



Ethics of the Dust.

John Ruskin

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It is characteristic of Ruskin that he should choose to lock up so much depth and beauty of thought in a series of playful lectures to young girls. In this little book, simple as it appears, we may catch many a glimpse of the ancient S ophia, or heavenly wisdom, going robed, not in a nuns dress, but in all the gorgeous colours in which the jewels of the rock are dyed. The sure instinct of the seer led Ruskin to consider not only the lilies of the field but the dust under his feet; he considered and studied for half a life-time, and then, with a perfect instinct, he took and re-created and vivified the dead knowledge of forms and processes, which is apt to He as so much useless lumber in the unreflecting mind. He had come to believe that all knowledge is only of use when it has a substantial bearing upon -life; and it is the very material of life that he here presents to young girls knowledge transformed by thought, feeling, fancy, wit and art into a scheme of life both delicately beautiful and attainable. It is not the least virtue of his method that where this scheme of his provokes criticism, it does so by calling out original powers of thought, by suggesting further complexities of life, greater dignities and nobilities of character. A modern Socrates, with maidens for disciples, he debates in a playful freedom the sermons that the wise may find in stones. Nothing comes amiss as an illustration the cats hairs, the Crystal Palace, needle and thread, the bulls of Nineveh, aB yzantine crucifix. It is this wide freedom of allusion, joined to the fascination of his subject of crystals and crystallisation, and the pictures of graceful girl-life, that give its peculiarly original charm to the book.

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