‘Modern

Painters,' the power of mountains in solemnizing the thoughts and purifying the hearts of the greatest nations of antiquity, and the greatest teachers of Christian faith. But I did not then dwell on what I had only felt, but not ascertained,—the destruction of all sensibility of this high order in the populations of modern Europe, first by the fine luxury of the fifteenth century, and then by the coarse lusts of the eighteenth and early nineteenth: destruction so total that religious men themselves became incapable of education by any natural beauty or nobleness; and though still useful to others by their ministrations and charities, in the corruption of cities, were themselves lost,—or even degraded, if they ever went up into the mountain to preach, or into the wilderness to pray.

There is no word, in the fragment of diary recording, in last 'Præterita,' our brief visit to the Grande Chartreuse, of

anything we saw or heard there that made impression upon any of us. Yet a word was said, of significance enough to alter the courses of religious thought in me, afterwards for ever.

I had been totally disappointed with the Monastery itself, with the pass of approach to it, with the mountains round it, and with the monk who showed us through it. The building was meanly designed and confusedly grouped; the road up to it nothing like so terrific as most roads in the Alps up to anywhere; the mountains round were simplest commonplace of Savoy cliff, with no peaks, no glaciers, no cascades, nor even any slopes of pine in extent of majesty. And the monk who showed us through the corridors had no cowl worth the wearing, no beard worth the wagging, no expression but of superciliousness without sagacity, and an ungraciously dull manner,