

A SKETCH OF  
**THE LIFE AND TIMES**  
OF  
**WILLIAM HICKMAN**



DELIVERED BEFORE THE KENTUCKY  
BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY, AT  
ASHLAND, KY., JUNE 22, 1909 :

BY  
**W. P. HARVEY, D. D.**

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## SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM HICKMAN, Sr.

By W. P. Harvey, D.D.

Did Mr. Hickman preach the first sermon preached in Kentucky? The Baptists of this state celebrated their centennial in 1876. In the genesis of the movement it was believed that he did.

What I say on this subject is based on the autobiography of William Hickman.

His name and picture graced our centennial certificates. The claim was based on Mr. Lewis Collins' History of Kentucky, published 1847, page 112: "William Hickman as the first preacher in Kentucky claims our first attention". Again he says, volume 1, page 416: "In 1776 William Hickman commenced here his labors in the Gospel ministry. He was the first to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ in the valleys of Kentucky."

I now quote from A. C. Graves, D.D., LaRue's Ministry of Faith, page 85: "Harrodsburg is the first settlement in Kentucky, and is also the oldest preaching point in the state. The first sermon ever preached in Kentucky was preached by William Hickman." Dr. Graves afterwards corrected this statement in a newspaper article.

### Hickman Not First Preacher.

William Hickman was not the first man who preached in this state. Collins' history, volume 1, page 441: "The Rev. John Lythe, of the Church of England, came early to Kentucky." Col. Henderson's convention met at Boonesboro, May 23, 1775, to organize proprietary government of lands he bought from the Indians. Sunday following, Collins' History of Kentucky, volume 2, pages 500 and 501: "Speaking of a large tree, Henderson says: 'This elm is to be our church council chamber, etc.' Again: 'Divine services for the first time in Kentucky was performed by Rev. John Lythe, of the Church of England.'"

G. W. Ranck's History of Boonesboro, published by Filson Club, page 30, agrees with the above statement. The ser-

mon preached on Sunday after Henderson's convention adjourned was eleven months before Mr. Hickman was in Kentucky and heard Tinsley preach at Harrodsburg.

In preparing my centennial address that was delivered at the centennial meeting at Harrodsburg, May, 1876, I borrowed a copy of "The Life and Travels of William Hickman", from his grandson, W. S. Hickman, I quote from pages 8 and 9: "We got to Harrodsburg the first day of April, 1776. Myself, Brother Thomas Tinsley, my old friend, Mr. Morton, took our lodging at Mr. John Gordon's, four miles from town.

"Mr. Tinsley was a good old preacher, Mr. Morton a good, pious Presbyterian, and love and friendship abounded among us. We went nearly every Sunday to town to hear Mr. Tinsley preach. I generally concluded his meetings. One Sunday morning, sitting at the head of a spring at this place, he laid his Bible on my thigh and said, 'You must preach today.' He said if I did not he would not. It set me in a tremor. I knew he would not draw back. I took the book and turned to the twenty-third chapter of Numbers and tenth verse: 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.'

"I spoke fifteen or twenty minutes, a good deal scared, thinking if I left my gaps down he would put them up. He followed me with a good sermon, but never mentioned my blunders."

Mr. Hickman was not a preacher when he first came to Kentucky on his tour of observation. I quote from Dr. J. B. Jeter's History of Baptists, according to Spencer's History of Kentucky, volume 1, pages 12 and 13. Virginia Baptist Preachers, First Series, page 240: "William Hickman after making a profession of religion visited the state of Kentucky. He went there in 1776, according to Elder John Taylor's History of Ten Churches. He began to preach while he was there."

Daniel Boone was in Kentucky, May, 1769. 'Squire Boone his brother, came soon afterwards. The brothers met accidentally January 1, 1770. They were natives of Pennsylvania, but came here from North Carolina.

According to Ashpuld's Register, there were 309 Baptists in this state in 1774. 'Squire Boone, a Baptist minister,

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was in Kentucky five years before Mr. Lythe. There may have been Baptist preaching before Henderson's convention, but if there was there is no authentic record of the fact.

Before returning "Life and Travels" to W. S. Hickman I had it copied with his consent.

Dr. Cathcart of Philadelphia proposed to buy it from me. I declined to sell, and gave it to him to "keep in a fire-proof vault" on condition that I could get it, if I ever needed it.

When I learned that I was expected to prepare this paper, I wrote for it. The answer came: "It was lost when the American Baptist Publication Society building was destroyed by fire." By the kindness of Mrs. Josephine Hickman Walker of Denver, Colorado, I borrowed the original copy, the only one in existence that I know of. By the use of "Life and Travels"—Mr. Hickman's autobiography—I have been enabled to correct current history in regard to him being the first man who preached in Kentucky.

#### **Early Life of William Hickman.**

"Life and Travels", published 1828, two years before his death. Republished, 1873. Contains thirty-five pages, and about 12,500 words. "A short account of my life and travels for more than fifty years, a professed servant of Jesus Christ. To which is added a narrative of the rise and progress of religion in the early settlement of Kentucky, giving account of the difficulties we had to endure, etc."

He was born in the county of King and Queen, Virginia, February 4, 1747. His father's name was Thomas Hickman, and his mother's name was Sarah Sanderson. "Both parents died young, leaving their orphan son and daughter to be cared for by their loving grandmother."

His "chance for education was very small, having but little time to go to school." He "could read but little, and hardly write any." At the age of 14 he was put to a trade with John Shackelford. Of his environment he says:

"I found them notoriously wicked. I soon fell into evil habits, for master, mistress, children, apprentices and Negroes were all alike."

His grandmother had given him a Bible with a charge not to neglect reading it, as he was accustomed to do when he was with her. After a while he neglected it, and left off

praying, and learned to curse and swear. He says: "I went often to church to hear the parson preach (the Episcopal Rector) when he was sober enough to go through his discourse." "Life and Travels", pp. 1 and 2.

In 1770 he married Miss Shackelford, his master's daughter. "She was fond of mirth and dancing."

About this time he heard of the "New Lights", as the Baptists were then called—those converted under Whitfield's preaching. (Spencer's History of Baptists of Kentucky, Vol. 1, p. 153). "Curiosity led him to go quite a distance to hear these babblers preach", ("Life and Travels", p. 2). He had said "that he was sure they were false prophets, and hoped he should never hear one." He went and "heard John Waller and James Childs, and the people relating their Christian experiences. God's power attended the word, numbers falling, and some convulsed, and others crying for mercy." He went home "heavy hearted". He told his wife what he had seen and heard. "She was disgusted for fear I would be dipped, too." "She tried to keep me from going the next day to see the converts baptized." He did go, and tells "a good many tears dropped at the water and not a few from my eyes" ("Life and Travels", p. 3).

He and his wife moved to Cumberland County. His serious impression passed away and he says: "I yoked myself with a parcel of ruffians and took to dissipation" ("Life and Travels", p. 4).

Soon he attended another Baptist revival. Many of his neighbors were converted, also his wife. She made a profession in his absence from home. He was displeased and told her to go and see Parson McRoberts (Episcopal clergyman) "that he would convince her that infant baptism was the right mode". She replied "that she was fond of hearing him preach, but that she would not pin her faith to his sleeve". For months he kept her from being baptized ("Life and Travels", p. 4).

#### **His Investigation and Conversion.**

He decided to examine his Bible and pray for God's guidance. As usual in such cases, he became convinced that the Baptists were right. He says: "I submitted and saw my wife buried with Christ in baptism." Soon afterward he

heard David Tinsley preach from Daniel, v. 27: "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting." He adds: "It was a glorious day to me, for God made use of it to show me what a wretch I was." The minister illustrated by supposing a man in debt to a merchant 500 pounds, and he has nothing with which to pay, and he should say to the merchant, "I will pay as I go." Would that satisfy the merchant? No, he would take him by the throat and say: "Pay what thou owest." He "then calmly explained how we are indebted to God's righteous law, and that if we could live as holy as an angel in Heaven to the end of our days, how could we atone for all our past sins?" He said, "God's Holy Spirit, I trust, sent it home to my heart." After conflicting emotions he was led to the proper view of the plan of salvation. He says: "I heard no voice, nor was any Scripture applied."

In this respect his Christian experience differed from those who imagined they heard a voice. His joy was unspeakable, and to him it seemed that everything praised God. This was February 24th, 1773 ("Life and Travels", pp. 4 and 5). April following, he was baptized by Reuben Ford, who had baptized his wife the fall before. He and the other converts organized a prayer meeting, eight men besides himself, and women, and young folks. In a few years the result was the organization of Skinquarter church, and the nine men all became ordained ministers ("Life and Travels", pp. 6 and 7). Noble example for young converts. When Buffalo Lick Baptist church, Shelby County, celebrated their centennial recently it was said that the church existed for twenty-seven years without a pastor, and that they looked after each other.

#### **William Hickman Visits Kentucky.**

In the spring of 1776 he "heard of a country called Kentucky". He and five others came to Kentucky, viz., Geo. S. Smith, Edmund and Thomas Wooldridge, William Davis and Jesse Low. "Three other men joined them in the back part of Virginia". "Three of our number were Christians, and we resolved to go to prayer every night. Our new companions in their hearts opposed it, but they submitted and behaved well."

The journey was difficult and perilous. "The road was a



rugged, small, narrow path, over mud, logs and high waters". When they reached Crab Orchard, some of the party filed off to Boonesboro, and the rest went on to Harrodstown, now Harrodsburg. He exclaims: "Here we discovered a wonder, when we came to the beauty of the country. I thought of the Queen of Sheba who came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and she said the half had not been told, so I thought of Kentucky. I thought if I could only get ten acres of land I would move to it" ("Life and Travels", p. 8). "On account of conflicting titles to land, whether Henderson rights or Cabin rights would stand in law," Mr. Hickman says "our tour answered us but little good or advantage."

### Mr. Hickman Returns to His Home.

He left his home in Virginia, Feb. 23, 1776, and arrived in Harrodsburg, April 1. The journey lasted for thirty-six days. He remained sixty days in Kentucky, and started home June 1. He reached his home the 24th. In all, he was out about four months, and finds his family and friends well. To the joy of his brethren he continued preaching, and many successful revivals crowned his labors. He conducted the funeral of an old lady "who was buried on the church acre", though he was not allowed to preach "on holy ground". "The holy acre", meaning the consecrated burial ground of an Episcopal church, in which only Episcopalians were expected to be buried, and on which preachers of other denominations were not allowed to preach—so he had to "preach outside". When he started home the gentleman (who was her son-in-law) who engaged his services, gave him two six-dollar bills. He told the man he never charged. The man replied that he knew it, but he wished him to accept it as a gift. He took it. Mr. Hickman says: "It was the first penny I ever received in my life that way, and I was particular to let him know that if I took it at all, it was as a gift, and not a charge." I have heard of some mothers-in-law who would give more than \$12 to bury some sons-in-law.

He says: "I went home with money thoughts. What, a money preacher! I looked and felt so little like it." ("Life

and Travels", p. 14). The Baptists of Virginia at that time had as their battle cry, "A free church and a free Gospel."

That slogan finally downed the hireling clergy and the established church of Virginia. Mr. Hickman had his misgivings about accepting money as a gift. Well he knew that he could not afford to subject himself to the charge of inconsistency.

The Baptist preachers paid a high price for being loyal to their convictions. They laid themselves, their wives and children on the altar in order to win one of the greatest moral victories of the ages. When the friends of the established church realized that it was doomed, there was a proposition to establish all churches and that each taxpayer could designate the church his tax for religion was to go to. Patrick Henry was an advocate of this proposition, and a "general tax bill was proposed in the Legislature."

The Hanover presbytery up to this time stood by the Baptists, but now they faltered under the leadership of Patrick Henry, and favored the General Assessment Bill. In their meetings resolutions were passed, and they signed petitions in favor of the bill, Prof. James says ("Struggles for Religious Liberty in Virginia", p. 135):

"When the Legislature of 1784 adjourned the Baptists of Virginia stood alone as a denomination in opposing the general assessment and kindred bills, and the outlook was not bright for the triumph of their principles."

Mr. Hickman tells of a young man who engaged him to preach his father's funeral. The time was set. Previous to this he met the young man at a night meeting and the young man took him aside and told him that he had heard that he charged for conducting funerals, and that he was not able to pay. Mr. Hickman asked him for his author, but he would not tell. Mr. Hickman told him he had never charged a penny in his life, and explained about the two six-dollar bills that had been given to him. "Well," said the young man, "if you do not charge you may preach it." The sermon was preached, but he had to do it outside "the holy acre".

In those days Mr. Hickman says, ("Life and Travels", p. 15): "Baptists were despised, which caused Christ's sheep to

huddle closer together, and love each other better than when there was no opposition. A little before this time eight or nine Baptist ministers were put in jail at different times and places." All over Virginia Baptist preachers were often in jail for preaching Baptist doctrines. They preached through the grates and hundreds were converted. Persecutors have been blind and have not learned "that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church". Persecution has been the thorny path by which martyrs attained canonization. It is the way to make our robes white in the blood of the Lamb, and eternal glory is the result of trials and tribulations.

William Hickman was ordained to the full work of the ministry in 1778 by Geo. Smith and James Duprey, when he was thirty-one years old, and two years after he began preaching. His services were in great demand and his success in winning souls to Christ was phenomenal.

He tells of a father who drove his daughter from home because she was converted and baptized. When he was from home his wife came to Mr. Hickman's home with her pack under her arm, and after relating a satisfactory experience, he and his wife took her to the water and he baptized her. Her husband did not find it out for two years. When the Lord's Supper was observed, she would be in a dark corner covered with a big handkerchief, in order to conceal her identity. The deacon who waited on her was posted.

He tells of two preachers who arraigned a young lady before the church on "the charge of wearing stays, they being in fashion in those days". Bro. Hickman defended her from being excluded ("Life and Travels", pp. 19 and 20).

#### **William Hickman Decides to Move to Kentucky.**

On August 16, 1783, he announced he would start August 16, 1784, and he did. His farewell sermon at Skinquarter was a disappointment to him. "Several preachers were present, and it was a time of weeping". Some friends followed him a day or two, and Geo. Smith accompanied him about one hundred miles. "We brought plenty of provisions and drove two cows, to furnish milk for the children and cream for his wife's coffee" ("Life and Travels", pp. 19 and 20).

"It rained almost every day. Waters were deep, and no ferries. We were wet day and night." After the toilsome

journey of eighty-four days, they arrived at Mr. Smith's cabin, Garrard County, November, 9, 1784. "Wet, dirty, poor spectacles we were, but thank God all in common health, the Lord was with us through the whole journey." The next day was Sunday, and there was an appointment for preaching at Smith's. There were three other preachers and they would have Hickman preach. He took his text from the fourth Psalm: "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself". He says: "I was followed by a Methodist preacher, Mr. Swope."

Elder John Taylor came from the North side of the river and preached at Bro. Robertson's. William Bledsoe was also there. Taylor's text was, "Christ is all in all." Hickman writes: "I fed on the food. It was like the good old Virginia doctrine."

April 5, 1785, he moved near Lexington, and he and his wife joined Lewis Craig's church, South Elkhorn, the fourth Saturday in April, 1785. He adds: "In the fall, Elkhorn Association was formed in the house of John Craig on Clear Creek. The Gospel began to spread and many churches were constituted. Four of Mr. Hickman's children were converted and joined South Elkhorn church.

William Hickman moved to Forks of Elkhorn, January 17, 1788. Leading citizens had persuaded him to locate among them. Unknown to him until afterward, they arranged to make him a present of one hundred acres of land. His preaching was greatly blessed, and resulted in many conversions, and the constitution of the Forks of Elkhorn church the second Saturday in June, 1788, with him as pastor, which position he held until his death in 1830, with a slight interim of about two years. His zeal for soul winning knew no bounds.

His missionary tours extended in all directions. The greater the destitution and the greater the danger, the more attractive to him. What is now Shelby County was then a wilderness, sparsely settled with a few forts, and full of roving bands of savages, but the tomahawks and the scalping knives were to him no terror. He tells of one of his frequent missionary tours to Shelby County.

He and his guard crossed Kentucky river at Frankfort in a

small canoe one at a time, swimming their horses; when all crossed they saddled the horses. The moon was shining and it was snowing. On their journey they crossed Benson Creek nineteen times. At some fords the ice would bear them, and at others the horses would break through. They found empty cabins. The occupants had either been killed by Indians or driven away. They reached the fort about 2 a.m. The old gentleman was away from home, and his wife had the "fort well barred", and thinking they were a decoy of Indians, she would not admit them. Finally they convinced her, and she let them in. "She raised a good fire, gave them something to eat, and put them to bed." Next morning runners were sent out to the forts, and a congregation was gathered. There was a church, known as Brashear's Creek, near Shelbyville, constituted with eight members about two years before, but they were scattered by the Indians. He remained sometime preaching from fort to fort. With his bodyguard of armed men, he used to say "it looked more like going to war than preaching the Gospel". They implored him to locate among them, but because of his devotion to Forks of Elkhorn, he could not consider it. On one of his tours he took John Morris who located among them and did fine work. Speaking of Morris who located in Shelby County, he says: "Many a tour I took with him, long circuits round, 'till at last I concluded they were well supplied, and I gave out going so often; but now I know of no county in the state so well supplied as Shelby—flourishing churches and good ministers. Great changes have turned up in thirty years; I went in the front through cold and heat, in the midst of danger, but my Lord protected me till now. Blessed be his name" ("Life and Travels", p. 20).

#### **William Hickman Starts Home to Virginia.**

William Hickman started June 1, 1791, to visit his old home and friends in Virginia. He traveled through several counties, preaching wherever he went. Friends manifested their love by throwing presents in his way, for which he was thankful to God, and then, after an absence of five months, he reached home and found his family and his brethren well. Soon he was invited by Mr. John Scott, grandfather of Col. Tom. Scott of Forks of Elkhorn, to preach in his neighbor-

hood in Scott County. He made several visits, converts multiplied and McConnell's Run church was constituted, now known as Stamping Ground, of which he was pastor for fourteen years.

He rejoices that he has had a glorious revival in his Forks of Elkhorn church. He "baptized more than five hundred at different places, in two years" ("Life and Travels", p. 32). Many new churches were organized, resulting in many members withdrawing from his church. Decline in membership distressed him, but he was consoled that they built a new brick meeting house.

Behold the grand old pioneer, over four-score years old. He is not an object for alms or pity, but a man that all must admire. Listen to him: "I am in my eighty-first year and have a greater charge on me than ever I had. Besides Forks of Elkhorn, I am pastor of three other churches, taking all of my time, but I want to spend my latter days to God's glory. I enjoy common health through the goodness of God. I have come nearly to the end of my privilege. I do believe in the true evangelical doctrines of the cross of Christ, and that I am a poor sinner of Adam's fallen race, believing the great God knew me from eternity, and included me as one of his purchases. In time he called me by his Spirit, and made me willing in the day of his power, for it is by grace I am saved, through faith, that not of myself. Therefore, he deserves all the glory" ("Life and Travels", p. 34).

This was the kind of theology he lived by, wrought by, and died by. In the fall of 1830 he visited his son, William, pastor at South Benson. After preaching, he started home, accompanied by his son, William. When he reached Frankfort he was unable to go further and stopped at the house of a friend. As he rested on a pallet talking of his trust in Jesus, he grew weaker until he was silenced in death. He is buried at Forks of Elkhorn. When he was seventy-six years of age, Elder John Taylor, author of "History of Ten Churches", says, pp. 48 and 49: "No man in Kentucky baptized so many people as this venerable man. He walks as erect as a palm tree, being at least six feet high, rather of a lean texture. His style of preaching was in a plain solemn style, and the sound of it, like thunder in the distance, but when in his

best mood, it sounded like thunder at home and operates with prodigious force on the consciences of his hearers." He was a loyal and consistent Baptist, and lacked patience with the extremest, self-assumed standards of orthodoxy. He tells of a Baptist preacher of this class he met at Marble Creek church, now East Hickman, Fayette County, who hurt his feelings. "How could we expect any better from such a man?"

Mr. Hickman organized twenty churches. He was the arbiter of peace among his brethren. His first wife was Miss Shackelford. Thirteen children were born to them. She died June 9, 1812, sorely distressed in mind about the massacre of her son Pascal at the battle of the River Raisin.

Hickman County was named in his honor. His second marriage was December, 25, 1814, to Mrs. Elizabeth Abbott. Three children were born to them. She died Sep. 21, 1826.

### **New Facts in History.**

Before closing this paper I must tell of that which caused him great trouble. In his "Life and Travels" he does not allude to it. John Taylor must have known it, and he does not mention it. Dr. Spencer heard that there was something, but his account is incomplete and inaccurate in details. In order to account for the event that has not been given to the public an explanation is in order. Bear in mind that Kentucky was a part of Virginia until 1792. Questions that were agitated in Virginia were discussed and agitated in Fincastle county of Virginia. There was a memorable meeting of Baptists at Williams' meeting house, Goochland county, Virginia, March 7, 1778, a meeting that deserves to rank with that at Runnymede in 1215 A.D., when the barons of England wrenched from the iron grip of King John the Magna Charta; a meeting pregnant with the same invincible purpose as that of Philadelphia in 1776, when the immortals signed the Declaration of Independence. That was with a contemptuous sneer styled (according to Prof. Jesse B. Thomas, D.D.) by the tyrants of Europe "an Anabaptist document". Let it be known and never be forgotten that Baptists through the ages have been the persistent and uncompromising champions of civil and religious liberty. Well does Bancroft, in creed a Unitarian, say (vol. II, p. 66),

“Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, has been from the first the trophy of the Baptists.”

With the Baptists of Virginia soul freedom was the reward of eternal vigilance and self-sacrifice. Like the heroes who scaled Meter Hill at Port Arthur, they resolved to conquer or die.

Two great questions were discussed for three days. First, shall we favor or oppose the ratification of the Federal Constitution? Unanimously they decided to oppose it, and nominated Elder John Leland for the legislature to vote against it. Their reason was that the Constitution contained no guarantee against the establishment of a national church.

Laws in all the colonies except Rhode Island, New Jersey and Pennsylvania had discriminated against Baptists religiously and politically and their long suffering and bitter experience put them on their guard.

The first petition presented to the Constitutional Congress in 1776 was by a committee composed of the Rev. Isaac Backus, and President Manning, of Rhode Island College, now Brown University, appointed by the Warren Baptist Association of Rhode Island, praying for the removal of civil and religious disabilities. As a result we have the sixth article of the Constitution of the United States: “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the United States.” Good so far, but the Baptists of Virginia in those days were not modest in their demands. Mr. James Madison, who wrote the Constitution, favored the ratification. On his return from the East he spent a half-day with Elder Leland. After fully explaining his position, he convinced Mr. Leland that while it was not all that was desired, it was too much to run the risk of losing, for unless Virginia ratified it, it could not become the law of the land.

### **Held Balance of Power.**

The Baptists held the balance of power in Orange county, and the election of Mr. Madison to the convention depended on the withdrawal of Mr. Leland from the race. Mr. Leland declared in favor of Mr. Madison who was elected. The Federal Constitution, after a hard struggle, was ratified by a majority of 10. Mr. Madison was elected to Congress and,



true to the faith and hopes of the Baptists, the amendment desired by the Baptists was offered by Mr. Madison January 8, 1789. It was the first amendment to the Constitution, and was adopted September 25, 1789, and reads as follows: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Quoting from Dr. H. M. King's "Religious Liberty", page 113, who quotes from Appleton's New Encyclopedia: "The article on religious liberty in the amendments to the American Constitution was introduced into it by the united efforts of the Baptists in 1789." Alone Baptists could not have done all credited to them. We had powerful friends, e.g.: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Patrick Henry, Gen. Washington and myriads of sympathizers in the struggle, and above all, God. Baptists were the pioneers—the agitators—the consistent forerunners.

H. M. King, D.D., "Religious Liberty" p. 113, says that "Judge Story in his commentary on the constitution says that at the time this amendment was adopted it was the genuine if not universal sentiment in America that Christianity ought to receive encouragement by the state."

This amendment sounded the death knell of the unhallowed union of church and state, not only in the United States, but on the Western Continent, and inaugurated a holy crusade against all forms of ecclesiastical despotism all over the world.

The second great question discussed at that memorable meeting at Williams' meeting house, Goochland county, was emancipation. August 8, 1789, the Baptist general committee of Virginia met in Richmond. "The property of hereditary slavery was taken up at this session," Mr. Semple (the Baptist historian) says: "And after some time employed in the consideration of the subject, the following resolution was offered by John Leland, and adopted: 'Resolved, that slavery is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature, and inconsistent with a Republican government, and therefore recommend it to our brethren to make use of every legal measure to extirpate this horrid evil from the land, and pray Almighty God that our honorable Legislature may have it in

their power to proclaim the great Jubilee consistent with the principles of good policy'."

Dr. Spencer said in "History of Kentucky Baptists", pp. 184 and 185, in 1880: "Whatever may be the thought on this subject now, it cannot be denied that the Baptists of ninety years ago were strongly opposed to slavery. They are entitled to the honor or reproach of being the first religious society in the South to declare explicitly in favor of the abolition of slavery."

In 1791 slavery agitation reached Kentucky. The Baptist Associations of Kentucky kept up a correspondence with the general committee of the Virginia Baptists, by letters and messengers, and were posted on all their proceedings. Many of the Baptist preachers became radically opposed to slavery, and favored emancipation. Mr. Hickman spent five months in Virginia this year, and he came home full of it. For thirty years the subject wrought havoc in our churches. Emancipation churches were organized and formed into emancipation district associations.

In 1805 a resolution was adopted at a meeting of Elkhorn Association at Bryants (calling a halt on the agitation) viz.: "This association judges it improper for ministers, churches or associations to meddle with emancipation of slavery, or any other political subject, and as such we advise ministers, churches and associations to have nothing to do therewith in their religious capacities."

This resolution gave great offense to the emancipation. "Even the laborious and earnest William Hickman was carried beyond the limits of prudence." On the "fast day" that same year he preached at Elkhorn, of which he was a member and pastor, text, Isaiah 58:6, "Is not this the fact that I have been chosen to loose the bands of wickedness to undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke." This sermon, says Theodore Boulware, "was disingenuous and offensive. The speaker declared nonfellowship for slaveholders." A few days afterward he wrote a letter to the church declaring his withdrawal. John Shackelford was called to the pastoral care of Forks of Elkhorn church for one year. Before his time was out Mr. Hickman returned and gave satisfaction to the church, and when

the year was out resumed its pastorship. The above incident is taken from Dr. Spencer's history.

"The minutes of the Forks of Elkhorn Church", kindly loaned to me by Dr. J. R. Sampey, the present pastor, do not accord with Spencer's account. The sermon stirred up a church crisis. I quote from church minutes, page 821: "Second Saturday in December, 1806, a charge against William Hickman for inviting Carter Farrant to preach at his home after being excluded for disorder in Hillsboro church". The church took the question, is it right to invite an excommunicated minister to preach? Answered by a majority of three-fourths, it is not. Second, five said Brother Hickman had erred, eight said he had not."

They loved him, and even if they differed with him in judgment, they made the allowance that true love required.

Did Mr. Hickman write a letter of withdrawal from the church? The church record does not sustain it. I quote from church minutes:

"The second Sunday in September, 1807. After divine services, proceeded to business. Bro. William Hickman came forward and informed the church that he was distressed on account of the practice of slavery, as being tolerated by the members of the Baptist Society, therefore, he declared himself no more in union with us and Elkhorn Association. Therefore, the church considers him no more a member in fellowship. This was nineteen years after he became pastor. Alas for human frailty and inconsistency."

The above act was nineteen months after his Thanksgiving sermon.

According to church minutes, we will see that John Shackelford was called to the pastorate for one year, and before the year was out, he was engaged for another year. "Second Saturday in January, 1808. Brother John Shackelford made choice of as minister to preach and administer the ordinances of this church, and that he be requested to attend us one year, on our monthly meeting days, and as he can make it convenient." Quoting from minutes, p. 102: "Second Saturday in October, 1808. Committee to talk to Bro. John Shackelford and see whether he will attend the church one

year more on the same principles he has done the preceding year and report to the church.

"4. The men appointed to talk to Bro. Shackelford report to the church, that he is willing to attend this church the ensuing year on the same principles he did the preceding year." He was called and accepted as pastor the second year. He was pastor from January, 1808, to December, 1809. He was pastor one year and eleven months.

According to church minutes of Forks of Elkhorn church, page 106: "The second Sunday in November, 1809, William Hickman came forward and offered his membership and after some conversation, he was restored to membership and his former standing."

According to church minutes Hickman ceased to be moderator of the church from the first Saturday in August, 1807, to the second Saturday in December, 1809. If he ceased to be pastor, when he ceased to be moderator, which is probable he was out of the pastorate about two years and three months. He saw those who had been converted under his ministry, alienated and ungrateful to him. Relations that had been the dearest of earthly ties, were broken. Suspicion took the place of confidence, and love was dethroned by misgivings and distrust. Some who had been enemies and jealous of him rejoiced in what they considered his downfall. The church that he loved better than his life languished, and the lost were neglected. Through the ages, Baptists have been proscribed and persecuted, and sad to tell, that some misguided Baptists have been almost as cruel and unmerciful to each other as those of other creeds have been to them. Many of the leading statesmen, and the Baptists, registered their protest against slavery over one hundred years before the immortal Lincoln issued his emancipation proclamation!

Mr. Hickman puts himself on record as a conscientious Christian and against an evil that he regarded as colossal, and sooner or later destined to threaten the existence of the Union. Seeing that the agitation was premature, and at the time hopeless, without apology or retraction, for the sake of peace among the churches and his own usefulness, he left the matter with God, who in his own time and way brought about the emancipation of slavery, thus vindicating the wis-

dom and foresight of his servant. We are thankful for our schools and colleges, and our great theological seminary, the spiritual lighthouse of our Southland. We rejoice that we have men trained in the highest and best learning, but far be it from us to fail to honor our sainted pioneers.

In their abject poverty and with their meager opportunities, regardless of hardship and danger, they planted the Gospel in the dark and bloody ground. They sowed in tears, and we are reaping with joy. They laid the foundation deep and strong, on which we are building. They courted not the favor of the world nor feared its frown. They contended not for an earthly but for a heavenly crown. They generally supported themselves, taking the Apostle Paul as an example, who made tents for a living when it was made necessary to do it. In no other way could the poor in those days have the Gospel preached to them. Let us not forget that there are sections in almost every part of Kentucky dependent upon poor, self-sacrificing men who have to supplement their scant salary by outside work.

### **The Backwoods Preachers.**

Thank God for the backwoods preachers, "the pathfinders, the blazers on the border". Often unknown to earthly fame. Without such, hundreds of our churches in this state and thousands in our Southland would be without pastors. There is no longer an excuse for brethren who contemplate the work of the ministry to neglect preparation for it. The average young man of today has double the opportunity for an education that the average young man had a generation ago.

There is not a young man in the state, endowed with a sound mind and body, who has not a far better opportunity for acquiring an education than the average college graduate in this audience had. No man can be too well trained for his work, whatever that work may be. It has always been true that where there is a will there is a way. How much more true in our day. With common sense as a foundation no one can have too much learning. Ignorance can only be bliss when the individual is irresponsible. The libraries of our pioneers consisted of sixty-six books, and that in one—the Bible. They were one-Book men, and known as

“mighty in the Scriptures”. As they studied it, they believed that God was their guide, and that Christ was their leader. In the annals of our pioneer worthies who wrought and pre-empted Kentucky for the Baptists, William Hickman was in vision and achievements imperial. By right, without detracting from his coadjutors, he ranks as the Gideon of the Baptist pioneer army in Kentucky.

The ancients imagined a circle around the sun, in which their orators, statesmen and heroes of all generations dwell. Be that as it may. I fancy I see the redeemed of every age and clime parading the streets of the New Jerusalem in glorious triumph. I fancy I see seats of high honor, reserved for prophets, apostles, martyrs and missionaries, who in all ages placed themselves on the altar, and obeyed God rather than men.

For truth with tireless zeal they sought,  
 In joyless paths they trod,  
 Heedless of pain or blame they wrought  
 And left the rest with God.

But though their names no poet wove  
 In deathless song or story,  
 Their record is inscribed above,  
 Their wreaths are crowns of glory.

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