

"I left ye candles and groff wax-light—
My bairnies sleep i' the mirk o' night.

"I left ye mony braw bolsters blae—
My bairnies ligg i' the bare strae."

A notion pathetic in its very extravagance. To Hannah Thelluson it scarcely seemed wonderful that any mother should rise up from "under the mools," and come thus to the rescue of her children.

"Oh, if this baby's father ever brings home a strange woman to be unkind to her, what shall I do? Anything, I think, however desperate. Rosa, my poor Rosa, you may rest in peace! God do so to me, and more also, as the Bible says, if ever I forsake your child."

While she spoke, half aloud, there was a tap at the door.

"Come in, nurse." but it was not the nurse; it was the father.

"I could not rest. I thought I would come too. They never let me look at baby."

"Look then. Isn't she sweet? See how her little fingers curl round her papa's hand already."

Mr. Rivers bent over the crib—not unmoved. "My poor little girl! Do you think, Aunt Hannah, that she will ever be fond of me?"

"I am sure she will."

"Then I shall be so fond of her."

Hannah smiled at the deduction. It was not her notion of loving—especially of loving a child. She had had enough to do with children to feel keenly the truth that, mostly, one has to give all and expect nothing—at least, for many years. But it was useless to say this, or to put any higher ideal of paternal affection into the young father's head. He was so completely a young man still, she said to herself; and felt almost old enough, and experienced enough, to be his mother.

Nevertheless, Mr. Rivers seemed much affected by the sight of his child, evidently rather a rare occurrence.

"I think she is growing prettier," he said. "Anyhow, she looks very peaceful and sweet. I should like to take her and cuddle her, only she would wake and scream."

"I am afraid she would," said Hannah, smiling. "You had better go away. See, there comes nurse." Who entered, in somewhat indignant astonishment, at finding not only Miss Thelluson but Mr. Rivers, intruding on her domains. Whereupon the latter, with true masculine cowardice, disappeared at once. But when Aunt Hannah—who accepted gladly the welcome name—rejoined him in the drawing room, she found him pacing to and fro with agitated steps.

"Come in, sister, my good sister. Tell me you don't think me such a brute as I have been saying of myself I am. Else why should that woman have thought it so extraordinary—my coming to look at my own child? But I do not mean to be a brute. I am only a miserable man, indifferent to everything in this mortal world. Tell me, shall I ever get out of this wretched state of mind? Shall I ever be able to endure my life again?"