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FAITHFUL CLING TO WANING HOPE

Men and Women Followers of Mrs. McPherson Grouped on Sands at Venice Pray That Leader Will Return to Them

To the hundreds of men and women who wait in a huddled and silent mass beneath the open sky on the beach between Venice and Ocean Park, Aimee Semple McPherson, their beloved leader, still lives.

A faith as strong and deep as the ocean they watch hour after hour with aching eyes holds them there with aching eyes holds them there.

"She can't be dead. She can't be dead."

It is almost a refrain, repeated time and time again, an expression of faith which flings defiance into the teeth of death itself.

"God wouldn't let her die. She was too noble. Her work was too great. Her mission was not ended. She can't be dead."

The crowd remains hushed and tense. The words are alike. They come only in answer to direct questions. The speakers say them as if quoting. Then their eyes turn back to the sea.

The elements of tragedy and hysteria are there. They flare occasionally as some woman breaks under the vigil and sobs. Otherwise the crowd remains fixed and motionless. Few words are exchanged.

Through the fog-bound, chilling night and then through the weary scorching hours of the day, the followers of the evangelist have kept their places on the sand in the hope of seeing their leader again.

Even the fast-flying rumors and conflicting reports which have marked the search for Mrs. McPherson since she disappeared into the ocean Tuesday afternoon have lost the power to arouse them.

They are numb, many of these watchers, numb as to felling. But in the night hours when there seemed yet to be some chance of finding their leader, they prayed in mass under the huge lights sent out from the motion-picture studios to facilitate the work of lifeguards and volunteers seeking the body.

But one time during the afternoon yesterday did the crowd change its position. In some manner word was spread about that promptly at 2:30 p.m. Mrs. McPherson would arise from the sea and speak to her followers. The appointed time came and many arose to

look further out to sea. But it passed without the miracle which some of her followers had taken for granted.

At noon, search of the sea was halted as hopeless. The long seine nets stretched from boat to boat which had dragged the ocean floor since Tuesday night were taken in.

A boat containing life guards continued the search alone for a little while longer and then also gave up. The tide was left to do its own work.

The cessation of the search failed to rouse the watchers. They waited for the miracle. They could not believe their leader dead.

As the hours wore on to another night, the crowd still remained on the sand, mute and inflexible with the faith that held them. But here and there, in response to questions, members of the flock admitted that their leader may have drowned. They were grief-stricken, but they held their posts.

To occasional questions, police and lifeguards shook their heads helplessly. They had done all in their power. They were exhausted.

Only an occasional swimmer ventured into the water near the spot where Mrs. McPherson is supposed to have been drowned during the day. The place seemed to be shunned by bathers.

Conflicting theories as to the manner of the evangelist's passing were advanced by the score. Some declared that she may have fallen into one of the many holes below water at that point on the beach. Others attributed her fate to a heart attack. Others to cramps or a fainting spell.

Even the description of her movements varied. A sailor stated that he had seen her just before she vanished on a float near the pier. Another man declared that she was but a short distance from the beach. Others said they had seen her struggle, but most of them insisted that she went down suddenly without a fight, the victim of a sudden attack of cramps or heart disease.