

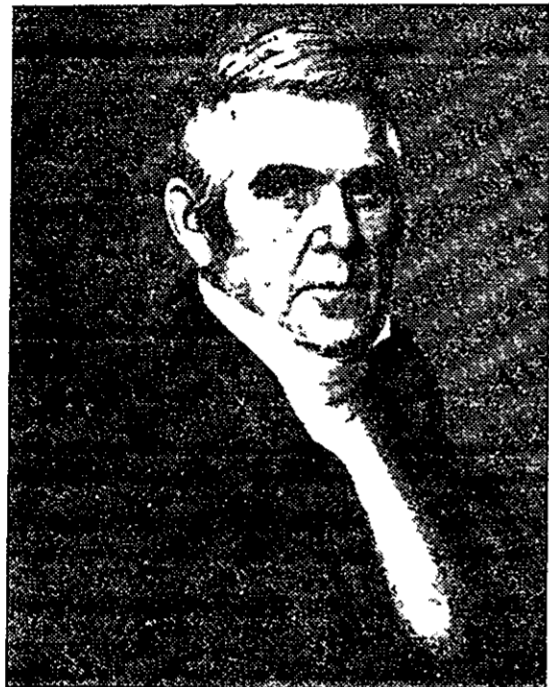
EARLY, BISHOP JOHN

Bishop John Early

A Man of Faith and Works

By WILLIAM K. THOMAS

Pastor Beulah Church, Richmond District



Bishop John Early

aggressive attitude won the approval of his ecclesiastical superiors and of his colleagues in the circuit ministry alike, and in 1812 he was named by them to attend the first delegated General Conference held in America.

According to his autobiographical sketch he married Miss Ann Warren of North Carolina in January, 1815. Since Bishop Asbury and his followers were largely opposed to marriage on the part of the preachers, he was constrained to locate for a number of years. His wife died however in 1820 leaving no children, and Early was readmitted to the itinerancy at the 38th session of the Virginia Conference in February, 1821. In 1822 he married Miss Elizabeth Browne Rivers a Virginia woman, with whom he remained happily united until her death in 1857. Six children blessed John Early's second marriage, one of whom, Phoebe Early, followed his father into the Methodist ministry.

Offered Many Positions

During the years of the War of 1812 and the War Between the States, Early was offered a number of Government positions. He was invited to accept the governorship of the Illinois territory but declined, and later during the administration of John Quincy Adams (1825-29) he received the offer of a like position in the Arkansas territory. While President John Tyler was in office (1841-45) Early was offered the office of Controller of the Treasury. He steadfastly refused these offers of au-

thority and prestige; his reply to each being that he "couldn't come down to such positions."

Early was first elected secretary of the Virginia Conference in 1815, the year of his location. He again was elected in 1822 upon his readmission, holding the secretaryship until 1844, except in the years 1831 and 1841 when he presided in the absence of a bishop. He held the office again from 1846 until 1849, making a total of 27 years.

The division of the church in 1844 was one of the most important events of his ministry. He was prominent in the separation period as a leader in the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. A speaker at the constituting convention of the Southern Church at Louisville in 1845, he was also elected president pro tempore of its first General Conference and appointed chairman of its finance committee. In addition to his other duties, Early was elected book agent of the newly formed connection in 1845. He opened his office in Richmond shortly after his election and expanded the publishing interests of his church until 1854 when he left the agency and it was moved to Nashville.

Elected Bishop

In 1854 at the third General Conference of the M. E. Church, South, at Columbus, Ga. Early was elevated to the episcopacy. Although he was 68 at the time of his election and apparently near the end of his career, he continued to be active in episcopal labors for 12 years and lived on for nearly 20 years after his consecration as bishop.

Death came in Lynchburg on November 5, 1874. His passing was widely mourned in both South and North and as far West as Texas. Funeral rites were held at Court Street M. E. Church, South, on November 7, and his remains were interred to their last resting place in the city of Lynchburg.

At the time of his death John Early was the last remaining link between the first American Methodists and those of the matured church. He had entered upon a ministry of constant circuit riding and loose connection; he ended his days in a ministry of station appointments and complex organization.

There was one great concern which was constantly in Early's mind after 1825: it was the institution that came in

(Continued on page 21)

BISHOP JOHN EARLY

(Concluded from page 8)

1824 to be called Randolph-Macon College. He gave more time to the "seminary of learning," which was located first at Boydton, Va., and later at Ashland, than he did to any other one interest that he had outside his actual preaching ministry. He was prominent in its original organization, its continued support and its academic expansion for 150 years. The original trustees of the college included the M. E. president of the board of trustees from 1827 to 1829, 1838. John Early rendered probably greater service to Randolph-Macon College during its formative period than any other one man. Without detracting from the honor due Gabriel P. Dussey, Heskiah G. Leigh and a host of others, who labored earnestly on its behalf, only Early was by its side throughout a period of more than four decades, giving it the wisdom and energy to its growth and

On an April evening 1804 a youth of 18 years made his way to the chancel of Flat Rock Church in the hills of Bedford County, Va., and kneeling there dedicated his life to his Lord and to the forwarding of the Christian Kingdom. From that moment of decision in a seemingly insignificant chapel in the woods was to come a far-reaching influence upon Methodism in Virginia and the United States. The youth who knelt in the company of other penitents was to become a preacher, an administrator, an educator and a civic leader.

John Early was born on January 1, 1786, in Bedford County. He was one of the 13 children of Joshua Early, a descendant of late 17th century immigrants, and Mary Leftwich Early, a descendant of early English settlers in Virginia. He and his brothers and sisters had little formal education for there were few opportunities for schooling in the hill country of Virginia during his childhood, but his command of English and knowledge of the Bible shown by the sermon outlines from his early ministry indicate that he received good training.

Methodist Convert

Though his parents were devout Baptists, he was converted to Methodism while still a young man and never after swerved in his belief that the doctrines of the Wesleyan persuasion were the most direct channel of the soul's salvation. Methodist preaching appealed to John Early. He liked the fire and eloquence of the early circuit riders, he liked the singing and the altar calls.

In 1806 he was licensed to preach. According to the late Dr. W. W. Bennett, Early's first sermon was preached at Wilson's Church on the Bedford Circuit with the text that he had shed on parents with his blood as a sacrifice on his own part. Three years later Early was ordained deacon. His certificate signed by Bishop Asbury is a valuable script, dated February 2, 1809, now lies fading in the archives of the Virginia Conference in Ashland. The following year he was ordained an elder by Bishop William McKendree.

His ministry began among the slaves of Thomas Jefferson at Poplar Forest, about 12 miles from his home in Bedford County. He was shortly moved from this service to the circuits near his home, where he carried on his work in a devoted and methodical manner. His

Modern Noah's Ark to Aid Africans

By Religious News Service.

Vicksburg, Miss.—A modern Noah's Ark, equipped for physical and spiritual reclamation work, will soon be on its way to Liberia.

The war-surplus LSM, converted for ocean-going use and the constructive work of peace, is being loaded at a Mississippi River landing 10 miles south of Vicksburg. Its cargo will include tractors, farm machinery and a complete sawmill for taming the jungles of Africa for the benefit of man.

R. G. LeTourneau, industrialist who has turned his talents and financial resources to the service of religion, is sponsoring the latter-day Ark.

"Hungry natives will listen to us about God," he says, "if we can show them a field of grain with a combine harvesting more in a day than they can eat in a year."

Mr. LeTourneau placed his plan before the State Department, which cleared it with the government of Liberia. He now has permission to carry out the plan as a demonstration of the Gospel and of American technology.

A carefully chosen crew—"technical missionaries" as Mr. LeTourneau calls them—will make the voyage. The "Ark" will carry food and supplies for 20 people for a year.

Mr. LeTourneau's son-in-law and daughter, Gustave and Louise Dick, will head the group. Both have been active in religious work since their youth. Accompanied by their three children, they are prepared for an indefinite stay in the Liberian jungle.

Half-Million Acres

Mr. LeTourneau intends to lease half a million acres of undeveloped jungle land. If he can improve the tract substantially within 30 years, the Liberian government will extend his lease for another 50.

The man whose life and work have earned him the name of "God's business partner" feels that this is the best way in which America can assist backward nations.

"Teach them to use machines and they can help themselves," Mr. LeTourneau says. "We can show them more in a year than we can tell them in a lifetime about the right way to live."

Missionary work in Africa, he feels, has progressed slowly because most of it must be carried to remote, hard-to-reach areas in heavy jungle and because the natives have not been trained to use modern machinery.

Liberian tribesmen have a habit of destroying rich acres of virgin timberland in order to raise a single sparse



Negroes in Liberia learn to help the missionary doctor.

ricecrop. This very timber will be used by Mr. LeTourneau's group to make up some of the expense of the venture. That's where the sawmill comes in. After it has been set up, the small crew will be able to process a wealth of raw lumber for sale in American and European ports.

Underneath this timberland lies some of the world's richest soil, according to Mr. LeTourneau, who prepared for the expedition by making airplane flights over the region and extensive topographical studies.

"That dirt will raise anything," he says. Minerals and other natural resources which may lie beneath the surface also will do their part in financing the expedition's work.

Baffu Bay, a bite in the Guinea coast of Africa 100 miles from civilization, will be the starting point for Mr. LeTourneau's experiment. From there his workers will force their way inland through a jungle maze which soars to 2000 feet above sea level at some points.

The industrialist will be no armchair strategist in this enterprise. When the Ark leaves Baffu Bay, he will board his converted twin-engine bomber for a quick flight to Liberia. Then he will meet the vessel and join his co-workers.

Industry has become greatly alarmed at the rapidly mounting costs due to the use of beverage alcohol. These costs have now risen to several billions of dollars annually due to preventable accidents, alcoholism, unnecessary absenteeism etc., representing a terrific needless waste of man power, efficiency and money.

URGES AMERICAN CHURCHES UNDERGIRD MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

Silver Bay, N. Y. (RNS)—American churches should serve as the financial and moral base for the world-wide Christian movement, it was urged here by Dr. Karl K. Quimby, educational secretary of the Methodist Board of Missions and Church Extension.

He said that since this country had remained "relatively undisrupted by the ravages of war" it could well afford to undergird the missionary movement "for the whole world for years to come."

Dr. Quimby gave the major address at the opening of an eight-day missionary education conference sponsored by the National Council of Churches.

Calling on the churches to bring the missionary enterprise "much closer to the center of the life of the churches," he said that the relatively new and struggling nations of Asia offer an unprecedented opportunity for the "missionary outreach" of American churches.

"These states happen to contain more than a third of the population of the entire world. As they go, so will go the whole world. The Christian mission needs to get there first before any other ideology captures or poisons their minds."

In seeking to expand the missionary work of the churches, Dr. Quimby said, a "careful restatement" of goals and objectives is essential in order to enlist a new generation in missionary endeavor.

The present work of the churches in this field, the Methodist official said, "is still being carried forward by members of a past generation." For this reason, "many leaders today feel the time is ripe for a careful restatement of our mission to the world."

Dr. Quimby stressed the need to get away from the notion that Christian missions are merely "an attractive sun parlor, or a wing to the house of our faith."

"Missions are not an afterthought, or some incidental addition to the program of the church. Rather, they are the very outflow of the heart of God. Missions lie at the heart of revelation."

The missionary conference was attended by some 550 church and mission leaders from more than a dozen Protestant denominations and eight countries, including Africa, India, Scotland, Wales, Canada, China and Korea. Highlight of the meeting was a golden anniversary celebration of the missionary education movement, which was founded in Silver Bay.

They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mt Zion which cannot be removed but abideth forever.—Psalm 125

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Early, John, Bishop

Papers (letters, diary) at
Randolph-Macon College, Ashland,
Virginia