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John Ruskin, His Social Philosophy

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Fort Hays Kansas State College

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JOHN RUSKIN, HIS SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY.

being

a thesis

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of the

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Submitted by

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JOHN RUSKIN, HIS SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY.

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JOHN RUSKIN, HIS SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY.

INTRODUCTION.

As one studies history it is interesting to notice the effect of thought and teachings upon the economic and social life of the people. Also it is of equal interest to note the effects of invention upon the thought and philosophy of social thinkers.

The author of this thesis became interested in the growth and development of economic and social doctrine from its earliest development. Due to the effects of the Industrial Revolution, the Victorian Era is rich in Economic thought and schemes for social betterment. Though much has been written concerning the life and works of the most outstanding men of this period, it was felt that one man of this period, John Ruskin, was not receiving merited consideration for his social teachings, and that he really deserved a higher rating than he had.

For this reason it was decided to set forth the teachings of John Ruskin, to explain them in the light of the day in which he lived, to compare them with recent economic thought, and to point out their influence on the trend of economic thought. With this in mind the author set out first, to develop briefly, the social and economic doctrines preceding and during the time of John Ruskin in order to better understand
Ruskin's social Philosophy. To still further enlighten the reader concerning the philosophy of Ruskin a brief biography is presented in which the influence of his early religious training is stressed together with the influence of the ancient philosophers and with the influence of his teacher, Thomas Carlyle. With this background in view the social philosophy was developed from the letters, lectures and essays of John Ruskin. With this material before him the author compared the teachings and doctrines of John Ruskin with those of his contemporaries and with those of his predecessors. It was also interesting to compare his philosophy with that of today and to show how his teachings have influenced the trend of social development.

The author began this work realizing that it is the common belief that John Ruskin is solely an art critic and not a social reformer. It is hoped that this thesis will help arouse interest in the teachings of John Ruskin as a social reformer; for it is felt that social reformers and economists of today could profit well by a study of John Ruskin's economic and social doctrines.
Chapter 1
The Life of John Ruskin.

John Ruskin was born February 8, 1819, in London, England. He was the only son of strict religious parents. His mother supervised his religious training and instruction far more than did his father who was a wealthy wine merchant and who devoted much of his time to his business. John Ruskin was of Scotch descent and was reared in the Calvinistic doctrine. His parents intended him for the Church and with this in mind his mother taught him the Bible stories and compelled him to memorize long passages from the Bible. It seems as though he was denied the association of other children. Play as we understand play was virtually unknown to him. While other children were playing he was being taught French and Latin by tutors. When but a child he began to write poetry and developed this art until young manhood when he won the Newdigate prize while attending Oxford University. The effects of this early training, particularly his religious training can be traced all through his social teachings. Shortly after winning the Newdigate prize he became interested in painting and architecture. Here he took a liberal view and rebelled against the traditions of his times, thus bringing down on his head the criticism of the artists of his day. His art study called for several trips to Italy and the continent where he studied
the painting of the medieval masters and the architecture of the older cities. Until 1860 he studied, wrote and lectured, much. His writings filled many volumes now largely unread. He gained a wide reputation as an art critic and it is for this reason that he is regarded more as an art critic than a critic of social and economic questions and problems. Even after 1860 he continued his study of art and he held a position as professor of fine arts in Oxford University. He was connected with this institution when his health broke, incapacitating him for further labors. But few writers wrote more than he and most of his works are treatises on art; six of his thirty-seven volumes are concerned with economic and social problems.

According to Hobson, a Ruskin student, Ruskin's interest in the field of Political Economy was developed through his interest in art, through his religious training and through the influence of Carlyle whom he greatly admired.

An artist is a close student of nature and the observer of nature's laws. Man as a creature of nature will come under this observation. Consequently, the fact that some classes do not thrive as well or enjoy the bounties of nature as much as others will naturally arouse the interest of the artist. In his mind man is the center of art. He is the most highly developed creature of creation. To discover that all men were not receiving justice at the hands of others naturally aroused the artist. His artistic development caused him to cry out
against this injustice. To him nature was out of harmony. Thus it was only natural that Ruskin should turn from art to economics and political economy when he found that the economic system dealt unjustly with thousands of people.

His religious training greatly influenced his social philosophy. As pointed out above, his parents had planned for him to enter the church as one of the clergy. His early training was carried out with that in view. The teachings of Christ abound with invective hurled at the industrialists who take advantage of the poor, the fatherless and the widow. Christ taught that man is of far greater importance than any creature; that he was but a little lower than the angels. With this teaching as a background Ruskin was bound to condemn any system that dealt unjustly with labor or took advantage of any class of people. His works on social philosophy abound with quotations and teachings of Biblical origin. His definition of wealth as life and his placing of man as the center and heart of social economy undoubtedly comes from the teaching of Christ. Ruskin said that Charity is greater than Justice; also, that no human actions were ever intended by the Maker of Men to be guided by the balances of expediency but by the balances of Justice. We look in vain through the long period of his works for any departure from the foundation principles which he had so early inculcated by his study of the Bible under his Mother's care and direction.
When he began to publish his essays on Political Economy his enemies attempted to belittle his works because they considered him an authority on art and that an artist could not be an authority in the field of Political Economy. Many still have that same opinion. He had developed a keen sense of justice and a nature very sensitive to the difference between right and wrong, justice and injustice. Furthermore, he was really better acquainted with the field of Political Economy than his critics accredited to him. He was reared in the home of a successful merchant and thus had first hand knowledge of the system that he condemned. His father clung to the social and economic doctrines of Ricardo, Malthus and John Stuart Mill. John Ruskin and his father engaged in arguments so heated that a breach between the two was threatened. John's father was severely criticized for permitting his son to publish his essays. The elder Ruskin attempted to dissuade his son from publishing his essays without success. Ruskin's father was torn between loyalty to his son and loyalty to his business and the old system.

Again, Ruskin was a student of ancient philosophy, especially of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. Also he was a student of scientific advancement and championed the cause of Huxley and Darwin. He was familiar with the writings and teachings of his contemporaries, Mill, Bastiat, Fawcett and Carlyle. It is possible that he may have misinterpreted some of the teachings of his contemporaries but never the less he was familiar with
their works. The principles upon which Ruskin laid most stress had relation to the duties of landlords, employers and bishops, respectively. According to Edward T. Cook, his biographer, he was a disciple of Plato. He sought to reconstruct society on the Platonic conception of justice assigning to each man his due place, and requiring from each man the fulfillment of his duties. "To him as to Plato, the health and the happiness of all the citizens was the sole end of legislation and the rule of the wisest was the surest method of securing it."

Ruskin undertook to carry out his Utopian ideas by organizing the St. George's Guild. The project consisted of some cottages in Wales, twenty acres of partly cleared woodland in Worcestershire, a few bleak acres in Yorkshire and a single museum in Sheffield. He wasted a fortune in the venture which today is regarded as a failure. All that remains of the project is the museum at Sheffield.

Ruskin had several illustrious contemporaries. Besides Mill, Fawcett, and Bastiat, there were Gladstone, Macaulay, Scott, Dickens and Carlyle. Ruskin was a great admirer of Scott, but the man who exerted the greatest influence on him and who determined the direction his teachings should take was Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle was born in 1795. Carlyle is regarded as the pioneer of idealism. He belonged to the romantic reaction against the materialism of the eighteenth century.

He rejected the cause and effect philosophy and the utilitarian ethics and the laissez faire political philosophy which was dominant in the beginning of the century. Carlyle denounced the mechanical spirit of the age in philosophy, politics, and industry. He denounced, "the materialistic spirit----politics without sincerity, democracy without reverence, economics without conscience, and philanthropy without discretion." He favored a government of the people and for the people but not by the people. In fact he opposed democracy. To him democracy meant aristocracy. We find in the study of Ruskin that Ruskin took very much the same views on economics, politics and government as did Carlyle. The works of Carlyle setting forth his political teachings preceded those of Ruskin by nearly twenty years.

Carlyle was a source of encouragement and inspiration to Ruskin. After completing his first essays on Political Economy he sent a copy to Carlyle. After reading the copy Carlyle sent back this reply: "Chelsea, October 29, 1860--You go down through those dismal-science people like treble X of senna, glauber and aloes; like a fit of British Cholera, threatening to be fatal! I have read your papers with exhilaration, exultation, often with laughter, with bravissimo! Such a thing flung suddenly into half a million dull British heads on the same day, will do a great deal of good." Carlyle championed

Ruskin's efforts many times and never failed to write or speak words of encouragement. It was through the efforts of Carlyle that Ruskin's essays were published in the Fraser's Magazine. At one time it seemed that a breach was forming between them but the misunderstanding that caused the rift was soon erased and their friendship renewed and terminated only with the death of Carlyle in 1881.

Ruskin began his writings on social and economic problems in 1860 and continued his letters and essays intermittently for the next quarter century. Twice during period he held the professorship of Fine Arts in Oxford University, 1870-1878 and 1883-1885. He never entirely gave up his art studies or lectures. He continued his travels abroad and his lectures in Oxford until his health broke definitely in 1885. The remainder of his life was merely waiting for the end which came in 1900.
Chapter 11

Background of Ruskin's Social Philosophy.

Part 1

In order to arrive at any definite conclusions concerning the social philosophy of John Ruskin it is necessary to treat, briefly, the economic and social doctrines of his predecessors as well as those of his contemporaries. No attempt has been made to evaluate this philosophy. The purpose has been to present the facts as a foundation for the study of Ruskin's philosophy, in order to better understand it and to evaluate it.

The countries of Western Europe, Spain, France, Holland, England, and Portugal, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries engaged in a struggle for colonial empires. It was during this period that a school of economic thought developed, known as the mercantilistic school. These same countries were dominated by the doctrines of this school. The central ideas prevalent in each of these countries during this period of empire building was a strong central government, a well trained army, and a favorable balance of trade. Spain became united under the banner of Ferdinand and Isabella, drove the Moors out of Spain and proceeded to plunder the most civilized peoples of the new world. The Spanish Armada stood in the way of the development of English commerce and the development of an English Colonial Empire. After the destruction of the Spanish
Armada the English planted colonies along the Atlantic Seaboard. The French were more interested in establishing fishing ports and trading posts than in planting permanent colonies. Whether it was importing gold as a result of conquest as in the case of Spain, or establishing permanent settlements as in the case of England, or establishing trading posts as in the case of France, the aim of each country was the same, the creation of a favorable balance of trade. Each country agreed that a strong army was necessary for the protection of the government and its commercial interests; that precious metals constituted the most important category of national wealth; that population should grow as rapidly as possible to hasten the growth of colonies and to increase the size of the army. Navigation acts and trading laws were enacted to regulate commerce between the colonies and the mother country. Commerce of the colonies was confined almost altogether with the mother country. Protection was another doctrine of the mercantilists, but was not advocated for the interests of the laboring classes nor for the protection of infant industries but to create a favorable balance of trade.

During the eighteenth century the Mercantilists were challenged by the Physiocratic School which believed that the wealth of a nation lies not in the precious metals but in land. Agriculture was conceived to be the basis of wealth. Historically, this school was in existence during the ascend-
ency of the Mercantilists but did not grow strong enough to challenge them until the eighteenth century. The Physiocrats believed that agriculture was the chief industry of a country. It was the contention of the Physiocrats that land is capable of producing more than is expended in the process of its cultivation. The excess, known as the "Produit Net", is the fund from which all classes of society must be supported, since agriculture is the only department of economic activity in which there is a surplus. Consequently the "Produit Net" must supply funds for the support of government, and since land is the sole producer, land must bear the burden of taxation. For the same reason in the loaning of money, no interest was charged except to landlords. It was also good Physiocratic doctrine to believe in divine-right monarchy and that the state should promote the construction of and the maintenance of public works. It was their belief in divine-right monarchy and despotism that led to their decline in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Part 2.

As society became more complex by changing from a strictly agricultural one to one partly so and partly industrial, social and economic thought was forced to change. Adam Smith (1723-1790) brought forth the theory
that, "The annual labor of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries of life." Smith, thus departs from the Physiocrats in that he contends that labor is productive. He distinguishes between two kinds of labor: productive and non-productive. Productive labor is labor that capital sets in motion, while non-productive labor is such labor as performed by a servant. Smith also contends that the wealth of a nation depends upon the proportion that its productive laborers bear to the total population including unproductive laborers; it follows that the former should be as large as possible and the latter as small as possible. Ricardo also contends that labor is the basis of value; he states, "Freely reproducible commodities exchange for each other in proportion to the amounts of labor required in their production."

Smith and Ricardo agree in their definitions of capital; Smith defines it as, "That portion of the stock of an individual or of a society which affords or yields a revenue." Ricardo defines capital as, "That part of the wealth of a country which is employed in producing and consists of food, clothing, tools, raw materials, necessary to give effect to labor." Smith contends that the function of capital is to set labor in motion. It does this by supplying food, tools, buildings necessary for

2. Ibid.
the conduct of productive processes in a society based on the division of labor. He distinguishes between two kinds of capital: fixed and circulating; fixed is that which affords a profit without changing masters such as machines or instruments of trade which facilitate labor; circulating capital is that which yields a profit by changing hands and is composed of money stock or provisions, raw materials of the manufacturer, partly manufactured goods, and completely manufactured goods not yet marketed. Fixed capital, he explains, is derived from circulating capital and circulating capital from lands, mines, and fisheries. All the fixed capital is used in setting labor in motion. Lauderdale in 1804 came forth with the idea that capital produces a profit. He says, "Capital produces a profit either by supplanting a portion of labor which would otherwise be performed by the hand of man or by performing a portion of labor which is beyond the reach of the personal exertion of man to accomplish."

Lauderdale thus advances beyond the economic thought of his day in contending that capital is a factor in production. The Physiocrats had held that land was the sole factor of production, Smith contended that labor was the factor of production and Lauderdale in contending that capital was the factor of production completes the step.

In the discussion of rent James Anderson in, 'Inquiry into the nature of the Corn Laws with a View to the new Corn bill for Scotland', says that the rent of a given area of land is determined by the difference between the value or price of its produce and that of the same piece of poorer land on which the value or price of the produce is just sufficient to cover the cost of production. Ricardo defines rent as, "That produce of the earth which is paid to the landlord for the use of the original and indestructible powers of the soil." He goes on to say, "The rise of rent is always the effect of the increasing wealth of a country, and of the difficulty of providing food for the augmented population. It is the symptom, but never the cause of wealth; for wealth often increases most rapidly while rent is either stationary, or even falling. Rent increases most rapidly as the disposable land decreases in its productive powers."

As regards wages Ricardo distinguishes between what he calls the market price of labor, the natural being, "that price which is necessary to enable the laborers, one with another to subsist and to perpetuate their race, without either increase or diminution," and the market price of labor as, "the price which is really paid for it from the natural operation of the proportion of the supply to the

6. The Development of Economic Doctrine, Scott, W. A., p. 113, quoting, Development of Political Economy, McCulloch. p. 34.
7. Ibid.
He thought of natural wages in terms of the necessaries and comforts of life. He also observes that, "in the natural advance of society the wages of labor will have a tendency to fall, as far as they are regulated by supply and demand; for the supply of laborers will continue to increase at the same rate, whilst the demand for them will increase at a slower rate. But we must not forget that wages are also regulated by the prices of the commodity on which they are expended."

In his discussion of profits, Ricardo defines that term as, "the total products minus the sum of the rents and wages paid to the cooperating landlords and laborers." They, "depend on high and low wages, wages on the price of necessaries, and the price of necessaries chiefly on the price of food. The natural tendency of profits then is to fall; for, in the progress of society and wealth, the additional quantity of food required is obtained by the sacrifice of more and more labor." Adam Smith included profits among the necessary costs of production, as also did Malthus, while Robert Torrens insisted that they are the surplus over and above the cost of production, being in fact the difference between the total value of the product and its cost. James Mill, father of John Stuart Mill, included profits among the costs of production, but explained

9. Ibid.
10. The Development of Economic Doctrine, Scott, W. A. p.120, Development of Political Economy, McCulloch
them as the result of a species of labor which added to the labor immediately employed and to that represented by capital, constitutes the costs or the natural value of commodities.

In his discussion of value Ricardo distinguishes between "natural value" and "market value". By market value he meant the actual price at which commodities change hands from day to day. By "natural value" he meant some point about which market values fluctuate and which they tend to approach. In the discussion of natural value he distinguishes between "value in use" and "value in exchange", by stating that utility is not the measure of exchangeable value, although essential to it, and that possessing utility, commodities desire their exchangeable value from two sources: from their scarcity and from the quantity of labor required to obtain them.

Part 3

The foregoing constituted the trend of economic thought preceding the time of John Stuart Mill, John Ruskin's illustrious contemporary. In his discussion of labor, Mill states that the function of labor is that of creating utility. He agrees with his forerunners in distinguishing two kinds of labor, productive and unproductive.
Mill agrees with Smith as to the function of capital when he says, "What capital does for production is to afford the shelter, protection, tools and materials which the work required, and to feed and to otherwise maintain the laborer during the process." He defines capital as that portion of the wealth or accumulated stock of a nation that is devoted to production. He then sets forth four propositions concerning capital; industry is limited by capital; capital is the result of saving; capital is consumed; and every increase of capital gives or is capable of giving, additional employment to industry; and this without assignable limit.

In speaking of profit Mill says, "The cause of profit is, that labor produces more than is required for its support. The reason why capital yields a profit is because food, clothing, materials and tools last longer than the time which was required to produce them; so that if a capitalist supplies a party of laborers with these things, on condition of receiving all they produce, they will, in addition to producing their own necessaries have a portion of their time remaining, to work for the capitalist."

Further on he states, "rate of profits depends on wages; rising as wages fall and falling as wages rise," meaning

by wages of labor, the cost of labor, the cost to the capitalist rather than what labor brings in to the laborer.

In the economic progress of society Mill saw that of the three classes, landlords, capitalist and laborers, the landlords were the class that tended to become rich; while, "the cost of the laborers subsistence tends on the whole to increase, and the profits to fall. Agricultural improvements are a counteracting force to the last two effects; but the first, though a case is conceivable in which it would be temporarily checked, is ultimately in a high degree promoted by these improvements; and the increase of population tends to transfer all benefits derived from agricultural improvements to the landlords alone."

Mill also favored better distribution rather than greater production of wealth. "A conscientious or prudential restraint on population is indispensable to prevent the increase of numbers from outstripping the increase of capital, and the condition of the classes who are at the bottom of society from being deteriorated." He also advocated, "a system of legislation favoring equality of fortunes, so far as is consistent with the just claims of the individual to the funds whether great or small, of his or her industry." This would lead to a well paid body

17. Ibid.
of laborers, no enormous fortunes. There would be leisure
time to cultivate freely the graces of life. Mill also ad-
vocated the provision of education by the government; also
that the government should intervene for the protection of
children and other young persons.

Part 4

The socialist group undoubtedly influenced John Ruskin in
the development of his social philosophy. Among the greatest
of this group is Sismondi, known as an interventionist, be-
cause he advocated government intervention in behalf of the
poor. He is not a state socialist. He is also regarded as a trans-
itionist because he fills the gap between the economists of
the historical school and the state socialists. In Sismondi's
judgment the followers of Adam Smith, Ricardo and Mill over-
emphasized the importance of wealth and capital and labor and
underestimated the human factor and the well-being of mankind.
It was the contention of Sismondi that the well-being of man-
kind should be the subject matter and goal of economic science
and that the attempt to separate wealth from other social
phenomena connected with human well-being had resulted in error
rather than in truth and had had unfortunate effects upon that
well-being itself.

Sismondi mentioned the tendency to overestimate the im-
portance of the increase of wealth and to underestimate that
of its distribution and in particular the consideration of
wages as a mere cost of production like the price of raw ma-
terials and machines. He would substitute for the study of wealth that of human well-being.

Sismondi also advocated that the state should intervene to modify competition, "to protect the poor against the rich, workman against employees, cultivators against the extension of large landholdings." It was also his contention that the state should attempt to curb production and to put a "drag upon the too rapid multiplication of inventions. Progress should be accomplished by easy stages, injuring no one, limiting no one, and not even lowering the rate of interest."

Among the reforms he advocated the following are the most important: right of combination of laborers, limitation of child labor, abolition of Sunday toil, and the assumption by the employees the maintenance of the workman during the period of illness or of lockout or of old age.

Saint Simon held that the prosperity and well-being of all classes depend upon the economic and professional classes; and that society should be reorganized in such a manner as to give the economic and professional classes control. Another contention was that labor should be guaranteed to all and that each should be rewarded according to the services he renders.

There was a group of socialists known as the Associationists, who put some of their theories into practice.

Among these the most noted were Robert Owen and


Louis Blanc. In general the associationists believed that the individual liberty was a possession as precious as economic well-being and that the acquisition and maintenance of both should be the goal of reformers. They were both opposed to the competitive system and state socialism. They desired to eliminate competition among employers for wages.

Louis Blanc believed that the state must assist in the process of accomplishing social reforms but only by way of giving the movement a start; that the government should give work for everybody; and that the distribution of work and of wages and profits among laborers should follow the principle that, from each according to his own capacity and to each according to his needs.

Robert Owen put his theories into practice and as a result of an experiment carried on in his own factory arrived at the following conclusions: productivity of labor depends largely upon the kind of treatment accorded laborers by their employers; the character and ideas of laborers can be transformed by their environment. He regarded profits as one of the major evils of modern society. He said that profits are the excess of the price of goods over the cost of production. He contended that goods should sell at the cost of production.

Such is in brief statement the development of economic philosophy preceding and during the time of John Ruskin. We are now ready to examine the philosophy of John Ruskin. We
will see that he agreed with some of this philosophy and opposed bitterly much of it.
Chapter III.
John Ruskin's Social Philosophy.

Part I.
Ruskin's Economic Philosophy.

John Ruskin approached his economic doctrine of Political Economy through art and also through the influence of Carlyle whom he greatly admired. He defines and explains what he means by political economy several times in his essays and lectures. In Munera Pulveris he says, "Political Economy is neither a science nor an art; but a system of conduct and legislature, founded on the sciences directing the arts, and impossible, except under certain conditions of moral culture." Again he says in the same essay, "The science which in the modern days has been called Political Economy is in reality nothing more than an investigation of the phenomena of commercial operations."

In 'Unto this Last' he says, "Political Economy (The economy of a state or of a citizen) consists simply in the production, preservation, and distribution of useful or pleasureable things." In the same essay he goes on to say, "the real science of Political Economy which has yet to be distinguished from that bastard science, as medicine from witchcraft, and astronomy from astrology is that which

2. Ibid., p. 149.
3. Ibid., Unto this Last, essay 2, p. 44.
teaches nations to desire and labor for the things that lead to life and which teaches them to scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction." Again he says, "the final object of political economy is to get good method of consumption, and great quantity of consumption. In other words to use everything and to use it nobly." We find in Munera Pulveris the following, "The aim of all political economy is the extension of life. The aim of all political economy is the multiplication of life at the highest standard." It is Ruskin's idea that economy no more means saving money than it means spending money; it means the administration of a house; it stewardship; spending or saving, whether money or time, or anything else, to the best possible advantage.

Ruskin attacks the current political economy from two angles. First, he accuses the science of commercial wealth of wrongfully assuming the title and function of political economy. Second, he impugns the accuracy of many of the fundamental doctrines of this commercial science and imputes to them an injurious influence upon the happiness and morality of society.

His full, final conception of political economy, as a science of human welfare, includes within its scope not

4. Ibid., essay 4, p. 85.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., ch. 1, p. 147.
merely the process by which men gain a livelihood, but all human efforts and satisfactions. Mercantile economy assumed that man as an industrial animal, a getter and a spender of money, is a separate being from man as a friend, a lover, a father, a citizen, or that he can conveniently and justifiably be regarded as separated from economic treatment. This Ruskin denied. Ruskin treats his whole economic philosophy from the standpoint of the human soul. "After all," he says, "the human soul itself has the most vital and essential kind of manufacture with which a nation could concern itself." He considered that the foundation of our society was laid on a basis of conquest and exaggerated inequality.

"Labor," he defines, "is the contest of the life of man with an opposite; the term life including his intellect, soul, and physical power, contending with question, difficulty, trial, or material force." The economists of his day recognized two kinds of labor, productive and non-productive. Likewise, Ruskin recognized two kinds of labor and designated them as positive labor, that which produces life, and the other negative, that which produces death. Bearing children he cites as an example of the former and committing murder as an example of the latter. "The first object of all

7. Ibid., Unto this Last, Essay 4, p. 95.
work," he says, "not the principle one, but the first and necessary one—is to get food, clothes, lodging, and fuel." He also used labor as the unit of measurement of price. He says, "The price of anything is the quantity of labor given by the person producing it, in order to obtain possession of it. Price depends on four variable quantities; quantity of wish the purchaser has for the thing; opposed to the quantity of wish the seller has to keep it; and the quantity of labor the purchaser can afford to obtain the thing; opposed to the quantity of labor the seller can afford to keep it." Price is then determined by the wish or demand for the goods and by the quantity of labor consumed in their manufacture or production.

It naturally follows, if labor is the unit of measurement of price that cheap labor really means that much labor has been required to produce small results, as Ruskin states "What is commonly called cheapness of labor, signifies, in reality, that many obstacles have to be overcome by it, so that much labor is required to produce a small result."

9. Ibid., Vol. XVII, essay 4, p. 94.
10. Ibid., p. 96.
In Munera Pulveris he gives a definition of price which is in keeping with the foregoing explanation, "Price is the quantity of labor which the possessor of a commodity will take in exchange for it (that commodity)."

While contending that price is dependent on quantity of labor consumed in its manufacture, yet we find him saying that, "Price is dependent on the human will. The power of choice is a relative one. It depends not merely on our own estimate of the thing but on everybody else's estimate." 12

In respect to wages Ruskin upholds a just wage and also an invariable standard of wages. In 'Unto this Last' we find, "The abstract idea, then, of just or due wages, as respects the laborer, is that they will consist of a sum of money which will at any time procure for him at least as much labor as he has given, rather more than less." 13

In advocating an invariable wage he disagreed with the economists of his day and also with those since. He sets forth his theory thus: "In this ultimate sense, the price of labor is indeed always regulated by the demand for it; but so far as the practical and immediate administration of the matter is regarded, the best labor has been and is as all labor ought to be, paid by an invariable standard." 14

In arguing this point he says that we pay the good and poor

11. Ibid., ch. 1, p. 153.
12. Ibid., ch. 11, p. 186-187.
13. Ibid., Essay 3, p. 66.
14. Ibid., Essay 11, p. 34.
physician the same; likewise the poor and good preacher and the good and poor bricklayer. The only reward the good workman receives, Ruskin claims, is in being chosen in preference to the poor one. The destructiveness of this system is that poor workmen in order to obtain work will lower the price of their labor, thus compelling the good workmen to do likewise.

In defining wages, Ruskin leans toward the old mercantilistic doctrine, in that he used food as pay for labor. He defines labor as, "The quantity of food which the possessor of the land gives you, to work for him." Labor is then paid from the produce of the land. Elsewhere he contends that when produce is being purchased labor is being purchased; he also contended that time and labor spent in our service today must be paid in equal amount of time and labor. "Just wages," he defines, "for labor consists in a sum of money which would approximately obtain equivalent labor at a future time." He was an advocate of a just, fair wage for labor. In The Crown of Wild Olive he states, "The lawful basis of wealth is, that a man who works should be paid the fair value of his work; and that if he does not choose to spend it today, he should have free leave to keep it, and spend it tomorrow." In his opinion a just, fair wage had to be determined from the standpoint of both employer and employee. It is, indeed, always the interest of

15. Ibid., Vol. XXVII, Letter, 1, p. 23.
both, (employer and employee), that the work should be rightly done, and a just price obtained for it; but in the division of the profit the gain of the one may or may not be the loss of the other. It is not the master's interest to pay wages so low as to leave the men sickly or depressed, nor the workman's interest to be paid high wages if the smallness of the master's profit hinders him from enlarging his business or conducting it in a safe and liberal way."

Ruskin claims that the prosperity of any nation is dependent on the quantity of labor which it spends in obtaining and employing means of life. Therefore the aim of labor is production, of which there are two kinds, positive production and negative production; positive production is that which produces life and negative is that which produces death. War and implements of war are examples of the latter. Since production is a function of labor, production is dependent on distribution and consumption. Ruskin says, "The crown of production is consumption and the wealth of a nation is only to be estimated by what it consumes." Again, "The production of effectual value, therefore, always involves two needs; first, the production of a thing essentially useful; then the production of the capacity to use it." Ruskin thus emphasizes the

17. Ibid., Vol. XVII, Unto this Last, Essay I, p. 28.
18. Ibid., Essay IV, p. 98.
consumption end, "Wise consumption is a far more difficult art than wise production. The vital question, for the individual and the nation, never, 'how much do they make?' but, 'to what purpose do they spend'?

Ruskin goes a step farther than most economists in that he considers life as the goal of production and consumption." It is the manner and issue of consumption which are the real tests of production. Production does not consist in things laboriously made but in things servicable consumable. And the question for the nation is not how much labor it employs, but how much life it produces. For as consumption is the end and aim of production, so life is the end and aim of consumption."

In approaching his discussion of wealth he condemns economic science as the science of getting rich. "It is," he says, "the art of establishing the maximum inequality in our own favor." Men nearly always speak and write as if riches were absolute and it were possible, by following certain scientific precepts, for everybody to be rich. Whereas riches are a power like that of electricity, acting only through inequalities or negations of itself. The force of a guinea you have in your pocket depends wholly on the default of a guinea in your neighbors pocket. If he does not want it, it would be of no use to you; the degree of power it possesses depends accurately upon the need or

20. Ibid., Vol. XVII, Unto this Last, Essay 4, p. 198.
21. Ibid., Essay 11, p. 43.
22. Ibid.
desire he has for it—and the art of making yourself rich—is therefore equally and necessarily the art of keeping your neighbor poor. Riches is a relative term, expressing the magnitude of the possession of one person or society as compared with those of other persons or societies."

John Stuart Mill states that, "To be wealthy is to have a large stock of useful articles." Mill emphasizes possession. Ruskin not only emphasizes possession but also use, as we find in his definition: "Wealth is the possession of useful articles, which we can use." Mill goes on to state that, "Wealth consists of all useful and agreeable objects which possess exchangeable value." Ruskin in disagreeing with Mill calls attention to the fact that a horse is useless and therefore unsalable if no one can ride; a sword if no one can use it; and meat if no one can eat. Thus he contends that every material utility depends on its relative human capacity. He places wealth on a broader base than exchange value. He says, "The wealth of this world consists, broadly, in its healthy food-giving land, its convenient building land, its useful animals, its useful minerals, its books and works of art." His theory of wealth is shot through and through with the idea that the objects or things must be valuable and useful.

23. Ibid., Munera Pulveris, Ch. 1, p. 152.
26. Ibid., p. 23.
27. Ibid., Vol. XXIX, letter 73.
Just as he claimed that life was the goal and aim of production and consumption, so he finally arrives at the conclusion that ultimately wealth is life. "The essence of wealth consists in power over men—it follows that the nobler and the more in number the persons over whom it has power, the greater the wealth......In fact, it may be discovered that the true veins of wealth are purple......and not in rock, but in flesh......perhaps even that the final outcome and consumption of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full breathed, bright 28 eyed and happy hearted human creatures." Wealth is more than material goods. He says that wealth is life, "Including all its powers of love, of joy and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number 29 of noble and happy human creatures."

He feels that the "science of getting rich" abrogates the true laws of wealth. He says that, "The laws which at present regulate the possession of wealth are unjust, because the motive which provoke to its attainment are impure; but no socialism can effect their abrogation, unless it can abrogate covetousness and pride, which it is by no means yet in the way of doing."

28. Ibid., Unto this Last, p. 55.
29. Ibid., p. 105.
30. Ibid., Munera Pulveris, Preface, p. 144.
Money, according to Ruskin, is not wealth, only a claim to the possession of wealth. "Money," he says, "is a documentary evidence of legal claim. It is not wealth but a documentary claim to wealth, being the sign of the relative quantities of it, to which, at a given time, persons or societies, are entitled."

In speaking of currency in general, Ruskin says, "The currency of any country consists of every document acknowledging debt, which is transferable in the country." "It gives claim to the return of equivalent wealth in any place. It gives claim to the return of equivalent wealth at any time. It gives claim (practical though not legal) to the return of equivalent wealth in any kind." Currency has credit power. Its worth in exchange depends on public opinion; it also has real worth and its base has exchange value; it has power over labor, exercised by the given quantity of the base, or of the things to be got for it.

In his discussion of property, Ruskin recognizes two classes, namely, first, that which produces life such as food and clothing; second, that which produces the objects of life, consisting of those things that give pleasure or suggests and preserves thought. He also recognizes five kinds of property; (1) property necessary to life but not producible by labor, as a share in the atmosphere, (2)...

31. Ibid., Ch. 1, p. 157.
32. Ibid., Ch. 3, p. 194.
33. Ibid., p. 196.
property necessary to life but only producible by labor, and of which the possession is morally connected with labor, so that no person capable of doing the work necessary for its production has a right to it until he has done that work; food, clothing and shelter fall into this division; (3) that which conduces to bodily pleasure and conveniences, without directly tending to sustain life; perhaps sometimes indirectly tending to destroy it; jewels, gold, horses for racing fall into this division; (4) that which bestows intellectual or emotional pleasure, consisting of land set apart for purposes of delight more than for agriculture; such as books, works of art, and objects of natural history; and (5) representative property consisting of documents or money.

He contends that man's power over property is five fold; it is power of use, for himself, administration, to others, ostentation, destruction or bequest.

Ruskin did not recognize profit in exchange of goods. He agreed that the intermediary should be paid for his part in the business transaction but he failed to see any grounds for profit. He found profit only in labor. That which the intermediary took over and above his just pay for effecting the exchange he called acquisition.
According to Fawcett, professor of political economy in Oxford University at the time of Ruskin's connection with that institution, interest of money consists of three distinct parts, namely, first, reward for abstinence, second, compensation for the risk or loss, third, wages for the labor of superintendence. Ruskin maintained that to pay capitalists for labor of superintending is to put them in a class as laborers. He states further that a superintendent is necessary for overseeing the enterprise but he does not class this as labor, he calls it a reward for doing nothing.

In discussing compensation for risk, Ruskin asks, "Compensation for risk, protection from it, or reward for running it? Every prudent merchant covers his risk but does not expect to make a profit out of his risks, nor calculate on a percentage on his insurance."

Ruskin denied that interest is a payment for labor. He contended that it was either taxation or usury. In principle he was opposed to interest, especially interest for gain. He accepted the system as it then existed, as he himself held bank stock. Interest for gain or profit he opposed. This he claimed to be usury. "Usury," he states, "is properly the taking of money for the loan or use of anything (over and above what pays for wear and tear),

34. Ibid., Vol. XXVII, Letter 18, p. 363.
such use involving no care or labor on the part of the lender; it includes all investments or capital whatsoever, returning dividends, as distinguished from labor wages, 35 or profits."

Throughout his economic philosophy, Ruskin pleads for social justice; a just wage to the laborer and a just price to the consumer. He bases his economy not so much on material things as on the soul of man. Man's well-being is his first consideration. Material things must contribute to that. He says that man does not live by bread alone. Life should advance toward beautiful and lovely things. Men should seek not greater wealth but simpler pleasure; not higher fortune, but deeper felicity; making the first of possession, self possession; and honoring themselves in the harmless pride and calm pursuits of peace.

Part 2.

Ruskin's Social Philosophy.

In his discussion of economy, Ruskin keeps in mind the individual and the nation. He condemns large fortunes because of their effect on the individual (not especially the accumulator) but the laborer, and society in general. "Large fortunes," he says, "cannot honestly be made by the work of one man's hands or head." He claims that accumulations

35. Ibid., XXVIII, Letter 68, p. 669.
beyond the satisfaction of wants we do not actually possess but have stewardship over. A farmer may have one-thousand acres of land under his control, one-hundred of which will be necessary to satisfy his wants. The remainder will be held in trust by him for heirs or for the state. He possesses one hundred acres, in this case, and has stewardship over nine-hundred acres. The ideal situation is to accumulate enough and no more to satisfy human wants within a life-time. Accumulation over and beyond this is unwarranted and will work a hardship on labor.

He also has society in mind in his admonition to purchasers. "In all buying," he says, "consider, first, what condition of existence you cause in the producer of what you buy; secondly, whether the sum you have paid is just to the producer, and in due proportion lodged in his hands; thirdly, to how much clear use, for food, knowledge, or joy, this that you have bought can be put; and fourthly, to whom and in what way it can be most speedily and servically distributed."

He emphatically states that goods must be useful and servicable and contribute knowledge, food or joy to the consumer. We are committing an injustice to the producer when we continue his condition of squalor and misery by purchasing goods produced under conditions of squalor. By purchasing goods produced in sweated shops because of a cheap price we

37. Ibid., Vol. XVII, essay 4, p. 113.
continue the miserable condition of the producers of those goods.

He was not alarmed, as were some economists preceding him, about the world becoming overpopulated. Malthus, an economist of the latter part of the eighteenth century held that the population was increasing more rapidly than the means of subsistence. He did not anticipate man's capacity for invention. Ruskin, in refutation of his contention says, "there is not yet nor will yet be, for ages be any real overpopulation of the world." As remedies for overpopulation he advocates, colonization, bringing in of waste lands and discouragement of marriage.

Ruskin's views of the relationship of men and women was beyond the views of men of his time. Man, as the breadwinner should be the head of the house but the woman was accorded the right of ownership of property and for this reason should have the right and privilege of the ballot. Marriage was regarded by Ruskin as a sacred institution and all who were physically and mentally fit should enter the marriage state. He held that the state should assist those who were unable to marry because of lack of a means of livelihood. Education should culminate in an engagement to marry. He says, "Permission to marry should be the reward held in sight of its youth during the entire latter part of the course of their education. No girl should receive permission to marry before her seventeenth year nor a
boy before his twenty-first birthday." He maintains that the ideal age is eighteen years for the girl and twenty-two for the boy. Permission to marry should be given publicly. "Every bachelor and Rosiere," he contends, "should be entitled to claim, if they need it, according to their position in life, a fixed sum from the state, for seven years from the day of their marriage for the setting up of their homes."

He treats banking from the social standpoint as he has in mind the protection of depositors when he says, "I do not mean that all bankers' clerks should be partners in the bank; but I do mean that all bankers should be members of a great national body, answerable as a society for all deposits; and that the private business of speculating with other people's money should take another name than that of banking."

Ruskin condemned the capitalistic system and factory system in no uncertain terms from the standpoint of society. He saw the machine displacing labor thus creating an unemployment problem. He says, "No machines will increase the possibilities of life. They only increase the possibilities of idleness." He also condemned machines from a health and aesthetic standpoint. He says that steam driven machines, pollute the air, water and earth and do not bring happiness. He approves water and wind driven machines because he considers these two forces

39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., Vol. XVII, p. 317
41. Ibid., Vol. XVII, p. 87
natural forces. "Whatever machinery," he says, "is needful for human purposes can be driven by wind and water."

The competitive system also fell under his condemnation. He branded it as cold and calculating and based solely on the "science of getting rich." The human element was lacking and the soul of man was disregarded. He thus describes the competitive system: "The modern Politico-Economic slave is a new and far more injured species, condemned in compulsory idleness, for fear he should spoil other people trades; the beautiful logical condition of the national theory of economy in this matter being that, if you are a shoemaker, it is a law of Heaven that you must sell your goods under their price, in order to destroy the trade of other shoemakers; but if you are not a shoemaker, and are going shoeless and lame, it is a law of Heaven, that you must not cut yourself a bit of cowhide to put between your foot and stones, because that would interfere with the total trade of shoemaking."

It is his contention that economic crises and distress therefrom are not caused by overproduction. "The statement of principle, that it is overproduction which is the cause of distress, is accurately the most foolish thing, not only hitherto ever said by men, but which it is possible for men ever to say,

42. Ibid., Vol. XXVIII, p. 138.
43. Ibid., Vol. XXVII, letter 3, p. 48.
respecting their own business."

In time of economic crises he contended that, "Whenever there is pressure of poverty to be met, all enforced occupation should be directed to the production of useful articles, only, that is to say, of food, of simple clothing, of lodging, or of means of conveying, distributing, and preserving these. The employment of persons in a useless business cannot relieve ultimate distress."

He anticipates our present economic distress and he also recognizes that men must be put to work but he maintains that that work must be useful and must contribute to public health and enjoyment. The classes of work for which men can be organized he gives as follows: (1) road making, (2) bringing in of waste lands, (3) harbor making, (4) porterage, (5) repair of buildings, (6) dress making and (7) works of art.

Education in Ruskin's mind was of great importance particularly vocational education. He maintained that the government should operate schools for youths. In these schools the youth should be taught, (a) laws of health; the calling by which the youth is to live and habits of gentleness and justice. It was also an idea of Ruskin's that market gluts could be prevented largely by directing youths into other trades. Elsewhere he states that the first elements of state education should be calculated equally for the advantage of

44. Ibid., Vol. XXVII, letter 5, p. 80.
45. Ibid., Vol. XXVII, appendix VIII, p. 545.
every order of person composing the state. The elements of this general state education should be briefly these; (1) laws of health; (2) the true mental graces, (3) reverence and compassion.

Also in his scheme of education he stressed the teaching of useful things with the hands. He said that every youth in the state from the king's son downwards should learn to do something finely and thoroughly with his hands. He contends that the most useful thing that boys learn in school are riding, rowing and cricketing. If he were living today he would likely include baseball, soccer and football in this list. In other words learning what to do is better than absorbing book knowledge. He emphasized physical skill.

We also find that Ruskin had very decided views on methods of instruction and motivation of effort, that are worthy of consideration. "I believe," he says, "all emulation to be false motive and all giving of prizes, a false means. Boys should work for works sake, not to have the desire to surpass other boys. The aim of the teaching should be to prove to him, and strengthen in him his own separate gift, not puff him into swollen rivalry with those who are everlastingly greater than he."

Ruskin was a strong advocate of the ownership of public utilities as we find from the following: "Neither the highways
nor the railroads of any nation should belong to any private person. All means of public transit should be provided at public expense, by public administration where such means are needed, and the public should be its own shareholder." Not only should the government own and operate public utilities such as public roads and railroads but they should be placed on a non-profit basis; they should pay their own expense and operation and no more.

In speaking of government he says, "Any form of Government will work, provided the governors are real, and the people obey them; and one will work, if the governors are unreal and the people disobedient." He was opposed to the American System because he felt that the people had too much freedom. He leaned rather toward an aristocracy, as opposed to a democracy. The following statement throws more light on his position, "All forms of government are good just as far as they attain this one vital necessity of policy—that the wise and kind, few or many, shall govern the unwise and the unkind; and they are evil so far as they miss of this or reverse it. If there be many foolish persons in a state, and few wise, then it is good that the few govern, and if there be many wise, and few foolish, then it is good that the many govern; and if many be wise yet one wiser, then it is good that one should govern."

47. Ibid., Vol. XVII, appendix, VI, p. 531.
48. Ibid., Vol. XXVIII, p. 651.
49. Ibid., XVII, ch. 5, p. 248-249.
Regardless of kind of government, Ruskin holds that, "The first duty of a state is to see that every child born therein shall be well housed, clothed, fed, and educated, till it attain years of discretion. But in order to the effecting of this the government must have an authority over the people of which we now do not so much as dream." It would seem from this statement that the individual was a creature of the state and that all individual initiative was lost. But we find that Ruskin did not go quite that far with his theory as he states, "All effectual advancement towards true felicity of the human race must be by individual not public effort."

Ruskin condemns modern government as being too costly. He lays the blame where it obviously belongs, on war. He does not necessarily blame the government but the nation as a whole. "This (tremendous cost), however, is not essentially the fault of the government. If nations choose to play at war, they will always find their government willing to lead the game, and soon coming under that term of Aristophanes, 'Shield-Sellers'. "Nor have we the least right to complain of our government being expensive, so long as we set the government precisely to do the work which brings no return." Ruskin, therefore, places the blame for the cost of government not on officials but on the citizens of the nation, who in turn are responsible for putting the officials in office.

50. Ibid., Vol. XVII, Time and Tide, letter 13, p. 337.
51. Ibid., Vol. XVII, essay 4, p. 111.
52. Ibid., Vol. XVII, essay 4, p. 251.
53. Ibid.
Plural voting was another point in Ruskin's scheme of government. "Every man upwards of twenty, who had been convicted of no legal crime, should have his say in the matter of government; but afterwards a louder voice as he grows older, and approves himself wiser. If he has one vote at twenty, he should have two at thirty, four at forty and ten at fifty. For every single vote which he has with an income of £100 a year, he should have ten with an income of £1000, (provided you first see to it that wealth is, as nature intended it to be, the reward of sagacity and industry." From this we conclude that he favored both an educational and property qualification for the franchise.

In concluding this part, I believe we can say that the central theme of Ruskin's social philosophy is the well-being of society. That government is the best government that enhances the well-being of society; that education is the best education that makes youth happy and equips them so that they can earn a livelihood at some useful labor. Capitalism and the factory system had no place in his scheme of things.

Part 3.

Ruskin's Social Experiments.

No theorist is content until he can put his theories into practice. In 1871 Ruskin started the St. George fund with a donation of £7000. Afterwards a company was organized and

given legal standing. He depended on gifts of land and on the land he placed tenants. The organization is known as the Company of St. George. Both tenant and officers had to subscribe to strict rules and regulations. Ten per cent of one's income was set aside for buying land for the nation; the cultivation of the land was entrusted to a body of supposedly well taught and well cared for peasants. Schools were to be erected for the teaching of the laborers. Persons upon entering the guild promised to give, of as much as could be spared, a tenth of their income; the Master of the Guild was elected by a majority of the guildsmen and was at any time subject to deposition, by a majority of the voters but was uncontrolled in authority while in office, over all the proceedings of the guild; the guild held its land in its own name; its capital was vested in trustees chosen by and accepted by the guildsmen. No one but the Master could incur any debt in the name of the guild. General subscriptions could be paid directly to the account of the guild at the Union Bank, Chancery Lane or to Mr. Egbert, Laxey, Isle of Man. The rents and profits that were derived from the estates and properties of the guild were to have been applied to the developing of the land and the physical, intellectual, moral, social and religious improvement of the residents of the guild.

Ruskin sets forth the purpose of the guild as follows:

"(1) The guild was originally founded with the intention of
showing how much food-producing land might be recovered by well-applied labor from the barren or neglected districts of nominally cultivated countries; (2) to show what tone and degree of refined education could be given to persons maintaining themselves by agricultural labor; (3) to convince some portions of the upper class of society that such occupation was more honorable, and consistent with higher thoughts and nobler pleasures, than their, at present favorite profession of war,"

Ruskin was the first Master of the guild although he admits his incompetency. Ruskin, as master of the guild reported the holdings of the guild for 1879 as follows; (1) The Sheffield Estate, consisting of eight plots of land or about one acre; (2) the Bewdley Estate, consisting of twenty-six acres; (3) the Cloughton Estate consisting of two plots of land or one and one-half acres; (4) the Mickley Estate, consisting of about thirteen acres and (5) the Barmouth Estate, a small plot of land on which were eight houses. No more land was added by gift during the time of Ruskin as Master. Practically all the land obtained through gift was rolling, bleak and barren. Ruskin desired barren barren land on which to carry on his experiments in soil building and reclamation, but the soil received was poorer than desired. No factories were to appear except those depending on wind or water power. No steam driven machinery was tolerated. John Ruskin's project had a three fold ob-

55. Ibid., Vol. XXX, p. 45.
jective: to teach better methods of agriculture, to teach better methods in industry and to teach art.

The results were not gratifying for several reasons; first, Ruskin was really unfitted as the Master of the guild on account of his health at this time; he was also unfitted to work with his agricultural projects on account of lack of experience; the same was true of industrial experiments; in art he was well qualified and this part of his program seems to have succeeded better than the others; second, the type of men he got on the land was not the type to carry on experiments successfully; third, the land was so poor that a living could not be made; in fact Ruskin had to use much of his own fortune in his projects; still another reason for lack of success was, that the land lay in isolated plots widely separated making supervision difficult. His program in art progressed much better than that in agriculture. He established at Wakely in Sheffield an art gallery which is still in existence. It was used largely as a place to exhibit his own works.

In connection with the St. George Guild there were associated experiments such as the revival of spinning and weaving of wool and flax. An attempt was made to teach the youth the lost art of spinning and weaving and spinning by hand. The country was combed for old spinning wheels. All clothing was to be made by hand. It was actually a rebellion against the factory system. For the most part, the project failed because
youth did not take kindly to this reactionary movement. Youth could also make more by working in the factories.

Plans were made to transplant these social experiments to the continent of Europe and to America. One was established in Tennessee. None were successful. Owen, Blanc, and Shaftesbury were others that carried on similar experiments. Actual results fell far short of the ideals that they pictured. The human factor cannot be measured. Edward T. Cook, Ruskin's biographer, claims that Ruskin's agricultural program did start interest in soil conservation which did give good results. A back to the farm movement was started. Also there is no doubt but that the interest was aroused in social problems.
CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION OF RUSKIN'S PHILOSOPHY

Ruskin differed from all other economists of his day in that they built their political economy on conditions as they existed while Ruskin built his on conditions as he thought they should exist. Ruskin was an idealist. In dealing with political economy he treated it with man as the central figure. In dealing with man he saw more than just flesh and blood; he saw a soul. All political economy must contribute to the development of the soul of man in the way of joy and happiness.

His contempt for the political economy as taught by his contemporaries can be seen in the following statement; "While I admit there is such a thing as mercantile economy, distinguished from social, I have always said that neither Mill, Fawcett nor Bastiat knew the contemptible science they professed to teach." 1

Much of the criticism of Ruskin's teaching arose from the fact that he opposed the teachings of economists of good standing such as Ricardo, Mill, Bastiat, Malthus and Fawcett. Another criticism arose from the fact that he was an art critic and in his field he was highly regarded; but it was thought preposterous for him to enter a field which he was considered wholly ignorant.

1. Note by Ruskin to 'A Disciple of Plato'.

It is also true that he criticized severely some of the economists without giving close study of their works. Be that as it may, he is wrong in some of his theories but sound in much of his doctrine and teaching.

It must be admitted that Hobson is right when he states that when Mr. Ruskin insists that, "The essence of the mis-teaching of your day concerning wealth of any kind consists of intrinsic value," he is denouncing the lack of principle which underlies the so-called philosophy of utilitarianism in its refusal to furnish any satisfactory check upon short range expediency of conduct. Ruskin contends that intrinsic value is of more importance than exchange value because intrinsic value is the absolute power of anything to support life.

Ruskin was ahead of the economists of his day in advocating a high wage scale for labor. The wage-fund doctrine was in vogue at that time. It represented wages as fixed in quantity at any given time by natural causes affecting the growth of capital, upon which no action of the workers themselves exercised any influence. The economist who held to this theory justified the payment of the lowest market wages by contending that the greatest average work would be obtained from the laborer, and therefore, the fullest benefit to the community and thus to the laborer himself. Ruskin, on the other hand, contended that higher wages resulted in a contented laborer and that a happier workman accomplished more; also a wage above the sub-
sistence level would result in greater consumption on the part of labor. Malthus taught that natural law prevented wages from remaining above the subsistence level, owing to the stimulus given by higher wages to an increase of the laboring population, which by flooding the labor market must speedily bring down any temporary rise. Ruskin's counter contention to the over-population argument was that there would never be an over-population of the world. In view of modern science it would seem that Ruskin's position is stronger than that of Malthus; likewise his position in regard to higher wages for labor.

Ruskin's invariable-standard-of-wages-argument is fallacious. It may be true that a good physician and a poor one will get the same wages for his services and that the good one will be rewarded by being chosen in preference to the poor physician. But nothing is to prevent the poor physician from offering his services at half price, and either displace the good physician or force him by his competition to work for an inadequate sum. From this we find that if the wages are invariable the uniform wage will be forced to the level of the poor workman. If the good workman is worthy of his hire he will receive more than his less competent brother, but this means a variable wage.

Ruskin, undoubtedly, is justified in his condemnation of division of labor even though commercial economy of his day and of our own time has approved of it on the grounds that the cost of production will be lowered. Ruskin, on the other hand,
condemns it on account of its degrading effect on the laborer. He says, "It confines him (the laborer) to the performance of some single, narrow routine task which calls for no exercise of his individual taste, feels no genuine interest, and educates only one activity starving all the others in order to impart to this a purely mechanical accuracy and perfection. It is not the labor that is divided but the man. It is a sad account of a man to give of himself that he has spent his life in opening a valve and never made anything but the eighteenth part of a pin." In this contention he was anticipating much unrest on the part of labor which is recognized as being caused by over mechanization. The laborer knows not the joy that comes of having completed or made some piece of work. The only incentive the laborer has to work is the pay envelope he receives at stipulated intervals. The mechanized worker has not the joy or contentment as had the independent worker who finishes a pair of shoes and looks with satisfaction upon the fruits of his toil. In condemning mechanized labor Ruskin was looking at the soul of man and the results of such labor upon the soul of the laborer. In this respect Ruskin went farther than any economist of his day or since.

He rebelled against the competitive system which was supported by the economists of his time and by economists since; although there seems to be a tendency today on the part

of some economists to break with the competitive system. Ruskin says, "Government and cooperation are in all things the law of life; anarchy and competition the laws of death." He contends that the foundation of the competitive system is the profit motive or as he calls it, "the science of getting rich." Labor was but a slave of capital sacrificed on the altar of profits. The laborer was recognized as a creature not possessing a soul. There is food for thought in Ruskin's condemnation of the competitive system. Ruskin contends for cooperation under the government. Recent developments in this country would justify his condemnation of the competitive system and also his justification of cooperation of industry under governmental direction. Weaknesses of the competitive system appeared under economic stress and industrial distress and it was recognized that cooperation must displace cut-throat competition which is the key stone of the competitive system.

In contending that there can be no profit save in labor Ruskin approached the doctrine of the Physiocrats. The Physiocrats contended that production should be confined to the getting of actual materials from the earth, while Ruskin allowed that profit may be made by altering the shape of materials. In other words Ruskin held that profit could be made in processing the products of the earth. Both, he and the Physiocrats denied that profits could come from capital as is now recognized. Both also denied profit in exchange. Ruskin called receiving
money in this manner acquisition. Ruskin recognized the necessity of an exchange or intermediary but contended that this intermediary should receive nothing above wages of labor in bringing about the transaction. According to Ruskin a stock buyer or grain buyer has no right to receive more than wages for assembling these products for the farmers and shipping them to the markets. We recognize that one who at his own risk assembles products and ships them to the markets and sells on a rising market is entitled to the difference to his purchasing and selling price; this is considered his profit after expense allowance is deducted.

In his discussion of interest he seems to confuse interest with usury. Undoubtedly his attitude toward interest was influenced by the attitude of the early church toward interest and also by Biblical teaching. At the time of his condemnatory remarks he held bank stocks on which he received interest. He defended his position by saying in substance that that was the accepted principle of economics. At the same time he challenged the principle. His opposition to exorbitant rates of interest is justifiable. At first he designated this as usury, but as he grew older his condemnation of usury came to include interest. The principle of interest which he accepted in his younger days was denied in his declining years as he calls all interest either taxation or usury.

He agrees with the Social-Democrats on three important points: (1) the abolition of the competitive system of industry
under private control, for profit, and the substitution of publicly organized industry for use; (2) the abolition of rent and interest; (3) the establishment of a labor basis of exchange. Ruskin states in Fors Clavigera, "The userers trade will be abolished utterly that the employer will be paid justly for his superintendence, but not for his capital; and the landlord paid for his superintendence of the cultivation of land, when he is able to direct wisely."

He approaches the doctrine of Karl Marx when he contends that the quantity of labor should be used as the basis of exchange for commodities. He is a state socialist to the extent that he advocates public ownership of railroads and roads. Ruskin held that all such public utilities should be operated on a non-profit basis. He did not recognize individual ownership of land and primogeniture. He even looked to peasant proprietorship as an economic basis of a healthy society. He says, "No landlord has any business with building cottages for his people. Every peasant should be able to build his own cottage—to build it to his own mind and to have a mind to build it to." Countries since the time of Ruskin have adopted the good features of the various schools of socialistic thought. Public ownership of public utilities is today regarded as an advancement; (likewise as to the right of the individual to the ownership of property, particularly land.) Ruskin also believed

that everybody should work in common and do simple work for his
dinner; and that fortunes of private persons should be small
and of little account in the state.

His theory of conservation of food in time of plenty for
years of scarcity is one that will probably attract more atten-
tion in the future. As countries become more thickly populated
a scarcity of food in one year will entail untold hardship and
suffering not only because of lack of food but also on account
of high prices due to the scarcity.

In conclusion it might be said that Ruskin exposed three
of the deepest and most destructive maladies of industrial society
first, the prevalent mechanization of work and life as shown by
his opposition to division of labor and the competitive system;
second, justice as an economic basis of all bargaining, as shown
when he advocates a just wage, just from the standpoint of both
the employer and employee; also when he contends that the buyer
must keep in mind the status of the laborer and the producer
when purchasing goods; and third, the definite forms of waste
and injury to work and human character arising from trade com-
petition. On the constructive side he has laid a true scientific
foundation of a science and art of social economics by insist-
ing upon (1) the reduction of commercial to human costs and
utilities as the true foundation of a theory of wealth; (2) the
inclusion of non-commercial as well as commercial values; and
(3) the establishment of a social standard of goodness or hap-
piness as an ideal. Honest production, just distribution, wise consumption--these words summarize the reforms the necessity of which he labored to enforce.
Chapter V
The Influence of Ruskin's Works on the Social and Political Life of the World

In estimating or evaluating the influence an individual may have on the social thinking of a people, and the crystallization of those thoughts into a composite whole, one must consider the reputation of that individual as a writer or speaker or both; also one must consider the circulation of his works; also the size of his audiences and the intellectual status of the readers and listeners.

Ruskin had already attained a considerable reputation as a writer and lecturer on various phases of art. He had traveled and studied in England and on the continent. He was a voluminous writer and was accepted as an authority in the field of art. Anything that he uttered was likely to be listened to with attention and anything that he wrote was likely to be read.

His lectures were not delivered to the masses. Rather they were delivered to the intellectual elite of his time. His audiences were composed largely of college students and other educated people. It seems that he was heard eagerly as the lecture room was often filled long before the time for the lecture. However, an audience of two-thousand people was considered a large audience and it seems that that was the capacity of the lecture room. Edward T. Cook, Ruskin's biographer, speaks of many being turned away and of many being compelled to stand.
This was the case when he delivered a lecture on Political Economy, now found in, "Unto this Last."

His essays on Political Economy were not so well received as were those on art. John Stuart Mill and Malthus were the accepted authorities on Political Economy and anything that conflicted with their doctrines was most certainly to arouse antagonism. John Ruskin was the first writer of any repute except Carlyle, to greatly disagree with the old order and publish his convictions. William M. Thackery, also a man of letters, and a close friend of John Ruskin was the editor of the Cornhill Magazine. Thackery agreed to publish Ruskin's essays on Political Economy, later published in book form as, 'Unto this Last'.

The Cornhill Magazine was a new venture and Thackery had just assumed the editorship. Consequently we may assume that it did not have a very wide circulation nor had it yet established a reputation as a publication. However Carlyle in his letter of congratulation to Ruskin after the appearance of the essays in the magazine speaks of the essays going into half a million British heads at once.

The publication of the essays on Political Economy had no sooner started in the Cornhill Magazine than a storm of protest arose from the adherents to the established order of Political Economy. The Saturday Review and the Scotsman carried scathing criticisms of the first essays appearing. After publishing three essays, Thackery wrote that he would have to discontinue
the series, stating that the life of the magazine was threatened. The fact that other magazines published reviews and comments, although uncomplimentary, indicate that the essays were being read and discussed. John Ruskin's father who was a merchant was not in sympathy with his son's ideas on political economy. The elder Ruskin was torn between loyalty to his son and loyalty to his business and the old social and economic order. John's father attempted to discourage his son in his efforts at writing on economic subjects and to return to the field of art but without success.

After being stopped in the Cornhill Magazine, the essays were arranged in book form and published in 1862. They sold very slowly at first, probably due to the fact that Messrs. Smith, Elder and Company, the publishers did not press the sale of the book. Ruskin always fixed the selling price of his books, which price did not allow much profit to the publisher. The first edition consisted of a thousand copies and after ten years was still unexhausted. In 1873, 102 copies still remained. In 1874 he reissued the book on his own account and for the next thirty years the annual sale was two-thousand copies. "Unto this Last" was published abroad and was translated into French, Italian and German. It also had a wide sale in the United States.

In 1862, through the influence of Froude, the Historian, and Carlyle, the Frasers Magazine consented to publish Ruskin's
essays on economic and social subjects. After four essays had appeared it, too bowed before the storm of protest from other publications and from its own subscribers.

Sesame and Lilies, the most popular of Ruskin's works on Social Philosophy was read widely both at home and abroad. It was translated into French, Italian, Spanish and Swedish.

It is difficult to say how many people read his words on political economy during the years from 1860 to the time of his death or even since his death. It has been suggested that many more read his works than the number of volumes sold indicate as many people, especially laborers borrowed books. After Ruskin undertook the publication of his own works the sales increased greatly as was indicated in the case of the publication of 'Unto this Last'. Opposition to his works lessened as the close of the century was approached.

It is also difficult to say how much of the reform movement during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century is due to Ruskin. It is known that he was the only prominent man of letters except Carlyle that fought the old economic order and social conditions growing out of the factory system. He did it at the expense of his reputation. He lost prestige by his attacks on the social order. So long as he confined his attentions to art he was popular. It is also known that his reform agitations preceded the reform measures by several years. Also many things
that he advocated have been realized, both in England and elsewhere. He also pointed out the fallacies in some of Mill's political economy, such as a demand for goods is not a demand for labor.

1 Edward T. Cook, his biographer, suggests that the reforms of 1875 during the ministry of Disraeli was due to the teachings of Ruskin. In Sesame and Lilies he advocated a better housing program, education for both boys and girls on a nationwide scale and a program of public health. Disraeli carried these reforms through Parliament in 1875. We know that Disraeli was an opportunist and a shrewd politician who would seize upon any idea or suggestion that would embarrass the other party and would prove beneficial to his own. Ruskin had been urging these reforms for fifteen years.

It is now known that his influence on labor was great. The Trade Union Act of 1870 gave freedom of combination to labor. It is now known that he had much to do with the rise of the Labor Party in England. At the convening of Parliament in 1906 it was found that a large contingent of labor members were present. A journalist sent each member a questionnaire asking what book had influenced them. The book which appeared in the greatest number of lists was 'Unto this Last'.

2 In his social experiments he started a movement toward

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1. The Life of Ruskin, Cook, Edward T., p. 138
soil conservation and reclamation. A back-to-the-soil movement was started. His advocacy of rights of women to hold property and to vote undoubtedly had its influence in gaining for women legal recognition of those rights.

Hobson in evaluating his work and life concludes as follows, "He exposed three of the deepest and most destructive maladies of modern industrial society: (1) injustice as an economic basis of all bargaining; (2) prevalent mechanization of work and life; (3) the definite forms of waste and injury to work and human character arising from trade competition. On the constructive side he has laid a true scientific foundation of a science and of social economics by insisting upon, (1) the reduction of commercial to human costs and utilities as the true foundation of the theory of wealth; (2) the inclusion of non-commercial as well as commercial values; (3) the establishment of a social standard of goodness or happiness as an ideal.

Honest production, just distribution, wise consumption—these words summarize the reforms the necessity of which he labored to enforce."


This author treats John Ruskin's philosophy from the standpoint of ethics and is of little value in this thesis.


These volumes were valuable in that they gave a picture of Ruskin, the man. They were valuable in compiling chapter 1 of this thesis.


These volumes were valuable in that they present the life of John Ruskin together with a brief explanation of his social doctrines. They were of special value in preparing chapter 1 of this thesis.


This volume while interesting was of but little value.


Of the entire set volumes XXVII, XVII, XXVIII, XXIX and XXX were the most valuable as source material for this thesis.

This volume was valuable in the writing of this thesis in that it gives the social ideas of Ruskin's contemporaries. The authorities are secondary, however.


This is a critical analysis of the social reforms of John Ruskin. One has the feeling that the author is biased in his views. However, it is interesting to compare this volume with recent economic thought.


This volume was valuable in that it gives an account of the growth and development of economic thought. It was valuable in the development of chapter 2 of this thesis which treats of the background of Ruskin's philosophy.