



A Letter of Confraternity of the Grey Friars, Chester.

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IN the valuable collection of manuscripts belonging to this Society there is a narrow strip of parchment, measuring about twelve by two and a half inches and bearing a neat and closely written inscription in contracted Latin. There are some ten lines of writing on the face of the document and nearly four lines on the back of it. The condition of the lower portion of the parchment indicates that part of it has formed a narrow strip to which a seal was doubtless attached. Unfortunately the seal is missing, the tag having been torn off. The document is otherwise in good condition.

While the general purport of the inscription is quite clear, the full translation of the contracted Latin offered some difficulty. This has been overcome by the courtesy respectively, of Professor J. A. Twemlow, B.A., of Liverpool University, and of the Rev. F. G. Slater, M.A., who have supplied a complete extension of the Latin, and a free but fairly close translation of it.

The document is a letter issued by a hitherto unrecorded warden of the Chester Franciscan friary to one Sir or Dom. Nicholas Kerke, admitting him an associate of the Order, and to participation in the benefits enjoyed by them, including certain special privileges conferred on the Grey Friars by an indulgence of Pope Sixtus IV. On the back is en-

dorsed a pardon for sins confessed to the warden as well as for others which would have been confessed if Nicholas had remembered them.

The name of the individual in whose favour the document was made out and the "pardon" endorsement have been inserted at some time subsequent to the inditing of the letter itself, and this was in accordance with the usual procedure at the date. In the fifteenth century such letters were prepared in large quantities, drawn up in a regular form, and with a space for the name of the grantee to be filled in at the time of issue.

The extended Latin is as follows :—

Venerabili in Christo ac discreto viro domino Nicholao Kerke frater Lodowicus fratrum minorum Cestrie gardianus et servus salutem et per presentis vite merita regna celestia promereri. Cum sanctissimus in Christo pater et dominus dominus Sixtus diuina prouidencia papa quartus non solum fratribus et sororibus nostri ordinis sed eciam confratribus et consororibus eiusdem litteras suffragiales habentibus de benignitate apostolica graciose concesserit quod quolibet eorum possit sibi eligere idoneum confessorem qui ipsos vel ipsorum quemlibet ab omnibus et singulis criminibus excessibus et peccatis in singulis sedi apostolice reseruatis casibus semel duntaxat hoc anno a publicacione litterarum papalium computando, videlicet a quarto die mensis Aprilis et semel in mortis articulo ab aliis vero tociens quociens opus fuerit absolueret et penitentiam salutarem iniungere posset idemque vel alius confessor plenariam omnium peccatorum eorundem remissionem in vere mortis articulo valeret elargiri per litteras suas apostolicas benigne indulisit : idcirco vestre deuocionis quam ob Christi reuerenciam ad nostrum habetis ordinem sincerum considerans affectum vos in confratrem et ad uniuersa et singula fratrum administrationis anglicane suffragia recipio tenore presencium in vita pariter et in morte vt in dictis apostolicis priuilegiis omniumque bonorum spiritualium beneficiis secundum formam et effectum eorundem perfruamini, vestre animi ad salutem adiiciens nichilominus de gracia speciali vt cum post obitum vestrum presencium facta fuerit exhibicio litterarum in nostro prouinciali capitulo eadem pro vobis fiet recommendacio que pro fratribus nostris defunctis ibidem recommendatis fieri consueuit. Valet in Christo Iesu et orate pro me. Datum Cestrie sub sigillo officii mei sexto die mensis Augusti anno domini millesimo cccc^{mo} lxxix^{no}.

[Endorsed]. Dominus Iesus Christus qui dedit discipulis suis potestatem ligandi atque soluendi ipse te absoluat. Et ego auctoritate dei patris omnipotentis Petri et Pauli et tocius sancte matris ecclesie atque virtute huius bulle et papalis indulgencie absoluo te ab omnibus peccatis tuis michi confessis et contritis et de quibus velles confiteri si tue occurrerent memorie, et concedo tibi plenam remissionem omnium peccatorum tuorum in quantum tamen ecclesie se extendunt in hac parte, ita vt sis absolutus ante tribunal domini nostri Iesu Christi habeasque vitam eternam et viuas in secula seculorum amen.

[Translation]. Friar Lewis, Warden and servant of the Friars Minor at Chester, to the discreet and worshipful in Christ Sir [or Dom?] Nicholas Kerke. Greeting and earning of the kingdom of heaven through the merits of this life present.

Since the most holy father and lord in Christ, the Lord Sixtus IV, by divine providence Pope, hath of his apostolic benevolence been pleased to grant, as well to the brethren and sisters of our Order as also to the associate brethren and sisters of the same who have letters suffragial, that any one of them may choose for himself a fit and proper confessor who may absolve them or any of them from all and singular crimes, excesses and sins, [except?] in individual cases reserved to the Apostolic See, once only in this year reckoning from the promulgation of the papal letter, to wit, from the fourth day of the month of April, and once in the moment of death from other things [or, by other men?] as often as need shall be, and may enjoin salutary penance, and of his goodness hath by his letters apostolic granted [that] the same or other confessor have power to bestow plenary remission of all sins of the same at the actual moment of death. Therefore in consideration of the sincere disposition of your devotion which out of reverence to Christ ye have unto our Order, and accepting you as brother associate and [admitting you?] to all and singular the suffrages of the brethren of the Anglican administration, I engage by the tenor of these presents, in life as well as in death, that ye enjoy in the said matter apostolic privileges and the benefits of all spiritual good, after the form and effect of the same, to your soul's health, adding moreover of special grace that when, after your decease, exhibition shall be made of this present letter in our provincial chapter, the like commendation shall be made for you as hath been wont to be made for our departed brethren therein commended. Farewell in Christ Jesus and pray for me. Given at Chester under the seal of my office the sixth day of the month of August in the year of our Lord MCCCCLXXIX.

[Endorsed]. May the Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath given to His disciples the power to bind and to loose, Himself absolve thee. And by the authority of God the Father Almighty, of Peter and Paul and all the holy Mother Church, and of the virtue of this bull and the papal indulgence, I absolve thee from all thy sins acknowledged and confessed to me, and from those which thou wouldest confess if they came to thy mind, and I grant thee full remission of all thy sins in so far nevertheless as they reach the church in this part, so that thou be absolved before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ and have everlasting life and dwell for ever and ever. Amen.

Letters of Confraternity, which were documents bestowing the privilege of participation in the benefits enjoyed by the body to which the grantor belonged, differed from Indulgences proper in that the latter did not admit the individual to whom they were issued to association or confraternity. In early times these letters of confraternity offered a convenient means by which a religious body might gratefully acknowledge benefactions, but the later letters have been described as "certificates of honorary membership" in a society, in return for donations made. They appear to have been regarded as a means for raising funds and various religious and semi-religious bodies competed with one another in adding special attractive clauses to the letters to induce the public to purchase.

A considerable number of these documents are extant, but an immense number must have been destroyed, as, in accordance with the procedure, on the death of the possessor of one or more of the letters, each should have been sent or presented to the Chapter concerned, when the name was enrolled in the records of the house, the promised services performed, and the letter was either destroyed or became waste parchment. It is clear from existing examples that some individuals and families collected these letters under the belief that they constituted what may be called spiritual life insurance policies. Naturally, as the number of the grants increased, as they did out of all proportion, they became less and less valued, and 9000 bezants together with 100 lbs. of silver in A.D. 1050, dwindled to the comparatively

insignificant sum of twelve pence, a common amount paid, in the fifteenth century.

In conclusion, I would refer those interested in these old letters to a valuable paper on "Some Letters of Confraternity," written by the Rev. Prebendary Clark-Maxwell, M.A., F.S.A., and printed in *Archæologia*, Vol. 75, page 19 *et seq.*, and I wish to acknowledge this paper as the source of the general remarks just made.

