

Upon his mother's death the young lad was sent to school—to a private boarding-school; but there he was so ill-treated by an elder boy that his life was positively wretched. Later on, at the age of ten, he was sent to Westminster, one of the great Public Schools of England; there his life was much happier, and although shy and sensitive to a degree that must have occasioned him bitter trials innumerable, he nevertheless made many friends. Moreover, taking part in all the school games, and, in especial, becoming proficient in cricket and football, he laid in such a stock of bodily health as in future years served to mitigate the disasters of his many mental shipwrecks, even if it could not entirely prevent them. At Westminster too, by virtue of much desultory and self-directed reading, he became a good Latin scholar, a fair Greek scholar, and also a fair English scholar, as English was understood in those days: Milton he seems to have known by heart. But of history, or of mathematics, philosophy, or science, he knew but little.

Leaving Westminster at the age of seventeen, Cowper did not go to college, but began, in London, the study of the Law. In due time he was called to the Bar; and he retained a nominal connection with his profession till he left London in 1763; but he was never fond of it, and was idle in the pursuit of it. It is said that he never held a brief. No profession could have been more unsuited to him than Law; but it may be doubted whether he would have succeeded in any profession. Everything relating to business seems to have been distasteful to him; and some years later, when careful husbandry of his resources had become a necessity, this duty was assumed by his friends, and retained by them to the end. His occupation in London, as far as he had any serious one, was literature. He was one of seven members of a coterie (all Westminster men) called *The Nonsense Club*, who amused themselves with literary trifling; and two of these having established a magazine called *The Connoisseur*, Cowper contributed to it several pieces in prose. He wrote also street ballads, and is said to have written a humorous ode.

It was in London that the clouds which darkened so much of Cowper's life began to gather. In 1753 he first experienced (at least with such intensity that they were noticeable to others) those strange and unaccountable feelings of melancholy and morbid wretchedness which gave to his life its terrible and tragic pathos. A residence for some months at the seaside restored his mind to its normal sanity; but the impression which his ailment made upon his friends was no doubt one of great anxiety as to his future. And moreover, little as he was able to bear it, Cowper was soon called upon to endure such a distress as the heart rarely recovers from,—occasioned no doubt by the conviction of those whose duty it was to act in the matter, that this recent obscuration of reason, short though it had been, would be but one of many recurring similar sad eclipses. The young dilettante writer (for he was scarcely more at this time) had conceived a