

In that letter Shirley sought help to 'bring to order' the overbearing singers who 'had assumed to themselves the right of controuling the Minister in the singing and in keeping exclusive possession of the whole Gallery'. He complained that the Gallery was stuffed full of musical instruments and that the Choir's music-making on Sundays was 'theatrical and more resembling a concert . . . and very offensive to many of the Congregation'. Since the singers usually attended

Gallery, and—without giving prior notice to the singers who were ready to chant the — started to read it, whereupon they interrupted him and chanted it. Quite what the rest of the congregation made of all this is not recorded.

The row was patched up, but ill-feeling smouldered afresh as the numbers of Sunday School children grew yet again, and resulted in the showdown of September 1813. For three Sundays battle raged between the curate and the singers who had locked themselves into the gallery while the hapless Sunday School children were marched up the Gallery stairs only to find their entrance barred, and the curate denounced the singers from the pulpit as being 'full of riot, tumult and intoxication', before quitting his church in despair.

Warden Gauntlett's tactful reply to the absconding curate probably did much to persuade him to return to Hornchurch, but Shirley wrecked his chances again by some unwise observations from the pulpit a few days later. By now he seems to have been mentally very disturbed, regarding himself as the personal saviour of the Sunday School and telling the no doubt astonished children, on 10 October, that 'you have enemies here, who would injure—would illtreat—would massacre you, but leave them to me, Vengeance will be mine, and I will defend you'. The following Sunday he thundered from the pulpit that the singers were 'guilty of Crimes of the most atrocious and blackest dye. By the advice of judicial authority I shall pursue the execrable, outrageous and infamous Wretches, the cause of the Gospel is injured by such Wicked People'.

Matters could not continue in this vein; the churchwarden wrote to Warden Gauntlett, and advice was sought from the relevant Ecclesiastical Commissary and from Doctors' Commons. Both learned bodies supported the Rev. Shirley (as they were honour-bound to do, and which a legal test case from another parish would uphold in 1816, that the officiating minister had the right to determine what might be sung and what might be chanted or spoken in a service, provided he gave the choir reasonable notice of his decisions), and also gave the opinion that if any of the singers had acted riotously then they could expect a summons from the local Justice of the Peace. The Vicar-Chaplain of Hornchurch (now) openly supported his curate, and Warden Gauntlett urged all concerned to 'lay aside their hostility in the face of clear legal guidance, the duty of public worship, and Christian Charity'. But either it was of little avail, or the Rev. Shirley was anxious to be on the move again, for within a year he was off to a curacy in South Mimms, before moving on again in October 1815 to the vicarage of Shirley in Derbyshire, under Earl Ferrers's patronage again, where at last he seems to have found peace of mind. His son Walter Augustus came up to New College in 1816.

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