

Bourg-St-Pierre, Valais, Suisse
10 July, 1931

Dear Jessie:

I have rather looked for a letter from you this week - some mail forwarded here contained a letter from the Thornquests giving their version of Margot's death.

I left Geneva last Thursday, a rainy morning, and was therefore glad that Dr. F. Chodat came on the same train as it is necessary to change from train to postal auto-car at Martigny, and it was very helpful under the circumstances to be with some one who understood the ways, as in Switzerland station porters seem to be few and far between (In Italy they swarmed), and as they do not usually announce the stations, and signs are not often in plain view, and trains halt but momentarily it would see, one must make a grand rush to get belongings and self out - usually you shove your baggage out of the window to a porter, - but as there were no porters at Martigny, and the rain pouring, it was, as I say, a wonderful aid to have some one to help me and my things from train to bus.

The ~~Swiss~~ trip up to Bourg-St. Pierre from Martigny is a thrilling and scenic one, the views down over the valley of the Rhone and the closing in of the mountains all very fine even tho seen thru the rain which became hail and snow by time we reached here, about a mile above sea level. Also it was as cold as winter time it seemed. I wore a lined jacket and lined coat and none too warm. The rain continued all of that day, but it cleared off the next morning and more glorious weather since would be hard to find anywhere - cool even to shivering, but tonic and pure air, and sunshine just warm enuf to be comfortable. These people keep doors and windows open all of the time. The cards enclosed will show you my present surroundings but cannot give the beauty of the scenery with all the greens of meadows, trees, and the rushing mountain streams, waterfalls, etc. The Alps in this corner of Switzerland reach their highest and most rugged development. Bourg-St. Pierre is very old, - over 1000 years or more, as it was a principal town on this route over the pass of the Grand St. Bernard, which has been used since Roman times as the chief road from Italy and the East to Northern Europe. Also over this road Napoleon brought his army, and Bourg-St. Pierre was one of his stopping places. But today it is a village of ancient buildings, inbred families, and old customs. And yet they have electric lights! - made possible by the waterfalls.

This hotel is primitive in structure and furnishings, but entirely comfortable and the meals good enuf. Since none of the people about the hotel speak English, I am constrained to make use of all the French I can muster. The Chodats have a chalet built on site of an old castle or chateau, which they use as a summer home.

The alpine garden on slopes of the hill on which the laboratory is located, is a real rock garden and extremely beautiful and interesting as here are collected about 1000 species of Alpine plants -

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many now in bloom, a quite wonderful show. But I am most absorbed in the flora of the meadows immediately about here, and have been busy every day collecting, identifying, and making specimens of certain ones. The variety is amazing. Altho I have already made what seems like a large acquaintance, new ones constantly come into view. All very fascinating. Also we have had daily trips to study meadow associations, and today far up a mountain for the Alpine meadow plants. - also lectures on the geology, most interesting. Next week we shall take a trip to the pass of the Grand St. Bernard, about 8000 above sea level, and here see the flora of the melting snow. I feel I am having a wonderful opportunity to thus get some real knowledge and first hand acquaintance with this country, such as tourists never realize. Bus loads and cars full of them pass here daily.

It will be a summer without a summer (such as we know) for me, and I wish you could have some of this coolness - it is what you would like. However I hope it is not such a hot summer as usual, tho the Thornquests letter said it had been dry.

With much love to you and Marjorie,

Laura

The following were on backs of postcards:

"The landlady said she gave me the warmest room they have - as the chimney from kitchen (two stories below) runs up the walls. Even so I find the feather bed comfort, which has been too warm ever since I first encountered it in Germany, is here not only enduring but most comfortable. The house is built with walls about 2 ft. thick, and steps are of stone, also as usual it is on several levels, so I come up a stairs and then down to get to my room. The view from my window is of near mountains, with a snow peak to the left, and a rushing, roaring little stream below the window."

"This shows the village of Bourg-St-Pierre. It is situated around the bend of the road seen in background of card no.1. The church is very old, and the streets very narrow. The bus could barely get thru some of them, especially to turn the corners. The houses are all with "Chalet roofs" - roofs made of flat stones laid on in such a way as to be rain and wind proof. However there is a daisy mail."

Bourg-St.-Pierre, Valais, Suisse
16 July, 1931

My dear Jessie:

Glad to have your letter of June 30th. I think it better to continue sending letters via the Cook & Co., London address, as when I leave here, it will be simpler to notify them, and thus far they have been quite prompt in forwarding my mail I think.

Am sorry you have had to endure such extremely hot weather, but hope it is over with by this time. My brother also writes of same sort and sends clipping concerning fatalities due to it in the north. Well, I should like to send you some of this climate for summer, or better still, have you here, for I know it would suit you. Yesterday, we lived "in the clouds" most of the time as they were low on the mountains, like a thick fog, and so chilly I wore two woollen (knit) sweaters and a trench coat and was none too warm. In the salon of this little hotel there is a funny metal stove, (all their stoves here seem to be odd, square affairs, some of tiles) in which they put some paper and kindlings and call it a fire. But I spend little time there. In fact I am trying to get myself "hardened" to the colder temperature, so every morning I take a cold sponge bath with window wide open. Sometimes it makes me gasp but I think the reaction good, as my troublesome cold is now but a remnant, tho I am quite sure I had some sort of a pneumonia, - for several days a high fever, - so am glad to be rid of it.

Day before yesterday we took a trip up above the tree limit, to study the upper meadow. The trail thru the woods, (spruce and some larch) was beautiful, along a steep rock gorge much of the way, and the plants very interesting of course. The high meadows are where they now keep their cattle, while they make hay from the lower meadows for the winter feed. A young man from Geneva who is interested in the horticulture side of botany, and I, are the only "steadies" at the Laboratory this summer. He and I are also the only regular boarders at this hotel. It is a station for members of the Alpine Club, so we frequently have transients, usually walkers. Since the young man cannot speak a word of English, nor can the people who operate the hotel, I am constrained to use all the French I can muster, and it is quite fun.

The old professor Chodat (père) is a very interesting man. He has been in the U.S. from N.Y. to California, about 4 years ago, and his observations and opinions concerning us are extremely interesting. Also he uses very delightful English, so I enjoy hearing him. He has given me much information concerning Switzerland's history, government, etc. He is no longer able to take the field trips but his knowledge of the flora is inexhaustible. The son is an excellent botanist, and is an interesting young man. They all live in their chalet her during the summer, the father, two daughters with two children each, and the son with his wife and two children, - quite a family. They are very devoted Genevese. - It seems the people of each canton in Switzerland are quite distinct units, much more so than our states.

Sunday, 19th July -

Since writing the above I have had some rather unusual experiences. The weather being fine on Friday, Dr. Chodat (fils), the young Swiss botanist, and I started at 10 o'clock for the Grand St. Bernard, taking knapsacks, plant press, vasculum, etc.

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It is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ kilometers in distance (not so far in miles), but it is uphill (and some of it quite steep) all of the way, since the ascent is to over 8000 ft. Also we did not keep to the road, but clambered over the rocks of the glacial moraines, and along the gorge sides, etc. wherever necessary to find the plants we were looking for. We ate our lunch on a sunny knoll, sheltered from the keen wind (and the lunch given us by our hotel landlady contained some oranges from Spain, decrepit affairs, but still oranges and I find myself rather wishing for a good one quite often!) and surrounded by interesting Alpine plants. Continuing, we passed up beyond the tree and scrub zone, and into the narrow pass among the "rugged rock piles vast and grim", then across an expanse of snow and so reached the Hospice at about 4:30 p.m., having collected many new (to me) species. The Hospice is over a thousand years old and is a monastery. Until recently the monks have furnished free food and lodging to travelers, but since the route has become an automobile road, the crowds of tourists made it necessary to turn one of the buildings into a hotel. However since the Chodats are on friendly terms with the monks, and have been going to the hospice with their students for years, an exception was made and we were welcomed into the Hospice. It was a most interesting experience - the building itself inside of such old time construction, walls about 3 ft. thick. On entering you pull a bell cord once. A priest responds. In this case the receiving priest happened to be well known to Dr. Chodat, and so we were soon fixt up with "chambers". I enclose a picture which will illustrate what they (the guest rooms) are like, except that now there are no mosquito nets over the beds, as there seem to be no mosquitoes. Each room has 3 beds and three wash-stands, etc., so I almost felt as tho I had an apartment. Everything was scrupulously clean, and plenty of warm bedclothes, and these last were needed, as after sunset, it seemed almost freezing cold. We were served a very plain but good warm supper in the "salle de manger" (all guest quarters are separated by iron grilles in the halls from the priests' quarters), and after we had finished, the young priest who had received us came into the dining room and got out a bottle of Char- treuse wine and served us each some. Then the man servitor brot in after dinner coffee which the priest also had with us. Then he got maps and described the trip to Tibet from which he had just returned, having left here last November for a place in Tibet where Catholics have a mission. Altho all his explanations were in French, I found it most interesting, and so the evening passed quickly. Altho all so old and apparently primitive, the Hospice is now equipped with running water, electric light, steam heat. As the bed, which I chose to sleep in, was most comfortable, I soon went to sleep and was awakened by a bell ringing at 5:30. After that, bells rang most of the time, for breakfast, their morning services, etc. I suppose. They have a quite elaborate church, also a Library and Museum all under one roof. Our little party met at 8 o'clock for dejeuner (bread and sweet butter, coffee or chocolate, and some sort of jam), and then we were soon afield, going over into Italy for the morning, and finding a quite different flora. I wish you could see the array of flowers - blue, yellow, pink, purple, violets, columbines, daisies, buttercups, gentians, harebells, etc. etc. I am pressing specimens of many and hope some of them will retain their colors.

After lunch and some tea, we began our return trip, which of course, we made in a few hours, as it was downhill all the way, and not much collecting to be done. The whole trip was the best one I have taken in years. I thot of how your father would once have enjoyed it. I was glad to find myself still equal to the walking. It was a pretty good test, but I did not feel the least fagged, tho it has been many a day since I have had a trip equal to it, but the weather and air were perfect for walking.

The mountain shoes weigh about two or three pounds each and the smallest I could get were so much to big I have to wear two pairs of stockings (one woolen), and also have a pair of insoles to keep them on. They are studded with nails and are certainly efficient for walking over rocks, and climbing boulders, and mountain sides.

They still raise the St. Bernard dogs and get quite an income from selling dogs for which of course they get fine prices. There were a dozen or so of the big fellows (most of them young ones) about. It seems the real St. Bs. are very shorthaired. On the outside of the Hospice a mark shows the deepest snow they have had - about 50 ft. It must be a terrible place in winter. During summer, every good day, there are scores of cars and buses carrying tourists - hundreds are fed at the hotel. We met several parties of women walking. Most of them were English women, one group was from Scotland. As they were interested in the flowers, I got into communication with them.

Enuf, you will say, for once! Love to you both,

Laura.

The following were on the back of postcards Laura enclosed:

"We came up to the Hospice from the opposite side shown in this picture and the snow there was still about a foot deep. By going around the little lake, one enters Italy. The Italian custom officials are very strict under Mussolini's regime and as I had not taken my passport we had some little redtape as they rather suspected our botanical paraphernalia."

On picture of Hospice:

"Altho they make no definite charge for food and lodging, of course ~~we~~ one puts into a little box at the entrance what he thinks he should pay."

On picture of flowers:

"The colors of the flowers in this picture are quite natural. There are many very bright colors - Forgetmets and Gentians are the blue ones; Campanula the purplish ones; Cyclamens are pink; Primroses yellow; Edelweiss white, and the orange colored composite looks like Hieracium Amantiacum, while the yellow one resembles Arnica, the brown headed one is an orchid, Nigretella Nigrum - all a part of the Alpine meadow flora - and many, many more."

Le Grand Combin
Bourge - St. - Pierre
Aug. 6, 1931

Dear Jessie:

The "Poste" today brot me quite a mail, yours of July 23 enclosing the letters from Anna, your Aunt Ella and the Ts. among the others - and pleased I was - for news from U.S.A. is so very scarce here, - also I like to know all is well with you, since you seem far away.

I can appreciate your Aunt Ella's feeling of being alone, without the care for her father. As long as one feels useful it is much easier to exist. I shall write her this evening also.

It is good of you to take time and trouble to make copies of my letters, and I appreciate it for I do not really find opportunity to write to all those of whom I think, and also it is not worth the time to repeat my experiences. I am glad if my letters are really of interest - they are usually written rather hurriedly.

It is good to know that hot weather is over with, and I hope the rest of the summer will be more endurable. I am expecting to feel the change when I go down to the lower altitudes. Am still wearing one or two sweaters every day, altho I find I am getting more accustomed to this cool air. The temp. varies greatly some days. When the south wind blows, the "Foehn" they call it, it is quite warm, but this always presages "Mauvais temps". This week nearly every day has been doubtful. We are noticing the weather especially, as one of the day trips over the mts. and into the next valley is scheduled for the first good day. Anna is right in thinking of your father in connection with my experiences here. If he were as once, it would be just what he would most enjoy. Insects are rather rare here, but I have seen several strange orthoptera and know they would have been of much interest to him.

Several more students have arrived in the last two weeks. One, a specialist in lichens from Zurich, and two nice young ladies (Misses Pride) from Wales, also another young man from Geneva. So now it is quite a little company. Only one of the Welsh girls is interested in Botany, but both like to walk.

I am just now working on the Alpine mosses. There are many, and species new to me. When I have finished with these, I shall have rather covered the field in a general way - a birds eye view of these Alpine associations. The lectures are extremely interesting, and excellent practice for understanding French. The formal work will close on the 15th. I think I shall leave about the 18th or 20th and go over to the Italian Lakes for a few days, before going up to the Black Forest in Germany to spend about a week, and then to Nuremberg, up the Rhine to Cologne and to Paris for a few days before sailing. As I am not quite certain of dates or stopovers, perhaps you better send my mail via Thos. Cook and Son, London, after date of leaving here, and also to Steamer "George Washington" sailing Sept. 10 Cherbourg, France (United States Line) not later than Sept. 1.

I am disgusted with our Legislature. Your news concerning the Raas is of interest. Also very unfortunate about the Williams' automobile accident, but hope they will both soon recover, tho the shock is usually the lasting effect, as I know by experience.

Anna's letter is also of interest. Keith is certainly a nice young fellow. I hope he can get his college course arranged to suit him, as he will be one to profit by it, I believe.

So far as I can learn, times do not seem to be any worse nor any better in our country. Over here, the failure of the German Bank and the recent "run" on the Bank of England have rather alarmed people. A bank in Geneva failed the other week, something unheard of there before.

I have recently written to the Thorquests, and am glad to know Jenks has cut the grass in the grove. So far as little Margot's body is concerned I am satisfied with the way Dr. Porter disposed of it. I suppose Mr. T. will try to do enuf work to earn the balance of money paid him and some more, but I am pleased to know he has put the new roofing on the cabin. There was so much fruit (peaches, pears, and grapes) in prospect, I told Mrs. T. I would furnish jars and sugar if she would can some of it for me.

Fruit is rather scarce up here in the mountains, tho the garden vegetables are just in their prime, especially the lettuce (so nice and crisp) which we have for dinner every day.

Much love to you and Marjorie,

Laura

P.S. I am unable to find your Aunt Ella's address this evening, and so shall enclose the letter to her, asking you to please finish the address. We are to start on a long day's trip tomorrow at 7 o'clock so I must to bed.

Sunday, Aug. 9, 1930

This letter did not get mailed on the 7th as intended, so now I add a P.S. as reply to yours of July 29th wh. was most welcome yesterday. Also I was glad to have the lews of the Legislature's final accomplishments tho my opinion concerning this session is unchanged. It has been amiserable waste of money wh. might have been saved for the state's use. I only hope it can now be managed so the state can be run on the appropriations and within the income, tho the curtailing of the college is very unfair. I hope it will not be necessary to make the salary cuts, - it will be so much harder to raise them again. I am glad tho that you are realizing some return in way of lower insurance, on your investment in the new roof, besides the feeling that you are now safer from fire - something I have rather feared for you.

The extra cent on gas and 35% on license fee just adds a little more to the automobile owner's burden. It seems the easy way out for finding additional revenue. Also it is a good thing to cut the state officers salaries, since the rest of us must go on short rations.

Your news concerning the Sarasota Jr. College bulletin is comforting, as it indicates pursuance of their plans. I am depending on that work as a "life saver" in more ways than one now. It would seem nearly unbearable to continue an aimless living at Inwood after this. For the Tampa project I imagine they will use the high school faculty as at St. Petersburg.

On the 7th we took the trip over one of the mt. ranges into an adjacent valley. It was the most interesting, and also most strenuous trip yet, clouds and mist and rain were intermittant and interfered with complete view of the landscape. It was similar to development of a photographic film, as the clouds, dissolving, brought out the scence for a time, sunlight in the green valleys very beautiful. The botanizing was excellent, and the climb up, also descent on opposite side, nearly precipitous, quite an adventure. The valley is a very wild and lonely one. We sat on rocks in the rain, to eat our lunches. Except for this stop we were "on the move" for 10 hours. About 20 minutes before leaving here, there was a dreadful accident on the Cd. St. B. road near here, a car, rounding one of the many sharp curves, to avoid a goat, skidded and went over a 120 ft. precipice. One man was killed and the other so injured he is probably dead. They say it is the first accident of the sort, tho this seems strange as the road is very narrow and on brink of declivities most of the way. I am still often wishing for you as I know you would enjoy this manner of life for a change.

Again love to you both.

L.