

**Ruskin and His Circle.** By Ada Earland.  
New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$1.75  
net.

It seems to be a part of the creed of today that the subject of a biography, especially if he is one of the *genus irritabile*, must first of all be discharged of his load, and his sins distributed among unhappy ancestors or contemporaries. Especially in autobiography is this theory carried to the limit. Very few impecunious geniuses are willing to say frankly: "I was lazy. I ought to have been, gently or otherwise, pushed out of the easy chair and given a turn at the woodpile." Miss Ada Earland starts out with the accepted theory. "Ruskin was the victim of circumstances," she says. It is true that she does not, in all cases, very clearly develop the connection between victim and circumstances; that she loses herself now and then in the details of the story of some distinguished friend of the grown-up and already-formed Ruskin, and forgets to tell us how these details materially affected his character. The friends were congenial company for him. They drifted into the path of his life, and remained of his associates because of similarity of tastes, or, perhaps, because of a dissimilarity of gifts, which made it possible to give and take, to be richer or poorer in possessions, tho not materially affected in character. Indeed, the lack of any real attempt to prove her main theme, leaves room for Miss Earland's real charm. She does collect

from various sources—none of them out of the common reach of the collector—many pleasant details of the life of her subject, details which give him a local habitation among the many groups of English intellectual men. She presses rather hard on a certain lonesomeness in the boy period, as if somehow the mother was at fault, and, on a certain aloofness in the middle years of Ruskin's life, as if not an overworked brain, but a lack of sympathy in ideals was at the bottom of his frequent flights from human intercourse. Aloneness is often mistaken for lonesomeness, and apartness for solitariness, tho both may be necessary conditions of a healthy intellectual growth. The book is entertaining and instructive; and is generously illustrated.