



The Elements of Drawing: (In Three Letters to Beginners)

John Ruskin

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["The Elements of Drawing" was written during the winter of 1856. The First Edition was published in 1857; the Second followed in the same year, with some additions and slight alterations. The Third Edition consisted of sixth thousand, 1859; seventh thousand, 1860; and eighth thousand, 1861. The work was partly reproduced in "Our Sketching Club," by the Rev. R. St. John Tyrwhitt, M.A., 1874; with new editions in 1875, 1882, and 1886. Mr. Ruskin meant, during his tenure of the Slade Professorship at Oxford, to recast his teaching, and to write a systematic manual for the use of his Drawing School, under the title of "The Laws of Fésolle." Of this only vol. i. was completed, 1879; second edition, 1882. As, therefore, "The Elements of Drawing" has never been completely superseded, and as many readers of Mr. Ruskin's works have expressed a desire to possess the book in its old form, it is now reprinted as it stood in 1859.] THE SECOND EDITION. As one or two questions, asked of me since the publication of this work, have indicated points requiring elucidation, I have added a few short notes in the first Appendix. It is not, I think, desirable otherwise to modify the form or add to the matter of a book as it passes through successive editions; I have, therefore, only mended the wording of some obscure sentences; with which exception the text remains, and will remain, in its original form, which I had carefully considered. Should the public find the book useful, and call for further editions of it, such additional notes as may be necessary will be always placed in the first Appendix, where they can be at once referred to, in any library, by the possessors of the earlier editions; and I will take care they shall not be numerous. August 3, 1857. PREFACE i. It may perhaps be thought, that in prefacing a manual of drawing, I ought to expatiate on the reasons why drawing should be learned; but those reasons appear to me so many and so weighty, that I cannot quickly state or enforce them. With the reader's permission, as this volume is too large already, I will waive all discussion respecting the importance of the subject, and touch only on those points which may appear questionable in the method of its treatment. ii. In the first place, the book is not calculated for the use of children under the age of twelve or fourteen. I do not think it advisable to engage a child in any but the most voluntary practice of art. If it has talent for drawing, it will be continually scrawling on what paper it can get; and should be allowed to scrawl at its own free will, due praise being given for every appearance of care, or truth, in its efforts. It should be allowed to amuse itself with cheap colors almost as soon as it has sense enough to wish for them. If it merely daubs the paper with shapeless stains, the color-box may be taken away till it knows better: but as soon as it begins painting red coats on soldiers, striped flags to ships, etc., it should have colors at command; and, without restraining its choice of subject in that imaginative and historical art, of a military tendency, which children delight in, (generally quite as valuable, by the way, as any historical art delighted in by their elders,) it should be gently led by the parents to try to draw, in such childish fashion as may be, the things it can see and likes,—birds, or butterflies, or flowers, or fruit. iii. In later years, the indulgence of using the color should only be granted as a reward, after it has shown care and progress in its drawings with pencil. A limited number of good and amusing prints should always be within a boy's reach: in these days of cheap illustration he can hardly possess a volume of nursery tales without good wood-cuts in it, and should be encouraged to copy what he likes best of this kind; but should be firmly restricted to a few prints and to a few books.

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