**Ruskin and the Crafts, Reading II**

**Textiles**

***PLEASE NOTE****: In any paragraphs of text with both* ***bold*** *and un-bolded text, those parts not in bold will be omitted during the live reading on 13th January.*

**Introduced by Laurence Roussillon-Constanty, Guild companion and Professor in Victorian Literature and Arts, Université de Pau et des Pays de l’Adour (France)**

**This is the second Reading of Ruskin and the Crafts series, a cycle organised by the Guild of St George. The first reading offered wonderful readings on Architecture and arts and today’s evening will be devoted to textile and we hope that, although this is a virtual event, you will enjoy the way we have tried weaving together the many threads of Ruskin’s ideas on textile – in text (since the word textile comes from textilis, which means woven in Latin) – but also in image – as most of his words invite the reader to envision the world in all its dimensions and indeed expand our daily lives through craft and all things creative. In order to explore this very rich theme of textile and demonstrate how “The Lesser Arts” (as William Morris called them) could lead to a better way of experiencing the world around us, we are very lucky to have three speakers this evening and a very international panel!**

**Our first speaker is Tess Darwin, who has rooted down in Falkland, in Scotland, and who is an embroiderer whose artistic work you’ll be able to discover in the course of tonight’s talk. Tess is a retired ecologist and environmental educator with a lifelong interest in arts, crafts and the natural world. In 1996 she published a book, *The Scots Herbal*, on traditional uses of wild plants on Scotland. Since retiring a few years ago, she has been developing her skills in textile art, and hand stitching with repurposed materials is now her main occupation. She has participated in several group exhibitions and given regular talks on her work (the latest one two days ago!).**

**The second speaker is Rachel Dickinson, who is a Reader in Interdisciplinary Studies and English at Manchester Metropolitan University in Manchester and Master of the Guild of St George. She is also a textile practitioner and enjoys spinning, dyeing and weaving.**

**Our third and most geographically remote speaker tonight is Arjun Shivaji Jain, joining from The Red House Cultural Centre, Delhi, India and I would particularly like to thank you for participating to this event at what is a very undue hour (almost midnight) locally for you.**

**Arjun studied physics at the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee between 2009-14, and Art and Science at Central Saint Martins, London in 2015-16. He's received a number of scholarships and fellowships from the Department of Science, Government of India, but has worked in various capacities across a wide range of fields apart from science as well, most prominently, painting and writing. At present, he is Young Companion's Representative in the Guild of St George, and runs a cultural centre in Delhi by the name of Red House, where he conducts and facilitates various programmes every weekend. The architecture of Red House, he's been working on for the past six years, using lime as a mortar, and Ruskin's *Seven Lamps* as its foundation.**

**Before we start, I should also mention that I’ll be one of the readers tonight. I am a Companion of the Guild and although I couldn’t stitch to save my life, I’ve done a bit of research on the connection between needle work and literature – in particular, I co-edited with Rachel a volume of essays, called Converging Lines: Needlework in English Literature and Visual Arts (which you can easily access online).**

**We will read passages from a wide selection of John Ruskin’s works, ranging from his early prose writings to his letters (*Fors Clavigera*) and *Unto his Last* and also from a couple of extracts from other authors that were inspired by Ruskin’s ideas.**

**Library Edition VI, *Modern Painters* Volume 4, § 6, lines 8-24 (165-166)**

6. I never have had time to examine and throw into classes the varieties of the mosses which grow on the two kinds of rock, nor have I been able to ascertain whether there are really numerous differences between the species, or whether they only grow more luxuriantly on the crystallines than on the coherents. But this is certain, that on the broken rocks of the foreground in the crystalline groups the mosses seem to set themselves consentfully and deliberately to the task of producing the most exquisite harmonies of colour in their power. They will not conceal the form of the rock, but will gather over it in little brown bosses, like small cushions of velvet made of mixed threads of dark ruby silk and gold, rounded over more subdued films of white and grey, with lightly crisped and curled edges like hoar frost on fallen leaves, and minute clusters of upright orange stalks with pointed caps, and fibres of deep green, and gold, and faint purple passing into black, all woven together, and following with unimaginable fineness of gentle growth the undulation of the stone they cherish, until it is charged with colour so that it can receive no more; and instead of looking rugged, or cold, or stern, as anything that a rock is held to be at heart, it seems to be clothed with a soft, dark leopard skin, embroidered with arabesque of purple and silver.

**In a letter from John Ruskin to his mother Margaret, 1869**

―VERONA, June 18.—Yesterday, it being quite cool, I went for a walk, and as I came down from a rather quiet hillside a mile or two out of town, I passed a house where the women were at work spinning the silk off the cocoons. There was a sort of whirring sound as in an English mill; but at intervals they sang a long sweet chant, all together, lasting about two minutes, then pausing a minute and then beginning again. It was good and tender music, and the multitude of voices prevented any sense of failure, so that it was all very lovely and sweet, and like the things that I mean to try to bring to pass. (19.lvii)

***Ruskin referred to that experience a few years later in Fors Clavigera 32, ‘Sandy-Knowe’ of August 1873. This letter is largely about Sir Walter Scott. Sandyknowe was Scott’s grandparents’ home, 30 miles outside of Edinburgh where the three-year-old was sent for his health and, as Ruskin puts it ‘The dawn of conscious life, 1774-750’ (27.587). We pick up at a point where Ruskin has been praising the ‘exquisite clearness and softness’ of the ‘Scottish Lowland air’ as well as natural music of the people and the landscape, notably from pebbles in water:***

With the murmur, whisper, and low fall of these streamlets, unmatched for mystery and sweetness, we must remember also the variable, but seldom wild, thrilling of the wind among the recesses of the glens; and, not least, the need of relief from the monotony of occupations involving some rhythmic measure of the beat of foot or hand, during the long evenings at the hearth-side.

In the rude lines describing such passing of hours quoted by Scott in his introduction to the *Border Minstrelsy*, you find the grandmother spinning, with her stool next the hearth,—“for she was old, and saw right dimly” (firelight, observe, all that was needed even then); “she spins to make a web of good Scots linen” (can you show such now, from your Glasgow mills?). The father is pulling hemp (or beating it). The only really beautiful piece of song which I heard at Verona, during several months’ stay there in 1869, was the low chant of girls unwinding the cocoons of the silkworm, in the cottages among the olive-clad hills on the north of the city. Never any in the streets of it;—there, only insane shrieks of Republican populace, or senseless dance-music, played by operatic-military bands. (27. 596)

**Library Edition VIII, The Seven Lamps of Architecture.**

**The Lamp of Sacrifice, §15, lines 1-4, 16-**

**‘…it is one of the affections of architects to speak of overcharged ornament. Ornament cannot be overcharged if it be good, and is always overcharged when it is bad… in all this ornament there is not one cusp, one finial, that is useless — not a stroke of the chisel is in vain; the grace and luxuriance of it all are visible—sensible rather—even to the uninquiring eye; and all its minuteness does not diminish the majesty, while it increases the mystery, of the noble and unbroken vault. It is not less the boast of some styles that they can bear ornament, than of others that they can do without it; but we do not often enough reflect that those very styles, of haughty simplicity, owe part of their pleasurableness to contrast, and would be wearisome if universal**. **They are but the rests and monotones of art; it is to its far happier, far higher, exaltation that we owe those fair fronts of variegated mosaic, charged with wild fancies and dark hosts of imagery, thicker and quainter than ever filled the depth of midsummer dream; those vaulted gates, trellised with close leaves; those misty masses of multitudinous pinnacle and diademed tower; the only witness, perhaps, that remain to us of the faith and fear of nations. All else for which the builders sacrificed, has passed away—all their living interests, and aims, and achievements. We know not for what they laboured, and we see no evidence of their reward. Victory, wealth, authority, happiness—all have departed, though bought by many a bitter sacrifice.** But of them, and their life and their toil upon the earth, one reward, one evidence, is left to us in those gray heaps of deep-wrought stone. They have taken with them to the grave their powers, their honours, and their errors; but they have left us their adoration.’

**In the 1871 Preface to Sesame and Lilies, Ruskin wrote:**

Again, let a certain part of your day (as little as you choose, but not to be broken in upon) be set apart for making strong and pretty dresses for the poor. Learn the sound qualities of all useful stuffs, and make everything of the best you can get, whatever its price. I have many reasons for desiring you to do this,—too many to be told just now,—trust me, and be sure you get everything as good as can be: and if, in the villainous state of modern trade, you cannot get it good at any price, buy it raw material, and set some of the poor women about you to spin and weave, till you have got stuff that can be trusted: and then, every day, make some little piece of useful clothing, sewn with your own fingers as strongly as it can be stitched; and embroider it or otherwise beautify it moderately with fine needlework, such as a girl may be proud of having done.

**And accumulate these things by you until you hear of some honest persons in need of clothing, which may often too sorrowfully be; and, even though you should be deceived, and give them to the dishonest, and hear of their being at once taken to the pawnbroker’s, never mind that, for the pawnbroker must sell them to some one who has need of them. That is no business of yours; what concerns you is only that when you see a half-naked child, you should have good and fresh clothes to give it**, [if its parents will let it be taught to wear them..] (18.39-40)

**Library Edition XVII, Unto This Last, Munera Pulveris, Time and Tide.**

**Unto This Last, §61, lines 1-40**

**‘Much store has been set for centuries upon the use of our English classical education. It were to be wished that our well-educated merchants recalled to mind always this much of their Latin schooling,—that the nominative of *valorem* (a word already sufficiently familiar to them) is *valor*; a word which, therefore, ought to be familiar to them. *Valor*, from *valere*, to be well or strong;— strong, *in* life (if a man), or valiant; strong, *for* life (if a thing), or valuable. To be “valuable”, therefore, is to “avail towards life.” A truly valuable thing or availing thing is that which leads to life with its whole strength. In proportion as it does not lead to life, or as its strength is broken, it is less valuable; in proportion as it leads away from life, it is unvaluable or malignant.**

 **The value of a thing, therefore, is independent of opinion, and of quantity. Think what you will of it, gain how much you may of it, the value of the thing itself is neither greater nor less. For ever it avails, or avails not; no estimate can raise, no disdain repress, the power which it holds from the Maker of things and of men.**

 [The real science of political economy, which has yet to be distinguished from the bastard science, as medicine from witchcraft, and astronomy from astrology, is that which teaches nations to desire and labour for the things that lead to life: and which teaches them to scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction]. (17.83-85)

And if, in a state of infancy, they supposed indifferent things, such as excrescences of shell-fish, and pieces of blue and red stone, to be valuable, and spent large measures of the labour which ought to be employed for the extension and ennobling of life, in diving or digging for them, and cutting them into various shapes,—or if, in the same state of infancy, they imagine precious and beneficent things, such as air, light, and cleanliness, to be valueless,—or if, finally, they imagine the conditions of their own existence, by which alone they can truly possess or use anything, such, for instance, as peace, trust, and love, to be prudently exchangeable, when the markets offer, for gold, iron, or excrescences of shells—the great and only science of Political Economy teaches them, in all these cases, what is vanity, and what substance; and how the service of Death, the Lord of Waste, and of eternal emptiness, differs from the service of Wisdom, the Lady of Saving, and of eternal fulness…’(17. 85)

**Unto This Last, §64, lines 1-5**

‘Wealth, therefore, is “THE POSSESSION OF THE VALUABLE BY THE VALIANT”; and in considering it as a power existing in a nation, the two elements, the value of the thing, and the valour of its possessor, must be estimated together.’

**Unto This Last, §72, lines 1-12**

[And as for production, the last of the words we ought to define:] ‘**I have hitherto spoken of all labour as profitable; because it is impossible to consider under one head the quality or value of labour, and its aim. But labour of the best quality may be various in aim. It may be either constructive (“gathering,” from con and struo), as agriculture; nugatory, as jewel-cutting; or destructive (“scattering,” from de ands struo), as war. It is not, however, always easy to prove labour, apparently nugatory, to be actually so; generally, the formula holds good: “he that gathereth not, scattereth”; thus, the jeweller’s art is probably very harmful in its ministering to a clumsy and inelegant pride.’**

**Library Edition XXIX, *Fors Clavigera*, Letters 73-96, Letter 95, October 1884, *Fors Infantiae*, para. 21, lines 1-**

*In this letter, Ruskin gives textiles primacy of place in his planned St George's Museum: he speaks of the historical and cultural significance of textiles, including embroidery and dyeing. He uses the word ‘acicular’, meaning a small needle or needle-shaped, more commonly a scientific term referring to crystals. He also digresses into discussion of ‘a remedy for Rents’, as in the careful mending of torn garments.*

21. (And lastly of needlework). **I find among the materials of Fors, thrown together long since, but never used, the following sketch of what the room of the Sheffield Museum, set apart for its illustration, was meant to contain. “All the acicular art of nations, savage and civilized—from Lapland boot, letting in no snow water, to Turkey cushion bossed with pearl,—to valance of Venice gold in needlework,—to the counterpanes and samplers of our own lovely ancestresses—(**imitable, perhaps, once more, with good help from Whitelands College and Girton). **It was but yesterday my own womankind were in much wholesome and sweet excitement, delightful to behold, in the practice of some new device of remedy for Rents (to think how much of evil there is in the two senses of that four-lettered word! as in the two methods of intonation of its synonym, Tear!), whereby it might be daintily effaced, and with a newness which would never make it worse. The process began—beautiful even to my uninformed eyes—in the likeness of herring-bone masonry, crimson on white, but it seemed to me marvellous that anything should yet be discoverable in needle process, and that of so utilitarian character. “All that is reasonable, I say, of such work is to be in our first Museum room; all that Athena and Penelope would approve. Nothing that vanity has invented for change, or folly loved for costliness.**

**“Illustrating the true nature of a thread and a needle, the structure first of wool and cotton, of fur and hair and down, hemp, flax, and silk:—microscope permissible, here, if anything can be shown of why wool is soft, and fur fine, and cotton downy, and down downier; and how a flax fibre differs from a dandelion stalk, and how the substance of a mulberry leaf can become velvet for Queen Victoria’s crown, and clothing of purple for the housewife of Solomon. “Then the phase of its dyeing. What azures and emeralds and Tyrian scarlets can be got into fibres of thread! “Then the phase of its spinning. The mystery of that divine spiral, from finest to firmest, which renders lace possible at Valenciennes**;[—anchorage possible, after Trafalgar (if Hardy had done as he was bid)]. “**Then the mystery of weaving. The eternal harmony of warp and woof; of all manner of knotting, knitting, and reticulation; the art which makes garments possible woven from the top throughout; draughts of fishes possible, miraculous enough, always, when a pilchard or herring shoal gathers itself into companionable catchableness;—which makes, in fine, so many nations possible, and Saxon and Norman beyond the rest.** [“And finally, the accomplished phase of needlework—the ‘Acu Tetigisti’ of all time, which does indeed practically exhibit—what mediæval theologists vainly disputed—how many angels can stand on a needle point, directing the serviceable stitch, to draw the separate into the inseparable.”]

**Unto This Last, §85, lines 1-**

‘And if, on due and honest thought over these things, it seems that the kind of existence to which men are now summoned by every plea of pity and claim of right, may, for some time at least, not be a luxurious one; consider whether, even supposing it guiltless, luxury would be desired by any of us, if we saw clearly at our sides the suffering which accompanies it in the world. Luxury is indeed possible in the future—innocent and exquisite; luxury for all, and by the help of all; but luxury at present can only be enjoyed by the ignorant; the cruelest man living could not sit at his feast, unless he sat blindfold. Raise the veil boldly; face the light; and if, as yet, the light of the eye can only be through tears, and the light of the body through sackcloth, go thou forth weeping, bearing precious seed, until the time come, and the kingdom, when Christ’s gift of bread, and bequest of peace, shall be “Unto this last as unto thee”; and when, for earth’s severed multitudes of the wicked and the weary, there shall be holier reconciliation than that of the narrow home, and calm economy, where the Wicked cease—not from trouble, but from troubling—and the Weary are at rest.’(17.114)

**In the Master’s Report of 1884, in the volume of the Library Edition dedicated to *The Guild and Museum of St. George* , Ruskin looked to past ways of making on a larger scale and living in community, with a focus on textiles:**

**I have said nothing on a subject which is yet of the deepest interest to myself, and of** **much more to many of our Companions than any of the matters above considered: the success of Mr. Albert Fleming in bringing back the old industry of the spinning-wheel to the homes of Westmoreland, greatly increasing their happiness, and effectively their means of support by the sale, already widely increasing, of the soundest and fairest linen fabrics that care can weave, or field-dew blanch. But of this, and the collateral results obtained by Mr. Rydings in the manufacture of the woollen home-spun products of the Isle of Man, now under the direction of our recently appointed second Trustee, Mr. Thomson of Huddersfield,** I will speak at length in a second report, which will be required after a month or two, to give account of the progress of the Museum subscription, and I trust of the building itself […]. (30. 83-84)

**AMONGST the evils resulting from the gradual depopulation of the villages is that round us here, in Westmoreland, all the old trades are dying or dead—bobbin-turning, charcoal-burning, wood-carving, basket-making, hand-spinning and weaving—some are clean vanished, and others are the mere ghosts of their old selves. My own personal experiment has been to try and reintroduce the hand-spinning and weaving of linen. For years past Mr. Ruskin has been eloquently beseeching English men and maidens once more to spin and weave. Wordsworth, too, melodiously lamented the disuse of the spinning-wheel;** [but for all that, it was as practically extinct all over England as our great-grandmothers’ sedan-chairs.]

[…] In the face of all this prevailing ignorance I determined to try and bring the art back to the Westmoreland women. Scattered about on the fell side were many old women, too blind to sew and too old for hard work, but able to sit by the fireside and spin, if any one would show them how, and buy their yarn. When I broached my scheme to a circle of practical relations a Babel of expostulation arose, wild as a Parsifal chorus. “It won’t pay; no one wants linen to last fifty years; it’s fantastic, impracticable, sentimental, and quixotic.” But to balance all this came a voice from Brantwood, saying, “Go ahead”; so I went ahead, hunted up an old woman who had spun half a century ago, and discovered some wheels of a similar period. I got myself taught spinning, and then set to work to teach others. […]

We then secured an old weaver, and one bright Easter morning saw our first piece of linen woven—the first purely hand-spun and hand-woven linen produced in all broad England in our generation. A significant fact that, if you think all round it. Over that first twenty yards the scoffers rejoiced greatly. I own it seemed terrible stuff, frightful in colour, and of dreadful roughness, with huge lumps and knots meandering up and down its surface. But we took heart of grace, and refreshed ourselves by reading that beautiful passage in the *Seven Lamps* which convinced us that these little irregularities were really the honourable badges of all true hand work. […]

 (30.329-30)

***The passage Fleming referred to from Ruskin’s The Seven Lamps of Architecture is this, from ‘The Lamp of Life’:***

I said, early in this essay, that hand-work might always be known from machine-work; observing, however, at the same time, that it was possible for men to turn themselves into machines, and to reduce their labour to the machine level; but so long as men work *as* men, putting their heart into what they do, and doing their best, it matters not how bad workmen they may be, there will be that in the handling which is above all price: it will be plainly seen that some places have been delighted in more than others—that there have been a pause, and a care about them; and then there will come careless bits, and fast bits; and here the chisel will have struck hard, and there lightly, and anon timidly; and if the man’s mind as well as his heart went with his work, all this will be in the right places, and each part will set off the other; and the effect of the whole, as compared with the same design cut by a machine or a lifeless hand, will be like that of poetry well read and deeply felt to that of the same verses jangled by rote. (8.214)

There are many to whom the difference is imperceptible; but to those who love poetry it is everything—they had rather not hear it at all, than hear it ill read; and to those who love Architecture, the life and accent of the hand are everything. They had rather not have ornament at all, than see it ill cut—deadly cut, that is. I cannot too often repeat, it is not coarse cutting, it is not blunt cutting, that is necessarily bad; but it is *cold* cutting—the look of equal trouble everywhere—the smooth, diffused tranquillity of heartless pains—the regularity of a plough in a level field. The chill is more likely, indeed, to show itself in finished work than in any other—men cool and tire as they complete: and if completeness is thought to be vested in polish, and to be attainable by help of sand paper, we may as well give the work to the engine lathe at once. (8.214)

**The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume LXXV. “Constructive Programme: It Meaning and Place”. Khadi. Lines 1-32**

*Gandhiji, whom I consider to be the practical-most disciple of Ruskin, writes here about khadi, hand-spun cotton, and the art of the charkha, the spinning wheel, as that panacea for the growing pauperism of India then. He has elsewhere written about his initiation into this art, and more generally, against ‘machinery’, which I shall introduce. It should be noted, also, that the initial design for the flag of India consisted of a full charkha in the centre, of which the wheel, also in the more ancient Ashoka Chakra, still remains. It will be seen here that Gandhi is wholeheartedly and whole-mindedly determined to put Ruskin into practice. Words possibly foreign to non-Indian audiences, I shall of course explain. Note that ‘swaraj’ translates to ‘self-rule’, and ‘swadeshi’ to, roughly, ‘localism’. Gandhiji talks here about ‘moral’ fibre.*

‘Khadi is a controversial subject. Many people think that in advocating khadi I am sailing against a headwind and am sure to sink the ship of swaraj and that I am taking the country to the dark ages. I do not propose to argue the case for khadi in this brief survey. I have argued it sufficiently elsewhere. Here I want to show what every Congressman, and for that matter every Indian, can do to advance the cause of khadi. It connotes the beginning of economic freedom and equality of all in the country. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Let everyone try, and he or she will find out for himself or herself the truth of what I am saying. Khadi must be taken with all its implications. It means a wholesale swadeshi mentality, a determination to find all the necessaries of life in India and that too through the labour and intellect of the villagers. That means a reversal of the existing process. That is to say that, instead of half a dozen cities of India and Great Britain living on the exploitation and the ruin of the 7,00,000 villages of India, the latter will be largely self-contained, and will voluntarily serve the cities of India and even the outside world in so far as it benefits both the parties.

 This needs a revolutionary change in the mentality and tastes of many. Easy though the non-violent was in many respects, it is very difficult in many others. It vitally touches the life of every single Indian, makes him feel aglow with the possession of a power that has laid hidden within himself, and makes him proud of his identity with every drop of the ocean of Indian humanity. This non-violence is not the inanity for which we have mistaken it through all these long ages; it is the most potent force as yet known to mankind and on which its very existence is dependent. It is that force which I have tried to present to the Congress and through it to the world. Khadi to me is the symbol of unity of Indian Humanity, of its economic freedom and equality and therefore, ultimately, in the poetic expression of Jawaharlal Nehru, “the livery of India’s freedom”.’

**Library Edition I, *Early Prose Writings 1834 to 1843*, taken from ‘Essay on the Relative Dignity of the Studies of Painting and Music, and the Advantages to be Derived from Their Pursuit’ 1838**

Para. 22, lines 3-12

‘Let two persons go out for a walk; the one a good sketcher, the other having no taste of the kind. Let them go down a green lane. There will be a great difference in the scene as perceived by the two individuals. The one will see a lane and trees; he will perceive the trees to be green, though he will think nothing about it; he will see that the sun shines, and that it has a cheerful effect, but that the trees make the lane shady and cool; and he will see an old woman in a red cloak; - *et voilà tout!*

Para. 23, lines 1-26

But what will the sketcher see? His eye is accustomed to search into the cause of beauty, and penetrate the minutest parts of loveliness. He looks up, and observes how the showery and subdivided sunshine comes sprinkled down among the gleaming leaves overhead, till the air is filled with the emerald light, and the motes dance in the green, glittering lines that shoot down upon the thicker masses of clustered foliage that stand out so bright and beautiful from the dark, retiring shadows of the inner tree, where the white light again comes flashing in from behind, like showers of stars; and here and there a bough is seen emerging from the veil of leaves, of a hundred varied colours, where the old and gnarled wood is covered with the brightness, — the jewel brightness of the emerald moss, or the variegated and fantastic lichens, white and blue, purple and red, all mellowed and mingled into a garment of beauty from the old withered branch.

Then come the cavernous trunks, and the twisted roots that grasp with their snake-like coils at the steep bank, whose turfy slope is inlaid with flowers of a thousand dyes, each with his diadem of dew: and down like a visiting angel, looks one ray of golden light, and passes over the glittering turf — kiss, — kiss, — kissing every blossom, until the laughing flowers have lighted up the lips of the grass with one bright and beautiful smile, that is seen far, far away among the shadows of the old trees, like a gleam of summer lightening along the darkness of an evening cloud.

Is not this worth seeing? Yet if you are not a sketcher you will pass along the green lane, and when you come home again, have nothing to say or to think about it, but that you went down such and such a lane.

***The Ethics of the Dust***

OLD LECTURER. […] To-morrow is to be kept for questions and difficulties; let us keep to the plain facts to-day. There is yet one group of facts connected with this rending of the rocks, which I especially want you to notice. You know, when you have mended a very old dress, quite meritoriously, till it won’t mend any more—

EGYPT (*interrupting*). Could not you sometimes take gentlemen‘s work to illustrate by?

L. Gentlemen‘s work is rarely so useful as yours, Egypt; and when it is useful, girls cannot easily understand it.

DORA. I am sure we should understand it better than gentlemen understand about sewing.

L. My dear, I hope I always speak modestly, and under correction, when I touch upon matters of the kind too high for me; and besides, I never intend to speak otherwise than respectfully of sewing;—though you always seem to think I am laughing at you. In all seriousness, illustrations from sewing are those which Neith likes me best to use; and which young ladies ought to like everybody to use. What do you think the beautiful word “wife” comes from?

DORA (*tossing her head*). I don’t think it is a particularly beautiful word.

L. Perhaps not. At your ages you may think “bride” sounds better; but wife’s the word for wear, depend upon it. It is the great word in which the English and Latin languages conquer the French and the Greek. I hope the French will some day get a word for it, yet, instead of their dreadful “femme.” But what do you think it comes from?

DORA. I never *did* think about it.

L. Nor you, Sibyl?

SIBYL. No; I thought it was Saxon, and stopped there.

L. Yes; but the great good of Saxon words is, that they usually do mean something. Wife means “weaver”. You have all the right to call yourselves little “housewives”, when you sew neatly.

DORA. But I don’t think we want to call ourselves “little housewives.

L. You must either be house-Wives, or house-Moths; remember that. In the deep sense, you must either weave men’s fortunes, and embroider them; or feed upon, and bring them to decay. You had better let me keep my sewing illustration, and help me out with it.

DORA. Well, we’ll hear it, under protest.

L. You have heard it before; but with reference to other matters. When it is said, “no man putteth a piece of new cloth on an old garment, else it taketh from the old,” does it not mean that the new piece tears the old one away at the sewn edge?

DORA. Yes; certainly.

L. And when you mend a decayed stuff with strong thread, does not the whole edge come away sometimes, when it tears again?

DORA. Yes; and then it is of no use to mend it any more.

L. Well, the rocks don‘t seem to think that; but the same thing happens to them continually. I told you they were full of rents, or veins. Large masses of rock are sometimes as full of veins as your hand is; and of veins nearly as fine; (only you know a rock vein does not mean a tube, but a crack or cleft). Now these clefts are mended, usually, with the strongest material the rock can find; and often literally with threads; for the gradually opening rent seems to draw the substance it is filled with into fibres, which cross from one side of it to the other, and are partly crystalline; so that, when the crystals become distinct, the fissure has often exactly the look of a tear, brought together with strong cross stitches. Now when this is completely done, and all has been fastened and made firm, perhaps some new change of temperature may occur, and the rock begin to contract again. Then the old vein must open wider; or else another open elsewhere. If the old vein widen, it may do so at its centre; but it constantly happens, with well-filled veins, that the cross stitches are too strong to break: the walls of the vein, instead, are torn away by them; and another little supplementary vein—often three or four successively—will be thus formed at the side of the first.

L MARY. That is really very much like our work. (18.336-38)

**Vol. XV, The Elements of Drawing Exercise VI (39-41).**

20. Choose any tree that you think pretty, which is nearly bare of leaves, and which you can see against the sky, or against a pale wall, or other light ground: it must not be against strong light, or you will find the looking at it hurt your eyes; nor must it be in sunshine, or you will be puzzled by the lights on the boughs. But the tree must be in shade; and the sky blue, or grey, or dull white. A wholly grey or rainy day is the best for this practice.

21. You will see that all the boughs of the tree are dark against the sky. Consider them as so many dark rivers, to be laid down in a map with absolute accuracy; and, without the least thought about the roundness of the stems, map them all out in flat shade, scrawling them in with pencil, just as you did the limbs of your letters; then correct and alter them, rubbing out and out again, never minding how much your paper is dirtied (only not destroying its surface), until every bough is exactly, or as near as your utmost power can bring it, right in curvature and in thickness. Look at the white interstices between them with as much scrupulousness as if they were little estates which you had to survey, and draw maps of, for some important lawsuit, involving heavy penalties if you cut the least bit of a corner off any of them, or give the hedge anywhere too deep a curve; and try continually to fancy the whole tree nothing but a flat ramification on a white ground. Do not take any trouble about the little twigs, which look like a confused network or mist; leave them all out, drawing only the main branches as far as you can see them distinctly, your object at present being not to draw a tree, but to learn how to do so.

*Elsewhere, Ruskin said,* ‘the imagination must be fed constantly by external nature’. *Trees feature frequently in my textiles, and I find it’s always helpful to start by drawing, paying attention to detail as Ruskin teaches, to the overall shape and branching pattern of each species, and the form of individual trees. Even though they will be an interpretation rather than a precise reproduction, the trees I go on to stitch will have in them what Ruskin calls the ‘memory’ of nature.*

**Conclusion:**

*From sketching to stitching,* *from training to teaching, this group of readings has aimed to demonstrate the multiple ramifications of Ruskin’s thought on textile and the running thread of fil rouge of his aesthetics and ethic stance: detailed attention to nature and others as individual threads of a larger whole – as if stitching, drawing and writing were all different but interconnected ways of being together and telling one’s story. And I would conclude with these lines that I find beautifully conveyed in these lines:*

§ 7. The power, therefore, of thus fully perceiving any natural object depends on our being able to group and fasten all our fancies about it as a centre, making a garland of thoughts for it, in which each separate thought is subdued and shortened of its own strength, in order to fit it for harmony with others; the intensity of our enjoyment of the object depending, first, on its own beauty, and then on the richness of the garland. (Modern Painters, chapter XVII, page 359

**END**

*This selection of texts prepared by the speakers for the Guild of St George, Jan 2023.*