

dear Esther : I came to hear all about Wilfred, and if he is a big enough man for the place. So do go on about him."

"I'm trying to go on, but you keep interrupting me. Well, Wilfred is modern and up to date in quite a different way from yours. He is in earnest about it. It isn't just a pose with him as it is with you. You see he is *really* young and fresh and enthusiastic, and believes in things with all his heart." Esther invariably sacrificed tact to truth.

The Duchess laughed her merry laugh. Nothing disturbed her good temper. "Thank you, my dear child. What a truly sisterly remark ! But I hope you don't mean that our beloved cousin is actually socialistic, and wishes to break up Papa's estate into small holdings, or something dreadful of that kind !"

"Oh dear no ! He is very much in earnest, but it is quite the right sort of earnestness. He fully realizes the responsibilities of a great position, and is most anxious to render himself equal to them. He talks about being an earl just as you'd talk about being a clergyman, if you know what I mean."

"I see. That is certainly more like Papa than me. I never feel that being a duchess is at all like being a bishop ! But if Wilfred is that sort of a person, I don't wonder that Mamma has taken to him. She always loves earnestness, and a sense of responsibility, and things like that."

The subject of the two sisters' conversation was their distant kinsman, Wilfred Wyvern, who had succeeded, some six months previously, to their father's title and estates. The late Earl of Westerham left no son ; and his only brother, Colonel Wyvern—heir presumptive to the peerage and a widower with one son—died a year or two before the Earl, his son having