

= Hensley Henson =

Herbert Hensley Henson ( 8 November 1863 ? 27 September 1947 ) was an Anglican priest , scholar and controversialist . He was Bishop of Hereford , 1918 ? 20 and Bishop of Durham , 1920 ? 39 .

The son of a zealous member of the Plymouth Brethren , Henson was not allowed to go to school until he was fourteen , and was largely self @-@ educated . He was admitted to the University of Oxford , and gained a first @-@ class degree in 1884 . In the same year he was elected as a Fellow of All Souls , where he began to make a reputation as a speaker . He was ordained as a priest in 1888 .

Feeling a vocation to minister to the urban poor , Henson served in the East End of London and Barking before becoming chaplain of an ancient hospice in Ilford in 1895 . In 1900 he was appointed to the high @-@ profile post of vicar of St Margaret 's , Westminster and canon of Westminster Abbey . While there , and as Dean of Durham ( 1913 ? 18 ) , he wrote prolifically and sometimes controversially . The Anglo @-@ Catholic wing of the Church took exception to his liberal theological views , which some regarded as heretical , and sought unsuccessfully in 1917 to block his appointment as Bishop of Hereford .

In 1920 , after two years in the largely rural diocese of Hereford , Henson returned to Durham as its bishop . The industrial north @-@ east of England , including County Durham , was badly affected by an economic depression . Henson was opposed to strikes , trade unions and socialism , and for a time his forthright expression of his views made him unpopular in the diocese . His opinions about some Church matters changed radically during his career : at first a strong advocate of the Church of England 's continued establishment as the country 's official church , he came to believe that politicians could not be trusted to legislate properly on ecclesiastical matters , and he espoused the cause of disestablishment . He campaigned against efforts to introduce prohibition , exploitation of foreign workers by British companies , and fascist and Nazi aggression , and supported reform of the divorce laws , a controversial revision of the Book of Common Prayer and ecumenism .

= = Life and career = =

= = = Early years = = =

Henson was born in London , the fourth son and sixth child of eight of Thomas Henson ( 1812 ? 96 ) , a businessman , and his second wife , Martha , née Fear . The family moved to Broadstairs on the coast of Kent when Henson was two years old . Thomas Henson was a zealous evangelical Christian who had renounced the Church of England and joined the Plymouth Brethren . Martha Henson shielded her children from the worst excesses of what the biographer Matthew Grimley describes as Thomas 's " bigotry " , but in 1870 she died , and , in Henson 's words , " with her died our happiness " . From an early age the young Henson was a dedicated Christian and felt a vocation for the Anglican priesthood ; his father 's fundamentalist views were anathema , and left him with what Grimley calls " an enduring hatred of protestant fanaticism " . In 1873 Thomas Henson remarried ; Emma Parker , widow of a Lutheran pastor , filled the role of stepmother with sympathy and kindness , mitigating the father 's grimness and ensuring that the children were properly educated . In Henson 's phrase , " she recreated the home " .

Henson was fourteen before his father allowed him either to be baptised or to attend a school . The Rector of Broadstairs conducted the baptism ; there were no godparents , and Henson undertook their functions himself . He took religious instruction from the rector leading to his confirmation as a communicant member of the Church of England in 1878 . At Broadstairs Collegiate School he derived little educational benefit , having already educated himself widely and deeply from books in his father 's library . He rose to be head boy of the school , but after a dispute with the headmaster during which Henson expressed " with more passion than respect " his opinion of the head , he ran away from the school in 1879 . He gained employment as an assistant master at Brigg grammar

school in Lincolnshire ; the headmaster there recognised his talent and recommended that he should apply for admission to the University of Oxford . Thomas Henson was against the idea , partly because his financial means had declined , but was talked round by his wife and gave his consent . Thomas agreed to fund his son 's studies , but the sum he allowed was too little to pay the substantial fees for residence at any of the colleges of the university . In 1881 Henson applied successfully for admission as an " unattached " student , a member of none of the Oxford colleges , but eligible for the full range of university tuition . Cut off from the camaraderie of college life , Henson felt seriously isolated . He concentrated on his studies , and gained a first class honours degree in Modern History in June 1884 .

= = = All Souls = = =

Such was the quality of Henson 's scholarship that his history tutor encouraged him to enter the annual competition for appointment as a Fellow of All Souls , the university 's post @-@ graduate research college . He was appointed in November 1884 , at the age of twenty . Membership of the college offered an annual stipend of £ 200 ; for the first time , Henson was in reasonably comfortable financial circumstances . At All Souls , he later wrote , " I was welcomed with a generous kindness which made me feel immediately at home . I formed friendships which have enriched my life . " His biographer John Peart @-@ Binns suggests that Henson may nonetheless have remained something of an outsider , his arrival at All Souls " akin to that of an alien " . The college was headed by the Warden , Sir William Anson , who became something of a father figure to Henson , and encouraged his researches . Henson 's first paper , on William II of England , marked him out as not only a fine scholar but a gripping speaker when he delivered it to an audience . Aware that his quick tongue could lead him into indiscretion , he adopted and maintained all his life the practice of writing out his lectures and sermons in full beforehand rather than improvising or speaking from concise notes . He preferred a quill pen , and wrote in a fine clear hand ; he considered illegible writing to be a form of bad manners as tiresome as inaudible talking . He gained a reputation as a controversialist . In a biographical sketch , Harold Begbie wrote that at Oxford Henson was nicknamed " Coxley Cocksure " ; he added :

Never was any man more certain he was right ; never was any man more inclined to ridicule the bare idea that his opponent could be anything but wrong ; and never was any man more thoroughly happy in making use of a singularly trenchant intellect to stab and thrust its triumphant way through the logic of his adversary .

In 1885 , in tandem with his work at All Souls , Henson acted as tutor to Lyle Rathbone , son of the philanthropic businessman William Rathbone . The family lived in Birkenhead , where for six months Henson stayed with them . He had ample leisure time , much of which he spent in visiting local churches and nonconformist chapels . This process left him struggling with doctrinal questions , but sure of a religious vocation . The day after his return to Oxford in October 1885 he went into St Mary 's , Iffley , and with his hand on the altar vowed to dedicate himself to God and the Church .

Henson 's beliefs on doctrine were still forming , but he inclined to high @-@ churchmanship and was influenced by Charles Gore and the Puseyites , though he was unattracted by more extreme Anglo @-@ Catholic forms of ritualism . With his suspicion of nonconformism he was a proponent of the principle of establishment ? the maintenance of Anglicanism as the official state religion ? and in 1886 he became secretary of the new Oxford Laymen 's League for Defence of the National Church , to counter the threat of disestablishment proposed by politicians such as Joseph Chamberlain and Charles Dilke .

= = = Ordination and east London = = =

The poverty Henson had seen during his six months in Birkenhead gave him a strong impetus to minister to the poor . In 1887 , after being ordained deacon , he took charge of the Oxford House Settlement , a high @-@ church mission in Bethnal Green , a poor area of the East End of London . While in this post he honed his speaking skills in public debates with atheist orators , many from the

National Secular Society 's Bethnal Green office .

In 1888 Henson was ordained priest . Shortly afterwards All Souls appointed him vicar of a church in its gift : St Margaret 's , Barking , east of London , a large , working class parish , with a population of 12 @, @ 000 , and increasing . At twenty @-@ five he was the youngest vicar in the country , and had a large staff of curates to manage . An All Souls colleague Cosmo Lang , himself on the brink of a Church career , visited Henson at Barking and noted , " He came six months ago to a parish dead ? 250 a good congregation in the church ; and now , when he preaches , every seat is filled ? 1100 ! "

With the energy and impetuosity noted by Lang , Henson worked continually over the next seven years to improve the parish , restoring the fabric of the church , opening clubs for his parishioners , and holding popular open @-@ air services in the vicarage grounds . At Barking his high @-@ church leanings were welcomed , and he was invited to preach from time to time at St Alban 's Holborn , a central London bastion of Anglo @-@ Catholicism . He was never physically strong , and his relentless work at Barking put a strain on his physique . In 1895 he accepted an offer from Lord Salisbury of a less arduous post , the chaplaincy of St Mary 's Hospital , Ilford , which he held until 1900 . In 1895 and 1896 , Henson was select preacher at Oxford , and from 1897 he served as chaplain to John Festing , Bishop of St Albans . He had time for writing ; between 1897 and 1900 he published four books , ranging from purely theological studies to analyses of Church politics . His beliefs had changed from his early high @-@ churchmanship to a broad @-@ church latitudinarianism ; his 1899 Cui bono ? set out his concerns about the strict ritualists in the Anglo @-@ Catholic wing of the Church .

= = = Westminster = = =

The Ilford appointment had been in Salisbury 's personal gift ; in his official capacity as prime minister he was responsible for Henson 's next appointment : rector of St Margaret 's , Westminster and canon of Westminster Abbey in 1900 . St Margaret 's , the parish church of the British parliament , was a high @-@ profile appointment ; Henson followed predecessors as willing as he was to court controversy including Henry Hart Milman and Frederic Farrar . His eventual successor as Bishop of Durham , Alwyn Williams wrote that at St Margaret 's , Henson 's brilliance as a speaker and independence of thought attracted large congregations and " his increasingly liberal churchmanship " appealed to a wide range of public opinion , though some of his views offended the orthodox .

In 1902 Henson married Isabella ( Ella ) Caroline ( 1870 ? 1949 ) , the only daughter of James Wallis Dennistoun of Dennistoun , Scotland . Grimley comments that it was in keeping with Henson 's usual impulsiveness that he proposed within four days of meeting her . The marriage was lifelong ; there were no children .

From his pulpit , Henson spoke against the view that ecumenism was , in W E Gladstone 's words , " a moral monster " , and criticised schools that failed to provide adequate religious instruction . Preaching at Westminster Abbey in 1912 he attracted international attention for naming and denouncing three British directors of the Peruvian @-@ Amazon Company for the " Putumayo atrocities " ? the mass enslavement and brutal treatment of indigenous Peruvians in the company 's rubber factories . During his time at St Margaret 's Henson published nine books , some of them collected sermons and lectures , others on the role of Christianity in modern society and theological questions .

Henson 's uncompromising character brought him into frequent conflict with old friends and colleagues . In 1909 he offended Charles Gore , now Bishop of Birmingham , by defying Gore 's order not to preach in the institute of a Congregational church in the diocese . His confrontational style and liberal theology caused delay in his promotion , despite his obvious abilities . An apocryphal story circulated in 1908 that the prime minister , Herbert Asquith , suggested Henson 's name to Edward VII when the see of York became vacant , and the king replied , " Damn it all , man , I am Defender of the Faith ! " In 1910 the post of Dean of Lincoln fell vacant . Asquith considered appointing Henson , but decided , as he told the Archbishop of Canterbury , Randall Davidson , that

" it would be rather like sending a destroyer into a land @-@ locked pool " .

= = = Dean and bishop = = =

In 1912 the Dean of Durham , George Kitchin , died . The Bishop , Handley Moule , hoped the prime minister would appoint Henry Watkins , the Archdeacon of Durham , but Asquith chose Henson . On 2 January 1913 Moule presided over Henson 's formal installation at Durham Cathedral .

The five years Henson spent as Dean of Durham were marked by further controversy , including his objection to the existing divorce laws as too favourable to men and unfair to women . He was hostile to changes aimed at giving the Church more control over its own affairs ; he regarded establishment and parliamentary control as safeguards against extremism . He opposed William Temple 's " Life and Liberty movement " , which campaigned for synodical and democratic government of the Church , and he was against the establishment of the National Assembly of the Church of England in 1919 . To Henson , the essence of Anglicanism rested on parliamentary enforcement of the rights of the laity of the Church against the bishops and priests , and the inclusion of both clergy and laity in all matters under the rule of the monarch as Supreme Governor of the Church .

Among other views for which Henson was known were his disapproval of teetotalism campaigners and of socialism , and for his disbelief in social reform as an ally of religion . When the Kikuyu controversy erupted in 1913 Henson once again found himself at odds with Gore . The question was whether two colonial bishops had committed heresy by taking part in an ecumenical service . Gore and his ally Bishop Weston of Zanzibar led the charge , and appear in Henson 's journal as " devoted , unselfish , indefatigable , eminently gifted , but ... also fanatical in temper , bigoted in their beliefs , and reckless in their methods . " Together with Bishop Moule , Dean Wace of Canterbury and other leaders , Henson strongly , and successfully , supported the accused bishops : " The Church owes a deep debt of gratitude to the Bishops of Uganda and Mombasa . "

Henson spoke out strongly , and ultimately unsuccessfully , against the proposed disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales . In doing so he addressed many nonconformist gatherings ; the historian Owen Chadwick suggests that this may have commended him to David Lloyd George , who became prime minister in 1916 . A serious doctrinal row within the Church seemed to many to put Henson out of the running for elevation to a bishopric . He had defended the right of clergy to express doubts about the virgin birth and bodily resurrection . He was , as most of his critics failed , or refused , to notice , doctrinally orthodox on the resurrection , and content to accept the tradition of the virgin birth , but his contention that other priests had the right to question them was intolerable to the Anglo @-@ Catholic wing of the Church , led by Gore .

Archbishop Davidson had no doubts about Henson 's doctrinal soundness , and persuaded him to issue a statement of faith to silence his critics . Davidson stated publicly that no fair @-@ minded man could read consecutively a series of Henson 's sermons without feeling that they had in him a brilliant and powerful teacher of the Christian faith . Gore and his followers were obliged to call off their protests . Against Davidson 's advice for caution , Lloyd George appointed Henson to the vacant see of Hereford in 1917 . Gore and others , including Cosmo Lang , now the Archbishop of York , failed to attend the consecration service . Their attitude hurt Henson , offended lay opinion in the Church , and was sharply criticised in The Times . Henson was consecrated bishop in Westminster Abbey on 4 February 1918 by Davidson , assisted by twelve supporting bishops . He was enthroned at Hereford Cathedral eight days later .

Although Henson 's elevation was controversial chiefly among factions of the clergy ? in general lay people supported his appointment ? it nevertheless gave fresh impetus to the idea of taking away from the prime minister the power to choose bishops . Gore attempted to promote the idea at the Convocation of Clergy in May 1918 ; Henson abandoned restraint and in Chadwick 's words " stripped Gore 's arguments bare " . He argued from historical examples that appointments made at the Church 's instigation were partisan and disastrous , and that the Crown and prime minister were able to take an unbiased view in the national interest . Despite the public support for him , the controversy revived Henson 's feelings of isolation .

The appointment was described as " sending an armoured car into an orchard of apple trees " and Henson had doubts about accepting a mainly rural diocese rather than ministering to the urban poor . Nevertheless , the clergy and laity of Hereford gave him a warm welcome , and he enjoyed working with the incumbents of country parishes . They appreciated his delicacy in not intruding unduly into local church concerns , and it was remarked that " he treated all the world as his equals " . During his brief time at Hereford he published only one book , *Christian Liberty* ( 1918 ) , a collection of sermons . There was regret in the diocese that his tenure there was brief . In 1920 the see of Durham became vacant on the death of Bishop Moule . Davidson wanted Thomas Strong , Dean of Christ Church , to be appointed and pressed his claims on Lloyd George , but the prime minister took the view that the area needed Henson 's practical skills and common touch rather than Strong 's academic scholarship .

= = = Durham = = =

Henson was translated to Durham ? England 's most senior diocese after Canterbury , York and London ? in October 1920 . The appointment was challenging : the area was in grave economic difficulty , with the important coal @-@ mining industry in a crisis caused by falling industrial demand for coal in the years after the war . Ecclesiastically there was potential for friction , as the Dean of Durham , James Welldon , who had once been a bishop himself , was temperamentally and politically at odds with his new superior , given to making public statements that Henson found infuriating . Welldon , in Henson 's view , " could neither speak with effect nor be silent with dignity " . They clashed on several occasions , most conspicuously when Welldon , a strong admirer of prohibition , publicly criticised Henson 's tolerant views on the consumption of alcohol . Relations between the Deanery and Auckland Castle , the bishop 's official residence , improved markedly in April 1933 when Cyril Alington , the Head Master of Eton from 1917 to 1933 , succeeded Welldon . Alington was almost universally loved , and though he and Henson differed on points of ecclesiastical practice , they remained warm friends .

At the beginning of Henson 's episcopate the Durham miners were on strike . He got on well with miners individually and conversed with many of them as they walked through the extensive grounds of Auckland Castle . It was said of him that he got on easily with everyone " except other dignitaries in gaiters " . Friction arose from Henson 's belief that strikes were morally wrong because of the harm they did to other working people , and he had , in Grimley 's words , " a violent , almost obsessional " , dislike of trade unions . His early concern for the welfare of the poor remained unchanged , but he regarded socialism and trade unionism as negations of individuality . For the same reason he was against state provision of social welfare , though a strong advocate of voluntary spending on it . Later in his bishopric Henson denounced the Jarrow March in 1936 as " revolutionary mob pressure " and condemned the action of his subordinate , the suffragan Bishop of Jarrow , who had given the march his blessing . He loathed class distinction , and was not antipathetic to social reformers , but he was strong in his criticism of Christian campaigners who maintained that the first duty of the Church was social reform . To Henson , the Church 's principal concern was each individual man or woman 's spiritual welfare .

The best @-@ known anecdote of Henson , according to Chadwick , comes from his time at Durham . Cosmo Lang complained that his portrait by Orpen " makes me look proud , pompous and prelatial " , to which Henson responded , " And to which of those epithets does your Grace take exception ? " Grimley remarks that on occasion each of those unflattering adjectives applied just as much to Henson . Nonetheless , Henson ranked Lang " among the greater figures of ecclesiastical history " .

The most conspicuous cause with which Henson was involved during his time at Durham was , in Anglican terms , of national , and even international , rather than diocesan concern . As a broad churchman he gave strong support in the mid @-@ 1920s to a major revision and modernising of the Book of Common Prayer , the Church 's prescribed forms of worship , used at all services . The evangelical wing of the Church opposed the revision , which some low @-@ church factions dubbed " popish " . Henson , now on the same side as the Anglo @-@ Catholics with whom he had early

been in bitter dispute , called the opposition " the Protestant underworld " . Despite the clear majority of clergy and laity in favour of the revision , the House of Commons refused to authorise it , and voted it down in 1927 and again in 1928 . Henson 's colleague Cyril Garbett wrote that the Commons had " made it plain that the Church does not possess full spiritual freedom to determine its worship " . The Church instituted damage limitation measures by permitting parishes to use the new unauthorised text where there was a local consensus to do so , but Henson was horrified at what he saw as Parliament 's betrayal of its duty to preside impartially over the governance of the Church , giving in to pressure from what he termed " an army of illiterates " .

Together with the suspicions he had started to harbour that a socialist government might misuse ecclesiastical patronage , the Prayer Book debacle turned Henson from a strong proponent of establishment to its best @-@ known critic . He spent much time and energy fruitlessly campaigning for disestablishment . He was , as he had often been earlier in his career , an isolated figure . Few of his colleagues agreed with him , even those dismayed by the parliamentary vote . He was less isolated in some other causes he took up in the 1920s and 30s . He was one of many wary of the ultra @-@ liberalism of the Modern Churchmen 's Union . In 1934 , he was among the senior clerics who censured Dean Dwelly for inviting a Unitarian to preach in Liverpool Cathedral and Bishop David for permitting it . He was critical of American evangelism as practised by Frank Buchman and the Oxford Group . Henson wrote of Buchman 's " oracular despotism " and " the trail of moral and intellectual wrecks which its progress leaves behind . "

Henson was in a minority of senior clergy in speaking out against the dictators of the Axis powers . He condemned Nazi anti @-@ Semitism , Mussolini 's invasion of Abyssinia , appeasement and the Munich agreement . On 1 February 1939 , at the age of seventy @-@ five , he retired from Durham to Hintlesham in Suffolk . Seven months later the Second World War began . Henson supported the Allies ' fight in what he saw as a just war to defeat godless barbarism ; he wrote of " The deepening infamies of Nazi warfare ? infamies so horrible as almost to shake one 's faith in the essential Divineness of Humanity . " He urged , " there can be no compromise or patched up peace " .

= = = Last years = = =

Winston Churchill was impressed by Henson . Grimley comments that they had much in common , both spending years as isolated figures speaking out for beliefs that were dismissed at the time and later vindicated . As prime minister , Churchill persuaded Henson out of retirement in 1940 to resume his old duties as a Canon of Westminster Abbey . After overcoming the momentary strangeness of being back in his old post after nearly thirty years he preached with vigour until cataracts made his eyesight too poor to continue . He retired from the Abbey in 1941 .

In his later years Henson 's lifelong sense of loneliness was compounded by the growing deafness of his wife , making their conversation difficult . He found some solace in the friendship of her companion , Fearn Bookers , who lived with the Hensons for more than thirty years . He occupied a considerable part of his retirement writing a substantial work of autobiography , published in three volumes under the title Retrospect of an Unimportant Life . Both at the time and subsequently many of his friends and admirers regretted his publishing the work ; they thought he had done his reputation a disservice . Despite what Williams calls the " peculiar interest and vivacity " of the books , his survey of his many campaigns and controversies , seemed to others to be self @-@ justifying and wilfully to deny many changes of stance that he had manifestly made during his career . In Williams 's view the posthumous publication of Henson 's edited letters were a better legacy : " delightful in both form and content , and , barbed though they often are , they do him fuller justice " .

In his writings Henson referred to his two regrets in life . The first was that he had not been at a public school , a fact to which he ascribed his lifelong feeling of being an outsider . The second regret was that he and his wife had been unable to have children . They unofficially adopted a succession of poor boys and paid for their education . At least one of them became a priest and was ordained by Henson .

Henson died at Hintlesham on 27 September 1947 at the age of eighty @-@ four . At his wish his body was cremated ; his ashes were interred in Durham Cathedral .

= = Books by Henson = =

= = = As editor = = =

Church Problems , a View of Modern Anglicanism . London : John Murray . 1900 . OCLC 29980088

. The Naked Truth by Bishop Herbert Croft . London : Chatto & Windus . 1919 [ 1674 ] . OCLC 265436413 .

A Memoir of the Right Honourable Sir William Anson . Oxford : Clarendon Press . 1920 . OCLC 4065005 .

= = = As author = = =