

INTRODUCTION

In the present writer's *Calendar of The Seconde Parte of a Register*, II. 64–6, a long document, with the title “A treatise of the Church and the Kingdome of Christ,” is briefly summarised. It consists of more than 24 large folio pages¹ (441–465), and is subscribed “Not yours excepte you repent. R.H.”

In a note the intention of printing the manuscript in full was declared, and reasons suggested for believing that R.H. was Robert Harrison. That intention is now carried out, and at the same time some new facts brought out concerning a very obscure episode in the emergence of the Separatist movement and in the lifetime of Robert Browne, its leader.

ROBERT HARRISON AT AYLSHAM. 1573–1574

Robert Browne and Robert Harrison were both students at Corpus Christi, Cambridge, the former apparently graduating B.A. in 1572, the latter M.A. in the same year. At the beginning of his *True and Short Declaration, both of the Gathering and Joyning Together of Certaine Persons: and of the Lamentable Breach and Division which Fell Amongst them*², Browne testifies to their acquaintance:

“Some of these which had lived and studied in Cambridge, were there knowne and counted forward in religion, and others, also both there and in the contrie were more carefull & zelous, then their forward enimies could suffer.

They in Cambridge were scattered from thense, some to one trade of life, & some to another: as Robert Browne, Robert Harrison, William Harrison, Philip Browne³, Robert Barker. Some of these

¹ More than 21 pp. (533–554) of the “Transcript” volume. For a description of these documents see the *Calendar*, referred to throughout as Peel, *Cal. Sec. Parte of a Register*.

² 1583 or 1584. The work is referred to throughout as “*T. and S. D.*,” and the references are to the 1888 reprint. This quotation is on A 1 recto.

³ William and Philip were probably brothers to the two first-named.

2 *The Brownists in Norwich and Norfolk, 1580*

applied themselves to teach schollers ; to the which labour, R. Broune also gave himselfe for the space of three years.”

Robert Harrison seems to have adopted the same profession, for it is as an applicant for a schoolmastership that he first appears in the neighbourhood of Norwich. At Aylsham, some twelve miles to the north, was a ‘Free School’ that was intimately connected with the county city, and, through it, with institutions that Harrison had known in the past, and was to know in the future. Founded by the Mayor of Norwich in 1517, it had as one of its endowments £10 yearly, paid by the Treasurer of the Great Hospital in Norwich, of which the Mayor etc. were Governors. Archbishop Parker, always solicitous for his native county, founded two scholarships in Corpus Christi, and appropriated them to this school, and to a similar school at Wymondham (commonly called Windham). Of the Aylsham scholars, one had to be born in the town, and the other, having been educated at the school, was to be nominated by the Mayor and Court of Norwich¹.

Parker’s concern for the school also appears in the interest he took in the appointment of a headmaster in 1573. Of three candidates for the post, Robert Harrison was superior to either of the others in scholastic attainments, and his application was supported by the Mayor and certain Aldermen of Norwich. From letters that passed between the Archbishop, the Bishop of Norwich, and the Mayor, it seems that at his marriage at Aylsham a short time previously, Harrison had asked the Vicar to alter the form of service prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer. He was also said to be very young, to be afflicted with a ‘frenzy,’ and to have an objection to reading profane authors to children. For all these reasons the ecclesiastical authorities were disposed to look elsewhere for a master, but the civil authorities persisted, and on his promising to live quietly and maintain no faction, and to have no evil or strange opinions, nor to defend such obstinately in the “propheysings,” Harrison was appointed².

Less than a month afterwards, however, appearing as god-

¹ For these particulars see Blomefield, *History of Norfolk*, vi. 282 and iii. 310 ff. Cf. also Parker’s will [Strype, *Parker* (1821 ed.), iii. 333 ff.].

² Strype, *Parker*, ii. 335 ff., and Cooper, *Athenae Cantabrigienses*, ii. 177 f.

Introduction

3

father “to the child of one Allen¹ of Aylsham,” he requested the officiating deacon to omit the sign of the cross and make other changes in the Baptismal Order. In Jan. 1573/4, he was therefore discharged from the school.

It is extremely unfortunate that the parish registers at Aylsham only go back to 1653, as the entries at Harrison’s marriage and at the baptism of Allen’s child would have furnished valuable information.

BROWNE AND HARRISON COME TO NORWICH

What became of Harrison after his dismissal at Aylsham is not clear. Browne, it is known², spent three years teaching, and then he too was discharged. After a period at his father’s home, he went to stay with Richard Greenham³, incumbent of Dry Drayton, near Cambridge, a man of saintly life and strong Puritan views. There he meditated on the state of the Church and on matters of Church government, and decided to preach without the licence and authorising of the Bishops, and against all such authorising. For six months he proclaimed this and kindred messages in public and in private, but he refused to receive a stipend or to take a charge. He then fell sick, and, while sick, was forbidden to preach by the Council.

On recovering health, having already⁴ “judged that the kingdom off God was not to be begun by whole parishes, but rather off the worthiest, were they never so fewe,” he⁵

“sought where to find the righteous which glorified God, with whome he might live and rejoise together, that thei putt awaie abominations. While he thus was careful, & he sought the Lord to shewe him more comfort of his kingdome and church than he sawe in Cambrige, he remembred some in Norfolke whome he harde saie were verie forward, therefore he examined the matter, and thought it his duetie to take his voiage to them ;...So while he thought on these thinges,

¹ For the significance of this name, see below, pp. 8–10.

² *T. and S. D.*, A 1 recto.

³ For Greenham see *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, Cooper’s *Athenae Cant.* II. 143 f., and *A parte of a register*, 86 ff. Also his *Works*, published in 1599.

⁴ *T. and S. D.*, A 3 verso.

⁵ *Ibid.*, A 4 recto and A 4 verso. The work was wretchedly printed, a fact which no doubt accounts for the weird punctuation, which is reproduced in the quotations in the text.

4 *The Brownists in Norwich and Norfolk, 1580*

& was purposed to trie also in Norfolk the forwardnes of the people, it fell out that R.H.¹, one whom he partlie was acquainted with before, he came to Cambridge. What was his purpose in coming, & howe he thought to have entred the ministerie, and did use some meanes to that end, it is needles to rehearse, onelie this I shewe, that he seemed to be verie careful in that matter, and though he leaned to much upon men for that matter, as upon M. Greenham M. Robardes² and others, & was careful amisse for the bishops authorising, yet his mind & purpose might be judged to be good, and no otherwise but well did R.B. judge of him.”

The chronology of Browne’s life is uncertain, but it is safe to say that it was probably early in 1580³ when he was urging Harrison not to proceed with his plan of seeking ordination from the Bishops. The result was that⁴

“R.H. ether chaunging his mind, or disappointed of his purpose, returned to Norwich wither also, a short time after R.B. tooke his journie. He came to R.H.’s house whoe then was Maister in the Hospitall at Norwich. He there finding roume enough, and R.H. willinge enough that he should abide with him, agreed for his board, and kept in his house.”

BROWNE AND HARRISON AT “THE HOSPITALL”

“*The Hospitall at Norwich*” can only mean the Great Hospital, also called the St Giles’s or Old Men’s Hospital⁵. Founded in 1249, this institution still exists, sheltering at the present day 200 old people, men and women. In 1547 it was surrendered to the king, and, with its possessions, was transferred by the Crown to the Mayor, Sheriffs and Commonalty of Norwich for the relief of poor people. With the transference, according to the *Victoria County History of Norfolk*, “the office of Master came to an end.” Whether this was so or not is uncertain, but probably the office was not filled for some time. The present Master, who is endeavouring to compile a list of his predecessors, states that “there is no record from 1550–1643, except that from

¹ Robert Harrison.

² Thomas Roberts, Archdeacon of Norwich, for whom see Index to Strype’s *Works*, and also below, pp. 5 f.

³ Cf. Burrage, *The True Story of Robert Browne*, 5–9, and Powicke, *Robert Browne*, 19–22.

⁴ *T. and S. D.*, A 4 verso. Italics the present writer’s.

⁵ Blomefield, iv. 376.

Introduction

5

a tablet in St. Andrew's Church it would appear that Will Jackson was at one time Master, and died in 1626."

So far a considerable search has failed to reveal any documentary evidence of Harrison's appointment or tenure of office, but the writer is not without hope that information of value will yet come to light. It certainly seems likely that the Mayor and Aldermen of Norwich, who were Governors of the Hospital, may have appointed as its Master the man they so strongly supported at Aylsham. This may have occurred any time between 1574 and 1580. The phrase "returned to Norwich," italicised in the quotation from Browne immediately above, plainly suggests that Harrison was domiciled in Norwich when he paid his visit to Cambridge. Naturally, living together, Browne and Harrison talked¹ "much and often...about matters of the church and kingdom of God, and of the Lordship and government of Christ."

This at once led to discussion of the attitude to be adopted with regard to the "forward preachers" in the city. A vigorous Puritan movement in Norwich was headed at this time by John More, the learned minister of St Andrew's, Thomas Roberts, Archdeacon of Norwich, and several others.

On Sept. 25th, 1576, these two, with Richard Crick, George Leeds, Richard Dowe, and William Hart, had petitioned² some Privy Councillor against "this conformitie of ceremonies." They complained that "there be alreadie 19 or 20 godlie Exercises of preching and Catechizing putt downe in this Cittie by the displacing of those preachers," and while they protest their loyalty to the Queen, they say:

"wee suffer ourselves rather to be displaced then to yeld to certain things. Our Bodies, goods, lands, life, Wife and Children be in her Ma^{ties} hands, onlie our souls, which must be either saved or dampned, we reserve to our God, who alone is able to save or dampne."

Two years later³, these ministers, except Hart, but with Vincent Goodwin and John Mapes, sent in a form of submission, in which they expressed willingness to subscribe the doctrinal articles, and declared that ministers ought not to refuse to preach,

¹ At length, in *T. and S. D.*, A 4 verso—B 1 recto.

² Peel, *Cal. Sec. Parte of a Register*, I. 143-6.

³ *Ibid.*, I. 146.

6 *The Brownists in Norwich and Norfolk, 1580*

nor parishioners refuse to attend worship because of the ceremonies.

On this, they seem to have been “restored to preaching¹.” *A True and Short Declaration* makes plain the fact that Harrison only reluctantly relinquished the belief that progress toward reformation could best be obtained by supporting these preachers. In Browne’s words²:

“Then fell out these questions between them: Whether those preachers that submitt themselves unto such popish power, or anie way so justifie, or tolerate it as laweful in some part, or partlie to be liked & used, can themselves be liked of, or do their duetie as laweful pastors and preachers?”

Hereat R.H. did stick because of M. Robardes, M. More, M. Deering³ & others whome he then did greatlie like off. But more he doubted, & as it were, drewe back, when he should geve over such preachers, or else forsake & shrinke from our owne good purpose. For he would have the consent of such preachers in the matters that were determined, & also would have them to joine, though it was made plaine unto him that they nether would nether could joine, taking that course which they did....”

“THE SUPPLICATION OF NORWICH MEN TO THE QUEENES MA^{TIE}” [1580]

What Browne omits to mention is that at first on his arrival in Norwich he himself signed a supplication which requested much the same things as “the preachers” desired, and certainly did not go as far as the position he had apparently reached ere he left Cambridge. Possibly the explanation is that the Supplication was already prepared when Browne arrived in Norwich, and he saw no objection to adding his name. This petition is printed almost in full in the present writer’s *Cal. Sec. Parte of a Register*⁴, which follows the manuscript in giving the date as 1583. An analysis of the document and the signatures attached immediately produced the conviction that the date (it must be remembered that the manuscript is a copy, and not the original petition) was several years too late. Reference to three of the

¹ Peel, *Cal. Sec. Parte of a Register*, I. 146–7.

² *T. and S. D.*, B 1 recto.

³ Edward Deering, for whom see *Dict. Nat. Biog.* etc.

⁴ I. 157–60.

Introduction

7

175 names¹ is sufficient to prove this—Robert Browne, Robt. Harrison, Hugh Brewer.

Now not only is there no evidence for thinking that Browne and Harrison returned to Norwich from the Low Countries in 1583, but by that time they had reached a stage in their progress toward separation far in advance of the Supplication's position. They no longer desired merely the "planting that holie Eldership, the verie senew of Christs Church," and the "removing the dumbe ministrie, that horrible evill, which filleth hell paunch with the soules of the people"; they had now set forth in print² their belief that true churches were to be formed only by Christians gathering out of, and separating from, the world, appointing their own ministers and officers, and this theory they were endeavouring to practise. Internal evidence thus inclined the writer to replace 1583 by 1580 as the true date. Welcome confirmation was forthcoming, in some measure, from documents now in the Muniment Room at the Castle, Norwich³. In an assessment for 70 "Calyvers" for the city of Norwich made in 1578, there appears the name of Hugh Brewer⁴, one of the 175 "Norwich

¹ The writer begs to acknowledge a serious omission in the *Cal. Sec. Parte of a Register*. Reviews of that work almost without exception mentioned the lengthy and exhaustive indexes. They were very lengthy (the Index of Persons occupies 25 pages with names in double columns), but unfortunately, they were not quite exhaustive. A note at the head of Index IV reads: "All the names...are indexed with the exception of the signatories on the following pages: I. 78, 124, 159 f., 275: II. 189f., 191f., 220f."

I. 159f. contains the signatories to the Norwich supplication, including Browne and Harrison. The Editor would like to confess that if the work were to be indexed again, the 800 signatories previously omitted would be added.

² At Middleburgh, in 1582, Browne published three works:

(1) *A Booke which Sheweth...* (2) *A Treatise of Reformation without tarying for anie...* (3) *A Treatise upon the 23 of Matthewe*.

The plural is used in the text because at this time the cleavage between Browne and Harrison had not begun; indeed the expense of printing the books seems to have been borne by Harrison (see below, p. 17).

³ Case 13, Shelf A, Bundle 1.

⁴ Brewer seems to have been a leading Puritan laymen, especially if he is to be identified with "one Bruer" mentioned in an informing letter,

8 *The Brownists in Norwich and Norfolk, 1580*

men” who signed the Supplication. In the Muster Roll¹ for the parish of St Andrew’s in 1580, Hugh Brewer’s name is missing, but that of “Widow Brewer” appears. It seems likely, therefore, that Hugh Brewer had died meanwhile, and that Widow Brewer was his relict. If this is so, the Supplication must be dated before the Muster Roll of 1580, and the conclusion drawn from internal evidence is thus confirmed.

SIGNIFICANT NAMES IN THE SUPPLICATION

Before leaving the Supplication several very significant names attached thereto should be noted.

(1) *Robart Barker*, whose name appears in *A True and Short Declaration*, first² as one of the “forward” students in Cambridge, and, then³ as one that forsook the Norwich company when trials began.

(2) *John Flower*. The name Flower will not be overlooked by those who remember that on New Year’s Eve 1588 (Jan. 10th 1589) Browne addressed to “Unckle Flower” a letter⁴ which was discovered by Mr Champlin Burrage, and printed by him in 1904, with the title *A New Years Guift*. Can the unknown uncle be John?

(3) *John Allens*. Here a suggestive recurrence of names must be noted.

(a) 1574. Harrison was godfather to the child of one *Allen* of Aylsham (above p. 3).

(b) [1580.] Browne, Harrison, and John *Allens* sign a supplication of Norwich men.

dated Dec. 2nd, 1576, from Sir Francis Wyndham to Nathaniel Bacon. [*Stiffkey Papers* (Royal Hist. Soc. 1915), 185f.] It describes how when Mr More had been “sequestred from his exercyse,” and a Mr Holland appointed to take his place, the superseder was called “Turnecote” and accused of false doctrine “by one Cornewall, a mynistr, & one Morley, a baker, & one Bruer” [Leonard Morley is also a signatory of the Supplication].

¹ This Muster Roll contains the names of nine of the 175 suppliants.

² A 1 recto.

³ C 2 recto.

⁴ This letter was referred to by Bancroft in his famous sermon at Paul’s Cross a few weeks later.

Introduction

9

(c) Before 1584, Browne was married to Alice, the daughter “of *Allen* of Yorkshire¹.”

(d) Harrison, who was married at Aylsham in 1573 (name of wife unknown), had, apparently, a brother William, and “certaine sisters²,” one of whom is referred to as “Sister *Allens*,” in Browne’s account of the strife in the church at Middleburgh.

The salient passages are (*italics* the present writer’s):

“There were sundrie meetings procured against R.B. by R.H. and his Partkers for certaine tales and slanders wer brought to R.H., which he straight way receaved, and delt against R.B. the accusations in the first miettinge were, that R.B. *condemned his Sister Allens as a reprobate*. alsoe he saied she had not repented of her abominations in England...³.”

Any doubt as to whose sister is meant is removed on the following page⁴:

“The faults They Laied Against him [Browne] Were, For rebukeinge *Rob. H. Sister* of Want of Love, And off abhorring the Pastar: Which They Counted A Slander. Likewise for rebukinge her of Judgeing Wrong Fullie on The Printer, Which Was also made a slauder.”

That is to say, “Rob. H. Sister,” and “his Sister Allens” are one and the same person, and therefore—dismissing as unlikely the possibility that Harrison had a sister with the Christian name Allens—one of Harrison’s sisters married an Allens, or else Harrison himself married an Allens (“Sister Allens” then being a sister-in-law).

It has already been suggested⁵ that Robert Browne’s wife

¹ Blore, *History and Antiquities of Rutlandshire*, is the source of this oft-quoted statement, for which he gives no authority. The Christian name Alice comes from the Achurch register.

² *T. and S. D.*, B 1 verso:

“This R.H. confirmed saing that he found it true; because bie his meanes certaine sisters of his when he taught and exhorted them, were called and wonne.”

³ *Ibid.*, C 3 recto and verso.

⁴ *Ibid.*, C 4 recto.

⁵ By Dr F. J. Powicke, in his *Robert Browne*, 39 n. It is strange that, having *A True and Short Declaration* before him, Mr Burrage could suggest (*True Story of Robert Browne*, 28) that “Sister Allens” might be Browne’s wife, and even stranger that, in his *Early English Dissenters*, i. 108 (pub-

10 *The Brownists in Norwich and Norfolk, 1580*

may have been connected with the Aylsham family named Allen, concerning the baptism of whose child Harrison was dismissed from his school in 1574, and, as Browne's first child was born in Feb. 1583/4, it does seem probable that Browne met his wife during the time he spent in Norwich and the country round about. The further possibility that Browne and Harrison married into the same family should not be overlooked; for although pastors' wives have often been the subject of discussion in Separatist churches—ancient¹ and modern—yet family relationship between Browne's wife and part of his flock would add significance to the statement²:

“Likewise for his wife there was much a doe, and for the power and authoritie which the husband hath over the Wife.”

A CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH FORMED

Whatever the reason that led Robert Browne to affix his name to the “Supplication of Norwich men,” it is evident that within a short time he had convinced, not only himself, but also Robert Harrison, that “the preachers” must be forsaken, and those who were called should form a church of Christian believers.

The determination of “the companie” is expressed in the document now printed (below, pp. 35–6):

“therefore ye wise men tarie and spie out your fit time to build the Lordes house, for it is not yet time with you, & we foolish rash children will, God willing, step to it now according to the good hand of God upon us & will stay no longer for you, as we hath hetherto done, the Lord forgive us.”

lished in 1912, after the publication of Dr Powicke's work), he should give the name of Robert Harrison's sister as one of the Middleburgh congregation without suggesting that she was the same person as “his Sister Allens.”

¹ The classical instance is, of course, Francis Johnson's congregation at Amsterdam, the troubles of which are graphically described in George Johnson's *A discourse of some troubles...* (1603). It is interesting to note that near the beginning of this volume (p. 7) the writer refers to the “pride of M^r Brownes wife and the other weomen in the banished English Church at Middleburgh” as being “a great cause of disagreement betweene M^r Harrison and M^r Brown,” and a possible cause of Harrison's death.

² *T. and S. D.*, C 4 verso.