

ART. III.—MISSIONARY SECRETARIAT OF
HENRY VENN.

The Missionary Secretariat of Henry Venn, B.D., Prebendary of St. Paul's, and Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society. By the Rev. W. KNIGHT, M.A., Rector of Pitt Portion, Tiverton, and formerly Secretary of the Church Missionary Society. *With an Introductory Biographical Chapter and a Notice of West African Commerce,* by his Sons, the Rev. JOHN VENN, M.A., Senior Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and the Rev. HENRY VENN, M.A., Rector of Clare Portion, Tiverton. London: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1880.

IN a previous Number the first portion of this valuable volume has been noticed by us, and to this it is not necessary to recur. It is our object now to deal with the second and more important division of the biography, in which the missionary aspect of Mr. Venn's life is presented to us—the more important division, for it is as Secretary of the Church Missionary Society that he will ever be remembered, and in that capacity he spent thirty out of fifty years of his ministerial life. Those thirty years saw the growth and development not only of missions, but of what Mr. Venn himself called “the science of missions;” during that period the great principles of missionary action were firmly established, and their application tested in almost all conceivable circumstances. We repeat the phrase “science of missions;” for just as it is no disparagement to the great teachers of earlier days to say that it is to Arnold that the public school system as now known amongst us owes its rise and establishment, so is it no discredit to Venn's predecessors in his line of labour to attribute to him a like result in the field of missionary enterprise. He was the last man to forget what was due to those who came before him. His sketch of the founders of the Church Missionary Society, and his portraits of Pratt and Bickersteth, which Mr. Knight has given in full, show his high value of the work done before he entered upon it, and gladly did he recognize the hand of God in raising up such labourers. “While we acknowledge,” he writes, “the varied distribution of gifts by which the great Head of the Church qualifies his servants for occupying different departments of labour, we cannot but see and admire his goodness towards the Society in associating Bickersteth with Pratt, Coates, and Woodrooffe in the management of a great institution for the conversion of the heathen, in the most critical period of its early history” (p. 169). Yet we, who view the matter as it is before us to-day, feel that it is Venn's life-

long labour which has given this institution a permanent character and developed the principles of its action ; and we recognize in the gift of such a man to the Society that same divine goodness which he ever loved to trace. He " will be known," as Mr. Knight says, " in any future records of the Church of England as the man who was the great agent in developing missions directed specially to the heathen, and, above all, Evangelical missions in connection with the National Church, and who made them a force in England and the world. The product of any man's life is the union of two factors—the occasion and the man. If the occasion has not come, the man will drift into some other work. If there is not the man for the occasion, the opportunity will be lost for want of some one to rise and seize it" (pp. 145, 146).

The great principles of this science of missions are twofold—spiritual and ecclesiastical. " The Society will be conducted upon those principles which we believe to be most in accordance with the gospel of Christ and with the spirit of the Reformed Church of England." This was the watchword of the founders, and to this the course of the Church Missionary Society has been true. " It must be kept," said Josiah Pratt, at the preliminary meeting, " in Evangelical hands." " There must be," said John Venn, at the same meeting, " the Church Principle, but not the High Church Principle." By these principles Mr. Venn stood firm. At the close of one of his reports he thus writes :—

The Protestant or Evangelical spirit which the founders of this Society infused, by the help of God, into its very constitution and framework has stood the test of sixty years ; that it has received a blessing from the Lord, and has won the confidence of the Church of Christ, the present report bears abundant evidence. The fundamental principles to which your Committee refer are such as these : that the Lord will guide his own work by the leadings of a special providence ; that the only solid foundation of a mission is the individual conversion of souls to Christ ; that the gospel of the grace of God is to be preached in its fulness and in its distinctness by the pioneer missionary and by the faithful pastors of 10,000 converts, in the bazaar, under the shade of a tree, in the capacious mission church, in the vernacular school, and in the training college ; that a preached gospel " is the power of God " for the formation and for the perfection of a mission ; that all other arrangements must give way to the fullest development of a preached gospel ; that the preacher of the gospel is the true leader of a mission till a spiritual church is raised and the external organization of constituted authorities becomes expedient ; that then the mission has accomplished its work, and this Society will be ready to withdraw its agency ; though, as in New Zealand, it may be difficult on both sides to break the relationship which spiritual principles have cemented and consecrated. These principles your Committee now transmit to their successors, uncompromised and unimpaired, to be the guiding

star in a shifting age of every successive Committee of the Church Missionary Society.

These are noble words, and words most important for the Church to bear in mind. In these days, when some men seem to think that they can manipulate Christian churches by ritual and song, it is well to have an institution amongst us whose watchword is, "The holy seed shall be the substance thereof." "Let the gospel be fully preached," Bickersteth had said before, "and we are persuaded that this gospel will be the power of God unto the salvation of some who will believe. This is your first great work. Everything else must be subordinate to this." What is true for Africa and the East is true for England. Speaking of the possible conflict between the spiritual and ecclesiastical principles, Mr. Venn wrote:—

I will venture to predict what will be the battleground of this conflict. It will be, as it seems to me, the question—In what way can a sinner obtain pardon and peace with God? Other great questions agitate the minds of the few; this is the great personal question with every man whose conscience is awake. Every Church and every minister of a Church must give a distinct answer to this inquiry; in seasons of religious conflict this is sure to be uppermost, and by the answer given every Church or minister will stand or fall. Men cannot unite upon other points while they disagree in this.

By whatever expression the truth of the gospel may be indicated, whether as the doctrine of the cross of Christ, whether as justification by faith only, whether as the Atonement, whether as redemption through the blood of Christ, it has ever encountered opposition. It was "to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness." In the earliest ages of the Church, and ever since, the struggle has been going on within the Church, to tear from this blessed truth its significance or its simplicity, to substitute a way of salvation more in accordance with natural reason and human prejudices. Popery worships the shadow but denies the substance of the truth, by setting up the doctrine of human merit, of works of supererogation, and of the mediation of saints. Superstition substitutes sacramental grace. Yet this truth, though ridiculed by the profane, though cavilled at by others, is cherished as the life of the soul by all who receive it. When received, it frees a man from the slavery of the world; it gives him power; it is accompanied by a change in the moral character which cannot be mistaken. This cardinal truth brought the Reformation. It has revived our Church. If its enemies are now mustering their forces, so are its friends. Its influence, blessed be God, increases daily. Presuming only to speak from personal experience, I hesitate not to say, that where one heart was swayed by its influence when I first entered the ministry of this metropolis,¹ thirty-seven years ago, hundreds might now be counted. At home it is becoming more and more the rallying point for all who are zealous on the Lord's side. It

¹ Mr. Venn came to London as minister of St. John's, Holloway, in 1834.

is the line of advance of all our social improvements. Abroad it is evangelizing the world. It is easily apprehended and cordially embraced by thousands of the negroes of Africa, of the Hindoos of India, and of the islanders of the Pacific. It has raised them into the brotherhood of Christendom (pp. 170, 171).

These, then, are the spiritual principles of this Science of Missions. The primary object of them, and of all true Churches, is the salvation of souls. And Mr. Venn was most jealous that this primary object should never be forgotten or overlaid. We well remember how in the early days of East African exploration by Krapf and Rebmann, when great interest was awakened amongst scientific folk by the discovery of the great snow mountains of that region, he was extremely anxious that the missionary should never sink into the geographical explorer; and when the high expectations of immediate triumph were for a time clouded by the successive deaths and failing health of one agent after another, his expression was, "The day of the Lord is on all pleasant pictures." We remember also, on the other hand, that when, as the result of Rebmann's work, there was one poor lame negro, and but one, truly converted to God, he rejoiced over him as the "holy seed"—the token that God had a blessing for the degraded tribes of that region; and how thoroughly he sympathized with the devoted Krapf, who, when his wife was taken from him in the island of Mombasa, carried over her corpse to the mainland of Africa for burial, and regarded that Christian grave as a sign that Africa should yet be the Lord's.

To carry on this work men of the right stamp were wanted, men understanding and valuing and living by the truth they were to proclaim. For many years they were not to be found in England; the English Church and Universities did not provide them, and this led to the establishment of the Islington College, a work begun by Mr. Bickersteth, but to which afterwards Mr. Venn gave most careful supervision. It would be invidious to select individual names out of a noble army of Christian warriors; but they will live in the history of the Church of Christ. Of later years the Universities have contributed a full and worthy contingent. By these men the gospel has been preached far and near and souls won for the Lord.

But when the spiritual work has made progress, and souls are won, and a Church is formed, then it becomes necessary to apply the ecclesiastical principles of the science of missions. And here at once come arrangements requiring much tact and delicacy combined with wisdom and firmness. From the first Mr. Venn recognized that the appointment and the withdrawal of agents must lie with the Church Missionary Society's Committee. Here was a work carried on by

a voluntary association, supported by voluntary funds. It was obvious that those who formed this association and supplied these funds must have a voice in the disbursement of them, would in fact only contribute them for the furtherance of their object; and if that work was in danger of being marred or hindered by unfit agents would withhold the funds. It is the principle now widely recognized in placing churches under trustee patronage; and this, let us observe, is nothing new, but only a development of that lay patronage from which the Church of England for so many centuries has so widely benefited. That the Church Missionary Society's Committee should occupy towards their labourers abroad a position analogous to that of lay-patrons at home is now on all hands admitted, and by the settlement of the Colombo dispute admitted, as we trust, conclusively. Thus the Church Missionary Society's contributors, through their representatives in Salisbury Square, exercise that control and legitimate influence of the lay element which is always a source of strength and safety to a Church.

No doubt there are those to whom this mode of proceeding is not acceptable. We have ourselves heard enunciated from the platform (not of a Church Missionary meeting) the dictum, "Let the Church go forth on the grand Ignatian principle—let nothing be done without the bishop: and because Ignatian, apostolical; and because apostolical, divine." But unfortunately for the speaker the true Ignatius never propounded the principle on which so much was to be built. If, however, we no longer hear this, we do meet with objections of the same kind, to one of which our attention is called in a note to p. 224. The source whence it is derived is not told us, but the mention of a Zulu scheme in the words which follow our quotation would perhaps sufficiently indicate it.

If you like to sound the Church Missionary Society as to funds, I have no objection, but nothing could induce me to submit to any dictation or interference on their part. The whole mission shall in every respect be managed by the Church here [that is, we suppose, by the Bishop?] or there shall be none. I have seen enough since I have been out here of the working of societies to make me loathe them—always excepting the dear Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which seems to be mercifully preserved from the Society spirit. If the Church Missionary Society will follow the example of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and place £500 a year entirely at my disposal for the formation of a mission, I will thankfully accept of it. But if they mean to bargain for power I will have nothing to do with them. I see every day I live more and more clearly that the whole Church work must be done by the Church, and not by any other agency. And, thank God, this diocese is beginning to think so too. If the Church Missionary Society will not help me without annexing conditions which the Church here will not assent to,

and if the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel cannot assist us further, we must look to God for supplying us the means in other ways.

We quote this as indicating a spirit which has from time to time to be met with in dealing with missionary work, and which shows the wisdom and safety of the line the Church Missionary Society has uniformly pursued. At one of the early discussions of the founders, Mr. John Venn remarked, "I would sacrifice a great deal to preserve Church order, but not the salvation of souls." If the ecclesiastical and spiritual principles come into collision, the ecclesiastical must bend to the spiritual. Spiritual work done by spiritual men, and such alone can do it, is our motto.

But, subject to this limitation—and the limitation, be it observed, involves no more than the legitimate rights of lay-patrons—Mr. Venn and his colleagues have always held heartily and firmly to the ecclesiastical principles of the Reformed Church of England. How true they have been to that Church the whole story of their work demonstrates. When the Society was originated, a first step was to send a deputation to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishops of Durham and London, with a copy of the rules of the Society and a respectful letter; and that episcopal countenance was so long withheld was due, not to any unwillingness on the part of the Society to welcome it, but to the fact that few men are able to rise so far beyond the level of their day as to throw themselves into a new and untried project which might perchance collapse and bring with its fall contempt and ridicule. But when the episcopal support came, it was most thankfully accepted. While to the importance of securing the supervision of their missionaries abroad by existing bishops, or by the establishment of new sees, Mr. Venn and the committee were always alive. It is a well-worn story that the Church Missionary Society in 1813 did battle for the foundation of the Indian Episcopate. The Bishopric of Sierra Leone, founded in 1851, was entirely due to Mr. Venn's zealous efforts; and among the stipendiary agents of the Society at the present time are no fewer than nine bishops, while at least three others have in earlier days marched under the same banner. We well remember a conversation of Mr. Venn with Dr. Russell, late Bishop of Ningpo, in which he said, "What you want is to have your episcopal position recognized;" the Presbyterian being in fact, as were the Presbyters of the Philippian Church, really an Episcopus, though not of course assuming episcopal functions. But there is a vast difference between conferring the episcopal order on a successful missionary for the consolidation and development of his work, and sending out into the mission field bishops, who may be successful or not, and who,

as experience shows, not seldom return home to the discredit of the missionary cause.

We do not like to leave the subject of the Ecclesiastical Principles, which Mr. Venn maintained, without calling attention to the able and interesting Paper on the Sacraments which Mr. Knight has been good enough to reproduce and thus to render permanent. It deserves careful study and expresses, as we are convinced, the true teaching of the Reformed Church of England, which the supporters of the Church Missionary Society claim as their rightful inheritance. Here again we have a pleasant reminiscence of Mr. Venn. In conversation on this Paper, he thus illustrated the federal nature of the Baptismal Covenant: "It is as when men make a bargain and say 'done,' and give their hands upon it. But the bargain has yet to be carried out."

Such then were the great missionary principles of this remarkable man. It is not, however, to be supposed that he did nothing but insist upon them. On the contrary he never forgot to enlist in the good cause all such collateral aids as were not inconsistent with these principles or obstructive of them. To make use of any means that would improve the people among whom the missionary agents were labouring, to introduce when possible the arts and industries of life, to establish schools and colleges, to provide good school and other books—these, as well as the direct preaching of the gospel, were objects always kept in view. To combine these with distinct mission work is nothing new, as the history of the New Zealand and Sierra Leone Missions abundantly shows. To regard it as a recent discovery, that civilization should go hand in hand with the Word of God, and to speak, as some have done, of the Church Missionary agents as neglecting this combination, can result only from ignorance. Into this matter, however, we cannot enter more fully.

But what above all gave Henry Venn the success he achieved and the influence he exerted, was the spiritual power he never failed to wield. In the reports he wrote, in the charges he delivered to missionaries on their departure, and in the correspondence he carried on with them, the power of this influence may be seen. Of these charges or instructions, as they are termed, Mr. Knight has given us a large number, and they all deserve careful study. It is indeed this preservation and arrangement of documents which makes his sketch of the "Missionary Secretariat" so valuable and fits it to become a handbook on missions, which cannot fail to be useful not only to the committee in years to come, but to many a missionary labouring under trials or grappling with difficulties, and also, as we may venture to say, to the Bishops of the Church at home and abroad. Those who carefully study these documents cannot fail to remark the masterly way in which the circumstances,

the dangers, the wants, the trials of each mission and each missionary are dealt with, so that one and all would feel they served a chief who well deserved their confidence and had at Salisbury Square a sympathizing friend. As to his correspondence with missionaries abroad, we have the testimony of some of them of the high value they set upon it. "He encouraged me from time to time by his excellent letters, which were exceeding precious to me." "I know from experience how thoroughly Mr. Venn made himself acquainted with every detail of our work." "He was one who in a most remarkable and very uncommon degree combined greatness and largeness of heart with rare mental qualifications for the work to which he devoted the best energies of his life." "No one I ever heard of had such a power to sympathize with and draw to himself persons much younger than himself." "Fatherly and friendly counsel and encouragement given at first entrance on mission work; wise and comforting letters subsequently written; hospitable reception at Mortlake; counsel and immediate direction, are some among other reasons which must ever impress upon me a grateful regard to Mr. Venn's memory." Such are a few out of many testimonies given by those who regarded him as their friend and leader; and these show conclusively what manner of man he was.

As a further illustration of this spiritual power, we would refer to the instructions, headed "Dangers and Safeguards," pp. 441-451. Mr. Venn is there dealing with the question of missions to civilized and cultured races, as contrasted with those to rude and untutored savages. The cry, he says, not unfrequently comes, "Send us missionaries of well-cultured intellects and of mental power; men capable of mastering the national literature, of grappling with systems of philosophy, of meeting in argument subtle and cavilling reasoners." Now it would not be like him to neglect any gifts which the servant of Christ may possess or can improve, and he urges on all missionary students the importance of mental discipline, but utters at the same time a word of caution.

"Do not be discouraged," he says, "by any sense of deficiency in natural ability or of inadequate mental furniture. You have been led to your present position by the clear providence of God. And if you still wait upon Him, and do not wilfully thrust yourselves into any particular post or branch of the work, you will always be able to feel 'I am where God has placed me; the task before me is that which He has appointed, and for which I doubt not that He will give strength sufficient.' A missionary of ordinary secular attainments, who depends on Divine grace, who calmly and prayerfully speaks of that which he knows by his own experience, who patiently endeavours to understand his

opponent's position, . . . will always meet with respect, and will feel, even when addressing such persons, that a Divine power accompanies the proclamation of God's truth. Let him but wield the sword of the Spirit ; let him only live and speak in close communion with God ; and he will find, after all, that the superiority, and the evident superiority, is on his own side" (pp. 443-444). And then he urges, as a natural sequel : " Beware of the temptation to omit or abridge devotional exercises, for the purpose of giving more time to intellectual study." " Languor in the spiritual life cannot be compensated by the most brilliant of earthly gifts. Let one or two hours be therefore daily given to private communion with God in prayer, and in reading the Scripture. Let it be actual communion—converse with God in solitude, real pouring out of the heart before Him, real reception from His fulness. Be abundant in intercessory supplication, especially in behalf of fellow-missionaries, native associates, members of your own household, and, the committee would also ask, in behalf of those who carry on the work at this central office" (p. 445).

There is a great deal in this interesting volume which we are obliged to leave without notice. The title it bears, "The Missionary Secretariat of Rev. H. Venn," accurately describes this second division of it, which we have now briefly reviewed. Mr. Knight was for many years his colleague, and he thoroughly understood the work he had to do, and has done it well. Such a history, supported throughout by original documents, is just what was needed. No one, who loves evangelical truth, can read this book without receiving great encouragement. It tells us that the principles we hold dear have been put to the proof and have never been found wanting. Only let us remember the great distinction, which Mr. Venn often made, between holding evangelical opinions and possessing the evangelical spirit. The opinions may be held and taught without life and power ; but where the spirit lives there must be triumph. It is also worth the consideration of the clergy, who support missions, whether they give them their due place in parochial organization. We remember Mr. Venn's describing his arrangements at Drypool and at Islington. His parochial workers were divided into three classes : (1) Sunday-school teachers ; (2) district visitors ; (3) missionary collectors ; and he was in the habit of promoting successful workers from the first class to the second, and from the second to the third. With him the missionary collector stood highest. It is not the classification which most men would naturally adopt, but coming from him we may be quite sure it has good grounds on which to rest. We suppose that in his view the field of labour should widen as progress was made. The Sunday-school teacher is connected

with the children of the parish, the district visitor with the adults and their homes, the missionary collector with the whole world. The last work, to be done rightly, would seem to require larger knowledge, wider sympathies, and the power of enlisting others in hearty service for the Lord. But whatever view we may take of this subject, the fact shows that when Mr. Venn went as secretary to Salisbury Square the mission field had already attained a position of paramount importance in his own mind. It was with that estimate and in that conviction that he lived and laboured for this great cause. The record of his life and work now before us ought to kindle in many hearts earnest zeal and happy confidence. The history of the Church Missionary Society teaches us that the gospel we love has lost none of its power. It has rescued from a life of blood the cannibal of New Zealand; it has melted the heart of the hard stoic of North-west America; it has elevated the down-trodden dwellers of the Indian hills and the crushed slave of Africa; it has cast down the thousand idols of the Hindoo. That which it has done it can and will do. There is still the same special Providence watching over the work of Christ's true Church. If difficulties arise, as they will, we may well remember the words of the venerable Thomas Scott, not seldom referred to in this volume, that "we must go forward believing that difficulties will be removed, in proportion as it is necessary for them to be removed."

We cannot better close these remarks than with an extract from a letter, written apparently to Mr. Knight himself, in which Mr. Venn expresses his own cheerful confidence. After writing of the defection, temporary, as it proved, of one from whom much had been hoped, he adds:—

"The Lord alone knows them that are his. Such cases as this do not affect me as once they did. Nearness to the world of light consoles me in the sight of gropers in the dark. The hope of soon seeing the 'King in His glory' makes me indifferent to the silly dishonour done to His office by those who obscure it by sacerdotalism. We have striven together, my dear friend, for the maintenance of the truth of the gospel. We are assuredly on the winning side, though a few ups and downs surround us. Let us strengthen each other in the Lord."

ART. IV.—BERTRAM AND THE REFORMERS.

IT is now more than a thousand years since Bertram wrote his famous treatise "On the Body and Blood of the Lord," against the rising error of the "Real Presence" and Transubstantiation; and unhappily the controversy still exists. Not only so,