

Judged by the Pass-Book
by Frances Hensaw Baden

My son, these maxims make a rule,
And lump them aye the gither;
The rigid righteous is a fule,
The rigid wise anither!

Robert Burns.

Wearily she ascended the stairs, entered the room, and sank almost exhausted into her rocking-chair—the little widow, Mildred McGregor, so young in years, but oh! so old in care and sorrow! Trials numberless were hers, as alone she had to battle with the world, and gain a living for her little ones. Two they were: a merry bright-eyed girl of six years, so full of life and joyous spirit, that she was the sunshine on the mother's path of dreariness; the other a boy, two years older, who from his infancy had been a little sufferer, and great fears filled the mother's heart lest he might go through life a cripple. It was by ceaseless toiling and continual self-denial that Mildred could obtain the necessaries to sustain that feeble little body, with his delicate appetite. Archie must have food nutritious and tempting, fruits, and wine; while Birdie and mamma were satisfied with a scant supply of the meanest necessaries of life. After her accustomed work of teaching a little school, Mildred had been about, that day, to obtain some sewing to do at night. Sorely in need of money, she must turn every hour to some account; even those that should have been given to sleep found her, weary and worn, plying her needle. Three months in arrears with her rent, and with scarce a hope that her landlord would longer have mercy, poor Mildred was more than usually depressed that afternoon.

She was won for a while from her gloomy thought by loving arms fondly caressing her, rosy lips pressed to hers, and a sweet, lispng tongue chirping forth words of love and welcome. Yes, for a while she must forget her sorrows and listen to her little Birdie. Another great comfort Mildred possessed: a faithful domestic, friend, and companion, all combined, whose only interest was with her mistress and her children. While Mandy was placing on the table their frugal meal, Mildred asked:

“How has Archie been today, Mandy?”

“About as usual. The doctor has been here, and says we can do no more just now but bathe his limb whenever it pains him so badly. I have used the last of the liquor.”

“Well, take a book and go for a little more. Just a little, tell Mrs. Grady. And I do hope to be able to pay her before long. Tell her so, Mandy.”

“I did tell her so the last time, and she said, ‘Never mind; whenever you can spare it.’ The agent has been here. I thought if he could only see you, he might wait a while longer; so I invited him to stop, and told him you would be in soon. So he did. I sent Bridie in; and after I had bathed Archie's limb and made him comfortable, I took him in, thinking surely his heart would be then softened. He waited over half an hour, looking over the books on the table. I was doing my

work in the next room, when I heard him jump up and say, ‘That is the reason she has no money to pay her debts,’ and was going out, when I met him in the passage. ‘Tell your mistress I shall expect the rent, or must make it the best I can; and she must find another house, or rooms.’”

“Well, well! I expected it would come. But what could he have meant by ‘that is the reason I had no money?’ I have been fated not to see that man. I wish I knew who the property belonged to; I think I would go right to him and plead for a little mercy.”

William Revere, the owner of Mildred’s little home, and many others, was rich, very rich, and with no one to share his hoards of gold and silver.

He was a bachelor, and not a very old one either. Years before he had loved, as men *sometimes* do, with a love that is forever.

He was fifteen when his little lady-love was born, and daily, for years, did he watch the beautiful child growing more lovely. Every thought of the future was filled with plans for her happiness. For her he would gain wealth. Their parents were dear friends, living in the same house. Merrily they would laugh over the youth’s devotion to the little maid. And she loved no one better than Willie then. But time wore on, and the little one was a beautiful maiden, with many admirers. Willie—grave, earnest Willie, so plain looking,—stood a poor comparison with the gay young gallants who sought her love; and he never told her his. Did she not know it? Had not the years of devotion proved how true it was? He would wait, and let her tire a little of the gay ones, he thought.

And so it was while Willie was waiting, the girl, scarcely more than a child, eloped and married. He had never seen her since; but his love had never died, nor been given to another.

He sat alone in his elegant library when the agent, who had just left Mildred’s home, entered.

“Well, Mason, what is it? You look annoyed.”

“I am, sir. You remember the tenant of ninety-six, — street. She has been promising to pay every week, until now three months have passed, and she is that much in arrears. I have waited, believing her a worthy woman, very poor, with two children, and would pay when she got it. But today I have been fully convinced she never will, and does not try to!”

“Who is she? A widow, you say, with two children. These are hard times, I know, Mason. I do not wish to be hard on a worthy person, understand,” said William Revere.

“Worthy! But I am convinced she is not, sir. Her name is Magruder; I have never seen her; but the truth is, sir, whisky is the reason she cannot pay her rent. The money that should be devoted to that, and yes, to bread for her children, is spent in whiskey!” said Mason, who was a strong advocate of the temperance cause, and had a perfect horror of alcohol; and when used by a woman, it filled his head and heart too with wrath, and in that humor he came to his employer.

“You may be mistaken, Mason. You say you say you have never seen her.”

“Never, sir, and do not want to. But I’m not mistaken. I’ll tell you. I have just left there. I called, found her out, went in, and sat down to wait for her. I amused myself looking over a few books on the table. In a few moments there came in a very pretty, bright looking little girl; but I fancied I smelt the fume of whiskey about her. A little while longer, and then came a boy, pale and sick looking; *then* I could not think it fancy. I *knew* he had been using whiskey freely—Ugh!—and bad whisky too! Just then my eye fell on a ‘pass-book;’ inadvertently I opened it—it was not just the thing, I knew, to do—but I glanced in, and believe me, sir, whisky came much oftener than bread. Now there is no mistaking *that*, if we can believe our eyes, yes, and nose too! It is not mercy to give her any more time. The city authorities had better take the children and care for them, and let *her* go to the work-house! I had intended to order an execution, or have her things set out; but I thought I would speak to you first.”

“Well, if it is so, as you say, proceed; that is, order her out, but do not take her things. You say you have never seen her?”

“No, sir, I have not. Archer rented the house to her when I was away this summer.”

Many times during the next few days, William Revere thought of the woman that Mason had decided to turn out. It was cold weather, and she was a widow with children, no matter how unworthy of sympathy. William Revere could not help feeling annoyed, and a little uneasy; at length he determined to go and see for himself. There was no longer time for delay, for it was then the very day that she would have to leave.

Arriving at his destination, William Revere knocked. The door was opened by the little Birdie.

“Does Mrs. Magruder live here?” he asked, glancing down on the pretty child, while his thoughts flew softly back to the time when just such a little girl was so dear to him. Still looking at her, he noticed not the approach of her mother.

“Mrs. Magruder—you mean Mc—”

He raised his eyes quickly as the sweet tones fell on his ear, but suddenly she stopped, and with a cry of surprise put forth both hands to greet him.

“Oh, Mildred! Dear little Milly! Where have you been all these years?” William Revere exclaimed.

Gently withdrawing the hands he still clasped, and giving him a seat, she told him of her sorrows. With the little Birdie in his arms, he listened to his long lost love, and forgot all about the poor widow and her children for whom he had come in search; for great joy filled William Revere’s heart, and hope was whispering sweet tidings of coming happiness for him at last. Now he might win her! At length bethinking himself, he said:

“I must have mistaken the number. In some one of these houses lives a poor, miserable woman, very much given to drinking. My agent has become rather disgusted with her, and ordered her out. The affair has worried me somewhat, so I came round to look into the case myself.”

“You were asking for Mrs. Magruder. That is what these people call me. *I* am the person you are in search of!”

“*You!* But he said that *that* woman was spending her money on whisky! There must be some other woman, surely, that he has mistaken!”

“No, no; ‘tis *I*. But oh! what can he mean by such a charge?” said Mildred, her face crimsoned with mortification at the thought.

Just then Archie came in, his pale little face bearing the traces of much suffering. After William Revere had spoken to him, the little fellow moved to his mother’s side and whispered:

“Mamma, please let Mandy have the pass-book; my leg hurts me so, I want it bathed.”

William Revere caught the words, low as they were, and he caught the pass-book too, and quickly, for the child’s request had brought to mind the agent’s words. With surprise Mildred gazed as William opened the book, looked an instant at its record, and then pointed to the numberless times whisky was written there.

All was explained fully then and more that little book told. William Revere’s eyes grew dim as he learned from that the story of her great poverty and continual self-denial; but there should be no more of that for Mildred and her little ones.

William laughed merrily over Mason’s blunder, and Mildred could not repress her smiles at the mistake which, although a very sad one, had a very joyous ending.

A knock on the door aroused the merry group; and as Mandy opened it, Mason was about to enter, when, starting back in surprise, he said:

“You here, Mr. Revere! I was seeking Mrs.,. Magruder. Is she not in?”

An expression of admiration was on his face as his eyes rested on Mildred. And well there might, for she was still very beautiful.

“Walk in Mason,” answered William Revere. “Here is the lady you are looking for, Mrs. Magruder.”

“That Mrs. Magruder!” exclaimed Mason, in the most intense surprise, and he gazed in bewilderment from Mildred to Mr. Revere.

In a manner of deep respect he approached Mildred, and said:

“Madam, I have been dreadfully mistaken somehow. I have only to see you to know that.”

Both Mildred and William Revere pitied his great embarrassment, and explained to him his mistake.

“Was it not a rather natural conclusion?” he asked, in a deprecating manner.

“A very hasty one, I should say, Mason. But we will not find much fault with you for this conclusion, for it has proved a very happy one, and perfectly satisfactory to all parties, I hope. I know it is to me.”

But Mason could not feel just so, or enjoy at all what seemed to others a good joke: first because the laugh was all on, not a bit from him; the next, when he looked on the beautiful young widow, he thought what might possibly have happened in favor of himself, if he had not been quite so hasty. For he too was a bachelor, and a much older one than his employer. Afterward, when excusing himself, he asked:

“What can a man believe, if not his own eyes?”

I do not know what his friends answered him, but I would advise, and plead, that nothing evil will be believed until it is fully proved, and all believed good until clearly disproved. This would be a safer rule to govern our thoughts, words, and deeds.

That very day William Revere carried to his home of luxury his wife—Mildred his at last!—with her children and the faithful Mandy.

“I tell you, Mason,” said William Revere, after he had presented him to Mrs. Revere, “that conclusion of yours, although it might not meet the approval of the majority, has mine, with many thanks; for it is the beginning of my life of real happiness, which I have never known until now.”

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