



# *Resume and Biographical Data*

## *of*

# *Marshall Keeble*

**B**orn in Rutherford County, Tennessee. Marshall Keeble was baptized into the body of Christ in the year 1895 under the preaching influence of Preston Taylor. when he was four years of age, his parents Robert and Mittie Keeble moved to Nashville Tennessee. One of the major influences on the life of young Keeble was S.W. Womack, a pioneer preacher and teacher who along with G.P. Bowser, Alexander Campbell and others laid the foundation for a Christian school among African-Americans. The Womacks were members of the Lea Avenue congregation in Nashville and next door neighbors to the Keebles. At the age of nineteen, Keeble was united in wedlock with Minnie Womack a graduate of Fisk University and one of the daughters of S.W. and Sally Womack. To this union three children were born. With the literary training of his Christian wife and the spiritual training of his father in-law, Marshall became one of the greatest preachers of the gospel since the days of the Apostles.

The first meeting held by Keeble which resulted in a large number being baptized was in Henderson, Tennessee. Sixty-nine precious souls obeyed the gospel of Christ on this occasion. In 1927 during a meeting in Tampa, Florida, he baptized 99. At Valdosta, Georgia in both 1929 and 1930, he baptized 163 in the first gospel meeting and 166 in the second. Although Keeble was praised for his simplicity of preaching, he was often criticized for his passivity on racial issues. One of his secrets for success was his unique ability to obtain financial support from many of the white brethren. Many have often compared his personal ideology to that of Booker T. Washington and the ideology G.P. Bowser to that of W.E. B. DuBois regarding their diverse philosophies towards education African-Americans. Keeble once acknowledged that Booker T. Washington was his idol and later employed Washington's strategy to raise funds from many whites for the benefit of Nashville Christian Institute.

On December 11, 1932, Sister Minnie Womack Keeble passed away at the age of fifty-three. After her death Marshall Keeble then married Laura Catherine Johnson of Corinth, Mississippi on April 3, 1934. Laura Catherine was the sixth child of ten siblings born to Luke and Susan Johnson on August 6, 1898. At the time she married Marshall, Sister Keeble was employed by a widow who tried to encourage her against getting married. When she made the decision to marry Keeble regardless, her employer then insisted on buying her wedding outfit. However, when the day of the wedding arrived, Keeble was nowhere to be found. In a statement later given by Sister Keeble she said, "I didn't know if he decided to come or what." An hour of two after the ceremony was to have begun, a friend finally drove him up in a brand new Chevrolet. The car dealer had warned them not to drive of 30 m.p.h., until the car was broke in, and that's exactly what they did all the way from Nashville, Tennessee to Corinth, Mississippi.

In the year 1942, a new chapter opened in the life of Marshall Keeble, when he became the first official president of Nashville Christian Institute. Being president of NCI elevated Keeble's influence among African-American Christians and it also gave the school credibility among black as well as whites. Without Keeble's name and his ability to raise funds for the school, Nashville Christian Institute would not have survived as long as it did. During his NCI days, wherever Keeble went he always took his "preacher boys" with him to participate in the services that were well attended by both races in an era of rigid segregation. Many preachers in our brotherhood today were once students of Keeble at Nashville Christian Institute.

Although the formal education of Marshall Keeble was limited, he is credited with baptizing more than 45,000 people and establishing over 200 congregations. No other person in the history of the Restoration Movement has been known to accomplish this milestone. He knew how to make incisive points by using simple illustrations from everyday life. In a ministry that spanned for over fifty years, he often preached three times on Sunday and each night during the course of a week. He made highly successful preaching trips to Nigeria, West Africa and was involved in numerous debates where he always defended the word of God. In several of his debates, he baptized his opponent before the debate was over. Because of his convictions, Keeble's life was threatened on various occasions and threats of bodily harm were made against him.

Having become very weak in the last years of his life due to age and diabetes, Keeble would still get up and dress every morning and wait for his assistant Willie Cato to come and pick him up for work. Because of his failing health and new federal legislation which allowed blacks to attend white institutions, Keeble announced in the March edition of the Gospel Advocate that Nashville Christian Institute would permanently close its doors on June 2, 1967. Finally, one April evening in 1968, the 89 year old Marshall Keeble took a bath, came out and sat down on the couch, nodded his head for the last time and died. Yet, the legacy of Marshall Keeble still lives on in the lives of many whom he touched. There will not be another like him soon, who was blessed to achieve so much with so very little to work with.