

ROBIN IRONSIDE

## THE ART CRITICISM OF RUSKIN

THE defenceless and, if the adjective can be so employed, voracious sensibility by which Ruskin was continually either oppressed or exalted, must be considered not only as explaining but also as excusing, the laughable, sometimes touching, puerilities of phrase and thought which weaken, at too many points, usually at the least opportune, the great but ill-sustained beauty of his judgements. It excuses them because it was the fountain whence his eloquence and insight flowed just as unrestrainedly as his obtuseness and absurdity. Had his intellect been capable of qualifying the strength of the impressions he received from Kate Greenaway or Marmontel, it might also have interfered with the ardent, immortal manner in which he gave himself up to Tintoretto or Abbeville. The force of his enthusiasm, a force in which his mental processes were drenched, has so often wrested an essence from the greatest works of art that its ill-governed range seems simply the defect inherent in a faculty more valuable, in this instance; than that of balanced judgement and one which, as Ruskin might have put it, discipline would have hampered more than licence has impaired. It was a faculty demanding constant exercise; pictures, buildings, statues made imperious calls upon his sensibility, but he required this summons, besought it of them, that sleep might not settle upon him, the lethargy of the world's miasmata, that his imagination might not be 'struck into numbness by the poisoned air'. His capacities for revulsion—from what was 'shapeless, colourless, deathful and frightful' in the visible signs of the civilization in which he found himself—were not less than his capacities for enthusiasm, and in either event his feelings were additionally violent for being quite undepartmentalized; the artistic sense was not for him an organ that might work independently; he allowed his entire being to be torn or uplifted by its operations; the penalty of lethargy was one he ran little risk of incurring and when he did incur it, it was nearer what he would have deemed to be the less dreadful

penalty of despair. He has described himself, possibly not without pride, as a man clothed in soft raiment, blown about hopelessly by storms of passion, a reed shaken by the wind.

In a spirit thus exposed, the 'chordal variety', the great inconsistency of utterance, were inevitable. We can understand that he could have known days in Venice when the city seemed bereft of all romance, 'only a heap of mud', the city of which he wrote, when she smiled upon him, that 'Time and Decay as well as the waves and tempests had been won to adorn her instead of to destroy, and might still spare for ages to come that beauty which seemed to have fixed for its throne the sands of the hour-glass as well as of the sea'. Inconstancy of this kind is an illustration of common experience; it is less usual to find such variations of mood accepted, with scant questioning, by an acute mind, as a basis of opinion, holding the direction of that opinion, indeed practically at their mercy. Ruskin would persuade us at one stage that we cannot have noble art without such old-fashioned virtues as justice and compassion; at another, he seems almost to claim a right to wickedness for the greatest artists, certainly regarding them as not to be judged by any conventional standard. He disappointed friends who prized in him a reverence for moral purity by his outraged response to their suggestion that he should remonstrate with Swinburne over the impurities of *Poems and Ballads*. Alternately, the vices of the multitude and their 'dim-eyed proprieties' offended him. Worshipping nature only more than he adored art, his ideas of truth in painting swerved about with extraordinary subtlety between a conviction that strict loyalty to natural appearances was a condition of fine painting and an imaginative awareness that fancy and abstraction convey truths which, indeed, Nature may have inspired, but which may require for their proper expression that groves of trees should be rearranged, the courses of streams deflected or the colours of the sky transmuted. He recoiled from an approach, in any attitude but one of awed absolute humility, to what was so variously perfect in its aspect as undefiled nature, but he could ask artists to realize for the sake of colour not to colour for the sake of realization, could assert that 'good colour is not necessarily the image of anything but itself' and that 'the most expressive art might be that which is least like nature'. The movements of his heart for and against particular artists were not less capricious

than his dealings with the broader issues of art criticism. Michelangelo, who unlocked the flow of his praise when he wrote *Modern Painters*, became the object of a subsequent attack, delivered in a lecture at Oxford, which his closest adherents were hardly able to condone. Attacked by *The Times* for the incongruity of an enthusiasm expended in almost equal measure, first upon Turner and then upon the pre-Raphaelites, he saw no difficulty in showing how pre-Raphaelite was the one and how Turnerian were the others.<sup>1</sup> The splendid, flushed materialism as he felt it to be—of Veronese summoned forth at one moment all the lavishness of appreciation of which he was capable; at another, the works of Giotto, the grave and intense mirror of a belief, moved him with an equal force. 'When the eye is exquisitely keen and pure', he wrote of pictures, 'it is fain to rest on grey films of shade, wandering rays of light and intricacies of tender form, passing over hastily, as unworthy or commonplace, what to a less educated sense appears the whole of the subject.' In the light of this passage, in the light of his response to Turner's final manner, the obscurity of which his own keen eye found to be 'dark with excess of light', his fury over Whistler must be seen again as characteristically inconsistent rather than as furnishing any ground for reproaches against the general quality of his perception. Had he been able to accept an invitation from Burne-Jones to visit the studio of Whistler, who was apparently prepared to be deferential, there is every likelihood that the painter's harmonies and symphonies would have rung melodiously for a critic who thought of a Carpaccio as a 'harmony in crimson and white', who could say on the subject of colour that 'it is the rich trebles that are sweet and precious'. He first saw Whistler's pictures and made his wretched criticism upon them at a period of spiritual distress when his published denunciations of the ugliness of life sounded, to Cardinal Manning, 'like the beatings of one's heart in a nightmare'; the changeful condition of his general temper could affect his artistic preferences not less strongly than these could create in him a political bias or a moral state. Proust questioned whether he loved medieval art because

<sup>1</sup> The establishment of such a likeness is, however, the less surprising for being based upon a study of the Turner watercolours than at Farnley Hall; they are sufficiently meticulous to furnish some ground for relating Turnerian to Pre-Raphaelite landscape.

it was religious or loved religion because it was the motive of medieval art; we may, however, reasonably assume that the latter view—and it is the more sympathetic—is a truer illustration of the customary functioning of his mind; we can say that a kind of atheism, born of despair, possessed him without quenching his religious fervour, a too beautiful thing for him to suffer its extinction, that he was able to preserve unshaken a faith in the value of class distinctions, out of which the splendour of chivalry had arisen, while advancing Socialist views which were an inspiration in orthodox Labour circles,<sup>1</sup> views which were less views than wounded protests against the meanness of so much of the contemporary prospect, whence refuge for millions of persons, supposing any number of them even sought it, was impossible.

To extract a unity, some coherent thread of thought from the teeming volumes of his art criticism by judicious re-groupings, careful reference to the fitful state of his health, of his knowledge, is, however, less a labour requiring forced interpretation than one which is irrelevant to any true measure of the critic's genius as it has survived for us. Ruskin himself was addicted to classifications, numberings and sub-numberings of the points in his demonstrations, but these were idiosyncratic, not part of any grand intellectual system to which the writer felt constrained to adhere. On the contrary, he did not deny, he even welcomed the charge of inconsistency, citing, with a sort of frivolity, the Bible as sufficient warrant for any amount of it. The charge was in any case superfluous; that sensitive appreciation must be fluid, mercurial, he had at various moments emphatically recognized. Unless important changes, he declared, were occurring continually, all his life long in a man's opinions, not one of those opinions could be, on any questionable subject, true. True taste he saw as 'forever growing, learning, reading, worshipping, laying its hand upon its mouth because it is astonished', and he has said that 'though there is much work in the world to be done, it is often the best thing a man can do—to tell the exact truth about the movements of his mind', a course which in his case, as surely should be so with any mind that would move openly

<sup>1</sup> A questionnaire submitted to the Labour members of the Parliament of 1906 revealed that Ruskin's *Unto This Last* had been more widely read among them than any other single work.

and in freedom, was bound to lead to great contradictions. A freely moving mind, a sensibility pliant to the faintest breath, a heart in which 'the charities of the imagination' were perpetually at work, such a combination of qualities, such a vulnerability to impressions composed the flexible foundation on which Ruskin produced his criticism; the kind of structure that was to rise upon this heaving basis depended on the critic's power of self-expression, on his ability to analyse his reactions rather than the objects which evoked them. Fortunately, Ruskin found words which, often enough and clearly enough, were a golden echo of his feelings. His writings abound in precepts as much as in classifications, but he may well have been as lost among them as his readers must be; whatever the value of his many doctrines, of the significance, that has so often been appraised, of his rôle as a reformer in all matters, it is in the passages of rhapsody, in the subtle analyses of his own conflicting emotions, that his spirit is today most alight. Compared with these, recent art criticism in England is an affair of flat balanced notions, careful peepings and botanizations which come near to reducing the importance of the subject to that of an amenity recommendable on rational grounds to all; whereas the subject has, in fact, an importance that can be plausibly elevated to that of an end, related to other ends, of living, or even—if it is not a contradiction in terms—to that of a substitute for living. Ruskin at least leaves us in no doubt that he is dealing with a passionate issue, momentous to anyone able to grasp its inspiring breadth. When his feelings were, so to speak, 'tuned in' to some great production, when there was no mental storm to interfere with perfect 'reception', we are made to see degrees of light and intensity in the work which had not been thus shown up before, or, if we do not know it already, to long to know the painting, the fragment of carving or the city<sup>1</sup> that had struck such a chord within him, a chord with such elaborate reverberations. It must be said that these moments of responsive poetry are like the rich seams in a labyrinthine mine; they do not evenly suffuse his writing, but startle the reader in isolated paragraphs, appendices, footnotes, amply compensating for the dead intervals—and Ruskin's

<sup>1</sup> Proust has related that the vitality of Ruskin's description of a tiny carved figure on one of the *soubassements* of Rouen Cathedral induced him and a companion to make a special journey to discover its whereabouts.

paroxysms can be as lifelessly set down as the rarer passages of simple dulness—in the thirty-nine volumes of Cook and Wedderburn's triumphant edition of his Works.<sup>1</sup>

The visionary depth of his perception is opened up for us not so much by the disentanglement of its elements as by an accretion of imagery and adornment without which its quality was not to be conveyed; he was always at the rich mercy of his own Pathetic Fallacy. He never wrote with the compelling obscurity of that type of great man, of whom he speaks, 'on whom Revelations rain till they bear him to the earth' and who 'lays his head in the dust and speaks thence—often in broken syllables'; but the fallacy of metaphor and simile was, as he has acknowledged, not the less a sign, when spontaneously adopted, of the fact of revelation. Of the relation of the human creature, as an artist, to the inconceivable universe, he wrote, with just such an instinctive certainty, that each 'must slowly spell out and long contemplate such part of it as may be possible for him to reach; then set forth what he has learned of it for those beneath him; extricating it from infinity as one gathers a violet out of grass; one does not improve either violet or grass in gathering it, but one makes the flower visible; and then the human being has to make its power upon his own heart visible also. . . . And sometimes he may be able to do more than this, and to set it in strange lights, and display it a thousand ways before unknown.' This is a comparison which illuminates a multitude of aspirations, not least those with which art has been most recently concerned. The progress of his roving consideration of the masterpieces of European art is, at intermittent but frequent turns, arrested by spasms of such expository, or, it may be, descriptive poetry; he saw the crests of the arches of St. Mark's, 'the central building of the world', 'break into a marble foam, and toss themselves far into the blue sky in flashes and wreaths of sculptured spray as if the breakers on the Lido shore had been frost-bound before they fell and the sea nymphs inlaid them with

<sup>1</sup> The Library Edition (Allen) 1903-1911. This masterpiece of scholarship, now obtainable second-hand for five or six guineas, has made any further research on its subject superfluous; Sir E. T. Cook (1857-1919), apart from the immense labour it involved, also published a biography of Ruskin, was successively editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Westminster Gazette*, and the *Daily News*, and was the author of books on Florence Nightingale and John Delane.

coral and amethyst'. Further north, the Cathedral front was 'lost among the tapestry of its traceries like a rock among the thickets of spring'; with the advent of Gothic architecture, the pillar had grown slender, the vaulted roof light 'until they had wreathed themselves into the semblance of the summer woods', of woods stirred by a disquiet breath, the dreaming Gothic spirit 'that wanders hither and thither among the niches, and flickers feverishly round the pinnacles, and frets and fades in labyrinthine knots and shadows along wall and roof, and yet is not satisfied nor shall be satisfied'. To penetrate what must appear to be, in contrast to the 'wolfish life' that lurked amid the forest of northern Gothic, the closed garden of early Italian painting, was, for Ruskin, to enter the inside of a pearl, a region where appeared rivers flowed between margins of marble past alternate azure promontories, a limpid, remote vision which Renaissance painting was to bring magnificently to earth, dazzling his attention by 'the coruscation of lightning and the flash of sunshine on the points of spears'. Tintoretto takes a fold of cloud from 'the flanks of the Alps and shows the mountains through its misty volume like seaweed through deep sea'. A figure by Veronese is surrounded with 'infinite daylight', but also invested 'with innumerable veils of faint shadow'. Ruskin saw the sixteenth-century masters, however, above all Titian and Veronese, as the great illustrators of mortal glory; they helped him to loosen the bonds, dear though these were, of the religion in which he had been brought up. He was at moments captivated by their preference for gems over flowers, by their undistinguishing association of tyrants with Holy Infants, luxuriousness with Madonnas, but he was also to sense, at last, the presence of a profound religion in this dethronement of the divine characters, their establishment amid the profanities of the vivid life—to so many appearances a pagan one—of the epoch. Much less inconstant, though less powerful, was his appreciation of their relish of the sheer obscurity and brightness of the spectacle of nature. Ruskin is most persuasive when the images that came most readily to his mind were those of the sky, the sea or the landscape. In the paintings of Turner upon which, for him, the poetry of Wordsworth supplied the proper comment, he found a vision which lingered faithfully over 'the irregular stains and mouldering hollows' of nature's detail, which,

steadfastly, looked 'to the conflagration for its flames and to the cataract for its iris' and was able to reveal a spirituality in nature by such a loyalty to her aspects; it was a vision that was alike remote from the limpid conventions of early religious art and the earthbound inspiration of Renaissance naturalism. Ruskin poured out rhetoric upon it; he found that there was not a stone, leaf or shadow or anything so small but that Turner gave it 'meaning and oracular voice'. He was a painter who was equally a master of the larger effects, able alone to give the 'fury and formalism of breakers on an even shore' or, in the late water-colours, to convey the movement of 'wreaths of fitful vapour gliding through groves of pine and irised around the pillars of waterfalls', or of 'glades whispering with the lapse of everlasting springs'. Ruskin's insight was sharpened by those passions in which he felt most confidence: his love of Turner was open-eyed and he recognized that all that the artist 'planned on any principle or in supposed obedience to canons of taste, was false and abortive; he only did right when he ceased to reflect . . . was successful only when he had taken no aim'. Turner's over-wrought, over-pondered academy exhibits in his later years are a pitiful proof of the rightness of this estimate. Of his very last paintings, Ruskin wrote the revealing epitaph that they 'presented the sum and perfection of his accumulated knowledge delivered with the impatience and passion of one who knows too much and has too little time to say it in, to pause for expression or ponder over his syllables. There was in them the obscurity, but the truth of prophecy; the instinctive, but burning language which would express less if it uttered more, which is indistinct only by its fullness'.

Among his manifold allegiances, Ruskin's devotion to Turner was the most perfectly responsive; he was never able to dissociate his affections for art and nature which burnt in a unison, into a single flame, distorting with a curious pathos, not to say beauty, his attempts to consider either separately; Turner's art, with all the brilliance of less ordinary, more obvious qualities, was also—Ruskin proved it—a mirror of the phenomena of nature, providing his critic with what seemed to be an identity of invention with the demonstrable truth of aspects. Ruskin's endless, distracted quest for this identity in all the products, whatever their specific uses, of creative human labour, a quest

leading him to follow tracks the complexity and ambiguity of which he scarcely foresaw, is a key to the extraordinary antinomies which mark his most reflective writings upon art; it was a quest embarked upon at the dictation of an antinomy in his sensibility which could not permit any generic difference between its reactions to landscape-painting and to landscape. Ruskin was an artist who looked at works of art with the subtlety and enthusiasm of a connoisseur, and a connoisseur who regarded nature with the devotion of an artist. His own drawings, at their best, live not by their invention, but by their display, from all angles, of those habits of nature's growth that are too slight, too momentary or too refined to attract the scrutiny, as Ruskin scrutinized, of the ordinary observer. Yet it remained true that no delicacy of execution, no abnormal clarity of sight, could give again one hundredth part of the beauty of a fragment of mica or syenite or of 'a drooping swathe of rain'. 'The deep, palpitating azure, half æther, half dew', of an early summer sky, 'the half-lighted horizons' of April, 'the smoking sides' of an Alp were profaned by the hopeless endeavour to imitate them. More than anything else, the springs of Ruskin's poetical manner of writing were fed upon the sensations of melancholy and ecstasy, 'the prison hopes', and fears, that crowded upon him anxiously, irresistibly amid the sights and sounds of nature, in a mountain shower or in 'the scented darkness of a pine wood', and became ever afterwards the light and shade in his memory; the art of Venice must have meant less to him without the mantle of the Adriatic and of the Venetian sky breaking into 'an open, long gulf of amber green'; he would have preferred the Piazza to have been a field, and the shafts of St. Mark's to have been 'rooted in wild violets'. Even the clear glass held up by Turner to the beauty of scarlet lichens or of the 'drifting wings' of clouds, was not without spots and opacities which impaired a transparency that could not, in any case, have shown all. Ruskin went so far as to declare that it was a sign of the greatest art to part voluntarily with its greatness in deference to the thing represented, Turner's *Falls of Terni*, for example, inspiring him chiefly with a regret that he was not on the spot, that the goats did not actually skip away among the rocks and the spray float above the fall. It was inevitable that trains of association and recollection should lead a mind that stood thus in awed gratitude before nature to hold,

for however brief an instant, such an extreme conclusion as to the purposes of painting. It was not a view to which he would have adhered a moment longer than the feelings remained which produced it, but the memory of, and regret for lost sojourns, in places to revisit which was not to recapture the happiness they had evoked, were always prompt to rise to their full pitch of vividness at the touch of an impression recorded by a spirit that had taken hold, with greater retentive force, of kindred vibrations. The regret was much more than mere disappointment at an imitation, reaching indeed a level where it became a satisfaction, the action of the memory, aided by the imagination, being positively a creative process, rejecting, selecting and composing, and so, when we recall an experience, 'with a kind of conceptive burning-glass, we may bend the sunshine of all the day, and the fullness of all the scene upon every point that we successively seize'. In a frame of mind less chagrined than that in which he wrote about the *Falls of Terni*, Ruskin applied a like estimate of the potentialities of memory to Turner, discovering that his composition was 'universally an arrangement of remembrances summoned just as they were wanted and set each in its fittest place'; in a dream, there was this kind of remembrance 'of forms seen long ago and now associated under new and strange laws'. Ruskin, however, could not but be aware that an attitude to painting, which even left room for the supposition that, by and large, the art was a vain, not to say a presumptuous mimicry—though anything it left room for, not excluding the vanity of regrets, might be turned to gold when passed through such a medium—required revision, refinement, amplification, if it was to fit the magnitude of the effect that pictures had upon him; he therefore sought, and found an artistic truth, or rather genuineness, the pursuit of which justified really any liberties that the artist might take with his subject; it was a truth of fancy, not of fact, a truth to the thoughts raised up in the artist by the shifting appearances of the world, not to the unfathomable truths of Nature herself, which, after all, were only dimly penetrable by the thoughts they engendered, and not in the least by scientific measurings and matchings of tints. 'Whatever', he wrote, 'has been the result of strong emotion is ill seen unless through the medium of such emotion, and will lead to conclusions utterly false and perilous,

if it be made a subject of cold-hearted observance, or an object of systematic imitation.' A picture should never be deceptively real; the mind of the artist must be to what he paints 'as the fire to the body on the pile, burning away the ashes, leaving the unconquerable shade'. Ruskin also clung to the conception that, since the painter cannot put Nature into his picture, since he should deal with the influence of Nature upon him, then he should put nothing into his work which is not suggestive; if he would summon the imaginative power of the spectator to join with his own, then 'he must turn it to account and keep it employed'.

It was thus that the claims—simultaneous rather than conflicting—upon his heart of nature and the arts were made soluble, made to float into one another, so that his memory and the play of the painter's imagination upon it, his affectionate, exact knowledge of rocks and clouds and the painter's tempering and casting of it upon canvas or paper, might—other circumstances being propitious—merge together into a joyful absorption of the last ounce of feeling that the detail, or the sum, of a fine landscape could be made to yield. The largeness of the feeling was rooted in its impurity; the sole delight in design, in the harmony or contrast of colour would have been shallow, even frivolous. It was plain to Ruskin that 'as soon as a great sculptor begins to shape his work out of the block we shall see that its lines are nobly arranged and of noble character. We may not have the slightest idea for what the forms are intended'. But even if it had been possible for him to isolate for long his recognition of such nobility, referable indeed only to visual satisfactions (a recognition that is crude or refined, as an estimate of the layout of a printed page or the savour of a dish may be crude or refined), he would properly have found it to bear the slenderest relation—though he would never have denied the necessity of the relation—to his recognition of the beauty of the finished work. The intrusion of the nature lover upon the art critic enriched the feelings of both; it is, however, only as the most constant and possibly as the most fruitful of the many ambiguities of Ruskin's thought that it puts forward some claim to be the principal compound in the great mixture of sensations produced in him by the contemplation of works of art—a passionate contemplation the quality of which was affected by, and affected, in turn or together, the scientist in

him, the philosopher, the historian, not least the obscure, unsatisfied amorist and above all the moralist. The beauty, as the largeness, of the quality is in its whole-heartedness, its whole-mindedness; it is confined by no narrowing notions of purely æsthetic propriety, of the kind that give such a small flavour to people's appreciation of the arts today. 'Appreciation' is the term in current use and aptly circumscribes a poverty of outlook which excludes what must be called the force of emotional weaknesses, reduces the matter of poetry to one of surface manipulation and fails to recognize in the excesses of surrealism<sup>1</sup> an effect of its own frosty emphasis on barren superficialities. The prestige of the visual arts, apparently growing, would be incomprehensible, if not an imposture, attached to a conception of their nature as appealing to faculties that could be isolated from the hopes and frustrations of living.

It is in Ruskin's earlier writings that we must look for nearly all that is evergreen in the expression of his complex susceptibility to works of art, and chiefly in *Modern Painters*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and the great *Stones of Venice*, though the fifth and final volume of *Modern Painters* was not completed until 1860 when the writer was forty-one. Ruskin was the only child of affluent parents who were both prepared and hopeful that he should devote his adult life to the cultivation of a boyhood talent for writing verse, but he could not dedicate his energies to a particular activity without an overriding impulse, a clear demand from his conscience to do so. Whatever his potential capacities as a poet, there was no such call upon him to fulfil them; it was, on the other hand, a violent sense of the injustice of the accepted critics to the later paintings of Turner that pushed him, at the age of twenty-four, conscience-stricken, incensed and in large ignorance of the work of earlier masters, to defend the artist in print, a defence which led him to an expanding, enamoured study of the visual arts, to an enraptured realization that it was his duty to share with everyone the treasures of experience he had thus won, and which developed into the intricate, unwieldy structure of *Modern Painters* and the books

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that Ruskin foresaw that the realms of the fantastic imagination 'have hardly yet been entered and that a universe of noble dream-land lies before us yet to be conquered', a conquest that would be a 'true unison of the grotesque with the realistic power'.

that followed. The personal happiness that he found in the prosecution of this duty was not, however, to be borne in comfort: the material ease in which he lived assured him the freedom to enjoy a universe of sensation which, however inspiring his expositions of it might be, was made inaccessible to the majority—he was compelled to admit—by the ugly circumstances of economic drudgery in which they lived. It came upon him with force that the rich, whose expenditure was wasteful and ostentatious, had ‘literally entered into partnership with Death’ and ‘dressed themselves in his spoils’. He felt more and more obliged to direct the vehemence of his mind to the exposure of social evils and to the organization of schemes for their removal. This re-orientation may be said to have been fully launched in 1862 with the publication of his economic views in *Unto This Last*; it represented as much, to him, a ransom to be paid for the years which a private income had enabled him to spend in amplifying his sensibility as an endeavour to clear the ground for the reception of what he had to say. The bitterness of the endeavour so exhausted his nerves that his ire was always trembling on the verge of infantile petulance, that his mind was positively driven to seek rest in intervals of insanity. It was a situation in which he was unable to give full attention to the imprint on his own spirit of the great works which he had, decreasingly, time to consider. His later art criticism, with its diminishing quantity, was also more liable to passages of absurdity and obstinacy, the results both of an over-wrought system and of the adulation of disciples. One would not belittle the salutary extent of his activity as a reformer; although the state of affairs he attacked in which the arts fulfil their comprehensive function for a too small minority, is still one that engages, and is likely to go on engaging, the efforts of progressive minds, he had none the less melancholy grounds for supposing that age had given him better work to do, than had the delusion—if it was such—of his youth, but it could not give again, could only exquisitely recall, in *Præterita*, the demonstrative sweetness of that delusion, with which so much poetry and revelation had been associated.

# TWO CHILDREN

G. W. STONIER

## I—TRAILING CLOUDS

### THE HOUSE

HERE is the house. Press the bell—ah, it doesn't ring, we must knock instead. The door is opened by the maid. Her name is Louisa.

Where are all the family?

Mr. Adams is in the garden, rolling the lawn. The children—but where can they have hidden themselves?—are in the garden too.

Mrs. Adams is upstairs, resting after lunch and enjoying a new novel by the Williamsons.

Mamselle is ironing a blouse in the kitchen.

Louisa has gone back to the scullery door, where she is talking to Mr. Reed the greengrocer.

Rat-tat-tat at the front door. 'Again! What a to-do!' cries Louisa running. Who can it be this time? The postman? No. Is it the butcher? No. Is it Santa Claus? No.

It is the moon-faced boy with a parcel addressed to Grandpa.

But Grandpa isn't due till next week.

The dog next-door barks because he can't abide strangers.

The children—where have they appeared from?—creep to the fence so as to squint through at the dog barking. He is a big brown retriever named Hector. 'Oooooooo,' wails Hector. 'Bow-wow,' whisper the children, 'woof-woof! bang-a-bang!' Hector looks terrible. His legs begin to shiver and his chain rattles. If he goes on like this his eyes will drop out.

'Oh the crysanths!' Mr. Adams has started up from the corner of the lawn where he is grubbing daisies. 'Walter and Alfred, come! No, stop where you are, be careful of the flower-beds!'

And Hector wails and Mr. Adams comes flapping, and at the window, looking down, Mrs. Adams says quietly, 'You pair of young Turks, I saw you.'