

J. C. Ryle's

Farewell to the Diocese.

Reverend and Dear Brethren,

Almost the last words of the great Apostle to the Gentiles are before the eyes of my mind today: 'I have finished my course; the time of my departure is at hand.' After filling unexpectedly the office of your Bishop for nearly twenty years, I am about to resign a post which years and failing health at the age of eighty-three told me I was no longer able to fill with advantage to the diocese or to the Church of England.

I have resigned my Bishopric with many humbled feelings. As I look back over the years of my episcopate, I am conscious that I have left undone many things which I hoped to have done when I first came to Liverpool. I am equally conscious that the many things I have had to do with—meetings, ordinations, confirmations, and consecrations—have been done very imperfectly. I only ask you to remember that I was sixty-four, and not a young man, when I first came here, and to believe that, amidst many difficulties, I have tried to do my duty. But I am thankful that our God is a merciful God.

I can truly say that my approaching separation from Liverpool will be a heavy wrench to me. I shall never forget you. I had ventured to hope that I might be allowed to end my days near the Mersey, and to die in harness. But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and he has gradually taught me by failing health that the huge population of this diocese requires a younger and stronger Bishop.

Before I leave you I ask you to accept a few parting words from an old minister who has had more than fifty-eight years' experience, and during that time has seen and learned many things. It is written, 'Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom' (Job 32. 7). Let me, then, charge all the clergy whom I am about to leave behind me never to neglect their preaching. Your districts and population may be comparatively small or large, but the minds of your people are thoroughly awake. They will not be content with dull, tame sermons. They want life, and light, and fire, and love in the pulpit as well as in the parish. Let them have plenty of it. Never forget that a lively, Christ-exalting minister will always have a church-going people.

Last, but not least, cultivate and study the habit of being at peace with all your brother ministers. Beware of divisions. One thing the children of the world can always understand if they do not understand doctrine. That thing is angry quarrelling and controversy. Be at peace among yourselves.

May God bless you all.

To the many lay Churchmen whom I shall leave behind in this diocese (knowing far less of them than I should have done if I had come among them a younger man), I can only send my best wishes, and add my prayers that this diocese may have God's blessing both in temporal and spiritual prosperity. Cling to the old Church of England, my lay brethren, cling to its Bible, its Prayer-book, and its

Articles. Let no charitable institution suffer. Consider the many poor and needy. Support missionary work at home and abroad. Help the underpaid clergy. Never forget that the principles of the Protestant Reformation made this country what she is, and let nothing ever tempt you to forsake them.

In a little time we shall all meet again; many, I hope, on the King's right hand and few on the left. Till that time comes I commend you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified. I remain, your affectionate Bishop and lasting friend,

J. C. LIVERPOOL.

THE PALACE, ABERCROMBY SQUARE,

February 1st, 1900.

[The following extract is taken from *John Charles Ryle 1816-1900* by Marcus L. Loane pp.112-113. published 1983AD]

His resignation took effect on March 1st and he and his daughter moved from Liverpool to Lowestoft a week or two later. He had bought a pleasant house overlooking the North Sea. Only a few weeks of life still remained; his strength was spent. On June 9th, he was only partly conscious and his daughter called the doctor and sent for her brothers. Only Herbert was able to arrive in time, for on Sunday, June 10th, in the eighty-fifth year of his age, Ryle was summoned to his reward. There was no pain; the end was calm: but for Herbert, it was "a blow to which nothing can be compared". Eighteen months later, he wrote to a friend: "The father is the background of life: and when he is taken, the world looks a different place ... It never can be the same. This is ... only the very fresh recollection of my own experience last year when my father died."

Ryle was buried beside his wife at All Saints' Church, Childwall, on the slope of a hill looking south across the Mersey into Cheshire. "The church," so Herbert wrote, "was filled with clergy and gentry. The graveyard was crowded with poor people who had come in carts and vans and buses to pay the last honours to the old man who certainly had won their love." The gravestone was engraved with two texts of which the second was a deliberate reminder of his conversion: "By grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8).

Hobson was the ordinary preacher at the provisional cathedral for the afternoon service on Sunday, June 17th.

Ryle, he said, "was great through the abounding grace of God. He was great in stature; great in mental power; great in spirituality; great as a preacher and expositor of God's most holy Word; great in hospitality; great in winning souls to God; great as a writer of Gospel tracts; great as an author of works which will long live... great as first Bishop of Liverpool. I am bold to say that perhaps few men in the nineteenth century did so much for God, for truth, for righteousness, among the English speaking race and in the world as our late bishop." And no finer tribute could have been paid than in one brief phrase of Bishop Chavasse who spoke of him as "that man of granite with the heart of a child".