GEORGE PRESTON AND CARTMEL PRIORY CHURCH.

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THE seventeenth century produced not a few good churchmen and church builders. Years ago, in the revival of Gothic architecture, we were taught to look upon their work as debased, and a great deal of work of that period has been cleared out of our churches on their restoration, and sold and converted to domestic uses. It is matter for congratulation that we have learned to look upon the work of our forefathers with a more historic eye, and to discern the beauty which is to be found in all styles, and even in uncouth figures and scrolls, when they are grouped and balanced by a man who had a meaning in his work. At all events, we can tolerate and preserve with loving care the work of every age, and learn our lesson from it.

Many persons are familiar with the work of Bishop Cosin at Auckland Castle Chapel and at Brancepeth, which he completed in the reign of Charles II; many have visited the churches at Croscombe and Bridgwater, and looked with admiration on the somewhat fantastic, and yet stately, Jacobean screens. In that county of

Somerset, at Low Ham, is a church which was built from the foundation, in the seventeenth century, after the model of the neighbouring churches of the fifteenth century, with founder's tomb and chancel screen all complete ; and on the chancel screen is this text, so characteristic, " My " son, fear thou God and the King, and meddle " not with them that are given to change."

Among the worthies of those days, whose name should ever be had in remembrance and loving regard, for his preservation of an ancient sanctuary, is George Preston, of Holker Hall. His grandfather, Sir Thomas Preston, of Preston Patrick and Levens, was connected with many of the good families in North Lonsdale and Westmorland, and was the purchaser of the site of Furness Abbey, at the dissolution of the religious houses. His second son, Christopher Preston, is considered to be the founder of Holker Hall ; and Christopher's second son was the George Preston who saved from ruin Cartmel Church, and earned the gratitude of all generations.

There is a monument on the north wall of the " Town Quire " of Cartmel Church, with a very long inscription, of which it will suffice to quote a few lines. " The said George, out of his zeal to " God, at his great charge repaired this church, " being in great decay, with a new roof of timber, " and beautifyed it within very decently with fret " plaister work, and adorn'd the chancell with " curiously carved wood-work, and placed therein " a pair of organs of great value ; he bequeathed " further by his will £100 towards the binding of " poor men's sonns of this parish apprentices, " besides diverse other acts of charity and pyety " through the whole course of his life, to whose " pious memory Thomas Preston his son and heir " caused this to be made, Anno 1640."

It will be well to examine more exactly what George Preston did for this grand old church, nearly 300 years ago. The first necessity was to re-roof the church. As far as I know, no record exists of the dismantling of the church at the Dissolution, nor can we say what the old roof was like. Doubtless the usual course was taken ; the lead was stripped from all the roofs, and the timbers partly removed and partly left to decay. There was an exception made in favour of the enlarged south choir aisle, which was called the Town Quire, and was used for the parish services. The rest of the church stood *sub divo* for about 83 years, drenched with rain and swept with storm. However, the old stalls of the monks, with their misereres, were allowed to remain in their place ; and the book-desks and poppy-heads bear witness to this day to the seasoning which they endured. There must have been among the Cartmel people in those days a great love for their old church (as there is now), or else that beautiful old oak would have been carted away to private houses. A marvellous and happy story is the preservation of Cartmel Church and its contents during those 83 years of desolation.

Then arose George Preston, and he covered in the dear old stalls, and again they felt dry and comfortable. It must not be thought that he did all the work at his own cost. It would seem that part of the expense of the repairs was provided out of the church rates ; but all beyond, and all the beautifying, was done at the charge of Mr. Preston.

This is the entry in the old Church Book, which has been kept without intermission since the year 1597, and contains the doings of the twenty-four sidesmen of Cartmel Parish. "July 3, 1618. It "is this day agreed between Mr. George Preston "and so many of the 24 as were present that the

"said Mr. George Preston for and in consideration "of two twenty mark Casts, to be paid to him "before Michaelmas in anno 1619, shall build up "and make anew the south roof over the parish "quire, and the other roof over the Lady Quire "and pyper quire, well and sufficiently before the "aforesaid Michaelmas Day. And further it is "agreed that so much lead as can be spared from "the same roof shall be weighed and put into such "safe keeping as the said Mr. Preston and Twenty-"four shall agree of until such time as security can "be provided for the repairs of the church yearly "for ever."

Mr. Preston put up a plain roof of oak at a somewhat lower pitch than the old roof, a roof which can now be seen from within, but which was not intended to be seen; a roof of continuous pairs of rafters, with plain collars and no mouldings of any sort, for he ceiled it, as the monument says, "with fret plaister work," and the marks of the laths and nails can be discerned from below. But the fretted ceiling is gone. It was removed in the restoration of 1857-58, and I can remember seeing a part of it still remaining at my first visit to Cartmel, in 1858.

The removal of that ceiling is a real loss to the symmetry of the Renaissance work in the church, and a sore affront to the taste of Mr. Preston. Mr. Edward Paley, of Lancaster, who was responsible for the removal, told me that he considered it too much decayed to be preserved, and that the renewal would be too costly. Two pictures which hang in the vestry show the appearance of the interior when the ceiling remained, and are now exhibited.[1]

[1] Unfortunately neither these nor the photographs of Mr. Preston's screen could be satisfactorily reproduced as illustrations to this paper.—Ed.

Mr. George Preston's next good deed was to surmount the ancient stalls with an oak screen of Renaissance character, and hardly at all Jacobean in detail. It is, at the same time, almost Gothic in feeling and deeply religious, and harmonises fully with the mediæval work. From each elbow of the stalls rises a strong pillar with a Corinthian capital, carrying a frieze and cornice. On the pillars and the frieze are carved in relief the emblems of the Passion, each pillar and bay varying from the last; the vine intertwining among the nails and the pincers and the hammer, the lanthorn, the cock, the cross, and the ladder. The panels are pierced with patterns of most clever design, all differing from one another.

It has often been wondered from whence Mr. Preston got his workers. Some say from Belgium. At any rate they were real craftsmen, and not the least of the benefits done by the master of Holker Hall was the introduction of these artistic carvers. In some of the neighbouring houses are to be found pieces of well-cut furniture, which we may assume to have been the work of these clever artists.

All this screen work was cleaned with great care at the restoration in 1864, and is now in beautiful order. The chancel doors are surmounted with the text

> ENTER INTO HIS GATES WITH PRAYSE
> AND INTO HIS COVRTS WITH LOVE.
> BE THANKFUL VNTO HIM AND
> SPEAKE GOOD OF HIS NAME. *Ps.* C. 4 *v.*

On the inner (east) side—

> I HAD RATHER BE A DOORE KEEPER
> IN THE HOUSE OF MY GOD . THEN
> TO DWELL IN THE TABERNACLES
> OF WICKEDNESS. *Psa.* 84.

Over the door of the screen leading to the Town Choir—

MY SOVLE HATH A DESIRE & LONG
ING TO ENTER INTO THE COVRTS OF THE LORD.

The third benefaction of George Preston was the gift of the organ. The inscription on the tomb records that he roofed the church, and adorned the chancel with curiously carved wood-work, "and "placed therein a pair of organs of great value." One would like to know in what position in the chancel these organs were placed, and what became of them.

It appears that an organ was in Cartmel Church before this gift of Mr. Preston, for he roofed the chancel, as we have seen, in 1618-9. Now the churchwardens' accounts for 1610 give, "To Thos. "Willan for organs £2 1*s.* 4*d.*, stuff for organs "and other things belonging 16*s.* 10*d.*"; and again, in 1617, "Two days at church when the "organs were amended 4*d.* Tabling and diet of "two clerks when they attended the organs, 8*s.*" It is just possible that these were the organs presented by George Preston, and that they were put up in the town choir before the chancel was roofed; but it seems more likely that the entry refers to an organ existing previously.

Twenty-six years later, the churchwardens' books contain this entry—"The 18th of November, 1643, "there was left furthe of the vestrie [outside the "vestry] xiii pieces of the sides and leaves of "organs, and the wind chiste; also a peece of an "old almerie, and iii peeces more of wood set with "organ sides." Now we know, from the Cartmel Church Book, that on the night of the 1st October, 1643, the Parliamentary Army rested at Cartmel, after defeating the King's forces at Lindal-in-Furness. It has been conjectured that Cromwell's

men broke up Mr. Preston's organ, and that the fragments of it are those mentioned as lying outside the vestry ; but there is no mention in the church book of any violence done to Cartmel Church by the Parliamentary soldiers.

Until thirty years ago, there stood over the chancel screen, in a plain gallery, which could not have been Preston's work, a barrel-organ which played forty hymn tunes, comprised on four barrels. This is shown in a photograph, taken about forty years ago, by Mr. Hogg, of Kendal. Now there is a fine organ, by Jardine, of Manchester, which stands in the old town choir, and worthily carries forward the intention of George Preston.

At the present day, the people of Cartmel are as proud of their church as their fore-elders have been in the ages past. The church is well kept, and is being adorned with various good gifts from year to year. There is a full surpliced choir and a hearty congregation, and the old Priory Church, in its present beauty and usefulness, speaks the praises of him who, nearly three centuries ago, saved it from ruin ; one whom the county of Lancaster may well remember with honour—Mr. George Preston, of Holker Hall.