

Edward Harrison of Petty France.

EDWARD HARRISON sprang from a family which had interests in Sedbergh in 1561, though one member had then become a citizen and grocer in London. Fifty years later, his ancestors were near Ashford in Kent, at Smeeth and Nettlestead and Orleston. At this last parish, Lancelot Harrison, M.A., of Jesus College, Cambridge, became rector in 1626. He sent his son Edward to the same college in 1634, but Edward went next year to St. John's, where he took his B.A. in 1637-8; he then migrated to Hart's Hall in Oxford, and became M.A. in 1640. He was ordained, and as seems a family custom, went to live at Smeeth, with Sir Edward Scott of Scott's Hall. In 1641 his father died, leaving to Edward £35 and his Latin books and his desk; the widow Katharine took a house and lands for life, after which Edward inherited; children Lancelot, Priscilla, Hugh, John and Katharine were to take cash when they came of age and again when the widow died; Elizabeth having had her portion on marrying Henry Collet.

Edward became vicar of Kensworth, a hamlet close to Watling Street, in a northern promontory of Hertfordshire, two miles south of Dunstable in Bedfordshire, a mile east of Whipsnade. In the next three or four years, Baptist principles were canvassed on a new scale, and in February 1643/4 complaint was made to the House of Lords that George Kendall, whom they had appointed vicar of Hemel Hempstead, had allowed Robert Baldwin to preach against the baptism of infants. Dr. Burgess was sent from Watford to enquire, and reported "the people there much possessed with Anabaptism and Antinomianism." This was not checked by sending Kendall and Baldwin to Newgate prison, for next Edward Harrison adopted Baptist views. He therefore resigned the vicarage, as he expressly stated after the Restoration when twitted with inconsistency.

The dates of this period are not clear, before 1646. The vicar in 1643 was John Syddall, who was deprived after twenty-eight years, with the approval of the parishioners, who nevertheless agreed to provide for Mrs. Syddall and her children, and on August 2nd, 1645, were ordered by the Committee for Plundered Ministers to do so at once. Walker implies that Syddall was allowed to live in the vicarage for some while after

sequestration, but was driven out, and died within two months; apparently the parishioners thought that his death ended the agreement. Walker says that soon afterwards, the vicarage was supplied by one Stratford, a loyalist, then successively by a weaver and two ploughmen.¹

It seems probable that Edward Harrison had resigned before September 2nd, 1645, for on that date he was at Newport Pagnell, acting as treasurer for the Eastern Association, that body of counties which maintained a fine army under the Earl of Manchester. This army in 1644 had marched north to besiege York, and had taken part in the victory of Marston Moor; it had a cavalry regiment under Fleetwood, whose major was Thomas Harrison from Newcastle-under-Lyme. Now each regiment had a chaplain; one had invited Baxter when he had fled to Coventry, but he declined, to his deep regret afterwards. The army was new-modelled, and Fairfax became Lord General; in June, 1645, he defeated the king at Naseby, and within a year the war was over. Parliament ordered the entrenchments at Newport Pagnell to be slighted, and the garrison paid off. It is noteworthy that in the county militia there, was a lad of eighteen or nineteen, John Bunyan.

Edward Harrison published a pamphlet, *Pædobaptism Oppugned*, about March 4th, 1645/46, which was answered in November by John Gere of St. Albans. He did not reply, apparently because he had left Hertfordshire, for Thomas Edwards, when he published the third part of his *Gangræna* in December, 1646, said he had gone from near St. Albans, and was at Petty France in London. And he was being caught up in another military movement. In 1647, Major Thomas Harrison was promoted to be colonel of horse, and Edward Harrison became preacher to it. There is no evidence, and no likelihood, that the two men were related. Edward would probably be in the thick of the meeting at Ware in November, 1647, then would go north to meet an invasion by the Scotch, passing Manchester, Appleby, Ripon and seeing the utter rout at Preston. It is a curious question whether his preaching had anything to do with the foundation of the church at Warrington and Hill Cliffe in Cheshire, which emerged soon afterwards, with military leaders, and which in later days was in touch with his London church.

By 1649 the second civil war was over, and Edward Harrison returned to civil life. He published a pamphlet in May, called

¹ A petition to the Lords on July 24th, 1646, by ministers in Hertfordshire was signed by John Wright, whom Urwick identifies as then at Kensworth; but he shows clearly that Wright had been at Letchworth since the sequestration of Yardley till September, 1646.

“Plain Dealing; or, the countryman’s doleful complaint and faithful watchword to the statesmen of the times, whether in the parliament or army.” Henceforth his concerns were with Baptists.

Tradition has attributed to him the “church at Kensworth,” and this should be examined. The Commissioners of 1650 mentioned him as officiating at Kensworth, apparently using the parish church again: and there is no evidence of any new vicar till April 30th, 1657, when John Goodman was certified; then followed James Baileman, Isaac Bringham, and Bishop Lyster, within six years. It does seem as if he lived in the village, on land of his own which was bequeathed in a later will, not drawing tithes, but using the parish church for worship. At least it is perfectly clear when the earliest MS. minutes of the Baptist church at Kensworth are examined in 1675, that there had been a widespread movement. Members were then on a church roll over a stretch of country from Brickhill in Buckingham to Mimms and Ridge on the borders of Middlesex, twenty-eight miles along Watling Street, and from Welwyn across to Berkhamstead. As there were over 300 members, after twelve years of persecution, the work done in the quiet season 1650-1657 must have been fine.

But Edward Harrison came of a family with wide connections, and he was well educated, and had taken a share in national affairs. Towns such as Luton, Dunstable, St. Albans, could not absorb all his energies. When in 1651 the London churches issued a third edition of their Baptist Confession, he signed. He was in some way linked with a church known from 1642, with such members as Mark Lucar, Thomas Kilcop, Benjamin Cox, another clergyman, and Richard Graves.

The regiment to which he had been preacher went to Ireland, and there many men took their discharge and settled down, forming Baptist churches, to one of which, at Kilkenny, Benjamin Cox went. These Irish churches took a hint from their military organisation, and suggested that Baptist churches everywhere should group in Associations. The idea was welcomed in London, and on July 24th, 1653, a circular was sent throughout England, recommending the plan. It was signed by nine men, second of whom was Edward Harrison; another signatory was Robert Bowes.

The custom of Confirmation had been introduced into some Baptist churches by other ex-clergy, and was being justified from Hebrews vi. 2, as the Laying on of Hands. Harrison applied to it the touchstone of other scriptures, and declared it no gold, but a counterfeit. This led to a rejoinder in 1654 by John Griffith, of London and Amersham.

Early in 1657, a new Instrument of Government was being drafted, and many lawyers wished Cromwell to take the title of King. There were two obvious advantages; that then by a well-established law, his title as King *de facto* would protect all who obeyed; and that his powers, where not expressly defined, would be the old customary powers, instead of arbitrary. But there was much opposition from many quarters, especially military. On April 3rd an address was presented to him, begging him to decline the title, and dreading his "fearful apostacy." It was signed by nineteen Baptists, including clergy such as Henry Jessey, Hanserd Knollys and Edward Harrison, Baptist pastors who earned their living such as John Spilbury, Samuel Tull, with John Clarke the doctor in Rhode Island, a very mixed body; while others equally prominent held their peace.

Harrison threw in his lot with London entirely after 1657, residing in his house on Petty France, a site now covered by Broad Street railway station; he retained a friendly interest in Kensworth, as will yet be seen. He was probably the publisher of a petition next year which had been intended for the parliament that the Protector dissolved in sadness at being unable to get on a constitutional and effective basis. Henceforth he took no further part in politics, that has been traced.

In 1658, Robert Bowes made his will, of which his wife and Samuel Tull were executors, bequeathing money in trust with Harrison, Tull, Spilbury, Daniel King and Hanserd Knowles, for the church to which he belonged—apparently then meeting at Glaziers' Hall, and certainly the most important of all the Baptist churches.

With the Restoration, the future of Baptists became uncertain; the rising of the Fifth Monarchists in 1661 excited fears of many conventicles; and when the Cavalier Parliament started on a course of repressive legislation, a reign of terror set in. A pamphlet, "Behold a Cry," details many outrages. The meeting at Petty France was raided on June 15th, 1662, by soldiers who wounded a boy and put the preacher in Newgate. A fortnight later they broke down the gallery, made much spoil, and wounded more people.

Harrison was not daunted, and a note stuck into a Spy Book relating to some period between 1663 and 1665, shows that he and Tull and Cox were joining together. Harrison preached at his own house, and in Bunhill Fields, Cox in Thames Street above the bridge, Tull in Cheapside at the Seven Stars. With 1665, the old Conventicle Act of Elizabeth under which all legal proceedings had hitherto taken place, was practically superseded by a new one, to hold for three years. So little was Harrison afraid, that on June 28th, 1666, he took part in ordaining

Thomas Patient as co-pastor with Kiffin at Devonshire Square; and as Patient died in the plague, ordaining his successor Daniel Dyke on February 17th, 1668. He was named next year in a proclamation against conventicles, and was indicted at Hicks Hall for regularly conducting one near Bishopsgate Church—evidently in his own house.

With March 1671/2 the tide turned, and the king offered to consider applications for licences to preach in specified houses. This would leave the open-air work on Bunhill Fields still illegal; but Harrison obtained one for his own house. He seems, however, to have had a wide vision, planning on a national scale, and recognising the advantage of grouping not merely ministers and local congregations, but Associations throughout the kingdom. After January 1673/4, he largely retired from active pastoral work at Petty France, being found henceforth chiefly in wider fields.

The Declaration of Indulgence, under which the licences were issued, was cancelled in March 1672/3, but it made no immediate difference, and work was carried on at Petty France, as in many other places. Negotiations were opened with John Child of Bucks, but they came to nothing. Then Nehemiah Cox, son of Edward's old friend Benjamin, who had been called to the ministry at Bedford, was invited, and on September 21st, 1675, he and William Collins, a Westminster scholar, were ordained joint-elders at Petty France.

Now the opportunity came for re-organisation, and we seem to trace Harrison's guidance in the earliest documents at St. Albans and of Petty France. On July 9th, 1675, the names of all the members of the "Church of Kinsworth" were taken, and on March 22nd, 1675/6 were entered in a new book. They lived in thirty places, Kinsworth itself housing only three members; thirteen at Leighton, thirty-three at Houghton, forty at Dunstable, thirty at Luton, forty-four near St. Albans, indicate the strong centres. On July 31st, 1676, a similar roll was prepared of the members at Petty France, and it shows five Harrisons.

The next step was to provide a rallying-point for many churches. The London Confession of 1644 was tacitly abandoned, and attention was given to the Westminster Confession of 1646. Its teaching on organisation had already been replaced among Congregationalists by a chapter drawn up in 1658; its teaching on baptism was now replaced by another chapter; and on August 26th, 1677, this revision was read by the Petty France church, and after consideration, was published. Next came Association revival. In 1678 we hear that a meeting was held on April 2nd at Hempstead; with another on

September 24th at Abingdon; in 1679, on April 20th, in London, October 6th at Hempstead again; in 1680 on February 29th, and on March 16th at St. Albans; in 1681 at Abingdon on April 3rd; in 1682 at Hempstead; in 1683 in London. These notices are all derived from the minutes of the Petty France church, and with the frequency of the Herts meetings they suggest that Edward Harrison was the moving spirit; though there is no sign that he ever used the title of Messenger or General Superintendent, such as was given at this time to Thomas Collier in the west. In the correspondence minuted, there are notes as to members received from Hemel Hempstead, St. Albans, Kensworth and Luton, from Warrington and from Abingdon.

It is surprising that a spy, reporting in 1676 to Danby about conventicles in London, Westminster, Southwark, had nothing to say about Petty France, though he heard of Kiffin at Devonshire House, with Thomas Hardcastle. In 1682 another spy was better informed, and said that Harrison, with five helpers, taught 600 people at three different places. These three may conceivably be the same as in 1663; though Tull of Cheapside had died in 1677, perhaps William Collins preached there, while Nehemiah Cox may have followed his father in Thames Street. John Gammon was another helper, till in 1684 he became pastor of a church in Boars Head Yard, off Petticoat Lane, where Bunyan preached his last sermon four years later.

The persecution that began in 1682 was very fierce. On May 27th, 1683, the church was excluded from Petty France. Association could meet no longer. The church book has only three entries in two years, and not till October, 1687, under a new Declaration of Indulgence by James, could the church resume work, and revise its roll. Edward Harrison lived to see liberty return, and to see a reprint of the 1677 Confession. In January, 1689, administration was taken out, as he died intestate, showing that he had lived lately in St. Martin's Fields, Westminster; his son Lancelot died a few months earlier, leaving legacies to Collins and Cox. His son Thomas was soon called to the ministry, and was needed, for Cox seems to have died, as a subscription was made on June 12th for his son.

A call was sent on July 28th, 1689, to all Calvinistic Baptist churches in England, improving the precedent of 1653. More than 100 churches answered; Petty France was represented by Wm. Collins, Thomas Harrison, and a relation John Collet; Hempstead sent its pastor Samuel Ewer; Kensworth sent two ministers, James Hardinge and Daniel Finch, and the Assembly met September 3rd-12th. It was decided to raise a Baptist Fund, and among the nine treasurers were three from Petty France, Robert Bristow, John Collet and Edward Harrison. This was

another son of the elder Edward, a goldsmith, living at the Hen and Chickens on Cheapside, and he was to receive all moneys. The minute of this appointment was signed by thirty-three men, including Collins and Finch. The Assembly approved the revised Confession, and sent it out with a commendation signed by Collins, Finch and Ewer, amongst others. Thus the work of Harrison was not only crowned with success, but it was handed on to a new generation in which two sons were taking leading parts.

A word or two as to his family may close this account. His wife Rebecca bore him two sons, Edward and Thomas. Of the younger enough has been said on pages 124-126, 134. The second Edward, goldsmith and treasurer, married Rebecca Lock, perhaps of a Baptist family known at Watford, and had three children. Joseph and Elizabeth (Jackson) died before him, and on his death in 1715, a third Edward inherited the family property at Kensworth.

W. T. WHITLEY.

HELWYS' "MYSTERY OF INIQUITY" survives in three copies, at Dublin, Oxford and London. The Bodleian copy has his autograph address to King James, with the bold claim that he had "no power over the immortal soules of his subjects, to make lawes & ordinances for them, and to set spiritual Lords over them." This was sent from Spitalfields, and within three or four years Helwys died in the prison of Newgate. Such a pioneer work deserved rescue from oblivion; and the Baptist Historical Society will publish a photographic reprint before Easter. Principal Robinson will prefix an introduction, dealing with the man and his theme. It will be illustrated with the autograph, with the family arms, and with pictures of the three homes of Helwys; his Hall, the Bake-house where he wrote, and Newgate.