

# Diary of a Woman

Adèle Lebourgeois-Chapin



## Journal de femme (1904)

Adèle Lebourgeois-Chapin vécut à Montréal au début du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle. Elle a tenu un journal où elle décrivait l'isolement et l'ennui qui étaient le lot des femmes bourgeoises de l'époque. Afin de rapprocher ces femmes, anglophones et francophones, elle organisait 'les causeries du lundi'. Ceci est un extrait de ce journal.

I was much struck by the separation between the French and English in Montreal. They led separate lives, and did not know each other. It was much as it had been in New Orleans before and immediately after our Civil War. There the French quarter and the American quarter were separated from one another by Canal Street, and there was no intercourse between them. This was much the case in Montreal, as I began to realize when members of each section met in my drawing-room, and I introduced them to each other; and I had a longing to make them understand each other better.

I resolved to start a club, after the model of our Fortnightly Club in New York, to consist of thirty members—fifteen French and fifteen English, and I asked Lady Drummond and Madame Dandurand to help me. I had begun to know Lady Drummond. Her rare and gracious presence and her beautiful home, with its great pictures, where I heard great music, and where she created an atmosphere, were like balm to my world-tossed and troubled spirit. I remember saying of Helena Gilder that the greatest thing a woman can do is to create an atmosphere, and let people come into it; and this Lady Drummond supremely did. I remember Lord Grey's saying of her once that she was like a combination of a Red Indian and a Saint; these were the two extremes of her personality. But she was many other things besides.

She was tall and straight, and had the straight outlook and the straight profile of the Red Indian, seeing with his quick, instinctive eye; she had also the self-surrender and the mystical insight of the Saints "who saw not all things clear"; and she also had the incisive mind of the philosopher, the tender sympathy of a mother, the wisdom of a woman of the world, and a sense of humour sometimes a little wicked!

Madame Dandurand had a real literary gift and great zeal and friendliness; and with the assistance of these two ladies our 'Causeries du Lundi' (which it ought to have been called, but was not) was formed. We were to meet once a week at three in the afternoon, at a different house each time. The subject for discussion was written on the card of the hostess, which was posted to each member a few days before the meeting. The hostess opened the discussion with a few remarks, and was informally in the chair, so as to prevent tête-à-tête talk, and the discussion was followed by tea. The first meeting I asked Lord Grey to open for us. It was at my house, and the subject I chose was patriotism. Lord Grey wrote:

*I am afraid I must resist the temptation to be present at your interesting Anglo-French causerie, however greatly I may sympathize with the object, with the Dramatis Personae, and with the subject selected for discussion. Please tell me how the discussion succeeds. I don't think you will be very far off a correct definition of the true Patriot if you ask your twenty mothers to agree upon the character they would most like their sons to have. Whatever the majority of your ladies may decide upon as the character they desire in their sons will, I venture to state, be a pretty correct description of a Patriot. I am prepared to argue this if necessary, the next time I have the pleasure of meeting you.*

I happen to have a copy of my answer to Lord Grey's letter, and I give it here, as it gives an account of the meeting:

*The meeting went off I think very successfully. I started off by saying that I had so many patriotic emotions—having been taught to love France by my father and England by my mother—in my childhood having learned to love the South, and my husband having taught me to love the North; that in France I sang the ‘Marseillaise’ ‘de plein coeur’ and in England ‘God Save the Queen’; in Germany, the ‘Wacht am Rhein’, in memory of my great grandmother; and in Ireland, ‘Erin Go Bragh’; and I questioned whether I had lost or gained by these patriotic emotions, but I was encouraged by Dr Osler who said in his speech, ‘we must begin by being denationalized and every problem in life should be faced from a cosmopolitan point of view.’ Still, I was not sure; and I wanted the ladies present to tell me: ‘What is patriotism?’ And then I appealed to Madame Lajoie, who spoke delightfully, saying Patriotism looked in two ways, to the past and to the future, and the patriotism of a new country was a patriotism of the future, etc.*

*Then I asked, what does one mean by one’s country? And I called attention to the fact that France had no word for home, and England had no word for patrie.*

*Then Mrs Leonowens said that one’s country is the place where one is best cared for, where one gets the best government, the best laws, etc. Then Madame Beaulieu said: ‘No; it is the soil: the land of one’s birth.’ Lady Drummond thought it to be so, but I asked if it were not more true of the English that they carried it with them and spread it abroad in the world, and that they left the land and the soil that they loved to carry their ideal overseas, and that the lands to which they brought it became England.*

*This Lady Drummond agreed to, but Mrs Logan thought patriotism was a provincial emotion which could not be broadened out. I asked, if the history of the world showed that man left his fireside to serve his village, his village to serve his state, and his state to serve his nation, would he stop there, would he not ultimately leave his nation, if need be, to serve humanity and the world? He did not give up his fireside, rather did he carry it with him—or his state, or his nation; that Marcus Aurelius had said: ‘When I am Antonius, my country is Rome, when I am a man my country is the world.’*

*Much interesting discussion followed this, and finally Madame Obolensky read what l’Abbé Klein had said at representing the French-Canadian point of view: that they did not look to France, nor did they look to England, but to an independent Canada. This was not received with enthusiasm except by two or three. Madame Thibodeau said that the part of women is to preserve peace and a condition where everyone is free and happy, and this England gave to Canada. I emphasized this and got Madame Thibodeau to enlarge on women’s mission as a peacemaker and upholder of a good established order, and I said that my idea of patriotism was embodied in Browning’s poem which I asked leave to read. (‘Home Thoughts From The Sea’.) Then tea and much talk. I wish I could elaborate more what others said, for they talked a great deal, I only putting the questions and making the remarks I have just outlined; but I do not wish to misquote, and of course I had to keep my own point in view to lead and draw out conversation. Someone, I don’t remember who, appealed to the English ladies to unite with them in developing Canada for the Canadians. We touched on our ideals for our sons, but I could not hold them to that; I said that to teach one’s sons to express patriotism by living for one’s country was better than to express it by dying for it.*

*P.S. I put this question: is patriotism loyalty to country (meaning land), or loyalty to Government, or loyalty to underlying national ideals, or loyalty to the best interests of the people? If all of these, then which is the highest, and which should be sacrificed, if any need be? I told here how Mark Twain had said at my table once that the United States had not resisted the real England, but only a temporary form of government that England repudiated, and how he added, that a country could have no greater privilege than to be a colony of the England of today.*

I had only one meeting, alas! My son was taken ill with a mastoid, and I had to go to him and in my anxiety I forgot all about the Club, but he made a marvellous recovery, and I was glad to have the following letter from Lord Grey, showing that the Club flourished and brought back fruit. I am only meant to be a bridge, or to scatter seed, and not even to know who passes over it or what harvests are reaped. In this case I do know, as Lord Grey writes:

*I have received from Lady Drummond and Mdme Dandurand most hopeful and cheerful accounts of the first meeting of your Anglo-French Club, and if you will allow me I should like to congratulate you most heartily upon the good service you have rendered to all concerned, both by initiating a new idea and also by putting sufficient force and energy into its attainment so as to secure its success. I believe you will have made the lives of many people very much happier and brighter by what you have already accomplished; and, as I have already stated to Lady Drummond, you have started a snowball which may perhaps roll to bigger dimensions than you can at present appreciate.*

It is such kind encouragement that makes what little one can do worth while, and inspires one to new efforts.

