

Straightening Out Mrs. Perkins

By Reuben Greene

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This true narrative has its setting in New England. Two neighbors are discussing with amusement the “queer” religious practices of Widow Perkins, who was passing by. When one of the two neighbors decided to “straighten out” the widow she runs into some disconcerting experiences, for Mrs. Perkins seems able to outwit her at every turn. The lively and natural dialog of this book is sprinkled with many Bible references pointing up some very obvious and pertinent conclusions.

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PREFACE

THIS little book is not fiction. It is a true story — a page from the life history of a real character. The Author has simply written the narrative as he heard it from the lips of Mrs. Campwell herself, with such minor changes in names as was necessary to screen the identity of some of the principles. Even the scene of the incident — beautiful Winthrop by the sea — has been left untouched, probably due to the author's intense love of New England, notwithstanding his desire to avoid too great accuracy in details of minor importance.

MRS. CAMPWELL ARRIVES.

IF YOU should ask the inhabitants of a certain little Canadian village why Mr. and Mrs. Angus Campwell suddenly sold the farm on which they had lived so long, and moved to the States, you doubtless would find them as much mystified today as they were when it all happened.

It is probable, however, that no one in the village was so astonished as the Campwells themselves, when, obeying what seemed at the time a mere impulse, they sold their home, and with their three children boarded the train for Boston. Six weeks from the day the desire to sell and move had entered Mrs. Campwell's heart, the old, familiar, loved furnishings had been disposed of, the farm had become the property of another, and they were en route for New England. No wonder their neighbors gasped in astonishment; and no wonder Mrs. Campwell turned to her husband as the train pulled away from the station — their station — and said:

“My, it doesn't seem possible, does it?”

It chanced that after considerable exploring, and after living temporarily here and there, they settled in a cozy little house within sight of the blue Atlantic, and only a few miles from that quaintest and most fascinating of New England cities, Boston. And so it happened, too, that one bright morning Mrs. Campwell was out in the front yard attending industriously to the wants of her flowers.

There is something about New England sunshine that makes everybody want to plant flowers, just as there is something inexpressibly enchanting about New England's meadows and woodlands that renders them unforgettably dear to all who have ever known them.

Mrs. Campwell possessed a disposition as warm, as gladsome, and as attractive as the bright June days of her new land. She was one of those rare, fortunate persons to whom God has given that peculiar charm of attracting folks without the least apparent effort. Already the neighbors were flocking to her home, delighted to find that Providence had sent so welcome an addition to the little colony by the sea.

It was Mrs. Van Ness who stopped on this particular morning, and called cheerily: “Good morning, Mrs. Campwell.”

There are always so many things to talk over when two women meet on a sunny morning — the children's health, new recipes that please the menfolk, plans for vacation time, “I see by the paper,” and of course all those little intimate details of family life that provide an endless theme for discussion in rural or semi-rural communities. Mrs. Campwell, being a newcomer, was naturally interested in hearing about her neighbors; and Mrs. Van Ness, being an old resident, was naturally full of information about her neighbors. Under such ideal conditions, conversation flowed along delightfully, so that when Mrs. Perkins passed by, the ladies were sitting on the steps, and the shade of the big maple had retreated from the flower bed to the edge of the sidewalk.

“That's Mrs. Perkins,” said the old resident when the passer-by was beyond the sound of their voices. “She lives in the little brown bungalow two blocks down and around the corner. She's a widow and has three children. One of them, the boy, is away at school.” Mrs. Campwell, glancing up as Widow Perkins passed, had seen a tall, slender, dark woman, not particularly good looking and yet attractive in a quiet, dignified way.

“I suppose she misses her boy a great deal,” said Mrs. Campwell. She, too had one boy and two girls.

“I suppose so,” agreed the old resident, “but they're a funny family. The son's studying to be a preacher. You see, they're Seventh-day Advents.”

“They're what?”

“Seventh-day Advents. Didn't you ever hear of them?”

“No,” replied Mrs. Campwell, tapping her knee with the trowel, “I never did. What are they?” “People that keep Saturday instead of Sunday.”

“Oh, they're Jews,” said Mrs. Campwell understandingly.

“No, they're not Jews,” the caller contradicted emphatically. “They're no more Jews than we are, but they go to church on Saturday just as we do on Sunday. They won't do anything on Saturday — won't even buy anything until the sun sets Saturday night.”

Mrs. Campwell laughed. “Well, that's the funniest thing I ever heard,” she said. “Here we are in the twentieth century of the Christian Era, and this poor woman still thinks she ought to go to church on Saturday. Why, she looks intelligent enough too.”

“They say there's always one queer family in every community,” Mrs. Van Ness remarked resignedly, as she rose to go; “I guess she's ours all right.”

“Have you ever talked to her about this Saturday business?”

Mrs. Van Ness seemed rather startled at the suggestion.

“Why, no,” she replied. “Religion is something most folks don't care to talk about.”

Mrs. Campwell brushed a wayward lock out of her eyes, and fastened it securely behind her ear, as she declared positively, "Well, I'm going up there and straighten her out. She's a too nice-appearing woman to be deceived by such foolishness as that."

"You've got more courage than I have," the old resident said, with a smile. "If you can change her views, you'll please everybody in the community. Well, come and see me, won't you? Good-bye."

And Mrs. Campbell was alone again with her flowers and her thoughts — some very, very new thoughts, by the way.

THE VISIT

TRUE to her word, one golden afternoon a few days later, Mrs. Campbell mounted the steps in front of the Perkins bungalow. Some of her courage had ebbed during the short walk from her home. After all, a person has a right to believe and worship as he chooses, and many persons resent any attempt to change their views. Suppose this woman should take offense and order her out? For just a moment she stood irresolute on the veranda, and then, fortified by the conviction that she was acting for the best, stepped forward and pressed the bell.

The gracious manner in which Mrs. Perkins greeted her visitor was reassuring.

"I am ashamed to think I haven't called on you yet," she confessed, as she directed her neighbor to a chair. "I am so glad you ignored my lack of courtesy and came to see me anyway."

"We never stand much on ceremony in the little Canadian town from which I came," returned Mrs. Campwell. "We just go when the spirit moves."

Mrs. Perkins nodded. "I like that way of doing things," she said; "it is so real."

As they chatted on a bit aimlessly, the caller found opportunity to study her hostess and her surroundings.

The home was comfortably and substantially furnished, with no attempt at display. Books and papers here and there added a certain studious atmosphere to the rooms. The mistress of the home seemed more attractive on a closer scrutiny. She appeared to be about forty years of age. Her hair was dark, with an occasional gray thread running through it. Her eyes, equally dark, were thoughtful and sober. There was an air of conscious strength, of controlled strength, about her that appealed strangely to the sunny disposition of the other woman. The visitor found herself wondering how a woman seemingly so well educated and intelligent could have become so greatly deceived. But deceived she certainly was, and so after they had talked of commonplace things for a while, Mrs. Campwell steadied herself for a moment and then remarked lightly:

"I believe you are a Seventh-day Advent, Mrs. Perkins."

"Yes," was the immediate reply, with no trace of embarrassment, "I am a Seventh-day Adventist."

"Isn't that strange! I never heard of them until I came here." The caller was speaking a little faster than was her custom. Her hostess smiled encouragingly.

"It is not to be wondered at. We are a small sect, comparatively, and not very numerous in Canada."

Mrs. Campwell took another long step forward. "But why do you keep Saturday for Sunday?" she asked. The other woman smiled again, and Mrs. Campwell was a bit relieved to see how friendly the smile was. "I don't," she replied. Then seeing the puzzled look on the other's face, she quickly added: "I keep the seventh day as the Sabbath, according to the commandment of God."

"But bless your heart, dear" — the pet word slipped out in that charming way that made everybody love her — "don't you know that Jesus changed the day when He rose from the dead, and that He commanded us to keep the first day holy?"

"No, I didn't know it," replied the other slowly. "Is that so?"

"Yes, indeed. That's the reason everybody keeps Sunday, except the Jews, who do not believe in Christ. You mustn't keep that old seventh day any longer, dear."

Mrs. Perkins was silent for a moment. The laughter had died out of her eyes and they had become very sober. She leaned forward intently.

"I do not enjoy being different from all my neighbors, Mrs. Campwell," she said quietly. "I know they all think that I am crazy, or that there is something queer about me, at least. But I feel that I must obey God, and in keeping the seventh day holy I am simply following the instruction I find in the Word of God. It is —"

"But you find just what I am telling you in the Bible — in the New Testament," interrupted Mrs. Campwell. "Of course you believe in the New Testament?"

A light flickered in the widow's dark eyes for a moment, and then went out.

"Yes," she replied, "I believe and love the New Testament as much as I do the Old; but I have never read anything about Jesus' changing the Sabbath. If I have, I have forgotten it."

"It's there in lots of places," declared the caller earnestly. "Would you be willing to find it for me?"

"Of course I would," Mrs. Campbell responded, her eyes glowing with elation. After all it was going to be easy, far easier than she had expected. This woman was deceived, but she loved the Bible, and would surely give up her curious belief when she saw what Jesus had done. Eagerly she took the well-thumbed volume that Mrs. Perkins extended to her.

"It looks as if it has seen a great deal of use," she said, examining it a moment, critically. "I think it's the funniest thing that you never came across these texts."

Mrs. Perkins did not reply, and her caller, opening the Book, began turning rapidly the pages of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Had she been less engrossed, and had she looked suddenly at her hostess, she would have caught a look of deepest interest, followed by an upward glance of prayer.

Mrs. Campwell halted in her march through Matthew. "Here is one text," she began, and then stopped abruptly. This was the passage her eyes had fallen upon: "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher." (Matthew 28:1).

"That isn't what I want," she explained, and began again turning the pages rapidly. She flew through Mark, Luke, and John, and on into Acts of the Apostles, and to the epistles of Paul, James, Peter, and John. To and fro, back and forth, she searched. Gradually the pages moved slower and slower. A dull red crept from her neck to her cheek, and from her cheek to her brow. The look of sympathy and interest deepened in the watching woman's eyes, and finally she said softly:

"Don't bother about it now, Mrs. Campwell. It is always hard to find things in someone else's Bible anyway."

The caller looked up, conscious that the panic within her had revealed itself outwardly. She observed gratefully that there was no trace of mockery in the widow's eyes — no trace of anything but tender solicitude. Still confused, she arose and laid the Book on the table.

"I feel dreadfully foolish," she said tremulously. "I am sure the texts are there, and somehow I just can't find them."

Mrs. Perkins put her arm around the other's shoulder, and gently drew her toward the wicker chair on the porch. "Let's forget all about it now," she urged. "When you are at home with your own Bible, and have the time, look up the texts, and then bring them to me. I shall be very glad to see them."

Mrs. Campwell's promise to do so was ready and emphatic. The two women sat on the veranda and talked about flowers, and this and that for a little while, but the visitor was not herself. Into her consciousness there kept intruding the fact that she had failed at a critical time. She felt humiliated and ashamed that she had been obliged to confess her inability to produce, readily, scriptural proof for her assertions. These thoughts robbed her of much of her natural charm and made her ill at ease. So presently she excused herself and left.

Returning into the house through the wide-open door, Mrs. Perkins picked up the well-thumbed Bible and turned its pages idly, caressingly. They were as familiar to her as an oft-read letter from a very dear friend. A half smile dawned on her face as she replaced the Book, a smile at once wistful and tender.

"Poor dear," she murmured, "poor, sweet dear!"

THE ELUSIVE REFERENCES

THAT evening after the supper was over and her husband had seated himself comfortably in his easy chair, Mrs. Campwell sat down beside him with her Bible on her lap, and told him the whole story of her embarrassing visit.

Angus chuckled. "You can't find anything when you're rattled," he said. "Get me my Bible."

Mr. Campwell attended church regularly. He believed, as do a great many Christians, that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on the first day of the week constituted the reason for the change of the Sabbath. He, too, believed that the New Testament abounded in texts which showed that either Jesus or the apostles had commanded such a change. Wiping his spectacles carefully, he opened his Bible, confidently expecting to succeed very quickly.

Side by side, silently, they searched for proof that the Son of God authorized the change in the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first. An hour later, Mr. Campwell, taking off his glasses to rest his eyes, said:

"Get the concordance. We can find it easily in that."

They moved into the dining room, and with the concordance on the table between them, began a systematic search.

"Say, the word 'Sunday' isn't in the Bible!" declared Angus suddenly, running his index finger along the S's. "Neither is Saturday."

"Of course they're not in the Bible," replied his wife. "I readjust the other day that the names of the days of the week are all heathen. Look for the first day of the week."

Obediently Mr. Campwell turned over to the F's, and there, sure enough, he found nine references to the first day of the week, one in the Old Testament, the others in the New.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Now we'll get the story."

Mrs. Campwell sighed. "Isn't it strange that I couldn't find them this afternoon?" she said. "You read them, and I'll take down the references of the ones that seem to be the strongest."

Angus began reading: "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher."

"That doesn't tell us anything," said Mrs. Campwell. "I found that text this afternoon."

A puzzled frown appeared between Angus' blue eyes. "No," he agreed, "it doesn't tell us anything, but it sounds like a pretty good argument for the widow. It says that after the Sabbath was over, the first day of the week began to dawn. Looks as if the Sabbath must have been the seventh day of the week then."

His wife was silent. Angus turned to the sixteenth chapter of Mark, read the second and ninth verses, and then announced: "There's nothing here that will help us. It reads about the same as Matthew. Well, we'll try Luke."

"Same thing," he declared presently, after a brief consideration of the text. "But listen here. The last verse of the twenty-third chapter says: 'They returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment.' That must mean the fourth commandment, doesn't it?"

"Of course it does," his wife answered, just the tiniest bit impatiently. "We know the seventh-day Sabbath was in force until after the resurrection of Christ. What we want is a text showing where Jesus changed the day."

"Well, we're not going to find any," Angus remarked. He had turned to St. John's Gospel while his wife had been talking, and had found out that the beloved disciple merely told the same story which the other three biographers of the life of Jesus recorded — that the Master rose from the dead on the first day of the week, after the Sabbath was past.

Angus took off his glasses, and leaning back in his chair, gazed absently at the ceiling. Mrs. Campwell regarded the untouched sheet of paper before her thoughtfully, tapping it with her pencil.

"Angus," she said presently, "there's something queer about this Sabbath question. What do you think it is?"

He shook his head. Suddenly, however, his face lighted up. "Maybe the apostles changed it," he suggested eagerly. "Maybe Jesus told Paul to change it when He appeared to him down there in Arabia. There are two more references here anyway."

Consulting the concordance again, Angus turned to Acts 20:7.

"Ah!" he exclaimed triumphantly, "here is something that sounds interesting. Listen. 'And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.' What do you think of that?"

She was silent for a moment. "It isn't very convincing," she answered, after she had considered the text. "In the first place it doesn't mention the Sabbath at all. Surely no one who is seeking to obey God would change one of His commandments on the strength of that verse."

Angus seemed a bit nettled as he asked, "Are you arguing in favor of the seventh day?"

"Of course not, Angus," she replied, smilingly; "but I am searching for the truth, and I don't see much light in that text."

"But it says they came together to break bread on the first day of the week."

"I know, dear. But it says in the second chapter of Acts somewhere [46th verse] that they came together to break bread every day. I remember reading that myself. How does that show a change of the Sabbath?"

"I guess it doesn't," replied Angus. "Well, here's the last text on the first day of the week. It is 1 Corinthians 16:2: 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.' That doesn't sound much like Sabbath keeping. Sounds more like bookkeeping, or figuring up your income tax."

Again Mrs. Campwell was silent for a few minutes. Finally she asked: "Angus, honestly, would you keep Sunday on the strength of any of those texts?"

"I would not," he answered promptly.

For a moment they faced each other inquiringly.

"No wonder Mrs. Perkins was so cool and sweet," said Mrs. Campwell presently. "I believe she knew all the time that there wasn't any such text as I was looking for. Oh, what a perfect fool I have been! And yet I still believe she is wrong somehow. What is the answer to it all?"

Angus closed his Bible with a snap. "You'd better ask Dr. May," he advised. "It isn't reasonable to suppose that one woman is right, and the whole town is wrong. He can probably set you right in five minutes."

"I will," she declared, as they made ready to go upstairs. And she was planning what she would say, when sleep overtook her.

MRS. VAN NESS HELPS OUT

IT was mid-afternoon. Mrs. Van Ness, dressed in a cool, white frock, her housework all finished, was sitting in a chair swing reading one of the season's best sellers. So engrossed was she in the adventures of the hero that she was not conscious of the approach of her neighbor until Mrs. Campwell stepped lightly up to the swing.

"I've come to ask you to help me out," announced the caller, as she sat down.

"Anything but money," promised the old resident. "Shall I bake you a cake? Do you want some sandwiches made? Or am I to help out while you entertain?"

"It's something quite different from all that," replied the other. She related, then, in detail, the story of her call upon Mrs. Perkins, and the fruitless effort she and Angus had made to find the text that would straighten out the Adventist.

"Now, Mrs. Van Ness," she went on, "I know that you have lived around here for a long time. Of course, you must have talked this question over before, and I want you to tell me why we keep Sunday, so I can go back and tell Mrs. Perkins."

Mrs. Van Ness's face was a picture of blank amazement.

“Why, my dear,” she exclaimed, “I’m no minister. Why in the world should I worry my brains over such a foolish thing as that?”

Mrs. Campwell’s eyes glinted a bit behind her spectacles.

“But there must be some reason, some Biblical reason, for keeping Sunday,” she insisted. “Mrs. Perkins asked me to give her a text, and I couldn’t. Instead of straitening her out, I am floundering around for something to hold on to.”

Mrs. Van Ness smiled sympathetically. “Lionel says” — Lionel was her husband — “that Advents are awfully good Bible students; and that it is a risky business arguing with them.”

“Why risky?” Mrs. Campwell shot the question sharply at her neighbor.

The old resident stirred a bit uneasily. This kind of conversation was not exactly to her liking.

“Because they don’t do anything but read the Bible, I suppose,” she answered, a bit spitefully. “If I went to bed with a Bible, and carried it around everywhere, I hope I’d know something about it.”

The caller thought of the widow’s well-thumbed Bible, and the conviction deepened that its owner had known positively that the Scriptures contain no divine command for the change of the Sabbath. “Just giving me rope enough to hang myself,” she mused. “Hanging is an unpleasant experience.” Mrs. Campwell turned again to her neighbor with determination mirrored on her honest countenance.

“Now either we are right and Mrs. Perkins is wrong, or she is right and we are wrong. This is a new subject to me, but I am going to get to the bottom of it. I did hope that you would be able to help me out.”

The other woman’s face flushed. “My mother’s religion is good enough for me,” she declared warmly. “Mother lived and died a Methodist, and so shall I. Anyway, if Saturday is the Sabbath, why don’t the great men keep it — the bishops, and the professors in the colleges? Don’t they understand the Bible as well as Mrs. Perkins?”

“I have great respect for my mother’s religion too,” said Mrs. Campwell quietly, “but I have more respect for the Word of God. If Paul had stuck to his father’s religion, he never would have been the great apostle to the Gentiles, and never would have written so large a part of the New Testament. I can’t answer your question about the big men in the church. It certainly seems as if they ought to know what’s right. I’m going to ask Dr. May next Sunday.”

Mrs. Van Ness dropped her eyes longingly on the book which lay, face downward, upon her lap. “You certainly are stirred up over the matter,” she said.

Mrs. Campwell caught the look, and stepped lightly from the swing. “I’m sorry to have troubled you,” she remarked sweetly.

“No trouble,” returned the other. “I’m sorry I am not able to help you out.” She watched her caller cross the broad, velvety lawn, and walk briskly away down the road before she picked up her book. “And I was beginning to like her,” she murmured, her forehead puckering into a frown. But a moment later she found her place, and the frown disappeared as she became deeply absorbed again in a fictitious hero.

CHANDLER MAY, D.D.

ALMOST everybody in Winthrop was willing to admit, yes, even boast, that the Reverend Dr. Chandler May was as asset to the town. Scholarly, refined, dignified, he seemed the very essence of ministerial efficiency. He was a man about forty-five years of age, of medium height, and rather inclined to stoutness. His face was smooth, round, and ruddy.

On this particular Sunday morning he preached even better than usual. He was speaking on the subject of Christian service; and his rich, musical voice, the symmetrical perfection of his sentences, and his noble bearing and graceful delivery convinced his communicants anew that they were indeed fortunate in their choice of a pastor.

“This is a day,” he declared as he neared the end of his discourse, “in which we are hearing less of creed, less of the technicalities of Bible exegesis, and more of the broader questions of love to man and the fatherhood of God.

"I question the value of certain parts of the Old Testament that have a tendency to reveal our heavenly Father as a very exacting God. I am sure, too, that we have quibbled too long, one with another, concerning points of mere doctrine, which become insignificant when viewed in the whiter light of the world's needs."

His words fell upon Mrs. Campwell's heart with peculiar emphasis. Was she exciting herself unnecessarily over the question of the Sabbath? Ought she to forget all about it, and be satisfied to go on as her neighbors and friends were going? Who was she to take it upon herself to settle a question that doubtless had puzzled wiser heads than hers?

But somehow since she had begun investigating the matter, the fourth commandment, at least the beginning of it, had been repeating itself in her mind over and over, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.'

Again and again the words sounded in her consciousness. "Can it be right," she asked herself, "to ignore the Sabbath question just because of the world's ills and needs?" Had she the right to disregard this doubt in her mind regarding the validity of Sunday observance? Surely a commandment of the Creator was too important a thing to be undecided upon.

She rose with the others for the last hymn, and stood absent-mindedly considering the matter.

Then, as the organist finished the introduction and swung into the melody, these old, familiar words claimed her attention:

"Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone,
And there's a cross for me."

Her eyes were wet when the last note had died away, but her mind was made up. She lingered until the church was nearly empty. Dr. May was concerned when he learned that something was bothering her. He was at her service.

"I suppose you'll think I'm foolish," she began a bit apologetically, "but a few days ago I went to see a woman in our neighborhood who keeps Saturday as the Sabbath. I went intending to straighten her out on that question. She asked me to read her a text that would prove that Jesus changed the Sabbath, and I couldn't find one. I have been looking ever since, but there doesn't seem to be any."

Dr. May looked down at the anxious face uplifted to his own, and laughed.

"Tell your friend to read the sixth chapter of Romans and the fourteenth verse," he said, reassuringly. "She will then see that we are not under the law, but under grace. Jesus didn't give any positive instruction about abolishing that particular commandment, but He did usher in the kingdom — the reign — of grace. Don't you remember what St. John says: 'The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ'? She is living under the old dispensation — under the old covenant. When Jesus on the cross cried, 'It is finished,' the Mosaic age passed away, and the era of grace began, under which we are living today." Mrs. Campwell beamed with understanding. "And the Sabbath was simply a part of the Mosaic law," she said eagerly.

"Yes," he responded, "that's it exactly."

"Well, I'll go right back and tell Mrs. Perkins. I know she will be glad to know the truth."

Dr. May's face hardened a little.

"Don't be too sure, my friend," he warned. "I've had some experience with Seventh-day Adventists. They are very obstinate people."

"But this lady is so sweet," Mrs. Campwell objected, "that I'm certain she'll be delighted to hear what you have told me."

The minister changed the subject rather abruptly to ask how she was enjoying her new home.

"Just lovely," she told him; and then, seeing that he was impatient to be off, thanked him for taking the time to answer her questions, and hurried away.

"I told you he'd put you right in five minutes," said Mr. Campwell, after listening to her story. "It stands to reason that men who have studied religion in the big colleges know all about such questions."

“That’s what Mrs. Van Ness said,” returned his wife as she started to get dinner. “But that isn’t always true. The apostles never had much schooling. Of course,” she added, after a moment’s hesitation, “they had a wonderful Teacher for more than three years.”

Mr. Campwell called the children, and drew his armchair up to the table. “Well,” he declared, “Dr. May gave you Scripture. That’s good enough for me.”

“Me, too,” Mrs. Campwell agreed, busy with serving. “If the Bible says so, that settles it. I would certainly even keep Saturday if I thought God required it.”

“Saturday is the seventh day of the week, all right,” put in the boy, Ralph. “The calendar shows that.”

“Yes, but that was under the Mosaic law. We’re under grace now,” his mother explained. “I’m going over and see Mrs. Perkins again tomorrow. I like her so much. Maybe we can persuade her to join our church.”

And thus the matter was shelved for twenty-four hours.

THE LIGHT BEARER

MRS. CAMPWELL did not make good her promise, for the simple reason that while she was getting ready to call upon Mrs. Perkins, that lady came to see her.

“I didn’t think it was fair to ask you to call twice, when I had not been to see you at all,” the widow declared, as she entered.

The other woman’s face expressed her pleasure.

“You’re just the person I was thinking about, and just the person I want to see,” she said, “I have just the text for you, and I felt that I couldn’t rest until I had seen you and told you about it.”

The visitor’s dark eyes glowed. “There is nothing in all the world I enjoy so much as studying the Bible,” she confessed. “See,” she went on, opening her hand bag, “here is the little copy I always carry with me.”

Ordinarily Mrs. Campwell would have waited a few minutes, diplomatically, before bringing up the subject she was so anxious to discuss; but her caller’s enthusiasm made that unnecessary. So she took her own Bible, seated herself opposite the widow, and began:

“Now, dear, read Romans 6:14.”

Mrs. Perkins smiled slightly, and then, to the other’s astonishment, without bothering to open her Bible, quoted the text exactly. There was something in that quiet little recitation, something in the poise and ready memory, that robbed Mrs. Campwell of a large part of the confidence with which she had been bubbling over. Nevertheless she went on bravely:

“That text, Mrs. Perkins, says that we are not under the law, but under grace. The Sabbath was part of the Mosaic law, and when Jesus died on the cross, that law passed away. If we are not under the law, why should you keep that old Jewish Sabbath? The Sabbath was a part of the old-covenant dispensation.”

Instead of answering immediately, Mrs. Perkins looked at her neighbor thoughtfully a moment, and then asked: “You are really deeply in earnest about this matter, are you not, Mrs. Campwell?”

“Indeed I am,” was the prompt reply.

“Then suppose we ask God to guide our minds while we study a bit.”

Mrs. Campwell readily consented, and the two women knelt together, to seek guidance of Him who is the source of all wisdom.

“Now,” began Mrs. Perkins when they were seated again, “notice carefully what the text says: ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.’ Let me ask you, first of all, What is sin?”

The other hesitated, and her caller suggested that she read the definition found in 1 John 3:4. Mrs. Campwell then read as follows:

“Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”

“What does John say sin is?” “The transgression of the law.”

“Have you ever sinned, Mrs. Campwell?”

“Of course,” she answered, nodding vigorously. “The Bible says, ‘All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.’ “

“Exactly. Now, dear, if you and I and everybody have sinned, and sin is the transgression of the law, how can it be possible that the law has been done away with? Paul says, ‘I had not know sin, but by the law.’ The law defines sin, explains what sin is. If you say there is no longer a law, then you are also saying that there is no longer any sin; and we know that the world is more sinful today than it ever was. Is that clear so far?”

“Yes, but Dr. May —”

“Pardon me, but let’s take one step at a time. Is the little bit clear that I have tried to explain?” “Yes; it is.”

“Very well. Then we’ll go a little farther. God says that the wages of sin is death. If sin is the transgression of the law, if everybody has sinned, and if the wages of sin is death, then everybody is doomed to die. Every man, woman, and child must die because he is under the law — that is, under its condemnation.”

Mrs. Campwell was following breathlessly, with wide-open eyes. The widow continued:

“Jesus dies in our stead. He paid the death penalty which the law demands. Consequently, you and I are not under the law, but under grace — under His grace.

“Suppose a man gets into a quarrel with a neighbor, and in a fit of anger kills him. He passes under the law immediately, and the law will reach out its long arm, take him, and send him to prison for a term of years, possibly for life. Suppose that after he serves, we will say eight years of a twenty-year sentence, the governor pardons him. He walks out of the prison free through the governor’s grace. He is no longer under the law; but, Mrs. Campwell, he is still subject to it; and should he get into another quarrel and kill another man, the law would most certainly reach out again and take him.”

Mrs. Campwell was called to the door, but on coming back she said eagerly, “Please go on. Tell me more.” The widow smiled with pleasure. “I’m afraid I’ll weary you,” she said. “There is so much more to tell. We shall have to arrange for some studies.”

“We will,” Mrs. Campwell promised enthusiastically, “but I want to know what Dr. May meant when he said we were living under a new covenant.”

“All right,” replied Mrs. Perkins briskly. “Open your Bible, and read Jeremiah 31:31-33.”

Mrs. Campwell obeyed, and found these words, which she read:” ‘Behold, the days come, said the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, said the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, said the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.’”

“That first covenant,” the caller explained, “was made between God and the children of Israel when He wrote His law on two tables of stone and gave them to Moses. If you read Exodus 31:18 and 34:1, you will see that God actually wrote those ten commandments with His own finger. Moses says in Deuteronomy 5:22 that God wrote those ten commandments, and ‘added no more.’ So you see that the ten commandment law is a thing separate and distinct from the law of Moses, which included all the civil and religious regulations of the commonwealth of Israel.

“The children of Israel promised to keep that law which was written on the tables of stone, but they didn’t do it. They forsook God, and worshipped idols and the sun. God punished them for breaking the covenant they had made with Him, and sent them into captivity. through the prophet Jeremiah, however, He promised that someday He would make a new covenant with them; only this time He declared that He would write His law — the same law, mind you — in their hearts.

“Jesus, through the psalmist, said, ‘Thy law is within my heart,’ and He expects that same law to be written in the hearts of His followers. That law includes the fourth, or Sabbath, commandment.”

She stopped speaking, and a throbbing silence fell. Out in the street where the summer shadows were lengthening, several children were playing, their shrill voiced intense as they called one to another. For some reason — who can explain the whims of the mind? — Mrs. Campwell found herself thinking of her own childhood, and the old home in faraway Canada. It seemed more remarkable than ever that she should have left the farm, journeyed so far, and found so strange a question awaiting her. Why did this Sabbath question affect her so impressively? Why did the words which this quiet, dark-eyed woman spoke, fall with such a thrill of conviction upon her heart?

She sighed deeply, unconsciously, and the other woman flashed her a sympathetic and understanding glance.

“I almost know what you are thinking,” she said. “That’s the way I felt when the Sabbath question first came to me ten years ago. There were twelve of us who attended some Bible readings held by a Seventh-day Adventist. When she reached the Sabbath question, they all lost interest but me. They couldn’t see any sense in it. To me it was the voice of God. The woman taught nothing but what the Bible said. I couldn’t deny it; neither could I reject it.”

Another silence followed. Presently Mrs. Campwell asked: “What did Jesus mean when He said, ‘It is finished’?”

“That’s too long a story for now, dear,” replied the widow. “I believe you have enough to think about for the present. If you wish, I will come over one evening each week, and we can study together. Maybe Mr. Campwell would like to study too. Would you be interested in that?” she asked somewhat anxiously.

They had both risen and walked slowly to the door. There the caller turned, her eyes intent on the blue eyes of her hostess. Mrs. Campwell drew a long breath.

“It is wonderful,” she said simply, “just wonderful.”

DR. MAY SAYS GOOD NIGHT

SUMMER had gone, not officially, but in reality. It was early September, and a faint tinge of autumn chill was in the air. The water was still blue, but the beach was deserted. The trees were not yet clothed in the brilliant red, orange, and yellow which are the glory of a New England October; but here and there a few leaves had turned, appearing, as human beings sometimes do, eager to hasten the season. The grass was still green, although it had lost the freshness and the velvety sheen of earlier months.

The weekly Bible study had long since become a fixture at the Campwell home. Mrs. Perkins had found the entire family deeply interested, and frequently a neighbor or two joined the little circle.

One night they were gathered as usual about the dining room table, and were beginning the study, when the doorbell rang. A moment later Mrs. Campwell ushered in the Reverend Dr. May. She was equal to the situation.

“You’re just in time, Doctor; we’re having a Bible study,” she said, and presented him to the others. The clergyman looked his surprise.

“This is very interesting, I’m sure,” he remarked somewhat uncertainly, and added, “I wish I might find more of my communicants so engaged.”

“This is a weekly affair with us,” Mrs. Campwell explained, after her visitor had seated himself a trifle stiffly. “Mrs. Perkins is our teacher.”

“Indeed!” Having thus spoken, he favored the widow with a curious stare. She returned his gaze unflinchingly.

“I fear I am an inefficient teacher,” she said lightly.

“She’s the best Bible student I’ve ever met,” declared Mr. Campwell, who never hesitated about saying what he thought.

Dr. May ignored the last remark, and turned to Mrs. Campwell.

“We have missed you very much at our services,” he said. “You haven’t forsaken us altogether, have you?” That was the question she had been dreading, and yet, she was almost glad that he had asked it, because she wanted him to have a fair chance to defend his position in the presence of Mrs. Perkins. She knew she was about to wound or offend him, but there was no way around it, so she replied:

"I am afraid I have, in a way, Dr. May. You see I have decided to keep the Sabbath."

The effect of this simple announcement was tremendous. It was news to everyone there, even to Mrs. Perkins. For weeks Mrs. Campwell had refused to go to church on Sunday; but although she had attended church at Boston several times on Saturday, she had not made a final decision. Mrs. Perkins' eyes grew moist with love and thankfulness. Angus and the children looked at her in astonishment. Dr. May was perplexed for a moment.

"What do you mean, Mrs. Campwell?" he asked. "Don't we all keep the Sabbath?"

"No," she answered calmly, in her seriously sweet voice. "I am convinced that Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is 'the sabbath of the Lord thy God.' "

A dull red glowed in the minister's face, as he recognized the import of her words.

"So you have become a Seventh-day Adventist," he commented bitterly. "You prefer the Mosaic law to the kingdom of grace."

"I have learned many things since I talked with you last, Dr. May," she replied, not the least ruffled. "I have learned that the Sabbath was instituted in the Garden of Eden, that it is as old as the world itself, that the Sabbath is the fourth precept in the law of God, and had nothing whatever to do with the law of Moses."

The light of battle glinted in the clergyman's eyes.

"Someone has been misleading you," he declared warmly. "We are not under the law; we are under grace." "When have we not been under grace?" she demanded to know. "Adam, the first man, sinned. Do you think Adam will be saved?"

Dr. May fidgeted in his chair. "Possibly," he answered. "That is not for us to say."

"Well, how about David? Surely the Bible teaches that God accepted David."

Mrs. Perkins was watching the duel with the keenest interest. Her dark eyes, burning with intensity, never left her pupil's face.

"Suppose I am willing to admit that David is a saved man, what does that prove?" the preacher asked. "What saved him?"

"Faith in Jesus Christ."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Campwell, hitching her chair forward in her earnestness, "faith in the grace, in the blood, of Jesus Christ. David was saved and Adam was saved because the grace of God was sufficient to forgive their sins, and to plan a way of escape, through the sacrifice of His Son. Grace, abundance of grace on the part of God, made the death of Jesus Christ possible. Therefore sinners have been under grace since Adam fell, although it was not clearly understood until Jesus brought it to light."

"That's right," put in Mr. Campwell.

"You know," Mrs. Campwell continued, addressing her words directly to the minister, "that sin is the transgression of the law. You know that grace does not excuse or permit sin. You know that the world is full of sin today; therefore there must be violation of the law everywhere."

The blood had receded from Dr. May's face, leaving it quite pale.

"Isn't there danger, Mrs. Campwell, of placing your opinion, or," with a glance at Mrs. Perkins, "the opinion of your teacher, above the decisions and instructions of the church? The church, recognizing that the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord mark a new era in the history of mankind, has, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the instruction of the early Fathers, ordained that we keep holy the first day of the week. As for the Mosaic law, Jesus Himself exclaimed as He died upon the cross, 'It is finished.'"

Mrs. Campwell flushed a little under the clergyman's words, but her voice remained cool and steady.

"I am not trying to follow the dictates of the church, but what the Bible commands," she replied. "Neither Jesus nor the apostles gave any command or instruction regarding a change of the Sabbath. I do not believe the church had or has a right to alter a command of the Creator. He declared that the Sabbath was given as a memorial of Creation. You change, not only the day, but also the reason for keeping it."

“Do you not know why Jesus said, ‘It is finished’? The Savior Himself gives us a divine commentary on these words. In His prayer to His Father at the last supper, He said, ‘I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gave me to do’ (John 17:4). As He hung upon the cross, Jesus had finished His earthly ministry. The ‘Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world,’ was dying for sinners. God’s Lamb had taken the place of the lambs and other animals which the Jews had been sacrificing daily for years, and which were merely symbols of Christ. The whole Jewish ceremony — the slaying of animals, the burning of incense, the candlestick, the showbread, in fact the entire ministry of the priests — simply typified the work that Jesus was to do in behalf of mankind. With His death, the necessity for all those rites and ceremonies in the earthly sanctuary ended, and that is why the veil of the Temple was rent asunder. The rending of that sacred curtain between the holy and the most holy place, showed that the round of service which had been carried on so long was over.”

As she stopped speaking, Dr. May turned to Mrs. Perkins, and said, with a wry smile: “You have found a ready pupil.” For a long moment their eyes met, his, blue, hard; hers, dark, unfathomable.

“When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth,” she quoted. The blue eyes wavered, and went back to the other woman.

“And now, Mrs. Campwell, I suppose you will be warning all your neighbors to get ready for the end of the world, as Miller did about a hundred years ago,” he said, speaking slowly and coldly.

Angus moved into the picture again. “I think you’d do better if you did a little warning yourself,” he declared. “Before the world war, you preachers were telling us that war was a thing of the past, and now you keep on telling us that the world is getting better. Why don’t you warn your flock to get ready for Christ’s coming?”

“Because it’s absurd,” the minister replied, his voice throaty with anger. “Alarmists like you Adventists do more harm than any other class of people in the world.”

“Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the prophets, even Jesus and Paul, were alarmists,” Mrs. Perkins remarked, her cool voice entering the heated discussion like an ocean breeze on a hot day. “What do you do, Doctor, with the 283 texts of the New Testament that, collectively, teach the literal, visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ?”

“There are no such texts,” he answered crisply. “Christ does come again in two ways — once when we accept Him, and again at death.”

“Then would you mind explaining just this one text to me: ‘Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.’ (Acts 1:11)?

“That Being who ascended, Doctor, was Jesus, the real, visible Jesus — the Jesus that Thomas handled in order to become convinced of his Lord’s resurrection. The text says, ‘This same Jesus. . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.’ That language seems to me as plain as human speech can possibly be. Please explain it.”

The Reverend Dr. May arose.

“I see no reason for continuing this discussion,” he announced rather loftily. “I am sorry, Mrs. Campwell, that you insist on being swayed by these fanatics. Someday, I feel sure, you will see the foolishness of it all, and we shall be glad to welcome you back into the fold. Goodnight.”

He bowed gravely and went out.

SIX MONTHS LATER

WINTER had passed again, although the snow still lay in patches on the north side of the hills and in the depth of the cool woods. Along the newly opened brooks the pussy willows were flowering; and everywhere the inaudible awakening of spring life was apparent.

In Winthrop, the wind was still keen from over the sea, but robins were singing at the dawn, and thousands of buds were beginning to swell with the promise of the resurrection. Under the eaves, the grass was green already, and the good New England housewives were preparing for the strenuous days of spring house cleaning.

It was Saturday morning; and Mrs. Van Ness, her arms full of bundles, was slowly climbing the long hill from town. Halfway up she met the Campwell family — Angus, his wife, and the children — walking briskly down. Mrs. Van Ness paused, glad for an opportunity to rest.

“Well,” she exclaimed by way of greeting, “here’s the whole family, and all dressed up. It’s too early for the theater, and you haven’t any baggage, so you must be going to have a picture taken.”

“No,” Mrs. Campwell explained with a smile, “we are going to Boston to church. We have to leave here early to get there in time for the Sabbath school.”

“Church! Sabbath school!” ejaculated Mrs. Van Ness in astonishment. “What is it, a convention?” “No; the Seventh-day Adventists have their services in Boston every Saturday.”

Mrs. Van Ness’s amazement deepened.

“You don’t mean to tell me that you all have turned Advents?” she demanded, her eyes wide open.

“Yes, we’re all keeping the Sabbath,” Mrs. Campwell answered. “I have been baptized, and Mr. Campwell and the children are going to be in just a little while.”

Words failed the old resident, and seeing her inability to talk, Mrs. Campwell went on: “Why, yes, didn’t you know it? We’ve been going in every Sabbath for a long time.”

Mrs. Van Ness found her voice. “Every Saturday you mean,” she said icily. “Every Saturday, like the Jews.”

Angus and the children had walked slowly ahead, leaving Mrs. Campwell to finish or abandon the discussion as she saw fit.

“‘If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise,’ “ she quoted. “I used to feel just the way you do, Mrs. Van Ness; but I have studied the Bible, and I have found out that there is no scriptural authority at all for keeping Sunday. I must obey God, not man. That is why I am going to church today.”

A whistle sounded up the track, and glancing toward the station, a little distance away, Mrs. Campwell saw her husband and the children beckoning to her wildly.

“Good-by,” she said hastily. “Come over, and we will have a Bible study together.”

With this parting word, and an unspoken prayer that God would guide her neighbor into the light of Bible truth, she hastened to join her husband and children. As the train sped onward toward Boston, she mused upon the strange but kind Providence which had brought them from their little Canadian village to find, not only a home, but a fuller, clearer knowledge of the Scriptures and the will of God in Winthrop by the sea.