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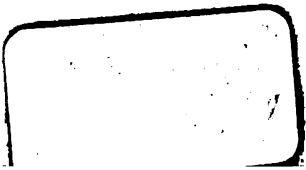
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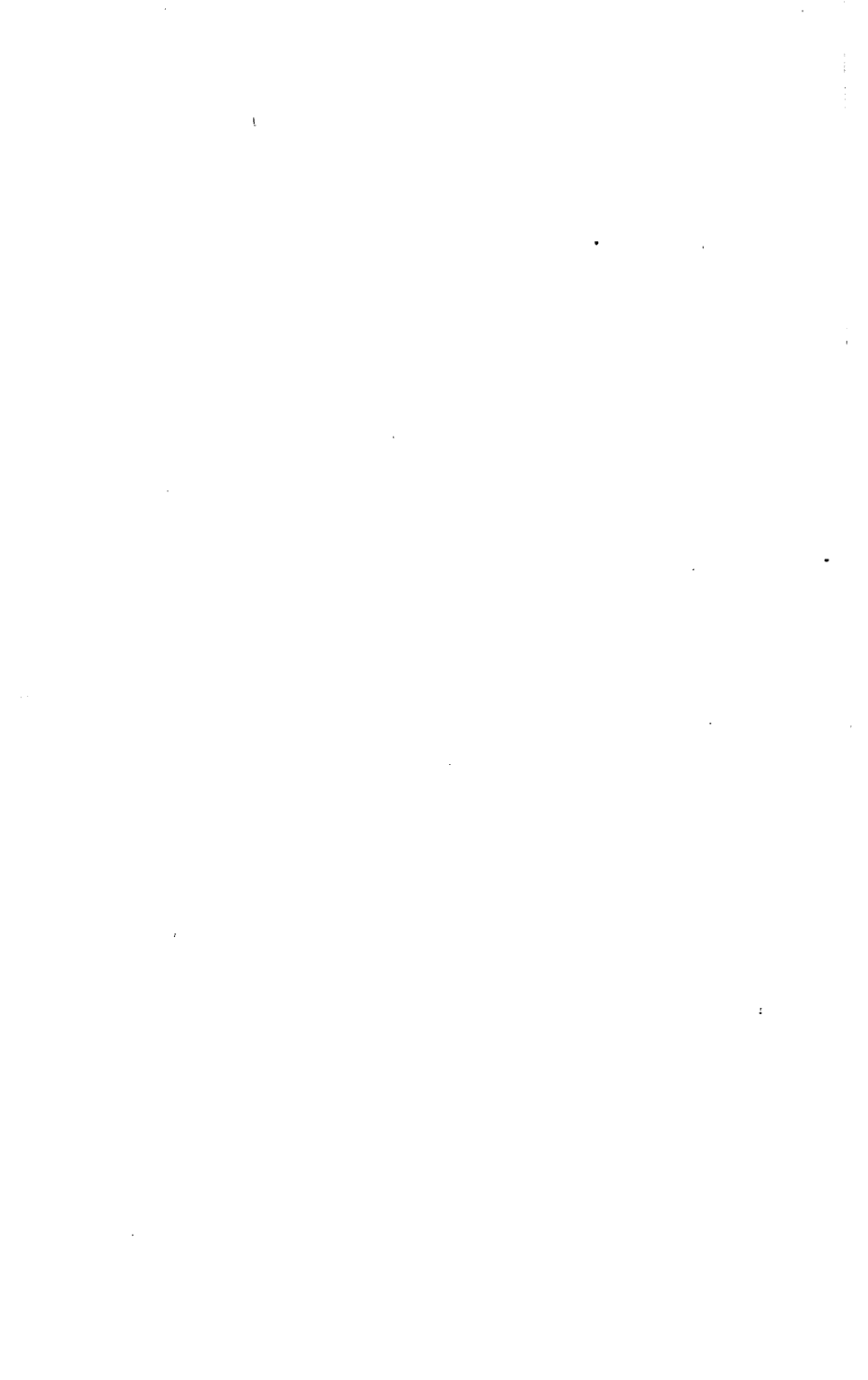
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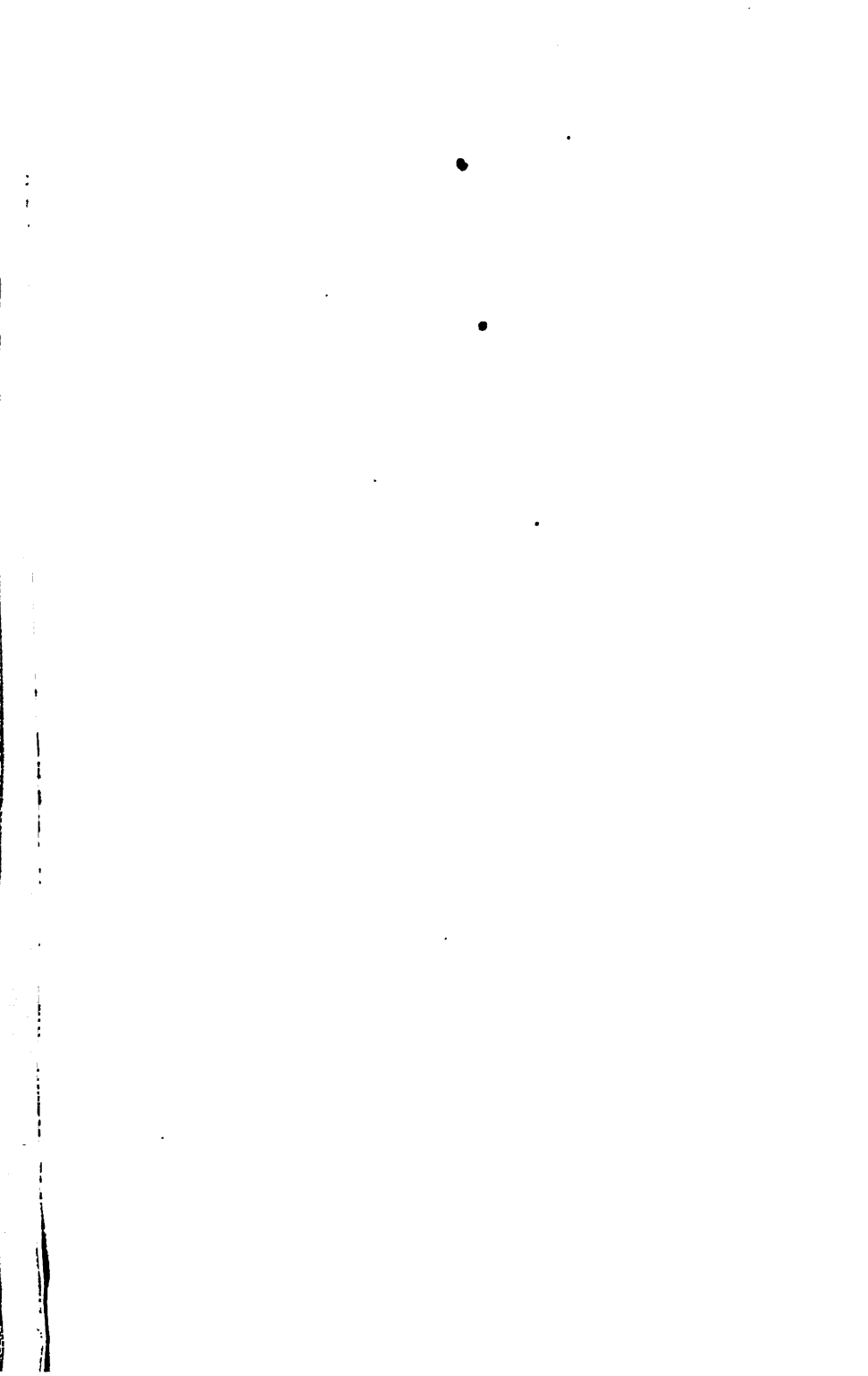
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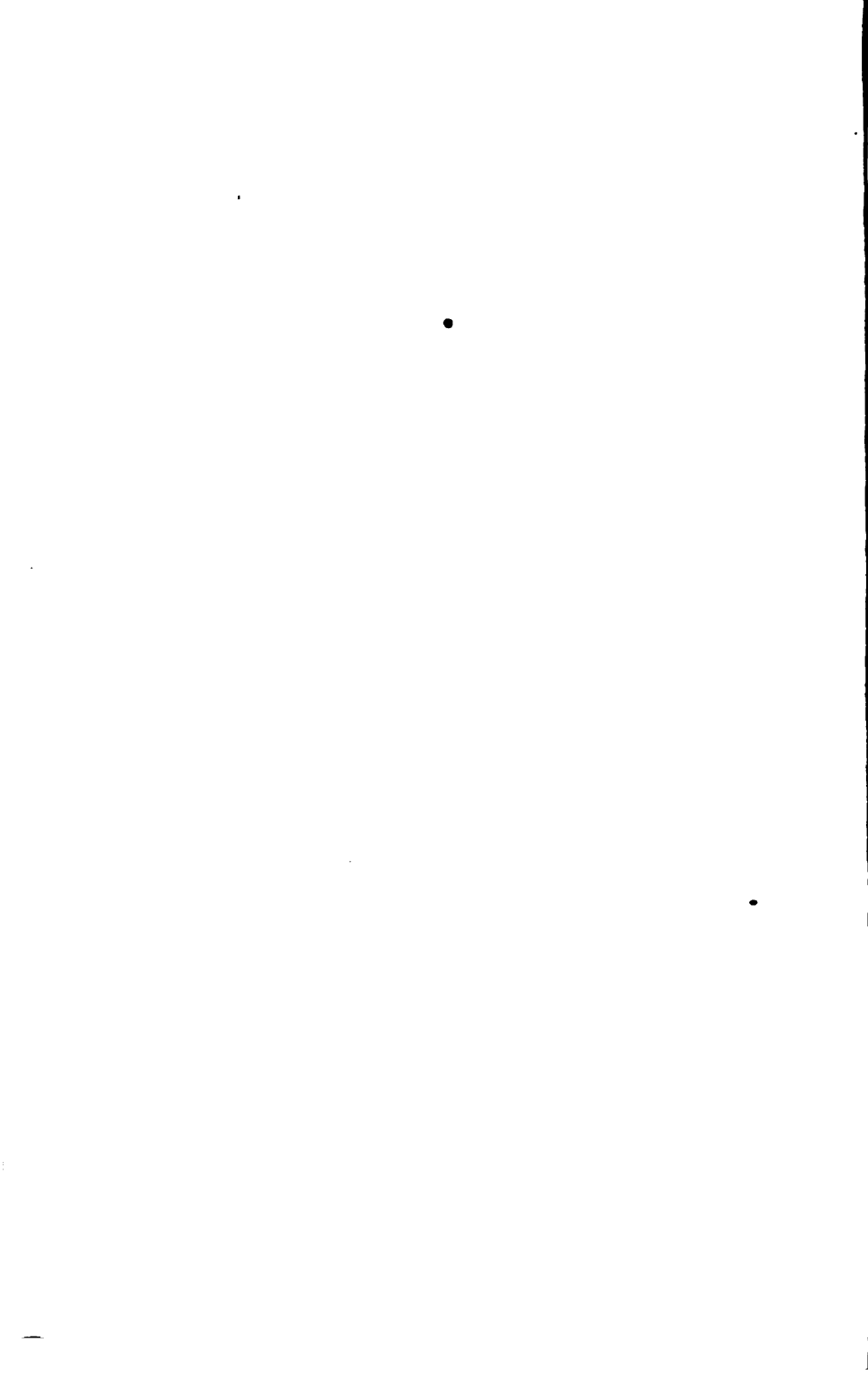
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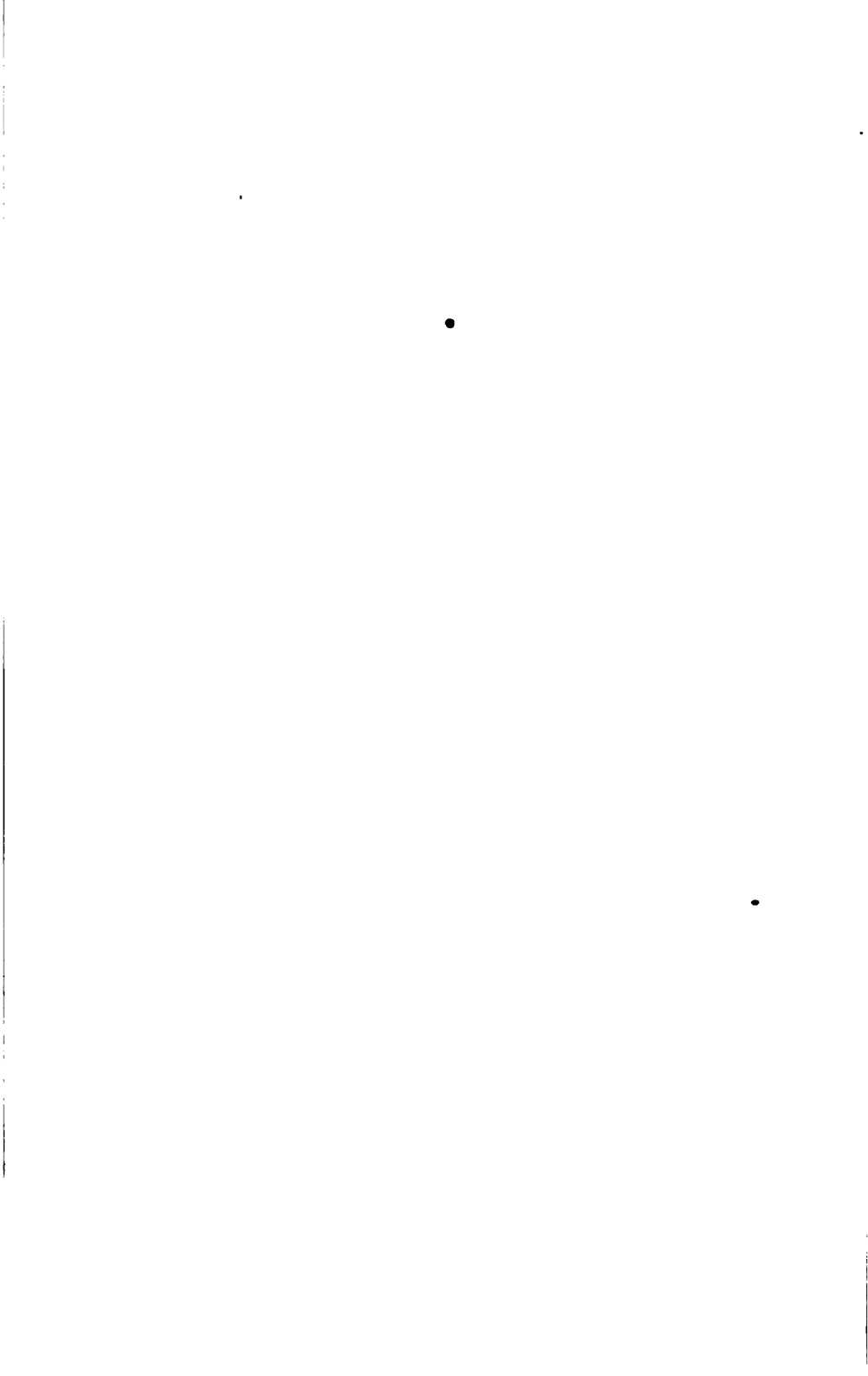








*THE LIFE OF WILLIAM COWPER*





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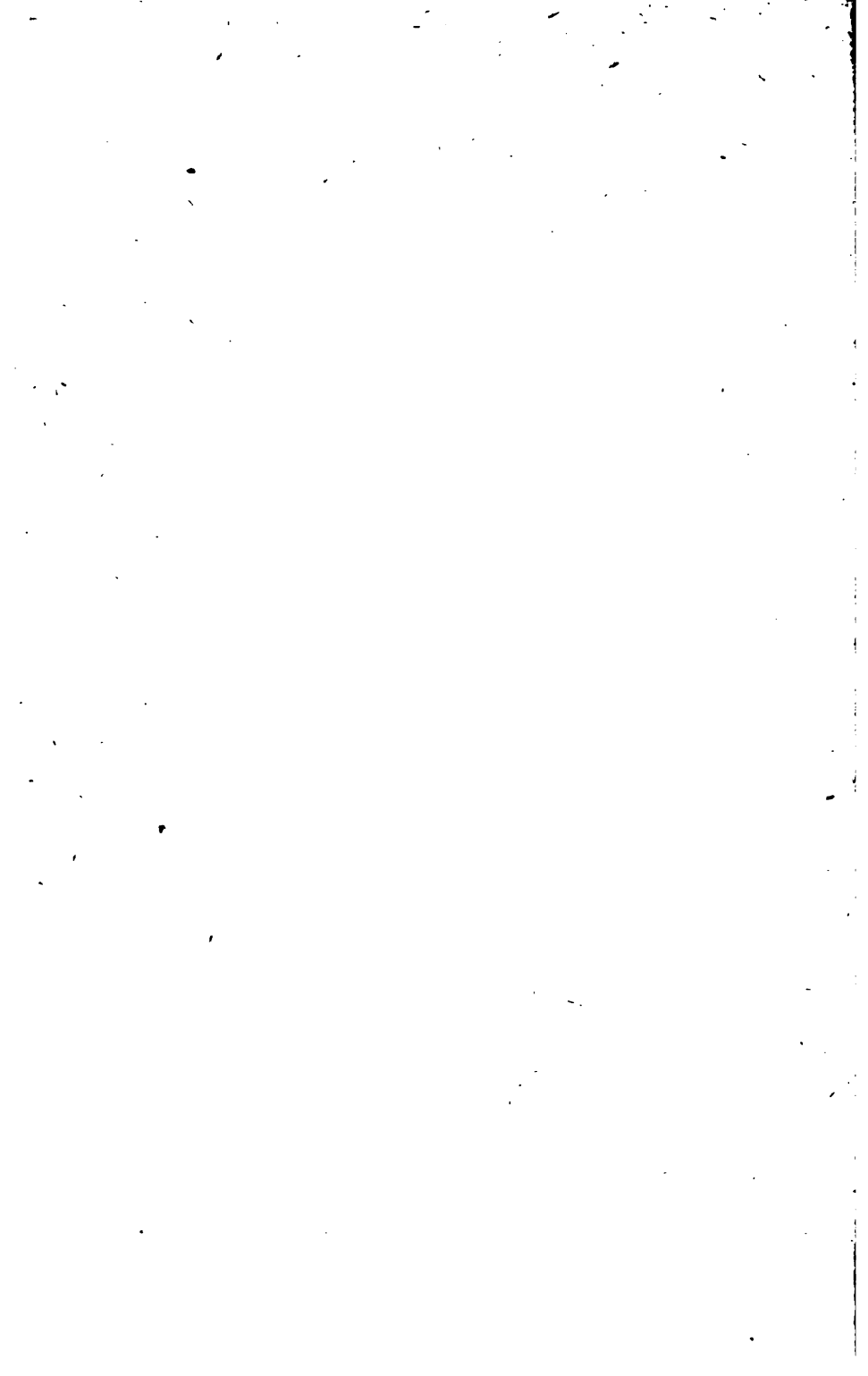


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Wm Cooper.







THE LIFE  
OF  
WILLIAM COWPER

BY  
THOMAS WRIGHT

*Principal of Cowper School, Olney,*

AUTHOR OF "THE TOWN OF COWPER," "THE CHALICE OF CARDEN," &c.

London

T. FISHER UNWIN

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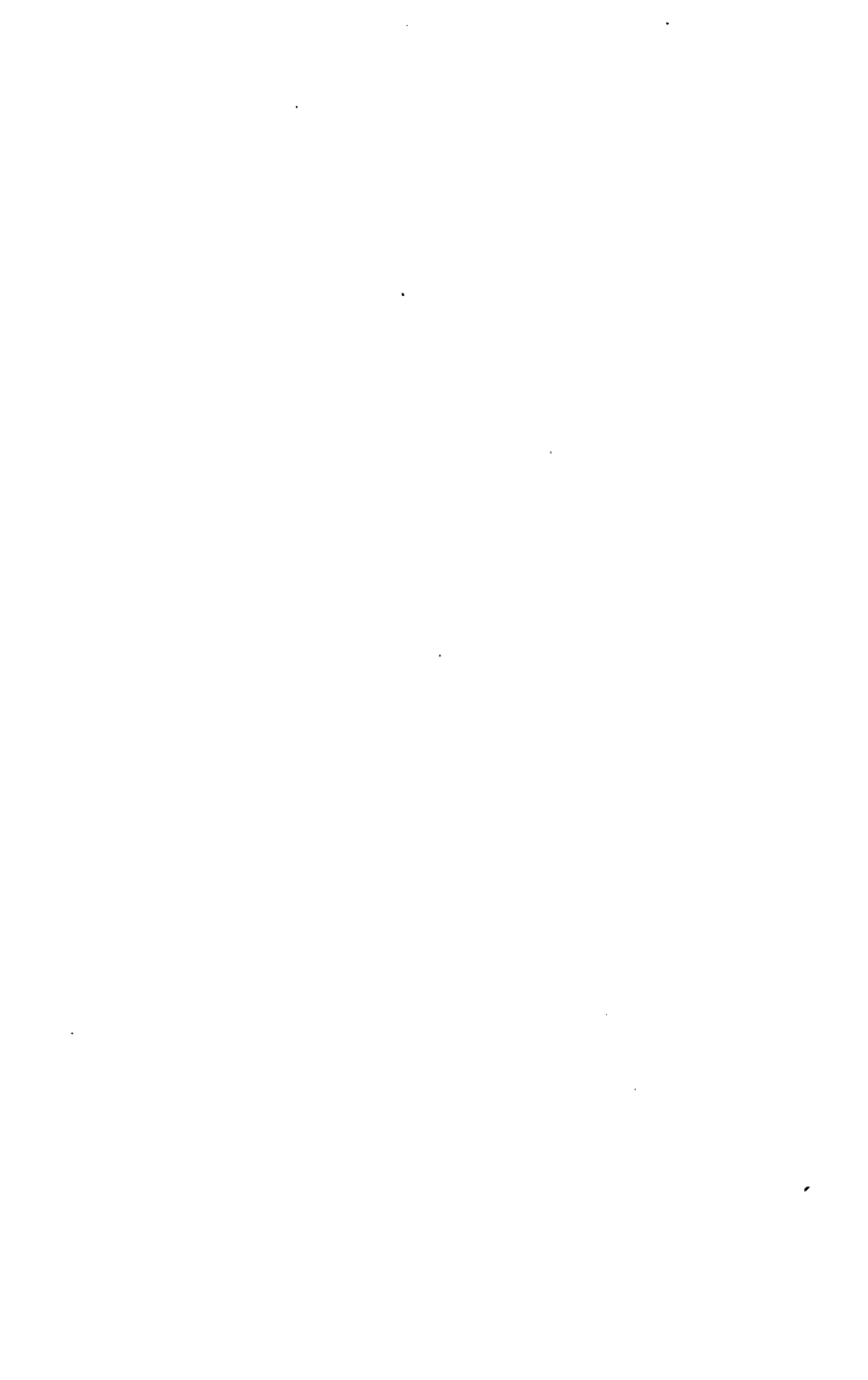
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**THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED**  
**WITH HER KIND PERMISSION**  
**TO**  
**LADY HESKETH**  
**OF EASTON NESTON**  
**IN THE**  
**COUNTY OF NORTHAMPTON**



## PREFACE.



**N**EARLY a century has passed since the death of William Cowper, and few poets have had more written about them. The first to commence a systematic life of him was his old friend the Rev. John Newton, in 1800, a few months after the poet's death. No more than sixteen pages, however, were actually written, the burden of the author's years proving too great an obstacle. The Life by Hayley, the friend of Cowper's last decade—a work containing much valuable material—first appeared in two volumes in 1803, to which two more were added in 1806. Hayley's correspondence with Lady Hesketh, now in the British Museum (Addit. MS. 30803 A, B) shows under what difficulties this Life was written. Hayley had the hardest work imaginable to get Lady Hesketh and Theodora to tell him anything. Never, perhaps, in the history of literature was biographer so handicapped. "The biographer of Cowper," her ladyship told him, "whoever he might be, should not consider himself as the writer of a *Novel*, and indeed I am firmly of opinion that you should deal only in *generals*, and by no means give a particular account of the life of our friend." That there is no need to make a novel of

a biography we admit, but for a biographer "to deal only in generals" would be to make his work absolutely valueless. What Lady Hesketh would not tell, it has taken nearly a hundred years to arrive at; bit by bit practically the whole of Cowper's story has been laid bare, and there cannot now be much of importance concerning him that we do not know.

The same year that saw the first issue of Hayley's work (1803) saw also *Cowper Illustrated*, &c., by James S. Storer, a volume containing interesting descriptions of the scenery alluded to in the *Task*. This popular publication, which went through at least ten editions, was reissued in 1822 with the title of *The Rural Walks of Cowper*, a book which exceeded its predecessor in popularity. The distressing "Memoir" written by the poet himself was first published in 1816. It covers only the first thirty-five years of his life. A brief account of the poet, prefixed to a quantity of new letters—the *Private Correspondence*—was issued in 1823 by the Rev. Dr. Johnson (Cowper's Johnny of Norfolk). In 1825 Mr. James Croft published the early love poems, &c., of the poet, and likewise a few anecdotes selected from the letters of Lady Hesketh. *The Life and Letters of Cowper*, by the Rev. T. S. Grimshawe, Rector of Biddenham (8 vols.), appeared in February, 1835. The "Life" is merely that by Hayley revised. This work was put together very hurriedly, and is crowded with mistakes. Scores of the letters, too, are greatly mutilated, and for no reason whatever except the bad taste of the compiler. Nevertheless, with all its faults, "Grimshawe" is not utterly valueless to the student of

Cowper. The Life and Letters by Southey—a truly excellent work—was issued in October of the same year (1835). In 1863 appeared the Aldine edition with a good life by the painstaking John Bruce, who died six years later. The various writings (1864–1869) of the Rev. Josiah Bull also threw fresh light on the poet's story, and the Rev. W. (now Canon) Benham was able to give a few fresh facts in the Globe edition (1870). The author's *Town of Cowper* appeared in 1886. An article entitled *Some Unpublished MSS. of the Poet Cowper*, by Mrs. D'Arcy Collyer, in the *Universal Review* for June, 1890, contains, along with some useful notes, a poem never before published (see Chapter V.), entitled "A Song of Mercy and Judgment," one of the most striking things Cowper ever wrote.

This brings us to the present volume. In it I have dealt with the poet's life exhaustively, embodying not only the various discoveries of my predecessors, but also a large number of new facts—facts of which previous biographers were ignorant. I would also observe that it has been my privilege to read what is, broadly speaking, the whole of Cowper's correspondence (as contained in Southey, Grimshawe, Gauntlett, Bull, &c., &c.) *in consecutive order*, a thing which probably has never been done before, except possibly by Mr. Bruce. The correspondence being scattered up and down the pages of so many volumes, my task was no easy one, but it has amply repaid me, for it has enabled me to discover what may be described as the central incident of the poet's life, the incident that coloured, and made wretched, the whole of his

last twenty-seven years ; and in no other way could I have discovered it. Religion, the miasmata of Olney, the influence of Newton, the sudden death of his brother—all these have at various times been held responsible for much of his misery. Undoubtedly the *cause* of Cowper's afflictions was inherited melancholia, but one of its effects has, curiously enough, escaped his former biographers, and that I am not wrong in attributing some importance to it is proved, I think, by the fact that we can trace its reaching influence throughout Cowper's life. The thing that caused him to believe that he was damned was a dream, a dream which he had at the end of February, 1773. It will of course be held, and rightly held, that this dream is only a specific instance of an habitual morbid frame of mind. Cowper, for his part, says over and over again, though not of course in so many words, that it was this dream, and nothing but this dream, that brought about the state of mind which rendered horrible the last twenty-seven years of his life. This belief of poor Cowper's cannot, alas ! shake, but will only strengthen, the general view of his disease ; but it is interesting to remark that as a rule he did not believe in dreams, and we often find him ridiculing them. It is not necessary to say more in the Preface on this point : an account of the dream and the accompanying circumstances will be found in Chapter IX.

I observed that Cowper's letters are scattered up and down the pages of a number of different works. These are—(1) Southey's "Life of Cowper," which contains several letters not in the correspondence as by

him arranged ; (2) Southey's " Letters of Cowper " ; (3) Southey's Appendix ; (4) Grimshawe, which contains a few not in Southey ; (5) " The Memoir of the Rev. Henry Gauntlett " (thirty-eight letters from Cowper to Teedon) ; (6) Bell's Edition of the Poems (two letters to Mrs. Balls) ; (7) Several letters in various periodicals (*e.g.*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, November, 1854). Besides these there is a goodly number of unpublished letters in the British Museum, and a considerable number in the hands of private persons. It has been my practice whenever possible to obtain copies of all unpublished letters, and also of the excised portions (which are very numerous) of those that have been published, my desire being, as soon as possible, to publish the whole in consecutive order with annotations. The whereabouts, indeed, of every letter ought to be known, and I should be greatly obliged to any person who has letters of the poet if he would compare them with what is given in Southey (not Grimshawe), and communicate with me. It will, I believe, be readily conceded that a complete collection of the correspondence of the prince of English letter-writers is a great desideratum.

Some account may now be given of the sources from which fresh facts have been obtained. These are— (1) The unpublished letters in the British Museum and in the hands of private persons ; (2) The Diary of Samuel Teedon, schoolmaster of Olney, who died in 1798. Southey, as I shall show, though he was aware of the existence of this book, never took the trouble to consult it. After being lost for many years, it was discovered by Mr. W. J. Harvey, of Champion Hill,

who intends to publish it with annotations; (3) The manuscript *Life of Teedon*, by William Soul, of Olney, written in 1848. The influence of Newton, Unwin, Lady Hesketh—any you will—over Cowper was as nothing compared with that of Samuel Teedon, the self-opinionated and infatuated schoolmaster of Olney; (4) The Ledger and Day-books of Dr. George Grindon, of Olney, who married Miss Green, Lady Austen's niece. These contain folios upon folios devoted to Mrs. Unwin, for Mr. Grindon attended her almost all the time she was at Olney and Weston; and there are scores of allusions to "W. Cowper, Esq.," "W. C., Esq.," and "Mr. Cowper." These books, and especially the Day-book for 1784 and 1785, have enabled me to lay some curious and interesting facts before the reader; (5) The Diary of the Rev. Abraham Maddock, containing most important references to Cowper, with whom Mr. Maddock was acquainted. It covers the period from 1765 to 1771—the time during which least has been known about the poet. This valuable manuscript, portions of which were printed in the *Kettering Leader* for 1889, is in the possession of H. Gough, Esq., of Redhill; (6) The Parish Registers of Olney, which have certainly never been consulted before by a biographer of Cowper; (7) Other sources too numerous to mention, for I have made inquiry in every direction that seemed at all likely to lead to fresh information. Two new poems are given, to wit, "A Thunder Storm" and "Heu quam remotus." Whether they are strictly new, is not of much importance, for they will, I have not the least doubt, be new to the reader.



Neither of them is to be found in any collection of Cowper's poems. The first has been printed only at the private press of the Rev. W. Barker, of Hastings ; the second appeared in one of the editions of Cowper's Autobiography. (For further information respecting them, see sections 46 and 54.)

The facts given about Cowper's two *protégés* likewise throw interesting light upon his life. How many people, I wonder, are aware that he had any *protégés* at all—that he brought up, educated, and cared for two children, a boy (Dick Coleman) and a girl (Hannah Willson). The second was treated almost as a daughter. Southey refers to the boy, but does not give his name ; he refers to the girl, but he was ignorant of her story. During half Cowper's life the first *protégé* was an anxiety to him, and the second added more trouble than any one else to his declining years. The reader, however, will find something new on almost every page, and the facts are dealt with—as unfortunately many in Southey are not—in chronological order.

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to many ladies and gentlemen who have rendered me assistance, and particularly to Henry Gough, Esq., of Redhill, for innumerable valuable notes and suggestions ; W. J. Harvey, Esq., of Champion Hill, for notes from Teedon's Diary ; the Rev. J. Barham Johnson (son of "Johnny of Norfolk"), Dial House, Norwich ; Rev. H. B. Johnson, Lullington Parsonage, Frome ; the Venerable Archdeacon Vesey, for notes on Huntingdon ; Rev. M. Atkinson, Huntingdon ; Sir Peniston Milbanke, for notes and kindness at Eartham ;

Lady Hesketh, of Easton Neston, for genealogical notes concerning the "Worshipful and auncient familie of the Heskaythes of Ruffourd"; the late lamented Rev. S. S. Lewis, M.A., of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, for notes about the poet's brother John; the Rev. J. Tarver, Filgrave; Professor Hales, King's College, London; R. F. Sketchley, Esq., Librarian, Dyce and Forster Libraries, South Kensington Museum; F. Grindon, Esq., Olney, for use of his grandfather's account books and permission to photograph relics; Rev. J. P. Langley, Olney, for permission to examine the registers; J. Palmer, Esq., J. Garrard, Esq., W. Swannell, Esq., Mrs. Higgins, of Turvey Abbey, and Mrs. Welton, of Olney, for permission to photograph relics; Mr. T. T. Coles, of Olney, for loan of books; Miss Bull, of Streatham Hill, London, for notes from Newton's Diary; Miss Bessie Wright, Margery Hall, Forest Gate; Mr. G. Loosley, Berkhamsted; Mr. Robert Gibbs, Aylesbury; Mr. A. E. Gibbs, of St. Albans; the late Rev. W. Barker, Hastings; and the kind correspondent who signed himself "J. M."

THOMAS WRIGHT.

COWPER SCHOOL, OLNEY,  
*July, 1892.*

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BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

*EARLY CHILDHOOD.*

(1731-41.)

1. "The Pastoral House."—1731-37.

THE distinction of being the birth-place of the celebrated poet and charming letter-writer, William Cowper, belongs to the Hertfordshire town of Great Berkhamsted, a town that also boasts of having been slightly connected with the poet Chaucer. Formerly, the name of the place was spelt Berkhamstead, but as its inhabitants have of late dispensed with a couple of its letters, we may pardonably do the same.

The poet was born at the Rectory House of this town on November 26, 1731, his father being the Rev. John Cowper, D.D., rector of the parish, and his mother, Anne, daughter of Roger Donne, Esq., of Ludham Hall, in Norfolk. Of the ancestors of both his father and mother one or two words may be said. The family of the Rev. John Cowper had for many generations been a distinguished one. Sir William Cowper, who died in 1664 at the age of 82, is remembered on account of his loyalty to the unfortunate

Charles, and from having erected a monument to Hooker, the celebrated divine, with an epitaph of his own composition in verse. His grandson and successor, the second Sir William, was the father of the first Earl Cowper, and also of Spencer Cowper, one of the judges of the Court of Common Pleas. The Rev. John Cowper, the poet's father, was the judge's son. Mrs. Cowper could trace her descent through several noble families to Henry III., King of England, and numbered among her ancestors Dr. Donne, the poet. It is pleasant to be able to connect the one poet with the other, and it is not uninteresting to take note that the first Earl Cowper was uncle to the poet's father.

Dr. Cowper's first three children, Spencer, born in 1729, and Ann and John (twins), born in 1730, died in their infancy. The entry of William's baptism is in his father's handwriting in the parish register :

“ 1731, Dec<sup>r</sup>,  
 y<sup>e</sup> 13, Will<sup>m</sup> y<sup>e</sup> son of John Cowper, D.D., rector of this Parish, and Anne his wife, was baptised.”

Two other children, Theodora and Thomas, born respectively in 1733 and 1734, like the first three, died very young.

At the old “ Pastoral House,” as he lovingly calls it, William Cowper spent the happy days of his early childhood, becoming attached to every tree, gate, and stile in the neighbourhood, preferring his own house to a palace, and supposing as a matter of course that he and his father and mother were going to live in it always. Cowper ever retained a very vivid recollection of these early days at Berkhamsted. We are all familiar with





COWPER'S MOTHER.

(Drawn by W. HARVEY, from the Original by HIENS.)



the description of his progress to the dame-school in the lines, "On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture" :—

"The Gardener Robin," says he—  
"Day by day drew me to school along the public way,  
Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapped  
In scarlet mantle warm, and velvet capped."

The site of the school to which Cowper was drawn by Robert Pope, to give Robin his full name, is still pointed out.

Who does not remember, too, the allusions to the tenderness of his mother ?

"Thy nightly visits to my chamber made,  
That thou mightest know me safe and warmly laid ;  
Thy morning bounties ere I left my home,  
The biscuit, or confectionery plum,  
All this, and more endearing still than all,  
Thy constant flow of love that knew no fall."

An equally pleasant picture is that of the little William standing at his mother's side and pricking the pattern of her dress into paper.

"When playing with thy vesture's tissued flowers,  
The violet, the pink, and jessamine,  
I pricked them into paper with a pin,  
And thou wast happier than myself the while,  
Wouldst softly speak, and stroke my head and smile."

In order to understand this, we must remember that a lady's dress in those days consisted, beside the gown proper, of a pair of folds reaching from the waist to the feet, and it was with these folds that children were wont to amuse themselves in the way related.

Since the childhood of Cowper many changes have naturally taken place in the town and neighbourhood of Berkhamsted, but it is still a pleasant spot, the scenery being picturesque and even luxuriant. On the left, as it is approached from London (distant about twenty-eight miles) by the North Western Railway, is seen the canal, "with locks and lock-keepers' white cottages, the high road about a field's length, and the uplands in the distance, crowned with groves." More to the front, on the same side, the tower of the church presents itself, "peering from out the surrounding trees, amidst which some tall poplars here and there raise their heads above their neighbours of the grove." The old rectory has long since disappeared, but an ancient ivy-clad building shelters a disused well to which the name of Cowper has attached itself; and the magnificent old parish church in which Cowper's father officiated has in its external appearance altered but little. The completion of the restoration of the church, which extended over a period of twenty years, and cost over £10,000, was commemorated in 1888. The population of Berkhamsted and the adjoining Northchurch, which are practically one, is about 8,000.

On November 7, 1737, a seventh child, which was named John, was born to Dr. Cowper. It was the only one beside William that grew to manhood: a few days later, on the 13th, the mother died, at the early age of 34. The story of Cowper's sorrow has often been told. When his mother died he "wanted two days of being six years old," yet such an impression had her affection and tenderness made on his mind that fifty years afterwards,

on receiving her picture, he "dwelt as fondly on the cherished features as if he had just mourned her death." Writing to his cousin, Mrs. Bodham, who had sent him the portrait, he says, "I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and of course the first on which I open my eyes in the morning." His lines, "On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture out of Norfolk," form one of the most touching elegies in the language. How pathetic, for example, is the following :—

" My mother ! when I learned that thou wast dead,  
 Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed ?  
 Hovered thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,  
 Wretch even then, life's journey just begun ?  
 Perhaps thou gavest me, though unfelt, a kiss ;  
 Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss—  
 Ah, that maternal smile !—it answers—Yes.  
 I heard the bell tolled on thy burial day,  
 I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away,  
 And, turning from my nursery window, drew  
 A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu !"

To his friend Hill, after the lapse of forty-seven years, he wrote : "I can truly say, that not a week passes (perhaps I might with equal veracity say a day) in which I do not think of her : such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short." The poet pleased himself with thinking that he bore a very near resemblance, both in mind and body, to his mother's family. To his cousin, Mrs. Bodham, in 1790, he

discovered, and he was expelled from the school." After having been at Market Street two years Cowper began to be troubled with specks in his eyes, and his father, alarmed for the consequences, removed him from Market Street, and placed him under the care of an eminent surgeon and oculist named Mr. Disney.

### 3. At the House of Mr. Disney the Oculist. 1739-41.

In his memoir Cowper says he was "sent to Mr. D——," but he told Hayley in a letter written in 1792, and quoted on p. 5 of Hayley's "Life of Cowper," that his father sent him "to a female oculist of great renown at that time." This apparent discrepancy is explained by the fact that both Mr. Disney and his wife had obtained celebrity in the same branch of medical science. At this house, says Cowper, religion was neither known nor practised—a statement which was made when, as Southey puts it, "he looked back through a distorted medium." His words probably mean that family prayers were not performed in that house. To quote Southey again, "What the opinions of the family were, he could as little know as he was likely to inquire, further than as to the place of worship which they frequented; and of their private devotions it was impossible that he could know anything."

As we have seen, William Cowper, even as a child, had plenty of trouble, but he also had his joys. It was always a pleasure to look back at the time when he and his cousins from Norfolk romped together in the

rectory garden at Berkhamsted ; or at Catfield among the Norfolk Broads, the residence of his uncle, the Rev. Roger Donne, with whom he now and again spent a holiday. Of his cousin Harriet (afterwards Mrs. Balls) he says, "She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter." Then there was Ann, whom he persisted in calling Rose—"the Rose that used to sit smiling on my knee, I will not say how many years ago"—the same who became Mrs. Bodham, and long after presented the poet with his mother's picture ; Elizabeth (afterwards Mrs. Hewitt) was his "play-fellow at Berkhamsted." Their brother Castres was equally a favourite with Cowper, who says, "He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him." The Norfolk cousins, in short, made up for what Cowper lacked in brothers and sisters—none of the seven children of Mrs. Cowper, as we before observed, having survived her, except William and John. To what particular period of his childhood these enjoyable hours belonged we cannot say, but probably there would be holidays of some kind upon leaving Mr. Disney's, which he did after a stay of about two years.

Even as a child Cowper was fond of reading. The Fables of Gay were special favourites with him, and he used to recite "The Hare and Many Friends" for the amusement of company. The child, too, was brought up in an atmosphere of poetry. Dr. Cowper, his father, wrote verses, and had caught the contagion of ballad writing, in which, says his son, he "succeeded well." The taste for this species of composition Cowper counted that he inherited from his father.

His uncle Ashley and his aunt Judith were also dabblers in rhyme. Some improvement having taken place in his eyes, Cowper was now, at the age of ten, placed at Westminster School.

## CHAPTER II.

### *SCHOOL-DAYS.*

(1741-49.)

#### 4. Early Days at Westminster.

**S**EVERE as Cowper is, in his *Tirocinium* and elsewhere, on public schools, his career at Westminster would seem to have been on the whole a not unhappy one ; at any rate he speaks quite as much of the pleasures of his school-days as of his crosses and troubles. In after years he could say :—

“ We love the playplace of our early days ;  
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone  
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.  
The wall on which we tried our graving skill,  
The very name we carved subsisting still ;  
The bench on which we sat while deep employed,  
Though mangled, hacked, and hewed, not yet destroyed ;  
The little ones unbuttoned, glowing hot,  
Playing our games, and on the very spot ;  
As happy as we once, to kneel and draw  
The chalky ring, and knuckle down at taw ;  
To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,  
Or drive it devious with a dextrous pat ;  
The pleasing spectacle at once excites  
Such recollections of our own delights,  
That, viewing it, we seem almost to obtain  
Our innocent sweet simple years again.”

Cowper, as he tells us himself, excelled at cricket and other games. To Unwin, in an undated letter of 1786, he says, "He who cannot look forward with comfort, must find what comfort he can in looking backward. Upon this principle I the other day sent my imagination upon a trip thirty years behind me. She was very obedient, and very swift of foot, presently performed her journey, and at last set me down in the sixth form at Westminster. I fancied myself once more a schoolboy—a period of life in which, if I had never tasted true happiness, I was at least equally unacquainted with its contrary. . . . Accordingly I was a schoolboy in high favour with the master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and had the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form for the admiration of all who were able to understand it." As Southey says, the poet's aversion to public schools arose from what he saw and what he reflected on in after life, not from any ill-usage which he experienced at Westminster. In his "Memoir" Cowper refers to a singular incident in connection with his father that happened during one of his holidays. Some acquaintance having done away with himself, the mind of Dr. Cowper was greatly exercised upon the subject of self-destruction, and whilst in this mood he put into the hands of his son, who was only eleven years old, a treatise in favour of suicide, requesting him to give his opinions upon it. Dr. Cowper heard his son's reasons and was silent, neither approving nor disapproving—the true motive for his conduct probably being that he wanted, if possible, to think favourably of the state of the departed friend. To set a child such a task cannot be pro-



nounced a very judicious action, and could the father have obtained glimpses of subsequent events, probably it would have been the last thing to enter his mind. As every one knows, the desire to commit suicide was always one of the earliest features of those terrible fits of despondency that in after years seized upon the afflicted poet. Four or five times, as we shall subsequently see, he attempted to destroy himself, whilst he would brood over the horrible subject for days, and even weeks.

Among the objects in Berkhamsted parsonage familiar to Cowper's childish eyes, one, his father's family Bible, has been preserved, being now in the possession of the Rev. J. Barham Johnson (son of "Johnny of Norfolk"). It is a thick volume in purple morocco—the Bible with Apocrypha (A.D. 1723) and the Book of Common Prayer (1726) bound up together—and contains the coat of arms of "John Cowper, A.M.," on the first page, and the entries of the births and deaths of Dr. Cowper's family.

In respect to Westminster, what Cowper in after years most regretted was that it afforded so little religious instruction. The duty of the schoolboy swallowed up every other; and he "acquired Latin and Greek at the expense of a knowledge much more important." To use the words of the Rev. Legh Richmond, "Jesus Christ was crucified between classics and mathematics," as in only too many other schools. Cowper, however, relates with gratification one mark of religious discipline which in his time was observed in Westminster—to wit, the pains which Dr. Nicholls took to prepare the lads for confirmation. The old

man acquitted himself of his duty like one who had a deep sense of its importance ; and most of the boys were struck by his manner, and affected by his exhortation. Cowper's mind had only a short time previously been brought to serious thoughts by an incident of which he gives the relation. "As I was crossing St. Margaret's churchyard, late one evening, I saw a glimmering light in the midst of it, which excited my curiosity. Just as I arrived at the spot, a grave-digger, who was at work by the light of his lanthorn, threw up a skull which struck me upon the leg. This little accident was an alarm to my conscience ; for that event may be numbered among the best religious documents which I received at Westminster." The impression, however, presently went off, and the boy, surveying his activity and strength, began to entertain the notion that he should never die. Soon after he was *struck with a lowness of spirits*, uncommon at his age, and at the same time he was troubled with the hallucination that he was consumptive, and consequently fated to an early death. The preparation for confirmation beginning not long after, Cowper was again led to serious thoughts, and "for the first time attempted prayer in secret."

At the age of thirteen he was seized with the small-pox, which very providentially did for him what the oculists had been unable to do—that is to say, it delivered his eyes from the spots ; not, however, from great liableness to inflammation, to which they were in a degree subject all his life.

The usher of the fifth form when he passed through it was Vincent Bourne, whose Latin poems Cowper

many years after rendered into English, when (May 23, 1781) he wrote, "I love the memory of Vinny Bourne. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in *his* way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to *him*"—excessive praise, but excusable in Cowper's partiality for his old tutor. "He was so good-natured," continues the poet, "and so indolent, that I lost more than I got by him, for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for everything that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all." Another usher was Dr. Pierson Lloyd, a man who, according to the lines to his memory long after translated by Cowper, "obtained the hearts of all."

On the various incidents of school life that tickled his fancy, Cowper was wont to dwell with great unction. He would refer, for example, to the greasy head of Mr. Bourne, and relate how the Duke of Richmond, having purposely set the schoolmaster's hair on fire, boxed his ears to put it out; and he often had in his eye the idle boys, who, when the usher asked what was the last word, were obliged to stare and say nothing. He admitted, too, having sometimes been naughty himself. He knew what it was to pass his bounds:—

"To enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames,"

"I still remember," he tells us—

"nor without regret,  
Of hours that sorrow since has much endeared,  
How oft, my slice of pocket store consumed,  
Still hungering, penniless, and far from home,

I fed on scarlet hips and stony haws,  
On blushing crabs, or berries, that emboss  
The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere."

It was while still at Westminster that Cowper first met his cousin Harriet (afterwards Lady Hesketh), daughter of Mr. Ashley Cowper. Cowper had one Sunday been dining at Mr. De Grey's, in Norfolk Street (the Mr. De Grey who was subsequently created Lord Walsingham), and was just going back to Westminster, when Mr. and Mrs. Ashley Cowper and their daughter Harriet arrived to drink tea there. This was among the incidents that were never eradicated from the poet's mind.

Like so many other boys, Cowper had a penchant for keeping live things. His choice in one instance fell upon a mouse, which he allowed the run of his bureau. "I kept it," he says, "till it produced six young ones, and my transports when I first discovered them cannot easily be conceived—any more than my mortification, when going again to visit my little family, I found that mouse herself had eaten them! I turned her loose in indignation, and vowed never to keep a mouse again." (To Hesketh, Jan. 16, 1786.)

Some of the incidents of his boyhood, besides those connected with school life, were subsequently made use of. At one time he much frequented a flatting-mill, and what he saw suggested to him, forty years later, a poem on that subject. "I enclose a few lines," he tells Newton (Dec. 21, 1781), "on a thought which struck me yesterday. . . . A flatting-mill is not met with in every street, and my book (his first volume of poems) will, perhaps, fall into the hands of many who do not

know that such a mill was ever invented. It happened to me, however, to spend much of my time in one when I was a boy, when I frequently amused myself with watching the operation I describe."

Cowper, of course, visited the places of public resort. In those days Bedlam mad-house was open to the cruel curiosity of holiday ramblers, and he also was a visitor there. "Though a boy," he says (July 19, 1784), "I was not altogether insensible of the misery of the poor captives, nor destitute of feeling for them. But the madness of some of them had such a humorous air, and displayed itself in so many whimsical freaks, that it was impossible not to be entertained, at the same time that I was angry with myself for being so."

Besides the mad-house, with Colley "Cibber's mad figures" upon its gate, which also struck him, Cowper visited another place of popular resort, "The Tower." He says, in "Charity" :—

"So have I seen (and hastened to the sight  
On all the wings of holiday delight),  
Where stands that monument of ancient power,  
Named with emphatic dignity, the Tower,  
Guns, halberts, swords, and pistols, great and small,  
In starry forms disposed upon the wall :  
We wonder, as we gazing stand below,  
That brass and steel should make so fine a show ;  
But, though we praise the exact designer's skill,  
Account them implements of mischief still."

Of his faults at school it appears that his principal one was the sad practice of telling falsehoods. Unfortunately, to tell a lie was regarded at Westminster as

only a schoolboy's trick ; Cowper seems, however, at an early age to have cured himself of his fault.

### 5. John Cowper and the Gipsy.

While Cowper was at Westminster his brother John was being educated at a preparatory school, then in considerable repute, at Felstead, in Essex, and here occurred an incident which throws a curious light on the history of the brothers, and shows what a similitude there was in their characters. John Cowper and a schoolfellow one day had the curiosity to inquire about their fortunes from a travelling gipsy tinker, or pedlar, who came to beg at the school, in an old soldier's red coat. The gipsy predicted to John Cowper "that he would only remain a short time at Felstead, and would, after leaving it, be sent to a larger school; that he would go to the University, and, before he left it, would form an attachment strong enough to give him much disappointment, as it would not be mutual; that he would not marry before he was thirty; but after that age his fate became obscure, and the lines of his hand showed no more prognostics of futurity." Sure enough within a short time, owing to some family accident, John was summoned home, and, instead of returning to Felstead, he was sent to Eton; and not only so, but the other predictions, as we shall subsequently see, one by one were verified; and instead of regarding the occurrences merely as curious coincidences, John took them for actual prophecy, and made a trouble of them. In short, though in another direc-

tion, he was almost as great an illusionist as was his more famous brother. The incident is referred to by the poet in his letter to Mrs. Cowper (his cousin), dated June 7, 1770.

## 6. Literary Beginnings.

Cowper began at an early age to take delight in the masterpieces of literature. Cowley and Milton especially pleased him. In respect to the latter, he tells us that he was quite unhappy because he had not become acquainted with him till he was fourteen, on which account he feared he had suffered a loss which could never be made up. In "Task," iv., he says:—

"New to my taste, his Paradise surpassed  
The struggling efforts of my boyish tongue  
To speak its excellence; I danced for joy."

With the "Allegro" and "Penseroso" he was so charmed that he was never weary of them. As for Homer, probably he could scarcely remember a time when he had not taken pleasure in that author. With a schoolfellow named Sutton (afterwards Sir Richard) he went through the whole of both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. When only fourteen years of age he translated an elegy of Tibullus—an achievement he always spoke of as the commencement of his poetical career.

Among his schoolfellows were Warren Hastings, Elijah Impey, Robert Lloyd (son of the Doctor), Charles Churchill, Richard Cumberland, Colman the

Elder, and Bonnell Thornton, all of whom rose to distinction and fame. Three of them, Lloyd, Churchill, and Colman, were his particular associates, and Cumberland boarded in the same house.

With Cowper at Westminster were also five brothers named Bagot : William, afterwards Lord Bagot ; Charles, who subsequently took the name of Chester, and was one of Cowper's neighbours at Olney ; Walter, in after life one of the poet's principal correspondents and friends ; Richard, who subsequently assumed the name of Howard ; and Lewis, the embryo bishop—my lord successively of Bristol, Norwich, and Asaph. Side by side with Cowper on the sixth form sat the young nobleman who subsequently became Lord Dartmouth. "We little thought," says Cowper (January 14, 1786), "that in process of time one of us was ordained to give a new translation of Homer. Yet at that very time, it seems, I was laying the foundation of this superstructure. Some two years after the time referred to, the young nobleman succeeded his grandfather as Earl of Dartmouth—the second of that title, and three years after that (in 1753), by his marriage with the only daughter and heiress of Sir Charles Gunter Nicholl, he acquired the Manor of Olney—for so many years the residence of the poet. His title, "the good Earl," which his contemporaries affectionately bestowed on him, he well deserved ; but what principally interests us is the indirect influence he exerted on Cowper, influence which we shall allude to further on.

Cowper's favourite school friend was Sir William Russell, of "The Chequers," near Princes Risborough, Bucks. "Chequers Court, the splendid seat of the



Russell family, is situated almost midway between Princes Risboro' and Wendover. Its grounds are very beautiful, and one charming spot in particular, 'Velvet Lawn,' is famed through all the district round. One of the Russell family married Cromwell's youngest daughter ; hence the various portraits and relics of the Protector that enriched the mansion."

In the Forster Library, South Kensington Museum, is preserved a very interesting relic of Cowper's school-days, a manuscript treatise on Logic (in Latin), consisting of 150 leaves, and entitled "Compendiū Logicæ Conimbricensis Traditum a Sapientissimo et Reverendissimo P. Francisco de Amaral Societatis Iesu. Anno Domini 1625," of which Dawson Turner, the Norfolk antiquary, to whom it formerly belonged, says, in a note : "This singularly beautiful MS. was given me by Rev. Dr. Johnson, the cousin of Cowper, and he charged me to preserve and value it as a book which the poet had at college,<sup>1</sup> and which he particularly prized. I suppose this is the same book as 'Heir. de Paiva. Compendium logices Conimbricensis, Lond. 1627. 8°.' See Watt's *Bibl. Brit.* 727."

Under this note is another by the late Sir Francis Palgrave, which runs as follows : "The calligraphy of the MS. is rather puzzling ; for the black-letter is what is usually called church-text ; and I have always considered it peculiar to England ; at least, I have never seen examples of it in any Continental MSS. : it is in this instance executed with remarkable ability. F. Palgrave, Dec., 1842."

<sup>1</sup> A mistake. Westminster School is, of course, meant.

It was before he had quitted Westminster that Cowper first tried his hand at writing verse in English. Several of his companions were versifiers, and one at least rose to very high fame as a poet in subsequent years, though that fame was but short-lived. Of Cowper's experiments one has been preserved, namely, Verses, written at Bath in his 17th year, on finding the heel of a shoe (1748), which was an imitation of John Phillips's "Splendid Shilling." To these juvenile effusions and his early love for the country there is the following reference in the "Task" (bk iv.) :—

" My very dreams were rural, rural too  
The first-born efforts of my youthful muse,  
Sportive and jingling her poetic bells,  
Ere yet her ear was mistress of her powers."

At the age of 18, with the reputation of scholarship, and the advantage of being known and esteemed by his principal schoolfellows, Cowper left Westminster, and, after a stay of nine months at Berkhamsted, he was sent to acquire the practice of the law with Mr. Chapman, an Attorney, of Ely Place, Holborn.

## CHAPTER III.

### *“THREE YEARS MISSPENT IN AN ATTORNEY’S OFFICE.”*

(1749–52.)

#### 7. At Mr. Chapman’s.

THE next periods of Cowper’s life are described by himself as “Three years misspent in an Attorney’s Office”; followed by several more equally misspent in the Temple. In his “Memoir” he asserts that at the time he left Westminster he was as ignorant of all kinds of religion as the satchel at his back. Reviewing this period elsewhere, and when in a calmer mood, he says, “At that time I valued a man according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that. I lived to see the vanity of what I had made my pride, and in a few years found that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them.” (To Newton, February 18, 1781.)

To the profession of the law Cowper was never much

inclined. He engaged in it, as he tells Mrs. King (March 3, 1788), rather because he was desirous to gratify a most indulgent father, than because he had any hope of success in it himself.

In the "Memoir" Cowper judges Mr. Chapman as severely as he did the Disneys. "Here," says he, "I might have lived and died without seeing or hearing anything that might remind me of one single Christian duty, had it not been that I was at liberty to spend my leisure hours (which were well-nigh all my time) at my aunt's in Southampton Row. By this means I had opportunity of seeing the inside of a church (St. George's, Queen's Square, just out of Russell Street), whither I went with the family on Sundays, and which probably I should otherwise never have seen"—meaning by his aunt the wife of his father's brother, Mr. Ashley Cowper.

Mr. and Mrs. Cowper's family consisted of three daughters. To the eldest, Harriet, we have already referred, and much will be said of her as we proceed; the name of the second was Theodora; the third and youngest, Elizabeth, subsequently became the wife of Sir Archer Croft. Ashley Cowper was a very little man, and used to wear a white hat lined with yellow, from which circumstances the poet in one of his letters makes the remark that it would not be surprising if some day he should be "picked" by mistake for a mushroom, and popped into a basket.

"I did actually," says Cowper, "live three years with Mr. Chapman, a solicitor—that is to say, I slept three years in his house, but I lived, that is to say, I spent my days in Southampton Row."

For fellow clerk he had no less a person than Edward Thurlow, who afterwards rose to the distinction of Lord Chancellor, and, a friendship having sprung up between the two, Cowper introduced Thurlow at his uncle's. "There," long after he reminded Lady Hesketh, "was I and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed from morning to night in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law."

The house in Southampton Row (No. 30) in which Ashley Cowper lived, and in which Cowper and Thurlow giggled, is still standing. It is the ninth house from Southampton Court northward. There were other things, however, besides love of fun in which Thurlow and Cowper were at one. Both greatly admired Milton, and Cowper long after remembered "with how much energy and interest" Thurlow would repeat passages from "Paradise Lost." Thurlow, again, was of a benevolent disposition, and Cowper—the very milk of human kindness—could not but admire—to give only one instance, Thurlow's goodness to a certain Miss Christian, the daughter of a poor clergyman who had been a friend of Thurlow's father. The future Lord Chancellor set her up in business, and disbursed three hundred pounds, which he could ill afford, to furnish a shop for her. Says Cowper, "I went with him to the house, and having seen her, am ready to swear that his motives were not, nor could be, of the amorous kind, for she was ugly to a wonder."

By and by this frequenting of Southampton Row, this giggling and laughing with his pretty cousins, led to something more serious, for Cowper fell in love with Theodora; and henceforth we find him taking extrava-

gant pains with his dress, writing love-letters, and inditing poems of but little intrinsic merit, in which she is alluded to under the poetical name of Delia,

### 8. In Love with Theodora.

Cowper's Love Poems, nineteen in number, were, of course, not intended for publication, nor were they printed till twenty-five years after his death, when they appeared in a volume edited by Mr. James Croft, Theodora's nephew. Their titles (or first lines when without titles) are as follows :—

1. Of himself.
2. The Symptoms of Love.
3. An Apology. (Written at Catfield.)
4. Delia, the unkindest girl on earth. (Written at Catfield.)
5. An Attempt at the Manner of Waller. (Written at Drayton, March, 1753.)
6. The sparkling eye, the mantling cheek.
7. On the green margin of the brook.
8. Upon a venerable rival.
9. This evening, Delia, you and I. (Written at Catfield.)
10. Written in a Quarrel.
11. See where the Thames, the purest stream.
12. How blest the youth whom fate ordains.
13. On her endeavouring to Conceal her Grief at Parting.
14. Bid adieu, my sad heart, bid adieu to thy peace! (Written at Berkhamsted.)
15. Written after Leaving her at New Burns. (Written at Berkhamsted.)
16. R.S.S. (Whatever that may mean.)
17. Written in a Fit of Illness. R.S.S.
18. To Delia. (1755.)
19. Last Stanzas to Delia.

The first was written in 1752, probably while

Cowper was still at Mr. Chapman's; the last belongs most likely to the year 1756.

We get in the "Lines addressed to Miss Theodora Jane Cowper" a faithful portrait of Cowper himself at this period. That he "dressed a little smarter" we have already noticed, and now that he had lost his heart he began also to lose his bashfulness, with the result that he found himself more at ease in company.

"Nay, now and then could look quite gay,  
As other people do;  
And sometimes said, or tried to say,  
A witty thing or two."

This of course brought him into favour with the ladies, and

"At length improved from head to heel,  
'Twere scarce too much to say,  
No dancing beau was so genteel,  
Or half so *dégagé*."

Then comes the last verse:—

"Now that a miracle so strange  
May not in vain be shown,  
Let the dear maid who wrought the change  
E'en claim him for her own."

That the "dear maid" would have been willing enough to claim him—notwithstanding his shortcomings—there is little reason to doubt, but, as both parties very well knew, a third person had to be considered, with whose objections we shall deal further on; but meantime everything seemed *couleur de rose* for the lovers.

A seal-ring, with head of Omphale, which Cowper gave to his cousin, was exhibited at the Guelph Exhibition in 1891.

Three of the Love Poems, "An Apology," "Delia, the unkindest girl on earth," and "This evening, Delia, you and I," were written in 1752, at Catfield (his uncle Donne's), where Cowper was spending a holiday, the chief pleasures of which consisted in driving about in a *whiskum snivel* (as they nicknamed the old-fashioned gig with bow springs), and laughing with his merry cousins, the Miss Donnes. It is worth remembering, too, about this time he visited Mundesley (ten miles off)—the spot on the Norfolk coast destined to be forever associated with the painful story of the last few years of his life.

The village of Mundesley, which is now rapidly springing into a fashionable watering-place, was not only in Cowper's day, but even up to very recent times, regarded as a very out-of-the-way kind of place. People, however, who did visit Mundesley found it very charming, and returned to it again and again. At the present day, of course, owing to convenient train service, it is as accessible as any other spot on the coast. To the north-west rises Trimingham Beacon, the highest ground in Norfolk, from the summit of which innumerable churches may be descried; and the ruins of the Abbeys of Bacton and Bromholm, not far distant, would be of interest to many.

Writing a few years ago, Mr. Clement Scott says, "There is no bathing round the coast of England to be compared to the stretch of deserted virgin sand untraversed by any human foot between the busy



watering-places of Cromer and Mundesley," whilst other writers have been equally loud in their praises, not only of its "broad, firm sands smooth as a billiard-table," and its "bracing air blown direct and uninterruptedly from the North Sea," but also of its other attractive features—the gigantic cliffs, rugged and verdure-covered, rising aloft almost perpendicularly to the height of between 100 and 200 feet; the old-fashioned cottages of the village, "prettily situate," to quote Mr. Walter Rye, "huddled round the banks of an impetuous little river, which is distinctly visible to the naked eye after heavy rain"; its comfortable old inns, the "Royal," the "Old Ship," and the "Lifeboat"; and the tumbledown parish church on the cliffs—to which church, by-the-bye, people are called by a bell that in former days was made to ring by the primitive method of thrusting a wooden prop against its clapper.

One wonders whether it was not the old church of Mundesley Cowper had in his mind when he wrote his "Letter from Mr. Village to Mr. Town," that appeared in the *Connoisseur*. After speaking of the indifference of people in those days to keeping the fabric of their churches in repair, he says, "Sometimes, the foundation being too weak to support the steeple any longer, it has been found expedient to pull down that part of the building, and to hang the bells under a wooden shed on the ground beside it. This is the case in a parish in Norfolk, through which I lately passed, and where the clerk and the sexton, like the two figures of St. Dunstan's, serve the bells in the capacity of clappers, by striking them alternately with a hammer."



## CHAPTER IV.

### *“TWELVE MORE EQUALLY MISSPENT IN THE TEMPLE.”*

(1752-63.)

#### 9. The First Derangement.—1752.

**H**AVING concluded the term of his engagement with Mr. Chapman, Cowper in 1752, at the age of 21, settled himself as a regular student of law in chambers in the Middle Temple, at which he had been entered three years previously, before he left school (April 29, 1748).

“This,” says he (“Memoir”), “being a critical season of my life, and one upon which much depended, it pleased my all-merciful Father in Jesus Christ to give a check to my rash and ruinous career of wickedness at the very onset. I was struck, not long after my settlement in the Temple, with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair.”

In short, Cowper had been seized with what it is usual to call his First Derangement, though it must be remembered that he had several times previously given way, though for but very brief periods, to fits of despondency.

To imagine, as some have done, that the origin of this malady is to be sought in the grief felt by him when a child of six for the death of his mother, is simply ridiculous ; nor need we suppose that the ill-usage he received at his first school had anything to do with it. By the time he was 21 he would certainly have got over the death of his mother, and as regards the school, it is certain that his time there was succeeded at Westminster by some very happy years. The cause of it appears to me very plain. The poet himself assures us that a tendency to lowness of spirits was observable in his family, and the case of his brother John, to inquire no further, at once occurs to the mind. This constitutional despondency, in a man of Cowper's morbid temperament, coupled with the fact of his having had far too much time at his disposal, is quite sufficient to account for what happened.

By the rash and ruinous career of wickedness he meant perhaps no more than his practice of abstaining from attending places of worship and from private devotion.

As his malady increased he lost all relish for the various studies, including the classics that had so often afforded him pleasure. He needed, he says, something more salutary than amusement, but had no one to direct him where to find it. At length, however, there fell into his hands a copy of Herbert's poems, and in

them, "gothic and uncouth as they were," he found a strain of poetry which he could not but admire.

It was a happy thought to commemorate Cowper and George Herbert in one window in Westminster Abbey, as was done by Mr. Childs, of Philadelphia, some years ago. They stand side by side, Herbert in clerical costume, by his "church porch," and Cowper in his well-known cap and dressing-gown, under the shadow of Olney steeple.

The two poets have much in common, and it is pleasing to learn that "Holy George Herbert" afforded the latter poet so much pleasure, especially in so dark an hour. No other author then gave Cowper any delight, and he pored over the book all day long. "I found," he says, "not here what I might have found, a cure for my malady, yet it never seemed so much alleviated as while I was reading him." Then he goes on to say, "In this state of mind I continued near a twelvemonth, when, having experienced the inefficacy of all human means, I at length betook myself to God in prayer : such is the rank which our Redeemer holds in our esteem, never resorted to but in the last instance, when all creatures have failed to succour us. My hard heart was at length softened, and my stubborn knees brought to bow ; I composed a set of prayers and made frequent use of them. Weak as my faith was, the Almighty, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, was graciously pleased to hear me."

10. "Causidice mi" gives himself an air at Southampton.—1753.

A change of scene having been recommended for him, Cowper seized the opportunity to make a visit to Southampton, in company with Mr. Thomas Hesketh (eight years later Sir Thomas), the affianced lover of his cousin Harriet, now "a brilliant beauty," in the height of her charms, who "attracted all eyes on her at Ranelagh" and other places of public resort.

Whilst at Southampton, where he remained several months, the chief pleasures Cowper indulged in were, to use his own words, "a walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fireside." Whatever other amusements the place afforded had but little charm for him. Nevertheless he "gave himself an air" and "wore trousers," and not infrequently sailed on the Hampton river with Mr. Hesketh's party. But he had no liking for the sea except in the finest weather, and never sailed so far as Portsmouth without feeling the confinement irksome. Poor *Causidice mi* (Italian, "My counsel"), indeed—which appellation Mr. Hesketh conferred upon his Templar friend in jest—was as glad to escape from "the good sloop the *Harriet*" as Noah may be supposed to have been "when he was enlarged from the ark, or Jonah when he came out of the fish." Little, however, as he distinguished himself on, or even cared for, salt water, he was master of one accomplishment, which even many sailors are unable to boast of—he was not a bad swimmer.





*Jt. Hesketh.*

LADY HESKETH.

(By F. COTES, R.A., 1755.)



The change of scene had the desired effect. Seated one beautiful morning on an eminence overlooking an arm of the sea, he felt suddenly the weight of all his misery taken off. "My heart," he says, "became light and joyful in a moment; I could have wept with transport had I been alone." After having been in the lowest depths, he now rose to the greatest heights, and entered into the enjoyment of life with his whole thoroughness. Every charming spot in the neighbourhood had for him a new beauty. When in the company of his cousin Harriet in particular he was all animation and jollity. He used to wander with her in the fields at Freemantle and Bevis Mount. He would read with her and laugh with her till their "sides ached," at anything or nothing. As can be seen, his affection for this cousin, whose name and his will for ever be connected, was even at this period very strong. Some years later, in the third letter of his that has been preserved, he said to her, "So much as I love you, I wonder how the deuce it has happened I was never in love with you."

Part of his time was spent at Lymington, and once at least he crossed the border into Dorsetshire, in order to make the acquaintance of Weymouth and other pleasant spots in the county. In reference to Lymington he tells Newton (July 28, 1784), "I know that place well, having spent six weeks there above twenty years ago. The town is neat, and the country delightful. You walk well, and will consequently find a part of the coast called Hall Cliff within the reach of your ten toes. It was a favourite walk of mine; to the best of my remembrance, about three miles distance from Lymington. There you may stand upon the beach

and contemplate the Needle-rock ; at least you might have done so twenty years ago, but since that time I think it is fallen from its base and is drowned, and is no longer a visible object of contemplation."

To Samuel Rose, who in August, 1793, was visiting in this neighbourhood, the poet says, "I rejoice that you have had so pleasant an excursion, and have beheld so many beautiful scenes. Except the delightful Up-way I have seen them all. I have lived much at Southampton, have slept and caught a sore throat at Lyndhurst, and have swum in the Bay of Weymouth."

### 11. The Nonsense Club.

At Southampton, after his recovery, Cowper was all gratitude to the Almighty for so graciously accepting his prayers ; but the very first thing he did on returning to London was to take those prayers, which had been so carefully composed, so fervently repeated, so signally answered—and throw them on the fire. And what is more, he again gave himself up to a life of carelessness. Not that he made no professions of Christianity. On the contrary, when in the company of deists, and he heard the gospel blasphemed, he never failed to assert the truth of it with much vehemence of disputation, going once so far into a controversy of this kind as to assert that he would gladly submit to have his right hand cut off so that he might be enabled to live according to the gospel.

In respect to the study of the law he took no more pains than previously. As Southey says, "It is pro-

bable that he had as little intention as inclination to pursue it, resting in indolent reliance upon his patrimonial means, and in the likely expectation that some official appointment would be found for him in good time."

He was called to the bar on June 14, 1754.

It is now time that we should say something of the company into which, during much of the Temple period, Cowper was thrown—that we should deal with that famous coterie, the Nonsense Club, which consisted of seven Westminster men, all of them clever and witty, who met frequently for literary conversation, and dined together every Thursday. The members, besides Cowper, were Bonnell Thornton, Colman, Lloyd, Joseph Hill, Bensley, and (according to Dr. Memes) De Grey; and I shall now give a very brief account of each, first observing that Thurlow, friend as he was of Cowper, does not seem at any time to have belonged to the club.

BONNELL THORNTON, the son of an apothecary in Maiden Lane, London, was intended by his father for the medical profession. His first attempts as an author appeared in *The Student, or Oxford and Cambridge Monthly Miscellany*, a periodical printed at Oxford, of which Kit Smart was the principal conductor.

Thornton's next venture was a periodical work entitled, *Have at ye all, or the Drury Lane Journal*, in rivalry, it is said, of Fielding's *Covent Garden Journal*, and in January, 1754, he and Colman began the *Connoisseur*; the two friends, like their predecessors in literature, Beaumont and Fletcher, working together in such a way that it is impossible to allocate

the authorship of any of the portions written by them. To this periodical Cowper contributed the following papers, all written in the year 1756 :—

- No. 111. Billy Suckling.
- „ 115. Complaints of an Old Bachelor.
- „ 119. On Keeping a Secret.
- „ 134. Letter from Mr. Village.
- „ 138. On Conversation.

and also a “ Letter from an Owl to a Bird of Paradise.” In reference to No. 119 Cowper tells Unwin (April 6, 1780) : “ I once wrote a *Connoisseur* upon the subject of secret-keeping, and from that day to this I believe I have never divulged one.”

Thornton, who in the year 1754 took the degree of Bachelor of Physic, is also remembered as a translator of Plautus—“ as far as it goes one of the best versions in our language from any ancient author.” He died in 1768, at the age of 44.

GEORGE COLMAN (the elder), born at Florence in 1733, was an accomplished Latin and Greek scholar while at Westminster, and, at the time he commenced the *Connoisseur* with Thornton, was still an undergraduate at Christchurch. Colman also gained fame as the translator of Terence, but it is as a writer of comedies that he is best remembered, his principal production being “The Jealous Wife” (1761). We shall have to refer again to him towards the latter years of Cowper’s life, but it may as well here be remarked that he lived till 1794.

Few careers are more fitted to point a moral or adorn a tale than that of the hapless ROBERT LLOYD. Born

in London in 1733, he distinguished himself at Cambridge, but was irregular in his habits. One of the earliest of Cowper's existing poems is an Epistle addressed to Lloyd while he was an undergraduate (1754)—verses which are noteworthy chiefly on account of their containing the first intimation of the writer's morbid feelings—his reference to "The Fierce Banditti" :—

" That, with a black, infernal train,  
Make cruel inroads on my brain,  
And daily threaten to drive thence  
My little garrison of sense ;  
The fierce banditti which I mean  
Are gloomy thoughts, led on by spleen."

After completing his education Lloyd became an usher under his father—the Dr. Lloyd who at the same school had taught Cowper. Disgusted with the wearisome routine of this life, of which in his poems he speaks with great bitterness, the younger Lloyd attempted to earn a subsistence by his literary talents alone. Though a spirited writer, he had some misgivings before he ventured upon the perilous position of authorship ; nevertheless the success which his friends Thornton and Colman had obtained raised his hopes and increased his confidence.

Having made himself generally known by a poem called "The Actor," which was followed by two indifferent theatrical pieces, he published a volume of poems. But despite his industry, and though his talents were of no common order, he gradually sank lower and lower, till at length he became a mere literary drudge. His last undertaking was the editorship of the *St.*

*James's Magazine*, the first number of which appeared in September, 1762. Some of the papers in this periodical have been traced to Cowper, notably a "Dissertation on the Modern Ode" (April, 1763), signed with his initials, and also "A Perfect Ode," which had been promised in that paper, and which appeared in a subsequent number of the magazine—its opening lines being—

" Shall I begin with ah, or oh ?  
Be sad? Oh ! yes. Be glad? Ah ! no."

The magazine having failed, Lloyd was cast into prison for debt, but his friend Churchill, coming to his assistance, generously allowed him a guinea a week, and endeavoured, though unsuccessfully, to raise a subscription for the purpose of extricating him from his embarrassments. A short time after, however (November, 1764), Churchill died, and on being informed of the news, Lloyd, whose dissolute habits, though he was only 31, had made great havoc with his constitution, was seized with a sudden sickness, and saying, "I shall follow poor Charles," he took to his bed, from which he never rose again.

JOSEPH HILL, the life-long friend and correspondent of Cowper, will be referred to in this history over and over again. He was a man of playful talent as well as solid practical sense, being in fact far and away the best all-round man of the seven. That, like his more giddy associates, stolid Josephus, or Sephus, as Cowper called him, was not without a sense of humour, the letter of the latter, dated June 9, 1786, bears witness. "The noble institution," says Cowper, "of the Non-

sense Club will be forgotten when we are gone who composed it ; but I often think of your most heroic line, written at one of our meetings, and especially think of it when I am translating Homer :

“ To whom replied the Devil yard-long-tailed.”

There was never anything more truly Grecian than that triple epithet ; and were it possible to introduce it into either Iliad or Odyssey, I should certainly steal it.” Unlike that with other members of the club, Cowper’s friendship for Hill was deep-seated ; and no wonder, for even at this period the poet could see that Sephus was a sensible, practical man, whilst the others, with all their talents—and they had many—were only butterflies.

With Mr. Hill’s two sisters, Theodosia and Frances, Cowper was also acquainted. These ladies, who continued in single blessedness all their lives, had the honour of being sketched as the “ Modern Antiques ” in the delightful “ Our Village ” of Miss Mitford.

Of BENSLEY we know little, but Cowper refers thus at Huntingdon (in 1765) to the early deaths of both him and Lloyd : “ The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of the society, it will be their own fault.” In another letter he says, “ Two of my friends have been cut off during my illness, in the midst of such a life as it is frightful to reflect upon.”

The last of the seven, if indeed he was a member, WILLIAM DE GREY, was a connection of Cowper’s, having married, in 1743, Mary, daughter of William Cowper, of the Park, near Hertford. After having successively passed through the offices of Solicitor and

Attorney-General, he was advanced to the dignity of Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, and subsequently, in 1780, elevated to the Peerage by the title of Baron Walsingham. Cowper thus refers to him in a letter to Hill (August 10, 1780): "I recollect that we both pitied Mr. De Grey when we called at his cottage at Taplow, and found, not the master indeed, but his desk, with his white-leaved folio upon it, which bespoke him as much a man of business in his retirement as in Westminster Hall. But by these steps he ascended the bench. Now he may read what he pleases and ride where he will, if the gout will give him leave."

Such is a brief account of the various members of the Nonsense Club. But of these seven, four, Thornton, Lloyd, Bensley, and De Grey, presently drop out of Cowper's history, the first three, as we have seen, dying in early life; and with Colman even, Cowper was not destined to have much further connection.

The meetings of the Nonsense Club, besides fostering the wit and humour that exhibited itself in the various literary productions of its members, had also a good deal to do with several displays of practical drollery that at different times gave amusement to the town, the leading spirit in the fun generally being Thornton. Among the best remembered of these pieces of nonsense was Thornton's exhibition of sign-paintings, in Bow Street, Covent Garden, which was opened on the same day as, and in good-humoured ridicule of, the exhibition of pictures made by the Society for the Promoting of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce—an institution whose place has since been taken by the Royal



Academy. Thornton styled his show "An Exhibition by the Society of Sign-Painters of all the curious signs to be met with in town or country, together with such original designs as might be transmitted to them as specimens of the native genius of the nation," and most of the daubings had actually hung in irons. Among those who entered into the humour of the adventure was Hogarth, who gave a few touches in chalk where effect could be added by it—changing, for instance, in the portraits of the King of Prussia and the Empress Maria Theresa, the cast of their eyes, so as to make them leer significantly at each other. Other signs exhibited were the following: "A Man"—nine tailors at work; "The Spirit of Contradiction"—two brewers bearing a cask, the men going different ways; "A Man loaded with Mischief"—a fellow with a woman, a magpie, and a monkey on his back. Encouraged by the success of the Sign-post Exhibition, Thornton now wrote a mock Ode for St. Cecilia's Day, "adapted to the ancient British music of the salt-box, jew's harp, marrow bones and cleavers, and humdrum, or hurdy-gurdy;" and not only wrote it, but had it set to music, and actually performed at Ranelagh to a crowded audience—though it must be observed that the performers were excellent musicians, the cleavers had been cast in bell-metal for the occasion, and even the jew's harp, in the mouth of a specialist, was made to produce sweet tones. So the nonsense-mongers had their harmless jests, and the town was amused.

## 12. Charles Churchill.

Another of Cowper's London acquaintances, though not a member of the Nonsense Club, was his old school-fellow, the gifted but dissipated Charles Churchill, the poet, who was born in February, 1731, the same year that Cowper himself first saw light. After attending Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge, he made a clandestine marriage, which proved a very unhappy one, with a young lady of the name of Scott, in Westminster. In 1756 we find him curate at Rainham, under his father, the Rev. Charles Churchill, rector of that parish, who also held the curacy and lectureship of St. John's, Westminster. At the death of his father, in 1758, Churchill, who was in his 27th year, and whose conduct had been hitherto irreproachable, was appointed his successor in the curacy and lectureship. He now, however, renewed his intimacy with Lloyd and other school companions, and at once launched into a career of dissolution and extravagance. Moreover, his poetry having brought him into notice, and his excesses having been bruited abroad, he finally threw off the restraints of his order, and, as if to show contempt for it, appeared in a gold-laced waistcoat, a gold-laced hat, and ruffles. In a poetical epistle entitled "Night," addressed to Lloyd, he attempted a defence of their nocturnal orgies—a defence, however, which contained a mournful avowal that they met for the sake of drowning reflection, each seeking in the other's society a refuge from himself. Says Churchill :—

“ Let slaves to business, bodies without soul,  
Important blanks in Nature's mighty roll,  
Solemnize nonsense in the day's broad glare,  
We might prefer, which heals or hides our care.”

Churchill was big in build, brawny and broad-shouldered.

“ Vast were his bones, his muscles twisted strong ;  
His face was short, but broader than 'twas long ;  
His arms were two twin oaks ; his legs so stout  
That they might bear a mansion-house about ;  
Nor were they, look but at his body there,  
Designed by fate a much less weight to bear.”

The companionship of the profligate John Wilkes did nothing to improve him, and he became at length an avowed infidel. The “Rosciad” (published in 1761), which raised him to fame, was followed by “The Ghost,” “Gotham” (called by Cowper a noble and beautiful poem), “The Candidate,” and other poems. Separating from his wife, with whom he had long lived unhappily, he now formed a connection with a Miss Carr, the daughter of a Westminster tradesman. In October, 1764, having gone to France to pay a visit to his friend Wilkes, then in exile, he was seized at Boulogne with a fever, which proved fatal on the 4th of November, and he was buried at Dover. As Byron, standing fifty years later by his grave, said, he had blazed “the comet of a season,” for he was no sooner dead than people forgot him, and it need scarcely be remarked that very few now read Churchill. Cowper, who, be it observed, was never particularly intimate with him, had for the talents of “the great Churchill,” as he styles him, extreme admiration, ranking him, indeed,

higher than any contemporary author ; and when in after years he came to write poetry largely himself, it was Churchill, more than any other writer, that he made his model. Both poets were masters of satire, albeit that Cowper's was kindly while Churchill's was bitter and scornful, both lovers of liberty, and both lovers of their country ; and Cowper, as he was apt to do in respect to those whom he admired, overlooked Churchill's faults in eagerness to do justice to his talents. At the same time, though that need hardly be said, in habits as well as temper and disposition the two men were as opposite as the poles. Cowper, much as he admired Churchill's genius, never belonged to his set, and certainly never disgraced himself with being a companion in "the great Churchill's" dissipations.

It must, nevertheless, be admitted that among these wits and *littérateurs* Cowper led a rather thoughtless life, and he afterwards deplored that so much of his time had been spent "among men who used the most holy Name in the universe for no purpose or a bad one, contrary to His own express commandment, who passed the day, and the succeeding days, weeks, and months, and years, without one act of private devotion, one confession of their sins, or one thanksgiving for the numberless blessings they enjoyed ; who heard the Word of God in public with a distracted attention, or with none at all ; who absented themselves voluntarily from the Holy Sacrament, and lived in the total neglect of it"—in the company of men, in short, who lived "without God in the world." It must be remembered, however, that at the time Cowper wrote these words he was apt to forget that it is quite possible to live

“in the world” without being “of the world,” and that, as a matter of fact, during part of his life at the Temple he had himself certainly done so. Then, again, it is undeniable that his being acquainted with these same wits and *littérateurs* proved afterwards to be of the greatest advantage to him, for all the while, though unconsciously, he was acquiring a masterly command of language, and undergoing the best possible training for the literary work that was to render so memorable his latter years.

### 13. Death of the Poet's Father. July 9, 1756.

For some time Cowper's father had been ailing, owing to an attack of palsy, and at the beginning of July, 1756, he was struck a second time. Cowper hurriedly set out for Berkhamsted, but on the 9th, the day before his son's arrival, Dr. Cowper passed away. His age was 61. “Then, and not till then,” says the poet, “I felt for the first time that I and my native place were disunited for ever. I sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from which I once thought I should never be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more.”

Some of Cowper's biographers have assumed, because nothing to the contrary appears in his writings, that he was but little affected by his father's death, which, to say the least of it, is a most uncharitable conclusion. In one of his letters to Mrs. King he calls him “most

indulgent," and, as Southey remarks, "If he had not loved his father dearly, and found that home a happy home whenever he went to it, he would not have 'preferred it to a palace.'" Moreover, it should also be observed that we have none of Cowper's letters written at or near the time of his father's decease.

Dr. Cowper's second wife, Rebecca, who was a cripple, having broken her leg, late in life, by a fall, survived her husband six years, dying at Bath on July 31, 1762, aged 63, and was buried in Bath Abbey. The poet makes several allusions to her in his letters. To Hill (May 14, 1767) he says, "I shall possibly now often desire you to call at the seed shop, in your way to Westminster, though sparingly. Should I do it often, you would begin to think you had a mother-in-law at Berkhamsted"—an allusion, no doubt, to the numerous commissions Cowper was wont to execute for Mrs. Cowper when resident in the Temple. He also refers to her in his letters of May 30, 1789 (to Mrs. King), and April 19, 1790 (to Lady Hesketh).

Dr. Cowper died intestate. On August 3, 1756, Cowper, on the renunciation of the widow, took out letters of administration. Lady Hesketh says that Cowper got little, if anything, by his father's death.

Robert Pope, Dr. Cowper's gardener, who used to take the infant William to school, lived till 1767. His burial is recorded on the 18th of January of that year.

14. The Farewell to Theodora.  
Probably 1756.

Over four years had passed since Cowper first found himself agitated at the name of Theodora, and the knowledge that his love for her was returned had brought many happy hours to his life, but now that happiness was destined to be at an end. His friends had by this time discovered that he was what is usually known as a failure, the result being that Mr. Ashley Cowper set himself dead against the match. And who can blame him? for there was not the slightest likelihood that Cowper would ever be able to support a wife. When, however, confronted by her father the girl showed some spirit. "What will you do," asked the little man, "if you marry William Cowper?" "Wash all day," was the reply, "and ride on the great dog at night." However, it was of no avail. Attached as he was to his nephew, and despite his anxiety to promote the happiness of his daughter, the father felt bound to refuse consent. Though the objections were founded first on the near degree of relationship, it is certain that the greatest obstacle was the inadequacy of Cowper's fortune, and the improbability of his ever being able to better himself; nor could any entreaties induce a departure from the resolution. Both Theodora and her lover came at length to see that a union between them would, for a very long time at any rate, be out of all question, so they very sensibly bowed to fate, and agreed to separate. As the lines entitled "To the Same" convey, the lovers were at first greatly distressed ;

but Cowper treasured in his heart—for a time at any rate—her vows and her parting words:—

“ Yet ere we looked our last farewell,  
From her dear lips this comfort fell,  
‘ Fear not that time, where’er we rove,  
Or absence, shall abate my love.’ ”

There is little doubt that Theodora long looked back with regret at these broken hopes, for she never married, and, as we shall hereafter see, the poet in years to come received many proofs of her affection without being aware of even the name of the person to whom he was indebted.

At Westminster, and after he had left it, Cowper’s dearest friend was William Russell, since become Sir William, “ 8th Baronet of the Russells of Chippenham ; ” but unhappily young Russell, of whom little is known except that he held a commission in the Guards, was drowned while bathing in the Thames, 1757 ; and this occurrence, happening so soon after the defeat of his hopes with respect to Theodora, came to Cowper as a terrible blow. In some verses which form part of a letter to one of his female relations he says:—

“ Doomed as I am, in solitude to waste  
The present moments, and regret the past ;  
Deprived of every 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 snatched by fate in early youth away ;  
And her—thro’ tedious years of doubt and pain,  
Fixed in her choice, and faithful—but in vain ! ”



Subsequently, however, he took the matter, as regards the lady, more philosophically, the simple truth being that, what with the bodily, mental, and pecuniary troubles that presently forced themselves upon him, he forgot all about her, or at any rate thought of her no more than as his cousin Theodora.

### 15. In Love a Second Time.—The Greenwich Beauty.

Not only did Cowper allow Theodora to pass from his thoughts, but he fell in love with another young lady, with whose name we are not acquainted, but of whom he gives some account in the earliest of his letters yet discovered—an epistle written in Latin, dated August, 1758, and addressed to his “delightfully funny friend” (*Deliciae et Lepores mei*) and fellow Templar, Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, “one of the most benevolent and friendly creatures in the world,” who was then on circuit in Ireland. “I lately passed,” he says, “three days in Greenwich, a blessed three days; and if they had been three years I should not have envied the gods their immortality. There I found that lovely and beloved little girl, of whom I have often talked to you; she is at that age, sixteen, at which every day brings with it some new beauty to her form. No one can be more modest, nor (what seems wonderful in a woman) more silent; but when she speaks you might believe that a muse was speaking. Woe is me that so bright a star looks to another region, having risen in the West Indies; thither it is

about to return, and will leave me nothing but sighs and tears.”

That Cowper's attachment to this young lady had gone to very great length is unlikely, but the fact that he should have fallen in love at all a second time proves that he had quite got over his disappointment in respect to Theodora; and the probability is that in the second instance as well as the first he found relief from his troubles in the pleasures of literature.

It may be noted, however, that from this time, with one single exception, Cowper never touched upon the subject of Love, that exception being lines 219-278 in the poem called “Retirement,” and, as might be expected, he writes not without bitterness. In abstaining from allusion to Love, Cowper stands almost alone among poets.

It may be noted that the Latin letter referred to is by no means a model of composition. A critic in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, June, 1836, observes: “We should have expected better Latinity from the pupil of Vincent Bourne.” Cowper, however, though an excellent Greek scholar, never distinguished himself in Latin. (See § 55.)

## 16. Literary and other Amusements.

As we have seen, Cowper often rambled, to use his own words, “from the thorny road of his austere patroness Jurisprudence into the primrose paths of literature and poetry.” His contributions to the *Connoisseur* and the *St. James's Magazine*, and his Love:

Poems, we have already noticed. Among his other productions were "An Ode on reading Richardson's 'History of Sir Charles Grandison,'" which was published in 1753 (with Richardson Cowper was personally acquainted); two satires from Horace, printed in Duncombe's Horace in 1757, and lines "Addressed to Miss Macarteny" on reading her "Prayer for Indifference," which appeared in the "Annual Register" for 1762. The Duncombes, father and son, were of Hertfordshire; the elder was an intimate friend of Cowper's father, and the younger, about the same age as Cowper's brother John, was connected with Benet College, Cambridge. As one of his early associates told Hayley, Cowper at this time frequently amused himself in translation from ancient and modern poets, and devoted his composition to the service of any friend who requested it. For his brother John, who was engaged on a translation of that poem, he did into English a couple of Cantos of Voltaire's "Henriade."

We also learn that between Cowper and his brother was conducted a rhyming correspondence, which for some time was all in Cowper's possession; but, with the exception of a few lines, it all perished "in the wreck of a thousand other things" when he left the Temple. (Letter to Hesketh, August 9, 1788.)

Perhaps during the whole of the period at the Temple there was only one pursuit in which he was really diligent, and that was the study of the classics, a study that throughout the whole of his life gave him as much pleasure as any other thing. He had read through the Iliad and Odyssey at Westminster with Sutton,

afterwards Sir Richard, and went through them again in the Temple with a friend—"a slothful and forgetful fellow," but withal "a person of fine classic taste"—named Alston, comparing Pope's translation throughout with the original. They were not long in discovering "that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute as a taste for Homer;" nevertheless they persevered in the comparison, though disgusted at finding, "when they looked for the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representation, puerile conceits instead, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position." So disgusted, indeed, were they with it that they were half disposed to treat it as they had lately done another book that had displeased them—"The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfitchet, Esq."—and pitch it on the fire.

It was the recollection of these studies that caused Cowper in after years to commence a translation of Homer himself; and in 1788, reminding Rowley, a friend of Alston as well as of himself, of these old times, he says, "We are strange creatures, my little friend; everything that we do is really important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin: consequences follow that were never dreamt of." In these days, too, Cowper likewise made himself intimately acquainted with Shakspeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Kit Marlow, Swift, Dryden, Mat Prior, and other head-and-shoulder men of our literature; but Homer and Milton always had the first place in his affections.

Cowper, however, had numerous ways of spending his time besides writing poetry and studying the *belles*

*lettres*. Like other gilded youth of those days, he was often to be seen among the pleasure-loving throngs that visited Vauxhall and its rival Marylebone Gardens. To the last he thus alludes in the aforementioned Latin epistle: "A few days ago I set off for Marylebone Gardens (*ad Hortos Bonæ Mariæ*), the delights of which place it is impossible to do justice to. Theatrical plays have been organized, which they perform there in the Italian fashion, only in our language. The portions styled recitatives are absurd beyond measure, but the songs are most sweet. There is this one thing, however, to be feared, namely, that sitting in the open air you may catch a cold if not a fever." His excursions into the country were not infrequent, some of his poems, as we have seen, being dated Catfield and Drayton, and he sometimes also found himself at Taplow and Hertford. The rage for frequenting seaside spots, too, had now developed itself, and instead of flocking to Bristol, Bath, and Tunbridge Wells, people were beginning to take to Margate and Brighton, or, as it was then called, Brighthelmston, Cowper, of course, as he belonged to the *beau monde*, following the popular custom, though subsequently, in his poem called "Retirement," he took upon himself to satirise it:—

" But now alike, gay widow, virgin, wife,  
 Ingenious to diversify dull life,  
 In coaches, chaises, caravans, and hoys,  
 Fly to the coast for daily, nightly joys,  
 And all, impatient of dry land, agree  
 With one consent to rush into the sea."

To his visits to Brighton and neighbourhood, one of which took place in September, 1762, Cowper refers

in a letter to Bull ("Memoirs of Bull," p. 126). "I am acquainted," he says, "with Rottingdean and all its charms—the downs, the cliff, and the agreeable opportunities of sauntering that the seaside affords." He found Brighton "a scene of idleness and luxury, music, dancing, cards, walking, riding, bathing, eating, drinking, coffee, tea, scandal, dressing, yawning, sleeping"—at least, this was his recollection of it twenty years after.

It may seem strange to picture Cowper as a sportsman, yet at this period of his life he certainly had no aversion to occasionally playing that *rôle*; though, during the time he was in love, if at no other, he made but a poor hand at the business. In "The Symptoms of Love" he says:—

"Let her guess what I muse on, when, rambling alone,  
I stride o'er the stubble each day with my gun,  
Never ready to shoot till the covey is flown."

His chambers in the Temple looked "into Pump Court, in which there are lime trees, and where the sound of water, though passing only into pails and pitchers, is rather agreeable" (Letter, June 20, 1789); and we learn that he used every year to purchase myrtles for them in Covent Garden; on the familiar objects of the neighbourhood he afterwards drew for his poetry, as when, in "Table Talk," he compared the creamy smoothness common with the poetasters of the time to that sight of old London, the figures at St. Dunstan's:—

“When labour and when dulness, club in hand,  
Like the two figures at St. Dunstan’s stand,  
Beating alternately, in measured time,  
The clockwork tintinnabulum of rhyme.”

“The dial of the clock,” says Northouck, in his “History of London” (1773), “projects over the street at the extremity of a beam; and over it, by a kind of whimsical conceit, is an Ionic porch, containing the figures of two savages, carved and painted, as big as life, which with knotted clubs alternately strike the hours and quarters on two bells hung between them.”

In T. Thorpe’s Catalogue of MSS., 1844, Art. 79, appears the following entry: “Common Place Book of William Cowper the poet, in his autograph 4to in the original wrapper 1757. Evidently compiled while studying the law.” I do not know what has since become of it, but Mr. Bruce, who had apparently perused it, says that it was “devoted to legal subjects, the greater part of the volume consisting of a treatise entitled ‘An Institute relative to trials at Nisi Prius, in seven parts.’” As Mr. Bruce observes, this volume is “the only known evidence of Cowper’s having given himself to any legal studies.”

### 17. Cowper at the Inner Temple.

In 1759 Cowper removed to the Inner Temple, having bought chambers there for £250. The little money he had was now fast diminishing, and though he speaks lightly of his circumstances to his friends,

it is evident that his jesting manner was but the accompaniment of a very anxious heart. During the first few years the profession of a barrister is rarely lucrative, and the case of Cowper was no exception to the general rule. It is doubtful even whether he ever had a brief. *Vide* letter to Hill, dated October 10, 1767, in which, after asking a law question, he observes: "You are a better councillor than I was, but I think you have much such a client in me as I had in Dick Harcourt." About this time, however, through family influence, he was made a Commissioner of Bankrupts, which brought him in £60 a year.

"Being the son of a staunch Whig, and a man that loved his country," he tells us that his soul was frequently wont to glow "with that patriotic enthusiasm which is apt to break forth into poetry," and the time being prolific in stirring incidents, Cowper, who founded his style on that of Rowe and Congreve, had plenty of subjects for his pen. But these productions, whether political songs, odes, or the halfpenny ballads he speaks of, "two or three of which had the honour to be popular," have all perished, though we may guess their burden by the letter written to Mr. Hill on January 3, 1782, in which he reminds his friend of "those happier days," when they spent their evenings together and talked over the great victories that Englishmen were winning on land and sea. "When poor Bob White," says he, "brought in the news of Boscawen's success off the coast of Portugal, how I did leap for joy! When Hawke demolished Confans I was still more transported. But nothing could express my rapture when Wolfe made the



conquest of Quebec." It may be noted that the date of Boscawen's victory was August 18, 1759, of Hawke's defeat of Admiral Conflans at Quiberon Bay, November 20, 1759, and of Wolfe's success, September 18, 1760.

With his brother John, who was about this time curate to the Rev. Mr. Fawkes, of Orpington, in Kent, Cowper continued to keep up a correspondence. John, however, did not confine himself to letters. "One morning," says Cowper, "as I was reading by the fireside, I heard a prodigious lumbering at the door. I opened it, and beheld a most rural figure, with very dirty boots, and a great-coat as dirty. Supposing that my great fame as a barrister had drawn unto me a client from some remote region, I desired him to walk in. He did so, and introduced himself to my acquaintance by telling me that he was the farmer with whom my brother lodged at Orpington. After this preliminary information he unbuttoned his great-coat, and I observed a quantity of long feathers projected from an inside pocket. He thrust in his hand, and with great difficulty extracted a great fat capon. He then proceeded to lighten the other side of him by dragging out just such another, and begged my acceptance of both. I sent them to a tavern, where they were both dressed, and I, with two or three friends whom I invited to the feast, found them incomparably better than any fowls that we had ever tasted from the London coops."

## 18. Cowper's Poverty.

Cowper's circumstances now got worse and worse, and he began to feel exceedingly uncomfortable on account of his worldly prospects. However, he buoyed himself up with the hope that he should always have clean linen, and in a half heroic, half despondent spirit, wrote as follows (September 2, 1762) to his friend, Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, of Tendring Hall, near Stoke-by-Nayland: "My resolution is (and I would advise you to adopt it) never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits. God knows how long that will be; but, in the meantime, *Io Triumphe!* If a great man struggling with misfortunes is a noble object, a little man that despises them is no contemptible one, and this is all the philosophy I have in the world at present. It savours pretty much of the ancient Stoic; but, till the Stoics became coxcombs, they were, in my opinion, a very sensible sect.

"If my resolution to be a great man was half so strong as it is to despise the shame of being a little one, I should not despair of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with all its appurtenances, for there is nothing more certain, and I could prove it by a thousand instances, than that every man may be rich if he will. What is the industry of half the industrious men in the world but avarice? and call it by which name you will, it almost always succeeds. But this provokes me, that a covetous dog who will work by candle-light in a morning, to get what he does not want, shall be

praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants rather than work like an ass to relieve them.

“ There are some sensible folks who, having great estates, have wisdom enough too to spend them properly ; there are others who are not less wise, perhaps, as knowing how to shift without 'em. Upon the whole, my dear Rowley, there is a degree of poverty that has no disgrace belonging to it ; that degree of it, I mean, in which a man enjoys clean linen and good company ; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I never rise above it. This is a strange epistle, nor can I imagine how the devil I came to write it, but here it is such as it is, and much good may do you with it. I have no estate, as it happens, so if it should fall into bad hands I shall be in no danger of a commission of lunacy.”

Despite philosophy and forced hilarity, however, his lessening means gave him perpetual uneasiness ; yet, with his usual paradoxicalness, he applied himself no more diligently to the law than he had done before.

His old fellow-student, on the other hand, had taken an entirely different course, for, possessed of a fine constitution and invincible strength of purpose, Edward Thurlow had applied himself with diligence and determination to the business of life, with the result that people already, and Cowper among them, prophesied great things of him. One evening, as the two friends were drinking tea together at a lady's house in Bloomsbury, Cowper, contrasting in melancholy foresight his own conduct and consequent prospects with those of his fellow-idler in former days, said to him, “ Thurlow,

I am nobody, and shall always be nobody, and you will be Chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are!" He smiled, and replied, "I surely will." "These ladies," said Cowper, "are witnesses!" The future Chancellor still smiled, and answered, "Let them be so, for I will certainly do it." Cowper's prophecy was fulfilled, but Thurlow's promise, whether through forgetfulness or inability, never came to anything.

### 19. The House of Lords Affair, 1763.

In 1763 the Clerk of the Journals of the House of Lords died, and about the same time the offices of Reading Clerk and Clerk of Committees were resigned. All three were patent offices in the patronage of Cowper's kinsman, Major Cowper, of Hertingfordbury, who immediately, fulfilling the expectations which had always been entertained of him, offered the two last, which were the most lucrative, to his cousin. Dazzled by so splendid a proposal, Cowper accepted the offer; but no sooner had he done so, than his inveterate diffidence induced a dread of a position to which the publicity from which he shrank was of necessity attached. Yet he had always looked forward to the succession to these offices, and had even remarked lightly that he should be glad when the holder of them was dead, that he might step into the vacant place. But now these words returned to his horrified conscience as having been uttered "in the spirit of a murderer." After much mental conflict, he begged Major Cowper to let him exchange these more profit-

able posts for the Clerkship of the Journals, the duties of which were performed in private, and, greatly as it was against the grain, the Major at length consented. The place to which Cowper had been appointed was given to a Mr. Arnold, and Cowper himself received the clerkship. But now a fresh difficulty arose. Objections were raised to the Major's right of presentation, a powerful party having been formed in the Lords to thwart it in favour of an old enemy of the family, and an order was issued that the Major's nominee should be examined at the bar of the House as to his qualifications for the post. What the consequences were had better be told in the words of Cowper himself. "Being necessarily ignorant," says he, "of the nature of that business, it became expedient that I should visit the office daily, in order to qualify myself for the strictest scrutiny. All the horror of my fears and perplexities now returned. A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence. I knew to demonstration that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for me. To require my attendance at the bar of the House, that I might there publicly entitle myself to the office, was, in effect, to exclude me from it. In the meantime, the interest of my friend, the honour of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward, all pressed me to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison, may have some idea of the situation; others can have none.

"My continued misery at length brought on a

nervous fever ; quiet forsook me by day, peace by night ; a finger raised against me was more than I could stand against. In this posture of mind I attended regularly at the office, where, instead of a soul upon the rack, the most active spirits were essentially necessary for my purpose. I expected no assistance from anybody there, all the inferior clerks being under the influence of my opponent, and accordingly I received none. The journal books were indeed thrown open to me, a thing which could not be refused, and from which, perhaps, a man in health, and with a head turned to business, might have gained all the information he wanted, but it was not so with me. I read without perception, and was so distressed that, had every clerk in the office been my friend, it could have availed me little, for I was not in a condition to receive instruction, much less to elicit it out of manuscripts without direction. Many months went over me thus employed, constant in the use of means, despairing as to the issue.

“ The feelings of a man when he arrives at the place of execution are probably much like mine every time I set my foot in the office, which was every day for more than half a year together.”

A letter which he wrote to his cousin Harriet (now the wife of Sir Thomas Hesketh) on the 9th of August, 1763, is of more than ordinary interest. “ I have a pleasure,” he says, “ in writing to you at any time, but especially at the present, when my days are spent in reading the Journals, and my nights in dreaming of them, an employment not very agreeable to a head that has long been habituated to the luxury of choosing

its subject, and has been as little employed upon business as if it had grown upon the shoulders of a much wealthier gentleman. . . . Oh, my good cousin! if I was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights. . . . I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool, but I have more weaknesses than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world as I am unfit for this, and God forbid I should speak it in vanity, I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom."

But now came a brief respite from all the turmoil, for when we next hear of Cowper he is spending a few weeks' furlough at Margate, in accordance with the advice of his physician and friend, the gifted Dr. William Heberden, author of the Latin work, "De Curatione Morborum." To this amiable and admirable man Cowper pays a tribute in the poem called "Retirement," the opening lines of which refer to his own case:—

"Virtuous and faithful Heberden, whose skill  
Attempts no task it cannot well fulfil,  
Gives melancholy up to nature's care,  
And sends the patient into purer air."

## 20. At Margate.—August and September, 1763.

As at Southampton ten years previously, the change of scene, together with other advantages, began to work an alteration in him for the better. To quote the

Memoir, "There, by the help of cheerful company, a new scene, and the intermission of my painful employment, I presently began to recover my spirits; though even here, for some time after my arrival (notwithstanding, perhaps, that the preceding day had been spent agreeably, and without any disturbing recollection of my circumstances), my first reflections, when I awoke in the morning, were horrible and full of wretchedness. I looked forward to the approaching winter, and regretted the flight of every moment which brought it nearer; like a man borne away by a rapid torrent into a stormy sea, whence he sees no possibility of returning, where he knows he cannot submit."

Many years after, when his friends Unwin and Newton at different times visited Margate, he calls up his own recollections of the place. To Unwin (July, 1779) he says: "When I was at Margate it was an excursion of pleasure to go to see Ramsgate. The pier, I remember, was accounted a most excellent piece of stone-work, and such I found it. By this time I suppose it is finished. . . . There was not at that time much to be seen in the Isle of Thanet, besides the beauty of the country and the fine prospects of the sea, which are nowhere surpassed, except in the Isle of Wight, or upon some parts of the coast of Hampshire. One sight, however, I remember engaged my curiosity, and I went to see it—a fine piece of ruins, built by the late Lord Holland at a great expense, which, the day after I saw it, tumbled down for nothing. Perhaps, therefore, it is still a ruin; and if it is, I would advise you by all means to visit it, as it must have been much improved by this fortunate accident. It is hardly pos-



sible to put stones together with that air of wild and magnificent disorder which they are sure to acquire by falling of their own accord.

“I remember (the last thing I mean to remember upon this occasion) that Sam Cox, the counsel, walking by the seaside, as if absorbed in deep contemplation, was questioned about what he was musing on. He replied, ‘I was wondering that such an almost infinite and unwieldy element should produce *a sprat.*’ ”

In one of his walks along the strand Cowper experienced a rather unpleasant adventure at a spot where “the cliff is high and perpendicular.” “At long intervals there are cart-ways, cut through the rock down to the beach, and there is no other way of access to it, or of return from it. I walked near a mile upon the water edge, without observing that the tide was rising fast upon me. When I *did* observe it, it was almost too late. I ran every step back again, and had much ado to save my distance.”

This visit to Margate and vicinity is thus referred to in the “Lines to the Rev. Mr. Newton on his return from Ramsgate” (October, 1780). Cowper says :—

“That ocean you have late surveyed,  
Those rocks I too have seen ;  
But I afflicted and dismayed,  
You tranquil and serene.

You from the flood-controlling steep  
Saw stretched before your view,  
With conscious joy, the threatening deep,  
No longer such to you.

To me the waves, that ceaseless broke  
Upon the dangerous coast,  
Hoarsely and ominously spoke  
Of all my treasure lost.

Your sea of troubles you have past,  
And found the peaceful shores;  
I, tempest-tossed, and wrecked at last,  
Come home to port no more."

Cowper left Margate at the beginning of October.

## 21. The Second Derangement:

Cowper's friends had hoped that his appearance in person might not be required in Parliament after all, but it soon became evident that such hopes were destined to be blighted.

"Again," says Cowper, "I feel myself pressed by necessity on either side, with nothing but despair in prospect. To this dilemma was I reduced, either to keep possession of the office to the last extremity, and by so doing expose myself to a public rejection for insufficiency (for the little knowledge I had acquired would have quite forsaken me at the bar of the House), or else to fling it up at once, and by this means to run the hazard of ruining my benefactor's right of appointment, by bringing his discretion into question. In this situation such a fit of passion has sometimes seized me when alone in my chambers, that I have cried out aloud, and cursed the hour of my birth; lifting up my eyes to heaven at the same time, not as a suppliant, but in the hellish spirit of rancorous reproach and blasphemy against my Maker. A thought would sometimes come across my mind that my sins had perhaps brought this distress upon me, that the hand of Divine vengeance was in it; but in the pride of my heart I presently acquitted myself, and thereby implicitly charged God

with injustice, saying, 'What sins have I committed to deserve this?'

"I saw plainly that God alone could deliver me, but was firmly persuaded that He would not, and therefore omitted to ask it. Indeed at His hands I would not, but as Saul sought to the witch, so did I to the physician, Dr. Heberden, and was as diligent in the use of drugs as if they would have healed my wounded spirit, or have made the rough places plain before me."

Cowper made, indeed, one effort of a devotional kind, using a prayer which he found in that well-known anonymous work, "The Whole Duty of Man," but soon laid the volume aside, and with it all thoughts of God and hopes of a remedy.

"I now," says he, "began to look upon madness as the only chance remaining. I had a strong foreboding that so it would fare with me, and I wished for it earnestly, and looked forward to it with impatient expectation !

"My chief fear was that my senses would not fail me time enough to excuse my appearance at the bar of the House of Lords, which was the only purpose I wanted it to answer."

As the day drew near he was still, as he had dreaded, in his senses, and then there entered into his mind the terrible suggestion that he should destroy himself. He grew more sullen and reserved, fled from society, even from his most intimate friends, and shut himself up in his chambers. He wished ardently for death, and found himself but little shocked at the idea of procuring it by his own hands. To continue in his own words, "Perhaps," thought I, "there is no God, or if there

be, the Scriptures may be false ; if so, then God has nowhere forbidden suicide. I considered life as my property, and therefore at my own disposal. But above all I was persuaded to believe, that if the act was ever so unlawful, and even supposing Christianity to be true, my misery in hell itself would be more supportable."

He then recollected the incident which we have already referred to, of his father putting into his hands for criticism, when he was a young boy, a treatise written in vindication of self-murder ; and argued because his father heard his reasons and was silent, neither approving nor disapproving that he had sided with the author, "and the circumstance," says Cowper, "now weighed mightily with me." It may be observed that in a healthier state of mind Cowper gauged with probable correctness his father's real reason for this at any rate indiscreet action.

Conversations with two persons, one at a chop-house and another at a tavern, also strengthened his determination, for each gave it as his opinion that a man had liberty to die as he saw convenient, and that it was only cowardice that prevented people in deep trouble from making away with themselves.

## 22. Laudanum and the River.—November, 1763.

Cowper's mind being made up, nothing remained but to put his intention into execution, and one evening, as soon as it was dark, affecting as cheerful and unconcerned an air as possible, he went into an apothecary's

shop, and asked for half an ounce of laudanum. "The man," says Cowper, "seemed to observe me narrowly ; but if he did I managed my voice and countenance so as to deceive him. The day that required my attendance at the bar of the House being not yet come, and about a week distant, I kept my bottle close in my side-pocket, resolved to use it when I should be convinced that there was no other way of escaping. This, indeed, seemed evident already ; but I was willing to allow myself every possible chance of that sort, and to protract the horrid execution of my purpose till the last moment."

The day before the dreadful ordeal, while breakfasting at Richard's coffee-house, he picked up a newspaper, and curiously enough caught sight of a letter which not only dealt in a laudatory manner with the subject of self-destruction, but which seemed to point directly to himself. He imagined, indeed, such was the disordered state of his mind, that the author was acquainted with his purpose, and had written that letter in order to secure and hasten the execution of it. Thereupon, with the cry, "Your cruelty shall be gratified ; you shall have your revenge !" he flung down the paper and rushed out of the room, directing his way towards the fields, with the determination to poison himself either in some solitary house or in a ditch.

Before he had walked a mile a thought struck him that he might yet spare his life ; that he had nothing to do but to sell what he had in the funds (which might be done in an hour), go on board a ship, and transport himself to France. There, when every other way of maintenance should fail, he promised himself a comfort-

able asylum in some monastery—an acquisition, he remembered, which would only involve changing his religion. Not a little pleased with this expedient, he returned to his chambers to pack up all his belongings ; but while thus engaged his mind changed again, and once more he resolved on self-murder.

Not knowing where to poison himself—for he was liable to continual interruption in his chambers—he laid aside that intention, and resolved upon drowning. Consequently he at once took a coach, and ordered the man to drive to Tower Wharf, intending to throw himself into the river from the Custom House quay.

He left the coach upon the wharf, but on arriving at the quay found the water low, and a porter seated upon some goods there, as if on purpose to prevent him.

“ This passage to the bottomless pit,” he says, “ being mercifully shut against me, I returned back to the coach, and ordered it to return to the Temple. I drew up the shutters, once more had recourse to the laudanum, and determined to drink it off directly ; but God had otherwise ordained. A conflict, that shook me to pieces, suddenly took place ; not properly a trembling, but a convulsive agitation, which deprived me in a manner of the use of my limbs, and my mind was as much shaken as my body.

“ Distracted between the desire of death and the dread of it, twenty times I had the phial to my mouth, and as often received an irresistible check ; and even at the time it seemed to me that an invisible hand swayed the bottle downwards as often as I set it against my lips. I well remember that I took note of this circumstance with some surprise, though it effected no change in my

purpose. Panting for breath and in an horrible agony, I flung myself back into the corner of the coach. A few drops of laudanum which had touched my lips, besides the fumes of it, began to have a stupefying effect upon me. Regretting the loss of so fair an opportunity, yet utterly unable to avail myself of it, I determined not to live; and already half dead with anguish, I once more returned to the Temple. Instantly I repaired to my room, and, having shut both the outer and inner door, prepared myself for the last scene of the tragedy. I poured the laudanum into a small basin, set it on a chair by the bedside, half undressed myself, and lay down between the blankets, shuddering with horror at what I was about to perpetrate. I reproached myself bitterly with folly and rank cowardice for having suffered the fear of death to influence me as it had done, and was filled with disdain at my own pitiful timidity; but still something seemed to overrule me, and to say, 'Think what you are doing! Consider, and live.'

"At length, however, with the most confirmed resolution, I reached forth my hand to the basin, when the fingers of both hands were as closely contracted as if bound with a cord, and became entirely useless. Still, indeed, I could have made shift with both hands, dead and lifeless as they were, to have raised the basin to my mouth, for my arms were not at all affected; but this new difficulty struck me with wonder; it had the air of a Divine interposition. I lay down in bed again to muse upon it, and while thus employed, heard the key turn in the outer door, and my laundress's husband came in."

Starting up, Cowper hastily dressed himself, hid the

basin, and affected as composed an air as he could. Moreover, the interruption had such an effect upon him, and the horror of the crime at the same time exhibited itself in so strong a light, that, seized with furious indignation, he snatched up the basin, and flung the laudanum out of the window.

### 23. On the Brink of Eternity.

The rest of that day he spent in a kind of "stupid insensibility," undetermined as to the manner of dying, but still bent on self-murder as the only possible deliverance. "I went to bed," he continues, "to take, as I thought, my last sleep in this world. The next morning was to place me at the bar of the House, and I determined not to see it. I slept as usual, and woke about three o'clock. Immediately I arose, and by the help of a rushlight found my penknife, took it into bed with me, and lay with it for some hours directly pointed against my heart. Twice or thrice I placed it upright under my left breast, leaning all my weight upon it, but the point was broken off square, and it would not penetrate.

"In this manner the time passed till the day began to break. I heard the clock strike seven, and instantly it occurred to me that there was no time to be lost, the chambers would soon be opened, and my friend would call upon me to take me with him to Westminster. 'Now is the time,' thought I; 'this is the crisis, no more dallying with the love of life!' I arose, and, as I thought, bolted the inner door of my chambers, but



was mistaken, my touch deceived me, and I left it as I found it.

“Not one hesitating thought now remained, but I fell greedily to the execution of my purpose. My garter was made of a broad piece of scarlet binding, with a sliding buckle, being sewn together at the ends; by the help of the buckle I formed a noose, and fixed it about my neck, straining it so tight that I hardly left a passage for my breath, or for the blood to circulate; the tongue of the buckle held it fast. At each corner of the bed was placed a wreath of carved work, fastened by an iron pin, which passed up through the midst of it, the other part of the garter which made a loop I slipped over one of these and hung by it some seconds, drawing up my feet under me, that they might not touch the floor, but the iron bent, and the carved work slipped off, and the garter with it. I then fastened it to the frame of the tester, winding it round and tying it in a strong knot. The frame broke short and let me down again.

“The third effort was more likely to succeed. I set the door open, which reached within a foot of the ceiling; by the help of a chair I could command the top of it, and the loop being large enough to admit a large angle of the door, was easily fixed so as not to slip off again. I pushed away the chair with my feet, and hung at my whole length. While I hung there I distinctly heard a voice say three times, ‘Tis over!’ Though I am sure of the fact, and was so at the time, yet it did not at all alarm me, or affect my resolution. I hung so long that I lost all sense, all consciousness of existence.

“When I came to myself again I thought myself in hell ; the sound of my own dreadful groans was all that I heard, and a feeling like that produced by a flash of lightning, just beginning to seize upon me, passed over my whole body. In a few seconds I found myself fallen on my face to the floor. In about half a minute I recovered my feet, and, reeling and staggering, stumbled into bed again.

“By the blessed providence of God the garter which had held me till the bitterness of temporal death was past, broke just before eternal death had taken place upon me. The stagnation of the blood under one eye, in a broad crimson spot, and a red circle round my neck, showed plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity. The latter, indeed, might have been occasioned by the pressure of the garter, but the former was certainly the effect of strangulation, for it was not attended with the sensation of a bruise, as it must have been, had I in my fall received one in so tender a part. And I rather think the circle round my neck was owing to the same cause, for the part was not excoriated, nor at all in pain.”

Hearing him fall, his laundress came presently to inquire whether he was well, adding she feared he had been in a fit.

“I sent,” continues Cowper, “to a friend, to whom I related the whole affair, and dispatched him to my kinsman at the coffee-house. As soon as the latter arrived I pointed to the broken garter, which lay in the middle of the room, and apprised him also of the attempt I had been making. His words were, ‘My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me ! To be sure you

cannot hold the office at this rate : where is the deputation ?' I gave him the key of the drawer where it was deposited, and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took it away with him ; and thus ended all my connection with the Parliament Office."

A new scene now opened upon him. Conviction of sin took place, and the sin just committed was exhibited to him in colours so inconceivably strong, that he despised himself, with a contempt not to be imagined or expressed. A sense of God's wrath, and a deep despair of escaping it, instantly succeeded, and the fear of death now became more prevalent in him than the desire of it had been before.

He next wrote to his brother at Cambridge, informing him of what had taken place, but adding the assurance that all his horrible intentions had been permanently laid aside.

The Rev. John Cowper had for nine years been a member of Benet, or, as it is now termed, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, having been admitted to the University in 1754. In 1759 he obtained the Chancellor's gold medal, in 1762 gained both prizes for Master of Arts, in 1763 was elected Fellow of his college. To use his own words, he had been highly applauded, he had been flattered up to the height of his wishes. His brother said of him : "He placed his chief delight in the acquisition of learning, and made such proficiency in it, that he had but few rivals in that of a classical kind." He was critically skilled in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and a perfect master of French and Italian. Being a man of a most candid and ingenuous spirit, and possessing a remarkably sweet

temper, he was endeared to all who knew him, and in his behaviour to his brother had always manifested an uncommon affection. In "Task," bk. ii. Cowper says :—

" I had a brother once :  
Peace to the memory of a man of worth !  
A man of letters, and of manners too !  
Of manners sweet as virtue always wears  
When gay good-humour dresses her in smiles !  
He graced a college, in which order yet  
Was sacred, and was honoured, loved, and wept  
By more than one, themselves conspicuous there !"

On arriving in London John Cowper found that although his brother had given up all intentions of self-murder, the state of his mind was terrible in the extreme.

That there was never so abandoned a sinner as himself, poor Cowper felt convinced. First one chapter of the Bible and then another seemed to condemn him ; and not only the Bible, but other books : passages in Tillotson's Sermons, lines in Beaumont and Fletcher ; till at last he was strongly tempted to use laudanum, not as a poison, but as an opiate, to compose his spirits. Gloom and anguish were his constant companions. He dined alone, either at the tavern, where he went in the dark, or at the chop-house, where he always took care to hide himself in the darkest corner of the room. If he slept it was only to be disturbed with terrifying dreams. Even the eyes of man he could not bear, but when he remembered that the eyes of God were upon him his anguish was intolerable. And then, to crown all, the impression intruded itself that he had committed the Unpardonable Sin. He believed that a neglect to

improve the mercies of God at Southampton was the sin against the Holy Ghost ; and no argument of his brother or of any one else had the slightest weight with him. To quote his terrible conclusion, "Life appeared to me now more eligible than death, only because it was a barrier between me and everlasting burnings."

In the "Greville Memoirs," vol. iii. pp. 134-5, mention is made of a parcel of letters from the Rev. John Newton to Mr. Thornton, which were sent to Southey as material for the Life of Cowper on which he was then engaged. Then follows :—"There is one curious fact revealed in these letters, which accounts for much of Cowper's morbid state of mind and fits of depression, as well as for the circumstance of his running away from his place in the House of Lords. It relates to some defect in his physical conformation ; somebody found out his secret, and probably threatened its exposure."

#### 24. "Damned Below Judas."

Everything that took place now seemed to afford fresh proof to Cowper that he had verily and indeed sinned against the Holy Ghost ; and on one occasion he exclaimed to his brother, "Oh, brother, I am damned ! Think of eternity, and then think what it is to be damned !" About this time, too, he wrote those sapphics commencing "Hatred and vengeance," lines which are so painful that one hardly likes to quote them, and yet quoted they must be if a true picture is to be drawn of the man William Cowper. "Hatred and

vengeance," he declares in the first stanza, are his "eternal portion."

" Damned below Judas ; more abhorred than he was,  
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master !  
Twice-betrayed Jesus me, the last delinquent,  
Deems the profanest."

In the succeeding stanzas he declares that man disavows, and Deity disowns him, and that his sentence is worse than Abiram's.

" Him the vindictive rod of angry Justice  
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong ;  
I fed, with judgment, in a fleshly tomb, am  
Buried above ground."

Pierced to the heart with the sight of this misery, John endeavoured to comfort his poor brother, though all to no effect ; but at length Cowper expressed a wish to see his friend and cousin, the Rev. Martin Madan.

Born in 1726, and trained to the bar, which he quitted in order to take orders, the Rev. Martin Madan was a very popular preacher, being looked upon, in fact, as one of the leaders of the Evangelical party. Tall of stature, he had a robust constitution, a fine open face, and a powerful and very musical voice.

Previous to this Cowper had looked upon him as an enthusiast, but now felt convinced "that if there was any balm in Gilead" Mr. Madan must administer it. Mr. Madan came, and, sitting on Cowper's bedside, began to declare to him the gospel. He spoke of original sin, showed that all men were on a level, insisted on the all-atoning efficacy of the blood of Jesus

and His righteousness for our salvation, and lastly urged the necessity of a lively faith in Jesus Christ. Thereupon some hope dawned in the heart of the sufferer, and the wounded spirit within him, though by no means healed, was less troubled.

Pleased with the result, his brother, though looking by no means with favourable eyes on the Evangelical clergy, urged the invalid to have recourse to Mr. Madan again. “My welfare,” says Cowper, “was his (John’s) only object, and all his prejudices fled before his zeal to procure it. May he receive, for his recompense, all that happiness the gospel, which I then became first acquainted with, is alone able to impart !”

Other friends, too, were extremely kind. Of one of them, Carr, the common friend of himself and Rowley, he many years afterwards said, “I shall never, I trust, be capable of forgetting his indefatigable attention to me during the last year I spent in London.”

The next few hours Cowper spent in sleep—a sleep disturbed with horrible visions, and when he awoke it was “with ten times a stronger alienation from God than ever.” His ears were then filled with awful voices, a numbness seized upon the extremities of his body, his hands and feet became stiff and cold, a cold sweat stood upon his forehead, and his heart seemed at every pulse to beat its last. By and by he rose from his bed and traversed the apartment, when all of a sudden a strange and horrible darkness fell upon him. The imaginary sensation of a heavy blow alighting on the brain, without touching the skull, was what he felt. He clapped his hand to his forehead, and cried aloud

with the pain. At every stroke his thoughts and expressions became more wild and indistinct; all that remained clear was the sense of sin, and the expectation of punishment. That distemper of mind, which he had so ardently wished for, had at length actually seized him. He was mad.

Instantly perceiving the change, the Rev. John Cowper consulted with various members of the family as to what should be done; and at length it was decided to remove the sufferer to St. Albans, in order that he might be under the care of the kind and gifted physician, Dr. Nathaniel Cotton.

Of the parting scenes with his friends Cowper preserved some recollections. Of that with Hill he reminded his friend twenty years after. How he saw Hill in his box at the coffee-house, and how the waiter raised the teapot to the ceiling with his right hand, while in his left the teacup, descending almost to the floor, received a limpid stream; limpid in its descent, but which had no sooner reached its destination than, frothing and foaming to the view, it became a roaring syllabub. (Letter, Dec. 7, 1782.)

To what happened to his belongings Cowper seems to have been perfectly indifferent, with one characteristic exception—his cat; even in his direst affliction, and when everything else was disregarded, Cowper, a life-long lover of animals, had a thought for his dumb companion. She was committed, and as Cowper knew quite safely, to the tender mercies of Hill. "Stroke puss's back the wrong way," he writes after his recovery, "and it will put her in mind of her master." His books, papers, and other belongings



went to the four winds, and with the exception of his law books, and a few others, he never heard of them again.

One of the last of his relatives that he saw before going to St. Albans was Lady Hesketh, who with Sir Thomas called upon him in his chambers. But on this occasion, the only one in his life when he saw her without pleasure, he neither spoke to her nor listened to what she said. "Then it was," writes Cowper long after, "I saw you last, and then it was I said in my heart, upon your going out at the door, 'Farewell! there will be no more intercourse between us for ever.' But Providence has ordered otherwise." (To Lady Hesketh, Nov. 23, 1785.)

Mr. H. Gough, of Redhill, tells me that he heard it stated on very good authority that Cowper once dwelt in Lambeth Terrace—a row of houses a little to the east of Lambeth Palace, though when this could be I am quite at a loss to conjecture. It is also said that there was a summer-house in the garden in some way connected with the poet's memory.



## CHAPTER V.

*AT ST. ALBANS.*

(1763 65.)

### 25. The "Collegium Insanorum."

COWPER arrived at Dr. Cotton's in December, 1763. The "Collegium Insanorum," with which title the worthy doctor dignified his house, was an extensive and somewhat picturesque Elizabethan building, in the shape (like so many other large houses of Elizabeth's time) of the letter E. Only the back of the E is now standing, the limbs having been cut away some 40 years ago to form a new thoroughfare, which appropriately enough took unto itself the name of College Street. The lower limb of the letter was in Dagnell Street.

The doctor was an amiable, mild, good man, and moreover a man of letters, having published several works both in prose and verse. Many years before he had lost his wife, and he was now verging on old age.

Through Cowper's insanity ran a vein of self-loathing and abhorrence. "The accuser of the brethren," he

says, "ever busy with him night and day, brought to his recollection in dreams his long forgotten sins, and charged upon his conscience things of an indifferent nature as atrocious crimes." In an interesting paper in the *Universal Review*, entitled "Unpublished MSS. of the Poet Cowper," Mrs. D'Arcy Collyer gives a poem entitled a song of "Mercy and Judgment" written by Cowper shortly after his recovery, in which he makes the following reference to what was then his late terrible disorder :—

" Food I loathed, nor ever tasted  
But by violence constrained,  
Strength decay'd and body wasted  
Spoke the terrors I sustained.

Bound and watch'd, lest life abhorring,  
I should my own death procure,  
For to me the Pit of Roaring  
Seem'd more easy to endure.

Then, what soul-distressing noises  
Seemed to reach me from below,  
Visionary scenes and voices,  
Flames of Hell and screams of woe ! "

He was all the while in expectation that the Divine vengeance would plunge him instantly into the bottomless pit, but at length he became so familiar with despair as to entertain a sort of hardiness and indifference as to the consequences.

" I began to persuade myself, that while the execution of the sentence was suspended, it would be for my interest to indulge a less horrible train of ideas than I had been accustomed to dwell upon. ' Eat and drink, for to-morrow thou shalt be in hell,' was the maxim on

which I proceeded. By this means I entered into conversation with the doctor, laughed at his stories, and told him some of my own to match them; still, however, carrying a sentence of irrevocable doom in my heart."

It was now five months since Cowper had settled at St. Albans, and the doctor, observing the seeming alteration, believed that his invalid was on the high road to recovery. Three more weary months, however, were to elapse before any real change was to take place.

"I remember," says Cowper, "about this time a diabolical species of regret that found harbour in my wretched heart. I was sincerely sorry that I had not seized every opportunity of giving scope to my wicked appetites, and even envied those who, being departed to their own place before me, had the consolation to reflect that they had well earned their miserable inheritance by indulging their sensuality without restraint. Oh, merciful God! what a Tophet of pollution is the human soul! and wherein do we differ from the devils, unless Thy grace prevent us?"

## 26. The Clouds begin to Break.

Eight months had passed, and Dr. Cotton, believing that his patient's health was much mended, reported his condition to the Rev. John Cowper. On the 25th of July John paid a visit to St. Albans, but to his disappointment found his brother almost as silent and reserved as ever. To the question how he found himself, came the disappointing reply, "As much better as despair can make me."

They then went together into the garden, and Cowper expressed to his brother the oft-repeated assurance of sudden judgment. John protested that it was all a delusion, and protested so strongly, that the poor convalescent could not help giving some attention to him. A ray of hope shot into his heart, and, bursting into tears, he cried out, "If it be a delusion, then I am the happiest of beings." "We dined together," says Cowper, "and I spent the afternoon in a more cheerful manner. Something seemed to whisper to me every moment, 'Still there is mercy.'" This scene in Dr. Cotton's garden at St. Albans was one of the most important in Cowper's life. It marks a turning-point, for though John stayed only one day, his company served to put to flight a thousand deliriums and delusions, and the next morning Cowper was a new creature. Sam Roberts, Dr. Cotton's man, who had been exceedingly attentive to him, observed, with others, the great alteration for the better, and expressed great joy on the occasion.

Not long after, walking in the garden, Cowper found upon a seat there a Bible that had probably been laid in his way purposely. He opened it upon the story of Lazarus, and he saw "so much benevolence, and mercy, and goodness, and sympathy with miserable men in our Saviour's conduct," that he was moved almost to tears, "little thinking," he says, "that it was an exact type of the mercy which Jesus was on the point of extending towards myself." Slowly the cloud of horror which had so long hung over him moved away, and every day brought fresh hope.

The next time he opened a Bible it happened to be

at the third chapter of Romans and 25th verse : " Whom God hath set forth 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."

"Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fulness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed and received the gospel." Henceforth all is bright and cheerful. Instead of horrid nightmares he had sound sleep and sweet dreams, instead of spending his days in moody silence he could now enjoy cheerful conversation, and his Bible that had so long lain unopened now became his constant companion. In place of unspeakable wretchedness had come transcendent happiness. To rejoice day and night was all his employment. He was even "too happy to sleep much," thinking it "lost time that was spent in slumber."

In the "Song of Mercy and Judgment," already referred to, and written about this time, he sings:—

" Lord, I love the habitation  
   Where the Saviour's honour dwells ;  
 At the sound of Thy salvation  
   With delight my bosom swells.  
     Grace divine, how sweet the sound,  
     Sweet the grace that I have found !  
  
 Me, through waves of deep affliction,  
   Dearest Saviour, Thou hast brought,  
 Fiery deeps of sharp conviction  
   Hard to bear and passing thought.  
     Sweet the sound of grace divine,  
     Sweet the grace which makes me Thine.

## AT ST. ALBANS.

'I,' He said, 'have seen thee grieving,  
 Lov'd thee as I passed thee by,  
 Be not faithless, but believing,  
 Look and live, and never die.'

All at once my chains were broken,  
 From my feet my fetters fell,  
 And that word, in pity spoken,  
 Snatched me from the gates of hell.  
 Grace divine, how sweet the sound,  
 Sweet the grace that I have found !

Since that hour, in hope of glory,  
 With Thy followers I am found,  
 And relate the wondrous story  
 To Thy list'ning saints around.  
 Sweet the sound of grace divine,  
 Sweet the grace which makes me Thine."

We learn from the diary of the Rev. A. Maddock that the works of the Rev. James Hervey were at this time very helpful to Cowper, who indeed went so far, in conversation with Mr. Maddock, as to ascribe his conversion to them. Writing to his cousin, Mrs. Cowper, April 17, 1766, Cowper mentions his great partiality to Hervey, whom he considers "one of the most scriptural writers in the world."

Ever watchful and apprehensive for his patient's welfare, Dr. Cotton was now alarmed lest the sudden transition from despair to joy should terminate in a fatal frenzy, but that anxiety presently ceased, and the good physician became satisfied that the cure was a sound one.

Cowper, however, was in no haste to remove, and he stayed at St. Albans twelve months after his recovery. During that time he and the doctor had together many



helpful religious conversations. "I was treated by him," says Cowper, who always rejoiced that he had been placed at St. Albans, "with the greatest tenderness while I was ill, and attended with the utmost diligence, but when my reason was restored to me, and I had so much need of a religious friend to converse with, to whom I could open my mind on the subject without reserve, I could hardly have found a fitter person for the purpose." The doctor, in fact, well merited the niche which his patient afterwards made for him in the temple of fame by the grateful allusion in the poem on Hope. As before observed, Cowper had now taken up his pen again, and doubtless he and his literary friend and physician found much pleasure in writing together. The hymn commencing, "How blest Thy creature is, O God," which he entitled "The Happy Change," is indeed a striking contrast in the spirit it breathes of serene happiness to the sapphics written in the black days gone by.

Among those who inquired after him at St. Albans were Sir Thomas and Lady Hesketh; and Cowper would gladly now have renewed correspondence with his dear cousin, only he thought well to "perform quarantine first," both for his own sake and because he thought his letters would be more satisfactory to her from any other quarter.

Of his life at St. Albans during his twelve months' convalescence Cowper does not give us much account, but he now and then refers to incidents that at that time interested him. The death, for example, of the celebrated Dr. Young, author of "Night Thoughts," at the neighbouring village of Welwyn, on April 12,

1765, clung to his memory, and he mentions an incident in a letter to Lady Hesketh that occurred during Dr. Cotton's last visit to the aged divine.

Cowper now began to see that it was time to make a change, for with Dr. Cotton, with whom he was "very deep in debt," he could not afford to remain. Where to go he was not quite certain, but was resolved not to see London again, the scene, as he terms it, of his former abominations. Moreover he felt, seeing how ignorant he was of the law, that he could not in conscience retain the office, which he had for some years held, of Commissioner of Bankruptcy. So he resigned it, though he had to lose thereby some £60 per annum, by which he reduced himself to an income scarcely sufficient for his maintenance; "but I would rather," says he, "have starved in reality than deliberately have offended against my Saviour." Through the kindness of his relatives, however, his income was again increased, and he resolved to settle in the neighbourhood of Cambridge, so as to be near his brother. Consequently he requested his brother to look out for lodgings; and the same day he poured out his soul to God in prayer, beseeching that wherever he might be led, it might be into the society of those who loved the Lord Jesus. No suitable lodgings could be found nearer to Cambridge than Huntingdon, but though this place was much further from his brother than he could have wished, Cowper decided to take them.

About this time he wrote the hymn, "Far from the world, O Lord, I flee," which had its origin in his resolution to retire into the country, and which contains the following well-known and beautiful lines:—

“ The calm retreat, the silent shade,  
 With prayer and praise agree ;  
 And seem by Thy sweet bounty made  
 For those who follow Thee.

There, if Thy Spirit touch the soul,  
 And grace her mean abode,  
 Oh, with what peace, and joy, and love  
 She communes with her God ! ”

Cowper now greatly regretted the loss of his books at the Temple, some of which had been his father's, whose arms they had on the inside of the cover. “ I could mourn for them,” says he, “ like Sancho for his Dapple, but it would avail me nothing.” In respect to his law-books, the greater part of which had been given to him by Lord Cowper, he gave some of them to his friend the Major, and the rest he afterwards sold “ for no more than £20 10s.”

Among the very few books that survived the general wreck was his father's Bible, referred to in Section 4. The Rev. John Newton, in his note in it, speaks of this volume as “ once the property and delight ” of the poet.

The “ red-leather trunk ” containing his papers had likewise disappeared ; and though its contents, as Cowper assures us, were of little worth, nevertheless we must regret its lost.

## 27. Dick Coleman.

Among the actions of Cowper just before leaving St. Albans are two that are very characteristic of him. In the first place he persuaded Dr. Cotton to part with, to

him, his servant Sam Roberts, and in the second he took upon himself the charge of a necessitous boy, named Richard Coleman—notwithstanding, too, the knowledge that in consequence of the lowness of his income he would himself for the future be bound to depend upon the bounty of friends.

In reference to Roberts, a rather prominent figure in this history, Cowper says, “He had maintained such an affectionate watchfulness over me during my whole illness, and waited on me with so much patience and gentleness, that I could not bear to leave him behind, though it was with some difficulty that the doctor was prevailed on to part with him. The strongest argument of all was the earnest desire he expressed to follow me. He seemed to have been providentially thrown in my way, having entered Dr. Cotton’s service just time enough to attend me; and I have strong ground to hope that God will use me as an instrument to bring him to a knowledge of Jesus.”

That in respect to the boy, Cowper’s motive was good, no one wishes to deny, but it cannot be denied that it was a piece of generosity at the expense of other people. And if keeping a necessitous boy was being generous with other people’s money, what was keeping a man-servant that he could certainly have done without?

The age of *Dick* Coleman, as the boy was generally called, was seven or eight. Writing afterwards at Huntingdon (November 12, 1766), Cowper says: “He is the son of a drunken cobbler at St. Albans, who would probably have starved him to death by this time, or have poisoned him with gin, if Providence

had not thrown him in my way to rescue him. I was glad of an opportunity to show some mercy in a place where I had received so much, and hope God will give a blessing to my endeavours to preserve him. He is a fine boy, of a good temper and understanding; and, if the notice that is taken of him by the neighbourhood does not spoil him, will probably turn out well." The expense of maintaining this boy, whom he subsequently apprenticed to a breeches-maker, was for some years a constant source of anxiety to Cowper.



## CHAPTER VI.

### *IN LODGINGS AT HUNTINGDON.*

(1765—June 22nd—Nov. 11th.)

#### 28. Benet College, Cambridge.

COWPER bade adieu to his "little physician" and took his leave of the Place of his Second Nativity, as he called St. Albans, on June 17, 1765, at four in the morning, and set out for Cambridge in order first to spend a few days with his brother, who was at that time curate of the neighbouring village of Foxton.

Benet, or Corpus Christi, John Cowper's college, dates back to the fourteenth century, and was founded by two guilds of townspeople, who at first had separate halls and worshipped in separate churches. In 1352 they united and erected a small college, which was named "The House of Scholars of Corpus Christi and Blessed Mary of Cambridge." For more than two hundred years the college had no chapel, the services being performed in the adjoining church of St. Benedict, and hence the name Benet College, by which the collegiate buildings were so long known. In 1823 the present imposing west front and new quadrangle were

commenced, and about the same time the place resumed its old and correct title of Corpus Christi. The library contains one of the most valuable collections of manuscripts in the kingdom. Among the members of Corpus Christi have been Archbishops Parker and Tenison (the former of whom gave the library, and was in other ways a great benefactor of the college), Christopher Marlow, and John Fletcher (dramatists), Sir Nicholas Bacon, and the antiquary, Richard Gough.

The conversation between the brothers is recorded in the narrative entitled "Adelphi." Cowper's heart was full of the great consolations it had pleased God to visit him with, and it having become one of his chief concerns that his relations might be made partakers of the same mercy, he took the opportunity to express his convictions without reserve.

John, however, belonging to an entirely different school of thought, could by no means see eye to eye with his brother in the matter of religion.

"At first," says Cowper, "I found him ready enough to talk with me upon these subjects; sometimes he would dispute, but always without heat or animosity, and sometimes would endeavour to reconcile the difference of our sentiments by supposing that, at the bottom, we were both of a mind and meant the same thing." Neither, however, could persuade the other, so the matter had for the present to be left.

On Saturday, the 22nd, after a stay at Cambridge of four days, Cowper, accompanied by his brother, proceeded to Huntingdon, where he took up his abode in lodgings that had previously been secured for him.



## 29. Early Days at Huntingdon.

Cowper was now thirty-three years of age ; in his profession he had not gone the right way to succeed, and consequently had not succeeded ; his recent derangement, as far as could be seen, had unfitted him for all callings ; that he would ever make his mark in the world, in any department whatever, seemed extremely improbable ; his brother loved him dearly, but his other relations, though they supplied sufficient to make him comfortable, treated him in other respects with coolness. The melancholy fact to all eyes seemed to be that he was a failure, and had come to Huntingdon merely to vegetate. But if we had no so-called failures in life we should have few great poets. The poet's loss is our gain. Had Cowper led a busy, industrious life ; had his career been what the world calls a successful one, we should have had no "Task," and very little of any other of his work that we now so much value.

The effects of his recent derangement were not by any means worn off, although in the general sense of the word he had recovered, and no sooner had John taken his leave, than finding himself surrounded by strangers, Cowper's spirits began to sink. "I felt," says he, "(such was the backsliding state of my heart) like a traveller in the midst of an inhospitable desert, without a friend to comfort, or a guide to direct him. I walked forth towards the close of the day, in this melancholy frame of mind, and having wandered about a mile from the town, I found my heart, at length, so powerfully drawn towards the Lord, that having gained a retired and secret nook in the corner of a field, I

kneeled down under a bank and poured forth my complaints before Him." After casting his burden on the Lord he at once experienced relief, feeling that where-soever his lot might be cast the God of all Consolation would still be with him.

"The next day," says Cowper, "I went to church for the first time after my recovery. Throughout the whole service I had much to do to restrain my emotions, so fully did I see the beauty and the glory of the Lord. My heart was full of love to all the congregation, especially to those in whom I observed an air of sober attention. A grave and sober person sat in the pew with me ; . . . while he was singing the psalm I looked at him, and observing him intent on his holy employment, I could not help saying in my heart, with much emotion, ' Bless you, for praising Him whom my soul loveth ! ' "

In his first letter from Huntingdon, written on the Monday, to his friend Hill, Cowper thus speaks of his apartments and servant : " I have a lodging that puts me continually in mind of our summer excursions ; we have had many worse, and except the size of it (which, however, is sufficient for a single man), but few better. I am not quite alone, having brought a servant with me from St. Albans, who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And whereas the Turkish Spy says he kept no servant, because he would not have an enemy in his house, I hired mine, because I would have a friend. Men do not usually bestow these encomiums on their lackeys, nor do they usually deserve them ; but I have had experience of mine, both in sickness and health, and never saw his fellow."

## 30. Huntingdon in Cowper's Days.

By this time Cowper had been able to look round him and find out what sort of a country he had got into. Situated near the Fen district, Huntingdon had a great name on account of its advantages for hunting and fishing, but Cowper had never been a huntsman, and at the present time, though most extraordinarily fond of fish, had no inclination for fishing. The river Ouse, however, was not wasted on him, for he admired its numberless quiet beauties, and three times a week bathed in its limpid waters. Henry of Huntingdon, the old historian, praised his native place for its handsomeness, and at the time its fifteen churches were standing, its priory, and its castle, the town was doubtless fair to look upon; and even in Cowper's day, when the number of churches had been reduced to two (All Saints' and St. John's), when the priory was destroyed, and nothing remained of the castle but its mounds, the place had still its attractions, and the longer Cowper lived in it the better he liked it.

The town consisted chiefly of one street, nearly a mile in length, and he describes it as one of the neatest towns of England. Its population was about 2,000, and as it was a considerable thoroughfare, and small vessels came up the river from Lynn, there was stir enough to make it lively. The present population is about 4,000, and that of the adjoining quaint old corporate town of Godmanchester a trifle over 2,000. The chief industry, as in the days of Cromwell—himself a native—was brewing, and the principal lion was Hinchingsbrook House (formerly the seat of the Crom-

wells) which a worthy inhabitant of the town, a draper named Peacock, did Cowper the favour of showing him. The town hall, built twenty years previously to Cowper's arrival, deserves mention, as does the old Grammar School, not then charmingly picturesque, but covered with a hideous garb of red brick, which has since been removed.

In the way of amusements Huntingdon boasted a card-assembly, a dancing-assembly, a club, a bowling-green, and a race-course—the last in a meadow called Portholme—though these diversions were patronized by its new resident “as much as if he lived a thousand miles off;” and when we have said this we have said thereabouts all that would interest the general reader concerning the Huntingdon of 125 years ago, when Cowper and his man Sam walked its streets.

Of the immediate neighbourhood the poet does not speak in flattering terms. “We have neither woods,” he tells Lady Hesketh, “nor commons, nor pleasant prospects; all flat and insipid; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood.” One spot, however, very greatly took his fancy, namely, the village of Hartford, situated about a mile and a half from the town. “The church there,” says he, “is very prettily situated upon a rising ground, so close to the river that it washes the wall of the churchyard. I found an epitaph there the other morning, the two first lines of which, being better than anything else I saw there, I made shift to remember. It is by a widow on her husband:—

‘Thou wast too good to live on earth with me,  
And I not good enough to die with thee.’”

The stone Cowper refers to has disappeared, but a small modern stone in the churchyard bears the same epitaph, the words, however, being used by a widower in reference to his wife.

### 31. 'Sephus and Lady Hesketh.

On the Monday, the third day after his arrival in Huntingdon, Cowper renewed his intercourse with his old friend 'Sephus (Josephus), as he playfully termed Joseph Hill. Mr. Hill had attended with friendly care to his affairs during the derangement, and Cowper says to him, "The only recompense I can make is to tell you that by the mercy of God I am restored to perfect health, both of mind and body. This I believe will give you pleasure, and I would gladly do anything from which you could receive it."

Cowper had not been long at Huntingdon before he discovered that he was running short of money, and this circumstance, considering his limited income, his debt to Dr. Cotton, which he was anxious to wipe off, his expenses on account of the St. Albans boy and his lackey, and his ignorance of housekeeping, is not surprising. With respect to the last he made the discovery that it is no such easy thing to keep house for two people. "A man," says he, "cannot always live upon sheeps' heads and liver and lights, like the lions in the Tower; and a joint of meat is an endless incumbrance. My butcher's bill for last week amounted to four shillings and tenpence. I set off with a leg of lamb, and was forced to give part of it away to my washer-

woman. Then I made an experiment upon a sheep's heart, and that was too little. Next I put three pounds of beef into a pie, and this had like to have been too much, for it lasted three days, though my landlord was admitted to a share in it. In short, I never knew how to pity poor housekeepers before ; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity."

Having to meet the various expenses of physician, rent, lackey, boy, and housekeeping, Cowper took more interest than he otherwise would have done in the state of his affairs in London ; consequently, when he found that the tenant of his chambers in the Temple—the rent from which he had plenty of uses for—was a bad payer, he was obliged to call in the assistance of Hill, whom he knew to be "an old dog" at a troublesome tenant. The expedients which he knew Hill would use having occurred to his mind, he makes reference to them, and—referring to the tenant—winds up his letter with, "Poor toad ! I leave him entirely to your mercy." Four months later, however, the toad was still in the hole, in which, apparently, he had lived, and still intended to live, rent free, when Cowper says of him, "I think the Welshman must morris (dance) ; what think you?" But a month later Hill had gained the day, and Cowper rejoices with him in the victory he has obtained over the Welshman's pocket.

Having heard in August (1765) that his friend had set out for Warwickshire, Cowper lived for a fortnight in continual expectation of seeing him, feeling assured

that he would take Huntingdon on his way back. The journey, however, as it turned out, was not to Warwick, but French Flanders. Being given to understand, nevertheless, that Hill had not relinquished the idea of looking him up, Cowper says, "I am glad that I have still a chance of seeing you, and shall treasure it up amongst my agreeable expectations ;" after which he observes slyly, "You don't tell me how you escaped the vigilance of the custom-house officers, though I dare say you were knuckle-deep in contrabands, and had your boots stuffed with all and all manner of unlawful wares and merchandises." Before long the promise was redeemed, the visit to Huntingdon took place ; and Cowper once more saw the old friend whom he so happily describes as—

"An honest man, close-buttoned to the chin,  
Broadcloth without and a warm heart within."

Of his other associates at the Temple there was only one that Cowper cared much to think about, namely, Carr, the friend who had been so attentive to him during his illness. Carr, too, was pressed to visit Huntingdon, but on account of an engagement found himself unable to comply.

Poor Lloyd and Bensley had gone to their long home, "cut off in the midst of such a life as it is frightful to reflect upon." To Colman and Thurlow, though he still continued to have a friendly feeling towards them, Cowper refers only rarely. Thornton's name he never mentions.

In respect to his relatives, the first letter he wrote was one to Lady Hesketh, a letter that obtained an

immediate, a friendly, and comfortable reply, and for some time she was the only relation he corresponded with. These letters, which naturally give details of his recovery, and abound in gratitude for God's goodness, also contain descriptions of Huntingdon and his mode of spending his time.

At the end of August or the beginning of October, Lady Hesketh invited him to pay a visit to her at Freemantle, near Southampton, but though the invitation was willingly accepted, the intention was never carried out.

### 32. The Knight of the Bloody Spur.

Restored to perfect health both of mind and body, Cowper now took frequent walks, bathed often in the river Ouse, and formed the acquaintance of several of the people of the town. His woollen-draper, the Mr. Peacock already referred to, "a very healthy, wealthy, sensible, 'sponsible man, and extremely civil," had already offered him the use of a cold bath, promised to get him the *St. James's Chronicle*, and to do him every service in his power; three families received him with utmost civility; and two in particular treated him with as much cordiality as if their pedigree and his had grown upon the same sheepskin. Besides these there were three or four single men, "odd scrambling fellows like himself," who suited his temper to a hair. With the clergy, too, he made friends: the rector of St. Mary's, the Rev. Thomas Hodgson, called upon him, "a good preacher, a conscientious minister, and a



very sensible man." The Rev. Isaac Nicholson, another resident clergyman, "very poor, but very good and very happy," also gained his heart. "He reads prayers here twice every day, all the year round; and travels on foot to serve two churches (Papworth St. Agnes and Yelling) every Sunday through the year; his journey out and home again being sixteen miles. I supped with him last night. He gave me bread and cheese, and a black jug of ale of his own brewing, and doubtless brewed by his own hands." Subsequently Mr. Nicholson held the vicariat of Leighton Bromswold (Hunts) and the curacy of Alconbury, where he died and was buried.

As regards the custom at Huntingdon of reading the prayers every day, it must be mentioned that this was done in compliance with the terms of a bequest of £70 per annum, left by one George Sayer for that purpose.

Being an early riser and an early walker, Cowper made the acquaintance of another early riser and early walker, a total abstainer and a vegetarian—a thin, tall old man—as good as he was thin, who was to be met with every morning of his life at six o'clock "at a fountain of very fine water, about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol water. His great piety can be equalled by nothing but his great regularity, for he is the most perfect timepiece in the world."

Cowper and his brother met every week, taking it in turns to make the journey—that is to say, one week John visited Huntingdon, and the next Cowper visited Cambridge—sometimes getting a lift in a neighbour's

chaise, but generally he rode. Horse exercise till this time he had not been much used to, but he found it very beneficial to him, and soon became quite proud of his skill in it. "I am become," says he, "a professed horseman, and do hereby assume to myself the style and title of the Knight of the Bloody Spur. It has cost me much to bring this point to bear; but I think I have at last accomplished it." Of his experiences in learning the art of horsemanship he afterwards, in his famous ballad of "John Gilpin," made excellent use, for we can scarcely doubt that he had the man William Cowper in mind when he wrote:—

"His horse, who never in that sort  
Had handled been before,  
What thing upon his back had got  
Did wonder more and more."

As a horseman, indeed, he never distinguished himself. "What Nature expressly designed me for," he says, "I have never been able to conjecture. I am sure, however, that she did not design me for a horseman, and that if all men were of my mind, there would be an end of all jockeyship for ever." This was to Unwin in May, 1781, and in the same letter he makes the observation that he would consider it no great treat to have a beast under him, whose walk would seem tedious, whose trot would jumble him, and whose gallop might throw him into a ditch. Elsewhere he speaks still more plainly, and says that he "always hated riding." Had Cowper been a better horseman, I do not think we should ever have had a "John Gilpin."





*W. Unwin*

REV. W. UNWIN AT 20.

(From a painting by GAINSBOROUGH, 1764.)

## 33. The Unwins.

One day, Cowper having just come out of church after morning prayers, as he was taking a solitary walk under a row of trees, was accosted by a young man of the name of Unwin, who we are told would have made advances of friendship before, only he understood that the stranger rather declined society than sought it. The two speedily became very pleased with each other, and Cowper invited his new friend to take tea with him. "I found him," says Cowper, "one whose notions of religion were spiritual and lively; one whom the Lord had been training from his infancy to the service of the temple. We opened our hearts to each other at the first interview; and when we parted I immediately retired to my chamber and prayed the Lord, who had been the author, to be the guardian, of our friendship; to give it fervency and perpetuity even unto death"—prayers which in this case were most literally answered. Thus began Cowper's first interview with William Cawthorne Unwin, who was to be regarded not merely as a friend, but as—

"A friend  
Whose worth deserves the warmest lay  
That ever friendship penned."

Concerning Morley Unwin, the father, a man rather advanced in years, a few facts have recently been brought to light. Formerly master of the Free School, and lecturer to the two churches in Huntingdon, he was at this time rector of Grimston, near Kings Lynn, in Norfolk, at which place he resided apparently from 1742 to 1748,

though his signature does not appear in the church registers before 1765, the absence of his name not only from the register, but also from other documents requiring a minister's signature, proving that even while he lived at Grimston his curate did the greater part of the work. In compliance, it is said, with the wish of his wife, Mary Cawthorne, who liked neither the situation nor the society of that sequestered place, Mr. Unwin, probably in 1748, became non-resident, and again took up his abode in Huntingdon, where he occupied a convenient house in the High Street, and prepared a few pupils for the University. He was also reappointed to the lectureship of St. Mary's, though his services there gave but little satisfaction. "The parish books," says Canon Benham, "contain several resolutions of censure upon him for neglect of duty, and once he was nearly dismissed."

On the Sunday after the first interview with the son, Cowper dined with the family, to which belonged, in addition to the members already mentioned, a daughter Susanna, about eighteen years of age, rather handsome and, for want of a better phrase, genteel. "In her mother's company she says little; not because her mother requires it of her, but because she seems glad of that excuse for not talking, being somewhat inclined to bashfulness." With Mrs. Unwin, who was much younger than her husband, and of lively talents, he had much delightful talk, which led to the discovery that they "had one faith, and had been baptized with the same baptism." "When I returned to my lodgings," says he, "I gave thanks to God, who had so graciously answered my prayers by bringing me into the society





MRS. UNWIN AT 26.

(From a painting by DAVIS, in 1750.)



of Christians." In a letter to Hill, Cowper thus sums up this amiable family: "The old gentleman is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much, to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family."

Cowper's intimacy with his new friends increased every day, and his letters are full of the pleasure he found in their company, and in that of Mrs. Unwin in particular. A conversation he had with her in their garden, he says, "did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company. I am treated in the family as if I was a near relation, and have been repeatedly invited to call upon them at all times. You know what a shy fellow I am; I cannot prevail with myself to make so much use of this privilege as I am sure they intend I should, but perhaps this awkwardness will wear off hereafter. It was my earnest request, before I left St. Albans, that wherever it might please Providence to dispose of me, I might meet with such an acquaintance as I find in Mrs. Unwin."

With his new friends, who formed "altogether the cheerfullest and most engaging family piece it is possible to conceive," Cowper now spent the better part of every day, for he found that, exactly to his taste, go when he would, the house was full of peace and cordiality. "You remember," he tells Hill, "Rousseau's description of an English morning; such are the morn-

ings I spend with these good people ; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug, and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable that had not an Unwin belonging to it."

### 34. Cowper as an Economist.

To the various expenses with which Cowper was encumbering himself we have already made reference. His physician, his household expenses, Sam Roberts, and Dick Coleman, however, not being apparently sufficient, he must needs now purchase a horse, and we find him applying for the necessary cash to Mr. Hill, which, not being forthcoming, he applies a second time, stating :—

" I wrote to you about ten days ago,  
Soliciting a quick return of gold,  
To purchase certain horse that likes me well."

In short, with one thing or another, during the four months spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, "by help of good management and a clear notion of economical matters," Cowper contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth.

It was evident, however, even to a man of Cowper's penetration, that this sort of thing could not go on for ever, and he was beginning to revolve in his mind how he could make some change, when, just at the right moment, an opening presented itself. A young gentle-

man, who had lived with Mr. Unwin as a pupil, had the day before gone to Cambridge, and the thought struck Cowper that he might be allowed to board at Mr. Unwin's and take his place—a course he was the more desirous of adopting because he began to find his retirement irksome.

For two or three days, during which he was "in a tumult of anxious solicitude," he dwelt upon this matter, nor could he divert his mind to any other subject. "I blamed and condemned myself for want of submission to the Lord's will; but still the language of my mutinous and disobedient heart was, 'Give me the blessing or else I die!'" Thus the "Memoir," and then follows a passage to which the student of Cowper should pay particular attention:—

"About the third evening after I had determined upon this measure, I at length made shift to fasten my thoughts upon a theme which had no manner of connection with it. While I was pursuing my meditations, Mr. Unwin and family quite out of sight, my attention was suddenly called home again by the words which had been continually playing on my mind, and were at length repeated with such importunity that I could not help regarding them—'THE LORD GOD OF TRUTH WILL DO THIS.' I was effectually convinced that they were not of my own production, and accordingly I received from them some assurance of success; but my unbelief and fearfulness robbed me of much of the comfort they were intended to convey; though I have since had many a blessed experience of the same kind, for which I can never be sufficiently thankful. I immediately began to negotiate the affair, and in a few days

it was entirely concluded." The point to notice is that Cowper had already got into the habit, which afterwards was attended so disastrously, of treating the visionary voices which from time to time he fancied he heard, as a definite revelation of the Divine will—a habit which, as well as that of attaching so much importance to dreams of a certain kind, must be regarded as a sort of latent insanity—a feature of his disease, which, even at times when in other respects he was perfectly in health, was never absent. To this, however, we shall have to refer later on.

Telling the news of his change to Hill, he says :—  
“The family live in a special good house, and in a very genteel way. I shall be as happy with them as I can be on this side of the sun. I did not dream of the matter till about five days ago; but now the whole is settled.”

The “special good house” in which Mr. Unwin lived was a large residence of red brick, with gabled portion in the middle, situated in the High Street. At that time, as now, it was divided into two, and Mr. Unwin lived in the south portion, to which belonged the gable. The whole of the house is wainscoted with oak, and the bedrooms of both parts contain interesting Flemish tapestries. Those of the north part are particularly interesting, one of the rooms exhibiting figures emblematic of the twelve months of the year, and another the classical story of King Masinissa poisoning his wife, Sophonisba, the principal picture of the series showing the king offering the cup. It is stated that the whole are shortly to be sold, and consequently in all probability will be removed.

In the rear of the house was, at the time of Cowper, a very large garden which extended as far as the common, but a good deal of it is now built over. A pretty walk under a row of lime-trees between the garden and the common is popularly known as Cowper's Walk ; a pear-tree in the garden, still a capital bearer, is pointed out as having been planted by him ; and the stone, still *in situ*, is also shown at which he used to mount his horse when about to set forth on his visits to his brother.



## CHAPTER VII.

### *WITH THE UNWINS.*

(November, 1765, to October, 1767.)

#### 35. The "Memoir."

SOON after he was comfortably settled with the Unwins Cowper began to write that painful narrative of his recent derangement, and religious experiences, called his "Memoir," which was meant only for the private reading of Mrs. Unwin and other of his friends, in consequence of which it was not printed till some years after his death. In the preceding chapters we have frequently quoted from it; indeed the particulars of his derangement could have been obtained from no other source. Some people have regretted that it should ever have been published but surely that is the wrong way to look at the matter. It throws much light on the history of his life; moreover, it is of great value as a subjective analysis of a morbid temperament. Commencing with the account of Cowper's being sent to the school at Market Street, it carries his story, in a very self-condemnatory style, up to the time of his entering the household of the Unwins; but as the whole was written when he was

in a state of religious enthusiasm, it must be taken with a good many grains of salt. We are not obliged to believe that Cowper was as black as he paints himself. When he contrasted his present feelings with those of his days at the Temple ; when he contrasted his present manner of employing his time—the numerous religious exercises in which he was now accustomed to engage—with the carelessness of the days gone by, his life previous to his conversion seemed altogether depraved ; but to the unbiassed reader the question cannot help obtruding itself whether the life he was now living was in all respects a sensible one for him to live. For eschewing cards and dancing, “the professed business of almost all the other *gentle* inhabitants of the town,” he cannot be blamed, for he had no tastes in those directions. Like others who abstained from these amusements, and endeavoured to live quiet lives, Cowper and his friends acquired the name of Methodists, though it should be understood that the name at that time was used to designate not a separate religious sect, but the then rapidly-increasing Evangelical party in the Church of England. But what should be particularly noticed is the way in which Cowper spent his time. “We breakfast,” he says, “commonly between eight and nine ; till eleven we read either the Scripture or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those 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 (Mr. Madan'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. After tea we sally forth to walk 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, until supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns, or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. 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." The question forces itself upon the reader whether Cowper was not doing the thing to excess in perpetually listening to sermons, singing hymns, and engaging in religious conversation. Is it to be expected that that sort of thing could last? As a matter of fact it did not last, as we shall see. It was the old misfortune—no compulsory occupation. Had Cowper, like the generality of men, been under the necessity of spending at least some part of the day in getting a living, he would have escaped three-quarters of the ills that he had the misfortune to endure. This life at Huntingdon, however, must be taken into consideration when we read the "Memoir."

## 36. A Question of Finances.

As mentioned before, Cowper's friends had banded themselves together in order to help him, and the poet, as may be expected, greatly appreciated their kindness. "My friend, the Major's behaviour, to me, after all he suffered by my abandoning his interest and my own in so miserable a manner, is a noble instance of generosity and true greatness of mind ; and, indeed, I know no man in whom those qualities are more conspicuous."

Cowper, however, had not long been settled with the Unwins before he found out that his relatives took umbrage on account of his having surrounded himself with so many expenses. His Uncle Ashley gave him to understand, though in the gentlest terms, "that the family were not a little displeas'd at having learnt that he kept a servant ; and that he maintained a boy also, whom he had brought with him from St. Albans ;" but though several letters passed on the subject, Cowper would not change his plan. Then came a storm, in which the Major, who had been the mover of it, went so far as to recommend that the family should not "give to one who knew so little how to make a right use of their bounty," and declared that for his part he should withdraw his subscription.

Whilst this matter was in agitation Cowper received an anonymous letter in a hand entirely strange to him. "It was conceived in the kindest and most benevolent terms imaginable, exhorting me not to distress myself with fears lest the threatened events should take place ; for that, whatever deduction of my income might

happen, the defect should be supplied by a person who loved me tenderly and approved my conduct." Cowper himself believed that the letter came from Lady Hesketh, but it is more probable that it came from her sister, and his first love, Theodora.

Another proof of friendship was given by Mrs. Unwin, who, though Cowper had not been ten months in the family, generously offered him his place under her roof, with the same accommodation, at half the stipulated payment—namely, at forty guineas per annum instead of eighty. (To Hesketh, Jan. 2, 1786.)

After all, however, the Major did not withdraw his subscription, and, although Cowper was not aware of it till many years after, still continued his steady friend. Finding that by taking up his abode with the Unwins Cowper had lessened his expenses, his friends appear to have been satisfied, but at any rate the matter was allowed to drop, and everything went on as before.

On November 8, 1765, he received a letter announcing his appointment to the honorary office of lecturer at Lyon's Inn, from which we gather that his determination to take no further part in the ordinary business of the world was not known except among his own intimate acquaintances. The post of course was declined: "Notwithstanding that it is so agreeable a thing," he tells Hill, "to read law lectures to the students of Lyon's Inn, especially to the reader himself, I must beg to waive it."

By and by we find Cowper inquiring of Hill concerning his "exchequer," and with reason, for he had got considerably into debt. To Dr. Cotton he still owed as much as £65; there was £12 which he had

borrowed from Thurlow and Bensley; and his half-year's reckoning with Mrs. Unwin, his servant's wages, the expenses connected with the St. Albans boy, and various other accounts, including a £14 draper's bill, had yet to be paid. Consequently altogether he was something like £140 behindhand. Receiving answer from his friend that the exchequer was extremely low, Cowper entered upon the resolution to make a sacrifice of stock, which, though at first Hill demurred, appears to have been done—with the result of removing his difficulties for a time.

### 37. Cowper thinks of becoming a Clergyman.

With Mrs. Cowper (Frances Maria), wife of the Major, who was first cousin both to Cowper and her husband, and sister to the Rev. Martin Madan, a correspondence now sprang up, which originated in her sending him a copy of Pearsall's "Meditations." This correspondence increased in frequency as that with Lady Hesketh grew less, the reason being that Mrs. Cowper was more in sympathy with his views on religion. At this period it gave him no pleasure whatever to speak about any other subject, and consequently this correspondence was wholly of a religious character.

Although Cowper harps continually on one string there is a peacefulness about these letters that makes them agreeable to read, for to the storm that was past had succeeded "a serenity of soul 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."

Cowper now began to think seriously of becoming a candidate for holy orders. The idea may have been suggested to him by the example of his acquaintance, the Rev. Abraham Maddock, a useful Evangelical minister of Kettering, who, like himself, had till middle life followed the law. He may have remembered, too, that the Rev. Martin Madan, the Rev. W. Romaine, and Mr. Jones of St. Saviour's had also, like Mr. Maddock, forsaken the bar in order to take to the pulpit. We notice, moreover, in Mr. Maddock's diary, that Mr. Madan was about this time frequently in this neighbourhood, and that on his preaching tours Cowper sometimes accompanied him. The intense earnestness of this preacher, his fine and nervous language, and the peculiar gracefulness of his delivery attracted crowds wherever he went. We must note, too, that Cowper was at this time thrown a good deal into the company of Dr. Thomas Haweis, of Aldwinckle (fifteen miles from Huntingdon), another prominent Evangelical clergyman, who rivalled in originality and eloquence Mr. Madan himself, and whose preaching, to use the forcible expression of Mr. Newton, resounded through the country like the report of a cannon.

By October (1766), however, Cowper had quite given up the idea, for on the 20th of that month he writes to Mrs. Cowper:—

"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 meantime, 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."

### 38. Cowper's "Abominable Pride."

The younger Unwin happening to be visiting London at this time, Cowper gave him an introduction, and desired him to call at the Park (Hertingfordbury) in his way. "If you knew him," he said to his cousin, "as well as I do you would love him as much. But I leave the young man to speak for himself, which he is very able to do. He is ready possessed of an answer to every question you can possibly ask concerning me, and knows my *whole* story, from first to last." But after Mr. Unwin's return Cowper's heart smote him ; for his motive in causing the visit, which he now explains, urged itself upon him as a base and unworthy one. "My dear cousin," he says (April 3, 1767), "you sent my friend Unwin home to us charmed with your kind reception of him, and with everything he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart ? What

motive do you think lay at the bottom of my conduct when I desired him to call upon you? I did not suspect, at first, that pride and vainglory had any share in it; but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him I discovered in that fruitful soil the very root of the matter. You know that I am a stranger here; all such are suspected characters, unless they bring their credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is a matter of speculation in the place whence I came, and to whom I belong. Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and has since that time received more convincing proofs of my *sponsibility*, yet I could not resist the opportunity of furnishing him with ocular demonstration of it by introducing him to one of my most splendid connections; that when he hears me called *That fellow Cowper*, which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. Oh pride! pride! it deceives me with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon the earth. How will it twist and twine itself about to get from under the cross, which it is the glory of our Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and good-will! They who can guess at the heart of a stranger, and you especially, who are of a compassionate temper, will be more ready, perhaps, to excuse me, in this instance, than I can be to excuse myself. But, in good truth, it was abominable pride of heart, indignation, and vanity, and deserves no better name."

### 39. The Death of the Elder Unwin.

For eighteen months all went agreeably at Huntingdon. In addition to the occupations that we have already referred to, Cowper had "become a great florist and shrub-doctor," in which capacity he was assisted by the Major, who sent him packets of seeds, of the kind chiefly that required no great skill in the management, for the reason that, at present, Cowper had "no skill to spare." Having commenced gardening, he studied the arts of pruning, sowing, and planting, and "enterprised everything in that way from melons down to cabbages." "I have a large garden," he tells Hill, "to display my abilities in, and, were we twenty miles nearer London, I might turn higgler, and serve your honour with cauliflowers and broccoli at the best hand."

But whilst in the midst of these agreeable occupations came a rude shock. On Sunday morning, July 2, 1767, Mr. Unwin (the father), whilst riding to his church at Graveley, was flung from his horse as he was passing through the town of Godmanchester, and received a bad fracture in the back part of his skull. "At nine o'clock," says Cowper, "he was in perfect health, and as likely to live twenty years as either of us; and before ten was stretched speechless and senseless upon a flock bed, in a poor cottage, where (it being impossible to remove him) he died on Thursday evening. I heard his dying groans, the effect of great agony, for he was a strong man, and much convulsed in his last moments. The few short intervals of sense



that were indulged him he spent in earnest prayer, and in expressions of a firm trust and confidence in the only Saviour. To that stronghold we must all resort at last, if we would have hope in our death."

Mr. Unwin was buried on the north side of the churchyard of St. Mary's, and over his remains lies a flat stone with rounded edges on a low basement now sunk in the ground. The inscription, which is almost hidden with moss, runs as follows :

MORLEY UNWIN, B.D.,  
DIED JULY 2, 1767,  
AGED 63.

To Mrs. Cowper, the poet wrote : " This awful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits which will not presently be worn off. May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day nor the hour when our Lord cometh ! "

" The effect of it upon my circumstances will only be a change of a place of abode. For I shall still, by God's leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behaviour to me has always been that of a mother to a son. We know not yet where we shall settle, but we trust that the Lord, whom we seek, will go before us and prepare a rest for us. "

Within a few days of this sad event Mrs. Unwin and Cowper received a visit from the Rev. John Newton, an Evangelical clergyman, who was then curate of Olney. Mr. Newton had been requested to call on Mrs. Unwin by Dr. Richard Conyers, of Helmsley, Yorkshire, a friend of the family, who had

been making a short stay at Olney. The presence of this devout man was a source of comfort ; and not only so, it was a visit of the greatest importance in respect to Cowper's destiny. But before proceeding further it would be well to give some account of Mr. Newton.

#### 40. The Rev. John Newton.

John Newton, born in London in 1726, was destined to become one of the leading spirits in the great Evangelical movement in England during the latter part of the last century. His father being captain of a ship in the Mediterranean trade, it was natural that the boy too should in due time follow the sea. On board ship he might, had he been so desirous, have had an honourable career, for his opportunities of doing well were excellent. But he associated with evil companions, and threw away chance after chance. By and by calamities of a serious nature opposed themselves. When his ship was off the coast of Africa he obtained his discharge, and entered into the service of a slave-dealer of Sierra Leone. After terrible sufferings through illness, and unkind treatment from his master's wife, he was at length visited by a captain of a vessel from England, with whom he at once embarked. Notwithstanding his privations, however, he still continued his dissipations, and such was his profanity that the captain, though little circumspect in his own behaviour, often reproved him. A copy of the "Imitation of Christ" that some one put into his hand set him thinking, and

he inquired of himself: "What if these things should be true?" Next day a dreadful storm arose. There was a cry that the ship was sinking. In the fear of the moment he reflected seriously on his past life, and for the first time in many years he made earnest supplications to God. The storm abated, the ship got safe to England, and Newton was a changed man. For some years he was engaged in voyages in connection with the slave trade, which at that time was not regarded, even by religious men, as a disgraceful calling. But although Newton had no scruples as to the rightfulness of the slave trade, he could not help looking upon himself as a sort of jailer, and was often "shocked with an employment so conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles." Hence he often prayed that he might be fixed in a more humane profession—prayers that were presently answered, for in 1755 he obtained the appointment of tide surveyor of the port of Liverpool. Five years previously he had married Mary Catlett, a young lady to whom he had long been ardently attached. Ever since his conversion he had spent all his spare time in study, and he now began to turn his attention to the work of the ministry. In 1764, at the request of his friend Mr. Haweis, he was presented by Lord Dartmouth with the curacy of Olney, the rector, the Rev. Moses Browne, having removed to Blackheath.

The history of the great Religious Revival has often been told, and the labours of Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw, Venn, Toplady, and others will long be remembered with thankfulness. It was a time when all England was aroused, and John Newton came to Olney, full of desire to promote the same work that

had been commenced by these eminent men, with most of whom he had become personally acquainted. It is interesting at this point to compare the ages of his most celebrated clerical contemporaries. Newton's own age was thirty-nine. Dr. Conyers, Mr. Madan, and Mr. Venn were thirty-nine also, all four having been born in the same month. John Wesley was sixty-one, in full vigour, and twenty-seven more years of industry lay before him. Grimshaw was fifty-six, and had only two years more to live; Whitefield, Romaine, Rowlands, and Berridge (the "Everton Ass," as he called himself) were each about fifty. Whitefield had only six more years to live, but Romaine had thirty-one, Rowlands twenty-six, and Berridge twenty-nine. To Toplady yet remained fourteen years, and to Fletcher twenty-one. Walker had been dead three years, James Hervey six.

This is not the place to discuss the merits or demerits of the Evangelicals. Their preaching would scarcely suit the present day. But they do not live in the present day. They were good and earnest men, they lived according to their lights, and they ought to be held in honour by every section of the Church.

In the August of 1764, the same year that he arrived in Olney, Newton published his Narrative—a series of fourteen letters in which he gives the history of his life until the time when he first had thought of entering the ministry. It awakened a good deal of attention, and Newton hoped that its publication would give additional weight to his ministry at Olney. He says: "The people stare at me since reading them, and well they may. I am indeed a wonder to many, a

wonder to myself, especially I wonder that I wonder no more."

Amongst those to whom Newton presented his Narrative was Mr. Thornton (Cowper's "John Thornton the Great"), a wealthy and liberal Russia merchant, with whom he had previously been acquainted. Mr. Thornton was brother-in-law to Dr. Conyers.

After reading it, and becoming further acquainted with Newton, Mr. Thornton formed a very high estimation of his character, and for many years gave him great assistance in pecuniary matters. "Be hospitable," he wrote, "and keep open your house for such as are worthy of entertainment ; help the poor and needy. I will stately allow you £200, and readily send whenever you have occasion for more." Whilst at Olney Newton received upwards of £3,000 in this way.

In a manuscript of the Rev. William Cole in the British Museum occurs the following curious notice :—  
"At the Archdeacon's visitation at Long Stratford in 1765, appeared as Minister of Olney, one Mr. Newton, a little odd-looking man of the Methodistical order, and without any clerical habit. He said he was Mr. Browne's curate, who was removed to some more advantageous one."

#### 41. The Removal to Olney.

As Cowper said, neither he nor Mrs. Unwin yet knew where they would settle. The only thing they desired was to remove to some town or village where they would be under an Evangelical minister of the gospel.

Accordingly they requested Dr. Conyers, Dr. Haweis, and their new acquaintance, Mr. Newton, to look out a place for them. It was a question whether they should travel northwards to Helmsley in Yorkshire, whether they should merely cross the Northamptonshire border and pitch their tent at Aldwinkle, or whether they should settle a few miles southward at Olney in Buckinghamshire. Had the first been selected, we should doubtless have had a poet singing of moor and dale, the decayed fane of Rievaulx, and saunterings by the tiny river Rye. Had the second been honoured by his residence, probably some of the praises destined to be lavished upon the Ouse would have been bestowed upon the Nen; the quiet beauties of favoured spots near Aldwinkle would have been besung instead of the poplars, the oaks, and the spinnies of Olney and Weston; and the shade of Dryden, born in that same parish, would have in some measure influenced the verse of a bard who held Dryden in high estimation. But the matter was soon decided. They were to settle under Newton, and either at Olney or in the neighbouring village of Emberton.

At first Emberton was decided upon, the principal inducement being that the house they proposed to take was commodious and well-built and had a large garden. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin visited Olney on August 3rd, but had not made up their minds when they returned. The question was whether they should take a comfortable house at Emberton, with a mile of road, often well-nigh impassable, between them and Mr. Newton, or a less convenient house at Olney, where they would be close to him. On the 18th of August Newton

writes to them : " I shall expect to hear from you soon whether Mrs. Unwin pitches upon Olney or Emberton. I hope it will be the former ; but if the latter, you will not be far from us, and I shall try to see her, if the weather or roads should confine her from being constantly amongst us." This letter seems to have decided them, for at their request Mr. Newton engaged the house in the market-place at Olney called " Orchard Side," the one now called " Cowper's House," and arranged that until it should be ready for their reception they should take up their abode with him.

Cowper, Mrs. Unwin, and Miss Unwin removed to Olney on September 14, 1767.

#### 42. Cooper or Cowper ?

In previous chapters several references have been made to the Rev. Abraham Maddock, and Cowper being at this time not infrequently in the company of that gentleman, the present seems a convenient place to deal with that vexed question, the pronunciation of the poet's name. Mr. Maddock's first reference to the poet is dated November 16, 1766, and commences as follows :—" This day Mr. Madan came and brought Mr. Cooper—(notice the spelling)—of Huntingdon, a relation of his, with him." The second reference is August 27, 1768 :—" Mr. Newton came with Mr. Cowper—(notice the altered spelling)—and preached my lecture from Rom. vi. 14." In the third reference to the poet, March 29, 1769, Mr. Maddock commences :—" Mr. Newton and Mr. Cowper came from Olney. . . ." And in the fourth reference, May 22,

1770, the name is also spelt Cowper. Thus we see that in the first entry Mr. Maddock spelt the name Cooper, but in subsequent entries, when he came to be more intimate with the poet, he spelt the name correctly. In the first instance he doubtless spelt it as he heard it pronounced. It is a noteworthy fact, too, that the Rev. John Newton did exactly the same thing. In his early letters to the poet at Huntingdon Mr. Newton spelt the word Cooper; later on it is always Cowper. May we not assume that Newton, like Maddock, was at first misled by the pronunciation?

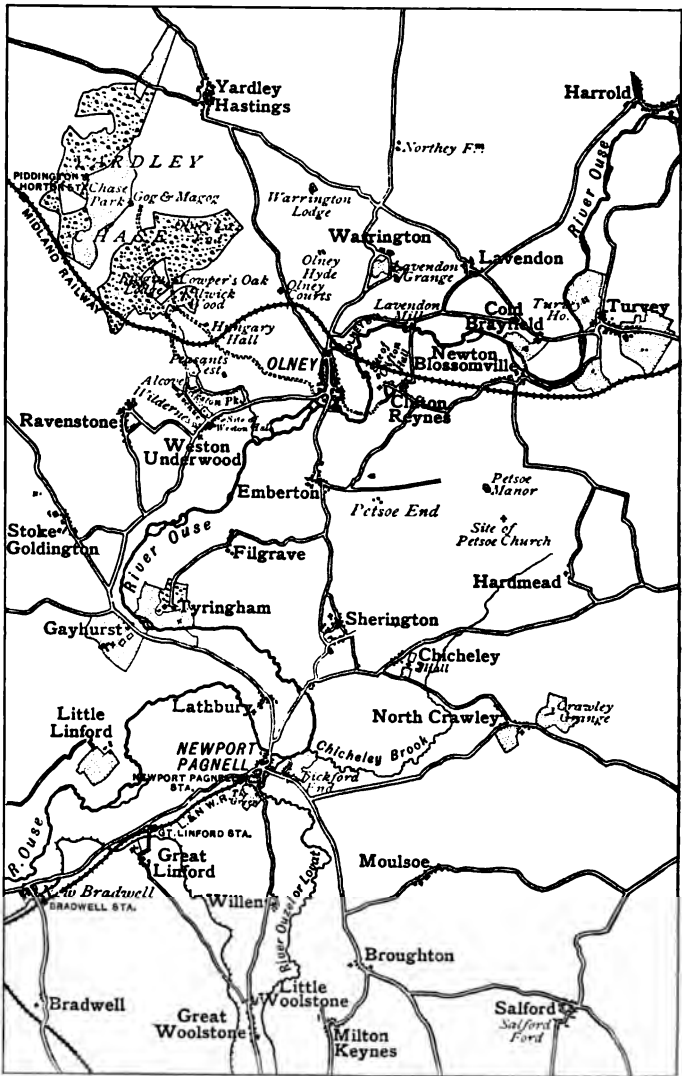
That not only Cowper pronounced his name Cooper, but that the public in time gone by pronounced it so too, is evidenced by the answer given in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1806 to Cowper's riddle which commenced, "I am just two and two." The answer began :—

"A riddle by Cowper  
Made me swear like a trooper."

Again, in a copy of Cowper's poems in the possession of the Rev. J. Tarver, of Filgrave (near Olney), is a slip of paper with the rubbing of a seal showing three hoops, and the following note in manuscript by the Rev. Josiah Bull :—"The above seal was from one of the following letters. By a singular accident the two noble families of Shaftesbury and Cowper changed their arms—the Shaftesbury family having three cows and Cowper family three hoops. This fact was once mentioned by the poet to his friend the Rev. W. Bull, from whom I heard it, and it is a curious circumstance that in pronouncing his own name Mr. Cowper always adhered to the arms and not to the spelling, calling himself Cooper and not Cowper.—J. P. B(ull)."







ENVIRONS OF OLNEY.

## BOOK II.

### CHAPTER VIII.

*THE INSEPARABLE FRIENDS, OR, FROM  
COWPER'S ARRIVAL IN OLNEY TO  
THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD DE-  
RANGEMENT.*

(Oct., 1767—Jan., 1773.)

#### 43. Olney in the Time of Cowper.

**T**HE town of Olney, in which Cowper had now settled, and which, owing to his connection with it, was to get to itself no little fame, consisted, and still consists, of one long, broad street, widening southward into a spacious triangular market-place, on the south side of which stands the large red-bricked house with stone dressings, sometimes called Orchard Side, which was to be for nineteen years the poet's home. The most conspicuous object in the town is the church with its tall steeple, and the most noticeable feature of the surrounding country is the River Ouse, that winds tortuously through the level meadows. The villages of Emberton, Weston Underwood, Clifton, and Lavendon lie respectively south, west, east, and north, at distances of a mile and a mile and a half; all of them more or less associated with

the poet's name. The small town of Newport Pagnell is five miles due south.

Cowper told Hill (May 7, 1768) that it was "a beautiful country, though not much celebrated in song." The former part of his assertion still holds good, but the latter, thanks to his own industry, none would now think of applying to it.

To get an idea of the appearance of Olney in Cowper's day we must turn to our old sketches and lithographs. One view, taken, at the beginning of the century, from the end of Weston Road, shows the old-fashioned shops with bow-windows, the "Bull" with its sign-board and gilded grapes, then the "Saracen's Head" with its sign-post out in the road, and next, the narrow lane intervening, the shop of William Wilson, the poet's barber, showing bravely its particoloured pole. On the other side of the way we notice the "Swan," (an inn in another part of the town is now so called), ornamented with a large wooden balcony—the "Swan," "where they are excessively careless," and where letters are sometimes overlooked, and do not arrive at their destination, if no inquiry be made, till some days have passed after their arrival in Olney. This was the inn to which the immortal postboy ("Task," iv.) used to consign his "important budget :"—

" He comes, the herald of a noisy world,  
With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks,  
News from all nations lumbering at his back.  
True to his charge, the close-packed load behind,  
Yet careless what he brings, his one concern  
Is to conduct it to the destined inn,  
And having dropped the expected bag—pass on."

Dick Tyrell, "the very person who was on the road in the days of the poet," was alive and still in office in 1832. But according to the writer in Hone's Year Book, who had an interview with him, poor Dick was then hastening fast to "the house of his fathers."

In the centre of the market-place stood three fine elms, which overshadowed a curious old two-storied stone building called the Shiel Hall. At the end facing north was a double flight of steps leading to the upper room, which answered for Olney the purpose of a Town Hall, and on each side the doorway of this room was a large bow-window. The word Sheil, somewhat unusual in England, is used freely in Scotland for a place of shelter and a place where corn was winnowed when that operation was performed by the hand. To readers of Burns, Scott, and Hogg it must be quite familiar.

At its south end stood several cottages and a blacksmith's forge,

To the north-east of the Shiel Hall was another conspicuous object, the Round House, Stone House, or town prison, a small hexagonal building; from which to the High Arch (the rise in the road near the Independent Meeting) and back again was the ancient whipping-distance for Olney (see Section 99). Thus in the poet's time the market-hill had three or four separate buildings on it, of one kind or another. In his time, too, the main street of Olney was also singular in appearance. A raised pitched causeway with posts at regular distances ran down the middle from the Swan Inn (in the market-place) to "Simon Johnstone's" (where the "Queen" now stands or thereabouts). It was kept in repair by a charity called the Causeway Charity,

the origin of which is unknown, and was done away with in 1790 and 1791, when in lieu of it, and with the charity funds, wide causeways or pitchings contiguous to the houses were made. The necessity for such a causeway may not at first thought be apparent ; but in those days, it should be remembered, the roads were in a wretched state. Moreover, along the west side of the High Street from Spout Lane (now Spring Lane) to the High Arch ran a stream of clear water, which was met by another stream which proceeded from the Yardley Road. The combined waters poured through the High Arch, and flowed thence into the river. The first mentioned was the larger of the two, being generally about two yards in breadth, but sometimes, of course, was much more formidable, and was lined on one side by a row of willow-trees. A gentleman still living remembers hunting for ducks' eggs along the stream.<sup>1</sup>

The Shiel Hall was taken down about 1816, the Round House about 1846. Of the three elms referred to, one seems to have disappeared before the commencement of the present century, another was blown down about 1832, and the third was half destroyed in July, 1884.

For the rest, the houses were most of them thatched, and as in the old coaching days there was a deal of traffic through the town, public-houses were particularly numerous. Many of these have long since lost their licences, but there are still people who remember the "Six Bells," the "Royal Oak," the "Buck and Breeches," and the "Star and Garter," not to mention others with less striking names.

<sup>1</sup> "The Town of Cowper."

Having described the town, a few notes may be appended concerning "the bridge of wearisome but needful length" that bestrode the valley between Olney and Emberton.

Its appearance was most singular. The arches were at irregular distances; the openings were of various shapes and sizes; one was large and square, others were strikingly diminutive. Some had distinctive names; that, for instance, nearest the old bridge being called the Constable Arch. This causeway, which in the old engravings seems of interminable length, was lined on both sides by wooden railings, in which in several places openings were left, so that by means of stone steps one could descend into the meadows. The two streams are now separated by a large plot of ground, but formerly there was between them only a narrow strip, the Mill Dam, which was strengthened on both sides by strong timbers that rose sheer from the water. Having become sadly dilapidated, this famous bridge was taken down in 1832, when its successor, a very much shorter bridge, was erected.

#### 44. The Vicarage and Orchard Side.

At the time Cowper and Mrs. Unwin reached Olney the vicarage was being enlarged and almost rebuilt by Lord Dartmouth, and it was not finished until October 23rd, on which day Newton removed thither, his new friends accompanying him.

Instead of "one of the most inconvenient," Newton now found the vicarage "one of the best and most

commodious houses in the county." Cowper described it as "a smart, stone building, well sashed, but much too good for the living." At the present day, mellowed by time, the newly-built, "well-sashed" house of Cowper's day is just beginning to look venerable.

Since the year 1753 the living of Olney had been held by the Rev. Moses Browne, an Evangelical clergyman of considerable repute both as a writer and preacher, who, subsequent to 1763, had been a non-resident, having removed that year to Morden College, Blackheath, to the chaplaincy of which he had been appointed; so at the time Cowper arrived in Olney Newton had been curate here about four years.

On the 9th of December Cowper and Mrs. Unwin removed to Orchard Side.

In his poetical epistle to Lady Austen, Cowper describes his house as

" Deep in the abyss of Silver End,"

an obscure part of the town, at the mouth of which stood two public-houses, the "Cock" and the "Game Cock." Nothing, however, but poetical licence justifies him in so describing it. It was not the most agreeably situated house in the town truly, for to live even on the verge of what might be called the Alsatia of Olney must have been accompanied with certain disadvantages; but it faces the market-hill, its situation is far from unpleasant, and on the whole Cowper made himself very comfortable in it. It was by no means every day that the boys of Silver End splashed his windows with mud, nor is it likely that the wailings of the infants of that locality were absolutely without





ORCHARD SIDE.  
COWPER'S HOUSE AT OLNEY.



intermission. A small etching in my possession (probably by Mr. James Storer) shows Orchard Side as it appeared in the poet's time. Under it, in neat lettering, are the words, "View in Olney, Bucks, September, 1819." It represents the house with cornice and imitation embattlements which hide the roof, and two doors instead of three.

To its castellated appearance Cowper himself refers in a letter to Unwin (July 3, 1786), written just after his removal to Weston. At first sight of the odd-looking place Unwin was shocked. In his eyes it had the appearance of a prison, and he did not like the thought of his mother living in it. Says Cowper: "Your view of it was not only just, but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purposes of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a gaol-delivery is at hand; the bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape."

The part of the house occupied by Cowper and Mrs. Unwin—for they never occupied the whole—was the western half, which is the farther of the two from Silver End. It should be borne in mind in reading this description that Cowper's House faces north. "You have not forgotten, perhaps," he writes to the Rev. W. Unwin (August 25, 1781), "that the building we inhabit consists of two mansions. And because you have only seen the inside of that part of it which is in our occupation, I therefore inform you that the other end of it is by far the most superb as well as the most commodious."

The yard at the back of the house, which reminds

us of the incident of the viper, celebrated in the poem called "The Colubriad," was followed by a long narrow garden threaded by a gravel path thirty yards long, at the end of which stood the small erection called "The Summer House," which for the greatness of its renown rivals even Cowper's world-famous parlour. As for the gravel walk, "though it afforded but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty," it proved in inclement weather a boon. Cowper, indeed, went so far as to say (to Newton, August 5, 1786) that it was "all they had to move on for eight months in the year"—a statement that might have been accurate with regard to Mrs. Unwin, who probably considered that in winter time female feet,

"Too weak to struggle with tenacious clay,  
Or ford the rivulets,"

are best at home; but scarcely so as far as Cowper was concerned. Neither badness of roads nor dulness of weather were any obstacle when *he* wanted an airing; at any rate, according to his own account, in the description of the weather-house:—

"Fearless of humid air and gathering rains,  
Forth steps the man—an emblem of myself."

Indeed, those simple critics who have assumed from a few passages written when Cowper was in an "unked" mood (as the Buckinghamshire people say), that his situation at Olney was one worthy of the utmost commiseration, can only be laughed at.

Between the poet's garden and the vicarage garden was an orchard—Mrs. Aspray's orchard—the same

that gave the name to Cowper's house, and in order that Cowper and his friend Newton might be able to visit each other without going through the street, they had a doorway made through the vicarage garden wall. For the privilege of passing through the orchard they paid a guinea a year, and hence the name by which it is generally known—Guinea Field. It was an incident that occurred in Mrs. Aspray's orchard that gave origin to Cowper's poetical fable of "The Raven."

#### 45. Early Days at Olney.

Cowper was now thirty-six years of age; his friend, the Rev. John Newton, was forty-two. A word or two may be permitted about the other men who have made the neighbourhood of Olney in a manner famous. Scott had not yet arrived here. He was at this time only a lad of twenty, disgraced and scorned, yet with plenty of spirit in him, toiling and rebelling on his father's farm at Braytoft. William Carey, afterwards the eminent missionary, certainly was innocent of Oriental languages. A child of six, he had done little besides play about his father's cottage at Paulerspury. Of another personage belonging to this neighbourhood, however, the literary world had heard a good deal. Two years previously (1765) Dr. Percy had published his celebrated "Reliques of English Poetry," written at the little parsonage of Easton Maudit, five miles east of Olney; but whether Cowper ever met Percy, or even read his book, we do not know. With the surrounding gentry Cowper,

as might be expected, made no acquaintances. Lady Throckmorton, however, the wife of Sir Robert Throckmorton, a man far advanced in years, was kind enough to favour him with the key of their pleasure grounds at Weston Underwood, a village a mile and a half distant. With her son John (afterwards Sir John) Cowper had been acquainted when a boy.

These early years at Olney were spent very happily. So far from being a recluse, Cowper, in company with Newton, visited all the country round. Now they are together at Northampton, now they are riding to Winslow ; one day they walk to Lavendon Mill, on another occasion pastoral work calls them to Weston. As before observed, Mr. Maddock in his diary notices visits of Cowper and Newton to Kettering on August 27, 1768, March 29, 1769, and May 22, 1770. "On September 19" (1772), writes Newton in his pocket-book, "breakfasted at Yardley ; spoke from Matt. v. 6 ; at Denton, from Phil. iv. 4. Mr. Cowper went with me, a pleasant walk both ways ;" and entries like a "pleasant walk with Mr. Cowper" are frequent in the record of Newton's pocket-book during this period. On these visits, too, Newton was sometimes accompanied by Mrs. Newton and Mrs. Unwin, as well as Cowper. The intercourse between the friends, indeed, became so close and affectionate, that, thanks to the right of way through Guinea Field, they "were seldom separate when at home and awake." Much of their time was spent in visiting the poor, ministering to the sick, and praying at the bedside of the dying.

In June, 1768, Cowper paid a visit to St. Albans,

where he doubtless saw again his "little physician," though the object of the visit was not to consult Dr. Cotton, but to apprentice Dick Coleman. The end of it was that the lad was fixed at Oundle. Referring to this trip, Cowper says (June 16, 1768), "I visited St. Albans about a fortnight since in person, and I visit it every day in thought. The recollection of what passed there, and the consequences that followed it, fill my mind continually." The vacancy he had left at the "Collegium Insanorum" was by and by filled up by a near female relation, and Cowper was led to pray, "May the same hand which struck off my fetters, deliver her also out of the House of Bondage."

#### 46. The Great House, and the Lines on "A Thunder Storm."

The exertions of John Newton at Olney were indefatigable. He threw his whole soul into the work to which he had been called, and his industry in every department of it, when we note his schools, his cottage lectures, his public services both in the town and villages, and his prayer-meetings, must command our admiration. In respect to the last, one of his most frequent resorts was the cottage of a certain Molly Mole, or, as he called it, "the Mole Hill"; and when the favoured Molly removed to another cottage, called by Newton "the new Mole Hill," the prayer-meetings followed her.

His exertions, too, had visible results; the accommodation at the church proving insufficient for the large

numbers who now regularly flocked to hear him, a large gallery had been erected and opened (July, 1765). But even then "there seemed no more room in the body of the church than before." Short days, uncertain weather, dirty roads—none of these made any sensible diminution in the assemblies; and the seriousness of his hearers gave Newton hope that his congregations did not come in vain. His powers of endurance seem to have been exercised almost as much in his self-imposed tasks at Olney as they were on the shores of Guinea. "I have often been engaged," says he, "about six hours in speaking at church and at home, yet find myself in good case, little or nothing fatigued; but if there was occasion, I could readily go and preach again."

In that same year, too, which was two years previous to Cowper's arrival, Newton had commenced having services in what was called the "Great House," a mansion, the property of Lord Dartmouth, that stood between the church and the mill.

This house being unoccupied, Newton got permission to make use of it, in the first instance for the meetings of the children, "where he could talk, preach, and reason with them in their own little way," and afterwards for prayer-meetings.

It was his particular pleasure to get his friends when they visited Olney to take part in the services at the Great House. Berridge and Venn, Rowland Hill, Symonds of Bedford, Bull of Newport, and many other divines were inveigled hither and called upon to speak; nor was Cowper, when he arrived in Olney, exempted. Of the townspeople who took part in these





OLNEY CHURCH.



services one especially attracted Cowper's attention—to wit, the person whom he subsequently dubbed "Wrong-headed Nathan Sample," a man "rich in spirit, though poor in expression; whose desires were unutterable in every sense, both because they were too big for language, and because Nathan had no language for them." Newton's own addresses were practical to a degree, and he always spoke bearing in mind some circumstance of recent occurrence. On one occasion he chooses a text because "Mr. Cowper is down in the depths;" on another he speaks from 2 Peter i. 10, "chiefly on account of my maid Molly, who is perplexed and tempted on the point of election." Mr. Bull refers to a paper in his possession containing a list of those who engaged in prayer at these meetings. It gives weekly dates for nearly twelve months, with a single name attached to each. Cowper's appears about eight times.

For the use of the worshippers at the Great House both Cowper and Newton wrote hymns, the most noteworthy being Cowper's "Jesus, where'er Thy people meet."

That it was scarcely wise of Newton to require Cowper to take such an active part in these services cannot be doubted. Had he attended merely as a worshipper no objection could have been made, but it was a mistake to press a man who was one of those "to whom a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison," to pray in public. Cowper, indeed, told Mr. Greathead that when he was expected to take the lead at these meetings "his mind was always greatly agitated for some hours preceding."

"But his trepidation," Mr. Greatheed continues, "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." "He spoke," says Newton, "with self-abasement and humiliation of spirit, yet with that freedom and fervency as if he saw the Lord whom he addressed face to face." The Rev. Andrew Fuller, who was in Olney a few years later (1776), makes the remark, "I know a person who heard him pray frequently at these meetings, and have heard him say, 'Of all the men that I ever heard pray, no one equalled Mr. Cowper.'"

To Newton, the people of the town, or rather the better disposed of them, naturally became strongly attached. His untiring energy, his earnest sermons, and the real interest he took in their little joys and sorrows could have no other effect; and those he gathered about him were indeed "a lovely company." Says he, writing to his wife about this time, "Many prayers are and will be put up for you while you are away. It is this endears Olney to me. The Lord has a praying people here, and they pray for us. To be interested in the simple, affectionate, and earnest prayers of such a people is a privilege of more value than the wealth of kings."

About this time the following incident occurred. When Cowper was out for a walk one day a shower began to come on, and he took refuge in a farm-house called Warrington Lodge, situated about two miles to the north of Olney. A severe storm broke over the

country, and the poet while waiting in the farm-house occupied himself in writing down in poetical form the various thoughts that the situation suggested. These lines, which he entitled "A Thunder Storm," he left with the farmer, whose name was Travel, and Mr. Travel took a copy of them. Where the original is no one knows (probably it was destroyed), but this copy was long in the possession of the Rev. William Barker, of Hastings, who printed the lines at his private press. Mr. Barker's mother was a Travel. There can be no doubt as to the genuineness of the piece, but of course great exactness or polish must not be looked for in a composition committed to paper in such an off-hand manner. The very roughness of it, indeed, enhances its interest, for it was Cowper's invariable practice to polish and repolish—a process that this piece would certainly have undergone had he destined it for publication. Apart from other considerations, then, it is some satisfaction to possess a poem of Cowper's in its original crude form. The lines are as follows:—

"A THUNDER STORM.

The Sky begins to lower and thickening Clouds  
 Portend a speedy storm, the Vocal tribes  
 No longer Sonnets sing; all, *all* are mute;  
 The Beasts forbear to graze and seek the shade:  
 Yon herd of Swine see, see how fast they run;  
 'Tis said they see the Wind—  
 A solemn and awful silence now prevails,  
 Save when the breeze the Thunder's harbinger  
 Just rustles through the Grove: on ev'ry brow  
 A dark despondence reigns, and hark! it comes;  
 I heard the sudden roar,—my Soul, be calm,  
 Look up and view its progress, be serene,

take the lead in the prayer-meetings, but beyond that I cannot see in what way Newton was to blame. In insisting on the importance of numerous religious exercises he was only acting like other leaders of the Evangelical party. It was a reaction. Previous to the revival of religion, services were too few, as they still continued to be among non-Evangelicals. The Evangelicals went too far the other way. Cowper, who had long identified himself with the party, had already committed the mistake at Huntingdon. In Mr. Barrie's delightful "Window in Thrums" the much-worried Hendry McQuimpha makes the remark, "A man canna be aye washin' at 'imself'," and many a true Christian, though he may never have said it, must have thought the same thing with respect to religious exercises.

Amongst those who found fault with Newton's behaviour towards Cowper, must be counted Lady Hesketh. "Mr. Newton is an excellent man, I make no doubt," said she, writing to her sister Theodora, "and a strong-minded man like himself might have been of great use, but to such a mind—such a tender-mind—and to such a wounded yet lively imagination as our cousin's, I am persuaded that eternal praying and preaching were too much; nor could it, I think, be otherwise. One only proof of this I will give you, which our cousin mentioned a few days ago in casual conversation. The case was this: He was mentioning that for one or two summers he had found himself under the necessity of taking his walk in the middle of the day, which he thought had done him a lot of harm, 'but,' continued he, 'I could not help it, for it was



*Zur Affectuosität d. W. d.  
John Newton*

1798.





when Mr. Newton was here, and we made it a rule to pass four days in the week together. We dined at one, and it was Mr. Newton's rule for tea to be on the table at four o'clock, for at six we broke up.' 'Well, then,' said I, 'if you had your time to yourself after six you would have good time for an evening's walk, I should have thought.' 'No,' said he; 'after six we had service, or lecture, or something of that kind, which lasted till supper.' I made no reply, but could not and cannot help thinking they might have made a better use of a fine summer's evening than by shutting themselves up to make long prayers."

Thus Lady Hesketh; but others have gone much farther, and even laid the cause of Cowper's mental depression at Newton's door, which, together with other charges, has been ably confuted by the Rev. J. H. Overton. Mr. Overton, after pointing out that the germs of this distressing melancholy, which cast a gloom over Cowper's latter years, are clearly traceable before his acquaintance with Newton began, makes the assertion that the most that can be said is, that the depression of spirits was increased by his intimacy with the pious and energetic curate of Olney, and then inquires whether there is any real foundation for this supposition. To answer this question, Mr. Overton examines the nature of the relationship which subsisted between Cowper and Newton, and points out that, although at first sight no two men could be more opposite in character, yet the differences were really superficial. Cowper's apparent effeminacy was all on the surface; his mind, when not unstrung, was, as his letters as well as his poems testify, of an essentially

masculine and vigorous type; while, on the other side, despite Newton's hard and rough exterior, his heart was as tender and delicate as that of a child. "Newton," continues Mr. Overton, "had a point of contact with every side of Cowper's character. He had at least as strong a sympathy with the author of 'John Gilpin' as with the author of the 'Task.' For one of the most marked features of John Newton's intellectual character was his strong sense of humour. Many of his 'Ana' rival those of Dr. Johnson himself; and now and then, even in his sermons, glimpses of his humorous tendency peep forth. (See Fourth Sermon on 'The Messiah'.) Again, he could fully appreciate Cowper's taste for classical literature; considering how utterly Newton's education had been neglected, it is surprising that he managed, under the most unfavourable circumstances, to acquire no contemptible knowledge of the great classical authors. Add to all this that Newton's native kindness of heart made him feel very deeply for the misfortune of his friend, and it will be no longer a matter of wonder that there should have been so close a friendship between the two men. It is readily granted that there was a certain amount of awe mingled with the love which Cowper bore to Newton, but Newton was the very last man in the world to abuse the gentle poet's confidence."

Mr. Overton next examines seriatim the various counts of the indictment brought against Newton, pointing out, in the first place, that Cowper's mental depression was not even aggravated by Newton's Calvinistic views; for, in the first place, although Newton was a Calvinist, it was only in a very modified

sense—the gloomy, repulsive side of Calvinism found no place in Newton's system; in the second place, Cowper never regarded himself as one of those predestined to be lost, do what they would, but, on the contrary, always held that he had once been a child of God. "To follow all the aberrations of a disordered intellect is of course impossible, but it is quite clear that the dreadful hallucination which possessed Cowper's mind had nothing to do with any of the five points of Calvinism;" and, in the third place, there is no evidence to show that either hymn-writing or visiting the poor tended in any way to induce a return of Cowper's malady. "Newton may well have thought that the consciousness of being usefully employed was the very best means of diverting Cowper's mind from the gloomy thoughts in which a want of occupation would have given him leisure to indulge."

The various other charges that have been brought against Newton are dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

#### 48. The Removal of Unwin to Stock, and other Incidents of 1769.

After his conversion at St. Albans, and especially after his renunciation of the idea of becoming a clergyman, we find Cowper nursing the hope that God might permit him to be an "instrument of turning many to the truth in a private way:" consequently it was with great joy that he seized any opportunity that presented itself of pointing out to others the importance of the

life in Christ. To help Newton in visiting the poor and ministering to the sick was a real pleasure, but not only to his humble neighbours did he seek to do good, he endeavoured likewise to promote the eternal happiness of his friends and relations. In January, 1769, Joseph Hill had just recovered from a dangerous illness, and Cowper, in a congratulatory letter to him (dated Jan. 21st), though half afraid of giving offence, takes upon himself to speak in a solemn strain. "My dear friend," he winds up, "I desire and pray, that when this last enemy shall come to execute an unlimited commission upon us, we may be found ready, being established and rooted in a well-grounded faith in His name, who conquered and triumphed over him upon the Cross."

To Cowper's joy "Hill" looked at the letter in the right light; and in his next to the same, the poet says, "I do assure you, the gentleness and candour of your manner engages my affection to you very much. You answer with mildness to an admonition which would have provoked many to anger."

To his brother John, Cowper also wrote in similar style on various occasions, though, unfortunately, the letters have been lost; and he was ultimately, as we shall by and by see, the means of being of great assistance to him. But it must be noticed that Cowper subsequently regarded in a different light the spirit with which he was then actuated (April 3, 1786). "This eagerness of spirit," he says, "natural to persons newly informed, and the less to be wondered at in me, who had just emerged from the horrors of despair, made me imprudent, and, I doubt not, troublesome to

many. . . . Good is intended, but harm is done, too often by the zeal with which I was at that time animated."

Meanwhile an event happened which made a great change in the Olney household, for young Unwin, with whom Cowper had become linked in the strongest bonds of friendship, now (July, 1769) quitted Olney, having been instituted to the Rectory of Stock, near Ramsden, in Essex. Educated at Christ College, Cambridge, Mr. Unwin, like his father, had attached himself to the Evangelical party, of which, though never a distinguished member, he was at all times a very diligent and conscientious one.

At the end of July 31st Hill invited the poet to London, which invitation, however, was declined, "Sir Cowper," as he was called at Olney, preferring "his home to any other spot of earth in the world."

"My dear friend," he says, "I am obliged to you for your invitation; but being long accustomed to retirement, which I was always fond of, I am now more than ever unwilling to re-visit those noisy and crowded scenes, which I never loved, and which I now abhor. I remember you with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as I ever entertained for any man. But the strange and uncommon incidents of my life have given an entirely new turn to my whole character and conduct, and rendered me incapable of receiving pleasure from the same employments and amusements of which I could readily partake in former days."

After his settlement at Olney, Cowper necessarily saw his brother less frequently. They now exchanged

only an annual visit. The poet thus alludes, in a letter to Lady Hesketh, to John's first appearance in the town: "My brother drove up and down Olney in quest of us, almost as often as you up and down Chancery Lane in quest of the Madans, with fifty boys and girls at his tail, before he could find us"—partly on account of the stupidity of those of whom inquiry was made, and partly from the out-of-the-way situation of the house, which was much hidden by the market-hill trees and buildings.

That John could not see his way to embracing the doctrines of Evangelicalism still continued a source of regret to the poet, who, whenever he met his brother, engaged him "in conversation of a spiritual kind." By and by John became more reserved, and, instead of arguing as formerly, listened patiently and made no reply, with a view—as he afterwards declared—to the avoidance of disputes, and to securing the "continuance of that peace which had always subsisted between us." When at Olney John conformed to the customs of Mrs. Unwin's household; went to church (where he would hear John Newton preaching those same doctrines that he felt so much repugnance to); "received civilly whatever passed in conversation upon the subject, but adhered strictly to the rule he had prescribed to himself, never remarking upon or objecting to anything he heard or saw"—carrying himself, indeed, like what he really was—a perfect gentleman. To request John Cowper to preach from Olney pulpit was of course out of all question, "nor," says Cowper, "when Mr. Newton was with us once at the time of family prayer, could we ask my brother to officiate, though being

himself a minister, and one of our own family for the time, the office seemed naturally to fall into his hands."

Despite, however, that he was apparently unaffected by what he heard and saw at Olney, there was in reality a slow change taking place in the mind of John Cowper. Morality alone, he was beginning to see, was not sufficient for fallen man. Something more was required. The ill-success that attended him in his own parish of Foxton was in itself a proof. His moral sermons, his warnings and reproofs, were "spoken to the wind and attended with no effect." If we are to believe his brother's words, he was one of those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised the doctrines of the Cross."

Notwithstanding his gifts and successes, John Cowper had always been troubled by a shadow on his happiness, a shadow which was none other than the prediction made when he was a boy by the gipsy tinker at Felstead. By a curious coincidence, all that the gipsy had prophesied had so far come true. We have seen how he was taken from Felstead and sent to a *larger school*—namely, Eton. His Felstead schoolfellow continued his friend throughout life, and to a younger sister of this friend John Cowper became much attached, though the young lady did not return his affection—thus fulfilling another portion of the gipsy's prophecy. Consonant with the prophetic words, too, he had reached the age of thirty, and was not married. And now only one more portion of the prophecy remained to be fulfilled. After the age of thirty "his fate became obscure, and the lines of his

hand showed no more prognostics of futurity." In other words, as John understood it, he was speedily to die ; the consequence being that his mind was often troubled. About this time his friend saw him again at Cambridge, and the following incident occurred : John Cowper was walking and talking with him in one of the college gardens near a gate, when he suddenly interrupted the conversation and exclaimed, " Did you see that man pass ? " The friend, who had observed nothing, asked what man he meant. John Cowper replied, " The very man you and I met at Felstead, and in a soldier's jacket—I saw him pass the gate ! " They both ran to it and into the public road, but saw no such person. Cowper said, " It is a warning—you know he could predict nothing of me after my thirtieth year." As the writer who supplied Southey with these facts observes, the dejection at various times of John Cowper, and the fancied apparition of the gipsy pedlar, " were but too surely indications of the same constitutional malady which so often embittered the existence of his brother."

For several years John Cowper had laboured hard at a translation of Apollonius Rhodius, his favourite author, and his friend perceived that he sat far too long at his work. His intense application to his studies, indeed, was gradually undermining his constitution. In the autumn of this year he made a journey into Wales ; whilst returning thence he took cold, and, lest he should be laid up at a distance from home, he pushed forward as fast as possible with fever upon him. Soon after his arrival at Cambridge he discharged a quantity of blood ; and his brother was at once sent



for from Olney. Every one believed that there was no hope. None were more depressed than William, but it was his brother's spiritual danger that gave him most pain.

Remembering that he had himself obtained good from the poems of George Herbert, Cowper read them to his brother. Seizing a fair opportunity, too, he made a confession of his faith, which, he says, "I did as well as I was able, illustrating it with my own experience." To the surprise of every one, however, John presently began to recover strength, and so rapidly did he mend, thanks to a strong constitution, that after a stay in Cambridge of only ten days his brother was able to leave him, in full belief that all was going on well.

#### 49. The Death of his Brother John.— March, 1770.

John's recovery, however, was only apparent. In February of the next year (1770) William was again summoned to attend him, and "by letters which represented him as so ill, that the physician entertained but little hope of his recovery." The complaints were "asthma and dropsy, supposed to be the effect of an imposthume in his liver." But what distressed Cowper was that his brother displayed so little preparedness for the change that was imminent. On the occasion of the former illness Cowper had been distressed at seeing on his brother's bed, not a Bible, but a book of plays; but this carelessness at an even more serious

time was tenfold more distressing to him. "He was cheerful," says Cowper, "when I first arrived, expressed great joy at seeing me, thought himself much better than he had been, and seemed to flatter himself with hopes that he should be well again. . . . He did not seem to lay his illness at all to heart, nor could I find by his conversation that he had one serious thought. As often as a suitable occasion offered, when we were free from company and interruption, I endeavoured to give a spiritual turn to the discourse; and the day after my arrival, asked his permission to pray with him, to which he readily consented. I renewed my attempts in this way as often as I could, though without any apparent success; still he seemed as careless and unconcerned as ever; yet I could not but consider his willingness in this instance as a token for good, and observed with pleasure, that though at other times he discovered no mark of seriousness, yet when I spoke to him of the Lord's dealings with myself, he received what I said with affection, would press my hand and look kindly at me, and seemed to love me all the better for it."

To Mrs. Unwin, on the 26th of February, he writes : "I am tossed upon the waves of Hope and Fear. I see my brother asleep upon the very brink of Ruin, and the only Hand that can pluck him thence is not yet stretched out for his Deliverance. Every day brings him sensibly nearer to the great Decision; my thoughts are interested in his Condition all day long, and at night I pray for him in my dreams." This letter, which is the only one that has been preserved from Cowper to this dear friend, is likewise interesting as

showing how passionately he was attached to her. Mr. Newton, writing to Cowper, had left a blank at the bottom of his letter, and Mrs. Unwin sent the letter on just as she received it, without, as Cowper would have liked, adding anything herself. "And why so?" he asks. "Do you imagine that a line from you, though it were but a line, would not be welcome to me, especially in my present distressful circumstances! This is my fourth letter to you since I came hither, and I have received but one from you; perhaps tomorrow's post will bring me another—at least I shall be much disappointed if it does not, and shall begin to suspect that I have done something wrong, though, wherever I fail, I am very sure I never *intentionally* fail in any point where your Peace and Happiness are concerned." And at the end of the letter he says, "Let nothing I have said distress you; your peace is as dear to me as my own, and I cannot grieve you without suffering myself."

Day after day William sat by his brother's side, spoke to him words of comfort, and "wrestled for a blessing upon him." The story of all this is a curious psychological study of the religious mind, which Cowper wrote under the title of "Adelphi." It certainly is very touching. To the patient's state of carelessness succeeded a spirit of devotion, and one day (the 10th of March) John was discovered pouring out earnest prayer. "Shortly after," says Cowper, "when I returned, he threw his arms about my neck, and, leaning his head against mine, he said, 'Brother, if I live you and I shall be more like one another than we have been, but, whether I live or live not, all is well, and will be

so ; I know it will ; I have felt that which I never felt before, and am sure that God has visited me with this sickness to teach me what I was too proud to learn in health. I never had satisfaction till now. The doctrines I had been used to referred me to *myself* for the foundation of my hopes, and there I could find nothing to rest upon. The sheet anchor of the soul was wanting. I thought you wrong, yet wished to believe as you did. I found myself unable to believe, yet always thought that I should one day be brought to do so. You suffered more than I have done before you believed these truths, but our sufferings, though different in their kind and measure, were directed to the same end. I hope He has taught me that which He teaches none but His own ; I hope so. These things were foolishness to me once, but now I have a firm foundation, and am satisfied.' Later on he said, 'I see the rock upon which I once split, and I see the rock of my salvation. I have peace in myself, and, if I live, I hope it will be that I may be made a messenger of peace to others. I have learned *that* in a moment which I could not have learned by reading many books for many years.'"

Curiously enough, the same day that he was so refreshed in spirit he began, to the great surprise of his physician, Dr. Glinn, to mend in body, and for several days all entertained hopes of his recovery, during which he greatly rejoiced William by his conversation. Among other things he said, "How plain do many texts appear, to which, after consulting all the commentators, I could hardly affix a meaning. Now I have their true meaning without any comment at all. There is but one key to the New Testament ; there is but one

interpreter. I cannot describe to you, nor shall ever be able to describe, what I felt in the moment when it was given to me."

The remarkable amendment, however, was arrested. The pains came on again, and once more his strength declined apace, but the comforting words of his brother and the great change that had taken place in himself, enabled him to bear with resignation his acutest sufferings. "In a time of severe and continual pain he smiled in my face and said, 'Brother, I am as happy as a king.'" Indeed, it is difficult to read this sketch by Cowper of the life, or rather latter days, of his brother, without tears starting to the eyes. At length came the end. "The Lord, in whose sight the death of His saints is precious, cut short his sufferings, and gave him a speedy and peaceful departure." This was on the 20th of March (1770).

Dr. Bennet, Bishop of Cloyne, writing to the Rev. Dr. Parr, says: "We have lost the best classic and most liberal thinker in our University, Cowper of Benet. He sat so long at his studies that the posture gave rise to an abscess in his liver, and he fell a victim to learning. The goddess has so few votaries here, that she resolved to take the best offering we had, and she employed Apollonius Rhodius to strike the blow."

John Cowper was buried, by his own desire, in the chancel of the church at Foxton, the master and fellows of his college attending as pall-bearers. William, in compliance with the wishes of his friends, was not present.

An elegy on his death, in which he is addressed under the name of "Moschus," by a fellow-collegian,

also testifies to the honour and esteem in which John Cowper was held at Cambridge.

As regards Apollonius, it really did seem as if the "sweet bard of Rhodes, bright star of Egypt's court," was not to be translated. "Melancthon did but think of a translation and died." Hoeltzlinus commenced to translate, and made considerable progress, but was cut off in the midst of his work. John Cowper, as we have seen, fared no better. Later writers, however, have been more successful. An edition of Apollonius was issued by Merkel in 1854, and by Seaton in 1888.

It is pleasing to be able to note that Corpus Christi still cherishes John Cowper's memory. When, a short time ago, Mr. Swann Hurrell, of Foxton, mentioned that the tablet to John Cowper's memory needed repairing, the college contributed substantially to the fund.

An oil painting, supposed to represent John Cowper, hangs within the college.

After John's death the story of the fortune-teller got to the ears of his relatives, one of whom, Mrs. Cowper (the major's wife), wrote to William on the subject. He replied thus (June 7, 1770): "As to the affair of the fortune-teller, he never mentioned it to me, nor was there any such paper as you mention. I looked over all his papers before I left the place, and, had there been such a one, must have discovered it. I have heard the report from other quarters, but no other particulars than that the woman foretold him when he should die." Cowper was misinformed in respect to the sex of the fortune-teller. As we said before, it was a man, and not a woman.

Having written an account of his own conversion ("The Memoir"), Cowper now thought fit to do the same in respect to the conversion of his brother; and consequently he wrote a short narrative with the following title:—

"Adelphi. A Sketch of the Character, and an Account of the Illness of the late Rev. John Cowper, A.M., Fellow of the Benet College, Cambridge, who finished his course with joy, March 20, 1770." This narrative was not published till after the poet's death.

Cowper, who some time before had sold his stock, had now for several weeks been thinking of selling his London chambers also in order to be able to draw money for current expenses. While still ignorant of what his brother had left, he hoped (April 21, 1770) that the cash realized by the sale of his chambers, added to the legacy from his brother, would be sufficient to purchase such an annuity as might enable him to subsist comfortably without being any longer chargeable to his friends. The legacy, however, turned out to be less than was expected. The exact sum was £700, of which £300 were owing to the college, the other £400 went to Cowper's account; but the poet declares himself to have been a considerable loser in point of income by his brother's death, from which it may be assumed that he received a regular allowance from him as well as from his other relatives.

## 50. At the "Bull."—1771.

In June, 1770, receiving tidings of the illness of her son, Mrs. Unwin hastened to Stock, but in a few days was able to leave him, happily out of danger.

In the autumn Hill a second time invited Cowper to London, but the invitation, as before, was declined. "I could not leave Olney," he says, "unless in a case of absolute necessity, without much inconvenience to myself and others."

In February, 1771, one of their servants fell ill with the small-pox, and Cowper and Mrs. Unwin were obliged to take up their abode for a short time at the "Bull," an inn situated on the opposite side of the market-place,

In reference to this incident Newton, who was on a visit in London, thus writes on the 2nd of March: "I long for Tuesday, that I may again think of you as living snugly at Orchard Side. What can you both do at the 'Bull,' surrounded with noise and nonsense day and night? Well, we cannot help it now. You have had a great cross, and I hope the Lord has sweetened it, and enabled you to bear it. I know His presence can comfort you in the midst of bulls and bears."

Later in this year Cowper began to show signs again of derangement; and alarmed with the increasing gloom that was enveloping his friend, Newton suggested the writing of hymns, in the hope that concentration of mind on holy themes would afford relief. He proposed likewise that Cowper's compositions and those of



himself should be published together in one volume, and entitled "The Olney Hymns." We can easily understand how it was that Cowper readily acquiesced in the proposal, for not only was hymn-writing congenial work, but the knowledge that his productions were destined to be printed—always such a stimulant to him—would increase the pleasure. "For my own part," says he (Dec. 13, 1786), "I could no more amuse myself with writing verse, if I did not print it when written, than with the study of tactics, for which I can never have any real occasion."

#### 51. The Olney Hymns.—1771 and 1772.

That the majority of the Olney Hymns supplied by Cowper were written in 1771 and 1772, I gather from Newton's remark in the preface. "We had not proceeded far upon our proposed plan, before my dear friend was prevented, by a long and affecting indisposition, from affording me *any further assistance*." This refers, of course, to Cowper's third derangement, by and by to be dealt with, which covered the whole of the year 1773; moreover, that Cowper wrote any hymns after the derangement is extremely improbable, seeing that he was continually haunted with the belief that God had forsaken him.

Some of the verses contributed by Cowper are strongly traceable to the melancholy which now troubled him, and which is supposed in the first instance to have been brought on by the death of his brother John. Looking back, for example, to the joy-

fulness of his latter days at St. Albans, and the calmness and holy joy of Huntingdon, and contrasting with them his present low state, he bursts forth :—

“ Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed !  
How sweet their memory still !  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill.”

Sometimes the note sounded is more despondent still :—

“ My former hopes are fled,  
My terror now begins ;  
I feel, alas ! that I am dead  
In trespasses and sins.

Ah, whither shall I fly !  
I hear the thunder roar ;  
The law proclaims destruction nigh,  
And vengeance at the door ! ”

A verse of another of the hymns runs :—

“ Thy saints are comforted, I know,  
And love thy house of prayer ;  
I therefore go where others go,  
But find no comfort there.”

And again :—

“ Oh, make this heart rejoice or ache !  
Decide this doubt for me ;  
And if it be not broken, break ;  
And heal it if it be ! ”

This is not, however, the usual strain of Cowper's

Olney Hymns, which breathe of trust in God, and pious gratitude for His great favours, showing that he still enjoyed many hours of happy serenity, as, for example, the first—the beautiful hymn entitled “Walking with God” :—

“ Oh for a closer walk with God !  
 A calm and heavenly frame ;  
 A light to shine upon the road  
 That leads me to the Lamb ! ”

By many this hymn is considered Cowper's masterpiece, but “Hark, my soul ! it is the Lord,” and “Jesus, where'er Thy people meet,” are perhaps its equals ; and the hymn, of which the following is the opening verse, is not less excellent :—

“ Sometimes a light surprises  
 The Christian while he sings ;  
 It is the Lord who rises  
 With healing in His wings ;  
 When comforts are declining,  
 He grants the soul again  
 A season of clear shining,  
 To cheer it after rain.”

Newton having about this time given a course of lectures at the Great House on the “Pilgrim's Progress,” it is not surprising to find that one of Cowper's hymns (No. 39) can be traced to that allegory. The subjects of many of the hymns were suggested by Mr. Barham, of Bedford, a friend of both Cowper and Newton.

“Jesus, where'er Thy people meet,” was composed, as we said, for the use of the worshippers at the Great House ; the hymn on “Submission” was

probably suggested by the loss of his brother John, as was also the beautiful hymn entitled "Welcome Cross" :—

" 'Tis my happiness below  
 Not to live without the cross,  
 But the Saviour's power to know,  
 Sanctifying every loss ;  
 Trials must and will befall,  
 But with humble faith to see  
 Love inscribed upon them all,  
 This is happiness to me."

The last written by Cowper, and one of the best, is said to have been composed at the beginning of his derangement, and after the frustration of a plan to destroy himself :—

" God moves in a mysterious way  
 His wonders to perform ;  
 He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
 And rides upon the storm."

About this time, and apparently at the vicarage, Cowper commenced to write a Commentary on the Gospel of St. John. Only the first chapter was completed. This fragment was found in the commencement of a folio volume afterwards used by Mr. Newton for his diary, and was printed in 1869 by the Rev. Josiah Bull, M.A. (Appendix to "Life of John Newton"). Like the Hymns, this Commentary was probably interrupted by the derangement of 1773.

## 52. Cowper Engaged to be Married, Autumn, 1772.

"What is there in the vale of life  
Half so delightful as a wife?"

COWPER, *Love Abused* (1780).

Mrs. Unwin who, several years previously, had, through her son's appointment to the Rectory of Stock, been deprived of his company, now found that she would very soon be called upon to relinquish her daughter too, Miss Unwin having become engaged to the Rev. Matthew Powley, a Northamptonshire clergyman, styled by Newton "a very valuable young man," curate of the Rev. Brooke Bridges, at Wadenhoe. Mr. Powley was born at Lowther, near Appleby, in 1740, and educated at Appleby Grammar School, whence he proceeded to Queen's College, Oxford, where, owing to the influence of Mr., afterwards Dr., Haweis, he and a few other young men "met in each other's rooms to read and pray and sing hymns." Strange as it may seem at the present day, this conduct, together with other proceedings of a like nature, brought him into trouble, and in the year 1761 he was excluded from the foundation, and threatened to be expelled from the college—a case which is paralleled by that of the "Proceedings against Six Members of St. Edmund's Hall," which occurred some time after, and to which we shall have occasion by and by to recur. This persecution, however, did good rather than harm, for it gained him the patronage of the distinguished divine, Mr. Venn. After a three years' curacy at Wadenhoe, Mr. Venn obtained for him the perpetual curacy of

Slaithwaite, in the parish of Huddersfield, to which he was licensed in 1767.

The approaching change in their household, it has been suggested, may have been one of the causes why, at the end of the year 1772, Cowper and Mrs. Unwin contracted an engagement of marriage. "What," asks Mrs. D'Arcy Collier, "could be more natural than that the prospect of the daughter's marriage and the fear of 'talk' when they should be left alone should make their own marriage appear the simplest solution of the difficulty?" But whether or not the impending departure of Miss Unwin had anything to do with Cowper's proposal of marriage, this we certainly know (by evidence of the Rev. John Newton, in his fragmentary *Life of the poet*), that an engagement of marriage was contracted, and that the marriage was to take place early in the year 1773. Mrs. Unwin, it may be observed, was forty-eight years of age, and Cowper forty-one. Soon after his engagement, however, Cowper's melancholy and despondency began to increase, and on June 7, 1772, we find Newton saying, in a letter to Mrs. Newton (then in London): "Dear Sir Cowper is in the depths as much as ever. The manner of his prayer last night led me to speak from Heb. ii. 18. I do not think he was much the better for it, but perhaps it might suit others."

On the 16th of September Newton preached at Collingtree, and was accompanied by Cowper and Mrs. Unwin. On the 19th of October he wrote in his diary, "Mr. Cowper has been ailing these two or three days, but I hope he is better." Instead of getting better, however, Cowper got worse, and before many

days of the new year had flown he was again seized by his dreaded malady, the exact day being the 24th of January (1773). We learn this from his letter dated April 3, 1786, where he observes: "I received . . . my snuff-box, &c., from Anonymous on the 24th of January, on which day, twelve years ago, I plunged into a melancholy that made me almost an infant."

The event is thus referred to by Newton in his diary: "A very alarming turn roused us from our beds and called us to Orchard Side at four in the morning. I stayed there till eight, before which time the threatening appearance went entirely off, and now things remain much as they were. My dear" (Mrs. Newton) "was there the whole day."





## CHAPTER IX.

### *THE THIRD DERANGEMENT.*

Jan., 1773—May, 1774.

#### 53. The Fatal Dream.

END OF FEBRUARY, 1773.

**B**UT though thus afflicted, Cowper nevertheless still held firmly to the belief that God was thus trying him only for the purpose to bring about good. Often Newton “heard him adore and submit to the sovereignty of God, and declare, though in the most agonizing and inconceivable distress, he was so perfectly satisfied of the wisdom and rectitude of the Lord’s appointments, that if he was sure of relieving himself only by stretching out his hand, he would not do it, unless he was equally sure it was agreeable to His will that he should do it.”

We have now come to that which to Cowper personally was the most pregnant moment in his existence, and yet, curious to say, this event, which so greatly concerned his personal comfort, has been entirely overlooked by all previous biographers. They have

recorded how he became acquainted with Newton, the story of the threefold cord, the origin of his great poem, and many things besides of great or less interest, but the incident of the Fatal Dream, the central point of his life, has never, so far as I am aware, been even alluded to. Hayley, Southey, Grimshawe, all are silent—a fact which I can explain only by assuming that not one of them was able to read, as it has been my privilege to do, the whole of Cowper's correspondence in consecutive order.

Hitherto, as before observed, despite the distressing state he had got into, Cowper still buoyed himself up with hope that God had not forsaken him; but one night, towards the end of February, he crossed the line that divided a life of hope from a life of despair. He had a Terrible Dream, in which "a Word" was spoken. What the dream was he does not tell us. Nor does he tell us "the word," though from his various references to it and to his malady we know its import. "Actum est de te, periisti"—"It is all over with thee, thou hast perished," was the thought ever uppermost in Cowper's mind. It is not impossible that that was the very "Word" (see to Newton, August 21, 1788), but whether it was so or not, the meaning must have been the same.

To this incident Cowper thus refers (October 16, 1785): "I had a dream twelve years ago, before the recollection of which all consolation vanishes, and, it seems to me, must always vanish. But I will neither trouble you with my dream nor with any comments upon it; for, if it were possible, I should do well to forget that, the remembrance of which is incom-

patible with my comfort." "Twelve years ago" makes, of course, the year of the dream 1773, but in an earlier letter (January 13, 1784) Cowper is very much more definite. He says, "Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. . . . The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years, in which I have spoken no other language. It is a long time for a man, whose eyes were once opened, to spend in darkness; long enough to make despair an inveterate habit; and such it is in me." Thus the date of the fatal dream was some time at the end of February, 1773, about a month after the day on which he was seized.

There is at least one more reference in Cowper's letters to this fatal event. It was not many months before his death. Lady Hesketh had been describing some lovely scenery, and the poet observes (October 13, 1798): "The country that you have had in prospect has been always famed for its beauties; but the wretch who can derive no gratification from a view of Nature, even under the disadvantage of her most ordinary dress, will have no eyes to admire her in any.

"In one day, in one *minute* I should rather have said, she became a universal blank to me; and though from a different cause, yet with an effect as difficult to remove as blindness itself."

Henceforth Cowper was a doomed man. God had forsaken him for ever. And the fearful delusion never left him except for very brief intervals during the remainder of his life. These fatal propensities for believing in dreams of a certain kind (ordinary dreams he did not believe in), and for imagining that he heard

supernatural voices, which propensities we alluded to in the chapters on Huntingdon, proved his undoing. To the student of literature the chief point of interest in Cowper's career probably is the incident of the commencement of the "Task"—the story of Lady Austen suggesting a subject for his pen ; but to Cowper himself that fact was of infinitesimal consequence compared with that dread moment when it was revealed to him, as he thought, from heaven, that the God that made him had doomed him to everlasting torment ; that God had even regretted that He had given existence to him. So deeply, indeed, was this engrained in his mind that for many years he never offered a prayer—did not even ask a blessing on his food ; his argument being that he had no right to do so—that it was useless (see § 95) ; and on February 24, 1783, in a letter to Newton, we find him writing the affecting sentence, " We think of you often, and one of us prays for you ; the other will, when he can pray for himself." Once, and once only, during the remainder of his life was the veil really raised, and that only for the brief space of three days, in the year 1785 (see § 112). Henceforward there was nothing to influence the fearful gloom save now and then a flash of momentary duration, the light that reached him at such times being comparable neither to that of the sun nor to that of the moon. It was " a flash in a dark night, during which the heavens opened only to shut again."

Cowper was now unwilling even to approach Newton's door, but on the 12th of April, in order to avoid the noise of the annual fair, he sought a retreat at the vicarage, and when there he resolved to stay. While

Cowper was still at the vicarage the long looked-for change took place in Mrs. Unwin's household, for on the 5th of May (1774) Miss Susanna Unwin was married at Olney Church to the Rev. Matthew Powley. The wedding could scarcely have been a very joyful one. Mrs. Unwin must have felt deeply the parting with her daughter, whose home was henceforward to be so far away as Huddersfield in Yorkshire, and the knowledge that her beloved friend was in so dreadful a state could not but increase her sadness.

#### 54. Newton's Cross.

Years after, describing his state at this period to Lady Hesketh (January 16, 1786), Cowper says, "I was suddenly reduced from my wonted rate of understanding to an almost childish imbecility. I did not, indeed, lose my senses, but I lost the power to exercise them. I could return a rational answer even to a difficult question, but a question was necessary or I never spoke at all. This state of mind was accompanied with misapprehension of things and persons that made me a very untractable patient. I believed that everybody hated me, and that Mrs. Unwin hated me most of all; was convinced that my food was poisoned, together with ten thousand megrims of the same stamp.

\* \* \* \* \*

"At the same time that I was convinced of Mrs. Unwin's aversion to me, I could endure no other companionship. The whole management of me consequently devolved upon her, and a terrible task she had. She

performed it, however, with a cheerfulness hardly ever equalled on such an occasion ; and I have often heard her say, that if ever she praised God in her life, it was when she found that she was to have all the labour. She performed it accordingly, but, as I hinted once before, very much to the hurt of her own constitution."

At first Cowper refused all medicines, but, in accordance with the wish of his Aunt Judith (Mrs. Madan), whom Newton had kept informed of all that had taken place, they were pressed upon him.

By this time Cowper had got into such a state that it was considered advisable to have recourse again to Dr. Cotton. For this purpose Newton made a journey to St. Albans, and he thus writes on the subject to Mr. Thornton : Dr. Cotton "desired that he might, if possible, be bled; and that the apothecary would give him an accurate account of the state of his blood, and what other observations he can make. He has been bled accordingly. . . . From what I told him, he seemed to think it a difficult case. It may be so according to medical rules ; but I hope that the Great Physician will cure him, either by giving a blessing to means, or immediately by His own hand."

On September 2nd (1773) the report is as follows : "Mr. Cowper has taken Dr. Cotton's medicines about twelve days. They agree well with him ; he eats better and sleeps no worse. He seems better in some respects ; has employed himself a little of late in his favourite amusement, gardening, and has pruned several of our fruit-trees, which I think he could not possibly have done when you were here. But the distress of his mind seems but little, if at all, abated. It gives me

great satisfaction that he is under a course of medicine ; and I am still in good spirits about his recovery."

By and by it was found that Dr. Cotton's medicines had "an inconvenient effect upon Cowper's spirits," and in consequence they were for a time discontinued, and the patient improved so much that Mr. and Mrs. Newton were not afraid to take a journey together into Warwickshire. Whilst they were absent, however, a fearful change took place. Cowper got it into his head that it was the will of God he should, "after the example of Abraham, perform an expensive act of obedience, and offer not a son, but himself." He likewise believed that, the will of Heaven having been made known to him, power to accomplish this act of obedience was at the same time given. Consequently he attempted to make away with himself. By what means, or by whom his hand was arrested, we are not told. On receipt of the news Newton hurried home. This was in October (1773).

On his return he writes : "I wish I could inform you that I found dear Mr. Cowper much better when I returned ; but his deliverance is yet to come ; though in his case, likewise, there are such evident proofs of the Lord's care and goodness as encourage us still to hope for a happy issue." After this occurrence Mr. and Mrs. Newton made it a point not to be both from home long together, without an absolute necessity, while Cowper's distress continued.

Cowper was now haunted with the belief that he had wilfully disobeyed the orders of Heaven. The sacrifice which had been required of him he had neglected to make, and in consequence God had sentenced him "to

a state of desertion and perpetual misery, of a kind peculiar to himself." Fearing the recurrence of the attempt at self-destruction, his friends were in a perpetual anxiety. But no other attempt was made, whether owing to their vigilance, or to Cowper's persuasion that, the opportunity having gone by, it was now useless to endeavour to appease the wrath of Heaven. He had sunk into a state of utter hopelessness, being haunted, to use Mr. Greatheed's words, "with the 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 this *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."

On December 2nd Cowper is neither worse nor better, but we learn that "sometimes the Lord visits him in his sleep, so that his dreams are gracious and comfortable, and his heart drawn forth in prayer; but when he awakes his distress returns"—a remarkable passage, inasmuch as it shows that even at the height of his madness his mind sometimes recovered its sanity during sleep.

Since October his state had become most distressing, and had required constant watchfulness on the part of his friends. Mrs. Unwin, who had left her own house, continued to attend him day and night, "equally regardless of her own health, and of the uncharitable construction of censorious and malicious tongues." In March (1774) writes Newton: "Mr. Cowper is



still in the depths. Sometimes I have hope that his deliverance is at hand ; at others I am almost at a stand. Yet I seldom am shaken in my persuasion that the issue, in the Lord's time, will be glorious."

Though Newton devoted himself so nobly to his friend, Cowper's affliction was a great trial to him, and a great strain upon him. It would also have been a great pull upon his purse but for the benevolence of Mr. Thornton, for says he, "There is something in me (I hope it is not pride) which makes me quite unwilling to receive any inmates upon the footing of boarders. The charge upon their account is not so great as if Mrs. Unwin had no house of her own ; yet it is considerable." In a subsequent letter he says :—"Mr. Cowper's long stay at the vicarage in his present uncomfortable state has been upon many accounts inconvenient and trying. His choice of being here was quite unexpected ; and his continuance is unavoidable, unless he was to be removed by force. Mrs. Unwin has often tried to persuade him to return to their own house, but he cannot bear to hear of it. He sometimes begs, and weeps, and pleads to stay with such earnestness that it must be submitted to. I make myself easy by reflecting that the Lord's hand is concerned ; and I am hoping weekly for his deliverance. His health is better : he works almost incessantly in the garden, and while employed is tolerably easy ; but as soon as he leaves off he is instantly swallowed up by the most gloomy apprehensions ; though in everything that does not concern his own peace he is as sensible, and discovers as quick a judgment as ever. The Lord evidently sent him to Olney, where he has been

a blessing to many, a great blessing to myself. The Lord has numbered the days in which I am appointed to wait upon him in this dark valley, and He has given us such a love to him both as a believer and as a friend, that I am not weary; but to be sure, his deliverance would be to me one of the greatest blessings my thoughts can conceive."

A fortnight after (May 14th) was perceived the first symptom of amendment. "Yesterday, as he was feeding the chickens," says Mr. Newton, "for he is always busy if he can get out of doors, some little incident made him smile; I am pretty sure it was the first smile that has been seen upon his face for more than sixteen months. I hope the continuance of air and exercise will, by the Lord's blessing, gradually lighten the cloud which hangs upon his mind."

A few days more, and, to the surprise of every one, Cowper suddenly signified his willingness to depart. When he had once made up his mind he longed to be gone. A few days were necessary to prepare Orchard Side for their reception, and on Monday, May 23rd (1774), Cowper quitted the vicarage, after a stay there of nearly a year and five months.

His kindness to Cowper during this long and weary period exhibits a beautiful feature in Newton's character. "Upon the whole," he says, "I have not been weary of my cross. Besides the submission I owe to the Lord, I think I can hardly do or suffer too much for such a friend, yet sometimes my heart has been impatient and rebellious."

## CHAPTER X.

### *TRIFLING, OR, FROM HIS RECOVERY TO THE DEPARTURE OF NEWTON.*

(May, 1774—Jan., 1780.)

#### 55. His Tame Hares, and the “*Heu! quam remotus.*”—1774.

**A**S Cowper began to recover he found amusement in various trifles, his chief pleasure being gardening, upon which he would talk freely, though other conversation he seldom noticed. But he improved every day. Nevertheless he did not regain hope. In some of his most melancholy moments he would compose lines descriptive of his unhappy state, and two of them have been preserved for us by Mr. Brian Bury Collins, a young friend of Newton's who occasionally visited at Olney:—

“*Caesus amor meus est, et nostro crimine : cujus,  
Ah ! cujus posthinc potero latitare sub alis ?*”

“*My love is slain, and by my crime is slain,  
Ah ! now beneath whose wings shall I repose ?*”

From neither company nor books did Cowper yet receive

any pleasure ; nevertheless, being in a condition that made some diversion necessary, he was glad of anything that would engage his attention, without fatiguing it ; consequently when a neighbour offered for his acceptance a leveret, formerly the plaything of his children, now tired of it, Cowper willingly took the creature under his protection, perceiving that in the management of such an animal, and in the attempt to tame it, he should find just that sort of employment which his case required. " It was soon known," he says, " among my neighbours that I was pleased with the present ; and the consequence was that in a short time I had as many leverets offered to me as would have stocked a paddock." He undertook the care of three, and distinguished them by the names Puss, Tiney, and Bess, but informs us that, notwithstanding the two feminine appellatives, they were all males. Turning carpenter, he built them houses to sleep in. In the daytime they had the range of the hall, but in the evening he sometimes permitted them to enter and gambol in his parlour. The houses or boxes in which they slept were apparently at one time kept in the kitchen, at the back of the hall, between which apartments Hugh Miller in 1845 noticed " a small port-hole in the plaster framed by a narrow facing of board, and through this port-hole, cut in the partition for the express purpose, Cowper's hares used to come leaping out to their evening gambols."

Each animal had his peculiarities of character and temper. Puss at once grew familiar, allowed Cowper to carry him about in his arms, more than once fell asleep on his knee, and after recovering from a sickness

of three days, signified his gratitude for the kindness shown him by licking the poet's hand, "first the back of it, then the palm, then every finger separately, then between all the fingers, as if anxious to leave no part unsaluted."

Tiney was very different. "He too was sick, and in his sickness had an equal share of my attention; but if, after his recovery, I took the liberty to stroke him, he would grunt, strike with his fore-feet, spring forward, and bite. He was, however, very entertaining in his way; even his surliness was matter of mirth; and in his play he preserved such an air of gravity, and performed his feats with such a solemnity of manner, that in him too I had an agreeable companion."

"Old Tiney, surliest of his kind,  
Who, nursed with tender care,  
And to domestic bounds confined,  
Was still a wild jack-hare.

I kept him for his humour's sake,  
For he would oft beguile  
My heart of thoughts that made it ache,  
And force me to a smile."

"Puss was tamed by gentle usage, Tiney was not to be tamed at all, and Bess had a courage and confidence that made him tame from the beginning."

"These creatures," continues Cowper—for all along we have been quoting from his charming paper in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (June, 1784)—"have a singular sagacity in discovering the minutest alteration that is made in the place to which they are accustomed, and instantly apply their nose to the examination of a new object. A small hole being burnt in the carpet, it was

mended with a patch, and that patch in a moment underwent the strictest scrutiny. They seem, too, to be very much directed by the smell in the choice of their favourites! To some persons, though they saw them daily, they could never be reconciled, and would even scream when they attempted to touch them; but a miller coming in engaged their affections at once, his powdered coat had charms that were irresistible." Bess died soon after he was full grown; Tiney lived to be nine years old; Puss to be eleven years eleven months, dying of sheer old age. As the hall door opened into the street, visitors, when the hares were out, were "refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door as the only possible way of approach."

Cowper, however, indulged in numerous pets besides the hares, and he speaks of his "eight pairs of tame pigeons," his linnet and his robins. Lady Hesketh has put it on record "that he had at one time five rabbits, three hares, two guinea pigs, a magpie, a jay, and a starling; besides two goldfinches, two canary birds, and two dogs. It is amazing how the three hares can find room to gambol and frolic (as they certainly do) in his small parlour;" and she adds, "I forgot to enumerate a squirrel, which he had at the same time, and which used to play with one of the hares continually."

The present is the place to insert the little known Latin poem of Cowper's, commencing "Heu! quam remotus," which bears date, "Die ultimo, 1774." So far as I am aware, it has never been printed, except in one of the editions of Cowper's Autobiography, published

by Mr. W. White, of Bedford, in 1835. Mr. Henry Gough has in his possession the following note in the handwriting of the late Dr. Blower, of Bedford :—

“The three poems beginning ‘Hatred and Vengeance,’ ‘Heu ! quam remotus,’ and ‘To Jesus, the Crown of my Life,’ appended to Mr. White’s edition of the Autobiography, were printed from a copy made by me from the originals in Cowper’s handwriting. These three poems were written on the same sheet of paper, which was then in the possession of Mr. Isaac Handscomb, formerly of Newport Pagnell. I do not know where the manuscript is now.

“Signed, WILLIAM BLOWER.”

In this most interesting poem, written in one of his darkest moods, Cowper, as was his wont at such times, rakes up again some of his old troubles. He recurs to the pleasant days once enjoyed at Berkhamsted, and regrets leaving so lightheartedly the happy home of his childhood, but most of all he bewails the cruel destiny which led him to forsake Theodora, and which has at length driven him into “Avernus’ jaws.” Professor Hales, of King’s College, London, pronounces these verses as but an indifferent piece of Latinity ; to use his own words, they are “bad Alcaics.” Cowper, indeed, fond as he was of writing in and translating into this language, never excelled either in Latin prose or Latin verse (see §15). The following is the poem, together with a poetical translation, kindly written for me by a friend, Mr. Alfred Gough, with the assistance of Professor Hales :—

“Heu ! quam remotus vescor omnibus  
 Quibus fruebar sub lare patrio,  
 Quam nescius jucunda quondam  
 Arva, domum, socios, reliqui !

## TRIFLING.

Et praeter omnes te mihi flebilem,  
 Te chariorem luce vel artubus,  
 Te vinculo nostram jugali  
 Deserui tremulam sub ense.

Sed nec ferocem me genuit pater,  
 Nec vagientem nutriit ubere  
 Leaena dumoso sub antro,  
 Fata sed hoc voluere nostra.

Et, fluctuosum ceu mare volvitur,  
 Dum commovebar mille timoribus,  
 Coactus in fauces Averni  
 Totus atro perii sub amne."

*Translation.*

"Far from my natal roof I sigh,  
 Of all its joys, alas ! bereft,  
 Since long ago, so thoughtlessly,  
 Sweet fields and home and friends I left ;

And thee forsook, for whom mine eyes  
 Weep sore, more loved than limb or life,  
 And linked to me by closest ties,  
 A victim trembling 'neath the knife.

Yet no fierce monster was I born,  
 No lioness e'er nourished me,  
 In some rude cave o'erhung with thorn ;  
 No !—this is Destiny's decree.

My soul by countless terrors riven,  
 And like the stormy ocean tossed,  
 Into Avernus' jaws was driven,  
 In its black stream for ever lost."

In the sale catalogue of the Hayley Correspondence, 1878—including numerous MSS. by Cowper—appears the following item :—

"128, Cowper (William) MS. Book of Rums, or occasional extempore pieces in Rhyme, written in the year 1776, 4to calf."



## 56. Cowper's fondness for Fish.

Cowper calls himself "the most ichthyophagous of Protestants," and his letters bear out the assertion. There is scarce a letter in this period in which he is not either asking for or acknowledging the receipt of fish, and the taste for it did not decline as he grew older. Mackerel, plaice, turbot, lobster, salmon, halibut, skate, all came alike to him. "One to whom fish is so welcome," he says to one of his London friends, "can have no great occasion to distinguish the sorts. In general, therefore, whatever fish are likely to think a jaunt into the country agreeable, will be sure to find me ready to receive them." In May, 1776, he has to thank Hill for a "very fine mackerel;" on the 12th of November "for a barrel of very good oysters;" on the 5th of January "for a tub of very fine spiced salmon." The last cost Cowper and Mrs. Unwin some debate, "and a wager into the bargain, one asserting it to be a sturgeon, and the other what it proved to be. But the lady was in the right, as she should be upon all such occasions."

Cowper's other friends, when they discovered his partiality for this article of diet, also, by and by, sent him presents of a like nature, particularly Unwin and Newton, after the latter had removed to London. In return for these Cowper was proud to despatch melons, cucumbers, and other garden produce of his own growing. Three parcels of herrings, for example, in October, 1777, were replied to by a "crimson cantalupe," a melon which, "with the fellow to it, grew

upon one joint." In 1778 Cowper took to rearing pine-apples. "I made," he tells Unwin, "Mr. Wrighte's gardener a present of fifty sorts of stove plant seeds; in return he has presented me with six fruiting pines, which I have put into a bark bed, where they thrive at present as well as I could wish. If they produce good fruit you will stand some little chance to partake of them." By and by he furnishes himself with glass from Bedford to make a frame for his pines, in which he takes so much interest as to allow them to give origin to a poem, "The Pine-apple and the Bee." Moreover, he enters on the design not only to glaze pine-apple frames, but also to mend the kitchen windows, and he commissions Unwin to buy him "a glazier's diamond pencil."

Several of Cowper's minor pieces relate to fish. There is the one "To the Immortal Memory of the Halibut," on which he dined April 26, 1784. Then there are the lines "On the High Price of Fish," beginning:—

"Cocoa-nut nought,  
Fish too dear."

In the letter to Hill, October 2, 1779, which contains the poem of "The Pine-apple and the Bee," Cowper says: "You have heard that when Arion performed upon the harp the fish followed him. I really have no design to fiddle you out of more fish; but if you should esteem my verses worthy of such a price, though I shall never be so renowned as he was, I shall think myself equally indebted to the Muse that helps me."

Later on he begs that Unwin would get himself

made Bishop of Chichester as soon as possible, in order that "we may have to thank you for every kind of fish the British coast produces."

57. Cowper thinks of turning Tutor, and endeavours to get Pupils.—July, 1776.

Although at much less expense than formerly, Cowper could not make his income cover his expenditure. Consequently we find him several times requesting Hill to sell more of his stock. Living on one's principal, however, cannot, as Cowper very well knew, last for ever, so he formed a design of doing something to increase his income, which was none other than that of "taking two, three, or four boys" under his care, to instruct them in the Greek and Latin languages. With a view to this he wrote to Hill, in the hope that, as the latter had an extensive acquaintance, he might be able to serve him. "I should pursue," he says, "with some few exceptions, the Westminster method of instruction, being that which I am best acquainted with myself, and the best upon the whole that I have had an opportunity of observing. They would lodge and board under our roof, and be in all respects accommodated and attended in a manner that would well warrant the demand of a hundred guineas per annum.

"You have often wished me an employment, and I know none but this for which I am qualified. If I can engage in it it will probably be serviceable to me in more respects than one; but as it will afford me some

sort of an establishment, at least for a time, it cannot but be desirable to one in my circumstances. If you are acquainted, therefore, with any person who has a son or sons between eight and ten years of age, for whom he would wish to find a tutor who will not make a property of them, nor neglect any means in his power to inform them thoroughly in what he undertakes to teach, you will oblige me by recommending *me*. Doubtless there are many such ; and it is not an easy matter to find a family where the two grand points of education, literature and sobriety, would be more closely attended to than in this."

Cowper's endeavours, however, were unsuccessful, and a month later (August 1st) he says to Hill: "If it were to rain pupils, perhaps I might catch a tub full ; but till it does, the fruitlessness of my inquiries makes me think I must keep my Greek and Latin to myself."

### 58. Cowper makes his Will.—May, 1777.

On the 20th of May, 1777, Cowper made his will, and, as might be expected, he left the little he had to the two friends to whom he was most indebted—namely, his beloved companion, Mrs. Unwin, and his conscientious "chancellor of the exchequer," Joseph Hill. This interesting document, which Southey discovered in the Register of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, runs as follows :—

"I, Wm. Cowper, of Olney, in the county of Bucks, do make this my last Will and Testament. I give to Mrs. Mary Unwin the sum of three hundred

pounds, or whatever sum shall be standing in my name in the books of the Bank of England at the time of my decease. I give to Mr. Joseph Hill, of Great Queen Street, whatever money of mine he may have in his hands, arising from the bond of my Chambers in the Temple, or may be due for the same at the time of my decease : and my desire is, that such money as he may have received on my account in the way of contribution, and not remitted to me, may be returned to those who gave it, with the best acknowledgments I have it in my power to render them for their kindness. I have written this with my own hand, and the contents may sufficiently prove that I am in my senses."

Then follow the date and his signature.

Throwing light, as it does, on the financial state of the poet, this document is rather interesting, but its provisions, of course, by the lapse of time, and the death of the principal legatee, were nullified.

#### 59. Lord Dartmouth at Olney.—June, 1777.

On the 9th of June (1777) Olney was informed, by the ringing of bells and other unmistakable signs, that Lord Dartmouth had come to the town. The visit was one of business. Says Newton, "I dined with Lord Dartmouth, Lord Verney, and about ten gentlemen of the county, at the 'Swan,' on Monday, upon a committee to inspect and report the ruinous state of our bridge. We had such a sumptuous dinner as I suppose was never seen at Olney before. We had a man cook, and a bill of fare from London. Sixteen

at table; the ordinary came to nine shillings, but I suppose a guinea apiece would not have defrayed the expenses. The town makes good the rest; they made a point of accommodating my lords and gentlemen very handsomely."

To Newton, ever since he had become acquainted with him, Lord Dartmouth had been extremely kind. It was not the friendship of a great lord to an inferior, but of one Christian man to another. Newton reckoned his various interviews with "the good earl" among the greatest pleasures of his life, and we may picture, if we like, those two excellent men sitting under Newton's "favourite great tree" in the vicarage garden, and conversing, "not concerning the comparatively petty affairs of human government, but of things pertaining to the kingdom of God." To his old school-fellow, Cowper, Lord Dartmouth also paid a visit. Among the subjects conversed upon were the South Sea Voyages of Captain Cook, which were just then engaging public attention, and Lord Dartmouth promised to lend the poet the books of both Cook and Forster (Cook's companion). We also learn that Cowper showed his noble visitor his garden, pointing out to him, among other things, his "Broallia,<sup>1</sup> a new flower in this country," which he had raised from a few seeds given him the previous year. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin considered it the most elegant flower they had seen, and Lord Dartmouth, says Cowper, "did it the honour to think with us."

<sup>1</sup> Doubtless the browallia, a stove plant from Peru, named after John Browallins, Bishop of Aboa.

Cowper thus alludes to his lordship in "Truth":—

"We boast some rich ones whom the gospel sways,  
And one who wears a coronet and prays ;  
Like gleanings of an olive-tree they show  
Here and there one upon the topmost bough."

With Mr. Wright, Lord Dartmouth's steward, "the truly respectable servant of a most valuable master," Cowper was also intimate, and his letters contain many allusions to him.

#### 60. The Fire at Olney.—October, 1777.

In October (1777) a dreadful fire, broke out in Olney. Seven or eight houses were quickly in flames, and, had not the wind suddenly changed, half of the town must have been destroyed. This event influenced the lives of both Cowper and Newton, for but for it the latter might have continued long to live in Olney. The case was as follows : The part of the loss which had not been covered by insurance was estimated at £450, and this fell wholly upon the poor. The town and neighbourhood immediately contributed £250. Lord Dartmouth sent £30. "The plan was to pay twelve shillings in the pound upon buildings, and sixteen upon goods, and to make up the full loss to the poorer sufferers." Mr. Newton promised £60, which he believed he could obtain from those sources of private benevolence that were always open to him ; but in the end, having exerted himself to the utmost, he obtained £200. "Such instances of benevolence," says

his biographer, Mr. Cecil, "with the constant assistance he afforded the poor by the help of Mr. Thornton, naturally led him to expect that he should have so much influence as to restrain gross licentiousness on particular occasions."

At the meeting of the committee for the fire Newton recommended, amongst other things, "the discontinuance of a foolish custom, almost peculiar to this town, of illuminating their houses on the 5th of November," and likewise preventing bonfires and firing guns, which, seeing that most of the houses were thatched, was a very sensible proposal. Newton's motion was approved by all present; and, imagining it to be the general desire of the people, he gave notice of it at church. But when the day came there was great opposition. Says Newton, "Many put up candles who had not done so in former years; and some who had, doubled their number. This gave encouragement to the sons of Belial, and when night came on there was much riot and confusion. A wild lawless mob paraded the streets, breaking windows, and extorting money from one end of the town to the other." The vicarage was expressly threatened. Newton himself was determined to brave it, but upon a friend's bringing word, about ten in the evening, that forty or fifty of them, full of fury and liquor, were just coming to beset the house, Mrs. Newton was so terrified, and her head was so much affected, that her husband, though he was ashamed to do it, was obliged to send out money, and beg peace. So the house was saved, but the whole affair occasioned Newton very great grief. He afterwards told Mr. Cecil that "he believed he should never have left Olney



had not so incorrigible a spirit prevailed in a parish which he had so long laboured to reform."

61. **The Death of Sir Thomas Hesketh.—**  
**April, 1778.**

In the spring of 1778 a small legacy came to Cowper from a rather unexpected quarter. But it was the kindness of his late friend (Sir Thomas Hesketh) in remembering him rather than the money itself that gave pleasure. "Poor Sir Thomas!" he says, "I knew that I had a place in his affections, and from his own information, many years ago, a place in his will; but little thought that after the lapse of so many years I should still retain it. His remembrance of me, after so long a season of separation, has done me much honour, and leaves me the more reason to regret his decease." After the death of her husband, which had happened abroad, Lady Hesketh returned to England, but for some years there was no communication between her and her cousin. Among her gifts to Cowper after the renewal of her acquaintance with him was a cameo of her late husband, and Cowper was happy to have it as a "copy of one whom we both knew and loved."

Sir Thomas was succeeded in the title by his brother Robert, from whom is descended the present head of the family, Sir Thomas George Fermor Fermor-Hesketh (7th baronet), to the wife of whom, Lady Flora Hesketh, the author has had the honour of dedicating the present volume.

## 62. Thurlow made Lord Chancellor.

In June, 1778, was fulfilled Cowper's prophecy concerning Thurlow, who in that month succeeded Earl Bathurst as Lord Chancellor of England. One of his first acts on assuming the dignity was to appoint Cowper's friend Hill as his secretary, and Mr. Unwin and others were in hopes something would be done for Cowper—in hopes that the promise of long previously, though it was spoken half in jest, would be fulfilled also. Unwin's advice, however, that he should write to Thurlow, Cowper found himself unwilling to follow. "I know the man," he says in reply, "and his disposition well; he is very liberal in his way of thinking, generous and discerning. He is well aware of the tricks that are played upon such occasions; and after fifteen years interruption of all intercourse between us, would translate my letter into this language—pray remember the poor. This would disgust him, because he would think our former intimacy disgraced by such an oblique application. He has not forgotten me; and if he had there are those about him who cannot come into his presence without reminding him of me; and he is also perfectly acquainted with my circumstances. It would perhaps give him pleasure to surprise me with a benefit; and if he means me such a favour, I should disappoint him by asking it." About this time Cowper wrote the lines on Thurlow's promotion.

## 63. Cherry Fair.—June, 1778.

Among the great events at Olney (and it is still an event of some importance) was the annual fair held on St. Peter's Day (June 29th), and generally known as Cherry Fair. The market-place was of course covered with booths, stalls, shows, swayboats, and much besides, but this year there was an additional attraction—namely, a wild beast show. In those days fairs were patronized by all classes of society, and among the visitors to see the lion, which was the greatest of the sights, were Mrs. Unwin, Cowper, and Newton. "He was wonderfully tame," says Newton, "as familiar with his keeper and as docile and obedient as a spaniel; yet the man told me he had his surly fits, when they dare not touch him."

Newton was then still engaged upon his Olney Hymns, and he told his friend Bull—"I got a hymn out of this lion, which you shall see when you come to Olney if you please me" ("The lion, though by nature wild," ii. 93).

Says Cowper to Unwin, "A lion was imported here at the fair, seventy years of age, and was as tame as a goose. Your mother and I saw him embrace his keeper with his paws, and lick his face. Others saw him receive his head in his mouth, and restore it to him again unhurt;—a sight we chose not to be favoured with, but rather advised the honest man to discontinue the practice—a practice hardly reconcilable to prudence, unless he had a head to spare. The beast, however, was a very magnificent one, and much more royal in appearance than those I have seen in the Tower."

#### 64. Cowper's Opinions concerning Men and Books.

Cowper having taken again to reading, his letters now furnish us with his opinions on men and books. He considered Gray "the only poet since Shakespeare entitled to the character of sublime." Previously Cowper had been prejudiced against him, but he could now write, "I once thought Swift's letters the best that could be written ; but I like Gray's better. His humour, or his wit, or whatever it is to be called, is never ill-natured or offensive, and yet I think equally poignant with the Dean's," which remarks, coming from a man generally admitted to be the best of English letter-writers, are not without value. The Abbé Raynal, in whose work Diderot had a finger, he admires "as a philosopher, as a writer, as a man of extraordinary intelligence." Dr. Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" gave him much pleasure, though he reckoned it a pity that so many mediocrities, and worse, had been admitted, and fell foul of the Doctor's treatment of his favourite Milton. This piece of criticism, seeing how largely Cowper was influenced by that poet, well deserves perusal. It is too long to be quoted here, but may be found in almost any collection of his letters, the date being October 31, 1779.

With Johnson's remarks on Dryden and Pope, Cowper agreed in the main. In respect to the latter he says, "With the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the first

masters. Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united. But I admire Dryden most, who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and carelessness almost peculiar to himself." On Prior he considered the Doctor had been too severe. As for historians, he admired Robertson, but liked Hume better.

### 65. Cowper and Scott.

About 1778 Cowper made the acquaintance of the Rev. Thomas Scott, afterwards better known through his commentary and other works. Scott was at this time curate of Weston, and lived at the house (near the church) which commands a view of the whole village street, and which is generally known as Pear-tree House, from the fact that Mr. Higgins, its owner, would take no rent of Scott but a hamper of pears annually from a fine tree in the garden, for which a receipt was regularly sent. Thomas Scott, born in 1747, at Braytoft (Lincolnshire), was in some respects a remarkable character. The son of a small farmer, he was at the age of 16 apprenticed to a medical practitioner, under whom he behaved so ill as to bring about his dismissal. For nine years he now led the uncongenial life of a common farm labourer, not only being employed in the most laborious and dirty work, but suffering much harsh treatment from his father, who, though naturally indignant at his son's folly, carried his resentment too far. At length breaking from bondage Scott declared his intention of seeking ordination, for in his spare hours he had kept up the

Latin, Greek, and other studies of his youth. After considerable difficulty he succeeded in his desire, and in 1772 entered upon the first of his four curacies in North Bucks—namely, that of Stoke Goldington. He subsequently held the curacies of Ravenstone, Weston Underwood, and Olney, dwelling in the neighbourhood about thirteen years (1772–1785). During the early years of his ministry his religion was nothing but a sham. Moreover, as far as he understood such controversies, he was “nearly a Socinian and Pelagian, and wholly an Arminian.” Meantime he studied very hard and performed his clerical duties after a fashion. But a great change was at hand. He was first led to reconsider his position by a sermon of John Newton’s—the man whom he had for some time ridiculed, but it was an action of Newton’s that brought the matter to a culminating point. The narrative shall be told in Scott’s own words:—

“In January, 1774, two of my parishioners, a man and his wife, lay at the point of death. I had heard of the circumstance; but, according to my general custom, not being sent for, I took no notice of it; till one evening, the woman being now dead and the man dying, I heard that my neighbour, Mr. Newton, had been several times to visit them. Immediately my conscience reproached me with being shamefully negligent in sitting at home, within a few doors of dying persons my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly, it occurred to me that, whatever contempt I might have for Mr. Newton’s doctrines, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character than my own. He must have more zeal and

love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit and supply my lack of care to those who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins. This reflection affected me so much, that, without delay, and very earnestly, yea with tears, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect ; and I resolved thenceforward to be more attentive to my duty: which resolution, though at first formed in ignorant dependence on my own strength, I have, by Divine grace, been enabled hitherto to keep. I went immediately to visit the survivor ; and the affecting sight of one person already dead, and another expiring in the same chamber, served more deeply to impress my serious convictions : so that from that time I have constantly visited the sick of my parishes, as far as I have had opportunity, and have endeavoured, to the best of my knowledge, to perform that essential part of a parish minister's duty."

A tombstone, carved by James Andrews, the Olney sculptor, to the memory of this couple, stands in the churchyard of Weston Underwood, in the angle between the chancel and the south aisle. Upon it are represented two coffins on a trestle.

At Pear-tree House Scott wrote "The Force of Truth" (published 1779), his most important work, with the exception of the "Commentary." It was revised by Cowper, "and, as to style and externals, but not otherwise, considerably improved by his advice." By this time a friendship had sprung up, not only between Scott and Cowper, but also between Scott and Newton.

66. The Publication of the Olney Hymns.  
—February, 1779.

In February, 1779, eight years after their commencement, were issued the Olney Hymns. The title-page was as follows :—

OLNEY HYMNS. IN THREE BOOKS.

Book I.—On Select Texts of Scripture.

II.—On Occasional Subjects.

III.—On the Spiritual Life.

*Cantabitis, Arcades, inquit,  
Montibus hæc vestris; soli cantare periti  
Arcades. O mihi tum quam molliter ossa quiescant,  
Vestra meos olim si fistula dicat amores.*

VIRG., *Ecl.* x. 31.

Rev. xiv. 3.

2 Cor. vi. 10.

The quotation from Virgil is thus rendered by Dryden :—

“ But you, Arcadian swains, shall sing my grief,  
And on your hills my last complaints renew;  
So sad a song is only worthy you.  
How light would lie the turf upon my breast,  
If you my sufferings in your songs express ! ”

Revelation xiv. 3 begins, “ And they sung as it were a new song,” and 2 Corinthians vi. 10, “ As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”

This volume, which is dated February 15, 1779, evidently owed its publication to Mr. Thornton, for Newton, in a letter to that gentleman dated February 13, 1779, submits the choice of the printer to him, though



he recommended his old friend, Joseph Johnson, of St. Paul's Churchyard, who had printed his Narrative and volume of sermons. Mr. Thornton took a thousand copies for distribution, and the volume had a considerable sale. It had, however, some opposition. Mr. Romaine, whom we have already referred to as a leading Evangelical divine, took the trouble to publish a book on the subject of Psalmody, in which he strongly censured modern hymn-writers. He said that whatever comfort people might think they received from the singing of hymns was wholly imaginary. Newton himself did not feel hurt by this censure, but he was afraid that it would hurt many well-meaning people, who looked upon Romaine as next door to infallible.

The Olney Hymns were 348 in all, Cowper having written 68 (which were marked with a C.), and Newton 280. The two chief motives for writing them were, as Newton says in his preface, "a desire to promote the faith and comfort of sincere Christians, and secondly, to raise a monument to perpetuate the remembrance of an intimate and endeared friendship."

Of the hymns by Cowper we have already spoken (§ 51). Among those by Newton, the best are "Safely through another week," "Come, my soul, thy suit prepare," "Begone, unbelief," and "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds!"

#### 67. At Gayhurst.—September, 1779.

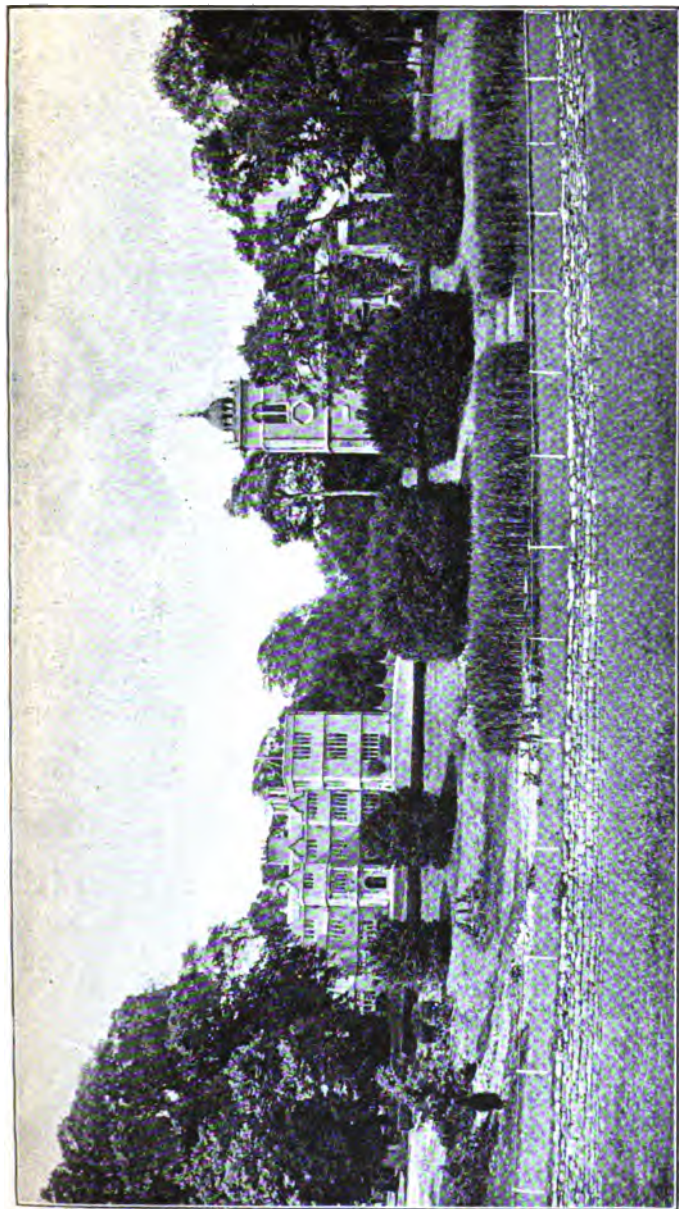
In September, 1779, Cowper made his first visit to Gayhurst, the beautiful and ancient mansion of Mr.

George Wrighte. "Your mother and I," he tells Mr. Unwin (September 21), "last week made a trip in a postchaise to Gayhurst, the seat of Mr. Wrighte, about four miles off. He understood that I did not much affect strange faces, and sent over his servant on purpose to inform me that he was going into Leicestershire, and that if I chose to see the gardens I might gratify myself without danger of seeing the proprietor. I accepted the invitation, and was delighted with all I found there. The situation is happy, the gardens elegantly disposed, the hothouse in the most flourishing state, and the orange trees the most captivating creatures of the kind I ever saw. A man, in short, had need have the talents of Cox or Langford, the auctioneers, to do the whole scene justice."

Gayhurst, indeed—or, to use its old name, Gotehurst—at which henceforward Cowper found himself an occasional visitor, was, and still is, a lovely spot, well meriting its beautiful derivation of Goddeshurst—none other than the hurst, or forest, of God.

Built in three distinct periods, Gayhurst House offers to the antiquary much of interest. The oldest portion, or Early Tudor house, was erected in 1500 by a member of the family of Neville. It has a huge chimney shaft, and abounds in narrow passages, thick walls, quaintly-formed and unexpected roofs and gables, and curiously contrived gutters. Its ghost—for of course it had a ghost—appears to have been laid before Cowper put in his appearance; at any rate he does not mention it.

Each of the many gables forms a room, and odd little rooms they are, with their small, strongly mul-



GAYHURST HOUSE AND CHURCH.




lioned windows of the ordinary Tudor type, many corners, and doors and floors of oak ; but curious as this old house now is, it must have been more so in former times, for many of its irregularities have been cleared away. There were numerous and strange projections, and tall stacks of chimneys contrived to mask secret chambers and hiding-places ; there were trap-doors, narrow recesses, and ingenious cabinets and drawers for the deposit of papers. At the west end of the top of the house is a room partly in the roof, which is supposed to have been used as a chapel, up one side of which passes the afore-mentioned huge chimney shaft, which at one time contained a secret staircase.

In 1581 the house came into the possession (by marriage) of Thomas Mulso, whose son William built the second, or Elizabethan, portion, making the new house, together with the old part, to form the letter

**E** a common arrangement at that time with loyal gentlemen. The old house corresponds with the lowest of the three limbs of the letter ; the porch is the short central limb. Thus "Gotehurst changed its front," "the former Tudor house became a wing," and the new façade exhibited its Gothic gables and much admired beauties of Italian architecture.

In 1596 Mary Mulso, heiress, the daughter of William Mulso, married the hapless Everard Digby, afterwards knighted, who had the misfortune to be drawn into the Gunpowder Plot, and who suffered on the scaffold. He was succeeded by his son, the gifted, mystical, and fantastic Sir Kenelm, author of "Private Memoirs," written for his wife, the beautiful Anastasia,

and many other works. In 1704 the estate was sold to Mr. George Wrighte, son of Sir Nathan Wrighte, Lord Keeper to Queen Anne. In 1725 Wrighte made another addition to the house, built in the Queen Anne style. This part, which consists of the dining-room below, the ball-room above, and the grand staircase, is at the back of Mulso's main building, filling up the space at the back of the  between the two large limbs.

Gayhurst passed from the Wrighte family in 1830. It now belongs to James William Carlisle, Esq., who purchased it in 1882.

The church, which, as Cowper observes, stands in the garden, was rebuilt by George Wrighte (1724–1728). It is in the Grecian style, with a square tower at the west end, surmounted by a cupola and four urns, one at each angle; and is historically interesting as being in all probability the last of the works of Sir Christopher Wren. The eminent architect, although he gave the plans for the church, never saw it finished, as he died in 1723, in his ninety-second year.

#### 68. Newton Removes to London.—January, 1780.

Newton's ministry at Olney now drew to a close. At this period the right of presentation to the living of St. Mary Woolnoth, in the city of London, was vested in his friend and patron, Mr. John Thornton, who, feeling the importance of fixing a sound and able preacher in such a post, pressed the living on Newton;

and the latter, on September 21, 1779, wrote to Bull : "My race at Olney is nearly finished ; I am about to form a connection for life with one Mary Woolnoth, a reputed London saint in Lombard Street." His last sermon in Olney, previous to his departure for London, was preached on Tuesday evening, January 11, 1780.

As might be expected, the loss of Newton was deeply regretted by many in Olney. Cowper especially greatly missed him. The vicarage seemed a melancholy object ; and as he walked in the garden in the evening it seemed lonely to think that when the smoke issued from the study chimney it was no longer a sign that Newton was there. And Newton himself, notwithstanding the unpleasant circumstances that preceded his removal, did not leave without considerable regret the town for which he had so long retained an affection, and to which he so frequently alludes as "dear Olney."

Referring to this event, Mrs. Oliphant says : "The effect of this departure on Cowper was miraculous ; whether Newton, in his intense enthusiasm, miscalculated his friend's powers, or whether he was only ignorant of the delicate nature of the mind on which he was working, it is evident that *the constant intercourse with him*, aided, perhaps, by the wearying sameness of the life, had an oppressive and crushing effect upon Cowper." And very naturally so. Would not anybody else have felt the same? To be constantly and entirely in the society of any one man, or even any two or three, very soon becomes intolerable. The same topics, the same ideas, the same arguments—for how-

ever good or original a man may be, his thoughts are apt to run day after day in much the same channel. Newton was a true friend to Cowper. His influence on him was good, but Cowper had too much of him, just as he had at other times too much of Lady Austen, and a vast deal too much of poor schoolmaster Teedon. If anybody was to blame it was Cowper himself. He could never, as he has told us over and over again, do things in moderation. He was either superlatively happy or inordinately miserable. He must either be more or less indifferent to people, or he must love them with all his might. If he had a friend they must work together, eat together, write together, read together—they must be inseparable—a state of affairs that could bring about but one result. The only wonder is that Cowper could not himself see it, and that he got on with his friends as well as he did. As regards Newton, however, it must be remembered that it was only during the first six years of Cowper's residence at Olney that they were so constantly in each other's society. From 1774 to 1780 they loved one another in moderation.

The vicarage had been occupied by Newton from May, 1764, to January, 1780—nearly sixteen years. The room used by him as a study is the one at the east end of the top of the house, with windows projecting from the roof. Over the mantelpiece may still be seen the wooden panel with the following texts in large lettering which he had painted on it:—

“Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable” (Isa. xliii. 4). “But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee” (Deut. xv. 15).



## CHAPTER XI.

*“CHARISSIME TAURORUM,” OR, FROM  
THE DEPARTURE OF NEWTON TO  
THE COMMENCEMENT OF HIS FIRST  
VOLUME.*

(January, 1780—December, 1780.)

### 69. Mr. Bull.

**B**ESIDES Newton, Cowper had hitherto had but little society at Olney, the chief reason being his own reluctance to meet strangers, and in order in some measure to fill up the gap caused by his removal, Newton, just before leaving the town, introduced him to the Rev. William Bull, an Independent minister, residing at Newport Pagnell, five miles distant. The choice was a happy one, and Cowper soon became as much attached to Bull as Newton and Bull were to each other. To Newton “a quiet pipe with ‘dear Taureau’” was one of the chief pleasures of this life. And Cowper, though no smoker, who is even satirical on smoking in one of his poems (“Conversa-

tion"), seems to have been never so delighted as when he could get Bull and his pipe into the summer-house—

"The smoke-inhaling Bull,  
Always filling, never full."

Cowper thus describes his new friend to Unwin: "A Dissenter, but a liberal one; a man of letters and of genius; a master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it; an imagination which, when he finds himself in the company he loves and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party; at other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way. No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one; and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is best of all qualified for the contemplation of either: it can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull.

"But—he smokes tobacco—nothing is perfect—

'Nihil est ab omni  
Parte beatum.'

By and by it became the custom for Mr. Bull to dine with Cowper regularly once a fortnight "the year round." Moreover, though it was a great undertaking, Cowper now and again made a visit to Mr. Bull. One of these visits suggested the poem called "The Doves,"



*Your most affectionate  
W Bull*

REV. WILLIAM BULL.



which he sent to Newton on June 2, 1780. It commences—

“Reasoning at every step he treads,  
Man yet mistakes his way.”

“The male dove,” adds Cowper, “was smoking a pipe, and the female dove sewing, while she delivered herself as above. This little circumstance may lead you perhaps to guess what pair I had in my eye.”

### 70. The Poet draws Mountains and Dabchicks.

In the February of 1780 Cowper added drawing to his other amusements. That he ever did anything of value in this department is not to be expected; but it served to amuse him, and he made “such surprising proficiency in the art” in the short space of two months, that when he showed his productions to Mrs. Unwin she was “all admiration and applause.” He put his heart and soul into it, as he did into everything else that pleased him. He tells Newton that his application to it was unwearied. “I never,” he says, “received a *little* pleasure from anything in my life; if I am delighted it is in the extreme. The unhappy consequence of this temperature is, that my attachment to any occupation seldom outlives the novelty of it.” The origin of Cowper’s taking up with the particular art of drawing is not far to seek. There was living in Olney at this time a worthy local artist and sculptor, named James Andrews, whose productions, considering

that he was entirely self-taught, are remarkably good. Though he excelled in painting, it was in sculpture that he exhibited most talent, and it is much to be regretted that his carved gravestones in Olney churchyard and other places were not preserved from the weather. The rains and frosts of a hundred years have had the effect that might be expected, and ere long but little of his work will be discernible. The best stone is that near the porch, to the memory of William Lambry, a pasture-keeper of Weston Underwood, who died in 1779. It represents a farmyard scene in winter—cut hayrick, sheep, fowls, trough, crook, ladder, shears. Of his other stones, one represents death—a skeleton—drawing aside the curtains of a sick man's bed, and with a pair of scissors cutting the thread of life; in another a child is holding an extinguisher over a flame on a tripod; a third, now let into the churchyard wall, is engraved with cherubs' heads, and contains a triangle and a circle, in the midst of which is the name in Hebrew of the Deity.

Thinking that he too might derive pleasure from the art of drawing, Cowper had secured Andrews' services. Most of his letters in the spring of this year contain allusions to his new pastime. "I draw mountains," says he, "valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks and dabchicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them, and her praise and my praise put together are fame enough for me." In a letter to Newton he writes: "James Andrews"—his "Michael Angelo," as he dubs him—"pays me many compliments on my success in the art of drawing; but I have not yet the vanity to think myself qualified to furnish your apartment." Spite of the praises of Mrs. Unwin and

“Michael Angelo,” Cowper seems never to have been imbued with the belief that his skill in drawing would ever be above the ordinary. In commissioning Unwin to purchase for him some Indian ink, a few brushes, and a pencil or two, he limits him to the sum of five shillings, observing, “I do not think my talent in the art worth more.”

The drawing mania lasted nearly a year, and might have extended even longer, only he found it hurtful to his eyes. He told Mrs. King (October 11, 1788) : “Many figures were the fruit of my labours, which had at least the merit of being unparalleled by any production either of art or nature. But, before the year was ended, I had occasion to wonder at the progress that may be made, in despite of natural deficiency, by dint alone of practice ; for I actually produced three landscapes, which a lady thought worthy to be framed and glazed. I then judged it high time to exchange this occupation for another, lest, by any subsequent productions of inferior merit, I should forfeit the honour I had so fortunately acquired.”

The lady in question was Lady Austen. An engraving from one of these drawings may be seen in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* for June, 1804. The poet gave up drawing, but “Michael Angelo” continued to paint and to carve until 1817, when they laid him to rest in the churchyard he had so loved to adorn, and put over his head a stone with a wheatsheaf on it—a fitting emblem of the fecundity of his invention. Another of the poet's amusements was carpentering. “There is not a squire in all this country,” he says, “who can boast of having made better squirrel-houses, hutches

for rabbits, or bird-cages, than myself; and in the article of cabbage-nets I had no superior."

The carpentering, however, was even more injurious to his eyes than the drawing. "In the character of a carpenter, indeed," says he, "I almost put them out." So this occupation had to be abandoned also.

### 71. Cowper's "Whisking Wit."

Even before he commenced drawing Cowper had done a little again at versifying, his first attempts after his derangement having been four political pieces. One was suggested by the defeat of the French admiral D'Estaing at St. Lucia (in December, 1778), another by the repulse of the same at Savannah (October, 1779). Of these two Cowper was "rather proud;" but as they contained prophecies of "an illustrious consummation" of the American War, which subsequent events did not verify, he was fain to destroy them. The other two, "On the Trial of Admiral Keppel," and an address to the mob "On the occasion of the late Riot at the House of Sir Hugh Palliser," though apparently thrown aside as being not of much account, have been preserved. Both Keppel and his vice-admiral, owing to mutual recriminations, had been put on their trials, before courts-martial, for dereliction of duty. "Each was declared to have conducted himself like a brave man, while the populace showed its versatility by first abusing Keppel, and then, on his acquittal, forcing open Palliser's house, destroying his furniture, and hanging him in effigy, as the persecutor of Keppel."



The *Universal Review* for June, 1890, in which these poems were first printed, also contains another poem that had not previously been published—namely, "The Bee and the Pine-apple," which commences:—

"A bee, allured by the perfume  
Of a rich pine-apple in bloom."

The well-known poem, "The Pine-apples and the Bee" (commencing "The Pine-apples in triple row"), was written on the same paper, and entitled, "Another on the same." In December, 1779, in consequence of a letter from Unwin, Cowper had written the humorous lines entitled, "The Yearly Distress; or, Tithing Time, at Stock, in Essex;" and now (February, 1780) his "whisking wit" produced the fable of the "Nightingale and Glowworm," founded on a statement in the Register that the glowworm is the nightingale's food. Another poem of this year was "A Fable," commencing, "A raven, while with glossy breast," the bird in question being one that had built a nest in one of the trees of Guinea Field.

Among these offshoots of his whisking wit must also be numbered the lost poem alluded to in his letter to Lady Hesketh of January 1, 1788, in which he speaks of it as having been written some ten years previously. He does not even mention the subject, but he certainly manages to rouse our curiosity when he declares that neither Mrs. Unwin nor he ever laughed more at any production of his, "perhaps not even at 'John Gilpin.'" "But," continues the poet, "for all this, my dear, you must, as I said, give me credit, for the thing itself is gone to that limbo of

vanity where alone things lost on earth are to be met with. Said limbo is, as you know, in the moon, whither I could not at present convey myself without a good deal of difficulty and inconvenience."

Of these morceaux Cowper sent more to Mr. Unwin than to Mr. Newton, and upon the latter intimating his knowledge that such was the case, Cowper made the observation: "You may think perhaps that I deal more liberally with Mr. Unwin in the way of poetical export, than I do with you, and I believe you have reason; the truth is this—if I walked the streets with a fiddle under my arm, I should never think of performing before the window of a privy councillor or a chief justice, but should rather make free with ears more likely to be open to such amusement. The trifles I produce in this way are indeed such trifles that I cannot think them seasonable presents for you. Mr. Unwin himself would not be offended if I was to tell him that there is this difference between him and Mr. Newton, that the latter is already an apostle, while he himself is only undergoing the business of incubation, with a hope that he may be hatched in time. When my Muse comes forth arrayed in sables, at least in a robe of graver cast, I make no scruple to direct her to my friend at Hoxton" (July 30, 1780).

One of his small pieces, however, he in this letter sent to Newton—namely, his riddle commencing, "I am just two and two."

On the occasion of sending Unwin the "Verses on a Goldfinch starved to Death in a Cage," he said (November 9, 1780): "I wrote the following last summer. The tragical occasion of it really happened at the next

house to ours. I am glad when I can find a subject to work upon ; a lapidary, I suppose, accounts it a laborious part of his business to rub away the roughness of the stone ; but it is my amusement, and if, after all the polishing I can give it, it discovers some little lustre, I think myself well rewarded for my pains.

“ I shall charge you a halfpenny apiece for every copy I send you, the short as well as the long. This is a sort of afterclap you little expected, but I cannot possibly afford them at a cheaper rate. If this method of raising money had occurred to me sooner, I should have made the bargain sooner ; but am glad I have hit upon it at last. It will be a considerable encouragement to my Muse, and act as a powerful stimulus to my industry.”

## 72. A Head once endued with a Legal Periwig.

When Newton was in Olney, knowing that Cowper had formerly been connected with the law, he occasionally asked his advice upon certain matters connected with his parishioners. For example, on January 14, 1775, he wrote : “ I have drawn up a clause to be inserted in Mrs. ——’s will, which my dear friend Mr. Cowper has looked over and approves, and says it will pass very well as to the forms of law.”

The knowledge of this having got abroad, the good people of Olney, who, with commendable shrewdness, always prefer not paying for a thing when it can be had for nothing, hit upon the happy expedient of turning the poet to account. Consequently, when law

cases cropped up, instead of taking the usual course, they went to Cowper, who, when he could not give the required assistance, was kind-hearted enough to apply to his friend Hill, who sent a speedy answer to his query. Writing to Hill, May 6, 1780, he says: "I know less of the law than a country attorney, yet sometimes I think I have almost as much business. My former connection with the profession has got wind, and though I earnestly profess, and protest, and proclaim it abroad, that I know nothing of the matter, they cannot be persuaded to believe that a head once endued with a legal periwig can ever be deficient in those natural endowments it is supposed to cover. I have had the good fortune to be once or twice in the right, which, added to the cheapness of a gratuitous counsel, has advanced my credit to a degree I never expected to attain in the capacity of a lawyer. Indeed, if two of the wisest in the science of jurisprudence may give opposite opinions on the same point, which does not unfrequently happen, it seems to be a matter of indifference whether a man answers by rule or at a venture. He that stumbles upon the right side of the question is just as useful to his client as he that arrives at the same end by regular approaches, and is conducted to the mark he aims at by the greatest authorities."

About this time he wrote "The Report of an Adjudged Case, not to be found in any of the Books." "Happy," said he, when he transcribed it six months later for his friend Hill, "is the man who knows just so much of the law as to make himself a little merry now and then with the solemnity of judicial proceedings."

## 73. Mrs. Powley at Olney.—May, 1780.

With Mrs. Unwin Cowper was always on most affectionate terms; to her son William he was scarcely less attached; but there was one member of the family who had shown a decided coolness towards him—namely, Mrs. Unwin's daughter Susanna, now Mrs. Powley. Mrs. Powley, we are told, esteemed Cowper as a man, but complained that her mother was wasting a deal of her property upon him. At a later date she declared that Mrs. Unwin had wasted eighteen hundred pounds upon him. Nothing, of course, was shown outwardly, and Cowper seems never to have been aware of the real cause of the coolness.

Mrs. Powley and her husband were now (May, 1780) on a visit to Olney, and Cowper urged William Unwin to try and get away from Stock to meet them. "You cannot always," says he, "find your brother and sister Powley at Olney. These and some other considerations, such as the desire we have to see you, and the pleasure we expect from seeing you all together, may, and I think ought, to overcome your scruples."

Far from suspecting what was really the case, Cowper, innocently enough, attributes Mrs. Powley's indifference to his poetical effusions, especially his humorous ones, to another cause. A few months later (December 24, 1780) he tells Unwin: "Your poor sister!—she has many good qualities, and upon some occasions gives proof of a good understanding; but as some people have no ear for music, so she has none for

humour. Well, if she cannot laugh at our jokes, we can, however, at her mistakes, and in this way she makes us ample amends for the disappointment. Mr. Powley is much like herself: if his wife overlooks the jest, he will never be able to find it. They were neither of them born to write epigrams or ballads, and I ought to be less mortified at the coldness with which they entertain my small sallies in the way of drollery, when I reflect that, if Swift himself had had no other judges, he would never have found one admirer."

#### 74. Cowper as a Letter-writer.

In a letter to Unwin, dated June 8, 1780, Cowper informs us of his own way of writing letters, and criticizes adversely the method of Pope. It runs as follows :—

"Your mother communicated to me the satisfaction you expressed in my correspondence, that you thought me entertaining, and clever, and so forth. Now you must know I love praise dearly, especially from the judicious, and those who have so much delicacy themselves as not to offend mine in giving it. But then, I found this consequence attending, or likely to attend, the eulogium you bestowed—if my friend thought me witty before, he shall think me ten times more witty hereafter—where I joked once, I will joke five times, and, for one sensible remark, I will send him a dozen. Now this foolish vanity would have spoiled me quite, and would have made me as disgusting a letter-writer as Pope, who seems to have thought that unless a

sentence was well-turned, and every period pointed with some conceit, it was not worth the carriage. Accordingly he is to me, except in a very few instances, the most disagreeable maker of epistles that ever I met with. I was willing, therefore, to wait till the impression your commendation had made upon the foolish part of me was worn off, that I might scribble away as usual, and write my uppermost thoughts, and those only."

Cowper had himself by this time got into his very best style. As showing in how interesting a manner he could describe even the most trivial occurrences, no better example could be found than the letter to Newton, dated August 21, 1780:—

"The following occurrence ought not to be passed over in silence, in a place where so few notable ones are to be met with. Last Wednesday night, while we were at supper, between the hours of eight and nine, I heard an unusual noise in the back parlour, as if one of the hares was entangled and endeavouring to disengage herself. I was just going to rise from table when it ceased. In about five minutes a voice on the outside of the parlour door inquired if one of my hares had got away. I immediately rushed into the next room, and found that my poor favourite Puss had made her escape. She had gnawed in sunder the strings of a lattice work, with which I thought I had sufficiently secured the window, and which I preferred to any other sort of blind, because it admitted plenty of air. From thence I hastened to the kitchen, where I saw the redoubtable Thomas Freeman, who told me that, having seen her just after she dropped into the street,

he attempted to cover her with his hat, but she screamed out and leaped directly over his head. I then desired him to pursue as fast as possible, and added Richard Coleman to the chase, as being nimbler and carrying less weight than Thomas ; not expecting to see her again, but desirous to learn, if possible, what became of her. In something less than an hour Richard returned, almost breathless, with the following account: that, soon after he began to run, he left Tom behind him and came in sight of a most numerous hunt of men, women, children, and dogs; that he did his best to keep back the dogs, and presently outstripped the crowd, so that the race was at last disputed between himself and Puss: she ran right through the town, and down the lane that leads to Dropshot. A little before she came to the house, he got the start and turned her; she pushed for the town again, and soon after she entered it sought shelter in Mr. Wagstaff's tan-yard, adjoining to old Mr. Drake's. Sturges's harvest men were at supper, and saw her from the opposite side of the way. There she encountered the tan-pits full of water, and, while she was struggling out of one pit, and plunging into another, and almost drowned, one of the men drew her out by the ears, and secured her. She was then well washed in a bucket to get the lime out of her coat, and brought home in a sack at ten o'clock.

"This frolic cost us four shillings, but you may believe that we did not grudge a farthing of it. The poor creature received only a little hurt in one of her claws and one of her ears, and is now almost as well as ever."



## 75. The Lacemakers.—June, 1780.

In his letter to Newton, of June 23, 1780, Cowper says: "We have sent a petition to Lord Dartmouth by this post, praying him to interfere in Parliament in behalf of the poor lacemakers. I say we, because I have signed it. Mr. G—— drew it up. Mr. —— did not think it grammatical, therefore would not sign it. Yet I think Priscian himself would have pardoned the manner for the sake of the matter."

During the first half of the century the lace trade had been good, and Olney and Newport Pagnell, the centres of it, had been in a prosperous condition; but, as may be seen from the following extract from Cowper's letter to Hill, dated July 8th of this year, everything had now changed. He says: "Mon Ami,—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 lacemakers. I am an eyewitness to 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 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 one thousand

two hundred lacemakers 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 ever be able to earn."

Let us take a peep into one of the cottages of the Olney lacemakers—a cottage, I mean, in Cowper's day. It ought not to be uninteresting to us—especially if we have read the beautiful lines about Voltaire and the cottager. We will suppose it is a winter's evening. A group of three women are seated at their pillows, and a fourth is turning her bobbin-wheel and filling the bobbins with thread. In the middle is a three-legged wooden stool called "the candleblock," upholding a candle, in a wooden candlestick, surrounded by three flasks of water with their necks inserted in sockets in the stool. Thus, with their pillows supported partly on their knees, and partly by a pillow-horse, also of three legs, and the candle-light reflected by the flask on to their work, they busily rattle their gaily-spangled bobbins and marshal their regiments of pins. Their expertness is amazing, and the work is done so regularly that they can tell the hour by their pillows as easily as by the clock. You can see, too, that the pillow no less than the lace is a subject of pride: some of the pins are large, and, being furnished with beaded or waxed heads, lord it magnificently over the rank and file, and seem to act as colonels and lieutenants to the liliputian army; the bobbins are particular objects of emulation, for, besides the plain and simple plebeians that hang round in great profusion, there is a goodly sprinkling of patricians, an æsthetic class, with carved initials or Christian names on their elegant stems, or

perforated with holes, and exhibiting tiny columns (we have seen some beautifully carved)—their spangles glittering with beads, shells, and coins. By the fire are three pipkins, which a child is filling with hot wood-ashes, and she will presently bring one to each of the workers, who will draw it under her gown to keep her feet warm.

Then there were the lace schools, where some twenty or thirty children were tutored by old dames, who estimated their proficiency by the number of pins stuck in in an hour, and where to assist themselves in counting they chanted in a sing-song voice the amount of work to be got over :—

“ 20 miles have I to go.  
19 miles have I to go.  
18 miles have I to go.”

These and the more elaborate songs sung at the pillow were called “Lace Tellings.”

At this time both men and boys, as well as women and girls, might have been seen at the pillow, but as the lace trade declined the former exchanged their bobbins and pins for the spade and flail. Not a few old men, however, now living made lace early in the century.

One of them told me that he distinctly remembered being first taken by his mother to the lace school. An old woman who met them cried out in a shrill voice, “Well, you’re going to set him down, then.” “Yes,” was the reply, “it’s time he was doing something.”

The place being so entirely given over to lace-

making, it was no easy matter to find girls suitable for service. At a much later date Cowper tried unsuccessfully to get a nurse in Olney for the infant son of his friend Rose, and he wrote on this occasion: "Girls fit to be nurses and worthy to be trusted with little William are scarce, and especially scarce in this country, where the lace pillow is the only thing they dandle" (Unpublished letter of January 9, 1793).

76. The "Anti-Thelyphthora."—December, 1780.

An incident now occurred in the religious world that gave origin to a deal of controversy. The Rev. Martin Madan, Cowper's cousin, the one who visited him at St. Albans, and whose name has several other times been mentioned in this book, published in 1780 a work, in two large octavos, to which he afterwards added a third as a supplement, entitled, *Thelyphthora; or, a Treatise on Female Ruin*, the substance of which was that polygamy is a state which was not only allowed by the Most High to the Jews, but spoken of in His law in such a manner as to show that it received His sanction to the end of the world. No wonder that such a book, written by such a man, fell like a bomb-shell among all professors of religion. To think that one of the most distinguished ministers of the Evangelical party should write a work of that sort! Cowper's first impulse after its perusal was to fall into jest, so he wrote the following "Impromptu":—

"If John marries Mary, and Mary alone,  
'Tis a very good match between Mary and John.  
Should John wed a score, oh, the claws and the scratches!  
It can't be a match—'tis a bundle of matches."

These lines being sent to Newton, the latter observed: "Your epigram made us sharers in your laugh; but the occasion and subject summoned my muscles back to their pristine seriousness. . . . He that is happy with one wife will want no more; he that is not happy with one has one too many. Or, suppose we Sternholdize the thought:—

"What different senses of that word, A Wife!  
It means the comfort or the bane of life.  
The happiest state is to be pleased with one,  
The next degree is found in having none."

The feeling of ridicule, however, which had at first exhibited itself in Cowper, was mingled with one of indignation, and instead of regarding his kinsman as he had come to do with veneration, he now viewed him only with abhorrence, as a vicious and immorally minded man—an opinion that was shared by the majority in the Evangelical world. That such, however, was not the case is now pretty clear. Taking his position upon the strictest literalism, holding himself bound by every word of the Bible, but rejecting every other ground of argument, it is not surprising that Mr. Madan arrived at the conclusions he came to. What was brought under his notice, too, as chaplain of the Lock, might also have seemed to add weight to his argument. "If Madan," says Mr. (now Canon) Benham, "ever looked sorrowfully upon his charge at the Lock, and thought how each fallen woman had been

once an innocent child, and might have been a happy wife with children round her knees, is it to be wondered at that he pondered on the question, 'On what theory *might* these have been wives?'"

In short, a man may arrive at wrong conclusions on the subject of marriage, and yet not necessarily be an immoral man.

Had Cowper contented himself with criticizing the book in his letters, or writing epigrams upon it for the amusement of his friends, all would have been well; but, unfortunately, he wrote in December 1780, and not only wrote, but sent to press, a satirical attack on Madan, entitled "Anti-Thelyphthora," a poem that was printed as a quarto pamphlet by Johnson, and issued anonymously in 1781. It is noticed in the sixty-fourth volume of the *Monthly Review*. In respect to this production Mr. Benham observes: "It seems almost incredible that such a foolish straining after the comic, such a coarse and vulgar effusion, could have proceeded from so delightful a humourist and such a thorough gentleman." But Cowper himself could see in after years that in publishing the "Anti-Thelyphthora" he had committed, if not a folly, a mistake. He had allowed the authorship of it to remain a secret at first, on account of his relationship to the person against whom it was aimed, but when that reason was taken away by the death of Mr. Madan, he was glad to let it remain an anonymity—to give it, what Carlyle would have called, "Christian burial." Some thirty years after the poet's death Southey disinterred it from the British Museum.

Despite its shortcomings, "Anti-Thelyphthora" is

most interesting to students of Cowper, for it was the first of his series of long poems. Poor as it was, taken as a whole, it was always a start. Cowper's maiden fight was a tilt with Sir Airy del Castro (Mr. Madan),<sup>1</sup> and though he did not greatly distinguish himself on the occasion, it served to inform him that he was not altogether wanting in skill as a satirist.

For example, as an indication of his powers in that line, take his allusion to the lady Hypothesis, who taught—

"That forms material, whatsoe'er we dream,  
Are not at all, or are not what they seem;  
That substances and modes of every kind  
Are mere impressions on the passive mind;  
And he that splits his cranium, breaks at most  
A fancied head upon a fancied post."

This was not at all bad for a beginning, and Cowper may well have imagined that the man who could write this could write more. Having broken a lance in behalf of monogamy, why not ride forth as the champion of other virtues? The Thelyphthorian doctrines man-gled, why not close with other abuses?

Meantime he was able to report an increase in his income. He was informed that Lady Cowper, a lady with whom he had once been slightly acquainted, and who had died in the previous August, had left him an annuity of £20. Subsequently, however, he discovered that the intelligence was not accurate. The money was to come to him, but "from a different mine" (December 10, 1780).

<sup>1</sup> The "Knight of the Silver Moon, Sir Marmadan," of this poem was Mr. Badcock, of the *Monthly Review*, who had severely handled Mr. Madan's book in that periodical.





## CHAPTER XII.

### *“SISTER ANNE;” OR, THE WRITING OF HIS FIRST VOLUME.*

(December, 1780—February, 1782.)

77. “The Progress of Error,” “Truth,” and  
“Table Talk.”—January and February, 1781.

**P**ERCEIVING that the occupation of writing pleased him, Mrs. Unwin encouraged it. Newton's praise of “Anti-Thelyphthora,” too, though it was misplaced, had considerable influence in inciting Cowper to make further use of his pen. And so it came about that he, who, for want of a better occupation, had mended kitchen windows, drawn mountains and dabchicks, and grown cantaloupes, found from that day forward he had enough to do. The first intimation we have of what he was about is in the letter to Newton, dated December 21, 1780. “It will,” he says, “not be long, perhaps, before you will receive a poem called ‘The Progress of Error.’ That will be succeeded by another, in due time, called ‘Truth.’ Don't be alarmed. I ride Pegasus with

a curb. He will never run away with me again. I have even convinced Mrs. Unwin that I can manage him, and make him stop when I please."

From this it may be gathered that though Newton had praised Cowper's former poem, the lengths the writer had gone had somewhat alarmed him. There was need, however, for no further fear. Henceforward Pegasus would be managed better.

"The Progress of Error" was finished in January, and Cowper's neighbour, Mr. Raban, being under the necessity of visiting London, undertook to carry the poem to the Rev. John Newton. No sooner had the poem departed, however, than Cowper began to feel uneasy, for he knew Mr. Raban "to be that sort of genius, which, being much busied in making excursions of the imaginary kind, is not always present to its own immediate concerns, much less to those of others; and wished the poem had been entrusted to 'a less volatile person.'" The important missive, however, arrived safely at its destination. "I am glad," says Cowper, "that 'The Progress of Error' did not err in its progress, as I feared it had, and that it has reached you safe; and still more pleased that it has met with your approbation, for had it not, I should have wished it had miscarried."

On Raban's return, Cowper was of course all eagerness to know how his friend Newton was going on, and all about him; but, provokingly enough, though "engineered with question after question," the reticent Mr. Raban had next to nothing to tell. We are allowed to picture this worthy seated in Cowper's parlour, with legs stretched out at full length, crossed feet, and folded

arms, his head reclining upon his shoulder, as he is elsewhere described, and answering Cowper's eager questions with a yawn and a monosyllable. "He told us, indeed," says Cowper, "that some invisible agent supplied you every Sunday with a coach, which we were pleased with hearing; and this, I think, was the sum total of his information."

In "The Progress of Error" Cowper satirizes, among other things, inordinate love of the chase, and the fashionable education of the day, and inveighs against gambling, drinking, gluttony, and other vices. He makes another and a last attack on his cousin, Martin Madan, whom he dubs "The Speculatist," and gibbets Lord Chesterfield (Petronius) as a foe to goodness and a corrupter of youth. The "quavering and semi-quavering" Occiduus, who falls under his displeasure, was probably a clergyman near Olney, and not Charles Wesley, as is generally supposed—at least, so says Squire Mansel of Lathbury (near Olney), contemporary of Cowper's, who annotated a copy of his poems. That Occiduus was an acquaintance of Cowper's is clear from the letter to Newton, dated September 9, 1781.

In drawing the picture of the "cassocked huntsman" there is little doubt that Cowper, though he mentions no particular name, had in his eye the Rev. Mr. Pomfret, rector of the neighbouring village of Emberton, a gentleman so addicted to the chase that it is remembered of him that after the sermon he would lean over the pulpit as the people were withdrawing, and inquire of his churchwarden, "Mr. Hale, where do the hounds meet to-morrow?"

The poem entitled "Truth," the second in order of composition, was likewise rapidly nearing completion. It "is already longer than its elder brother," writes Cowper, "and is yet to be lengthened by the addition of perhaps twenty lines." On February 4th it is spoken of as "long since finished." "I wrote that poem," he tells Unwin, June 24, 1781, "on purpose to inculcate the eleemosynary character of the Gospel, as a dispensation of mercy in the most absolute sense of the word, to the exclusion of all claims of merit on the part of the receiver; consequently to set the brand of invalidity upon the plea of works, and to discover, upon scriptural ground, the absurdity of that notion, which includes a solecism in the very terms of it, that man by repentance and good works may deserve the mercy of his Maker."

"Table Talk," the third poem, was also as good as completed, and he was engaged in making a fair copy of it for Newton. "Now," says he, "I believe I shall hang up my harp for the remainder of the year, and—

"Since Eighty-one has had so much to do,  
Postpone what yet is left till Eighty-two."

On February 18th he writes:—

"I send you 'Table Talk.' It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me to drop a word in favour of religion. In short, there is some froth, and here and there a bit of sweetmeat, which seems to entitle

it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle. I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should consult the taste of my readers at the expense of my own approbation ; nor more serious than I have been, lest I should forfeit theirs. A poet in my circumstances has a difficult part to act : one minute obliged to bridle his humour, if he has any ; and the next, to clap a spur to the sides of it : now ready to weep from a sense of the importance of his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh, lest his gravity should be mistaken for dulness.”

Of the great pains he took with his poems Cowper made no secret. “To touch and retouch,” he says, “is, though some writers boast of negligence, and others would be ashamed to show their foul copies, the secret of almost all good writing, especially in verse. I am never weary of it myself” (July 2, 1780).

78. “Expostulation.”—February, 1781.

Notwithstanding his “purpose to shake hands with the Muse,” and take his leave of her for the present, Cowper very soon, to use his own expression, had another *tête-à-tête* with her. The title of his new experiment was “Expostulation.” His plan was to give a brief summary of the history of the Jews, the miraculous interpositions in behalf of that people, their great privileges, their abuse of them, and their consequent destruction ; and then, by way of comparison, such another display of the favours vouchsafed to this country, the similar ingratitude with which they have

requited them, and the punishment they have therefore reason to expect, unless reformation interpose to prevent it.

By this time, too, the idea had entered into Cowper's head of publishing his poems in the form of a book; but for some weeks he was very much in doubt whether any bookseller would undertake the risk of bringing it out. To publish it on his own account was out of the question. Thanks, however, to the good offices of Mr. Newton a publisher was at length found, Mr. Joseph Johnson, the same who had printed "*Anti-Thelyphthora*." "Johnson," says Cowper, "has heroically set all peradventures at defiance, and takes the whole charge upon himself. So out I come." At first Cowper had intended not to allow his name to appear on the title-page, but in compliance with Johnson's request he gave way.

It was then decided to commence with "*Table Talk*," because, its subjects being more popular, there was some chance of its catching "the public by the ear." Cowper's idea was while the first three poems were being printed to go on with the fourth. These four, together with seven or eight smaller pieces, would, he imagined, furnish a volume of tolerable bulk.

"If," says Cowper, "it were inquired of me what my motive was for publishing, I should answer, 'Amusement.' There is nothing but this—no occupation within the compass of my small sphere, poetry excepted, that can do much towards diverting that train of melancholy thoughts which, when I am not thus employed, are for ever pouring themselves in upon me. And if I did not publish what I write, I could not

interest myself sufficiently in my own success to make an amusement of it.”

In another letter he observes that his objects in writing and publishing are two : “first, to amuse myself, and secondly, to compass that point in such a manner, that others might possibly be the better for my amusement.” He also remarked that though he was indifferent to fame, he had “taken the utmost pains to deserve it.”

From time to time the poems had been subjected to the criticism of Newton, to whose suggestions Cowper always gave careful consideration. To the criticisms of Johnson the publisher, who took a more than ordinary interest in the work with which he was entrusted, the volume also owed certain improvements. “He marked such lines as did not please him, and as often as I could I paid all possible respect to his animadversions.” Cowper, indeed, had reason to be very much satisfied with his publisher.

In compliance with Cowper's request, Mr. Newton now wrote a preface for the work, which preface, however, in accordance with the advice of the publisher, was not allowed to appear in the first edition. To Mr. Unwin nothing had as yet been mentioned on the subject, but, preliminaries having been adjusted, Cowper on the 1st of May announced to him what was about to be done. “In the press, and speedily will be published, in one volume octavo, price three shillings, Poems, by William Cowper, of the Inner Temple Esq.” The principal reason, he tells his friend, why he never mentioned to him, till then, what he was about to make known to the world, was that, “till within

these few days, I had not the honour to know it myself."

Unwin, however, felt a little hurt at being so long kept in the dark, but Cowper at once wrote again to him and smoothed down the irritation. He told him that he loved him and valued his friendship as much as ever. He assured him again that till the present time he had not the smallest expectation of sending a volume to the press, and he remarked that the obvious and only reason why he resorted to Mr. Newton instead of "my friend Unwin," was because the former lived in London, the latter at Stock—the former was upon the spot to correct the press and to arrange business matters with the publisher, whereas the latter living so far distant from the metropolis could not be applied to for those purposes without a manifest encroachment on his kindness. So Unwin was appeased, as Newton had been on a somewhat similar occasion, and the friendship between them that was already so strong became all the more closely cemented.

The book, however, did not appear for some little while. "The season of publication," Cowper was obliged to tell his friend, three weeks later, "is just elapsed. The town is going into the country every day, and my book cannot appear till they return—that is to say, not till next winter." The misfortune, however, had attendant advantages, for not only was Cowper now able to correct the proof-sheets himself, but he found time, in compliance with Johnson's suggestion, to write several new long poems.

An interesting fact may be noted with respect to "Expostulation." In the first few copies that



were struck off there appeared, after the paragraph on the abuse of the Holy Sacrament, a passage consisting of twenty-four lines condemnatory of the practices of Roman Catholics. But in the remaining copies and in subsequent editions these lines were replaced by the twenty-four lines that now stand, on the subject of “Obduracy against repentance” (lines 390-413). The alteration was brought about in the following manner.

Soon after the passage had been printed, Cowper, although he had previously perceived no impropriety in it, became uneasy on the subject, and after three days’ unquiet submitted it to Newton, who condemned it. In consequence, the passage was cancelled, and Cowper, “working like a tailor who sews a patch upon a hole in a coat,” made twenty-four lines to fill the gap. As “The Cancelled Passage” is omitted even among the footnotes of most editions of Cowper, I have thought well to give it here. It runs as follows :—

“ Hast thou admitted with a blind, fond trust,  
 The lie that burned thy father’s bones to dust,  
 That first adjudged them heretics, then sent  
 Their souls to heaven and cursed them as they went ?  
 The lie that Scripture strips of its disguise,  
 And execrates above all other lies,  
 The lie that claps a lock on mercy’s plan,  
 And gives the key to yon infirm old man,  
 Who once ensconced in apostolic chair  
 Is deified, and sits omniscient there ;  
 The lie that knows no kindred, owns no friend  
 But him that makes its progress his chief end,  
 That having spilt much blood, makes that a boast,  
 And canonizes him that sheds the most ?  
 Away with charity that soothes a lie,  
 And thrusts the truth with scorn and anger by ;

## "SISTER ANNE."

Shame on the candour and the gracious smile  
 Bestowed on them that light the martyr's pile,  
 While insolent disdain in frowns expressed  
 Attends the tenets that endured the test !  
 Grant them the rights of men, and while they cease  
 To vex the peace of others grant them peace ;  
 But trusting bigots whose false zeal has made  
 Treachery their duty, thou art self-betrayed."

A fragment of verse, written upon a bill of *James Nickolls, Lace Manufacturer at Oulney, near Newport Pagnell, Bucks*, and first published by Mrs. Collyer in 1890, is supposed also to have been excised from this poem. It represents an Evangelical divine mourning over the disuse in daily life of cassock and girdle, "and treating it as one more melancholy proof of the deterioration of the order"—the cassock, which had formerly been worn by clergymen in the streets, having during the previous twenty or thirty years been given up.

"Methinks I see thee decently arrayed  
 In long-flow'd nightgown of stuff damask made,  
 Thy cassock underneath it closely braced  
 With surcingle about thy mod'rate waist.  
 Thy morning wig, grown tawny to the view,  
 Though once a grizzle, and thy square-toed shoe.  
 The day was when the sacerdotal race  
 Esteem'd their proper habit no disgrace,  
 Or rather when the garb their order wears  
 Was not disgraced as now by being theirs."

As on the same paper as this fragment is "The Flating Mill," the date of which was December, 1781, its date is probably about the same.

The cut that Cowper makes at the bishops should also be noticed in this poem (lines 376-385) :—

"And though a bishop toil to cleanse the stain,  
 He wipes and scours the silver cup in vain."

To what particular incident this passage alludes I do not know, but to no order of men did Cowper show less mercy than to bishops, "and," says one of his biographers (Mr. Benham), "as one looks over the list of that period there seems little reason why he should have held them in veneration." He had already trounced them in "Anti-Thelyphthora" :—

"But not the mitred few ; the soul their charge,  
They left these bodily concerns at large."

In reference to the first passage, Cowper tells Newton that Mrs. Unwin "thought there was a fair opportunity to give the bishops a slap ; and as it would not have been civil to have denied a lady so reasonable a request, I have just made the powder fly out of their wigs a little."

### 79. The Greenhouse.

Of all the pleasures of Cowper's life few held higher rank in his affections than his greenhouse, a structure of his own building, and one that was so small that "Lord Bute's gardener could take it" upon his back and walk away with it. In "Task," III., Cowper writes :—

"Who loves a garden, loves a greenhouse too.  
Unconscious of a less propitious clime,  
There blooms exotic beauty, warm and snug,  
While the winds whistle and the snows descend ;"

whilst in "The Winter Nosegay," a poem inserted in his first volume, he speaks even more rapturously of his "sunny shed" :—

## "SISTER ANNE."

" 'Tis a bower of Arcadian sweets,  
 Where Flora is still in her prime,  
 A fortress to which she retreats  
 From the cruel assaults of the clime.  
 While earth wears a mantle of snow,  
 These pinks are as fresh and as gay  
 As the fairest and sweetest that blow  
 On the beautiful bosom of May."

For several years his greenhouse had afforded him pleasure, but in the summer of this year (1781) it was to add to its agreeable associations. The season was an extremely hot one.

At the end of May Cowper said to Newton : " You seldom complain of too much sunshine, and if you are prepared for a heat somewhat like that of Africa, the south walk in our long garden will exactly suit you." The heat " reflected from the gravel and from the walls, and beating upon your head at the same time," set Cowper wondering whether he could not fashion unto himself some retreat, and then he thought of the greenhouse. Consequently on August 16th we find him telling Newton : " I might date my letter from the greenhouse, which we have converted into a summer parlour. The walls hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun, too, in a great measure excluded by an awning of mats, which forbids him to shine anywhere except upon the carpet, it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney. We eat, drink, and sleep where we always did ; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees, and the singing of birds, are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children."

“Our severest winter,” he writes to Mr. Unwin (June 8, 1783), “commonly called the spring, is now over, and I find myself seated in my favourite recess, the greenhouse. In such a situation, so silent, so shady, where no human foot is heard, and where only my myrtles presume to peep in at the window, you may suppose I have no interruption to complain of, and that my thoughts are perfectly at my command. But the beauties of the spot are themselves an interruption, my attention being called upon by those very myrtles, by a row of grass pinks just beginning to blossom, and by a bed of beans already in bloom; and you are to consider it, if you please, as no small proof of my regard, that, though you have so many powerful rivals, I disengage myself from them all and devote this hour entirely to you.”

In yet another letter (to Mr. Newton, September 18, 1784) he makes a charming allusion to his favourite retreat: “My greenhouse is never so pleasant as when we are just upon the point of being turned out of it. The gentleness of the autumnal suns and the calmness of this latter season make it a much more agreeable retreat than we ever find it in summer: when the winds being generally brisk we cannot cool it by admitting a sufficient quantity of air without being at the same time incommoded by it. But now I sit with all the windows and the door wide open, and am regaled with the scent of every flower in a garden as full of flowers as I have known how to make it. We keep no bees, but if I lived in a hive I should hardly hear more of their music. All the bees in the neighbourhood resort to a bed of mignonette, opposite to

the window, and pay me for the honey they get out of it by a hum, which, though rather monotonous, is as agreeable to my ear as the whistling of my linnets."

The biographer would here note that the erections called by Cowper the greenhouse and the summer-house were not one and the same, as is stated, by mistake, in "The Town of Cowper," for one of Cowper's letters distinctly states that such was not the case (to Unwin, June 12, 1785). The greenhouse has now disappeared. The summer-house, which probably was not yet given over to Cowper's use, demands a passage to itself, and will be dealt with further on.

#### 80. Newton's Visit to Olney.—June, 1781.

For a long time Newton had promised himself the pleasure of a visit to his old flock at Olney, and in June the event took place. With him came Mrs. Newton and his niece, Miss Catlett, a little boarding-school miss of twelve, whom he loved very dearly, and who became a great comfort to him in after years. Of course Cowper would not listen to the proposal that they should put up at an inn. "Miss Catlett must not think of any other lodging than we can without any inconvenience, as we shall, with all possible pleasure, furnish her with. We can each of us say—that is, I can say it in Latin, and Mrs. Unwin in English—*Nihil tui a me alienum puto*. She shall have a great bed and a great room."

This visit was to all parties a most agreeable one. Cowper had resolved beforehand to do or say nothing

that should throw a gloom over the gathering. I determined, as much as possible, to be deaf to the suggestions of despair; that, if I could contribute but little to the pleasure of the opportunity, I might not dash it with unseasonable melancholy, and, like an instrument with a broken string, interrupt the harmony of the concert.

But not only did he not spoil the pleasure of others, he entered so heartily into the joy of the occasion himself that his own dark thoughts were quite forgotten. With Newton he talked of his forthcoming volume, and the many other topics that interested both, and with Miss Catlett, whose name was so suggestive to him of a certain article of diet, he was always having his little joke: "Now, Miss Catlett," he would ask pleasantly, "shall I give you a piece of cutlet?" On account of her high spirits he dubbed her "Euphrosyne, the laughing lady."

When Newton went back again Cowper's sensations "were far from pleasant," and Mrs. Unwin suffered more upon the occasion than when Newton first took leave of Olney.

### 81. Lady Austen.—July, 1781.

Looking out of his window, one day in July, Cowper noticed two ladies enter the draper's shop on the opposite side of the way, one of whom he recognized as Mrs. Jones, of Clifton. Being much struck with the appearance of the stranger, he inquired who she was, and learnt that she was Lady Austen, widow of

Sir Robert Austen, Baronet, and sister of Mrs. Jones ; thereupon he got Mrs. Unwin to invite the ladies to tea ; but upon their arrival, in acceptance of the invitation, the poet, who had since repented of his boldness, could not at first muster sufficient courage to join the little party.

But, having at length forced himself into their company, he found Lady Austen such a vivacious and sympathetic companion that he speedily lost all shyness, with which in her presence he seems never afterwards to have been troubled. In his own words, she was "a lively, agreeable woman, who had seen much of the world, and accounted it a great simpleton, as it is—one who laughed and made laugh, and could keep up a conversation without seeming to labour at it." In the evening he escorted the ladies home, and a few days after, with Mrs. Unwin, returned the visit. The walk from Olney to Clifton is a very beautiful one. The path leads first through level meadows intersected by narrow arms of the river, and about half-way to Clifton, a few yards beyond the main stream, takes us past the pleasant spot where stood the picturesque old water-mill to which Cowper alludes in "The Winter Morning Walk" ("Task," V.). The current is spoken of as stealing silently and unperceived beneath its sheet of ice and snow, but at the mill it bursts asunder its icy shackles, and

" Scornful of a check, it leaps  
The mill-dam, dashes on the restless wheel,  
And wantons in the pebbly gulf below :  
No frost can bind it there ; its utmost force  
Can but arrest the light and smoky mist  
That in its fall the liquid sheet throws wide."



The music of its familiar clack and splashing waters has long ceased ; even the mill itself, with all its appurtenances, has disappeared ; but the site is still very lovely, especially in summer time, when the shallow streams that surround it are yellow with irises, and bristle with reeds, and rushes, and wax-like umbels of butomus.

Mounting a steep path brings us to the top of Clifton Hill, and the view is not soon forgotten by the memory. The visitor carries away remembrance of the smooth line of the horizon broken by the conspicuous spire of Hanslope church (eight miles distant); the nearer prospect of the Weston uplands (in front of whose woods and spinnies could formerly be seen the old mansion of the Throckmortons); the steep white road leading to Weston, the river winding through the level meadows, and, here and there lost to sight, appearing in the evening sun like a succession of silver lakes, the lines of willows marking the smaller watercourses, the roof-tops of the long town of Olney ; the church with its many-lighted steeple and great east window ; the mill at Olney ; and the straight run of river at the foot of the declivity, lined on the near side by a row of willows, doddered with age, and grown with polypodies and wild raspberry.<sup>1</sup>

Clifton itself, which was now to be such a favourite resort of Cowper, consisted of a group of cottages, an antiquated circular dove-house, and three important structures which stood on the brow of the hill that overlooks the river—namely, the Church, the Rectory, and the Hall ; but the last, called also the

<sup>1</sup> "The Town of Cowper."

Manor House—the "Mr. Small's house" of Cowper's letters—has now quite disappeared.

Clifton Hall was a large, square, and strongly-built mansion of stone, with a large porch at the front that faced the river. It was of no antiquity, having been built by Alexander Small, Esq., about 1750 (his bust in a large wig by Scheemaker can be seen in the church), but it stood doubtless on or near the site of the ancient castellated mansion of the Borards and Reyneses, at a distance of about eighty yards to the north-west of the church. The fishpond, the orchard, a portion of the avenue, and the wall round the garden still remain.

The Rectory is a building of considerable antiquity, portions of it being about three hundred years old. In a Terrier (November 11, 1639) of Thomas Webb (a rector, who, by the by, is said to have been hanged for sheep-stealing) it is described as "The Parsonage, consisting of five bays, built of stone, and covered with thatch."

The outcome of this meeting of Cowper and Lady Austen was a friendship which, as the former said, gave them and Mrs. Unwin an opportunity to verify Solomon's word that "a threefold cord is not soon broken"; and in the lines addressed to her later in the year he inquires :—

"But who can tell how vast the plan,  
Which this day's incident began?"—

a passage which had a happy sequel, for but for this meeting of Cowper and Lady Austen the finest of his poems had not been written. It has been said by

Southey, and truly: "The most fortunate incident in his literary life was that which introduced him to this lady."

Many pleasant walks and conversations were enjoyed by the friends that summer, and as the following extract from Cowper's "hop-o'-my-thumb" rhyming letter to Newton testifies (July 12, 1781), their dissipation took the form of picnicing:—"Mrs. Jones proposes, ere July closes, that she and her sister, and her Jones Mister, and we that are here, our course shall steer, to dine in the Spinnie; but for a guinea, if the weather should hold, so hot and so cold, we had better by far stay where we are. For the grass there grows, while nobody mows (which is very wrong), so rank and so long, that, so to speak, 'tis at least a week, if it happen to rain, ere it dries again."

Everything, however, turned out favourably; so Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Lady Austen, "all dined together in the Spinnie—a most delightful retirement, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton, of Weston. Lady Austen's lackey and a lad that waits on me in the garden drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *fête champêtre*. A board laid over the top of the wheelbarrow served us for a table; our dining-room was a root-house, lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock the servants, who had dined under the great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the Wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening

without one cross occurrence, or the least weariness of each other, a happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of."

82. "Hope," "Charity," "Conversation," and "Retirement."—June to September, 1781.

The poem entitled "Hope" was written in June, and by the end of the same month Cowper had commenced "a proper sequel" to it, namely, "Charity," written in a fortnight, and finished on July 12th, when he says, in a jingling letter to Newton, "I have writ 'Charity,' not for popularity, but as well as I could, in hopes to do good." With this production was completed what has been called his series of Christian Poems, and, as he then supposed, his first volume. The poem called "Conversation," which he found himself engaged upon at the end of July, would, he thought, make a very good introduction to a second volume. "My design in it," he says, "is to convince the world that they make but an indifferent use of their tongues, considering the intention of Providence when He endued them with the faculty of speech; to point out the abuses, which is the jocular part of the business, and to prescribe the remedy, which is the grave and sober."

Among the practices satirized in "Conversation," one is smoking, though, drolly enough, as we have seen, two of Cowper's most intimate friends were ardent votaries of the fragrant weed. His fondness for Mr. Bull, however, was so much stronger than his antipathy to tobacco that he was always ready to find an excuse

for him ; and as for Newton, he good-naturedly tells that divine, “ You will observe, for your comfort and the honour of the same pipe, that it hardly falls within the line of my censure. You never fumigate the ladies, or force them out of company ; nor do you use it as an incentive to hard drinking.”

Instead of being kept for another volume, “ Conversation,” at Johnson’s suggestion, went to swell the present one ; and upon learning that even now the book would not be too large, Cowper set to work upon the subject of “ Retirement.” This was towards the end of August. He says : “ My view in choosing that subject is to direct to the proper use of the opportunities it affords for the cultivation of a man’s best interests ; to censure the vices and the follies which people carry with them into their retreats, where they make no other use of their leisure than to gratify themselves with the indulgence of their favourite appetites, and to pay themselves by a life of pleasure for a life of business. In conclusion, I would enlarge upon the happiness of that state, when discreetly enjoyed and religiously improved.” The poem was finished on October 3rd, and the work of printing the volume went forward, though Cowper had often to bewail the tardiness of Johnson’s operations, in order to quicken which he once applied to Newton. “ I know little of booksellers or printers,” he says in an after letter, “ but have heard from others that they are the most dilatory of all people ; otherwise, I am not in a hurry, nor would be so troublesome ; but am obliged to you, nevertheless, for your interference, if his promised alacrity be owing to any spur you have given him.”

The postal arrangements of those days, thanks to the letters of Newton and the poems of Cowper, are pretty well understood. As the cost of sending a letter was high, Cowper, whenever possible, made himself the possessor of franks—that is, free letters, which he was frequently able to do owing to his aristocratic connections, and the good offices of his friend Unwin, who obtained them from Mr. Robert Smith, afterwards Lord Carrington. Previous to the year 1764 any letter signed by a member either of the House of Lords or the House of Commons went free, but after that date, in order to avoid abuses of this privilege, the whole of the address as well as the signature had to be in the member's own handwriting. Cowper's friends would make him presents of as many as six or eight franks at once, all, of course, at this time, with the address, "Mr. Joseph Johnson, St. Paul's Churchyard;" in other words, six or eight sheets of paper with that address written on the back.

But amid all these pleasant occupations one black spectre was always present—the belief that he was doomed to perdition. "My thoughts," he tells Newton (August 21, 1781), "are clad in a sober livery, for the most part as grave as that of a bishop's servants. They turn, too, upon spiritual subjects, but the tallest fellow, and the loudest amongst them all, is he who is continually crying with a loud voice, *Actum est de te; periisti!* It was the old refrain, "It is all over with thee; thou hast perished."

## 83. The Fracas.—January, 1782.

By the time Lady Austen set out for London in October she and the poet (or rather Sister Anne and Brother William, as they now preferred to call one another) were closest friends. Lady Austen, indeed, made up her mind to disturb Dick Coleman, his wife, and the thousand rats that inhabited the eastern portion of the house occupied by Cowper, and live there herself. "Next spring twelvemonth she begins to repair and beautify, and in the following winter she intends to take possession."

Cowper, in the same letter, tells Unwin, whom he requests to visit her in London, more about Lady Austen's character. "She has many features in her character which you will admire ; but one, in particular, on account of the rarity of it, will engage your attention and esteem. She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation, as is hardly to be found in any rank of life, and, if report say true, is scarce indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it ; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings, she has the most, and the most harmless, vivacity you can imagine." Elsewhere he says, "She is exceedingly sensible, has great quickness of parts, and an uncommon fluency of expression."

In December, to all appearance, the affection between the brother and sister was undiminished, for on the 17th was despatched the "Poetical Epistle to Lady

Austen ;" but before February had flown a disagreement occurred which had its origin in some passage that Cowper wrote, which gave her displeasure. Says he, "Conscious of none but the most upright and inoffensive intentions, I yet apologized for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence, after this, proceeded smoothly for a considerable time ; but at length, having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject could warrant, and intimating that when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and, so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error." The simple truth of the matter was, Lady Austen was in love with him, and she had clung to the hope that the affection with which he regarded her was something more than mere friendship.

Such being the case, it is not surprising that the letter gave "mortal offence. It received, indeed, an answer, but such a one as could by no means be replied to"—an answer in which she "expressed herself with a warmth that she knew must have affronted and shocked" both Cowper and Mrs. Unwin.

And that was the end of the friendship that promised



so much—at least so thought Cowper. Far otherwise it proved, for Lady Austen, soon after, sent a present of three pairs of ruffles, with advice that he should soon receive a fourth. “I knew they were begun before we quarrelled. I begged Mr. Jones to tell her, when he wrote next, how much I thought myself obliged, and gave him to understand that I should make her a very inadequate though the only return in my power by laying my volume at her feet.” This, of course, was the volume of poems that was on the point of being published.

#### 84. Wilson, the Barber.

Of Cowper's neighbours none was more in his company than Wilson, the barber, a worthy whom the poet reckoned amongst the “men of best intelligence” in the town. Plenty of people now living in Olney can remember Mr. Wilson, and numbers of interesting facts connected with the poet scattered up and down the pages of this volume owe their preservation to him. Cowper's references to his “friseur” and the articles inseparable from his calling are of frequent occurrence.

“First came the barber,” he says (July 27, 1780), “who, after having embellished the outside of my head, has left the inside just as unfurnished as he found it.” In one place, speaking of the inability of some people to appreciate a joke, he says: “You might as well relate a good story to a barber's block” (December 21, 1780). In another he likens something or other to

the action of putting a plaster on a barber's block. Cowper's own wig-block is still preserved in the summer-house.

Even in his brightest years Cowper was subject to brief periods of melancholy, and Wilson when he called would sometimes perceive that vacant, woe-begone look that only too accurately betrayed the state within. On such occasions, whilst shaving him, the barber was obliged again and again "to chuck up his lower jaw," which had the habit of falling.

After the summer of 1781, when he made a public profession of religion by joining the Baptist church in the town, Mr. Wilson, contrary to his previous habit, was very strict in his observance of the Sabbath. "The barber and hairdresser who officiates for me," says Cowper in June of that year, "would not wait upon the king himself on a Sunday."

Previous to this it had been his custom to go out every Sunday morning to dress the hair of Lady Austen, but he now sent word that although he should be only too happy to attend her other days, he could no longer do so on Sundays.

At first thought the reader may not look upon this as a very great calamity to Lady Austen, but calling to mind the lofty and elaborate head-dresses of the last century, he will form some idea of the dilemma in which she found herself. Probably, too, whilst honouring the one, who sacrificed his interest to his conscience, he will sympathize just a little with the other, and think none the worse of her for being vexed and rating Mr. Wilson roundly. All, however, to no effect; and as in the small town of Olney there

was only one barber (Cowper adds, "one bellman, one poet"), she was obliged to have her hair dressed on Saturday evenings. And we are told that more than once she sat up all night to prevent its disarrangement.<sup>1</sup>

Besides Wilson and Raban, there were several other townsmen with whom Cowper was more or less acquainted, and whom he refers to as making visits to him, generally for the purpose of bringing news. Two of them, with Mr. Wilson, he describes as entering on this errand on November 27, 1781. "First Mr. Wilson, then Mr. Teedon, and lastly Mr. Whitford, each with a cloud of melancholy on his brow, and with a mouth wide open, have just announced to us this unwelcome intelligence from America." Of Teedon we shall have a good deal to say by and by. Whitford was the minister of the Independent meeting at Olney, of which he was pastor from 1776 to 1783. He was an old friend of John Newton's, having, in fact, at one time studied under him.

### 85. The Publication of the First Volume.— February, 1782.

The volume which had been so long in the press was now put before the world. Cowper had made his "public *entrée*."

The "Task" has been read, and read again, by almost everybody, but these earlier and, to use Cowper's own description of them, "serio-comic" poems, although containing many passages of beauty

<sup>1</sup> "The Town of Cowper."

and a great deal of humour, have been somewhat neglected. What can be droller than "the smirking, smart Abbé" in "The Progress of Error," "the Splenetic" in "Conversation," or "the Persian" in the same poem?—

"A Persian, humble servant of the sun,  
Who, though devout, yet bigotry had none,  
Hearing a lawyer, grave in his address,  
With adjurations every word impress,  
Supposed the man a bishop, or at least,  
God's name so much upon his lips, a priest ;  
Bowed at the close with all his graceful airs,  
And begged an interest in his frequent prayers."

What more beautiful than the account of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus in "Conversation," the contrast between Voltaire and the Cottager in "Truth," or the lines on Whitefield (Leuconomus) in "Hope"? To quote from the last :—

"He loved the world that hated him : the tear  
That dropped upon his Bible was sincere :  
Assailed by scandal and the tongue of strife,  
His only answer was a blameless life ;  
And he that forged and he that threw the dart  
Had each a brother's interest in his heart."

But perhaps the greatest charm of all is the abundance of delightful couplets, often proverbial verses, that, as Hayley says, "express a simple truth with perfect grace and precision." You meet with them on almost every page. To take a few of the best :—

"None sends his arrow to the mark in view  
Whose hand is feeble or his aim untrue."

—*Progress of Error.*

"Called to the temple of impure delight,  
He that abstains, and he alone, does right."  
—*Progress of Error.*

"'Tis hard if all is false that I advance,  
A fool must now and then be right by chance."  
—*Conversation.*

"Vociferated logic kills me quite,  
A noisy man is always in the right."  
—*Conversation.*

"Where men of judgment creep and feel their way  
The positive pronounce without dismay."  
—*Conversation.*

"A moral, sensible, and well-bred man  
Will not affront me, and no other can."  
—*Conversation.*

"An idler is a watch that wants both hands,  
As useless when it goes as when it stands."  
—*Retirement.*

Shafts of wit are levelled at anybody and everybody  
whom, having weighed in the balance, he finds wanting  
—not excluding himself—

"Patriots who love good places at their hearts,—  
. . . Admirals extolled for standing still,  
Or doing nothing with a deal of skill.  
Generals who will not conquer when they may,  
Firm friends to peace, to pleasure, and good pay."

The "cassocked huntsman" and the "fiddling priest."  
Geologists and antiquaries likewise get a drubbing, and  
the geologists and antiquaries of those days, as any-  
body may know who has taken the trouble to inquire  
into the matter, were not undeserving of chastisement.

The picture of the smart abbé encountering some loitering English travellers is inimitable. The abbé

"Points to inscriptions wheresoe'er they tread,  
Such as when legible were never read ;"

and—

"Exhibits elevations, drawings, plans,  
Models of Herculean pots and pans,  
And sells them medals, which, if neither rare  
Nor ancient, will be so, preserved with care."

Cowper also has a fling at the novelist with his "sentimental frippery;" and at dancing and card-playing.

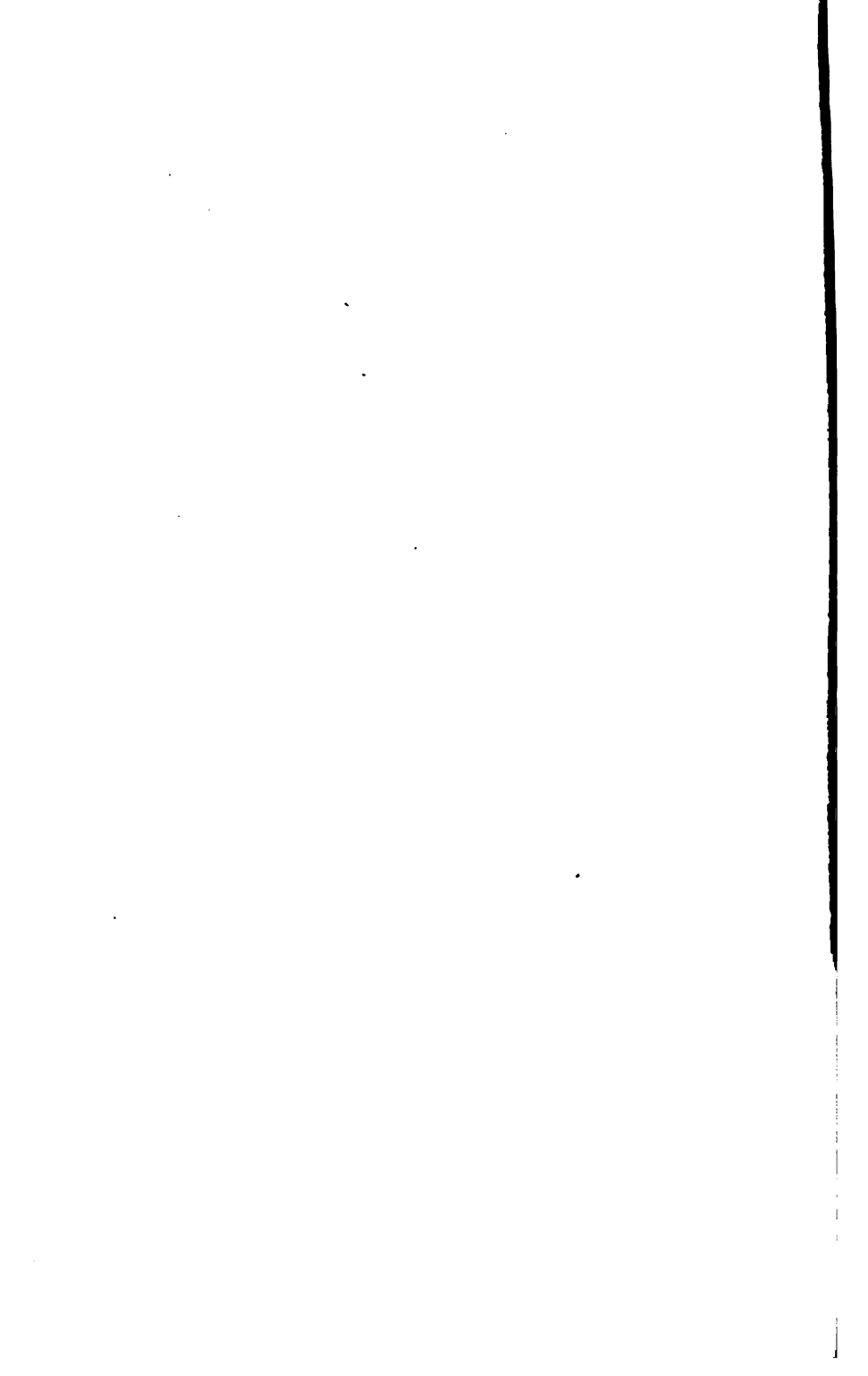
Dr. Doran, in his "Habits and Men," thus sums up the poems in this first volume: "Cowper is certainly the sweetest of our didactic poets. He is elevated in his 'Table Talk;' acute in detailing 'The Progress of Error;' and he chants the praises of 'Truth' in more dulcet notes than were ever sounded by the fairest swan in Cayster. His 'Expostulation' is made in the tones of a benevolent sage. His 'Hope' and his 'Charity' are proofs of his pure Christianlike feeling—a feeling which also pervades his 'Conversation' and his 'Retirement,' and which bars the shafts of his satire without taking away from their strength."

Along with Cowper's original poems there were printed in this first volume his translations from his old schoolmaster, Vincent Bourne, a man whose memory he ever cherished, and of whose poems he said:—

"His humour is entirely original—he can speak of a magpie or a cat in terms so exquisitely appropriated to the character he draws, that one would suppose him

animated by the spirit of the creature he describes. And with all his drollery there is a mixture of rational and even religious reflection at times, and always an air of pleasantry, good-nature, and humanity, that makes him, in my mind, one of the most amiable writers in the world."

So much for Cowper's first volume, and there were already, as we have seen, visions in his mind of a second. "A French author I was reading last night," he told Unwin, "says, 'He that has written will write again.' If the critics do not set their foot upon this first egg that I have laid, and crush it, I shall probably verify this observation."





## CHAPTER XIII.

### *THE RECONCILIATION; OR, FROM THE PUBLICATION OF HIS FIRST VOLUME TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE "TASK."*

(February, 1782—July, 1783.)

#### 86. What the Critics Said.

**W**HEN Cowper first began to think of publishing he thought that if he pleased his friends he would care for the opinion of nobody else. "I sometimes feel such a perfect indifference," he told Newton, "with respect to the public opinion of my book, that I am ready to flatter myself no censure of reviewers, or other critical readers, would occasion me the smallest disturbance." But though this "desirable apathy" was not always present with him, he was still persuaded that it was not in the power of the critics to mortify him much, and he endorsed the assertion of Horace, who said "that he should neither be the plumper for the praise, nor the leaner for the condemnation of his reader."

Cowper had certainly pleased his friends. John

Newton, Mr. Bull, Mrs. Unwin, William Unwin, were delighted, and the last said that the book had moved his wife to both smiles and tears. One of Cowper's intimate friends, says Hayley, wrote in his copy the following passage from the younger Pliny, as descriptive of the book: "*Multa tenuiter, multa sublimiter, multa venuste, multa tenere, multa dulciter, multa cum bile.*" ("Many passages are delicate, many sublime, many beautiful, many tender, many sweet, many acrimonious.") Cowper, who was pleased with the application, said candidly, "The latter part is very true indeed! Yes, yes, there are *multa cum bile.*" When the book was out, however, Cowper found that he was by no means indifferent to what the great world might say. "It is well, said I, that my friends are pleased; but friends are sometimes partial, and mine, I have reason to think, are not altogether free from bias. Methinks I should like to hear a stranger or two speak well of me."

One by one the reviews came out. The *London Magazine* and the *Gentleman's Magazine* were both favourable, but the *Critical Review* attacked the book with much hostility. The author, it said, was "not possessed of any superior abilities, or power of genius, requisite to so arduous an undertaking; his verses are in general weak and languid, and have neither novelty, spirit, nor animation to recommend them." Again, "He never rises to anything that we can commend or admire," and further on the poet is spoken of as "travelling on a plain, level, flat road, with great composure, almost through the whole long and tedious volume, which is little better than a dull sermon in

very indifferent verse." There is no need for the admirers of Cowper to wax indignant over this criticism, it is the sort of thing every author has at one time or another to put up with. It is impossible to please everybody. At the same time, a criticism like this was not calculated to raise the spirits of a man so sensitive as Cowper. But whatever mortification Cowper may have felt on this occasion was more than compensated by the pleasure he received subsequently from the very handsome letter which the eminent Benjamin Franklin sent to Mr. Thornton, by whom he had been presented with a copy.

Dr. Franklin said: "I received the letter you did me the honour of writing to me, and am much obliged by your kind present of a book. The relish for reading of poetry has long since left me; but there is something so new in the manner, so easy and yet so correct in the language, so clear in the expression, yet concise, and so just in the sentiments, that I have read the whole with great pleasure, and some of the pieces more than once. I beg you to accept my thankful acknowledgments, and to present my respects to the author."

Franklin's letter was of course despatched to Cowper, who observed, "We may now treat the critics as the Archbishop of Toledo treated Gil Blas when he found fault with one of his sermons. His grace gave him a kick, and said, 'Begone for a jackanapes, and furnish yourself with a better taste, if you know where to find it.'"

As yet, however, the great magazine, the most formidable of all the tribunals, had not pronounced judgment. The *Monthly Review* still kept him in hot

water. "Alas!" says Cowper, "when I wish for a favourable sentence from that quarter (to confess a weakness that I should not confess to all), I feel myself not a little influenced by a tender regard to my reputation here, even among my neighbours at Olney. Here are watchmakers, who themselves are wits, and who at present perhaps think me one. Here is a carpenter and a baker, and, not to mention others, here is your idol, Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame. All these read the *Monthly Review*, and all these will set me down for a dunce if those terrible critics should show them the example. But oh! wherever else I am accounted dull, dear Mr. Griffith, let me pass for a genius at Olney."

This was on the 12th of June (1782). At length the dreaded review came out, the "critical Rhadamanthus" spoke, and not unfavourably. Most modern poets, it said, copy their sentiments and diction from those who have sung before them, "their very modes of thinking as well as versification are copied from the said models. 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." To give two more excerpts: "Mr. Cowper's predominant turn of mind, though serious and devotional, is at the same time duly humorous and sarcastic. Hence his very religion has a smile that is arch, and his sallies of humour an air that is religious." "His language is plain, forcible, and expressive." Cowper could now face without fear the carpenter, the baker, and the schoolmaster, for had not the *Monthly*

*Review* pronounced that it was on the whole a very decent volume? But though praise had been bestowed by the various magazines, it had been bestowed in most cases only grudgingly, and Cowper did not feel any particular encouragement to keep on writing. To Unwin he said: "You tell me you have been asked if I am intent upon another volume. I reply not at present, not being convinced that I have met with sufficient encouragement. I account myself happy in having pleased a *few*, but am not rich enough to despise the *many*. I do not know what sort of a market my commodity has found, but if a slack one, I must beware how I make a second attempt." As it subsequently appeared, the book sold but slowly.

### 87. The Case of Simon Browne.

In the suppressed preface Newton said: "The hope that the God whom Cowper served would support him under his affliction, and at length vouchsafe him a happy deliverance, never forsook me. The desirable crisis, I trust, is now nearly approaching; the dawn, the presage of returning day, is already arrived."

In respect to which Cowper had observed (December 21, 1780): "Your sentiments with respect to me are exactly Mrs. Unwin's. She, like you, is perfectly sure of my deliverance, and often tells me so. I make but one answer, and sometimes none at all. That answer gives *her* no pleasure, and would give *you* as little; therefore, at this time, I suppress it." In another letter to the same, Cowper compares himself to a criminal

being taken to execution, who, "though carried through the roughest road, when he arrives at the destined spot would be glad, notwithstanding the many jolts he met with, to repeat his journey." Mr. Newton then wondered whether it would be any use to draw his attention to something resembling his state in another person, and he mentioned the case of Simon Browne. Simon Browne had been minister of the Dissenters' Meeting in Old Jewry, to which he had been called in 1716. In 1723 he lost both his wife and only son, as a result of which he fell into a deep melancholy, which ended in a settled persuasion that "he had fallen under the sensible displeasure of God, who had caused his rational soul gradually to perish, and left him only an animal life, in common with the brutes."

Like Cowper, he considered it "profane for him to pray, and incongruous to be present at the prayers of others." Like Cowper, too, he at times felt strong temptations to suicide. Resigning his ministry under this delusion, he returned to his native place, Shepton Mallet, in Somersetshire, where he devoted himself to literature. For one of his books ("A Defence of the Religion of Nature") he prepared an extraordinary dedication to Queen Caroline, the object of which was to request the queen's prayers in her "most retired address to the King of kings, that the reign of her beloved consort might be renowned to all posterity by the recovery of a soul in the utmost ruin"—meaning of course himself. Though suppressed at the time by Mr. Browne's friends, this curious epistle found its way twenty years later into the hands of Dr. Hawkesworth, who printed it in the *Adventurer* as a literary curiosity.

Simon Browne's delusion remained with him till his death, which occurred in 1732.

In reply to Newton's letter concerning this person Cowper wrote (March 14, 1782): "I was not unacquainted with Mr. Browne's extraordinary case before you favoured me with his letter and his intended dedication to the queen, though I am obliged to you for a sight of these two curiosities, which I do not recollect to have ever seen till you sent them. I could, however, were it not a subject that would make us all melancholy, point out to you some essential differences between his state of mind and my own, which would prove mine to be by far the most deplorable of the two." And in this strain he proceeds. It was in fact perfectly useless to argue with Cowper on the state of his mind. Upon one subject he was unreasonable, and it was impossible to move him. "I must deal with you," he says, "as I deal with poor Mrs. Unwin, in all our disputes about it, cutting all controversy short by an appeal to the event."

#### 88. Lady Austen again.—June, 1782.

Towards the end of June Lady Austen was at Clifton again, and one of her first actions was to send her sister with a letter to Cowper. The result was a perfect reconciliation. Lady Austen, he tells Unwin, "seized the first opportunity to embrace your mother with tears of the tenderest affection, and I, of course, am satisfied." The passing cloud that had obscured this friendship having now blown over, there were once again pleasant

journeyings to and from Clifton. Lady Austen even proposed that Cowper and Mrs. Unwin should leave Olney and hire Clifton Hall.

“ We are as happy,” he writes to Mr. Unwin (July 16, 1782), “ in Lady Austen, and she in us, as ever. Having a lively imagination, and being passionately desirous of consolidating all into one family (for she has taken her leave of London), she has just sprung a project which at least serves to amuse us and to make us laugh ; it is to hire Mr. Small’s house, on the top of Clifton Hill, which is large, commodious, and handsome, will hold us conveniently, and any friends who may occasionally favour us with a visit. The house is furnished ; but if it can be hired without the furniture, will let for a trifle.”

By and by the walks to Clifton were suddenly interrupted by the autumn rains, which swelled the river and covered the meadows with one great sheet of water. But although parted from his affectionate “ sister,” the poet, instead of suffering himself to be depressed by the weather, amuses himself by striking off, from a small printing-press she had given him, a short poem on the flood, which poem, by the by, is said to have been the earliest matter printed in Olney ; and with characteristic drollery, instead of expressing a wish that the waters may abate, cries rather, “ Oh that I were a Dutchman, that I need not repine at the mud ! ”

“ Or meadows deluged with a flood,  
But in a bog live well content,  
And find it just my element.”

This Dutch weather seems to have penetrated even the parlour walls, for the printed lines “ turn up their





*Clifton Hall (South Front)*

(From a very poor sketch, probably, however, the only one in existence.)



tails like Dutch mastiffs." Thus Cowper acted something like the irrepressible Cardinal de Retz, who avenged his captivity by writing an account of his gaoler.

The letter to Unwin, dated August 3, 1782, is signed with a specimen of the poet's own printing, thus :—

## William Cowper.

Even the floods, however, could not altogether keep the friends separate. If Cowper was unable to go to Lady Austen, Lady Austen was not prevented from coming to him. "A flood, indeed, has sometimes parted us for many days ; but though it has often been impossible for us, who never ride, to visit *her*, as soon as the water has become fordable by an ass she has mounted one and visited us."

An unexpected occurrence now brought the friends nearer together. Mr. Jones before the subsidence of the floods had occasion to go to London, and no sooner was he gone than Clifton Rectory, or the "chateau," as Cowper calls it, "being without a garrison, was besieged" during the night and broken into by thieves ; and the frightened ladies, not daring to stay there alone, came to Olney, and took refuge with Mrs. Unwin. "Men furnished with firearms were put into the house, and the rascals, having intelligence of this circumstance, beat a retreat." Mrs. Jones and Miss Green returned to Clifton ; but Lady Austen, who had not quite recovered from a recent indisposition, had been so scared and terrified that she resolved to remain with Mrs. Unwin until apartments could be prepared

for her at Olney Vicarage. This occurrence was subsequently turned to account, for it suggested, no doubt, the Rural Thief in "Task," IV., whose poverty results from idleness, and who prowls abroad for plunder, that—

" He may compensate for a day of sloth  
By works of darkness and nocturnal wrong."

About this time was written the ballad of "The Distressed Travellers," which records how Cowper and Mary (Mrs. Unwin) attempted a journey on a muddy day to Clifton, and commences—

" I sing of a journey to Clifton  
We would have performed if we could."

### 89. The Woman in a Nun's Hood.—August, 1782.

Meantime the friendship between Cowper and Mr. Bull went on steadily strengthening. One of the advantages to Cowper of this friendship was a good supply of books which Bull sent from time to time by Dumville, the carrier. As he always smoked a particular kind of tobacco, "Orinoco," it was Mr. Bull's custom when he visited Cowper to bring his box with him. Leaving it one day at Cowper's, the poet returned it with some verses, "To the Rev. William Bull," in which, referring to the passage in "Conversation," he says—

"Forgive the bard, if bard he be,  
Who once too wantonly made free  
To touch with a satiric wibe  
That symbol of thy power, the pipe ;"

and which winds up with—

“And so may smoke-inhaling Bull  
Be always filling, never full.”

After this the “oval box” seems to have made no more journeys to Olney; at any rate when Cowper ensconced himself in the summer-house it was Bull’s custom to keep a supply of the Orinoco there.

Mr. Bull was sometimes accompanied to Orchard Side by his son “Tommy, the young Hebræan.”

As was natural, Cowper took a friendly interest in Bull’s various affairs, and several of his letters at this time relate to the idea of establishing at Newport an academy for the preparation of students for the ministry. Both Newton and Cowper believed that no one could be more fitted for such an undertaking than Bull, and the scheme gradually advanced to fulfilment.

Mr. Bull delighted in a study “some eighteen feet square, with an arched roof,” entirely surrounded with volumes; possessing large old casement windows; and furnished with immense square chairs of fine Spanish mahogany. Over the mantle-tree hung a well-executed drawing in crayons of the celebrated quietist, Madame Guion, an author of whom Mr. Bull was a passionate admirer. It was obtained in the following way. Hearing that there was a picture of his favourite author in the house of a stranger, he rode twenty miles to see it, and the stranger politely insisted on his acceptance of it. Cowper tells Unwin that it is a striking portrait, too characteristic not to be a strong resemblance, and, were it encompassed with a glory,

instead of being in a nun's hood, might pass for the face of an angel. Mr. Bull, who possessed Madame Guion's poems in three volumes, lent them to Cowper, whom they so much pleased that he looked out "a Liliputian paper book" which he happened to have by him, and set to work at translating them.

Mr. Bull encouraged the poet in this work, and from the best of motives, but one cannot help thinking that the writings of Madame Guion were more calculated to cause Cowper to brood over his great trouble than to do him good. To a man like Cowper, for instance, the less he was led to muse on such subjects as "The Vicissitudes experienced in the Christian Life" the better. One verse of this poem runs as follows:—

"My claim to life, though sought with earnest care,  
No light within me or without me shows ;  
Once I had faith, but now in self-despair  
Find my chief cordial and my best repose."

Here was Cowper's own case. It was like seeing one's face in a glass.

Cowper's account of a later visit to Mr. Bull is thus told in a letter to Newton (September 23, 1783):—

"Since you went we dined with Mr. Bull. I had sent him notice of our visit a week before, which, like a contemplative studious man as he is, he put in his pocket and forgot. When we arrived the parlour windows were shut, and the house had the appearance of being uninhabited. After waiting some time, however, the maid opened the door, and the master

presented himself. It is hardly worth while to observe so repeatedly that his garden seems a spot contrived only for the growth of melancholy, but being always affected by it in the same way, I cannot help it. He showed me a nook, in which he had placed a bench, and where he said he found it very refreshing to smoke his pipe and meditate. Here he sits with his back against one brick wall and his nose against another, which must, you know, be very refreshing and greatly assist meditation. He rejoices the more in this niche because it is an acquisition made at some expense, and with no small labour; several loads of earth were removed in order to make it, which loads of earth, had I the management of them, I should carry thither again, and fill up a place more fit in appearance to be a repository for the dead than the living. I would on no account put any man out of conceit with his innocent enjoyments, and therefore never tell him my thoughts upon this subject, but he is not seldom low-spirited, and I cannot but suspect that his situation helps to make him so."

Whatever Cowper thought, Bull was exceedingly attached to this favourite nook. It was overshadowed by a lilac tree. In his garden Mr. Bull had a circular walk, which was accurately measured that he might know how many times round it would make a mile. At one point near the garden gate stood a sun-dial, and at its side was a little ledge for holding bullets, which bullets Mr. Bull moved from one hollow to another at every round. This was his mode of taking exercise.

## 90. "John Gilpin."—October, 1782.

The vicarage was soon ready for the reception of Lady Austen, and as soon as she was settled therein, the door in the wall that had been in use when Newton was at Olney was opened again. Henceforward Lady Austen, the poet, and Mrs. Unwin allowed never a day to pass without meeting ; and so intimate did they become that "a practice obtained at length of dining with each other alternately every day, Sundays excepted."

Then Lady Austen would play on the harpsichord and sing the songs Cowper wrote for her—"No longer I follow a sound," "When all within is peace," or the dirge commencing "Toll for the brave." So the days passed happily, but in the autumn of 1782 a dark time seemed at hand, the poet's mind clouded, and he moved about with a vacant and woebegone look. Nothing seemed to afford him pleasure ; his books, his favourite haes, his birds, were unnoticed, and he cared not to pace his thirty yards of gravel walk, or to meditate among his apple-trees and hollyhocks in the garden of which he had formerly been so fond.

Mrs. Unwin saw with apprehension his dejection and his altered demeanour, and did all that an affectionate woman could do to dispel the darkness, but apparently in vain, and both she and Lady Austen feared that a winter of distress and sorrow was about to succeed a summer of so much happiness. Ten years had passed since his last attack, ten had interposed between that and the second attack, and ten between that and the first ; and to all appearance another of these



decennial periods of madness awaited the poet. The tenderness of Mrs. Unwin and the vivacity of Lady Austen were equally unavailing, and gloom was thrown over the little circle. But one evening, in the famous parlour, the three friends being seated, a droll tale, that she had heard when a girl, came into Lady Austen's mind, and she proposed to tell it. Mrs. Unwin readily assented, but Cowper was silent, for by this time he had got into that pitiable state in which nothing seemed to interest him. This was not very encouraging to Lady Austen, but she began her story, and told how a certain citizen, "of famous London town," rode out to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of his wedding—how he went farther than he intended, and all his misadventures. The poet, indifferent at first, and apparently paying no attention to what was going on, gradually grew interested as the story proceeded, and Lady Austen, seeing his face brighten, and delighted with her success, wound up the story with all the skill at her command. Cowper could now no longer control himself, but burst out into a loud and hearty peal of laughter. The ladies joined in the mirth, and the merriment had scarcely subsided by supper-time. The story made such an impression on his mind that at night he could not sleep; and his thoughts having taken the form of rhyme, he sprang from bed, and committed them to paper, and in the morning brought down to Mrs. Unwin the crude outline of "John Gilpin." All that day and for several days he secluded himself in the greenhouse, and went on with the task of polishing and improving what he had written. As he filled his slips of paper he sent them across the

Market-place to Mr. Wilson, to the great delight and merriment of that jocular barber, who on several other occasions had been favoured with the first sight of some of Cowper's smaller poems. This version of the origin of "John Gilpin" differs, we are aware, from the one generally received, which represents the famous ballad as having been commenced and finished in a night ; but that the facts here stated are accurate we have the authority of Mrs. Wilson ; moreover, it has always been said in Olney that "John Gilpin" was written in the "greenhouse," and that the first person who saw the complete poem, and consequently the forerunner of that noble army who have made merry over its drolleries, was William Wilson, the barber.<sup>1</sup> "The story of 'John Gilpin,'" observes Hazlitt, "has perhaps given as much pleasure to as many people as anything of the same length that ever was written."

Who the real John Gilpin was remained unknown until 1839, when it was revealed in the *Aldine Magazine* by Mr. William West. After describing the "short, squat, grotesque figure" of Mr. Vanhagen, a famous confectioner of those days, Mr. West observes that the original of John Gilpin was none "other than Mr. Beyer, at the top of Paternoster Row, or rather the corner of Cheapside. He was an eminent linendraper, superlatively polite—somewhat taller than my friend V., not quite so stout. . . . This is not generally known, but that Cowper had Beyer in his eye when he wrote the poem I had the assurance fifty years ago from John Annesley Colet, who knew Beyer better than I did, and also Mr. Cowper and some of his con-

<sup>1</sup> "The Town of Cowper."

nections.” A directory of London for 1772 has this entry :—

“Beyer, John, linendraper, 3, Cheapside ;”  
an entry that is repeated year by year until 1792, when the initial is changed, and we have—

“Beyer, M., linendraper, 3, Cheapside,”  
the alteration being accounted for by an obituary notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine* :—

“May 11, 1791, aged 98, Mr. Beyer, linendraper, of Cheapside.”

Another directory supplies us with the information that “Beyer, M.,” was “Beyer, Martha” ; and who shall reprove us for assuming that this person was the worthy linendraper's no less worthy widow, the “careful soul” who “two stone bottles found,” and did several other things with which we are equally familiar ?

A map of London published at the end of the last century, which gives every house with its number, shows No. 4, Cheapside, at the S.E. corner of Paternoster Row, and No. 3, which was John Beyer's address, at the N.E. corner. To sum up these facts : Mr. John Gilpin, or to give him his correct name, Mr. John Beyer, was born in 1693, and carried on business as a linendraper at No. 3, Cheapside, the N.E. corner. He was well known, superlatively polite, and inclined to obesity. He died on May 11, 1791, at the advanced age of ninety-eight, and his business was afterwards carried on by one Martha Beyer, who may have been his widow.

The famous ballad was first printed (anonymously) in November, 1782, in the *Public Advertiser*, and it not only did the hearts good of its numerous readers, it

acted in a similar manner upon the poet himself, for in this same month of November we read of his growing plump, and the ladies told him that he was looking as young as ever.

It is a mistake to suppose, as some have done, that "John Gilpin" owed its popularity to the recitation of it by Henderson, the comedian. In May, 1784, twelve months before the ballad was read at Freemasons' Hall, Cowper could write : "In the last packet but one that I received from Johnson, he asked me if I had any improvements of 'John Gilpin' in hand, or if I designed any; for that to print only the original again would be to publish what has been hackneyed in every magazine, in every newspaper, and in every street;" and in the following October he says : "I have not been without thoughts of adding 'John Gilpin' at the tail of all" (*i.e.*, of his second volume). "He has made a good deal of noise in the world; and perhaps it may not be amiss to show, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The critical reviewers charged me with an attempt of humour. *John having been more celebrated upon the score of humour than most pieces that have appeared in modern days*, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation." From this it is evident that Henderson's recitation<sup>1</sup> of it in the following year did no more for the ballad than to give a fillip to its popularity.

Cowper was several times requested by his friends, and particularly by Lady Austen, to write a sequel; but over and over again he declined. "Having," he says

<sup>1</sup> Henderson died on November 25, 1785. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, near Dr. Johnson.

(May 8, 1784), “always observed that authors, elated with the success of a first part, have fallen below themselves when they have attempted a second, I had more prudence than to take her counsel.” Nevertheless, being repeatedly urged, Cowper did finally attempt a sequel, but with such ill success that he determined not to go on with it.

In this sequel Mrs. Gilpin was to have been represented as going out for a walk in order to pass the time away during her husband’s involuntary excursion. Only the three following stanzas have been preserved :—

“Then Mrs. Gilpin sweetly said  
 Unto her children three,  
 I’ll clamber o’er this stile so high,  
 And you climb after me.

But having climbed unto the top,  
 She could no further go,  
 But sate, to every passer by,  
 A spectacle and show :

Who said, ‘Your spouse and you this day  
 Both show your horsemanship ;  
 And if you stay till he comes back,  
 Your horse will need no whip.’”

These lines, which are interesting only as a curiosity, were found among the papers of Mrs. Unwin. They were in the handwriting of Cowper, and accompanying them was a sketch of a woman in a huge bonnet sitting astride a gate. Hone, who engraved it in his *Table Book*, supposed the sketch to have been made by Cowper’s friend Romney.

Among other pieces written this summer were “The

Colubriad," in which Cowper tells how he encountered—

“ With head erect, and eyes of fiery hue,  
A viper, long as Count de Grasse's queue;”

and not only encountered, but came off victorious—

“ With outstretched hoe I slew him at the door,  
And taught him *never to come there no more.*”

As the following description proves, Cowper spent the winter as agreeably as he had spent the summer. He is writing to Mr. Hill (December 7, 1782):—

“ How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine!—yours, spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it, where no noise is made but what we make for own amusement. For instance, here are two rustics and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies has been playing on the harpsichord, while I with the other have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog in the meantime, howling under the chair of the former, performed in the vocal way to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and, having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it.”

Battledore and shuttlecock were resorted to when inclement weather prevented exercise out of doors. If the ladies were unable to join him the poet had recourse to his dumb-bells, upon which he would “ring a thousand bob-majors.” Later on he added a skipping-

rope to his gymnastic appliances, through which, if he did not flatter himself, he jumped with as much agility as when a boy.

What with one thing or another, despite that never absent cloud of despair, this was one of the happiest periods of Cowper's life. As Southey says: "His letters were now expressive not only of content, but of enjoyment." To Hill, November 11, 1782, he writes:—

"I am glad your health is such that you have nothing more to complain of than may be expected on the down-hill side of life. If mine is better than yours, it is to be attributed, I suppose, principally to the constant enjoyment of country air and retirement; the most perfect regularity in matters of eating, drinking, and sleeping; and a happy emancipation from everything that wears the face of business. I lead the life I always wished for, and, the single circumstance of dependence excepted (which, between ourselves, is very contrary to my predominant humour and disposition), have no want left broad enough for another wish to stand upon."

#### 91. Mr. Smith's Almoner.—November, 1782.

The poor of Olney, as mentioned in a previous chapter, were miserably poor, and it made Cowper wretched to think what sufferings they would have to endure during the approaching winter. The lace trade had declined so much that the poor lacemakers could only earn just enough to keep body and soul together

even in summer-time, whilst in winter, when there was the additional difficulty of being compelled to procure fuel, their hardships can scarcely be imagined.

For the most part these poor creatures suffered in silence, and we read of only one act of violence, when one Saturday, in the autumn of 1774, a waggon laden with flour was attacked by a mob assembled for the purpose about the Bull Inn. Writing to Unwin on November 4, 1782, Cowper says :—

“ We do what we can. But that *can* is little. You have rich friends, are eloquent on all occasions, and know how to be pathetic on a proper one. The winter will be severely felt at Olney by many, whose sobriety, industry, and honesty recommend them to charitable notice ; and we think we could tell such persons as Mr. Bouverie or Mr. Smith half a dozen tales of distress, that would find their way into hearts as feeling as theirs. You will do as you see good ; and we in the meantime shall remain convinced that you will do your best. Lady Austen will, no doubt, do something, for she has great sensibility and compassion.”

The Mr. Smith alluded to was Mr. Robert Smith, of Nottingham, a rich banker, and founder of the banking firm of Smith, Payne and Smiths. The application was successful, and in his next letter (November 18th) Cowper was able to write as follows :—

“ On the part of the poor, and on our part, be pleased to make acknowledgments, such as the occasion calls for, to our beneficent friend, Mr. Smith. I call him ours, because, having experienced his kindness to myself in a former instance, and in the present his disinterested readiness to succour the distressed, my



ambition will be satisfied with nothing less. He may depend upon the strictest secrecy ; no creature shall hear him mentioned, either now or hereafter, as the person from whom we have received this bounty. But when I speak of him, or hear him spoken of by others, which sometimes happens, I shall not forget what is due to so rare a character. I wish, and your mother wishes it too, that he could sometimes take us in his way to Nottingham ; he will find us happy to receive a person whom we must needs account it an honour to know. We shall exercise our best discretion in the disposal of the money ; but in this town, where the gospel has been preached so many years, where the people have been favoured so long with laborious and conscientious ministers, it is not an easy thing to find those who make no profession of religion at all, and are yet proper objects of charity. The profane are so profane, so drunken, dissolute, and in every respect worthless, that to make them partakers of his bounty would be to abuse it. We promise, however, that none shall touch it but such as are miserably poor, yet at the same time industrious and honest, two characters frequently united here, where the most watchful and unremitting labour will hardly procure them bread. We make none but the cheapest laces, and the price of them is fallen almost to nothing."

The disposal of Mr. Smith's bounty led to some interchange of letters between that gentleman and Cowper. "We corresponded," says Cowper, "as long as the occasion required, and then ceased. Charmed with his good sense, politeness, and liberality to the

poor, I was indeed ambitious of continuing a correspondence with him, and told him so. Perhaps I had done more prudently had I never proposed it. But warm hearts are not famous for wisdom, and mine was too warm to be very considerate on such an occasion. I have not heard from him since, and have long given up all expectation of it. I know he is too busy a man to have leisure for me, and I ought to have recollected it sooner. He found time to do much good, and to employ us, as his agents, in doing it, and that might have satisfied me." In the same letter Cowper tells his friend how he laid out the money.

"Though laid under the strictest injunctions of secrecy, both by him (Mr. Smith) and by you on his behalf, I consider myself as under no obligation to conceal from you the remittances he made. Only, in my turn, I beg leave to request secrecy on your part, because intimate as you are with him, and highly as he values you, I cannot yet be sure that the communication would please him, his delicacies on this subject being as singular as his benevolence. He sent forty pounds, twenty at a time. Olney has not had such a friend as this many a day ; nor has there been an instance at any time of a few families so effectually relieved, or so completely encouraged to the pursuit of that honest industry by which, their debts being paid, and the parents and children comfortably clothed, they are now enabled to maintain themselves. Their labour was almost in vain before ; but now it answers ; it earns them bread, and all their other wants are plentifully supplied."

Cowper told Unwin in January, 1784, that his bosom.

burned to immortalize Mr. Smith. "How I love and honour that man!" he says. Consequently we find a tribute to this generous *incognito* in "Task," IV., in which, alluding to the industrious poor, the poet says:—

" Meanwhile ye shall not want  
What, conscious of your virtues, we can spare,  
Nor what a wealthier than ourselves may send.  
I mean the man who, when the distant poor  
Need help, denies them nothing but his name."

In the winter of 1783–84 Mr. Smith again befriended the poor of Olney. Says Cowper: "Like the subterraneous flue that warms my myrtles, he does good and is unseen. His injunctions of secrecy are still as rigorous as ever, and must therefore be observed with the same attention."

The gratitude of the relieved was very touching. One poor woman, and an honest one, "carried home two pair of blankets, a pair for herself and husband, and a pair for her six children. As soon as the children saw them, they jumped out of their straw, caught them in their arms, kissed them, blessed them, and danced for joy. An old woman, a very old one, the first night that she found herself so comfortably covered, could not sleep a wink, being kept awake by the contrary emotions of transport on the one hand, and the fear of not being thankful enough on the other."

It may as well here be said that the abject poverty of so many of the people as described in some of Cowper's letters does not now exist. Lacemaking as a means of living-getting is almost extinct, and few towns of its size are better provided with charities than Olney.

Mr. Smith, who was created Lord Carrington in 1796, died in 1838. The present Lord Carrington, the third of that title, is his grandson.

## 92. Cowper and America.—January, 1783.

For seven years the country had been at war with the Americans. The skirmish at Lexington in April, 1775, had marked the commencement of the strife. On June 18th of the same year the colonists had been defeated at Bunker's Hill. The "Declaration of Independence" was issued on July 4, 1776. On October 16, 1777, occurred the first great reverse of the British, the surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga. Thenceforward the Americans, assisted by the French, had decidedly the best of the war. In the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown a second great disaster befell the Britishers. This was the decisive blow, and though the war lingered a little longer, the American colonies were virtually severed from the Empire.

The preliminaries of the Treaty of Peace with America and France were signed at Versailles on January 20, 1783, during the Shelburne administration. The event is thus alluded to in a letter of Cowper to Newton on January 26th :—

"It is reported among persons of the best intelligence at Olney—the barber, the schoolmaster, and the drummer of a corps quartered at this place—that the belligerent powers are at last reconciled, the articles of the treaty adjusted, and that peace is at the door. I

saw this morning at nine o'clock a group of about twelve figures very closely engaged in a conference, as I suppose upon the same subject. The scene of consultation was a blacksmith's shed (on the Market-place adjoining the Shiel Hall), very comfortably screened from the wind, and directly opposed to the morning sun. Some held their hands behind them, some had them folded across their bosom, and others had thrust them into their breeches pockets. Every man's posture bespoke a pacific turn of mind; but, the distance being too great for their words to reach me, nothing transpired. I am willing, however, to hope that the secret will not be a secret long, and that you and I, equally interested in the event, though not perhaps equally well-informed, shall soon have an opportunity to rejoice in the completion of it."

To Unwin Cowper writes on the 2nd of February :  
"I give you joy of the restoration of that sincere and firm friendship between the kings of England and France, that has been so long interrupted. It is a great pity, when hearts so cordially united are divided by trifles. Thirteen pitiful colonies, which the king of England chose to keep, and the king of France to obtain, if he could, have disturbed that harmony which would else no doubt have subsisted between those illustrious personages to this moment. If the king of France, whose greatness of mind is only equalled by that of his queen, had regarded them, unworthy of his notice as they were, with an eye of suitable indifference; or, had he thought it a matter deserving in any degree his princely attention, that they were in reality the property of his good friend the king of England; or,



## CHAPTER XIV.

### *THE WRITING OF THE "TASK."*

(July, 1783—June, 1785.)

"A la demande de Lady Austen, il composa la poëme didactique 'La Tache' en 1783, rempli d'admirables descriptions, de nobles pensées, d'un sentiment profond."—*L'Encyclopédie des Gens du Monde*, Paris, 1836.

#### 93. "The Sofa."—July, 1783.

COWPER'S great poem, the immortal "Task," was commenced probably in July, 1783. The story of its origin has been told again and again. Lady Austen had often urged him to try his powers in blank verse—a species of composition he had hitherto not attempted. At last he promised to comply with her request if she would give him a subject. "Oh," she replied, "you can never be in want of a subject; you can write upon any—write upon this sofa!" Consequently upon that sofa he wrote.

Whilst he was engaged on the first book of the "Task," the Rev. John Newton made a second visit to the scene of his former labours. Writing to him in September, Cowper says: "You know not what I suffered while you were here. . . . The friend of my

heart, the person with whom I had formerly taken sweet counsel, no longer useful to me as a minister, no longer pleasant to me as a Christian, was a spectacle that must necessarily add the bitterness of mortification to the sadness of despair." Mr. Newton, who was accompanied by his wife, stayed at Olney three weeks, but Cowper did not mention to him what he was engaged upon, and curiously enough he said nothing to Newton about it till May of the next year (1784), when the poem was nearly completed. Mr. Bull, however, was let into the secret very early. On the 3rd of August Cowper writes to that gentleman: "The *Sofa*' is ended, but not finished;—a paradox, which your natural acumen, sharpened by habits of logical attention, will enable you to reconcile in a moment. Do not imagine, however, that I lounge over it; on the contrary, I find it severe exercise to mould and fashion it to my mind!"

Cowper, as was his way, continued to revise this poem and interpolate passages right up to the time when the whole book was sent to the press. For example, late in the year he inserted the reference to Mrs. Unwin:—

"Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive  
Fast locked in mine."

Whilst the compliment to Mr. Throckmorton—

"Thanks to Benevolus, he spares me yet," &c.,

could not have been paid till the following spring.

Cowper did not by any means write with uniform speed. Commenting on what he had done at a later



date, he says : " Tully's rule—' *Nulla dies sine linea* '—will make a volume in less time than one would suppose. I adhered to it so rigidly that, though more than once I found three lines as many as I had time to compass, still I wrote ; and, finding occasionally, and as it might happen, a more fluent vein, the abundance of one day made me amends for the barrenness of another."

Though Lady Austen had suggested the " Task," Cowper now found that she was a hindrance to its progress.

He had got into the habit of paying his " devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven." " Customs," says he, " very soon become laws. I began the ' Task.' Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten ; and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing ; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which at first was optional a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect the ' Task ' to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject."

#### 94. Reading Aloud.

Cowper found the evenings the most agreeable portion of the day. When not amusing himself with his hares he was generally employed in reading aloud. " My

evenings," he says, "are devoted to books. I read aloud for the entertainment of the party"—meaning, of course, Mrs. Unwin and Lady Austen—"thus making amends by a vociferation of two hours for my silence at other times." He had no library of his own, the books being obtained from a London library to which he was a subscriber, and from Mr. Bull, Mr. Unwin, Lord Dartmouth, and other friends. Among the works he perused in this way were the "eight volumes of Johnson's Prefaces, or Lives of the Poets." "In all that number," he says, "I observe but one man—a poet of no great fame—of whom I did not know that he existed till I found him there, whose mind seems to have had the slightest tincture of religion; and he was hardly in his senses. His name was Collins. He sunk into a state of melancholy, and died young. Not long before his death he was found at his lodgings in Islington, by his biographer, with the New Testament in his hand. He said to Johnson: 'I have but one book, but it is the best.' Of him, therefore, there are some hopes. But from the lives of all the rest there is but one inference to be drawn—that poets are a very worthless, wicked set of people."

The works that pleased him most, however, were books of travels. The voyages of Cook and Forster he had read with avidity, and in October, 1783, we find him commencing Hawkesworth. "My imagination," he tells Newton, "is so captivated upon these occasions, that I seem to partake with the navigators in all the dangers they encountered. I lose my anchor; my mainsail is rent into shreds; I kill a shark, and by signs converse with a Patagonian, and all this without

moving from the fireside. The principal fruits of these circuits that have been made round the globe seem likely to be the amusement of those that stayed at home. Discoveries have been made, but such discoveries as will hardly satisfy the expense of such undertakings. We brought away an Indian, and, having debauched him, we sent him home again to communicate the infection to his country—fine sport, to be sure, but such as will not defray the cost. Nations that live upon bread-fruit, and have no mines to make them worthy of our acquaintance, will be but little visited for the future. So much the better for them; their poverty is indeed their mercy.”

It is to Hawkesworth he refers in “Task,” IV.:

“He travels, and I too. I tread his deck,  
Ascend his topmast, through his peering eyes  
Discover countries, with a kindred heart  
Suffer his woes, and share in his escapes.”

95. He had not Prayed for Ten Years.—  
A Side Reference to the Dream.—October  
27, 1783.

But amid all these agreeable circumstances Cowper was never, even for a single day, able to free himself from the effects of his terrible dream. Among those who attempted to reason with him concerning the belief that had infixed itself in his mind was Mr. Bull, but with as little success as Newton. In respect to Mr. Bull's counsel, Cowper observes: “There is not a man upon earth that might not be the better for it, myself only excepted. Prove to me that I have a right to pray,

and I will pray without ceasing ; yea, and pray too, even in 'the belly of this hell,' compared with which Jonah's was a palace—a temple of the living God ! But let me add, there is no encouragement in the Scripture so comprehensive as to include my case, nor any consolation so effectual as to reach it. I do not relate it to you, because you could not believe it ; you would agree with me if you could. And yet the sin by which I am excluded from the privileges I once enjoyed, you would account no sin ; you would tell me that it was a duty. This is strange ; you will think me mad ; but I am not mad, most noble Festus ! I am only in despair ; and those powers of mind which I possess are only permitted to me for my amusement at some times, and to acuminate and enhance my misery at others. I have not even asked a blessing upon my food these ten years, nor do I expect that I shall ever ask it again."

To Newton, on February 24, 1783, he had written : " We think of you often, and one of us prays for you ; the other will, when he can pray for himself ! "

It may be remarked that before meals, when the rest of the party stood for grace, it was Cowper's custom to sit down and take his knife and fork in his hand, " to signify that he had no part in the exercise."

#### 96. Another Fire at Olney, and what followed.—November 1, 1783.

On Saturday, November 1, 1783, the town was visited with another fire—a description of which fills

Cowper's letter to Newton of the 3rd. "On Saturday night," he says, "at eleven o'clock, when I had not been in bed five minutes, I was alarmed by a cry of fire, announced by two or three shrill screams upon our staircase. Our servants, who were going to bed, saw it from their windows, and in appearance so near that they thought our house in danger. I immediately rose, and putting by the curtain saw sheets of fire rising above the ridge of Mr. Palmer's house, opposite to ours. The deception was such that I had no doubt it had begun with *him*, but soon found that it was rather farther off. In fact, it was at three places : in the out-houses belonging to George Griggs, Lucy and Abigail Tyrrel.

"Having broke out in three different parts, it is supposed to have been maliciously kindled. A tar-barrel and a quantity of tallow made a most tremendous blaze, and the buildings it had seized upon being all thatched, the appearance became every moment more formidable. Providentially the night was perfectly calm, so calm that candles without lanterns, of which there were multitudes in the street, burnt as steadily as in the house. By four in the morning it was so far reduced that all danger seemed to be over ; but the confusion it had occasioned was almost infinite. Every man, whosupposed hisdwelling-house in jeopardy, emptied it as fast as he could, and conveyed his moveables to the house of some neighbour, supposed to be more secure. Ours, in the space of two hours, was so filled with all sorts of lumber that we had not even room for a chair by the fireside. George Griggs is the principal sufferer. He gave eighteen guineas, or nearly

that sum, to a woman, whom, in his hurry, he mistook for his wife; but the supposed wife walked off with the money, and he will probably never recover it. He has likewise lost forty pounds' worth of wool. London never exhibited a scene of greater depredation, drunkenness, and riot. Everything was stolen that could be got at, and every drop of liquor drunk that was not guarded. Only one thief has yet been detected; a woman of the name of J——, who was stopped by young Handscomb with an apron full of plunder." On the 17th of the month we have the sequel to this occurrence, which is related in Cowper's most humorous vein: "Since our conflagration here we have sent two women and a boy to the justice for depredation: Sue Riviss, for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you well remember, escaped for want of evidence; not that evidence was indeed wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman whom I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing apparel which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol, had William Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he good-naturedly, though, I think, weakly, interposed in her favour, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some iron-work, the property of Griggs, the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be

whipped, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house to the high arch and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed it, had filled his left hand with red ochre, through which after every stroke he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable Handscomb, who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to strike harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver End, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapped his face with a most Amazonian fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle thrashed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing."

### 97. Thurlow, Colman, and Bacon.

Among the persons to whom Cowper had presented copies of his first volume were Lord Thurlow and

Colman, his old intimates at the Temple. To Thurlow, in the letter that accompanied the volume, he had said :—

“ My Lord,—I make no apology for what I account a duty. I should offend against the cordiality of our former friendship should I send a volume into the world, and forget how much I am bound to pay my particular respects to your lordship upon that occasion. When we parted, you little thought of hearing from me again, and I as little that I should live to write to you, still less that I should wait on you in the capacity of an author.

“ Among the pieces I have the honour to send there is one for which I must intreat your pardon ; I mean that of which your lordship is the subject. The best excuse I can make is, that it flowed almost spontaneously from the affectionate remembrance of a connection that did me so much honour.”

Cowper looked for a reply to this letter with much anxiety. He said to Unwin (March 18, 1782): “ Whether I shall receive any answer from his Chancellorship or not is at present *in ambiguo*, and will probably continue in the same state of ambiguity much longer. He is so busy a man, and at this time, if the papers may be credited, so particularly busy, that I am forced to mortify myself with the thought that both my book and my letter may be thrown into a corner as too insignificant for a statesman’s notice, and never found till his executor finds them. This affair, however, is neither at my *libitum* nor his. I have sent him the truth, and the truth which I know he is ignorant of.” A fortnight later, in reply to some favourable



opinions communicated to him by Unwin, he says : "Alas, we shall never receive such commendations from him on the woolsack ! He has great abilities, but no religion. Mr. Hill told him some time since that I was going to publish ; to which piece of information, so far as I can learn, he returned no answer, for Mr. Hill has not reported any to me. He had afterwards an opportunity to converse with him in private, but my poor authorship was not so much as mentioned ; whence I learn two lessons : first, that, however important I may be in my own eyes, I am very insignificant in his ; and secondly, that I am never likely to receive any acknowledgment of the favour I have conferred upon his lordship."

And so it proved. Thurlow did not even take the trouble to acknowledge the receipt of the book ; and this was the sequence to the large promise he had made to provide for Cowper if he should attain the Chancellorship ! To expect Thurlow to keep a promise made in a laughing mood and on the spur of the moment would have been foolish, but Cowper had a right to expect a few graceful words. Half a dozen strokes of Thurlow's pen would have filled him with joy, but these were denied him. To add to the mortification, Colman, too, was mute. At first Cowper made all the excuses for them possible. Both were busy men ; but when month after month passed by, and still no answer came, his wounded spirit showed itself in indignant verse, and in the poem called "The Valediction" (November, 1783) he branded with the name of False Friend both Niger and Terentius, him of the woolsack, and him of the sock and buskin.

"Farewell, false hearts ! whose best affections fail,  
Like shallow brooks which summer suns exhale ;  
Forgetful of the man whom once ye chose,  
Cold in his cause, and careless of his woes ;  
I bid you both a long and last adieu !  
Cold in my turn, and unconcerned like you."

In the letter in which he sent the lines to Unwin (November 10, 1783) he said : " You will understand before you have read many of them that they are not for the press. I lay you under no other injunctions. The unkind behaviour of our acquaintance, though it is possible that in some instances it may not much affect our happiness, nor engage many of our thoughts, will sometimes obtrude itself upon us with a degree of importunity not easily resisted, and then, perhaps, though almost insensible of it before, we feel more than the occasion will justify. In such a moment it was that I conceived this poem, and gave loose to a degree of resentment which, perhaps, I ought not to have indulged, but which in a cooler hour I cannot altogether condemn. My former intimacy with the two characters was such that I could not but feel myself provoked by the neglect with which they both treated me on a late occasion."

As a set-off, however, against the vexation caused by the conduct of Colman and Thurlow must be placed the pleasure caused by the attentions of Mr. Bacon, the sculptor. Bacon, who was a friend of Newton, had read Cowper's first volume with great delight, and he now made himself known to the poet by sending him a print of the monument of Lord Chatham, which he had just been executing. " Nothing," says Cowper, " can be more handsome

than the present, nor more obliging than the manner in which he has made it. I take it for granted that the plate is, line for line, and stroke for stroke, an exact representation of his performance. . . . I have most of the monuments in the Abbey by heart, but I recollect none that ever gave me so much pleasure." Whilst this impression was still warm, the poet introduced his new friend and his work into the poem upon which he was engaged.

" Bacon there  
Gives more than female beauty to a stone,  
And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips."  
(*"Task,"* bk. I.)

In his letter to Newton of January 25 (1784) Cowper encloses his translation of Dr. Jortin's<sup>1</sup> "*In Brevitatem*," which he prefaces with the following jingle :—

" The late Dr. Jortin  
Had the good fortune  
To write these verses  
Upon tombs and hearses  
Which I, being jinglish,  
Have done into English."

### 98. At Book the Fifth.—February, 1784.

It may have surprised some readers that so much of the "*Task*" is taken up with descriptions of scenes in winter. But it must be remembered that nearly the whole of the poem was written in the winter months,

<sup>1</sup> For account of Dr. John Jortin, see *Gentleman's Magazine*, February, 1839.

and not only so, but in the severest winter that had been experienced for nearly fifty years. Towards the end of February (1784) Cowper gives Newton "joy of a thaw that has put an end to a frost of nine weeks' continuance," and to Bull he says, on the 22nd, "The ice in my ink, however, is not yet dissolved. It was long before the frost seized it, but it at last prevailed. The 'Sofa' has consequently received little or no addition since. It consists at present of four books and part of a fifth; when the sixth is finished, the work is accomplished, but, if I may judge by my present inability, that period is at a considerable distance."

To the severity of this particular season we owe many of the most graphic descriptions in the poem, *e.g.*, the frozen mill-race, the birds hiding themselves in holes and crannies to die, and the touching allusions to the pinched and starving poor, who, thanks to the benevolence of Mr. Smith and others, were saved, only just in time.

"My descriptions," says Cowper, "are all from nature—not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience—not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I varied as much as I could (for blank verse without variety of numbers is no better than bladder and string), I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance, because, at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed.

"If the work cannot boast a regular plan (in which respect, however, I do not think it altogether indefen-

sible), it may yet boast that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, and that, except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency—to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure, as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue.”

All through the spring and summer Cowper continued to work at the various poems for his new volume. It has for a long time been believed that much of the “Task” was written in the summer-house, and I must plead guilty to having propagated that error in my “Town of Cowper,” for error I now, with a very much more intimate knowledge of Cowper, believe it to be. The fact is probably that at the time he was writing the “Task” the summer-house was not his at all! I do not think the Asprays, who owned the garden in which it stands, had as yet given it up to him, for the reason that Cowper does not mention the summer-house at all till June 12, 1785, nearly nine months after the manuscript of the “Task” had been placed in the hands of the publisher. Moreover, he then speaks of it as if it had only just come into his possession. (See also the letter of June 25, 1785, to Hill.)

In the letter of June 12th, too, he had to explain to Unwin that the summer-house was not the greenhouse. Had the summer-house been in Cowper's possession long there would have been no necessity to say this, for Unwin was not infrequently a visitor at Olney, and Cowper always kept him well posted up in the concerns of Orchard Side. It is with

reluctance I write it, but the claim of the summer-house to be the place in which was written any portion of either the "Task" or "John Gilpin" must be pronounced untenable. The glories that it arrogated to itself in reality belonged to the now defunct green-house!—or rather let us say the chief glories—for the summer-house, as we shall presently see, is not to be treated irreverently.

In 1784 the Rev. John Newton published his "Apologia," a defence of his position as a clergyman of the Church of England. Some one wrote a reply, which was noticed in the *Monthly Review*, where the critic, stating the case between Mr. Newton and his opponent, made this observation: "In reply to Mr. Newton's fourth argument, in which, in the usual *cant of these reformers*, he pleads," &c. The *Monthly Review* was at that time, as we have seen, read at Oiney, passing from hand to hand in a small circle of friends, Cowper being of the number. The poet marked his disapprobation by writing these lines upon the offending page:—

"These critics, who to faith no quarter grant,  
But call it mere hypocrisy and *cant*,  
To make a just acknowledgment of praise,  
And thanks to God for governing our ways,  
Approve Confucius more, and Zoroaster,  
Than Christ's own servant, or that servant's master."

These lines appear in Storer's "Rural Walks of Cowper," edition of 1826.

Cowper's letters contain a good many allusions to the works of the Marquis Caraccioli, which author so pleased him that he had half a mind to translate

him into English. A number of his remarks on Caraccioli, written on separate scraps of paper, have been preserved ("Southey," vol. vii. p. 272). Before March (1784), however, the idea of this translation had been given up.

### 99. The Election of 1784.—March.

The year 1784 was an important one in the political history of England. The Shelburne Ministry, which had signed the preliminaries of peace with France and America, had been succeeded by a Coalition under the Duke of Portland, which was dismissed in December, 1783, at which date William Pitt, then only in his twenty-fifth year, became Premier, a position which he maintained for the extraordinary period of seventeen years. Four months later, finding his majority had dwindled to the low number of one, he resolved to appeal to the country, and Parliament was dissolved on the 24th of March.

Of this election, in so far as it concerned this "terrarum angulo" and himself, Cowper has left some amusing descriptions. On the 29th of March he writes: "As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchard Side, where in general we live as undisturbed by the political elements, as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the water-mark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We

were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys hallooed, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville. Puss was unfortunately let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

“Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at a window than be absolutely excluded. In a minute the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour were filled. Mr. Grenville, advancing towards me, shook me by the hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he and as many more as could find chairs were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe; and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my assertion, by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed



likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he wore suspended by a riband from his button-hole. The boys hallooed, the dogs barked, Puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued, and for which, had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former. It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world, where one cannot exercise any without disobliging somebody. The town, however, seems to be much at his service, and, if he be equally successful throughout the county, he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr. Ashburner, perhaps, was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepresentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr. Grenville that I had three heads, I should not, I suppose, have been bound to produce them."

The candidate in question, "our pretty plausible candidate," as Cowper elsewhere styles him, was William Wyndham Grenville, a partisan of Mr. Pitt. The other candidates were Mr. John Aubrey (Pittite) and

Lord Verney (Foxite), whose most indefatigable supporter at this end of the county was Mr. Throckmorton, subsequently Cowper's friend. At that time Buckinghamshire and its boroughs returned as many as fourteen members to Parliament, the number for the county itself being two.

The following was the result of the poll :—

W. W. Grenville (Pittite) ...	2261
John Aubrey, Esq. (Pittite) ...	1740
Ralph Earl Verney (Foxite) ...	1716

consequently the first two were elected. Verney petitioned against Aubrey, but unsuccessfully.

Writing to Newton on the 11th of March, Cowper says: "The election has made a great noise in the steeple, and some in the street; but at length we are quiet again. The Squire of Weston assisted in canvassing the town for Lord Verney, and met with several affronts, but was especially insulted by wrong-headed Nathan Sample; who, it seems, has much the same aversion to a Papist that some people have to a cat: rather an antipathy than a reasonable dislike."

On the 26th of April Cowper gives us further information of the contest: "The candidates for this county have set an example of economy which other candidates would do well to follow, having come to an agreement on both sides to defray the expenses of their voters, but to open no houses for the entertainment of the rabble; a reform, however, which the rabble did not at all approve of, and testified their dislike of it by a riot. A stage was built, from which the orators had designed to harangue the electors. This became the

first victim of their fury. Having very little curiosity to hear what gentlemen could say who would give them nothing better than words, they broke it in pieces, and threw the fragments upon the hustings. The sheriff, the members, the lawyers, the voters, were instantly put to flight. They rallied, but were again routed by a second assault like the former. They then proceeded to break the windows of the inn to which they had fled; and a fear prevailing that at night they would fire the town, a proposal was made by the freeholders to face about, and endeavour to secure them. At that instant a rioter, dressed in a merry andrew's jacket, stepped forward and challenged the best man among them. Olney sent the hero to the field, who made him repent of his presumption: Mr. Ashburner was he. Seizing him by the throat, he shook him—he threw him to the earth, he made the hollowness of his skull resound by the application of his fists, and dragged him into custody without the least damage to his person. Animated by this example, the other freeholders followed it, and in five minutes twenty-eight out of thirty ragamuffins were safely lodged in gaol."

100. Cowper's "tender yet resolute letter" to Lady Austen.—The Spring of 1784.

We have seen how Cowper at Lady Austen's instance commenced the "Task," and we have seen too how he begrudged the time which he was compelled to give to that lady in detriment to the progress of the poem. But the fact now began to dawn upon his mind that

Lady Austen was in love with him. The only wonder is that he did not perceive it before. Nobody can blame her for losing her heart to the poet. She saw only the bright and cheerful side of his character, and knew little or nothing of the canker of despair that gnawed continually at his heart. She certainly had reason, too, at times, for believing that the passion was returned. Cowper's attentions to her, his affectionate manner of addressing her, and above all a short poem that he sent her, seemed to point to one and the same thing. This poem, containing only twelve lines, was printed for the first time in 1870, in the Globe edition of Cowper. It is entitled, "To a lady who wore a lock of his hair set with diamonds," and contains the lines—

" The heart that beats beneath that breast  
Is William's, well I know ;  
A nobler prize and richer far  
Than India could bestow."

Hayley, who was not permitted to print the verses, makes the sapient remark : " Those who were acquainted with the unsuspecting innocence and sportive gaiety of Cowper would readily allow, if they had seen the verses to which I allude, that they are such as he might have addressed to a real sister ; but a lady only called by that endearing name may be easily pardoned if she was induced by them to hope that they might possibly be a prelude to a still dearer alliance. To me they appeared expressive of that peculiarity in his character, a gay and tender gallantry perfectly distinct from amorous attachment."

As soon as Cowper discovered in what light Lady

Austen regarded him, he perceived that matters could no longer go on as they were. The thought of love—anything more than a brotherly and sisterly love—had never entered his mind, for since his dreadful derangement at the vicarage he had given up all thoughts of marriage (it should be remembered, too, that he was in his fifty-fourth year), and seeing himself called on to renounce either one lady or the other, he felt it to be his bounden duty to cling to Mrs. Unwin, to whose kindness he had been indebted for so many years.

It has been said by some that Mrs. Unwin was jealous of Lady Austen. Very likely she was. When we consider how tenderly and patiently she had watched over Cowper in his dark and dreadful hours, how for so many years she had shared his joys and sorrows, and delighted in his companionship, we need not wonder if some feeling akin to jealousy stirred her when she perceived the danger of her place being taken by one who, though more brilliant, could not possibly love him more.

But Mrs. Unwin had no need to fear. Cowper's affection for her, his knowledge of her worth, his gratitude for past services, would not allow him to hesitate. He had hoped that it would be possible to enjoy the friendship of both ladies; but when he discovered that it was necessary to decide between one and the other, he bowed to the painful necessity, and wrote Lady Austen "a very tender yet resolute letter, in which he explained and lamented the circumstances that forced him to renounce her society." She in anger burnt the letter, and henceforth there was no more communication between them. The threefold cord

was broken. Before long, Lady Austen, who had ill health, was obliged to visit Bristol. Cowper speaks of her as at Bristol on the 8th of May, so she must have left Olney before that date.

In respect to the letter that caused the rupture, Hayley says, very sensibly, though in his usual flowery and inflated style : "Had it been confided to my care, I am persuaded I should have thought it very proper for publication, as it displayed both the tenderness and the magnanimity of Cowper ; nor could I have deemed it a want of delicacy towards the memory of Lady Austen, to exhibit a proof that, animated by the warmest admiration of the great poet, whose fancy she could so successfully call forth, she was willing to devote her life and fortune to his service and protection. The sentiment is to be regarded as honourable to the lady ; it is still more honourable to the poet that with such feelings as rendered him perfectly sensible of all Lady Austen's fascinating powers, he could return her tenderness with innocent regard, and yet resolutely preclude himself from her society when he could no longer enjoy it without compromising what he owed to the compassionate and generous guardian of his sequestered life." Lady Austen herself admitted in after years "that a more admirable letter could not be written."

Some have judged Lady Austen severely, and have been of opinion that she was a "very artful woman." If it is a crime for a pretty widow to try by all means in her power to bring about a union between herself and the man she loves, then I am afraid her ladyship stands condemned. If it is no crime, there is an end of the matter. Losing Cowper, however, was a fortunate





LADY AUSTEN.

(From a miniature in possession of Dr. GRINDON of Olney.)



thing for Lady Austen, for it is certain that she had it not in her to exercise the patience which companionship with a person of Cowper's state of mind rendered necessary—that patience which was so salient a feature in the character of Mrs. Unwin.

As appears from the ledger of Mr. Grindon, Lady Austen was staying with her sister at Clifton again in August, 1786, and also in March, 1787.

But Cowper and she were now strangers to each other. Although only two miles separated them, there was no communication between her and the poet. Lady Austen subsequently married an accomplished French gentleman named M. de Tardiff. She died in Paris in 1802.

In the possession of Dr. Francis Grindon, of Olney, are several interesting relics of Lady Austen and her friends, to wit : (1) An exquisite clasp miniature of Lady Austen herself at the age of eighteen ; (2) Her presentation dress of crimson satin brocade ; (3) Her fan ; (4) An interesting miniature of her second husband, Baron Tardiff—the clasp of a bracelet ; (5) A small portrait of Miss Green, her niece.

101. The Brothers Throckmorton.—  
May, 1784.

The attention of the public was at this period being attracted by the invention of balloons, and numerous were the speculations indulged in as to the results that might be looked for. "Thanks to Mongolfier," says Cowper, "we shall fly at last." Again, on November 17, 1783, he writes to Newton :—

"Swift observes, when he is giving his reasons why the preacher is elevated always above his hearers, that, let the crowd be as great as it will below, there is always room enough overhead. If the French philosophers can carry their art of flying to the perfection they desire, the observation may be reversed, the crowd will be overhead, and they will have most room who stay below. I can assure you, however, upon my own experience, that this way of travelling is very delightful. I dreamt, a night or two since, that I drove myself through the upper regions in a balloon and pair with the greatest ease and security. Having finished the tour I intended, I made a short turn, and with one flourish of my whip descended; my horses prancing and curvetting with an infinite share of spirit, but without the least danger either to me or my vehicle. The time, we may suppose, is at hand, and seems to be prognosticated by my dream, when these airy excursions will be universal, when judges will fly the circuit and bishops their visitations; and when the tour of Europe will be performed with much greater speed, and with equal advantage, by all who travel merely for the sake of having it to say, that they have made it."

To the same (December 15, 1783) Cowper writes another long letter on ballooning, in which he parodies the lines of Pope:—

"Learn of the little Nautilus to sail,  
Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale."

To—

"Learn of the circle-making kite to fly,  
Spread the fan-tail, and wheel about the sky."

Aeronautics at length became so much the mode that

even in North Bucks a balloon ascent was attempted, on the occasion of which Cowper and Mrs. Unwin were present; and as this occurrence was the means of introducing Cowper to a gentleman with whom he continued long in the most intimate terms of friendship, it will be advisable to let the poet recount the story in his own words: "You may possibly remember," he tells Unwin (December, 1783), "that at a place called Weston, little more than a mile from Olney, there lives a family whose name is Throckmorton. The present possessor is a young man whom I remember as a boy. He has a wife,<sup>1</sup> who is young, genteel, and handsome. They are Papists, but much more amiable than many Protestants. We never had any intercourse with the family, though ever since we lived here we have enjoyed the range of their pleasure-grounds, having been favoured with a key, which admits us into all. When this man succeeded to the estate, on the death of his elder brother, and came to settle at Weston, I sent him a complimentary card, requesting the continuance of that privilege, having till then enjoyed it by the favour of his mother, who on that occasion went to finish her days at Bath. You may conclude that he granted it, and for about two years nothing more passed between us. A fortnight ago I received an invitation in the civillest terms, in which he told me that the next day he should attempt to fill a balloon, and if it would be any pleasure to me to be present, should be happy to see me. Your mother and I went. The whole country was there, but the

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Throckmorton was the daughter of Thomas Gifford, Esq., of Chillington (Staffordshire).

balloon could not be filled. The endeavour was, I believe, very philosophically made, but such a process depends for its success upon such niceties as make it very precarious. Our reception was, however, flattering to a great degree, insomuch that more notice seemed to be taken of us than we could possibly have expected—indeed rather more than of any of his other guests. They even seemed anxious to recommend themselves to our regards. We drank chocolate, and were asked to dine, but were engaged. A day or two afterwards, Mrs. Unwin and I walked that way, and were overtaken in a shower. I found a tree that I thought would shelter us both, a large elm, in a grove that fronts the mansion. Mrs. T. observed us, and, running towards us in the rain, insisted on our walking in. He was gone out. We sat chatting with her till the weather cleared up, and then at her instance took a walk with her in the garden. The garden is almost their only walk, and is certainly their only retreat in which they are not liable to interruption. She offered us a key of it, in a manner that made it impossible not to accept it, and said she would send us one. A few days afterwards, in the cool of the evening, we walked that way again. We saw them going toward the house, and exchanged bows and curtsies at a distance, but did not join them. In a few minutes, when we had passed the house, and had almost reached the gate that opens out of the park into the adjoining field, I heard the iron gate belonging to the courtyard ring, and saw Mr. T. advancing hastily towards us; we made equal haste to meet him. He presented to us the key, which I told him I esteemed a singular favour,

and after a few such speeches as are made on such occasions, we parted. This happened about a week ago. I concluded nothing less than that all this civility and attention was designed, on their part, as a prelude to a nearer acquaintance ; but here at present the matter rests. I should like exceedingly to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call now and then, and to receive one, but nothing more. For though he is one of the most agreeable men I ever saw, I could not wish to visit him in any other way, neither our house, furniture, servants, or income being such as qualify us to make entertainments ; neither would I on any account be introduced to the neighbouring gentry. Mr. T. is altogether a man of fashion, and respectable on every account." On the 10th of May (1784) Cowper writes to Newton :—

"On Friday, by particular invitation, we attended an attempt to throw off a balloon at Mr. Throckmorton's, but it did not succeed. We expect, however, to be summoned again in the course of the ensuing week. Mrs. Unwin and I were the party. We were entertained with the utmost politeness. It is not possible to conceive a more engaging and agreeable character than the gentleman's, or a more consummate assemblage of all that is called good-nature, complaisance, and innocent cheerfulness, than is to be seen in the lady. They have lately received many gross affronts from the people of this place, on account of their religion. We thought it therefore the more necessary to treat them with respect."

With the amiable brothers, indeed, John and George Throckmorton, Cowper was daily becoming more

intimate. Whenever he went he was welcome, and the more he saw of them the better he liked them. "You say well, my dear," he wrote to Lady Hesketh a few years later, "that in Mr. Throckmorton we have a peerless neighbour ; we have so. In point of information upon all important subjects, in respect, too, of expression and address, and, in short, everything that enters into the idea of a gentleman, I have not found his equal (not often) anywhere. Were I asked who in my judgment approaches nearest to him in all his amiable qualities and qualifications, I should certainly answer his brother George." What Cowper had lost in Lady Austen, in fact, was made up to him in his new friends the Throckmortons.

Partridges and hares from the Hall often graced Cowper's table. If Mr. Throckmorton draws the river he sends Mrs. Unwin a fine jack. Nor were his favours confined to times when he himself was at Weston. If he and Mrs. Throckmorton were away, as not infrequently happened, Cowper and Mrs. Unwin were always to consider the garden and its contents as their own, and to gather whatever they liked without scruple.

### 102. The Walks at Weston.

The path that Cowper usually took when visiting Weston is the one that gradually rises from the close, called the Fightle, through several enclosures on the west side of Olney, and is parallel to the road leading from Olney to Weston, the highest portion being that called by Cowper in his letters "the Cliff." "One

morning last week," he tells Lady Hesketh (November 26, 1786), "they (the Throckmortons) both went with me to the cliff—a scene, my dear, in which you would delight beyond measure, but which you cannot visit except in the spring or autumn. The heat of summer and the clinging dirt of winter would destroy you. What is called the cliff is no cliff, nor at all like one, but a beautiful terrace, sloping gently down to the Ouse, and from the brow of which, though not lofty, you have a view of such a valley as makes that which you see from the hills near Olney, and which I have had the honour to celebrate, an affair of no consideration." He thus alludes to it in the "Task":—

"How oft upon yon eminence our pace  
Has slackened to a pause, and we have borne  
The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,  
While admiration, feeding at the eye  
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene."

With a few vivid touches he then lays the charming panorama before his readers, the "slow winding Ouse," the square tower of Clifton church, the tall spire of Olney, "groves, heaths, and smoking villages remote." From this elevation may be descried, in clear weather, the village of Steventon, in Beds, and also the faint profile of Bow Brickhill. In Cowper's day Clifton Hall could be seen peeping through the trees on Clifton Hill, whilst on the right stood out conspicuously Weston Hall, the mansion of the Throckmortons.

From "the Cliff" he usually took his way to the Ho-brook, a diminutive stream that crosses the road about midway between Olney and Weston. Bounded on one side by the Ho-brook is a long narrow plantation

called, locally, the First Spinnie, but better known to readers of Cowper as the Shrubbery. It is threaded by a winding path, and in its midst stood the rustic hut or "moss-house," a favourite haunt of Cowper (see § 84), which had on one side of it a weeping willow, and in front a beautiful circular sheet of water. It was an unpretentious stone structure, with thatched roof, covered with ivy and moss, and at a distance looked very like a great mushroom.

The following lines on the Shrubbery, which were written by Cowper in a time of affliction, were inserted in his first volume of poems :—

" Oh, happy shades—to me unblest !  
 Friendly to peace, but not to me !  
 How ill the scene, that offers rest,  
 And heart, that cannot rest, agree.

This glassy stream, that spreading pine,  
 Those alders quiv'ring to the breeze,  
 Might soothe a soul less hurt than mine,  
 And please, if anything could please.

The saint or moralist should tread  
 This moss-grown alley musing, slow ;  
 They seek, like me, the secret shade,  
 But not, like me, to nourish woe.

Me, fruitful scenes, and prospects waste,  
 Alike admonish not to roam ;  
 These tell me of enjoyments past,  
 And those of sorrows yet to come."

In the Moss-house was placed a board upon which were inscribed the poet's lines :—

" Here, free from riot's hated noise,  
 Be mine, ye calmer, purer joys,  
 A book or friend bestows ;



Far from the storms that shake the great  
Contentment's gale shall fan my seat  
And sweeten my repose."

But this board was stolen, so the poet put up another with the following lines, which are substantially the same as those in the sixth book of the "Task":—

"No noise is here, or none that hinders thought ;  
Stillness, accompanied with sounds like these,  
Charms more than silence. Meditation here  
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart  
May give a useful lesson to the head,  
And learning wiser grow without his books."

Keeping to the windings of the streamlet, and passing many a pleasant nook, we enter the field in front of the "Peasant's Nest"—no longer as formerly a picturesque thatch-roofed cottage half hidden in foliage. Its trees have been felled, and the building itself is transformed into a prim-looking farmhouse. Still keeping to our streamlet or "weedy ditch," into which the peasant used to dip his bowl, we are brought to another plantation, the Second Spinnie, crowded with firs, pines, and yews, from which we emerge into the Chestnut Avenue:—

"Thank to Benevolus, he spares me yet  
These chestnuts ranged in corresponding rows,  
And, though himself so polished, still reprieves  
The obsolete prolixity of shade."

An abrupt descent leads to the "Rustic Bridge," and the "gulf" where "the willows" used to "dip their pendent boughs, stooping as if to drink;" and ascending the steep walk that borders the northern extremity of the Park we are brought to the Alcove, a hexagonal

structure, with three sides open, that was built by Mr. John Higgins for Sir Robert Throckmorton in 1753.

Quitting the Alcove, we presently find ourselves in the beautiful "Avenue of Lime Trees." Mr. Throckmorton, as well he might be, was very proud of this handsome avenue, and Cowper, in a letter written after he himself had become a resident at Weston, thus refers to the care that was taken to preserve its beauty (July 6, 1788) :—

"By the help of the axe and the wood-bill, which have of late been constantly employed in cutting out all straggling branches that intercepted the arch, Mr. Throckmorton has now defined it with such exactness that no cathedral in the world can show one of more magnificence or beauty. I bless myself that I live so near it ; for, were it distant several miles, it would be well worth while to visit it, merely as an object of taste ; not to mention the refreshment of such a gloom both to the eyes and spirits. And these are the things which our modern improvers of parks and pleasure-grounds have displaced without mercy ; because, forsooth, they are rectilinear. It is a wonder that they do not quarrel with the sunbeams for the same reason."

The Wilderness, with its ceaseless caw of rooks, whither we are now walking, has still abundant charms ; its walks, however, have not been "well-rolled" for many a day, and the monuments, adorned with bright green moss, and with ivy, are in a dilapidated state. To some of the vanished glories of this spot Cowper alludes in "Task," VI. Laburnum contributed its "streaming gold." There were lilacs, syringas, and Guelder roses. Hypericum presented her slender rods

of flowers, mezereon her "blushing wreaths." There was "Althæa with the purple eye," broom with blossoms, "Yellow and bright, as bullion unalloy'd," and luxuriant above all "The jasmine, throwing wide her elegant sweets."

The broad walk that borders the northern side of the Wilderness is ornamented with two monumental urns, and the statue of a lion in a recumbent posture.

Upon the pedestal of one of the urns is engraved the well-known epitaph on Sir John Throckmorton's pointer :—

" Here lies one who never drew  
 Blood himself, yet many slew ;  
 Gave the gun its aim, and figure  
 Made in field, yet ne'er pulled trigger.  
 Armed men have gladly made  
 Him their guide, and him obeyed ;  
 At his signified desire,  
 Would advance, present, and fire.  
 Stout he was, and large of limb,  
 Scores have fled at sight of him ;  
 And to all this fame he rose,  
 By only following his nose.  
 Neptune was he called ; not he  
 Who controls the boist'rous sea,  
 But of happier command,  
 Neptune of the furrowed land ;  
 And your wonder, vain, to shorten,  
 Pointer to Sir John Throckmorton."

On the pedestal of the other urn is an inscription written at the request of Mrs. Courtenay (Catharina), afterwards Lady Throckmorton, on a puppy named Fop. We shall refer to it further on in the book (§ 204).

The most conspicuous object in the Wilderness is

the Gothic Temple, now in a sadly ruinous state, a frequent haunt of the Rev. John Newton as well as Cowper. In front of it is a large grass plot surrounded by trees and shrubs.

The grounds that we have been describing were laid out by the famous landscape gardener, Lancelot, or, as he was more familiarly called, from a phrase he was fond of using, "Capability" Brown. Cowper, after alluding in "Task," III., to the handiwork of this "omnipotent magician" (not thinking of Weston in particular), observes :—

" 'Tis finished ! and yet, finished as it seems,  
Still wants a grace, the loveliest it could show,  
A mine to satisfy the enormous cost."

The grounds of several other gentlemen of this neighbourhood were laid out by Brown, notably those of Lord Northampton (the eighth Earl) and Mr. Chester, of Chicheley. The works on the estate of the former were suddenly brought to a standstill in 1767, owing to the outrageous cost of the celebrated election of that year, in which Lord Northampton was opposed by the Earl of Halifax and Earl Spencer. As the reward for his labours Brown was put into possession of a manor, and among the papers at Castle Ashby is a curious memorandum of land at Fenny Compton conveyed to "Laurence Brown, Taste, esquire, in return for taste," by Spencer, Lord Northampton.

Having described the grounds, it may not be superfluous to say something about the house. Weston Hall, the ancient mansion of the Throckmortons, which

stood on the left side of the road leading from Olney to Weston, just outside the village, was entirely demolished in 1827 ; and of its near appurtenances none are now standing except the iron gates with four stone piers, and a portion of the stabling and granary crowned by a cupola. It consisted of a quadrangle enclosing a court, or, as the villagers used to call it, "the jail-yard;" and drawings are in existence of each of its fronts. The north, principal, or Queen Anne front, faced the park, and was built by Sir Robert Throckmorton about 1710. Projecting northwards, and at right angles to it, were the stables, the one on the west side, which occupied the site of the present Roman Catholic chapel, being for the coach-horses, the one on the other side for the hunters. The rest of the exterior was partly in the Queen Anne style and partly Elizabethan, the most irregular portion being the west front, which had a porch, and was a perfect medley of chimneys, gabled projections, and windows, the last dotted about in the oddest manner imaginable. From the general appearance of the interior it was judged that the house must have been commenced about the end of the fifteenth century ; at the time of its demolition the southern portion was in ruins, and had not been inhabited for two hundred years. Coats-of-arms which adorned some of the windows bore the date 1572, and over the door of one of the parlours were several ancient escutcheons of arms.

Weston Hall, indeed, with the exception of its north front, was a most odd-looking place. Beautiful it certainly was not. Nevertheless, with its pleasant prospects, its extensive library, its aviary, and numerous

other amenities, it was by no means wanting in attractions.

In taking the house down several interesting discoveries were made. In one place was a concealed door, which, when bolted from the inner side, could not be distinguished from the wainscot. Three of the garrets on the west side of the house had in days of persecution been thrown together to form a chapel; and in another garret, next to the chapel, was found a trap-door opening into a small secret room below, the situation of which was concealed from the outside by a large stack of chimneys. It contained a box sufficiently long for a person to lie in at ease, in which were two mattresses, a rough hewn ladder long enough to reach the trap-door, a candlestick, a crust of bread, some chicken bones, and a priest's breviary. Doubtless these hiding-places often had occupants in the troublous days of Elizabeth and James I., during which the Throckmortons suffered so much on account of their religion; but although it was a matter of history that hiding-places of some sort existed in the house, they had not been known even to the family of late years.

The library, the family portraits, and the coats-of-arms on painted glass, with which the windows were adorned, were removed to Coughton, the principal residence of the family; the black marble and white flags which formed part of the pavement of the entrance-hall are now in the floor of the Roman Catholic chapel.

At the entrance of the village is still standing one of the gateways of the park; the other, which was similar in appearance, and stood on the side nearest Olney, has

disappeared. The road in front of the house, which ran through the park (from which it was not railed off), was formerly a private one, and consequently the gates were shut at night. The public road ran between the hall and the river, but with the exception of the portion abutting upon the village street, where stands the socket of the ancient cross, has since been done away with.<sup>1</sup>

### 103. Finding a Publisher.—October, 1784.

On the 11th of October the first instalment of the "Task," "four quires of verse," was sent by "the waggon" for the perusal of Unwin, who was requested, after he had read it, to lose no time in conveying it to Joseph Johnson, the publisher. If Johnson declined the work, Unwin was to offer it to his friend Longman, or any other. Having read the instalment, Unwin hastened to say how pleased he was with it, whereupon the poet replied:—

"Your letter has relieved me from some anxiety, and given me a good deal of positive pleasure. I have faith in your judgment, and an implicit confidence in the sincerity of your approbation. The writing of so long a poem is a serious business, and the author must know little of his own heart who does not in some degree suspect himself of partiality to his own production; and who is he that would not be mortified by the discovery that he had written five thousand lines in vain?"

<sup>1</sup> "The Town of Cōwper."

"If, when you make the offer of my book to Johnson, he should stroke his chin, and look up to the ceiling and cry 'Humph!' anticipate him, I beseech you, at once by saying 'that you know I should be sorry that he should undertake for me to his own disadvantage, or that my volume should be in any degree pressed upon him. I make him the offer merely because I think he would have reason to complain of me if I did not.' But, that punctilio once satisfied, it is a matter of indifference to me what publisher sends me forth."

Johnson, however, accepted the work without demur. "My imagination tells me," says Cowper to Unwin " (for I know you interest yourself in the success of my productions), that your heart 'fluttered when you approached his door, and that it felt itself discharged of a burthen when you came out again." This was on the 1st of November. The shop of Joseph Johnson and his nephew and successor, Rowland Hunter, who were Dissenters, was No. 72, on the north side of St. Paul's Churchyard. It was a building, we are told, "plain and unadorned, befitting the headquarters of the bookselling of Protestant Dissent."

#### 104. *Newton's Relations with Cowper.—* *November, 1784.*

The poem having been placed in Johnson's hands, Cowper now broke the news to Newton. He says: "I am again at Johnson's, in the shape of a poem in blank verse, consisting of six books, and called the



“Task.” I began it about this time twelvemonth, and, writing sometimes an hour in a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes two hours, have lately finished it. I mentioned it not sooner, because almost to the last I was doubtful whether I should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind as, while it spurred me to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify me for it. My bookseller, I suppose, will be as tardy as before. I do not expect to be born into the world till the month of March, when I and the crocuses shall peep together.”

Notwithstanding this explanation, however, Cowper could not help thinking that Newton would feel somewhat hurt at having been kept so long in the dark, and he tells Unwin :—

“ I wrote to Mr. Newton by the last post to tell him that I was gone to the press again. He will be surprised, and perhaps not pleased. But I think he cannot complain, for he keeps his own authorly secrets without participating them with me. I do not think myself in the least injured by his reserve, neither should I if he were to publish a whole library without favouring me with any previous notice of his intentions. In these cases it is no violation of the laws of friendship not to communicate, though there must be a friendship where the communication is made. But many reasons may concur in disposing a writer to keep his work secret, and none of them injurious to his friends. The influence of one I have felt myself, for which none or them would blame me—I mean the desire of surprising agreeably. And, if I have denied myself this pleasure in your instance, it was only to give myself a greater,

by eradicating from your mind any little weeds of suspicion that might still remain in it, that any man living is nearer to me than yourself. Had not this consideration forced up the lid of my strong-box like a lever, it would have kept its contents with an invisible closeness to the last ; and the first news that either you or any of my friends would have heard of the 'Task' they would have received from the public papers. But you know now that neither as a poet nor a man do I give to any man a precedence in my estimation at your expense."

As Cowper had anticipated, so it proved. "The moment Mr. Newton knew," he tells Unwin "(and I took care that he should learn it first from me), that I had communicated to you what I had concealed from him, and that you were my authorship's go-between with Johnson on this occasion, he sent me a most friendly letter indeed, but one in every line of which I could hear the soft murmurs of something like mortification, that could not be entirely suppressed. It contained nothing, however, that you yourself would have blamed, or that I had not every reason to consider as evidence of his regard to me. He concluded the subject with desiring to know something of my plan, to be favoured with an extract, by way of specimen, or (which he should like better still) with wishing me to order Johnson to send him a proof as fast as they were printed off. Determining not to accede to this last request for many reasons (but especially because I would no more show my poem piecemeal than I would my house if I had one, the merits of the structure in either case being equally liable to suffer by such a partial view of

it), I have endeavoured to compromise the difference between us, and to satisfy him without disgracing myself. The proof-sheets I have absolutely, though civilly, refused ; but I have sent him a copy of the arguments of each book, more dilated and circumstantial than those inserted in the work ; and to these I have added an extract as he desired."

By and by Cowper had a letter from Newton "that did not please him," and returned an answer that possibly "may not have pleased Newton." Newton's letter was "fretful and peevish," and Cowper's "if not chargeable with exactly the same qualities, was, however, dry enough." Cowper tells Unwin on the 10th of December "that Newton would have been pleased had the book passed out of his hands into yours, or even out of yours into his, so that he had previously had opportunity to advise a measure which I pursued without his recommendation, and had seen the poems in manuscript. But my design was to pay you a whole compliment, and I have done it. If he says more on the subject I shall speak freely, and perhaps please him less than I have done already."

This show of fight on the part of so mild a man as Cowper is rather amusing, but we are to learn from it that he had a will of his own. To conceal from so close a friend as Newton what had been revealed to Unwin was scarcely in good taste, and Cowper, though he does not say as much, seems to have felt it ; but good taste or not, the thing was done, and there was an end of it. This storm in a teacup, however, soon subsided. The friends continued to write to one another, and in April we find Cowper saying : "I was very

much pleased with a sentence in Mr. Newton's last : 'I am perfectly satisfied with the propriety of your proceeding as to the publication.' Now, therefore, we are friends again. Now he once more inquires after the work, which, till he had disburthened himself of this acknowledgment, neither he nor I in any of our letters to each other ever mentioned. Some side-wind has wafted to him a report of those reasons by which I justified my conduct. I never made a secret of them. Both your mother and I have studiously deposited them with those who we thought were most likely to transmit them to him. They wanted only a hearing, which once obtained, their solidity and cogency were such that they were sure to prevail."

### 105. "Tirocinium."

This poem, two hundred lines of which had been written as early as 1782, was resumed in the middle of 1784. "It turns," says Cowper, "on the question whether an education at school or at home be preferable, and I shall give the preference to the latter." Elsewhere he writes:—

"I do not know that schools in the gross, and especially public schools, have ever been so pointedly condemned before. But they are become a nuisance, a pest, an abomination; and it is fit that the eyes and noses of mankind should, if possible, be opened to perceive it."

When, in November, the poem was finished, Cowper

explained more fully its *raison d'être*. He says to Unwin :—

“It is entitled ‘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 obtain 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 to their own sons, where that is practicable, to take home 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.”

Cowper wished to dedicate the poem to Unwin, but wrote :—

“I can see that you may have very reasonable objections to my dedicatory proposal. You are a clergyman, and I have banged your order. You are a child of Alma Mater, and I have banged her too. Lay yourself, therefore, under no constraints that I do not lay you under, but consider yourself as perfectly free.”

The objections, however, were not allowed to stand, consequently to Unwin the poem was dedicated.

It must be admitted that “Tirocinium” is not a very attractive poem; nevertheless, like everything that Cowper wrote, it contains some excellent passages. The tribute in it to John Bunyan, and the pleasant lines about “the play-place of our early days”—the early days, of course, at Westminster—are among the best.

106. The Commencement of Homer.—  
November 12, 1784.

On November 12th (1784), about a week after his completion of "Tirocinium," Cowper had commenced another important work, none other than the translation of Homer, for whom, as we have seen, he had always felt the greatest admiration. At Westminster, when he read the Iliad and the Odyssey through with his friend Alston, comparing them with Pope's translation, "his love and admiration of the original had increased in proportion to his distaste of a version which so thoroughly disguises it," and it was the remembrance of these feelings that prompted him to undertake the task of producing a translation himself. The Iliad and the Odyssey he held to be "the two finest poems that ever were composed by man, and composed in the finest language that ever man uttered." All languages of which he knew anything he considered "gibberish compared with Greek."

"For some weeks," he says, "after I had finished the 'Task,' and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day, being in such a distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the Iliad, and, merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception of what I was then entering upon than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I

had recourse to the same expedient and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work, till at last I began to reflect thus:—The Iliad and the Odyssey together consist of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer; and, though he was not an enlightened man, has interspersed many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems.”

As in the case of the “Task,” Cowper did not tell his friends what he was doing till a considerable portion of the work was finished. He broke the news to Hill on December 24, 1785.

“Till I had made such a progress in my present undertaking as to put it out of all doubt that, if I lived, I should proceed in and finish it, I kept the matter to myself. It would have done me little honour to have told my friends that I had an arduous enterprise in hand, if afterwards I must have told them that I had dropped it. Knowing it to have been universally the opinion of the literati, ever since they have allowed themselves to consider the matter coolly, that a translation, properly so called, of Homer is, notwithstanding what Pope has done, a desideratum in the English language, it struck me that an attempt to supply the deficiency would be an honourable one, and having made myself, in former years, somewhat critically a master of the original, I was by this double consideration induced to make the attempt myself. I am now

translating into blank verse the last book of the Iliad, and mean to publish by subscription."

When employed on the "Task" Cowper's work had been very unequal; sometimes he wrote three lines, sometimes a large number, just as the fit took him or circumstances permitted. His translation of "The Old Asiatic Tale," however, was produced in an entirely different manner. It was performed by piecework: he set himself forty lines for his daily task, and never excused himself from that task when it was possible to perform it. "Equally sedulous," said he, "I am in the matter of transcribing, so that between both, my morning and evening are most part completely engaged."

107. "The Poplar Field," and other contributions to the "Gentleman's Magazine."  
—January, 1785.

His smaller pieces Cowper sometimes sent to the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In the January number for 1785 appeared the exquisite little poem entitled "The Poplar Field." The origin of it is stated in a letter to Lady Hesketh, dated May 1, 1786. "There was," he says, "some time since, in a neighbouring parish called Lavendon, a field, one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little paradise. But the poplars have been felled, and the scene has suffered so much by the loss that, though still in point of prospect beautiful, it has not charms sufficient to attract me now. A certain poet wrote a copy of verses



on this melancholy occasion." The opening verse runs :—

"The poplars are felled ; farewell to the shade,  
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade ;  
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,  
Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives."

There are few things in Cowper more beautiful or melodious than this morceau.

"Lynch Close," the field referred to, is near Lavendon Mill. Several poplars are still standing that have sprung up since the poet's day.

Subsequently he sent to the same magazine two pieces more—a Latin translation of "The Poplar Field," and another "On a Rosebud," the neck of which he had inadvertently broken in Lady Austen's dining-room at Olney Vicarage. A lady, Mrs. C., having, previous to its publication, obtained a copy, had the dishonesty to claim to be its author. After three or four months' delay, however, it appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* with Cowper's signature—W. C. "Poor simpleton!" commented the poet, "she will find now perhaps that the 'Rose' had a thorn, and that she has pricked her fingers with it."

### 108. Mr. Teedon.

Among the townspeople with whom Cowper was familiar, and who sometimes visited him, was a poor schoolmaster named Samuel Teedon, formerly of Bedford, who came to Olney about 1775, and who lived in a cottage midway between the Market-place and Wes-

ton Road, or, as it was then termed, Dagnell Street or Dag Lane. Samuel Teedon was an egotistical and inordinately vain, but simple-minded and fervently religious, man. Just such a man in respect to his religious views as was not infrequently the product of the Evangelical school. The fervent preaching of Newton and like men with which this neighbourhood—perhaps more than any other in England—then abounded had had the effect of making his religion a good deal more to him than a mere name. He wrestled with God in prayer, and he believed that he was especially favoured of Heaven. People at the present day may sneer at the poor schoolmaster of Olney. That an egotistical pedagogue, who had but indifferent health, who was bamboozled by the people in authority in the town, who with all his industry was scarcely able to keep himself from starving, who bought his copybooks half a dozen at a time for fear of running heavily into debt, who in spite of this precaution dreaded his stationer's bill only less than he did the arrival of rent day ;—that a man who was so situated should imagine himself a peculiar favourite of Heaven may excite in some minds nothing but ridicule. But unjustly so, for Samuel Teedon, with all his eccentricities, had in his composition a considerable amount of wisdom. Every man, no matter how poor, is specially favoured of Heaven, provided he believes so, and lives up to his lights. With this belief of Teedon's, then, we have little fault to find ; but another belief that took hold of him, and that increased as years went on, must be regarded differently. This, however, must be dealt with in a subsequent chapter. It was owing to John Newton,

probably, that Cowper became acquainted with this singular character—a character that was subsequently to exert such an extraordinary influence over his life. At any rate, Newton seems always to have greatly interested himself in Teedon, who is first alluded to by Cowper in the letter to Newton of February 25, 1781. Cowper says: “He that tells a long story should take care that it be not made a long story by his manner of telling it. His expression should be natural, and his method clear; the incidents should be interrupted by very few reflections, and parentheses should be entirely discarded. I do not know that poor Mr. Teedon guides himself in the affair of story-telling by any one of these rules, or by any rule indeed that I ever heard of. He has just left us after a long visit, the greatest part of which he spent in the narration of a certain detail of facts that might have been compressed into a much smaller compass, and my attention to which has wearied and worn out all my spirits. You know how scrupulously nice he is in the choice of his expression; an exactness that soon becomes very inconvenient both to speaker and hearer, where there is not a great variety to choose out of.”

Teedon is also alluded to as a visitor on November 27, 1781; and on February 7, 1785, Cowper gives us the following most amusing specimen of the school-master's manner: “Mr. Teedon, who favours us now and then with his company in an evening as usual, was not long since discoursing with that eloquence which is so peculiar to himself, on the many providential interpositions that had taken place in his favour. ‘He had wished for many things,’ he said, ‘which, at the time

when he formed these wishes, seemed distant and improbable, some of them indeed impossible. Among other wishes that he had indulged, one was that he might be connected with men of genius and ability—and, in my connection with this worthy gentleman,' said he, turning to me, 'that wish, I am sure, is amply gratified.' You may suppose that I felt the sweat gush out upon my forehead when I heard this speech; and if you do you will not be at all mistaken. So much was I delighted with the delicacy of that incense."

From these extracts it will be seen that Cowper at first regarded Teedon as somewhat of a bore, though a decidedly amusing one; and it is quite certain that when he wrote the passages in "Conversation" about the teller of long-winded stories and the reciter of prodigies and complaints, he had Teedon in his eye. (See also to Newton, December 31, 1781.) At the same time, from the very first there was something in Teedon that both Cowper and Mrs. Unwin liked. They pitied and often relieved his poverty; and as for his weaknesses—his vanity and obtrusiveness—they good-naturedly got what amusement they could out of them, and passed them over.

About this time the religious part of the community were much exercised on the subject of Sunday-schools, which had lately been inaugurated by Mr. Robert Raikes, and were now becoming general. The honour of establishing a Sunday-school at Olney belongs to the Rev. Thomas Scott, and Cowper thus refers to it (September 24, 1785): "Mr. Scott called upon us yesterday; he is much inclined to set up a Sunday-school, if he can raise a fund for the purpose. Mr. Jones has

had one some time at Clifton, and Mr. Unwin writes me word that he has been thinking of nothing else, day and night, for a fortnight. It is a wholesome measure that seems to bid fair to be pretty generally adopted, and, for the good effects that it promises, deserves well to be so. I know not, indeed, while the spread of the gospel continues so limited as it is, how a reformation of manners in the lower class of mankind can be brought to pass ; or by what other means the utter abolition of all principle among them, moral as well as religious, can possibly be prevented. Heathenish parents can only bring up heathenish children ; an assertion nowhere oftener or more clearly illustrated than at Olney ; where children, seven years of age, infest the streets every evening with curses and with songs, to which it would be unseemly to give their proper epithet. Such urchins as these could not be so diabolically accomplished, unless by the connivance of their parents. It is well, indeed, if, in some instances, their parents be not themselves their instructors. Judging by their proficiency, one can hardly suppose any other. It is therefore doubtless an act of the greatest charity to snatch them out of such hands, before the inveteracy of the evil shall have made it desperate. Mr. Teedon, I should imagine, will be employed as a teacher, should this expedient be carried into effect. I know not at least that we have any other person among us so well qualified for the service. He is indisputably a Christian man, and miserably poor, whose revenues need improvement, as much as any children in the world can possibly need instruction."

It may be noted that in the early days of Sunday-schools the teachers were paid.

## 109. Various other Olney Folk.—May, 1785.

Previous biographers of Cowper have erred in ignoring Cowper's relations with his humbler neighbours at Olney. They have said much about his works, much about the history of poetry, much about his better-to-do contemporaries and his critics; but they seem to have lost sight of the fact that Cowper was a man as well as a poet. He continually took a keen interest in the little world around him—the little world of Olney. And not only so, but the very best passages in his poems are those descriptive of the simple folk amongst whom he dwelt. When Cowper takes upon himself to describe the Millennium his flight is by no means a satisfactory one; when he attacks Frederick the Great and other "royal mastiffs" he is apt to be dull; when he lunges at Thelyphthora he makes himself look foolish, and even his descriptions of cucumber-rearing, skilled as he was in that occupation, are only very mediocre reading. When, however, he touches upon the joys and sorrows of those about him, his verse has something of the divine fire. "Crazy Kate" and the "Lace-maker" are brilliants of the first water. "The Post-boy," "The Woodman and his Dog," and "The Thresher" are second only to them; while as for the figures in his letters, "Mr. Ashburner," the Herculean draper; wrong-headed Nathan Sample, thirsty Geary Ball, poor Jenny Raban, James Andrews (my "Michael Angelo"), Tom Freeman the gingerbread baker, Wilson the barber, "the junior son of Molly Boswell," and a whole host besides, are they not as cleverly cut and as

familiar to lovers of Cowper as the characters in Dickens?

In May, 1785, three of these well-known figures were carried to their grave. On the 19th Cowper speaks of Geary Ball as a neighbour of ours "whose sole occupation, although he too is naturally ingenious, has centred in filling his glass and emptying it. He is now languishing in a dropsy, and in the prime of life, labouring under all the infirmities of age. He solaces himself, I am told, with the recollection of somewhat that passed in his experience many years ago, which, although it has been followed by no better fruits than will grow at an alehouse, he dignifies by the name of 'conversion.' Sows are so converted when they are washed, and give the same evidence of an unchanged nature by returning to the mire. Mr. Perry, whose daughter he married, often visits him, but declares that of all the insensibles he ever saw, poor Geary is the most completely stupid. So long as he was able to crawl into the street, his journey was to the 'Royal Oak' and home again; and so punctual were we both, I in cleaning my teeth at my window, and he in drinking his dram at the same time, that I seldom failed to observe him. But both his legs are now blistered, and refuse to assist him in poisoning himself any longer."

In May Geary Ball died. At Geary's door, Cowper, looking out of his window, saw Mr. Ashburner standing "with a bundle of gloves and hatbands under his arm." The following day, again looking out of his window, Cowper saw Mr. Ashburner "march before the coffin, and lead the procession that attended Geary to the

grave." "He might be truly said to march, for his step was heroic, his figure athletic, and his countenance as firm and confident as if he had been born only to bury others, and was sure never to be buried himself." A week later and Cowper had to chronicle the death of Mr. Ashburner. "Mr. Ashburner, the elder, went to London on Tuesday se'nnight in perfect health and spirits, so as to be remarkably cheerful, and was brought home in a hearse the Friday following. When I first heard the tidings I could hardly credit them; and yet have lived long enough myself to have seen manifold and most convincing proofs, that neither health, great strength, nor even youth itself, afford the least security from the stroke of death. It is not common, however, for men at the age of thirty-six to die so suddenly."

On June 7, 1785, Cowper informs Newton of the death of "wrong-headed Nathan Sample" (the maltster), the same who had made himself conspicuous at the prayer-meetings at the Great House, but who had dulled his otherwise excellent character by the too eager pursuit of mammon. "We inquired," said Cowper, "but could not learn, that anything memorable passed in the last moments of poor Nathan. I listened in expectation that he would at least acknowledge what all who knew him in his more lively days had so long seen and lamented—his neglect of the best things, and his eager pursuit of riches. But he was totally silent upon that subject. Yet it is evident that the cares of this world had choked in him much of the good seed. I believe with you, however, that he is safe at home. He had a weak head and strong passions,



which He who made him well knew, and for which He would undoubtedly make great allowance. The forgiveness of God is large and absolute ; so large, that though in general He calls for confession of our sins, He sometimes dispenses with that preliminary. Such instances, perhaps, may not be common, but I know that there have been such, and it might be so with Nathan." There is a cubical stone, surmounted with a small obelisk, and surrounded with iron railings, to the memory of Nathan Sample in Olney churchyard.

#### 110. Carey at Olney.—June, 1785.

For some time past the English eye had been turned towards our then new dependency, India. We had lost our Western empire—now the United States—and it seemed to many there was great danger, owing to the contention about East Indian patronage, of our losing our Eastern empire too. India at this time presented a melancholy scene of rapine and corruption. It was said by Burke that every man became unbaptized in going to India, and that, should it please Providence, by some unforeseen dispensation, to deprive Great Britain of her Indian empire, she would leave behind no memorial but the evidences of her ambition, and the traces of her desolating wars.

Bemoaning this sad state of affairs, in a letter to Newton (January 25, 1784), Cowper says : "Every man has his sentiments upon this subject, and I have mine. Were I constituted umpire of this strife, with full powers to decide it, I would tie a talent of lead

about the neck of this patronage, and plunge it into the depths of the sea. To speak less figuratively, I would abandon all territorial interest in a country to which we can have no right, and which we cannot govern with any security to the happiness of the inhabitants, or without the danger of incurring either perpetual broils, or the most insupportable tyranny at home."

And he winds up his letter with : "What shall I say therefore? I distrust the court, I suspect the patriots ; I put the Company entirely aside, as having forfeited all claim to confidence in such a business, and see no remedy, of course, but in the annihilation, if that could be accomplished, of the very existence of our authority in the East Indies."

The idea that a moral revolution might take place, that England would redeem her character, and become a blessing to the country over which she had tyrannized, did not occur to Cowper. Such, however, as it is our happiness to know, has been the case. Curiously enough, one of the agents in this reform was at the very time Cowper was writing this letter living in the neighbourhood of Olney, and a little later spent several years in Olney itself. This was William Carey, the father of modern missions. Born 1761, at Paulerspury, in Northamptonshire, of poor parents, William Carey was, at the age of fourteen, bound apprentice to Charles Nickolls, a shoemaker, at Hackleton, about six miles from Olney. Here he not only learned the gentle craft, but spent his spare time in study, and made some acquaintance with the Greek New Testament. On the death of his master, Carey transferred his apprenticeship to a neighbouring shoemaker named Old. A

turning-point in his life was an address delivered in the village by the Rev. Thomas Scott, then of Ravenstone, and he now turned his attention with greater fervour than ever to the study of the Scriptures. Scott, who subsequently met Carey at Mr. Old's, prophesied that the "sensible-looking lad, in his working apron," would prove no ordinary character. In after days Scott used to speak of Mr. Old's house as Carey's college. After residing several years at Hackleton and the adjoining village of Piddington, Carey joined the Baptist church at Olney, then under the pastoral care of Mr. Sutcliff. Mr. Sutcliff put a Latin Grammar into his hand, and owing largely to Sutcliff's help Carey was able to continue in his studies, with a view to entering the ministry. On July 17, 1785, he preached his first sermon at Olney, a sermon that was "so crude and weak" that the members of the church "doubted whether he possessed sufficient ability to make a useful minister." Owing, however, to the personal influence of Sutcliff the point was carried, and Carey was subsequently "called to the work of the ministry." There are five entries respecting him in the Baptist Church-book at Olney. Carey's last sermon at Olney is thus alluded to by Teedon: "March 26 (1793). I went to Mr. Sutcliff's meeting and heard Mr. Carey preach, the missionary to go to the Hindos [=Hindoos], with his Son about 10 years of age. A collection was made; I gave 6d.; it amounted almost to £10. The Lord prosper the work."

It would be out of place in this book to pursue Carey's career further. Those who wish to know how he preached and starved at Moulton, how the Baptist

Missionary Society was founded, how he set out for India, and what he accomplished there, must refer to other works. It becomes us here merely to observe that it was a curious coincidence that at the very moment the poet of Olney was bewailing the deplorable state of India, the missionary of Olney was studying map and lexicon with a view to carrying thither great blessings.

### III. "The Nutshell of a Summer-house."— June, 1785.

Cowper's letters are now besprinkled with references to the renowned summer-house, which, as will be remembered, I have been obliged to shear of its chief glory—the reputation of having been the place in which the poet wrote the "Task" and "John Gilpin." To Hill (June 25, 1785) he says: "I write in a nook that I call my boudoir. It is a summer-house not much bigger than a sedan-chair, the door of which opens into the garden, that is now crowded with pinks, roses, and honeysuckles, and the window into my neighbour's orchard. It formerly served an apothecary (Mr. Aspray), now dead, as a smoking-room; and under my feet is a trap-door which once covered a hole in the ground, where he kept his bottles; at present, however, it is dedicated to sublimer uses. Having lined it with garden-mats, and furnished it with a table and two chairs, here I write all that I write in summer-time, whether to my friends or to the public. It is secure from all noise, and a refuge from all intrusion; for

intruders sometimes trouble me in the winter evenings at Olney ; but (thanks to my boudoir !) I can now hide myself from them. A poet's retreat is sacred ; they acknowledge the truth of that proposition, and never presume to violate it."

This little retreat is a plain rustic building of lath and plaster, covered with red tiles. It has one window which looks into the orchard between Cowper's house and the vicarage—Guinea Field—and a door which from its much patched, yet withal very shaky, appearance, leads one to the belief that it must contain some of Cowper's own carpentering. The walls and ceiling are covered with the signatures of visitors, many of them being the names of persons of note from great distances. The two benches are a modern institution. Cowper, as we see from the extract just given, used a chair. In the floor is the trap-door Cowper refers to, or rather a board that takes up. Mr. Bull, who visited Cowper once a fortnight, used to keep his pipes and tobacco under it.

Though in all probability nothing of either the "Task" or "John Gilpin" was written in the summer-house, this small retreat has claims on our reverence, for in it Cowper not only wrote numbers of his minor pieces, but made a commencement of his translation of Homer. By June, 1786, he had got to denominate it his "workshop" and his "verse manufactory." He tells Newton (June 22, 1786) : "As soon as breakfast is over I retire to my nutshell of a summer-house, which is my verse manufactory, and here I abide seldom less than three hours, and not often more. In the afternoon I return to it again ; and all the daylight that follows,

except what is devoted to a walk, is given to Homer." Elsewhere he calls it a bandbox.

He tells Unwin on June 12, 1785: "I am sitting in the summer-house (not the greenhouse); the door, which is open, is toward the garden, and the window, which is open also, is toward a pleasant orchard, so that if it were possible to be cool, that happiness would be mine, but in such a day as this there is no room to hope for it."

To Lady Hesketh (May 29, 1786) he says: "I long to show you my workshop, and to see you sitting on the opposite side of my table. We shall be as close packed as the wax figures in an old-fashioned picture-frame. I am writing in it now. It is the place in which I fabricate all my verse in summer-time."

From Cowper's house to the summer-house extended, as already observed, the "gravel walk of thirty yards." About half-way down this walk stood until recently some cottages, the bottoms of whose lower windows were on a level with the garden ground, and it is said that the poet as he paced his walk could sometimes hear one of the cottagers, "an old breeches-maker," singing, as he worked, to the plaintive tune of Ludlow, the hymn beginning—

"O for a closer walk with God."

The tree of Ribstone pippins planted by Cowper, which stood near the cottages, has now disappeared. Of his garden he says: "The very stones in the wall are my intimate acquaintance—I should miss almost the minutest object."

Though the greenhouse had now a formidable rival

in the summer-house, the former was by no means discarded, as the letter to Lady Hesketh, of February 9, 1786, shows : "My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May or beginning of June ; because, before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats ; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine ; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day."

### 112. The Three Days' Oasis.—In May, 1785.

Twelve years had now elapsed since the Fatal Dream—since Cowper had received, as he believed, his final doom. For twelve years this fantastic idea had possessed him. But now, in May, 1785, for a very brief period, the cloud was removed. The prayers of Mrs. Unwin, Newton, and his other friends seemed to be answered, and the prisoner of all these years felt his shackles fall from him. After all, God had not given him over, was his thought. "I began to hope," says he, "that having walked the whole breadth of the bottom of this Red Sea, I was beginning to climb the opposite shore, and I prepared to sing the song of Moses." But to use his own words again, he was "doomed to disappointment," and he got it into his head, moreover, that God gave those hopes to him in derision, and took them away in vengeance. He thus alludes to this very small oasis in the great desert of

his spiritual experience (the letter was written twelve months later, on May 20, 1786).

“Adam’s approach to the tree of life, after he had sinned, was not more effectually prohibited by the flaming sword that turned every way, than mine to its great Antitype has been now almost these thirteen years, a short interval of three or four days, which passed about this time twelvemonth, alone excepted. For what reason it is that I am thus long excluded, if I am ever again to be admitted, is known to God only. I can say but this : that if He is still my Father, this paternal severity has toward me been such as that I have reason to account it unexampled. For though others have suffered desertion, yet few, I believe, for so long a time, and perhaps none a desertion accompanied with such experiences. But they have this belonging to them, that, as they are not fit for recital, being made up merely of infernal ingredients, so neither are they susceptible of it ; for I know no language in which they could be expressed. They are as truly things which it is not possible for man to utter as those were which Paul heard and saw in the third heaven. If the ladder of Christian experience reaches, as I suppose it does, to the very presence of God, it has nevertheless its foot in the abyss. And if Paul stood, as no doubt he did, in that experience of his to which I have just alluded, on the topmost round of it, I have been standing, and still stand, on the lowest, in this thirteenth year that has passed since I descended.”

The following letter to Newton, dated May, 1785, seems to have been written shortly after that “short interval of three or four days” :—



“ I am sensible of the tenderness and affectionate kindness with which you recollect our past intercourse, and express your hopes of my future restoration. I too within the last eight months have had my hopes, though they have been of short duration, cut off like the foam upon the waters. Some previous adjustments, indeed, are necessary before a lasting expectation of comfort can have place in me. There are those persuasions in my mind which either entirely forbid the entrance of hope, or, if it enter, immediately eject it. They are incompatible with any such inmate, and must be turned out themselves before so desirable a guest can possibly have secure possession. This, you say, will be done. It may be, but it is not done yet ; nor has a single step in the course of God’s dealings with me been taken towards it. If I mend, no creature ever mended so slowly that recovered at last. I am like a slug or snail, that has fallen into a deep well : slug as he is, he performs his descent with an alacrity proportioned to his weight ; but he does not crawl up again quite so fast. Mine was a rapid plunge ; but my return to daylight, if I am indeed returning, is leisurely enough. . . .

“ I can say nothing for myself at present ; but this I can venture to foretell, that should the restoration of which my friends assure me obtain, I shall undoubtedly love those who have continued to love me, even in a state of transformation from my former self, much more than ever.”

On June 4th, referring to Mr. Greatheed, who had been preaching at the Independent Meeting, he says : “ I should have been glad to have been a hearer ;

but that privilege is not allowed me yet. Indeed, since I told you that I had hope, I have never ceased to despair; and have repented that I made my boast so soon, more than once." Subsequent experiences of hope that he had were of a still more transient kind. He describes the light that reached him as comparable neither to that of the sun nor to that of the moon. "It is a flash in a dark night, during which the heavens seemed opened only to shut again."

### 113. Publication of The "Task."—June, 1785.

"*The Task, a Poem, in Six Books. By William Cowper, Esq., 8vo., 4s. in Boards. Johnson.*"—Review, in the *New London Magazine*.

Meantime his great poem, the "Task," or rather his second volume, of which the "Task" was the principal poem, was rapidly approaching completion. On Tuesday, May 31st, he returned the last proof to Johnson, and in a few days the book was in the hands of the public.

The "Task" has beauties of its own on almost every page, but certain portions far outshine the rest; and we think that most persons will agree that among the very finest must be reckoned the description of the preparations for tea (Book IV.), of the unexpected fall of snow (Book IV.), of the frosty morning, with the fine satirical transition to the Empress of Russia's palace of ice (Book V.), and the winter's walk at noon under the oaks and elms of Weston Park (Book VI., lines 57-117); but of equal beauty are the description

of the walk by the Peasant's Nest and the Alcove in Book I., and the story of Crazy Kate.

The following passage from Book V. (lines 177-188) is also in his best style :—

“ Great princes have great playthings. Some have played  
 At hewing mountains into men, and some  
 At building human wonders inountain high.  
 Some have amused the dull, sad years of life,  
 Life spent in indolence, and therefore sad,  
 With schemes of monumental fame ; and sought  
 By pyramids and mausolean pomp,  
 Short-lived themselves, to immortalize their bones.  
 Some seek diversion in the tented field,  
 And make the sorrows of mankind their sport.  
 But war's a game, which, were their subjects wise,  
 Kings would not play at.”

But undoubtedly the noblest lines in the whole poem are those at the end of the Fifth Book, the “ Address to the Creator.” We can here give only the last eleven, but the reader would do well to turn to his “ Cowper” and read carefully all of them :—

“ Thou art the source and centre of all minds,  
 Their only point of rest, Eternal Word !  
 From Thee departing, they are lost, and rove  
 At random, without honour, hope, or peace.  
 From Thee is all that soothes the life of man,  
 His high endeavour and his glad success,  
 His strength to suffer and his will to serve ;  
 But oh, Thou bounteous Giver of all good !  
 Thou art of all Thy gifts Thyself the crown !  
 Give what Thou canst, without Thee we are poor ;  
 And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away.”

The “ Task” of course has its blemishes. Portions of Book III., the “ Garden,” though as a whole it is scarcely inferior to the other books, are very dull

reading. But it would puzzle a man of ten times Cowper's genius to throw us into ecstasies over a description of cucumber rearing. A manure heap does not easily lend itself to poetry. Then, again, Cowper's ignorance of history causes him to make blunders. Even in his throw-off he describes the Picts as our ancestors—a mistake, by the by, which he repeats in the letter to Newton, dated February 10, 1784. These, however, are only spots in a sun; as Southey admirably puts it, "Never were intellectual delight and moral instruction and religious feeling more happily blended than in this poem."

Besides the "Task" Cowper's second volume contained "Tirocinium," "John Gilpin," and the fine and manly "Epistle to Joseph Hill."

The title of the principal poem was of course suggested by the incident that gave origin to it. Lady Austen had set him a task, and nothing seemed to him more appropriate than "Task" to call it. He says himself on the subject:—"It is not possible that a book including such a variety of subjects, and in which no particular one is predominant, should find a title adapted to them all." Nor did it appear to him that because he performed more than his task, therefore the "Task" was not a suitable title. "A house would still be a house, though the builder of it should make it ten times as big as he first intended."

"For the same reason," he observes, "none of the inferior titles apply themselves to the contents at large of that book to which they belong. They are, every one of them, taken either from the leading (I should say the introductory) passage of that particular book,

or from that which makes the most conspicuous figure in it. Had I set off with a design to write upon a gridiron, and had I actually written near two hundred lines upon that utensil, as I have upon the Sofa, the gridiron should have been my title. But the Sofa being, as I may say, the starting-post, from which I addressed myself to the long race that I soon conceived a design to run, it acquired a just pre-eminence in my account, and was very worthily advanced to the titular honour it enjoys, its right being at least so far a good one, that no word in the language could pretend a better."

"The Time-piece appears to me (though by some accident the import of that title has escaped you) to have a degree of propriety beyond the most of them. 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, as it is, with a sufficient degree of accommodation to the subject."



## CHAPTER XV.

### *THE TALE OF TROY DIVINE.*

(June, 1785—November, 1786.)

#### 114. The Reception of the "Task."

**A**S on the publication of his former volume, Cowper ordered copies of his book to his various friends. But this time he made two exceptions. Both Thurlow and Colman had treated him with discourtesy on the former occasion, and he now allowed himself "to be a little pleased with an opportunity of showing them that he resented their treatment, and sent the book to neither." Like most authors, Cowper was less troubled on account of the reception of his second book than his first. The flutter of excitement, the fear of what the world might say, the feeling—fallacious enough—that the eyes of all Christendom were upon him, were not now present. One's "feelings on the occasion soon become obtuse." Says Cowper: "I am even so indifferent to the matter, that I can truly assert myself guiltless of the very idea of my book sometimes whole days together. God knows that, my mind having been occupied more than

twelve years in the contemplation of the most distressing subjects ; the world, and its opinion of what I write, is become as unimportant to me as the whistling of a bird in a bush."

Cowper was soon, however, to learn that his book was well received. Lord Dartmouth had begun to read it, and hastened to say that "the specimen has made him impatient for the whole." Bacon, the sculptor, in one of the few letters *to* Cowper which have escaped destruction, had nothing but praise for it. To this letter, and one received from another friend, Cowper alludes thus in a letter to Unwin : "I have received, since you went, two very flattering letters of thanks, one from Mr. Bacon, and one from Mr. Barham, such as might make a lean poet plump and an humble poet proud. But, being myself neither lean nor humble, I know of no other effect they had than that they pleased me ; and I communicate the intelligence to you not without an assured hope that you will be pleased also."

In the same letter he says : "Mr. Teedon has just left us. He has read my book, and, as if fearful that I had overlooked some of them myself, has pointed out to me all its beauties. I do assure you the man has a very acute discernment, and a taste that I have no fault to find with. I hope that you are of the same opinion."

Newton also liked it, and no praise gave Cowper more pleasure than that of his old friend. Writing to him on the 10th of December, 1785, the poet says : "What you say of my last volume gives me the sincerest pleasure. I have heard a like favourable report



of it from several different quarters, but never any (for obvious reasons) that has gratified me more than yours. I have a relish for moderate praise, because it bids fair to be judicious ; but praise excessive, such as our poor friend Teedon's (I have an uncle also who celebrates me exactly in the same language),—such praise is rather too big for an ordinary swallow. I set down nine-tenths of it to the account of family partiality."

Another admirer at Olney was the Rev. Thomas Scott, and the public were as pleased with the volume as were Cowper's friends. Its popularity, thanks in some measure to the pioneering of "John Gilpin," was instantaneous ; and as long as there are men who love nature, as long as there are men who prefer the delights of the country to the fascination of the crowded city, as long as religion and virtue have their votaries, the "Task" will continue to be one of the most cherished of our classics.

### 115. The Renewal of his Correspondence with Lady Hesketh.—October, 1785.

Of the many pleasures the publication of Cowper's second volume brought him, none gratified him more than the effect it had of renewing his correspondence with his relatives. For nearly twenty years he had heard little or nothing from them. His uncle Ashley, his cousin the Major (now General), his cousin Harriet, all had been silent, and Cowper himself had taken no pains to resume intercourse with them. The silence of the first two originated, doubtless, in his obstinacy respecting his pecuniary affairs. During this time they

had continued the stipulated allowance, but it was not likely they would take great interest in a man who, while he was the recipient of their favours, disregarded their wishes. It is probable, too, that they regarded him as little better than a madman, their opinion being corroborated by the tidings of his twelve months' derangement at Olney. Lady Hesketh, as we have seen, had been repelled by the religious tone of his letters at Huntingdon. Then, again, though he had sent copies of his first volume to Hill and other friends, he had not sent any to his relatives. Cowper, therefore, could scarcely blame his relations for not resuming intercourse with him before. And as a matter of fact he did not blame them. The neglect was reciprocal. The publication of the "Task" however, put matters in another light. Cowper's kinsfolk discovered that he whom they had regarded as a wayward, morbid recluse, and possibly a madman, was the writer of a book of poetry pronounced on all sides to be a work of genius. The man was not what they took him to be, or he was greatly changed for the better. They were proud to renew their acquaintance with him, and the poet, now that the ice was once broken, was as delighted as they. But agreeable as he felt it to be to correspond with his other relations, it was the renewal of acquaintance with Lady Hesketh that gave him most delight. This lady had now been a widow seven years. The perusal of Cowper's book, and especially of "John Gilpin," brought to her recollection all the merry days of time gone by, and she found it impossible to refrain from writing to the cousin whom she had once loved so dearly; so she wrote, and we may judge how her letter

was received by Cowper's reply to it (October 12, 1785): "My dear cousin, it is no new thing with you to give pleasure. But I will venture to say that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself—'This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more are actually returned.' You perceived, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than as in fact it proved—a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you that neither years nor interrupted intercourse have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value—if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment. But I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times too when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again."

In her second letter Lady Hesketh inquired into the state of his finances, offering, in the event of his being straightened, such assistance as she was able to afford. He replies: "My benevolent and generous cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted anything, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to

supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively, declined the favour. I neither suffer, nor have suffered, any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition, and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me, that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing by acceptance. To you, therefore, I reply yes — whensoever, and whatsoever, and in what manner soever you please; and add, moreover, that my affection for the giver is such as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs. Unwin and I have lived at Olney we have had but one purse; although during the whole of that time, till lately, her income was nearly double mine. Her revenues, indeed, are now in some measure reduced, and do not much exceed my own; the worst consequence of this is, that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as neither life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. . . .

“Now, my beloved cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it; but indulge yourself in communicating (no

matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy—a token and proof of your affection.”

The letters of Cowper to his cousin, Lady Hesketh, are among the most delightful in his correspondence. He is almost always cheerful when writing to her, and he is always most affectionate. They sometimes commence with “My dear Cousin”; but when in a whimsical mood it was “My dearest Coz,” “My dearest Coswoz,” or “My dearest Cuzzy-wuzzy,” and he sometimes styled himself “Yours ever Giles Gingerbread”—in allusion, probably, to some joke of his Temple days. In one letter he is “Jeremy Jago.”

In short, so agreeable did Cowper find writing to and hearing from his cousin, that he expressed the hope that their correspondence had now suffered its last interruption, and that they would go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this would permit—a wish that was almost literally fulfilled.

116. The Rev. Walter Bagot.—December, 1785.

Shortly after the publication of his first volume Cowper was visited by an old schoolfellow, the Rev. Walter Bagot, rector of Blithfield, Staffordshire, who was staying with his brother Charles (whose name was now altered to Chester), at Chicheley, five miles distant. “Having read my book, and liking it,” says Cowper,

“he took that opportunity to renew his acquaintance with me.”

Cowper had been acquainted at Westminster, it may be remembered, with the five brothers Bagot. To one of them, now a bishop, Cowper paid a compliment in the “Task.” For paying this compliment he gives his reasons in a letter to Unwin (December 18, 1784): “In the first place, then, I wished the world to know that I have no objection to a bishop, *quid* bishop. In the second place, the brothers were all five my school-fellows, and very amiable and valuable boys they were. Thirdly, Lewis, the bishop, had been rudely and coarsely treated in the *Monthly Review*, on account of a sermon which appeared to me, when I read their extract from it, to deserve the highest commendations, as exhibiting explicit proof both of his good sense and his unfeigned piety.”

In November, 1785, Mr. Bagot was at his brother's again, and visited Cowper three times. On the last occasion Cowper informed his friend of the new translation of Homer. Mr. Bagot received the news with great pleasure, immediately subscribed a draft of twenty pounds, and promised his whole heart and his whole interest, which lay “principally among people of the first fashion.”

#### 117. Anonymous.—December, 1785.

In December (1785) Cowper received a letter that greatly gratified him from a person who styled himself or herself, whichever it might be, Anonymous. What

the contents of this letter were we do not know, but Cowper thus speaks of it to Lady Hesketh: "Hours and hours and hours have I spent in endeavours, altogether fruitless, to trace the writer of the letter that I send by a minute examination of the character; and never did it strike me, till this moment, that your father wrote it. In the style I discover him; in the scoring of the emphatic words (his never-failing practice); in the formation of many of the letters." In the next letter to Lady Hesketh, however, Cowper was by no means so certain, but he declared therein that he would try no more to pierce the veil behind which Anonymous had thought proper to hide. "He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be, so sacred to me that, if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery."

Describing the second letter of Anonymous, Cowper says: "In the last place, he gives his attention to my circumstances, takes the kindest notice of their narrowness, and makes me a present of an annuity of fifty pounds a year, wishing that it were five hundred pounds."

Various presents arrived also for Cowper, brought by the Wellingborough coach. These were "a most elegant writing-desk" of cedar, mounted with silver, the same that figures in his portrait by Abbot, and a handsome snuff-box, the lid of which was embellished with a landscape. In the background of the picture was a hill with a cottage surrounded by trees, and in the fore-

ground were represented three hares. Above were the words, "The peasant's nest," and below, "Puss, Tiney, and Bess." There likewise came a pocket-book, "the completest that I ever saw," and a watch-chain, "the most brilliant." The desk had arrived on the 7th of December, and the snuff-box, &c., on the 24th of January, on which day twelve years previously Cowper had plunged into a melancholy that made him almost an infant. Of his desk he over and over again speaks in raptures. "My desk, the most elegant, the completest, the most commodious desk in the world, and of all the desks that are or ever shall be, the desk that I love the most. . . . How pleasant it is to write upon such a green bank!"

And again (to Lady Hesketh): "My desk is always pleasant, but never so pleasant as when I am writing to you. If I am not obliged to you for the thing itself, at least I am for your having decided the matter against me, and resolving that it should come spite of all my objections. Before it arrived Mrs. Unwin had spied out for it a place that exactly suits it. A certain fly-table in the corner of the room, which I had overlooked, affords it a convenient stand when it is not wanted, and it is easily transferred to a larger when it is." The fly-table here referred to is now in the possession of Mrs. Welton, of Olney, and the desk is among the treasures of Canon Cowper Johnson, Rector of Northwold.

In all probability Cowper's kind friend Anonymous was none other than his cousin and first love, Theodora, Lady Hesketh's sister. That it was not, as Cowper at first supposed, his uncle Ashley is certain, for the



poet received money from Anonymous after Ashley's death. (See to Hesketh, July 11, 1788.)

That Lady Hesketh knew who Cowper's secret friend was may be gathered from his letter of December 19, 1787: "By the post of yesterday," he says to Lady Hesketh, "I received a letter from Anonymous, giving me advice of the kind present which I have just particularized, in which letter allusion is made to a certain piece by me composed, entitled, I believe, the 'Drop of Ink.' The only copy I ever gave of that piece I gave to yourself. Is it *possible*, therefore, that between you and Anonymous there may be some communication?"

Having discovered that Lady Hesketh and Anonymous were acquainted with each other, Cowper henceforth, whenever he received any presents from his unknown friend, wrote and thanked Lady Hesketh for them, constituting her, to use his own expression, "my Thanks-receiver-general." Lady Hesketh, be it mentioned, had assured Cowper that she herself was not "Anonymous."

#### 118. At the End of the Iliad.—January, 1786.

Up till now Cowper had apprized no one of the work he was engaged upon except Mrs. Unwin and her son, but on November 9, 1785, he breaks the news to Lady Hesketh: "It is a secret, a great secret," he says, that she must not whisper even to her cat. "I am making a new translation of Homer, and am on the point of finishing the twenty-first book

of Iliad." He writes to Unwin on October 22 (1785): "I am now in the twentieth book of Homer, and shall assuredly proceed, because the further I go the more I find myself justified in the undertaking; and in due time, if I live, shall assuredly publish. In the whole I shall have composed about forty thousand verses, about which forty thousand verses I shall have taken great pains, on no occasion suffering a slovenly line to escape me. I leave you to guess, therefore, whether, such a labour once achieved, I shall not determine to turn it to some account, and to gain myself profit if I can, if not at least some credit for my reward."

In a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* (August, 1785) Cowper had criticized Pope's translation, and showed how greatly Homer had suffered "in the English representation that we have of him. Sometimes his sense is suppressed, sometimes other sense is obtruded upon him; rhyme gives the word, a miserable transformation ensues; instead of Homer in the graceful habit of his age and nation, we have Homer in a strait-waistcoat." "Upon many occasions," says Cowper, "Pope has given an interpretation of whole passages utterly beside their meaning." The letter was signed "Alethes."

Cowper thus defends his plan of publishing by subscription: "A subscription," he says (January 10, 1786), "is surely on every account the most eligible mode of publication. When I shall have emptied the purses of my friends and of their friends into my own, I am still free to levy contributions upon the world at large, and I shall then have a fund to defray the expenses of a new edition."

As on former occasions, Joseph Johnson was to be the publisher. "He wishes me," the poet tells Unwin (December 31, 1785), "to be a gainer by my labours—in his own words, 'to put something handsome into my pocket,' and recommends two large quartos for the whole. He would not, he says, by any means advise an extravagant price, and has fixed it at three guineas, the half, as usual, to be paid at the time of subscribing, the remainder on delivery. Five hundred names, he adds, at this price will put above a thousand pounds into my purse."

In order to obtain plenty of subscribers Cowper "gulped and swallowed," and wrote again to Thurlow and Colman. He was uncertain even whether or not to try Martin Madan, whom he had attacked in "Anti-Thelyphthora," but eventually decided not to. In respect to the two first, "I now," says Cowper, "bring them both to a fair test. They can both serve me most materially if so disposed." The result was that Colman wrote in reply "the most affectionate letter imaginable," and the name of Thurlow was ultimately placed on the subscription list.

In January (1786), having got to the end of the Iliad, Cowper now decided to translate the Odyssey also, and not only so, but to give notice of the same to the public. He says (February 18, 1786): "My reason for giving notice of an Odyssey as well as an Iliad was this: I feared that the public, being left to doubt whether I should ever translate the former, would be unwilling to treat with me for the latter, which they would be apt to consider as an odd volume, and unworthy to stand upon their shelves alone. It

is hardly probable, however, that I should begin the *Odyssey* for some months to come, being now closely engaged in the revisal of my translation of the *Iliad*, which I compare as I go most minutely with the original. One of the great defects of Pope's translation is that it is licentious. To publish, therefore, a translation now that should be at all chargeable with the same fault, that were not indeed as close and as faithful as possible, would be only *actum agere*, and had therefore better be left undone. Whatever be said of mine when it shall appear, it shall never be said that it is not faithful."

Though Cowper had reached the end of the *Iliad*, however, he had by no means finished it. "I told you," he says to Bagot, on May 20, 1786, "that I had almost finished the translation of the *Iliad*, and I verily thought so. But I was never more mistaken. By the time when I had reached the end of the poem the first book of my version was a twelvemonth old. When I came to consider it after having laid it by so long it did not satisfy me. I set myself to mend it, and I did so; but still it appeared to me improvable, and that nothing would so effectually secure that point as to give the whole book a new translation. With the exception of a very few lines I have so done, and was never in my life so convinced of the soundness of Horace's advice, to publish nothing in haste, so much advantage have I derived from doing that twice which I thought I had accomplished notably at once."

## 119. Fuseli and Maty.

Among those to whom Cowper made known what he was engaged upon was his old friend the General, who, no sooner than he had received the information, intimated his desire to see a specimen of the work. Cowper sent him the "Interview between Priam and Achilles." When the MS. came back, there was enclosed in the same cover some notes upon it by an unknown critic, who subsequently turned out to be Fuseli, the painter and art-critic. Both the General and Johnson strongly urged Cowper to submit the whole of his MS., bit by bit, to the same hand.

Henry Fuseli, or more properly Johann Heinrich Füssli, was born at Zurich in 1742. For eight years he had been studying in Italy, and had only just come to settle in England. Upon perusal of the criticisms Cowper discovered that the learning and ability of their author, whose name he did not yet know, had not at all been overrated, and willingly consented to submit to him the whole of his MS. Says Cowper: "He is in truth a very clever fellow, perfectly a stranger to me, and one who, I promise you, will not spare for severity of animadversion where he shall find occasion."

Writing in January (1786), Lady Hesketh mentioned that Dr. Maty of the British Museum, who had read the "Task," intended to review it, and that he had asked permission to allude to the newly-commenced translation of Homer. This incident gave Cowper pleasure, for, says he, "I have authentic intelligence

of his being a critical character, in all its forms, acute, sour, and blunt, and so incorruptible withal, and so unsusceptible of bias from undue motives, that, as my correspondent informs me, he would not praise his own mother did he not think she deserved it."

Lady Hesketh next expressed the desire that a book of the new Homer should be submitted to Maty's criticism, and Cowper, at all times willing to oblige his cousin, gave consent. With Fuseli, who at first teased sadly with his numerous criticisms, Cowper by and by got on admirably. The Swiss had scarcely his equal in "an accurate and familiar acquaintance with the original"; moreover, "foreigner as he is," says the poet, "he has an exquisite taste in English verse. The man is all fire, and an enthusiast in the highest degree on the subject of Homer, and has given me more than once a jog when I have been inclined to nap with my author.

"By his assistance I have improved many passages, supplied many oversights, and corrected many mistakes, such as will of course escape the most diligent and attentive labourer in such a work. I ought to add, because it affords the best assurance of his zeal and fidelity, that he does not toil for hire, nor will accept of any premium, but has entered on this business merely for his amusement."

But though Cowper got on so well with Fuseli, who, though "the most caustic of men," was greatly pleased with the translation, it was otherwise with Maty, who, on the contrary, declared against it. The animadversions of Maty gave the poet much pain, and put him into one of his most melancholy moods. "In

part," says Cowper, "they appeared to me unjust, and in part ill-natured, and yet, the man himself being an oracle in everybody's account, I apprehended that he had done me much mischief. Why he says that the translation is far from exact is best known to himself. For I know it to be as exact as is compatible with poetry; and prose translations of Homer are not wanted—the world has one already." This was on May the 8th (1786).

In an unpublished letter, dated March 13, 1793, Cowper comments on the affair as follows: "Maty was much offended that I refused to submit my copy to his revisal, and abused my specimen for it shamefully." As an antidote, however, to the venom of Maty came a most appreciative letter from Colman. On the whole, the translator of Terence admired Cowper's work exceedingly, and considered that it breathed the spirit and conveyed the manner of the original.

## 120. Preparations for the Arrival of Lady Hesketh.—Spring, 1786.

Early in February Lady Hesketh had delighted her cousin by promising to visit Olney in the ensuing summer. Delighted, however, but feebly expresses the state of his feelings—he was in the greatest ecstasies. "I shall see you again," he says; "I shall hear your voice; we shall take walks together; I will show you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse and its banks, everything that I have described. I anticipate

the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son all at once."

Two days after he writes: "We talk of nobody but you. What we will do with you when we get you, where you shall walk, where you shall sleep—in short, everything that bears the remotest relation to your well-being at Olney, occupies all our talking time which is all that I do not spend at Troy."

Lady Hesketh, however, would not consent to Orchard Side, consequently Cowper and Mrs. Unwin were requested to look out for apartments for her.

On February 19th Cowper hastened to say that the required apartments, "just such as we could wish," had been secured. "The house in which you will find them is within thirty yards of our own, and opposite to it. The whole affair is thus commodiously adjusted; and now I have nothing to do but to wish for June; and June, my cousin, was never so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand to say, and they will all rush into my mind together, till it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing."

For some reason or other, however, the house in question was after all not available, so Cowper and Mrs. Unwin had to go hunting again. At the end of March they imagined once more that they were suited, the proposed rooms being in the house of a lace-buyer, near the church, and on the 29th Cowper furnished his



cousin with full particulars. But this arrangement was no more capable of being carried out than the other, and Lady Hesketh suggested putting the visit off for a month. Cowper, however, would not hear of it. "My cousin," says he, "I will not wait till August, neither can Mrs. Unwin wait till August; I insist, and she entreats, that you come at the time appointed. . . . Difficulties will perhaps vanish at your appearance; fifty points may be adjusted when you are on the spot, not one of which can be touched without you. Of this be sure, that by some means or other you shall have a place at Olney." To work, accordingly, Cowper went again, and this time his good angel conducted him to the house of a Jack-of-all-trades, named Maurice Smith. The question was whether Mr. Smith knew anybody who would let lodgings, ready furnished, to a lady with three servants. "Maurice's wife calls out (she is a Quaker), 'Why dost thee not take the vicarage?'" The vicarage, be it observed, was now in part tenanted by a bachelor curate, Mr. Postlethwaite, who had succeeded Mr. Scott. Continued Cowper, "I replied, 'There is no furniture.' 'Pshaw!' quoth Maurice's wife; 'we will furnish it for thee, and at the lowest rate—from a bed to a platter, we will find all.' 'And what do you intend now?' said I to Mrs. Unwin. 'Why, now,' quoth she, 'I am going to the curate to hear what *he* says.' So away she goes, and in about twenty minutes returns.—'Well, now it is all settled. Lady Hesketh is to have all the vicarage, except two rooms, at the rate of ten guineas a year; and Maurice will furnish it for five guineas from June to November inclusive.' . . . Come, then," he concludes his letter,

“my beloved cousin, for I am determined that, whatsoever king shall reign, you shall be *Vicar* of Olney.”

Cowper's spirits had for months risen amazingly, owing in great measure to the renewal of his intercourse with his cousin, but the pleasure of looking forward to her arrival did him even more good, and, to use his own expression, “Mr. Blue-devil” had taken his departure. He buoyed himself up, moreover, with the hope that the primal cause of his dejection would some day be removed.

The poet thus describes the house that had been bespoken for his cousin :—

“It is a smart stone building, well sashed, by much too good for the living, but just what I would wish for you. It has, as you justly concluded from my premises, a garden, but rather calculated for use than ornament. It is square, and well walled, but has neither arbour nor alcove, nor other shade, except the shadow of the house. But we have two gardens, which are yours. Between your mansion and ours is interposed nothing but an orchard, into which a door, opening out of our garden, affords us the easiest communication imaginable, will save the round about by the town, and make both houses one. Your chamber-windows look over the river, and over the meadows, to a village called Emberton, and command the whole length of a long bridge, described by a certain poet, together with a view of the road at a distance.”

There was nothing to do now but calmly wait till June. But the coming event monopolized almost all his thoughts, and tinged both his conversation and letters. He tells Newton (April 1st) :—

“It has pleased God that I should, like Joseph, be put into a well, and, because there are no Midianites in the way to deliver me, therefore my friends are coming down into the well to see me.”

By the end of May he had begun to get impatient, and he told his cousin how he longed to show her his summer-house.

“I long to show you my workshop, and to see you sitting on the opposite side of my table. We shall be as close packed as two wax figures in an old-fashioned picture-frame. I am writing in it now. It is the place in which I fabricate all my verse in summer time. I rose an hour sooner than usual this morning that I might finish my sheet before breakfast, for I must write this day to the General. The grass under my windows is all bespangled with dew-drops, and the birds are singing in the apple-trees, among the blossoms. Never poet had a more commodious oratory in which to invoke his muse.”

Fearful lest, having arrived as far as Newport, Lady Hesketh, who brought her own horses and carriage, might take the wrong turn, Cowper resolved to draft into her service his gardener, Kitchener, whom for brevity he called Kitch.

“He is sober, and as trusty as the day. He has a smart blue coat, that, when I had worn it some years, I gave him, and he has now worn it some years himself. I shall set him on horseback, and order him to the ‘Swan’ at Newport, there to wait your arrival, and if you should not stop at that place, as perhaps you may not, immediately to throw himself into your suite, and to officiate as your guide. . . . The first man, therefore,

you shall see in a blue coat, with white buttons, in the famous town of Newport, cry, 'Kitch!' He will immediately answer, 'My Lady!' and from that moment you are sure not to be lost" (June 12, 1786).

### 121. How Cowper Looks at Fifty-four.

Cowper was now fifty-four years of age. On November 9, 1785, a few days before his birthday, he had given his cousin some account of his appearance. "As for me," he says, "I am a very smart youth of my years; I am not indeed grown grey so much as I am grown bald. No matter; there was more hair in the world than ever had the honour to belong to me. Accordingly, having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth, which being worn with a small bag, and a black ribbon about my neck, continues to me the charms of my youth, even on the verge of age." And he puts as a postscript: "That the view I give you of myself may be complete, I add the two following items: That I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat."

According to Hayley, who became acquainted with him a few years later, Cowper was of a middle stature, rather strong than delicate in the form of his limbs; the colour of his hair was of a light brown, that of his eyes a bluish grey, and his complexion was ruddy.

Being often wrapped in thought—though, unfor-

tunately, the thoughts that engaged him were often dark and despairing ones—Cowper, like some other men of letters, was occasionally inattentive to the ordinary concerns of life. He tells us (March 19 1784) that his silence and his absence of mind made him “sometimes as entertaining as if he had wit. They furnish an occasion for friendly and good-natured raillery; they raise a laugh, and I partake of it.”

There is a passage in one of Cowper’s letters written about this time (May 15, 1786), that brings out a feature in his character that we do not usually give him credit for. He says:—

“I am not ashamed to confess that, having commenced an author, I am most abundantly desirous to succeed as such. *I have (what perhaps you little suspect me of) in my nature an infinite share of ambition.* But with it I have, at the same time, as you well know, an equal share of diffidence. To this combination of opposite qualities it has been owing that, till lately, I stole through life without undertaking anything, yet always wishing to distinguish myself. At last I ventured, ventured too in the only path that, at so late a period, was yet open to me; and am determined, if God have not determined otherwise, to work my way, through the obscurity that has been so long my portion, into notice.”

As a companion to the foregoing account of Cowper, we have an excellent picture of Mrs. Unwin about the same time. Writing to her sister Theodora, shortly after her arrival in Olney, Lady Hesketh says (June, 1786):—

“She is very far from grave; on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little Puritanical words, which fall from her *de temps en temps*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety—great, indeed, must it have been, not to have been totally overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong, but she certainly seems to possess the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature, and, as I before said, has, in the most literal sense of those words, no will, or shadow of inclination, but what is *his*. My account of Mrs. Unwin may seem, perhaps, to you, on comparing my letters, contradictory; but when you consider that I began to write at the moment, and at the first moment that I saw her, you will not wonder. Her character develops itself by degrees; and though I might lead you to suppose her grave and melancholy, she is not so by any means. When she speaks upon grave subjects she does express herself with a Puritanical tone, and in Puritanical expressions, but on all other subjects she seems to have a great disposition to cheerfulness and mirth; and, indeed, had she not, she could not have gone through all she has. I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way. There is something truly affectionate and sincere in her manner. No one can

express more heartily than she does her joy to have me at Olney; and as this must be for his sake, it is an additional proof of her regard and esteem for him."

Both Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, as was the custom in those days, took snuff, Mrs. Unwin using a silver box, a present from Cowper, which had been purchased for him in London by a friend, but which had the drawback that in size and form it was "more fit for masculine than feminine use." Cowper himself was satisfied with what he terms "a leathern trunk." This was previous to November, 1785. On the 30th of that month Lady Hesketh, having sent Mrs. Unwin a snuff-box as a present, Cowper succeeded to the possession of the silver one.

## 122. The Famous Parlour.

The present appearing the most suitable place, I now purpose giving some account of the interior of the poet's house, and more particularly of the renowned parlour. The passage into which the front door now opens, and the small narrow room on the right as you enter, were formerly one, and formed Cowper's hall, the contents of which the poet himself, at the time he was looking forward to the arrival of his cousin, thus describes:—

"Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present. But he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see

him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author ; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made. But a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament ; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the farther end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long."

The parlour made famous by Cowper's poems is a room about thirteen feet square, and has two windows (still retaining their shutters) in front. It had formerly, besides the door opening into the hall, two other doors exactly opposite the windows, one opening on to a staircase, the other (now removed) belonging to a cupboard. The chimney is wainscoted, as are the walls for about a yard from the ground. Over the fireplace hung an etching of Lord Thurlow, which Cowper often contemplated, calling to mind the day when he was intimate with the original. "It is very like him," he tells Hill (January, 1783), "but he is disguised by his hat, which, though fashionable, is awkward ; by his great wig, the tie of which is hardly discernible in profile, and by his band and gown, which give him an appearance clumsily sacerdotal."

Cowper's chair, which figures in the accompanying engraving, is now in the possession of Mr. Henry Gough, of Redhill, and seated therein we may imagine the poet giving expression to his well-known lines in the Fourth Book of the "Task" :—





COWPER'S CHAIR.





COWPER'S POKER, OR RATHER "POKERETTE," GIVEN HIM BY SIR JOHN THROCKMORTON.



" 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 evening in."

The subsequent history of the "loud-hissing urn," above mentioned, is an affecting one, as appears by the letter of December 24, 1786, in which Cowper requests his cousin to buy a new tea-urn, "that which we have at present having never been handsome, and being now old and patched. A parson once, as he walked across the parlour, pushed it down with his belly, and it never perfectly recovered itself." The particular tea in that particular urn was bohea. Green tea Cowper never touched, "or only to be poisoned with it."

Previous to the arrival of his desk Cowper used to do his writing upon a "book of maps," which was placed on a "card-table." "You will wonder, no doubt," he says to Newton (March 19, 1785), "when I tell you that I write upon a card-table; and will be still more surprised when I add that we breakfast, dine, sup, upon a card-table. In short, it serves all purposes, except the only one for which it was originally designed. The solution of this mystery shall follow, lest it should run in your head at a wrong time, and should puzzle you perhaps when you are on the point of ascending your pulpit: for I have heard you say that at such seasons your mind is often troubled with impertinent intrusions. The round table which we formerly had in use was unequal to the pressure of my superincumbent breast and elbows. When I wrote upon it, it creaked and tilted, and by a variety of inconvenient

tricks disturbed the process. The fly-table was too slight and too small; the square dining-table too heavy and too large, occupying, when its leaves were spread, almost the whole parlour; and the sideboard-table, having its station at too great a distance from the fire, and not being easily shifted out of its place and into it again, by reason of its size, was equally unfit for my purpose. The card-table, therefore, which had for sixteen years been banished as mere lumber; the card-table, which is covered with green baize, and is therefore preferable to any other that has a slippery surface; the card-table, that stands firm and never totters—is advanced to the honour of assisting me upon my scribbling occasions, and, because we choose to avoid the trouble of making frequent changes in the position of our household furniture, proves equally serviceable upon all others. It has cost us now and then the downfall of a glass: for, when covered with a table-cloth, the fish-ponds are not easily discerned, and, not being seen, are sometimes as little thought of. But, having numerous good qualities which abundantly compensate that single inconvenience, we spill upon it our coffee, our wine, and our ale, without murmuring, and resolve that it shall be our table still to the exclusion of all others. Not to be tedious, I will add but one more circumstance upon the subject, and that only because it will impress upon you, as much as anything that I have said, a sense of the value we set upon its escorial capacity. Parched and penetrated on one side by the heat of the fire, it has opened into a large fissure, which pervades not the moulding of it only, but the very substance of the plank. At the mouth of this aperture a sharp

splinter presents itself, which, as sure as it comes in contact with a gown or an apron, tears it. It happens, unfortunately, to be on that side of this excellent and never-to-be-forgotten table which Mrs. Unwin sweeps with her apparel, almost as often as she rises from her chair. The consequences need not, to use the fashionable phrase, be given in detail : but the needle sets all to rights ; and the card-table still holds possession of its functions without a rival."

At his card-table Cowper would sit, paper, pounce-box, and penknife before him, the two last in frequent requisition if he should chance to be penning an epistle to a stranger or a person of dignity—the result being a stiff and uninteresting composition. Writing to a friend, however, not only does his pen fly with the rapidity of lightning, but he makes very few either erasures or corrections, and with what happy result, everybody knows.

Such is a brief account of the parlour at Orchard Side and its contents. In this room Cowper read aloud of an evening while the ladies plied their crochet-hook or knitting-needles ; here he wrote both letters and poetry ; in this room his hares gambolled, his linnets twittered, and his dog Mungo defied the thunder and lightning. Here, when there was no other means of getting exercise, he and Mrs. Unwin played battledoor and shuttlecock while Lady Austen fingered the harpsichord ; here he was told the story of John Gilpin ; in this room he read the ballad at the breakfast table. Here occurred the amusing incident of the "kissing candidate." From these windows Cowper viewed so many of the scenes he so graphically describes in his letters

With this room, in short, are associated a thousand and one incidents familiar to readers of Cowper.

123. The Arrival of Lady Hesketh at Olney.—June, 1786.

At length the long-wished-for day arrived, and with a welcome from the steeple Lady Hesketh made her entrance into Olney. Says Cowper : "I am fond of the sound of bells, but was never more pleased with those of Olney than when they rang her into her new habitation. It is a compliment that our performers upon those instruments have never paid to any other personage (Lord Dartmouth excepted) since we knew the town. In short, she is, as she ever was, my pride and my joy, and I am delighted with everything that means to do her honour. Her first appearance was too much for me ; my spirits, instead of being gently raised, as I had inadvertently supposed they would be, broke down with me under the pressure of too much joy, and left me flat, or rather melancholy, throughout the day, to a degree that was mortifying to myself and alarming to her. But I have made amends for this failure since, and in point of cheerfulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for many years."

The long-talked-of event, was in short, a *fait accompli*. After an interval of twenty-three years the cousins had again met. Lady Hesketh and her suite, to wit, "Mrs. Eaton, Cooke, and Samuel," were installed in the vicarage. Her ladyship was able to gaze on



the "fine passion-tree in a green tub" which the poet had so long destined "to her parlour chimney," and every morning when she opened her eyes they alighted "on Phaëton kneeling to Apollo, and imploring his father to grant him the conduct of his chariot"—the subject of the furniture of the "superb" bed which had been procured for her use by Maurice Smith.

As Lady Hesketh was furnished with a carriage and horses, it was no longer necessary for Cowper to take air and exercise on foot. He was able, even, to ride as far as Gayhurst and see his friends, the Wrightes; northwards he pressed as far as "Bozeat Turnpike," and more than once he visited his friend Bull at Newport Pagnell.

Writing to her sister Theodora about this time, Lady Hesketh gives a most pleasant picture of herself, the poet, and Mrs. Unwin, in one of the rooms which she occupied at the vicarage. "It proving a wet evening," she says, "we had no temptation to walk, but continued sitting comfortably round one dining-table without stirring till after supper. Our friend delights in a large table and a large chair; there are two of the latter comforts in my parlour. I am sorry to say that he and I always spread ourselves out in them, leaving poor Mrs. Unwin to find all the comfort she can in a small one, half as high again as ours, and considerably harder than marble. However, she protests it is what she likes, that she prefers a high chair to a low one, and a hard to a soft one; and I hope she is sincere; indeed, I am persuaded she is. Her constant employment is knitting stockings, which she does with the finest needles I ever saw, and very nice they

are (the stockings I mean). Our cousin has not for many years worn any other than those of her manufacture. She knits silk, cotton, and worsted. She sits knitting on one side of the table in her spectacles, and he on the other reading to her (when he is not employed in writing) in *his*. In winter, his morning studies are always carried on in a room by himself; but as his evenings are spent in the winter in transcribing, he usually, I find, does this *vis-à-vis* Mrs. Unwin." Lady Hesketh then goes on to speak of the summer-house—his *boudoir*. "This is in the garden; it has a door and a window; just holds a small table with a desk and two chairs; but though there are two chairs, and two persons *might* be contained therein, it would be with a degree of difficulty, for this cause—as I make a point of not disturbing a poet in his retreat, I go not there." Lady Hesketh's visit, in short, did Cowper a world of good. She was a cheerful, kind-hearted, and sensible woman. She delighted in a bit of humour or a droll story as much as Cowper himself, and had the satisfaction of making him laugh very many times, "and particularly when she related Mr. Jekyll's story of the Gloucestershire attorneys"—whatever that may have been. In respect to his religious views, she naturally was convinced that it was impossible that a person of his innocence and purity of character should be singled out by the Almighty as an object of His especial aversion. She did not believe that he was in a state of sin beyond redemption, and she told him so. Her conversation, moreover, so far influenced him, that one day he recommenced the practice of saying grace at dinner.

124. "The Unwarrantable Interference of  
Newton."

Now occurred what some writers have been pleased to style "the unwarrantable interference of Newton." The people of Olney were of old very much addicted to gossiping—a complaint which, strange as it may appear, was not confined to the softer sex. Cowper even puts it stronger, and says that he never knew a lie hatched at Olney that waited long for a bearer. The Olney people saw the erstwhile retiring Cowper step into the carriage of Lady Hesketh, they heard of him among the Throckmortons at Weston, they knew he was visited by the Wrightes, the Chesters, and other people of position and fashion; whereupon, with that insight which was so conspicuous a feature in their character, they arrived at the conclusion that the once guileless and gentle poet was a confirmed pleasure-seeker, if not an out-and-out debauchee. Every time Lady Hesketh's carriage rolled away with him it took him to some scene of dissipation! And they not only thought so and said so in Olney, but one of them when visiting in London, took the trouble to pour the dreadful tidings into the ear of Newton, who, shocked at what he heard, then and there wrote a letter of remonstrance to his old friend—a letter which would not have been at all out of place had it been couched in more appropriate language. As it was it very much hurt the feelings both of Mrs. Unwin and Cowper, for they felt that it was extremely unkind of Mr. Newton not to have made proper inquiry. In reference to this

letter Cowper tells Unwin (September 24, 1786): "The purport of it is a direct accusation of me, and of her an accusation implied, that we have both deviated into forbidden paths, and lead a life unbecoming the Gospel," and further on the poet expresses his wonder that Newton should have listened to a tale-bearer with so much credulity. "If he had heard only the truth, or had believed no more than the truth, he would not, I think, have found either me censurable or your mother."

On September 30, 1786, Cowper wrote Newton a reply. After some strictures on the wagging tongues of Olney he observes: "We visit, indeed, at Mr. Throckmorton's, and at Gayhurst; rarely, however, at Gayhurst, on account of the greater distance: more frequently, though not very frequently, at Weston, both because it is nearer, and because our business in the house that is making ready for us often calls us that way. The rest of our journeys are to Bozeat turnpike and back again; or perhaps to the cabinet-maker's at Newport. As Othello says:—

'The very head and front of my offending  
Hath this extent, no more.'

What good we can get or can do in these visits is another question, which they, I am sure, are not at all qualified to solve. Of this we are both sure, that under the guidance of Providence we have formed these connections; that we should have hurt the Christian cause, rather than have served it, by a prudish abstinence from them; and that St. Paul himself, conducted to them as

we have been, would have found it expedient to have done as we have done."

Another report that the Olney people set rolling was that Cowper had turned Papist. As aforesaid, however, the breach between the two friends did not long continue. All the facts of the case at length reached Newton's ears, and we may be sure that he was as rejoiced to learn that the report was untrue as he had before been grieved to hear it. The Evangelical Dr. Johnson, as Newton has been styled, was sometimes hasty and rough in his manner, but his intentions were always good, his heart was always warm. Cowper, on his part, only too readily forgave and forgot, and the "duetto" at Weston, and the "trio" in Colman's buildings, very soon found themselves on the same amicable terms as before.

### 125. Cowper Removes to Weston.

One evening in May Cowper had learnt that a commodious house at Weston belonging to the Throckmortons was empty, and he mentioned to Lady Hesketh what a capital abode it would make for her. "The environs are most beautiful, and the village itself one of the prettiest I ever saw. Add to this, you would step immediately into Mr. Throckmorton's pleasure-ground, where you would not soil your slipper even in winter."

When Lady Hesketh got to Olney she asked the poet how he would like to live in this charmingly situated house himself. The idea was an excellent one, for, besides being in a beautiful neighbourhood, he

would be placed almost within stone's throw of his accomplished friends. It did not take long to bring about a decision, and Cowper thus communicates the news to Unwin (July 3rd) :—

“ And now I shall communicate news that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the front of our abode you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison, and you sighed at the thought that your mother lived in it. Your view of it was not only just, but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purposes of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a jail-delivery is at hand. The bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr. Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the treaty. I have my cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us, and the house is large enough to take us and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will, I hope, prove advantageous both to your mother and me in all respects. Here we have no neighbourhood, there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy-smelling fumes of the marsh miasma ; there we shall breathe

in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure-grounds in which we can always ramble, and shall not wade through almost impassable dirt to get at them. Both your mother's constitution and mine have suffered materially by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a more wholesome residence. So far is well, the rest is left to Heaven."

He tells Mr. Bagot: "After having lived twenty years at Olney, we are on the point of leaving it, but shall not migrate far. We have taken a house in the village of Weston. Lady Hesketh is our good angel, by whose aid we are enabled to pass into a better air and a more walkable country. The imprisonment that we have suffered here, for so many winters, has hurt us both. That we may suffer it no longer she stoops to Olney, lifts us from our swamp, and sets us down on the elevated grounds of Weston Underwood."

Writing to Newton, however, he is still more severe on the place he was just leaving: "A fever of the slow and spirit-oppressing kind seems to belong to all, except the natives, who have dwelt in Olney many years; and the natives have putrid fevers. Both they and we, I believe, are immediately indebted for our respective maladies to an atmosphere encumbered with raw vapours issuing from flooded meadows; and we, in particular, perhaps, have fared the worse for sitting so often, and sometimes for months, over a cellar filled with water. These ills we shall escape in the uplands, and, as we may reasonably hope, of course, their con-

sequences. But, as for happiness, he that has once had communion with his Maker must be more frantic than ever I was yet if he can dream of finding it at a distance from Him. I no more expect happiness at Weston than here, or than I should expect it in company with felons and outlaws in the hold of a ballast-lighter. Animal spirits, however, have their value, and are especially desirable to him who is condemned to carry a burthen, which at any rate will tire him, but which, without their aid, cannot fail to crush him."

What Cowper says about the atmosphere, raw vapours, &c., was all imaginary. It was the wretched sanitary condition of the town that caused the "putrid fevers," and not a miasma. To mention only one thing. Among the presentments of the "Jury and Homage" of the Olney "Court-Leet," by far the most common, even so recently as forty or fifty years ago, was to direct that various offenders should remove heaps of refuse which they had placed in the public highway. I do not know how it used to be in other towns, but at Olney the people were in this respect almost incorrigible. All that sort of thing, however, is passing, or has passed away, and with improved sanitary arrangements the town is one of the healthiest in the kingdom.

In respect to the Throckmortons, Lady Hesketh, writing to her sister Theodora about this time, says: "I wish he could, with ease to himself, see as much of them as possible; for I am sure a little variety of company, and a little cheerful society, is necessary to him. Mrs. Unwin seems quite to think so, and expresses the greatest satisfaction that he has within the last year consented to mix a little more with human creatures.



As to her, she does seem, in *real truth*, to have no will left on earth but for his good, and literally no will but *his*. How she has supported herself as she has done, the constant attendance, day and night, which she has gone through for the last thirteen years, is to me, I confess, incredible! And, in justice to her, I must say she does it all with an ease that relieves you from any idea of its being in a state of sufferance. She speaks of him in the highest terms, and, by her astonishing management, he is never mentioned in Olney but with the highest respect and veneration."

But Lady Hesketh did more for Cowper than translate him from Olney to Weston. She "obtained additional subscriptions from his relations : of £20, and afterwards £40, a year from Lord Cowper, and £10 from W. Cowper, of Hertingfordbury (probably the son of Major Cowper), besides adding £20 herself" (Add MS. 24155, f. 123, British Museum).

## 126. The Old House at Olney

On December 16, 1786, Cowper describes to Newton a visit he made to the house at Olney he had recently quitted. "Never," he says, "did I see so forlorn and woeful a spectacle. Deserted of its inhabitants, it seemed as if it could never be dwelt in for ever. The coldness of it, the dreariness, and the dirt made me think it no unapt resemblance of a soul that God has forsaken. While He dwelt in it, and manifested Himself there, He could create His own accommodations, and give it occasionally the appearance of a palace ; but

the moment He withdraws, and takes with Him all the furniture and embellishment of His graces, it becomes what it was before He entered it—the habitation of vermin, and the image of desolation. Sometimes I envy the living, but not much, or not long; for, while they live, as we call it, they too are liable to desertion. But the dead who have died in the Lord I envy always; for they, I take it for granted, can be no more forsaken.

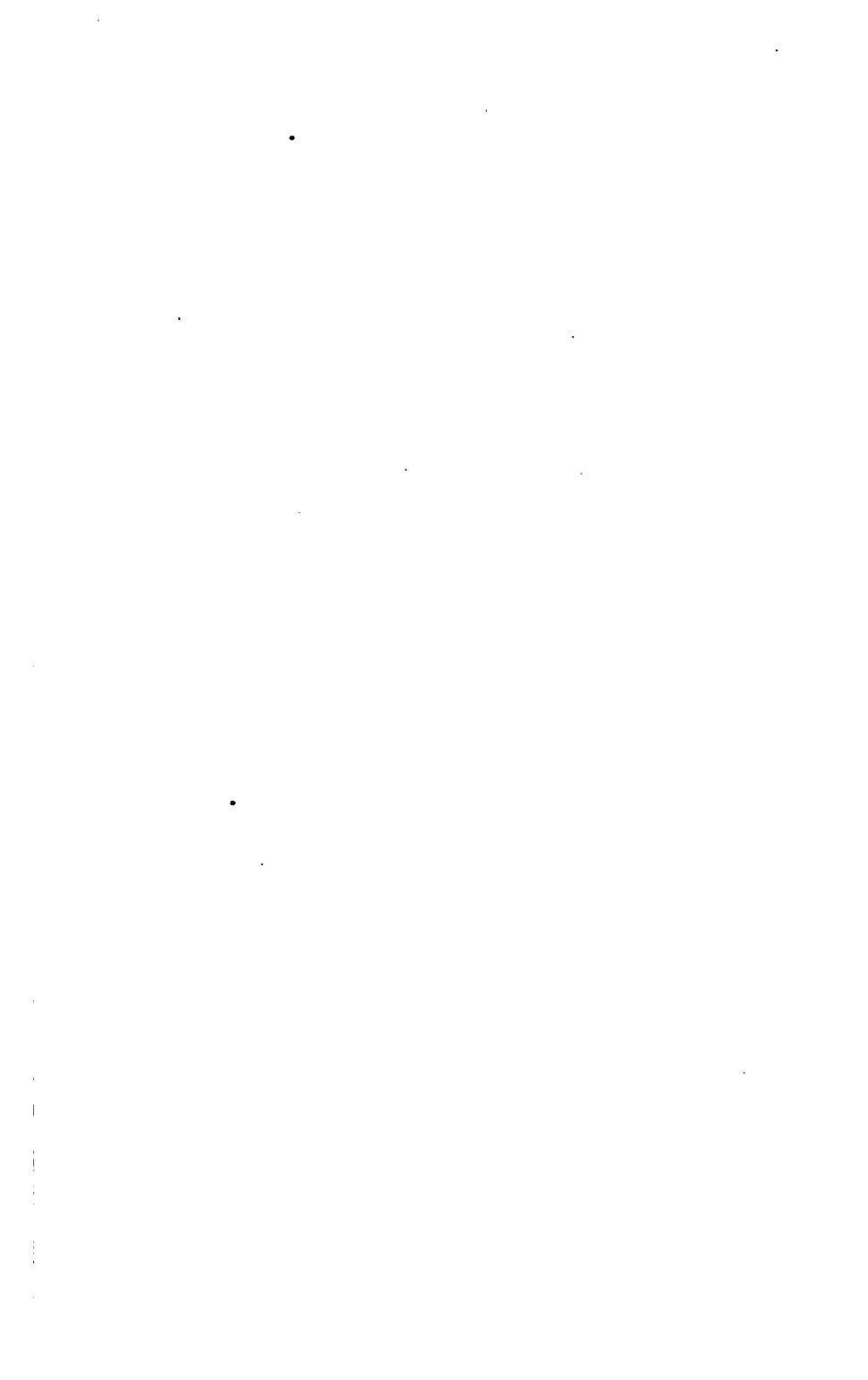
“This Babylon, however, that we have left behind us, ruinous as it is, the ceilings cracked and the walls crumbling, still finds some who covet it. A shoemaker and an alemonger have proposed themselves as joint candidates to succeed us. Some small difference between them and the landlord, on the subject of rent, has hitherto kept them out, but at last they will probably agree. In the meantime Mr. Raban prophesies its fall, and tells them that they will occupy it at the hazard of their lives unless it be well propped before they enter it. We have not, therefore, left it much too soon, and this we knew before we migrated, though the same prophet would never speak out so long as only our heads were in danger.”

In another letter he writes: “The carpenter in the meantime has assured Mr. Smith, the landlord, that unless it be well propped, and speedily, it will infallibly fall. Thank you, my dear, for saving our poor noddles from such imminent danger.”

The Mr. Smith referred to as the owner of Cowper's house was the Rev. George Smith, of Market Street, the Bedfordshire village at which Cowper went to school. Cowper's house now (1892) belongs to Mr. W. H. Collingridge, of the City Press, London.

Cowper writes to Newton (November 17, 1786) :—  
“ I could not help giving a last look to my old prison and its precincts ; and, though I cannot easily account for it, having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heart-ache when I took my last leave of a scene that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu to a place in which God had so often found me. The human mind is a great mystery ; mine, at least, appeared to me to be such upon this occasion. I found that I not only had a tenderness for that ruinous abode, because it had once known me happy in the presence of God ; but that even the distress I had suffered for so long a time, on account of His absence, had endeared it to me as much. I was weary of every object, had long wished for a change, yet could not take leave without a pang at parting.”

Indeed, spite of all he said against it, Orchard Side had served Cowper a good turn. To look at, it was, we admit, a cheerless, prison-like edifice. Cowper, however, need not have been under any fear lest it should collapse while he was in it, for, as before observed, it is still standing, and in all probability will continue to stand for many a day.



BOOK III.

CHAPTER XVI.

*THE "COULEUR DE ROSE;" OR, FROM  
COWPER'S ARRIVAL IN WESTON TO  
THE INTRODUCTION OF MRS. KING.*

(November, 1786–February, 1788.)

127. *Weston Lodge.*

**W**ESTON LODGE, the large and comfortable house to which Cowper had now moved, was to be his residence for nearly ten years. In a letter to Mrs. Hill he speaks of some of the advantages of his situation: "The opposite object," to the Lodge, "and the only one, is an orchard, so well planted, and with trees of such growth, that we seem to look into a wood, or rather to be surrounded by one. Thus, placed as we are in the midst of a village, we have none of those disagreeables that belong to such a position, and the village itself is one of the prettiest I know; terminated at one end by the church tower, seen through the trees, and at the other by a very handsome gateway, opening into a fine grove of elms, belonging to our neighbour Courtenay."

Another letter (to Lady Hesketh, November 26,

1786) describes the house itself: "You well know that the best house has a desolate appearance unfurnished. This house, accordingly, since it has been occupied by us and our *meubles*, is as much superior to what it was when you saw it, as you can imagine. The parlour is even elegant. When I say that the parlour is elegant, I do not mean to insinuate that the study is not so. It is neat, warm, and silent, and a much better study than I deserve, if I do not produce in it an incomparable translation of Homer. I think every day of those lines of Milton, and congratulate myself on having obtained, before I am quite superannuated, what he seems not to have hoped for sooner :

' And may at length my weary age  
Find out the peaceful hermitage !'

For if it is not a hermitage, at least it is a much better thing ; and you must always understand, my dear, that when poets talk of cottages, hermitages, and such-like things, they mean a house with six sashes in front, two comfortable parlours, a smart staircase, and three bed-chambers of convenient dimensions ; in short, such a house as this."

At Olney Cowper had lived the life of a recluse. At Weston, on the contrary, he was visited by all around him, and he describes his study—the room on the right as you enter—as exposed to all manner of inroads. Here, in one of the cambric muslin caps made for him by Lady Hesketh, and seated at the desk which had been given him by Anonymous, he might generally be found, and use made the new order of things familiar to him ; so familiar, indeed, that neither servants going and



WESTON LODGE.

10 YEARS THE RESIDENCE OF COWPER.





coming disconcerted him, nor even if a lady, with an oblique glance of her eye, caught two or three lines of his MS., did he feel himself inclined to blush, though naturally the shyest of mankind.

On the walls of his study hung among other things a couple of engravings from paintings by Vernet—one of Marseilles, the other of the Isle of Visida, Bay of Naples; also two French prints, both on Iliad subjects, in one of which Agamemnon was represented addressing Achilles exactly in the attitude of a dancing-master turning miss in a minuet.

128. **The Death of Unwin.**—November 29,  
1786.

Scarcely had Cowper and Mrs. Unwin got comfortably settled in their new abode before they received a great shock. Mr. Unwin had been travelling with Mr. Henry Thornton, when, on his return, he was seized with typhus fever at Winchester, and the news that he was dangerously ill was speedily followed by tidings of his death.

Unwin was a man of sincere piety, warm and constant affections, and singularly amiable manners, "one of those rare persons who are liked at first sight, and loved in proportion as they are known." His cheerfulness and ready wit would alone have made him an agreeable companion. The day after Cowper last saw him (in August, 1786), whilst he (the poet), Mrs. Unwin, and Lady Hesketh were seated quietly together, the last made the remark, "Now we want Mr. Unwin." Her

reason, Cowper observes, at least one of her reasons, for saying so being that they had spent near half an hour together without laughing—an interval of gravity that seldom occurred when Mr. Unwin was present.

But now, and so suddenly that neither, at first, could scarcely realize the fact, Mrs. Unwin was bereaved of her only and beloved son, and Cowper his endeared friend.

In December Cowper devoted some time to the melancholy employment of composing a Latin inscription for Mr. Unwin's tombstone. A relative of Mr. Unwin's having objected, however, to one of the expressions in it, this epitaph of Cowper's was not used, the following, in English, being put in its place. It is on the flat stone that covers his remains in Winchester Cathedral :—

IN MEMORY OF THE

REV. WILLIAM CAWTHORNE UNWIN, M.A.

RECTOR OF STOCK, IN ESSEX.

He was educated at the Charter-house, in London, under the Rev. Dr. Crusius ; and, having gone through the education of that school, he was at an early period admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge. He died in this city, the 29th of Nov. 1786, aged forty-one years, leaving a widow and three young children.

Mr. Bull writes in December : " Poor Mrs. Unwin and Mr. Cowper ! I rode over to smoke a pipe yesterday, and sympathize a little with them. They bore it better than I expected."

129. The "Ladies of the Inkbottle" and the good-natured Padre.

To his late friend Cowper had written (August 24, 1786): "Lady Hesketh transcribes for me at present. When she is gone, Mrs. Throckmorton takes up that business, and will be my lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter. She solicited herself that office." When neither Lady Hesketh nor Mrs. Throckmorton were at elbow, Mrs. Unwin tendered her services, chiefly, however, in respect to the minor poems, many of which are in her beautiful Italian hand.

But Cowper's most industrious helper was Dr. Gregson, Mr. Throckmorton's chaplain, styled more familiarly "Griggy," or "The Padre." On December 21, 1786, Cowper writes to Lady Hesketh: "I have already invited the good Padre in general terms, and he shall positively dine here next week, whether he will or not. I do not at all suspect that his kindness to Protestants has anything insidious in it, any more than I suspect that he transcribes Homer for me with a view for my conversion. He would find me a tough piece of business, I can tell him, for, when I had no religion at all, I had yet a terrible dread of the Pope. How much more now!"

Three days later the poet says: "The Padre is to dine with us on Thursday next. I am highly pleased with him, and intend to make all possible advances to a nearer acquaintance. Why he is so silent in company I know not. Perhaps he is reserved, like some other people; or perhaps he holds it unsuitable to his function to be forward in mixed conversation. Certain it is

that he has enough to say when he and I are together. He has transcribed the ninth book for me, and is now transcribing the twelfth, which Mrs. Throckmorton left unfinished." By May, 1788, Cowper and "Griggy" were as "great as two inkle-weavers," and Cowper explains the term by observing "that inkle-weavers contract intimacies with each other sooner than other people, on account of their juxtaposition in weaving of inkle. Hence it is that Mr. Gregson and I emulate those happy weavers in the closeness of our connection. We live near to each other, and while the Hall is empty are each other's only extraforaneous comfort."

### 130. "Johnny Higgins."

Another friend Cowper made at Weston was Mr. John Higgins, a young man of eighteen, and nephew to that Mr. Charles Higgins who received from Scott the yearly rent of a hamper of pears. In December, 1786, Cowper did not know Mr. John Higgins "even by sight." But hearing about this time that young Higgins was a great admirer of his poems, which he had studied to such an extent that he was able to repeat any of them by heart, Cowper invited his neighbour to a "dish of tea," and hence sprang up an intimacy productive of pleasure to both. Among his other accomplishments "Johnny Higgins," as Cowper now styled him, was very clever with his pencil; and as "some little return" for the ornament he gave to Cowper's study, Mrs. Unwin would sometimes indulge him with a sight of many of the poet's lesser efforts—

“spic and span.” On one occasion, having sent him a couple of “spic and span new pieces,” she observes that Mr. Higgins’s “drawing is framed and glazed, and the execution of it is much admired by all who have seen it.” Lady Hesketh, who had also been the recipient of Mr. Higgins’s favours, on one occasion (June, 1791), presented the young artist with a “perfectly elegant” waistcoat. “It is a miserable return for his beautiful drawings,” she observes to Cowper, “but he must consider it as the widow’s mite. . . . Pray tell him his performances are approved by everybody. People regret that he is born to affluence, since it threatens to deprive the world of such a genius.” It is owing to the pencil of Mr. Higgins that we possess pictures of Weston Hall. Just before its demolition in 1828 he made drawings of each of its four sides. In Turvey Abbey, to which Mr. Higgins removed on the death of his uncle Charles in 1793, may still be seen two relics of Cowper—namely, the poet’s silver shoe-buckles, and the chest of drawers in which “The Retired Cat” ensconced herself. Mr. Higgins likewise preserved several anecdotes of the poet, which the late Dean Burgeon (brother of the present Mrs. Higgins, of Turvey Abbey) has encrusted in his “Lives of Twelve Good Men.” The great charm of the social gatherings at Weston Hall was the table-talk, to which, of course, Cowper was ever the chief contributor. “We dined yesterday at the Hall” (he writes to Lady Hesketh) “and spent our four or five hours there very agreeably, as we always do, *except when the company is too large for conversation.*”<sup>1</sup> To quote Dean Burgeon: “It was

<sup>1</sup> The dinner-hour of those days was three o’clock.

not so much *what* Cowper said, as the way he said it—his *manner* of relating an ordinary incident—which charmed his auditory, or convulsed them with merriment. Moreover, they knew that something delightful was coming before it came. His eye would suddenly kindle, and all his face become lighted up with the fun of the story, before he opened his lips to speak. At last he began to relate some ludicrous incident—which although you had yourself witnessed it, you had failed to recognize as mirthful. A bull had frightened him, and caused him to clear a hedge with undue precipitancy. His 'shorts' became seriously lacerated; and the consternation with which their modest occupant had effected his retreat home—holding his garments together in order that his calamity might escape detection—was made extravagantly diverting."

This may have been the animal that forms the subject of one of Cowper's minor poems, "On a mischievous bull, which the owner of him sold at the author's instance." After expressing a trifle of pity for the creature whose fate it is to be exiled from the pleasant fields of Weston, the poet suddenly remembers that his late foe was conspicuously wanting in appreciation for nature, and breaks forth:—

" But thou canst taste no calm delight ;  
 Thy pleasure is to show  
 Thy magnanimity in fight,  
 Thy prowess,—therefore, go !

" I care not whether east or north,  
 So I no more may find thee ;  
 The angry muse thus sings thee forth,  
 And claps the gate behind thee."

Of another creature that spoilt the pleasure of his

walks Cowper himself makes mention in a letter to "Mrs. Frog." After telling her that the rabbit that infested the Wilderness and devoured her carnations had been shot, he says: "I myself have been in some danger of being devoured in like manner by a great dog—viz., Pearson's. But I wrote him a letter on Friday (I mean a letter to Pearson, not to the dog, which I mention to prevent mistakes) informing him that, unless he tied up his great mastiff in the daytime, I would send him a worse thing, commonly called and known by the name of an attorney. When I go forth to ramble in the fields I do not sally (like Don Quixote) with a purpose of encountering monsters, if any such can be found; but am a peaceable, poor gentleman, and a poet, who mean nobody any harm, the fox-hunters and the two universities of this land excepted."

To have recourse again to Dean Burgeon: "Once in the grey of the evening, whilst adjusting his shoe-buckle on the step of a stile, the village post-woman advanced towards him, and on reaching the stile, little dreaming who was behind it and what he was about, inadvertently planted the sole of her foot on the back of the poet's head. He, as little dreaming who was overhead, tossing up suddenly, seemed to himself to have caused the astonished female to make a kind of rotatory somersault in the air. The fun of such described adventures of course depended in part on your knowledge of the persons and of the localities discoursed of; but, above all, it resulted from the playful humour—call it rather *wit*—which was at all times prepared to construct out of the slenderest materials an amusing incident. So ready and so graceful, in fact, was the poet's fancy that

he knew how to make an amusing story out of *nothing*."

In Turvey Abbey is preserved a chair furnished with three wheels that had formerly belonged to the Throckmortons. In connection with it Mr. Higgins "used to describe the poet's comical distress at finding himself on a certain occasion (like his own 'John Gilpin') taking a longer journey than he intended. A merry party of young people, having first set open the doors of every passage-room in Weston Hall, persuaded Cowper to seat himself comfortably in the aforesaid chair; and then, paying no manner of attention to his urgent entreaties that they would stop, whirled him in triumph and in laughter up and down the whole length of the mansion."

The beautiful and well-known epitaphs, by Cowper, to the mother and father of Mr. John Higgins are in Weston Church.

### 131. Mr. Churchey and Samuel Rose.

Towards the end of 1786 a letter was received from a Mr. William Churchey, attorney-at-law, of Hay, Breconshire, who sent some verses with the request that Cowper would revise them, and who wanted advice whether to publish or not, inquiring—

"Say shall my little bark attendant sail,  
Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale?"

In reply, Cowper congratulated him on the possession of a poetical talent with which he might always amuse himself when fatigued with the weightier matters of



the law ; and, as to publication, recommended it to him by all means, as the principal incentive to exertion. "Publication," he said, "is necessary to give an edge to the poetical turn, and what we produce in the closet is never a vigorous birth if we intend that it should die there." But though Cowper answered this letter with courtesy and kindness, he hoped the Welshman would trouble him no more—a wish that was not fulfilled, for the attorney several times after crossed Cowper's path. But this letter was not the only inconvenience or embarrassment that resulted from the poet's fame. Odes were composed to his honour, though he was not always gratified with the sight of them. But he was at least "tickled with some *douceurs* of a very flattering nature by post." A lady unknown addressed him as the "best of men ;" an unknown gentleman, who had read his inimitable poems, invited him to his seat in Hampshire, and another *incognito* gave him hopes of a memorial in his garden. All these attentions, Cowper pretended, could have only one result. "If you find me a little vain hereafter," he tells Bagot, "you must excuse it, in consideration of these powerful incentives, especially the latter; for surely the poet who can charm an attorney, especially a Welsh one, must be at least an Orpheus, if not something greater."

On January 18, 1787, Cowper received his first visit from a young man, who afterwards became a very close friend, one who was to take the place of Unwin in his affections. When Lady Austen departed there had appeared Mr. Throckmorton, and what he lost in Unwin he was now to find in Rose.

Samuel Rose was the son of Dr. William Rose, a schoolmaster, of Chiswick, who was largely concerned in the *Monthly Review*. Cowper thus notices his future friend's first visit:—"A young gentleman called here yesterday, who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey to London from Glasgow, having just left the University there. He came, I suppose, partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of some of the Scotch professors for my two volumes. His name is Rose, an Englishman."

### 132. The Fourth Derangement.—January to June, 1787.

Again the month of January had come round. Every January since the disastrous month in 1773 had been looked forward to by Cowper with fear and trembling, and it was always with a feeling of great relief when the memorable 24th had been passed. More than once this trying period had well-nigh been too much for him; more than once, but for the efforts of his friends, and especially of Mrs. Unwin, he would have fallen into his old state of despondency. But the death of Mr. Unwin had cast a gloom over both, and this gloom, added to the influence of the season, proved more than could be combated. Even early in the month he had been troubled with a nervous fever. His letter of the 18th—the last he wrote before the attack—was a very ominous one. It was not a particularly melancholy letter, and apparently his fever was

not much worse, but the dreadful 24th was close at hand ; not far distant either was the still more dreadful black day of February, the day of the Fatal Dream ; and Lady Hesketh, to whom the letter was sent, must have felt uneasy when she found that her cousin had taken for his chief topic the subject of dreams. He says :—

“ I have a mind, my dear, as free from superstition as any man living, neither do I give heed to dreams in general as predictive, though particular dreams I believe to be so. . . . Some very sensible persons will acknowledge that in times of old God spoke by dreams, but affirm with much boldness that He has since ceased to do so. If you ask them why, they answer, because He has now revealed His will in the Scripture, and there is no longer any need that He should instruct or admonish us by dreams. I grant that with respect to doctrines and precepts He has left us in want of nothing, but has He thereby precluded Himself in any of the operations of His Providence? Surely not. It is perfectly a different consideration ; and the same need that there ever was of His interference in this way there is still, and ever must be, while man continues blind and fallible, and a creature beset with dangers, which he can neither foresee nor obviate. His operations, however, of this kind are, I allow, very rare ; and, as to the generality of dreams, they are made of such stuff, and are in themselves so insignificant, that, though I believe them all to be the manufacture of others, not our own, I account it not a farthing-matter who manufactures them.”

Cowper must have been seized with his derangement within a few days of the writing of this letter, and

most likely on the 24th itself. Of the details of the next six months—which time the malady lasted—only a few are given us. "My indisposition," wrote Cowper, in the following October, "could not be of a worse kind. Had I been afflicted with a fever, or confined by a broken bone, neither of these cases would have made it impossible that we should meet. I am truly sorry that the impediment was insurmountable while it lasted, for such in fact it was. The sight of any face, except Mrs. Unwin's, was to me an insupportable grievance ; and when it has happened that, by *forcing* himself into my hiding-place, some friend has found me out, he has had no great cause to exult in his success, as Mr. Bull can tell you."

Once Cowper tried to hang himself, and was saved only by Mrs. Unwin accidentally entering the room and cutting him down ; another time he was prevented from taking his life in an even more dreadful manner by the sudden entrance of Mr. Bull. Mrs. Newton made the offer to come to Mrs. Unwin's assistance, but Cowper's impatience at the presence of a third person rendered this impossible. For the same reason Newton himself deferred an intended visit to Olney. "From this dreadful condition of mind," says Cowper, "I emerged suddenly ; so suddenly, that Mrs. Unwin, having no notice of such a change herself, could give none to anybody ; and when it obtained, how long it might last, or how far it was to be depended on, was a matter of the greatest uncertainty."

Cowper used to speak of the previous derangement as "the dreadful seventy-three," and of this one as the "more dreadful eighty-six." Again and again

during this indisposition Mr. Bull had called, in the hope of being able to effect some good, but invariably Cowper refused to see him. At length, however, in the beginning of July, a meeting took place, and Lady Hesketh wrote on the 5th to Mr. Bull: "I am truly thankful that the ice is at last broken, and that he was prevailed upon to see you. I do sincerely hope that, having once experienced the comfort of your society, he will himself be desirous of renewing it whenever you can indulge him with it."

The last visitor Cowper had seen before his seizure had been Mr. Rose, and Mr. Rose was one of the first to visit him after his recovery. The first letter, too, which Cowper wrote was to his new friend, to thank him for his visit, and also for a copy of Burns's poems. This was on July 24th. Having read the poems, Cowper told Rose that he considered them "a very extraordinary production," but he added subsequently: "Poor Burns loses much of his deserved praise in this country through our ignorance of his language. I despair of meeting with any Englishman who will take the pains that I have taken to understand him. His candle is bright, but shut up in a dark lantern. I lent him to a very sensible neighbour of mine. But his uncouth dialect spoiled all; and, before he had half read him through, he was quite ramfeezled."

Though now fairly well again, it was some time before Cowper resumed his pen. He spent most of his time in reading books from the shelves of his friends the Throckmortons. He says, on September 4th (1787):—

"I have read Savary's Travels into Egypt; Me-

moires du Baron de Tott ; Fenn's Original Letters ; the Letters of Frederick of Bohemia, and am now reading Memoires d'Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise. I have also read Barclay's Argenis, a Latin romance, and the best romance that ever was written—all these, together with Madan's Letters to Priestley, and several pamphlets, within these two months. So I am a great reader."

On August 30th he writes : " My health and spirits seem to be mending daily. I use exercise, and take the air in the park and wilderness. I read much, but as yet write not. Our friends at the Hall make themselves more and more amiable in our account, by treating us rather as old friends than as friends newly acquired. There are few days in which we do not meet, and I am now almost as much at home in their house as in our own. Mr. Throckmorton, having long since put me in possession of all his ground, has now given me possession of his library. An acquisition of great value to me, who never have been able to live without books, since I first knew my letters, and who have no books of my own."

In the following letter to Newton Cowper deals with an extraordinary delusion that had long been present with him, but which had now left him. It is dated October 2, 1787 : " My dear Friend,—After a long but necessary interruption of our correspondence, I return to it again, in one respect at least better qualified for it than before ; I mean by a belief of your identity, which for thirteen years I did not believe. The acquisition of this light, if light it may be called which leaves me as much in the dark as ever on the

most interesting subjects, releases me, however, from the disagreeable suspicion that I am addressing myself to you as the friend whom I loved and valued so highly in my better days, while in fact you are not that friend, but a stranger. I can now write to you without seeming to act a part, and without having any need to charge myself with dissimulation; a charge from which, in that state of mind and under such an uncomfortable persuasion, I knew not how to exculpate myself, and which, as you will easily conceive, not seldom made my correspondence with you a burthen. Still, indeed, it wants, and is likely to want, that best ingredient which can alone make it truly pleasant either to myself or you—that spirituality which once enlivened all our intercourse. You will tell me, no doubt, that the knowledge I have gained is an earnest of more and more valuable information, and that the dispersion of the clouds, in part, promises, in due time, their complete dispersion. I should be happy to believe it; but the power to do so is at present far from me. Never was the mind of man benighted to the degree that mine has been.”

### 133. A Day at Chicheley.

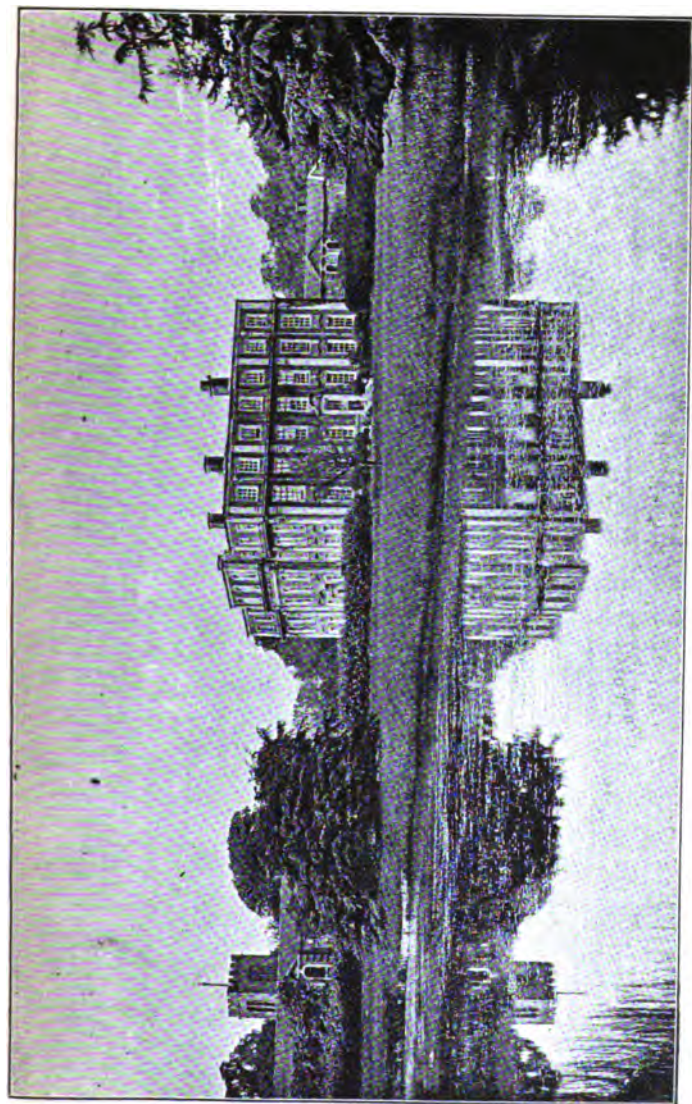
One Monday in November of 1787, “Mrs. Throck carried” Cowper and Mrs. Unwin in her chaise to Chicheley, and Cowper spent his morning there so agreeably that it caused him very sensible regret that there were five miles of a dirty country interposed between him and the Chesters. “Now,” said the poet

to Mrs. Chester, "I shall write boldly to your brother Walter, and will do it immediately. I have passed the gulf that parted us, and he will be glad to hear it."

"It seemed," he wrote to Lady Hesketh, "as if all the world was there to meet us, though in fact there was not above half of it, their own family, which is very numerous, excepted. The Bishop of Norwich was there, that is to say, the little Doctor Lewis Bagot, and his lady. She is handsome, and he in all respects what a bishop should be. Besides these, Mrs. Praed was there, and her sister, Miss Backwell. There might be many others, but if there were I overlooked them. 'Foresaid little Bishop and I had much talk about many things, but most about Homer. I have not room to particularize, and will therefore sum up the whole with observing, that both with respect to our ideas of the original, of Pope's translation, and of the sort of translation that is wanted, we were perfectly at an agreement. As to the house, it is handsome, so is the pleasure ground, and so are all the gardens, which are not less, I believe, than four in number. With respect to the family themselves, they are all amiable, and our visit was a very agreeable one."

Chicheley Hall, a handsome country house of red brick with stone dressings, was erected in 1715 by Sir John Chester, near the site of a former mansion, built by Anthony Cave (whose effigy in brass and large monumental altar-tomb may be seen in Chicheley Church) about 1550. One of the rooms on the second floor is wainscoted with oak panelling of a date antecedent to the rest of the house, and over the fireplace is a beam, on which is the following inscrip-





CHICHELEY HALL.



tion :—"Cave ne Deum offendas, cave ne proximum lædas, cave ne tua negligentia familiam deseras, 1550." This wainscot doubtless formed part of Anthony Cave's mansion, and the date 1550 is probably that of its completion.

Among the treasures of Chicheley Hall is a manuscript entitled "The King's Answer to the Divines' Prayer concerning Religion"—probably an original composition of Charles I.

134. The Mortuary Verses.—November,  
1787.

On November 27 (1787) Cowper gives us the origin of his series of mortuary verses.

"On Monday morning last Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and, being desired to sit, spoke as follows : 'Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All Saints, in Northampton ; brother o Mr. Cox, the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You will do me a great favour, sir, if you would furnish me with one.' To this I replied, 'Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town, why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox the statuary, who, everybody knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose.' 'Alas ! sir, I have

heretofore borrowed help from him ; but he is a gentleman of so much reading that the people of our town cannot understand him.' I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, ' Perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too, for the same reason.' But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my Muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress, which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The waggon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton, loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals ! I have written *one* that serves *two hundred* persons."

One of the stanzas of this poem is often quoted, that commencing—

"Like crowded forest-trees we stand,  
And some are marked to fall."

The clerk of All Saints, as soon as he had obtained the favour, took care to let it be widely known both at Northampton and Olney who had written the verses. Moreover he sent a bundle of them to Maurice Smith, the Olney Jack-of-all-trades, " who sold them for three-pence a piece—a high price for a ' Memento Mori,' a commodity not generally in great request."

Cowper wrote stanzas "On a similar occasion" for the years 1788, 1789, and 1790. The original MS. of the Dirge of 1789 is in the Northampton Museum. There were no verses for 1791, the old clerk having

died, and Cowper hoped that this would put him out of office ; but in November of the following year " the successor of the clerk defunct " made a journey to Weston and begged a continuance of the favour, which the poet kindly granted. So verses were also written for the years 1792 and 1793.

135. Mr. Clotworthy Rowley.—February,  
1788.

In December (1787) Cowper had the pleasure of hearing from his old Templar friend, Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, who was now living at Dublin. Having read Cowper's poems, Mr. Rowley had felt his friendship for the poet revived, and wrote accordingly. He likewise sent half a dozen books which Cowper had lent him twenty-five years previously, apologizing for having kept them so long, and explaining that they had been sent to Dublin by mistake. Cowper, who regarded Rowley as " one of the most benevolent and friendly creatures in the world," replied with the utmost cordiality, and gave an account of his history since their parting. He likewise told him that he was translating Homer. Hearing what work Cowper had got " on the anvil," Mr. Rowley made himself busy in procuring subscribers for it, and the correspondence between the two old friends thus resumed was continued as long as the poet lived at Weston. Says Cowper : " I have now, therefore, a correspondent in Ireland, another in Scotland, and a third in Wales." To wit, Rowley, Rose, and Churchey. " All this would be very

diverting, had I a little more time to spare to them." But as he elsewhere says—

"It is a maxim of much weight,  
Worth conning o'er and o'er,  
He who has Homer to translate  
Had need of nothing more."

### 136. The "Frogs."

The uninterrupted kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Throckmorton, or, as he not infrequently styled them, "the Throcks," or "Mr. and Mrs. Frog," still continued to constitute one of the greatest pleasures of Cowper's existence, and he thus speaks of a small return he made them for their numerous favours :—

"This morning, being the morning of New Year's Day, I sent to the Hall a copy of verses, addressed to Mrs. Throckmorton, entitled, 'The Wish, or the Poet's New Year's Gift.' We dine there to-morrow, when I suppose I shall hear news of them. Their kindness is so great, and they seize with such eagerness every opportunity of doing all they think will please us, that I held myself almost in duty bound to treat them with this stroke of my profession."

In this graceful little poem Cowper tells Mrs. Throckmorton that oft he has wished her good, "but never yet in rhyme." There would be no need to wish her fairer, more prudent, more sprightly, more ingenious, or even to wish her a greater amount of wedded love. What in particular to pray for her

he did not, indeed, know ; so he gets over the difficulty in this way :—

"None here is happy but in part ;  
 Full bliss is bliss divine ;  
 There dwells some wish in every heart,  
 And doubtless one in thine.

That wish, on some fair future day,  
 Which fate shall brightly gild  
 ('Tis blameless, be it what it may),  
 I wish it all fulfill'd."

During the next year or two several other poems owed their existence to incidents connected with Mrs. Throckmorton. Notably the lines on the death of her bullfinch (September, 1788), and those "On her Beautiful Transcript of Horace's Ode 'Ad librum suum,'" which ode, and another, by the by, pretended to have been discovered in 1788, turned out to be forgeries. They were said to have been discovered in the Palatine Library, and communicated by Gasper Pallavicini, the sub-librarian. Into the company of Mrs. Throckmorton, indeed, he and Mrs. Unwin were very much thrown, and they found her at all times agreeable, whether they drank tea with her in the spacious and sombre parlour at the Hall, whether she took three o'clock dinner with Cowper and Mrs. Unwin at the Lodge, as sometimes she was prevailed upon to do, or whether she walked with them in the early morning to gather mushrooms. In wet weather it was Mrs. Unwin's custom to make the journey between her house and the Hall in pattens or clogs.

As regards the conversation, both religion and politics were excluded, consequently, notwithstanding

the difference of Cowper's views from those of his friends, they were perfectly at peace. Not but what Mrs. Frog, when opportunity offered, would give a sly poke at the poet. For example, she one day told him, "with a significant sort of a look," that she was going to town "on purpose to be present at the ball at Brooks's." "I answered," says Cowper, "'It is indifferent to me on what account you go, if you do but take care of yourself while you are gone, and return in good health to Weston.' Thus, and by such management as this, I contrive to avoid all party disputation—a moderate course, which I think myself the more at liberty to pursue, because my political principles are upon record having long since been printed."

In all probability, too, the joke at Cowper's expense, in reference to Mr. Canniford, the curate, owed its origin to the playfulness of Mrs. Throck.

Mr. Canniford had, early in 1788, undertaken the joint curacies of Ravenstone and Weston Underwood, rendered vacant by the departure of a lame curate, named Mr. Bull (no kin to Cowper's "Taureau"). At Olney, where Mr. Canniford had preached once, "he was hailed as the Sun by the Greenlanders after half a year of lamp-light." A few days after his arrival at Weston circumstances led him into Cowper's company. "The moment he entered the room," says Cowper (February 7, 1788), "I felt myself incurably prejudiced against him: his features, his figure, his address, and all that he uttered, confirmed that prejudice, and I determined, having once seen him, to see him no more. Two days after he overtook me in the village. 'Your humble servant, Mr Cowper! A fine morning, sir, for



a walk. I had liked to have called on you yesterday morning to tell you that I had become your near neighbour. I live at Mr. Socket's.' I answered, without looking at him, as dryly as possible, 'Are you come to stay any time in the country?' He believed he was. 'Which way,' I replied, 'are you going? to Olney?' 'Yes.' 'I am going to Mr. Throckmorton's garden, and I wish you good day, sir.' I was in fact going to Olney myself, but this rencontre gave me such a violent twist another way that I found it impossible to recover that direction, and accordingly there we parted. All this I related at the Hall the next time we dined there, describing also my apprehensions and distress lest, whether I would or not, I should be obliged to have intercourse with a man to me so perfectly disagreeable. A good deal of laugh and merriment ensued, and there for that time it ended. The following Sunday, in the evening, I received a note to this purport: 'Mr. Canniford's compliments,' &c. Understanding that my friends at the Hall were to dine with me the next day, he took the liberty to invite himself to eat a bit of mutton with me, being sure that I should be happy to introduce 'him. Having read this note, I threw it to Mrs. Unwin. 'There,' said I, 'take that and read it; then tell me if it be not an effort of impudence the most extraordinary you ever heard of.' I expected some such push from the man; I knew he was equal to it. She read it, and we were both of a mind. I sat down to my desk, and with a good deal of emotion gave it just such an answer as it would have deserved had it been genuine. But having heard by accident in the morning that he spells his name with a C, and observing

in the note that it was spelt with a K, a suspicion struck me that it was a fiction. I looked at it more attentively and perceived that it was directed by Mrs. Throck. The inside I found afterwards was written by her brother George. This served us with another laugh on the subject, and I have hardly seen, and never spoken to, Mr. Canniford since."

We have mentioned that Mr. Throckmorton allowed Cowper the run of his library, and gave him the key of his garden, but these were by no means the only privileges accorded. Cowper names one other in his letter of September 20, 1787: "Know also that when we found ourselves disposed to stew or to pot, we have an abundant supply of pigeons for those purposes from our neighbour's dove-cote, Mrs. Throck having given us the use of it at discretion."

Early in 1788 an accident occurred to Mrs. Unwin that might have proved serious. Says Cowper on the 21st of January:—"Providence interposed to preserve me from the heaviest affliction that I can now suffer, or I had lately lost Mrs. Unwin, and in a way the most shocking imaginable. Having kindled her fire in the room where she dresses (an office that she always performs for herself), she placed the candle on the hearth, and, kneeling, addressed herself to her devotions. A thought struck her, while thus occupied, that the candle being short might possibly catch her clothes. She pinched it out with the tongs, and set it on the table. In a few minutes the chamber was so filled with smoke, that her eyes watered, and it was hardly possible to see across it. Supposing that it proceeded from the chimney, she pushed the billets backward, and,

while she did so, casting her eye downward, perceived that her dress was on fire. In fact before she extinguished the candle the mischief that she apprehended was begun; and when she related the matter to me she showed me her clothes with a hole burnt in them as large as this sheet of paper. It is not possible, perhaps, that so tragical a death should overtake a person actually engaged in prayer, for her escape seems almost a miracle. Her presence of mind, by which she was enabled, without calling for help or waiting for it, to gather up her clothes and plunge them, burning as they were, in water, seems as wonderful a part of the occurrence as any."

### 137. The Drolleries of Cowper's Letters.

Cowper was often brimming with fun. Several of his letters are from beginning to end splendid specimens of sustained humour, and indeed in almost every letter, except when he was in his darkest moods, there are small drolleries of one kind or another.

One amusing habit of his was dropping into Hudibrastic rhyme in all sorts of unexpected places. For example, he commences one letter with—

" A noble theme demands a noble verse,  
In such I thank you for your fine oysters."

One of his letters to Newton is from

" Your humble me,  
W. C."

Another to the same gentleman winds up with—

" I nothing add but this—that *still I am*  
Your most affectionate and humble  
William."

The letter to Unwin of June 12, 1782, ends with—

" We send you a cheese,  
In hopes it will please :  
If so, your mother  
Will send you another."

The various commissions that Cowper charged his friends with are put just as oddly. To Unwin, March 21, 1784, he says :—" Your mother wishes you to buy for her ten yards and a half of yard-wide Irish, from two shillings to two shillings and sixpence per yard; and my head will be equally obliged to you for a hat, of which I enclose a string that gives you the circumference. The depth of the crown must be four inches and one-eighth. Let it not be a round slouch, which I abhor, but a smart, well-cocked, fashionable affair. A fashionable hat likewise for your mother; a black one if they are worn, otherwise chip."

He writes on December 19, 1781 :—

" Mrs. Unwin sends her love, and will be much obliged to Mrs. Newton if she will order her down a loaf of sugar, from nine pence to ten pence the pound, for the use of my sweet self at breakfast."

He says on March 14, 1782, to Newton :—

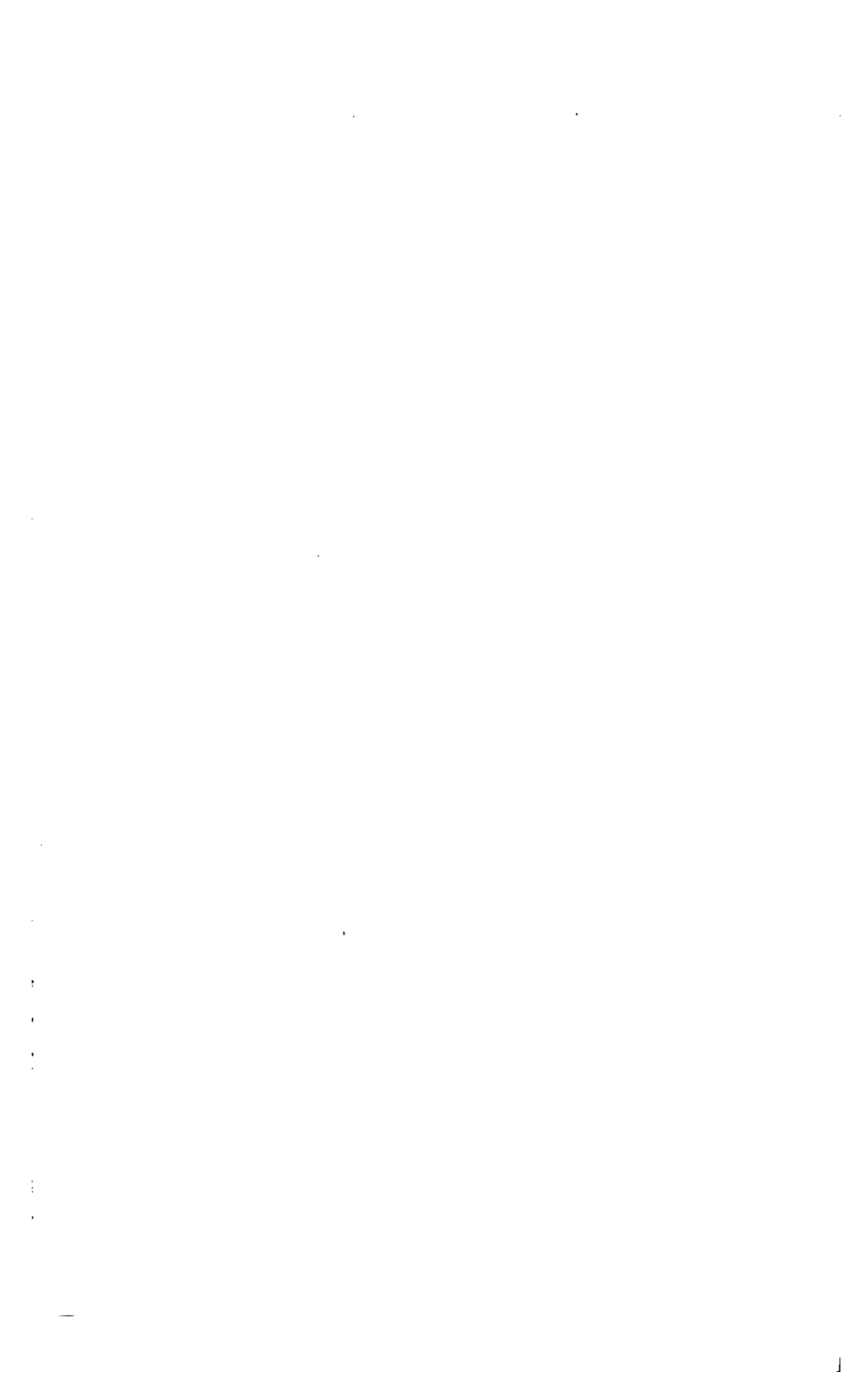
" We return you many thanks, in the first place for a pot of scallops excellently pickled, and in the second for the snuff-box. We admired it, even when we sup-

posed the price of it two guineas ; guess, then, with what raptures we contemplated it when we found that it cost but one. It was genteel before, but then it became a perfect model of elegance, and worthy to be the desire of all noses."

To Lady Hesketh, December 10, 1787, he says :—

" I thank you for the snip of cloth, commonly called a pattern. At present I have two coats, and but one back. If at any time, hereafter, I should find myself possessed of fewer coats, or more backs, it will be of use to me."

He tells that lady on July 11, 1791 : " Our affectionate hearts all lay themselves at your pettitoes ;" and the letter to her of September 9, 1787, winds up with— " I have a perpetual din in my head, and, though I am not deaf, hear nothing aright, neither my own voice nor that of others. I am under a tub, from which tub accept my best love."



## CHAPTER XVII.

*“THE FAIR OF PERTENHALL;” OR, FROM  
THE ENTRANCE OF MRS. KING TO  
THE INTRODUCTION OF “JOHNNY OF  
NORFOLK.”*

(February, 1788—January 22, 1790.)

### 138. Mrs. King.

**T**HERE now enters upon, the stage, of which Cowper is the principal character, another figure—namely, Mrs. King, wife of the Rev. John King, Rector of Pertenhall, Beds, and a connection of Professor Martyn, the botanist. This lady had been a friend of Cowper's brother John, a number of whose poems (John's) in his own handwriting were in her possession. Having read the “Task, &c.,” with great pleasure she took upon herself to write a friendly letter to Cowper, who replied with cordiality and expressed a wish that they should become better acquainted. In a letter to Newton he refers to her as “evidently a Christian, and a very gracious one.” Mrs. King subsequently informed Cowper of the

poems in her possession, and not only so, but forwarded them for his perusal.

The correspondence had not gone on long before Cowper sent her a picture which he had formed of her in his own imagination. He says :—

"Your height I conceive to be about five feet five inches, which, though it would make a short man, is yet height enough for a woman. If you insist on an inch or two more, I have no objection. You are not very fat, but somewhat inclined to be fat, and unless you allow yourself a little more air and exercise, will incur some danger of exceeding in your dimensions before you die. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to you to walk a little more, at least in your garden, and to amuse yourself occasionally with pulling up here and there a weed, for it will be an inconvenience to you to be much fatter than you are, at a time of life when your strength will be naturally on the decline. I have given you a fair complexion, a slight tinge of the rose in your cheeks, dark brown hair, and, if the fashion would give you leave to show it, an open and well-formed forehead. To all this I add a pair of eyes not quite black, but nearly approaching to that hue, and very animated. I have not absolutely determined on the shape of your nose, or the form of your mouth ; but should you tell me that I have in other respects drawn a tolerable likeness, have no doubt but I can describe them too."

We are assured, however, that the portrait here drawn bore but little resemblance to the original. Cowper was evidently no expert at delineating people's appearance and character from their handwriting.



## 139. The Five Slave Ballads.—Spring, 1788.

Thanks to the exertions of Clarkson and Wilberforce the country was about this time much exercised on the subject of the slave trade, and Lady Hesketh suggested that Cowper should write some songs concerning it, "as the surest way of reaching the public ear." Having, however, in the translation of Homer so much work in hand, Cowper, though he had the heartiest sympathy for the slaves, doubted whether he ought to take up a fresh subject. Moreover, he felt himself not at all allured by the undertaking; it seemed to offer only images of horror, which could by no means be accommodated to the style of that sort of composition. Whilst he was pondering these things a work was announced from the pen of Hannah More, a writer for whom he had the greatest respect. Says Cowper: "The sight of her advertisement convinced me that my best course would be that to which I felt myself most inclined, to persevere without turning aside to attend to any other call, however alluring, in the business I have in hand.

"It occurred to me, likewise, that I have already borne my testimony in favour of my black brethren (in 'Charity'), and that I was one of the earliest, if not the first, of those who have in the present day expressed their detestation of the diabolical traffic in question."

Nevertheless, we find him again "turning the matter in his mind as many ways as he could," the result being that he wrote five songs or ballads dealing with the subject, namely:—

1. The Morning Dream.
2. Sweet Meat has Sour Source.
3. *A poem that is lost.*
4. The Negro's Complaint.
5. Pity for Poor Africans.

In the letter in which Cowper sent "The Morning Dream" to his cousin the General, he thus refers to Nos. 2 and 3. "Of the other two, one is serious, in a strain of thought perhaps rather too serious, and I could not help it. The other, of which the slave-trader is himself the subject, is somewhat ludicrous."

To Lady Hesketh he wrote: "I shall now probably cease to sing of tortured negroes—a theme which never pleased me, but which, in the hope of doing them some little service, I was not unwilling to handle." It is interesting to note that the famous William Wilberforce, the emancipator of the slaves, was for a short time—between the years 1805 and 1809—a resident in this neighbourhood. At the death of Mr. Pomfret, the Rector of Emberton in Cowper's day, the Rev. Thomas Fry was appointed to the living. For a few years Mr. Fry was non-resident, a curate was in charge of the parish, and Mr. Wilberforce occupied the rectory house. Mr. Wilberforce's son Samuel, afterwards Bishop, first of Oxford and after of Winchester, was educated under Mr. Fry at Emberton.

Another poem that belongs to the spring of 1788 is the sonnet addressed to his cousin, "Henry Cowper, Esq., on his emphatical and interesting delivery of the defence of Warren Hastings, Esq., in the House of Lords."

## 140. Mr. Bean.—March, 1788.

The death of the aged and non-resident Vicar of Olney, the Rev. Moses Browne, necessitated the choice of a successor, and that choice fell on the Rev. James Bean, a friend of the Rev. John Newton, who arrived in the town on the 3rd of March. Unlike his predecessor, Mr. Bean resided at Olney, and not many days elapsed after his arrival before he made the acquaintance of the poet, who was able to write on the 12th: "The new Vicar of Olney is arrived, and we have exchanged visits. He is a plain, sensible man, and pleases me much. A treasure for Olney, if Olney can understand his value." And on the 17th he says: "Of Mr. Bean I could say much, but have only time at present to say that I esteem and love him. On some future occasion I shall speak of him more at large;" and he observed a few weeks later: "He is a man with whom, when I can converse at all, I can converse on terms perfectly agreeable to myself; who does not distress me with forms, nor yet disgust me by the neglect of them; whose manners are easy and natural, and his observations always sensible. I often, therefore, wish them nearer neighbours."

The vicarage at Olney, which had so long been but partially occupied by a bachelor curate, now began "once more to assume a comfortable aspect." After several visits had been interchanged, spite of "dirty ways, high winds, rain and snow," Mr. Bean on April 17th drank tea at the lodge, and next day

Cowper and Mrs. Unwin did the same at the vicarage, which they found very agreeable, their new neighbours being of a character exactly suited to their wish: "conversible, peaceable, amiable."

In 1789, at Mr. Bean's request, Cowper wrote a "Hymn, for the use of the Sunday School at Olney"—"Hear, Lord, the song of praise and prayer"—a request that caused the poet to observe: "I am somewhat in the case of Lawyer Dowling, in 'Tom Jones;' and, could I split myself into as many poets as there are muses, could find employment for them all."

#### 141. Cowper "in at the Death."

On the 3rd of March Cowper wrote a very characteristic letter to Lady Hesketh, describing how it came about that a few days previously he was in at the death of a fox. Cowper lived in a fox-hunting country, and all the gentry among whom he was thrown were ardent fox-hunters. Mr. Wrighte of Gayhurst, Mr. Praed of Tyringham, Mr. Chester of Chicheley, and the brothers Throckmorton. The poet's own sentiments on the subject are pretty well known. His satiric lines on the hunting squire and the hunting parson are among the best things of his first volume, and both in his letters and subsequent verse he is always ready to have a cut at this one of his pet aversions—as, for example, in that delightful poem, "The Needless Alarm"—a poem whose melodious lines and realistic pictures are followed by the moral:—

"Beware of desperate steps. The darkest day,  
Live till to-morrow, will have passed away."

The letter referred to of the 3rd of March is so good of its kind, that no apology is needed for quoting it whole. He says: "One day last week Mrs. Unwin and I, having taken our morning walk, and returning homeward through the Wilderness, met the Throckmortons. A minute after we had met them we heard the cry of hounds at no great distance, and, mounting the broad stump of an elm, which had been felled, and by the aid of which we were enabled to look over the wall, we saw them. They were all at that time in our orchard: presently we heard a terrier, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton, which you may remember by the name of Fury, yelping with much vehemence, and saw her running through the thickets within a few yards of us at her utmost speed, as if in pursuit of something which we doubted not was the fox. Before we could reach the other end of the Wilderness, the hounds entered also; and when we arrived at the gate which opens into the grove, there we found the whole weary cavalcade assembled. The huntsman, dismounting, begged leave to follow his hounds on foot, for he was sure, he said, that they had killed him—a conclusion I suppose he drew from their profound silence. He was accordingly admitted, and, with a sagacity that would not have dishonoured the best hound in the world, pursuing precisely the same track which the fox and the dogs had taken, though he had never had a glimpse of either after their first entrance through the rails, arrived where he found the slaughtered prey. He soon produced dead reynard, and rejoined us in the grove with all his dogs about him. Having an opportunity to see a ceremony, which I was pretty sure

would never fall in my way again, I determined to stay and to notice all that passed with the most minute attention. The huntsman having, by the aid of a pitchfork, lodged reynard on the arm of an elm, at the height of about nine feet from the ground, there left him for a considerable time. The gentlemen sat on their horses contemplating the fox, for which they had toiled so hard ; and the hounds, assembled at the foot of the tree, with faces not less expressive of the most rational delight, contemplated the same object. The huntsman remounted ; cut off a foot, and threw it to the hounds—one of them swallowed it whole like a bolus. He then once more alighted, and, drawing down the fox by the hinder legs, desired the people, who were by this time rather numerous, to open a lane for him to the right and left. He was instantly obeyed, when throwing the fox to the distance of some yards, and screaming like a fiend, 'Tear him to pieces !' at least six times repeatedly, he consigned him over absolutely to the pack, who in a few minutes devoured him completely. Thus, my dear, as Virgil says, what none of the gods could have ventured to promise me, time itself, pursuing its accustomed course, has of its own accord presented me with. I have been in at the death of a fox, and you now know as much of the matter as I, who am as well informed as any sportsman in England."

142. At Chicheley again.—May 24, 1788.

On the 24th of May Cowper speaks of having dined again with " the most companionable and domestic Mr.

Chester." "The whole kingdom," he says, "can hardly furnish a spectacle more pleasing to a man who has a taste for true happiness than himself, Mrs. Chester, and their multitudinous family. Seven long miles are interposed between us, or perhaps I should oftener have an opportunity of declaiming on this subject."

\* \* \* \* \*

"I saw at Mr. Chester's a great curiosity—an antique bust of Paris, in Parian marble. You will conclude that it interested me exceedingly. I pleased myself with supposing that it once stood in Helen's chamber. It was, in fact, brought from the Levant, and, though not well mended (for it had suffered much by time), is an admirable performance."

In October of the same year, 1788, Cowper records another visit to the Chesters, this time in Lady Hesketh's carriage, when he had the pleasure of seeing another of the five brothers—Howard—whom he had not met for many years. Cowper was truly happy, he tells the Rev. Walter Bagot in being the instrument of bringing the Chesters and Lady Hesketh to an acquaintance. "She and your sister would love each other more than people generally do in this neighbourhood, could they come often together. Another year perhaps may afford more frequent opportunities than they are likely to find in the present, which is now far spent, and threatens us with foul weather soon and dirty roads, which make Chicheley unapproachable by mortal wight, who is subject to fear in a carriage. Menelaus tells Telemachus that had Ulysses returned safe from Troy, it was his intention to have built him a city and

a house at Argos, that he and his people, transferring themselves thither from Ithaca, might have become his neighbour. Had I the thousands with which some people are favoured, I would gladly build for the Chesters, not a city, which they would not want, but a house at least as good as that which Menelaus had designed for Ulysses, in the precincts of Weston Underwood, their non-residence here being the only defect in the situation."

The following year, as Cowper had hoped, afforded fresh opportunities of visiting his amiable friends at Chicheley Hall, and, as the Chesters and Throckmortons were friends, if he could not go in Lady Hesketh's carriage there was the chance of Mr. Throckmorton's. For example, the letter of the 17th of June begins, "Here am I, at eight in the morning, in full dress, going a visiting to Chicheley"—one of a strong party which filled two chaises—to wit, Mrs. Frog the elder, Mrs. Frog the younger, Mrs. Gifford, and the poet.

Among Cowper's *penchants*, one was for asking riddles, and in one of his letters he inquires of Mr. Bagot, "Why is the winter like a backbiter? Because Solomon says that a backbiter separates between chief friends, and so does the winter; to this dirty season it is owing that I see nothing of the valuable Chesters, whom indeed I see less at all times than serves at all to content me."



**143. Cowper's Dogs: Mungo, the Marquis, and Beau.**

Two of Cowper's hares having died, and Puss, the survivor, being so decrepit through age that it promised very shortly to follow them, the poet, about 1782, had procured himself another favourite—namely, a dog called Mungo (already once referred to), whose heroism in defying the thunder forms the staple of the letter of July 27, 1785. The successor of Mungo was a dog called the Marquis, who, dying in September, 1787, was "succeeded by Beau." The dog Beau, celebrated in prose and song, obtained a place in his master's affections second only, if second, to the affectionate and patriarchal hare, Puss. Beau had been presented to the poet by two young ladies, Charlotte and Barbara, the daughters of Sir Robert Gunning, of Horton House, a mansion situated a few miles distant, and was a constant companion of him in his walks. We learn that Beau was "spotted liver-colour and white, or rather white and chestnut." "In the science of fetch and carry" he speedily became an adept, and took no less readily to the water. Bread he would beg for "with much importunity." "He is regularly combed," says the poet, "and his ears, which are remarkably handsome, are my own particular care. They gather burrs while he threads all the thickets in his way, from which I deliver them myself as soon as we get home." Though Beau had been taught to take to the water, his master never gave him "a forced washing," for he had noticed "that dogs often washed get rheumatisms,

because they do not dry themselves by exercise, but lie down in their damp coats, which is hurtful to everything but a Highlander."

The feat of Beau, which is immortalized in the well-known poem of "The Dog and the Water-lily," is thus referred to in the letter of June 27, 1788 : "Walking by the river side, I observed some water-lilies floating at a little distance from the bank. They are a large white flower, with an orange-coloured eye, very beautiful. I had a desire to gather one, and, having your long cane in my hand, by the help of it endeavoured to bring one of them within my reach. But the attempt proved vain, and I walked forward. Beau had all the while observed me very attentively. Returning soon after toward the same place, I observed him plunge into the river, while I was about forty yards distant from him ; and, when I had nearly reached the spot, he swam to land with a lily in his mouth, which he came and laid at my foot."

The incident occurred near Goosey Bridge, close to Olney. Another poem of which this dog is the subject is entitled "On a spaniel called Beau, killing a young bird," and bears date July 15, 1793.

Whether frisking amid the flags and rushes, or pursuing the swallows when his master walked abroad, or whether licking his hand or nibbling the end of his pen when in his lap at home, Beau oftentimes, like his predecessor, the hare, beguiled Cowper's heart of thoughts that made it ache, and forced him to a smile.

Cowper's letter of December 13, 1789, terminates with a paragraph which shows that Beau was in favour also with Lady Hesketh. It runs as follows :

“Received from my master, on account current with Lady Hesketh, the sum of — one kiss on my forehead. Witness my paw,      BEAU +, his mark.”

#### 144. Dr. Ash and Dr. Grindon.

Among Cowper's ailments was the formidable one of indigestion, which, however, he was able to cope with owing to the prescription in 1786 of Dr. Ash, of London, to whom his case had been represented by Lady Hesketh. Writing to his cousin on July 5, 1788, Cowper tells her that—“The soluble *salt of tartar* has been of such sovereign use to me, I have not ceased to take it since the time when Dr. Ash prescribed it, and believe myself indebted to it in a great degree for the measure of health that I have enjoyed ;” and on the 20th of December he speaks of having taken the soluble tartar daily for two years. If a variety of physicians could have put him right Cowper would certainly have got well. Few men, it may be assumed, consulted more doctors, or consumed more physic. While at Olney, and Weston, besides that of Dr. Ash, he had the benefit of the advice of Dr. Cotton (St. Albans), Dr. Grindon (Olney), Dr. Kerr (Northampton), and Mr. Gregson, to say nothing of the “Elliott's medicines” which he was constantly taking for the good of his eyes, and to the virtues of which he was convinced that he owed their preservation ; but it is very possible that “Elliott's medicines” got credit for some of the benefits that in reality accrued from fresh air and plenty of exercise, though Cowper was not the

laudanum to enable him to sleep at night, and Elliott's medicines for his eyes, all of which were in pretty constant use, Cowper must have had a good deal of trouble to keep his constitution right, and must have spent no small portion of his time in attending to it. The constant currying of himself for lumbago he admits to have been troublesome, but otherwise he makes little complaint. When one of his friends had the rheumatism Cowper consoled him by observing that "rheumatism is better than the gout, and that one must have something."

145. Visit of Newton, the "Bouton de Rose," and Lady Hesketh. The Household at Weston.—July and August, 1788.

"The trio in Coleman's Buildings" (Mr. and Mrs. Newton and "Catty") were frequently in the poet's thoughts, and Cowper always looked forward with pleasure to a visit from any of them. In July of this year both Mr. and Mrs. Newton came to see him, and whilst they were at Weston he was also visited by the friend whom he playfully styled "The Bouton de Rose." "The Newtons are still here," writes Cowper to Lady Hesketh, on August 9th, "and continue with us, I believe, until the 15th of the month. Here is also my friend, Mr. Rose, a valuable young man, who, attracted by the effluvia of my genius, found me out in my retirement last January twelvemonth. I have not permitted him to be idle, but have made him transcribe for me the twelfth book of the Iliad."

On August 21st he says: "Our friends are gone,

having made us (to ourselves, at least) a very agreeable visit. We are now as quiet as dormice in a hollow tree."

On the return of Mr. Newton to London, Cowper thus wrote to him (September 2nd): "My dear Friend,—I rejoice that you and yours reached London safe, especially when I reflect that you performed the journey on a day so fatal, as I understand, to others travelling the same road. I found those comforts in your visit which have formerly sweetened all our interviews, in part restored. I knew you; knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the Chief Shepherd feeds His flock, and felt my sentiments of affectionate friendship for you the same as ever. But one thing was still wanting, and that thing the crown of all. I shall find it in God's time, if it be not lost for ever. When I say this, I say it trembling; for at what time soever comfort shall come, it will not come without its attendant evil; and, whatever good thing may occur in the interval, I have sad forebodings of the event, having learned by experience that I was born to be persecuted with peculiar fury, and assuredly believing, that, such as my lot has been, it will be so to the end."

Mr. Rose quitted Weston early in September, and Cowper, writing to him on the 25th, commences his letter with a riddle—a way of putting things to which, as we have seen, he was much addicted:—

"Say what is the thing by my riddle design'd,  
Which you carried to London, and yet left behind?"

"I expect your answer, and without fee." What the solution was we are not informed, but doubtless

Mr. Rose was able to give it when he returned to Weston, as he did a few weeks later. Soon after his arrival he wrote to his sister Harriet, and in this letter, dated October 25th, we get some pleasant glimpses of the Weston household. "I came here on Thursday; and here I found Lady Hesketh, a very agreeable, good-tempered, sensible woman, polite without ceremony, and sufficiently well-bred to make others happy in her company. I here feel no restraint, and none is wished to be inspired. The 'noiseless tenor' of our lives would much please and gratify you. An account of one day will furnish you with a tolerably accurate idea of the manner in which all our time is passed. We rise at whatever hour we choose; breakfast at half after nine, take about an hour to satisfy the *sentiment*, not the *appetite*—for we talk—good heavens, how we talk! and enjoy ourselves most wonderfully. Then we separate, and dispose of ourselves as our different inclinations point. Mr. Cowper to Homer, Mr. R. to transcribing what is already translated, Lady Hesketh to work and to books alternately, and Mrs. Unwin, who in everything but her face is like a kind angel sent from heaven to guard the health of our poet, is busy in domestic concerns. At one, our labours finished, the poet and I walk for two hours. I then drink most plentiful draughts of instruction which flow from his lips, instruction so sweet, and goodness so exquisite, that one *loves* it for its flavour. At three we return and dress, and the succeeding hour brings dinner upon the table, and collects again the smiling countenances of the family to partake of the neat and elegant meal. Conversation continues till tea-time,

when an entertaining volume engrosses our thoughts till the last meal is announced. Conversation again, and then rest before twelve, to enable us to rise again to the same round of innocent, virtuous pleasure."

After Rose's departure Cowper wrote to him (January 19, 1789): "I have taken since you went away many of the walks which we have taken together, and none of them, I believe, without thoughts of you. I have, though not a good memory in general, yet a good local memory, and can recollect, by the help of a tree or stile, what you said on that particular spot. For this reason I purpose, when the summer is come, to walk with a book in my pockets; what I read at my fireside I forget, but what I read under a hedge, or at the side of a pond, that pond and that hedge will always bring to my remembrance; and this is a sort of *memoria technica*, which I would recommend to you, if I did not know that you have no occasion for it."

In one of his later letters to Rose, Cowper thus testifies to the estimation in which he and the ladies held his young friend: "Lady Hesketh, Mrs. Unwin, and myself often mention you, and always in terms that, though you would blush to hear them, you need not be ashamed of; at the same time wishing much that you could change our trio into a quartetto."

#### 146. Cowper's Oak.

Among the walks taken by Cowper and Rose, one had been to Kilwick Wood, where they discovered a very fine, ancient and hollow oak tree, the same that has since been known by the name of Cowper's Oak.

It was in this wood that the poet laid the scenes of his "Needless Alarm," when—

"With the high-raised horn's melodious clang  
All Kilwick and all Dingleberry rang."

Some months later (in 1791) Cowper commenced the fine fragment of which this oak is the subject, a poem that owes its preservation to the diligence of Hayley, who, subsequently to the poet's death, alighted upon it after a long search among the piles of books and papers that had been consigned to his keeping. "I could hardly have been more surprised," observed the delighted biographer, with a bathetic simile, "if a noble oak in its material majesty had started up from the turf of my garden, with full foliage, before me."

What this fragment might have grown into it is not of much use conjecturing. Whether we should have had pictures drawn of the venerable anchorite, Ralph de Jerdeley, who is famed to have dwelt in a cave or bower in these solitudes, or what we should have had, we know not; but Cowper could scarcely have found a better subject to suit him. "The Four Ages," "The Mediterranean," and what not that were suggested at various times by his friends, possessed for him none of the possibilities of this splendid subject. Among the scenes favourable to meditation, Cowper ranked none above the woodlands, and he could heartily endorse the lines of Madame de la Mothe Guion, translated by himself, on that theme:—

"Ye Forests, that yield me my sweetest repose,  
Where stillness and solitude reign,  
To you I securely and boldly disclose  
The dear anguish of which I complain.



Here, sweetly forgetting and wholly forgot,  
 By the world and its turbulent throng,  
 The birds and the streams lend me many a note  
 That aids meditation and song."

"Cowper's Oak" is still standing, and though it has lost a few stout limbs and upholds a little more dead wood, it has not greatly altered since the time of the poet. We still behold its "hollow trunk" with "excoriate forks deform."

"A giant bulk,  
 Of girth enormous, with moss-cushioned root  
 Upheaved above the soil, and sides emboss'd  
 With prominent wens globose."

And we may still say with the poet—

"Time made thee what thou wast—king of the woods ;  
 And time hath made thee what thou art—a cave  
 For owls to roost in."

Writing from Weston to Mr. Rose, September 11, 1788, Cowper says: "Since your departure I have twice visited the oak, and with an intention to push my inquiries a mile beyond it, where it seems I should have found another oak much larger and much more respectable than the former; but once I was hindered by the rain, and once by the sultriness of the day. This taller oak has been known by the name of Judith many ages, and is said to have been an oak at the time of the Conquest. If I have not an opportunity to reach it before your arrival here, we will attempt that exploit together; and even if I should have been able to visit it ere you come, I shall be glad to do so; for the pleasure of extraordinary sights, like other pleasures,

is doubled by the participation of a friend." The oak first referred to is that now called "Cowper's Oak," and the one to which Cowper's noble poem is addressed.

The second oak, the one called Judith, situated near Chase Park Farmhouse, and a mile farther from Weston than the first, is now called Gog (the larger of the two trees Gog and Magog). As is easily seen by any one who visits these trees, Cowper's description of their situation is perfectly clear. But he is not only clear—he makes a similar statement in another letter, written September 13, 1788 (two days after), to Lady Hesketh. We quote from this also: "I walked with him [Mr. Gifford] yesterday on a visit to an oak on the border of Yardley Chase, an oak which I often visit, and which is one of the wonders that I show to all who come this way and have never seen it. I tell them all that it is a thousand years old, believing it to be so, though I do not know it. A mile beyond this oak stands another, which has from time immemorial been known by the name of Judith, and is said to have been an oak when my namesake, the Conqueror, first came hither. And beside all this, there is a good coachway to them both, and I design that you shall see them too."

Notwithstanding the perfect clearness of Cowper's description, almost every person who has hitherto spoken of the trees has curiously confused them, and it has been repeatedly, though erroneously, said that what is now called "Cowper's Oak" is the one that was formerly called Judith, whilst all mention as to the situation of the other tree has been forborne. How

the mistake arose is easy to see. Hayley, instead of reading carefully Cowper's description, wrote to Dr. Johnson, of Norfolk, to ask for particulars. Dr. Johnson wrote in reply a letter which completely confuses the affair. It may be seen in Hayley's "Life of Cowper." This letter misled Hayley, and has misled almost every person who has dealt with the subject ever since. The facts, then, are these. Firstly, the Yardley Oak, the tree to which the poem is addressed, the hollow tree, the tree said by Cowper to be 22 feet 6½ inches in girth, is the one now called "Cowper's Oak," situated three miles from Weston, just beyond Kilwick Wood, near Cowper's Oak Farmhouse.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the oak at Yardley Lodge, the perfectly sound tree, the tree that was formerly called Judith, the tree said by Cowper to be 28 feet 5 inches in girth, is the one now usually called Gog, and is situated a mile farther from Weston than the last mentioned, near the old-fashioned farmhouse of Chase Farm, which was formerly called the Ranger's Lodge. These facts, which are gathered from Cowper's letters, tally exactly with local tradition. Indeed, had it not been for Dr. Johnson's letter there would never have been any confusion. The name Judith, by which Gog was originally known, was possibly obtained from its having been planted by the Lady Judith, niece to the Conqueror, and wife of Earl Waltheof.

The following memorandum was found among the poet's papers after his death: "Yardley Oak, in girth, feet 22, inches 6½. The oak at Yardley Lodge, feet 28, inches 5."

<sup>1</sup> Also called Biggin Lodge.

Gog and Magog are both larger than "Cowper's Oak," Gog is now 32 feet in girth, measured at about 5 feet from the ground. Close to the ground, by reason of the huge protuberances and mighty roots, it is, of course, far greater. Magog, which stands at a distance of 50 yards from its tremendous brother, is 29 feet in girth, and its trunk is not nearly so irregular.<sup>1</sup>

147. He begins the *Odyssey*.—September  
24, 1788.

In May Cowper had got again into the 19th book of the *Iliad*, and was "on the point of displaying such feats of heroism performed by Achilles as make all other achievements trivial." "I may well exclaim," he says, "'O for a Muse of fire!' especially having not only a great host to cope with, but a great river also; much, however, may be done when Homer leads the way. I should not have chosen to have been the original author of such a business, even though all the Nine had stood at my elbow. Time has wonderful effects. We admire that in an ancient for which we should send a modern bard to Bedlam."

On the 23rd of September of the same year the *Iliad* was finished, and next day he began the *Odyssey*. He writes to Rose on the 25th: "I rejoice that you are prepared for transcript work: here will be plenty for you. The day on which you shall receive this, I beg you will remember to drink one glass at least to the success of the *Iliad*, which I finished the day before

<sup>1</sup> "The Town of Cowper."

yesterday, and yesterday began the *Odyssey*. It will be some time before I shall perceive myself travelling in another road ; the objects around me are at present so much the same ; Olympus, and a council of gods, meet me at my first entrance. To tell you the truth, I am weary of heroes and deities, and, with reverence be it spoken, shall be glad, for variety's sake, to exchange their company for that of a Cyclops."

Not only was Cowper rather weary of heroes and deities of the *Iliad*, but he began by and by to weary of the whole work of translation, for he says a few weeks later : " Let me once get well out of these two long stories, and if I ever meddle with such matters more, call me, as Fluellen says, ' a fool and an ass and a prating coxcomb. ' " However, he kept on, and on January 29, 1789, was able to say to Bagot : " I am now in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, conversing with the dead. Invoke the muse in my behalf, that I may roll the stone of Sisyphus with some success. To do it as Homer has done it is, I suppose, in our verse and language, impossible ; but I will hope not to labour altogether to as little purpose as Sisyphus himself did."

#### 148. Mrs. King's " Douceurs."

In his letter to Lady Hesketh of April 14, 1788, Cowper had enclosed a poem which he styled " Benefactions : a poem in Shenstone's manner," and to which he subsequently gave the name of " Gratitude." In these lines he enumerates the many gifts he had received from his cousin : the cap and ribbon that adorned his

head, his "wheel-footed studying chair," whose bright studs rivalled the lustre of that in which Cassiopeia sat, his carpets, table, and mirror, the china that decked the alcove, and what not besides. She had also presented him with a very handsome signet ring, which the poet's friend, Mr. Chester, a person of skill in articles of *virtù*, declared was the best of its kind in England, "and much undersold at thirty guineas."

In the following September a number of presents came from Mrs. King, including a housewife for Mrs. Unwin, "the very thing she had just begun to want," a toothpick case, some cakes, and some apples, in respect to which last Cowper says: "The cakes and apples we will eat, remembering who sent them, and when I say this, I will add also, that when we have neither apples nor cakes to eat, we will still remember you." And then he goes on, "You have been at Bedford. Bedford is but twelve miles from Weston. When you are at home we are but eighteen miles asunder. Is it possible that such a paltry interval can separate us always? I will never believe it. Our house is going to be filled by a cousin of mine and her train, who will, I hope, spend the winter with us. I cannot, therefore, repeat my invitation at present, but expect me to be very troublesome on that theme next summer. I could almost scold you for not making Weston in your way home from Bedford."

In January an "honest old neighbour" of Mrs. King's is the medium by which more presents arrive—to wit, "two pair of bottle-stands, her own manufacture, a knitting-bag, and a piece of plum-cake." "The time," says Cowper, "seems approaching when

that good lady and we are to be better acquainted ; and all these *douceurs* announce it." To Mrs. King he said : " You have sent me the very things I wanted, and which I should have continued to want, had not you sent them. As often as the wine is set on the table, I have said to myself, ' This is all very well ; but I have no bottle-stands ; ' and myself as often replied, ' No matter ; you can make shift without them. ' Thus I and myself have conferred together many a day ; and you, as if you had been privy to the conference, have kindly supplied the deficiency, and put an end to the debate for ever." In April more good things came, and among them Cowper's brother's poems, " whose handwriting," he says, " struck me the moment I saw it. They gave me some feelings of a melancholy kind, but not painful. I will return them to you by the next opportunity."

#### 149. A High-Buck Holiday.—January, 1789.

In the opening month of 1789 an accident happened to Mrs. Unwin, which proved the beginning of her decline. It is thus alluded to by the poet : " I have more items than one by which to remember the late frost : it has cost me the bitterest uneasiness. Mrs. Unwin got a fall on the gravel-walk covered with ice, which has confined her to an upper chamber ever since. She neither broke nor dislocated any bones : but received such a contusion below the hip, as crippled her completely. She now begins to recover, after having been helpless as a child for a whole fortnight,

but so slowly at present that her amendment is even now almost imperceptible." In reference to this calamity Cowper writes, in an unpublished letter of January 19 (1789): "I have been so many years accustomed either to feel trouble or to expect it, that habit has endued me with that sort of fortitude which I remember my old schoolmaster, Dr. Nicholl, used to call the passive valour of an ass."

On the 4th of February Mrs. Unwin was certainly on the road to recovery, "but the room over the study," which they occupied in order to save journeys up and down stairs, still continued the place of their habitation. By help of a staff too, on one side, "and a human prop on the other," she could move from chamber to chamber. But the great day was the 10th of February, "what we call here a High-Buck Holiday. On that day Mrs. Unwin descended, for the first time since her fall, into the study"—and thenceforward for some months she went on mending; but as the year waned Mrs. Unwin's health gave the poet fresh uneasiness. "She has almost constant headaches; almost a constant pain in her side, which nobody understands; and her lameness, within the last half year, is very little amended."

#### 150. "Miss" Hannah.

The ill-returns which he received from his kindness in educating and bringing up Dick Coleman did not deter Cowper from repeating the experiment, and in 1781 we find him possessed of a second *protégée*.



a little girl named Hannah Willson, who was the daughter of Dick Coleman's wife by a former husband. Hannah had been received into Cowper's household solely from charitable motives, the idea being to train her for a useful servant. In his second *protégée* Cowper was no more fortunate than in his first, for Hannah Willson, though in a different way, proved as unworthy of the poet's kindness as Dick Coleman.

Cowper's first reference to her is on July 22, 1781, when he describes to Newton a picnic in the spinney (see § 81). Those who made up the party, it may be remembered, were Cowper, Mrs. Unwin, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Lady Austen, and they were accompanied by Lady Austen's lackey and Hannah. Says Cowper, writing on the aforementioned date to Newton, "We were seven in number, including Hannah, who, though highly delighted with her jaunt, was not at all more pleased than her elders. She is as much delighted to-day with the acquisition of a sister born last night, but whether the rest of that noble family will have equal cause to rejoice in the event, is uncertain. Should she be followed by a troop, unless they practise Dean Swift's recommended method for the maintenance of the poor, it is not easy to say where they will find victuals, certainly not at Olney."

On Christmas Eve, 1784, Cowper writes: "We are agreeably disappointed in Hannah: we feared that through a natural deficiency of understanding we should always find her an encumbrance; but she has suddenly brightened up, and being put into such little offices as she is capable of, executes them with an expertness and alacrity at which we wonder. She has

an exceeding good temper, and bids fair to discover more sense than we suspected would ever fall to her lot."

Mrs. Unwin seems from the first to have taken a great interest in the girl, but now by her foolish partiality she thoroughly spoilt her. In March, 1787, she is styled in Dr. Grindon's ledger "Miss Hannah," showing that she was regarded rather as one of the family than as a servant—for when referring to a servant of Mrs. Unwin, Mr. Grindon always put "Mrs. U.'s maid."

For some time Hannah conducted herself tolerably well, for Cowper writes as follows to Lady Hesketh on April 14, 1789: "She is truly a good girl, and in no part of her behaviour blamable. Her chief occupation at present in the day-time is to make black lace for a cloak (of Mrs. Unwin's), which she does, by the account of the judicious in those matters, exceedingly well. In the evening she works at her needle. Ever since the first week or ten days of Mrs. Unwin's lameness she has slept on the floor in a corner of her closet, that she might be at hand to assist her as often as she wanted help; and though sometimes called from her pallet twice or thrice in a night, has risen always with an affectionate readiness that no artifice can imitate."

#### 151. The King's Recovery.—February, 1789.

In the summer of 1788, owing to political and domestic anxieties, the health of King George III. had

begun to break down. At the beginning of the autumn he was for some days in danger from a violent fever ; and when it subsided he was found to be bereft of his reason. It was then suggested that the Prince of Wales should assume the reins of government as regent. But the two parties in the State, the Pittites and the Foxites, differed in their opinion as to what powers should attend that office. Pitt, in the hopes, as he said, that the king's illness would not be of long duration, insisted that the authority entrusted to the regent should be restricted ; Fox, on the other hand, who knew that the elevation of the Prince of Wales would be concurrent with the downfall of Pitt, wished that full powers should be granted. Meantime, whilst the two parties were squabbling, the king, to the great joy of his subjects, with whom the Prince of Wales was unpopular, suddenly began to mend, and his physician, Dr. Willis, prophesied a speedy recovery. Cowper, who loved his king, and honoured Mr. Pitt, was not less gratified than other people. "The king's recovery," he says, "is with us a subject of daily conversation and of continual joy. It is so providentially timed that no man who believes a Providence at all can say less of it than that 'This is the finger of God !' Never was a hungry faction so mortally disappointed, nor the integrity of an upright administration more openly rewarded." In every town and village throughout the country there were rejoicings. At Weston "Mr. Frog illuminated the front of his house in the handsomest manner, threw up many rockets, gave a large bonfire and beer to the people." Cowper was there, and as his friends told

him, caught a violent cold on the occasion, though he was himself not very willing to admit it. In the evening there was a dance at the Hall, at which Cowper's *protégée*, "Miss" Hannah, greatly enjoyed herself, being not a little proud of a "favour" pinned before her, which had been sent her by Lady Hesketh—and the more so because no other "lady in the company" was so distinguished.

On the 23rd of April the king, accompanied by the queen and royal family, proceeded to St. Paul's Cathedral to give public thanks to Almighty God.

In commemoration of these happy events Cowper wrote two short poems: "Annus Memorabilis, 1789," and "On the Queen's Visit to London, the Night of the 17th March, 1789."

During the time of the rejoicings the particular work Cowper had in hand was a review of Glover's "Athenaid," for the *Analytical Review*, which he had undertaken to oblige Joseph Johnson.

## 152. The Cuckoo Clock and the Hamper. —June, 1789.

In June Cowper has a commission for his friend Rose. He says: "I am going to give you a deal of trouble, but London folks must be content to be troubled by country folks; for in London only can our strange necessities be supplied. You must buy for me, if you please, a cuckoo clock; and now I will tell you where they are sold, which, Londoner as you are, it is possible you may not know. They are sold,

I am informed, at more houses than one, in that narrow part of Holborn which leads into Broad St. Giles'. The shop is now in High Holborn, north-side. It seems they are well-going clocks, and cheap, which are the two best recommendations of any clock. They are made in Germany, and such numbers of them are annually imported that they are become even a considerable article of commerce."

In the next letter he writes : " Many thanks for the cuckoo, which arrived perfectly safe and goes well, to the amusement and amazement of all who hear it. Hannah lies awake to hear it, and I am not sure that we have not others in the house that admire his music as much as she."

The friendship of Cowper and Rose increased with time. The " Bouton de Rose " was always welcome at Weston, and both Cowper and Beau felt melancholy after his departure. When Rose could not himself come he would often send the poet, which was quite needless, however, something to remember him by. One of these reminders, a well-filled hamper, arrived during Lady Hesketh's stay at Weston in the October of 1789, and while his cousin, " spectatress of the business," sat on the stairs the poet " unpacked and expounded " below, whilst at the same time they diverted themselves with imagining the manner in which Homer would have described the scene. Detailed in his circumstantial way, it would have furnished materials for a paragraph of considerable length in an Odyssey.

" The straw-stuff'd hamper with his ruthless steel  
He open'd, cutting sheer th' inserted cords,

Which bound the lid and lip secure. Forth came  
 The rustling package first, bright straw of wheat,  
 Or oats, or barley ; next a bottle green  
 Throat-full, clear spirits the contents, distill'd  
 Drop after drop odorous, by the art  
 Of the fair mother of his friend—the Rose."

And so on. "I should rejoice to be the hero of such a tale in the hands of Homer."

By the end of November Cowper had finished the *Odyssey* first going over. But as he said, though the work was done, it was not finished (December 1, 1789, to Newton). To finish it he set to work backwards, beginning at the last book, with the design to persevere in that crab-like fashion till he should arrive at the first. He says (April 19, 1790): "I find so little to do in the last revisal, that I shall soon reach the *Odyssey*. I am in high spirits on this subject, and think that I have at last licked the clumsy cub into a shape that will secure to it the favourable notice of the public."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

*“JOHNNY OF NORFOLK;” OR, FROM  
THE INTRODUCTION OF MR. JOHN  
JOHNSON TO THE COMPLETION OF  
HOMER.*

(January 22, 1790—September 8, 1790.)

153. Catharina.—January, 1790.

**I**N his letter to Mrs. King of January 18, 1790, Cowper refers to his piece called “Catharina,” written apparently in the autumn of the preceding year. Miss Stapleton, the heroine of the verses, had been on a visit to the Throckmortons, and about this time was engaged to George Courtenay, Esq., Mr. Throckmorton’s brother. The opening verses are very pretty :—

“ She came—she is gone—we have met—  
And meet perhaps never again ;  
The sun of that moment is set,  
And seems to have risen in vain.  
Catharina has fled like a dream—  
(So vanishes pleasure, alas !)  
But has left a regret and esteem,  
That will not so suddenly pass.

## "JOHNNY OF NORFOLK."

The last ev'ning ramble we made,  
 Catharina, Maria, and I,  
 Our progress was often delay'd  
 By the nightingale warbling nigh.  
 We paus'd under many a tree,  
 And much she was charm'd with a tone,  
 Less sweet to Maria and me,  
 Who so lately had witness'd her own."

Maria, of course, was Mrs. John Throckmorton. The poet then goes on to mention Catharina's preference for the country, trusts that in the country she may therefore pass her days, and that the particular part in which she may pass them may be Weston. In other words, he cherished the hope, and ventured on the prophecy, that Miss Stapleton would ere long be Mrs. George Throckmorton; and there was every probability that the prophecy would be fulfilled, for his new friend came to Weston again and again. "The Hall has been full of company," he writes to Johnson (October 31, 1791), "ever since you went, and at present my Catharina is there singing and playing like an angel."

## 154. "Johnny of Norfolk."

For twenty-seven years Cowper had held no intercourse with his maternal relations—those with whom he had in his childhood spent so many happy days. Of what had become of them he knew nothing, and they, on their part, until he became famous, had altogether lost knowledge of him. The poet's uncle, Roger Donne, it will be remembered, had four daughters and one son—to wit, Elizabeth (who married



Mr. Thomas Hewitt, of Mattishall), Catharine (who married Mr. John Johnson, of Ludham), Castres (Vicar of Ludham), Harriet (Mrs. Balls), and Anne (married to Thomas Bodham, of Mattishall). I am careful to be thus definite for two reasons. Firstly, because the names of these persons will occur again and again in the following pages, and secondly, because previous biographers have been very much at sea on the subject—have got the whole thing into a tangle—which they need not have done had they looked at the back of the poet's picture by Abbot, where may be seen the family tree.

Mr. John Johnson, the son of Catharine, henceforth and for ever "Johnny of Norfolk," determined to seek the poet out, and one day in January, 1790, he proceeded to Weston, where, having made himself known, he was received by his kinsman with every demonstration of affection. Mr. Johnson was a student of Caius College, Cambridge, a subscalarian, or man that sleeps under the stairs—a name given to those students whose rooms were in that situation. Like many other young men, he fancied he had the gift of writing poetry, and he brought with him a manuscript poem, entitled "The Tale of the Lute," the scenes of which were laid at Audley End, and which he produced as coming from Lord Howard, with his lordship's request that Cowper would revise it. Cowper having read the poem, praised here and censured there; but next day, when they walked in Kilwick Wood, it came out that, although Lord Howard was acquainted with the poem, and had advised its being brought to Cowper, the actual writer was Johnson himself. Mr. Johnson was after-

wards sorry, as he told Cowper, that he had had recourse to artifice ; but the poet comforted him by saying : " Give yourself no trouble on the subject of the politic device you saw good to recur to, when you presented me with your manuscript ; it was an innocent deception, at least it could harm nobody save yourself ; an effect which it did not fail to produce ; and, since the punishment followed it so closely, by me at least, it may very well be forgiven. You ask, how I can tell that you are not addicted to practices of the deceptive kind ? And certainly, if the little time that I have had to study you were alone to be considered, the question would not be unreasonable ; but in general a man who reaches my years finds

" That long experience does attain  
To something like prophetic strain."

I am very much of Lavater's opinion, and persuaded that faces are as legible as books, only with these circumstances to recommend them to our perusal, that they are read in much less time, and are much less likely to deceive us. Yours gave me a favourable impression of you the moment I beheld it, and, though I shall not tell you in particular what I saw in it, for reasons mentioned in my last, I will add, that I have observed in you nothing since that has not confirmed the opinion I then formed in your favour. In fact, I cannot recollect that my skill in physiognomy has ever deceived me, and I should add more on this subject had I room."

Henceforward Cowper loved his young kinsman " as a son," and always regarded the day on which he

arrived as “*albo notandus lapillo.*”<sup>1</sup> In one of his letters he describes him as “a sweet lad, but as shy as a bird. It costs him always two or three days to open his mouth before a stranger; but when he does, he is sure to please by the innocent cheerfulness of his conversation.”

Mr. Johnson, who was studying with a view to holy orders, and who was at the same time blessed with very high spirits, inquired of Cowper, when he came to know him more, whether he (Mr. Johnson) ought not to cultivate a graver demeanour; to which the poet replied: “Yours, my dear Johnny, are vagaries that I shall never see practised by any other, and, whether you slap your ankle, or reel as if you were fuddled, or dance in the path before me, all is characteristic of yourself, and therefore to me delightful. I have hinted to you indeed sometimes, that you should be cautious of indulging antic habits and singularities of all sorts, and young men in general have need enough of such admonition. But yours are a sort of fairy habits, such as might belong to Puck or Robin Goodfellow, and therefore, good as the advice is, I should be half sorry should you take it. This allowance at least I give you. Continue to take your walks, if walks they may be called, exactly in their present fashion, till you have taken orders! Then indeed, forasmuch as a skipping, curvetting, bounding divine might be a spectacle not

<sup>1</sup> It was the custom of the ancient Thracians every evening, before they slept, to throw into an urn a white pebble, if the day passed agreeably; but if not, a black one. By counting the pebbles they could form some idea of the amount of happiness or unhappiness of their lives.

altogether seemly, I shall consent to your adoption of a more grave demeanour."

Cowper made the discovery, too, that on two points at least Johnson resembled himself. Says he: "You are a scatter-brain. I made the discovery perhaps the sooner, because in this you very much resemble myself, who, in the course of my life, through mere carelessness and inattention, lost many advantages; an insuperable shyness has also deprived me of many. And here again there is a resemblance between us. You will do well to guard against both, for of both, I believe, you have a considerable share as well as myself."

Among the accomplishments of Mr. Johnson was that of playing on the fiddle. Cowper tells him on July 31, 1790: "You may treat us too, if you please, with a little of your music, for I seldom hear any, and delight much in it. You need not fear a rival, for we have but two fiddles in the neighbourhood—one a gardener's, the other a tailor's: terrible performers both!"

When Mr. Johnson arrived on the visit alluded to Cowper found him some transcribing to do, for he was now in the middle of the *Odyssey*, and had just lost his "best amanuensis," Mr. George Throckmorton, who had gone to Bath. When Johnson told Cowper that he had never read the *Odyssey*, the latter observed to him: "You are a man to be envied, who have never read the *Odyssey*, which is one of the most amusing story-books in the world. There is also much of the finest poetry in the world to be found in it, notwithstanding all that Longinus has insinuated to the contrary. His comparison of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to the meridian

and to the declining sun is pretty, but, I am persuaded, not just. The prettiness of it seduced him ; he was otherwise too judicious a reader of Homer to have made it. I can find in the latter no symptoms of impaired ability, none of the effects of age."

Before Mr. Johnson had been many times a guest at Weston, his "mathematico-poetical head" was scarcely less intimately acquainted with the contents of the *Odyssey* than was the poetical but by no means mathematical head of his kinsman.

### 155. January and the Moon.—February, 1790.

Among the figments of Cowper's imagination one was the belief that he was affected by the moon, and not only so, but that all human beings more or less suffered from its influences. So great was the effect of this belief upon his spirits that he looked forward to the period of every full moon with more or less apprehension. Lady Hesketh told a friend that Cowper was "always low at that time, and quite different to what he is at any other ; yet with his wit pierces even the gloom which this planet occasions ; for as we returned last night in the coach from an airing, and after he had talked much of the causes and effects of this wonderful planet, he at last, after fixing his eyes steadfastly upon it, said laughingly—

"I'll instant write a most severe lampoon,  
Of which the subject shall be yonder moon."

He told Lady Hesketh that if she had any *crabs* (sour-

tempered persons) amongst her acquaintances, he was sure that if she attended to them she would find them always much more peevish and ill-tempered at the new and full moon than at any other time ; for he was sure it influenced the temper as well as the brain, when either was at all disordered. Though Cowper's spirits were low at such times, the full moon had "no effect upon *his* temper, which appears equally sweet at all times."

Another bugbear to him was, as we have previously intimated, the month of January. This was the month in which both his great derangements had commenced. "Twice," he writes (February 5, 1790), "has that month returned upon me, accompanied by such horrors as I have no reason to suppose ever made part of the experience of any other man. I accordingly look forward to it, and meet it with a dread not to be imagined. I number the nights as they pass, and in the morning bless myself that another night is gone, and no harm has happened. This may argue, perhaps, some imbecility of mind, and no small degree of it ; but it is natural, I believe, and so natural as to be necessary and unavoidable. I know that God is not governed by secondary causes in any of His operations, and that, on the contrary, they are all so many agents in His hand, which strike only when He bids them. I know consequently that one month is as dangerous to me as another, and that, in the middle of summer, at noon-day, and in the clear sunshine, I am in reality, unless guarded by Him, as much exposed as when fast asleep at midnight, and in mid-winter. But we are not always the wiser for our knowledge, and I can no more avail myself of mine, than if it were in

the head of another man, and not in my own. I have heard of bodily aches and ails, that have been particularly troublesome when the season returned in which the hurt that occasioned them was received. The mind, I believe (with my own, however, I am sure it is so), is liable to similar periodical affection. But February is come, my terror is passed, and some shades of the gloom that attended his presence have passed with him. I look forward with a little cheerfulness to the buds and the leaves that will soon appear, and say to myself, till they turn yellow I will make myself easy. The year will go round, and January will approach. I shall tremble again, and I know it; but in the meantime I will be as comfortable as I can." Easterly winds and disturbed sleep also had very great influence on him, and interfered seriously with his writing.

156. **Cowper's Three Mothers, and the Lines on the Receipt of his Mother's Picture out of Norfolk.—Spring, 1790.**

The beautiful sonnet to Mrs. Unwin, which commences—

"Mary! I want a lyre with other strings,"

was apparently written early in 1790. It was the spring of 1790, too, that saw produced that other exquisite piece, "The Lines on the Receipt of My Mother's Picture out of Norfolk." At the very mention of this unequalled masterpiece the heart warms with emotion.

What poem in the world has so passionate, so spontaneous an opening :—

"Oh that those lips had language !"

But criticism on the finest thing that Cowper produced, and the most touching elegy in the English tongue, is quite unnecessary. The tears that have dimmed the eyes of the thousands who have read it, testify sufficiently to its worth. Had Cowper written nothing else his name would have lived for ever. The picture that gave origin to the poem was a miniature painted in oils by Heines, sent to the poet as a present by his cousin Anne (Rose), wife of the Rev. Thomas Bodham, Rector of Mattishall. This picture, which is now in the possession of the Rev. Charles E. Donne, Vicar of Faversham, Kent, was exhibited in the "Third National Portrait Loan (Supplementary) Collection at South Kensington in 1868." It is described in the catalogue thus : "Anne Donne, Mrs. Cowper [the poet's mother], to waist, miniature size ; full face ; low blue dress—on canvas, 6 × 5 in."

In acknowledging the receipt of the gift, the poet says (February 27, 1790) : "The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She



died when I completed my sixth year, yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper, and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought, in the days of my childhood, much to resemble my mother, and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed to be a competent judge, can trace both her and my late uncle your father—somewhat of his irritability, and a little, I would hope, both of his and of her—I know not what to call it, without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention; but, speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say—*good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St. Paul's, and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is that, whatever I am, I love you all."

To Lady Hesketh he says: "I am delighted with Mrs. Bodham's kindness in giving me the only picture of my mother that is to be found, I suppose, in all the world. I had rather possess it 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. I remember her too, young as I was when she died, well enough to know that it is a very exact resemblance of her, and as such it is to me invaluable.

Everybody loved her, and, with an amiable character so impressed upon all her features, everybody was sure to do so."

Mrs. Bodham, in her letter, invited the poet to Norfolk. "Alas!" says he (writing to Johnson), "she might as well invite the house in which I dwell; for, all other considerations and impediments apart, how is it possible that a translator of Homer should lumber to such a distance! But, though I cannot comply with her kind invitation, I have made myself the best amends in my power, by inviting her and all the family of Donnes to Weston. Perhaps we could not accommodate them all at once, but in succession we could, and can at any time find room for five, three of them being females, and one a married one. You are a mathematician; tell me, then, how five persons can be lodged in three beds (two males and three females), and I shall have good hope that you will proceed a senior optime?"

He replied to Mrs. Bodham's letter as follows: "My dearest Cousin,—What shall I say in answer to your affectionate invitation? I *must* say this, I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done, perhaps, and it will answer to us just as well: you and Mr. Bodham can come to Weston, can you not? The summer is at hand, there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask you altogether for want of house-room, but for Mr. Bodham and yourself we have good room, and equally good for any third in the shape of a Donne, whet er named Hewitt, Bodham, Balls, or

Johnson, or by whatever name distinguished. Mrs. Hewitt has particular claims upon me; she was my playfellow at Berkhamstead, and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so! Neither do I at all forget my cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter; give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister, and Mrs. Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you she will love you for your own."

By March 12th he had finished the Poem, which was written "not without tears," yet which, he tells Mrs. King, he had more pleasure in writing than any that he ever wrote, one excepted. "That one," he says, "was addressed to a lady who had supplied to me the place of my own mother—my own invaluable mother—these six-and-twenty years," referring, of course, to the sonnet—

"Mary! I want a lyre with other strings."

"Some sons may be said to have had many fathers, but a plurality of mothers is not common." At the end of March the poem was sent to Lady Hesketh, who passed it on to the General; upon hearing which Cowper remarked: "I am glad that thou hast sent the General those verses on my mother's picture. They will amuse him—only I hope that he will not miss my mother-in-law, and think that she ought to have made a third. On such an occasion it was not possible to mention her with any propriety."

So the poet reckoned that he had in all three mothers—namely, his actual mother, his step-mother,

and Mrs. Unwin. The General's approbation of his verses gave him pleasure, and he observed: "Should he offer me my father's picture, I shall gladly accept it."

157. Cowper is "delivered of two or three other Brats."—March, 1790.

In writing to Mrs. King on March 12th (1790), Cowper requested her to destroy a piece of poetry he had sent her, entitled "To Lady Hesketh on her Furnishing for me our House at Weston," promising to make her amends by sending her a new edition of it when time should serve, delivered from the passages he disliked in the first, and in other respects amended. Whether or not Mrs. King complied with the request we cannot say, but certain it is that somehow or other the first version as well as the second has been preserved. The poet goes on to say: "I have likewise, since I sent you the last packet, been delivered of two or three other brats, and, as the year proceeds, shall probably add to the number. All that come shall be basketed in time, and conveyed to your door."

What particular "brats" Cowper in this letter referred to, we do not know, but he wrote in this year the following small pieces:—

(1) "Inscription for a Stone erected at the Sowing of a Grove of Oaks at Chillington, the seat of T. Gifford, Esq." Mr. Thomas Gifford was the father of Mrs. Throckmorton.

(2) "To Mrs. Throckmorton, on her Beautiful Transcript of Horace's Ode, 'Ad Librum Suum.'" It is dated February, 1790 (see § 136)

(3) The lines "To Mrs. King, on her Kind Present," &c. August 14th.

(4) "Stanzas on the late Indecent Liberties taken with the Remains of the great Milton, anno 1790." August, 1790.

(5) "In Memory of the late John Thornton, Esq." November, 1790.

On January 3rd Cowper describes himself as "still thrumming Homer's lyre," and on May 2nd he is "still at the old sport"—namely, working at his last revisal—"Homer all the morning, and Homer all the evening." "Thus," says he, "have I been held in constant employment, I know not exactly how many, but I believe these six years, an interval of eight months excepted. It is now become so familiar to me to take Homer from my shelf at a certain hour, that I shall no doubt continue to take him from my shelf at the same time, even after I have ceased to want him. That period is not far distant. I am now giving the last touches to a work which, had I foreseen the difficulty of it, I should never have meddled with; but which, having at length nearly finished it to my mind, I shall discontinue with regret."

Cowper's afternoons were devoted to walking. But even when abroad his favourite Homer was never entirely out of his mind, and he wrote, he tells Mrs. King, "many and many a passage" with one foot on a mole-hill, with his hat crown upward on his knee, and paper on hat.

At the beginning of June Cowper had tidings of the marriage of his friend Rose, the consequence being, of course, a letter of congratulation, in which he takes occasion to ask a riddle or enigma, the making of which pestilent little things, as we have several times

pointed out, formed one of his special delights. "Samson," says Cowper, "at his marriage proposed a riddle to the Philistines. I am no Samson, neither are you a Philistine. Yet expound me the following if you can: What are they, which stand at a distance from each other and meet without ever moving?"

"Should you be so fortunate as to guess it, you may propose it to the company when you celebrate your nuptials; and if you can win thirty changes of raiment by it, as Samson did by his, let me tell you they will be no contemptible acquisition to a young beginner."

In a subsequent letter (September 13, 1790) he says: "The trees of a colonnade will solve my riddle."

### 158. The Laureateship.

By the death of Thomas Warton, the gifted author of the "History of English Poetry," was rendered vacant the poet-laureateship. This office, which dated from the time of Queen Elizabeth, the first laureate being none other than the poet Spencer, and which had been filled by Ben Jonson and Dryden, was for some time degraded by the admission of men of very inferior talents, or rather of no talents at all. The appointment of Warton, though he was not much of a poet, was a decided improvement; and it is not at all surprising that on the death of that *littérateur* many should imagine that no one more worthy of the laurel wreath could be found than the author of the "Task." The poet himself had to be consulted, however, and even at the first breath of such a thing he thus replied

to Lady Hesketh : "I thank thee for the offer of thy best services on this occasion. But Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention, whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them ! It would be a leaden extinguisher clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading. To speak seriously, it would make me miserable, and therefore I am sure that thou, of all my friends, wouldst least wish me to wear it."

The greatest obstacle to his acceptance of the office was the knowledge that it was the duty of the poet-laureate to write an ode on the king's birthday—or as Cowper himself had phrased it—

"His quit-rent ode, his peppercorn of praise."

He learned subsequently, however, that according to the new condition of the office odes were no longer required. Nevertheless there were still lions in the path. He says : "I could neither go to Court, nor could I kiss hands, were it for a much more valuable consideration. Therefore never expect to hear that royal favours find out me !"

In the meantime Cowper had received another letter from his quondam correspondent, Mr. Churchey, who made the singular request that the poet would use his interest and influence to get him, Mr. Churchey, made laureate. Says Cowper : "I have been applied to within these few days by a Welshman, with a wife and many children, to get him made poet-laureate as fast as possible. If thou wouldst wish to make the world merry twice a year, thou canst not do better than procure the office for him. I will promise thee that he

shall afford thee a hearty laugh in return every birthday and every new year. He is an honest man."

The laureateship was first offered to William Hayley, afterwards Cowper's biographer, and now in the zenith of his fame, but in a few verses on the occasion to Mr. Pitt he gracefully declined it. Finally, the office, and the £100 a year and the tierce of canary, or rather its value, that accompanied it, fell to the lot of a nonentity named Henry James Pye, who became, and deservedly, the butt of all the wits of his day. Even Cowper's "Welsh attorney" would have filled the office with more dignity.

#### 159. The Narrative of Mr. Van Lier.—Midsummer, 1790.

In June, July, and August we find Cowper at work translating the narrative of Mr. Van Lier. Mr. Van Lier, a minister of the Reformed Church at the Cape of Good Hope, was born in Holland, in the year 1764. After the usual course of education he entered at the University, where, though he did not neglect his studies, he forgot his religion, and became vicious. Then followed a series of trials; and at length, thanks partly to several excellent works, notably Newton's "Cardiphonia," he was led back to his old beliefs. Subsequently Mr. Van Lier wrote a narrative in Latin, containing an account of his conversion, and of all the remarkable events of his life. This narrative he addressed to Newton, at whose request it was translated by Cowper. It was published under the title of



“The Power of Grace Illustrated,” and its contents comprise nearly two hundred pages. “I have no objection at all,” Cowper tells Newton (October 15, 1790), “to being known as the translator of Van Lier’s Letters, when they shall be published. Rather, I am ambitious of it as an honour. It will serve to prove that if I have spent much time to little purpose in the translation of Homer, some small portion of my time has, however, been well disposed of.”

Cowper appears to have finished Homer and Mr. Van Lier at about the same time—namely, in September, 1790.

#### 160. The Anodyne of God.—July 7, 1790.

The condition of Mrs. Unwin continued to give Cowper constant anxiety. She had ailed more or less ever since her accident in the January of 1789. Up to now she had often been employed in transcribing Cowper’s rhymes for his friends, but on June 14th the poet observed: “It is very seldom that she can write without being much a sufferer by it. She has almost a constant pain in her side, which forbids it.”

In July her case was made known to Mr. Gregson (Griggy), who possessed considerable medical knowledge. Cowper writes on the 7th of that month: “He says, indeed, it is a case perfectly out of the reach of all physical aid, but at the same time not at all dangerous. Constant pain is a sad grievance, whatever part is affected, and she is hardly ever free from an aching head, as well as an uneasy side, but patience is

an anodyne of God's own preparation, and of that He gives her largely."

As for Cowper himself, at any time and at any season, the remembrance of his lost condition would force itself upon him. At any moment there might ring in his ear the dismal words: "Actum est de te, periisti." All roads led to that melancholy London. For example, Mrs. King mentioned once her admiration for the beauties of Cloudland. Says Cowper (June 14, 1790):—

"I am, like you and Mr. King, an admirer of clouds, but only when there are blue intervals, and pretty wide ones too, between them. One cloud is too-much for me, but a hundred are not too many. So, with this riddle and with my best respects to Mr. King, to which I add Mrs. Unwin's to you both,—

"I remain, my dear madam,

"Truly yours,

"W. C."

161. The Visit of Mrs. King and the Completion of Homer.—September 9, 1790.

Later in the month Cowper had the pleasure of a visit from Mr. and Mrs. King, and he expressed the same wish that he had made in reference to several of his other friends—namely, that it had pleased Providence to appoint their habitation and his nearer together. He gave hopes too that the Kings might expect him and Mrs. Unwin at Pertenhall—hopes, however, that were never realized. Mrs. King brought

with her as a present a patchwork counterpane of her own making, which Lady Hesketh, who afterwards saw it, pronounced "the most beautiful and best executed of the kind she ever saw," and which inspired the poet to write on August 14th the lines "To Mrs. King," in which he pictures the *mêlée* that would ensue should every maiden come—

"To scramble for the patch that bears  
The impress of the robe she wears."

The poem winds up with an expression of thanks to—

"The gentle fair of Pertenhall  
Who put the whole together."

In November Cowper received a visit from another lady—the Dowager Lady Spencer—the same to whom he had determined to dedicate his *Odyssey*, and whom he regarded, in point of character and accomplishments, "one of the first women in the world." Lady Spencer was one of the few "ladies of fashion" he knew, in whose company he kept in high spirits. Says he, "I am a shy animal, and want much kindness to make me easy. Such I shall be to my dying day."

Meantime the long task of translation was finished, and not only finished, but the MS. was forwarded to the publisher. Cowper writes on the 9th of September (1790): "Johnny left us yesterday morning, and whither do you think he is gone, and on what errand? Gone, as sure as you are alive, to London, and to convey my Homer to the bookseller's. But he will return the day after to-morrow, and I mean to part

with him no more till necessity shall force us asunder. Suspect me not, my cousin, of being such a monster as to have imposed this task myself on your kind nephew, or even to have thought of doing it. It happened that one day, as we chatted by the fireside, I expressed a wish that I could hear of some trusty body going to London, to whose care I might consign my voluminous labours, the work of five years. For I purpose never to visit that city again myself, and should have been uneasy to have left a charge, of so much importance to me, altogether to the care of a stage-coachman. Johnny had no sooner heard my wish than, offering himself to the service, he fulfilled it ; and his offer was made in such terms, and accompanied with a countenance and manner expressive of so much alacrity, that, unreasonable as I thought it at first to give him so much trouble, I soon found that I should mortify him by a refusal. He is gone, therefore, with a box full of poetry, of which I think nobody will plunder him. He has only to say what it is, and there is no commodity, I think, a freebooter would covet less."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *THE NORFOLK COUSINS; OR, FROM THE COMPLETION OF HOMER TO THE INTRODUCTION OF HAYLEY*

(September, 1790—March 25, 1792.)

#### 162. Hurdis.

**A**MONG the poets of the day who acknowledged their indebtedness to Cowper was the Rev. James Hurdis, a most amiable and accomplished man, whose name, however, has been saved from oblivion, not by his productions, but through his connection with the poet whom he had made his master, for very few nowadays have heard of, let alone read, the once popular "Village Curate." Having addressed a letter to Weston, Mr. Hurdis got the following in reply (March 6, 1791): "Sir,—I have always entertained, and have occasionally avowed, a great degree of respect for the abilities of the unknown author of 'The Village Curate,'—unknown at that time, but now well known, and not to me only, but to many. For, before I was favoured with your obliging letter, I knew your name, your place of abode, your

profession, and that you had four sisters ; all which I neither learned from our bookseller, nor from any of his connections. You will perceive, therefore, that you are no longer an author *incognito*. The writer, indeed, of many passages that have fallen from your pen could not long continue so. Let genius, true genius, conceal itself where it may, we may say of it, as the young man in Terence of his beautiful mistress, '*Diu latere non potest.*'"

The reputation of Cowper, even in his own country, was by no means insignificant, as may be judged from his letter of February 13, 1791. The poet had occasion to send Sam Roberts to the "George" at Woburn, kept by a Mr. Martin, who, "having learned from Sam whose servant he was, told him, that he had never seen Mr. Cowper, but he had heard him frequently spoken of by the companies that had called at his house ; and therefore when Sam would have paid for his breakfast, would take nothing from him. Who says that fame is only empty breath? On the contrary, it is good ale and cold beef into the bargain."

### 163. Cowper's Twenty Books.

Perhaps there never was a man of letters, at any rate since the invention of printing, who possessed fewer books than Cowper ; for writing to Bagot on March 18, 1791, he speaks of himself as "a poor man who has but twenty books in the world, and two of them are your brother Chester's." As we have seen, Cowper had once a good collection, which was lost



*William Cowper. Esq.?*

HOOK-PLATE OF THE POET COWPER.

From a copy of the First Volume of ERASMUS MIDDLETON'S "Biographia Evangelica," 4 vols., London, 1779-86, 8vo. Upon the title-page is the Poet's autograph, "WM. COWPER, 1797." The arms are as follows:—Quarterly: I and IV *Argent*, three martlets *gules*; on a chief engrailed of the last, as many annulets *or*—*Cowper*. II and III *or*, on a chevron *sable* three escallops *argent*; on a chief of the second, a lion passant of the third—*Stanbridge*. Crest: A lion's gambe erect and erased *or*, holding a branch *vert*, fruited *gules*.





when he removed to St. Albans. In May, 1788, he received news that this collection was still in being. But the news proved false, and the poet thereupon wrote: "Alas! my library—I must now give it up for a lost thing for ever. The only consolation belonging to the circumstance is, or seems to be, that no such loss did ever befall any other man, or can ever befall me again. As far as books are concerned, I am:

" ' Totus teres atque rotundus,'

and may set fortune at defiance. The books, which had been my father's, had, most of them, his arms on the inside cover, but the rest no mark, neither his name nor mine. I could mourn for them like Sancho for his Dapple, but it would avail me nothing."

Cowper, then, in 1791 had only twenty books, or rather eighteen, for two of them belonged to some one else. But out of these eighteen, nine had been in his possession only since February, 1788. (In that month Mr. Rowley had returned the borrowed half-dozen, and three gift books had been received since.) Consequently from his leaving St. Albans to three years after his removal to Weston, he actually possessed only nine books of his own. What these were it would be interesting to know.

I was in hopes that, after a careful study of Cowper's letters, I should be able to name them, and also the others that made up the twenty that he possessed in 1791, but though it is impossible to do this, I am able to make out a list that is probably pretty correct. I believe that these nine books were—

1. His father's Family Bible.

2. Horace, "a little Horace of mine." The one in which Mrs. Throckmorton transcribed the spurious ode.

3. Ainsworth's Latin and English Dictionary. (Bought in 1784.)

4. Beattie's Poems. (Bought in 1784.)

5. Burns's Poems. (Given him by Rose in 1787.)

6. Psalms and Hymns. (Madan's Collection.)

7. Vincent Bourne's Latin Poems.

8. Pearsall's Meditations (see § 37).

9. Milton.

Of the first five we are certain, the last four were among his possessions at his death, and from various remarks that he made at this period it is probable that he then owned them. In addition to these nine should be named two books that belong respectively to the Rev. Mr. Jones, of Clifton, and the Rev. Thomas Scott, which he was permitted to keep as long as he liked—namely, "Homer with a clavis" and Virgil (see letter, July 12, 1784). Of the remaining eleven, which consisted of the half-dozen books returned in 1787 by Clotworthy Rowley, and four others, we can name for certain only four, to wit:—

10. Villoison's Iliad (see letter, October 4, 1789). Presented by Mr. Throckmorton.

11. Twining's Aristotle (see letter, April 30, 1789). Presented by General Cowper.

12. Clarke's Commentary on Homer. (Given him March, 1788, by Rose.)

13. Travels of Solander (see letter July, 5, 1788).

The remaining seven were probably Thomson's "Seasons," one or two of John Newton's books, Hervey's

Meditations, a Greek New Testament, a book or two on gardening, a volume of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and Bishop Newton on the Prophecies. Add to these a copy of each of his own volumes of poems and we have, I think, a pretty accurate list of the books in Cowper's possession during the time he was producing his principal works. But though this list cannot be pronounced a perfect one, we possess a list of the books in Cowper's possession at his death that is perfect, to wit : "A catalogue of the library of the late William Cowper, Esq., taken by William Barker, Bookseller, East Dereham, Norfolk, October, 1800." This interesting list, from a copy in the handwriting of the late Mr. John Bruce, which was given me by Mr. Henry Gough, of Redhill, will be found in the Appendix. The number had risen from 20 to 177, but most of the books were gifts.

How it was that Cowper possessed so few books is not easy to say. That he was a true book-lover is certain. Nevertheless, we actually find him on April 1, 1782, commissioning a friend to buy him a "genteelish tooth-pick case;" and at what price do you suppose? He says, "I shall not think half a guinea too much for it; only it must be one that will not easily break." This, too, while his library, if so dignified a name could be given to so contemptible a collection, consisted of only nine volumes. Then again on May 23rd of 1781, because his neck-cloths were shabby, and he was taking to stocks, he is in need of "a handsome stock-buckle, for a very little money," and observes that "for twenty or twenty-five shillings perhaps a second-hand affair may be purchased that will make a

figure at Olney." What can be made of a man, a professed book-lover, too, who thinks nothing of laying down his half-guinea and his guinea for a tooth-pick case or a stock-buckle, and yet denies himself in books ! When, owing to the goodness of friends, his books began to increase in number, Cowper required something to put them on, and we find him writing on March 17, 1788, as follows : "I am likely to be furnished soon with shelves, which my cousin of New Norfolk Street is about to send me ; but furniture for these shelves I shall not presently procure, unless by recovering my stray authors. I am not young enough to think of making a new collection, and shall probably possess myself of few books hereafter but such as I may put forth myself, which cost me nothing but what I can better spare than money—time and consideration." In due time Lady Hesketh fulfilled her promise, and the new gift is thus described in the poem entitled "Gratitude" :—

"This movable structure of shelves,  
 For its beauty admired and its use,  
 And charged with octavos and twelves,  
 The gayest I had to produce ;  
 Where, flaming in scarlet and gold,  
 My poems enchanted I view,  
 And hope, in due time to behold  
 My Iliad and Odyssey too."

Not only did Lady Hesketh supply him with shelves, she also sent in May of the same year a convenient apparatus for the reception of his papers. He says : "A thousand thanks, my dear, for the new convenience in the way of stowage which you are so kind

as to intend me. There is nothing in which I am so deficient as repositories for letters, papers, and litter of all sorts. Your last present has helped me somewhat, but not with respect to such things as require lock and key, which are numerous. A box, therefore, so secured will be to me an invaluable acquisition. And, since you leave me to my option, what shall be the size thereof, I of course prefer a folio. On the back of the book-seeming box, some artist, expert in those matters, may inscribe these words :

*Collectanea curiosa,*

the English of which is, a collection of curiosities. A title which I prefer to all others, because, if I live, I shall take care that the box shall merit it, and because it will operate as an incentive to open that which being locked cannot be opened; for in these cases the greater the baulk the more wit is discovered by the ingenious contriver of it—viz., myself."

164. "The Four Ages."—May, 1791.

Mr. Canniford, the curate for whom Cowper had discovered in himself such an aversion, had been succeeded by the Rev. John Buchanan, a gentleman considerably more agreeable than his predecessor had been objectionable, and one who was as much respected by the Throckmortons as by Cowper. There was always a place laid for him at dinner at the Hall.

Mr. Buchanan, who lived only a few doors from the Lodge, at the house in Weston, now an inn under the title of "Cowper's Oak," made the observation that

no poet ancient or modern had expressly treated on the four divisions of human life, infancy—youth, manhood, and old age, suggesting at the same time that it was a suitable subject for a poem. Pleased with the idea, the poet requested him to draw out his thoughts at length, and on Mr. Buchanan's compliance, wrote to him as follows: "My dear sir, you have sent me a beautiful poem, wanting nothing but metre. I would to Heaven you would give it that requisite yourself; for he who could make the sketch cannot but be well qualified to finish. But if you will not, I will, provided always, nevertheless, that God gives me ability, for it will require no common share to do justice to your conceptions." Accordingly in May (1791) he began upon the theme, hoping to produce a work of about the same length as the "Task." But of this intended poem only thirty-eight lines were written; it was laid aside for the lines on Yardley Oak, which in its turn was sacrificed to the notes on Milton.

"The Four Ages" begins very promisingly, and it is a thousand pities the poet did not keep on with it. It is interesting to note that a poem on the Four Ages of Man has since been written by M. Werthmuller, a citizen of Zurich. This performance gave rise to another German poem on the Four Ages of Woman, by M. Zacharie, professor of poetry at Brunswick.

Many other people proposed subjects for Cowper's pen; so numerous were these suggestions, indeed, that he was at length provoked to say (in an unpublished letter of March 30, 1792): "I had need have two heads like Parnassus itself to execute all of this sort that has been recommended to me."

## 165. Publication of Homer.—July 1, 1791.

Having finished Homer, Cowper set to work to translate that parody on the Iliad the *Batrachomyomachia* (the War of the Frogs and Mice)—a Greek poem, commonly, though erroneously ascribed to Homer. Cowper did not tell any of his friends except Mr. Johnson that this piece was to accompany his translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Says he (May 23, 1791): “I had more reasons than one for this mysterious management; that is to say, I had two. In the first place, I wished to surprise my readers agreeably; and secondly, I wished to allow none of my friends an opportunity to object to the measure, who might think it perhaps a measure more bountiful than prudent. But I have had my sufficient reward, though not a pecuniary one. It is a poem of much humour, and accordingly I found the translation of it very amusing. It struck me, too, that I must either make it part of the present publication, or never publish it at all; it would have been so terribly out of its place in any other volume.”

Meantime Cowper's subscription lists, thanks to the exertions of Mr. Johnson, Mr. Rose, Lady Hesketh, Mr. Bagot, and various other friends, were exhibiting a goodly array of names, and the poet had hopes that after five years “ploughing and sowing on the plains of Troy,” once fruitful to his predecessor Pope, some harvest would arise for him also. The University of Cambridge, which had been worked by Johnny, supplied a very respectable number of names. Not so

the University of Oxford. When applied to by a friend of Mr. Throckmorton's, the answer was that they subscribed to nothing. Which treatment raised the ire of the poet sufficiently to cause him to write :—

“ Could Homer come himself, distress'd and poor,  
 And tune his harp at Rhedicina's door,  
 The rich old vixen would exclaim (I fear),  
 ' Begone ! no tramper gets a farthing here.' ”

By the 6th of March the publisher had printed as far as the fourth *Odyssey*, and Cowper expected that he and the swallows would appear together. The swallows, however, appeared first. May and June went by, but at length, on the, to him, memorable 1st of July the work came out—in the shape of two quarto volumes—the *Iliad*, being inscribed to his young kinsman, Earl Cowper, and the *Odyssey*, as already stated, to Lady Spencer. “ Now,” the poet wrote to Johnson, “ you may rest. Now I can give you joy of the period of all your labours in my service ”—referring, of course, to Johnson's exertions as a transcriber.

On the whole, the work was well received, and sufficient proofs reached Cowper from various quarters that he had not “ ploughed the fields of Troy in vain.” “ I have,” says he, “ every reason to be satisfied.” Pecuniarily it was certainly a success. Johnson paid all expenses, and gave the poet a thousand pounds, at the same time allowing him to retain the copyright. Beyond this, not much can be said in favour of the work upon which Cowper had spent so much time. Very few people of recent years have tackled it, and still fewer have praised it, though amongst the few may



be instanced such respectable critics as Croker and Samuel Rogers. The truth is, it is dull reading, though the same must be said, I suppose, of all the other blank verse translations of Homer. If a person unacquainted with Greek wants to read the Iliad or the Odyssey he goes to Pope. With all its faults there is no doubt that Pope's is at once the most vivid, the most musical, the most readable translation. It is so good that nobody wants a better—that is to say for general reading. Pope is to Cowper, Lord Derby, and the other blank verse translators what the Authorized Version of the Bible is to the Revised Version. Less correct, but more inviting. Pope we read, Cowper, Lord Derby, and others we merely refer to. I do not, of course, include the recent translators, such as Messrs. Butcher and Lang, among these "others." Translating Homer, however, and apart from its pecuniary success, was very useful to Cowper. He says: "A thousand times have I been glad of it; for a thousand times it has served at least to divert my attention, in some degree, from such terrible tempests as I believe have seldom been permitted to beat upon a human mind. Let my friends, therefore, who wish me some little measure of tranquillity in the performance of the most turbulent voyage that ever Christian mariner made, be contented, that, having Homer's mountains and forests to windward, I escape, under their shelter, from the force of many a gust that would almost over-set me; especially when they consider that, not by choice, but by necessity, I make *them* my refuge."

Of the immortal Homer himself, Cowper, an enthusiastic admirer, has said some very sensible things,

certain of them not at all complimentary to the ancient poet. For example, he wrote to Mr. Bagot (January 3, 1787): "You wish to hear from me at any calm interval of epic frenzy. An interval presents itself, but whether calm or not is perhaps doubtful. Is it possible for a man to be calm who for three weeks past has been perpetually occupied in slaughter; letting out one man's bowels, smiting another through the gullet, transfixing the liver of another, and lodging an arrow in a fourth? Read the thirteenth book of the Iliad, and you will find such amusing incidents as these the subject of it, the sole subject. In order to interest myself in it, and to catch the spirit of it, I had need discard all humanity. It is woeful work; and were the best poet in the world to give us at this day such a list of killed and wounded, he would not escape universal censure,—to the praise of a more enlightened age be it spoken. I have waded through much blood, and through much more I must wade before I shall have finished. I determine in the meantime to account it all very sublime, and for two reasons: first, because all the learned think so, and secondly, because I am to translate it. But, were I an indifferent bystander, perhaps I should venture to wish that Homer had applied his wonderful powers to a less disgusting subject: he has in the Odyssey, and I long to get at it."

Of the Odyssey he spoke as follows: "In the speeches made by the shade of Agamemnon there is more insight into the human heart discovered than I ever saw in any other work, unless in Shakespeare's;" but he also observes: "The battle with which the

book concludes is, I think, a paltry battle, and there is a huddle in the management of it altogether unworthy of my favourite, and the favourite of all ages."

The following is a summary of the principal facts connected with this undertaking. It was commenced November 21, 1784, and completed August 25, 1790. Consequently it took the poet some six years, but during eight months of the intervening time he was hindered by indisposition (his fourth derangement.) On the 8th of September, 1790, it was carried to London. Afterwards Cowper gave the work a second revision, which he concluded on March 4, 1791. The work was published, as we have seen, on July 1st of that year, but the poet continued to revise it, on and off, right up to the time of his death, with a view to a second edition. The following are the principal translations of Homer:—

*Iliad*.—Chapman, 1611; Pope, 1725; Cowper, 1791; Lord Derby, 1864; Professor Blackie, 1866; Worsley and Conington, 1868; Way, Wright, Green, Andrew Lang, Ernest Myers, and Walter Leaf (in prose, 1883).

*Odyssey*.—Chapman, 1616; Pope, 1725; Cowper, 1791; William Morris, Philip Stanhope Worsley, Lord Carnarvon, 1886; Way, Schomberg, "Avia," Andrew Lang, and Professor Butcher (in prose), 1879.

One of the results of the publication of Homer was that it put the poet into communication with Thurlow again, the subject of their correspondence being the propriety of translating Homer in blank verse.

## 166. The Bodhams Stay a Parson's Week.

On June 15th Cowper wrote : "The absence of Homer (for we have now shaken hands and parted) is well supplied by three relations of mine from Norfolk —my cousin Johnson, an aunt of his, and his sister. I love them all dearly, and am well content to resign to them the place in my attentions so lately occupied by the chiefs of Greece and Troy. His aunt and I have spent many a merry day together, when we were some forty years younger ; and we make shift to be merry together still. His sister is a sweet young woman, graceful, good-natured, and gentle, just what I had imagined her to be before I had seen her."

The aunt was Mrs. Balls. The name of Johnson's sister was Catharine. On the 23rd he wrote : "Mrs. Balls is an unaffected, plain-dressing, good-tempered, cheerful, motherly sort of a body. Her niece is an amiable young woman in all respects, a handsome likeness of Johnson, and with a smile so like my mother's, that in this cousin of mine she seems almost restored to me again. I would she had better health. Johnny, with whom I have been always delighted, is also so much in love with me that no place in the world will suit him to live in at present except Weston. Where he lives his sister will live likewise, and their aunt is under promise to live with them, at least till Catharine shall have attained under her tuition some competent share of skill in the art of housekeeping. They have looked at a house, the next but one to ours. It is an old house with *girt* casement windows, and

has a fir tree in the little court in front of it. Here they purpose to settle, if Aunt Bodham, who is most affectionately attached to them all, can be persuaded not to break her heart about it."

On July 7th, writing to Mrs. Bodham, who had been won over, Cowper, after telling her that Kitty had improved and that Johnny ailed nothing, observed: "Great preparation is making in the empty house. The spiders have no rest, and hardly a web is to be seen where lately there were thousands."

By the 11th, however, the idea had been given up, an accurate survey of the house proving that it was "so mean a ruin that it would have cost its value to make it habitable. They could only take it from year to year, for which reason the landlord would do nothing."

Writing on June 28th, Cowper had said: "I expect to see shortly Mrs. Bodham here and her husband. If they come, which depends on the recovery of a relation of theirs, at present very much disposed, they will stay, I imagine, a parson's week,<sup>1</sup> that is to say, about a fortnight and no longer."

On July 28th he says: "Our house is brimful, as it has been all the summer, with my relations from Norfolk."

## 167. The Milton Scheme and the Delphic Teedon.

Cowper was now "idle," and for two reasons: first,

<sup>1</sup> Literally, the period from a Monday till the Saturday week following.

on account of his eyes, which were troubling him again ; and secondly, because he knew not to what to attach himself in particular. He says : " Many different plans and projects are recommended to me. Some call aloud for original verse, others for more translation, and others for other things. Providence, I hope, will direct me in my choice, for other guide I have none, nor wish for another."

As we have before noticed, the weakness of his eyes was a continual source of anxiety. By care, however, and by saving them when they were tired, they stood him in stead, as the sequel proved, as long as he had need of them.

Whilst thus undecided what to do, an offer came from Mr. Joseph Johnson, the bookseller. A splendid edition of Milton was in contemplation, which should rival the celebrated Shakspeare of John Boydell. Would Cowper accept the responsible office of editor ?

For such an undertaking Cowper had but few qualifications. It is true that he possessed a refined critical taste and discernment, and it is also true that all his life he had been an admirer and a student of Milton. But he had had only trifling experience as an annotator, his knowledge of history was superficial, he had no books, and was situated in a spot where it was next to impossible to procure any—that is, of the particular sort that would be wanted. He saw the difficulties, but at the time they did not seem insurmountable. Moreover, a portion of the work would consist in translating the Latin poems of Milton into English verse, and translating was just then the occupation that best accorded with his taste.

Again, if it was possible to do so, he wished to oblige Johnson, who had acted towards him all along not only with fairness, but even with liberality. Still he was in doubt. The question was not whether the work was too formidable, but whether or not "he was providentially called to it"—and this brings us again to the subject of Samuel Teedon.

Whilst Cowper lived at Olney he had regarded Teedon, as we have seen, as a good Christian, but at the same time as a vain and somewhat obtrusive man. Yet, for the sake of his good points, he had always been willing to pass over his weaknesses. But as years went on things changed, and at length the belief of Teedon's that he (Teedon) was especially favoured by Providence came to be shared by Cowper, in consequence of which, by degrees, extraordinary to say, the refined and gifted poet got to regard the vain and eccentric schoolmaster as a kind of Delphic oracle. Cowper had seen visions and dreamed dreams and heard voices. Teedon in like manner received, as he took them to be, revelations from God. But there was this difference: Cowper believed himself a man whom God abhorred; Teedon regarded himself as Heaven's special favourite. Consequently, whenever in doubt, Cowper had recourse to Teedon. Mrs. Unwin, whose health had for some time been ailing, had likewise a great regard for Teedon; and as the correspondence that now sprang up, and the numerous visits that occurred, had apparently no injurious effect on the poet, she did nothing to discourage them.

That Teedon was sincere in his convictions we have no reason to doubt. He endeavoured to use his

influence for the poet's good, urging him to keep himself continually occupied, encouraging him to be frequent in prayer, and assuring him that God in His own time would remove the terrible burden of his life. Moreover, though to interpret them at all was presumptuous, he always put on Cowper's dreams the brightest possible interpretations.

When the question arose whether he should undertake the editorship of Milton, it was Teedon that Cowper consulted, and Teedon, after much prayer, obtained from Heaven that it was certainly expedient that the poet should engage in the work. Cowper's doubts now vanished. On September the 7th he rose in a tranquil state of mind, and wrote to Johnson accepting the offer; whilst Mrs. Unwin, by the same messenger who carried the letter to Olney, sent information to the schoolmaster of what had been done, concluding her letter with the hope that God might speed the work, and that Mr. Teedon would "continue to help them with his prayers on this occasion," and the wish "that every blessing bestowed upon them may be doubled to him." In another note, written a few days after, she says: "Mr. Cowper desires Mrs. Unwin to acquaint Mr. Teedon that his anxiety did not arise from any difficulties he apprehended in the performance of his work, but his uncertainty whether he was providentially called to it or not. He is now clearly persuaded by Mr. Teedon's experiences and gracious notices, that he is called to it, and is therefore perfectly easy. Mr. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin thank Mr. Teedon for the interesting part he takes in this affair, and hope the Lord will continue to enable him



not only to persevere, but also to feel a blessing in it, to his own self spiritually and personally. Mr. Cowper begs Mr. Teedon will be very earnest in prayer, that the possession of peace he now enjoys may be continued to him."

Mrs. Unwin thus communicates the news to Cowper's cousin, Mrs. Balls (October 25, 1791): "Ever since the close of his translation I have had many anxious thoughts how he would spend the advancing winter. . . . But a gracious Providence has dissipated my fears on that head. After a warm and strong solicitation, he has been prevailed upon to stand forth as an editor of the most splendid and magnificent edition of Milton that ever was offered to the public. His engagement is to translate all the Latin and Italian poems, to select the most approved notes of his predecessors in that line, and to add elucidations and annotations on the text as he sees proper. Fuseli is to furnish paintings for the thirty copper-plates, and Johnson, the bookseller, has taken upon himself to provide the first artists for engraving. This work will take your cousin, upon his own computation, about two years."

Several of Cowper's friends regretted that so much more time was to be given up to mere "translating and editing," notably Bagot and Hurdis. To the former he replied: "As to Milton, the die is cast. I am engaged, have bargained with Johnson, and cannot recede. I should otherwise have been glad to do as you advise, to make the translation of his Latin and Italian part of another volume; for, with such an addition, I have nearly as much verse in my budget as would be required for the purpose." To the latter:

“I am much obliged to you for wishing that I were employed in some original work rather than in translation. To tell the truth, I am of your mind; and, unless I could find another Homer, I shall promise (I believe) and vow, when I have done with Milton, never to translate again.”

Cowper now set industriously to work, and on November 14th (1791) he was able to say: “I have made a considerable progress in the translation of Milton’s Latin poems. I give them, as opportunity offers, all the variety of measure that I can. Some I render in heroic rhyme, some in stanzas, some in seven and some in eight syllable measure, and some in blank verse. They will altogether, I hope, make an agreeable miscellany for the English reader. They are certainly good in themselves, and cannot fail to please but by the fault of their translator.”

On February 21, 1792, he writes to Hurdis: “Milton at present engrosses me altogether. His Latin pieces I have translated, and have begun with the Italian. These are few, and will not detain me long. I shall then proceed immediately to deliberate upon and to settle the plan of my commentary, which I have hitherto had but little time to consider. I look forward to it, for this reason, with some anxiety. I trust at least that this anxiety will cease when I have once satisfied myself about the best manner of conducting it. But, after all, I seem to fear more about the labour to which it calls me than any great difficulty with which it is likely to be attended. To the labours of versifying I have no objection, but to the labours of criticism I am new, and apprehend that I shall find them wearisome.”

To this period probably belongs Cowper's pleasant poem entitled "The Retired Cat." In the letter to Lady Hesketh, of November 10, 1787, he had referred to a playful kitten in his possession—"the drollest of all creatures that ever wore a cat's skin," and this kitten, "dressed in a tortoise-shell suit," was probably in advanced life the heroine of the poem. In Cowper's bedroom stood a chest of drawers, to which the "poet's cat, sedate and grave," in search of some place of "serene repose," one day drew nigh.

" A drawer, it chanced, at bottom lined  
With linen of the softest kind,  
With such as merchants introduce  
From India, for the ladies' use,  
A drawer impending o'er the rest,  
Half open in the topmost chest,  
Of depth enough and none to spare,  
Invited her to slumber there ;  
Puss with delight beyond expression  
Survey'd the scene and took possession."

A short time after, Susan Wheeler, the chambermaid, passing by, shut the drawer—

" By no malignity impelled,  
But all unconscious what it held."

Fortunately on the evening of the next day the poet, hearing an "inexplicable scratching," came to the rescue, and not only was poor Puss rescued from an untimely end, but a poem on the subject was then and there indited.

168. Cowper's Profile, made by Mr. Higgins.—1791.

Some time in this year (1791) was executed Cowper's well-known silhouette. It is now in the possession of Mr. Hollingshead, of Olney, and on the back of it is inscribed "Profile of Cowper the poet, taken from life by old James Andrews, of Olney. It was done for Mr. Wilson, who knew the poet well all the years he resided at Olney—Sarah Wilson, 1858." Mrs. Wilson (who was thirty-two years younger than her husband) died in 1869. In reference to copies of this interesting relic Dean Burgon writes: "Those of Cowper's admirers who possess a silhouette of him, in which a slice has evidently been scraped away from the back of his wig, may care to be told that the very striking likeness in question was obtained by reducing a shadow of the poet's profile made by Mr. Higgins in 1791—with which Lady Hesketh would not be content until 'a trifle' more than the shadow justified had been taken off. The flatness of the back of Cowper's head was even extraordinary."

169. "Oh! Mr. Cowper, don't let me Fall!"  
—December 21, 1791.

In December Mrs. Unwin was seized with a paralytic attack, and the painful event is recorded in the letter of the 21st: "On Saturday last, while I was at my desk near the window, and Mrs. Unwin at the fireside opposite to it, I heard her suddenly exclaim,





“Oh! Mr. Cowper, don't let me fall!” I turned and saw her actually falling, together with her chair, and started to her side just in time to prevent her. She was seized with a violent giddiness, which lasted, though with some abatement, the whole day, and was attended too with some other very, very alarming symptoms. At present, however, she is relieved from the vertigo, and seems in all respects better.

“She has been my faithful and affectionate nurse for many years, and consequently has a claim on all my attentions. She has them, and will have them as long as she wants them; which will probably be, at the best, a considerable time to come. I feel the shock, as you may suppose, in every nerve. God grant that there may be no repetition of it. Another such a stroke upon her would, I think, upset me completely; but at present I hold up bravely.”

Mrs. Unwin for a time lost the use of her lower limbs; the vertigo “disturbed her sight so much that for a day or two she saw objects inverted; and her speech was slightly affected. By January 1st, however, she had greatly recovered, and was gathering strength daily. At the end of the month she was able to join the poet again in his study. Says he: “Her recovery has been extremely slow, and she is still feeble; but I thank God, not so feeble but that I hope for her perfect restoration as the spring advances.”

## 170. Thomas Park.—February 18, 1792.

On the 18th of February, 1792, commenced the acquaintance of Cowper with Mr. Thomas Park, a gentleman then well known in the world of letters. Mr. Park was author of "Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems," and subsequently editor of "Walpole's Royal and Noble Authors." The commencement of the correspondence between them was the arrival from Mr. Park of a parcel containing "Cursory Remarks," a copy of "Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdes," and a "kind letter," in respect to which Cowper observed: "Everything that relates to Milton must be welcome to an editor of him; and I am so unconnected with the learned world that, unless assistance seeks *me*, I am not very likely to find it. Fletcher's work was not in my possession; nor, indeed, was I possessed of any other, when I engaged in this undertaking, that could serve me much in the performance of it.

"The various untoward incidents of a very singular life have deprived me of a valuable collection, partly inherited from my father, partly from my brother, and partly made by myself; so that I have at present fewer books than any man ought to have who writes for the public, especially who assumes the character of an editor. At the present moment, however, I find myself tolerably well provided for this occasion by the kindness of a few friends, who have not been backward to pick from their shelves everything that they thought might be useful to me. I am happy to be able to number you among these friendly contributors."



When Park told Cowper that he was an engraver the poet wrote : " You have not in the least fallen in my esteem on account of your employment, as you seemed to apprehend that you might. It is an elegant one, and, when you speak modestly, as you do, of your proficiency in it, I am far from giving you entire credit for the whole assertion. I had indeed supposed you a person of independent fortune, who had nothing to do but to gratify himself ; and whose mind, being happily addicted to literature, was at full leisure to enjoy its innocent amusement. But it seems I was mistaken, and your time is principally due to an art which has a right pretty much to engross your attention, and which gives rather the air of an intrigue to your intercourse and familiarity with the muses than a lawful connection. No matter : I am not prudish in this respect, but honour you the more for a passion, virtuous and laudable in itself ; and which you indulge not, I dare say, without benefit both to yourself and your acquaintance."

Mr. Park subsequently sent Cowper a poem written when he was twenty years of age, with the request that the poet would criticise it ; the result being the discovery that Park had " genius and delicate taste ;" and that if he were not an engraver he might be one of our first hands in poetry.

Cowper's correspondence had by this time grown apace, and the task not infrequently fell to him of "reducing to molehills" a mountain of unanswered letters. On April 8, 1792, for example, he is deeply in debt to all his correspondents, and he has letters to write without number. "Like autumnal leaves," he

says, "that strew the brooks in Vallombrosa, the unanswered farrago lay before me."

The death of the aged Sir Robert Throckmorton in 1791 made a considerable change at Weston, for in March of the following year Sir John and Lady Throckmorton, as they will henceforth be styled, quitted the village, in order to reside at the family seat of Bucklands in Berkshire. Says Cowper : "I feel the loss of them, and shall feel it, since kinder or more friendly treatment I never can receive at any hands than I have always found at theirs. But it has long been a foreseen change, and was, indeed, almost daily expected long before it happened. The desertion of the Hall, however, will not be total. The second brother, George, now Mr. Courtenay, intends to reside there ; and, with him, as with his elder brother, I have always been on terms the most agreeable."

## CHAPTER XX.

### *“EPIITAPH HAYLEY;” OR, FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF HAYLEY TO THE JOURNEY TO EARTHAM.*

(March, 1792—August, 1792.)

#### 171. William Hayley.—March 25, 1792.

THE following month saw the commencement of Cowper's acquaintance with Hayley. William Hayley, who henceforth becomes a prominent figure in this biography, was born at Chichester, in 1745. Owing to a disease from which he suffered in his childhood, he was always inconvenienced with slight lameness. After his recovery from the illness, he was placed at Eton, whence he proceeded to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he amused himself with his classical studies, and took lessons in Italian. Quitting Cambridge in 1766, without taking his degree, he entered his name at the Middle Temple, only, however, very speedily to throw over the law and betake himself to the writing of poetry, for having “a fair inheritance on which to rest,” he was able to betake himself to pretty much what he pleased. Books, retirement, and friendship were, in his estimation, the

principal treasures of life. At first he attempted the drama, but unsuccessfully. Then he wrote, in the form of epistles in verse, his *Essays on Painting, History, and Epic poetry*—addressed respectively to Romney, Gibbon, and Mason. That on History procured for him the friendship of Gibbon, and his fame, as a great poet, was prophesied. The "*Triumphs of Temper*," his next production, raised his reputation to the highest pitch, such was the mediocrity of the age, and at the time he sought the friendship of Cowper he was regarded by many as the greatest living poet.

Hayley had married, in 1769, "Eliza," daughter of the Rev. Thomas Ball, Dean of Chichester, a lady to whom for some years he was greatly attached, from whom, indeed, spite of their subsequent separation, he was never altogether estranged. When, in 1774, he removed to Eartham, a pretty villa built by his father, who had been dead some years, he felicitated himself above all things on the happiness he would enjoy there with his wife. A morbid temperament, however, that Mrs. Hayley inherited soon began to interfere with his pleasure. Sudden fluctuations of spirits, extreme irritability, restlessness, pride, suspicion, depression, melancholy—all these at various times manifested themselves in her, and involved her husband "in scenes of anguish and affliction, with which no human powers appeared strong enough incessantly to contend." These characteristics drove Hayley from her presence. He did not cease to love her, but, like the king in the ballad of Fair Rosamund :—

"(Besides his wife) he dearly loved  
A fair and comely dame,"

whose name, according to village tradition, was Cottrell, and who was settled by her lover in what is now "the gardener's cottage," a neat whitewashed tenement standing just outside the grounds. Charles Lamb, in reference to the ballad, gave it as his opinion that there is great virtue in the word *besides*. But that is neither here nor there. Unlike Queen Eleanor, however, jealousy had no portion in the character of Mrs. Hayley, and not only was she not jealous, but she adopted from its birth the child that proceeded from her husband's irregular connection. This child, born October 5, 1780, was named Thomas Alphonso Hayley. Several years after Hayley and his wife separated "upon amicable terms." Mrs. Hayley continued to be proud of her husband, and carried on a frequent correspondence with him, whom, in her brighter moments, she addressed as Hotspur; nor did the separation cause unhappiness to either. Hayley gave himself up to the pleasures of building, gardening, and literature. He enlarged and beautified his house at Eartham, and embellished the grounds, making the place so charming, that his friend Gibbon, the historian, frequently a visitor there, called it the little Paradise of Eartham.<sup>1</sup> The character of Hayley himself is thus summed up by Southey: "All who knew him, concur in describing his manners as in the highest degree winning, and his conversation as delightful. It is said that few men have ever rendered so many essential acts of kindness to those who stood in need of them. His errors were neither few nor trifling; but his good qualities greatly preponderated.

<sup>1</sup> Eartham came subsequently into the possession of the Huskisson family. It is now the residence of Sir Peniston Milbanke.

He was a most affectionate father, a most warm and constant friend." His works, much as they were admired in his own day, are now, and deservedly, entirely forgotten. In one special form of composition, however, he has shown some excellence—that of writing epitaphs ; and it was his mournful satisfaction to write epitaphs on most of his friends. Whatever else dies his epitaphs will live ; hence the sobriquet that has attached itself to him—a sobriquet, be it observed, that has nothing uncomplimentary about it. The most distinguished personages of the time in literature and art were guests at Eartham. Gibbon we have already noticed ; Romney, Flaxman, Joseph Warton, Sargent, and Miss Seward may also be mentioned.

Meantime Cowper was busily engaged in translating the Latin and Italian poems of Milton, and Fuseli was employed upon the illustrations. This work had not long gone on before it became known that the eminent publisher, Boydell, had engaged Mr. Hayley to write a life for a sumptuous edition of Milton's poems, and it was represented by certain newspapers that Hayley and Cowper were rivals. Instead of making mischief, however, this distortion of fact did the very opposite ; it was the means of bringing the two poets together as friends. As soon as he found out what was bruited abroad, the generous Hayley wrote a graceful sonnet addressed to Cowper, and inclosed it with a letter which contained the assurance that till the present moment he was unaware upon what work Cowper was engaged, and that their two works would be so different in character, that it was impossible they could clash—a letter written on the most friendly and even

affectionate terms. This was on the 7th of February. The packet was left for Cowper at Johnson, the publisher's, owing to whose negligence it did not reach its destination for six weeks. The same evening that it was received, however, it was answered—to the great relief of Hayley, who, being unaware of Cowper's reason for not replying earlier, had suffered both “anxiety and mortification.” This letter, couched as it was in kindness, produced a second from Earham; and Cowper said of his new friend: “He is now, however, convinced that I love him, as indeed I do, and I account him the chief acquisition that my own verse has ever procured me.”

In the next letter he wrote (April 6th) Cowper says: “God grant that this friendship of ours may be a comfort to us all the rest of our days, in a world where true friendships are rarities, and especially where suddenly formed they are apt soon to terminate! But, as I said before, I feel a disposition of heart toward you that I never felt for one whom I had never seen; and that shall prove itself, I trust, in the event, a propitious omen.”

Hayley having declared his intention of paying Cowper a visit, the poet observes: “It gives me the sincerest pleasure that I may hope to see you at Weston; for, as to any migrations of mine, they must, I fear, notwithstanding the joy I should feel in being a guest of yours, be still considered in the light of impossibilities. Come, then, my friend, and be as welcome (as the country people say here) as the flowers in May!”

## 172. Cowper Plays the Commentator.

The Latin and Italian poems being translated, Cowper winds up his letter to Hayley of April the 6th with : "And now, for the present, adieu ; I am going to accompany Milton into the lake of fire and brimstone, having just begun my annotations."

To Mr. Rose, the day before, he had said : "I have begun my notes, and am playing the commentator manfully. The worst of it is that I am anticipated in almost all my opportunities to shine by those who have gone before me."

It was indeed pitiful business for a man of Cowper's abilities to be engaged upon. Translating Homer, which had already been translated well, was bad enough, but to annotate Milton, which had been annotated to death, was even worse.

In April the poet was much annoyed by a malevolent report that had for some time been current in Buckinghamshire and the neighbouring counties, that, though he had given himself an air of declaiming against the slave trade in the "Task," he was in reality a friend to it ; and from one of his correspondents, the Rev. J. Jekyll Rye (Vicar of Darlington, near Northampton), he received information that he had "been much traduced and calumniated on this account." How the report originated may be read in Cowper's own words : "The people of Olney petitioned Parliament for the abolition. My name was sought among the subscribers, but was not found. A question was asked, how that happened? Answer was made,



that I had once indeed been an enemy to the slave trade, but had changed my mind, for that, having lately read a history, or an account of Africa, I had seen it there asserted, that till the commencement of that traffic, the negroes, multiplying at a prodigious rate, were necessitated to devour each other; for which reason I had judged it better that the trade should continue, than that they should be again reduced to so horrid a custom."

But as the poet in replying to Mr. Rye observed, the single reason why he did not sign the petition was, because he was never asked to do it; and the reason why he was never asked was because he was not a parishioner of Olney.

Colour, too, had been given to the report by Cowper's habit of not abstaining from sugar or rum, after the practice of the most enthusiastic of the abolitionists; and in respect to this he writes as follows: "If any man concludes, because I allow myself the use of sugar and rum, that therefore I am a friend to the *slave trade*, he concludes rashly, and does me great wrong; for the man lives not who abhors it more than I do. My reasons for my own practice are satisfactory to myself, and they whose practice is contrary, are, I suppose, satisfied with theirs. So far is good. Let every man act according to his own judgment and conscience; but if we condemn another for not seeing with our eyes, we are unreasonable; and if we reproach him on that account, we are uncharitable, which is a still greater evil."

Not knowing how he could better or more effectually refute the scandal, the poet sent on the 16th, the same

day that he replied to Mr. Rye, a copy of verses "To the printers of the *Northampton Mercury*,"<sup>1</sup> prefaced by the following letter :—Sirs,—“ Having lately learned that it is pretty generally reported, both in your county and in this, that my present opinion, concerning the slave trade, differs totally from that which I have heretofore given to the public, and that I am no longer an enemy but a friend to that horrid traffic ; I entreat you to take an early opportunity to insert in your paper the following lines, written no longer since than this very morning, expressly for the two purposes of doing just honour to the gentleman with whose name they are inscribed, and of vindicating myself from an aspersion so injurious.

“ I am, &c.,

“ W. COWPER.”

The following is the sonnet :—

TO WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, Esq.

“ Thy country, Wilberforce, with just disdain,  
Hears thee, by cruel men and impious, call'd  
Fanatic, for thy zeal to loose th' enthrall'd  
From exile, public sale, and slav'ry's chain.  
Friend of the poor, the wrong'd, the fetter-gall'd,  
Fear not lest labour such as thine be vain !  
Thou hast achiev'd a part, hast gain'd the ear  
Of Britain's senate to thy glorious cause :  
Hope smiles, joy springs, and tho' cold caution pause  
And weave delay, the better hour is near,  
That shall remunerate thy toils severe  
By peace for Afric, fenc'd with British laws.  
Enjoy what thou hast won, esteem and love,  
From all the just on earth and all the blest above ! ”

<sup>1</sup> This newspaper, which is still continued, and is still widely read in North Bucks, was commenced as early as 1720. On May 2, 1890, was issued as a supplement a fac-simile of its first number (May 2, 1720).

On the 20th of May Cowper told Lady Hesketh :  
 “My sonnet, which I sent you, was printed in the Northampton paper last week, and this week it produced me a complimentary one in the same paper, which served to convince me at least, by the matter of it, that my own was not published without occasion, and that it had answered its purpose.”

The complimentary sonnet referred to was as follows :—

TO WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

ON READING HIS SONNET OF THE SIXTEENTH INSTANT ADDRESSED  
 TO MR. WILBERFORCE.

“ Desert the cause of liberty !—the cause  
 Of human nature !—sacred flame that burn'd  
 So late, so bright within thee !—thence descend  
 The monster Slavery's unnat'ral friend !  
 'Twere vile aspersion ! justly, while it draws  
 Thy virtuous indignation, greatly spurn'd.

As soon the foes of Afric might expect  
 The altar's blaze, forgetful of the law  
 Of its aspiring nature, should direct  
 To hell its point inverted ; as to draw  
 Virtue like thine, and genius, grovelling base,  
 To sanction wrong, and dignify disgrace.

Welcome *detection* ! grateful to the *Cause*,  
 As to its Patron, Cowper's just applause !”

S. M'CLELLAN.

April 25, 1792.

### 173. Hayley's First Visit.—May, 1792.

For some time Cowper had been looking forward to Hayley's promised visit. On April 26th he says :  
 “I will endeavour when Hayley comes to greet him with a countenance that shall not stiffen him into free-

stone, but cannot be answerable for my success. It will depend in some measure on the countenance that he presents himself; for whether I will or not, I am always a physiognomist, and if I dislike a man's looks, am sure to assume such as he will find equally disagreeable. But I hope better things from my friend Hayley. It seldom happens that a person so amiable in his disposition is very Gorgonian in his aspect."

Cowper, however, need have had no fears, for the fine open face of Hayley, who arrived in the middle of May, was the very reflection of the mind within. Hayley, whose own age, by the by, was forty-seven, gives to his friend Romney the painter the following account of this visit:—

"My host, though now in his sixty-first year, appeared as happily exempt from all the infirmities of advanced life as friendship could wish him to be; and his more elderly companion, not materially oppressed by age, discovered a benevolent alertness of character that seemed to promise a continuance of their domestic comfort. Their reception of me was kindness itself. I was enchanted to find that the manners and conversation of Cowper resembled his poetry, charming by unaffected elegance, and the graces of a benevolent spirit. I looked with affectionate veneration and pleasure on the lady who had devoted her life and fortune to the service of this tender and sublime genius.

"The delight that I derived from a perfect view of the virtues, the talents, and the present domestic enjoyments of Cowper, was suddenly overcast by the darkest and most painful anxiety.

“After passing our mornings in social study, we usually walked out together at noon. In returning from one of our rambles around the pleasant village of Weston, we were met by Mr. Greatheed, an accomplished minister of the gospel, who resides at Newport Pagnel, and whom Cowper described to me in terms of cordial esteem.

“He came forth to meet us as we drew near the house, and it was soon visible from his countenance and manner that he had ill news to impart. After the most tender preparation that humanity could devise, he acquainted Cowper that Mrs. Unwin was under the immediate pressure of a paralytic attack.

“My agitated friend rushed to the sight of the sufferer: he returned to me in a state that alarmed me in the highest degree for his faculties—his first speech to me was wild in the extreme—my answer would appear little less so; but it was addressed to the predominant fancy of my unhappy friend, and, with the blessing of Heaven, it produced an instantaneous calm in his troubled mind.

“From that moment he rested on my friendship, with such mild and cheerful confidence, that his affectionate spirit regarded me as sent providentially to support him in a season of the severest affliction.”

The results of Mrs. Unwin's seizure were of a most painful nature. Her speech was almost unintelligible from the moment that she was struck; it was with difficulty that she opened her eyes, and she could not keep them open; and as to self-moving powers from place to place, and the use of her right hand and arm, she had entirely lost them.

Cowper wished to send to Northampton for Dr. Kerr, but Mrs. Unwin was unwilling. Hayley, who had no inconsiderable knowledge of medicine and the art of healing, inquired if there was an electrical machine in the village. To the surprise of everybody there happened to be one, belonging to a neighbour named Sockett. Hayley then wrote a representation of the case to his friend Dr. Austen (the same that had cured the king), who recommended a course of medicine. Thanks to this and the electrical machine, Mrs. Unwin began to acquire strength again.

Grateful for the kindness of Dr. Austen, who gave his valuable services gratuitously, and delighted at the progress made by Mrs. Unwin, Cowper on May 26th composed the following sonnet, which is entitled, "To Dr. Austen, of Cecil Street, London" :—

"Austen ! accept a grateful verse from me !  
 The poet's treasure ! no inglorious fee !  
 Lov'd by the Muses, thy ingenuous mind  
 Pleasing requital in a verse may find ;  
 Verse oft has dash'd the scythe of Time aside,  
 Immortalizing names, which else had died :  
 And, oh ! could I command the glittering wealth  
 With which sick kings are glad to purchase health :  
 Yet, if extensive fame, and sure to live,  
 Were in the power of verse like mine to give,  
 I would not recompense his art with less,  
 Who, giving Mary health, heals my distress :  
 Friend of my friend ! I love thee though unknown,  
 And boldly call thee, being his, my own."

Before Hayley left Weston, he had exacted a promise from Cowper to make a return visit to Eartham.

The first letter that Cowper wrote to Hayley (dated

June 4th), after the departure of the latter, begins as follows :—

“ ALL'S WELL.

“ Which words I place as conspicuously as possible, and prefix them to my letter, to save you the pain, my friend and brother, of a moment's anxious speculation. Poor Mary proceeds in her amendment still, and improves, I think, even at a swifter rate than when you left her. The stronger she grows the faster she gathers strength, which is perhaps the natural course of recovery. She walked so well this morning, that she told me at my first visit she had entirely forgot her illness, and she spoke so distinctly, and had so much of her usual countenance, that had it been possible she would have made me forget it too.”

By June 11th Dr. Austen (the good Samaritan, as Cowper called him) had no doubt of Mrs. Unwin's ultimate recovery. The day before, the poet had written, “ It is a great blessing to us both that, poor feeble thing as she is, she has a most invincible courage, and a trust in God's goodness that nothing shakes ; ” and a week later he wrote : “ Be it known to you that we have these four days discarded our sedan with two elbows. Here is no more carrying, or being carried, but she walks upstairs boldly, with one hand upon the balustrade, and the other under my arm, and in like manner she comes down in the morning.”

Mrs. Unwin's attack had quite put a stop to Milton. Writes Cowper on July 8th to his publisher : “ Days, weeks, and months escape me, and nothing is done, nor is it possible for me to do anything that demands study and attention in the present state of our family.

I am the electrician ; I am the escort into the garden ; I am wanted, in short, on a hundred little occasions that occur every day in Mrs. Unwin's present state of infirmity ; and I see no probability that I shall be less occupied in the same indispensable duties for a long time to come." To Hayley he had written on June 10th : "What is to become of Milton I know not ; I do nothing but scribble to you, and seem to have no relish for any other employment." A few days later he likens Mrs. Unwin's progress in the road of recovery to the progress of the old nurse in Terence, and in the same letter says in reference to Milton, "I know not what will become of it."

On June 14th (1792) Cowper receives from the Rev. Richard Polwhele, poet, historian, and antiquary, a "most acceptable present," namely, "two volumes of poetry by gentlemen of Devonshire and Cornwall," and next day hastens to tender thanks both for them and for "beautiful lines," of which he (Cowper) is the subject, written by Mr. Polwhele on one of the blank leaves.<sup>1</sup>

This same month Miss Stapleton (Catharina) was married to Mr. George Throckmorton—thus fulfilling Cowper's prophecy.

#### 174. "Carwardine the Generous."

When his new friend was at Weston, Cowper had explained to him the state of his circumstances, and Hayley at once fell to wondering whether a pension might not be procured for his brother bard through the

<sup>1</sup> For long account of the Rev. R. Polwhele, his writings, and recollections, see *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. xcvi. pp. 140, 244, 343.



influence of Thurlow. Having himself some acquaintance with Thurlow, and his friend, the Rev. Thomas Carwardine (of Earl's Coln Priory, near Halstead, Essex), being much more intimate with him, Hayley hoped that between them they would be able to do something—at any rate he meant to try. On June 5th Cowper wrote: "Can I ever honour you enough for your zeal to serve me? Truly I think not. I am, however, so sensible of the love I owe you on this account, that I every day regret the acuteness of your feelings for me, convinced that they expose you to much trouble, mortification, and disappointment. . . . Let it please God to continue to me my William and Mary, and I will be more reasonable than to grumble." At his first convenient opportunity, in accordance with the fashion of those days, Hayley wrote a note to Thurlow requesting an appointment to breakfast, but considerable time elapsed without an answer. By and by Carwardine sent Cowper's poems as a present for the Chancellor's daughter; Hayley then seized the occasion to write a second note, and this "burst the barricado." The appointment was made, Hayley breakfasted with the Chancellor, and immediately after communicated what had taken place to Cowper. "Huzza!" he says, "I have passed an agreeable hour, from eight to nine this morning, with the Chancellor, and left both him and Lord Kenyon, who was with us, so impressed with warm wishes to serve you, that I am persuaded your old friend Thurlow will accomplish it if possible." Thurlow now knew, what he did not know before, that Cowper was by no means, had in fact never been, a rich man.

Referring to the exertions of his friends, Cowper writes to Lady Hesketh on June 11th:—"I live only to write letters. Hayley is, as you see, added to the number, and to him I write almost as duly as I rise in the morning; nor is he only added, but his friend Carwardine also—Carwardine the generous, the disinterested, the friendly. I seem, in short, to have stumbled suddenly on a race of heroes, men who resolve to have no interests of their own till mine are served."

Whatever good intentions Thurlow might have had in respect to Cowper, they were not put into execution. A few weeks later he resigned the Chancellorship.

Nevertheless it occurred to Hayley that it might give Cowper pleasure to meet again his friend of former days; so he informed Thurlow of the intended visit to Eartham of his dear "William of Weston"—and observed: "How happy I should be to present to you, under my roof, the man you honoured with your early regard!" Not only did Hayley invite the ex-Chancellor to Eartham, but he again pressed him to do something for Cowper's finances. Thurlow, however, neither accepted the invitation nor allowed himself to be overcome by Hayley's importunities. The ex-Chancellor was not troubled again.

#### 175. The Portrait by Lemuel Abbot.—July, 1792.

In the year 1792 Cowper, who had never before been drawn, though his profile had been cut as already related, was to have his portrait taken twice, first by Abbot, in July, at Weston, and a second time by Romney, in August.



COWPER, BY ABBOT.

The original, as Cowper himself points out, is what is called a "half-length," showing "all but foot and ankle."



The painting by Abbot was done to oblige "Johnny of Norfolk." "How do you imagine I have been occupied these last ten days?" says Cowper to Mr. Bull, on the 25th of July. "In sitting,—not on cockatrice eggs, nor yet to gratify a mere idle humour, nor because I was too sick to move; but because my cousin Johnson has an aunt who has a longing desire of my picture, and because he would therefore bring a painter from London to draw it. For this purpose I have been sitting, as I say, these ten days, and am heartily glad that my sitting time is over." Indeed so wearied was he on one occasion that young Mr. Higgins, who sometimes looked on, kindly took his place and sat for the *hand*.

Abbot's oil-painting represents the poet in a periwig, green coat, yellow waistcoat, and breeches (the Throckmorton archery costume). In an unpublished letter of August 29, 1792, Cowper says, "Green and buff are colours in which I am oftener seen than in any others, and are become almost as natural to me as to a parrot, and the dress was chosen principally for that reason." The periwig is probably the identical article concerning which he wrote to "Mrs. Frog" (Throckmorton) in March, 1790: "My periwig is arrived, and is the very perfection of all periwigs, having only one fault: which is, that my head will only go into the first half of it, the other half, or the upper part of it, continuing still unoccupied. My artist in this way at Olney has, however, undertaken to make the whole of it tenantable, and then I shall be twenty years younger than you have ever seen me." Before him is the writing desk that was presented by Theodora. "My desk, the most

elegant, the compactest, the most commodious desk in the world, and of all the desks that ever were or ever shall be, the desk that I love the most." In a letter to Hayley (July 15, 1792) he writes :—

" Abbot is painting me so true,  
That (trust me) you would stare,  
And hardly know, at the first view,  
If I were here or there."

And a few days later he said to the same correspondent, " Well, this picture is at last finished, and well finished, I can assure you. Every creature that has seen it has been astonished at the resemblance. Sam's boy bowed to it, and Beau walked up to it, wagging his tail as he went, and evidently showing that he acknowledged its likeness to his master. It is half length, as it is technically but absurdly called : that is to say, it gives all but foot and ankle." Cowper thought Abbot's likeness of him the " closest imaginable ;" and according to Mr. Johnson, " Catharina," and Mr. John Higgins, it was a better resemblance than either Romney's or Lawrence's.

#### 176. The Journey to Eartham.—August 1st.

Cowper had now quite made up his mind to visit Hayley, though to take a journey of a hundred and twenty miles was verily a deed of derring-do. " A thousand lions, monsters, and giants " were in his way, nevertheless he hoped they would all vanish if he had but the courage to face them, and he had little doubt that the change of air, together with the novelty of the

scene, would be useful both to him and Mrs. Unwin. "Pray for us, my friend," he says to Mr. Bull, "that we may have a safe going and return. It is a tremendous exploit." Persons accustomed to travel, as Cowper observes, would make themselves merry with all this anxiety, which seemed so disproportioned to the occasion. But for over twenty-six years Cowper had scarcely stirred from the neighbourhood of Olney and Weston. "Once," he says, writing to Newton, "I have been on the point of determining not to go, and even since we fixed the day ; my troubles have been so insupportable. But it has been made a matter of much prayer, and at last it has pleased God to satisfy me, in some measure, that His will corresponds with our purpose, and that He will afford us His protection. You, I know, will not be unmindful of us during our absence from home ; but will obtain for us, if your prayers can do it, all that we would ask for ourselves—the presence and favour of God, a salutary effect of our journey, and a safe return."

On July 29th he writes to Hayley as follows, commencing his letter with a verse of poetry :—

" Through floods and flames to your retreat  
I win my desp'rate way,  
And when we meet, if e'er we meet,  
Will echo your huzza ! "

" You will wonder at the word *desp'rate* in the second line, and at the *if* in the third ; but could you have any conception of the fears I have had to bustle with, of the dejection of spirits that I have suffered concerning this journey, you would wonder much more

that I still courageously persevere in my resolution to undertake it. Fortunately for my intentions, it happens, that as the day approaches my terrors abate; for had they continued to be what they were a week since, I must, after all, have disappointed you; and was actually once on the verge of doing it. I have told you something of my nocturnal experiences, and assure you now, that they were hardly ever more terrific than on this occasion. Prayer has however opened my passage at last, and obtained for me a degree of confidence that I trust will prove a comfortable viaticum to me all the way. On Wednesday therefore we set forth.

"The terrors that I have spoken of would appear ridiculous to most, but to you they will not, for you are a reasonable creature, and know well that, to whatever cause it be owing (whether to constitution, or to God's express appointment) I am hunted by spiritual hounds in the night season. I cannot help it. You will pity me, and wish it were otherwise; and though you may think there is much of the imaginary in it, will not deem it for that reason an evil less to be lamented—so much for fears and distresses. Soon I hope they shall all have a joyful termination, and I, my Mary, my Johnny, and my dog, be skipping with delight at Eartham!"

His friends, Rose, General Cowper, and Carwardine, informed him of their desire to meet him at various points on the route. "Other men," remarks Cowper, "steal away from their homes silently, and make no disturbance; but when I move, houses are turned upside down, maids are turned out of their beds, all the counties through which I pass appear to be in an



uproar : Surrey greets me by the mouth of the General, and Essex by that of Carwardine. How strange does all this seem, to a man who has seen no bustle, and made none, for twenty years together !”

Abbot, who had returned to London, in fulfilment of his commission, ordered a coach to Olney, “with four steeds to draw it,” and on Wednesday, August 1st, Cowper, Mrs. Unwin, Johnson, Sam, and Beau set out for Eartham. A day or two after, describing the journey, he says : “It pleased God to carry us both through the journey with far less difficulty and inconvenience than I expected. I began it indeed with a thousand fears, and when we arrived the first evening at Barnet, found myself oppressed in spirit to a degree that could hardly be exceeded. I saw Mrs. Unwin weary, as she might well be, and heard such noises, both within the house and without, that I concluded she would get no rest. But I was mercifully disappointed. She rested, though not well, yet sufficiently.”

At the “Mitre,” where the night was spent, Cowper was met by Mr. Rose. At Kingston, where they dined the second day, he encountered the General (who lived at Ham, close by), whom he had not seen for thirty years. The second night was passed at Ripley (six miles from Guildford). Of the remainder of the journey Cowper thus speaks in a letter to Teedon : “I indeed myself was a little daunted by the tremendous height of the Sussex hills, in comparison of which all that I had seen elsewhere are dwarfs ; but I only was alarmed ; Mrs. Unwin had no such sensations, but was always cheerful from the beginning of our expedition to the end of it.” And he adds, “I had one glimpse

—at least I was willing to hope it was a glimpse—of heavenly light by the way ; an answer, I suppose, to many fervent prayers of yours. Continue to pray for us, and when anything occurs worth communicating let us know it."

By ten o'clock on the third evening they were safe at Eartham !

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *EARTHAM.*

(August and September, 1792.)

#### 177. Hayley's House.

**H**AYLEY received his visitors with the utmost cordiality, and Cowper was in raptures with all he saw. "Here," he writes to Mr. Greatheed, "we are in the most elegant mansion that I ever inhabited, and surrounded by the most delightful pleasure-grounds that I have ever seen; but which, dissipated as my powers of thought are at present, I will not undertake to describe. It shall suffice me to say, that they occupy three sides of a hill, which in Buckinghamshire might well pass for a mountain, and from the summit of which is beheld a most magnificent landscape bounded by the sea, and in one part by the Isle of Wight, which may also be seen plainly from the window of the library, in which I am writing."

And again: "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."

He tells Mrs. Courtenay : " The inland scene is equally beautiful, consisting of a large and deep valley well cultivated, and inclosed by magnificent hills, all crowned with wood. I had, for my part, no conception that a poet could be the owner of such a paradise ; and his house is as elegant as his scenes are charming."

To Newton he writes : " Here Mrs. Unwin walks more than she did or could be persuaded to do at Weston ; the cheerfulness naturally inspired by agreeable novelty, I suppose, is that which enables her to do it ; and when she is weary she gets into a chaise drawn by Socket<sup>1</sup> and little Hayley, and pushed behind either by me or my cousin Johnson ; the motion of which differs indeed from that of walking, but on rough gravel, such as this country affords, is hardly less beneficial.

" Perhaps when I write again I shall be less hurried, though every day is crowded with employment."

In a letter to Mrs. King, written after his return, Cowper says : " Hayley is one of the most agreeable men, as well as one of the most cordial friends. His house is elegant ; his library large, and well chosen ; and he is surrounded by the most delightful scenery. But I have made the experiment only to prove, what indeed I knew before, that creatures are physicians of little value, and that health and cure are from God only. Henceforth, therefore, I shall wait for those blessings from Him, and expect them at no other hand."

With Hayley's friend Guy, a medical practitioner of Chichester, who was frequently in their company, Cowper was also delighted.

<sup>1</sup> A lad Hayley had brought from Weston Underwood.



EARTHAM, THE RESIDENCE OF HAYLEY.



Speaking of the manner in which they employed their time at Eartham, Hayley observes : "Homer was not the immediate object of our attention. The morning hours that we could bestow upon books were chiefly devoted to a complete revisal and correction of all the translations, which my friend had finished, from the Latin and Italian poetry of Milton ; and we generally amused ourselves after dinner in forming together a rapid metrical version of Andreini's *Adamo*"—a poem that is interesting only from the fact that it probably suggested to Milton the design of "*Paradise Lost*." Neither the original nor Cowper and Hayley's joint version of it are of any particular merit. This translation, which is included in some editions of Cowper's works, is entitled "*Adam, a drama*."

#### 178. The Portrait by Romney.—August 26th.

Only a month had passed since Cowper's portrait had been painted by Abbot, and now, at the request of Hayley, he was to be drawn in crayons by Romney.

George Romney, the great rival of Sir Joshua Reynolds, was one of the guests invited by Hayley to meet Cowper at Eartham. The story of Romney was a curious one. Born about 1735, he was bred to his father's trade of carpenter-joiner, obtained a knowledge of painting from a portrait-painter at Kendal when he was nineteen, married at twenty-two, and at twenty-seven quitted his wife, with her concurrence, to seek his fortune in London. It had been thirty years since he took this step, and Fortune had favoured him. He

continued to provide for his wife and children, but that was all. During those thirty years he had not seen her, nor did he return to her or Kendal till seven years subsequently, when, though famous and rich, he was a broken-down old man.

Romney had long been the friend of Hayley. Fifteen years previously he had drawn Hayley's portrait, "an admirable likeness," which the Eartham bard now gave to his "William of Weston." Romney's portrait of Cowper was regarded by Hayley as one of the most masterly and faithful resemblances he ever beheld. Romney himself considered it as the nearest approach he had ever made to a perfect representation of life and character. It had, however, an "air of wildness in it expressive of a disordered mind, which the shock produced by the paralytic attack of Mrs. Unwin was rapidly impressing on his countenance." Cowper also considered the picture a good one. Comparing it with Abbot's, in an unpublished letter of August 29, 1792, he says: "Romney has succeeded equally well in drawing my head only, but my head in a different aspect, little more than a profile." On his return to Weston, Cowper wrote the following lines, which show that he did not notice, though all his friends did, "the symptoms of woe in it" :—

TO GEORGE ROMNEY, Esq.,

On his picture of me in crayons, drawn at Eartham, in the sixty-first year of my age, and in the months of August and September, 1792.

" Romney, expert infallibly to trace  
 On chart or canvas, not the form alone  
 And semblance, but, however faintly shown,  
 The mind's impression too on every face,



With strokes that time ought never to erase ;  
 Thou hast so pencilled mine, that though I own  
 The subject worthless, I have never known  
 The artist shining with superior grace.

But this I mark, that symptoms none of woe  
 In thy incomparable work appear :  
 Well! I am satisfied, it should be so,  
 Since, on maturer thought, the cause is clear ;

For in my looks what sorrow could'st thou see,  
 While I was Hayley's guest, and sat to thee?"

### 179. The Epitaph on Fop.—August 25th.

Try as he might, Cowper was not able, while in Sussex, to use his pen to his satisfaction. "I am in truth," he says, "so unaccountably local in the use of my pen, that, like the man in the fable, who could leap well nowhere but at Rhodes, I seem incapable of writing at all, except at Weston."

Consequently we find that the only original piece he wrote during this visit was the epitaph on the dog Fop. He despatched it to Weston on August 23rd, when he says: "Without waiting for an answer to my last, I send my dear Catharina the epitaph she desired, composed as well as I could compose it in a place where every object, being still new to me, distracts my attention, and makes me as awkward at verse as if I had never dealt in it. Here it is:—

#### EPITAPH ON FOP,

A DOG, BELONGING TO LADY THROCKMORTON.

Though once a puppy, and though Fop by name,  
 Here moulders one whose bones some honour claim ;  
 No sycophant, although of spaniel race !  
 And though no hound, a martyr to the chase !

Ye squirrels, rabbits, leverets, rejoice !  
 Your haunts no longer echo to his voice.  
 This record of his fate exulting view,  
 He died worn out with vain pursuit of you !

“ Yes ! ” the indignant shade of Fop replies,  
 “ And worn with vain pursuit, man also dies ! ”

The epitaph gave “ Catharina ” great gratification. Cowper afterwards told her he was glad she was pleased with it, and that he should be prouder still to see it “ perpetuated by the chisel ”—an allusion doubtless to the intention of the lady to have it inscribed on the basement of a monumental urn destined for the Wilderness, where it may still be read. In the previously quoted letter the poet says more about his situation :—

“ I am here, as I told you in my last, delightfully situated, and in the enjoyment of all the most friendly hospitality can impart ; yet do I neither forget Weston, nor my friends at Weston : on the contrary, I have at length, though much and kindly pressed to make a longer stay, determined on the day of our departure—on the 17th of September we shall leave Eartham ; four days will be necessary to bring us home again, for I am under a promise to General Cowper to dine with him on the way, which cannot be done comfortably, either to him or to ourselves, unless we sleep that night at Kingston.”

Cowper had in fact, spite of the allurements of Eartham, soon begun to get homesick. He tells Lady Hesketh, on September 9th : “ This is, as I have already told you, a delightful place ; more beautiful scenery I have never beheld, nor expect to behold ; but the charms of it, uncommon as they are, have not

in the least alienated my affections from Weston. The genius of that place suits me better, it has an air of snug concealment, in which a disposition like mine feels peculiarly gratified; whereas here I see from every window woods like forests, and hills like mountains, a wildness, in short, that rather increases my natural melancholy, and which, were it not for the agreeables I find within, would soon convince me that mere change of place can avail me little." And he subsequently wrote to Newton: "Within doors all was hospitality and kindness, but the scenery *would* have its effect; and though delightful in the extreme to those who had spirits to bear it, was too gloomy for me."

#### 180. Hurdis, Charlotte Smith, and "Little Tom."

Cowper had the gratification while at Earham of meeting his correspondent Hurdis. But the pleasure of the meeting was mingled with sadness owing to the fact that Hurdis had but recently lost a beloved sister—the "Sally" of one of Cowper's minor poems. "You would admire him much," Cowper tells Lady Hesketh. "He is gentle in his manners, and delicate in his person, resembling our poor friend Unwin, both in face and figure, more than any one I have ever seen. But he has not, at least he has not at present, his vivacity."

Another person whom Hayley had invited to meet Cowper was the gifted but unfortunate Charlotte Smith, who had just begun "The Old Manor House," the best

of her novels. "She devoted," says Hayley, "the early part of the day to composition in her own apartment; and entertained the little party at Eartham by reading to them in the evening whatever the fertility of her fancy had produced in the course of a long studious morning. This lady had a quickness of invention and a rapidity of hand which astonished every witness of her abilities. Cowper repeatedly declared that he knew no man among his early associates, some of whom piqued themselves on rapid composition, who could have composed so rapidly and so well. . . . It was delightful to hear her read what she had just written; for she read as she wrote, with simplicity and grace."

From a letter written at Eartham to Charlotte Smith after her departure, we see that Cowper still continued to have brief periods of hope. He says:—

"I was much struck by an expression in your letter to Hayley, where you say that you 'will endeavour to take an interest in green leaves again.' This seems the sound of my own voice reflected to me from a distance; I have so often had the same thought and desire. A day scarcely passes, at this season of the year, when I do not contemplate the trees so soon to be stript, and say, 'Perhaps I shall never see you clothed again.' Every year, as it passes, makes this expectation more reasonable; and the year with me cannot be very distant, when the event will verify it. Well, may God grant us a good hope of arriving in due time where the leaves never fall, and all will be right!"

Charlotte Smith's novel, "The Old Manor House," was published in 1793, and she sent Cowper a copy. On July 25th of the same year we find him acknow-

ledging the receipt of her poem of "The Emigrants," which she had dedicated to him.

Perhaps the most pleasing incident in connection with this visit to Eartham was the interest excited in Cowper's mind by Hayley's son Tom, whose talents and sweetness of disposition made such an impression on Cowper that he invited him to criticise his Homer. Mrs. Unwin benefited very considerably by the visit, but it was in the article of speech chiefly, and in her powers of walking, that she was most sensible of improvement. Her sight and her hand still failed her, so that she could neither read nor work, mortifying circumstances both, to one who was never willingly idle. And Eartham had done the poet good too. "I am," he says, "without the least dissimulation, in good health; my spirits are about as good as you have ever seen them; and if increase of appetite and a double portion of sleep be advantageous, such are the advantages that I have received from this migration. 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."

### 181. The Return to Weston.

The time had now come for Cowper to say good-bye to his kind host, but the journey back was almost as much dreaded as had been the journey thither. Moreover, Cowper always felt a sadness in parting with

friends. He left Hayley with a heavy heart, and it was with a heavy heart too that he took leave of "our dear Tom," who had accompanied him a short distance on the journey. But, soon after this last separation, his troubles gushed from his eyes, and then he was better.

Having arrived at the "Sun," at Kingston, he set out for Ham, in order to see the General again. "But," says he, "the struggles that I had with my own spirit, labouring as I did under the most dreadful dejection, are never to be told. I would have given the world to have been excused. I went, however, and carried my point against myself, with a heart riven asunder—I have reasons for all this anxiety, which I cannot relate now. The visit, however, passed off well, and we returned in the dark to Kingston; I, with a lighter heart than I had known since my departure from Eartham, and Mary too, for she had suffered hardly less than myself, and chiefly on my account. That night we rested well in our inn, and at twenty minutes after eight next morning set off for London; exactly at ten we reached Mr. Rose's door."

Mr. Rose had invited to meet Cowper at breakfast a very well-known character of that day, the Welsh bard, Edward Williams, who was working at his trade, as a mason, in London. Mr. Williams, whose knowledge of Welsh antiquities and literature was proverbial, was led by Mr. Rose to converse on these topics. Cowper, however, sat at the corner of the fireplace in total silence—the knowledge that he was in London, the scene of so many sad associations of his early days, having caused a depression that he was unable to throw

off. But though in too nervous a state to converse, or even to bear an introduction, we are told that the poet occasionally "raised his eyes toward the speaker," and that he was a "well-pleased and attentive listener." After "a dish of chocolate," Cowper and Mrs. Unwin proceeded on their journey, Mr. Rose riding with them as far as St. Albans. Says Cowper: "From this time we met with no impediment. In the dark, and in a storm, at eight at night, we found ourselves at our own back-door. Mrs. Unwin was very near slipping out of the chair in which she was taken from the chaise, but at last was landed safe. We all have had a good night, and are all well this morning."





## CHAPTER XXII.

### *THE TEEDON ORACLE.*

(September, 1792—December, 1793.)

#### 182. Constantly Teedon.

**A**S might well be expected, it took Cowper no little time to get straight again after this “frisk into Sussex.” “Chaos himself,” he tells Hayley, “even the chaos of Milton, is not surrounded with more confusion, nor has a mind more completely in a hubbub, than I experience at the present moment. At our first arrival, after long absence, we find a hundred orders to servants necessary, a thousand things to be restored to their proper places, and an endless variety of minutæ to be adjusted; which, though individually of little importance, are most momentous in the aggregate.” A slight return of his disorder, too, added to his difficulties, as he informed Newton:—

“I have neither been well myself, nor is Mrs. Unwin, though better, so much improved in her health, as not still to require my continual assistance. My disorder has been the old one, to which I have

been subject so many years, and especially about this season—a nervous fever ; not, indeed, so oppressive as it has sometimes proved, but sufficiently alarming both to Mrs. Unwin and myself, and such as made it neither easy nor proper for me to make much use of my pen while it continued. At present I am tolerably free from it ; a blessing for which I believe myself partly indebted to the use of James's powder, in small quantities ; and partly to a small quantity of laudanum, taken every night ; but chiefly to a manifestation of God's presence vouchsafed to me a few days since ; transient, indeed, and dimly seen through a mist of many fears and troubles, but sufficient to convince me, at least while the enemy's power is a little restrained, that He has not cast me off for ever."

Cowper now began again to hear voices, and, as aforetime, he communicated them to the Olney school-master. The influence of Teedon, indeed, over Cowper was extraordinary. From the 27th of August, 1791, to the 2nd of February, 1794, a period of 891 days, no fewer than 277 recorded letters passed between Olney and Weston, namely :—

From Cowper to Teedon . .	72 letters.
„ Mrs. Unwin to Teedon	17 „
„ Teedon to Cowper . .	126 „
„ Teedon to Mrs. Unwin	62 „

It is rather sad to say there are good grounds for the supposition that this list is by no means a complete one.

These facts have been ascertained chiefly from Teedon's diary, which after the lapse of many years was discovered in 1890 by Mr. W. J. Harvey, of Champion Hill, S.W. It is a small MS. volume, size

6 inches by 3½ inches, contains 122 pages closely written in a neat and minute hand, and dates from the 17th of October, 1791, to the 2nd of February, 1794. By none of Cowper's previous biographers has this diary been consulted. Southey refers to it, but that he did not see it is certain, for the single quotation from it (vol. iii. p. 148) he had second-hand, namely, from the "Memoir of the Rev. Henry Gauntlett." To a person acquainted with Cowper's history and surroundings, this closely-written volume of the impecunious and garrulous schoolmaster — the Olney Pepys—conveys a great deal. To him it is not a mere collection of facts written by and relating only to an insignificant person, who, had his name not been linked with that of Cowper, would never have been heard of; it is not a mere chronicle of the small events of an out-of-the-way town in the Midlands; the names of Teedon's scholars are not merely the names of boys and girls, as like to other boys and girls as pins are to pins — nobodies; it conveys much more than this. As we turn over its soiled yellow pages the little world in which Cowper lived and moved seems to be rehabilitated. "The squire" and "madam," as Cowper and Mrs. Unwin are constantly styled, are of course the central figures, but their abode being Weston they are only rarely seen in Olney, though now and then they take tea with their new friend, the Rev. Mr. Bean, at the Vicarage. We see Teedon in his best coat and breeches trudging up Overs Hill towards the Lodge to receive his quarter-age; for the poet, thanks to the beneficence of an unknown friend, is able to allow him as much as £7 10s.

per quarter—a sum which, considering the modest total his pupils' pence amounted to, was a small fortune. Lady Hesketh imagined that Cowper was impoverishing himself by distributing his bounty so lavishly. But says Cowper;: “I know who is alluded to in your letter, under the description of a person who lives luxuriously at my cost. But you are misinformed. Unless a pint of ale at meal-times be a luxury, there are no luxuries in that man's house, I assure you ; and I can assure you beside, that whatever he has, he has it not by gift of mine ; Mrs. Unwin and I are merely the medium through which the bounty passes, not the authors of it. But we administer it conscientiously, and as in the sight of God, and are the more scrupulous about it because it is not ours.” We see Teedon another day approaching Weston on a very different errand. “The squire” has heard fresh voices, and he wishes to consult the man who is the peculiar favourite of Heaven. Teedon's face is serious this time, and before setting out it is evident that he has wrestled long in prayer. Teedon was certainly often absurd and injudicious, but he was no hypocrite.

In the period covered by the diary some two and a half years, no fewer than ninety-two visits of Teedon to Cowper are recorded, being an average of about one every nine days—hence there was a letter or a visit every three or four days.

We are also permitted to become acquainted with Teedon's household, which consisted, besides the schoolmaster, of his cousin, Elizabeth Killingworth, familiarly called “Mammy” ; of Mammy's son Worthy, already alluded to in this book as Eusebius Killingworth, who

did a little at bookbinding ; and likewise of Mary Taylor, "Polly," also styled "cousin." Mr. William Soul, of Olney, however, calls her "daughter," and it is evident that the people of Olney regarded her as Teedon's illegitimate daughter (she was now a middle-aged woman), born before Teedon's arrival in Olney, and, as one piously hopes, before his conversion. In the ledger of Mr. Grindon she is styled sometimes "daugr." and sometimes "kinsw." On January 11, 1794, Teedon writes : "I went over to Weston, saw the Esq<sup>r</sup> and Mad<sup>m</sup>, and went to Miss Higgins, who told me she heard there were (*sic*) to be a wedding at my house, viz., Polly and Worthy." Worthy was at this time forty-three.

We are able also, by means of the diary, to take a peep inside Mr. Teedon's school, which was none other than the upper part of the old Shiel Hall (described in § 43), which building, to Teedon's terror, the authorities threatened to pull down. Poor place as it was, it was his school. On November 23, 1792, he writes :—

"I could not bare (=bear) the School on Acc<sup>t</sup> of the Smoak (=smoke). I went to the (Rev.) Mr. Bean, and he advised me to go to Mr. Wright (Lord Dartmouth's steward) at  $\frac{1}{2}$  after 2, who ordered Mr. Raban to repair the chimney, &c."

On October 22 (1791), "M. (Maurice) Smith called me to tell me my school would be pulled down, &c. I replied I was glad of it if they would build me another."

On July 6th of the next year he writes that he was assaulted with reproach by Ashburner, who had inter-

cepted a note which he sent to inform Raban of the pulling down of the Shiel Hall, and blacksmith's shop adjoining. Continues Teedon: "I went over to the Esqr. (Cowper) and informed him of it, who desired me to go to Raban and inform him, and write down his Ans<sup>r</sup>, who (*i.e.*, Raban) defied them to touch the School." As mentioned earlier in this work, the Shiel Hall was not actually demolished till 1816.

Besides a day school for boys, Teedon and his household also kept a night school for girls. From each scholar was received from 6s. 3d. to 7s. per quarter. The number of scholars mentioned in the diary is 87 (boys 50, girls 37). Thus, taking night school and day school together, he might have had between 30 and 40 at a time, perhaps not so many.

The diary, it will be remembered, closes on February 2, 1794, and on this date Teedon made a visit to Cowper. Probably, however, he visited him after.

Very often the different voices Cowper heard caused only distress, but occasionally it was not so, as witness the letter to Teedon of October 16, 1792, written while Mr Johnson was at Weston:—

"On Sunday, while I walked with Mrs. Unwin and my cousin in the orchard, it pleased God to enable me once more to approach Him in prayer, and I prayed silently for everything that lay nearest my heart with a considerable degree of liberty. Nor did I let slip the occasion of praying for you.

"This experience I take to be a fulfilment of those words:—

"*'The ear of the Lord is open to them that fear Him, and He will hear their cry.'*

“The next morning, at my waking, I heard these :

“*Fulfil thy promise to me.*”

“And ever since I was favoured with that spiritual freedom to make my requests known to God, I have enjoyed some quiet, though not uninterrupted by threatenings of the enemy.”

Referring to another of his cheering moments, Cowper says :—

“In one of my short sleeps I dreamed that I had God’s presence in a slight measure, and exclaimed under the impression of it—

“*‘I know that Thou art infinitely gracious, but what will become of me?’*”

“This fever keeps me always in terror, for it has ever been the harbinger of my worst indispositions. As to prayer, the very Collects you mention have been the prayers that I have generally used when I have felt the least encouragement to pray at all. But I may add, never with any sensible effect. In compliance, however, with your call to that service, I will use them again, and be careful not to omit them, at least till the time you mention is expired. Yet if faith be necessary to effectuate prayer, alas, what chance have mine !”

A week later he wrote again to Teedon :—

“I have now persevered in the punctual performance of the duty of prayer as long, and I believe longer, than the time which you specified. Whether any beneficial effect has followed, I cannot say. My wakings in the night have certainly been somewhat less painful and terrible than they were, but this I cannot help ascribing to the agency of an anodyne which I have constantly

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sufficient to show that Dick was a general nuisance. It is as follows: "September 18 (1792), Worthy went over with my letter to the Esq<sup>r</sup> (*i.e.*, Cowper), but as they did not come (referring to Cowper and Mrs. Unwin's return from Eartham), brought it back. Found Dick Coleman just come in, and advised Kitchener (Cowper's gardener) by all means if they came to get rid of him without Mr. Cowper's seeing him." I do not think we should be wronging Dick by assuming that he was drunk.

### 183. The Miltonic Trap.—December, 1792.

Even before the journey to Eartham Cowper had been much troubled because he was unable to proceed with Milton. After his return the various hindrances he continued to meet with, and the consequent unsettled state of his mind again militated against the progress of his studies. On October 28th he writes: "The consciousness that there is so much to do, and nothing done, is a burthen I am not able to bear. Milton especially is my grievance, and I might almost as well be haunted by his ghost as goaded with continual reproaches for neglecting him."

On November 9th he writes to Rose: "I wish that I were as industrious and as much occupied as you, though in a different way; but it is not so with me. Mrs. Unwin's great debility (who is not yet able to move without assistance) is of itself a hindrance such as would effectually disable me. Till she can work, and read, and fill up her time as usual (all which is at

present entirely out of her power), I may now and then find time to write a letter, but I shall write nothing more. I cannot sit with my pen in my hand and my books before me, while she is in effect in solitude, silent, and looking at the fire. To this hindrance that other has been added, of which you are already aware, a want of spirits, such as I have never known, when I was not absolutely laid by, since I commenced an author."

On December 1st he declares that he was never so idle in his life, and he says: "God knows when this will end, but I think of bestirring myself soon, and of putting on my Miltonic trammels once again." On December 6th Milton still hung in doubt, neither spirits nor opportunity sufficing for that labour, and the poet regretted continually that he ever suffered himself to be persuaded to undertake it. By the 29th the incubus was almost intolerable. "How often," he says, "do I wish, in the course of every day, that I could be employed once more in poetry, and how often of course that this Miltonic trap had never caught me! The year ninety-two shall stand chronicled in my remembrance as the most melancholy that I have ever known, except the few weeks that I spent at Eartham; and such it has been principally because, being engaged to Milton, I felt myself no longer free for any other engagement. That ill-fated work, impracticable in itself, has made everything else impracticable."

It afforded him some relief, however, when he was informed by his publisher that there was no need for him to hurry, as the artists engaged for the work were not likely to be very expeditious.

Feeling that Milton ought to be done, Cowper had

but little inclination either for any other branch of composition, and we find him mourning on the 10th of February :—

“ My pens are all split, and my ink-glass is dry ;  
Neither wit, common-sense, nor ideas have I.”

In the year 1792 a small volume (duodecimo) was published with the following title, “Original Poems on various occasions. By a Lady. Revised by William Cowper, Esq., of the Inner Temple.” The Preface is dated June 30, 1792, and in a footnote (third edition) the writer is explained to be “Mrs. Cowper, the aunt of the immortal poet.” It is probable, however, that the writer was not Cowper’s aunt, but his cousin, Frances Maria, wife of the General.

#### 184. “Pushpin with Homer.”—1793.

Cowper had a great desire to bring out as soon as possible a second edition of his Homer, for a reason which, he said, any poet may guess, if he will but thrust his hand into his pocket. Consequently, finding that he was in a condition to do nothing else, he now set to work to revise that work, in deference to the many criticisms that had been pronounced upon it, to annotate it, and otherwise to prepare it for the press. It was dreary work, drearier even than annotating Milton, and Cowper soon found that he had only jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire.

In January arrived the portrait of Hayley, which had been given, or rather promised, to the poet when at

Eartham. In reference to it some months previously, Cowper had said: "I began to be restless about your portrait, and to say, How long shall I have to wait for it? I wished it here for many reasons: the sight of it will be a comfort to me, for I not only love but am proud of you, as of a conquest made in my old age. Johnny goes to town on Monday, on purpose to call on Romney, to whom he shall give all proper information concerning its conveyance hither."

After considerable delay, the reason for which we do not know, the portrait at length arrived on the 20th of January. Says Cowper: "Had you come, and come without notice too, you would not have surprised us more, than (as the matter was managed) we were surprised at the arrival of your picture. It reached us in the evening, after the shutters were closed, at a time when a chaise might actually have brought you without giving us the least previous intimation. Then it was, that Samuel, with his cheerful countenance, appeared at the study door, and with a voice as cheerful as his looks, exclaimed, 'Mr. Hayley is come, Madam!' We both started, and in the same moment cried, 'Mr. Hayley come! And where is he?' The next moment corrected our mistake, and, finding Mary's voice grow suddenly tremulous, I turned and saw her weeping."

Meanwhile the work of annotating Homer continued but slowly owing to the weakness of Cowper's eyes. He writes to Hayley on February 24th: "Your letter (so full of kindness, and so exactly in unison with my own feelings for you) should have had, as it deserved to have, an earlier answer, had I not been perpetually

tormented with inflamed eyes, which are a sad hindrance to me in everything. But, to make amends, if I do not send you an early answer, I send you at least a speedy one, being obliged to write as fast as my pen can trot, that I may shorten the time of poring upon paper as much as possible. Homer, too, has been another hindrance, for always when I can see, which is only about two hours every morning, and not at all by candle-light, I devote myself to him, being in haste to send him a second time to the press, that nothing may stand in the way of Milton. By the way, where are my dear Tom's remarks, which I long to have, and must have soon, or they will come too late?"

On the 20th of January he had said: "I play at pushpin with Homer every morning before breakfast, fingering and polishing, as Paris did his armour."

On March the 4th Tom sent his criticisms accompanied with a letter rather flowery, but quite *comme il faut*, in which he addresses the poet as "Honoured king of bards." Cowper, who was charmed with the criticisms, one of which convicted him of a "bull," and others of inappropriate epithets, altered several of the lines in deference to them, and thanked his "dear little censor," adding, "I only regret that your strictures are so few, being just and sensible as they are."

In April the revision was ended, and nothing remained to do but the annotating. He says on the 23rd: "My only studying time is still given to Homer, not to correction and amendment of him (for that is all over), but to writing notes. Johnson has expressed a wish for some, that the unlearned may be a little illuminated concerning classical story and the

mythology of the ancients. . . . Poking into the old Greek commentators blinds me. But it is no matter. I am the more like Homer."

The only time he had for study was in the morning. In May he speaks of rising at six, and fagging till near eleven, when he breakfasted. In November he was still at the same pursuit, and on the 29th we find him writing: "I have risen, while the owls are still hooting, to pursue my accustomed labours in the mine of Homer."

#### 185. The Death of Mrs. King.—February 6, 1793.

Till almost the end of 1792 the correspondence had continued between Cowper and Mrs. King. In February of that year Mrs. King had requested the poet to write for her "a copy of verses on a pen stolen by a niece of hers, from the Prince of Wales's standish." When the news that Cowper was about to comply with this request reached the Rev. John Newton that gentleman was afraid lest his friend, in dealing with so difficult a subject, might not act with his usual discretion. The Prince of Wales (afterwards George IV), be it mentioned, was at this time justly despised by all right-thinking people on account of his vicious and profligate habits. Newton's fears, however, were effectually laid by Cowper's reply, which runs as follows:—

"You may dismiss all fears lest I should bestow praise on so unworthy a subject of it as his Royal Highness. There is not a character in Europe that I

more abominate. Whatever I may write on that occasion, shall, you may depend on it, do him as little honour and as much justice as the lines you sent me. I have paid here and there a compliment to persons who I knew deserved one, and I would not invalidate them all by proving that my Muse is an indiscriminating harlot, and her good word nothing worth." By and by the lines were written, and sent to Mrs. King on March 8th. They run as follows, the title being "On a Late Theft" :—

" Sweet nymph, who art, it seems, accused  
Of stealing George's pen,  
Use it thyself, and having used,  
E'en give it him again.

The plume of his, that has one scrap  
Of thy good sense expressed,  
Will be a feather in his cap  
Worth more than all his *crest*."

The poet wished to be known only to Mr. and Mrs. King as the author. The last letter of Cowper's to Mrs. King appears to have been that of October 14, 1792, written shortly after his return from Eartham. For some time this lady had been ailing, but she lingered on till the 6th of February of the following year, on which day she died. Her friend, Professor Martyn, thus recorded the event in his diary, February 6, 1793: "In the evening died my excellent friend, the eminently pious Margaret, above forty years wife to my cousin, the Rev. John King, having supported a long and painful sickness with exemplary patience and resignation, in the fifty-eighth year of her age." She was interred within the chancel of Pertenhall church.

Meantime Cowper's mental sufferings rather increased



than subsided. He writes to Teedon on February 2, 1793 :—

“I despair of everything, and my despair is perfect, because it is founded on a persuasion that there is no effectual help for me, even in God.

“From four this morning till after seven I lay meditating terrors, such terrors as no language can express, and as no heart I am sure but mine ever knew. My very finger-ends tingled with it, as indeed they often do. I then slept and dreamed a long dream, in which I told Mrs. U. with many tears that my salvation is impossible, for the reason given above. I recapitulated, in the most impassioned accent and manner, the unexampled severity of God’s dealings with me in the course of the last twenty years, especially in the year ’73, and again in ’86, and concluded all with observing that I *must* infallibly perish, and that the Scriptures which speak of the insufficiency of man to save himself can never be understood *unless* I perish.

“I then made a sudden transition in my dream to one of the public streets in London, where I was met by a dray ; the forehorse of the team came full against me, and in violent anger I damn’d the drayman for it.

“Such are my nocturnal experiences, and my daily ones are little better. I know that I have much fever, but it is a fever for which there is no cure, and is as much the afflictive hand of God upon me as any other circumstance of my distress.”

In another letter he records a dream if possible still more painful. He says : “I seemed to be taking a final leave of my dwelling, and every object with which I have been most familiar, on the evening before my

execution. I felt the tenderest regret at the separation, and looked about for something durable to carry with me as a memorial. The iron hasp of the garden door presenting itself, I was on the point of taking that ; but recollecting that the heat of the fire in which I was going to be tormented would fuse the metal, and that it would therefore only serve to increase my insupportable misery, I left it. I then awoke in all the horror with which the reality of such circumstances would fill me."

On May 16th he writes to Teedon in the following distressing manner : " You," said he, " receive assurances almost as often as you pray of spiritual good things intended for me ; and I feel in the meantime everything that denotes a man an outcast and a reprobate. I dream in the night that God has rejected me finally, and that all promises and all answers to prayer made for me are mere delusions. I wake under a strong and clear conviction that these communications are from God, and in the course of the day nothing occurs to invalidate that persuasion. As I have said before, there is a mystery in this matter that I am not able to explain. I believe myself the only instance of a man to whom God will promise everything, and perform nothing."

In his letter of July 2nd he refers to a matter that had troubled him ever since the year 1786. He says :—

" I have already told you that I heard a word in the year '86, which has been a stone of stumbling to me ever since. It was this :

" '*I will promise you anything.*'

" This word taken in connection with my experience,

such as it has been ever since, seems so exactly accomplished, that it leaves me no power at all to believe the promises made to you. You will tell me that it was not from God. By what token am I to prove that? My experience verifies it. In the day I am occupied with my studies, which, whatever they are, are certainly not of a spiritual kind. In the night I generally sleep well, but wake always under a terrible impression of the wrath of God, and for the most part with words that fill me with alarm, and with the dread of woes to come. What is there in all this that in the least impeaches the truth of the threatening I have mentioned? *I will promise you anything*:—that is to say, much as I hate you, and miserable as I design to make you, I will yet bid you be of good cheer and expect the best, at the same time that I will show you no favour. This, you will say, is unworthy of God. Alas! He is the fittest to judge what is worthy of Him, and what is otherwise. I can say but this, that His conduct and dealings are totally changed toward me. Once He promised me much, and was so kind to me at the same time, that I most confidently expected the performance. Now He promises me as much, but holds me always at an immense distance, and so far as I know, never deigns to speak to me. What conclusions can I draw from these promises, but that He who once loved now hates me, and is constantly employed in verifying the notice of '86, that is to say, in working distinctly contrary to His promises?

“This is the labyrinth in which I am always bewildered, and from which I have hardly any hope of deliverance.”

## 186. The Quadruple Alliance.—July 7, 1793.

In June little was done besides; some lines suggested by an incident that occurred when Mr. Johnson was going to Cambridge to take his degree. In the following month Hayley endeavoured to get Cowper to collaborate with him, hoping that together they might produce a poem of value—though what the proposed literary partnership at first was we do not know. The answer came in a letter commencing with the following sonnet :—

“ TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

“ WESTON, *June 29, 1793.*

“ Dear architect of fine CHATEAUX in air  
 Worthier to stand for ever if they could,  
 Than any built of stone, or yet of wood,  
 For back of royal elephant to bear !

Oh for permission from the skies to share,  
 Much to my own, though little to thy good,  
 With thee (not subject to the jealous mood ! )  
 A partnership of literary ware !

But I am bankrupt now ; and doom'd henceforth  
 To drudge, in descant dry, on others' lays ;  
 Bards, I acknowledge, of unequall'd worth !  
 But what is commentator's happiest praise ?

That he has furnish'd lights for other eyes,  
 Which they who need them use, and then despise.

“ What remains for me to say on this subject, my dear brother bard, I will say in prose. There are other impediments which I could not comprise within the bounds of a sonnet.

“My poor Mary’s infirm condition makes it impossible for me, at present, to engage in a work such as you propose. My thoughts are not sufficiently free, nor have I, or can I, by any means, find opportunity; added to it comes a difficulty which, though you are not at all aware of it, presents itself to me under a most forbidding appearance.”

Instead of being discouraged, however, Hayley made a second proposal—namely, that he should unite with Cowper in the poem called “The Four Ages,” of which, as we have seen, a commencement had already been made, and not only so, but that the assistance should be obtained of Lawrence and Flaxman, who were to illustrate the production. This idea the poet jumped at. Writing on July 7th, he said: “I am in haste to tell you how much I am delighted with your projected quadruple alliance, and to assure you, that if it please God to ‘afford me health, spirits, ability, and leisure, I will not fail to devote them all to the production of my quota of ‘The Four Ages.’”

Cowper’s darkest days, however, were rapidly approaching, and the scheme fell through.

### 187. Sam and the Shed.—July 27, 1793.

Cowper amused himself during the summer of this year by making alterations in his garden. Two of his neighbours, Mr. Praed, of Tyringham, and Mr. Wrighte, of Gayhurst, had for some time been “employed in changing the face of the country around them.” “After their laudable example,” says

Cowper, "I too am working wonders here, but on a smaller scale. I have already built one summer-house with the materials of the old study, and am building another opposite to it." And a few days later he describes himself as "at that moment, with all the imprudence natural to poets, expending nobody knows what in embellishing my premises, or rather the premises of my neighbour Courtenay, which is more poetical still." The second summer-house referred to, as it turned out, got built in a very different way from what Cowper intended when he gave the order to his faithful factotum, Samuel Roberts. Cowper thus describes the mistake in a letter to Hayley: "I said to Sam—'Sam, build me a shed in the garden, with anything that you can find, and make it rude and rough like one of those at Eartham.'—'Yes, sir,' says Sam, and straightway laying his own noddle and the carpenter's noddle together, has built me a thing fit for Stow Gardens. Is not this vexatious?—I threaten to inscribe it thus:—

" 'Beware of building? I intended  
Rough logs and thatch, and thus it ended.'"

"But my Mary says I shall break Sam's heart and the carpenter's too, and will not consent to it."

It may be observed that the year before Sam and his wife (Nanny) had made a jaunt to Stow (near Buckingham) for the purpose of visiting "an uncle from whom they had expectations. Hannah went with them, and the uncle accompanied them through the gardens." Sam, it would seem, had a desire to emulate the alcoves and temples of the place of his

visit. Cowper commences his letter to Hayley of August 15th as follows :—

“ Instead of a pound or two, spending a mint  
Must serve me at least, I believe, with a hint,  
That building, and building, a man may be driven  
At last out of doors, and have no house to live in.”

“ Besides, my dearest brother, they have not only built for me what I did not want, but have ruined a notable tetrastic by doing so. I had written one which I designed for a hermitage, and it will by no means suit the fine and pompous affair which they have made instead of one. So that, as a poet, I am every way afflicted; made poorer than I need have been, and robbed of my verses: what case can be more deplorable?”

The tetrastic that succeeded the “ notable ” one that was ruined, and that took its place in Sam’s “ spick-and-span ” alcove, is entitled “ Inscription for an Hermitage,” and runs as follows :—

“ This cabin, Mary, in my sight appears,  
Built as it has been in our waning years,  
A rest afforded to our weary feet,  
Preliminary to—the last retreat.”

### 188. The Attentions of Cowper’s Friends.

The lights that brighten up this dull background of Milton and Homer are the agreeable attentions of the poet’s friends and the charming morceaux that from time to time he threw off. Of many of the latter we have already spoken. In respect to the

former Cowper is never in so happy a mood as when he is acknowledging them. Take, for example, his letter of thanks for the presents that arrived by way of Mr. Johnson, from Mr. Johnson's friend Copeman :—

“ *To Pean!* ”

“ My dearest Johnny,—Even as you foretold, so it came to pass. On Tuesday I received your letter, and on Tuesday came the pheasants; for which I am indebted in many thanks, as well as Mrs. Unwin, both to your kindness and to your kind friend Mr. Copeman.

“ In Copeman's ear this truth let Echo tell,—  
 “ Immortal bards like mortal pheasants well : ”  
 And when his clerkship's out, I wish him herds  
 Of golden clients for his golden birds.’ ”

“ Our friends the Courtenays have never dined with us since their marriage, *because* we have never asked them; and we have never asked them, *because* poor Mrs. Unwin is not so equal to the task of providing for and entertaining company as before this last illness. But this is no objection to the arrival here of a bustard; rather it is a cause for which we shall be particularly glad to see the monster. It will be a handsome present to *them*. So let the bustard come, as the Lord Mayor of London said of the hare, when he was hunting—‘ Let her come, a' God's name: I am not afraid of her.’ ”

Had Cowper lived a few years later it would have been quite impossible for him to receive a present of this kind. The last bustard is said to have been seen at Thetford in the year 1832.



Previous to the publication of his *Homer*, Cowper does not appear to have been acquainted with any versions of his favourite bard except those of Hobbes and Pope. In May of this year (1793) Mr. Thomas Park offered to make him a present of the translation of that fine old Elizabethan poet, George Chapman, a work that, with all its deficiencies, breathes a most noble spirit, and that has provoked admiration from such critics as Waller, Dryden and Pope, to say nothing of Keats, who wrote perhaps the most exquisite of his sonnets in its praise :

“ Much have I travelled in the realms of gold.”

Cowper, in reply to Mr. Park, writes : “ I have never seen Chapman’s translation of *Homer*, and will not refuse your offer of it, unless, by accepting it, I shall deprive you of a curiosity that you cannot easily replace. The line or two which you quote from him do him credit.”

In due time Mr. Park’s “ acceptable present ” arrived, but though other poets have been loud in the praise of “ Greek-thund’ring Chapman,” Cowper found him but little to his taste. He says : “ I know not whether the book be a rarity, but a curiosity it certainly is. I have as yet seen but little of it—enough, however, to make me wonder that any man, with so little taste for *Homer* or apprehension of his manner, should think it worth while to undertake the laborious task of translating him ; the hope of pecuniary advantage may perhaps account for it.” What would Keats have said had this letter of Cowper’s fallen into his hands?

But if Cowper was severe on Chapman, he was still more severe on the translation of the famous philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, for he goes on to say: "I have seen a translation by Hobbes, which I prefer for its greater clumsiness. Many years have passed since I saw it, but it made me laugh immoderately. Poetry that is not good can only make amends for that deficiency by being ridiculous; and, because the translation of Hobbes has at least this recommendation, I shall be obliged to you, should it happen to fall in your way, if you would be so kind as to procure it for me."

One of the principal topics in literary and artistic circles at this time was the recently completed set of illustrations, in outline, of subjects from the *Odyssey* by John Flaxman. These delightful works of art were engraved in Rome by Piroli, under Flaxman's own supervision; and Lady Spencer, who was then on a visit to that city, sent a set of the engravings to Cowper as a present—the commission being executed by Sir John Throckmorton, who also happened to be in Rome at the time. Cowper, as might be expected, was exceedingly delighted with the gift. He says: "The figures are highly classical, antique, and elegant; especially that of Penelope, who, whether she wakes or sleeps, must necessarily charm all beholders." And in another letter: "I am charmed with Flaxman's Penelope, and will send you a few lines, such as they are, with which she inspired me the other day while I was taking my noonday walk:—

"The suitors sinn'd, but with a fair excuse,  
Whom all this elegance might well seduce;  
Nor can our censure on the husband fall,  
Who, for a wife so lovely, slew them all."

It subsequently transpired that Flaxman was at work at, and had nearly finished, illustrations of the Iliad too, whereupon Hayley suggested that Cowper's forthcoming second edition of Homer should be illustrated with the engravings from them, to which Cowper replied: "It seems a great pity that the engravings should not be bound up with some Homer or other; and, as I said before, I should have been too proud to have bound them up in mine. But there is an objection, at least such it seems to me, that threatens to disqualify them for such a use, namely, the shape and size of them, which are such that no book of the usual form could possibly receive them, save in a folded state, which I apprehend would be to murder them." The expensiveness of the ornament, too, Cowper elsewhere imagines would militate against the proposal.

Before Cowper, in the previous year, had made his journey to Earham, Mr. Johnson had presented him with a stone bust of Homer, a present that produced the sonnet which thus commences:—

"Kinsman beloved, and as a son, by me!  
When I behold the fruit of thy regard,  
The sculptured form of my old favourite bard,  
I reverence feel for him, and love for thee."

The poet gave orders to the Olney stonemason and sculptor, James Andrews, to make a pedestal for it. This was the James Andrews who long previously had taught him drawing, and whom he had dubbed "my Michael Angelo." After a delay of almost twelve months the order was completed, and Cowper set up the head of his "dear old Grecian" "on a famous fine

pedestal" (July 24, 1793). He was now puzzled about a motto, and wished Hayley to decide for him between two—one being two lines he had composed himself, in Greek, the other, his own translation of the passage in the *Odyssey* that is supposed to refer to Homer's blindness. Hayley decided in favour of the former, which runs :—

“*Εἰκόνα τις ταύτην ; κλυτὸν ἄνερος ὄνομα δῶκεν.  
Ὄνομα δ' ὅπως ἀνήρ ἀφθιτον αἶεν ἔχει,*”

and sent the following as a translation of it :—

“The sculptor?—nameless, though once dear to Fame :  
But This Man bears an everlasting name.”

“So,” says Cowper, “I purpose it shall stand ; and on the pedestal, when you come, in that form you will find it. The added line from the *Odyssey* is charming, but the assumption of sonship to Homer seems too daring. Suppose it stood thus :—

“*Ὡς δὲ παῖς ᾧ πατρὶ, καὶ οὐποτε λήσομαι αὐτοῦ.*”

I am not sure that this would be clear of the same objection, and it departs from the text still more.

On August 27th Cowper tells Hayley : “I have set up Homer's head, and inscribed the pedestal ; my own Greek at the top, with your translation under it, and

“*Ὡς δὲ παῖς ᾧ πατρὶ,*” &c.

“It makes altogether a very smart and learned appearance.”

Cowper's Greek and Hayley's translation of it are

still plain enough on the pedestal near the top. Not so, however, the other Greek line, which several times I searched for in vain, but which I have since found. This line, curiously enough, is quite at the bottom of the pedestal, and was obscured by grass, weeds, and briars. It is from Book I. of the *Odyssey* (line 308), with a slight variation. In the original it stands thus :—

“Ὡς τε πατήρ ᾧ παιδί, καὶ οὐποτε λήσομαι αὐτῶν,”

which is rendered by Cowper in his translation :—

“Who as a father teaches his own son  
Has taught me, and I never will forget.”

On the pedestal it appears :—

“Ὡς τε παῖς ᾧ πατρὶ καὶ οὐποτε λήσομαι αὐτοῦ.”

This bust, with its pedestal, after the departure of Cowper from Weston, was removed to the Wilderness close by, where it now stands. The bust of Homer has interested the people of Weston perhaps more than anything else connected with the poet Cowper. The prevalent idea in the village is that “Homer was a poet too, but a foreigner—some say a German.”

As the following letter will show, dated Weston, September 4, 1793, the bust was not the only appropriate present sent by Johnson to Cowper :—

“My dearest Johnny,—To do a kind thing, and in a kind manner, is a double kindness, and no man is more addicted to both than you, or more skilful in contriving them. Your plan to surprise me agreeably

succeeded to admiration. It was only the day before yesterday, that while we walked after dinner in the orchard, Mrs. Unwin between Sam and me, hearing the Hall clock, I observed a great difference between that and ours, and began immediately to lament, as I had often done, that there was not a sun-dial in all Weston to ascertain the true time for us. My complaint was long, and lasted till, having turned into the grass-walk, we reached the new building at the end of it, where we sat awhile and reposed ourselves. In a few minutes we returned by the way we came, when what think you was my astonishment to see what I had not seen before, though I had passed close by it, a smart sun-dial mounted on a smart stone pedestal! I assure you it seemed the effect of conjuration. I stopped short and exclaimed—‘Why, here is a sun-dial, and upon our ground! How is this? Tell me, Sam, how it came here? Do you know anything about it?’ At first I really thought (that is to say, as soon as I could think at all) that this factotum of mine, Sam Roberts, having often heard me deplore the want of one, had given orders for the supply of that want himself, without my knowledge, and was half pleased and half offended. But he soon exculpated himself by imputing the fact to you.”

This sun-dial after Cowper left Weston was removed by the Throckmortons to the Hall Garden, and in 1828 it was placed where it now stands, in the garden of the priest’s house, and on or near the site of the porch that belonged to the west front of the mansion.

The only inscription on it is :—

“Walter Gough, No. 21, Middle Row, Holborn, London.”

The stone-work of the dial, like that of the pedestal of Homer, was the work of James Andrews.

189. The Portrait by Lawrence and the Lines "To Mary."—October 8, 1793.

Cowper was now to have his portrait taken for a third time. He writes to Hayley on October 5th: "On Tuesday we expect company—Mr. Rose and Lawrence the painter. Yet once more is my patience to be exercised, and once more I am made to wish that my face had been movable, to put on and take off at pleasure, so as to be portable in a band-box, and sent to the artist."

Thomas Lawrence, the artist, afterwards Sir Thomas, was born in 1769; consequently at this time he was a young man of twenty-four. It may be added that he was knighted in 1815, that he became president of the Royal Academy, in succession to Benjamin West, in 1820, and that his death occurred in 1830.

In Lawrence's portrait, as in Romney's, the poet is represented in the cap which he was accustomed to wear in a morning, presented to him by Lady Hesketh, the same immortalized in his lines entitled "Gratitude":—

"This cap, that so stately appears,  
With ribbon-bound tassel on high,  
Which seems by the crest that it rears  
Ambitious of brushing the sky;  
This cap to my cousin I owe,  
She gave it, and gave me beside,  
Wreathed into an elegant bow,  
The ribbon with which it is tied."

Though Cowper somewhat dreaded the ordeal, yet the presence of the stranger did him good. Writing to Teedon on the 12th, he says : " I am amused ; and having been obliged to take laudanum again to quiet my nerves and spirits, somewhat discomposed by their arrival, I have slept more composedly of late, and accordingly have for some days past suffered less from melancholy than I usually do."

Of this picture Lady Hesketh said : " Nothing can equal, as a resemblance (in my opinion) the sketch done by Lawrence ! If the painter had not lessened the softness of the resemblance by heightening the animation it would have been perfect." (Unpublished letter, August 1, 1800.)

We may now observe that there exist altogether five different likenesses of the poet of which we know the history, namely :—

1. The shadow or profile taken by Mr. Higgins. The reduction from this by James Andrews is now in the possession of Mr. Hollingshead, of Olney. (See § 168.)

2. The oil-painting by Abbot. Painted in July, 1792, at Weston. (See § 175.) This painting is now in the possession of the Rev. W. Cowper Johnson, Rector of Northwold, near Brandon, Norfolk.

3. The portrait in crayons by Romney. Drawn in August and September, 1792, at Eartham. (See § 178.) Now in the possession of Henry Robert Vaughan Johnson, Esq., of 1, Elvaston Place, South Kensington.

4. The Sketch by Sir Thomas Lawrence. Drawn at Weston in October, 1793. I do not know where the original now is.







COWPER, BY JACKSON

5. A painting now in the possession of Earl Cowper, at Penschangar, Herts. It was painted after the poet's death, probably from the portraits by Abbot and Lawrence, and is ascribed to Jackson, R.A.

The portrait by Abbot was exhibited in the Guelph Exhibition in 1891. In the same exhibition were two paintings of the poet, one described as by G. Romney (half-length, life-size, to right, black coat, red cap. Canvas 30 × 24½ in.); and the other as by L. F. Abbot (half-length, life-size, to left, looking upwards; black coat and grey waistcoat, white cap; his left hand thrust in his waistcoat. Canvas 30 × 24 in.). They were lent respectively by W. Percival Boxall, Esq., and G. P. Brice, Esq. Seeing that the true Abbot and the true Romney (the same that everybody is familiar with in engravings) are in possession of members of the Johnson family, one can only come to the conclusion that these two must be spurious. It may be remarked that they differ from the true pictures in size of canvas and dress as well as in the features.

In the Guelph Exhibition, too, was exhibited a miniature of Cowper inscribed with his autograph. Of its history its owner, Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, knows nothing except that it was formerly part of the collection of Lady Morgan. Most of the things in that collection were bought by Sir Charles Morgan in Paris, in 1830.

The health of Mrs. Unwin was again rapidly declining, and she at length sank into a state of second childishness. The worse she became, however, the brighter burned Cowper's affection for her; and it was in the autumn of 1793, whilst she was in this pitiable

state, that he wrote those affecting stanzas "To Mary" :—

"TO MARY.

The twentieth year is well-nigh past,  
 Since first our sky was overcast,  
 Ah, would that this might be the last !

My Mary !

Thy spirits have a fainter flow,  
 I see thee daily weaker grow—  
 'Twas my distress that brought thee low,

My Mary !

Thy needles, once a shining store,  
 For my sake restless heretofore,  
 Now rust disus'd, and shine no more,

My Mary !

For, though thou gladly would'st fulfil  
 The same kind office for me still,  
 Thy sight now seconds not thy will,

My Mary !

But well thou play'dst the housewife's part,  
 And all thy threads, with magic art,  
 Have wound themselves about this heart,

My Mary !

Thy indistinct expressions seem  
 Like language utter'd in a dream ;  
 Yet me they charm, whate'er the theme,

My Mary !

Thy silver locks, once auburn bright,  
 Are still more lovely in my sight  
 Than golden beams of orient light,

My Mary !

For, could I view nor them nor thee,  
 What sight worth seeing could I see ?  
 The sun would rise in vain for me,

My Mary !

Partakers of thy sad decline,  
 Thy hands their little force resign ;  
 Yet, gently prest, press gently mine,

My Mary !

Such feebleness of limbs thou prov'st,  
That now at every step thou mov'st  
Upheld by two, yet still thou lov'st,

My Mary !

And still to love, though prest with ill,  
In wintry age to feel no chill,  
With me is to be lovely still,

My Mary !

But, ah ! by constant heed I know,  
How oft the sadness that I show  
Transforms thy smiles to looks of woe,

My Mary !

And, should my future lot be cast  
With much resemblance of the past,  
Thy worn-out heart will break at last,

My Mary !”

### 190. Hayley's Second Visit.—November, 1793.

Shortly after the departure of Lawrence, Weston was visited again by Hayley, who found both Johnson and Rose there. Rose had brought an invitation to Cowper from Lord Spencer to meet the historian Gibbon at Althorpe, and the poet's friends pressed him to accept it. Hayley, in particular, wished to see Cowper and Gibbon personally acquainted. "I perfectly knew," says he, "the real benevolence of both ; for widely as they might differ on one important article, they were both able, and worthy to appreciate, and enjoy, the extraordinary mental powers, and the rare colloquial excellence of each other. But the constitutional shyness of the poet conspired with the present infirm state of Mrs. Unwin to prevent their meeting.

He sent Mr. Rose and me to make his apology for declining so honourable an invitation." After quitting Althorpe Hayley returned again to Weston. It was, I believe, about this time that he gave some pleasure to his host and hostess by producing a recent newspaper, containing a speech of Mr. Fox, in which the orator had quoted Cowper's impressive lines on the Bastille :—

“Ye horrid tow'rs, the abode of broken hearts ;  
 Ye dungeons, and ye cages of despair,  
 That monarchs have supplied from age to age  
 With music, such as suits their sov'reign ears,  
 The sighs and groans of miserable men !  
 There's not an English heart that would not leap,  
 To hear that ye were fall'n at last ; to know,  
 That e'en our enemies, so oft employ'd  
 In forging chains for us, themselves were free.”

Mrs. Unwin, we are told, discovered marks of vivid satisfaction, Cowper smiled, and was silent.

Though Cowper exhibited more or less cheerfulness, yet Hayley, referring to this visit, remarks : “My fears for him, in every point of view, were alarmed by his present very singular condition. He possessed completely, at this period, all the admirable faculties of his mind, and all the native tenderness of his heart ; but there was something indescribable in his appearance, which led me to apprehend that, without some signal event in his favour, to re-animate his spirits, they would gradually sink into hopeless dejection. The state of his aged infirm companion afforded additional ground for increasing solicitude. Her cheerful and beneficent spirit could hardly resist her own accumulated maladies,

so far as to preserve ability sufficient to watch over the tender health of him whom she had watched and guarded so long."

To Mrs. Courtenay Cowper gives some account of how they occupied themselves. This is on November 4 (1793) :—

"When two poets meet there are fine doings, I can assure you. My Homer finds work for Hayley, and his 'Life of Milton' work for me, so that we are neither of us one moment idle. Poor Mrs. Unwin in the meantime sits quiet in her corner, occasionally laughing at us both, and not seldom interrupting us with some question or remark, for which she is constantly rewarded by me with a 'Hush—hold your peace.' Bless yourself, my dear Catharina, that you are not connected with a poet, especially that you have not two to deal with ; ladies who have, may be bidden indeed to hold their peace, but very little peace have they. How should they in fact have any, continually enjoined as they are to be silent ?

"I write amidst a chaos of interruptions : Hayley on one hand spouts Greek, and on the other hand Mrs. Unwin continues talking, sometimes to us, and sometimes, because we are both too busy to attend to her, she holds a dialogue with herself. Query, is not this a bull—and ought I not instead of dialogue to have said soliloquy ?"

Hayley says that Cowper entreated him to remain at Weston the whole winter, proposing that they should make a regular and complete revisal of Homer together. This Hayley would have done, only he believed that by returning to London he could render his friend a more-

essential service. Consequently he left Weston about the end of November.

On November 24th Cowper writes to Hurdis, who had just been appointed to the professorship of poetry at Oxford: "When your short note arrived, which gave me the agreeable news of your victory, our friend of Eartham was with me, and shared largely in the joy that I felt on the occasion. He left me but a few days since, having spent somewhat more than a fortnight here; during which time we employed all our leisure hours in the revisal of his 'Life of Milton.' As to my own concern with the works of this first of poets, which has been long a matter of burthensome contemplation, I have the happiness to find at last that I am at liberty to postpone my labours. While I expected that my commentary would be called for in the ensuing spring, I looked forward to the undertaking with dismay, not seeing a shadow of probability that I should be ready to answer the demand; for this ultimate revisal of my Homer, together with the notes, occupies completely at present (and will for some time longer) all the little leisure that I have for study—leisure which I gain at this season of the year by rising long before daylight."

191. The Arrival of Lady Hesketh.—  
November, 1793.

Cowper, indeed, had again been relieved by a letter from Johnson, the bookseller, saying that his Miltonic labours might be still further postponed.



The poet tells Hayley on December 8th: "It is a great relief to me that my Miltonic labours are suspended. I am now busy in transcribing the alterations of Homer, having finished the whole revisal. I must then write a new Preface, which done I shall endeavour immediately to descant on 'The Four Ages.'"

These Miltonic labours, it may as well at once be said, were not only suspended, but never resumed. It will be remembered that he commenced the series of his translations about the middle of September, 1791. In February, 1792, he had completed all his Latin pieces, and shortly after he finished the Italian. While at Eartham in August he revised all his translations. His commentary is restricted to the first three books of the "Paradise Lost."

In this unfinished state the work was published by Hayley in the year 1808, for the benefit of the second son of Mr. Rose, the godchild of Cowper. Some designs in outline were furnished by Flaxman.

The gloom in which Cowper so often found himself began now rapidly to deepen.

Two letters which he wrote to Teedon, and which, though without date, apparently belong to this month, contain the darkest forebodings. Though for two nights, owing to doses of laudanum, he had obtained more sleep, he says, yet "neither of those nights has passed without some threatenings of that which I fear more than any other thing, the loss of my faithful, long-trying, and only intimate. From whom they come I know not, nor is the time precisely mentioned; but it is always spoken of as near approaching. Mrs.

Unwin has slept her usual time, about five hours, and is this morning as well as usual. As for me, I waked with this line from *Comus* :—

“ ‘ The wonted roar is up amid the woods ; ’

consequently I expect to hear it soon.”

In the next letter he speaks of being “ plunged in deeps, unvisited by any soul but mine.” He is never cheerful because he can never hope, and “ to look forward to another year seems madness.”

“ Mrs. Unwin,” he continues, “ is as well as when I wrote last, but, like myself dejected—dejected both on my account and on her own. Unable to amuse herself either with work or reading, she looks forward to a new day with despondence, weary of it before it begins, and longing for the return of night.

“ Thus it is with us both. If I endeavour to pray, I get my answer in a double portion of misery. My petitions, therefore, are reduced to three words, and those not very often repeated—‘ God have mercy ! ’ ”

But the gloom of this dark period was now to be a little brightened by the presence of Lady Hesketh.

During Cowper’s residence at Weston she had generally paid him an annual winter visit, “ knowing that to be the season when his nerves and spirits are usually most oppressed.” At the end of ’92, however, she was ill herself at Bath, so was prevented from attending him as usual. Not having seen his cousin for two years, Cowper looked forward to her visit now (November, 1793) with even more interest, if that were possible, than formerly. She arrived about the middle of the month—but only to discover that her

cousin's condition was truly deplorable. She says : " I found this dear soul the absolute nurse of this poor lady, Mrs. Unwin, who cannot move out of her chair without help, nor walk across the room unless supported by two people ; added to this, her voice is almost wholly unintelligible, and as their house was repairing all the summer, he was reduced, poor soul ! for many months to have no conversation *but hers* ! His situation was terrible indeed ; and the more so as he was deprived, by means of this poor lady, of all his wonted exercises, both mental and bodily, as she did not choose he should leave her for a moment, or ever use a pen or a book except when he read to her, which is an employment that always I know fatigues and hurts him, and which, therefore, my arrival relieved him from."

As on former occasions, the presence of Lady Hesketh went far towards brightening things up, and Cowper's letter of the 8th of December, in which he thanks Rose for a box of books, contains some gleams of cheerfulness. " We have read," says Cowper, " that is to say, my cousin has, who reads to us in an evening the history of Jonathan Wild, and found it highly entertaining. The satire on great men is witty, and I believe perfectly just. We have no censure to pass on it, unless that we think the character of Mrs. Heartfree not well sustained, not quite delicate in the latter part of it, and that the constant effect of her charms upon every man who sees her has a sameness in it that is tiresome, and betrays either much carelessness, or idleness, or lack of invention."



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *THE BREAKDOWN.*

January, 1794—July, 1795

192. Still and Silent as Death.—  
January, 1794.

ON December 17th Cowper wrote a letter to Hayley criticising some lines of Homer as translated by Thurlow, Hayley, and himself; and on January 5 (1794) he wrote a second letter dealing with the same subject. These letters were followed by such a silence as filled Hayley with the severest apprehensions, and the accounts which he received from Lady Hesketh, who, out of pity for the helpless state and infirmities of Mrs. Unwin, continued to stay at Weston, tended to increase his anxiety. Cowper indeed, had again been seized with his old and terrible complaint, and even the presence of his cousin was powerless to remove it. As on former occasions, it began in the dreaded month of January. A few facts concerning his state at this time were gleaned by Sir J. Mackintosh, who visited Olney seven years subsequently. One of Cowper's illusions was that it was his duty to inflict upon himself severe penance for his sins. Six days he sat "still and silent as death," and "took no

other food during that time than a small piece of bread dipped in wine and water. After every attempt to rouse him had failed, his medical attendant suggested, as the only remaining hope, that Mrs. Unwin should indirectly invite him to go out with her, if she could be induced to do this, for her state of mind now required almost as much management as his. She, however, perceived the necessity of making the experiment, and observing that it was a fine morning, said she should like to try to walk. Cowper immediately rose, took her by the arm, and the spell which had fixed him to the chair was broken. "This," as Southey observes, "appears to have been the last instance in which her influence over him was exerted for his good."

In February Mr. Johnson (Johnny of Norfolk) came to Weston, and assisted in attending on his kinsman as long as his professional duties permitted; and of the sad state into which Cowper had got we are informed by the following letter to Hayley, written by Mr. Greatheed, who continued to be a frequent visitor at the Lodge:—

"NEWPORT PAGNEL, *April 8, 1794.*

"DEAR SIR,—Lady Hesketh's correspondence acquainted you with the melancholy relapse of our dear friend at Weston, but I am uncertain whether you know, that in the last fortnight he has refused food of every kind, except now and then a very small piece of toasted bread dipped generally in water, sometimes mixed with a little wine. This, her ladyship informs me, was the case till last Saturday, since when he has

eaten a little at each family meal. He persists in refusing such medicines as are indispensable to his state of body. In such circumstances his long continuance in life cannot be expected. How devoutly to be wished is the alleviation of his danger and distress! You, dear sir, who know so well the worth of our beloved and admired friend, sympathize with his affliction, and deprecate his loss doubtless in no ordinary degree. You have already most effectually expressed and proved the warmth of your friendship. I cannot think that anything but your society would have been sufficient, during the infirmity under which his mind has long been oppressed, to have supported him against the shock of Mrs. Unwin's paralytic attack. I am certain that nothing else could have prevailed upon him to undertake the journey to Eartham. You have succeeded where his other friends knew they could not, and where they apprehended no one could. How natural therefore, nay, how reasonable, is it for them to look to you, as most likely to be instrumental, under the blessing of God, for relief in the present distressing and alarming crisis! It is indeed scarcely attemptable to ask any person to take such a journey, and involve himself in so melancholy a scene, with an uncertainty of the desired success; increased as the apparent difficulty is by dear Mr. Cowper's aversion to all company, and by poor Mrs. Unwin's mental and bodily infirmities. On these accounts Lady Hesketh dares not ask it of you, rejoiced as she would be at your arrival. Am not I, dear sir, a very presumptuous person, who, in the face of all opposition, dare do this? I am emboldened by those two powerful supporters, conscience and

experience. Was I at Eartham, I would certainly undertake the labour I presume to recommend, for the bare possibility of restoring Mr. Cowper to himself, to his friends, and to God."

### 193. Hayley's Third Visit.—April, 1794.

The kind-hearted Hayley no sooner received this letter than he resolved to go, though it was most inconvenient for him to do so, for he even had to borrow money for the journey. With his usual eccentricity, he took his maid Jenny with him as an attendant. Cowper, however, manifested no pleasure at his arrival, though after a few days he was willing to receive food from Hayley's hand, which he would take from no one else. Profiting by Hayley's presence, Lady Hesketh now left for London in order that she might have a personal conference with Dr. Willis, who had then a great name for his skill in such cases, and to whom Thurlow had been kind enough to write, requesting his attention to the unfortunate poet. Dr. Willis prescribed for Cowper, and paid a visit to Weston; but he could do very little good.

Hayley now sent for his son Tom, whom he had placed at a private school near Derby, Cowper having "twice spoken in a manner that seemed to indicate a wish to see him," and when the lad arrived Cowper shrank less from him than from the others. But that was all.

On the 23rd of April, whilst Lady Hesketh and Hayley were watching together over the sufferer, a letter from Lord Spencer arrived at Weston, to



announce the intended grant of a pension from the King to Cowper, of £300 per annum, rendered payable to his friend Mr. Rose, as his trustee. This intelligence gave the greatest gratification to the poet's friends, though at the same time their pleasure was mingled with pain, Cowper being too far gone to exhibit even a glimmering of joy. For this favour, it may be noted, Thurlow can have no credit, for nearly two years had passed since he had ceased to be Lord Chancellor.

Shortly after the arrival of the news of the pension Hayley was under the "painful necessity" of forcing himself from his unhappy friend. "Though he appeared to take no pleasure in my society," says Hayley, "yet he expressed extreme reluctance to let me depart. I hardly ever endured an hour more dreadfully distressing than the hour in which I left him." Hayley never saw Cowper again. In the middle of May there came a letter from Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, containing congratulations on account of the pension, and an invitation to Ireland. Lady Hesketh, who replied to it on May 21st, told Mr. Rowley that Cowper was "utterly incapable of attending to anything;" and that he had not opened a letter, or suffered one even to be read to him since the second week in January.

"Truly," she continues, "as I lament the sufferings of this invaluable creature, I cannot wonder at them, as the close attendance he has paid to Mrs. Unwin for the last two years, and his unceasing assiduity to her ever since she had her last attack of the palsy, must have overcome spirits less tender and susceptible than those of my unhappy cousin. . . . All which the most lively

interest and affection could think of for his relief has been done, or attempted to be done; but in all attempts of this sort I find a terrible hindrance in the person of the poor old lady, who really seems to live only to counteract whatever schemes are planned for his benefit, and the recovery of his health and spirits." In quoting these letters of Lady Hesketh, it may be remarked that I have abstained from putting italics in most places where her words are scored. The curious practice of underlining, and unnecessarily, so many words in a letter, she seems to have copied from her father, in whose correspondence it was also a common feature. In this single letter to Mr. Rowley no fewer than seventy-seven words are underlined!

#### 194. He Walks incessantly Backwards and Forwards.—The Spring of 1795.

Lady Hesketh appears to have remained with her cousin all through the year 1794. Contrary to her fears, the winter was passed through very tolerably, she having been able to get him to employ himself with "little avocations, such as netting, putting maps-together, playing with the solitary board, &c." But as spring came on he got worse again. Writing to Mr. Johnson on May 5th, she says: "He now does nothing but walk incessantly backwards and forwards, either in his study or in his bedchamber. He really does not sometimes sit down for more than half an hour the whole day, except at meal-times, when, as I said before, he takes hardly anything. He has left off bathing his

fect, will take no laudanum, and lives in a constant state of terror that is dreadful to behold! He is now come to expect daily, and even hourly, that he shall be carried away; and kept in his room from the time breakfast was over till four o'clock on Sunday last, in spite of repeated messages from Madam, because he was afraid somebody would take possession of his bed, and prevent his lying down on it any more!"

A few days previously Lady Hesketh had written to Dr. Willis for the first time since September. She told him, what she indeed thought, that Cowper had no chance either for health or life except by passing some time under his care, and she desired him to inform her whether he had, or was likely to have in the course of the summer, room for the unhappy invalid. To Johnson she said: "The expense of this will, I know, be very great; but I will with pleasure do all in my power to make this easy to him. Of his pension he has not received one farthing, nor is likely to do so before next winter."

### 195. Hannah's Extravagance.

The conduct of Hannah Willson, who, it will be remembered, we took notice of in § 150 as Cowper's second *protégée*, likewise added to Lady Hesketh's embarrassments. This girl had for a considerable time been thoroughly spoilt by the foolish partiality of Mrs. Unwin, who, astonishing as it may seem, not only indulged her at home, but paid for her to be sent to a boarding school. Says Teedon in his diary: "July 19 (1792), I went over to Weston, found Hannah better.

Madam (Mrs. Unwin) informed me she should send her out for a year and a half." On January 18, 1793, Hannah calls at Teedon's "to take her leave." On September 28th of the same year he writes: "I went and drank tea with the Esq<sup>r</sup>. (Cowper). Mrs. Dumvile, who had been lately at Bedford, told us Hannah could not bare (bear) staying at Bedford, and has sent a letter for the Esq<sup>r</sup>." By and by Hannah returned to Weston, and as Mrs. Unwin grew more feeble, the whole management of the house gradually devolved upon her. Instead, however, of doing as she ought to have done, she neglected her duty, and cultivated extravagant habits in dress, attention to which and writing love-letters took up the greater part of her time. One of Teedon's entries refers to his making "her 12 crow-pens;" and his numerous references to her, and the way he speaks of her, show that she was no unimportant member of Cowper's household. Several of the entries run: "Drank tea with Hannah and Madam" (Mrs. Unwin). Like most spoilt people she was sometimes ill-behaved. "June 24 (1793)," writes Teedon, "Hannah came in very wet from a heavy shower, warmed, dried, &c., and not so much as returned a thank." Under the sway of Hannah everything at the Lodge had long been going to rack and ruin, and even Lady Hesketh, when she arrived in November, 1793, was able to effect but little reformation. Her ladyship thus writes to Mr. Johnson on May 5, 1794:—

"Hannah's amazing extravagance has not cost less than one hundred and fifty pounds since last July! What can become of our poor cousin, sick or well, if

she is to go on in this manner I cannot guess. All in my power I have done to put some stop to such shameful proceedings, but in vain : the boarding school has finished what Mrs. Unwin's absurd, unpardonable indulgence had begun, and what is to become of her I know not ! She literally does nothing but walk about, and dress herself, and write love-letters. If you saw her sweep the village with muslin dresses of twelve shillings a yard, and feathers a yard long, you would really think it was some duchess. I have told her that the daughter of a man of five thousand pounds a year would not be allowed to dress as she does ; and when one considers that all this finery is to dine in the *kitchen*, it makes one sick. She certainly looks very elegant and showy, and as Mrs. Unwin does not restrain her, I wonder not at the girl." Further on she says of Cowper : " All he is worth in the world would not half keep Hannah, taking finery and idleness into the account, for she puts out all her clothes and linen to be mended, as well as made. I am sure she is a singular instance of foolish fondness ; and now Mrs. Unwin lies in bed till past one, this girl never attends her in her room, or does the least thing for her in return for all her indulgence ! "

It was indeed high time some altogether fresh move should be made, for on the 17th of the previous month Mrs. Unwin had had another attack. " It affected her face and voice only. She is a dreadful spectacle," continues Lady Hesketh ; " yet within these two days she has made our wretched cousin drag her round the garden ; though even Samuel can scarce support her." Part of the time she could spare from the invalids, Lady

Hesketh spent in the pleasing task of arranging and putting into books the various letters that Cowper had written to her.

Mr. Johnson arrived at the Lodge in the month of July, and very soon came to the conclusion that things could go on as they were no longer. He then set about the very difficult task of persuading Cowper and Mrs. Unwin to return with him to Norfolk. To the great joy of both himself and Lady Hesketh he succeeded; and he at once commenced to make arrangements for the proposed change.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *IN NORFOLK.*

(July, 1795—April 25, 1800.)

#### 196. The Journey into Norfolk.

**W**HEN it was proposed that a removal should be made, neither Cowper nor his friends thought of anything further than a temporary absence. Had, indeed, a final separation from Weston been suggested it is doubtful whether either Cowper or Mrs. Unwin could have been persuaded to move, and as it was, Mr. Johnson was not at all certain whether even when the journey was begun they might not insist upon turning back.

Cowper, however, had a presentiment that he should never return, and on a panel of the window-shutter in his bedchamber—a room that overlooked his garden—he wrote, unknown to any one at the time, the following lines :—

“Farewell, dear scenes, for ever closed to me ;  
Oh, for what sorrows must I now exchange ye !”

with two dates below, written thus :—

“July 22.  
— 28, 1795.”

The second date is accounted for by the circumstance that the removal from Weston took place, not on the day expected, but nearly a week after.

These two lines and the dates are still on the shutter, but under them were originally four more lines which were obliterated by an industrious housemaid. They ran as follows :—

“ Me miserable ! how could I escape  
Infinite wrath and infinite despair !  
Whom Death, Earth, Heaven, and Hell consigned to ruin,  
Whose friend was God, but God swore not to aid me !  
July 27, '95.”

Mr. Henry Gough, who gave me these lines, had them from Sam Roberts, who copied them from the shutter. They also appear in Corry's "Life of Cowper," 12mo, Lond., p. 31.

That any writing at all is now legible is partly owing to the fact that for nearly forty years the shutter in question was closed to avoid the window-tax, but when at different times the shutters have been painted, care has been taken to keep clear of the writing.

Passing through Olney and the village of Turvey, Mr. Johnson and his invalids by and by reached Bedford, which town—a relay of horses having been provided—they passed through without stopping ; and on the evening of the first day arrived at the village of Eaton Socon, near St. Neots. Here for a brief space Cowper once more recovered his spirits. Walking with Mr. Johnson up and down the churchyard, which was bathed in peaceful moonlight, he began again to exhibit something of his old self, conversing with his



kinsman with much composure on the subject of Thomson's "Seasons," and the circumstances under which they were probably written. But this was the last gleam of cheerfulness; henceforth in the poet's story all is dark. This pleasant episode, however, had the effect of greatly encouraging Mr. Johnson, who now felt firmly convinced that his afflicted patient would some day recover.

At Cambridge, as at Bedford, horses had been provided; the second night was passed at Barton Mills, and on the third day they reached the village of North Tuddenham—their journey's end.

197. At North Tuddenham and Mundesley.  
—July 31—October 17, 1795.

At this village, by the kindness of the Rev. Leonard Shelford, they were accommodated with an untenanted parsonage-house, where they were received by Miss Johnson, Mr. Johnson's sister, and her friend, Miss Margaret Perowne. It had been Mr. Johnson's first idea to remove his invalids at once to his own residence in the market-place of East Dereham, about three miles distant, the reason for altering the arrangement being the belief that the more retired position of Tuddenham would at first be more beneficial to Cowper. Mr. Johnson was now the recipient of a letter from Lady Hesketh, in which she rejoiced greatly at his happy stroke of generalship, in that he had contrived to take not only Cowper, but Madam (as she called Mrs. Unwin) too, as part of his travelling equipage. "But

for that," she continued, "our poor friend would still have remained a miserable captive; nor would she ever have allowed him to have strayed beyond the walls of his prison-house had not your friendly heart inspired you with the happy idea of making her the partner of his flight." From this it will be perceived that as Mrs. Unwin's mind and body became more and more debilitated her disposition underwent a total change; from being Cowper's gentle companion and watchful friend, she had now become, though she cannot be held responsible for her conduct, selfish, peevish, and exacting. But now that she was no longer in an establishment where she was mistress, all this was at an end, for she naturally did not expect to have everything directed according to her will in a house that belonged to another; and Cowper, on his part, without neglecting her, was no longer obliged to sacrifice his health in order to gratify her numerous caprices.

The season being favourable, Mr. Johnson and his kinsman took many walks in the neighbourhood, visiting on one occasion Cowper's cousin, Mrs. Bodham, at Mattishall Rectory. At the sight of his own portrait by Abbot, in the house of that lady, he clasped his hands passionately, and uttered a vehement wish that his feelings were, or could again be, such as they were when that picture was painted.

In August, after a stay at Tuddenham of three weeks, Mr. Johnson, hoping that the invalids might derive some benefit from the sea air, took them to the village of Mundesley.

As Mundesley and its neighbourhood were connected with Cowper's boyhood and youth, so they were

destined to be associated with his declining years. As a happy, merry lad, he had played upon its sands, and now, after the lapse of so many years, as a broken-down, despondent man just upon entering old age, he again gazed on the well-known scenes, again viewed from Mundesley cliffs and Mundesley sands that which in a happier mood he had pronounced "the most magnificent object under heaven"—the great deep. "The most forlorn of beings," says Cowper (August 27, 1795), "I tread a shore under the burden of infinite despair that I once trod all cheerfulness and joy. I view every vessel that approaches the coast with an eye of jealousy and fear, lest it arrive with a commission to seize me. But my insensibility, which you say is a mystery to you, because it seems incompatible with such fear, has the effect of courage, and enables me to go forth, as if on purpose to place myself in the way of danger. The cliff is here of a height that it is terrible to look down from; and yesterday evening, by moonlight, I passed sometimes within a foot of the edge of it, from which to have fallen would probably have been to be dashed in pieces. But though to have been dashed in pieces would perhaps have been best for me, I shrunk from the precipice, and am waiting to be dashed in pieces by other means. At two miles' distance on the coast is a solitary pillar of rock that the crumbling cliff has left at high-water mark. I have visited it twice, and have found it an emblem of myself. Torn from my natural connections, I stand alone and expect the storm that shall displace me."

Notwithstanding the omnipresent gloom, Mr. John-

son perceived that there was something inexpressibly soothing to Cowper in the monotonous sound of the breakers, and this induced him to confine the walks of the poet, whom dejection precluded from the exercise of choice, or at least the expression of it, almost wholly to the sands.

Upon his favourite Weston, which he conjectured, and, as it proved, rightly, he should never see again, Cowper's thoughts often dwelt. To the Rev. John Buchanan (September 5, 1795) he writes: "To you, sir, I address this, urged to it by extreme penury of employment, and the desire I feel to learn something of what is doing, and has been done, at Weston (my beloved Weston!) since I left it. . . . Gratify me with news of Weston! If Mr. Gregson and your neighbours the Courtenays are there, mention me to them in such terms as you see good. Tell me if my poor birds are living! I never see the herbs I used to give them without a recollection of them, and sometimes am ready to gather them, forgetting that I am not at home."

We gather, too, from this letter that he was occasionally visited with a few gleams of cheerfulness. "My chamber," he says, "commands a very near view of the ocean, and the ships at high water approach the coast so closely, that a man furnished with better eyes than mine might, I doubt not, discern the sailors from the window; no situation, at least when the weather is clear and bright, can be pleasanter; which you will easily credit, when I add that it imparts something a little resembling pleasure even to me."

Owing to the spray borne by the sea breezes, Cowper, whose eyes had always been weak, was now troubled with inflammation in the eyelids—an inconvenience which he caused to be abated by walking “in lanes and under hedges” in preference to the beach, and when he did walk on the beach by using an umbrella. One of these walks was that which he, Mr. Johnson, and Samuel took (probably in September) to the small seaside village of Happisburgh, or, as it is also called, Hazeborough. There is no roadway running parallel with the sea between Mundesley and Happisburgh, as is the case nearly always on other coasts, and as the road winds about so much, the two places were at least eight miles apart. On the way are the villages of Paston and Bacton, the former noted on account of its ancient hall and its picturesque church. Even at the present day Happisburgh has a name for its desolateness. “In its neighbourhood,” says Mr. Walter Rye, “can be noticed, perhaps better than anywhere else, the effects of the heavy east winds, which always seem to be blowing on to the land—the hedge-row trees being bent inward and twisted into fantastic shapes, as though frozen while being blown almost to the ground by a heavy gale. Nothing but maple and ash seems to recover itself and grow straight again.” “That day,” says Cowper, “was indeed a day spent in walking. I was much averse to the journey, both on account of the distance and the uncertainty of what I should find there. But Mr. Johnson insisted ; we set out accordingly, and I was almost ready to sink with fatigue long before we reached the place of our destination.” The only inn being full of

company, the travellers borrowed a lodging elsewhere. After dinner Mr. Johnson and Samuel visited the Lighthouse, but Cowper was too tired to accompany them, though he was not uninterested in the account of what they saw.

He winds up the letter describing this journey with a sentence that shows he still retained his old partiality for a certain article of food: "I have seen no fish since I came here, except a dead sprat upon the sands, and one piece of cod, from Norwich, too stale to be eaten."

Believing constant change to be of all things the most beneficial for his invalids, Mr. Johnson now proposed that they should make a journey to look at Dunham Lodge, a vacant house situated in a park, on high ground about four miles from Swaffham. The route taken was the roundabout one of fifty miles, *via* Cromer, Holt, and Fakenham: Cromer, situated in what its admirers have since delighted to call Poppyland; Holt, whose wiseacres long ago are said to have pounded an owl, whereby they earned for their town a notoriety equalled only by that of the far-famed Gotham, and for their descendants the cognomen of "Holt knowing ones"; Fakenham, with its well-known ghost. Had he been in a happy mood, we could scarcely fancy Cowper passing through such localities without discovering the wherewithal to furnish a droll letter or a charming fragment of verse; but his sportive days had long been over.

With Dunham Lodge, though it was too spacious, Cowper had no particular fault to find, in consequence whereof Mr. Johnson determined to treat for it. One

night they spent at Mr. Johnson's residence in the market-place at the neighbouring town of East Dereham, and then they returned to Mundesley by a different route, "the health, if not the spirits, of Cowper having benefited by the journey, though Mrs. Unwin's infirmities continued the same."

On the 26th of September Cowper wrote another letter to Lady Hesketh, in which he regrets that he ever left Weston. "There indeed," he says, "I lived a life of infinite despair, and such is my life in Norfolk. Such, indeed, it would be in any given spot upon the face of the globe; but to have passed the little time that remained to me there was the desire of my heart. My heart's desire has been always frustrated in everything that it ever settled on, and by means that have made my disappointments inevitable. . . . I remain the forlorn and miserable being I was when I wrote last."

198. Dunham Lodge.—October, 1795—  
September, 1796.

A few days later (October 7th) the invalids removed to Dunham Lodge. By this time Cowper's sufferings had told heavily on his constitution. His countenance had got extremely thin, and had assumed a yellowish hue. Owing to the weakness of his eyes, which could not endure the cold winter winds, he was much confined to the house; and as he would neither write nor read at any time, his state would have been in the extremest degree deplorable but for the presence

of Mr. Johnson, whose attention to his afflicted kinsman had now become unintermittent. Though he would not read, Cowper was willing to be read to, and, curious to say, works of fiction interested him most. In his youth he had been delighted with the novels of Richardson, on one of which, "Sir Charles Grandison," he had written an ode, and now, in the dark days at Dunham, he took pleasure in renewing his acquaintance with them. There was, however, no real improvement in him; oft during the reading he lost every other sentence through the inevitable wanderings of his mind; and when left to himself the supernatural voices that he seemed to hear gave him fresh distress. In fulfilment of "a word heard in better days" twenty-six years previously, he considered his doom close at hand. "All my themes of misery," he says, "may be summed in one word. He who made me regrets that He ever did. Many years have passed since I learned this terrible truth from Himself." It was the old, old story. Every hour he expected to be summoned to the "Pit of Roaring," and he cared for life only because that hour was thereby delayed. Finding that he was impressed with the reality of these voices, Mr. Johnson, with doubtful wisdom, introduced a tube into the poet's chamber, near the bed's head, and employed a person with whose voice Cowper was not acquainted to speak words of comfort through it. The artifice was never discovered, but neither did it effect any good.

Cowper never cared to be left long by those about him, and Sunday, when Mr. Johnson was away at his ministerial duties, was the most wretched day of the



week. At eveningtide it was his practice to listen frequently on the steps of the hall door for the barking of dogs at a farmhouse some two miles distant—a sound that generally announced the approach of his kinsman.

In June occurred the most hopeful sign that his friends had yet witnessed. Gilbert Wakefield's edition of Pope's Homer had just been published. Johnson mentioned in Cowper's hearing that in some places Wakefield had drawn comparisons between Pope's translation and that of Cowper; and not only so, but laid the volumes of Wakefield in a place where he thought the poet would see them. To Johnson's delight Cowper presently referred to the books, sought out the comparisons in question, and made some corrections in his own version in consequence. Offering all the encouragement in his power, Johnson had the gratification in August of perceiving that Cowper had deliberately engaged in a revisal of the whole of his translation. For some time nearly sixty new lines were written every day. The poet was even so enthusiastic over it as to remark that he had never known till then how Homer ought to be translated. All this was reported to Hayley, who heard the news with delight, but who was unable to comply with Johnson's request that he should visit Norfolk. In September Johnson took his invalids for a second time to Mundesley, but, as the event proved, it was a mistake, for the poet having been disturbed, immediately discontinued his employment; and from the sea air and exercise he derived no apparent benefit. Towards the end of October the party left Mundesley for Johnson's

house at East Dereham, Cowper having declared that he preferred it to Dunham.

Samuel Roberts, Cowper's attendant, told Mr. Adkins of Ravenstone Mill (near Olney), that the poet was in the habit of frequently saying to him about this time, "Wretch that I am to wander thus in chase of false delight."

The sad state into which Cowper had fallen having become widely known, numerous were the inquiries that were made about him by those who had received pleasure and profit from his writings. A copy of one of the letters written to him at this time has been preserved. It is from a Quaker gentleman of Philadelphia, Joseph Bringhurst, and bears date 3rd, Mo. 4th, 1796. After stating how helpful Cowper's writings had been to him in a period of adversity, he says, "There are in this city and in the circle of my acquaintance many amiable and some great minds who love thee with true affection. Their interest in thy happiness makes them earnestly desirous of a satisfactory account of thy present condition."

### 199. The Death of Mrs. Unwin.

East Dereham, which in Cowper's day had about 2,000 inhabitants, and in 1881 5,640, is the principal town in Mid-Norfolk. The church, cruciform in shape, has, like several other East Anglian towns, a detached belfry—the New Clocker—which owed its erection, in the reign of Henry VIII., to the fact that the tower of the church was not considered sufficiently

strong to bear the bells. A well in the churchyard, named after the famous local saint, St. Withberga, and reputed to have miraculous properties, has obtained considerable celebrity.

As Mr. Johnson's house fronted a busy market-place, Cowper was now sometimes drawn a little from his melancholy self-contemplation, and he found it a convenience that there was a way into the fields without entering the street.

Meantime Mrs. Unwin was fast sinking, and on the morning of the 17th of December it became evident that she could not last many hours. Cowper, who was aware of the fact, inquired of the servant that morning as soon as he rose, "Sally, is there life above-stairs?" and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, he went to Mrs. Unwin's bedside as usual. On his return to the room below a little before one o'clock, Mr. Johnson, in compliance with his request, took a book and commenced to read to him. It was Miss Burney's "Camilla." But he had read only a few pages before he was beckoned out of the room to be informed that all was over. Returning by and by, Mr. Johnson again took up the book, and after turning a few pages over quietly broke the news. Cowper heard it "not entirely without emotion," but presently was as composed as before.

A few hours later he said he was sure "she was not actually dead, but would come to life again in her grave, and then undergo the horrors of suffocation, for he was the occasion of all that she or any other creature upon earth ever did or could suffer." He then accompanied Mr. Johnson to the room. After gazing for a few

moments on the cold, still face, he flung himself to the other side of the room with a passionate expression of feeling—the first that had been noticed in him since the last return of his malady at Weston. Presently he became calm. As soon as they got downstairs he asked for a glass of wine, and from that time never mentioned her name nor spoke of her again. It was decided by Mr. and Mrs. Powley, who had now arrived from Yorkshire, that Mrs. Unwin should be buried in St. Edmund's chapel, in the church of East Dereham. In order that Cowper should know nothing about it till all was over, the ceremony was performed at night by torchlight. Mrs. Unwin was seventy-two years of age.

Over her remains is placed a marble tablet to her memory, with the following inscription by Hayley:—

“ IN MEMORY OF MARY,  
WIDOW OF THE REV. MORLEY UNWIN,  
AND  
MOTHER OF THE REV. WILLIAM CAWTHORNE UNWIN,  
BORN AT ELY, 1724.  
BURIED IN THIS CHURCH, 1796.

Trusting in God, with all her heart and mind,  
This woman prov'd magnanimously kind ;  
Endur'd affliction's desolating hail,  
And watch'd a poet thro' misfortune's vale.  
Her spotless dust, angelic guards, defend !  
It is the dust of Unwin, Cowper's friend !  
That single title in itself is fame,  
For all who read his verse revere her name.”

### 200. “ The Castaway.”

The early part of 1797 was passed by Cowper in a state of utter dejection. He firmly believed that good

and evil spirits haunted his couch every night, and that the latter had the mastery. The people about him he often suspected of bad intentions. "For instance," as Johnson told Dr. Currie, "he said there were two Johnnies—one the real man, the other an evil spirit in his shape; and when he came out of his room in the morning he used to look me full in the face inquiringly, and turn off with a look of benevolence or anguish, as he thought me a man or a devil!" To his cousin, Lady Hesketh, now an invalid at Clifton, Cowper wrote only one letter this year, on May 15th, and that consisted of only a few lines. Like the others despatched to her from Norfolk, it breathes little besides infinite despair.

As spring advanced he was again persuaded to resume his walks. A course of asses' milk, begun in June, did him much good, and his thin sallow complexion began to assume its old ruddiness, in consequence of which the visit to Mundesley was that year omitted.

Hayley, who in order to reduce expenses was meditating a removal from Eartham to the village of Felp-ham, now offered to place his old residence at the service of Cowper and Lady Hesketh. The kind offer, however, was declined. To move Cowper so great a distance was out of all question, and Lady Hesketh did not feel well enough to leave Clifton. Another idea then occurred to the good-natured Hayley. Cowper's spirits might possibly be raised, he thought, if he were to receive assurances from various men of piety and distinction that his poems had rendered great services to religion and morals. Consequently he set to work, and the result was that Cowper received letters to that effect from Lord Kenyon, the Bishop of London (the

dear, delightful bishop, as Hayley calls him), the Bishop of Llandaff, and other kind-hearted men in high places. No relief, however, accrued therefrom to the sufferer. "The pressure of his malady had made him deaf to the most honourable praise."

In September Johnson tried the experiment of tempting him again with Homer. He placed the commentators on the table one by one—Villoisson, Barnes, and Clarke—opening them all, together with the poet's translation, at the place where it had been left off twelve months previously. Then he commenced a conversation in which he assured Cowper that the occurrences which his imagination had represented could not possibly befall him. Said Cowper, "Are you sure that I shall be here till the book you are reading is finished?" "Quite sure," replied Johnson, "and that you will also be here to complete the revisal of your Homer (pointing to the books) if you will resume it to-day." The words sank into the poet's mind, and after Johnson had quitted the room he seated himself on the sofa, took up one of the books, and said in a low and plaintive voice, "I may as well do this, for I can do nothing else." The revision once taken up was never laid aside, and nothing contributed more to alleviate his sufferings than this occupation.

In the summer of 1798, instead of making a prolonged visit to Mundesley, Johnson and Cowper took several short ones. Instead of novels he now allowed his friend to read to him Gibbon's works and the "Pursuits of Literature." On the 24th of July he received a visit from the Dowager Lady Spencer, who eight years previously had called upon him at Weston,

and towards the end of the year he was visited by his old friend Sir John Throckmorton, “much altered,” wrote Cowper to his cousin, “since I saw him last, yet not so much but that I should have known him anywhere.” The letter in which he makes this observation (December 8, 1798) was the last he wrote to Lady Hesketh. She had received ten letters in all from him out of Norfolk. The one which Southey was unable to recover was printed in the *Universal Review* for June, 1890.

Mr. Johnson, who still continued the practice of reading to him, and had exhausted a large collection of novels, now began to read to the poet his own works. Cowper listened in silence till they got to “John Gilpin,” which he begged not to hear. His kinsman then proceeded to his unpublished poems, which he heard willingly, but without remark.

In Miss Perowne, Cowper had an admirable attendant, and one to whom he became so much attached that he never liked her to be away from him. In the letter of 26th July, 1798, he says: “I wrote a few days since to M. P., to tell her that as she had left me suddenly and alarmed me much by doing so, she would equally relieve me would she as suddenly return.” Johnson described her as one of those excellent beings whom Nature seems to have formed expressly for the purpose of alleviating the sufferings of the afflicted.

On Friday, the 8th March of the next year (1799), he completed the revisal of his Homer. On the 9th he commenced a preface to the new edition, which he finished next day.

Cowper being now without employment, Mr. John-

son laid the fragment called "The Four Ages" before him ; but after correcting a few lines and adding two or three more, he declined to proceed with it, saying that "it was too great a work for him to attempt in his present situation." That evening at supper other projects were suggested, to each of which he objected, but remarked that he might be able to put together some Latin verses he had just thought of. Accordingly, next morning he seated himself at his desk and made a commencement of his poem "Montes Glaciales," suggested by an account (which had been read to him from a newspaper while they were at Dunham) of some ice-islands recently seen in the German Ocean. This was on March 11th, and a few days after, in compliance with the request of Miss Perowne, he translated it into English with the title of "On the Ice Islands." On March 20th, the day after he finished the translation, he wrote the stanzas, entitled "The Castaway," founded on an anecdote in Anson's voyages, which his memory suggested to him, though he had not seen the book for many years—a poem that is very touching to all who know Cowper's history. It is the story of a poor fellow on Anson's ship who was washed overboard in a storm. A good swimmer, he battled as he could with the waves ; his friends, who heard his cries, checked the course of the ship, and threw out casks, coops, and cords, though they knew it was impossible to rescue him. At length, subdued by toil, he sank ; and Cowper draws a parallel between the fate of the unhappy man and that of himself. Each perished—

" But I beneath a rougher sea,  
And 'whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he."



On April 11th he wrote a letter to his old friend John Newton to return thanks for a letter and a book which the latter had been kind enough to send him. Like his other letters of this period, it is very sad. In August he translated his poem, "The Castaway," into Latin verse, and between August and December, at the instigation of Johnson, he wrote a number of translations from various Latin and Greek epigrams.

In December Johnson and Cowper removed to a larger house in the town, and in his new residence the poet amused himself during the month of January in translating a few of Gay's fables into Latin verse, the one that he did first being "The Hare and Many Friends," which he knew when he was a child. He finished the "Miser and Plutus" ("Avarus et Plutus"), and commenced "The Butterfly and Snail," of which, however, he completed only two lines. Towards the end of January Hayley requested him, by letter, to newly model the passage in his Homer, relating to the dance of Ariadne—a passage that both Pope and Cowper had injured by mistaking the meaning of one word, Hayley's immediate reason for requesting the alteration being his desire to quote the passage in a work which he was just putting to press. Cowper obligingly complied. "The neat transcript of these improved verses proved the last effort of his pen."

201. "What can it Signify?"—April 25,  
1800.

The day Hayley received the lines Cowper was seized with dropsy in his legs. A physician, Mr. Woods, was

called in, but it was with great difficulty that the patient could be got to take the medicines prescribed. After February 22nd he could not bear even the exercise of a post-chaise, and before the end of March he was confined altogether to his chamber. Nothing could be gloomier than the state of his mind. Dr. Lubbock, of Norwich, who called upon him one day, inquired how he felt. "Feel!" replied Cowper, "I feel unutterable despair!"

Of his friends, two of the dearest, much as they wished it, were unable to visit him. Lady Hesketh was still an invalid at Clifton, and Hayley was watching over his dying son, the "dear little Tom" of eight years previously. One friend, however, was able to and did come, namely, Samuel Rose, at the departure of whom, on the 6th of April, Cowper showed evident signs of regret, though he had expressed hardly any pleasure on his arrival.

On the 19th of April it was evident that death was near, and Mr. Johnson ventured to speak of his approaching dissolution as the signal for his deliverance from the miseries of both mind and body. Cowper making fewer objections than might have been supposed, Johnson proceeded to say, "that in the world to which he was hastening, a merciful Redeemer had prepared unspeakable happiness for all His children, and therefore for him." To the first part of this sentence he listened with composure, but upon hearing the concluding words he passionately entreated that no further observations might be made on the subject. He lingered five days longer. On Thursday he sat up as usual in the evening. In the course of the night, when he was exceedingly exhausted, Miss Perowne offered

him some refreshment, which he rejected, saying, “What can it signify?” and these were the last words he was heard to utter. At five in the morning a deadly change had taken place in his features, and he remained in an insensible state from that time till about five in the afternoon, when he ceased to breathe, expiring so peacefully that none who stood at his bedside could tell the precise moment of his departure. From the time of his death till the coffin was closed, Mr. Johnson says, “the expression with which his countenance had settled was that of calmness and composure, mingled, as it were, with holy surprise.” He was in the 69th year of his age.

So, with all its troubles and all its fears, passed away the spirit of the amiable Cowper. He himself was of opinion that the forms of the departed are permitted to revisit the earth, and speaking upon this subject to Newton on May 28, 1781, he had said: “The time will come, perhaps (but death will come first), when you will be able to visit them without either danger, trouble, or expense, and when the contemplation of those well-remembered scenes will awaken in you emotions of gratitude and praise, surpassing all you could possibly sustain at present. In this sense, I suppose, there is a heaven upon earth at all times, and that the disembodied spirit may find a peculiar joy arising from the contemplation of those places it was formerly conversant with, and so far, at least, be reconciled to a world it was once so weary of, as to use it in the delightful way of thankful recollection.”

As may be seen from the following lines from the end of the “Task,” Cowper had once hoped

that he might be buried in Olney or his beloved Weston :—

“ So glide my life away ! and so at last,  
 My share of duties decently performed,  
 May some disease, not tardy to perform  
 Its destined office, yet with gentle stroke,  
 Dismiss me weary to a safe retreat,  
 Beneath the turf that I have often trod.”

It was decided, however, that he should be interred in East Dercham Church by the side of Mrs. Unwin. Over his remains is a monument erected to his memory by Lady Hesketh, the inscription of which was supplied by Hayley. It runs :—

“ IN MEMORY OF  
 WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.,  
 BORN IN HERTFORDSHIRE, 1731,  
 BURIED IN THIS CHURCH, 1800.

Ye, who with warmth the public triumph feel  
 Of talents, dignified by sacred zeal,  
 Here, to devotion's bard devoutly just,  
 Pay your fond tribute due to Cowper's dust !  
 England, exulting in his spotless fame,  
 Ranks with her dearest sons his favourite name.  
 Sense, fancy, wit, suffice not all to raise  
 So clear a title to affection's praise ;  
 His highest honours to the heart belong ;  
 His virtues form'd the magic of his song.”

## APPENDIX A.

### *A CATALOGUE OF THE LIBRARY OF THE LATE WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ., TAKEN BY WILLIAM BARKER, BOOKSELLER, EAST DEREHAM, NORFOLK, OCTOBER, 1800.*

[From a copy in the handwriting of the late John Bruce, F.S.A. The numbers and words in brackets are added by the author. The words italicised are in the handwriting of Dr. J. Johnson.]

#### FOLIOS.

1. Calvin's Sermons. Lond., 1583.
2. Bp. Reynolds's Works. Lond., 1679.
3. Westminster Poems, &c. 1728.
4. Chapman's Homer's Iliad. (Presented by Mr. Park in May, 1793.)
5. Villoison's Homer's Iliad. Venice, 1788. (Presented by Mr. Throckmorton in 1789.)
6. Pope's Homer, 3 vols., Subscription Copy. Lond., 1715.
7. *Also the three volumes of Boydell's Milton, a present from Mr. Hayley, the editor. These volumes have not Mr. Cowper's name written in them, as almost all the others have.*

#### QUARTOS.

8. Baxter's Saints' Everlasting Rest. Lond., 1654.
9. Flavel's Sermons. Lond., 1673.
10. Flavel's Method of Grace. Lond., 1699.
11. Holy Bible, large paper. Oxford, 1726. (This was the family Bible of Cowper's father, referred to on p. 41.)
12. Hayley's Life of Milton. Lond., 1796.

13. Beresford's *Æneid* of Virgil. Lond., 1794.
14. *Antithelyphthora*, with other Tracts.
15. Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary*. Lond., 1763.
16. Ainsworth's *Lat. and Eng. Dictionary*. 1783.
17. *Wrongs of Almoova, &c.*
18. *Hederici Lexicon*. Lond., 1766.
19. Maurice's *History of Hindostan*, vol. ii. Lond., 1798.
20. Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, royal paper. Lond., 1791.
21. Hayley's *Milton*, 3 vols., Imperial paper. Lond., 1797.
22. Curious ornamented MS. of College Lectures. 1625. (*See* §6.)
23. Bentley's *Milton's Paradise Lost*. Lond., 1732.
24. Clarke's *Homer's Iliad and Odyssey*, 2 vols. Lond., 1754.
25. *Dissertationes Homericæ*, by Riccins. Florence, 1740.
26. Barnes' *Homer's Iliad and Odyssey*, 2 vols. Camb., 1711.
27. Twining's *Aristotle*. Lond., 1789. (Presented by General Cowper in 1789.)
28. Dalzell's *Plains of Troy*. Edinb., 1791. (Translation of Chevalier.)
29. Macpherson's *Homer's Iliad*. Lond., 1773.
30. Cowper's *Homer*, 2 vols., royal paper. Lond., 1791.

## OCTAVOS.

31. Buxtorffii *Lexicon*. Lond., 1646.
32. *Homer's Iliad*, Gr. and Lat. Lond., 1728.
33. *Devonshire and Cornwall Poems*. Bath, 1792. (Presented by Rev. Richard Polwhele, June, 1792.)
34. Dawson's *Lexicon*. Camb., 1706.
35. Lyon's *Hebrew Grammar*. Camb., 1757.
36. *Elegant Extracts*, large paper. Lond. (By Vicesimus Knox.)
37. *Biographia Evangelica*, 4 vols. Lond., 1779. (By the Rev. Erasmus Middleton, afterwards Rector of Turvey. Mr. Henry Gough writes: "This very copy was in the possession of a friend of mine, now deceased. It was purchased at Hayley's sale. In each volume was the poet's engraved bookplate (which I have never seen elsewhere), with the arms of Cowper and Stanbridge quarterly, and his autograph. Each volume had also his crest on the back in gold.")
38. Erskine's *Sermons*, 3 vols. Lond., 1763.

39. Berington's Rights of Dissenters, &c. (A Roman Catholic work.)
40. Lawrence's Clergyman's Recreation. Lond., 1714.
41. Religious Tracts.
42. Newton's Ecclesiastical History. Lond., 1770.
43. Another copy. Lond., 1770.
44. Voyage to South America, 2 vols. Lond., 1758.
45. Boillieu's Works, 2 vols. Lond., 1712.
46. Juvenal's Satires. Lond., 1739.
47. Rutter and Carter's Modern Eden. Lond., 1767.
48. Newton's Sermons at Olney. Lond., 1767.
49. Green's (William) Translation of the Psalms. Camb., 1762.
50. Brown's Dictionary of the Bible, 2 vols. Edinb., 1789.
51. Horæ Solitariae. (By Ambrose Serle.) 2 vols. Lond., 1787.
52. Johnson's Lives of the Poets, 4 vols. Lond., 1790.
53. European Magazine, 1789.
54. Gentleman's Magazine, 1786. (*See* No. 82.)
55. Lunardi's Voyage and Expedition to Botany Bay.
56. Newton's Six Discourses. Liverpool, 1760.
57. Edwards's (Jonathan) History of Redemption. Edinb., 1774.
58. American Sermons, &c.
59. Analytical Review, 27 vols., complete.
60. Grace Triumphant and Redemption.
61. La Butte's and Du Fresnoy's French Grammar.
62. Letter to the Catholic Clergy. Lond., 1790.
63. Letter to Warton, &c.
64. Madan's Juvenal, 2 vols. Lond., 1789.
65. Monthly Review, 1769 to 1775 inclusive, 17 vols. (*See* No. 86.)
66. Burn's Justice, 4 vols. Lond., 1776.
67. Burns's Scottish Poems. Edinb., 1787.
68. Virgillii Opera. Lond., 1687.
69. Cowper's Poems, 2 vols., large paper. Lond., 1788.
70. Miscellaneous Tracts.
71. Hitt on Fruit Trees. Lond., 1768.
72. Miller's Gardener's Kalendar. Lond., 1765.
73. Religious Tracts.
74. Review of Wesley. Lond., 1772.
75. Gillies' Memoirs of Whitfield. Lond., 1772.

76. Newton on the Prophecies, 3 vols. Lond., 1759.
77. Planting and Ornamental Gardening. Lond., 1785.
78. Beattie's Poems. Lond., 1784. (Bought by Cowper. *See* Letter, April 5, 1784.)
79. Volume of Tracts.
80. Wilberforce on Christianity. Lond., 1797.
81. Pope's Homer by Wakefield, 11 vols. Lond., 1796.
82. Gentleman's Magazine, 1787 to 1793 inclusive, 14 vols. (*See* No. 54.)
83. More's (Hannah) Strictures on Education, 2 vols. Lond., 1799.
84. Le Grand's Tales, Royal, large paper. Lond., 1796.
85. Vol. of Magazines and Reviews.
86. Monthly Review. 1777. (*See* No. 65.)
87. Newton's Milton, 6 vols. Interleaved. Lond., 1790.
88. Heyne's Virgil, 4 vols. Lond., 1793.
89. Newton's Milton, 4 vols. Lond., 1770.
90. Clarke's Homer's Odyssey, 2 vols. Lond., 1758.
91. Clarke's Homerica, for the Iliad. Lond., 1741.
92. " " for the Odyssey, 4 vols. Turin, 1766.
93. Scott's (John Scott, D.D.) Christian Life, vol. v. Lond., 1699.
94. Pursuits of Literature. Lond., 1798. (By T. J. Mathias.)

## SMALL OCTAVOS AND DUODECIMOS.

95. Pope's Homer's Odyssey, 5 vols. Lond., 1725.
96. Life of Janeway. Edinb., 1745.
97. Virgilii Opera. Edinb., 1743.
98. Novum Testamentum Græcum. Oxon., 1742.
99. Dryden's Miscellany, 6 vols. Lond., 1716.
100. Life of Henry. Lond., 1716.
101. Memoirs du Comte de Vordæ. Paris, 1703.
102. Voltaire's Louis XIV., in French, 2 tom. Hague, 1752.
103. Owen on Indwelling Sin. 1732.
104. Le Seau Enlevé, tom 2°. Paris, 1758.
105. Swift's Miscellanies, 11 vols. Lond., 1731.
106. Abrégé de L'Histoire Universale (*sic*), 3 tom, 12mo. Lond., 1758.
107. Fulfilling of the Scriptures. Glas., 1753.



108. Pasor's Lexicon, Gr. and Lat. Lond., 1650.
109. Terence's Comedies, 3 vols. Lond., 1734.
110. Memoires du Duc de Villars, 3 tom. Hague, 1734.
111. Scott's Force of Truth. Lond., 1779.
112. Swinden's Beauties of Flora. Lond., 1778.
113. Bond's Horace. 1767.
114. Poems by a Lady, revised by W. Cowper, Esq. Lond., 1792. (This lady is generally supposed to be his Aunt Judith.)
115. Charlotte Smith's Sonnets. Lond., 1792.
116. Novum Testamentum Græcum, 2 tom. Lond., 1763.
117. Cardiphonia, 2 vols. Lond., 1781. (By John Newton.)
118. Select Passages. Lond., 1787.
119. Moliere's Comedies, 8 vols. Lond., 1732.
120. Smollett's Don Quixote, 4 vols. Lond., 1782.
121. Letters to a Wife, 2 vols. Lond., 1793. (By John Newton.)
122. Owen's Juvenal, 2 vols. Lond., 1785.
123. Williams's Poema, 2 vols. in one. Lond., 1794.
124. Poetical Attempts, 2 vols. in one. Lond., 1792.
125. Voltaire's Charles XII., 2 vols. in one. Berlin, 1752.
126. Collection of Psalms and Hymns. Lond., 1767. (Qu. Martin Madan's Collection?)
127. Postlethwaite's Grammatical Art Improved. Lond., 1795. (A Mr. Postlethwaite was Curate of Olney in 1785. This might be the same.)
128. Romaine's Life of Faith. Lond., 1764.
129. Lives of Hugh Bryan and Mrs. Mary Hatson. Lond., 1760.
130. Histoire de Charles XII. Basle, 1732.
131. Letters of Henry and Frances, 2 vols. in one. Lond., 1767.
132. Watson's (Bishop) Apology for the Bible. Lond., 1796.
133. Browne on the Knowledge of Christ. Lond., 1772. (This was Moses Browne's translation from Zimmermann.)
134. Trimmer's Æconomy of Charity. Lond., 1787.
135. Memoirs of Voltaire. Lond., 1785.
136. Pearsall's Meditations, 2 vols. Lond., 1765. (Presented by his cousin, Mrs. Cowper.)
137. Edwards against Chauncy. Newhaven, 1790.
138. Letters from Italy. Lond., 1773.
139. Life of Halyburton. Glasgow, 1782.
140. Vol. of Tracts.

141. Christian World Unmasked. Lond., 1773. (By John Ber-  
ridge.)
142. Thomson's Seasons. Lond., 1744.
143. Bourne's Poemata. Lond., 1743. (By Vincent Bourne.)
144. Aureæ Sententiæ. Lond., 1768.
145. Johnson's Poetical Works. Lond., 1785.
146. Anacreontis Carmina. Morocco Argent., 1786.
147. Loss of the Halswell and Bentley's Poems.
148. Religious Tracts.
149. Cooper's Discourses. Yarmouth, 1786.
150. Cowper's Poems, 2 vols., fine paper, elegantly bound. Lond.,  
1798.
151. Cowper's Poems, 2 vols., fine paper, smaller size, elegantly  
bound. Lond., 1798.
152. Newton's Life of Grimshaw. Lond., 1797.
153. Gisborne's Poems, sacred and moral. Lond., 1798.
154. Gisborne's Walks in a Forest. Lond., 1799.
155. Book of Cookery.
156. Godivin's St. Leon, 4 vols. Lond., 1799.
157. Rambler, 4 vols. Lond., 1779.
158. Knox's Essays, 2 vols. Lond., 1784. (Vicesimus Knox.)
159. Old Manor House, 4 vols. Lond., 1793. (By Charlotte  
Smith, who presented it to the poet.)
160. Mirror, 3 vols. Lond., 1783. *For Lady Hesketh.*
161. Lounger, 3 vols. Edinb., 1787. *For Lady Hesketh.*
162. Hobbes's Homer. Lond., 1677. *For Lady Hesketh.*
163. Hervey's Theron and Aspasio, 3 vols. Lond., 1761.
164. Dakin's History, 2 vols. Lond., 1724.
165. Life of Colonel Gardiner. Lond., 1763. (By Dr. Dodd-  
ridge.)
166. Hervey's Meditations. Lond., 1776.
167. Hayley's Essay on Old Maids, 3 vols. Lond., 1773.
168. Hayley's Poems and Plays, 6 vols. Lond., 1788.
169. Hayley's Two Dialogues. Lond., 1787.

## EIGHTEENS.

170. Andrew's Preces Privatæ. Oxon., 1675. (Bishop Andrews.)
171. Novum Testamentum Græcum, 2 tom. Amst.
172. Horatii Opera. Amst., 1718.
173. Hudibras. Lond., 1781.

174. Shakespeare's Works, 9 vols., last vol. wanting. Lond., 1747.  
*To be reserved for Lady Hesketh.*
175. Bell's Edition of Milton's Smaller Poems. Lond., 1778.
176. " " Young's Works. Edinb., 1784.
177. Buchanani Poemata. Amst., 1676.

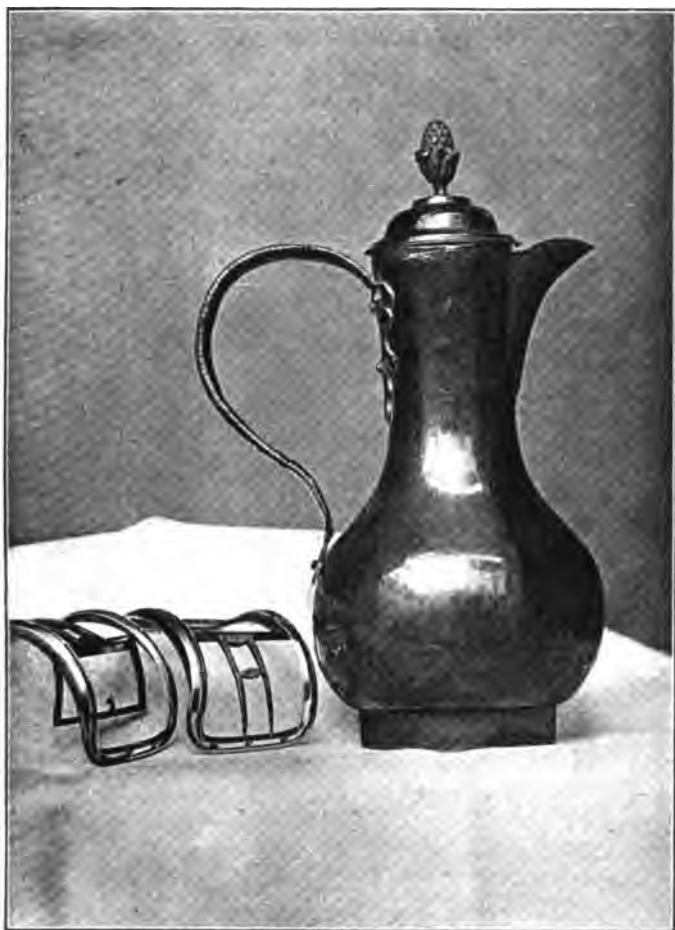
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## APPENDIX B.

### SOME RELICS OF COWPER AND THEIR PRESENT OWNERS (1892).

1. *A small table* bought at Constable's sale. Constable was butler to Sir Charles Throckmorton. This is the fly table referred to in § 117. (Mrs. Welton, Olney.)
2. *Silver Stock-buckle* worn by Cowper. Purchased at Olney, Sept. 27, 1837, of Thomas Kitchener, man to Mr. Wilson, Cowper's barber. See Letter to Unwin, May 23, 1781. (Mrs. Welton.)
3. *Coat button*, also bought of Kitchener. (Mrs. Welton.)
4. *Piece of Cowper's hair* in a locket. This was given by Mrs. Unwin to Mrs. Samuel Mason, who gave it to the present possessor (Mrs. Welton). Mrs. Mason is buried in Olney churchyard.
5. *Pieces of the poet's patchwork counterpane*. The counterpane was bought at Cowper's sale at Weston in 1795, and belonged for many years to Miss Handscomb, who remembered Cowper, and lived to the advanced age of ninety. (Thomas Wright.)
6. *Profile of Cowper*, see § 168. (Mr. Hollingshead, Olney.)
7. *Cowper's armchair*. (Mr. Hollingshead.)
8. *Cowper's pocket-case*. (Mr. Hollingshead.)
9. *Pokerette* that Sir John Throckmorton had made for Cowper. Presented by Mrs. Welton to the Bucks Archæological Society.
10. *Another button*. Ditto.
11. *Cowper's father's family Bible*. A few of *Cowper's books*. *Two engravings* that hung in his study. Some MSS. of his translation of Homer. The *Letters* published in "The

- Private Correspondence" (1824). *One of his cambric muslim caps.* All in the possession of the Rev. J. Barham Johnson (son of Johnny of Norfolk), Dial House, Ipsawich Road, Norwich.
12. *Portrait by Abbot. Table. Writing-desk. Watch of Ashley Cowper* (given to the poet by Lady H.). Canon W. Cowper Johnson (eldest son of Johnny of Norfolk), Rector of Northwold, near Brandon, Norfolk.
  13. *Portrait by Romney.* Henry Robert Vaughan Johnson, Esq., Barrister of Lincoln's Inn, of 1, Elvaston Place, South Kensington.
  14. *The picture of the poet's mother.* Picture of Dr. Johnson (Johnny of Norfolk). Rev. Chas. Ed. Donne, Vicar of Faversham, Kent.
  15. *Cowper's wig-block.* This is preserved in the summer-house. See Letter to Mrs. Newton, March 4, 1780.
  16. *The MS. of the Northampton Dirge for 1789* is in the Northampton Museum.
  17. The late Sir Charles Reed had some relics of Cowper.
  18. *The MS. of Yardley Oak* is in the possession of Mr. W. H. Collingridge, of the *City Press*, London.
  19. *His silver shoe-buckles.* Belonged to the late Charles Longuet Higgins, Esq., of Turvey Abbey. Now in the possession of Mrs. Higgins. They were given to John Higgins, Esq., of Turvey Abbey, by R. B. Dunlop, Esq., who received them from the Rev. John Buchanan, Curate of Weston Underwood, 1826. Size 3 in.  $\times$  2 $\frac{1}{2}$  in.
  20. *His coffee-pot.* Belongs to Mrs. Charles Longuet Higgins. Given to her by her brother, the late Dean of Chichester. It was originally bought at Miss Cary's sale at Weston Underwood in 1853. Handle covered with cane. Height 10 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches.
  21. The Rev. W. Cowper Johnson, jun., possesses a *ball of worsted* wound by Cowper for Mrs. Unwin; *netting* done by Cowper; *seal-ring* with head of Omphale, given by Cowper to Theodora; *Cowper's watch* (once in the possession of Ashley Cowper); and a *cap* worn by the poet when writing. All these were exhibited in the Guelph Exhibition, 1891.



**COWPER'S SILVER SHOE-BUCKLES, AND HIS COFFEE-POT.**

In the possession of Mrs. HIGGINS of Turvey Abbey.



22. *Cowper's snuff-box* (see § 117). Charles A. Godfrey, Esq., 41, Devonshire Place, Portland Place, W.
23. *A chest of drawers*. D. A. Fox, Esq., Birkenhead.
24. *Portrait of Cowper's father*. Rev. N. Madan Pratt, Windrush Vicarage, Burford.
25. *Sofa that was Cowper's*. Henry Hives, Esq., Wharncliffe Lodge, Crescent Road, Crouch End, N.
26. *Original Letters of Cowper*.
- A. A number of letters to Unwin and Rose are in the British Museum, Addit. MSS. 24154, 21556.
- B. Alfred Morrison, Esq., has one to General Cowper, April 14, 1788.
- C. G. Milner Gibson Cullum, Esq., has one to Hayley, November 17, 1793; W. W. Manning, Esq., Redcliffe Gardens, South Kensington, one to Rose.
- D. In the Library at Bedford is one to Bull, January 7, 1786.
- E. In the Forster Library, South Kensington Museum, are three letters : (1) To Johnson, the Bookseller, March 5, 1786. (2) To Rose, February 19, 1789 (in Southey this letter is dreadfully mutilated). (3) To Unwin, without address or date. This is the letter treating of Churchill's great poetic merits.
- F. Miss Bull, of 12, Montrell Road, Streatham Hill, S.W., has some letters.
- G. C. Willmore, Esq., Queenwood College, Hants, has several.

NOTE.—Since making out the above list the author has received copies of a large number of other letters of Cowper (many of them unpublished). He thanks all who have sent them, and will make the list complete in his collection of the poet's letters, now in hand.

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## APPENDIX C.

*SUMMARY OF EVENTS CONNECTED WITH COWPER,  
HIS FRIENDS AND HIS WORKS, FROM 1798 TO  
THE PRESENT YEAR (1892).*

- 1798, June 9. Samuel Teedon was buried at Olney. A manuscript Life of Teedon is in existence, written in 1848 by the eccentric William Soul, of Olney. It is in the possession of Henry Gough, Esq., of Red Hill.
1800. The Rev. John Newton visited Southampton, and while there, commenced to write a Life of his late friend the poet. One hindrance or another, however, prevented him from continuing it. All that remains is the fragment of sixteen pages written at Southampton.
1801. The Earl of Dartmouth died. His descendant, the late William Walter Legge, was the fifth Earl. Cowper's Translations from Madame de la Mothe Guyon published.
- 1802, Aug. 12. Lady Austen died at Paris. She had for some years been married to a French gentleman, M. de Tardif. Her sister Martha (wife of the Rev. Thomas Jones, of Clifton) was buried at Olney on July 2, 1795.
1803. Hayley's Life first appeared in two volumes. The later editions (1806, 1809, 1812) were in four volumes, and contained supplementary letters.
1803. *Cowper, illustrated* by a series of Views, in, or near, the Park of Weston Underwood, Bucks. Accompanied with copious Descriptions, and a Sketch of the Poet's Life. London, 1803, 4°, pp. 51. The author of this popular work, which saw at least ten editions (1803-1810), was James S. Storer. He and John Greig, his partner, were the engravers of the plates, thirteen in number.
- The Rural Walks of Cowper*, first published in 1822, was a republication of this work, with new and different plates. This book was published in three sizes, 8°, 12°, 18°. James Sargent Storer and his son, Henry Sargent Storer, the authors of this work, were eminent engravers,



and their works are almost countless. Both were connected with Olney. The son died in 1837, and the father in 1854.

Mr. Robert Storer, brother of James Storer, the engraver, and father of Mr. W. P. Storer, the author's first schoolmaster, was one of the persons who remembered Cowper. Robert Storer was a Bluecoat boy, and he used to tell how Cowper, who met him in the street one day, patted his head, told him of famous men Christchurch had produced, and prophesied that if he too were diligent a useful career lay before him.

1804. Samuel Rose died, after a comparatively short career of professional eminence. He was in his 38th year.
1806. Rev. Walter Bagot died, aged 75.
1807. Lady Hesketh died.  
Dec. 21. Rev. John Newton died in his 83rd year. He was buried at St. Mary Woolnoth's, of which he had been Rector 28 years.
1808. The Unfinished Commentary of Milton was published by Hayley for the benefit of the second son of Mr. Rose, the godchild of Cowper. Some designs in outline were furnished for it by Flaxman.
1816. The Memoir of the Early Life of William Cowper published—the narrative written by himself at Huntingdon. Also "Adelphi," a sketch of the life and character of his brother John.
1819. Died, without issue, Sir John Throckmorton (fifth Baronet). He was succeeded by his brother George.
1821. Rev. Thomas Scott died at Aston Sandford (Bucks), where he had been Rector 21 years.
1823. "Private Correspondence of William Cowper, Esq., with several of his most intimate friends. Now first published from the originals in the possession of his kinsman, John Johnson, LL.D., Rector of Yaxham with Welborne in Norfolk." In two volumes.
1824. Mrs. Joseph Hill died. She had survived her husband, who also lived to an advanced age.
- 1825, Oct. 22. On this day died, unmarried, Theodora Jane Cowper. (The poet's first love.)

This year was published "Poems, the Early Productions of William Cowper; now first published from the originals, in the possession of James Croft, with anecdotes of the Poet, collected from letters of Lady Hesketh, written during her residence at Olney. London, 1825." These were the poems preserved by Theodora.

- 1826, July 27. Death of Sir George Courtenay Throckmorton, aged 72.
- 1828, Feb. 24. Burial of Eusebius Killingworth (whose age was 77) at Olney. An old gentleman of Olney spoke to me of him as follows: "Old Daddy Worth, as we used to call him. His was my first school, and we used to pay sixpence a week. He was a small, spare man, whose lean legs looked like sticks in their worsted stockings and knee breeches. He always appeared in a woollen cap, something after the fashion of that worn by Cowper. He was fond of music, and among the things sold when he died was a harpsichord." The Rev. Dr. Johnson (Cowper's Johnny) kindly allowed Mr. Killingworth a small pension, of which the Rev. Henry Gauntlett, of Olney, was the weekly almoner.

Notes concerning the family extracted from the Olney Parish Registers :—

Elizabeth Killingworth (Mammy) was buried at Olney on Dec. 5, 1807.

Eusebius Killingworth and Mary Taylor (Polly) were married at Olney on April 18, 1808.

Mary Killingworth was buried at Olney on Nov. 19, 1817.

1833. Rev. Dr. Johnson (Johnny of Norfolk) died. He and his sister, Mrs. Hewitt, were interred in the same vault at Yaxham, near Dereham.

Taylor's Cowper published.

- 1835, Nov. 9. Death of Mrs. Powley (*née* Susanna Unwin). There was only one letter of Cowper's remaining among her papers—that dated June 25 (1784). Mrs. Powley was in her 89th year. She had a devotion to a Mr. Kilvington (after the death of her husband in Dec. 23, 1806) resembling her mother's to Cowper.

1835. *Life and Works of Cowper*, published by John S. Memes, 3 vols., post 8vo, Edinburgh.
- 1835, February. This month was published "The Life and Letters of Cowper," by the Rev. T. S. Grimshawe, Rector of Biddenham (8 vols.). It was dedicated to the Dowager Lady Throckmorton, the Catharina of Cowper's poems. Grimshawe and "Johnny of Norfolk" married two sisters.
- In October, 1835, appeared "The Life and Letters of Cowper," by Southey, but Southey was debarred from printing the "Private Correspondence," which had been placed in the hands of Grimshawe. This, however, was added as a supplement on the expiration of the copyright. Southey's edition (15 vols., 1834-37) was reprinted by Bohn—Standard Library (1853-54).
1840. Nov. 28. Henry Cowper, son of General Cowper, died at Tewin Water, Hertfordshire, aged 82. (See *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. xv., N.S.)
1853. Hugh Miller visited Olney. He met with Mr. Hale, of Emberton, and also the old Weston errand woman, aged 71, both of whom remembered Cowper. The latter spoke of the poet's "white cap and his suit of green turned up with black," and told how Lady Hesketh used to put coppers into her velvet bag every time she went out, in order to make the children happy. He also saw the Ribstone pippin tree in the garden at Olney. This tree, which was planted by Cowper, has long since disappeared. Her story about the poet being so fond of drawing thistles is apocryphal, for after 1780 Cowper gave up drawing altogether, that is to say, at least twelve months before the old woman was born, the reason being because drawing hurt his eyes.
1863. This year appeared the Aldine edition, with a good life by John Bruce. Mr. Bruce continued to collect material on Cowper, which he would have published, but he died suddenly in the autumn of 1869. His list of Cowper's letters, 1,799 in number, is in the British Museum (Addit. MS. 29716).
1864. This year was published "Memorials of the Rev.

- William Bull," by his grandson, the Rev. Josiah Bull, M.A.
1866. A series of excellent articles on Cowper appeared in the *Sunday at Home*. They were by the Rev. Josiah Bull.
1869. Bull's "Life of Newton" published. It contains Cowper's Commentary on St. John.
1870. Issue of the Globe Edition of Cowper, with good memoir by the Rev. W. Benham.
1886. This year was published "The Town of Cowper" (S. Low and Co.), by the author of the present volume. The chief aim of the writer was to point out the principal discoveries made of late years in respect to the poet, and to describe the scenes among which he moved. Several chapters are devoted to Cowper's contemporaries at Olney.
1888. This year was erected in Edmonton Church a memorial to Cowper and Charles Lamb. It occupies a good position at the west end of the north wall of the edifice, and consists of two inscribed white marble panels surrounded by a graceful design in freestone, the arches of which are supported by veined marble pilasters. In the upper portion of each panel is carved a portrait in bas-relief, the one on the right showing the head of Cowper, in his well-known calico cap, while on the left panel the features of "The Gentle Elia" are characteristically depicted. The inscription on the right panel is as follows :—

In memory of  
 WILLIAM COWPER, the poet,  
 Born at Berkhamstead, 1731,  
 Died and buried at East Dereham, 1800.  
 He was the author of  
 The diverting history of "John Gilpin."

[Here follow the first three stanzas of that well-known composition.]

Along the base of the design the following words are inscribed :—

“This monument to commemorate the visit of the London and Middlesex Archæological Society To Edmonton Church and parish on the 26th of July, 1888, Was erected by the President of the meeting, Joshua W. Butterworth, F.S.A.”

For criticism on Cowper, see Ste Beuve's "Causeries du Lundi" (vol. xi., 1868). Stopford Brooke's "Theology in the English Poets" (1874). Goldwin Smith's monograph in the "English Men of Letters" series (1880). Leslie Stephen, in series iii. of "Hours in a Library" (1882). Mrs. Oliphant, in "The Literary History of England" (1882).

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## APPENDIX D.

### COWPER'S WORKS.

1. Nos. 111, 115, 134, 139, *Connoisseur*. 1756.
2. Translations from Horace. 1757-59.
3. *Olney Hymns*. 1779.
4. *Anti-Thelyphthora*. 1781. Anonymous.
5. First volume of his poems. 1782.
6. Article on Hares, *Gentleman's Magazine*, June, 1784.
7. *The Task*, &c. 1785. 2nd edition of 5 and 7 in 1786. Other editions in 1787, 1788, 1793, 1794 (two), 1800. Innumerable editions since.
8. Article on Homer, *Gentleman's Magazine*, Aug., 1785.
9. *Homer*. July, 1791. 2nd edition. 1802.
10. *Van Lier*. 1792. "The Power of Grace Illustrated; in six letters from a minister of the Reformed Church (Van Lier) to John Newton, translated by W. Cowper."
11. *Poems* (*Mother's Picture, Dog and Water Lily, &c.*). 1798.

### POSTHUMOUS WORKS.

12. *Guyon*. 1801.
13. *Adelphi*. 1802.

14. Milton, Latin and Italian Poems of. Published by Hayley for the benefit of Cowper's godson, W. C. Rose. 1808.
15. Milton, Cowper's Comments on. Published by Hayley. 1810.
16. Poems, in three vols. Published by John Johnson, LL.D. (Contained some pieces that had not previously appeared.)
17. Memoir of the Early Life of William Cowper. 1816.
18. Poems, Early Productions of William Cowper. Published by James Croft. 1825.
19. His Letters. Some were published by Hayley in 1803; others by Cowper's kinsman, John Johnson, in 1814. Grimshawe's Cowper was published in February, 1835; Southey's in October, 1835. Others have been published since, and some are still unpublished.
20. Commentary on Chapter i. of St. John's Gospel. In Bull's "Life of Newton," 1869.

# THE UNWIN FAMILY OF CASTLE HEDINGHAM, ESSEX.

THOMAS UNWIN,  
of Castle Heddingham, Essex, *b.* 1618, *d.* 1689.

THOMAS UNWIN = MARY.....  
*b.* 1645. *d.* 1701.

THOMAS UNWIN = MARTHA.....  
*b.* 1678, appr. in London, at  
Grocers' Hall, 1694. (Her father, 1702, was a cloth manufacturer,  
of Castle Heddingham.)

THOMAS, *b.* 1702,  
*bapt.* at Castle  
Heddingham.

MORLEY,  
*b.* 1703, *d.* 1767, æt. 63.  
Fellow of Queen's Coll. Camb.;  
Rector of Grimston, Norfolk;  
and later, Master of Grammar  
School, Huntingdon. Married,  
in 1742, MARY, daughter of  
WILLIAM CAWTHORNE, Linen-  
draper, of Ely. She was born in  
1724, died 1796, and is buried at  
East Dereham, with the  
Poet Cowper.

MARTIN,  
*b.* 1706.

LAUNCELOT,  
*b.* 1707.

MATTHIAS,  
*b.* 1711.

JOHN,  
*b.* 1714.

MARTHA.

HENRY,  
Predeceased his father.

WILLIAM CAWTHORNE = A Miss SHUTTLEWORTH,  
M.A., Christ's Coll. Camb. who died at Croydon,  
Rector of Stoke-cum-Ramsden. in 1825, æt. 75.  
*d.* 29 Nov., 1786, æt. 41; buried  
at Winchester. The Friend of  
Cowper.

SUSANNA = Rev. MATTHEW POWLEY,  
*d.* 1835, æt. 89. Vicar of Dewsbury.

JOHN.

WILLIAM.

Several other children.

It is a singular coincidence that both the *Publishers* and *Printers* of this Volume are descended from the UNWINS of Castle Heddingham.





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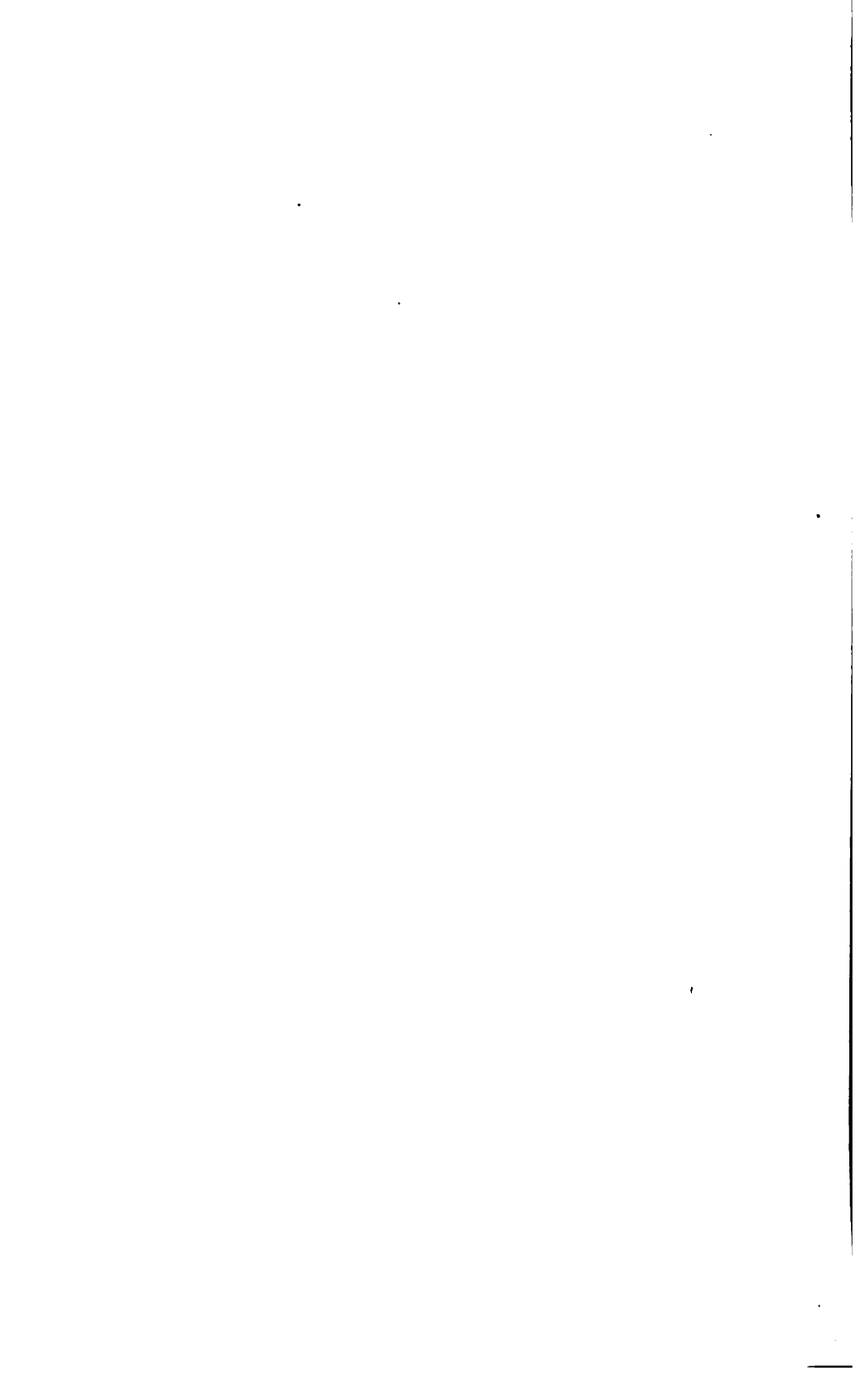
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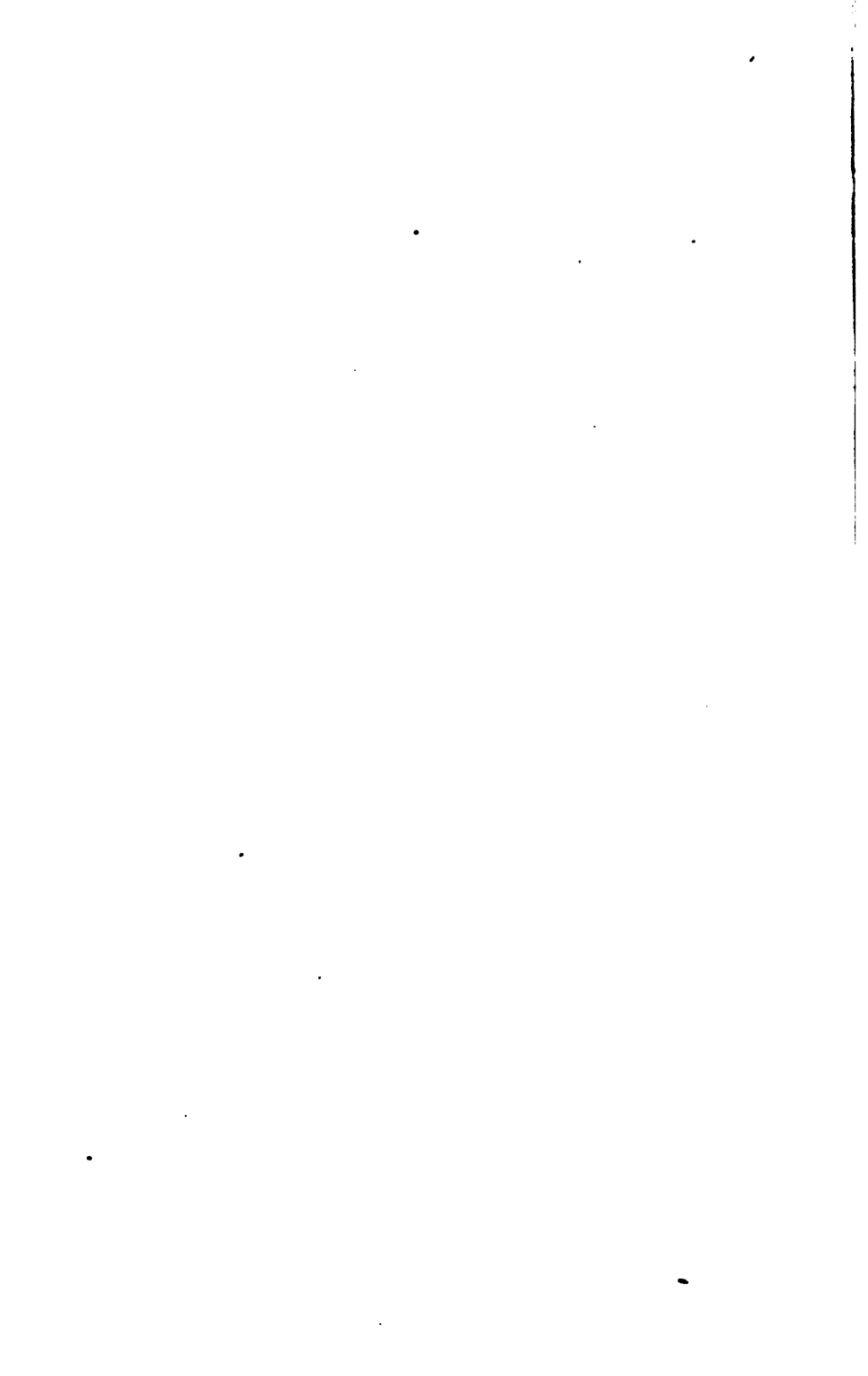
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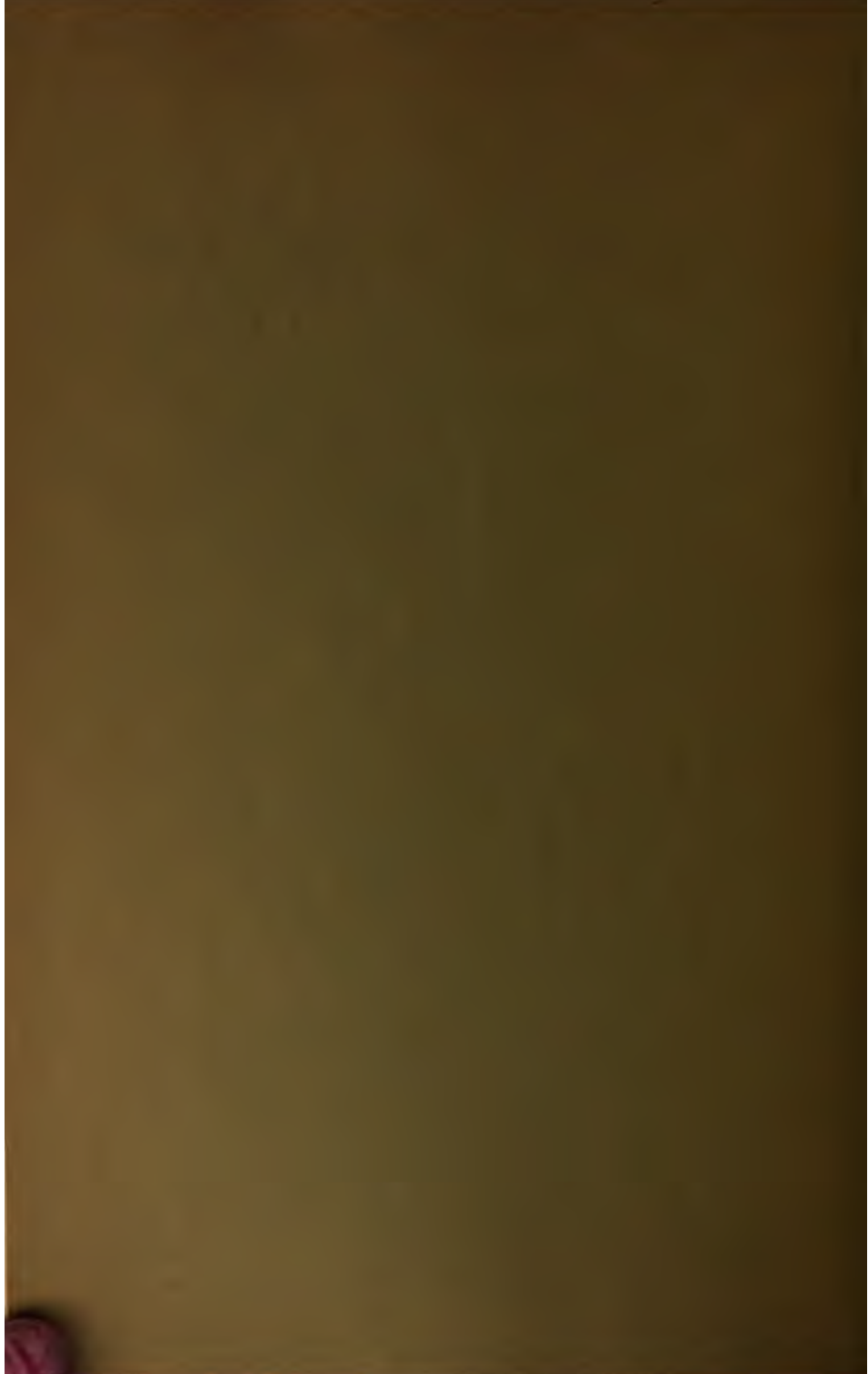
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