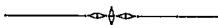


addresses his ordination candidates (Address X.): "I would earnestly press upon you the duty of forming early in your ministry, and steadfastly maintaining throughout its course, real habits of theological study. You cannot with full efficiency perform the work God has set you to do without such habits. Even if your whole ministry is to be spent amongst a few unlettered people, you cannot 'make full proof' of it unless you are evermore a student. The mind which is not thus enriched will very soon become sterile. You will, unawares, be perpetually producing from it the same crop, and evermore with a feebleness of growth; you will become a mere self-repeater; your ministry will grind on, in a single groove, on a track of the dullest uniformity. Your people may be too unlettered to reason upon the causes of this barrenness in their teacher, but they will feel it; and its impression will most assuredly be marked in their feeble irretentive perception of the mighty truths which your drowsy monotone has made so dull and commonplace to them."

And if this be the effect of an unstudious ministry amongst the uncultured, its effect must be far more disastrous when the preacher's lot is cast amongst men of more active minds, trained to reason out religious and social questions for themselves.

These considerations appear to render a revision of the duties of the pastor's office, to say the least, desirable. That a certain amount of non-ministerial labour must devolve upon the parish priest is doubtless a necessity. That all has been done that might be done to minimize this, and set him freer for the calm, patient, and thorough discharge of his true functions, admits of question.

ALFRED PEARSON.



ART. IV.—WILLIAM COWPER.

ANOTHER biography of William Cowper has lately been added to those already in existence. The author of the new life is the Principal of Cowper School, Olney, and he has consequently had exceptional advantages in living on the spot associated with so many years of the poet's lifetime. Mr. Wright has, we believe, been engaged for some time on the work, and his intimate knowledge of the district has enabled him to throw fresh light on many interesting details in the poet's career. He has further consulted many and important documents unknown to previous biographers, and he claims to have discovered "a large number of new facts." He has certainly succeeded in producing a volume to which all lovers of the poet will turn with interest, although regarded simply on

its merits as a biography, we regret that we are unable to speak of it in terms of unqualified praise. The method of dividing the volume into a series of paragraphs, each with a conspicuous heading, is objectionable, and the author lacks those higher literary qualities which the biographer of so charming a poet and so perfect a letter-writer should possess.

The most important of Mr. Wright's discoveries is undoubtedly what, rightly or wrongly, he calls "the central incident of the poet's life—the incident that coloured and made wretched the whole of his last twenty-seven years." Many have been the conjectures as to the exciting cause of Cowper's misery. The death of his mother, his treatment at school, the influence of Newton, the loss of his brother, the climate of Olney, have all been held responsible in turn. But Mr. Wright tells us it was none of these things. In reading through the poet's correspondence he has discovered that "the thing that caused him to believe that he was damned was *a dream*—a dream which he had at the end of February, 1773." This is what Mr. Wright says about it: "Hitherto, despite the distressing state he has got into, Cowper still buoyed himself up with hope that God had not forsaken him; but one night towards the end of February he crossed the line that divided a life of hope from a life of despair. He had a terrible dream, in which 'a word' was spoken. What the dream was he does not tell us, nor does he tell us 'the word,' though from his various references to it and to his malady we know its import. 'Actum est de te periisti'—'It is all over with thee, thou hast perished' was the thought ever uppermost in Cowper's mind." Twice at least does the poet refer to the fatal dream. Writing in January, 1784, he says: "Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. . . . The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years, in which I have spoken no other language. It is a long time for a man, whose eyes were once opened, to spend in darkness; long enough to make despair an inveterate habit, and such it is in me." And again a year later he writes: "I had a dream twelve years ago, before the recollection of which all consolation vanishes, and it seems to me must always vanish." Perhaps, too, the following passage, in a letter to Lady Hesketh, may refer to it: "In one day—in one *minute* I should rather have said—she (Nature) became a universal blank to me; and though from a different cause, yet with an effect as difficult to remove as blindness itself." Henceforth, says Mr. Wright, Cowper was a doomed man. God had forsaken him for ever; he was destined to everlasting torment. And this fearful delusion, except for very brief intervals, never left him. Once, in 1785, the cloud lifted for three days; but it was only, as the poor poet expressed it, "a flash in a

dark night, during which the heavens opened only to shut again."

There is doubtless something in this new discovery; but it must not be forgotten that the attack of religious melancholia which followed the fatal dream was not the first from which the poet had suffered. Ten years before he was visited with a similar derangement, when he was firmly convinced that he had committed the unpardonable sin. "Oh, brother, I am damned!" he then cried. "Think of eternity, and then think what it is to be damned!" It was on that occasion that he wrote the fearful lines: "Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion." Several times he attempted to commit suicide, and once almost successfully. His cousin, Martin Madan, chaplain of the Lock Hospital, was sent for to comfort him, but his uncompromising Calvinism only made confusion worse confounded. After this Cowper was removed to Dr. Colton's Collegium Insanorum, where he stayed two years.

Much has been written about Newton's influence over Cowper, and it is impossible to consider the question of the poet's dream without referring to it. That it was bad for a man of Cowper's temperament, with his highly-strung nerves and morbid sensibility, to be for ever engaged in religious exercises is evident. He was even called upon to take a leading part in the extempore prayer-meetings. His customary walk had to be given up, for "now," he tells Lady Hesketh, "we have sermon or lecture every evening, which lasts till supper-time." His sensible cousin clearly saw that this "eternal praying and preaching" was too much for his "wounded yet lively imagination." But more than this, bearing in mind the former period of religious madness, it seems to us, to say the very least of it, a most unfortunate occurrence that Cowper should have been subjected to the deadly influences of Calvinistic theology. And when we say Calvinistic theology, we do not so much mean its distinctive tenets as the general view of the character of God which it presents. "Your God is my devil," said John Wesley to George Whitefield, when the latter was once setting forth some hard dogma of Calvinism. This God was, alas! the God of Cowper's imagination during long periods of his unhappy existence. For years the poor man never uttered a prayer, holding that it would be impious to do so. "Prove to me," he once said to Mr. Ball, "that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing; yea, and pray too even in the 'belly of this hell,' compared with which Jonah's was a palace." He would not even ask a blessing upon his food, but used to sit down during grace and take up his knife and fork to signify, as he said, that he had no part in the exercise. His case, he held, was hopeless: the promises of

Scripture were not meant for him; the God that made him regretted his existence, and had irrevocably doomed him to the endless agonies of hell. This terrible condition was, according to Mr. Wright, the result of the fatal dream of February, 1773; and the passages we have quoted from Cowper's correspondence certainly lend weight to the theory. But behind the dream was the *decretum horribile* of Calvinism, without a belief in which the dream itself could hardly have been possible, or at any rate would only have been regarded as the outcome of a disordered digestion. Having carefully examined the fresh evidence which bears on the poet's derangement, we are more than ever confirmed in our belief that, as Canon Benham has carefully put it, "the Calvinistic doctrine and religious excitements threw an already trembling mind off its balance, and aggravated a malady which, but for them, might probably have been cured."

Mr. Wright has also much to tell us about the influence of Samuel Teedon, the infatuated schoolmaster of Olney, over the unhappy poet. The diary of this eccentric personage has been lately discovered, and for the first time use has been made of it in the history of Cowper. Mr. Wright tells us that "the influence of Newton, Unwin, Lady Hesketh—any you will—over Cowper was as nothing compared with that of Samuel Teedon." That the poet was for a time under the wretched influence of this self-conceited enthusiast is beyond question true; but when we remember that the Teedon period did not apparently cover more than three or four years, towards the end of the poet's lifetime, when his mind was hopelessly unhinged, and after Mrs. Unwin had been stricken with paralysis, we can hardly agree with Mr. Wright that the influence of Teedon was greater than the influence of Newton.

This poor and egotistical schoolmaster came to Olney in 1775, and was introduced to Cowper by Newton, who held him in high esteem. He was certainly a religious man, and specially favoured, he believed, of heaven. He was accustomed now and then to spend the evening with the poet, who was amused at his egotism and vanity. The following extract well illustrates Cowper's opinion of his eccentric friend: "Mr. Teedon, who favours us now and then with his company in the evening, was not long since discoursing with that eloquence which is so peculiar to himself on the many providential interpositions that had taken place in his favour. 'He had wished for many things,' he said, 'which at the time seemed distant and improbable—some of them, indeed, impossible. Amongst other wishes, one was that he might be connected with men of genius and ability; and, in my connection with this worthy

gentleman,' said he, turning to me, 'that wish, I am sure, is amply gratified.' You may suppose that I felt the sweat gush out upon my forehead when I heard this speech; and if you do you will not be at all mistaken. So much was I delighted with the delicacy of that incense."

But in after-years, when Cowper had removed to the neighbouring village of Weston, we find Samuel Teedon elevated into the position of a prophet and an interpreter of dreams. The poet now shared his friend's belief that he—Teedon—was specially favoured by Providence. Whenever Cowper was in doubt, or heard voices, or saw visions, or dreamed dreams, he had recourse to Teedon; and Teedon interpreted the voices, and revealed the will of the Almighty. When, for instance, the poet was asked to undertake the editorship of Milton, he consulted the oracle, to whom it was revealed, after much wrestling in prayer, that the work should be undertaken. So Cowper accepted the offer, and the following note was despatched to Olney: "Mr. Cowper desires Mrs. Unwin to acquaint Mr. Teedon that his anxiety did not arise from any difficulties he apprehended in the performance of his work, but his uncertainty whether he was providentially called to it or not. He is now clearly persuaded by Mr. Teedon's experiences and gracious notices that he is called to it, and is therefore perfectly easy." The Teedon diary, discovered in 1890, is a small manuscript volume, 6 inches by 3½ inches, of 122 closely written pages, and dating from October, 1791, to February, 1794. During this period no less than ninety-two visits of Teedon to Cowper are recorded, while almost three hundred letters passed between Olney and Weston. "The squire" and "madam," as Cowper and Mrs. Unwin are usually styled, are the central figures in the little world which the diary reveals; but we also get a glimpse of the schoolmaster's household, of his school in the upper part of the old Shiel Hall, of his money difficulties, and other matters of detail. We sometimes see him in his best coat and breeches trudging along the muddy road to Weston to receive his quarterly allowance of £7 10s., of which Cowper was the almoner, but not the author. But more frequently the squire has again heard voices, and Teedon is on his way to interpret the same, or a fresh revelation has been given, and must be speedily delivered. The squire's "voices," together with the schoolmaster's "interpretations," were carefully committed to writing, but fortunately the manuscripts have not been preserved. Teedon further prescribed for the poet the prayers he should use and how long he should continue at his devotions, promising relief within a stated time. Painful, indeed, are the poet's letters to his presumptuous adviser. He has

used the specified prayers, he writes to Teedon, he has kept to his devotions as long as, and even longer than the time mentioned; but his "despair is perfect;" he only "gets as an answer a double portion of misery." The diary closes on February 2nd, 1794, on which day a visit to the squire is recorded. In the following year Cowper left Weston for Norfolk; and henceforth Teedon disappears from the poet's history. He died in 1798, and was buried at Olney.

The third point on which Mr. Wright has something new to tell his readers is in connection with the poet's *protégés*. Few people are probably aware that Cowper, like Johnson, had any *protégés* at all; still less that they were to him a continual source of trouble and anxiety. The one, a boy named Dick Coleman, was the son of a drunken cobbler at St. Alban's, "who," says Cowper, "would probably have starved him to death or poisoned him with gin if Providence had not thrown him in my way to rescue him." This was during his residence with Dr. Colton, and in spite of his necessitous condition, which rendered him obligatory to other people, Cowper determined on maintaining the boy, and eventually he apprenticed him to a breeches-maker. But the lad turned out badly, and became a lifelong trouble to the poet. After his marriage Dick lived next door to his benefactor at Olney in a small house, spoken of by Cowper as inhabited by "Dick Coleman, his wife, and a thousand rats." In spite, however, of the ingratitude with which he was repaid, Cowper continued to help him, as the following letter, written from Weston to his publisher, shows: "There is one Richard Coleman in the world, whom I have educated from an infant, and who is utterly good for nothing; but he is at present in great trouble, the fruit of his own folly. I send him, by this post, an order upon you for eight guineas." In consequence of this fresh act of benevolence Coleman was enabled to get back to Olney, but only to continue his former practices. A few weeks later—in September, 1792, we learn from Teedon's diary that he was over at the lodge, probably drunk. The extract is as follows: "Worthy went over to Weston with my letter for the Esq^{re}., but as they did not come (from Eastham), brought it back. Found Dick Coleman just come in, and advised Kitchener (Cowper's gardener) by all means, if they come, to get rid of him without Mr. Cowper's seeing him." At this point the worthless Dick Coleman disappears from the narrative.

The other *protégé* was a little girl, one Hannah Willson, the daughter of Coleman's wife by a former husband, who appears to have been taken into the poet's household about the year 1781. It was originally intended to train her for domestic

service, but Mrs. Unwin seems to have unduly indulged her, and before long we find her regarded as one of the family. She is always referred to in Dr. Grindon's ledger, which Mr. Wright has carefully examined, as "Miss Hannah"; and afterwards, as we learn from Teedon's diary, she was sent to a school at Bedford. On leaving school she returned to Weston, and as Mrs. Unwin became more feeble, the management of the household devolved entirely upon her. But again the poet's kindness was shamefully abused. Hannah entirely neglected her duties, and cared only for dressing, and walking, and writing love-letters. Mr. Teedon, as we learn from the diary, makes "her twelve crow-pens." He often "drinks tea with Hannah and madam." One day we catch a glimpse of Hannah's ingratitude: "June 24, 1793. Hannah came in very wet from a heavy shower; warmed, dried, etc., and not so much as returned a thank." On Lady Hesketh's arrival a few months later she is aghast at the condition of things in the poet's household, but is apparently unable to effect a reformation. "Hannah's amazing extravagance," she writes to her cousin in May, 1794, "has not cost less than one hundred and fifty pounds since last July! What can become of our poor cousin, sick or well, if she is to go on in this manner I cannot guess. All in my power I have done to put some stop to such shameful proceedings, but in vain; the boarding-school has finished what Mrs. Unwin's absurd, unpardonable indulgence had begun, and what is to become of her I know not. She literally does nothing but walk about, and dress herself, and write love-letters. If you saw her sweep the village with muslin dresses of twelve shillings a yard, and feathers a yard long, you would really think it was some duchess. I have told her that the daughter of a man of five thousand pounds a year would not be allowed to dress as she does. . . . All he (Cowper) is worth in the world would not half keep Hannah, taking finery and idleness into the account, for she puts out all her clothes and linen to be mended, as well as made. I am sure she is a singular instance of foolish fondness; and now Mrs. Unwin lies in bed till past one, this girl never attends her in her room, or does the least thing for her in return for all her indulgence."

In answer to this letter Mr. Johnson soon afterwards arrived at the Lodge, and at once began making arrangements for removing the poet and Mrs. Unwin into Norfolk. They went, but whether Hannah went with them we are not told. She, too, disappears from the narrative, and Mr. Wright never mentions her again.

On leaving Weston, Cowper seems to have had a presenti-

ment that he should never return; for on the shutter of his bedroom window he wrote the following hopeless lines:

Farewell, dear scenes, for ever closed to me;
Oh for what sorrows must I now exchange ye!

These lines, together with the dates, "July 22, July 28, 1795," may still be seen; but the lines which followed were long ago carefully obliterated by an industrious housemaid. They were these:

Me miserable! how could I escape
Infinite wrath and infinite despair!
Whom Death, Earth, Heaven, and Hell consigned to ruin,
Whose friend was God, but God swore not to aid me!

July 27, '95.

For five years longer the agony lasted, during which time the clouds hardly ever lifted. In September he wrote to Lady Hesketh, regretting that he had left Weston. "There, indeed," he says, "I lived a life of infinite despair, and such is my life in Norfolk. . . . I remain the forlorn and miserable being I was when I wrote last." In the following year Mrs. Unwin died. At first Cowper would not believe it: "She was not actually dead, but would come to life again in her grave, and then undergo the horrors of suffocation, for he was the occasion of all that she or any other creature upon earth ever did or could suffer." Johnson led him to the death-chamber, when he gazed for a few moments on the features he had loved so well, uttered one passionate cry of grief and left the room. He then asked for a glass of wine, took two pinches of snuff, and never spoke of Mrs. Unwin again.

A melancholy interest attaches itself to his last original poem, "The Castaway." It is founded on an incident in "Anson's Voyages," of a poor fellow washed overboard and drowned. The unhappy poet draws a comparison with the lost sailor and himself:

We perished, each alone;
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

This terrible conviction never left him. When shortly before his death the doctor asked him how he felt, he replied, "Feel! I feel unutterable despair." A few days later Johnson ventured to speak of death as a deliverance from evil. As Cowper seemed to listen he went on to say that Christ had gone to prepare a place of blessedness for all His children, *and therefore for him*. It was enough; with a cry of anguish the dying man entreated his relative to say no more. For five days longer the poet lingered. Miss Perowne once offered him some refreshment. He would not take it. "What can it signify?" he murmured; and those were the last words he

uttered. He died on April 25, 1800. "From the moment of his death until the coffin was closed," says Mr. Johnson, "the expression into which his countenance had settled was that of calmness and composure, mingled as it were with holy surprise." The exquisite lines of Mrs. Browning are the most fitting commentary on these words :

Like a sick child that knoweth not his mother while she blesses
And drops upon his burning brow the coolness of her kisses,
That turns his fevered eyes around—"My mother! where's my mother?"
As if such tender words and deeds could come from any other!

The fever gone, with leaps of heart he sees her bending o'er him,
Her face all pale from watchful love—the unwearied love she bore him!
Thus woke the poet from the dream his life's long fever gave him,
Beneath those deep pathetic eyes which closed in death to save him.

Thus? Oh, not *thus*! no type of earth can image that awaking,
Wherein he scarcely heard the chant of seraphs round him breaking,
Or felt the new immortal throb of soul from body parted,
But felt those eyes alone, and knew—"my Saviour! not deserted!"

JOHN VAUGHAN.



ART. V.—THE OLDEST COMMENTARY ON THE PSALMS.

STUDIES IN THE "MIDRASH TEHILLIM."—No. II.

WE cannot penetrate far into the "Midrash" without encountering remarks that bear upon questions which are at the present day being earnestly debated amongst ourselves. Prominent among such subjects is the question of the so-called "headings" of the Psalms. The reader of the "Midrash" is at once reminded of the gulf which divides the current English view of the subject from the view of these earliest native expositors.

In the original language the heading, it should be remembered, is sometimes a portion of the first verse of the psalm, as in Ps. xv. and *passim*; sometimes it constitutes an entire verse, as in Ps. lxxiii.; while sometimes, again, as in Ps. xviii., it forms an entire verse and runs into a second; and in Ps. li. it occupies two entire verses.¹ Now, the third psalm is the first psalm in the Psalter which has a heading—"A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son"—but what is

¹ See the disquisition on the subject in my work, "The Gradual Psalms; a Treatise on the Fifteen Songs of Degrees, with Commentary based on Ancient Hebrew, Chaldee, and Christian Authorities." Hayes, London, 1874.