

## A Dark Day, A Starry Night:

*And Other Signs of the End (and the Beginning) in Maine* | BY WINONA HOWE



Forty years ago, it seemed to me that a fairly large proportion of Sabbath sermons concerned the second advent and were based on a familiar text, Revelation 6:12–13: “And...lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind” (KJV).<sup>1</sup> At that time, it never occurred to me that anyone besides Adventists would be particularly interested in this text.

These events and, most certainly, their interpretation, were so important a part of our eschatology that they almost seemed to have been written for us alone. In fact, it was easy for Seventh-day Adventists to appropriate the ownership of certain historical events because of their application to their own religious history and beliefs. In particular, the Dark Day (May 19, 1780) and the Night the Stars Fell (Nov. 13, 1833) have assumed such a vital place in Adventist eschatology that we often

fail to consider what effect they may or may not have had on the rest of the world.

It is harder to appropriate similarly the Great Lisbon Earthquake (Nov. 1, 1755) for a number of reasons. First, it is more difficult to identify this event as conclusively, due to the great number of earthquakes that occur. Furthermore, it is problematic to take ownership of an event that can only be defined as a tragedy, one attended by great loss of life. A disaster of this proportion seems to belong by some inherent spiritual right to those involved: the victims, the survivors, and those who lost their loved ones. In addition, the fact that this purported Christian event, this sign of the end, did not happen in America made it less immediate to even the early days of Adventism.

Although the phenomena of the heavens were visible in other parts of the world, they were very much a part of the American experience at the time, particularly in New England. The Maine regionalist author, Charles Asbury Stephens, who writes about both the Dark Day and the Night the Stars Fell,

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explores their effect on those who witnessed them. His stories are not set in the context of Adventism, but Stephens was aware of Adventists and various facets of their reputation, as other stories of his demonstrate. The three stories that deal with these eschatological events all initially appeared in *The Youth's Companion*, a journal for which Stephens wrote extensively from the 1870s to 1929, when it ceased publication.<sup>2</sup>

Stephens's short story, "The Dark Day," recounts one young couple's experience in May 19, 1780.<sup>3</sup> Although the story is presented as fact, the reader should remember that many of Stephens's stories fall somewhere between fact and fiction. They often borrow from Stephens's own experiences or from family history, but the information is shaped and altered until it may bear no more than a resemblance to the original.

In the case of "The Dark Day," it is impossible not to notice parallels between Lyman Morrill, the protagonist of the story, and Joseph Stevens, the paternal great-grandfather of the author.<sup>4</sup> Both young men fight in the Revolutionary War, are paid in almost worthless "Continental money," decide to clear land in a relatively uninhabited part of Maine, and situate their homesteads just west of a body of water.

At this point, however, the personal history of Stevens diverges somewhat from the presentation of Morrill's experiences. Stevens locates his homestead on Lake Penneesseewassee in Oxford County (in western Maine), whereas Morrill's land is near Great Pond in Kennebec County (the county to the east of Oxford). More importantly, Stevens did not take up land until 1786, which makes his actual move too late for the Dark Day (although he had previously lived in South Paris, also located only a few miles from Lake Penneesseewassee).

In contrast, Morrill (having already built a cabin) is represented as taking his wife and young son from Reading, Massachusetts, to their new home on May 19, 1780. The Morrills may have been actual people of that name, pioneers in the Great Pond area whose story Stephens had heard, or they may have been fictional characters, suggested by the history of Stephens's own great-grandparents, who moved to what was then considered a wilderness area in the same approximate period.<sup>5</sup>

"There have been several 'dark days' and 'yellow days'

since the famous one of May 19, 1780, which spread such consternation and foreboding throughout New England," the narrative of "The Dark Day" begins,

*but none of them have equaled it in depth of gloomy obscurity. A strange darkness came on before midday, and for sixteen hours or more the people of New England believed that the end of the world was at hand.*

*Among many other attempted explanations, put forth at the time and afterward, one was that a comet, passing near the earth, had brushed its "tail" through our atmosphere. One savant attributed it to a hypothetical volcanic eruption in Labrador; still another to an unprecedented rarefaction of the air over North America, causing all the suspended particles of dust and smoke to settle in a zone near the earth's surface.*

*Great forest fires in Canada, causing enormous volumes of smoke, were also held responsible for the darkness; and this, combined with a peculiarly light state of the air, is the explanation most commonly accepted. The recorded testimony of eye-witnesses, however, is to the effect that, although smoky days had preceded it and followed it, the obscurity of the 19th was not like that of smoke.<sup>6</sup> (593)*

These three paragraphs supply not only a fair amount of information quite quickly, but also a context for the story that follows (although what might perhaps seize the attention of the Adventist eschatologist is the initial thought about there having been several "dark days").<sup>7</sup>

Lyman Morrill (the protagonist of the story), has fought in the Revolutionary War, been both imprisoned and wounded, married a young woman who nursed him, fathered a child (quaintly named Lafayette), cleared ten acres in the Maine wilderness, and built a house. He then goes to fetch his wife and baby in Massachusetts. By May 19, they have been on the road five days, Lyman walking while Ruth rides a white mare and carries the baby in her arms.

This is the last day of their journey to their new home; only twenty miles are left to traverse, but the road is merely a deteriorating track through the forest. The narrator comments on the weather (initially calm and hazy, followed by showers and dense clouds). It is still morning when the day moves from the usual to the unexpected, becoming exceptionally dark and gloomy.

*"Is night coming on, Lyme, or what is it?" Ruth exclaimed.*

*"Oh, no, it can't be night. It isn't noon yet," he replied.*

*"But all the birds have stopped singing. And the frogs have begun to peep just as they do after sunset." (593)*

The young couple know they are in trouble before long. They are in a section where the path is marked only by blazes scored on the tree trunks, and it is too dark to ascertain whether or not these are present. Lyman wants to stop and camp; he is afraid that they will be irretrievably lost if they continue. Ruth, in contrast, is even

The young couple then move through a world that has suddenly become a frightening and alien place. Nothing is familiar. Not only can they no longer visually discern the path or blazes on the trees, but when Lyman runs his hands over the trunks, he finds no vestige of a mark. Indeed, Lyman's fears have been realized, as he and Ruth now understand that they are completely lost. Both adults are terrified, but they remain silent, neither wishing



more frightened than her husband. In her panic, she foolishly insists that they return to the house where they had spent the previous night (clearly an impossibility), as she would take comfort from being around others at a time when the routines of life, which we accept without thought, are suddenly altered, perhaps forever.

It occurs to Ruth that perhaps it may never be light again, and then she has another thought, which is even more disconcerting: "[P]erhaps it's the end of the world" (593). Stephens provides a narrative interjection at this point: "So constantly were the Scriptures read at that time and so literally were all passages interpreted, that throughout New England the thought of judgment day seems to have oppressed the entire population" (593).

Even though this interjection interferes with the flow of the story, it is particularly interesting. It gives insight into the religious climate of the time, demonstrating that the Seventh-day Adventist Church that would soon emerge in America was not as different and as religiously isolated from the rest of the population as we might believe today.

to infect the other with their fears. Young Lafayette, however, knows no such compunction as he wails without ceasing.

Eventually, the couple hears sounds they cannot identify. Lyman thinks it may be "cocks crowing lustily a long way off. Ruth insists it is singing; it sounds, in fact, much like 'Old Hundred'" (594). They are puzzled when the singing changes to apparent groans, but they continue to press forward, hoping for at least the comfort of other people. Indeed, when they reach a clearing, they find a group of people, but the comfort that they had expected through human contact is not immediately forthcoming. The Morrills have stumbled into an Indian encampment whose inhabitants are also extremely frightened.

In addition, the Indians view the sudden appearance of Lyman and Ruth as another of the alarming aspects of the day, and they flee the clearing in terror. Lyman recognizes one of the Indians as Squanto, who had begged salt from him while he was working on his land, and he calls out, identifying himself. Squanto

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then reassures the other members of the group and the Morrills are made welcome, a meeting that marks the beginning of a relationship with Molly, Squanto's wife, that will continue for many years. "The next morning the sun rose about as clear as usual," and the Morrills reach their new home at last (594).

This concludes Stephens's first version of the Dark Day, a story written in a style very typical of this author: presenting either information or a message in a simple narrative, couched in the personal experience of specific characters. Interest is added by the fact that the Indians fear the sudden apparition of a white woman holding a baby and riding on a white horse. Especially because of the religious overtones that the Dark Day inevitably presents, it is impossible not to think of Joseph leading Mary and the child as they leave for the unknown terrors of a foreign land, an impression only strengthened because of the many artists who have portrayed the Flight to Egypt.

The importance of this specific image is underlined, for the scene comprises one of the two illustrations of the story provided by *The Youth's Companion*. The second illustration adds another biblical touch; it is a picture of Squanto, his arms spread wide in a position readily identified as one assumed during crucifixion. The idea of Squanto as not only comforter, but also savior, is somewhat undercut, however, by the text, which explains that Squanto "now and again passed his hands before his eyes, then extended them north and south, shaking his head, to indicate to Morrill that something very ominous was occurring in the heavens" (594).

This passage suggests a degree of befuddlement, a depiction that in accounts of Native Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would often be linked with the consumption of alcohol. Furthermore, the concept of Squanto as savior is even more drastically undercut by the ironic information offered that, two years later, "Squanto went to Canada and was killed in a brawl" (594).

Stephens revisited the topic in another story for *The Youth's Companion*, which was also titled "The Dark Day."<sup>8</sup> Perhaps because twenty-two years had elapsed since publication of the first "Dark Day," Stephens may have felt there would be no problem appropriating his own title for another version of the same event, the Dark Day of May 19, 1780. This time, Stephens recounts the story as the personal experience of

his great-grandfather. Furthermore, he presents it as a story that, over the years, had become a family favorite:

*And the fact that first piqued the fancy of us youngsters was that our then youthful great-grandfather was exploring the forest in quest of a good location for his new farm at the time of the famous Dark Day—when people everywhere believed the world was coming to an end, as foretold in the Biblical prophecy that "the sun shall be darkened and the moon refuse to give her light."*

*That Dark Day, as we heard it described, was indeed spectacular. It set us asking a hundred questions as to what caused it and how dark it really was. (1–2)*

Again, Stephens provides descriptions of the dark conditions and offers possible explanations. Forest fires in Canada are mentioned again, along with possible fires in "the moss and peat beds of Labrador. But from all accounts, the darkness did not wholly resemble the obscurity occasioned by smoke, nor smell like it. It was a kind of velvety opaqueness," explains Stephens, "which seemed to settle over the whole country, though darkest in New England" (2).

The progression of darkness is more carefully charted in this version of "The Dark Day." The phenomenon begins at 9 a.m., darkens to prevent reading or telling time from watches by 10 a.m., and continues to grow darker for the next two hours. The darkness lessens during the afternoon, but the general condition lasts until nighttime. "Birds and animals exhibited bewilderment; barn fowls sought their roosts, cattle came home from their pastures and lowed plaintively to be yarded," writes Stephens.

"Some persons believed the darkness to be due to an eclipse of the sun, which clouds prevented from being seen; but astronomers say there was no eclipse at that time," he continues. "Others suggested that a volcano had somewhere burst forth, belching clouds of black dust into the heavens; but no such volcano was ever discovered" (2–3).

After a few more contextual comments, Stephens moves on to the story of the Old Squire's father, who, in company with his brother and three other potential settlers, travels from Massachusetts to Oxford County, Maine, where they look about, investigating soil conditions, the incidence of rocks, the availability of timber, and so forth (although not until 1786 did Stevens, at least, finally clear land and establish a permanent homestead).

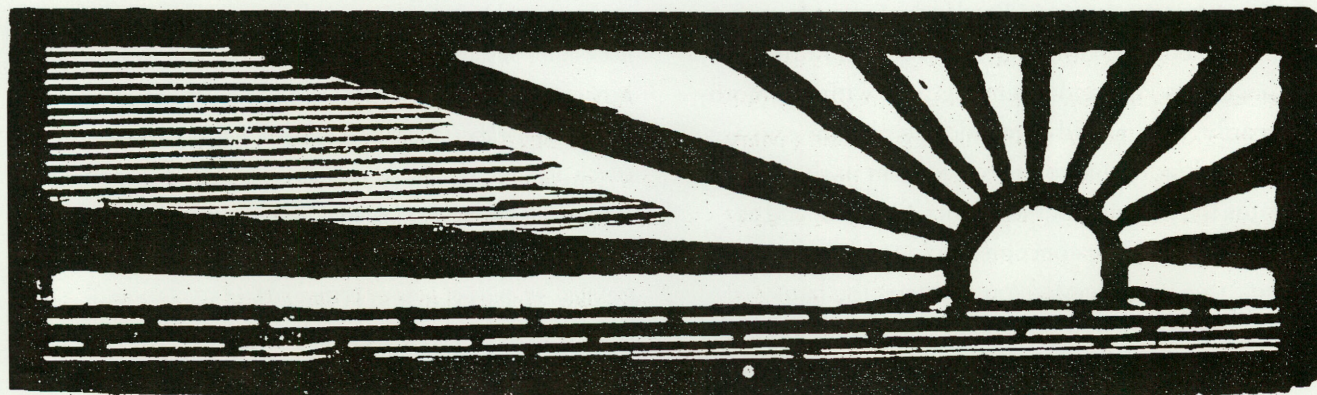
On one of these trips of exploration in 1780 "the famous Dark Day overtook them" (4). The young men are con-

fused and uneasy (much as Lyman and Ruth in the earlier account). They also become lost and stumble into an Indian encampment, this time identified as a camp of Saco Abnakis. The group hardly notices them, as they mutter words that "Great-grandfather Joseph" interprets as some sort of "prayer-meeting."

But Stevens is quick to add that everyone present feels "under the influence of a singular spell, or sense of helplessness, in the presence

the religious symbolism emerging in both description and illustration. Stephens does not dwell on or even explore these topics in "The Dark Day"; he cannot be described as a psychological author.

Nevertheless, his brief descriptions are suggestive and they allow the imaginative reader to share the perceptions and emotions of his characters. The second "Dark Day" lacks these overtones. It can be described more as a cata-



of an inexplicable event" (5–6). After the darkness abates somewhat, the Indians hospitably share their food with the prospective settlers, and all feel their spirits rise with the world's return to normalcy.

Although these two stories of the same name depend on the same event for structure, they are very different. Stephens presents the latter version as part of family history. Therefore, it is far more rambling (even in the short confines of a typical Stephens story or chapter), briefly discussing or mentioning Indian agriculture, the dimensions of the narrator's great-grandfather's house, the journey of the young family to its new home, and the vicissitudes of that journey, the birth of Stephens's grandfather, and so forth.

The story is less consciously shaped, and it lacks the drama of the earlier tale: the tree blazes fading as the young couple searches feverishly to find their way, their terror quickening when they realize they are lost (a state of mind only heightened by the incessant wailing of their infant son), and

log of events related to the settlement of the author's ancestors in Oxford County, with the Dark Day being the most dramatic.

Stephens sets another story in the context of another "Adventist" event with a somewhat comic recounting of "The Night the Stars Fell."<sup>9</sup> In a style typical for him, Stephens begins by recalling what the United States was like at that time. It could be termed a pioneer country then, with historic individuals like Thomas Jefferson and John Adams only recently deceased, when

*the great meteoric storm... for a space of several hours beat on the continent of North America with wild, bright inclemency. [It was] the most startling phenomenon which white people had ever beheld on these shores.*

*Far less was then known of the nature, composition and periodicity of meteors than at present; and in many parts of the country this amazing star-shower was believed to be the portent, foretold in the Scriptures, of the immediate dissolution of the world. (185)*

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After this informational introduction, Stephens moves into the actual story. Of course, the characters are different from those in "The Dark Day," but they are familiar to any Stephens reader: they are identified as the Old Squire and Grandmother Ruth, the grandparents of the narrator of the Old Farm stories, a series based on Stephens's relatives, which brought the author his greatest popularity.

The couple has taken a load of turkeys and chicken to Portland to sell for Thanksgiving. Ruth does not usually accompany Joe on a trip of this sort; she has done so this time because her mother is in Portland, visiting from her home in Connecticut. Consequently, Joe and Ruth remain a week in Portland, spending time with her mother. Ordinarily, they would conclude their business in a day and spend more time on the road than in the city.

Now it is the morning of November 13, 1833, and as they start home they are concerned because they feel they should not have been away so long, leaving the farm chores to Jonathan, one of their neighbors. In addition, they are uncertain what "those Crowes" might have been doing during their absence.

The Crowes are a local problem, one for which the Old Squire must take some responsibility, as he is the one who not only hired Consider and Amma Crowe to run his sawmill, but also provided them with two cottages on his property in which to live.

*From the outset, however, the Crowes proved worthless as laborers. Three other families of the same name moved there the following year, and later still another Crowe family came, nobody quite knew when—although about thirty persons, and as idle, disorderly and thievish a crew as ever pestered a decent community.*

*There were six families of them, all living in these two small houses, and pigs could hardly have been more filthy. The older persons, as well as the children, went about in rags, or scarcely clothed at all. (186–87)*

As Joe and Ruth drive toward home, they wonder what new tribulation they must endure from the Crowes, who are a constant thorn in their flesh on a number of levels, but, most particularly, because they themselves must be blamed for the presence of these individuals. If the Old Squire had not offered jobs to the first two men, the plague of the Crowes would never have been unleashed upon the community, although it must be said that the

Old Squire and Ruth are the members of the community who suffer most because they are such near neighbors.

Furthermore, at this point, it is unclear that anything can be done; the Crowes are entrenched in their physical location as securely as they are in their "thievish" ways. Not only are the Crowes lazy, dirty, and unprepossessing, they are also outright thieves.

*They fished a little in the brook, hunted a little, whined and begged round, and stole a great deal by night from the fields of corn and potatoes.*

*Every week or so a sheep or a lamb would be missing from the flock in the pasture, and occasionally a veal calf. Nothing in the way of tinware, dishes, or clothing could be left out after dark. Even so unwieldy a thing as a dye-pot, full of yarn for socks, which grandmother had set outdoors overnight, disappeared mysteriously. If the bulkhead door of the cellar was left unlocked, some of the Crowes were quite likely to come poking in there before morning, in quest of pork or corned beef. (187)*

Given the Crowes's propensities for illegally acquiring the possessions of others, the Old Squire and Grandmother Ruth hardly know what to expect when they return. As their neighbor has gone to the farm only to do the chores, it has been essentially open season for the Crowes for an entire week. Their only hope is that the sermons of the Methodist minister, who is currently holding revival meetings nearby, may have had a desirable effect on the Crowes:

*There is no doubt that the elder preached vigorous doctrine, and held out little hope for the Crowes hereafter unless they speedily reformed. He more than hinted to them, too, that the day of the Lord might be close at hand. They were unpromising subjects for reformation; yet it is likely that the elder's exhortations produced some effect. The Old Squire and grandmother earnestly hoped so—otherwise they did not expect to find much left about the house or in the cellar when they got home from Portland! (187)*

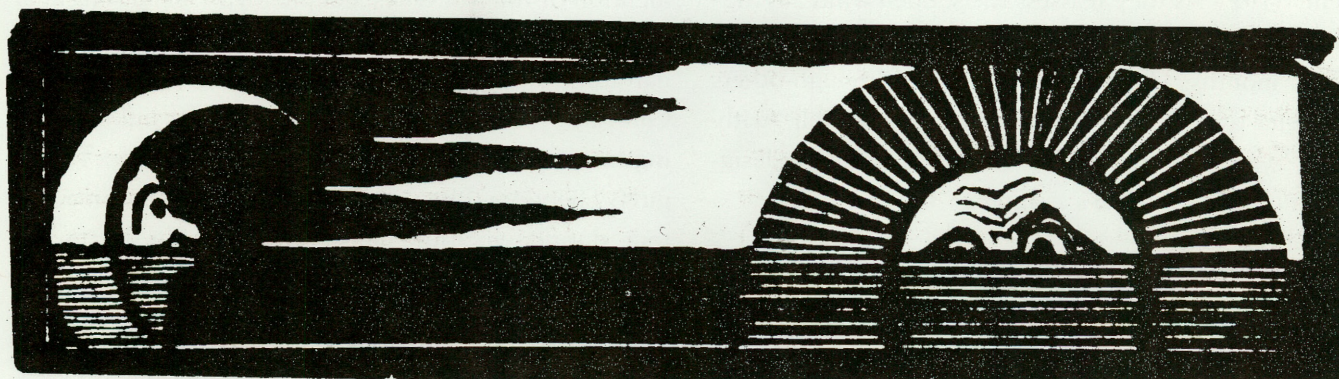
Joe and Ruth chat, but do not spend all their time discussing the Crowes. The day stretches on and the miles fly by. They make such good time, in fact, that they decide to drive into the night if, by so doing, they can sleep in their own beds instead of spending a few hours camped by the side of the road. It is a beautiful night. "So clear was the sky that the Milky Way spanned the heav-

ens in a wide arch of creamy light; and in the north the Great Dipper turned slowly to westward as the evening wore on" (188).

Ruth sees a shooting star, then another; the Old Squire discusses different theories of meteors. The shower continues, becoming almost continuous so that the countryside is lit by "the wild, uncanny illumination" (188). At this point, Grandmother Ruth introduces the idea that again demonstrates how well Stephens's writings reflect the feelings of the times:

religious, but his beliefs do not depend on the religious interpretation of others. In addition, he has a much more curious and analytical approach to life than his wife. He is interested by the facts that some fireballs appear to break apart, whereas others fade away, and in whether or not the meteorites vaporize or reach the ground (as they hear sounds like loud reports or explosions).

One brief sentence suggests that Grandmother Ruth is not alone in her fearful reaction to the falling stars as an eschatological



*"Joseph," she at last exclaimed, solemnly, "do you suppose this means the end of the world? You know what the Bible says about the stars falling then."*

*"No, Ruth," replied the Old Squire, reassuringly, "I do not. These are not the stars, not real stars. They are meteors—small bodies that fall to the earth. They often fall. To-night there happens to be more of them than usual, that's all."*

*"Perhaps the Bible meant meteors, Joseph," grandmother remarked, her apprehensions far from being allayed. "They look like stars, and, oh, they are falling so fast! It may be the end, Joseph."*

*"I guess we shall find that the sun will rise about as usual to-morrow morning," the Old Squire said. (188–89)*

This interchange illuminates the characters of the speakers. Grandmother Ruth is always emotional, strongly religious, and generally fears the worst. Clearly, she is filled with apprehension by the "falling stars," viewing the nighttime display not as announcing the coming of Christ, but rather as the end of the world.

The Old Squire, in comparison, is also deeply

event: "At one house they heard voices singing a hymn; and at another place the people seemed to be at prayer" (190). It is after their arrival at their own home, however, that they witness a most surprising (although comic) result of the phenomenon.

It is after 2 a.m., and would of course still be dark were it not for the still "continuous glare of the star-shower" (191). However, because of the unusual source of light, the Old Squire takes care of the team and Grandmother makes ginger tea, without lighting any candles or lanterns. The Old Squire even takes up a book "to show that he could read by the light of the falling stars" (191). At this point, the final phenomenon of the evening begins.

The couple notices several people moving toward the house; they appear to be carrying objects of varying sizes. One woman is crying. The group moves forward and places its burdens on the porch. It is the first wave of the Crowes, who approach bearing a dye-pot and several sheep pelts, calling up images of bringing offerings to

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lay before an angry and possibly vengeful god.

Other Crowes follow, bringing articles pilfered from the Old Farm over time. These include clothes, an ax, and a hoe; "[s]everal tin pans, a brass kettle, a flail, a sap-yoke, three piggins, numerous hanks of stocking-yarn, in fact a multiplicity of things now arrived, as skulker after skulker stole into the yard" (192).

The Old Squire and Grandmother Ruth cannot help but be amused as they watch the procession. "If the last day was at hand, these wretched people plainly did not wish to be found with all that pilfered property about them!" (192). As they reassess the sudden windfall, the Old Squire and Grandmother Ruth discover items missing for months. This is the reason that, although others may refer to this night as "the night the stars fell," within the Stevens family, it is more often called by a designation of Grandmother's assigning: "the night of restitution."

It would be comforting to think that the events of this night and the Crowes' response indicate sincere repentance so that they become good neighbors who share the values of those around them and contribute to the welfare of the community. Stephens is more realistic than to provide that perhaps desired, but too-easy, ending, a fact evident in the epilogue.

"Elder Cumnor's exhortations had perhaps quickened their consciences," writes Stephens. "Repentance inspired by fright may be better than none, but the effects are not likely to be enduring," he continues, "and a strict regard for the facts compels me to say that when they found the great day had not come, the Crowes soon relapsed into their former modes of life, and had finally to be dealt with in a different way" (192). Unfortunately, no indication can be found elsewhere in Stephens's writings about how the Crowes are dealt with.

In "The Night the Stars Fell," however, they act as exemplars of all those who, on November 13, 1833, not only thought the end of the world was at hand, but were also brought to a realization of their sins, wanting to change their lives for the better quickly enough so that the end of the world would be a positive event that they could greet with gladness. For the Crowes' peace of mind, on this occasion, it was fortunate that the people they had wronged were immediately at hand, so that restitution could indeed be accomplished.

Three of Stephens's stories, then, focus on the phenomena of the Dark Day and the Night the Stars Fell, events extremely important to Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. Given Stephens's knowledge of and interest in the period, including its religious concerns, it is reasonable to assume that he must have been aware of the beginning of Adventism. The fact that he was not only aware, but had some knowledge of the reputation of the early Adventist Church is evident in four of his other stories.

The first, "White Sunday," contains a very brief mention of the Millerites, coupled with something that they were apparently notorious for at the time.<sup>10</sup> The narrator, sometimes called Kit, has just come to the Old Farm (the home of his grandparents), and is learning from his cousins what it is like to live there. Three girls, Theodora, Ellen, and Wealthy, take him on a tour, during which the reader, as well as Kit, learns not only about the geographical features of the farm, but also about the personalities and characters of the people who live there.

They find strawberries blooming here and there. The girls mark these spots because, by the time the fruit develops, tall grass will hide the plants. They remark that their grandfather does not like them to go after strawberries because the grass is difficult to mow when trampled by people picking berries. Gram, in contrast, loves strawberries, and she specifically sends the girls strawberry picking, unless she decides to go herself. She, however, is even less careful of the grass than her granddaughters.

*"And when she goes, I tell you the grass has to catch it!" exclaimed Wealthy. "She just creeps along and crushes down a whole acre of it at one time!"*

*"Yes, Gramp scolded a little about it one day," said Ellen. "He came in at noon and said to grandma, 'Ruth Ann, I should think that the Millerites had been creeping through my east field.' He said that to tease her, because Gram doesn't approve of the Millerites at all." (25)*

This is the only mention of the Millerites in "White Sunday," but this paragraph indicates that even though the Israel Dammon trial occurred when Stephens was only a few months old, he was conversant with the "creeping" controversy.<sup>11</sup>



One passage in "Immersing the Lambs" mentions a number of religions, Adventism being one of them: "The Old Squire and Gram were nominally Congregationalists, and the old meeting-house had once belonged to that sect;" writes Stephens, "but becoming reduced in numbers, and being unable to support a clergyman of that denomination during the entire year, they had allowed the Methodists, and finally the Second Adventists to hold meetings there" (102-3).<sup>12</sup>

*thus breaking up the Congregationalist Society in that town.*

*"I do not take it upon me to say who is right, and who is wrong on these great religious questions," the old gentleman used to remark, when the subject came up. "But I disapprove of sowing the seeds of dissension in any church." However, he used sometimes to go to hear the Adventists' ministers. (108)*

Gram responds to the Old Squire's remark



Already in this short paragraph, the chief argument against Adventists and Adventism is implicit, although it is not spelled out until a few paragraphs later. The question is, Why are the Congregationalists reduced in numbers so they must share their space with other denominations? The answer seems to follow that more aggressive soul-winning techniques have seduced Congregationalists into other denominations. As might be expected, the Old Squire is more curious about and accepts other religions more easily than his spouse, but even he is critical of Adventist tactics.

*The Old Squire, indeed, was by no means a strict sectarian; he attended the Methodist service and sometimes, not often, the Adventist. Gram was more conservative and did not go, as a rule, except when there was a Congregationalist minister, although she always spoke well of the Methodists...*

*The Old Squire's chief objection to the Adventists was, that their preachers had come into the place uninvited, and by their zealous efforts, had caused a considerable number to withdraw from the church,*

that "All Christians are good people" with the statement, "I cannot help believing that we (meaning the Congregationalists) are in the right" (108). It is not surprising, however, that the Old Squire continues to attend Adventist meetings, even if he does not totally endorse either their message or their methods. First, he is tolerant and feels that all should seek salvation in their own way. Second, given his thirst for knowledge (an aspect of his character explored in many other stories), it is hardly surprising that he would not surrender an opportunity to learn, to improve his mind and enlarge his understanding, no matter how that opportunity presents itself.

Perhaps the Old Squire's most direct involvement with the Millerites occurs at the time of the Great Disappointment. In a story titled "Old Hosannah," Stephens reports on the unusual state of mind in Oxford County, Maine, in 1844.<sup>13</sup>

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*Many of the rural people had been led to believe that the world was coming to an end immediately. A celebrated preacher named Miller had so interpreted the prophecies of Scripture, and had even announced the date. He had thousands of converts, and among them were nearly all the old Squire's neighbors. The sincerity of Miller and his followers is unquestioned. So fully did they believe that the world would be destroyed. . . that work generally ceased among them. Those who had farms sold their live stock to drovers and, although winter was at hand, allowed their crops to go unharvested.*" (153)

These circumstances must indeed have caused stress and disruption in the Maine countryside, where neighboring farmers who might routinely disagree on the breed of sheep most likely to thrive in the local climate or the best day for cutting hay now find themselves divided over a far more important question, one that might mark one's salvation or signal the loss of eternal life.

The Old Squire, along with Grandmother Ruth, cannot accept Miller's message, although most of the neighboring farmers have. It is typical of him, however, that, once his decision is made, he does not spend time questioning his or attempting to argue his neighbors out of theirs. Stephens always presents the Old Squire as a practical individual (with the two exceptions of buying horses and investing in questionable money-making schemes). He is immediately concerned about what will happen to these believers (even though, in his view, they are misguided) if, indeed, the Lord does not arrive, following the schedule that they have set forth for him.

"[I]f a mistake had been made, many of their neighbors would be near starvation before the winter had passed," writes Stephens. "The newly cleared land then produced great crops of potatoes. But so convinced were the people that no further food would be needed that they left their potatoes in the ground and spent the time in devotional exercises" (154).

The Old Squire's solution to the problem is a practical one. He sells a horse and yoke of oxen to obtain the money to hire men to harvest not only his own potatoes, but also those from ten surrounding farms. Clearly, he does not have the space available to store this many potatoes, so he and his men bury "over a thousand bushels" in pits they dig for storage (154).

"It proved to be a wise provision," according to Stephens. "The [date] came and passed, and the earth con-

tinued to revolve on its axis as usual.<sup>15</sup> The people who had believed it would stop were soon in deep trouble. Snow had fallen," writes Stephens, "the ground was hard frozen; famine threatened them. Only the old Squire's free potato pits saved them from gnawing hunger" (154).

The story concludes with an account of Thanksgiving in this hungry year. A pond on the Old Farm freezes over, trapping a flock of wild geese, which the Old Squire is able to capture. Most of these are "picked and dressed"; the Old Squire and Grandmother Ruth then distribute them to the nearby farmers who had not expected to have Thanksgiving (and perhaps feel thankful) this year. "Years afterwards Grandmother Ruth used to tell us the good time she and the young old Squire had, going from house to house that snowy morning, handing out geese and potatoes to those credulous, hungry neighbors of theirs" (157).

This anecdote shows the Old Squire to be tolerant, thoughtful, practical, generous, and nonjudgmental. Although he does not agree with the Millerites, he goes out of his way to be supportive. He does not say, "I told you so." Instead, through his own initiative and hard work, he ensures that his neighbors will not starve. He is particularly pleased with the windfall of geese. His grandson remarks, "They were a fun-loving couple in those young days" (157), referring specifically to the early morning jaunt, when the Old Squire and Grandmother Ruth provided Thanksgiving geese for their hungry neighbors.

**T**he final mention of Seventh-day Adventists that occurs in Stephens's works is again a side issue to the plot, but it casts light on an aspect of Adventism not usually featured in the Church's early history—lumbering and lumberjacks. Stephens's "The Hobgobalo-Ginkasaur" is set in Maine at a lumber camp on Lurvey's Stream.<sup>16</sup>

*Lurvey had a crew of nineteen choppers, all from the Petitcodiac region in New Brunswick and all ardent Seventh-day Adventists. That was not quite so remarkable a circumstance as it may seem at first. The Seventh-day Adventists keep Saturday instead of Sunday for their Sabbath and day of rest. No lumber company would hire Seventh-day Adventists to work with others not of that belief on account of the bother and extra expense of having two Sundays in one week. "Seventh-day" workers had therefore*

*to band together enough to make up a full crew and all hire at one place. (153)*

Again, Stephens gives more sociological context than was necessarily his aim. He intends to give the reader a little information about this new religion and move on with the story, but he also gives insight into the times. It is not just the Adventists who are unwilling to work on their "Sabbath," but others, as well. There does not

on their hands with nothing to do" (154).

"Certain lumber companies have tried to introduce services and amusements," claims Stephens, "but not much progress has been made as yet; and at the time I now refer to nothing of the kind had been even attempted. The crew was left to amuse itself in any uproarious way it chose" (154).

Clearly, Stephens is not critical, either of the Adventist loggers' beliefs or of the way



appear to be that much difference between the two groups, except for the day they feel is the true Sabbath.

Stephens gives the Adventists higher marks as a group, however, not because of their religious beliefs, but because of their consistency in following them. "The crew from Petitcodiac had come to Maine in a body and hired for the winter with old Zack Lurvey," writes Stephens. "They were conscientious workers, steady and trustworthy in their habits, which is more than can be said of all loggers. On Saturday," he continues, "they sat round the camp and read their Bibles, but they made up for it by working hard the next day" (153).

Thus, the Adventists are really more to be admired than loggers who do not devote their day of rest to religious study, but who often get into some sort of mischief instead. "Sunday is often a gala day with the loggers in the woods," Stephens begins. "Really, some proper Sunday entertainment ought to be devised for logging crews off in the woods to keep them out of mischief. They have a whole day

they elect to spend their holy day. It is their Adventism, however, that causes the group to become the objects of a practical joke, although they are not selected as victims because of their beliefs. Instead, the perpetrators think the Adventists will be especially naive because they are "lately arrived province men" (154).

Clinton Sparks, an employee of the Old Squire, has been working on a contraption to "haul logs a distance of two miles on a winter road across a swamp" (151). Sparks is a bit of an inventor; he makes a sort of tractor by mounting a wood-burning steam engine on cart wheels. This strange machine actually works, puffing its smoky way wherever Sparks steers it, while he toots the steam whistle he has added.

Sparks tests the machine by running it up to the Old Squire's logging camp (which is not far from Zack Lurvey's). It is Sunday, and Sparks is surprised to hear the crash of falling timber. He asks Cully, the prankish foreman, what is going on. "Aw, it's auld Zack Lurvey's

**On Saturday...**

**they sat round**

**the camp and**

**read their Bibles,**

**but they made**

**up for it by**

**working hard**

**the next day.**

Canadians!" Culley says. "The haythen have lost the run of the days of the wake!" (154).

Sparks and Cully decide to play a practical joke on the men from New Brunswick. They disguise the tractor, covering it with a black tarpaulin over a frame of poles. They give it a ten-foot-tall tail with a tassel. They cut holes in the tarpaulin for eyes and make a long horizontal gash for the mouth; they add a bark nose and ears. "They had no end of a good time making it all that afternoon—a nice Sunday job!—and they had it done by sunset" (155).<sup>17</sup> They christen this contraption the hobgobalo-ginkasaur.

Cully runs to prepare "the unsuspecting provincials" (155) by rushing into their camp and warning them of the strange beast heading their way. In his Irish accent (probably almost indecipherable to his hearers), he adjures them to run, telling them that the hobgobalo-ginkasaur, which ate two of his men, is coming and that they have not a moment to lose.

The Canadians do not immediately panic, but they go outside to look and listen, wondering what Culley's hysterics can mean. "Like steady sober men of good conscience, they stood wondering and for some time wholly unafraid" (156), but that is before they see the monster advancing steadily toward them, with every apparent intention of doing them harm.

"It is an axiom among military men that no army runs like an army of brave soldiers when once it is routed!" Stephens informs his readers. "The Canadians stood their ground and stared until the hobgobalo-ginkasaur reached the stream bank and started to cross over where they were. Without word or outcry of any sort they suddenly broke and ran. And, oh, how they ran!" (156).

Needless to say, this chaotic scene has consequences. "Old man Lurvey couldn't get his crew to go back to their camp. The 'Seventh-day' men refused utterly to enter the woods again till Old Zack himself had gone up and investigated" (157). Although the lumberjacks initially refuse to talk, Lurvey finds out the truth at last.

As is evident in a number of Stephens's other stories, Lurvey and the Old Squire are often on opposite sides of disputes. On this occasion, Lurvey sues him "for damages on account of loss of time by his logging crew" (157). The Old Squire settles out of court for fifty dollars and says nothing to Sparks. Later, however, the two jokesters take responsibility by repaying the Old Squire the amount he had paid Lurvey because of their prank.

Through the stories of Charles Asbury Stephens (and, most likely, other regional authors of the time whose works may now be forgotten), it is possible to see how people around the early Seventh-day Adventists viewed them. Stephens himself gives his readers four views: the creeping Millerites satirized in the Maine newspapers; the aggressive proselytizers who cause consternation in religious circles by attracting members who belong to other congregations; the individuals who believe so strongly in Christ's return that they make no provision for themselves and their families past the date when they know he will appear; and, finally, the hard-working men steadfast in their faith and sincere in their actions, although they may possibly be a little naive.

Perhaps even more important, however, are the views Stephens gives the reader of non-Adventist Christians at the time, as events that they fear may signal the end of the world also confound them. It is obvious from stories of his set in the context of the Dark Day and the Night the Stars Fell that heeding these natural, yet unnatural events and regarding them as charged with eschatological significance was not limited to our religious forbears, but was held by many.

Stephens underlines this unifying response with a short anecdote concerning the Dark Day, which he includes in the second story titled "The Dark Day," dealing with the Connecticut Legislature:

*The Legislature had gone into session, but when it grew too dark to see the face of the Speaker, many members became alarmed; and someone hastily made a motion to adjourn—as Judgment Day was probably at hand. Whereupon Mr. Davenport arose and said,*

*"Mr. Speaker, this is either Judgment Day or it is not. If it is, I wish to be found doing the duty which the people of Connecticut have sent me here to do. If it is not, there is no need for adjournment. I move you, sir, that candles be sent for and that we proceed with our deliberations." (3)*

Davenport's response to the adjournment motion is not just a reaction to what he may view as religious hysteria. He is, instead, stating his personal credo: that each of us has our place to fill and our duty to do. The Lord can expect no more of us, except that when he comes we are doing the best job that we can in the place appointed for us.

Windows like these into the minds of contemporary non-Adventists, which Charles Asbury Stephens provided,

cause us to feel a kinship with them, as well as with the pioneers of our denomination, with all, in fact, who observe, wonder, and seek to understand the transcendent. ■

## Notes and References

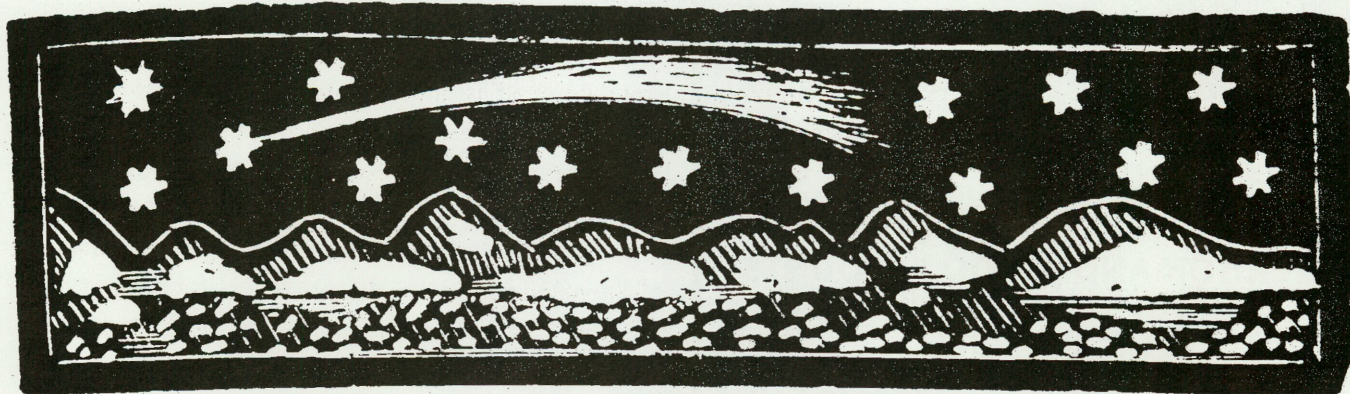
1. Other biblical references refer to the time of the end in a similar fashion, but in less specific terms: "For...there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in

the clock has stopped and it is actually evening (503).

3. "The Dark Day" was originally published in the November 22, 1906, issue of *The Youth's Companion*.

4. Stevens is the family name of the author, Charles Asbury Stephens. When Stephens began writing for publication, he was apparently afraid that his efforts might be unworthy and embarrass his family; therefore, he chose to alter the spelling of his name.

5. Stephens also mentions the name *Morrill* in his short story, "Lost in the Encyclopedia": "The fact was that the



divers places" (Matt. 24:7); "And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven" (Luke 21:11). Luke's fuller version ("fearful sights and great signs") could easily be taken to refer to the Dark Day, and so forth.

2. Another story published in *The Youth's Companion* four years before Stephens's "The Dark Day" also demonstrates the interest of readers in the subject. In this story by Bertha E. Bush, "An Unhistoric Dark Day" (Oct. 16, 1902), two children are left alone for a night and two days. On the first evening, they read to pass the time. Jimmy's book tells of a day when "[c]andles were lighted in the houses. The fowls retired to roost; the cocks were crowing all around as at the break of day; objects could not be distinguished but at very little distance; and everything bore the appearance and gloom of night." He is, of course, reading an account of May 19, 1780. The following day, the children are amazed when the day turns extremely dark just about noon. "'Why! Why-ee!' cried Jennie in astonishment. 'The chickens are going to roost. Jimmy, it's another Dark Day!'" Unlike the Morrills, Jimmy and Jennie are delighted that they are present for an event this historic. They are extremely disappointed when they discover that

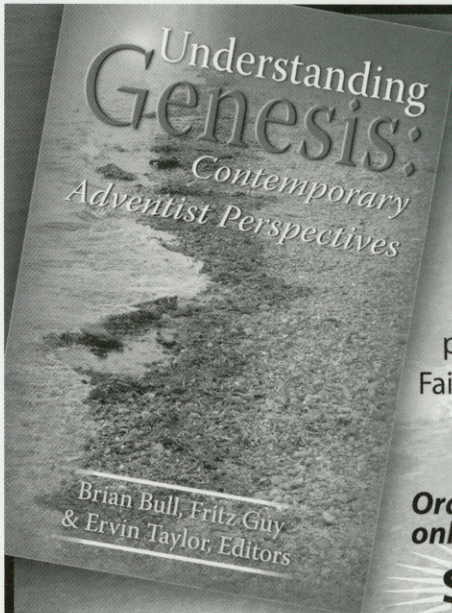
Old Squire belonged to a generation of men—the Hamlins, the Fessendens, the Morrills, the Washburns—who did honor to their native state and rose to eminence in political life. With better opportunities for education in his youth, I feel sure he would have taken his place among the best of them" (195–96).

6. Current explanations for the phenomenon are fairly evenly split between: (1) smoke from extensive forest fires; and (2) no explanation fitting the circumstances that contemporary observers reported.

7. This statement is confirmed by many contemporary accounts. However, May 19, 1780, is generally spoken of as the darkest of the dark days.

8. Stephens's second story titled "The Dark Day" was originally published in the August 1928 issue of *The Youth's Companion*. Slightly extended to provide context and continuity, and retitled "When and Why They Came," it was later included in a compilation of Stephens's stories, *My Folks in Maine*. Regaining its original title ("The Dark Day") and without the additions, it was republished in 1967 in the Stephens anthology, *Grandfather's Broadaxe and Other Stories of a Maine Farm Family*. In the interest of clarity, I distinguish between the first and second versions of "The Dark Day" in the text.

**The Lord can  
expect no more  
of us, except  
that when  
he comes we are  
doing the best  
job that we can  
in the place  
appointed for us.**



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9. "The Night the Stars Fell" was originally published in the April 18, 1907, issue of *The Youth's Companion*.

10. In *When Life Was Young at the Old Farm in Maine* (Boston: The Youth's Companion, 1912).

11. Because of newspaper coverage of the

Israel Dammon trial in March 1845 (in the *Piscataquis Farmer* among others), Maine residents would have been well aware of the group's displays of religious enthusiasm, which included hugging and kissing, shouting, testifying, and creeping. Ronald Graybill addressed the last in a roundtable discussion of four theologians and historians: "The crawling, believe it or not, had a Biblical basis. If you are going to heaven, you have to humble yourself as a little child, and [Matthew 18:1-6] was the text they used. Children crawl, and so some used that to show that they were ready for Jesus' coming..." Rennie Schoepflin, ed., "Scandal or Rite of Passage: Historians on the Dammon Trial," *Spectrum* 17.5 (Aug. 1987): 41.

12. The story appears in *When Life Was Young*. Although *Millerites* is the term we most often hear today, Second Adventists was also applied to the religious entity that would become the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The official name was adopted in the fall of 1860.

13. In *My Folks in Maine* (Norway, Me.: The Old Squire's Book Store, 1934). Because of the inclusion of religious issues in this particular story, a reader might assume that the title bears specific reference to this. If so, it is in a satirical sense, since Hosannah is a goose, so named because she takes on herself the duty of sentry for the Old Farm's flock of geese, warning of any danger she detects.

14. Stephens uncharacteristically gets an important detail wrong here, citing the date of the Great Disappointment (although he does not give the event a name) as October 21, 1843.

15. Stephens again mentions October 21 as the date of the Great Disappointment.

16. "The Hobgobalo-Ginkasaur" was originally published in the October 12, 1922, issue of *The Youth's Companion*.

17. On the previous page, Stephens had suggested that "proper Sunday entertainment" be carried out in logging camps (154). Clearly, this type of activity was not what he had in mind.

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