

Prayer-Book and Ledger.

By M.S.P.

A STORY FOUNDED ON FACT.

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CHAPTER IV.

By the time the family lawyer had arranged matters with regard to the doctor's will and the presence of his daughter at Chelford was no longer necessary, ten days had elapsed, and Richard must hasten home to his charge. His wife still looked so unfit to face the sordid surroundings of their London home, that he persuaded her to spend a few days in the Somersetshire village where his father was vicar. Gertrude had always been a great favourite with her husband's family. Mrs Joyce had felt her heart warm towards the gentle girl who had never known a mother's love, and now longed to comfort her in her sorrow; while the bereaved daughter found it inexpressibly soothing to pour out her grief into the sympathising ear of "mother." Richard's young sisters—Ethel and Winnie—took almost entire charge of little Lionel, and grandpapa was never tired of trotting him on his knee and shewing him his "tick-tick."

The fresh air and bright, wholesome life at the vicarage proved very refreshing, but still Gertrude's nights were weary, and sometimes almost sleepless. One night, when the dear old vicar—who still held religiously to the customs of his forefathers—was sipping his usual glass of whisky-toddy, a sudden thought occurred to him, and, turning to his daughter-in-law he exclaimed: "My dear, what you want is a 'night-cap;' mix her one, Ethel—but not as strong as mine—it will make her sleep."

Ethel willingly complied, and the prescription had the desired effect. Gertrude slept better, so the nightly potion became a regular institution, which was continued after her return home.

The "mothers" mustered in full force to welcome back their beloved leader, whose bright and winning ways made her a general favourite. Mrs Jones, however, was not able to be present, her frequent visits to the public-house around the corner making such serious demands upon her time that meetings had to be given up. The curate's wife had not succeeded in her attempts to reform that good woman—she really couldn't do without a "little drop;" and, as Gertrude herself found it equally indispensable, what could she say?

There is in South America a plant known as the pitcher-plant, which ekes out a living by eating insects. The extreme end of its leaf is shaped like a pitcher, the outer lips being

smearred with a luscious substance. Attracted by this, an unwary fly alights upon its surface, and wanders on and on, enjoying the delicious nectar, and oblivious of the fact that he is penetrating deeper and deeper into the vessel. Presently he finds himself upon a slippery plane of downward-pointing hairs. Too late he endeavours to retrace his steps, the sharp points render return impossible. His frantic struggles only hasten his descent, and he falls headlong into the fermenting liquid below, where the bodies of former victims await his coming.

Just as pleasantly does the devil's drink-trap lure its victims on to ruin. Oh, if teachers and parents would only warn the young committed to their care of the danger which lurks in the wine-cup, that they might beware of the first draught!

Gertrude's nerves had received a severe shock, but her constitution was a good one, and once more amid the daily routine of duty, where there was so much to draw her thoughts off from herself, she began to recover. But even while engaged in the Master's work among His poor and suffering, she was traversing the downward path. There were times when she had a suspicion that she was taking too much in the way of stimulant. Then she would resolve to do without it, and for a couple of days would adhere to the resolution; but the deadly poison with which she was tampering speedily weakens the will-power—that divinest gift to humanity. The dreadful depression which follows such indulgence—the unstrung nerves, the lassitude and weariness—soon overcame her scruples, and each return to the old habit only served to rivet its chains more firmly.

Richard, busy with the growing concerns of his parish, saw nothing of all this. Sometimes, coming in unexpectedly, he would wonder to find his wife lying on the couch, with flushed face, in a heavy slumber, but she always had some excuse ready; and to associate the word "drunkard" with her beloved and honoured name was the last thought to occur to his mind. It was well the doctor had been called home too soon to be aware of the misery and degradation his advice had caused. But we will draw a veil over the months which followed, and when next we see our friends great changes will have taken place.

What words may be pronounced quicker and shorter by adding syllables to them? Quick and Short.

Why is the schoolmistress like the letter C? Because she forms lasses into classes.