

—Country Philosopher—

Visits to the church in the wildewood

Did you ever go to a Bush Meeting?

Every summer, when I was young, my family went to Purcellville, Va. to take part in a social gathering sponsored by several small churches.

There was a beautiful grove of oak trees that served as the meeting place for these religious festivities. The underbrush had been removed and the forest floor was covered with lush, green grass. A small wooden church stood in the middle of the grove and picnic tables ran for as far as the eye could see.

From 10 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock that evening there would be continual church services. Visiting preachers came from miles around to give their short sermons. Various choirs and quartets performed and the glade rang with the stirring hymns associated with the old-time religion.

It was a fine day for the old folks. Meeting friends, discussing crops, and finding that religion was certainly not the gloomy hell and brimstone

some people tried to make it. The day, dedicated to God, was fun-filled. Each and every person who attended that Bush Meeting was filled with the love and friendship that Jesus so wanted us all to have. There were handshakes, and kisses, the roar of laughter, and most glorious warmth of Christian fellowship.

And if this joyous meeting was beautiful for the parents, it was simply a land of fantasy for the children. We would arrive at the meeting grounds in our 1929 Ford. The trip from Washington had been uneventful if you consider eight flat tires as being inconsequential. We drove our old car into a weed-filled parking area. It was wonderful for a city boy to see the means of transportation those farmers had used in getting to the meeting grounds. There were wagons, and buggies, a few old trucks, and scores of spirited horses.

My mother and father would immediately enter the little church and I was free to roam that grove. I passed

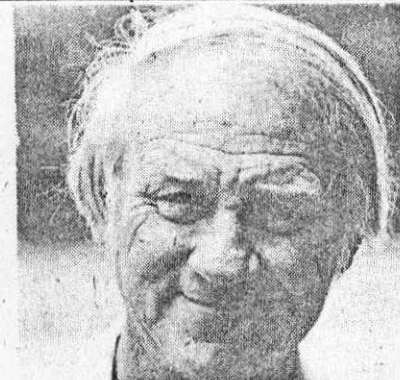
hundreds of tables and each table groaning with delicious food. Huge, brown hams, fried chicken, potato salad, pies and cakes, homemade bread, pickles and beans and candy and potato chips. Large containers of iced-tea, or lemonade, and it was impossible to go hungry or thirsty.

There was always a pretty girl in her pigtails and gingham dress who blushed when you looked at her, and...by golly...you fell madly in love for the tenth time since you arrived.

We children would run through the forest giddy with joyous feelings. We picked berries, threw stones in the brook, and constantly answered the pleasant question, "And whose little boy are you?"

Daddy and Mama could come from the church, their faces flushed with the glory of their religious conviction. They searched out relatives, made new friends, and proudly displayed me to everyone they met.

It was in that shaded grove that I first encountered those beautiful



blessings that have given such meaning to my life. The wonder of nature and God's creativity. The human heart with its understanding and compassion.

When we drove home late in the evening I lay exhausted on the back seat of the car. My father would be softly humming an off-key tune and my mother would be cuddled close to him. There was a warm glow in that car. A warm glow of family love, and the spirit of God, that kept us company on our long journey home.

Those Bush Meetings were many, many years ago. The wars, the greed, the prejudice and hate that I have encountered since have dimmed my opinion of man.

But I have never given up on the potential of man.

We can be so magnificent if we try.