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978-1-108-00822-8 - Memoir of Henry Venn, B.D.: Prebendary of St Paul's, and Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society

William Knight

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Memoir of Henry Venn, B.D.

Henry Venn (1796–1873) was an Anglican clergyman who, like his father and grandfather before him, was influential in the evangelical movement and campaigned for social reform, eradication of the slave trade, and better education and economic progress in the British colonies so as to enable them to become responsible for their own affairs. Venn was Secretary of the Church Missionary Society from 1841 to 1873, and alongside practical training and appointment of missionaries and ministers he spent time developing a theology of mission and principles for its practice. This book, published in its second edition in 1881, was edited by William Knight who had access to Venn's private journals and correspondence (from which he used substantial quotations), and met Venn's niece, who provided the portrait of her uncle used as the frontispiece of the book. The appendix contains some of Venn's own accounts of his early missionary work.

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Secretary of the Church Missionary Society*

WILLIAM KNIGHT



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MEMOIR
OF
HENRY VENN, B.D.

*PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S, AND HONORARY SECRETARY
OF THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY*

BY

WILLIAM KNIGHT, M.A.

RECTOR OF PITT PORTION, TIVERTON, AND CHAPLAIN TO HIS GRACE THE LORD
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY
FORMERLY SECRETARY OF THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY

*A NEW EDITION
WITH PORTRAIT AND APPENDIX*

SEELEY, JACKSON, AND HALLIDAY, FLEET STREET
LONDON. MDCCCLXXXII

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P R E F A C E.

THIS revised and compressed *Memoir of Henry Venn* has been prepared for the press at the instance of many friends, who hoped that such a life and character might be more widely studied if presented in a less costly form.

As the book now appears, I am solely responsible for it, though I have adopted the valuable Biographical Sketch almost without change, endeavouring to carry forward, as far as the materials at my command enabled me, a record of the latter and more important years of his life. Several of his friends expressed to me their disappointment that the first edition did not contain more reminiscences from the pens of those who knew him ; but, though I have since applied to those friends and others for such sketches and anecdotes, I have applied almost in vain. Nevertheless, the additional matter to which I have had access will be found full of interest and highly characteristic. I have had the opportunity of availing myself more largely of his private journal ; many important and graphic letters have been added ; and I have to express my thanks to the Rev. Prebendary Wilson, the Rev. Canon Clayton, and the Rev. G. T. Fox for very valuable additions to the correspondence ; and last, but not least, to Miss Caroline E. Stephen for a life-like portraiture of her revered uncle.

In order not to interfere with the continuity of the work, I have, along with other documents, removed to the Appendix Mr. Venn's own narratives of the early

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years of the *Church Missionary Society*, and his Suggestions for the Organization of Native Churches. They are far too valuable to be lost, and will perhaps some day be prized as no unimportant authorities in connection with the ecclesiastical history of our country. It is with a similar feeling that I have seized the opportunity of adding to this edition Mr. Venn's own memoranda of his share in the debates of the two notable Commissions of which he was a member, whilst I have been careful not to violate any implied pledge of secrecy.

I have endeavoured to profit by the criticisms, most of them fair and friendly, which the former Volume elicited. I never expected that writers moving in a totally different sphere would be able to appreciate a man who devoted himself to a cause which we must love before we can understand; but it is a noble cause none the less, and it is based on those 'certainties' which were the life and power of one who was truly a Father in God.

W. KNIGHT.

PITT RECTORY,
All Saints Day, 1881.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.



MANY hindrances, of little concern to the public, have delayed the issue of this memoir. Its preparation was naturally undertaken in the first instance by Mr. Venn's own family, and for a most important and well-executed part of it they are still responsible. The fear of transgressing on the side of panegyric has perhaps restrained them from expressing to the full the admiration which to a stranger would have cost no scruples; but, if the biographical chapter errs in any direction, it only errs in that subdued reticence which to its subject would have been most congenial, and it is no common portrait of a Christian father, friend, and pastor, who brought rare qualifications to a work which he was almost the first to realise under its new conditions and full development.

When, in the course of the memoir, it became necessary to deal with the special work in connection with the administration of the Church Missionary Society, which gradually absorbed all Mr. Venn's time and energies, it was felt that, even at the risk of some lack of unity in the execution, this portion of the narrative might fare best in the hands of some one, if such could be found, who had been associated with him in this work of his life.

His sons accordingly proposed this task to me, as I had been for nearly thirteen years officially attached to the Church Missionary Society, both at home and in the East, and had been through most of that time his confidential coadjutor. Though I shrank from so responsible a part, involved as I was in other duties, I consented to

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do my best in a work for which others thought me suitable.

I had some guide as to the points which my honoured friend would have desired to be made prominent, in the various papers, some of them carefully corrected by himself, which were put into my hands; for I remembered his saying to me—'My grandfather kept everything; my father kept nothing; I have taken a middle course.' He had long so completely merged his individuality in the cause to which he had consecrated himself that I felt sure that the memorial most in accordance with his wishes, could he speak to us from his place of rest, would take something of the form into which I have endeavoured to mould it. I recollect, too, his more than once expressing a wish in past years to write 'The Constitutional History of the Society,' leaving me to record the growth of the different missions. This was never achieved, but I felt that in the present review a contribution might perhaps be made towards its accomplishment. His own writings supply the materials, and they can hardly fail of commanding attention, now that they are presented at a single view. Some of the occasional papers thus collected into a permanent form are now either very rare or quite out of print. The sketch of Mr. Bickersteth's secretariat is a work of no small care and pains. Mr. Venn always rated highly his predecessor's assertion of the great spiritual principles of the Society. He believed them to be based on immutable truth, and his single aim and object was to transmit them undiluted and unimpaired to his successors.

The same arts that did gain
A power, must it maintain.

W. KNIGHT.

PITT RECTORY, TIVERTON,
April, 1880.

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