LETTER XXXV.

Dear Henry:--

You cannot think how beautiful are these Alpine valleys. Our course, all the first morning after we left Chamouni, lay beside a broad, hearty, joyous mountain torrent, called, perhaps from the darkness of its waters, Eau Noire. Charming meadows skirted its banks. All the way along I could think of nothing but Bunyan's meadows beside the river of life, "curiously adorned with lilies." These were curiously adorned, broidered, and inwrought with flowers, many and brilliant as those in a western prairie. Were I to undertake to describe them, I might make an inventory as long as Homer's list of the ships. There was the Canterbury bell of our garden; the white meadow sweet; the blue and white campanula; the tall, slender harebell, and a little, short-tufted variety of the same, which our guide tells me is called "Les Clochettes," or the "little bells"--fairies might ring them, I thought. Then there are whole beds of the little blue forget-me-not, and a white flower which much resembles it in form. I also noticed, hanging in the clefts of the rocks around Tête Noir, the long golden tresses of the laburnum. It has seemed to me, when I have been travelling here, as if every flower I ever saw in a garden met me some where in rocks or meadows.

There is a strange, unsatisfying pleasure about flowers, which, like all earthly pleasure, is akin to pain. What can you do with them?--you

want to do something, but what? Take them all up, and carry them with you? You cannot do that. Get down and look at them? What, keep a whole caravan waiting for your observations! That will never do. Well, then, pick and carry them along with you. That is what, in despair of any better resource, I did. My good old guide was infinite in patience, stopping at every new exclamation point of mine, plunging down rocks into the meadow land, climbing to the points of great rocks, and returning with his hands filled with flowers. It seemed almost sacrilegious to tear away such fanciful creations, that looked as if they were votive offerings on an altar, or, more likely, living existences, whose only conscious life was a continued exhalation of joy and praise.

These flowers seemed to me to be earth's raptures and aspirations --her better moments--her lucid intervals. Like every thing else in our existence, they are mysterious.

In what mood of mind were they conceived by the great Artist? Of what feelings of his are they the expression--springing up out of the dust, in these gigantic, waste, and desolate regions, where one would think the sense of his almightiness might overpower the soul? Born in the track of the glacier and the avalanche, they seem to say to us that this Almighty Being is very pitiful, and of tender compassion; that, in his infinite soul, there is an exquisite gentleness and love of the beautiful, and that, if we would be blessed, his will to bless is infinite.

The greatest men have always thought much of flowers. Luther always kept a flower in a glass, on his writing table; and when he was waging his great public controversy with Eckius, he kept a flower in his hand. Lord Bacon has a beautiful passage about flowers. As to Shakspeare, he is a perfect Alpine valley--he is full of flowers; they spring, and blossom, and wave in every cleft of his mind. Witness the Midsummer Night's Dream. Even Milton, cold, serene, and stately as he is, breaks forth into exquisite gushes of tenderness and fancy when he marshals the flowers, as in Lycidas and Comus.

But all this while the sun has been withering the flowers the guide brought me; how they look! blue and white Canterbury bells, harebells, clochettes, all bedraggled and wilted, like a young lady who has been up all night at a ball.

"No, no," say I to the guide; "don't pick me any more. I don't want them. The fact is, if they are pretty I cannot help it. I must even take it out in looking as I go by."

One thing is evident; He who made the world is no utilitarian, no despiser of the fine arts, and no condemner of ornament; and those religionists, who seek to restrain every thing within the limits of cold, bare utility, do not imitate our Father in heaven.

Cannot a bonnet cover your head, without the ribbon and the flowers,

say they? Yes; and could not a peach tree bear peaches without a blossom? What a waste is all this colored corolla of flowers, as if the seed could not mature without them! God could have created the fruit in good, strong, homely bushel baskets, if he had been so disposed.

"Turn off my eyes from beholding vanity," says a good man, when he sees a display of graceful ornament. What, then, must he think of the Almighty Being, all whose useful work is so overlaid with ornament? There is not a fly's leg, nor an insect's wing, which is not polished and decorated to an extent that we should think positive extravagance in finishing up a child's dress. And can we suppose that this Being can take delight in dwellings and modes of life or forms of worship where every thing is reduced to cold, naked utility? I think not. The instinct to adorn and beautify is from him; it likens us to him, and if rightly understood, instead of being a siren to beguile our hearts away, it will be the closest affiliating band.

If this power of producing the beautiful has been always so fascinating that the human race for its sake have bowed down at the feet even of men deficient in moral worth, if we cannot forbear loving the painter, poet, and sculptor, how much more shall we love God, who, with all goodness, has also all beauty!

But all this while we have been riding on till we have passed the meadows, and the fields, and are coming into the dark and awful pass

of the Tête Noir, which C. has described to you.

One thing I noticed which he did not. When we were winding along the narrow path, bearing no more proportion to the dizzy heights above and below than the smallest insect creeping on the wall, I looked across the chasm, and saw a row of shepherds' cottages perched midway on a narrow shelf, that seemed in the distance not an inch wide. By a very natural impulse, I exclaimed, "What does become of the little children there? I should think they would all fall over the precipice!"

My guide looked up benevolently at me, as if he felt it his duty to quiet my fears, and said in a soothing tone, "O, no, no, no!"

Of course, I might have known that little children have their angels there, as well as every where else. "When they have funerals there," said he, "they are obliged to carry the dead along that road," pointing to a road that resembled a thread drawn on the rocky wall.

What a strange idea--such a life and death! It seemed to me, that I could see a funeral train creeping along; the monks, with their black cloaks, carrying tapers, and singing psalms; the whole procession together not larger in proportion than a swarm of black gnats; and yet, perhaps, hearts there wrung with an infinite sorrow. In that black, moving point, may be a soul, whose convulsions and agonies cannot be measured or counted by any thing human, so impossible is it to measure souls by space.

What can they think of, these creatures, who are born in this strange place, half way between heaven and earth, to whom the sound of avalanches is a cradle hymn, and who can never see the sun above the top of the cliff on either side, till he really gets into the zenith?

What they can be thinking of I cannot tell. Life, I suppose, is made up of the same prosaic material there that it is every where. The mother thinks how she shall make her goat's milk and black bread hold out. The grandmother knits stockings, and runs out to see if Jaques or Pierre have not tumbled over the precipice. Jaques and Pierre, in return, tangle grandmother's yarn, upset mother's milk bucket, pull the goat's beard, tear their clothes to pieces on the bushes and rocks, and, in short, commit incredible abominations daily, just as children do every where.

In the night how curiously this little nest of houses must look, lighted up, winking and blinking at the solitary traveller, like some mysterious eyes looking out of a great eternity! There they all are fast asleep, Pierre, and Jaques, and grandmother, and the goats. In the night they hear a tremendous noise, as if all nature was going to pieces; they half wake, open one eye, say, "Nothing but an avalanche!" and go to sleep again.

This road, through the pass of the Tête Noir, used to be dangerous; a very narrow bridle-path, undefended by any screen whatever. To have

passed it in those old days would have had too much of the sublime to be quite agreeable to me. The road, as it is, is wide enough, I should think, for three mules to go abreast, and a tunnel has been blasted through what seemed the most difficult and dangerous point, and a little beyond this tunnel is the Hotel de la Couronne.

If any body wanted to stop in the wildest and lonesomest place he could find in the Alps, so as to be saturated with a sense of savageness and desolation, I would recommend this hotel. The chambers are reasonably comfortable, and the beds of a good quality--a point which S. and I tested experimentally soon after our arrival. I thought I should like to stay there a week, to be left there alone with Nature, and see what she would have to say to me.

But two or three hours' ride in the hot sun, on a mule's back, indisposes one to make much of the grandest scenes, insomuch that we were glad to go to sleep; and on awaking we were glad to get some dinner, such as it was.

Well, after our dinner, which consisted of a dish of fried potatoes and some fossiliferous bread, such as prevails here at the small hotels in Switzerland, we proceeded onward. After an intolerably hot ride for half an hour we began to ascend a mountain called the Forclaz.

There is something magnificent about going up these mountains,

appalling as it seems to one's nerves, at particular turns and angles of the road, where the mule stops you on the very "brink of forever," as one of the ladies said.

Well, at last we reached the top, and began to descend; and there, at our feet, as if we were looking down at it out of a cloud, lay the whole beautiful valley of the Rhone. I did not know then that this was one of the things put down in the guide book, that we were expected to admire, as I found afterwards it was; but nothing that I saw any where through the Alps impressed me as this did. It seemed to me more like the vision of "the land that is very far off" than any thing earthly. I can see it now just as distinctly as I saw it then; one of these flat, Swiss valleys, green as a velvet carpet, studded with buildings and villages that looked like dots in the distance, and embraced on all sides by these magnificent mountains, of which those nearest in the prospect were distinctly made out, with their rocks, pine trees, and foliage.

The next in the receding distance were fainter, and of a purplish green; the next of a vivid purple; the next, lilac; while far in the fading view the crystal summits and glaciers of the Oberland Alps rose like an exhalation.

The afternoon sun was throwing its level beams in between these many-colored ranges, and on one of them the ruins of an old Roman tower stood picturesquely prominent. The Simplon road could be seen,

dividing the valley like an arrow.

I had gone on quite ahead of my company, and as my mule soberly paced downward in the almost perpendicular road, I seemed to be poised so high above the enchanting scene that I had somewhat the same sensation as if I were flying. I don't wonder that larks seem to get into such a rapture when they are high up in the air. What a dreamlike beauty there is in distance, disappearing ever as we approach!

As I came down towards Martigny into the pasture land of the great mountain, it seemed to me that the scenery might pass for that of the Delectable Mountains--such beautiful, green, shadowy hollows, amid great clumps of chestnut and apple trees, where people were making their hay, which smelled so delightfully, while cozy little Swiss cottages stood in every nook.

All were out in the fields, men, women, and children, and in one hayfield I saw the baby's cradle--baby, of course, concealed from view under a small avalanche of a feather bed, as the general fashion in these parts seems to be. The women wore broad, flat hats, and all appeared to be working rather lazily, as it was coming on evening.

This place might have done for Arcadia, or Utopia, or any other of those places people think of when they want to get rid of what is, and get into the region of what might be.

I was very far before my party, and now got off my mule, and sat down on a log to wait till they came up. Then the drama enacted by C.'s mule took place, which he has described to you. I merely saw a distant commotion, but did not enter into the merits of the case.

As they were somewhat slow coming down, I climbed over a log into a hayfield, and plucked a long, delicate, white-blossomed vine, with which I garlanded the top of my flat hat.

One is often reminded of a text of Scripture in these valleys--"He sendeth springs into the valleys, which run among the hills."

Every where are these little, lively, murmuring brooks falling down the rocks, prattling through the hayfields, sociably gossiping with each other as they go.

Here comes the party, and now we are going down into Martigny. How tired we were! We had to ride quite through the town, then through a long, long row of trees, to come to the Hotel de la Tour. How delightful it seemed, with its stone entries and staircases, its bedrooms as inviting as cleanliness could make them! The eating saloon opened on to a beautiful garden filled with roses in full bloom. There were little tables set about under the trees for people to take their strawberries and cream, or tea, in the open air if they preferred it, a very common and pleasant custom of continental hotels.

A trim, tidy young woman in a white cap, with a bunch of keys at her girdle, ushered us up two flights of stone stairs, into a very clean, nice apartment, with white muslin window curtains. Now, there is no feature of a room that speaks to the heart like white muslin window curtains; they always shed light on the whole scene.

After resting a while we were called down to a supper of strawberries and cream, and nice little rolls with honey. This honey you find at every hotel in Switzerland, as one of the inevitables of the breakfast or tea table.

Here we were to part from our Chamouni guides, and engage new ones to take us to St. Bernard. I had become so fond of mine that it really went quite to my heart; we had an affecting leave-taking in the dark stone entry, at the foot of the staircase. In the earnestness of my emotion I gave him all the change I had in my pocket, to buy souvenirs for his little folks at home, for you know I told you we had compared notes on sundry domestic points. I really flattered myself that I was doing something quite liberal; but this deceitful Swiss coin! I found, when I came to tell C. about it, that the whole stock only amounted to about twenty cents: like a great many things in this world, it looked more than it was. The good man, however, seemed as grateful as if I had done something, wished all sorts of happiness to me and my children, and so we parted. Peace go with him in his Chamouni cottage.

JOURNAL--(CONTINUED.)

Saturday, July 9. Rose in a blaze of glory. Rode five mortal hours in a char-à-banc, sweltering under a burning sun. But in less than ten minutes after we mounted the mules and struck into the gorge, the ladies muffled themselves in thick shawls. We seemed to have passed, almost in a moment, from the tropics into the frigid zone. A fur cloak was suggested to me, but as it happened I was adequately calorified without. Chancing to be the last in the file, my mule suddenly stopped to eat.

"Allez, allez!" said I, twitching the bridle.

"I won't!" said he, as plainly as ears and legs could speak.

"Allez!" thundered I, jumping off and bestowing a kick upon his ribs which made me suffer if it did not him.

"I won't!" said he, stuffily.

"Won't you?" said I, pursuing the same line of inductive argument, with rhetorical flourishes of the bridle.

"Never!" he replied again, most mulishly.

"Then if words and kicks won't do," said I, "let us see what virtue there is in stones;" and suiting the action to the word, I showered him with fragments of granite, as from a catapult. At every concussion he jumped and kicked, but kept his nose in the same relative position. I redoubled the logical admonition; he jumped the more perceptibly; finally, after an unusually affecting appeal from a piece of granite, he fairly budged, and I seized the bridle to mount.

"Not at all," said he, wheeling round to his first position, like a true proslavery demagogue.

"Ah," said I; and went over the same line of argument in a more solid and convincing manner. At length the salutary impression seemed permanently fastened on his mind; he fairly gave in; and I rode on in triumph to overtake the party--having no need of a fur coat.

Horeb, Sinai, and Hor! What a wilderness! what a sudden change! Nothing but savage, awful precipices of naked granite, snowy fields, and verdureless wastes! In every other place in the Alps, we have looked upon the snow in the remote distance, to be dazzled with its sheeny effulgence--ourselves, meanwhile, in the region of verdure and warmth. Here we march through a horrid desert--not a leaf, not a blade of grass--over the deep drifts of snow; and we find our admiration turns to horror. And this is the road that Hannibal trod, and

Charlemagne, and Napoleon! They were fit conquerors of Rome, who could vanquish the sterner despotism of eternal winter.

After an hour's perilous climbing, we reached, at last, the hospice, and in five minutes were sitting at the supper table, by a good blazing fire, with a lively company, chatting with a gentlemanly abbé, discussing figs and fun, cracking filberts and jokes, and regaling ourselves genially. But ever and anon drawing, with a half shiver, a little closer to the roaring fagots in the chimney, I thought to myself, "And this is our midsummer nights' dream"!