

Roman Catholics. And under the system here suggested the duty of the State would not be, as it is in Germany, to control the religious teaching, but simply to give a capitation grant to each denomination to meet the expenses incurred.

If the suggestions here thrown out meet the approval of any large number of Churchmen, is it too much to hope that a Bill embodying them might be introduced into the House of Lords during this year, and that the Church might thus be first in the field with a proposal of its own, designed to settle this great question on Christian and national rather than on sectarian and partisan lines?



Cowper.

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM.

II.

SUCH was the cloud. Did it ever break? Yes, I am able to say that it did. Decisively at last, but only at the very last, it was removed. I possess a precious tradition of Cowper's *closing half-hour* on his death-bed at Dereham. His nephew, John Johnson, told the story some eighty years ago to William Marsh, afterwards Dr. Marsh, of Beckenham, a name of blessed memory. Marsh told it to his daughter, my saintly and venerated friend, Miss Catherine Marsh, still spared, in the goodness of God, at the age of eighty-eight, in her Norfolk home to be a blessing to numberless souls; and Miss Marsh told it a few years ago to me. Cowper lay dying, in extremest weakness; there had not come to him one gleam of hope, and now he was without power to speak. Johnson, "Johnny of Norfolk," his dearly-loved nephew, was watching by him, with thoughts strongly tempted towards a blank infidelity by the sight of such goodness left seemingly so awfully deserted. But now upon a sudden there came a change; the dying face was irradiated as with a surprise and joy "unspeakable and full of glory"; William Cowper

lay speechless, motionless, but enraptured, for the last half-hour before the ceasing of his breath. Then did his nephew, when all was over, clasp the dead man's Bible to his heart. "His faith shall be my faith," he said, "and his God shall be my God."

But what a cloud it was which was thus broken! Seventeen years passed over this true man of God with spiritual despair always present with him, or at least close behind him; it is a mystery absolutely insoluble on this side the veil. Yet is it not just here that the darkness turns to glory as we look again? This unspeakably suffering man, what was he doing during no small part of that long term of woe? Having once found in his possession the precious talent of the poet, he began to use it, and he went on using it persistently, and with a rising power, in the service of the God who yet, as he believed, would frown on him for ever. Under that cloud the whole contents of the first volume were written, and the whole of "The Task," and such poems as the Elegy on his Mother, and the Sonnet to Mary Unwin. And He who was hidden from him by that dense mystery of the mania so loved him all the while as greatly to use him. Not at once, but soon, he began to be read, to be quoted, to be admired, to be found out for a genius, to be recognised as a great English poet, a star risen at last on the almost forsaken sky of the English Muse, from which Gray, now twelve years ago, had vanished, and on which Wordsworth had not yet risen. William Cowper, of Olney, and of the Inner Temple, was a poet; and then—he was a Methodist too. So in his brilliant pages Methodism, that is to say, the faith of Christ, living and in power, made its way into regions of reserved and fastidious culture where not even a Wesley could have found an entry. Cowper, overshadowed always by that cloud, did the day's work of a giant for English godliness, not to speak of English home-life, and English public and patriotic virtue, using for God his firm, true, versatile, and absolutely natural pen. May we not venture to affirm that to him, as he woke up into the heavenly presence from that last half-hour of long-deferred and unspoken

joy, the "*Well done, good and faithful servant,*" had a glorious emphasis altogether of its own? "God is not unrighteous to forget."

But I have anticipated the course of years by this sketch of the tribulation and the fidelity of Cowper. Let me return, and very briefly trace his annals as an author, and speak more fully of the close of his days.

He was fifty-one years old before he suspected himself a poet. He had long played and trifled as a poetaster. And then his hymns had struck some glorious higher notes. But not till 1780 did a most unlikely theme draw him into a serious effort. He wrote in that year a set and serious poem on a strange subject with a strange title, "Anti-Thelyphthora"; a piece meant to controvert a certain good man's misguided advocacy of polygamy in Christian society. The poem, mediocre as a whole, had in it some flashes of power, and Cowper's near friends praised it a good deal. The praise roused him to a consciousness of faculty, and he began at last to write, not for mere amusement, but as a man working with a purpose. In the metre known as the heroic couplet, with Churchill's use of it and Dryden's present in his mind, but after all in a manner of his own, he produced and perfected poem after poem, all aimed at correcting and elevating English thought and life, and meanwhile, almost by stealth, infusing into the literary matter the Christian Gospel. "The Progress of Error," "Truth," "Table Talk," "Expostulation," "Hope," "Charity," "Conversation," "Retirement," so they followed one another into manuscript. You will find them all well worth your reading if you care for admirable good sense expressed in singularly true, easy, nervous English; often illuminated by passages of fine and genial humour, often by exquisite beauties of thought and diction; as, for example, where in "Conversation," not far from passages of genial satire worthy of Horace, upon conversational foibles, the Walk to Emmaus with its "converse" is described and moralized.

So Cowper's first volume grew to its fulness. It was published in 1781. Upon the whole it was favourably reviewed, and met

with many readers ; but it did not at once bring him the fame which was yet to come.

Then, in the summer of 1783, another and more distinguished work was begun. A brilliant and lively stranger, Lady Austen, came to the Olney neighbourhood and made the acquaintance of Cowper. Indeed, she lost her heart to this man of fifty-two, though her scarcely-veiled attachment met with no response but his friendship. Lady Austen had some literary taste and insight ; she genuinely admired Cowper's work, and now she pressed him to write again, in earnest, and to write in that noble but difficult metre, ill-named blank verse. But what should he write on ? He could write on anything, was her answer ; let him write on the sofa where she sat. Strange as it seems, this odd set subject was accepted, and in due time a poem was developed which takes its gracefully humorous beginning from a sofa, and from the reflections which it awakes, and then wanders from it far afield indeed, into a whole world of truth and beauty, into many a scene of masterly description, and paragraphs of noble reasoning and appeal. And "The Task" thus set by Lady Austen was far from discharged even then, in the writer's view. Another poem followed in sequel, and another, and another, till "The Time Piece," "The Garden," "The Winter Evening," "The Winter Morning Walk," "The Winter Walk at Noon," lay complete and connected in their order. They were written, we gather, sometimes roughly and rapidly at first, and then perfected in due time by the poet's willing pains ; sometimes the verse came only in the smallest daily dribblets ; but all was ultimately corrected and finished into a singular perfection of rhythm and diction. So "The Task" was achieved indeed. It was veritably, as Lady Austen had desired, a poem in blank verse ; a large and original poetic structure, instinct with thought and utterance, pure, elevated, charmingly readable ; it touched upon a wide range of subjects, and all of them were matters of real life and current importance ; the vices and dissipations of the town and society, public and political morality, the glory and perils of the State, the charm and influence of rural pleasures,

the life of the poor, the gospel of grace, the hope of glory. Its blank verse (to use again that ungainly term) was of a quality, I presume to say, such as had never been presented since Milton finished "Paradise Regained." True poets in that long century had used the metre, notably Thomson in "The Seasons," but Thomson, beautiful and poetically true as his feeling continually is, and often his diction, never handles his chosen metre happily. He never deviates for twenty consecutive lines, rarely for ten, into a rhythm really felicitous; the movement, the measure, is too often little better than a ponderous monotone. Cowper, whose young mind had assimilated Milton with a deep love and sympathetic reverence, never, if I judge aright, consciously imitated Milton, except in one charming passage of parody early in "The Sofa," where he plays with Adam's wonderful address to Eve, "With thee conversing." But he found his own true rhythmical genius moving naturally in Milton's manner, only with just the differences natural to the subjects, so different from Milton's on which he found himself at work. The march and cadence never halting, is never wearisome. It advances, it rises and falls, it passes from the majestic to the almost familiar with a faultless tact. However it came to be so, the rhythmical management of "The Task," apart from the grace of the poem and its manly force of thought, its charm of versatile description, its often humorous aroma, its lofty moral purpose and didactic power, was the achievement of a master. It combines the skilful and the natural in admirable perfection. It is never other than distinguished and dignified, but the distinction is native, the dignity is the exact opposite of mannerism and assumption.

"The Task" was published in 1784. Certain minor poems were appended to it, including two, the opposites of each other, and each immortal. One of the two is, "Toll for the Brave," a grand lyric of majestic sorrow, born out of one of the poet's most melancholy hours, in which the news of the loss of the *Royal George* at Spithead had come to him. The other piece, an infinitely merry ballad, which had already delighted the

public in a separate shape, was no other than "The diverting History of John Gilpin."

The volume had a sale beyond all remembered example. It sprang at one leap into an English classic, and such it still remains after a hundred and twenty years; a time amply sufficient (considering particularly *what* a hundred and twenty years the time has been) to assure to it a permanence of fame. It became the book of the day in the Court of George III. Fox, the most fastidious of critics of English, soon quoted it in an impassioned speech in Parliament. And it is pleasant to know that Robert Burns saw at once its greatness. "Is not 'The Task,'" he wrote to a friend, "in spite of its Methodism, a noble poem?" Cowper, I may remark by the way, reciprocated this admiration of the admired; despite the difficult "Scotticisms" of his great contemporary, he recognised and loved the genius of Burns.

In one striking respect indeed Burns and Cowper, otherwise so remotely different, were alike. They were the two chief exponents, at the close of their century, of the unaffectedly natural in poetry. Even Gray, not to speak of Pope, so true, so great a poet, in his own brilliant but wholly different fields, scarcely ever wrote with that sort of art which by its intense regard towards Nature conceals itself. This Burns and Cowper did. What Burns did in Western Scotland, Cowper did in Midland England. Alike human life and the landscapes of the Ouse are drawn by him not as a certain style demands, but as he sees them for himself, with eyes at once luminous and deeply sympathetic. It remained indeed for Wordsworth to read the very soul of Nature; but Cowper truly saw her face, and in her face he caught true glimpses of her soul, unhindered by a conventional medium, an artificial veil.

When "The Task" was published, Cowper's great providential work in life was practically done. One large and monumental labour, indeed, was still to be achieved. He translated into English blank verse the entire "Iliad" and "Odyssey" of Homer, and in 1791 the work was published by

subscription, a subscription easily raised, such was now his reputation. The version is an excellent performance in its kind. Everywhere an accurate representation of the Greek is aimed at, and it is largely attained; and the rendering is clear and dignified. It is a translation which the lover of Homer, and of English, may still usefully consult. But it would never of itself have added to the fame of Cowper, in the sense of raising in the least degree his existing reputation. Its best merit is that it allayed his melancholy, as he says himself in the Introduction, "during many thousand hours."

Later still, and in an evil hour for his peace, he was persuaded, partly by Teedon, to attempt an edition of Milton. This was a work which in prospect only harassed him, and for which he hardly did more than translate, gracefully and well, of course, Milton's masterly Latin poems. Of his own original work, one last lyric, literally his last, I mention. It was written within a year of the end, in the valley of the shadow of worse than death, and with those clouds it is dyed deep as night; I mean the magnificent stanzas called "The Castaway." Never was he more forlorn of soul, being able to write at all, than when he sang,

"Obscurest night involv'd the sky,
The Atlantic billows roar'd."

And never, wonderful as is the phenomenon, did he write with firmer and more admirable lyric force. Two lines of that great and mournful ode were favourites with Thomas Arnold of Rugby:

"And tears by bards and heroes shed
Alike immortalize the dead."

I have thus again anticipated a little the story of Cowper's life. I resume the thread, to trace it now rapidly to the end. A new and helpful friend, sympathetic, strong, and wholesome, had come into his life in 1786: his cousin, Lady Hesketh, daughter of Ashley Cowper, and sister of the old love, Theodora. She found herself at Olney, and soon took Cowper, and also Mrs. Unwin, now failing fast in strength, under her wing, and

in time persuaded them actually to leave Orchard Side, and to move to the pleasant upland village of Weston Underwood, two miles from Olney, a place whose mansion and park had already been charmingly drawn and painted in "The Task." There they spent nine years; and these again were broken by what for both friends was an extraordinary effort, a visit to another recent acquaintance, Cowper's ardent literary admirer, and later his first biographer, William Hayley, of Eartham, in Kent. It was at Weston that Homer was translated; there also two fine fragments were produced, in the metre of "The Task"—"Yardley Oak" and "The Four Ages"—along with some minor pieces bearing still the old grace and light about them. But in January, 1794, the dreadful malady came to another crisis, and a silence as of the grave was its chief symptom. And then, at length, the devoted nephew-friend, John Johnson, persuaded Cowper, with infinite difficulty, to leave the old haunts altogether, with Mrs. Unwin, for Norfolk, for a series of successive sojournings at Tuddenham, at Mundesley, at Dunham, and at last at Dereham. But it was only one sad story of failing strength and never-lifted spiritual gloom, while yet, to the almost end, as we have seen, some of the old power lay still in his hand and some answer still was made to his true Muse. Mrs. Unwin, the "Mary" of two exquisite poems, and of the deep friendship of four-and-thirty years, now pathetically helpless in body and in spirit, passed away before his eyes in 1799. And at last, as we have seen, the suffering son of genius and of sorrow himself stepped, through a short, radiant vestibule, into the light and peace of the eternal temple.

I am very sensible of the inadequacy of this sketch of Cowper's life and work; I can only hope that I have at least developed and animated in some measure the reader's interest in *the man*. If that be so, I am clearly confident that he will find *the poet* also precious to his interests, literary and historical. Cowper will be found to be something much larger and much stronger than the "amiable Cowper," as he is sometimes called.

He *is* the lovable Cowper, in a rare degree. But from all points of view from which we can eliminate the mysterious and separable element of his mania, he is as sane, as manly, as distinguished, as uplifting as he is lovable. I hesitate not to call him great. And I have with me in the use of that word that admirable critic, who never patronizes, and who delights to honour, the late Mr. F. T. Palgrave. He writes thus, in his rich and noble anthology, "The Golden Treasury," in a note to Cowper's Sonnet to Mrs. Unwin: "The Editor knows no sonnet more remarkable than this. . . . Cowper unites with an exquisiteness in the turn of thought which the ancients would have termed 'irony' an intensity of pathetic tenderness peculiar to his loving and ingenuous nature. . . . Where he is great, it is with that elementary greatness which rests on the most universal human feelings. Cowper is our highest master in simple pathos."

Shall we attempt, before we leave Cowper, to see him, in his habit, as he was when he walked down the street at Olney, or turned for a friendly talk into one of the shop doors, or traversed Weston Park with Mrs. Unwin on his arm? Like Milton, here is a man of middle height, strongly built and well set up; the walk is active and light. It is his happier hour of occupied and natural thought and feeling. You look into his face, you note his head, the front finely formed, the back curiously shallow. The profile is finely cut: a nose almost as aquiline as Gray's, and a mouth and eyes expressive of the kindest feeling, the best common sense, and a large store of humorous pleasantry. So Abbot painted him, quite late in life. You talk with him; he is exquisitely and unaffectedly the gentleman; he is interested in you at once; he wins your love quickly, yet you would not care to take a liberty with him. But perhaps it is his sadder hour; the face is pinched and grey, the eyes unnaturally dilated as they were when Romney drew him; he is far away in sombre thought; he must if possible be diverted, be occupied, to avert disaster.

Persuade him to prune his trees, or water his flowers, or, best of all, to get to his parlour or his greenhouse, or to that tiny box, the still existing summer-house, and write. The results will very possibly be immortal, living on when the suffering writer shall have long "outsoared the shadow" of that mysterious night.



The Baptismal Controversy.—II.

A PLEA FOR CAREFUL DEFINITION.

BY THE REV. N. DIMOCK, M.A.

LET us turn for a few moments to look at the teaching of our Articles: "Baptism . . . is a sign of regeneration or new birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly (*recte*¹ baptismum suscipientes) are grafted into the Church: the promises of the forgiveness of sins and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost are visibly signed and sealed² (per Spiritum Sanctum visibiliter obsignantur³)."

Here certainly we have the efficacy of baptism put into its

¹ The word *recte* does not refer merely to the proper *matter* and *form* of the sacrament. In this it differs from *rite*, having a wider and fuller sense, which includes moral and spiritual qualifications (see Drury's "Confession and Absolution," p. 269).

² So the MS. of 13 Queen Elizabeth, 1571. The punctuation was altered in the printed copies, though not in one of the oldest English editions. See Archbishop Lawrence, "Doctrine of the Church of England," Part II., p. 79, note; and Dr. Burney's "Collection" of Documents (privately printed), pp. 42, 43.

³ So the Latin of 1571, as also of 1553 and 1562 MS. and 1563. Jewel writes: "In precise manner of speech salvation must be sought in Christ alone, and not in any outward signs. . . . St. Cyprian saith: *Remissio peccatorum, sive per baptismum sive per alia sacramenta donetur, proprie Spiritus Sancti est; et ipsi soli hujus efficientiæ privilegium manet* [De Bapt. Christ.] . . . Likewise saith St. Hierome: *Homo aquam tantum tribuit: Deus autem [dat] Spiritum Sanctum, quo . . . sordes abluuntur* [In Isai. Proph., Cap. IV.]" (Works, "Apol. and Defence," p. 463, P.S.; see also Cranmer's Works, vol. iii., p. 553; edit. Jenkyns.) Hooker says: "The grace of baptism cometh by donation from God alone" ("E. P.," Book V., chap. lxii., § 19; see also Book VI., chap. vi., § 1). "*Remissio peccatorum, sive per baptismum, sive per alia sacramenta donetur proprie Spiritus Sancti est*" (Arnald, Abbas Bonævallis; see Ussher's Works, vol. iii., p. 143; edit. Elrington).