

before Miss Thelluson's time, and she foresaw the same thing over again—or worse.

"Do not say I 'wish' to go. But my brother-in-law requires me much, he says, and would like to have me as soon as you could spare me. Not a day sooner, though, than you find convenient. I could not bear that. You have been so kind; I have been so happy here."

"As I trust you will be everywhere," replied Lady Dunsmore cordially. "Your brother's home—I forget exactly where it is."

"Easterham. He is the Reverend Bernard Rivers, the vicar there."

"Son to Sir Austin Rivers, of Easterham Moat-House, who married one of the Protheroes?"

"I really don't know Lady Rivers's antecedents—I never can remember pedigrees," replied Hannah, smiling. "But his father is certainly Sir Austin, and they live at the Moat-House."

"Then I know all about them. Why did you not tell me before? I must have met your brother-in-law. He is the eldest—no, I am forgetting again—the second son, but takes the place of the eldest, who is of weak intellect, is he not?"

"I believe so, unfortunately. He has epileptic fits."

"And is not likely to marry. All the better for the clergyman. I am sure I have seen him—a tall, bearded, handsome young man."

"Rosa used to think him handsome. As to his youth, I fancy he was about five years her senior. That would make him just my age; but men are quite young still at thirty."

"Women, too, I hope," said the countess, smiling with a pleasant consciousness that if Debrett had not betrayed it, no one would ever have imagined that she was herself fully that age. Then, as if struck with a sudden thought, she eyed Miss Thelluson keenly—one of those acute, penetrating looks of hers, a mixture of the shrewd woman of the world with the single-minded, warm-hearted woman that she undoubtedly was, also.

"I am going to take a great liberty with you, Miss Thelluson," she continued after a pause; "but I am a candid person—may I say a few candid words?"

"Certainly. And I should thank you for saying them."

"Well, then, you are still a young woman."

"Oh, no; not young."

The countess put out her pretty hand with imperative gesture, and repeated—

"Yes; a young unmarried woman, and I am a matron and a mother. May I ask, have you well considered in every point of view the step you are about to take?"

"I think I have. That there are many difficulties, I know; and I am prepared for them."

"What sort of difficulties?"

Hannah hesitated; but the frank, kind eyes seemed to compel an answer. She was so unused to sympathy that when it did come she could not resist it—

"First—I know I may speak confidentially, Lady Dunsmore—first, there is the Moat-House. The Rivers family did not quite