

usual lot of sisters, to share most of the cares and responsibilities of a wife, without a wife's blessing or a wife's love.

"I must go now. Good-night," she said.

"Good-night? Nay, surely you are coming back to me again? You don't know what a relief it has been to talk to you. You cannot tell how terrible to me are these long, lonely evenings."

A moan, to Hannah incomprehensible. For her solitude had no terror—had never had. In early youth she would sit and dream for hours of the future—a future which never came. Now she had done with dreaming; the present sufficed her—and the past. She liked thinking of her dear ones living, her still dearer ones dead, and found in their peaceful, unseen companionship all she required. Never was there a person less dependent on outward society. And yet when she had it she rather enjoyed it—only she never craved after it, nor was it any necessity of her existence. On such women, who themselves can stand alone, others always come and lean—men especially.

As Miss Thelluson quitted him, Mr. Rivers looked after her with those restless, miserable eyes of his, from which the light of happiness seemed fled for ever.

"Pray come back soon," he said imploringly. "I do so hate my own company."

"Poor man! How sad it would be if we women felt the same!" thought Hannah. And she, who understood, and could endure, not only solitude but sorrow, took some comfort to herself;—a little more, also, in the hope of imparting comfort.

A child asleep! Painters draw it; poets sing about it: yet the root of its mystery remains a mystery still. About it seem to float the secrets of earth and heaven—life and death: whence we come, and whither we go: what God does with and in us, and what he expects us to do for ourselves. It is as if, while we gaze, we could catch drifting past us a few threads of that wonderful web—which, in its entirety, He holds solely in His own hands.

Hannah Thelluson looked on this sleeper of six months old with a feeling of not merely tenderness, but, awe. She listened to the soft breathing—which might have to draw its last sigh—who knows? perhaps eighty years hence, when she and all her generation were dead, buried, and forgotten. The solemnity of the charge she had undertaken came upon her tenfold. She stood in the empty nursery, apparently left deserted for two hours, for the fire was out, and the candle flickered in its socket. Strange shadows came and went; among them one might almost imagine human shapes—perhaps the dead mother gliding in to look at her lonely child. Even as in some old ballad about a cruel stepmother—

"The night was lang and the bairnies grat,
Their mither she under the mools heard that.

"She washed the tane and buskit her fair,
She kamed and plaited the tither's hair;"

and then reproached the new wife, saying—the words came vividly back upon Hannah's mind—