



SUNDAY
FRACTURES

Marcia Livingston

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A NOTE ABOUT THIS STORY ...

Sunday Fractures was originally published in 1880 as part of a collection of short stories titled *Divers Women*. The stories were written by Isabella Macdonald Alden and her sister Marcia Macdonald Livingston. You may know Marcia better as Grace Livingston Hill's mother.

Divers Women is available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

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SUNDAY FRACTURES

CHAPTER I

Some People Who Went Up to the Temple

An elegant temple it was, this modern one of which I write—modern in all its appointments. Carpets, cushions, gas fixtures, organ, pulpit furnishings, everything everywhere betokened the presence of wealth and taste. Even the vases that adorned the marble-topped flower-stands on either side of the pulpit wore a foreign air, and in design and workmanship were unique. The subdued light that stole softly in through the stained-glass windows produced the requisite number of tints and shades on the hair and whiskers and noses of the worshippers.

The choir was perched high above common humanity, and praised God for the congregation in wonderful voices, four in number, the soprano of which cost more than a preacher's salary, and soared half an octave higher than any other voice in the city. To be sure she was often fatigued, for she frequently danced late on a Saturday night. And occasionally the grand tenor was disabled from appearing at all for morning service by reason of the remarkably late hour

and unusual dissipation of the night before. But then he was all right by evening, and, while these little episodes were unfortunate, they had to be borne with meekness and patience; for was he not the envy of three rival churches, any one of which would have increased his salary if they could have gotten him?

The soft, pure tones of the organ were filling this beautiful church on a certain beautiful morning, and the worshippers were treading the aisles, keeping step to its melody as they made their way to their respective pews, the heavy carpeting giving back no sound of footfall, and the carefully prepared inner doors pushing softly back into place, making no jar on the solemnities of the occasion, everything was being done “decently and in order”—not only decently, but exquisitely.

A strange breaking in upon all this propriety and dignity was the sermon that morning. Even the text had a harsh sound, almost startling to ears which had been lifted to the third heaven of rapture by the wonderful music that floated down to them.

“Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you.”

What a harsh text! Wasn't it almost rough? Why speak of fear in the midst of such melody of sight and sound? Why not hear of the beauties of heaven, the glories of the upper temple, the music of the heavenly choir—something that should lift the thoughts away from earth and *doing* and fear? This was the unspoken greeting that the text received. And the sermon that followed! What had gotten possession of the

preacher? He did not observe the proprieties in the least! He dragged stores, and warehouses, and common workshops, even the meat markets and vegetable stalls, into that sermon! Nay, he penetrated to the very inner sanctuary of home—the dressing-room and the kitchen—startling the ear with that strange-sounding sentence: “Take heed what ye do.”

According to him, religion was not a thing of music, and flowers, and soft carpets, and stained lights, and sentiment. It had to do with other days than Sunday, with other hours than those spent in softly cushioned pews. It meant *doing*, and it meant taking heed to each little turn and word and even thought, remembering always that the fear of the Lord was the thing to be dreaded. What a solemn matter *that* made of life! Who wanted to be so trammelled? It would be fearful.

As for the minister, he presented every word of his sermon as though he felt it thrilling to his very soul. And so he did.

If you had chanced to pass the parsonage on that Saturday evening which preceded its delivery—passed it as late as midnight—you would have seen a gleam of light from his study window. Not that he was so late with his Sabbath preparation—at least the *written* preparation. It was that he was on his knees, pleading with an unutterable longing for the souls committed to his charge—pleading that the sermon just laid aside might be used to the quickening and converting of some soul—pleading that the Lord would come

into his vineyard and see if there were not growing some shoots of love and faith and trust that would bring harvest.

It was not that minister's custom to so infringe on the sleeping hours of Saturday night—time which had been given to his body, in order that it might be vigorous, instead of clogging the soul with the dullness of its weight. But there are *special* hours in the life of most men, and this Saturday evening was a special time to him. He felt like wrestling for the blessing—felt in a faint degree some of the persistency of the servant of old who said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Hence the special unction of the morning. Somewhat of the same spirit had possessed him during the week, hence the special fervour of the sermon. With his soul glowing then in every sentence, he presented his thoughts to the people.

How did they receive them? Some listened with the thoughtful look on their faces that betokened hearts and consciences stirred. There were those who yawned, and thought the sermon unusually long and prosy. Now and then a gentleman more thoughtless or less cultured than the rest snapped his watch-case in the very face of the speaker, by accident, let us hope. A party of young men, who sat under the gallery, exchanged notes about the doings of the week, and even passed a few slips of paper to the young ladies from the seminary, who sat in front of them. The paper contained nothing more formidable than a few refreshments in the shape of caramels with which to beguile the tediousness of the hour.

There was a less cultured party of young men and women who unceremoniously whispered at intervals through the entire service, and some of the whispers were so funny that occasionally a head went down and the seat shook, as the amused party endeavoured, or *professed* to endeavour, to subdue untimely laughter. I presume we have all seen those persons who deem it a mark of vivacity, or special brilliancy, to be unable to control their risibles in certain places. It is curious how often the seeming attempt is, in a glaring way, nothing but *seeming*. These parties perhaps did not break the Sabbath any more directly than the note-writers behind them, but they certainly did it more noisily and with more marked evidence of lack of ordinary culture.

The leader of the choir found an absorbing volume in a book of anthems that had been recently introduced. He turned the leaves without regard to their rustle, and surveyed piece after piece with a critical eye, while the occasionally peculiar pucker of his lips showed that he was trying special ones, and that just enough sense of decorum remained with him to prevent the whistle from being audible. Then there were, dotted all over the great church, heads that nodded assent to the minister at regular intervals; but the owners of the heads had closed eyes and open mouths, and the occasional breathing that suggested a coming snore was marked enough to cause nervous nudges from convenient elbows, and make small boys who were looking on chuckle with delight.

And thus, surrounded by all these different specimens of humanity, the pastor strove to declare the whole counsel of God, mindful of the rest of the charge, “whether men will hear or whether they will forbear.” He could not help a half-drawn breath of thanksgiving that *that* part was not for him to manage. If he had had their duty as well as his own to answer for what *would* have become of him?

Despite the looking at watches, the cases of which would make an explosive noise, and the audible yawning that occasionally sounded near him, the minister was enabled to carry his sermon through to the close, helped immeasurably by those aforesaid earnest eyes that never turned their gaze from his face, nor let their owners’ attention flag for an instant. Then followed the solemn hymn, than which there is surely no more solemn one in the English language. Imagine that congregation after listening, or professing to listen, to such a sermon as I have suggested, from such a text as I have named, standing and hearing rolled forth from magnificent voices such words as these:

“In all my vast concerns with thee,
In vain my soul would try
To shun thy presence, Lord, or flee
The notice of thine eye.

“My thoughts lie open to the Lord
Before they’re formed within;
And ere my lips pronounce the word
He knows the sense I mean.

“Oh, wondrous knowledge, deep and high!

Where can a creature hide!
Within thy circling arm I lie,
Inclosed on every side.”

Follow that with the wonderful benediction. By the way, did you ever think of that benediction—of its fullness? “The *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, the *love* of God, the *communion* of the Holy Ghost, be with you *all*. Amen.”

Following that earnest amen—nay, *did* it follow, or was it blended with the last syllable of that word, so nearly that word seemed swallowed in it?—came the roll of that twenty-thousand-dollar organ. What did the organist select to follow that sermon, that hymn, that benediction? Well, what *was* it? Is it possible that that familiar strain was the old song, “Comin’ Through the Rye”? No, it changes; it has the ring of “Money Musk.” Then there is a touch—just a dash, rather—of “Home, Sweet Home,” and then a bewilderment of sounds, wonderfully reminding one of “Dixie” and of “Way down upon the Suwanee River,” and then suddenly it loses all connection with memory, and rolls, and swells, and thunders, and goes off again into an exquisite tinkle of melody that makes an old farmer—for there was here and there an old farmer even in that modern church—murmur as he shook hands with a friend, “Kind of a dancing jig that is, ain’t it?”

To the sound of such music the congregation trip out. Half-way down the aisle Mrs. Denton catches the fringe of Mrs. Ellison’s shawl.

“Excuse me,” she says, “but I was afraid you would escape me, and I have so much to do this week. I want you to

come in socially on Tuesday evening; just a few friends; an informal gathering; tea at eight, because the girls want a little dance after it. Now come early.”

Just in front of these two ladies a group have halted to make inquiries.

“Where is Fanny today? Is she sick?”

“Oh, no. But the truth is her hat didn’t suit, and she sent it back and didn’t get it again. She waited till one o’clock, but it didn’t come. Milliners are growing so independent and untrustworthy! I told Fanny to wear her old hat and never mind, but she wouldn’t. Estelle and Arthur have gone off to the Cathedral this morning. Absurd, isn’t it? I don’t like to have them go so often. It looks odd. But Arthur runs wild over the music there. I tell him our music is good enough, but he doesn’t think so.”

“I don’t know what the trouble is, but the young people do not seem to be attracted to our church,” the elder lady says, and she says it with a sigh. She belongs to that class of people who *always* say things with a sigh.

Further on Mrs. Hammond has paused to say that if the weather continues so lovely she thinks they would better have that excursion during the week. The gardens will be in all their glory. Tell the girls she thinks they better settle on Wednesday as the day least likely to have engagements. The lady knows that she is mentioning the day for the regular church prayer-meeting, and she is sending word to members of the church. But what of that?

“I’m tired almost to death,” says Mrs. Edwards. “We have been house-cleaning all the week, and it is such a trial,

with inefficient help. I wouldn't have come to church at all today but the weather was so lovely, and we have so few days in this climate when one can wear anything decent, it seemed a pity to lose one. Have you finished house-cleaning?"

At the foot of the stairs Miss Lily Harrison meets the soprano singer. "Oh, Lorena!" she exclaims, "your voice was just perfectly divine this morning. Let me tell you what Jim said, when you went up on the high notes of the anthem. He leaned over and whispered to me, 'The angels can't go ahead of that, *I* know.' Irreverent fellow! Lorena, what a perfect match your silk is! Where did you succeed so well? I was *dying* to see that dress! I told mamma if it were not for the first sight of that dress, and of Laura's face when she saw it was so much more elegant than hers, I should have been tempted to take a nap this morning instead of coming to church. However, I got a delicious one as it was. Weren't you horribly sleepy?"

At this point Misses Lily and Lorena are joined by the said Jim. And be it noticed that he makes the first remark on the sermon that has been heard as yet.

"We had a stunning sermon this morning, didn't we?"

"Oh, you shocking fellow!" murmurs Lorena. "How *can* you use such rough words?"

"What words?' Stunning?' Why, dear me, that is a jolly word; so expressive. I say, you sheep in this fold took it pretty hard. A fellow might be almost glad of being a goat, I think."

“Jim, don’t be wicked,” puts in Miss Lily who has a cousinship in the said Jim, and therefore can afford to be brusque. Jim shrugs his shoulders.

“Wicked,” he says. “If the preacher is to be credited, it is you folks who are wicked. I don’t pretend, you know, to be anything else.”

A change of subject seems to the fair Lorena to be desirable, so she says, “Why were you not at the hop last night, Mr. Merchant?”

And Jim replies, “I didn’t get home in time. I was at the races. I hear you had a *stunning*—I beg your pardon—a *perfectly splendid* time. Those are the right words, I believe.”

And then the two ladies gathered their silken trains into an aristocratic grasp of the left hand, and sailed downtown on either side of “Jim” to continue the conversation. And those coral lips had but just sung:

“My thoughts lie open to the Lord,
Before they’re formed within;
And ere my lips pronounce the word
He knows the sense I mean.”

What *could* He have thought of her? Is it not strange that she did not ask this of herself.

“How are you today?” Mr. Jackson asked, shaking his old acquaintance, Mr. Dunlap, heartily by the hand. “Beautiful day, isn’t it?”

Now, what will be the next sentence from the lips of those gray-headed men, standing in the sanctuary, with the echo of solemn service still in their ears? Listen:

“Splendid weather for crops. A man with such a farm as mine on his hands, and so backward with his work, rather grudges such Sundays as these this time of year.”

And the other?

“Yes,” he says, laughing, “you could spare the time better if it rained, I dare say. By the way, Dunlap, have you sold that horse yet? If not, you better make up your mind to let me have it at the price I named. You won’t do better than that this fall.”

Whereupon ensued a discussion on the respective merits and demerits, and the prospective rise and fall in horse-flesh.

“Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you.” *Had* those two gentlemen heard that text?

CHAPTER II

Some People Who Forgot the Fourth Commandment

Let me introduce to you the Harrison dinner-table, and the people gathered there on the afternoon of that Sabbath day. Miss Lily had brought home with her her cousin Jim; he was privileged on the score of relationship. Miss Helen, another daughter of the house, had invited Mr. Harvey Latimer; he was second cousin to Kate's husband, and Kate was a niece of Mrs. Harrison; relationship again. Also, Miss Fannie and Miss Cecilia Lawrence were there, because they were schoolgirls, and so lonely in boarding-school on Sunday, and their mother was an old friend of Mrs. Harrison; there are always reasons for things.

The dinner-table was a marvel of culinary skill. Clearly Mrs. Harrison's cook was *not* a church-goer. Roast turkey, and chicken-pie, and all the side dishes attendant upon both, to say nothing of the rich and carefully prepared dessert of the nature that indicated that its flakiness was *not* developed

on Saturday, and left to wait for Sunday. Also, there was wine on Mrs. Harrison's table; just a little home-made wine, the rare juice of the grape prepared by Mrs. Harrison's own cook—not at all the sort of wine that others indulged in—the Harrisons were temperance people.

“I invited Dr. Selmsen down to dinner,” remarked Mrs. Harrison, as she sipped her coffee. “I thought since his wife was gone, it would be only common courtesy to invite him in to get a warm dinner, but he declined; he said his Sunday dinners were always very simple.”

Be it known to you that Dr. Selmsen was Mrs. Harrison's pastor, and the preacher of the morning sermon.

Miss Lily arched her handsome eyebrows.

“Oh, mamma,” she said, “how could you be guilty of such a sin! The *idea* of Dr. Selmsen going out to dinner on Sunday! I wonder he did not drop down in a faint! Papa, did you ever hear such a sermon?”

“It slashed right and left, that is a fact,” said Mr. Harrison, between the mouthfuls of chicken salad and oyster pickle. “A little too sweeping in its scope to be wise for one in his position. Have another piece of the turkey, James? He is running into that style a little too much. Some person whose opinion has weight ought to warn him. A minister loses influence pretty rapidly who meddles with everything.”

“Well, there was *everything* in that sermon,” said Miss Cecilia. “I just trembled in my shoes at one time. I expected our last escapade in the school hall would be produced to point one of his morals.”

“You admit that it would have pointed it?” said the cousin Jim, with a meaningful laugh.

“Oh, yes; it was *awfully* wicked, I’ll admit that. But one didn’t care to hear it rehearsed in a church.”

“That is the trouble,” mamma Harrison said. “Little nonsenses that do very well among schoolgirls, or in the way of a frolic, are not suited to illustrate a sermon with. I think Dr. Selmsen is rather apt to forget the dignity of the pulpit in his illustrations.”

“Lorena says he utterly spoiled the closing anthem by that doleful hymn he gave out,” said Miss Lily. “They were going to give that exquisite bit from the last sacred opera, but the organist positively refused to play it after such woebegone music. I wish we had a new hymn-book, without any of those horrid, old-fashioned hymns in it, anyhow.”

It was Mr. Harvey Latimer’s turn to speak. “Oh, well now, say what you please, Selmsen can *preach*. He may not suit one’s taste always, especially when you get hit; but he has a tremendous way of putting things. Old Professor Marker says he has more power over language than any preacher in the city.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Harrison, struggling with too large a mouthful of turkey, “he is a *preacher*, whatever else may be said about him; and yet, of course, it is unfortunate for a minister to be always pitching into people; they get tired of it after a while.”

“Jim, did you know that Mrs. Jamison was going to give a reception to the bride next Wednesday evening?” This from Lily.

“No; *is* she? That will be a grand crush, I suppose.”

“I heard her giving informal invitations in church today,” Helen said, and one of the schoolgirls said:

“Oh, don’t you think she said she was going to invite us? Celia told her to send the invitation to you, Mrs. Harrison. We felt sure you would ask us to your house to spend the evening; Madam Wilcox will always allow that. But there is no use trying to get her permission for a party. You *will* ask us, *won’t* you?”

Whereupon Mrs. Harrison laughed, and shook her head at them, and told them she was afraid they were naughty girls, and she would have to think about it. All of which seemed to be entirely satisfactory to them. The conversation suddenly changed.

“Wasn’t Mrs. Marsh dressed in horrid taste today?” said Helen Harrison. “Really I don’t see the use in being worth a million in her own right, if she has no better taste than *that* to display. Her camels’ hair shawl is positively the ugliest thing I ever saw, and she had it folded horribly. She is round-shouldered, anyhow—ought never to wear a shawl.”

“I think her shawl was better than her hat,” chimed in Miss Lily. “The *idea* of that hat costing fifty dollars! It isn’t as becoming as her old one; and, to make it look worse than it would have done, she had her hair arranged in that frightful new twist!”

“Why, Lily Harrison! I heard you tell her you thought her hat was lovely!” This from Lily’s youngest sister.

“Oh, yes, of course,” said Miss Lily. “One must say something to people. It wouldn’t do to tell her she looked horrid.”

And the mother *laughed*.

“It is a good thing for Mrs. Marsh that she holds her million in her own right,” observed cousin Jim. “That husband of hers is getting a little too fast for comfort.”

“Is that so?” Mr. Harrison asked, looking up from his turkey bone.

“Yes, sir; his loss at cards was tremendously heavy last week; would have broken a less solid man. He had been drinking when he played last, and made horridly flat moves.”

“Disgraceful!” murmured Mr. Harrison; and then he took another sip of his home-made wine.

There were homes representing this same church that were not so stylish, or fashionable, or wealthy. Mrs. Brower and her daughter Jenny had to lay aside their best dresses, and all the array of Sunday toilet, which represented their very best, and repair to the kitchen to cook their own Sunday dinners. Was it a thoughtful dwelling upon such verses of Scripture as had been presented that morning which made the Sunday dinner the most elaborate, the most carefully prepared, and more general in its variety, than any other dinner in the week? Their breakfast hour was late, and, by putting the dinner hour at half-past three, it gave them time to be elaborate, according to their definition of that word. Not being encumbered with hired help, mother and daughter could have confidential Sabbath conversations with each other as they worked. So while Mrs. Brower

carefully washed and stuffed the two plump chickens, Jennie prepared squash, and turnip, and potatoes for cooking, planning meanwhile for the hot apple sauce, and a side dish or two for dessert, and the two talked.

“Well, did you get an invitation?” the mother asked, and the tone of suppressed motherly anxiety showed that the subject was one of importance. Did she mean an invitation to the great feast which is to be held when they sit down to celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb, and which this holy Sabbath day was given to help one prepare for? No, on second thought it could not have been that; for, after listening to the morning sermon, no thought of anxiety could have mingled with that question. Assuredly Jennie was invited—*nay, urged, entreated*; the only point of anxiety could have been—*would* she accept? But it was another place that filled the minds of both mother and daughter.

“Indeed I did.” There was glee in Miss Jennie’s voice. “I thought I wasn’t going to. She went right by me and asked people right and left, never once looking at me. But she came away back after she had gone into the hall, and came over to my seat and whispered that she had been looking for me all the way out, but had missed me. She said I must be sure to come, for she depended on us young people to help make the affair less ceremonious. Don’t you think, Emma wasn’t invited at all, and I don’t believe she will be; almost everyone has been now. Emma was so sure of her invitation, because she was such a friend of Lu Jamison’s. She thought she would get cards to the wedding, you know; and when they didn’t come she felt sure of the reception. She has been

holding her head wonderfully high all the week about it, and now she is left out and I am in. Mother, isn't that rich?"

Mrs. Brower plumped her chickens into the oven, and wiped the flour from her cheek and sighed. "There will be no end of fuss in getting you ready, and expense too. What are you going to wear, anyway?"

"Mother," said Jennie, impressively, turning away from her squash to get a view of her mother's face, "I ought to have a new dress for this party. I haven't anything fit to be seen. It is months since I have had a new one, and everybody is sick of my old blue dress; I'm sure I am."

"It is entirely out of the question," Mrs. Brower said, irritably, "and you know it is. I *wonder* at your even thinking of such a thing, and we so many bills to pay; and there's that pew-rent hasn't been paid in so long that I'm ashamed to go to church."

"I wish the pew-rent was in Jericho, and the pew, too!" was Miss Jennie's spirited answer. "I should think churches ought to be free, if nothing else is. It is a great religion, selling pews so high that poor people can't go to church. If I had thought I couldn't have a new dress I should have declined the invitation at once. I did think it was time for me to have something decent; and I make my own clothes, too, which is more than most any other girls do. I saw a way to make it this morning. I studied Miss Harvey's dress all the while we were standing. I could make trimming precisely like hers, and put it on and all. I could do everything to it but cut and fit it."

“I tell you, you haven’t anything to cut and fit, and can’t have. What’s the use in talking?”

And in her annoyance and motherly bitterness at having to disappoint her daughter, Mrs. Brower let fall the glass jar she had been trying to open, and it opened suddenly, disgorging and mingling its contents with bits of glass on the kitchen floor. Does anyone, having overheard thus much of the conversation, and having a fair knowledge of human nature, need to be told that there were sharp words, bitterly spoken, in that kitchen after that, and that presently the speech settled down into silence and gloom, and preparations for the Sunday dinner went on, with much slamming and banging, and quick nervous movements, that but increased the ferment within and the outside difficulties. And yet this mother and daughter had been to church and heard that wonderful text, “Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you.” Had listened while it was explained and illustrated, going, you will remember, into the very kitchen for details. They had heard that wonderful hymn:

“In vain my soul would try
To shun thy presence, Lord, or flee
The notice of thine eye.”

Both mother and daughter had their names enrolled on the church record. They were at times earnest and anxious to feel sure that their names were written in the book kept before the throne. Yet the invitation to Mrs. Jamison’s reception, informally whispered to the daughter as she

moved down the church aisle, had enveloped the rest of their Sabbath in gloom.

“Friend, how earnest thou in hither, not having on the wedding garment?”

It was a wedding reception to which Jennie had been invited. Did neither mother nor daughter think of that other wedding, and have a desire to be clothed in the right garment?

CHAPTER III

Some People Who Forgot the Ever-Listening Ear

There were two other members of the Brower family who had attended church that Sabbath morning. One was Mr. Brower, senior. And at the season of dinner-getting he lay on the couch in the dining-room, with the weekly paper in his hand, himself engaged in running down the column of stock prices. He glanced up once, when the words in the kitchen jarred roughly on his aesthetic ear, and said:

“Seems to me, if I were you, I would remember that today is Sunday, and not be quite so sharp with my tongue.”

Then, his solemn duty done, he returned to his mental comparison of prices. Also, there was Dwight Brower, a young fellow of nineteen or so, who acted unaccountably. Instead of lounging around, according to his usual custom, hovering between piazza and dining-room, whistling softly, now and then turning over the pile of old magazines between whiles, in search of something with which to pass away the

time, he passed through the hall on his return from church, and without exchanging a word with anyone went directly to his room. Once there, he turned the key in the lock, and then, as though that did not make him feel quite enough alone, he slipped the little brass bolt under it, and then began pacing the somewhat long and somewhat narrow floor. Up and down, up and down, with measured step and perplexed, anxious face, hands in his pockets, and his whole air one of abandonment to more serious thought than boys of nineteen usually indulge.

What has happened to Dwight? Something that is not easily settled; for as the chickens sputter in the oven below, and the water boils off the potatoes, and the pudding is manufactured, and the cloud deepens and glooms, he does not recover his free-and-easy air and manner. He ceases his walk after a little, from sheer weariness, but he thrusts out his arm and seizes a chair with the air of one who has not time to be leisurely, and flings himself into it, and clasps his arms on the table, and bends his head on his hands and thinks on.

The holy hours of the Sabbath afternoon waned. Mr. Brower exhausted the stock column, read the record of deaths by way of doing a little religious reading, tried a line or two of a religious poem and found it too much for him, then rolled up a shawl for a sofa-pillow, put the paper over his head to shield him from the October flies, and went to sleep.

Jennie went in and out setting the table, went to the cellar for bread and cake and cream, went to the closet

upstairs for a glass of jelly, went the entire round of weary steps necessary to the getting ready the Sunday feast, all the time with the flush on her cheek and the fire in her eye that told of a turbulent, eager, disappointed heart, and not once during the time did she think of the solemn words of prayer or hymn or sermon, or even *benediction*, of the morning. She had gotten her text in the church aisle. It was, "Wherewithal shall I be clothed, in order to sit down at the marriage-supper of Mrs. Jamison's son and daughter?" And vigorously was it tormenting her.

What an infinitely compassionate God is ours who made it impossible for Dr. Selmsler, as he sat alone in his study that afternoon, to know what was transpiring in the hearts and homes of some of his people!

Those chickens sputtered themselves done at last, and the hot and tired mother, with still the anxious look on her face, stooped and took them from their fiery bed, and the father awoke with a yawn to hear himself summoned to the feast. It was later than usual; many things had detained them; four o'clock *quite*, and before the army of dishes could be marshaled back into shape, the bell would certainly toll for evening service. "Let the fear of the Lord be upon you." And *He* said, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

Dwight Brower was summoned, too, from his room; and his mother, who had just realized the strangeness of his absence, looked up as he came in, and said:

"Are you sick today, Dwight?"

"No, ma'am," he answered.

And something in his voice made her look again; and something in his face made her keep looking, with a perplexed, half-awed air. What had happened to Dwight? What change had come to him amid the afternoon hours of that Sabbath day? Very different experiences can be passing in the same house at the same time.

It was only across the street from the Browsers' that little Mrs. Matthews poured coffee for herself and husband, while Mollie, the cook, stood on the side-piazza and sang in a loud, shrill, and yet appreciative tone, "There is rest for the weary." Little Mrs. Matthews had glowing cheeks, though she had done nothing more serious than exchange her silken dress for a wrapper, and lie on the sofa and finish the closing chapters of George Eliot's last new novel, since her return from church.

Aye, it is true. She had been a listener in the same sanctuary where the earnest charge had rung, "Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you." At least Mrs. Matthews had taken her handsomely clothed little body to church; I will not say that her mind was there, or that she had heard much of the sermon. Some of it, however, she undoubtedly *had* heard, and she proved it at this point, breaking in upon Dr. Matthews' musings as he stirred his second cup of coffee.

"Dr. Matthews, how do you like being preached at?"

"Preached at?" the doctor echoed, with a sleepy air.

"Yes, preached at. I'm sure, if you were not asleep this morning, you must have heard yourself all but called by name. Who else could Dr. Selmsler have been hinting at

when he burst forth with such a tirade on whist parties? It isn't a week since we had ours, and he almost described what we had for supper."

"Fudge!" said Dr. Matthews. He was occasionally more apt to be expressive than elegant in his expressions. "What do you suppose he knows about our party? There were a dozen, I dare say, that very evening, and as many more the next evening. They are common enough, I am sure. And he didn't say anything personal, nor anything very bad, anyhow. They all take that position—have to, I suppose; it's a part of their business. *I* don't like them any the less for it. I wouldn't listen to a preacher who played whist."

Mrs. Matthews set her pretty lips in a most determined way, and answered, in an injured tone, "Oh, well, if you like to be singled out in that manner, and held up as an example before the whole congregation, I'm sure you're welcome to the enjoyment; but as for me, I think it is just an insult."

"Stuff and nonsense!" echoed the doctor. "How you women can work yourselves into a riot over nothing! Now you know he didn't say any more than he has a dozen times before. In fact, he was rather mild on that point, I thought; and I concluded he considered he had said about all there was to be said in that line, and might as well slip it over. There wasn't a personal sentence in it, anyhow. The doctor is a gentleman. More than that, I don't believe he knows we had a whist party. If he set out to keep track of all the *parties* there are in his congregation, it would make a busy life for him. Your conscience must have reproached you, Maria."

“Well, some people are less sensitive than others, I suppose. I *know* men who wouldn’t like to have their wives talked about as freely as yours was from the pulpit this morning. I tell you, Dr. Matthews, that he meant *me*, and I know it, and I don’t mean to stand it, if you do.”

“How will you help it?” the doctor asked, and he laughed outright. It did seem ridiculously funny to him. “A tempest in a thimble,” he called it. His wife was given to having them. “What will you do about it? Fight him, or what? It’s a free country, and the man has a right to his opinions, even if *you* don’t agree with him. Better hush up, Maria. I don’t believe in duels, and they are against the law in this country besides; you are powerless, you see.”

It is a pity he said that. Mrs. Dr. Matthews being a woman, and being a member of that church, knew she was *not* powerless. And women of her stamp are sure to be *dared* by random, half-earnest sentences, to show the very utmost that their weak selves can do. As truly as I tell you the story here today, that is the way the ferment began.

“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Aye, and a little acid *sours* the whole lump.

Do you think Mrs. Dr. Matthews sallied out directly her meal was concluded, and openly and bitterly denounced Dr. Selmsler as a pulpit slanderer? She did nothing of the sort. She chose her time and place and persons with skill and tact, and said, “Didn’t they think, just among themselves, not intending to breathe it outside for the world, that Dr. Selmsler was getting a *little* unpopular among the young people? He was so *grave*—almost stern. She felt distressed

sometimes lest they should cultivate a feeling of fear toward him. She *did* think it was so important that the young people should be attracted.”

Watching her opportunity—and it is wonderful how many opportunities there are in the world, if one only watches for them—she remarked at Mrs. Brower’s that Dr. Selmsen was just a little inclined, she thought, to pay rather too much attention to families like the Harrisons. It was natural, she supposed. Ministers were but human, and of course with their wealth and influence they could make their home very attractive to him; but she always felt sorry when she saw a clergyman neglecting the poor. Dr. Selmsen certainly had called at Mr. Harrison’s twice during this very week. Of course he might have had business—she did not pretend to say. But there were *some* who were feeling as though their pastor didn’t get time to see them very often. He ought to be willing to divide his attentions.

Now, Mrs. Brower belonged by nature to that type of woman who is disposed to keep an almanac account with her pastor. She knew just how many calls Dr. Selmsen made on her in a year, and just how far apart they were. It really needed but a suggestion to make her feel doubly alert—on the *qui vive*, indeed—to have her feelings hurt. So of course they were *hurt*.

In point of fact, there is nothing easier to accomplish in this jarring world than to get your feelings injured. If you are bent on being slighted there is no manner of difficulty in finding people who apparently “live and move and breathe” for no other purpose than to slight you. And as often as you

think about them, and dwell on their doings, they increase in number. A new name is added to the list every time you think it over; and the fair probability is that every single person you meet on that day when you have just gone over your troubles will say or do, or leave unsaid or undone, that which will cruelly hurt you. I tell you, dear friend, it becomes you to keep those feelings of yours hidden under lock and key, out of sight and memory of anyone but your loving Lord, if you don't want them *hurt* every hour in the day.

CHAPTER IV

Some People Who Were False Friends

Did a woman ever start out, I wonder, with the spirit of turmoil and unrest about her, that she did not find helpers? Especially if she be one of a large congregation, she comes in contact with some heedless ones—some malicious ones—some who are led into mischief by their undisciplined tongues—some who have personal grievances. And there are always some people in every community who stand all ready to be led by the last brain with which they come in contact; or, if not that, they are sure to think exactly as Dr. Jones and Judge Tinker and Professor Bolus do, without reason as to why or wherefore. This class is very easily managed. A little care, a judicious repetition of a sentence which fell from the doctor's or the judge's or the professor's lips, and which might have meant anything or *nothing*, by the slightest possible changes of emphasis, can be made to mean a little or a great deal. It wasn't slow work either—not half so slow as it would have been to attempt the building up of someone's reputation; by reason of the law of

gravitation the natural tendency is downward, so prevalent in human nature, and by reason of the intense delight which that wise and wily helper, Satan, has in a *fuss* of any sort.

Do Mrs. Dr. Matthews the justice of understanding that she didn't in the least comprehend what she was about; that is, not the magnitude of it. She only knew that she had been stung, either by her conscience or else by Dr. Selmsen. She chose to think it was Dr. Selmsen, and she felt like repaying him for it. He should be made to understand that people wouldn't bear everything; that he must just learn to be a little more careful about what he said and did.

"Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you."

Yes, *she* heard the text, and was thinking of her party all the time. Did she think that certain things which occurred in her parlors on that evening were not in accordance with the text? Then did she think to blot out the text by showing her ability to stir up a commotion? What *do* such people think, anyway?

There came a day when even Mrs. Dr. Matthews herself stood aghast over what had been done, and didn't more than half recognize her hand in the matter, so many helpers she had found—non-temperance men, men of antagonistic political views, men who winced at the narrowness of the line drawn by their pastor—a line that shut out the very breath of dishonesty from the true Church of Christ—men and women who were honest and earnest and *petty*—who were not called on enough, or bowed to enough, or consulted enough, or ten thousand other pettinesses, too small or too

mean to be advanced as excuses, and so were hidden behind the general and vague one that, on the whole, Dr. Selmsler didn't seem to "draw;" the "young people" thought him severe or solemn or *something*; his sermons were not "just the thing—did not quite come up to the standard," whatever that may mean.

So the ball grew—grew so large that one day it rolled toward the parsonage in the shape of a letter, carefully phrased, conciliatory, soothing—meant to be; "every confidence in his integrity and kindness of heart and good intentions," and every other virtue under the sun. But, well, the fact was the "young people" did not feel quite satisfied, and they felt that, on the whole, by and by, toward spring, perhaps, or when he had had time to look around him and determine what to do, a *change* would be for the best, both for himself and for the cause. Indeed, they were persuaded that he himself needed a change—his nervous system imperatively demanded it.

Let me tell you what particular day that letter found its way to the parsonage; a rainy, dreary day in the early winter, when the ground had not deliberately frozen over, and things generally settled down to good solid winter weather, but in that muddy, slushy, transition state of weather when nothing anywhere seems settled save clouds, dull and dreary, drooping low over a dreary earth; came when the minister was struggling hard with a nervous headache and sleeplessness and anxiety over a sick child; came when every nerve was drawn to its highest tension, and the slightest touch might snap the main cord. It didn't snap, however. He

read that long, wise, carefully-written, *sympathetic* letter through twice, without the outward movement of a muscle, only a flush of red rising to his forehead, and then receding, leaving him very pale. Then he called his wife.

“Mattie, see here, have you time to read this? Wait! Have you nerve for it? It will not help you. It is not good news nor encouraging news, and it comes at a hard time; and yet I don’t know. We can bear any news, can’t we, now that Johnnie is really better?”

With this introduction she read the letter, and the keen, clear gray eye seemed to grow stronger as she read.

“Well,” she said, “it is not such *very* bad news; nothing, at least, but what you ministers ought to be used to. We can go. There is work in the world yet, I suppose.”

“Work in the Lord’s vineyard, Mattie, for *us*, if he wants us. If not, why then there is rest.”

Shall I tell you about that breaking up? About how the ties of love, and friendship, and sympathy were severed? You do not think that the whole church spoke through that letter? Bless you, no. Even Mrs. Dr. Matthews cried about it, and said it was a perfect shame, and *she* didn’t know what the officers meant. For her part, she thought they would never have such another pastor as Dr. Selmsler. And I may as well tell you, in passing, that she did what she could to cripple the usefulness of the next one by comparing him day and night, in season and out of season, with “dear Dr. Selmsler.” There are worse people in the world than Mrs. Dr. Matthews.

Did he stay all winter and look about him and decide what to do? You know better than that. He sent his resignation in the very next Sabbath; and some of those letter-writers were hurt, and thought he had more Christian principle than that; and thought that ministers, of all men, should not be so hasty in their acts. It showed a bad spirit.

They went home after that—Dr. Selmsler and his wife—to *her* mother's home. So many people have *her* mother's home to go to. Blessed mothers! He was so glad to get to her. He needed change and rest, and the letter-writers had spoken truthfully. Did he take cold in packing and travelling? Was he overworked? Were the seeds of the disease running riot in his system during that early fall? Were they helped along any by that letter? Who shall tell? We know this much: he took to his bed, and he was no longer pale or quiet; the flush of fever and the unrest of delirium were upon him. He rolled and tossed and muttered; and it was always of his work, of his cares, of his responsibilities—never of *rest*; and yet rest was coming to him on swift wing.

The Lord of the vineyard knoweth when his reapers have need of soft, cool days of glory, to follow weeks of service. Rapidly they come to him; but the river must be crossed first, and first there must be a severing of earth-ties, a breaking of cords stronger than life. Never mind; the King knows about this, too; and it must be, and *is*, and *shall be*, well.

The rest came—all that we on this side knew of it—a pulseless heart, a shrouded form, lips of ice, forehead of snow, hush and silence. Just the other side of the filmy veil

which we call "Time," what was the appearance of it there? He knows, and has known these many years. And, thank God, the wife of his love knows now, but we do not.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart, the things that are prepared" for them.

What said the elegant modern church that, during the process of this change, was undergoing a candidating siege? Why, they met in decorous assemblage, and passed resolutions, and had them printed, and draped the pulpit in mourning, and sent a delegation of the church to the funeral, with knots of the finest *crepe* streaming from their shoulders; and, on the Sabbath following, the quartette choir sang the funeral dirge in such a way as to melt almost the entire audience to tears. And then they went home, some of them, and remarked that the candidate who occupied their pulpit that morning had an exceedingly awkward way of managing his handkerchief, and didn't give out notices well. They didn't believe he would "draw" the "young people."

Now, what of all this story of one Sabbath day? Is it overdrawn? Do you say there are no such people as have been described? I beg your pardon, there *are*. It is *not* a story; it is a truthful repetition of Sabbath conversations. Would that such Sabbath desecrations were rare. They are not. You will remember that out of a congregation of five hundred I have not given you a description of a dozen people. The difficulty is that a dozen people can and *do* set in commotion large bodies of humanity, and bring about results of which they themselves do not dream.

About that minister: If he sunk under such a common matter as having certain ones in a church disaffected with him, it shows a weak mind, do you say? He should have expected trials, and disappointments, and coldness, and disaffection. "The servant is not greater than his lord." All true; he had preached that doctrine to himself for twenty years, and earnestly strove to live by it. I do not say that he sunk under the humiliation; only, don't you remember the fable of the last straw that broke the camel's back? What I *do* say is, that he had borne hundreds and thousands of "straws." Also, remember it was *the Lord* who called him from work. Assuredly he did not call himself. I think the master said, "Let him come; it is enough; and we need him here."

Then what about the unfinished work that he left? What about the midnight prayer over that sermon, the wrestling for a sign of fruit? Was it in vain? There is fruit that you and I do not see, oftentimes. Do you remember the young man, Dwight Brower, and the Sabbath afternoon communion that he had with himself? Not with himself alone; the world, the flesh, and the devil were in full strength before him; and not *them* only—the angel of the covenant was there beside him. There was a conflict—the world and the devil were vanquished. Dwight Brower's name was on the church-roll, but his heart had been with the world. He came over that day, distinctly, firmly, strongly, to the Lord's side. He weighed the solemn words, "Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you." They sounded to him as they never had before. He resolved then and there that they

should mean to him what they never had before, that they should mean to him what they evidently did to his pastor.

That was twenty years ago. There were modern churches even then. Dwight Brower has been a power in the land since then. Not one, but scores—aye, hundreds—aye, thousands of souls has the Lord given him as seals to his ministry; and he is working now.

Once I visited where he preached. I heard a lady say to him, “That was a wonderful sermon that you gave us today. To begin with, it is a wonderful text. I never before realized that the Lord was actually *watching* all our ways.”

He turned toward her with a smile, and said, “It was Dr. Selmsler who preached today. He has been gone twenty years, and he is preaching yet.”

“And I heard a voice saying unto me, Write Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.”

Does it seem to you a pity that he could not have known—could not have had one glimpse of the fruit of his work? How do you know what view of waving harvests being garnered in the Lord calls him to look down upon from the heights of Pisgah? “When I awake with thy likeness I shall be satisfied.” Be sure the Lord has satisfied him.

Meantime, that modern church is still very modern indeed, and at this present time its pulpit is vacant—they are candidating!



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SUNDAY FRACTURES

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