

THE  
CHRISTIAN LEADERS  
OF  
**The Last Century;**  
OR,  
ENGLAND A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

*By the*  
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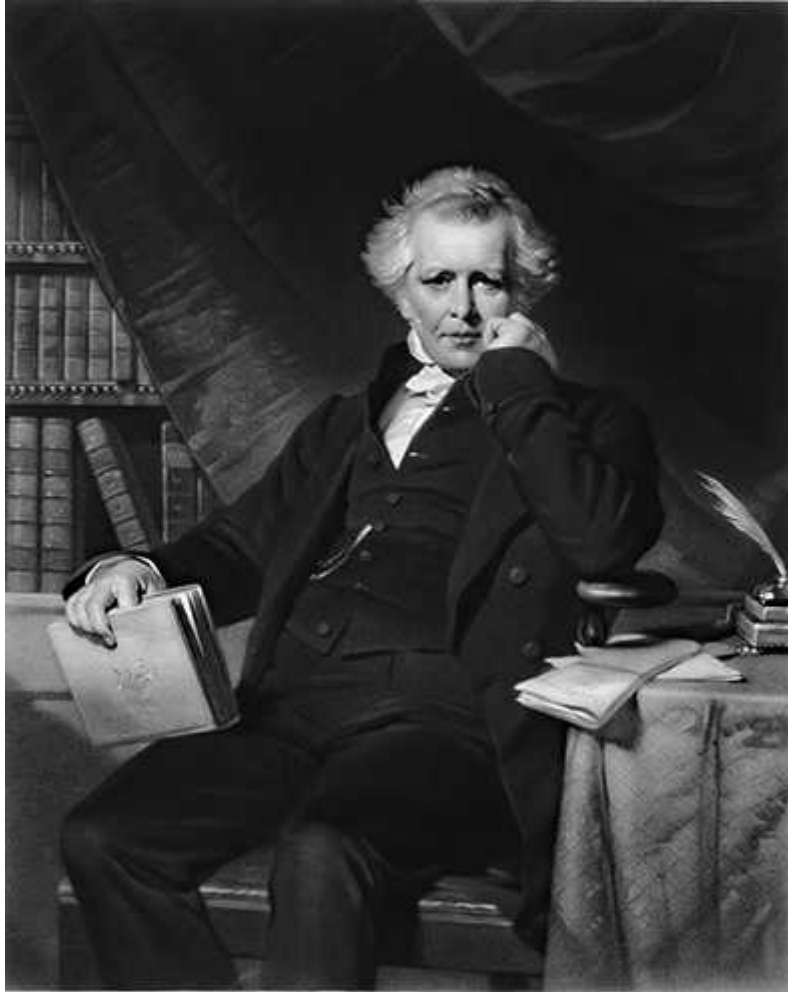
"Enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of  
their fathers."—JOB viii. 8.

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Portrait by Henry Cousins after George Richmond, 1864AD.

## IX.

### *Henry Venn and his Ministry.*

#### CHAPTER I.

Born at Barnes, Surrey, 1724—His Ancestors—Curious Anecdotes of his Boyhood and Youth—Enters St. John's, Cambridge, 1742—Fellow of Queen's, 1749—Curate of West Horsley, 1750—Curate of Clapham, 1754—Change in his Religious Views—Becomes acquainted with Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon—Married, 1757—Vicar of Huddersfield, 1759.

**T**HE seventh spiritual hero of the last century to whom I wish to direct the attention of my readers, is one better known than several of his contemporaries. The man I mean is Henry Venn, for some time Vicar of Huddersfield, in Yorkshire, and afterwards Vicar of Yelling, in Huntingdonshire. He is the only English minister of the eighteenth century whom I consider

worthy to be ranked with the six whose memoirs I have already put together—viz., Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw, Romaine, Rowlands, and Berridge. These seven men appear to me, in some respects, to stand alone in the religious history of England a hundred years ago. Beside them, no doubt, there were many others of eminent grace and gifts. But none attained to the degree of the first seven.

One reason why Henry Venn is better known than many of his day, is the excellence of the only biography of him. Few men certainly have been so fortunate in their biographers as the evangelical Vicar of Huddersfield. In the whole range of Christian memoirs, I know few volumes so truly valuable as the single volume of “Henry Venn’s Life and Letters.” I never take it down from my shelves without thinking of the words which our great poet puts in the mouth of Queen Katherine:—

“After my death I wish no other herald,  
No other speaker of my living actions,  
To keep mine honour from corruption,  
But such an honest chronicler as—.”

*Henry VIII.*, Act iv. sc. 2.

In fact, almost the only fault I find with the book is one which is most rare in a biography—it is too short!

Another reason why Henry Venn’s name is so well known to English evangelical Christians, is the happy circumstance that he left behind him children who followed him “even as he followed Christ.” His son, and his son’s sons, have all been thoroughly like-minded with him. For more than a century there has never been wanting a minister of his name within the pale of the Church of England, to preach the same doctrine which he preached in the pulpit of Huddersfield. The name of “Venn” has consequently never ceased to be before the public. When Whitefield and Wesley and Berridge were laid in their graves, they left no sons “to keep their name in remembrance,” however numerous their spiritual children may have been. But the family-name of Venn has been so much in men’s mouths for three generations, that there are few English Christians who are not acquainted with it.

While, however, I fully admit that Henry Venn’s name is well known in this country, I cannot help thinking that there is much confusion in men’s minds as to the period of his ministry, and the time when he died. Some, I know, are in the habit of speaking of him as a contemporary of Scott, and Cecil, and Simeon. Even a writer like Sir James Stephen, in an article contributed to the *Edinburgh Review*, speaks of him as the last of four evangelical fathers,” of whom Scott, Newton, and Milner were the first three! All these ideas about Venn are totally inaccurate. The authors of them, I suspect,

confound Henry Venn with his son John Venn of Clapham. Henry Venn belonged to an earlier generation, and was well known and popular long before Newton, or Scott, or Cecil, or Simeon, or Milner, were ever heard of. To class him with these good men is an entire mistake. His true place is with Whitefield, and Wesley, and Grimshaw, and Rowlands, and Romaine, and Beridge. These were the men by whose side he laboured. These were the men with whom he must be ranked. To clear up Henry Venn's true history, and to convey some correct information about the main facts of his life and ministry, is the object that I set before me in the present memoir. Once for all, I wish it to be understood that the men I undertake to write about in this work are men of the last century. The men of the present century are men that I purposely leave alone.

Henry Venn was born at Barnes, in Surrey, on the 2nd of March 1724—within twenty-one years of the birth of John Wesley. He was the descendant of a long line of clergymen, reaching downwards in unbroken succession from the time of the Reformation. William Venn died vicar of Otterton, Devonshire, in 1621. Richard Venn, his son, succeeded him at Otterton; and after suffering greatly for his steadfast adherence to the Church of England in the Commonwealth times, died quietly in possession of his living. After him, his son, Dennis Venn, died vicar of Holberton, in Devonshire, in 1691. And finally his son, Richard Venn, rector of St. Antholin's, in the City of London, was the father of the subject of this memoir. These facts are full of interest. At the present day the name of Venn has appeared for seven generations in the clergy list of the Church of England!

Henry Venn's father is said to have been "an exemplary and learned minister, very zealous for the interests of the Church of England, and remarkable for great liberality towards the poor, and especially towards distressed clergymen." Little is known about him, except the fact that he was the son of a very strong-minded mother, who said that "Richard should not go to school till he had learned to say 'No.'" He was once brought into much public notice, and incurred obloquy, on account of the opposition which he made, in conjunction with Bishop Gibson, to the appointment of Dr. Rundle to the Bishopric of Gloucester. The grounds of his objection were certain expressions which he had heard Dr. Rundle use, of a deistical tendency; and the result of his opposition was, that Dr. Rundle was actually kept out of the see of Gloucester, and was obliged to content himself with the Irish bishopric of Derry.<sup>1</sup> When we remember what times they were when these things happened, and what kind of a man Dr. Rundle's patron, Sir Robert Walpole, was,

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<sup>1</sup> It is only fair and just to the character of one long dead to say, that living descendants or connections of Dr. Rundle deny the correctness of the statement here made about his opinions. I can only say that my authority is Mr. Venn's biography.

it is impossible not to admire the courage and conscientiousness which Richard Venn displayed in the affair. He died at the early age of forty-eight, when his son Henry was only fifteen years old.

The facts recorded about Henry Venn, as a boy, are few, but interesting. They are enough to show that from his earliest childhood he was a “thorough” and decided character, and one who never did anything by halves. In fact, Dr. Gloucester Ridley was so struck with his energy of character when young, that he said, “This boy will go up Holborn, and either stop at Ely Place (then the London palace of the Bishop of Ely), or go on to Tyburn!” (the place where criminals were hanged.) The following three anecdotes will show what kind of a boy he was. I give them in his son’s own words:—“While he was yet a child, Sir Robert Walpole attempted to introduce more extensively the system of Excise. A violent opposition was excited, and the popular feeling ran strongly against the measure. Young Henry Venn caught the alarm, and could not sleep in his bed lest the Excise Bill should pass; and on the day when it was to be submitted to Parliament, his boyish zeal made him leave his father’s house early, and wander through the streets, crying ‘No Excise!’ till the evening, when he returned home exhausted with fatigue, and with his voice totally lost by his patriotic exertions.”

“A gentleman, who was reported to be an Arian, called one day upon his father. Young Henry Venn, then a mere child, came into the room, and with a grave countenance earnestly surveyed him. The gentleman, observing the notice which the child took of him, began to show him some civil attentions, but found all his friendly overtures sternly rejected. At length, upon his earnestly soliciting him to come to him, the boy indignantly replied, ‘I will not come near you; for you are an Arian.’”

“As he adopted with all his heart the opinions which he imbibed, he early entertained a most vehement dislike of all Dissenters. It happened that a Dissenting minister’s son, two or three years older than himself, lived in the same street in London with his father; and young Henry Venn, in his zeal for the Church, made no scruple to attack and fight the unfortunate Nonconformist whenever he met him. It was a curious circumstance, that, many years after, he became acquainted with this very individual, who was then a Dissenting minister. He frankly confessed that young Venn had been the terror of his youthful days, and acknowledged that he never dared leave his father’s door till he had carefully looked on every side to see that this young champion of the Church was not in the street.”

Henry Venn’s education began at the age of twelve, in a school at Mortlake, near Barnes. From this school he was removed to one kept by a Mr. Croft, at Fulham, but only stayed there a few months. He left at his own request under very singular circumstances. He complained to his mother, as very few boys ever do, “that his master was too indulgent, and the discipline

was not sufficiently strict.” From Fulham he went to a school at Bristol, kept by Mr. Catcott, author of a work on the Deluge, and an excellent scholar, though a severe master. From thence he removed to a school kept by Dr. Pitman at Markgate Street, in Hertfordshire, and there finished his early education.

In June 1742, at the age of seventeen, Henry Venn entered St. John’s College, Cambridge. He only continued a member of that house three months, as he removed to Jesus College in September, on obtaining a scholarship there, and remained on the books of Jesus for seven years. In the year 1745, he took the degree of B.A. In 1747, he was appointed by Dr. Battie, who had been a ward of his father’s, to one of the university scholarships which he had just founded; and in June the same year he was ordained deacon by Bishop Gibson, without a title, from the respect which the bishop bore to his father’s memory. In 1749, he became M.A., and was elected Fellow of Queen’s College. This was the last of the many steps and changes in his educational career. At this date his ministerial life begins; and although he held his fellowship until his marriage, in 1757, from this time he had little more close connection with Cambridge.

Henry Venn’s ministerial life began in 1749, when he was twenty-five years old.<sup>2</sup> He first served the curacy of Barton, near Cambridge, and afterwards officiated for various friends, at Wadenhoe in Northamptonshire, and Little Hedingham in Essex, and other places of which I cannot find out the names. In 1750 he ceased to reside at Cambridge, and became curate of Mr. Langley, rector of St. Matthew, Friday Street, London, and West Horsley, near Guildford. Venn’s duty was to serve the church in London during part of the summer, and to reside the remainder of the year at Horsley. In this position he remained continuously for four years, until he became curate of Clapham in 1754.

I can find no evidence that Venn had any distinct theological views for some little time after he was ordained. In fact, he appears, like too many, to have taken on him the holy office of a minister without any adequate conception of its duties and responsibilities. It is clear that he was moral and conscientious, and had a high idea of the department suited to the clerical life. But it is equally clear that he knew nothing whatever of evangelical religion; and in aftertime he regarded his college days as “days of vanity and ignorance.”

One thing, however, is very plain in Venn’s early history—he was scrupulously honest and conscientious in acting up faithfully to anything which

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<sup>2</sup> By a comparison of dates it would appear that Henry Venn became a Fellow, was ordained, and took a curacy near Cambridge in the very same year that the famous John Bertridg became curate of Stapleford, near Cambridge. But I can find no proof that they were friends at this tune.

he was convinced was right. Indeed, he used often to say “that he owed the salvation of his soul to the resolute self-denial which he exercised, in following the dictates of conscience in a point which seemed itself of only small importance.”

“The case,” says his son, “was this: He was extremely fond of cricket, and was reckoned one of the best players in the university. In the week before he was ordained he played in a match between Surrey and All England, which excited great interest, and was attended by a very numerous body of spectators. When the game terminated in favour of the side on which he was playing, he threw down his bat, saying, ‘Whoever wants a bat which has done me good service may take that, as I have no further occasion for it.’ His friends inquiring the reason, he replied, ‘Because I am to be ordained on Sunday; and I will never have it said of me, “Well struck, parson.”’ To this resolution, notwithstanding the remonstrances of friends, he strictly adhered; and, though his health suffered by a sudden transition from a course of most violent exercise to a life of comparative inactivity, he never could be persuaded to play any more. From being faithful in a little, more grace was imparted to him.”

“His first considerable religious impressions,” adds his son, “arose from an expression in the form of prayer, which he had been accustomed to use daily, but, like most persons, without paying much attention to it—‘That I may live to the glory of thy name.’ The thought powerfully struck his mind, ‘What is it to live to the glory of God? Do I live as I pray? What course of life ought I to pursue to glorify God? After much reflection, he came to the conclusion that to live to God’s glory required that he should live a life of piety and religion in a degree in which he had not yet lived; and that he ought to be more strict in prayer, more diligent in reading the Scriptures and pious books, and more generally holy in his conduct. And, seeing the reasonableness of such a course of life, he showed his honesty and uprightness by immediately and steadily pursuing it. He set apart stated seasons for meditation and prayer, and kept a strict account of the manner in which he spent his time and regulated his conduct. I have heard him say that, at this period, he used to walk almost every evening in the cloisters of Trinity College while the great bell of St. Mary’s was tolling at nine o’clock, and amidst the solemn tones of the bells, and in the stillness and darkness of the night, he would indulge in impressive reflections on death and judgment, heaven and hell.”<sup>3</sup>

“In this frame of mind,” his son continues, “Law’s ‘Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life’ was particularly useful to him. He read it repeatedly, with peculiar interest, and immediately began, with great sincerity, to frame

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<sup>3</sup> The close resemblance between Henry Venn’s experience at Cambridge, and George Whitefield’s at Oxford, cannot fail to strike any one who reads attentively the biographies of the two men.

his life according to the Christian model there delineated. He kept a diary of the state of his mind—a practice from which he derived great benefit, though not in the way he expected, for it chiefly made him better acquainted with his own deficiencies. He also allotted the hours of the day, as far as was consistent with the duties of his station, to particular acts of meditation and devotion. He kept frequent fasts; and was accustomed often to take solitary walks, in which his soul was engaged in prayer and communion with God. I have heard him mention, that in these retired walks in the meadow behind Jesus College he had such a view of the goodness, mercy, and glory of God, as elevated his soul above the world, and made him aspire toward God as his supreme good.”

Such was the religious condition of Henry Venn’s mind when he first began the active work of the Christian ministry. Earnest, zealous, moral, conscientious, and scrupulously determined to do his duty, he put his hand to the plough and went forward. At Barton he distributed religious tracts and conversed with the poor in such an affectionate manner, that some remembered him after an interval of thirty years. At Horsley he instructed many of the poor on the week-days at his own home. His family prayers were attended by thirty or forty poor neighbours, and the number of communicants increased from twelve to sixty. In fact, the neighbouring clergy began to regard him as an enthusiast and a Methodist. But his zeal, unhappily, was so far entirely without knowledge. He knew nothing whatever of the real gospel of Christ, and, of course, could tell his hearers nothing about it. The consequence was, that for nearly four years of his ministerial life his labours were in vain.

Henry Venn’s four years at Horsley, however, were by no means thrown away. If he did little good to others, he certainly learned lessons there of lasting benefit to his soul. The solitude and seclusion of his position gave him abundant time for reading, meditation, and prayer; and in the honest use of such means as he had, God was graciously pleased to show him more light, and to lead him onward towards the full knowledge of the gospel. Little by little he began to find out that “Law’s” divinity was very defective, and that his favourite author did not give sufficient honour to Christ. Little by little he began to discover that he was, in reality, trying to “work out a righteousness” of his own, while, in truth, he had nothing to boast of; and that, with all his straining after perfection, he was nothing better than a poor weak sinner. Little by little he began to see that true Christianity was a scheme providing for man’s wants as a ruined, fallen, and corrupt creature; and that the root of all vital religion is faith in the blood and righteousness and mediation and mercy of a Divine Saviour—Christ the Lord. The scales began to fall from his eyes. The tone of his preaching began sensibly to alter. And though, when



he left Horsley for Clapham he had not even yet attained full light, it is perfectly evident that he went out of the parish in a totally different state of mind from that with which he entered. It was true that even now he “saw men as trees, walking;” but it is no less true that he could have said, “I was blind, and now I see.”

I pity the man who can read the story of Henry Venn’s religious experience without deep interest. The steps by which God leads his children on from one degree of light to another are all full of instruction. Seldom does He seem to bring his people into the full enjoyment of spiritual knowledge all at once. We must not, therefore, “despise the day of small things.” We should rather respect those who fight their way out of darkness and grope after truth. What has been won by hard fighting is often that which wears the longest. Theological principles taken up second-hand have often no root, and endure but for a little season. Striking and curious is the similarity in the experience of Whitefield, Berridge, and Venn. They all had to fight hard for spiritual light; and having found it, they held it fast, and never let it go.

The five years during which Henry Venn was curate of Clapham completely settled his theological creed, and formed a turning-point in his religious history. His work there was very heavy, as he held two lectureships in London, beside his curacy. His regular duty on Sunday consisted of a full service at Clapham in the morning; a sermon in the afternoon at St. Alban’s, Wood Street; and another in the evening at Swithin’s, London Stone. On Tuesday morning, he preached again at Swithin’s; on Wednesday morning, at seven o’clock, at his father’s old church, St. Antholin’s; and on Thursday evening at Clapham. To preach six sermons every week was undoubtedly a heavy demand on a curate of only four years’ standing! Yet it is not unlikely that the very necessity for exertion which his position entailed on him was the means of calling forth latent power. Men never know how much they can do, until they are put under the screw, and obliged to exert themselves. At any rate Venn was compelled to learn how to preach from notes, from sheer inability to write six sermons a-week, and thus attained a facility in extemporaneous speaking which he afterwards found most useful.

In a spiritual point of view, Venn’s character was greatly influenced, during his five years’ residence at Clapham, by three circumstances. The first of these was a severe illness of eight months’ duration, which laid him aside from work in 1756, and gave him time for reflection and self-examination. The second was his marriage, in 1757, to the daughter of Dr. Bishop, minister of the Tower Church, Ipswich; a lady who, from her piety and good sense, seems to have been admirably qualified to be a clergyman’s wife. The third, and probably the most important circumstance of his position, was the friendship that he formed with several eminent Christians, who were of great use

to his soul. At Horsley he seems to have had no help from any one, and whatever he learned there he did not learn from man. At Clapham, on the contrary, he at once became intimate with the well-known layman John Thornton and Dr. Haweis, and afterwards with George Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon.

To Lady Huntingdon, Henry Venn seems to have been under peculiar obligations for advice and counsel. The following extract from a letter which she addressed to him about the defects in his first preaching at Clapham, is an interesting example of her faithfulness, and throws much light on the precise state of her correspondent's mind at this period. She says: "O my friend, we can make no atonement to a violated law; we have no inward holiness of our own; the Lord Jesus Christ is 'the Lord our righteousness.' Cling not to such beggarly elements, such filthy rags, mere cobwebs of Pharisaical pride; but look to him who hath wrought out a perfect righteousness for his people. You find it a hard task to come naked and miserable to Christ; to come divested of every recommendation but that of abject wretchedness and misery, and receive from the outstretched hand of our Immanuel the riches of redeeming grace. But if you come at all you must come thus; and, like the dying thief, the cry of your heart must be, 'Lord, remember me.' There must be no conditions; Christ and Christ alone must be the only mediator between God and sinful men; no miserable performance can be placed between the sinner and the Saviour. And now, my dear friend, no longer let false doctrine disgrace your pulpit. Preach Christ crucified as the only foundation of the sinner's hope. Preach him as the Author and Finisher as well as the sole Object of faith, that faith which is the gift of God. Exhort Christless sinners to fly to the City of Refuge; to look to Him who is exalted as Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sins. Go on, then, and may your bow abide in strength. Be bold, be firm, be decided. Let Christ be the Alpha and Omega of all you advance in your addresses to your fellow-men. Leave the consequences to your Divine Master. May his gracious benediction rest upon your labours! and may you be blessed to the conversion of very many, who shall be your joy and crown of rejoicing in the great day when the Lord shall appear."—The date of this faithful letter is not given. I am inclined, however, to conjecture that it was written between the time of Venn's illness in 1756 and his marriage in 1757. At any rate, it is a remarkable fact, recorded by his son, that he used to observe that after 1756 he was no longer able to preach the sermons which he had previously composed. Lady Huntingdon's faithful letter was probably not written in vain.

Whatever defects there may have been in Venn's doctrinal views during the first few years of his Clapham ministry, they appear to have completely vanished after his restoration to health in 1757. He was soon recognized as a worthy fellow-labourer with that noble little company of evangelists which, under the leading of Whitefield and Wesley, was beginning to shake the land;

and from his gifts as a preacher took no mean position among them. Whitefield seems especially to have delighted in him. In a letter written some time in 1757, he says to Lady Huntingdon: “The worthy Venn is valiant for the truth, a son of thunder. He labours abundantly, and his ministry has been owned of the Lord to the conversion of sinners. Thanks be to God for such an instrument to strengthen our hands! I know the intelligence will rejoice your ladyship. Your exertions in bringing him to a clearer knowledge of the everlasting gospel have indeed been blessed. He owes your ladyship much, under God, and I believe his whole soul is gratitude to the Divine Author of mercies, and to you the honoured instrument in leading him to the fountain of truth.” Testimony like this is unexceptionable. George Whitefield was one of the last men on earth to be satisfied with any preaching which was not the full gospel. We cannot for a moment doubt that (during the last two years of Venn’s curacy at Clapham, he at length walked in the full light of Christ’s truth, and declared all the counsel of God.”

In the year 1759, Henry Venn was appointed vicar of Huddersfield, in Yorkshire, by Sir John Ramsden, at the solicitation of Lord Dartmouth. He accepted the appointment from the purest of all motives, a desire to do good to souls. The town itself presented no great attractions. In point of income he was positively a loser by the move from Clapham. But he felt deeply that the offer opened “a great and effectual door” of usefulness, and he did not dare to turn away from it. He seems also to have had a strong impression that he had not been successful at Clapham, and that this was an indication that he ought not to refuse a change. His wife was averse to his moving; and her opinion no doubt placed him in much perplexity. But the result showed beyond doubt that he decided rightly. In leaving Clapham for Yorkshire, he was in God’s way.

Henry Venn became vicar of Huddersfield at the age of thirty-five, and continued there only twelve years. He went there a poor man, without rank or influence, and with nothing but God’s truth on his side. He found the place a huge, dark, ignorant, immoral, irreligious, manufacturing town. He left it shaken to the centre by the lever of the gospel, and leavened with the influence of many faithful servants of Jesus Christ, whom he had been the means of turning from darkness to light. Few modern ministers appear to have had so powerful an influence on a town population as Henry Venn had on Huddersfield. The nearest approach to it seems to have been the work of Robert M’Cheyne at Dundee.

The story of Henry Venn’s life from the time of his settlement at Huddersfield is a subject which I must reserve for another chapter. I do not feel that I could possibly do justice to it now. How he lived, and worked, and preached, and prospered in his great manufacturing parish—how he turned the world upside down throughout the district around, and became a centre

of light and life to hundreds—how his health finally gave way under the abundance of his labours, and obliged him to leave Huddersfield—how he spent the last twenty years of his life in the comparative retirement of a little rural parish in Huntingdonshire,—all these are matters which I cannot enter into now. I hope to tell my readers something about them in another chapter.

## CHAPTER II.

Mode of Working at Huddersfield—Effect of his Ministry—Fruits found in 1824—Extra-parochial Labours—Friendly relation with Whitefield—Health Fails—Wife Dies—Leaves Huddersfield for Yelling, 1771—Description of Yelling—Second Marriage—Description of Life at Yelling—Dies, 1797.

HENRY VENN was Vicar of Huddersfield from 1759 to 1771. These twelve years, we need not doubt, were the period of his greatest public usefulness. In the full vigour of his bodily and mental faculties, with his mind thoroughly made up about all the leading doctrines of the gospel, with his heart thoroughly set on his Master's business, he entered his new sphere with peculiar power and acceptance, and soon "made full proof of his ministry." His time there was certainly short, if measured by years alone, in consequence of his failing health; but it measured by action and usefulness, like Edward the Sixth's reign, it was very long indeed.

For more than one reason a peculiar interest attaches to Venn's ministry at Huddersfield. For one thing, he was the only one of the seven spiritual heroes of the last century who ever became incumbent of a large town population. Wesley and Whitefield were itinerant evangelists, whose parish was the world. Romaine was the rector of a little confined district in the City. Rowlands lived and died among Welsh mountains, Grimshaw on Yorkshire moors, and Berridge on Bedfordshire plains. Venn was the only man among the seven who could number his lawful parishioners by thousands.—For another thing, he was the first evangelical clergyman in the Church of England who proved that the manufacturing masses of our fellow-countrymen can be thoroughly reached by the gospel.

He proved to a demonstration that the working-classes in our great northern towns are to be got at just like other men, if they are approached in the proper way. He proved that the preaching of the cross suits the wants of all Adam's children, and that it can "turn the world upside down" among looms and coal-mines, just as thoroughly as it can in watering-places, country parishes, or metropolitan chapels-of-ease. We all know this now. Nobody would dream of denying it. But we must remember it was not so well known a hundred years ago. Let honour be given where honour is due. The first clergyman in England who fairly proved the power of evangelical aggression on a manufacturing parish, was Henry Venn.

A clergyman's work in a large town district in the last century was very unlike what it is in these times. A vast quantity of religious machinery, with which every one is familiar now, in those days did not exist. City missions, Scripture readers' societies, Pastoral aid societies, Bible women, mothers' meetings, were utterly unknown. Even schools for the children of the poor were few, and comparatively defective, and utterly out of proportion to the

wants of the population. In short, the evangelical minister of a great town a hundred years ago was almost entirely shut up to the use of one weapon. The good old apostolical plan of incessant preaching, both “publicly and from house to house,” was nearly the only machine that he could use. He was forced to be pre-eminently a man of one thing, and a soldier with one weapon, a perpetual preacher of God’s Word. Whether in the long run the minister of last century did not do more good with his one weapon than many do in modern times with an immense train of parochial machinery, is a question which admits of much doubt. My own private opinion is, that we have too much lost sight of apostolical simplicity in our ministerial work. We want more men of “one thing” and “one book,” men who make everything secondary to preaching the Word. It is hard to have many irons in the fire at once, and to keep them all hot. It is quite possible to make an idol of parochial machinery, and for the sake of it to slight the pulpit.

These things ought to be carefully remembered in forming an estimate of Venn’s ministry at Huddersfield. Let us never forget that he went to his great Yorkshire parish, like David against Goliath, with nothing but his sling and stones, and an unwavering faith in the power of God. He went there with no sympathizing London committee to correspond with him, encourage him, and assist him with funds. He went there with no long-tried plans and approved modes of evangelical aggression in his pocket. He went there with nothing but his Bible, and his Master at his side. Bearing these things in mind, I think the following extracts from his admirable biography ought to possess a peculiar interest in our eyes.

His son, John Venn, says: “As soon as he began to preach at Huddersfield, the church became crowded to such an extent that many were not able to procure admission. Numbers became deeply impressed with concern about their immortal souls; persons flocked from the distant hamlets, inquiring what they must do to be saved. He found them in general utterly ignorant of their state by nature, and of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. His bowels yearned over his flock, and he was never satisfied with his labours among them, though they were continued to a degree ruinous to his health. On the Sunday he would often address the congregation from the desk, briefly explaining the psalms and the lessons. He would frequently begin the service with a solemn and most impressive address, exhorting the worshippers to consider themselves as in the presence of the great God of heaven, whose eye was in a particular manner upon them, while they drew nigh to him in his own house. His whole soul was engaged in preaching; and as at this time he only used short notes in the pulpit, ample room was left to indulge the feelings of compassion, tenderness, and love, with which his heart overflowed towards his people. In the week he stately visited the different hamlets in his extensive parish; and collecting some of the inhabitants at a private

house, he addressed them with a kindness and earnestness which moved every heart.” A letter written in 1762 to Lady Huntingdon, informs us that in that year, beside his stated work on the Lord’s day, the Vicar of Huddersfield generally preached eight or ten sermons in the week in distant parts of the parish, when many came to hear who would not come to church. It also mentions that his outdoor preaching was found especially useful.

His grandson, Henry Venn, has gathered some additional facts about his Huddersfield ministry, which are well worth recording. He tells us that “Mr. Venn made a great point of the due observance of the Sabbath, both in the town and parish. He induced several of the most respectable and influential inhabitants to perambulate the town, and by persuasion, rather than by legal intimidation, to repress the open violation of the day. By such means a great and evident reformation was accomplished.”

“He endeavoured to preserve the utmost reverence and devotion in public worship, constantly pressing this matter upon his people. He read the service with peculiar solemnity and effect. The *Te Deum*, especially, was recited with a triumphant air and tone, which often produced a perceptible sensation throughout the whole congregation. He succeeded in inducing the people to join in the responses and singing. Twice in the course of his ministry at Huddersfield he preached a course of sermons in explanation of the Liturgy. On one occasion, as he went up to church, he found a considerable number of persons in the churchyard, waiting for the commencement of the service. He stopped to address them, saying, he hoped they were preparing their hearts for the service of God, and that he had himself much to do to preserve his heart in a right frame. He concluded by waving his hand for them to go into the church before him, and waited till they had all entered.”

“He took great pains in catechizing the younger members of his congregation, chiefly those who were above fourteen years of age. The number was often very considerable; and he wrote out for their use a very copious Explanation of the Church Catechism, in the way of questions and answers.”<sup>4</sup>

The immediate effects produced by Henry Venn’s preaching appear to have been singularly deep, powerful, and permanent. Both his son and grandson have supplied some striking illustrations of them.

His son says: “A club, chiefly composed of Socinians, in a neighbouring market-town, having heard much censure and ridicule bestowed upon the preaching of Henry Venn, sent two of their ablest members to hear this

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<sup>4</sup> I cannot make out whether this Explanation of the Church Catechism was ever published. It certainly does not appear in a complete manuscript catalogue of Mr. Venn’s writings which, by the kindness of one of his descendants, is now lying before me. If it was ever published, it seems a pity that it has fallen out of sight, and is not better known. Something, perhaps, would be known of it in the town of Huddersfield at this day. Can any reader throw light on the point?

strange preacher, detect his absurdities, and furnish matter of merriment for the next meeting. They accordingly went to Huddersfield Church; but were greatly struck, on entering, by seeing the multitude that was assembled together, and by observing the devotion of their behaviour, and their anxiety to attend the worship of God. When Mr. Venn ascended the reading-desk, he addressed his flock, as usual, with a solemnity and dignity which showed him to be deeply interested in the work in which he was engaged. The subsequent earnestness of his preaching, and the solemn appeals he made to conscience, deeply impressed the visitors, so that one of them observed, as they left the church, ‘Surely God is in this place! There is no matter for laughter here!’ This gentleman immediately called on Mr. Venn, told him who he was, and the purpose for which he had come, and earnestly begged his forgiveness and his prayers. He requested Mr. Venn to visit him without delay, and left the Socinian congregation; and from that time to the hour of his death became one of Mr. Venn’s most faithful and affectionate friends.”<sup>5</sup>

“Another gentleman, highly respectable for his character, talents, and piety, the late William Hey, Esq., of Leeds, used frequently to go to Huddersfield to hear Mr. Venn preach, and he assured me that once returning home with an intimate friend, they neither of them opened their lips to each other till they came within a mile of Leeds, a distance of fifteen miles, so deeply were they impressed by the truths which they had heard, and the manner in which they had been delivered.”

Henry Venn’s grandson visited Huddersfield in 1824, fifty-three years after his honoured grandfather had left the place. On inquiry he found that even after the lapse of half a century, the fruits of his wonderful ministry were yet remaining on earth. The memorials he gathered together from these survivors of the old congregation are so deeply interesting that I am sure my readers will be glad to hear them, though in a somewhat abridged form.

Mr. Venn’s grandson says: “Through the kind assistance of Benjamin Hudson, Esq., of Huddersfield, I saw all the old people then living in the town and neighbourhood who had received their first religious impressions under my grandfather’s ministry, and still maintained a religious character. They were all in the middle or lower ranks of life; none of a superior class had survived. What I am about to record must, therefore, be received as the genuine and unstudied testimony of persons of plain, unpolished sense.

“Mr. William Brook of Longwood gave me the following account of the first sermon he heard at Huddersfield Church: ‘I was first led to go by listening with an uncle of mine, named W. Mellor, at the door of a prayer-meeting: we thought there must be something uncommon to make people so earnest. My uncle was about nineteen, and I was about sixteen; and we went together

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<sup>5</sup> This gentleman was James Kershaw, Esq., of Halifax.



to the church one Thursday evening. There was a great crowd within the church, all silent, and many weeping. The text was, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." W. Mellor was deeply attentive; and when we came out of church we did not say a word to each other till we got some way into the fields. Then W. Mellor stopped, leaned his back against a wall, and burst into tears, saying, "I can't stand this." His conviction of sin was from that time most powerful, and he became quite a changed character. I was not so much affected at that time; but I could not after that sermon be easy in sin. I began to pray regularly; and so, by degrees, I was brought to know myself, and to seek salvation in earnest. The people used to go from Longwood in droves, to Huddersfield Church, three miles off. Some of them came out of church together, whose ways home were in this direction; and they used to stop at the Firs' End, about a mile off, and talk over, for some time, what they had heard, before they separated to go to their homes. That place has been to me like a little heaven below!

"I never heard a minister like him. He was most powerful in unfolding the terrors of the law. When doing so, he had a stern look that would make you tremble. Then he would turn off to the offers of grace, and begin to smile, and go on entreating till his eyes filled with tears.'

"The next person I saw was George Crow, aged eighty-two, of Lockwood, a hamlet about a mile from the town. When I asked him whether he ever thought of old times, he answered, 'Ah, yes! and shall do to the last. I thought when Mr. Venn went I should be like Rachel for the rest of my days, weeping and refusing to be comforted. I was abidingly impressed the first time I heard him, at an early period of his ministry. He was such a preacher as I never heard before or since; he struck upon the passions like no other man. Nobody could help being affected: the most wicked and ill-conditioned men went to hear him, and fell like slaked lime in a moment, even though they were not converted. I could have heard him preach all the night through.'

"I also visited Ellen Roebuck, eighty-five, living at Almondbury. She was very deaf and infirm, but when she understood the object of my visit she talked with great energy. 'I well remember his first coming to Huddersfield, and the first sermon he preached. It was on that text, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved:" and it was as true of himself as it was of St. Paul. He took every method for instructing the people; he left nothing unturned. Always at work! it was a wonder he had not done for himself sooner. The lads he catechized used to tell him that people said he was teaching a new doctrine, and leading us into error; but he always replied, "Never mind them; do not answer them; read your Bibles, and press forward, dear lads; press forward, and you cannot miss heaven.'" "

"I saw also John Starkey of Cawcliff, aged eighty. As I conversed with him, he seemed gradually to wake up, till his countenance glistened with

joy. He said, 'I esteemed Mr. Venn too much for a man. I almost forgot that he was a creature and an instrument. His going away went nearer to my heart than anything. He was a wonderful preacher. When he got warm with his subject, he looked as if he would jump out of his pulpit. He made many weep. I have often wept at his sermons. I could have stood to hear him till morning. When he came up to the church, he used to go round the church-yard and drive us all in before him.'

I make no excuse for making the above extracts. They speak for themselves. I pity the man who can read them without interest. If after fifty years such living witnesses to the power of Henry Venn's ministry could be found, what may we suppose must have been the effect of his preaching in his day and generation? If the direct good he did was so marked and unmistakable, what a vast amount of indirect good must have been done by his presence in the district where God placed him?

We must not for a moment suppose that Henry Venn's labours in Christ's cause were entirely confined to Huddersfield during the time that he was vicar of that parish. So far from this being the case, there is abundant evidence that he occasionally did the work of an evangelist in many parts of England very distant from Yorkshire. We possess no journal of his movements, but a close examination of that interesting but oddly-arranged book, "Lady Huntingdon's Life and Times," shows plainly that the Vicar of Huddersfield preached every year in many pulpits besides his own. It could hardly be otherwise. He was on terms of intimate friendship with all the leading evangelists of his day, such as Wesley, Whitefield, Grimshaw, and Fletcher. These apostolic men not unfrequently found their way to Huddersfield vicarage, and preached for him in his pulpit. We cannot wonder that, so long as health permitted, Venn helped them in return. In fact, he seems frequently to have made excursions through various parts of England, and to have laboured in every way to preach the gospel, as an itinerant, so far as parochial engagements would allow him. We hear of him constantly in Lady Huntingdon's chapel at Oathall near Brighton, and at Bath. At one time he is at Bretby near Burton-on-Trent. At another he is at Fletcher's famous establishment at Trevecca in South Wales. Occasionally we read of his preaching at Bristol, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Worcester, and London. The half of his labours, probably, outside his own parish, is entirely unknown.

The truth must be spoken on this point. It is vain to attempt to draw any broad line of distinction between Henry Venn and his great contemporaries in the revival of the last century. No doubt he had a large town parish, and of course found it more difficult than others to be long absent from home. But in all spiritual points, in matters of doctrine and practice, and in his judgment of what the times required, he was entirely one with Whitefield and Grimshaw. He delighted in their labours. He stood by their side and

helped them, whenever he had an opportunity. When Grimshaw died, it was Henry Venn who preached his funeral sermon in Luddenden Church. When Whitefield died, the man who preached the noblest funeral sermon in Lady Huntingdon's chapel at Bath was the same Henry Venn. Conduct like this, I am afraid, will not recommend my hero to some Churchmen. They will think he would have done better had he confined his labours to Huddersfield, and abstained from apparent irregularities. I content myself with saying that I cannot agree with them. I think that in keeping up intimate relations with the itinerant *evangelists* of last century, Venn did what was best and wisest in the days it which he lived. I think his unhesitating attachment to Whitefield to the very last a singularly noble trait in his character. It ought never to be forgotten that the last sermon preached by Whitefield in Yorkshire, before he sailed for America to die, was delivered in the pulpit of Huddersfield Church.

An extract from a letter written by Venn to Lady Huntingdon, about the year 1768, will give a very clear idea of the unhesitating course of action which the Vicar of Huddersfield adopted, and the boldness with which he supported Whitefield. It was written on the occasion of Whitefield preaching on a tombstone in the churchyard of Cheltenham Parish Church, after permission had been refused to preach in the church. Venn says: "To give your ladyship any just description of what our eyes have witnessed and our hearts have felt within the last few days at Cheltenham, exceeds my feeble powers. My inmost soul is penetrated with an overwhelming sense of the power and presence of Jehovah, who has visited us with an effusion of his Spirit in a very eminent manner. There was a visible appearance of much soul-concern among the crowd that filled every part of the burial-ground. Many were overcome with fainting; others sobbed deeply; some wept silently; and a solemn concern appeared on the countenance of almost the whole assembly. But when he pressed the injunction of the text (Isa. lv. i) on the unconverted and ungodly, his words seemed to act like a sword, and many burst out into piercing cries. At this juncture Mr. Whitefield made an awful pause of a few seconds, and wept himself. During this interval Mr. Madan and myself stood up and requested the people, as much as possible, to restrain themselves from making a noise. Oh, with what eloquence, what energy, what melting tenderness, did Mr. Whitefield beseech sinners to be reconciled to God, to come to Him for life everlasting, and to rest their weary souls on Christ the Saviour! When the sermon was ended the people seemed chained to the ground. Mr. Madan, Mr. Talbot, and myself, found ample employment in trying to comfort those who seemed broken down under a sense of guilt. We separated in different directions among the crowd, and each was quickly surrounded by an attentive audience still eager to hear all the words of this

life. Of such a season it may well be said, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation I have succoured thee; behold! now is the accepted time—behold! now is the day of salvation!”

In the year 1771, Henry Venn’s useful Yorkshire ministry came to an end. Most reluctantly he left Huddersfield, and became the rector of Yelling, a small country living in Huntingdonshire. This happened when he was only forty-seven years old. There were many who blamed him for the step, and thought that he ought to have died at his post in Yorkshire. But really, when the circumstances of the case are fairly considered, it seems impossible to say that he was wrong. His health during the latter period of his residence at Huddersfield failed so completely, that his public usefulness was almost at an end. He had a cough and spitting of blood, beside other symptoms of approaching consumption. He was only able to preach once a fortnight; and even then the exertion rendered him incapable of rising from his couch for several days. In short, it is very evident that if he had continued at Huddersfield much longer, he would have died. Just at this crisis, his friend the Lord Chief Baron Smythe, who was one of the Commissioners of the Great Seal, offered him the Chancellor’s living of Yelling. The offer appears to me to have been a providential opening, and I think Venn was quite right to accept it.

It is easy to find fault with Venn for “overworking” himself at Huddersfield, and to hold him up as a beacon and warning to young ministers who are full of zeal and abundant in labours. I venture to doubt, however, whether it is quite just and fair. It was not “overworking” alone that made his health break down. There were mental causes as well as physical. Nothing, I suspect, had so much to do with his removal from Huddersfield as the death of his wife in 1767, leaving him a widower with five young children. Up to this time, his position at Huddersfield had been one of many trials, partly from the bitter opposition of many who hated evangelical religion, partly from the straitened circumstances to which his very scanty income often reduced him. But so long as his wife lived, none of these things seemed to have moved him. Mrs. Venn was a woman of rare prudence, calmness, good sense, affection, and sympathy. She was, in fact, her husband’s right hand. When she died, such a load of care and anxiety was accumulated on his head, that his health gradually gave way. People who have not been placed in similar circumstances, may probably not understand all this. Those who have had this cross to carry, can testify that there is no position in this world so trying to body and soul as that of the minister who is left a widower, with a young family and a large congregation. There are anxieties in such cases which no one knows but he who has gone through them; anxieties which can crush the strongest spirit, and wear out the strongest constitution. This,

I strongly suspect, was one chief secret of Venn's removal from Huddersfield. He left it, no doubt, because he felt himself too ill to do any more work there. But the true cause probably of his breaking down was the load of care entailed on him by the death of his wife. It was just one of those secret blows from which a man's bodily health never recovers.

Venn's own private feelings, on leaving Huddersfield, are best described in a letter which he wrote at the time to Lady Huntingdon:—"No human being," he says, "can tell how keenly I feel this separation from a people I have dearly loved. But the shattered state of my health, occasioned by my unpardonable length and loudness in speaking, has reduced me to a state which incapacitates me for the charge of so large a parish. Providence has put it into the heart of the Lord Commissioner to offer this small living to me. Pray for me, my most faithful friend, that God's blessing may go with me, and render my feeble attempts to speak of his love and mercy efficacious to the conversion of souls. At Yelling, as at Huddersfield, I shall still be your ladyship's willing servant in the service of the gospel; and when I can be of any use in furthering your plans for the salvation of souls and the glory of Christ, I am your obedient servant at command."

It is recorded that the last two or three months of Venn's residence at Huddersfield were peculiarly affecting. At an early hour the church was crowded when he preached, so that vast numbers were compelled to go away. Many came from a great distance to take leave of him, and tell him how much they owed him for benefits received under his ministry. Mothers held up their children, saying, "There is the man who has been our faithful minister and our best friend!" The whole parish was deeply moved; and when he preached his farewell sermon (Col. iii. 2) he could hardly speak for deep emotion.

The parish of Yelling, to which Henry Venn retired on leaving Huddersfield, is a little agricultural district on the south-east border of Huntingdonshire, about seven miles south of Huntingdon, five east of St. Neots, and twelve miles west of Cambridge. At this present day it has a population of about 400 souls. It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast than the great evangelist of Yorkshire found between his new cure and his old. Vast indeed is the transition from the warmhearted and intelligent worshippers of a northern manufacturing district to the dull, and cold, and impassive inhabitants of a purely agricultural parish in the south of England! Venn felt it deeply. He says himself in a letter to Stillingfleet, 'Your letter found me under great searchings of heart, upon the point of beginning my ministry in this place. What a change from thousands to a company of one hundred! from a people generally enlightened, and many converted, to one yet sitting in darkness, and ignorant of the first principles of the gospel! from a house resounding with the voice of thanksgiving, like the noise of many waters, to

one where the solitary singers please themselves with empty sounds, or gratify their vanity by the imagination of their own excellence! from a Bethel to myself, and many more, to a nominal worship of the God of Christians! A change painful indeed, yet unavoidable. With a heavy heart, therefore, did I begin yesterday to address my new hearers.”

Trying, however, as the change was to Henry Venn’s mind, there can be little doubt that it was exceedingly beneficial to his body. The comparative rest and entire change of his new position in all probability saved his life. Little by little his constitution rallied and recovered his tone, until he was able to get through the work of his small parish with comparative ease. In short, after going away from Huddersfield, apparently to die, he lived on no less than twenty-six years, to the great joy of his friends, the great advantage of his family, and the great benefit of the Church of Christ. How little man knows what is best for his fellow-creatures! If the Vicar of Huddersfield had remained at his post, and died in harness, his children would have lost the best training that children perhaps ever had, and the world would have lost a quantity of most valuable correspondence.

Venn’s life at Yelling was singularly quiet and uneventful. His second marriage, soon after his settlement there, appears to have added much to his happiness. The lady whom he married was the widow of Mr. Smith of Kensington, and daughter of the Rev. James Ascough, Vicar of Highworth, Wilts. In her he had the comfort of finding a thorough help, and a most wise and affectionate stepmother to his children. She lived with him twenty-one years, and was buried at Yelling. The domestic arrangements and employments at his country home were truly simple and edifying. The following sketch, drawn out by himself for a Huddersfield friend, gives a pleasing impression of the way in which his life went on: “You tell me you have no idea how we go on. Take the following sketch. I am up one of the first in the house, soon after five o’clock; and when prayer and reading the blessed Word is done my daughters make their appearance, and I teach them till Mrs. Venn comes down at half-past eight. Then family prayer begins, which is often very sweet, as my own servants are all, I believe, born of God. The children begin to sing prettily; and our praises, I trust, are heard on high. From breakfast we are all employed till we ride out, in fine weather, two hours for health, and after dinner employed again. At six, I have always one hour for solemn meditation and walking in my house till seven. We have then sometimes twenty, and sometimes more, of the people, to whom I expound God’s Word. Several appear much affected; and sometimes Jesus stands in the midst, and says, ‘Peace be unto you!’ Our devotions end at eight, we sup and go to rest at ten. On Sundays I am still enabled to speak six hours, at three different times, to my own great surprise. Oh the goodness of God in raising me up!”

Quiet, however, as Henry Venn's life was at Yelling, we must not suppose that he had no opportunities of being useful to souls. Far from it. He was within reach of good old John Berridge, and the two fellow-labourers often met and strengthened one another's hands. Though he seldom came before the public as he did in his Huddersfield days, he still found many ways of doing his Master's business, and proclaiming the gospel which he loved. The value of his preaching was soon discovered even in his secluded neighbourhood, and he had the comfort of seeing fruit of his ministry in Huntingdonshire as real and true, if not so abundant, as in Yorkshire. Occasionally he preached out of his own parish, though not perhaps so often as his friend and neighbour Berridge could have wished him. He delighted in the society of the good Vicar of Everton whenever he could have it. "Just such a Calvinist as Mr. Berridge is," he used to say, "I wish all ministers of Christ to be." Sometimes he preached in London, and was not ashamed to appear in the pulpit of Surrey Chapel so late as 1786. His vicinity to Cambridge gave him many opportunities of seeing members of the University who valued evangelical truth, and men like Simeon, Jowett, Robinson, and Farish, long testified their deep sense of the advantage they derived from his society and conversation. Above all, the leisure that he enjoyed at Yelling enabled him to keep up a very extensive correspondence. He lived in the good old time when letters were really well thought over and worth reading, and the letters that left Yelling parsonage are a proof to this day how wisely and well he used his pen.

On the whole, the evening of Henry Venn's life seems to have been a singularly happy one. He had the immense comfort of seeing his four children walking in their father's footsteps, clinging firmly to the doctrines he had loved and preached, and steadily serving their father's God. Not least, he had the joy of seeing his son John an able minister of the New Testament, and of leaving him rector of Clapham, and a man honoured by all who knew him. Indeed, it is recorded that there were few texts so frequently on Henry Venn's lips, in his latter years, as the saying of Solomon, "A wise son maketh a glad father."

At the age of sixty-eight, he withdrew almost entirely from the public work of the ministry. His constitution had never entirely recovered from the effect of his work at Huddersfield, and old age came prematurely upon him. Yet even then he was never idle. In fact, he knew not what it was to have a tedious or a vacant hour.

His last days are so beautifully described by his grandson, in his admirable biography, that I shall give the account just as he has set it down. He tells us that "he found constant employment in reading and writing, and in the exercise of prayer and meditation. He often declared that he never felt more

fervency of devotion than whilst imploring spiritual blessings for his children and friends, and especially for the success of those who were still engaged in the ministry of the blessed gospel, from which he was himself laid aside. For himself, his prayer was, that he might die to the glory of Christ. 'There are some moments,' he once said, 'when I am afraid of what is to come in the last agonies; but I trust in the Lord to hold me up. I have a great work before me, to suffer and to die to his glory.' But the spread of his Redeemer's kingdom lay nearer to his heart than any earthly or personal concerns. Even when the decay of strength produced occasional torpor, this subject would rouse him to a degree of fervency and joy, from which his bodily frame would afterwards suffer. I have understood that nothing so powerfully excited his spirits as the presence of young ministers whose hearts he believed to be devoted to Christ.

"About six months before his death he finally left Yelling, and settled at Clapham, near his son. His health from this time rapidly failed, and he was often on the brink of the grave. A medical friend, named Pearson, who often visited him, observed that the near prospect of death so elated his mind with joy, that it actually proved a stimulus to life. On one occasion Mr. Venn remarked some fatal appearances, and said, Surely these are good symptoms.' Mr. Pearson replied, 'Sir, in this state of joyous excitement you cannot die!'

"At length, on the 24th of June 1797, his happy spirit was released, and, at the age of seventy-three, Henry Venn entered into the long anticipated joy of his Lord."

I have yet more to say about this good man. His preaching, his literary remains, his correspondence, and the leading features of his character, all seem to deserve further notice. But I must reserve all to another chapter.



### CHAPTER III.

His Preaching Analysed—His Literary Remains examined—Extraordinary Power as a Letter-writer—Soundness of Judgment about Doctrine—Wisdom and Good Sense about Duties—Prudent Management of his Children—Unworldliness and Cheerfulness—Catholicity and Kindliness of Spirit—Testimony of Cowper, Simeon, and Sir James Stephen.

IT is no easy matter, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, to form a correct estimate of Henry Venn's gifts and character. In fact, the materials for forming it are singularly scanty. He was peculiarly a man of one thing, absorbed in the direct work of his calling, always about his Master's business, and regardless of the verdict of posterity. He spent the greater part of his life in Yorkshire and Bedfordshire, in days when the public press was in its infancy, and there was but little communication between county and county. The only trustworthy biography of the man is a short account begun by his son, but not completed, and finished by a grandson who never saw him. As a specimen of biography, Venn's "Life" is beyond all praise; but still it is the work of a loving relative, and not of a bystander. Under these circumstances I feel unusual difficulty in handling the subject of this chapter. I cannot help thinking that the famous Vicar of Huddersfield was a man who is scarcely understood by the present generation. However, I must throw myself on the indulgence of my readers, and do the best I can.

There are two things which I propose to do in this chapter, I will first give some account of my hero, as a preacher, a writer, and a correspondent. I will then point out certain prominent features in his character, which appear to me of such rare beauty and excellence that they deserve the special notice of Christians.

As a *preacher*, I venture to think we know next to nothing of what Venn was. His sermons still extant, consisting of fourteen preached at Clapham, before he removed to Huddersfield, and eight single discourses preached on various special occasions between 1758 and 1785, most certainly fail to give us any idea of his pulpit powers. Perhaps the best of them are his funeral sermons for Grimshaw and Whitefield. In doctrine they are all, no doubt, sound, scriptural, and evangelical. But it is useless to deny that, at this day, they seem, as you read them, rather tame and commonplace. There is nothing striking, brilliant, or powerful about them. There is nothing that appears likely to lay hold of men's minds, to arrest or to keep up attention. In short, you find it hard to believe that the man who preached these sermons could ever have been considered a great preacher.

Yet it is clear as daylight that Henry Venn was a great preacher. The extraordinary effects that his sermons produced at Huddersfield—his undeniable popularity with congregations accustomed to hear such mighty orators as Whitefield—the high opinion entertained of his powers by Lady Huntingdon

and other good judges—all these are facts that cannot possibly be explained away. The Vicar of Huddersfield may not have possessed the glowing eloquence of Rowlands or Whitefield. But for all that he must evidently have been a man of great pulpit powers.

The truth of the matter, I suspect, is simply this. Venn's sermons were precisely of that sort which are excellent to hear, but not excellent to read. Listened to, they are clear, satisfying, interesting, and instructive. Written down, they seem poor, and ungrammatical, and diffuse, and commonplace. Whether men will believe it or not, it is a fact that English for hearing, and English for reading, are almost two different languages, and that speeches and sermons which sound admirable when you listen to them, seem curiously flat and lifeless when you sit down to read them in cold blood. Of all the illustrations of this principle in rhetoric, I venture the conjecture that there seldom was a more remarkable one than Venn. To read his sermons over, there seems no more life or fire in them than there is in an empty stove in July. And yet the Vicar of Huddersfield, by the universal testimony of all his contemporaries, was a mighty preacher.

Let us add to all this that Venn's action and delivery, by all accounts, were singularly lively and forcible. The witness of his hearers at Huddersfield, on this point, was unanimous. His face, his voice, his hands, his eyes, his whole manner in preaching, arrested attention, and clothed all that he said with power. Who can deny the immense effect of good delivery? The ancients went so far as to call it the first, second, and third qualification of a good orator. Who can fail to see, from the traditional account, already quoted, that Venn had a peculiar gift of delivery? The sermons of a man who "looked as if he would jump out of the pulpit," may contain nothing that is original or remarkable, but they are just the sermons that often turn the world upside down. Printed sermons can show us a preacher's matter, but they cannot show us his manner as delivered. Second-rate matter, if only well delivered, will never fail to beat first-rate matter badly delivered, as long as the world stands.

After all, we must never forget that we know nothing of the nature of Venn's sermons in the days of his greatest power. They were extempore sermons, or sermons preached from notes; and that fact alone speaks volumes. Not one of these sermons, I believe, was taken down shorthand, as most of Whitefield's were, and the consequence is that we have not an idea what they were like. But every intelligent hearer of the present day knows well that a man may be a most powerful extempore preacher, who is a very dull and uninteresting writer. There are scores of men whom it is very pleasant to hear, but very wearying to read. Perhaps if we possessed good shorthand reports of some of Venn's best Huddersfield sermons, we should see at a glance the

secrets of his popularity as a preacher. As matters stand, I must frankly confess it is a subject which is now wrapped in some obscurity. I have done my best to throw some conjectural light upon it, and must leave it here. I only wish to remind my readers, in passing on, that there are few things so little understood in the world as the true causes of pulpit power.

As a *writer*, Venn's reputation rests almost entirely on two works, which are pretty well known,—“The Complete Duty of Man,” and “Mistakes in Religion.” The first of them is a “System of doctrinal and practical Christianity,” and was intended to supply something better than that mischievous and defective volume, the “Whole Duty of Man.” The second of them is a collection of essays on the prophecy of Zacharias (the father of John Baptist), in which the erroneousness of many common views of religion is faithfully and scripturally exposed. Besides these, Venn published two or three smaller pamphlets, which are but little known.

The two works above-named were undoubtedly very useful in their day, and are still to be found on the shelves of most collectors of religious literature. They are sound, scriptural, and evangelical. But I strongly suspect that they stick to the shelves on which they stand, and are books which most people know better by name than by reading. The plain truth is, that every age has its own peculiar style of writing. Popular as the “Spectator,” and “Tatler,” and “Rambler,” were in their times, it may well be doubted whether they would be much read if published now. Even the pens of Addison, Johnson, and Steele, would not command success. The same remark applies to the sound and scriptural writings of Henry Venn. They did good service in their day, when men loved a somewhat stiff and classical style, and would have turned with disdain from any other sort of English composition as unworthy of an educated person. But like the jawbone of an ass, which Samson once used so effectively, they are now laid aside. Their work is done. Like the famous long-bows which our forefathers used at Cressy and Agincourt, we still view them with respect, and are proud of the victories which they won. But we do not use them ourselves. Rifled artillery and breechloaders have superseded them. The fashion of our weapons is changed.

After all, a close examination of Venn's two volumes will soon show an intelligent reader why they are no longer popular. The composition is of that stately and somewhat high-flown style which was thought the standard of excellence in the last century. The sentences are often very long, and somewhat involved. The words are frequently of Latin or French origin. There is a curious absence of that rich fund of ready, happy illustration, which Whitefield and Rowlands had at their finger ends. The appeals to the imagination are few, and come in stiffly and awkwardly when they do come, like men dressed in new or borrowed clothes. In short, the style of the books is neither Saxon, nor sparkling, nor racy, nor pithy, nor anecdotal, nor pictorial. We

must not wonder that they are no longer popular. Let us thank God for them. They were read in their day and generation by hundreds, who would probably have read no other evangelical literature. They may still do good to good men, and be liked by those who are really hungering for spiritual food. But we must not insist on everybody admiring them, or call people graceless and ungodly because they do not take pleasure in reading them. We must not count it a strange thing if many call them heavy, and dry, and cold.

As a *correspondent and letter-writer*, Henry Venn deserves the highest admiration. Nothing gives me such a high idea of his mental and spiritual stature, as the collection of letters which accompanies his biography. I never wonder at his reputation when I read these letters. I consider them above all praise, and commend them to the special attention of all who want to form a just estimate of the seventh great evangelist of England a hundred years ago. The true measure of the Vicar of Huddersfield and Yelling is to be found in his letters much more than his books or printed sermons.

Letter-writing, we must never forget, was a much more important business in the last century than it is at the present day. The daily newspaper was a very different affair from what it is now. Periodicals and cheap publications had a very limited circulation. The result was, that letters became most powerful instruments either for good or evil. Men of the world, like Lord Hervey, Lord Chesterfield, or Horace Walpole, were not ashamed to throw their whole minds into their correspondence. Religious men entered so fully into doctrinal, practical, and experimental questions with their correspondents, that their letters were almost as useful as their sermons. John Newton's well-known volume of letters, called "Cardiphonia," has perhaps done as much good to Christ's cause as anything that ever came from his pen. In days like those, it is no mean praise to say that Henry Venn was second to none as a letter-writer. Compare the letters that he wrote after settling down in Huntingdonshire, with the very best that Newton published, and I venture to say boldly that no impartial judge would hesitate to pronounce that the epistolary mine at Yelling yielded quite as rich metal as that at Olney.

It is curious, indeed, to observe how free Venn's letters are, comparatively, from the faults which impair the usefulness of his books and printed sermons. There is a striking absence of that stiff and laboured mode of expression to which I have already adverted. He writes easily, naturally, and pleasantly, and makes you feel that you would like to hear again from such a correspondent. Like the letters of Mrs. Savage (Matthew Henry's sister), you cannot help regretting that the editor made so small and limited a selection from the stock he had in hand. You close the volume with the impression that you would have liked it better if it had been twice as long. For my own part, I confess to a strong suspicion that we have in Venn's published correspond-

ence the real key of Venn's popularity as a preacher. I suspect that his extempore sermons must have closely resembled his letters. I give it, of course, as my own private conjecture, and nothing more. All I say is, that if the vicar of Huddersfield preached in his pulpit in the same clear, pithy, and direct fashion that he wrote to his friends, I do not wonder that he was a preacher of mighty power. Once more, I advise those who want to know the secret of Venn's reputation to study his letters.

It only remains for me now to point out what seem to me to have been the prominent features in Henry Venn's character. I approach this subject with much diffidence. I have no other means of forming an opinion than a close examination of my hero's life and letters. I am very sensible that I may err in my judgment, and may say too much of some points and too little of others. But after dwelling so much on this good man's life and ministry, I cannot help inviting the attention of my readers to some characteristics which appear to me to stand out with peculiar brightness, as we look at him from a distance.

1. The first excellency that I notice in Venn's character is the *soundness of his judgment on difficult and disputable points in theology*. He lived in a day when the controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism was at its height, and when violent and exaggerated statements were continually made on both sides. In a day like this, he seems to me to have been singularly happy in observing the proportion of truth in doctrine. I can put my finger on no leading minister of last century whose views of the gospel appear to have been so truly scriptural and well balanced. Of course he was alternately claimed as an ally, or abused as an enemy, by extreme partisans on both sides. But I can find no man of that era who seems to have understood so thoroughly the relative value of every part and portion of evangelical Christianity.

Let us hear what he says about Calvinism: "As to Calvinism, you know I am moderate. Those who exalt the Lord Jesus as all their salvation, and abase man, I rejoice in. I would not have them advance further till they see more of the plan of sovereign grace, so connected with what is indisputable, that they cannot refuse their assent. Difficulties, distressing difficulties, are on every side, whether we receive that scheme or no. We must be as little children; we must be daily exercising ourselves in humble love and prayer; we must be looking up to our Saviour for the Holy Ghost. And after this has been our employment for many years, we shall find how much truth there is in that divine assertion, 'If any man think that he knoweth anything yet as he ought to know, that man knoweth nothing.' I used to please myself with the imagination, fifteen years ago, that by prayer for the Holy Ghost, and reading diligently the lively oracles, I should be able to understand all Scripture, and to give it all one clear and consistent meaning. That it is perfectly consistent I am very sure; but it is not so to any mortal's apprehension here. We are so

proud, that we must have something to humble us; and this is one means to that end.”—(15th Feb. 1772.)

Let us hear what he says about assurance: “I believe that the knowledge of our acceptance with God is to be constantly urged as one of the greatest motives to lead a strict life, and to abstain from all appearance of evil, seeing the Holy Ghost, whose testimony alone can satisfy the conscience, will never dwell with the slothful or lukewarm, much less with presumptuous offenders. Scripturally to state, and firmly to maintain by sound argument, the knowledge of salvation, is, I believe, a most useful way of preaching—guarding against hypocrites, who will sometimes speak great swelling words about these matters, though themselves the servants of corruption, and conscious of the lie they tell in speaking of their joy in the Lord. I judge that one great reason of the worldliness prevailing amongst orthodox Dissenters is their teachers not pressing this point; and that, amidst very much error, one great cause of Mr. Wesley’s success, some years ago, was his urging Christians not to rest without joy in God from receiving the atonement.”—(1775.)

Let us hear what he says about holiness: “True holiness is quite of another character than we, for a long time, in any degree conceive. It is not serving God without defect, but with deep self-abasement, with astonishment at his infinite condescension and love to sinners, to ungodly enemies, and to men who in their lost estate are exceedingly vile. It is pleasing to consider how we are all led into this point, however we may differ in others; and were it not for the demon of controversy, and a hurry of employment which leaves no time for self-knowledge or devout meditation on the oracles of God, I am persuaded we should very soon be so grounded on this matter, that bystanders would no longer reproach us for our divisions.” —(1776.)

Let us hear what he says about weak faith: “Weak faith seeks salvation only in Christ, and yields subjection to him, and brings the soul to his feet, though without assurance of being as yet saved by him. There is not one duty a weak believer slights. Weak faith is attended with sorrow and humiliation; as in his case he said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.’ It produces new desires and affections, new principles and purposes, and a new practice, though not in such strength and vigour as is found in old established believers. Ask the weakest and most disconsolate believer, whether he would forsake and give up his hope in Christ; and he will eagerly reply, ‘Not for the whole world!’ There is, therefore, no reason why weak believers should conclude against themselves; for weak faith unites as really with Christ as strong faith, just as the least bud in the vine draws sap and life from the root no less than the strongest branch. Weak believers, therefore, have abundant cause to be thankful; and while they reach after growth in grace, ought not to overlook what they have already received.”—(1784.)

Hear, lastly, what he says about indwelling sin:—“I sympathize with you

in your troubles from the corruption of nature. I feel myself harassed with hardness of heart and coldness of affection toward God and man, and by slightly performing secret duties, when I know so well that God is ‘a rewarder (only) of those who diligently seek him.’ How totally does the estimate I made of myself thirty-five years ago differ from what I know now to be my real condition! I then confidently expected to be holy *very soon*, even as St. Paul was; and then there would be no other difference here between me and angels than that I, by watching, fasting, and praying without ceasing, had conquered and eradicated sin, which they had never even known. *Now*, when I compare myself with the great apostle, I can scarcely perceive a diminutive feature or two of what shines so prominently in that noble saint.”— (1787.)

2. The second excellency that I notice in Venn is his *singular wisdom and good sense in offering advice to others about duties*. This is a rare qualification. I sometimes think it is almost easier to find a man of grace than a man of sense. How few are the people to whom we can turn for counsel on practical questions in religion, and feel a confidence that they will advise us well! The vicar of Huddersfield appears to me to have possessed the Spirit of counsel and of a sound mind in an eminent degree. His letters to Jonathan Scott, John Brasier, and Lady Mary Fitzgerald, containing directions for living a Christian life, and a solution of doubts and fears, ought to be read in their entirety to be fully appreciated. They are so thoroughly good all the way through that it is not fair to quote from them. I know nothing in the English language, of a short kind, so likely to be useful to those who are beginning a Christian life. His letter to a clergyman on the study of Hebrew and the value of translations of the Bible, is a model of sensible advice, and furnishes abundant proof that evangelical clergymen of the last century were not, as their enemies often insinuated, “unlearned and ignorant men.” Last, but not least, his letters to his son and other clergymen on the ministerial office and its duties and trials, and the mistakes of young ministers, are a magazine of Christian wisdom which will amply repay examination. Indeed, there are few books which I would so strongly recommend to the attention of young clergymen as “Venn’s Life and Letters.” The truth is, the whole volume is full of strong Christian good sense, and it is difficult, in giving selections from it, to know where to begin and where to stop. The following quotations must suffice.

To a friend at Huddersfield he says, in 1763:—“The first thing I would press upon you is to beg of God more *light*. There is not a more false maxim than this, though common in almost every mouth, that ‘Men know enough if they would but practice better.’ God says, on the contrary, ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.’ And as at first men live in sin easy and well pleased, because they know not what they do; so after they are alive

and awake they do little for God, and gain little victory over sin, through the *ignorance* that is in them. They have no comfort, no establishment, no certainty that they are in the right path, even when they are going to God, because the eyes of their understanding are so little enlightened to discern the things that make for their peace. In all your prayers, therefore, call much upon God for divine teaching.”

To a rich widow residing in London he says:—“In the day when the eternal state of man is determined, the greater part of those that are lost will perish, not through any gross and scandalous iniquity, but through a deadness to God and his love, an ignorance of their own sinfulness, and, in consequence of that, through reigning pride and self-sufficiency. Now, the one great source of all this miserable disorder, or that at least by which it is maintained and strengthened, is keeping much company with those whom the Scripture marks out as engaged in talk without sense—company, not with near relatives or chosen friends, not with those for whom we have any real regard, but with those who come to see us and we go to see them, only because the providence of God has brought us into one town. It is this that devours infinitely precious time, and engages us in mere trifling, when we otherwise should be drawing nigh to God and growing rich in divine knowledge and grace; and such slaves are we naturally to the love of esteem, so eagerly desirous of having every one’s good word, that we are content to go on in the circle of fashionable folly, while our hearts condemn us, and a secret voice whispers, ‘This manner of spending time can never be right.’”

To the same lady he says:—“You certainly judge right not to restrain your son from balls, cards, &c., since a mother will never be judged, by a son of his age, capable of determining for him; and perhaps, after your most strict injunctions to have done with such sinful vanities, he would be tempted even to violate your authority. The duty you are called of God to exercise now is to bear the cross borne at different times and in divers measures by all the disciples of a crucified Saviour. True, it is painful to see one’s dear child a lover of pleasure more than of God—painful to see a young creature, born for communion with God and acquaintance with heavenly joys, wedded to trivial gratifications and the objects of sense alone. But such are we! God prevented us with his goodness, and sounded an alarm in our souls, or we had been such to this hour. He expects, then, that your experience should teach you to wait for patience till mercy apprehend him also. From the whole, you see you are to learn two most important lessons from the painful situation you remain in with regard to your son. The one is, your own weakness and inability to give a single ray of light, or to excite the faintest conviction of sin, or to communicate the least particle of spiritual good, to one who is dearer to you than life. How ought this to take away every proud



thought of our own sufficiency, and to keep us earnest importunate suppliants at the door of Almighty mercy and free grace! The other lesson is, that your own conversion, and reception of the Lord Jesus Christ as your portion and righteousness, ought to be marvellous in your eyes. You have many kind thoughts and the highest esteem for me, for which I desire to retain a dear sense in my mind; but you know I am merely a voice which said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’”

3. The third excellency which strikes me in Venn’s character is *his singular prudence and tenderness in the management of his children*. Few ministers, perhaps, have ever been more successful than he was in the education and training of his family; few, perhaps, ever trained their sons and daughters with such unwearying pains, diligence, affection, watchfulness, and prayer. The families of pious ministers, like the sons of Samuel and David, have often brought discredit on their father’s house; or, like the children of Moses, have not been in any way remarkable. The family of Henry Venn forms a bright exception. All turned out well; all proved Christians of no common degree; and all gladdened their father’s heart in his old age.

It would be impossible, in the narrow limits of this work, to give any adequate idea of Venn’s dealing with his children. Those who feel an interest in the subject, and would like to know a most successful parent’s mode of communication with his children, would do well to study the hundred pages of letters to his children which are to be found in the volume of his life and letters. Rarely indeed does a father succeed in uniting faithfulness, spirituality, and deep familiar affection so completely, in his correspondence with sons and daughters, as Henry Venn did. I can only find room for three specimens.

To his daughter Catherine he says, in 1781, writing on the due observance of the Sabbath:—“When I was of your age, I was, alas! a mere pretender to religion. Though I constantly went to the house of God on the Sabbath, I saw not the glory of the Lord—I understood not his Word—I did not hear it when it was read—I asked for nothing—I wanted nothing for my soul,—so foolish and ignorant was I! I was glad when the worship was over and the day was over, that my mouth might pour out foolishness, and that I might return to my sports and amusements. Oh, what a wicked stupidity of soul! I am astonished how God could bear with me. Had he said: ‘I swear thou shalt never ascend into the hill of the Lord, nor see my face, who findest it such a weariness to be at church, and art so proud and profane in spirit. No: dwell for ever with those whom you are like; dwell with the devil and his angels, and with all who have departed this life enemies to my name and glory.’ Oh! had the Lord spoken thus to me in displeasure, I had received the due reward of my deeds. But adore him for his love to your father. In this state he opened my eyes and allured my heart, and gave me to seek him and his strength and

face, and to join all his saints who keep holy his day, and to be glad to hear them say, 'Come, and let us go up to the house of the Lord.' Nay, more than this, he gave me your blessed mother for a companion, who loved exceedingly the house and day of the Lord; and repaired to you and me her loss, by giving me another of his dear children who sanctifies each Sabbath with delight, and reverences God's house with her whole heart. Thus, instead of casting me into hell, he has made me the father of one dear saint in glory, and of four more—all of whom, I trust, fear and love the God of their father and mother, and all of whom, I have a lively hope, I shall meet in the courts above."

To his daughter Jane he writes, in 1785:—"A great part of our warfare is to overcome our natural propensity to seek happiness in meat and drink, in dress and show; which only nourish our disease, and keep us from communion with God as our chief good. More than thirty-seven years ago he was pleased, in his adorable mercy, to give me a demonstration that all was vanity and vexation of spirit but himself. From that hour (such is the energy of divine teaching), rising up and lying down, going out and coming in, I have felt this truth. I began and continued to seek the Lord and his strength and his face evermore. I was then led to know how the poverty and emptiness of all terrestrial good could be well supplied from the fulness of an adorable Jesus. And, oh! how unspeakably blessed I am that I see my children impressed with the same precious and invaluable feelings, and that I hope, upon the best grounds, that we shall enjoy an eternity together in glory, where you shall know your father, not the poor, polluted, *hasty*, sinful creature he now is, but holy, without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing; and when I shall know my dear children, not as emerging from a sea of corruption, and struggling against the law of sin in their members, and needing frequent intimations to do what is right, but when naturally and continually all within and without will be perfectly holy. Oh! what a meeting will that be, when all my prayers for your precious souls ever since you were born, when all my poor yet well-meant instructions and lessons from God's Word, and all your own petitions, shall be fully answered, and we shall dwell in a perfect union together!"

To his son John, on his appointment to the rectory of Clapham, he writes, in 1792:—"Children, the old adage says, are careful comforts. I find the truth of this now, particularly respecting you. I was careful to see you called out to usefulness; and now providentially a great door is found, I am in daily concern lest you should be hurt and suffer loss in your new station. You must beware of company; you must be much in secret and retirement. Visiting friends, and being seldom in a solemn spirit before the throne of grace, ruin most of those who perish among professors of godliness."

The following facts, communicated to me by a connection of Henry Venn's, are in themselves so deeply interesting, and throw so much light on

his mode of dealing with little children, that I make no apology for introducing them here. It appears that one of his daughters married a widower with a family of young children. These motherless little ones excited a strong interest in his heart, and he took one of them, only three years old, to his home at Yelling, and endeavoured to train the child for God. My correspondent says:—"The first thing he found out was that the poor child was afraid of the dark. That very evening he took him by the hand, led him into his study, where the shutters were already closed, and seating him on his knee, with his arm close round him, he told the timid boy so wonderful a story out of God's Book as to make the child forget all beside. This he repeated day by day, till the evening story came to be anxiously expected. 'You will sit by my side to-day, John, and hold my hands, while you hear a new Bible story,' said the venerable man, after many a story had been told on the knee; 'and tomorrow you will like to sit by me without holding my hands, will you not? This point once gained, a seat at a little distance was chosen, still in the dark; then one opposite; then one at the furthest end of the study; till, before winter closed, my father had entirely forgotten his fears of the dark, nor did they at any period of his life ever recur to him."

The advice given by this more than grandfather to the child, when he left Yelling for school, was often quoted; and though for a time he threw off the restraints of religion, and sought happiness in the world, the closing words of his venerable friend were never forgotten, and in after-life were repeated to his children and grandchildren scores if not hundreds of times: "Remember, little John, if anything could make heaven not heaven to me, it would be the not having you with me there."

God's blessing did follow that Christian teaching; and after a long life spent, first in actively doing, and then in suffering, his Father's will, that "Little John" rejoined his loved and honoured teacher in the skies, frequently saying, "When I get to heaven, how I shall bless God for the early lesson of dear old Henry Venn!"

4. The fourth excellency that I notice in Venn is his *singular unworldliness and cheerfulness of spirit*. He had his share of worldly trials; and these, too, of all sorts and descriptions. Sickness and severe bodily trials—the loss of his wife in the middle of his abundant labours at Huddersfield—straitened circumstances, arising out of the extreme scantiness of his professional income,—all these things broke in upon him from time to time, and sorely tried his faith. But he seems to have been wonderfully strengthened throughout all his troubles. He preserved a cheerful frame of mind under every cross and trial, and was always able to see blue sky even in the gloomiest day.

His very portrait gives one the impression of a happy Christian. As we look at it, we can well understand the story that on more than one occasion he was asked to preach by clergymen who did not know him, under the idea

that he was a jolly parson of the old school, and not a Methodist preacher!<sup>6</sup> They judged of him by his smiling face, and could not imagine that the man who had such a countenance could be the friend of Whitefield, Berridge, and Wesley. Striking, indeed, is the lesson that the incident contains. Well would it be for the Church of Christ if all preachers of the gospel were more careful to recommend their principles by their demeanour, and to show by their bearing that their Master's service is truly happy.

One single extract from his correspondence will suffice to show the vicar of Huddersfield's unworldly spirit. He heard that a lady, who knew and valued him, had made a will, leaving him a large sum of money. He at once wrote her a letter, positively declining to accept it, of which the following extract is a part: "I understand by my wife your most kind and generous intention toward me in your will. The legacy would be exceedingly acceptable; and I can assure you the person from whom it would come would greatly enhance the benefit. I love my sweet children as much as is lawful; and as I know it would give you pleasure to administer to the comfort of me and mine, I should with greater joy accept of your liberality.

"But an insurmountable bar stands in the way—the love of Him to whom we are both indebted, not for a transient benefit, for silver or gold, but, for an 'inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.' His honour, his cause, is, and must be, dearer to his people than wife, children, or life itself. It is the pious resolve of his saints, 'I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.' To be, therefore, a stumbling-block in the way of any that are seeking him, to give the least countenance to any that would gladly bring his followers into contempt, would grieve me while in health, darken my mind in sickness, and load me with self-condemnation on my death-bed. After the most mature deliberation, therefore, it is our request that you will not leave us any other token of your regard than something of little value."

5. The last excellency that I note in Henry Venn is his *extraordinary catholicity and kindliness of spirit, and his readiness to love and honour his brethren*. Jealousy among ministers of Christ is, unhappily, a very common feeling. Nowhere, perhaps, will you find men so slow to recognize the gifts of others, and so quick to detect their faults, as in the ranks of preachers of religion. Of all the men of last century who attained eminent usefulness, I find none so free from jealousy as Henry Venn. He seems to delight in speaking well of his fellow-labourers, and to rejoice in their gifts and success.

It would be taking up too much room to quote all the expressions he uses

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<sup>6</sup> All Evangelical clergymen a hundred years ago were called "Methodists." Many people in the present day are not aware of this fact.

about his contemporaries. Let it suffice to say that I find in his "Life" repeated kind words about the following men,—Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw, Romaine, Walker, Conyers, Hervey, Howell Harris, Berridge, Fletcher, Robinson, Newton, Adams, Cecil, Scott, and Abraham Booth the Baptist. That list alone is enough to show the largeness and warmth of Venn's heart. To suppose that he agreed with all these good men in all things, is simply unreasonable. But he had a quick eye to see grace, and a ready mind to acknowledge and admire it. Well would it be for the Church of Christ, if all ministers were more of his frame and spirit in this matter! Envy and jealousy are too often the greatest blots on the character of great men.

It only remains for me, now, to conclude my account of Henry Venn by quoting the language used about him by three good judges, though very different men.

Let us hear what Cowper the poet thought of him. He says, in a letter to Newton, written in 1791: "I am sorry that Mr. Venn's labours below are so near to a conclusion. I have seen few men whom I could have loved more, had opportunity been given me to know him better; so at least I have thought as often as I have seen him."

Let us hear what Charles Simeon of Cambridge thought of him. He says: "I most gladly bear my testimony that not the half, nor the hundredth part, of what might have been justly said of that blessed man of God has been spoken. If any person now living, except his children, is qualified to bear this testimony, it is I, who, from my first entrance into orders to his dying hour, had most intimate access to him, and enjoyed most of his company and conversation. How great a blessing his conversation and example have been to me will never be known till the day of judgment. I dislike the language of panegyric, and therefore forbear to expatiate on a character which, in my estimation, was above all praise. Scarcely ever did I visit him but he prayed with me, at noon-day, as well as at common seasons of family-worship. Scarcely ever did I dine with him but his ardour in returning thanks, sometimes in an appropriate hymn, sometimes in prayer, has inflamed the souls of all present. In all the twenty-four years that I knew him, I never remember him to have spoken unkindly of any one but once; and then I was struck with the humiliation he expressed for it in prayer next day."

Let us hear, lastly, what Sir James Stephen thought of Henry Venn. In his "Essays on Ecclesiastical Biography" "(amidst some things I cannot subscribe to), he concludes his account of the vicar of Huddersfield and Yelling with the following passage: "With a well-stored memory, he was an independent, if not an original, thinker. With deep and even vehement attachments, he knew how to maintain, on fit occasions, even to those he loved most, a judicial gravity, and even a judicial sternness. He acted with indefatigable energy

in the throng of men, and yet in solitude could meditate with unwearied perseverance. He was at once a preacher at whose voice multitudes wept and trembled, and a companion to whose privacy the wise resorted for instruction, the wretched for comfort, and all for sympathy. In all the exigencies, and in all relations of life, the firmest reliance might always be placed on his counsel, his support, and his example. Like St. Paul, he became all things to all men, and for the same reason, that he might by any means save some.”

Such was the last of the seven great spiritual heroes of the last century. I have dwelt long on his history, but I feel that he deserves it. He was not the commanding preacher that either Whitefield or Rowlands was. He did not possess the polish of Romaine, or the originality of Grimshaw or Berridge. But, take him for all in all, Henry Venn was a great man.