

# **MISS TOOSEY'S MISSION**

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Miss Toosey's Mission by Evelyn Whitaker

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**EVELYN WHITAKER**

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BY

THE AUTHOR OF "LADDIE."

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1878.

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### CHAPTER I.

MISS TOOSEY always wore a black silk dress on Sunday, and went three times to church. Morning, afternoon, and evening, as soon as the bell changed at the quarter, that black silk dress came out of Miss Toosey's little house in North Street, turned the corner into High Street, crossed the Market-place, passed under the archway into the churchyard, in at the west door, and up the middle aisle, past the free seats, which occupy the lower end of Martel church, and stopped at the second pew on the left-hand side, one sitting in which has been rented by Miss Toosey for many years. This pew is immediately in front of

the churchwardens' seat, where those two dignitaries sit majestically, with a long rod placed conveniently on either hand, ready to be seized at a moment's notice, to execute judgment on youthful offenders in the free seats, though the well-known fact, that generations of paint and varnish have made them fixtures, somewhat takes off from the respect and awe felt for them. Miss Toosey is short, and the pew-door has a tendency to stick; and when you have a Bible, prayer-book, hymn-book, spectacle-case, and umbrella in your hands, you cannot enter into a struggle on equal terms; and so when Mr. Churchwarden Wyatt happens to be in church in time, he leans over and opens the pew-door for Miss Toosey, "and very kind of him too, a most gentlemanly man Mr. Wyatt is, my dear."

The black silk was quite a part of Sunday in Miss Toosey's mind, and therefore holy, to a certain extent; she would have considered it disrespectful to the day to put on any other dress, and no stress of weather



could prevent her wearing it; indeed, she thought it decidedly a want of trust in Providence to fear that heavy rain or deep snow might injure it. She would pin up the skirt inside out round her waist, with a reckless disregard of appearances, so that you could hardly guess she had any dress on at all under her shawl; but nothing would have induced her to put on another. Of late years, too, she had not felt it quite right to wear it on week-days when she was asked out to tea, it seemed to her inappropriate, like reading a regular Sunday book on week-days, which has something profane about it. It had been through many vicissitudes; not even Miss Toosey herself could accurately recall what it was in its original form, and the first distinct incident in its existence was the black crape with which it was trimmed, in respect to the memory of Miss Toosey's father, old Toosey, the parish doctor. This was fifteen years ago, and since then it had been unpicked and re-made several times, turned,

sponged, dipped, French-chalked, cleaned, trimmed and altered, till it would have required vast ingenuity to do anything fresh to it.

As the black silk was part of Sunday to Miss Toosey, so was Miss Toosey part of Sunday to many of the Martel people. The Miss Purts, the draper's daughters, in the Market-place, knew that it was time to put on their smart bonnets (the latest Paris fashion), when they saw Miss Toosey pass the window, so as to ensure their clattering into church on their high heels, tossing and giggling, not later than the *Venite*.

Old Budd, the clerk, with his white beard and wooden leg, always said "Good-morning, Miss Toosey; fine day, mum," as he stumped past her pew-door on his way to the vestry, which made her feel rather uncomfortable, as he said it out loud, and it did not seem quite right; but then Mr. Budd is such a good man, and, being a church official, no doubt he has a right to behave just as he pleases. Even Mr.

Dodson, the late curate, after baptizing fifteen pugnacious babies, all crying lustily, said, as he passed Miss Toosey on his way back to the reading-desk, wiping the beads of perspiration from his good-natured red face, "Warm work, Miss Toosey."

I think that both Mr. Peters the rector, and Mr. Glover the curate, would quite have lost their place in the service if Miss Toosey's seat had been empty, as they neither of them could have preached with comfort without the fat, red-velvet cushion with the tassels, on which they laid their books.

I do not think it ever occurred to Miss Toosey that there was anything amiss in Martel church or its services. She was proud of the fine, old, grey-stone tower, which had been built when men gave willingly of their best for the service of God, and so built "for glory and for beauty;" and she loved the roof of the nave, which was rich in oak carving bleached white by time, with angels and