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"Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good will toward men."

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### BIOGRAPHY.

#### COWPER.

Born at Berkhamstead, in Hertfordshire, A. D. 1731.

Man in society is like a flower  
Blown in its native bed: 'tis there alone  
His faculties, expanded in full bloom,  
Shine out; there only reach their proper use.

TASK.

The amiable subject of this sketch, attained to the summit of poetical fame. To all who possess a taste for literature; who feel the softer emotions of humanity; and to the religious mind especially, the name of Cowper will be ever dear.

His constitution was remarkably delicate from his infancy, and his mind was so tender as to be easily depressed into melancholy. The rudiments of learning he received at market-street, Hertfordshire, and when nine years old, he was sent to Westminster school. The literary advantages acquired by him at that celebrated seminary, were purchased at the expense of his future peace. A public school affords free scope for the cruelty of the greater boys toward their helpless juniors, and Cowper's tender age and constitutional timidity, exposed him peculiarly to this species of oppression. It produced an indelible effect upon his mind through life, and it affords the clue by which his future circumstances are to be explained. Occasional symptoms of derangement, in his early youth, may apparently be ascribed to the same cause.\*

Having remained at this school for nine years, and laid in a large stock of classical knowledge: at the age of eighteen he was articled to an eminent attorney; and three years afterwards, he entered as a student of law in the society of the Inner Temple. His genius and inclinations were no better adapted to this pursuit, than his acquired habits. While in the Temple, he renewed an intimacy with Messrs. Colman, Thornton, and Lloyd, who had been his school fellows, and contributed three papers to the "Connoisseur," conducted by the two former. Being nominated, by the interest of his family, to the lucrative posts of Reading Clerk and Clerk of private Committees, in the House of Lords, he conceived so great a dread of officiating before the assembled peers, that, notwithstanding the delay and danger to which it exposed his temporal prospects, he determined on relinquishing the appointment. He had now reached his thirty-first year, and having lost his father, from whom he inherited no adequate fortune—disappointed too of his earthly hopes, the conflict in his mind may be con-

\* The natural cheerfulness of his temper, which at times was so awfully depressed by derangement, is pleasantly displayed in an humorous anecdote related by himself in a letter to a friend:—

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, and its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows:—"Sir, I am clerk of the parish of all Saints, Northampton, brother of Mr. C. 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 would do me a great favour, Sir, if you would furnish me with one." To this I replied, "Mr. C. you have several men of genius in your town; why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of your's in particular, C. the Statuary, who every body knows is a first-rate maker of verses; he surely of all the world is the man 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 confessed to you, my dear Sir, that 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 unimpeachable too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over Weston on purpose to inquire 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 epigrams upon their equals: I have written one that serves two hundred persons."

ceived from the following verses addressed to one of his female relations:—

"O prone to pity, gen'rous and sincere,  
Whose eye ne'er yet refus'd the wretch a tear;  
Whose heart the real claim of friendship knows,  
Nor thinks a lover's are but fancy'd woes;  
See me—ere yet my destin'd course half done,  
Cast forth a wand'rer on a wild unknown!  
See me, neglected on the world's rude coast,  
Each dear companion of my voyage lost!  
Nor ask why clouds of sorrow shade my brow,  
And ready tears wait only leave to flow:  
Why all that soothes a heart, from anguish free,  
All that delights the happy—parts with me!"

If these emphatic lines afforded a promise of the future excellency of Cowper's productions, they were equally predictive of his future distress. They breathe the same wounded spirit with many of his later pieces. The principal difference consists in the author's unacquaintance, at the former period, with the consolations of the gospel, and his knowledge of their worth, with a sense of their loss, at the latter. The breach was already made which nothing but the balm of salvation could heal. The season was at hand when that restorative became indispensably necessary.

In lieu of the more advantageous offices which he had relinquished, he accepted of the appointment of clerk of the journals in the House of Lords, hoping that his personal attendance would not be requisite, but this expectation also was frustrated, for an occasion soon occurred which rendered it absolutely necessary for the Clerk to appear at the bar of the house; which had such an effect upon his nerves, that he was obliged to resign the place. A morbid melancholy seized him; and it was found necessary to place him under the care of Dr. Cotton, who kept an asylum at St. Alban's, usually entitled the college. He remained there eighteen months: the latter part, however, of this period saw him not only in the possession of his restored faculties, but in the enjoyment of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But our limits will not admit the lengthened detail which, descriptive of this amiable man, is so desirable.

In 1765 he settled at Huntingdon, where he formed an acquaintance with a clergyman of the name of Unwin, in whose family he became an inmate. In the summer of 1767, Mr. Unwin was killed by a fall from his horse; on which Cowper, with Mrs. Unwin, on the invitation of Mr. Newton, retired from Huntingdon, and settled at Olney. Of this place Mr. Newton was curate. To a collection of Hymns published by that gentleman, our Poet contributed sixty eight, many of which are truly sublime.

The cordial esteem and filial affection which Cowper had at first entertained for Mrs. Unwin, gradually assumed the similitude of a conjugal attachment. They had no prospect of separation during life; and without a matrimonial union, so intimate a connexion was liable to malevolent aspersions. This union however, he proposed, and the time for accomplishing it was fixed, when, alas! his relapse into constitutional melancholy frustrated their design. It afforded an occasion of proving that Mrs. Unwin was worthy to have been the wife of Cowper. This relapse occurred in his forty-second year: & several years elapsed before he sufficiently recovered his spirits to employ his mind in composition.

In 1782, a volume of his poems appeared, which did not excite much attention; but the second volume in 1785, stamped his reputation as a first-rate poet, particularly by that exquisite piece, "The Task." Lady Austin, for whom the poet had a peculiar regard, being a great admirer of the sublime Milton, requested him to try his powers in blank verse; and on his asking her for a subject, she replied, "Oh, you can write upon any; let it be this SOFA." Thus originated one of the finest poems in our language. The same lady was also

the occasion of the popular ballad of "John Gilpin," which well known story she related to amuse Cowper in one of his gloomy moments; and it had such an effect upon him, that he turned it into verse.

Among the numerous books which Cowper read, in the long evenings of winter, was Pope's elegant version of Homer. His own familiar and accurate knowledge of the original, prompted him frequently to complain of the translator's deviations from his Author, and to express his wish that some person equal to the performance would produce a more exact version. Lady Austin naturally urged him to undertake it; and upon completing his "Tirocinium," which was designed to avert from the rising generation the evils he had observed at public schools, he began to translate the Iliad. The version is not so pleasing as that of Pope, but it is said to exhibit a more faithful picture of the original.

After the publication of his Homer he was solicited by a bookseller to prepare a splendid edition of Milton's Poetical Works, in which the Latin and Italian Poems were to be translated and Notes on the whole subjected by Cowper. Both these projects were frustrated, but a prose translation, executed by him, while correcting his Homer, was published in 1792, by Mr. Newton, who had requested it. About the time his attention was directed to the life and works of Milton, Mr. Hayley, to whose elegant account of Cowper's life the reader is referred, was engaged in a similar design, which brought about an intimacy between them, which continued till Cowper's death. It was in consequence of this connection, and increased infirmities, that our author suspended his exertions on Milton.

In 1794 he had the pleasure to receive from Earl Spencer (who was distantly related to Cowper) his Majesty's grant of a pension which Dr. Johnson and Mr. Gibbon had successively enjoyed. It was nominally £300 per annum, but the royal bounty only yielded pleasure to his friends, for he was now sunk into a state of complete dejection, from which he never fully emerged.\*

In December, 1796, Mrs. Unwin died; but the condition of Cowper was such, that he seemed not to feel the loss of a person whom he had so long and sincerely loved. He continued, however, to write occasionally, and also finished a revival of his Homer, which has been printed since. Some short Latin and Greek poems he translated into English, and two of Gay's Fables into Latin verse. Another of Gay's Fables he attempted, but he only translated two lines, when at the close of January 1800, he was seized with dropsical symptoms, and on the 26th of April he expired.

On reviewing the faint outlines of this extraordinary genius, at the same time reflecting on his peculiar affliction, the reader, in Cowper's own beautiful lines, may exclaim:—

God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform,  
He plants his footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.  
Deep in unathomable mines  
Of never-fading skill,  
He treasures up his bright designs,  
And works his sovereign will.

\* The following anecdote will give some idea of the terrors that sometimes afflicted the Poet.—During a visit to Lady Austin, at Clifton, Cowper appeared at table absorbed in gloomy reflection, when one of the Company, wishing to console him, said, "There can be no doubt, Mr. Cowper, that you will be happy." The Poet instantly seized a wine-glass, and dashing it on the floor, exclaimed "I shall be damned as sure as that glass is broke!" "The glass contained water, Sir." "There, Mr. Cowper," said his friend, "you see the glass is whole!"

### ANNIVERSARY.

#### CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

This society was formed in the year 1800, and has been the means of extending the principles of the Protestant Church throughout Europe, a great portion of the East