

"HOLY GHOSTERS,"

DOINGS OF RELIGION CRAZED FANATICS IN CONNECTICUT.

Their Brutal Attempts to Work Miracles With Barbarous Rites.

Religious fanaticism knows neither period nor race. One need not go to the plateau of far away Tibet nor venture among the Zuni Indians of the Southwest to find instances of it. It is at our very doors. It is almost beyond belief, but it is nevertheless a fact, that the leader of the band of Connecticut fanatics now prominent is a man of education and a graduate of both Wesleyan and Yale.

Since the days when witches were hanged in Salem no more atrocious form of religious fanaticism has shocked a civilized community than that which was flashed over the wires from the little Connecticut town of Old Lyme last week. A group of men and women, self-styled the Holy Ghost Band, tortured a crippled old woman named Albino Mather, and nearly caused her death. They were trying to relieve her of an evil spirit.

"I never seen such ghouls in my life here while afore, an' I've lived here, man an' boy, for nigh onto sixty-six year," exclaimed a typical old Connecticut farmer the other day, when I asked him about the Holy Ghosters. The old man was sitting on the settee in the office of the Beacon House, pulling on a cornob pipe which looked as old as he did.

"Ever since Miss Lizbeth Sisson come here an' started her revival services in the Methodist meetin' house at Black Hall," he continued, "the hull population from the Postmaster down to the office of the Beacon House, pulling on a cornob pipe which looked as old as he did.

I discovered that the religious excitement which culminated so shamefully two weeks ago last week, really was attributable to the advent of Miss Elizabeth Sisson. She is a resident of New London, was at one time a teacher in the public schools, and subsequently sailed to India as a missionary. On her return she was accompanied by a little 5-year-old Hindoo girl named Nadya, whom she had adopted.

Miss Sisson began her evangelistic services at Black Hall under very favorable circumstances. The Rev. C. B. Bromley was pastor of the Methodist Church at the time, and the New London woman succeeded in arousing a deep religious feeling in the flock.

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WOMAN'S INFLUENCE AT WORK

Soon after conducting the services at the Methodist Church she turned her labors to the Baptists, their place of worship being located in Old Lyme, two miles north of Black Hall.

Miss Sisson's more enthusiastic converts were apparently dissatisfied with religion as it was expounded in the local pulpits, and ceased to attend services, claiming that they were not fervid enough to suit their taste.

The secessionists accordingly formed themselves into a holiness band, which had a membership of over forty, including some prominent families. Postmaster Sisson, who was being held by the leaders, the holiness people held Monday evening meetings at the members' houses, and some of the gatherings were so fervent in prayer and song that the members did not depart for their homes until early morning.

But the holiness band, one of the firm believers in the new religion, was carried completely away by the belief of the Holy Ghosters. Anderson is about 60 years old, is a graduate of both Wesleyan and Yale Universities, and in every-day affairs is regarded as a man of sound judgment. On the subject of religion, however, he is rabid. His belief in the methods of the Holiness people borders on a mania.

As a result of the formation of the new band, a deplorable condition of affairs ensued. Families unable to adopt the new belief as a whole were disrupted. Brothers quarreled, and children who had grown to love and respect their parents were separated from them by the powerful mystic influence of the new creed.

Soon after Miss Sisson's revival meetings at the Black Hall Church, Pastor Sisson was compelled to resign. The feeling in his congregation was so intense at the encouragement he held out to the Holiness Band that he could not stem the tide of disapproval. Mr. Bromley is at present pastor of a Methodist Church at Hope Valley, R. I., having been transferred from the Connecticut districts.

The Rev. Mr. Gavin also resigned his pastorate in the Baptist Church three weeks ago, and it is hinted that the clergyman's overzealousness in the doctrine as preached by Miss Sisson is responsible for the change.

A MISTAKEN ZEAL. The Holy Ghosters might still have remained outside the pale of the law but for their belief in the accomplishment of miracles. Twice has Mrs. Mather been the subject of their zeal in this direction. The first trial was early in the spring, and consisted in working the old woman in the center of the room in a rocking chair, and while chanting a hymn and offering prayers they formed a ring and slowly moved around the room.

Anderson was the leader of the weird ceremonies, and was successful in working the majority of the persons forming the circle up to a high state of excitement. After this performance was well under way Anderson suddenly called upon Mrs. Mather to rise from the chair and walk. But she remained motionless and was unable to move a muscle.

Thereupon Anderson fished a small bottle from his pocket containing an oily liquid and poured the contents over the head of the subject, saying, "I command you, arise and walk!" The cripple was still compelled to keep her seat, and Anderson's countenance became livid. Two members at the back of the chair began to rock it, and continued doing so for several seconds. Suddenly Charles Young fell flat upon the floor at the front of the chair. This was evidently a signal for those behind the chair to end their maneuvers by giving the old lady a terrific lurch out upon the prostrate form of Young. She landed across his body, but managed to receive an ugly bruise on the side of her face.

MRS. MATHER'S AWFUL TORTURE Mrs. Mather screamed with agony, but no one offered to place her back in the chair. One of the women present, a resident of Black Hall, fearing that the victim would be foully dealt with, quietly stole away from the assembly and left the band to continue their healing. The awful scene continued until 3 o'clock the next morning. After the woman fell upon Young, the latter arose and joined the circle, which paraded during the entire night, singing and praying, and momentarily expecting to witness a miracle. While the healers surrounded Mrs. Mather, she was frequently turned upon the floor by a kick from a heavy boot, and her agonized shrieks and moans were to the Holiness Band an indication that she was possessed of an evil spirit, which they were determined to cast out.

Finally they were forced to desist from sheer exhaustion. When examined later in the week by Dr. Wallace, the two physician, Mrs. Mather's body was found to be covered with bruises. The town authorities have taken the case of Mrs. Mather in hand, claiming that as she is supported by the town, they do not believe in paying doctors' fees brought about by a misguided lot of people in their attempts at healing. No sentiment is wasted in this Connecticut town.

Written by Grand Jurors sworn out during the week by Grand Jurors, summoning six members of the band to appear at a hearing which was held last Friday morning. Abel P. Tanner, a lawyer of New London, at one time the Greenback candidate for Governor of Connecticut, was engaged for the prosecution. The members who were summoned at the hearing were H. M. Caulkins and wife, Ansel Champion and wife, Wilbur Anderson and Charles Young.

The Holy Ghosters claim that their actions are all prompted by divine instructions. The members of the band received a message from the Lord commanding him to go to a neighboring stream and drown himself. He started out as directed and actually waded up to his neck in the frigid water. But another message was received from the Lord informing him that He did not need him on high

just at that particular moment and that he had better retrace his steps to the shore. He did so and is still to be seen daily on the streets of Lyme.

Another instance of the peculiar views entertained by the Holy Ghosters is that reported about one of the members. He stated in public that "he did not see why he was not just as good as Jesus Christ. Like our Savior, he could do nothing wrong."

The Devil Did It All.

To the Editor of the "Herald": I am led to write you a letter in correction of the many absurd rumors published in the newspapers, especially since my own name occurs quite prominently in them.

The Lord has in the last year, been teaching me many things from the Scriptures concerning His gospel and concerning the time of His second advent, and He has shown me from the Scriptures a fair outline of the history of the next nine centuries.

I was believing that God had opened a way for me to go out and preach in public the teaching that He had given me, and had gone to Hope Valley, R. I., to assist Rev. C. B. Bromley in a revival that he was having in that place. But I could get no liberty of spirit as to the fact that in my special work there was any opening for me, and on the evening of October 9th I determined to wait upon God in prayer, that He might reveal to me what He wished me to do.

It is enough to say here that I got the answer I wished for. The Lord distinctly showed me my mission, and deliberately, for a testing, turned me over to Satan.

Satan entered into and took complete possession of my body (but not my mind), and from Saturday night to Tuesday morning, October 12th, my body was not completely in his possession as if, just as it were, in the old witchcraft stories, a corpse had been animated by a spirit of the other world. But my mind was my own all the time and I was closely watching to see if anything wrong should be done with me, for if this was the case it would show that the spirit possessing me was that of Satan, and not of God, as I supposed.

Satan, however, was far too cunning to give himself away in that manner. But he was permitted to use my own lips to open communication with me, and I was in constant communication with him, and the things done in Lyme were done by him and under his direction.

W. L. ANDERSON, Old Lyme, Conn., Oct. 28, 1915. -New York Herald.

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