

LETTER XXXII.

DEAR CHILDREN:--

I promised to write from Chamouni, so to commence at the commencement. Fancy me, on a broiling day in July, panting with the heat, gazing from my window in Geneva upon Lake Lemman, which reflects the sun like a burning glass, and thinking whether in America, or any where else, it was ever so hot before. This was quite a new view of the subject to me, who had been warned in Paris only of the necessity of blanket shawls, and had come to Switzerland with my head full of glaciers, and my trunk full of furs.

While arranging my travelling preparations, Madame F. enters.

"Have you considered how cold it is up there?" she inquires.

"I am glad if it is cold any where," said I.

"Ah, you will find it dreadful; you will need to be thoroughly guarded."

I suggested tippetts, flannels, and furs, of which I already possessed a moderate supply. But no; these were altogether insufficient. It was necessary that I should buy two immense fur coats; one for C., and one for myself.

I assure you that such preparations, made with the thermometer between eighty and ninety, impress one with a kind of awe. "What regions must they be," thought I to myself, "thus sealed up in eternal snows, while the country at their feet lies scorching in the very fire!" A shadow of incredulity mingled itself with my reflections. On the whole, I bought but one fur coat.

At this moment C. came up to tell me that W., S., and G. had all come back from Italy, so that our party was once more together.

It was on the 5th of July that S. and I took our seats in the coupé of the diligence. Now, this coupé is low and narrow enough, so that our condition reminded me slightly of the luckless fowls which I have sometimes seen riding to the Cincinnati market in coupés of about equal convenience. Nevertheless, it might be considered a peaceable and satisfactory style of accommodation in an ordinary country. But to ride among the wonders of the Alps in such a vehicle is something like contemplating infinity through the nose of a bottle. It was really very tantalizing and provoking to me till C. was so obliging as to resign his seat on top in my favor, and descend into Sheol, as he said. Then I began to live; for I could see to the summit of the immense walls of rock under which we were passing. By and by we were reminded, by the examination of our passports, that we had entered Sardinia; and the officers, being duly satisfied that we were not going to Chamouni to levy an army among the glaciers, or raise a sedition among the

avalanches, let us pass free. The discretion and wisdom of this passport system can never be sufficiently admired. It must be entirely owing to this, that the Alps do not break out on Europe generally, and tear it in pieces.

But the mountains--how shall I give you the least idea of them? Old, sombre, haggard genii, half veiled in clouds, belted with pines, worn and furrowed with storms and avalanches, but not as yet crowned with snow. For many miles after leaving Geneva, the Mole is the principal object; its blue-black outline veering and shifting, taking on a thousand strange varieties of form as you approach it, others again as you recede.

It is a cloudy day; and heavy volumes of vapor are wreathing and unwreathing themselves around the gaunt forms of the everlasting rocks, like human reasonings, desires, and hopes around the ghastly realities of life and death; graceful, undulating, and sometimes gleaming out in silver or rosy wreaths. Still, they are nothing but mist; the dread realities are just where they were before. It is odd, though, to look at these cloud caperings; quite as interesting, in its way, as to read new systems of transcendental philosophy, and perhaps quite as profitable. Yonder is a great, whiteheaded cloud, slowly unrolling himself in the bosom of a black pine forest. Across the other side of the road a huge granite cliff has picked up a bit of gauzy silver, which he is winding round his scraggy neck. And now, here comes a cascade right over our heads; a cascade, not of water,

but of cloud; for the poor little brook that makes it faints away before it gets down to us; it falls like a shimmer of moonlight, or a shower of powdered silver, while a tremulous rainbow appears at uncertain intervals, like a half-seen spirit.

The cascade here, as in mountains generally, is a never-failing source of life and variety. Water, joyous, buoyant son of Nature, is calling to you, leaping, sparkling, mocking at you between bushes, and singing as he goes down the dells. A thousand little pictures he makes among the rocks as he goes; like the little sketch which I send you.

Then, the bizarre outline of the rocks; well does Goethe call them "the giant-snouted crags;" and as the diligence winds slowly on, they seem to lean, and turn, and bend. Now they close up like a wall in front, now open in piny and cloudy vistas: now they embrace the torrent in their great, black arms; and now, flashing laughter and babbling defiance through rifted rocks and uprooted pines, the torrent shoots past them, down into some fathomless abyss. These old Alp mothers cannot hold their offspring back from abysses any better than poor earth mothers.

There are phases in nature which correspond to every phase of human thought and emotion; and this stern, cloudy scenery answers to the melancholy fatalism of Greek tragedy, or the kindred mournfulness of the Book of Job.

These dark channelled rocks, worn, as with eternal tears,--these traces, so evident of ancient and vast desolations,--suggest the idea of boundless power and inexorable will, before whose course the most vehement of human feelings are as the fine spray of the cataract.

"For, surely, the mountain, falling, cometh to nought;  
The rock is removed out of his place;  
The waters wear the stones;  
Thou wastest away the things that grow out of the earth,  
And thou destroyest the hopes of man;  
Thou prevailest against him, and he passeth;  
Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away."

The sceptical inquirer into the mysteries of eternal things might here, if ever, feel the solemn irony of Eliphaz the Temanite:--

"Should a wise man utter vain knowledge?  
Should he reason with unprofitable talk?  
Or with speeches that can do no good?  
Art thou the first man that ever was born?  
Or wast thou made before the hills?"

There are some of my fellow-travellers, by the by, who, if they had been made before the hills, would never have been much wiser. All through these solemn passages and gorges, they are discussing hotels, champagne, wine, and cigars. I presume they would

do the same thing at the gates of the Celestial City, if they should accidentally find themselves there. It is one of the dark providences that multitudes of this calibre of mind find leisure and means to come among these scenes, while many to whom they would be an inspiration, in whose souls they would unseal ceaseless fountains of beauty, are forever excluded by poverty and care.

At noon we stopped at Sallenches, famous for two things; first, as the spot where people get dinner, and second, where they take the char, a carriage used when the road is too steep for the diligence. Here S., who had been feeling ill all the morning, became too unwell to proceed, so that we had to lie by an hour or two, and did not go on with the caravan. I sat down at the room window to study and sketch a mountain that rose exactly opposite. I thought to myself, "Now, would it be possible to give to one that had not seen it an idea of how this looks?" Let me try if words can paint it. Right above the fiat roof of the houses on the opposite side of the street rose this immense mountain wall. The lower tier seemed to be a turbulent swell of pasture land, rolling into every imaginable shape; green billows and dells, rising higher and higher in the air as you looked upward, dyed here and there in bright yellow streaks, by the wild crocus, and spotted over with cattle. Dark clumps and belts of pine now and then rise up among them; and scattered here and there in the heights, among green hollows, were cottages, that looked about as big as hickory nuts.

Above all this region was still another, of black pines and crags; the pines going up, and up, and up, till they looked no larger than pin feathers; and surmounting all, straight, castellated turrets of rock, looking out of swathing bands of cloud. A narrow, dazzling line of snow crowned the summit.

You see before you three distinct regions--of pasture, of pine, of bare, eternal sterility. On inquiring the name of the mountain, I was told that it was the "Aiguille" something, I forget what; but I discovered that almost all the peaks in this region of the Alps are called Aiguille, (needle,) I suppose from the straight, sharp points that rise at their summits.

There is a bridge here in Sallenches, from which, in clear weather, one of the best views of Mont Blanc can be obtained--so they tell us. To-day it is as much behind the veil, and as absolutely a matter of faith as heaven itself. Looking in that direction you could not believe that there ever had been, or could be, a mountain there. The concealing clouds look as gray, as cool, and as absolutely unconscious of any world of glory behind them as our dull, cold, every-day life does of a heaven, which is, perhaps, equally near us. As we were passing the bridge, however, a gust of icy wind swept down the course of the river, whose chilly breath spoke of glaciers and avalanches.

Our driver was one of those merry souls, to be found the world over, whose hearts yearn after talk; and when I volunteered to share the

outside seat with him, that I might see better, he inquired anxiously if "mademoiselle understood French," that he might have the pleasure of enlightening her on the localities. Of course mademoiselle could do no less than be exceedingly grateful, since a peasant on his own ground is generally better informed than a philosopher from elsewhere.

Our path lay along the banks of the Arve, a raving, brawling, turbulent stream of muddy water. A wide belt of drifted, pebbly land, on either side of it, showed that at times the torrent had a much wider sweep than at present.

In fact, my guide informed me that the Arve, like most other mountain streams, had many troublesome and inconvenient personal habits, such as rising up all of a sudden, some night, and whisking off houses, cattle, pine trees; in short, getting up sailing parties in such a promiscuous manner that it is neither safe nor agreeable to live in his neighborhood. He showed me, from time to time, the traces of such Kuhleborn pranks.

We were now descending rapidly through the valley of Chamouni, by a winding road, the scenery becoming every moment more and more impressive. The path was so steep and so stony that our guide was well enough contented to have us walk. I was glad to walk on alone; for the scenery was so wonderful that human sympathy and communion seemed to be out of the question. The effect of such scenery to our generally sleeping and drowsy souls, bound with the double chain of earthliness



and sin, is like the electric touch of the angel on Peter, bound and sleeping. They make us realize that we were not only made to commune with God, but also what a God he is with whom we may commune. We talk of poetry, we talk of painting, we go to the ends of the earth to see the artists and great men of this world; but what a poet, what an artist is God! Truly said Michael Angelo, "The true painting is only a copy of the divine perfections--a shadow of his pencil."

I was sitting on a mossy trunk of an old pine, looking up admiringly on the wonderful heights around me--crystal peaks sparkling over dark pine trees--shadowy, airy distances of mountain heights, rising crystalline amid many-colored masses of cloud; while, looking out over my head from green hollows, I saw the small cottages, so tiny, in their airy distance, that they seemed scarcely bigger than a squirrel's nut, which he might have dropped in his passage. A pretty Savoyard girl, I should think about fifteen years old, came up to me.

"Madame admires the mountains," she said.

I assented.

"Yes," she added, "strangers always admire our mountains."

"And don't you admire them?" said I, looking, I suppose, rather amused into her bright eyes.

"No," she said, laughing. "Strangers come from hundreds of miles to see them all the time; but we peasants don't care for them, no more than the dust of the road."

I could but half believe the bright little puss when she said so; but there was a lumpish, soggy fellow accompanying her, whose nature appeared to be sufficiently unleavened to make almost any thing credible in the line of stupidity. In fact, it is one of the greatest drawbacks to the pleasure with which one travels through this beautiful country, to see what kind of human beings inhabit it. Here in the Alps, heaven above and earth beneath, tree, rock, water, light and shadow, every form, and agent, and power of nature, seem to be exerting themselves to produce a constant and changing poem and romance; every thing is grand, noble, free, and yet beautiful: in all these regions there is nothing so repulsive as a human dwelling.

A little further on we stopped at a village to refresh the horses. The auberge where we stopped was built like a great barn, with an earth floor, desolate and comfortless. The people looked poor and ground down, as if they had not a thought above the coarsest animal wants. The dirty children, with their hair tangled beyond all hope of combing, had the begging whine, and the trick of raising their hands for money, when one looked at them, which is universal in the Catholic parts of Switzerland. Indeed, all the way from the Sardinian frontier we had been dogged by beggars continually. Parents seemed to look upon their children as valuable only for this purpose; the very baby in

arms is taught to make a pitiful little whine, and put out its fat hand, if your eye rests on it. The fact is, they are poor--poor because invention, enterprise, and intellectual vigor--all that surrounds the New England mountain farmer with competence and comfort--are quenched and dead, by the combined influence of a religion and government whose interest it is to keep people stupid that they may be manageable. Yet the Savoyards, as a race, it seems to me, are naturally intelligent; and I cannot but hope that the liberal course lately adopted by the Sardinian government may at last reach them. My heart yearns over many of the bright, pretty children, whose little hands have been up, from time to time, around our carriage. I could not help thinking what good schools and good instruction might do for them. It is not their fault, poor little things, that they are educated to whine and beg, and grow up rude, uncultured, to bring forth another set of children just like themselves; but what to do with them is the question. One generally begins with giving money; but a day or two of experience shows that it would be just about as hopeful to feed the locusts of Egypt on a loaf of bread. But it is hard to refuse children, especially to a mother who has left five or six at home, and who fancies she sees, in some of these little eager, childish faces, something now and then that reminds her of her own. For my part, I got schooled so that I could stand them all, except the little toddling three-year olds--they fairly overcame me. So I supplied my pocket with a quantity of sugar lozenges, for the relief of my own mind. I usually found the little fellows looked exceedingly delighted when they discovered the nature of the coin. Children are

unsophisticated, and like sugar better than silver, any day.

In this auberge was a little chamois kid, of which fact we were duly apprised, when we got out, by a board put up, which said, "Here one can see a live chamois." The little live representative of chamoisdom came skipping out with the most amiable unconsciousness, and went through his paces for our entertainment with as much propriety as a New England child says his catechism. He hopped up on a table after some green leaves, which were then economically used to make him hop down again. The same illusive prospect was used to make him jump over a stick, and perform a number of other evolutions. I could not but admire the sweetness of temper with which he took all this tantalizing, and the innocence with which he chewed his cabbage leaf after he got it, not harboring a single revengeful thought at us for the trouble we had given him. Of course the issue of the matter was, that we all paid a few sous for the sight--not to the chamois, which would have been the most equitable way, but to those who had appropriated his gifts and graces to eke out their own convenience.

"Where's his mother?" said I, desiring to enlarge my sphere of natural history as much as possible.

"On a tué sa mere"--"They have killed his mother," was the reply, cool enough.

There we had the whole story. His enterprising neighbors had invaded

the domestic hearth, shot his mother, and eaten her up, made her skin into chamois leather, and were keeping him till he got big enough for the same disposition, using his talents meanwhile to turn a penny upon; yet not a word of all this thought he; not a bit the less heartily did he caper; never speculated a minute on why it was, on the origin of evil, or any thing of the sort; or, if he did, at least never said a word about it. I gave one good look into his soft, round, glassy eyes, and could see nothing there but the most tranquil contentment. He had finished his cabbage leaf, and we had finished our call; so we will go on.

It was now drawing towards evening, and the air began to be sensibly and piercingly cold. One effect of this mountain air on myself is, to bring on the most acute headache that I ever recollect to have felt. Still, the increasing glory and magnificence of the scenery overcame bodily fatigue. Mont Blanc, and his army of white-robed brethren, rose before us in the distance, glorious as the four and twenty elders around the great white throne. The wonderful gradations of coloring in this Alpine landscape are not among the least of its charms. How can I describe it? Imagine yourself standing with me on this projecting rock, overlooking a deep, piny gorge, through which flow the brawling waters of the Arve. On the other side of this rise mountains whose heaving swells of velvet green, cliffs and dark pines, are fully made out and colored; behind this mountain, rises another, whose greens are softened and shaded, and seem to be seen through a purplish veil; behind that rises another, of a decided cloud-like purple; and in the

next still the purple tint changes to rosy lilac; while above all, like another world up in the sky, mingling its tints with the passing clouds, sometimes obscured by them, and then breaking out between them, lie the glacier regions. These glaciers, in the setting sun, look like rivers of light pouring down from the clouds. Such was the scene, which I remember with perfect distinctness as enchaining my attention on one point of the road.

We had now got up to the valley of Chamouni. I looked before me, and saw, lying in the lap of the green valley, a gigantic pile of icy pillars, which, seen through the trees, at first suggested the idea of a cascade.

"What is that?" said I to the guide.

"The Glacier de Boisson."

I may as well stop here, and explain to you, once for all, what a glacier is. You see before you, as in this case, say thirty or forty mountain peaks, and between these peaks what seem to you frozen rivers. The snow from time to time melting, and dripping down the sides of the mountain, and congealing in the elevated hollows between the peaks, forms a half-fluid mass--a river of ice--which is called a glacier.

As it lies upon the slanting surface, and is not entirely solid

throughout, the whole mass is continually pushing, with a gradual but imperceptible motion, down into the valleys below.

At a distance these glaciers, as I have said before, look like frozen rivers; when one approaches nearer, or where they press downward into the valley, like this Glacier de Boisson, they look like immense crystals and pillars of ice piled together in every conceivable form. The effect of this pile of ice, lying directly in the lap of green grass and flowers, is quite singular. The village of Chamouni itself has nothing in particular to recommend it. The buildings and every thing about it have a rough, coarse appearance. Before we had entered the valley this evening the sun had gone down; the sky behind the mountains was clear, and it seemed for a few moments as if darkness was rapidly coming on. On our right hand were black, jagged, furrowed walls of mountain, and on our left Mont Blanc, with his fields of glaciers and worlds of snow; they seemed to hem us in, and almost press us down. But in a few moments commenced a scene of transfiguration, more glorious than any thing I had witnessed yet. The cold, white, dismal fields of ice gradually changed into hues of the most beautiful rose color. A bank of white clouds, which rested above the mountains, kindled and glowed, as if some spirit of light had entered into them. You did not lose your idea of the dazzling, spiritual whiteness of the snow, yet you seemed to see it through a rosy veil. The sharp edges of the glaciers, and the hollows between the peaks, reflected wavering tints of lilac and purple. The effect was solemn and spiritual above every thing I have ever seen. These

words, which had been often in my mind through the day, and which occurred to me more often than any others while I was travelling through the Alps, came into my mind with a pomp and magnificence of meaning unknown before--"For by Him were all things created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things are by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things subsist."

In this dazzling revelation I saw not that cold, distant, unfeeling fate, or that crushing regularity of power and wisdom, which was all the ancient Greek or modern Deist can behold in God; but I beheld, as it were, crowned and glorified, one who had loved with our loves, and suffered with our sufferings. Those shining snows were as his garments on the Mount of Transfiguration, and that serene and ineffable atmosphere of tenderness and beauty, which seemed to change these dreary deserts into worlds of heavenly light, was to me an image of the light shed by his eternal love on the sins and sorrows of time, and the dread abyss of eternity.