

The Church.

"HER FOUNDATIONS ARE UPON THE HOLY HILLS."

THEREFORE I WILL NOT BE NEGLIGENT TO PUT YOU ALWAYS IN REMEMBRANCE OF THESE THINGS, THOUGH YE KNOW THEM AND BE ESTABLISHED IN THE PRESENT TRUTH.—3 PETER 1, 12.

VOLUME II.]

COBOURG, UPPER CANADA, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1838.

[NUMBER XIX.]

Original Poetry.

For the Church.

VERSES.

1. The spires of old England! that point to the skies,
To the goal of our hopes, where the heart's treasure lies;
To the home of the spirit, where Jesus is gone,—
To mansions of glory which Jesus hath won.
2. The spires of old England! that taper above,
Like the heart's upward flame when it burneth with love;
When bright with the dew of its heavenly birth,
The soul looks aloft from the shadows of earth.
3. The fair village-church! with its white walls of snow,
Its ivy-crown'd porch with the stone seats below;
Where, shelter'd alike from the storm and the sun,
Young and aged may rest when their labour is done.
4. Meek temple of God! with its altar and shrine,
Where man may drink deep of the fountain divine;
Where the prince and the peasant their Maker adore,—
Then blend in one dust when life's travail is o'er.
5. The green sodded graves! that affection hath dress'd
With wreaths of bright flowers,—where the wearied ones rest:
The eloquent marble! last tributes to those,
The lov'd and the lost, that in silence repose.
6. Bless church of my fathers! tho' far o'er the wave
I've wandered from thee, and the lov'd in the grave;
Though the friends of my youth be all sleeping afar,—
Be thou my home ever, my bright polar-star!
7. Remote in the forest, where Canada's snow,
Or her sunlight of summer, falls brightly below,—
I see thee, I see thee in semblance arise,—
Thine offspring of beauty is dear to my eyes.
8. Oh! fair tender scion! whose early youth seems
Reflection of her that haunts memory's dreams;
How fair, yet how feeble—far off and away—
Thy leaflets are waving, thy flow'r drinks the day!
9. In sorrow, in weakness, like sire-bereft child,
That no mother hath car'd for, thou weep'st in the wild;
Yet dried be thy tears, and thy mourning forego,
For the Lord is thy banner and smiles on thy woe.
10. The Lord is thy banner! the might of his power
Shall shield thee and save thee, thou young forest-flower!
Thy foes cannot crush thee, tho' slight be thy stem,
For the Lord is with thee, and but weakness with them.
11. Meek temple of God! when oppression and ruth
Are poured on thy walls, be thy bulwark the truth;
Though tempest and flood in their fury unite,
Stand firm in the Lord, in the power of his might.
12. Though the curse of the goddess upon thee be pour'd,
O, be thou still bless'd with the smile of the Lord;
Be thy battlement strong! thy foundation below
Firmly bas'd on the Rock that no power can o'erthrow.
13. Then grow, and still gather the good of the clime,—
Till strong in the stature of manhood and prime,
The fulness of glory around thee be spread,
And thy white-vestur'd form be all worthy thy Head!

J. H. Loughboro', October, 1838.

THE REV. HENRY VENN, M.A., RECTOR OF YELLING, HUNTINGDONSHIRE.*

The style of preaching too universally adopted during the last century, both within and without the pale of the Established Church, was lamentably defective. There were many champions, indeed, to be found to defend the out-works of Christianity, to refute the assertions of the gain-sayer, and confound the reasonings of the sceptic; but, generally speaking, the great fundamental doctrines of the Gospel were not prominently brought forward in the ministrations of the pulpit. Morality was substituted for vital godliness. The condescending mercy of the Saviour in opening a way of access to the Father, was rarely alluded to. The all-important doctrines of man's corrupt state by nature, of justification by faith alone, and of sanctification by the power of the Eternal Spirit, were among those truths, which, if not discarded, were certainly not prominently advanced. For this assertion, at which some perchance may be offended, we are fully borne out by the authoritative declarations of some of the most eminent prelates of the Church; and Secker, Horeley, and Horne, must have been uncharitable in their censures, and unwarrantable in the language employed in their charges, or these remarks hold true. Nor was the defect confined to the Established Church. It had extended itself to the various denominations of nonconformists; and we have before us at this moment more than one volume of sermons by eminent Dissenters of the period referred to, where the lack of spiritual instruction is indeed deplorable. As far as our own Church is concerned, an unquestionable improvement has taken place: and to this, under the Divine blessing, we mainly look for her stability. Legal enactments for that stability are absolutely necessary. Every encroachment upon her rights and property should be viewed with a jealous eye; but it is the faithful preaching of an "unclouded Gospel," it is the dissemination far and wide of the doctrines of the Reformation,—it is the bold, uncompromising avowal of Scripture truth, which must, after all, prove the bulwark of our Zion, and render her a praise upon earth.

It was at the period to which we have alluded, that the founders of Methodism began to excite attention by a style of preaching very different from that usually adopted, and

by a strictness of life, which failed not to excite the derision of the ungodly. The departure of these devoted men from the strict rules of canonical obedience was much to be deplored. They had a straightforward course to pursue; and they needed not to have struck out into devious paths. We need not comment on their mode of procedure. We would only look back with gratitude to those worthies who felt the need of a more spiritual mode of instruction as well as they, but who saw no necessity of themselves withdrawing from the pale of the Establishment. Such was the subject of the present memoir. For though at one period he did not feel it to be entirely his duty to withhold preaching in unconsecrated places of worship, he yet afterwards deeply lamented having done so; and solemnly warned others from following an example, which he felt had conducted to many evil results. As he advanced in life, the more important did he feel it to be, that the ministers of the Established Church should be scrupulously cautious in no respect to transgress the rules of canonical obedience; which transgression, when it does occur, is too often the index of a mind not willing to submit to lawful authority, and is utterly at variance with the solemn vows undertaken on entering holy orders.

HENRY VENN was born at Barnes, in the county of Surrey, on the 2d of March, 1724. His ancestors were clergymen of the Church of England in an uninterrupted line from the Reformation. His father was Richard Venn, rector of St. Antholin's, Watling Street, London. His mother was the daughter of Richard Ashton, Esq., paymaster of the pensions to King Charles II. and privy purse to James II.

Henry from his earliest years gave decisive proof that his talents were of no ordinary kind; and, after having been placed at several schools, one of which was that of Mr. Catcott, of Bristol, author of a treatise on the Deluge, &c. &c., he was, at the age of seventeen, admitted a member of St. John's College, Cambridge; but having obtained a Rustat scholarship in Jesus College, he speedily removed to that society. Whilst a resident member of the University he gained many friends by his generosity of feeling, amiability of character, and what is usually termed goodness of heart. He took the degree of B.A. in 1745. In 1747, he was appointed one of the University scholars. He was ordained deacon the same year by Bishop Gibson, of London. He was soon after elected a fellow of Queen's College, took his degree of M.A.; and his fellowship he retained until his marriage, in 1757.

Up to this period it does not appear that Mr. Venn had serious views on the subject of religion, although he was sincerely attached to the Church. Amiable he was; and, as far as can be learned, strictly moral in his conduct. But amiability and outward abstinence from vice do not constitute vital religion. These may be testified, and have frequently been testified, by persons who have been utterly ignorant of "the truth as it is in Jesus;" nay, who have been vehemently opposed to the reception of that truth. Like the young man in the Gospel, whose candid, open, ingenuous conduct so far won upon our Lord, that it is recorded, that Jesus loved him; yet, like him, they may lack one thing: it is the one thing needful—the desire to make an unreserved surrender of the heart, and all other possessions, to the service of Jehovah. Mr. Venn's sense, too, of clerical decorum was very conspicuous. He had been extremely fond of cricket, at which he was esteemed quite an adept; he fully resolved, however, that, after his ordination, he would no more engage in that game; nor could he be induced to do so by the most earnest solicitations of his friends. Still, however, that holy principle of action, which afterwards led him to labour in his Master's service, was wanting; for there may be an external attention to propriety of conduct, and a sincere desire to give "no offence in any thing," even when the soul is not wholly subject to the law of God.

The period arrived, however, when a great change was to be wrought in the religious principles of Mr. Venn. The first considerable religious impression made upon his mind, says his biographer, arose from an expression in the form of prayer that he had been daily accustomed to use, "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? The impression was not effaced; and he began seriously to inquire into his religious state. In this frame of mind, Law's "Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life," with all its deficiencies, was particularly useful to him. He now began to think more seriously, to live more strictly, to keep a closer watch over his actions. He at this time served the curacy of Barton, near Cambridge. He afterwards assisted various friends; and in July 1750, he accepted the curacies of Mr. Longley, rector of St. Matthew, Friday Street, London; and of West Horsley, Surrey. At this latter place his duty was performed with the most careful attention and the most scrupulous exactness. His family prayer was attended by many of the parishioners. The communicants were very considerably increased; and his own life was distinguished for the utmost precision and regularity. To a living which he might have had, and of some value, he voluntarily recommended an individual, whom he deemed better qualified to fill it, and who obtained it by his instrumentality. A work of Mr. Law's, at that time first published, the "Spirit of Love," or "Spirit of Prayer," opened Mr. Venn's eyes to the faults of that writer, whom he had hitherto regarded as a correct guide in religious matters. He saw through the errors of that system by which he had sought to be regulated. He was now resolved to call no man master. He sought for spiritual illumination and guidance from its only true source. By earnest prayer, and diligent perusal of the word of God, he was led to clearer apprehension of the truth, until the Gospel, in all its vivifying power and saving energy, was brought home to his heart and conscience. We cannot fail to admire clerical consistency, and outward respect to religious matters. We cannot but praise zeal for the salvation of souls, by whomsoever it is testified. Clerical lukewarmness is a sin

of no small magnitude. Clerical deficiency in duty must be accounted for at the judgment-seat of the chief Shepherd, whose searching inquiry, of every subordinate shepherd, will be, "Where is the flock that was given thee—thy beautiful flock?" But energy, devotedness, zeal, and labour, may all be testified, and have been repeatedly testified, even while there is a lamentable deficiency in the proclamation of the free offer of pardoning mercy set forth in the Gospel, and Jesus has not been exalted, in all his offices, as the sole ground of the sinner's hope.

Soon after this change in his views, in 1751, Mr. Venn accepted the curacy of Clapham, in Surrey, where he resided five years—at the same time holding several lectureships in London. Here he became acquainted with Mr. John Thornton, between whom and himself the strongest feelings of friendship existed. In 1756, it pleased God to lay him on a bed of sickness, and for eight months he was incapacitated from duty. This sickness was peculiarly blessed for his soul's good. He had now clearer views of the Gospel plan of salvation, which was apparent by a more decided mode of preaching. In May 1757, he married a daughter of Dr. Bishop, minister of Tower Church, in Ipswich. She was a person of the deepest piety, and entered into her rest 1767. In 1759, he was presented to the vicarage of Huddersfield, in Yorkshire, a poor piece of preferment in a worldly point of view, for the income did not exceed £100 per annum; but he was anxious to labour in a large sphere of usefulness: and he had not been long settled in the living before an important change took place in the spiritual aspect of the affairs of the Established Church. The parish church itself was crowded to excess. The ignorance of the neighbourhood was most deplorable; but he soon perceived some fruits of his labours. Numbers were seriously impressed. The services of the Church, too often engaged in in a formal spirit, were now attended with the heartfelt desire for instruction. Opposition of course awaited him. His doctrines were misrepresented: his conduct was condemned: he was regarded as an intemperate in principle, while, at the same time, his own conduct, and that of his converts, was censured as too strict.

He felt, that to preach Christ as the only Saviour of sinners, was his duty, his honour, and his privilege; and he was willing to account as a brother in the Lord every labourer in the vineyard who sought to magnify His grace and mercy who died for sinners upon the cross, whatever might be their opinions on minor points. "Those," says he, "who exalt the Lord Jesus Christ as their saviour, and abase man, I rejoice in; and would not have them advance farther, 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 the 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 any thing yet as he ought to know, that man knoweth nothing.' I used to plume myself with the imagination, fifteen years since, that, by prayer for the Holy Ghost, and reading diligently the lively oracles, I should be able to understand all Scripture, and 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 always have something to humble us; and this is one means to that end."

In 1763, he published "The complete duty of Man."—There were two works extant, under a somewhat similar title, which were widely circulated among the members of the Established Church—"The Old and the New Whole Duty of Man." Both were radically defective: the "Old," as keeping almost out of view the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel; the "New," as giving a most unscriptural view of these doctrines.

In 1770, he was presented, by his friend Baron Smyth, then one of the commissioners of the Great Seal, to the rectory of Yelling, in Huntingdonshire; which, from the declining state of his health, he felt it his duty to accept.—Huddersfield was a charge far too great for him. He had many symptoms which led to the supposition that he was on the very verge of consumption. He was necessarily incapacitated from using exertion in his ministerial calling; and he wisely came to the determination to leave the scene of his more active labours, and to retire to the quiet seclusion of a country village. "Nothing would have prevailed on me to leave Huddersfield," says he, in a letter bearing date November 17, 1770, "if my lungs had not received an irreparable injury, of which I am more sensible by several symptoms than ever. What I feel in giving up the Huddersfield congregation, no words can sufficiently express; instead of being rejoiced at the providence, I barely feel resigned." And again, to another friend, he thus expressed himself: "Lucrative views were not of force to determine me; and so it will be found; for, all things considered, the increase of income will not be many pounds, and the increase of trials will be very grievous, for instead of a large congregation, the glory of the country, I shall have very few, and probably, such is the thinness of the inhabitants, never many; instead of the love wherewith I was loved at Huddersfield, I shall give offence, and be always five or six miles from any conversible people." There is indeed, no small denial of the mind, which many clergymen are called upon to exercise, when they are placed in spheres of comparatively little usefulness, and when they are eagerly intent upon performing their Master's work. Such appears to have been the case with Mr. Venn: the retirement of a secluded village did not seem calculated for a man of his ardour and zeal, who had been accustomed to the activity of busy life; yet to this he was led; and doubtless many souls were benefited by his exchange. The present Bishop of Winchester thus admirably speaks with reference to this

very subject: "Not all," says he, "are called to speak in the great congregation: the path of duty will lead some, as it did John the Baptist, into the desert. Do their spirits droop? Does their interest flag, when they survey their narrow sphere? And are they tempted to sit down inactive and listless in the restricted lot of their inheritance? Let them estimate, if they can, the value of a single soul in the sight of the great Shepherd and Bishop. Let them reflect whether the smallest number will not be more than they can be sufficient to answer for, in the day when they shall render an account of their stewardship. Let them remember, that they may perform their commission as acceptably to God, and, perhaps, as usefully, when two or three are gathered together in his name, as in the crowded city and populous haunts of men. Though their flock be but as a few sheep in the wilderness, it is still that beautiful flock for which Christ shed his blood; and he will one day ask of their pastor respecting each of them, inconsiderable as their number may have been, 'With whom hast thou left them?'"

Soon after his taking up his residence at Yelling, he married for the second time. The lady was the widow of Mr. Smith of Kensington, and lived after the marriage 21 years. His living being at no great distance from Cambridge, he had frequent opportunities of holding intercourse with members of the University; some of whom eagerly sought his society, and were much benefited by it. His conversational powers were very great: the advice which he imparted was, in the truest sense of the word, sound and judicious; and thus, even in his narrow sphere of strictly parochial duty, he was made the instrument of incalculable good. In the autumn of 1791, he engaged the services of a permanent curate. His constitution was naturally very weak; and at the age of 68 he found it necessary wholly to withdraw from active duty. His family consisted of one son and three daughters, one daughter having died in childhood. The son was well known as the rector of Clapham. In respect to his children, indeed, he was singularly blessed, as may be seen in his various letters.

About six months before his death he left Yelling, and removed to Clapham. Here he continued in a most delightful frame of mind, ready to obey the summons of his heavenly Master. "At length," to use the words of his biographer, "on the 24th of June, 1797, his happy spirit was released, and entered into the long-anticipated joy of his Lord.

* Charge delivered to the clergy of the diocese of Winchester, in October, 1823.

HORSE LITURGICAL.

No. VII.

THE ABSOLUTION.

It has been well observed that to those who feel the sting, and have an appalling sense of the wages of sin, vague and indeterminate ideas of the mercy of God will not be satisfactory, without some accompanying clearness of persuasion upon the scripture doctrine of Absolution. This comfort and encouragement has been supplied to the Christian worshipper, in the offices of our apostolic Church. She gives not to her priests a ministry only of fear, and shame, and sorrow: not only are they to proclaim the terrors of the Lord, but to dispense his blessings also. After leading his fellow-worshippers, humble and penitent, to the throne of grace—confessing there their sinfulness and helplessness, and dependence only on the mercy of God through Christ—the pastor of the Church proceeds to the office of consecration. He takes, as it were, the sinner by the hand, raises him from the dust, and comforts him with God's promise of pardon,—not vaguely or indefinitely expressed, but authoritatively spoken on the strength of the positive commission with which he has been entrusted. By that authority, embraced specifically in the charge conveyed to his ministers by Christ himself, he declares and pronounces to the penitent the "absolution and remission of their sins." By our sins we are delivered up, as it were, bound with a chain, ready for punishment; but by God's mercy through Christ, vouchsafed to us upon our hearty repentance, we are delivered, and his ministers are, upon those terms, commissioned to pronounce our discharge.

Nor is the Church of England singular in this construction of the waste and desires of her penitent people. "We are every one of us," says Calvin, "ready to admit that after a general confession, to subjoin some signal promise which may excite hope of pardon and reconciliation, is a very useful and beneficial practice.—And from the very beginning I was desirous of adopting this method, but I yielded too easily to the apprehensions of others." In answer to the expression of such apprehensions as are here implied, it can be unhesitatingly affirmed that there is nothing in the Absolution appointed by our Church that borders upon unreasonable pretension—no claim laid to powers which our Saviour does not expressly sanction. The Absolution here enjoined is plainly declaratory and conditional, although it proclaims with ministerial authority God's readiness to receive the true penitent and sincere believer. In the words of Dean Comber, "it is a solemn promulgation of pardon by a commissioned person, repeated when the whole congregation confess their sins, wherein they are assured of forgiveness, if they repent and believe; and this is fitted for a mixed company of good and bad men, where many hypocrites feign repentance; but this absolution gives no encouragement to such; only it assures all that there is a pardon, and shews on what terms it may be had; so that to those who truly do repent, it is present remission, to those that do not, it is a monitor that they may repent; it comforts the godly, and allows not the wicked to presume, nor yet to despair; and this being pronounced to all the people, every one is to take his portion."

This conditional absolution was spoken by St. Peter to the penitent Jews, when he said, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you for the remission of sins." [Acts, ii. 38.]

* From the "Church of England Magazine."