

toeratic little hearts—as warm as other hearts, though perhaps more suppressed. She loved them also; but it was rather a sad kind of affection, as she knew it could only be temporary. They would drift away from her, and marry earls and dukes; and she would be no more to them than “our old governess.” It was nearly the same with other little folks of her own rank—the children of her friends or schoolfellows—who generally called her Aunt Hannah, and were very fond of her whilst she was with them; but, of course, soon forgot her when she was away. All natural—quite natural; yet it sometimes seemed rather sad.

Now here was a child to whom she had an actual right of blood. Whether or not the Rivers family had liked Rosa, or herself, they could not abolish the fact that she was the child’s aunt; and, if the father desired it, its natural guardian. The first impulse of strangeness and shrinking passed away, and as she read over again Mr. Rivers’s letter, and began clearly to comprehend what he wished, there grew up a longing, indescribable, after that duty which was set before her in such a sudden and unexpected way; yet which, the more she thought about it, seemed the more distinct and plain.

She dried her eyes, and, late as it was, prepared to answer the letter, knowing she would not have leisure to do it next morning before post time. Besides, she wished to “sleep upon it,” as people say; and then read it over again in the calm light of day: Hannah Thelluson being one of those people who dislike doing things in a hurry, but who, having once put their hand to the plough, never look back.

She was fully aware that if she acceded to her brother-in-law’s request she must not look back; however difficult the position might be, it would be still more difficult to quit it and return to her old calling as a governess. And that provision for her old age, which she was year by year slowly accumulating,—with the pathetic prudence of a woman who knows well that only her own labour stands between her and the workhouse,—that too must be given up. For Mr. Rivers would, of course, offer her no salary; and, if he did, how could she possibly accept it? Was she not coming to his house as a sister, with all the honours and some few of the bondages of that relationship? Her common sense told her that, pleasant as in some measure her duties might be, they entailed considerable sacrifices as well. But women like her, though they dislike taking a leap in the dark, will often take a most difficult and dangerous one with their eyes open, fully counting the cost.

“Yes. I will venture it,” she said, after a long pause of thought. “The risk cannot be much.—and it is only my own, after all.”

So she sat down to write her letter.

While she does so, let us look at her,—the solitary governess whom few ever looked at now.

Miss Thelluson could not have been handsome, even in her first youth, which was past now. Her face was long and thin; her eyes deep-set, though they were sweet eyes in themselves, grave and tender, and of a soft grey. Her hair was of no particular colour,—in fact, she had no special attraction of any kind, except a well-proportioned figure, which in motion had a willowy grace, that