



# Church Matters

## *Burial Laws Act 1880*

In another page we give the full text of the New Burials Act which is now in force in England and Wales, and which gives to Non-conformists the right to bury their dead in an orderly manner, and according to some manner, and according to some Christian form in all English and Welsh churchyards open for interments.

It is impossible to over estimate the importance of this Act, and at the same time it seems difficult to realise the full effect of the change it brings about.

Hitherto the church clergyman has enjoyed absolute control over the parish graveyard. And of all religious services at the grave. But he enjoys this exclusive right no longer.

Non Conformist ministers from hence forth may enter the churchyards and there perform Christian and orderly services at the grave without let or hindrance.

It seems almost too much to hope that so great and radical a change as this will not lead to some few complications, and, if may be, bring to the surface some little bitterness. But this will be only for a time, and the day is not distant when we shall be lost in wonderment as to why the concession of such a popular right had been so long resisted, there being really no danger in it. The end of the measure we are confident will be a more genuinely Christian spirit among the general body of professing Christians. There may be still certain irreconcilable sects and parties who can see no comfort in aught but disunion and their own narrow dogmatism. But the world will get on without them, and despite their cries, alarms, and fears.

It would be amusing, were it not painful, to note some of the alarms which have already been sounded. At one burial, which has taken place since the Act came into force, there has, been a most unseemly squabble. A certain curate, on the plea that the required 48 hours notice had not been given, insisted on performing the Church of England burial service at the interment of a non conformist, and afterwards, on the minister of the congregation to which the deceased belonged proceeding to perform a service he was threatened with the pains and penalties of the law. But in other places both the spirit and the letter of new law has been respected by those hitherto in absolute authority over the parish churchyard, and the interment of Non Conformists has been allowed to take place in a Christian and orderly manner. This has been especially the case in our own neighbourhood, where the operation of the new law has been exhibited in the broadest possible manner. On Thursday afternoon last, for the first time probably in any English churchyard since the days of the reformation a Priest of the Roman Catholic Church, with his attendant acolytes, and dressed in the grab of their several offices, met the corpse of a deceased member of their church at the entrance to St. Mark's churchyard, New Swindon, and, conducting it in procession, chanting the services of the Roman Catholic Church the while, to the newly formed grave, there performed in absolute peace and quietness, and in the most perfect order the service appointed for the burial of the dead.

This, we say, was to show up the effect of the new Burials Act in its broadest and most literal sense, and the perfect order and decency with which the whole thing was done might well be put before Non

Conformists as an example to be followed, and before Churchmen as an assurance that by the exercise of a little Christian charity, as distinguished from mere religious profession, the last concession, and certainly not the least important one, made to Non Conformists need not be made a source of trouble or offence to them.

In the past, as, as is well known, very little matters have been made to evoke very bitter and uncharitable feelings. Without referring unnecessarily to the past, we may say that many a heart has been wrung and many a tender feeling outraged by the way interments have been conducted in this same graveyard. Children have again and again been buried "like dogs"; a suicide has been denied "Christian burial", and the objectionable monogram, R I P., has been ruthlessly obliterated from the tomb which marked the grave of a deceased member of the Roman Catholic Church. But,, fortunately for us all, English legislation has outstripped the bigotry and intolerance of men, and if those to whom concessions have been made but use their newly acquired rights temperately and fairly, respecting the feelings and convictions of others as though they were their own, we shall gradually passing out of sight and memory before the brighter and more generous hopes and prospects of the future.

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