

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.

BEX, RHONE VALLEY.

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 underdone vegetables "à 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.



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» [excerpt], Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1891

Fanny Kemble as Beatrice — Thomas Sully, 1833, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

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