

Woman Bitten By Snake In Effort To 'Get Holy Ghost' At McBroom's Branch Meet:

By Samuel K. Neal.

"Holy Roller" Preacher Gets "Hot" And Calls Disciples To Altar To Prove Faith In Weird Manner, Denounces Preachers, Cigarette Smokers, Stockingless Legs:

St. Luke chapter 10, verse 13, says "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

Residents living near the scene of a protracted "Holy Roller" meeting – it has entered its third week, and will probably last the entire summer – at McBroom's Branch down in the lower end of the county near Cole's store, called the 'bluff' of the Benevolent One who is self-appointed medium of the Holy Ghost, and it resulted in distress for one woman.

Mrs. Cora Brown, 43, wife of Oscar Brown, 12th district Jackson county farmer, is suffering today from three wounds inflicted by the deadly poisonous fangs of a copperhead snake as she "acquired" the creed of the church Monday night.

One of the preachers conducting the meeting – there are four, if you feel curiosity creeping on – was also bitten on the hand. We tried to find his whereabouts on a jaunt to the place, but could not.

Interesting- If True:

Far be it from us to scoff at the faith of any person's religion. If a copperhead snake can get a meal off your brawny arm, why that, minister, is all right with us. Personally – very, ah, very personally – we prefer the salvation offered in simple doctrine which never includes snakes.

No snakes in our religion. No, sir.

F. C. Dover, of Chattanooga, is headman of the Holy Roller meeting down there, and he made the assertion last week that he would like to exhibit his faith by showing what could be done with a copperhead snake.

He declared that he had handled 21 copperheads and two rattlers while he had been preaching.

Oliver Grogan, a farmer living in the 18th district had captured a large copperhead and had "stored" him in an empty lard can at his home. Monday he gave the snake a new home, a half-gallon fruit jar, and Monday night he carried the jar with its hideous contents to the meeting.

He Bit A Dog:

Mr. Dover preferred a snake whose fangs were unsullied, and Mr. Grogan assured him that the copperhead had only bitten the Grogan family dog in the nose. The dog, incidentally, is suffering with a swelled head which will probably kill him.

After admonishing his followers to pray, and talk in the "unknown tongue," the preacher gave the jar top a slight twist openward. He needed a man or woman with faith at that moment. It was many moments before he finally found one, and it came in the form of one of his "assistants'." The snake was removed from the jar, poured like water into the "assistants" hands, and he began his fanatical gyrations with the serpent in his hands, and passed it among others who took turns handling it.

The snake probably realizing what was being done with him, must have got sore about it when Mrs. Brown's turn came.

One witness at the meeting said that he saw the snake strike her arm three times, and said "I understand she's pretty sick today."

The weird drama was enacted under an arbor fastly secured from easy access. Church members of various denominations living in the region refused to allow use of their buildings for the meeting.

De-Modernize:

Mr. Dover, whose home, he says, is at Chattanooga, denounces the modern gal by telling his listeners that they cannot “get” the Holy Ghost unless they throw away their jewelry. He wears a watch chain that resembles a log chain and it is tied to a \$35 watch, by his own confession.

One young lady, in the throes of receiving the mysterious spirit, nonchalantly tossed away a string of beads, a costly wrist watch, and a ring.

She, with friends, it was said, searched the arbor the most of the next day for her jewelry. The search availed nothing.

Mr. Dover also tells you that you cannot “get” the Holy Ghost if you smoke, chew, dip snuff, or use tobacco in any way. Girls must not wear short sleeve dresses, and they also must wear them higher at the top and lower at the bottom. Another thing: they must wear hosiery.

You shouldn't drink carbonated beverages, but he doesn't mention whiskey or playing-cards. He denounces Methodist and Presbyterian preachers as men who “misguide” the multitudes.

Frigid Feet:

One man, who had been a regular attendant and an active participant at the services, learned Monday that a copperhead snake would be on hand that night. He sent his wife to church in his stead, and stayed at home “to care for the baby.”

The arbor, will be moved onto the highway – No. 24- this week, probably Saturday, at the grounds adjoining the Bethany church, where the meeting will continue indefinitely.

Fun, But Disgusting:

You will have a lot of fun at the Holy Roller meeting, but if you lived in the vicinity of it you would become disgusted. We were assured of that by residents who live near the place and know whereof they speak.

It is one of the complexities of the Southern civilization, and civilized people tolerate that form of religion because we came to this county seeking religious freedom.

We could not accuse the preacher of conducting a racket, because all he has asked for is a pair of new overalls, a shirt, and a pair of shoes. He said he wouldn't preach any longer unless the clothes were forthcoming.

He hadn't got them Tuesday night. He dresses well.

If you seek adventure in a mild form we recommend a visit to the arbor on some warm evening. If you are afraid of snakes, however, or if sight of them causes a creepy feeling to steal up your spine and makes you shudder and want to run, then stay at home and read your Cosmopolitan or Saturday Evening Post – go swimming, we don't care. Just stay away from the arbor.

But before you go, read the 20th verse in chapter 10 of St. Luke: “Noting withstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”

Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN: Thursday, 21 July 1932.

*See more Putnam County, TN history at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>