

It must be made plain to us some day ; I believe it always is to those who have innocent hearts."

And as she sat, her hands folded on her lap, pale and sad as she looked, there was such a sweet composure in her aspect, that Bernard stopped and gazed--gazed till the peace was reflected on his own.

"You are a saint, and I am--only a man. A very wretched man sometimes. 'Think for me--tell me what I ought to do.'"

Hannah paused a little, and then suggested that he should, for a few weeks or so, part with Rosie and herself, and let them go, as Lady Dunsmore had earnestly wished, to pay her a visit in London.

"Did she say so?" said Bernard, with sensitive fear. "Do you think she said it with any meaning--that she had any idea concerning us?"

"You need not be afraid even if she had," was the rather proud answer. Alas! how quick they were growing to take offence, even at one another. Yes, it was best to part. "I mean," Hannah added, "that, even if she guessed anything, it would not signify. I shall confess nothing; and I have often heard her say that a secret accidentally discovered ought to be held just as if it had never been discovered at all. Be satisfied--neither Lady Dunsmore nor I shall betray you, even to one another."

And for a moment Hannah thought with comfort that this good woman was her friend--had grown more and more such, as absence discovered to both their mutual worth. It would be a relief after the long strain to rest upon this genial feminine companionship--this warm and kindly heart.

"She will treat me like a friend too--not like her old governess, if you are uneasy about that. Or, if you like it better, I shall be received less as poor Hannah Thelluson than as Mr. River's sister-in-law and Rosie's aunt. I am to go about with her everywhere--she made me quite understand that. A strange, changed life for me; but my life is all so strange."

And Hannah sighed. She felt as if she had let her oars go, and were drifted about involuntarily, she knew not whither, hardly caring whether she should ever touch land; and if she did, whether it would be as a living woman, or a creature so broken down and battered that she could neither enjoy nor suffer any more? Who could tell? Fate must decide.

Mr. Rivers listened to her silently, but full of thought--thoughts which, perhaps, she could not have followed had she tried. He was a very good man, but he was also a man of the world; he would not have been a Rivers else. He saw at once the advantage of Lady Dunsmore's countenance--not merely because she happened to be a marquis's daughter and an earl's wife, but because in any society she was the sort of person whose friendship was valued and valuable. Was it human nature, or only masculine nature, that, dearly as he loved Hannah, Bernard unconsciously prized her the more because she was prized by such a woman as the Countess of Dunsmore?

"Go, then," he said. "I will not hinder you. Pay your visit you will be happy; and it will in many ways be a good thing." Then with a nervous eagerness that, in spite of her reason, pained Hannah acutely--"When does she want you? How soon can you start?"