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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE LATE BISHOP CHAVASSE.

BY THE REV. LE B. E. FRENCH, CANON OF CLONFEET.

“**E**SPECIALLY Francis James Chavasse.” It is safe to say that in many churches this addition has been silently made to the Eucharistic commemoration of God’s departed servants within the past couple of months. All over the world there are not a few who rise up and call him blessed. Others will tell of his work for twenty-three years as second Bishop of Liverpool, and his share in the building of the great Cathedral now rising on the bank of the Mersey, which might almost be described as his monument, and beneath whose shadow, in “The Founder’s plot,” his body rests. The present writer met him only once after his elevation to the episcopate, but had the great privilege of knowing him well in earlier days as Friend, Preacher, and Teacher. In casting “at his feet one flower that fades away,” it will help to conciseness if I arrange a few reminiscences under these three heads.

(1) In my first term at Oxford, nearly forty years ago, I was given an introduction to Mr. Chavasse, who at the time was Principal of Wycliffe Hall, a Theological College for graduates of any University. His kindly welcome cheered me much at a time when I was as a stranger in a strange land, and from that day he proved himself a friend indeed. This was characteristic of him. He always had a personal acquaintance with a very large number of undergraduates in the various Colleges, and never missed an opportunity of getting to know one, or showing him any kindness and hospitality possible, or of bringing good influence to bear upon the young life around him. Almost every term he and Mrs. Chavasse (a daughter of Mrs. Maude who wrote the Confirmation hymn, “Thine for ever”) had drawing-room meetings in their house which were addressed by well-known speakers of the Evangelical school, such as Bishop Knox and Colonel Seton Churchill, and attended by men from every College and of all social grades. I remember to have seen the heir to a well-known Irish peerage at one. On Sundays at 9 p.m., after a hard day’s work, it was his custom to deliver a lecture of an informal kind, though carefully prepared, to any members of the University who cared to attend, and “the Iron Room,” which was placed at his disposal, was generally full; and any afternoon one called at Wycliffe Lodge (the Principal’s residence) one would meet a few of the many undergraduates who from time to time found it a pleasant rendezvous. Mr. Chavasse had no official responsibility for any of these. His work among them was voluntary, and in addition to his duties as Head of a Hall. There was little that was attractive in his appearance, except the engaging smile which now and then lit up his habitually grave countenance. “His bodily presence was weak,” and few in those days would have expected him to live to the age of eighty-one. His manner was nearly always serious. Yet it is hardly an

exaggeration to say that all who knew him loved him. He attracted others by "the beauty of holiness," and was immensely respected by leaders of schools of thought widely different from that with which he was associated for his transparent goodness and intense devotion to duty. There is reason to believe that his appointment to the see of Liverpool, which to himself was unexpected and unwelcome, was largely due to the influence exerted in high quarters by Canon (now Bishop) Gore. This appointment was only accepted after consultation with "eight of his wisest friends" who agreed in regarding it as a Call of Duty. It ought perhaps to be said that, though he held his own "Evangelical" views with strong conviction, and always expressed them with scholarly precision of language, he was not, strictly speaking, a party man, and he deplored any exhibition of what might be called an unfair partisanship. I remember him saying, "The Church papers make me sad," and how he mentioned in explanation that the current issue of the *Guardian* reported *in extenso* a sermon by Dr. Gore on some special subject, and the *Record* one by a well-known Low Church preacher, "but," he said, "neither paper makes any allusion to the other sermon." When a reference was made at table to the "extreme views" of Dr. King, the famous Bishop of Lincoln, Chavasse at once remarked upon his saintly character and the good influence he had exerted upon many when he was a Canon of Christ Church. In illustration of the gravity of his own manner it may be mentioned that a favourite sentence of his at parting was "God go with you." One felt instinctively that there was nothing formal or affected in this. One came away from his presence with a sense of a benediction following.

(2) As a *Preacher* he was earnest, forceful, and direct. He used the simplest language, and always showed the divisions of his sermons, like Spurgeon, upon whom I imagine he had modelled his style. In term time he always preached on Sunday evenings at St. Peter-le-Bailey, where he had formerly been Rector. This was a happy arrangement for the clergy of this Church, and in a better sense of the word it was happy for the large congregation which filled it, among whom there was always a good sprinkling of undergraduates. Many will gratefully remember those sermons as long as life shall last. Probably too some who have since become of note in the Church have taken them as models for their own discourses. In this pulpit he was at his best. He did not perhaps appear to such conspicuous advantage at St. Mary's (the University Church) or in College Chapels. The sermon always lasted just half-an-hour, and never seemed long. It almost always followed a particular plan. First, there would be a short, pithy sentence which would arrest attention. Then a sentence or two to "picture the scene" or elucidate the context. The subject would then be treated under four heads. At the close would occur some words which would recall the brief introduction. This orderly arrangement made his sermons easy to store in the mind. He used few metaphors, but many illustrations, often drawn from history or

biography or tales of the Saints. He always preached, at least on these Sunday evenings, in the "extempore" manner, but used a few notes. We of the University had the advantage of hearing now and then the ablest preachers, e.g., Archbishops Benson and Temple, Bishop Boyd Carpenter, Bishop Welldon (then Head Master of Harrow), Cosmo Lang (now the Archbishop of York), Canon Knox-Little, and, greatest of all, Charles Gore. (Canon Liddon died shortly before I "went up.") No one would place Chavasse on a level with these as a pulpit orator, but as a preacher to an ordinary mixed congregation in a parish church he appeared to many without a rival. His simplicity of style and language was not due to ignorance, but to careful preparation. It is probable that this simplicity, coupled with his humility, often veiled from others his fine intellect and sound learning. Though he spoke with great fluency he never willingly did so literally "extempore," and hereby a tale may be hung. On one of the occasions that he visited Dublin to conduct a "Quiet Day" he stayed with the Archbishop, Lord Plunket, whose hospitality he greatly enjoyed. He had not expected to be called upon for more than his set addresses, and was rather taken aback when more than once the Archbishop asked him to speak without preparation at some social gathering. This gave him the impression that the Irish clergy must be very ready speakers.

(3) After I had taken my degree I spent a year at Wycliffe Hall. It is no purpose of these reminiscences to describe the life there, but only to illustrate what manner of man the Principal showed himself to be upon closer acquaintance. The days were fully occupied from Early Chapel at 7.30 a.m. till the last Service at 9 or 9.15 p.m. Mr. Chavasse had the assistance of a Vice-Principal and Chaplain, but he left little for them to do. As a teacher he was particularly interesting and helpful in the daily Greek Testament lesson before breakfast, and in his addresses at a special Service on Friday afternoons. He was full of short pregnant sayings, e.g. "God's bidding is God's enabling"; "We are men of power as we are men of prayer"; "Praying will keep you from sinning, or sinning will keep you from praying." He laid the utmost stress upon the necessity of maintaining after Ordination regular habits of devotion, and pointed to the example of men like the late Mr. Moody and the Swiss Pastor Oberlein, who were powerful preachers because they were mighty in prayer. He insisted on the duty of careful preparation of sermons. "Always prepare your sermons, at all events, till you are sixty." "If you preach exactly the same sermons as you did ten years before, there is something wrong." "In preaching," he said, "you are not to be like Abraham, who 'went out, not knowing whither he went.'" On the other hand, he thought it unreasonable to believe that a carefully prepared sermon had done its work when it was preached once. Other words of advice were, "Aim at preaching 'ex tempore,' but not till you are master of the situation"; "Always choose the subject and text of the coming Sunday's sermon early in the week, and at the close

of the week write fast, with your people before you." "Throw your strength into a few things." He taught a very high standard of Pastoral Visiting. "The glory of the Church of England," he said, "is the parochial system." "Visit at all times, in all weathers, and in all states of health." "If your work is in a town never rest satisfied with less than forty visits paid in the week; if in the country, with less than twenty-five." (He had no experience of amalgamated parishes in Ireland!) He held that a clergyman could not know his flock too well, or they him. Once he said, "I feel still the thrill of indignation I felt when, early in my ministry, I heard another clergyman say that in these days our people know too much about us. They cannot know too much about us. If they do, there is something wrong." One address on "The clergyman in his home" was particularly impressive. A few sentences still live in the memory. "Do not emulate the Hall." "The doubtful novel will find no place on your table." "There must be nothing in the home to over-awe the humblest parishioner, nothing to offend the taste of the most fastidious critic." Another piece of advice was, "Be moderate in your wearing of jewellery if" (with a marked emphasis on the word) "you see fit to wear any." He gave also daily lectures on books of the New Testament, the history of the Prayer Book, Confirmation Classes, etc. I do not recall any address on Catechizing, but I do remember a suggestive hint when he was giving advice as to how to become an "extempore" speaker. "Listen, when you can, to an experienced teacher taking a class in the Day School. It will teach your brain to work quickly." He said there were three books which would help us to become good judges of character, viz. the Bible, *the Pilgrim's Progress*, and Shakespeare's historical plays. In his personal habits he was the soul of method. He was always an early riser, and every day had its appointed duties for each quarter of an hour, except for a brief interval in the afternoon. "Live by rule" was his advice, and he certainly practised it. Early in my own ministry in the King's Co. I was visited by an Oxford rector who remarked on the way "Chavasse sits at his desk to read, like a grown-up schoolboy." Others would wonder how he ever found time for study. "Live by rule" was the explanation. "It makes me ashamed," a friend once said, "to see all that little man gets through." How did he manage it? He lived by rule. His annual bill for books must have been large, as it was his habit to give one to each member of the Hall at the end of term.

Among the books in my own study the following were presents from him: Dale on *The Atonement*, Godet's *Defence of the Christian Faith*, and Archbishop Trench's *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches*.

Some of his pupils have been called to positions of great influence. Among those who are still with us may be instanced the Archbishop of Melbourne and the Bishop of Leicester (late of Peterborough), whose claim upon the gratitude of the present writer is that he taught him to ride a bicycle.

It was during a short visit to the Isle of Man that I had the happiness of meeting Dr. Chavasse after he became Bishop. He was characteristically spending his hardly-earned holiday in taking charge of a country parish in the north of the island. His family were with him in the charming rectory. After luncheon he gave up his share in an expedition that had been planned for the afternoon in order to talk to me. He was impressed by what I told him of the size of an Irish country parish. When I remarked that his own work must be arduous, he admitted that this was so, but added, "It is very happy work." He spoke of his clergy as a devoted body of men, but surprised me (for I had not expected so much confidence), by saying "Unfortunately a few are not up to the mark." I understood him to mean, "from the intellectual standpoint," but perhaps I was wrong. He then said, "I hope after a little we shall be able to remedy that"; a remark which illustrates the power of patronage possessed by an English Bishop, and which might also serve to reveal the latent strength which his gentle manner concealed. When I rose to leave the expected invitation came, "Shall we kneel down?" Some sentences in the prayer that followed are not forgotten, but they are not for repetition, even though the writer has no fear that any who may read his words will wish to "turn and rend him." Though letters have passed between us since I never met him again. Now he has passed over, and it may well be that here and there among those who have learned from him to live close to the Unseen World may be one whose ears have caught some faint echoes of the trumpets sounding on the other side. And assuredly many will long cherish with affection and reverence the memory of that quiet, strong personality, as of one who "allured to brighter worlds, and led the way."

During the coming twelve months Spain is certain to be much in the public eye, as the National Assembly prepares a new Code of Laws which will—if adopted—still further limit the existing tolerance in that kingdom. The Rev. Alex. Stuart, who for many years has worked as a missionary in Spain, gives a description of Romanism in that land in his book, *In Darkest Spain* (Marshall Bros., 3s. 6d.). Taken as a whole, we believe that the volume accurately depicts popular religion in the home of the Inquisition, and many who read it will be distressed by the perversion of Christianity outlined. Bigotry, intolerance and worship indistinguishable from idolatry, are united with superstition incredible to most English Christians. When we contrast Rome as seen in England with what Mr. Stuart outlines, we see how the environment of English Protestantism has changed the ancestral religion of the Mediterranean peoples. The book makes interesting—if sad reading.
