



# Sesame and Lilies: And the King of the Golden River (Classic Reprint)

*John Ruskin*

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Excerpt from Sesame and Lilies: And the King of the Golden River

Few tasks are more difficult than to present an account of John Ruskin that is at once fair and brief. It is difficult to be fair to him, because his life, while one of steadfast integrity of purpose, chastity of conduct, clear, high endeavor, and unselfish love for humanity, was narrowed by many limitations, - almost weaknesses. They were not of the surface but were grained in his nature; they led him into inevitable inconsistencies and anomalous situations, and brought down upon him ridicule and abuse, which, though utterly without justification, were not without cause.

Yet these same weaknesses were necessary to the carrying out of his life work! That is the tragedy of it. It is the thing that is hardest to explain; it is particularly hard to explain briefly. To understand it one must know something of the years of labor, the tragedies of love, the illnesses and the griefs that left their marks upon this man's highly sensitized soul.

John Ruskin was born in London, on the 8th of February, 1819. He had no childhood, as we know the term, and almost no young manhood. He was an only child, with a busy merchant for a father, and for a mother a Spartan woman of Scotch ancestry, whose rigorous discipline over her son never relaxed to the day of her death, - when the "boy" was over sixty.

The story of his almost toyless infancy, which he tells so freely and charmingly in *Præterita*, has often been related. For some time his only plaything was a bunch of keys. Later he was given a ball, a cart, and a box of wooden bricks. He spent much time studying the patterns in the carpet and the lines of brick in the neighboring houses, and in watching the filling of a water cart near by. An aunt, pitying his "monastic poverty," gave him a Punch and Judy.

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