

## MISSION TO THE ALABAMA

*These letters contain reports of a missionary tour undertaken by James L. Sloss and Hiland Hubbard. William H. Barr, a graduate of Hampden-Sidney College in 1801, was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1806 and went to South Carolina as a missionary. In 1809 he became pastor of a church in Abbeville District where he remained until his death in 1843.<sup>1</sup> James L. Sloss was born in Ireland. In 1803 he emigrated to America, where he settled in Lexington, Virginia. He was successively a printer's apprentice, a school teacher, and a minister, being licensed to preach on 17 November 1817. Nearly his whole ministerial life was spent in the Alabama region.<sup>2</sup> Hiland Hubbard was also a Presbyterian minister; however, there is no biographical information on him at the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.<sup>3</sup>*

DEAR FRIEND-I am directed by the Presbytery of South Carolina, to forward to you the reports of James L. Sloss, and Hiland Hubbard missionaries to the Alabama Territory. After hearing their reports, presbytery directed them to abridge the first part, in which they had given a minute and particular account of the manner in which they had discharged their mission, and the places at which they had preached, as this would not be interesting to the publick, & the reports thus epitomised are now transmitted to you, with the

William H. Barr, Hiland Hubbard, and John L. Sloss, "Mission to the Alabama. A Letter from the Rev. William H. Barr, to the Editor, dated Abbeville, South Carolina, October 20th 1818"; "Report of a Missionary Tour, read before the Presbytery of South Carolina, at their Fall Session, A.D. 1818, by Mr. Hiland Hubbard"; "Report of a Missionary Tour, read before the South Carolina Presbytery, at their Fall Session, A.D. 1818, by Mr. John L. Sloss," *The Weekly Recorder* 5(11 December 1818): 138-40.

1. William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 9 vols. (New York, 1858), 4: 384-87.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 581-83.

3. Elizabeth S. Hoyt, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, to Jacqueline Bull, 10 September, 1969.

hope that you will be so obligin as to give them a place in your useful paper.

Immediately after the Alabama Territory was acquired by our government, the presbytery of which I have the honor to be a member, believing that it would be settled with unparalleled rapidity, and feeling a desire that religious instruction should keep pace with the population, that the most important posts should, if possible, be preoccupied by able and faithful ministers of the New Testament, and that the first settlers generally might be prevented from sinking into that ignorance, superstition, and wickedness, which at once degrades human nature, embroils civil society, and ensures both temporal and eternal misery; presbytery did employ James L. Sloss, and Hiland Hubbard, then licentiates, as missionaries in these parts, and at the same time wrote to the Board of Missions of the General Assembly, giving information of the destitute situation of the Alabama settlements, and the pressing call for missionary aid. Presbytery have since thought proper to assign Messrs. Sloss and Hubbard trials prior to ordination, and at our last stated sessions of presbytery, they attended. and were

ordained as missionaries, without relation to any particular churches. A few days after their ordination, they again set out for the Alabama Territory, where they will spend at least six months and it is hoped, that they will finally settle in that country. One reason why the Presbytery of South Carolina wish these reports to have a place in your Recorder is, that the attention of the Christian public may be called to this destitute region of our country. Eighty or a hundred thousand inhabitants, with so few religious instructors, is surely-a weighty consideration, and calls loudly upon the friends of Zion to come over and help us. I am yours affectionately,

WM. H. BARR

Report of a Missionary Tour, read before the Presbytery of South Carolina, at their Fall Session, A.D. 1818, by Mr. Hiland Hubbard

To the Rev. Moderator and Members of the Presbytery of South Carolina

Commissioned by you to itinerate as a Missionary in the frontier of Georgia and the Alabama Territory, I left Willington, South Carolina, on the 12th of December, 1817, for that purpose.<sup>4</sup>

The first Sabbath I spent in Washington, Georgia, where there was a large and respectable congregation almost entirely destitute of a preached Gospel.

On Monday, in company with brother Sloss, I started on my journey, and rode through the villages Greensborough, Watkinsville, Athens, Madison, and Eatonton,<sup>5</sup> where I preached as often as circumstances would permit. In these several places, the people were almost, or entirely destitute of the preaching of the Gospel. In some

places they were anxious to obtain a Minister, and would give a comfortable support, could they find one willing to settle with them. In this part of the country there are many, who have lived so long without any religious privileges, that they have become almost entirely indifferent concerning them. They are grossly immoral and ignorant. But among them, there are a few, who appear to be feelingly affected with a sense of their situation, and are anxious to obtain a preacher, to instruct, to comfort, and to build them up in holy things. Yea, they appear to groan and sigh for the sins of the people, and almost fear lest they should share the fate of Sodom. The pleasure of preaching to such people was truly great; and to leave them, and go to others equally destitute, but less anxious to hear, was often very trying to my feelings.

On Wednesday the 31st of December, I left this frontier, and started through the Indian territory, accompanied by Brother Sloss. After travelling through a wilderness of about 260 miles, almost entirely inhabited by Indians, we came to the head Settlements of Alabama, where we commenced preaching. Through Jones's Valley,<sup>6</sup> which is very thickly inhabited, I preached very frequently, and sometimes to very large and respectable congregations. This Valley is about 50 miles in length and from three to six miles in width, running in a south western direction. In this Valley, there is not, I believe, an individual preacher of the Gospel. Here, are many, who formerly enjoyed religious privileges, and thought themselves alive to the best feelings of the soul, that now appear to be languishing and almost spiritually dead.-If the soul is not cheered by the light and truths of the Gospel, it will droop in darkness.

4. Willington is in Abbeville County, South Carolina. Heilprin and Heilprin, *A Complete Pronouncing Gazetteer*, p. 2006.

5. Eatonton is probably the town referred to here.

6. Jones Valley is a long valley which separates the Cahaba and Black Warrior coal fields. It is about 100 miles long and 3 or 4 miles wide. With its outliers, it occupies parts of Jefferson, Tuscaloosa, and Bibb counties. Owen, *History of Alabama*, 2: 814-15.

From this Valley I went on to the Falls of the Black Warrior, where I spent a Sabbath & preached to a large and attentive audience. This was a village, at that time, of about 100 houses, where, I believe, a Clergyman of the Presbyterian order had never before spent a Sabbath. This is a flourishing place, standing at the head of navigation on the Black Warrior. It certainly will be a large town, and it is important that it be immediately occupied by an able and faithful minister of Jesus, before heterodox and irreligious men shall have gained a place here.

From this place I went down the river about 50 miles to Russel's Settlement, where I preached a number of days in succession.<sup>7</sup> This settlement is composed principally of Methodists and Baptists; but there are some Presbyterians, who were anxious to hear the word. Indeed, the inhabitants generally appeared to receive the word gladly. This certainly is a place deserving the notice of Missionaries.

After spending a few days in this place, I started down the river for St. Stephens, which stands on the western bank of the Tombigbee. This is the present seat of government in this Territory, and the Legislature was then in session. I spent a Sabbath, and preached to a very large and attentive audience. This place is sufficiently large and wealthy to support a minister. Indeed, the people profess to be willing to give a liberal support; but as yet, they have been unable to obtain one to settle with them.

From this place, I visited the towns of Jackson and Claiborne, <sup>8</sup> at both of which places I preached.

7. Russel's Settlement was near the present town of Greensboro. Albert J. Pickett, *History of Alabama*, (Sheffield, Ala., 1896), p. 625.

8. Claiborne, on the east bank of the Alabama River, was built on the old Federal Road. It became a large cotton market but never recovered its prominence after the Civil War and Reconstruction. Fort Claiborne was nearby. *Alabama Guide*, p. 363.

At Claiborne, I found a Mr. F. a preacher of the Presbyterian order, who was preaching a part of his time in that place, and a part in some neighbouring settlements. I returned to St. Stephens, and received an invitation to remain at least three months; with which I complied. During my residence here, I visited, more than once, some settlements on the Chickesahay,<sup>9</sup> where I found the people entirely destitute of preaching, but very anxious to hear the word, and to obtain the labours of a minister. I formed a small Church here, and thought the prospect of building up a society better, than in any place which I had before visited.

During my stay at St. Stephens, meetings were attended very punctually and seriously. I thought the prospect then flattering, but what may be the result God only knows. What may be the effect of my labours through the Alabama Territory, whether there will be any fruit, I cannot say. I have endeavoured to labour faithfully as a Missionary, and whether people hear, or whether they forbear, rests between them and their God. In this long tract of country where there are between 80, and 100 thousand inhabitants, there are settled but two clergymen of the Presbyterian order, though there are at least fifty wanted. To this part of our country very few missionaries have yet been sent. While they have gone to the East and to the West, to the North, to the South, this country has been forgotten. It is lamentable to see the destitute situation of this country. No part of the United States is so destitute of preaching as this Territory. The state of Society, I know, renders it discouraging to ministers to settle here; but is not this a day of great things? Is it a time to be discouraged?

9. The Chickasawhay River joins the Leaf River in south-east Mississippi to form the Pascagoula, which empties into the Gulf of Mexico at Pascagoula Bay. In the early days it was navigable for fifty miles above Waynesboro. Federal Writers' Project, Mississippi, *Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State* (New York, 1949), pp. 15, 491. Hereafter cited as *Mississippi Guide*.

By no means. The Lord works with his own powerful arm and will ere long possess the whole habitable earth. Will not missionaries, then, his favoured instruments, be faithful until all his vineyard shall be cultivated. Your servant in the Gospel.

HILAND HUBBURD.<sup>10</sup>

Report of a Missionary Tour, read before the South Carolina Presbytery, at their Fall Session, A.D. **1818**, by Mr. John L. Sloss

To the Rev. the Moderator, and Members of the Presbytery of South-Carolina

In compliance with your directions I proceeded from this state on the 12th day of December **1817** in company of the Rev. H. Hulburd.-I remained nearly three weeks in Georgia, preaching as often as opportunities offered in destitute congregations. I spent most of the time in that part of the state commonly called the New-Purchase. In this tract of country Gospel labourers are greatly needed. Ignorance, and immorality prevail in an alarming degree, and many seem to be perishing for lack of knowledge.

I passed from the New Purchase, through the Cherokee Nation, to Jones's Valley, in the Alabama Territory. I continued in this Valley nearly six days, and preached five times. I afterward visited, in succession, the Falls of the Black Warrior, Russel's Settlement, St. Stephens, Jackson, Claiborne, and Winchester (in Mississippi) <sup>11</sup> preaching in these places, and in the surrounding neighborhood, as often as I found opportunity.

When I first visited Jackson, I was solicited by the citizens to remain with them. After I had completed my two months missionary tour, I

<sup>10</sup>. This name is spelled incorrectly twice in this article. It should be Hubbard.

<sup>11</sup>. Winchester was on the Chickasawhay River. Incorporated in **1818**, it was the seat of Wayne County. *Ibid.*, p. 372.

returned to this town, and in compliance with the wishes of many of the inhabitants, I consented to remain with them, at least one year. This term commenced two weeks after the time at which we expected to receive a Commission from the Board of Missions of the General Assembly. We were now of the opinion that no such commission had been transmitted; and I felt confident that the design of the Presbytery in allowing me to spend three months as a missionary in that country would be fully answered by settling there. I now therefore, became stationary before the expiration of the third month.

Whether my missionary labours have been very useful in that country, I am not able to say. The great extent of country through which I was to travel, and the short time allowed me for this purpose, prevented me from remaining long in any particular neighborhood. I never, but once, preached twice at the same place. I had not, therefore, opportunity to observe whether my labours were or were not productive of good. I have perhaps, been the means of erasing from the minds of many persons some of their unfavorable prejudices against Presbyterianism.

I have not yet had an opportunity to organize a single congregation. Members of our church are very scarce in the country through which I travelled, and the few that I saw are considerably scattered.

The state of religion in the Alabama Territory is not prosperous. There are, it is true, many professing Christians, but many of them seem to *have lost their first love!* Many, who have named the name of Christ, *have not been careful to depart from ALL iniquity.* <sup>12</sup> Some plead zealously for the indulgence of propensities, which we believe to be sinful; and they engage with eagerness in many of the fashionable amusements of the present day.

This is so much the case in certain places, that it

<sup>12</sup>. Variations of Rev. **2:4** and **2 Tim. 2:19**.

would be difficult to determine, from the conduct of the people, who are professors, and who are not. You will readily believe that such Christians do greater injury to the cause of Christ, than avowed infidels. Under the garb of friendship, they wound the very vitals of religion. Well do they deserve the woe denounced by our Lord against the Scribes and Pharisees: "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites' for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." 13

It may, perhaps, be of service to say something here of the most important places which I visited whilst in the Territory, that you may be the better able to direct the travels of those whom you may hereafter send as missionaries to that country.

**Jones's Valley** is more closely settled than any part of the Territory through which I have travelled, It is thirty or forty miles long, and from two to four miles wide. There is in it sufficient room for two or three preachers. Most of the inhabitants who profess religion are Methodists or Bap­tists, and yet I believe Presbyterian preachers might be as successful there as any other.

The town near the Falls of the Black Warrior will be an important situation. The commercial advantages which it enjoys will draw thither many occasional visitors, and will, thereby, give it a commanding influence over the moral habits of the surrounding country. It is, therefore, of great importance that this influence should be rightly directed. If the citizens of the town be erroneous in their principles, and immoral in their conduct, error and immorality will, in all probability, be disseminated through the neighboring country. It is, therefore, highly important that some Clergyman of acknowledged talents, evangelical principles, and genuine piety, should settle there. There are few places where such a person

13. Matt. 23:13.

might be instrumental in doing more good, or where a man of contrary character might do more harm. It is necessary that this place be soon occupied, that dangerous men may be prevented from settling in it.

The tract of country usually called Russel's Settlement lies on the east side of the Black Warrior, and not more than eight or ten miles from it. The fertility of the soil will secure to that place a numerous and respectable population. A good preacher might do much good there.

St. Stephens, the present seat of government, is a place of considerable consequence; and it would be greatly for the interest of religion if an able evangelical preacher were to settle in it.

Mobile, Claiborne, and the town about to be constructed at the mouth of the Kahawba, 14 will be important places, and deserve the serious attention of the friends of religion. If evangelical preachers do not soon settle in these places, they will, I fear, ere long, be occupied by the **pretended friends** but **real enemies** to the cause of Christ.

I must not omit the Kahawba Valley. 15 The tract of country known by this name lies between the Kahawba on the west, and the Coosa on the East. It is forty or fifty miles long, and from four furlongs to two miles wide. The soil is fertile--it will, therefore, be closely settled.

I have been informed that there is a Settlement, which lies south-east of this, called the **Pleasant Valley**, 16 the inhabitants of which are said to be

14. The first state capital was established at the mouth of the Cahaba River and named Cahaba by an act of the legislature on 13 February 1818. The town was laid out and a bridge was built across Clear Creek. In 1825 a disastrous flood forced the relocation of the capital at Tuscaloosa. Owen, *History of Alabama, I: 186-88*

15. Cahaba Valley separates the Cahaba and Coosa coal fields. It is 55 miles long and about 3 miles wide. It includes parts of St. Clair, Jefferson, Shelby, and Bibb counties. *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.

16. Pleasant Valley was in the northern part of Washington County above St. Stephens.

Presbyterians. The valley is said to be quite small.

There may be many other parts of the Territory as important as some of those which I have mentioned; but if so, I am not so well acquainted with them. There is a large tract of country about Fort Jackson, and some settlements on the Alabama, of which I know very little.

A large portion of the Territory has not yet been settled, and many of the persons now there are not stationary. This renders it impracticable to organize congregations in many parts of that country, and inexpedient to attempt it in others.

The present state of the Territory calls loudly to the friends of religion to be active in their exertions to promote the cause of Christ there. The character of the community is not yet permanently fixed-the population is continually increasing-and its maritime situation, and great commercial advantages, by drawing through it the trade of a considerable portion of the country which lies immediately north of it, will give it a great influence over the moral habits and principles of those residing there.

To this I would add; there is frequent communication between this Territory and Boston, and many persons have emigrated thence, some of whom are worthy. Boston, no doubt contains

many of the faithful followers of Jesus; yet I believe it to be the nursery of the most dangerous heresy, with which the Church of Christ is at present infested. *It is the hot-bed of Socinianism.* And if the important situations be not soon pre-occupied, I fear the Alabama Territory will, ere long, be cursed by the residence of some of these marked enemies of Christ's Church.

Let Christians then be on the alert. Let them be active in their exertions to arrest the progress of error and immorality-and to be beforehand with their arch enemy. Let their united supplications ascend to Zion's King, that he may prosper his own cause, succeed the efforts of his true servants, and expose to view the wicked designs of his enemies! Let Christians not give him rest day or night, until he shall make Zion a praise in the whole earth-until he shall give the heathen to his Son for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; so that there may be nothing to hurt or destroy in all his holy mountain.<sup>17</sup>

So prays your servant in the gospel.

JAMES L. SLOSS.

*Jackson, (A.T.) Sept. 30, 1818.*

17. This sentence paraphrases Isa. 62:7, 11 :9 and Ps. 2:8

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