KEENER, BISHOP JOHN CHRISTIAN

My God

By Lois Matilda Buck

Thou art a God of joy: God of the dawn on the sea, When the white waves run to the light, Call to the day that will be.

Thou art a God of strength: God of the strong, silent peaks, As they stand uplifted in white. Hushed by Thy voice as it speaks.

Thou art a God of love: God of the unfound flower,

That unfolding into Thy hand Blooms as in garden bower.

Thou art a God of peace: God of the hush on the night. When the land lies still at Thy feet, Trusting to Thee without sight.

Thou art a God of life God of my own beating heart. As it surges in yearning to Thee Kneeling in worship apart. -[Methodist Episcopal Mission, Meerut, India, Dec. 28, 1905.

Bishop John Christian Keener

By Bishop E. E. Hoss

in New Orleans, was not a great surprise, for he was known to be almost eightyseven years old, having been born in the city of Baltimore February 7, 1819. Nevertheless it will be an occasion of genuine and widespread sorrow in his own church, and of no little interest in other denominations. During the past fifty years no statelier figure has appeared in Methodist circles. From every point of view he was an uncommon man, towering far above the ranks of ordinary mortals, and commanding attention by the sheer strength and vigor of his personality. My own conviction is, moreover, that, great as he seemed in the eves of his contemporaries, he will loom larger and larger still in the eyes of his successors. History has a way of correcting current judgments, sometimes by reversing them altogether, but more frequently by toning them down or touching them up so as to bring them closer to the truth. Only those who are intrinsically worthy can stand the test of posthumous criticism If John C. Keener does not belong in this class, then all the signs are at fault. He was the first native of Baltimore, that cradle of American Methodism, to come into the succession of Asbury and McKendree and Soule, the second being Alpheus W. Wilson, who likewise has his membership in the Southern branch of the Church, and now succeeds to the post of seniority in the College of Bishops. A good heredity is a good beginning, and Bishop Keener had that advantage. triendship of many of the chief ministers of the Church. At the division in 1844, he naturally followed the Baltimore Conference and adhered North. He took a deep interest in all ecclesiastical movements him, for example, that Wm. Taylor was sent as a missionary to California. His while was also a most godly and useful of such a son as God gave them.

The death of this eminent minister of he spent a year or two teaching in a prithe gospel, which took place on the 19th vate family in Maryland. On his return inst, after a short illness at his residence. North to become principal of Wilbraham Academy, he took young Keener, then a lad of ten or eleven years, back with him. The story of the journey, as the Bishop once related it to me, was very interesting. In Philadelphia he got lost and wandered about for some time, an evergrown boy with yellow hair and a freekled face, before finding his friends. At Wilbraham he remained three years, and then passed on to the Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn., of which Dr. Fisk had, in the meantime, become President. Through this early period of his life he was more or less given to fads. Among other things, he became, under the influence of the old gentle man with whom he boarded, an enthusiastic vegetarian, and during one winter, to quote his own language, ate potatoes enough to bury himself under. The traditions are that he was not a particularly diligent student. Though utterly free from gross vices of any sort, he was full of fun and frolie. His old friend and college mate, Dr. E. E. Wiley, once said to me "If any mischief went on in college, it was generally understood that Jack Keener had a hand in it." The late Dr. Frederick Merrick, whom Arthur Edwards credited with having been eighteen years old at and expressed surprise that a man so lack to the Episcopacy. Seriousness has differ all a credit to him.

learn what they did teach" "What, then, New Orleans Christian Advocate there?" things. When Wilbur Flak was a young man his fellow students were many who subset wrote "Post Oak Circuit," a humorous and

quently became famous; such as Daniel Curry, Joseph B. Cummings, Erastus Wentworth and Charles Collins. Association with such young men could not fall to be a stimulating force. But nothing counted for so much in his development as the presence and influence of Dr. Fisk, who by all accounts must have been a most charming character. None of his biographers has been able to set him fairly before the public. All alike, and in spite of their evident admiration for him, they leave the impression that he was rather thin and commonplace. But the boys who sat at his feet never ceased to sound his praises. Bishop Keener joined in the chorus most heartily. To the end of his life he could think of no words that were too eulogistic to be applied to his old teacher.

After his graduation Bishop Keener returned to Baltimore, and went into business as a wholesale druggist. Before many years, however, he abandoned this venture and removed to Alabama, being largely influenced to take this step by the fact that the young lady to whom he was engaged had gone thither before him. Soon after reaching that state he entered the itinerant ministry on trial-about 1842. From the first he was successful in his new vocation. His preaching was characterized by evangelistic tervor. Wherever he went as pastor great revivals of religion followed Nor did he ever lose the gift of urgent appeal. Long after he had passed his three score and ten he was still perfectly at home in the midst of a religious upheaval. On the strength of the record which he made in Alabama, he was transferred to Louisiana and stationed in New Orleans, which has always been one of the hardest fields in the United States for Protestant churches. Up to that time Methedism had managed to maintain there only struggling and doubtful existence. To him more than to any other one man is due whatever successes it has achieved in later years. He possessed staying qualities. Nothing trightened him. The greater the obstacle that confronted him the more res olate his comage became. He had also the birth, also gave me similar information, racticy of drawing around him men . ? the highest intelligence, and of interesting ing in seriousness should have been chosen them in his work. His friendships were

ent ways of showing itself. First and last he filled nearly all the In a long conversation eight or ten years offices in the church, was pastor of buth ago, I asked Bishop Keener the direct ques- white and colored congregations, prestung His father, Mr. Christian Keener, was a tion: "Did they have a full curriculum at elder on large districts, agent for tenteleading layman, and enjoyed the close Middletown in your day?" "No," he re- nary College, missionary to the soldiers plied, "they didn't teach much, and I didn't in the Confederate army, and editor of the were you doing all the time you were every one of these positions he showed "O, well, I was doing various great ability. No judge of a United States Incidentally I learned to skate Court ever took his duties with a keener and enterprises. It was primarily due to and to eat codfish, but chiefly I was en sense of their importance than he disgaged in studying New England characoplayed in presiding over a Quarterly Conter." In spite of such half-jocular re- ference. It was said of him that everymarks, it is certain that he got much good thing began to move up as soon as he set woman. The coupic were wholly worthy out of his college life. His new surrounds his foot inside of a pastoral charge. More ings were provocative of thought. Among than fifty years have clapsed since he

emergent issues. Even those who were not

willing to follow his leadership were com-

pelled to admire his persistent candor.

Bishop Keener first appeared at a General Conference in 1854. One of his collesgues from Louisiana, considerably his junior, was Holland N. McTyeire. For some reasons of petty jealous; he was not elected in 1858. But in the reconstruction General Conference of 1866 he was once more on hand, and very influential. The Daily Christian Advocate under his editorship fairly sparkled When it came to choosing the four new Bishops he received a large vote, but not quite enough to put him in, Weightman, Doggett, Marvin and McTyeire being named. Again in 1870 he played a most important part. Bishop Janes and Dr. Harris were present on a mission of fraternity and union from the Methodist Episcopal Clurch, and were received with great courtesy. But at a critical stage of the proceedings Dr Keener grose with a copy of the Journal of the preceding General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in his hand, and challenged the authority of the two Commissioners, on the ground that the resolution under which they were acting empowered them to deal directly only with the African Metnodists, and contained a bare clause concerning "any other branch of the Methodist Church that may wish to unite with ns." Such a roundabout way of getting at things did not at all please him, and he said so in decorous but vigorous English. A few days later, partly, no doubt, as a regult of this episode, he was elected Bishop, defeating Dr. James A. Duncau, of Virginia, the most brilliant preacher of the whole Church, by the narrow margin of one vote or two votes. That was the first General Conference in which laymet sat. Renator Reger Q Mills represented Texas I have been told that he had some doubt chout the accuracy of the count and was with difficulty restrained from expressing It ca the floor

Proposity eight lears. Both his wo the result of the period of the F. the sometimes to account the Min was mine rethresend, would a charter कर्म कर कर कि स्थापन करने के का कि कि time for the above all all areas to Max in his career die being wer his Compos feelings but dere was a distant quiver in his wave so so read the tries maper the early had a bed to be a leader to To do I be a Mineral and Coner. Schem meaning Whan he arm he am His groupe va care dr dater had see alt. get and the property of the control of the control of percest a morning of the College to Buchops incaga to kept up the live est interin all ten affairs of the Church Caucor

that his memory gradually failed him, he was mentally alert and vigorous to the he literally prealded, but he was no martivery last. It was worth going a long ways net. For the more letter of the law ha to spend an hour with him and hear him had less respect than many others, but he

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was most striking. Full six feet tall, and hesitate to say that the capisst way to get weighing 200 pounds or more, he had a rid of an unworthy minister or member face which one could not easily forget. Is the best. It is told of him that he once blonde, smooth, with a magnificent forehead, a Roman nose, penetrating blue eyes the Texas Conferences without a trial, and a firm, strong jaw. As a youth he provided he would sign a written pictga was not handsome, but time dealt gently with him, and when he came to be old, softened and transfigured his countenance. to be implicitly trusted. It is a matter of In any company he would have been sin- knowledge that he tried to make great gled out as a man of distinction.

Above all things, he was a Christian, being what Neander termed "a heroic believer." I have never known a man that seemed to me to be more absolutely consecrated. He knew, as few do, the meaning of prayer. No one ever heard him speak of himself in a way that had even the semblance of boastfulness. But all that he had and all that he was belonged without reserve to Christ. His three sons, two of whom have long been in Paradise, were itinerant ministers, and one of his daughters was a minister's wife His conviction two men that the gospel is sufficient to save the world was absolute. The missionary revival in the Church got much of its impulse from him, and the Mexican Mission, which now embraces three Annual Conferences, was, humanly speaking, his creation. He delighted to speak of it as "a distinct creation of the Holy Chost'

His preaching was peculiar. It would not be correct to say that it was ever popular. Usually it lacked sharpness of outline and definition Except when he undertook to write poetry, he was really a peet A sort of golden haze often surrounged his sermons. I once spoke of him, in an article on Bishop McTyeire, as being subtle, and the epithet did not much please him. In spite of the disabilities which I bave mentioned, he delivered himself at ever heard him on the Prodigal Son or on old hymns' Divas and Lazarus, can forget the wonderful play of imagination, and the verita- hand on my snoulder and said to me to Loble sea-surge of feeling with which he ingry. No man is fit to be an edit a to a reached his citmax?

dreaded. He did not fight for exercise but when I was made mishop, he with the a for victory, and he usually won it. His humor, which or principle was carefully repressed in the pulpit, here broke out in the board telligible to two forces that the full force. Once in a while, wher he was. Kings thinot in this course upon which dealing with what he conceived to be relled you have now outbred, and to bring the gious quackery or humbuggery, it took the rain with you! He bimsed has at last form of sarcesm and beent like aque fortic. outrue the tempes a and the bleate, said to Sincerity was the grand tone of his char- aste with do i actor, and the lack of the provoked his scorn.

In the chair of a deliberative excembly kept always within the spirit of it. For In personal appearance Bishop Keener Church trials he had a horror, and did not consented to let a preacher out of one of never to apply for readmission.

> His judgments of non were not glyryr men out of some who could not justif, the good opinion that he held of them. Nor did he take much pleasure in revising his estimates, though he would do it when the facts were compulsory.

He was delightfully human even in ha prejudices. Nothing could be freaker or more positive than his diglikes. I should be glad to see him and Eishop lob. P. Newman on the other side. There uses was a more pronounced case of what Charles Lamb calls "imperfect sylongthies" than that which existed between 'is

Though Bishop Keerer was an interes Southerner, he had a wide of thook or, live His intellectual interests were varied. Great books were a passion with him After he was seventy-five he carried Professor Jebb's two volumes on The Adic Orators on his Entsteyn counds. On alother occasion. I found him does in para Bargen's "Revision Revissa" He vas nos haps the first man in his Church to read Purcell's "Manning." He was also very fond of music, and took a great delight in the fine arts, especially in fainting never missing an opportunity to visit a gailery or see a masterplece.

In his social life, whether as how in guest, he was most delightial. To have him under one's reef was a benefit to How effectually 1, did pray at the family times with tremendous energy. Who that altar, and with what tose he sang the great

When I was elected editor, 'e put life cannot take an empty cruth rad a Gas'er In debate he was an antagonist to be and make two pounds of good butter," up. affectionate letter, closing with with contence: 'May the Lord God gir' yo ever

Citra, Fig., January 22, 1998

The Posity of Acbert Paras

By the Rev. John Reid Sharacu, D.H.

Among the impericable trecaures of grandeer. It is to this poem that Whirtier

Christian Advocate, Feb. 1, 1906. p.150-151.

John Christian Keener was a Baltimorean, having been born there Feb. 7, 1819. He graduated at Wesleyan University, Connecticut, taking his A.B. in 1835 and his A.M. in 1839. He then entered the drug business in Baltimore and remained in it two or three years. In the meantime, his sweetheart, Miss Mary Anna Spencer, had moved with her parents to Alabama. Alabama then held great attraction for young Keener, and to Alabama he came. Here he married Miss Spencer, and here, too, he was licensed to preach at old Rehobeth Church, then on the Linden Circuit, but in Wilcox County. Other appointments on that circuit included Dayton, Demopolis, Linden, Spring Hill and nineteen others-twentyfour in all. Shortly after Brother Keener was licensed to preach, the pastor of the Linden Circuit missed the way, went astray, and young Keener was appointed to fill out the unexpired year's work. He was admitted on trial into the Alabama Conference in the fall of that year-1842—and was appointed to serve as junior preacher, with the distinguished Dr. Lovick Pierce as senior preacher, at Franklin Street and West Ward, Mobile. In the middle of the

year 1843 his presiding elder sent him to Demopolis. Here he held a great revival meeting. Demopolis was made over. Formerly a point on the Linden Circuit, it now became a station and has remained such until this good day. He reported 68 white members and 115 colored members. He served Demopolis through 1845; he served Tuscaloosa during 1846 and 1847. His next appointment was at Montgomery, where he served only one year, transferring at the end of that year to the Louisiana Conference. It was while serving in New Orleans that he was elected a Bishop in 1870. His son, Dr. J. O. Keener, was for many years a member of the Alabama Conference, and served with rare distinction as President of the Southern University at Greensboro.

Dr. Robert Kennon, one of the mobeloved ministers of that section.

J. H. Vincent was born at Tusc loosa, Alabama, Feb. 23rd, 1832. H parents were northern people, I father having been born near Milto Pa., and his mother at Philadelphi She was Mary Raser. In early li she was left an orphan, and can South to be with her brothers, one Mobile and one in Demopolis. Tl elder Vincent met her at the home. her brother, and they were marrie at Demopolis. They later moved Tuscaloosa and were living the when, in 1832, J. H., Jr., was bor Mr. Vincent had been reared a Prebyterian and Miss Raser a Luthera After their marriage they joined th Methodist Church in which your J. H. Vincent was baptized. The Vin cents returned to Pennsylvania tl latter part of 1837. Their son w licensed to preach in 1850. He fillvarious appointments in 'two of t Northern Conferences, and was elec ed a Bishop in the Methodist Episc pal Church in 1888. He was one the founders and principal leade of the Chautaugua Movement.) became the author of numerous boo and pamphlets, and was known

EPISCOPACY

of a number of books, including one of the most dependable Histories of Methodism ever written, a monu mental work that ought never to be out of print. He was a church states man and was so recognized by all who knew him. He became the first President of Vanderbilt University originally a Methodist institution. In 1847 in Mobile he married Miss Amelia Townsend. One of their daught ters became the wife of Rev. John J. Tigert, who later became a Bisho in the Church, while another man