

CLAIRE CLAIRMONT, JOURNAL: AUGUST 14-22, 1814

WEDNESDAY, 17 AUGUST.

Set off at 5. Rainy - we got to some village whose name we did not enquire, wet through - and we asked at a small dirty roadside inn, to be allowed to dry ourselves - but they were as inhospitable as at Gray, and it was only by giving them money, we got them to light a faggot, and let us dry our clothes. Then continue our journey as the rain had nearly ceased. Dine in another village whose name I do not recollect upon dry Bread, a bit of Cheese and plums. It became a beautiful Evening, the rainy clouds fled fast away before the wind and blue sky appeared in various quarters. We approached Besançon the beauty of its situation was an enchantment. The town is in a Valley - it is dirty and old but Nature, dear Nature more than compensates for these defects. We did not stop, but when we had quitted the town, the most stupendous brown rocks burst upon the eye - on top of these rocks stands an old castle in ruins. You then pass through an archway cut through moss and verdure overgrown rocks, and it was almost dark, then issuing from that Mountains, valleys and rivers open on you - a winding road on the top of Rocks - Mountains on each side enclosing a valley, green and smooth as velvet, and there was also a pebbly murmuring stream. These delight-giving scenes last the whole way from Besançon to Mort, a village about a league and a half distant. Our pleasant river got sulky here and insisted upon remaining at a dirty small house, so horribly dirty that we hastened away and climbed some wild rocks and sat there reading till the sun went down. I read *As you like it* which Shelley lent me, for though he forgot to bring his watch, he put in his pocket three small volumes of Shakespeare and carries them about everywhere with him. The wild scene in which this romantic drama is laid, accorded wonderfully with the scene before us - Shelley said poetry read in a room never came so near the soul as if read in a beautiful spot, in the wide open air and under the wide open Heaven. How much is lost by those who live in cities - they are never visited by those deep feelings of adoration for Nature, which took possession of us then, and which to recollect alone will be Heaven. It is fortunate for them that they imagine themselves happy - else how boundless would be their surprise if they could suddenly become philosophers and view things in their true and most beautiful point of view. When the sun set we returned to our Inn - Shelley said it was a regular den - the Beds were so dreadfully dirty we renounced all idea of entering them; and we slept all night on chairs round the kitchen fire. Shelley was much disturbed by a door which creaked whilst some one seemed to be opening and shutting it till and advanced hour of the night - and also by the cries of a sick baby - and so was poor Mary who as very tired and weak, and much in want of sleep, but could get none.

THURSDAY AUGUST 18TH

We mounted the cart and set off at four. The morning was balmy and refreshing. The road still continues beautiful - Deep woods on each side of us; we reach Noë at noon - and as usual had to stop at a terrifically dirty inn. We got some bread and got into the woods by climbing through a retired glen which ascends, and the pines hang so thickly over it that a deep shade was formed. Here we sat and eat our bread. Shelley said there would come a time when no where on the Earth, would there be a dirty cottage to be found - Mary asked what time would elapse before that time would come - he said perhaps in a thousand years - We said perhaps it would never come, as it was so difficult to persuade the poor to be clean. But he said it must infallibly arrive, for Society was progressive and was evidently moving forwards towards perfectibility - and then he described the career made by man - I wish I could remember the whole - but half has slipped out of my memory - only I recollect men were first savages - then nomadic tribes wandering from place to place with their flocks - then they formed into villages - then to towns, and then improvement in mind, morals, comforts etc set in - and then next came the Arts - and then the Sciences - and from this point, Society would go on step by step to almost perfection. When we returned to Noë we found our driver and his cart had got tired of waiting and had gone on - so we hurried along the road to L'Avrine but no cart - it was still far beyond us, Shelley's ankle (sic) was so bad that Shelley hired another cart and driver who took us to Pontarlier, where at last we found our first driver - he was very impertinent - asked us why we had staid (sic) so long in the woods there was nothing to see in the woods - said he had waited two hours at Noë expecting us to return - and then had driven on - it was all our faults he said - and after thinking a while Shelley remarked that the driver was right and it was his dissertation upon the perfectibility of Man that had put us into such difficulties. Mary laughed and said Men always were the sources of a thousand difficulties - then Shelley asked her why she of a sudden looked so sad - and she answered I was thinking of my father - and wondering what he was now feeling. He then said, "Do you mean that as a reproach to me-" and she answered "Oh! No! Don't let us think more about it." But I think something or other had brought her flight into her mind and the sorrow her father must feel - and she loves him so much. We were horribly (sic) tired: but the Inn and the beds were clean.

SUNDAY AUGUST 21ST

Set off from Neufchatel at eight. Our new Swiss friend whose name we do not know, but who seems a perfect Gentleman, got into the carriage and drove out of the town with us. Going along he told us, he was much struck yesterday, when he met them at the Bureau des Postes, by seeing two such very young people as Shelley and Mary wandering in search of a carriage, and speaking french so imperfectly they could scarcely make themselves understood, he wondered how they got into a strange town and a distant country and felt interest in them and thought he would see more of them and serve them. He said from the first moment I took you for Lovers, and supposed you might have run away from your parents and meant to give you good advice. Then he asked if indeed they had escaped from England on account of Love, and they said Yes - He then begged them to return to England, rather than proceed further - but they refused. Next he asked if I had also run away for the sake of Love and I answered Oh! dear No - I came to speak french. He seemed puzzled and yet amused by our Youth and Simplicity, and left us just outside the Gate of the Town, expressing his hearty wishes for our safety and happiness. We breakfasted at Buree and there saw German dresses for the first time; the women wore heavy cloth dresses of a dark colour, and white handkerchiefs on their heads and on their shoulders and bosoms. The country we passed was pretty and interesting rather than grand. We dined at a small place called Arberg I think; the towns are most delightfully clean, in many of the streets there were fountains which gushed like music and inspired an idea of freshness, very welcome as from Noon till four it was very hot.

Here the leaves have been torn out, and only the Account of the latter part of the Day of the 22nd August remains and is as follows: Reach Murgental about nine and get some Bread and Butter for Breakfast, Then we continued our Journey by a road that was very hilly and very woody; Now and then the white Alps are to be distinguished and they appeared to me to be about half an hours walk distant - but Shelley said they were at least a hundred miles away. Dine at Goffingen and rest there two hours.

Ed. Cameron, Kenneth Neill. *Shelley and His Circle 1773-1822*. Volume III. 1970. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.