

HARRISON'S DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH UNDER ELIZABETH.

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WILLIAM HARRISON, the author of the "Description of England" prefixed to Holinshed's *Chronicle* (ed. 1, 1577; ed. 2, 1587), was born in Bow Lane, Cheapside, April 18, 1534. He was educated at St. Paul's School, where he was when the English Litany first appeared in 1544, and at Westminster under Alexander Nowell. He was at both Universities (M.A., Oxford; B.D., Cambridge). At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, February 16, 1558-9, he was instituted to the living of Radwinter, in the north-west of Essex, at the presentation of William Brooke, Lord Cobham, whose Chaplain he was; this he held till his death in 1593. For some ten years, 1571-1581, he also had the adjoining parish of Wimbish. He became Canon of Windsor in 1586, where he died. His wife survived him a few months; he left two daughters and a son.

The work to which he devoted most of his time, the "Chronologie," was never published, the MS. is in the Library of the Bishops of Derry. Thus he is best known by his "Description." Dr. Furnivall, who brought out a new edition of this for the New Shakespeare Society, says: "His racy accounts of our forefathers' dress, food, houses, have made Harrison one of the most often quoted and trusted authorities on the condition of England in Elizabeth's and Shakespeare's day."—(*Dict. National Biography*.)

He appears a diligent parochial clergyman. He had the great qualifications of insight, sympathy and humour. His name does not appear in a "black list" of unpreaching ministers in Essex, drawn up by the Puritans about 1585; in fact, he seems in some sympathy with the moderate Puritan position. He has a keen sense of social injustice, especially in engrossing (or, as we should say, cornering) corn and articles of food, and in turning arable land into parks. "Certes, if it be not one curse of the Lord to have our country converted in such sort from the furniture of mankind into the walks and shrouds of wild beasts, I know not what is one!" His attitude towards the destruction of small holdings reminds one strongly of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village." While recognizing

many improvements of recent years, he regards covetousness as greatly on the increase.

“ I would I might live no longer than to see four things in the land reformed : that is, the want of discipline in the Church ; the covetous dealing of most of our merchants in the preferment of the commodities of other countries, and hindrance of their own ; the holding of fairs and markets on the Sunday to be abolished and referred to the Wednesday ” (and that every man with forty or more acres shall be required to plant one acre with wood). “ But I fear me that I should then live too long, and so long, that I should either be weary of the world, or the world of me ; and yet they are not such things but they may easily be brought to pass.”

He devotes the opening chapters of his second book to a description of the Church. This has special value, as coming from a keen observer, not from a partizan.

Cathedrals, he says, have now become, especially in the nether parts, rather markets and shops for merchandize than solemn places of prayer whereunto they were first erected.

He speaks well of bishops, except that he does not like their frequent translations. “ They be not idle in their callings . . . they so apply their minds to the setting forth of the word that there are very few of them which do not every Sunday or oftener resort to some place or other within their jurisdictions where they expound the Scriptures with much gravity and skill.”

On the discipline of the Church, he says :

“ They have under them also their archdeacons . . . which archdeacons are termed in law the Bishops’ Eyes ; and these (besides their ordinary courts, which are holden within so many or more of their several deaneries, by themselves or their officials, once in a month at the least) do keep yearly two visitations or synods (as the bishop doth in every third year, wherein he confirmeth some children, though most care but a little for that ceremony) in which they make diligent inquisition and search as well for the doctrine and behaviour of the ministers as the orderly dealing of the parishoners in resorting to their parish churches and conformity with religion.”

Harrison takes a moderate view on the question of faculties for pluralities. He thinks the inhabitants of the second parish get more profit in a short time as regards preaching, than they would otherwise

have in many years. (Small livings were then normally held by non-preaching ministers, who merely read Homilies from the book.) The practice, he says, is attacked as if there were more good preachers than vacant livings; this might seem borne out by the number of applicants for every vacancy; but when the merits of these applicants are weighed, most will be found quite unfit. There would be much to be said against pluralities were it not for the present necessity; but there are more livings vacant annually than the universities produce preachers to fill them. Harrison's remedy is that much in favour now, especially with dignitaries, "If in country towns and cities, yea even in London itself, four or five of the little churches were brought into one, the inconvenience would in great part be redressed." He adds that very often a small living is of so little value as not to be able to maintain a mean scholar, much less a learned man.

He maintains that the clergy are over-taxed—out of all proportions to laymen. Their contributions to subsidies run to six shillings in the pound. In fact a man with a benefice of £20 a year thinks himself well off if after meeting all ordinary payments he has £13 6s. 8d. left towards the maintenance of himself and family (he puts his own income at £40 "computatis computandis"). "As if the church were now become the ass whereon every market man is to ride and cast his wallet."

He defends the marriage of bishops and clergy, meeting a criticism that "their wives be fond after the decease of their husbands, and bestow themselves not so advisedly as their calling requireth," by declaring that the same holds good sometimes of duchesses, countesses, and the wives of barons and knights, for "Eve will be Eve, though Adam would say nay."

He denounces the greed of patrons. "Not a few also find fault with our threadbare gowns, as if not our patrons but our wives were the cause of our woe. But if it were known to all, what I know to have been performed of late in Essex, when a minister taking a benefice of less than twenty pounds in the Queen's books, so far as I remember, was forced to pay to his patron twenty quarters of oats, ten quarters of wheat and sixteen yearly of barley, which he called *hawks' meat* . . . the cause of our threadbare gowns would easily appear, for such patrons do scrape the wool from our clokes."

He gives a description of the Sunday services. After speaking

of Morning Prayer, in which he lays stress on the Psalms and Lessons, he speaks of the "Letanie and suffrages, an invocation in my opinion not devised without the great assistance of the Spirit of God, although many curious mindsick persons utterly condemn it as superstitious and savouring of conjuration and sorcery." (This was the line taken by the Frankfort Puritans in their letter to Calvin.) "This being done we proceed to the Communion, if any communicants be to receive the Eucharist; if not, we read the decalog, epistle, and gospel, with the Nicene creed (of some in derision called the dry communion), and then finish with a homily or sermon, which hath a psalm before and after it, and finally with the baptism of such infants as on every Sabbath day (if occasion so require) are brought unto the churches; and thus is the forenoon bestowed. In the afternoon likewise we meet again, and after the psalms and lessons ended we have commonly a sermon, or at the least our youth catechised by the space of an hour. And thus do we spend the Sabbath day in good and godly exercises, all done in our vulgar tongue, that each one present may hear and understand the same.

"As for our churches themselves, bells and times of morning and evening prayer remain as in times past, saving that all images shrines, tabernacles, roodlofts and monuments of idolatry are removed, taken down, and defaced, only the stories in glass windows excepted, which for want of sufficient store of new stuff, and by reason of extreme charge that should grow by the alteration of the same into white panes throughout the realm, are not altogether abolished in most places at once, but by little and little suffered to decay, that white glass may be provided and set up in their rooms. Finally, whereas there was wont to be a great partition between the quire and the body of the church, now it is either very small or none at all, and, to say the truth, altogether needless, sith the minister saith his service commonly in the body of the church, with his face toward the people, in a little tabernacle of wainscot provided for the purpose, by which means the ignorant do not only learn divers of the psalms and usual prayers, by heart, but also such as can read do pray together with him, so that the whole congregation at one instant pour out their petitions unto the living God for the whole estate of his church in most earnest and fervent manner."

Harrison is not over fond of holy days. "Our holy and festival days are very well reduced also unto a less number; for whereas

not long since we had under the pope fourscore and fifteen called festival, and thirty *profesti*, beside the Sundays, they are all brought unto seven and twenty ; and with them the superfluous numbers of idle wakes, guilds, fraternities, church-ales, help-ales and soul-ales, called also dirge-ales, with the heathenish rioting at bride-ales, are well diminished and laid aside. And no great matter were it if the feasts of all our apostles, evangelists and martyrs with that of all saints, were brought to the holy days that follow upon Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide ; and those of the Virgin Mary, with the rest, utterly removed from the calendars, as neither necessary nor commendable in a reformed church."

Harrison gives what is probably our best account of the clerical meetings or "prophesyings" (so called from the presumed Scripture precedents, 1 Samuel x. 5-13, and other places where "the sons of the prophets" are mentioned ; also 1 Cor. xiv. 31). These were favoured by a number of bishops, as tending to promote Scripture knowledge and to train preachers ; Archbishop Grindal, recognising possible misuse, issued rules for their regulation. But the Queen, who thought three or four preachers quite enough for a county, ordered him to suppress them. He wrote a respectful but manly remonstrance (given in full by Thomas Fuller—another main source of our knowledge of the subject). The result was his suspension. When at the Hampton Court Conference the Puritans asked for meetings and prophesyings, the King retorted that they aimed at a Scottish presbytery "which as well agreeth with a monarchy as God and the Devil. Then Jack and Tom and Dick and Will shall meet, and at their pleasure censure me and my council, and all our proceedings."

Harrison thinks these conferences admirable. "In many of our archdeaconries we have an exercise lately begun, which for the most part is called a prophesy or conference, and enacted only for the examinations or trial of the diligence of the clergy in their study of holy Scriptures. Howbeit, such is the thirsty desire of the people in these days to hear the word of God, that they also have as it were with zealous violence intruded themselves among them (but as hearers only) to come by more knowledge through their presence at the same. Herein also (for the most part) two of the younger sort of ministers do expound, each after other, some piece of the scriptures ordinarily appointed unto them in their courses (wherein they

orderly go through with some one of the evangelists, or of the apostles, as it pleaseth the whole assembly to choose at the first in every of these conferences) ; and when they have spent an hour or a little more between them, then cometh one of the better learned sort, who being a graduate for the most part, or known to be a preacher sufficiently authorised and of a sound judgement, supplieth the room of a moderator, making first a brief rehearsal of their discourses, and then adding what him thinketh good of his own knowledge, whereby two hours are most commonly spent at this most profitable meeting. When all is done, if the first speakers have shewed any piece of diligence, they are commended for their travail, and encouraged to go forward. If they have been found to be slack, or not sound in delivery of their doctrine, their negligence and error is openly reprov'd before all their brethren, who go aside of purpose from the laity, after the exercise ended, to judge of these matters and consult of the next speakers and quantity of the text to be handled in that place. The laity never speak of course (except some vain and busy head will now and then intrude themselves with offence), but are only hearers ; and as it is used in some places weekly, in others once in fourteen days, in divers monthly, and elsewhere twice in the year, so is it a notable spur unto all the ministers thereby to apply their books, which otherwise (as in times past) would give themselves to hawking, hunting, tables, cards, dice, tipping at the alehouse, shooting of matches and other like vanities, nothing commendable in such as should be godly and zealous stewards of the good gifts of God, faithful distributors of the word unto the people, and diligent pastors according to their calling."

These conferences were fiercely attacked when the second edition of this work appeared. It contains an additional paragraph, ascribing the opposition to "Satan, the author of all mischief," who has "stirred up adversaries of late unto this most profitable exercise, who not regarding the commodity that groweth thereby so well to the hearers as speakers, but either stumbling (I cannot tell now) at words and terms, or at the leastwise not liking to hear of the reprehension of vice, or peradventure taking a misliking at the slender dimensions of such negligent ministers as now and then in their courses do occupy the rooms, have either by their own practice, their sinister information, or suggestions made upon surmises unto

other, procured the suppression of these conferences, condemning them as hurtful, pernicious and daily breeders of no small hurt and inconvenience. But hereof let God be judge, unto whom the cause belongeth."

Harrison finishes his account of the Church by expressing his ideas for the training of the clergy in connection with the cathedrals. His idea, not altogether correct, of the working of the catechetical schools in the great Sees of the primitive Church, and of the training of junior clergy by the bishops, is that from these schools the Bishops with the rest of the elders chose out the ripest scholars who were willing to serve in the ministry "whom they placed also in their cathedral cities, there not only to be further instructed in the knowledge of the Word, but also to inure them to the delivery of the same unto the people in sound manner, to minister the sacraments, to visit the sick and brethren imprisoned, and to perform such other duties as then belonged to their charges. . . . Being in process of time found meet workmen for the Lord's harvest, they were forthwith sent abroad, after imposition of hands and prayer generally made for their good proceeding, to some place or other then destitute of her pastor, and others taken from the school also placed in their rooms." Harrison would like this restored; in some respects he remarkably anticipates diocesan theological colleges adjacent to cathedrals. We have already, he says, schools and universities; it would be good to train in the cathedral cities men already educated. This would make the cathedrals of real use; "the stalls in their quires would be better filled, which now for the most part are empty; and prebends should be prebends indeed, there to live till they were preferred to some ecclesiastical function, whereas now prebends are but superfluous additaments unto former excesses, and perpetual commodities to the owners." . . . One hindrance is the general contempt of the ministry, "the greatest part of the more excellent wits choose rather to employ their studies unto physic and the laws, utterly giving over the study of the Scriptures, for fear lest they should in time not get their bread by the same." "But as I have good leisure to wish for these things, so it shall be a longer time before it will be brought to pass."

HAROLD SMITH.