

tenderest views of the cross, yet ever listening to the dark fiend at his side that whispered, "it is not for you." No words could describe the agony inflicted on the gentle spirit of Cowper, by this awful delusion, which undoubtedly was a relic of his former insanity. Yet, strange to say, this poor, wounded, bleeding heart was all the while pouring out instruction, guidance and consolation for others. How much poorer would our christian literature be, wanting "The Task," the hymns, the touching letters of Cowper! The pierced heart of the poet sent out the most precious balm, for others only, while taking despair as its portion: or, as Mrs. Browning finely expresses it,—

"O poets! from a maniac's tongue was poured the deathless singing;
O christians! to your cross of hope a hopeless hand is clinging;
O men! this man, in brotherhood, your weary paths beguiling,
Groaned only while he taught you peace, and died while ye were smiling."

But most mysterious of all—this gloom continued to the last. His last poetical effusion was that fearful wail of a desponding spirit, *The Custawty*, over which Hugh Miller hung during his last night on earth, while the clouds of insanity were deepening into midnight gloom—a mournful witness to the truth of two lines of the poem,—

"But misery still delights to trace
Its semblance in another's case."

How sad to find the gentle, loving Cowper, in this effusion, taking, as a type of himself, a sailor who had fallen overboard in a storm, amid the roaring waves of the Atlantic, and who, after an hour's battling with the billows, sank into the scething caldron. How piteous to think that the last stanza he penned on earth should be this—

"No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone;
When snatched from all effectual air,
We perished each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he."

We picture to our-elves the glad and holy surprise of him whose last words were, "I feel unutterable despair," when he emerged from the depths of that inscrutable despondency which had so long enshrouded him, and found himself safe for ever in the arms of infinite love—all clouds scattered amid the shinings of an eternal day.

It was during the interval between his two attacks of insanity—those eight years which were the happiest of his whole life—that Cowper composed his portion of the

Olney Hymns, which were the joint production of himself and his beloved friend John Newton. The total number of hymns contributed by Cowper to this collection was sixty-eight. They are truly utterances of the heart—crystallizations of the emotions that surged through his own spirit. What love and sorrow—what trembling and rejoicing—what childlike trust and holy fear thrill through these lovely hymns; while a few of them are shadowed by his own painful malady. Once Cowper was out in the fields alone, meditating and lifting his heart to God. Suddenly he was seized with a dreadful presentiment of returning insanity, which unhappily was soon realized. But ere the gloom gathered and while faith was strong, he sat down and composed that most touching hymn which has comforted many a troubled heart,—

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

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

The beautiful hymn which commences, "How blest the creature is, O God," and which he named *The Happy Change*, was the first he composed after his second recovery from his cruel malady. About the same period he wrote perhaps his finest hymn, "Far from the world, O Lord, I flee." Gladly would we linger longer over Cowper's hymns, did the space at disposal permit. He will long be revered and loved as the author of those hymns so dear to the christian's heart, "O, for a closer walk with God;" "There is a fountain filled with blood;" "What various hindrances we meet;" and, "'Tis my happiness below, Not to live without the cross."

The next great contribution to sacred song were the hymns of John and Charles Wesley. Regarded in a mere literary point of view, they must be accorded a foremost place in our English hymnology. Lyrical fire, melody of versification, strength, beauty and purity of diction, concentrated power without strain or effort; tenderness, pathos, mastery over the emotions of the soul,—all these qualities are largely and strikingly