

PREFACE

IN the thirty-five years that have elapsed since Canon Benham published the last one-volume edition of Cowper's poems, a certain number of new poems have appeared in various books, much new light has been thrown on Cowper's life, but little or no work has been done on the actual text of the poems. It seemed worth while therefore to collect these scattered poems and print them with the rest conveniently in one volume; to utilize the new facts by carefully testing thereby the dates hitherto accepted for the composition of the poems; and to examine the text afresh and if possible constitute it on scientific principles.

The poems first here collected do not, with two or three exceptions, add much to Cowper's poetic reputation; but the aim of this series is to provide complete texts, and readers of the OXFORD COWPER have before them every poem of his hitherto printed (besides a few from MS.), except the translations of Homer and *Adamo*. No modern edition has reprinted these; the translation of Homer is dead, that of *Adamo* was never alive.

The dates at which most of the poems were composed are fairly certain; nor have the new facts displayed by Mr. Wright in his *Life of Cowper* (1892) and *Correspondence of Cowper* (1904) much disturbed the traditional order. But a search through various magazines and periodicals of the time, especially *The Gentleman's Magazine*, has enabled me to give earlier dates than have hitherto been known for the first publication of many of the miscellaneous poems; and the first published version often shows a large number of variations from later versions. I cannot hope to have traced all these early versions; an exhaustive search through the files of the *Northampton Mercury*, *General Evening Post*, and other papers not easily accessible, would be necessary for this. But the copies disinterred by previous editors and by myself supply ample evidence of the constant minute alterations made by Cowper in his least important poems; and this is the main interest of the early versions and the variants they supply; for the various readings are often intrinsically of equal value; the alteration has produced no improvement.