

"Oh, yes ; I am glad they enjoy themselves," returned Adeline, and changed the conversation ; but through it all, the pale, vexed face, the anxious eyes, heavy with an unspoken anger, an annoyance that could not be complained of, struck Hannah with pity. Here, she thought, was a false position too.

At nine the butler came in, announcing formally, "Miss Thelluson's servant."

"It is Grace. I told her to call for me on her way from chapel. I wished to go home early."

"And without Bernard ? I understand. Very right ; very nice," whispered lady Rivers, in a tone of such patronising approval, that Hannah repented herself of having thus planned, and was half inclined to call Mr. Rivers out of the dining room and tell him she was going. But she did not. She only rose, and bade them all good-night. Not one rough word had broken the smooth surface of polite conversation ; yet she was fully aware that, though with that convenient plaistering over of sore or ugly places peculiar to the Rivers family, they said nothing, they all knew well, and knew that she knew they knew, why she was going, and the instant her back was turned would talk her over to their hearts' content. Yet she walked out of the room slowly, calmly, with that dignified, lady like presence she had, almost better than beauty. Yes, even though she saw lady Rivers rise to accompany her up-stairs—a piece of condescension so great that there was surely some purpose in it. Lady Rivers seldom took trouble without a purpose.

Yet for a moment she hesitated, sat pulling her rings off and on, and eyeing with her critical woman-of-the-world gaze this other woman, who fulfilled the apostolic law of being in the world, not of it. The long strain of the evening had worn Hannah out, and she was in doubt whether Bernard would like her stealing off thus—whether, since Lady Rivers thought it "wise," it really was not most unwise thus to condense the cloudy scandal into shape by paying it the respect of acceptance. As she tied her bonnet, her hands trembled a little.

"Are you ready ? Then Miss Thelluson, may I say just one word before you go ? As a married lady and the mother of a family, speaking to a young—no, not exactly a young, but an unmarried—person, may I ask, is it true what I hear, that you have had a definite offer of marriage from Mr. Morecomb ?"

Hannah started indignantly, and then composed herself.

"I do not quite see that the matter concerns anyone but myself and Mr. Morecomb. But since you have heard this, I conclude he has told you. Yes, it is true."

"And what answer did you give ? You may as well tell me : for he will ; he is coming here to-morrow."

Hannah waited a moment. "I have given the only answer I could give—No."

Lady Rivers sprang from her chair. "Good heavens ! Are you mad ? My dear Miss Thelluson, I beg your pardon ; but really—to refuse such an offer ! If Mr. Morecomb had come and asked me for one of my own daughters, I would at least have considered