

Moat-House, but not of the House on the Hill. When you did me the honour to give me that position, you distinctly said I should manage it as I chose. I claim my right. For Rosie's sake I must beg of you not to send away her nurse."

"Good heavens! you will not see! How can I, placed as I am, keep in my house a woman who is disgraced for life?"

"Not disgraced; only unfortunate. She is a very good girl indeed. She protests solemnly she had not an idea that in marrying James Dixon she was doing wrong."

"How you women do hold to your point!" said Mr. Rivers in great irritation, almost agitation. "But she has done wrong. She has broken the law. In the eye of the law she is neither more nor less than a poor seduced girl, mother of a bastard child."

Now Hannah Thelluson was an exceedingly "proper" person; that is, though not ignorant of the wickedness of the world—the things "done in secret," as St. Paul terms them—she agreed with St. Paul that it was a shame to speak of them, unless unavoidable, and for some good end. If duty required, she would have waded through any quantity of filth; but she did not like it: she preferred keeping in clean paths if possible. Oftentimes she had been startled, not to say shocked, by the light way in which some fast young ladies who came about the Moat-House, and even the Misses Rivers themselves, talked of things which she and the girls of her generation scarcely knew existed, and certainly would never have spoken about, except to their own mothers. And among the qualities in Mr. Rivers which first drew her towards him was one which women soon instinctively find out in men—as men, they say, in women—that rare delicacy of thought and action which no outward decorum can ever imitate, because it springs from an innate chastity of soul. Thus, when in his excitement Mr. Rivers used such exceedingly plain, ugly words, Miss Thelluson looked at him in intense astonishment, and blushed all over her face.

Some people called Hannah a plain woman—that is, she was tall, and thin, and colourless, not unlike the white lily she had been compared to; but when she blushed, it was like the white lily with a rosy sunset glow upon it. For the moment she looked absolutely pretty. Something in Mr. River's eyes made her conscious that he thought so—or, at least, that he was thinking of her, and not of poor Grace or the subject in hand at all.

"Why do you not oftener wear white, I like it so much," he said, softly touching her gown, a thick muslin, embroidered with black, which she thought would be a sort of mediæval compromise. She was so fond of white, that it was half-regretfully she had decided she was too old to wear it. But among her new dresses she could not resist this one. It pleased her to have it noticed, or would have done, had not her mind been full of other things.

"I was going to the pic-nic in Langmead Wood, you know: but never mind that just now. Before I start I shall have to tell poor Grace her doom. A heavy blow it will be. Do not ask me to make it worse by telling her she must leave us."

Bernard was silent.

"I cannot bear to resist your will," pleaded she. "When I first