

# He Died at

*The story of*

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In our minds, let's travel back in time to the late 1850s and imagine a scene ...

Two boys push their sticks through the July dust, pretending—as boys are wont to do—that the sticks are plows and horses turning over the rocky Virginia mountain soil in preparation to plant the corn. The morning sun is rising high over the ridge now, and the heat of the day is just beginning to show itself fierce when the sound of horseshoes clashing with rocks cause the boys to stop their plowing and glance down the rock-strewn path toward the creek below. A shaggy ol' mare appears with a black-coated man, in a large black hat, on its back.

"It's Johnny Kline!" they blurt out, almost in unison.

And with that, two pairs of bare feet speed up the path toward the log cabin. Bursting through the open front door, they exclaim the news, as only little boys can do.

"It's Johnny Kline! It's Johnny Kline! Johnny Kline is coming!"

The other children look up from their various duties and amusements, and spontaneous smiles spread as if a contagion has hit the home. The mother quickly sizes up the house and begins to straighten the furniture a bit—as mothers are wont to do—and commands one of the boys to run and tell father, who is in the field behind the house hoeing corn.

Two bare feet peel through the corn rows, as only a country boy can do, and before the feet have stopped their pounding, the morning news is gushing out, "Daddy, come! Johnny Kline is coming! He's coming up the path! I saw him!"

"OK, son, I am coming." And with four more quick slashes at some especially pernicious-looking weeds, the father shoulders his hoe and strides towards the cabin below, his quick gait belying his own excitement at the news.

Visitors in the "hollers" of the Virginia mountains were rare, and the mere fact of someone coming up the path would have caused a stir in the household. But when that familiar old mare and that familiar black coat and hat, with that familiar white hair hanging out from under it, made their appearance, it was nearly impossible for the children to keep from smiling and giggling with excitement as they bounced from window to window, peeping

in embarrassed joy at the visitor as he dismounted and tied the reins to the rail, then loosened the saddle on ol' Nell.

The mountain people of Virginia (during the Civil War, the western counties of Virginia would break away from Virginia and call themselves West Virginia) were an independent lot: tough as hickory saplings, hard to get to know, "uned'rcated," and suspicious by nature of strangers invading their hidden "hollers." But Johnny Kline had travelled their rocky paths for many years now, and by his kind and gentle nature had won the hearts of many of these backwoods folks, to the point that they almost revered him. No, he would refuse to be called "Reverend," but due to his repeated visits in these almost forgotten places, the mere mention of his name would strike a genuine reverence in their hearts for many years after his death.

The reason was quite simple: Johnny Kline cared about them. And they knew that.

## Fourth generation revival

John Kline was born June 17, 1797, in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania. He was the great-grandson of Elder George Kline. His great-grandfather had emigrated from Germany as a Lutheran minister and taken up residence in New Jersey where he met the Schwarzenau Brethren, later called the "Dunkers," the "German Baptists," or the "Church of the Brethren." George joined the fledgling



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movement and was later ordained among them. In those early days, zeal for revival was fresh and the Brethren won converts—like George—into their movement.

But as usually happens, the following generations lost some of “the cutting edge” of the kingdom message, and

too many of them settled into the formalities of going to meeting, keeping the ordinances, and maintaining an outward separation ... all of which are very good and right. But the kingdom of God is more than keeping ordinances and attending preaching services. The kingdom of God is also being delivered from a self-centered life ... into a life of service to others.

More than one hundred years had passed since the German Baptist revival had begun, and too many were sleepy. The frontiers of America were opening up and there were rich farmlands to clear and houses and barns to build. It was oh, so easy to slip into the routine of “church,” and let the extension of God’s kingdom take a backseat to the everyday pressing needs of frontier life.

John Kline found himself a young believer in such a church. The historical records do not indicate that John was ever tempted to abandon his church. In fact, throughout his diary he constantly exclaims thanksgiving and joy in the fellowship he found among his Brethren. He wrote in a letter to a friend:

... as to the progress of the church, it is but little I think, and it is owing to the coldness of our brethren.

We are all too much for the world and accumulation of worldly things. This brings darkness and a gloss over the Gospel, and of course makes people think that they are just as good as any other Christian. It is true that according to morality and honesty, they are often equally as good, but large numbers of our children do not have, as it were, any parental rule. They are taught more how to rise in the world than how to love Christ and deny themselves. This is the way things are going. They generally have a taste for the world in the things of the world. But, oh, how will it be with these parents who speak so little with their children of Christ and self-denial, who only have the world at heart? I am fearful, oh I tremble, when I think of it, and my heart weeps over the daughter of Zion who has defiled herself.

Did he ever wonder if fourth generation churches—sleepy, though doctrinally orthodox—could be revived? I certainly have wondered that. In fact, it is probably more correct for me to say that I seriously doubt that will happen, in the majority of cases.

John simply put his hand to the plow ... and became an instrument of revival. Just because very few in his church were reaching out in evangelistic endeavors did not stop him from starting an endeavor. Rare as it is that a sleepy, fourth generation church revives, John proved that it can happen!

## Into the hills

John lived on a farm at what is now Broadway, Virginia. Broadway is located in the Shenandoah Valley, nestled up to the Appalachian range on the west. The Valley was comfortably settled and economically prospering in John’s day. But the story changed as soon as one followed the north branch of the Shenandoah River through a narrow gap—Brock’s Gap—in the first range of hills. In these rugged mountains lived the poor folks, those who could not afford the rich farm lands of the broad Valley, much less the lands of the coastal plains further east. These folks were “mountain people.” They were poorer, less educated, less respected, and—in the beginning of John Kline’s ministry—practically unchurched.

John Kline set out to change that. I don’t think he sat down one day and said, “You know, I think I will make a



goal of starting several churches in the mountains before I die.” No, he simply saw a need and stepped in to fill it. It meant more than preaching. It meant, sometimes, giving economic aid to those who listened to his preaching. He wrote in his diary concerning the poor people west of the Gap:

We found some of the members in a very poor condition. One sister, in particular, moved my feelings deeply. Her husband is somewhat dissipated and does not provide for his family as he should. She is the mother of three small children; and, judging from their present appearance, they have undergone a good deal of suffering for lack of food and clothing. None of them have any shoes; and the thin coverings they have on are so patched and darned that one can hardly tell the kind of goods they were originally made of. I inquired how they were off in the way of food. She replied that they had about a peck of corn meal in the house and several bushels of potatoes buried in the garden; and she reckoned they could do right well till she could get some more washing and other work to do. I gave that patient, uncomplaining sister three dollars out of my own pocket money.<sup>1</sup> ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ There is a day coming when we shall more fully realize this truth than now.

## Good habits

It is not hard to start a bad habit. In fact, all we have to do is start coasting along in life, and living a self-centered life will become as habitual as breathing. But John Kline started habits of service to others. One of these habits was to make an evangelistic trip into the mountain counties of Virginia (now West Virginia), on a regular basis. In the beginning he sometimes went alone. In later years he usually took another brother with him, as his good habits began to wear off on others. These trips were usually carried out in the fall of the year, and lasted several weeks. He would mount his faithful Nell—she took him an estimated 30,000 miles in her life, equal to more than one time around the world—and head up into the hills.

He would preach at appointed meetings, of course, but he would also visit the sick, read Scripture to the elderly,

<sup>1</sup> A production worker earned an average of \$0.06/hour at that time. \$3.00 would have been approximately one week’s wage.

warn sinners to repent, speak personally to the children and young folks, and in every house he stopped at he would not leave until he had tried to testify. He noted in his diary:

In all my visits I make it a point not to leave a house without making an effort to speak on the subject of religion, and say something that may leave an impression for good.

At the time of his death, the results of his labors could be seen in the formation of a number of Bible-practicing “Dunker” churches in those rugged hills. A baptism here, and two over there, and later another one here again. And over the years little congregations would form ... just from the labors of ol’ Johnny Kline and Nell, practicing his good habits year after year.

He wrote in his diary, when he was just beginning his outreaches into the mountains:

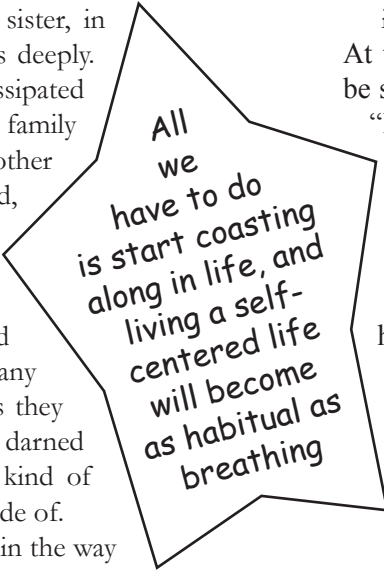
One man may sometimes strike a hard stone a good many times without breaking it; when another may take the same hammer, strike it in a slightly different place, or in a different way, and it falls to pieces. It may be that the first man’s strokes accomplished more than he knew of. The force of his blows may have diminished the solidity of the stone, and thus made it easier for the second man to break. If I cannot see much fruit of my labor here now, perhaps some, who will come after me, may.

## The preacher

John focused his evangelistic attention on the neighboring counties. In addition, he usually made the trip to the annual conference of the Brethren. The conference was held at a different location each year. Sometimes it was close by, in Virginia, but more often it was in the Midwestern states. John would saddle up Nell and begin the long journey, preaching as he went. He would then return, preaching as he went. In later years, when the railroads were laid out, he went by train. The early journeys usually took a month, sometimes two. These travels became the means of his acquaintance with different congregations, and as a rule they were delighted when Johnny Kline passed through.

John’s style of preaching was generally expository. Strong’s Concordance and similar study aids have given expository preaching a knock in the head. Today there is a strong tendency to look up a bunch of Scriptures on a certain topic and speak *topically*. In John’s day it was the custom to read off a verse, or perhaps several verses, and take off preaching from there.

This style of preaching lent itself more to weaving real life stories and applications into the sermon. In this, John



All we have to do is start coasting along in life, and living a self-centered life will become as habitual as breathing

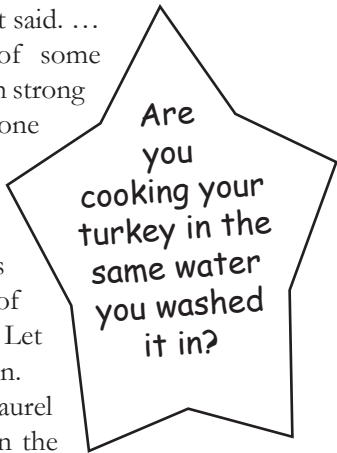
excelled. An example is found when a friend told him the story of some Indian squaws who were butchering a turkey. They pulled the feathers and then proceeded to remove the guts. Next they put the turkey on to boil, *using the very same water they had washed it in*. John used that illustration:

That minister who gets up and in a beautiful and glowing discourse sets forth the Christian “cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,” and then comes down [from his pulpit] to mix with the world, and follow its fashions and vanities, *is cooking his turkey in the same water he washed it in*. The professor of religion<sup>2</sup> who, to appearance, makes a very humble confession of his sins, with seeming repentance and deep contrition of heart, only to go away and thrust himself again into the filthiness of his former life, is cooking *his* turkey in the same water he washed it in.

On another occasion he spoke of laurel, a plant well known to his hearers:

In my travels among the mountains of our Virginia, I have often seen the laurel holding out its evergreen but poisonous leaves in sprays of most enticing beauty. Miles and miles of road, in one unbroken stretch, may be seen densely hedged on either hand by this beautiful emblem of sin and death. Herds of cattle and flocks of sheep are every year driven over these roads. Every herdsman and shepherd knows the danger to be apprehended from the inclination ... to “sidle” off the plain and beaten track and pluck the green leaves of the laurel to their own destruction. Many a time have I overtaken flocks of sheep, some of which were lying along the road “*down with the staggers*.” This last is the name of the disease which is brought on by taking laurel. The old sheep avoid it. They will not taste it. ... It is hardly necessary for me to point out to you the lesson of instruction to be gathered from what I have just said. ...

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of some who “are drunken, but not with strong drink.” I fancy I hear someone in the congregation say: “I guess they must have taken laurel.” Precisely so, friend! They took the laurel that has been the ruin of thousands of the Lord’s sheep and lambs. Let me tell you exactly what I mean. The love of *worldly pleasure* is laurel of *one kind*. It blooms forth in the



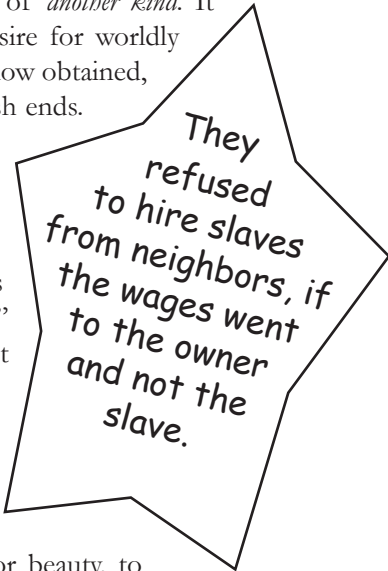
<sup>2</sup> The word “religion” did not have the negative connotations attached to it that some people now unwisely attach to it.

desire for fine dress, lively company, night gatherings, social parties, and the like things.

*Worldly treasure* is laurel of *another kind*. It blooms forth in the desire for worldly possessions, no matter how obtained, and only to gratify selfish ends.

I have known some old sheep to take this kind.

*Ambition to be great and highly honored* is still *another kind*. This is the “deer-tongued” laurel,<sup>3</sup> the very tallest kind that grows, and has the richest-looking flowers. But it is just as poisonous as any, and it blooms forth in the desire to be admired for beauty, to be looked up to for superior power and wisdom, and to be held in high honor for great deeds. I have known *old sheep* and even *leaders of the flock* to eat this kind until they staggered considerably ...



With such practical, everyday illustrations, John was able to bring forth the rich treasures of the kingdom in terms the listeners could appreciate.

## Facing culture head on Slavery

John Kline did well among the mountain people to the west of his home. His real battle was to the east, in the flat lands of the coastal plain of Virginia. Here were the rich and politically powerful slaveholders.

In 1782, about 15 years before John Kline was even born, the Brethren had declared themselves firmly against slavery. The minutes for the 1782 Annual Conference begin with these words:

It has been unanimously considered that it cannot be permitted in any wise by the church, that a member should or could purchase Negroes, or keep them as slaves.

This plain, simple declaration caused little problem in Pennsylvania, where most of the early Brethren settled. But once they began to move south of the Mason-Dixon line, it was culturally incorrect. And as long as the Brethren kept that conviction to themselves, it cost them little. They refused to hire slaves from neighbors, if the wages went to the owner and not the slave. If someone desired to unite with the Brethren, he was not permitted to do so until he

<sup>3</sup> Rhododendron.

had released his slaves, with the exception of those under age. In this case, it was determined to be better for the owner to raise the child, send him/her to school, train him/her in an occupation, and then officially release him/her when he/she became of legal age. Again, this caused little concern to slaveholders in the south, if a man wanted to release his slaves. But as the years passed by, some of the southern States began to make it harder and harder for slaves to be freed, until it became practically impossible to legally free slaves in some areas.

What to do? The slavery question was splitting some denominations down the middle, with a northern version and a southern version. While many of the denominations did not like the idea of slavery, they were unwilling to stand up against the culture and declare it to be anti-Christian to force another person, against his will, to a lifetime of servitude. So they compromised, to be politically correct.

But the Brethren said “No.” Slavery was a sin.<sup>4</sup> Other churches were making concessions because of the new laws that made it hard to release slaves. The Brethren still said “No!” John noted in his diary, concerning a council meeting at his congregation:

Decide the question as to what the churches here in the slaveholding States should require of any slave owner desiring to come into the church. A very delicate matter to act upon in the present sensitive<sup>5</sup> condition of public feeling on slavery. But it is the aim of the Brethren here not to offend popular feeling, so long as that feeling does not attempt any interference

4 Not referring to “indentured servanthood,” where a person of his own free will sells himself for a determined amount of time (possibly his entire life), usually to pay off debts. Indentured servanthood is essentially a long-term labor contract. On the other hand, anyone captured against his will and sold by another person is kidnapped, which Paul listed as a sin (menstealers-1 Ti. 1:10) right along with such sins as murder, prostitution, homosexuality, and lying.

5 He uses “sensitive,” but not meaning they were sensitive in conscience, but that the subject was one that caused a lot of emotional feelings when talked about in society. Much like the topics of abortion and gay “marriage” are today.

with what they regard and hold sacred as their line of Christian duty. Should such opposition arise, which I greatly fear will be the case at no distant day, it will then be seen that it is the fixed purpose and resolve of the Brotherhood to “obey God rather than men.” It was decided in council that every slaveholder coming into the church must give up his or her slaves as property; and yet not turn them off houseless and homeless, but allow them to remain, and labor,

and be fed and clothed as usual, until suitable and lawful provisions can be made for their complete emancipation.

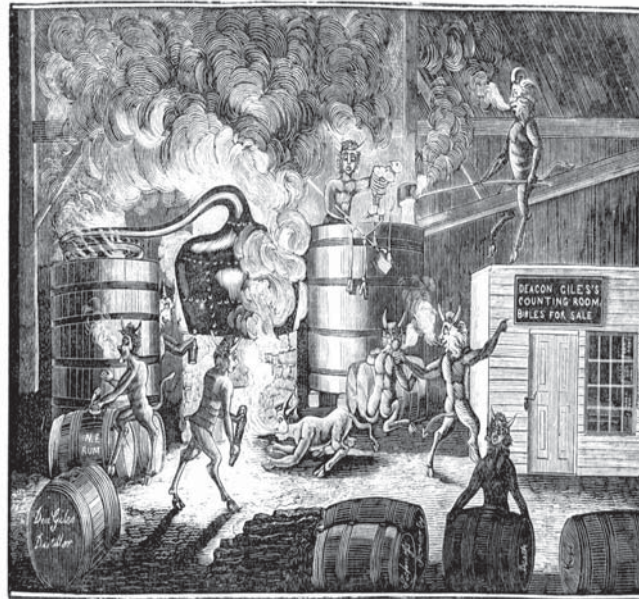
In this we see the Christian response to a culturally acceptable sin. Not only were the slaves to be released, but they were to be released with dignity. And if releasing them would open them up to being recaptured and resold into captivity (which became a reality in some areas), then the release was done in such a way to help prevent this. For this reason, it was acknowledged that allowing the slaves the opportunity to continue working for their previous master as employees until

they could legally be released would certainly be Christ-like. The point to keep in mind is that this option cost the slaveholder financially; he had bought the slave, and likely before he got his investment back he would start paying him prevailing wages and help him get a start in his free life. It would have been simpler to kick him out onto the street.

That’s what happens when the kingdom of God breaks into an ungodly culture!

## Distilleries

One year prior to the 1782 Conference that spoke against slavery, the Brethren also spoke against another socially acceptable sin—alcoholic drinks. While the Bible does not call drinking alcohol sin, drunkenness certainly is. Recognizing the propensity of men toward drunkenness, the Brethren began to forbid the members of their



**We heartily counsel all the brethren who have distilleries, that they should by all means endeavor to put them away ...**

churches to operate distilleries. The 1781 Annual Meeting minutes on this subject read as follows:

We heartily counsel all the brethren who have distilleries, that they should by all means endeavor to put them away in order to escape from the evil so often arising from them, and to avoid offense ...

This may seem strange to those of us who have grown up in churches where alcohol is never used, except medicinally. But in John Kline's day, it was acceptable in most churches to sit down at the end of the day and have a beer. A totally abstentious church was rare.

But seeing the evils of the misuse of alcohol, the Brethren looked at the culture around them and basically said, "We are not going that way. We follow Christ. Alcohol is no longer a necessity [see sidebar on this page], and alcohol consumption is wrecking our society. Therefore we will not manufacture alcoholic beverages."

Not only did he never manufacture any, it is recorded of John Kline that he never even *drank* any alcohol, other than perhaps for medicinal purposes.

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## War

John saw it coming. He wrote in his diary in 1847, after being told of a slave auction in which a mother and her children—a daughter of twelve years old, and two boys eight and ten—were sold and separated:

They were now parted, never to see each other anymore. There was no hope left them of ever hearing from each other again. The gentleman said the little boys did not seem to mind it so very much; but, said he, the agony of the mother and the distress of the daughter were past description. It is to be hoped that such heart-rending scenes are not often to be witnessed; and I do believe that the time is not far distant when the sun will rise and set upon our land cleansed of this foul stain, though it may be cleansed with blood. I would rejoice to think that my eyes might see that bright morning; but I can have no hope of that.

Fourteen years passed. That "bright morning" did not come. In fact, the "cleansing of blood" appeared imminent. On January 1, 1861, John noted in his diary:

The year opens with dark and lowering clouds in our national horizon. I feel a deep interest in the peace and prosperity of our country; but in my view both are sorely threatened now. Secession is the cry further south; and I greatly fear its poisonous breath is being wafted northward towards Virginia on the

wings of fanatical discontent. ... The perishable things of earth distress me not, only insofar as they affect the imperishable. Secession means war; and war means tears and ashes and blood. It means bonds and imprisonments, and perhaps even death to many in our beloved Brotherhood, who, I have the confidence to believe, will die rather than disobey God by taking up arms.

And war it was. The Brethren were acquainted with war in their history. During the tumultuous days of what is called The Revolutionary War, they had been harangued by sympathizers of the American forces for refusing to partake in the rebellion against Great Britain. In fact, the persecution was part of the reason for the emigration to Virginia and other areas. Their land and property had been confiscated in Philadelphia, so they left to look for new homes.

As the year 1861 rolled on, the Civil War began. And John Kline took to the offensive. No, he did not pick up his rifle; he picked up his pen and began to write to members of Congress and other politicians, explaining the teachings of the Brethren and why they could not bear arms. His goal was ... well, I shall let John himself explain his motive, with the diary entry for December 20, 1861:

Write to John Hopkins, to John C. Woodson, and to Charles Lewis. I can but entreat these men to stand in defense of our Brethren, and try to devise some plan by which they can be exempted from the necessity of bearing arms. I feel sure that if we can be rightly understood as to our faith and life, there will be some way provided for their exemption. The Brotherhood is a unit, heart and hand against arms-bearing. These things I make known to these men; not, however, in any spirit of defiance, but in the spirit of meekness and obedience to what we in heart believe to be the will of the Lord. Many have already expressed to me their determination to flee from their homes rather than disobey God.

“Flee rather than disobey God.” It was this simple dedication to the will of God that made the Brethren strong. God gives grace to those who are willing to bear the cost of following Jesus—cost what it may. But to those who only have a form of godliness, with no surrender to do the will of Christ, grace will not flow to them.

John’s letters and pleas paid off. The recipients of the letters were moved to write in a conscientious objector exemption in their draft laws. However, there was a \$500

fine,<sup>6</sup> plus a tax of two percent of the value of the goods of the person seeking exemption.

The brothers set to work collecting the payments of those affected, and when some of the young men could not afford the fine, others in the Brotherhood helped them out. John Kline himself put up some of the money for the fines.

That’s what happens when the kingdom of God breaks into an ungodly culture!

### Underground Railroad

In spite of official exemption from bearing arms, some local officials did cause the Brethren problems. John Kline spent time in jail on three different occasions, but was promptly released in each occasion. And when some of the young Brethren were caught trying to escape to the North to avoid conscription, John was soon at the jail to encourage them to stand true.

On April 18, 1863, John received a caller ... at 1 a.m. It was Abraham Funk, asking for his help with a man with a broken leg.

George Sellers had escaped from the Southern army. He was part of a group of men making their way north towards freedom, by night, with some “help” along the way. Abraham Funk was one such “helper.” Leaving Abe’s house about 11 p.m., the group was walking along a road when the cry of “Rebel scouts!” went through the group. They quickly

jumped into the ditch, not realizing that it was an embankment about 100 feet deep. Only George was hurt, with a fractured leg.

Since John Kline practiced some medicine, he was called upon. He wrote in his diary for that day:

We are keeping the whole matter a profound secret to save the life of a good man. He was taken back to Abraham Funk’s, where he is at this time receiving treatment in secret from me.

About a month later, John left to attend Annual Meeting, reporting that George “is nearly well, and in fine spirits.” John Kline’s involvement in helping George was not a



**In this unique photograph, Sarah Bowman and Catherine Showalter deliver food to the Brethren men in jail for refusing to bear arms in the Civil War.**

<sup>6</sup> About one or two year’s wages. However, a good work horse was worth up to \$1,000, so by selling a horse two fines could be paid.

political statement for one side or the other. It was simply trying to help another human to live righteously, even if that meant going against the grain of the surrounding culture.

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### Plain dress

Wherever the natural man goes, the natural passions and desires go. Wherever the kingdom of God goes, the natural passions and desires have to go ... that is, leave!

One natural desire of humanity is to be recognized as "somebody." Pride is another name for it. What the person is "recognized" as varies, as some (usually women) want to be recognized as pretty. Others (usually men) want to be recognized as tough. Some want to be "in," others want to be weird, some want to be cool, and some even want to be recognized as superreligious—all by the way they dress.

Jesus has another route. This route is to wear simple, utilitarian clothing that does not naturally attract the human eye as pretty, tough, "in," "weird," "cool," or even superreligious—like the special robes used by some ministers—just for the looks of it. Through the ages men have called it plain dress, or simple clothing.

In John Kline's day, Methodists, Quakers, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren all promoted the wearing of plain dress. In fact, from a distance one could not tell who that man on the horse was—was he a Methodist, or Amish, or a Quaker?<sup>7</sup> All of them wore the same basic black coat with a split up the tail so that it would naturally fall over both sides of the saddle. On his head was his umbrella and sunshade—a large-brimmed black hat with a low crown. Since a man often could not know what kind of weather he may run

into before he returned home, the hat was standard gear outside, as protection from hot sun and rain.

In contrast, the general population tried to spice up their looks by flashing colors, feathers or a tall crown on the hat, big brass buttons on the coat, a sword on the side, a wig on the head, sleeves rolled up to show off the

muscles ... anything to give them some sort of special recognition in the flesh as tough, "in," weird, cool, or handsome.

John Kline and the Brethren simply used unassuming clothes that caused no special attraction to their flesh. Modest in cut, low-key in color, and utilitarian. Some sneered and some admired them for their simplicity; neither sneer nor compliment turned them aside. The Brethren did not try to "fit in" to society, nor were they trying to be weird—they were simply taking Jesus seriously in His teachings, in practical ways.

That's what happens when the kingdom of God breaks into an ungodly culture!



**While John Kline was not really a circuit preacher, his ministry bore very similar results.**

### John's final days

They warned John. He felt it coming.

In 1864 he made a trip to Hagerstown, Indiana to attend the Annual Conference of the German Baptists. Recognizing his leadership skills and supreme Christian character, for the last four years his brothers in Christ had chosen him to be mod-

erator of the conference.

John did not know it, of course, but he sort of sensed it: it would be his last Annual Conference. In his closing discourse, he spoke the following words, which ended up being prophetic:

Brethren and friends, let me say to you, that it is the duty, and not only the duty, but the highest attainment of Christian liberty, to be with Jesus and to give knowledge to all around that one has not only been, but now is every day, with Jesus. True godliness, however, does not desire to make a display of itself; it seeks no prominence in the world; neither does it aspire to receive the applauses of men. It does not ride upon the tempest of religious disputes,

<sup>7</sup> With the exception, perhaps, of the use of a beard. The Quakers and Methodists did not tend to let their beards grow, while the Brethren, Amish, and early Mennonites all generally wore a beard. The first Mennonites in Lancaster County, PA were known as "the long-bearded Swissers" by some of their neighbors.



nor clothe itself with the whirlwind of fanatical excitement. But, like the divine Spirit from which it springs, it speaks in the still, small voice of tender compassion and love. Like its Lord, it enters the house of the humble, contrite heart, and would have no man know it; but it cannot be hid.

Now, Brethren and friends, I have only touched some of the chords in the beautiful anthem of my theme. I now leave it with you, hoping that you may learn every note in it; and by the sweet music of a good life delight the ears and warm the hearts of all who hear its rich harmonies. Possibly you may never see my face or hear my voice again. I am now on my way back to Virginia, not knowing the things that shall befall me there. But I feel that I have done nothing worthy of bonds or of death; and none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.

It was May 19, 1864. The Civil War was raging. John had been given passes by both the North and South to cross the lines so that he could attend Conference. In those stormy days, the mere fact of crossing from one side of the lines to the other would be enough to raise suspicion—on either side. John knew his trip was a dangerous one. But a few days after his sermon, he took the train back to Maryland, where he then mounted on Nell once more and crossed the mountains back into Virginia, without incident.

On June 15, John went on Nell a few miles and repaired a clock for a neighbor. While there, a group of young, Rebel cavalymen saw Nell outside and called John to the door to ask him where he was going after he left there. They were neighbors ... and John indicated that

he would head straight over the ridge, for home. Did he realize that they were asking him so they could waylay him? We don't know ... but it is highly probable that he did suspect something fishy. He had been threatened already, and the day before he had warned a non-Brethren friend that this man's life was in danger from Southern sympathizers in the area.

Finishing the clock repair, John got on Nell and headed for home. On top of the little ridge, two men, Jake Acker and Joe Riddle, waited in the woods. Jake had been chosen to fire the first shot. After John passed by, Jake raised his gun for a moment, then lowered it. He could not bring himself to shoot the innocent old man in the back. "I can't shoot that man!" he told Joe.

"You ain't no soldier!" returned Joe.

And a shot rang out. White-haired John Kline fell off of Nell. Joe approached John, and seeing that he wasn't dead yet, he fired another shot at point blank range, so close that it left powder burns on John's clothes. Their dirty deed finished, the two men escaped.<sup>8</sup>

No one ever openly confessed to murdering John, but everyone in the community sort of knew who was responsible. Since the Brethren followed Jesus and obeyed Him, no charges were ever brought against the men. And since the Civil War still raged, the civil authorities were too occupied

to worry about the collateral effect of an old preacher getting shot.

Some of John's neighbors had wrongly suspected that John was secretly carrying information to the Northern armies in the guise of his trip to Annual Conference. It is very likely that his stand against slavery and participation in war<sup>9</sup> played into the circumstances as well.

<sup>8</sup> These two were not the only ones involved. Others had waited along another road in case John took an alternate route home.

<sup>9</sup> John had also been against secession of the South from the



**A memorial marks the spot in Virginia where Johnny Kline was martyred.**

Photos © Robert H. Moore II, Provided by [www.hmdb.org](http://www.hmdb.org)



And so they murdered John Kline in cold blood. He was about his business for the Lord, doing his duty of blessing his neighbors. While he wasn't killed for directly refusing to orally deny Christ, his adherence to the principles of the kingdom of God certainly led up to his death. Thus he belongs in the long list of those martyred for Jesus.

### Dying at his post

Some time before his murder, Johnny Kline had written a poem about one of his fellow preachers, John Miller, who had died as a young man.

Away from his home and the friends of his youth  
He hasted, the herald of mercy and truth,  
For the love of his Lord and to seek for the lost—  
Soon, alas! was his fall, but he died at his post.

The stranger's eye wept that in life's brightest bloom  
One gifted so highly should sink to the tomb;  
For in order he led in the van of his host,  
And he fell like a soldier, he died at his post.

He wept not for himself that his warfare was done,  
The battle was fought and the victory won,  
But he whispered of those whom his heart clung to most,  
"Tell my brethren for me that I died at my post."<sup>10</sup>

He asked not a stone to be sculptured with verse;  
He asked not that fame should his merits rehearse;  
But he asked as a boon when he gave up the ghost,  
That his brethren might know that he died at his post.

Victorious his fall, for he rose as he fell,  
With Jesus his Master in glory to dwell,  
He passed o'er the stream and has reached the bright court,  
For he fell like a martyr; he died at his post.

And can we the words of his exit forget?  
O, no, they are fresh in our memory yet.  
An example so brilliant shall not be lost;  
We will fall in the work, we will die at our post.

John Kline wrote these words about someone else, not about his own life. However, it is safe to say that John penned these words almost prophetically concerning his own life. Yes, indeed, Johnny Kline died at his post.

May you and I follow him as he followed Christ. ~

(Note that the picture at the beginning of the story is NOT John Kline.)

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Union, but not so much as a political sentiment as much as for keeping unity and peace.

<sup>10</sup> I do not know if the young man actually uttered the words, or if John was writing in allegory.

## John Kline on True Patriotism

On February 22, 1849, John Kline heard the distant roar of cannon. It would be another 12 years before the American Civil War would begin. These cannon were merely celebrating Washington's birthday. On that day, John wrote the following in his diary:

I have a somewhat higher conception of true patriotism than can be represented by the firing of guns which give forth nothing but meaningless sound. I am glad, however, that these guns report harmless sound, and nothing more. If some public speakers would do the same, it might be better both for them and their hearers. My highest conception of patriotism is found in the man who loves the Lord his God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. Out of these affections spring the subordinate love for one's country; love truly virtuous for one's companion and children, relatives, and friends; and in its most comprehensive sense it takes in the whole human family. Were this love universal, the word patriotism, in its specific sense, meaning such a love of one's country as makes its possessors ready and willing to take up arms in its defense, might be appropriately expunged from every national vocabulary.

