

*revival
at
head
of
flint
church*

We boys always wanted to visit the Head of Flint Church when a revival meeting was on, but Pap would not let us go. He said there was a rough crowd down there and we might get into trouble. That made us want to go worse than ever. Head of Flint, a Wine-brenarian church five or six miles south of our house, sat on a hillside near the headwaters of Flint creek,

from which it got its name. One winter Pap got elected to serve on the grand jury, so we just up and went to visit Head of Flint one night. We picked a good night, for they had one of the biggest times that night they ever had.

In those days no protracted meeting was any good without testimonies. When that part of the service was ordered, the folks began to get up — one after another — and tell their religious experiences. Some of these were plum whoppers, but these folks had told them so often they believed them, so we didn't hold it against them.

The night we went to Head of Flint, Alex Sheppard gave his experience, and went into the thing in dead earnest. "It was twenty-three years, six months, and four days ago, when I was a choppin' wood out in the timber, all alone, and the Spirit came along and lep' on me like a dog. I tried to git away and keep on in my sins, but was overcome by the Spirit, and laid there 'til the folks found me, all out of my head and feverish, and carried me home. I have been under the blood ever since, brothers, and washed as white as any wool you ever saw."

Just then some mischievous fellow broke in and asked him if he didn't mean as white as dog's hair. He said that if Alex started in likening the Lord's spirit to a dog, he ought to stay with it, hair, hide, tail, and all.

Then a lot of crazy talk started and as many as twenty men and a few women got mixed up in it. Aunt Sarah Armstrong started to sing, and Old Noddy Brooks

jumped up on a seat and yelled, "Let us pray!" About that time somebody kicked the stovepipe down. Smoke began pouring out into the room, setting everybody to coughing and sneezing, 'til they had to open the windows to get their breath. It was nearly zero weather and the wind blew out all the coal oil lamps. The women began to scream, and the children started to cry. Everybody edged toward the doors to go home and the meeting ended right then and there.

Outside, the Lowell fellows got to quarreling with some of the Head of Flint crowd. Soon they got into a fight, and several of them had black eyes, peeled noses, and were generally bunged up. It was an awful thing to happen at church, and we thought it would end the revival for good. It didn't, though, and the next night there was a bigger crowd than ever. Experiences were told that outdid Alex Sheppard's by a good ways. Pierkses two boys were there and told us afterwards that if anything ever happened to them like the things the Head of Flint folks bragged about the Lord doing, they would never quit running as long as they had a breath in them. But we had all we wanted of Head of Flint and never went back. Anyway, Pap would have made it warm for us if he ever found out.

But the bulliest place of all to attend a meeting was at Trinity Church, three miles west of our house. It was a Primitive Methodist crowd, with more "religion" to the square inch than anybody I ever saw. It was better than a circus and never cost a cent.

Every night at a protracted meeting the house would

be jammed to the doors, with a lot standing outside looking in the windows. The service generally would start off with singing five or six songs, followed by a season of prayer. Many of these prayers had been learned by heart and were rattled off without a break. Others seemed to be made up as they went along, and were pretty poor. Sometimes two would get to praying at once, and maybe before they got through a third and fourth one would join in, and you couldn't understand a thing that was said. Old Brother Cartman said the Lord could understand even if everybody felt moved to pray at once. We always doubted that a little.

After another song or two, the preacher would name a text and preach a short sermon, made up mostly of exhortations calling for people to repent of their sins and turn to the Lord. Pretty soon the working members would get enough of that and start up a song, and people were begged to come to the altar for prayers. A dozen or so of the old standbys would go forward and drop down on their knees at the mourners' bench, and start to pray as loud as they could talk. Then for half an hour or so — between singing, praying, exhorting, and all — a dozen or so passed through the congregation hauling at the folks to get them to the altar. Lots of folks did go forward every night, and the workers labored with them, as they called it, trying to "bring them through."

Along about ten o'clock somebody would jump up from the mourners' bench and yell out "I've got it, I've got it," maybe six or seven times in a row.

"Amen, amen, amen," would come from all over the

front part of the church. Then somebody would start to jump up and down, and some more would join in right away, and they would shout and hug one another like they were tickled most to death. They would flock around the new convert as thick as flies, and shake his hand and pound him on the back, and say, "Glory hallelujah, praise the Lord!"

Then about that time another one would "come through" and more people would shout and clap that one on the back. Pretty soon there would be a general breaking out — like the measles — and every member would be singing, or shouting, or praying, or exhorting, or prancing around the aisles, until they got worked up to a regular frenzy. We tried not to miss anything but it was a tough job, for there was so much going on all the time that a person needed two or three pairs of eyes to take it all in.

Along about eleven o'clock somebody started what they called "the Holy Pilgrimage," kind of a grand march up and down the aisles and around the church. This marching never seemed to interfere with the half dozen other things doing on. Everybody did whatever popped into his head, and it got to be a regular picnic. By that time several of them would be in a trance, flat on the floor, limp as a rag, their eyes set and just plum gone. That was held to to be the farthest anybody could go in grace, but it never seemed like much to me. Then their families carried them out to the bobsleds and took them home. The doxology ended the meeting 'til

the next night, when they would all be back at it as hard as ever.

But Trinity Church never got any bigger, because these converts nearly all backslid during the summer and fall to furnish the timber for the next revival to work on. They joined church every winter as sure as there was a revival. And their joining, even the fourth or fifth time, seemed to tickle the working members just as much as ever. Nobody ever seemed to question the sincerity of their antics.

Our family never got mixed up in those meetings except as spectators. For one thing, it was all contrary to Pap and Mother's style of religion. They had been brought up in the Campbellite Church, and held that religion was in the head instead of the feet and that there was no truth in those hair-raising religious testimonies. Out at Trinity when they asked all who wanted to go to Heaven to stand up, we sat there just like heathens. And we were too, as far as their religion was concerned. But it was a lot of fun to watch what went on at Trinity, and we went as often as our folks would let us.