

THE LOST SHEEP

A Play in One Act.

by

Andrew Nelson Lytle.

Cornsilk Farm,

Guntersville, Alabama.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

May Kate, A high brown mulatto wench.

Brother Jake, the new parson.

Aunt Martha, Ben's mother.

Ben, May Kate's wandering husband.

Zobedee, the leading elder.

Sister Adelaide.

Brother Jim.

The Starter.

Members of the Keys Chapel Church, African.

Place Rural Tennessee . . . a barn turned temporarily into a church.

Time September, after the crops are laid by. Evening during a protracted meeting.

Setting -

Back center, large double barn doors. Left and right, stalls. Between them an improvised platform upon which rests the pulpit and chairs for the Parson, the Starter, and the Leading Elder.

In front of the platform rows of benches stretch out towards the audience, with a center ^{aisle} dividing them. The benches are rough, home-made affairs.

At the rise of the curtain May Kate peers through a crib door down left, looks quickly about the barn, then lets her eyes rest on the open doors back center, through which a bright moon flows to light the back of the meeting house. The place is well lighted generally by its rays.

She enters with the easy rhythm of a bob-cat; puts two lanterns on posts opposite each other in the center of the building; goes to the partly opened doors and looks to the right and left. She speaks with disgust.

MAY KATE.

Wahh! Look at dat moon. And dey aint nothin round here but a wale.

(She moves down front her voluptuous body, picks up a dust cloth and goes to work on pulpit and chairs. But it is evident her mind is not on her business, for she goes again to the doors and looks out. She returns quickly and hides in front of the pulpit.)

(Brother Jake sticks his head through the doors and looks cautiously around. He enters, dressed in a Prince Albert, a rolled stiff shirt, high collar without tie, patched trousers, and field shoes. He feels very fine and handsome, as he walks up to the raised platform.

May Kate raises the hand with the cloth and jiggles it. He sees it, looks over the pulpit, grins largely, tiptoes to shut the doors, comes back and leans over the pulpit.)

JAKE.

Good evenin, Sister Kate.

MAY KATE.

Good evenin, Bro'r Jake.

JAKE.

I'se mighty glad to see you bout de Lord's business, sister.

MAY KATE. (Moving stage L to dust.)

Sorter tidyin up the pull-pit.

JAKE.

De Lord will reward you, shore.

(He walks about to show her how fine the reward will be; then comes to her. She giggles.)

Yea, de Lord will sho-ly pervide fer you fer dis. (Closes) You is party tonight, sister. Dat you is, and I don't keer who know hit.

(She snuggles into his arms. He takes her; remembers his position and
her away.)

But, mind you, don't go settin yoe hald on vanity. Hit'll lead you in con-
trary ways. Vanity's de debil's reapiin machine. Dat tis. (He stalks up and
do-n in his best bull pit manner.) Vanity is vanity, say de Lord. And
when de Lord say vanity is vanity, dat's show God what he mean. (Turning
abruptly) Aint dat de traf?

MAY KATE.

Dat tis.

JAKE.

It showly is.

MAY KATE. (Nestling again.)

You doesn't think I'sa vain, does you, Bro'r Jake?

JAKE.

I hopes not, gal. I hopes not. (His arms play about her.) Old Scratch
in all sorts o places, a-tuptin you befoes you know hit.

MAY KATE. (Breaking away to bench S. L.)

I'll be keerful ob him den. (Jake follows) Br'r Jake, dey's gonna be a
sorter settin' out at our house attar de meetin, and Pap wants you to come
over. We's killed a young sheat, and dey's gonna be a little oider about.

JAKE.

I'll be der, honey. I'll showly be der. (Sitting on bench beside her.)

But aint dey nobody else wants me to come 'sides yoe Pappy?

MAY KATE.

We all wants you to come.

JAKE.

But nobody in partic'lar?

MAY KATE.

Does you want a partic'lar invite?

JAKE.

Oh yes, I aint hit I want to come.

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MAY KATE.

Den I gies it to yer.

JAKE.

You know, sister, you is do pertest I ever seed you tonight.

MAY KATE.

Aw, git out

(She rises, gives ~~999999~~ him a playful knock; and the unbalanced bench throws him to the floor, bench on top of his dignity. Angry, he picks himself up and begins to brush off.)

If you come over here, I'll help bresh you off.

(He backs up to her reluctantly, and her arms go insinuatingly around his neck. He ceases to frown, makes a grab at her, and she escapes coquettishly to one side of the pulpit. He follows, chases her around it until they stop facing each other.)

JAKE.

You know, sister Kate, ever time I gits alone wid you, I feel do debil
~~9999999999~~
a-temptin me.

MAY KATE. (Purcing her lips in his direction.)

Sav you do?

JAKE. (leaning across pulpit to meet her.)

No-, behave yoese'f, gal. Git behimo me, satan. Git behimo me, I say. Git behimo . . . (A long, lascivous kiss.) U mmm . . . Ummmmmm . . . Jest like long sweetnin.

MAY KATE

Ole scratch don't mind you ve'y well, do he?

JAKE.

You heard me tell him to git behimo me.

MAY KATE.

Yea, I he-rod you, but I didn't hear him a-mindin.

JAKE.

He do worst debil you ever seed fo misbehavin. But, no mine bout do debil,

JAKE.

honey, you come set in yoe daddy's lap.

MAY KATE.

You forgits I'ee a ma'ied woman, Brer Jake.

JAKE.

Dat banjo picker is gone fer good. Swap a preacher fer a sinner ever time, sister, and you'll git right wid de Lord.

(He pulls her, not without a friendly struggle, into a chair back of the pulpit, where they embrace. At this point Aunt Marthy, a fat old negro woman, moving her weight with the regularity of a pendulum, enters calling, "May Kate, May Kate." She sees the two disentangle. Jake crawls out the back doors.)

AUNT M.

What you doin behine dat pull-pit, gal?

MAY KATE.

Sorter straightain hit up befoe de meetin.

AUNT M.

Straightain hit up. war you? I'll be bound you'd a been straightain out behine it in one mee minute. And in de Lord's house too. De Lord'll punish dem what blasphome he house who war de reason? Who war he?

MAY KATE.

Who war who?

AUNT M.

You know who. . . And yoe husband back from his wanderins.

MAY KATE.

Ben!

AUNT M.

Yeh, Ben.

MAY KATE.

You's lyin. He been gone two year.

AUNT M.

No, I aint lyin. Ben, yoe husband befoe God, you hussy, is back. (Chant.)
De lost sheep is back in de foal agin. He war lost and he's foun'. De Lord's

MAY KATE.

He los' hese'f. An' dey aint nothin' sheepish bout him, unless'n hit's he stink, an' dat's goatish.

AUNT M.

You a fine one to talk bout goats. Here yoo husband right out de doo, and *you* bout to pley de hog under he nose.

MAY KATE.

Ho- come I know he out de doo?

BEN. (Thrusting his head in through door down left.)

Manny, you too long. I couldn't wait no moe. . . . Hello, gal, aint you glad to see me. You don't act like you is.

(May Kate attempts to be cold and distant; but Ben's sophistication and sleek attire is too much. He is bedazzling in a black and white check suit, close-fitting trousers, striped silk shirt, large jewel below a ready-made bow tie, patent-leather shoes which, minus a few buttons, give him a devil-may-care attitude. He has a banjo.)

MAY KATE.

Um! You's mighty sleek for us country folks.

AUNT M.

Aint he doo! You does look fine, boy. An *you* back jes' in time fer de meetin'.

BEN.

Meetin'? A-, go long, manny. I wants to talk wid May Kate.

AUNT M.

Not tell you fess religion. You's de most worriscome child I is got.

BEN (Pushing her out.)

All right, den. You go leave me wid my wife. (A. M. goes out.) What you actin' so offish about, gal. You knows you glad to see me.

MAY KATE.

Oh, is I?

BEN.

Course you is. Dey all is.

MAY KATE.

What you doin back here, den?

BEN.

De idea you astin me dat. I come all de way from de city jast to see you, honey.

MAY KATE.

Dat black gal, Maude, run you off??

BEN.

Maude? Who she?

MAY KATE.

Quit aekin nullish. You know-s. De woman you lof' no fer.

BEN.

Oh, dat Maude. I aint need dat woman in a year.

MAY KATE.

You aint'?

BEN.

So he'p me, I aint.

MAY KATE.

What you been doin all dat time? It show aint took you no year to make up de piece o' mind you got. Eff'n it did, you kin turn on round and go back agin. Dey aint nobody wants to seev you round here. (Seagnors off.)

BEN.

Honey, you show got yalle--jackish since I been gone.

MAY KATE.

An' I aint loss' my stinger, neither, big boy.

BEN.

No-, Kate, don't ek lak dat. You still loves me, don't you, sugar?

MAY KATE.

Does I look lak I been lettin' de grass grow under my feets, a-waitin' fer you to come now me out?

BEN.

Umh! You looks swell . . . jes' lak de heart of a great big watermelon! been cracked de cold. Come on, honey, take yoe baby back agin. De moe I been away from you de hongrier I'd git to see you. (Heavy struggle.)

MAY KATE (Pushing him away.)

T'oe year! Umh! I aint never seed yoe belly dat rattlin' empty.

BEN.

It's de truf. And when it come cotton-pickin time, I could jes' see you out dere, a-fillin yoe old sack faster'n any of em. All of a sudden I seed I had to come on back to my baby.

MAY KATE.

I picked three humerd pounds yastiddy.

BEN.

Did? No- aint you sumpin. Befoe I lef de bes' you could do was two ten. Aint dat right?

MAY KATE.

Dat tis. Ho- you member dat?

BEN.

I aint forgot nothin' you ever done. I aint forgot how you useter could love neither, sugar. Member how me an you useter set out under de hill in gatherin time, wid de moon a-leanin over sorter keorless- like? a-lo-kin at me and you? All de yearth was a-smellin of curin' hay, and de crickets was a-buzzin, and de old mules a-swishin deir tails in de barn. Don't you member? It's gatherin' time now, baby, and I jost couldn't stay away no longer. See, dar's de moon, de same ole moon, a-comin' ober de top of de knob. It's a-talkin' to us, honey, stallin' to us. (He is close beside her.) It's a sayin Ben, she's yourn. Nobody's but yourn, and you aint a-goin leave her agin. It's a savin', kiss ole Ben, 'by Kate. Don't let him stand dar hongry in gatherin' time.

MAY KATE.

Eff I did hit'd take a twenty acre fiel' to fill yoe.

... to fill you.

(Ben grabs her violently, and they embrace. Brother Jake, with resumed dignity, re-enters. He finds them much to his surprise in a situation, the consequences of which are well known to him. He assumes the pose of wounded dignity: then clears his throat - without effect. He clears it again. Still no response. He forgets his wounded dignity.)

JAKE.

Sister Kate . . . Sister Kate . . . You certainly is free and easy to-night.

BEN. (quickly turning: drawing razor)

Nigger, what dat you said?

JAKE (Moving down right, Ben following.)

Put dat razor up. Dis is de Lord's house.

BEN.

Dat don't dull de ridge of my razor.

JAKE.

Put it away, I say.

MAY KATE.

He de preacher, Ben.

BEN.

Oh! So you is de preacher, is you?

JAKE. (Drawing himself up.)

I has de honor of functionin fer dis flock.

BEN.

Well, from now on, parson, you do yoe functionin in de pull-pit, whar you b'longs; or I'll be doin' some functionin myse'f. Come on, May Kate, less step down de road a piece.

MAY KATE (As they move off.)

We'll be back befoe church is broke, Bro'r Jake.

JAKE.

sister Kate, you better stay here and worship wid us. Froy de looks off things you needs a powerful lot o prayin.

MAY KATE.

I'll do dat when I gits back, Br'r Jake.

B N.

An ef we don't gits back, Parson, den you pray for us.

(Jake is enraged. He strides towards them and jerks May Kate back into the room. Ben draws his weapon. Jake picks up a bench - then the congregation enters gradually, with it Uncle BILL.)

BILL.

Whar you gine, gal?

MAY KATE.

I'ee jes' gine stop out wid Ben, Daddy.

BILL. (Looking over his spectacles to see.)

Wid Ben! whar ho?

BEN

Here no, Uncle Bill. I come back for May Kate.

UNCLE B.

You is? Well, you aint gine git her. No nigger can up and leave my gal like you done. den come seshayin back and think he gal walk off wid her easy like.

BEN

She my wife, Uncle Bill.

UNCLE B.

Which one?

(Murmure from the congregation which, excepting a few stragglers is all in. Uncle Zebadee, with white whiskers, white kinked head, bent over with years and toil, moves forward and seats himself to the right of the parson's chair. The Official Starter, a strong negro wench, is seated on the left. She gets her title by "starting" the shouting when the picture of hell-fire and brimstone fails to act upon the congregation quick enough.

Brother Joe and Sister Adelaide come in and seat themselves in the middle of the church. Brother Joe is under the influence of corn and falls asleep immediately upon seating himself. His wife, Adelaide, punches him frequently, but he only opens his eyes to close them again. Other negroes, young and old, giddy and grave, flirtatious and loquacious, come in and fill the barn with noise and pantomime until Zebedee takes charge.)

UNCLE B. (Continued.)

Go set down, May Kate.

MAY KATE.

But I wants to be wid Ben.

UNCLE B.

You been away from him two year. Leastway, he been away from you two year, and now you can't wait untill church is broke to step out wid dis banjo-playin sinner. Go on down dar.

(He drives her with the motions of his cane to a seat Stage right.)

A YOUNG BROTHER.

Kin you still knock her, Ben?

BEN.

No- dis?

(His fingers run quickly over his "box". The congregation quivers with anticipation of pleasure other than religion.)

A YOUNG BROTHER.

Mason dar.

JAKE.

You take yoese'f and dat sinful instrument outer dis house of worship.

BEN.

Joe as soon as I kin take my waddin wif wid me.

UNCLE B. (As Ben moves towards M.K.)

Git back dar. (Raising cane.) You aint a-gonna play de rooster wid my gal no moe.

JAKE.

I know-s, but my judgment tell me . . .

ZEB.

Let de Lord do de jedgin. What dis boy need in Prayer. Aint I right, sisters?

(Answers: Yeh, yeh. You right. So right. Need Prayer. Amen.)

He standin in the need of Prayer.

(Zeb sings t is out. The congregation joins in. Ben drops in a seat near M. K.)

It's me . . . it's me, Oh Lord
standin in the need of Prayer.
Oh, it's me, Oh Lord, standin in the need of Prayer.
Not my brother, not my sister,
But it's me, Oh, Lord, standing in the need of Prayer.

ZEB.

Does you begin to feel de spirit, son?

BEN.

I does, Uncle Zeb.

JAKE.

Dat's fine. Now, since we is stuck a thorn in de debil's foot, dey aint nothin lef to keep us from standin close to de Lord. Less begin by takin up de collection. Br'r Sam'l, will you do de honors?

ZEB.

Jest a mimit, Br'r Jake. I wants to say somethin. Less Sunday when de hat went by, certain pusses of dis congregation, instid ob droppin deir dimes in to make hit jingle, jest shuck de hat. Now, tonight, when she jumble, I wants dat jingle to heb some meanin

JAKE.

Amen. Amen.

JAKE.

Throw him out you deacons.

BEN

Why doesn't you try hit.

JAKE.

I kin. (Deacons interpose.)

AUNT MARTHY. (Entering.)

Whar my Ben? Is he come?

A BROTHER.

Yeh, he show come, sister.

AUNT. M.

Whar my los' lamb? Oh, dar you is, come to grace. Sweet Jesus, bless
he name.

(She begins to shout. Three holders, after much effort, get
her into her seat. Uncle Zebedee rises.)

ZEBEDEE.

May Kate, set down dar whar you'll be away from de dee and temptation.

You, Ben, over dar.

JAKE.

But, Br'r Zeb, his pussion heah will spile de elements of dis meetin.

ZEB.

De Lord say hit better to bring one rank goat into de fole dan tis to keep
forty fleecy lambs inside. Dat's de scripeter.

JAKE.

I know dat. But I don't want no son o Satan a-jumpin wid my flock.

ZEB

Br'r Jake, we is obleeged to try . . . And look at his pore ole mammy,

worried to death ober his ways!

JAKE.

Sisters, let's don't argify in de Lord's house. Eff May Kate never drapp
no dime in, twern't her fault. She aint quite horse'f yit.

ADELAIDE.

Eff det had been me, Parson, you wouldn't talk so purty.

BEN. (Rising.)

Eff May Kate aint drapped no dime in, hit's because she leave sich matters
up to her man. Gimme dat hat. (with great non-chalence he tosses a dollar
bill into it. Great reaction from congregation.)

MAY KATE.

Could you git det drunken man o yours do dat, Sister Adelaide.

ZEB.

Here. Here. De debil put dem words in yoe moufs, bofe of you. Pass de hat
agin, Br'r Sam'l. See if you kin all do as good as Br'r Ben. De Lord ^{is}
beginnin to sit wid him.

(As this is done, Br'r Jim starts up-

No hidin place down dere,
Oh, dey's no hidin place down dar.
I went to de rock fer to hide my face.
De rock cried out, 'No hidin place'.
No hidin place down dere.

Oh, de sinner man he gamble an he fell.
Oh, de sinner man he gambl an he fell.
Instid of goin to Heaven, he had to go to Hell,
No hidin place down dere.

Oh, de rock cried I'm burnin too.
Oh, de rock cried I'm burnin too.
Cause I wants to go to Gaben jist de same as you,
No hidin place down dere.

(The congregation sings this with feeling. As the hat comes back
to Zebecce, the singing is hushed with expectancy. When he nods

final approval, the song bursts in loud relief. At its height

May Kate jumps up in a shouting fit. She throws herself, presun-
ably by accident, in Ben's arms. The meeting is in chaos.)

JAKE.

May Kate, take yoese'f out'n dat damn nigger's arms. You heah me, May Kate.

MAY KATE

Oh, my soul's a achin,

ADELATOR.

Taint yoe soul dat's achin, you Jezebell.

JAKE.

You deacons, take em apart. (Kneels by pulpit.) Oh, Lord God, take de debil out'n dis pore sinner woman. She don't know what she's a-doin.

(As he prays, he looks sidewise to see that May Kate is taken from the devil's arms.)

MAY KATE.

Oh Jesus, how I loves him.

JAKE.

Massen at her God In yoe house, God. Bellow yoe thunder. Shake yoe lightning.

(The holders bring M.K. back to her seat. Jake rises.)

Dat's hit. You's downed ole Scratch. De lord will see yoe good works, brothers. And now, sir, clear outern de lord's house.

ZEB.

No, we aint give him no chance. Set down, Ben. Set down, I say.

JAKE.

How come yo aint?

ZEB.

De boy aint done nuthin. Dat war May Kate tryin to Jezebell him.

UNCLE B.

I gi beat her good when I gits her home.

ZEB

Yeh, May Kate, you akin lak dat, and yoe Christian Pappy by yoe side.

MAY KATE.

ADLAIDE.

"O all need you.

BEN.

She never done nothin.

ZEB.

Heeh, Ben. It's a fight wid de debil to bring you back. Lissen boy. All of you lissen. Dis aint gwil hurt none of you. (Holords, from the congregation.) I'm gwil tell you what happened to Jonah fer goin in contrary ways to de Lord's command. " Arise, Br'r Jonah, and go ye to Ninny, dat wicked city, and tell dem misbehavin chilburn ofains to right deir ways or I'll be attar em."

JAKE. (Rising.)

A bible story.

ZEB

And Jonah say, " I'll go, Lord, eff'n I got to walk over step ob de way. But no sooner had de Lord turn her back den dat black rascal Jonah struck out thru de under bresh in de direction of Terville, on de udder side ob de r- ilroad track.

JAKE. (Rising.)

Det's de scripiter. De scripiter.

ZEB.

Why did he do dis, I aske yer? Why did he go agin de command ob de Lord? (Why'Er'r. Why. Go on. Tell us.) Heeh me! He done what many mose has done, befoe he time and attar it. Dey wuz a ginger-braid gal, name Rose of Sharon, over at Terville. Det's why he done it. She wuz a dancin woman, too, sisters. A dancin woman, brothers. (Loud responses.) A sinful woman. Heeh me, May Kate?

(The Starter rises and beats her head against the pulpit.)

STARTER.

Oh Lord, save de men of dis congregation from de ways ob . . . Do you heeh me, Lord?

John: He hear

ZEB.

Why, she was so sinful, dat de sin oozed out'n her eyes and ears and rolled out on de groun'. Yeh, hit did. It got so de king ob dat country had to hab de darby out ditchin when she went to town to buy meat for dinner. So what happened to Jonah? What happened to him, I asks yer. (Loud responses.) De mate ob de boat picked him up by de seat ob he breeches and throwed him overboard, clothes and all, and down went Jonah as straight ^{as he could go} into de whale's belly. ~~as he could go.~~

(At the mention of belly there are snickers from the back row. This irritates the old man. He stops, pulls up his specs, and pounds the pulpit.)

Yeh, belly. . . . De Bible say belly, and I says belly. Belly, belly, belly
BELLY.

JAKE. (Rising.)

And I says belly.

ZEB.

And dat's what happens to folks dat don't heed de command ob de Lord. You scoffers on dat back bench better heed me. And you, Ben, you heared me?

BEN.

Yes. I heared you, Uncle Zeb. But de pint is, I aint Jonah.

(Moans from congregation.)

JAKE.

You see he still stiff necked, Uncle Zeb. De debil's got him. Let de debil hab him. We must spend our time wid Sister Kate. It's gonna take a powerful lot o prayin. Dat tis. And attar dis meetin, May Kate, I wants to set out and pray wid you. De debil's slipped up behine you, and it's gonna take us hafe to drive him out.

BEN.

(Rises, shifts his derby, spits on the floor, and moves to the

back of the barn -ith insulting impudence and ease.)

BEN.

So de debil's got me, is he? Dat's jest yoe way o sayin yoe wants my woman.

(The congregation takes in its breath.)

Well, you aint a goin to git her. May Kate, is you willin to go to de debil wid me, honey?

MAY KATE.

Anywhere wid you, big boy.

(Moves from saintly members. Ben starts in her direction, but Uncle Bill pulls her into her seat. Deacons look menacingly.)

JAKE.

May Kate's my . . . de Lord's woman. She a little weak at times, but we must save her. Is I right? (You is. Save her. from all parts of barn.) Now, -ill you git?

BEN.

Oh, yeh, I's a-gittin. But I aint gone fer good. (Moves nearer barn door, stage left.) You all is mighty fine Christians, aint you? (He slightly strikes a few dance chords on his banjo. Again, but more decidedly the congregation tingles with the music. He laughs.) Dat look lak hit. Well, Parson, I see yoe Christians aint forgot de debil's chunes. Das all I wants to know.

JAKE

Git out o here, you son of Satan.

(With a final strum, Ben exits.)

Brothers and sisters, we's done all we could. You, Sister Marthy, you see ho de -ind blo-. And no-, as Leadin Elder, I wants to tell Br'r Jake on de part of de congregation ho- proud we is to hab h'im come preach for us, to hab him lead us out'n de land of Egypt. . . into de promised land. (Amens.) We's been in dat sinful land long enough.

JAKE. (Rising and bowing.)

Brother, sisters, Br'r Zebedee, I wants to thank you for de kind words.

(Amens) And I wants to tell you how proud I is to be de shepherd ob de flock. Yes. I wants to tell you all how glad I is. I wants you all to hit, everbody coddin in dis House of God. (He does. Yes. Yes. ect.) De tex o my sermon dis evenin is -- De Lee' Sheep. We's had a powerful good example befoe us tonight. Let hit set like a beam of wa rin in yoe eyes, my chil'lurn. Bey was a man had two sons. De youngest was spoiled by he mummy and lef unbeat by he pappy (Zebr: A Reckless Pappy.) So one day dat boy up and say, " Papp, I wants you to gie me what you aims to while I'ee young and kin enjoy hit. " " All right, son, " say he pappy, " It ain' goino be much, but lyar tis. " So dis boy went into a furrin land and spent de money in r uty livin. He sinned. Oh, how he sinned! When de Christians is up in Heaven a-flyin from one cherry-beam to another cherry beam, he-agine be down in de debil's Hell a-jumpin from one fryin-pan to another fryin Pan.

(At this Aunt Marthy shouts out of the church, holders dragging after her.)

But befoe I goes deep into dis subject, I feels obleeged to make a fession to my flock. I wants you all to know dat I aint always been as godly as I is today. (Loud responses: Amen. Aint it de truf. Bless he name.) I wants you to know dat I has sinned. (Oh Lords.) I wants you to know dat I has called de figgers to de debil's chumps. (Still louder) I wants you to know dat I has been a dancer in my sinnin days. (Very loud.) I wants you to know dat I has et my oats in de wrong flel'. (Approac ing climax.) I'ee done all dese here things tell de Lord come to me in all he mercy and say: " Samson. . Oh, Samson, take yoe fool hold out'n Sellah's lap. "

(Climax for responses. Several sisters shout. After they are quieted he proceeds.)

Eff'n anybody here have sinned, let him or her git up and tell de Lord ab ut hit. No 's de time . . . to wash away yoe sins in de Lamb's blood. Yeh's now de time.

(Ben can be seen in a stall, begin ing to strum his banjo, softly at first, then gradually louder.)

ONE SISTER. (leaps up.)

The Lord been soft to me. He ginnin clothes 'deu de neckle - sompin Trest

OUR SISTER (continued.)

when I'ee hongry, and water when I'ee thirsty. He done all dis for me, and
het I'ee aimed.

(The music is louder. Some of the congregati n begin
unconsciously to pat their feet.)

JAKE.

What dat I hear? Nit's de debil as shoro's I'm a son of God . . . A-sending
dancin chunes in tru de -indow. He's a-temptin you. Sten' up and face him.
His fare is burnin lo- in hell. (Groans from congregation.) He need ~~99999~~^{rich}
wood to flare up under his kittles. Is you agine to be dat wood? Answer me,
is you? (No Lord . Don't wanna burn. ect . . . from all parts of barn. This
does not keep their feet from patting, however.) Fight wid de Lord, you
brothers of Ham. Git down on yoe bended knees. Hold up yoe right han'. Glory
Hallelujah ram. Oh, Lord God, save dese pore sinners. Save, Ole Harster, from
de debil's chunes.

(The young begin to giggle and in a the words, almost un-
consciously to Old Don Tucker.)

Heeh de debil! Heeh him, God!

(By this time, and without his knowledge of it, Jake's foot
keeps time to the music.)

Yeh, God, Old Don Tucker he got drunk,
Fell in de fare and kicked up a chunk

What' dat I'ee a-seyin? Oh, Lord God, de debil's jumped in my mouf. Scrouge
him out, Lord. He kno- I war a dancin man one time, Lord. He know dat. He
kno- he had a holt on me, Lord. Look at dat foot, a-shakin like any sinner.
Stop yoe shakin, foot. Stop it, I say. Oh, Lord hef' of on in a-goin. Nomaine,
shake allyou wants to, you aint gaine cut no pigeon wing in de Lord's house,
even if tis a barn.

(At this point, the pious part of the congregati n is down on
its knees, praying. The frivolous are beginning to jig.
Those neither pious nor frivolous are patting their feet,
not quite the Lord's, not quite the devils.)

Partners to yoe places like nailed to dey trees.

(All but a few plous fall in line.) Ben steps out among them.)

JAKE.

De Lord's lef' me. De debil's got me.

(He grabs banjo from Ben.)

Gie dat box to somebody -het kno- ho- to knock hit, nigger. Balance all,

Hendé around and circle to de lef'. Half way back, end promenade home . . .

(while this is taking place, Ben slips May Kate to the barn door. They look at the person in the devil's hands; then go out under the gathering moon, as the

CURTAIN FALLS.

She's me_n. She's got every kind of me_t in her, like a tuetle.

Miss Neid_, I had me a swell party last night, nothin but preachers and teachers, brains buttin brains.

The woman who shouted and fell at the preacher's feet. @ Let her lay where the Lord pitched her.

Here, take this money. I saved it up to bury me, but it looks like I can't die.

He's over in the fence corner, his belly bilin like a pot.

Look her, Sis Kate, do you sell camphor?

Time somebody put salt in his liquor. Ran every body out of the house but grandm_. " Now, if you want to shoot me, go ahead but you're not going to chase me out of my house."

Squire Fletcher cried whenever grandm_'s name was mentioned, and he died a few weeks afterwards.