

Cooper was indebted for much of his early religious instruction to the Gainsborough Methodist Sunday-school and chapel. Among his boyish recollections were those of the stirring victories of Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, Salamanca, and Vittoria; and the more sorrowful ones of the hard struggle of his widowed mother for a living, oppressed by the heavy war taxes and the high price of food. Bunyan's immortal dream, the grand old ballad of "Chevy Chase," and Byron's "Childe Harold" first awakened his literary taste; and he became a Chartist in sympathy at twelve, through reading the Radical press of the day. In his fourteenth year he became deeply convinced of sin through the street preaching of the Primitive Methodists, and joined the Society, but without experiencing the change of heart he sought. At fifteen he began to work at shoemaking, and for eight years devoted most of his waking hours to that employment, never earning more than ten shillings a week. But they were glorious years of mental toil, self-denial, and earnest self-improvement.

His Methodist associations helped to make a man of him; but the writings of Volney and Voltaire, for he was an omnivorous reader, poured their leprous distilment in his ear, and, for a time, tinctured his mind with their specious skepticism. A settled plan of self-education now possessed his soul. About his twentieth year he began the study of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and French without a master; rising at three or four in the morning, repeating his declensions and conjugations while working on his shoemaker's bench, not even pausing during his meals. He worked till eight or nine at night, and then studied till he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. Too poor to have a fire, he wrapped himself in his mother's cloak and kept shuffling his feet while he read, to keep off cold and drowsiness. He mastered the controversial works of Paley, Sherlock, Butler, Stillingfleet, and Warburton; completed an extensive course of historical and poetical reading; devoured the volumes of Scott and Irving as they came from the press; and had learned by heart the whole of "Hamlet" and four books of "Paradise Lost," when outraged nature revolted against the strain of excessive toil of body and mind on insufficient and