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CHURCH BRIEFS.

BY THE REV. HAROLD SMITH, D.D.

THE rubric after the Nicene Creed mentions the reading of Briefs, Citations and Excommunications. All are obsolete ; so it would seem is the following sentence, which forbids the giving out of any notice not prescribed in the Prayer Book or ordained by the King or the Ordinary !

A Church Brief was a royal warrant authorising collections in churches and chapels, and in special cases from house to house, for some charitable object. (There were, however, also local briefs, granted by the Justices to deserving persons, authorising them to collect money from the charitable or to receive Church collections.) Briefs were issued by the King, the Privy Council, or latterly the Lord Chancellor. During the Interregnum such collections were at first authorised by Parliament, but later by the Council of State ; from the Restoration the Lord Chancellor was again the normal authority. In ordinary cases it was usual to apply first to the Quarter Sessions, bringing evidence of damage or cost, and to send their certificate to the Lord Chancellor. The standard book on this subject, to which this article is mainly indebted, is *Church Briefs*, by Mr. W. A. Bewes (1896).

Down to the Restoration, or at least till the later years of the Commonwealth, our notices of briefs are derived from the State Papers, or from miscellaneous sources, and are probably far from complete. But from the above date many parish registers contain for a number of years a full list of sums collected upon briefs, and from 1754 we have also the original briefs preserved in the British Museum. I have seen lists in many registers in Essex, including quite small parishes ; two of the earliest are at Woodford and Waltham Abbey.

(1) The most usual occasion for a brief was a fire. There was no fire insurance until after the Fire of London ; the first regular fire office was opened in 1681. The oldest surviving office is the *Sun*, not later than 1710 ; the *Hand in Hand*, founded in 1686, is now absorbed in the Commercial Union. It was long before insurance became general in the country, and a fire might well mean absolute ruin. Hence in the event of serious fires, it became usual to apply for a brief, even when only an individual was concerned ; but especially when there were many sufferers. In the earlier period the great majority of briefs were for fires ; but the proportion became less as time went on. There were a number of disastrous fires in this period, over and above the Fire of London. It may be that our knowledge is greater than at an earlier period, while later on brick and tiles replaced wood and thatch. We know of many cases of whole towns, or a large part, being burnt, e.g. Nantwich 1583 ; Tiverton 1598, 1612 ; Marlborough 1653 (224 houses burnt, damage

£70,000) and 1679; Northampton 1675 (600 houses, damage £152,000); Southwark 1676; Blandford 1677 and 1731; Wem 1677; Bungay 1688; New Alresford 1690; Warwick 1694 (damage £90,000); and Buckingham 1724.

(2) At one time it was common to obtain a brief for losses at sea; this gradually died out.

(3) Some briefs were issued for the repair of harbours, e.g. Colyton or Seaton 1574; Hastings 1578; St. Ives 1586; Dunwich and Southwold 1618; Watchet 1662; Meeching *alias* Newhaven 1662; Grimsby 1663; Hartlepool 1665.

(4) But next to fires the most common occasion was the building, or more usually the rebuilding, of a church; latterly these briefs predominated. For all churches known to have been rebuilt between 1650 and 1815 a brief was probably issued; and the date of the rebuilding can be gathered or verified from this. There are many notices in parish registers of contributions towards St. Paul's Cathedral (1678); other present cathedrals include Ripon (1661), St. Albans, Llandaff (1732) and Chelmsford (1801).

(5) An object recurring from time to time in the earlier period is redemption of captives taken by Turkish or Moorish pirates (Algiers, Sallee, etc.). These pirates were a scourge for many years; it is a wonder that France or Spain did not make a determined and persistent effort to suppress them long before. This object always made a very great appeal, far more than church building or any ordinary fire. Such collections were made in 1624, 1645, 1670 f., 1680, 1692, 1700.

(6) Briefs were issued also to meet calamities of various kinds, e.g. the Plague 1625, 1665-6, and at Cambridge 1631; Teignmouth and Shaldon, burnt by the French, 1690; widows and orphans of seamen who perished in the Great Storm, 1703; cow-keepers, to meet losses from cattle disease, 1715; oyster-dredgers, loss by frost 1742; Inundation in Lancashire 1722; also at Brighthelmstone; and at Wroot 1730.

(7) A very large number of briefs were issued at the Restoration. Pepys notes June 30, 1661, "To Church, when we perceive that the trade of briefs is come up now to so constant a course every Sunday, that we resolve to give no more to them." But among them were several unusual ones: (a) For the Herring Fishery, to build docks, wharves, and storehouses to be filled with nets, casks, salt. Pepys was made one of the commissioners, but complains that the money was largely mis-spent. (b) For Philip Dandulo, a Mahometan Turk, converted to the Christian faith. Kennett gives his petition; he was the only son of a silk merchant in the island of Tzio; converted by the ministry of Dr. Wild, Dr. Warmestry, Dr. Thurscrosse and Dr. Gunning, and baptised by Dr. Gunning in Exeter House Chapel November 28, 1657. In consequence of his conversion he is unable to return to his native land (Woodford 5s. 8d., Waltham Abbey 17s. 3d.). (c) Protestants in the Great Dukedom of Lithuania, now in a most lamentable and sad condition, and the translating and printing of their Bible. The translator

was Samuel Rogislaus Chylinski ; Evan Tyler printed (Waltham Abbey £1 2s. 8½*d.*).

(8) This is only one of a large number of briefs in behalf of Protestants of other lands. One of the first acts of James I was to order a collection for the city of Geneva, recently attacked by the Duke of Savoy (Bewes, pp. 93-6). There were also collections for Protestant refugees from France, 1621 and 1627 ; and for ministers exiled from the Palatinate 1627-35. Above all there was the collection for the Vaudois, afterwards extended to Poles and Bohemians, under Cromwell. The total was £38,000, of which Cromwell personally gave £2,000. In 1681 came the first of four briefs for Protestant refugees from France ; the first brought in £18,000, the others over £63,000. The collection for the Vaudois under William III brought in £27,600. There were also large collections for the Irish Protestants. Parish registers show how greatly these objects appealed compared with those of ordinary briefs. In 1677 there was a collection for thirty distressed Protestant ministers of Hungary, released from the galleys of Naples by the Dutch ambassador ; in 1681 for ministers of Lesser Poland ; in 1703 for Protestant refugees from Orange, forced by the French King to quit their native country because they would not turn Papists. In 1707-8 there was one for building a Protestant church at Oberbarmen ; another in 1709 for one at Mittau in Curland ; in 1716-17 for Reformed Episcopal Churches in Great Poland, Russian Poland, and Polish Prussia. Passing over a few others, this list closes with one for the Protestant colony at Philippen in Moldavia, on the River Neister 1764.

High Laver, a country parish in Essex, between Ongar and Bishops Stortford, has a very full list of briefs from 1660 to 1709, and again 1730-42. (The adjacent parish, Magdalen Laver, has a list 1678-1743.) The chief family there were the Mashams of Otes. Roger Williams, the founder of the State of Rhode Island, had been chaplain to Sir William Masham, and was married in High Laver Church. The philosopher, John Locke, lived the closing years of his life with Sir Francis Masham, whose wife was the daughter of Cudworth, the Cambridge Platonist. Locke's tomb is under the south wall of the church ; above it on the outside wall is his well-known epitaph. (As this is becoming faint, it is proposed to move it within the church.) Also in the churchyard is the tomb of Abigail, Lady Masham, who supplanted Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. Among the lists of briefs there are several " house to house " ones, with a list of contributors. Thus on January 30, 1670-1, there was one " for the Redemption of His Majesty's Subjects taken by Turkish Pyrats." The first names are Samuel Lowe, rector, and his wife, 10s. ; his man, Francis Patman, 6*d.* ; his maid, Joan Adams, 6*d.* ; Sir Francis Masham, Bart., and his Lady, £1 ; his man, Daniel Corbet, 1s. ; three of their maids, 2s. ; Robert King, his wife, and their five children, 6s. 6*d.* ; their maid, Frances Roberts, 6*d.* The total sum collected was £3 16s. 6*d.*, gathered from seventy-seven persons, including labourers and " daysmen." In September,

1678, for the "Rebuilding of the Cathedral of St. Paul in London" the collection was £2 10s. 8d. from fifty-seven contributors. In October, 1680, another collection for the redemption of captives of Turkish pirates, £2 7s. 1d. was gathered from eighty-eight contributors. In April, 1695, there was one for the "Inhabitants of Warwick, their loss from fire." Sir Francis Masham was apparently away. The list begins, "Samuel Lowe, rector, £1; My Lady Masham, 2s. 6d.; Mrs. Cudworth, 2s. 6d.; Mr. Lock, 5s." The total is £3 2s. 6d. from forty-nine persons in all.

Briefs were finally abolished in 1828. They had always been an expensive way of raising money, the expenses of distribution and collection, apart from legal costs, being necessarily high; and latterly the returns from many parishes for ordinary objects were very low. An example how the expenses ate into the receipts is presented in the case of St. Mary-at-the-Walls, Colchester. This church, ruined in the Siege (1648), was rebuilt about 1713 (Bewes, p. 35). The amount collected on the brief was £1,595 13s. 6d.; but expenses ran to £546 19s. 10d., or well over one-third. In the closing years of briefs those for churches usually brought in from £300 to £500, while expenses ran to about £230. The system was felt to have outlived its usefulness. Fire insurance was now common, and the number of briefs for fires was much less. Church building was on the increase; but it was felt that this could best be met by subscribing to the Incorporated Church Building Society. For a number of years "King's Letters" were issued in behalf of this Society (alternately with the S.P.G. and the National Society); but these ended in 1853.

ON THE LAST FRONTIER. Letters of Mary Percy Jackson. Pp. 118. *The Sheldon Press*. 2s. 6d. net.

For a reliable, adequate and informative picture of pioneer life in Western Canada, these letters cannot be surpassed. Miss Jackson, a qualified medical practitioner, volunteering for service in newly settled areas, was sent by the Minister of Health for Alberta to a new settlement in the Peace River country where her "practice" covered about 300 square miles of a country without trains, even without roads. Her palatial shack measured 14 by 10 feet. For transport in summer she relied chiefly upon a horse. In the winter months snow-shoes, sleighs and dog-teams were called into service. In outstanding colours, she paints the picture of life-saving work among a cosmopolitan scattered community, including half-breeds mostly consumptive. Despite the difficulties and hardships, Dr. Jackson's joy of living and her joy in service is always apparent. She has much to say on the subject of the prevailing method—or lack of method—of settlement and upon the type and nationality of the successful settler. It is an admirable little book.

F. B.