

Collecting for a Chapel.

AN old account-book, leather-bound and brass-clasped, small enough for the pocket, has been given by Mr. W. Dotisio of Bradford-on-Avon to our Society. To the superficial observer it contains sermons preached in 1836. But close inspection shows that the thrifty owner wrote these in between the lines of the record of a begging expedition on behalf of a chapel to be built at Corsham in 1828.

A Baptist cause rose there in 1822 out of the Independent church. People met at first in a converted cottage, then built a room able to hold 200. A church was formed 1823, and next year Henry Webley took the oversight with the approval of the Home Mission. He did so well that by 1828 a third home was needed. Money was promised, but this time it was decided to make an appeal to friends outside. The case was laid before the Baptist Home Missionary Society at Bath, and on 12 April 1828 it was commended, and a statement in the collecting book was signed by John Paul Porter of Bath, Thomas Gough of Westbury Leigh, Robert Aitchison of Bratton, Joseph Rodway of Bradford, Peter Anstie and W. Walton of Trowbridge, Thomas Ayres of Keynsham, Owen Clarke of Taunton, Thomas Sturges of Melksham, and John Edwards, secretary to the Society. Other signatures were soon secured; Joseph Dear of Calne, Samuel Webley of Avening, James Dunn of Hampton, Henry Hawkins of Stroud, James Biggs and J. S. Bunce of Devizes, William Cornwall of Avebury, Thomas Clarke of Paulton.

With these credentials, Webley visited Bradford-on-Avon, Chippenham, Tytherton, Norton, Melksham, Martho, Hungerford, Newbury, Oakingham, Trowbridge, Bath, Laverton, Market Lavington, Devizes, Salisbury, Downton, Forton, Ryde, Newport, Yarmouth, Weymouth, Poole, Charmouth, Hilsley, Kingswood, Midsomer Norton, Westbury, Bratton and Sherborne. Apparently this tour occupied nearly four months, and subscriptions of from half-a-crown to five pounds were gathered. At Frome in August other signatures were secured, including W. H. Murch of Stepney. Hammersmith, Maidenhead, Grittleton, Colerne, Kingston, Andover, Whitchurch, Longparish, Broughton, Weymouth again, Axminster, were visited.

The chapel was opened on 1 January 1829, before all the

funds needed were collected. Fresh appeal was made, and on 6 October 1830 the committee (of the Bristol Building Fund?) examined and approved, and added a special commendation to friends in Bristol; this was signed by Samuel Newell, William Thorp, John Wooldridge, William Lucy, Thomas Winter, Thomas Roberts and John Leifchild. A close examination of the lists shows that if a man lent the weight of his name to the appeal, he seldom gave the weight of his guinea to the collector. With a minister this is explicable. John Blakeman of Crayford had just inscribed that under existing circumstances they were not able to render assistance, but did not doubt the respectability, from the signatures borne. Nine friends at Gravesend, however, did give their crowns or half-crowns; but Canterbury and Chatham were not very helpful, though Margate led off with thirty and fifty shillings.

A fillip was given on 17 October 1831 by Thomas Fox Newman of Frome, with a new testimonial, and soon afterwards the collecting ceased. The chapel was freed from debt, and the indefatigable pastor at once inspired the church to build two more chapels, at Biddestone and Alington. Indeed within eight years there were chapels also at Moor Green, Sherstone, Sandy Lane and Yatton Keynell, while three needed enlargement, and three more villages were evangelized.

The accounts are of interest in many ways. Now that we have to pay £45 a place for an elementary school, it is tantalizing to read of chapels at £1 a place. The whole incident shows the sturdy reliance of the West Country on its own churches; London might not have existed.

Sir John Bramston's Notes on Dissenters.

CONVENTICLES being suppressed in 1686, use has been made of the houses for those meetings, for the use of the orthodox and conformable clergy and their auditors; a great ease, and of great benefit to the parishioners in great parishes. [London was chiefly in view.]

In 1687 the king changes several justices of the peace, judging that the new ones, out of hatred to the Church of England, and out of desire to have the penal laws abrogated, they will also promote the taking away the Test too. The king sends Commissioners into London, Middlesex, and into every county, to enquire what moneys had been levied on the Dissenters

of all sorts, and by whom, in matters relating to religion. [Apparently an attempt was made, and failed, to compel reimbursement.]

In 1688 the *mobile* that day the king went, grew very unruly, and in great multitudes assembled; and pulled down that night and the following day many houses where mass was said and priests lodged. They went also to Wild House, the Spanish Ambassador's; the rabble demolished that chapel. [It was rebuilt by the nation, but the ambassador ceased to use the house, and the Baptists hired it; it became famous as Little Wild Street.]

Elinor, wife of Thomas Rands, died 11 October 1691. She was the daughter of a clergyman, Mr. Colson, in Lincolnshire, but she turned Anabaptist; died in London.

I have been ill with a cold a week, and I was in fear I should not have been able to go to church on Christmas Day [1699]; but I thank God I went, received the communion at the rails; this being the first time the communion hath been celebrated since the table was railed in, and the pulpit removed. [Sir John died within six weeks, at the age of 88. This note as to the communion-rails is to be compared with a recollection of 59 years earlier, as to the doings of the royalist army raised to fight the Scots:—]

A special commission of Oyer and Terminer for trial of some soldiers, who had broken into the church at Easterford-Kelvedon, burnt the rails about the communion table, stolen the surplice and the church plate, or some of it; my father sitting there as judge.

[Sir John lived at Roxwell, four miles west of Chelmsford. In the grand-jury room of that assize-town, are monuments and portraits of the family. He was a Knight of the Bath, and member of many parliaments. He began his autobiography in 1683, so that all notes except that of 1640 are contemporary. He would have been surprised had he lived eight years longer, to find land at his park-gates bequeathed as an endowment for the Baptist church at Halstead.]