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SOMERVILLE HALL.

BY MRS. ELLIS.

There are few things that strike us more, in retracing the course of our past lives, than the changes which have taken place in the situation of the families around us, and in the character and circumstances of the friends of our youth. We never see the effect of such changes so forcibly displayed, as when years of absence have repeatedly separated us from our own home circle; and it might sometimes furnish a subject for retrospection, of no idle or unprofitable nature, to inquire by what moral agency some families have been enabled to rise, while others have fallen in the scale of social influence, and domestic comfort.

With such feelings I would retrace the history of my past life, when, after obtaining an appointment in India, I went into the north of England, to pay a visit to my only sister, who was happily married, and settled at the distance of four miles from Somerville Hall.

Fond of all rural sports, I here amused myself to my heart's content, wishing only it was possible to avoid the visits of the country people, upon whom I looked down from the classic eminence I had recently obtained at college, with the common degree of disdain. In vain my sister told me of this worthy person, and that good family, of singular character she had met with, and of genius born and blushing in the shade. It was well for her to be amused and contented, with all that surrounded her where her lot was cast; but with me the case was widely different, and I saw no reason why I should be more than barely civil to the society I met at her house.

One day, however, she appeared to be enjoying a premeditated triumph. The Somervilles of Somerville Hall were expected to dinner, and with the only daughter and heiress of this house she had contracted a close intimacy.

Of the name of Kate Somerville I had already become weary; as well as of the history of her wit, her lovers, her music, her riding, her fortune, and her eccentricity; and I had pictured her to myself an untamed country girl, setting up for a character, proud of her money, flirting with the farmers of the neighbourhood, and queening it, with a kind of vulgar superiority, over every one she met.

On this idea of my sister's friend I had dwelt so long, that the bare mention of her name had become an offence to me; and yet every one would mention it. The country jockies talked about her pony, the ladies about her dress, the envious about her oddities, the poor about her benevolence, the scrupulous about her extravagance, the extravagant about her scruples, until I began

not what to make of her; but instead of the curiosity which such contradictory reports might naturally have excited, I conceived a sort of horror at the idea of encountering a woman of so many pretensions; and to avoid the long day she was expected to spend at my brother's, I should have betaken myself to the fields until nightfall, had I not been unfortunately confined to the house by a severe cold.

To increase my disgust, other neighbours were expected, so that I was to see this heroine in full play, amongst her humble friends, and admiring satellites. Escape being impossible I nerved myself for the occasion, and determined, as my last and only resource, to keep the whole length of the room between myself, and the object of my anticipated dislike.

All the other guests had arrived, and were sitting in country stags around the drawing-room, when I heard a loud and not unmusical laugh in the adjoining apartment; and my sister, evidently recognising a well-known sound, hastened out to welcome her friend. The laugh still continued, as Miss Somerville entered, leaning on the arm of her father, a most respectable-looking gentleman of fifty, with blue coat, white waistcoat, and powdered hair. The lady laughed on, for though she was undergoing the ceremony of being presented to the company, she was all the while telling my sister the history of some droll adventure which had detained them by the way.

"This is absolute rudeness," thought I, as the party advanced towards me; and I consequently condescended to pay no farther regard to my sister's friend, than to notice that she had a profusion of close curling black hair thrown back from a broad clear forehead, and teeth of the most shining whiteness. I afterwards discovered that her eyes were dark and flashing; and though her mouth was rather wide, the bold and beautiful curve of her chin, and the noble line from that to her small classical ear, was such as might have redeemed from vulgarity a countenance more broadly marked than hers.

Miss Somerville was certainly not what I had expected. She was bold, but not vulgar—bold, for she was a spoiled child, and had never known the fear of punishment—bold, for she was a high-minded woman, and had never felt the shame of acting a false part.

Still, I did not like her. She had the manners of one who has been accustomed to be thought droll; and though in my heart I could not accuse her of affectation, there was an arch curve about her lips, and a triumphant elevation of her marked and meaning eye-brows, that seemed to set me at defiance; so that before I was aware of it, I had assumed the air and tone of one who acts on the defensive. With others she conversed rapidly and fluently; but whenever her opinions and mine came in contact, they were decidedly opposed; and before the evening closed, we were positively rude to each other. On my part, I was piqued that one so young, and a woman, should presume to take the lead in conversation; while she was equally surprised and annoyed, to find a gentleman, and a stranger, insensible to her attractions, and unmoved by her influence.

Once, and once only, I detected myself gazing at her with admiration. She had been talking with an old gentleman, of narrow prejudices, and rigid ways of thinking and judging of the poor; when, forgetting all argument, all reasoning, and all calculation—three things she was rather apt to forget—she burst forth into such an indignant and eloquent appeal to the feelings and sympathies of human nature, that the company became silent, and every eye was fixed upon her. Upon which she appeared suddenly to recollect herself, and, shocked at the prominent part she was taking, as well as at the degree of personal feeling she was exhibiting, a burning crimson rushed into her face, while she bent down her head, silent, and evidently abashed.