

And, I assure you, I who have gone about the world much more than you have, that I have seen many sad instances in which——”

But the expression of distress, and even of revulsion, on the governess's face made the other lady pause.

“Well, well,” she said; “you must have thought the matter well over, and it is after all, purely your own affair.”

“It is my own affair,” replied Hannah, still gently, but in a way that would have closed the subject, had not the countess, with her infinite tact and good breeding, dismissed it at once herself, and began consulting with Miss Thelluson on the best way of replacing her, and the quickest, that she might the sooner be free “to go to that poor little baby.”

“And remember,” she added, “that on this point you need have no qualms. My old nurse used to say that any sensible woman, with a heart in her bosom, could manage a baby.”

Hannah smiled, and her happy feeling returned, so that she was able to listen with interest, and even amusement, to a vivid description which the clever countess gave of baby's grandmother and aunts, whom she had met in London that season.

“All Easterham is *terra incognita* to me, Lady Dunsmore; but I shall try not to be afraid of anything or anybody, and to do my best, whatever happens—a very commonplace sentiment; but, you see, I was always a commonplace person,” added Hannah, smiling.

“In which case you would never have found it out,” replied the countess, who had hitherto had few opportunities of any long talk with her governess, on other topics than the children. Now, having both an aptitude and a love for the study of character, she found herself interested unawares in that grave, still, refused-looking woman, who, though perhaps, as she said, a little commonplace when in repose, was, when she talked, capable of so much and such varied expression, both of feature and gesture—for there is a language of motion quite as plain as the language of form, and of the two perhaps it is the most attractive.

She said to herself, this brilliant little lady, who had seen so much of life—of aristocratic life especially, and of the terrible human passions that seethe and boil under the smooth surface of elegant idleness—she said to herself, “That face has a story in it.”

Yes, Miss Thelluson had had her story, early told and quickly ended; but it had coloured her whole life, for all that.

She had no brothers; but she had an orphan cousin, of whom she was very fond. As childish playfellows, the two always said they would marry one another, which everybody laughed at as an excellent joke, until it grew into earnest. Then Hannah's father, an eminent physician, interfered. There was consumption in the family, and the young man had already shown ominous symptoms of it. His marrying anybody was unwise; his marrying a first cousin absolute insanity. Dr. Thelluson, much as he blamed himself for allowing the young people every chance of falling in love, when it was most imprudent for them to marry, was yet too good a man frantically to shut the stable-door after the steed was stolen, and to overstrain parental authority to cruelty. He did not forbid