

think at the time. I soon awoke from my delusion, and then I vowed solemnly by God's help to forget the past and live only for the future. My wife's childishness tried me greatly, but I accepted my punishment—my punishment of my own making—and, thank God, during the greater part of our married life we were sincerely attached to each other. I feel my Saviour has forgiven me, my sister, and I only want yours to die happy."

Next train brought her to his bedside, just in time to assure him that she would take full charge of his family.

Life was easy from that time; it was a labor of love to rear Maude's family, and well they repaid her. One by one they married and left their home; one by one they scattered through the length and breadth of the land, till at last Mary was alone, all but her grand-nephew, Henry Dakers, and his mother. Alone did I say? No, not alone; her Saviour was ever near to comfort her, and to whisper into her ear when the last struggle came, "Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

CHAPTER III.

Christmas Eve—happy, holy Christmas! the fire burned brightly on the hearth (for my husband and I loved the open fire), the kettle sung songs like the famous one of old, "full of family glee," and we four—that is John and I, little Mary and two-year-old Nellie—were gathered round the table. There was another morsel of humanity upstairs, but as strangers never counted him, I do not care about forcing him on your notice. But father and I thought as much of him in his helpless babyhood as ever you can of the stylish, dashy young people whom in mockery you term "your children." Well, our baby Johnnie (you see he had not left the *i e* class yet, though we hoped in time to have him plain, honest John) was upstairs, and there after tea I carried off my two daughters, leaving papa alone with only my "Life of Mary Barton," as I called it, for company.

What a game of romps we had before the "miller" came with his dust bag, dim-

ming the eyes of my three babies. Then nurse came with the "white robes," and soon two dear forms were kneeling before me, four little hands were clasped and raised, four bright eyes devoutly closed, as each in turn repeated her evening prayer and hymn, each listening to the other, and saying the hymn verse about, while baby sucked his thumb in an ecstasy of delight.

Very soon my two were in their bed, locked in each other's arms, whilst their regular breathing showed them already far on the way to dreamland. Johnnie, too (the little cormorant), was asleep and I could once more leave the nursery and join my husband.

"Don't leave the room, Jane, till I return," I said to the nurse, and when she answered "No, ma'am," I knew she would keep her word.

Down to the dining-room I went. My husband, as usual, had drawn his chair near the fire, and with his "student's lamp," and paper across his knee, looked the picture of comfort.

There were two other things which most persons would have included among the comforts, but alas! they were troubles to me; one was a handsome meerschaumpipe, the other a half-filled glass of brandy and water. These were on the table beside the lamp.

"Why, Marian," was my greeting, "I did not know I had an authoress for my wife. I think I shall have to get up a divorce case, say you married me under 'false pretences,' or something of the kind."

"Just as you like," I answered laughingly, "but I know how it will turn out if you do get the divorce."

"Indeed! how, pray?"

"Why you will come next day and marry me again, authoress and all."

A merry laugh—such as it seems to me only John can give—and I suddenly felt myself half smothered, for his arms were round me, his bushy whiskers on my face. (It was my own fault, though—I should not have knelt beside him) "What vanity to suppose such a thing." The voice was close to me, so that any little interruption was of no consequence. But we did not act like simpletons much longer. Behold us then seated on the sofa like two staid old fogies,