

tered by storm or lost in the fog, and are never found again.

In striking contrast to the mountains and the sea is the sylvan beauty of the placid mere or meadows, the unbrageous trees with their sunlit masses of foliage and bright skies and fleecy clouds, as shown in Mr. Chavignaud's fine painting. We need not go to foreign lands in search of the picturesque. At our very doors God spreads his beauties of the commonplace. So Mr. Ruskin thus describes the glory of the sky that overarches our lives every day:

It is a strange thing how little in general people know about the sky. There is not a moment of any day of our lives, when nature is not producing scene after scene, picture after picture, glory after glory, and working still upon such exquisite and constant principles of the most perfect beauty, that it is quite certain it is all done for us, and intended for our perpetual pleasure. And every man, wherever placed, however far from other sources of interest or of beauty, has this doing for him constantly.

The noblest scenes of the earth can be seen and known but by few; it is not intended that man should live always in the midst of them, he injures them by his presence, he ceases to feel them if he has always with them; but the sky is for all; as right as it is, it is not "too bright, nor good, for human nature's daily food;" it is fitted in all its functions for the perpetual comfort and exalting of the heart, for the soothing it and purifying it from its dross and dust. Sometimes gentle, sometimes capricious, sometimes awful, never the same for two moments together; almost human in its passions, almost spiritual in its tenderness, almost divine in its infinity, its appeal to what is immortal in us is as distinct as its ministry of chastisement or of blessing to what is mortal is essential.

And yet we never attend to it, we never make it a subject of thought, but as it has to do with our animal sensations; we look upon all by which it speaks to us more clearly than the brutes, upon all which bears witness to the intention of the Supreme, that we are to receive more from the covering vault than the light and the dew which we share with the weed and the worm, only as a succession of meaningless and monotonous accident, too common and too vain to be worthy of a mo-

ment of watchfulness or a glance of admiration.

If in our moments of utter idleness and insipidity, we turn to the sky as a last resource, which of its phenomena do we speak of? One will say it has been wet, another it has been windy, and another it has been warm. Who, among the whole chattering crowd, can tell me of the forms and the precipices of the chain of tall white mountains that girded the horizon at noon yesterday? Who saw the narrow sunbeam that came out at the south and smote upon their summits until they melted and mouldered away in a dust of blue rain? Who saw the dance of the dead clouds when the sunlight left them last night, and the west wind blew them before it like withered leaves?

All has passed, unregretted as unseen; or if the apathy be ever shaken off, even for an instant, it is only by what is gross, or what is extraordinary; and yet it is not in the broad and fierce manifestations of the elemental energies, not in the clash of the hail, nor the drift of the whirlwind, that the highest characters of the sublime are developed. God is not in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still small voice.

It seems to me that in the midst of the material nearness of the heavens God means us to acknowledge His immediate presence as visiting, judging, and blessing us. "The earth shook, the heavens also dropped, at the presence of God." "He doth set his bow in the cloud," and thus renews, in the sound of every drooping swathe of rain, his promises of everlasting love. "In them hath he set a *tabernacle* for the sun;" whose burning ball, which without the firmament would be seen as an intolerable and scorching circle in the blackness of vacuity, is by that firmament surrounded with gorgeous service, and tempered by mediatorial ministries; by the firmament of clouds the golden pavement is spread for his chariot wheels at morning; by the firmament of clouds the temple is built for his presence to fill with light at noon; by the firmament of clouds the purple veil is closed at evening round the sanctuary of his rest; by the mists of the firmament his implacable light is divided, and its separated fierceness appeased into the soft blue that fills the depth of distance with its bloom, and the flush with which the mountains burn as they drink the overflowing of the dayspring.

And in this tabernacling of the unendurable sun with men, through the shadows of the firmament, God would seem to set forth the stooping of His own majesty to men