

Sabbath in the Kirk

They were beginning to sing the first Psalm. The married men, like father, with wives already in the church, started for their pews; but it always took the second or third Psalm to start the young men. They sat in the back corner, farthest from their parents — and farthest from grace the ministers would have said sometimes. But these stalwart sons of grim Calvinistic fathers had more grace in their hearts than they cared to display.

The interior of the church, like the chaste and simple outside, was neither garish nor crude. The low pulpit with the Ionic frieze behind on the wall and two steps at each side, was neat and suitable. Between the two aisles was a main section of seats with a partition running through the center as in the old New England churches. This divided the pews into definite sections. There was no promiscuous mixing of families. The rows of pews along the outside of the church were broken in the middle by the two stoves.

Our pew was in front of the right hand stove and the boy's corner. In later years, I used to feel shy going in past all those boys. Grandmother Stevenson sat in front of us and I sat with her,

whiling away the tedious hour by watching the Squire's second wife, Barbara Kennedy, who sat in front of us with her two daughters. She had recently returned from a trip to Scotland. I admired her Glasgow bonnet and silk gown, her long watch chain, fine Irish lace, the bead fringe on her dolman, and her dignity and poise.

The Squire, who had on the big linen coat he always wore in hot weather, sat alone in the pew in front, just where, if the sermon proved a bit wearisome, he could look out at McDowall's waving grain and his own farmstead beyond with the long row of pines. A prince among men was the Squire, a real Lord Chesterfield with his distinguished carriage and grand manner. It was easy to imagine him visiting not long since with his cousin, the Lord Mayor of London.

On each side of the pulpit were three amen-corner pews, reserved we thought for the elders and the elect. On our side, in the front seat, directly in front of the Squire, sat his brother John, "Tama Jim's" father, the spiritually minded elder who had so much to do with organizing the church.

His farm joined the McCosh farm across the road, but the house, once filled to overflowing with fourteen children, was set back in the fields. The gentle Uncle John sat through the service with his

hands upon the top of his cane, his head bowed, and his eyes closed. He never slept. His eyes were not strong in the later years.

His wife, Jean McCosh, had died some time before. She was a sister of Uncle Andrew McCosh who lived in the "wee hoose". They were cousins of Dr. James McCosh, distinguished metaphysician and former president of Princeton. This pioneer woman was richly endowed with intellect and character. Her illustrious son, James, inherited many of her strong qualities. From the vantage point of her amen-corner seat, she used to scrutinize the congregation. All through the service she would look down over the top of her glasses.

Behind Uncle John's pew was that of his brother-in-law, Gilbert McDowall, who named his farm "Dangart" after his home in Scotland. The name of the farm was applied to the man, and so the elder McDowall was known in north Tama as the "Dangart". He had donated a corner of his farm for the church site. His home was up in the field behind the church. Back of his was the Stevenson pew. After grandfather's death grandmother moved to the pew in front of us.

I remember only one man sitting in the amen-corner on the opposite side of the church. This was James Taylor, a middle-aged bachelor living

in a little white house on the top of a high hill near the Ridge Road. His shining bald head and full sandy beard contrasted with his "Sabbath blacks". His grey eyes twinkled with kindly humor as he stuttered a greeting, "Ay, ay, it's a fine day. Quite so, quite so." But his eyes took on a glint of steel when any one in the congregation talked of hymns or an organ. He was a Covenanter direct from Scotland with all the prejudices of his ancestors, who, rather than give up their faith, had been driven into the glens by fierce persecution.

Not far from Taylor, in the side seats corresponding to the Squire's, sat Gilbert McMillan who lived at Four Mile Grove and was always ready for a "crack wi' his frien's". Just behind him was Andrew Wilson who came late from Scotland, a middle-aged bachelor and something of a sport. He sent back for his long-time sweetheart, that colorful Scotchwoman with her broad accent and original sayings, who became Aunt Salie to the whole clan.

Back of the stove on our side, Mrs. Dodd was trying to keep the baby from mussing her long christening robe. It was like the one mother had made from her mother's wedding dress. Most of our grandmothers embroidered exquisite eyelet designs on the sheerest of muslin for their wedding dresses.

In the center section sat the patriarchal Andrew McCosh from across the way. Behind him in an earlier day were the Andrew Dodds. In the words of Esma Galt McCormack, a gifted granddaughter of the Wilson clan:

There was dear 'Auntie Dodd' wi' her sonsie face
So full of genuine, kindly grace,
I can still see it beaming, so brightly it shone,
As she welcomed both strangers and friends to her
home.

Ah! the cheer of that home, can we ever forget?
And the good things to eat! I remember them yet,
Her shortbread, her scones, and her cheese kept for
months!
And even a haggis I tasted there once.

In front of the Dodds sat Mrs. McCosh's warm-hearted and clever brother, Geordie Sloss, ever ready to argue religion or help a friend in need. His placid wife always had a bag of peppermints in the generous pocket of her black silk "goon". She had a way of deftly slipping these into the hands of near-by bairns.

The children all went to church in Tranquillity. We little girls sat demurely enough for awhile in our beruffled, tucked, and lace-trimmed dresses, our pink and blue sashes, and our hair ribbons. We were not so uncomfortable as the boys with their kilts (plaited skirts) and white starched

blouses with the wide embroidered frills. They were real little Lord Fauntleroyes when they put on their velvet tams. Great was their joy when at seven they were emancipated from kilts and curls.

It was hard to sit still so long but there was no sneaking out past father's guarding knee, nor was there any giggling. We had to preserve a proper decorum. Our mothers were fortified with cookies, our fathers with rods at home which were used rather briskly sometimes when there had been special provocation during the long sermon.

Mr. and Mrs. Dodd walked proudly up with the baby who looked wonderingly at Dr. Hughes as he put his hand upon her head and said, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Then the men settled themselves in peace for a long hour of rest. The sermon seemed orthodox and they nodded assent. There might be need for some nudges from the "gude wife" this day for the men had worked hard at the hay. The flies buzzed drowsily about the children's cookies.

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