

Amusing Stories from an Imaginary Cocktail Party With Nannie Jordan

“There were many amusing incidents that I can recall, though they might not improve with the telling — but they are all told in good faith and would die with me unless I tell them to my ‘Smiles and Tears.’ ”

Nannie Jordan

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



IN A VISIT RECENTLY to Lexington I was attracted, as I was passing the church, to a number of people looking up. I was told they were discussing the immense brass ball on the dome. “Why — didn’t you know? It was an old whiskey still.” I really did not, and cannot wonder that it is an object of amusement to strangers.



The brass sphere in the steeple of the Lexington Presbyterian Church.



CONVERSATION between two of our Elders (this was told to me) is far too funny to die with me.

A cornet had been added to our choir, a member of the V. M. I band — an innovation, and yet approved by some of our members, Service had begun when loud applause, made apparently with a cane, was heard in the vestibule. One Elder went out to investigate and this conversation occurred:

“Was that you making that noise?”

“Yes, I always applaud when I go to a circus.”

The Bible tells us to worship God with all musical instruments, psaltery, and harp. Why not the sweet clear notes of the cornet?



BEFORE THE DAYS of manufactured ice the old North [now Maury] River was our only dependence in Lexington. I remember, when the hard Winter freezes came, how the great blocks of solid ice were cut and loaded on wagons by the negro men. Large



Nannie Jordan, 1876.
Photograph by Michael Miley.

pits were ready for it, with, in our home, a house built over the top, the wagons were driven up the alley and the blocks of ice slid on a plank into the pit, a man would get into the pit, cover the ice with straw and make it very solid. When summer came we had ice in abundance.

A man named “Lord” established an ice factory, and our primitive method of obtaining it passed into oblivion. I remember an old lady saying, “I don’t care for Lord’s ice half as much as I do for God’s.”

THE INNER CIRCLE of Lexington was not prone to admit within its sacred precincts any individual who had not been born in Lexington, or had other very strong credentials. . . . A Professor, newly elected to a chair in Washington and Lee University, said that when he took up his work there he was told he would be a social out-cast, because the requirements were “birth in Lexington, or twenty-five years residence” (This was Dr. Stevens). He was perplexed by such a

situation, and sought a way to rectify it. When he told me this, I said, “Doctor, you are popular in Lexington, how did you manage it?” He replied “I married a Letcher.”

AN OLD MAN named Wheeler used to sell cherries from Shaners. I once asked him to let me have half a gallon, He said, “I’m not allowed to sell that much, but you can have two quarts.” That suited me just as well.

V.M.I. BOY, infringing rules one night, out when he should have been in, saw the sentinel coming and hid behind the Houdon Statue of Gen. Washington which stood in front of the Main Arch. The sentinel came nearer and remarked, “Lord, George, this is the damned coldest night I ever saw.” The answer came from behind the statue, ‘I’ll be damned if it ain’t.” That sentinel soon walked his beat at the other end of the parade ground.

NANNIE JORDAN AND HER 'SMILES AND TEARS'

Nannie Jordan, born in Lexington in 1856, was a much-loved teacher and “a woman of happy and pleasant personality and strong character, deeply religious,” as the Lexington Gazette said when she died in 1942. Along the way, she wrote a delicious memoir she called “Smiles and Tears of Other Years,” consisting of stories, usually amusing and always vividly told, that shine a fascinating light on our town and its wondrous people. From time to time we’ll be publishing the best of “Smiles and Tears,” wishing that we had been there to hear her tell these tales herself.