

# Nellie McClung Readings

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FOUNDATION

# A Letter from Emily Murphy

11011 - 88 avenue  
Edmonton, August 5, 1927  
PERSONAL

My Dear Mrs. McClung:

Enclosed you will find a copy of section 60 of the Supreme Court Act of Canada, R.C.S. 1906, Cap 139, with also a letter to the Governor General in Council, which letter I am asking you to be good enough to sign and return to me by registered mail as soon as possible.

You will recall that the National Council Of Women, The Women's Institutes, the Women's Church [sic] Temperance Union, University clubs and other of our organizations, in convention, submitted resolutions to the Honorable, Prince Minister at Ottawa requesting of him that women be admitted to the Senate of Canada, thus permitting us to secure our full enfranchisement.

As a result, with the approval of the Federal Cabinet, on June 25th, 1923, in the printed "Orders of the Day" a motion was submitted by the Hon. Senator McCoig of Chatham, Ont., asking the members of the Upper Chamber that an address might be graciously pleased to give his consent to the submission of a measure to the Parliament of the United Kingdom to amend the British North America act, 1867, so that a "female person shall be deemed qualified to be summoned to the Senate if she reached the full age of thirty years, and is either a Natural born subject of the king, or a subject of the King naturalized under the provisions of any Act of the Parliament of Great Britain, or of any British Dominion or possession or of the Parliament of Canada."

When this motion was read in the Canadian Senate the Honorable Senator McCoig failed to speak to his motion; neither did he appear to speak upon the same at any subsequent day when it was called so that the motion was never discussed. Since then, this motion has not been placed before the House.

As four years have since elapsed, and as it is now held by a large and important body of opinion that such proposed amendment was not, and is not necessary, it has therefore become highly desirable that this matter be determined without further delay in order that the women of this Dominion—compromising approximately one-half of the electorate—may enjoy their full political rights on the same terms as these are, or maybe, enjoyed by man.

It may here be pointed out that while in 1923, women generally were gratified in having Senator McCoig's motions placed before the Senate of Canada, with a possible prospect of its being later submitted to the House of Commons for added appeal to his Majesty, we have now come to realize that the matter is one which cannot with any degree of fairness be submitted for decision to a body of male persons, many of whom have expressed themselves towards it in a manner that is distinctly hostile.

Undoubtedly, our proper procedure under these circumstances is to take advantage of a friendly recourse to the Supreme Court of Canada as provided for in Section 60 of the Supreme Court Act.

You will see by the copy of the Supreme Court Act which I enclose that "interested persons" may refer matters of law or fact touching the interpretation of the British North America Acts, 1867 to 1886, or the constitutionality or interpretation of any Dominion or Provincial legislation, to the Governor-General in Council requesting that the matter at issue be referred to the Supreme Court of Canada for its hearing and consideration.

Clause 6 of the same Act further provides for an appeal to His Majesty in Council from the advice or judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada should such an appeal be deemed desirable.

Clause 4 and 5 provide for the expenses and witnesses in such cases as pertain to constitutional matters.

You will recall that a constitutional interpretation was recently asked for by the Governor-General in Council concerning the Separate Schools question in Alberta.

This interpretation was without cost to this Province.

As the matter referred to in our letter to the Governor-General is purely a technical one, I have not thought it necessary to submit the matter to Canadian women generally, they having already endorsed the principle, but only to the few “interested persons” as specifically required by the Act, these being all from the Province of Alberta and women reasonably capable of giving an account of the principles that actuate them should they be required to do so.

The following are the names in alphabetical order, your own among them:—

Henrietta Edwards  
Irene Parlby  
Nellie L. McClung  
Louise C. McKinney  
Emily F. Murphy

I do not feel it even remotely necessary to urge upon you to the extreme desirability [sic] of your lending your much-valued influence to this matter, which is so closely allied with the political, social and philanthropic interest of all Canadian Women.

Yours very sincerely,

Emily F. Murphy

# Speaking of Women: Anti-Suffrage Reasoning

This deep-rooted fear, that any change may bring personal inconvenience, lies at the root of much of the opposition to all reform.

Men held to slavery for long years, condoning and justifying it, because they were afraid that without slave labor life would not be comfortable. Certain men have opposed the advancement of women for the same reason; their hearts have been beset with the old black fear that, if women were allowed equal rights with men, some day some man would go home and find the dinner not ready, and the potatoes not even peeled!

But not many give expression to this fear, as a reason for their opposition. They say they oppose the enfranchisement of women because they are too frail, weak and sweet to mingle in the hurly-burly of life; that women have far more influence now than if they could vote, and besides, God never intended them to vote, and it would break up the home, and make life a howling wilderness; the world would be full of neglected children (or none at all) and the homely joys of the fireside would vanish from the earth.

I remember once hearing an eloquent speaker cry out in alarm, "If women ever get the vote, who will teach us to say our prayers?"

Surely his experience of the franchised class had been an unfortunate one when he could not believe that anyone could both vote and pray!

That women are physically inferior to men is a strange reason for placing them under a further handicap, and we are surprised to find it advanced in all seriousness as an argument against woman suffrage. The exercising of the ballot does not require physical strength or

endurance. Surely the opponents of woman suffrage do not mean to advocate that a strong fist should rule; just now we are a bit sensitive about this, and such doctrine is not popular. Might is not right; with our heart's blood we declare it is not!

No man has the right to citizenship on his weight, height, or lifting power; he exercises this right because he is a human being, with hands to work, brain to think, and a life to live.

It is to save women from toil and fatigue and all unpleasantness that the chivalrous ones would deny her the right of exercising the privileges of citizenship; though just how this could be brought about is not stated. Women are already in the battle of life; thirty per cent of the adult women of Canada and the United States are wage earners, and the percentage grows every day. How does the lack of the ballot help them? Is it any comfort to the woman who feels the sting of social injustice to reflect that she, at least, had no part in making such a law? Or do the poor women who go through the deserted streets in the grey dawn to their homes, alone and unprotected after their hard night's work at the office-cleaning, ever proudly reflect that at least they have never had to drag their skirts in the mire of the polls, or be stared at by rude men as they approach the ballot box?

The physical disability of women is an additional reason for their having the franchise. The ballot is such a simple, easy way of expressing a preference or wish so "genteel," ladylike and dignifies.

Maclean's May 1916.

# Speaking of Women: Woman Suffrage Bill

But time goes on, and the world moves; and the ways of the world are growing kinder to women. Here and there in a sheltered eddy in the stream of life, where the big currents never are felt, you will find the old mossy arguments that women are intended to be wageless servants dependent upon man's bounty, with no life or hopes of their own. But the currents of life grow stronger and stronger in these terrible days, and the moss is being broken up, and driven out into the turbulent water.

On March 1st, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the Woman Suffrage Bill was given its second reading in the legislature of Alberta, and the women of the province gathered in large numbers to hear the debate. For over an hour before the galleries were opened; women waited at the foot of the stairs; white-haired women, women with little children by the hand, women with babies in their arms, smartly-dressed women, alert, tailor-made business women; quiet, dignified and earnest; they were all there; they filled the galleries; they packed every available space. Many were unable to find a place in the gallery, and stood outside in the corridors.

"I consider it an honor to stand anywhere in the building," one bright-eyed old lady said when someone expressed their regret at not having a seat for her, "and I can read the speeches to-morrow, and imagine that I heard them."

When the Premier rose to move the second reading of the Bill the silence of the legislative chamber was tense, and the great mass of humanity in the galleries did not appear to breathe. The Premier, in a straightforward way, outlined the reasons for the granting of the franchise; he did not speak of it as a favor,

a boon, a gift, or a privilege, but a right, and declared that the extension of the franchise was an act of justice; he did not once refer to us as the "fair sex," or assure us of his deep respect for us. The Leader of the Opposition, whose advocacy of woman franchise dates back many years, seconded the reading of the Bill; and short speeches were made by other members. There was only one who opposed it; one timorous brother declared it would break up the home.

On the same day that the Bill got its second reading, and at the same hour, the women of Calgary met together to discuss what women should do with the vote; and they drafted a platform, which must commend itself to all thinking people. Each subject discussed was for human betterment, and social welfare.

Women will make mistakes, of course,—and pay for them. That will be nothing new—they have always paid for men's mistakes. It will be a change to pay for their own. Democracy has its failures—it falls down utterly sometimes, we know, but not so often, or so hopelessly, as any other form of government. There have been beneficent despotisms, when a good king ruled absolutely. But unfortunately the next kind was not good, and he drove the country to ruin. "King Jehosh did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but Amaziah, his son, did that which was evil."

Too much depended upon the man!

Democracy has its faults; the people may run the country to the dogs, but they will run it back again. People, including women, will make mistakes, but in paying for them they will learn wisdom.

Nellie McClung, "Speaking of Women," Maclean's May 1916.

# Speaking of Women: Women on Homesteads

Now even in the matter of homesteads women are not allowed free land unless they are widows with the care of minor children; although any man who is of the age of eighteen may have one hundred and sixty acres on payment of ten dollars, and the performance of certain duties. The alleged reason for this discrimination is that women cannot perform the required duties and so, to save them from the temptation of trying, the Government in its fatherly wisdom denies them the chance.

But women are doing homestead duties wherever homestead duties are being done. Women suffer the hardships—cold, hunger, loneliness—against which there is no law; and, when the homestead is “proved,” all the scrub cleared, and the land broken, the husband may sell the whole thing without his wife’s knowledge, and he can take the money and depart, without a word. Against this there is no law wither!

No person objects to the homesteader’s wife having to get out wood, or break up scrub land, or drive oxen, so long as she is not doing these things for herself and has no legal claim on the result of her labor. Working for someone else is very sweet and womanly, and most commendable. What a neat blending there is of kindness and cruelty in the complacent utterances of the armchair philosophers who tell us that women have not the physical strength to do the hard tasks of life and therefore should not be allowed to vote! Kindness and cruelty have never blended well, though clever people have tried to bring it about.

Little Harry had a birthday party one day, and as part of the entertainment he proudly exhibited a fine family of young puppies, who occupied a corner of the barn. One of his little

guests seemed to be greatly attracted by the smallest puppy. He carried about in his arms and appeared to lavish great affection on it! At last, he took it into the house, and interviewed Harry’s mother. “Oh, Mrs. Brown,” he said, “this little puppy is smaller than any of the others—and Harry says it will never grow to be a fire big dog—and maybe it is sick—and it is a dear sweet pet—and please may we drown it!”

I saw a letter last week which was written to the Sunshine Editor of one of our papers, from a woman on the homestead. She asked if a pair of boots could be sent to her, for she had to get out all the wood from the bush. Her husband had gone to work in the mines in B.C. She expressed her gratitude for the help she had received from Sunshine before, and voiced the hope that when “she got things going” she would be able to show her gratitude by helping someone else. There was no word of complaint. And this brave woman is typical of many. Whether able or not able, women are out in the world, meeting its conditions, bearing its conditions, fighting their own battles, and always under a handicap.

Now the question is, what are we going to do about it?

One way, pursued by many, is to turn blind eyes to conditions as they are, and “haver” away about how frail and sweet women are; and that what they need is greater dependence. This babble of marriage and home for every woman sounds soothing, but does not seem to lead anywhere. Before the war, there were a million and a half more women than men in the Old Country alone—what will the proportion be when the war, with its fearful destruction of men, is over? One would think, to read the vaporings which pass as articles on the suffrage question, that good husbands will be supplied upon request, if you would only write your name and address plainly and enclose a stamped envelope.

It is certainly true that the old avenues of labor have been closed to women. The introduction of machinery has done this, for now the work is done in factories, which formerly was done by hand labor. Women have not deserted their work, but the work has been taken from them. Sometimes it is said that women are trying to usurp men’s place in the world; and if they were, it would be merely an act of retaliation, for men have already usurped

women' sphere. We have men cooks, milliners, hairdressers, dressmakers, laundrymen— yes, men have invaded women's sphere. It is inevitable and cannot be changed by words of protest. People do well to accept the inevitable.



# Purple Springs

## The Play

“Sorry, sir,” said the man in the box-office of the Grand, “but the house had been sold out for two days now. The standing room has gone too.”

“Can you tell me what this is all about, that every one is so crazy to see it?” the man at the wicket asked, with studied carelessness. He was a thick-set man, with dark glasses, and wore a battered hat, and a much bedraggled waterproof.

“The women here have got up a Parliament, and are showing tonight,” said the ticket-seller. “They pretend that only women vote, and women only sit in Parliament. The men will come, asking for the vote, and they’ll get turned down good and plenty, just like the old man turned them down.”

“Did the Premier turn them down?” asked the stranger. “I didn’t hear about it.”

“Did he? I guess, yes—he ripped into them in his own sweet way. Did you ever hear the old man rage? Boy! Well, the women have a girl here who is going to do his speech. She’s the woman Premier, you understand, and she can talk just like him. She does everything except chew the dead cigar. The fellows in behind say it’s the richest thing they ever heard. The old boy will have her shot at sunrise, for sure.

“He won’t hear her,” said the man in the waterproof, with sudden energy. “He won’t know anything about it.”

“Sure he will. The old man is an old blunderbuss, but he’s too good a sport to stay away. They’re decorating a box for him, and have his name on it. He can’t stay away.”

“He can if he wants to,” snapped the other man. “What does he care about this tommyrot—he’ll take no notice of it.”

“Well,” said the man behind the wicket, “I believe he’ll come. But say, he sure started something when he got these women after him. They’re

the sharpest-tongued things you ever listened to, and they have their speeches all ready. The big show opens tonight, and every seat is sold. You may get a ticket though at the last minute, from some one who cannot come. There are always some who fail to show up at the last. I can save you a ticket if this happens. What name?”

“Jones,” said the gentleman in the waterproof. No doubt the irritation in his voice was caused by having to confess to such a common name. “Robertson Jones. Be sure you have it right,” and he passed along the rail to make room for two women who also asked for tickets.

The directors of the Women’s Parliament knew the advertising value of a mystery, being students of humanity, and its odd little ways. They knew that people are attracted by the unknown; so in their advance notices they gave the names of all the women taking part in the play, but one. The part of the Premier—the star part—would be taken by a woman whose identity they were “not at liberty to reveal.” Well-known press women were taking the other parts, and their pictures appeared on the posters, but no clue was given out as to the identity of the woman Premier.

Long before sundown, the people gathered at the theatre door, for the top gallery would open for rush seats at seven. Even the ticket holders had been warned that no seat would be held after eight o’clock.

Through the crowd came the burly and aggressive form of Robertson Jones, still wearing his dark glasses and with a disfiguring strip of court plaster across his cheek. At the wicket he made inquiry for his ticket, and was told to stand back and wait. Tickets were held until eight o’clock.

In the lobby, flattening himself against the marble wall, he waited, with his hat well down over his face. Crowds of people, mostly women, surged past him, laughing, chattering, feeling in their ridiculous bags for their tickets, or the price of a box of chocolates at the counter, where two red-gold blondes presided.

Inside, as the doors swung open, he saw a young fellow in evening dress, giving out handbills, and an exclamation almost escaped him. He had forgotten all about Peter Neelands!



Robertson Jones, caught in the eddies of women, buffeted by them, his toes stepped upon, elbowed, crowded, grew more and more scornful of their intelligence, and would probably have worked his way out—if he could, but the impact of the crowd worked him forward.

“A silly, cackling hen-party,” he muttered to himself. “I’ll get out of this—it’s no place for a man—Lord deliver me from a mob like this, with their crazy tittering. There ought to be a way to stop these things. It’s demoralizing—it’s unseemly.”

It was impossible to turn back, however, and he found himself swept inside. He thought of the side door as a way of escape, but to his surprise, he saw the whole Cabinet arriving there and filing into the boxes over which the colors of the province were draped; every last one of them, in evening dress.

That was the first blow of the evening! Every one of them had said they would not go—quite scornfully—and spoke of it as “The Old Maids’ Convention”—Yet they came!

He wedged his way back to the box office, only to find that there was no ticket for him. Every one had been lifted. But he determined to stay. Getting in again, he approached a man in a shabby suit, sitting in the last row.

“I’ll give you five dollars for your seat,” he whispered.

“Holy smoke!” broke from the astonished seat-holder, and then, recovering from his surprise, he said, “Make it ten.”

“Shut up the, and get out—here’s your money,” said Mr. Jones harshly, and in the hurriedly vacated seat, he sat down heavily.

Behind the scenes, the leader of the Women’s Party gave Pearl her parting words:

“Don’t spare him, Pearl,” she said, with her hand around the girl’s shoulder, “it is the only way. We have coaxed, argued, reasoned, we have shown him actual cases where the laws have worked great injustice to women. He is blind in his own conceit, and cannot be moved. This is the only way—we can break his power by ridicule—you can do it, Pearl. You can break down a wall of prejudice to-night that would take long years

to wear away. Think of cases you know, Pearl, and strike hard. Better to hurt one, and save many! This is a play—but a deadly serious one! I must go now and make the curtain speech.”

“This is not the sort of Parliament we think should exist,” she said, before the curtain, “this is the sort of Parliament we have at the present time—one sex making all the laws. We have a Parliament of women tonight, instead of men, just to show you how it looks from the other side. People seem to see a joke better sometimes when it is turned around.”

Robertson Jones shrugged his shoulders in disgust. What did they hope to gain, these freaks of women, with their little plays and set little speeches. Who listened or noticed? No one, positively no one.

Then the lights went out in the house, and the asbestos curtain came slowly down and slowly crept into the ceiling again, to re-assure the timorous, and the beautiful French garden, with its white statuary, and fountain, against the green trees, followed its plain asbestos sister, and the Women’s Parliament was revealed in session.

The Speaker, in purple velvet, with a sweeping plume in her three-cornered hat, sat on the throne; pages in uniform answered the many calls of the members, who, on the Government side were showing every sign of being bored, for the Opposition had the floor, and the honorable member from Mountain was again introducing her bill to give the father equal guardianship rights with the mother. She pleaded eloquently that two parents were not any too many for children to have. She readily granted that if there were to be but one parent, it would of course be the mother, but why skimp the child on parents? Let him have both. It was nature’s way. She cited instances of grave injustice done to fathers from having no claim on their offspring.

The Government members gave her little attention. They read their papers, one of the Cabinet Ministers tatted, some of the younger members powdered their noses, many ate chocolates. Those who listened, did so to sneer at the honorable member from mountain, insinuating she took this stand so she might stand well with the men. This brought a hearty laugh, and a great pounding of the desks.

When the vote was taken, the House divided along party lines. Yawningly the

Government members cried “No!”

Robertson Jones sniffed contemptuously; evidently this was a sort of Friday afternoon dialogue, popular at Snookum’s Corners, but not likely to cause much of a flutter in the city.

There was a bill read to give dower rights to men, and the leader of the Opposition made a heated defense of the working man who devotes his life to his wife and family, and yet has no voice in the disposition of his property. His wife can sell it over his head, or will it away, as had sometimes been done.

The Attorney General, in a deeply sarcastic vein, asked the honorable lady if she thought the wife and mother would not deal fairly—even generously with her husband. Would she have the iron hand of the law intrude itself into the sacred precincts of the home, where little cherub faces gather round the hearth, under the glow of the glass-fringed hanging lamp. Would she dare to insinuate that love had to be buttressed by the law? Did not a man at the altar, in the sight of God and witnesses, endow his wife with all his goods? Well then—were those sacred words to be blasphemed by an unholy law which compelled her to give back what he had so lovingly given? When a man marries, cried the honorable Attorney General, he gives his wife his name—and his heart—and he gives them unconditionally. Are not these infinitely more than his property? The greater includes the less—the tail goes with the hide! The honorable leader of the Opposition was guilty of a gross offense against good taste, in opening this question again. Last session, the session before, and now this session, she has harped on this disagreeable theme. It has become positively indecent.

The honorable leader of the Opposition begged leave to withdraw her motion, which was reluctantly granted, and the business of the House went on.

A page brought in the word that a delegation of men were waiting to be heard.

Even the Opposition laughed. A delegation of men, seemed to be an old and never-failing joke.

Some one moved that the delegation be heard, and the House was resolved into a committee of the whole, with the First Minister in the chair.

The First Minister rose to take the chair, and was greeted with a round of applause. Opera glasses came suddenly to many eyes, but the face they saw was not familiar. It was a young face, under iron gray hair, large dark eyes, and a genial and pleasant countenance.

For the first time in the evening, Mr. Robertson Jones experienced a thrill of pleasure.

At least the woman Premier was reasonably good looking. He looked harder at her. He decided she was certainly handsome, and evidently the youngest of the company.

The delegation of men was introduced and received—the House settled down to be courteous, and listen. Listening to delegations was part of the day’s work, and had to be patiently borne.

The delegation presented its case through the leader, who urged that men be given the right to vote and sit in Parliament. The members of the Government smiled tolerantly. The First Minister shook her head slowly and absent-mindedly forgot to stop. But the leader of the delegation went on.

The man who sat in the third seat from the back found the phrasing strangely familiar. He seemed to know what was coming. Sure enough, it was almost word for word the arguments the women had used when they came before the House. The audience was in a pleasant mood, and laughed at every point. It really did not seem to take much to amuse them.

When the delegation leader had finished, and the applause was over, there was a moment of intense silence. Every one leaned forward, edging over in their seats to get the best possible look.

The Woman Premier had risen. So intent was the audience in their study of her face, they forgot to applaud. What they saw was a tall, slight girl whose naturally brilliant coloring needed no make-up; vivid as a rose, a straight mouth with a whimsical smile. She gave the audience one friendly smile, and then turned to address the delegation.

She put her hands in front of her, locking her fingers with the thumbs straight up, gently moving them up and down, before she spoke.

The gesture was familiar. It was the Premier’s own, and a howl of recognition came from the

audience, beginning in the Cabinet Ministers' box.

She tenderly teetered on her heels, waiting for them to quiet down, but that was the occasion for another outburst.

"Gentlemen of the Delegation," she said, when she could be heard, "I am glad to see you!"

The voice, a throaty contralto, had in it a cordial paternalism that was as familiar as the Premier's face.

"Glad to see you—come any time, and ask for anything you like. You are just as welcome this time as you were the last time! We like delegations—and I congratulate this delegation on their splendid, gentlemanly manners. If the men in England had come before their Parliament with the frank courtesy you have shown, they might still have been enjoying the privilege of meeting their representatives in the friendly way.

"But, gentlemen, you are your own answer to the question; you are the product of an age which has not seen fit to bestow the gift you ask, and who can say that you are not splendid specimens of mankind? No! No! Any system which can produce the virile, splendid type of men we have before us today, is good enough for me, and," she added, drawing up her shoulders in perfect imitation of the Premier when he was about to be facetious, "if it is good enough for me—it is good enough for anybody."

The people gasped with the audacity of it! The impersonation was so good—it was weird—it was uncanny. Yet there was no word of disrespect. The Premier's nearest friends could not resent it.

Word for word, she proceeded with his speech, while the theatre rocked with laughter. She was in the Premier's most playful, God-bless-you mood, and simply radiated favors and goodwill. The delegation was flattered, complimented, patted on the head, as she dilated on their manly beauty and charm.

In the third seat from the back, Mr. Robertson Jones had removed his dark glasses, and was breathing like a man with double pneumonia. A dull, red rage burned in his heart, not so much at anything the girl was saying, as the perfectly idiotic way the people laughed.

"I shouldn't laugh," a woman ahead of him said, as she wiped her eyes, "for my husband has a Government job and he may lose it if the Government members see me but if I don't laugh, I'll choke. Better lose a job than choke."

"But my dear young friends," the Premier was saying, "I am convinced you do not know what you are asking me to do;" her tone was didactic now; she was a patient Sunday School teacher, labouring with a class of erring boys, charitable to their many failings and frailties, hopeful of their ultimate destiny, "you do not know what you ask. You have not thought of it, of course, with the natural thoughtlessness of your sex. You ask for something which may disrupt the whole course of civilization. Man's place is to provide for his family, a hard enough task in these strenuous days. We hear of women leaving home, and we hear it with deepest sorrow. Do you know why women leave home? There is a reason. Home is not made sufficiently attractive. Would letting politics enter the home help matters. Ah no! Politics would unsettle our men. Unsettled men mean unsettled bills—unsettled bills mean broken homes—broken vows—and then divorce."

Her voice was heavy with sorrow, and full of apology for having mentioned anything so unpleasant.

Many of the audience had heard the Premier's speech, and almost all had read it, so not a point was lost.

An exalted mood was on her now—a mood that they all know well. It had carried elections. It was the Premier's highest card. His friends called it his magnetic appeal.

"Man has a higher destiny than politics," she cried, with the ring in her voice that they had heard so often, "what is home without a bank account? The man who pays the grocer rules the world. Shall I call men away from the useful plow and harrow, to talk loud on street corners about things which do not concern them. Ah, no, I love the farm and the hallowed associations—the dear old farm, with the drowsy tinkle of cow-bells at eventide. There I see my father's kindly smile so full of blessing, hardworking, rough-handed man he was, maybe, but able to look the whole world in the face.... You ask me to change all this."

Her voice shook with emotion, and drawing a huge white linen handkerchief from the folds of her gown, she cracked it by the corner like a whip, and blew her nose like a trumpet.

The last and most dignified member of the Cabinet, caved in at this, and the house shook with screams of laughter. They were in the mood now to laugh at anything she said.

“I wonder will she give us one of his rages,” whispered the Provincial Secretary to the Treasurer.

“I’m glad he’s not here,” said the Minister of Municipalities, “I’m afraid he would burst a blood vessel; I’m not sure but I will myself.”

“I am the chosen representative of the people, elected to the highest office this fair land has to offer, I must guard well its interests. No upsetting influence must mar our peaceful firesides. Do you never read, gentlemen?” she asked the delegation, with biting sarcasm, “do you not know of the disgraceful happenings in countries cursed by manhood suffrage? Do you not know the fearful odium into which the polls have fallen—is it possible you do not know the origin of that offensive word ‘Poll-cat’; do you not know that men are creatures of habit—give them an inch—and they will steal the whole sub-division, and although it is quite true, as you say, the polls are only open once in four years—when men once get the habit—who knows where it will end—it is hard enough to keep them at home now! No, history is full of unhappy examples of men in public life; Nero, Herod, King John—you ask me to set these names before your young people. Politics has a blighting, demoralizing influence on men. It dominates them, hypnotizes them, pursues them even after their earthly career is over. Time and again it has been proven that men came back and voted—even after they were dead.”

The audience gasped at that—for in the Premier’s own riding, there were names on the voters’ lists, taken, it was alleged, from the tomb-stones.

“Do you ask me to disturb the sacred calm of our cemeteries?” she asked, in an awe-stricken tone—her big eyes filled with the horror of it. “We are doing very well just as we are, very well indeed. Women are the best students of economy. Every woman is a student of political economy. We look very closely at every dollar

of public money, to see if we couldn’t make a better use of it ourselves, before we spend it. We run our elections as cheaply as they are run anywhere. We always endeavor to get the greatest number of votes for the least possible amount of money. That is political economy.”

There was an interruption then from the Opposition benches, a feeble protest from one of the private members.

The Premier’s face darkened; her eyebrows came down suddenly; the veins in her neck swelled, and a perfect fury of words broke from her lips. She advanced threateningly on the unhappy member.

“You think you can instruct a person older than yourself, do you—you, with the brains of a butterfly, the acumen of a bat; the backbone of a jelly-fish. You can tell me something, can you? I was managing governments when you were sitting on your high chair, drumming on a tin plate with a spoon.” Her voice boomed like a gun. “You dare to tell me how a government should be conducted.”

The man in the third seat from the back held to the arm of the seat, with hands that were clammy with sweat. He wanted to get up and scream. The words, the voice, the gestures were as his own face in the glass.

Walking up and down, with her hands at right angles to her body, she stormed and blustered, turning eyes of rage on the audience, who rolled in their seats with delight.

“Who is she, Oh Lord, Who is she?” the Cabinet ministers asked each other for the hundredth time.

“But I must not lose my temper,” she said, calming herself and letting her voice drop, “and I never do—never—except when I feel like it—and am pretty sure I can get away with it. I have studied self-control, as you all know—I have had to, in order that I may be a leader, a factor in building up this fair province; I would say that I believe I have written my name large across the face of this Province.”

The government supporters applauded loudly.

“But gentlemen,” turning again to the delegation, “I am still of the opinion even after listening to your cleverly worded speeches, that I will go on

just as I have been doing, without the help you so generously offer. My wish for this fair, flower-decked land is that I may long be spared to guide its destiny in world affairs. I know there is no one but me—I tremble when I think of what might happen to these leaderless lambs—but I will go forward confidently, hoping that the good ship may come safely into port, with the same old skipper on the bridge. We are not worrying about the coming election, as you may think. We rest in confidence of the result, and will proudly unfurl, as we have these many years, the same old banner of the grand old party that had gone down many times to disgrace, but thank God, never to defeat.”

The curtain fell, as the last word was spoken, but rose again to show the “House” standing, in their evening gowns. A bouquet of American beauty roses was handed up over the foot-lights to the Premier, who buried her face in them, with a sudden flood of loneliness. But the crowd was applauding, and again and again she was called forward.

The people came flocking in through the wings, pleading to be introduced to the “Premier,” but she was gone.

In the crowd that ebbed slowly from the exits, no one noticed the stout gentleman with the dark glasses, who put his hat on before he reached the street, and seemed to be in great haste.

The comments of the people around him, jabbed him like poisoned arrows, and seared his heart like flame.

“I wonder was the Premier there,” one man asked, wiping the traces of merriment from his glasses, “I’ve laughed till I’m sore—but I’m afraid he wouldn’t see the same fun in it as I do.”

“Well, if he’s sport enough to laugh at this, I’ll say he’s some man,” said another.

“That girl sure has her nerve—there isn’t a man in this city would dare do it.”

“She’ll get his goat—if he ever hears her—I’d advise the old man to stay away.”

“That’s holding a mirror up the public life all right.”

“But who is she?”

“The government will be well advised to pension that girl and get her out of the country—a few more sessions of the Women’s Parliament, and the government can quit.”

He hurried out into the brilliantly lighted street, stung by the laughter and idle words. His heart was bursting with rage, blind, bitter choking. He had been laughed at, ridiculed, insulted—and the men, whom he had made—had sat by applauding.

John Graham had, all his life, dominated his family circle, his friends, his party, and for the last five years had ruled the Province. Success, applause, wealth, had come easily to him, and he had taken them as naturally as he accepted the breath of his nostrils. They were his. But on this bright night in May, as he went angrily down the back street, with angry blows, the echo of the people’s laughter in his ears was bitter as the pains of death.

Nellie McClung, *Purple Springs* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1992) 280-289