

# ‘TRUTH’



Henry du Pré Labouchere ('Men of the Day. No. 90.')

by Carlo Pellegrini

chromolithograph, published in *Vanity Fair* 7 November 1874

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'TRUTH' was a London-based weekly journal founded by Henry Labouchère in January 1877 and it ran for 80 years. Labouchère was a diplomat and Liberal politician who was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. Between 1868 and 1880, when he withdrew from politics, he gained renown as a journalist, editor, and publisher. His unflinching and uncompromising style gained a large audience for first his reporting, and later his personal weekly journal, *Truth*, which was often sued for libel. Today, he would be seen as being hostile, virulent and vexatious in his views. These pieces must be read with a degree of circumspection!! Needless to say, he did attract quite a few enemies.

P.R.S.

## 'TRUTH'

**Thursday 22 May 1890**

*One of the most singular ecclesiastical grievances that have ever come under my notice is that of the humbler class of parishioners at **Worsley**, near Manchester. This parish is blessed with a very beautiful church, an extremely picturesque churchyard, and a **Marquis** for Vicar. Under the combined influence of all these attractions there is such a desire to be buried in this favoured spot, that corpses from Manchester and all the surrounding districts crowd into it, to the exclusion of the natives, who have the first right there. To make matters worse, successive parsons, in obedience to the laws of political economy, have put up prices with the growth of the demand. At the present moment graves have gone up to £10, the right of erecting a monument is priced at the same figure, and the other fees have risen in proportion.*

*Seriously, however, the grievance, though possibly unique, is a very genuine one. This particular burial ground was given to the parish a few years ago by a benevolent Peer. He, of course, intended it as a "God's Acre" for rich and poor, not as a sort of mortuary farm for the enrichment of future incumbents - noble or otherwise. In any case, however, the parishioners are clearly the people who have the first right to the graveyard, and that they should be excluded in this way by prohibitory rates in favour of wealthy strangers is a gross scandal.*

*There are several valuable lessons about this case. What impresses me most is the revelation of the commercial value of the aesthetic and aristocratic elements in sepulture. Why do not a few of our poverty-stricken landowners select picturesque sites and lay them out as high-art burial grounds? Why are not impecunious Peers engaged and ordained to act as chaplains? If capital is wanted to develop the idea, I would mention a dozen respectable promoters who would find the money in a week.*

**Thursday 5 June 1890**

*With reference to a paragraph in **TRUTH** of May 22 respecting the churchyard of Worsley, near Manchester, the **Rev. St. Vincent Beechey**, Rector of Hilgay, and formerly Vicar of Worsley, sends me a letter, which, it is only fair to say, puts a different complexion upon the matter. **Canon Beechey's letter is too long for me to publish** in full, but the important point which he makes is that the high fees charged for interments and monuments, which evoked my remarks, are not charged to the parishioners. To parishioners, I am given to understand, the charge for a grave is 5s. and for a burial 1s., at which rates, with such an attractive spot to repose in and with a **Marquis** to perform the last rites, the parishioners ought indeed to be content. **Canon Beechey** further tells me that he is the party responsible for having put up the prices to "outsiders," and that the parish has been greatly benefited thereby; which confirms my view of the commercial advantages to be gained by making burial places really attractive.*

*There is only one point I have to dispute with **Canon Beechey**, and that is his remark that I sneered "at the rank of the **Marquis of Normanby**, the Vicar of this delectable spot." Far from it: I feel the highest regard for a nobleman who shows a desire to make himself of some practical use to his fellow-creatures, even though it be only in such a modest dilettante sphere of usefulness as a country vicarage. The only persons at whom I am disposed to sneer are those who could derive gratification from having the burial service over their departed relatives read by a Peer of the realm. That there are many such I do not doubt, for, by one of the most singular paradoxes of human nature, snobbery is never more conspicuously displayed than in the last honours paid to corpses.*