

SINGING CONVENTIONS

I attended my first singing convention when I was two. Of course, I don't remember a thing about it, but I've learned that I was the center of attraction. The Goreville Methodist Church was undertaking a grand remodeling program. Until then, stoves had been used to heat the Sanctuary. Now it had been decided that a basement should be dug, and a furnace installed. Parishioners volunteered to help dig the basement. Dirt was carefully removed around each supporting pillar. Later, they reasoned, a new post would be installed on the concrete floor, and the dirt and old supporting pillar could be removed.

It was decided that a singing convention would be a convenient way of raising funds for financing the undertaking. They did not calculate on the wide attendance or the weakened condition of the supports, which stood on little islands of dirt in the newly dug basement. The anticipated Sunday came. The crowd soon filled the church and overflowed to the lawn surrounding it. When the music knew no bounds, and when enthusiasm was at its highest, an awful thing happened! The dirt under the pillars began to crumble because of the added weight! As a result, the floor gave way, and people and pews began to scoot toward the center aisle. Unfortunately my mother and I were a part of the scooting congregation! She 'came out with a Johnson County yell'. She said, "Save my baby!" Then I was handed from one to another 'till I reached the window, and was tossed into the waiting arms of a young man outside. His name was Ralla Wiggins, and he always reminded me of that flight each time I met him. No one was seriously hurt. The offering was especially generous.... We did have to repair the church, and besides we felt the wrath of God had descended upon us. The tempo of the music that day reached proportions that even singing Methodists weren't accustomed to.

I was only two, but I learned the importance of a good 'understanding' and even yet when we sing "The Church's One Foundation", I rather wonder if we shouldn't add a verse to include the physical foundation as well as the spiritual!

Several years elapsed and I was now a member of that same church. Again it was time for redecorating, and I was asked to help do the job. Any teenager would have jumped at the chance to earn \$1.00 per day as helper for the older member of the congregation who'd been engaged to do the work. He was tall and stately, with white hair. He reminded me of pictures of Moses or the Apostles, and I felt as if I had a divine commission to do the work for the church. I'd been asked to do a mural on the kindergarten classroom wall also, which gave my innate abilities a chance to blossom forth. Michael Angelo, himself, couldn't have been more proud. While I was in this etherial state of mind, I was suddenly shocked back to reality. Imagine my surprise when my co-worker hit his finger with the hammer and swore with such gusto that the rafters fairly rang! I said nothing, but my gasp and look of astonishment prompted an explanation of his unorthodox behavior. He most eloquently stated that some things were 'cussing matters'. I never found that anywhere in The Methodist Discipline, but I'm inclined to agree that there is some truth in the statement.

I've referred to the Presbyterians already. By today's standards those from my hometown would be considered religious fanatics. They worshipped in a large frame building which stood West of the road where Old Town met New. Their church was plain and austere as any self respecting Calvinistic church should have been. A hall occupied the upper floor. Perhaps that is why we called it 'Old Hall Church'. The church taught that it was wrong to cook on Sunday. Worse yet, one couldn't even buy a loaf of bread when the bread box was empty. As a practicing Presbyterian, my aunt Alice had prepared baked chicken for Sundays dinner on the Saturday before. She then went to help uncle Tom in the grocery store they owned. Farmers spent the day in town on Saturday. They came by wagon and hitched their teams on the racks provided near the store. They loafed in the stores and on the streets, catching up on news of the world, the state, and the community. Some stores had furniture for sale, in the dry goods side, and country women loved to congregate here. Here they nursed their babies and changed them. They felt no inhibitions about exposing their

breasts as their greedy babies enjoyed the warm meals provided at all hours. A few modest ones, spread a lacy handkerchief over thir exposed bosoms. We town boys hadn't been taught much about ~~himan~~ anatomy in school, but a hurried trip through the 'dry goods side' and a little observation on one's own part left one with the feeling that he was not entirely a stranger to such matters.

While my Aunt was busy selling groceries, my cousin Gail and I played in her back yard. Gail was her grandson, which made it alright to be there. Hunger prompted and we went to investigate her kitchen. The table was 'spread' which means that food was on the table and a cloth covered it. Dissappointed with our discovery there, Gail suggested we go to the pantry. Here we found the baked chicken, and we forthwith confiscated it. When cousin Murriel returned home she found two greasy boys, an upset house and a well fed dog on the back porch. We found that one baked chicken was too much for two small boys. I could tell you the grimy details, but I'll only say my mother was baking chicken well into the evening to replace the one aunt Alice lost.