

Above a steepy crag we wound
Where gloomy pines his forehead crowned ;
And heard we, with a sullen swell,
The turbid Arve dash through the dell ;
You might have thought it, moaning by,
Wail for the loss of liberty ;
For high the rocks whose mighty screen
Confined the narrow pass between,
And many a mass of granite grey
Opposed the torrent's forceful way ;
So headlong rushed the lightning tide,
No pass was there for aught beside ;
And we high o'er those cliffs so sheer
Must climb the mountain barrier,
Until unfolded to the eye
The fruitful fields of Chamouni.

It lay before us, as a child
Of beauty in the desert wild ;
Full strange it seemed that thing so fair,
So fairy-like, could harbour there ;
For fields of bending corn there grew
Close to the glacier's wintry blue ;
And saw we the same sun-ray shine
On pasture gay and mountain pine,
Whose dark and spiry forests rose
Till mingled with eternal snows
That climbed into the clear blue sky
In peaked, impending majesty.
'Tis passing strange that such a place
In all its native loveliness
Should, pent within those wilds so lone,
For many ages pass unknown—

Unknown save by a simple few
Who their own valley only knew,
Nor dared the mountain ridge that bound
That lovely vale with terrors round ;
That lived secluded from mankind,
Contented yet in heart and mind ;
That lived within that world alone,
A world of beauty of their own.¹
And now Helvetia's cliffty reign
Contains not in her Alpine chain,
In valley deep, on mountain high,
A race like those of Chamouni ;

¹ [Cf. "The Crystal Hunter," below, p. 388.]

A TOUR ON THE CONTINENT

For they have loved, at dawn of day,
 To trace the chamois' fearful way,
 Or on the toppling shelf of snow
 With crags above and clouds below;
 Or on the peak whose spiry head
 Is beetling o'er abysses dread,
 Where place for foot, and grasp for hand,
 Is all the hunter can command;
 Or on the glacier's rigid wave
 Where he may find a chasmy grave;
 Returning with his spoils at even
 Ere the red sun hath left the heaven.¹

[THE ARVE AT CHAMOUNI]

*Ms VIII
after Source
of Arveron*

<Pie> I WOKE to hear the lullaby
 Of the swift river rolling by, <swift>
 Monotonous yet beautiful
 Ever the gentle pebbly swell!
 <Of ever> And every ripple lent his plash
 <m> Joining in chorus with the dash
 Of every mighty mountain stream
 That joyful sung his morning hymn,
 His iris-glory round him quivering
 Where his white showery falls were shivering.
 There is a melancholy smile
 On nature's features fair the while,
 When the dank dew descending grey
 Weep for the loss of parting day;

¹ [In the MS. Book viii., which contains the first draft of the "Tour," the following lines—descriptive, probably, of the Alps—immediately precede the prose passage on "The Source of the Arveron" (below, p. 386), and the above lines, "I woke to hear the lullaby" :—

"Oh, are there spirits, can there be
 Things of such wondrous mystery?
 Oh, are there spirits, can a mind
 Float bodiless and unconfined?
 Or can the air, the earth, the sea
 Be filled with immortality?
 Some say that in the cold moonlight
 There hovereth many a changing sprite.
 Some say the wind,—and who can tell?—
 Bears spirits' voices in its swell.
 But if upon our mortal sense
 There rules unearthly influence—
 If there be sprites in earth or air,
 They surely have their dwelling there."

¹ ["It is here
 Mont Blanc in
 is the Dôme, of
 ch. iv. in *The Alps*
 II.

A TOUR ON THE CONTINENT

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There is a sad and soft complaining
 In the light breeze when day is waning;
 The evening star is fair and full,
 But it is passing sorrowful;
 And merry is the laughing light
 That blushes o'er the heaven's height,
 That stream and bird and breeze and tree
 For very joy sing merrily,
 When wakes the morn the mountain snows
 From their cold, fixed, pale repose.
 It was a most enchanting vision!
 The morning mists had upward risen
 And, floating in the fields of air,
 Lay in long lines most calmly there.
 You could not call them clouds, I wist,
 They were not smoke, they were not mist;
 They were a sort of visible breeze
 Touching the tops of the pine-trees
 That, as we passed beneath and strook
 Their stretchy branches, ever shook
 The laughing showers of dancing dew
 Reflecting every rainbow hue,
 Or clinging to the clusters dank
 Of bright green moss upon the bank.
 And where those pines their crests had cloven
 How rich the sun was interwoven!
 And smiling through the leafy shade
 Among the spangled grass it played,
 And drank the dew from flower and blade,
 Melting the heavy drops to air
 That so dragged down the gossamer.

[EVENING AT CHAMOUNI]

Nor such the night whose stormy night,
 Heroic Balmat braved,¹
 When darkening on the Gouté's height,
 The tempest howled and raved.
 Upon the mighty hill, forlorn,
 He stood alone amid the storm;

¹ ["It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that this refers to the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786 by Jacques Balmat."—*Editor's Note*, 1891. The "Gouté's height" is the Dôme, or the Aiguille, du Goutier. For an account of Balmat's ascent, see ch. iv. in *The Annals of Mont Blanc*, by C. E. Matthews (1898).]

Tour," the
 the prose
 "I woke

not for
 take -
 Lake smiled
 sweetly

<for>

the morn [sic repitition]

<lightso>

Watching the last day gleams decay,
 Supposing its returning ray
 Should see him lying there asleep,
 With Alpine snow for winding sheet.
 Methinks I see him, as he stood
 Upon the ridge of snow,
 The battering burst of winds above,
 The cloudy precipice below,
 Watching the dawn. With proud delight
 He saw that long, tempestuous night
 Drive to the westward, and unfold
 The ocean snowfields upward rolled,
 Bright with the morning's glance of gold,
 It past away, the tossing flood
 Of changing vapour, headlong riding,
 And lo! the untrodden summit stood
 Accessibly beside him.

THE SOURCE OF THE ARVERON

WHAT a delicious thing is a reverie, that total abstraction from all things present, that stilly, dreamy, waking vision that places you where you are not, that carries you where you wish to be, that presents the past to your recollection, and the future to your fancy, so forcibly, so impressively, so lovelily, throwing a glow on every circumstance, and a halo on every feature, giving the vivid, the magic colouring of the dream to the defined and distinct recollection of the reality. It is thus that I look back upon our first walk at Chamouni, to the Source of the Arveron. What varieties of childish beauty we met with in that short walk, every little mountaineer was a perfect picture, one little fellow insisted upon conducting us to the source, and as *notre guide principale* piloted us proudly through the crowd of little fry who were lying in wait, all expecting a similar distinction, but who, finding the post of honour preoccupied, followed very gravely *en suite*. "Voilà la source," quoth our *petit conducteur*, as we emerged from a dark wood of pines bordering on the waves of the flowing Arveron. It was exceeding lovely. The day had been one continued succession of storms, but the eve was breaking and giving fair promise of a sunny morrow. Right in front a few exhausted, but lingering, tempest clouds shadowed the dark masses of pine that girdle the Montanvert, but farther to the west broke away into fleecy masses, scarcely distinguishable from the eternal snow that flashed through their openings, and farther still a serene evening sky glowed peacefully. A lurid, ominous light pervaded the whole air, that stormy and murky lume, the effect of the strange combat between the sun and tempest; the one casting the whole body of gigantic

<shootin>

<lu> A TOUR ON THE CONTINENT

387

mountains into a dreary darkness, the other pouring a stream of red,
ghostly, dusky light up the valley, that caught as it past the projecting
pinnacled spires of the glacier des Bossons, which flashed dazzling forth
from the gloom of the ribbed crags as the lightning leaps from the
thunder cloud. A low, hollow, melancholy echoing was heard issuing from
the recesses of the mountains, the last sighing of the passing-away tempest,
the last murmurs of the storm spirit as he yielded up his reign, it past
away, and the blue rigidity of the transparent cavern of the glacier woke
rosily to the departing sun.

<grotto>

<Kiss of the>

The foam-globes¹ round come riding fast,
Like snow upon the eddies cast,
Forth from his cold and silent tomb,
Forth flies the river from the gloom,
The bars that echoed to his roaring
Those icy bars have burst before him,
And now his chafed surges see
Bound high in laughing liberty!
Oh, frigidly the glacier pale
Bears broadly to the nether vale!
Right in his cliffy, shivered side
Yawneth a chasm high and wide,
And from the portal arched and strong
Springs glad some forth the Arveron,
Seems it an ancient forteresse,
All shattered in its mightiness;
The higher towers all rent and riven,
The battlements all² downward driven,
And that its form thou now couldst trace,
Froze to an icy³ wilderness:
And that, its portal vast and old,
All arched by the crisp ice cold,
And through whose chasms of paly green
The shivery sunshine shot between,
Or trembling with a meteor light,
Or dancing in the billows bright,
Smiling aetherially through
The ghost lights of the crystal blue.

¹ [See above, note on p. 62.]

² [The ed. of 1891 reads "are" for "all."]

³ [The ed. of 1891 reads "a mighty."]