

COMMUNICATIONS.

For the Colonial Churchman.

MESSRS. EDITORS,

Having in my possession a work, perhaps rather rare among your readers, the life of the Rev. H. Venn, to which is attached a most valuable correspondence, replete with instruction on many subjects of vital import to churchmen and christians generally, I have resolved to transmit to you occasional selections for insertion in the Colonial Churchman, if they meet your approbation.

Henry Venn was born at Barnes in Surry on the 2d of March 1724. His ancestors were clergymen of the Church of England, in an uninterrupted line from the period of the Reformation. In June 1742 being seventeen years of age, he was admitted of St. John's College, Cambridge. But having obtained a scholarship in Jesus college, he removed in September to that Society, of which he continued a member for seven years. Possessing a never failing fund of high spirits, a natural hilarity and gaiety of manner, an engaging sweetness of temper, and a memory stored with anecdotes, which he related in a manner peculiarly interesting, his company was much sought after.

Besides this he captivated all whose good opinion he wished to gain, by a delicate attention, arising from a happy mixture of benevolence, modesty and respect. He was however very select in the choice of his society, never keeping company either with profligate men, or with persons of mean talents. The rule he laid down was, to be acquainted only with those from whom he could gain improvement.

It was about the time of his ordination 1747, that his first religious impressions commenced. True he was moral and decent in his conduct, regular in his attendance on public worship, but he was a stranger to that influence of religion which gives it a predominancy in the mind over every thing besides, and to these views of the benefits and excellence of the christian dispensation, which render the Saviour the object of the highest affection and regard.

He possessed, however, high ideas of clerical decorum, and scrupulous conscientiousness in doing faithfully whatever he was convinced to be right; and so highly did he rate a strict regard to conscience, in acting up to the light received, that he often used to say, in his own forcible way of expressing himself, 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 of itself seemed one only of small importance.

The case was this:—He was extremely fond of cricket, and reckoned one of the best players in the university. In the week before he was ordained, he played in a match between Surry and all England. When the game terminated, in favour of the side on which he played, 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!'" And to this resolution he strictly adhered, though his health suffered by a sudden transition from a course of violent exercise, to a life of comparative inactivity. Thus being faithful in a little, more grace was imparted to him.

In 1754, he accepted the curacy of Clapham in Surry, where he resided five years; officiating at the same time, during the week, in three different churches in London. His regular duties consisted of a full service at Clapham on the Sunday morning, a Sermon in the afternoon at St. Alban's, Wood street. And in the evening at St Swithin's. On Tuesday morning, a Sermon at St. Swithin's; on Wednesday morning at 7 o'clock at St. Antholins—and on Thursday evening at Clapham.

In May 1757, he married Miss Bishop, daughter of the Rev. Dr. Bishop. In this Lady Mr. Venn found a mind congenial with his own—the most sincere and exalted piety, directed by a sound judgment, and enlivened by a sweetness of disposition and animation which rendered her peculiarly interesting as a companion and a friend.

In 1759, he accepted the vicarage of Huddersfield in Yorkshire, the grand scene of his labours in the church. As soon as he began to preach at Hudders-

field, 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. On the Sunday he would often address the congregation from the desk, briefly explaining and enforcing the Psalms and the Lessons. In the week he stately visited the different hamlets of 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 remarkable instance occurred about this time, of the success of his preaching which deserves to be noticed.—A Club, chiefly composed of Socinians in a neighbouring town, having heard much of his preaching, sent two of their body to hear this strange preacher as many termed him, and to furnish matter of merriment for the next meeting. They accordingly went; but could not but be struck, when they entered the church, to see the multitude that was assembled together, to observe the devotion of their behaviour, and to witness their anxiety to attend the worship of God—When Mr. Venn ascended the reading desk, he addressed his flock with a solemnity and dignity which shewed him to be deeply interested in the work in which he was engaged. The earnestness of his preaching, and the solemn appeals he made to conscience deeply impressed them; so that one of them observed as he left the church, "Surely God is in this place! there is no matter for laughter here."—This gentleman immediately called Mr. V.—mentioned all the circumstances, and earnestly begged his forgiveness and his prayers. He left the Socinian congregation, and to the hour of his death remained one of Mr. Venn's most faithful friends.

Mr. Venn adopted the fundamental doctrines of that system which is called Calvinistic. This gave a tincture to his preaching; leading him to exalt, in higher strains the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ, and to speak less of the power and excellence of man. But his Calvinism stopped here. He did not break the bond of brotherly love and union with those of his friends who were still zealous Arminians; and above all, it did not lead him to relax in his views of the necessity or the nature of holiness. On the contrary, he urged the practice of it most effectually, from what he conceived to be stronger and purer motives. With respect to others, he candidly left every person to determine for himself what system he should adopt: well convinced, that if a man entertained a supreme love to God, and a steadfast faith in Christ Jesus, he would be a good christian, whether he leaned to the views of Calvin or Arminius. He dreaded young men hastily adopting Calvinistic views; and, when once asked, respecting a young minister, about whom he had been much interested, whether he was a Calvinist or an Arminian; he replied, "I really do not know: he is a sincere disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is of infinitely more importance than his being a disciple of Calvin or Arminius."

The following extracts from letters written to his friends, at different periods of his life, will serve to confirm the remarks already made:—

"As to Calvinism, you know I am moderate. Those who exalt the Lord Jesus, as all their salvation, and abase man, I rejoice in. 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. 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 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.

"Though the doctrines of grace are clear to me, I am no friend to high Calvinism. A false libertine Calvinism stops every avenue. Sin, the law, holiness, experience, are all nothing. Predestination cancels

the necessity of any change, and dispenses at once with all duty."

What difficulties surround us! What rocks on each hand! Were not our pilot infallible, it were impossible to steer through the narrow pass which lies between Antinomian abuse of the doctrines of grace, and self-righteous renunciation of the blood of the Cross.

O Prince of Peace! heal our divisions—diffuse thy patient loving spirit! Give discernment to distinguish aright between what is essential and what is not, and to bear with each other's differences, till the perfect day discovers all things in their true proportions

And here, Messrs. Editors, I must at present pause, fearful of engrossing too much of your periodical. In what I have now submitted to your readers, they will find many topics for meditation, profitable to all; but particularly so, to those who are labouring in the same vineyard where toiled the holy Venn; and who are looking for that same recompense of reward when they rest from their labours, as we may suppose to be his now,—not only his, but of all who have fought the good fight, have kept the faith,—have finished their course.

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RELIGION IS TRUE WISDOM.

"The Christian Religion contains within itself a key to those difficulties, doubts, and mysteries, by which the human mind is agitated, so soon as it is raised beyond the mere objects which interest, the senses. Christianity alone offers a clew to this labyrinth—a solution to these melancholy and discouraging doubts; and however hard its doctrines may seem to unaided flesh and blood, yet explaining as they do the system of the universe, which without them is incomprehensible, and through their practical influence rendering men in all ages more worthy to act their part in the general plan, it seems wonderful how those, whose professed pursuit was wisdom, should have looked on Religion not alone with that indifference, which was the only feeling evinced by the heathen philosophers towards the gross mythology of their time, but with hatred, malice, and uncharitableness."

The above are among the eloquent remarks of Sir Walter Scott, relative to that awful state of religion and literature in France, which hurried on the Revolution of 1798. It was then that Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire, Viderst, and others, called on the world to applaud them as among the very first of their poets, and to listen admiringly to their philosophical ravings, and their corruptions and obscene code of false morality. And in these days, wise and observing writers detect and seek to expose the lurking danger of the wisdom of this world, discarding or despising the gospel of Christ and the sublime plan of salvation. In the proud and un sanctified, and carnal heart, there ever exists a desire to shun or pass by christianity, in its humility and self-abasement, from an unwillingness to descend from that false eminence in which the mind loves to place itself. May we not fear, Messrs. Editors, that in youth the usual system of academic education, too frequently brings the student in admiring contact with the heathen philosophy above alluded to by Scott? Is not manhood too often puffed up with that intellectual pride, and with that high estimate of the supposed capabilities and all-sufficiency of unassisted reason and unblessed learning, which leads the mind lightly to esteem our chartered hopes of salvation through Him of Nazareth, dashing the deceived one against the teachorous rock of worldly wisdom? Failing to distinguish between the use and abuse of the modes through which Religion is displayed—some inflated account of a revival or inconsistent conduct in one who had been esteemed a true disciple of Christ, or some passage of scripture which he cannot, or will not understand—some, or all of these causes may lead the student—(too willingly misled by the maxims of "a world lying in wickedness") to cherish the feeling that, after all preachers may say, he is not so very unsafe!

Alas! the insufficiency—the danger of mere human learning, when it puffeth up, or leads the mind from Religion! At the very time in which Grotius was standing on the pinnacle of praise and honor which