

**THE CROWN OF WILD
OLIVE; FOUR LECTURES ON
WORK, TRAFFIC, WAR, AND
THE FUTURE OF ENGLAND**

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The Crown of Wild Olive; Four Lectures on Work, Traffic, War, and the Future of England by
John Ruskin

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Four Lectures

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THE FUTURE OF ENGLAND.

BY

JOHN RUSKIN, M.A.

And indeed it should have been of gold, had not Jupiter been so
poor. — ARISTOTELIANUS (*Politics*).

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INTRODUCTION.*

I. TWENTY years ago, there was no lovelier piece of lowland scenery in South England, nor any more pathetic in the world, by its expression of sweet human character and life; than that immediately bordering on the sources of the Wandel, and including the low moors of Addington, and the villages of Beddington and Carshalton, with all their pools and streams. No clearer or diviner waters ever sang with constant lips of the hand which "giveth rain from heaven;" no pastures ever lightened in springtime with more passionate blossoming; no sweeter homes ever hallowed the heart of the passer-by with their pride of peaceful gladness — fain-hidden — yet full-confessed. The place remains (1870) nearly unchanged in its larger features; but with deliberate mind I say, that I have never seen anything so ghastly in its inner tragic meaning, — not in Pisan

* Called the "preface" in former editions: it is one of my bad habits to put half my books into preface. Of this one, the only prefatory thing I have to say is that most of the contents are stated more fully in my other volumes; but here are put in what, at least, I meant to be a more popular form, all but this introduction, which was written very carefully to be read, not spoken, and the last lecture on the Future of England, with which, and the following notes on it, I have taken extreme pains.

Maremma, — not by Campagna tomb, — not by the sand-isles of the Torcellan shore, — as the slow stealing of aspects of reckless, indolent, animal neglect, over the delicate sweetness of that English scene: nor is any blasphemy or impiety, any frantic saying or godless thought, more appalling to me, using the best power of judgment I have to discern its sense and scope, than the insolent defiling of those springs by the human herds that drink of them. Just where the welling of stainless water, trembling and pure, like a body of light, enters the pool of Carshalton, cutting itself a radiant channel down to the gravel, through warp of feathery weeds, all waving, which it traverses with its deep threads of clearness, like the chalcedony in moss-agate, starred here and there with white grenouillette; just in the very rush and murmur of the first spreading currents, the human wretches of the place cast their street and house foulness; heaps of dust and slime, and broken shreds of old metal, and rags of putrid clothes; which, having neither energy to cart away, nor decency enough to dig into the ground, they thus shed into the stream, to diffuse what venom of it will float and melt, far away, in all places where God meant those waters to bring joy and health. And, in a little pool, behind some houses farther in the village, where another spring rises, the shattered stones of the well, and of the little fretted channel which was long ago built and traced for it by gentler hands, lie scattered, each from each, under a ragged bank of mortar, and scoria, and bricklayer's refuse, on one side, which the clear water nevertheless chastises to purity; but

it cannot conquer the dead earth beyond; and there, circled and coiled under festering scum, the stagnant edge of the pool effaces itself into a slope of black slime, the accumulation of indolent years. Half-a-dozen men, with one day's work, could cleanse those pools, and trim the flowers about their banks, and make every breath of summer air above them rich with cool balm: and every glittering wave medicinal, as if it ran, troubled only of angels, from the porch of Bethesda. But that day's work is never given, nor, I suppose, will be: nor will any joy be possible to heart of man, for evermore, about those wells of English waters.

2. When I last left them, I walked up slowly through the back streets of Croydon, from the old church to the hospital: and, just on the left, before coming up to the crossing of the High Street, there was a new public house built. And the front of it was built in so wise manner, that a recess of two feet was left below its front windows, between them and the street-pavement: a recess too narrow for any possible use (for even if it had been occupied by a seat, as in old time it might have been, everybody walking along the street would have fallen over the legs of the reposing wayfarer). But, by way of making this two feet depth of freehold land more expressive of the dignity of an establishment for the sale of spirituous liquors, it was fenced from the pavement by an imposing iron railing, having four or five spearheads to the yard of it, and six feet high: containing as much iron and iron-work, indeed, as could well be put into the space; and by this stately arrangement, the

little piece of dead ground within, between wall and street, became a protective receptacle of refuse: cigar ends, and oyster shells, and the like, such as an open-handed English street-populace habitually scatters: and was thus left, unsweepable by any ordinary methods. Now the iron bars which, uselessly (or in great degree worse than uselessly), enclosed this bit of ground, and made it pestilent, represented a quantity of work which would have cleansed the Carshalton pools three times over: of work, partly cramped and perilous, in the mine: partly grievous and horrible, at the furnace: partly foolish and sedentary, of ill-taught students making bad designs: work from the beginning to the last fruits of it, and in all the branches of it, venomous, deathful,* and miserable.

3. Now, how did it come to pass that this work was done instead of the other; that the strength

* A fearful occurrence took place a few days since, near Welverhampton. Thomas Snape, aged nineteen, was on duty as the "keeper" of a blast-furnace at Deepfield, assisted by John Gardner, aged eighteen, and Joseph Swift, aged thirty-seven. The furnace contained four tons of molten iron, and an equal amount of cinders, and ought to have been run out at 7.30 P.M. But Snape and his mates, engaged in talking and drinking, neglected their duty, and, in the meantime, the iron rose in the furnace until it reached a pipe wherein water was contained. Just as the men had stripped, and were proceeding to tap the furnace, the water in the pipe, converted into steam, burst down its front and let loose on them the molten metal, which instantaneously consumed Gardner; Snape, terribly burnt, and mad with pain, leaped into the canal and then ran home and fell dead on the threshold. Swift survived to reach the hospital, where he died too.

In further illustration of this matter, I beg the reader to look at the article on the "Decay of the English Race," in the *Paris-Midi Gazette* of April 19, of this year; and at the articles on the "Report of the Thames Commission," in any journals of the same date.

and life of the English operative were spent in defiling ground, instead of redeeming it, and in producing an entirely (in that place) valueless piece of metal, which can neither be eaten nor breathed, instead of medicinal fresh air and pure water?

4. There is but one reason for it, and at present a conclusive one, — that the capitalist can charge percentage on the work in the one case, and cannot in the other. If, having certain funds for supporting labor at my disposal, I pay men merely to keep my ground in order, my money is, in that function, spent once for all; but if I pay them to dig iron out of my ground and work it, and sell it, I can charge rent for the ground, and percentage both on the manufacture and the sale, and make my capital profitable in these three by-ways. The greater part of the profitable investment of capital, in the present day, is in operations of this kind, in which the public is persuaded to buy something of no use to it, on production or sale of which the capitalist may charge percentage; the said public remaining all the while under the persuasion that the percentages thus obtained are real national gains, whereas, they are merely filchings out of partially light pockets, to swell heavy ones.

5. Thus, the Croyden publican buys the iron railing, to make himself more conspicuous to drunkards. The public-house keeper on the other side of the way presently buys another railing, to out-rail him with. Both are, as to their *relative* attractiveness, just where they were before; but they have lost the price of the railings; which they must either themselves finally lose, or make their aforesaid customers, the amateurs

of railings, pay, by raising the price of their beer, or adulterating it. Either the publicans, or their customers, are thus poorer by *precisely what the capitalist has gained*; and the value of the industry itself, meantime, has been lost to the nation: the iron bars in that form and place being wholly useless.

6. It is this mode of taxation of the poor by the rich which is referred to in the text (§ 34), in comparing the modern acquisitive power of capital with that of the lance and sword: the only difference being that the levy of blackmail in old times was by force, and is now by cozening. The old rider and reiver frankly quartered himself on the publican for the night; — the modern one merely makes his lance into an iron spike, and persuades his host to buy it. One comes as an open robber, the other as a cheating pedler; but the result, to the injured person's pocket, is absolutely the same. Of course many useful industries mingle with, and disguise the useless ones; and in the habits of energy aroused by the struggle, there is a certain direct good. It is better to spend four thousand pounds in making a gun, and then to blow it to pieces, than to pass life in idleness. Only do not let the proceeding be called "political economy."

7. There is also a confused notion in the minds of many persons, that the gathering of the property of the poor into the hands of the rich does no ultimate harm: since, in whosoever hands it may be, it must be spent at last, and thus, they think, return to the poor again. This fallacy has been again and again exposed; but granting the plea true,