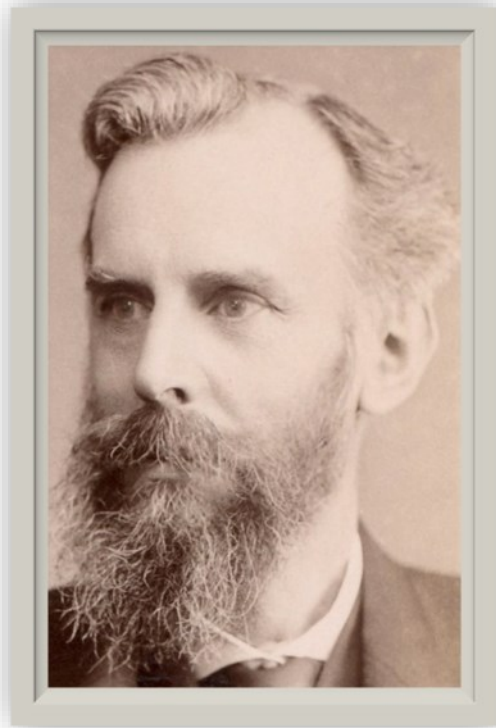


First Biographies

John Venn

(1834-1923)



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Retold by Christina Eastwood

John Venn

John Venn died on 4th of March 1923. He was a mathematician. He came from a Christian family and he was well brought up. His parents loved their children and they wanted them to know Jesus Christ as their own Saviour. The Venn family had some good friends. The Wilberforce family were their friends as well as The Macaulay family. These were happy Christian families.

When he grew up John Venn invented something. It was a kind of diagram. Now we call these diagrams "Venn diagrams". Venn diagrams can help us to sort information. You could ask your parents to help you make a simple Venn diagram. It could show your reading books. It might look like the diagram on the last page.

John Venn's mother died when he was a

little boy. John Venn loved his father. His father was good to him. His father taught him from the Bible. John listened. He thought it was true. But what he heard did not change his heart. John went off to Cambridge University. He was going to be a minister. How pleased his father was! He was a minister. His father had been a minister. His grandfather had been a minister. Now John would be a minister too.

John did not read much when he was young. It is good to read when we are young. Our parents help us find good books to read. When he got to Cambridge John began to read. He read some good books but he also read some bad books. One such book was called Essays and Reviews. It made John doubt. He doubted what his father taught him from the Bible. Was it really true? Now his father was not with him.

He could not ask him about it. He could not talk to him.

The book was in chapters. One chapter was about the Old Testament. In the Old Testament there are prophecies. God told his servants what was going to happen. In the New Testament the prophecies came true. But the book said, "No. These prophecies were not really about what was going to happen."

One chapter was about the miracles in the New Testament. The New Testament tells us how Jesus made the blind man see. That is a miracle. The book said these miracles did not really happen.

Another chapter was about Hell. The Bible says Hell will go on for ever. The book said, "No. Hell will only last for a time."

Another chapter was about rocks. "Clever scientists know about rocks," said the book. "They say they are millions of years old. The

Bible says they are only thousands of years old. The Bible must be wrong.”

The last chapter was about the Bible. “The Bible is just an ordinary book,” it said. “The Bible has mistakes in it. It is just like any other book.”

John read the book. He read it carefully. Then he began to ask some questions. He did not ask, “is what this book said true?” He asked, “is the Bible true?”

The first thing he thought about was Sunday. His father had said it was a special day. It was a day of rest. “I can be a Christian without that,” he thought. “I do not believe it any more.” Then he thought about the Bible itself. “Did God write it all?” he asked. “I don't think so,” he said to himself. “I can be a Christian without that.”

On he went with his questions. He found more and more things that he did not believe.

“Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners,” says the Bible. “I don't think so,” said John Venn. “I can be a Christian without that.”

By now John Venn was a preacher. He was preaching sermons, but he did not really believe what he preached. John Venn did not believe what the Bible says. He was not a real Christian. What would his father think? John Venn never told him. Soon his father died.

John Venn's story is a sad story but it shows us something very important. If we have a Christian family we should be thankful. But our family does not make us Christian. We need to know Jesus Christ ourselves.

1 Information from Michelle (Ellie) Clewlow, MA (Oxon.), MA (Lond.) *Intersecting Sets: John Venn, Church and University, 1834-1923* PhD Thesis 2007 and other sources

A Venn Diagram

