

HUMOR



Samuel Sewall

(1652-1730)

from *Diary*

[Sewall is the only judge at the infamous Witchcraft Trials of 1692 who recanted and apologized in public. His first wife died in 1717. He courted the widow Denison unsuccessfully, then married Abigail Tilley in 1719, but she died within a year, as he says, “to our great astonishment, especially mine.”]

“September 30 [1720]. Mr. Colman’s lecture. Daughter Sewall acquaints Madam Winthrop that if she please to be within at 3 p.m., I would wait on her. She answered she would be at home.

October 1... Saturday. I dine at Mr. Stoddard’s; from thence I went to Madam Winthrop’s just at 3. Spake to her, saying my loving wife died so soon and suddenly, ‘twas hardly convenient for me to think of marrying again; however, I came to this resolution, that I would not make my court to any person without first consulting with her. Had a pleasant discourse about 7 (seven) single persons sitting in the fore-seat...[those eligible for marriage sat in the front of the church].

October 3... Waited on Madam Winthrop again; ‘twas a little while before she came in. Her daughter Noyes being there alone with me, I said I hoped my waiting on her mother would not be disagreeable to her. She answered she should not be against that... At last Madam Winthrop came too. After a considerable time I went up to her and said if it might not be inconvenient, I desired to speak with her. She assented and spake of going into another room; but Mr. Airs and Mrs. Noyes presently rose up and went out, leaving us there alone. There I ushered in discourse from the names in the fore-seat; at last I prayed that Katherine [Mrs. Winthrop] might be the person assigned for me. She instantly took it up in the way of denial, as if she had caught at an opportunity to do it, saying she could not do it before she was asked. Said that was her mind unless she should change it, which she believed she should not; could not leave her children. I expressed my sorrow...prayed her consideration, and asked her when I should wait on her again.

October 6th... A little after 6 p.m. I went to Madam Winthrop’s... Madam seemed to harp upon the same string. Must take care of her children; could not leave that house and neighborhood where she had dwelt so long... I gave her a piece of...cake and gingerbread wrapped up in a clean sheet of paper; told

her...my daughter Judith was gone from me and I was more lonesome--might help to forward one another in our journey to Canaan [heaven]..

October 10th... In the evening I visited Madam Winthrop, who treated me with a great deal of courtesy; wine, marmalade...

October 11th... I writ a few lines to Madam Winthrop... I thank you for your unmerited favors of yesterday; and hope to have the happiness of waiting on you tomorrow...

October 12... Madam Winthrop's countenance was much changed from what 'twas on Monday, looked dark and lowering.... I got my chair in place, had some converse, but very cold and indifferent to what 'twas before. Asked her to acquit me of rudeness if I drew off her glove. Inquiring the reason, I told her 'twas great odds between handling a dead goat and a living lady. Got it off.... Told her the reason why I came every other night was lest I should drink too deep draughts of pleasure. She had talked of canary [wine]; her kisses were to me better than the best canary....

October 16... I visited Madam Winthrop, who treated me courteously, but not in clean linen as sometimes. She said she did not know whether I would come again or no. I asked her how she could so impute inconstancy to me. (I had not visited her since Wednesday night, being unable to get over the indisposition received by the treatment received that night...)

October 19... Visited Madam Winthrop... Was courteous to me, but took occasion to speak pretty earnestly about my keeping a coach. I said t'would cost 100 [pounds] per annum; she said 'twould cost but 40...

October 20... Madam Winthrop not being at lecture, I went thither first; found her very serene... She told me Madam Usher had been there, and said the coach must be set on wheels, and not be rusting. She spake something of my needing a wig... Asked her if she would be within tomorrow night... She said she could not tell whether she should or no. I took leave. As were drinking at the governor's, he said in England the ladies minded little more than that they might have money, and coaches to ride in. I said, 'And New England brooks its name.' At which Mr. Dudley smiled. Governor said they were not quite so bad here.

October 21... I go to Madam Winthrop's... She received me courteously. I asked when our proceedings should be made public; she said they were like to be no more public than they were already. Offered me no wine that I remember. I rose up at 11 o'clock to come away, saying I would put on my coat; she offered not to help me. I prayed her that Juno [servant] might light me home; she opened the shutter and said 'twas pretty light abroad, Juno was weary and gone to bed. So I came home by star light as well as I could....

October 24... Stopped at Madam Winthrop's... I was come to inquire whether she could find in her heart to leave that house and neighborhood, and go and dwell with me at the South End; I think she said softly, 'Not yet.' I told her it did not lie in my lands to keep a coach.... As to a periwig, my best and greatest friend [God], I could not possibly have a greater, began to find me with hair before I was born, and had continued to do so every since; and I could not find it in my heart to go to another.

October 31... At night I visited Madam Winthrop...and found she was gone...

November 2... Gave her [Madam Winthrop] about 1/2 pound of sugar almonds... She seemed pleased with them, asked what they cost. Spake of giving her a hundred pounds per annum if I died before her. Asked her what sum she would give me, if she should die first. Said I would give her time to consider of it... Gave me a glass or two of canary...

November 4th... I asked Madam what fashioned necklace I should present her with; she said, 'None at all'.... She said she could not change her condition, she had said so from the beginning, could not be so far from her children, the lecture. Quoted the Apostle Paul affirming that a single life was better than a

married. I answered that was for the present distress [sexual desire]. Said she had not pleasure in things of that nature as formerly. I said, 'You are the fitter to make me a wife'....

November 7th... I went to Mad. Winthrop... She set me an armed chair and cushion; and so the cradle was between her armed chair and mine. Gave her the remnant of my almonds; she did not eat of them as before, but laid them away... I told her I loved her, and was so fond as to think that she loved me. She said [she] had a great respect for me...

Took leave of her. As came down the steps she bid me to have a care. Treated me courteously.... I did not bid her draw off her glove as sometime I had done. Her dress was not so clean as sometime it had been.

Jehovah jireh! [God will provide]

The American Puritans (Anchor 1956)
ed. Perry Miller