

FIRST CROSSING THE ALLEGHANIES.

“What—are you stepping Westward? Yea.”—WORDSWORTH.

UPWARD along the vast mountain, crushing the withering oak-leaves
Often beneath his foot, strolling the traveller goes;

Toiling slowly behind him follows the stage, heavy-laden,
Sometimes lost in the trees, frequently seen far below.

On the summit he lingers, gathers the grape's purple clusters,

Picks the chestnut, new dropped, out of its thorn-guarded nest;
Wherefore now gazes he, musing, steadfastly down the long valley?

Wherefore wander his eyes toward the horizon afar?
Say! is he waiting, impatient, to see when, straining and smoking,

The heads of the horses may come winding up the white road?
Or watching the rainbow glories which deck the opposite mountain,

Where Autumn of myriad dyes, gives each tree a hue of its own?
Perchance he looks at the river which winds far below, vexed and
foaming,

Childishly fretting around rocks which it cannot remove.
Ah! that river runs *Westward*, for from this summit the waters

Part like brothers who roam far from the family home,
Some to the mighty Atlantic, some to the far Mississippi.

On this dividing ridge turning he looks toward the land
Where is the home of his fathers, where are the graves of those dear
ones

Whom Death has already snatched out of his circle of Love?
And oh!—forgive ye Penates! forgive him that loved household circle,

If with his mother's form, if with his sister, he sees
Another and dearer shape, gliding softly between them,
Gliding gracefully up, fixing his heart and his eye.

Ah! how lovely the picture, how forever attractive the image

Which floats up from the past, like to a beautiful dream:
Yet not a dream was it, but one of the picturesque moments,
Sent to adorn our life, cheering its gloomiest years.

Real was the heavy disease which fastened his head to his pillow.

Real the burning heat in every feverish limb,
Real the pains which tormented every delicate fibre,

Rousing his drowsy soul to a half-conscious life,
And so, waking, one night, out of a long stupefaction,
Vague and feverish thoughts haunted as spectres his brain.

All around was familiar, it was his own little chamber,
But all seemed to him strange, nothing would come to him right.

Ghostly shadows were stretching their arms on the wall and the ceiling,
Round and round within circled a whirlpool of thoughts,

Round and round they went, his will had no power to restrain them,
Round and ever around some insignificant thing!

It was as if on his brain a fiend with a hammer was beating,
And each blow as it fell was to be counted by him!

Moments spun out to years, so long the torture continued,
Wearied out at last, he moved and uttered a groan.

Then was the gloom dispersed. For from the shadows a figure
Arose, and lightly stepped to the side of the bed,

Bent down gently and kissed his brow, while her beautiful ringlets
 Lay on his burning cheek — cooling and soft was the touch.
 “Dearest,” she softly said — and every fiend which distressed him
 Darted off at the word as if from Ithuriel’s spear,
 Tenderly from her eye, moist with gentle affection,
 Into his very soul entered her sisterly look.
 She was his cousin and friend, playmates they were from their childhood,
 Therefore hers was the right in his sick chamber to watch,
 Cousin, sister, and friend — many the titles he gave her,
 Now in each beating heart closer the union was knit,
 Softly pressing her hand to his lips, he sank into slumber.
 Great, O Love, is thy skill, quite a physician art thou ;
 Instead of the gold-headed cane, instead of the wig and the snuff-box,
 Give me the Archer-boy, him for a Doctor I’ll take.
 Such was the picture which came before the mind of the stripling,
 This the image which rose, constantly floating around.
 Such a beautiful moment haunts the soul with its spectre,
 Who can tell it to sleep shut in the tomb of the past ?
 But see, the carriage is near ! Flee, ye sweet recollections !
 Now must we seem a man, easy and strong as the rest,
 Ready in word and act — this alone will protect us ;
 Just as this thorny bur guards the young fruit from its foes.

Thus then he mounts the carriage, sitting aloft with the driver,
 Wider the eye can range, freer the heart can beat here.
 Now we have climbed to the summit, now there open before us,
 Stretching far to the West, valleys and rivers and woods,
 Downward by gentle degrees, along the side of the mountain
 Winds our Simplon road, close to precipitous gulphs ;
 Shooting up from below, spread the tops of the pine trees.
 Here a single misstep rolls us a thousand feet down,
 But, courage ! trust to the driver, trust to the sure-footed horses,
 Trust to that mighty Power who holds us all in his hand.
 Merrily tramples the team, of the well-filled manger desirous,
 Where below, like a map, lie many houses and farms,
 Over them all we look, over cornfields and meadows,
 Over the winding streams, shrouded with mantles of mist,
 Over an ocean of forest, up to the distant horizon,
 Many a mile beyond, stretches our lengthening road.

Nature, vast as thou art, we can unshrinkingly face thee !
 Look on thy giant forms with an unfaltering eye ;
 He who carries within him a spirit conscious and active,
 Treasures of well-arranged thought, gathered from action and life,
 Has striven, believed, and loved—who knows all the worth of the moment
 When soul stimulates soul, pulses together beat.
 He has a world within to match thine, beautiful mother !
 He can give to thee more than he can take from thy hand.
 Wanderer, tremble not before this grand Panorama,
 Let not this mighty scene weary thine heart or thine eye.
 Bring the Romance of Life to balance the Romance of Nature,
 The spirit has hopes as vast, the heart has its pictures as fair.