

Consideration of this point leads naturally to the question of the text. It is in the constitution and presentation of the text that I hope to have made some advance on my predecessors. I have not, of course, attempted to chronicle all the misprints of all the early editions, or all the aberrations of Hayley and other editors; such a chronicle would serve no useful purpose and would take up an intolerable deal of space. But in the editions of the poems printed in Cowper's lifetime all variants which indicate a difference of reading have been noted; where two editors—Crest and Hayley, or Johnson and Hayley—of equal or nearly equal authority, print different versions of posthumous poems, one version has been followed throughout the poem, the variants from the other being placed in the notes; and, as already stated, readings involving verbal changes from early printed or MS. copies are given either in the foot-notes or at the end of the volume. Thus an attempt has for the first time been made to supply a sufficiently full critical apparatus¹.

For the text of the poems contained in the two volumes published by Cowper himself I have followed the royal 8vo edition dated 1800. There were eleven editions of each volume before 1801: namely, 1782 and 1785 (first edition of each volume separately), 1786 (first two-volume edition), 1787, 1788, 1793, 1794 5, 1798 (2), 1799, 1800 (2)². These fall into two main groups, those from 1782 (1785) to 1788 forming the first group, the remainder the second.

The second group differs from the first mainly by its adoption of a slightly more consistent and more modern spelling and a less haphazard punctuation; actual differences of text are very few, as may be seen by inspection of the critical notes. No doubt changes of spelling and punctuation were not definitely adopted by Cowper himself or even by his friends; at any rate there is no direct evidence that Cowper saw the proofs of any but the first edition of each volume, and we know that he gave away his copyright in them to Johnson the publisher³, who doubtless produced editions as they were wanted, on his own responsibility. But the fresh poems added to several later editions (see pp. xx-xxii) can only have been obtained from one or other of Cowper's friends, probably Newton, Lady Hesketh, or John Johnson; and the list

¹ Bruce gave a considerable number of variants; his notes, though incomplete and not always accurate, are valuable.

² See p. xx-xxii for a further description of these editions.

³ See *Letters* (ed. Wright), ii. 419.