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978-1-108-00853-2 - The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 5: Modern Painters III

John Ruskin

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The influence of John Ruskin (1819–1900), both on his own time and on artistic and social developments in the twentieth century, cannot be over-stated. He changed Victorian perceptions of art, and was the main influence behind ‘Gothic revival’ architecture. As a social critic, he argued for the improvement of the condition of the poor, and against the increasing mechanisation of work in factories, which he believed was dull and soul-destroying. The thirty-nine volumes of the Library Edition of his works, published between 1903 and 1912, are themselves a remarkable achievement, in which his books and essays – almost all highly illustrated – are given a biographical and critical context in extended introductory essays and in the ‘Minor Ruskiniana’ – extracts from letters, articles and reminiscences both by and about Ruskin. This fifth volume contains Volume 3 of *Modern Painters*.

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The Works of John Ruskin

VOLUME 5: MODERN PAINTERS III

JOHN RUSKIN
EDITED BY EDWARD TYAS COOK
AND ALEXANDER WEDDERBURN



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WORKS OF
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JOHN RUSKIN

EDITED BY

E. T. COOK

AND

ALEXANDER WEDDERBURN



LONDON

GEORGE ALLEN, 156, CHARING CROSS ROAD

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VOLUME V

MODERN PAINTERS

VOLUME III

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MODERN PAINTERS

VOLUME III

CONTAINING

PART IV

OF MANY THINGS

BY

JOHN RUSKIN

*Of arrogance, "Accuse me not
If, having walked with Nature,
And offered, far as frailty would allow,
My heart a daily sacrifice to Truth,
I now affirm of Nature and of Truth,
Whom I have served, that their Divinity
Revolts, offended at the ways of men,
Philosophers, who, though the human soul
Be of a thousand faculties composed,
And twice ten thousand interests, do yet prize
This soul, and the transcendent universe,
No more than as a mirror that reflects
To proud Self-love her own intelligence."*

WORDSWORTH

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The drawing of Plate A was reproduced by half-tone process in *The Artist* for July 1897, and again, March 1900; that of Plate B, on a somewhat larger scale than here, in *Studies in Both Arts* (Plate ix.), where a passage from *Modern Painters*, vol. iv. ch. xiii., was given with it, under the title of "The Aiguilles and their Pedestal"; and that of Plate F, by autotype, in the large paper edition of *Studies in Ruskin* (1890), Plate 5, and again, by half-tone process, in *The Artist* for July 1897.

The following drawings were exhibited at the Ruskin Exhibition at the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours in 1901: Plate 12, No. 243; Plate 13, No. 114; Plate 14, No. 310; Plate 15, No. 205. The drawings of Plates 12 and 13 were also exhibited at the Coniston Exhibition in 1900 (Nos. 102 and 54); and that of Plate G at Manchester in 1904 (No. 371).

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INTRODUCTION TO VOL. V

(*In the chronological order, Vol. IV. is followed in succession by Vols. VIII.–XII.; the present Introduction should thus be read after that to Vol. XII.*)

THE second volume of *Modern Painters* was published in April, 1846; the third and fourth volumes appeared in the early part of 1856. The story of Ruskin's life and work during the intervening decade is told in the Introductions to Vols. VIII. to XII. We have now to pick up the thread of the interrupted book, and as the third and fourth volumes were written and published much at the same time, it will be convenient to treat them together here.

We left Ruskin, with *The Stones of Venice* and much occasional work well off his hands, setting out once more with his parents for Switzerland (Vol. XII. p. xxxvii.). His father, as we have said (*ibid.*, p. xxvii.), was impatient to see the great book continued. The good-humoured chaff of friends pointed the author in the same direction. "*Modern Painters*, I tell him," wrote Rossetti, "will be old masters before the work is ended."¹ He needed change of thought and scene, and amid the stillness of the Alpine meadows, and the solemn silence of the hills, he resumed his interrupted work.

In his final epilogue to *Modern Painters*, Ruskin (as already mentioned) speaks of the whole book as inspired by the beauty and guided by the strength of the snows of Chamouni. We have seen that this was the case with the first volume (Vol. III. p. xxv.), which was written after a Swiss tour in 1842. The second volume similarly followed upon his foreign tour in 1845. He was in Switzerland again in 1846 and 1849, and for a shorter time in 1851. On all these occasions he was collecting impressions, observations, and memories which were to be utilised in the later volumes of the book. To these earlier tours we must, therefore, revert, before we can take up the

¹ *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham*, p. 171.

thread in 1854. The book, though interrupted by other tasks, was never out of the author's mind, and in every sojourn among the mountains he was preparing himself, by "walking with Nature" and "offering his heart a daily sacrifice to Truth," to affirm the lessons which he had learnt. Even amidst his work at Venice, his mind was set on his earlier task, and we have seen his satisfaction in finding a point of contact between *Modern Painters* and his architectural work.¹ The study of the Renaissance suggested to him the thought that the formalism of the classical architecture had killed the love of nature which had been conspicuous in the earlier Gothic art, and that the romantic movement, making the landscape of Turner possible, was a revolt against the imprisonment of the spirit within the Five Orders. So, too, when at Venice the news of Turner's death had reached him, he went on indeed with his immediate task, but registered a vow to use his increased knowledge to the greater honour of the Master. "I will make *Modern Painters*," he wrote to his father (January 1, 1852), "so complete a monument of him, *D.V.*, that there will be nothing left for the Life but when he was born, and where he lived, and whom he dined with on this or that occasion. All which may be stated by anybody."

Already in 1845 Ruskin had commenced the studies necessary for the later volumes. He returned home in that year by the St. Gothard, as already related (Vol. IV. p. xxxv.), in order to find the sites or scenes of some of Turner's later drawings. He described his studies in letters to his father:—

"FAIDO, *Friday, August 15.*—I have found his [Turner's] subject² or the materials of it here; and I shall devote to-morrow to examining them, and seeing how he has put them together. The stones, road, and bridge are all true; but the mountains, compared with Turner's colossal conception, look pigmy and poor. Nevertheless, Turner has given their actual, not their apparent size. . . . I have got two sketches to-day (Saturday) of Mr. Turner's subject, and a specimen of the stones of the torrent—gneiss coloured by iron ochre proceeding from decomposing garnets. The road on the left is the old one, which has been carried away in the pass, and that on the right is the new one, which crosses the stream by the shabby temporary bridge. It has been carried away twice, so that there are

¹ See Vol. X. pp. xlvii., 207 *n.*

² That is, for the drawing in Ruskin's possession of "The Pass of Faido," engraved as the frontispiece to *Modern Painters*, vol. iv. ("The Gates of the Hills"), and analysed in that volume, ch. ii. and Plates 20 and 21.

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the remains of two roads and two bridges, and three new bridges of wood, which Turner has cut out, keeping the one he wanted. The gallery on the left is nearly destroyed — it protected the road from a cataract which has now taken another line, and has left the worn channel you see.”

“FAIDO, *Sunday, 17th.*— . . . On looking at my two sketches, made yesterday, I find them wonderfully like the picture, but it is beautiful to see the way Turner has arranged and cut out. I never could have dreamed of taking such a subject.”¹

These were the studies and drawings used in the chapter (ii.) of the fourth volume on “Turnerian Topography.”

In the following year Ruskin was again in Switzerland, and he has described in *Præterita* (ii. §§ 189, 190), with illustrative extracts from his diary, how he occupied himself with watching phases of the sunset, and the forms and colours of trees, rocks, and clouds. But it was in the Swiss tour of 1849, partly with his parents and partly by himself, that the principal studies for the third and fourth volumes of *Modern Painters* were made; for that reason, an account of the tour was reserved (Vol. IX. p. xxiii.) for the present place.² His diaries and letters of the period are indeed on almost every page a commentary on the book. The scenes which left the deepest impress were Vevay, Chamouni, the Rhone Valley, and Zermatt. Nearly all the most beautiful and the most important passages in the third and fourth volumes embody impressions received or observations recorded at one or other of those places. They went first to Vevay, and it was there, among the narcissus meadows, then scarce touched by villas and railways,

¹ See also Vol. IV. p. xxiv. *n.*

² The itinerary of the tour of 1849 was as follows: Folkestone (April 15–18), Boulogne, by rail to Paris (April 24), Sens (April 25), Mont Bard (April 26), Dijon, Champagnole (April 29), Geneva (April 30), Chambéry (May 2), the Grande Charreuse, St. Laurent (May 4), Chambéry (May 5), and thence to Geneva and Vevay. Leaving his parents there, Ruskin went on a short tour with Richard Fall (for whom see Vol. II. p. 429) to Chamouni (May 12) and Martigny (May 17), returning to Vevay (May 18). Thence to St. Martin's; a month later, he went with his parents, by Salanches (June 10), to Chamouni (June 13). There they stayed a month, returning to Geneva (July 18). Leaving it again after a brief stay, they spent some days at St. Martin's and went on to St. Gervais, whence Ruskin started off by himself, beginning with the Tour of Mont Blanc from Chamouni over the Col de Bonhomme to Chapiu (July 27), and thence over the Col de la Seigne to Courmayeur (July 28). Crossing the Col de Ferret to Martigny he went next to Zermatt (Aug. 2), and after a few days there, returned by St. Nicholas (Aug. 10) to Chamouni (Aug. 15). He spent three nights at the inn on the Montenvers (Aug. 22) and returned to Chamouni (Aug. 25), thence proceeding by Sion and Martigny to Visp and Leuk (whence he ascended the Gemmi Pass), and so to Geneva (Aug. 30), where he rejoined his parents, and Dijon (Sept. 4) to Paris (Sept. 8), Amiens (Sept. 14) and Calais (Sept. 16).

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that Ruskin stored up the impressions which he cast into his prose-poem to the grass of the field. Everybody knows the passage; it is the one which Matthew Arnold cited as an example of Ruskin's genius in its best and most original exercise.¹ The first thought of the passage occurs in his diary of 1849:—

“VEVAY, *Sunday, June 3.*— . . . Such grass, for strength, and height, and loveliness, I never saw—all blue too with masses of salvia, and flamed with gold, yet quiet and solemn in its own green depth; the air was full of the scent of the living grass and new-mown hay, the sweet breathing of the honeysuckle and narcissus shed upon it at intervals, mixed with the sound of streams, and the clear thrill of birds' voices far away. The sun's rays (as it fell from behind a western cloud) rose gradually up towards the cottage Pleiades,² casting the shadows of the pines far across its avenue of turf—that indescribable turf, soft like some rich, smooth fur, running in bays and inlets and bright straits and shadowy creeks and gulphs, in among the forest, calm, upright, unentangled forest, itself scattered in groups like a happy crowd—with isolated tufted trees here and there, and then two or three together, and then many; graceful as clouds in summer sky—no wildness, nor crowding; no withering; each serene in his place and quiet pride. I looked at the slope of distant grass on the hill; and then at the waving heads near me. What a gift of God that is, I thought. Who could have dreamed of such a soft, green, continual, tender clothing for the dark earth—the food of cattle, and of man. Think what poetry has come of its pastoral influence, what happiness from its everyday ministering, what life from its sustenance. Bread that strengtheneth man's heart—ah, well may the Psalmist number among God's excellencies, ‘He maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.’”

It was on the same walk that another thought came to him, which finds expression in a passage of the present volume,³ and elsewhere in his writings:—

“VEVAY, *Sunday, June 3.*—I walked up this afternoon to Blonay,⁴ very happy, and yet full of some sad thoughts; how perhaps I should not be again among those lovely scenes; as I was now and had ever been, a youth with his parents—it seemed that the sunset

¹ Ch. xiv. § 51, p. 289, below.

² Presumably a cottage on the slopes of the Pleyaux, or Pleiades, a mountain above Vevay.

³ See below, p. 183.

⁴ The Castle of Blonay, two miles above Vevay to the north-east; an hour's walk from the Castle leads to the top of the Pleiades.

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Vevay in Spring

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of to-day sunk upon me like the departure of youth. First I had a hot march among the vines, and between their dead stone walls; once or twice I flagged a little, and began to think it tiresome; then I put my *mind* into the scene, instead of suffering the body only to make report of it; and looked at it with the possession-taking grasp of the imagination—the true one; it gilded all the dead walls, and I felt a charm in every vine tendril that hung over them. It required an effort to maintain the feeling: it was poetry while it lasted, and I felt that it was only while under it that one could draw, or invent, or give glory to, any part of such a landscape. I repeated ‘I am in *Switzerland*’ over and over again, till the name brought back the true group of associations, and I felt I had a soul, like my boy’s soul, once again. I have not insisted enough on this source of all great contemplative art. The whole scene without it was but sticks and stones and steep dusty road.

“I tried the same experiment again on a group of old cottage and tower near Blonay, in coming down; the tower, as I found afterwards, dated 1609 on a stone forming the top of one of its quaint windows, as opposite [reference to a sketch], but, seen in the distance, remarkable only for its upper open window, letting a bit of the far-off blue mountains of Meillerie clear through it, and its conical roof mingling with their peaks. All this I longed to draw, but said to myself that ‘the bit of fence and field underneath would not do.’ A minute after I corrected myself, and by throwing my mind full into the fence and field, as if I had nothing else but them to deal with, I found light and power, and loveliness, a Rogers vignette character put into them directly. I felt that the human soul was all—the subject nothing.

“Not so, when I passed ‘a little further on’¹ past the low chapel that I drew last time I was here, with its neighbouring gate, inscribed ‘pense a ta fin’; and came down among the meadows, covered half a fathom deep with the emblem by which God suggests that thought.”²

A little later, on the way to Chamouni, the same experience came to him:—

“SALLENCHES, *June* 1849.—I had a pleasant walk up the hill towards St. Gervais this afternoon. . . . I felt in this walk, being somewhat tired, very forcibly again how much the power of nature depended upon the quantity of mind which one could give to her. I had an exquisite winding path—a road—with bits of rocky bank,

¹ Milton: *Samson Agonistes*, line 2.

² Here, in the diary, follows the passage on the grass just given.

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and flowery pasture, and cottages and chapels. I had the whole valley of the Arve, from the Grotte de Balme to St. Gervais. I had the Doron and its range behind me, the mighty cliffs of the Varens beside me, the Nant d'Arpenaz like a pillar of cloud at their feet; Mont Blanc and all its aiguilles with the Verte and Argentière in front of me; marvellous blocks of granite and pines beside me, and yet with all this I enjoyed it no more than a walk on Denmark Hill. Setting myself to find out the reason of this, I discovered that when I confined myself to one thing—as to the grass or stones, or the Doron, or the Nant d'Arpenaz, or the Mont Blanc—I began to enjoy directly; because then I had mind enough to put into the thing, and my enjoyment arose from the quantity of mental and imaginative energy which I could give it; but when I looked at all together, I had not, in my then state of weariness, mind enough to give to all, and none were therefore of any value. I thought this a most instructive lesson; both showing how the majesty of nature depends upon the force of human spirit, and how each spirit can only embrace at a time so much of what has been appointed for its food, and may therefore rest contented with little, knowing that if it throw its full energy into that little, it will be more than enough; and that an over-supply of food would only be an over-tax upon its energies. This crushing of the mind by overweight is finely given by Forbes.”¹

This experience was utilised, and some of the notes from the diary embodied, in the present volume (p. 183, below). A month at Chamouni followed, and this, for *Modern Painters*, was among the most fruitful times in Ruskin's life. With the faithful Couttet for his guide, he rambled during long days among the glaciers, or sauntered in the valley, examining, observing, sketching.² And at evening time we may see him leaning, as he says in his diary (July 8), “on the blocks of lichen wall beside the road, exchanging good-nights with the passers-by, and listening as their voices left me to the filling of the valley by the sound of the waves of the Arve, mixed with cattle bells and many strange and dim mountain sounds, mingled in confusion like the grey stones of the wall I leaned upon.” Thus did “beauty born of murmuring sound” pass into his thoughts and words. But in company with the hours of restful thought came strenuous labours.

He worked upon the stones of Chamouni as diligently as upon

¹ *Travels through the Alps*, ch. iv., pp. 56–57 in Coolidge's reprint of 1900.

² For an extract from his diary at this time, see *Modern Painters*, vol. iv. ch. xvii. § 30 (author's note); for his measurements of mountain angles, *ibid.* ch. xviii. § 15 (author's note).

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B



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Chamouni

View from the Hotel de l'Union.

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the *Stones of Venice*. He noted all the angles of the Aiguilles, observed every fleeting effect of cloud, examined the rocks, collected the minerals, gathered the flowers, and weighed the sand in the streams.¹ His observations were entered up in his diaries and notebooks as carefully as were his architectural studies at Venice (Vol. IX. p. xxiv.). His industry in drawing was as great. Two characteristic drawings of Chamouni are here given. At a later time, when' he was examining his materials for the composition of the fourth volume of *Modern Painters*, he made a catalogue of his sketches at Chamouni. This is given below as showing the amount of work he did; it will be seen that no less than forty-seven drawings belong to the period of study which we are now describing.² An extract from his diary will show how his days were spent:—

“CHAMOUNI, 28th day (and for this year, last,—unless I return from Zermatt): *Evening, July 10.*—It has been a glorious one; I was working from Mont Blanc before breakfast, out immediately afterwards; made some notes of Aiguille Bouchard, went on to the

¹ See Vol. XI. p. 237.

² The following “Catalogue of Sketches in neighbourhood of Mont Blanc” is from his diary of 1854. “1849 B” refers to a second and shorter stay at Chamouni when he was on his way to Venice in the autumn of that year (see Vol. IX. p. xxiv.):—

1. Mont Blanc and its aiguilles, from Geneva	1849
2. Same sketch continued, with the Buet and Sixt mountains, and camera lucida outlines of Mole below; on the back, camera lucida of Salève	1849
3. The Brezon, from inn window, Bonneville	1849 B
4. End of Bonneville on the other side of the bridge	1849
5. Limestone promontories of the Brezon, a little beyond last sketch; on the back an elaborate sketch of Mont Blanc de St. Gervais, and an oven at St. Martin's	1849
6. Valley of Cluse, and Aiguille de Varens	1849
7. Ravine near Maglans	1849
8. Cottage at Maglans; on the back, limestone cliffs at entrance of Valley of Cluse	1849
9. Top of Mont du Reposoir, above Sallenches	1849
10. Valley of Cluse, looking back from Sallenches	1846
11. Mont Blanc, from St. Martin's	1849
12. Mont Blanc, from St. Martin's, in storm	1849
13. Aiguille Sans Nom, from Les Montets	1844
14. Aiguilles of Chamouni, from Les Ouches	1842
15. Aiguilles of Chamouni, from near Bossons	1844
16. Camera lucida outlines of Mont Blanc, from Chamouni	1849
17. Montagne de la Côte, from Chamouni	1849
18. Montagne de la Côte, from Chamouni; on the back, a little bit of Petit Charmoz and Blaitière in cloud	1849
19. Montagne de la Côte, from Chamouni; on the back, a little bit of Petit Charmoz and Blaitière in cloud	1849
20. Montagne de la Côte, from Chamouni; on the back, a little bit of Petit Charmoz and Blaitière in cloud	1849
21. Top of Mont Blanc, from Chamouni	1849
22. Autumn on the bases of the Aiguilles	1849
23. The Aiguilles of Chamouni, from the village	1849 B
24. Camera lucida outline of the same; on the back, camera lucida of Jorasses and Aiguille Dru, and most important sketch of Blaitière	1849
25. Large eye-sketch of Aiguilles of Chamouni, from Chamouni	1849
26. Aiguille Dru, from Chamouni	1849

Source beside the Arveron, somewhat closer than usual, it having changed its bed entirely within the last three days, and running four feet deep where I used to walk; took slopes of Dru, from just beside the Arveron bridge; then climbed the avalanche with Couttet to foot of rocks near Montanvert; could not get upon them; awkward chasm between the ice and them; and at the only place where we could get upon them, another at the other side which made it a risk to pass the ridge. Got on them at last, however, higher up, and took from them specimens 27, 28 . . . [notes on these, and on the geology of the rocks]. After examining the rocks here — note that the one under the cascade is called the Rocher du Chataigne—we climbed to one almost isolated promontory of pines immediately on the right of the bare rocks. At the top of it the glacier was seen against the sky through the most fantastic pines, and the grand rocks falling to the Source, nodding forwards (like a wave about to break¹), and the great cascade bounding from its narrow way, with the look of a wildly revolving wheel—I was irresistibly reminded by its action of the gesture of the leapers into

27. Shoulders of Charmoz, from Chamouni	1849
28. Aiguille du Plan, from foot of Breven, half a mile beyond village of Chamouni	1849
29. Aiguille Charmoz, from bottom of valley, beneath it	1849
30. Angles of Aiguille Dru; and on back, reflections in Lake of Geneva	1849
31. Aiguille Bouchard, from valley	1849
32. Aiguille Bouchard and Glacier du Bois	1849
33. Aiguilles of Chamouni, from foot of Flegère	1849
34. General contours of the same	1849
35. The same, from ascent beyond Glacier des Bois	1844
36. Aiguille Charmoz, from window of the "Union"	1849
37. Outlines of Aiguille du Plan	1849
38. Aiguille du Plan, from its base	1849
39. Continuation of the same sketch	1849
40. Aiguille Blaitière, from near its base	1849
41–43. Views of the spur of Aiguille Blaitière	1849
44. Aiguille Blaitière, from the foot of its glacier	1849
45. Details of Aiguille Charmoz	1849
46. Aiguille Charmoz, from Montanvert	1849
47. Cleavage of Petit Charmoz	1849
48. Aiguille Verte, from near Flegère	1844
49. Shadow of Aiguille Dru on cloud, from Montanvert	1849
50. Aiguilles with Mont Blanc, from Aiguille Bouchard	1844
51. Col du Géant, from Aiguille Bouchard	1844
52. Aiguille d'Argentière, from flank of Buet	1844
53. Top of Montagne de la Côte, from the flank of Mont Blanc	1844
54. Pines close to Glacier des Bois	1849
55. Pines at foot of Montanvert	1849
56. Rocks near Les Ouches (above Les Montets)	1844
57. Aiguilles Rouges, from window of "Union"	1849
58. Side of the Breven	1849
59. Aiguilles Rouges, from Source of Arveron	1844
60. Limestones of the Valley of Sixt	1844
61. The same, better drawn (at head of valley)	1849
62. View from my window at Chapin; on the back, Aiguille de Varens in cloud	1849
63. View from the top of the Col de la Seigne	1849
64. Mont Blanc, from the Allées Blanche	1849

¹ Ruskin uses this image in *Modern Painters*, vol. iv. ch. xv. § 2.

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La Cascade de la Folie, Chamouni

From the drawing in the possession of Sir John Simon, K.C.B.

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the lake, especially the man waving his hat in Cruikshank's illustrations to *Pee-wit*.¹ There is something in its great weight of water which makes it differ in its fling from all other cascades I have ever seen—its waves bound like masses of stone, and nearly all the way down, the solid water is seen yellowish among the small clouds of blue spray which beat down with it. . . . [References follow to diagrams of the curves of the falling water and of the angles of the rocks.] I never saw a more wonderful scene than the glen at this point with its small, but steep torrent, its mighty stones cast down from the moraine above, and its vertical walls, shutting us in to the glacier and the awful cataract beneath it. Nor have I yet seen a more noble and burning sunset than was on the Charmoz and lower Verte to-night—a hot, almost sanguine, but solemn crimson. . . . I have much to thank God for, now and ever.”

Laborare est orare. Ruskin's thankfulness found its expression in those careful and loving studies, in words and drawings, of the Chamouni aiguilles which fill so large a portion of the fourth volume of *Modern Painters*.

His first month at Chamouni was now over, and his parents returned from the Alps to Geneva. He, meanwhile, attended by Couttet and George, was permitted to have another month to pursue his mountain-studies. First, he made the familiar Tour of Mont Blanc, proceeding by St. Gervais and Contamines over the Col du Bonhomme to Chapiu, and thence over the Col de la Seigne to Courmayeur. The first two days are described in a letter to his father: ²—

“COURMAYEUR, *Sunday afternoon.*

“[*July 29th, 1849.*]

“MY DEAREST FATHER,—(Put the three sheets in order first, 1, 2, 3; then read this front and *back*, and then 2, and then 3, front and back.)

“You and my mother were doubtless very happy when you saw the day clear up as you left St. Martin's. Truly it was impossible that any day could be more perfect towards its close; we reached Nant Borrant at twelve o'clock—or a little before; and, Couttet having given his sanction to my wish to get on, we started again soon after one, and reached the top of the Col de Bonhomme about five.

¹ The frontispiece to the second volume (1826) of *German Popular Stories*, with etchings by Cruikshank. In J. C. Hotten's edition (1869), for which Ruskin wrote an introduction (reprinted in a later volume of this edition), the illustration referred to faces p. 202.

² Portions of this letter are printed in W. G. Collingwood's *Life of Ruskin*, 1900, pp. 113–115.

You would have been delighted with that view—it is one of those lovely seas of blue mountain, one behind the other, of which one never tires—this, fortunately, westward, so that all the blue ridges and ranges above Conflans and Beaufort were dark against the afternoon sky, though misty with its light; while eastward, a range of snowy crests, of which the most important was the Mont Iseran, caught the sunlight full upon them. The sun was as warm, and the air as mild on the place where the English travellers sank and perished,¹ as in our garden at Denmark Hill on the summer evenings.

“There is, however, no small excuse for a man’s losing courage on that pass, if the weather were foul. I never saw one so literally pathless—so void of all guide and help from the lie of the ground—so embarrassing from the distance which one has to wind round mere brows of craggy precipice without knowing the direction in which one is moving, while the path is perpetually lost in heaps of shale or among clusters of crags, even when it is free of snow. All however when I passed was serene, and even beautiful, owing to the glow which the red rocks had in the sun. We got down to Chapiu about seven, itself one of the most desolately placed villages I ever saw in the Alps. Scotland is in no place that I have seen so barren or so lonely. Ever since I passed Shap Fells, when a child,² I have had an excessive love for this kind of desolation, and I enjoyed my little square chalet window and my chalet supper exceedingly (mutton with garlic). I fell asleep the moment I lay down, in spite of sheep bells and mule scents beneath me, and was never more surprised in my life than at waking at midnight with a very sharp and well-defined sore throat. I thought I must be dreaming of sore throat at first, but it wouldn’t go away, and when I woke in the morning it was worse.”

He consulted his symptoms, however, and determined to press on to Courmayeur:—

“So we started at half-past six up the wildest Scottish-looking valley, with a glacier in front of us, not at all the sort of thing which one would especially select for the morning ride of a patient with a sore throat. It was too cold to sit on the mule, so I got off and walked until we got into the sun, and then rode up to the

¹ The higher slopes of the Col du Bonhomme are occasionally swept by violent winds and snow-eddies; this was the case on September 13, 1830, when two Englishmen, with guides, perished from cold and exhaustion on the Pass. In fine weather guides delight to point out the scene of the disaster, to give their charges a pleasing sense of adventure.

² See *Modern Painters*, vol. iii. ch. xvii. § 13, and Vol. XII. p. xxi.

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Col. When we got up, the last cloud—except a small group on the Monts Combin and Velan far away—had melted; Mont Blanc and his whole company of hills were clear, and after again consulting my feelings and pulse, I unpacked my sketch-book, sat down under a stone, and made a memorandum which I do not intend to touch hereafter—as I fancy few artists can show a careful sketch in colour, made at 8000 feet above the sea when suffering under violent sore throat.”

The view from the Col de la Seigne sadly disappointed the artist with the sore throat:—

“I made this memorandum (he continues) because I never want to pass that Col again; it is without exception the ugliest and most barren Alpine view, and the most degrading to all the noble objects it encloses, I have ever seen; and, even if I did pass it again, I might pass it twenty times without having the hills so perfectly clear, or the sun so exactly in the right place to show their structure.

“I was still more disappointed for some time as I descended; a glorious white stream of ice at last appeared on the left, and I began to recover my good humour. I walked down the greatest part of the first descent of the Col—like that from the Col de la Balme to Tour.”

The traveller halted to refresh himself, and then:—

“We pushed on towards and past the Lac de Combal—a lake of which you will instantly form a strong opinion when I tell you that it is banked up by a heap of débris at one end and choked up by a valleyful of débris at the other. The moraine of the great glacier¹ of the Allée Blanche after this chokes up the valley altogether for a length of at least two miles: I never saw such a mighty heap of stones and dust; the glacier itself is quite invisible from the road (and I had no mind for extra work or scrambling) except just at the bottom, where the ice appears in one or two places; being exactly of the colour of the heaps of waste coal at the Newcastle pits; and admirably adapted therefore to realise one’s brightest anticipations of the character and style of the Allée Blanche.

“The heap of its moraine conceals, for the two miles of its extent, the entire range of Mont Blanc from the eye. At last you weather the mighty promontory, cross the torrent which issues from its base, and find yourself suddenly at the very foot of the vast

¹ See *Modern Painters*, vol. iv. ch. xv. § 16.