

**WILLIAM
COWPER**

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William Cowper by Marion Harland

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MARION HARLAND

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BY

MARION HARLAND

AUTHOR OF "SOME COLONIAL HOMESTEADS AND THEIR
STORIES," "WHERE GHOSTS WALK," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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PREFATORY AND DEDICATORY

THESE studies of the characters and home-lives of certain people famous in the judgment of the public, have to do with what they *were*, rather than with what they did. I have essayed no critical analysis of the works that won renown for them. Believing that every human life is a complete story in itself, full of movement and interest, I have tried to disentangle the personal element from the network in which circumstance involved it, and to tempt my reader to regard the man or woman as a fellow-being, rather than as an abstract product of the times in which he or she lived and wrought.

I have an hereditary right to the more than friendly interest I feel in William Cowper. One hundred years ago, save one, my maternal grandmother, a woman of rare culture and fine literary taste, in

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tender compliment to her favourite poet, changed to "Olney" the Indian name of the Virginia homestead to which she was taken as a bride. Cowper's death, in 1800, produced a profound sensation among his admirers on this side of the Atlantic. Every turn in his sorrowful pathway was almost as familiar in the reading circles of America as in England. As a child, I heard him talked of as if he had lived and written and suffered upon the adjoining plantation to the Virginia Olney. The first bit of sacred verse I committed to memory was learned from a well-thumbed copy of *Olney Hymns*, once the property of my sainted grandmother. At ten years of age I knew by heart whole pages of *The Task*, and dozens of Cowper's shorter poems, incited to the undertaking by stories of that blessed woman's fondness for the gentle poet's writings. I learned to love him before I really comprehended who and what he was, also to associate his name with that of the ancestress who died long before I was born.

It seems, then, good in my eyes, and not a sentimental fantasy, that this loving study of William Cowper as man and friend

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should be dedicated to the sweet memory of the gracious gentlewoman from whom, as I like to believe, I have inherited my love of letters, and whatever talent for story-making and story-telling I may possess.

Among those to whom I am indebted for assistance in the preparation of this work I name with pleasure Rev. J. P. Langley, Vicar of Olney, now resident in the Vicarage once tenanted by John Newton; Mr. Thomas Wright of Olney, the best living authority upon all that pertains to the life and writings of William Cowper, and Beverly Chew, Esq., of New York, who has courteously placed at my disposal certain rare and valuable prints used in illustrating these pages.

MARION HARLAND.

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