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GOLDWIN SMITH'S LIFE OF COWPER.*

THE admirable series of *bijou* biographies edited by Mr. Morley has been enriched by Mr. Goldwin Smith's delightful book on Cowper, which even when compared with the work of Mr. Morley, Professor Huxley, or Mr. Leslie Stephen, seems to us entitled to at least a primacy *inter pares*. The life and literary career of Cowper is a subject requiring a peculiar delicacy of sympathetic criticism; all the other great men of letters, from Hume and Gibbon to Thackeray, whose memoirs are given in this series, are so directly in unison with modern ideas as to make an appreciative treatment of their work easy to the writer of to-day. In the case of Cowper, to the superficial critic, it might seem otherwise. As John Keble was the representative poet, in the feeble prettiness of his verse, of that wave of Anglican pseudo-Catholic revival which has left its rubbish

and its wrecks "on every shore," so William Cowper was the laureate of a far greater religious revival, that which was the heir and echo of Puritanism, far more earnest and noble than the *culte* of the chasuble and the mitre, and still surviving in that Methodism which is, as Mr. Goldwin Smith says, the greatest Protestant Church now on earth. But this religious movement to which Cowper certainly adhered, has scant sympathy with modern ideas of progress, except perhaps in its earnestness and essentially popular character. It belongs to the past, and, as a factor in modern thought, is as dead as Druidism.

But the impression left by Mr. Goldwin Smith's estimate of Cowper is that Calvinistic Evangelicalism is, after all, only a foreign element in Cowper's poetry. It is quite otherwise with Keble. His poetry, second rate, forced and effeminate, is nothing without stained-glass windows, cathedral aisles, and other ecclesiasticisms; all through it, such as it is, we hear

* COWPER, by GOLDWIN SMITH, M.A., in Morley's Series of English Men of Letters. London and New York: Macmillan & Co. Toronto: Willing & Williamson.