

THE GUILD OF ST. GEORGE: RUSKIN'S ATTEMPT TO TRANSLATE HIS IDEAS INTO PRACTICE¹

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TO John Ruskin *Fors Clavigera* represented the last stage of the message he had first set out in his twenties in *Modern Painters*. It was the culmination of years of labour, and it carried the heaviest burden of his lifetime. He saw *Fors* as the virtual fulfilment of *Modern Painters* whose message had been advanced and developed through the years by such works as *The Stones of Venice*, *Unto This Last* and the Inaugural Oxford lectures. These works represented to him vehicles that carried part of the same message which, as he wrote :

knowing no more as I unfolded the scroll of it, what next would be written there, than a blade of grass knows what the form of its fruit shall be, I have been led on year by year to speak, even to this its end.²

He gave particular emphasis to this link between *Modern Painters* and *Fors*, when he wrote in *Fors*, Letter LXXVIII :

Modern Painters taught the claim of all lower nature on the hearts of men ; of the rock, and wave, and herb, as a part of their necessary spirit life ; in all that I now bid you to do, to dress the earth and keep it, I am fulfilling what I then began.³

Fors ended his message, and in his attempt to give practical application to his ideas expressed therein, he undertook the most exacting task of his life and the one which cost him popularity, friends and sanity. *Fors* was more than a mere statement of aim or thought, it was part of a major experiment made in the best of faith and carried out in the bravest manner. It is doubtful if a more generous attempt has ever been made by any individual to right social wrongs and to save suffering humanity. Before a

¹ Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Ruskin Trustees and to their publishers, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., for permission to include the various unpublished letters quoted in this article.

² *Fors* VII, LXXVIII, p. 166 (London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd.)

³ *Ibid.* p. 165.

consideration is made of Ruskin's ability to translate his ideas into practice, it is well first to consider what in fact were the positive ideas expressed in this last part of his message given in *Fors Clavigera* at regular monthly intervals during the years 1871 to 1878, and after that spasmodically between 1880 and 1884.

It is permissible to state that in *Fors* there is a two-way stream of ideas: those ideas presented with the purpose of exposing contemporary social evil and distress, and those presented in order to show a way out of the social muddle into happiness and greater security. The *Fors* letters, a monthly series beautifully printed and well set out, addressed to the workmen and labourers of Great Britain, were written as a result of Ruskin's deep feelings of distress at the acute poverty and misery prevalent everywhere. This intense awareness of suffering humanity developed in him a keen sense of responsibility of which he wrote in his first *Fors* letter, dated 1 January 1871:

I have listened to many ingenious persons, who say we are better off now than ever we were before. I do not know how well off we were before; but I know positively that many very deserving persons of my acquaintance have great difficulty in living under these improved circumstances: also, that my desk is full of begging letters, eloquently written either by distressed or dishonest people; and that we cannot be called, as a nation, well off, while so many of us are living either in honest or in villanous beggary.

For my own part, I will put up with this state of things, passively, not an hour longer. I am not an unselfish person, nor an Evangelical one; I have no particular pleasure in doing good; neither do I dislike doing it so much as to expect to be rewarded for it in another world. But I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, and the very light of the morning sky, when there is any—which is seldom, now-a-days, near London—has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly.

Therefore, as I have said, I will endure it no longer quietly; but henceforward, with any few or many who will help, do my poor best to abate this misery.¹

Such was his undertaking in *Fors* and the result of it was his Guild of St. George, a Society still in existence today, for which, after a weary seven-year struggle, he secured a legal constitution and recognition by the Board of Trade.

In *Fors*, Ruskin was slow to formulate his ideas about his Guild, and slower still to undertake any practical interpretation of them. It was his avowed policy to allow his ideas to circulate

¹ *Fors* 1, 1, p. 4.

for a number of years before embarking on any practical undertaking, in order to allow full play to his ideas that they might meet and measure public criticism. He wrote in Letter LVIII, dated October 1875 :

I knew they would only be mocked at, until by some years of persistence the scheme had run the course of the public talk, and until I had publicly challenged the denial of its principles in their abstract statement, long enough to show them to be invincible.¹

The germ of the scheme that was ultimately to be known as the Guild of St. George rests on Ruskin's suggestion, made in his first *Fors* letter, that a portion of his income be set aside for the building up of a 'National Store' for the common good. This giving of tithe was to be a concerted effort :

each of us laying by something, according to our means, for the common service ; and having amongst us, at last, be it ever so small, a national Store instead of a National Debt. Store which, once securely founded, will fast increase, provided only you take the pains to understand, and have perseverance to maintain, the elementary principles of Human Economy, which have, of late, not only been lost sight of, but wilfully and formally entombed under pyramids of falsehood.²

At the back of this aim was the desire :

still to keep the fields of England green, and her cheeks red.³

The object of the fund was, as he stated in Letter V :

to begin, and gradually—no matter how slowly—to increase, the buying and securing of land in England, which shall not be built upon, but cultivated by Englishmen, with their own hands, and such help of force as they can find in wind and wave.⁴

And so he straightway dedicated his forthcoming endeavours to the securing of land that was to be hand cultivated, and not contaminated by the use of any steam driven machinery. These were the conditions which he laid down when appealing for help in this undertaking :

We will try to make some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful. We will have no steam-engines upon it, and no railroads ; we will have no untended or unthought-of creatures on it ; none wretched, but the sick ; none idle, but the dead. We will have no liberty upon it ; but instant obedience to known law, and appointed persons : no equality upon it ; but recognition of every betterness that we can find, and reprobation of every worseness. When we want to go anywhere, we will go there quietly and safely, not at forty miles an hour in

¹ *Fors* V, LVIII, p. 284.

² *Fors* I, I, p. 5.

³ *Ibid* p. 7.

⁴ *Fors* I, V, p. 23.

the risk of our lives ; when we want to carry anything anywhere, we will carry it either on the backs of beasts, or on our own, or in carts, or boats ; we will have plenty of flowers and vegetables in our gardens, plenty of corn and grass in our fields,—and few bricks. We will have some music and poetry ; the children shall learn to dance to it and sing it;—perhaps some of the old people, in time, may also.¹

He was not interested in the kind of land to be secured for, as he wrote in *Fors* :

I do not care where the land is, nor of what quality. I would rather it should be poor, for I want space more than food. I will make the best of it that I can, at once, by wage-labour, under the best agricultural advice.²

He regarded barren ground as a better challenge since—and this was very important to him—those who tilled it would be working for the good of future generations and not for selfish end. But whatever the quality of the land, the treatment of it was always to be such as would secure :

the absolute best that can be made of every acre.³

Study was to be made of the nature of the soil, the flowers and plants that grew there, and every effort was to be made to increase fertility :

“ Whatever piece of land we begin work upon ” he vowed in Letter VIII, “ we shall treat thoroughly at once, putting unlimited manual labour on it, until we have every foot of it under as strict care as a flower-garden.”⁴

Ruskin constantly reminded his readers that these ideas expressed in *Fors* were ages old :

St. George’s arrangements, which are to take the hills, streams, and fields that God has made for us ; to keep them lovely, pure, and orderly as we can ; to gather their carefully cultivated fruit in due season ; and if our children then multiply so that we cannot feed them, to seek other lands to cultivate in like manner,—these arrangements, I repeat, will be found very advantageous indeed, as they always have been ; wheresoever even in any minor degree enforced.⁵

He acknowledged the Tyrol as the immediate source of influence, writing in *Fors*, Letter XI :

I hold it an entirely practical proceeding, since I find my ideal of felicity actually produced in the Tyrol, to set about the production of it, here, on Tyrolese principles ; which, you will find, on inquiry, have not hitherto implied the employment of steam, nor submission to the great Universal law of Supply and Demand, nor even Demand for the local Supply of a “ Liberal ” government.

¹ *Fors* I, V, p. 23.

² *Fors* IV, XXXVII, p. 8

³ *Fors* I, VIII, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 16.

⁵ *Fors* VI, LXIX, p. 277.

But they do imply labour of all hands on pure earth and in fresh air. They do imply obedience to government which endeavours to be just, and faith in a religion which endeavours to be moral. And they result in strength of limbs, clearness of throats, roundness of waists, and pretty jackets, and still prettier corsets to fit them.¹

In his attempt to produce this ideal of felicity in *Fors*, he expounded on the evils of the modern political economists, particularly John Stuart Mill, a veritable *Fors* target. He extolled the virtues of manual labour which alone could produce food, fuel and clothing from land and sea; above all, he tried to give his readers understanding of certain basic principles concerning the government of a country. He gave frequent emphasis to the fact that the successful working of a government was dependent on two things: on an obedient people and on intelligent governors of high moral worth. He strove to make his readers realize that more important than the actual form of government was the moral quality of the men who served in it. He listed the three principal duties of any government: to provide food, fuel and clothes; to provide moral and intellectual education, and to care for the destitute. In his frequent reminders in *Fors* that only by manual effort, could food, fuel and clothes be produced from land and sea, he echoed—consciously or unconsciously—those teachings with which he was so familiar in Xenophon's *Economist*. He exalted the manual labourer and was quick to show that the scholar, painter, and musician were, by comparison, parasites since they secured their food, fuel and clothes only through the physical efforts of others—namely, of the manual labourer. It naturally followed that he condemned any system of government that permitted usury through the letting of land or sea; he was as quick to condemn the improvident nation that imported food, or brought the misery of unemployment to her people by the use of steam-driven machinery on the land.

It is possible that it was the memory of the Tyrolean peasant costume which caused him later in *Fors*, when building up a Utopian vision of his St. George's Company, to make decrees concerning the regulation of dress. He allowed himself this flight of fancy in Letter LVIII, when he outlined a happy

¹ *Fors* I, XI, p. 18.

existence for his Company. He first gave details about the National Store he planned to set up and wrote :

The store of the St. George's Company, then, is to be primarily of food ; next of materials for clothing and covert ; next of books and works of art,—food, clothes, books, and works of art being all good, and every poisonous condition of any of them destroyed.¹

From there he went on to particularize about the grain to be used, the vintage of the wine—"pure" and "not less than ten years old", the wood to be used in building—"seasoned oak and pine" and, in great detail and to his obvious delight, the purest gold and silver currency. Of it he wrote :

the ducat and half-ducat in gold, the florin, penny, half-penny, and one-fifth of a penny in silver ; the smaller coins being beat thin and pierced, the halfpenny with two, the one-fifth of a penny with five, apertures.²

It was with evident enjoyment that he described the stamps the individual coins were to bear. He described in detail the "absolutely pure gold" ducat, whose weight was slightly to exceed the weight of the English sovereign :

On one of its sides it will bear the figure of the archangel Michael ; on the reverse, a branch of Alpine rose : above the rose-branch, the words "Sit Splendor" ; above the Michael, "Fiat voluntas" ; under the rose-branch, "sicut in coelo" ; under the Michael, "et in terrâ", with the year of the coinage : and round the edge of the coin, "Domini".³

The penny was to bear :

St. George's shield on one side and the English daisy on the other, without inscription.⁴

He laid down certain stringent currency rules :

The sum of the entire currency, in and out of circulation, will be given annually on every note issued (no issues of currency being made but on the first day of the year), and in each district, every morning, the quantities of the currency in and out of circulation in that district will be placarded at the doors of the government district bank.⁵

The Company's store was to consist also of uncut gems, and a selected series of classics which was to be accessible to all in every village library.

While it is true to state that Ruskin did in fact build up a National Store in so far as he set up a museum in which were

¹ *Fors* V, LVIII, p. 285.

² *Ibid.* p. 287.

³ *Ibid.* p. 288.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 287.

uncut gems, rare texts, and works of art, and he also secured several plots of land, he did not seriously at any time ever envisage the practical realization of his Utopian vision. This higher flight of fancy—and positively, it was no more—has, down the years since his death been seized as laughing point by many writers of repute and standing. Such, quite simply, was his Utopian dream. He was not dismayed by the loud jeers of the daily press, but he hated the popular misconception that he was seeking to found a colony where the poor would be made rich, and the sad, happy. He had no faith in monastic orders that sought to save the world by withdrawing from it and, moreover, he was horrified that he should be regarded by anyone as the leader or champion of a new movement. As early as 1873, in Letter XXX, he stated his position emphatically :

to state clearly what must be done by all of us, as we can, in our place ; and to fulfil what duty I personally acknowledge to the State ; also I have promised, if I live, to show some example of what I know to be necessary, if no more able person will show it first. That is a very different thing from pretending to leadership in a movement which must one day be as wide as the world. Nay, even my marching days may perhaps soon be over, and the best that I can make of myself be a faithful signpost.¹

On another occasion he described his present endeavours as :

Mere raft-making in the midst of irrevocable wreck.²

He set his faith on the basic simplicity of his idea which rested on the acceptable, indisputable assumption that :

washed faces are healthier than dirty ones, whole clothes decenter than ragged ones, kind behaviour more serviceable than malicious, and pure air pleasanter than foul.³

On some pages of *Fors* he might write of Utopia and linger in enjoyment over the vision, but on other pages he made infinitely clear the fact that his aim was no more than to indicate, by practical illustration, the obvious road that all should follow. Unlike many others who write of the fair land, he spent a great part of his fortune in his attempt to “ make her a happy England ”. It was a difficult task and he was particularly sensitive about making appeals for subscriptions. In Letter XXXVII he wrote :

¹ *Fors* III, XXX, p. 18.

² *Fors* V, L, p. 42.

³ *Fors* IV, XXXVII, p. 12.

For my own part, I entirely hate the whole business : I dislike having either power or responsibility ; am ashamed to ask for money, and plagued in spending it.¹

but he vowed :

unless I am struck with palsy, I do not seriously doubt my perseverance, until I find somebody able to take up the matter in the same mind, and with a better heart.²

Nobody came forward to take up the matter and so he persisted in his task for many years—it was no mere quixotic humour. As long as he had health and strength, he never attempted to evade this responsibility which, rightly or wrongly, he believed to be his.

Three years after the publication of his first *Fors* letter, Ruskin wrote in January 1874 :

I have not hitherto stated, except in general terms, the design to which these letters point, though it has been again and again defined, and it seems to me explicitly enough—the highest possible education, namely, of English men and women living by agriculture in their native land.³

He then gave clear indication of his intention :

The substantial wealth of man consists in the earth he cultivates, with its pleasant or serviceable animals and plants, and in the rightly produced work of his own hands. I mean to buy, for the St. George's Company, the first pieces of ground offered to me at fair price, (when the subscriptions enable me to give *any* price),—to put them as rapidly as possible into order, and to settle upon them as many families as they can support, of young and healthy persons, on the condition that they do the best they can for their livelihood with their own hands, and submit themselves and their children to the rules written for them.⁴

In this specific statement of the work to be done Ruskin explained that his tenants (and he made clear his preference for “ young couples of the higher classes ”) would be selected for him by experienced landlords. He referred to the laws binding tenancy agreements : first, the probationary year, next the three-year lease and finally, with the ultimate possibility of buying the land, the life-long lease at a rent consisting only of a tithe of the land's produce. At this stage in his planning he contemplated the appointment of an overseer to act as advisory agent on land cultivation. And the rules and regulations he laid down were formed to produce, so far as possible, a

¹ *Fors.*, IV. XXXVII, p. 12.

³ *Ibid.* p. 7.

² *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 8.

self-supporting community in which trade and the importing of goods were reduced to a minimum and steam driven engines banished. The provision which he made for educational needs embraced adult no less than child :

The children will be required to attend training schools for bodily exercise, and music, with such other education as I have already described. Every household will have its library, given it from the fund, and consisting of a fixed number of volumes,—some constant, the others chosen by each family out of a list of permitted books, from which they afterwards may increase their library if they choose. The formation of this library for choice, by a republication of classical authors in standard forms, has long been a main object with me. No newspapers, nor any books but those named in the annually renewed lists, are to be allowed in any household. In time I hope to get a journal published, containing notice of any really important matters taking place in this or other countries, in the closely sifted truth of them.¹

This love of truth made him virtually a cultural dictator. The programme which he devised for his St. George's Schools was written in the shade of Plato, with music and dancing the subjects of prime importance. "Skill in useful manual work" might well be taken as his educational slogan, and in his rejection of the three Rs as the groundwork of primary education, he made huge attack on the contemporary system. He made the following comment on his general educational purpose in Letter XIV :

I begin to give these letters the completed character I intend for them ; first, as it may seem to me needful, commenting on what is passing at the time, with reference always to the principles and plans of economy I have to set before you ; and then collecting out of past literature, and in occasional frontispieces or woodcuts, out of past art, what may confirm or illustrate things that are forever true : choosing the pieces of the series so that, both in art and literature, they may become to you in the strictest sense, educational, and familiarise you with the look and manner of fine work.²

The setting up of a Museum at Sheffield was his bravest and finest attempt thus to make his readers familiar with that "look and manner of fine work".

To Ruskin the whole undertaking, the writing of *Fors*, the establishing of his Guild of St. George, and his own generous contributions of time and money to it were merely actions dictated by common-sense. He gave simple interpretations of his undertaking in Letter IX :

¹ *Fors* IV, XXXXVII, p. 9.

² *Fors* II, XIV, p. 12.

To divert a little of the large current of English charity and justice from watching disease to guarding health, and from the punishment of crime to the reward of virtue ; to establish, here and there, exercise grounds instead of hospitals, and training schools instead of penitentiaries, is not, if you will slowly take it to heart, a frantic imagination.¹

He was opposed to, as he was irritated by, Victorian notions of charity. He wrote emphatically in Letter XIX :

My alms-people are to be the ablestbodied I can find ; the ablestminded I can make ; and from ten to four every day will be on duty.²

He sought help from able-bodied, receptive people, and he looked for support mainly from those of his readers who had followed with sympathetic understanding his writings during the 1860 to 1870 decade. In answer to the popular criticism that his Company was to be a refuge he wrote :

Alas, this is not by any means the notion of the St. George's Company. It is to be a band of delivering knights—not of churls needing deliverance ; of eager givers and servants—not of eager beggars, and persons needing service. It is only the Rich, and the Strong, whom I receive for Companions,—those who come not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Rich, yet some of them in other kind of riches than the world's ; strong, yet some in other than the world's strength. But this much at least of literal wealth and strength they *must* have,—the power, and formed habit, of self-support.³

Ruskin envisaged three classes of companion : the companion servant whose day was spent on guild work ; the companion militant at work either on St. George's land, or on a specific task set by the Master ; and the companion consular. This last class of companion, while contributing a tithe, remained in his own profession or occupation, but vowed to preserve in it the highest standard of honesty. On one occasion in *Fors* Ruskin reduced the qualification for membership of his company or guild to the following requirement :

Anyone, therefore, may be a Companion of St. George who sincerely does what they can, to make themselves useful, and earn their daily bread by their own labour.⁴

As he saw it, he had no hard demands to make of his companions for, he argued, he asked neither for the monk's enthusiasm, nor for the knight's courage. On the other hand, he demanded implicit obedience. In short, companions were to accept as full

¹ *Fors* I, IX, p. 18.

³ *Fors* VI, LXIII, p. 79.

² *Fors* II, XIX, p. 6.

⁴ *Fors* VI, LXVII, p. 212.

and absolute authority Ruskin's decrees as Master of the Guild. They were, moreover, to accept his rulings on the admission of companions, on the appointment or non-appointment of officers, and on the expenditure of the Guild's funds. When at length Ruskin reached the stage of framing a constitution for his Company, he ruled that while the Master in power should have authority equal to that of a Roman Dictator, he could, at any meeting of the Guild, be deposed by a majority vote against him.

Such then were, in the main, some of the general ideas about his Guild of St. George which Ruskin circulated in *Fors Clavigera* during the years of persuasion. It must be recollected that these years of persuasion were to Ruskin years of phenomenally hard work—even for him—as professor, teacher, author, critic and, maybe the most exhausting of all, correspondent to the many earnest enthusiasts (mainly women) who wrote to him for advice when they were really seeking friendship.

Apart from these diverse activities and public duties, the task of publicizing his ideas about his Guild of St. George by the writing of his monthly *Fors* letter was formidable enough, but even then his work did not end there. He still had two onerous burdens to carry in connection with his Guild: first, he had to establish the Guild and win for it a legal constitution—a seven year burden; and second, he had to administer the society when founded, and act as Master with full powers and responsibility vested in him. Perhaps of these two burdens, the work of establishing the Guild proved the heavier, and it might be well now to consider Ruskin's practical work as founder of the Guild of St. George.

The first decisive step taken by Ruskin to translate his ideas into practice was in May 1871 when he proposed to set up a fund and made solemn promise to contribute to it. This was the public promise he made in *Fors*, Letter V:

The tenth of whatever is left to me, estimated as accurately as I can, (you shall see the accounts) I will make over to you in perpetuity, with the best security that English law can give, on Christmas Day of this year, with engagement to add the tithe of whatever I earn afterwards.¹

¹ *Fors* I, V, p. 22.

Two months later, in Letter VIII, he intimated the amount of his tithe as it could so far be estimated :

Now you know I promised you the tenth of all I had, when free from encumbrances already existing on it. This first instalment of 14,000£ is not all clear, for I want to found a Mastership of Drawing under the Art Professorship at Oxford ; which I can't do rightly for less than 5,000£. But I'll count the sum left as 10,000£ instead of 9,000£, and that will be clear for our society, and so, you shall have a thousand pounds down, as the tenth of that, which will quit me, observe, of my pledge thus far.¹

He straightway secured the services of two eminent Victorians, Sir Thomas Dyke Acland and the Right Honourable William Cowper-Temple, as trustees of the fund which he named the " St. George's Fund "—but he was emphatic that beyond this establishment of the fund no further action would be taken meantime. He invited others to contribute, reminding his readers that such money was a gift not an investment :

It is a frank and simple gift to the British people ; nothing of it is to come back to the giver.²

People were slow to respond to this invitation, but within nine months of his first *Fors* publication he received a gift of seven acres of woodland in Worcestershire from a wealthy Birmingham merchant, George Baker, who was ultimately to succeed Ruskin as Master of the Guild. This gift Ruskin announced in a footnote to Letter IX :

Since last *Fors* was published I have sold some more property, which has brought me in another ten thousand to tithe ; so that I have bought a second thousand consols in the names of the Trustees—and have received a pretty little gift of seven acres of woodland, in Worcestershire, for you, already—so you see there is at least a beginning.³

But he made no proposal about tending, or even inspecting, the land. He was conscious even at this early stage in his endeavours of hampering legal restrictions, and he made some reference to them in this letter. His Christmas letter again touched on legal matters :

At least, however, you will be glad to know that I have really made you the Christmas gift I promised—7,000£ consols, in all, clear ; a fair tithe of what I had : and to as much perpetuity as the law will allow me. It will not allow the dead to have their own way long, whatever license it grants the living in their

¹ *Fors* I, VIII, p. 14.

² *Ibid.* p. 15.

³ *Fors* I, IX, p. 21.

humours : and this seems to me unkind to those helpless ones ;—very certainly it is inexpedient for the survivors.¹

He then explained the difficulty that faced him :

As it stands, I can only vest my gift in trustees, desiring them, in the case of my death, immediately to appoint their own successors, and in such continued succession, to apply the proceeds of the St. George's fund to the purchase of land in England and Scotland, which shall be cultivated to the utmost attainable fruitfulness and beauty by the labour of man and beast thereon, such men and beasts receiving at the same time the best education attainable by the trustees for labouring creatures, according to the terms stated in this book, *Fors Clavigera*.²

He was unable to make the permanent settlement which he wished and he wrote somewhat frustratedly :

I cannot, because of the lawyers I was talking of last month, get it given you in a permanent and accumulative form.³

It was not until the second year of his venture that he formed his Company of St. George and invited his readers to join. He was delighted in June to announce the first gift of money from a stranger and so to declare his fund formally opened. By the end of the year he was able to report that from his six subscribers he had received the total amount of £104 15s. and he added complacently :

It is a beginning. We shall get on in time—better than some companies that have started with large capital.⁴

Twelve months later, he could report increase of only nine subscribers to his fund which now amounted to £236 13s. although over a thousand copies of *Fors* had been sold. Again, at the end of 1874, he could report only slow progress despite the four years of mendicancy. For this he blamed his earlier failures in other practical experiments of which he gave some account in Letter XLVIII. He described his unsuccessful tea shop venture at Paddington, where, for the dual purpose of employing two of his mother's aged servants and helping the poor, tea made up in small quantities was cheaply sold. There business languished, and for this Ruskin blamed himself for his slowness in making a decision about the form and colour of the outside signboard. For his failure to keep clean and pure a

¹ *Fors* I, XII, p. 3.

³ *Fors* II, XVII, p. 5.

² *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁴ *Fors* II, XXIV, p. 25.

spring at Carshalton, that he sought to have dedicated to his Mother's memory, he blamed the muddy spring water and the careless parishioners ; while he accounted for his failure in the clean sweeping of St. Giles, by blaming himself for an unfortunate choice of district and for not adequately supervising the proceedings. He made no mention of the fact that this simple and surely inoffensive experiment in road-sweeping brought him cruel abuse in the press. In *Fors* Ruskin argued that he had failed in these and other practical undertakings only because he was unable to devote his time wholly to them. Nevertheless, he reminded his readers that he had learned from these past experiences and that the financial loss incurred was entirely his own.

The year 1874, however, was memorable in that it brought him a new gift of land for his Guild, as well as a devoted friend and patron, Mrs. Fanny Talbot. Guild histories and biographies of Ruskin to date make little reference to this lady who received between 1874 and 1889 some 365 letters from him. This important collection of letters, together with other manuscripts and papers of vital importance to the history of the Guild, have lately been generously presented to the John Rylands Library by a member of the Guild of St. George, Mrs. Rawnsley of Grasmere, Westmorland, who, with her husband, the late Canon H. D. Rawnsley, was also devoted to Ruskin. The importance of these letters to the history of the Guild is the subject matter of a detailed work that has lately been completed. It is sufficient here to state that the letters give a vivid and vital picture of Ruskin's feelings during the years of his main endeavour for the Guild. As well as providing a refreshing commentary, they also give a pleasing glimpse of a Ruskin relaxed, happily playing chess by correspondence with her.

Ruskin's excitement in December 1874 when he learned of Mrs. Talbot's projected gift was intense and he wrote to his friend Macdonald about it :

My dear Macdonald,

I have been able now to read Mrs. Talbot's letter—it seems the kindest and most wonderful and most pretty beginning for me that could be—and there's not the slightest fear of the St. George's Company ever parting with an inch of

anything they get hold of!—if that is indeed the only fear in question—but do I rightly understand this letter as an offer to us of a piece of freehold land, with cottages on it—as a gift!—Don't send the note if I misunderstand—but if I am right please enclose it to Mrs. Talbot with yours—for there is no spot in England or Wales I should like better to begin upon in *any* case—please ask for me more particulars about the extent of land—state and circumstances of cottages etc.

—and believe me

Ever gratefully Yours,

J. Ruskin.¹

Too excited even to wait for Macdonald to reply, he enclosed the above letter in a note to Mrs. Talbot with the explanation :

I meant to send the enclosed to Mr. Macdonald—but—for fear of his not being at home in time I venture to address it at once to you, with most true thanks for the kind expression and intentions of your letter—on which I only fear to presume too far.²

Some few days later he wrote again formally to accept the cottages and to indicate his plans for them :

The ground and houses which you offer me are exactly the kind of property I wish most to obtain for the St. George's company : I accept them at once with very glad thanks ; and will endeavour soon to come and see them and thank you and your son in person.—No cottager shall be disturbed—but—in quiet and slow ways assisted—as each may deserve or wish—to better their own houses in sanitary and comfortable points.—My principle is to work with the minutest possible touches—but with steady end in view—and by developing as I can—the energy of the people I want to help.³

To her son, Quarry Talbot, an aspiring artist with whom he had earlier slight acquaintance, he wrote on 18 December 1874 for information about the cottagers who were now to be St. George's tenants ;

I need not say—in any too tiresome repetition—that I am most grateful to your mother and you, for your gift and thought. As I have taken her at her word, so you also I trust, and will ask you therefore to be at the pains to tell me something of the character & means of livelihood of the people now on this plot of land. Judging by this photograph, the cottages seem so respectable and so well kept, as compared with our Cumberland ones, that I should think very little encouragement necessary to get all done that may be desirable for them, by their own energy. I cannot make out what the walls are for, near the top of the ground—and the line defining the property seems to ignore all expressed limitations of such a kind. It will be necessary to mark the St. George's limits very carefully, at first in order not to have any legal difficulties if I fence the whole when I've got anything worth taking care of.⁴

¹ Rylands Eng. MS.1161/1a. n.d.

² Ibid. 1161/1. 10.12.1874.

³ Ibid. 1161/3. n.d.

⁴ Rylands Eng. MS. 1163/1. 18.12.74.

He ended his letter with a promise to see to the house drainage.

Despite the fact that he had already experienced legal difficulty in connection with the giving of his tithe to the Society, Ruskin in his first acceptance of Mrs. Talbot's gift of land and cottages at Barmouth seemed singularly unconscious of major legal problems relating to its possession. He wrote to Mrs. Talbot in January 1875 :

My delay in writing was entirely owing to the Trustee's not having decided whether to act through their lawyers or mine—I only heard from Mr. Temple yesterday ;—he wishes my own lawyer to arrange the matter with your's ; and if indeed any doubt could exist respecting the usefulness to me of your gift, I would myself at once follow your kind suggestion and come down to Barmouth. But there is no question at all. *Any* land—*any* buildings offered me I would take—but these are just the kind and in the kind of place I should like best.

and he concluded optimistically :

Now my dear Madam, the *defining* of boundaries is lawyers' business—and I think your's and mine should settle it for us. Will you kindly tell yours to draw up a deed defining the limits properly, with measured map of the ground accurately drawn :—when it is ready, I will send down a friend to examine the spot and see that any questionable points are cleared.—He will bring up the deed to my lawyer, and I hope we shall have no further difficulty.¹

A later letter dated 3 February 1875 anticipated the legal need for definition of the St. George's Company and he made hasty, and altogether inadequate, suggestion :

Your solicitor will I doubt not require explanation of the nature of St. George's company, such as can be put in legal documents. If no simple form such as “ The St. George's company formed under the direction or directorship (I wrote ‘ dict ’—just now in beginning ‘ director ’—that missing of letters I consider one of the most definite signs of great nervous exhaustion) of J. R. of Corpus Christi Coll. Oxford, for the education of English peasantry ”, will stand in law, you must just transfer the land straight to *me* without verbal restraint and trust me to do right with it.²

But in *Fors*, Letter L, he gave glimpse of the legal trouble ahead :

An acre of ground, with some cottages on it, has been given me for our Company ; but it is not easy to find out how the company is to lay hold of it. I suppose the conveyancing will cost us, in the end, half a dozen times the value of the land ; and in the meantime I don't care to announce our possession of it, or say what I mean to do with it.³

In order to “ lay hold ” of the land and legally establish his Company of St. George, Ruskin secured the services of leading

¹ Rylands Eng. MS, 1161/3. 29.1.75.

² Ibid. 1162/4. 3.2.75.

³ *Fors* V, L, p. 47.

Counsel, William Barber. Barber's task was to draw up in terms that would satisfy the legal requirements of the Board of Trade a Memorandum and Statutes of the Company of St. George from Ruskin's own statement of his aims and objects. At length, in July 1875, in Letter LV, Ruskin published Barber's Memorandum and Statutes and, after making some amendments himself, he invited his readers to comment on it.

This Memorandum gave clear statement of the Company's aim which, with Ruskin's amendment, finally read :

The Company is constituted with the object of determining and instituting in practice the wholesome laws of agricultural life and economy and of instructing the agricultural labourer in such science art and literature as are properly connected with husbandry.

With this object it is proposed to acquire by gift purchase or otherwise plots or tracts of land in different parts of the country which will be brought into such state of cultivation or left uncultivated or turned into waste or common land and applied to such purposes as having regard to the nature of the soil and other surrounding circumstances may in each case be thought to be most generally useful.¹

The clause concerning membership as drawn up by Barber infuriated Ruskin, because it made membership of the Company determined by fixed subscription, and he stated categorically :

Nothing can be required as a condition of entrance, except the consent of the Master, and signature promising obedience to the laws.²

The Memorandum gave details of the solemn ceremony of entering names of Companions on the Roll of Companions and the safe keeping of this Roll. The importance of this ceremony, which in a measure forecast the vow that Ruskin was shortly to formulate, was stressed :

Each Companion shall by virtue of the entry of his name on the Roll be deemed to have bound himself by a solemn vow and promise as strict as if the same had been ratified by oath to be true and loyal to the Company and to the best of his power and might so far as in him lies to forward and advance the objects and interests thereof and faithfully to keep and obey the statutes and rules thereof yet so nevertheless that he shall not be bound in any way to harass annoy injure or inconvenience his neighbour.³

The full powers of the Master were stated and information given about the work and status of " Retainers of the Company " — those at work supervising or managing Company property. It is

¹ *Fors V.* LV, p. 206.

² *Ibid.* p. 210.

³ *Ibid.* p. 206.

a curious fact that in the history of the Guild there has never been a retainer. The Memorandum also set out the principle of rent :

The rents and profits to be derived from the estates and properties of the Company shall be applied in the first instance in the development of land [here Ruskin added —“ to the development and enlargement of the Society’s operations also ”] and the physical intellectual moral social and religious improvement of the residents thereon in such manner as the Master shall from time to time direct or approve and the surplus rents and profits if any shall be applied in reduction of the amount paid by the tenants in proportion to their respective skill and industry either by a gradual remission of rent towards the close of the tenancy or in such other way as may be thought best but in no case shall the Companions personally derive any rents or profits from the property of the Company.¹

So far as the vesting of property was concerned, the Memorandum read :

All land and hereditaments for the time being belonging to the Company shall be conveyed to and vested in any two or more of the Companions whom the Master may from time to time select for the office as Trustees of the Company and shall be dealt with by them according to the directions of the Master.²

To this Ruskin objected :

I do not think the Master should have the power of choosing the Trustees. I was obliged to do so, before any Society was in existence ; but the Trustees have to verify the Master’s accounts, and otherwise act as a check upon him. They must not, therefore, be chosen by him.³

Such then were some of the general ideas expressed in the legal statement of the Company of St. George. It is evident that Ruskin, satisfied with the amended document, believed that his Company was as good as legally established. The satisfaction was short-lived, however, for in Letter LXVI he quoted a letter from his solicitors which contained the following clear statement :

If you desire to have a legal Company, or the supervision of the Charity Commissioners, you must give way in many points which you have hitherto considered indispensable to your scheme.⁴

Ruskin’s reply which he also quoted in this letter showed frank disillusionment :

Now I find at the last moment that neither Mr. Barber nor anybody else can *give* us a piece of land at all, but must sell it us.

and he ended :

¹ *Fors* V, LV, p. 208.

³ *Ibid.* p. 211.

² *Ibid.* p. 209.

⁴ *Fors* VI, LXVI, p. 190.

Fix your mind, and Mr. Barber's on this one point—the grip of the land. If you can't give us that, send in your accounts, and let us be done with the matter.¹

Ruskin did not appreciate the fact that his solicitors had no precedent to follow in trying to win a legal constitution for his Company. Nor were his solicitors at first fully aware of the fact that the case was unique, and for many long months they investigated the possibility of assimilating the non-profit winning Company of St. George to a commercial undertaking. As long as they worked along these lines they failed and Ruskin, despairing, resolved to leave all legal matters :

in the hands of our companion Mr. Somervell, and in the claws of the English faculty of Law.²

He made the following comment on this action in Letter LXVIII:

I perceive that it is out of my power to give the Company a legal status, according to the present law of England, unless it be permitted to gather dividends for itself, instead of store for the nation, and to put its affairs in the hands of a number of persons who know nothing about them, instead of in the hands of one person who is acquainted with them.

Under these circumstances, I consider it to be best that the companions should settle their own legal status with the lawyers ; and this the more, as I do not choose to run the Society into farther expense by the continuance of correspondence between these legal gentlemen and me, without the slightest chance of either party ever understanding the other.³

And so he temporarily left the scene of legal battle.

Despite these long frustrating legal anxieties which absorbed so much of his time and energy, Ruskin's enthusiasm for his Society remained. In Letter LVI, published in August 1875, he gave notice of the most significant action he ever took on behalf of the Guild. The notes and correspondence section of this letter told of his new undertaking :

I have become responsible, as the Master of the Company, for rent or purchase of a room at Sheffield, in which I propose to place some books and minerals, as the germ of a museum arranged first for workers in iron, and extended into illustration of the natural history of the neighbourhood of Sheffield, and more especially of the geology and flora of Derbyshire.⁴

The setting up of the Museum was a never failing pleasure and interest to him, and as long as his strength prevailed over many bouts of brain fever, he devoted himself to it. As age and

¹ *Fors VI, LXVI, p. 193.*

³ *Fors VI, LXVII, p. 229.*

² *Fors VII, LXXIV, p. 44.*

⁴ *Fors V, LVI, p. 233.*

illness advanced, he grew weary of the Guild problems and some of its querulous members, but he never wearied of his Museum for working men at Sheffield.

The following letter, Letter LVII, told of further activity taken towards the establishment of the Guild. This time Ruskin had to report that he was attempting to frame a vow or creed which companions would be called upon to sign. It proved a singularly difficult task and he wrote somewhat impatiently in Letter LVII :

The fact being that I am, at this central time of my life's work, at pause because I cannot set down any form of religious creed so simple, but that the requirement of its faithful signature by persons desiring to become Companions of St. George, would exclude some of the noblest champions of justice and charity now labouring for men.¹

The vow, when once it was written out to his satisfaction, was published in October 1875 in Letter LVIII. Acceptance of the vow provided another condition of membership, and there was also a certain formality attached to it for it had to be written out by hand and, as Ruskin stated :

signed with the solemnity of a vow, by every person received into the St. George's Company.²

The vow is essentially a happy statement of belief that dwells on the loving and living God, and on the nobility of men. It calls for love of God, service to man and the preserving of all lovely things of nature. A typical clause reads :

I will not kill nor hurt any living creature needlessly, nor destroy any beautiful thing, but will strive to save and comfort all gentle life, and guard and perfect all natural beauty, upon the earth.³

and another :

I will strive to raise my own body and soul daily into higher powers of duty and happiness ; not in rivalry or contention with others, but for the help, delight, and honour of others, and for the joy and peace of my own life.⁴

His final call was for loyalty and devotion and obedience to the laws of the country, to the crown, and to society. He was yet a step nearer to the establishment of his Society.

He had further evidence of practical work in Sheffield, and was delighted to be able to report the first purchase for the

¹ *Fors* V, LVII, p. 249.

² *Ibid.*, LVIII, p. 273.

³ *Ibid.* p. 274.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Museum of ten Turner engravings at a cost of £29 10s. He gave details of his Sheffield major purchase in Letter LX :

. . . we had a balance of £501 7s. at the bank, which balance I have taken, and advanced another hundred of my own, making £600, to buy the Sheffield property with : this advance I shall repay myself as the interest comes in, or farther subscription ; and then use such additional sums for the filling of the museum, and building a small curator's house on the ground. But I shall not touch any of the funded sum ; and hope soon to see it raised to £10,000. I have no word yet from our lawyer about our constitution. The Sheffield property, like the funded, stands in the names of the Trustees.

I have accepted, out of our forty subscribers, some eight or nine for Companions, very gratefully. Others wish well to the cause, but dislike the required expression of creed and purpose. I use no persuasion in the matter, wishing to have complete harmony of feeling among the active members of the Society.¹

Membership showed some increase during the first part of 1876 and Ruskin in the February *Fors* reported that of his fifty-four subscribers twenty were companions. He also reported, accurately as he believed, that the Society was now legally in existence. Further satisfaction came to him from the appointment of Henry Swan as Curator. Swan, a former pupil of Ruskin's at the Working Men's College, proved an altogether admirable curator whom the workmen respected. But despite this progress made, as the year advanced the Company languished. It is possible that Ruskin's withdrawal from the legal issue was responsible for the decline in membership and in November 1876, he wrote :

The entire pause in subscriptions, and cessation of all serviceable offers of Companionship, during the last six months, may perhaps be owing in some measure to the continued delay in the determination of our legal position. I am sure that Mr. Somervell, who has communicated with the rest of the Companions on the subject, is doing all that is possible to give our property a simply workable form of tenure ; and then, I trust, things will progress ; but, whether they do or not, at the close of this seventh year, if I live, I will act with all the funds then at my disposal.²

Ruskin's major activity, in this year of resolution, was the purchase of a piece of land for a few Sheffield working men who were eager to work allotments in their leisure. He wrote about this action from Venice in Letter LXXVI which he dated 4 March 1877 :

¹ *Fors* V. LX, p. 351.

² *Fors* VII, LXXIII, p. 20.

A few of the Sheffield working-men who admit the possibility of St. George's notions being just, have asked me to let them rent some ground from the Company, whereupon to spend what spare hours they have, of morning or evening, in useful labour. I have accordingly authorized the sale of £1,200 worth of our stock, to be re-invested on a little estate near Sheffield, of thirteen acres, with good water supply. The workmen undertake to St. George for his three per cent; and if they get tired of the bargain, the land will be always worth our stock. I have no knowledge yet of the men's plans in detail; nor, as I have said in the text, shall I much interfere with them, until I see how they develop themselves. But here is at last a little piece of England given into the English workman's hand, and heaven's.¹

He was delighted at this request, but, unfortunately the purchase threw the Society into some confusion, since both trustees resigned when he insisted that the property be bought. The loss of the services of Dyke Acland and Cowper-Temple was a grievous blow to Ruskin and the Society for in quality and status they were, as Ruskin was to find, virtually irreplaceable. Hard at work in Venice at the time of the actual purchase of land, Ruskin wrote of the event in *Fors*, Letter LXXVII dated Easter 1877:

No details have yet reached me of the men's plan at Sheffield; but the purchase of their land may be considered as affected "if the titles are good". No doubt is intimated on this matter; and I think I have already expressed my opinion of the wisdom of requiring a fresh investigation of title on every occasion of the sale of property; so that, as my days here in Venice are surcharged with every kind of anger and indignation already, I will not farther speak at present of the state of the British Law.²

The next *Fors* letter, dated May 1877, carried the following comment on the resignation of his trustees:

the explanations which, now that the Company is actually beginning its work, I felt it due to our trustees to give, more clearly than heretofore, of its necessary methods of action respecting land, have issued in the resignation of our present trustees, with the immediately resulting necessity that the estate of Abbeydale should be vested in me only until I can find new trustees.³

Immediately in his search for new trustees, he consulted George Baker, reporting to him that Quarry Talbot had agreed to act, "but", he added, "I should thankfully accept any person whom you suggested". He was to learn, however, that he was unable to make any such appointment until the first official meeting of the Guild in February 1879.

¹ *Fors* VII, LXXVI, p. 113.

² *Ibid.*, LXXVII, p. 141.

³ *Ibid.*, LXXVII, p. 169.

Legal problems dragged on and it was not until June 1877 that Ruskin was able to make this satisfactory report to his *Fors* readers :

At last our legal position is, I think, also secure. Our solicitors have been instructed by Mr. Barber to apply to the Board of Trade for a licence under sec. 23 of the " Companies Act, 1867 ". The conditions of licence stated in that section appear to have been drawn up precisely for the convenience of the St. George's Company, and the terms of it are clearer than any I have yet been able to draw up myself.

. . . There will not, in the opinion of our lawyers, be any difficulty in obtaining the sanction of the Board of Trade under this Act ; but I remain myself prepared for the occurrence of new points of formal difficulty ; and must still and always pray the Companions to remember that the real strength of the Society is in its resolved and vital unity ; not in the limits of its external form.¹

Even so, this happy announcement did not ease the load of Guild work and responsibilities which Ruskin since the resignation of his trustees had carried. In July, he commented, on a necessary change that had to be made in the title of the society :

The first of the formal points of difficulty which, last month, I said I should be prepared to meet, turns out to be one of nomenclature. Since we take no dividend, we cannot be registered as a " Company ", but only a " Society "—" Institute "—" Chamber ", or the like.

I accept this legal difficulty as one appointed by Fors herself ; and submit to the measures necessitated by it even with satisfaction ; having for some time felt that the title of " Company " was becoming every day more and more disgraceful, and could not much longer be attached to any association of honourable Englishmen.²

The society was duly registered as the Guild of St. George. In August, he made further comment on his difficulties :

I regret that the Abbey Dale property still stands in my name ; but our solicitors have not yet replied to my letter requesting them to appoint new Trustees ; and I hope that the registration of the Guild may soon enable me to transfer the property at once to the society as a body.³

In September he wrote cheerfully in the notes and correspondence section of Letter LXXXII under the sub-title *Affairs of the Master* :

Too many for him : and it is quite certain he can't continue to ride so many horses at once, or keep so many balls in the air. All that he thinks it needful, in this *Fors*, to say, is that, whatever he may cease hope of doing, he will not fail from St. George's work, as long as he has strength for any work at all.⁴

¹ *Fors* VII, LXXIX, p. 205.

³ *Ibid.*, LXXXI, p. 269.

² *Ibid.*, LXXX, p. 229.

⁴ *Ibid.*, LXXXII, p. 328.

Even as late as 1878, the matter was still unsettled and his administration of Guild affairs was correspondingly wearisome and trying; he wrote in 1880 in the first *Fors* letter in the Second Series under the Company's Affairs :

I never was less able to give any account of these, for the last month has been entirely occupied with work in Oxford; the Bank accounts cannot be in my hands till the year's end; the business at Abbeydale can in no wise be put on clear footing till our Guild is registered; and I have just been warned of some further modifications needful in our memorandum for registry.¹

and he added :

But I was completely convinced last year that, fit or unfit, I must take all these things in hand myself; and I do not think the leading article of our Correspondence will remain after the present month so wholly unsatisfactory.²

Not until February 1878 was he able to report ultimate success in the long, exhausting struggle to secure legal recognition for his company :

I am happy to be able at last to state that the memorandum of our constitution, drawn up for us by Mr. Barber, and already published in the 55th number of the first series of *Fors*, has been approved by the Board of Trade, with some few, but imperative, modifications, to which I both respectfully and gladly submit, seeing them to be calculated in every way to increase both our own usefulness, and public confidence in us.

The organization of the Guild, thus modified, will be, by the time this letter is published, announced, as required by the Board, in the public journals; and, if not objected to on the ground of some unforeseen injuriousness to existing interests, ratified, I believe, during the current month, or at all events within a few weeks. I have prepared a brief abstract of our constitution and aims, to be issued with this letter, and sent generally in answer to inquiry.³

Nevertheless he was still not free to transfer property and appropriate monies to the Guild and he wrote :

Until the registration of the Guild, I am still obliged to hold the Abbey Dale estate in my own name; and as we cannot appoint our new trustees till we are sure of our official existence, I am obliged to order the payment of subscriptions to my own account at the Union Bank, to meet the calls of current expenses, for which I have no authority to draw on the account of the Guild but by cheque from its trustees.⁴

The difficulties proved greater than his strength and the *Fors* letter following the announcement of his success carried a pathetic publishers' note reporting his serious illness "from

¹ *Fors* VIII, I, p. 17.

³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 57.

² *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 58.

prostration caused by overwork " and his inability until further notice to issue *Fors*.

It is true to say that Ruskin spent himself trying to overcome legal difficulties. He himself accounted for his breakdown—in the first *Fors* letter to be published after his illness :

The doctors said that I went mad, this time two years ago, from overwork. I had not been then working more than usual, and what was usual with me had become easy. But I went mad because nothing came of my work. People would have understood my falling crazy if they had heard that the manuscripts on which I had spent seven years of my old life had all been used to light the fire with, like Carlyle's first volume of the French Revolution. But they could not understand that I should be the least annoyed, far less fall ill in a frantic manner, because, after I had got them published, nobody believed a word of them. Yet the first calamity would only have been a misfortune,—the second (the enduring calamity under which I toil) is humiliation,—resisted necessarily by a dangerous and lonely pride.¹

And he laid the blame for his sorrow and illness on the great solitude he experienced :

All alike, in whom I had most trusted for help, failed me in this main work : some mocked at it, some pitied, some rebuked,—all stopped their ears at the cry : and the solitude at last became too great to be endured.²

In the Spring of 1878, on Easter Monday, he sent a note to Mrs. Talbot which showed his attitude of mind towards his Guild of St. George at this time of great physical weakness :

I believe for the last few days I have been gaining ground and may at least begin to rectify the confusion of business which had just reached its uttermost when I was struck down—so very nearly *under* the ground—and beyond all farther gain a loss of it—or of anything thereon. But the only hope I have of being able to do so, is in the consent of my friends to regard me for the future—so far from a "master"—as in the most literal sense—their "most obedient Servant" can be and telling me what I can *quickly* do to extricate them from inconvenience in the present state of the St. G. affairs.³

He recoiled from the whirling Guild questions that encompassed him and wrote again on 8 May 1878 to declare firmly :

But above all, I must not be talked to or questioned about St. George, till my own time. I hope to do good work for him yet, but till I *call* them my St. George people must at present get on exactly as if I were dead.⁴

He was too weary to see the road that in 1871 seemed to lie so clearly ahead. He experienced in convalescence an excessive

¹ *Fors* VIII, IV, p. 109.

² *Ibid.* p. 110.

³ Rylands Eng. MS. 1161/66. Easter Monday, 1878.

⁴ *Ibid.* 1161/67. 8.5.78.

weariness of Guild affairs with its unresolved land questions and halting companions, many of whom sought to please him but had no real understanding of the ideas he set before them. He came to rely more and more on George Baker to whom he frequently, in private correspondence, expressed his desire to be free from wearying Guild worries and responsibilities.

The first meeting of the Guild of St. George took place on 21 February 1879; unfortunately Ruskin was unable to be present, but extracts from his letter to George Baker, who deputized for him, were read to the twenty assembled companions who met at Queen's Hotel, Birmingham. Howard Swan, the Curator of Sheffield Museum, read the Master's report which touched on educational rather than agricultural aspects of the Guild's work, and indicated Ruskin's intention to devise such of his time as was available to "method of school instruction and especially the arrangement of the Museum of the Guild". He made interesting comment on the Guild's legal position and, for reasons of health, delegated his authority on legal and land affairs to the Trustees. These were his words :

It is at present a peculiarity of British law that while, for any selfish purpose, a company may acquire without difficulty, or dispute, any lands they desire, the acquisition of land for any benevolent purpose is discouraged and encumbered with legal forms which render the operation of the Guild at present extremely complex. The state of the present Master's health entirely precludes him from undertaking duties which require vexatious and minutely divided attention; and he therefore begs that all legal powers for acquisition and management of lands may be vested in the Trustees only.¹

He added the following pointed reminder :

The Master to his great regret, must also beg the members of the Guild to remember that his knowledge does not qualify him, nor do the nature of his general occupations permit him, to undertake the personal direction of any farming operations, or management of any of the retainers of the Guild, in residence on their lands. Nor was it ever proposed by him, in the constitution of the Guild, that such duties should be entrusted to its Head. The Master's office consists only in the maintenance of the principles of the Guild inviolate, on occasions when any question of their extent or force may present themselves, and in directing or authorising the employment of its resources in any particular manner, but not in the superintendence of the carrying out of such orders. For instance, the Master may authorise expenditure in draining a fen, or in enclosing a piece of sea sand; but is not to be expected to survey the fall of the channels, or

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 18.

design the foundations of the embankment. The existing Master, however, supposing himself qualified to direct usefully the method of school instruction, and especially the arrangement of the museums of the Guild, has set himself, with what time he can spare, to carry out these objects ; and he trusts that the expense, which with this view he has permitted in the establishment of the Museum at Sheffield, may not be considered unjustifiable.¹

At the Extraordinary General Meeting, which immediately followed the reading of this report, the following resolution was passed :

That it shall be lawful for the Guild, in General Meeting to appoint any fit and proper person or persons to be Trustee or Trustees or Treasurer of the Guild, for such purposes and with such powers as the Guild, in General Meeting, shall from time to time appoint and to revoke any such appointment and re-appointment in like manner.²

It is a curious fact that in the Memorandum originally published and approved, the office of Trustee was omitted. It may well be that Ruskin was advised by his solicitors, Tarrant and Mackrell, not to include such office in his Society, but he obviously regretted the decision. This, and another resolution concerning salaries of auditors and others, were confirmed at a later meeting held on 18 March and once more Ruskin, who at the time was at work on a new Edition of *The Stones of Venice*, asked Baker to delegate for him, and sent the following note to him the day before the meeting took place :

Meantime all you have to say to the Guild people is that it's not me that's bothering them, but English law and lawyers, and whatever we do of real work will not depend on anything that these can hinder, but on our severally understanding each in his own place, what he can best labour at under his own hand and for his own neighbour. And that they need no more look to the mortal master for help, than the leaves of a great tree look to the first pith of it (though I dare say the old pith is good for more than I am).³

Ruskin was made constantly weary by the stupidity of some of his Companions ; it is obvious that he found physically exhausting the ever-questioning companions who sought his advice. In his General Statement of 1882 he gave public reminder of this :

I went to look at all the cottages myself : and in general the Master of the Guild would hold annual visits to the estates, within his reach, part of his necessary duty. I am now, however, entirely past work of this kind—nor was it one for

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 18.

² Ruskin Collection (Guild of St. George).

³ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 303.

which I was fitted ; still less, must it be said in passing, should the Companions suppose that I am myself able, or that the Master under any circumstances would be able, to become the confidant of their private feelings or distresses, as if he were the Abbot of a monastery. The drainage of land he may sometimes superintend, but not that of spirits.¹

He spoke more openly to George Baker in a letter written on 17 March 1879 :

Poor Mr. . . . 's [name cut out] letter makes me sad. We have too many of our people of this sort who only want to talk or be talked to—The Fors correspondence was far the most laborious part of the number—and not of the slightest use, really. Nor is there the least need for more than I've said—when once the British public begin to see that it is true. What we want now is the help of men of common sense—standing and perseverance—who will think only of what is to be done—not said.²

It must have been a great relief to Ruskin when at last Baker and F. H. Chamberlain were elected Trustees. By a special resolution they were empowered to pay out funds, and also to raise out of the capital trust funds any amounts of money stated by the Master. No longer did they hold the position of financial advisers, they were virtually his assistants. At the end of 1879 Ruskin wrote as follows to Baker :

I have your kind letter with cheque, and return receipts account with best thanks,—and as you may well suppose—true reflection to you of your kind wishes for the year to come.

I heartily trust that you will not regret having helped me at this time and set all things in practical order—the new Fors will not cost me much trouble—its chief purpose being to make known this pleasant condition of things. Nor will the duty of the Trusteeship be onerous to you and Mr. Chamberlain. You say I have given no general directions—but there are no general responsibilities. The Trustees are simply the legal holders of [passage cut.] the St. George's fund and] certify the correctness of the Master's statements as to its amount and expenditure. You ought not to have any trouble with the accounts, which are properly the Master's business : but, in the present state of my health, I trespass on you so far as to ask you to get the accountant's statement into short form for me there is really nothing else now to be done. You have to receive estates—when I buy them—and to sell stock or buy it as occasion may be—nothing more.

Your own kind superintendance of the ground you gave me of course is an exceptional favour. I should be very glad that Graham had an assistant. He wrote to me about it some time since, but I have been in an extraordinary state of weariness since I left London, and could not write about it, day after day passing, in intentions [valediction and signature cut off.]³

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 49.

² Ruskin Collection (Guild of St. George). 17.3.79.

³ Ruskin Collection (Guild of St. George). n.d.

Another attack of brain fever lasting three months made him, on recovery, more anxious than ever to withdraw from Guild activities as this letter to George Baker shows :

Brantwood,
Sunday 20th March, 1881.

So I am told. But I have been dreaming much and have lost all count of time.

Dear Mr Baker,

I have had another sharp attack of brain fever—nothing like so severe as the first one but giving me final warning to resign the position of Mastership of St. George's Company.

Put yourself and Mr Chamberlain at once in communication with Messrs Tarrant and Mackrell through whom you may receive directions from the original members of the Company—mostly girls. I myself must confine my work to Proserpina and general art work. Mr Allen must give up the publishing business and take to his engraving. Answer this *to myself* care of Mrs Severn—take copies of all my letters henceforward—you must wind up the affairs of the Company at once—so that I may come out of it with clean hands and a pure heart—though I may have to beg like Auld Edie Ochiltree. I have *three* thousand not *twelve* now in stocks and the Society of the Rose must henceforward deal with Fors Clavigera to which I shall add no word more.

Ever your faithful and affectionate servant,
J. Ruskin¹

A second letter (18 April 1881) gave further details about his wishes on this matter :

But, my first letter after my illness was quite serious—I *must* quit myself of these responsibilities. When Mr Mackrell called—instead of relieving me, he was fain to go into questions about “ what would become of the twenty acres at Bewdley ” etc, which I could no more settle than the affairs of Afganhistan!—on deliberate review of my ten years' results, I feel that nothing more can be done by me against the rage of modern trade ; and I want to “ shake the dust off my feet at it ”—and to sell all the Sheffield land at Topley—and to give you back the land at Bewdley—and Mrs Talbot hers at Barmouth and use what we have in the bank and what regular subscriptions come in for the one thing I *can* do now—the Museum arrangement at Walkley.²

At the end of the year he made reference in his report of 1881 to his severe illness and to his wish to retire :

The attacks of severe illness which I have lately sustained render me sincerely desirous of retiring from the office, but until the permission to do so is granted me, I maintain the structure of the Company as I have established it.³

¹ Ruskin Collection (Guild of St. George). 20.3.81.

² *Ibid.* 18.4.81.

³ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 32.

Again the burden of the Report turned on his Museum work and his proposed heavy expenditure but he wrote confidently of the future :

. . . I believe the general public will not be slack in aiding us, for an object of so much real and unquestionable public service as the liberal education of the artisan.¹

He was convinced that this educational object would receive public support and he concluded his report with these words :

Whatever has been thought by my casual readers of the tenor of my teaching in political or economical questions, I do not think the principles of education which I have recommended from first to last have ever been otherwise than approved as rational, simple, and easily applicable, while the knowledge which I have obtained in the arts and elementary sciences, during the secluded labour of a mercifully prolonged lifetime, can only now be made serviceable to my country on the condition of its supplying me with funds for the support of educational institutions whose design, as surely enough proved by that with which I have begun at Sheffield, will be on no extravagant scale either in building, furniture, or officering ; and will enlarge only in the gradual demonstration of their usefulness to the most active and intelligent classes of our labouring population.²

In 1882, Ruskin launched what was virtually a public appeal for his Guild with his publication of a pamphlet entitled "General Statement explaining the Nature and Purpose of St. George's Guild". In it he restated his aims and expressed the belief that if he had cast all other work aside and devoted his whole time and energy to Guild work the Society would have prospered. To win new members he intimated his decision to abandon the requirements of a tithe from Companions and proposed instead :

to accept any person as Companion, who, complying with our modes of action and consenting in our principles, will contribute one per cent of their income, up to ten pounds on incomes reaching a thousand a year, on the understanding that, above that sum, no more shall be asked.³

He stated his willingness to accept contributions from strangers who were invited to support any branch of activity which most interested them. The four principle activities named were : agricultural labour, historical investigation and illustration, completion of mineralogical collection of St. George's Museum, and purchase of manuscripts and other objects of general

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 39.

² *Ibid.* p. 41.

³ *Ibid.* p. 47.

interest for St. George's Museum. In connection with this last activity, he reminded his readers of his lifelong interest in Museums and he gave detailed information about his proposed development at Sheffield. This General Statement ended with a strong appeal for funds for the purchase of manuscripts shortly to be sold in the Hamilton Palace Library sale on which he made this comment :

I think the English public ought to have confidence enough in my knowledge of Art and History to trust me with a considerable sum for this purpose.¹

Clearly, it was Ruskin's museum enterprise which gave him his new confidence. He reminded his readers where their duty lay and wrote :

the founding of museums adapted for the general instruction and pleasure of the multitude, and especially the labouring multitude, seems to be in these days a farther necessity, to meet which the people themselves may be frankly called upon, and to supply which their own power is perfectly adequate, without waiting the accident or caprice of private philanthropy.²

To make his argument the stronger he presented the case that an educational establishment for the young was of greater importance than a church to a clergyman. He wrote :

I continually see subscriptions of ten, fifteen or twenty thousand pounds, for new churches. Now a good clergyman never wants a church. He can say all that his congregation essentially need to hear in any of his parishioners' best parlours, or upper chambers, or in the ball-room at the Nag's Head ; or if these are not large enough, in the market-place, or the harvest field.³

But the appeal won response only from Mrs. Talbot and so the rare manuscripts offered at Hamilton Palace Library went to other buyers and not to the Guild of St. George.

The following year Ruskin resumed publication of his *Fors* letters which reflected a more tranquil state of mind than heretofore. The following letter to his Trustee, George Baker, written on the death of co-trustee Chamberlain gives a picture of Ruskin's life at this time :

Brantwood,
7th December 83

Dear Mr Baker,

I am so very glad you have been at Sheffield and so kindly arranged everything for me there—and I have written to Messrs Tarrant and Mackrell, to be all ready for Monday.

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx, 58.

² *Ibid.* p. 53.

³ *Ibid.* p. 52.

In all business matters please remember that on receiving a letter *unexpectedly* about anything, however important, I may be simply unable to even read it for a day or two—much more to think of it. All my work is done and can only be done, one thing, or one group of [? intended] things at a time. If I get a business letter while I am watching a cloud from four in the afternoon to four in the morning, what can I do? (See my last Oxford lecture when it comes out.)

In general, I open all letters, glance at them, and if a house is on fire may answer—but for the most part only get a vague notion of their contents. But when once I have written explicit directions about anything—I trust to their being followed out, and am thrown out of all gear, if they are not. In this case I had sent warning from Lucca in 1882 and advised you of probable expenses to be kept provided for out of the Bennett bequest; and when your letters came about it—I recollect glancing at total sum and saying to myself—that's in, all right—but never looked to see *what* stock was bought or what cash over.

I sold 500 myself to be able to fulfil promises, on Wednesday, and I hope the cash is in bank this morning, but I don't want to break into it the first minute and should be very grateful if you would send, tomorrow, £50 to Miss Caroline Leech, Belvedere Belmont, Dyke Road, Brighton, putting it down in Trustees account 'to drawings by John Leech bought for Sheffield Museum' you won't mind advancing so much?

And note, when you sell out, that besides the sums stated in my last account there will be £150 to Bryce Wright for the largest topaz in matrix and largest Ural emerald, sent to Sheffield last month.

Ever affectionately and faithfully yours

J. Ruskin

Alas, Mr Smart won't serve. I will try Mr Thompson of Huddersfield.¹

He succeeded in securing the services of George Thompson of Huddersfield as co-trustee with George Baker.

The only Guild meeting, which Ruskin ever attended, took place in December 1884, and his presence at this meeting may possibly be accounted for by the fact that one resolution presented and passed concerned the setting up of a Museum at Bewdley. It read: that Mr. Ruskin be authorized to proceed with work for erection of Museum at Bewdley, under the Master's superintendence, plans and estimates to be prepared before the end of the year.²

In his report Ruskin touched on the difficulties that existed between the Sheffield Corporation and himself in the matter of ownership of the Walkley collections. He referred in this report to "insignificant" Guild possessions and added that he could have made greater progress if he had wished to undertake land management on an extensive scale:

¹ Ruskin Collection (Guild of St. George). 7.12.83.

² Ruskin Collection (Guild of St. George).

but as I know very little about land myself, and as the few landowners of my acquaintance were unlikely to render me assistance in exemplifying our principles of land tenure during the present state of political feeling,—(nor do I blame them),—I delayed for the present, and, may probably have to bequeath to the succeeding Master, the prosecution of the objects of the Guild in that direction, though ultimately to be the principal one ; and as I have hitherto used, so in the time during which I may yet be able to conduct the business of the Guild, I shall in all likelihood use the entire means at my disposal for the accumulation of the objects of study which, more than most men, I am qualified to select and arrange.¹

He explained that Guild expenditure had for the past three years been devoted mainly to the Sheffield Museum and he made this comment on his accounts :

I have not the slightest compunction in presenting these accounts to the Guild, feeling entirely confident of the educational value of every article of the things purchased, so that I may invite persons otherwise uninterested in us, or our plans, to subscribe separately and distinctly to our expenses in these directions.²

Ruskin's last report, written with the object of securing wide support for Guild activities, sounded a valedictory note. In it he expressed his regret that in the long fifteen year struggle only two wealthy friends, Mrs. Talbot and George Baker, had come forward to help him. He tried to show that the action taken by his friends to pay his law costs after the Whistler court case, and to make him a gift of Turner's Splügen was misguided and he added :

I am very grateful to them, but would very willingly have gone without the Splügen, and paid my own law costs, if only they would have helped me in the great public work which I have given certainly the most intense labour of my life to promote.³

There was a justifiable bitterness in his words :

I offered to arrange a museum,—and if the means were given me, a series of museums,—for the English people, in which, whether by cast, photograph, or skilled drawing, they should be shown examples of all the most beautiful art of the Christian world. I did enough to show what I meant, and to make its usefulness manifest. I may boldly say that every visitor, of whatever class, to the little Walkley Museum, taking any real interest in art, has acknowledged the interest and value even of the things collected in its single room. And yet year after year passes and not a single reader or friend has thought it the least incumbent on them to help me to do more ; and from the whole continent of America, which pirates all my books, and disgraces me by base copies of the plates of them, I have never had a sixpence sent to help me in anything I wanted to do.⁴

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 71.

² *Ibid.* p. 83.

³ *Ibid.* p. 95.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 96.

And so he took his stand and gave this advice :

to the numbers of people who write to express their gratitude to me, I have only this one general word,—send your gratitude in the form of pence, or do not trouble me with it ; and to my personal friends, that it seems to me high time their affection should take that form also, as it is the only one by which they can also prove their respect.¹

Following the intimation of his projected scheme to build a new Museum at Bewdley he reminded the British Public that the continuance of his work was dependent on public subscription. Unfortunately there was no response to his appeal and so Ruskin was forced to dispense with the services of some artists whom he had employed to work for him. A note to Mrs. Talbot written in March 1886, made reference to the Guild's financial difficulties:

Of course Quarry *would* be working for me if I had the money now to carry on the St. G. work. But I've had to turn off Alessandri and Randal, instead of taking any helpers on.²

And later in June he wrote again :

I can't play chess today for it has been a great sorrow to me to think that you, who have benefited the St. George's Guild of all my friends the most frankly and grandly should as if by the fierce enemy of all righteousness be shortened in your own income and anxious to know what Quarry could do in painting. He has great and fine power—but he wants certain perceptions, yet and artistic training—He could only do work like Randal's—as yet—and I've been obliged this year, because the public—(nay,—because nobody but you,—almost !) sends me a penny. I've been obliged I say, to turn off both Randal and Alessandri,—keeping, and *that* with difficulty, my best man only, Rooke.

—How can I take Quarry on, whom I should have to direct also in this my busiest time—while the others have been trained for years and years !?

Most thankfully I'll take him on—if I get the means,—but I *can't*—till I do.

Supposing—for at any moment of course I *may* get the means,—supposing I could—(I haven't yet opened my this morning's letters—this that I tell you has been on my mind long—) Supposing I could. I should ask him to go immediately to Auxerre where by two hours train—he is within reach of *everything* I want—and to tell me what is at Auxerre. Rooke is at Laon—Quarry could see what *he* is about as he passes. And, I think, that is the best thing to plan for them both, wife as well I mean. I hope some things are left at Auxerre—of which, if Quarry can go there, I will send him word. I give Rooke £50 a month. Randal had £40. If I take Quarry on I could only give him as much.³

Unfortunately all plans were brought to a final pause for he was again attacked by brain fever. Over a year elapsed before he

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 97.

² Rylands Eng. MS. 1161/291. 17.3.86.

³ Rylands Eng. MS. 1161/360. 27.6.86.

was able to resume correspondence, and then not for long, and never again on Guild matters.

Ruskin succeeded as founder of the Guild of St. George, but the question now to be considered is how far did he succeed as Master?

His first opportunity to show his powers as Master of the Guild, as distinct from founder, came with George Baker's gift of land in Bewdley. This gift, it will be remembered, was made in two instalments, a first in 1871 and a second in 1875, but Ruskin made no move either to inspect the land, or to set it in order. When in 1875, he received the second gift from Baker, he wrote in *Fors*, Letter LVIII :

While, therefore, I am perfectly content, for a beginning, with our acre of rocky land given us by Mrs. Talbot, and am so little impatient for any increase that I have been quietly drawing ragged-robin leaves in Malham cove, instead of going to see another twenty acres promised in Worcestershire,—I am yet thinking out my system on a scale which shall be fit for wide European work.¹

Not until July 1877, did he visit Birmingham—and it is likely that the real purpose of his visit there was not so much to view St. George's Bewdley land, but to settle matters about the appointment of trustees with Baker himself. He wrote of this visit to Birmingham :

I have been staying for two days with the good Mayor of Birmingham : and he has shown me St. George's land, his gift, in the midst of a sweet space of English hill and dale and orchard, yet unhurt by hand of man : and he has brought a representative group of the best men of Birmingham to talk to me, and they have been very kind to me, and have taught me much : and I feel just as I fancy a poor Frenchman of some gentleness and sagacity might have felt, in Nelson's time,—taken prisoner by his mortal enemies, and beginning to apprehend that there was indeed some humanity in Englishmen, and some providential and inscrutable reason for their existence.

You may think it strange that a two days' visit should produce such an effect on me ; and say, (which indeed will be partly true,) that I ought to have made this visit before now. But, all things considered, I believe it has been with exactness, timely ; and you will please remember that just in proportion to the quantity of work and thought we have spent on any subject, is the quantity we can farther learn about it in a little while, and the power with which new facts, or new light cast on those already known, will modify past conclusions. And when the facts are wholly trustworthy, and the lights thrown precisely where one asks for them, a day's talk may sometimes do as much as a year's work.²

¹ *Fors* V, LVIII, p. 279.

² *Fors* VII, LXXX, p. 215.

In Letter LXV, published in May 1876, a year before his visit to Bewdley, he reported the first activity there. Under the sub-title *Affairs of the Company* in the Notes and Correspondence section he wrote :

I have given leave to two of our Companions to begin work on the twenty acres of ground in Worcestershire, given us by Mr. George Baker, our second donor of land ; (it was all my fault that he wasn't the first). The ground is in copsewood ; but good for fruit trees ; and shall be cleared and brought into bearing as soon as the two Companions can manage it. We shall now see what we are good for, working as backwoods men, but in our own England.¹

The next letter, Letter LXVI, dated May 1876 and published in June of that year gave this information in the Notes and Correspondence section :

I am really ashamed to give any farther account, just now, of the delays in our land work, or of little crosses and worries blocking my first attempt at practice. One of the men whom I thought I had ready for this Worcestershire land, being ordered, for trial, to do a little bit of rough work in Yorkshire that I might not torment Mr. Baker with his freshmanship, threw up the task at once, writing me a long letter of which one sentence was enough for me,—that “ he would do *his share*, but no more ”. These infernal notions of Equality and Independence are so rooted, now, even in the best men's minds, that they don't so much as know even what Obedience or Fellowship mean ! Fancy one of Nelson's or Lord Cochrane's men retreating from his gun, with the avowed resolution to ‘ do no more than his share ’ ! However, I know there's good in this man, and I doubt not he will repent, and break down no more ; but I shall not try him again for a year.²

It is obvious that Ruskin, despite his anger, regarded Burdon's withdrawal as only a temporary lapse, and it is, of course, as obvious that Ruskin showed little understanding of human nature in his treatment of this Companion who, after all, had given up his regular employment to devote himself to Guild activities. In this incident Ruskin showed that weakness which marred his every human relationship : his inability fully to appreciate the wounding power of words. Nevertheless, Guild accounts for June and August of this same year in which Burdon withdrew from the Bewdley undertaking, show that Ruskin made two payments of five pounds to Burdon and that he also paid to him on 9th November, 1877, a cheque for £20. And so, while Ruskin in the first instance made a serious error in his treatment of an enthusiastic Companion, he at least showed some degree of

¹ *Fors* VI, LXV, p. 163.

² *Ibid.*, LXVI, p. 182.

responsibility for him by the various payments which he made in an attempt to make amends.

The actual clearing of the land was left entirely to George Baker to make such plans as he wished. Guild accounts for the year 1877 show that Baker received a cheque for £100 for this purpose and his own statement about expenditure incurred reads :

I enclose you Crump's bills and statement, showing amount in hand. The cost of getting out the roots is £67 . 3 . 5., or an average of £13 . 8 . 8. per acre. The rest of the sum expended is £19 . 6 . 3., paid for cleaving and stacking the roots ready for charcoal or fuel. Of this we have 103 cords, worth, at 7s. a cord, £36 . 1 ; and a few poles—say, £3 . 19. Total value in hand £40.

Your loving and faithful friend
Geo. Baker.¹

The work of clearing the land continued at the Guild's expense. Wages and other expenses for 1881 appear in accounts as £106 7s. 1d. ; £169 for 1882 ; £172 for 1883 ; £122 for 1884. Sale of produce from the estate reached only £31 15s. in 1884. having dropped from £52 3s. in 1883. Ruskin was frankly not interested in this work of clearing the land ; it is obvious from his Guild Reports that he appreciated the beauty of Bewdley more than any thought of reclaiming the land. In 1879, he made this comment :

The second of the estates of the Guild, at Bewdley, is in a beautiful part of England, in which the Master, for his own part, would be well content that it should remain, for the present, in pasture or orchard, a part of the healthy and lovely landscape of which so little remains now undestroyed in the English midlands. But he is well content to leave it at the option of Mr. George Baker, to whose kindness the Guild owes the possession of this ground, to undertake any operations upon it which in his judgment seem desirable for the furtherance of the objects of the Guild.²

In his *General Statement* of 1882, in which the Guild's original intention was stated to be the reclaiming of " food-producing land " by " well-applied labour " he made comment on Bewdley, and again referred to its beauty and to his own satisfaction with its native state :

I also much regret having only once been able to visit a piece of ground given us, twenty acres in extent, by our kind Trustee, Mr. George Baker, in one of the loveliest districts of Worcestershire, so precious, in its fresh air and wild woodland,

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 116.

² *Ibid.* p. 20.

to the neighbouring populations of large manufacturing towns, that I am content at present in our possession of it, and do not choose to break the quiet of its neighbourhood by any labourer's cottage building, without which, however, I do not at present see my way to any effective use of the ground.¹

Ruskin valued Bewdley for its beauty, and it was only when negotiations for his Sheffield Museum development plan broke down that he contemplated the idea of disturbing that beauty and building another museum there. On this matter he made the following comment :

But we need immediately, beyond all other needs, a storehouse for our property on our own ground : and I have, therefore, on the final rupture of negotiations at Sheffield, requested Mr. Robson to adapt the design he had prepared for the museum in that town, to this immediate purpose on our ground at Bewdley, where the air is free from smoke and the soil dry.²

He gave details about the proposed building and continued with characteristic optimism :

As the site of the building is at a considerable distance even from the town of Bewdley, it is necessary to contemplate also the erection of a sort of cloistral *Inn* of the humblest kind, such as may serve the student, providing him with pleasant lodging and good food on the honestest terms. Let us get the Museum built first—the inn can be ready as soon as it is needed.³

Museum and Inn together may sound like castles in Spain, but is the idea so very far removed from principles guiding the establishment of residential colleges for further education? The distinction between Ruskin's vision of a cloistral inn and the average residential college for further education might be said to rest on degrees of comfort. Ruskin's inn was to be of the humblest kind, presumably free from the deep armchairs, thick carpets, curtains and other familiar furnishings of today's college. Further details about the Bewdley Museum were given in December 1884 at the only Guild meeting Ruskin ever attended, when he renewed his appeal for financial support for this purpose. Unfortunately the appeal failed, the Museum consequently was never built, and George Baker continued during the few years of illness with intervals of health that remained to Ruskin, to supervise this plot of ground. It will be noted that it was only when the idea of building a Museum at Bewdley was advanced that Ruskin showed interest in the land.

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 50.

² *Ibid.* p. 75.

³ *Ibid.* p. 76.

Before that his attitude towards Bewdley might almost be likened to that of an official of the National Trust—he regarded it for its beauty and for its greenness in an industrial area and he felt that it should rightly be left in peace. Certainly he viewed with a certain amount of consternation the idea of putting up a labourer's cottage in such idyllic surroundings, but then, of course, as has been stated many times, he was not prepared to act as adviser on land policy. George Baker never attempted to wrest advice from him about the land, he appears always to have attempted to relieve Ruskin of any Guild burden that he felt he could carry for him.

The same statement cannot be made of Mrs. Talbot, donor of the Barmouth property and land. She was obviously delighted to have opportunity of approaching Ruskin and she saw to it that none was lost. Although he constantly reminded her that she was in fact responsible for the administration of the property, she never accepted this view. Ruskin received gift of the Barmouth land in 1874 and after visiting it in 1876, he wrote somewhat sentimentally :

I have just been down to Barmouth to see the tenants on the first bit of ground,—noble crystalline rock, I am thankful to say,—possessed by St. George in the island.¹

Nevertheless he was alive to the needs of the property which was obviously in a bad state of repair and he wrote in Letter LXIX :

I find the rain coming through roofs, and the wind through walls, more than I think proper, and have ordered repairs ; and for some time to come, the little rents of these cottages will be spent entirely in the bettering of them, or in extending some garden ground, fenced with furze hedge against the west wind by the most ingenious of our tenants.²

On this visit Ruskin was delighted to meet Auguste Guyard, the exiled French social reformer and philanthropist to whom the Talbots had given shelter on their Barmouth property. Guyard loved the Barmouth land, cared for it, knew its natural outcrop and cultivated rare herbs and trees there. His work for Barmouth came near to approaching Ruskin's early plans for the care and cultivation of St. George's land. The two men had natural sympathy for each other. Blanche Atkinson, a Companion of the Guild and also, as the Rylands Ruskin manuscripts show, an

¹ *Fors* VI, LXIX, p. 275.

² *Ibid.*

enthusiastic correspondent, records in her account of *Ruskin's Social Experiment at Barmouth* that he made the following statement to Guyard :

These things which I am but now discovering and trying to teach, *you* knew and taught when I was a child.¹

Of Guyard's death in 1882 Ruskin wrote in a letter to Mrs. Talbot dated 12 September :

I found your sad letter waiting with others of importance at Bourneville which I had given as a safe address—but far ahead of my progress on the journey.

I lose in M. Guyard a friend of more value to me than any words could say, his spiritual character—total probity—refined affectionateness and broken fate in life were all of the profoundest interest to me ; his sympathy was among the most precious pleasures yet left to me in my own work.²

Ruskin, harried by ill health and overwork, never came to love the Barmouth land as Guyard loved it—and yet his hopes were high in August 1877, as this postcard to Mrs. Talbot shows :

I wish every rock in England were as well looked after as *our* Rock will be.³

In his Report of 1879 he made the following comment on the estate :

The Barmouth estate consists chiefly of rocky ground, in the shelter of which are erected a few ill-built cottages. The rents of these are for the most part at present spent in bettering the sanitary condition of the place and its tenements ; but the Master has no intention of allowing so many ultimately to remain on the ground, and as the leases fall in, the poorer cottages will be removed, and the ground brought into such other use as may be possible. One of the tenants has already changed the crannies of his rocky garden into little beds of vegetables, protected by stout furze hedges ; and under the kind supervision of the former owner of the land, Mrs. Talbot, the Master is sure that the best is being everywhere now done of which the place is capable.⁴

In his General Statement of 1882, Ruskin again described Barmouth as “ a piece of rocky land ” and reported on the Guild's activities there :

This piece of crag, falling steep from the moors to the shore, had some small tenements in the nooks of it, of which the rents have been taken without alteration, and applied to sanitary improvements, such as were feasible, without disturbance of the inmates. I went to look at all the cottages myself : and in general the Master of the Guild would hold annual visits to the estates, within his reach,

¹ Rylands Eng. MS. 1164/40, p. 40.

³ Ibid. 1161/52. 17.8.77

² Ibid. 1161/88. 12.9.82.

⁴ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 21.

part of his necessary duty. I am now, however, entirely past work of this kind—nor was it one for which I was fitted.¹

He never failed to give emphasis to the fact that he accepted no responsibility so far as the land policy of the Guild was concerned. His Report for 1884 showed that he regarded the property and land owned by the Guild as “ insignificant possessions ”, and it is possible that it was in the matter of rent only that he exerted influence in this sphere of work. Barmouth rents were low, ranging from 30s. to £5 a year and Ruskin laid great emphasis on the need for tenants to be trained to pay their rents punctually. Blanche Atkinson’s pamphlet on the Barmouth experiment makes clear the fact that Ruskin exercised only remote control there, and that responsibility lay with Mrs. Talbot who endeavoured to give practical application to his theories—generally after correspondence and consultation with him, at times to his intense annoyance. It is obvious from Blanche Atkinson’s account that the punctual payment of rent was a matter of paramount importance. She cited the case of a tenant who was dismissed by reason of her unpunctuality in rent payment, but she also made reference to a case where a financially embarrassed, widowed tenant was allowed a rent free year. It is evident that Ruskin was consulted on the matter for she wrote :

Mr. Ruskin took the case into his serious consideration and, after consulting with Mrs. Talbot, decided that the widow should be allowed to stay in her cottage rent free for one year.²

Letters written by Ruskin to Mrs. Talbot show the way in which the Barmouth property was administered : Mrs. Talbot arranged for repairs (obviously deciding which were necessary) and then she received a cheque from Ruskin to meet the cost. For instance, in February 1877, he forwarded a cheque to her for £80 12s. and wrote :

You would have had this cheque long ago, disorderly as I am—if you were not the dear sort of person of whom one says—“ Oh—Mrs. Talbot will put up with anything.”

Howbeit—I am much excited & much wearied with my work here—and to take out my business book is a mighty effort to me.

Howbeit, I did want, in sending my cheque, with always gratefulest thanks to ask about these local board rates—income, & land tax in all £16 . 7 . 5.—or

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 49.

² Rylands Eng. MS. 1164/40, p. 23.

thereabouts—we are not charged this yearly are we—oh these poor people—forgive my dullness but I make so many blunders in Fors, I want to be as clear as I can in what statement I now make.

And now—so many thanks for all your kindness in that gift of minerals, and your pretty way of doing it.¹

Some months later he wrote in answer to her question about appointing a rent collector :

Please appoint the person you think well of to take the rents for me.—I am sure you will choose well—and tell Garibaldi that indeed I wish I could buy his cottage—but I have no more money and must not spend St. George's money in buying cottages but only land. And that I'll try to write more simply, every day.²

By his joking reference to " Garibaldi " Ruskin sent a message to an old Barmouth inhabitant and his comment on cottage-purchasing gives clear indication that the Master of the Guild did not relish the idea of being land-lord so much as land-owner. He may of course have been dismayed at the bad condition of the property and some of its attendant difficulties—there was at least *one* difficult tenant as this extract from his letter shows :

The objectionable woman must be got rid of, please and the wise one put in, at the rent she can pay, and the wretched cottage pulled down.³

He gave Mrs. Talbot some advice about the treatment of needy tenants :

Yes, by all means remit rents wherever it would be distressful—explaining that we only take it to keep their houses in repair and do what is otherwise helpful to them.⁴

Repairs to Barmouth property made quite heavy inroads on Guild capital. Furthermore, Ruskin at work in Geneva in 1882 was devastated to learn that the sanitary commissioners had condemned some of the cottages. He wrote in horror to Mrs. Talbot :

I did not calculate on the interference of Sanitary Commissioners ; and in future, would much rather knock the cottages down altogether than pay for improvements under other people's order. Please therefore clear away the dilapidated cottage and let the others on any terms you yourself judge best (temporarily or continuously,) forbidding always the establishment of any sort of machinery ; or dirt producing manufacture.⁵

It is curious that Ruskin, infuriated as he must have been by the action of the sanitary authorities, yet left the decision to Mrs.

¹ Rylands Eng. MS. 1161/40. 2.2.77. ² Ibid. 1161/51. 13.7.77.

³ Ibid. 1161/53. n.d.

⁴ Ibid. 1161/273. 24.2.86.

⁵ Ibid. 1161/89. 15.9.82.

Talbot to sell, repair or knock down the cottages. In answer to Mrs. Talbot's query about his decision in this matter he wrote :

I have your most kind letters ; and can only leave the cottages—to be sold—or repaired as you think best for the effects in the neighbourhood of the example—whether in kindness, or in sanitary change—I am simply unable to judge, unless I was on the spot.¹

But poor Mrs. Talbot felt unable to take so decisive a step alone, and so she wrote again for advice, reporting the estimated cost of repairs and received the reply :

My last letter *was* intended to be conclusive in leaving the question in your hands and I am quite content with the estimate you give me of £135.²

This figure does not appear in Guild accounts given in *Fors* for the period January to December 1882, but the Barmouth account records :

Rents	£ 48 1 4
Gift from Mrs. Talbot towards new buildings	69 6 0
	<hr/>
	£117 7 4
<i>Less</i>	
Repairs, rates etc.	£ 42 2 2
On account of new buildings	75 5 2
	<hr/>
	£117 7 4 ³
	<hr/>

As late as 1886, Mrs. Talbot was still seeking his approval for her actions and she received this answer from Ruskin :

Yes of course I should like things sold in Barmouth—but my head and heart are deep in the dead things of long ago—and simply *cannot* think more than they are thinking. There's more in a single year of my real life than I could tell in all that's left of my three volumes—and I'm terrified every evening lest I should not sleep, and every morning—lest I fall sick before sunset.

The chess amuses and relieves me—but *business*—you must do as if I were dead.⁴

And we must imagine that she ceased to harry him and allowed him to relax over their chess games by post.

¹ Rylands Eng. MS. 1161/90. Michaelmas Day, 1882.

² *Ibid.* 1161/91. 7.11.82.

³ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 144.

⁴ Rylands Eng. MS. 1161/313. n.d.

The land gifted to the Guild of St. George therefore, was administered by its donors and not by the Master of the Guild. Ruskin was more directly concerned with the administration of Abbeydale which must be described as the Guild's biggest failure. It will be recollected that the request for a plot of land for allotments made by the Sheffield working men, came at a time when Ruskin was hard at work in Venice. His order that Abbeydale be purchased caused the resignation of his disapproving trustees which in turn cast all Guild business and responsibilities fully on to Ruskin at a time when he had neither time, energy, health, nor inclination to devote himself either to the workmen or to Guild affairs. After intimating his purchase in *Fors*, Letter LXXVI he added :

I have no knowledge yet of the men's plan in detail ; nor, as I have said in the text, shall I much interfere with them, until I see how they develope themselves.¹

It is clear that Ruskin regarded the actual purchase of the land as his responsibility, and, in his mind, care of the land automatically became the workmen's responsibility. He reminded them :

You have this land given you for your work that you may do the best you can for *all* men ; you are bound by certain laws of work, that the " best you can " may indeed be good and exemplary ; and although I shall endeavour to persuade you to accept nearly every law of the old guilds, that acceptance, I trust, will be with deeper understanding of the wide purposes of so narrow fellowship and, (if the thought is not too foreign to your present temper) more in the spirit of a body of monks gathered for missionary service, than of a body of tradesmen gathered for the promotion even of the honestest and usefulest trade.

It is indeed because I have seen you to be capable of co-operation, and to have conceived among yourselves the necessity of severe laws for its better enforcement, that I have determined to make the first essay of St. George's work at Sheffield.²

Their gratitude at this opportunity which he gave them angered him, and he wrote in *Fors*, Letter LXXIX :

When I wrote privately to one of your representatives, the other day, that Abbeydale was to be yielded to your occupation rent-free, you received the announcement with natural, but, I must now tell you, with thoughtless, gratitude. I ask you no rent for this land, precisely as a captain of a ship of the line asks no rent for her deck, cleared for action. You are called into a Christian ship of war ;—not hiring a corsair's hull, to go forth and rob on the high seas. And you will find the engagements you have made only tenable by a continual reference to the cause for which you are contending,—not to the advantage you hope to reap.³

¹ *Fors* VII, LXXVI, p. 113.

² *Ibid.*, LXXIX, p. 182.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

Apart from these few rules, he left them alone :

You will have only to consider, each day, how much, with an earnest day's labour, you can produce, of any useful things you are able to manufacture. These you are to sell at absolutely fixed prices, for ready money only ; and whatever stock remains unsold at the end of the year, over and above the due store for the next, you are to give away, through such officers of distribution as the society shall appoint.¹

Hint of Ruskin's awareness of difficulties at Abbeydale was given in the notes and correspondence section of Letter LXXXI when he wrote :

I ought, by rights, as the Guild's *master*, to be at present in Abbey Dale itself ; but as the Guild's *founder*, I have quite other duties.²

In the November *Fors*, Letter LXXXIII, he wrote :

. . . I have been greatly concerned by the difficulties which naturally present themselves in the first organisation of work at Abbey Dale,—the more that these are for the most part attributable to very little and very ridiculous things, which, with all my frankness, I see no good in publishing. The root of all mischief is of course that the Master is out of the way, and the men, in his absence, tried at first to get on by vote of the majority ;—it is at any rate to be counted as no small success that they have entirely convinced themselves of the impossibility of getting on in that popular manner ; and that they will be glad to see me when I can get there.³

In January 1878, Ruskin explained in the first letter of the new *Fors* Series that until the Guild was officially registered no real progress could be made at Abbeydale nor could things be set in order there.

The year following, in his Report of 1879, Ruskin, abandoning the picturesque title of " Abbeydale ", described the property as :

The Mickley Estate, consisting of about thirteen acres of land at Mickley, in the parish of Dronfield, in the County of Derby, with dwelling-houses, barns, stable, cow-houses, and out-building.

and went on to state the action he had so far taken :

The Master has for the present placed it under the superintendence of his own head gardener, Mr. David Downs, on whose zeal and honesty he can rely, this superintendence being at present given without expense to the Guild. But the gardens will it is hoped, soon become important enough to require the establishment of a Curatorship in connection with them.⁴

¹ *Fors* VII, LXXIX, p. 184.

³ *Ibid.*, LXXXIII, p. 367.

² *Ibid.*, LXXXI, p. 269.

⁴ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 21.

The object was to show :

the best methods of managing fruit-trees in the climate of northern England, with attached green-houses and botanic garden for the orderly display of all interesting European plants.¹

That object, however, had to be modified and the hope expressed for Abbeydale in Ruskin's Report for 1881 was modest enough :

On the land at Totley I can only say that its superintendent, Mr. Downs, has been doing all that could be done under the conditions of such climate, and lately severe seasons, wholly unprecedented in my time and his (and we are both now growing old together). I find, however, that *he* troubles himself too much with the usual farmer's questions of market price ; when the land has once been got into good heart, its produce shall be kept at a fixed low price, for the markets of the poor.²

Expenditure in 1880 amounted to £100 and in 1881 to £134 14s. 6d.

In his *General Statement* of 1882, Ruskin presented the Abbeydale history in different language :

In order to try the present conditions of fruit and vegetable supply to large towns, I authorised the purchase for the Guild of a plot of thirteen acres, within six miles of Sheffield, which came very completely under the head of "waste land", having been first exhausted and then neglected by former proprietors. Of course, in the first years, nothing but outlay is to be recorded of this acquisition, and the recent severe winters have retarded prospect of better things ; but the land is now fairly brought into heart, and will supply good fruit (strawberries, currants, and gooseberries) to the Sheffield markets at a price both moderate and fixed. I have further the intention of putting some part of the ground under glass, and of cultivating, for botanical study, any beautiful plants which may in their tropical forms illustrate the operation of climate in our own familiar English species. For this special purpose I should be glad to receive subscriptions from any persons interested in botanical education : all such specially intended contributions should be sent to Mr. Henry Swan, Curator of the St. George's Museum in Sheffield.³

The plan failed, no subscriptions were received and the 1884 Report made mention of "The Mickley Estate" and its "thirteen acres of very poor land in Derbyshire".

Schemes failed, depression grew, and at length the land was let to a tenant to farm. Responsibility for this failure must fall on Ruskin for he made the purchase. Obviously it was a bad purchase, and the men for whom the land was bought were, of course, unfamiliar with land toil and therefore likely to become

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 20.

² *Ibid.* p. 40.

³ *Ibid.* p. 49.

frustrated by it. This was a danger which Ruskin foresaw, and when the danger became an eventuality he took action, and handed the plot over to his own gardener's superintendence. Together they worked valiantly, but Ruskin came to realize his mistake for he wrote to Downs in the Spring of 1881 :

Suppose we sell all that good-for-nothing land at Totlely, and take somebody else in, for once—if we can—instead of being always taken in ourselves, for a change?¹

It is to his credit that for a number of years they still attempted to cultivate the plot. Nevertheless, if the result of this labour was weak, the intention was a brave and generous one : to bring those who toil at mechanical labour in cities out into light and fresh air.

Ruskin's second purchase of land was made at Cloughton near Scarborough where he bought a plot of land for a Companion named John Guy, who refused to work a steam-driven machine and so was dismissed from Newby Hall, his place of employment. Ruskin appears to have regarded this stand in much the same light as he regarded Plimsoll's in the House of Commons. In *Fors*, Letter LXXVIII, he published in the notes and correspondence section Guy's letters in which he referred to his action, to his re-employment at Scarborough, and to his full determination to 'steer clear of steam'. Impressed by his courage Ruskin commented :

One of our brave and gentle companions, has encouraged me in my own duties, and will, I trust, guide no less than encourage others in theirs.²

Indeed, he was so much encouraged by Guy's action that in 1877 he purchased for £80 a plot of land for him to work on Cloughton Moor. Like Abbeydale, the plot obviously was difficult to work. A second letter from Guy, published in the notes and correspondence section of Letter I New Series, made some report on his work there :

We are clearing, and intend closing, about sixteen hundred yards of what we think the most suitable and best land for a garden, and shall plant a few currant and gooseberry bushes in, I hope directly, if the weather keeps favourable.³

He ended his letter with a statement which suggested that he was yet another of those companions who were members for Ruskin's sake rather than for faith in his ideas. He concluded :

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. xxvii.

² *Fors* VII, LXXVIII, p. 178.

³ *Fors* VIII, I, p. 19.

We shall try our best to work and make arrangements to suit your views as far as we understand them, and anything you could like us to do, we shall be glad to perform.¹

It is evident that Guy was waiting to receive instructions and directions—but as evident that Ruskin regarded Guy now merely as a tenant of St. George fully responsible for the holding. He stated in his Report of 1879 :

The Cloughton Estate was bought in order to establish in useful work a member of the Guild, Mr. John Guy, with his wife, whom the Master judged capable of setting an example of practical and patient country economy. He has not been disappointed in them, and the last letter he has received, subjoined to this report, will sufficiently, he believes, justify his satisfaction in these tenants.²

While the letter subjoined to the report justified Ruskin's opinion of the Guys as tenants, it also gave clear indication of the increasingly difficult problems which the land presented. The quantity and quality of the soil were poor, the land sloped and the neighbours clearly regarded the task as a waste of time. Ruskin made no further report on the land, but the Trustees' Report for 1883 made reference to the departure of Guy from Cloughton in 1882 and reported that another tenant was at work on the land.

Ruskin's land ventures therefore were fraught with exhausting problems that were never resolved, and the tenants whom he selected for those difficult plots of land purchased at his order proved unequal for the task despite their preliminary enthusiasm. Undoubtedly his greatest achievement in his attempt to translate his ideas into practice was his Museum at Sheffield. The story of the Museum has been told many times and in many places, but in *Fors* Ruskin gives a commentary which is often neglected. The first notice of this great experiment was given in the Notes and Correspondence Section of Letter LVI, when he told of the room at Sheffield that was to be the "germ of a museum arranged first for workers in iron". As if to explain his object more clearly, he appended a letter from a Leeds correspondent, who wrote to ask him how a healthy tendency could be brought about in the adolescent who knew pleasures related only to 'animal passions and lusts'. To this question Ruskin made reply :

¹ *Fors* VIII, I, p. 26.

² *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 21.

Nothing *can* be done, but what I am trying to form this St. George's Company to do.¹

It is unfortunate that this tremendous undertaking should have been associated in the first instance with bitterness. In his *Fors* letter Ruskin told of the ill feeling that existed between himself and the Sheffield Corporation as a result of his refusal (somewhat outspoken) to accept for his purpose a space offered to him in the existing Sheffield Museum. Letter LX told of his purchase at a cost of £600 of the small house at the top of a high hill on the outskirts of Sheffield that was to be his Museum. He described this undertaking in the following way in his General Statement of 1882 :

The duty of which I am myself best capable, and the consummation of all that hitherto has been endeavoured in my writings.²

From that time onwards till his death, Guild funds were principally directed towards museum expenditure.

Ruskin experienced intense pleasure in planning his Museum. At times he wrote in *Fors* about the project almost as if he were a kind of cultural Providence :

Indeed, all the things that Solomon in his wisdom sent his ships to Tarshish for,—gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks,—you shall see in their perfection, and have as much as St. George thinks good for you.³

There were no delays in his Museum building, he knew the road and he pursued it steadily. Furthermore, in his appointment of Swan as Curator he showed a surety of touch that was lacking in appointments made, or favours given, in connection with his land ventures or industrial experiments. In Letter LXII he published notice of this appointment :

Our eight thousand Consols giving us £240 a year, I have appointed a Curator to the Sheffield Museum, namely, Mr. Henry Swan, an old pupil of mine in the Working Men's College in London ; and known to me since as an estimable and trustworthy person, with a salary of forty pounds a year, and residence. He is obliged at present to live in the lower rooms of the little house which is to be the nucleus of the museum :—as soon as we can afford it, a curator's house must be built outside of it.⁴

Swan obviously made an excellent curator whom the men trusted and regarded as a kind of club leader. Guild accounts

¹ *Fors* V, LVI, p. 234.

² *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 51.

³ *Fors* V, LX, p. 336.

⁴ *Fors* VI, LXII, p. 63.

occasionally record the gift of a few shillings to the fund from a working man "per Mr. Swan". An unusual item in the Accounts for the half-year ending 30 June 1878 shows a Christmas gift from Swan of "six women's dresses and one child's dress in blue cloth" at a cost of £5 5s. The relationship established was obviously a happy one and it may be assumed that Ruskin felt that through Swan he was getting nearer to those whom he sought most to help.

He lingered over the problem of displaying exhibits in such a way that they would become interesting to the inexperienced museum visitor. In Letter LXIX, he gave details about the intended display of minerals and promised that each would be displayed :

in its own little cell, on purple, or otherwise fittingly coloured velvet of the best. and he kept his promise. He was emphatic that beauty of arrangement of exhibits was of vital importance and in *Deucalion* he devoted many pages to this subject. At the same time he showed the wisest understanding of the kind of difficulty the iron workers were likely to experience in trying to look at and see value in some of the exhibits. In the Notes and Correspondence section of Letter LXX he gave detailed information about the cost of some exhibits and wrote :

I am sending in gifts to the men at Sheffield, wealth of various kinds, in small instalments—but in secure forms. Five bits of opal ; the market value of one, just paid to Mr. Wright, of 9 Great Russell Street, £3 ; a beryl, of unusual shape, ditto, £2 ; a group of emeralds, from the mine of the Holy Faith of Bogota, and two pieces of moss gold,—market value £2 . 10.s,—just paid to Mr. Tennant. Also, the first volume of the Sheffield Library ; an English Bible of the thirteenth century,—market value £50,—just paid to Mr. Ellis. I tell these prices only to secure the men's attention, because I am not sure what acceptant capacity they have for them. When once they recognise the things themselves to be wealth,—when they can see the opals, know the wonderfulness of the beryl, enjoy the loveliness of the golden fibres, read the illuminations of the Bible page—they will not ask what the cost, nor consider what they can get for them. I don't believe they will think even of lending their Bible out on usury.¹

He himself gave generously to the Museum and wrote with characteristic self-criticism :

I am a little ashamed of my accounts this time, having bought a missal worth £320 for myself, and only given one worth £50 to Sheffield.²

¹ *Fors* VI, LXX, p. 331.

² *Ibid.*

His great generosity and also the generosity of Mrs. Talbot in this Museum building have record breaking features. Occasionally Mrs. Talbot's generosity was a matter of concern to him for it served to emphasise the apathy of others. He wrote in *Fors*, Letter LXXI :

Another donation, of fifty pounds, by Mrs. Talbot, makes me sadly ashamed of the apathy of all my older friends.¹

The visit of Prince Leopold to his Museum in 1879 was some reward for all his labour, and, in turn, it brought renewed public interest in his endeavours. During the half hour spent with Ruskin at Walkley, the Prince was shown amongst other things the Verrocchio Madonna, the early printed Bibles, the specimens of English illuminated manuscripts, the minerals and precious stones and the paintings, etchings and photographs of Venice. Ruskin wrote in October happily of this event to Mrs. Talbot :

I really think that at last with the Prince's good help, we are well set up at Sheffield—but I'm sadly tired, now after a week of responsibility and extreme excitement in general ways—for the most part delightful—but too much for me.²

In February 1880 she delighted him with yet another gift of money and he wrote :

Your gift—with the assurances of your present prosperity implied by it—comes, you see as a part of these great encouragements—and what do you think I am going to do with at least the half of it? Buy two Diamonds, one for Sheffield, one for the Westminster boys for whom I am writing a grammar of Crystallography which greatly amuses and interests me myself and which will work into the Bible of Amiens in a way which only you and one or two more of my dearest readers could guess. And of all the crystals I have examined I find good diamonds the most instructive.³

Ruskin discovered in the years following his serious illness of 1878 that he was able to relax happily over Museum matters, while ordinary Guild affairs frustrated him. His faith in his proposals for the extension of his Museum reflected his belief that the general public would give him financial support. He imagined that those who refused to support his agricultural ventures would undoubtedly have sympathy with this project with its wide educational purpose. He believed too, that his

¹ *Fors* VI, LXXI, p. 361.

² Rylands Eng. MS. 1161/72. 25.10.79.

³ *Ibid.* 1161/79. 7.2.80.

own position in England established him exclusively as the man to lead such a scheme. In Letter IV of the New Series of *Fors*, he made this public promise :

And, in fine, here I am yet for a few years, I trust, at their service—ready to arrange such a museum for their artizans as they have not yet dreamed of ;—not dazzling nor overwhelming, but comfortable, useful, and—in such sort as smoke-cumbered skies may admit,—beautiful ; though not, on the outside, otherwise decorated than with plain and easily worked-slabs of Derbyshire marble, with which I shall face the walls, making the interior a working man's Bodleian Library, with cell and shelf of the most available kind, undisturbed, for his holiday time. The British public are not likely to get such a thing done by anyone else for a time, if they don't get it done now by me, when I'm in the humour for it. Very positively I can assure them of that ; and so leave the matter to their discretion.¹

Again he pleaded for public support in his General Statement of 1882. He urged the founding of Museums as a public duty rather than as the task of the philanthropist. His happy confidence that Sheffield would give financial aid to his scheme for the development of his Walkley Museum was evident in his statement :

I think it possible that as soon as I send in a definite plan, Sheffield itself alone may frankly give me all I want for the erection.²

Unhappily his Report of 1884 told of the final rupture of negotiations at Sheffield where as Ruskin stated in his last Guild Report :

In other words, Sheffield offered, if we would give them our jewels, to make themselves a case for them.³

Now his plans turned to the prospect of building a small museum at Bewdley. Despite these many difficulties about the actual site of the Museum, he continued his practical work of building up a National Store of Treasures some of which could be lent to schools and other educational establishments. During the years 1881 to 1889, he used the Guild's available income for this purpose and he procured books, manuscripts, drawings and minerals. He made the following comment on his mineral purchases :

The members of the Guild may perhaps be surprised to see the large sums spent from time to time in purchase of minerals. These have been bought

¹ *Fors* VIII, IV, p. 125.

² *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 57.

³ *Ibid.* p. 98.

by no means exclusively for the museum at Sheffield, but in view of a design long entertained by me of making minerology, no less than botany, a subject of elementary education, even in ordinary parish schools, and much more in our public ones.¹

And he went on to explain his years old custom of giving and lending a collection of minerals to schools. He gave some information about his expenditure for the year, which in 1884 amounted to £1000 14s. and added :

I have not the slightest compunction in presenting these accounts to the Guild, feeling entirely confident of the educational value of every article of the things purchased ; so that I may invite persons otherwise uninterested in us, or our plans, to subscribe separately and distinctly to our expenses in these directions.²

Such was his ambition and also his faith in the general public, but as his Report of 1885 showed, his hope no less than his faith was misplaced. Despite his own example at Walkley of the kind of work he hoped to do for his country, his plea fell unnoticed by all save his good friend Mrs. Talbot. At times despair would seize him and he would write to her :

of course I won't accept that money. If other people won't help me, as well as you, after all you've done, I shall give up.³

At other times he would relent and write as he did in the winter of 1885 :

Dear Mama Talbot,

What a sweet *you* are ! to be so happy in giving away 3 hundred pounds.—Heaven send I may be spared to give you a welcome at the Inn Door and take you through the Jewel room.—All the same—[and he made a chess move] —I can't let your king come over my way, just now.

Ever your gratefulest,
J. RUSKIN.⁴

His indomitable spirit refused to accept public apathy as defeat and his last Report carried this message :

The educational and archaeological purposes for which I thus instantly want money are only a collateral branch of the work of the St. George's Guild, which is essentially the buying and governing of land for permanent national property ; but while I remain its Master, I mean to direct all its resources to the branch of its work which none can deny my capacity of directing rightly.⁵

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 74.

² *Ibid.* p. 83.

³ Rylands Eng. MS. 1161/130. 21.12.84.

⁴ *Ibid.* 1161/160. n.d.

⁵ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 97.

As already stated, the appeal failed, but Ruskin continued to work independently for his Museum as long as health and time allowed. In 1890, Sheffield Corporation provided spacious new quarters for the Museum at Meersbrook Park, and a tenuous agreement was made whereby the Ruskin collections were loaned to the City for a period of twenty years. This agreement was renewed at intervals by subsequent Masters and Corporation officials until 1953, when it was felt by the Sheffield authorities that the Museum represented unjustifiable expenditure, and so it was closed to the public on April 18th of that year. The late Master of the Guild, Alexander Farquharson, then decided to place the Ruskin collections in the care of Reading University, where the present Master, Professor Hodges, is responsible for the National Store which John Ruskin built for his Guild of St. George.

Apart from these main Guild activities, Ruskin inspired and encouraged others to make industrial experiments. His help and financial support made possible such brave undertakings as Albert Fleming's revival of the Langdale Linen Industry, and Egbert Ryding's work to revive weaving in the Isle of Man. Ruskin was particularly excited by this latter project which he organized; to further this work he financed the building of a water mill at Laxey, known as St. George's Mill. Later Reports show satisfaction that his trustee, George Thomson, a Huddersfield wool merchant, was also directing operations at Laxey. Inspired by Ruskin's principles, George Thomson registered his Huddersfield woollen industry under the Friendly Societies Act and introduced welfare, pension and profit-sharing schemes for his workers. Ruskin wrote to Thomson in 1886:

I cannot enough thank you or express the depth of my pleasure in the announcement made in your letter to Mrs. Severn, of the momentous and absolutely foundational step taken by you in all that is just and wise, in the establishment of these relations with your workmen.¹

To Ruskin this action was a virtual translation into practice of part of his message in *Fors Clavigera*.

This St. George's work was to John Ruskin the prime task of his life. Indeed it was, as he said, the culmination of his life's

¹ *Works*, Library Edition, xxx. 333.

labour for which he sought fair hearing and fair judgement. It may be that too many of his critics have paused to mock, pity, and rebuke, taking their stand on that portion of the road he failed to sweep clean, thereby losing sight of John Ruskin, the "faithful signpost", and of the path of progress he so clearly indicated.