

## The Camp Meeting.

I was once spending the summer months in one of the low-land counties of S. Carolina, bordering on Savannah (found). There happened to be resident at that time, in the family to whom I was paying a visit, a pious old lady generally known as Mother Bell. She had been a mother in the church for upwards of thirty years, and was regarded with a kind of reverential awe by all the members. In truth she was the most important personage in the connexion, being a kind of supervisor-general over all ecclesiastical affairs. She had by her influence the appointment of ministers, and always felt it peculiarly incumbent upon her to remind them of their failings & suggest to them the proper course.

In addition to many other amiable & christian qualities, she manifested peculiar regard for the welfare of the young. It was not to be expected then that I should remain long in the family, without attracting her attention. I soon became a favourite, and the perpetual subject of her christian zeal.

There was to be a camp meeting in a few days, on the opposite shore of Cape Hatteras, and as the time drew near the old lady became very enthusiastic. One great concern was to prevail on me to attend, for, to use her own expressions, she "thought I would be

benefitted. I was rather desirous to go than otherwise, having never attended a meeting of the kind, and but little persuasion was therefore necessary.

When the day arrived the weather was unfavourable, having very much the appearance of storming. The good old soul was not to be intimidated with trifles, and as soon as a few necessaries could be collected such as hymnbooks, bibles, we walked toward the place of embarkation. While on the way a reverend squire of the neighbourhood, accosted us, with what I learned to have become a proverb in those parts, "that a camp meeting always brought a storm." "Ah, squire!" said the old lady, drawing up her lips & assuming an uncommonly serious air, "Ah squire! if you thought as much of your poor soul as you do of the weather, you would be sure to go to heaven!" The squire bowed ~~to~~ <sup>with</sup> profound reverence & passed on.

When we came on board the vessel, we found a rare assemblage of personages, who were scattered about the deck in different positions, (the women generally sitting on their petticoats, with their frocks turned over their knees), and were singing as if their lives depended on the issue.

We were soon bounding over the rolling waves, & notwithstanding the wind had increased almost to a gale, the singing did not cease. I was stumbling about, among the crowd, when a violent flaw swept by, and away went my light straw hat, on the wings of the wind. It caught upon the top of a wave,

was borne high in the air, descended & was seen  
no more. "There! there!" I shouted as I caught a last  
glimpse of its broad brim - and the countenances of  
every one bespoke their sympathy. Old Mother Bell  
was completely disconcerted. "Poor child! poor child!"  
she exclaimed, "what will he do!" After a moment's  
pause she loosed from her head an old black pluck  
and reaching it to me, "here, here" she said, "take this,  
I have another." This operated like magic on the  
visibles of the company. The song of praise were  
soon converted into a general titter. Some snorted,  
some crammed pocket handkerchiefs into their mouths  
and others ran behind. I set immediately to work,  
at converting the old bonnet into a less objectionable  
shape, and by the time we had arrived at the camp  
ground & were ready to disembark, had manufactured  
it into what I thought a respectable cocked hat. Not  
so it seems thought others, for my appearance on  
shore created a general commotion. Even the preachers  
were scarcely able to keep their seats; and I could see  
companies of verdant ladies, dodging behind the  
trees to squint at me & laugh. I contented myself  
with feeling that I was the lion of the day & directed  
my attention to the strange & marvellous sights around  
me. The first thing that attracted my notice was  
the altar, a square spot of ground in front of the stand,  
covered with corn husks & surrounded by a railing com-  
posed of rough poles. Within this were some fifteen  
or twenty persons, mostly females, turning themselves

and bleating like sheep. Mother Bell was in a perfect foam, and sallied forth among the crowd dragging <sup>the altar</sup> ~~in~~ "force of arms", all the young persons on whom she could lay hold. She made several attempts to get at me, but I carefully avoided her by keeping on the opposite side of ~~her~~ the altar. - At night she had her tent in such an uproar, praying & exhorting, that I thought it the most advisable policy, to retire on board of the vessel. It is true, I did not rest very comfortably, rolling all night on the hard floor & occasionally half drowned with water, but when I looked out in the morning I did not envy the condition of those who remained on shore. During the night the Squire's storm, predicted with such prophetic gravity, had really come, & with relentless fury, deluged the entire camp ground. The stand, but yesterday occupied by the minister was floating majestically at a distance. The canvas tents were mostly washed away, & were dashed about by the angry surges. Beds, tables, chairs, trunks & ladies' handboxes & dresses were floating about in inextricable confusion. To add interest to the scene, men, women and children

So drenched with wet, with hair dishevelled so,

That not like merry mortals looked, were wading about to save their effects.

The first person I looked for was Mother Bell. And there she was, holding the skirts of her clothes in both hands above her knees & splashing along

through the water like an elephant. She was making the best of her way, with many others, to the neighbouring house of a widow lady, which had been converted in a place of rendezvous, by the unfortunate sufferers.

Having volunteered to lead the way, for her more timid associates, she marched a head, like ~~a~~ true heroine urging on her followers, when all of a sudden down she sunk into a well, which was concealed beneath the water. The Lord save us! she uttered, and the rest set up a cry; none dared venture however, within a foot of her & the old lady was left to scramble her way out alone. It was not long before she was safely lodged within the house, where she immediately went to prayers. It would seem that even here she was not free from misfortunes, for the lady is said to have quarrelled with her about the loss of her beautiful white water board. To what use it had been appropriated is left to conjecture, but one gentleman was heard to say, that he saw it gracefully floating gracefully off from the house, on the water.

Wm. Sparrow Jr

September 4<sup>th</sup> 1840

I would say to the Advertiser that the subject was chosen, & the main part of this composition written after 9 o'clock last night. The remainder has been written since prayers this afternoon. This I hope will be sufficient excuse for its many defects.

will be

Severely criticised as having an improper  
tendency, by connecting ridicule with religion.

ny (Sparrow)