

"There is some grace in her yet," thought I, "for she knows how to blush; and from that moment I regarded her with more complacency, while my sister relieved her embarrassment by immediately proposing music."

Again I was annoyed beyond measure, for I doubted not this country bells would inflict upon us some old piece of music, with its endless variations and accompaniments, the practice of a whole year of her boarding-school education. I was mistaken in my calculations, however; for Miss Somerville refused to be the first to play; and my sister had to make many journeys round the room, pleading with different ladies before any could be led blushing to the instrument. As usual, when they did come, they came in shoals; and the gentlemen then aroused themselves with politics, more to their hearts' content. There were still some of the party not so easily satisfied; and I heard my sister whisper to her friend, "My dear Kate, have pity upon my piano, and put a stop to this discord."

Kate laughed heartily at my sister's dilemma; but rose immediately, and taking her humble place amongst the musical group, waited patiently until two young ladies had finished their well-known company duet; when the party could not do otherwise than make way for one whose pretensions all agreed to be unrivalled, though her style of singing was by no means popular.

I had watched these movements, and prepared my nerves for what I expected would be showing off in the highest style of country execution; in other words, making as much noise as the piano was capable of producing, when my ear was caught by one of the sweetest of Scotch ballads, sung by the clearest and most musical of voices, with such rapid alternations of playfulness and pathos, that it seemed to come as fresh from the heart of the minstrel, as if it had never been played or sung before—a genuine burst of feeling, sung as the wild bird sings on his native tree. I had heard more powerful voices, and listened to performances more elaborate and complete, but it seemed to me that I had never before listened to such free-born native music; and when the song was ended, I found I had unconsciously placed myself beside the singer, while most of those who previously composed the musical group, had fallen back into their places, and were forming themselves into little coteries of laughter and of gossip around the room.

Miss Somerville rose from her seat.

"You are not tired," I exclaimed with impatience.

"Oh no," she answered, "but I see my audience is. My style of music is not popular amongst them. They like their own much better; and I must not monopolize."

My sister had now moved away to another part of the room; and I consequently found myself *tête-à-tête* with the very person I most wished to avoid; and who, unless she would be always singing to me, would, I believed, be nothing but intolerable. Contrary to my expectations, we fell into a most awkward silence, when suddenly the lady turned to me, and said, with a look of grave concern, "You seem to have a dreadful cold, sir. It must be a sad bore to sit in such a room as this, and hear us all talking of things you don't care about; with that ringing in the ear, and throbbing in the temples, which a bad cold produces. I know nothing worse to endure; and in charity to you, I am going to break up the party, by carrying off my father. But, stay one moment."

And she went hastily out of the room, without allowing me time to apologize for my stupidity and rudeness, on the score of that indisposition which she had so kindly noticed. My sister followed her, but soon returned.

"When will these people go away?" I asked with impatience.

"As soon as Mr. and Miss Somerville order their carriage."

"And why don't they order it now?"

"Because Miss Somerville is standing by the nursery fire, making you a nœstrum for your cold."

"What an unaccountable creature!" I exclaimed. Why, I have been positively rude to her."

"That makes no difference with her," replied my sister. "She would cure the malady of an enemy, just as willingly as that of a friend."

"Then there is nothing personal in the matter," thought I, with a slight touch of disappointment.

It is a few days this visit was to be returned; and so much were the effects of my cold alleviated by the means above alluded to, that I felt it would be impossible to make indisposition a plea for absenting myself from the party.

Somerville Hall was built in the old English style. It had a

square flat front, with octagonal towers projecting a little at each end; and there were turrets, and recesses, and mullioned windows, and winding passages, and all sorts of things to be long remembered about it; but most of all the ivy. Never have I seen such deep, such rich festoons of ivy as hung over the arched entrance of the eastern tower. And then there was that old-fashioned plant, with its bright red berries, and short green leaves, and the rambling clematis all about the front; while a white rose climbed up to the window of Kate's own room, as if to mark the purity and acromedness of that particular spot.

But I forget; for I was a long time before I thought there was anything sacred connected with her; and especially on the day I allude to, though she had cured my cold, I felt as if I owed her a sort of revenge, because I could not dislike her as I had intended; and I thought of nothing but how pleasant it would be to bring her down, and humble her.

The avenue of elms through which we drove, did not lead directly to the house, though it commanded a view of it through every opening in the trees; but when we had approached within a hundred yards, the road turned off into an open sweep, along a lawn of the smoothest turf, sloping down to a bright sparkling river, which watered the adjoining meadows, winding like a silver thread amongst the green tufts of ash, and birch, and willow, that fringed its verdant banks. In approaching nearer to the mansion, we passed along the side of a beautiful shrubbery, whose winding walks were scarcely visible amongst the thickly-grouping lilacs, and laburnums, and the weeping willows, that hung over the road.

On reaching this spot, my sister exclaimed with astonishment at the sight of an enormous mound of earth, which several workmen were engaged in rearing, while beside them stood the master of the house, his attention being so entirely absorbed, that he did not observe our carriage pass. It was then I first learned that this excellent man—for excellent he certainly was in all qualities of the heart—was inveterately addicted to the habit of devoting himself to what are commonly called hobbies; and having no public pursuits, nor anything, in short, to lead him out of the narrow precincts of his hereditary domain, the restless spirit of invention, so often mistaken for that of improvement, had left its traces on many portions of his estate, where sums of money had been sunk sufficient to have cured a man less enterprising, of the fascinating, but dangerous habit of trying experiments on a large and expensive scale. In one part of his grounds, in particular, though happily remote from the house, was a ruinous heap of broken earth, interspersed with deep pits, beside which were scattered a few slightly built sheds, unoccupied, and falling to decay. Here Mr. Somerville had once intended to establish a pottery; but the idea of digging for coal soon afterwards presenting itself to his mind, the latter gained the ascendancy; and another part of his estate presented an equally deserted scene, strewn with the vestiges of a project equally futile.

It was strange, as Kate used often to observe, that her father should allow these things to remain—that he should not employ some of his numerous host of labourers to smooth down the earth, and carry off the rubbish, in order to efface the memory of defeated enterprise. The disease of hobby-riding had, however, the same symptoms and character with him, as with others. The object of the present moment, and the hopes it supplied, so entirely occupied his mind, that he seemed to feel neither the pain of wounded pride, nor that of disappointed effort. To him the future was all; and the past was consequently nothing.

To a superficial observer, Mr. Somerville presented a perfect picture of an amiable, peace-loving country gentleman. And so in fact he was. He had not an unkind thought or feeling towards any human being. But at the same time he knew very little what human beings were. On the subject of chemical combinations, and patent machinery, his information was far more extensive, and his attention more easily excited. He would probably have fallen asleep, had any one talked to him of moral principle; and even on the finer distinctions, of religious creed and party, he was neither an intelligent, nor a patient listener; although no man could be more strictly moral, as to general conduct, or more scrupulous in observing the religious forms to which he had been accustomed from his youth. Talk to Mr. Somerville, however, on some of his favourite subjects, tell him of some recent invention in mechanism, or discovery in science, and his eyes were lighted up with animation, his whole frame was instinct with another life, and he became for the instant a new and a different man.

Kate Somerville, tainted as she sometimes was to treat with playful satire her father's little peculiarities, still spoke of them