

# LINCOLN'S RELIGION

## IS CLEARED

By WILLIAM D. NOWLIN  
Greenville, Kentucky

One of the most interesting characters in all American history is Abraham Lincoln. Born in a one-room log cabin in the wilderness of Kentucky, reared in the grinding poverty and hardships of the backwoods of Indiana and Illinois, he, by dint of industry and application, became a great lawyer and statesman, a great president and



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preserver of a nation.

Every student of history is familiar with the real humanity and depths of character of this great American citizen. In the study of such a character questions will arise: "What of his ancestry? Were they pious, religious people? What of his training? What inspired him to a great life?" The student naturally looks for something in the dreary pioneer life of "Honest Abe" that inspired him to nobler and greater things beyond the horizon of his wilderness home. In our search for this inspiration we find that Lincoln's parents were pious, religious Baptist stock. The Lincolns were Baptists in Kentucky and united with a Baptist church in Indiana, where they first settled after leaving Kentucky, as shown by the following:

"Lincoln City, Ind., Nov. 5, 1921 — Rolling back the mists of a century and offering the deerskin-bound records of Little Pigeon Baptist Church near here as the missing link of Abraham Lincoln's religion, Thomas B. McGregor, Assistant Attorney-General of the State of Kentucky, has given to an appreciative American substantial evidence that Abraham Lincoln was reared in the simple faith of the 'hard-shelled' Baptist Church. (Continued on page 4, column 4)

### Lincoln's Religion

(Continued from page one)  
"Much of the mystery of Lincoln's religion, and that of his parents, for over half a century a mooted question, has been evaporated by the finding of Mr. McGregor in the little old deerskin book of Little Pigeon Church.

"There is no record of Abraham Lincoln's affiliation with any church denomination, but McGregor's story of Thomas Lincoln, moderator and pillar of the Little Baptist church, proves conclusively, Mr. McGregor says, that the Lincoln family were Baptists.

#### WERE WELL TO DO

"The parents of Abraham Lincoln deserve a fairer estimate than has been allotted them by most of the biographers of Lincoln," says Mr. McGregor, "and the story, as told by the records that are still to be found in the archives of Little Pigeon Church, near Lincoln City, Spencer County, Indiana, of the devotion paid by the parents of Lincoln to Him who guided the lad of Pigeon Creek in the hour of the nation's travail, goes far to give to them their true estimate. In fact, they were well-to-do joiners of their day; of sturdy ancestral stock, owned a farm, domestic animals, tools and a family Bible; neighborly, sacrificing and active church-going members.

"Pigeon Creek Church was founded on June 8, 1816, the year that Thomas Lincoln and his family moved from Kentucky and settled

on Little Pigeon Creek in what was then Warwick County, Indiana Territory. It was then, as now, the chief church in that vicinity. When the meeting-house was built, its site was selected about a mile west of Thomas Lincoln's home, the church building today occupying practically the same place. When Lincoln's mother died she was buried between their home and the church, the graveyard not having been at that time started at the church, but when Lincoln's sister, Sarah Grigsby, died in 1828, she was buried at the church burying ground, where her grave is yet to be seen, marked by a rough stone.

"This church, with its continuous existence since 1816, has only two books containing its records and minutes, the first covering the period from 1816 to 1840. It is in this book that we find Abraham Lincoln's father, stepmother and sister were active members of the hard-shell Baptist church of Pigeon Creek, and this book, with its deerskin cover, the hair still remaining, not only reveals in its crude, historic way the true religion of Lincoln's parents, but gives us the best insight yet found to his own religious views.

#### RECORDS OF CHURCH

"Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks were married by a Methodist minister by the name of Jesse Head, but shortly afterward they were united with one of the churches of Baptist Licking-Locust Association of regular Baptist churches of Kentucky, and when Nancy Lincoln died in Indiana, Abraham, by his own efforts, had their Kentucky pastor, Elder David Elkins, come to their wilderness home and preach his mother's funeral.

"After Thomas Lincoln had married Sally Bush Johnson he sent back to his Kentucky church and obtained his letter of fellowship, and as the minutes on June 1, 1823 show, he united with the Pigeon Creek Church by this letter and his wife by experience. From that date until they moved to Illinois in 1830, their names appear frequently in the minutes of the church proceedings, Thomas being one of the pillars of the church acting as moderator, on committees to investigate the conduct of brethren and sisters, and messenger to associations, bearing the letter of Pigeon Creek to her sister churches.

#### TEXT OF RECORDS

"The historic minutes which record the affiliation of Thomas Lincoln and his wife with this little pioneer church follows:

"June the 7" 1823.

"The church met and after prayer proceeded to business.

"1st Inquired for fellowship.

(Continued on page 5, column 2)

# Lincoln's Religion

(Continued from page five)  
tist faith of his fathers.

## LINCOLN AND HIS BIBLE

The following account of Lincoln and his Bible is taken from one of our Baptist papers:

"The Bible which fed the soul of Abraham Lincoln in the Kentucky log cabin of his boyhood was one of the cheap little Bibles imported from England by vote of the American Congress in 1777.

"Lincoln loved the Bible above all books, and once paid the following tribute to it: 'I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man. In regard to the great Book, I have only to say that it is the best book which God has given to men.'"

Lincoln's addresses, speeches, and messages are shot through and through with quotations from the Bible. For example, take this paragraph from his second Inaugural Address delivered March 4, 1865: "The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense

cometh.' If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offenses which in the providence of God must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense come, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him? Fondly do we hope — fervently do we pray — that this mighty scourge of war may pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

In Mr. Barton's recent book, "The Soul of Abraham Lincoln" he gives on page 86 a statement taken from Scribner's Monthly, 1873, page 343, as follows: "Here I relate an incident which occurred on the 4th of March, 1861, as told me by Mrs. Lincoln. She said:

"Mr. Lincoln wrote the conclusion of his inaugural address

the morning it was delivered. The family being present, he read it to them. He then said he wished to be left alone for a short time. The family retired to an adjoining room, but not so far distant but that the voice of prayer could be distinctly heard. There, closeted with God alone, surrounded by the enemies who were ready to take his life, he commended his country's cause and all dear to him to God's care and with a mind calm by communion with his Father in Heaven, and courage equal to the danger, he came forth from that retirement ready for duty."

Lincoln was a man of God, a man of prayer, a man of faith. He believed unquestionably in the eternal purposes of God, and in the infallibility of His revealed will — the Bible.

(KENTUCKY BAPTIST HISTORY, pp. 187-196, 1922 edition).

Signed with other names is:  
 "Thomas Lincoln, white corn,  
 manufactured — pounds — 24."  
 "Thus," continued Mr. McGreg-  
 or, "we have revealed to us the  
 religion of Abraham Lincoln's par-  
 ents, his sister Sarah, and of him-  
 self. He was raised in the simple  
 Baptist faith, which in after years  
 never left him.

"We have no record of Thomas  
 Lincoln or his wife ever uniting  
 with any church after they moved  
 to Illinois in 1830."

The above was published by the  
 daily papers, and is taken from  
 Judge McGregor's lecture on Lin-  
 coln. It will be observed that Judge  
 McGregor refers to the "Licking  
 Locust Association of Regular Bap-  
 tists in Kentucky" as "Hardshell."  
 The Licking Locust Association, ac-  
 cording to Spencer, was consti-  
 tuted 1807 as a result of a split on  
 the slavery question. This associa-  
 tion was an "emancipation asso-  
 ciation," but it disappeared  
 about 1820, according to history.

Judge McGregor, however,  
 makes a mistake when he con-  
 cludes that the association, be-  
 cause anti-slavery, was anti-mis-  
 sion. The churches constituting the  
 Licking Locust Association were  
 missionary, and all of them that  
 now exist are still missionary.  
 Many of the preachers who were  
 known as "Emancipation preach-  
 ers" were among the most evan-  
 gelistic of the state. The Licking  
 Locust association could not have  
 been a "Hardshell Association,"  
 for it passed out of existence at  
 least a decade before the mission  
 split — or before there were any  
 Hardshell associations. Prior to  
 1816, the date when the Lincolns  
 left Kentucky, there were no  
 "Hardshells" in Kentucky. To  
 whatever Baptist church the Lin-  
 colns may have belonged in Ken-  
 tucky, it was not a "Hardshell" or  
 Anti-mission church, for Spencer  
 says, "Previous to 1816 there was  
 not an Anti-mission Baptist in Ken-  
 tucky so far as known" (Vol. I,  
 p. 570). Neither could the Pigeon  
 Creek Church, founded in 1818 in  
 Indiana, be a "Hardshell" church,  
 for the split between the Mission-  
 aries and Anti-missionaries had  
 not taken place, and did not occur  
 until about 1832 and following. John  
 Taylor and Daniel Parker, the  
 leaders, later in the Hardshell  
 movement, were yet lined up with  
 the Regular Baptist body, which  
 was doing mission work in 1816.

William E. Barton, D.D., LL.D.,  
 in his "The Soul of Abraham Lin-  
 coln," published in 1920, page 35,  
 says: "Thomas Lincoln is alleged  
 by Herndon to have been a Free-  
 will Baptist in Kentucky, a Pres-  
 byterian in the latter part of his  
 life in Indiana, and finally a Dis-  
 ciple (I, 11). He does not state  
 where he obtained his information,  
 but it is almost certain that he  
 got it from Sally Bush Lincoln on  
 the occasion of his visit to her in  
 1865, as she is the accredited  
 source of most of the information  
 of this character.

"I am more than tempted to be-  
 lieve that either she or Herndon  
 was incorrect in speaking of Thom-  
 as Lincoln's earliest affiliation as  
 a Free-will Baptist. There were  
 more kinds of Baptists in Heaven  
 and on earth than were under-  
 stood in her philosophy; but I ques-  
 tion whether the Free-will Bap-  
 tists, who originated in New Eng-  
 land, had by this time penetrated  
 to so remote a section of Kentucky.  
 What she probably told Herndon  
 was that he was not of the most  
 reactionary kind — the so-called  
 'Hard-shell' or Anti-mission Bap-  
 tists . . . The Scripps biography,  
 read and approved by Lincoln,  
 said simply that his parents were  
 consistent members of the Baptist  
 church." This should settle the  
 question as to the church affilia-  
 tion of the Lincolns. Mr. Barton  
 also gives evidence to show that  
 the Lincolns were never Presby-  
 terians nor Disciples. They were  
 simply Baptists.

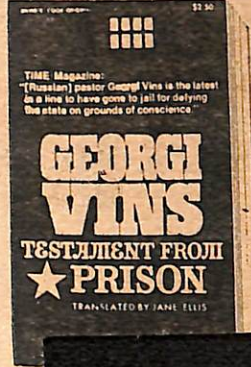
Another point worth noticing is  
 the subscription list for the build-  
 ing of the chimney to the church.  
 Next to "corn," "wheat" es-

"whiskey" on the list. This shows  
 that whiskey at that time was a  
 staple commodity in commerce.  
 We have two other such subscrip-  
 tions. South Elkhorn and Pitman's  
 Creek churches both have old subscrip-  
 tion lists for pastor's salary  
 and church building respectively  
 with whiskey as a part of the pay-  
 ment.

Mr. McGregor says Abraham  
 Lincoln "had their Kentucky pas-  
 tor, Elder David Elkins, come to  
 their wilderness home (in Indiana)  
 and preach his mother's funeral."  
 We learn from Spencer that David  
 Elkins was "one of the early pas-  
 tors of Goodhope Church," and  
 that "he labored with a good de-  
 gree of success among the church-  
 es of Russell's Creek Association,  
 and preached the introductory ser-  
 mon before that body in 1814"  
 (Vol. I, p. 336). This puts pastor  
 Elkins in that section of Kentucky  
 where the Lincolns lived, but El-  
 kin's was never a "Hardshell." All  
 of these facts go to show that while  
 the Lincolns were Baptists they  
 were not "Hardshell" Baptists in  
 Kentucky.

In response to a letter addressed  
 to the postmaster at Lincoln City,  
 Indiana, asking what kind of a  
 Baptist church "Little Pigeon  
 Creek" was, and if the old records  
 show from what Baptist church in  
 Kentucky Thomas Lincoln's letter  
 came, the author received a reply  
 from the clerk of the church, say-  
 ing: "Old Pigeon Church is a Reg-  
 ular Baptist Church. Some call  
 them Hardshells, but the right  
 name is Primitive Baptist. The

**BY ALL MEANS GET THIS BOOK!**  
**Georgi Vins**  
**TESTAMENT FROM**  
**PRISON**  
 TRANSLATED BY JANE ELLIS



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record doesn't show what church  
 he (Thomas Lincoln) was lettered  
 out of." This was signed, "Lewis  
 Varner, church clerk of Pigeon  
 Church, Booneville, Ind, 1-4-22."  
 This shows that the church is now  
 a Hardshell church, and this fact,  
 perhaps, misled Mr. McGregor.

In response to a letter to Hon.  
 Thomas B. McGregor, the author  
 received the following:

COMMONWEALTH OF KY.  
 Attorney General's Office  
 Frankfort, Ky.  
 State House, Jan. 2, 1922.

Dr. William D. Nowlin, Pastor  
 First Baptist Church  
 Greenville, Ky.

My Dear Doctor:

I am in receipt of your letter of  
 the 31st ult., relative to my recent  
 article upon the religious views of  
 the parents of Abraham Lincoln,  
 and I have noted with interest  
 what you have to say touching up-  
 on the history of the Hardshell  
 Baptist Church in Kentucky.

The article you saw was doubt-  
 less taken from a Chautauqua ad-  
 dress that I have delivered in sev-  
 eral States and which was recent-  
 ly used in a magazine and by the  
 Associated Press in tabloid form.

I found the old church book of  
 the Little Pigeon Church more  
 than twelve years ago, and at that  
 time I looked closely into the his-  
 tory of the Lincoln family in Ken-  
 tucky. Thomas Lincoln joined the  
 Little Pigeon Creek Church in  
 Spencer County, Indiana, by letter,  
 and knowing the customs of the  
 Primitive Baptist Church so well,  
 I immediately began to look for  
 his church connection in Kentucky.  
 In my search somewhere, I ran  
 across the fact that his anti-slav-  
 ery views were that of his church  
 and that he was a member of such  
 church in either Hardin or Wash-  
 ington counties, Ky. In 1807, there  
 was a dissension in the General  
 Union of Baptists, and those  
 churches refusing to give fellow-  
 ship to slaveholders formed a sep-  
 arate Association and it was known  
 as "The Baptist Licking Locust  
 Association, Friends of Humanity."  
 It was of short life, however, and  
 by 1814 it had disappeared. The  
 home of the Lincolns in Kentucky  
 was in Baptist territory.

With high regards and best wish-  
 es, and thanking you for your in-  
 terest in my article, I am

Yours very truly,  
 Thos. B. McGregor

It should be remembered, how-  
 ever, that it was not the anti-slav-  
 ery sentiment that marked a  
 church as "Hardshell," but the  
 anti-mission sentiment. Many of  
 the early Baptists who were anti-  
 slavery were thoroughly mission-  
 ary. The zealous, evangelistic  
 missionary, Wm. Hickman, was  
 one of the "emancipators," but  
 never anti-missionary.

Mr. McGregor says Abraham  
 Lincoln "was raised in the simple  
 Baptist faith, which in after years  
 never left him."

While there is no record of Abra-  
 ham Lincoln having either joined  
 a church, it is believed that he  
 lived and died in the simple Bap-  
 (Continued on page 8, column 1)