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AN ORATION

COMMEMORATIVE OF

Col. Philemon Hawkins, Senior,  
Deceased,

Born on the 28th of September, 1717,

AND WHICH

Was Delivered on the 28th Day of September, 1829,

At his Late Residence in the County of Warren  
North Carolina,

BY

JOHN D. HAWKINS, Esq.

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## FOREWORD TO SECOND EDITION.

THIS address was delivered by my late father, Colonel John D. Hawkins, in 1829, and was first published in that year. Very few copies of the original pamphlet are now known to be in existence. Believing that its re-publication will be of interest to the numerous descendants of its subject, Colonel Philemon Hawkins, Sr., I have decided to issue this second edition for private circulation.

A. B. HAWKINS, M. D.

Raleigh, N. C., February 22, 1906.

## AN ORATION.

Colonel Philemon Hawkins, of Pleasant Hill, Warren county, North Carolina, in the seventy-seventh year of his age, having for many years entertained the desire to call together his descendants and connexions, as well as those of his late father, Col. Philemon Hawkins, senior, deceased, at his late residence in Warren county, with the view, thus assembled, to unite in bearing testimony to his worth and to his memory, and to cement together more closely the whole family union, did, on the 28th day of September, 1829, thus assemble them, as well as health and circumstances permitted; and he invited many respectable friends to associate upon the occasion, having previously caused the old family Mansion House of the deceased to be fitted up. When thus assembled, he called upon his grandson, Leonidas Polk, and great grandson of the deceased, to offer up to the Throne of Grace a prayer upon the occasion, who delivered an elegant and a very appropriate prayer. And he called upon his son, John D. Hawkins, and grandson of the deceased, to deliver an oration commemorative of his history, and his virtue; when he delivered the following:

### *My relatives and respected hearers:*

I am called upon by Col. Philemon Hawkins, now the elder, to fulfil a trust, which his great desire to greet his relatives and friends, influenced at the same time by the most profound filial veneration, has induced him to impose. It is for me to attempt on this day to do justice to the character and memory of Col. Philemon Hawkins, senior, deceased. The task is a novel one, and the theme requires abler efforts than, I fear, I can bring to the discharge of it. It is therefore with great distrust I attempt to approach it. An assemblage of this sort, and upon such an occasion, is not only new, but unprecedented in our section of country. But, notwithstanding its novelty, what can be more justifiable, or more interesting than to witness a large assemblage of relatives and friends, called together by the venerable head of his family association, to pay homage to the great worth of a departed ancestor, who, when living, stood pre-eminently at its head? It is an effort, although a feeble one, to arrest from oblivion

the recollection of one, whose memory is fast fading away, and ere long will be forgotten, because all who knew him will soon have passed by and be forgotten also.

To hold up to view the successful enterprise, the patriotism and the virtues of the departed dead, is the province of biography, which acts as a mirror to reflect upon the living, examples of wisdom and of worth, from whence may be derived the most salutary lessons. If biography in general produces these conceded results, its benign influence will operate in an increased ratio upon relatives, when contemplating the enviable character of a departed and beloved ancestor.

Col. Philemon Hawkins, senior, deceased, was born on the 28th of September, 1717, on Chickahominy river, near Todd's bridge in Charles City county and State of Virginia, this day 112 years ago. He was the oldest child of his parents, Philemon and Ann, and his father died when he was of tender years, leaving three children, Philemon, John and Ann. Although Philemon the elder died, leaving to his children a scanty patrimony, he seemed to have entertained peculiar notions of predilection in regard to them. He felt towards them an unusual confidence; for, by his will, he desired that they should come to the control of their patrimony at the age of 18 years; and this confidence, as regarded the subject of this memoir, was not misplaced.

The widowed mother Ann afterwards intermarried with a native of Ireland; and by the time her son Philemon had reached the appointed age of 18, his celebrity for industry and manly deportment excelled all his associates, even those of riper years, and was of extensive circulation, a sure prognostic that he would rise above his then condition. Col. Lightfoot, of Williamsburg, a gentleman of great wealth and discernment, had three plantations in Charles City county and the fame of our then youthful ancestor had reached him though he lived 60 miles distant, and had deeply impressed him with a desire to place these three estates under his youthful control. He sent for him to come to Williamsburg,

and on getting there, they made a contract, the stipulations of which showed at once the confidence of the employer and the great reputation for good management and great ability in the employed. But his mother was unhappily married. It was her misfortune not to find in her husband that conjugal tenderness, affection and forbearance, which the wedded estate should assure to those who enter into it. The ill treatment of her husband had rendered the protection of her son Philemon necessary to her safety. And her husband's embarrassments and difficulties had fixed in him a determined resolution to remove to North Carolina. This was a trying time for the mother. To accompany her husband she was compelled to do; but to leave her son would bereave her of that protection which had not only stayed the arm of cruelty, but was further necessary to aid her with the necessaries of life, and to dispel the sad gloom of a cheerless fireside. She entreated her son to accompany her, and he pleaded his engagement, and the necessity he was under honorably to fulfil it. Under these distressing and conflicting embarrassments, the unhappy mother repaired to Williamsburg to entreat Col. Lightfoot to let her son off from his bargain, that he might accompany her to North Carolina. When she named the subject to him, he peremptorily refused to let him off, saying, although he was but a boy, he had long desired his services and the pay he was to give him was ample; and that he should not only injure himself, but her son, by letting him off from the contract. With this mortifying and most distressing rebuff the distracted mother retired to a neighboring place to spend the night, having been unwilling to expose to Col. Lightfoot's views the secret motives which so much prompted her to desire the company of her son. There melancholy, with all its accompaniments of distress, harrowed up her soul, and she resolved to try Col. Lightfoot once more, though mortifying, to tell him the cause of her importunities. She gained his presence the next morning, and found upon his brow that peculiar look, which

indicated unwillingness to hear any more from her upon the subject of her errand. But she entreated him to listen to her motives, and unfolded to him her situation; that although her son was but a boy, he was her gallant protector and defender. This changed the scene. Col. Lightfoot, as a man of chivalry, could not permit his interest to weigh against a woman's safety and a mother's safety too, when that was to be secured by the presence of her son. He instantly said, "Go madam, and take your son. His great worth had caused me to desire much his management of my business; but your need is entitled to the preference; and those rare qualities and powers, which he possesses, and which had gained him my confidence and esteem, will ensure your protection."

Philemon, together with his brother John and his sister Ann, accompanied his mother and her husband to North Carolina, and they settled upon Six Pound creek, then Edgecombe, now Warren county. Nearly the whole country was then a wilderness inhabited by Indians and the wild beasts of the forest. This country was then called a frontier, where civilization had shed abroad but little of its influence, and where the first settlers had to share, in a great degree, the privations which attended the first settlers of these United States. Persecution conduced to the first settlements of America, and that though of a different sort, fixed the destiny of this branch of the Hawkins family in this country.

There were other branches from the Charles City stock, which migrated to other parts of the Union; one went to the State of Kentucky, which produced Joseph Hawkins formerly a member of Congress from Kentucky, and who afterwards died in New Orleans. That gentleman traced his connexion with our family in a conversation with our distinguished and venerable fellow citizen Nathaniel Macon, Esq., who now contributes by his presence to commemorate this occasion, and this day.

This branch of the family came here headed by Philemon, who was but a youth a little turned 18 years of age, poor in

purse, but rich in spirit. By the sweat of his brow he sustained his mother, his sister and his brother with all the comforts their wants required. He cheered the drooping spirits of his mother, and, by every effort in his power, contributed to her wants and her wishes. His filial affection is recounted the more willingly, because it is a virtue he not only practiced, but because his course was such as to inspire his descendants with his kindred spirit; and it is that spirit which gave rise to this assemblage, and it is one of the manifold evidences of its analogy to the parental stock which gave it birth. May its influence descend to the remotest family generation in parallel with this laudable example!

In the year 1743, he intermarried with Delia Martin, the daughter of Zachariah Martin, Esq., who lived in an upper county of Virginia. But she lived with her brother, Capt. John Martin, on Sandy Creek, then Edgecombe, now Franklin county. They were married in Virginia at a church in the county of Brunswick, by Parson Betty. By her he had Fannie, who intermarried with Maj. Leonard Bullock, Col. John Hawkins, Col. Philemon Hawkins, Col. Benjamin Hawkins, late Superintendent of Indian affairs, Col. Joseph Hawkins of the Continental army, and Ann, who intermarried with Micajah Thomas, Esq. All of whom have long since passed to the tomb, except our venerable host Col. Philemon Hawkins who is also the only survivor of the signers of the Constitution of North Carolina ratified in the year 1776; and whose laudable desire to see altogether the descendants of his worthy father, as well as his collateral kindred, has invited us here this day that his history may be told over, to excite us to inculcate his virtues, and to profit by his examples, at the same time we attempt to do honor to his memory.

Our worthy ancestors lived at the mouth of Six Pound creek on Roanoke river, about ten years. They then removed to *this* tract of land, and not many years afterwards to *this place*, which was then in the county of Edgecombe. The province of North Carolina was divided at an early period of our

history as suited the then Lords Proprietors, and their government, into eight precincts, as they were called, to-wit: Beaufort, Carteret, Chowan, Craven, Currituck, Hyde, Perquimons and Pasquotank, to which Bertie precinct was afterwards added, by a division of Chowan. These precincts embraced the whole province and were afterwards called counties, and were divided and sub-divided and other counties erected as the population extended and the reasons and necessities of the province developed themselves. The first settlements were made upon the seashore and they extended westwardly, as they increased. The metes and bounds of these counties or precincts were but little known, and, owing to the savage inhabitants of the country, their geography could not be better ascertained at that time. Legislative acts were frequently resorted to, to settle occurring disputes about boundary and to form new counties, where the interests of the inhabitants required them. This section of country, as well as I can now ascertain it, was comprehended within Beaufort precinct, and Edgecombe county spread largely within its limits. From Edgecombe the county of Granville was taken in the year 1758, and the dividing line began at the mouth of Stone House creek, on Roanoke river. Thence to the mouth of Cypress swamp, on Tar river and from thence across the river in a direct course to the middle ground between Tar river and Neuse river, being the dividing line between Edgecombe and Craven counties. The uncertainty of this latter line now forms the subject matter of an unsettled dispute as to boundary between the counties of Wake and Franklin. In 1764, the county of Bute was taken from the county of Granville; and in 1779 the county of Bute was divided into the counties of Warren and Franklin.

I have been thus circumstantial in the detail of the change and formation of counties, because our ancestor figured in many of them, living the greater part of the time at the same place. In the year 1757 he was elected High Sheriff of Granville county, which then consisted of what Granville now is,

added to all Franklin, and all that part of Warren lying to the south of Roanoke river. In this extensive country, where civilization was far from being complete, and where the arm of the law was weakened by an habitual insubordination, great energy of mind as well as personal bravery was required to perform the duties of sheriff. These qualities he possessed in an eminent degree; and when his deputies were overpowered, as was sometimes the case, by those who threw off the restraints of the law, he repaired at once to the scene of action, and, even when threatened to be mobbed would personally attack the leader, having the address at the same time to win over his followers to a more correct course. This once occurred in the Little river settlement now in the county of Franklin, where one Bud Kade headed a mob to avoid paying taxes. And in the year 1759 when Robin Jones was considered the most eminent lawyer in this country, many of the suitors in Granville court, whose misfortune it was not to get him on their side, lost their causes, as they supposed, by his superior knowledge, and they fixed the determination to drive him by violence from the court. A threat to this effect, it was hoped, would deter him from attending the court; but Mr. Jones was not thus to be alarmed. He felt that he was shielded by his duty to his clients and the laws of the country; and that if the deputies could not enforce subordination, he relied upon the High Sheriff. To that end, he privately advised the High Sheriff of the machinations planning, and solicited his personal attention early at court, prepared for events, and to keep order. Accordingly the High Sheriff attended court at an early hour, armed to meet any occurrence. Robin Jones informed the court of the danger which threatened him, urging at the same time that he was an officer of the court, and entitled to its protection. The court ordered the sheriff to keep out of the court house all persons disposed to produce a riot. Thus protected by the constituted authorities, and firmly supported by his own inclination, he met at the court house door the ring leaders, and some of them were bold

and conspicuous characters; for among them was Col. Benton, the grandfather of Col. Thomas H. Benton, the present Senator from Missouri, who felt himself aggrieved and justified in the course he took. The threatening rioters assembled at the court house door, armed and made a show to enter; but were prevented by the determined spirit of the High Sheriff whose look, with arms in his hands, was too convincing that the entrance would be too costly; and, therefore, they desisted from their purpose and dispersed.

The construction of the government which existed at this period of our history was one of such discordance between the governors and the governed, that that moral force which is essential to its well being, and to the cementing together of all its parts, did not exist. The idea of subjection to a foreign yoke, of a tributary obligation, even of the mildest form, is repugnant to the choice; and although the idea might not at that time have been entertained to throw it off, yet a restlessness and a dissatisfaction prevailed and a slight matter was calculated to produce a popular ferment. We can trace this jealous discontented spirit through our history for a long time before it broke out in the Revolution which cured us of that grievous disquietude. It was that disquietude, but more systematically kept up, which had increased to an unprecedented height, and caused the Regulators to assemble in the year 1771 and which ended in the battle of the Alemance on the 16th day of May of that year. Gov. Tryon, the then Governor of the colony of North Carolina, resided at New Bern and finding that the Regulators were trampling down everything like government, and, if not resisted, would throw the whole country into anarchy and misrule, and being by education a military man, and of great personal bravery, he resolved to march against them, and called to his assistance a considerable military force. He at the same time called to his assistance as many of the most respectable citizens of the colony as he could, thereby calculating to add to his military the moral force of the country. His assemblage on this occa-

sion was large. It contained many of the first characters of the colony and it had, as was expected, the calculated imposing effect. The number on the side of the Regulators was the largest; but they lacked discipline or unity of action. Upon this occasion his Excellency selected our venerated ancestor as his chief Aid-de-Camp and assigned to him the hazardous duty to read to the Regulators his Proclamation, which he did promptly. And after the battle commenced, he was the bearer of the Governor's commands throughout the whole action. This so exposed him to the fire of the enemy, that his hat was pierced by two balls, various balls passed through his clothes, and one bullet and two buck shot lodged in the breach of his gun, which he carried and used during the action. But he had the good fortune not to be wounded. After the battle was over, he was complimented by the Governor for the very efficient aid he gave him, and for the bravery and ability he displayed during the engagement.

This spirit of dissatisfaction, which had so often manifested itself, although apparently quieted for the time, continued to increase until it burst in open opposition to the British Government, about four years after the battle of Alamance, and terminated in the establishment of the independence of the United States. It is a little remarkable that during this arduous struggle for our independence, those who had been found, during minor conflicts, arrayed against the government and laws, were never found acting conspicuously in support of it. On the contrary, many of them were Tories; and those who fought bravely under the banners of George III, against the Regulators, were, during that great struggle, the true Whigs of the country. The reason for this difference seems to have arisen from the circumstance that many of the Regulators were enemies to good order and to government generally, and for these causes were unwilling to unite in any systematic efforts to shake off the British yoke.

During this great struggle for American liberty, our ancestor being three score years old, did not render himself

conspicuous in a military point of view, except by pushing forward his sons in aid of the good cause, by supplying them with all the money and other means which they required for that purpose. But he was offered the command of a Brigadier General, which he declined, preferring to act in a civil capacity. Although he was thus old, he had the industry, activity and enterprise of a younger man, and preferred that his sons should go forth in personal defence of the country, while he stayed at home and made and supplied them with the necessary funds; and this he did largely, as occasions required them, feeling and acting for the good cause more efficiently than he could have done in the field. But after the adoption of the Constitution in 1776, and upon the election of Richard Caswell, who was the first Governor of the State of North Carolina, he was elected by the General Assembly one of the Counsel of State; which station he filled for some time, not only with Governor Caswell, but subsequently with Governor Alexander Martin.

Col. Philemon Hawkins, our ancestor, was a man about five feet nine inches high, very compactly built, and, when in vigorous health, weighed about one hundred and fifty-eight pounds. He possessed uncommon muscular powers and bodily activity, and a strength of constitution, which enabled him to bear fatigue and fitted him for hardships. His early education had been scanty, owing to his poverty and the loss of his father; but his natural mind was vigorous and comprehensive, well fitting and qualifying him for correct judgment, for which he was conspicuous. This made him seem to be correct by intuition; although he would make very logical deductions, showing at the same time the possession of strong reasoning powers. His buoyant and enterprising spirit always kept him one of the first men of his time. This, added to his extensive business, gave him the great knowledge of men and things, which he so eminently possessed, and were the great sources of his general intelligence. Not having had the benefit of a more early and liberal education, and feeling

great need of it, and particularly for its concomitants, good language and the free use of words, he resolved at a very early period to acquire the means, and to give his sons good educations. He soon obtained by his assiduity the money, but the patrons of literature were so few, and seminaries of learning so scarce, that there was not a classical school in all this country to which he could send his two first sons, Col. John and Col. Philemon Hawkins. Under such circumstances, he concluded to send them to Scotland, under the protection of a friend; but Col. John Hawkins was so nearly grown, and unwilling to go, that the idea was abandoned. When Col. Benjamin and Col. Joseph Hawkins arrived at the proper ages, he sent them to Princeton College, which seminary was at that time, owing to the great want of intercourse, such as is now in use, by stages and steamboats, almost as difficult of access as many of the European Colleges. They continued at Princeton, progressing regularly in their collegiate course, and were only prevented from receiving the honors of the College by the war of the Revolution, which waxed warm at Princeton, and in the Jerseys, and suspended the business of that institution.

From the end of the Revolutionary war to the time of his death, our venerated ancestor gave his attention mainly to the pursuits of private life. He was a Justice of the Peace from an early period, as long as he lived, and was a valuable member of the Court of his county. His favorite pursuits from early life, were raising stock, cropping, and the pursuit of some regular profitable business; and, by a steady application to them all, he acquired great wealth. At the opening of the land office under the present government, having the ability, he became largely interested in taking up and acquiring lands, as well as all other property; he became entangled in many legal difficulties growing out of the state of the country and the speculations consequent upon a change of its policy. This new business, calling into action his superior judgment, showed him to possess an adaptation for it;

for he uniformly prevailed. This latter business, and his often seeking distant markets for what he had to sell, added to his previous very extensive acquaintance, rendered him one of the most noted men in this country; and, what was calculated to keep up his notoriety, his was a house of unbounded hospitality. It was always open to administer to the comforts of all. And here I may be permitted to say, that no man ever had a helpmate, whose general good sense, good management, and superior domestic economy, exceeded that of Mrs. Delia Hawkins, the wife of Col. Philemon Hawkins, sen'r, deceased. They were both poor originally, and had to resort to all the drudgery of labor attending that condition in life. But, by their good conduct and superior good sense, the scene was soon changed, and as they travelled on through life, increasing in wealth, they also increased in respectability and refinement, till at length their house—*this house*—was the resort of the fashionable and the gay, the man of business and the literati of the country. All found here a plentiful, an elegant, and a sumptuous repast. Although Col. Philemon Hawkins was not himself a man of science, his sons Benjamin and Joseph were, and they lived here with their parents, and added a zest to all that was agreeable. The style and fashion of the place was noted and exemplary, and the resort to it from many parts of the world considerable. During the French revolution in 1792, there were many men of note from France, who resorted here to enjoy the great pleasure of conversing in their own language, which Col. Benjamin Hawkins, from his classical knowledge of it, was enabled to afford them.

Col. Philemon Hawkins, sen'r, deceased, lived up to the maxim, that extended hospitality, properly conducted, did not conflict hurtfully with the true rule of domestic economy; that the additional supply to be laid in for that object, only required an additional effort to procure it, which the company of friends always doubly paid him for. So that he set down these few additional efforts as better and more agree-

ably requited than those bestowed for the sake of money alone. And as the human character seems generally to be better satisfied, and more regaled by variety, it might be permitted to weigh this maxim and see if its analysis proves it correctness. He pursued the rule of being generally employed in some useful business, or to some useful purpose, and by way of innovating upon its monotony, he would put forth his additional efforts to the cause of hospitality, by way of change, and agreeable relaxation in the same pursuit. By this means, though the pursuit be the same, the object aimed at was different, and that constituted the pleasurable variety. For the variety sought for, is to the sense, and if the same pursuit produces it, which in every other respect is useful, it is more than safe to rely upon this maxim. If this, then, is a logical deduction, in a money making sense, and so it may be by keeping off worse pursuits, it surely should not be departed from. And to the pleasure and reciprocal advantage afforded by the practice of hospitality, is to be added the sum of advantage to those upon whom it is bestowed.

*This* house, once animated by the presence of our venerated ancestors, and once the seat of pleasure, of grandeur and of science, has undergone by the work of time a great change; and what is there upon which time will not leave its stamp? For many years it has been almost deserted, and for a long time in a state of dilapidation; and could the spirit of the dead look back upon that earthly tabernacle which was occupied in life, surely the spectacle to our ancestors must have presented a sad contrast. But the day of resurrection for this spacious old mansion is at hand. Our venerable host has decreed it to be so. Ere long the extensive repairs already begun, and which are far advanced, will be completed, when it will present again its ancient appearance, somewhat modified, and somewhat improved. And one great incentive to this work arises from the holy feeling of reverential regard for its ancient owners; and that appearance should be revived here as a tribute to their memory. The example thus

set of reverence to parents, if followed, will never fail to enkindle and to keep alive those finer feelings of the soul, which ennoble our character and our nature, and have been valued in all ages as virtuous testimony of grateful benevolence. History records it as great virtue in Epaminondas, that in the celebrated Battle of Leuctra, where he gained unfading laurels as a General, upon being felicitated for the renown he had won, he showed his greatest pleasure consisted in the pleasure his parents would enjoy at his victory.

This day one hundred and twelve years ago, Col. Philemon Hawkins, sen., deceased, was born, and he died on the 10th day of September, 1801, having lived nearly eighty four years. He has now been dead upwards of twenty-eight years, and notwithstanding the long time which has rolled on since his death, his appearance is still fresh in the recollection of many of us; and his manly perseverance, his steady habits of useful industry, his systematic arrangement of his business and his time, his contempt for idleness and dissipation, will, it is earnestly hoped, never be forgotten by us. He was a great friend to schools. Not having had himself the benefits of a liberal, scientific education, but possessing in an eminent degree all that practical good sense which could estimate the worth of it, he was their liberal patron. He was a strong advocate for internal improvements. His comprehensive mind pioneered him through the ways which are now followed, though slowly, to advance the best interests of the country in the way of its improvement. He had himself struggled through the wilderness, had seen the face of the country gradually improve, and he regretted much that all his influence could achieve was to open new roads, from whence great benefit was derived.

When we take a review of his rise and progress in life, and contrast them with the idleness and dissipation of the present day, we are ready to exclaim, that degeneracy is surely among us. He lived within his income, and caused it continually to increase; by which he was not only increasing his ability to

live, but to increase his fortune, and to add to his power to be useful. Accustomed to labor in early life, laudable industry was viewed by him as a great virtue, and as the road to honor and usefulness; and he who practiced it, was much exalted in his estimation. He always looked back to the days of his early life with pleasing reminiscences, and the most grateful feelings to the giver of all good for having inspired him with the resolution, and given him the ability and the aptitude for labor and industrious enterprise, by which he had been able to throw off the shackles of poverty, and to acquire an ample fortune to raise and to sustain his family and himself in his old age. If a similar course was now pursued, much happier indeed would be the condition of this country. Let us then emulate his virtues, and inculcate his habits, and instill into the minds of our children the examples of his prosperous and useful life; and when each rolling year shall bring around the day of his birth, let us hail it as his natal day, and endeavor to imprint it deeper and deeper in their hearts.