

George Holden of Cranleigh.

RIGHT reverend; one of a great company of those who have won to themselves a good degree, and in the adversities and experiences of strenuous lives been led to know Him Whom to know is life eternal.

Such was George Holden; born about 1800, the child of humble parents, poverty and hard work were his early lot. He came under spiritual influences and became attached to old-fashioned Independents and Huntingtonians who lived in his district. He had become a workman in the building trade, and in a few years by diligence, entered into business for himself at Cranleigh, a country village, where he married and settled down.

Schools and "means of grace" were non-existent in many villages, and the light into which he had been brought prompted efforts for the moral and spiritual well-being of his neighbours, many of whom were very ignorant and superstitious. By converse, by example, and soon by meetings, he began a ministry that extended into the surrounding district. God had opened a way for him both in providence and grace, and to the God of his life a sacrifice of praise and service continually went up.

By his second marriage he became my uncle and I knew him well in his later years, and none who knew him could forget him. His ancient stately figure was attired in the Georgian fashion—knee-breeches and stockings with cloth gaiters; a long waistcoat with watch-guard and seal hanging below; a square-collared tail-coat, white neckcloth, and a low-crowned silk hat.

Clean-shaven and silver-haired, he was a striking personality wherever he went on his numerous journeys. At home his patriarchal grace and wisdom shone out. In business, which his two sons then shared with him, his diligence, experience, and good judgment were manifest, and yet withal he filled an important place in the ministry and was recognised as a leader amongst the churches and people of his order.

The first time I heard him was in a shed that had been opened for Gospel-preaching. Soon after I, then a boy, was his guest, and his companion one memorable Sunday. Rising betimes, he conducted worship with his little household—wife, servant, and guest. Soon after nine o'clock his gig was brought

round, a large old Bible placed on the floor, and he drove some nine miles to the county town, improving the occasion as the pony walked up the hills by perusing a chapter he was meditating on.

Arriving at the town, he put up the pony and proceeded to an ancient meeting-house under the shadow of a more ancient castle, and at 10.30 commenced the service, concluding about noon. Driving home, after dinner and a short rest he was ready for the afternoon meeting at a chapel built at his own cost in his own garden, where, to a full audience of his neighbours, he again ministered. Then tea, and soon after five o'clock he left home to walk three miles to a village where, in another humble chapel, he conducted the evening service. He preached a Latimer-like sermon, extempore and full of homely references that appealed to the crowded congregation of village folk.

Toward the close some hymn came to his mind as expressing the thought of his text, so he quoted one verse :

When God makes up His last account
Of natives in His holy mount,
'Twill be an honour to appear
As one new-born or nourished there.

Then, turning to the rustic choir, said : " We'll have that hymn to close with ; you singers can be finding it. It begins, ' God in His earthly temple-lays.' " So the service closed and the worshippers slowly dispersed, and as the setting sun of that Sunday evening gleamed across the widespread Weald, the old preacher trudged homeward with one who still lives to remember that day.

Two or three times a year he made a visitation to a number of places where he was known and esteemed. These visits were almost episcopal, and, as he travelled, his venerable looks and quaint garb made him very like a bishop in official clerical costume. The most important of these journeys was each autumn, when, for nearly two months, he visited towns in the Midlands and North, preaching each Sunday and many week-evenings in various chapels, and conducting family prayer or exhortation at the houses of his worthy hosts, which were thrown open for all who liked to attend. A titled lady of some note in those days welcomed him to her and her husband's mansion and arranged meetings.

When past middle age an unexpected event happened, the good man came to see believers' baptism, and quietly joined those who practised it. He was not fond of argument and the change did not affect his life-long friendships nor extensive ministry.

His strong memory and gift of profitable conversation made him a charming guest. Some of the recollections of his God-

directed life would be thought fanciful now-a-days. But from a man of such sound practical mind they were singular answers to prayer—not mere fairy tales. One was as follows, given almost in his own words:—

“Years ago, when I was beginning to get on in business, I and others were asked to contract for the restoration of E—— Church. Being near, the job would have just suited me, and I went very carefully into the matter. The architect had specified rather extensive cutting away to be done as he might direct. Having had experience of these ancient buildings, I felt this might be dangerous to the structure, and a night or two before the tenders went in I dreamt I was at the church, the scaffolding up, and work in full progress. Some extensive cutting away was being done by the architect’s orders to one of the piers that carried the tower and spire, and whilst I was watching, the pier collapsed, the tower and spire fell, turning completely over, as generally happens in such cases, and the iron vane-rod was deeply embedded in one of the graves. All was so clear and vivid, that in sending in my tender I made it subject to some assurance as to the clause noticed.

“My tender being the lowest, I was summoned to see the architect, with whom I discussed the clause, saying, ‘Suppose in carrying out your orders to cut away, even if my knowledge and experience convinces me it is dangerous, an accident happens, am I to bear the loss?’ The architect courteously assured me it was so, and firmly refused to modify the condition. I therefore declined the job, which was soon entrusted to another builder.

“Weeks passed, and one summer morning, between five and six o’clock, as I was dressing, one of my men, who lived at that village, came into my garden. I felt sure there was something unusual. He called to me at the open window: ‘Master, there has been an accident at E—— Church; the steeple’s fallen—toppled right over.’

“‘Yes,’ said I; ‘and I’ll tell you where the point struck. It is by that grave near the path.’ My warning dream had come true. Some dangerous cutting away had been done, causing building and builder to be half ruined. I saw the gracious hand of God who had preserved me from that calamity.”

His devoted wife did her best by gathering the village children on Sundays and week-day mornings to learn reading and memorise Scripture and hymns, by visiting poor villagers, and providing material help in needy cases.

The good man made full proof of his ministry and laboured on till advanced years limited and ended his strenuous career.

The village cause he founded still lives. The chapel in his

garden is now superseded by one in the main road, and the various activities of a ministry happily maintained.

He walked the dark world in the mild
 Still guidance of the Light;
 In tearful tenderness a child,
 A strong man in the right.
 With weary hand yet steadfast will,
 In old age as in youth,
 The Master found him sowing still
 The good seed of His truth.

T. R. HOOPER.

WILLIAM HARTLEY was a yeoman of Bucks, who in 1649 published on the right of laymen to preach. He preached at Buckingham, *Good News to All People*, and published it in 1650. Next year he again upheld the usefulness of private persons preaching, sounding the passing-bell of the prerogative priest. This was too much for Richard Carpenter of Aylesbury, who opposed him. Carpenter also wrote a scurrilous account of a formal debate on baptism he had with John Gibbs, minister of Newport Pagnel. Hartley therefore published in 1652 "*Infant-baptism none a Christ's. And the vanity thereof discovered; together with the equity and necessity of dipping or baptizing believers. Calculated on purpose to undeceive the people from the sophistry of Mr. Carpenter, &c.*" The pamphlet is severely logical, and ramifies to say that unbaptized infants are saved, that there is no such thing as "original sin" as commonly understood (what Smyth had said a generation earlier), that scripture declares a son is not answerable for his father's sin, that cleansing is not by baptism, but by the blood of Christ. He is scathing on the "tyth-coats of the black regiment," and notes that on the very day when Carpenter opposed in the afternoon the sermon by Gibbs in the morning, he was deprived of his benefice. (Carpenter's later career was most erratic.) Hartley was appointed Parish Register at Stony Stratford in 1653; in 1657 he sold land there for the Baptist Church. He died in March 1697/8, an apothecary, and Gibbs published his funeral sermon. The pamphlet of 1652 attracted the attention of George Fox, and the only copy known has just been discovered in a volume of tracts in Fox's library, at Friends' House. Entry 91-649 in the Baptist Bibliography should be re-numbered 66-652.