

"Very kind I am sure," muttered the latter, and then a dead silence reigned for some seconds between the two, not too congenial companions.

"This will never do," thought Sir William. "What can I talk about? Parliament? Hardly. His flock? No; that won't go down. But the idea is not a bad one, so here goes. Suppose we say the parish? Yes. That will do. Now for it." And thereupon he began: "You have not a large number of gentry among your parishioners, I suppose?"

"No. The Squire's is almost the only gentleman's house in the place, but the neighbourhood is a pleasant enough one."

"I am glad you have found it so, for the position of many country clergymen is not a pleasant one. Their visiting is frequently confined to one or two families, and that is neither good for them nor those they visit."

"True. For country clergy are often too poor to visit amongst those who consider themselves country people."

"Yes. But no one expects the clergy to return any civility showed to them," said Sir William, feeling how little ground he gained, "and you know an unmarried man, who is a gentleman, is acceptable in any society."

As he received no answer to this last remark, Sir William again spoke. "You are peculiarly fortunate in having a man like Mr. Brereton for your Squire."

"He is not particularly liberal, nor is he a very good churchman," returned Mr. Carlton. "I am not intimate with him."

"Oh! I thought you were on remarkably good terms with the family." Again, he elicited no observation, except a polite negative shake of the head. Sir William continued, "I have heard that Mrs. Brereton was a remarkably pleasant woman."

"Yes, she was a great loss to those who knew her. But she was reserved, too much so, I should have thought, to be a general favourite. During the latter part of her life she never went into society at all."

"Does her daughter resemble her?"

"I do not see any likeness myself," replied Mr. Carlton.

"Reserve only excepted? Still I think a woman cannot be too reticent."

"Silence is golden, they say," acquiesced Mr. Carlton.

"Sign number one," said Sir William to himself. Change of subject can't be allowed though. "What a pretty girl she is," he observed aloud.

Mr. Carlton remarked that she was variable in her looks.

"Certain sign!" This to himself; then aloud, "so gentle and modest too. And yet..... and yet," hesitated the baronet.

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