

Baptist Meetings in the City of London.

WITHIN the walls of the city, which had so many parish churches, Nonconformist public worship no longer takes place. There were in the Stuart days many dissenting meetings, but only three Baptist houses were of any lasting importance. Each of them was used by more than one church, but as nearly all those churches are extinct, and the survivor is insignificant, the very memory has passed away. A brief sketch of each may show the hardship wrought by the lease-hold system.

I. The Glass House, Pinners' Hall.

1. A Venetian in the days of Elizabeth erected a large building west of Old Broad Street, opposite the stately home of Sir Thomas Gresham. In 1649 this was hired for a Baptist church led by William Consett and Edward Drapes, to which belonged also Edward Cressett, busy in public affairs, John Harman, a captain in the navy, Peter Scutt, a draper, whose relations were prominent in the army and at Whitehall, and John Vernon, quarter-master-general of the army. The church took the lead in all Baptist affairs, and was the centre of denominational correspondence with Wales, Ireland and Scotland. At the Restoration, the church moved away to the Glovers' Hall on Beech Lane off White Cross Street, and the Glass House was used for dancing.

Now there was a very ancient Society of Pin-

makers, mentioned by Stow in Elizabeth's reign as having a Hall on Addle Street. It had fallen on evil days, had lost its Hall, and had almost died. In 1636 it secured a new charter, and it now desired a new home: for this the Glass House was acquired, though the precise terms are obscure. It is certain that the control, and eventually the ownership, was with the Hollis family. This family came from south Yorks, where the elder Thomas Hollis endowed churches at Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. His own life was however bound up with London, and his funeral sermon in 1718 said that he had walked in communion with one church above sixty years.

2. The church which is thus vouched for as existing in 1657 was of the rare type favoured by Jessey, admitting both Baptists and Pedobaptists. Its first pastor is unknown, but soon after the Act of Uniformity it was ministered to by Anthony Palmer, lately rector of Bourton, and George Fownes, lately incumbent of High Wycombe. The date forbids us to accept the usual version that Palmer gathered this church. Palmer had played a very ambiguous part at Bourton, where he not only had been rector, but also had formed a Gathered Church, had been a County Commissioner for ejecting scandalous and ignorant ministers, and had taken a leading part in promoting the Congregational Savoy Conference of 1658. Fownes had become a Baptist, and had thereupon resigned his living. The two men together were well fitted for an open-membership church of well-educated citizens.

In 1672 Charles issued a Declaration of Indulgence, and offered to entertain applications for buildings to be licensed. On 16 April, papers were lodged for three City Halls, the Leathersellers, Lorimers, Pinner's. On behalf of this last, the former Glass House, three separate applications were made. But all were refused, although the Curriers' Hall had been licensed on

2 April: strong opposition was developing to the use of any such conspicuous buildings. The Hollis church had to content itself with premises on London Bridge.

In 1678 Palmer died, and Fownes went to a church of the same type at Broadmead. At this time popular attention was diverted against the Roman Catholics, and Hollis therefore encouraged the church not only to call a new pastor, Richard Wavel, an Oxford graduate, but also to take a long lease of the Pinners' Hall. It was specially fitted for worship with two galleries, each running round three sides. Speedily it became again one of the chief centres of dissenting life; and the church sub-let it for many purposes, including the famous Merchants' Lecture given every Tuesday. Only in 1692 have we any reason to think that a Baptist was chosen for this, but Elias Keach published one or two of his Morning Lectures there.

In 1715, when the defeat of the Old Pretender assured liberty to dissenters, Hollis began to stir in denominational affairs, both by correspondence with the colonies, and by seeking to revive the united work projected in 1689. He died in 1718, but he had trained his sons to follow in his steps; even in 1680 Thomas junior had joined the church, and when six churches subscribed £1,000 to form the Particular Baptist Fund, he was asked to be the Trustee in whose name the South Sea Stock might be taken. He agreed, and granted the use of Pinners' Hall as the headquarters of the Fund. He had already benefited the London churches by a gift of a hundred guineas, and by promoting the erection of the first baptistery north of the Thames, in the large premises of the Barbican church. His endowments of Harvard in Massachusetts provided stipends for two professors, and scholarships, preferably for Baptists. Thomas junior died in 1730, bequeathing £500 to the Fund, to provide books or instruction to Baptist students for the ministry; John

and Isaac Hollis duly paid it over at Pinner's Hall. John had been a Manager from 1724, also a Treasurer; at his death in 1736 he left £1,100.

Funeral sermons were preached for these, and others of the family, by Jeremiah Hunt, who succeeded Wavel in 1707, having been graduated at Edinburgh and Leyden. When he died in 1744, the church called James Foster. He had come from the west country, where he made his mark against the Deists, and where he had been led to join the Baptists by reading Gale's reply to Wall. In 1724 he had become colleague of Joseph Burroughs at the Barbican church, and had also undertaken a Sunday evening lecture in Old Jewry. He was recognized by no less a judge than Pope as the best preacher in London, and as the Barbican lease had run out, he was willing to accept the pastorate at Pinner's Hall. Being chosen to attend the rebel Earl of Kilmarnock to the scaffold, and publishing an account of his last days, he received from the Marischal College of Aberdeen a diploma of D.D. This he justified by publishing the great lectures in which he had controverted the Deists, in volumes subscribed for by more than two thousand readers. He built up the church on rather new lines, baptizing such men as William Whiston, former professor at Cambridge. But he undoubtedly hastened its departure from Trinitarian views.

He was succeeded in 1753 by his friend Caleb Fleming, a Socinian, who had signalized himself by numerous controversies, and three pamphlets on behalf of pedobaptism. His strength was already spent, and the church ran down for the rest of his life. The Hollis family was dying out, and Thomas Brand, adopted into it, appears to have outrun his pastor. When Fleming died, and the lease simultaneously ended, no one cared to take any further steps, and the church came to an ignominious end in 1779.

3. At a very early date, the building had been let for Saturday worship. Two Calvinistic Seventh-day churches used it, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The one had been headed by John Belcher, a bricklayer, and had occupied many places, after one of which it is often called the Bell Lane church; it is the mother-church of the Rhode Island Seventh-day Baptists. The other was gathered in 1675/6 by Francis Bampfield, who was arrested at Pinners' Hall in 1683 while preaching. The two churches amalgamated by 1702, Joseph Stennett being now the pastor. After his death in 1713 the church became unimportant, and migrated in 1721 to share the premises at Mill Yard owned by the Arminian Sabbatarians. It never plucked up heart to own a building, and flickered out last century.

4. In 1708, Joseph Maisters hired the Hall for Sunday afternoon, bringing a church which had worshipped at Joiners' Hall at least twenty years, perhaps since 1672. His church was not one of the six which founded the Fund in 1717, though it had profited by the liberality of Hollis: perhaps the death of Maisters in that year paralyzed its energy. Thomas Richardson came from Tottlebank next year; he sided with the non-subscribers in 1719, but joined the Calvinist Fraternal in 1724. The same year he moved his church on to Devonshire square, hiring the use for half the Sunday. There it expired in 1751.

5. In 1741 another Baptist church hired the Hall for part of the Sunday. This was descended from the great Petty France church, which had divided on the question of congregational singing. Since 1707 this section had worshipped at Artillery Lane, Spitalfields, at first under Nathaniel Hodges; it had been invited to join in the Fund. Hodges was a rich doctor, and retired from the pastorate on being knighted; another doctor succeeded, John Kinch, from the Barbican.

Under him the theology had become very ambiguous, and when John Weatherley from Taunton followed him in 1731, the church became very isolated. Weatherley died in 1752, and was presently followed by Richard Barron from Deptford, where he apparently had served the General Baptist church. Isaac Kimber and Joseph Jefferies also worshipped with Barron, the latter succeeding him. Under him it ran down so much that he welcomed a proposal to surrender alternate Sunday afternoons in 1771.

6. In 1771 the ancient General Baptist church of 1624 let the lease of its premises in Horsleydown expire, and came with its minister Joseph Brown to use Pinners' Hall every other Sunday afternoon.

When the lease from the Hollis family ran out in 1778, there were thus three "Baptist" churches rendered homeless; one an open-membership Socinian, one a nondescript, one a General Socinian. Neither separately nor unitedly did they care to take a new lease, nor did the Fundees join with them. A new lease was granted to an evangelical Independent church; the Hollis church died at once, Jefferies' church and Brown's took a short lease of another place, then clubbed with two others to take a lease of ground on Worship Street, where the former soon died, and whence the latter re-crossed the river to fuse ultimately with the Deptford church. Pinners' Hall ceased to have any connection with Baptist worship, and was taken down about 1800. The Pinners' Company seems to have died also.

II. Dowgate and Eastcheap.

The great church which first used the Glass House on Broad Street, retired in 1660 to Glovers' Hall, where it was persecuted till 1683. In the dark days of James it cannot be traced, but in 1690 we hear of two

churches, each desiring John Noble as pastor; to solve the difficulty they united. Apparently they were this old church, and another formerly under John Child and Du Veil; for all the other churches can be accounted for.

The united church settled at Tallowchandlers' Hall near Dowgate Hill. This building for a year sheltered also a new church gathered by Elias Keach, which after three rapid migrations built itself a home outside the walls, on Great Alie Street; to-day it worships at King's Cross. Noble's church seems to have been in the very forefront of the churches, as it had been in the days of Vernon and Scutt. Thus when an address of loyalty was being presented to George I in 1715, Noble was one of the three PB representatives; and when the Fund was started, his church was much the largest contributor. After some thirty years, Noble obtained a helper in Samuel Wilson, who undertook the evening lecture. A few years later, Noble moved his church on to Maidenhead Court, Great Eastcheap, where a handsome meeting-house had been built. Wilson continued his evening lecture, and about the same time became pastor of the old Wapping church. Noble therefore obtained another helper in the person of Peter Davenport, who had been pastor at Liverpool, and had come to Horsley Down. He also arranged with Gill of Horsley Down to preach a lecture on Wednesday evening, which continued for thirty years.

Noble died in 1730, and was followed next year by Samuel Dew from Weston under Penyard, near Ross. There was a prominent member named Bevois, who was elected to office in the city, and qualified for it by taking the sacrament at a parish church. This gave rise to serious trouble in the church; his action was emphatically condemned by all the ministers, and echoes of the trouble were heard in Gill's church. It is to be noted that this is the first Baptist church to

produce a member eminent enough for such a position, since the days of Kiffin.

When Gill ceased his Wednesday lecture, this was taken up by Brine and Stevens. The lease of the meeting ran out in 1760, when the church broke up; a few went to Stevens' church in Devonshire Square; most went with Dew to Gill's church in Horsley Down. The Wednesday lecture was transferred to Brine's premises at Curriers' Hall.

III. Curriers' Hall.

The Curriers Livery Company owned a hall off Little Wood Street, within Cripplegate. When Charles II issued his Declaration of Indulgence, Edmund Calamy promptly asked for a license to preach there, and it is the only City Hall thus licensed. Such use ended when Calamy found another home.

1. Elias Keach returned to England in 1692, and after a brief experience at Pinners' Hall, gathered a new church which met first near his father's house in Wapping, then at this Hall. The stay however was short, and they soon moved to Tallowchandlers' Hall while their own house was building on Great Alie Street.

2. Another church had been gathered in 1645 by Hanserd Knollys. He did a great deal of preaching in Wapping, Great St Helens, Piccadilly; but his church held consistently to the city. In his life-time it met first on Coleman Street, then in the George Yard leading down to Broken Wharf. His successor took it to the Bagnio off Newgate Street. The third pastor was David Crosley from Tottlebank, whose coming has been post-dated. A letter at Bridlington, dated 1699, shows that he was already pastor, and that the church was already housed at Curriers' Hall. This fits with the fact that its lease ran out in 1799. For the century it stayed, it had a series of pastors whose

height of doctrine was partially compensated for by lowness of morality or slenderness of ability. The only one to call for comment is John Brine of Kettering, whom they called from a pastorate at Coventry in 1730. In his stay of 35 years he published a large number of pamphlets and sermons. When the lease expired, the church moved a short distance and hired a house on Red Cross Street, whence it went to Aldersgate Street, dying about 1859.

3. The Calvinistic Seventh-day church which had met at Pinner's Hall on Saturday till 1721, and then went to share Mill Yard, grew tired of the association. It called Edmund Townsend from Natton in 1727, and returned into the city, obtaining the use of Curriers' Hall. After Townsend's death it never could find a pastor who was not also pastor of an ordinary church, but the existence of an endowment which was diverted to its uses kept it alive. It went on to Red Cross Street, Devonshire Square and other places, till all pretence of worship ceased about 1849, and its last pensioner died in 1863.

4. When the Eastcheap lease ran out in 1769, the two Wednesday lecturers, Brine and Stevens, chose Curriers' Hall as their centre. Others succeeded them, but the institution does not seem to have survived the expiration of the lease.

The Hall was taken down about 1802, and when the Curriers' Company acquired a new home, now at 6 London Wall, it had no further association with worship.