

"And is that the extent of your second objection?"  
 "It is said that a woman's true reason comes last; and I believe mine is not unfolded. But you shall hear it if you wish, for I am not skilled in concealing the truth."

"By all means. I believe I shall like your last reason better than the first."

"Well, then, there is nothing I despise so much as the affectation of what is good. Do you like my reasoning so far?"

"Extremely."

"Now, it so happens that from our position in the country, my father and I have become intimately acquainted with the affairs of all the poor people in the neighbouring village. It was the habit of my mother to associate herself much with the weal and the wo of those around her, and my father has brought me up to do the same."

"And how is it possible," I exclaimed, "that any proof of the active power of such benevolence should operate to your disadvantage?"

"Just because you do not understand me: and if any of these poor people should exhibit their gratitude, as they sometimes do, in a very disproportionate and unreasonable manner, you would look upon it all as a scene got up for the occasion to make me appear in your eyes the 'Lady Bountiful' of the village."

Of course I disclaimed all tendency to such injurious suspicions; but Miss Somerville seemed to have understood the nature of my feelings towards her from the first; and leaving me, as I thought, rather haughtily, to prepare for her ride, I remained in perfect ignorance as to whether my company was really irksome or otherwise.

I had never before that day seen Kate Somerville on horseback. A black pony of uncommon symmetry was led to the door, and the lady soon appeared in her riding dress, which became her more than any other. She was, indeed, the queen of equestrians. The old servant who held her rein, looked proudly at his mistress, then at me, and then at the pony. It had been taught to stand perfectly still, until she was fairly in the saddle, when it bounded from the ground, and danced upon the green sward, in a manner that would have unseated a less skilful rider.

No doubt the lady herself was a little vain of this display; for when she shook back her glossy ringlets from her brow and cheek, I could see that its colour was heightened; and while she stretched her hand amongst the animal's flowing mane, and patted its arched and beautiful neck, she looked aside at me with a merry laugh, which told how completely the subject of our late conversation was forgotten in the excitement of that moment.

Miss Somerville looked both so happy and so well on horseback, that it was with feelings of pride as well as pleasure I accompanied her in her morning's ride, which, however, turned out to be a very different affair from what I had expected, notwithstanding all she had told me of her intentions. No sooner had we reached the village through which our road lay, than I found my patience put to the test by stopping at almost every door. Even at the auberge, or hotel, as it was called, where a red lion swung high in the air—even there Kate Somerville reined in her steed, and striking sharply at the door with her riding-whip, desired to speak with the master of the house.

"The girl is possessed," thought I. "What can she want here?"

"I want to speak with Mr. Giles," said Miss Somerville to the woman who had answered her summons; and immediately the master himself came forward, and asked if she would be pleased to alight.

"No, no," said Kate, "I only want to speak to you about old Stephenson, the gardener. He has joined the temperance society, and I don't want you to be tempting him to violate his pledge. I see you are laughing at what you think his folly. You can do that as much as you please; but remember he has been on the brink of ruin, and it is a great thing

for an old man like him to begin a new course of life. If, therefore, he falls away again by your persuasion, the sin will lie at your door. So look to it, if you please, Mr. Giles; for we hear of a good deal that passes in your house."

At the commencement of this conversation, just and praiseworthy as it certainly was, I had felt a strange nervous sensation creep over me, by no means lessened on observing that we were stationed in the most conspicuous part of a populous village, and on a public road, where carriages were every moment liable to pass. It is true, I was myself too much a stranger in the neighbourhood, to run any risk of recognition; but I was annoyed beyond measure, to be under the necessity of waiting for a young lady engaged in such a conversation, and in such a place. Nor was the spirit of gallantry which inspired me at the commencement of our ride, at all revived by observing the arch smile which played upon the lips of Kate Somerville, as she turned to condole with me on my trying situation. I was even contemplating the possibility of leaving her, as she had originally proposed, when she added, with a total change of look and manner, "You must really have patience with me now; for this is the house where the poor young woman is so ill; and I don't know how long I shall be obliged to stay."

"Well, Peggy!" said she to the afflicted mother, who came out to meet her, wiping her eyes with her apron, "You see I am behind my time; but I hope I am not too late."

"Oh! no, Miss;" replied the woman. And she began again her story of often-repeated sorrows; when Kate suddenly turned back to me, and, with a look of serious concern, requested I would leave her, as she felt really grieved to trespass so much on my time.

Had this request been made five minutes earlier, I should certainly have complied; but the tenderness of her manner, when she addressed the old woman, and the entire change her character appeared to have undergone, interested me too deeply; and dismounting, in order to fasten both our horses with greater security, I sat down on a low bench beside the cottage wall.

The humble tenement which the sufferer within was about to exchange for one of still narrower dimensions, was neater, and more respectable, than many in the village. The window of the sick-room, beside which I had unconsciously chosen my seat, was overgrown with ivy; and the casement being thrown open to admit more air into the chamber of death, I found that in the position I had taken, I could not avoid hearing much of what passed within. What, then, was my surprise to find that Kate Somerville could, when the occasion seemed to demand it, speak in tones of the gentlest soothing; while with her own hand she performed many of those tender offices, which the last stage of human suffering demands.

In this work of charity she was disturbed by the feeble cry of a young child, which seemed to distress her beyond measure; for, drawing the old woman nearer to the window, she said in a whisper loud enough for me to hear, "Why don't you send away the poor baby, just for a few days? It is impossible for you to do your duty both to the mother and the child."

"But where am I to send it, Miss?" said the grandmother. "She pines after it sadly, and I am sure if I was to send it away, the thought of what I had done would disturb her last moments. There, now, she hears it, and points to the cradle; and that is just the little pitiful cry it will keep up till night-fall. If I did but know of any body that would take it, it would be a great mercy to us all."

"Alice," said Kate, returning to the bed where the poor young woman lay, "will you trust your baby with me for a few days? I will take great care of it?"

"Oh! yes, to be sure, Miss," replied a low husky voice, that was scarcely intelligible; "it could not be in better hands."

A convulsive cough then came on, and every moment