EARLY, BISHOP JOHN
Bishop John Early

A Man of Faith and Works

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O n 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 little 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 petitioners to become a preacher, an administrator, an educator and a civil 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 his sermons and the 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 deviated from 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 free 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, his first sermon was preached at Wilson's Church on the Bedford circuit with the text that he had chosen as his theme. On that occasion he was about 18 years of age.

Three years later Elijah was ordained deacon, his ordination sermon being given by Bishop M. N. McEnery, D.D. The ceremony was at the Annual Conference of Virginia held in Richmond in January, 1809.

Officiated Many Positions

In the War between the States, Bishop Early was selected a number of important positions. He was made to accept the arduous task of Group Agent of the United States during the war. He was made to serve as superintendent of the 3rd District of Virginia. He received the rank of a brigadier general in the Army of the United States. While President John Tyler was in office, 1841-1845, Early was made the Associate Controller of the Treasury. He was made to accept the offices of authority and prestige; his reply to each being that he "could not come down to such positions."

Early was first elected secretary of the Virginia Conference in 1836, the year of his location. He again was elected in 1832 upon his readmission, holding the secretarialship until 1844, except in the years 1833 and 1841 when he presided in the absence of a bishop. Early held the office again from 1846 until 1848, 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 church in 1845. He opened his office in Richmond shortly after his election and expended the publishing interests of his church until 1854 when he left the ministry 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 65 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, 1873. He was first buried in a prominent place in a northern cemetery, but in 1890 his body was removed to the Episcopal Church at Louisville, Ky.

At the time of his death Bishop Early was the last remaining link between the first American Methodists and those of the modern church. He had controlled a ministry of constant circuit riding and local 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 1855. It was the institution that came in (Continued on page 22)
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 LST, 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 project as a demonstration of the Gospel and of American technology.

A carefully chosen crew—"technical missionaries" as Mr. LeTourneau calls them—will man the voyage. The "Ark" will carry food and supplies for 20 people 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 underdeveloped jungle land. If he can improve the tract substantially within 10 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 man," feels that this is the best way in which America can assist backward nations.

"Teach them to use machinery and try to help themselves," Mr. LeTourneau has said. "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.

I enjoy trust men have a habit of destroying rich acres of virgin timberland in order to raise a single sparse

reservoir. 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.

Buffs Bay, a bit in the Guinea Coast of Africa 160 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 seems to zoom feet above sea level at some points.

The industrialist will be no aloof statistician in this enterprise. When the Ark leaves, it will be his job to be converted from the seaman into a jungle guide.

For a year he will rest the vessel and join his crew in an exploration of the thick, impenetrable forests of Africa.

Industry has become greatly alarmed at the rapidly mounting costs due to the use of human labor. These costs have been three to six times as high.

President Quimby, educational secretary of the Methodist Board of Missions and Church Extension, said that since this country has remained relatively uninvolved by the ravages of war it could well afford to underwrite 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 stimulating notions 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 so, we go will the Christian mission needs to set 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 of 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 pallor, 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 essence of the heart of God. Missions are the heart of revelation."

The missionary enterprise was at its peak in some of the world's chief mission fields—it is being renewed in new lands and mission centers, according to Quimby. He said that the idea of a Protestant and denominational missionary movement, which was founded in Silver Bay.

They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mt. Zion which cannot be moved but abideth forever—Isa. 26.12.

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