

Mr. Barefoot & Rev. Broad

by Guy Benjamin Brookshire

You want to hear about Mr. Barefoot? Great county wit. He died of an argument giving water in the war. Goes like this. Mr. Barefoot and the Right Reverend Broad, a son of Tennessee and, hiccup, an embezzler — others say that Mr. Barefoot was the embezzler and that an old injun told him what to do. Maybe, hiccup, was in jail and Mr. Barefoot fled. Anyhow, As a young man he followed the doctor for his education. “What should I do to be famous?” Dr. Burroughs tried to shake him but he clung. Knocked him off the high post fence when he back talked. “Go ahead and hit me, but you can’t shake me long as I can learn.” Learned simplicity from a mouse. Not afraid of the dark he slept in the woods. Carried a bedroll to sleep. A wallet for his victuals. When asked where his family was from, where they kept house, who his father was, he’d point to the steeple and say, “Same as you. My father is yours, brother.” Spent most days swimming and fishing, winter and summer. Cold hurts at first, but you wake up. Lutherans were gossips. Methodists were prudes. Church of Christ hateful. Baptists strained. Presbyterians didn’t know what to think. Rev. Broad: a waste of time. “Preachers: friends for old women.” When he saw farmers, pilots, and carpenters at work he reckoned man was the smartest animal there was. But bankers, rainmakers, and preachers made him think man the most foolish. “You want to live right? Why, think right, or fit for a yoke.” At a picnic he saw Rev. Broad only eating cornbread and iced tea. “Now how come you’d go all that way to Houston to eat fancy barbeque, and the best in the world is right here and you don’t eat it?” “No. I declare, Mr. Barefoot, in Houston I took only cornbread and ice tea only there as well.” “Well why in the hell didn’t you go to Cuba? Or ain’t they got cornbread?” Rev. Broad is walking by and Mr. Barefoot offers him some peanuts and they get to talking and Rev. Broad eats up all the peanuts. “I said you could have some, not all.” “Sir, I shall send you a bushel.” “I don’t want a bushel tomorrow, I wanted my sack today.” “Come round tomorrow for a

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pitcher of tea?" "Got peanuts in it?" Mr. Barefoot walks in the rain the next day, knocks on the door. "Come in." Gets mud all over Rev. Broad's yellow Persian rug. Only Persian rug in the county. Frowning. "Well. I am sorry. I got mud all over your vanity, I say, rug."

"Yes, with vanity of another stripe." Some people say Mr. Barefoot gave the retort to himself. Rev Broad agreed so fast and loud it became his. Rev. Broad gave a sermon all afternoon on free will when asked what heaven is like. Mr. Barefoot walks by, drawing frowns. "Got to be a better word for that will than free. Sit there all a blue sky day." Mr. Barefoot sent for some of Rev. Broad's muskydine wine, and inquired after how the pecans had done that year. Rev. Broad sent no wine, but a bushel of pecans. "That man can't answer a damn thing strait, but he'll give you more than you can carry of something you don't want." Someone asked him where the finest examples of manhood were. "I don't know off the top of my head, but there are some good looking women in Memphis." He was talking about living right and everybody walked by. He played on the fiddle and they gathered around. "A lick of a tune does more than a prayer." Danforth Wiley was the best shot in the county, but cheated his brother in law out of his inheritance. "You all shake a man's hand for picking a small target, but a man shouts fire from a ways off and you don't bother to look for the smoke." Rev. Broad preached all morning about Moses and Elijah. Mr. Barefoot walked by their high noses. "Talk on about Egyptians dead and dust, but not a word on present ills." John Times and John Manwaring were the best banjo pickers in the county, but couldn't sit in the same room to play. "They can tune a string, but no their hearts." Professor from New York City brings a telescope around and names the mountains on the moon for a fee. Mr. Barefoot walks by. Looks it up and down. "Turn that thing on the earth and look for justice." Rev. Broad preaches the praises of the honest poor all Sunday. Mr Barefoot walks by as the plate gets passed. "Good Shepherd's got big shears." Come along the war. Mr. Barefoot enlists in Rev. Broad's rifles. They march off to war. Rev Broad gets shot leading a charge. The men all come

tumbling back. The wounded are left between the lines. Rev. Broad is croaking for water. Mr. Barefoot goes out to give him some. Gets shot himself. They argue all night long about works and faith. In the morning both are dead. Died in the war, of an argument.

