

**THE WORKS OF WILLIAM COWPER,
COMPRISING HIS POEMS,
CORRESPONDENCE, AND
TRANSLATIONS. WITH A LIFE OF THE
AUTHOR BY THE EDITOR, ROBERT
SOUTHEY, VOL. I**

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With a Life of the Author by the Editor, Robert Southey, Vol. I by William Cowper & Robert Southey

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WILLIAM COWPER & ROBERT SOUTHEY

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WITH
A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,
BY THE EDITOR,
ROBERT SOUTHEY, Esq. LL. D.
POET LAUREATE, &c.

LONDON:
BALDWIN AND CRADOCK,
PATERNOSTER ROW.
1835.

PREFACE.

WHEREFORE the present edition of Cowper's Works is not announced as being complete, and wherefore there can be no complete edition of them at this time, are questions which that part of the public who take an interest in such things may be expected to ask, and which the Editor can satisfactorily answer, as far as relates to the Publishers and to himself.

In the autumn of 1833 he was requested by those Publishers to undertake such an edition; they gave him credit for that knowledge of general literature, and more especially of English literature, without which no one who regarded his own reputation would take upon himself an office of this kind; and there was another motive which led them to make the application, and which induced him to accede to it: he entertained a sense of gratitude towards a poet whose writings had so often, and, in earlier years, so profitably delighted him; Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock, therefore, supposing him competent to the task, rightly inferred from his known sentiments, that he would not be disinclined to undertake it. Shortly afterwards

another firm made a like application to him: the intention in that quarter was abandoned when it was made known in reply, that an arrangement had already been concluded; and a third publisher, who had previously formed the same design, and was about to have proposed it to the same person, gave up his intention also when he knew that the ground was taken.

Two volumes of Cowper's letters had been edited, under the title of *Private Correspondence*, in 1824, by his friend and kinsman, the late Dr. J. Johnson. They had obtained so poor a sale, that upwards of one thousand copies were remaining in the publisher's warehouse. Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock proposed to purchase whatever copyright there might be in these volumes, with the remaining stock; the publishers held them in treaty for several months, and in the mean while began secretly to print an edition of Cowper's works in the same form as this, which had been previously announced, and for which preparations had been made, wherein neither care nor expense had been spared. An editor was found, whom the *Evangelical Magazine* pronounced "from personal knowledge" to be "the only living man who could do justice to the life of Cowper." Their eagerness to get into the field was such, that the first volume was published before the engravings for it could be made ready; and the work, thus surreptitiously prepared and hurried

into the world, was announced as the only complete edition of Cowper.

Meantime, the present Editor was receiving assistance, to an extent beyond his expectations, from the surviving friends of Cowper, and the representatives of those who were departed. Collections of letters were entrusted to him, and portraits lent for the engraver's use. His progress had been arrested by domestic circumstances; but if this had not been the case, a sense of what was due to the author, and to the public, would have withheld him from hastily performing the work in which he had engaged.

Had Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock completed the purchase upon which they were so long held in treaty, his intention was to have inserted, in the *Life of Cowper*, only such extracts from his letters as might be spun into the thread of the narration; and after the biography, to have arranged the whole correspondence; which, with the large additions that he was enabled to make, might then indeed have been called complete. Finding it not in his power to proceed upon this plan, it became necessary for him to extend the biographical part of his design, and to work more in mosaic: he has made such use of the letters in Dr. J. Johnson's collection as he had an unquestionable right to do; he has extracted from them as largely as suited his purpose, and has brought

into his narrative the whole of the information contained in them. The purchasers of the present Edition will in this respect lose nothing.

It would be unbecoming in him to offer any remarks upon the manner in which Mr. Grimshawe has performed an undertaking which he says, he was "called upon to engage in both on public and private grounds." But there is a passage in that gentleman's preface which must not be left unnoticed. After declaring his purpose of "revising Hayley's Life of the Poet, purifying it from the errors that detract from its acknowledged value, and adapting it to the demands and expectations of the religious public," Mr. Grimshawe says he is enabled to effect this object, "and to present for the first time a *Complete Edition of the Works of Cowper*, which it is not in the power of any individual besides himself to accomplish, because *all others are debarred access to the Private Correspondence.*" Mr. Grimshawe (it is presumed,) is a member of the Eclectic Society¹, founded by Mr. Newton, and not of the Society founded by St. Ignatius Loyola: he cannot therefore be supposed to use words with a mental reservation. But in what sense can it be said, that any person is *debarred access* to a book which has been upon sale ever since it was published, twelve years ago?

¹ "Consisting of several pious ministers, who stately met for the purpose of mutual edification. It is still in existence." *Note to Mr. Grimshawe's Cowper*, vol. ii. 107.

The more grateful task must now be performed of acknowledging the assistance with which the Editor has been favoured. He is obliged to the widow of Dr. J. Johnson for the interest she has taken in an Edition which it was hoped would in no respect be unworthy of Cowper's name; to Mr. Bodham Donne, of Mattishall (Cowper's kinsman), for the use of his family pictures, and other favours, which will be specified in the proper place; to Mr. Stephen, of the Colonial Office, for Mr. Newton's letters to Mr. Thornton, written during his residence at Olney; to Mr. Bull, for the unpublished letters to his father, and for the passages heretofore omitted in those which were published; to Mr. Unwin, for entrusting him with the letters which he had in like manner inherited,—a large and most valuable collection, comprising many which have not been printed, and more which were mutilated, for reasons that no longer exist; to Mr. Rowley, for the letters to Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, which throw new light upon Cowper's history, both personal and literary; and to Mrs. Micklem, (through the kind offices of Mr. Gutch,) for Lady Hesketh's collection,—a most important series, the greater part of which will be new to the public; and also for Hayley's letters to that lady, after Cowper's decease. Other obligations will be duly and thankfully acknowledged as they are made use of.

It remains for him to notice here one communication, which he has no other means of replying to. An admirer of Cowper, and a most attentive reader of his works, has sent him a copy of the *Task*, in the margin of which he has inserted such parallel passages as he supposed Cowper, while composing the text, might have had, wittingly or unwittingly, in mind. He accompanied it with a very useful index to that poem, thinking that, "although the *Task* is one of the most popular long poems in our language, it is probably the one in which, from its discursive character, we find with most difficulty a half-remembered passage." The Editor takes this opportunity of informing his unknown friend, that he means to avail himself both of the notes and index; and of requesting that, if he will not favour him with his name (with which, however, it would gratify the Editor to be made acquainted), he will at least let him know where the volumes of the present Work may be sent him, as they are published, in acknowledgement of obligation and respect.

KESWICK, *Oct. 6, 1835.*