

ST. JAMES A.M.E.

Miscellaneous Notes

South Norfolk

Tower
There was a bell in the church at old St. James that rang out to summon the people to worship on Sunday morning. We remember the inharmonious sound of church bells simultaneously ringing from all around the town -- some far, some near, some muffled, others clear. Here and there we heard a chime which played a familiar sacred tune which the other accompanying chimes nearby emphasized as if in counterpoint. It all created an atmosphere of serenity and worshipfulness throughout the community.

At our house, however, it was a signal to get on a little faster with the dressing for Sunday School and the preparation for Sunday morning breakfast and family worship at the table, a ritual which was never omitted in Rev. Berry's household. As a matter of fact, preparation for the Sabbath had really begun on Saturday with special house cleaning and the performance of all routine daily tasks so that only the chores of absolute necessity would have to be carried out on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Father had spent Saturday afternoon in the quietude of his study preparing his sermon, or to use his own words -- "getting myself together." This was a familiar phrase which meant to us come anything short of fire or high ^{hell} water, he was not to be disturbed. The last things for us at night were likely to be polishing five or six pairs of shoes, a bath, and alternating glances at the Sunday School lesson ^{with} and the funnies.

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Mother was the first to rise on Sunday mornings as on other mornings. Hers was the responsibility of completing Sunday dinner, which had already been started the night before, with the setting of rolls to rise. Breakfast for eight had had to be prepared before Lula went off to Hampton Institute. Then there were only seven but relieved mother of a strong right arm. Usually it was a matter of all hands on deck to make up beds, set the dining room table and get dressed. After all four boys had ~~four~~ individual four-in-hand knots to tie; in winter, four pairs of high shoes to lace, four pairs of black ribbed stocking to pull up to the knee while eight legs of shrunken white union suits were pushed down to the ankles. If we were lucky, there were unbroken straps to anchor them underfoot and eight elastic garters to hold stockings above our knees. We could now don our knickers with matching coat in time to answer the first call to breakfast.

We all assembled together. Father, dressed in ministerial attire with his Bible in hand, sat at the head of the table, and Mother, the only one not dressed for Church, sat at the opposite end. Then followed Scripture reading, prayer and breakfast, and we were off to Sunday School at 9:15. By eleven o'clock, Mother had joined us at church for the adult services.

We have vivid memories of the impressive Christian services at old St. James. We can close our eyes now and see that immaculately robed choir with its extraordinarily beautiful and harmonious voices, sing the Processional, "Come Ye That Love the Lord, and Let Your Joys Be Known. Rejoice, Give Thanks, and Sing," with Mary Simmons, leading the sopranos, Eva Archer ^{the} the altos, Bud McCoy or Willie Falkord the tenors, and Frank Greenleaf ^{Bell}, the bassos.

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Rev. L. L. Berry, the pastor, in dramatic and reverent tones then announced the hymn "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" to be sung by both the choir and congregation. Prayer offered by an officer of the Church was a Methodist custom in those days. So on this Sunday morning Brother Painter (?) was called upon to lead the Congregation in prayer:

"Heavenly Father, we bow before thy throne of grace to ask Thy divine blessings upon the members of this congregation and their families. We thank Thee for life and health and strength for the privilege to worship Thee."

"Come Heavenly Dove With All Thy quickening Power, etc."

"Bow our heads below our hearts and our hearts below our knees. Thou art the same unchangeable God who spoke to the wave, and the wave obeyed You. You spoke to the sea, and the Sea calmed." "Calm'd Away" away (?)

"Listen to the Lamb," by Nathaniel Dett _____