



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HEYTESBURY

To the Editor of the Wiltshire Independent

Sir,—Having observed in your spirited and well conducted Independent a correspondence between Veritas on the one hand, and Messrs. Prangley and Snelgrove, the Churchwarden, and Overseer, on the other, upon the subject of the conduct of the Rev. John Knight, towards the Dissenters of Heytesbury, and perceiving that there exists a great discrepancy of opinion respecting it I have devoted some time to the purpose of making enquiry into the facts of the case, and beg to forward you the following statements as the result of that enquiry, leaving it to you and your candid readers, to decide, whether Mr. Knight's conduct has or has not been unchristian; and whether the Dissenters of Heytesbury have or have not been scandalously treated, and must grossly insulted.

Some time since, a child by the name of Whatley, of Heytesburv, died, and its parents who are Dissenters applied to Mr. Knight on its behalf for christian burial. The customary evidence as to the baptism was given in the usual way; Mr. Knight, however, discredited it, and sent the applicant to the Dissenting Minister (who had baptized the child) for a written certificate, and it was not until he had received this additional testimony, that he, Mr Knight, consented to bury the child.

Another child of the name of Richardson, died, its parents, Dissenters, applied to the Rev. John Knight, for christian burial; the customary evidence of Baptism was given in the usual way, together with the name of the Dissenting Minister who baptized it. Mr. Knight disbelieved or affected to disbelieve the testimony given, and refused to give the child christian burial, until after he had been assured by the Dissenting Minister, of the truth of the statement made.

Another child named Vaggs, died, its parents who were well known members of the Dissenting Chapel, applied for christian burial for it. The customary evidence was given in the usual way. It was however as in the other cases discredited, and the child refused Christian burial, on the grounds of the parents not presenting a written certificate, from the Dissenting Minister. Finding, however, that the parents who justly considered that their veracity ought not to be thus questioned, were determined not to ask for such an unnecessary document, the Curate who acted for Mr. K., sent the sexton with a verbal message to the Dissenting Minister, for a written certificate; the Dissenting Minister stated that the child had been baptized: he however refused to send a written statement to that effect, considering (no doubt) that the Curate ought not to have sent a verbal message by anyone on whose veracity or ability to bring a correct reply, he himself could not place any reliance. It appears, however, that the Sexton's statement was credited, for after the veracity of the parents had been thus questioned, and their feelings thus insulted, the Curate consented to bury the child.

Another child of the name of Marks, died, the parents applied in the usual way for christian burial, to ensure which, they had had their child baptized within a few days previously. The usual evidence was as in the fore-mentioned cases tendered, together with the name of the Minister who baptized it. On account of the parents inability to produce a written certificate from the Dissenting Minister, christian burial was at once refused, and as the dog in the manger that would neither eat the hay himself, nor let the Ox do so, so Mr, Knight, not satisfied with refusing the rites of burial, himself, called on his Churchwarden and desired him to forbid any other Clergyman who might from motives of charity, have felt inclined to officiate. The favour of a bit of ground, was however, condescendingly granted, and in this, the child's remains were silently deposited. In this case, the parents own signature, was not required to his statement, nor was he offered the alternative of taking his oath. Dr. Lushington states that no Clergyman can refuse to bury a person dying in his own parish. 'It is of common right," and Sir J. Nicholl in a celebrated case brought before him in the Court of Arches, declared, that "the Church of England admits nor knows of such indecency as that of a corpse being buried without funeral rites, in *consecrated ground*" It appears, however, from the foregoing cases, as well as those I shall mention hereafter, that Dr. Lushington's opinion has no weight with Mr. Knight, and it is equally evident that the celebrated Sir John Nicholl, extensive as his knowledge must be of the laws of the Church, knew nothing of the indecencies, permitted and practiced by the Churches of Heytesbury and Knook.

I am, Sir, your obliged Servant,

A CHURCHMAN.

Heytesbury, January 1st, 1839

(Wiltshire Independent – Thursday 3 January, 1839)

HEYTESBURY

To the Editor of the Wiltshire Independent

SIR,—Agreeably to the intimation given in my first letter, which you obligingly inserted in your last week's *Independent*, I now beg to forward you another case or two, illustrative of the character and conduct of the Rev. Jno. Knight, who is called the Protestant (?) Clergyman of the parishes of Heytesbury and Knook. The last case I mentioned was that of a child named Marks, who, although made a Christian by baptism, was treated as a Heathen, and buried without funeral rites, in consecrated ground. The very general feelings and expressions of disapprobation and disgust which this and other cases called forth in Heytesbury and adjoining parishes, caused an application to be made for the opinion and advice of Mr. Jno. Wilks, honorary secretary to the Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty, whose reply was highly condemnatory of Mr. Knight's conduct, inasmuch as it was a violation of the 68th canon of the Church of England. The Dissenting minister, considering the instructions and admonitions which Mr. Wilks' letter contained might be useful to Mr. Knight, by inducing him to abandon his erroneous position that he could legally demand a written certificate from a Dissenting minister. and also in dissuading him from persisting in a course, which, even if it *were* legal, must inevitably lend to

numerous and insurmountable difficulties, to Churchmen, as well as Dissenters, lay and clerical, waited on Mr. Knight with the letter in question. How far this minister succeeded in the desirable object of setting Mr. Knight right, and thus removing the parochial dissensions already to a certain extent engendered, will best appear by the notice which was posted on the church door at Heytesbury, immediately after, and which was to the following effect:—

“Notice is hereby given, That no corpse will be buried in this Church-yard with funeral rites, unless legal proof of Baptism be first produced. Given under my hand, &c. (Signed) Jno. KNIGHT.”

From this, it would appear that it was Mr Knight's determination to apply the same rule equally to members of the Established Church and to Dissenters. In short, this is the only construction it will admit of. But what will your readers think of Mr. Knight's clerical consistency when they are informed that the next person, who died in Heytesbury (the wife of Thomas Bartlett) although she had never been baptized at all, was buried with funeral rites, and in consecrated ground; and this too without a single question being asked respecting her baptism!! To lessen the surprize which this statement is calculated to produce among *some* of your readers, it is but justice to Mr. Knight to state, that this woman attended the Church, which might possibly (according to Mr. Knight's orthodoxy) be deemed a sufficient explanation. Soon after this another woman died, named Susannah, or Diana, Scullard, and was buried with funeral rites in the consecrated ground at Heytesbury. In this case, also, not only was there no "*legal*" proof of baptism demanded, but the question was not even asked; and if it had been, no certificate of her baptism could have been produced. According to Mr. Knight's notice, this woman should not have had Christian burial; but she was a Churchwoman, and this I suppose is a sufficient explanation. Whether such proceedings as these are best calculated to raise or *sink* our Church and her Clergy in the estimation of right minded men is a question I leave to the decision of the public, and especially to those, who like myself, will had the day when the Church shall be divested of her abuses, and all her pulpits filled, not by intolerant bigots, nor Popish Priests in flimsy disguise, but by *genuine Christians*, of *true* PROTESTANT *principles*, and *clerical consistency*.

I am, Sir, your obliged Servant,

A CHURCHMAN.

Heytesbury, January 8th, 1839

P.S. The Children of Whatley and Marks died and were buried at Knook, and not at Heytesbury, as stated in my first letter. If I have made any other misstatement it has been unintentional, and I shall be happy to be set right by either party.

[The above letter, although dated the 8th, did not reach us until the evening of the 10th; our correspondent will therefore see that its non-appearance last week was unavoidable.]

(Wiltshire Independent – Thursday 17 January, 1839)