Frances Anne «Fanny» Kemble — letters from Switzerland (1878)

STUTTGART.

MY DEAREST H—

I am detained here, very bitterly against my will, by the non-arrival of my luggage, which is *supposed* to be reposing in the Cologne custom house. Harry Kemble got me my tickets, and had my luggage registered for me to this place, Stuttgart, without, however, being aware that it would have to be *examined* at Cologne, so on I came, nothing doubting, and here, where I expected to embrace my trunks, am told they are waiting, poor things, to be rummaged at Cologne. This is very vexatious, as I am eager to get to my mountains, and have no particular liking for Stuttgart, which is a funny little German imitation of Versailles, a huge palace with a tiny town tied to its tail. There are, however, very pretty gardens and park, and these are rather a comfort, especially as, in addition to the detention for my luggage, a mistake was made about the hotel to which I was taken, and I spent Saturday and yesterday in a second-class German hotel, where people smoked in the eating-room, where none of the modern decencies of life were known, and which was on the noisiest street of the town, immediately opposite the railroad station, so that the racket was incessant and intolerable. This morning I have changed my residence to a better hotel, and a less noisy neighborhood, and am preparing my mind to wait with patience for the clothes of my body. I suppose such pieces of carelessness or ill fortune are not infrequent with travelers, as all the hotel people and railroad officials seem to take our case very much more philosophically than we do ourselves. We were assured that, by sending a telegram to Cologne, the things would certainly be forwarded here by yesterday evening. They did not make their appearance, then, however, and we were comfortably assured that they would come to-night. I do not, however, much expect to see them, as I was also informed by one of the clerks that I might be thankful if they arrived to-morrow, and so I will; in short, when I see them, I shall leave off expecting them. My poor maid-servants are worse off than I am myself; for I had a few changes of linen with me, while they literally have nothing but what they stand in. On the other hand, the novelty of the place, the pretty Versailles like gardens, the fountains and statues, etc., divert and console them more than they do me.

This place has only one valuable association for me. Close to it, at the other end of the park, is Koenigstadt, a charming village often resorted to by Dr. Norman Macleod, when as a youth he studied at Stuttgart. He speaks of it more than once in his letters and memoirs, and as his life, which I have been reading lately, has impressed and *exhorted* me more than any book I have read for a long time, I was glad to make a pilgrimage thither for his sake, and that of my friend Thackeray, with whom it was also much-frequented ground.

Good-bye, dear. I wrote to you yesterday, but as there will be many days when I shall not be able to do so, I write again to-day. When I begin climbing the mountains, my writing and sending letters will be a little less frequent. God bless you.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

BAGNI DI LEPRESE.

MY VERY DEAR H—

I found your letters, among others, waiting for me here on my arrival yesterday, but I had had a carriage journey of eight hours, in great heat, and was too tired to write to anybody but —, from whom I also found a letter. I was grieved to hear how ill you had been, my dearest H—, and shall be most anxious to know of your entire recovery, and how you are able to tolerate a new person attending upon you, . . . to serve a person well and conscientiously seems to me almost as certain to make one love them, as to be so served naturally would, especially when the assistance rendered is personal, and such as you, my dearest H—, require.

I can give you a very good account of myself thus far; the distressing nervous symptoms, the constant tendency to hysterical crying, and the intolerable trembling feeling of apprehension, as of some impending catastrophe, have entirely left me, and I have had no unpleasant sensations except those consequent upon a slight sunstroke, which both Ellen and I experienced after a long drive under a broiling sun, in an open carriage up the Finstermunz; nausea, and such dizziness as absolutely to stagger about at the end of a long day's journey, in which we had suffered extremely from the heat, and eaten scarcely anything. It was a mere effect of exhaustion and fatigue, by which I was never so affected before in traveling, — to be sure, I never was sixty-eight years old before in traveling.

I have now gone over the only one of the great Alpine passes with which I was hitherto unacquainted, the Stelvio, and am inclined to think that it is the grandest of them all. The summit is nine thousand feet above the sea, and the ascent on the Swiss side beautiful as well as sublime in the highest degree. Strangely enough, on the Swiss side, splendid forests of large trees, and the innumerable variety of lovely mountain Swiss wild flowers accompanied us almost up to the very top, while on the Italian side great fields of snow extended far down the grizzly chasms and abysses, and snow was falling as we came down. Certainly the bare horror of that precipitous descent was anything but Italian.

The summer has been rainy hitherto, I am told, and perhaps it is one of those rainy seasons, two of which are said, by observers of such phenomena, to alternate in Switzerland with every third and dry season.

The place from which I now write to you is on the edge of a small mountain lake in a valley at the foot of the Bernina Pass in the Engadine. The lake has undoubtedly been a volcano; it has the unmistakable features of an extinct crater, and the place moreover is celebrated for its hot sulphur baths, which are another indication of the former volcanic condition of the neighborhood. I expect to rest here for a week.

I have left myself but little room, dearest H—, to tell you of the new prospect which is just opened to the L—s. The vicar of Leamington, an old and sickly man, is recently dead, and his living has been offered to Mr. L—. In many respects it seems to me an advantageous and desirable thing for him, but poor F—, who has just settled herself in her new home at Stratford-on-Avon, and is enchanted with it, is in despair at the idea of having immediately to give it up, and go and live in Leamington, which she dislikes. "Will fortune never come with both hands full?" Certainly it seems to me a piece of unusual good luck, attended by sharp disappointment. I wish F— could think less of the latter than she does.

God bless you, my dearest H—. Good-bye; you shall hear from me as soon as possible again.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY.

HOTEL ROSEGG, PONTRESSINA.

MY DEAREST H—

I have only just arrived at this place over the Bernina Pass, from Leprese, whence I last wrote to you. After my five days' consecutive traveling over the Foralberg, the Finstermunz, and the Stelvio passes, I was very glad of the quiet of the little Italian (for though in Switzerland its whole character is southern) watering-place by the side of an extinct volcano, now filled with a pretty lake abounding in trout, and with hot sulphur springs coming up on its shores to prove its former fiery character.

I wrote to you immediately on my arrival there. I hoped to have found some tidings of you here, but have not done so, and now I fear I must wait for my letters till I get to Samaden, which will not be for several days. My week at Leprese was not without some excitement, for we were in daily expectation of the arrival of Luigi to claim Ellen, . . . and I, starting at eight o'clock this morning to cross the Bernina, left them standing at the inn door, whence they were to go down to the Lake of Como in the afternoon. . . .

Our journey to-day was a very tedious one, for the Pass of the Bernina is not comparable to many that I have traversed. The weather was dreadful, pouring with rain all day, and the step by step crawl of five hours up a steep mountain pass, in torrents of rain, with snow lying over all the mountain tops, and turbid, furious torrents springing from every gap in them, and threatening at every moment to tear the road away under the horses' feet, is not cheerful.

This place, however, Pontressina, as far as I am able to see from the windows of my rooms, is really very beautiful, and deserves all the praises of its enthusiastic admirers.

I have a magnificent snow mountain and glacier immediately opposite to me here, and very noble ranges of Alpine peaks rising in every direction above the lower rocks and cliffs and pine-covered slopes of the valley.

If the weather would only clear a little, I am sure it would be splendidly beautiful, but the summer hitherto has been unusually wet and cold and I am sorry to say, after a few transient gleams of sunshine, the clouds have gathered all over the valley again.

Dearest H—, I am tired with my journey, but very fairly well; to-morrow, I have no doubt that I shall be quite "jolly." How are you, my dear! I am very anxious to hear that you have thrown off all remains of your late cold, and to know how Louisa's successor discharges her duties to you? God bless you, dear.

I am ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

SILVAPLANA.

MY DEAREST H—

Never come to Silvaplana, which is a charmingly pretty place in the Engadine, because it has a climate worse than anything I ever experienced anywhere of the worst kind of March weather. The roads are blinding white and deep with burning dust, the tops of all the mountains are blinding white and cold with never-melting snow, and a piercing wind blows through this narrow alpine corridor, which flays the skin off your face, at least whatever skin the sun does not broil off it at the same time.

Having said this, I will return to the more agreeable characteristics of the place. It is charmingly situated on two pretty little lakes, which just in front of the village are joined together by a channel not wider than the Liffey at Dublin. In short, they are like a pair of spectacles on a large scale, laid down in the middle of smooth green meadows of such grass as Switzerland only owns. The water is of a curiously beautiful green color, suggesting the idea that the lake bottoms are lined with copper. Pine and larch woods frame in these pretty mountain meres, and above them tower the crags, and cliffs, and rocks, and snow and glaciers, of the Engadine Alps; and if the sun did not fry, and the wind scorch, and the dust suffocate one, I think it might be a pleasant, as it undoubtedly is, a pretty place.

To-morrow I go back over the Juliar Pass to a place called Thusis, at the entrance of the Via Mala, at the northern foot of the Splügen Pass, and shall probably stay there a week, in the course of which I expect H— will join me, and I shall send MacFarland home to take care of my house till I return to London.

S— has made no mention whatever in her letters of the railroad strikes and riots in the United States, nor have any other of my American correspondents alluded to them.

As F— very much prefers her one year's residence at Stratford-on-Avon, in her picturesque manor house, to leaving it directly, I am of course very glad that the Bishop of Worcester allows her that indulgence. She does not fancy Leamington, which I regret, because Mr. L— has accepted that position, and it appears to me, in many respects, a fitting and appropriate one for him.

A poor gentleman, a certain archdeacon, arrived here a few days ago, to fill the English chaplaincy at this place for five weeks, and I really am concerned for the worthy gentleman, who yesterday read the prayers admirably, and preached an excellent sermon to his wife and two children, myself and my two servants — a large congregation, which will be half as large next Sunday, when I shall not be here. No English people ever stop here. It is only three miles from St. Moritz, and a few more from Pontressina, to which two places all English travelers in the Engadine betake themselves, and where there are already resident chaplains provided for them. I am really very sorry for the archdeacon. I have told you all my story, my dearest H—. I am well, though I have a slight touch of erysipelas in my face and neck, from the effect of the sun and wind. It causes me some annoyance, but does not signify much.

God bless you, my dearest friend; I am thankful that my letters have still the power to cheer and interest you.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

THUSIS.

MY DEAREST H—

My nephew joined me yesterday evening, a day sooner than expected, and as every place in this house, and indeed in the whole village, I believe, is crammed with travelers, he was obliged to put up with a *shake down* in the billiard-room for the night, for which he was not otherwise than thankful, not having stopped a night on his way from London here.

He is very glad to get rid of his theater work, which was beginning to be oppressively hot and trying, and to have a month's holiday of fresh air, and change of scene before he resumes it again. I am very glad to have him with me; he is very kind and affectionate to me. He is like his own father and my father, but likest of all to a water-color drawing I have of my uncle, Stephen Kemble. I remember, when he was a little child, his great resemblance to a portrait I had of Stephen Kemble's daughter, my cousin Mrs. Arkwright. Before leaving England, he had been staying several days at Warsash, and brought me a very good account of my sister and her family, who are all assembled there. . . .

By the by, I have just had an interview, in the garden of this place, with ex-president General Grant and his family. . . . . I heard they were expected to pass through this place, and having promised a poor man to do him a service, which I thought General Grant could help me to do, I went down to the garden where he was sitting smoking, . . .

I laid my case before him, that of a poor Swiss man, porter of one of the Engadine hotels, who had lived sixteen years in America, and served in the Northern Army, and been pensioned by the United States Government, having lost an eye in the war; but he could only draw his pension by the means of certain vouchers, which I thought General Grant could possibly give him. My application, however, proved fruitless, for the General was not going into the Engadine, but the other way, and so my poor Swiss man will not get his pension through that venture of mine.

It is Sunday, and I am going to church; not without some painful misgiving as to the amount of edification I am likely to derive from that ceremony. Anything more extraordinary than some of the so-called English church services I have attended since I have been in the Engadine cannot well be imagined. At one place the clergyman intoned the whole liturgy, at the top of his voice and the top of his speed, only varying this wonderful chant by dropping every three minutes into an inaudible whisper, from which he emerged like a subterranean river, and went on again at the top of his voice and the top of his speed. Another day, the officiating clergyman spent half his time kneeling, apparently in silent adoration, before a cross, which was in the middle of the communion table, with his back to the congregation; then intoned the Litany, at the end of which the service was understood to be over, and everybody departed. Many of the persons crossed themselves, with an inclination towards the communion table on entering the church. In short, anything less like the Protestant Church of England than all these performances cannot well be described.

You asked me if S—, in her last letter, had said anything about the trade riots in America, and I told you she had not; but F— in her last letter, and M. F— in hers, speak of them as having been very serious indeed, and having required the intervention of the armed force everywhere to put them down.

I am upon the whole rather glad than sorry that this question of the relations between labor and capital, the one vital material question of modern civilized society, should have come to a crucial debate and trial in America, where the whole matter will be reduced to its simplest fundamental elements, and no side issues and complications, such as would attend dealing with them in Europe, exist to obscure the understanding of the people or trammel legislative action upon the matter. Nowhere else are the circumstances equally favorable for arriving at a sound and permanent result with regard to the rights of employers and employed, and the two great forces, which in truth are but one, of modern commercial, industrial and financial civilized existence, capital and labor, and the settling once for all their respective claims and powers, as in America, where the conditions of society are most favorable for so doing, and will simplify the process, even for older countries and more complex communities, where the difficulties are greater and the *elbow* room for all experiments less. Now I must go to church.

God bless you, dearest H—. I leave this place on Tuesday, and shall probably not have time to write to you again before that.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY.

ST. MORITZ, ENGADINE.

MY DEAREST H—

I remember many years ago your telling me that you thought the most beautiful thing in all your traveling experience was the descent of the Splügen to Chiavenna, on the Italian side, so I thought much of you three days ago, as I came down that same beautiful mountain staircase.

I have not, however, changed my opinion or altered in my preference of the Swiss over the Italian side of the Alps. Thus I think the Swiss side of the Splügen not only grander and more sublime, but more beautiful and charming than the Italian side. This has something to do with my delight in the exquisite flora of the Alps, in the gems with which the green mantles of the huge mountains are embroidered, the tiny blessed blossoms that creep to the very feet of the terrible glaciers, and the trembling sprays of tender vivid color that hang tearful and decked with diamonds over the black chasms of the roaring cataracts. The incomparable bright soft verdure of the high Alpine meadows is far lovelier to me than all the vines of the South. The one seem almost too immaculate, in their close-cropped velvet freshness, to harbor the smallest unclean creeping thing; the other, with their untrimmed, flaunting, luxuriant garlands, trailing over white walls alive with lizards, suggest earwigs, and spiders, and scorpions in every corner and crevice of their crumbling terraces. The *unpaintable* huge mountain heads and shoulders, and dark large woods and rushing torrents, which have never found, and never will find, adequate representation in art, are far more fascinating to me than those exquisite, ready-made pictures that meet one at every quarter of a mile in Italy; with the ruined, tumble-down houses and degraded-looking population, forming always to me painful features in the landscape.

But the wild flowers alone in Switzerland are such a delight to me, that I know nothing of the sort comparable to it anywhere else. The preference these exquisite creatures themselves show for the highest parts of the mountains, where just earth enough clings to support them, the masses of rhododendron, the sheaves of blue-bells of every shade, from almost white, to deepest purple, and every size, from the clumps of tiny blossoms that shiver in the spray of the waterfalls, to the large single deep bell vibrating on its hairlike stem in the keen mountain breeze, and those lovely things, the rose veronica, the deep blue of dwarf gentian, and the ermine edelweiss that are never found but where the everlasting snow is their neighbor, these are an enchantment to me, which nothing in all the glorious, glowing, untidy dishevelment of a southern landscape compensates for. The fact is, the moral of the two aspects of nature is absolutely dissimilar, and the one is congenial in its severity, and the other not in its softness, to *my* human nature.

The Swiss people I think the most disagreeable people in both worlds; but their country is my earthly paradise.

My diary records thus of our journey from Splügen to Chiavenna: "Lordly, lovely, wonderful mountain-pass; Italy at the bottom, cypresses, vines, chestnuts; every quarter of a mile a perfect picture, wretched population, hideous human dwellings, fit only for cattle; at the hotel, lofty rooms, scaliola floors, marble mirrors, magnificence, bad smells, and — bed-bugs."

We have just arrived at this place this morning, and I think we shall stay here a week, though such is the tyranny the innkeepers of this region exercise over unfortunate travelers, that it is rather difficult to be sure of what one will be allowed to do. I hear of people who are turned out of their rooms, neck and crop, under pretext that they were already bespoken, and that the unlucky occupants were only received without being aware of it *pro tem.*

As soon as you arrive you are challenged as to the length of your stay, about which perhaps you have not even made up your own mind, in order that your rooms may be let to other people the very hour before you leave them. It is really curious to see the fervent zeal of money-making by which every class of the community here and every individual of every class is animated. Their season is but of two months, which is their sole reply to every remonstrance against the exorbitance of their charges; and certainly they cannot be accused of not making hay while the sun shines.

Harry and I get on very pleasantly together; he seems an amiable, well-disposed person, is very quiet and well bred, and is kind and affectionate to me. I hope he enjoys his holiday traveling, and though I am afraid he finds me rather a dull companion, our fellowship upon the whole is, I think, satisfactory to both of us. He remembers very gratefully your kindness to him when he was in Dublin, and was speaking of it with great warmth the other day.

I ought to have told you, while I was on the chapter of my travels, of how we came out of Italy here, that is from Chiavenna by the Maloya Pass into the Engadine. The Italian, the lower part of the pass, is extremely beautiful, and the upper part very fine, but it is not, to my thinking, one of the most beautiful or finest of the Alpine passes. The final ascent from the southern side to the summit is peculiar, and unlike any other I have gone over. Generally zigzags that take one up the last of these portentous climbs are conducted over the necks and shoulders of the mountain crest, but in this instance our last approach to the summit seemed to be made up the inside walls of a huge well in the earth, the sides of which were clothed with enormous larches, that made it look from the top like a great thousand-feet-deep *hole* cut in a forest growing perpendicularly up to the sky. Round this gigantic ball the road wound in spiral curves like the bore of a rifle till it got to the top, and then there was no descent on the other side, for the valley of the Upper Engadine is a mere strip of meadowland, with a chain of charming lakes, formed by the course of the Inn, running through the middle of it, and the mountain tops hemming it in on both sides, and its lowest level is five thousand feet above the sea. So here we are. It is all very fine and very charming; but the air is too sharp and bracing for me, and with all due respect to the Princess de Metternich, and the gentlemen of the Alpine Club, who set the fashion of the rage for the Engadine, it is by no means the most beautiful part of Switzerland. Good-bye, my dearest H—. God bless you.

I am ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

SAMADEN.

MY DEAREST H—,

What you say in your letter about my nephew's enthusiastic juvenile impressions of Switzerland made me laugh, and him, to whom I imparted it, smile.

He has already seen more than once the most beautiful parts of Switzerland, and under far pleasanter circumstances than those of his present journeys with me.

Charles Santley, the singer, who married Gertrude Kemble, has been always a very kind friend of Harry's, and has two or three times brought him to Switzerland, during the theatrical recess, and in those tours he had not only Santley's companionship, walking over some beautiful passes, but the cheerful company of his family, young girls, and Gertrude herself, who is, I should think, endowed with good animal spirits, and what is called nowadays "jolly," which I, my dear H—, am decidedly not.

I dare say Harry may like coming abroad, and traveling with a certain amount of luxury, but I doubt very much if his holiday will upon the whole have been half as pleasant as those he has spent in Switzerland before.

He is peculiarly amiable in his manner, and gentle and courteous and kind to me. His temper appears perfectly even and sweet, and the reasonableness and sound common sense of all his views and appreciations of life and people, though not perhaps an attractive quality in so young a man, is a very unusual and valuable one. He has a great deal of character, but is very reticent and as guarded and courteous in expressing his own thoughts and feelings, as he is quick and keen sighted in observing those of other people. Our intercourse is pleasant to me, because of his gentle and affectionate manner, and his occasional great likeness to his father and grandfather. Mine, I suspect, is not altogether pleasant to him, because of my abrupt and brusque manner and quick, sudden, strong transitions of feeling; but we get on very well together. I am very glad to have him with me, and he, I have no doubt, gets some enjoyment out of our journey together.

We are both rejoicing to-day at having left St. Moritz, which we had neither of us liked at all. The place itself is less attractive than any other where we have stopped in the Engadine, and its essentially watering-place character, crowded with over-dressed dandies and equivocal or unequivocal ladies, with a perfect fair of booths filled with rubbish, at extortionate prices, incessant *braying* of bands and ringing of bells, the eternal inrushing and outrushing of arriving and departing travelers, made it altogether an unpleasant residence. I am stopping here only for one day, to-morrow, Sunday; and on Monday leave the Upper Engadine for the baths of Tarasp, another but much quieter bathing-place, at the lower end of the lower valley, which I shall leave by the pass of the Finstermunz, by which I made my first approach to it over the Stelvio.

To revert to the question of enthusiasm, my *remains* of that quality, and ready capacity of excitement are, I take it, a matter of no small surprise and amusement to Harry . . . . Good-bye, God bless you, my dearest H—.

I am ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

TARASP, LOWER ENGADINE.

MY DEAREST H—,

Your new maid's comment upon your bodily infirmities and your spiritual graces enchants me. Louisa never, till the day of judgment, would have found out, or at any rate expressed that your patient fortitude and warm benevolence of heart could be put into the scale against the sad deprivation with which you are afflicted. She must be a good and wise creature, so to interpret your trial and your character, and it comforts me to think you have such a person about you.

I came to this place the day before yesterday, leaving Samaden and driving down the Upper Engadine and into the lower valley, a journey of about thirty-two miles, which was in itself very delightful, for the weather was perfect, and the scenery lovely the whole way.

I do not indorse the general enthusiasm for the Upper Engadine, to which it is now the fashion for tourists to flock in thousands.

The scenery, though fine, is hard in its character, the climate, though invigorating, harsh, and too sharply stimulating; and the great height of the valley above the sea-level forbids all vegetation but the grass of the meadows, and larches and pines of the lower mountain slopes, above which shine the cold splendors of the glaciers and everlasting snows.

But the rage for this *superior* region is something wonderful. Every hotel in every village is crammed with people, sleeping two, three, and four in a room. The hotel-keepers are the direct descendants and representatives of the robber knights of old; fleecing the wretched wayfarers, and adding insult to injury by telling you in the most pathetic way, if you complain of their extortions, that *their season only lasts two months.* Poor ephemeræ! . . .

The Lower Engadine, though infinitely less bepraised and crowded with illustrious tourists than the Upper, seems to me quite charming. The snow peaks and glaciers, it is true, are lost sight of, but mountain ranges and rocky cliffs, from five to ten thousand feet high, with dolomite coloring, are not despicable boundaries to one's horizon in every direction. The valley of the Inn itself, which one follows all the way to the Tyrol, is a succession of fine deep gorges, with precipices for their walls, and the level basins, which alternate with these are not only soft with the perfect grass meadows of the Alps, but varied with warmer tints of ripening grainfields, and the larch woods are rendered less monotonous and gloomy by the admixture of the forest growth of a milder climate.

The friendly (as the Germans say) aspect of the landscape suggests human industry and cultivation; the villagers are really perfect studies for a painter, with their quaint old houses, all covered with friezes, arabesques, and ornaments, the fine mahogany color of their woodwork, their highly wrought antique iron balconies, and the profuse fringes of exquisite flowers, especially carnations, blooming all over and streaming like garlands from them, they are really surprisingly curious, picturesque, and charming.

I am very much pleased with this place itself, where I expect to stay until next Monday, and then to leave the Engadine by the Finstermunz Pass, recrossing it in the opposite direction from that in which I traversed it at the beginning of my tour.

Good-bye, my dearest H—. It is most delightful to me to be able, by my letter, to give you ever so small a share in the pleasure of my journey. God bless you, dear.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY.

MY DEAREST H—,

Here we are out of the mountains, at least so far as to be once more traveling by railroad. We took our last drive through the lovely Foralberg on Wednesday, and are now in the nook of the mountains, opening out on the broad Rhine valley, and on the railroad to Zürich.

My departure from the Engadine was celebrated on my part, precisely as my entance to it had been, by a severe bilious attack, which sent me here staggering with sick headache and far from happy.

I have enjoyed my whole summer very much, though the Engadine has not agreed with me, and I am sure that unless people require and are able to bear the climate, it is not a good residence for them.

I have just had a visit from Mrs. Storey, the American sculptor's wife, who tells me that her husband was quite unable to endure the sharpness of the air at St. Moritz, was obliged to sit up, gasping for breath, half the night, and was altogether so depressed and miserable (in that atmosphere to so many people exhilarating, that he was obliged to leave it and come down to find air that he could breathe. I was able to *endure* it, and to pass four weeks at different places in the Engadine, but I felt unwell and very uncomfortable the whole time, and especially so at Pontressina, and at St. Moritz, the very favorite places of resort of English enthusiasts.

I have staid at this place before, but not at this house, and when I left it, it was to start immediately for England and America; that was when you brought me, at the Euston Square Hotel, those splendid red roses and myrtle branches, that lived across the Atlantic, and are now flourishing plants in my dear Mary Fox's greenhouse.

We shall only stay here a week, and then go straight to Paris, where Harry will leave me, and I shall remain to shop, and then go on to Brussels.

I do not expect to get to England much before the first of October, or to Wales much before the fifteenth, which will, I am afraid, be later than they would like me to come; but I shall not be able to manage it earlier.

I shall have no more pretty places and pleasant journeys to write you about, my dearest H—, and I am sorry for it, nothing but the old unchanging story, then.

I am ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY.

I wrote to you, my dearest H—, on my arrival at this place, but yesterday's post brought me two short letters from you, and I cannot leave your dear words unacknowledged, although my present circumstances of quiet stay here do not afford me much matter for letter-writing.

Nothing can be more unlike than my nephew Harry's disposition and mine. . . .

His face is handsome, though rather heavy for so young a man; his figure is bad, short and thickset; altogether he reminds me of Charles Mason, and by times of my father and his own, by strong likenesses of countenance and expression. We get on very well together, but are very decidedly unlike each other in every respect.

The season of this place is nearly over, and the house comparatively empty. Several of the remaining guests are American, and among them is Mrs. Storey, the wife of the sculptor, whom I knew in Rome, and who, failing the smallest scrap of English or foreign nobility or even gentry, whose society is the daily bread of her life, when she can get it, has fallen, in her utter destitution of better things, upon me, and assures me I am to her a perfect "oasis in the desert."

The poor woman has been ordered here to take the baths, and I think will die no other death than the dullness of her cure.

By the by, if Mrs. St. Quintin can travel so far as north of Aberdeen, she ought to come here next summer, and take a course of these waters, which are really wonderful for all rheumatic and gouty-rheumatic affections. A short stay would probably be sufficient for her, and the place is so pretty and pleasant, that it would really repay her for coming so far to do herself good.

The hotel is, after the fashion of modern hotels, a perfect palace–spacious, luxurious, magnificent, and comfortable. The baths are in the house, and are quite delightful, both in the temperature of the water itself, which is warm and soft, and in their arrangement, the baths being square wells about four feet deep, sunk in the floor of a dressing-room, lined with white china tiles, cleaner looking even than marble, and always full of this pellucid water, which runs through them the whole time.

The house is surrounded with a most charming garden laid out in terraces, with fountains and flowerbeds, and magnificent oleander and pomegranate bushes, in large green cases, adding a stately smiling formality and dignity to the bloomy flowering fragrance and less artificial beauty of great masses of roses and geraniums and variegated beds of colored leaves.

My principal delight, however, is the kitchen-garden, a fine space of level ground of about three acres, lying below the terrace and fountains of the flower-garden, admirably laid out and kept, and full of the finest fruit I almost ever saw–pears, apples, and grapes, trained with the utmost care and considerable taste over espaliers–a really beautiful sight and peculiarly charming as one looks over the low wall of inclosure from this space of cultivation, perfect of its kind, to the sharp and splintered spikes and cliffs of barren rock, and the huge shoulders of wood-mantled mountains rising into the sky in every direction, and sheltering this beautiful bit of human industry.

I wonder whether the soil here derives heat and consequent prolific power from the subterranean fires, by which I suppose these natural hot springs are sent boiling to the earth's surface?

If you never were here, it would be worth your while to get dear E— to look out an account of it in Murray's "Swiss Handbook" and read it to you, for it is very curious and interesting.

God bless you, dear H—. I think you had now better send your letters to Coutts, as I leave this place for Paris on Thursday next.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

BRUNNEN, SCHWYTZ.

MY DEAREST H—,

I traveled all last week and arrived here the day before yesterday. My desire to avoid Paris took me round through a part of Belgium I had never seen before, and through the forest of Ardennes (I suppose Rosalind was the daughter of a dispossessed Duke of Brabant), and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. This region of the Ardennes is wild and wooded, and much more picturesque than I supposed anything in Belgium to be. I also traversed the scene of much of the late war between France and Prussia, passing through both the poor siege-wrecked towns of Metz and Strasbourg, and coming into Switzerland, through a defile of the Vosges, all which was new to me, as I have hitherto come to my beloved Alps either straight through Paris or by the Rhine.

The weather is very unfavorable for traveling, being hot and stormy and very wet, and the complaints about it are universal. It does not seem, however, to daunt or deter tourists much. The day of my arrival at Lucerne, three hundred people were seated at the *table d'hôte*, and the boats that touch at this place three or four times a day, going up and down the lake, are crowded with passengers. I have very often passed by this Brunnen on my way to and from St. Gotthard, but never disembarked. I am now, however, here for a week, and find it in every respect a most excellent halting-station. It is immediately in the *Elbow* of the Lake of Lucerne. The upper half of the arm stretching to Lucerne and the lower to Fluelen. The position of the hotel is beautiful, commanding both the reaches of the lake, and all the fine mountains of this part of it.

On Saturday I am going to a place called Axenstein, which is a very fine hotel some way up the mountain, immediately behind this place, which from its greater elevation has more extent of view, but loses the advantage of being immediately on the shore of the lovely lake.

When I leave this neighborhood, I am going to stay on the Lake of Geneva, in order to let my new maid pay a visit to her friends and family. They live near Montreux, mother and grandmother and brothers and sisters, and she has seen none of them for five years, having been in service in Scotland all that time.

I do not like staying at those crowded places on the Lake of Geneva, full of full-dressed American and French tourists, but I hope by doing so to make my poor little Swiss girl and her family very happy.

Good-bye, my dearest H—; the beautiful lake and mountains are vanishing behind a thick curtain of rain and it is quite cold, as well as wet. It is pleasant to know that when the sun shines again, the beautiful lake and mountains will be there. God bless you, dear.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

Do think of people going up the Righi by railroad! I think that must have been an American idea.

I do not think that the exertions I make in traveling deserve your admiration. The beautiful scenery, I am still, thank God, able to visit, lies within easy reach of travelers by railroad and steamboat, and demands but little effort of any sort.

This morning, however, I have performed something of a feat, for I have gone down to Brunnen *on foot* and by what may be called the back staircase on the mountain, literally the dry bed of an Alpine torrent, *fifteen hundred feet* down the steepest possible hillside, by the irregular broken rocky steps of the mountain nymph–leaps and plunges. Before I got to the bottom, I thought I should become as *liquid* as herself. The pretty creature can have no *knees*. How my old rheumatic ones did shake under me and my fourteen stone weight! She has feet, however, and with them has worn her rocky steps so round and smooth that my heavy mortal boots slipped and slid over them, threatening to make my descent headlong more than once. Arrived at the bottom, I took a carriage at Brunnen, and returned by the main road, resolving, until I became a centipede, nothing should tempt me to walk down fifteen hundred feet of perpendicular mountain side again.

The present mode of traveling detracts much from its pleasure, in consequence of the vast crowds of people one meets in every direction. The inns, or hotels, begging their pardons, are all like palaces (gin palaces, I think I ought to say), magnificent, flaring, glaring, showy, luxurious, in all their public apartments, but noisy, disorderly, dirty, and quite deficient in comfortable *private* accommodation. There are hardly any private sitting-rooms to be had any longer anywhere. Every room, except the great public sitting-room, is a bed-room, with two, three, and four beds in it; and if you insist, as I do, upon having a place of my own to inhabit, the unnecessary bed or beds are abstracted from it, one left for my occupancy, together with toilet table, washhand-stand, and all etcs. A sofa or armchair and extra table are then introduced, and you are told, "Voilà, madame, voilà votre salon," and made to pay for it as if it really were a first-class sitting-room, being assured, if you remonstrate, that you are occupying the bedroom of two or more persons, to the great injury of the house, since you can only eat for one, and probably drink no wine.

To the attractions of these huge houses of entertainment are added musical bands, illuminations, fire-works, fire-balloons, and spectacles of every kind, *besides* that of the sweet, solemn, and sublime natural features of the beautiful scenery — all which seems to me very *vulgar*, — bread and butter, and pâté de foie gras, and marmalade and jam, and caviare, one on top of the other; but I am thankful for what I have enjoyed, and do still enjoy, though under such different conditions.

God bless you, my dearest H—. I wish I had ever traveled in Switzerland with you in former days. How much I should have enjoyed both that and the remembrance of it.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY.

AXENSTEIN, ABOVE BRUNNEN.

MY DEAREST H—,

I am sitting in the midst of clouds and darkness, thunder, lightning, and down-pouring rain. The mountains are all packed in cotton wool, and the whole aspect of the sky and earth and water is most lugubrious.

After ten days of brilliantly beautiful weather, we have this very unpleasant change, and as to-night the moon is at her full, I am afraid we may have a succession of storms for some days now; the whole season has been most unpropitious for travelers this year, and the summer seems inclined to end as it began.

I left the borders of the Lake of Lucerne on Saturday to climb up to this place, which is more than a thousand feet above it, and where on level ground, surrounded by charming woods and meadows, a magnificent hotel has been built, commanding views up both the arms of the lake and its mountain walls. The position is really magnificent, and the house a sort of an Aladdin Palace, with flower-gardens, terraces, and fountains. The immense amount of traveling now could of course alone meet the expenses of such establishments as these, which are literally springing up in every direction all over Switzerland, and are emptied and filled literally by a *tide* of travelers every four and twenty hours, who cover the whole surface of the country, rushing in and rushing out at each place for one night, or even perhaps for only half a day, and then tearing off somewhere else.

Of course, since you and I first traveled in Switzerland, the whole mode and manner of so doing has changed. An enormous mass of restless humanity rolls about in every direction, and the provision for the accommodation of such multitudes is very different from what travelers formerly required. These splendid houses, with their huge public dining and drawing-rooms, and *table d'hôte* at which people sit down and feed by the three and four hundred at a time, are neither clean, quiet, nor comfortable, but they meet the wishes of the *pilgrims* of the present day, and I, to whom they are simply abominable, in their noisy, vulgar luxury, *endeavor* to rejoice in the increase of the pleasure of "traveling for the million," while I do really rejoice that my traveling was done under far other conditions.

Next week I spend on the lake of Geneva, to enable my new maid to visit her family, whom she has not seen for five years, and after that I go to the Lago Maggiore to see, I hope, my dear Ellen and her baby, so that in point of fact I am making what may be called a domestic tour through Switzerland.

I am ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

TERRITET MONTREUX.

MY DEAREST H—,

I wrote to you last from the Lake of Lucerne, and am now looking over the Lake of Geneva, at its lower end, where the Dent du Midi and the mountains of the Rhone Valley form such a splendid group above and beyond Villeneuve. I think you must have stopped at Villeneuve, some time or other, going over the Simplon into Italy. There used to be a charming house there, the Hôtel Byron, standing alone in its own grounds, quite at the end of the lake, and just above the Château Chillon.

I used always to stay there on my way up and down the Rhone valley. It was kept by two brothers of the name of Wolff, who were proprietors also of the good old-fashioned hotel L'écu de Genève in Geneva. They having failed, and the person who took the Hôtel Byron after them failed also, the pleasant house is now shut up, and I do not suppose it will ever be opened as an hotel again. The railroad now runs all the way from Geneva to the foot of the Simplon, an easy journey of less than eight hours, and nobody wants to stop half way at Villeneuve. Then, too, there is really almost a continuous terrace all along the shore of the lake from Lausanne to Villeneuve of hotels like palaces, one more magnificent than another, with terraces and gardens, and foundations and bands of music, and such luxurious public apartments, and *table d'hôte*, that it is absolutely impossible that some if not several proprietors of such costly establishments should fail to make them answer, especially as in traveling, as well as everything else, fashion directs the movements of the great majority of people, and for the last few years there has been a perfectly insane rush of the whole tourist world to the valley of the Upper Engadine, to the almost utter forsaking of the formerly popular parts of Switzerland.

The house where I am, the Hôtel des Alps, is a magnificent establishment, but there are very few people in it, and the manager seemed to me rather depressed in giving me the account of the failure of the proprietors of the Hôtel Byron, and said that there was not a corner of Switzerland now without a huge hotel, and that every year half a dozen hotel keepers became bankrupt. . . .

The week after next I expect to be at Stresa, on the Lago Maggiore. . . . . My incidents of travel are of a strictly *domestic* character, but very pleasant withal, and the weather is perfectly beautiful.

I am enjoying this lovely paradise to the utmost, though I now *rail* along the base of the mountains, over whose tops I formerly used always to take my way. God bless you, dearest H–.

I am ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

TERRITET MONTREUX.

MY DEAREST H—,

Though I did get down the back stairs of the mountain at Axenstein, I get up the front stairs of my hotel here, which are broad and by no means steep, with no little trouble, not that there are many of them, for I am on the first floor; but I am acquiring a very considerable difficulty in the art (or nature) of breathing, and think that I may yet, before I die, develop the accomplishment of decided asthma.

I always had a tendency that way, for even as a girl going uphill was a difficulty to my respiratory organs, and both sides of my family may have bequeathed me confirmed asthma. My Uncle John, as you know, suffered from it, and my mother's mother, old Madame de Camp, was a grievous martyr to it. Fanny Twiss, too, had very severe attacks of it, so that I feel rather entitled to be asthmatic. As for my descent of the Axenstein, I do not think I should have attempted it, if I had known what it was; but I had no conception of its depth and steepness, until I had gone so far down that I felt any amount of descent would be easier to me than the ascent of even a quarter of the way back, so I persevered to the bottom. My man-servant told me it was the roughest and steepest path he had ever gone down, but he is neither a very good mountaineer nor a vigorous person, and I thought that if he had achieved it, I could; but I certainly had no idea what it was, until I was too far engaged in it to give it up, and having to go up or down, as I could not remain in the mountain nymph's bed till she returned to occupy it herself, I chose the least of two evils. It was extremely beautiful, for the whole course of the torrent was through the forest that clothes the mountain side, of splendid pines, and larches and beeches, their great feet sunk deep in brown moss, and the golden sunshine sending its shafts of light through their branches. If the water had been there it would have been enchanting; but if the water had been there, *I should not*.

I shall finish my week at Montreux on Monday, and then go to a place only an hour further on by rail in the Rhone Valley, called Bex, where I also mean to stay a week before I go over the Simplon. I am not here at Montreux itself, but about a mile further on, nearer the end of the lake, at a place called Territet, at the Hôtel des Alps, which, now that the Hôtel Byron is closed, is about the best of these fine establishments on the lake shore.

My purpose in taking up my abode here was to be as near as possible to the home of my maid's friends and family, that she might get to them every day as easily and stay with them as long as possible . . . There are two or three huge pensions and hotels at Glion and the Righi Vaudois and half way over the Col de Jaman. It is all very beautiful, but swarming in every direction with this invading population of travelers and tourists. I sometimes think what an amazement the present aspect of these shores would cause Rousseau, if he could see them now! I have felt half inclined to get the "La Nouvelle Heloise" and re-read it here, but am too lazy to go to the library for it. One ought really to read it here. God bless you, my dearest H—.

I am ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

I have this moment received, dearest H—, your letter in answer to my own from Montreux. It rejoices my heart whenever I now get a few lines of your own dictation, as I regard your having the power to make that exertion a favorable indication of your whole condition. How thankful I am, my beloved friend, that you still can "eat and drink and sleep", and that you are mercifully exempt from physical suffering, beyond that, which I fear is, however, an almost equal trial, the weary sense of weakness, which in itself must be a grievous burden.

I write you from a place that you have not forgotten, for I do not imagine you were never in it, half way between the lower end of the Lake of Geneva and Martigny, and directly on the line of the railroad, which is now finished all the way from Geneva to the foot of the Simplon at Brigue — a small town or large village called Bex, which I suppose owes its creation and continued existence to the salt mines immediately behind it, and in the mountain. This supply of salt is the only one in Switzerland, and the works are very considerable, and employ a great many people, and I imagine really support the town.

The hotel, a large and fine establishment, is about two miles from Bex, and three from the railroad and main valley of the Rhone. It is near the salt works, and calls itself "le Grand Hôtel des Salines", and is a large bathing establishment, supplied with a copious stream of almost ice-cold water by the mountain torrent that dashes down the ravine close by it. The house stands in a complete *cul de sac* of the mountain, opening between fine sweeping lines of wood and rock in the direction by which it is approached to the valley of the Rhone.

There is level ground enough about it for charming gardens, and pleasant grounds and winding paths cut in every direction through the chestnut and walnut woods, with which the lower slopes of its encircling mountain walls are closed, and a most beautiful fountain, one of the highest water jets I ever saw, springs from the midst of the flower-beds immediately opposite my window.

It is a very charming place, and is very much frequented by foreigners, French and German people, but not much, I think, by English or Americans, to which I attribute the circumstance, particularly agreeable to me, that the cookery is French and good, and that I am not exasperated with daily offers of tough raw flesh, calling itself *rosbif*, and the underdon vegetables "a l'Anglaise", that is to say, not even boiled through, and accompanied with a white fluid simulating melted butter . . . .

Ellen and her baby are to come down from her perch in the Varese to Stresa, on the Lago Maggiore, and pay me a visit of a week there. This arrangement is better in many respects than my going to her, for their home is a farm in a *piccolo paese*, and she would have worried and exerted herself to make me comfortable, English fashion, and the effort would have been very bad for her.

God bless you, dear. I am *squeezed* for room on my paper, but

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

BEX, RHONE VALLEY.

MY DEAREST H—,

I write you one more line from this place, because tomorrow I shall leave it, and as I expect to travel for the next four days, I may not find it so easy to write to you again till I get to Stresa.

I have been quite charmed with this place, where I never made any stay before, though I have twice passed a night here on my way down from the mountains, but have always given it the go-by in passing up and down the Rhone Valley.

It is very much frequented by foreigners, French and German, who come here in the spring and autumn for the benefit of the fresh salt water bath.

English travelers do not often visit it, and as a rule know nothing whatever of the medicinal properties of its waters; but the place itself is very beautiful, and in spring, when all the orchards, with which the valley is covered, are in blossom, it must really be exquisite, and worth coming from England, I should think, to see. The valley is a horseshoe of gently undulating meadows and orchards, rising gradually to the mountains, the lower half of which is clothed with beautiful chestnut and walnut woods, above which the rocky walls and spires and summits peer down upon the green Eden at their feet. The valley opens down to the great main river road of the Rhone, on the other side of which, immediately in front of my windows, towers the huge Dent du Midi, with its snow slopes and glaciers and pyramidal rocky peaks piercing the sky.

There is no water view from the house, but a lovely fountain, eighty feet high, the daughter of the mountain stream, which seems to be leaping up to her cradle in the high rocks above the house, immediately faces my room, and a rushing foaming torrent is seen from several parts of the well-laid-out pleasure grounds that surround the house, but we have no lovely lake expanse in our view. The place is very charming to me, the weather is just now beautiful, and I have hopes that we shall cross the Simplon in sunshine. My next letter to you will be from Italy, where I hope to be on Thursday. God bless you, my dearest H—.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.

A gentleman who sat by me at dinner to-day told me what I was very sorry to hear, that the wine-making vines in France had been attacked by a destructive insect come over from America, which it was apprehended might destroy the crop; that the price of wine had risen already in France in consequence, and that great alarm was felt on the subject throughout all the grape-growing districts of Switzerland. It is quite as bad a plague, he says, as the Colorado beetle.

STRESA.

MY DEAR E—,

I should find it impossible to tell you how very very sad your letter made me, not for my beloved friend, whose growing infirmity of mind and partial unconsciousness are merciful alleviations of the heavy tedium of her prolonged trial, but for you, my poor E—, whose burden seems to me indeed one of the heaviest I can imagine. It is vain wishing that things were other than they are. They are as God wills, and our best resource, even when He allows us others, is still our absolute resignation to His will. He will surely support you, under the task He has appointed you, and to be what you are to H— must reward you in some measure with the consciousness of your admirable devotion to the duty you have accepted.

God bless you and sustain you to the end. The time cannot be far off when she and you will alike be set free, and you will only have to rejoice that you have been so faithful and so good.

You will be sorry to hear that my last letter from F— brought me the bad news of a furious hurricane having swept over the coast of Georgia, terribly injuring all the estates, the plantations, and absolutely devastating their property at Butler's Island. The whole rice crop is destroyed, the fields submerged under from three to four feet of water. The rice has been harvested–that is, cut–but only stacked in the fields, where the portion of it that has not been swept down to the sea by the flood is lying rotting.

This is not only the loss of the year's income, which depends upon the crop, but also the loss of the means of planting for the next year, unless money is borrowed for the purpose. Altogether it is a most distressing occurrence.

I am just going off to church now to be present at the baptism of Ellen's baby. Luigi has very kindly, and I think wisely, consented to allow the child to be christened in the Protestant church.

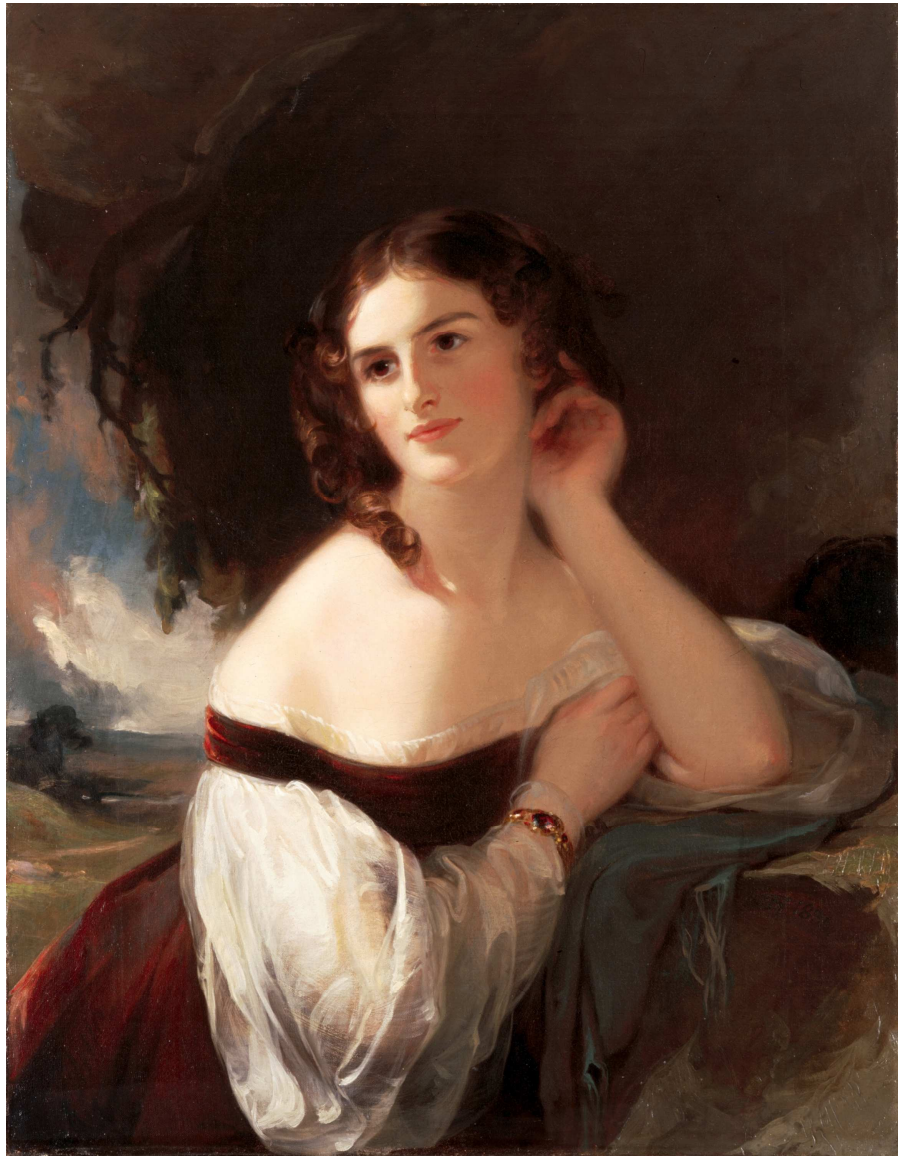
I want you to get your "Peerage," and look out for me who is the Countess of —. There comes to the *table d'hôte* here such an extraordinary woman calling herself by that name, that I really would give something to know who and what she is. She is quite old and extremely handsome–must have been a rare beauty in her youth. She is now exactly like a wax figure in a barber's shop. Her complexion the fairest blush rose; her eyebrows penciled, like the Empress Eugenie's; a perfect turban of auburn plaits all round her head, without a shred of cap or lace on it, and her ears hung with large rubies, set in diamonds; her collar fastened with a huge opal, set in diamonds, and her fingers covered with more precious stones, of every sort, shape, and size, than I ever saw on any human hands before. She has with her a young Spanish duke, but whether by way of husband or son, I do not know; and she is Countess of—, and who and what is she?

I have just come from church, where Ellen's big boy has been baptized. The poor little fellow will not, I trust, prove a "fair-weather" Christian, for it is pouring torrents of rain, the sky is as black as London, the lake as black as the sky, all broken up into angry foam, and the beautiful opposite shores blurred, dark, dirty, and dreary looking.

Good-bye, my dearest H—. Good-bye, my dear E—. God bless and comfort and support you both.

Ever, as ever, yours,

FANNY KEMBLE.



references:

text — «Further Records, 1848-1883, A Series of Letters by Frances Anne Kemble (forming a sequel to records of a girlhood and records of later life), with a portrait of Mrs. Charles Kemble», Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1891
Fanny Kemble's portrait — Thomas Sully, 1834, oil on canvas, 91.8 × 71.0 cm, located at the White House/Washington D.C.
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