

Prayer-Book and Ledger.

By M.S.P.

A STORY FOUNDED ON FACT.

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CHAPTER VIII.

Day after day did "Mother Broome" persevere with her self-appointed task. She visited her patient at all hours; took her out for drives; took her to her own home; made her go into society once more; and at last, one day, when three-months-old Eric had added his unconscious influence, Gertrude agreed to sign the pledge. Then her good angel sent for Richard.

"Mr Joyce," she said, her voice trembling with suppressed eagerness, "your wife has made up her mind to sign the pledge, and abstain altogether, but we must have your help. You have alcohol in the house, I know—in the decanters and in the cellar; will you empty it all away before we go any further, and take the pledge with Mrs Joyce? We can do nothing more until you do this."

After a few minutes' thought, Richard left the room. He emptied away the wine in the cellar, and then, turning the decanters upside down into the sink, carried them into the dining-room. Humbly and prayerfully did the husband and wife append their signatures to the modest blue and white card, and then knelt and asked God's blessing upon the step they had taken. Mrs Broome rose from her knees and, softly stealing from the room, left them alone.

The ups and downs, the hopes and fears, which followed, can be realised only by those who have passed through a similar experience. But Gertrude steadily held on her way in spite of all, and Mrs Broome rarely let a day pass without visiting her charge. Sometimes she would go home very down-hearted, feeling it almost impossible that the struggle could last much longer. Every ring at the door-bell made her start with apprehension, and when, in fear and trembling, she again visited "Glenalder" her heart would be filled with thankfulness at finding she still might hope. Upon one of these visits she found the young mother seated in the rocking-chair with her baby at her breast. The probability of this had not occurred to the elder woman, and she spoke at once.

"Do you know what you are doing, Mrs Joyce? You are giving that child a taste for alcohol. You must give up nursing him at once, my dear!"

Gertrude's implicit reliance upon her good friend was touching to behold.

"Am I?" she said. "Oh, I never thought of that! I will give it up at once;" and she laid the now sleeping infant upon her knee.

Next day Mrs Broome had to go to town, and upon arriving at home again, about 9 p.m., her husband said, "There's been a young gentleman here for you in a desperate state of mind, and he'll be back again at ten."

(Mrs Broome loyally kept the sad secrets confided to her care, and although her husband was sometimes interested in hearing details of her "cases," not even he had any clue to their names.)

The next hour was passed in much trepidation. What had happened? Had the poor victim fallen once more? Ten o'clock arrived at last, and with it Richard, who explained that the baby was seriously ill, and would take nothing, and his mother almost beside herself with anxiety. The carriage was waiting, and a few minutes sufficed to bring them to the scene of trial. Arrived in the nursery, Gertrude was seen bending in agony over the cradle, where the baby was screaming lustily, while the nurse in vain endeavoured to feed him with bread and milk.

"You've killed my baby—you've killed him!" exclaimed the mother in excited tones.

Mrs Broome's experienced eye speedily grasped the situation.

"He will be all right directly," she said; and hastily descending the stairs, she jumped into the carriage and drove to the nearest chemist's shop. Having purchased a tin of infant's food and a feeding-bottle she returned, prepared the food, and presented herself once more in the nursery, where Master Eric was still improving the occasion to the best of his ability. Taking him in her arms she soon succeeded in coaxing him to take the bottle, and, quite exhausted, he dropped into a profound slumber, while Gertrude fell upon her friend's neck and overpowered her with grateful expressions of affection.

(To be continued.)

WHEN will the public and especially working men and the lower middle classes make a thorough study of Socialist economics and come to see that, as far as the good of the whole community is concerned, private enterprise is a failure all round.—*Labour Chronicle*.

INTEREST—or rather usury, as it was formerly called—was expressly forbidden by the Bible, the great Pagan philosophers, and the Christian Church. Exacting interest was a criminal offence in England until the reign of Henry VIII., and was not generally permitted until that of James I.—*English Paper*.