



### Little Bell's Verdict.

(Carrol King, in 'Temperance Leader.')

John Braid lay propped up on his pillows of softest down, and looked round the richly-furnished room, and into the glowing red heart of the fire with eyes that saw nothing. A black shadow had fallen athwart his spirit, and it had blotted out the very sunshine of Heaven for him—the shadow of approaching death. After the consultation with the eminent city specialist, on the afternoon of that very day, his own doctor had told him tenderly enough, but unmistakably, to set his house in order, for he must die and not live, and that within a very few months. He could not realize it. His illness did not cause him much actual pain—only uneasiness, and daily-increasing weakness. And he was not such a very old man—only sixty-seven, full of business schemes, as able to conduct his great establishment as ever he had been, and yet—this one dread Presence he had 'not' planned for.

'The Shadow, cloaked from head to foot,  
That holds the key of all the creeds.'

He heard a faint sound from the muffled door-bell, and immediately after his pastor was at his bedside, with warm hand grip and face full of sorrowing sympathy.

'I met the doctors,' he explained, 'and they told me the truth—I pressed for it. I am most truly sorry, Mr. Braid.'

'Are you?' said John Braid, looking at him with eyes of keen intelligence. 'Then sit down there, where I can see your face, and let me hear what comfort you can give and what information regarding this—unexpected future.'

'Certainly; I am glad to do it,' said the minister, taking the chair indicated by the imperious pointing finger. 'The comfort is full and rich; the information is somewhat misty to the eye of sense—even St. Paul could only see through a glass darkly, you know, but—'

He read from a pocket Bible the beautiful opening verses of the fifteenth chapter of John, but the sick man fidgeted restlessly.

'Oh! don't go on,' he broke forth at last. 'I learned that and the following—the "true vine" chapter—and repeated them to my mother on Sabbath evenings in our country home, when I was twelve years of age. There is no comfort there for me.'

'How no comfort?' said the astonished pastor.

'There is none,' repeated the old man deliberately, 'for I have not fulfilled the conditions. Man, I can bring as clear a business-trained brain to bear on that as I have done on my ledgers. He says—"No life for the branch except it abide in the vine," and common-sense tells me that. He says, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch withered—cast into the fire and burned;" and that, too, is reasonable—just what I should do with useless rubbish. So, leave that Book alone for a minute, and give me your own ideas. If you had suddenly to assume the sole charge of my great breweries and distilleries, and I had to go into your study and get up a couple of sermons per week, and a few stock thoughts and pet phrases for general use, and so forth, how would you set about getting up your knowledge of the new start? This, to me, is as violent a change as that could be to either of us.'

'But surely, Mr. Braid,' said the perplexed pastor, 'you have been a religious man all your life? You have done more for the poor of our church than—'

'Nay—stop,' said the old man grimly, 'I want no glamor here. I did nothing for the poor! I parted with a good deal of superfluous cash that did not cost me the

less by a single glass of champagne, but the work was done by proxy, and to the proxy goes the reward! Think again, sir.'

'There was a poem I learned off by heart, and took the prize for reciting at school,' he continued, dreamily, 'and it comes by snatches now, since I have heard that my record must so soon be handed in:—'

'God bends from out the deep, and says—  
I gave thee this great gift of life—'

I gave thee of My seed to sow,  
Bringest thou now My hundredfold?  
Can I look up with face aglow,  
And answer—"Father, here is gold?"'

The minister turned over the pages of the Book silently. 'Mother did not want me to go into the drink business—in fact, I promised her I would not, but she was dead, and my father's brother—a millionaire—tempted me, and said I had business abilities, and—he was very kind, too. I married his daughter, became his successor in business, and inherited his wealth. I have thrown all the force of my being into the business, and now—I don't seem to catch on to your platitudes about "the Comforter" and the "many mansions," because you see it will be no comfort to me to meet with God, about whom I never troubled myself when in health.'

Again there was a long pause, which the reverend gentleman broke by asking, half-diffidently—

'What about your daughter, Mr. Braid? I hope you will send for her now? Can, I do—'

'No, sir,' said the old man placidly, 'for it is done. I have sent her a wire—the first communication between us for thirteen years, but I know it will bring her.'

'She had left your home before I came to this charge.'

'Yes; she is my only surviving child,' John Braid said sadly; 'but I won't receive her husband—he's a fool! Presumed to tell me, sir—me!—that it would mean disloyalty to Christ's kingdom to take the post of manager in my counting-house, with a most liberal salary, and rising prospects! He actually said he should like to see every brewery and distillery swept off the face of the earth! There's a Christian for you!'

Slowly and timidly the door handle turned, and John Braid fixed eager eyes on it. A graceful child entered—a quaint, dainty little maiden of ten summers—and advanced shyly to the bedside. She held out her little hand. 'Grandpa,' she said, timidly, 'mother cannot come till to-morrow afternoon, so she sent me to tell you, and to stay with you till she comes.'

The old man's hand closed on hers, and the eyes devoured her face eagerly.

'So you are my grandchild? What is your name?'

'Isabel Braid Cairney, but they always call me "little Bell," because mother is "Bell," too.'

'I see—little Bell. Did she tell you that I am—dying?'

'She said you were going to Jesus,' said little Bell, looking wistful, 'and we all prayed before I came away that Jesus would make you glad—glad to meet him.'

Her grandfather glanced at the minister.

'You speak as if he were somebody you knew, little Bell, who lived in the next street.'

'Why, grandpa, he lives far nearer than the next street,' she said, with a quick, glad smile. 'He lives in our house.'

John Braid looked at her steadily.

'Do you know anything of the Home—the place prepared—of the future life at all?'

'Yes,' she answered simply. 'My little sister Dora is there, and mother tells us about Home.'

The minister rose to go, and a smile was on his lips as he shook hands with his friend.

'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,' he said softly—'You have found your informant, Mr. Braid, and who can doubt that she has been sent?'

John Braid only nodded silently, and the minister went away.

'Take that high chair, little Bell,' said John Braid to the little maiden, 'and tell me all you know about the far country?'

'I can tell you more about Jesus,' she said. 'He is getting it ready for us, you know—'

'I don't know,' he interrupted hastily. 'How do you get to know and trust him?'

'Why—you just love him,' she said, looking very wistful again. 'You can't help loving him.'

'Could you give him your gold? and your business?' he asked, drily.

'Yes,' she said, eagerly, 'father asks him every day to bless him in his business.'

'Aye—but what about mine, little Bell?'

'Give it all to him,' she said earnestly.

'He will make it a blessing if you do.'

'Look at me, little Bell. Do you know what my business is—or has been?'

'No, grandpa, indeed I don't.'

'I make—and sell—whiskies, brandies, wines, ales, all kinds of intoxicating liquors,' he said, watching her face, which grew very serious.

'Dear grandpa, I'm very sorry,' she said, sweetly. 'No—Jesus couldn't take that—there is no blessing in it. Father prays every day that God would destroy all hindrances to his kingdom on earth, and I know he thinks that the worst.'

'Then what am I to do, little Bell?' asked the old man mournfully, opening his heart and its anxieties to the child in spite of himself.

'You must just begin at the beginning, grandpa—he will know what to do with everything when you give yourself to him, and say—"I am a poor sinner, and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all-in-all," and then—he'll teach you.'

'And all my long life-work, little Bell?'

'He says some people's works must be burned,' she said seriously, 'but they themselves shall be saved "as by fire," so you can trust him to do right, grandpa, with your life-work.'

'Strange! Strange!' he said musingly. 'Intellectual knowledge is valueless here! It is a thing of the heart, not the head, and a child can understand it, while I—,' he sighed mournfully again, 'over a wasted life,' that had grovelled when it might have soared Godward.

Yet the little child became the minister of God to his world-calloused heart, and led him, empty-handed, with 'nothing but leaves,' to that all-loving one who saves to the uttermost all who come unto him 'as little children.'

### Little by Little.

God broke our years to hours and days,  
that

Hour by hour and day by day,

Just going on a little way,

We might be able all along,

To keep quite strong.

Should all the weight of life

Be laid across our shoulders, and the future strife

With woe and struggle, meet us face to face

At just one place,—we could not go;

Our feet would stop, and so

God lays a little on us every day,

And never, I believe, on all the way

Will burdens bear so deep,

Or pathways lie so steep—

But we can go, if by God's power,

We only bear the burden of the hour.

Strong drink is to-day as ever the deadly enemy of mankind. Total abstinence is the only way of safety. Teachers cannot too strongly impress upon their scholars the importance of resisting the first temptation to partake of the cup of death.

### Special Clubbing Offer.

'World Wide' and 'Northern Messenger,' one year each, only \$1.00 for both. Postage extra for Montreal and suburbs or foreign countries excepting United States and its dependencies, also Great Britain and Ireland, Transvaal, Bermuda, Barbadoes, British Honduras, Ceylon, Gambia, Sarawak, Bahama Islands, Zanzibar. No extra charge for postage in the countries named.