

Ann Palmer

Interview with Ann Palmer (90)

120 N. Church St., Union, S.C.

—*Caldwell Sims, Union, S.C.*

"De cows lowed fer days befo' Will Abrams died. Dey got wusser and wusser jes' right 'mediately befo' he died. De owls, dey had been hollering in dis here holler down behind Miss Belle's house fer mo' dan a month. One day Miss Belle, she 'lowed she ain't never heard so many screech owls befo' dis in her life. I had done fetched her one of my collards. We was a-talking out on de back porch.

"I took and told her 'bout how Will had done got his finger infected fooling wid dem dead folks. Miss Belle, she say dat ain't got nothing to do wid Will being sick. She also 'lowed dat dat wasn't any reason fer dem owls a-screeching and gwine on so. Den I told her, I says, 'Miss Belle, ain't you heard de cows, how dey lows at night here recently? Yes'm, all dese is death signs; it ain't gwine be long neither befo' we hears 'bout somebody a-dying in dese here parts.' Miss Belle, she look at me sort of furious like, but she never say nothing dat time.

"Dat night de beastes was a-taking on so dat I had to hold my pulse. Fust (first), real tight like dis; den I presses harder and harder till I jes' natchelly squeeze all de blood out of my wristes. Dat is one of de best signs I knows fer making dem owls and cows git quiet. Yes sir, you has to hold your pulse fer five whole minutes, tight. When you does dis, de owl's voice, he git lower and lower as your pulse git weaker and weaker. Look, honey chile, all dese other niggers, dey had been a-tying up a sheet or a-putting de shovel in de fire, and a-turning over de nasty old shoes; but de owls, dey kept right on a-screeching. But dis old darky, she de one what know'd how to weaken 'em down by holding her pulse. Now, I doesn't tell dese young niggers 'round here; neither does I tell many white folks 'bout de wisdom I is learn't 'bout such things.

"Will Abrams, he been ailing fer I [TR: disremembers] how many weeks. He couldn't eat nothing but beans. I had beans in my bottom corn. Catherine, she axed me fer some and I give 'em to her. Will, he eat 'em, fer dat was his craving. His finger got wusser till it nearly driv him crazy. Den he got down and took to de bed. Look like his time, it was drawing nigh.

"White folks, de Judgement is a-coming. We's all got to face it. De folks is wicked, both black and so is de white. How dey 'spects de good Lawd to have mercy on de wicked and sinful souls de way dey does every day is mo' dan aunt Ann can see, and I is already done lived my ninety years. De Lawd, He still sees fit to bless me wid health; and de good white folks, He 'lows dem to help me.

"How could Dr. Dawkins or either Dr. Montgomery do Will any good when de Lawd, He done sot de hour? Dr. Montgomery, he 'lowed to Catherine dat Will had two chances to die and one to live. He also

said dat he had done his best. All de darkies and white folks, too, in Union, dey come over here to see Will. Lots of 'em fetched 'em some things along to give to Will. He was a good man 'cause he had done been born again, and he followed 'de straight and narrow path'. Dat's de reason dey liked him, 'cause his deeds, dey up and spoke fer him. Well, so many folks was a-gwine in dat room dat Dr. Montgomery, he say Catherine have to keep dem out. Will, he kept a-getting weaker and weaker. De ailing in his finger had done spread all over his chest. Dr. Montgomery and Dr. Dawkins, dey held a consultation. When dey come out dey told Catherine and dem others dat Will had done took and got pneumonia from dat finger. So dat night, even de dogs, dey took to howling and gwine on. 'Tain't no use to set dar and laugh when de owls screeched and de cows lowed and de dogs howled. It sho am de death sign.

"Hard work, trouble, and a-fooling wid dem dead folks, dem de things what make Will go away so easy. He was always a-running 'round a-getting sorry niggers out of scrapes, and a-making 'greements wid de white folks fer 'em; and dey never thanked him half de time. Us old folks, us told him to stop fooling wid dem dead niggers and all such as de like, 'cause he gwine to kill his-self. I is most blind, but de darkies, dey told me how Will fooled 'round a-doing things fer so many sorry folks.

"But den, God plucks his flowers. De night of de eighth day dem doctors had done 'lowed dat Will had pneumonia. Will look up at his wife and say, 'Git dese folks out of here so I can die by myself'.

"It was 'leven o'clock in de morning when dey come and told me. Susie Eubanks, she 'lowed dat de screeching of de owls wake her up dat morning 'bout 3 o'clock. I 'lowed dat a dog a-howling was what riz me up. Catherine 'lowed dat she hadn't laid down no time till she heard Gus's cow a-lowing. All de signs took and failed den, as dey will do on such occasions."