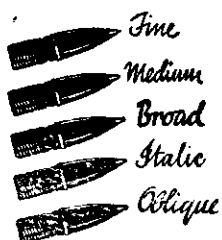


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## Books

# THE YOUNG RUSKIN

THE DIARIES OF JOHN RUSKIN, 1835-  
1847, selected and edited by Joan Evans and  
John Howard Whitehouse; Oxford: Clarendon  
Press, English price £3/10/-.

(Reviewed by James Bertram)

THERE are forty volumes in  
the library edition of Rus-  
kin's Works; and most of  
them, one suspects, stay in the  
library. To these we must now add  
the first of three massive volumes  
of hitherto unpublished diaries. "An  
essential basis for any study of Rus-  
kin's development," no doubt; but who  
is still interested in the development  
of this too-copious Victorian prophet?  
Surprisingly, it seems, a good many  
people.

The tragedy of Ruskin's private life  
came as a piquant footnote to *Sesame  
and Lilies*: Sir William James's *The  
Order of Release*, some years ago, was  
widely read; more recently Dr. Joan  
Evans, in her own biography, under-  
lined the fatal effects of his frustrated  
youthful love for Adèle Domecq. The  
indulgent, obsessive parents of a bril-  
liant, sin-haunted boy had much to  
answer for, as these diaries make clear.

In this first volume, the seventy open-  
ing pages are perhaps too generously  
given to a precocious schoolboy's de-  
tailed record of four months in Switzer-  
land in 1835, neatly illustrated by exact  
little geological drawings. At least, this  
celebrates Ruskin's first great love—the  
Alps, and rock formations. There is a  
gap till 1839: the brief lively shadow  
of Adèle appears, then suddenly "I have  
lost her." The young undergraduate at  
Christ Church has his first lung haemor-  
rhage, and is ordered to winter abroad.  
It was in this year, 1840, that Ruskin  
determined "to keep one part of diary  
for intellect and another for feeling." The  
"book of pain" was later destroyed  
by the diarist: yet what remains is a  
considerable bulk of extraordinary rich-  
ness and liveliness.

It begins with a full record of the  
Italian tour of 1840-41. Ruskin is still  
travelling with his parents, occasion-  
ally spitting blood, and  
worried about his eyes,  
which he overstrained  
by continual sketching.  
The intense application  
of the dedicated student  
of art compels admira-  
tion; but Ruskin was  
often the conventional  
Englishman abroad.  
Florence—"the Arno a  
nasty muddy ditch";  
Rome—"the inside (of  
St. Peter's) would make  
a nice ballroom—but is  
good for nothing else";  
Naples—"nothing extra-  
ordinary and the bay too  
large"; Paestum and  
Vallombrosa—"hum-  
bugs"; at last, Venice—  
"Thank God I am here!"  
This and Chamouni  
are my two bournes of  
earth."

The Alps, Turner, St.  
Mark's—Ruskin had dis-  
covered his true voca-  
tion; and the remaining  
diaries until 1847 cover  
the heroic years of  
*Modern Painters* and the  
*Seven Lamps*. Dr. Evans  
has illustrated them  
handsomely with ex-

cellent reproductions from the diary  
sketches, and more elaborate studies  
from the Ruskin Catalogue—it is often  
forgotten that this evangelist of art was  
himself an admirable draughtsman, and  
a skilful if uninventive painter in water  
colour. All this is background material  
superbly presented and edited, and the  
art historian will be properly grateful  
for it. But the general reader will prob-  
ably relish more the emerging character  
—touchy, passionate, crusty, more and  
more self-contradictory—of a very great  
Victorian.

Here is a charming sample of Vic-  
torian sensibility in an entry for Ash  
Wednesday, 1844:

Finished Amalfi, satisfactorily, and heard  
a valuable sermon from Melville on the  
fall of man . . . My uncle Tweddale is said  
to be on his deathbed, and we receive from  
his daughter Mary a letter which I shall  
keep as a curiosity: "Gentlemen, my father  
is dying, and for that reason will you have  
the kindness to stop the Times Newspaper!"

## BIG FOOTBALL

THE BATTLE FOR THE RUGBY CROWN,  
by Terry McLean; A. H. and A. W. Reed,  
16/-.

THE 1956 Springboks not only aroused  
unprecedented public interest in  
New Zealand; they also posed more  
baffling problems than any previous  
touring team. Their inconsistency on the  
field and some cryptic managerial pro-  
nouncements gave local critics a busy  
winter trying to reconcile incompatibles.  
Why did a team with so much talent  
make quite so many mistakes in ele-  
mentary techniques? Why did it score  
scintillating tries and yet descend to  
aimless ineffectiveness in the same  
match? And why such an epidemic of  
pulled hamstring muscles?

No one is better equipped than Terry  
McLean to probe into these and other  
mysteries. In general, he follows the  
successful pattern of his previous simi-  
lar book, with very competent brief  
critical accounts of all matches, a full  
statistical summary, pen portraits of all  
the tourists and other particularly good  
analytical chapters. He writes with zest,  
is eminently impartial, but not fright-



S. S. VIVIERS

"One question naggingly demanded an answer"

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 15, 1957.