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MEMOIRS

OF THE

Life and Writings

OF

WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

WILLIAM COWPER

REVISED, CORRECTED, AND RECOMMENDED,

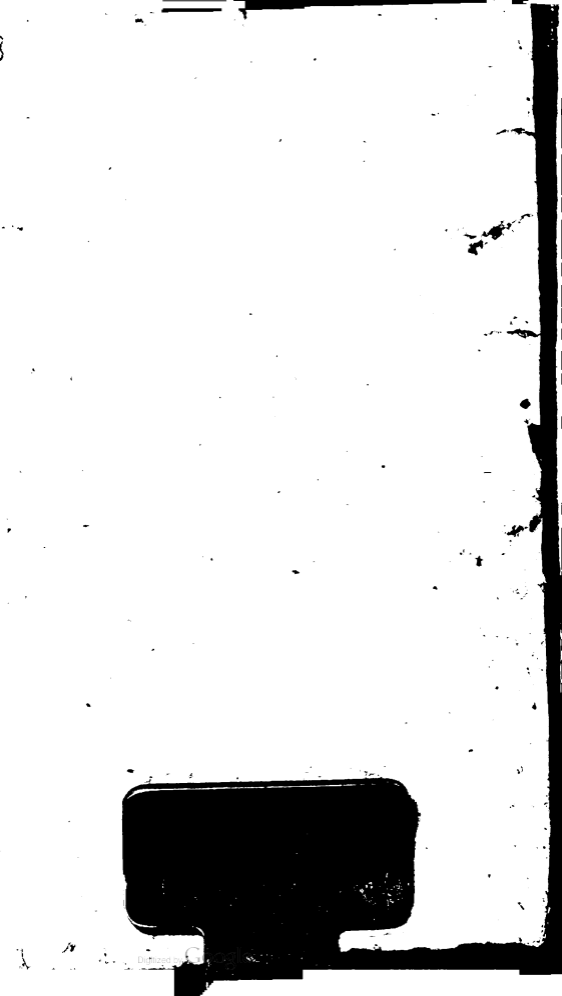
BY THE

REV. S. GREATHED, F. S. A.

LONDON

PRINTED FOR WHITTINGHAM AND ARLISS,
PAVERNOSTER ROW AND
WILLIAMS AND SON, STATIONERS' COURT.

1819



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C. Whittingham, Printer, Chiswick.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Narrative was founded on a Memoir of Cowper, with which I supplied the Evangelical Magazine, in the year 1803. It is interspersed, also, with extracts from a Sermon which I had preached, on occasion of his decease, in May 1800. The remainder was abstracted from Mr. Hayley's life and posthumous writings of Cowper. With the execution or the design of the compilation, I was unacquainted, till two-thirds of it had gone through the press. I then added, at the request of the publisher, to the remarks on

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Mr. C.'s two volumes of poems which had been annexed to the Narrative, the catalogue of his other writings, which closed the volume.

Having been solicited to revise and correct a new edition of it, I willingly prefix my testimony of its historical truth; which may be judged the more requisite, as it comprises some very interesting facts that were omitted by Mr. Hayley. Nothing is here added, of which I was not either personally a witness, or had not positive assurance, from others that were so.

Some important mistakes concerning Mr. Cowper, having not only been commonly entertained, but diligently propagated, and pertinaciously supported, I think it my duty to recommend this Narrative to more general attention than it has hitherto obtained, as it may serve to correct such misrepresentations.

That this amiable and excellent man laboured under partial derangement, during a considerable portion of his life, is now generally understood: but it is not so well known, that he discovered in early youth a tendency to this deplorable malady. Hence it has been imputed to his religious impressions, and even to his religious sentiments, by persons who were unfavourably disposed, either toward religion itself, or else toward that system of religion which Mr. Cowper embraced.

These prejudices happen to be exactly the reverse of the fact. Mr. Cowper's earliest regard to practical piety coincided with his *recovery* from the first severe attack of his malady: and the only proof that he usually gave of insanity, after his unhappy relapse, was his adherence to a sentiment utterly *incompatible* with his religious creed. Having repeatedly and

fully conversed with him on the subject, I feel it incumbent on me to protest against misconceptions, at once so gross and so zealously maintained. My testimony may perhaps be the more willingly received, when I avow myself no partisan for the theological system which Mr. Cowper imbibed. I apprehend it, with every other that has been adopted by parties into which the Church of Christ is divided, to be mingled with human errors: but I conceive that every unbiassed reader of Cowper's original compositions, must admit the *leading* points of his belief to have promoted in *him* the *love of GOD and of mankind*, in which all *real* RELIGION consists.

SAMUEL GREATHEED.

Bishop's Hull,
April 9, 1814.

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BRIEF MEMOIRS
OF
WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

FEW persons, in any age of Christianity, have been equally eminent for Evangelical devotion, and for literary genius and taste. Religious people may, indeed, in general, be regarded as better informed, because more accustomed to read, than others in the classes of life to which they chiefly belong: but while an earnest desire of religious knowledge usually renders the pious peasant, or mechanic, superior to his worldly neighbours, it seldom pervades the circles of the polite; and when it does, is liable to render them less ardent in the pursuit of literary excellence, by fixing their principal attention on objects of infinitely greater importance. The very interesting subject of this memoir, might, at the first view, be deemed a striking exception to this rule, yet it may reason-

ably be doubted, whether, if an awful dispensation of the providence of God had not incapacitated him for the sublimer enjoyments of devotion, he would ever have attained to the summit of poetical fame. His life, on the whole, has become an object of great curiosity to all who possess a relish for literature and humanity; but to the religious mind, especially if in some measure endowed with a similar taste, the inquiry is singularly attractive. To the former class of readers, Mr. Hayley's work is highly gratifying. Beside the correct information which he collected, and the lively remarks which he interspersed, the selection which he had opportunity to make from Mr. Cowper's confidential correspondence, comprising the substance or extracts of above four hundred and fifty letters, affix a value to his publication, as unalienable as it is incalculable. His work included also the treasure of many beautiful pieces of poetry, which had not before been published: but it passed in silence events of Cowper's life, highly important to the illustration of his character; of which, the exhibition that it afforded, was neither adequate to the satisfaction of pious readers, nor to the preservation of others from erroneous conclusions.

Mr. Cowper's family was illustrious, both for rank and talents. His grandfather, Spencer Cowper, was a judge in the Court of Common Pleas,

and brother of the first Earl Cowper, who was Lord Chancellor in the reign of Queen Ann and George the First. Beside Dr. John Cowper, Chaplain to George the Second and Rector of Berkhamstead, the poet's father, Judge Cowper had several children; among whom was the mother of the late Rev. Martin Madan, and of the pious and ingenious Frances Maria Madan, who married her first cousin Major Cowper, son of Dr. Cowper's elder brother, and heir of the family estate near Hertford. This lady was recently well known, and highly esteemed, among the politer religious people of the metropolis; and about the year 1793 she published a volume of excellent devotional poems, which had the honour of being revised and introduced to the public by our poet. By his mother's side, he is supposed to have been related to Dr. Donne, the celebrated satirist, whose name she bore. Her character is immortalized by the most beautiful of Mr. Cowper's shorter poems; and was justly described, in an epitaph inscribed on her tomb at Berkhamstead, by her niece, the late Lady Walsingham. She died in 1737, leaving two sons by Dr. Cowper, who married again. Her elder son, who is the subject of this memoir, was born Nov. 15 (old style), 1731. The character, and remarkable conversion, of her younger son, John, are admirably

described in a narrative by his brother, with which the Rev. Mr. Newton favoured the public.

Time often fills up, by new objects, the traces made upon the mind by the loss of those whom we have loved; and nothing remains, but a recollection that they once existed: but Cowper possessed a heart of exquisite sensibility and durable affection, as appears from a letter to Mrs. Bodham, acknowledging the receipt of his mother's picture, more than fifty years after her decease.

The soft emotions of filial affection were revived upon the receipt of this portrait, which he says, "I had rather possess than the richest jewel in the British crown; for I loved her with an affection, that her death, fifty-two years since, has not in the least abated." This affection is beautifully expressed in the subjoined quotation from the poem just alluded to:—

"Thy nightly visits to my chamber made,
That thou might'st know me safe and warmly laid;
Thy morning bounties, ere I left my home,
The biscuit, or confectionary plum;
The fragrant waters on my cheeks bestow'd,
By thy own hand, till fresh they shone and glow'd;
All this, and more endearing still than all,
Thy constant flow of love, that knew no fall,
Ne'er roughen'd by those cataracts and breaks
That humour interpos'd too often makes;
All this still legible in mem'ry's page,
And still to be so, to my latest age,

Adds joy to duty, makes me glad to pay
Such honours to thee as my numbers may ;
Perhaps a frail memorial, but sincere,
Not scorn'd in heav'n, though little notic'd here."

William Cowper, when nine years old, was sent to Westminster school. The literary advantages acquired by him in that celebrated seminary, were purchased at the hazard of his future peace. Among the numerous and irrefragable proofs of human depravity, the disposition of children to inflict pain, is not the least obvious. Their delight in tormenting animals (if not early repressed by education) might be supposed to originate in childish ignorance and thoughtlessness; but the tyranny they exercise, if permitted, over servants and weaker children, does not admit of a similar extenuation. A public school affords free scope for the cruelty of the greater boys toward their helpless juniors; and Cowper's tender age and constitutional timidity, exposed him peculiarly to this species of oppression. It produced an indelible recollection upon his mind through life; and it affords, in part, the clue by which his future circumstances are to be explained. Occasional symptoms of derangement, in his early youth, may in some measure be ascribed to the same cause; but it seems to have been partly constitutional, and partly arising from the consequences of having trifled away the most valuable portion of his life.

From a very negligent, though ingenious tutor, he contracted, during his latter years at Westminster, habits of indolence, which no force inferior to that of Religion, could probably have surmounted. His natural bashfulness, however unsuitable to the profession of a barrister, was not suffered to exempt him from a calling in which his powerful connexions afforded the fairest prospects of advancing his temporal interests. At the age of eighteen, he was articled to an eminent attorney; and three years afterwards, he entered as a student of law, in the society of the Inner Temple. His genius and inclinations were as little adapted to this pursuit, as his acquired habits. He amused himself with light poetical compositions; and divided his social hours between the convivial or literary intercourse of eminent persons who had been his school-fellows, and the more domestic conversation of his polite and affectionate relations. In 1756 he lost his father, from whom he inherited little or no fortune. He formed about that time, a peculiar intimacy with Sir William Russel, whose premature decease greatly affected him. He also cherished a tender attachment to an amiable and accomplished young lady, one of his first cousins, whose hand was expected to crown his approaching establishment in life.

This important crisis was deferred till he reached

his thirty-first year; and its result at that time produced the final disappointment of his earthly hopes. Being nominated, by the interest of his family, to the lucrative posts of reading-clerk, and clerk of private committees, in the House of Lords, he conceived so great a dread of officiating before the assembled peers, that notwithstanding the delay and danger to which it exposed his temporal prospects, he determined upon relinquishing the appointment. He then severely regretted having mis-spent nearly half of his past life in amusing, instead of useful employment; the loss proved irremediable, and could produce only fruitless remorse. This evil he often deplored in his correspondence, and he doubtless alluded to it in the following excellent "Comparison" [Poems, vol. I.] :—

The lapse of time and rivers is the same,
Both speed their journey with a restless stream;
The silent pace, with which they steal away,
No wealth can bribe, no prayer persuade to stay;
Alike irrevocable both when past,
And a wide ocean swallows both at last.

The effects of such a conflict in his mind, are pathetically represented in the annexed verses, addressed to one of his female relations, whose faithful memory enabled Mr. Hayley to communicate them to the public :—

“Doom’d as I am, in solitude to waste
The present moments, and regret the past;
Depriv’d of ev’ry joy I valued most,
My friend torn from me, and my mistress lost;
Call not this gloom I wear, this anxious mien,
The dull effect of humour, or of spleen!
Still, still, I mourn, with each returning day,
Him—snatch’d by fate, in early youth, away;
And her—through tedious years of doubt and pain,
Fix’d in her choice, and faithful—but in vain!
O prone to pity, gen’rous, and sincere,
Whose eye ne’er yet refus’d the wretch a tear;
Whose heart the real claim of friendship knows,
Nor thinks a lover’s are but fancy’d woes:
See me—ere yet my destin’d course half done,
Cast forth a wand’rer on a wild unknown!
See me, neglected on the world’s rude coast,
Each dear companion of my voyage lost!
Nor ask why clouds of sorrow shade my brow,
And ready tears wait only leave to flow;
Why all that soothes a heart, from anguish free,
All that delights the happy—palls with me.”

If these emphatic lines afforded a promise of the future excellence of Mr. Cowper’s productions, they were equally predictive of his future distress. They breathe the same burdened spirit with many of his later pieces. The principal difference consists in the author’s unacquaintance, at the former period, with the consolations of the gospel; and his knowledge of their worth, with a sense of their loss, at the latter. The wound was already made, which nothing but the balm of salvation could

heal; and that, no longer than it was infused by appropriating faith. The season was at hand when that restorative became indispensably necessary. Mr. Cowper accepted the appointment of clerk of the journals in the House of Lords, in lieu of the more advantageous offices which he had relinquished, hoping that his personal attendance would not be requisite: but this expectation also was frustrated, and the necessity of appearing in public overwhelmed him with dismay; while his unwillingness to renounce every prospect of earthly comfort, his fear of injuring the friendly kinsman whose patronage had repeatedly obtained his appointments, and the urgent exhortations of his intimate acquaintances to surmount a diffidence that appeared to them so unreasonable, excited a tumult in his breast which filled him with inexpressible anguish.

At this distressing crisis, appears to have commenced his serious attention to religion. Educated in the knowledge of the holy scriptures, and estranged from the fool-hardy arrogance which urges unhappy youths to infidelity, he had constantly retained a reverence for the sacred scriptures. His manners were, in general, decent and amiable: and the course of dissipation in which he had indulged himself, being customary with persons in similar circumstances, he remained, till this period, insensible of his state as a sinner in

the sight of God. Reflecting upon the evil of sin, as a transgression of the law of God, he was terrified by an apprehension lest his offences should be unpardonable. Instead of finding relief from reading, every book he opened, of whatever kind, seemed to him adapted to increase his distress; which became so pungent as to deprive him of his usual rest, and to render his broken slumbers equally miserable with his waking hours. In this deplorable condition, his brother John, who had taken clerical orders, made the utmost exertions to tranquillize his mind by such religious arguments as he could adduce; but to no purpose.

He was, however, visited about the same time by the Rev. Martin Madan, his first cousin, whose conversation was attended with different success: for, by demonstrating from the scriptures the depravity of human nature, Mr. M. persuaded him that all mankind were on the same level before God. The atonement and righteousness of Christ being set forth to him, Mr. Cowper perceived therein the remedy which his case required. He felt the redemption of sinners to be the only refuge for his troubled soul; and its darkness was dispelled almost instantaneously, by a ray of hope and peace. His brother was astonished at a change which then seemed to him unaccountable. But his peace, alas! was transient. A conviction of the necessity of faith in Christ, in order to expe-

rience the blessings of salvation, excited his earnest desire for the attainment; but imagining it to be attainable by his own powers, his failure in the trial involved him in aggravated distress, and on the following day his mind again sank into despair. With a constitutional tendency toward derangement, and depressed as his spirits had habitually become, it would have been astonishing, if, in so severe and complicated a trial, he had escaped complete insanity. This occasioned his removal to St. Alban's in December, 1763, where he remained eighteen months under the humane care of the late Dr. Cotton, at what was entitled the College: an institution founded by that amiable and ingenious physician, for the relief of persons under mental derangement. The latter and greater part, however, of this period was spent by Mr. Cowper, not only in the possession of his restored faculties, but in the enjoyment of peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When the force of Mr. Cowper's distress became weakened to such a degree as to allow of conversation with the Doctor, he derived relief and pleasure from that intercourse, and joined in the daily worship of the family with increasing satisfaction. At length his despair was effectually removed by reading in the sacred scriptures, that "God hath set forth Christ Jesus to be a propitiation, through

faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." (Rom. iii. 25.) While meditating upon this passage, he obtained a clear view of the gospel, which was attended with unspeakable joy. His subsequent days were chiefly occupied with praise and prayer, and his heart overflowed with love to his crucified Redeemer. An extract from a hymn which he wrote under these delightful impressions will best describe the comfort that he enjoyed:—

"How blest thy creature is, O God,
When, with a single eye,
He views the lustre of thy word,
The day-spring from on high!

"Through all the storms that veil the skies,
And frown on earthly things,
The Sun of righteousness he eyes,
With healing on his wings.

"The glorious orb, whose golden beams
The fruitful year control,
Since first, obedient to thy word,
He started from the goal,

Has cheer'd the nations, with the joys
His orient beams impart;—
But, Jesus, 'tis thy light alone
Can shine upon the *heart*."

The transports of his joy, which at first interrupted his necessary sleep, having subsided, were followed by a sweet serenity of spirit, which he

was enabled to retain, notwithstanding reviving struggles of natural and habitual corruption. The benefit he derived from the conversation of his beloved physician, induced him to prolong his stay at St. Alban's twelve months after his recovery.

Concerning the happy change in his experience, he thus writes in his correspondence with Mrs. Cowper:—"The deceitfulness of the natural heart is inconceivable. I know well that I passed upon my friends for a person at least religiously inclined, if not actually religious, and what is more wonderful, I thought myself a Christian, when I had no faith in Christ, when I saw no beauty in him, that I should desire him; in short, when I had neither faith nor love, nor any Christian grace whatever, but a thousand seeds of rebellion instead, evermore springing up in enmity against him. But, blessed be God, even the God who is become my salvation, the hail of affliction and rebuke for sin has swept away the refuge of lies. It pleased the Almighty, in great mercy, to set all my misdeeds before me. At length the storm being past, a quick and peaceful serenity of soul succeeded, such as ever attends the gift of lively faith in the all-sufficient atonement, and the sweet sense of mercy and pardon, purchased by the blood of Christ. Thus did he break me and bind me up: thus did he wound me, and his hands made me whole.

“ You are so kind as to inquire after my health, for which reason I must tell you, what otherwise would not be worth mentioning, that I have lately been just enough indisposed to convince me, that not only human-life in general, but mine in particular, hangs by a slender thread. I am stout enough in appearance, yet a little illness demolishes me. I have had a severe shake, and the building is not so firm as it was. But I bless God for it with all my heart. If the inner man be but strengthened day by day, as I hope, under the renewing influences of the Holy Ghost, it will be, no matter how soon the outward is dissolved. He who has, in a manner, raised me from the dead, in a literal sense, has given me the grace, I trust, to be ready at the shortest notice, to surrender up to him that life which I have twice received from him. Whether I live or die, I desire it may be to his glory, and it must be to my happiness. I thank God that I have those amongst my kindred to whom I can write, without reserve of sentiment, upon this subject, as I do to you. A letter upon any other subject is more insipid to me than ever my task was when a school-boy, and I say not this in vain glory, God forbid! but to show you what the Almighty, whose name I am unworthy to mention, has done for me the chief of sinners. Once he was a terror to me, and his service, oh, what a weariness it was! Now I can say I love him,

and his holy name, and am never so happy as when I speak of his mercies to me."

The state to which he had been reduced, had broken off for ever his former connexions and pursuits; and having found the pearl of matchless price, he could cheerfully relinquish them. He sought retirement and concealment at Huntingdon, where he might often have the company of his brother alone, without being known to the numerous academical friends, amidst whom he resided at Cambridge; but he could not anywhere long remain unnoticed. Mr. C's appearance was striking and interesting. A most intelligent and engaging countenance, a well-proportioned figure, and elegant manners, speedily drew attention from the inhabitants of a rural borough town. An amiable young man, a student from Cambridge, whose father, Mr. Unwin, a clergyman, then superintended a private classical seminary at Huntingdon, conceived so strong a desire for the acquaintance of this interesting stranger, that he surmounted Mr. Cowper's reserve, and gradually acquired his confidential friendship. Some other neighbours likewise ingratiated themselves in his esteem; and he was soon introduced to several of the most respectable families in the place. His faithful friend, Mr. Joseph Hill, who had taken the care of his temporal concerns, both corresponded with,

and visited him, from London. With his affectionate brother he spent some part of every week, alternately, at their respective places of abode. He resumed also his correspondence with Lady Hesketh, daughter of his uncle Mr. Ashley Cowper, clerk of parliament, in London; and with his cousins at Hartingfordbury, Major Cowper and his lady before-mentioned. In the last correspondent he soon discovered one, who, like himself, lived in fellowship with Christ. His letters to her will probably appear to the serious reader, the most valuable part of Mr. Hayley's collection. The following extract from another of them, shows how clearly Mr. Cowper discerned, and how warmly he had embraced the leading truths of the gospel, although as yet a stranger to the advantages of an evangelical ministry. "The book you mention lies now upon my table. Marshall is an old acquaintance of mine; I have both read him and heard him read with pleasure and edification. The doctrines he maintains are, under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, the very life of my soul, and the soul of all my happiness. That Jesus is a *present* Saviour from the guilt of sin, by his most precious blood, and from the power of it by his Spirit; that corrupt and wretched in ourselves, in him, and in *him only*, we are complete; that being united to Jesus by a lively faith, we have a

solid and eternal interest in his obedience and sufferings, to justify us before the face of our Heavenly Father; and that all this inestimable treasure, the earnest of which is in grace, and its consummation in glory, is given, *freely given* to us of God; in short, that he hath opened the kingdom of heaven *to all believers*: these are the truths which, by the grace of God, shall ever be dearer to me than life itself; shall ever be placed next my heart, as the throne whereon the Saviour himself shall sit, to sway all its motions, and reduce that world of iniquity and rebellion to a state of filial and affectionate obedience to the will of the Most Holy. These, my dear cousin, are the truths to which by nature we are enemies; they debase the sinner, and exalt the Saviour, to a degree which the pride of our hearts (till Almighty grace subdues them) is determined never to allow. May the Almighty reveal his Son in our hearts, continually more and more, and teach us to increase in love towards him continually, for having *given* us the unspeakable riches of Christ."

Mr. Cowper shortly became more intimate with Mr. Unwin's family than with any other in Huntingdon; and toward the close of 1765, he took up his residence entirely with them. Mrs. Unwin had always been very fond of reading, and was esteemed for superior intelligence; but she had

been remarkable also for gaiety and vivacity. She soon, notwithstanding, fully entered into Mr. Cowper's religious views, and discovered a change of character that was far from being agreeable to her fashionable acquaintances. Her age exceeded Mr. Cowper's but seven years; yet, as she had married very young, and was the mother of his academical friend, he naturally regarded her with a kind of filial, as well as with a spiritual affection. He thus writes of her to his cousin, Mrs. Cowper:—"The lady in whose house I live, is so excellent a person, and regards me with a friendship so truly Christian, that I could almost fancy my own mother restored to life again, to compensate me for all the friends I have lost, and all my connexions broken."

In another letter, he describes the manner in which their time daily was employed. "As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such,—we have none. The place indeed swarms with them; and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessaries to this way of murdering our time; and by so doing, have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do:—We breakfast commonly between eight and nine;—

till eleven, we read either the scriptures, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of these holy mysteries. At eleven we attend divine service,—which is performed here twice every day;—and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner; but if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden; where, with Mrs. Unwin, and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's* collection, and, by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert; in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. I need not tell you, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something like a filial one for her; and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life; above all for an heart to like it. After tea we sally forth to walk

* Mr. Martin Madan's.

in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker; and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse, as before, till supper; and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon; and last of all, the family are called to prayers."

While Mr. Cowper's time and attention were so fully occupied with religious objects, it is not strange that his mind should be impressed with a desire to preach the gospel. On this subject he remarks, "I have had many anxious thoughts about taking orders; and I believe every new convert is apt to think himself called upon for that purpose;—but it has pleased God, by means which there is no need to particularize, to give me full satisfaction as to the propriety of declining it. Indeed, they who have the least idea of what I have suffered from the dread of public exhibitions, will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the mean time, if it please the Almighty, I may be an instrument of turning many to the truth in a private way; and I hope that my endeavours in this way have not been entirely unsuccessful. Had I the zeal of Moses, I should want an Aaron to be my spokesman."—

The usefulness to which he alludes in this passage, was no less than the conversion of almost all Mr. Unwin's family. The consequent alteration of their conduct excited the surprise and displeasure of their former intimates, whose round of amusements had long been undisturbed by appearances of genuine godliness. They regretted that a man of Mr. Cowper's accomplishments should have been spoiled for society by religion; and still more, that his delusion should have infected a family so extensively connected as Mr. Unwin's, with the polite inhabitants. That connexion was soon dissolved; and their resentment of the change vented itself in a calumny, to which a gross ignorance of the principles of Christian friendship afforded the sole support.

A solemn and unexpected event removed Mr. Cowper to a vicinity more congenial with his feelings, and more conducive to his religious advantage. In the summer of 1767, Mr. Unwin was killed by a fall from his horse. At that juncture, Mr. Newton, then Curate of Olney, was travelling homeward from Cambridge, and called upon Mrs. Unwin, by the desire of the late Dr. Conyers, who had learned from her son, about six months before, the change that had been wrought in her mind. Mr. Newton found the family in the depth of affliction for their recent and sudden loss; and

as they proposed shortly to remove from Huntingdon, he invited them to fix their abode at Olney. They repaired in the following October, to a house so near the vicarage in which he lived, that by opening a door-way in a garden-wall, they could exchange mutual visits without entering the public street. Mrs. Unwin kept the house; and Mr. Cowper continued to board with her, as he had done in her husband's life-time. Their days were spent nearly as at Huntingdon; except the differences produced by a substitution of frequent evangelical worship for the daily forms of prayer,—the advantages of a more extended religious intercourse,—and the peculiar friendship of Mr. Newton.

In this situation, he enjoyed much of the consolations of religion, and was greatly endeared to the poor people among whom he resided, by his amiable manners, and his exemplary piety. Mr. Greatheed thus testifies, in his funeral sermon—“Often (says he) have I heard described, the amiable condescension with which our late excellent neighbour listened to your religious converse, the sympathy with which he soothed your distresses, and the wisdom with which he accorded to you his seasonable advice. At your stated meetings, for prayer, (would there were such in every parish!) you have heard him, with benefit

and delight, pour forth his heart before God in earnest intercession, with a devotion equally simple, sublime, and fervent; adapted to the unusual combination of elevated genius, exquisite sensibility, and profound piety, that distinguished his mind. It was, I believe, only on such occasions as these, that his constitutional diffidence was felt by him as a burden, during this happy portion of his life. I have heard him say, that when he expected to take the lead in your social worship, his mind was always greatly agitated for some hours preceding. But his trepidation wholly subsided, as soon as he began to speak in prayer; and that timidity, which he invariably felt at every appearance before his fellow-creatures, gave place to an awful, yet delightful consciousness of the presence of his Saviour.

“ His walk with God, in private, was consistent with the solemnity and fervour of his social engagements. Like the prophet Daniel, and the royal Psalmist, ‘ he kneeled three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God,’ in retirement, besides the regular practice of domestic worship. Relieved by a familiar and experimental knowledge of the gospel from all terror and anxiety, his mind was stayed upon God; and for several ensuing years it was kept in perfect peace. The corrupt dispositions which have so strong a

hold upon the human heart, appeared to be in him peculiarly suppressed; and when in any degree felt, they were lamented and resisted by him. His *hymns*, mostly written during this part of his life, describe both the general tenor of his thoughts, and their occasional wandering, with a force of expression dictated by the liveliness of his feelings. While his attainments in the love of God were thus eminent, you, my friends, can testify the exemplary love that he practised toward his neighbours. To a conduct void of offence toward any individual, and marked with a peculiar kindness toward them who fear God, was added, a beneficence fully proportioned to his ability."

At the recommendation of Mr. Newton, his capacity of doing good to the poor was greatly enlarged by the liberal assistance of the late Mr. Thornton, who secretly distributed the bounties which the providence of God had signally conferred upon him, by a variety of confidential almoners, exclusive of the sums which he personally administered to the relief of the distressed, and for the advancement of the gospel. Mr. Cowper had previously exerted to the utmost his confined ability for similar purposes. While at St. Alban's, he had undertaken the charge of a little boy, who was in imminent danger of ruin, through the depravity, and consequent misery, of

his parents. At Huntingdon, he had put this child to school; and having brought him to Olney, he re-visited St. Alban's the following year, in order to bind him apprentice to an useful trade. This lad, whose name was Richard Coleman, afterwards settled at Olney, and married a favourite servant of Mrs. Unwin, whose daughter, by a former husband, was likewise brought up by that lady. It is to be lamented, that neither she nor her father-in-law proved worthy of the charitable advantages by which they were distinguished; but the acceptance of such exertions in the sight of our Heavenly Father, is independent of the success with which they may be attended on earth. Mrs. Unwin, whose income was larger, employed that also, to an unusual degree, in the relief of poor families.

His compassionate solicitude for the poor of Olney, in the year 1780, is kindly expressed in one of his letters to Joseph Hill, Esq. wherein he writes thus:—

“If you ever take the tip of the Chancellor's ear between your finger and thumb, you can hardly improve the opportunity to better purpose, than if you should whisper into it the voice of compassion and lenity to the lace-makers. I am an eye-witness of their poverty, and do know, that hundreds in this little town are upon the point of

starving, and that the most unremitting industry is but barely sufficient to keep them from it. I know that the bill by which they would have been so fatally affected is thrown out; but Lord Stormont threatens them with another; and if another like it should pass they are undone. We lately sent a petition from hence to Lord Dartmouth; I signed it, and am sure the contents are true. The purport of it was to inform him that there are very near 1,200 lace-makers in this beggarly town; the most of whom had reason enough, while the bill was in agitation, to look upon every loaf they bought as the last they should be ever able to earn. I can never think it good policy to incur the certain inconvenience of ruining 30,000 in order to prevent a remote and possible damage, though to a much greater number. The measure is like a scythe, and the poor lace-makers are like the sickly crop that trembles before the edge of it: The prospect of peace with America is like the streak of dawn in the horizon, but this bill is like a black cloud behind it, that threatens their hope of a comfortable day with utter extinction."

Mr. Cowper's epistolary intercourse with his friends and relations, became, from whatever cause, less frequent, after his settlement at Olney. The distance from Cambridge being greatly increased, he could only occasionally enjoy inter-

views with his brother. In February, 1770, he was called thither to attend one whom he so dearly loved, in his last illness. He expired the 20th of the following month, after having afforded the most satisfactory evidence, that his brother's zealous and affectionate endeavours to promote his spiritual welfare, had not been in vain*.

The pleasure he experienced on this ground supported his mind under the pressure of so heavy an affliction. It is affectionately expressed, in a letter addressed to his relation, Mrs. Cowper:—

“ You judge rightly of the manner in which I have been affected by the Lord's late dispensation towards my brother. I found in it cause of sorrow, that I lost so near a relation, and one so deservedly dear to me, and that he left me just when our sentiments upon the most interesting subjects became the same: but much more cause of joy, that it pleased God to give me clear and evident proof that he had changed his heart, and adopted him into the number of his children. For this I hold myself peculiarly bound to thank him, because he might have done all that he was pleased to do for him, and yet have afforded him neither strength nor opportunity to declare it. I doubt not that he enlightens many understandings, and works a gracious change in many in their last

* See Mr. C.'s narrative.

moments, whose surrounding friends are not made acquainted with it."

The most happy season of Mr. C.'s life was during the first years of his residence at Olney, in the uninterrupted society of his pious and affectionate friend the Rev. Mr. *Newton*, who describes the stability and warmth of that mutual affection, which they felt for each other, in his preface to the first volume of Cowper's poems, in which he writes, "we were seldom seven successive waking hours separated."

The consolation, which (after having endured the severest distress at the time to which we now refer) he derived from a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him, he thus describes in an affecting allegory:—

"I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
 Long since; with many an arrow deep infix'd
 My panting side was charg'd, when I withdrew
 To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
 There was I found by one who had himself
 Been hurt by th' archers. In his side he bore,
 And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.
 With gentle force, soliciting the darts,
 He drew them forth, and heal'd, and bade me live.
 Since then, with few associates, in remote
 And silent woods I wander, far from those
 My former partners of the peopled scene;
 With few associates, and not wishing more.
 Here much I ruminate, as much I may,
 With other views of men and manners now
 Than once, and others of a life to come."

During the interval which elapsed between Mr. Cowper's retirement from London and this period, it does not appear that he had employed his poetical talents, except in a few occasional hymns. They were, however, then called forth, by a friendly compact with Mr. Newton, to supply his congregation with a new assortment of hymns for public worship. Those which, in the first edition of the Olney collection, are distinguished by the letter C. prefixed, demonstrate how well he could adapt his compositions to the purposes of evangelical devotion. The degree to which his mind was then absorbed in religious engagements, and the exalted comfort he enjoyed in communion with Christ and his people, would, probably, not have been adapted with ease to subjects of a less spiritual nature. It is remarkable, that as the afflictions which suspended his poetical essays, preceded his religious convictions, so his attention to composition was renewed before his privation of spiritual comfort. Religion, therefore, appears rather to have stimulated than to have impeded his poetical exertions. Had his spiritual enjoyments extended throughout his life, it is probable that he might not have written so much, or with equal attractions for general readers; but what he had written would doubtless have been more uniformly

marked with spirituality, and more elevated by heavenliness of mind.

An important change would, in that case, also have occurred in his temporal condition. Mrs. Unwin's son had taken orders; and her daughter was married to an evangelical clergyman. Her intimate friendship with Mr. Cowper had been matured by an exchange of mutual kindnesses for several successive years; and, after their removal to Olney, by dwelling together without other inmates. The cordial esteem and filial affection which Mr. Cowper had at first entertained for her, gradually assumed the similitude of a conjugal attachment. They had no prospect of separation during life; and without a matrimonial union, so intimate a connexion between them was liable to malevolent aspersion. The difference of their ages was trifling, compared to that which had subsisted between a Howard, or a Johnson, and the companions for life who were chosen by those eminent men: probably from motives somewhat similar to those which induced Mr. Cowper to propose marriage with Mrs. Unwin. The time for accomplishing their union was fixed, when his relapse into constitutional melancholy frustrated their design; and it is not unlikely, that the agitation of mind, often felt in similar circum-

stances, proved unfavourable to Mr. C.'s natural infirmity. It afforded, however, to Mrs. Unwin, an occasion of proving herself worthy to have been the wife of Cowper. She devoted her own life to the preservation of his; and it pleased God to prosper her efforts to that effect, though not to fulfil her hopes of his complete recovery. Her fortune, her time, her health, her comfort, and (in some degree) her reputation, were sacrificed to his safety and relief. His heart was deeply sensible of what he owed to her; and he only waited for deliverance from the distress of mind which unfitted him for every social engagement, to complete that which he had formed with Mrs. Unwin. He has repeatedly said, that, if he ever again entered a church, it would, in the first instance, be to marry her. So groundless were reports, that have been circulated, at later periods, of the probability of his marriage with other persons!

We have now to present to our readers, that part of Mr. Cowper's life, which has excited the astonishment and sympathetic compassion of all who had any acquaintance with his history: and the better he was known, the more did his case surprise; for his distress appears not to have arisen from a suspension of spiritual consolations, but from their total and final extinction. Mr. Greatheed says, "Without some gross provocation of

the Holy Spirit, so dreadful a privation of peace and hope could hardly have been imagined; yet they who had the best capacity and advantages for judging in this case, remain the most strenuous defenders and warmest admirers of his universal deportment."

Of this sad reverse in his experience, he conceived some presentiment as it drew near, and during a solitary walk in the fields, composed that Hymn, of the Olney collection, beginning "God moves in a mysterious way," &c. which is very expressive of that faith and hope, which he retained at the time, even in the prospect of his severe distress.

Mr. Cowper's relapse occurred in 1773, in his forty-second year. His derangement so completely subverted the doctrinal sentiments which had afforded him, for the last nine years, the most transcendent comfort, that he considered himself as cast off for ever from the hope of mercy, although he never doubted the divine change which had been wrought in his mind.

"After the clearest views of the love of God, (to use Mr. Greatheed's expressions) and that expansion of heart which he had enjoyed in his ways, his mind became obscured, confused, and dismayed. He concluded, as too many have done, under so sensible a change, and as the Psalmist,

in his infirmity, was tempted to do, that "the Lord had cast him off; that he would be favourable no more; that his mercy was clean gone for ever!" That vivid imagination, which often attained the utmost limits of the sphere of reason, did but too easily transgress them; and his spirits, no longer sustained upon the wings of faith and hope, sunk, with their weight of natural depression, into the horrible abyss of absolute despair. In this state, his mind became immoveably fixed. He cherished an unalterable persuasion, that the Lord, after having renewed him in holiness, had doomed him to everlasting perdition. The doctrines in which he had been established directly opposed, such a conclusion, and he remained still equally convinced of their *general* truth: but he supposed himself to be the only person, that ever believed with the heart unto righteousness, and was notwithstanding excluded from salvation. In this state of mind, with a deplorable consistency, he ceased not only from attendance upon public and domestic worship, but likewise from every attempt at private prayer; apprehending, that for *him* to implore mercy, would be opposing the determinate counsel of God. Permission seemed to be given, as in the case of Job, to the adversary of Christ, and of his people, to harass the soul of an afflicted friend, in a manner and measure that

cannot be conceived by any person who has not felt it. Amidst these dreadful temptations, such, nevertheless, was his unshaken submission to what he imagined to be the divine pleasure, that he was accustomed to say, "If holding up my finger would save me from endless torments, I would not do it against the will of God." It was only at seasons, when racked by the immediate expectation of being plunged into everlasting misery, his mind became wholly distracted, that he ever uttered a rebellious word against that God of love, whom his lamentable delusion transformed into an implacable oppressor."

Through the depths of his distress, Mr. Newton attended him with unfailing tenderness of friendship, and once entertained him fourteen months at the vicarage; but he was deaf to consolation or encouragement, while he supposed the ear of his Creator to be shut against his complaints and requests. His pious neighbours were struck with terror, as well as with compassion, at so awful a change. He was inaccessible to all, except Mr. Newton; but all, like him, longed to contribute to his relief.

After the first dreadful paroxysm of his disorder, although his unhappy persuasion remained unalterable, he was induced to admit some diversion of his mind from melancholy. Estranged

from human society, he was inclined to domesticate a young leveret; and his neighbours immediately supplied him with three. The choice of their food, and the diversity of their dispositions, amused his mind; and their occasional diseases called forth his tenderness. Two of them died; but the third was his companion throughout his abode at Olney.

Seven years elapsed before he sufficiently recovered spirits to employ his mind in composition; to which he was urged by Mrs. Unwin, as the most effectual mode of relieving his thoughts from the despair by which they were continually agitated. She suggested, as a subject, "The Progress of Error;" and the poem under that title, was the first fruits of his renewed application. "Truth," as a pleasing contrast, became his next topic. "Expostulation" was formed upon the ground-work of a sermon repeated to him by Mr. Newton. "Hope, Charity, Conversation, and Retirement," which were subjects either peculiarly familiar, or highly interesting to his mind, succeeded; and having determined upon publishing a volume, by the persuasion of his friends, he introduced it with a colloquial poem on popular subjects, and augmented it with a number of smaller pieces, written upon various occasions. The whole, except a few of the latter, were written during the winter of 1780.

In a letter from Mr. Cowper, we have the design of all his publications. "My sole drift is to be useful; a point which, however, I knew I should in vain aim at, unless I could be likewise entertaining. I have therefore fixed these two strings upon my bow, and by the help of both, have done my best to send my arrow to the mark. My readers will hardly have begun to laugh, before they will be called upon to correct that levity, and peruse me with a more serious air. As to the effect, I leave it in his hands who can alone produce it; neither prose nor verse can reform the manners of a dissolute age, much less can they inspire a sense of religious obligation, unless assisted and made efficacious by the power who superintends the truth he has vouchsafed to impart."

In his poem on Retirement, we find the following very pathetic description of himself; and discover his ability in administering consolatory advice to other afflicted minds, though he unhappily resisted all attempts of the same nature from his friends.

"Look where he comes—in this embow'r'd alcove
Stand close conceal'd, and see a statue move:
Lips busy, and eyes fix'd, foot falling slow,
Arms hanging idly down, hands clasp'd below,
Interpret to the marking eye distress,
Such as its symptoms can alone express
That tongue is silent now; that silent tongue
Could argue once, could jest or join the song,

Could give advice, could censure or commend,
 Or charm the sorrows of a drooping friend.
 Renounc'd alike its office and its sport,
 Its brisker and its graver strains fall short ;
 Both fail beneath a fever's secret sway,
 And, like a summer brook, are pass'd away.
 This is a sight for pity to peruse,
 Till she resemble faintly what she views,
 Till sympathy contract a kindred pain,
 Pierc'd with the woes that she laments in vain.
 This, of all maladies that men infest,
 Claims most compassion, and receives the least.

But with a soul that ever felt the sting
 Of sorrow, sorrow is a sacred thing :
 Not to molest, or irritate, or raise
 A laugh at his expense, is slender praise ;
 He that has not usurp'd the name of man,
 Does all, and deems too little all, he can,
 T' assuage the throbbings of the fester'd part,
 And stanch the bleedings of a broken heart.
 'Tis not, as heads that never ache suppose,
 Forg'ry of fancy, and a dream of woes ;
 Man is a harp whose chords elude the sight,
 Each yielding harmony dispos'd aright ;
 The screws revers'd (a task, which, if he please,
 God in a moment executes with ease),
 Ten thousand thousand strings at once go loose,
 Lost, till he tune them, all their power and use.

No wounds like those a wounded spirit feels ;
 No cure for such, till God, who makes them, heals.
 And thou, sad sufferer under nameless ill,
 That yields not to the touch of human skill,
 Improve the kind occasion, understand
 A father's frown, and kiss his chast'ning hand,
 Yet seek him, in his favour life is found,
 All bliss beside—a shadow or a sound :

Then heaven eclips'd so long, and this dull earth
Shall seem to start into a second birth ;
Nature, assuming a more lovely face,
Borrowing a beauty from the works of grace,
Shall be despis'd and overlook'd no more,
Shall fill thee with delights unfelt before,
Impart to things inanimate a voice,
And bid her mountains and her hills rejoice ;
The sound shall run along the winding vales,
And thou enjoy an Eden ere it falls."

At that period, Mr. Cowper had the greater need of occupation for his mind, on account of the removal of his only familiar associate, Mr. Newton, from the curacy of Olney to the rectory of St. Mary Woolnoth, in London; where he superintended the publication of his friend's poems in the summer of 1781. Previously to his departure from the former place, he insisted on introducing to Mr. Cowper, his intimate acquaintance, Mr. Bull, of Newport Pagnel, as his substitute in social converse. Mr. Cowper had always shrunk back from intercourse with strangers; and the gloom which still depressed his mind, rendered him at that time, peculiarly reluctant to admit a new visitor. Mr. Newton, who dreaded to leave Mr. C. wholly destitute of a confidential friend, used, in this instance, an affectionate violence, which was attended with all the success he could hope for. The afflicted bard soon formed a strong attachment to Mr. Bull, whose extensive informa-

tion and natural vivacity tended greatly to alleviate Mr. Cowper's habitual dejection. They regularly spent together one day every fortnight: the only seasons, for five years, in which Mr. Cowper admitted any company, except during his friendship with the late lady Austen, which commenced in September 1781. This lady, whose brilliancy of wit and unequalled talents in conversation, were admirably adapted to the relief of a mind like Mr. Cowper's, then resided with her sister, who was married to Mr. Jones, the clergyman of Clifton: a village about one mile from Olney. Mrs. Jones had long known and loved the gospel, and was intimate with Mrs. Unwin. Her sister had chiefly lived in France, during her union with Sir Robert Austen; after whose death she again settled in England. She also had received the truth as it is in Christ, and had been useful to the enlightning of an endeared friend, who was married to a gentleman in France, named Billacoys.

Lady Austen, accompanying Mrs. Jones on a visit to Mrs. Unwin, Mr. Cowper, though with much hesitation, joined the party; and he shortly found, in Lady Austen's animated conversation, a powerful antidote to his melancholy. Their mutual visits soon became very frequent, and Lady Austen removing to the vicarage house

then occupied by Mr. Scott, who had succeeded Mr. Newton at Olney, her intercourse with Mrs. Unwin and Mr. Cowper was made as easy, and as constant, as Mr. Newton's had been. They were so charmed with her society, that Mr. Hayley informs us, it became their custom to dine always together alternately, in the houses of the two ladies. She exerted her irresistible powers to rouse Mr. Cowper from dejection, which often seized his mind, even in company; and the first printed poem which he produced after the publication of his volume, the well-known ballad of John Gilpin, resulted from a story which she repeated for his diversion at such a crisis. Many short poetical effusions likewise were occasioned by their intimacy; among others, "The Rose," and several which were first published by Mr. Hayley. Mr. Bull also, in 1782, suggested employment for Mr. Cowper, which produced his beautiful translations from Madam Guyon. In the following year he began, at the instance of Lady Austen, his grand work, "The Task;" which was finished and committed to the press in 1784. Immediately on closing it, he wrote his "Tirocinium," with a desire to avert from the rising generation the evils he had experienced, or observed, at public schools. The connexion of Lady Austin with him and Mrs. Unwin,

was suddenly terminated about that period, by the apprehensions of the latter, that Lady Austen had formed an attachment to Mr. Cowper, inconsistent with the engagements which subsisted between herself and him. As these remained profoundly secret, that Lady might inadvertently afford ground for the suspicion; but she soon became aware of its consequences, by a farewell-letter from Mr. Cowper, in which he explained and lamented the circumstances which compelled him to renounce the society of a friend, whose company and conversation he so much esteemed, and whom, from that time, he never met again.

The happy success of her efforts to divert his melancholy, and to awaken his poetical genius, rendered this unavoidable measure very detrimental to his mind. Of the flattering expectations which he had cherished at the commencement of their friendship, we may form some judgment from a poetical epistle he addressed to her during a visit which she made to London in the winter of 1781. It thus concludes :

Say, Anna, had you never known
The beauty of a rose full-blown,
Could you, though luminous your eye,
By looking on the bud, descry,
Or guess, with a prophetic pow'r,
The future splendour of the flow'r?
Just so th' Omnipotent, who turns
The system of the world's concerns;

From mere minutiae can adduce
 Events of most important use,—
 And bid a dawning sky display
 The blaze of a meridian day!

The works of man tend, one and all,
 As needs they must, from great to small;
 And Vanity absorbs, at length,
 The monuments of human strength;
 But who can tell, how vast the plan
 Which this day's incident began?
 Too small perhaps the slight occasion
 For our diminish'd observation;
 It pass'd unnotic'd, like the bird
 That cleaves the yielding air unheard;
 And yet may prove, when understood,
 A harbinger of endless good!

Not that I deem, or mean to call
 Friendship a blessing cheap, or small;
 But merely to remark, that ours,
 Like some of nature's sweetest flow'rs,
 Rose from a seed of tiny size,
 That seem'd to promise no such prize:
 A transient visit intervening,
 And made almost without a meaning,
 (Hardly th' effect of inclination,
 Much less of pleasing expectation!)
 Produced a friendship, then begun,
 That has cemented us in one;
 And placed it in our power to prove,
 By long fidelity and love,
 That Solomon has wisely spoken:—
 'A three-fold cord is not soon broken.'

Some account of this lady, and of her friend
 Mrs. Billacoys, was inserted in the *Theological
 Miscellany* for August 1787: and in subsequent
 numbers of that work were added, several letters

which the latter addressed to Lady Austen, and a copy of verses written by Mr. C. to Mrs. Billacoys. This poem, which is annexed to his translations from M. Guyon, is referred to in the following extract from a letter by Mrs. B. which discovers how just an opinion she entertained of the author :

“ All things combine to distinguish him. He is blessed with a superior understanding, and an uncommon share of learning; and these are united to a heavenly mind, to form a character which angels must look down upon with pleasure. But what delight, what tender esteem, must fill the breasts of his obliged friends! of which happy number, although unworthy and almost unknown, I hope he will admit me, from the condescension he has already shown, in the sweetest verses I ever read. His every line opens an expanse of varied and celestial beauties, diffusing a joyful consolation that touches the inmost soul, and bends it, with a persuasive and irresistible eloquence, in humble submission to the will of God. His own soul has felt the comfort he knows so well to administer to others. Heaven has taught him the divine skill of strengthening the weak mind, of encouraging a timid and trembling faith, of raising in prayer the feeble hands that hang down, wiping the tear from

the mournful eye, and teaching it to look up to heaven."

Previously to the cessation of intercourse between Mr. C. and Lady Austen, she had suggested to him an undertaking that occupied the remainder of his life. Many of their social hours had been amused with literary information or entertainment. Among the numerous books which Mr. Cowper read, in the long evenings of winter, to his female friends, was Pope's elegant version of Homer. His own familiar and accurate knowledge of the original, prompted him frequently to complain of the translator's deviations from his author; and to express his wish, that some person, equal to the performance, would produce a more exact version. Lady Austen naturally urged him to undertake it; and he followed her advice after he had relinquished her company. He began to translate the Iliad in November 1784, immediately upon completing the "Tirocinium."

The constant exercise of his mind in composition, so far succeeded in diverting him from habitual despair, that he became more attached to society; and in the spring of 1785, he invited Mr. Greatheed to participate with Mr. Bull in their stated interviews. It was not, however, by arguing against his inveterate melancholy, that

his religious friends could promote its relief. An allusion to the subject was usually productive of its symptoms; although, upon any other religious topic than that of his own prospect of futurity, Mr. Cowper would converse freely and profitably. The necessity, however, of avoiding so interesting a theme, could not but make an essential difference, both in his conversation and correspondence, from what either had been, previous to his unhappy relapse. In writing to his former friends, to whom he again became gradually habituated, as his poetical exercises advanced, he touches sparingly and cautiously upon religion. He more freely indulges a vein of humour, which contributed to the momentary dissipation of his gloom; while he could scarcely advert to spiritual subjects without approximating the source of his distress. This remark applies to most of his subsequent letters, as well as to the sportive sallies of his poetical pieces. The flow of wit, which, in both instances, displays the peculiar powers of his mind, and fascinates the literary reader, was employed by him, merely as a substitute for spiritual reflection, in which he esteemed it presumptuous to indulge himself; or as a forcible effort to resist the intrusion of distress and terror. The following passage, in a much later epistle to Mr. Hayley, affords a general key

to his correspondence, from the time of its revival at Olney:—“*Non sum quod simulo*,—I am not what I affect to be, my dearest brother. I seem cheerful upon paper sometimes, when I am absolutely the most dejected of all creatures. Desirous, however, to gain something myself by my own letters, unprofitable as they may, and must be, to my friends, I keep melancholy out of them as much as I can, that I may, if possible, by assuming a less gloomy air, deceive myself, and, by feigning with a continuance, improve the fiction into reality.” His habitual conversation was, as might be apprehended from this passage, very different from the style of his letters. It was serious, sensible, and affectionate; but often dejected, and seldom brilliant. In his letters, as printed, there are many obvious chasms, which were probably occupied mostly with expressions of religious despondency.

His correspondence, and his sphere of society, was greatly enlarged, in consequence of the publication of his second volume of poems, which appeared in June 1785. The height to which it raised his reputation as an author, roused the attention of his polite relations; with whom, during his more depressed condition, his intercourse had been wholly suspended; and the hilarity of his lighter productions, encouraged them

to renew their communications with the poet. In October that year, he received an affectionate letter from his cousin, Lady Hesketh, who, in the interval that had occurred, was deprived, by death, of her husband, Sir Thomas Hesketh. The fortune he had left her, enabled her generously to offer Mr. Cowper any addition which might be desirable to his income. It could not have been made more seasonably, as Mrs. Unwin's fortune, which was equally shared between them, had recently been much reduced. From a person whom Mr. Cowper had so highly esteemed from their days of childhood, he did not scruple to receive an obligation of this nature. In June 1786, after a separation of three-and-twenty years, these endeared relations met at Olney; when some apartments in the vicarage, which had been occupied by Lady Austen, were prepared for Lady Hesketh. In order, however, that, when she renewed her visits, they might compose but one family, Mr. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin removed, in the following November, to a more commodious habitation in the pleasant village of Weston, a mile and an half distant from Olney. Mr. (now Sir John) Throckmorton and his lady, to whom the house, and most of the parish belonged, had, in the preceding summer, cultivated the acquaintance of Mr. Cowper; and they neglected no means of rendering their vicinity

to him agreeable and useful. This accession of local comforts was very shortly embittered by the premature decease of Mrs. Unwin's only son, whose friendship with Mr. Cowper had subsisted and increased from their first interview at Huntingdon. Soon afterwards, Mr. Rose, a gentleman of the law, in London, passing near Weston, introduced himself to Mr. Cowper, although he was then peculiarly difficult of access, his habitual dejection having been aggravated by the loss of Mr. Unwin. Mr. Rose's zeal surmounted every obstacle; and the ardour of his attachment to the author of "The Task," excited in him reciprocal friendship, which was fostered by frequent correspondence, the active services of Mr. Rose at London, and his occasional visits at Weston.

Mr. Cowper's spirits did not recover their usual tone till Sept. 1787, when he resumed his application to Homer. A great majority among his acquaintances and his readers, earnestly wished him rather to have been employed in original composition; and some of his intimate friends were, moreover, apprehensive that the great extent of his undertaking might prove detrimental to his health and comfort. A short letter to his constant and affectionate correspondent, Jos. Hill, Esq. in November the same year, satisfactorily explains his reasons for perseverance in the work he had

begun. "Assure yourself," says he, "of one thing, that though to a bye-stander it may seem an occupation surpassing the powers of a constitution never very athletic, and at present not a little the worse for wear, I can invent for myself no employment that does not exhaust my spirits more. I have even found those plaything avocations, which one may execute almost without any attention, fatigue me, and wear me away, while such as engage me much, and attach me closely, are rather serviceable to me than otherwise." He frequently, nevertheless, composed short pieces to gratify his friends, and to record domestic incidents, that interested his feelings. At the request of some advocates of justice and humanity, he wrote about this time some popular Lyrics against the detestable Slave-Trade; and he obliged the inhabitants of Northampton with several copies of versés for bills of mortality; but his attention to his great undertaking was so little remitted, that he completed the first sketch of the translation of the Iliad in September 1788, and finished the seventeenth book of the Odyssey in the following May. He derived great help, in transcribing from his zealous friends; the number of whom was increased, about that time, by the important accession of his young kinsman, Mr. Johnson, of Norfolk, who repeatedly spent some time at Weston, in the

intervals of his studies at Cambridge. For him, Mr. Cowper entertained a truly paternal regard; and it was requited by a degree of affection too seldom manifested by a son to his own father.

Mr. Cowper's intercourse with others of his maternal kindred was also now renewed; and he was indebted to it for the highly acceptable present of his mother's picture. Mr. Johnson had the satisfaction of transmitting to the bookseller, in Sept. 1790, a corrected copy of the whole translation of Homer. After it had undergone a fresh revisal, while passing through the press, it was published in July the following year. Having prosecuted this laborious occupation, though closely, yet with a moderation that admitted of needful exercise and relaxation, he accomplished it, in the possession of health and spirits, at least equal to what he had enjoyed at its commencement.

His religious state during this period, was no otherwise likely to be improved, than as the diversion of his thoughts from despair tended to relieve his constitutional malady. The nature of his employment was such, as would probably have been, in some measure, detrimental to any person capable of religious enjoyment. It is much to be regretted, that his correspondence with Mr. Newton, by which the real state of his mind was most likely to be unfolded, closes, in Mr. Hayley's pub-

lication, with the year 1784. It is only known, from Mr. Greatheed's sermon, that Mr. Cowper was not destitute, at times, of glimmering hope and dawning consolation; and that he repeatedly resumed his approaches to the throne of divine grace: but these seasons were, unhappily, too transient to admit of his renewed attendance on public worship, or of his attainment to a steadfast reliance on the infallible promises of the gospel. Yet, as these delightful intervals occurred during the time that he was most fully occupied with poetical labours, it does not appear that the latter proved at all inimical to his spiritual recovery. Nor is it certain than an equal time spent in original composition, would have afforded him a similiar relief; especially, if of so laborious a nature as he had experienced "The Task" to be, to his intellectual powers. The repeated solicitations of his friends induced him notwithstanding, as soon as his Homer was completed, to direct his thoughts toward a third volume of poems. Occasional pieces, (of which several have been published in successive editions of his former volumes, and others are interspersed by Mr. Hayley in his biographical narrative,) had already accumulated; and he designed to introduce them with a larger work, somewhat resembling his Task, the subject of which, the "Four Ages" of man's life, was

suggested to him by Mr. Buchanan, a neighbouring clergyman of classical taste and amiable character. His attention, nevertheless, was soon diverted from this object, by a proposal from his bookseller, to publish a splendid edition of Milton's poetical works; in which the Latin and Italian Poems were to be translated, and Notes on the whole to be subjoined, by Mr. Cowper. Both these projects were frustrated by unexpected events; but a prose translation of some religious epistles which had been performed by him, while correcting his Homer, was published in 1792, by Mr. Newton, at whose request it had been undertaken. It consists of six letters, written in Latin by the late Mr. Vanlier, a minister of the gospel in the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope. They are descriptive of his conversion from scepticism to the love of Christ, which was exceedingly remarkable in most of its circumstances.

Soon after Mr. Cowper had entered upon his translations from Milton, his spirits received a severer shock than they had sustained since the death of Mr. Unwin. The mother of that beloved friend, who, as he expresses himself on the occasion, had been his own "faithful and affectionate nurse for many years," was attacked, in December 1791, with a disorder which afterwards proved to be paralytic. It was not at first attended with

permanent effects; and her apparent recovery afforded him speedy relief. In the following March, Mr. Cowper's acquaintance with Mr. Hayley commenced, by a friendly letter and sonnet which he received from that gentleman, in consequence of his proposed work on Milton. Mr. Hayley having engaged his services to another bookseller for a similar purpose, kindly offered to Mr. Cowper the use of some scarce books, with which Milton had been conversant; and entreated him to visit his rural retreat in Sussex, that they might confer upon their respective performances. Mr. Cowper declined an invitation to go so far from home; but invited Mr. Hayley to visit him at Weston; and they met there about the middle of May. The gratification afforded to Mr. Cowper by the company of his benevolent poetical brother, was unexpectedly dashed, by a new and alarming attack of Mrs. Unwin's disorder. Mr. Greatheed, having come to meet Mr. Hayley at Weston, was waiting for the return of the two poets from a walk, when Mrs. U. with whom he was conversing, was suddenly deprived of the use of her limbs, her speech, and faculties, in a very distressing degree. The discovery threw Mr. Cowper at first, on his return home, into a paroxysm of desperation; but the tender sympathy of his literary associate, and the apparent benefit derived

from medicinal exertions for Mrs. Unwin's relief, gradually recruited his spirits. She also slowly, but imperfectly recovered her powers; and Mr. Cowper laid aside all other occupations, that he might incessantly attend to her help and comfort. Mr. Hayley being obliged, after a fortnight's stay, to return home, Mr. Cowper's neighbouring friends attempted to supply the want of his services at Weston. At the commencement of August, Mrs. Unwin had sufficiently regained her strength, to accompany Mr. Cowper and Mr. Johnson to Mr. Hayley's elegant house at Eartham; his solicitations, with the hope of benefit from the journey, and a change of scene, having prompted them to the enterprise. They were absent from home, for the first time in twenty-six years, about seven weeks: and this extraordinary exertion, if not productive of effects so beneficial as were wished, yet was attended with none of the evils that might have been apprehended from its novelty. On the road, at Kingston, Mr. Cowper had a gratifying interview, both in going and returning, with General Spencer Cowper, son of a younger brother of the poet's father, with whom he had frequently corresponded since the publication of "The Task."

Mr. Cowper was highly pleased with the pleasures of Eartham, and the affectionate hospitality

of his good friend Mr. Hayley, though these did not prove a remedy for his distress. In letters to his friends, while he continued here, he thus describes his situation:—"I am in the most elegant mansion that I have ever inhabited, and surrounded by the most delightful pleasure grounds that I have ever seen. Here we are as happy as it is in the power of terrestrial good to make us. It is almost a Paradise in which we dwell; and our reception has been the kindest that it was possible for friendship and hospitality to contrive." But he adds, "As to that gloominess of mind which I have had these twenty years, it cleaves to me even here, and could I be translated to Paradise, unless I left my body behind me, would cleave to me even there also. It is my companion for life, and nothing will ever divorce us.

After his return to Weston, Mr. Cowper attempted to proceed with his commentary on Milton; but it proved a severer labour to him than his poetical compositions had been; and the continual attention required by the decline of Mrs. Unwin's strength and faculties, disabled him for application; and gradually distressed his spirits. He at length suspended his exertions on Milton, and limited them to a revisal of his Homer for a second edition; on which he employed several hours every morning, before Mrs. Unwin was able

to quit her chamber. The remainder of every day was uniformly devoted to her consolation. Thus was spent the whole of 1793; and at the commencement of the following year, he sank into a depth of melancholy, as desperate, though not equally violent, as that which he endured when first deprived of religious comfort. His cousin, Lady Hesketh, who had usually spent a part of the year at Weston, then made it her constant residence, solely for his preservation and relief; which Mrs. Unwin, having been reduced to second childhood through her increasing infirmities, was no longer capable of promoting. Mr. Hayley, who had revisited Weston the preceding year, repaired thither in April 1794, to unite his efforts with those of Mr. Cowper's afflicted friends, for his solace and restoration;—but all were fruitless. It appeared extremely desirable that he should be removed to the house of Dr. Willis, at Greatford in Lincolnshire, in order to reap the utmost advantages of medical assistance; but he could not be prevailed upon to accompany Lady Hesketh thither; and a journey which she undertook, accompanied by Mr. Greatheed, to obtain the doctor's advice, as well as a visit which the latter made, in consequence, to Mr. Cowper, proved wholly unsuccessful.

It may easily be supposed, that in such circum-

stances, the expenses of the family at Weston were greatly enhanced. Mr. Hayley's friendly exertions had not been limited to objects of social or literary intercourse. He had zealously and pathetically applied to persons in power, with whom either Mr. Cowper or himself had formerly been connected, to obtain such an honourable mark of regard to his friend's literary merits, as might secure him from pecuniary embarrassment under accumulated burdens. In his last visit at Weston, he had the pleasure to receive from Earl Spencer (who was distantly related to Mr. Cowper, and had always testified the highest esteem of him) his Majesty's grant to the latter, of a pension which Dr. Johnson and Mr. Gibbon had before enjoyed. It was nominally 300*l.* per annum; but nearly one-third was swallowed up by customary fees of office. Though it could not have been bestowed more seasonably for Mr. Cowper's exigencies, his state of mind was such as not to admit even of his learning the acquisition. Mr. Hayley was under the necessity of relinquishing his ineffectual attempts at consolation; but Lady Hesketh endured the trial till July 1795, when her health could no longer sustain its effects. Mr. Johnson, who had taken orders two years before, had repeatedly quitted his parochial charge at Dereham, to share with her so oppressive

a burden; but he could not further prolong his absence without impropriety. In such circumstances, no alternative remained, but to transport his afflicted kinsman, with his equally distressed and helpless companion, from the scene which they were no longer able to enjoy, to one where he could watch over the remnant of their lives. He conducted so difficult an enterprise, with a skill dictated by exquisite tenderness, and with a success that exceeded every hope. Mr. Cowper, who had trembled at the thoughts of passing his own threshold, not only supported, but even, in some degree, enjoyed so long a journey; and Mrs. Unwin, who had been supposed incapable of removal, sustained it without the slightest detriment. Their subsequent situations were carefully accommodated to their wants and their inclinations; but Mr. Cowper seldom discovered any degree of sensibility, except regret for his distance from the beloved scenes of Weston. Mr. Johnson, apprehending that his own residence in the town of East-Dereham might tend to distress the tender spirits of Cowper, with an affectionate solicitude for the relief of his mind, removed his invalids from Weston to North-Tuddenham, in Norfolk, where they were accommodated with the Parsonage house, by the kindness of the Rev. Leonard Shelford. From this place

his indulgent guardian removed him to the village of Mundsley, upon the coast of Norfolk, hoping that a sea view might relieve his afflicted spirits; Mr. Johnson devoting himself fully to every means that could be devised to promote his recovery.

The Lord was peculiarly kind to Mr. Cowper in the provision of such suitable and affectionate attendants, whose amiable dispositions inclined them, at no easy expense, to constant and persevering endeavours for his comfort. Mr. Johnson anxiously watched every inclination he expressed, that he might seize the opportunity to indulge it, in which he was assisted by the tender exertions of his amiable and benevolent female friend, Miss Perowne. In one of their walks, visiting Dunham Lodge, a seat on a high ground, in a park, about four miles from Swaffham, Mr. Cowper observed it was a house rather too spacious for him, yet such as he should not be unwilling to inhabit; this remark induced Mr. Johnson to become the tenant of it, hoping that it might prove an advantage to him. His mind, however, admitted of no other relief, than from being gorged with books of fictitious narrative; and his affectionate kinsman submitted to the painful drudgery of incessantly reading them to him. Having exhausted these, Mr. Johnson began to read to him his own poems; but when he came to the his-

tory of Gilpin, he begged not to hear it, though he listened willingly to his other works, both published and manuscript, without making a single remark on any. The only benefit produced was, that they prevented his mind from preying continually upon itself.

It was highly gratifying to Mr. Johnson's feelings, when he found Mr. Cowper willing to attend daily in Mrs. Unwin's room, while a portion of scripture was read to her. At the close of 1796, she obtained a relief from all her sufferings; and happily, Mr. Cowper no longer possessed those acute sensations, which would have rendered the event insupportable to him. She expired with perfect tranquillity: he saw her half an hour before she drew her last breath, and again some hours afterwards; but thenceforth never mentioned her name!

In June, 1797, the hopes of his friends were reanimated, his distress being, in a degree, alleviated. Mr. Wakefield's edition of Pope's Homer coming into his hands in August, he read the notes to himself with considerable interest, which incited him to resume, for a few weeks, his revision of Homer, which was far advanced before his last relapse, and sometimes he produced sixty corrected lines in a day. But the fond expectations of his friends were soon disappointed, for he did

not again take up the work till September, in the following year. He then persevered till its completion, which was effected in March 1799. He had, since leaving Weston, written only three or four letters, all expressive of his own misery, to some of his intimate friends; and when visited by the Dowager Lady Spencer, Sir John Throckmorton, and Mr. Rose, he declined conversing with them. The only compositions to which he could afterwards be excited, were some translations into English of short Latin and Greek poems, and two of Gay's Fables, into Latin verse; beside two original poems, one called "The Cast-away," describing the unhappy fate of a mariner washed overboard, recorded in Anson's Voyage, in allusion to his own hopeless condition; the other, which he composed in Latin, on the appearance of some ice-islands, in the German Sea, and translated into English, to gratify Miss Perowne, whose attention to the poet's last years, resembled that of Mrs. Unwin or Lady Hesketh. The former of these two poems appears to have been the last original production of his pen, and exhibits the amazing powers of his mind, when labouring under such distress. The concluding verses, as having a very striking allusion to his own case, as above hinted, we take the liberty to transcribe:—

He long survives, who lives an hour
 In ocean, self-upheld :
 And so long he, with unspent pow'r,
 His destiny repell'd :
 And ever, as the minutes flew,
 Entreated help, or cry'd—" Adieu !"

At length his transient respite past,
 His comrades, who before
 Had heard his voice in every blast,
 Could catch the sound no more :
 For then, by toil subdued, he drank
 The stifling wave, and then he sank.

No poet wept him : but the page
 Of narrative sincere,
 That tells his name, his worth, his age,
 Is wet with Anson's tear :
 And tears by bards or heroes shed,
 Alike immortalize the dead.

I therefore purpose not, nor dream,
 Descanting on his fate,
 To give the melancholy theme
 A more enduring date :
 But misery still delights to trace
 Its 'semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allay'd,
 No light propitious shone ;
 When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
 We perish'd, each alone :
 But, I beneath a rougher sea,
 And whelm'd in deeper gulfs, than he.

He had written two lines only, of a Latin version of another of Gay's fables, when, at the close of January 1800, he was seized with dropsical symptoms, which became more and more

alarming, his strength at the same time daily decaying, till his decease, which was on the 25th of April following. "Death (says Mr. Greatheed) which he had for so long a period hourly expected, seemed hardly to be apprehended by him, when it really approached. His young friend and relative, convinced that he would shortly exchange a world of infirmity and sorrow for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, repeatedly endeavoured to cheer him with the prospect, and to assure him of the happiness that awaited him. Still he refused to be comforted. "Oh, spare me! spare me! You know, you *know* it to be false,"—was his only reply; with the same invincible despair, to which he had so long been a prey. Early on the 25th of April, he sank into a state of apparent insensibility, which might have been mistaken for a tranquil slumber, but that his eyes remained half open. His breath was regular, though feeble; and his countenance, and animal frame were perfectly serene. In this state he continued for twelve hours; and then expired, without moving a limb, or even heaving a breath."

The last words he was heard to utter, were on the preceding night; when a cordial being offered him by Miss Perowne, he declined it, saying, "What can it signify?"

Thus, contrary to the hopes and even expectation of all his friends, his evening closed in clouds and darkness, so far as could be discovered,

“ Without one cheerful beam of hope,
Or spark of glimmering day.”

All who knew this excellent man, however, were so fully convinced of his genuine piety and integrity of heart, that notwithstanding he despaired, they could not doubt of his Salvation. To him, with singular propriety, we may apply the following affecting picture, drawn by the pencil of a kindred spirit, the amiable Dr. Watts: “ See! within those curtains, a person of faith and serious piety, but of melancholy constitution and fearing death. Behold the man a favourite of heaven, a child of light, assaulted with the darts of hell, and at the last gasp of life, when he seems to be sinking into eternal death, he quits the body, with all its sad circumstances, and feels himself in the arms of his Saviour, and the presence of his God.”

Our Poet was buried in a part of Dereham church, called St. Edmund's Chapel, on the 3d of May, when several of his relatives attended; and here his affectionate cousin, Lady Hesketh, ordered a monument to be erected to his memory.

In person, Mr. Cowper was of the middle sta-

ture, rather strong than delicate in form; his hair light brown, his eyes of a bluish grey, his complexion ruddy, and his whole countenance full of expression and sensibility.

The following lines, by an unknown writer, on seeing an elegant sketch of Cowper's portrait, by Lawrence, pay a just and elegant compliment, both to the artist and the bard:—

“ Sweet Bard, whose mind, thus pictur'd in thy face,
O'er ev'ry feature spreads a nobler grace;
Whose keen, but soften'd, eye appears to dart
A look of pity through the human heart:
To search the secrets of man's inward frame;
To weep with sorrow o'er his guilt and shame.

“ Sweet Bard, with whom in sympathy of choice
I've oft-times left the world at Nature's voice,
To join the song that all her creatures raise,
To carol forth their great Creator's praise;
Or wrapt in visions of immortal day,
Have gaz'd on Truth, in Zion's heavenly way.

“ Sweet Bard, by this thine image, all I know,
Or ever may, of Cowper's form below;
Teach one who views it with a Christian's love,
To seek and find thee in the realms above.

In manners he was easy, gentle, and particularly affable to the fair sex. In dress he was neat without affectation, in diet temperate, and in conduct irreproachable. He understood the Greek, Latin, Italian, and French languages.

Those who wish to see a fuller account of Mr. Cowper's religious experience, accompanied with appropriate observations and reflections, will be

gratified with perusing Mr. Greatheed's sermon, which was preached on occasion of Mr. C.'s decease, before a considerable number of his old neighbours and acquaintances at Olney.

To them who desire a display of his literary excellence, the faithful and judicious account which Mr. Hayley has supplied, will be highly acceptable. Beside its narrative, epistolary, and critical departments, his two volumes comprise above a hundred poetical pieces by Mr. Cowper, original or translated, most of which have never before been published. The author's translations from Milton are reserved, in order to be published, together with Mr. Hayley's labours on that poet, in a superb edition of Milton's works; of which the profits will be devoted to the erection of a public monument, in memory of Mr. Cowper. Marble, however, cannot form a monument more durable than his own immortal compositions.

BRIEF REVIEW
OF
MR. COWPER'S WRITINGS.

1. *HIS ORIGINAL POETRY.*

Poet and Saint to thee are justly given,
The two most sacred names of earth and heaven.
COWLEY.

IT is pleasing to review the map of a country we have traversed. The mind dwells with pleasure on spots that have interested, either by the beauty of their scenery, or the incidents which have there occurred: with such pleasure do we peruse a liberal review of our favourite author. We are gratified to meet with passages that particularly charmed us in the perusal; and we are glad to find others pleased with the same objects as ourselves: nor is the amusement uninstruc- tive. When different travellers, who have pursued the same rout, meet together at their journey's end, it is much if each has not observed some object which the other has overlooked. So, when several persons have perused the same book, and come to

compare notes upon it, he must be a simple reader indeed, who has no observation to communicate, no remark to offer, different from his companions. The present attempt, therefore, will not, we hope, be thought assuming; especially as we do not mean to put our Poet to critical torture, nor to hunt for blemishes where beauties are so abundant.

Should these pages meet the eye of some young reader, who has not yet perused our favourite Bard, he must have little true taste, if the specimens here exhibited do not make him anxious to peruse the whole.

Table Talk.

In a letter to Mr. Bull, Cowper says, "I cast a side-long glance at the good liking of the world at large, more for the sake of their advantage and instruction, than their praise. They are children; if we give them physic, we must sweeten the rim of the cup with honey." With some regard, therefore, to the prevailing taste, this poem, which contains less notice of his favourite theme, was placed first. It is written in the form of *Dialogue*, Messrs. A. and B. being the interlocutors; and contains an animated descant on several popular subjects, the chief of which are, Freedom and Poetry. The patriotic, and

the venal, ambitious statesman, are finely discriminated in contrast. The sceptred Tyrant, and the sanguinary Hero, are described in just, but sombre colours. The advantages "in Britain's chartered land," which Freedom affords to Science and Truth—Religion and Virtue, as described by Cowper, may inspire gratitude for our pre-eminence, and teach us to distinguish Freedom from Anarchy. Though, with a peculiar love of liberty and independence, he abhorred "the lie that flatters," he knew how to do justice to virtue, even on a throne; and with an Alfred and an Edward, he does honour to the living sovereign;

"His life a lesson to the land he sways."

The portrait of Chatham is as just, as the remark it suggests, is pious:—

"Such then are rais'd to station and command,
When Providence means mercy to a land.
He speaks, and they appear; to him they owe
Skill to direct, and strength to strike the blow;
To manage with address, to seize with power,
The crisis of a dark decisive hour."

From these subjects, the Poet makes an easy transition to poetry; in which, after having traced the outline of its rise and progress, he thus delineates—*A Poet's just pretence,*

"Fervency, freedom, fluency of thought,
Harmony, strength, words exquisitely songt;

Fancy, that from the bow that spans the sky
 Brings colours, dipp'd in Heaven, that never die ;
 A soul exalted above earth, a mind
 Skill'd in the characters that form mankind ;
 And, as the Sun, in rising beauty dress'd,
 Looks to the westward from the dappled east,
 And marks, whatever clouds may interpose,
 Ere yet his race begins, its glorious close ;
 An eye like his, to catch the distant goal,
 Or ere the wheels of verse begin to roll ;
 Like his, to shed illuminating rays
 On every scene and subject it surveys ;
 Thus grac'd, the man asserts a Poet's name,
 And the world cheerfully admits the claim."

Whilst Cowper laments that religion has so seldom found a skilful guide into poetic ground, he beautifully describes the service which such a poet may render to its great and important interests, and which himself most eminently exemplified :—

" To see a Bard all fire,
 Touch'd with a coal from Heaven, assume the lyre,
 And tell the world, still kindling as he sung,
 With more than mortal music on his tongue,
 That he who died below, and reigns above,
 Inspires the song, and that his name is Love."

He then contrasts, in a very able manner, such a noble end, with the lower objects of poetical ambition, by which so many have debased their talents and corrupted the morals of mankind :

" How are the powers of genius misapplied !
 The gift, whose office is the Giver's praise,
 To trace him in his word, his works, his ways ;

Then spread the rich discovery, and invite
 Mankind to share in the divine delight ;
 Distorted from its use and just design,
 To make the pitiful possessor shine ;
 To purchase, at the fool-frequented fair
 Of vanity a wreath for self to wear ;
 Is profanation of the basest kind—
 Proof of a trifling and a worthless mind.

Progress of Error.

This first essay of his long suspended talent, though second in the arrangement, was suggested to him, as we have seen, by Mrs. Unwin, to divert his mind from its own malady. The design is to point out the influence which ill habits and bad sentiments produce upon each other :—

“ Faults in the life breed errors in the brain,
 And these reciprocally those again ;
 The mind and conduct mutually imprint,
 And stamp their image in each other's mint.”

Error is traced, in its progress, through inordinate attachment to sensual pleasure, the influence of clerical dissipation, violations of the Christian sabbath, gaming, drunkenness, and folly. The Poet then meets a common objection :—

“ Is man then only for his torment plac'd,
 The centre of delights he may not taste ?”

And answers it effectually, by pointing out the true sources of pleasure in domestic life, in acts of Christian benevolence, in rural retirement, in

the studies of true philosophy, and the duties and enjoyments of genuine religion.

The breach made on the moral powers by sensuality, is described as widened by novels and other pernicious books put into the hands of youth; by the neglect of parents to give religious instruction to their offspring, the state of public education, and the abuse of the press:

“ The breach, though small at first, soon op’ning wide,
 In rushes folly with a full-moon tide;
 Then welcome errors, of whatever size,
 To justify it by a thousand lies.
 As creeping ivy clings to wood or stone,
 And hides the ruin that it feeds upon,
 So sophistry cleaves close to, and protects
 Sin’s rotten trunk, concealing its defects.
 Mortals, whose pleasures are their only care,
 First wish to be impos’d on, and then are;
 And, lest the fulsome artifice should fail,
 Themselves will hide its coarseness with a veil.”

The Poet presses on our attention,

————— “ The judgment of the skies!
 He that hates truth shall be the dupe of lies:
 And he that *will* be cheated to the last,
 Delusions, strong as hell, shall bind him fast:
 But if the wand’rer his mistake discern,
 Judge his own ways, and sigh for a return;
 Bewilder’d once, must he bewail his loss
 For ever and for ever? No—the cross!—
 There, and there only, is the power to save.
 There no delusive hope invites despair,
 No mock’ry meets you, no deception there;
 The spells and charms that blinded you before,
 All vanish there, and fascinate no more.”

“The progress of Error,” says Mr. Hayley, “seems the least attractive of the several admonitory poems; and we judge from it, that even the genius of Cowper required the frequent habit of writing verse to display itself to advantage.”

The subject, however, is of high importance to all, and especially to the young of both sexes, and of all ranks. Cowper appears in this poem as a Christian philosopher, acquainted with the powers of man, with his passions, and with his habits; warning us of danger, proposing to us the path of safety, or opening to us the most effectual remedy. He that can bring to his reading a mind fraught with just observations on man, may easily convince himself that this poem contains a valuable portion of interesting and useful, though to some offensive truth: And he that is willing to learn, without making the dangerous experiment of foreign travel, may be instructed at home, and, perhaps, guarded against the fascinations of sensuality and the delusions of error.

The four following poems are Christian Exhortations to Piety;—“which,” says Mr. Hayley, “may be thought tedious and dull by readers who have no relish for devotional eloquence.” In these Mr. C. aims to communicate his own perceptions of the truth, beauty, and influence of the religion of the Bible.

The first is,

Truth;

In which the Poet states the simplicity of evangelical truth, and the opposition with which it meets from "the sober, the busy, and the gay." The doctrine of salvation, by faith in the Son of God, without human merit, though most clearly revealed in the sacred oracles, and most ably defended by St. Paul, has ever had to contend with the ignorance, prejudices, and pride of the human heart. Man is much more disposed to hope for salvation, by ceremonial observances, and self-imposed, though painful mortifications, than by a scriptural dependance upon the Saviour of sinners. This disposition the Poet has exemplified in a Popish recluse, an Indian Bramin, and a modern pharisaical prude. By way of contrast to these, he presents us with the picture of religion produced by Truth:—

"Artists, attend, your brushes and your paint—
Produce them—take a chair—now draw a saint."
Oh, sorrowful and sad! the streaming tears
Channel her cheeks—a Niobe appears!
Is this a saint! Throw tints and all away—
True piety is cheerful as the day;
Will weep, indeed, and heave a pitying groan,
For others' woe, but smiles upon her own.

"What purpose has the King of saints in view?
Why falls the gospel like a gracious dew?"

To call up plenty from the teeming earth,
 Or curse the desert with a tenfold dearth?
 Is it that Adam's offspring may be sav'd
 From servile fear, or be the more enslav'd?
 To loose the links that gall'd mankind before,
 Or bind them faster on, and add still more?
 The freeborn Christian has no chains to prove;
 Or, if a chain, the golden one of love:
 No fear attends to quench his glowing fires;
 What fear he feels, his gratitude inspires.
 Shall he, for such deliv'rance, freely wrought,
 Recompense ill? He trembles at the thought.
 His master's int'rest and his own, combin'd,
 Prompt ev'ry movement of his heart and mind:
 Thought, word, and deed, his liberty evince;
 His freedom is the freedom of a prince."

In this poem, Cowper illustrates the importance of principle and motive in religion.

The snares of learning and wit are happily displayed in Voltaire, contrasted with a pious unlettered cottager; and those of rank and property are placed in contrast with piety in lower conditions.

Upon the plan of evangelical truth the Poet answers the question, What is man? and conducting us to the most awful tribunal, boldly arraigns the man who had boasted of his virtue and neglected the great salvation; and contrasts with him the true believer:—

"All joy to the believer! He can speak—
 Trembling, yet happy; confident, yet meek."

"Since the dear hour that brought me to thy foot,
 And cut up all my follies by the root,

I never trusted in an arm but thine,
 Nor hop'd, but in thy righteousness divine :
 My pray'rs and alms, imperfect and defil'd,
 Were but the feeble efforts of a child ;
 Howe'er perform'd, it was their brightest part,
 That they proceeded from a grateful heart :
 Cleans'd in thine own all-purifying blood,
 Forgive their evil, and accept their good.
 I cast them at thy feet—my only plea
 Is what it was—dependance upon thee :
 While struggling in the vale of tears below,
 That never fail'd, nor shall it fail me now."

"The poem on Truth," says Mr. Hayley, "exhibits the author's singular talent of blending the humorous and the sublime. In his portrait of the Sanctified Prude he is at once the copyist and compeer of Hogarth: in his picture of Cheerful Piety and True Christian Freedom, he soars to a species of excellence that the pencil of Hogarth could not command."—The next poem is called

Expostulation ;

Which was founded on a sermon preached by the poet's very valuable friend, Mr. Newton. In the history of the Jews, he traces the sins and punishment of a guilty people, and calls upon them, as monitors of the nations :

"To rouse their fears,
 Say wrath is coming, and the storm appears ;
 But raise the shrillest cry in British ears."

This introduces the Poet to the sins of Britain,

which he enumerates. Cowper then takes an interesting review of our civil and religious history, and calls upon the nation to humble itself before God; to acknowledge its obligations, and act worthy of its pre-eminent station and superior advantages. Many are the beautiful passages which might be selected from a poem which "flows in an even tenor of sublime admonition;" but one or two must suffice.

The following is an admirable description of what the clergy ought to be, while the concluding lines contain a severe censure on what they are:—

"The priestly brotherhood, devout, sincere,
From mean self-int'rest and ambition clear;
Their hope in heav'n, servility their scorn,
Prompt to persuade, expostulate, and warn;
Their wisdom pure, and giv'n them from above,
Their usefulness ensur'd by zeal and love;
As meek as the man Moses, and withal
As bold as, in Agrippa's presence, Paul;
Should fly the world's contaminating touch,
Holy and unpolluted:—are thine such?
Except a few with Eli's spirit blest,
Hophni and Phineas may describe the rest."

In the tender and plaintive spirit of Jeremiah, perhaps Cowper's model in this poem, he concludes in lines of exquisite beauty:—

"Muse, hang this harp upon yon aged beech,
Still murin'ring with the solemn truths I teach:
And, while, at intervals, a cold blast sings
Through the dry leaves, and pants upon the strings,

My soul shall sigh in secret, and lament
 A nation scourg'd, yet tardy to repent.
 I know the warning song is sung in vain ;
 That few will hear, and fewer heed the strain :
 But, if a sweeter voice, and one design'd
 A blessing to my country and mankind,
 Reclaim the wand'ring thousands, and bring home
 A flock, so scatter'd, and so wont to roam,
 Then place it once again between my knees ;
 The sound of truth will then be sure to please :
 And truth alone, where'er my life be cast,
 In scenes of plenty or the pining waste,
 Shall be my chosen theme, my glory to the last.

Hope.

This poem opens with a description of human life, as viewed by querulous old age, as engaging the ardour of youth, and exciting the disgust of fashionable indolence. The remedy proposed, is Hope, which introduces the *Hope of the Gospel*, its origin, and happy influence. The Poet then digresses on the degeneracy of man from his birth, his folly in some of his employments, the dissipation of pleasure, and the pageantry of death. Having intimated that Hope is founded in divine grace, the Poet states, in a dialogue between Vinoso (a wine bibber), two officers, and the chaplain of a regiment, with exquisite humour, their objection to the doctrines of grace as subversive of good morals; and with equal success answers it, by pointing to the moral influence of these doctrines, exemplified in the converts amongst

the poor Cornish miners, and the inhabitants of Greenland. Under the name of *Leuconomus* he introduces the illustrious, though despised character of Whitefield; which is sketched with the hand of a master; and is, perhaps, one of the finest passages the pen of Cowper wrote: but it is well known, we presume, to our readers, and too long for insertion here. The inseparable connexion between evangelical hope and purity of character, with the superiority of the gospel to all other systems, in its moral influence, are then happily described:—

“ For this—of all that ever influenc’d man,
 Since Abel worshipp’d, or the world began—
 This only spares no lust; admits no plea;
 But makes him, if at all, completely free:
 Sounds forth the signal, as she mounts her car,
 Of an eternal, universal war;
 Rejects all treaty, penetrates all wiles,
 Scorns, with the same indiff’rence, frowns and smiles;
 Drives through the realms of sin, where riot reels,
 And grinds his crown beneath her burning wheels!”

And hence the Poet accounts for the opposition of the human mind to the system of grace.

Of equal beauty is the following impassioned apostrophe to truth:—

“ Parent of hope, immortal truth! make known
 Thy deathless wreaths, and triumphs all thine own:
 Oh, see me sworn to serve thee, and command
 A painter’s skill into a poet’s hand!

That, while I, trembling, trace a work divine,
 Fancy may stand aloof from the design,
 And light, and shade, and ev'ry stroke, be thine." }

In delineating this Hope, the offspring of divine truth in the human breast, the Poet describes the conviction which precedes the joy it communicates, and the praise it inspires to the "God of Hope;" and finishes with the comparative character and influence of the Christian poet and the Christian preacher.

This poem exhibits, in a gay diversity of colouring, Cowper's power of description, and his vigour of sentiment, employed in the defence and praise of genuine religion.

Charity.

The Poet here teaches us, that the *social affections* which were intended to attach man to man, and produce general welfare, are, with a few exceptions, severed by avarice; that *commerce*, which is capable of associating all the branches of mankind, though it deserve praise for its improvement of the arts, stands branded with the odious slave trade; and that *philosophy* has been found ineffectual to produce charity or genuine love.— He adds,

"'Tis Truth divine, exhibited on earth,
 Gives Charity her being and her birth."

From this divine original Cowper borrows his beautiful portrait.

Alms-giving having been improperly considered as embracing the whole of Charity, the Poet describes the former, without the latter, in the character of two modern Pharisees:—An aged maiden—

“Flavia, most tender of her own good name,
Is rather careless of her sister's fame:
Her superfluity the poor supplies,
But, if she touch a character, it dies.
The seeming virtue weigh'd against the vice,
She deems all safe, for she has paid the price.”

And a country squire, who, when the brief goes round the church,

“Slides guinea behind guinea in his palm;
Till, finding (what he might have found before)
A smaller piece amidst the precious store,
Pinch'd close between his finger and his thumb,
He half exhibits, and then drops the sum.”

True charity is then considered as having for its rule the Holy Scriptures; for its principle, faith in the Son of God; and for its motive, love to him, who, for our sakes, became poor; as being the very essence of vital religion, and as producing the most important effects.

The sentiments which Cowper endeavours to impress on the heart of his reader, in this series of devotional poems, are drawn from the purest fountain of truth, the Sacred Oracles. Of him

we may say, in his own words, that to correct a too general dereliction of the important and fundamental truths of Christianity, by those who ought to have been their advocates:—

“ A man arose, a man whom God has taught,
With all Elijah’s dignity of tone,
And all the love of the beloved John,
To storm the citadels they built in air,
And smite th’ untemper’d wall; (’tis death to spare!)
To prove, that without Christ all gain is loss,
All hope despair, that stands not on his cross.”

Conversation.

“ In the extensive and admirably varied poem on Conversation,” says Mr. Hayley, “ the Poet shines as a teacher of manners, as well as of morality and religion. It is remarkable, that in this work he is particularly severe on what he considered as his own peculiar defect, that excess of diffidence, that insurmountable shyness, which is so apt to freeze the current of English conversation.”

“ True modesty is a discerning grace,
And on’y blushes in the proper place;
But counterfeit is blind and skulks through fear,
Where ’tis a shame to be asham’d to appear.”

“ This poem,” continues the brother Poet, “ abounds with much admirable description, both serious and comic. The portrait of the splenetic man is, perhaps, the most highly finished example of comic power; and the scene of the two dis-

principles, on the way to Emmaus, is a perfect model of solemn and graceful simplicity."

Aware that "the light and vain" might condemn the seriousness of his muse, and attempt to shield themselves from the force of his satire, by representing him as "a gloomy fanatic," he repels the charge with animated dignity:—

"What is fanatic frenzy? scorn'd so much!
And dreaded more than a contagious touch.
I grant it dang'rous, and approve your fear;
That fire is catching if you draw too near:
But sage observers oft mistake the flame,
And give true Piety that odious name."

Retirement.

A great portion of human happiness, in the present state, arises from a due mixture of action and retirement, the one preparing for the other:—

"Wisdom's self (says Milton)
Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude,
Where, with her best nurse, Contemplation,
She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair'd."

A Hymn, composed by Cowper, in the Olney collection*, shows us how passionately he loved, and religiously improved retirement. But the retirement which Cowper recommends, is not to

* No. xlv. Book 3.

kill time, but to redeem it; not to escape reflection, but to court it:—

“ To serve the Sov'reign we were born t' obey.
 Then sweet to muse upon his skill display'd
 (Infinite skill) in all that he has made!
 To trace, in nature's most minute design,
 The signature and stamp of pow'r divine;
 Contrivance intricate, express'd with ease,
 Where unassisted sight no beauty sees;
 The shapely limb and lubricated joint,
 Within the small dimensions of a point
 Muscle and nerve miraculously spun;
 His mighty work, who speaks and it is done;
 Th' invisible, in things scarce seen, reveal'd,
 To whom an atom is an ample field.”

After pursuing these thoughts, till he appears almost lost in contemplation, he sublimely adds,

“ Absorb'd in that immensity I see,
 I shrink abas'd, and yet aspire to thee:
 Instruct me, guide me to that heav'nly day,
 Thy words, more clearly than thy works, display;
 That, while thy truths my grosser thoughts refine,
 I may resemble thee, and call thee mine!

“ Oh blest proficiency! surpassing all
 That men erroneously their glory call,
 The recompense that arts or arms can yield,
 The bar, the senate, or the tented field.
 Compar'd with this sublimest life below,
 Ye kings and rulers, what have courts to show?
 Thus studied, us'd, and consecrated thus,
 On earth what is, seems form'd indeed for us:
 Not as the plaything of a froward child,
 Fretful unless diverted and beguil'd;
 Much less to feed and fan the fatal fires
 Of pride, ambition, or impure desires;

But as a scale, by which the soul ascends,
From mighty means, to more important ends ;
Securely, though by steps but rarely trod,
Mounts, from inferior beings, up to God ;
And sees, by no fallacious light or dim,
Earth made for man, and man himself for him."

"The poem on Retirement," says Mr. Hayley, "may be a delightful and useful lesson to those who wish to enjoy and improve a condition of life which is generally coveted by all, in some period of life. The different votaries of retirement are very happily described ; and the portrait of Melancholy, in particular, has all that minute and forcible excellence, derived from the faithful delineation of nature." For, as we have remarked, "the Poet described himself when under the overwhelming pressure of that grievous malady."

Cowper's retirement is not idle solitude ; but engaged in the employment of reading and reflection, mingled with social intercourse, well selected, ennobled with religious enjoyment, and relieved by that pleasure which religion "does not censure nor exclude."

The poem concludes with the following beautiful lines, descriptive of his own retirement:—

"Me poetry (or, rather, notes that aim
Feebly and vainly at poetic fame)
Employs, shut out from more important views,
Fast by the banks of the slow winding Ouse ;

Content, if thus sequester'd, I may raise
A monitor's, though not a poet's praise ;
And while I teach an art too little known,
To close life wisely, may not waste my own."

"Of the smaller poems, at the end of the first volume," says Mr. Hayley, "three are eminently happy, both in sentiment and expression—the verses assigned to Alexander Selkirk, the Winter Nosegay, and Mutual Forbearance."

And surely the mind endowed with taste, and inspired by piety, will not overlook his Comparison and contrast of the Lapse of Time with Rivers (cited before, p. 7); and his Love of the World Reproved; or, Hypocrisy Detested. Of his Fables, all of which are written with ease and spirit, The Nightingale and Glow-worm which, has for its moral, Peace amongst Christians—The Pine-apple and Bee; or, the Disappointment of Folly—The Lily and the Rose—are beautiful: as is also The Shrubbery, written in time of affliction.

Exhibiting such a versatility of high poetical talent as this volume does, in the pathetic and sublime, in the grave and humorous, as, perhaps, has scarcely ever been displayed by any individual; and treating the most sacred subjects with the eloquence of a prophet and the simplicity of an evangelist,—Why was the immediate success

of this first volume below its extraordinary merit? Such a neglect is confessed by his amiable biographer, who, whilst he acknowledges the powerful claims of Cowper to instant admiration and applause, apologizes for the inattention of the public, by observing, "He hazarded some sentiments in his first volume, which were likely to obstruct its immediate success in the world. I allude to the eulogy of Whitefield, whom Foote had taught the nation to deride, as a mischievous fanatic; and a censure in which he had indulged himself, against Mr. Charles Wesley, for allowing sacred music to form a part of his occupation on a Sunday evening."

This apology is hardly sufficient, as a cause, to account for the effect. The former passage was little noticed; and the latter allusion, if true, was by no means generally understood.

The first volume, in consequence of being published by Mr. Newton, was chiefly known among religious people; who, it must be confessed, discerned and loudly acknowledged its excellence: and the ignorance and prejudice respecting religion, which notoriously prevail in the literary world, suffice to account for its limited circulation. His compositions, in general, are also, perhaps, less adapted to strike at first view, than to delight increasingly at every repeated

perusal. He seldom aims at ornament; and his versification, particularly in the principal pieces of this volume, is sometimes uncouth, if not careless. The mode, likewise, in which his poems were published, was not attractive; an awkward, plain, ill-printed octavo of poems, by a person of whom the literary world knew nothing, might easily escape notice, or meet with contempt. Mr. C. had no great connexions that would use means to make him known, having been insulated from the world for many years: and as he wrote solely for the relief of his own mind, without expectation of the fame he afterwards acquired, or even ambition of it; so his style, at that time, was certainly inferior to that which he afterwards attained by practice and labour. The Reviewers too did not unite to do him justice. In the *Critical Review* of his first volume, it was said, "He is not possessed of any superior abilities, or powers of genius, requisite to so arduous an undertaking: his verses are, in general, weak and languid, and have neither novelty, spirit, or animation, to recommend them; that mediocrity so severely condemned by Horace, (*Non dii non homines, &c.*) pervades the whole; and whilst the author avoids every thing that is ridiculous or contemptible, he never rises to any thing that we can commend or admire. He says what is

incontrovertible, and what has already been said over and over, with much gravity; but says nothing new, sprightly, or entertaining; travelling on in a plain, level, flat road, with great composure, almost through the whole long and rather tedious volume, which is little better than a dull sermon on Truth," &c. Even when quoting the fervid paragraph we have inserted on Hope (p. 79), they observe, "All this is very true, but there needs no ghost, nor author, nor poet, to tell us what we knew before, unless he could tell it us in a new and better manner." [*Critical Rev.* vol. liii. p. 287.]

So much for these sagacious censors, whom we shall have further occasion to notice by-and-by. It is with very different feelings that we quote, from the *Monthly Review*, for October, in the same year (1782), the following judgment of Mr. Cowper's first publication; the justice of which has since received universal confirmation. Mr. C. himself understood that the late excellent Dr. Johnson was the writer; the latter having, probably, sent this paper to the *Monthly Review*, with which he had no stated connexion, for the purpose of counteracting the effects of the former illiberal criticism.

"What Pope has remarked of women, may, by a very applicable parody, be said of the general run of modern poets, most poets have no character

at all; being, for the chief part, only echoes of those who have sung before them.... This, however, is not the case with Mr. Cowper; he is a poet, *sui generis*; for as his notes are peculiar to himself, he classes not with any known species of bards that have preceded him: his style of composition, as well as his modes of thinking, are entirely his own. The ideas, with which his mind seems to have been either endowed by nature, or to have been enriched by learning and reflection, as they lie in no regular order, so are they promiscuously brought forth as they accidentally present themselves. Mr. Cowper's predominant turn of mind, though serious and devotional, is, at the same time, dryly humorous and sarcastic. Hence his very religion has a smile that is arch, and his sallies of humour an air that is religious; and yet, motley as is the mixture, it is so contrived as to be neither ridiculous nor disgusting. His versification is almost as singular as the materials upon which it is employed. Anxious only to give each image its due prominence and relief, he has wasted no unnecessary attention on grace or embellishment: his language, therefore, though neither strikingly harmonious nor elegant, is plain, forcible, and expressive." [*Monthly Rev.* vol. lxvii. p. 262.]

The Task.

As this is universally acknowledged to be the masterpiece of our Poet, it will merit particular attention. The history of its origin affords an illustration of a common remark, that works and vents, the most considerable and important, often arise from circumstances apparently trivial and accidental. Lady Austen, who, from a nurse's story, had suggested the humorous ballad of John Gilpin, now urged our Poet to graver composition in blank verse, being herself a great admirer of Milton. Mr. C. as his biographer informs us, demurred for want of a subject, when Lady A. in her lively way, rejoined—"O, you can write upon any thing—write upon this *sofa*." The oddity of the thought set the Poet's imagination to work, and (together with a recollection, perhaps, of Phillips' Splendid Shilling) produced a poem (says Mr. Hayley) "of such infinite variety, that it seems to include every subject and every style, without any dissonance or disorder; and to have flowed without effort from Christian philanthropy, eager to impress upon the hearts of all readers whatever might lead them most happily to the full enjoyment of human life, and to the final attainment of heaven." This indeed was the leading object in most of his compositions,

and to which all others were subordinate and subservient. Even when he trifles, (and no man could trifle more agreeably) it is only a little to relieve the attention of his readers, and to beguile them unawares into some more serious and important theme. Nor was he ashamed, even in the face of a scornful world, to introduce the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel. Many, probably, of his literary readers were too ignorant of theology to understand him; and others, that understood, were offended with the self-denying doctrine of the cross, which he inculcated; still the fascinating beauties of his verse led them on, and they knew not how to give up an author who was continually charming them with the sallies of his wit, and the coruscations of his genius. As a proof of the former part of this remark, how often has that beautiful allusion, in this very poem, to a crucified Redeemer, as "one who had himself been wounded by the archers," been cited in proof of Mr. C.'s love of retirement and the kindness of his friends, without a suspicion of its real and evangelical import!

But to return to the Task. This poem is divided into six books, viz. The Sofa—Time Piece—Garden—Winter Evening—Winter Morning Walk—Winter Walk at Noon. The first embraces the proper subject of the poem:—

“ I sing the Sofa. I, who lately sang
 Truth, Hope, and Charity, and touch'd with awe
 The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand,
 Escap'd with pain from that advent'rous flight,
 Now seek repose upon an humbler theme;
 The theme, though humble, yet august and proud
 Th' occasion—for the Fair commands the song.”

The history of this luxurious article of furniture is curious, but clear and simple:—

“ At first necessity invented stools,
 Convenience next suggested elbow chairs,
 And luxury th' accomplish'd *sofa* last.”

The praises of the sofa, compared with all other conveniencies for repose, [“ The nurse sleeps sweet,” &c.] are given in an evident parody on that beautiful passage of Milton, beginning—

“ Sweet is the breath of Morn, her rising sweet,” &c.

Cowper, however, soon rises from the sofa and ranges through the fields of nature. In works of science, and in the discovery of truth, method is highly important; but poets reject its restraints. Genius has wings; and while the man of argument looks only at the nearest objects round him, and is studious to keep to his subject and his text, the man of imagination soars aloft and takes more enlarged views; views which embrace a thousand objects that are undiscernable to meaner and contracted minds. The Poet, however, connects his topics, and groups them, like the skilful painter,

that not confusion, but harmony and order may be the result. He quits his sofa to walk abroad, and moralizes as he goes. He extols the charms of rural scenery, recollects the pleasures of his boyish rambles, commends the advantages of civilized life; but censures and deplures the evils introduced into great towns and cities by wealth and luxury. One passage is remarkable, as happily proving that poets are not always prophets. Representing Omai as returning to his southern isle, and longing for a visit from Europeans, but looking and longing still in vain—he says,

“Alas! expect it not. We found no bait
To tempt us in thy country. Doing good,
Disinterested good, is not our trade.”

Would it not have rejoiced the heart of this benevolent writer to have anticipated, that, in about a dozen years, more than thirty persons would undertake a mission to those islands; not on a voyage of gain or curiosity; but simply to convey to them the precious tidings of the gospel?

The reason wherefore our Poet named the second book of his *Task* the *Time-Piece*, is thus explained by him. “The book to which it belongs, is intended to strike the hour that gives notice of approaching judgment; and dealing pretty largely in the signs of the times, seems to be denominated with a sufficient degree of accommodation to the

subject." Among the first objects which provoke his censure, is the execrable *slave trade*, a species of iniquity which he always speaks of with horror and detestation, and which he evidently considered (and we have accumulated reasons for doing so) as incurring the vengeance of Heaven, on all concerned in it. He then views the judgments of Providence, which had recently visited both Europe and the West Indies, deprecating and condemning that atheistical philosophy, which, referring every thing to second causes, overlooks "the first great cause:"—

"Happy the man who sees a God employ'd
In all the good and ill that chequer life!
Resolving all events, with their effects
And manifold results, into the will
And arbitration wise of the Supreme."

Lamenting the depravity of his country, he considers the pulpit as the proper instrument of reformation: this leads him to bewail and expose the vices of the pulpit, in the following characters:—the Reverend Advertiser of Engraved Sermons—The Petit-maitre Parson—The Theatrico-clerical Coxcomb—The Pulpit Jester: and, as a contrast to all these, he sketches, with an admirable pencil, the portrait of the Christian Minister:—

"There stands the messenger of truth: there stands
The legate of the skies!—His theme divine,

His office sacred, his credentials clear.
 By him the violated law speaks out
 Its thunders; and by him, in strains as sweet
 As angels use, the gospel whispers peace.
 He 'stablishes the strong, restores the weak,
 Reclaims the wand'rer, binds the broken heart,
 And, arm'd himself in panoply complete
 Of heav'nly temper, furnishes with arms,
 Bright as his own, and trains, by ev'ry rule
 Of holy discipline, to glorious war,
 The sacramental host of God's elect!"

The third Book brings our Poet home again;

— " I, designing other themes, and call'd
 T' adorn the *sofa* with eulogium due,
 To tell its slumbers, and to paint its dreams,
 Have rambled wide."

But he returns not to dream upon his sofa: we soon find him in his favourite retreat, *the garden*; where, like the bee, he gathers sweets from every flower on which he settles:—

————— " Philosophy baptiz'd
 In the pure fountain of eternal love,
 Has eyes indeed; and viewing all she sees
 As meant to indicate a God to man,
 Gives *him* his praise, and forfeits not her own."

Some, probably, having no taste for the same enjoyments, have complained of his descriptions here as dull and heavy; and have ridiculed "the stercorarious heap" which formed his hot-bed: perhaps there may be too many *Johnsonian* terms in this description, and some want of the simplicity

by which his writings are in general eminently distinguished. But Cowper was not one of those writers, who, by studying to be always good, are never excellent. He has his inequalities; and we know where there are no valleys there can be no hills. In the present book there are fine passages. We have already quoted the striking account of his conversion and experience; and the following passage, in which he justifies his anxiety for the reformation and happiness of mankind, is worthy the genius and the pen of Shakspeare:—

“ ’Twere well, says one sage erudite, profound,
 Terribly arch'd and aquiline his nose,
 And over-built with most impending brows;
 'Twere well, could you permit the world to live
 As the world pleases. What's the world to you?
 Much. I was born of woman, and drew milk,
 As sweet as charity, from human breasts.
 I think, articulate, I laugh and weep,
 And exercise all functions of a man.
 How then should I, and any man that lives,
 Be strangers to each other? Pierce my vein:
 Take of the crimson stream meand'ring there,
 And catechise it well; apply thy glass,
 Search it, and prove now if it be not blood
 Congenial with thine own: and if it be,
 What edge of subtilty canst thou suppose
 Keen enough, wise and skilful as thou art,
 To cut the link of brotherhood, by which
 One common Maker bound me to the kind?

The fourth Book changes the scene to winter, and describes the manner in which he used

to spend *the winter's evening* with his amiable friends:—

“ Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast;
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And, while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful ev'ning in.”

Here he sits and ridicules, at once, the amusements and occupations of the world:—

“ 'Tis pleasant through the loop-holes of retreat
To peep at such a world; to see the stir
Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd;
To hear the roar she sends through all her gates
At a safe distance, where the dying sound
Falls a soft murmur on th' uninjur'd ear.
Thus sitting, and surveying thus at ease
The globe and its concerns, I seem advanc'd
To some secure and more than mortal height,
That lib'rates and exempts me from them all.
It turns, submitted to my view, turns round
With all its generations; I behold
The tumult, and am still. The sound of war
Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me;
Grieves, but alarms me not. I mourn the pride
And avarice, that makes man a wolf to man;
Hear the faint echo of those brazen throats
By which he speaks the language of his heart;
And sigh, but never tremble at the sound.”

The fifth Book increases in interest with the religious reader. After describing the rural occupations of a frosty *morning*, the author discusses two very important topics, the horrors of war,

and the blessings of civil and religious liberty: from the latter subject he gently digresses to the liberty of the gospel:—

“ But there is yet a liberty, unsung
 By poets, and by senators unprais'd,
 Which monarchs cannot grant, nor all the pow'rs
 Of earth and hell confed'rate take away;
 A liberty, which persecution, fraud,
 Oppression, prisons, have no pow'r to bind;
 Which whoso tastes can be enslav'd no more.
 'Tis liberty of heart, deriv'd from heav'n;
 Bought with HIS blood who gave it to mankind,
 And seal'd with the same token! It is held
 By charter, and that charter sanction'd sure
 By th' unimpeachable and awful oath
 And promise of a God! His other gifts
 All bear the royal stamp that speaks them his,
 And are august; but this transcends them all.”

The whole remainder of this book (which extends a dozen pages further) is of the same texture, full of the purest evangelical sentiments, dressed in all the charms of eloquence, and of genius.

The last Book, entitled *The Winter Walk at Noon*, comprehends a variety of subjects, as specified in the argument prefixed by the author. Among these, the criminality of cruelty to brutes, is amply and ably discussed; and the author's thoughts are led to that happy period, when “ the groans of the creation shall have an end.” A view is then taken of the renovation of all things,

and the poem draws towards a conclusion, with a fine description of the good and happy man, from which we give the following extract as a proper close, as well to our reflections, as to Mr. Cowper's Task:—

“ So glide my life away! and so at last,
 My share of duties decently fulfill'd,
 May some disease, not tardy to perform
 Its destin'd office, yet with gentle stroke,
 Dismiss me, weary, to a safe retreat
 Beneath the turf that I have often trod.
 It shall not grieve me, then, that once, when call'd
 To dress a Sofa with the flow'rs of verse,
 I play'd awhile, obedient to the fair,
 With that light task; but soon, to please her more,
 Whom flow'rs alone I knew would little please,
 Let fall th' unfinished wreath, and rov'd for fruit;
 Rov'd far, and gather'd much: some harsh, 'tis true,
 Pick'd from the thorns and briers of reproof,
 But wholesome, well-digested; grateful some
 To palates that can taste immortal truth;
 Insipid else, and sure to be despis'd.
 But all is in his hand whose praise I seek.
 In vain the poet sings, and the world hears,
 If he regard not, though divine the theme.
 'Tis not in artful measures, in the chime,
 An idle tinkling of a minstrel's lyre,
 To charm his ear, whose eye is on the heart;
 Whose frown can disappoint the proudest strain,
 Whose approbation—prosper even mine.

Etrocinium.

Of this poem the author himself gives the following account, in a letter to his friend Mr. Bull:

“It is called *Tirocinium* *, or a Review of Schools. The business and purpose of it are, to censure the want of discipline, and the scandalous inattention to morals that prevail in them; especially in the largest, and to recommend private tuition, as a mode of education preferable on all accounts; to call upon fathers to become tutors of their own sons, where that is practicable; to take home to them a domestic tutor where it is not; and if neither can be done, to place them under the care of such a man as he to whom I am writing; some rural parson, whose attention is limited to a few.”

“From education, as the leading cause,
The public character, its colour draws;
Thence the prevailing manners take their cast,
Extravagant or sober, loose or chaste.”

This poem, though perhaps the least attractive, is one of the most important of his performances, and we hope may prove one of the most useful. To prevent serious evils, and to promote the general welfare, were not only, as in his other poems, his leading motive, but apparently the *sole* motive he had in view, in composing the *Tirocinium*. He had experienced the advantages and the disadvantages of a public education. Few persons ever were better disposed or quali-

* *Tirocinium*, signifies The Noviciate, or preparatory Course.

fied to avail themselves of the former; few have been so sensible as he was to the latter. Having struck the balance, and become fully persuaded that the disadvantages attending public schools greatly exceeded the advantages they could confer, he wished to turn his own damage to the public benefit. Whatever allowances should be made, either for the author's constitutional feelings, or for his warmth as a poet and a satirist, let parents, who have a choice, seriously weigh the solid arguments advanced by him in favour of private education, before they expose their children to the infectious atmosphere of the more crowded schools. It is reported of an eminent minister, that he once asserted, children to be as safe in a public school as if they were in heaven: but it is difficult to conceive upon what principle he grounded this assertion, except it was the same on which the Turks consider themselves safe in a city that has the plague.

In addition to the *Task* and *Tirocinium*, Mr. C.'s second volume originally contained only a brief EPISTLE to his old and faithful friend JOSEPH HILL, Esq. and the much-celebrated ballad of JOHN GILPIN, which had been printed in a newspaper, soon after the publication of his first volume; but was not suspected to have been the production of Mr. Cowper's muse, by any but

the few intimate acquaintances to whom he had imparted the secret. Like his other humorous compositions, it is to be regarded as means, by which he co-operated with the efforts of his friends, to repel a melancholy that unfitted him for more serious engagements. The epistle to Mr. Hill shows how truly the writer had caught the spirit and manners of Horace. In later editions, his publisher introduced successively several other poems that Mr. C. had written on occasional subjects; a practice which greatly increased the sale of the later editions, by detracting from the comparative value of the preceding. The principal of these accessions was the *Monody on receiving his Mother's Picture*, from which, though already noticed, we cannot refrain to quote the following allusion to his own unhappy fate, as exquisitely tender and pathetic:—

“Thou, as a gallant bark from Albion's coast
(The storms all weather'd and the ocean cross'd)
Shoots into port at some well-haven'd isle,
Where spices breathe and brighter seasons smile,
There sits quiescent on the floods that show
Her beauteous form reflected clear below,
While airs impregnated with incense play
Around her, fanning light her streamers gay—
So thou, with sails how swift! hast reach'd the shore
'Where tempests never beat, nor billows roar;'
And thy lov'd consort on the dang'rous tide
Of life, long since, has anchor'd at thy side.

But me, scarce hoping to attain that rest,
 Always from port withheld, always distress'd—
 Me howling winds drive devious, tempest toss'd,
 Sails ript, seams op'ning wide, and compass lost,
 And day by day some current's thwarting force
 Sets me more distant from a prosp'rous course.
 But oh, the thought, that thou art safe, and he!
 That thought is joy, arrive what may to me.
 My boast is not that I deduce my birth
 From loins enthron'd, and rulers of the earth;
 But higher far my proud pretensions rise—
 The son of parents pass'd into the skies!

The beautiful song, called *The Rose*, originated from a trifling circumstance that occurred in his intercourse with Lady Austen and Mrs. Unwin; and having been printed anonymously, and been sung at some places of entertainment, its sentimental delicacy and elegance induced some wittings of each sex to deck themselves with a borrowed plume, which they were soon afterwards forced to relinquish with disgrace. Several of these occasional pieces, and others since published, sprung from the author's sense of his obligations to the Throckmorton family, with whom, at the time, he enjoyed the most cordial intimacy.

To Mr. Bull we are indebted for the publication of some excellent original pieces, of which we shall only notice, at present, the MORTUARY VERSES that he first collected at the close of Mr. C.'s translations from Madam Guion. To a copy of the earliest of these poems, which the author

gave Mr. Bull, was prefixed the following singular inscription:—

STANZAS
subjoined to a Bill of Mortality
for
the Parish of All-Saints,
in the Town of
Northampton,
Ann. 1787.
Written at the request of the Clerk,
JOHN COX,
To whom they are humbly inscribed
by his occasional Poet,
and obedient servant,
WM. COWPER.

The office thus humorously assumed was unexpectedly proposed to Mr. C. and was at first accepted with some reluctance. The late Mr. Cox walked from Northampton to Weston, about fourteen miles, to request Mr. Cowper to write a copy of verses for an annual bill of mortality, which he was to present to his parishioners at Christmas. For many years these bills had been supplied with verses, either from books, or the invention of the more ingenious neighbours. In scarcely any instance, however, had they risen above mediocrity. Mr. C. wished to decline such an undertaking; and advised the clerk to apply to a gentleman at Northampton, who was known to be in the habit of writing verses. "Ah, Sir," said the clerk, "Mr. —— has often favoured me with poems;

but he is a gentleman that reads a great deal, and my parishioners complain that his verses are so learned they cannot understand them." "As much, to be sure," said Mr. C. when relating the circumstance, "as if *I* read nothing." "But," he added, "have you, Mr. Cox, walked to this distance, on purpose to ask me to write for you?" "Yes, indeed, Sir, and I hope you will be so good." Mr. C. told him he should soon hear from him, and accordingly sent him the verses inscribed as above. Their intrinsic merit soon greatly increased the demand for the Bills of Mortality at Northampton; and the clerk found his account so well in the distribution, that he did not fail to renew his application during the next three years. Mr. C. willingly improved so favourable an opportunity of impressing solemn truths upon the minds of his neighbours: but on the fifth return of the season he was not called upon to perform his usual task. Mr. Cox, at that juncture, was added to the number of those whose deaths he had been accustomed to register; and his successor, named Wright, had not opportunity to apply, in time, for Mr. C.'s help. He attempted to supply the deficiency by reprinting a copy of verses, which had, several years before, been a favourite with the parish. It could not, however, make amends for the absence of Mr. C.'s composition; and the former applica-

tion was renewed to him in 1792; and repeated the following year with equal success, as before. His unhappy relapse in 1794 prevented the continuance of these favours; and the succeeding bills of mortality proved the loss to be irréparable. The six copies which he furnished, are all admirably adapted to strike the attention of common readers, and to lead their minds to the most serious and profitable reflection. The *second*, and the *last*, are, perhaps, the most generally impressive. Mr. Ball annexed to them an *epitaph on Mr. Hamilton*, of Newport-Pagnel, a brother of Mrs. Greatheed, at whose request Mr. C. composed it in 1789. Its object is precisely the same with that of the preceding verses, and it is enforced with remarkable energy.

Mr. Hayley supplied the public with a numerous selection from those poems of Mr. Cowper which remained unpublished, or which had been occasionally printed in the earlier part of his life. Many of them being intimately connected with events mentioned by the biographer, are interspersed in the narrative, but without a punctual regard to their obvious dates. Our Poet, though almost unknown as such, till the latter stages of his life, had furnished early proofs of his genius. Some lines in blank verse, written when he was in his seventeenth year, on so trifling an incident

as that of *finding the heel of a shoe*, bear a strong resemblance to the mock heroic of John Phillips, and to some passages of the Task. Some stanzas, on *reading Sir Charles Grandison*, which seem to have been earlier written, are serious and neatly expressed. As Mr. C. mingled with the world, he evidently imbibed some of its follies. In an *epistle to his friend Robert Lloyd*, when he was twenty-three years old, he introduces the sacred name of God, in a manner that he would afterwards have severely condemned, and that must impair the pleasure of a pious reader in the perusal. His imitations of two satires of Horace, published three years later, by the Duncombes, are, like the originals, very trifling.

Of his later poems, an excellent one, *in memory of the late John Thornton, Esq.*; several addressed to, or written for, *Lady Austen*; the *Retired Cat*, a beautiful tale; one of his *songs* designed to promote the abolition of the *slave trade*; a poem addressed to *the Queen*, brilliant in imagination; some poems written for the *Throckmortons*; verses to a *Nightingale*, to *Mr. Wilberforce*, *Dr. Austen*, *Dr. Darwin*, and *Mr. Romney*; an admirable *sonnet*, and some very pathetic *stanzas*, addressed to *Mrs. Unwin*; some lines of a poem on *Human Life*; and his last, and most melancholy composition, called *The Cast-away*; are all inserted in Mr. Hayley's

biographical account: and in the *character* of Mr. C. subjoined to it, are introduced some lines in memory of his uncle, *Ashley Cowper, Esq.* and others addressed to *Mrs. Bodham, Mrs. King, and Lady Hesketh*; all of which does equal credit to the author's genius and his gratitude. We omit here two poems which had previously been published by Mr. Bull. In Mr. Hayley's *appendix*, the additions to the original poems are, a sonnet to the *Rev. John Johnson*; a few stanzas to *Mr. Newton*; some lines, called *Love Abused*, two *epitaphs*, two *inscriptions*, two tales founded on interesting facts; some stanzas on the disturbance of *Milton's Relics*; and two very short complimentary pieces; beside a Latin poem, on the appearance of some *islands of ice* in the German ocean; which he composed, and also translated into English, not long before his decease.

Most of the occasional poems naturally appear to the greatest advantage, in connexion with the incidents which gave rise to them; but they, in general, manifest the tender sensibility, or the benevolent wit of the writer. We shall only cite the sonnet addressed to *Mrs. Unwin*; in which he seems to have laboured at the most sublime expression of his gratitude to so faithful and valuable a friend; and he succeeded, though not to the satisfaction of his own feelings, yet, we appre-

hend, to the admiration of every attentive and competent reader :—

“ Mary! I want a lyre with other strings;
Such aid from heaven, as some have feign'd they drew;
An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new,
And undebas'd by praise of meaner things!

That ere through age or woe I shed my wings,
I may record thy worth, with honour due,
In verse as musical as thou art true;
Verse that immortalizes whom it sings!

But thou hast little need: there is a book,
By seraphs writ, with beams of heavenly light,
On which the eyes of God not rarely look;
A chronicle of actions, just and bright!
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine,
And since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine.”

Life, vol. ii. p. 43.

Mr. C.'s attention was so often, and so arduously, engaged in translating the compositions of other poets, that it appears necessary to devote a particular compartment of this review to his labours in that line. Before, however, we proceed to a different subject, it may be proper to refer back to the opinions which have been expressed, by various writers, of his *original* compositions. Mr. Hayley, alluding to *one* of the critical journals, which we have cited at length, humorously applies to this memorable decision, a couplet from the volume thus condemned:—

“ The moles and bats, in full assembly, find
“ On special search, the keen-eyed eagle blind.”

The contrast which we have exhibited from a rival review, shows how necessary it is for persons who form their opinions of new publications from the decisions of periodical reviewers, to regard the ancient admonition,—

“ Audi alteram partem!”

When the second volume of Mr. Cowper's works appeared, the *Monthly Critic* (which could not then be Johnson, as he was recently deceased) gave a still more honourable testimony to the talents of our Bard, whose fame was now rapidly spreading and increasing.

“ The author,” says this Reviewer, “ is always moral, yet never dull: and though he often expands an image, yet he never weakens its force. If the same thought occurs, he gives it a new form; and is copious, without being tiresome. He frequently entertains by his comic humour; and still oftener awakens more serious and more tender sentiments, by useful and by pathetic representation; by descriptions that sooth and melt the heart; and by reflections which carry their alarm to the conscience, and rouse and terrify guilt in its closest retreats. The Poet writes under the strong impression of Christian and moral truths, and we

feel him to be in earnest, when he pleads their cause, and deploras the neglect that is shown them by some, and the insults that are offered them by others: conviction gives force to imagination; and the Poet dips his pen in the stream that religion hath opened in his own bosom.

“Mr. Cowper possesses strong powers of ridicule; and nature formed him for a satirist of the first order. He sees Folly under every disguise; and knows how to raise a laugh at her expense, either by grave humour or more sportive raillery. He is alive to every feeling of compassion, and spares none that violate the laws of humanity. His benevolence is as extensive as the creation; and though the particular impressions which religion hath made on his mind, and the general corruption of the times, have thrown a shade of melancholy (it will be called *spleen* by some persons) over his writings, yet we always behold an amiable and generous principle shining through the cloud, and struggling to overcome the evils which it deploras.”—[*Monthly Rev.* vol. lxxiv. p. 416, 17.]

The conductor of the *Critical Review* had evidently, when Mr. C. published his second volume, perceived the deplorable error which had, three years before, disgraced that work. Accordingly, without the slightest reference to a piece of criti-

cism which he doubtless wished to be consigned to oblivion, he proceeds to speak thus of the *Task*, alluding to Lady Austen's influence in the accomplishment of that work :

“ In the name of the public we pay our acknowledgments to this lady, as the primary cause of a publication which, though not free from defects, for *originality of thought, strength of argument, and poignancy of satire*, we speak in general, is superior to any that has lately fallen into our hands. We here meet with no affected prettiness of style, no glaring epithets, which modern writers so industriously accumulate; and reversing Homer's exhibition of his Hero in Rags, convey the image of a beggar, clothed in ‘purple and fine linen.’

“ The reflections he makes, naturally arise from the objects which present themselves to his view; and the scenery is depicted in *chaste* and *exact* colouring. We meet with no meretricious ornaments; no superfluity of epithets, and crowded figures, which often throw an indistinct glare over modern poetic landscapes, instead of representing their objects in a clear and proper light.

“ It is but justice to observe, before we conclude our review of this poem, that the religious and moral reflections with which it abounds, though sometimes the diction is not sufficiently elevated, in general possess the *acuteness* and *depth* of *Young*,

and are often expressed with the energy of *Shakspeare*." [*Crit. Rev.* vol. lx. p. 251—6.]

We have already so often referred to Mr. Hayley's remarks on various parts of his friend's compositions, that it seems superfluous to quote further from his biographical work: yet the following extract, from the communications of an anonymous, but admirable critic, which are subjoined to that work, appears to us too excellent to be omitted.

"The noblest benefits and delights of poetry can be but rarely produced, because all the requisites for producing them so very seldom meet. A vivid mind, and happy imitative powers, may enable a poet to form glowing pictures of virtue, and almost produce in himself a short-lived enthusiasm of goodness; but although even these transient and factitious movements of mind may serve to produce grand and delightful effusions of poetry, yet, when the best of these are compared with the poetic productions of a genuine lover of virtue, a discerning judgment will scarcely fail to mark the difference. A simplicity of conception and expression; a conscious, and therefore unaffected dignity; an instinctive adherence to sober reason, even amid the highest flights; an uniform justness and consistency of thought; a glowing, yet temperate ardour of feeling; a pecu-

liar felicity, both in the choice and combination of terms, by which even the plainest words acquire the truest character of eloquence, and which is rarely to be found, except where a subject is not only intimately known, but cordially loved; these I conceive are the features peculiar to the real votary of virtue; and which must, of course, give to his strains a perfection of effect never to be attained by the poet of inferior moral endowments. I believe it will be readily granted, that all these qualities were never more perfectly combined than in the poetry of Milton. And I think too, there will be little doubt, that the next to him, in every one of these instances, beyond all comparison, is Cowper. The genius of the latter did certainly not lead him to emulate the songs of the Seraphim: but though he pursues a lower walk of poetry than his great master, he appears no less the enraptured votary of pure unmixed goodness. Nay, perhaps, he may in this one respect possess some peculiar excellencies, which may make him seem more the bard of Christianity. That divine religion infinitely exalts, but it also deeply humbles the mind it inspires: it gives majesty to the thoughts, but it impresses meekness on the manners, and diffuses tenderness through the feelings: it combines sensibility with fortitude, the lowliness of the child with the magnani-

mity of the hero. The grandest features of the Christian character were never more gloriously exemplified than in that spirit which animates the whole of Milton's poetry. His own Michael does not impress us with the idea of a purer, or more awful virtue, than that which we feel in every portion of his majestic verse; and he no less happily indicates the source from which his excellence was derived, by the bright beams which he ever and anon reflects upon us from the sacred scriptures. But the milder graces of the gospel are certainly less apparent. What we behold is so awful, it might almost have inspired a wish, that a spirit, equally pure and heavenly, might be raised to illustrate, with like felicity, the more attractive and gentler influences of our divine religion. In Cowper, above any poet that ever lived, would such a wish seem to be fulfilled. In his charming effusions we have the same spotless purity; the same elevated devotion; the same vital exercise of every noble and exalted quality of the mind; the same devotion to the sacred scriptures; and, to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel: the difference is, that instead of an almost repressive dignity, we have the sweetest familiarity; instead of the majestic grandeur of the Old Testament, we have the winning graces of the New; instead of those thunders, by which angels were discom-

fited, we have, as it were, 'the still small voice' of him who was meek and lowly of heart.

"May we not then venture to assert, that from that spirit of devoted piety, which has rendered both these great men liable to the charge of religious enthusiasm; but which, in truth, raised the minds of both to a kind of happy residence—

'In regions mild, of calm and serene air,
Above the smoke, and stir of this dim spot,
Which men call earth'——

A peculiar character has been derived to the poetry of them both, which distinguishes their compositions from those of almost all the world beside. I have already enumerated some of the superior advantages of a truly virtuous poet; and presumed to state, that these are realized in an unexampled degree in Milton and Cowper. That they both owed this moral eminence to their vivid sense of religion, will, I conceive, need no demonstration, except what will arise to every reader of taste and feeling, on examining their works. It will here, I think, be seen at once, that that sublimity of conception, that delicacy of virtuous feelings, that majestic independence of mind, that quick relish for all the beauties of nature, at once so pure and so exquisite, which we find ever occurring in them both, could not have existed in the same unrivalled degree, if their devotion had

been less intense, and of course their minds more dissipated amongst low and distracting objects *."

—*Cooper's Life*, vol. ii. p. 421.

2. MR. C.'s POETICAL TRANSLATIONS.

Mr. C. though possessed in an uncommon degree of original genius, yet appears to have taken peculiar pleasure in transfusing the productions of other poets into a different language. His great familiarity with the Greek and Latin classics, and the natural ease and accuracy with which he wrote, singularly qualified him for translation; and rendered it much less fatiguing to his mind, than original composition. His talents of this kind were exhibited in his first volume, in several versions from Latin to English, and from English to Latin; as he wrote both languages with equal purity, elegance, and ease. Of the former class, his copies from the *Poemata* of Vincent Bourne, the ingenious but negligent usher of Westminster-school, to whom we have formerly alluded, are remarkable for the air of originality which is so

* This admirable parallel is now so well known to be the performance of Alexander Knox, Esq. of Dublin, that it cannot longer be improper for us to ascribe it to him.

seldom found in translations. The majority in number, of the poems inserted by Mr. Hayley in the appendix to his biography of Cowper, consists also of versions in English or Latin. With exception of the two satires from Horace, already mentioned, and a grateful tribute to the memory of Dr. Lloyd, they formed our Poet's amusement, when, in a state of lamentable dejection and infirmity, he found himself unequal to more serious exertions. From his old favourite Bourne, he translated near a score of shorter or longer poems; a few of which, especially the last, are scarcely inferior, in liveliness and point, to his earlier performances of this kind. From the *Greek Anthologia*, and the Latin of Owen, he rendered into English nearly fifty short epigrammatic pieces. A longer poem, ascribed to *Virgil*, was translated by him, with great precision, likewise, in 1799; and at the commencement of 1800, he began to turn some of Gay's Fables into Latin verse. Two of them he completed, in an elegant manner: but was stopped by his last illness, when he had executed only two lines of the third.

These efforts proved inadequate, as substitutes, for the constant amusement which he had, through almost ten years, derived from his great work on *Homer*. Of this he completed the revision for a second edition, about thirteen months before his

death. It has since been published by his amiable kinsman, the Rev. J. Johnson; and it is not only furnished with useful notes, but had received numerous and important corrections from the author, partly at the instance of his literary friends. The nature, and the extent of this work, preclude us from entering into a particular investigation of its merits, though we think they have not as yet been duly appreciated by the public. It is certainly the only genuine delineation of the father of heathen poetry, in the English language, and perhaps in any other. Pope exhibited the gods and heroes of the Greeks in so pleasing a disguise, that the deception is neither suspected, nor willingly admitted by his readers. In Cowper's faithful copy of this valuable monument of heathen notions and manners, the enlightened mind clearly detects the noxious fruits of corrupt nature; and is struck with a powerful sense of the value of divine revelation, by which we have been delivered from the absurdity and barbarity of paganism.

That Mr. C. employed so great a space of his time in this laborious performance, not from inclination, but from the necessity of such an occupation for his mind, is evident, from the Sonnet to Mr. Johnson, already mentioned among the poems which Mr. Hayley has added to his biography. On this account, and as it expresses Mr. C.'s view

of the criticisms passed upon his Homer, this place appears suitable for its insertion:—

TO JOHN JOHNSON,

On his presenting me with an antique Bust of Homer.

“ Kinsman belov'd, and as a son by me!
 When I behold this fruit of thy regard,
 The sculptur'd form of my old fav'rite Bard,
 I rev'rence feel for him, and love for thee.

Joy too, and grief! much joy, that there should be
 Wise men and learn'd, who grudge not to reward
 With some applause my bold attempt, and hard,
 Which others scorn. Critics by courtesy!

The grief is this, that sunk in Homer's mine,
 I lose my precious years, now soon to fail!
 Handling his gold, which, howsoe'er it shine,
 Proves dross, when balanc'd in the Christian scale!

Be wiser thou!—like our forefather Donne,
 Seek heavenly wealth, and work for God alone!”

Hayley's Life of Cowper, vol. ii. p. 291.

On the subject of Mr. C.'s translations from *Madame Guion's* poems, it seems necessary, in some measure, to enlarge; as the strain of piety which uniformly pervades them, and the general ignorance of their originals which prevails in England, render them liable, notwithstanding their genuine excellence, to be neglected, for the greater part, by literary readers. Even among the friends of experimental religion, there are few

who discover an interest in the productions of Madame Guion; and still fewer who have opportunity to compare Mr. C.'s beautiful translations of them with the patterns from which he copied. We cannot, however, but esteem it a happy occurrence, that our Poet was brought to so much acquaintance with a writer, whose mind, in several important respects, was congenial with his own. Small as the number is of his original compositions, on subjects purely spiritual, we know not how the deficiency could otherwise have been so well supplied from a foreign source.

M. Guion, like our author, was of a respectable family; habituated, from her childhood, to afflictions; supported under them by the consolations of religion; but at times awfully depressed by the loss of these enjoyments; active in doing good, yet fond of retirement. She was a voluminous writer, and every where manifests great liveliness of imagination, often united with considerable sublimity of genius. The severity of her distresses, while very young, appears greatly to have affected her constitution; and it probably produced in her, as in Mr. C. a liability to be carried beyond rational and scriptural limits, by the force of internal impressions. In forms and doctrinal sentiments, they greatly differed: but they felt, perhaps equally, the power of spiritual religion;

and were remarkably similar in manifesting an unlimited submission to what *they* conceived to be the will of God, amidst the most excruciating trials of faith and patience.

Of nearly forty pieces in verse, translated by our author, from several *volumes* of M. Guion, the principal, in extent and poetical merit, is that on the *Nativity* of Jesus; which stands the first in order, of what she terms, *Poèmes Heroïques*. It is, perhaps, the most elegant composition, of its extent, that has ever appeared on a religious subject. The translation, notwithstanding its apparent freedom, is (with the exception of a few lines) nearly verbal, though highly improved. Compare, for instance, the two following couplets of the original, with the version:—

“Rochers, superbes monts; vous cavernes profondes;
Torrens, qui des rochers précipitez vos ondes;
Vignes, terroir fertile, ingénieux sillons,
Où l'on voit ondoier le bel or des moissons:”

“Rocks, lofty mountains, caverns, dark and deep,
And torrents raving down the rugged steep;
The fruitful vineyard, and the furrow'd plain,
That seems a rolling sea of golden grain.”

Mr. Hayley observes, of this poem, that in translating it, “Cowper seems to have chosen the style of Pope, which, on other occasions, he had rather tried to avoid. His versification, in this instance, affords a complete proof, that in rhyme, as in

blank verse, he could at once be easy, forcible, and melodious." The remark is certainly just; and the occasion, we think, equally obvious. If the Iliad had been written in French, Mr. Cowper would probably have translated it in the style of Pope:—

—————"As harmony itself exact,
In verse well disciplin'd, complete, compact."

On a comparison with the original, throughout this beautiful rhapsody, we apprehend that any adequate judge of French and English poetry, would allow it to be as fine a specimen of translated verse, as is extant in either language.

Many of the shorter pieces are excellent of their kind. Impartiality obliges us to except that which immediately follows the principal poem. It was his first essay in the translations from Guion, that on the Nativity being performed much later. It is composed in a stanza peculiarly unsuitable to the Lyric strains of Madame Guion: all of which were adapted to French airs, then familiarly known; and were mostly sung by herself, or her servant, to beguile ten years of imprisonment for conscience sake. Mr. C. never repeated the drawling metre which disfigures this poem; though he afterwards, in several cases, adopted heroic lines; apparently for the sake of variety, and, perhaps, through

want of considering that they are less suitable to *lyric* poetry, in the English, than in the French language. In most instances, the translator judiciously and happily imitates the stanzas of the originals, as nearly as the different natures of the two languages admit: and in some, where he departs from the author's *metre*, he retains and even improves, the *spirit* of her Lyrics: as in the charming little piece entitled the *Swallow*, which amply makes amends for the preceding elegy. The next short poem, we think inferior to the original: but, that our readers may be able to do justice both to the author and translator, we are inclined to cite Madame Guion's lines:—

Souhaits pour le Regne de l'Amour.

“ Ah, régnés sur toute la terre,
Je le désire, ô mon très cher Epoux :
Je ne veux point d'autre salaire
Que de voir tous les cœurs à vous.

“ Cent fois je m'afflige moi même,
Ne vous voyant régner sur tous les cœurs :
Ah, faites que chacun vous aime!
Esprit Saint, où sont vos ardeurs ?

“ Tous les cœurs ne sont que de glace ;
Mais pour le monde ils sont tous pleins d'ardeurs :
Fondez les du feu de la grace,
Ou donnez nous de nouveaux cœurs !”

As Madame Guion seldom speaks of Christ by any other title than that of her *husband*, or *love*,

it may be of some use to observe, that this peculiarity, probably, arose from one among many circumstances that distinguished her life. By the advice of her religious friend, Genevieve Granger, prioress of a Benedictine nunnery, she signed, while young, a marriage contract of devotedness to Christ. It cannot, however, be denied, that her expressions are sometimes tinged with childishness and levity. These her translator has corrected with his usual delicacy; especially in the poem which succeeds to that we have just quoted, and in which he has greatly excelled his original. In the two following lyrics, he has transfused the author's spirit in more elegant verse: but in the next, which she entitled, *Amour de reconnaissance et pur*, he has dropped the contrast she designed, between grateful and disinterested love; and, by making the last couplet of each stanza *trochaic*, he has altered her metre to disadvantage.

Most of these trifling imperfections would probably have been obviated by the revisal which Mr. C. designed to give these poems, if they had been published during his life time. To point out the numerous beauties of piety, sentiment, and poetry, with which most of these small pieces are embellished, would occupy too much room, and must be needless to any reader of

religious taste! We shall limit ourselves to a few occasional remarks.

The excellent hymn on *The Testimony of Divine Adoption*, is rather a paraphrase than a strict copy. That on *Self-diffidence*, has striking beauty. That called *Self-love and Truth incompatible*, seems to refer to Madame Guion's own conversion. At the age of twenty years, when labouring for salvation by outward performances, her attention was seasonably and effectually directed to the work of God in her soul, by a pious Franciscan Friar, who had long dwelt in solitude.

The poem, called *The Secrets of Divine Love are to be kept*, is not merely the longest, but likewise the most beautiful of all the Lyric pieces. It bears, indeed, rather too close a resemblance, in its composition, to the Heroic poem on the Nativity; but its subject is different, and refers to that silent communion with God, to which Madame Guion was peculiarly accustomed. If she carried it to excess, let us beware of the more dangerous extreme, of attending merely to external religion. Dr. WATTS could exclaim,

“ My God, permit me not to be
A stranger to myself and Thee!
In secret silence of the mind,
My heav'n, and there my God I find.”

Several of the remaining poems treat of the same subject less copiously; but with much fervour

of devotion, and with very beautiful simplicity. Others dwell, with extreme pathos, upon a topic that was but too familiar to the translator; and he has given them a force of expression, to which, probably, no other poet could have attained. The piece, descriptive of the "*Vicissitudes experienced in a Christian Life,*" is both the most copious and the most striking in this point of view. It so accurately represents Mr. C.'s feelings and disposition, that it excites surprise to find it an accurate translation from the author. She, however, endured for seven years, nearly the same degree of distress that Mr. C. sustained for almost four times that period. The rest of her life, which equalled his in duration, was mostly, from the time of her conversion, cheered with a happy sense of the love of God, similar to that which Mr. C. enjoyed for nine years previous to his melancholy relapse. Her lot, therefore, though marked by almost every species of worldly affliction, was in this life incomparably more favourable than his; but their troubles and their enjoyments on earth are doubtless now absorbed in "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." One difference in their earthly conditions, is too striking to pass unnoticed. Madame Guion, though admired and revered, by several of the greatest characters of her time and nation,

was reproached and persecuted throughout her life; and even her memory has been loaded with odium and contempt. Her translator, on the contrary, when living, was beloved by persons of every class who knew him; and since his decease, has been, as if by universal consent, exalted to the pinnacle of fame. The superiority of his genius to that of Madame Guion, is not alone sufficient to elucidate such a contrast. Their manners were equally pure and benevolent: but Guion was eminently active and zealous in religion; and it should be remembered, that while Cowper retained the capacity of being so, he also was slighted, even by his most intimate worldly connexions. Guion had the misfortune to belong to a most corrupt communion, in which spiritual religion was branded with heresy. We fear that it would be difficult wholly to exculpate our own country from a similar charge; but we rejoice that the high estimation in which such a character as Cowper's is deservedly held among us, redounds, on the comparison, in no small degree, to the honour of the Protestant religion, and of the British nation.

It is evident, from the manner in which Mr. C. has turned the phraseology of Madame Guion, that he did not enter into the theory which pervades her writings, and those of the Mystics in

general on the distinction between that love toward God, which springs from a sense of our obligations to his goodness, and that which regards solely the excellence of his nature. The former they condemn as base, because it is interested: and they consider genuine piety as the fruit of the latter principle. The most celebrated American divines have adopted a system nearly resembling the Mystics in this respect; and their writings have gained ground in England during the last half century. Mr. C. regarded it as equally a duty to love God for what he is *in himself*, and for what he is *to us*: but he strongly exemplified the former principle, even while he was unalterably persuaded that he had nothing to hope from divine grace. His absolute resignation to the secret will of God, under the fullest conviction that it had decreed his everlasting destruction, was equal to that which any Mystic could have professed; but it was not founded upon their distinguishing sentiment. While he retained that love of God which regards solely the divine excellence, he incessantly deplored the loss of that sense which he had enjoyed, of gratitude for redeeming grace. *Who* would not deplore, that he should so unhappily mistake the character of that GOD whose Name is LOVE?

Together with the translations from Guion,

Mr. C. presented to Mr. Bull his Epistle to a Lady in France, and his poem on Friendship, which were therefore annexed to the last-mentioned publication. On this account, we have deferred till now our remarks on them, rather than pass over them so briefly, as was necessary in our catalogue of Mr. C.'s original poems, to which they properly belong. The former of these beautiful poems, as already observed, was first printed in the Theological Miscellany for July 1789, with the consent of Lady Austen, at whose desire it had been written. In the same Magazine for August 1787, was inserted some account of her connexion with Mrs. Billacoys, (to whom Mr. C. addressed this epistle) under the assumed names of *Aspasia* and *Clara*. A summary of the more striking incidents in this narrative will probably gratify our readers. The parents of Mrs. B. having been unfortunate in trade, she was reduced to want, when scarcely arrived at years of maturity. Observing in a newspaper an advertisement for a young woman qualified to attend a lady going to reside in France, she offered her service; and her manner so much interested Lady Austen, who was the advertiser, that she was accepted, although destitute of the qualifications required. Lady A. who was nearly of the same age, and had recently

entered on the marriage state, discovered mental excellence in her attendant, that engaged her peculiar esteem. Mr. Billacoys, a French gentleman, who was a visitor in the family, at Sancerre, near the centre of France, conceiving an ardent attachment to the humble friend of Lady A. prevailed upon her to conform to the external rites of popery, in order to the accomplishment of their union. His temper, which was vehement, and aggravated by unsuccessful litigations, proved a severe trial even to *her* singularly meek disposition. She had also to endure incessant bodily weakness and pain. In this state of complicated distress, she was deprived of the resource she had enjoyed in the conversation of Lady A. who returned to spend some time in her native country. Their temporary separation proved, however, the occasion of a more happy and durable connexion. Lady A. while in England, heard and believed the gospel; and when she rejoined her friend at Sancerre, their renewed intercourse, together with the perusal of Mr. Hervey's *Theron* and *Aspasio*, and other evangelical books in Lady A.'s possession, were made useful in leading Mrs. Billacoys to a knowledge of the way of salvation. On Lady A.'s return to England, in 1771, an epistolary correspondence

commenced, from which many pleasing and edifying extracts are given, in the Magazine before mentioned, and in one, called the Divine Treasury, which succeeded it. This intercourse being carried on during Lady A.'s intimacy with Mr. C. he readily concurred to promote the consolation of her friend, by the epistle which has led to this digression. Mr. Hayley justly regards it as an evidence, that Cowper "was most truly himself, when exerting his poetical talents for the purpose of consoling the afflicted;" and expresses his persuasion that, "it must prove to all religious readers, acquainted with affliction, a lenient charm of very powerful effect."

In the last couplet of this epistle Mr. C. illustrates the singular privilege which Mrs. B. enjoyed, in the knowledge of Christ, while surrounded with popish darkness:—

" 'Twas thus, in Gideon's fleece, the dews were found,
And drougt on all the drooping herbs around."

This comparison was so pleasing to him, that he resumed and dilated it, in some verses addressed to his beloved kinsman, Mr. Johnson. As they mark both the benevolence, and the habitual bent of his mind to spiritual topics, we shall here insert them:—

TO A YOUNG FRIEND,

ON HIS ARRIVING AT CAMBRIDGE WET, WHEN NO
RAIN HAD FALLEN THERE.

“ If Gideon’s fleece, which drench’d with dew he found,
While moisture none refresh’d the herbs around,
Might fitly represent the church, endow’d
With heav’nly gifts to heathens not allow’d ;
In pledge, perhaps, of favours from on high,
Thy locks were wet, when other’s locks were dry :
Heav’n grant us half the omen—may we see
Not drought on others, but much dew on thee!”

The poem on Friendship, Mr. Hayley terms singularly beautiful, and regards it as one of the most admirable among Cowper’s minor poems. He has reprinted both this and the epistle to Mrs. B. in his biographical work, with variations by the author. Those of the Epistle are very slight, but may justly be deemed improvements. On the contrary, the copy of the poem on Friendship, published by Mr. Bull, is not only more copious than that printed in Mr. Hayley’s work, but appears to us so much superior in most of the places where they differ, that we cannot but conjecture the latter to have been the original sketch of the author, which he enlarged and improved, when he gave it to Mr. Bull. Beside the exchange of several lines and stanzas, for others which appear to us inferior, the entire omission of the following verses, in the copy which Mr. Hayley has published, seems to us unaccountable upon any other supposition:—

“ Mutual attention is implied,
 And equal truth on either side,
 And constantly supported :
 ’Tis senseless arrogance, t’ accuse
 Another of sinister views,
 Our own as much distorted.

“ But will sincerity suffice ?
 It is indeed above all price,
 And must be made the basis ;
 But every virtue of the soul,
 Must constitute the charming whole,
 All shining in their places.

“ The noblest friendship ever shown,
 The Saviour’s history makes known,
 Though some have turn’d and turn’d it ;
 And (whether being craz’d, or blind,
 Or seeking with a bias’d mind)
 Have not, it seems, discern’d it.

“ O, Friendship ! if my soul forego
 Thy dear delights, while here below,
 To mortify and grieve me ;
 May I myself at last appear
 Unworthy, base, and insincere ;
 Or may my friend deceive me !”

3. MR. COWPER’S PROSE WRITINGS.

Having completed our survey of Mr. C.’s poetical productions, whether original or translated, it only remains for us to attend to him in the character of a prose-writer. Mr. C. indeed, wrote little in prose, with a view to publication ; and

published still less himself: but the specimens which appeared, during his life-time only, were sufficient to demonstrate, that had he applied himself as much to prosaic, as to poetic composition, he would equally have excelled in both. Mr. Hayley has reprinted three papers, with which Mr. C. when twenty-five years old, supplied his friends, Colman and Thornton, for their entertaining and instructive publication, called the *Connoisseur*. Of these papers, the subjects are—Babbling, Improperities common in Parochial Congregations, and Conversation. The moral of them is mostly good; and the wit, as in his early poetical pieces, redundant. He wrote no preface to either of his volumes of poems; but he introduced his translation of Homer to the world with one, which ought to have silenced the cavilling censors of the day, especially after the woful mistake that one of them had committed, in passing a premature sentence on the same writer. Mr. C.'s preface to Homer is a masterpiece, both in ideas and expression.

Shortly afterwards was published by Mr. Newton, a work which Mr. C. had executed before the completion of his Homer. It is entitled, *The Power of Grace illustrated*; and consists of six letters, translated from the Latin of Mr. Vanleer, then minister of a Dutch reformed church, at the

Cape of Good Hope. In these he transmitted to Mr. Newton (whose writings, and those of other English divines, had been highly useful to his spiritual welfare) a narrative of the Lord's dealings with him; which contains some circumstances, perhaps, unparalleled in religious history. Mr. V. was a student of theology, at a Dutch university; but, like too many young men in similar situations on the continent, he was an avowed opposer of Christianity. It pleased God, by some afflictive events, to lead him to more serious thoughts; and afterwards, in a sudden and wonderful manner, effectually to change the disposition of his heart, and consequently the tenor of his life and conversation: although he remained, even then, unacquainted with the manner of a sinner's acceptance with God; and was brought very gradually to faith in Christ, as the Saviour of sinners, having before regarded him merely as a human being. Mr. Vanleer was early removed to a better world; being cut off, amidst much usefulness, when about thirty years of age: but there is room to believe, that his transient labours in South Africa were, in a considerable degree, instrumental to the work of God, which now so happily flourishes in that remote country. The same simplicity and energy which usually characterize Mr. C.'s language, appear in his translation of this interesting narrative: and if the original had been

published, the same fidelity, as in his other versions, would doubtless have been manifest.

In 1802, Mr. Newton favoured the public with his deceased friend's account of the character and death of his brother, the Rev. John Cowper, which had been written twenty-three years before. Of this narrative, Mr. C. never made more than two copies; both of which he gave away: but extracts had been privately taken from these, and had been partially printed. Like the letters last mentioned, it contains the memorial of a very remarkable work of the Spirit of God, upon the heart of a learned and amiable man, who had before been inimical to the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel. It is written with the utmost simplicity, but with much force of expression.

In a late edition of Mr. C.'s poems, is reprinted a letter that was first published about twenty years ago in the Gentleman's Magazine, describing his treatment of the *tame hares*, which contributed to his diversion from melancholy, after the shock of his first relapse into despair. It strongly marks both the author's humanity, and that accuracy of description which pervades his writings in general. In another number of the same periodical publication, is an humorous anecdote of the celebrated orator Henley, of which Mr. C. happened to be the only witness, beside the parties concerned.

The chief body of Mr. C.'s prose writings that

have been published, consists of his familiar *Letters*, inserted by Mr. Hayley in the narrative of his life. Of these, more than four hundred are printed, in whole, or in the greater part, beside shorter extracts. The religious reader has to lament, that a very small proportion of this number, was written before Mr. C. lost his enjoyment of spiritual comfort. Previous to that awful crisis, his letters dwell with delight upon evangelical truths. Afterwards, they either avoid these subjects, or allude to them with the most gloomy despondency. The chasms that are obvious, in many of the letters, afford strong ground to apprehend, that passages of this kind frequently occurred in the originals which the editor judged it prudent to suppress. In what is published, it is evident, that Mr. C. usually endeavoured, when writing to his relations and literary friends, to divert his own melancholy, and to prevent it from being obtrusive on them. That he should have aimed to do so, is less surprising, than that his attempts should often have been, apparently in both respects, completely successful. For style and sentiment, his correspondence is certainly inferior to no collection that has been made of private letters, written by eminent persons of various countries. Mr. C. possessed advantages which very few have enjoyed in the aggregate. He had imbibed his religious

sentiments from the pure source of the gospel, and with these, a temper, and a practice, worthy of such an original. To a disposition, naturally humane and modest, he united talents as engaging as they were impressive. To be loved and admired, he needed only to be known; and his letters unfold, in a great degree, his genuine character; neither clouded by reserve, nor distorted by affectation. That moral rectitude and excellence, which dignified the charms of his poetry, manifests itself, unadorned in his letters; and outvies the laboured eloquence of those eminent writers, who, in their familiar correspondence, often betray an erroneous or depraved sentiment, even when intent on its concealment or embellishment. The natural genius, and the acquired endowments of Cowper, are undoubtedly conspicuous in his writings; but these advantages have been shared by authors who were destitute of sound religious principles. That which enhances the value of Cowper's productions, is, that "his heart was right in the sight of God."

AN
EPISTLE
TO THE
REV. WILLIAM BULL.
BY W. COWPER, ESQ.

[*Never before printed.*]



MY DEAR FRIEND,

IF reading verse be your delight,
'Tis mine as much, or more, to write;
But what we *would*, so weak is man,
Lies oft remote from what we *can*.
For instance, at this very time,
I feel a wish, by cheerful rhyme,
To sooth my friend, and had I power,
To cheat him of an anxious hour.
Not meaning (for I must confess
What 'twere but folly to suppress)
His pleasure or his good alone,
But squinting partly at my own.
But though the sun is flaming high
I'the centre of yon arch, the sky,

And he had once, and who but he?
 The name for setting genius free ;
 Yet whether poets of past days
 Yielded him undeserved praise,
 And he, by no uncommon lot,
 Was fam'd for virtues he had not ;
 Or whether, which is like enough,
 His highness may have taken huff ;
 So seldom sought by invocation,
 Since it has been the reigning fashion,
 To disregard his inspiration,
 I seem no brighter in my wits,
 For all the radiance he emits,
 Than if I saw through midnight vapour
 The glimmering of a farthing taper.
 Oh, for a succedaneum then
 T' accelerate a creeping pen ;
 Oh, for a ready succedaneum,
 Quod caput, cerebrum et cranium
 Pondere liberet exoso,
 Et morbo jam caliginoso !
 'Tis here ; this oval box* well fill'd
 With best tobacco, finely mill'd,
 Beats all Antycira's pretences
 To disengage th' encumber'd senses.

* On one of his visits to the poet Mr. Bull had accidentally left his box behind him, filled with Oroonoko tobacco.

Oh Nymph of Transatlantic fame,
Where'er thine haunt, whate'er thy name,
Whether reposing on the side
Of Oroonoko's spacious tide,
Or listening with delight not small
To Niagara's distant fall,
Tis thine to cherish and to feed
The pungent nose-refreshing weed;
Which, whether pulveriz'd it gain
A speedy passage to the brain,
Or whether touch'd with fire, it rise
In circling eddies to the skies,
Does thought more quicken and refine
Than all the breath of all the nine—
Forgive the bard, if bard he be,
Who once too wantonly made free
To touch with a satiric wipe
That symbol of thy power, the PIPE.
So may no blight infect thy plains,
And no unseasonable rains;
And so may smiling peace once more
Visit America's sad shore.
And then secure from all alarms
Of thundering drums and glitt'ring arms,
Rove unconfin'd beneath the shade
Thy wide expanded leaves have made.
So may thy votaries increase
And fumigation never cease;

May Newton * with renewed delights
Perform thine odoriferous rites;
While clouds of incense, half divine,
Involve thy disappearing shrine;
And so may smoke-inhaling Bull,
Be always filling, never full.

W. C.

Olney, June 22, 1782.

* Rev. J. Newton, late of St. Mary's Woolnoth, London,
but then of Olney.

ELEGY

ON THE

DEATH OF WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

BY THE REV. T. BECK.

OH! Cowper, hadst thou left behind
The mantle of thy muse;
Could I the sacred relic find,
Or couldst thou through my darksome mind
One ray like thine diffuse;
Then should my pensive numbers tell
In Thee, how great a poet fell!

Thy genius, fraught with classic lore,
Could Wisdom's fountain-head explore,
Rich streams of ancient song to pour*.
Thy Spirit warm'd with sacred fire,
Attun'd in sweetest strains thy lyre
To themes that holy love inspire †:

* Translation of Homer. † Olney Hymns.

L

Yet oft would condescend,
In humbler mirthful sounds to play,
To chase black-boding gloom away,
Or gratify a friend*.

Oh fatal stroke to human pride!
That such a soul should be ally'd
To such a feeble frame:
That he who felt such heavenly glow
Should sink so melancholy low;
Should vindicate the ways of God,
Yet tremble at his vengeful rod;
Should sing so sweet of pard'ning grace,
Yet dread to meet his Saviour's face;
Should sooth so soft another's care,
Yet doom himself to dark despair;
Should taste and feel that God is good,
Yet doubt the Saviour's cleansing blood;
Should lash an Atheistic age,
Yet half reject the cheering page,
Nor dare the promise claim!

Let not the world in malice boast
A saint of God forsook and lost:—
Religion, cheering balm, divine,
Sweet peace and sacred joy are thine.
Yet may the soul that owns thy sway,
Imprison'd in its house of clay,

* The Task, and other lighter poems.

Its shatter'd crazy organs find
Too little for a mighty mind:
Or through disorder'd senses trace
All things deform'd and out of place.
So Gallileo, dungeon bound,
No longer stars or planets found
To cheer his dreary cell:
Ah! what avail'd his curious art!
His tubes nor light nor hope impart,
In superstition's hell!

Religion never gave the wound
Which Cowper felt within;
'Twas in corrupted nature found,
Th' effect of Adam's sin.
In bitter streams this fountain flows
Throughout this vale beneath;
And all Creation heaves and throes
With sorrow, sin, and death.

Distressing care and tort'ring pain,
The palsy'd limb, the frenzy'd brain,
To this dire cause we trace:
Yet He who, by his healing word,
The limb, the sight, the life restor'd;
Whose mighty voice from demons saves
The maniac wand'ring 'mong the graves;
He makes e'en sharp affliction prove
The wholesome medicine of love,
The furnace of his grace.

Ye mourning saints through thickest darkness led,
Let not tormenting unbelief prevail;
Shall the sheep die for whom the Shepherd bled?
Shall God's almighty pow'r and promise fail?
Ah no; e'en Cowper of all hope bereft—
Bereft of reason—deeming God his foe,
Was not to dreadful self-destruction left,
Nor left to sin, or murmur 'midst his woe.
The conflict past, his happy spirit flies
To worlds of joy, on angels' pinions borne:
So sets the sun in darkness—soon to rise
In lustre fresh, with the returning morn.

FINIS.



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