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127 Ninth Avenue, North

Nashville, Tennessee

UN-CONVENTIONALITIES

By J. W. Storer

It will be kept in mind that what is here set down are the opinions and views of the writer - and may or may not coincide with the opinions and views of others.

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Last year at Oklahoma City the "meet in Chicago" was promoted by a group which had skill, if not finesse. The plea was "plenty of hotel space," and "ample room at the Coliseum." Then too, it was urged that Chicago needed us. So we went to the Windy City - we came, we saw, but did we conquer? I ask you!

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There were 17 Conventions in Chicago during the week Southern Baptists were in session. Three of them had their headquarters in the Stevens Hotel, where we had ours. Not all of them were as dry as the Southern Baptist Convention. What you mean "dry"? I mean not wet!

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The first session was held on Tuesday night. It was Foreign Mission night, and people were turned away - the only time this was true during the Convention. The chairs were very uncomfortable, and after three long hours I was seated, slatted, and satiated.

An unusual feature was a sound picture, "Advance in Africa," and it was indeed a moving picture.

The addresses were good, tho it was difficult to hear them. Most of all I found the brief messages of the newly appointed missionaries up-lifting. But I could not help thinking of the ratio of difference between 700 plus missionaries and 7,000,000 minus members of the Southern Baptist Convention. Looking at it that way we discover we are not as big as we brag we are.

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I asked a taxi driver what the Coliseum was built for. He replied that the main thing was horse shows and fights. Nice prelude for S.B.C. attendants. At that, there was a good deal of horse sense shown - and no fights.

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It is always interesting to watch the wives of the speakers. Just about every shade of emotion is emoted - pride, dismay, uncertainty, persevering loyalty, and patient endurance; once in a while a look that plainly says - "What did you say that for?"!

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Listening, one is struck with the occasional flashes of brilliance, and the frequent flashes of photographic bulbs.

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During one session I counted the number of times the word "great" was used descriptive of our work, our churches, our Convention. Believe it or not - 523 times! "Great" got so it grated.

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On the speaker's desk was a warning red light which came on when the speaker was within a minute of the expiration of the time allotted him. But the brothers, and even the President, ran the red light.

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On occasion, such as the Layman's Report, jokes detoured and never got back on the concrete. Right funny tho, to see the attempt to get rolling again.

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There was the usual announcing of "lost" items; everything from money, mamas, and movie cameras.

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Back of the stage was a hot dog and soft drink stand. Nothing unusual to see a speaker rushing onto the stage with the remnant of a dog and mustard showing. Mustered into service, as it were.

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Everytime I hear a group singing, "I love thy rocks and rills," it occurs to me that that does not necessarily mean the singers are patriotic. A man who merely loves rocks and rills may be nothing but a geologist.

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The Press Club breakfast on Wednesday was a delightful affair. This was arranged for by Albert McClellan, and the representatives of both secular and denominational papers were introduced. Senator Kerr, one of the Vice-Presidents, was the principal speaker, and did a good job. Mayor Kennely of Chicago almost missed the boat, but did arrive in time to offer to bail out any of the brothers who got in jail. Chicago corn - all mayors of all cities do it!

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Someone said that the Convention was rather colorless. Actually there was an abundance of "color"!

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After a particularly long address, one is made aware that length is one of the least important qualities which a speech can have.

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An announcement was made about the Baptist Displaced Persons Program. Without being facetious - we are indeed troubled with Baptist Displaced Persons. Perhaps "Mis-placed" is a better descriptive.

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When the train strike came on, there was a mighty hurrying and scurrying to find a way home. There is something very disconcerting, even sinister, in looking at the long lines of idle railroad cars at a time when economic hypochondria, a highly nervous condition, is tormenting the country. Be it remembered that it is impossible to divorce problems of economics from problems of right. There is too much "feather-bedding" in this country, period.

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It was good to see Hines Sims leading the singing. After his illness, he looked fit as a viola. He really puts the omph in "Onward Christian Soldiers" - had us all on the double.

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Speaking of music, we had some good Choirs - but for my money, the Oklahoma Baptist University Glee Club classed the field. It has the voices, the harmony, the know-how, and is indeed an Angelic group.

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The Executive Committee's "Report on Promotion" Wednesday night was unique. Told in dialogue and narrator style, spot light and musically accompanied, it brought us from the beginnings of the Co-operative Program up to date on our business and financial plans. Very informative, and the result of hard work in preparation.

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When perspective will enable historical observations to be freed from the moment, the one big thing done by the Convention was the setting up of two new Theological Seminaries; Golden Gate at Berkeley, California, and Southeastern at Wake Forest. Actually, of course, since Golden Gate was in existence as a California State project, and was taken over by the S.B.C., Southeastern is the only new - "de nova," as my friend Tibbs says - seminary.

The report of the Committee on Theological Education was adopted without a dissenting vote. Which was a surprise!

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Our Convention has long since passed the point where any considered action is possible by the Messengers in session. It must be done by the Committees appointed to work between annual meetings.

It is a matter for gratitude that the Committees take their work seriously, and bring the Convention the results of their faithful work, for final action. But what, except for very palpable and glaring errors, can the Convention do, other than adopt the reports. Actually, the days for deliberation by the Convention have long gone. We are too large, and our business is too complex. There is a danger here which we had best be watching. It breeds both indifference and what the French call a lazy fare. We have become spectators, rather than participators. And it furnishes fertile soil for a Dantonian appeal. Of course, Brother Danton got the axe, but he made a lot of trouble for Convention heads before his toppled!

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Ellis Fuller was at his best, speaking to the Convention Thursday morning. And he surely did help clear the atmosphere of disputant disturbers.

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Best story I heard - an old wheezer - Farmer Giles had been invited to supper by his rich Kentucky neighbor. Expecting that his journey homeward would be dark, he had taken his stable lamp. There had been a bit too much of Kentucky Derby Dew, but Giles reached home in the wee hours, safely guided by his lamp. Next morning, he received the following note from his friend: "Dear Giles - I am returning your stable lamp with bearer. Please send back my parrot and cage."

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We go to San Francisco next year, and late in June. The following year (1952) we go to Miami. This business of going from one extreme to another, gets me down. I plain don't like to travel. We will, however, have a very wonderful place to meet in San Francisco, clean, commodious and comfortable. No more mule barns, please!

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There was a news item in a Chicago paper headlined, "Sues Air Line; Charges it delayed honeymoon." Sued for \$10,000 - what a honeymoon he must have expected. Which makes me recall a statement attributed to Mae West: "I'm not as bad as they say I am - I'm worse!"

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No one has any conception of the dignity of labor until he has seen President Lee presiding. Those who anticipated a riot and a ruckus about a hangover from the Oklahoma City attempt to codify the Convention can well understand what Dean Inge meant when he said, "Worry is interest paid on trouble before it falls due."

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As I grow older, I find myself less censorious; I've discovered that most men are as good as life permits them to be.

I think a preacher friend of mine is too bitter in saying that if we took all the men who have held office in the Southern Baptist Convention the past twenty years and dropped them in the middle of Lake Michigan, their families would mourn them, and the Memorial Committee would shed crocodile tears at the next session, but that the Convention would be better off.

Yea - I think my friend is soured on the stalk.

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After many years of Convention going, I've discovered that one way to save face is to keep the lower part of it shut.

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Saw a sign on a church - "Be square all week, and then be 'round on Sunday."

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Significant? In the Convention Bulletin (which prints all the proceedings of the Convention, and which the brothers who attend ball games carefully garner and memorize for home reporting) was this delicious item:

"After Item 3 was amended to read as follows it was adopted,
(3) We recommend that the Southern Baptist Convention do not undertake for the present, to operate Bible Institutes, President Lee asked the Convention to pause for a moment of prayer and thanksgiving"!

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It is a necessity for all who attend Convention sessions to refrain from taking things too seriously; they must have both imagination and a sense of humor.

Someone has said that imagination was given to man to compensate him for what he is not; a sense of humor to console him for what he is.

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On the way up via plane, the winds were contrary and gale-like. One of our Oklahoma preachers spent the entire time with his face in his hands and a cup in between - there just ain't no justice, lo, he moaned.