

The Hollis Family and Pinner's Hall.

THE Pinner's Hall on Old Broad Street in London, was held on lease for ninety-nine years from 1678 by the Hollis family, and by them was sub-let for several religious purposes. A description of the six Baptist churches which used the Hall was given in our *Transactions*, V. 75. An article has appeared in the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* for October 1921, classifying one of these churches as mainly an Independent foundation, and challenging the view that the Hollises were Baptist. It seems, therefore, desirable to present the evidence more fully. As a preliminary the Hollis pedigree may be set forth so far as is relevant.

Thomas Hollis (1) was of Rotherham, where he was buried 4th February 1663-4. His son, Thomas Hollis (2), 1634-1718, migrated to London 1654, settled in the Minorities where he dealt in Sheffield goods; he established a Hollis trust in Rotherham, maintaining schools there and at Doncaster, contributing to the support of a chapel at Sheffield, for whose building he was the largest subscriber in 1700, and maintaining a hospital there for aged women; it was he who took the long lease of Pinner's Hall. His son, Thomas Hollis (3), 1659-1731, was the chief benefactor of Harvard College in Massachusetts, and his example was followed by his brothers Nathaniel and John. Nathaniel had a son, Thomas Hollis (4), who had a son, Thomas Hollis (5), 1720-1774, Fellow of the Royal Society and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, whose life was published in 1780, and of whom a sketch is given in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. His uncle Timothy, son of John was his heir, and with the death of Timothy's grandson, John, the name is supposed to have died out, though all the Hollis trustees in Yorkshire are descendants by various daughters. It is not important to place Samuel Hollis, Baptist minister at Shifnal 1813-1829, but it is worth while noting that Thomas Brand Hollis only assumed that surname in recognition of a handsome bequest.

The ecclesiastical connections of the family must next be traced. Thomas Hollis (2) attended the parish church at Sheffield till he left that town about 1654. When his funeral sermon was preached in 1718, it was said that he

had walked in communion with the church that heard the sermon for above sixty years. This London church therefore existed by 1658. It is unfortunate that its minute-books are unknown, but from contemporary notices we can recover much of its history. The first point is that it arose by 1658, and therefore was not founded by Anthony Palmer who was rector of Bourton-on-the-water till 1662. There is, however, no reason to question the statements of Calamy, copied frequently without verification, that this church soon after 1662 enjoyed the services of Palmer and of George Fownes. Calamy says of Palmer that he was of the congregational persuasion, and Wilson adds that he was somewhat inclined to the distinguishing sentiment of the Baptists. Fownes was the vicar of High Wycombe, but quitted the office voluntarily before 1660; Wilson attributes this to his embracing the sentiments of the Baptists. When Palmer died in 1678, Fownes removed to Bristol where he succeeded Hardcastle, the Presbyterian minister of Broadmead. These facts give the clue to the exact nature of this congregation; it was neither Pedobaptist nor Baptist, but contained members of both opinions, and was equally indifferent in the choice of its ministers. The same was true of Jessey's church in London, of the Broadmead church, of the Bedford church. What this church desired was a cultured ministry; Palmer and Fownes were both masters of arts, they were succeeded by Wavel, an Oxford B.A., then in 1705 came Jeremiah Hunt of Leyden University, in 1744 James Foster from the Barbican, to whom Marischal College gave D.D. four years later, in 1753 Dr. Caleb Fleming, the last minister. Of these six, Foster was a Baptist, Fownes is said to have been, Palmer is said to have been inclined that way; Wavel, Hunt and Fleming were Pedobaptists. And it was to this church, a Mixed-membership or Union church as it might have been styled to-day, that most of the Hollis family belonged.

The church sought a license for Pinners' Hall in 1672, but was refused; an unusual thing. A license was given for a place on London Bridge. In 1678 Thomas Hollis (2) took a lease of the Hall, and devoted it entirely to Nonconformist purposes. His own church used it for worship on Sunday morning, and on Tuesday morning the Merchants' Lecture was delivered there by six ministers in rotation. These were all Pedobaptist, except that in 1692 Elias Keach seems to have lectured two or three times. On Saturday morning a Seventh-day Baptist church worshipped, and another in the afternoon; these amalgamated, and migrated elsewhere in 1721. On Sunday afternoon, from 1708 to 1724, a Baptist church worshipped there under Joseph Maisters and Thomas Richardson. Then in the afternoon from 1741 till the end

of the lease, a Baptist church under Weatherley, Barron, Kimber and Jefferies used the place, sharing it after 1771 with another Baptist church under Joseph Brown. From 1717 to the end of the lease, the Hall was the headquarters of the Particular Baptist Fund. In 1719, when the meeting of ministers called for Salters' Hall broke into two, the "orthodox" section assembled at Pinners' Hall for its later meetings. It thus appears that the Hollis family, who controlled the building throughout, acted uniformly on a neutral basis, as between Pedobaptists and Baptists. There never was a baptistery on the premises; there is no evidence that any believer or any infant was baptized there.

Now as to the personal attitude of Thomas Hollis (2). In 1678, the very year when he took the lease, he helped the Sheffield nonconformists secure the New Hall for worship, and when the Upper Chapel was built in 1700, he was the chief subscriber; he also bought the New Hall and converted it into almshouses, endowing them. So says the minister emeritus, who adds that the trust is for the free worship of God, the chapels of Rotherham and Sheffield being "of an Independent foundation, though intended for common worship by Protestant Dissenters generally"; all of these have devolved "by natural course into the hands of the Unitarians." On such points he is an excellent authority; but not as to London. It is next to incredible that Oliver Cromwell had worshipped in Pinners' Hall, which from 1649 till his death was used by a Baptist church; this statement is enough to cast doubt on all the statements about London and the Hollises there. In the funeral sermon preached for Thomas Hollis (2) it is said that he trained up his children in the knowledge and practice of religion, a point interesting in connection with his son, to be considered presently. Hunt is very reticent as to the exact position of Hollis; "his charity was not confined to a party, though it might extend more to these who were of his own persuasion." So we can draw no inference from the facts that he was a liberal founder of the Particular Baptist Fund, and that he was appealed to by Benjamin Stinton on behalf of the Pennsylvania Baptists, and that he joined John Taylor of the Baptist church in Wild street and sent them a large number of books. But Stinton asserted that he "was a Baptist by profession"; and Crosby printed that statement in 1738, whereas it has just been denied that any such statement can be traced before 1780. Even that later book, in a family biography, is fairly good evidence; while Stinton's is contemporary.

Thomas Hollis (3) is even less understood by the Unitarian student, though he knows his great benefactions to Harvard. Out of the many sermons preached on his death in

1731, may be taken this plain statement by Benjamin Colman, reprinted by Crosby in 1738:—"He was not strictly of our way, nor in judgment with us in the point of infant baptism." And professor Wigglesworth, Independent, Hollisian professor of divinity, in his sermon expressly dilated on his goodness to "us, who are christians of a different denomination from himself." He also refers to "the very modest reservations" Hollis had made "in favour of his own denomination among us," namely that in the ten scholarships for divinity students there is an absolute preference for Baptists. These statements ought to have prevented any doubt; but the matter is beyond all dispute within the denomination; he was one of the first treasurers of the Particular Baptist Fund. Ivimey also declares, without giving his authority, that about 1680 he was baptized on the profession of his repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Thomas (3) was succeeded by his brother John as treasurer of the Fund; he in his life and at his death gave large sums to it. The two brothers in 1716 built, mostly at their own expense, the first baptistery in London north of the Thames. Its records have recently been deposited at Dr. Williams' Library; unfortunately after the first few years, no names of people baptized are given, only the names of the ministers baptizing; so that we are unable to say whether any Hollises of the next generation thus pledged themselves. In the generation after, it would appear that interest in religion was superseded by addiction to politics.

Horley was for a few years the centre of an old General Baptist Church of Surrey, Sussex, and Kent, whose records are at Dr. Williams' Library. It is first heard of in 1668, and for a century met in the homes of its members. By 1760 it was concentrating at Horley and Charlwood, and sought help from other congregations. Five years later it contributed to Dan Taylor's house at Birchcliff. The meeting-house at Horley has been identified by Mr. T. Rowland Hooper, of Redhill, by the help of some deeds. It seems to have been wholly set apart for worship, and was notified as the law required, in 1760. A library was housed here in 1771, given by William Ashdowne, of Dover. The meeting-house ceased to be used as such in 1790, when Nutfield became the centre. The building was then used as a bakery, and was till lately known as the Old Bakehouse.