

# What Janey Thinks of Nellie

By MRS. EMILY F. MURPHY  
(JANEY CANUCK)

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# What Janey Thinks of Nellie

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Mrs. McClung is probably Canada's leading woman orator. She is now en route to England where she will represent Canadian Methodism at the Ecumenical Congress. This study is particularly interesting as it is from the pen of another famous western woman writer

**W**e were travelling through Southern Alberta last Spring,—Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst and I—when, having elicited all I knew concerning irrigation, Indian Reserves, tumble-weed, seed grain loans, and other matters pertaining to the district, she proceeded, as a return courtesy, to teach me a new and somewhat intricate game of solitaire.

It was the game she used to play in Holloway Jail while on a hunger strike in order that she might forget her sufferings.

Thinking she was forgetting them altogether too well, the prison officials took the cards from her.



**MRS. NELLIE McCLUNG,**  
Canada's leading woman orator; well known also as a contributor to Maclean's.

We were getting on nicely with the game when the Conductor, passing through the car, called out the words, "Purple Springs, next station."

Yes! I had heard this name before—the name that carries both a question and a lure. It was the one Mrs. McClung had chosen for her new novel.

Writers had dreamed of “purple cows”, but none of “purple springs”. “Why are you doing it?” I had asked of her. “Sure an’ it isn’t fitting for our national exponent of prohibition. People will waggle their heads and say things about you, like as not.”

“Read, and see for yourself”, said she. But the novel wasn’t out, and here I was at Purple Springs itself—a very small station on a very large prairie and not a single clue to the title.

Since then, I have learned the answer, the story being off the press and out and about for itself. To catch the author’s thought you will have to read it too, for this reviewer—like the author—has no intention of setting it forth ahead of time. “Purple Springs” is a picturesque prairie idyll with a wonderfully clever political setting.

This setting, which is a true story of how the suffrage was won in Western Canada, is of especial interest at this time when Mrs. McClung has just been elected as one of the members to represent the City of Edmonton in the Legislature of Alberta.

Indeed, she is the fourth woman to be so elected in Alberta, for the world does move, and superior worth is not a matter of sex.

Some of the incidents in “Purple Springs” plainly suggest that, for the material, the author has drawn upon her own life, especially in that chapter wherein she so graphically depicts the famous Mock Parliament of Women, which was held in the Manitoba Capitol in 1914, and immediately afterwards in the towns of that province, and what did more than anything else to break down the prejudice which had so long surrounded women as possible voters.

In the play which was presented in the Walker Theatre by the Political Equality League of Manitoba, Mrs. McClung took the leading part—that of Premier. So ably did she drive home the arguments for her cause by caustic satire and dramatic humor, that the Winnipeg Telegram declared victory was assured the women, the play being described as “the cleverest piece of satire ever heard locally.”

Apart from its results politically and socially in the history of the West, the incident is markworthy as showing the potentialities of the stage in the making or marring of any vital movement which may be swaying the minds of the people, even to the extent of unseating a Government, however firmly seated in the saddle.

Shortly after the suffrage was won in Manitoba, the McClung family moved to Edmonton, Alberta, where Mrs. McClung was largely instrumental in forming another Political Equality League and where, in 1915, at the head of a large deputation of men and women, she made her famous "Come Across" speech. Shortly afterwards, the Honorable Arthur Sifton, Premier of the Province, introduced a bill placing men and women on an absolute political equality.

It may, therefore, be claimed without risk of refutation that the early enfranchisement of the women of Alberta is largely due to Mrs. McClung, because of her fearless, untiring, and clever advocacy of their cause. This is a fact known and recognized by the women of the province, and one which they did not forget when she stood last July as a candidate for the constituency of Edmonton.

During the period of her struggle for the franchise, many and vitriolic have been the criticisms passed upon her, but chiefly, be it said, by persons whose censure was preferable to their praise.

Having known and loved her for years, I beg to say it isn't true that she has cannibalistic tendencies—indeed, it isn't—and I know for a certainty that she didn't kill Cock Robin, or even sink the *Lusitania*.

Yes! in the clash of conflict, Nellie McClung has had to endure the unfriendly criticism that comes to all leaders and you may have noticed that epithets and brickbats are seldom padded. This has been the history of all women who have assumed leadership, or broken new trails. The laurel wreath and marble bust are the gift of later generations who enjoy the happiness for which the leaders strove.

A modern philosopher has said, "To be famous, is to be hated by people who do not know you", a dictum eminently applicable to the subject of this sketch. Those most severely critical of Mrs. McClung are strangers to her or who for some reason or other, fear her influence. In her personality there is a geniality and open frankness that almost invariably disarm your hostility and which win you to her cause.

This may best be illustrated in the case of the country editor who, incensed at one of her trenchant arguments regarding a certain law relating to women, undertook to say in two columns, and with double-leaded indignation, exactly what he thought of her.

Mrs. McClung could not complain that his opinion was unilluminative, or that it lacked in preciseness, even if his knowledge of the statute left much to be desired.

A gentleman in the town who had known her for years, forwarded the paper to Mrs. McClung, advising that she at once proceed to “eat him alive.”

### Is She Overestimated?

**A**mong the editor’s comments was one that emphatically stated that “This Nellie McClung was a very much over-estimated person.”

Mrs. McClung replied agreeing with him about this—absolutely agreeing with him—and saying she never had any illusions about it. At the same time, she ventured to point out how this was the fault of other people and should not be laid upon her as a matter of culpability. She then explained the law more fully and, as a result, the next issue of his paper carried her letter, with a polite editorial declaring her to be a broadminded, clever, and useful woman, who was doing big things for the province.

There is no doubt that Carlyle was wholly correct when he said that “The right good fighter was oftenest also the right good improver, discerner, doer, and worker of every kind”. It is natural, therefore, that Mrs. McClung is an active participant in many movements which make for the weal of Alberta’s Capitol.

Sometimes, we find her urging Mothers’ Pensions, amendments to the Dower Act, the Factory Act, or the Minimum Wage Bill. Or, maybe, she is concerned about the better enforcement of prohibition, the work of the Public Health Nurses, the raising of funds for the Y.W.C.A. the I.O.D.E., or the Red Cross. Her services are being constantly requisitioned by the Young People’s Clubs, for a meeting of the Social Service Council, a literary meeting, or for a religious service at the University.

We may not agree with her viewpoint on all or any of these subjects, and some of us may even carry around for her a few of the verbal brickbats above referred to, but, nevertheless, we all turn out to hear her, for her gift of interpreting public situations has almost become a public function. Indeed, since coming to Edmonton in 1913, she has addressed more than four hundred public meetings for various causes, all of which were given without remuneration, except three, the funds from these being used to pay for subscriptions she had made to patriotic endeavors. It may be reasonably doubted if any other Canadian woman has ever given so freely of her time and talents to the use of her continuing city. The record is truly a remarkable one and shows that whatever her objects, they were certainly not for her own personal aggrandizement.

During the war period, Mrs. McClung was one of the first women called to Ottawa to take part in the famous War Conference of 1918, where she was acknowledged to be one of the most out-standing figures. It was no idle comment of the writer who said, in discussing the personnel of the gathering, that "the 'line-up' of Alberta brains at this Conference is pretty formidable."

It is claimed that this conference to formulate plans in the crisis of the nation arose out of an appeal addressed by Mrs. McClung and an Edmonton friend to Sir Robert Borden, urging that women be registered for national service and conservation of food. After considerable correspondence, it was suggested by the Prime Minister, that the movement should be national instead of provincial, as they had first proposed, and that they would hear further from the Hon. N.W. Rowell.

It was Mr. Rowell who ultimately sent out the national call.

Another piece of Empire building engaged in by Mrs. McClung is still fresh in the memory of the people of the city. We refer to her undertaking, as president of the Edmonton Women's Institute, to become responsible for the entertainment of the soldiers' wives from the country who came to attend the Sessions arranged by the Soldiers' Settlement Board last winter.

### Helping the Soldiers' Wives.

**O**ther organizations in the city, because of the seriousness of the undertaking, had been obliged to turn it down, and for a time it seemed as if the scheme must fail, until it was carefully considered by the institutes and then successfully put through. During the eight days of the conference, 300 women and 105 children were cared for, being given the freedom of the City. Other towns, encouraged by the results in Edmonton, have also undertaken to minister to the wives of the soldier settlers in like manner, and to make them feel that they belong here in the North.

Mrs. McClung has always been a spokesman for the teaching profession, urging practical reforms wherever there has seemed a call. That she was entitled to speak on their behalf is evidenced by the fact that at fifteen years of age she herself started to teach and continued to do so for seven years. Then she reformed and married big splendid "Wes" McClung, perfecting herself by rearing one of the finest and best-looking families in the Province.

By reason of her stories which have been published in America, and by reason of the fact that she has spoken to large audiences in twenty-eight



states of the Union, Mrs. McClung has given great publicity to Canada in general, and to Alberta in particular.

She is vice-president for Alberta of the Canadian Authors' Association, and has held the position of president of the Edmonton Branch of the Canadian Women's Press Club.

Mrs. McClung is a clever *raconteur*, and, above all, delights in telling stories on herself. One of these relates how, last winter, during the Convention of the Soldiers' wives, she assisted Lieutenant-Governor Brett in receiving them at Government House. One of the visitors on saying good-bye, shook her hand warmly and remarked with evident sincerity, "I will certainly have something to tell our people when I go home. I will tell them that I met Nellie McClung, *and there was sure no style about her!*"

Her common sense and keen wit may best be illustrated by an incident which took place on an occasion when Mrs. McClung was advocating the woman's cause in opposition to a certain member of Parliament, who had undertaken to publicly refute her arguments. After drawing a lurid picture of the terrible evils which must inevitably accrue as a result of woman's suffrage, the gentleman concluded with the following ominous words:—"If the time should ever come that women leave their peaceful firesides to vote at the polls, on that day I shall certainly resign my seat. Not one of them shall ever vote for *me*." The audience was with him to a man—and might have stayed with him, had not Mrs. McClung arisen to her feet and, with a twinkle in her eye, begged leave to point out that while, in some quarters, such an event might be considered as untoward, it must nevertheless, be generally construed as an excellent demonstration of the purifying effect of women in politics.

If anyone still doubts that Mrs. McClung is essentially a woman of action, we would point out that during August she sailed for England as one of the delegates to the Ecumenical Council of the Methodist Church, which is convened every ten years, and which will be attended by representatives from all parts of the world. Twelve delegates are being sent by Canada, and Mrs. McClung is the only woman. Indeed, she is the only woman in the world so appointed, an honor which the women of this Dominion will not fail to appreciate.

She is also to be one of the speakers at this great Assemblage in Westminster Hall in London.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *What Janey Thinks of Nellie* by Emily Murphy]