

King's Briefs the Forerunners of Mutual Insurance Societies.

The following information of Briefs and Brief-books may be of interest to the readers of THE JOURNAL. The writer remembers to have seen, long ago, a book which contained the account of money collected by means of Briefs, at the Friends' Meeting House, Bull Street, Birmingham. This book appears, unfortunately, to have been destroyed, which is cause for regret, but perhaps not so much for surprise, for one finds, from inquiries made, that the Brief-books connected with several of the churches in Birmingham are also destroyed or lost; St. Martin's, St. Philip's, St. Mary's, St. Bartholomew's, St. John's Digbeth, and the Edgbaston parish church, have all lost their books. It would have been interesting to have read, in the records of the last-named, a grateful acknowledgment that on September 21st, 1684, Newbold Pacy, near Stratford-on-Avon, collected two shillings and threepence "for Edgbaston church" (the record in the Register at Newbold does not add for what reason the help was required); unless other places made a larger contribution, one does not see that very efficient help could be rendered by two shillings and threepence.

Cornelius Walford, a Barrister-at-Law, has given considerable attention to the subject of Briefs, and from his books,¹ and other sources, I have been able to gather a few particulars. The earliest trace of issuing Briefs, in England, appears in connection with the redemption of Christian captives² sold into slavery to the Moors and

¹ *King's Briefs, their Purposes and History*; being a paper read before the Royal Historical Society; and reprinted from its Transactions; vol. x.; By Cornelius Walford, barrister-at-law. Printed for Private Circulation, 1882. On page 58 is the following: In the minutes of the proceedings of the Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends, held at Exeter in 1729, it is recorded, "Two briefs for building or re-building two steeple-houses being offer'd to this meeting, they are returned with 'nothing collected' writ upon them."

² "This is not the place to enter into a history of the practice, which continued to be carried on; owing partly to the encouragement the pirates received from European nations when at war with one another. As far as regards England, the worst period was that of Charles I. and the two latter Stuarts. It diminished towards the close of the century." For an account of the sufferings of Friends who were taken captive, see *Account of the Slavery of Friends in the Barbary States; towards the Close of the Seventeenth Century*; 1848.

Turks, in 1206, but the system had been in vogue in Northern Europe at a much earlier date. In the first century of the Christian Era, the practice was in full operation in Rome, and earlier still in Assyria. It has played an important part in the social history of this country. Walford mentions a case in 1247, when alms were requested for the building of the Hospital of St. John the Evangelist, at Cambridge, the donors being assured that their generosity would be rewarded by the remission of forty days of Purgatory. In 1423, a Brief was issued for the repair of Salisbury Cathedral. In 1694, more than half Warwick was destroyed by fire, including a considerable portion of the Castle; a national collection was made by means of King's Briefs, and £110,000 was gathered, including £1,000 from Queen Anne.

The right to grant Briefs was in the hands of the Sovereign, the Lord Chancellor, and the Church. Any sort of calamity might be helped by what seems, in this practical day, a very cumbrous method. Floods, earthquakes, hailstones, shipwrecks, fire, and plague are especially mentioned, also that money was thus raised for redeeming persons sold into captivity, for relieving those suffering for conscience sake or from robbers on land or water, and as a means of collecting funds for the founding of hospitals and churches. When a Brief came into a parish, it was read from the pulpit during service, and at the close of the service the clerk stood at the door with a money box, and with a loud voice called out, "Please remember the Brief." Not only were Briefs issued to all the Church dignitaries, but the "Teachers of separate Congregations" had the privilege of making the announcement from the pulpit, and even any person who preached in any meeting of the people called Quakers must give out the notice, and ask the grave congregation to "Please remember the Brief." In addition to these official means, a house-to-house collection was invited, the results of which must have been very doubtful, to say the least.

Even in the time of Pepys, Briefs seem to have become a nuisance. He writes in his *Diary*, June, 1661, "To church where we observe the trade of Briefs is come now up to so constant a course every Sunday, that we resolve to give no more to them"; and no wonder, for it appears that the parish book contains entries of these collections in church towards the relief of losses by fire on the fourteen

successive Sundays previous to the date of Pepys's entry in his *Diary*.

Among the archives in the safe in Bull Street³ was recently found a document issued by George III., in 1797, connected with Warwick Meeting House ; it sets forth that William Armstrong, of Henley-upon-Thames, had his Mill burnt down, and sustained damage to his property of £418 10s. 4d. The same Brief states that John Rowly, of Malden, in Surrey, had suffered from a conflagration caused by children playing with dry straw and matches, the unlawful combination having resulted in a loss of £161. The well known liberality of Friends, and the probability that the Warwick Meeting House, in those days, held a good sized congregation, may have encouraged the sufferers to hope for a liberal response to this appeal, and to count upon a large addition being made to the collections from Church and Chapel. When we read that one shilling was collected at the Warwick Meeting House, we are inclined to sympathise with the blighted hopes of William Armstrong and John Rowly, who must have felt that Briefs were but broken reeds to lean upon in time of trouble, and to unite in the satisfaction the two men must have felt when the cumbersome machinery was declared illegal. The "illegality" would be peculiarly apparent to Armstrong and Rowly, as they were even defrauded of the one poor shilling, the Brief drifting into the Bull Street strong-box, and the shilling ! Query ? has search ever been made for this lost piece of money, and inquiry instituted for interest that should have accrued since 1797 ?

In the Brief now preserved in the Bevan-Naish Library, it is stated that "farming Briefs" is illegal. One would have thought the rashest speculator would have hesitated to advance money to the man who was too poor to wait for the result of such appeal to the compassion of his country, for not only was the result of such appeal most uncertain, as we have seen, but the expenses connected with the issue were so great, that very little of what was collected reached the sufferer.

³ D. possess an official Brief, addressed to "Bristol Quakers Meeting," for a fire at Ellerton Mill, Shropshire, for which money was "to be collected, from House to House, throughout the Counties of *Salop, Chester, Lancaster, York, Lincoln, Leicester, Northampton, Oxford, Gloucester, and Worcester.*" Bristol Friends do not appear to have made any collection. The date is 1790. [EDS.]

For instance, a Brief was issued on behalf of a parish church in 1809, the number of copies sent out was 9,986, the amount brought in was £614 10s. 9d., the expenses incurred were £330, so the net amount received for the restoration of the church was only about £284!

This tendency to reduction made people claim more than their right; thus a man whose loss would have been covered by £20 would put it down on the Brief as £300, and when the money required for building a church was really only £300—£1,000 would be asked for; and so after centuries of use and abuse the whole system got satisfactorily made illegal by Act of Parliament. The main difficulty of passing this Act was the fact of the very large fees derived by the legal profession and the Government officials.

An essay on Briefs would be incomplete without a reference to the two pamphlets prepared by T. N. Brushfield, M.D. on *Devonshire Briefs*, and contributed by him to the "Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art," in 1896, in which he has catalogued the 1,103 Briefs issued in East Budleigh church, from 1669 to 1828. Scarcely any of these Briefs were on behalf of distress in Devonshire, but include practically every county in England. We may mention that out of the 623 Briefs in the Crawford collection, all but 114 are included in the East Budleigh Records, and these probably occurred during the nineteen years during which no record was kept at East Budleigh.

In conclusion, one feels that by the abolition of Briefs in 1828, one of the many abuses and useless remains of an earlier time was wisely swept away by the revolutionary energy of the earlier part of the nineteenth century.

JOEL CADBURY.

As a contrast with the cold formality of the usual printed document, we give here a appeal from Buckinghamshire Quarterly Meeting in 1692.⁴

Dear friends and Brethren.

In the heart-opening love of God, & blessed fellowship of the Gospel of Jesus, we very dearly salute you: in w^{ch} al the living & sensible ones are near one to another, & have atender sense of, & sympathizing with each other in the

⁴ This appeal is in the handwriting of Thomas Ellwood. It is in D. (Gibson Bequest MSS. iii. 57.)

various Exercises, Sufferings, Losses, & Afflictions that befall any, who, being baptized by the One Spirit, are indeed made Members of y^e one Body.

And as we know there cannot but be a fellowfeeling & compassionate Commiseration of the wants of such, in all those who are gathered into, & abide in the blessed Truth: so we are thereby induced to lay before you y^e great Loss, and thereby low Condition, of our dear friend & Brother in the Truth, James Smith, of Aylesbury, in this County of Bucks, an honest & serviceable Member of this our Quarterly Meeting, of whose faithfulness & sincerity to y^e Lord we have an ample Testimony in ourselves (as we doubt not but many of you also have), & whose blameless Conversation & upright Dealing hath gained Truth & him a good report, even amongst them y^t are without. He, on y^e 26^t of y^e 2^d month last past, by a fire, w^{ch} brake forth, about Midnight, in the House wherein he dwelt, in little more than an hour's space, had y^e House burnt down to y^e Ground, & most of his Goods, both in House and Shop, consumed, the suddenness & violence of y^e fire (increased much by a very strong wind) & the Season wherein it fell (being the dead time of y^e night) permitting to save but little, & that of little value. His wife & himself hardly scaped through y^e flames & Smoak, in w^{ch} three of his family lost their lives.

He keeping a Sale-Shop, & driving a very considerable Trade therein, & being furnished wth a stock of Goods answerable to y^e Trade he had, we cannot find, upon y^e nearest Computation we can make, & best Information he can give us, y^t y^e Loss he sustained by this devouring fire, could be less than a Thousand or Eleven Hundred Pounds. By w^{ch} great Loss, He and his wife, who, by y^e blessing of God on their industrious labours, have heretofore been able & very forward to exercise Hospitality & Charity, as Occasion offered, & were serviceable to Truth & friends in their places, have now nothing left to support themselves wth, having honestly & freely offered up y^e whole of what was saved (both in Monies, Goods, & Debts) towards y^e discharging of those Engagements to others, which he, as a Trader, lay under. The Consideration wherof, as it hath deeply affected us, some hope it wil you also, wth a compassionate Sense of their Condition, w^{ch} we desire ye wil recommend to y^e faithful friends of & belonging to your Monthly Meeting, y^t they who desire to be rich in good works, & are ready to distribute, may not miss so inviting

an Occasion to do good & to communicate, wth w^{ch} kind of Sacrifices God is wel pleased.

And what, in y^e opening love of God, shal be freely given, by faithfull ffriends, on this Occasion, we desire may be returned as soon as conveniently it can be, to Thomas Olliffe, of Aylesbury aforesaid, for the use of our said ffriend & Brother, James Smith.

So committing you to y^e guidance of y^e good spirit of God, in this, and al other services of Truth, we remain

Your ffriends & Brethren, met together on the service of the same Truth, at our Quarterly Meeting at Weston Turvill, in y^e County of Bucks, this 29th day of the 4th month, 1692,

ROBT. JONES,
RICH. BAKER,
WM. LODDINGTON,
DANIELL ROBERTS,
JNO. PENINGTON,
THO. OLLIFFE,
HENRY TREDWAY,
JOHN BELLERS,
EDM. BELSON,
HENRY COSTARD,
JOHN WHITE,
THO. REDMAN,
WILL. GRIMSDALE,

ROGER DANCER,
ALEX. MERRICK,
THO. DELL,
THOMAS WHITE,
WILLIAM RUSSELL,
JOHN PUDDIVATT,
WILLIAM ASHBY,
JOHN PARTRIDGE,
JOHN HALLIDAY,
THOMAS COOKE,
JOHN HOTON,
JAMES PHILLIPS,
THO. ELLWOOD.

It is evident that many collections were made in Meeting Houses, and Friends must have attended their meetings provided with money in order to respond to them. Thomas Davidson, of Fritchley, Derbyshire, has made some extracts from an old Brief-book connected with the Meeting of Codnor Breach, near Heanor, which may be thus tabulated :—⁵

Date.	Place.	Amt. lost.	Amt. collected.	
			£	s. d.
8 June, 1707	.. Spilsby ..	..	5,984	.. 6 0
10 Sept., "	.. Shireland ..	..	3,505	.. 1 9
10 " "	.. ..	..	612	.. 1 1

⁵ The time covered by the minutes is 1700 to 1762 ; Breach Monthly Meeting was then joined to Nottingham, and afterwards handed back to Chesterfield.

Date.	Place.	Amt. lost.	Amt. collected.	
			s.	d.
14 Sept., 1707	.. North Morston	.. 3,465	4	10
28 " "	.. Little Port ..	.. 3,931	4	4
5 Oct., "	.. Towchester	.. 1,057	1	2
14 Dec., "	.. Southam ..	.. 4,454	1	8
9 June, 1708	.. Wincanton	.. 2,930	1	6
1 Aug., "	.. Gt. Yarmouth	.. 1,228	1	6
10 Oct., "	.. Aleonbury Cumweston	3,318	1	0
17 " "	.. Lisburne, Ireland	.. 31,770	2	0
1 May, 1709	.. Strand, London	.. 17,880	1	2½
8 " "	.. Edinburgh ..	.. 7,962	1	8½
17 July, "	.. Market Rayson	.. 1,228	1	2
21 Aug., "	.. Holt-Market ⁶	.. 11,258	1	8

In the minute-book of "Olvestone Preparative Meeting," Gloucestershire, covering the period from 1787 to 1824, lent to D. by J. Marshall Sturge, of Bewdley, there is a list of collections for various fires, occupying three pages. In 1790, two collections amounting to £0 6s. 6d. were handed over to the local authority; in 1796, fourteen collections, made since 1791, amounting to £1 5s. 6d. were paid over; and other entries occur down to the year 1809. The Churchwarden or other official who received the money, signed his name in the book. Four shillings was the largest amount collected on any one occasion.

⁶ A copy of the Queen's Brief issued for this fire, 1708, is among the records belonging to Ratcliff and Barking Monthly Meeting.

Whitefield's Estimate of Quakerism.

"The Quakers, though wrong in their principles, yet I think have left us an example of patient suffering, and did more by their bold, unanimous and persevering testimonies, than if they had taken up all the arms in the Kingdom. In this respect I hope I shall follow them as they did Christ, and though I die for him, yet take up no carnal weapon in defence of him in any wise."

Extracted from a letter of George Whitefield, dated, "Philadelphia, November 10, 1739." See his *Works*, London, 1771, vol. i. p. 79.