

THE STORY OF A HYMN.

Of all lives mingled with sadness, that of Cowper's seems most to enlist general sympathy.

Left an orphan at an early age, educated in the hardest of schools, and suffering from frequent and severe attacks of melancholy, he learned to love retirement, where, hid behind the stage, he might with safety look out at the busy conflicts of every-day life. The longer he lived, the more he became disgusted with the shameless sins of the world, and the unblushing boldness of infidelity. Thus, cast in an age when it was fashionable to scoff at everything religious, can we much wonder that one so pure should take so decided a stand against the prevailing evils, as Cowper does, not only in "The Task," but in his hymns. For example, take that one so familiar,

"O for a closer walk with God !
A calm and heavenly frame ;"

But, passing this by, there is one in particular to which I wish to refer, as he was prompted to write it under the following peculiar circumstances. Cowper, as I have already remarked, was subject to fits of melancholy, and when in such a state was often tempted to commit suicide. On one occasion while in London, being so afflicted, he determined to put an end to his life. It was a dull, drizzling day. Going out, he ordered a coach to drive him to that bridge, whose history is closely allied with that of the far-famed Bridge of Sighs. Here he had decided to take the fatal step,—to find a watery grave. When nearing the bridge the mists, which all morning had been gathering, now became more dense ; in consequence of which the driver was compelled to halt. This gave Cowper time to reflect and repent. While waiting here, the mists rolled away ; and, as they did so, his melancholy departed. He ordered the driver to take him home ; and on his return home he wrote that most beautiful hymn :

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

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

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