

The
Nellie L. McClung
Contest Reciter



Selections from Mrs. Nellie L. McClung's
Book "The Second Chance."

MRS. MARY L. EWING

Dominion W.C.T.U. Superintendent Medal Contest
MELBOURNE, QUE.

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MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Mrs. Perkins was enjoying an afternoon tea with Mrs. Watson. While they ate, the visitor's eye took in the surroundings.

"You'll soon have a real nice place here, Mrs. Watson," she said, looking around. "Poor Mrs. Cavers, who lived here just before you came, would have had things nice if she had had her own way. She was the greatest woman for makin' little fixin's—she and my Martha were always doin' something—dear me, the way she'd stick up for that man, and make excuses for him! 'Mr. Cavers has a headache,' or 'Mr. Cavers is quite tired out.' Mr. Cavers, mind you. Oh, I tell you, she was fetched up different. Any one could see that. When I saw her first she was as pretty a girl as you'd see, and Bill was a fine-lookin' man, too. We never knew he would drink, and I don't think he ever did until Sandy Braden got his license and opened up a bar. I'll never forget the first night he came home drunk. She came runnin' over to our house and told us she was afraid he was dyin'. Pa and I went over with her, and I told her right out, plump and plain, what was wrong with him just as soon as I saw him. I'll never forget the way she backed up from me, givin' queer little screeches, and then she came back quick, her eyes just blazin', and says she, grabbin' me by the shoulders, 'I don't—believe—it,' just as slow as that, and then she begged me to forgive her, the pore lamb, and straightened right up as stiff as a poker, but all white and twitchy, and from that day to this she has never let on to a livin' soul about him drinkin', but she's just as nice to him as if he was a good man to her.

"And when her little Georgie died, if ever a woman was tried sore it was her. She sent Bill for the doctor, and he fell in with a threshin' gang and forgot to come home; yes, and that poor woman was alone with little George choking with croup. Libby Anne ran over for me, but he was too far gone. Bill came home in the mornin' so drunk we couldn't make him understand that the child was dead, and he kept askin' us all the time how little Georgie was now. I came home in the mornin' to help to milk, and Martha went over to stay with her. Martha can't ever forget the sad sight she saw when she went in. Bill was on the lounge drunk. Little George lay on the bed dead, and she was sittin' there makin' the shroud, and even then she made excuses for Bill to Martha, and said he'd been up all night, and was tired.

"That was the first of the trouble, but Bill has been drunk a good many times since; for you see Sandy Braden's still in town."

Mrs. Watson, quietly listening, could not but breathe the prayer that Sandy Braden might not long remain in town.

Jan 11/15

2.50

J. Brown sent 33/10

59/100

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THE HOUSE OF TROUBLE

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Bill Cavers was a very poor farmer, as one look at his abandoned homestead would show; that he was not a success as a husband no one would doubt after seeing Mrs. Cavers; and that he was a conspicuous failure as a father, Elizabeth Anne Cavers, his daughter, with her frightened eyes and sad mouth, would abundantly testify. But there was one capacity in which William Cavers was a spectacular success, and that was in maintaining the country's revenue from malt and distilled liquors, for Bill was possessed of a thirst that never faltered.

Bill was quite different from the drunkard who consumes and never produces, for he would work and work hard; and he was strictly honest with every one except himself and family. Sandy Braden was not afraid to trust Bill with all the whiskey he wanted, for Bill would surely pay. His wife might not have respectable clothes to come to town in, and Libby Anne knew what it was like more than once to go hungry to bed, but Bill always paid what was chalked up against him at the Grand Pacific without question. All the neighbors called Bill Cavers a good, straight fellow.

Although Mrs. Cavers now lived a life of poverty, she had once known a happy home where plenty abounded and she often told Libby Anne about it.

One spring Mr. Cavers promised his wife and child a three month's trip to Ontario in the fall. All summer long they worked and saved; making butter, gathering eggs, tending fowl and even doing the work in the fields to save the wages of a hired man. Oh, how Libby Anne's little arms did ache as she carried the sheaves! But she never complained, for were they not going to her mother's wonderful home!

At last the grain was marketed and they had decided to leave on December the first.

The day before they were to start, Bill went to town to cast his vote; the Provincial elections were held that year on the last day of November. There was a good deal of excitement over the election, for Sandy Braden, the popular proprietor of the Grand Pacific Hotel, was running against a Brandon man, and Millford was standing solid for their own man. The bar could not be opened until after five o'clock, when the voting was over, but after that there was nothing to prevent good-fellowship abounding.

It did abound all night. There was a bonfire in front of the hotel when the returns began to come in, for Sandy was winning easily, and Sandy certainly showed his gratitude for the way the boys had stood by him.

Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne waited all that long night. They tried to keep up each other's courage, making all sorts of excuses for Mr. Cavers's absence. Mrs. Cavers knew, but she did not tell Libby Anne, that he was going to cash the wheat-tickets that he had saved for the trip, for the train went so early in the morning he was afraid he might not have time then.

Libby Anne went again and again into the little bedroom to look at the trunk already strapped. Surely people always went if the trunk was strapped, and she tried and tried to feel what it was like yesterday.

THE FORCE OF EVIL.

Just as the sun was rising on the first day of December ushering in the first day of the winter excursions, they heard him coming. He was coming with the Thomas boys, who were often his companions on similar occasions. Some one had loaded them up and started them for home, trusting to a drunken man's luck not to get killed.

Round the turn of the road they came singing, and Libby Anne and her mother listened with sinking hearts as the sound came nearer and nearer:

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

they sang, putting the words to that good old rollicking Scotch tune of "Highland Laddie."

Bill fell out of the waggon at the door. He was covered with dirt, his clothes were torn, and one eye was blackened, but he was in a genial mood, and tried to dance on the door-step. They got him in at last and put him to bed, where he slept profoundly until the next afternoon. He brought home out of his wheat-tickets thirty-five cents and the half of a dollar bill—the other half was torn away.

Libby Anne did not shed a tear until she saw her mother unstrap the trunk to get out something, and then suddenly all the strength went out of the lithe little arms that had carried the sheaves so bravely, and she fell in a little heap on the floor, sobbing out strangely.

Her mother gathered her up in her arms and rocked her for a long time in the rocking-chair, crooning over her queer little rambling tunes without meaning; only once she spoke, and then what she said was this: "Libby Anne, I hope you will never be as lonely to see me as I am right now to see my mother."

Just then a still later consignment of Mr. Braden's supporters drove past the house gaily singing the same refrain:

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

THE FORCE OF EVIL

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

By half-past two o'clock, the time set for the service, the yard at the Chicken Hill School-house was well filled with buggies and waggons, while knots of men, looking uncomfortable in high collars, stood discussing the crops and the price of horses, all in the best of humour. When they saw the minister's grey horse coming, the minister himself became the subject of conversation.

"It beats me," George Steadman said, springing the lid of his pipe with his thumb as he struck a match on the sole of his boot, "it beats me what a man sees in preaching as a steady job. It's easy work, all right, only one day in the week; but there's no money in it. A man can make more money at almost anything else he goes at, and be more independent. It certainly beats me why they do it."

THE FORCE OF EVIL.

"Did ye ever hear, George, of greater rewards than money, and a greater happiness than being independent?" Roderick Ray, the Scottish Covenanter, asked gently, as he unbuckled his "beast" from the cart. Roderick Ray had a farm on Oak Creek, three miles east of the school-house. "Yon man is a Methodist, an' I'm na' sa fond o' them as o' some ither, but I can see he has the root o' the matter in him for all; and I'm thinkin' that he has the smile o' his Lord and Master on him, an' that's better nor gold, nor siller, nor houses, nor lands, nor cattle on a thousand hills; for, after all, George, these things slip frae us easy and we slip away frae them easier still, an' it's then we'll hear the Good Man ask: "An' hoo did ye spend the years I gave ye? Did ye warn the sinner, teach the young, feed the hungry an' comfort the sad?" An' I'm thinkin', George, that to all this yon little man, Methoda body though he be, will be able to give a verra guid answer an' a very acceptable one."

Inside the building the women had already gathered. Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne sat beside the window. Mrs. Cavers's eyes were on the group of men at the woodpile, for Bill, her husband, was among them, very much smartened up in his good clothes. She had had some difficulty in persuading him to come. He wanted to stay at home and sleep, he said. While the men talked beside the woodpile, Sandy Braden, the hotelkeeper, drove up with his pacing horse and rubber-tired buggy. He stopped to talk to the men. Sandy was a very genial fellow, and a general favorite.

Mrs. Cavers sat perfectly still; only the compression of her lips showed her agitation.

"Come on, Bill, and I'll give you a good swift ride," she heard him say.

Bill hesitated and looked around uneasily. Sandy gave him a significant wink and then he went without a word.

Inside, Mrs. Cavers gave a little smothered cry, which Libby Anne understood. She moved nearer to her mother in sympathy.

Mrs. Cavers leaned forward, straining her eyes after the cloud of dust that marked the pacing horse's progress, clasping and unclasping her hands in wordless misery. Bill was gone—she had lost him again. The wind drove ripples in the grain, the little white clouds hung motionless in the sky, but Bill was gone, and the sun, bright and pitiless, was shining over all. Then the other men came in and the service began.

The whole meeting was one of inspiration and power. The congregation sang with enthusiasm and the Rev. John Burrell spoke as a man who knew something of the sorrows of humanity and felt a deep compassion for the men and women before him.

At the close, Teddy Watson hitched up Mrs. Cavers's horse. There was still no sign of Bill, so she and Libby Anne drove sadly home.

Her aching heart told the poor woman only too plainly that her husband was lost again.

Little wonder that the cry went up, "Oh, God, why will professed Christian people license the stuff that robs us of our dear ones and drags them down to destruction!"

AN APPEAL FOR JUSTICE

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

It was the first of July, the day of the annual Pioneer's Picnic at Millford. Crowds were thronging into the little town, and among them the Watson and Cavers families.

Pearl Watson went with her two brothers, who took the green vegetables to the hotel. Jimmy had been accustomed to bringing milk to the back door and was quite an admirer of Mr. Braden, the genial proprietor.

Mr. Braden himself came into the kitchen just as they knocked at the door. He was faultlessly dressed, and in a particularly happy mood, for the first of July was one of his richest harvests, both in the dining-room and in the bar, where many a dollar would be laid on the altar of "auld lang syne"; and besides this, Sandy Braden was really glad to see all the old timers, apart from any thought of making money. He paid Jimmy for the vegetables, and gave him an extra quarter for a treat for himself and the others.

Acting on a sudden impulse, Pearl said: "Mr. Braden, you know Bill Cavers, don't you?"

Mr. Braden said he did.

"Well," said Pearl, "they've all come to town to-day. Mrs. Cavers hasn't been here for ever so long, but Bill promised to stay sober to-day if she'd come."

Pearl hesitated.

"Well, what else?" he said.

"They're goin' to have a photo taken to send home to her folks in Ontario. Mrs. Cavers is all fixed up, with her hair curled, and Libby Anne has a new dress made out of her mother's weddin' one, and Bill is lookin' fine—he hasn't been drunk since that Sunday you took him away from the school when we were havin' church."

Mr. Braden suddenly stopped smiling.

"And what I want to ask you, Mr. Braden, as a real favor, is not to fill Bill up until they get the photo taken, anyway. You know how his lip hangs when he's drunk—he wouldn't look nice in a photo to send home. Mrs. Cavers went all white and twitchy that day you took him away from church. I was right behind her, and I guess that's how she'd look in a photo if he got drunk, and she wouldn't look nice, either; and even Libby Anne wouldn't be lookin' her best, because she gets mad when her father is drunk, and says she'd like to kill you, and burn up all your whisky, and lots of things like that that ain't real Christian. So you see, it would spoil the whole picture if you let him get drunk."

Sandy Braden was not a hard-hearted man, and so, when Pearl told him all this with her eyes on him straight and honest and fearless, he was distinctly uncomfortable.

He tried to get a grip on himself. "Who told you to come to me about it?" he asked suspiciously.

"Nobody told me," Pearl said. "I never thought of it myself until I saw you lookin' so fine and such fine clothes on you, and you so full of good humour, and I thought maybe you're not as bad as I always thought you were, and maybe you don't know what a bad time Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne have when Bill drinks."

"You see," Pearl continued, after she had waited in vain for him to speak, "you've got all Bill had anyway. You mind the money they saved to go home—you got that, I guess, didn't you? And you'll not be losin' anything to-day, for Bill hasn't got it. He gave all the money he had to Mrs. Cavers—he was afraid he'd spend it—and that's what they're goin' to get the photo with."

Sandy Braden continued to look at the floor, and seemed to be unconscious of her presence.

"That's all I was wantin' to say," Pearl said at last.

He looked up then, and Pearl was struck with the queer white look in his face.

"All right, Pearl," he said. "I promise you Bill won't get a drop here to-day." He tried to smile. "I hope the photo will turn out well."

"Thank you, Mr. Braden," Pearl said. "Good-bye."

Sandy Braden went back to the bar-room and told his bartender not to sell to Bill Cavers under any consideration. The bartender, who owned a share in the business, became suspicious at once.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because I don't want Bill Cavers to get drunk, that's all," he said shortly.

"Out with it, Sandy. Who's been at you? Have the W. C. T. U. been interviewing you?"

"That's none of your business, Bob. If I choose to shut down on Bill Cavers it's nobody's business, is it?"

"Well, now, I guess it's some of my business," the bartender said. "Don't forget that I have a little interest in this part of the joint; and besides, you know my principles. I'll sell to any one who has the money—we're out for the coin, and we're not running any Band of Hope."

"Now, see here, Bob, this man Cavers drinks up every cent he earns, and to-day I happen to know that he is trying to keep straight. They've come in to get a photo taken, and she hasn't been off the farm for years."

The bartender laughed.

"Bill will take a hot photo when he gets about two finger-lengths in him! No, it's not our business who buys. We're here to sell. That's one thing I don't believe in, is refusin' liquor to any man. Every man has a perfect right to as much liquor as he wants."

Sandy Braden was about to make a spirited reply, but some one called him in the office and in the excitement of the day's events he forgot all about Bill Cavers.

Pearl's appeal had been pathetic. It had touched one heart, at least slightly. But, like many another has been, its effect was killed by the influence of a grasping life.

Needless to say, Bill Cavers got all the liquor he wanted that day, and no photo was taken.

A BARTENDER'S VIEWS

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Mr. Cavers had mysteriously disappeared, and Dr. Clay set out to look for him. The doctor felt sure that the man was drinking and so turned toward the hotel. As he entered, Bob Steele, the bartender, was telling about Bill Cavers going to have his photo taken.

"They got around Sandy easy," he was saying; "but that's one thing I won't let any one interfere with. As long as I've been selling liquor I've never refused to sell to any man. I refuse no one. Every man has a perfect right to whatever he wants to eat or drink—I claim that for myself, and I hold that no one has a right to interfere with another man's liberty."

The crowd in the bar-room gave maudlin approval.

"And so you just bet Bill Cavers got all he wanted. He came in here soon after dinner, and the first man that asked him to drink got turned down. Think of Bill Cavers refusin' good liquor! But when he heard it bubblin' in the glass his knee just wobbled—that's the beauty of sellin' our goods, it advertises itself, and works sure nights and Sundays. I says: 'What'll you have, Bill?' and he said—'Bill's an honest fellow—he said, 'I've no money, Bob.' But I says: 'That makes no difference, your credit is good here—you've always paid—and so name yer drink, Bill,' and I poured out a glass of Three Swallows; and you bet by the time Bill was ready to quit he would sure look well in a picture. I was takin' a risk of losin' money, too. Bill's honest enough, but there's a strong chance that there'll be judgment against his stuff this fall. But I've always said a man has a right to all the liquor he wants, and I'm prepared to stand by it even if I drop money on it. It may be foolish"—looking around for applause, but his audience were not in the mental condition to discuss fine ethical points—"but I'm prepared to do it."

Dr. Clay, standing on the outer edge of the crowd, heard all this. He made his way to the bar. "Where is Bill Cavers, now?" he asked.

The gleam in the doctor's eyes should have warned the bartender to be discreet in his answers. "Well, I can't just say," he answered with mock politeness, resenting the tone of the doctor's question. "He didn't leave word with me, but I guess he's getting his photo taken."

"Did you set him drunk and then turn him out in this blazin' sun?" the doctor asked, in a voice so tense with anger that the audience, befuddled as they were, drew closer to see what it was all about.

"We never keep people longer than is necessary," the bartender said, with an evil smile, "and besides, Bill was due at the photographer's."

Before the doctor knew what he was doing his right arm flew out and landed a smashing blow on the bartender's smirking face, a blow that sent him crashing into the bottles behind him. He recovered in an instant, and the doctor's quick eye caught the flash of a knife in his hand as he came over the bar at him. With a swift blow the doctor knocked the knife from his hand, and, grasping him by the coat collar, he dragged him to the back door, and then, raising him on the toe of his boot, landed him in the middle of the mud-puddle that had been left by the morning's rain.

A CRUSHING DEFEAT

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Pearl was looking for Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne. She was on her way to the parsonage when she caught sight of something like a parasol down in the trees where the horses were tied. She ran down to the picnic grounds hastily, and there in a grassy hollow, shaded by a big elm, she found the objects of her search.

Bill Cavers, with purple face and wide open mouth, lay breathing heavily. Libby Anne was fanning him with her muslin hat, and Mrs. Cavers was tenderly bathing his swollen face with water. Libby Anne had brought from the river. Her own eyes were red with crying and hopeless with defeat.

"We've just found him, Pearl," she said. "He's been here in the hot sun I don't know how long. I never saw him breathing so queer before."

"I'll get the doctor," said Pearl.

She ran back up the road and found the doctor at the stable behind the hotel.

"Come quick, Doctor!" cried Pearl. "We need you."

They reached the grassy slope. Mrs. Cavers had made a pillow of her coat for his head, and was still bathing his face. The doctor hastily loosened the drunken man's clothing and listened to the beating of his heart. Its irregular pounding was unmistakable, it was making its last great fight.

Dr. Clay took out his hypodermic syringe and made an injection in Bill's arm. Bill stirred uneasily. "I don't—want—it—Bob," he said thickly. "I promised—the—missus. She's—with me—to-day."

The doctor listened again to the sick man's heart. It was falling.

Mrs. Cavers, looking up, read the doctor's face.

She fell on the ground beside her husband, calling him every tender name as she rained kisses in his livid cheeks, uttering queer little cries like a wounded animal, but begging him always to live for her sake, and crying out bitterly that she could not give him up.

The sick man gazed into her face, and a look of understanding came into his bloodshot eyes.

"Ellie," he said with great effort, "I—did—not—want—it—at first," and with his eyes still looking into hers, as if mutely pleading with her to understand, the light faded from them . . . and the last long, staggering breath went out. Then fell silence . . . that never-ending silence . . . and quite perceptibly the color went in patches from his face.

Dr. Clay gently touched Mrs. Cavers's arm.

"Yes, doctor, I know . . . he's dead." She talked like people do in their sleep.

"I did my best, Will," she said, as she smoothed his thick black hair. "I tried my hardest to save you, and I always thought I would win . . . but they've beat me, Will. They were too strong for me . . . and I'm sorry!" She bent down and tenderly kissed his forehead, damp now with the dews of death.

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.

