The Letters of John Ruskin to Lord and Lady Mount-Temple
For E. P. B., J. B., and R. N. B.
In the noble tradition of English epistolary art—now so sadly waning—the position of John Ruskin remains to be evaluated. Unlike the correspondence of other eminent Victorians such as Eliot, Thackeray, and Clough, the turbulent letters of Ruskin, amounting to many thousands and scattered throughout the world, have yet to be assembled, edited, and presented complementary to his major writings. Certainly, Ruskin was a capacious correspondent who wrote lengthily to myriad persons about myriad subjects. Indeed, no incident seemed too inconspicuous to record, no correspondent too insignificant to address; for Ruskin cast his net widely, and while his letters do not consistently discriminate between the trivial and the relevant, they sustain a high level of pertinence in terms of the social and aesthetic questions which bedeviled the Victorians. In fact, his intensity of feeling, comprehension of vision, and passionate concern for truth, as they play over the restlessness of the age, define, evoke, or interpret for the twentieth century, as no other pen is able, the numerous problems confronting a troubled and perplexed people.

No less perplexed than his fellow-countrymen was John Ruskin himself; but his bewilderment took, to his utter misfortune, heterogeneous forms. And there seems small doubt but that his torrents of prose on subjects so diverse as architecture, botany, art ancient and modern, geology, the state of society, and innumerable other components of Victorian ex-
perience derive, in part at least, from his concern for the "condition of England." His major—and many minor—works can, in fact, be read as stormy manifestations of anxieties about sundry contemporary issues. Similarly, these apprehensions are also evident in the letters he wrote his many correspondents. But Ruskin was not only disquieted over the vexing enigmas of his time. He was also the victim, from his earliest years, of emotional turmoil. And his personal problems come confusedly to the fore in scattered references in prose works and in at least two large collections of letters, one of which deals with his ill-contracted marriage.¹ The other is the present volume in which signal emphasis falls upon Ruskin's disastrous courtship of Rose La Touche, the ethereal Irish girl who died young.

But before introducing the *dramatis personae* of this correspondence, a word on the present edition seems appropriate. *The Letters of John Ruskin to Lord and Lady Mount-Temple* grew out of a previous editorial undertaking of mine, *Ruskin's Letters from Venice, 1851-52.*² During the preparation of the latter volume, it became constantly clearer that of approximately twenty-five volumes of Ruskin's correspondence already published—including two sturdy volumes in the Library Edition³ of his *Works*—the editorial procedures were frequently haphazard and, in general, inadequate. In sequence after sequence of his letters one noted faulty transcription, disregard for textual accuracy, incorrect identification, inadequate annotation and, in one case at least, bowdlerizing of considerable magnitude. Furthermore, dubious use of Ruskin's letters appeared in biographical studies. Wrenched out of context, a portion of a larger correspondence would be used—sometimes with excisions made in individual letters—to elucidate some phase of Ruskin's career or life; and sometimes letters incorrectly dated were employed to illuminate an in-

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² New Haven, 1955.
cident after, or antecedent to, their actual writing. For these reasons, as well as in the interests of future Ruskin biographers, it seemed pertinent to consider the Mount-Temple correspondence in the fullest extent possible. For until Ruskin’s letters are conscientiously edited, an impartial and objective biographical and critical estimate of him will not be feasible. In a sense, then, the letters to Lord and Lady Mount-Temple form a conspicuous part of the large jigsaw puzzle that is the life and work of John Ruskin.

The collecting of as many letters as possible from Ruskin to Lord and Lady Mount-Temple commenced hopefully, for 137 of the 234 letters of this edition are in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Thus over one-half the manuscript was immediately at hand. Further enquiries at customary academic sources yielded a good many more; and private owners, with one lamentable exception, who ultimately succumbed, were extremely generous in permitting the use of their letters. In fact, except for one trying experience, the search for, and acquisition of, letters progressed smoothly and pleasantly. But this is not to suggest that every letter Ruskin wrote the Mount-Temples is here presented. Unquestionably, some are missing, though not as many as might at first be supposed. A cursory glance at the letters shows that Ruskin concentrated his epistolary addresses to the Mount-Temples in 1866-68 and 1870-72, times of tension in his relations with Rose La Touche. It is also apparent that his correspondence with them increased—but not in emotional intensity—with the development of the St. George’s Guild. However, the range of the sequence—from 1856 until 1888—while broad, is, in one sense, limited by the intensity of the relationship between Ruskin and Lord and Lady Mount-Temple to those times when he experienced emotional or intellectual stress.

To establish a clear text was the obligation subsequent to the gathering of available letters. Fortunately, a large part of the correspondence existed, as noted, in manuscript form in the Pierpont Morgan Library; this, of course, greatly facilitated the solution of textual problems. But for some letters recourse to photostatic copies was the only way of obtaining their inclusion in this edition. And, regarding the few Mount-
Temple letters first printed in the *Works*, I have, with some reluctance, been compelled to rely upon the transcriptions of Cook and Wedderburn as the originals cannot be traced. Another small but important group of six letters was most kindly copied by the owner. The result, then, was a large manuscript, deriving mostly from original or photostatic sources, all illustrative of the numerous quirks of Ruskin’s letter-writing art. And those idiosyncrasies are, wherever possible, retained in the present edition. Consequently, Ruskin’s odd spellings and excessive use of dashes remain, for deletion or “tidying-up” of any sort would result in failure to evoke the tone and tenor of the letters and, ultimately, in misrepresentation of the man himself. Thus only minor normalizations are made: all new paragraphs are indented, full stops are added where Ruskin, in his haste, omitted them, and, very rarely, another punctuation mark—a comma, for instance—is supplied to clarify the meaning or intention of a passage. Where departure from the normally acceptable is flagrant the editorial *sic* is inserted. But emendations are kept to a rigid minimum, so that the reader may have before him a text as close as possible to the original.

Ruskin was notoriously casual in the dating of his correspondence. And as readers will observe, the initial annotation for many of the letters concerns the attempt—not untouched by a quiet desperation—of the editor to establish a precise date. Indeed, the time of writing is one of the most important and bewildering aspects of the editing of this text. And it is hoped that critics—kind and unkind—will not consider the editor dwells too long upon, and seems to make too much of, the dating of individual letters. In only two cases does an envelope supply a date; on other occasions either the day and the month or the day, the month, and the year are given. Quite often a letter has no date at all. But internal evidence—a reference to a lecture, an echo of a phrase in Ruskin’s diary, a social engagement, or a comment on his work in progress—often provides the clue that delivers the editor from unhappy ignorance. On occasion, though, one must admit defeat—as in Letters 47 and 128—and finally give a date that only by courtesy could be termed satisfactory.
One of the more agreeable tasks of an editor is to express his appreciation to those persons and organizations that have assisted him. I wish, first, to thank the American Philosophical Society for two extremely generous grants which enabled me to work in England. Another, who aided me materially but who remains anonymous, also has my deepest appreciation. Officials of the John Rylands Library in Manchester, of the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale, of the Cambridge University Library, and of the Cornell University Library have kindly answered numerous inquiries and supplied photostats of necessary documents. To Sir Stanley Unwin and to the officials of Allen and Unwin acting for the Ruskin Literary Trustees I record my appreciation for their permission to reproduce material they control. To Frederick B. Adams, Director of the Pierpont Morgan Library, as well as to Herbert Cahoon and Mary Kenway, both of his staff, I owe a deep debt of gratitude for their constant help. To the late Countess Mountbatten and her archivist, Mrs. Georgiana Blois, I am also indebted for generous assistance and considerable interest. Neither can anyone involved in Ruskin studies fail to express appreciation to Helen Gill Viljoen. To Lewis Horrox I am most grateful for his invaluable contributions to this edition of letters. A number of other persons—in the United States, Great Britain, and Ireland—have also given generously of time and knowledge; to the following, then, I would also record my gratitude: George Goodspeed, Nancy Devine, Van Aken Burd, Marjorie Wynne, Dr. Charles Dickson, Mrs. Michael Wentworth Beaumont, Peter Quennell, Mrs. R. E. G. Carolin, Graham Reynolds, Brian Connell, James Dearden, and John Hewitt Mitchell.
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