

**HARRIS, WILLIAM L., BISHOP**

**3.**—BISHOP WILLIAM L. HARRIS. *JOURNAL*, PAGES 269.

Bishop William Logan Harris, D.D., LL.D., was born near Gallion, O., November 1, 1817, at U. S. City, New York City, September 2, 1887, and was, at the time of his seventy years of age. In 1841 he was converted by the Rev. Mr. Clark at a camp meeting conducted by the Rev. Henry O. Sibley. Six months later he was received into full communion by the Rev. John T. Kellam.

Soon after his conversion he entered Newark Seminary, where he remained two years paying his way by sawing wood, lighting the fires, and fighting the bell on that institution.

After leaving the seminary he taught for a short time a district school near Newark, O. In his next year he was licensed to preach, and September 9, 1847, he joined the Michigan Conference, which then included the northern portion of Ohio.

After having served seven years in the pastorate he was elected, in 1845, a professor in Ohio Wesleyan University, and after a service of two years in that pastorate he became, in 1848, principal of what is now the Baldwin University. In 1851 he was tutor in Ohio Wesleyan University. In 1859 he was elected in the same institution to the double chair of Chemistry and Natural History, which position he held for eight years.

In 1860 he was elected by the General Conference one of the Secretaries of the Missionary Society, was re-elected in 1863, and in 1868, holding the position for twelve years. He was Secretary of the General Conference from 1866 to 1872. In 1872 he was elected Bishop, and continued in this high office until September 2, 1887, when death closed his earthly labors.

Bishop Harris served the Church as pastor, teacher, Missionary Secretary, and Bishop. He was nine years a pastor, fourteen a teacher, twelve a Missionary Secretary, and fifteen a Bishop. As a pastor he was successful, not because of any one distinguishing feature or quality of mind, heart, and work, but because of a happy combination of the qualities suited to this most important relation to the Church. He was a close student of human nature, and readily and thoroughly became acquainted with the people he served. He was in hearty sympathy with the young people and was gifted with an unusual amount of imagination. His mind seemed to be constantly engaged in the business and human interests of his country. He was successful in his preparation for the great trials of a constant warfare in preaching the word. His language as a secretary was simple and well measured power. It is said that many his sermons revived millions who were fast asleep. His sermons were full of life and vigor. His general benevolence and charity of these were his chief features, some of which remain to this day.

Bishop Harris always placed a very humble estimate upon his abilities as a preacher. It would not be strange if this estimate discouraged a full absorbing attention and effort necessary to possible proficiency. But there is no doubt that he under-

estimated the measure of his powers and the practical value of his ministry. As a preacher he was always thoughtful, earnest, evangelical, and instructive. In clearness of statement, directness of aim, and in fortifying his positions by the application of scriptural texts, he was not excelled.

As a scholar and as a teacher in our institutions of learning he is worthy of very favorable mention. Technically speaking, he was not what men of letters call a scholar. But while it was not possible for him to be completely given to scholarly methods he always had at command the best practical results of scholarship.

Though he had not the advantages of a collegiate training, and was never graduated from any college, he supplied this lack by the most persistent study of the college curriculum, at such odd hours and days as he could save from professional duty, until he well mastered all its subjects. His powers of acquisition were very great, his perceptions were quick and clear, his memory wonderfully retentive and his reasoning close and correct. Few men could more readily master the central idea of a subject, and, when necessary, acquaint themselves more fully with its details.

His own methods of study gave cast to his work as a teacher. He strove to make his students comprehend principles, the controlling and outlining ideas of a subject, its general scope and drift, rather than to make a statement of recorded facts or of unapplied details. He was emphatically an *abductor*; he led out or drew out the student's powers, and helped him to definite and clear conceptions; to express the same in his own language, and stimulate him to independent effort and original investigation. But in his work as a teacher the scholar and method were not equal to the man—the personality. His energy and force of character were never more manifest and moving than in those days when he daily went in and out before large classes of young men.

He was the picture of health and personification of courage. As one of his students once wrote of him: "He was a very whirlwind of activity." He seemed the living representative of energy, force, conquering push, and irresistible effort. He was never popular with the lazy student, but he was an inspiration, a discourse, and an uplifting power to the earnest and industrious. His sympathy with higher education and with young people, his tact in teaching, his delight in the growth of mind and in the development of character, made the work of instruction a great pleasure to him. He has often been heard to remark that the joy of his connection with our institutions of learning was the most pleasant period of his life.

If ever success is a sure source of pleasure, it would seem that the successful work and period of his life ought to have been a time of joy and satisfaction to himself. He was eight years Secretary of the North Ohio Conference, and afterward of the Central Ohio, until he declined further re-election. The Church rarely had an ideal General Conference Secretary, when he came into office. His great frame and great endurance, his powerful

voice, his unfailing attention, quick perception and rapid execution, thoroughly adapted him to this position. No man ever excelled him in gathering and recording the real intent of a great deliberative body, or in editing, digesting, and embodying the results of its work.

We doubt whether the Church at large has fully appreciated, or could fully appreciate, the services he rendered as Missionary Secretary. In presenting the claims of the Society to the Annual Conferences he was called to take the place of Dr. Durbin, the ideal organizer of the missionary spirit and enthusiasm of the Church and the matchless pulpit and platform orator. But in adaptability to all the demands of this great office there has been no secretary superior to Dr. Harris. His unwearied industry, sound judgment, knowledge of men, of methods, and of promising fields of effort, his business sagacity and accuracy, his comprehensive and lucid reports to the Missionary Committee, and his clear, crisp statements or explanations of facts and of reasons for or against pending propositions, were invaluable to the Church and could be appreciated only by those having knowledge of the needs and specific work of the Missionary Society. I think it may be safely said that no man in the whole history of the Church ever had a fuller knowledge of our many missionary fields, and no one ever so fully established a *personal* connection between them and the home Church.

Into the Episcopal office Bishop Harris brought mental qualities and a discipline of mind peculiarly fitted for the work of a General Superintendent. The ability he possessed for the office and the services he rendered in it were well defined. He was a man emphatically of one work in the office. To the work to which the Church had called him he gave all his time and talent. He did not simply give preference, but also all his strength to purely official duties. The many, manifold, and exacting demands necessarily made of a chief pastor led him as a rule to decline all invitations to perform unofficial services. In this high office he particularly excelled as an administrator and a parliamentarian. In caring for and directing the general interests of the Church the legal cast of his mind became more pre-eminently manifest.

Any analysis of the powers of Bishop Harris would be very incomplete without special reference to this. It was often remarked, especially in his earlier activities, that nature seemed to have designed him for the profession of law. After entering the ministry he read the standard authorities in law literature and acquired a knowledge that greatly served him and subserved the interests of the whole Church, as his administrative career and his work in ecclesiastical law fully prove. His ability to grasp both principles and details were nowhere better illustrated than in his knowledge of law, both constitutional and statutory, civil and ecclesiastical. He insisted on definite legislation and the embodiment of essential principles in law forms, and then, which is much more, in a faithful application of these principles. His ac-

curite knowledge of law and his studied application of its principles were recognized by the entire Church, and gave him exceptional influence as a counselor, legislator, and administrator.

His knowledge of ecclesiastical and parliamentary law seemed complete and always at his command. In this he was an authority long before he came into the Episcopacy. Perhaps no one was ever more at home in the presidency of a great deliberative body or in watching and sharing in its proceedings. He was especially in demand when a crisis, a tangle, a dilemma, or a delicate and rugged difficulty required an exposition of law or the citation of precedents. His aptness in this regard sometimes saved the Church from much disturbing debate and needless controversy.

Yet it does not follow that he was always the happiest presiding officer. His natural love for controversy, his intense interest in debate, something like impatience at the ignorance and misstatements of participants, and his own clear convictions and conclusions led him sometimes to lose sight of his relations as a judge and to manifest the qualities of an advocate.

Bishop Harris was a man of decided and clear convictions. In them he was always definite, positive, powerful, and uncompromising. He always knew, and those associated with him always knew, what he believed and desired. Sometimes he thundered forth his convictions with marvelous emphasis. Because he saw so clearly he believed it his duty to make others see and to obey, not him, but the truth. The clearness of his conceptions, the strength of his convictions, and the earnestness of his advocacy sometimes gave the appearance of abruptness in manner and quickness in temper; but his transparency, integrity, and generosity always showed in the end the greatness of his soul, the kindness of his sympathies, and the warmth of his friendship. His Christianity was of a manly type. It was a religion of principles rather than of manifested emotions. In my earlier acquaintance with him it did not seem to me that his massive form and strength, his positive and mental tendencies, his authoritative disposition, and his exuberant spirits were under the full control of divine grace; but when I saw, as it was my privilege, his home life, heard him pray at his family altar, and learned the motives that controlled his conduct in his daily life, then I well knew the thoroughness of his consecration and depth of his spirituality.

Bishop Harris belonged to three Annual Conferences, and yet was never transferred. His itinerant ministry covered half a century.

September 6, 1837, he entered the traveling connection in the Michigan Conference, and September 6, 1887, he was borne to the place appointed for all the Evangelists.

In 1886 the North Ohio and Central Ohio Conferences invited him to hold their sessions in 1887 and celebrate with them the semi-centennial of his ministry. His colleagues sympathized with the request and kindly arranged his work accordingly. During the intervening months he looked forward to the ap-

promising occasion with unusual pleasure. Every thing seemed providentially opportune. Not a few friends of his early ministry gratefully awaited his coming. The North Ohio Conference was to hold its session at Gauchau, which is within six miles of the place of his birth, stands on the very spot where he was converted, and formed a part of the old enclosure upon which he was licensed to preach. In writing to a friend and accepting the hospitalities of his house he said: "I cannot express the satisfaction with which I anticipate a visit to your town."

But life is largely made up of unexpected changes and sudden transitions. He had spent the summer abroad in rest and recuperation and seemingly had gained much. But suddenly an alarming telegram comes from beyond the sea, a few days of dreadful suspense intervene while the homeward voyage is accomplished. When he reached his home then his family, his friends, and the Church breathed more easily. But it was soon apparent that an all-wise Providence had brought him home simply that he might say "good-bye" to those he loved best, and in their presence pass triumphantly into his rest.

In some respects Bishop Harris holds a unique place in our history as a Church. It is no disparagement to others to say that, in knowledge of ecclesiastical law, in acquaintance with the economy of the Church, in a knowledge of the details of its work, and in the extent of his travels and supervision, he has not been surpassed. He gave the Church fifty years of uninterrupted service; of active, eminently practical, efficient service. His life will stand out boldly in the history of the Church as one of massive toil and rigorous execution of great tasks. His name and services are known in all the Churches and have had world-wide recognition. But his work on earth is done. He will go in and out before us no more. It seems wellnigh impossible to realize that we have seen his face, heard his voice, and received his blessing for the last time. But we will praise the great Head of the Church for the long life and abundant work of his servant, we will cherish his memory, strive to imitate his excellences, and rejoice in the hope we have of meeting and greeting him in the great future.

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