

"A Chicken from Satan's Egg"

A history of Palmyra Interesting enough for
Adults, entertaining enough for children.
To be read aloud with 2-10 readers.

Reader 1: Palmyra began when John Swift wandered into the woods of upstate New York and built a little cabin next to mud creek.

Reader 2: And while he was out hunting, three Tuscagora Indians came and admired the cabin and asked Mrs. Swift if they could share her hasty pudding.

Reader 3: As she was preparing the food over the fire, these fellows told Mrs. Swift they liked her home so much they were going to steal it from her.

Reader 4: Well, she knew how to take care of troublemakers. She pulled a red hot poker out of the fire and, turning it to those three "land speculators," offered them the door.

Reader 5: Many more farmers came to Mud Creek. They wandered out on Indian trails and made farms out of the woods, and soon the trails became roads.

Reader 6: Those were the days when growing a farm meant cutting down and clearing all the trees in the forest and killing the wolves that roamed the woods. The settlers brought apple seeds to plant orchards. They traveled in wagons, burned fish oil for light, and saved their apples, hung on a string all winter.

Reader 7: It was back when the last bear found Mr. Spears's daughters outside their yard picking berries. Well, those girls scrambled over the fence so fast calling for daddy to get his gun.

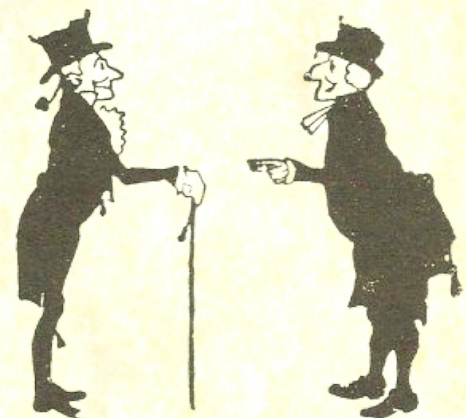
Reader 8: In a short while it came time for Zebulon Williams to build a store. Folks met there and sat by the fire to hear the news or the latest complaints or to laugh at their neighbors.

Reader 9: Did you hear that Old Nat Harris got a visit from a friend, who, poor thing, "was possessed of a large red nose"? They were walking by the Harris trout pond when the fellow bent near the water to get a drink. As the nose neared the water a large trout jumped right out and bit it!

Reader 10: The friend threw back his head in pain, and sent that fish flying.

Reader 1: But Uncle Nat, quick as a wink, caught up the fish and tossed him back into the pond, saying, "Fine day for fishing."

Reader 2: Well, that one kept the neighbors howling with laughter, and before too long, Uncle Nat Harris became known as "Trout Harris."



Reader 3: But even better than a good story, the people of Palmyra loved a good quarrel.

Reader 4: So when Palmyra decided to build a church, Mr. Clark said he would give one-hundred dollars to build it on his side of the river, but only fifty dollars if it were built on the south side.

Reader 5: But no, no, no, Humphrey Sherman wanted it on the south side and he'd give twice as much money to build it there and absolutely nothing if built on Mr. Clark's side. In the end, Mr. Clark didn't get his way, but he only had to pay fifty dollars.

Reader 6: Mr. Sherman was the wealthiest landowner in Palmyra and by now he knew how to get his own way. And since the church rested half way on his land, he insisted that only women should sit on his half, because, "There were some men who shouldn't have a seat on holy ground!"

Reader 7: The pews were filled before the walls were built. Swallows and wheelwrights nested in the rafters, while sheep grazed inside the holy boards until the church was finished. And the preacher prayed from the bible and said, "How dreadful is this place!"

Reader 8: But he wasn't talking about sheep. He was trying to remember when God last spoke to man, and how the people had trembled, because "God's house" was the "Gate of Heaven."

Reader 9: A place where Prophets saw the face of God.

Reader 10: The Bible was full of such mysteries—bushes that burned, pillars of fire, ladders to heaven. But it was all such a long time ago. It was hard to understand.

Reader 1: Still, religion was in high fashion in Palmyra.

Reader 2: As soon as the plowing was finished or it got too cold to harvest, everyone headed over to sit on the hard church benches to see what storm was brewing and what the preachers had to say about it.



Reader 3: And since you asked— “Who says baptism has to be by immersion? Maybe in the Bible stories the candidate just fell in the water by accident.”

Reader 4: “How can anyone be sure how deep the water was in the first place? The Bible never said how deep it was. Sprinkling is just as good as a river. Anyhow, not everyone has a river. Sprinkling wouldn’t cause a baby to drown like a river.”

Reader 5: “The Bible never said anything about baptizing babies!”

Reader 6: Reverend Gill had to admit the Bible did say “all in the household were baptized,” but you couldn’t prove there were babies in that household.

Reader 7: The Reverend Bacon said, “If you are going to have a baby who knows nothing be baptized and give him the Sacrament, you might as well give the Sacrament to drunkards and Sabbath breakers.”

Reader 8: But the Reverend Bell said, “You are saying that God created all men and made some to be evil. It’s absurd!”

Reader 9: Reverend Onderdonk took the easy way out and said some things were just “mystery revealed in scripture but not to be explained by men.”

Reader 10: And that’s when Reverend Bacon said what he should have never said. He said: “The Episcopalians played cards and danced on the sacrament tables the night before!”



Reader 1: Oh dear. It was all downhill from there. Brother Hudson said: “Reverend Bacon is hatching chickens from Satan’s own eggs!”

Reader 2: So Reverend Onderdonk said (and I’m not making this up), “This town ain’t big enough for the two of us.”

Reader 3: Soon the congregations were threatening the ministers. When they didn’t like what Brother Marks preached, they threatened to provide a handful of whips at the next meeting and promised a gallon of whiskey to anyone who would wear them out on Preacher Marks.

Reader 4: What a mess. But there was one thing that the churches agreed on:

Reader 5: It was that God the Father,

Reader 6: and his son Jesus Christ,

Reader 7: and the Holy Ghost

Reader 8: weren’t three people.

Reader 9: Yet they were three people

Reader 8: but still only one person.

Reader 10: They were everywhere present

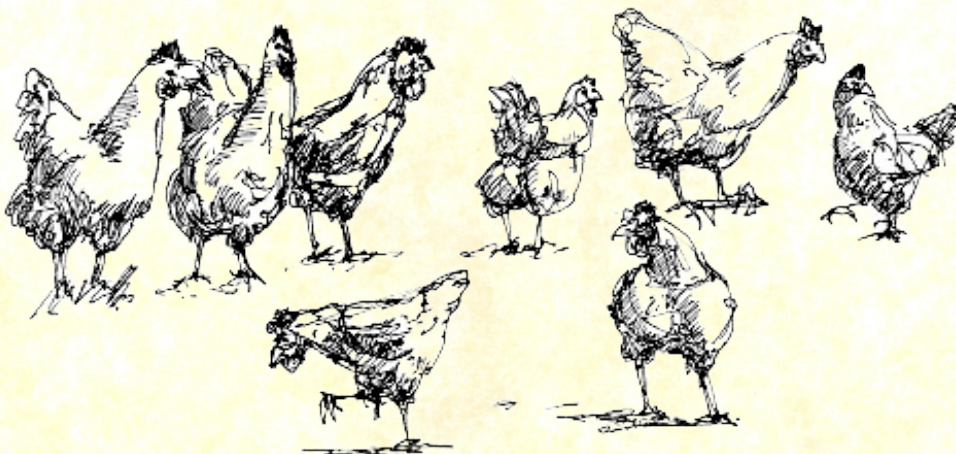
Reader 1: and nowhere.

Reader 2: They were large enough to fill space

Reader 3: and small enough to fit in your heart.

Reader 4: It was confusing—

Reader 6 : And the churches agreed it should be that way.



Reader 7: It was a good thing that in the middle of this “war of words and tumult of opinions” there was a farm three miles out of town, where a Yankee family with the last name Smith read the Bible every night and sang a hymn to finish the day.

44 EVENING SHADE. S. M. Baptist Harmony, p. 373.

This day is past and gone, The evening shades appear; O may we all remember well, O

may we all re-mem-ber well, The night of death is near.

1 We lay our garments by,
Upon our beds to rest:
No death will soon disrobe us all,
Of what we here possess.

2 Lord, keep us safe this night,
Secure from all our fears:
May angels guard us while we sleep,
Till morning light appears.

4 And when we early rise,
And view th' unwearied sun,
May we set out to win the prize,
And after glory run.

5 And when our days are past,
And we from time remove,
O may we in thy bosom rest,
The bosom of thy love.

Reader 8: And when the father took off his spectacles, they all knew it was time for prayer, although he had to remind young William to settle down from time to time.

Reader 9: Their Mother was famous for baking, and served their guests raspberries and “Rye” bread.

Reader 10: The neighbors claimed the sisters were the “best in times of sickness.” Mother kept the fires and taught the daughters weaving, sewing, cooking and gardening—Cabbage Potatoes, carrots, beets, turnips, beans, and pumpkins.

Reader 1: Father had planted Apple and peach trees steps from their door, and acres of wheat, beans and flax beyond.

Reader 2: Each morning the boys would go out to plough the fields or sow the oats and corn for a new crop. There was a little bit of hunting and a little fishing for trout and sometimes even salmon on their own Crooked River.

Reader 3: And there were days on end felling trees, pulling stumps, and splitting rails for the fence, “horse high, bull strong, and hog tight.” They split the trees into logs for sheds, a barn and a cooper shop. Wood for hoops and staves were stored alongside drying flax in the loft above the shop.



Reader 4: On holidays and parades, Father marched in the town Militia. And on such an occasion Mother Smith would sell her ginger bread buttermints cakes and root beer to the delight of the whole village.

Reader 5: Father taught the boys to make barrels like the best of coopers. They built stone walls and wells, and fireplaces, tapped maple trees and boiled it down to prizewinning sugar.

Reader 6: And neighbors planned their crops around the time they could hire the Smith boys to help with the harvest.

Reader 7: The boys made split wood chairs, sap bowls, and barrels for shipping on the Erie canal, while Mother taught the girls to spin linen and weave baskets.

Reader 8: And in all those long hours working side by side, they spoke many times of the strange and glorious promises of the Bible and the stormy words of the preachers.

Reader 9: It was a good thing the twelve-year-old Smith boy began to wonder, “How shall I know what is true?”

Reader 10: His many questions led him to the book of James. There he read the words that had been waiting for over a thousand years for him to read: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it shall be given him.”



Reader 1: Not far from the "Old North Woods" where he and his father and brothers had been cutting trees the day before, Joseph left an ax in a stump near the spot where he planned to return.

Reader 2: In this quiet land, so far from the tumult of opinions, God would choose a witness to his glory.

Reader 3: So on clear morning a plowboy, not yet fifteen years old, walked into the silent woods and knelt down to pray.

Reader 4: And that's why Satan attacked him. He liked things just the way they were. Joseph cried out to God for mercy. Just when he thought he would be destroyed, he saw a glorious pillar of fire and light, brighter than the sun, falling on him.

Reader 1: He wondered how the branches and leaves were not burning, and he began to hope that he could endure this glory. He saw many angels. And when the light fell on him, he was filled with love and peace.

Reader 2: He saw a man standing in the light and immediately another followed. The first spoke to him saying, "Joseph, my son."

Reader 3: Then pointing to the other, he said, "This is my Beloved Son. Hear Him!"

Reader 4: Joseph asked the Personages in the light which of all the churches he should join. He was answered that he must join none of them.

Reader 5: At that moment the Lord's Ancient Kingdom came to life again.

Reader 6: When the light departed, Joseph found himself lying on his back, looking up into heaven. At first, he had no strength, but after a while he recovered and stood on his feet. When Joseph walked out of the grove that day, the ground was holy.

Reader 7: Walking out of the Grove that day, Joseph knew more about God than all the ministers in Palmyra—there could be no more tumult of opinion. While the ministers would insist God could only be known through books and universities, how could Joseph deny what he had seen?