

his engagement should be broken through, and now all that engaged his thoughts was how to bring it about. Harder work than he thought, for Mary had never wavered in her faith towards him; he was her all, her idol, and it would be long before she could realize that it was only clay.

Let us pass over the next two years. The vanity and selfishness of Maude (her mother had foreseen it long ago), the uncertainty of Charles, the quiet life of sacrifice of Mary, how shall we describe them, or the comments of outsiders? We will take one peep into the parlor of our old acquaintance, Mrs. Sloane, hear what those assembled there say, and draw a veil over the rest.

Five years before we found in that parlor Mr., Mrs., and the Misses Sloane, Minnie and Morton Bell. All are there now except the pretty Minnie and Augusta Sloane. Death had claimed both, and their fireside chairs were empty.

"Mother," it was Mr. Sloane who broke the silence, "Norton tells me that Charles Dakers is about to be married to Maude Barton."

"Indeed!" answered Mrs. Sloane; "then of course she will give up teaching."

"Give up teaching? Why you are making a mistake between her and her sister Mary, to whom he has been engaged so many years."

"Perhaps so, but one forgets occasionally, you know."

"Of course," said Bertha Sloane, who had listened attentively to the conversation, "he must feel that Maude is better suited to him; one cannot expect a man to be bound by a promise made when things were so different; it would be a kind of new world 'Jephthah's vow.'" Bertha, now Mrs. Harris, could not but remember that her own husband had jilted another for her, and now regretted it, though she hardly knew that yet.

"Yes," answered Morton Bell, "I suppose one cannot 'expect' a man to do so, because now-a-days we expect so very little; but it does seem to me rather strange that a man who had once loved Mary Barton could ever change from her to Maude."

"I fear, Morton, my dear boy"—Mrs. Sloane loved to be patronizing occasion-

ally—"that either you are very Quixotic, or else have a *penchant* (pronounced *pon-shon*) for the fair Mary herself."

"I really cannot say, Mrs. Sloane," though I think I can acquit myself of both charges. Truth is I was at one time intimate with both James and Henry; they left me far behind them, one winter, I am thankful to say, for I fell in with an old friend of my father's, 'total abstinence,' and he prevented my keeping pace with them."

"Ah well!" returned the gentleman of the house, "Dakers is old enough to know what he is about; but I must say I think he is behaving very badly to Mary. It would be poor consolation to her to tell her she is better without him, and yet it really is so."

"Tootruer sir," replied Morton; "and to a girl like Mary that will be the hardest part of the trial. She will feel his desertion keenly, for I know now fondly she loves him; but she will never let any one see how she suffers."

"For my part," said Mrs. Sloane, "I have always considered Charles Dakers very silly to allow himself to be tied to a poor girl like Mary, and if she had done right she would have freed him years ago."

"So she wished, but he held her to her promise. As I told you, Mrs. Sloane, I was intimate there; I, therefore, saw a great deal more than mere outsiders. I have heard many remarks about her altered looks and spirits, but who can keep up good looks when they have hard work and no rest?—or who can be in good spirits when constantly listening for the unsteady footsteps of a drunken brother? I think the pale, sad face of Mary Barton had more to do with my taking the pledge than anything else."

So was she talked about—not only at the Sloanes, but elsewhere. A few, a very few, pitied her; but it usually ended in some such remark as that of Mr. Sloane, "Better no husband than a loveless one." Yes, better, far better; but does she think so? She does, or rather will in time, but the shock is too recent for her to rally under it yet. How she came to understand that Charles wished for freedom, she never quite knew; but it came to her at last. Maude it was who first "broke the ice," as people term it, and so when during the evening they were