

JOHN RUSKIN

MODERN PAINTERS

MODERN PAINTERS

VOL.II

"OF IDEAS OF BEAUTY"
AND
"OF THE IMAGINATIVE FACULTY"

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"Accuse me not
Of arrogance,....
If, having walked with Nature,
And offered, far as frailty would allow,
My heart a daily sacrifice to Truth,
I now affirm of Nature and of Truth,
Whom I have served, that their Divinity
Revolts, offended at the ways of men.
Philosophers, who, though the human soul
Be of a thousand faculties composed,
And twice ten thousand interests, do yet prize
This soul, and the transcendent universe,
No more than as a mirror that reflects
To proud Self-love her own intelligence."

WORDSWORTH

*RE-ARRANGED IN TWO VOLUMES, AND REVISED BY THE
AUTHOR*

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MODERN PAINTERS.

PART III.

OF THE IMAGINATIVE FACULTY

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

In revising this terminal division of my former second volume, I find less to be corrected or condemned than in the previous chapters; but far more, were it conveniently now possible, to be supplied. The treatment of this part of the subject is not only incomplete, but involves the omission of all the most important practical questions in the useless curiosity of analysis: just as a common anatomist describes the action of muscles in walking, without thereby helping anybody to walk; or those of a bird's wing in flying, without defining the angles of its stroke to the air. I have thus examined at tedious length the various actions of human conception and memory, without helping any one to conceive, or to remember; and, at least in this part of the book, scarcely touching at all on the primary questions (both moral and intellectual) how far the will has power over the imagination. It was perhaps in reality fortunate that I should not have entered on these higher inquiries till I was older and more experienced; nor shall I now attempt to remedy such defects by hasty patching of the text or fortuitous addition of notes to it. One or two introductory observations may, however, make this imperfect essay more useful, so far as it reaches.

In the first place, the reader must be warned not to trouble himself with the distinctions, attempted, or alluded to, between Fancy and Imagination. The subject is jaded, the matter of it insignificant, and the settlement of it practically impossible, not merely because everybody has his own theory,

but also because nobody ever states his own in terms on which other people are agreed. I am myself now entirely indifferent which word I use; and should say of a work of art that it was well "fancied," or well "invented," or well "imagined," with only some shades of different meaning in the application of the terms, rather dependent on the matter treated, than the power of mind involved in the treatment. I might agree with Sir Piercie Shafton that his doublet was well fancied, or that his figure of speech was well conceived, and might perhaps reserve the word "Imagined" for the design of an angel's dress by Giotto, or the choice of a simile by Dante. But such distinctions are scarcely more than varieties of courtesy or dignity in the use of words; and I could not in essential nature of faculty distinguish Sir Piercie's designing from Giotto's, except, as I said, with respect to the matter of it; and the fixture of his attention rather on the dress than the angel. Briefly, the power of the human mind to invent circumstances, forms, or scenes, at its pleasure, may be generally and properly called "imagination;" while the especial power of intellect required to handle the different subjects of invention, varies in so many modes that it is of no use to try to find words for them. Sir Piercie (to keep to one example) is at no loss for new metaphors, or for new patterns of colour, but he is struck dumb when required to invent a story; and stands helpless by, hearing with mere amazement Mysie Happer's flowing relation to the enquiring landlord, "that Ball, her palfrey, had fallen by the way, because he had been overwrought with carrying home the last melder of meal to the portioner of Longhope, and that she had turned in Ball to graze in the Taskers' Park, near Cripplecross, for he had stood as still as Lot's wife with very weariness; and that the knight had courteously insisted she should ride behind him, and that she had brought him to her kind friend's hostelry rather than to proud Peter Peddie's, who got his malt at the Mellerstane Mills; and that he must get the best the house afforded, and that he must get it ready in a moment of time, and that she was ready to help in the kitchen." It seems to me, indeed, probable, from my general experience, and observation, that the distinction thus implied by Scott between the gifts of ornamental design, and of circumstantial invention, may be well-grounded, and perhaps