# A Tender Lion

# A Tender Lion

The Life, Ministry, and Message of J. C. Ryle

Bennett W. Rogers


**Reformation Heritage Books**
Grand Rapids, Michigan

**Reformation Heritage Books**
2965 Leonard St. NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
616-977-0889
orders@heritagebooks.org
www.heritagebooks.org

*Printed in the United States of America*
19 20 21 22 23 24/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

---

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Rogers, Bennett W., author.
Title: A tender lion : the life, ministry, and message of J.C. Ryle / Bennett W. Rogers.
Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Reformation Heritage Books, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018046077 (print) | LCCN 2018050836 (ebook) | ISBN 9781601786494 (epub) | ISBN 9781601786487 (hardcover : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Ryle, J. C. (John Charles), 1816-1900. | Church of England—Bishops—Biography. | Bishops—England—Biography.
Classification: LCC BX5199.R9 (ebook) | LCC BX5199.R9 R64 2019 (print) | DDC 283.092 [B] —dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018046077

---

*For additional Reformed literature, request a free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above regular or e-mail address.*

**To Christie,**
*for your patience and encouragement*

and to

**Henry and Hugh,**
*for your love and laughter*

# Contents

# Tables

# Preface

J. C. Ryle is the most popular and the most neglected evangelical Anglican of the Victorian era. He became the undisputed leader and spokesman of the evangelical party within the Church of England in the last half of the nineteenth century, and his works continue to be read by evangelicals of various denominational stripes more than a century after his death. Despite this popularity, he has been virtually ignored. An illuminating comparison can be made between Ryle and one of his most famous contemporaries, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. In the year that Spurgeon died (1892), at least eighteen biographies were written about him. Fewer than half that many have been written about Ryle in the 118 years since his death in 1900.

M. Guthrie Clark (1947) and G. W. Hart (1963) produced the first biographies of Ryle, but they are brief and based on minimal research. Marcus Loane published a short biography in 1953 and enlarged it in 1967 and again in 1983. Loane's biographies present Ryle as a model Christian and an example of evangelical continuity within the Church of England. While Loane's works utilize more primary- and secondary-source material than the works of either Clark or Hart, they tend to be more hagiographic and devotional than critical or scholarly.

In 1975 Reiner Publications released an autobiographical fragment Ryle composed for his family in 1873 that covered his life from 1816 to 1860. Peter Toon edited the volume, and Michael Smout added a biographical postscript that discussed Ryle's life after

1860.[1] Following its publication, Toon, Smout, and Eric Russell set out to write the definitive critical biography of Ryle but fell short of their goal. Russell was forced to abandon the project because of prior vocational commitments. Soaring production costs restricted the work to fewer than one hundred pages. Moreover, the authors concluded that a definitive life could not be written until more was known about evangelicalism in the Church of England and G. R. Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party* was replaced. Despite these setbacks, their work remained the fullest treatment of Ryle until Eric Russell's biography replaced it in 2001.

Russell's biography, *J. C. Ryle: That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child*, is the fullest treatment of Ryle to date. Russell presents Bishop Ryle as an exemplary church leader—one who was able to combine leadership, conviction, and compassion. Russell delves more deeply into Ryle's thought than previous biographers and uncovers new and valuable material (especially in Liverpool), but in the end Russell's work has more in common with the work of Clark, Hart, and Loane than that of Toon and Smout.

Iain H. Murray published a new biography, *J. C. Ryle: Prepared to Stand Alone*, in 2016 to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of Ryle's birth. It is the first major biography of Ryle written by a non-Anglican. Though it is less comprehensive than Russell's work, Murray draws new attention to Ryle's love of Puritanism; his relationship with his favorite son, Herbert Edward Ryle; and the abiding emphases of his teaching. Murray presents Ryle as a champion of biblical orthodoxy in an age of doctrinal decline. He was an exemplary evangelical, as opposed to an Anglican, for Murray is clearly unsympathetic to Ryle's churchmanship. This approach may make Ryle more accessible to some non-Anglicans, but it tends to minimize important church-related aspects of his thought and ministry.

1. Peter Toon and Michael Smout, *John Charles Ryle: Evangelical Bishop* (Swengal, Pa.: Reiner Publications, 1976), 5.

Several other studies deserve mention. Ian D. Farley's outstanding work *J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool: A Study in Mission amongst the Masses* focuses exclusively on Ryle's episcopacy in Liverpool. John Newby systematized Ryle's theology under the traditional theological loci in an unpublished dissertation titled "The Theology of John Charles Ryle." J. I. Packer penned an appreciative and insightful survey of Ryle's life and work in *Faithfulness and Holiness: The Witness of J. C. Ryle*. David Bebbington evaluated Ryle's ministry and outlook in *The Heart of Faith: Following Christ in the Church of England*. Alan Munden contributed a short but remarkably comprehensive account of Ryle's life to the Day One Travel Guide series titled *Travel with Bishop J. C. Ryle: Prince of Tract Writers*. Andrew Atherstone has edited and published a new edition of Ryle's autobiography titled *Bishop J. C. Ryle's Autobiography: The Early Years*. It is based on the original text recently rediscovered in December 2015 among the private family archives of John Charles, prince of Sayn-Wittgestein-Berleburg, grandson of Edward Hewish Ryle and named for his great-great grandfather, Bishop John Charles Ryle. It is now the definitive edition of this critically important primary source, and it includes an expansive appendix containing a number of extremely rare documents that shed light on Ryle's early years. And Lee Gatiss has recently edited and introduced three new volumes on Ryle: *Distinctive Principles for Anglican Evangelicals* (2014), *Christian Leaders of the Seventeenth Century* (2015), and *Stand Firm and Fight On: J. C. Ryle and the Future for Anglican Evangelicals* (2016). Gatiss's introduction to *Christian Leaders* on Ryle as a historian is particularly illuminating and is the first study of its kind.

The purpose of this work is to produce the first intellectual biography of J. C. Ryle. Toon and Smout were unable to produce such a work in 1975, and in many respects, this work seeks to complete what they started. Thankfully, a number of excellent studies have shed new light on Anglican evangelicalism,[2] and Balleine's

2. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from*

work has been replaced by Kenneth Hylson-Smith's *Evangelicals in the Church of England: 1734–1984*. Therefore, an undertaking of this kind is now possible.

The primary question of this work is, Who is J. C. Ryle? The typical answer is epitomized by the nom de plume he used in the correspondence columns of the evangelical press—"an old soldier." Both friend and foe alike regard him as an "icon of unbending traditionalism."[3] I argue that he is far more dynamic and complex, progressive and pragmatic, and creative and innovative than is often realized. Ryle simply defies simple categorization. He could be traditional, moderate, and even radical—and was called such at different times by different groups during his fifty-eight-year ministry. Perhaps the difficulty in understanding the man is attributable to the many and varied roles he played in the Victorian Church. He began his ministerial career as a rural parish priest; he ended it as the bishop of the second city of the British Empire. In the time between, he became a popular preacher, influential author, effective controversialist, recognized party leader, stalwart

*the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Sessions from the Via Media, 1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Christopher J. Cocksworth, *Evangelical Eucharistic Thought in the Church of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth Press, 1978); Doreen Roseman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 1992); Mark Smith and Stephen Taylor, eds., *Evangelicalism in the Church of England c.1790–c.1890: A Miscellany* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2004); Peter Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833–1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979); Martin Wellings, *Evangelicals Embattled: Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism, Darwinism, and Theological Liberalism 1890–1930* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2003); and Anne Bentley, "The Transformation of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England in the Latter Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Durham, 1971).

3. Martin Wellings, introduction to "J. C. Ryle: 'First Words.' An Opening Address Delivered at the First Liverpool Diocesan Conference, 1881," in *Evangelicalism in the Church of England c.1790–c.1890: A Miscellany*, ed. Mark Smith and Stephen Taylor (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2004), 286.

Church defender, and radical Church reformer. Much of the work that has been done on Ryle has focused on certain aspects of his ministry or has treated the whole more generally. As a result, some aspects of Ryle's life and work have never been discussed in detail, and others have never been discussed at all. The aim of this work is to present J. C. Ryle's thought, life, and ministry in its fullness and in context. In so doing, I hope to provide a more thorough answer to the central question of this work than has hitherto been given and shed further light on Victorian evangelicalism in general and evangelicalism within the Church of England in particular.

This volume is organized chronologically and topically. Each chapter focuses on a particular period of Ryle's life and analyzes an aspect of his thought and work, building on the previous chapter thematically. For example, Ryle's preaching in Helmingham, which is the subject of chapter 2, created a market for his pastoral writings, which is the subject of chapter 3. The work concludes with a summary of Ryle's thought and life.

# Acknowledgments

I would like to thank *some* of the people who helped turn this dream into a reality. I would like to thank Dr. David Puckett, my doctoral supervisor, for pointing me in Ryle's direction and for his advice and encouragement along the way. Dr. Michael Haykin's interest and example has spurred me on as well.

I owe a debt of gratitude to an army of librarians in Liverpool, Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol, Glasgow, and London for granting me access to sources that are not available in the United States, and to Southern Seminary for generously giving me a field-study grant that allowed me to visit them. Ben Ruppert and his predecessors at the Southern Seminary Interlibrary Loan Office have been a tremendous help in tracking down obscure Victorian sources. I would like to thank Dr. Miles Van Pelt and Reverend John McCarty for giving me a research room in the RTS Jackson Library and allowing me to camp out there for the last three years. I would also like to thank Jay Collier and Annette Gysen at Reformation Heritage Books for believing in this project and helping me see it to completion.

I have been blessed by the love and support I have received from my family and good friends. The Davises of Vicksburg, Mississippi, have been a great source of encouragement. The Shearers of Anchorage, Kentucky, were our home away from home. Ben Bailie has been a sounding board, wise counselor, and sympathetic listener since my first day on campus. And Joe Hillrich, Tim Walker, and Nathan Cummins have walked with me through the

highs and lows of this project—and life, more generally—over the last eight years. Their support has been incalculable.

No words can adequately express my appreciation to my wife, Christie, and my boys, Henry and Hugh. Your sacrifice, encouragement, and faith in me have made this dream a reality.

# 1

# Christian and Clergyman

John Charles Ryle was born on May 10, 1816, at Park House, Macclesfield. He was the fourth of six children and the eldest son. The Macclesfield of Ryle's birth was a growing factory village with a population of 17,746, according to the census of 1821.[1] It was situated on a main route from London to the northwest and was linked to the major industrial centers of Manchester and Liverpool by canals. It was home to a copper works and a number of cotton mills, but the silk industry dominated all others. The silk trade prospered during the closing decades of the eighteenth century, and that prosperity was accelerated by the Napoleonic Wars, which made French silks scarce. During these years many industrialists made a fortune in silk. John Ryle (1744–1808), Ryle's grandfather, was one of them.

Shortly before Ryle's birth, the religious character of Macclesfield was strongly Protestant, Anglican, and evangelical. Lollardy took root in Macclesfield during the fifteenth century, its forest providing a safe haven for worshipers. There is no available evidence about the town's response to the Reformation, but based on subsequent history, it was probably well received. Puritanism

1. For the history of Macclesfield, see C. Stella Davies, *A History of Macclesfield* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961); J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire Past and Present: A History of the Hundred of Macclesfield, in the County of Palatine of Chester*, 2 vols. (London: J. P. Earwaker, 1877, 1880); George Ormerod, *The History of the County of Palatine and the City of Chester*, 3 vols. (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1882).

flourished in Cheshire in general and Macclesfield in particular. As early as the late sixteenth century, Puritan services, the Geneva gown, and popular religious lectures could be found in the Macclesfield church. Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, almost vanished altogether after the Reformation; it survived only in the households of a few wealthy Roman Catholic families. Given the town's Puritan sympathies, it is not surprising that it supported the Parliamentarians during the Civil War, nor is it surprising that ten ministers within the deanery of Macclesfield lost their livings as a result of the Great Ejection.

The reception of the evangelical revival in Macclesfield deserves special attention. Evangelical preaching and doctrines were first brought to the town by the itinerant John Bennet of Chinley in the early 1740s. John Wesley came in 1745 and then again in 1759. From that time on he visited regularly. One of the more remarkable features of Wesley's ministry in Macclesfield was his unusually strong relationship with the established church in the community. The vicar of St. Michael's, James Roe (1711–1765), became an evangelical late in life. David Simpson (1745–1799), the vicar of Christ Church, was an ardent and enthusiastic evangelical. He was an active pastor, prolific author, a local itinerant, and intimate friend of John Wesley. For a season, all the parish churches in Macclesfield were in evangelical hands, and local Methodists were all communicants in the Church of England.

**Family**

By all accounts John Ryle was a remarkable man. He became a successful silk manufacturer, prosperous landowner, and respected banker. When he died in 1808, he left his son, J. C. Ryle's father, somewhere between 250,000 and 500,000 pounds. John's success also extended to the political sphere. He was elected alderman and then mayor of Macclesfield. He was also a committed evangelical Christian, Methodist, and philanthropist. His mother had been converted after hearing John Wesley preach in 1745, and through her

influence he became a Christian. Wesley and Ryle became intimate friends, and Wesley often stayed at Ryle's home when he visited Macclesfield, which he did regularly from 1759 until his death in 1791.[2] Ryle provided the site for the construction of a Methodist meetinghouse in 1764 and the land and the funds for another in 1779. J. C. Ryle never knew his grandfather or his grandmother; both died before he was born. He spoke of them and their evangelical faith with great admiration in his autobiography, however.[3]

The parents of J. C. Ryle, John Ryle (1783–1862) and Susanna Hurt, form an interesting contrast with his grandparents. Both Ryle's grandfather and father were professional successes. Ryle's father continued to run the lucrative family silk business. He purchased more land and properties and expanded the family's holdings. He also took over a failing bank in 1800 and made it profitable for decades. Both Ryle's grandfather and father were interested in politics and public service. Ryle's father was elected mayor of Macclesfield in 1809 and 1810. He became the first MP for Macclesfield elected under the reformed Parliament in 1832, and he held that seat until 1837.[4] He later became the high sheriff of Cheshire. Before his bank crashed in 1841, he was so excessively popular that he was practically the "king of the place."[5] Ryle's mother, Susanna, also came from a wealthy, land-owning family. She was related to Sir Richard Arkwright, the inventor of the

2. John Wesley often mentioned these visits in his journals. See *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, 8 vols. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909–1916), 4:310; 6:14, 100, 226, 411; 7:300. For more information about Methodism in Macclesfield, see Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield* (London: Wesley Conference Office, 1875); and R. B. Walker, "Religious Changes in Cheshire, 1750–1850," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 17 (1966): 77–94.

3. See J. C. Ryle, *Bishop J. C. Ryle's Autobiography: The Early Years*, ed. Andrew Atherstone (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2016), 6.

4. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 5.

5. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 5.

spinning jenny. But neither John nor Susanna showed much interest in spiritual matters.

Ryle recorded in his autobiography that his home was destitute of real spiritual religion. Family prayers were almost never said. His father's spiritual instruction consisted of showing the children pictures in an old Bible on sleepless Sunday nights. His mother's spiritual instruction consisted of nothing more than occasionally listening to the children recite the Church catechism in "a very grave and rather gloomy manner."[6] Sometimes the elderly members of the family read sermons silently on winter Sunday nights, but they looked so "unutterably grave and miserable" that Ryle concluded sermons must be dull and religion must be disagreeable.[7] His first governess was a Socinian, and none of her successors had "any real spirituality about them."[8] The Christian Sabbath was not kept, they had no religious friends or family members, and no Christians ever visited them or brought them any religious books or tracts.[9]

The family regularly attended Christ Church, which was one of only two parish churches in Macclesfield. For a brief period, both churches had evangelical incumbents, which was unusual for the time.[10] They were not, however, succeeded by evangelical clergymen. Ryle described the incumbents of St. Michael's and Christ Church of his childhood as "wretched high and dry sticks of the old school" and remarked, "I can truly say that I passed through childhood and boyhood without hearing a single sermon likely

6. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 62–66.

7. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 62.

8. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 64.

9. Ryle said that the only two books that affected him as a child were Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Mrs. Sherwood's *Conversations on the Church Catechism*.

10. Charles Row, the incumbent of St. Michael's, had an evangelical conversion late in life. David Simpson, the minister of Christ Church from 1779 to 1799, was an outspoken evangelical, popular preacher, and energetic pastor. He regularly allowed John Wesley to preach in his pulpit. See Mark Smith, "David Simpson," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 683–84.

to do good to my soul."[11] He was brought up to regard evangelical clergymen as "well-meaning, extravagant, fanatical enthusiasts, who carried things a great deal too far in religion."[12]

Ryle summed up the spiritual condition of his family and childhood as follows:

> The plain truth is that neither in my own family nor among the Hurts or Arkwrights with whom I was most mixed up when young can I remember that there was a whit of what may be called a real spiritual religion. There was literally nothing to make us young people thorough Christians. We never heard the gospel preached on Sunday and vital Christianity was never brought before us by anybody from the beginning of the year to the end or on a weekday.[13]

**Education**

Ryle was a precocious child and an eager learner. Isaac Eaton, the clerk of St. Michael's, taught him to read, write, and cipher at an early age. Miss Holland, his sister's Unitarian governess, instructed him in the rudiments of Latin as well. By the age of four he had become a proficient reader and was extremely fond of books, especially books about travel, natural history, military battles, and shipwrecks.[14]

In 1824, at the age of eight, Ryle was sent to a preparatory school run by John Jackson, vicar of Over. This was not a happy time in his life. The accommodations were rough and uncomfortable. He was one of seventeen pupils who were lodged in two rooms and shared one washroom. He later remarked, "Of course at

11. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 63.

12. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 64.

13. Ryle, *Autobiography,* 64.

14. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 20. Military battles and seafaring remained a lifelong fascination for Ryle. He regularly used military and maritime illustrations in his sermons.

this rate we could not be very clean."[15] There was also a great deal of "petty bullying and tyranny." For example, with the master's permission, he was tossed in a blanket by the older boys for not rising with the rest of the students. He was thrown to the ceiling and then fell to the floor when a student let go of one corner of the blanket. He suffered a concussion and was sick for some time, but the incident was hushed up and his family was never told.[16] Furthermore, the pupils were often left unsupervised for long periods of time while Rev. Jackson attended to the needs of his parish.

In terms of academics, things were more tolerable. The students were well grounded in Latin and Greek. They were also taught writing, arithmetic, history, geography, French, and dancing. The two most popular sports were cricket and stone throwing, and Ryle excelled at both. Religious instruction was nonexistent, and as a result, the moral condition of the school was deplorable. He later recalled, "As to the religion at the private school there was literally none at all, and I really think we were nothing better than little devils. I can find no other words to express my recollection of our utter ungodliness and boyish immorality."[17]

Ryle's three and a half years at Jackson's preparatory school gave him a good grounding in Latin and Greek; produced a sturdy, independent, and combative young man;[18] and laid a good foundation for future academic success at Eton and beyond. From a moral and spiritual standpoint, however, his education was a complete failure. He recollected, "I am quite certain that I learned more moral evil in a private school then I ever did in my whole life afterwards and most decidedly got no moral good."[19]

15. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 23–24.

16. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 24.

17. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 66.

18. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 25: "I don't think I was an ill-natured, bad-tempered boy, but I was sturdy, very independent and combative. I had a very strong opinion of my own, and never cared a bit for being a minority, and was ready to fight anybody however big if necessary."

19. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 26.

The King's College of Our Lady of Eton beside Windsor was founded by Henry IV in 1440 to combat heresy and provide a clerical education for the middle class.[20] When Ryle entered in January 1828, it was doing neither. His classmates were hardly middle class. Most of them were the sons of noblemen, aristocrats, or the rich and well connected. Religion had no place in the curriculum. The headmaster of the school was the infamous Dr. John Keate, who stands out in the public mind as the supreme symbolic figure of the old unreformed Eton.[21] Keate was an excellent classical scholar, a poet, and an accomplished teacher, but he is probably best remembered for his savage floggings. The curriculum under Keate was exclusively, narrowly, and monotonously classical. Homer, Virgil, and Horace were read in extenso. Under Keate, a student could expect to read through the *Iliad* and *Aeneid* twice during his tenure at Eton. Translations from books of extracts, such as *Scriptores Graeci*, *Scriptores Latini*, and *Scriptores Romani* rounded out the curriculum. Mathematics was optional. History, English literature, and geography were studied only insofar as they had a bearing on the classics. The only natural science that was offered consisted of occasional guest lectures. Religious instruction was nonexistent and even discouraged until the Duke of Newcastle established a scholarship to encourage the study of divinity in 1829.[22]

20. For two of the best histories of Eton, see H. C. Maxwell Lyte, *A History of Eton College 1440–1875* (London: Macmillan, 1877); and Christopher Hollis, *Eton: A History* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1960). See also William Lucas Collins, *Etoniana, Ancient and Modern* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1865); Lionel Cust, *A History of Eton College* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899); Wasey Sterry, *Annals of the King's College of Our Lady of Eton beside Windsor* (London: Methuen, 1898); and Francis St. John Thackeray, *Memoir of Edward Craven Hawtrey D.D., Headmaster and Afterward Provost of Eton* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896).

21. Hollis, *Eton: A History*, 191.

22. Keate's antagonism to religious instruction has been well documented. John Bird Sumner, the archbishop of Canterbury, was forbidden "from saying a single word about God to his pupils" while serving as an assistant master at Eton from 1802 to 1817. Every Sunday afternoon between two and three all the boys