

There had passed over him that great blow—the first grief of a lifetime ; and it had struck him down as a man of naturally buoyant temperament usually is struck by any severe shock—sinking under it utterly. Even as sometimes those whom in full health disease has smitten, die quicker than those who have been long inured to sickness and suffering.

His sister-in-law observed him compassionately but sharply ; more sharply than she had ever done before. The marriage having been all settled without her, she had not to criticise but to accept him as Rosa's choice, and had actually only seen him twice—on the wedding-day, and the one brief visit afterwards. She had noticed him little, until now. But now, when they were to live together as brother and sister ; when he expected her to be his friend and companion, daily and hourly ; to soothe him and sympathise with him, put up with all his moods and humours, consult him on all domestic matters, and in short, stand to him in the closest relation that any woman can stand to any man, unless she is his mother or his wife, the case was altered. It behoved her to find out, as speedily as possible, what sort of man Mr. Rivers was.

He had a handsome face, and yet—this “yet” is not so unfair as it seems—it was likewise a good face : full of feeling and expression. A little feminine, perhaps—he was like his mother, the first Lady Rivers, who had been a very beautiful woman ; and once Hannah had thought it boyishly bright—too bright to interest her much, but it was not so now. The sunshine had all gone out of it, yet it had not attained the composed dignity of grief. Irritable, restless, gloomy, morbid, he seemed in that condition into which a naturally good-tempered man is prone to fall, when some great shock has overset his balance, and made him the exact opposite of what he once was—hating every thing and every body about him, and himself most of all.

Hannah sighed as she listened, though trying not to listen to his fault-finding with the servants, sometimes *sotto voce*, sometimes barely restrained by his lingering sense of right from breaking out into actual anger—he who was, Rosa used to assert, the sweetest-tempered man, the most perfect gentleman, in all the world. Yet even his crossness was pathetic—like the naughtiness of a sick child, who does not know what is the matter with him. Hannah felt so sorry for him ! She longed to make excuse for those domestic delinquencies and tell him she would soon put all right ; as she knew she could, having been her father's housekeeper ever since she was a girl of sixteen.

She was bold enough faintly to hint this, when they got into the drawing-room, where some trivial neglect had annoyed him excessively, much more than it deserved ; and she offered to rectify it.

“ Will you really ? Will you take all these common household cares upon your self ? ”

“ It is a woman's business ; and I like it. ”

“ So *she* used to say. She used constantly to be longing for you, and telling me how comfortable everything was when her sister was housekeeper at home. She—she—— ”

It was the first time the desolate man had ventured off the safe