

Bishop J C Ryle

Eric Russell

Liverpool became a diocese in 1880. For over 300 years south-west Lancashire had been part of the diocese of Chester, but with the rapid growth in population due to the industrial revolution, the building of the railways and the development of the vast docks system on the banks of the Mersey, voices were raised advocating a further division of the ancient diocese of Chester and the creation of a new diocese centred on Liverpool. Earlier in the century the diocese of Ripon had been reconstituted and Chester lost its Yorkshire territory. Another sub-division was made in 1847 when the diocese of Manchester was created to meet the religious needs of south Lancashire. Chester was again reduced in size when the counties of Cumberland and Westmoreland were transferred in 1856 to Carlisle. The diocese of Chester over the years had been considerably reduced in area, but due to the movement of workers to south-west Lancashire to meet the demands of industry, the population was constantly increasing and making it more and more difficult for the Church to fulfil her ministry.

Victorian Liverpool

Liverpool in the closing decades of the nineteenth century was fast becoming the hub of trade and commerce in the north-west of England. Manufacturers in the great industrial centres of Lancashire and Yorkshire exported their goods through the port. Iron and steel, machinery, textiles, manufactured goods and pottery were among the numerous items exported, and grain, raw cotton, sugar-cane, tobacco, timber and meat were some of the imported goods unloaded at the docks. The development of the railways and the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894, a project fiercely opposed by the Liverpool Fathers when first proposed, increased rather than decreased the importance and wealth of Merseyside. The phenomenal rise in the population in the 20 years between 1861 and 1881, when the population of Liverpool almost doubled to 550,000 inhabitants, was a challenge to the Church and demanded an immediate response.

It rankled with some on Merseyside that the Roman Catholic hierarchy after 1850 had established an archdiocese centred on Liverpool and yet Liverpool did not have its own Anglican bishop. Some of the leading churchmen in Liverpool were determined to gain support for separation

from Chester and the formation of a new diocese across the Mersey, and by means of letters to the press, printed pamphlets, lobbying members of Parliament and influencing friends in high places they sought to bring pressure to bear on the government to introduce a bill establishing the new see of Liverpool. The Home Secretary, Richard Assheton Cross, was on the side of reform in Church and State, and representing south-west Lancashire he was conversant with the strong feelings of Liverpool churchmen. It was known he considered the Liverpool bishopric 'a feasible and common sense arrangement', and there was a confident hope that Cross would initiate a bill advocating the creation of a new Anglican see centred on Liverpool. Cross introduced the Bishopric Bill in May 1887 proposing the creation of four new bishoprics, Liverpool, Newcastle, Wakefield and Southwell. Despite vociferous opposition from the Liberation Society in the House the Bill was passed the following year and Liverpool had its own diocese.

The First Bishop

The next step after the formation of the new diocese was to appoint the first bishop. Political motives obviously played a large part in the appointment. When Disraeli, the Prime Minister, realized towards the close of the General Election in 1880 that Gladstone's Liberal Party was going to succeed him in office he wrote to the Queen on holiday in Baden Baden telling her that 'the Tories subscribed the whole endowment and built "the Palace"', and Lord Sandon's seat for Liverpool depended on the appointment being made by the present administration, and 'the whole city was most anxious that Her Majesty should appoint Canon Ryle the designate Dean of Salisbury'.¹ Queen Victoria may well have preferred a Broad Churchman, but she acceded to the request and Ryle was urgently called to Downing Street. When asked by Lord Sandon if he would accept the bishopric of Liverpool, he replied immediately, 'My Lord I will go'.² He thought he 'would rather wear out as Bishop of Liverpool than rust out as Dean of Salisbury'. The offer of a bishopric came to him in such a remarkable manner that he felt he could not refuse. He had not sought preferment and felt it was a clear call to duty. Evangelicals were delighted with the news and the *Record* claimed 'a better appointment could hardly have been imagined',³ but *The Church Times* was bitterly disappointed that a High Churchman had not been appointed to 'Gladstone's See'.⁴ *The Guardian* took a more moderate view and felt that Ryle would make a good bishop:

1 G W E Buckle (ed) *The Letters of Queen Victoria* (1930) p 78

2 G Magnell *Benjamin Disraeli* (1903) pp 117-18

3 *The Record* 16 April 1880

4 *The Church Times* 23 April 1880

Probably no man of his school of thought would be so acceptable to High Churchmen, and there can be no doubt that under his direction a higher tone of Churchmanship will be realized than would have been possible under a Bishop of whom the Evangelical clergy would have been jealous.⁵

The position of Evangelicals in the Church was undoubtedly strengthened by Ryle's appointment to Liverpool. His nomination was a tribute to their influence in the country long after the Evangelical Revival, and a stinging rebuff to the Ritualists.

Canon and Mrs Ryle with Herbert, their middle son, travelled up to Liverpool soon afterwards to view the 'the Bishop's Palace' in Abercromby Square. He was delighted with the new home, except in one point. 'A bishop', he told members of the Bishopric Committee, 'should have a large library. Mine is a very large and important library of Protestant theology, and whether it will be necessary to convert the stables, for which I shall have no use, into a library, I don't know'. Ryle continued: 'You know my opinions. I am a committed man ... I come among you as a Protestant and Evangelical Bishop of the Church of England, but I do not come among you as the bishop of one particular party. I come with the desire to hold out the right hand to all loyal churchmen'.⁶

Consecration at York

The consecration of Canon John Charles Ryle as the first Bishop of Liverpool took place in York Minster on St Barnabas Day, 11 June 1880, by the Archbishop of York, assisted by the Bishops of Durham, Chester and Manchester. The sermon was preached by his friend, Canon Edward Garbett on Acts 11:24: 'He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and faith.' In accordance with custom, his University conferred an honorary Doctorate on Ryle which delighted him, but one or two other gifts were politely refused. Well-wishers sent him an ornately embroidered cope and mitre, but he returned them, saying he 'had no intention of making a guy of himself',⁷ and another gift of a pastoral staff was graciously, but firmly declined: 'No staff for me, if you send me a staff I shall lock it up in a cupboard and never see it again. A Bishop wants a Bible and no staff.'⁸ The enthronement of the new Bishop took place on 1 July in the pro-Cathedral Liverpool. The bells of all the Anglican churches in the city rang out in acclamation, vast crowds thronged the streets and the heartiest cheers were raised for the new

5 *The Guardian* 21 April 1880

6 *The Macclesfield Herald* 1 May 1880

7 M Guthrie Clark *J C Ryle* p 22

8 *Liverpool Courier* 15 February 1900

bishop and the Dean of Chester in their carriage. Dean Howson preached the sermon in the unavoidable absence of the Bishop of Chester, due to illness. After the service, Bishop Ryle was heard to remark: 'I have changed my clothes, but I have not changed my coat nor my principles.'⁹

Organizing the Diocese

Immediately after his consecration the Bishop set about the task of organizing and administrating the new diocese. *The Church Times* had said that: 'No Evangelical Bishop named in our time had been an administrative success',¹⁰ and he was determined to prove his critics wrong. Ryle was almost alone among Evangelicals in supporting united gatherings of clergy of all parties, such as the annual Church Congress, and being a born orator and an eloquent platform speaker, he had no fear of the Diocesan Conference and revelled in the opportunities for the cut and thrust in debate it provided after he set it up in 1881. The constitution of the Conference was unique in that it was a collective and not an elective body. The Conference was open to all the licensed clergy in the diocese and two elected lay representatives from the parishes. All in all, the annual Conference was a success and helped to set the machinery of diocesan organization in motion and maintain its smooth running. The Bishop did not always get his own way, but he assured his antagonists that he had a broad back, and was not the man to take the 'huff' because he was treated 'ruff'.

More Clergy

In some dioceses Boards of Patronage were established and it was suggested that such a Board should be set up in Liverpool to appoint to new parishes, but Ryle would have none of it. 'For the sake of peace', he argued, 'men of decided opinions would be passed over in favour of moderate men until the diocese was filled with colourless, tame, no-party men, theological jelly-fish who would do no good'.¹¹ The consecration of new bishops generally led to an increase of clergy in the new dioceses. In the four years preceding the formation of the diocese of Liverpool, the Bishop of Chester ordained 26 men to serve in parishes across the Mersey, but in the next four years Ryle ordained 113 deacons. Both deacons and priests were required to sit the Bishop's Examinations before ordination and to assess them the Bishop appointed, in the first instance, three Examining Chaplains, H C G Moule, principal of Ridley Hall, Oxford,

⁹ *Liverpool Courier* 20 March 1900

¹⁰ *The Church Times* 23 April 1880

¹¹ *Liverpool Courier* 15 February 1900

C H Waller, tutor at St John's, Highbury, and H James, of Bury St Edmunds, all of evangelical persuasion. In 1883 he surprised many by appointing in 1883 his own son, Herbert Ryle, a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, who later became a renowned advocate of biblical criticism. One year three men for Priest's Orders were rejected by the examiners because of 'utter ignorance and inefficiency' and two deacons for 'unsoundness in doctrine'.¹² Ordinands were required to attend the Bishop's Palace for three days prior to ordination and each evening the Bishop spoke to them from the Scriptures and fervently exhorted them: 'Read your Bible, young men, read your Bible.'¹³ The Bishop understood the strains of parochial life and each year he gathered together the men he had ordained and after sharing Holy Communion together in St Nathaniel's Church, one or more leading evangelical preachers would open the Scriptures and encourage them in the work of the ministry. The younger clergy looked forward to 'the Bishop's Priests Parties' as they were affectionately known.¹³ During his episcopate Ryle ordained 535 deacons, and 541 priests, many of whom served the whole of their ministry in the diocese. The majority of ordinands in the diocese came from Oxford and Cambridge colleges, with a fair number each year from St Aidan's Theological College, across the Mersey in Birkenhead.

Ryle believed more would come to the diocese, except that the income of many clergy in the diocese was too small to allow them to employ a curate. He was keen to see stipends increased and set up a Sustentation Fund in 1891, which gradually raised the income of clergy in large parishes to a minimum of £235 per annum, with a house, and smaller parishes £200 and a house. Liverpool had the distinction of being the first diocese outside the archdiocese of York to start a Pension Fund for its clergy. The fund was augmented in 1897 with a generous gift of £25,000, which enabled old and infirm clergy to retire from their parishes on a small pension. The amount varied according to need between £50 and £290 per year. The Bishop was liberal in the use of his own money. He refused to hold large sums in personal savings and it was his custom following illness, to give his clergy a handsome gift to help tide them over a difficult time, and at the close of the year he always gave generous donations to his favourite missionary societies.

Church Attendances

Ryle's episcopate covered a period when there was intense interest in numbers attending church services. In October 1881, the *Liverpool Daily Post*, in common with other newspapers in the country, organized a census

12 Maurice H Fitzgerald *A Memoir of Herbert Edward Ryle* (1932) p 136

13 O R Clarke 'The First Bishop of Liverpool' in *Churchman* LXIX 1955 pp 225-6

of Sunday morning church attendances in the city, and the findings published a few weeks later led the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, a native of Liverpool and patron of several churches in the diocese, to describe the results as ‘an extremely disgraceful result’. Ryle, too was disappointed, but treated the figures as a challenge to the diocese to be more zealous in the work of evangelism. A similar census conducted a few weeks later on a Sunday evening produced rather better figures, but Canon A Hume, a Liverpool incumbent and sociologist, questioned the accuracy of the figures and persuaded the Diocesan Conference to organize a credal survey in the parishes throughout the diocese. Hume believed such a survey would show that the Church of England in Liverpool was far stronger than the newspaper results indicated. The survey was carried out in 1882 and confirmed Hume’s belief, but critics claimed the results were exaggerated. The Bishop accepted Hume’s findings and blamed poor preaching and a lack of pastoral visitation for the discrepancy between church attendance and religious profession. Anxious to obtain a true picture the Bishop decided to arrange his own diocesan census on Trinity Sunday 1882. He insisted on the strictest rules of enumeration to obtain accuracy and although the weather was inclement on the chosen day there were over 165,000 attendances at Anglican services. The result was little different from previous surveys and confirmed that church attendances had peaked and toward the end of the century were gradually declining. This was confirmed later by the *Liverpool Daily Post* church census figures of 1891, 1898 and 1902.

New Churches

Ryle had an evangelistic and pastoral concern for the masses of people in Liverpool and the diocese who were apparently untouched by the regular ministrations of the Church and he interpreted the census figures as revealing an urgent need for more clergy and lay helpers, more churches and mission rooms, and the sub-division of large parishes. Early in his episcopate he launched an appeal to build several new churches in the diocese. Sometimes the Bishop expressed his disappointment at the response to diocesan efforts, but at the annual meeting of the Diocesan Church Building Society in 1884 he stated that 18 new churches were in the course of erection at an average cost of no more than £10,000 for the site, building and endowment of the church. Only 18 months later he announced to the Diocesan Conference that 12 new churches had been consecrated, four licensed and four more in the final stages of erection. Several of the older churches were completely renovated and where a parish could not afford to build a new church sometimes they erected an iron church for the time being. This type of building was manufactured in Liverpool and according to an advertisement in the *Diocesan Year Book* they were

'tasteful in design, economical, durable, made of the best materials, and erected in the most careful manner'.¹⁴ Costing considerably less than a brick building, an iron church had a distinct advantage that when no longer required it could later be taken down and re-erected on another site. However, the 'tin tabernacles' as they were called were always considered second-best and the congregations worked to raise sufficient funds to have their own 'proper church'. In addition to these churches there were in 1883 152 mission halls and rooms in the diocese, each one under the direct control of the incumbent of the parish. These places of worship met a need among the poorer people since they offered an Anglican service in a less formal atmosphere than a parish church and without the embarrassment of paid pews. Ryle's administration was a fine achievement of church building. In all 24 new churches were built in the diocese during Ryle's episcopate. A leader writer in the *Liverpool Courier* commented in 1900: 'If he did not build a cathedral, he did something better and more practical, he encouraged the building of churches and mission-rooms, and his reign will be memorable for the completeness with which the spiritual needs of the populous districts have been covered.'¹⁵

A problem closely related to that of providing more places of worship was the need of suitable residences for the clergy with families. Most Victorian vicarages and rectories were built for large families, with huge attic bedrooms for the servants, extensive gardens and outhouses, and were expensive to maintain. However, in some down-town parishes there was no suitable accommodation and in such cases the Bishop willingly gave permission for the clergy and their families to live outside the parish boundaries. These non-resident clergy were good humouredly called 'tram-car clergy' by the people of Liverpool as they travelled in for services and 'vestry-hours'.

A New Cathedral

When the new diocese was created, St Peter's Church in Liverpool was designated the pro-Cathedral. Built in 1699 it had seating for 1,300 people, and was surrounded by a pleasant churchyard. It stood in a prominent position in the town centre and at the hub of the business world, but it was not really suitable for Cathedral-type services. When the Bishop saw it he described it as 'the most unpretentious structure either in England or Wales that can boast of Cathedral dignity'.¹⁶ It was generally felt in the diocese that being such an important port, Liverpool should have a new cathedral on a scale worthy of a great city. In his Primary Charge to the

14 *The Church of England Yearbook* 1885 p xviii

15 *Liverpool Courier* 11 June 1900

16 *Record* 21 June 1880

diocese the Bishop spoke of ‘the want of a Cathedral for Liverpool’, though he intimated that he had some doubts whether it would be built in his lifetime. Naturally there were dissenting voices that a new cathedral was a waste of money, but at the Diocesan Conference in 1882 a resolution was passed that a committee should be formed to produce a report on the feasibility of a new cathedral.

Something of ‘a cathedral fever’ developed in the city and ‘the battle of the sites’ began. In all, 23 sites were looked at, but the committee could reach no unanimous agreement. Eventually after considerable dissension had been overcome it was decided that St John’s Church, below St George’s Hall, in the city centre, was the best site, and application was made to Parliament for an Act making provision for a new cathedral in Liverpool. After the Act was passed the cathedral committee resorted to a novel procedure of selecting an architect. Invitations were sent to several distinguished church architects to send in proposed designs for the new cathedral. Four finalists were chosen and the final adjudication left to an architectural assessor. After a careful study the plans of William Emerson were chosen, a gothic style building seating 1,400 people with a large dome reminiscent of Brunelleschi’s dome in Florence Cathedral. Liverpool, however, was not to see Emerson’s cathedral built for, soon after appointing him, the committee had second thoughts and realized that his design would clash with the classical style of St George’s Hall in close proximity. A second competition was hastily arranged and Emerson was asked to submit another plan, but he refused saying he thought it unfair, ‘to ask a winner of a race to compete a second time because the committee chose to change the shape of the cup’.¹⁷ The Cathedral Act prescribed that the powers under the Act should be exercised before 1 June 1888, but no agreement could be reached; the Bishop warned that it would cost half a million pounds to build a new cathedral on the scale envisaged; the region was experiencing another period of trade depression, and the treasurer reported that the cathedral appeal had met with a lukewarm response. It was a disappointment to many in the city when the Act was allowed to lapse and the project postponed until a more opportune time. Sir William Forwood, a member of the cathedral committee, felt ‘the Bishop did not help the cause, for though he was anxious that a cathedral should be built he frequently explained his opinion, both in public and in private, that additional churches and mission halls could be more useful’.¹⁸ The decision to postpone the building of the new cathedral was a wise one, and as events proved it was fully justified. It was left to Ryle’s successor, Bishop Chavasse to inaugurate a new scheme. Sir Frederick Ratcliffe, chairman of the reconstituted cathedral committee, wrote:

¹⁷ Q Hughes *Seaport Architecture and Townscape in Liverpool* (1964) pp 108-9

¹⁸ W Forwood *Recollections of a Busy Life* (1900) p 195

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The first Bishop had come in 1880 to a congeries of parishes unaccustomed to work together as a unit. He left in 1900 to Bishop Chavasse, his successor, an effective Diocese, so organized that it was possible, in the very first year of the new episcopate, to hope for active support for a Cathedral on a new site, not only from the city of Liverpool, but from the considerable centres of population in other parts of the Diocese.¹⁹

In June 1901 a resolution was passed that a new cathedral should be built on St James' Mount, the Liverpool Cathedral Act was passed in 1902, and in 1904 the foundation stone was laid by King Edward VII.

Ritual Controversy

The long protracted controversy over the site of the new cathedral was not the only dispute to disturb the peace of the diocese in the early years of Ryle's episcopacy. Shortly after his consecration the Bishop was involved in an unpleasant disagreement over ritual with one of his clergy. The Bishop's attention was drawn to a report in the *Liverpool Courier* in July 1880, describing a service at St Margaret's Church in Liverpool, when lighted candles were burning on the altar, incense was used and a cope and biretta worn by the celebrating priest. The Bishop wrote to the Rev James Bell-Cox, the offending clergyman, inviting him to the Palace 'for some friendly discussions'.²⁰ Ryle appealed to him to give up the illegal practices for the sake of peace in the diocese, but the priest was unable to give that assurance. The question of legality was not one that Bell-Cox in company with other Anglo-Catholic priests recognized. The dispute dragged on and at one point Bell-Cox wrote to the Bishop, stating:

the obedience I have promised to pay the Bishop is a canonical obedience, due only when acting canonically in his spiritual capacity as Bishop. Whenever a Bishop takes action simply on the ground of a secular decision, the validity of which we cannot recognise, we are bound to repudiate the bishop's action.

Here the matter rested for a while and Bell-Cox in defiance of the Bishop continued the illegal practices without restraint. Eventually Ryle's hand was forced by a written complaint brought under the Church Discipline Act of 1840. The Bishop took legal advice and was advised, in the opinion of the Archbishop of York and his own Chancellor, he had no real

19 Frederick Radcliffe 'Some Notes on the First Scheme for a Liverpool Cathedral' in *Liverpool Review* (1930) p 121

20 *Correspondence between the Bishop and the Rev J Bell-Cox* in the Picton Reference Library Liverpool

alternative but to permit the case to go before the ecclesiastical court. Even though he had the right of veto, reluctantly Ryle allowed the law to take its course and Bell-Cox was cited to appear before the Chancery Court of York, but he persistently ignored the injunction to attend. Twice being suspended from office and twice disobeying the suspension notice, Bell-Cox was eventually sentenced by Lord Penzance to a period of imprisonment for 'manifest contumacy and contempt of court'. On a technical irregularity Bell-Cox's lawyer obtained a rule *nisi*, and the recalcitrant priest was released from Walton Jail in Liverpool after 15 days. He returned to St Margaret's in triumph and continued the services as before, while the Bishop was powerless to stop the illegal practices. Protestants came to accept that litigation had failed to stem the tide of ritualism and ceremonialism in the Church and saw the way forward was through education rather than litigation.

Church and People

When Bishop Ryle went to Liverpool he became the target of much criticism on the grounds that he was a country parson who had spent 36 years in two Suffolk parishes and was not the man to wrestle with the problems of a new Lancashire diocese so closely identified with the Industrial Revolution. Victorian England was class-conscious and in Liverpool there were, on one hand, some extremely rich ship owners, importers and exporters, insurance agents, merchants and businessmen, who left the city each evening to return to their comfortable homes on the outskirts, and on the other hand, many poor families, who had no regular work, and existed in the rat-infested courts or cellars in the city centre. The 'submerged tenth' of the population lived a miserable existence and generally depended on casual labour to make ends meet, and suffered most during times of trade depression.

Although Ryle acknowledged that the Bible was full of teaching on social concern and constantly urged his clergy to support legislative measures which promoted temperance, purity, thrift, healthy dwellings, clean water, reading-rooms and recreation grounds, he believed that social problems could only be solved by Government. Nevertheless, the *Diocesan Year Books* reveal that the new diocese did recognize its responsibility toward the poor and we find that the Church of England Temperance Society, the Diocesan Waifs and Strays Society, the Liverpool Sunday School Institute, the Ladies Parochial Bible and Domestic Mission, and the Liverpool Branch of the Mothers Union, all did sterling work to help relieve the miserable lot of the poor. When the Bishop periodically surveyed the variety of religious and philanthropic agencies supported by

the Church in the diocese, he confidently claimed: 'There was enough to show that they did not deserve the bitter remark that they were a "Dead See".'²¹ However, Ryle believed that it was the responsibility of the State to tackle the great social problems and it was the primary task of the Church to proclaim the gospel. He was convinced that leading a man to repent of his sin and trust in Christ as his Saviour could alone change his heart and life and lift him out of the gutter.

The Closing Years

Addressing the Diocesan Conference in 1890 the Bishop surveyed the progress of the diocese during the first decade and told his audience:

The Bishop who follows me will find the following machinery for carrying out the Church's work; viz, two archdeacons instead of one, ten rural deacons instead of six, a regular daily cathedral service supported entirely by voluntary contributions with a service of song which will bear comparison with that of many old cathedrals; a diocesan finance association, four Diocesan institutions for the reception and distribution of Diocesan funds for Church-building, Church-aid, augmentation for poor livings, and Church education; an annual Diocesan conference, and two gatherings for clergy and laity in each rural deanery each year. In short, whatever our difficulties may be, there is no want of Diocesan organization and machinery.

The increasing demands of the diocese on the Bishop's ministrations, especially in the growing number of confirmation services, and a sudden breakdown in his health, led Ryle to appoint an assistant bishop. The Rt Rev Peter Sorenson Royston had just returned to England after serving for 35 years in the Colonies, including 19 of them as the Bishop of Mauritius. He could have appointed a Suffragan Bishop, but he objected to the re-establishment of this office on the grounds that they would have no more responsibilities than episcopal curates.

Ryle advocated in his paper *Church Reform* that the laity should have more say in church government and church policy. He complained that too often like passengers in the gospel train 'they have taken their seats in the right train, and are only to sit quiet, while the clerical engine drives them to heaven, perhaps half asleep'.²² He believed that the Church, and the evangelical wing in particular, was losing ground because the laity were not being fully employed in Christian work. He saw that the road forward lay in a partnership between clergy and laity, and he appealed to the clergy to take the laity seriously, and the laity to co-operate as fully as they were

22 J C Ryle Address to the Hull Church Congress 1890

able with the clergy in the work of God:

In our Established Church it will never do to try and man the walls with officers, and let the rank and file to sit in their barracks. Clergy and laity must learn to work together. We must have not only an apostolic succession of ministers, but an apostolic succession of laymen if our Church is to stand much longer.²³

The Liverpool Church of England Scripture Readers Society was another useful adjunct of the Church in the diocese. The Readers worked under the superintendency of the clergy in the parish, and gave valued assistance in the conduct of services and in sick visiting.

In 1894 as part of the diocesan efforts to halt the drift away from the Church in the closing decades of the Victorian era, the Bishop sponsored the Liverpool General Christian Mission, led by the Rev W Hay Aitkin and Prebendary W E Askwith, assisted by supporting ministers. In a Pastoral Letter the Bishop stated that:

The object of the Mission is not so much to tell people new things, as to induce them to feel old things more deeply. The benefits of the Mission do not consist in temporary excitement and running after strange preachers, but in the new sense of the value of souls, leading to repentance, faith and practical holiness. It is only when the Bible is read, Sunday kept better, the Lord's Table better attended, that a mission does any real good.

Almost every parish in the diocese participated in the Mission and when it concluded many clergy testified to blessings received in their churches.

Two years later the Bishop addressed a great Missionary Conference in Liverpool organized by the Student Volunteer Missionary Movement. His words from the chair touched everyone in the hall by their power and sincerity:

If you go forth in the name of the Lord Jesus, armed with the Word of God, and holding the truth of the everlasting Gospel, lifting up the Cross, and saying to all to whom you go, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world', I cannot doubt that the good will bear abundant fruit, although you may not live to see it.²⁴

Under Ryle's sterling leadership and J R Mott's clear vision as secretary

23 J C Ryle Address to the Hull Church Congress 1890

24 J C Pollock *A Cambridge Movement* (1953) p 131

of the Movement, a new aim and watchword came out of the conference, 'The Evangelization of the World in our Generation', which caught the imagination of hundreds of young Christians and led many of them to offer their lives for missionary work overseas. Ryle was a keen supporter of missionary work both at home and overseas. His last sermon before he retired was preached on behalf of the Church Missionary Society and in his address he told the congregation that he had just received a postal order for 23 shillings from a nurse who wished the money go to missionary work. When the offertory was taken up at the close of the service it was discovered that someone had placed a gold chain in one of the collecting boxes in response to the Bishop's challenging appeal. The total collection at the service amounted to £120, a record missionary collection for the church.

In May 1896 the Bishop celebrated his 80th birthday. He rejoiced to have his family around him, and was only saddened that Henrietta, his wife, had not been spared to share the moment with him. It was while she was attending the Liverpool Exhibition in 1886, on the occasion of Queen Victoria's visit to the city, that she caught a chill from which she never fully recovered. When she died in April 1889 it was estimated that between five and six thousand people stood with bared heads in Abercromby Square facing the Bishop's palace, to pay their respects to a great Christian lady, who did so much, particularly, for the spiritual and moral welfare of women and children in the diocese.

The last of Ryle's achievements in the closing years of his episcopate was to put in hand plans for the building of a Church House in Liverpool. This was not in any sense a second choice to a cathedral, but had been in mind for many years. Important documents and papers relating to the new diocese had to be stored in Chester because there was no suitable storage place in the city. An excellent site was secured in the commercial area and the foundation stone laid on 1st August 1899. The Bishop subscribed an initial donation of £1,000 to the building fund, and later bequeathed more than 4,000 of his biblical and theological tomes, along with several boxes of paintings, several by his artist son, Arthur, to be housed in the new building and to form, he hoped, the nucleus of a theological library in the north of England.

A Victorian Bishop

Bishop Ryle was far from being a colourless and undistinguished figure and everyone who knew him recognized a commanding personality, endowed with gifts of leadership and possessing great strength of character. Ryle however, was not without blemishes. To the many in the

diocese who were acquainted with him only as 'the First Bishop of Liverpool', it seemed at times as though he possessed an undue sense of his office and was a grave and austere individual. He was unashamedly class conscious and made no pretence to be a champion of the poor. There were occasions when he appeared arrogant, priggish and self-opinionated. He was a proud man, proud of his education, proud of his prowess in sport, and proud of his position in the Church. But those who worked more closely with the Bishop recognized a man of deep faith, who took God at his Word, believed in the power of prayer, loved Christ with all his heart, and was totally committed to his service.

How did he measure up to the office of a Bishop? When Ryle was consecrated bishop he was 64 years of age, extremely strong and robust with a fine physique, and possessed of enormous reserves of energy. His capacity for work was astonishing, his use of time intense.

He was not deterred by age and regarded his elevation to the episcopate as a fresh starting point in an already full and varied career. For 20 years, save for a slight stroke he suffered toward the end of his days, he enjoyed good health and was able to fulfil a heavy load of episcopal duties.

It is as an evangelical writer that Ryle is probably best remembered. In the second half of the nineteenth century he was one of the most popular and best-read writers of evangelical literature. His evangelical tracts and doctrinal papers were eagerly read by thousands, not only in this country but by interested readers overseas. While pressure of work curtailed his writing in Liverpool he did compile for publication several volumes of sermons and addresses including *Principles for Churchmen*, *The Upper Room*, *Light from Old Times* and *The Christian Race*.

He was ahead of his time in that he strongly believed Evangelicals had a right to be heard in the central councils of the Church. Despite much criticism from fellow Evangelicals, who advocated a separatist policy, he contended they were mistaken in their views and regularly attended the annual Church Congress in different parts of the country and seized every opportunity to make known what Evangelicals believed.

The Victorian age was a period of church building and renovation and with hindsight we see Ryle was responsible during his episcopate for building too many churches, too large, and too near together in the overcrowded districts. A century later with the amalgamation of parishes many of these churches have been closed and demolished.

Perhaps Bishop Ryle's greatest mistake was that he stayed in office too long. It might have been wiser if he had let go the reins long before he was

Churchman

compelled to retire through ill health. An opportune time may have been soon after the death of his wife in 1889 or after he suffered a stroke two years later, but he had a wish to die in harness and held on to office until his natural powers completely failed.

What influence, if any, has Ryle had on the Church in the twentieth century? Bishop David in 1930, 50 years after the founding of the diocese, confirmed that 'the main tradition of the diocese is firmly Evangelical'.²⁵ The resurgence of Evangelicalism in the second quarter of the present century was considered by one leading church layman as due in part to Ryle's lasting influence. Albert Mitchell, in an article on Ryle in 1940 wrote: 'It is no exaggeration to say that his virile personality dominated two generations of Evangelicals, and sets its ineradicable mark upon a third.'²⁶ For over a century Liverpool diocese has had a succession of evangelical bishops and has attracted a steady stream of evangelical clergy to serve in the parishes. The diocese at the beginning of a new millenium remains a predominantly evangelical diocese. A century later the assessment by Bishop Chavasse of his predecessor's work in the diocese is confirmed: 'His twenty years Episcopate was a turning point in the history of the Church on the Mersey.'²⁷

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25 Dr A A David 'The Diocese in 1930' in *Liverpool Review* (1930) p 234

26 Albert Mitchell article on Ryle in *The Record* 11 July 1941

27 Dr F J Chavasse, the Bishop of Liverpool, at the Diocesan Conference 23 October 1900