



The Stones of Venice, Volume III (of 3)

John Ruskin 1819-1900

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Excerpt: ... of realization is often allowed, for the sake of color, than would be right without it. For there is not any distinction between the artists of the inferior and the nobler schools more definite than this; that the first color for the sake of realization, and the second realize for the sake of color. I hope that, in the fifth chapter, enough has been said to show the nobility of color, though it is a subject on which I would fain enlarge whenever I approach it: for there is none that needs more to be insisted upon, chiefly on account of the opposition of the persons who have no eye for color, and who, being therefore unable to understand that it is just as divine and distinct in its power as music (only infinitely more varied in its harmonies), talk of it as if it were inferior and servile with respect to the other powers of art; 53 whereas it is so far from being this, that wherever it enters it must take the mastery, and, whatever else is sacrificed for its sake, it, at least, must be right. This is partly the case even with music: it is at our choice, whether we will accompany a poem with music, or not; but, if we do, the music must be right, and neither discordant nor inexpressive. The goodness and sweetness of the poem cannot save it, if the music be harsh or false; but, if the music be right, the poem may be insipid or inharmonious, and still saved by the notes to which it is wedded. But this is far more true of color. If that be wrong, all is wrong. No amount of expression or 187 invention can redeem an ill-colored picture; while, on the other hand, if the color be right, there is nothing it will not raise or redeem; and, therefore, wherever color enters at all, anything may be sacrificed to it, and, rather than it should be false or feeble, everything must be sacrificed to it: so that, when an artist touches color, it is the same thing as when a poet takes up a musical instrument; he implies, in so doing, that he is a master, up to a...

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