

A REAL VICTORY

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Bill Cavers was dead; a victim of the drink demon.

Sandy Braden, the hotel-keeper, stood looking at the quiet form on the grass before him and Mrs. Cavers kneeling beside it.

A cheer from the lacrosse grounds near by came like a voice from another world; the world of life and pleasure and action.

Mrs. Cavers, roused at the sound, stood up and addressed the hotel-keeper.

"Excuse me, Mr. Braden," she said, "I was almost forgetting. Mr. Cavers, I know, had not enough with him to pay for . . . all this." She motioned toward Bill's dead face. "This . . . must have cost a lot." She handed him some silver. "It is all I have with me to-day . . . I hope it is enough. I know Mr. Cavers would not like to leave a debt . . . like this."

Mechanically Sandy Braden took the money, then dropping it as if it burned him, he turned away and went slowly up the road that he had come, reeling unsteadily. A three-seated democrat, filled with drunken men, was just driving away from his stable. They were a crowd from Howard, who had been drinking heavily at his bar all the afternoon. They drove away—madly lashing their horses into a gallop.

Sandy Braden hid in a clump of poplars until they got past him. Looking back toward the river he could see Mrs. Cavers kneeling beside her husband, and even at that distance he fancied he could see Bill's dead face looking into hers, and begging her to understand.

Just as the democrat passed the poplars its occupants burst into maudlin song:

"Who's the best man in this town?
Sandy Braden, Sandy Braden.
Who's the best man in this town?
Sandy Braden, Sandy Braden."

And then it was that Sandy Braden fell prone upon the ground and buried his face in the cool, green grass, crying: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

When the victorious lacrosse team came down the street, they were followed by a madly cheering throng. They went straight to the hotel, where, by the courtesy of the proprietor, they had always been given rooms in which to dress.

Bob Steele, the bartender, met them at the office door, all smiles and congratulations, in spite of a badly blackened eye.

"Come on in, boys!" he called. "It's my treat. Walk right in."

Most of the boys needed no second invitation.

Every one was in the gayest humour. The bartender called in the porter to help him to serve the crowd. The glasses were being filled when a sudden hush fell on the bar-room, for Sandy Braden, with a face as ghastly as the one he had just left on the river-bank, came in the back door.

He raised his hand with a gesture of authority.