

threatened suffocation; but no sooner was the paroxysm over than the sufferer sunk again into a heavy sleep; and Kate, taking advantage of the opportunity, hastened to the door, with the infant in her arms.

"Give me something to wrap it in," said she; "a cloak—a shawl—any thing will do. There is Jane Butler at the lodge. I am sure she will be kinder to it than any one; and I will bring you tidings of it every day."

"But who is going to take it to her?" asked the old woman; "I dare not trust it to my boy."

"I will tell you who will take it," said Kate Somerville, bounding into her saddle, and stretching out her arms for the child—"I will take it myself, for the sooner it is beyond the hearing of its poor mother, the better."

And so there we actually were again upon the high-road, riding back to the hall, and Kate Somerville with the baby in her lap; yet managing so well both that and her horse, that we reached the lodge without a fold of the cloak being displaced, and, probably, without the young traveller itself being aware of any change from its warm cradle in the cottage.

Had I endeavoured, during this part of our ride, to analyze my feelings, I should have found the task impossible; for, notwithstanding the horror it might have occasioned, had we met any of my college friends by the way, I doubt whether I did not like Miss Somerville the better for this forgetfulness of self—of appearances—of every thing, in short, but the necessity of the case, and the strong impulse under which she acted.

"There," said she, after placing the child in the hands of Jane Butler, with many charges as to its care and treatment—"there is nothing like transacting one's own business. Had I left it to those old women, they would have consulted about this little affair all day, until the poor mother would have been distracted with their foolish talk. And now we will ride as fast as you please, for Mr. Langton will wonder what has become of us."

It was on this day that my brother first thought it right to warn me against the insidious nature of my growing intimacy with Miss Somerville. Of course I disclaimed all idea, and even all desire, of rendering our acquaintance more than the mere pastime of the moment; yet it was not wholly without some secret satisfaction that I read in his manner, as well as that of my sister, a lurking desire that it should be cherished into something more than friendship. Still it was no part of my plan of conduct to commit myself by any act or word that could be so construed. I only tried the often-practised experiment of drawing on a correspondence, which, as the time of my departure for India was at hand, I felt as if I had a reasonable plea for proposing. In this, however, my hopes were disappointed; for thoughtless and independent as the behaviour of Miss Somerville in some respects unquestionably was, in others there was a guarded caution, of which no man could take advantage.

"Without a mother," she said, "and without a friend whom I can consult about the common affairs of life, I have been compelled to lay down rules for my own conduct; and one of these has been, never to enter into a correspondence with a gentleman. I might have said, never to make a friend of one; but I feel, now that you are on the point of leaving us, perhaps for ever, that I shall miss you in our social circle, almost as much as if you had been the friend of many years. I have every thing in the world I desire, except a friend. You will think this strange when your amiable sister is so near me. But a married woman, and a mother, ought to have, and must have, her own little circle of absorbing interest, within which another cannot enter."

"You will find this friend, most probably, long before I return; when the feeling of friendship will have given place to a happier and closer attachment."

"Never, while my father lives. As he grows older, he will need me more and more; and perhaps a few years will make me a fitter companion for his old age."

It was the day of my last visit to Somerville Hall, when this conversation took place. I was mortified on this occasion to find myself confronted at table by Mr. Ferguson, who took his place on the opposite side with great complacency. I was mortified, too, that I had not succeeded in drawing Miss Somerville into a correspondence; for notwithstanding the prejudice her character and manners had at first excited in my mind, I felt daily and hourly that her society was becoming more essential to my enjoyment. It is true, she was not of the class of women I admired. She was, in fact, of no class. Yet she possessed what so many are deficient in—the power, not only of awakening interest, but of keeping it alive.

As soon as it was possible to leave the table on this occasion, Miss Somerville rose from her seat; and much as I wished to follow her, I was kept back by a feeling of wounded pride, which, however, had its own punishment; for instead of enjoying the last evening I should spend for many years alone, with the women who of all others interested me most, I sat, as if chained to the table, while the gentleman of the house told long stories about things I neither cared for, nor understood.

For a long time I remained in a sort of stupor, fixed in the same position, filling my glass when the decanter was pushed towards me, and nodding my ready assent whenever Mr. Somerville appealed to me for my opinion. At last the question suddenly flashed across my mind—what can it be that brings Mr. Ferguson here so often, and keeps him here so long? Is it the love of wine? For the lord of the mansion was more than commonly addicted to the old-fashioned hospitality, which presses wine upon a guest. But, no. This was no solution of the enigma; for Mr. Ferguson was a man upon whom wine appeared to produce no effect.

The case was widely different with the good-natured master of the house; and I now saw, for the first time, the influence that wine was capable of exerting, both over his appearance and his character. His whole manner, in fact, was changed. His words were no longer cautious and well chosen. He was no longer on his guard against receiving a false impression. But while his dark eyes sparkled with uncommon lustre, and his movements were quick and restless, touch but upon some favourite project, and all the hidden energies of his nature seemed to rise like an uncontrollable flood.

Was it possible that Mr. Ferguson could be playing upon this kind-hearted old man, for his own selfish purposes; and bending him to his views by this unnatural agency? My feelings recoiled from such a thought; yet what sympathy could there be between this cold-blooded unfathomable man, and one whose heart was warmed in no common degree by the kindest feelings of human nature?

Unable to look steadily at the contrast these two characters presented, or to contemplate the unequal ground upon which they would meet, should the interest of one in any way interfere with that of the other, I rose from the table, and walked out upon the lawn, to enjoy the refreshment of a clear moonlight evening.

The train of my reflections led me back at that moment to the conversation of the clergyman who had regretted the absence of religion in this family; and I began to perceive that there might be temptations within the most privileged and secluded sphere of human life. "After all," said I, "there must be something in the idea of this good man, there must be something to fall back upon in the hour of trial, something to protect us in the season of temptation."

Such were the vague conclusions which my short and superficial acquaintance with human life at that time produced in my mind. I had seen, in the pleasant home in which I had lately been received almost as a member of the family, a combination of all that we are accustomed to associate with our ideas of earthly happiness—health, and wealth, and freedom from anxiety, with a love of rural occupations, and a situation calculated to prolong these blessings.