

**LETTERS FROM ABROAD
TO KINDRED AT HOME.
IN TWO VOLUMES; VOL.
II. [NEW YORK-1841]**

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Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home. In Two Volumes; Vol. II. [New York-1841] by
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CATHARINE MARIA SEDGWICK

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LETTERS FROM ABROAD

TO

KINDRED AT HOME.

"Well, John, I think we must own that God Almighty had a hand in making other countries besides ours."—*The Brothers.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"HOPE LESLIE," "POOR RICH MAN AND THE RICH POOR MAN,"
"LIVE AND LET LIVE," &c., &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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1841.

LETTERS, & c.

JOURNEY TO LANSLEBOURG.

Sunday Evening, October 20.

HERE we are, my dear C., at the foot of Mont Cenis, at the Hotel Royal, reading and writing by an excellent wood fire, the first we have had or needed. This inn was built by the order of Napoleon, and K. and I have slept in the room he occupied, more soundly than he did, I fancy.

Our first day's drive to Annecy was through a pretty country of hill and dale. The leaves were falling in showers, almost the only autumnal sign. The ground, highly cultivated, was looking as green as ours does on the first of September, and much as our Berkshire may a hundred years hence. I wonder if that lapse of time will bring us the convenience we find here, of extra horses at the foot of every long hill, ready to be attached to the traveller's carriage.

Annecy is a little place, rendered interesting by its thrift—a singular quality in a Savoy town—and by its old chateaux and sanctuaries that have a name in history, religious and civil. I went out alone, while the day was dawning, to the sanctuary where the bones of St. François de Sales and La Mere Chantal

are permitted to lie side by side. "A tender friendship," says the pious Catholic, "subsisted between these saints." Protestant scandal does not allow this platonic character to the sentiment that united them; but let religious pity keep close the veil which hides the history of feelings that a forced condition converted into crime. I like to enter a Catholic church in the gray of the morning, while the lights on the altar are struggling through the misty dawn, while the real people that glide in and drop down before the images and pictures are as shadowy as the pictures themselves; and the poor, old, haggard creatures come tottering in to say in the holy place, as it would seem, their last prayer; and the busy peasant, with her basket on her arm and her child at her side, drops in to begin her day of toil with an act of worship. I saw in that dim sanctuary a scene that would make too long a story for a letter, dear C. When I entered, two persons (my *dramatis personæ*) were kneeling before an altar, over which hung a painting representing the frail saint (if, indeed, the Mere de Chaptal were frail) as triumphantly trampling on temptation in the old form of the serpent.

We stopped for a while at Aix to see baths famous in the time of the Romans, and which are still in good preservation. The water resembles that of the hot springs of Virginia; its temperature is 110° of Fahrenheit. Till we reached Chambery Savoy appeared fertile; and the hills in the approach to this town, its capital, are covered with

vineyards, and very beautiful, but the town itself, or so much of it as we saw, is horrid; its narrow, dirty streets filled with beggars, soldiers, and priests. You may resolve the three classes into one. The beggar frankly begs, the priest begs, pleading the sanction of divine authority, and the soldier takes without the pains of begging.

A priest in the court of our Chambery inn beset François for money to say masses for his dead: "Mes morts," replied our courier-philosopher, "Mes morts sont tous en paradis,"* "and if they were not," he added, "what could such men as they do for them?" Alas for his Catholic faith in our heretical company!

The road from Chambery is continually ascending, with Alps on each side, little towns pitched in among the rocks, and habitations sprinkled over the rough and sharp hill-sides, where it seems hard work for a few goats to find subsistence. I have seen many a patch of rye, that I could cover with my shawl, niched in among the rocks, and the people look truly like the offspring of this hard, niggard soil. They are of low stature and shrunken, and their skin like a shrivelled parchment. They reminded us of the Esquimaux, and the pointed cap and shaggy garment are not dissimilar to the dress of the savage. Half of them, at least, have *goîtres*, some so large as to be truly hideous "wallets of flesh." But far more revolting even than these poor wretches with their huge excrescences, are the *Cretins*; an abounding species of idiot who infest us, clamorously begging

* "My dead are all in paradise!"

with a sort of brutish chattering, compared to which, the begging children's monotone chant, "Monsieur, donnez—moi—un peu—la charité—s'il vous plait," is music. The Savoyard is far down in the scale below the German peasant; he will rise as soon as the pressure is removed; these people are crushed irrecoverably. Various causes are assigned for their prevailing physical and mental diseases: unwholesome water, malaria, and inadequate and bad food sufficiently explain them. The children, to my astonishment, looked fat and healthy. It takes time to overpower the vigour of nature, and counteract the blessed effect of life in the open air. The people in the towns appear more healthy and in more comfortable condition than in the open country. I remarked among them some young women stout and comely enough, with a becoming kind of cap, with broad, stiffly-starched bands, which are so brought together and set off behind that they resemble white wings. They wear a black riband around the throat (probably adopted to hide the goitre) fastened by a large broach, at which hangs a cross. The bottoms of their skirts are ornamented with a narrow-coloured stripe, some with one, some with half a dozen. François tells us that a red stripe indicates a dowry of a hundred francs; but, as this is but courier information, I do not give it to you for verity.

You know it is my habit to walk whenever I can, and to talk with the people by the way-side; and as the roads have been heavy ever since we left Geneva, and our voiturier is a "merciful man" to his

beast, I have had this indulgence for many a mile. The Savoyards speak French well, though they use a patois among themselves. I stopped yesterday to talk to some women who were washing around a fountain on their knees. One of them said, in reply to my inquiry, "It was hard enough!" "But," said I, "you should have cushions to kneel on." "Ah, oui, madame, mais les pauvres ne sont pas les riches;"* there was a world of meaning in this truism.

I joined a peasant-girl in the twilight last evening who, after spending her whole day in tending her cow at an hour's walk from her house, was carrying home her five bottles of milk, the product of the cow. What would our *peasant-girls* think of such a life? Their leisurely, lady-like afternoons and unmeasured abundance pass in vision before me as I ask the question.

My dear C., how often do I mentally thank God for the condition of our working people! My poor way-side friend told me she lived on barley, milk, and potatoes; that she never ate meat; "how could she when she had no money to buy it?" But our host at Modane, who is a round, full-fed, jolly widower, gives a different version of the poor's condition, which, from his sunny position, he looks down upon quite cheerily. "They have salted meat for winter," he says, "occasionally a bottle of wine, and plenty of brandy. They can work at night by oil made from nuts and flaxseed; they have a portion of wood from the commune, and they econ-

* "Ah, yes, ma'am; but the poor are not the rich."

omize by living in the winter in the stable!" This is the common discrepancy between the rich man's account of the poor and the poor man's own story.

François says, "What think you the charitable send them for medicine when they are ill? why, *bread*; and they get well, and live to a hundred or even a hundred and twenty years!" Perhaps some of our feasting Dives, victims of turtle-soup, patés de foie gras, and—calomel, might envy these poor wretches, who find in a wheaten loaf "Nature's sweet restorative." Life is a "tesselated pavement, here a bit of black stone and there a bit of white;" it is not all black even to the Savoyard mountaineer.

Even in Savoy the "schoolmaster is abroad." While some of our party were lunching at St. Michel, K. and I walked on. Our first *poste-restante* was on the pedestal of a crucifix. While we sat there, a pretty young mother came out of a house opposite with her child. I called the little tottler to me, and the mother followed. What a nice letter of introduction is a child! We entered into conversation. She told me all the children in St. Michel went to school; that they had two schools for the poor; one supported by the commune, and another where each child paid three francs per month. The little ten-months'-old thing gave me her hand at parting, and the mother said, "Au revoir, madame." "*Au revoir!*" where may that be?

There was an inscription on the cross under which we were sitting, purporting that a certain bishop granted an indulgence of forty days to who-