

MY DEAR SISTER—I begin to think it very long since I heard from you or any of my Kirkham friends. I have indeed no claim upon any one but you, for hitherto I have only written to you, and my wife, I believe, is in debt to some of her nieces. She has been a diligent correspondent to her sister, but has scarcely written to any one else, nor had time for it, to say the truth, till we came here. Our time here has passed very agreeably, and would have done still more so if the weather had been more settled. But the inclemency of the winter seems to extend into the summer, which has been for the most part wet and cold, with here and there a few fine days intervening. These we have availed ourselves of mostly to walk or ride about near home.

One day we went, the whole family, to see the source of the Orbe, where I had been before, and since then I have made two little excursions of a day, one to mount the Chasseral, a mountain in the chain of the Jura near Yverdon, and one of the highest in the chain. I was well rewarded for my fatigue, though disappointed in my hopes of a fine view of the Alps, which were enveloped in mist. But the near view was rich, and the ascent alongside a gorge in the chain presented glimpses of an abyss that would have set my nerves in uproar a year or two ago. I am still a little of a coward, or at least the unsteadiness of my head on great elevations gives me the appearance of it, but I hope I am improving. In mounting Ehrenbreitstein opposite Coblenz last autumn my tremors excited the risibility of a neighbouring party, but I have passed coolly since then over tracks much more formidable.

I should not boast, however, for at Vallorbe I remained quietly on the near side of the spring whilst all the rest save Camille<sup>2</sup> walked round it on a narrow ledge of rock. Even poor Alfred<sup>3</sup> was carried over, on the back of my coachman, who would fain have performed the same service for Camille and myself.

You will think I have flown off from the abysses in ascending the Chasseral from terror at the recollection, but in fact there was no danger there. I had combined a little botanical pursuit with the excursion, so that what with scarce plants, and the richly wooded chasms below our feet, and the laughing plains of the Pays de Vaud spread before us, we had a great treat at small expense. My companion was a German whom I have got acquainted with. Skinner declined accompanying us, as he thought the conversation would be often in German, and about plants. I have made another trip to these mountains with M. de Fleury, our hostess' French visitor, and in addition to the objects and recompenses of the former trip we had a hunt after picturesque beauties and situations, for M. de Fleury draws and paints like an artist. His visit, indeed, into Switzerland has this principal object, and he has left Champitet this morning on a tour into the wilder part of the country, where he means to stay a month or six weeks, studying nature and painting, as he says, internally, for he has brought no colours, etc., with him. Our hunt led us across the slope of a mountain which consists for the most part of the rubbish which has fallen from the cliffs above. Patches of wood and verdure have established themselves in some places, but in others the rubbish extends from the foot of the cliffs to the foot of the mountain without interruption, and with so steep a slope that, viewed from below at a little distance, it appears almost perpendicular, though in fact the angle; as in all such cases, is about 45°. Giggleswick Scar, which you will recollect very well, will give you a perfect idea of it, if you imagine it extended up to the height of Pendle Hill or thereabouts..

At about three-fourths of this elevation did I follow my prospect hunter across this tremendous slope without a track, and with labour and exertion that made the perspiration run off my face in streams, sometimes filling my eyes, sometimes flowing over my spectacles, so that I could not see my way or my leader. Every now and then a great tin box, like a portmanteau, which I had slung across my shoulders to put plants in, came slipping round and encumbering my knees, so that upon the whole I was in a ridiculous situation. At last I began to think myself in a dangerous one, and that if my foot slipped, or my footing gave way, I should not stop till I had rolled down to the bottom, as I had seen several heavy stones do, which I had previously amused myself with loosening, and making fall. But our adventure was more laborious than dangerous, and would bear no comparison with the situations which botanists, mineralogists, and prospect hunters encounter every day amongst the higher Alps.

As soon as the weather, which is at present very unfavourable, becomes fair, we mean to set off on a tour round the lake of Geneva, which we reckon will occupy us about ten days. After our return, and a few days' repose, we

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<sup>1</sup> Comprising pages 106 - 116

<sup>2</sup> *Camille de Pury*

<sup>3</sup> Alfred de Pury

propose to go for about a month to Interlachen, a village in a valley of the higher regions of Switzerland, from whence, as weather, and legs, and heads will allow, we shall endeavour to see some of the more accessible beauties of that country. You may figure me to yourself, if you please, scrambling amongst the rocks with a perpendicular abyss of a couple of thousand feet yawning at me, a staff in my hand armed at one end with a pike and at the other with a hook, shoes armed with projecting prongs upon my feet, a guide before and another behind, holding a pole betwixt me and death. You may figure me so to yourself, but no one will ever see me in such a situation. If I break my neck it will be by a much humbler fall, and those who saw me in Scotland will, I have no doubt, reassure you, if you should feel any uneasiness on my account.

We have had every reason to be satisfied with our change of residence. The old lady, who of course wished to make a profit by us, spreads her table frugally, but not scantily, and I am better pleased than if we, and especially the children, were tempted by tit-bits and rarities. In some things she is more liberal than we have a right to expect, and she seldom lets a day pass without producing foreign wines, which are not in our agreement. Fortunately for our sobriety her wines are not always of the best.

We have had no disagreement of any kind. Her brother, who stayed here with his daughter about ten days, is a very agreeable, very modest and unassuming old gentleman, rather over polite, and so fearful of giving trouble to anybody that in his own house he often deprives himself for fear of inconveniencing his children or his servants, singular enough in an old soldier. He was formerly in the Swiss corps in the French service, and is now a colonel in one of the Swiss Militia regiments, as also high in office in the civil government of his canton. His daughter, Camille de Pury, is a fine girl of about nineteen, not handsome, but a good figure, and very agreeable. She took a deal of notice of Anne, who attached herself to Camille most closely, and, if our plans admit of it, she is to pay Camille a visit of a week in the course of the summer at Neufchatel. The son, Alfred de Pury, continues here; his situation is without hope of amendment, and, on the contrary, becoming worse, I think. He can walk upon level ground, and moves about a good deal, but he cannot raise himself from his chair without the utmost difficulty, and he is carried upstairs. But he has his enjoyments, is cheerful and amiable in his manners, well informed, and desirous of improving himself.

He has been for the last two years in Germany studying, and speaks the language pretty well. He is desirous of learning English, and reads to some of us every now and then for half an hour, and can already translate with the help of a dictionary. He and my wife try to make a little conversation every day between French and English, and succeed sometimes pretty well, sometimes they are a little at cross purposes. William seems very fond of Alfred.

The children are all perfectly at their ease in speaking French now, though they speak it very incorrectly as yet. It is much the same with me and Skinner. My wife is the hindmost, as you will naturally suppose, her anxieties and occupations during the winter left no room for so dry study, but for the last two months she has been diligent. The pronunciation will be her greatest difficulty; she understands pretty well all she reads, but she cannot follow the conversation, and sometimes says she despairs of ever doing it, or being able to speak. Were we to remain in a French family much longer I have no doubt she would get as much facility as would place her at her ease in company, which she has hitherto avoided, where she could, on that account. The children continue well, and we are in hopes that the next winter may pass over without alarm or anxiety, but the recollection of the last winter has made us determine to ask Miss Currer to join us, if her health permits her.

It appears to have been very tickle this last winter, and therefore, if she can travel, the mild climate we mean to seek may be advantageous also to her. We understand that Rawdon Briggs, whose health still continues delicate, and who has had a severe attack of inflammation on the breast this spring, means to pass the winter in the south of Europe, and he may probably in that case accompany her. If she joins us she will most likely set out some time in the course of the month of August, and if you have any letters, or anything is coming to me which is too heavy for the post, she would take charge of it. Will you intimate this to the Captain,<sup>4</sup> or my sister Langton, and if they have anything to forward, as I hope by this time they will, the opportunity ought not to be lost. I will desire Miss Currer to communicate to you the time of her departure, and where a parcel will find her – probably the safest by sending it to Zachary, whom she will see on her way. My wife and the children join me in kind and affectionate remembrances to all our dear relatives, as does Skinner. – Adieu, dear Cicely, your affectionate brother, **THO. LANGTON.**

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<sup>4</sup>Son of John Langton, the eldest brother.

My wife, who promised to write to both Margaret and Bessy, and who moreover is in debt<sup>5</sup> to Jane<sup>6</sup> and Bessy Langton, Mrs. Hugh and Bessy (St. Michael's), dare not face her creditors, and desires me to propose a composition – which is that she will write them a general epistle after our return from the Alps, if she can possibly find time, which they must accept and grant her a certificate, or she must fly the country. She has so much to do studying with the children French and drawing, sewing for them, playing at whist with Madame du Peyrou, and a number of et-ceteras which I cannot detail, that it is impossible for her to meet all-claims.

I hope they will be indulgent, and communicate their generosity in their own handwriting, and as in duty bound she will “ever pray, etc.”

My wife desires me to mention as a piece of news that George is about the best Frenchman of the party, which I can confirm, bating a twang of the patois.

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<sup>5</sup>The “debt” mentioned is one of correspondence, not of money

<sup>6</sup>Mrs. Joe Birley