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A trifling theft was committed, which, by a blunder of his own in pursuing the thief after the property had been restored, was magnified into an affair of the last importance. One of their favourite chiefs was killed too by a blunder. Nothing, in short, but blunder and mistake attended him, till he fell breathless into the water, and then all was smooth again. The world indeed will not take notice, or see, that the dispensation bore evident marks of divine displeasure; but a mind I think in any degree spiritual cannot overlook them. We know from truth itself, that the death of Herod was for a similar offence. But Herod was in no sense a believer in God, nor had enjoyed half the opportunities with which our poor countryman had been favoured. It may be urged, perhaps, that he was in jest, that he meant nothing but his own amusement, and that of his companions. I doubt it. He knows little of the heart, who does not know that even in a sensible man it is flattered by every species of exaltation. But be it so, that he was in sport:—it was not humane, to say no worse of it, to sport with the ignorance of his friends, to mock their simplicity, to humour and acquiesce in their blind credulity. Besides, though a stock or a stone may be worshipped blameless, a baptized man may not. He knows what he does, and by suffering such honours to be paid him, incurs the guilt of sacrilege.

We are glad that you are so happy in your church, in your society, and in all your connexions. I have not left myself room to say any thing of the love we feel for you.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Oct. 10, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I send you four quires of verse, which having sent, I shall dismiss from my thoughts, and think no more of, till I see them in print. I have not after all found time or industry enough to give the last hand to the points. I believe, however, they are not very erroneous, though in so long a work, and in a work that requires nicety in this particular, some inaccuracies will escape. Where you find any, you will oblige me by correcting them.

In some passages, especially in the second book, you will observe me very satirical. Writing on such subjects I could not be otherwise. I can write nothing without aiming at least at usefulness: it were beneath my years to do it, and still more dishonourable to my religion. I know that a reformation of such abuses as I have censured is not to be expected from the efforts of a poet; but to contemplate the world, its follies, its vices, its indifference to duty, and its strenuous attachment to what is evil, and not to reprehend, were to approve it. From this charge at least I shall be clear, for I have neither tacitly nor expressly flattered either its characters or its customs. I have paid one, and only one compliment, which was so justly due, that I did not know how to withhold it, especially having so fair an occasion;—I forget myself, there is another in the first book to Mr. Throckmorton,<sup>1</sup>—but the compliment I

<sup>1</sup> *Task*, Book 1, line 262, 'Thanks to Benevolus,' etc.

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**THE CORRESPONDENCE OF  
WILLIAM COWPER**



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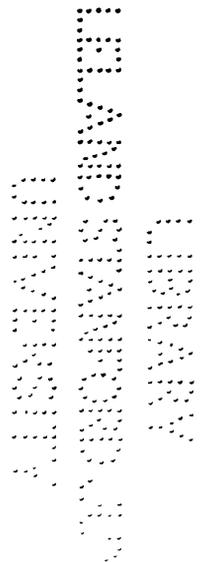
**ARRANGED IN CHRONOLOGICAL  
ORDER, WITH ANNOTATIONS**

**BY THOMAS WRIGHT**

**PRINCIPAL OF COWPER SCHOOL, OLNEY  
AUTHOR OF 'THE LIFE OF WILLIAM COWPER,' ETC.**

**IN FOUR VOLUMES  
VOLUME II**

**NEW YORK  
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY  
372 FIFTH AVENUE  
LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
MCMIV**



THE  
SCOTCH  
MAGAZINE  
FOR  
1841

Edinburgh: T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to His Majesty

# THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM COWPER

TO JOSEPH HILL<sup>1</sup>

*July 27, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am to thank you, though in great haste, for a very fine turbot and lobster its companion. Are you not going into the country? Shall I not hear from you when you are a little at leisure? I do not forget that you write innumerable letters upon business; but methinks a letter now and then not upon business should, for that very reason, be a refreshment to you. How fares the nation? You think I differ from you in politics. In truth I do not; I am ready at a moment's warning to adopt yours, and renounce my own. The nook I live in affords me no means of making up a set of opinions on any such subject so well founded as not to be departed from. My respects attend Mrs. Hill.—Your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> It was in the 'Epistle to Joseph Hill' that Cowper wrote that famous description:—

'An honest man, close-button'd to the chin,  
Broadcloth without and a warm heart within.'

Hill was a solicitor in Savile Row.

VOL. II.

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A

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Aug. 3, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Entertaining some hope that Mr. Newton's next letter would furnish me with the means of satisfying your inquiry on the subject of Dr. Johnson's opinion,<sup>1</sup> I have, till now delayed my answer to your last; but the information is not yet come, Mr. Newton having intermitted a week more than usual since his last writing. When I receive it, favourable or not, it shall be communicated to you; but I am not very sanguine in my expectations from that quarter. Very learned and very critical heads are hard to please. He may perhaps treat me with lenity for the sake of my subject and design, but the composition I think will hardly escape his censure. Though all doctors may not be of the same mind, there is one doctor at least, whom I have lately discovered, my professed admirer. He too, like Johnson, was with difficulty persuaded to read, having an aversion to all poetry, except the *Night Thoughts*; which on a certain occasion, when being confined on board a ship he had no other employment, he got by heart. He was, however, prevailed upon, and read me several times over; so that if my volume had sailed with him, instead of Dr. Young's, I might perhaps have occupied that shelf in his memory which he then allotted to the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Johnson's opinion of Cowper never found expression in print. There are on the other hand many criticisms of Johnson in Cowper's letters, and the poet was particularly displeased, as we shall see, by Johnson's criticism of Milton's blank verse. Dr. Johnson, as Cowper tells us, read and recommended his first volume. Boswell makes one reference to Cowper in a footnote to his *Life* as 'a man of real genius.'

Doctor : his name is Renny, and he lives at Newport Pagnell.

It is a sort of paradox, but it is true : we are never more in danger than when we think ourselves most secure, nor in reality more secure than when we seem to be most in danger. Both sides of this apparent contradiction were lately verified in my experience. Passing from the greenhouse to the barn, I saw three kittens (for we have so many in our retinue) looking with fixed attention at something, which lay on the threshold of a door, coiled up. I took but little notice of them at first ; but a loud hiss engaged me to attend more closely, when behold—a viper ! the largest I remember to have seen, rearing itself, darting its forked tongue, and ejaculating the aforementioned hiss at the nose of a kitten almost in contact with his lips. I ran into the hall for a hoe with a long handle, with which I intended to assail him, and returning in a few seconds missed him : he was gone, and I feared had escaped me. Still, however, the kitten sat watching immovably upon the same spot. I concluded, therefore, that, sliding between the door and the threshold, he had found his way out of the garden into the yard. I went round immediately, and there found him in close conversation with the old cat, whose curiosity being excited by so novel an appearance, inclined her to pat his head repeatedly with her fore foot ; with her claws, however, sheathed, and not in anger, but in the way of philosophical inquiry and examination. To prevent her falling a victim to so laudable an exercise of her talents, I interposed in a moment with the hoe, and performed upon him an act of decapitation, which though not immedi-

ately mortal proved so in the end. Had he slid into the passages, where it is dark, or had he, when in the yard, met with no interruption from the cat, and secreted himself in any of the out-houses, it is hardly possible but that some of the family must have been bitten; he might have been trodden upon without being perceived, and have slipped away before the sufferer could have well distinguished what foe had wounded him.<sup>1</sup> Three years ago we discovered one in the same place, which the barber slew with a trowel.

Our proposed removal to Mr. Small's was, as you suppose, a jest, or rather a joco-serious matter. We never looked upon it as entirely feasible, yet we saw in it something so like practicability, that we did not esteem it altogether unworthy of our attention. It was one of those projects which people of lively imaginations play with, and admire for a few days, and then break in pieces. Lady Austen returned on Thursday from London, where she spent the last fortnight, and whither she was called by an unexpected opportunity to dispose of the remainder of her lease. She has now therefore no longer any connexion with the great city, she has none on earth whom she calls friends but us, and no house but at Olney. Her abode is to be at the vicarage, where she has hired as much room as she wants, which she will embellish with her own furniture, and which she will occupy as soon as Mrs. Scott has produced another child, which is expected to make its entry in October.

<sup>1</sup> Cowper wrote a poem on this incident—*The Colubriad* (Lat. Coluber, a snake).

Mr. Bull,<sup>1</sup> a dissenting minister of Newport, a learned, ingenious, good-natured, pious friend of ours, who sometimes visits us, and whom we visited last week, has put into my hands three volumes of French poetry, composed by Madame Guyon;<sup>2</sup>—a quietist say you, and a fanatic, I will have nothing to do with her.—It is very well, you are welcome to have nothing to do with her, but in the mean time her verse is the only French verse I ever read that I found agreeable; there is a neatness in it equal to that which we applaud with so much reason in the compositions of Prior.<sup>3</sup> I have translated

<sup>1</sup> William Bull (1738-1814) was an independent minister who took the church at Newport Pagnell in 1764. Here he received pupils, one of whom, John Leach, became Sir John and Master of the Rolls. Bull's friendship with John Newton and Cowper is matter of literary history. For their religious meetings the poet composed some of the *Olney Hymns*. To Cowper's translation of Madame Guyon's poems Bull added a preface, and the dedication ran as follows:—

'To the Rev. William Bull these translations of a few of the spiritual songs of the excellent Madame Guion, made at his express desire, are dedicated by his affectionate friend and servant William Cowper, July 1782.'

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne Marie Bouvières de la Mothe Guyon (1648-1717) is called Madame de la Mothe Guion in Cowper's 'Translation of her Poems,' published at Newport Pagnell. She was born at Montargis, and after becoming a widow at twenty-eight devoted her life to the poor at Geneva, and afterwards at Paris, where she resided in 1686. Imprisoned in the Bastille in 1695, she was not released until 1702. She died at Blois. She wrote many other works besides her spiritual poetry, and her collected works appeared in forty volumes.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Prior (1664-1721). Probably born at Wimborne, Dorset, where tradition asserts that a copy of Raleigh's *History of the World*, preserved in the old chained library, was burnt by the poet's carelessness. He was educated at Westminster School under Dr. Busby, and at St. John's College, Cambridge. For a short time he represented East Grinstead in Parliament, and became in literary and political work a close associate of Bolingbroke and Swift. In 1719 there appeared an edition of his works that is said to have brought the poet four thousand guineas. It was *Solomon on the Vanity of the World* that most excited the admiration of Cowper, although of this Prior himself wrote:—

'Indeed poor Solomon in rhyme  
Was much too grave to be sublime.'

several of them, and shall proceed in my translations, till I have filled a Lilliputian paper-book I happen to have by me, which, when filled, I shall present to Mr. Bull. He is her passionate admirer, rode twenty miles to see her picture in the house of a stranger, which stranger politely insisted on his acceptance of it, and it now hangs over his parlour chimney. It is a striking portrait, too characteristic not to be a strong resemblance, and were it encompassed with a glory, instead of being dressed in a nun's hood, might pass for the face of an angel.

Our meadows are covered with a winter-flood in August; the rushes with which our bottomless chairs were to have been bottomed, and much hay which was not carried, are gone down the river on a voyage to Ely, and it is even uncertain whether they will ever return. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* I am glad you have found a curate; may he answer! Am happy in Mrs. Bouverie's continued approbation; it is worth while to write for such a reader.—  
With our united love to all at Stock,

WILLIAM COWPER.

Next time you write, shall be glad of a frank to your sister.

TO LADY AUSTEN

Aug. 12, 1782.

To watch the storms, and hear the sky  
Give all our almanacks the lie;  
To shake with cold, and see the plains  
In autumn drown'd with wintry rains;  
'Tis thus I spend my moments here,  
And wish myself a Dutch Mynheer;

I then should have no need of wit,  
For lumpish Hollander unfit.  
Nor should I then repine at mud,  
Or meadows deluged with a flood ;  
But in a bog live well content,  
And find it just my element ;  
Should be a clod, and not a man,  
Nor wish in vain for Sister Ann,  
With charitable aid to drag  
My mind out of its proper quag ;  
Should have the genius of a boor,  
And no ambition to have more.

MY DEAR SISTER,—You see my beginning. I do not know but in time I may proceed even to the printing of halfpenny ballads. Excuse the coarseness of my paper ; I wasted such a quantity before I could accomplish any thing legible, that I could not afford finer. I intend to employ an ingenious mechanic of the town to make me a longer case ; for you may observe that my lines turn up their tails like Dutch mastiffs, so difficult do I find it to make the two halves exactly coincide with each other.

We wait with impatience for the departure of this unseasonable flood. We think of you, and talk of you, but we can do no more, till the waters shall subside. I do not think our correspondence should drop because we are within a mile of each other. It is but an imaginary approximation, the flood having in reality as effectually parted us as if the British Channel rolled between us.

Yours, my dear sister, with Mrs. Unwin's best  
love.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

*Aug. 14, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The letter in which this to you was enclosed did not reach me till this afternoon, though dated the twenty-seventh of July, nor did it leave London till yesterday. Mr. Forster, who often takes the charge of Mr. Newton's dispatches to me, no doubt forgot to put it into the post.

I thank you for Madame Guyon, I often spend a morning in translating some select pieces, such as I think may be successfully rendered in English. When time shall serve, you shall have the fruit of my labours.

Mrs. Unwin joins me in best respects to Mrs. Bull, not forgetting the young gentleman. We are as well as these turbulent elements will permit us to be, and in hopes of seeing you once more at Olney, I remain your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Aug. 27, 1782.*

The last four days have been days of adventure, teeming with incidents in which the opposite ingredients of pain and pleasure have been plentifully mingled, and of the most interesting kind. Lady Austen's behaviour to us ever since her return to Clifton has been such as to engage our affections to her more than ever. A flood, indeed, has sometimes parted us for many days; but though it has often been impossible for us, who never ride, to visit *her*,

as soon as the water has become fordable by an ass, she has mounted one, and visited *us*. On Thursday last, in the evening, she came down with her sister to the evening lecture. She had not been long seated in her pew before she was attacked by the most excruciating pains of bilious colic: having much resolution, however, and being determined not to alarm her sister, the congregation, or the minister, she bore it without discovering much of what she felt even to Mrs. Jones till the service was over. It is a disorder to which she has lately been very subject. We were just sitting down to supper, when a hasty rap alarmed us. I ran to the hall window, for the hares being loose, it was impossible to open the door. The evening had been a dismal one, raining almost continually, but just at that time it held up. I entreated Mrs. Jones to go round to the gate, and, understanding by her tremulous voice that something distressful was at hand, made haste to meet her. I had no sooner reached the yard-door, and opened it, than Lady Austen appeared leaning upon Mr. Scott.<sup>1</sup> She could not speak, but thrusting her other arm under mine, with much difficulty made shift to attain the great chair by the fireside in the parlour: there she suffered unutterable anguish for a considerable time, till at length, by your mother's application and assistance, being a little relieved, she contrived to climb the staircase, and after about three hours' agony was put to bed. At eleven at night we sent off a messenger to Northampton, who returned at seven the next morning, and brought a physician with him. He prescribed, and she was better. Friday night

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Scott, the Commentator. See vol. i. p. 260.

she slept tolerably, rose cheerful, and entertained us all Saturday with much agreeable conversation as usual; but her spirits being too great for her strength, the consequence was a frightful hysteric fit, which seized her just as she was going to bed. She was alone, for her sister had been obliged to go home; and thinking there was no need of such a precaution, she would have nobody else to sleep with her. The appointed signal was, that she should knock if she wanted any thing. She did so; your mother hastened to the chamber, and I after her to know if I could be of any use. She had not begun to undress, so I was admitted; and soon after her disorder became quite convulsive, accompanied with most of the symptoms of the most violent fits of that sort I have ever seen. In about an hour she grew better, rested tolerably, and was in good spirits on Sunday, and last night well enough to return to Clifton upon the ass. To-day we dine there.

Are you curious to know her sentiments of *you*? The question has, no doubt, excited your curiosity if you had none before. Suppose, however, I postpone the gratification of it, and make it part of my next letter, finishing this with something more important? No; you must be satisfied this moment: no man that merits the good opinion of others can be indifferent to it. You shall then.

She would have known you for your mother's son the moment she saw you, had you not been announced by name. This is some praise, let me tell you, especially from her, who thinks that mother the best of women, and loves her at least as much as if she were her own. Your figure the most elegant she ever saw,—no longer complain of

callous legs, and a belly with nothing in it!—your countenance quite handsome,—no longer be ashamed of a nose you have sometimes thought too long!—every motion of your limbs, your action, your attitude, bespeak the gentleman;—added to all this, your vivacity and your good sense, together with an amiable disposition, which she is sure you possess, though she has but an hour's knowledge of you, have placed you so high in her esteem, that had you an opportunity to cultivate an interest there, you would soon be without a rival. Fourteen years ago I would not have made you this relation; such a stripling as you were at that time would have been spoiled by so much praise, and through the mere hunger after more would have lost what he had acquired already; but, being the father of a family, and the minister of three parishes, I am not afraid to trust you with it. I beg Mrs. Unwin will add a short postscript to your next, just to inform me whether, when you perused this picture of yourself, you blushed, and how often. I had almost forgot what she desired me to insert, that she wishes as much for a Mr. Unwin here, as you can possibly for a Lady Austen at Stock.

Notwithstanding the uncommon rigour of the season, much of our wheat is carried, and in good condition. It does not appear that the murmurings of the farmers were with any reason: the corn has suffered much less by mildew than was reported; and if it is at all injured (in this part of the world at least), it must be ascribed to their foolish impatience, who *would* cut it down too soon. It is so cold this 27th of August that I shake in the greenhouse where I am writing.

Our united love attends you all. Your letter is gone to Dewsbury.<sup>1</sup>—Yours, my dear William,  
WM. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Sept. 6, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Yesterday, and not before, I received your letter, dated 11th of June, from the hands of Mr. Small.<sup>2</sup> I should have been happy to have known him sooner; but whether being afraid of that horned monster, a Methodist, or whether from a principle of delicacy, or deterred by a flood, which has rolled for some weeks between Clifton and Olney, I know not,—he has favoured me only with a taste of his company, and will leave me on Saturday evening, to regret that our acquaintance, so lately begun, must be so soon suspended. He will dine with us that day, which I reckon a fortunate circumstance, as I shall have an opportunity to introduce him to the liveliest and most entertaining woman in the country. I have seen him but for half an hour, yet, without boasting of much discernment, I see that he is polite, easy, cheerful, and sensible. An old man, thus qualified, cannot fail to charm the lady in question. As to his religion, I leave it—I am neither his bishop nor his confessor. A man of his character, and recommended by you, would be welcome here, were he a Gentoo, or a Mahometan.

I learn from him that certain friends of mine, whom I have been afraid to inquire about by letter,

<sup>1</sup> To see William Unwin's sister Susanna, who had been married in 1774 to the Rev. Matthew Rowley, at this time Vicar of Dewsbury.

<sup>2</sup> Of Clifton Hall.

are alive and well. The current of twenty years has swept away so many whom I once knew, that I doubted whether it might be advisable to send my love to your mother and your sisters. They may have thought my silence strange, but they have here the reason of it. Assure them of my affectionate remembrance, and that nothing would make me happier than to receive you all in my green-house, your own Mrs. Hill included. It is fronted with myrtles, and lined with mats, and would just hold us, for Mr. Small informs me *your* dimensions are much the same as usual.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

About this time (October 1782) Cowper wrote *John Gilpin*, founded on the adventures of a Mr. John Beyer, linen-draper, of 3 Cheapside. Mr. Beyer died on May 11th, 1791, aged 98, being succeeded in business by Martha Beyer, who may have been his widow. The tale was told to Cowper by Lady Austen.

The ballad was first printed anonymously in November 1782 in the *Public Advertiser*, and in book form was published by Johnson, London, 24mo, 1783.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

Oct. 27, 1782.

MON AIMABLE ET TRES CHER AMI,—It is not in the power of chaises or chariots to carry you where my affections will not follow you; if I heard that you were gone to finish your days in the Moon, I should not love you the less; but should con-

template the place of your abode, as often as it appeared in the heavens, and say—Farewell, my friend, for ever! Lost, but not forgotten! Live happy in thy lantern, and smoke the remainder of thy pipes in peace! Thou art rid of Earth, at least of all its cares, and so far can I rejoice in thy removal; and as to the cares that are to be found in the Moon, I am resolved to suppose them lighter than those below; heavier they can hardly be.

I have never since I saw you failed to inquire of all the few that were likely to inform me, whether you were sick or abroad, for I have long wondered at your long silence and your long absence. I believe it was Mr. Jones who told me that you were gone from home. I suppose, therefore, that you have been at Ramsgate, and upon that condition I excuse you; but you should have remembered, my friend, that people do not go to the seaside to bring back with them pains in the bowels and such weakness and lassitude as you complain of. You ought to have returned ten years younger, with your nerves well braced and your spirits at the top of the weather glass. Come to us, however, and Mrs. Unwin shall add her attentions and her skill to those of Mrs. Bull; and we will give you broth to heal your bowels, and toasted rhubarb to strengthen them, and send you back as brisk and as cheerful as we wish you to be always.

Both your advice and your manner of giving it are gentle and friendly, and like yourself. I thank you for them, and do not refuse your counsel because it is not good, or because I dislike it, but because it is not for me; there is not a man upon earth that might not be the better for it, myself

only excepted. Prove to me that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing; yes, and praise too, even in the belly of this hell, compared with which Jonah's was a palace, a temple of the living God. But let me add, there is no encouragement in the Scriptures so comprehensive as to include my case, nor any consolation so effectual as to reach it. I do not relate it to you, because you could not believe it; you would agree with me if you could. And yet the sin by which I am excluded from the privileges I once enjoyed, you would account no sin, you would even tell me that it was a duty. This is strange;—you will think me mad,—but I am not mad, most noble Festus, I am only in despair, and those powers of mind which I possess are only permitted to me for my amusement at some times, and to acuminate and enhance my misery at others. I have not even asked a blessing upon my food these ten years, nor do I expect that I shall ever ask it again. Yet I love you, and such as you, and determine to enjoy your friendship while I can:—it will not be long, we must soon part for ever.

Madame Guyon is finished, but not quite transcribed. Mrs. Unwin, who has lately been much indisposed, unites her love to you with mine, and we both wish to be affectionately remembered to Mrs. Bull and the young gentleman.—Yours, my friend,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Nov. 4, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You are too modest; though your last consisted of three sides only, I am cer-

tainly a letter in your debt. It is possible that this present writing may prove as short. Yet, short as it may be, it will be a letter, and make me creditor, and you my debtor. A letter indeed ought not to be estimated by the length of it but by the contents, and how can the contents of any letter be more agreeable than your last?

You tell me that *John Gilpin*<sup>1</sup> made you laugh tears, and that the ladies at court are delighted with my *Poems*. Much good may they do them! May they become as wise as the writer wishes them, and then they will be much happier than he! I know there is in the book that wisdom which cometh from above, because it was from above that I received it. May they receive it too! For whether they drink it out of the cistern, or whether it falls upon them immediately from the clouds, as it did on me, it is all one. It is the water of life, which whosoever drinketh shall thirst no more. As to the famous horseman abovementioned, he and his feats are an inexhaustible source of merriment. At least we find him so, and seldom meet without refreshing ourselves with the recollection of them. You are perfectly at liberty to deal with them as you please. *Auctore tantum anonymo imprimantur*; and when printed, send me a copy.

I congratulate you on the discharge of your duty and your conscience, by the pains you have taken for the relief of the prisoners. You proceeded

<sup>1</sup> Cowper got the name of John Gilpin from a tombstone in the churchyard of St. Margaret's, Westminster, which lay in a conspicuous position on the path south of the church. It was not long ago moved by the churchwardens to some other spot, or destroyed. Cowper must have passed over it hundreds of times when at school, and the name was very conspicuous. G. Y. in *The Outlook*, Nov. 8, 1902.

wisely, yet courageously, and deserved better success. Your labours, however, will be remembered elsewhere, when you shall be forgotten here; and if the poor folks at Chelmsford should never receive the benefit of them, you will yourself receive it in heaven. It is pity that men of fortune should be determined to acts of beneficence sometimes by popular whim or prejudice, and sometimes by motives still more unworthy. The liberal subscription raised in behalf of the widows of the seamen lost in the Royal George was an instance of the former. At least a plain, short, and sensible letter in the newspaper convinced me at the time, that it was an unnecessary and injudicious collection: and the difficulty you found in effectuating your benevolent intentions on this occasion, constrains me to think that had it been an affair of more notoriety than merely to furnish a few poor fellows with a little fuel to preserve their extremities from the frost, you would have succeeded better. Men really pious delight in doing good by stealth: but nothing less than an ostentatious display of bounty will satisfy mankind in general. I feel myself disposed to furnish you with an opportunity to shine in secret. We do what we can. But that *can* is little. You have rich friends, are eloquent on all occasions, and know how to be pathetic on a proper one. The winter will be severely felt at Olney by many, whose sobriety, industry, and honesty, recommend them to charitable notice: and we think we could tell such persons as Mrs. Bouverie, or Mr. Smith,<sup>1</sup> half a dozen tales of distress that would find their way into hearts as feel-

<sup>1</sup> This was Robert Smith, first Baron Carrington (1752-1838). His father was a member of the banking firm of Smith, Payne & Co., of

ing as theirs. You will do as you see good; and we in the mean time shall remain convinced, that you will do your best. Lady Austen will no doubt do something; for she has great sensibility and compassion, but a large family of necessitous relations is continually making a loud and an expensive demand upon her.

Now for business. Your mother wishes you to buy her twelve yards of silk for a gown, from five to seven shillings a yard, and half-ell wide. The colour, either ruby, garnet, or *boüe de Paris*.

Ten yards and a qu<sup>r</sup>. of yard wide Irish cloth, from 2s. 6d. to 2s. 9d. the yard.

Two yards of satin, of any colour because it is to be dyed with a white one, but it must be good in substance, although its being damaged or discoloured will be of no consequence. It is to match with one of 11s. the yard.

We rejoice that Mrs. Unwin is relieved. For my own part I have a second time cured the toothache by the use of James's powders. It was not therefore without reason that I recommended them. Our love attends that lady, her sister, *et toute la belle famille*.—Yours, my dear Unwin, WM. COWPER.

The last frank.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

Nov. 5, 1782.

*Charissime Taurorum—*

*Quot sunt, vel fuerunt, vel posthac aliis erunt in annis.*

WE shall rejoice to see you, and I just write to

Nottingham and London. Robert was born in London, for which city he sat in Parliament through five successive Parliaments until his elevation to the peerage in 1797. This, it is said by Wraxall, was the only occasion on which George III.'s objection to giving English peerages to those engaged in trade was overcome.

tell you so. Whatever else I want, I have, at least, this quality in common with publicans and sinners, that I love those that love me, and, for that reason, you in particular. Your warm and affectionate manner demands it of me. And though I consider your love as growing out of a mistaken expectation that you shall see me a spiritual man hereafter, I do not love you much the less for it. I only regret that I did not know you intimately in those happier days, when the frame of my heart and mind was such as might have made a connexion with me not altogether unworthy of you.

I add only Mrs. Unwin's remembrances, and that I am glad you believe me to be, what I truly am, your faithful and affectionate,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Doctor Beattie<sup>1</sup> is a respectable character. I account him a man of sense, a philosopher, a scholar, a person of distinguished genius, and a good writer. I believe him too a Christian; with a profound reverence for the Scripture, with great zeal and ability to enforce the belief of it (both which he exerts with the candour and good manners of a gentleman), he seems well entitled to that allowance; and to deny it him, would impeach one's own right to the appellation. With all these good things to recommend him, there can be no dearth of sufficient reasons to read his writings. You favoured me some years since with one of his volumes, by which I was both

<sup>1</sup> James Beattie (1735-1803), poet and essayist. Author of *The Minstrel*.

pleased and instructed; and I beg that you will send me the new one, when you can conveniently spare it, or rather bring it yourself, while the swallows are yet upon the wing; for the summer is going down apace.

You tell me you have been asked, if I am intent upon another volume? I reply,—not at present, not being convinced that I have met with sufficient encouragement. I account myself happy in having pleased a few, but am not rich enough to despise the many. I do not know what sort of market my commodity has found, but if a slack one, I must beware how I make a second attempt. My bookseller will not be willing to incur a certain loss; and I can as little afford it. Notwithstanding what I have said, I write, and am even now writing for the press. I told you that I had translated several of the poems of Madame Guyon. I told you too, or I am mistaken, that Mr. Bull designed to print them. That gentleman is gone to the seaside with Mrs. Wilberforce, and will be absent six weeks. My intention is to surprise him at his return with the addition of as much more translation as I have already given him. This, however, is still less likely to be a popular work than my former. Men that have no religion would despise it; and men that have no religious experience would not understand it. But the strain of simple and unaffected piety in the original is sweet beyond expression. She sings like an angel, and for that very reason has found but few admirers. Other things I write too, as you will see on the other side, but these merely for my amusement. Our hearts ache for the pain Mrs. Unwin has suffered. We truly pity her. Pain is

so great an evil that freedom from it was held by some philosophers to be the *summum bonum*, and had I lived in their day, I should have thought so too. If the whooping cough should attack your little ones your mother recommends James's powder as a good clearer of the stomach.

The lace will be sent to Mr. Newton's; she feared to trust it in a frank. It is well made, and the thread was bought on purpose.<sup>1</sup> W. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

Nov. 11, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your shocking scrawl, as you term it, was, however, a very welcome one. The character, indeed, has not quite the neatness and beauty of an engraving; but, if it cost me some pains to decipher it, they were well rewarded by the minute information it conveyed. I am glad your health is such, that you have nothing more to complain of than may be expected on the downhill side of life. If mine is better than yours, it is to be attributed, I suppose, principally to the constant enjoyment of country air and retirement; the most perfect regularity in matters of eating, drinking, and sleeping; and a happy emancipation from everything that wears the face of business. I lead the life I always wished for, and, the single

<sup>1</sup> Cowper enclosed with this letter his lines on the "Loss of the Royal George"—in English and in Latin. The 'Royal George,' commanded by Admiral Kempenfelt, who himself wrote *Original Hymns and Poems*, sank off Spithead while being repaired on 29th August 1782. Eight hundred people perished, including the admiral, who was in his cabin at the time.

circumstance of dependence excepted (which, between ourselves, is very contrary to my predominant humour and disposition), have no want left broad enough for another wish to stand upon.

You may not, perhaps, live to see your trees attain to the dignity of timber;—I, nevertheless, approve of your planting, and the disinterested spirit that prompts you to it. Few people plant when they are young; a thousand other less profitable amusements divert their attention; and most people, when the date of youth is once expired, think it too late to begin. I can tell you, however, for your comfort and encouragement, that when a grove, which Major Cowper had planted, was of eighteen years' growth, it was no small ornament to his grounds, and afforded as complete a shade as could be desired. Were I as old as your mother, in whose longevity I rejoice, and the more, because I consider it as, in some sort, a pledge and assurance of yours, and should come to the possession of land worth planting, I would begin to-morrow, and even without previously insisting upon a bond from Providence that I should live five years longer.

I saw last week a gentleman who was lately at Hastings. I asked him where he lodged. He replied at P——'s. I next inquired after the poor man's wife, whether alive or dead. He answered dead. So then, said I, she has scolded her last; and a sensible old man will go down to his grave in peace. Mr. P——, to be sure, is of no great consequence, either to you, or to me; but having so fair an opportunity to inform myself about him, I could not neglect it. It gives me pleasure to learn somewhat of a man I knew a little of so many

years since, and for that reason merely I mention the circumstance to you.

I find a single expression in your letter which needs correction. You say I carefully avoid paying you a visit at Wargrave.<sup>1</sup> Not so;—but connected as I happily am, and rooted where I am, and not having travelled these twenty years,—being, besides, of an indolent temper, and having spirits that cannot bear a bustle—all these are so many insuperables in the way. They are not, however, in yours; and if you and Mrs. Hill will make the experiment, you shall find yourselves as welcome here, both to me and to Mrs. Unwin, as it is possible you can be any where.—Yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Nov. 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am to thank you for a fine cod, which came most opportunely to make a figure on our table, on an occasion that made him singularly welcome. I write, and you send me a fish. This is very well, but not altogether what I want. I wish to hear from you, because the fish, though he serves to convince me that you have me still in remembrance, says not a word of those that sent him, and with respect to your and Mrs. Hill's health, prosperity, and happiness, leaves me as much in the dark as before. You are aware, likewise, that where there is an exchange of letters it is much easier to write. But I know the multiplicity of your affairs, and therefore perform my part of the

<sup>1</sup> A village in Berkshire, seven miles north-east of Reading.

correspondence as well as I can, convinced that you would not omit yours, if you could help it.

Three days since I received a note from old Mr. Small, which was more than civil—it was warm and friendly. The good veteran excuses himself for not calling upon me, on account of the feeble state in which a fit of the gout had left him. He tells me, however, that he has seen Mrs. Hill, and your improvements at Wargrave, which will soon become an ornament to the place. May they! and may you both live long to enjoy them! I shall be sensibly mortified if the season and his gout together, should deprive me of the pleasure of receiving him here; for he is a man much to my taste, and quite an unique in this country.

When it suits you to send me some more of Elliott's medicines, I shall be obliged to you. My eyes are, in general, better than I remember them to have been since I first opened them upon this sublunary stage, which is now a little more than half a century ago; yet I do not think myself safe, either without those remedies, or when, through long keeping, they have, in part, lost their virtue. I seldom use them without thinking of our trip to Maidenhead, where I first experienced their efficacy. We are growing old; but this is between ourselves: the world knows nothing of the matter. Mr. Small tells me you look much as you did: and as for me, being grown rather plump, the ladies tell me I am as young as ever.—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Nov. 18, 1782.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—On the part of the poor, and on our part, be pleased to make acknowledgments, such as the occasion calls for, to our beneficent friend Mr. Smith. I call him ours, because having experienced his kindness to myself in a former instance, and in the present his disinterested readiness to succour the distressed, my ambition will be satisfied with nothing less. He may depend upon the strictest secrecy; no creature shall hear him mentioned, either now or hereafter, as the person from whom we have received this bounty. But when I speak of him, or hear him spoken of by others, which sometimes happens, I shall not forget what is due to so rare a character. I wish, and your mother wishes it too, that he could sometimes take us in his way to Nottingham; he will find us happy to receive a person whom we must needs account it an honour to know. We shall exercise our best discretion in the disposal of the money; but in this town, where the Gospel has been preached so many years, where the people have been favoured so long with laborious and conscientious ministers, it is not an easy thing to find those who make no profession of religion at all, and are yet proper objects of charity. The profane are so profane, so drunken, dissolute, and in every respect worthless, that to make them partakers of his bounty would be to abuse it. We promise, however, that none shall touch it but such as are miserably poor, yet at the same time industrious and honest, two characters



frequently united here, where the most watchful and unremitting labour will hardly procure them bread. We make none but the cheapest laces, and the price of them is fallen almost to nothing.

Thanks are due to yourself likewise, and are hereby accordingly rendered, for waving your claim in behalf of your own parishioners. You are always with them, and they are always, at least some of them, the better for your residence among them. Olney is a populous place, inhabited chiefly by the half-starved and the ragged of the earth, and it is not possible for our small party and small ability to extend their operations so far as to be much felt among such numbers.<sup>1</sup> Accept, therefore, your share of their gratitude, and be convinced that when they pray for a blessing upon those who have relieved their wants, He that answers that prayer, and when He answers it, will remember His servant at Stock.

I little thought when I was writing the history of John Gilpin, that he would appear in print—I intended to laugh, and to make two or three others laugh, of whom you were one. But now all the world laughs, at least if they have the same relish for a tale ridiculous in itself, and quaintly told, as we have.—Well—they do not always laugh so innocently, or at so small an expense—for in a world like this, abounding with subjects for satire, and with satirical wits to mark them, a laugh that hurts nobody has at least the grace of novelty to recommend it. Swift's darling motto was, *Vive la bagatelle*—a good wish for a philosopher of his complexion, the greater part of whose wisdom, whence-

<sup>1</sup> Olney is now a thriving town of about 3000 inhabitants, who are engaged chiefly in the shoe-trade. Very little lace is made.

soever it came, most certainly came not from above. *La bagatelle* has no enemy in me, though it has neither so warm a friend, nor so able a one, as it had in him. If I trifle, and merely trifle, it is because I am reduced to it by necessity—a melancholy, that nothing else so effectually disperses, engages me sometimes in the arduous task of being merry by force. And, strange as it may seem, the most ludicrous lines I ever wrote have been written in the saddest mood, and, but for that saddest mood, perhaps had never been written at all. To say truth, it would be but a shocking vagary, should the mariners on board a ship buffeted by a terrible storm, employ themselves in fiddling and dancing; yet sometimes much such a part act I.

Your mother is delighted with your purchase, and esteems it an excellent bargain; the 18s. 6d. included in Mr. Smith's draft she sinks in the same purpose, and gives it to the poor. On so laudable an occasion we are not willing to be inactive.

I hear from Mrs. Newton, that some great persons have spoken with great approbation of a certain book. Who they are, and what they have said, I am to be told in a future letter. The Monthly Reviewers in the meantime have satisfied me well enough.—Yours, my dear William, W. C.

TO MRS. NEWTON

Nov. 23, 1782.

MY DEAR MADAM,—The soles with which you favoured us were remarkably fine. Accept our thanks for them; thanks likewise for the trouble you take in vending my poems, and still more for

the interest you take in their success. My authorship is undoubtedly pleased when I hear that they are approved either by the great or the small; but to be approved by the great, as Horace observed many years ago, is fame indeed. Having met with encouragement, I consequently wish to write again; but wishes are a very small part of the qualifications necessary for such a purpose. Many a man who has succeeded tolerably well in his first attempt, has spoiled all by the second. But it just occurs to me that I told you so once before, and if my memory had served me with the intelligence a minute sooner, I would not have repeated the observation now.

The winter sets in with great severity. The rigour of the season, and the advanced price of grain, are very threatening to the poor. It is well with those that can feed upon a promise, and wrap themselves up warm in the robe of salvation. A good fireside and a well-spread table are but very indifferent substitutes for these better accommodations; so very indifferent, that I would gladly exchange them both, for the rags and unsatisfied hunger of the poorest creature that looks forward with hope to a better world, and weeps tears of joy in the midst of penury and distress. What a world is this! How mysteriously governed, and, in appearance, left to itself. One man, having squandered thousands at a gaming-table, finds it convenient to travel; gives his estate to somebody to manage for him; amuses himself a few years in France and Italy; returns, perhaps, wiser than he went, having acquired knowledge which, but for his follies, he would never have acquired; again makes a splendid

figure at home, shines in the senate, governs his country as its minister, is admired for his abilities, and, if successful, adored, at least by a party. When he dies he is praised as a demi-god, and his monument records every thing but his vices. The exact contrast of such a picture is to be found in many cottages at Olney. I have no need to describe them ; you know the characters I mean. They love God, they trust Him, they pray to Him in secret, and though He means to reward them openly, the day of recompense is delayed. In the mean time they suffer every thing that infirmity and poverty can inflict upon them. Who would suspect, that has not a spiritual eye to discern it, that the fine gentleman was one whom his Maker had in abhorrence, and the wretch last mentioned dear to Him as the apple of His eye ? It is no wonder that the world, who are not in the secret, find themselves obliged, some of them, to doubt a Providence, and others, absolutely to deny it, when almost all the real virtue there is in it, is to be found living and dying in a state of neglected obscurity, and all the vices of others cannot exclude them from the privilege of worship and honour ! But behind the curtain the matter is explained ; very little, however, to the satisfaction of the great.

If you ask me why I have written thus, and to you especially, to whom there was no need to write thus, I can only reply, that having a letter to write, and no news to communicate, I picked up the first subject I found, and pursued it as far as was convenient for my purpose.

Mr. Newton and I are of one mind on the subject of patriotism. Our dispute was no sooner begun

than it ended. It would be well, perhaps, if, when two disputants begin to engage, their friends would hurry each into a separate chaise, and order them to opposite points of the compass. Let one travel twenty miles east; the other as many west; then let them write their opinions by the post. Much altercation and chafing of the spirit would be prevented; they would sooner come to a right understanding, and, running away from each other, would carry on the combat more judiciously, in exact proportion to the distance.

My love to that gentleman, if you please; and tell him, that, like him, though I love my country, I hate its follies and its sins, and had rather see it scourged in mercy, than judicially hardened by prosperity.

Mrs. Unwin is not very well, but better than she has been. She adds her love to both.—Yours, my dear madam, as ever,

WM. COWPER.

TO REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Nov. 30, 1782.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Since such is Mr. Smith's<sup>1</sup> desire, we will dispose of the money before the expiration of the year. It is, indeed, already disposed of, except a very small part, which it was our intention to reserve till the increasing severity of the season should call for the application of it. A man and his wife have been made so happy, that they could neither of them sleep for joy. They are perfectly honest, sober, and industrious, but with all their industry were unable to maintain themselves

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Robert Smith, afterwards Lord Carrington.

and five children without running deeply in debt to the baker. The discharge of this debt, and the additional comfort of some necessary clothing, were blessings so unexpected, that the transports they felt on receiving them are not often equalled.

Your friend, Mr. Teedon, who with all his foibles is a deserving man, so far at least as the strictest honesty and the most laborious attention to his little school can entitle him to that character, has been very seasonably and substantially relieved. The poor man's writing-paper was almost all expended, and not having wherewithal to purchase more, or to pay his small arrears to the stationer, he had fretted himself into a slow fever, which Mr. Smith, however, has effectually cured, and he stands restored to his former health and sprightliness of conversation. Rent day was likewise near at hand, a formidable era, which I believe his indigence always obliges him to anticipate with horror; but the terrors of it are removed, and the sum of three guineas has performed all these wonders. Our judgment in these matters is, that it is better to give effectual relief to a few than to split a sum into diminutive items, the operation of which is scarcely perceptible among many. We have, however, delivered others from the entanglement of debts which, though small, were to them an insupportable burthen; and by putting a few shillings in their pockets, have encouraged them to undergo the drudgery of their miserable occupations with alacrity and delight. I have been rather circumstantial in my detail, because, though it is certain Mr. Smith would not have entrusted his bounty to our disposal had he not had something like an implicit confidence in our discretion, it will

perhaps afford him satisfaction to know, with some degree of particularity, in what manner that discretion has been exercised. We have given to none but the honest, the worthy, and consequently, I may add, to none but the truly grateful.

To-morrow I shall expect a letter from Mr. Newton ; it is not therefore in my power to give you any information by this post on the subject which Mrs. Newton touched so lightly. Whether he himself will enlarge upon it is doubtful, being fearful, for wise reasons, of receiving praise, and for the same reasons fearful of communicating it. But as for me, my modesty is in no danger ; I have that within which sufficiently guards me against the workings of vanity ; no man would think highly of himself, if he believed that his Maker thought meanly of him.

I have a poem upon *Friendship*, which, for the life of me, I cannot now transcribe ; it is at least thirty stanzas in length, each consisting of six lines. On some future occasion, perhaps, I may have more time, and find myself less indolent. At present I can write nothing but a letter, and, to say the truth, am not sorry when I have reached the end of it.

I beg you will mention us handsomely to Mr. Smith and to Mr. and Mrs. Creuzé. Your mother is pretty well ; her love attends you.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

I have written this a week sooner than I need have done, a discovery I have made this moment ; it is possible, therefore, that I may find an opportunity to send you *Friendship*.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Dec. 7, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—At seven o'clock this evening, being the seventh of December, I imagine I see you in your box at the coffee-house. No doubt the waiter, as ingenious and adroit as his predecessors were before him, raises the teapot to the ceiling with his right hand, while in his left the teacup descending almost to the floor, receives a limpid stream; limpid in its descent, but no sooner has it reached its destination, than frothing and foaming to the view, it becomes a roaring syllabub. This is the nineteenth winter since I saw you in this situation; and if nineteen more pass over me before I die, I shall still remember a circumstance we have often laughed at.

How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine!—yours, spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it; where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement. For instance, here are two rustics, and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies has been playing on the harpsichord, while I, with the other, have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog,<sup>1</sup> in the meantime, howling under the chair of the former, performed, in the vocal way, to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it. I know you love dearly to be idle, when you can find

<sup>1</sup> Probably Mungo.

an opportunity to be so ; but as such opportunities are rare with you, I thought it possible that a short description of the idleness I enjoy might give you pleasure. The happiness we cannot call our own, we yet seem to possess, while we sympathise with our friends who can.

The papers tell me that peace is at hand, and that it is at a great distance ; that the siege of Gibraltar is abandoned, and that it is to be still continued. It is happy for me, that though I love my country, I have but little curiosity. There was a time when these contradictions would have distressed me, but I have learned by experience that it is best for little people like myself to be patient, and to wait till time affords the intelligence which no speculations of theirs can ever furnish.

I thank you for a fine cod with oysters, and hope that ere long I shall have to thank you for procuring me Elliott's medicines. Every time I feel the least uneasiness in either eye, I tremble lest, my Æsculapius being departed, my infallible remedy should be lost for ever. Adieu. My respects to Mrs. Hill.—Yours faithfully, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Jan. 11, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—On Thursday evening Mr. Raban<sup>1</sup> drank tea with us ; he brought us a barrel of pickled oysters, for which we return our thanks, and the agreeable news of your welfare, in which we rejoice. He arrived brimfull of admiration at the wonderful performances of a certain soothsayer,

<sup>1</sup> Tom Raban, the carpenter-parson.

whom I recollect you mentioned when we saw you at Olney. I do not, I hope, offend against the law of charity in my judgment of this man; to say truth, I account him rather an object of pity than censure; but as to the intelligence with which he is furnished, it seems to be derived merely from a spirit of divination. We know that, in old time, persons influenced by such a spirit were ready enough to bear testimony to the Apostles and their doctrine, but they refused the testimony and rebuked the spirit. His extraordinary remembrance and application of Scripture, therefore, do not seem to warrant his pretensions to any higher character than that of a diviner. An opinion I am the more confirmed in when I recollect that he is ambitious to be thought an intimate friend of the Angel Gabriel, and that he calls Christ his Brother and God his Father in a style of familiarity that seems to bespeak no small share of spiritual pride and vanity. Mr. Raban admired his interpretation of some scriptures relating to the day of judgment, and gave him credit for having placed them in a new light; but in our opinion that light was darkness, inasmuch as it was derogatory from the honour of the Judge, and contrary to the tenor of every passage that speaks of Him in that office. But perhaps I have a heavier charge than any of these to allege against Mr. Best, or at least his oracle. A woman of most infamous character, too vile for description, had the curiosity to visit him; he examined her palm as usual, and pronounced her little less than an angel. He was even so enamoured of her that he was with——

*Cætera desunt.*

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Jan. 19, 1783.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Not to retaliate, but for want of opportunity, I have delayed writing. From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement, we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement; not that our society is much multiplied,—the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's *château*. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions, and other amusements of that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant, and beg to be excused.

Having no frank, I cannot send you Mr. Smith's two letters as I intended. We corresponded as long as the occasion required, and then ceased. Charmed with his good sense, politeness, and liberality to the poor, I was indeed ambitious of continuing a correspondence with him, and told him so. Perhaps I had done more prudently had I never proposed it. But warm hearts are not famous for wisdom, and mine was too warm to be very considerate on such an occasion. I have not heard from him since, and have long given up all expectation of it. I know he is too busy a man to have leisure for me, and ought to have recollected

it sooner. He found time to do much good, and to employ us as his agents in doing it, and that might have satisfied me. Though laid under the strictest injunctions of secrecy, both by him, and by you on his behalf, I consider myself as under no obligation to conceal from you the remittances he made. Only, in my turn, I beg leave to request secrecy on your part, because, intimate as you are with him, and highly as he values you, I cannot yet be sure that the communication would please him, his delicacies on this subject being as singular as his benevolence. He sent forty pounds, twenty at a time. Olney has not had such a friend this many a day; nor has there been an instance at any time of a few poor families so effectually relieved, or so completely encouraged to the pursuit of that honest industry by which, their debts being paid, and the parents and children comfortably clothed, they are now enabled to maintain themselves. Their labour was almost in vain before; but now it answers; it earns them bread, and all their other wants are plentifully supplied.

I wish, that by Mr. Bates' assistance your purpose in behalf of the prisoners may be effectuated. A pen so formidable as his might do much good, if properly directed. The dread of a bold censure is ten times more moving than the most eloquent persuasion. They that cannot feel for others, are the persons of all the world who feel most sensibly for themselves.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Jan. 26, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is reported among persons of the best intelligence at Olney—the barber,<sup>1</sup> the schoolmaster,<sup>2</sup> and the drummer of a corps quartered at this place, that the belligerent powers are at last reconciled, the articles of the treaty adjusted, and that peace is at the door.<sup>3</sup> I saw this morning, at nine o'clock, a group of about twelve figures very closely engaged in a conference, as I suppose, upon the same subject. The scene of consultation was a blacksmith's shed,<sup>4</sup> very comfortably screened from the wind, and directly opposed to the morning sun. Some held their hands behind them, some had them folded across their bosom, and others had thrust them into their breeches pockets. Every man's posture bespoke a pacific turn of mind; but the distance being too great for their words to reach me, nothing transpired. I am willing, however, to hope that the secret will not be a secret long, and that you and I, equally interested in the event, though not, perhaps, equally well-informed, shall soon have an opportunity to rejoice in the completion of it. The powers of Europe<sup>5</sup> have clashed with each other to a fine purpose; that the

<sup>1</sup> Wilson.

<sup>2</sup> Teedon.

<sup>3</sup> Preliminaries of peace with America and France, signed January 20th, 1783.

<sup>4</sup> Adjoining the Shiel Hall, on the Market Place.

<sup>5</sup> France, Spain, and Holland were all allied with the young republic against England. Preliminary articles of peace were signed, November 30, 1782. A treaty giving the United States its independence was signed in Paris, September 3, 1783. At the surrender of Cornwallis at York Town, October 1781, the American army of 16,000 men contained 7000 French soldiers.

Americans, at length declared independent, may keep themselves so, if they can; and that what the parties, who have thought proper to dispute upon that point, have wrested from each other in the course of the conflict, may be, in the issue of it, restored to the proper owner. Nations may be guilty of a conduct that would render an individual infamous for ever; and yet carry their heads high, talk of their glory, and despise their neighbours. Your opinions and mine, I mean our political ones, are not exactly of a piece, yet I cannot think otherwise upon this subject than I have always done. England, more, perhaps, through the fault of her generals, than her councils, has in some instances acted with a spirit of cruel animosity she was never chargeable with till now. But this is the worst that can be said. On the other hand, the Americans, who, if they had contented themselves with a struggle for lawful liberty, would have deserved applause, seem to me to have incurred the guilt of parricide, by renouncing their parent, by making her ruin their favourite object, and by associating themselves with her worst enemy, for the accomplishment of their purpose. France, and of course Spain, have acted a treacherous, a thievish part. They have stolen America from England, and whether they are able to possess themselves of that jewel or not hereafter, it was doubtless what they intended. Holland appears to me in a meaner light than any of them. They quarrelled with a friend for an enemy's sake. The French led them by the nose, and the English have thrashed them for suffering it. My views of the contest being, and having been always such, I have consequently

brighter hopes for England than her situation some time since seemed to justify. She is the only injured party. America may, perhaps, call her the aggressor; but if she were so, America has not only repelled the injury, but done a greater. As to the rest, if perfidy, treachery, avarice, and ambition can prove their cause to have been a rotten one, those proofs are found upon them. I think, therefore, that whatever scourge may be prepared for England, on some future day, her ruin is not yet to be expected.

Acknowledge, now, that I am worthy of a place under the shed I described, and that I should make no small figure among the *quidnuncs* of Olney.

I wish the society you have formed may prosper. Your subjects will be of greater importance, and discussed with more sufficiency. The earth is a grain of sand, but the spiritual interests of man are commensurate with the heavens.

Pray remind Mr. Bull, who has too much genius to have a good memory, that he has an account to settle for Mrs. Unwin with her grocer, and give our love to him. Accept for yourself and Mrs. Newton your just share of the same commodity, with our united thanks for a very fine barrel of oysters. This, indeed, is rather commending the barrel than its contents. I should say, therefore, for a barrel of very fine oysters.—Yours, my dear friend, as ever,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Feb. 2, 1783.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Your journey, following so close upon the heels of the account you send

of it, your mother has not opportunity to charge you with any commissions. She will be glad, therefore, to be informed, as early as may be, of your next. Your skill and adroitness in supplying her wants procure you the trouble of these frequent applications.

I give you joy of the restoration of that sincere and firm friendship between the Kings of England and France, that has been so long interrupted. It is great pity, when hearts so cordially united are divided by trifles. Thirteen pitiful colonies, which the King of England chose to keep, and the King of France to obtain, if he could, have disturbed that harmony which would else, no doubt, have subsisted between those illustrious personages to this moment. If the King of France, whose greatness of mind is only equalled by that of his Queen, had regarded them, unworthy of his notice as they were, with an eye of suitable indifference; or, had he thought it a matter deserving in any degree his princely attention, that they were, in reality, the property of his good friend the King of England; or, had the latter been less obstinately determined to hold fast his interest in them; and could he, with that civility and politeness in which monarchs are expected to excel, have entreated his Majesty of France to accept a bagatelle, for which he seemed to have conceived so strong a predilection, all this mischief had been prevented. But monarchs, alas! crowned and sceptred as they are, are yet but men; they fall out, and are reconciled, just like the meanest of their subjects. I cannot, however, sufficiently admire the moderation and magnanimity of the King of England. His dear friend on the other

side of the channel has not indeed taken actual possession of the colonies in question, but he has effectually wrested them out of the hands of their original owner; who, nevertheless, letting fall the extinguisher of patience upon the flame of his resentment, and glowing with no other flame than that of the sincerest affection, embraces the King of France again, gives him Senegal and Goree in Africa, gives him the islands he had taken from him in the West, gives him his conquered territories in the East, gives him a fishery upon the banks of Newfoundland; and, as if all this were too little, merely because he knows that Louis has a partiality for the King of Spain, gives to the latter an island in the Mediterranean, which thousands of English had purchased with their lives; and, in America, all that he wanted, at least all that he could ask. No doubt there will be great cordiality between this royal trio for the future: and though wars may, perhaps, be kindled between their posterity, some ages hence, the present generation shall never be witnesses of such a calamity again. I expect soon to hear that the Queen of France, who, just before this rupture happened, made the Queen of England a present of a watch, has, in acknowledgement of all these acts of kindness, sent her also a seal wherewith to ratify the treaty. Surely she can do no less.<sup>1</sup>

We have mislaid no franks. You have received them all. I enclose the letters you wish to see. It is long since you received a cheese. Did you like it

<sup>1</sup> The Treaty was not signed until September, but the provisions of the Treaty were under discussion during the year. Louis xvi. and his Queen had reason to regret the expenditure on the American War.

or not? Your mother is well and sends her love. I am well except that I want exercise, of which the weather deprives me. My love is also with you and yours.—I am, as ever,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Feb. 8, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—When I contemplate the nations of the earth, and their conduct towards each other, through the medium of scriptural light, my opinions of them are exactly like your own. Whether they do good or do evil, I see them acting under the permission or direction of that Providence who governs the earth, whose operations are as irresistible as they are silent and unsuspected. So far we are perfectly agreed; and howsoever we may differ upon inferior parts of the subject, it is, as you say, an affair of no great consequence. For instance, you think the peace a better than we deserve, and in a certain sense I agree with you: as a sinful nation we deserve no peace at all, and have reason enough to be thankful that the voice of war is at any rate put to silence. But when I consider the peace as the work of our ministers, and reflect that with more wisdom, or more spirit, they might perhaps have procured a better, I confess it does not please me. Such another peace would ruin us, I suppose, as effectually as a war protracted to the extremest inch of our ability to bear it. I do not think it just that the French should plunder us, and be paid for doing it; nor does it appear to me that there was an absolute necessity for such tameness on our part, as

we discover in the present treaty. We give away all that is demanded, and receive nothing but what was our own before. So far as this stain upon our national honour, and this diminution of our national property, are a judgment upon our iniquities, I submit, and have no doubt but that ultimately it will be found to be judgment mixed with mercy. But so far as I see it to be the effect of French knavery and British despondency, I feel it as a disgrace, and grumble at it as a wrong. I dislike it the more, because the peacemaker has been so immoderately praised for his performance, which is, in my opinion, a contemptible one enough. Had he made the French smart for their baseness, I would have praised him too ; a minister should have shown his wisdom by securing some points, at least, for the benefit of his country. A schoolboy might have made concessions. After all, perhaps, the worst consequence of this awkward business will be dissension in the two Houses, and dissatisfaction throughout the kingdom. They that love their country, will be grieved to see her trampled upon ; and they that love mischief will have a fair opportunity of making it. Were I a member of the Commons, even with the same religious sentiments as impress me now, I should think it my duty to condemn it.

You will suppose me a politician ; but in truth I am nothing less. These are the thoughts that occur to me while I read the newspaper ; and when I have laid it down, I feel myself more interested in the success of my early cucumbers, than in any part of this great and important subject. If I see them droop a little, I forget that we have been many

years at war; that we have made an humiliating peace; that we are deeply in debt, and unable to pay. All these reflections are absorbed at once in the anxiety I feel for a plant, the fruit of which I cannot eat when I have procured it. How wise, how consistent, how respectable a creature is man!

Because we have nobody to preach the gospel at Olney, Mr. Chater waits only for a barn, at present occupied by a strolling company; and the moment they quit it, he begins. He is disposed to think the dissatisfied of all denominations may possibly be united under his standard; and that the great work of forming a more extensive and more established interest than any of them, is reserved for him.

Mrs. Unwin thanks Mrs. Newton for her kind letter, and for executing her commissions. She means to answer next week, by the opportunity of a basket of chickens. We truly love you both, think of you often, and one of us prays for you; the other will, when he can pray for himself. W. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Feb. 13, and 20, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—In writing to you I never want a subject. Self is always at hand, and self with its concerns is always interesting to a friend.

You may think, perhaps, that having commenced poet by profession, I am always writing verses. Not so. I have written nothing, at least finished nothing, since I published, except a certain facetious history of *John Gilpin*, which Mr. Unwin would send to the *Public Advertiser*. Perhaps you might read it without suspecting the author.

My book procures me favours, which my modesty will not permit me to specify, except one which, modest as I am, I cannot suppress—a very handsome letter from Dr. Franklin at Passy.<sup>1</sup> These fruits it has brought me.

I have been refreshing myself with a walk in the garden, where I find that January (who according to Chaucer was the husband of May) being dead, February has married the widow.—Yours, etc.,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Feb. 20, 1783.*

SUSPECTING that I should not have hinted at Dr. Franklin's encomium under any other influence than that of vanity, I was several times on the point of burning my letter for that very reason. But not having time to write another by the same post, and believing that you would have the grace to pardon a little self-complacency in an author on so trying an occasion, I let it pass. One sin naturally leads to another, and a greater; and thus it happens now, for I have no way to gratify your curiosity, but by transcribing the letter in question. It is addressed, by the way, not to me, but to an acquaintance<sup>2</sup> of mine, who had transmitted the volume to him without my knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was at this time in Paris as American Plenipotentiary arranging the Treaty between the United States and Great Britain. His letter would seem to have been written to Cowper as far back as May 1782, and it will have been seen that Cowper had enclosed a copy to William Unwin in that month. See vol. i. p. 479.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. John Thornton, the rich Turkey merchant.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Great revolutions happen in this Ant's nest of ours. One emmet of illustrious character and great abilities pushes out another; parties are formed, they range themselves in formidable opposition, they threaten each other's ruin, they cross over and are mingled together, and like the coruscations of the Northern Aurora amuse the spectator, at the same time that by some they are supposed to be forerunners of a general dissolution.

There are political earthquakes as well as natural ones, the former less shocking to the eye, but not always less fatal in their influence than the latter. The image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream was made up of heterogeneous and incompatible materials, and accordingly broken. Whatever is so formed must expect a like catastrophe.

I have an etching of the late Chancellor<sup>1</sup> hanging over the parlour chimney. I often contemplate it, and call to mind the day when I was intimate with the original. It is very like him, but he is disguised by his hat, which, though fashionable, is awkward; by his great wig, the tie of which is hardly discernible in profile; and by his band and gown,

<sup>1</sup> Edward Thurlow (1731-1806). He was a fellow-clerk with Cowper in the office of a solicitor named Chapman, in Ely Place, Holborn. Some playful words took place between the two youths, when Thurlow is supposed to have said that if he ever became Lord Chancellor he would remember Cowper (see Letter, Feb. 11, 1786). He did actually become Lord Chancellor in 1778, and Cowper, who addressed verses to him and sent him his poems, was undoubtedly disappointed that he did not receive some recognition from his former comrade. Later in Cowper's life, however, they were reconciled, and in any case Thurlow was kind to Dr. Johnson, and relieved the poet Crabbe from financial embarrassments.

which give him an appearance clumsily sacerdotal. Our friendship is dead and buried, yours is the only surviving one of all with which I was once honoured.  
—Adieu, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Feb. 24, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A weakness in one of my eyes may possibly shorten my letter, but I mean to make it as long as my present materials, and my ability to write, can suffice for.

I am almost sorry to say that I am reconciled to the peace, being reconciled to it not upon principles of approbation, but necessity. The deplorable condition of the country, insisted on by the friends of administration, and not denied by their adversaries, convinces me that our only refuge under Heaven was in the treaty with which I quarrelled. The treaty itself I find less objectionable than I did, Lord Shelburne<sup>1</sup> having given a colour to some of the articles that makes them less painful in the contemplation. But my opinion upon the whole affair is, that now is the time (if indeed there is salvation for the country) for Providence to interpose to save it. A peace with the greatest political advantages would not have healed us; a peace with none may procrastinate our ruin for a season, but

<sup>1</sup> William Petty, Lord Shelburne (1737-1806) was Prime Minister of England from July 1782 to February 1783. He was born in Dublin, served under Lord Granby and fought at Minden. He sat for High Wycombe in 1760, and in 1761 was re-elected for that borough and for Co. Kerry in the Irish Parliament, but by the death of his father became Baron Wycombe in that year. In 1764 he took his seat in the Irish House of Lords as Earl of Shelburne. In 1784 he was created Marquis of Lansdowne.

cannot ultimately prevent it. The prospect may make all tremble who have no trust in God, and even they that trust may tremble. The peace will probably be of short duration; and, in the ordinary course of things, another war must end us. A great country in ruins will not be beheld with eyes of indifference, even by those who have a better country to look to. But with them all will be well at last.

As to the Americans, perhaps I do not forgive them as I ought; perhaps I shall always think of them with some resentment as the destroyers,—intentionally the destroyers, of this country. They have pushed that point farther than the house of Bourbon could have carried it in half a century. I may be prejudiced against them, but I do not think them equal to the task of establishing an empire. Great men are necessary for such a purpose; and their great men, I believe, are yet unborn. They have had passion and obstinacy enough to do us much mischief; but whether the event will be salutary to themselves or not, must wait for proof. I agree with you, that it is possible America may become a land of extraordinary evangelical light; but, at the same time, I cannot discover any thing in their new situation peculiarly favourable to such a supposition. They cannot have more liberty of conscience than they had; at least, if that liberty was under any restraint it was a restraint of their own making. Perhaps a new settlement in church and state may leave them less. Well,—all will be over soon. The time is at hand when an empire will be established that shall fill the earth. Neither statesmen nor generals will

lay the foundation of it, but it shall rise at the sound of the trumpet.

Mr. Scott's last child is dead,—died this morning at four o'clock. The great blemish it had in its face made it a desirable thing that it should not live; and a virulent humour, which consumed the flesh from the bones, made it desirable that it should die soon. It lived a little time in a world of which it knew nothing, and is gone to another, in which it is already become wiser than the wisest it has left behind.

Our united thanks, both for the worsted and the satin; they are remarkably well dyed; the former arrived in the shape of a pair of breeches.

I am well in body, but with a mind that would wear out a frame of adamant; yet upon *my* frame, which is not very robust, its effects are not discernible. Mrs. Unwin is in health. Accept our unalienable love to you both.—Yours, my dear friend, truly,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

*March 7, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—When will you come and tell us what you think of the peace? Is it a good peace in itself, or a good peace only in reference to the ruinous condition of our country? I quarrelled most bitterly with it at first, finding nothing in the terms of it but disgrace and destruction to Great Britain. But having learned since, that we are already destroyed and disgraced, as much as we can be, I like it better, and think myself deeply indebted to the King of France for treating us with so much

lenity. The olive-branch, indeed, has neither leaf nor fruit, but it is still an olive-branch. Mr. Newton and I have exchanged several letters on the subject; sometimes considering, like grave politicians as we are, the state of Europe at large; sometimes the state of England in particular; sometimes the conduct of the House of Bourbon; sometimes that of the Dutch; but most especially that of the Americans. We have not differed perhaps very widely, nor even so widely as we seemed to do; but still we have differed. We have, however, managed our dispute with temper, and brought it to a peaceable conclusion. So far, at least, we have given proof of a wisdom which abler politicians than myself would do well to imitate.

How do you like your northern mountaineers?<sup>1</sup> Can a man be a good Christian that goes without breeches? You are better qualified to solve me this question than any man I know, having, as I am informed, preached to many of them, and conversed, no doubt, with some. You must know, I love a Highlander, and think I can see in them what Englishmen once were, but never will be again. Such have been the effects of luxury!

You know that I kept two hares.<sup>2</sup> I have written nothing since I saw you but an epitaph

<sup>1</sup> Highlanders quartered at Newport Pagnell.

<sup>2</sup> Originally Cowper had three hares, obtained in 1774, Bess, Tiney, and Puss, but Bess died young. Tiney, whose epitaph Cowper had just written, lived to be nine years old. Puss lived nearly three years longer. Though they had female names, they were all males. Cowper's charming paper on them in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (June 1784) is well known. See note to letter of 8th March 1786.

on one of them, which died last week. I send you the first impression of it.<sup>1</sup>

Believe me, my dear friend, affectionately yours,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 7, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Were my letters composed of materials worthy of your acceptance, they should be longer. There is a subject upon which they who know themselves interested in it are never weary of writing. That subject is not within my reach; and there are few others that do not soon fatigue me. Upon these, however, I might possibly be more diffuse, could I forget that I am writing to *you*, to whom I think it just as improper and absurd to send a sheet full of trifles, as it would be to allow myself that liberty, were I writing to one of the Four Evangelists. But since you measure me with so much exactness, give me leave to requite you in your own way. Your manuscript, indeed, is close, and I do not reckon mine very lax. You make no margin, it is true; if you did, you would have need of their Liliputian art, who can enclose the creed within the circle of a shilling; for, upon the nicest comparison, I find your paper an inch smaller every way than mine. Were my writing, therefore, as compact as yours, my letters *with* a margin would be as long as yours without

<sup>1</sup> The first verse of the *Epitaph on a Hare* runs as follows:—

Here lies, whom hounds did ne'er pursue,  
Nor swifter greyhound follow,  
Whose foot ne'er tainted morning dew,  
Nor ear heard huntsman's halloo.

one. Let this consideration, added to that of their futility, prevail with you to think them, if not long, yet long enough.

Corporal East<sup>1</sup> has paid us two visits. We thank you for recommending it to him to call: he entertained us agreeably with a very modest, though, at the same time, a very extraordinary narrative of his Christian adventures in the camp. Twice he prayed here, and in his prayers and in his conversation discovered a vein of good sense not common in people of his rank, and a warmth of heart peculiar to persons truly spiritual. The poor fellow, not having received his pay, found himself in some distress, and would have been obliged to have left some part of his slender means in pawn at his quarters, had we not supplied him with half a guinea. He marched for Northampton yesterday.

Yesterday a body of Highlanders passed through Olney. They are part of that regiment which lately mutinied at Portsmouth. Convinced to a man, that General M—— had sold them to the East India Company, they breathe nothing but vengeance, and swear they will pull down his house in Scotland, as soon as they arrive there. This determination is, no doubt, a very unchristian one; but, as men, if their charge against the General be well supported, I cannot blame them. The rest of them are quartered at Dunstable, Woburn, and Newport; in all, eleven hundred. A party of them, it is said, are to continue some days at Olney. None of their principal officers are with them; either conscious of guilt, or, at least, knowing themselves to be sus-

<sup>1</sup> See Letter to Newton, April 1784. It would seem that East was an impostor whom Newton had not sent.

pected as privy to, and partners in, the iniquitous bargain, they fear the resentment of the corps. The design of government seems to be to break them into small divisions, that they may find themselves, when they reach Scotland, too weak to do much mischief. Forty of them attended Mr. Bull, who found himself singularly happy in an opportunity to address himself to a flock bred upon the Caledonian mountains. He told them he would walk to John o'Groat's house to hear a soldier pray. They are in general so far religious that they will hear none but evangelical preaching; and many of them are said to be truly so. Nevertheless, General M——'s skull was in some danger among them; for he was twice felled to the ground with the butt-end of a musket. The sergeant-major rescued him, or he would have been for ever rendered incapable of selling Highlanders to the India Company. I am obliged to you for your extract from Mr. Bowman's letter.<sup>1</sup> I feel myself sensibly pleased by the approbation of men of taste and learning; but that my vanity may not get too much to windward, my spirits are kept under by a total inability to renew my enterprises in the poetical way.

We love and respect Mrs. Cunningham, and sympathise with her under her many trials. May she arrive in safety! The severity of the season will, I suppose, retard her journey. We should rejoice more in your joy on the occasion, did not her visit to London look with an unfavourable aspect upon yours to Olney.

About three weeks since Mrs. Unwin sent you a

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Mr. Bowman, Vicar of Martham, Norfolk. Died 1792.

couple of fowls, and about ten days since a sparerib from her own pig. We do not wish you to thank us for such matters, nor do we even imagine that any are due; every idea of that sort vanishes before the recollection of the many obligations under which you have laid us; but it is always satisfactory to us to know that they have reached you.

We are tolerably well, and love you both.—Yours,  
my dear friend, W. C.

When your last letter came, my eye was so much inflamed that I could not look at your seal. It is better now, and I mean to consider it well when I see it next.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*March 30, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The sturgeon was incomparable, the best we ever had. We liked both sturgeon and salmon, but choose the former as the more durable commodity of the two, thanking you at the same time for your bounty.

To despatch your questions first, which are of more importance than any subject that is likely to occur at present, will be both the civilest and the wisest course. Walnut shells skilfully perforated, and bound over the eyes, are esteemed a good remedy for squinting; the pupil naturally seeking its light at the aperture, becomes at length habituated to a just position. But to alleviate your anxiety upon this subject, I have heard good judges of beauty declare that they thought a slight distortion of the eye in a pretty face rather advantageous.

The figure, however, cannot be good if the legs do not stand perpendicular to the person; knock-knees, therefore, must be corrected if they can. It is, I suppose, a case of weakness. I should therefore recommend the cold bath as a strengthener, and riding on horseback, as soon as the boy is capable of it, as a means of forcing the knees into their proper line. Their pressure against the saddle will naturally push them outwards, and accordingly you may frequently observe the legs of persons habituated from their infancy to this sort of exercise, curved almost into an arch: witness half the jockeys and postillions in the kingdom. The more the little man is made to turn the point of his toe inward when he is riding, I suppose the better.

You ask me how I like the peace. When a country is exhausted, peace is always preferable to war, and so far I like it, but no farther. Bad, however, as it is, it might be attended with some benefits, which the jarring interests of irreconcilable parties will not suffer us to reap at present. The papers inform us that Lord Bute<sup>1</sup> is at the bottom of all this mischief,—no matter:—if the country is to be visited for its iniquities, there would be discord and anarchy, though Lord Bute were mouldering in the tomb of his ancestors. The

<sup>1</sup> John Stuart, third Earl of Bute (1713-1792) was born in Edinburgh. He became a favourite of Frederick, Prince of Wales, and afterwards of his son George III., upon whose accession he was made Groom of the Stole and First Gentleman of the Bedchamber, offices which made him practically Prime Minister. He was hated by the public as a favourite and a Scotsman. In 1762 he became First Lord of the Treasury, and made peace with France and Spain the following year. He retired from power in 1780, and at the time that Cowper wrote he was spending his declining years in his villa at Christchurch, Hants.

Chancellor, too, is blamed, and perhaps with reason: the nation stands much in need of a political reform, to which he is an enemy, and consequently to all who advise one. A man of his abilities must have great influence, must either do much good or much evil; though wise, he is not infallible, and the errors of wise men are the most pernicious of all. I have found the etching you recommended, and admire it as the express image of a face with which I was once familiar, but his great hat and his long band give him the air of an awkward country parson.

One of my hares is dead—behold his Epitaph:

We shall be happy to see you, and Mrs. U. with you, or any part of your family. I hope to be able to find a melon or two.—Yours ever, with our united love,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*April 5, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—When one has a letter to write, there is nothing more useful than to make a beginning. In the first place, because, unless it be begun, there is no good reason to hope it will ever be ended; and secondly, because the beginning is half the business; it being much more difficult to put the pen in motion at first, than to continue the progress of it, when once moved.

Mrs. Cunningham's illness, likely to prove mortal, and seizing her at such a time, has excited much compassion in my breast and in Mrs. Unwin's, both for her and her daughter. To have parted

with a child she loves so much, intending soon to follow her ; to find herself arrested before she could set out, and at so great a distance from her most valued relations, her daughter's life too threatened by a disorder not often curable, are circumstances truly affecting. She has indeed much natural fortitude, and to make her condition still more tolerable, a good Christian hope for her support. But so it is, that the distresses of those who least need our pity excite it most ; the amiableness of the character engages our sympathy, and we mourn for persons for whom perhaps we might more reasonably rejoice. There is still, however, a possibility that she may recover ; an event we must wish for, though for her to depart would be far better. Thus we would always withhold from the skies those who alone can reach them ; at least till we are ready to bear them company.

Last week I had a letter from William Hadland, in very tragical terms soliciting the favour of an old coat, or money to purchase one. I have returned no answer, nor do I at present intend any ; partly for the reasons that influenced you to refuse it, and partly because I have heard a very different account of the offence for which he was degraded from that which his friend East related. I am informed that after the mutiny of the volunteers had been punished by confinement, they were offered their pay and a free pardon, upon condition that they would return to their duty ; and that this was the critical moment which Hadland seized to raise a contribution for them, that they might still continue obstinate in their refusal, which the want of subsistence would otherwise render difficult, if

not impossible. I am the rather inclined to believe this story, because his punishment, which else seems to have been unreasonable and unjust, is thus sufficiently accounted for: certainly they would not flog and degrade him for a mere act of benevolence and compassion; but when he had abetted the mutineers, he made their cause his own, and became even more guilty than the original delinquents.

I did not see Mr. W—— when he was at Olney, or only saw him from the window. What reason he had for excepting us out of the number of those he visited, I know not; but we are not sorry that he made the exception. I wish him well, but am glad that he made no appeal or apology to me: the many to whom he made them are not satisfied, nor did even the letter he produced serve him. It professed to be a letter from his wife, but it was written by his son, and therefore had no weight.

I would always close what I write with news from Olney, did Olney furnish any worth communicating; but either it does not, or I have not heard it. The Lower Meeting has found a minister at last, and the people it seems are fond of him. His name I think is Hillyard.<sup>1</sup> While he is new he will be sure to please. Mr. Scott has been ill ever since he returned from Lincolnshire; indeed, he is hardly ever well, and his distempers are of a kind that seem to make his life extremely precarious. He is better, however, within these few days.

Mrs. Unwin will be glad to know what she owes Mrs. Newton for the items mentioned in my last.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Thomas Hillyard, minister of the Independent Meeting at Olney from 1783 to 1828. See letter of June 17, 1783.

We are tolerably well; but neither the season nor the wind, which is east, are favourable to our spirits; they always sink in the spring. Assure yourselves that we love you, and believe me, my dear friend,  
truly yours,  
WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

April 20, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—My device was intended to represent not my own heart, but the heart of a Christian, mourning and yet rejoicing, pierced with thorns, yet wreathed about with roses. I have the thorn without the rose. My brier is a wintry one, the flowers are withered, but the thorn remains. My days are spent in vanity, and it is impossible for me to spend them otherwise. No man upon earth is more sensible of the unprofitableness of a life like mine than I am, or groans more heavily under the burthen; but this too is vanity, because it is in vain; my groans will not bring the remedy, because there is no remedy for me. The time when I seem to be most rationally employed, is when I am reading. My studies, however, are very much confined, and of little use, because I have no books but what I borrow, and nobody will lend me a memory. My own is almost worn out. I read the *Biographia*<sup>1</sup> and the *Review*. If all the readers of the former had memories like mine, the compilers of that work would in vain have laboured to rescue the great names of past ages from oblivion, for what I read

<sup>1</sup> 'The Biographia and the Review.'—The *Review* is of course the *Monthly Review*, the *Biographia* the *Biographia Britannica*, of which five large folio volumes appeared in 1778-9, bringing it down to the letter 'F.'

to-day, I forget to-morrow. A bystander might say, This is rather an advantage, the book is always new;—but I beg the bystander's pardon; I can recollect though I cannot remember, and with the book in my hand I recognise those passages which, without the book, I should never have thought of more. The *Review* pleases me most, because, if the contents escape me, I regret them less, being a very supercilious reader of most modern writers. Either I dislike the subject, or the manner of treating it; the style is affected, or the matter is disgusting. Your namesake the Bishop of Bristol<sup>1</sup> furnishes the principal article of the two last numbers, but (though he was a learned man, and sometimes wrote like a wise one) I see him labouring under invincible prejudices against the truth and its professors; shrewd in his interpretations of prophecy, but heterodox in his opinions upon some religious subjects, and reasoning most weakly in support of them. How has he toiled to prove that the perdition of the wicked is not eternal, that there may be repentance in hell, and that the devils may be saved at last: thus establishing, as far as in him lies, the belief of a purgatory, and approaching nearer to the church of Rome than ever any Methodist did, though papalizing is the crime with which he charges all of that denomination. When I think of the poor Bishop, I think too of some who shall say hereafter, 'Have

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Newton (1704-1782), Bishop of Bristol, had been dead about a year. He prepared an annotated edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, and wrote a *Dissertation on the Prophecies*. Gibbon has this amusing reference to him in his *Memoir of My Life and Writings*:—

'Bishop Newton, in writing his own life, was at full liberty to declare how much he himself and his eminent brethren were disgusted by Mr. Gibbon's prolixity, tediousness and affectation.'

we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name done many wondrous works? Then shall He say unto them, Depart from me, for I never knew you.' But perhaps he might be enlightened in his last moments, and saved in the very article of dissolution. It is much to be wished, and indeed hoped, that he was. Such a man reprobated in the great day, would be the most melancholy spectacle of all that shall stand at the left hand hereafter. But I do not think that *many*, or indeed *any* will be found there, who in their lives were sober, virtuous, and sincere, truly pious in the use of their little light, and though ignorant of God, in comparison with some others, yet sufficiently informed to know that He is to be feared, loved, and trusted. An operation is often performed within the curtains of a dying bed, in behalf of such men, that the nurse and the doctor (I mean the doctor and the nurse) have no suspicion of. The soul makes but one step out of darkness into light, and makes that step without a witness. My brother's case has made me very charitable in my opinion about the future state of such men.

We wait with anxiety to be informed what news you receive from Scotland. Present our love, if you please, to Miss Cunningham. I saw in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for last month an account of a physician who has discovered a new method of treating consumptive cases, which has succeeded wonderfully in the trial. He finds the seat of the distemper in the stomach, and cures it principally by emetics. The old method of encountering the disorder has proved so unequal to the task, that I should be much inclined to any new practice that

came well recommended. He is spoken of as a sensible and judicious man, but his name I have forgot. Our love to all under your roof, and in particular to Miss Catlett, if she is with you.—  
 Yours, my dear friend, Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

May 5, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter to Mr. Scott being sent unsealed demands my thanks as it did my perusal. You may suppose I did not hear Mr. Mayor, but I heard of *him*. Mr. Scott and Mr. Chater liked him, the latter especially, who spoke of him at our house in terms of the highest commendation. I found, however, from the report of others that his sermon would have disgusted me. He not only dwelt upon circumstantials, which is certainly (to use a simile from Horace) as unprofitable an employment as to pluck the hairs out of a horse's tail one by one, but expressed himself with a coarseness quite unworthy of the pulpit. Sin, he said, turns a man upside down, and grace turns a man inside out, then comes sin again, and by a dexterous jerk sets him topsy-turvy. I have formerly attended the Robin Hood Society, but those orators in leathern aprons and woollen night-caps never stooped so low for their rhetorical flowers. How different is that plainness of speech, which a spiritual theme requires, from that vulgar dialect which this gentleman has mistaken for it! Affectation of every sort is odious, especially in a minister, and more especially an affectation that betrays him into expressions fit only for the mouths of the illiterate.

Truth indeed needs no ornament, neither does a beautiful person; but to clothe it, therefore, in rags, when a decent habit was at hand, would be esteemed preposterous and absurd. The best proportioned figure may be made offensive by beggary and filth; and even truths which came down from Heaven, though they cannot forego their nature, may be disguised and disgraced by unsuitable language. It is strange that a pupil of yours should blunder thus. You may be consoled, however, by reflecting, that he could not have erred so grossly, if he had not totally and wilfully departed both from your instruction and example. Were I to describe your style in two words, I should call it plain and neat, *simplicem munditius*, and I do not know how I could give it juster praise, or pay it a greater compliment. Certainly, therefore, the disciple in this particular at least, is not like his master. He that can speak to be understood by a congregation of rustics, and yet in terms that would not offend academical ears, has found the happy medium. This is certainly practicable to men of taste and judgment, and the practice of a few proves it. *Hactenus de concionando.*

Fanny Kitchener brought Mrs. Unwin a letter yesterday of her own writing. It was sensible and well expressed,—much better than the preachment above-mentioned. The purport of it was to confess the impropriety of her past conduct, and to entreat Mrs. Unwin's forgiveness of the offence it must have given her. She spoke with many tears and much feeling, and in the judgment of common charity is truly penitent. Mr. Scott, who I believe is a surgeon that makes more use of the knife than the poultice,

had told her there was but little encouragement for sinners of her complexion; but your letter to her healed all and brought her peace. She is very painfully distempered in body, and in hopes of being admitted into the Northampton hospital.

We are truly glad to hear that Miss Cunningham is better, and heartily wish you more promising accounts from Scotland. *Debemur morti nos nos-traque.* We all acknowledge the debt, but are seldom pleased when those we love are required to pay it. The demand will find you prepared for it, but not me, though I have had long notice. I watched and longed for it some years, but within the last ten have learnt to fear it.

Our love attends Mrs. Newton. You have both an undiminished share in it.—Yours, my dear friend,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

May 12, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A letter written from such a place as this is a creation; and creation is a work for which mere mortal man is very indifferently qualified. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, is a maxim that applies itself in every case where Deity is not concerned. With this view of the matter, I should charge myself with extreme folly for pretending to work without materials, did I not know, that although nothing should be the result, even That nothing will be welcome. If I can tell you no news, I can tell you at least that I esteem you highly; that my friendship with you and yours is the only balm of my life; a comfort, sufficient to reconcile me to an existence destitute of every other. This is not the

language of to-day, only the effect of a transient cloud suddenly brought over me, and suddenly to be removed, but punctually expressive of my habitual frame of mind, such as it has been these ten years.

They that have found a God, and are permitted to worship Him, have found a treasure, of which, highly as they may prize it, they have but very scanty and limited conceptions. Take my word for it,—the word of a man singularly well qualified to give his evidence in this matter, who having enjoyed the privilege some years, has been deprived of it more, and has no hope that he shall live to recover it. These are my Sunday morning speculations;—the sound of the bells suggested them, or rather, gave them such an emphasis that they forced their way into my pen, in spite of me; for though I do not often commit them to paper, they are never absent from my mind.

In the *Review* of last month, I met with an account of a sermon preached by Mr. Paley,<sup>1</sup> at the consecration of his friend, Bishop Law.<sup>2</sup> The critic

<sup>1</sup> William Paley (1743-1805) wrote his most important works later—*Horæ Paulinæ* in 1790, *Evidences of Christianity* in 1794, and *Natural Theology* in 1802. He was at this time Archdeacon of Carlisle. Paley and John Law were friends at Cambridge, Law lecturing on mathematics, and Paley on metaphysics and morals. When Law became Bishop of Clonfert, Paley succeeded him as Archdeacon of Carlisle. It was Law's urgency which led Paley to expand his lectures into his book, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, published in 1785. Paley was intimate at Christ's College, Cambridge, with William Unwin, to whom this letter by Cowper is addressed.

<sup>2</sup> John Law (1745-1810), Bishop of Elphin, eldest son of Edmund Law, Bishop of Carlisle. He had two brothers, one of whom was the first Lord Ellenborough, and the second, Bishop of Bath and Wells. Law was appointed Prebendary of Carlisle in 1773, and Archdeacon in 1777. He was succeeded in the archdeaconry by William Paley, of whom he was the greatest friend for many years. He died in Dublin, and was interred in the vaults of Trinity College Chapel.

admires and extols the preacher, and devoutly prays the Lord of the harvest to send forth more such labourers into His vineyard. I rather differ from him in opinion, not being able to conjecture in what respect the vineyard will be benefited by such a measure. He is certainly ingenious, and has stretched his ingenuity to the uttermost in order to exhibit the church established, consisting of bishops, priests, and deacons, in the most favourable point of view: but an unspiritual, lazy, luxurious hierarchy is too sable a subject for such washing to whiten it. I lay it down for a rule, that when much ingenuity is necessary to gain an argument credit, that argument is unsound at bottom. So is his, and so are all the pretty devices by which he seeks to enforce it. He says first, 'that the appointment of various orders in the church is attended with this good consequence, that each class of people is supplied with a clergy of their own level and description, with whom they may live and associate on terms of equality.' But in order to effect this good purpose, there ought to be at least three parsons in every parish, one for the gentry, one for the traders and mechanics, and one for the lowest of the vulgar. Neither is it easy to find many parishes, where the laity at large have any society with their minister at all. This, therefore, is fanciful, and a mere invention. In the next place he says it gives a dignity to the ministry itself, and the clergy share in the respect paid to their superiors. Much good may such participation do them! They themselves know how little it amounts to. The dignity a parson derives from the lawn sleeves and square cap of his diocesan will never endanger his humility.

Pope says truly—

Worth makes the man, and want of it the fellow ;  
The rest is all but leather or prunello.

Again—' Rich and splendid situations in the church have been justly regarded as prizes, held out to invite persons of good hopes, and ingenuous attainments.' Agreed. But the prize held out in the Scripture is of a very different kind ; and our ecclesiastical baits are too often snapped by the worthless, and persons of no attainments at all. They are indeed incentives to avarice and ambition, but not to those acquirements by which only the ministerial function can be adorned,—zeal for the salvation of men, humility, and self-denial.

Mr. Paley and I, therefore, cannot agree.

Your mother is much obliged and much approves, but the muslin is not come. Good cheeses cannot be procured, therefore she will send Mrs. Unwin a dozen yards of fashionable edging. Thanks for franks.—Yours, my dear friend.

WM. COWPER.

I should not have written a word of this had I recollected that we had no franks to your present place of abode,—nor would I send it now did not your mother insist upon it. John should have a drawing master if it were possible.

TO JOSEPH HILL.

*May 26, 1783.*

I feel for my uncle,<sup>1</sup> and do not wonder that his loss afflicts him. A connexion that has subsisted so many years could not be rent asunder without

<sup>1</sup> Ashley Cowper had just lost his wife.

great pain to the survivor. I hope, however, and doubt not but when he has had a little more time for recollection, he will find that consolation in his own family, which it is not the lot of every father to be blessed with. It seldom happens that married persons live together so long, or so happily; but this, which one feels oneself ready to suggest as matter of alleviation, is the very circumstance that aggravates his distress; therefore he misses her the more, and feels that he can but ill spare her. It is, however, a necessary tax which all who live long must pay for their longevity, to lose many whom they would be glad to detain (perhaps those in whom all their happiness is centered), and to see them step into the grave before them. In one respect at least this is a merciful appointment: when life has lost that to which it owed its principal relish, we may ourselves the more cheerfully resign it. I beg you would present him with my most affectionate remembrance, and tell him, if you think fit, how much I wish that the evening of his long day may be serene and happy.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*May 31, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You have had but a disagreeable part to perform towards your two visitors, which, though disagreeable, you have performed well. I understand perfectly your reasons for not offering your pulpit to the first; but though I have no doubt of your having withheld it for reasons not less cogent, from the last, I am not equally aware of them. Whether your objections were suggested

by his general course of life, or by any particular instance of misconduct, my memory, which is but an indifferent one, does not furnish me with the means of knowing; neither is there any necessity that you should inform me, unless it should happen that you have nothing more important to write about, for I feel myself much disposed to an implicit acquiescence in the propriety of all you do. I recollect, but very imperfectly, something that passed at Doctors' Commons, where he shone indeed as he does every where, but so much in the wrong place, that serious and thinking people were rather disgusted than pleased. If, however, his ministry prospers at home, it is well; and he may find in that circumstance a consolation of which I fear our friend at Epsom cannot so readily avail himself.

We rather rejoice than mourn with you on the occasion of Mrs. Cunningham's<sup>1</sup> death. In the case of believers, death has lost his sting, not only with respect to those he takes away, but with respect to survivors also. Nature indeed will always suggest some causes of sorrow, when an amiable and Christian friend departs; but the Scripture, so many more, and so much more important reasons to rejoice, that on such occasions, perhaps more remarkably than on any other, sorrow is turned into joy. The law of our land is affronted if we say the king dies, and insists on it that he only demises. This, which is a fiction, where a monarch only is in question, in the case of a Christian is reality and truth. He only lays aside a body, which it is his privilege to be encumbered with

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Cunningham, sister of Mrs. Newton, died May 1783. Newton had already adopted her daughter, Eliza.

no longer; and instead of dying, in that moment he begins to live. But this the world does not understand, therefore the kings of it must go on demising to the end of the chapter, till futurity shall prove that most of them are dead indeed.

Our illustrious visitors from the Continent, whatever opinion they may conceive of our *politesse*, in which perhaps they may condescend to think us inferior only to themselves, are likely to entertain but a mean one of our devotion. They will observe, at least, that the Sabbath is almost as obsolete in England as in France. I feel something like indignation kindle within me, when the papers tell me that our dukes and our judges, the legislators who not long since enacted a penalty upon the profanation of that day, themselves profane it, and in a manner the most notorious. The Duchess of Devonshire<sup>1</sup> has amused the world and herself almost as long as the most celebrated lady can expect to do it. They that were infants when she first started in the race of pleasure, are now beginning to engage attention, and will soon elbow that Queen of the revels out of her delightful office. Instead of a girdle there will be a rent, and instead of beauty, baldness. I once knew her Grace of Devonshire's mother well; she is a sensible and discreet woman, so that the daughter has the more to fear, and the less to plead in her excuse. Yet a little while, and she and all such will know that their life was madness. *Quicquid in buccam venerit loquor.*

<sup>1</sup> Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806), who reigned at Devonshire House in 1783, has been immortalised by Gainsborough. She was the daughter of the first Earl Spencer—hence Cowper's acquaintance with her mother. Her husband was the fifth Duke of Devonshire. She wrote a poem on *The Passage of the Mountain of St. Gothard*, that has been translated into several languages.

We are well, and shall rejoice to see you at any time. Be assured of our love, and believe me, my dear friend, ever yours,  
WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

June 3, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—My greenhouse, fronted with myrtles, and where I hear nothing but the pattering of a fine shower and the sound of distant thunder, wants only the fumes of your pipe to make it perfectly delightful. Tobacco was not known in the golden age. So much the worse for the golden age. This age of iron, or lead, would be insupportable without it; and therefore we may reasonably suppose that the happiness of those better days would have been much improved by the use of it. We hope that you and your son are perfectly recovered. The season has been most unfavourable to animal life; and I, who am merely animal, have suffered much by it.

Though I should be glad to write, I write little or nothing. The time for such fruit is not yet come; but I expect it, and I wish for it. I want amusement; and, deprived of that, have none to supply the place of it. I send you, however, according to my promise to send you every thing, two stanzas composed at the request of Lady Austen. She wanted words to a tune she much admired, and I gave her these on Peace.<sup>1</sup>

—Yours,

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> The *Song of Peace*, sent with this letter, commences:—

No longer I follow a sound;  
No longer a dream I pursue;  
Oh Happiness! not to be found,  
Unattainable treasure, adieu!

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*June 8, 1783.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Our severest winter, commonly called the spring, is now over, and I find myself seated in my favourite recess, the greenhouse. In such a situation, so silent, so shady, where no human foot is heard, and where only my myrtles presume to peep in at the window, you may suppose I have no interruption to complain of, and that my thoughts are perfectly at my command. But the beauties of the spot are themselves an interruption; my attention is called upon by those very myrtles, by a double row of grass pinks just beginning to blossom, and by a bed of beans already in bloom; and you are to consider it, if you please, as no small proof of my regard, that though you have so many powerful rivals, I disengage myself from them all, and devote this hour entirely to you.

You are not acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Bull, of Newport; perhaps it is as well for you that you are not. You would regret still more than you do that there are so many miles interposed between us. He spends part of the day with us to-morrow. A dissenter, but a liberal one; a man of letters and of genius; master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it—an imagination which, when he finds himself in the company he loves, and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party. At other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way.

No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this, than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one, and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is best of all qualified for the contemplation of either; it can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull. But—he smokes tobacco. Nothing is perfect—

*Nihil est ab omni  
Parte beatum.*

I find that your friend Mr. Fytche has lost his cause; and more mortifying still, has lost it by a single voice. Had I been a peer, he should have been secure of mine; for I am persuaded that if conditional presentations were in fashion, and if every minister held his benefice, as the judges their office, upon the terms of *quamdiu bene se gesserit*, it would be better for the cause of religion, and more for the honour of the Establishment. There ought to be discipline somewhere; and if the Bishops will not exercise it, I do not see why lay patrons should have their hands tied. If I remember your state of the case (and I never heard it stated but by you), my reflections upon it are pertinent. It is, however, long since we talked about it, and I may possibly misconceive it at present; if so, they go for nothing. I understand that he presented upon condition, that if the parson proved immoral or negligent, he should have liberty to call upon him either for his resignation or the penalty. If I am wrong, correct me.

On the other side I send you a something, a

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song if you please, composed last Thursday—the incident happened the day before.

[Here follows 'The rose had been washed.']—  
Yours, W. C.

The muslin is found, the gown is admired,  
Procure us some franks. Adieu, I am tired.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

June 13, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you for your Dutch communications. The suffrage of such respectable men must have given you much pleasure, a pleasure only to be exceeded by the consciousness you had before of having published truth, and of having served a good Master by doing so. Mr. Madan, too, I remember had the testimony of a Dutch divine in favour of his *Thelyphthora*. The only inference is, that Dutch divines are not all alike; and that in Holland, as well as elsewhere, error and heresy can find advocates among those, who by their very function are called upon to root them out.

I have always regretted that your *Ecclesiastical History*<sup>1</sup> went no further; I never saw a work that I thought more likely to serve the cause of truth, nor history applied to so good a purpose. The facts incontestable, the grand observations upon them all irrefragable, and the style, in my judgment, incomparably better than that of Robertson or Gibbon. I would give you my reasons for thinking so, if I had not a very urgent one for declining it: you have no ear for such

<sup>1</sup> Newton's *Review of Ecclesiastical History*. Published 1769.

music, whoever be the performer. What you added, but never printed, is quite equal to what has appeared, which I think might have encouraged you to proceed, though you missed that freedom in writing which you found before. While you were at Olney this was at least possible: in a state of retirement you had leisure, without which I suppose Paul himself could not have written his Epistles. But those days are fled, and every hope of a continuation is fled with them.

The day of Judgment is spoken of not only as a surprise, but a snare—a snare upon all the inhabitants of the earth. A difference indeed will obtain in favour of the godly, which is, that though a snare, a sudden, in some sense an unexpected, and in every sense an awful event, yet it will find *them* prepared to meet it. But the day being thus characterised, a wide field is consequently open to conjecture; some will look for it at one period, and some at another; we shall most of us prove at last to have been mistaken, and if any should prove to have guessed aright, they will reap no advantage; the felicity of their conjecture being incapable of proof till the day itself shall prove it. My own sentiments upon the subject appear to me perfectly scriptural, though I have no doubt that they differ totally from those of all who have ever thought about it; being, however, so singular, and of no importance to the happiness of mankind, and being, moreover, difficult to swallow, just in proportion as they are peculiar, I keep them to myself.

I am, and always have been, a great observer of natural appearances; but, I think, not a superstitious one. The fallibility of those speculations which

lead men of fanciful minds to interpret Scripture by the contingencies of the day, is evident from this consideration, that what the God of the Scriptures has seen fit to conceal, he will not as the God of Nature publish. He is one and the same in both capacities, and consistent with Himself; and His purpose, if He designs a secret, impenetrable, in whatever way we attempt to open it. It is impossible, however, for an observer of natural phenomena not to be struck with the singularity of the present season. The fogs I mentioned in my last still continue, though till yesterday the earth was as dry as intense heat could make it. The sun continues to rise and set without his rays, and hardly shines at noon, even in a cloudless sky. At eleven last night the moon was a dull red; she was nearly at her highest elevation, and had the colour of heated brick. She would naturally, I know, have such an appearance looking through a misty atmosphere; but that such an atmosphere should obtain for so long a time, and in a country where it has not happened in my remembrance even in the winter, is rather remarkable. We have had more thunderstorms than have consisted well with the peace of the fearful maidens in Olney, though not so many as have happened in places at no great distance, nor so violent. Yesterday morning, however, at seven o'clock, two fire-balls burst either in the steeple or close to it. William Andrews saw them meet at that point, and immediately after saw such a smoke issue from the apertures in the steeple as soon rendered it invisible. I believe no very material damage happened, though when Joe

Green went afterwards to wind the clock, flakes of stone and lumps of mortar fell about his ears in such abundance, that he desisted, and fled terrified. The noise of the explosion surpassed all the noises I ever heard;—you would have thought that a thousand sledge-hammers were battering great stones to powder, all in the same instant. The weather is still as hot, and the air as full of vapour, as if there had been neither rain nor thunder all the summer.

There was once a periodical paper published, called *Mist's Journal*<sup>1</sup>: a name pretty well adapted to the sheet before you. Misty however as I am, I do not mean to be mystical, but to be understood, like an almanack-maker, according to the letter. As a poet, nevertheless, I claim, if any wonderful event should follow, a right to apply all and every such post-prognostic, to the purposes of the tragic muse.

Dead ducks cannot travel this weather; they say it is too hot for them, and they shall stink.—  
Yours and yours, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

June 17, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter reached Mr. Scott while Mr. Mayor was with him; whether it

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Mist, *d.* 1737. Mist was a printer in Great Carter Lane in 1716, whence he published a folio newspaper of six pages, *The Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post*. The following year he was arrested on suspicion of printing libels against the Government. *Mist's Journal*, as it came to be called, contained contributions by Daniel Defoe. In 1721 he was sentenced to stand in a pillory at Charing Cross and at the Royal Exchange; at both places, we are told, he was very well treated by the mob. Two volumes from *Mist's Weekly Journal* were published in 1722, under the title of *The Collection of Miscellaneous Letters*.

wrought any change in his opinion of that gentleman, as a preacher, I know not; but for my own part I give you full credit for the soundness and rectitude of *yours*, not only because I think highly of your judgment, but because it coincides exactly with that of every judicious person whom I have heard mention him. I believe no man was ever scolded out of his sins. The heart, corrupt as it is, and because it is so, grows angry if it be not treated with some management and good manners, and scolds again. A surly mastiff will bear perhaps to be stroked, though he will growl even under that operation,—but if you touch him roughly, he will bite. There is no grace that the spirit of self can counterfeit with more success than a religious zeal. A man thinks he is fighting for Christ, and he is fighting for his own notions. He thinks that he is skilfully searching the hearts of others, when he is only gratifying the malignity of his own, and charitably supposes his hearers destitute of all grace, that he may shine the more in his own eyes by comparison. When he has performed this notable task, he wonders that they are not converted: ‘he has given it them soundly, and if they do not tremble, and confess that God is in him of a truth, he gives them up as reprobate, incorrigible, and lost for ever.’ But a man that loves me, if he sees me in an error, will pity me, and endeavour calmly to convince me of it, and persuade me to forsake it. If he has great and good news to tell me, he will not do it angrily, and in much heat and discomposure of spirit. It is not therefore easy to conceive on what ground a minister can justify a conduct which only proves that he does

not understand his errand. The absurdity of it would certainly strike him, if he were not himself deluded.

Mr. Raban<sup>1</sup> was ordained a minister to an Independent congregation at Yardley, on Thursday last. Three ministers attended, and three sermons were preached upon the occasion. Mr. Bull was one of them. The church consists at present of only twenty-five members. He is to have no stipend, and was unanimously chosen. There was a large congregation, and vast numbers went from Olney. I have been informed that Mr. Bull's examination of him was very close, and his own account of himself very affecting. All his own family were present, and all dissolved in tears.

Mr. Hillyard,<sup>2</sup> Mr. Whitford's successor, who came hither from Kimbolton, is very acceptable and much followed. Though a man of no education, he has taken great pains to inform his mind. He often pronounces a word wrong, but always uses it with propriety. He is never out of temper in the pulpit, but his sermons are experimental, searching, and evangelical. He bids fair, consequently, for considerable success. A people will always love a minister, if a minister seems to love his people. The old maxim, *Simile agit in simile*, is in no case more exactly verified: therefore you were beloved at Olney, and if you preached to the Chickesaws, and Chachtaws, would be equally beloved by them.

<sup>1</sup> Tom Raban, the carpenter-parson. His house, the last in the town on the left side as you approach the bridge, is still standing. Mr. Raban continued to live at Olney and to work as a carpenter. See Coleman's *History of the Northamptonshire Churches*.

<sup>2</sup> See letter of 5th April 1783.

The summer is passing away, and hitherto has hardly been either seen or felt. Perpetual clouds intercept the influences of the sun, and for the most part there is an autumnal coldness in the weather, though we are almost upon the eve of the longest day. We are glad to find that you still entertain the design of coming, and hope that you will bring sunshine with you.

We are well, and always mindful of you; be mindful of us, and assured that we love you. Mrs. Unwin is not the less thankful for the cocoa nuts because they were so naught they could not be eaten. If they were bought, the seller was to blame; for which reason I thought it necessary to tell you what they were.—Yours, my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton's affectionate

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

June 20, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—This comes accompanied by a letter Mrs. Unwin received from Mrs. Powley; she thought it would please you. I send you the *petite* piece I promised, not quite so worthy of your notice; but it is yours by engagement, otherwise I believe you would never have seen it.

The rose had been wash'd (just wash'd in a shower).

The ladies are in the greenhouse, and tea waits.—  
Yours more than I have time to tell you,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

June 27, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A fine morning, though a shady one, has induced me to spend that time in walking which I had devoted to the quill; consequently I send you no letter for Mr. Newton, but am obliged to postpone my answer to his last till the usual opportunity shall arrive. I cannot resist fine weather; and the omission is of no great consequence, both because I have nothing new to communicate, and because I have a frank which will convey that nothing to him gratis. I wish you and yours a pleasant excursion, as pleasant as the season and the scene to which you are going can possibly make it. I shall rejoice to hear from you, and am sufficiently flattered by the recollection, that just after hearing you protest against all letter-writing, I heard you almost promise to write a letter to me. The journeys of a man like you must all be sentimental journeys, and better worth the recital than Sterne's would have been, had he travelled to this moment. Adieu, my friend!—  
Yours,  
WM. COWPER.

Mrs. Unwin's love. Send the *Review*.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

June 29, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The translation of your letters<sup>1</sup> into Dutch was news that pleased me much. I intended plain prose, but a rhyme obtruded itself,

<sup>1</sup> Newton's *Cardiphonia*.

and I became poetical when I least expected it. The Bœotian atmosphere I have breathed these six days past, makes such a sally of genius the more surprising,—so long, in a country not subject to fogs, we have been covered with one of the thickest I remember. We never see the sun but shorn of his beams. The trees are scarce discernible at a mile's distance. He sets with the face of a red-hot salamander, and rises (as I learn from report), with the same complexion. Such a phenomenon at the end of June has occasioned much speculation among the *connoscenti* at this place. Some fear to go to bed, expecting an earthquake; some declare that he neither rises nor sets where he did, and assert with great confidence that the day of Judgment is at hand. This is probable, and I believe it myself, but for other reasons. In the meantime I cannot discover in them, however alarmed, the symptoms even of a temporary reformation. This very Sunday morning the pitchers of all have been carried into Silver End<sup>1</sup> as usual, the inhabitants perhaps judging that they have more than ordinary need of that cordial at such a juncture. It is however, seriously, a remarkable appearance, and the only one of the kind that at this season of the year has fallen under my notice. Signs in the heavens are predicted characters of the last times; and in the course of the last fifteen years I have been a witness of many. The present obfuscation (if I may call it so), of all nature may be ranked perhaps among the most remarkable; but possibly it may not be universal; in London at least, where

<sup>1</sup> To the Cock Inn.

a dingy atmosphere is frequent, it may be less observable.

Pardon a digression which I slipped into at unawares, a transition from Holland to a fog was not unnatural. When you wrote those letters you did not dream that you were designed for an apostle to the Dutch. Yet so it proves, and such among many others are the advantages we derive from the art of printing: an art in which indisputably man was instructed by the same great teacher who taught him to embroider for the service of the sanctuary, and to beat out the cummin—and, which amounts almost to as great a blessing as the gift of tongues, diffusing an author's sentiments upon the noblest subjects through a people.

Mrs. Unwin desires me to send her love, and to thank Mrs. Newton for all she has done for her. Every thing has arrived safe, and been managed exactly to her mind. In the course of next month she hopes to treat you with a couple of dux.—  
Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*July 27, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You cannot have more pleasure in receiving a letter from me than I should find in writing it, were it not almost impossible in such a place to find a subject.

I live in a world abounding with incidents, upon which many grave, and perhaps some profitable observations might be made; but those incidents never reaching my unfortunate ears, both the entertaining narrative and the reflection it might suggest

are to me annihilated and lost. I look back to the past week, and say, what did it produce? I ask the same question of the week preceding, and duly receive the same answer from both—nothing! A situation like this, in which I am as unknown to the world, as I am ignorant of all that passes in it, in which I have nothing to do but to think, would exactly suit me, were my subjects of meditation as agreeable as my leisure is uninterrupted. My passion for retirement is not at all abated, after so many years spent in the most sequestered state, but rather increased; a circumstance I should esteem wonderful to a degree not to be accounted for, considering the condition of my mind, did I not know, that we think as we are made to think, and of course approve and prefer, as Providence, who appoints the bounds of our habitation, chooses for us. Thus am I both free and a prisoner at the same time. The world is before me; I am not shut up in the Bastille; there are no moats about my castle, no locks upon my gates, of which I have not the key; but an invisible, uncontrollable agency, a local attachment, an inclination more forcible than I ever felt, even to the place of my birth, serves me for prison-walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass. In former years I have known sorrow, and before I had ever tasted of spiritual trouble. The effect was an abhorrence of the scene in which I had suffered so much, and a weariness of those objects which I had so long looked at with an eye of despondency and dejection. But it is otherwise with me now. The same cause subsisting, and in a much more powerful degree, fails to produce its natural effect. The very stones in the garden-walls are my intimate

acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal, and am persuaded that were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent; some of them perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighbouring cottages, disgusting. But so it is, and it is so, because here is to be my abode, and because such is the appointment of Him that placed me in it.

*Iste terrarum mihi præter omnes  
Angulus ridet.*

It is the place of all the world I love the most, not for any happiness it affords me, but because here I can be miserable with most convenience to myself and with the least disturbance to others.

You wonder, and (I dare say) unfeignedly, because you do not think yourself entitled to such praise, that I prefer your style, as an historian, to that of the two most renowned writers of history the present day has seen. That you may not suspect me of having said more than my real opinion will warrant, I will tell you why. In your style I see no affectation. In every line of theirs I see nothing else. They disgust me always, Robertson<sup>1</sup> with his pomp and his strut, and Gibbon<sup>2</sup> with his finical and French manners. You are as correct as they. You express yourself with as much precision. Your words are ranged with as much propriety, but you

<sup>1</sup> William Robertson (1721-1793), Author of *History of Charles V.*, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) of the *Decline and Fall*.

do not set your periods to a tune. They discover a perpetual desire to exhibit themselves to advantage, whereas your subject engrosses you. They sing, and you say; which, as history is a thing to be said, and not sung, is, in my judgment, very much to your advantage. A writer that despises their tricks, and is yet neither inelegant nor inharmonious, proves himself, by that single circumstance, a man of superior judgment and ability to them both. You have my reasons. I honour a manly character, in which good sense, and a desire of doing good, are the predominant features; but affectation is an emetic.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

*Aug. 3, 1783.*

MY DEAR BULL,—I began to despair of you as a correspondent, yet not to blame you for being silent. I am acquainted with Rottingdean<sup>1</sup> and all its charms, the downs, the cliff, and the agreeable opportunities of sauntering that the seaside affords. I knew, besides, that your preachings would be frequent, and allowed an especial force above all to the consideration of your natural indolence; for though diligent and active in your business, you know in your heart that you love your ease, as all parsons do: these weighty causes all concurring to justify your silence, I should have been very unreasonable had I condemned it.

I laughed, as you did, at the alarm taken by your

<sup>1</sup> Bull was visiting Mrs. Wilberforce, who hired a house for him to preach from. Generally he stood at a window. The clergyman of Rottingdean, offended at these irregular proceedings, denounced them in a sermon from 2 Tim. i. 13.

reverend brother of the Establishment, and at his choice of a text by way of antidote to the noxious tendency of your discourses. The text, with a little transposition and variation of the words, would perhaps have come nearer to the truth, and have suited the occasion better.

Instead of exhorting his hearers to hold fast the form of sound words, he should have said the sound of a form, which I take to be a just description of the sermons he makes himself, that have nothing but a sound and a form to recommend them. I rejoice that the bathing has been of use to you; the more you wash the filthier may you be, that your days may be prolonged, and your health more established. Scratching is good exercise, promotes the circulation, elicits the humours, and if you will take a certain monarch's word, of itching memory, is too great a pleasure for a subject.

I was always an admirer of thunderstorms, even before I knew whose voice I heard in them; but especially an admirer of thunder rolling over the great waters. There is something singularly majestic in the sound of it at sea, where the eye and the ear have uninterrupted opportunity of observation, and the concavity above being made spacious reflects it with more advantage. I have consequently envied you your situation, and the enjoyment of those refreshing breezes that belong to it. We have indeed been regaled with some of these bursts of ethereal music. —The peals have been as loud, by the report of a gentleman who lived many years in the West Indies, as were ever heard in those islands, and the flashes as splendid. But when the thunder preaches, an horizon bounded by the ocean is the only sounding-board.

I have but little leisure, strange as it may seem ; that little I devoted for a month after your departure to the translation of Madame Guyon. I have made fair copies of all the pieces I have produced upon this last occasion, and will put them into your hands when we meet. They are yours to serve you as you please ; you may take and leave as you like, for my purpose is already served. They have amused me, and I have no further demands upon them. The lines upon Friendship, however, which were not sufficiently of a piece with the others, will not now be wanted. I have some other little things which I will communicate when time shall serve, but I cannot now transcribe them.

Mrs. Unwin is well, and begs to be affectionately remembered to you and yours. I wish you many smugglers to shine in your crown of rejoicing on a certain day that approaches, and would take the trade myself if I could suppose it might be the means of introducing me to a place amongst them ; but I must neither wear a crown, nor help to adorn one.—Yours, my dear friend, Wm. Cowper.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I received your letter on the first. I answer on the third. You leave Lymington on the sixth, and will consequently be at home when you receive my answer. I shall not, therefore, be very prolix, writing as I do, under the expectation and hope that we shall see you soon.

We are both indebted and obliged to you for your journal of occurrences, and are glad that there is not one amongst them for which *you* have reason

to be sorry. Your seaside situation, your beautiful prospects, your fine rides, and the sight of the palaces which you have seen, we have not envied you; but are glad that you have enjoyed them. Why should we envy any man? Is not our greenhouse a cabinet of perfumes? It is at this moment fronted with carnations and balsams, with mignonette and roses, with jessamine and woodbine, and wants nothing but your pipe to make it truly Arabian;—a wilderness of sweets! The *Sofa* is ended, but not finished; a paradox, which your natural acumen, sharpened by habits of logical attention, will enable you to reconcile in a moment. Do not imagine, however, that I lounge over it;—on the contrary, I find it severe exercise, to mould and fashion it to my mind!

Let us see you as soon as possible; present our affectionate respects to your family, and tell the Welshman and his chum that if they do not behave themselves well, I will lash them soundly; they will not be the first academics to whom I have shown no mercy.—Yours, with Mrs. Unwin's love,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*August 4, 1783.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I feel myself sensibly obliged by the interest you take in the success of my productions. Your feelings upon the subject are such as I should have myself, had I an opportunity of calling Johnstone aside to make the inquiry you propose. But I am pretty well prepared for the worst, and so long as I have the

opinion of a few capable judges in my favour, and am thereby convinced that I have neither disgraced myself nor my subject, shall not feel myself disposed to any extreme anxiety about the sale. To aim with success at the spiritual good of mankind, and to become popular by writing on scriptural subjects, were an unreasonable ambition, even for a poet to entertain, in days like these. Verse may have many charms, but has none powerful enough to conquer the aversion of a dissipated age to such instruction. Ask the question, therefore, boldly, and be not mortified even though he should shake his head, and drop his chin; for it is no more than we have reason to expect. We will lay the fault upon the vice of the times, and we will acquit the poet.

I am glad you were pleased with my Latin ode, and indeed with my English dirge, as much as I was myself. The tune laid me under a disadvantage, obliging me to write in Alexandrines; which I suppose would suit no ear but a French one; neither did I intend any thing more than that the subject and the words should be sufficiently accommodated to the music. The ballad is a species of poetry, I believe, peculiar to this country, equally adapted to the drollest and the most tragical subjects. Simplicity and ease are its proper characteristics. Our forefathers excelled in it; but we moderns have lost the art. It is observed, that we have few good English odes. But to make amends, we have many excellent ballads, not inferior perhaps in true poetical merit to some of the very best odes that the Greek or Latin languages have to boast of. It is a sort of composition I was ever fond of, and if graver matters had not called

me another way, should have addicted myself to it more than to any other. I inherit a taste for it from my father, who succeeded well in it himself, and who lived at a time when the best pieces in that way were produced. What can be prettier than Gay's ballad, or rather Swift's, Arbuthnot's, Pope's and Gay's, in the *What d'ye Call It?*— 'Twas when the seas were roaring'<sup>1</sup> I have been well informed that they all contributed, and that the most celebrated association of clever fellows this country ever saw did not think it beneath them to unite their strength and abilities in the composition of a song. The success, however, answered to their wishes, and our puny days will never produce such another. The ballads that Bourne<sup>2</sup> has translated, beautiful in themselves, are still more beautiful in his version of them, infinitely surpassing, in my judgment, all that Ovid or Tibullus have left behind them. They are quite as elegant, and far more touching and pathetic than the tenderest strokes of either.

<sup>1</sup> John Gay (1685-1732) was born at Barnstaple. His first poem, *Wine*, was published in 1708. What he called a 'tragi-comic pastoral farce,' *What d'ye Call It*, was published in 1715, and contained the ballad referred to by Cowper which commences:—

'Twas when the seas were roaring  
With hollow blasts of wind,  
A damsel lay deploring  
All on a rock reclined.  
Wide o'er the rolling billows  
She cast a wistful look ;  
Her head was crowned with willows  
That trembled o'er the brook.

His *Beggar's Opera* was produced with immense success in 1728.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Bourne (1695-1747) was a Westminster boy, and afterwards a master of Westminster School, where he was usher of Cowper's form. Cowper had an exaggerated appreciation of Bourne's Latin poems, which he also declared elsewhere to be 'not at all inferior to Ovid.'

So much for ballads, and ballad writers. 'A worthy subject,' you will say, 'for a man whose head might be filled with better things;'—and *it is filled with better things, but to so ill a purpose, that I thrust into it all manner of topics that may prove more amusing; as for instance, I have two goldfinches, which in the summer occupy the greenhouse. A few days since, being employed in cleaning out their cages, I placed that which I had in hand upon the table, while the other hung against the wall: the windows and the doors stood wide open. I went to fill the fountain at the pump, and on my return was not a little surprised to find a goldfinch sitting on the top of the cage I had been cleaning, and singing to and kissing the goldfinch within. I approached him, and he discovered no fear; still nearer, and he discovered none. I advanced my hand towards him, and he took no notice of it. I seized him, and supposed I had caught a new bird, but casting my eye upon the other cage perceived my mistake. Its inhabitant, during my absence, had contrived to find an opening, where the wire had been a little bent, and made no other use of the escape it afforded him, than to salute his friend, and to converse with him more intimately than he had done before. I returned him to his proper mansion, but in vain. In less than a minute he had thrust his little person through the aperture again, and again perched upon his neighbour's cage, kissing him, as at the first, and singing, as if transported with the fortunate adventure. I could not but respect such friendship, as for the sake of its gratification had twice declined an opportunity to be free, and, consenting to their*

union, resolved that for the future one cage should hold them both. I am glad of such incidents; for at a pinch, and when I need entertainment, the versification<sup>1</sup> of them serves to divert me.

I hope you will receive a very fine melon, which we send according to your last direction: it will leave this place on Wednesday. Accept my love, and present it to all your family. Your mother is well, and adds hers.

I transcribe for you a piece of Madam Guyon, not as the best, but as being shorter than many, and as good as most of them. It will give you an idea of her manner. When you write to, or see Mr. Smith, I beseech you remember me to him as one that esteems him highly.—Yours ever, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Sept. 7, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—So long a silence needs an apology. I have been hindered by a three-weeks visit from our Hoxton friends,<sup>2</sup> and by a cold, and feverish complaint, which are but just removed. A foggy summer is likely to be attended with a sickly autumn; such multitudes are indisposed by fevers in this country, that the farmers have with difficulty gathered in their harvest, the labourers having been almost every day carried out of the field incapable of work; and many die.

The French poetess<sup>3</sup> is certainly chargeable with the fault you mention, though I thought it not very glaring in the piece I sent you. I have endeavoured

<sup>1</sup> See poem, *The Faithful Bird*.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Newton.

<sup>3</sup> Madam Guyon.

indeed, in all the translations I have made, to cure her of that evil, either by the suppression of passages exceptionable upon that account, or by a more sober and respectful manner of expression. Still, however, she will be found to have conversed familiarly with God, but I hope not fulsomely, nor so as to give reasonable disgust to a religious reader. That God should deal familiarly with man, or, which is the same thing, that He should permit man to deal familiarly with Him, seems not very difficult to conceive, or presumptuous to suppose, when some things are taken into consideration. Woe to the sinner that shall dare to take a liberty with Him that is not warranted by His Word, or to which He Himself has not encouraged him! Till the incarnation of the Godhead is verily believed, He is unapproachable by man upon any terms; and in that case to accost Him as if we had a right of relationship, when in reality we have none, would be to affront Him to His face. But an Incarnate God is as much human as divine. When He assumed man's nature, He revealed Himself as the Friend of man, as the Brother of every soul that loves Him. He conversed freely with man while He was upon earth, and as freely with him after His resurrection. I doubt not, therefore, that it is possible to enjoy an access to Him even now unincumbered with ceremonious awe, easy, delightful, and without constraint. This, however, can only be the lot of those who make it the business of their lives to please Him, and to cultivate communion with Him. And then I presume there can be no danger of offence, because such a habit of the soul is of His own creation, and near as we come, we

come no nearer to Him than He is pleased to draw us. If we address Him as children, it is because He tells us He is our Father. If we unbosom ourselves to Him as to a friend, it is because He calls us friends; and if we speak to Him in the language of love, it is because He first used it, thereby teaching us that it is the language He delights to hear from His people. But I confess that through the weakness, the folly, and corruption of human nature, this privilege, like all other Christian privileges, is liable to abuse. There is a mixture of evil in everything we do; indulgence encourages us to encroach, and while we exercise the rights of children, we become childish. Here, I think, is the point in which my authoress failed; and here it is that I have particularly guarded my translation, not afraid of representing her as dealing with God familiarly, but foolishly, irreverently, and without due attention to His majesty, of which she is sometimes guilty. A wonderful fault for such a woman to fall into, who spent her life in the contemplation of His glory, who seems to have been always impressed with a sense of it, and sometimes quite absorbed in the views she had of it.

I saw the *Tything Time* in the *General Evening*, but my *Royal George* in Latin I have not yet seen. I have two or three trifles by me, but forget which I have sent and which not. The following I believe is new.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The poem enclosed was *The Inkglass*, subsequently entitled *Ode to Apollo on an Inkglass almost Dried in the Sun*, the first verse of which runs as follows:—

Patron of all those luckless brains  
That, to the wrong side leaning,  
Indite much metre with much pains,  
And little or no meaning.

Your mother has many days been troubled with a pain in her side. We believe it nervous. She is otherwise well. Do not delay to write as long as I have not delayed it unless you have as good a reason. Our fond love to you all.—Yours, my dear William,  
W. C.

The parcel of lace is still at Hoxton. Behold my last frank.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Sept. 8, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Mrs. Unwin would have answered your kind note from Bedford, had not a pain in her side prevented her. It still continues, but is less violent than it was. I, who am her secretary upon such occasions, should certainly have answered it for her, but was hindered by illness, having been myself seized with a fever immediately after your departure. The account of your recovery gave us great pleasure, and I am persuaded that you will feel yourself repaid by the information that I give you of mine. The reveries your head was filled with, while your disorder was most prevalent, though they were but reveries, and the offspring of a heated imagination, afforded you yet a comfortable evidence of the predominant bias of your heart and mind to the best subjects. I had none such; it would have been wonderful if I had: indeed I was in no degree delirious, nor has any thing less than a fever really dangerous ever made me so. In this respect, if in no other, I may be said to have a strong head; and perhaps for the same reason that wine would never make me drunk, an ordinary

degree of fever has no effect upon my understanding.

*Over*

The epidemic begins to be more mortal as the autumn comes on. Two men of drunken memory, Bob Freeman and Bob Kitchener, have died of it since you went. In Bedfordshire it is reported, how truly however I cannot say, to be nearly as fatal as the plague. It is well for those about me that I am neither very subject to fevers, nor apt to lose my senses when I have one. My ravings would be those of a man more conversant with things beneath than with things above, and if they bore any resemblance to my habitual musings, would serve only to shock bystanders. I heard lately of a clerk in a public office, whose chief employment it was for many years to administer oaths, who being light-headed in a fever, of which he died, spent the last week of his life in crying day and night—'So help you God—kiss the book—give me a shilling.' What a wretch in comparison with you, and how happy in comparison with me!

I have indeed been lately more dejected and more distressed than usual; more harassed by dreams in the night, and more deeply poisoned by them in the following day. I know not what is portended by an alteration for the worse after eleven years of misery, but firmly believe that it is not designed as the introduction of a change for the better. You know not what I suffered while you were here, nor was there any need you should. Your friendship for me would have made you in some degree a partaker of my woes, and your share in them would have been increased by your inability to help me. Perhaps, indeed, they took a keener edge from the

consideration of your presence; the friend of my heart, the person with whom I had formerly taken sweet counsel, no longer useful to me as a minister, no longer pleasant to me as a Christian, was a spectacle that must necessarily add the bitterness of mortification to the sadness of despair. I now see a long winter before me, and am to get through it as I can. I know the ground before I tread upon it; it is hollow, it is agitated, it suffers shocks in every direction; it is like the soil of Calabria, all whirlpool and undulation; but I must reel through it,—at least if I be not swallowed up by the way.

Mr. Scott has been ill almost ever since you left us. This light atmosphere, and these unremitting storms, are very unfriendly to an asthmatic habit. He suffers accordingly; and last Saturday, as on many foregoing Saturdays, was obliged to clap on a blister by way of preparation for his Sunday labours. He cannot draw breath upon any other terms. If holy orders were always conferred upon such conditions, I question but even bishoprics themselves would want an occupant. But he is easy and cheerful, and likes his wages well.

I beg you will mention me kindly to Mr. Bacon,<sup>1</sup> and make him sensible that if I did not write the paragraph he wished for, it was not owing to any want of respect for the desire he expressed, but to mere inability. If in a state of mind that almost disqualifies me for society, I could possibly wish to form a new connexion, I should wish to know him;

<sup>1</sup> John Bacon (1740-1799) received from Sir Joshua Reynolds the first gold medal for sculpture awarded by the Royal Academy. His works include the monument to Pitt in Westminster Abbey, and to Dr. Johnson in St. Paul's. He also made the colossal figure of Father Thames in the courtyard of Somerset House.

but I never shall, and things being as they are, I do not regret it. You are my old friend, therefore I do not spare you; having known you in better days, I make you pay for any pleasure I might then afford you, by a communication of my present pains. But I have no claims of this sort upon Mr. Bacon.

Be pleased to remember us both, with much affection, to Mrs. Newton, and to her and your Eliza<sup>1</sup>; to Miss Catlett<sup>2</sup> likewise, if she is with you. Poor Eliza droops and languishes, but in the land to which she is going, she will hold up her head and droop no more. A sickness that leads the way to everlasting life is better than the health of an antediluvian. Accept our united love.—My dear friend,  
sincerely yours,  
W. C.

Lady Austen desires me to add her compliments.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Sept. 23, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We are glad that having been attacked by a fever, which has often proved fatal, and almost always leaves the sufferer debilitated to the last degree, you find yourself so soon restored to health, and your strength recovered. *Your* health and strength are useful to others, and in that view important in *His* account who dispenses both, and by your means a more precious gift than either. For my own part, though I have not been

<sup>1</sup> *Miss Eliza Cunningham*, a niece of Newton's. Adopted by Newton, after the death of her mother, in 1783. She died in October 1785.—See Cowper's Letter of 16th October 1785.

<sup>2</sup> *Miss Catlett*. Adopted by Newton after the death of her father, Mr. George Catlett (Mrs. Newton's brother), in 1774. She was a great comfort to Newton in his declining years.

laid up, I have never been perfectly well since you left us. A smart fever, which lasted indeed but a few hours, succeeded by lassitude and want of spirits, that seemed still to indicate a feverish habit, has made for some time, and still makes me very unfit for my favourite occupations, writing and reading;—so that even a letter, and even a letter to you, is not without its burthen. An emetic which I took yesterday has, I believe, done me more good than any thing, but I shall be able to ascertain that point better when I have recovered from the fatigue of it. John Line has had the epidemic, and has it still, but grows better. When he was first seized with it, he gave notice that he should die, but in this only instance of prophetic exertion he seems to have been mistaken: he has, however, been very near it. Bett Fisher was buried last night: she died of the distemper. Molly Clifton is dying, but of a decline. I should have told you, that poor John has been very ready to depart, and much comforted through his whole illness. He, you know, though a silent, has been a very steady professor, and therefore, though but a botcher, which is somewhat less than a tailor, seems to have been more than a match for the last enemy. Oh, what things pass in cottages and hovels, which the great never dream of! French philosophers amuse themselves, and, according to their own phrase, cover themselves with glory, by inventing air-balls, which, by their own buoyancy, ascend above the clouds, and are lost in regions which no human contrivance could ever penetrate before. An English tailor, an inhabitant of the dunghills of Silver End, prays, and his prayer ascends into the

ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. He indeed covers himself with glory, fights battles, and gains victories, but makes no noise. Europe is not astonished at his feats, foreign Academies do not seek him for a member ; he will never discover the art of flying, or send a globe of taffeta up to heaven. But he will go thither himself. I am afraid there is hardly a philosopher among them that would be wise enough to change conditions with him if he could, yet certainly there is not one that would not be infinitely a gainer by doing so.

Since you went, we dined with Mr. Bull at Newport. I had sent him notice of our visit a week before, which, like a contemplative, studious man, as he is, he put in his pocket and forgot. When we arrived, the parlour windows were shut, and the house had the appearance of being uninhabited. After waiting some time, however, the maid opened the door, and the master presented himself. Mrs. Bull and her son were gone to Bedford, but having found what we chiefly wanted, we dined and spent the afternoon together comfortably enough. It is hardly worth while to observe so repeatedly that his garden seems a spot contrived only for the growth of melancholy ; but being always affected by it in the same way I cannot help it. He showed me a nook, in which he had placed a bench, and where he said he found it very refreshing to smoke his pipe and meditate. Here he sits, with his back against one brick-wall, and his nose against another, which must, you know, be very refreshing, and greatly assist meditation. He rejoices the more in this niche, because it is an acquisition made at some expense, and with no small labour ; several loads of

earth were removed in order to make it,—which loads of earth, had I the management of them, I should carry thither again, and fill up a place more fit in appearance to be a repository for the dead than the living. I would on no account put any man out of conceit with his innocent enjoyments, and therefore never tell him my thoughts upon this subject; but he is not seldom low-spirited, and I cannot but suspect that his situation helps to make him so.

Mrs. Unwin begs that Mrs. Newton will be so kind as to buy her a box-comb, with fine teeth on both sides. She hopes the ham arrived safe.

I shall be obliged to you for Hawkesworth's *Voyages*, when it can be sent conveniently. The long evenings are beginning, and nothing shortens them so effectually as reading aloud.

Lady Austen returns her compliments. The Jones's are gone to Brighton. Mr. Page<sup>1</sup> has warning to quit Ranstone.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Scott is better than he has been, but so weak that he is obliged to ride to Weston. Mrs. Unwin is well, and bids me assure you of our joint love, which I would be understood to do in the warmest terms, and with the greatest sincerity. Our love likewise attends Eliza.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Sept. 29, 1783.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—We are sorry that you and your household partake so largely of the ill effects

<sup>1</sup> Rev. B. Page, Newton's successor at Olney. He removed to Ravenstone.

<sup>2</sup> Ravenstone, a village near Olney.

of this unhealthy season. You are happy, however, in having hitherto escaped the epidemic fever, which has prevailed much in this part of the kingdom, and carried many off. Your mother and I are well. After more than a fortnight's indisposition, which slight appellation is quite adequate to the description of all I suffered, I am at length restored by a grain or two of emetic tartar. It is a tax I generally pay in autumn. By this time, I hope, a purer ether than we have seen for months, and these brighter suns than the summer had to boast, have cheered your spirits, and made your existence more comfortable. We are rational; but we are animal too, and therefore subject to the influences of the weather. The cattle in the fields show evident symptoms of lassitude and disgust in an unpleasant season; and we, their lords and masters, are constrained to sympathise with them: the only difference between us is, that they know not the cause of their dejection, and we do,—but, for our humiliation, are equally at a loss to cure it. Upon this account I have sometimes wished myself a philosopher. How happy in comparison with myself, does the sagacious investigator of nature seem, whose fancy is ever employed in the invention of *hypotheses*, and his reason in the support of them! While he is accounting for the origin of the winds, he has no leisure to attend to their influence upon himself; and while he considers what the sun is made of, forgets that he has not shone for a month. One project indeed supplants another. The *vortices* of Descartes gave way to the gravitation of Newton, and this again is threatened by the electrical fluid of a modern. One generation blows bubbles, and the

next breaks them. But in the meantime your philosopher is a happy man. He escapes a thousand inquietudes to which the indolent are subject, and finds his occupation, whether it be the pursuit of a butterfly, or a demonstration, the wholesomest exercise in the world. As he proceeds, he applauds himself. His discoveries, though eventually perhaps they prove but dreams, are to him realities. The world gaze at him, as he does at new phenomena in the heavens, and perhaps understand him as little. But this does not prevent their praises, nor at all disturb him in the enjoyment of that self-complacence, to which his imaginary success entitles him. He wears his honours while he lives, and if another strips them off when he has been dead a century, it is no great matter ; he can then make shift without them.

I have said a great deal upon this subject, and know not what it all amounts to. I did not intend a syllable of it when I began. But *currente calamo*, I stumbled upon it. My end is to amuse myself and you. The former of these two points is secured. I shall be happy if I do not miss the latter.

By the way, what is your opinion of these air-balloons? I am quite charmed with the discovery. Is it not possible (do you suppose) to convey such a quantity of inflammable air into the stomach and abdomen, that the philosopher, no longer gravitating to a centre, shall ascend by his own comparative levity, and never stop till he has reached the medium exactly *in equilibrio* with himself? May he not by the help of a pasteboard rudder, attached to his posteriors, steer himself in that purer element with ease ; and again by a slow and gradual discharge of

his aerial contents, recover his former tendency to the earth, and descend without the smallest danger or inconvenience? These things are worth inquiry; and (I dare say) they will be inquired after as they deserve. The *pennæ non homini datæ* are likely to be less regretted than they were; and perhaps a flight of academicians and a covey of fine ladies may be no uncommon spectacle in the next generation. A letter which appeared in the public prints last week convinces me, that the learned are not without hopes of some such improvement upon this discovery. The author is a sensible and ingenious man, and under a reasonable apprehension that the ignorant may feel themselves inclined to laugh upon a subject that affects himself with the utmost seriousness, with much good manners and management bespeaks their patience, suggesting many good consequences that may result from a course of experiments upon this machine, and amongst others, that it may be of use in ascertaining the shape of continents and islands, and the face of wide-extended and far distant countries; an end not to be hoped for, unless by these means of extraordinary elevation the human prospect may be immensely enlarged, and the philosopher, exalted to the skies, attain a view of the whole hemisphere at once. But whether he is to ascend by the mere inflation of his person, as hinted above, or whether in a sort of bandbox, supported upon balloons, is not yet apparent, nor (I suppose) even in his own idea perfectly decided.—Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Oct. 6, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is indeed a melancholy consideration that the Gospel, whose direct tendency is to promote the happiness of mankind in the present life, as well as in the life to come, and which so effectually answers the design of its Author, whenever it is well understood and sincerely believed, should through the ignorance, the bigotry, the superstition of its professors, and the ambition of popes, and princes the tools of popes, have produced incidentally so much mischief, only furnishing the world with a plausible excuse to worry each other, while they sanctified the worst cause with the specious pretext of zeal for the furtherance of the best.

Angels descend from Heaven to publish peace between man and his Maker; the Prince of Peace Himself comes to confirm and establish it, and war, hatred, and desolation are the consequence. Thousands quarrel about the interpretation of a book which none of them understand. He that is slain dies firmly persuaded that the crown of martyrdom expects him; and he that slew him is equally convinced that he has done God service. In reality they are both mistaken, and equally unentitled to the honour they arrogate to themselves. If a multitude of blind men should set out for a certain city, and dispute about the right road till a battle ensued between them, the probable effect would be that none of them would ever reach it; and such a fray, preposterous and shock-

ing in the extreme, would exhibit a picture in some degree resembling the original of which we have been speaking. And why is not the world thus occupied at present?—even because they have exchanged a zeal, that was no better than madness, for an indifference equally pitiable and absurd. The holy sepulchre has lost its importance in the eyes of nations called Christians, not because the light of true wisdom has delivered them from a superstitious attachment to the spot, but because He that was buried in it is no longer regarded by them as the Saviour of the world. The exercise of reason, enlightened by philosophy, has cured them, indeed, of the misery of an abused understanding; but together with the delusion they have lost the substance, and for the sake of the lies that were grafted upon it have quarrelled with the truth itself. Here, then, we see the *ne plus ultra* of human wisdom, at least in affairs of religion. It enlightens the mind with respect to non-essentials, but with respect to that in which the essence of Christianity consists, leaves it perfectly in the dark. It can discover many errors that in different ages have disgraced the faith; but it is only to make way for the admission of one more fatal than them all, which represents that faith itself as a delusion. Why those evils have been permitted shall be known hereafter. One thing in the meantime is certain, that the folly and frenzy of the professed disciples of the Gospel have been more dangerous to its interests than all the avowed hostilities of its adversaries; and perhaps for this cause these mischiefs might be suffered to prevail for a season, that its divine

original and nature might be the more illustrated, when it should appear that it was able to stand its ground for ages against that most formidable of all attacks, the indiscretion of its friends. The outrages that have followed this perversion of the truth have proved indeed a stumbling-block to individuals; the wise of this world, with all their wisdom, have not been able to distinguish between the blessing and the abuse of it. Voltaire was offended, and Gibbon has turned his back; but the flock of Christ is still nourished, and still increases, notwithstanding the unbelief of a philosopher is able to convert bread into a stone, and a fish into a serpent.

I am much obliged to you for the voyages,<sup>1</sup> which I received, and began to read last night. My imagination is so captivated upon these occasions that I seem to partake with the navigators in all the dangers they encountered. I lose my anchor; my mainsail is rent into shreds; I kill a shark, and by signs converse with a Patagonian, and all this without moving from the fireside. The principal fruits of these circuits, that have been made around the globe, seem likely to be the amusement of those that stayed at home. Discoveries have been made, but such discoveries as will hardly satisfy the expense of such undertakings. We brought away an Indian, and having debauched him, we sent him home again to communicate the infection to his country; fine sport to be sure, but such as will not defray the cost. Nations that live upon bread-fruit, and have no mines to make them worthy of our acquaintance, will be but

<sup>1</sup> Hawkesworth's.

little visited for the future. So much the better for them! their poverty is indeed their mercy.—  
Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

*October 13, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am much obliged to you for your American anecdotes, and feel the obligation perhaps more sensibly, the labour of transcribing being in particular that to which I myself have the greatest aversion. The Loyalists are much to be pitied; driven from all the comforts that depend upon and are intimately connected with a residence in their native land, and sent to cultivate a distant one, without the means of doing it; abandoned too, through a deplorable necessity, by the government to which they have sacrificed all,—they exhibit a spectacle of distress, which one cannot view even at this distance without participating in what they feel. Why could not some of our useless wastes and forests have been allotted to their support? To have built them houses indeed, and to have furnished them with implements of husbandry, would have put us to no small expense; but I suppose the increase of population, and the improvement of the soil, would soon have been felt as a national advantage, and have indemnified the state, if not enriched it. But I am afraid that nothing so virtuous, or so wise, is to be looked for in the public measures of the present day. We are bountiful to foreigners, and neglect those of our own household. I remember that, compassionating the miseries of the Portuguese, at the time of the

Lisbon earthquake, we sent them a ship-load of tools to clear away the rubbish with, and to assist them in rebuilding the city. I remember, too, it was reported at the time, that the court of Portugal accepted our wheel-barrows and spades with a very ill grace, and treated our bounty with contempt. An act like this in behalf of our brethren, carried only a little further, might possibly have redeemed them from ruin, have resulted in emolument to ourselves, have been received with joy, and repaid with gratitude. Such are my speculations upon the subject, who not being a politician by profession, and very seldom giving my attention for a moment to any such matter, may not be aware of difficulties and objections, which they of the cabinet can discern with half an eye. Perhaps to have taken under our protection a race of men proscribed by the Congress might be thought dangerous to the interests we hope to have hereafter in their high and mighty regards and affections. It is ever the way of those who rule the earth, to leave out of their reckoning Him who rules the universe. They forget that the poor have a friend more powerful to avenge, than they can be to oppress, and that treachery and perfidy must therefore prove bad policy in the end. The Americans themselves appear to me to be in a situation little less pitiable than that of the deserted Loyalists. A revolt can hardly be said to have been successful that has exchanged only an apprehended tyranny for a real one, and has shaken off the restraints of a well ordered government, merely to give room and opportunity for the jarring opinions and interests of its abettors to throw all into a state of anarchy.

This is evidently the case at present, and without a special interposition of Providence is likely to be for years to come. They will at last, perhaps, after much ill temper and bloodshed, settle into some sort of establishment; but hardly, I think, into a more desirable one (and it seems they themselves are pretty much of the same opinion) than they enjoyed before. Their fears of arbitrary imposition were certainly well founded. A struggle, therefore, might be necessary, in order to prevent it, and this end might surely have been answered without a renunciation of dependence. But the passions of a whole people, once put in motion, are not soon quieted. Contest begets aversion, a little success inspires more ambitious hopes, and thus a slight quarrel terminates at last in a breach never to be healed, and perhaps in the ruin of both parties. It does not seem likely, that a country so distinguished by the Creator with every thing that can make it desirable, should be given up to desolation for ever; and they possibly may have reason on their side, who suppose that in time it will have the pre-eminence over all others; but the day of such prosperity seems far distant: Omnipotence indeed can hasten it, and it may dawn when it is least expected. But we govern ourselves in all our reasonings by present appearances. Persons at least no better informed than myself are constrained to do so.

You surprise me most agreeably with a polite and sensible letter from Mr. Bacon<sup>1</sup>: that good man has a place in my heart, though I never saw him, and never may. I shall never see the print he so oblig-

<sup>1</sup> The sculptor.

ingly presents me with, without sentiments of gratitude and friendship, and shall endeavour to answer his letter in such terms as his kindness justly claims, as soon as the print arrives.

We have opened two of the cocoa nuts: one naught and the other excellent; the third promises to be a good one. I intended to have taken another subject when I began, and I wish I had. No man living is less qualified to settle nations than I am; but when I write to you, I talk,—that is, I write as fast as my pen can run, and on this occasion it ran away with me. I acknowledge myself in your debt for your last favour, but cannot pay you now, unless you will accept as payment, what I know you value more than all I can say beside, the most unfeigned assurances of my affection for you and yours.—Yours, etc.,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Oct. 20, 1783.*

I should not have been thus long silent, had I known with certainty where a letter of mine might find you. Your summer excursions, however, are now at an end, and addressing a line to you in the centre of the busy scene in which you spend your winter, I am pretty sure of my mark.

I see the winter approaching without much concern, though a passionate lover of fine weather and the pleasant scenes of summer; but the long evenings have their comforts too, and there is hardly to be found upon the earth, I suppose, so snug a creature as an Englishman by his fireside in the winter. I mean, however, an Englishman that lives in the

country, for in London it is not very easy to avoid intrusion. I have two ladies to read to, sometimes more, but never less. At present we are circumnavigating the globe, and I find the old story with which I amused myself some years since, through the great felicity of a memory not very retentive, almost new. I am, however, sadly at a loss for Cook's *Voyage*, can you send it? I shall be glad of Forster's too.<sup>1</sup> These together will make the winter pass merrily, and you will much oblige me.

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Oct. 20, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have nothing to say on political subjects, for two reasons; first, because I know none that at present would prove very amusing, especially to you who love your country; and, secondly, because there are none that I have the vanity to think myself qualified to discuss. I must beg leave, however, to rejoice a little at the failure of the Caisse d'Escomptes, because I think the French have well deserved it; and to mourn equally that the Royal George cannot be weighed; the rather, because I wrote two poems, one Latin and one English, to encourage the attempt. The former of these only having been published, which the sailors would understand but little of, may be

<sup>1</sup> Captain James Cook (1728-1779). The books referred to are: *A Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World performed in His Majesty's ships 'Resolution' and 'Adventure' in the years 1772-5*, written by James Cook, Commander of the 'Resolution,' 2 vols., 4to, 1777; and *A Voyage round the World in H.B.M. sloop 'Resolution,' commanded by Captain Cook, during the years 1772-5*, by George Forster, F.R.S., 2 vols., 4to, 1777.

the reason, perhaps, why they have not succeeded.—  
Believe me, my friend, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Oct. 22, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have made a point of saying no fine things to Mr. Bacon, upon an occasion that would well have justified them ; deterred by a *Caveat* he entered in his letter. Nothing can be more handsome than the present, nor more obliging than the manner in which he has made it. I take it for granted that the plate is, line for line, and stroke for stroke, an exact representation of his performance, as nearly at least, as light and shade can exhibit, upon a flat surface, the effect of a piece of statuary. I may be allowed, therefore, to say that I admire it. My situation affords me no opportunity to cultivate the science of connoisseurship ; neither would there be much propriety in my speaking the language of one to you, who disclaim the character. But we both know when we are pleased. It occurs to me, however, that I ought to say what it is that pleases me, for a general commendation, where there are so many particular beauties, would be insipid and unjust.

I think the figure of Lord Chatham singularly graceful, and his countenance full of the character that belongs to him. It speaks not only great ability and consummate skill, but a tender and heartfelt interest in the welfare of the charge committed to him. In the figure of the City, there is all that *empressement* (pardon a French term, it

expresses my idea better than any English one that occurs) that the importance of her errand calls for; and it is noble in its air, though in posture of supplication. But the figure of Commerce is indeed a perfect beauty. It is a literal truth, that I felt the tears flush into my eyes while I looked at her. The idea of so much elegance and grace having found so powerful a protection, was irresistible. There is a complacency and serenity in the air and countenance of Britannia, more suited to her dignity than that exultation and triumph which a less judicious hand might have dressed her in. She seems happy to sit at the feet of her deliverer.—I have most of the monuments in the Abbey by heart, but I recollect none that ever gave me so much pleasure. The faces are all expressive, and the figures are all graceful.—If you think the opinion of so unlearned a spectator worth communicating, and that I have not said more than Mr. Bacon's modesty can bear without offence, you are welcome to make him privy to my sentiments. I know not why he should be hurt by just praise; his fine talent is a gift, and all the merit of it is His property who gave it.

We were sorry to be told by Mr. Jones that you are neither of you well, and heartily wish you may be able to tell us in your next that you are better. Our love to Mrs. Newton.—Believe me, my dear friend, sincerely and affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

I am out of your debt.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Nov. 3, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—My time is short, and my opportunity not the most favourable. My letter will consequently be short likewise, and perhaps not very intelligible. I find it no very easy matter to bring my mind into that degree of composure, which is necessary to the arrangement either of words or matter. You will naturally expect to receive some account of this confusion that I describe, some reason given for it.—On Saturday night, at eleven o'clock, when I had not been in bed five minutes, I was alarmed by a cry of fire, announced by two or three shrill screams upon our staircase. Our servants, who were going to bed, saw it from their windows, and in appearance so near, that they thought our house in danger. I immediately rose, and putting by the curtain, saw sheets of fire rising above the ridge of Mr. Palmer's house, opposite to ours. The deception was such, that I had do doubt it had begun with *him*, but soon found that it was rather farther off. In fact, it was at three places;—in the outhouses belonging to George Griggs, Lucy and Abigail Tyrell. Having broke out in three different parts, it is supposed to have been maliciously kindled. A tar-barrel and a quantity of tallow made a most tremendous blaze, and the buildings it had seized upon being all thatched, the appearance became every moment more formidable. Providentially, the night was perfectly calm; so calm that candles without lanterns, of which there were multitudes in the street, burnt as steadily as in

a house. By four in the morning it was so far reduced, that all danger seemed to be over; but the confusion it had occasioned was almost infinite. Every man who supposed his dwelling-house in jeopardy, emptied it as fast as he could, and conveyed his moveables to the house of some neighbour, supposed to be more secure. Ours, in the space of two hours, was so filled with all sorts of lumber, that we had not even room for a chair by the fireside. George Griggs is the principal sufferer. He gave eighteen guineas, or nearly that sum to a woman whom, in his hurry, he mistook for his wife; but the supposed wife walked off with the money, and he will probably never recover it. He has likewise lost forty pounds' worth of wool. London never exhibited a scene of greater depredation, drunkenness, and riot. Every thing was stolen that could be got at, and every drop of liquor drunk that was not guarded. Only one thief has yet been detected; a woman of the name of J——, who was stopped by young Handscomb with an apron full of plunder. He was forced to strike her down, before he could wrest it from her. Could you visit the place, you would see a most striking proof of a Providence interposing to stop the progress of the flames. They had almost reached, that is to say, within six yards of Daniel Raban's wood pile, in which were fifty pounds' worth of faggots and furze: and exactly there they were extinguished; otherwise, especially if a breath of air had happened to move, all that side of the town must probably have been consumed. After all this dreadful conflagration, we find nothing burnt but the out-houses; and the dwellings to which they belonged have suffered only the damage

of being unroofed on that side next the fire. No lives were lost, nor any limbs broken. Mrs. Unwin, whose spirits served her while the hubbub lasted, and the day after, begins to feel the effect of it now. But I hope she will be relieved from it soon, being better this evening than I expected. As for me, I am impregnable to all such assaults. I have nothing, however, but this subject in my mind, and it is in vain that I invite any other into it. Having, therefore, exhausted this, I finish, assuring you of our united love, and hoping to find myself in a frame of mind more suited to my employment when I write next.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Nov. 10, 1783.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I have lost and wasted almost all my writing time, in making an alteration in the verses<sup>1</sup> I either enclose or subjoin, for I know not which will be the case at present. If prose comes readily, I shall transcribe them on another sheet, otherwise, on this. You will understand, before you have read many of them, that they are not for the press. I lay you under no other injunctions. The unkind behaviour of our acquaintance,<sup>2</sup> though it is possible that in some instances it may not much affect our happiness, nor engage many of our thoughts, will sometimes obtrude itself upon us with a degree of importunity not easily resisted; and then, perhaps, though almost insensible of it

<sup>1</sup> *The Valediction.*

<sup>2</sup> Thurlow and Colman, to each of whom Cowper had sent a copy of his first volume of Poems. Neither acknowledged the gift.

before, we feel more than the occasion will justify. In such a moment it was that I conceived this poem, and gave loose to a degree of resentment, which perhaps I ought not to have indulged, but which in a cooler hour I cannot altogether condemn. My former intimacy with the two characters was such, that I could not but feel myself provoked by the neglect with which they both treated me on the late occasion. So much by way of preface.

You ought not to have supposed that if you had visited us last summer, the pleasure of the interview would have been all your own. By such an imagination you wrong both yourself and us. Do you suppose we do not love you? You cannot suspect your mother of coldness; and as to me, assure yourself I have no friend in the world with whom I communicate without the least reserve, yourself excepted. Take heart then, and when you find a favourable opportunity to come, assure yourself of such a welcome from us both as you have a right to look for. But I have observed in your two last letters somewhat of a dejection and melancholy, that I am afraid you do not sufficiently strive against. I suspect you of being too sedentary. 'You cannot walk.' Why you cannot is best known to yourself. I am sure your legs are long enough, and your person does not overload them. But I beseech you ride, and ride often. I think I have heard you say, you cannot even do that without an object. Is not health an object? Is not a new prospect, which in most countries is gained at the end of every mile, an object? Assure yourself that easy chairs are no friends to cheerfulness, and that a long winter spent by the fireside is a prelude to an

unhealthy spring. Every thing I see in the fields is to me an object, and I can look at the same rivulet, or at a handsome tree, every day of my life, with new pleasure. This indeed is partly the effect of a natural taste for rural beauty, and partly the effect of habit; for I never in all my life have let slip the opportunity of breathing fresh air, and of conversing with nature, when I could fairly catch it. I earnestly recommend a cultivation of the same taste to you, suspecting that you have neglected it, and suffer for doing so.

Last Saturday se'nnight, the moment I had composed myself in my bed, your mother, too, having just got into hers, we were alarmed by a cry of fire on the staircase. I immediately rose, and saw sheets of flame above the roof of Mr. Palmer's house, our opposite neighbour. The mischief, however, was not so near to him as it seemed to be, having begun in a butcher's yard, at a little distance. We made all haste downstairs, and soon threw open the street door, for the reception of as much lumber, of all sorts, as our house would hold, brought into it by several who thought it necessary to move their furniture. In two hours' time we had so much that we could hold no more, even the uninhabited part of our building being filled. Not that we ourselves were entirely secure—an adjoining thatch, on which fell showers of sparks, being rather a dangerous neighbour. Providentially, however, the night was perfectly calm, and we escaped. By four in the morning it was extinguished, having consumed many out-buildings, but no dwelling-house. Your mother suffered a little in her health, from the fatigue and bustle

of the night, but soon recovered. As for me, it hurt me not. The slightest wind would have carried the fire to the very extremity of the town, there being multitudes of thatched buildings and faggot-piles so near to each other, that they must have proved infallible conductors.

We rejoice in the recovery of John and William. Thank you for the communication of the letters, which I return, but have not time to comment upon them. I only applaud your feelings upon the occasion; it is a proper pride that resents an injury by conferring a favour. I cannot but wish you had had the means of doing it. Your mother wishes you to take six pounds due to her from your uncle and pay Mrs. Newton and yourself when a convenient time shall offer.

The balloons prosper: and I congratulate you upon it. Thanks to Montgolfier, we shall fly at last. Our sincere and affectionate good wishes attend you all.—Yours ever, my dear friend,

W. C

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Nov. 17, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A parcel arrived last night, the contents of which shall be disposed of according to order. We thank Mrs. Newton (not from the teeth outwards) for the tooth-brushes.

The country around us is much alarmed with apprehensions of fire. Two have happened since that of Olney. One at Hitchin, where the damage is said to amount to eleven thousand pounds, and another, at a place not far from Hitchin, of which

I have not learnt the name. Letters have been dropped at Bedford, threatening to burn the town; and the inhabitants have been so intimidated as to have placed a guard in many parts of it several nights past. Some madman or some devil has broke loose, who it is to be hoped will pay dear for these effusions of his malignity. Since our conflagration here, we have sent two women and a boy to the justice for depredation; Sue Riviss, for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you well remember, escaped, for want of evidence; not that evidence was indeed wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol had Billy Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he good-naturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favour, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones, is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some iron-work, the property of Griggs, the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be whipt, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house<sup>1</sup> to the high arch,<sup>2</sup> and back again.

<sup>1</sup> The 'Round House' on the Market Hill.

<sup>2</sup> The rise in the ground near the Congregational Church. Two streams running along Olney High Street, one from the Yardley Road and one from Spring Lane here met, and the combined waters passed through the High Arch to the river.

He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed it, had filled his left hand with red ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable Handscomb, who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to strike harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver End, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapt his face with a most Amazonian fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle threshed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing. Mr. Teedon has been here, and is gone again. He came to thank me for an old pair of breeches. In answer to our inquiries after his health, he replied that he had a slow fever, which made him take all possible care not to inflame his blood. I admitted his prudence, but in his particular instance, could not very clearly discern the need of it. Pump water will not heat

him much ; and, to speak a little in his own style, more inebriating fluids are to him, I fancy, not very attainable. He brought us news, the truth of which, however, I do not vouch for, that the town of Bedford was actually on fire yesterday, and the flames not extinguished when the bearer of the tidings left it.

Swift observes, when he is giving his reasons why the preacher is elevated always above his hearers, that let the crowd be as great as it will below, there is always room enough over-head. If the French philosophers can carry their art of flying to the perfection they desire, the observation may be reversed, the crowd will be over-head, and they will have most room who stay below. I can assure you, however, upon my own experience, that this way of travelling is very delightful. I dreamt, a night or two since, that I drove myself through the upper regions in a balloon and pair, with the greatest ease and security. Having finished the tour I intended, I made a short turn, and, with one flourish of my whip, descended ; my horses prancing and curvetting with an infinite share of spirit, but without the least danger, either to me or my vehicle. The time, we may suppose, is at hand, and seems to be prognosticated by my dream, when these airy excursions will be universal, when judges will fly the circuit, and bishops their visitations ; and when the tour of Europe will be performed with much greater speed, and with equal advantage, by all who travel merely for the sake of having it to say, that they have made it.

I beg you will accept for yourself and yours our

unfeigned love, and remember me affectionately to Mr. Bacon, when you see him.—Yours, my dear friend,  
WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Nov. 23, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your opinion of voyages and travels would spoil an appetite less keen than mine; but being pretty much, perhaps more than any man who can be said to enjoy his liberty, confined to a spot, and being very desirous of knowing all that can be known of this same planet of ours, while I have the honour to belong to it,—and having, besides, no other means of information at my command, I am constrained to be satisfied with narratives, not always, indeed, to be implicitly depended upon, but which, being subjected to the exercise of a little consideration, cannot materially deceive us. Swinburne's<sup>1</sup> is a book I had fixed upon, and determined, if possible, to procure, being pleased with some extracts from it, which I found in the *Review*. I need hardly add that I shall be much obliged to Mrs. Hill for a sight of it. I account myself truly and much indebted to that lady for the trouble she is so kind as to take upon my account, and shall esteem myself her debtor for all the amusement I meet with, in the southern hemisphere, should I be so fortunate as to get there. My reading is pretty much circumscribed, both by want of books and the influence of particular reasons. Politics are my abhorrence, being almost

<sup>1</sup> Swinburne's Travels. Henry Swinburne wrote *Travels through Spain in 1775-1776*, and *Travels in the Two Sicilies in 1777-1779*.

always hypothetical, fluctuating, and impracticable. Philosophy—I should have said natural philosophy, mathematically studied, does not suit me; and such exhibitions of that subject, as are calculated for less learned readers, I have read in former days, and remember in the present. Poetry, English poetry, I never touch, being pretty much addicted to the writing of it, and knowing that much intercourse with those gentlemen betrays us unavoidably into a habit of imitation, which I hate and despise most cordially.

I am glad my uncle is so well, and that he found new beauties in so old an acquaintance as the scene at Hastings. My most affectionate respects to him, if you please, when you see him next.—If *he* be the happiest man, who has least money in the funds, there are few upon earth whom I have any occasion to envy. I would consent, however, to have my pounds multiplied into thousands, even at the hazard of all I might feel from that tormenting passion. I send nothing to the papers myself, but Unwin sometimes sends for me. His receptacle of my squibs is the *Public Advertiser*; but they are very few, and my present occupations are of a kind that will still have a tendency to make them fewer.—Yours, my dear friend, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Nov. 24, 1783.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—An evening unexpectedly retired, and which your mother and I spend without company (an occurrence far from frequent), affords me a favourable opportunity to write by

to-morrow's post, which else I could not have found. You are very good to consider my literary necessities with so much attention, and I feel proportionably grateful. Blair's Lectures (though I suppose they must make a part of my private studies, not being *ad captum fœminarum*) will be perfectly welcome.

You say you felt my verses ; I assure you that in this you followed my example, for I felt them first. A man's lordship<sup>1</sup> is nothing to me, any further than in connection with qualities that entitle him to my respect. If he thinks himself privileged by it to treat me with neglect, I am his humble servant, and shall never be at a loss to render him an equivalent. I am, however, most angry with the manager.<sup>2</sup> He has published a book since he received mine, and has not vouchsafed to send it me ; a requital which good manners, not to say the remembrance of former friendship, ought to have suggested. I will not, however, belie my knowledge of mankind so much, as to seem surprised at treatment which I had abundant reason to expect. To these men, with whom I was once intimate, and for many years, I am no longer necessary, no longer convenient, or in any respect an object. They think of me as of the man in the moon, and whether I have a lantern, a dog and a faggot, or whether I have neither of those desirable accommodations, is to them a matter of perfect indifference : upon that point we are agreed, our indifference is mutual, and were I to publish again, which is not impossible, I should give them a proof of it.

<sup>1</sup> A reference to Thurlow.

<sup>2</sup> Colman, who was manager of the Haymarket Theatre.

L'Estrange's *Josephus* has lately furnished us with evening lectures. But the historian is so tediously circumstantial, and the translator so insupportably coarse and vulgar, that we are all three<sup>1</sup> weary of him. How would Tacitus have shone upon such a subject, great master as he was of the art of description, concise without obscurity, and affecting without being poetical. But so it was ordered, and for wise reasons no doubt, that the greatest calamities any people ever suffered, and an accomplishment of one of the most signal prophecies in the Scripture, should be recorded by one of the worst writers. The man was a temporiser too, and courted the favour of his Roman masters at the expense of his own creed; or else an infidel, and absolutely disbelieved it. You will think me very difficult to please; I quarrel with Josephus for the want of elegance, and with some of our modern historians for having too much. With him, for running right forward like a gazette, without stopping to make a single observation by the way; and with them, for pretending to delineate characters that existed two thousand years ago, and to discover the motives by which they were influenced, with the same precision as if they had been their contemporaries. Simplicity is become a very rare quality in a writer. In the decline of great kingdoms, and where refinement in all the arts is carried to an excess, I suppose it is always rare. The latter Roman writers are remarkable for false ornament, they were yet no doubt admired by the readers of their own day; and with respect to authors of the present era, the most popular among them appear

<sup>1</sup> Cowper, Mrs. Unwin, and Lady Austen.

to me equally censurable on the same account. Swift and Addison were simple; Pope knew how to be so, but was frequently tinged with affectation; since their day I hardly know a celebrated writer who deserves the character. But your mother wants room for a postscript, so my lecture must conclude abruptly.—Yours, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Nov. 30, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have neither long visits to pay nor to receive, nor ladies to spend hours in telling me that which might be told in five minutes, yet often find myself obliged to be an economist of time, and to make the most of a short opportunity. Let our station be as retired as it may, there is no want of playthings and avocations, nor much need to seek them in this world of ours. Business, or what presents itself to us, under that imposing character, will find us out, even in the stillest retreat, and plead its importance, however trivial in reality, as a just demand upon our attention. It is wonderful how by means of such real or seeming necessities, my time is stolen away. I have just time to observe that time is short, and by the time I have made the observation, time is gone. I have wondered in former days at the patience of the Antediluvian world; that they could endure a life almost millenary, with so little variety as seems to have fallen to their share. It is probable that they had much fewer employments than we. Their affairs lay in a narrower compass; their libraries were indifferently furnished; philosophical researches

were carried on with much less industry and acuteness of penetration, and fiddles, perhaps, were not even invented. How then could seven or eight hundred years of life be supportable? I have asked this question formerly, and been at a loss to resolve it; but I think I can answer it now. I will suppose myself born a thousand years before Noah was born or thought of. I rise with the sun; I worship; I prepare my breakfast; I swallow a bucket of goats' milk, and a dozen good sizeable cakes. I fasten a new string to my bow, and my youngest boy, a lad of about thirty years of age, having played with my arrows till he has stripped off all the feathers, I find myself obliged to repair them. The morning is thus spent in preparing for the chace, and it is become necessary that I should dine. I dig up my roots; I wash them; I boil them; I find them not done enough, I boil them again; my wife is angry; we dispute; we settle the point; but in the mean time the fire goes out, and must be kindled again. All this is very amusing. I hunt; I bring home the prey; with the skin of it I mend an old coat, or I make a new one. By this time the day is far spent; I feel myself fatigued, and retire to rest. Thus what with tilling the ground and eating the fruit of it, hunting and walking, and running, and mending old clothes, and sleeping and rising again, I can suppose an inhabitant of the primæval world so much occupied, as to sigh over the shortness of life, and to find at the end of many centuries, that they had all slipt through his fingers, and were passed away like a shadow. What wonder then that I, who live in a day of so much greater refinement, when there is so much more to be wanted, and

wished, and to be enjoyed, should feel myself now and then pinched in point of opportunity, and at some loss for leisure to fill four sides of a sheet like this? Thus, however, it is, and if the ancient gentlemen to whom I have referred, and their complaints of the disproportion of time to the occasions they had for it, will not serve me as an excuse, I must even plead guilty, and confess that I am often in haste, when I have no good reason for being so.

This by way of introduction; now for my letter. Mr. Scott is desired by Mr. De Coetlogon to contribute to the *Theological Review*, of which, I suppose, that gentleman is a manager. He says he has insured your assistance, and at the same time desires mine, either in prose or verse. He did well to apply to you, because you can afford him substantial help; but as for me, had he known me better, he would never have suspected me for a theologian, either in rhyme or otherwise.

Lord Dartmouth's Mr. Wright spent near two hours with me this morning; a respectable old man, whom I always see with pleasure, both for his master's sake and for his own. I was glad to learn from him that his lordship has better health than he has enjoyed for some years.—Believe me, my dear friend, your affectionate

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 15, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I know not how it fares with you at a time when philosophy has just brought forth her most extraordinary production, not excepting, perhaps, that prodigy, a ship, in all respects

complete, and equal to the task of circumnavigating the globe. My mind, however, is frequently getting into these balloons, and is busy in multiplying speculations as airy as the regions through which they pass. The last account from France, which seems so well authenticated, has changed my jocularity upon this occasion into serious expectation. The invention of these new vehicles is yet in its infancy, yet already they seem to have attained a degree of perfection which navigation did not reach, till ages of experience had matured it, and science had exhausted both her industry and her skill, in its improvement. I am aware, indeed, that the first boat or canoe that was ever formed, though rude in its construction—perhaps not constructed at all, being only a hollow tree that had fallen casually in the water, and which, though furnished with neither sails nor oars, might yet be guided by a pole—was a more perfect creature in its kind than a balloon at present; the single circumstance of its manageable nature giving it a clear superiority both in respect of safety and convenience. But the atmosphere, though a much thinner medium, we well know, resists the impression made upon it by the tail of a bird, as effectually as the water that of a ship's rudder. Pope, when inculcating one of his few useful lessons, and directing mankind to the providence of God as the true source of all their wisdom, says beautifully—

Learn of the little nautilus to sail,  
Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale.

It is easy to parody these lines, so as to give them

an accommodation and suitableness to the present purpose.

Learn of the circle-making kite to fly,  
Spread the fan-tail, and wheel about the sky.

It is certain, at least, that nothing within the reach of human ingenuity will be left unattempted to accomplish, and add all that is wanting to this last effort of philosophical contrivance. The approximating powers of the telescope, and the powers by which the thunderstorm is delivered of its contents peaceably and without mischief, were once, perhaps, in appearance more remote from discovery, and seemed less practicable, than we may now suppose it, to give direction to that which is already buoyant; especially possessed as we are of such consummate mechanical skill, already masters of principles which we have nothing to do but to apply, of which we have already availed ourselves in the similar case of navigation, and having in every fowl of the air a pattern, which now at length it may be sufficient to imitate. Wings and a tail, indeed, were of little use, while the body, so much heavier than the space of air it occupied, was sure to sink by its own weight, and could never be held in equipoise by any implements of the kind which human strength could manage. But now we float; at random, indeed, pretty much, and as the wind drives us; for want of nothing, however, but the steerage which invention, the conqueror of many equal, if not superior difficulties, may be expected to supply. Should the point be carried, and man at last become as familiar with the air as he has long been with the ocean, will it in its consequences prove a mercy, or a judgment?

I think, a judgment. First, because if a power to convey himself from place to place, like a bird, would have been good for him, his Maker would have formed him with such a capacity. But he has been a groveller upon the earth for six thousand years, and now at last, when the close of this present state of things approaches, begins to exalt himself above it. So much the worse for *him*. Like a truant school-boy, he breaks his bounds, and will have reason to repent of his presumption. Secondly, I think it will prove a judgment, because, with the exercise of very little foresight, it is easy to prognosticate a thousand evils which the project must necessarily bring after it; amounting at last to the confusion of all order, the annihilation of all authority, with dangers both to property and person, and impunity to the offenders. Were I an absolute legislator, I would, therefore, make it death for a man to be convicted of flying, the moment he could be caught; and to bring him down from his altitudes by a bullet sent through his head or his carriage, should be no murder. Philosophers would call me a Vandal; the scholar would say that, had it not been for me, the fable of Dædalus would have been realised; and historians would load my memory with reproaches of phlegm, and stupidity, and oppression; but in the mean time the world would go on quietly, and if it enjoyed less liberty, would at least be more secure.

I know not what are your sentiments upon the subject of the East India Bill. This, too, has frequently afforded me matter of speculation. I can easily see that it is not without its blemishes; but its beauties, in my eye, are much predominant.

Whatever may be its author's views, if he delivers so large a portion of mankind from such horrible tyranny as the East has so long suffered, he deserves a statue much more than Mongolfier, who, it seems, is to receive that honour. Perhaps he may bring our own freedom into jeopardy; but to do this for the sake of emancipating nations so much more numerous than ourselves, is at least generous, and a design that should have my encouragement, if I had any encouragement to afford it.

We are well, and love you. Remember us, as I doubt not you do, with the same affection, and be content with my sentiments upon subjects such as these, till I can send you, if that day should ever come, a letter more worthy of your reception.—  
Nous sommes les vôtres,

GUILLAUME ET MARIE.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Dec. 27, 1783.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Thanks to the patriotic junto, whose efforts have staved off the expected dissolution, franks have not yet lost their currency. Ignorant as they were that my writing by this post depended upon the existence of the present parliament, they have conducted their deliberations with a sturdiness and magnanimity that would almost tempt one to suppose that they had known it. So true it is, that the actions of men are connected with consequences they are little aware of; and that events, comparatively trivial in themselves, may give birth to the most important.

My thoughts of ministers and men in power are

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nearly akin to yours. It is well for the public, when the rulers of a state are actuated by principles that may happen to coincide with its interests. The ambition of an individual has often been made subservient to the general good ; and many a man has served his country, merely for the sake of immortalising himself by doing it. So far, it seems to me, the natural man is to be trusted, and no farther. Self is at the bottom of all his conduct. If self can be pleased, flattered, enriched, exalted by his exertions, and his talents are such as qualify him for great usefulness, his country shall be the better for him. And this, perhaps, is all the patriotism we have a right to look for. In the mean time, however, I cannot but think such a man in some degree a respectable character, and am willing, at least, to do him honour, so far as I feel myself benefited by him. Ambition and the love of fame are certainly no Christian principles, but they are such as commonly belong to men of superior minds, and the fruit they produce may often plead their apology. The great men of the world are of a piece with the world to which they belong ; they are raised up to govern it, and in the government of it are prompted by worldly motives : but it prospers, perhaps, under their management ; and when it does, the Christian world, which is totally a distinct creation, partaking of the advantage, has cause to be thankful. The sun is a glorious creature ; he does much good, but without intending it. I, however, who am conscious of the good he does, though I know not what religion he is of, or whether he has any or none, rejoice in his effects, admire him, and am sensible that it is every man's duty to be thankful for him. In this

sentiment I know you agree with me, for I believe he has not a warmer votary than yourself.

We say, the king can do no wrong; and it is well for poor George the Third that he cannot. In my opinion, however, he has lately been within a hair's-breadth of that predicament. His advisers, indeed, are guilty, and not he; but he will probably find, however hard it may seem, that if he can do no wrong he may yet suffer the consequences of the wrong he cannot do. He has dismissed his servants but not disgraced them; they triumph in their degradation, and no man is willing to supply their places. Must their offices remain unoccupied, or must they be courted to resume them? Never was such a distracted state of things within my remembrance; and I much fear that this is but the beginning of sorrows. It is not a time of day for a king to take liberties with the people: there is a spirit in the Commons that will not endure it; and his Majesty's advisers must be less acquainted with the temper of the times than it is possible to suppose them, if they imagine that such strides of prerogative will not be resented. The address will gall him. I am sorry that he has exposed himself to such a reprehension, but I think it warranted by the occasion. I pity him; but king as he is, and much as I have always honoured him, had I been a member I should have voted for it.

I am obliged to Mr. Bacon for thinking of me. That expression, however, does not do justice to my feelings. Even with the little knowledge I have of him, I should love him, had I no reason to suppose myself at any time an object of his attention; but knowing that I am so happy as to have a share in

his remembrance, I certainly love him the more. Truly I am not in his debt: I cannot say wherefore it is so, but certainly few days pass in which I do not remember *him*. The print, indeed, with which he favoured me, and which is always in my view, must often suggest the recollection of him; but though I greatly value it, I do not believe it is my only prompter.

I finish with what I wish may make you laugh, as it did me. Mr. Scott, exhorting the people to frequent prayer, closed his address thus:—‘You have nothing to do but to ask, and you will ever find Him ready to bestow. Open your wide mouths, and He will fill them.’

Mrs. Unwin is well. Accept an old but a true conclusion—our united love to you and yours, and believe me, my dear friend, Your ever affectionate

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Jan. 3, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Your silence began to be distressing both to your mother and me, and had I not received a letter from you last night, I should have written by this post to inquire after your health. How can it be, that you, who are not stationary like me, but often change your situation and mix with a variety of company, should suppose me furnished with such abundant materials, and yourself destitute? I assure you faithfully, that I do not find the soil of Olney prolific in the growth of such articles as make letter-writing a desirable employment. No place contributes less to the

catalogue of incidents, or is more scantily supplied with anecdotes worth notice.

We have

One parson, one poet, one helman, one crier,  
And the poor poet is our only 'squire.

Guess, then, if I have not more reason to expect two letters from you, than you one from me. The principal occurrence, and that which affects me most at present, came to pass this moment. The stair-foot door<sup>1</sup> being swelled by the thaw, would do any thing better than it would open. An attempt to force it upon that office has been attended with such a horrible dissolution of its parts, that we were immediately obliged to introduce a chirurgeon, commonly called a carpenter, whose applications we have some hope will cure it of a locked jaw, and heal its numerous fractures. His medicines are powerful chalybeates, and a certain glutinous salve, which he tells me is made of the tails and ears of animals. The consequences, however, are rather unfavourable to my present employment, which does not well brook noise, bustle, and interruption.

This being the case, I shall not perhaps be either so perspicuous, or so diffuse, on the subject of which you desire my sentiments, as I should be; but I will do my best. Know, then, that I have learned long since, of Abbé Raynal, to hate all monopolies, as injurious, howsoever managed, to the interests of commerce at large: consequently the charter in question would not at any rate be a favourite of mine. This, however, is of itself, I confess, no sufficient reason to justify the resumption of it. But

<sup>1</sup> The stairs rise from the parlour.

such reasons, I think, are not wanting. A grant of that kind, it is well known, is always forfeited by the nonperformance of the conditions. And why not equally forfeited, if those conditions are exceeded, if the design of it be perverted, and its operation extended to objects which were never in the contemplation of the donor? This appears to me to be no misrepresentation of their case, whose charter is supposed to be in danger. It constitutes them a trading company, and gives them an exclusive right to traffic in the East Indies. But it does no more. It invests them with no sovereignty; it does not convey to them the royal prerogative of making war and peace, which the king cannot alienate if he would. But this prerogative they have exercised, and, forgetting the terms of their institution, have possessed themselves of an immense territory, which they have ruled with a rod of iron, to which it is impossible they should ever have a right, unless such a one as it is a disgrace to plead,—the right of conquest. The potentates of this country they dash in pieces like a potter's vessel, as often as they please, making the happiness of thirty millions of mankind a consideration subordinate to that of their own emolument, oppressing them as often as it may serve a lucrative purpose, and in no instance, that I have ever heard, consulting their interest or advantage. That government, therefore, is bound to interfere, and to unking these tyrants, is to me self-evident. And if having subjugated so much of this miserable world, it is therefore necessary that we must keep possession of it, it appears to me a duty so binding upon the legislature to rescue it from the hands of those usurpers,

that I should think a curse, and a bitter one, must follow the neglect of it. But suppose this were done, can they be legally deprived of their charter? In truth I think so. If the abuse and perversion of a charter can amount to a defeasance of it, never were they so grossly palpable as in this instance; never was charter so justly forfeited. Neither am I at all afraid that such a measure should be drawn into a precedent, unless it could be alleged as a sufficient reason for not hanging a rogue, that perhaps magistracy might grow wanton in the exercise of such a power, and now and then hang up an honest man for its amusement. When the governors of the Bank shall have deserved the same severity, I hope they will meet with it. In the mean time I do not think them a whit more in jeopardy because a corporation of plunderers have been brought to justice.

We are sorry for Mrs. Unwin's relapse. Half an ounce of senna boiled in half a pint of water, and wrung till it will yield no more, half an ounce of Epsom salts dissolved in it. Half the quantity taken an hour or two before rising is Dr. Kerr's prescription for the same disorder. He is a physician of great eminence at Northampton, and to my knowledge his remedy has been successful. Add to it a tea-spoonful of spirits of lavender or grate nutmeg into it. You are desired to keep the money till you hear further.

We are well and love you all. I never wrote in such a hurry, nor in such disturbance. Pardon the effects, and believe me yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO MRS. HILL

Jan. 5, 1784.

DEAR MADAM,—You will readily pardon the trouble I give you by this line, when I plead my attention to your husband's convenience in my excuse. I know him to be so busy a man, that I cannot in conscience trouble him with a commission, which I know it is impossible he should have leisure to execute. After all, the labour would devolve upon you, and therefore I may as well address you in the first instance.

I have read, and return the books you were so kind as to procure for me. Mr. Hill gave me hopes, in his last, that from the library, to which I have subscribed, I might still be supplied with more. I have not many more to wish for, nor do I mean to make any unreasonable use of your kindness. In about a fortnight I shall be favoured, by a friend in Essex, with as many as will serve me during the rest of the winter. In summer I read but little. In the mean time I shall be much obliged to you for Forster's Narrative<sup>1</sup> of the same Voyage, if your librarian has it; and likewise for Swinburne's *Travels*,<sup>2</sup> which Mr. Hill mentioned. If they can be sent at once, which perhaps the terms of subscription may

<sup>1</sup> See letter, October 20, 1783. Johann Georg Forster (1754-94) was a traveller who with his father, Reinhold Forster, accompanied Cook in his second voyage, as naturalist. Georg Forster published a rival account of Cook's voyage in the *Resolution*, against the orders of the Admiralty. He afterwards settled in Germany, marrying a daughter of Heyne, the philologist.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Swinburne (1743-1803) was born at Bristol. Wrote *Travels through Spain*, 1775 and 1776, published 1779—a book quoted by Gibbon in the ninth and tenth chapters of the *Decline and Fall*. See Letter and Note, Nov. 23, 1783.

not allow, I shall be glad to receive them so. If not, then Forster's first, and Swinburne afterwards: and Swinburne, at any rate, if Forster is not to be procured.

Reading over what I have written, I find it perfectly free and easy; so much indeed in that style, that, had I not had repeated proofs of your good-nature in other instances, I should have modesty enough to suppress it, and attempt something more civil, and becoming a person who has never had the happiness of seeing you. But I have always observed, that sensible people are best pleased with what is natural and unaffected. Nor can I tell you a plainer truth, than that I am, without the least dissimulation, and with a warm remembrance of past favours,—My dear madam, your affectionate humble servant,

WM. COWPER.

I beg to be remembered to Mr. Hill.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Jan. 8, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I wish you had more leisure, that you might oftener favour me with a page of politics. The authority of a newspaper is not of sufficient weight to determine my opinions, and I have no other documents to be set down by. I, therefore, on this subject, am suspended in a state of constant scepticism, the most uneasy condition in which the judgment can find itself. But *your* politics have weight with me, because I know your independent spirit, the justness of your reasonings, and the opportunities you have of information.

But I know likewise the urgency and the multiplicity of your concerns; and, therefore, like a neglected clock, must be contented to go wrong, except when, perhaps twice in the year, you shall come to set me right.

Public credit is indeed shaken, and the funds at a low ebb. How can they be otherwise, when our western wing is already clipt to the stump, and the shears, at this moment, threaten our eastern. Low, however, as our public stock is, it is not lower than my private one; and this being the article that touches me most nearly, at present, I shall be obliged to you, if you will have recourse to such ways and means for the replenishment of my exchequer, as your wisdom may suggest, and your best ability suffice to execute. The experience I have had of your readiness upon all similar occasions, has been very agreeable to me; and I doubt not but upon the present I shall find you equally prompt to serve me.—So, yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Jan. 13, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I too have taken leave of the old year, and parted with it just when you did, but with very different sentiments and feelings upon the occasion. I looked back upon all the passages and occurrences of it, as a traveller looks back upon a wilderness, through which he has passed with weariness and sorrow of heart, reaping no other fruit of his labour than the poor consolation that, dreary as the desert was, he has left it all behind him. The

traveller would find even this comfort considerably lessened, if, as soon as he had passed one wilderness, another of equal length, and equally desolate, should expect him. In this particular, his experience and mine would exactly tally. I should rejoice indeed that the old year is over and gone, if I had not every reason to prophesy a new one similar to it.

The new year is already old in my account. I am not, indeed, sufficiently second-sighted to be able to boast by anticipation an acquaintance with the events of it yet unborn, but rest convinced that, be they what they may, not one of them comes a messenger of good to me. If even death itself should be of the number, he is no friend of mine. It is an alleviation of the woes even of an unenlightened man, that he can wish for death, and indulge a hope, at least, that in death he shall find deliverance. But, loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come when it once ended. For, more unhappy than the traveller with whom I set out, pass through what difficulties I may, through whatever dangers and afflictions, I am not a whit the nearer home, unless a dungeon may be called so. This is no very agreeable theme; but in so great a dearth of subjects to write upon, and especially impressed as I am at this moment with a sense of my own condition, I could choose no other. The weather is an exact emblem of my mind in its present state. A thick fog envelopes every thing, and at the same time it freezes intensely. You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to

encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it;—but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. The hedge that has been apparently dead, is not so; it will burst into leaf and blossom at the appointed time; but no such time is appointed for the stake that stands in it. It is as dead as it seems, and will prove itself no dissembler. 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. My friends, I know, expect that I shall see yet again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not in my own? For causes which to them it appears madness to allege, but which rest upon my mind with a weight of immovable conviction. If I am recoverable, why am I thus? why crippled and made useless in the church, just at that time of life, when, my judgment and experience being matured, I might be most useful? why cashiered and turned out of service, till, according to the course of nature, there is not life enough left in me to make amends for the years I have lost,—till there is no reasonable hope left that the fruit can ever pay the expense of the fallow? I forestall the answer:—God's ways are mysterious, and He giveth no account of His matters:—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs that use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained.

I am glad you have found so much hidden treasure; and Mrs. Unwin desires me to tell you that you did her no more than justice, in believing that she would rejoice in it. It is not easy to surmise the reason, why the reverend doctor, your predecessor, concealed it. Being a subject of a free government, and I suppose full of the divinity most in fashion, he could not fear lest his great riches should expose him to persecution. Nor can I suppose that he held it any disgrace for a dignitary of the church to be wealthy, at a time when churchmen in general spare no pains to become so. But the wisdom of some men has a droll sort of knavishness in it, much like that of a magpie, who hides what he finds with a deal of contrivance, merely for the pleasure of doing it.

Mrs. Unwin is tolerably well. She wishes me to add that she shall be obliged to Mrs. Newton, if, when an opportunity offers, she will give the worsted-merchant a jog. We congratulate you that Eliza does not grow worse, which I know you expected would be the case in the course of the winter. Present our love to her. Remember us to Sally Johnson, and assure yourself that we remain as warmly as ever.—Yours,

W. C.

M. U.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Jan. 22, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—When I first resolved to write an answer to your last, this evening, I had no thought of any thing more sublime than prose. But before I began, it occurred to me that perhaps you

would not be displeased with an attempt to give a poetical translation of the lines<sup>1</sup> you sent me. They are so beautiful, that I felt the temptation irresistible. At least, as the French say, it was *plus forte que moi*; and I accordingly complied. By this means I have lost an hour; and whether I shall be able to fill my sheets before supper, is as yet doubtful. But I will do my best.

For your remarks, I think them perfectly just. You have no reason to distrust your taste, or to submit the trial of it to me. You understand the use and the force of language as well as any man. You have quick feelings, and you are fond of poetry. How is it possible, then, that you should not be a judge of it? I venture to hazard only one alteration, which, as it appears to me, would amount to a little improvement. The seventh and eighth lines I think I should like better thus,—

*Aspirante levi zephyro et redeunte serenâ  
Anni temperie, fecundo e cespite surgunt.*

My reason is, that the word *cum* is repeated too soon. At least my ear does not like it; and when it can be done without injury to the sense, there seems to me to be an elegance in diversifying the expression, as much as possible, upon similar occasions. It discovers a command of phrase, and gives a more masterly air to the piece. *Tellus* and *Virtus* have the last syllable long, but the last syllable of *Virtutis* is short. I believe, therefore, that the last in *Telluris* is so too. If *extincta* stood unconnected with *telis*, I should prefer your word *micant* to the doctor's *vigent*. But the latter seems to stand more in

<sup>1</sup> *In brevitatem vitæ spatii hominibus concessi.* By Dr. Jortin.

direct opposition to that sort of extinction, which is effected by a shaft or arrow. In the day-time the stars may be said to die, and in the night to recover their strength. Perhaps the Doctor had in his eye that noble line of Gray,—‘*Hyperion's march they spy, and glitt'ring shafts of war!*’ But it is a beautiful composition. It is tender, touching, and elegant. It is not easy to do it justice in English, as for example—

Suns that set, and moons that wane,  
 Rise and are restored again ;  
 Stars that orient day subdues,  
 Night at her return renews.  
 Herbs and flowers, the beauteous birth  
 Of the genial womb of earth,  
 Suffer but a transient death  
 From the winter's cruel breath.  
 Zephyr speaks ; serener skies  
 Warm the glebe, and they arise.  
 We, alas ! earth's haughty kings,  
 We, that promise mighty things,  
 Losing soon life's happy prime,  
 Droop, and fade, in little time.  
 Spring returns, but not our bloom ;  
 Still 'tis winter in the tomb.<sup>1</sup>

Many thanks for the books, which, being most admirably packed, came safe. They will furnish us with many a winter evening's amusement. We are glad that you intend to be the carrier back. We rejoice too that your cousin has remembered you in her will. The money she left to those who attended her hearse would have been better bestowed upon you ; and by this time perhaps she thinks so. Alas !

<sup>1</sup> Published in Cowper's *Works*, under the title ‘On the Shortness of Human Life.’

what an inquiry does that thought suggest, and how impossible to make it to any purpose! What are the employments of the departed spirit? and where does it subsist? Has it any cognizance of earthly things? Is it transported to an immeasurable distance; or is it still, though imperceptible to us, conversant with the same scene, and interested in what passes here? How little we know of a state to which we are all destined; and how does the obscurity, that hangs over that undiscovered country, increase the anxiety we sometimes feel as we are journeying towards it! It is sufficient, however, for such as you, and a few more of my acquaintance, to know that in your separate state you will be happy. Provision is made for your reception, and you will have no cause to regret aught that you have left behind.—*Apropos de ça*, I have written to Mr. Smith. My letter went this morning. How I love and honour that man! For many reasons I dare not tell him how much. But I hate the frigidity of the style, in which I am forced to address him. That line of Horace—‘*Dii tibi divitias dederunt artemque fruendi*’—was never half so applicable to the poet’s friend, as to Mr. Smith. My bosom burns to immortalise him. But prudence says ‘Forbear!’ and, though a poet, I pay respect to her injunctions.

I sincerely give you joy of the good you have unconsciously done by your example and conversation. That you seem to yourself not to deserve the acknowledgement your friend makes of it, is a proof that you do. Grace is blind to its own beauty; whereas such virtues as man may reach without it, are remarkable self-admirers. May you make such

impressions upon many of your order! I know none that need them more.

You do not want my praises of your conduct towards Mr. Peacock. It is well for him, however, and still better for yourself, that you are capable of such a part. It was said of some good man (my memory does not serve me with his name), 'do him an ill turn and you make him your friend for ever.' But it is Christianity only that forms such friends. I wish his father may be duly affected by this instance and proof of your superiority to those ideas of you which he has so unreasonably harboured. He is not in my favour now, nor will be upon any other terms.

I laughed at the comments you make on your own feelings, when the subject of them was a newspaper eulogium. But it was a laugh of pleasure and approbation: such indeed is the heart, and so is it made up. There are few that can do good, and keep their own secret, none perhaps without a struggle. Yourself, and your friend Smith, are no very common instances of the fortitude that is necessary in such a conflict. In former days, I have felt my heart beat, and every vein throb, upon such an occasion. To publish my own good deed was wrong. I knew it to be so. But to conceal it seemed like a voluntary injury to myself. Sometimes I could, and sometimes I could not succeed. My occasions for such conflicts indeed were not very numerous. Your mother's best love attends you. She is well.—Yours,

W. C.

Thanks for the sturgeon. Your mother's compliments to Mr. Wright. She wishes him very happy in his new relation.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Jan. 25, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—This contention about East Indian patronage seems not unlikely to avenge upon us, by its consequences, the mischiefs we have done there. The matter in dispute is too precious to be relinquished by either party; and each is jealous of the influence the other would derive from the possession of it. In a country whose politics have so long rolled upon the wheels of corruption, an affair of such value must prove a weight in either scale absolutely destructive of the very idea of a balance. Every man has his sentiments upon this subject, and I have mine. Were I constituted umpire of this strife, with full powers to decide it, I would tie a talent of lead about the neck of this patronage, and plunge it into the depths of the sea. To speak less figuratively, I would abandon all territorial interest in a country to which we can have no right, and which we cannot govern with any security to the happiness of the inhabitants, or without the danger of incurring either perpetual broils, or the most insupportable tyranny at home:—that sort of tyranny, I mean, which flatters and tantalises the subject with a show of freedom, and in reality allows him nothing more; bribing to the right and left, rich enough to afford the purchase of a thousand consciences, and consequently strong enough, if it happen to meet with an incorruptible one, to render all the efforts of that man, or of twenty such men, if they could be found, romantic, and of no effect. I am the king's most

loyal subject, and most obedient humble servant. But by his Majesty's leave, I must acknowledge I am not altogether convinced of the rectitude even of his own measures, or the simplicity of his views; and if I were satisfied that he himself is to be trusted, it is nevertheless palpable, that he cannot answer for his successors. At the same time he is my king, and I reverence him as such. I account his prerogative sacred, and shall never wish prosperity to a party that invades it, and that under the pretence of patriotism would annihilate all the consequence of a character essential to the very being of the constitution. For these reasons I am sorry that we have any dominion in the East,—that we have any such emoluments to contend about. Their immense value will probably prolong the dispute, and such struggles having been already made in the conduct of it, as have shaken our very foundations, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that still greater efforts and more fatal, are behind; and, after all, the decision in favour of either side may be ruinous to the whole. In the mean time, that the Company themselves are but indifferently qualified for the kingship, is most deplorably evident. What shall I say therefore? I distrust the court, I suspect the patriots, I put the Company entirely aside, as having forfeited all claim to confidence in such a business, and see no remedy of course, but in the annihilation, if that could be accomplished, of the very existence of our authority in the East Indies.

Unwin has lost a cousin, and found a thousand pound. She died worth sixty thousand; but left most of her fortune to poor relations, some of whom

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she has probably ruined by her kindness. Accept our best love to yourself and household. Mary Bell is dead and buried. The small-pox is in Dag Lane:<sup>1</sup> no other news.—Yours, my dear friend, most truly,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Feb. 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am glad that you have finished a work,<sup>2</sup> of which I well remember the beginning, and which I was sorry you thought it expedient to discontinue. Your reason for not proceeding was, however, such as I was obliged to acquiesce in, being suggested by a jealousy you felt, ‘lest your spirit should be betrayed into acrimony, in writing upon such a subject.’ I doubt not you have sufficiently guarded that point; and indeed, at the time, I could not discover that you had failed in it. I have busied myself this morning in contriving a Greek title, and in seeking a motto. The motto you mention is certainly apposite. But I think it an objection, that it has been so much in use; almost every writer, that has claimed a liberty to think for himself upon whatever subject, having chosen it. I therefore send you one, which I never saw in that shape yet, and which appears to me equally apt and proper. The Greek word, *δεσμος*, which signifies literally a shackle, may figuratively serve to express those chains which bigotry and pre-

<sup>1</sup> Dag Lane. Dagnell Lane or Dagnell Street, a name since foolishly altered to Weston Road. It takes its name from Dagnell Manor, a house that is still standing.

<sup>2</sup> *Apologia; or, Four Letters to a Minister of an Independent Church*, published March 1784. See letter of March 11, 1784.

judice cast upon the mind. It seems, therefore, to speak like a lawyer, no misnomer of your book, to call it,

*Μισοδεσμος.*

The following pleases me most of all the mottoes I have thought of. But with respect both to that and the title you will use your pleasure.

*Querelis*

*Haud justis assurgis, et irrita jurgia jactas.*

Æn. x. 94.

From the little I have seen, and the much I have heard of the manager of the Review you mention, I cannot feel even the smallest push of a desire to serve him in the capacity of poet. Indeed I dislike him so much, that, had I a drawer full of pieces fit for his purpose, I hardly think I should contribute to his collection. It is possible too, that I may live to be once more a publisher myself; in which case, I should be glad to find myself in possession of any such original pieces, as might decently make their appearance in a volume of my own. At present, however, I have nothing that would be of use to him; nor have I many opportunities of composing, Sunday being the only day in the week which we spend alone.

I am at this moment pinched for time, but was desirous of proving to you with what alacrity my Greek and Latin memory are always ready to obey you, and therefore by the first post have, to the best of my ability, complied with your request.—Believe me, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Feb. 10, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The morning is my writing time, and in the morning I have no spirits. So much the worse for my correspondents. Sleep, that refreshes my body, seems to cripple me in every other respect. As the evening approaches, I grow more alert, and when I am retiring to bed am more fit for mental occupation than at any other time. So it fares with us whom they call nervous. By a strange inversion of the animal economy, we are ready to sleep when we have most need to be awake, and go to bed just when we might sit up to some purpose. The watch is irregularly wound up, it goes in the night when it is not wanted, and in the day stands still. In many respects we have the advantage of our forefathers the Picts.<sup>1</sup> We sleep in a whole skin, and are not obliged to submit to the painful operation of puncturing ourselves from head to foot, in order that we may be decently dressed, and fit to appear abroad. But on the other hand, we have reason enough to envy them their tone of nerves, and that flow of spirits which effectually secured them from all uncomfortable impressions of a gloomy atmosphere, and from every shade of melancholy from every other cause. They understood, I suppose, the use of vulnerary herbs, having frequent occasion for some skill in surgery; but physicians, I presume, they had none, having no need of any. Is it possible, that a creature like myself can be

<sup>1</sup> Cowper was of Scots descent.

descended from such progenitors, in whom there appears not a single trace of family resemblance? What an alteration have a few ages made! They, without clothing, would defy the severest season; and I, with all the accommodations that art has since invented, am hardly secure even in the mildest. If the wind blows upon me when my pores are open, I catch cold. A cough is the consequence. I suppose if such a disorder could have seized a Pict, his friends would have concluded that a bone had stuck in his throat, and that he was in some danger of choking. They would perhaps have addressed themselves to the cure of his cough by thrusting their fingers into his gullet, which would only have exasperated the case. But they would never have thought of administering laudanum, my only remedy. For this difference, however, that has obtained between me and my ancestors, I am indebted to the luxurious practices, and enfeebling self-indulgence, of a long line of grandsires, who from generation to generation have been employed in deteriorating the breed, till at last the collected effects of all their follies have centred in my puny self—a man indeed, but not in the image of those that went before me;—a man, who sighs and groans, who wears out life in dejection and oppression of spirits, and who never thinks of the aborigines of the country to which he belongs, without wishing that he had been born among them. The evil is without a remedy, unless the ages that are passed could be recalled, my whole pedigree be permitted to live again, and being properly admonished to beware of enervating sloth and refinement, would preserve their hardiness of

nature unimpaired, and transmit the desirable quality to their posterity. I once saw Adam in a dream. We sometimes say of a picture, that we doubt not its likeness to the original, though we never saw him; a judgment we have some reason to form when the face is strongly characterized, and the features full of expression. So I think of my visionary Adam, and for a similar reason. His figure was awkward, indeed, in the extreme. It was evident that he had never been taught by a Frenchman to hold his head erect, or to turn out his toes; to dispose gracefully of his arms, or to simper without a meaning. But if Mr. Bacon was called upon to produce a statue of Hercules, he need not wish for a juster pattern. He stood like a rock; the size of his limbs, the prominence of his muscles, and the height of his stature, all conspired to bespeak him a creature whose strength had suffered no diminution; and who, being the first of his race, did not come into the world under a necessity of sustaining a load of infirmities, derived to him from the intemperance of others. He was as much stouter than a Pict, as I suppose a Pict to have been than I. Upon my hypothesis, therefore, there has been a gradual declension, in point of bodily vigour, from Adam down to me: at least if my dream were a just representation of that gentleman, and deserve the credit I cannot help giving it, such must have been the case.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON, BOOKSELLER<sup>1</sup>

Cambridge, Feb. 19, 1784.

SIR,—If you have Albinus's *Complete System of the Blood Vessels*, and his Anatomical Tables, beg you will send me a copy of each in sheets. As soon as I know the price shall remit the money.—I am, sir, etc.,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

Feb. 22, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I congratulate you on the thaw; I suppose it is an universal blessing, and probably felt all over Europe. I myself am the better for it, who wanted nothing that might make the frost supportable; what reason, therefore, have they to rejoice, who, being in want of all things, were exposed to its utmost rigour! The ice in my ink, however, is not yet dissolved. It was long before the frost seized it, but at last it prevailed. *The Sofa* has consequently received little or no addition since. It consists at present of four books and a part of a fifth; when the sixth is finished, the work is accomplished, but if I may judge by my present inability, that period is at a considerable distance.

I owe you thanks for your kind remembrance of me in your letter sent me on occasion of your departure, and as many for that which I received

<sup>1</sup> I insert this letter because Southey gives it; but we have no record that Cowper was at Cambridge at this date. Most likely Southey made a mistake of some kind. I have not been able to trace the original.

last night. I should have answered had I known where a line or two from me might find you; but, uncertain whether you were at home or abroad, my diligence, I confess, wanted the necessary spur.

It makes a capital figure among the comforts we enjoyed during the long severity of the season, that the same *incognito*<sup>1</sup> to all except ourselves, made us his almoners this year likewise, as he did the last, and to the same amount. Some we have been enabled, I suppose, to save from perishing, and certainly many from the most pinching necessity.

Are you not afraid, Tory as you are, to avow your principles to me, who am a Whig? Know that I am in the opposition; that though I pity the King, I do not wish him success in the present contest. But this is too long a battle to fight upon paper. Make haste, that we may decide it face to face.

Our respects wait upon Mrs. Bull, and our love upon the young Hebræan.<sup>2</sup> I wish you joy of his proficiency, and am glad that you can say, with the old man in Terence,—

omnes omnia

Bona dicere, et laudare fortunas meas,  
Qui gnatum haberem tali ingenio præditum.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

February, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I give you joy of a thaw, that has put an end to a frost of nine weeks continuance with very little interruption; the longest

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Smith, the banker.

<sup>2</sup> Young Tom Bull. He succeeded his father at Newport Pagnell.

that has happened since the year 1789. May I presume that you feel yourself indebted to me for intelligence, which perhaps no other of your correspondents will vouchsafe to communicate, though they are as well apprised of it, and as much convinced of the truth of it, as myself? It is, I suppose, every where felt as a blessing, but no where more sensibly than at Olney; though even at Olney the severity of it has been alleviated in behalf of many. The same benefactor, who befriended them last year, has with equal liberality administered a supply to their necessities in the present. Like the subterraneous flue that warms my myrtles, he does good, and is unseen. His injunctions of secrecy are still as rigorous as ever, and must therefore be observed with the same attention. He, however, is a happy man, whose philanthropy is not like mine, an impotent principle, spending itself in fruitless wishes. At the same time, I confess it is a consolation, and I feel it an honour, to be employed as the conductor, and to be trusted as the dispenser of another man's bounty. Some have been saved from perishing, and all, that could partake of it, from the most pitiable distress.

I will not apologise for my politics, or suspect them of error, merely because they are taken up from the newspapers. I take it for granted, that those reporters of the wisdom of our representatives are tolerably correct and faithful. Were they not, and were they guilty of frequent and gross misrepresentation, assuredly they would be chastised by the rod of parliamentary criticism. Could I be present at the debates, I should indeed have a better opinion of my documents. But if the House

of Commons be the best school of British politics, which I think an undeniable assertion, then he that reads what passes there has opportunities of information, inferior only to theirs who hear for themselves, and can be present upon the spot. Thus qualified, I take courage; and when a certain reverend neighbour<sup>1</sup> of ours curls his nose at me, and holds my opinions cheap, merely because he has passed through London, in his way to Wiltshire, I am not altogether convinced that he has reason on his side. I do not know that the air of the metropolis has a power to brighten the intellects, or that to sleep a night in the great city is a necessary cause of wisdom. He tells me that Mr. Fox is a rascal, and that Lord North is a villain; that every creature execrates them both, and that I ought to do so too. But I beg to be excused. Villain and rascal are appellations which we, who do not converse with great men, are rather sparing in the use of. Neither can I persuade myself that because one of them has frequented the gaming-table, and the other, after having been at the head of the court party, has associated with him, they are therefore traitors to their country, and fit only to be hanged. I can conceive them both to be most entirely persuaded of the rectitude of their conduct; and the rather, because I feel myself much inclined to believe that, being so, they are not mistaken. I cannot think that secret influence is a bugbear, a phantom conjured up to serve a purpose; the mere *shibboleth* of a party. Stuartism, in my mind, has been the characteristic of the present reign; and being, and having always been

<sup>1</sup> Bull.

somewhat of an enthusiast on the subject of British liberty, I am not able to withhold my reverence and good wishes from the man, whoever he be, that exerts himself in a constitutional way to oppose it. The son of Lord Chatham seems to me to have abandoned his father's principles. I admire neither his measures nor his temper; but very much admire the forbearance and lenity with which he is treated, and that consideration of his youth which men of equal ability, to say the least, and certainly of much greater experience, vouchsafe to show him. His obstinate continuance in office, with no better reason for it than an imaginary point of honour, is without example. It is *like* a young man either intoxicated with power, or implicitly, and at all hazards, executing the dictates of men more subtle and able than himself. I fear much that he is the tool of mischievous purposes, and that his unrelaxing steadiness, too much resembling that of a certain personage, will bring down a storm upon himself and upon the nation.

Caraccioli<sup>1</sup> upon the subject of self-acquaintance was never, I believe, translated. I have sometimes thought that the *Theological Miscellany* might be glad of a chapter of it monthly. It is a work which I much admire. You, who are master of their plan, can tell me whether such a contribution would be welcome. If you think it would, I would be punctual in my remittances; and a labour of

<sup>1</sup> Marquis de Caraccioli. Born at Paris 1723; died 1803. Author of *Jouissance de soi-même*, *Univers Énigmatique*, *Tableau de la Mort*, etc. His *Travels of Reason in Europe* were translated into English in 1780. Cowper's first volume of poems (1782) is prefaced by a quotation from Caraccioli. See also letters 8th March 1784, and 19th March 1784. Cowper, as the above shows, contemplated translating the *Jouissance de soi-même*.

that sort would suit me better in my present state of mind than original composition on religious subjects.

Remember us as those that love you, and are never unmindful of you.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Feb. 29, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have no frank, therefore cannot return the letters now. We are glad that you have such a Lord Petre in your neighbourhood. He must be a man of a liberal turn, to employ a heretic in such a service. I wish you a further acquaintance with him, not doubting that the more he knows you he will find you the more agreeable. You despair of becoming a prebendary for want of certain rhythmical talents, which you suppose me possessed of. But what think you of a cardinal's hat? Perhaps his lordship may have interest at Rome, and that greater honour may await you. Seriously, however, I respect his character, and should not be sorry if there were many such Papists in the land.

Mr. Smith has given free scope to his generosity, and contributed as largely to the relief of Olney as he did last year. Soon after I had given you notice of his first remittance, we received a second to the same amount, accompanied indeed with an intimation that we were to consider it as an anticipated supply, which, but for the uncommon severity of the present winter, he should have reserved for the next. The inference is, that next winter we are to

expect nothing. But the man and his beneficent turn of mind considered, there is some reason to suppose that, logical as the inference seems, it may yet be disappointed.

Adverting to your letter again, I perceive that you wish for my opinion of your answer to his lordship. Had I forgot to tell you that I approve of it, I know you well enough to be aware of the misinterpretation you would have put upon my silence. I am glad, therefore, that I happened to cast my eye upon your appeal to my opinion, before it was too late. A modest man, however able, has always some reason to distrust himself upon extraordinary occasions. Nothing is so apt to betray us into absurdity, as too great a dread of it; and the application of more strength than enough is sometimes as fatal as too little: but you have escaped very well, considering that you were addressing yourself to a lord, and that a lord is a creature you do not every day converse with. For my own part, when I write to a stranger, I feel myself deprived of half my intellects. I suspect that I shall write nonsense, and I do so. I tremble at the thought of an inaccuracy, and become absolutely ungrammatical. I feel myself sweat. I have recourse to the knife and the pounce. I correct half a dozen blunders, which in a common case I could not have committed, and have no sooner dispatched what I have written, than I recollect how much better I could have made it; how easily and genteelly I could have relaxed the stiffness of the phrase, and have cured the insufferable awkwardness of the whole, had they struck me a little earlier. Thus we stand in awe of we know not what, and miscarry through mere desire to excel.

I read Johnson's Prefaces<sup>1</sup> every night, except when the newspaper calls me off. At a time like the present, what author can stand in competition with a newspaper? or who, that has a spark of patriotism, does not point all his attention to the present crisis? The consequences that I expect will follow our commotions are too terrible to be mentioned. They will proclaim *themselves* soon, if I have any skill in political speculation.

The sturgeon was excellent. Your mother has been for some time afflicted with a pain in her side. The approach of spring is always unfriendly to her constitution. Farewell, we remember you all with the sincerest affection.—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

By this time I hope you have done with bark and vitriol, and that your appetite and spirits are restored.

I am so disgusted with Grandpapa P., for allowing himself to be silent, when so loudly called upon to write to you, that I do not choose to express my feelings. Woe to the man whom kindness cannot soften!

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 8, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—By this time I suppose the unhappy young man to whom you paid your charitable visit in Bridewell, is on the point of removing

<sup>1</sup> Introductions to the *Lives of the Poets*, by Samuel Johnson. Twenty-two *Lives* appeared in 1779, and the remainder in 1781. The collected edition of the *Lives* appeared in four volumes in 1783.

from Newgate, where he has been sometime, to Maidstone, his place of trial. His parents, especially his mother, are, as may be supposed, in the deepest affliction, in which his aunt \* \* \* is a sharer. She was with me this morning, charged with the fourth message of the kind, entreating me to intercede with Lord Dartmouth to intercede with the Judge, and to bespeak his favour;—a wild application, dictated by distress and ignorance of the integrity with which justice is administered in this country. I believe I have convinced them of the impropriety and indeed of the impossibility of all such sinister anticipation, but have not been able to excuse myself from the task of recommending him to the intercession of Lord Dartmouth, should he be condemned, an event which seems to be certain. I have told them (for I thought it would be cruel not to do so) that I can give them no encouragement to expect that my interposition will do them any service; that there being no circumstance in the complexion of his case that seems to single him out from the common herd of offenders, and to give colour to such a proceeding, I did not at all suppose that his lordship would be willing to undertake the office; or that if he should, the king would be entreated, mercy not being so much a matter of mere favour as not to be determined in its operations by the peculiar and distinguishing features of the case. Thus stands the affair. I could not decline a labour to which common humanity calls me, though in consideration of the hopelessness of my errand, for his lordship's sake as well as my own, I would gladly have done so.

I thank you for the two first numbers of the *Theo-*

*logical Miscellany.* I have not read them regularly through, but sufficiently to observe that they are much indebted to Omicron. An essay, signed Parvulus, pleased me likewise; and I shall be glad if a neighbour of ours, to whom I have lent them, should be able to apply to his own use the lesson it inculcates. On further consideration I have seen reason to forego my purpose of translating Caraccioli. Though I think no book more calculated to teach the art of pious meditation, or to enforce a conviction of the vanity of all pursuits that have not the soul's interests for their object, I can yet see a flaw in his manner of instructing, that in a country so enlightened as ours would escape nobody's notice. Not enjoying the advantages of evangelical ordinances and Christian communion, he falls into a mistake natural in his situation; ascribing always the pleasures he found in a holy life to his own industrious perseverance in a contemplative course, and not to the immediate agency of the great Comforter of His people; and directing the eye of his readers to a spiritual principle within, which he supposes to subsist in the soul of every man, as the source of all divine enjoyment, and not to Christ, as he would gladly have done, had he fallen under Christian teachers. Allowing for these defects, he is a charming writer, and by those who know how to make such allowances, may be read with great delight and improvement. But with these defects in his manner, though, I believe, no man ever had a heart more devoted to God, he does not seem dressed with sufficient exactness to be fit for the public eye, where man is known to be nothing, and Jesus all in all. He must, therefore, be

dismissed as an unsuccessful candidate for a place in this *Miscellany*, and will be less mortified at being rejected in the first instance, than if he had met with a refusal from the publisher. I can only, therefore, repeat what I said before, that when I find a proper subject, and myself at liberty to pursue it, I will endeavour to contribute my quota. But alas! where spiritual communications are in question, the heart rather than the head is wanted. I could draw the picture of Despair at any time; I could delineate the country through which he travels, and describe his progress, could trace him from melancholy to rage, from rage to obduracy, and from obduracy to indifference about the event; and this I could do in prose or verse with the greatest facility, but to what good purpose? Like Cibber's mad figures<sup>1</sup> upon Bedlam gate, the representation might be allowed to be just, but if it were admired would be so only in proportion as it shocked.

Last Tuesday evening we were alarmed by another fire. A barn adjoining to George Gee's malthouse was burnt to the ground; his building escaped, though a part of the thatch of it was consumed. The wind would have brought it our way, had it blown at all, for it was in the east, but the

<sup>1</sup> Caius Gabriel Cibber, the father of Colley Cibber, was a native of Holstein who came to England about 1659 to follow his profession of sculptor. He made several of the decorations of the city of London. To his figures of lunatics—the Raving and the Melancholy—over the gates of Bethlehem Hospital, Pope makes the following reference in the *Dunciad* :—

‘Where o’er the gates by his fam’d father’s hand,  
Great Cibber’s brazen, brainless brothers stand.’

These figures are now in the South Kensington Museum.

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weather was perfectly calm. There is no doubt of its having been kindled maliciously.

Mrs. Unwin is very sorry to be so troublesome on the old subject of worsted, but her whole stock is nearly exhausted. She is well, and joins in love with your faithful and affectionate

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

*Olney, March 11, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I little thought when I made myself merry with our pretty, plausible candidate, that I was laughing at your expense. Had I suspected any such consequence, I should have postponed my joke to a more convenient opportunity. The newspaper having always come uncharged, I had reason to hope that the same grace and favour would have been vouchsafed to a letter of mine, and what was the cause of so partial a distinction, am at a loss to imagine.

I return you many thanks for your *Apology*, which I have read with great pleasure.<sup>1</sup> You know of old that your style always pleases me: and having in a former letter given you the reasons for which I like it, I spare you now the pain of a repetition. The spirit, too, in which you write, pleases me as much. But I perceive that in some cases it is possible to be severe, and at the same time perfectly good-tempered; in all cases I suppose where we suffer by an injurious and unreasonable attack, and can justify our conduct by a plain

<sup>1</sup> *Apologia; or, Four Letters to a Minister of an Independent Church. By a minister of the Church of England.*

and simple narrative. On such occasions, truth itself seems a satire, because by implication at least it convicts our adversaries of the want of charity and candour. For this reason perhaps you will find that you have made many angry, though you are not so; and it is possible that they may be the more angry upon that very account. To assert, and to prove, that an enlightened minister of the Gospel may, without any violation of his conscience, and even upon the ground of prudence and propriety, continue in the establishment; and to do this with the most absolute composure, must be very provoking to the dignity of some dissenting doctors; and to nettle them still the more, you in a manner impose upon them the necessity of being silent, by declaring that you will be so yourself. Upon the whole however I have no doubt that your *Apology* will do good. If it should irritate some, who have more zeal than knowledge, and more of bigotry than of either, it may serve to enlarge the views of others, and to convince them, that there may be grace, truth, and efficacy, in the ministry of a church of which they are not members. I wish it success, and all that attention to which, both from the nature of the subject, and the manner in which you have treated it, it is so well entitled.

It is hardly possible for a man to interest himself less than I do in what passes in the political world. I have my own reasons for discharging myself of that burthen, and such reasons as I believe no man ever had but myself. Had I dropped from the moon into this system eleven years ago, the concerns of a world to which I did not naturally belong would not have engaged me much; and just

as little engaged I feel myself under a persuasion which nothing has yet shaken, that I am an extramundane character with reference to this globe of yours; and that, though not a native of the moon, I was not, however, made of the dust of this planet. Yet I confess that for the sake of amusement, and that I may forget as much as possible my terrible translation out of an England that gave me birth into an England that did not, I sometimes talk upon these subjects, and to you have sometimes written upon them, as if they were indeed as important to me as they are to every man around me. Nor have I any objection to doing so at this moment. Know, then, that my reasons for thinking (in which thoughts I appear to you to be singular) that the present contest is between the Crown and the Commons are these: the Crown, no less than the India Company, quarrelled with Fox's India Bill: the Crown, for causes palpable enough, espoused the cause of Mr. Pitt's. The Crown interfered by a whispered message to nullify the former, and by upholding the new minister in his place, in opposition to a majority of the House, in hopes to give effect to the latter; but finding itself unable to carry this favourite point in a Parliament so unfriendly to its designs, the Crown dissolved it; expecting, and, I fear, with too good reason, that a new one will be more propitious. Thus, in short, I have accounted for my opinion; for as to what is said by many, of the King's personal dislike of Fox and Lord North, I put it pretty much out of the question; hoping, at least, that he is a more sensible King than to throw the whole business of his empire into a state of distraction, merely to gratify a pique

against two individuals. The patronage of the East Indies will be a dangerous weapon in whatever hands; I had rather, however, see it lodged any where than with the Crown. In that event, I should say adieu for ever to every hope of an uncorrupt representation, and consequently to every hope of constitutional liberty for the subject. In one point, after all, we are agreed, we think favourably of neither party; and for my own particular, I can truly say, that I have no prospect of deliverance for this country, but the same that I have of a possibility that we may one day be disencumbered of our ruinous possessions in the East.

Our good neighbours, who have so successfully knocked away our Western crutch from under us, seem to design us the same favour on the opposite side; in which case we shall be poor, but I think we shall stand a better chance to be free: and I had rather drink water-gruel for breakfast, and be no man's slave, than wear a chain, and drink tea as usual.

We received the last parcel of worsted by Grace Stamford, and return Mrs. Newton many thanks. But little news is stirring. The election has made a great noise in the steeple, and some in the street; but at length we are quiet again. The Squire of Weston<sup>1</sup> assisted in canvassing the town for Lord Verney, and met with several affronts, but was especially insulted by wrong-headed Nathan Sample; who, it seems, has much the same aversion to a Papist that some people have to a cat; rather an antipathy than a reasonable dislike. Pentecross<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sir Robert Throckmorton.

<sup>2</sup> Probably Rev. Thomas Pentycross, one of Lady Huntingdon's preachers—'Dear Penty.' See *Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon*, vol. ii. p. 59.

wrote a letter to Jones, in which he represented the cause of Pitt as the cause of God : but for want of *his* spectacles I could not clearly discern it to be so. Molly Clifton is dead and buried ; the rest of us, I believe, are all alive and unburied. Mr. Scott had a political epistle of his printed in last Thursday's *General Evening* ;—plain, I thought, and sensible.

I have just room to add, that we love you as usual, and are your very affectionate William and Mary.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 19, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I wish it were in my power to give you any account of the Marquis Caraccioli. Some years since I saw a short history of him in the *Review*, of which I recollect no particulars, except that he was (and for aught I know may be still) an officer in the Prussian service. I have two volumes of his works, lent me by Lady Austen. One is upon the subject of self-acquaintance, and the other treats of the art of conversing with the same gentleman. Had I pursued my purpose of translating him, my design was to have furnished myself, if possible, with some authentic account of him, which I suppose may be procured at any bookseller's who deals in foreign publications. But for the reasons given in my last I have laid aside the design. There is something in his style that touches me exceedingly, and which I do not know how to describe. I should call it pathetic, if it were occasional only, and never occurred but when his subject happened to be particularly affecting. But it is universal ; he has not a sentence that

is not marked with it. Perhaps, therefore, I may describe it better by saying, that his whole work has an air of pious and tender melancholy, which to me at least is extremely agreeable. This property of it, which depends perhaps altogether upon the arrangement of his words, and the modulation of his sentences, it would be very difficult to preserve in a translation. I do not know that our language is capable of being so managed, and rather suspect that it is not, and that it is peculiar to the French, because it is not unfrequent among their writers, and I never saw any thing similar to it in our own.

I converse, you say, upon other subjects than that of despair, and may therefore write upon others. Indeed, my friend, I am a man of very little conversation upon any subject. From that of despair I abstain as much as possible, for the sake of my company; but I will venture to say that it is never out of my mind one minute in the whole day. I do not mean to say that I am never cheerful. I am often so; always, indeed, when my nights have been undisturbed for a season. But the effect of such continual listening to the language of a heart hopeless and deserted, is, that I can never give much more than half my attention to what is started by others, and very rarely start anything myself. My silence, however, and my absence of mind, make me sometimes as entertaining as if I had wit. They furnish an occasion for friendly and good-natured raillery; they raise a laugh, and I partake of it. But you will easily perceive that a mind thus occupied is but indifferently qualified for the consideration of theological matters. The most useful and the most delightful topics of that kind are to me forbidden

fruit;—I tremble if I approach them. It has happened to me sometimes that I have found myself imperceptibly drawn in, and made a party in such discourse. The consequence has been, dissatisfaction and self-reproach. You will tell me, perhaps, that I have written upon these subjects in verse, and may, therefore, if I please, in prose. But there is a difference. The search after poetical expression, the rhyme, and the numbers, are all affairs of some difficulty; they amuse, indeed, but are not to be attained without study, and engross, perhaps, a larger share of the attention than the subject itself. Persons fond of music will sometimes find pleasure in the tune, when the words afford them none. There are, however, subjects that do not always terrify me by their importance; such, I mean, as relate to Christian life and manners; and when such an one presents itself, and finds me in a frame of mind that does not absolutely forbid the employment, I shall most readily give it my attention, for the sake, however, of your request merely. Verse is my favourite occupation, and what I compose in that way, I reserve for my own use hereafter.

My evenings are devoted to books. I read aloud for the entertainment of the party, thus making amends by a vociferation of two hours for my silence at other times.

I have lately finished eight volumes of Johnson's Prefaces, or Lives of the Poets. In all that number I observe but one man—a poet of no great fame—of whom I did not know that he existed till I found him there, whose mind seems to have had the slightest tincture of religion; and he was hardly in his senses. His name was Collins. He sunk into

a state of melancholy, and died young. Not long before his death, he was found at his lodgings in Islington by his biographer, with the New Testament in his hand. He said to Johnson, 'I have but one book, but it is the best.' Of him, therefore, there are some hopes. But from the lives of all the rest there is but one inference to be drawn:—that poets are a very worthless, wicked set of people.

Mrs. Unwin sends her love; she is much obliged to Mrs. Newton for the care she has taken about the worsted. She had no suspicion that Mrs. Newton had forgot it, but supposed her correspondent might. We are in good health, and waiting as patiently as we can for the end of this second winter. The news is—that the brother of farmer Rush, a very sober young man, was driving his waggon last week to Bedford, and in the way ordered his man forward with the team, saying he would follow him, but he has never been heard of since.—Yours, my dear friends, truly,

WM. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*March 21, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I thank you for the entertainment you have afforded me. I often wish for a library, often regret my folly in selling a good collection; but I have one in Essex. It is rather remote, indeed, too distant for occasional reference; but it serves the purpose of amusement, and a waggon being a very suitable vehicle for an author, I find myself commodiously supplied. Last night I made an end of reading Johnson's Prefaces; but

the number of poets whom he has vouchsafed to chronicle being fifty-six, there must be many with whose history I am not yet acquainted. These, or some of these, if it suits you to give them a part of your chaise, when you come, will be heartily welcome. I am very much the biographer's humble admirer. His uncommon share of good sense, and his forcible expression, secure to him that tribute from all his readers. He has a penetrating insight into character, and a happy talent of correcting the popular opinion, upon all occasions where it is erroneous; and this he does with the boldness of a man who will think for himself, but, at the same time, with a justness of sentiment that convinces us he does not differ from others through affectation, but because he has a sounder judgment. This remark, however, has his narrative for its object, rather than his critical performance. In the latter, I do not think him always just, when he departs from the general opinion. He finds no beauties in Milton's *Lycidas*. He pours contempt upon Prior, to such a degree, that were he really as undeserving of notice as he represents him, he ought no longer to be numbered among the poets. These, indeed, are the two capital instances in which he has offended me. There are others less important, which I have not room to enumerate, and in which I am less confident that he is wrong. What suggested to him the thought that the *Alma*<sup>1</sup> was written in imitation of *Hudibras*, I cannot conceive. In former years, they were both favourites of mine, and I often read them; but never saw in them the least resemblance to each other; nor do I now,

<sup>1</sup> *Alma*; or, *The Progress of the Mind* (1733).

except that they are composed in verse of the same measure. After all, it is a melancholy observation, which it is impossible not to make, after having run through this series of poetical lives, that where there were such shining talents, there should be so little virtue. These luminaries of our country seem to have been kindled into a brighter blaze than others, only that their spots might be more noticed! So much can nature do for our intellectual part, and so little for our moral. What vanity, what petulance in Pope! How painfully sensible of censure, and yet how restless in provocation! To what mean artifices could Addison stoop, in hopes of injuring the reputation of his friend! Savage, how sordidly vicious, and the more condemned for the pains that are taken to palliate his vices. Offensive as they appear through a veil, how would they disgust without one. What a sycophant to the public taste was Dryden; sinning against his feelings, lewd in his writings, though chaste in his conversation. I know not but one might search these eight volumes with a candle, as the prophet says, to find a man, and not find one, unless, perhaps, Arbuthnot were he.

I shall begin Beattie<sup>1</sup> this evening, and propose to myself much satisfaction in reading him. In him, at least, I shall find a man whose faculties have now and then a glimpse from Heaven upon them;—a man, not indeed in possession of much evangelical light, but faithful to what he has, and never neglecting an opportunity to use it. How much more

<sup>1</sup> James Beattie (1735-1803), poet and essayist, born at Laurencekirk. In 1758 Beattie was Master of Aberdeen Grammar School, and in 1760 became Professor of Moral Philosophy at Marischal College, Aberdeen, published *The Minstrel*, 1771-4.

respectable such a character, than that of thousands who would call him blind, and yet have not the grace to practise half his virtues! He, too, is a poet, and wrote the *Minstrel*. The specimens which I have seen of it pleased me much. If you have the whole, I shall be glad to read it. I may, perhaps, since you allow me the liberty, indulge myself here and there with a marginal annotation, but shall not use that allowance wantonly, so as to deface the volumes.

Your mother wishes you to buy for her ten yards and a half of yard-wide Irish, from two shillings to two shillings and sixpence per yard; and my head will be equally obliged to you for a hat, of which I enclose a string that gives you the circumference. The depth of the crown must be four inches and one-eighth. Let it not be a round slouch, which I abhor, but a smart well-cocked fashionable affair. A fashionable hat likewise for your mother; a black one if they are worn, otherwise chip. If you have time she will be glad if you will pay her debts to Mrs. Newton. She thinks they amount to about three pounds. If there is a balance on either side it shall be settled at our meeting.—Yours,  
my dear William, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 29, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It being his Majesty's pleasure that I should yet have another opportunity to write before he dissolves the parliament, I avail myself of it with all possible alacrity. I thank you for your last, which was not the less welcome for coming,

like an extraordinary gazette, at a time when it was not expected.

As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchard side,<sup>1</sup> where in general we live as undisturbed by the political element, as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the water mark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies<sup>2</sup> and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys haloo'd, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville.<sup>3</sup> Puss<sup>4</sup> was unfortunately let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at a window than be absolutely excluded. In a minute

<sup>1</sup> Cowper's House, Olney, now the Cowper Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Unwin and Lady Austen.

<sup>3</sup> William Wyndham Grenville (1759-1834), afterwards Earl Grenville, and Prime Minister (1806-7).

Result of the Poll—

W. W. Grenville (Pittite)	.	2261
John Aubrey (Pittite)	.	1740
Ralph, Earl Verney (Foxite)	.	1716

The first two were elected.

<sup>4</sup> One of Cowper's tame hares.

the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour were filled. Mr. Grenville advancing toward me shook me by the hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he and as many more as could find chairs were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the draper, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he wore suspended by a ribband from his buttonhole. The boys halloo'd, the dogs barked, Puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued; and which,

had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former. It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world where one cannot exercise any without disobliging somebody. The town, however, seems to be much at his service, and if he be equally successful throughout the county, he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr. Ashburner, perhaps, was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepresentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr. Grenville that I had three heads, I should not, I suppose, have been bound to produce them.

Mr. Scott, who you say was so much admired in your pulpit, would be equally admired in his own, at least by all capable judges, were he not so apt to be angry with his congregation. This hurts him, and had he the understanding and eloquence of Paul himself, would still hurt him. He seldom, hardly ever indeed, preaches a gentle, well-tempered sermon, but I hear it highly commended: but warmth of temper, indulged to a degree that may be called scolding, defeats the end of preaching. It is a misapplication of his powers, which it also cripples, and teases away his hearers. But he is a good man, and may perhaps outgrow it.

Many thanks for the worsted, which is excellent. We are as well as a spring hardly less severe than the severest winter will give us leave to be. With our united love, we conclude ourselves yours and Mrs. Newton's affectionate and faithful

W. C.

M. U.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*April, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Having been obliged by the account given of Corporal East<sup>1</sup> in your last to form a less favourable opinion of his pretensions to the Christian character than his apparent modesty and spirituality had filled me with, I am not sorry to have had an opportunity to speak my mind to him. After the arrival of your letter I likewise saw Mr. Bull, who related to me what had passed between him and a certain other soldier, on the subject of that man's character and conduct. The regiment being disembodied, he paid me a second visit last Thursday morning, in his way to London, where, he said, he expected to find work, having sought it in vain at Northampton. I saw him coming, and being at first very unwilling to enter upon the business of crimination, sent him word that we were engaged. That was true, for we were just sitting down to breakfast, at which time one generally finds a mere spectator inconvenient. I meant that he should walk off, but he did not choose to understand me. After breakfast, therefore, I ordered him into the parlour. In the first place, I told him he had misinformed us when he said that you had sent him, you being yourself the witness; he was unwilling to confess a direct falsehood, and therefore replied, that he was much mistaken if you had not. I rejoined, You certainly then are much mistaken. I next addressed him with a long detail of the particular crimes with

<sup>1</sup> See 7th March 1783.

which his fellow-soldier and common report had charged him. But here again he found it convenient to have a bad memory. He could not recollect that he had ever been guilty of swearing since he made a profession; or of gaming, except that once he threw dice for a mutton pie; or of drunkenness more than once, since he became a militia man. The best advice I could give him was to confront his accuser in the presence of Mr. Bull, before whom he had lodged his accusation; but he said the man was gone into Bedfordshire, and where to find him he knew not. Thus we parted,—he disappointed, that instead of money, which I dare say he came for, he had met with a reproof; and I glad to be rid of him in a way which pretty well secures me from the danger of seeing him again. He did not weep, but he trembled so that his knees would hardly support him. I have heard worse of him since, and worse than I am willing to believe, notwithstanding my present thoughts of him.

People that are but little acquainted with the terrors of divine wrath are not much afraid of trifling with their Maker. But for my own part I would sooner take Empedocles's leap, and fling myself into Mount *Ætna*, than I would do it in the slightest instance, were I in circumstances to make an election. In the Scripture we find a broad and clear exhibition of mercy; it is displayed in every page. Wrath is in comparison but slightly touched upon, because it is not so much a discovery of wrath as of forgiveness. But had the displeasure of God been the principal subject of the book, and had it circumstantially set forth that

measure of it only which may be endured even in this life, the Christian world perhaps would have been less comfortable; but I believe presumptuous meddlers with the Gospel would have been less frequently met with. The Word is a flaming sword; and he that touches it with unhallowed fingers, thinking to make a tool of it, will find that he has burnt them.

What havoc in Calabria! every house is built upon the sand, whose inhabitants have no God, or only a false one. Solid and fluid are such in respect to each other: but with reference to the divine power they are equally fixed or equally unstable. The inhabitants of a rock shall sink, while a cock-boat shall save a man alive in the midst of the fathomless ocean. The Pope grants dispensations for folly and madness during the carnival. But it seems they are as offensive to Him, whose vicegerent he pretends himself, at that season as at any other. Were I a Calabrian, I would not give my papa at Rome one farthing for his amplest indulgence, for this time forth for ever. There is a word that makes this world tremble; and the Pope cannot countermand it. A fig for such a conjuror! Pharaoh's conjurors had twice his ability.

Our thanks are due for a pair of fine soles and a lobster, and we sincerely pay them. Give our love to Mrs. Newton, and accept it yourself.—Believe me, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

April 5, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—The hat which I desired you to procure for me, I now write to desire that you will not procure. Do not hastily infer that I mean to go about bareheaded: the whole of the matter is, that a readier method of supply has presented itself since I wrote.

I thanked you in my last for Johnson; I now thank you, with more emphasis, for Beattie, the most agreeable and amiable writer I ever met with; the only author I have seen whose critical and philosophical researches are diversified and embellished by a poetical imagination, that makes even the driest subject, and the leanest, a feast for an epicure in books. He is so much at his ease too, that his own character appears in every page, and which is very rare, we see not only the writer but the man: and that man so gentle, so well-tempered, so happy in his religion, and so humane in his philosophy, that it is necessary to love him, if one has the least sense of what is lovely. If you have not his poem called the *Minstrel*, and cannot borrow it, I must beg you to buy it for me; for though I cannot afford to deal largely in so expensive a commodity as books, I must afford to purchase at least the poetical works of Beattie.

I have read six of Blair's Lectures, and what do I say of Blair?<sup>1</sup> That he is a sensible man,

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Blair (1718-1800), born at Edinburgh, where, in 1759, he gave a series of lectures on Composition. He published *Sermons and Lectures* in 1783.

master of his subject, and excepting here and there a Scotticism, a good writer, so far at least as perspicuity of expression, and method, contribute to make one. But oh the sterility of that man's fancy! if indeed he has any such faculty belonging to him. Perhaps philosophers, or men designed for such, are sometimes born without one; or perhaps it withers for want of exercise. However that may be, Doctor Blair has such a brain as Shakespeare somewhere describes as 'dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage.'

I take it for granted that these good men are philosophically correct (for they are both agreed upon the subject) in their account of the origin of language; and if the Scripture had left us in the dark upon that article, I should very readily adopt their hypothesis for want of better information. I should suppose, for instance, that man made his first effort in speech in the way of an interjection, and that ah, or oh, being uttered with wonderful gesticulation, and variety of attitude, must have left his powers of expression quite exhausted: that in a course of time he would invent names for many things, but first for the objects of his daily wants. An apple would consequently be called an apple, and perhaps not many years would elapse before the appellation would receive the sanction of general use. In this case, and upon this supposition, seeing one in the hand of another man, he would exclaim with a most moving pathos, 'Oh apple!'—Well and good—oh apple! is a very affecting speech, but in the meantime it profits him nothing. The man that holds it, eats it, and *he* goes away with 'oh apple' in his mouth, and with nothing better.

Reflecting upon his disappointment, and that perhaps it arose from his not being more explicit, he contrives a term to denote his idea of transfer or gratuitous communication, and the next occasion that offers of a similar kind, performs his part accordingly. His speech now stands thus, 'Oh give apple!' The apple holder perceives himself called upon to part with his fruit, and, having satisfied his own hunger, is perhaps not unwilling to do so. But unfortunately there is still room for a mistake, and a third person being present, he gives the apple to *him*. Again disappointed, and again perceiving that his language has not all the precision that is requisite, the orator retires to his study, and there, after much deep thinking, conceives that the insertion of a pronoun, whose office shall be to signify that he not only wants the apple to be given, but given to himself, will remedy all defects, he uses it the next opportunity, and succeeds to a wonder, obtains the apple, and by his success such credit to his invention, that pronouns continue to be in great repute ever after.

Now as my two syllablemongers, Beattie and Blair, both agree that language was originally inspired, and that the great variety of languages we find upon earth at present took its rise from the confusion of tongues at Babel, I am not perfectly convinced that there is any just occasion to invent this very ingenious solution of a difficulty, which Scripture has solved already. My opinion, however, is, if I may presume to have an opinion of my own, so different from theirs, who are so much wiser than myself, that if man had been

his own teacher, and had acquired his words and his phrases only as necessity or convenience had prompted, his progress must have been considerably slower than it was, and in Homer's days the production of such a poem as the *Iliad* impossible. On the contrary, I doubt not that Adam on the very day of his creation was able to express himself in terms both forcible and elegant, and that he was at no loss for sublime diction, and logical combination, when he wanted to praise his Maker.

We hope that you will give us the pleasure when you come of seeing some of your family with you ; the more, the more welcome. We have two spare beds, besides a small one that will serve a little one. Your mother, who joins with me in love, begs you will buy for her eight blue, deep blue, water glasses. They are three shillings the pair.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*April 25, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I wish I had both burning words, and bright thoughts, but have at present neither. My head is not itself. Having had an unpleasant night, and a melancholy day, and having already written a long letter, I do not find myself in point of spirits at all qualified either to burn or shine. The post sets out early on Tuesday. The morning is the only time of exercise with me. In order, therefore, to keep it open for that purpose, and to comply with your desire of an immediate answer, I give to you as much as I can spare of the present

evening. I have also been ill with a rheumatism in my back, which though in a great measure removed, has left an aching sensation behind it, which my present occupation makes me feel more sensibly. Do not imagine that I have a design to enhance the merit of my punctuality by an enumeration of the difficulties under which I observe it. I mean no more than an apology for sending you a sheet, which, when it arrives, you will not find it worthy of your perusal.

Since I despatched my last, Blair has crept a little further into my favour. As his subjects improve, he improves with them; but upon the whole I account him a dry writer, useful no doubt as an instructor, but as little entertaining as with so much knowledge it is possible to be. His language is (except Swift's), the least figurative I remember to have seen, and the few figures found in it are not always happily employed. I take him to be a critic very little animated by what he reads, who rather reasons about the beauties of an author, than really tastes them; and who finds that a passage is praiseworthy, not because it charms him, but because it is accommodated to the laws of criticism in that case made and provided. I have a little complied with your desire of marginal annotations, and should have dealt in them more largely, had I read the books to myself; but being reader to the ladies, I have not always time to settle my own opinion of a doubtful expression, much less to suggest an emendation. I have not censured a particular observation in the book, though when I met with it, it displeased me. I this moment recollect it, and may as well therefore note it here. He is commending, and deservedly,

that most noble description of a thunderstorm in the first *Georgic*, which ends with

*Ingeminant austri, et densissimus imber.*

Being in haste, I do not refer to the volume for his very words, but my memory will serve me with the matter. When poets describe, he says, they should always select such circumstances of the subject as are least obvious, and consequently most striking. He therefore admires the effects of the thunderbolt splitting mountains, and filling a nation with astonishment, but quarrels with the closing member of the period, as containing particulars of a storm not worthy of Virgil's notice, because obvious to the notice of all. But here I differ from him; not being able to conceive that wind and rain can be improper in the description of a tempest, or how wind and rain could possibly be more poetically described. Virgil is indeed remarkable for finishing his periods well, and never comes to a stop but with the most consummate dignity of numbers and expression; and in the instance in question I think his skill in this respect is remarkably displayed. The line is perfectly majestic in its march. As to the wind, it is such as only the word *ingeminant* could describe; and the words *densissimus imber* give one an idea of a shower indeed, but of such a shower as is not very common, and such a one as only Virgil could have done justice to by a single epithet. Far, therefore, from agreeing with the Doctor in his stricture, I do not think the *Æneid* contains a nobler line, or a description more magnificently finished.

We are glad that Dr. Conyers has singled you out upon this occasion. Your performance we

doubt not will justify his choice: fear not,—you have a heart that can feel upon charitable occasions, and that, therefore, will not fail you upon this. The burning words come always fast enough, when the sensibility is such as yours. You come alone, and we shall be happy to see you, but promised ourselves the additional pleasure of seeing some of your family with you.

Thanks for the fish,<sup>1</sup> with its companion a lobster, which we mean to eat to-morrow. We want four Chinese tooth-brushes: they cost a shilling each: the harder the better. If you have not bought the water-glasses, you need not. Thanks also for the hat, which is greatly admired, and for the *Minstrel*, which I dare say I shall admire no less. Beattie is become my favourite author of all the moderns; he is so amiable I long to know him.

Your mother, as well as usual, binds up her love with mine, and bids me direct them both to yourself and all your family. Our compliments to the house of Ord.—Yours, my dear friend. W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*April 26, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We are truly sorry that you have been indisposed. It is well, however, to have passed through such a season and to have fared no worse. A cold and a sore throat are troublesome things, but in general an ague is more troublesome; and in this part of the world few have escaped one. I have lately been an invalid myself,

<sup>1</sup> On this Cowper wrote some verses: *To the Immortal Memory of the Halybutt on which I dined this day, Monday, April 26, 1784.*

and have just recovered from a rheumatic pain in my back, the most excruciating of the sort I ever felt. There was talk of bleeding and blistering, but I escaped with only an embrocation and a box of pills. Mr. Grindon attended me, who, though he fidgets about the world as usual, is, I think, a dying man, having had some time since a stroke of apoplexy, and lately a paralytic one. His loss will be felt in this country. Though I do not think him absolutely an *Æsculapius*, I believe him to be as skilful as most of his fraternity in the neighbourhood, besides which, he has the merit of being extremely cautious, a very necessary quality in a practitioner upon the constitutions of others.

We are glad that your book runs. It will not indeed satisfy those whom nothing could satisfy but your accession to their party; but the liberal will say you do well, and it is in the opinion of such men only that you can feel yourself interested.

I have lately been employed in reading Beattie and Blair's Lectures. The latter I have not yet finished: I find the former the most agreeable of the two; indeed, the most entertaining writer upon dry subjects that I ever met with. His imagination is highly poetical, his language easy and elegant, and his manner so familiar that we seem to be conversing with an old friend, upon terms of the most sociable intercourse, while we read him. Blair is, on the contrary, rather stiff, not that his style is pedantic, but his air is formal. He is a sensible man, and understands his subjects, but too conscious that he is addressing the public, and too solicitous about his success, to indulge himself for a moment in that play of fancy which makes the other so agreeable.

In Blair we find a scholar, in Beattie both a scholar and an amiable man ; indeed, so amiable, that I have wished for his acquaintance ever since I read his book. Having never in my life perused a page of Aristotle, I am glad to have had an opportunity of learning more than (I suppose) he would have taught me, from the writings of two modern critics. I felt myself, too, a little disposed to compliment my own acumen upon the occasion. For though the art of writing and composing was never much my study, I did not find that they had any great news to tell me. They have assisted me in putting my own observations into some method, but have not suggested many, of which I was not by some means or other previously apprised. In fact, critics did not originally beget authors ; but authors made critics. Common sense dictated to writers the necessity of method, connexion, and thoughts congruous to the nature of their subject ; genius prompted them with embellishments, and then came the critics. Observing the good effects of an attention to these items, they enacted laws for the observance of them in time to come, and having drawn their rules for good writing from what was actually well written, boasted themselves the inventors of an art which yet the authors of the day had already exemplified. They are, however, useful in their way, giving us at one view a map of the boundaries which propriety sets to fancy ; and serving as judges, to whom the public may at once appeal, when pestered with the vagaries of those who have had the hardiness to transgress them.

The candidates for this county have set an example of economy, which other candidates would

do well to follow, having come to an agreement on both sides to defray the expenses of their voters, but to open no houses for the entertainment of the rabble; a reform, however, which the rabble did not at all approve of, and testified their dislike of it by a riot. A stage was built, from which the orators had designed to harangue the electors. This became the first victim of their fury. Having very little curiosity to hear what gentlemen would say who would give them nothing better than words, they broke it in pieces, and threw the fragments upon the hustings. The sheriff, the members, the lawyers, the voters, were instantly put to flight. They rallied, but were again routed by a second assault, like the former. They then proceeded to break the windows of the inn to which they had fled; and a fear prevailing that at night they would fire the town, a proposal was made by the freeholders to face about and endeavour to secure them. At that instant a rioter, dressed in a merry Andrew's jacket, stepped forward, and challenged the best man among them. Olney sent the hero to the field, who made him repent of his presumption. Mr. Ashburner was he. Seizing him by the throat, he shook him,—he threw him to the earth, he made the hollowness of his skull resound by the application of his fists, and dragged him into custody without the least damage to his person. Animated by this example, the other freeholders followed it: and in five minutes twenty-eight out of thirty ragamuffins were safely lodged in gaol.

Adieu, my dear friend; writing makes my back ache, and my paper is full. We love you, and are yours,

W. AND M.

At Lady Austen's instance Cowper had begun *The Task*, and they had been as brother and sister to each other, but he now perceived that she was in love with him. That her passion was returned she had considerable reasons for supposing, for Cowper had written to her lines which, coming from any other man, would have had only one construction. One of the verses in the morsel '*To a Lady who wore a lock of his hair set with diamonds,*' runs :

The heart that beats beneath that breast  
Is William's, well I know ;  
A nobler prize and richer far  
Than India could bestow.

Cowper, however, had thought of nothing more than brotherly and sisterly friendship ; besides, to form any other attachment would be a cruel slight on Mrs. Unwin, who loved him so dearly and had done so much for him. When, therefore, he found how matters were going, and that it was absolutely necessary to sever his connection with one lady or the other, he wrote to Lady Austen a 'tender but resolute letter.' In anger she burnt it, but henceforth there was no more communication between them. The three-fold cord was broken. Subsequently Lady Austen married a French gentleman named Tardiff, with whom she lived happily. She died in Paris in 1802.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

May 3, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The subject of face-painting may be considered (I think) in two points of view.

First, there is room for dispute with respect to the consistency of the practice with good morals; and secondly, whether it be on the whole convenient or not, may be a matter worthy of agitation. I set out with all the formality of logical disquisition, but do not promise to observe the same regularity any further than it may comport with my purpose of writing as fast as I can.

As to the immorality of the custom, were I in France, I should see none. On the contrary, it seems in that country to be a symptom of modest consciousness, and a tacit confession of what all know to be true, that French faces have in fact neither red nor white of their own. This humble acknowledgment of a defect looks the more like a virtue, being found among a people not remarkable for humility. Again, before we can prove the practice to be immoral, we must prove immorality in the design of those who use it; either that they intend a deception, or to kindle unlawful desires in the beholders. But the French ladies, so far as their purpose comes in question, must be acquitted of both these charges. Nobody supposes their colour to be natural for a moment, any more than he would if it were blue or green: and this unambiguous judgment of the matter is owing to two causes: first, to the universal knowledge we have, that French women are naturally either brown or yellow, with very few exceptions; and secondly, to the inartificial manner in which they paint: for they do not, as I am most satisfactorily informed, even attempt an imitation of nature, but besmear themselves hastily, and at a venture, anxious only to lay on enough. Where, therefore, there is no wanton

intention, nor a wish to deceive, I can discover no immorality. But in England (I am afraid) our painted ladies are not clearly entitled to the same apology. They even imitate nature with such exactness, that the whole public is sometimes divided into parties, who litigate with great warmth the question, whether painted or not? this was remarkably the case with a Miss B——, whom I well remember. Her roses and lilies were never discovered to be spurious, till she attained an age that made the supposition of their being natural impossible. This anxiety to be not merely red and white, which is all they aim at in France, but to be thought very beautiful, and much more beautiful than nature has made them, is a symptom not very favourable to the idea we would wish to entertain of the chastity, purity, and modesty of our countrywomen. That they are guilty of a design to deceive, is certain. Otherwise, why so much art? and if to deceive, wherefore and with what purpose? Certainly either to gratify vanity of the silliest kind, or, which is still more criminal, to decoy and inveigle, and carry on more successfully the business of temptation. Here, therefore, my opinion splits itself into two opposite sides upon the same question. I can suppose a French woman, though painted an inch deep, to be a virtuous, discreet, excellent character; and in no instance should I think the worse of one because she was painted. But an English belle must pardon me, if I have not the same charity for her. She is at least an impostor, whether she cheats me or not, because she means to do so; and it is well if that be all the censure she deserves.

This brings me to my second class of ideas upon this topic : and here I feel that I should be fearfully puzzled, were I called upon to recommend the practice on the score of convenience. If a husband chose that his wife should paint, perhaps it might be her duty, as well as her interest, to comply. But I think he would not much consult his own, for reasons that will follow. In the first place, she would admire herself the more ; and in the next, if she managed the matter well, she might be more admired by others ; an acquisition that might bring her virtue under trials, to which otherwise it might never have been exposed. In no other case, however, can I imagine the practice in this country to be either expedient or convenient. As a general one, it certainly is not expedient, because in general English women have no occasion for it. A swarthy complexion is a rarity here ; and the sex, especially since inoculation has been so much in use, have very little cause to complain that nature has not been kind to them in the article of complexion. They may hide and spoil a good one ; but they cannot (at least they hardly can) give themselves a better. But even if they could, there is yet a tragedy in the sequel, which should make them tremble. I understand that in France, though the use of rouge be general, the use of white paint is far from being so. In England, she that uses one, commonly uses both. Now all white paints, or lotions, or whatever they may be called, are mercurial, consequently poisonous, and consequently ruinous in time to the constitution. The Miss B—— above mentioned was a miserable witness of this truth, it being certain that her flesh fell from her bones before she died. Lady

Coventry was hardly a less melancholy proof of it; and a London physician perhaps, were he at liberty to blab, could publish a bill of female mortality, of a length that would astonish us.

For these reasons, I utterly condemn the practice, as it obtains in England: and for a reason superior to all these, I must disapprove it. I cannot, indeed, discover that Scripture forbids it in so many words. But that anxious solicitude about the person, which such an artifice evidently betrays, is, I am sure, contrary to the tenor and spirit of it throughout. Show me a woman with a painted face, and I will show you a woman whose heart is set on things of the earth, and not on things above. But this observation of mine applies to it only when it is an imitative art. For in the use of French women, I think it as innocent as in the use of a wild Indian, who draws a circle round her face, and makes two spots, perhaps blue, perhaps white, in the middle of it. Such are my thoughts upon the matter.

Your mother gives you her true love. Her respects and mine attend all the party. She wishes you to bring her a pound of the best pins. Thanks for the books, cloth, and brushes. *Vive valeque.*—  
Yours ever, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

May 8, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—When our correspondents send us money, I always hold them entitled to an immediate answer; accordingly, though since the arrival of yours, I have only had time to run through the newspaper, I am now with pen in hand, upon

the point of informing you that your letter, together with its contents, is at this moment safe at Olney.

You do well to make your letters merry ones, though not very merry yourself, and that both for my sake and your own; for your own sake, because it sometimes happens, that by assuming an air of cheerfulness we become cheerful in reality; and for mine, because I have always more need of a laugh than a cry, being somewhat disposed to melancholy by natural temperament, as well as by other causes.

It was long since, and even in the infancy of *John Gilpin*, recommended to me by a lady now at Bristol,<sup>1</sup> to write a sequel.<sup>2</sup> But having always observed that authors, elated with the success of a first part, have fallen below themselves, when they have attempted a second, I had more prudence than to take her counsel. I want you to read the history of that hero, published by Bladon, and to tell me what it is made of. But buy it not; for, puffed as it is in the papers, it can be but a bookseller's job, and must be dear at the price of two shillings. In the last packet but one that I received from Johnson, he asked me if I had any improvements of *John Gilpin* in hand, or if I designed any; for that to print only the original again would be to publish what has been hacknied in every magazine, in every newspaper, and in every street. I answered, that the copy which I sent him contained two or three small variations from the first, except which I had none to propose, and that if he thought him now

<sup>1</sup> Lady Austen.

<sup>2</sup> The fragment of a sequel given in Hone's *Table-Book*, p. 454, and fathered on Cowper, is now generally laid to Charles Lamb. See Letter of 30th April 1785, and also *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, edited by E. V. Lucas, vol. i. pp. 314 and 518.

too trite to make a part of my volume, I should willingly acquiesce in his judgment. I take it for granted, therefore, that he will not bring up the rear of my *Poems* according to my first intention, and shall not be sorry for the omission. It may spring from a principle of pride; but spring it from what it may, I feel, and have long felt, a disinclination to a public avowal that he is mine; and since he became so popular, I have felt it more than ever; not that I should have expressed a scruple, if Johnson had not. But a fear has suggested itself to me, that I might expose myself to a charge of vanity by admitting him into my book, and that some people would impute it to me as a crime. Consider what the world is made of, and you will not find my suspicions chimerical. Add to this, that when, on correcting the latter part of the fifth book of *The Task*, I came to consider the solemnity and sacred nature of the subjects there handled, it seemed to me an incongruity at the least, not to call it by a harsher name, to follow up such premises with such a conclusion. I am well content, therefore, with having laughed, and made others laugh, and will build my hopes of success, as a poet, upon more important matter.

In our printing business we now jog on merrily enough. The coming week will, I hope, bring me to an end of *The Task*, and the next fortnight to an end of the whole. I am glad to have Paley on my side in the affair of education. He is certainly on all subjects a sensible man, and on such, a wise one. But I am mistaken, if *Tirocinium* do not make some of my friends angry, and procure me enemies not a few. There is a sting in verse, that prose neither

has, nor can have ; and I do not know that schools in the gross, and especially public schools, have ever been so pointedly condemned before. But they are become a nuisance, a pest, an abomination, and it is fit that the eyes and noses of mankind should, if possible, be opened to perceive it.

This is indeed an author's letter ; but it is an author's letter to his friend. If you will be the friend of an author, you must expect such letters. Come July, and come yourself, with as many of your exterior selves as can possibly come with you.

Yours, my dear William, affectionately, and with your mother's remembrances, W. C.

In May 1784 Cowper made the acquaintance of the accomplished and amiable brothers John and George Throckmorton of Weston Hall, sons of the aged Sir Robert Throckmorton. Mrs. John Throckmorton was the daughter of Mr. Thomas Gifford of Chillington Hall, Staffordshire.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*May 10, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We rejoice in the account you give us of Dr. Johnson. His conversion will indeed be a singular proof of the omnipotence of Grace ; and the more singular, the more decided. The world will set his age against his wisdom, and comfort itself with the thought that he must be superannuated. Perhaps, therefore, in order to refute the slander, and do honour to the cause to which he becomes a convert, he could not do better than devote his great abilities, and a considerable

part of the remainder of his years, to the production of some important work not immediately connected with the interests of religion. He would thus give proof, that a man of profound learning, and the best sense, may become a child without being a fool; and that to embrace the gospel, is no evidence either of enthusiasm, infirmity, or insanity. But He who calls him will direct him.

On Friday, by particular invitation, we attended an attempt to throw off a balloon at Mr. Throckmorton's, but it did not succeed. We expect, however, to be summoned again in the course of the ensuing week. Mrs. Unwin and I were the party. We were entertained with the utmost politeness. It is not possible to conceive a more engaging and agreeable character than the Gentleman's, or a more consummate assemblage of all that is called good-nature, complaisance, and innocent cheerfulness, than is to be seen in the Lady. They have lately received many gross affronts from the people of this place, on account of their religion. We thought it, therefore, the more necessary to treat them with respect.—Best love, and best wishes,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*May 22, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am glad to have received at last an account of Dr. Johnson's favourable opinion of my book.<sup>1</sup> I thought it wanting, and had long since concluded that not having had

<sup>1</sup> See Letter, 5th June 1784.

the happiness to please him, I owed my ignorance of his sentiments to the tenderness of my friends at Hoxton, who would not mortify me with an account of his disapprobation. It occurs to me that I owe him thanks for interposing between me and the resentment of the Reviewers, who seldom show mercy to an advocate for evangelical truth, whether in prose or verse. I therefore enclose a short acknowledgment, which, if you see no impropriety in the measure, you can, I imagine, without much difficulty convey to him through the hands of Mr. Latrobe. To him I also make my compliments, with thanks for the share he took in the patronage of the volume. If on any account you judge it an inexpedient step, you can easily suppress the letter.

I pity Mr. Bull. What harder task can any man undertake than the management of those, who have reached the age of manhood without having ever felt the force of authority, or passed through any of the preparatory parts of education?<sup>1</sup> I had either forgot, or never adverted to the circumstance, that his disciples were to be men. At present, however, I am not surprised that, being such, they are found disobedient, untractable, insolent, and conceited; qualities that generally prevail in the minds of adults in exact proportion to their ignorance. He dined with us since I received your last. It was on Thursday that he was here. He came dejected, burthened, full of complaints: but we sent him away cheerful. He is very sensible of the prudence, delicacy, and attention to his character, which the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bull superintended an evangelical academy at Newport Pagnell. He prepared young men for the ministry.

society have discovered in their conduct towards him upon this occasion; and indeed it does them honour; for it were past all enduring, if a charge of insufficiency should obtain a moment's regard, when brought by five such coxcombs against a man of his erudition and ability. The worst part of the business is, that unless young men can be found modest, well tempered, humble, and teachable, there seems to be no hope. He is indeed nervous, and may seem to want those stern features, and that determined tone and manner that are almost indispensably requisite in a tutor. But I do not see that in the present case the matter would be much mended, did he possess them. For what impression can a look, or the most emphatical threat be expected to make, where there is no power to make it good? The rod is out of the question. They are too old, though not too wise for that. Impositions, by way of penalty, are equally so, both because they are incapable of performing any, and because at their age, they may choose whether they will submit to them or not. The society may indeed expel them; and these hopeful youths have, it should seem, no great objection to their doing so. There are other academies ready to receive them; and which, because untried, they prefer to yours.<sup>1</sup> They are, therefore, under no sufficient control, perfectly easy with respect to the consequences of their refractoriness, and of course set no bounds to their insolence. I do not assert it with confidence, but am much inclined to believe that an institution of this kind would succeed better, were the pupils

<sup>1</sup> Newton was one of the founders of the academy and helped to support it.

admitted at a much earlier age. It could not indeed be hoped that all would be converted and become fit for the ministry. But having the advantage of spiritual ordinances, it is probable that some would, and the rest, at a proper age, having been soberly and well-trained, might be sent out to serve society in some other capacity. But this is thrown out merely by the way, for I already foresee that it would require a change in the whole plan.

I rather wonder that a man of so liberal a mind as Mr. Brewer should be so much hurt by your publication; and wonder no less that after having seen in it the reasons that influenced you to print it, he should express so much surprise and concern at its appearance. Was not your probity impeached when you were charged with interested motives for continuing in the church? and when the sincerity of your opinion respecting her ritual, discipline and order was called in question? But such is the influence of a denomination, that the most unprejudiced have yet a bias which in the long run discovers itself.

Poor Nat. Gee has disgraced his gray hairs.—He is suspended *ab officio*, and his eldest son says Amen for him. But I suppose William Peace has given you this piece of history, which I, therefore, needed not to have mentioned. He has probably told you, too, that Lady Austen is gone to Bath.

This fine May makes us amends for a doleful winter. The hot weather came on so fast, that there was not more than a week's interval between the nakedness of December and the full leaf. We are in good health, and always remember you and Mrs. Newton with sincere affection.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*About 24th of May 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is hard upon us striplings who have uncles still living (*N.B.* I myself have an uncle still alive) that those venerable gentlemen should stand in our way, even when the ladies are in question; that I, for instance, should find in one page of your letter a hope that Miss Shuttleworth would be of your party, and be told in the next that she is engaged to your uncle. Well, we may perhaps never be uncles; but we may reasonably hope that the time is coming when others, as young as we are now, shall envy us the privileges of old age, and see us engross that share in the attention of the ladies to which their youth must aspire in vain. Make our compliments, if you please, to your sister Elizabeth, and tell her that we are both mortified at having missed the pleasure of seeing her.

Balloons are so much the mode, that even in this country we have attempted a balloon. You may possibly remember that at a place called Weston, little more than a mile from Olney, there lives a family whose name is Throckmorton.<sup>1</sup> The present possessor of the estate is a young man whom I remember a boy. He has a wife, who is young, genteel, and handsome. They are Papists, but much more amiable than many Protestants. We never had any intercourse with the family, though ever since we lived here we have enjoyed the range of their pleasure grounds, having been favoured with

<sup>1</sup> In an earlier letter Cowper spelt the word Throgmorton.

a key, which admits us into all. When this man succeeded to the estate, on the death of his elder brother, and came to settle at Weston, I sent him a complimentary card, requesting the continuance of that privilege, having till then enjoyed it by the favour of his mother, who on that occasion went to finish her days at Bath. You may conclude that he granted it, and for about two years nothing more passed between us. A fortnight ago, I received an invitation in the civilest terms, in which he told me that the next day he should attempt to fill a balloon, and if it would be any pleasure to me to be present, should be happy to see me. Your mother and I went. The whole country were there, but the balloon could not be filled. The endeavour was, I believe, very philosophically made, but such a process depends for its success upon such niceties as make it very precarious. Our reception was, however, flattering to a great degree, insomuch that more notice seemed to be taken of us than we could possibly have expected; indeed rather more than of any of his other guests. They even seemed anxious to recommend themselves to our regards. We drank chocolate, and were asked to dine, but were engaged. A day or two afterwards, Mrs. Unwin and I walked that way, and were overtaken in a shower. I found a tree that I thought would shelter us both—a large elm, in a grove that fronts the mansion. Mrs. T. observed us, and running towards us in the rain insisted on our walking in. He was gone out. We sat chatting with her till the weather cleared up, and then at her instance took a walk with her in the garden. The garden is almost their only

walk, and is certainly their only retreat in which they are not liable to interruption. She offered us a key of it in a manner that made it impossible not to accept it, and said she would send us one. A few days afterwards, in the cool of the evening, we walked that way again. We saw them going toward the house, and exchanged bows and curtsies at a little distance, but did not join them. In a few minutes, when we had passed the house, and had almost reached the gate that opens out of the park into the adjoining field, I heard the iron gate<sup>1</sup> belonging to the court-yard ring, and saw Mr. T. advancing hastily toward us; we made equal haste to meet him, he presented to us the key, which I told him I esteemed a singular favour, and after a few such speeches as are made on such occasions, we parted. This happened about a week ago. I concluded nothing less than that all this civility and attention was designed, on their part, as a prelude to a nearer acquaintance; but here at present the matter rests. I should like exceedingly to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call, and now and then to receive one, but nothing more. For though he is one of the most agreeable men I ever saw, I could not wish to visit him in any other way, neither our house, furniture, servants, or income being such as qualify us to make entertainments; neither would I on any account be introduced to the neighbouring gentry, which must be the consequence of our dining there; there not being a man in the country, except himself, with whom I could endure to associate. They are squires, merely such, purse-proud and sportsmen.

<sup>1</sup> The iron gates of the court-yard are still standing.

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But Mr. T. is altogether a man of fashion, and respectable on every account.

I have told you a long story. Farewell. We number the days as they pass, and are glad that we shall see you and your sister soon.—Yours, etc.,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*June 5, 1784.*

WHEN you told me that the critique upon my volume was written, though not by Dr. Johnson himself, yet by a friend of his, to whom he recommended the book and the business, I inferred from that expression that I was indebted to him for an active interposition in my favour, and consequently that he had a right to thanks. But now I concur entirely in sentiment with you, and heartily second your vote for the suppression of thanks which do not seem to be much called for. Yet even now were it possible that I could fall into his company, I should not think a slight acknowledgment misapplied. I was no other way anxious about his opinion, nor could be so, after you and some others had given a favourable one, than it was natural I should be, knowing, as I did, that his opinion had been consulted.—I am affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*June 21, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We are much pleased with your designed improvement of the late preposterous celebrity, and have no doubt that, in good hands,

the foolish occasion will turn to good account. A religious service, instituted in honour of a musician, and performed in the house of God, is a subject that calls loudly for the animadversion of an enlightened minister; and would be no mean one for a satirist, could a poet of that description be found spiritual enough to feel and resent the profanation. It is reasonable to suppose that in the next year's almanack we shall find the name of Handel<sup>1</sup> among the red-lettered worthies, for it would surely puzzle the Pope to add any thing to his canonisation.

This unpleasant summer makes me wish for winter. The gloominess of that season is the less felt, both because it is expected, and because the days are short. But such weather, when the days are longest, makes a double winter, and my spirits feel that it does. We have now frosty mornings, and so cold a wind, that even at high noon we have been obliged to break off our walk in the southern side of the garden, and seek shelter, I in the green-house, and Mrs. Unwin by the fireside. Hay-making begins here to-morrow, and would have begun here sooner had the weather permitted it.

Mr. Wright called upon us last Sunday. The old gentleman seems happy in being exempted from the effects of time, to such a degree, that, though we meet but once in the year, I cannot perceive that the twelve months that have elapsed have made any change in him. It seems, however, that as much as he loves his master, and as easy as I

<sup>1</sup> George Frederick Handel (1685-1759) was born at Halle. First visited London in 1710, and wrote many of his operas in England. He was buried in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey.

suppose he has always found his service, he now and then heaves a sigh for liberty, and wishes to taste it before he dies. But his wife is not so minded. She cannot leave a family, the sons and daughters of which seem all to be her own. Her brother died lately in the East Indies, leaving twenty thousand pounds behind him, and half of it to her; but the ship that was bringing home that treasure, is supposed to be lost. Her husband appears perfectly unaffected by the misfortune, and she, perhaps, may even be glad of it. Such an acquisition would have forced her into a state of independence, and have made her her own mistress, whether she would or not. I charged him with a petition to Lord Dartmouth, to send me Cook's<sup>1</sup> last Voyage, which I have a great curiosity to see, and no other means of procuring. I dare say I shall obtain the favour, and have great pleasure in taking my last trip with a voyager whose memory I respect so much. Farewell, my dear friend: our affectionate remembrances are faithful to you and yours.

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. MATTHEW POWLEY, DEWSBURY, NEAR  
LEEDS

June 25, 1784.

MY DEAR SIR,—I have read your *Antiperfectionism* both in folio and quarto with the closest atten-

<sup>1</sup> *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, undertaken by the command of his Majesty, for making discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere to determine the position and extent of the west side of North America, its distance from Asia, and the practicability of a northern passage to Europe, performed under the direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore, in his Majesty's ships 'Resolution' and 'Discovery' in the years 1776-80. Vols. I. and II. written by Captain James Cook, F.R.S. Vol. III. by Captain James King, LL.D., F.R.S. 3 vols. 4to. 1784.*

tion I could give it, but being perfectly a stranger to this controversy, am but indifferently qualified to revise what you have written. I can truly say, however, that it pleased me both with respect to the matter and the manner. Your arguments appear to me conclusive, such as may be evaded perhaps (for what arguments may not by a quibbling adversary?) but unanswerable on the grounds of Scripture, good sense, and candour. I observe, however, that a gentleman who saw your work in Yorkshire, and whose remarks upon it accompanied your books, is of opinion that your opponents do not contend for sinless perfection, as required by Scripture. It may be so; but if they do not, I am utterly at a loss to conceive what colour of plausibility they can give to their argument, or how they can defend it for a moment. It appears too by your quotations from their writings, of the fidelity of which I have no doubt, that, whether they can in reality derive it from Scripture or not, it is a point they very much labour, and at the expense of all honest and sound interpretation. I must, therefore, take it for granted that your friend misunderstands them in this respect; and if he does, I see no solid objection either to your plan or the execution of it. I have not had time to read their books, though I have hastily skimmed them over, and in doing so found sufficient reason to confirm me in the opinion I have just given of Mr. Atkinson's observation.

Whether it be advisable to publish or not is another question. That they do much mischief, and that unless they can be successfully opposed, they are likely to do much more, is certain. Your

undertaking, therefore, is laudable, and if the seasonableness and expedience of it were the only points to be considered, every friend to truth and sound doctrine would advise you by all means to print. But when I reflect how few readers you are likely to find,—how certain it is that the people principally concerned will be forbidden by Pope John to touch your volume,—that religious persons of your own opinions will perhaps have but little curiosity to see how you prove that to be erroneous which they are already persuaded is so,—and that the world at large care for none of these things, I cannot but fear lest your enterprise should prove an expensive one, and not meet with the success it deserves. You, however, who live where these points have been more agitated than in most other places, must be better qualified than I can possibly be to make an estimate of the probabilities for or against you; and to your judgment, therefore, I must leave them. I can only repeat what I said, that such a work seems very much wanted, and that, if it can find readers, yours seems to me exceedingly well calculated to answer the purpose.

I subjoin a few remarks I made as I passed along, which you will abide by or reject as you see good, and am, with Mrs. Unwin's love to you, my dear friend, your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

Instead of my notes, which are short, and not very important, I send you an extract from a letter I received last night from Mr. Newton, in answer to one in which I informed him of your design. If it should effect a change in your purpose, which

I think not very unlikely, my comments will be of no use ; if otherwise, I will transmit them to you on the first summons.

‘I wish Mr. Powley’s defence of the truth, or his antidote against error, may be very useful ; but I own I seldom expect much good from controversial publications, though under some circumstances it is not easy to forbear. It is not pleasing to a minister to see false and hurtful notions sown amongst his hearers. Yet it must be so. The sowing of the wheat will give occasion to the sowing of the tares, and, except endeavours to pull up the tares are managed with a gentle hand, and with great wisdom, the wheat likewise will be hurt. Mr. Fletcher’s sermon, which otherwise might ere long be forgotten, will be perpetuated by Mr. Powley’s answer. Mr. Fletcher will be more talked of, more thought of, more read in and about Dewsbury. Mr. Powley’s book will be read and approved by his own friends, who do not need it ; while few of those for whom it is designed will or dare give it a fair perusal ; and controversies are apt to betray both writers and readers into either an angry or self-approving spirit. I cannot easily expatiate on my neighbour’s mistakes without admiring my own sagacity ; therefore, had I been consulted, I should probably have advised Mr. Powley to go on speaking the truth in love, taking only a slight and occasional notice of what Mr. Anybody is pleased to do or teach ; and so far as the Lord gives the truth entrance and hold in the hearts of His people, so far error will be effectually kept out ; and it can be kept out this way only. We may persuade folks to like our system of notions, and the next preacher

may persuade them to prefer his; but they whom the Lord persuades will not so readily part with what He has taught them.'

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*July 3, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I was sorry that I could only take a flying leave of you. When the coach stopped at the door, I thought you had been in your chamber; my dishabille would not otherwise have prevented my running down for the sake of a more suitable parting.

We rejoice that you had a safe journey, and though we should have rejoiced still more had you had no occasion for a physician, we are glad that, having had need of one, you had the good fortune to find him. Let us hear soon that his advice has proved effectual, and that you are delivered from all ill symptoms.

Thanks for the care you have taken to furnish me with a dictionary. It is rather strange that at my time of life, and after a youth spent in classical pursuits, I should want one; and stranger still that, being possessed at present of only one Latin author<sup>1</sup> in the world, I should think it worth while to purchase one. I say that it is strange, and indeed I think it so myself. But I have a thought that when my present labours of the pen are ended, I may go to school again, and refresh my spirits by a little intercourse with the Mantuan<sup>2</sup> and the Sabine bard;<sup>3</sup> and perhaps by a reperusal of some

<sup>1</sup> 'A little Horace of mine.'

<sup>2</sup> Virgil.

<sup>3</sup> Horace. See letter of 12 July 1784, and 8 November 1784.

others, whose works we generally lay by at that period of life when we are best qualified to read them, when, the judgment and the taste being formed, their beauties are least likely to be overlooked.

This change of wind and weather comforts me, and I should have enjoyed the first fine morning I have seen this month with a peculiar relish, if our new taxmaker had not put me out of temper. I am angry with him, not only for the matter, but for the manner of his proposal. When he lays his impost upon horses, he is even jocular, and laughs; though considering that wheels, and miles, and grooms, were taxed before, a graver countenance upon the occasion would have been more decent. But he provokes me still more by reasoning as he does on the justification of the tax upon candles. Some families, he says, will suffer little by it;—Why? Because they are so poor, that they cannot afford themselves more than ten pounds in the year. Excellent! They can use but few, therefore they will pay but little, and consequently will be but little burthened, an argument which for its cruelty and effrontery seems worthy of a hero; but he does not avail himself of the whole force of it, nor with all his wisdom had sagacity enough to see that it contains, when pushed to its utmost extent, a free discharge and acquittal of the poor from the payment of any tax at all; a commodity, being once made too expensive for their pockets, will cost them nothing, for they will not buy it. Rejoice, therefore, O ye penniless! the minister will indeed send you to bed in the dark, but your remaining half-penny will be safe; instead of being spent in the

useless luxury of candlelight, it will buy you a roll for breakfast, which you will eat no doubt with gratitude to the man who so kindly lessens the number of your disbursements, and while he seems to threaten your money, saves it. I wish he would remember, that the halfpenny, which government imposes, the shopkeeper will swell to two-pence. I wish he would visit the miserable huts of our lace-makers at Olney, and see them working in the winter months, by the light of a farthing candle, from four in the afternoon till midnight. I wish he had laid his tax upon the ten thousand lamps that illuminate the Pantheon, upon the flambeaux that wait upon ten thousand chariots and sedans in an evening, and upon the wax candles that give light to ten thousand card-tables. I wish, in short, that he would consider the pockets of the poor as sacred, and that to tax a people already so necessitous, is but to discourage the little industry that is left among us, by driving the laborious to despair.

A neighbour of mine, in Silver End, keeps an ass; the ass lives on the other side of the garden wall, and I am writing in the green-house: it happens that he is this morning most musically disposed, either cheered by the fine weather, or by some new tune which he had just acquired, or by finding his voice more harmonious than usual. It would be cruel to mortify so fine a singer, therefore I do not tell him that he interrupts and hinders me; but I venture to tell you so, and to plead his performance in excuse of my abrupt conclusion.

I send you the goldfinches, with which you will do as you see good. We have an affectionate

remembrance of your late visit, and of all our friends at Stock.—Believe me ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

*July 5, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A dearth of materials, a consciousness that my subjects are for the most part and must be uninteresting and unimportant, but above all, a poverty of animal spirits, that makes writing much a great fatigue to me, have occasioned my choice of smaller paper. Acquiesce in the justness of these reasons for the present; and if ever the times should mend with me, I sincerely promise to amend with them.

Homer says on a certain occasion, that Jupiter, when he was wanted at home, was gone to partake of an entertainment provided for him by the Æthiopians. If by Jupiter we understand the weather, or the season, as the ancients frequently did, we may say, that our English Jupiter has been absent on account of some such invitation; during the whole month of June he left us to experience almost the rigours of winter. This fine day, however, affords us some hope that the feast is ended, and that we shall enjoy his company without the interference of his Æthiopian friends again.

Is it possible that the wise men of antiquity could entertain a real reverence for the fabulous rubbish, which they dignified with the name of religion? We, who have been favoured from our infancy with so clear a light, are perhaps hardly competent to decide the question, and may strive in vain to

imagine the absurdities that even a good understanding may receive as truths, when totally unaided by revelation. It seems, however, that men, whose conceptions upon other subjects were often sublime, whose reasoning powers were undoubtedly equal to our own, and whose management in matters of jurisprudence that required a very industrious examination of evidence, was as acute and subtle as that of a modern Attorney-General, could not be the dupes of such imposture as a child among us would detect and laugh at. Juvenal, I remember, introduces one of his Satires with an observation, that there were some in his day who had the hardiness to laugh at the stories of Tartarus, and Styx, and Charon, and of the frogs that croak upon the banks of Lethe, giving his reader at the same time cause to suspect that he was himself one of that profane number. Horace, on the other hand, declares in sober sadness that he would not for all the world get into a boat with a man who had divulged the Eleusinian mysteries. Yet we know that those mysteries, whatever they might be, were altogether as unworthy to be esteemed divine as the mythology of the vulgar. How then must we determine? If Horace were a good and orthodox heathen, how came Juvenal to be such an ungracious libertine in principle, as to ridicule the doctrines which the other held as sacred? Their opportunities of information, and their mental advantages, were equal. I feel myself rather inclined to believe, that Juvenal's avowed infidelity was sincere, and that Horace was no better than a canting hypocritical professor.

You must grant me a dispensation for saying

anything, whether it be sense or nonsense, upon the subject of politics. It is truly a matter in which I am so little interested, that were it not that it sometimes serves me for a theme, when I can find no other, I should never mention it. I would forfeit a large sum if, after advertising a month in the *Gazette*, the minister of the day, whoever he may be, could discover a man that cares about him or his measures so little as I do. When I say that I would forfeit a large sum, I mean to have it understood that I would forfeit such a sum, if I had it. If Mr. Pitt be indeed a virtuous man, as such I respect him. But at the best, I fear, that he will have to say at last with Æneas,

*Si Pergama dextrâ  
Defendi possent, etiam hæc defensa fuissent.*

Be he what he may, I do not like his taxes. At least I am much disposed to quarrel with some of them. The charge of ten shillings upon horses, considering that travellers were heavily charged before, appears to me unreasonable; and herein I must be at least disinterested, for I never ride. But the additional duty upon candles, by which the poor will be much affected, hurts me most. He says, indeed, that they will but little feel it, because even now they can hardly afford the use of them. He had certainly put no compassion into his budget when he produced from it this tax, and such an argument to support it. Justly translated it seems to amount to this—'Make the necessaries of life too expensive for the poor to reach them, and you will save their money. If they buy but few candles, they will pay but little tax; and if

they buy none, the tax, as to them, will be annihilated.' True. But, in the meantime, they will break their shins against their furniture, if they have any; and will be but little the richer, when the hours, in which they might work, if they could see, shall be deducted.

Mr. Unwin left us on Wednesday. Mrs. Powley is with us, and begs to be remembered. Mr. Grindon is confined under a second stroke of the apoplexy, and is thought to be in danger. I enclose a letter to old Mr. Small, who has sent me some rhubarb seed, for which I write to thank him, and shall be your debtor for a penny, by way of *viaticum*. Mrs. Unwin, except that she has a pain in her face, is well. I have bought a great dictionary, and want nothing but Latin authors to furnish me with the use of it. Had I purchased them first, I had begun at the right end. But I could not afford it. I beseech you admire my prudence. *Vivite, valete, et mementote nostrum*.—Yours affectionately,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

July 12, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Your sister leaves us this evening; her journey will be on foot to Newport: your mother and I mean to accompany her as far as to the limits of our usual walk. The coach takes her up at five in the morning. It will be on both sides a sorrowful parting; the distance of the separation and the length of it will make it such. But this first part of the business is rather in danger of being disconcerted: the weather lowers

and threatens to make a walk impracticable. How the ladies will settle it, therefore, as yet I know not, having seen neither of them this morning. Your sister desires me to thank you for the hint given to Miss Unwin, for which she holds herself not the less indebted to you though it did not succeed.

You are going to Bristol. A lady,<sup>1</sup> not long since our very near neighbour, is probably there: she *was* there very lately. If you should chance to fall into her company, remember, if you please, that we found the connection on some accounts an inconvenient one, that we do not wish to renew it, and conduct yourself accordingly. A character with which we spend all our time should be made on purpose for us; too much or too little of any single ingredient spoils all: in the instance in question, the dissimilitude was too great not to be felt continually, and consequently made our intercourse unpleasant. We have reason, however, to believe that she has given up all thoughts of a return to Olney.

I think with you that Vinny's line is not pure. If he knew any authority that would have justified his substitution of a participle for a substantive, he would have done well to have noted it in the margin. But I am much inclined to think that he did not. Poets are sometime exposed to difficulties insurmountable by lawful means, whence I imagine was originally derived that indulgence that allows them the use of what is called the *poetica licentia*. But that liberty, I believe, contents itself with the abbreviation or protraction of a word, or an altera-

<sup>1</sup> Lady Austen.

tion in the quantity of a syllable, and never presume to trespass upon grammatical propriety. I have dared to attempt to correct my master, but am not bold enough to say that I have succeeded. Neither am I sure that my memory serves me correctly with the line that follows; but when I recollect the English, am persuaded that it cannot differ much from the true one. This, therefore, is my edition of the passage—

*Basia amatori tot tum permissa beato.*

Or,

*Basia quæ juveni indulgit Susanna beato  
Navarcha optaret maximus esse sua.*

The preceding lines I have utterly forgotten, and am consequently at a loss to know whether the distich, thus managed, will connect itself with them easily, and as it ought.

We thank you for the drawing of your house. I never knew my idea of what I had never seen resemble the original so much. At some time or other you have doubtless given me an exact account of it, and I have retained the faithful impression made by your description. It is a comfortable abode, and the time I hope will come when I shall enjoy more than the mere representation of it.

I have not yet read the last *Review*, but dipping into it, I accidentally fell upon their account of Hume's *Essay on Suicide*.<sup>1</sup> I am glad that they have liberality enough to condemn the licentiousness of an author whom they so much admire:—I say liberality, for there is as much bigotry in the

<sup>1</sup> David Hume (1711-1776), born at Edinburgh. His essays on *Suicide* and *The Immortality of the Soul* were cancelled by him after being once printed, but subsequently appeared in his *Works*.

world to that man's errors as there is in the hearts of some sectaries to their peculiar modes and tenets. He is the Pope of thousands, as blind and presumptuous as himself. God certainly infatuates those who will not see. It were otherwise impossible, that a man, naturally shrewd and sensible, and whose understanding has had all the advantages of constant exercise and cultivation, could have satisfied himself, or have hoped to satisfy others with such palpable sophistry as has not even the grace of fallacy to recommend it. His silly assertion that because it would be no sin to divert the course of the Danube, therefore it is none to let out a few ounces of blood from an artery, would justify not suicide only, but homicide also; for the lives of ten thousand men are of less consequence to their country, than the course of that river to the regions through which it flows. Population would soon make society amends for the loss of her ten thousand members, but the loss of the Danube would be felt by all the millions that dwell upon its banks to all generations. But the life of a man and the water of a river can never come into competition with each other in point of value, unless in the estimation of an unprincipled philosopher.

I thank you for your offer of the classics. When I want I will borrow. Horace is my own. Homer, with a clavis, I have had possession of some years. They are the property of Mr. Jones. A Virgil, the property of Mr. Scott, I have had as long. I am nobody in the affair of tenses, unless when you are present.—Your mother and sister send their best love.—Yours ever,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

July 19, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Notwithstanding the justness of the comparison by which you illustrate the folly and wickedness of a congregation assembled to pay divine honours to the memory of Handel, I could not help laughing at the picture<sup>1</sup> you have drawn of the musical convicts. The subject indeed is awful, and your manner of representing it is perfectly just; yet I laughed, and must have laughed had I been one of your hearers. But the ridicule lies in the preposterous conduct which you reprove, and not in your reproof of it. A people so musically mad as to make not only their future trial the subject of a concert, but even the message of mercy from their King, and the only one he will ever send them, must excuse me if I am merry where there is more cause to be sad; for melancholy as their condition is, their behaviour under it is too ludicrous not to be felt as such, and would conquer even a more settled gravity than mine.

In those days when Bedlam was open to the cruel curiosity of holiday rambles, I have been a visitor there. Though a boy, I was not altogether insensible of the misery of the poor captives, nor destitute of feeling for them. But the madness of some of them had such a humorous air, and displayed itself in so many whimsical freaks, that it was impossible not to be entertained, at the same that I was angry with myself for being so. A line of Bourne's is very expressive of the spectacle which

<sup>1</sup> At the commencement of Newton's *Fourth Sermon on the Messiah*.

this world exhibits, tragi-comical as the incidents of it are, absurd in themselves, but terrible in their consequences :

*Sunt res humanæ flebile ludibrium.*

An instance of this deplorable merriment has occurred in the course of last week at Olney. A feast gave the occasion to a catastrophe truly shocking. Lucy and his wife, and two women whose name is Hine, relations of the glazier, went in a covered cart to Woolaston, to partake of the anniversary merry-making at that place. Having spent the day, no doubt very agreeably, they got into the tumbril, expecting nothing but they should soon be safe at home again. Some geese were in the horse-path, and in danger of being run over. Lucy waved his hat to scare them, forgetting that his horse might possibly be frightened too. He was so, and ran away. On one side of the road was a steep declivity, where two women were killed by an overturn about two years ago : fearing the same fate, and the women screaming and clinging about him in such a manner that he was unable to guide his horse, Lucy gave him a sudden and violent twitch to the other side. In a moment, running as he did at full speed, he dashed himself and the cart against a wall : the force of the shock threw him and broke all his harness, a circumstance without which not a single life would have been saved. Lucy received a violent contusion on his head, and his legs were terribly torn. One of the women had her arm broken and her wrist dislocated ; the other was only bruised : but Mrs. Lucy was the greatest sufferer, having her skull fractured, and one side of her face

with half her scalp so completely separated from the bone, that when her husband went to take her up, he mistook the loose flesh for the cushion she wore upon her head. The story is almost too shocking to be related, but having begun it I could not choose whether I would finish it or not. She is, however, alive, and is attended at Woolaston, from which place she could not be removed, by Dr. Kerr. I heard yesterday that there were hopes of her recovery, which is the more wonderful as she is with child. So dangerous it is to all, and so fatal to some, to forget that we are not introduced into this world merely to amuse ourselves for a few years as well as we can, and then to pass out of it unnoticed by Him who sent us.

About a month since I had a letter from one whom you remember, and from whom I little expected to hear—James Nichols. He wrote to inquire after his old connexions at Olney, particularly after Nelly Langton, desiring to be informed of all that has happened here; how many births, deaths, and marriages, I suppose, have taken place at Olney since he left it: but I have not answered him, neither do I intend it. He says much about the Lord and His dealings with him; but I have long considered James as a sort of pedlar and hawker in these matters, rather than as a creditable and substantial merchant. He is now a mason's labourer at Ostend, and when he wrote had just received a hurt in his leg by a fall from the top of a ladder.

Remember us as we remember you; that is, with undiminished friendship and affection.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*July 28, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I may perhaps be short, but am not willing that you should go to Lymington without first having had a line from me. I know that place well, having spent six weeks there above twenty years ago. The town is neat, and the country delightful. You walk well, and will consequently find a part of the coast, called Hall-Cliff, within the reach of your ten toes. It was a favourite walk of mine; to the best of my remembrance, about three miles distance from Lymington. There you may stand upon the beach and contemplate the Needle-rock; at least you might have done so twenty years ago. But since that time I think it is fallen from its base, and is drowned, and is no longer a visible object of contemplation. I wish you may pass your time there happily, as in all probability you will; perhaps usefully too to others, undoubtedly so to yourself.

The manner in which you have been previously made acquainted with Mr. Gilpin<sup>1</sup> gives a providential air to your journey, and affords reason to hope, that you may be charged with a message to him. I admire him as a biographer. But as Mrs. Unwin and I were talking of him last night, we could not but wonder that a man should see so much excellence in the lives, and so much glory and beauty in the deaths of the martyrs, whom he has recorded, and at the same time disapprove the principles that produced the very conduct he

<sup>1</sup> See Letter of 16 Aug. 1784.

admired. It seems, however, a step towards the truth, to applaud the fruits of it; and one cannot help thinking that one step more would put him in possession of the truth itself. By your means may he be enabled to take it!

We are obliged to you for the preference you would have given to Olney, had not Providence determined your course another way. But as, when we saw you last summer, you gave us no reason to expect you this, we are the less disappointed. At your age and mine, biennial visits have such a gap between them that we cannot promise ourselves upon those terms very numerous future interviews. But whether ours are to be many or few, you will always be welcome to me, for the sake of the comfortable days that are past. In my present state of mind my friendship for you indeed is as warm as ever. But I feel myself very indifferently qualified to be your companion. Other days than these inglorious and unprofitable ones are promised me, and when I see them I shall rejoice. In the meantime my faith in the assurances of my friends is too weak to be productive of anything like joy. My sensations upon such occasions are rather like those of poor old Tantalus, if he be still where the poets placed him.

I saw the advertisement of your adversary's book. He is happy at least in this, that, whether he have brains or none, he strikes without the danger of being stricken again. He could not wish to engage in a controversy upon easier terms. The other, whose publication is postponed till Christmas, is resolved, I suppose, to do something. But do what he will, he cannot prove that you have not been

aspersed, or that you have not refuted the charge; which unless he can do, I think he will do little to the purpose.

We heartily wish that the sea-bathing may be of use to Eliza :<sup>1</sup> I have known it serviceable in similar cases. Mrs. Unwin thinks of you, and always with a grateful recollection of yours and Mrs. Newton's kindness. She has had a nervous fever lately; but I hope she is better. The weather forbids walking, a prohibition hurtful to us both. I forgot to tell you that Mr. Grindon<sup>2</sup> died soon after I had informed you of his illness: his son succeeds him. We heartily wish you a good journey, and are affectionately yours,

W. C. AND M. U.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Aug. 14, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I give you joy of a journey performed without trouble or danger. You have travelled five hundred miles without having encountered either. Some neighbours of ours, about a fortnight since, made an excursion only to a neighbouring village, and brought home with them fractured skulls, and broken limbs, and one of them is dead. For my own part I seem pretty much exempted from the dangers of the road,—thanks to that tender interest and concern which the legislature takes in my security! Having, no doubt, their fears lest so precious a life should determine

<sup>1</sup> Newton's adopted daughter, Eliza Cunningham.

<sup>2</sup> Maximilian Grindon, surgeon, of Olney. He died 28th July 1784. His son George, who succeeded him, married Ann Green, Lady Austen's niece.

too soon, and by some untimely stroke of misadventure, they have made wheels and horses so expensive, that I am not likely to owe my death to either.

Your mother and I continue to visit Weston daily, and find in those agreeable bowers such amusement as leaves us but little room to regret that we can go no further. Having touched that theme, I cannot abstain from the pleasure of telling you that our neighbours in that place, being about to leave it for some time, and meeting us there but a few evenings before their departure, entreated us during their absence to consider the garden, and all its contents, as our own, and to gather whatever we liked, without the least scruple. We accordingly picked strawberries as often as we went, and brought home as many bundles of honey-suckle as served to perfume our dwelling till they returned. I hear that Mr. Throckmorton is making another balloon, a paper one, containing sixteen quires. It is to fly upon the wings of ignited spirits, and will therefore, I suppose, be set up at night. I take it for granted that we shall be invited to the spectacle; but whether we shall have the courage to expose ourselves to the inconveniences of a nocturnal visit, is at present doubtful.

Once more, by the aid of Lord Dartmouth, I find myself a voyager in the Pacific Ocean. In our last night's lecture we were made acquainted with the island of Hapae, where we had never been before. The French and Italians, it seems, have but little cause to plume themselves on account of their achievements in the dancing way; and we may hereafter, without much repining at it, acknowledge

their superiority in that art. They are equalled, perhaps excelled, by savages. How wonderful, that without any intercourse with a politer world, and having made no proficiency in any other accomplishment, they should in this, however, have made themselves such adepts, that for regularity and grace of motion they might even be our masters! How wonderful too, that with a tub and a stick they should be able to produce such harmony, as persons accustomed to the sweetest music cannot but hear with pleasure! Is it not very difficult to account for the striking difference of character, that obtains among the inhabitants of these islands? Many of them are near neighbours to each other, and their opportunities of improvement much the same; yet some of them are in a degree polite, discover symptoms of taste, and have a sense of elegance; while others are as rude as we naturally expect to find a people who have never had any communication with the northern hemisphere. These volumes furnish much matter of philosophical speculation, and often entertain me even while I am not employed in reading them.

I am sorry you have not been able to ascertain the doubtful intelligence I have received on the subject of cork skirts and bosoms. I am now every day occupied in giving all the grace I can to my new production; and in transcribing it I shall soon arrive at the passage that censures that folly, which I shall be loth to expunge, but which I must not spare, unless the criminals can be convicted. The world, however, is not so unproductive of subjects for censure, but that it may possibly supply me with some other that may serve as well.

If you know any body that is writing, or intends to write an epic poem on the new regulation of *franks*, you may give him my compliments, and these two lines for a beginning—

*Heu quot amatores nunc torquet epistola rara !  
Vectigal certum, perituraque gratia FRANKI !*

Our true love to all your family, yourself, you may be sure, included.—Yours faithfully,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*August 16, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Had you not expressed a desire to hear from me before you take leave of Lymington, I certainly should not have answered you so soon. Knowing the place, and the amusements it affords, I should have had more modesty than to suppose myself capable of adding any thing to your present entertainments worthy to rank with them. I am not, however, totally destitute of such pleasures as an inland country may pretend to. If my windows do not command a view of the ocean, at least they look out upon a profusion of mignonne, which, if it be not so grand an object, is however quite as fragrant: and if I have not a hermit in a grotto, I have nevertheless myself in a greenhouse,—a less venerable figure, perhaps, but not at all less animated than he: nor are we in this nook altogether unfurnished with such means of philosophical experiment and speculation as at present the world rings with. On Thursday morning last, we sent up a balloon from Emberton meadow.

Thrice it rose, and as oft descended; and in the evening it performed another flight at Newport, where it went up, and came down no more. Like the arrow discharged at the pigeon in the Trojan games, it kindled in the air, and was consumed in a moment. I have not heard what interpretation the soothsayers have given to the omen, but shall wonder a little if the Newton shepherd prognosticate any thing less from it than the most bloody war that was ever waged in Europe.

I am reading Cook's last voyage, and am much pleased and amused with it. It seems that in some of the Friendly Isles, they excel so much in dancing, and perform that operation with such exquisite delicacy and grace, that they are not surpassed even upon our European stages. O! that Vestris had been in the ship, and he might have seen himself outdone by a savage. The paper indeed tells us that the queen of France has clapped this king of capers up in prison, for declining to dance before her, on a pretence of sickness, when in fact he was in perfect health. If this be true, perhaps he may by this time be prepared to second such a wish as mine, and to think that the durance he suffers would be well exchanged for a dance at Anamooka. I should, however, as little have expected to hear that these islanders had such consummate skill in an art that requires so much taste in the conduct of the person, as that they were good mathematicians and astronomers. Defective as they are in every branch of knowledge, and in every other species of refinement, it seems wonderful that they should arrive at such perfection in the dance, which some of our English gentlemen, with all the assistance of

French instruction, find it impossible to learn. We must conclude, therefore, that particular nations have a genius for particular feats; and that our neighbours in France, and our friends in the South Sea, have minds very nearly akin, though they inhabit countries so very remote from each other.

Mrs. Unwin remembers to have been in company with Mr. Gilpin at her brother's. She thought him very sensible and polite, and consequently very agreeable.

We are truly glad that Mrs. Newton and yourself are so well, and that there is reason to hope that Eliza is better. You will learn from this letter that we are so, and that for my own part I am not quite so low in spirits as at some times. Learn too, what you knew before, that we love you all, and that I am your affectionate friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Olney, Sept. 11, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am obliged to you for a plentiful supply of franks, and hope that you have not been inattentive to my interests upon the occasion, but have furnished yourself with an equal number bearing my address. You have my thanks also for the enquiries you have made upon the subject of male rumps corked. Despairing, however, of meeting with such confirmation of that new mode, as would warrant a general stricture, I had, before the receipt of your last, discarded the passage in which I had censured it. I am proceeding in my transcript with all possible despatch, having nearly finished the fourth book, and hoping, by the end of

the month, to have completed the work. When finished, that no time may be lost, I purpose taking the first opportunity to transmit it to Lemon Street; but must beg that you will give me in your next an exact direction, that it may proceed to the mark without any hazard of a miscarriage. A second transcript of it would be a labour I should very reluctantly undertake; for though I have kept copies of all the material alterations, there are many *minutiae* of which I had made none: it is, besides, slavish work, and of all occupations that which I dislike the most. I know that you will lose no time in reading it, but I must beg you likewise to lose none in conveying it to Johnson, that if he chooses to print it, it may go to the press immediately; if not, that it may be offered directly to your friend Longman, or any other. Not that I doubt Johnson's acceptance of it, for he will find it more *ad captum populi* than the former.<sup>1</sup> I have not numbered the lines, except of the four first books, which amount to three thousand two hundred and seventy-six. I imagine, therefore, that the whole contains about five thousand. I mention this circumstance now, because it may save him some trouble in casting the size of the book, and I might possibly forget it in another letter.

About a fortnight since, we had a visit from Mr. Venn,<sup>2</sup> whom I had not seen many years. He introduced himself to me very politely, with many thanks on his own part, and on the part of his family, for the amusement which my book had

<sup>1</sup> J. Johnson of St. Paul's Churchyard became the publisher of *The Task*.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Henry Venn of Yelling, distinguished Evangelical clergyman. Died 1797.

afforded them. He said he was sure that it must make its way, and hoped that I had not laid down the pen. I only told him in general terms, that the use of the pen was necessary to my well being, but gave him no hint of this last production. He said that one passage in particular had absolutely electrified him, meaning the description of the Briton in *Table Talk*. He seemed indeed to emit some sparks when he mentioned it. I was glad to have that picture noticed by a man of a cultivated mind, because I had always thought well of it myself, and had never heard it distinguished before. Assure yourself, my William, that though I would not write thus freely on the subject of me or mine to any but yourself, the pleasure I have in doing it is a most innocent one, and partakes not in the least degree, so far as my conscience is to be credited, of that vanity with which authors are in general so justly chargeable. Whatever I do, I confess that I most sincerely wish to do it well, and when I have reason to hope that I have succeeded, am pleased indeed, but not proud; for He, who has placed everything out of the reach of man, except what He freely gives him, has made it impossible for a reflecting mind, that knows this, to indulge so silly a passion for a moment.

Our connection with the Westonians is much *in statu quo*. We frequently meet, and are always most perfectly polite. Last week we encountered the whole family in the evening. Mr. Throckmorton said that he should send up a balloon in half an hour, and that if we had any curiosity to see it, and would step home with him, by the time we had drank a dish of tea, it would be ready to

mount. At this time, however, it was beginning to be dark, and being well assured that the delay would be longer than he supposed, we excused ourselves on account of the late hour; in fact, we should have had two miles to walk between ten and eleven o'clock at night, which would not have suited either of us. We expect, however, to be invited to a daylight exhibition of the same kind on Tuesday. He has sent us partridges and a hare.  
—Yours,  
W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Sept. 11, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have never seen Dr. Cotton's book, concerning which your sisters question me, nor did I know, till you mentioned it, that he had written anything newer than his *Visions*.<sup>1</sup> I have no doubt that it is so far worthy of him, as to be pious and sensible, and I believe no man living is better qualified to write on such subjects as his title seems to announce. Some years have passed since I heard from him, and considering his great age, it is probable that I shall hear from him no more; but I shall always respect him. He is truly a philosopher, according to my judgment of the character, every tittle of his knowledge in natural subjects being connected in his mind with the firm belief of an Omnipotent agent.—Yours, etc.,

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Cotton (1705-1788). Born in London, settled at St. Albans about 1740, and remained there until his death. Kept a private madhouse, which he called the Collegium Insanorum; there Cowper was confined from December 1763 to June 1765. Cotton's poem *Visions in Verse* was published anonymously in 1761.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Sept. 18, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Following your good example, I lay before me a sheet of my largest paper. It was this moment fair and unblemished, but I have begun to blot it, and having begun, am not likely to cease till I have spoiled it. I have sent you many a sheet that in my judgment of it has been very unworthy of your acceptance, but my conscience was in some measure satisfied by reflecting, that if it were good for nothing, at the same time it cost you nothing, except the trouble of reading it. But the case is altered now. You must pay a solid price for frothy matter, and though I do not absolutely pick your pocket, yet you lose your money, and, as the saying is, are never the wiser; a saying literally fulfilled to the reader of my epistles.

My greenhouse is never so pleasant as when we are just upon the point of being turned out of it. The gentleness of the autumnal suns, and the calmness of this latter season, make it a much more agreeable retreat than we ever find it in summer; when, the winds being generally brisk, we cannot cool it by admitting a sufficient quantity of air, without being at the same time incommoded by it. But now I sit with all the windows and the door wide open, and am regaled with the scent of every flower in a garden as full of flowers as I have known how to make it. We keep no bees, but if I lived in a hive I should hardly hear more of their music. All the bees in the neighbourhood resort

to a bed of mignonette, opposite to the window, and pay me for the honey they get out of it by a hum, which, though rather monotonous, is as agreeable to my ear as the whistling of my linnets. All the sounds that nature utters are delightful—at least in this country. I should not perhaps find the roaring of lions in Africa, or of bears in Russia, very pleasing; but I know no beast in England whose voice I do not account musical, save and except always the braying of an ass. The notes of all our birds and fowls please me, without one exception. I should not, indeed, think of keeping a goose in a cage, that I might hang him up in the parlour for the sake of his melody, but a goose upon a common, or in a farm-yard, is no bad performer; and as to insects, if the black beetle, and beetles indeed of all hues, will keep out of my way, I have no objection to any of the rest; on the contrary, in whatever key they sing, from the gnat's fine treble, to the bass of the humble bee, I admire them all. Seriously, however, it strikes me as a very observable instance of providential kindness to man, that such an exact accord has been contrived between his ear, and the sounds with which, at least in a rural situation, it is almost every moment visited. All the world is sensible of the uncomfortable effect that certain sounds have upon the nerves, and consequently upon the spirits:—and if a sinful world had been filled with such as would have curdled the blood, and have made the sense of hearing a perpetual inconvenience, I do not know that we should have had a right to complain. But now the fields, the woods, the gardens, have each their concert, and the ear of man is for ever regaled

by creatures who seem only to please themselves. Even the ears that are deaf to the Gospel are continually entertained, though without knowing it, by sounds for which they are solely indebted to its author. There is somewhere in infinite space a world that does not roll within the precincts of mercy, and as it is reasonable, and even scriptural, to suppose that there is music in Heaven, in those dismal regions perhaps the reverse of it is found; tones so dismal, as to make woe itself more insupportable, and to acuminate even despair. But my paper admonishes me in good time to draw the reins, and to check the descent of my fancy into dreams, with which she is but too familiar.

Our best love attends you both, with yours, *Sum ut semper, tui studiosissimus,*  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

October 2, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—A poet can but ill spare time for prose. The truth is, I am in haste to finish my transcript, that you may receive it time enough to give it a leisurely reading before you go to town; which, whether I shall be able to accomplish, is at present uncertain. I have the whole punctuation to settle, which in blank verse is of the last importance, and of a species peculiar to that composition; for I know no use of points, unless to direct the voice, the management of which, in the reading of blank verse, being more difficult than in the reading of any other poetry, requires perpetual hints and notices, to regulate the inflections, cadences, and pauses. This, however, is an affair

that in spite of grammarians must be left pretty much *ad libitum scriptoris*; for I suppose every author points according to his own reading. If I can send the parcel to the waggon by one o'clock next Wednesday, you will have it on Saturday the ninth. But this is more than I expect. Perhaps I shall not be able to despatch it till the eleventh, in which case it will not reach you till the thirteenth. I rather think that the latter of these two periods will obtain, because, besides the punctuation, I have the argument of each book to transcribe. Add to this, that in writing for the printer, I am forced to write my best, which makes slow work. The motto of the whole is—*Fit surculus arbor*. If you can put the author's name under it, do so;—if not, it must go without one, for I know not to whom to ascribe it. It was a motto taken by a certain prince of Orange, in the year 1733, but not to a poem of his own writing, or indeed to any poem at all, but, as I think, to a medal.

Mr. — is a Cornish member; but for what place in Cornwall I know not. All I know of him is, that I saw him once clap his two hands upon a rail, meaning to leap over it;—but he did not think the attempt a safe one, and therefore took them off again. He was in company with Mr. Throckmorton. With that gentleman we drank chocolate, since I wrote last. The occasion of our visit was, as usual, a balloon. Your mother invited her, and I him, and they promised to return the visit, but have not yet performed. *Tout le monde se trouvoit là*, as you may suppose, among the rest, Mrs. W——.<sup>1</sup> She was driven to the door by her son, a

<sup>1</sup> Probably Mrs. Wrights of Gayhurst.

boy of seventeen, in a phaeton, drawn by four horses from Lilliput. This is an ambiguous expression, and should what I write now be legible a thousand years hence, might puzzle commentators. Be it known therefore to the Alduses and the Stevenses of ages yet to come, that I do not mean to affirm that Mrs. W — herself came from Lilliput that morning, or indeed that she was ever there, but merely to describe the horses, as being so diminutive, that they might be, with propriety, said to be Lilliputian.

The privilege of franking having been so cropped, I know not in what manner I and my booksellers are to settle the conveyance of proof-sheets hither, and back again. They must travel, I imagine, by coach, a large quantity of them at a time; for, like other authors, I find myself under a poetical necessity of being frugal.

We love you all, jointly and separately, as usual.

W. C.

I have not seen, nor shall see, the Dissenter's answer to Mr. Newton,<sup>1</sup> unless you can furnish me with it.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Oct. 9, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND.—The pains you have taken to disengage our correspondence from the expense with which it was threatened, convincing me that my letters, trivial as they are, are yet acceptable to you, encourage me to observe my usual punctuality.

<sup>1</sup> Referring to Newton's *Apologia*. See Letter 11th March 1784.

You complain of unconnected thoughts. I believe there is not a head in the world but might utter the same complaint, and that all would do so, were they all as attentive to their own vagaries, and as honest as yours. The description of your meditations at least suits mine: perhaps I can go a step beyond you, upon the same ground, and assert with the strictest truth that I not only do not think with connexion, but that I frequently do not think at all. I am much mistaken if I do not often catch myself napping in this way; for when I ask myself what was the last idea (as the ushers at Westminster ask an idle boy what was the last word), I am not able to answer, but, like the boy in question, am obliged to stare and say nothing. This may be a very unphilosophical account of myself, and may clash very much with the general opinion of the learned, that the soul being an active principle, and her activity consisting in thought, she must consequently always think. But pardon me, *messieurs les philosophes*, there are moments when, if I think at all, I am utterly unconscious of doing so, and the thought, and the consciousness of it, seem to me at least, who am no philosopher, to be inseparable from each other. Perhaps, however, we may both be right; and if you will grant me that I do not always think, I will in return concede to you the activity you contend for, and will qualify the difference between us by supposing that though the soul be in herself, as you say, an active principle, the influence of her present union with a principle that is not such, makes her often dormant, suspends her operations, and affects her with a sort of deliquium, in which she suffers a temporary loss of all her

functions. I have related to you my experience truly, and without disguise; you must therefore either admit my assertion, that the soul does not necessarily always act, or deny that mine is a human soul; and though I be sometimes more than half of that opinion myself, it is a negative which I am sure you will not easily prove. So much for a dispute which I little thought of being engaged in to-day.

Last night I had a letter from Lord Dartmouth.<sup>1</sup> It was to apprise me of the safe arrival of Cook's last voyage, which he was so kind as to lend me, in Saint James's Square. He writes, however, from Sandwell.<sup>2</sup> The reading of those volumes afforded me much amusement, and I hope some instruction. No observation, however, forced itself upon me with more violence than one, that I could not help making on the death of Captain Cook. God is a jealous God, and at Owhyhee the poor man was content to be worshipped.<sup>3</sup> From that moment, the remarkable interposition of Providence in his favour was converted into an opposition, that thwarted all his purposes. He left the scene of his deification, but was driven back to it by a most violent storm, in which he suffered more than in any that had preceded it. When he departed he left his worshippers still infatuated with an idea of his godship, consequently well disposed to serve him. At his return he found them sullen, distrustful, and mysterious.

<sup>1</sup> William Legge, second Earl Dartmouth (1731-1801.) In 1753 he married the daughter and heiress of Sir Charles Gunter Nicholl, and so acquired the Manor of Olney. Cowper refers to him in *Truth* as 'One who wears a coronet and prays.'

<sup>2</sup> Sandwell Park, Birmingham, one of Lord Dartmouth's seats.

<sup>3</sup> This assumption of Cowper's is controverted in Professor J. K. Laughton's life of Cook in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. xii. p. 69.

A trifling theft was committed, which, by a blunder of his own in pursuing the thief after the property had been restored, was magnified into an affair of the last importance. One of their favourite chiefs was killed too by a blunder. Nothing, in short, but blunder and mistake attended him, till he fell breathless into the water, and then all was smooth again. The world indeed will not take notice, or see, that the dispensation bore evident marks of divine displeasure; but a mind I think in any degree spiritual cannot overlook them. We know from truth itself, that the death of Herod was for a similar offence. But Herod was in no sense a believer in God, nor had enjoyed half the opportunities with which our poor countryman had been favoured. It may be urged, perhaps, that he was in jest, that he meant nothing but his own amusement, and that of his companions. I doubt it. He knows little of the heart, who does not know that even in a sensible man it is flattered by every species of exaltation. But be it so, that he was in sport:—it was not humane, to say no worse of it, to sport with the ignorance of his friends, to mock their simplicity, to humour and acquiesce in their blind credulity. Besides, though a stock or a stone may be worshipped blameless, a baptized man may not. He knows what he does, and by suffering such honours to be paid him, incurs the guilt of sacrilege.

We are glad that you are so happy in your church, in your society, and in all your connexions. I have not left myself room to say any thing of the love we feel for you.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Oct. 10, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I send you four quires of verse, which having sent, I shall dismiss from my thoughts, and think no more of, till I see them in print. I have not after all found time or industry enough to give the last hand to the points. I believe, however, they are not very erroneous, though in so long a work, and in a work that requires nicety in this particular, some inaccuracies will escape. Where you find any, you will oblige me by correcting them.

In some passages, especially in the second book, you will observe me very satirical. Writing on such subjects I could not be otherwise. I can write nothing without aiming at least at usefulness: it were beneath my years to do it, and still more dishonourable to my religion. I know that a reformation of such abuses as I have censured is not to be expected from the efforts of a poet; but to contemplate the world, its follies, its vices, its indifference to duty, and its strenuous attachment to what is evil, and not to reprehend, were to approve it. From this charge at least I shall be clear, for I have neither tacitly nor expressly flattered either its characters or its customs. I have paid one, and only one compliment, which was so justly due, that I did not know how to withhold it, especially having so fair an occasion;—I forget myself, there is another in the first book to Mr. Throckmorton,<sup>1</sup>—but the compliment I

<sup>1</sup> *Task*, Book 1, line 262, 'Thanks to Benevolus,' etc.

mean is to Mr. Smith.<sup>1</sup> It is however so managed, that nobody but himself can make the application, and you, to whom I disclose the secret; a delicacy on my part, which so much delicacy on his obliged me to the observance of.

What there is of a religious cast in the volume I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons; first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance,—and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many volumes as Lope de Vega, or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience.

My descriptions are all from nature: not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience: not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I have varied as much as I could (for blank verse without variety of numbers is no better than bladder and string), I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance; because at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed.

If the work cannot boast a regular plan (in which respect however I do not think it altogether indefensible), it may yet boast, that the reflections are

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Robert Smith, the banker, afterwards Lord Carrington:—

I mean the man who, when the distant poor  
Need help, denies them nothing but his name.

—*Task*, Book 4, line 428.

naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, and that except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency: to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure, as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue.

If it pleases you, I shall be happy, and collect from your pleasure in it an omen of its general acceptance.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

Your mother's love. She wishes that you would buy her a second-hand cream-pot, small, either kit, jug, or ewer of silver.

I shall be glad of an immediate line to apprise me of its safe arrival.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Oct. 20, 1784.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Your letter has relieved me from some anxiety, and given me a good deal of positive pleasure. I have faith in your judgment, and an implicit confidence in the sincerity of your approbation. The writing of so long a poem is a serious business; and the author must know little of his own heart, who does not in some degree suspect himself of partiality to his own production; and who is he that would not be mortified by the discovery, that he had written five thousand lines in vain? The poem however which you have in hand will not of itself make a volume so large as the last, or as a bookseller would wish. I say this, because when I had sent Johnson five thousand verses, he applied for a thousand more. Two years

since, I began a piece<sup>1</sup> which grew to the length of two hundred, and there stopped. I have lately resumed it, and (I believe) shall finish it. But the subject is fruitful, and will not be comprised in a smaller compass than seven or eight hundred verses. It turns on the question, whether an education at school or at home be preferable, and I shall give the preference to the latter. I mean that it shall pursue the track of the former,—that is to say, that it shall visit Stock in its way to publication. My design also is to inscribe it to you. But you must see it first; and if, after having seen it, you should have any objection, though it should be no bigger than the tittle of an *i*, I will deny myself that pleasure, and find no fault with your refusal. I have not been without thoughts of adding *John Gilpin* at the tail of all. He has made a good deal of noise in the world, and perhaps it may not be amiss to show, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The Critical Reviewers charged me with an attempt at humour. *John* having been more celebrated upon the score of humour than most pieces that have appeared in modern days, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation: but in this article I am entirely under your judgment, and mean to be set down by it. All these together will make an octavo like the last. I should have told you, that the piece which now employs me, is in rhyme. I do not intend to write any more blank. It is more difficult than rhyme, and not so amusing in the composition. If, when you make the offer of my book to Johnson, he should stroke his chin, and

<sup>1</sup> *Tirocinium*.

look up to the ceiling and cry—‘Humph!’—anticipate him (I beseech you) at once, by saying—‘that you know I should be sorry that he should undertake for me to his own disadvantage, or that my volume should be in any degree pressed upon him. I make him the offer merely because I think he would have reason to complain of me, if I did not.’—But that punctilio once satisfied, it is a matter of indifference to me what publisher sends me forth. If Longman should have difficulties, which is the more probable, as I understand from you that he does not in these cases see with his own eyes, but will consult a brother poet, take no pains to conquer them. The idea of being hawked about, and especially of your being the hawk, is insupportable. Nichols (I have heard) is the most learned printer of the present day.<sup>1</sup> He may be a man of taste as well as of learning; and I suppose that you would not want a gentleman usher to introduce you. He prints the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, and may serve us, if the others should decline; if not, give yourself no farther trouble about the matter. I may possibly envy authors, who can afford to publish at their own expense, and in that case should write no more. But the mortification would not break my heart.

I proceed to your corrections, for which I most unaffectedly thank you, adverting to them in their order.

Page 140.—Truth generally, without the article *the* would not be sufficiently defined. There are

<sup>1</sup> A title usually given to his partner Bowyer. John Nichols (1745-1826) wrote *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* and many other books.

many sorts of truth, philosophical, mathematical, moral, etc. ; and a reader, not much accustomed to hear of religious or scriptural truth, might possibly, and indeed easily, doubt what truth was particularly intended. I acknowledge that *grace*, in my use of the word, does not often occur in poetry. So neither does the subject which I handle. Every subject has its own terms, and religious ones take theirs with most propriety from the Scripture: thence I take the word *grace*. The sarcastic use of it in the mouths of infidels I admit, but not their authority to proscribe it, especially as God's favour in the abstract has no other word, in all our language, by which it can be expressed.

Page 150.—*Impress the mind faintly, or not at all*.—I prefer this line, because of the interrupted run of it, having always observed that a little unevenness of this sort, in a long work, has a good effect,—used, I mean, sparingly, and with discretion.

Page 127.—This should have been noted first, but was overlooked.

My sentiments on the subject of Charles's decollation are peculiar; at least I believe they are so. I think it was a good deed, but ill done; that his life was forfeited, but taken away upon wrong motives. But my notions being peculiar are for that reason better suppressed, and I am indebted to you for the hint. Be pleased, therefore, to alter for me thus, with the difference of only one word from the alteration proposed by you,—

We too are friends to royalty. We love  
The king who loves the law, respects his bounds,  
And reigns content within them.

You observed probably, in your second reading, that I allow the life of an animal to be fairly taken away, when it interferes either with the interest or convenience of man. Consequently snails, and all reptiles that spoil our crops, either of fruit, or grain, may be destroyed if we can catch them. It gives me real pleasure, that Mrs. Unwin so readily understood me. Blank verse, by the unusual arrangement of the words, and by the frequent infusion of one line into another, not less than by the style, which requires a kind of tragical magnificence, cannot be chargeable with much obscurity,—must rather be singularly perspicuous,—to be so easily comprehended. It is my labour, and my principal one, to be as clear as possible. You do not mistake me, when you suppose that I have great respect for the virtue that flies temptation. It is that sort of prowess which the whole strain of Scripture calls upon us to manifest, when assailed by sensual evil. Interior mischiefs must be grappled with. There is no flight from them. But solicitations to sin, that address themselves to our bodily senses, are, I believe, seldom conquered in any other way.

In the introduction to the art of cucumber-raising, in the third book, I might beg you to substitute gnats for fleas. I need not tell you why.

Your mother also has had a letter from Mrs. Powley, in which she gives a particular account of her illness, and of the consolation she received in the course of it. It was equally refreshing to your mother, who, upon the strength of such pleasing evidence of her interest in a better world, could have made a cheerful surrender of her into the

hands of her heavenly Father, had He seen good to take her.

Our balloon at Weston was just like those with which you played at Hampstead. The younger Throckmorton has broken his collar-bone, to which misfortune I suppose it is owing that we have not yet been visited by the elder. We met him once since we visited his house, when he made us a genteel apology.

We have to trouble you yet once again in the marketing way. I want a yard of green satin, to front a winter under waistcoat, and your mother a pound of prepared hartshorn. Being tolerably honest folks, it is probable that we shall some time or other pay you all our debts. These and the cream-pot may all come together by the waggon.

I can easily see that you may have very reasonable objections to my dedicatory proposal. You are a clergyman, and I have banged your order. You are a child of *Alma Mater*, and I have banged her too. Lay yourself, therefore, under no constraints that I do not lay you under, but consider yourself as perfectly free.

With our best love to you all, I bid you heartily farewell. I am tired of this endless scribblement.  
Adieu!—Yours,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Oct. 30, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I accede most readily to the justness of your remark on the subject of the truly Roman heroism of the Sandwich islanders. Proofs

of such prowess, I believe, are seldom exhibited by a people who have attained to a high degree of civilization. Refinement and profligacy of principle are too nearly allied, to admit of any thing so noble; and I question whether any instances of faithful friendship, like that which so much affected you in the behaviour of the poor savage, were produced even by the Romans themselves, in the latter days of the empire. They *had* been a nation whose virtues it is impossible not to wonder at. But Greece, which was to them, what France is to us, a Pandora's box of mischief, reduced them to her own standard, and they naturally soon sunk still lower. Religion in this case seems pretty much out of the question. To the production of such heroism, undebauched nature herself is equal. When Italy was a land of heroes, she knew no more of the true God than her ciccisbèos and her fiddlers know now; and indeed it seems a matter of indifference, whether a man be born under a truth which does not influence him, or under the actual influence of a lie: or if there be any difference between the two cases, it seems to be rather in favour of the latter; for a false persuasion (such as the Mahometan, for instance) may animate the courage, and furnish motives for the contempt of death, while despisers of the true religion are punished for their folly by being abandoned to the last degrees of depravity. Accordingly we see a Sandwich islander sacrificing himself to his dead friend, and our Christian seamen and mariners, instead of being impressed by a sense of his generosity, butchering him with a persevering cruelty that will disgrace them for ever; for he was a defenceless, unresisting

enemy, who meant nothing more than to gratify his love for the deceased. To slay him in such circumstances was to murder him, and with every aggravation of the crime that can be imagined.

I am now reading a book which you have never read, and will probably never read—Knox's *Essays*.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps I should premise, that I am driven to such reading by the want of books that would please me better, neither having any, nor the means of procuring any. I am not sorry, however, that I have met with him; though when I have allowed him the praise of being a sensible man, and in *his* way a good one, I have allowed him all that I can afford. Neither his style pleases me, which is sometimes insufferably dry and hard, and sometimes ornamented even to an Herveian tawdriness; nor his manner, which is never lively without being the worse for it: so unhappy is he in his attempts at character and narration. But writing chiefly on the manners, vices, and follies of the modern day, to me he is at least so far useful, as that he gives me information upon points concerning which I neither *can* nor *would* be informed except by hearsay. Of such information, however, I have need, being a writer upon those subjects myself, and a satirical writer too. It is fit, therefore, in order that I may

<sup>1</sup> Vicesimus Knox (1752-1821), son of a headmaster of Tunbridge School, whom he succeeded in that post. Published his *Essays Moral and Literary* in 1778, Dr. Johnson having expressed a kindly opinion of them. He lives to-day by the title of a compilation, that went through many editions, *Elegant Extracts, or Useful and Entertaining Passages in Prose, selected for the improvement of Scholars at Classical and other Schools in the Art of Speaking, in Reading, Thinking, Composing, and in the Conduct of Life*, 1781, and *Elegant Extracts, or Useful and Entertaining Pieces of Poetry, selected for the Improvement of Youths*, 1789.

find fault in the right place, that I should know where fault may properly be found.

I am again at Johnson's in the shape of a poem in blank verse, consisting of six books, and called *The Task*. I began it about this time twelve-month, and writing sometimes an hour in a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes two hours, have lately finished it. I mentioned it not sooner, because almost to the last I was doubtful whether I should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind, as, while it spurred me to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify me for it. My bookseller, I suppose, will be as tardy as before. I do not expect to be born into the world till the month of March, when I and the crocuses shall peep together. You may assure yourself that I shall take my first opportunity to wait on you. I mean likewise to gratify myself by obtruding my Muse upon Mr. Bacon.

Adieu, my dear friend! we are well, and love you.—Yours, and Mrs. Newton's, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Nov. 1, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Were I to delay my answer, I must yet write without a frank at last, and may as well therefore write without one now, especially feeling, as I do, a desire to thank you for your friendly offices so well performed. I am glad for your sake, as well as for my own, that you succeeded in the first instance, and that the first trouble proved the last. I am willing too to consider Johnson's

readiness to accept a second volume of mine, as an argument that at least he was no loser by the former; I collect from it some reasonable hope that the volume in question may not wrong him neither. My imagination tells me (for I know you interest yourself in the success of my productions) that your heart fluttered when you approached his door, and that it felt itself discharged of a burthen when you came out again. You did well to mention it at the Thorntons'; they will now know that you do not pretend to a share in my confidence, whatever be the value of it, greater than you actually possess. I wrote to Mr. Newton by the last post, to inform him that I was gone to the press again. He will be surprised, and perhaps not pleased: but I think he cannot complain, for he keeps his own authorly secrets without participating them with me. I do not think myself in the least degree injured by his reserve; neither should I, were he to publish a whole library without favouring me with any previous notice of his intentions. In these cases it is no violation of the laws of friendship not to communicate, though there must be a friendship where the communication is made. But many reasons may concur in disposing a writer to keep his work a secret, and none of them injurious to his friends. The influence of one I have felt myself, for which none of them would blame me—I mean the desire of surprising agreeably. And if I have denied myself this pleasure in your instance, it was only to give myself a greater, by eradicating from your mind any little weeds of suspicion, that might still remain in it, that any man living is nearer to me than yourself. Had not this consideration forced up the lid

of my strong box like a lever, it would have kept its contents with an inviolable closeness to the last; and the first news that either you or any of my friends would have had of *The Task*, they would have received from the public papers. But you know now, that neither as poet, nor as man, do I give to any man a precedence in my estimation at your expense.

I am proceeding with my new work (which at present I feel myself much inclined to call by the name of *Tirocinium*) as fast as the Muse permits. It has reached the length of seven hundred lines, and will probably receive an addition of two or three hundred more. When you see Mr. Smith, perhaps you will not find it difficult to procure from him half-a-dozen franks, addressed to yourself, and dated the fifteenth of December, in which case they will all go to the post filled with my lucubrations, on the evening of that day. I do not name an earlier, because I hate to be hurried; and Johnson cannot want it sooner than, thus managed, it will reach him.

I am not sorry that *John Gilpin*, though hitherto he has been nobody's child, is likely to be owned at last. Here and there I can give him a touch that I think will mend him, the language in some places not being quite so quaint and old-fashioned as it should be; and in one of the stanzas there is a false rhyme. When I have thus given the finishing stroke to his figure, I mean to grace him with two mottoes, a Greek and a Latin one, which, when the world shall see that I have only a little one of three words to the volume itself, and none to the books of which it consists, they will perhaps understand as a

stricture upon that pompous display of literature, with which some authors take occasion to crowd their titles. Knox, in particular, who is a sensible man too, has not, I think, fewer than half a dozen to his *Essays*.—Adieu, W. C.

I am very sensible of Miss Unwin's kindness, and beg that you will present my thanks to her. I had more than once wished for Lunardi.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

Nov. 8, 1784.

MY GOOD FRIEND,—*The Task*, as you know, is gone to the press: since it went I have been employed in writing another poem, which I am now transcribing, and which, in a short time, I design shall follow. It is intituled, *Tirocinium, or a Review of Schools*: the business and purpose of it are, to censure the want of discipline, and the scandalous inattention to morals, that obtain in them, especially in the largest; and to recommend private tuition as a mode of education preferable on all accounts; to call upon fathers to become tutors of their own sons, where that is practicable; to take home a domestic tutor where it is not; and if neither can be done, to place them under the care of such a man as he to whom I am writing; some rural parson, whose attention is limited to a few.

Now what want I?—A motto. I have taken mottoes from Virgil and Horace till I begin to fear lest the world should discover (what indeed is the case) that I have no other authors of the Roman

class. Find me one therefore in any of your multitudinous volumes, no matter whether it be taken from Burgersdicius, Bogtrottius, or Puddengulpus; the more recondite the better, the world will suppose that at least I am familiar with the author whom I quote, and though the supposition will be an erroneous one, it will do them no harm, and me some good.

When you have found it, bring it with you, either to-morrow, Saturday, or Monday. One of those three days you and your son must dine with us. Choose, and let us know which you choose, in an answer by the bearer.—Yours, with our joint love to Mrs. Bull,

WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Nov. 1784.

DEAR Joseph—five-and-twenty years ago—  
 Alas, how time escapes!—'tis even so—  
 With frequent intercourse, and always sweet,  
 And always friendly we were wont to cheat  
 A tedious hour—and now we never meet!  
 As some grave gentleman in Terence says,  
 ('Twas therefore much the same in ancient days),  
 Good lack, we know not what to-morrow brings—  
 Strange fluctuation of all human things!  
 True. Changes will befall, and friends may part,  
 But distance only cannot change the heart:  
 And, were I call'd to prove the assertion true,  
 One proof should serve—a reference to you.

Whence comes it then, that in the wane of life,  
 Though nothing have occur'd to kindle strife,

We find the friends we fancied we had won,  
 Though numerous once, reduced to few or none?  
 Can gold grow worthless that has stood the touch?  
 No; gold they seem'd, but they were never such.

Horatio's servant once, with bow and cringe,  
 Swinging the parlour door upon its hinge,  
 Dreading a negative, and overawed  
 Lest he should trespass, begg'd to go abroad.  
 'Go, fellow!—whither?'—turning short about—  
 'Nay—stay at home—you're always going out.'  
 "'Tis but a step, sir, just at the street's end.'—  
 'For what?'—'An' please you, sir, to see a friend.'—  
 'A friend!' Horatio cried, and seem'd to start—  
 'Yea, marry shalt thou, and with all my heart.  
 And fetch my cloak; for though the night be raw,  
 I'll see him too—the first I ever saw.'

I knew the man, and knew his nature mild,  
 And was his plaything often when a child:  
 But somewhat at that moment pinch'd him close,  
 Else he was seldom bitter or morose:  
 Perhaps, his confidence just then betray'd,  
 His grief might prompt him with the speech he made;  
 Perhaps 'twas mere good-humour gave it birth,  
 The harmless play of pleasantry and mirth.  
 Howe'er it was, his language, in my mind,  
 Bespoke at least a man that knew mankind.

But not to moralise too much, and strain  
 To prove an evil of which all complain.  
 (I hate long arguments verbosely spun),  
 One story more, dear Hill, and I have done:  
 Once on a time an emperor, a wise man,  
 No matter where, in China or Japan,  
 Decreed that whosoever should offend  
 Against the well-known duties of a friend,

Convicted once, should ever after wear  
But half a coat, and show his bosom bare.  
The punishment importing this, no doubt,  
That all was naught within, and all found out.

Oh happy Britain! we have not to fear  
Such hard and arbitrary measure here :  
Else, could a law like that which I relate,  
Once have the sanction of our triple state,  
Some few, that I have known in days of old,  
Would run most dreadful risk of catching cold :  
While you, my friend. whatever wind should blow,  
Might traverse England safely to and fro,  
An honest man, close button'd to the chin,  
Broad-cloth without, and a warm heart within.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Nov. 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—To condole with you on the death of a mother aged eighty-seven would be absurd; rather, therefore, as is reasonable, I congratulate you on the almost singular felicity of having enjoyed the company of so amiable, and so near a relation so long. Your lot and mine in this respect have been very different, as indeed in almost every other. Your mother lived to see you rise, at least to see you comfortably established in the world; mine dying when I was six years old, did not live to see me sink in it. You may remember with pleasure, while you live, a blessing vouchsafed to you so long; and I, while I live, must regret a comfort of which I was deprived so early. I can truly say, that not a week passes (perhaps I might

with equal veracity say a day), in which I do not think of her. Such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short. But the ways of God are equal;—and when I reflect on the pangs she would have suffered, had she been a witness of all mine, I see more cause to rejoice than to mourn, that she was hidden in the grave so soon.

We have, as you say, lost a lively and sensible neighbour in Lady Austen, but we have been long accustomed to a state of retirement within one degree of solitude, and being naturally lovers of still-life, can relapse into our former duality without being unhappy at the change. To me indeed a third is not necessary, while I can have the companion I had these twenty years.

I am gone to the press again; a volume of mine will greet your hands some time either in the course of the winter, or early in the spring. You will find it perhaps on the whole more entertaining than the former, as it treats a greater variety of subjects, and those, at least the most, of a sublunary kind. It will consist of a poem, in six books, called *The Task*. To which will be added another, which I finished yesterday, called, I believe, *Tirocinium*, on the subject of education.<sup>1</sup>

You perceive that I have taken your advice, and given the pen no rest.

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> The title-page of Cowper's forthcoming book ran as follows:—*The Task*, a Poem, in six books, by William Cowper of the Inner Temple, Esq. *Fili surculus arbor*. Anonym. To which are added by the same author, An Epistle to Joseph Hill, Esq., *Tirocinium*, or a Review of Schools, and the *History of John Gilpin*. London: Printed for J. Johnson, No. 72 St. Paul's Churchyard. 1785.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Nov. 20, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—The *Tirocinium* kisses your hands. I changed my mind about mottoes to *John Gilpin*. I feared that the world might not understand me; and then, instead of thinking me witty, they might have called me foolish. *Tiro*, too, in consideration of the subject, actually required a learned embellishment of that sort. You will observe that mine is learned indeed. My neighbour, Mr. Bull, furnished me with it, for I have no such writers as are pressed into my service for this purpose in all my library; I had worn out Horace and Virgil before. *N.B.*—He never saw a line of the poem.

I do not think that drinkers, gamesters, fornicators, lewd talkers, and profane jesters—men, in short, of no principles either religious or moral (and such we know are the majority of those sent out by our Universities)—*can* be dishonoured by a comparison with anything on this side Erebus. I do not, therefore, repent of my frogs.

When I first knew Cambridge, I know that Benet<sup>1</sup> had a character: it was my father's principal inducement when he chose that college for my brother; a slight alteration therefore may be sufficient, and by substituting *was* for *is* the matter may be accommodated. As thus,

He graced a college in which order yet  
*Was* sacred.

And indeed it stands so in the foul copy.

<sup>1</sup> Now Corpus Christi.

The following short drama will, I think, set the musical business in so clear a light that you will no longer doubt the propriety of the censure.

*Scene opens, and discovers the Abbey filled with Hearers and Performers. An ANGEL descends into the midst of them.*

*Angel.* What are you about ?

*Answer.* Commemorating Handel.

*Angel.* What is a commemoration ?

*Answer.* A ceremony instituted in honour of him whom we commemorate.

*Angel.* But you sing anthems ?

*Answer.* Yes, because he composed them.

*Angel.* And Italian airs ?

*Answer.* Yes, and for the same reason.

*Angel.* So then because Handel set anthems to music, you sing them in honour of Handel ; and because he composed the music of Italian songs, you sing them in a church. Truly Handel is much obliged to you, but God is greatly dishonoured.

*[Exit ANGEL, and the music proceeds without further impediment.]*

A letter arrived last night from Yorkshire, begun by Mrs. Powley, but finished by her husband. She has had a return of her nervous disorder, but the physician does not apprehend her to be in any danger. Her frame of mind is happy and spiritual, full of thankfulness, praise, and confidence.

I cannot immediately recollect the exsputory lines, and have not leisure to look for them.

The parcel, if you please, by the Diligence. Thanks.

Lady A. is neither returned nor returnable : she has taken a house at Bristol, and furnished it.

Adieu.—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

You will find also an epistle to Joseph Hill, Esq., which I wrote on Wednesday last : a tribute so due

that I must have disgraced myself had I not paid it. He ever serves me in all that he can, though he has not seen me these twenty years.

*The Task* and the other poems that went to fill his second volume finished, Cowper looked about for another subject for his pen, and finally he decided to make a new translation of Homer. This translation and its various revisions occupied Cowper the greater part of the last sixteen years of his life. At Westminster, when he read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* through with his friend Alston, comparing them with Pope's translation, 'his love and admiration of the original had increased in proportion to his distaste of a version which so thoroughly disguises it,' and it was the remembrance of these feelings that prompted him to undertake the task of producing a translation himself.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Nov. 27, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—All the interest that you take in my new publication, and all the pleas that you urge in behalf of your right to my confidence, the moment I had read your letter, struck me as so many proofs of your regard; of a friendship, in which distance and time make no abatement. But it is difficult to adjust opposite claims to the satisfaction of all parties. I have done my best, and must leave it to your candour to put a just interpretation upon all that has passed, and to give me credit for it, as a certain truth, that whatever seem-

ing defects, in point of attention and attachment to you, my conduct on this occasion may have appeared to have been chargeable with, I am in reality as clear of all real ones as you would wish to find me.

I send you enclosed, in the first place, a copy of the advertisement to the reader, which accounts for my title, not otherwise easily accounted for; secondly, what is called an argument, or a summary of the contents of each book, more circumstantial and diffuse by far than that which I have sent to the press. It will give you a pretty accurate acquaintance with my matter, though the tenons and mortises, by which the several passages are connected, and let into each other, cannot be explained in a syllabus; and lastly, an extract, as you desired. The subject of it I am sure will please you; and as I have admitted into my description no images but what are scriptural, and have aimed as exactly as I could at the plain and simple sublimity of the Scripture language, I have hopes the manner of it may please you too. As far as the numbers and diction are concerned, it may serve pretty well for a sample of the whole. But the subjects being so various, no single passage can in all respects be a specimen of the book at large.

My principal purpose is to allure the reader, by character, by scenery, by imagery, and such poetical embellishments, to the reading of what may profit him. Subordinately to this, to combat that predilection in favour of a metropolis, that beggars and exhausts the country, by evacuating it of all its principal inhabitants: and collaterally, and as far as is consistent with this double intention, to have a stroke at vice, vanity, and folly, wherever I find

them. I have not spared the Universities. A letter which appeared in the *General Evening Post* of Saturday, said to have been received by a general officer, and by him sent to the press, as worthy of public notice, and which has all the appearance of authenticity, would alone justify the severest censure of those bodies, if any such justification were wanted. By way of supplement to what I have written on this subject, I have added a poem, called *Tirocinium*, which is in rhyme. It treats of the scandalous relaxation of discipline, that obtains in almost all schools universally, but especially in the largest, which are so negligent in the article of morals, that boys are debauched in general the moment they are capable of being so. It recommends the office of tutor to the father, where there is no real impediment; the expedient of a domestic tutor, where there is; and the disposal of boys into the hands of a respectable country clergyman, who limits his attention to two, in all cases where they cannot be conveniently educated at home. Mr. Unwin happily affording me an instance in point, the poem is inscribed to him. You will now, I hope, command your hunger to be patient, and be satisfied with the luncheon that I send, till dinner comes. That piecemeal perusal of the work, sheet by sheet, would be so disadvantageous to the work itself, and therefore so uncomfortable to me, that I dare say, you will waive your desire of it. A poem, thus disjointed, cannot possibly be fit for anybody's inspection but the author's.

Tully's rule—'*Nulla dies sine lineá*'—will make a volume in less time than one would suppose. I adhere to it so rigidly, that though more than once

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I found three lines as many as I had time to compass, still I wrote; and finding occasionally, and as it might happen, a more fluent vein, the abundance of one day made me amends for the barrenness of another. But I do not mean to write blank verse again. Not having the music of rhyme, it requires so close an attention to the pause and the cadence, and such a peculiar mode of expression, as render it, to me at least, the most difficult species of poetry that I have ever meddled with.

I am obliged to you, and to Mr. Bacon, for your kind remembrance of me when you meet. No artist can excel as he does, without the finest feelings; and every man that has the finest feelings is, and must be, amiable.

Adieu, my dear friend!—Affectionately yours,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Nov.* 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—The slice which, you observe, has been taken from the top of the sheet, it lost before I began to write; but being a part of the paper which is seldom used, I thought it would be a pity to discard, or to degrade to meaner purposes, the fair and ample remnant, on account of so immaterial a defect. I therefore have destined it to be the vehicle of a letter, which you will accept as entire, though a lawyer perhaps would, without much difficulty, prove it to be but a fragment. The best recompense I can make you for writing without a frank is, to propose it to you to take your revenge by returning an answer under the same predicament;

and the best reason I can give for doing it is the occasion following. In my last I recommended it to you to procure franks for the conveyance of *Tirocinium*, dated on a day therein mentioned, and the earliest, which at that time I could venture to appoint. It has happened, however, that the poem is finished a month sooner than I expected, and two-thirds of it are at this moment fairly transcribed; an accident to which the riders of a Parnassian steed are liable, who never know, before they mount him, at what rate he will choose to travel. If he be indisposed to despatch, it is impossible to accelerate his pace; if otherwise, equally impossible to stop him. Therefore my errand to you at this time is to cancel the former assignation, and to inform you that by whatever means you please, and as soon as you please, the piece in question will be ready to attend you; for without exerting any extraordinary diligence, I shall have completed the transcript in a week.

The critics will never know that four lines of it were composed while I had an ounce and a half of ipecacuanha upon my stomach, and a wooden vessel called a pail between my knees; and that in the very article of—in short, that I was delivered of the emetic and the verses in the same moment. Knew they this, they would at least allow me to be a poet of singular industry, and confess that I lose no time. I have heard of poets, who have found cathartics of sovereign use, when they had occasion to be particularly brilliant. Dryden always used them, and in commemoration of it, Bayes in the *Rehearsal* is made to inform the audience, that in a poetical emergency he always had recourse to stewed prunes.

But I am the only poet who has dared to reverse the prescription, and whose enterprise, having succeeded to admiration, warrants him to recommend an emetic to all future bards, as the most infallible means of producing a fluent and easy versification.

Your mother is well, and desires me to give her love to you. Nothing more has passed between us and the Throckmortons, except that lately, when they drew the river, they presented us with a fine jack. The ways are now growing dirty, and our pilgrimages to Weston will of course become less frequent. It is not likely therefore, at present, that our acquaintance with them should increase.

My love to all your family. Adieu! W. C.

*P.S.*—It is proper for me to subjoin that our post goes out on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday, and that my letters are always put in the preceding evening. Franks therefore, if you get any, you will know easily how to date.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Nov. 29, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am happy that you are pleased, and accept it as an earnest that I shall not, at least, disgust the public. For though I know your partiality to me, I know at the same time with what laudable tenderness you feel for your own reputation, and that for the sake of that most delicate part of your property, though you would not criticise me with an unfriendly and undue severity, you would, however, beware of being satisfied too hastily, and with no warrantable cause for being

so. I called you the tutor of your two sons, in contemplation of the certainty of that event, and accounting it no violation of truth to assert *that* as true to-day which will be so to-morrow. It is a fact in suspense, not in fiction.

My principal errand to you now is to give you information on the following subject: The moment Mr. Newton knew (and I took care that he should learn it first from me) that I had communicated to you what I had concealed from him, and that you were my authorship's go-between with Johnson on this occasion, he sent me a most friendly letter indeed, but one in every line of which I could hear the soft murmur of something like mortification, that could not be entirely suppressed. It contained nothing, however, that you yourself would have blamed, or that I had not every reason to consider as evidence of his regard to me. He concluded the subject with desiring to know something of my plan, to be favoured with an extract, by way of specimen, or (which he should like better still) with wishing me to order Johnson to send him a proof as fast as they were printed off. Determining not to accede to this last request for many reasons (but especially because I would no more show my poem piecemeal, than I would my house if I had one; the merits of the structure, in either case, being equally liable to suffer by such a partial view of it), I have endeavoured to compromise the difference between us, and to satisfy him without disgracing myself. The proof-sheets I have absolutely, though civilly, refused. But I have sent him a copy of the arguments of each book, more dilated and circumstantial than those inserted in

the work ; and to these I have added an extract as he desired ; selecting, as most suited to his taste, The view of the restoration of all things—which you recollect to have seen near the end of the last book. I hold it necessary to tell you this, lest, if you should call upon him, he should startle you by discovering a degree of information upon the subject, which you could not otherwise know how to reconcile, or to account for.

You have executed your commissions *à merveille*. We not only approve, but admire. No apology was wanting for the balance struck at the bottom, which we accounted rather a beauty than a deformity. Pardon a poor poet, who cannot speak even of pounds, shillings, and pence, but in his own way.

I have read Lunardi<sup>1</sup> with pleasure. He is a lively, sensible young fellow, and I suppose a very favourable sample of the Italians. When I look at his picture, I can fancy that I see in him that good sense and courage that no doubt were legible in the face of a young Roman two thousand years ago.—Your affectionate,  
W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Vincenzo Lunardi, 1759-1806, was the first aerial traveller in England. He was an Italian, born at Lucca, and was secretary to the Neapolitan Embassy in England. In 1784 he obtained leave from Sir George Howard, the governor of Chelsea Hospital, to make a balloon ascent from the grounds of the hospital. Owing to a riot this leave was revoked, and Lunardi's first ascent was made from the Honourable Artillery Company's grounds in the presence of two hundred thousand spectators. He sailed over London, and descended at Ware. He was called 'The Flying Man,' and the excitement was intense. His account of this journey in a series of letters in 1784 was the book that Cowper had read. He afterwards published an account of five aerial voyages in Scotland in 1786. Died at Lisbon.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Dec. 4, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You have my hearty thanks for a very good barrel of oysters ; which necessary acknowledgment once made, I might perhaps show more kindness by cutting short an epistle, than by continuing one, in which you are not likely to find your account, either in the way of information or amusement. The season of the year, indeed, is not very friendly to such communications. A damp atmosphere and a sunless sky will have their effect upon the spirits ; and when the spirits are checked, farewell to all hope of being good company, either by letter or otherwise. I envy those happy voyagers, who, with so much ease, ascend to regions unsullied with a cloud, and date their epistles from an extramundane situation. No wonder if they outshine us who poke about in the dark below, in the vivacity of their sallies, as much as they soar above us in their excursions. Not but that I should be very sorry to go to the clouds for wit : on the contrary, I am satisfied that I discover more by continuing where I am. Every man to his business. Their vocation is, to see fine prospects, and to make pithy observations upon the world below ; such as these, for instance : that the earth, beheld from a height that one trembles to think of, has the appearance of a circular plain ; that England is a very rich and cultivated country, in which every man's property is ascertained by the hedges that intersect the lands ; and that London and Westminster, seen from the neighbourhood of the moon, make but an insignificant figure. I admit the utility of these

remarks; but in the mean time, as I say, *chacun à son goût*; and mine is rather to creep than fly; and to carry with me, if possible, an unbroken neck to the grave.—I remain, as ever, your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 13, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Having imitated no man, I may reasonably hope that I shall not incur the disadvantage of a comparison with my betters. Milton's manner was peculiar. So is Thomson's. He that should write like either of them, would, in my judgment, deserve the name of a copyist, but not of a poet. A judicious and sensible reader therefore, like yourself, will not say that my manner is not good, because it does not resemble theirs, but will rather consider what it is in itself. Blank verse is susceptible of a much greater diversification of manner, than verse in rhyme: and why the modern writers of it have all thought proper to cast their numbers alike, I know not. Certainly it was not necessity that compelled them to it. I flatter myself, however, that I have avoided that sameness with others, which would entitle me to nothing but a share in one common oblivion with them all. It is possible that, as the reviewer of my former volume found cause to say that he knew not to what class of writers to refer me, the reviewer of this, whosoever he shall be, may see occasion to remark the same singularity. At any rate, though as little apt to be sanguine as most men, and more prone to fear and despond, than to overrate my own productions,

I am persuaded that I shall not forfeit anything by this volume that I gained by the last.

As to the title, I take it to be the best that is to be had. It is not possible that a book, including such a variety of subjects, and in which no particular one is predominant, should find a title adapted to them all. In such a case, it seemed almost necessary to accommodate the name to the incident that gave birth to the poem; nor does it appear to me, that because I performed more than my task, therefore *The Task* is not a suitable title. A house would still be a house, though the builder of it should make it ten times as big as he at first intended. I might indeed, following the example of the Sunday newsmonger, call it the *Olio*. But I should do myself wrong; for though it have much variety, it has, I trust, no confusion.

For the same reason none of the interior titles apply themselves to the contents at large of that book to which they belong. They are, every one of them, taken either from the leading (I should say the introductory) passage of that particular book, or from that which makes the most conspicuous figure in it. Had I set off with a design to write upon a gridiron, and had I actually written near two hundred lines upon that utensil, as I have upon the Sofa, the Gridiron should have been my title. But the Sofa being, as I may say, the starting-post from which I addressed myself to the long race that I soon conceived a design to run, it acquired a just pre-eminence in my account, and was very worthily advanced to the titular honour it enjoys, its right being at least so far a good one, that no word in the language could pretend a better.

The Time-piece appears to me (though by some accident the import of that title has escaped you) to have a degree of propriety beyond the most of them. The book to which it belongs is intended to strike the hour that gives notice of approaching judgment, and dealing pretty largely in the *signs* of the *times*, seems to be denominated, as it is, with a sufficient degree of accommodation to the subject.

As to the word *worm*, it is the very appellation which Milton himself, in a certain passage of the *Paradise Lost*, gives to the serpent. Not having the book at hand, I cannot now refer to it: but I am sure of the fact. I am mistaken, too, if Shakespeare's Cleopatra do not call the asp, by which she thought fit to destroy herself, by the same name. But not having read the play these five-and-twenty years, I will not affirm it. They are, however, without all doubt, convertible terms. A worm is a small serpent, and a serpent is a large worm. And when an epithet significant of the most terrible species of those creatures is adjoined, the idea is surely sufficiently ascertained. No animal of the vermicular or serpentine kind is crested, but the most formidable of all.

We do not often see, or rather feel, so severe a frost before Christmas. Unexpected, at least by me, it had like to have been too much for my greenhouse, my myrtles having found themselves yesterday morning in an atmosphere so cold that the mercury was fallen eight degrees below the freezing-point.

We are truly sorry for Mrs. Newton's indisposition, and shall be glad to hear of her recovery. We

are most liable to colds at this season, and at this season a cold is most difficult of cure.

Be pleased to remember us to the young ladies, and to all under your roof and elsewhere, who are mindful of us.—And believe me, your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

Your letters are gone to their address. The oysters were very good.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Dec. 18, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I condole with you, that you had the trouble to ascend St. Paul's in vain, but at the same time congratulate you, that you escaped an ague. I should be very well pleased to have a fair prospect of a balloon under sail, with a philosopher or two on board, but at the same time should be very sorry to expose myself, for any length of time, to the rigour of the upper regions, at this season, for the sake of it. The travellers themselves, I suppose, are secured from all injuries of the weather by that fervency of spirit and agitation of mind, which must needs accompany them in their flight; advantages which the more composed and phlegmatic spectator is not equally possessed of.

The inscription of the poem is more your own affair than any other person's. You have, therefore, an undoubted right to fashion it to your mind, nor have I the least objection to the slight alteration that you have made in it. I inserted what you have erased for a reason that was perhaps rather chimerical than solid. I feared,

however, that the Reviewers, or some of my very sagacious readers, not more merciful than they, might suspect that there was a secret design in the wind; and that author and friend had consulted in what manner author might best introduce friend to public notice, as a clergyman every way qualified to entertain a pupil or two, if peradventure any gentleman of fortune were in want of a tutor for his children. I therefore added the words—'And of his two sons only'—by way of insinuating, that you are perfectly satisfied with your present charge, and that you do not wish for more; thus meaning to obviate an illiberal construction, which we are both of us incapable of deserving. But the same caution not having appeared to you to be necessary, I am very willing and ready to suppose that it is not so.

I intended in my last to have given you my reasons for the compliment I have paid Bishop Bagot,<sup>1</sup> lest, knowing that I have no personal connection with him, you should suspect me of having done it rather too much at a venture. In the first place, then, I wished the world to know that I have no objection to a bishop, *quâ* bishop. In the second place, the brothers were all five<sup>2</sup> my school-fellows, and very amiable and valuable boys they were. Thirdly, Lewis, the bishop, had been rudely

<sup>1</sup> In *Tirocinium*—

And therefore 'tis that, though the sight be rare,  
We sometimes see a Lowth or Bagot there.

<sup>2</sup> William, Lord Bagot.

Charles, who took the name of Chester, and became one of Cowper's neighbours—residing at Chicheley near Olney.

Walter, one of Cowper's principal correspondents.

Richard, who assumed the name of Howard.

Lewis, Bishop of Bristol, Norwich, St. Asaph.

and coarsely treated in the *Monthly Review*, on account of a sermon, which appeared to me, when I read their extract from it, to deserve the highest commendations, as exhibiting explicit proof both of his good sense, and his unfeigned piety. For these causes me thereunto moving, I felt myself happy in an opportunity to do public honour to a worthy man, who had been publicly traduced; and indeed the Reviewers themselves have since repented of their aspersions, and have travelled not a little out of their way in order to retract them, having taken occasion by the sermon preached at the bishop's visitation at Norwich, to say everything handsome of his lordship, who, whatever might be the merit of the discourse, in that instance, at least, could himself lay claim to no other than that of being a hearer.

Since I wrote, I have had a letter from Mr. Newton, that did not please me, and returned an answer to it, that possibly may not have pleased him. His was fretful and peevish; and mine, if not chargeable with exactly the same qualities, was, however, dry and unsavoury enough. We shall come together again soon, I suppose, upon as amicable terms as usual: but at present he is in a state of mortification. He would have been pleased, had the book passed out of his hands into yours, or even out of yours into his, so that he had previously had opportunity to advise a measure which I pursued without his recommendation, and had seen the poems in manuscript. But my design was to pay you a whole compliment, and I have done it. If he says more on the subject, I shall speak freely, and perhaps please him less than I have done already.

Your mother has had another letter from Mr. Powley ; your sister has had a relapse, but is still pronounced to be in no danger. Had we a frank, it should have been enclosed. She is still composed, resigned, and comfortable.—Yours, with our love to all,  
W. C.

We wished to have thanked you sooner for three fine cod, with shrimps and oysters, all excellent in their way ; but knew not where a letter might find you.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON, BOOKSELLER

I did not write the line that has been tampered with hastily, or without due attention to the construction of it ; and what appeared to me its only merit is, in its present state, entirely annihilated.

I know that the ears of modern verse-writers are delicate to an excess, and their readers are as troubled with the squeamishness as themselves. So that if a line do not run as smooth as quicksilver, they are offended. A critic of the present day serves a poem as a cook does a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs of it to a post and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope ; but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation, which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods, that have nothing but their oily smoothness to recommend them.

I have said thus much, as I hinted in the beginning, because I have just finished a much longer poem than the last, which our common friend will receive by the same messenger that has the charge of this letter. In that poem there are many lines which an ear so nice as the gentleman's who made the above-mentioned alteration would undoubtedly condemn; and yet (if I may be permitted to say it) they cannot be made smoother without being the worse for it. There is a roughness on a plum which nobody that understands fruit would rub off, though the plum would be much more polished without it. But, lest I tire you, I will only add that I wish you to guard me from all such meddling; assuring you that I always write as smoothly as I can; but that I never did, never will, sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it. W. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Christmas eve, 1784.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am neither Mede nor Persian; neither am I the son of any such, but was born at Great Berkhamstead, in Hertfordshire, and yet I can neither find a new title for my book, nor please myself with any addition to the old one. I am, however, willing to hope that, when the volume shall cast itself at your feet, you will be in some measure reconciled to the name it bears, especially when you shall find it justified both by the exordium of the poem, and by the conclusion. But enough, as you say with great truth, of a subject very unworthy of so much consideration.

Had I heard any anecdotes of poor dying Daniel,<sup>1</sup> that would have bid fair to deserve your attention, I should have sent them. The little that he is reported to have uttered of a spiritual import was not very striking. That little, however, I can give you upon good authority. His brother asking him how he found himself, he replied, 'I am very composed, and think that I may safely believe myself entitled to a portion.' The world has had much to say in his praise, and both prose and verse have been employed to celebrate him in the *Northampton Mercury*.<sup>2</sup> But Christians, I suppose, have judged it best to be silent. If he ever drank at the fountain of life, he certainly drank also, and often too freely, of certain other streams, which are not to be bought without money and without price. He had virtues that dazzled the natural eye, and failings that shocked the spiritual one. *But iste dies indicabit.*

We are agreeably disappointed in Hannah;<sup>3</sup> we feared that through a natural deficiency of understanding, we should always find her an encumbrance; but she has suddenly brightened up, and being put into such little offices as she is capable of, executes them with an expertness and alacrity at which we wonder. She has an exceeding good temper, and bids fair to discover more sense than we suspected would ever fall to her lot. Stephen Stow<sup>4</sup> has behaved himself so well on board the

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Raban.

<sup>2</sup> For 13 Dec. 1784.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Willson, Cowper's protégée, daughter of Dick Coleman's wife by a former husband. See letter of July 22, 1781.

<sup>4</sup> He was over six feet high, lost his toes in the American War, and afterwards got a living in a hovel near the bridge by making skewers of elder wood.

ballast lighter, that he has been discharged before his time expired, and is now at Olney.

Mrs. Powley is less frequently visited with her fits, and they are less violent. She is still much comforted.

Mrs. Unwin intended you a present of a rope,—not of hemp, but of onions; but unfortunately forgot. Many thanks to Mrs. Newton for her care of the stockings. A little boy of Molly Thompson's, stepping over the threshold for a certain occasion, fell and broke his leg. Say not that I send you no news.—Yours, my dear friend, with our love to you all,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Jan. 5, 1785.*

I have observed, and you must have had occasion to observe it oftener than I, that when a man, who once seemed to be a Christian, has put off that character and resumed his old one, he loses, together with the grace which he seemed to possess, the most amiable part of the character that he resumes. The best features of his natural face seem to be struck out, that, after having worn religion only as a handsome mask, he may make a more disgusting appearance than he did before he assumed it.

According to your request, I subjoin my Epitaph on Dr. Johnson; at least I mean to do it, if a drum, which at this moment announces the arrival of a giant in the town, will give me leave. I have not yet sent the copy to the Magazine.

## EPITAPH ON DR. JOHNSON.

Here Johnson lies—a sage, by all allow'd,  
 Whom to have bred may well make England proud ;  
 Whose prose was eloquence by wisdom taught,  
 The graceful vehicle of virtuous thought ;  
 Whose verse may claim, grave, masculine, and strong,  
 Superior praise to the mere poet's song ;  
 Who many a noble gift from Heaven possessed,  
 And faith at last—alone worth all the rest.  
 Oh man immortal by a double prize,  
 On earth by fame, by favour in the skies !

Mr. Page<sup>1</sup> has quitted the country, having neither left admirers behind him, nor taken any with him : unless perhaps his wife be one, which admits some doubt. He quarrelled with most of his acquaintance, and the rest grew sick of him. Even his friend Maurice Smith was of this number. He even quarrelled with his auctioneer in the midst of the sale of his goods, and would not permit him to proceed, finishing that matter himself. He took leave of his audience in these words: 'And now let us pray for your wicked Vicar.'<sup>2</sup>—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Olney, Jan. 15, 1785.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Your letters are always welcome. You can always either find something to say, or can amuse me and yourself with a sociable and friendly way of saying nothing. I never found that a letter was the more easily written, because the writing of it had been long delayed. On the contrary, experience has taught me to answer soon,

<sup>1</sup> Rev. B. Page, Newton's successor at Olney.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Moses Browne.

that I may do it without difficulty. It is in vain to wait for an accumulation of materials in a situation such as yours and mine, productive of few events. At the end of our expectations we shall find ourselves as poor as at the beginning.

I can hardly tell you with any certainty of information upon what terms Mr. Newton and I may be supposed to stand at present. A month, I believe, has passed since I heard from him. But my *friseur*<sup>1</sup> having been in London in the course of this week, whence he returned last night, and having called at Hoxton, brought me his love, and an excuse for his silence, which (he said) had been occasioned by the frequency of his preachings at this season. He was not pleased that my manuscript was not first transmitted to him, and I have cause to suspect that he was even mortified at being informed, that a certain inscribed poem was not inscribed to himself. But we shall jumble together again, as people that have an affection for each other at bottom, notwithstanding now and then a slight disagreement, always do.

I know not whether Mr. Smith has acted in consequence of your hint, or whether, not needing one, he transmitted to us his bounty, before he had received it. He has, however, sent us a note for twenty pounds; with which we have performed wonders, in behalf of the ragged and the starved. He is a most extraordinary young man, and though I shall probably never see him, will always have a niche in the museum of my reverential remembrance.

<sup>1</sup> William Wilson, Cowper's wig-maker. With Wilson, a sincere Christian and a wit, Cowper was very familiar. It was to him that the ballad of *John Gilpin* was first shown. See letter of 4th June 1785.

The death of Dr. Johnson has set a thousand scribblers to work, and me among the rest. While I lay in bed, waiting till I could reasonably hope that the parlour might be ready for me, I invoked the Muse, and composed the following epitaph—

Here Johnson lies—a sage, by all allow'd.

It is destined, I believe, to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which I consider as a respectable repository for small matters, which, when intrusted to a newspaper, can expect but the duration of a day. But Nichols having at present a small piece of mine in his hands, not yet printed (it is called *The Poplar Field*, and I suppose you have it), I wait till his obstetrical aid has brought that to light, before I send him a new one. In his last he published my epitaph upon Tiney :<sup>1</sup> which, I likewise imagine, has been long in your collection.

Not a word yet from Johnson. I am easy, however, upon that subject, being assured that so long as his own interest is at stake, he will not want a monitor to remind him of the proper time to publish.

You and your family have our sincere love. Forget not to present my respectful compliments to Miss Unwin, and, if you have not done it already, thank her on my part for the very agreeable narrative of Lunardi. He is a young man, I presume, of great good sense and spirit (his letters, at least, and his enterprising turn, bespeak him such), a man qualified to shine not only among the stars, but in the more useful, though humbler sphere of terrestrial occupation.

<sup>1</sup> One of Cowper's hares.

I have been crossing the channel in a balloon, ever since I read of that achievement by Blanchard. I have an insatiable thirst to know the philosophical reason, why his vehicle had like to have fallen into the sea, when, for aught that appears, the gas was not at all exhausted. Did not the extreme cold condense the inflammable air, and cause the globe to collapse? Tell me, and be my Apollo for ever!—  
Affectionately yours, W. C.

We love and thank you for your wishes to see us, and if we all live we shall sometime or other all meet together at Stock, but not just now. I could have filled another side, but the want of a frank has cramped me.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Jan. 22, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The departure of the long frost, by which we were pinched and squeezed together for three weeks, is a most agreeable circumstance. The weather is now (to speak poetically) genial and jocund; and the appearance of the sun, after so tedious an eclipse, peculiarly welcome. For were it not that I had a gravel-walk about sixty yards long, where I take my daily exercise, I should be obliged to look at a fine day through the window, without any other enjoyment of it;—a country rendered impassable by frost, that has been at last resolved into rottenness, keeps me so close a prisoner. Long live the inventors and improvers of balloons! It is always clear overhead, and by and by we shall use no other road.

How will the Parliament employ themselves when they meet?—to any purpose, or to none, or only to a bad one? They are utterly out of my favour. I despair of them altogether. Will they pass an act for the cultivation of the royal wildernesses? Will they make effectual provision for a northern fishery? Will they establish a new sinking-fund, that shall infallibly pay off the national debt? I say nothing about a more equal representation, because, unless they bestow upon private gentlemen of no property a privilege of voting, I stand no chance of ever being represented myself. Will they achieve all these wonders, or none of them? And shall I derive no other advantage from the great Wittenagemot of the nation, than merely to read their debates, for twenty folios of which I would not give one farthing?—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*7th Feb., 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter reached me last night, consequently so late that the frank enclosed is useless, yesterday being the day of the date thereof. A mistake at Newport Pagnell Post Office occasioned the delay; it had been returned from that place to London, or would have arrived at Olney a week sooner than it did. We live in a state of such uninterrupted retirement, in which incidents worthy to be recorded occur so seldom, that I always sit down to write with a discouraging conviction that I have nothing to say. The event commonly justifies the presage. For when I have filled my sheet, I find that I have said nothing. Be

it known to you, however, that I may now at least communicate a piece of intelligence to which you will not be altogether indifferent, that I have received, and revised, and returned to Johnson, the two first proof sheets of my new publication. The business was despatched indeed a fortnight ago, since when I have heard from him no further. From such a beginning, however, I venture to prognosticate the progress, and in due time the conclusion of the matter.

In the last *Gentleman's Magazine* my Poplar Field appears. I have accordingly sent up two pieces more,—a Latin translation of it, which you have never seen, and another on a Rose-bud, the neck of which I inadvertently broke, which, whether you have seen or not, I know not. As fast as Nichols prints off the poems I send him, I send him new ones. My remittance usually consists of two; and he publishes one of them at a time. I may indeed furnish him at this rate, without putting myself to any great inconvenience. For my last supply was transmitted to him in August, and is but now exhausted.

I communicate the following anecdote at your mother's instance, who will suffer no part of my praise to be sunk in oblivion. A certain lord Archibald Hamilton has hired the house of Mr. Small at Clifton,<sup>1</sup> in our neighbourhood for a hunting seat. There he lives at present with his wife and daughter. They are an exemplary family in some respects, and I believe an amiable one in all. The Rev. Mr. Jones, the curate of that parish, who often dines with them by invitation on a Sunday,

<sup>1</sup> Clifton Hall.

recommended my volume to their reading; and his lordship, after having perused a part of it, expressed to the said Mr. Jones an ardent desire to be acquainted with the author, from motives which my great modesty will not suffer me to particularise. Mr. Jones, however, like a wise man, informed his lordship, that for certain special reasons and causes I had declined going into company for many years, and that therefore he must not hope for my acquaintance. His lordship most civilly subjoined that he was very sorry for it.

‘And is that all?’ say you. Now, were I to hear you say so, I should look foolish and say—‘Yes.’—But having you at a distance, I snap my fingers at you, and say—‘No, that is not all.’—Mr. Teedon, who favours us now and then with his company in an evening, as usual, 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 when he formed those wishes, seemed distant and improbable, some of them indeed impossible. Among other wishes that he had indulged, 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.

Thus far I proceeded easily enough; and here I laid down my pen, and spent some minutes in re-

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collection, endeavouring to find some subject, with which I might fill the little blank that remains. But none presents itself. Farewell, therefore, and remember those who are mindful of you!

Present our love to all your comfortable fire-side, and believe me ever most affectionately yours,

W. C.

Do you like the cheese?

Ventorum is certainly good Latin.

They that read Greek with the accents would pronounce the  $\epsilon$  in  $\phi\iota\lambda\epsilon\omega$ , as an  $\eta$ . But I do not hold with that practice, though educated in it. I should therefore utter it just as I do the Latin word *filio* taking the quantity for my guide.

Who wrote the Latin epigram, and who is the subject of it?

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Olney, Feb. 19, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am obliged to you for apprising me of the various occasions of delay to which your letters are liable. Furnished with such a key, I shall be able to account for any accidental tardiness, without supposing anything worse than that you yourself had been interrupted, or that your messenger has not been punctual.

Mr. Teedon has just left us. He came to exhibit to us a specimen of his kinsman's skill<sup>1</sup> in the art of bookbinding. The book on which he had exercised his ingenuity was your *Life*. You did not, indeed, make a very splendid appearance; but, considering that you were dressed by an untaught artificer, and that it was his first attempt, you had no cause to be

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Eusebius Killingworth, the 'Worthy' of Teedon's *Diary*.

dissatisfied. The young man has evidently the possession of talents, by which he might shine both for the benefit of others and for his own, did not his situation smother him. He can make a dulcimer, tune it, play upon it, and with common advantages would undoubtedly have been able to make a harpsichord. But, unfortunately, he lives where neither the one nor the other are at all in vogue. He can convert the shell of a cocoa-nut into a decent drinking-cup; but when he has done, he must either fill it at the pump, or use it merely as an ornament of his own mantle-tree. In like manner, he can bind a book; but if he would have books to bind, he must either make them or buy them, for we have few or no literati at Olney. Some men have talents with which they do mischief; and others have talents with which, if they do no mischief to others, at least they can do but little good to themselves. They are, however, always, a blessing, unless by our own folly we make them a curse; for if we cannot turn them to a lucrative account, they may however furnish us at many a dull season with the means of innocent amusement. Such is the use that Mr. Killingworth makes of his; and this evening we have, I think, made him happy, having furnished him with two octavo volumes, in which the principles and practice of all ingenious arts are inculcated and explained. I make little doubt that, by the half it, he will in time be able to perform many feats, for which he will never be one farthing the richer, but by which, nevertheless, himself and his kin will be much diverted.

How much better is he employed than a neighbour of ours has been for many years, whose sole

occupation, although he too is naturally ingenious, has centred in filling his glass and emptying it. He is neither unknown nor much known to you, but you remember him by the name of Geary Ball. He is now languishing in a dropsy, and, in the prime of life, labouring under all the infirmities of age. He solaces himself, I am told, with the recollection of somewhat that passed in his experience many years ago, which, although it has been followed by no better fruits than will grow at an alehouse, he dignifies with the name of Conversion. Sows are so converted when they are washed, and give the same evidence of an unchanged nature by returning to the mire. Mr. Perry, whose daughter he married, often visits him, but declares, that of all the insensibles he ever saw, poor Geary is the most completely stupid. So long as he was able to crawl into the street, his journey was to the Royal Oak and home again; and so punctual were we both, I in cleaning my teeth at my window, and he in drinking his dram at the same time, that I seldom failed to observe him. But both his legs are now blistered, and refuse to assist him in poisoning himself any longer.

Osborn, the Baptist, as Mr. Wilson informed me, had determined to pay William Penn an official visit as a deacon of the church, for the purpose of imparting to him the sentence of his expulsion, but meeting him accidentally in the street, and discerning, both in his gait and in his features, indications of a temper that it might not be safe to irritate, abandoned his purpose for ever. These men both have wives, and neither of them believes the sin and folly of their husbands.

The winter returning upon us at this late season with redoubled severity, is an event unpleasant even to us who are well furnished with fuel, and seldom feel much of it, unless when we step into bed or get out of it; but how much more formidable to the poor! When ministers talk of resources, that word never fails to send my imagination into the mud-wall cottages of our poor at Olney. There I find assembled in one individual, the miseries of age, sickness, and the extremest penury. We have many such instances around us. The parish, perhaps, allows such a one a shilling a week; but, being numbed with cold, and crippled by disease, she cannot possibly earn herself another. Such persons, therefore, suffer all that famine can inflict upon them, only that they are not actually starved; a catastrophe which, to many of them, I suppose, would prove a happy release. One cause of all this misery is, the exorbitant taxation with which the country is encumbered; so that, to the poor, the few pence they are able to procure have almost lost their value. Yet the budget will be opened soon, and soon we shall hear of resources. But I could conduct the statesman, who rolls down to the House in a chariot as splendid as that of Phaeton, into scenes that, if he had any sensibility for the woes of others, would make him tremble at the mention of the word.—This, however, is not what I intended when I began this paragraph. I was going to observe, that of all the winters we have passed at Olney, and this is the seventeenth, the present has confined us most. Thrice, and but thrice since the middle of October have we escaped into the fields for a little fresh air, and a little change of motion.

The last time, indeed, it was at some peril that we did it, Mrs. Unwin having slipped into a ditch, and, though I performed the part of an active 'squire upon the occasion, escaped out of it upon her hands and knees.

If the town afford any other news than I here send you, it has not reached me yet. I am in perfect health, at least of body, and Mrs. Unwin is tolerably well. Adieu! We remember you always, you and yours, with as much affection as you can desire; which being said, and said truly, leaves me quite at a loss for any other conclusion than that of

WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Feb. 27, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I write merely to inquire after your health, and with a sincere desire to hear that you are better. Horace somewhere advises his friend to give his client the slip, and come and spend the evening with him. I am not so inconsiderate as to recommend the same measure to you, because we are not such very near neighbours as a trip of that sort requires that we should be. But I do verily wish that you would favour me with just five minutes of the time that properly belongs to your clients, and place it to my account. Employ it, I mean, in telling me that you are better at least, if not recovered.

I have been pretty much indisposed myself since I wrote last; but, except in point of strength, am now as well as before. My disorder was what is commonly called and best understood by the name of a thorough cold; which, being interpreted, no

doubt you will know, signifies shiverings, aches, burnings, lassitude, together with many other ills that flesh is heir to. James's powder is my nostrum on all such occasions, and never fails.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Feb. 28, 1785.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Permit me to say that I think you deal more generously with his Lordship<sup>1</sup> than wisely. Great men have great advantages, to which little ones have no need to make any voluntary addition; and it is perhaps one of the privileges to which their superiority is apt to think itself entitled, that they are in some sort emancipated from those obligations of civility and attention to small folks, by which the latter hold themselves bound in all their intercourse with *them*. It is possible, for instance, that his Lordship, without being at all offended by your application, may seem to take you at your word, and to avail himself of the leave you have given him to be silent, and in reality mean no such thing. He might, when he had just read your letter, even mean the contrary, and say to himself, I will send the poor devils something to keep them alive, by the first opportunity that I have of writing to Mr. Unwin; but other important matters intervening, his favourite mare having taken a nail in her foot, or his Lordship having occasion possibly to settle the structure and furniture of a new chariot, in that negligence of little men and little matters that belongs to nobility,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Petre.

he might overlook poor Buttsbury<sup>1</sup> and its benevolent advocate altogether. You in the meantime have precluded yourself from all future intercession in their behalf, because though his Lordship might not mean to put a silent negative upon your suit, you cannot be sure that he did not. I think, therefore, that you soared a little too high into the regions of civility upon this occasion; and if instead of telling him you should interpret his silence as an everlasting Nay, you had taken the liberty to insinuate the uneasiness of a state of suspense, and that being anxious both for the speedy relief of the people at Buttsbury, and anxious likewise to know that you had not offended by addressing him in their behalf, you should therefore wait with some impatience for an answer,—you had done as well. But *serò sapere* belongs to man, and the pain that the acquisition of such wisdom costs us amounts often to the full value of the purchase; and where feelings like yours are in question, perhaps to more.

I heartily wish you may be able to accommodate your difference about tithes without a lawsuit; both because the matter in dispute is small, and because you are the last man living that should thrust yourself in among the nettles of litigation, if you can possibly avoid it; having so little flesh to feed that ravenous vexation of spirit to which you are liable. But if you must engage, and there be no remedy, in that case I recommend to you the celebrated Joseph Hill for an attorney, the Exchequer as well as the Chancery being his familiar province. He is an honest man, as a certain poet sings truly, and also

<sup>1</sup> Village near Stock, and six and a half miles south-west of Chelmsford.

of great ability—*μικρὸν δέμας ἀλλὰ μαχητής*. Barrister I know none, but he knows them all, and will recommend to you the fittest for the purpose.

*Je suis mortifié* that your cheese turns out no better: it came from a country most famous for that commodity, and was in my judgment the best of two which we were permitted to purchase as a favour:—*sed de caseis non est disputandum*.

The press proceeds like a broad-wheeled waggon, slow and sure. After the correction of the two first sheets, a complete month intervened before I received two more; and before I am favoured with another packet perhaps another month may be almost expended: So the wild goose in the meadow flaps her wings and flaps them, but yet she mounts not; she stands on tiptoe on the banks of Ouse, she meditates an ascent, she stretches her long neck, she flaps her wings again; the successful repetition of her efforts at last bears her above the ground; she mounts into the heavenly regions exulting, and who then shall describe her song?—to herself at least it makes ample recompense of her laborious exertions.

In the last *Gentleman's Magazine*, a poet appears with my signature, of whom I know nothing, except that his verses<sup>1</sup> did not please me. I mean therefore

<sup>1</sup> Two sets of verses appeared in successive numbers of *The Gentleman's Magazine* signed 'W. C.' In the issue for January 1785, vol. lv. p. 53, were the lines entitled 'The Poplar Field.' They begin—

The poplars are fell'd, and adieu to the shade  
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade.  
The winds play no longer, and sing in their leaves,  
Nor the Ouse in its bosom their image receives.

The poem was afterwards amended, and now reads: 'The poplars are felled; farewell to the shade.' In the February issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine* appeared the verses the authorship of which Cowper disclaims in this letter.

in future to insert an asterisk between my two initials by way of discrimination. I tell you this, that if at any time you should pick up the *Magazine* at a coffee-house, and cast your eyes upon W. \* C. you may know your friend when you see him.

We are as well as this terrible and unseasonable winter will permit. In the course of last week indeed I was very ill for a day or two, but James's powder has restored me.

Our best love attends you and all yours. My dear friend, I am very affectionately always at your service,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*March 19, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You will wonder, no doubt, when I tell you that I write upon a card-table; and will be still more surprised when I add, that we breakfast, dine, sup, upon a card-table. In short, it serves all purposes, except the only one for which it was originally designed. The solution of this mystery shall follow, lest it should run in your head at a wrong time, and should puzzle you, perhaps, when you are on the point of ascending your pulpit: for I have heard you say, that at such seasons your mind is often troubled with impertinent intrusions. The round table, which we formerly had in use, was unequal to the pressure of my superincumbent breast and elbows. When I wrote upon it, it creaked and tilted, and, by a variety of inconvenient tricks, disturbed the process. The fly-table was too slight and too small; the square dining-table, too heavy and too large, occupying, when its

leaves were spread, almost the whole parlour; and the sideboard-table, having its station at too great a distance from the fire, and not being easily shifted out of its place and into it again, by reason of its size, was equally unfit for my purpose. The card-table, therefore, which had for sixteen years been banished as mere lumber; the card-table, which is covered with green baize, and is, therefore, preferable to any other that has a slippery surface; the card-table, that stands firm and never totters,—is advanced to the honour of assisting me upon my scribbling occasions; and, because we choose to avoid the trouble of making frequent changes in the position of our household furniture, proves equally serviceable upon all others. It has cost us now and then the downfall of a glass: for, when covered with a table-cloth, the fish-ponds are not easily discerned; and not being seen, are sometimes as little thought of. But having numerous good qualities which abundantly compensate that single inconvenience, we spill upon it our coffee, our wine, and our ale, without murmuring, and resolve that it shall be our table still, to the exclusion of all others. Not to be tedious, I will add but one more circumstance upon the subject, and that only because it will impress upon you, as much as any thing that I have said, a sense of the value we set upon its escorial capacity. Parched and penetrated on one side by the heat of the fire, it has opened into a large fissure, which pervades not the moulding of it only, but the very substance of the plank. At the mouth of this aperture, a sharp splinter presents itself, which, as sure as it comes in contact with a gown or an apron, tears it. It happens, unfortunately, to be on that

side of this excellent and never-to-be-forgotten table which Mrs. Unwin sweeps with her apparel, almost as often as she rises from her chair. The consequences need not, to use the fashionable phrase, be given in detail; but the needle sets all to rights; and the card-table still holds possession of its functions without a rival.

Clean roads and milder weather have once more released us, opening a way for our escape into our accustomed walks. We have both, I believe, been sufferers by such a long confinement. Mrs. Unwin has had a nervous fever all the winter, and I a stomach that has quarrelled with every thing, and not seldom even with its bread and butter. Her complaint, I hope, is at length removed; but mine seems more obstinate, giving way to nothing that I can oppose to it, except just in the moment when the opposition is made. I ascribe this malady—both our maladies, indeed—in a great measure, to our want of exercise. We have each of us practised more, in other days, than lately we have been able to take; and for my own part, till I was more than thirty years old, it was almost essential to my comfort to be perpetually in motion. My constitution, therefore, misses, I doubt not, its usual aids of this kind; and unless, for purposes which I cannot foresee, Providence should interpose to prevent it, will probably reach the moment of its dissolution the sooner for being so little disturbed. A vitiated digestion, I believe, always terminates, if not cured, in the production of some chronical disorder. In several I have known it produce a dropsy. But no matter. Death is inevitable; and whether we die to-day or to-morrow, a watery death or a dry one, is of no

consequence. The state of our spiritual health is all. Could I discover a few more symptoms of convalescence there, this body might moulder into its original dust without one sigh from me. Nothing of all this did I mean to say; but I have said it, and must now seek another subject.

One of our most favourite walks is spoiled. The spinnie<sup>1</sup> is cut down to the stumps: even the lilacs and the syringas, to the stumps. Little did I think, (though indeed I might have thought it), that the trees which screened me from the sun last summer would this winter be employed in roasting potatoes and boiling tea-kettles for the poor of Olney. But so it has proved: and we ourselves have, at this moment, more than two waggon loads of them in our wood-loft.

Such various services can trees perform;  
Whom once they screen'd from heat, in time they warm.

The mention of the poor reminds me of saying, in answer to your application in behalf of the Freemans, that they long since received a portion of their nameless benefactor's annual remittance. Mrs. Unwin sent them more than twelve pounds of beef, and two gallon loaves.

A letter from Manchester reached our town last Sunday, addressed to the Mayor or other chief magistrate of Olney. The purport of it was, to excite him and his neighbours to petition Parliament against the concessions to Ireland that Government has in contemplation. Mr. Maurice Smith, as constable, took the letter. But whether that most respectable personage amongst us intends to comply

<sup>1</sup> The plantation adjoining the road from Olney to Weston.

with the terms of it, or not, I am ignorant. For myself, however, I can pretty well answer, that I shall sign no petition of the sort; both because I do not think myself competent to a right understanding of the question, and because it appears to me, that, whatever be the event, no place in England can be less concerned in it than Olney.

We rejoice that you are all well. Our love attends Mrs. Newton and yourself, and the young ladies.— I am yours, my dear friend, as usual,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN, AT MRS. ORD'S, NO.  
20 LEMAN STREET, GOODMAN'S FIELDS, LONDON

March 20, 1785.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I thank you for your letter. It made me laugh, and there are not many things capable of being contained within the dimensions of a letter, for which I see cause to be more thankful. I was pleased, too, to see my opinion of his Lordship's *nonchalance* upon a subject that you had so much at heart, completely verified. I do not know that the eye of a nobleman was ever dissected. I cannot help supposing, however, that, were that organ, as it exists in the head of such a personage, to be accurately examined, it would be found to differ materially in its construction from the eye of a commoner; so very different is the view that men in an elevated, and in an humble station, have of the same object. What appears great, sublime, beautiful, and important to you and to me, when submitted to the notice of my lord, or his grace, and submitted, too, with the utmost humility, is

either too minute to be visible at all, or if seen, seems trivial, and of no account. My supposition, therefore, seems not altogether chimerical.

In two months I have corrected proof-sheets to the amount of ninety-six pages, and no more. In other words, I have received three packets. Nothing is quick enough for impatience, and I suppose that the impatience of an author has the quickest of all possible movements. It appears to me, however, that at this rate we shall not publish till next autumn. Should you happen, therefore, to pass Johnson's door, pop in your head as you go, and just insinuate to him, that, were his remittances rather more frequent, that frequency would be no inconvenience to me. I much expected one this evening, a fortnight having now elapsed since the arrival of the last. But none came, and I felt myself a little mortified. I took up the newspaper, however, and read it. There I found that the emperor and the Dutch are, after all their negotiations, going to war. Such reflections as these struck me. A great part of Europe is going to be involved in the greatest of all calamities;—troops are in motion,—artillery is drawn together,—cabinets are busied in contriving schemes of blood and devastation,—thousands will perish, who are incapable of understanding the dispute; and thousands, who, whatever the event may be, are little more interested in it than myself, will suffer unspeakable hardships in the course of the quarrel:—Well! Mr. Poet, and how then? You have composed certain verses, which you are desirous to see in print, and because the impression seems to be delayed, you are displeased, not to say dispirited;

—be ashamed of yourself! you live in a world in which your feelings may find worthier subjects;—be concerned for the havoc of nations, and mourn over your retarded volume when you find a dearth of more important tragedies!

You postpone certain topics of conference to our next meeting. When shall it take place? I do not wish for you just now, because the garden is a wilderness, and so is all the country around us. In May we shall have asparagus, and plenty of cucumbers, and weather in which we may stroll to Weston; at least we may hope for it; therefore, come in May; you will find us happy to receive you, and as much of your fair household as you can bring with you.

We are very sorry for your uncle's indisposition. The approach of summer, seems, however, to be much in his favour, that season being of all remedies for the rheumatism, I believe, the most effectual.

I thank you for your intelligence concerning the celebrity of *John Gilpin*. You may be sure that it was agreeable;—but your own feelings on occasion of that article pleased me most of all. Well, my friend, be comforted! You had not an opportunity of saying publicly, 'I know the Author.' But the author himself will say as much for you soon, and perhaps will feel in doing so a gratification equal to your own.

In the affair of face-painting, I am precisely of your opinion. Present your mother's respects and mine to the family in Lemman Street, and assure yourself and yours that you have the affectionate remembrances of us both.—Adieu, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*April 9, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—In a letter to the printer of the *Northampton Mercury*,<sup>1</sup> we have the following history:—An ecclesiastic of the name of Zichen, German superintendant or Lutheran bishop of Zetterfeldt, in the year 1779 delivered to the Courts of Hanover and Brunswick a prediction to the following purport. That an earthquake is at hand, the greatest and most destructive ever known; that it will originate in the Alps and in their neighbourhood, especially at Mount St. Gothard; at the foot of which mountain, it seems, four rivers have their source, of which the Rhine is one. The names of the rest I have forgotten. They are all to be swallowed up. That the earth will open into an immense fissure, which will divide all Europe, reaching from the aforesaid mountain to the States of Holland; that the Zuyder Sea will be absorbed in the gulf; that the Bristol Channel will be no more: in short, that the North of Europe will be separated from the South, and that seven thousand cities, towns, and villages, will be destroyed. This prediction he delivered at the aforesaid Courts, in the year seventy-nine, asserting, that in February following the commotion would begin, and that by Easter 1786, the whole would be accomplished. Accordingly, between the fifteenth and twenty-seventh of February, in the year eighty, the public gazettes and newspapers took notice of several earthquakes in the Alps, and in the regions at

<sup>1</sup> This newspaper still flourishes (1903).

their foot; particularly about Mount St. Gothard. From this partial fulfilment, Mr. Okely argues the probability of a complete one, and exhorts the world to watch and be prepared. He adds, moreover, that Mr. Zichen was a pious man, a man of science, and a man of sense; and that when he gave in his writing, he offered to swear to it—I suppose, as a revelation from above. He is since dead.

Nothing in the whole affair pleases me so much as that he has named a short day for the completion of his prophecy. It is tedious work to hold the judgment in suspense for many years; but any body, methinks, may wait with patience till a twelvemonth shall pass away, especially when an earthquake of such magnitude is in question. I do not say that Mr. Zichen is deceived; but if he be not, I will say that he is the first modern prophet who has not both been a subject of deception himself, and a deceiver of others. A year will show.

Mrs. Unwin thanks Mrs. Newton for her letter. We hope that Patty had been falsely accused. But, however that may be, we see great cause to admire either the cogency of her arguments, or her husband's openness to conviction, who, by a single box on the ear, was so effectually assured of the innocence of his wife, as to become more attached to her than ever. For the sake of good husbands, it is to be hoped that she will keep her nostrum a secret, or communicate it only to ladies in her own predicament, who have need of the most forcible proofs of their integrity.

Our love attends all your family.—Believe me,  
my dear friend, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

April 22, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—When I received your account of the great celebrity of *John Gilpin*, I felt myself both flattered and grieved. Being man, and having in my composition all the ingredients of which other men are made, and vanity among the rest, it pleased me to reflect that I was on a sudden become so famous, and that all the world was busy enquiring after me; but the next moment, recollecting my former self, and that thirteen years ago, as harmless as John's history is, I should not then have written it, my spirits sank, and I was ashamed of my success. Your letter was followed the next post by one from Mr. Unwin. You tell me that I am rivalled by Mrs. Bellamy;<sup>1</sup> and he, that I have a competitor for fame, not less formidable, in the Learned Pig. Alas! what is an author's popularity worth, in a world that can suffer a prostitute on one side, and a pig on the other, to eclipse his brightest glories? I am therefore sufficiently humbled by these considerations; and unless I should hereafter be ordained to engross the public attention by means more magnificent than a song, am persuaded that I shall suffer no real detriment by their applause.

<sup>1</sup> George Anne Bellamy (1727 or 1731-1788), was a well-known actress, born at Fingal in Ireland. Her name of George was given by mistake for Georgiana. She first played with Garrick at a private performance of *The Distressed Mother*; her first public appearance was in Covent Garden, in 1742, in *Love for Love*, but her great success was secured when she played in 1744 in *The Orphan*. In 1745 she appeared in Dublin, under the management of Sheridan. In 1785 she published six lively volumes entitled *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy, late of Covent Garden Theatre, written by herself*, a very readable account of a life into which many events and many people were crowded.

I have produced many things under the influence of despair, which hope would not have permitted to spring. But if the soil of that melancholy, in which I have walked so long, has thrown up here and there an unprofitable fungus, it is well, at least, that it is not chargeable with having brought forth poison. Like you, I see, or think I can see, that Gilpin may have his use. Causes, in appearance trivial, produce often the most beneficial consequences; and perhaps my volumes may now travel to a distance, which, if they had not been ushered into the world by that notable horseman, they would never have reached.

I hope that neither the master of St. Paul's or any other school, who may have commenced my admirer on John's account, will write to me for such a reason; yet a little while, and if they have laughed with me, their note will be changed, and perhaps they will revile me. *Tirocinium* is no friend of theirs; on the contrary, if it have the effect I wish it to have, it will prove much their enemy; for it gives no quarter to modern pedagogues, but finding them all alike guilty of supineness and neglect in the affair of morals, condemns them, both schoolmasters and heads of colleges, without distinction. Our temper differs somewhat from that of the ancient Jews. They would neither dance nor weep. We indeed weep not, if a man mourn unto us; but I must needs say, that, if he pipe, we seem disposed to dance with the greatest alacrity. I ought to tell you that this remark has a reference to *John Gilpin*, otherwise having been jumbled a little out of its place you might be at a loss for the explication.—  
Yours,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

April 30, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I return you thanks for a letter so warm with the intelligence of the celebrity of *John Gilpin*. I little thought, when I mounted him upon my Pegasus, that he would become so famous. I have learned also, from Mr. Newton, that he is equally renowned in Scotland, and that a lady there had undertaken to write a second part, on the subject of Mrs. Gilpin's return to London, but not succeeding in it as she wished, she dropped it.<sup>1</sup> He tells me likewise, that the head master of St. Paul's school (who he is I know not), has conceived, in consequence of the entertainment that John has afforded him, a vehement desire to write to me. Let us hope he will alter his mind; for should we even exchange civilities upon the occasion, *Tirocinium* will spoil all. The great estimation however in which this knight of the stone-bottles is held, may turn out a circumstance propitious to the volume of which his history will make a part. Those events that prove the prelude to our greatest success, are often apparently trivial in themselves, and such as seemed to promise nothing. The disappointment that Horace mentions is reversed—We design a mug, and it proves a hogshead. It is a little hard

<sup>1</sup> See letter of 8th May '84. An Oxford graduate translated *Gilpin* into Latin. '*Johannis Gilpini Historia Lepida.*' The first verse runs:—

'Gilpinus erat municeps  
Honoris quam famosi,  
Turmarum et centurio  
Londoni fabulosi.'

There is a copy in the Museum at Olney.

that I alone should be unfurnished with a printed copy of this facetious story. When you visit London next, you must buy the most elegant impression of it, and bring it with you. I thank you also for writing to Johnson. I likewise wrote to him myself. Your letter and mine together have operated to admiration. There needs nothing more but that the effect be lasting, and the whole will soon be printed. We now draw towards the middle of the fifth book of the *Task*. The man, Johnson, is like unto some vicious horses, that I have known. They would not budge till they were spurred, and when they were spurred, they would kick.—So did he; his temper was somewhat disconcerted: but his pace was quickened, and I was contented.

I was very much pleased with the following sentence in Mr. Newton's last:—'I am perfectly satisfied with the propriety of your proceeding as to the publication.'—Now therefore we are friends again. Now he once more inquires after the work, which, till he had disburthened himself of this acknowledgment, neither he nor I, in any of our letters to each other, ever mentioned. Some side-wind has wafted to him a report of those reasons by which I justified my conduct. I never made a secret of them, but both your mother and I have studiously deposited them with those who we thought were most likely to transmit them to him. They wanted only a hearing, which once obtained, their solidity and cogency were such that they were sure to prevail.

You mention Bensley. I formerly knew the man you mention, but his elder brother much better.

We were schoolfellows, and he was one of a club of seven Westminster men,<sup>1</sup> to which I belonged, who dined together every Thursday. Should it please God to give me ability to perform the poet's part to some purpose, many whom I once called friends, but who have since treated me with a most magnificent indifference, will be ready to take me by the hand again, and some, whom I never held in that estimation, will, like Bensley, (who was but a boy when I left London), boast of a connection with me which they never had. Had I the virtues, and graces, and accomplishments of St. Paul himself, I might have them at Olney, and nobody would care a button about me, yourself and one or two more excepted. Fame begets favour; and one talent, if it be rubbed a little bright by use and practice, will procure a man more friends than a thousand virtues. Dr. Johnson, I remember, in the life of one of our poets, (I believe of Savage), says, that he retired from the world flattering himself that he should be regretted. But the world never missed him. I think his observation upon it is, that the vacancy made by the retreat of any individual is soon filled up; that a man may always be obscure, if he chooses to be so; and that he who neglects the world will be by the world neglected.

Your mother and I walked yesterday in the Wilderness. As we entered the gate a glimpse of something white, contained in a little hole in the gate-post, caught my eye. I looked again and discovered a bird's nest with two tiny eggs in it. By and by they will be fledged, and tailed, and get wing-feathers, and fly. My case is somewhat similar

<sup>1</sup> The Nonsense Club.

to that of the parent bird. My nest is in a little nook. Here I brood and hatch, and in due time my progeny takes wing and whistles.

We wait for the time of your coming with pleasant expectation. Accept our warm love and present it to all your family.—Yours truly,

W. C.

Your mother received a bill of charges attending admission into the Stuatway estate. Your share of the expense amounts to about £18. She will be glad if you will send her a bank note for £10.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*May, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I do not know that I shall send you news, but whether it be news or not it is necessary that I should relate the fact, lest I should omit an article of intelligence important at least at Olney. The event took place much nearer to you than to us, and yet it is possible that no account of it may yet have reached you.—Mr. Ashburner, the elder, went to London on Tuesday se'nnight in perfect health and in high spirits, so as to be remarkably cheerful, and was brought home in a hearse the Friday following. Soon after his arrival in town he complained of an acute pain in his elbow, then in his shoulder, then in both shoulders; was blooded; took two doses of such medicine as an apothecary thought might do him good; and died on Thursday, in the morning, at ten o'clock. When I first heard the tidings I could hardly credit them, and yet have lived long enough myself to have seen manifold

and most convincing proofs that neither health, great strength, nor even youth itself, afford the least security from the stroke of death. It is not common, however, for men at the age of thirty-six to die so suddenly. I saw him but a few days before with a bundle of gloves and hatbands under his arm at the door of Geary Ball,<sup>1</sup> who lay at that time a corpse. The following day I saw him march before the coffin, and lead the procession that attended Geary to the grave. He might be truly said to march, for his step was heroic, his figure athletic, and his countenance as firm and confident as if he had been born only to bury others, and was sure never to be buried himself. Such he appeared to me while I stood at the window and contemplated his deportment; and then he died.

I am sensible of the tenderness and affectionate kindness with which you recollect our past intercourse, and express your hopes of my future restoration. I, too, within the last eight months, have had my hopes, though they have been of short duration, cut off like the foam upon the waters. Some previous adjustments indeed are necessary before a lasting expectation of comfort can have place in me. There are those persuasions in my mind which either entirely forbid the entrance of hope, or, if it enter, immediately eject it. They are incompatible with any such inmate, and must be turned out themselves before so desirable a guest can possibly have secure possession. This, you say, will be done. It may be, but it is not done yet; nor has a single step in the course of God's dealings with me been taken towards it. If I mend, no

<sup>1</sup> Geary Ball was buried 27 March 1785.

creature ever mended so slowly that recovered at last. I am like a slug or snail that has fallen into a deep well: slug as he is, he performs his descent with an alacrity proportioned to his weight; but he does not crawl up again quite so fast. Mine was a rapid plunge; but my return to daylight, if I am indeed returning, is leisurely enough.—I wish you a swift progress, and a pleasant one, through the great subject that you have in hand; and set that value upon your letters to which they are in themselves entitled, but which is certainly increased by that peculiar attention which the writer of them pays to me. Were I such as I once was, I should say that I have a claim upon your particular notice which nothing ought to supersede. Most of your other connections you may fairly be said to have formed by your own act; but your connection with me was the work of God. The kine that went up with the ark from Bethshemesh left what they loved behind them, in obedience to an impression which to them was perfectly dark and unintelligible. Your journey to Huntingdon was not less wonderful. He, indeed, who sent you, knew well wherefore, but you knew not. That dispensation, therefore, would furnish me, as long as we can both remember it, with a plea for some distinction at your hands, had I occasion to use and urge it, which I have not. But I am altered since that time, and if your affection for me had ceased you might very reasonably justify your change by mine. I can say nothing for myself at present; but this I can venture to foretell, that should the restoration of which my friends assure me obtain, I shall undoubtedly love those who have continued to love me, even in a state of transforma-

tion from my former self, much more than ever. I doubt not that Nebuchadnezzar had friends in his prosperity; all kings have many. But when his nails became like eagle's claws, and he ate grass like an ox, I suppose he had few to pity him.

I am glad that Johnson is in fact a civiller man than I supposed him. My quarrel with him was not for any stricture of his upon my poetry, (for he has made several, and many of them have been judicious, and my work will be the better for them), but for a certain rudeness with which he questioned my judgment of a writer of the last century, though I only mention the effect that his verses had upon me when a boy. There certainly was at the time a bustle in his temper, occasioned, I imagine, by my being a little importunate with him to proceed. He has however recovered himself since; and, except that the press seems to have stood still this last week, has printed as fast as I could wish. Had he kept the same pace from the beginning, the book had been published, as indeed it ought to have been, three months ago. That evil report of his indolence reaches me from every body that knows him, and is so general, that had I a work, or the publication of one in hand, the expenses of which I intended to take the hazard of upon myself, I should be very much afraid to employ him. He who will neglect himself cannot well be expected to attend to the interests of another.

We are going to pay Mr. Pomfret<sup>1</sup> a morning visit. Our errand is to see a fine bed of tulips, a sight that I never saw. Fine painting, and God the artist.—Mrs. Unwin has something to say in

<sup>1</sup> Rector of Emberton, one mile south of Olney.

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the cover. I leave her therefore to make her own courtesy, and only add that I am yours and Mrs. Newton's—Affectionate  
WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*June 4, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Thanks for the stockings, thanks for the mackerel. We were very sorry to learn from the bearer of the former that Mrs. Newton is still indisposed, and to such a degree that she could not spare Sally Johnson, whose intended journey, we are sure, would not have been postponed, had there not been too much cause for it. We heartily wish for a more favourable account of her.

Mr. Greatheed<sup>1</sup> had your letter the day after we received it. He is a well-bred, agreeable young man, and one whose eyes have been opened, I doubt not, for the benefit of others, as well as for his own. He preached at Olney, a day or two ago, and I have reason to think with acceptance and success. One person, at least, who had been in prison some weeks, received his enlargement under him. I should have been glad to have been a hearer; but that privilege is not allowed me yet. Indeed, since I told you that I had hope, I have never ceased to despair; and have repented that I made my boast so soon, more than once. A king may forbid a man to appear before him, and it were strange if the King

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Samuel Greatheed, who had been one of Mr. Bull's pupils, resided nineteen years at Newport Pagnell, being during part of the time pastor of the Independent Church which Mr. Bull raised at Woburn. He died in 1823. There are many references to him in these letters.

of kings might not do the same. I know it to be His will that I should not enter into His presence now; when the prohibition is taken off, I shall enter; but in the mean time I should neither please Him, nor serve myself, by intruding.

We have lately been well taken in, to speak in the jockey phrase, or to speak more classically, duped and imposed upon. A certain short man with a rosy round face, and a protuberant belly, calling himself Mr. Crawford, minister of a dissenting congregation in the Borough, attended us one day last week with a petition from his church for assistance towards payment of a debt incurred by rebuilding their meeting-house. Mrs. Unwin received him in the parlour. I was in the garden and was called in. Notwithstanding that physiognomy has, by the ingenious Mr. Lavater,<sup>1</sup> been at length improved into a science, yet having never made it my particular study, I am with reason apt to distrust my own skill in the interpretation of features. On this occasion, however, a better opinion of my proficiency would have been advantageous to myself, and I should have done the object of it no wrong. The moment I saw him, something seemed to say to me, 'that fellow is a rascal!' I rejected the information, to which had I given due credit, I should have saved five shillings. From this place he went to Towcester, gleaning however all that he could get at Wellingborough, and at other places by the way. At Towcester, a little on this side of the town he was seen by Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801) was born at Zurich. He wrote a volume of poems, but his name is principally associated with his two books, *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* and *Physiognomische Fragmente*.

Shepherd, a dissenting minister of that place, leading a female companion into a wood at no great distance from the road, whom he saw him pick up as he went. Arriving not long after in the town of Towcester, he began immediately to exercise his petitioning talents, and calling in the first place upon Mr. Shepherd, was of course not a little surprised to find that he encountered, in that gentleman, an eyewitness of his shame. He denied the charge at first, but at length, being hard pushed, confessed it, and had the impudence to plead the festivity of the season in his excuse, it being fair-time at Towcester, and the road consequently abounding with objects of temptation. He had drunk, he said, a little too freely, and was therefore not sufficiently on his guard. Mr. Scott received this narrative from Mr. Shepherd, and I from Mr. Scott. The report of his offence flying before him, and meeting him in every place, his harvest in this part of the world at least was over. Accordingly he found it necessary to return. In his way to town, he passed again through Olney, not suspecting that his ill-savour had been wafted this way also. Mr. Wilson<sup>1</sup> saw him, and as soon as he could, followed him, overtook him upon the bridge, related to him what he had heard, and begged him, if he had the means of justification in his power, and valued either his own character, or the Gospel that he preached, (for he had preached at Olney), to return and clear himself. He answered, that he valued his character highly, but that he had left some clean linen at Newport, and it was indispensably necessary that he should enquire after it.

<sup>1</sup> William Wilson, Cowper's wigmaker. See letter of 15 Jan. 1785.

In vain Mr. Wilson assured him that a clear character was of more importance than a clean shirt; he persisted in his purpose, promising to return and to exculpate himself either in the evening or the next morning. But unhappily some other very important hinderance intervened, and he never came.—I have told you this long story, merely to guard you against such a vagrant should he come in your way, which I thought not impossible. It is true, however, (for enquiry has been made), that he is a minister, that he ministers in the Borough, and that his meeting-house has been rebuilt.

My book is at length printed, and I returned the last proof to Johnson on Tuesday. I have ordered a copy to Charles Square,<sup>1</sup> and have directed Johnson to enclose one with it, addressed to John Bacon, Esq. I was obliged to give you this trouble, not being sure of the place of his abode. I have taken the liberty to mention him, as an artist, in terms that he well deserves.<sup>2</sup> The passage was written soon after I received the engraving with which he favoured me, and while the impression that it made upon me was yet warm. He will, therefore, excuse the liberty that I have taken, and place it to the account of those feelings which he himself excited.

The walking season is returned. We visit the Wilderness daily. Mr. Throckmorton, last summer, presented me with a key of his garden. The family are all absent, except the priest and a servant or

<sup>1</sup> Rev. John Newton's.

<sup>2</sup>

'Bacon there

Gives more than classic beauty to a stone.'

*Task*, Book 1., line 702.

two; so that the honeysuckles, lilacs, and syringas, are all our own.

We are well. Mrs. Unwin subjoins her thanks to mine for the fish, and for the trouble that Mrs. Newton has taken with the stockings; and our united love attends yourselves and the young ladies.—Yours, my dear friend, with much affection,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN, AT THE  
REV. MATTHEW POWLEY'S, DEWSBURY, YORKSHIRE

*June 12, 1785.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—It was at first your Mother's design to write, but learning from a second application to your letter that you would be far removed from Stock when hers should arrive there, she changed her purpose, and has entrusted the charge to me. My business, therefore, is to express the agreeable views we have of your expected visit here, and the sensations with which they are accompanied. Many words, I trust, will not be necessary to assure you that we enjoy the prospect which in your Mother's contemplation and mine appears to be all that we could wish, except that Mrs. Unwin's presence here makes not a part of it. If it were possible that she could waft herself to the door of the diligence, and by means of the diligence contrive to be set down at ours, we should allow the party to be complete. We could without difficulty make room for your other self, though under such a roof as ours it would puzzle him who packed up the *Iliad* in a nutshell to make room for more; else William, and Mary, and half a dozen others, if they were

yours, would be most welcome. She begs, and so do I, that you would mention us not so much civilly as affectionately to Miss Unwin, and tell her that being no strangers to her character, but having learned it from the best authority, even your own, we sincerely rejoice that she is of the number. I indeed am under some little concern upon the occasion, having never known a writer in my life whose good fortune it had been in any degree to please his readers, that did not disappoint in person the expectations he had raised by his book; insomuch that if I were asked which is the best part of a tolerable poet, I should answer, that which he has printed. But it will be well; my heart tells me that in all my intercourse with my friends I wish to shine in nothing but in esteeming and loving them as I ought,—a part, to which, however I may fail in others, I have the vanity to think myself not altogether unequal. Remember us also, with much affection, to Miss Shuttleworth, with whom being already acquainted, we are warranted by our experience to say that we shall be happy to see her. We are only sorry that we must lose you so soon; but of this, which is the only disagreeable part of the story, we will think as little as possible at present.

Under the languor and lassitude with which the heat of this day affects me, I am not able to send you a long letter. I am sitting in the summerhouse (not the greenhouse), the door, which is open, is toward the garden, and the window, which is open also, is toward a pleasant orchard, so that if it were possible to be cool, that happiness would be mine, but in such a day as this there is no room to hope for it. You have pleased me much by taking a

book to Dewsbury.<sup>1</sup> I wanted to send one, but knew of no conveyance. *John Gilpin*, whom you say you directed hither, has galloped to some other place; at least he has not reached Olney.

Forget not to give our love to the Powleys. Your sister, we hope, will receive a benefit to her spirits from your visit, for which she will be long the better. If good news, as Solomon says, coming from a far country be pleasant, the sight of friends from a far country must still be more so.

John, once the Little, but now almost the Great, and promising to be altogether such in time, make yourself master of the *Iliad* and of the *Odyssey* as soon as you can, and then you will be master of two of the finest poems that ever were composed by man, and composed in the finest language that ever man uttered. All languages of which I know any thing are gibberish compared with Greek.—My dear William, ever yours,  
WM. C.

Many thanks for a most excellent turbot, and for a lobster equally good.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

June 13.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your note written yesterday we receive this morning, and are this moment going to breakfast. We are truly sorry for the occasion of our disappointment.

Mrs. Unwin well knows the Healer of all diseases, and will not fail to apply to Him on your child's behalf.—Yours affectionately,  
WM. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Matthew Powley's.

TO JOSEPH HILL

June 25, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I write in a nook that I call my *Boudoir*. It is a summerhouse not much bigger than a sedan chair, the door of which opens into the garden, that is now crowded with pinks, roses, and honeysuckles, and the window into my neighbour's orchard. It formerly served an apothecary,<sup>1</sup> now dead, as a smoking-room; and under my feet is a trap-door, which once covered a hole in the ground, where he kept his bottles. At present, however, it is dedicated to sublimer uses. Having lined it with garden mats, and furnished it with a table and two chairs, here I write all that I write in summer-time, whether to my friends, or to the public. It is secure from all noise, and a refuge from all intrusion; for intruders sometimes trouble me in the winter evenings at Olney. But (thanks to my *Boudoir*!) I can now hide myself from them. A poet's retreat is sacred. They acknowledge the truth of that proposition, and never presume to violate it.

The last sentence puts me in mind to tell you that I have ordered my volume to your door. My bookseller is the most dilatory of all his fraternity, or you would have received it long since. It is more than a month since I returned him the last proof, and consequently since the printing was finished. I sent him the manuscript at the beginning of last November, that he might publish while

<sup>1</sup> Named Aspray. The orchard from which Cowper's house took its name, 'Orchard Side,' is called in these letters 'Mrs. Aspray's orchard.'

the town was full;—and he will hit the exact moment when it is entirely empty. Patience (you will perceive) is in no situation exempted from the severest trials; a remark that may serve to comfort you under the numberless trials of your own.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*June 25, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A note that we received from Mr. Scott,<sup>1</sup> by your desire, informing us of the amendment of Mrs. Newton's health, demands our thanks, having relieved us from no little anxiety upon her account. The welcome purport of it was soon after confirmed by Sally Johnson, so that, at present, we feel ourselves at liberty to hope that by this time Mrs. Newton's recovery is complete. Sally's looks do credit to the air of Hoxton. She seems to have lost nothing, either in complexion or dimensions, by her removal hence; and, which is still more to the credit of your great town, she seems in spiritual things also, to be the very same Sally whom we knew once at Olney. Situation, therefore, is nothing. They who have the means of grace, and a heart to use them, will thrive any where; others no where. More than a few, who were formerly ornaments of this garden which you once watered, here flourished, and here have seemed to wither. Others, transplanted into a soil apparently less favourable to their growth, either find the exchange an advantage, or at least

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Thomas Scott, the Commentator, curate of Olney, February 1781 to Christmas 1785.

are not impaired by it. Of myself, who had once both leaves and fruit, but who have now neither, I say nothing; or only this, — That when I am overwhelmed with despair, I repine at my barrenness, and think it hard to be thus blighted; but when a glimpse of hope breaks in upon me, I am contented to be the sapless thing I am, knowing that He who has commanded me to wither, can command me to flourish again, when He pleases. My experiences, however, of this latter kind, are rare and transient. The light that reaches me cannot be compared either to that of the sun or of the moon. It is a flash in a dark night, during which the heavens seem opened only to shut again.

We inquired, but could not learn, that any thing memorable passed in the last moments of poor Nathan.<sup>1</sup> I listened in expectation that he would at least acknowledge what all who knew him in his more lively days had so long seen and lamented, his neglect of the best things, and his eager pursuit of riches. But he was totally silent upon that subject. Yet it was evident that the cares of this world had choked in him much of the good seed, and that he was no longer the Nathan whom we have so often heard at the old house, rich in spirit, though poor in expression; whose desires were unutterable in every sense, both because they were too big for language, and because Nathan had no language for them. I believe with you, however, that he is safe at home. He had a weak head and strong passions, which He who made him well knew, and for which

<sup>1</sup> 'Wrong-headed Nathan Sample,' the maltster, who had made himself conspicuous at the prayer-meetings at the Great House. He was buried 9 June 1785. There is in the south of Olney churchyard a small obelisk to his memory. See letter of 11 March '84.

He would undoubtedly make great allowance. The forgiveness of God is large and absolute; so large, that though in general He calls for confession of our sins, He sometimes dispenses with that preliminary, and will not suffer even the delinquent himself to mention his transgression. He has so forgiven it, that He seems to have forgotten it too, and will have the sinner to forget it also. Such instances, perhaps, may not be common, but I know that there have been such, and it might be so with Nathan.

I know not what Johnson is about, neither do I now inquire. It will be a month to-morrow since I returned him the last proof. He might, I suppose, have published by this time, without hurrying himself into a fever, or breaking his neck through the violence of his despatch. But having never seen the book advertised, I conclude that he has not. Had the parliament risen at the usual time, he would have been just too late, and though it sits longer than usual, or is likely to do so, I should not wonder if he were too late at last. Dr. Johnson laughs at Savage for charging the still-birth of a poem of his upon the bookseller's delay; yet when Dr. Johnson had a poem of his own to publish, no man ever discovered more anxiety to meet the market. But I have taken thought about it, till I am grown weary of the subject, and at last have placed myself much at my ease upon the cushion of this one resolution, that if ever I have dealings hereafter with my present manager, we will proceed upon other terms.

Mr. Wright called here last Sunday, by whom Lord Dartmouth made obliging inquiries after the volume, and was pleased to say that he was im-

patient to see it. I told him that I had ordered a copy to his Lordship, which I hoped he would receive if not soon, at least before he should retire into the country. I have also ordered one to Mr. Barham;<sup>1</sup> and have many times blushed that I omitted to do so on the former occasion.

We suffer in this country very much by drought. The corn, I believe, is in most places thin, and the hay harvest amounts in some to not more than the fifth of a crop. Heavy taxes, excessive levies for the poor, and lean acres, have brought our farmers almost to their wits' end; and many, who are not farmers, are not very remote from the same point of despondency. I do not despond, because I was never much addicted to anxious thoughts about the future, in respect of temporals. But I feel myself a little angry with a minister, who, when he imposed a tax upon gloves, was not ashamed to call them a luxury. Caps and boots lined with fur are not accounted a luxury in Russia, neither can gloves be reasonably deemed such in a climate sometimes hardly less severe than that. Nature, indeed, is content with little, and luxury seems, in some respect, rather relative, than of any fixed construction. Accordingly it may become, in time, a luxury for an Englishman to wear breeches, because it is possible to exist without them, and because persons of a moderate income may find them too expensive. I hope, however, to be hid in the dust before that day shall come; for, having worn them so many years, if they be indeed a luxury, they are such a one as I could very ill spare; yet spare them I must, if I cannot afford to wear them.

<sup>1</sup> Of Bedford, a large West Indian proprietor. A Moravian.

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We are tolerably well in health, and as to spirits, much as usual—seldom better, sometimes worse.—  
Yours, my dear friend, affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

*The Task*, or rather Cowper's second published volume, of which *The Task* was the principal poem, was published in June 1785.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

July 9, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You wrong your own judgment when you represent it as not to be trusted; and mine, if you suppose that I have that opinion of it. Had you disapproved, I should have been hurt and mortified. No man's disapprobation would have hurt me more. Your favourable sentiments of my book must consequently give me pleasure in the same proportion. By the post, last Sunday, I had a letter from Lord Dartmouth, in which he thanked me for my volume, of which he had read only a part. Of that part, however, he expresses himself in terms with which my authorship has abundant cause to be satisfied; and adds, that the specimen has made him impatient for the whole. I have likewise received a letter from a judicious friend of mine in London, and a man of fine taste, unknown to you, who speaks of it in the same language. Fortified by these cordials, I feel myself qualified to face the world without much anxiety, and delivered in a great measure from those fears which, I suppose, all men feel upon the like occasion.

My first volume I sent, as you may remember, to the Lord Chancellor, accompanied by a friendly but respectful epistle. His Lordship, however, thought it not worth his while to return me any answer, or to take the least notice of my present. I sent it also to Colman, manager of the Haymarket theatre, with whom I once was intimate. He likewise proved too great a man to recollect me; and though he has published since, did not account it necessary to return the compliment. I have allowed myself to be a little pleased with an opportunity to show them that I resent their treatment of me, and have sent this book to neither of them. They, indeed, are the former friends to whom I particularly allude in my epistle to Mr. Hill; and it is possible that they may take to themselves a censure that they so well deserve. If not, it matters not; for I shall never have any communication with them hereafter.

If Mr. Bates has found it difficult to furnish you with a motto to your volumes, I have no reason to imagine that I shall do it easily. I shall not leave my books unransacked; but there is something so new and peculiar in the occasion that suggested your subject, that I question whether, in all the classics, can be found a sentence suited to it. Our sins and follies, in this country, assume a shape that Heathen writers had never any opportunity to notice. They deified the dead, indeed, but not in the Temple of Jupiter. The new-made god had an altar of his own; and they conducted the ceremony without sacrilege or confusion. It is possible, however, and I think barely so, that somewhat may occur susceptible of accommodation to your pur-

pose; and if it should, I shall be happy to serve you with it.

I told you, I believe, that the spinnie<sup>1</sup> has been cut down; and, though it may seem sufficient to have mentioned such an occurrence once, I cannot help recurring to the melancholy theme. Last night, at near nine o'clock, we entered it for the first time this summer. We had not walked many yards in it, before we perceived that this pleasant retreat is destined never to be a pleasant retreat again. In one more year, the whole will be a thicket. That which was once the serpentine walk is now in a state of transformation, and is already become as woody as the rest. Poplars and elms without number are springing in the turf. They are now as high as the knee. Before the summer is ended, they will be twice as high; and the growth of another season will make them trees. It will then be impossible for any but a sportsman and his dog to penetrate it. The desolation of the whole scene is such, that it sunk our spirits. The ponds are dry. The circular one, in front of the hermitage,<sup>1</sup> is filled with flags and rushes; so that, if it contains any water, not a drop is visible. The weeping willow at the side of it, the only ornamental plant that has escaped the axe, is dead. The ivy and the moss, with which the hermitage was lined, are torn away; and the very mats that covered the benches have been stripped off, rent in tatters, and trodden under foot. So farewell, spinnie; I have promised myself that I will never enter it again. We have both prayed in it: you for me, and I for you. But it is desecrated from

<sup>1</sup> Or *Mosshouse*. See letter of 22 July 1781.

this time forth, and the voice of prayer will be heard in it no more. The fate of it in this respect, however deplorable, is not peculiar. The spot where Jacob anointed his pillar, and, which is more apposite, the spot once honoured with the presence of Him who dwelt in the bush, have long since suffered similar disgrace, and are become common ground.

There is great severity in the application of the text you mention—I am *their music*. But it is not the worse for that. We both approve it highly. The other in Ezekiel does not seem quite so pat. The prophet complains that his word was to the people like a pleasant song, heard with delight, but soon forgotten. At the commemoration, I suppose that the word is nothing, but the music all in all. The Bible, however, will abundantly supply you with applicable passages. All passages, indeed, that animadvert upon the profanation of God's house and worship, seem to present themselves upon the occasion.

We have returned thanks to Mr. William Unwin for a turbot and lobster, and he disclaims all right to the acknowledgment. Is it due to you and Mrs. Newton? If it be, accept a grateful one, accept likewise our love and best wishes; and believe me, my dear friend, with warm and true affection.—  
Yours, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

July 27, 1785.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—You and your party left me in a frame of mind that indisposed me much to

company. I comforted myself with the hope that I should spend a silent day, in which I should find abundant leisure to indulge sensations which, though of the melancholy kind, I yet wished to nourish. But that hope proved vain. In less than an hour after your departure, Mr. Greatheed made his appearance at the greenhouse door. We were obliged to ask him to dinner, and he dined with us. He is an agreeable, sensible, well-bred young man; but with all his recommendations I felt that on that occasion I could have spared him. So much better are the absent, whom we love much, than the present whom we love a little. I have however made myself amends since, and nothing else having interfered, have sent many a thought after you.

You had been gone two days when a violent thunderstorm came over us. I was passing out of the parlour into the hall, with Mungo<sup>1</sup> at my heels, when a flash seemed to fill the room with fire. In the same instant came the clap, so that the explosion was (I suppose) perpendicular to the roof. Mungo's courage upon the tremendous occa-

<sup>1</sup> There is a letter in the Cowper Museum, Olney, from Mr. Wilson, Cowper's wigmaker, with an anecdote about this dog: 'There was in the town,' says Wilson, 'a bull-dog with a face the most resembling that of an African that I think is possible, and was called Mongo. Mr. Cowper wished to have him, and I gave half a guinea for him, and being something out of the common way, was taken into the parlour. Marquis, the name of that little dog, thought him an intruder, and set up his bristles, expressing great anger at such an infringement on his domains. Mongo submitted to it for some time, until it was no longer bearable, then taking him up with his fore feet, pressing him to his side for a short time, then setting him down safely, convinced Marquis of his power and of his generosity, so that if he passed him afterwards the whole day, he made a circuit to the other side of the room.'—WILLIAM WILSON to Mr. JAMES STORER, 8th Jan. 1830.

sion constrained me to smile, in spite of the solemn impression that such an event never fails to affect me with ;—the moment that he heard the thunder (which was like the burst of a great gun), with a wrinkled forehead, and with eyes directed to the ceiling, whence the sound seemed to proceed, he barked ; but he barked exactly in concert with the thunder. It thundered once, and he barked once ; and so precisely in the very instant when the thunder happened, that both sounds seemed to begin and to end together. Some dogs will clap their tails close, and sneak into a corner, at such a time, but Mungo it seems is of a more fearless family. A house at no great distance from ours was the mark to which the lightning was directed ; it knocked down the chimney, split the building, and carried away the corner of the next house, in which lay a fellow drunk, and asleep upon his bed ;—it roused and terrified him, and he promises to get drunk no more ; but I have seen a woeful end of many such conversions. I remember but one such storm at Olney since I have known the place ; and I am glad that it did not happen two days sooner for the sake of the ladies, who would probably, one of them at least, have been alarmed by it. You have left behind you Thomson's *Seasons*, and a bottle of hartshorn. I will not promise that you shall ever see the latter again ; having a sore throat, I made free with part of it this morning, in the way of outward application, and we shall probably find a use for the remainder. The *Seasons* you shall have again.

I have received, since you went, two very

flattering letters of thanks, one from Mr. Bacon, and one from Mr Barham, such as might make a lean poet plump, and a humble poet proud. But being myself neither lean nor humble, I know of no other effect that they had, than that they pleased me; and I communicate the intelligence to you, not without an assured hope that you will be pleased also.

We are now going to walk, and thus far I have written before I have received your letter.

*Friday.*—I must now be as compact as possible. When I began, I designed four sides, but my packet being transformed into two single epistles, I can consequently afford you but three. I have filled a large sheet with animadversions upon Pope, and shall send it by Sunday's post, indifferent whether Nichols detects me or not. I am proceeding in my translation—'*Velis et remis, omnibus nervis*'—as Hudibras has it; and if God give me health and ability, will put it into your hands when I see you next.

Your fish was good,—perfectly good, and we did not forget you in our cups. The money was found, and not a farthing had eloped. My hat is come, and we both admire it; but your mother's either was never sent, or sent the wrong way, for it has not reached us. Tell John that I love him with all my heart for doing so much credit to his tutor, and to my public recommendation of the very plan upon which he is educated.

Mr. Teedon has just left us. He has read my book, and, as if fearful that I had overlooked some of them myself, has pointed out to me all its beauties. I do assure you the man has a very

acute discernment, and a taste that I have no fault to find with. I hope that you are of the same opinion.

Be not sorry that your love of Christ was excited in you by a picture. Could a dog or a cat suggest to me the thought that Christ is precious, I would not despise that thought because a dog or a cat suggested it. The meanness of the instrument cannot debase the nobleness of the principle. He that kneels before a picture of Christ, is an idolater: but he in whose heart the sight of such a picture kindles a warm remembrance of the Saviour's sufferings, must be a Christian. Suppose that I dream as Gardiner did, that Christ walks before me, that he turns and smiles upon me, and fills my soul with ineffable love and joy; Will a man tell me that I am deceived, that I ought not to love or rejoice in him for such a reason, because a dream is merely a picture drawn upon the imagination? I hold not with such divinity. To love Christ is the greatest dignity of man, be that affection wrought in him how it may.

Adieu! May the blessing of God be upon you all! It is your mother's heart's wish and mine.—  
Yours ever, W. C.

*P.S.*—You had hardly reached Emberton<sup>1</sup> when Mr. Teedon came to charge us with his thanks to Miss Unwin for her goodness to him; the poor man looked so humble and grateful, that I forgave him all his past intrusions. I beseech you, therefore, that you transmit his acknowledgments to his kind benefactress.

<sup>1</sup> One mile south of Olney.

*P.P.S.*—It happened that Mr. Smith being gone to Hampstead when two of my *Task* packets were sent to his house, Johnson paid the postage of them. I entreat you at a fair opportunity to defray the debt, for I account it one.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*August 6, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I found your account of what you experienced in your state of maiden authorship very entertaining, because very natural. I suppose that no man ever made his first sally from the press without a conviction that all eyes and ears would be engaged to attend him; at least, without a thousand anxieties lest they should not. But, however arduous and interesting such an enterprise may be in the first instance, it seems to me that our feelings on the occasion soon become obtuse. I can answer, at least, for one. Mine are by no means what they were when I published my first volume. I am even so indifferent to the matter, that I can truly assert myself guiltless of the very idea of my book sometimes whole days together. God knows that my mind having been occupied more than twelve years in the contemplation of the most tremendous subjects, the world and its opinion of what I write is become as unimportant to me as the whistling of a bird in a bush. Despair made amusement necessary, and I found poetry the most agreeable amusement. Had I not endeavoured to perform my best, it would not have amused me at all. The mere blotting of so much paper would

have been but indifferent sport. God gave me grace also to wish that I might not write in vain. Accordingly, I have mingled much truth with much trifle; and such truths as deserved, at least, to be clad as well and as handsomely as I could clothe them. If the world approve me not, so much the worse for them, but not for me. I have only endeavoured to serve them, and the loss will be their own. And as to their commendations, if I should chance to win them, I feel myself equally invulnerable there. The view that I have had of myself, for many years, has been so truly humiliating, that I think the praises of all mankind could not hurt me. God knows that I speak my present sense of the matter at least most truly, when I say, that the admiration of creatures like myself seems to me a weapon the least dangerous that my worst enemy could employ against me. I am fortified against it by such solidity of real self-abasement, that I deceive myself most egregiously if I do not heartily despise it. Praise belongeth to God; and I seem to myself to covet it no more than I covet divine honours. Could I assuredly hope that God would at last deliver me, I should have reason to thank him for all that I have suffered, were it only for the sake of this single fruit of my affliction,—that it has taught me how much more contemptible I am in myself than I ever before suspected, and has reduced my former share of self-knowledge (of which at that time I had a tolerable good opinion) to a mere nullity, in comparison with what I have acquired since. Self is a subject of inscrutable misery and mischief, and can never be studied to so much advantage as in the dark; for as the bright

beams of the sun seem to impart a beauty to the foulest objects, and can make even a dunghill smile, so the light of God's countenance, vouchsafed to a fallen creature, so sweetens him and softens him for the time, that he seems, both to others and to himself, to have nothing savage or sordid about him. But the heart is a nest of serpents, and will be such while it continues to beat. If God cover the mouth of that nest with his hand, they are hush and snug; but if he withdraw his hand, the whole family lift up their heads and hiss, and are as active and venomous as ever. This I always professed to believe from the time that I had embraced the truth, but never knew it as I know it now. To what end I have been made to know it as I do, whether for the benefit of others or for my own, or for both, or for neither, will appear hereafter.

What I have written leads me naturally to the mention of a matter that I had forgot. I should blame nobody, not even my intimate friends, and those who have the most favourable opinion of me, were they to charge the publication of *John Gilpin*, at the end of so much solemn and serious truth, to the score of the author's vanity; and to suspect that, however sober I may be upon proper occasions, I have yet that itch for popularity that would not suffer me to sink my title to a jest that had been so successful. But the case is not such. When I sent the copy of *The Task* to Johnson, I desired, indeed, Mr. Unwin to ask him the question, whether or not he would choose to make it a part of the volume? This I did merely with a view to promote the sale of it. Johnson answered, 'By all means.' Some months afterward, he enclosed a note to me in one

of my packets, in which he expressed a change of mind, alleging, that to print *John Gilpin* would only be to print what had been hackneyed in every magazine, in every shop, and at the corner of every street. I answered, that I desired to be entirely governed by his opinion; and that if he chose to waive it, I should be better pleased with the omission. Nothing more passed between us upon the subject, and I concluded that I should never have the immortal honour of being generally known as the author of *John Gilpin*. In the last packet, however, down came John, very fairly printed, and equipped for public appearance. The business having taken this turn, I concluded that Johnson had adopted my original thought, that it might prove advantageous to the sale; and as he had had the trouble and expense of printing it, I corrected the copy, and let it pass. Perhaps, however, neither the book nor the writer may be made much more famous by John's good company, than they would have been without it; for the volume has never yet been advertised, nor can I learn that Johnson intends it. He fears the expense, and the consequence must be prejudicial. Many who would purchase will remain uninformed: but I am perfectly content.

My compliment to Mr. Throckmorton was printed before he had cut down the Spinnie. He indeed has not cut it down, but Mr. Morley, the tenant,—with the owner's consent, however, no doubt. My poetical civilities, however, were due to that gentleman, for more solid advantages conferred upon me in prose; without any solicitation on our part, or even a hint that we wished it (it was indeed a

favour that we could not have aspired to), he made us a present of a key of his kitchen-garden,<sup>1</sup> and of the fruit of it whenever we pleased. That key, I believe, was never given to any other person; nor is it likely that they should give it to many, for it is their favourite walk, and was the only one in which they could be secure from all interruption. They seem, however, to have left the country, and it is possible that he may never know that my Muse has noticed him.

I have considered your motto, and like the purport of it: but the best, because the most laconic manner of it, seems to be this—

*'Cum talis sis, sis noster;'*

*utinam* being, in my account of it, unnecessary.

Mrs. Newton has our hearty thanks for the turbot and lobster, which were excellent. To her and to the young ladies we beg to be affectionately remembered.

Three weeks since, Mr. Unwin and his late ward, Miss Shuttleworth, and John, called on us in their way from the north, having made an excursion so far as to Dumfries. Mr. Unwin desired me to say, that though he had been often in town since he had the pleasure of seeing you last, he had always gone thither on business, and making a short stay, had not been able to find an opportunity to pay his respects to you again.—Yours, my dear friend, most truly,

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> On the right as you enter Weston from Olney.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Aug. 27, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I did very warmly and very sincerely thank Mr. Bacon for his most friendly and obliging letter; but having written my acknowledgments in the cover, I suppose that they escaped your notice. I should not have contented myself with transmitting them through your hands, but should have addressed them immediately to himself, but that I foresaw plainly this inconvenience: that, in writing to him on such an occasion, I must almost unavoidably make self and self's book the subject. Therefore it was, as Mrs. Unwin can vouch for me, that I denied myself that pleasure. I place this matter now in the van of all that I have to say: first, that you may not overlook it; secondly, because it is uppermost in my consideration; and thirdly, because I am impatient to be exculpated from the seeming omission.

You told me, I think, that you seldom read the papers. In our last we had an extract from Johnson's Diary, or whatever else he called it.<sup>1</sup> It is certain that the publisher of it is neither much a friend to the cause of religion nor to the author's memory; for, by the specimen of it that has reached us, it seems to contain only such stuff as has a direct

<sup>1</sup> *Prayers and Meditations: composed by Samuel Johnson, LL.D., and published from his Manuscripts by George Graham, D.D., Prebendary of Rochester and Vicar of Islington in Middlesex, 1785.* Of this book, one of its editors, Dr. G. Birkbeck Hill, says: 'That he should have wished his friend to publish all that is included in these *Prayers and Meditations*, almost passes belief. Most likely, when in the weakness of his last days, he placed these papers in his hands, he forgot how much they contained that was meant for no eye but his own.'

tendency to expose both to ridicule. His prayers for the dead, and his minute account of the rigour with which he observed church fasts, whether he drank tea or coffee, whether with sugar or without, and whether one or two dishes of either, are the most important items to be found in this childish register of the great Johnson, supreme dictator in the chair of literature, and almost a driveller in his closet; a melancholy witness to testify how much of the wisdom of this world may consist with almost infantine ignorance of the affairs of a better. I remember a good man<sup>1</sup> at Huntingdon, who, I doubt not, is now with God, and he also kept a Diary. After his death, through the neglect or foolish wantonness of his executors, it came abroad for the amusement of his neighbours. All the town saw it, and all the town found it highly diverting. It contained much more valuable matter than the poor Doctor's Journal seems to do; but it contained also a faithful record of all his deliverances from wind (for he was much troubled with flatulence), by whatever vent it escaped him; together with pious acknowledgments of the mercy. There is certainly a call for gratitude, whatsoever benefit we receive; and it is equally certain, that we ought to be humbled under the recollection of our least offences: but it would have been as well if neither my old friend had recorded his eructations, nor the Doctor his dishes of sugarless tea, or the dinners at which he ate too much. I wonder, indeed, that any man of such learned eminence as Johnson, who knew that every word he uttered was deemed oracular, and that every scratch of his pen was accounted a

<sup>1</sup> Cowper also refers to poor Mr. Jedderel's Journal in the next letter.

treasure, should leave behind him what he would have blushed to exhibit while he lived. If Virgil would have burned his *Æneid*, how much more reason had these good men to have burnt their Journals.

Mr. Perry will leave none such behind him. He is dying, as I suppose you have heard. Dr. Kerr, who, I think, has visited him twice or thrice, desired at his last visit to be no more sent for. He pronounced his case hopeless; for that his thigh and leg must mortify. He is, however, in a most comfortable frame of mind. So long as he thought it possible that he might recover, he was much occupied with a review of his ministry; and under a deep impression of his deficiencies in that function, assured Mr. Raban that he intended, when he should enter upon it again, to be much more diligent than he had been. He was conscious, he said, that many fine things had been said of him; but that, though he trusted he had found grace so to walk as not to dishonour his office, he was conscious, at the same time, how little he deserved them. This, with much more to the same purport, passed on Sunday last. On Thursday, Mr. Raban was with him again; and at that time Mr. Perry knew that he must die. The rules and cautions that he had before prescribed to himself, he then addressed directly to his visitor. He exhorted him, by all means, to be earnest and affectionate in his applications to the unconverted, and not less solicitous to admonish the careless, with a head full of light, and a heart alienated from the ways of God; and those, no less, who being wise in their own conceit, were much occupied in matters above their reach, and

very little with subjects of immediate and necessary concern. He added, that he had received from God, during his illness, other views of sin than he had ever been favoured with before; and exhorted him by all means to be watchful. Mr. Raban being himself the reporter of these conversations, it is to be supposed that they impressed him. Admonitions from such lips, and in a dying time too, must have their weight; and it is well with the hearer, when the instruction abides with him. But our own view of these matters is, I believe, that alone which can effectually serve us. The representations of a dying man may strike us at the time; and, if they stir up in us a spirit of self-examination and inquiry, so that we rest not till we have made his views and experience our own, it is well; otherwise, the wind that passes us is hardly sooner gone, than the effect of the most serious exhortations.

We have new neighbours; with whom, however, we should be very sorry to live as such; but there is no danger. Lord Peterborough<sup>1</sup> and *his* Lady Anne Foley have hired a house at Weston, and a young man of the name of Smith, who they say finds it convenient to be at a distance from his creditors, is of the party. Mr. Jones, whom we saw lately, but whom we do not see once in three months, begins to be weary of his master. His connection with him indeed exposes him, at present, to almost inevitable danger of giving offence both to those that are within and to those that

<sup>1</sup> The reference is obscure. Charles Henry (Mordaunt), fifth and last Earl of Peterborough, was born 1758, succeeded 1779, and died in 1814, when all his honours became extinct. He was never married. Lady Anne Foley was the daughter of Thomas, first Baron Foley, but she was married in 1776 to Sir Edward Winnington. She died in 1794.

are without. It is hardly possible for a minister of the gospel to be more unsuitably associated. I take it for granted that he will have to do with them as little as possible.

We heartily wish that Mrs. Newton's excursion to the salt water may prove beneficial both to herself and to Miss Cunningham. I need not say, give our love to them, for you will send my letter. The coldness of this August is without precedent in my remembrance, but I have heard that bathing is most salutary in such a season. We beg to be remembered affectionately to Miss Catlett, and to all who ever think of us, and who are in the number of your connections.

Farewell, my friend. My views of my spiritual state are, as you say, altered; but they are yet far from being such as they must be, before I can be enduringly comforted.—Yours, unfeignedly,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*August 27, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I was low in spirits yesterday, when your parcel came and raised them. Every proof of attention and regard to a man who lives in a vinegar bottle is welcome from his friends on the outside of it; accordingly your books were welcome (you must not forget by the way that I want the original, of which you have sent me the translation only), and the ruffles from Miss Shuttleworth most welcome. I am covetous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees whom I highly value and esteem, and consequently

felt myself much gratified by her very obliging present. I have had more comfort, far more comfort, in the connections that I have formed within the last twenty years, than in the more numerous ones that I had before.

*Memorandum.*—The latter are almost all Unwins or Unwinisms.

You are entitled to my thanks also for the facetious engravings of John Gilpin. A serious poem is like a swan, it flies heavily, and never far; but a jest has the wings of a swallow, that never tire, and that carry it into every nook and corner. I am perfectly a stranger however to the reception that my volume meets with, and I believe in respect of my *nonchalance* upon that subject, if authors would but copy so fair an example, am a most exemplary character. I must tell you nevertheless, that although the laurels that I gain at Olney will never minister much to my pride, I have acquired some. The Rev. Mr. Scott is my admirer, and thinks my second volume superior to my first. It ought to be so. If we do not improve by practice, then nothing can mend us; and a man has no more cause to be mortified at being told that he has excelled himself, than the elephant had, whose praise it was, that he was the greatest elephant in the world, himself excepted. This moment it occurs to me, that we have received from you a basket of very fine fish, unacknowledged hitherto, the receipt of which I hereby then thankfully acknowledge.

If it be fair to judge of a book by an extract, I do not wonder that you were so little edified by Johnson's Journal. It is even more ridiculous than

was poor Jedderel's of flatulent memory. The portion of it given to us in this day's paper contains not one sentiment worth one farthing; except the last, in which he resolves to bind himself with no more unbidden obligations. Poor man! one would think, that to pray for his dead wife, and to pinch himself with church fasts, had been almost the whole of his religion. I am sorry that he, who was so manly an advocate for the cause of virtue in all other places, was so childishly employed, and so superstitiously too, in his closet. Had he studied his Bible more, to which by his own confession he was in great part a stranger, he had known better what use to make of his retired hours, and had trifled less. His lucubrations of this sort have rather the appearance of religious dotage, than of any vigorous exertions towards God. It will be well if the publication prove not hurtful in its effects, by exposing the best cause, already too much despised, to ridicule still more profane. On the other side of the same paper I find a long string of aphorisms, and maxims, and rules, for the conduct of life, which, though they appear not with his name, are so much in his manner with the above-mentioned, that I suspect them for his. I have not read them all, but several of them I read that were trivial enough: for the sake of one, however, I forgive him the rest; he advises never to banish hope entirely, because it is the cordial of life, although it be the greatest flatterer in the world. Such a measure of hope, as may not endanger my peace by disappointment, I would wish to cherish upon every subject in which I am interested. But there lies the difficulty,—mine at

least; whose sanguine temper does not incline me to, nor even permit me, moderation in any thing. A cure, however, and the only one, for all the irregularities both of hope and fear, is found in submission to the will of God. Happy they that have it!

This last sentence puts me in mind of your reference to Blair in a former letter, whom you there permitted to be your arbiter to adjust the respective claims of *who* and *that*. I do not rashly differ from so great a grammarian, nor do I at any rate differ from him altogether;—upon solemn occasions, as in prayer or preaching, for instance, I would be strictly correct, and upon stately ones;—for instance, were I writing an epic poem, I would be so likewise, but not upon familiar occasions.

God *who* heareth prayer, is right.

Hector *who* saw Patroclus, is right.

And the man *that* dresses me every day, is in my mind right also;—because the contrary would give an air of stiffness and pedantry to an expression, that in respect of the matter of it cannot be too negligently made up.

Adieu, my dear William! I have scribbled with all my might, which, breakfast-time excepted, has been my employment ever since I rose, and it is now past one.—Yours, with our warmest remembrances of all with you. W. C.

*P.S.*—Your mother's hat, which was directed to Miss Shuttleworth at Wellingborough by mistake, has been arrived some time, and is much approved. Mrs. Unwin returns thanks for silk for pin-cushion.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Sept. 24, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am sorry that an excursion, which you would otherwise have found so agreeable, was attended with so great a drawback upon its pleasures as Miss Cunningham's illness must needs have been. Had she been able to bathe in the sea, it might have been of service to her; but I knew her weakness and delicacy of habit to be such as did not encourage any very sanguine hopes that the regimen would suit her. I remember Southampton well, having spent much time there; but though I was young, and had no objections on the score of conscience either to dancing or cards, I never was in the assembly-room in my life. I never was fond of company, and especially disliked it in the country. A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fire-side, had always more charms for me than any other amusement that the place afforded. I was also a sailor, and being of Sir Thomas Hesketh's party, who was himself born one, was often pressed into the service. But though I gave myself an air, and wore trousers, I had no genuine right to that honour, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather. How they contrive to elude the wearisomeness that attends a sea life, who take long voyages, you know better than I; but for my own part, I seldom have sailed so far as from Hampton river to Portsmouth, without feeling the confinement irksome, and some-

times to a degree that was almost insupportable. There is a certain perverseness, of which I believe all men have a share, but of which no man has a larger share than I;—I mean that temper, or humour, or whatever it is to be called, that indisposes us to a situation, though not unpleasant in itself, merely because we cannot get out of it. I could not endure the room in which I now write, were I conscious that the door were locked. In less than five minutes I should feel myself a prisoner, though I can spend hours in it, under an assurance that I may leave it when I please, without experiencing any tedium at all. It was for this reason, I suppose, that the yacht was always disagreeable to me. Could I have stepped out of it into a corn-field or a garden, I should have liked it well enough; but being surrounded with water, I was as much confined in it as if I had been surrounded by fire, and did not find that it made me any adequate compensation for such an abridgment of my liberty. I make little doubt but Noah was glad when he was enlarged from the ark; and we are sure that Jonah was, when he came out of the fish; and so was I to escape from the good sloop the *Harriet*.

In my last, I wrote you word that Mr. Perry was given over by his friends, and pronounced a dead man by his physician. Just when I had reached the end of the foregoing paragraph, he came in. His errand hither was to bring two letters, which I enclose; one is to yourself, in which he will give you, I doubt not, such an account both of his body and mind, as will make all that I might say upon those subjects superfluous. The only

consequences of his illness seem to be, that he looks a little pale, and that though always a most excellent man, he is still more angelic than he was. Illness sanctified is better than health. But I know a man who has been a sufferer by a worse illness than his, almost these fourteen years, and who at present is only the worse for it.

Mr. Scott<sup>1</sup> called upon us yesterday: he is much inclined to set up a Sunday school, if he can raise a fund for the purpose. Mr. Jones has had one some time at Clifton; and Mr. Unwin writes me word that he has been thinking of nothing else day and night, for a fortnight. It is a wholesome measure, that seems to bid fair to be pretty generally adopted, and for the good effects that it promises, deserves well to be so. I know not, indeed, while the spread of the gospel continues so limited as it is, how a reformation of manners, in the lower class of mankind, can be brought to pass; or by what other means the utter abolition of all principle among them, moral as well as religious, can possibly be prevented. Heathenish parents can only bring up heathenish children; an assertion no where oftener or more clearly illustrated than at Olney; where children, seven years of age, infest the streets every evening with curses and with songs, to which it would be unseemly to give their proper epithet. Such urchins as these could not be so diabolically accomplished, unless by the connivance of their parents. It is well, indeed, if in some instances their parents be not themselves their instructors. Judging by their proficiency, one can hardly suppose any other. It is, therefore, doubtless an act

<sup>1</sup> See *supra*, p. 331.

of the greatest charity to snatch them out of such hands, before the inveteracy of the evil shall have made it desperate. Mr. Teedon, I should imagine, will be employed as a teacher, should this expedient be carried into effect. I know not, at least, that we have any other person among us so well qualified for the service. He is indisputably a Christian man, and miserably poor, whose revenues need improvement, as much as any children in the world can possibly need instruction.

I understand that Mr. Jones is in London; it is possible that you may have seen him, and if you have, are better acquainted with his present intentions respecting Lord Peterborough than myself. We saw him, not long since, when he talked of resigning his office immediately; but I hear that he was afterwards otherwise advised, and repented of his purpose. I think it great pity that he did. A thing that a man had better never have touched cannot too soon be relinquished. While his principal kept himself at a distance, his connection with him was less offensive; but now to all who interest themselves in his conduct as a minister of the gospel, it is an offence indeed. He seems aware of it, and we hope, therefore, will soon abandon it.

Mrs. Unwin hopes that a hare, which she sent before Mrs. Newton went her journey, arrived safe. By this week's coach she also sent three fowls and a ham, with cabbages, of whose safe arrival she will likewise be glad to hear. She has long been troubled with a pain in her side, which we take to be of the spasmodic kind, but is otherwise well. She joins with me in love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, and

to the young ladies; neither do we forget Sally Johnson.—Believe me, my dear friend, with true affection, yours,  
W. C.

Hannah desires me to give her duty to Miss Cunningham and to Miss Catlett.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Oct. 11, 1785.*

MY DEAR SIR,—You began your letter with an apology for long silence, and it is now incumbent upon me to do the same; and the rather, as your kind invitation to Wargrave entitled you to a speedier answer. The truth is, that I am become, if not a man of business, yet a busy man, and have been engaged almost this twelvemonth in a work that will allow of no long interruption. On this account it was impossible for me to accept your obliging summons; and having only to tell you that I could not, it appeared to me as a matter of no great moment, whether you received that intelligence soon or late.

You do me justice, when you ascribe my printed epistle to you, to my friendship for you; though, in fact, it was equally owing to the opinion that I have of yours for me. Having, in one part or other of my two volumes, distinguished by name the majority of those few for whom I entertain a friendship, it seemed to me that it would be unjustifiable negligence to omit yourself; and if I took that step without communicating to you my intention, it was only to gratify myself the more,

with the hope of surprising you agreeably. Poets are dangerous persons to be acquainted with, especially if a man have that in his character that promises to shine in verse. To that very circumstance it is owing, that you are now figuring away in mine. For, notwithstanding what you say on the subject of honesty and friendship, that they are not splendid enough for public celebration, I must still think of them as I did before,—that there are no qualities of the mind and heart that can deserve it better. I can, at least for my own part, look round about upon the generality, and, while I see them deficient in those grand requisites of a respectable character, am not able to discover that they possess any other, of value enough to atone for the want of them.

I beg that you will present my respects to Mrs. Hill, and believe me, ever affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

The popularity of *The Task* brought Cowper a number of new friends. It was also the origin of the renewal of his correspondence with some of his relations, notably Lady Hesketh.

TO LADY HESKETH

Oct. 12, 1785.

MY DEAR COUSIN,—It is no new thing with you to give pleasure; but I will venture to say, that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it con-

tained a letter from you, I said within myself—  
'This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more, are actually returned.' You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured, that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you, that neither years, nor interrupted intercourse, have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value: if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment, but I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment that deserves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction, and many other feats we have performed together, upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelvemonth, I should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply, as to feel no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend, Sir Thomas. I should remember

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him, indeed, at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself; but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you endears him to me still more. With his uncommon understanding (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance), and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof, that he could give, of a judgment that never deceived him, when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me: that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter, but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs. Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me, during the far greater part of that time, it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been for thirteen of those years in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary; an attention, and a care, that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject; it would be cruel to particularise only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late a day is much; but to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth,

is much more, and in these postdiluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy, for the most part, are parents who have daughters. Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived, even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's felicity, who has three female descendants from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear cousin, dejection of spirits, which, I suppose, may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write, therefore, generally three hours in a morning, and in an evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer, at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer, at Olney. Ay, and the winters also; I have seldom left it, and except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never I believe a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved cousin, I shall not always be thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can.—Yours, my dear friend, and cousin,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*October 16, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—To have sent a child<sup>1</sup> to heaven is a great honour and a great blessing, and your feelings on such an occasion may well be such as render you rather an object of congratulation than of condolence. And were it otherwise, yet, having yourself free access to all the sources of genuine consolation, I feel that it would be little better than impertinence in me to suggest any. An escape from a life of suffering to a life of happiness and glory, is such a deliverance as leaves no room for the sorrow of survivors, unless they sorrow for themselves. We cannot, indeed, lose what we love without regretting it; but a Christian is in possession of such alleviations of that regret, as the world knows nothing of. Their beloveds, when they die, go they know not whither; and if they suppose them, as they generally do, in a state of happiness, they have yet but an indifferent prospect of joining them in that state hereafter. But it is not so with you. You both know whither your beloved is gone, and you know that you shall follow her; and you know also that in the meantime she is incomparably happier than yourself. So far, therefore, as she is concerned, nothing has come to pass but what was most fervently to be wished. I do not know that I am singularly selfish; but one of the first thoughts that your account of Miss Cunningham's dying moments and departure suggested to me, had self for its object. It struck

<sup>1</sup> *Eliza Cunningham, one of Newton's two adopted daughters. She died in October, 1785.*

me that she was not born when I sank into darkness, and that she is gone to heaven before I have emerged again. What a lot, said I to myself, is mine! whose helmet is fallen from my head, and whose sword from my hand, in the midst of the battle; who was stricken down to the earth when I least expected it; who had just begun to cry victory! when I was defeated myself; and who have been trampled upon so long, that others have had time to conquer and to receive their crown, before I have been able to make one successful effort to escape from under the feet of my enemies. It seemed to me, therefore, that if you mourned for Miss Cunningham, you gave those tears to her to which I only had a right, and I was almost ready to exclaim, 'I am the dead, and not she; you misplace your sorrows.' I have sent you the history of my mind on this subject without any disguise; if it does not please you, pardon it at least, for it is the truth. The unhappy, I believe, are always selfish. I have, I confess, my comfortable moments; but they are like the morning dew, so suddenly do they pass away and are gone. I had a dream twelve years ago, before the recollection of which all consolation vanishes, and as it seems to me, must always vanish. But I will neither trouble you with my dream nor with any comments upon it; for, if it were possible, I should do well to forget that, the remembrance of which is incompatible with my comfort.

It should seem a matter of small moment to me, who never hear him, whether Mr. Scott shall be removed from Olney to the Lock,<sup>1</sup> or no; yet, in

<sup>1</sup> At Christmas 1785, the Rev. Thomas Scott, then curate of Olney, removed to London to become joint-chaplain at the Lock Hospital.

fact, I believe, that few interest themselves more in that event than I. He knows my manner of life, and has ceased long since to wonder at it. A new minister would need information, and I am not ambitious of having my tale told to a stranger. He would also, perhaps, think it necessary to assail me with arguments, which would be more profitably disposed of if he should discharge them against the walls of a tower. I wish, therefore, for the continuance of Mr. Scott. He honoured me so far as to consult me twice upon the subject. At our first interview, he seemed to discern but little in the proposal that entitled it to his approbation. But when he came the second time, we observed that his views of it were considerably altered. He was warm,—he was animated; difficulties had disappeared, and allurements had started up in their place. I could not say to him, Sir, you are naturally of a sanguine temper; and he that is so, cannot too much distrust his own judgment;—but I am glad that he will have the benefit of yours. It seems to me, however, that the minister who shall re-illuminate the faded glories of the Lock, must not only practise great fidelity in his preaching, to which task Mr. Scott is perfectly equal, but must do it with much address; and it is hardly worth while to observe, that his excellence does not lie that way, because he is ever ready to acknowledge it himself. But I have nothing to suggest upon this subject that will be new to you, and therefore drop it; the rather, indeed, because I may reasonably suppose that by this time the point is decided.

I have reached that part of my paper which I generally fill with intelligence, if I can find any:

but there is a great dearth of it at present; and Mr. Scott has probably anticipated me in all the little that there is. Lord Peterborough having dismissed Mr. Jones from his service, the people of Turvey have burnt him [Mr. Jones] in effigy, with a bundle of quickthorn under his arm. What consequences are to follow his dismissal is uncertain. His lordship threatens him with a lawsuit; and unless their disputes can be settled by arbitration, it is not unlikely that the profits of poor Jones's stewardship will be melted down at Westminster. He has laboured hard, and no doubt with great integrity, and has been rewarded with hard words and scandalous treatment.

Mr. Scott (which perhaps he may not have told you, for he did not mention it here) has met with similar treatment at a place in this country called Hinksey,<sup>1</sup> or by some such name. But he suffered in effigy for the Gospel's sake;—a cause in which I presume he would not be unwilling, if need were, to be burnt *in propria persona*.

I have nothing to add, but that we are well, and remember you with much affection; and that I am,  
my dear friend,—Sincerely yours, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Oct. 22, 1785.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—You might well suppose that your letter had miscarried, though in fact it was duly received. I am not often so long in arrear, and you may assure yourself that when at any time it happens that I am so, neither neglect nor idleness

<sup>1</sup> Tingewick, near Buckingham.

is the cause. I have, as you well know, a daily occupation,—forty lines to translate, a task which I never excuse myself when it is possible to perform it. Equally sedulous I am in the matter of transcribing, so that between both, my morning and evening are for the most part completely engaged. Add to this, that though my spirits are seldom so bad but that I can write verse, they are often at so low an ebb as to make the production of a letter impossible. So much for a trespass which called for some apology, but for which to apologise further, would be to commit a greater trespass still.

I know not whether you saw my letter to Mr. Urban.<sup>1</sup> It was printed in the *Magazine* for August, and produced in that for September a citation from Say's *Essays*, made by Mr. Nichols<sup>2</sup> himself, of which Homer's celebrated moonlight night is the subject. Say's opinion of Pope's translation of that passage confirms what I have said of it in my epistle. I may, therefore, reasonably conclude, that Nichols, who makes the quotation, is on my side also. I do not know that Pope's work was ever more roughly handled than by myself upon this occasion; yet although the *Magazine* be a field in which disputants upon all questions contend, no one has hitherto enlisted himself on Pope's behalf against me. The truth is, that on those points where I touched him, he is indefensible. Readers of the original know it; and all others must be conscious, that whether he deserves my censure, or deserves it not, the matter is not for them to meddle with. I am now in the twentieth book of Homer, and

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Aug. 1785. The letter was signed 'Alethes.'

<sup>2</sup> John Nichols, the printer and editor.

shall assuredly proceed, because the farther I go the more I find myself justified in the undertaking: and in due time, if I live, shall assuredly publish. In the whole I shall have composed about forty thousand verses, about which forty thousand verses I shall have taken great pains, on no occasion suffering a slovenly line to escape me. I leave you to guess, therefore, whether, such a labour once achieved, I shall not determine to turn it to some account, and to gain myself profit if I can,—if not, at least some credit, for my reward.

I perfectly approve of your course with John. The most entertaining books are the best to begin with, and none in the world, so far as entertainment is concerned, deserves the preference to Homer. Neither do I know that there is anywhere to be found Greek of easier construction,—poetical Greek I mean; and as for prose, I should recommend Xenophon's *Cyropædia*. That also is a most amusing narrative, and ten times easier to understand than the crabbed epigrams and scribblements of the minor poets, that are generally put into the hands of boys. I took particular notice of the neatness of John's Greek character, which (let me tell you) deserves its share of commendation; for to write the language legibly is not the lot of every man who can read it. Witness myself for one.

I like the little ode of Huntingford's<sup>1</sup> that you

<sup>1</sup> George Isaac Huntingford (1748-1832) was bishop successively of Gloucester and Hereford. He printed *Monostrophics* in Greek and Latin in 1781 for private circulation. An anonymous translation came out in 1785, attributed separately to the Rev. Charles Powlett and the Rev. P. Smyth. Huntingford issued in 1784 *An Apology for the Monostrophics which were published in 1782, with a Second Collection of Monostrophics*, 1784. This book was criticised in the *Monthly Review* of 1785.

sent me. In such matters we do not expect much novelty, or much depth of thought. The expression is all in all, which to me at least appears to be faultless. Yet Huntingford's *Monostrophics* have been my ratsbane for these six months past. Not a Review has been published, I think (a Monthly one at least), of which they have not occupied a third part. The learned Poet, it seems, had the misfortune to meet with a more learned Critic. The Critic found many faults in his Greek. The Poet justified. The Critic replied; and though this controversy was conducted on the part of both with the utmost good temper, mine, I must confess, has been sometimes a little ruffled by the length of it. I wish, said I to myself, that if men must needs write odes, they would write them in a language of which they are sure they are masters.

But oh! what is Huntingford to Robert Heron, Esq.? Have you seen that man's *Letters of Literature*?<sup>1</sup> If you have, then say with me, I beseech you, that you have seen the vainest, the cruellest, the most unjustifiable attack upon the most eminent writers that was ever made. I should long to see him well and handsomely chastised, if I did not account him beneath the notice of any man

<sup>1</sup> Written by John Pinkerton (1758-1826), a Scots antiquary and historian, born at Edinburgh. In 1783 he published *Select Scottish Ballads*, with the sub-title, *Hardy Knute: an Heroic Ballad*. A discussion in the *Gentleman's Magazine* ultimately demonstrated he was a literary forger, and himself the author of *Hardy Knute*. In 1785, under the pseudonym of 'Robert Heron,' Pinkerton published *Letters of Literature*. His depreciation of the classical authors of Greece and Rome, while it roused the ire of Cowper, secured him the acquaintanceship of Horace Walpole and of Gibbon.

equal to the task.<sup>1</sup> But he that can find no beauties in Virgil, and, which is worse, not a single instance of the sublime in Scripture, must either belie himself, or be, of all creatures that live, the most destitute of taste and sensibility.

Adieu, my dear William! We are well, and you and yours are ever the objects of our affection.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I am glad that I always loved you as I did. It releases me from any occasion to suspect that my present affection for you is indebted for its existence to any selfish considerations. No, I am sure I love you disinterestedly, and for your own sake, because I never thought of you with any other sensations than those of the truest affection, even while I was under the influence of a persuasion that I should never hear from you again. But with my present feelings, superadded to those that I always had for you, I find it no easy matter to do justice to my sensations. I perceive myself in a state of mind similar to that of the traveller, described in Pope's *Messiah*, who, as he passes through a sandy desert, starts at the sudden and unexpected sound of a waterfall. You have placed me in a situation new to me, and in which I feel myself somewhat puzzled how I ought to behave. At the same time that I would not grieve you, by putting a check

<sup>1</sup> Cowper did, however, chastise him. He wrote the lines 'On the Author of *Letters of Literature*.'

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upon your bounty, I would be as careful not to abuse it as if I were a miser, and the question not about your money, but my own.

Although I do not suspect that a secret to you, my cousin, is any burden, yet having maturely considered that point, since I wrote my last, I feel myself altogether disposed to release you from the injunction to that effect under which I laid you. I have now made such a progress in my translation that I need neither fear that I shall stop short of the end, nor that any other rider of Pegasus should overtake me. Therefore if at any time it should fall fairly in your way, or you should feel yourself invited to say I am so occupied, you have my poetship's free permission. Dr. Johnson read and recommended my first volume. W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Nov. 5, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Were it with me as in days past you should have no cause to complain of my tardiness in writing. You supposed that I would have accepted your packet as an answer to my last; and so indeed I did, and felt myself overpaid,—but though a debtor, and deeply indebted too, had not wherewithal to discharge the arrear. You do not know nor suspect what a conquest I sometimes gain when I only take up the pen with a design to write. Many a time have I resolved to say to all my few correspondents, ‘I take my leave of you for the present; if I live to see better days, you shall hear from me again.’ I have been driven to

the very verge of this measure; and, even upon this occasion, was upon the point of desiring Mrs. Unwin to become my substitute. She, indeed, offered to write in my stead; but fearing that you would understand me to be even worse than I am, I rather chose to answer for myself. So much for a subject with which I could easily fill the sheet, but with which I have occupied too great a part of it already. It is time that I should thank you, and return you Mrs. Unwin's thanks for your *Narrative*. I told you in my last in what manner I felt myself affected by the abridgment of it contained in your letter; and have, therefore, only to add upon that point that the impression made upon me by the relation at large was of a like kind. I envy all that live in the enjoyment of a good hope, and much more all who die to enjoy the fruit of it: but I recollect myself in time; I resolved not to touch that chord again, and yet was just going to trespass upon my resolution. As to the rest, your history of your happy niece is just what it should be,—clear, affectionate, and plain; worthy of her, and worthy of yourself. How much more beneficial to the world might such a memorial of an unknown but pious and believing child eventually prove, would the supercilious learned condescend to read it, than the history of all the kings and heroes that ever lived! But the world has its objects of admiration, and God has objects of His love. Those make a noise and perish; and these weep silently for a short season, and live for ever. I had rather have been your niece, or the writer of her story, than any Cæsar that ever thundered.

The vanity of human attainments was never so conspicuously exemplified as in the present day. The sagacious moderns make discoveries which how useful they may prove to themselves I know not; certainly they do no honour to the ancients. Homer and Virgil have enjoyed (if the dead have any such enjoyments) an unrivalled reputation as poets through a long succession of ages: but it is now shrewdly suspected that Homer did not compose the poems for which he has been so long applauded; and it is even asserted by a certain Robert Heron, Esq., that Virgil never wrote a line worth reading. He is a pitiful plagiarist; he is a servile imitator, a bungler in his plan, and has not a thought in his whole work that will bear examination. In short, he is any thing but what the *literati* for two thousand years have taken him to be—a man of genius, and a fine writer. I fear that Homer's case is desperate. After the lapse of so many generations, it would be a difficult matter to elucidate a question which time and modern ingenuity together combine to puzzle. And I suppose that it were in vain for an honest plain man to inquire, 'If Homer did not write the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, who did?' The answer would undoubtedly be, 'It is no matter; he did not: which is all that I undertook to prove.' For Virgil, however, there still remains some consolation. The very same Mr. Heron, who finds no beauties in the *Æneid*, discovers not a single instance of the sublime in Scripture. Particularly, he says, speaking of the prophets, that Ezekiel, although the filthiest of all writers, is the best of them. He, therefore, being the first of the learned who has reprobated

even the style of the Scriptures, may possibly make the fewer proselytes to his judgment of a heathen writer. For my own part, at least, had I been accustomed to doubt whether the *Æneid* were a noble composition or not, this gentleman would at once have decided the question for me; and I should have been immediately assured that a work must necessarily abound in beauties that had the happiness to displease a censorer of the Word of God. What enterprises will not an inordinate passion for fame suggest? It prompted one man to fire the Temple of Ephesus; another, to fling himself into a volcano; and now has induced this wicked and unfortunate squire either to deny his own feelings, or to publish to all the world that he has no feelings at all.

This being the fifth of November, is the worst of all days in the year for letter-writing. Continually called upon to remember the bonfire, one is apt to forget everything else. The boys at Olney have likewise a very entertaining sport, which commences annually upon this day; they call it Hockey; and it consists in dashing each other with mud, and the windows also, so that I am forced to rise now and then, and to threaten them with a horsewhip, to preserve our own. We know that the Roman boys whipped tops, trundled the hoop, and played at tennis; but I believe we nowhere read that they delighted in these filthy aspersions: I am inclined, therefore, to give to the slovenly but ingenious youths of Olney full credit for the invention. It will be well if the Sunday-school may civilise them to a taste for more refined amusements. That measure is so far in forwardness that a subscription

is made: but it amounts, I am told, to no more than nineteen pounds; a feeble beginning, which, as taxes are continually growing, promises no long duration.

We have lost our noble neighbours: Lord Peterborough and his lady are gone; and gone to return no more. Mr. Throckmorton was so much displeased with his steward, Mr. Morley, for letting them his house, that he had almost dismissed him from his service. He is not likely, indeed, to keep it long: having made too free with spirituous liquors, his legs begin to swell, and he is going fast into a dropsy.

Mr. Jones and Lord Peterborough have parted at last; and, after many bickerings, have parted upon amicable terms. Jones having delivered in an honest account refused to falsify it to the prejudice of his own reputation, and his master threatened him with a lawsuit. But finding him inflexible, and not to be intimidated, he gave him his hand, treated him as a friend, and admitted him into his confidence. It is well for little folks that great folks are apt to be somewhat capricious; they would otherwise, perhaps, be at all times insolent and oppressive alike.

Mr. Scott is pestered with anonymous letters, but he conducts himself wisely; and the question whether he shall go to the Lock or not seems hasting to a decision in the affirmative.

We are tolerably well: and Mrs. Unwin adds to mine her affectionate remembrances of yourself and Mrs. Newton.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Nov. 7, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your time being so much occupied as to leave you no opportunity for a word more than the needful, I am the more obliged to you that you have found leisure even for that, and thank you for the note above acknowledged.

I know not at present what subject I could enter upon, by which I should not put you to an expense of moments that you can ill spare: I have often been displeased when a neighbour of mine, being himself an idle man, has delivered himself from the burthen of a vacant hour or two, by coming to repose his idleness upon me. Not to incur, therefore, and deservedly, the blame that I have charged upon him, by interrupting you, who are certainly a busy man, whatever may be the case with myself, I shall only add that I am, with my respects to Mrs. Hill, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, Nov. 9, 1785.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Whose last most affectionate letter has run in my head ever since I received it, and which I now sit down to answer two days sooner than the post will serve me; I thank you for it, and with a warmth for which I am sure you will give me credit, though I do not spend many words in describing it. I do not seek *new* friends, not being altogether sure that I should find them, but have unspeakable pleasure in being still beloved by an old one. I hope that now our

correspondence has suffered its last interruption, and that we shall go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this will permit.

I am happy that my poems have pleased you. My volume has afforded me no such pleasure at any time, either while I was writing it, or since its publication, as I have derived from yours and my uncle's opinion of it. I make certain allowances for partiality, and for that peculiar quickness of taste, with which you both relish what you like, and after all drawbacks upon those accounts duly made, find myself rich in the measure of your approbation that still remains. But above all, I honour *John Gilpin*, since it was he who first encouraged you to write. I made him on purpose to laugh at, and he served his purpose well; but I am now in debt to him for a more valuable acquisition than all the laughter in the world amounts to, the recovery of my intercourse with you, which is to me inestimable. My benevolent and generous cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted anything, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively, declined the favour. I neither suffer, nor have suffered, any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition, and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me, that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing

by acceptance. To you, therefore, I reply, yes. Whensoever, and whatsoever, and in what manner soever you please; and add, moreover, that my affection for the giver is such as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs. Unwin and I have lived at Olney, we have had but one purse, although during the whole of that time, till lately, her income was nearly double mine. Her revenues indeed are now in some measure reduced, and do not much exceed my own; the worst consequence of this is, that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as neither life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. My own income has been better than it is, but when it was best, it would not have enabled me to live as my connections demanded that I should, had it not been combined with a better than itself, at least at this end of the kingdom. Of this I had full proof during three months that I spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, in which time by the help of good management, and a clear notion of economical matters, I contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth. Now, my beloved cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it, but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the

sweetest that I can enjoy—a token and proof of your affection.

I cannot believe but that I should know you, notwithstanding all that time may have done: there is not a feature of your face, could I meet it on the road, by itself, that I should not instantly recollect. I should say, that is my cousin's nose, or those are her lips and her chin, and no woman upon earth can claim them but herself. As for me, I am a very smart youth of my years; I am not indeed grown grey so much as I am grown bald. No matter: there was more hair in the world than ever had the honour to belong to me; accordingly having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own, that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth, which being worn with a small bag, and a black ribband about my neck, continues to me the charms of my youth, even on the verge of age. Away with the fear of writing too often!

W. C.

*P.S.*—That the view I give you of myself may be complete, I add the two following items—That I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Nov. 9, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You desired me to return your good brother<sup>1</sup> the bishop's charge as soon as

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Bagot (1740-1802), successively Bishop of Bristol, Norwich and St. Asaph, was, with his brother, a schoolfellow of Cowper's at Westminster. Published in 1780 his *Warburtonian Lecture on the Prophecies*.

I conveniently could, and the weather having forbidden us to hope for the pleasure of seeing you, and Mrs. Bagot with you, this morning, I return it now, lest, as you told me that your stay in this country would be short, you should be gone before it could reach you.

I wish, as you do, that the charge in question could find its way into all the parsonages in the nation. It is so generally applicable, and yet so pointedly enforced, that it deserves most extensive spread. I find in it the happiest mixture of spiritual authority, the meekness of a Christian, and the good manners of a gentleman. It has convinced me, that the poet, who, like myself, shall take the liberty to pay the author of such valuable admonition a compliment, shall do at least as much honour to himself as to his subject.—Yours, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, Nov. 23, 1785.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I am obliged to you for having allotted your morning to me, and not less obliged to you for writing, when the opportunity you had set apart for that purpose had been almost entirely consumed by others. It cost me some little deliberation to decide whether I should answer by this night's post, or whether I should wait till I could tell you that the wine is arrived: but to say the truth, I had it not in my power to wait; so I cut the matter short at once by determining to believe that the frequency of my letters will not make them a burden to you. I did not know or

suspect that Providence had so much good in store for me in the present life, as I promise myself now from the renewal of our intimacy. But it seems that my calculations upon that subject were erroneous; it is renewed: and I look forward to the permanence of it with the pleasantest expectations, and resolve to do all I can to deserve your punctual correspondence, by being as punctual as possible myself. *How easily are resolutions made and kept when the whole heart is in them!*

Fifty things present themselves to me that I want to say, and while each pleads for the preference, they all together so distract my choice that I hardly know with which to begin.

I thank you, my dearest cousin, for your medical advice. I have tried other wines, but never could meet with any that I could drink constantly but port, without being the worse for it. And with respect to the quantity, that is a point that habit so effectually decides, that after many years' practice, a limitation to a certain stint becomes in a manner necessary. When I have drunk what I always drink, I can feel that more would disgust me. I have, indeed, a most troublesome stomach, and which does not improve as I grow older. I have eaten nothing for some time past that it has not quarrelled with, from my bread and butter in the morning down to the egg that I generally make my supper. It constrains me to deny myself some things that I am fond of, and some that are in a degree necessary to health, or that seem to be so. Green tea I have not touched these twenty years, or only to be poisoned by it: but bohea, which never hurts me, is so good a substitute, that I am perfectly

well satisfied upon that head. Less easy, however, do I find it to reconcile myself to an almost total abstinence from all vegetables, which yet I have been obliged to practise for some time. But enough, and too much by half, upon a subject that shall never again engross so large a portion of the paper that I devote to you.

You supposed in a former letter that Mrs. Cowper, of Devonshire Street, has written to me since I saw the rest of the family. Not so, my dear. Whatever intelligence she gave you concerning me, she had it from the Newtons, whom she visits. Yourself were the last of my female relations that I saw before I went to St. Albans. You do not forget, I dare say, that you and Sir Thomas called upon me in my chambers a very few days before I took leave of London: then it was that I saw you last, and then it was I said in my heart, upon your going out at the door, Farewell! there will be no more intercourse between us for ever. But Providence has ordered otherwise, and I cannot help saying once more how sincerely I rejoice that He has. It were pity that, while the same world holds us, we, who were in a manner brought up together, should not love each other to the last. We do, however, and we do so in spite of a long separation; and although that separation should be for life, yet will we love each other.

I intended to have been very merry when I began, but I stumbled unawares upon a subject that made me otherwise; but if I have been a little sad, yet not disagreeably so to myself. That you admire Mr. Pitt, my dear, may be, for aught I know, as you say it is, a very shining part of your character;

but a more illustrious part of it, in my account, is your kindness and affection to me. Sweet self, you know, will always claim a right to be first considered, a claim which few people are much given to dispute. Upon the subject of politics you may make me just what you please. I am perfectly prepared to adopt all your opinions, for living when and as I do, it is impossible that I should have any decided ones of my own. My mind, therefore, is as much a *carte blanche* in this particular as you can wish. Write upon it what you please. I know well that I honoured his father, and that I have cut capers before now for victories obtained under his auspices; and although capering opportunities have become scarce since he died, yet I am equally ready even now to caper for his son when a reasonable occasion should offer. As to the King, I love and honour him upon a hundred accounts; and have, indeed, but one quarrel with him in the world; which is, that after having hunted a noble and beautiful animal, till he takes it perhaps at last in a lady's parlour, he in a few days turns it up and hunts it again. When stags are followed by such people as generally follow them, it is very well: their pursuers are men who do not pretend to much humanity, and when they discover none, they are perfectly consistent with themselves; but I have a far different opinion of the character of our King: he is a merciful man, and should therefore be more merciful to his beast.

I admire and applaud your forgery, but your last was performed in such haste that the date did not much resemble the direction. I imagine, however, that, all things considered, the Post Office, should

they detect your contrivance, would not be much disposed to take notice of it. It is a common practice, but seldom so justifiably practised as by you.<sup>1</sup>

My dearest cousin, if you give me wine, there is no good reason wherefore you should also be at the expense of bottles, of which we could not possibly make any other use than to furnish the rack with them, where the cats would break them. I purpose, therefore, to return the hamper charged with the same number that it brings, by your permission. The difference will be sixteen shillings in the price of the wine.

Our post comes in on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays; on the two former days about breakfast time, and on Sundays, at this season at least, in the afternoon. Adieu, my dear; I am never happier, I think, than when I am reading your letters, or answering them.—Ever yours, Wm. C.

*P.S.* The kindness of that concern you take in the affairs of my stomach calls upon me to be a little more particular. I have tried Madeira, and find that it heats me in the night. Sherry I understand to be a creator of appetite, which I do not want. I am taking bark and steel, from which I expect much. Mine is merely a case of relaxation.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Nov. 28, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—In the first place, thanks for the cloth and muslin, which gave great satisfaction;

<sup>1</sup> The letter was probably franked in her father's name.

and in the second ditto, thanks for your intelligence concerning my handsome escape, so far at least, out of the paws of the critics.

You may rejoice with me, and I dare say will, that the door of patronage begins to open. My dear cousin, Lady Hesketh's connections are many and polite; she undertakes, as you will see, to further my subscription with a readiness and warmth that leaves me no room to doubt that my Proposals will be circulated as far as she can drive them. But this is not all. The Rev. Walter Bagot, who called on me two years ago, induced to it mainly by my first publication, in like manner induced by my second, has called upon me again. He has been here twice, and we expect him again with his wife, by her own desire, on Thursday or Friday next. At his last visit I imparted to him my design to publish a new English Homer by subscription. No man could receive such intelligence with more pleasure, nor is it possible to say with what a glow of friendship, or with how much uncommon alacrity he offered himself to my service, together with all his interest, which is important both for its weight and its extent. So far so good.

I am not immediately in need of the *Odyssey*: my correspondence with Lady Hesketh having been very frequent, has of late engaged much of my time, and is likely to do so. The day before yesterday I began Book XXIII. But send Ulysses when you can.

I would gladly gratify you by sending the part of the translation which you desire, although I could not commit it to the post without much anxiety, having, in fact, no other copy; for the

first copy bears very little resemblance to the second all the way through. But there is an insuperable difficulty. If you reflect a moment you will be sensible of it. The quire being written book-fashion, the same sheet contains as much of what you do not want as of what you do: for instance, if I send you page one, I must also send pages forty-one and forty-two, which are found on the corresponding side of the same sheet. I could not, therefore, send you enough, unless I sent you more than a frank would carry. We shall be truly glad to hear that Miss Shuttleworth is better. Adieu.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Nov. 30.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Your kindness reduces me to a necessity (a pleasant one indeed) of writing all my letters in the same terms: always thanks,—thanks at the beginning and thanks at the end. It is, however, I say, a pleasant employment when those thanks are indeed the language of the heart: and I can truly add, that there is no person on earth whom I thank with so much affection as yourself. You insisted that I should give you my genuine opinion of the wine. By the way, it arrived without the least damage or fracture, and I finished the first bottle of it this very day. It is excellent, and though the wine which I had been used to drink was not bad, far preferable to that. The bottles will be in town on Saturday. I am enamoured of the desk and of its contents before I see them. They will be most entirely welcome. A few years

since I made Mrs. Unwin a present of a snuff-box—a silver one; the purchase was made in London by a friend; it is of a size and form that make it more fit for masculine than feminine use. She therefore with pleasure accepts the box which you have sent,—I should say with the greatest pleasure. And I, discarding the leathern trunk that I have used so long, shall succeed to the possession of hers. She says, Tell Lady Hesketh that I truly love and honour her. Now, my cousin, you may depend upon it, as a most certain truth, that these words from her lips are not an empty sound. I never in my life heard her profess a regard for any one that she felt not. She is not addicted to the use of such language upon ordinary occasions; but when she speaks it, speaks from the heart. She has baited me this many a day, even as a bear is baited, to send for Dr. Kerr. But, as I hinted to you upon a former occasion, I am as muleish as most men are, and have hitherto most gallantly refused; but what is to be done now?—If it were uncivil not to comply with the solicitations of one lady, to be unmoved by the solicitations of two would prove me to be a bear indeed. I will, therefore, summon him to consideration of said stomach, and its ailments, without delay, and you shall know the result.—I have read Goldsmith's *Traveller* and his *Deserted Village*, and am highly pleased with them both, as well for the manner in which they are executed, as for their tendency, and the lessons that they inculcate.

Mrs. Unwin said to me a few nights since, after supper, 'I have two fine fowls in feeding, and just fit for use; I wonder whether I should send them

to Lady Hesketh ?' I replied, 'Yes, by all means ! and I will tell you a story that will at once convince you of the propriety of doing so. My brother was curate on a time to Mr. Fawkes,<sup>1</sup> of Orpington, in Kent: it was when I lived in the Temple. One morning, as I was reading by the fireside, I heard a prodigious lumbering at the door. I opened it, and beheld a most rural figure, with very dirty boots, and a great coat as dirty. Supposing that my great fame as a barrister had drawn unto me a client from some remote region, I desired him to walk in. He did so, and introduced himself to my acquaintance by telling me that he was the farmer with whom my brother lodged at Orpington. After this preliminary information he unbuttoned his great coat, and I observed a quantity of long feathers projected from an inside pocket. He thrust in his hand, and with great difficulty extracted a great fat capon. He then proceeded to lighten the other side of him, by dragging out just such another, and begged my acceptance of both. I sent them to a tavern, where they were dressed, and I with two or three friends, whom I invited to the feast, found them incomparably better than any fowls that we had ever tasted from the London coops. Now, said I to Mrs. Unwin, 'it is likely that the fowls at Olney may be as good as the fowls at Orpington, therefore send them ; for it is not possible to make so good a use of them in any other way.'

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Francis Fawkes (1720-1777) was for some time a curate at Croydon, and afterwards vicar of Orpington in Kent. He died vicar of Hayes. He wrote much original verse of a mediocre character, but was most distinguished as a translator. Dr. Johnson praised his *Anacreon*, and his contemporaries found much talent in his renderings of Sappho and other poets.

My dear, I have another story to tell you, but of a different kind. At Westminster School I was much intimate with Walter Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot. In the course, as I suppose, of more than twenty years after we left school, I saw him but twice;—once when I called on him at Oxford, and once when he called on me in the Temple. He has a brother who lives about four miles from hence,<sup>1</sup> a man of large estate. It happened that soon after the publication of my first volume, he came into this country on a visit to his brother. Having read my book, and liking it, he took that opportunity to renew his acquaintance with me. I felt much affection for him, and the more because it was plain that after so long a time he still retained his for me. He is now at his brother's; twice has he visited me in the course of the last week, and this morning he brought Mrs. Bagot with him. He is a good and amiable man, and she a most agreeable woman. At this second visit I made him acquainted with my translation of Homer: he was highly pleased to find me so occupied, and with all that glow of friendship that would make it criminal in me to doubt his sincerity for a moment, insisted upon being employed in promoting the subscription, and engaged himself and all his connections, which are extensive, and many of them of high rank, in my service. His chariot put up at an inn in the town while he was here, and I rather wondered that at his departure he chose to walk to his chariot, and not to be taken up at the door; but when he had been gone about a quarter of an hour his servant came with a letter his master had written at the

<sup>1</sup> At Chicheley Hall.

inn, and which, he said, required no answer. I opened it, and found as follows:—

'*Olney, Nov. 30, 1785.*

'MY GOOD FRIEND,—You will oblige me by accepting this early subscription to your Homer, even before you have fixed your plan and price; which when you have done, if you will send me a parcel of your subscription papers, I will endeavour to circulate them among my friends and acquaintance as far as I can. Health and happiness attend you.  
—Yours ever, WALTER BAGOT.'

*N.B.* It contained a draft for twenty pounds.

My dearest cousin, for whom I feel more than I can say, I once more thank you for all; which reminds me by the way of thanking you in particular for your offer of oysters. I am very fond of them, and few things agree better with me, when they are stewed without butter. You may perceive that I improve upon your hands, and grow less and less coy in the matter of acceptance continually.

In a letter of Mr. Unwin's to his mother he says thus: 'I have been gratified to-day by the high character given of my friend's poem in the *Critical Review*.' So far, therefore, I have passed the pikes. The Monthly Critics have not yet noticed me.

Adieu, my faithful, kind, and consolatory friend!  
—Ever, ever yours, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Dec. 3, 1785.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am glad to hear that there is such a demand for your last Narrative. If I may

judge of their general utility by the effect that they have heretofore had upon me, there are few things more edifying than death-bed memoirs. They interest every reader, because they speak of a period at which all must arrive, and afford a solid ground of encouragement to survivors to expect the same, or similar support and comfort, when it shall be their turn to die.

I also am employed in writing narrative, but not so useful. Employment, however, and with the pen, is, through habit, become essential to my well-being; and to produce always original poems, especially of considerable length, is not so easy. For some weeks after I had finished *The Task*, and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day, being in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the *Iliad*; and merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception of what I was then entering upon, than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I had recourse to the same expedient, and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work; till at last I began to reflect thus:—The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* together consists of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer; and, though he was not

an enlightened man, has interspersed many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems. In short, he is in all respects a most venerable old gentleman, by an acquaintance with whom no man can disgrace himself. The literati are all agreed to a man, that, although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner. I will try, therefore, whether I cannot copy him somewhat more happily myself. I have at least the advantage of Pope's faults and failings, which, like so many buoys upon a dangerous coast, will serve me to steer by, and will make my chance for success more probable. These and many other considerations, but especially a mind that abhorred a vacuum as its chief bane, impelled me so effectually to the work, that ere long I mean to publish proposals for a subscription to it, having advanced so far as to be warranted in doing so. I have connections, and no few such, by means of which I have the utmost reason to expect that a brisk circulation may be procured; and if it should prove a profitable enterprise, the profit will not accrue to a man who may be said not to want it. It is a business such as it will not, indeed, lie much in your way to promote; but, among your numerous connections, it is possible that you may know some who would sufficiently interest themselves in such a work to be not unwilling to subscribe to it. I do not mean—far be it from me—to put you upon making hazardous applications, where you might possibly incur a refusal, that would give you though but a moment's pain. You know best your own oppor-

tunities and powers in such a cause. If you can do but little, I shall esteem it much; and if you can do nothing, I am sure that it will not be for want of a will.

I have lately had three visits from my old school-fellow, Mr. Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot, and of Mr. Chester of Chicheley. At his last visit he brought his wife with him, a most amiable woman, to see Mrs. Unwin. I told him my purpose, and my progress. He received the news with great pleasure; immediately subscribed a draft of twenty pounds; and promised me his whole heart, and his whole interest, which lies principally among people of the first fashion.

My correspondence has lately also been renewed with my dear cousin, Lady Hesketh, whom I ever loved as a sister (for we were in a manner brought up together), and who writes to me as affectionately as if she were so. She also enters into my views and interests upon this occasion with a warmth that gives me great encouragement. The circle of *her* acquaintance is likewise very extensive; and I have no doubt that she will exert her influence to its utmost possibilities among them. I have other strings to my bow (perhaps, as a translator of Homer, I should say to my lyre), which I cannot here enumerate; but, upon the whole, my prospect seems promising enough. I have not yet consulted Johnson upon the occasion, but intend to do it soon.

My spirits are somewhat better than they were. In the course of the last month I have perceived a very sensible amendment. The hope of better days seems again to dawn upon me; and I have now and then an intimation, though slight and transient, that God has not abandoned me for ever.

We have paid Nat. Gee his interest, and I enclose his acknowledgment. His last was so effectually mislaid that we have never found it. Mrs. Unwin, who sends her love, begs that you will pay out of that sum for the newspapers, and remit, if you can think of it, the few shillings that will remain, by the first that shall call upon you in his way to Olney. She is sorry that she forgot the greens.

This last paragraph must be considered as in a parenthesis, for I am going back to the subject of the preceding, viz. myself. Having been for some years troubled with an inconvenient stomach, and lately with a stomach that will digest nothing without help, and we having reached the bottom of our own medical skill, into which we have dived to little or no purpose, I have at length consented to consult Dr. Kerr, and expect to see him in a day or two. Engaged as I am, and am likely to be, so long as I am capable of it, in writing for the press, I cannot well afford to entertain a malady that is such an enemy to all mental operations.

The morning is beautiful, and tempts me forth into the garden. It is all the walk that I can have at this season, but not all the exercise. I ring a peal every day upon the dumb-bells.—I am, my dear friend, most truly, yours and Mrs. Newton's,  
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, Dec. 6, 1785.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I write not *upon* my desk, but *about* it. Having in vain expected it by the waggon that followed your letter, I again expected it by the next; and thinking it likely that it might

arrive last night at Sherington, I sent a man over thither this morning, hoping to see him return with it; but again I am disappointed. I have felt an impatience to receive it that you yourself have taught me, and now think it necessary to let you know that it is not come, lest it should perhaps be detained in London by the negligence of somebody to whom you might entrust the packing of it, or its carriage to the inn.

I shall be obliged to be more concise than I choose to be when I write to you, for want of time to indulge myself in writing more. How, will you say, can a man want time, who lives in the country, without business and without neighbours, who visits nobody, and who is visited himself so seldom? My dear, I have been at the races this morning, and have another letter to write this evening; the post sets out at seven, and it is now drawing near to six. A fine day, you will say, for the races, and the better, no doubt, because it has rained continually ever since the morning. At what races do you suppose that I have been? I might leave you to guess, but loving you too well to leave you under the burden of an employment that must prove for ever vain, I will even tell you, and keep you no longer in suspense. I have been at Troy, where the principal heroes of the *Iliad* have been running for such a prize as our jockeys would disdain to saddle a horse for; and yet, I assure you, they acquitted themselves most nobly, though a kettle and a frying-pan were to reward their labours.

I never answered your question concerning my strong partiality to a common. I well remember making the speech of which you remind me, and the

very place where I made it was upon a common, in the neighbourhood of Southampton, the name of which, however, I have forgot. But I perfectly recollect that I boasted of the sagacity that you mention just after having carried you over a dirty part of the road that led to it. My nostrils have hardly been regaled with those wild odours from that day to the present. We have no such here. If there ever were any such in this country, the enclosures have long since destroyed them; but we have a scent in the fields about Olney that to me is equally agreeable, and which, even after attentive examination, I have never been able to account for. It proceeds, so far as I can find, neither from herb, nor tree, nor shrub: I should suppose, therefore, that it is in the soil. It is exactly the scent of amber when it has been rubbed hard, only more potent. I have never observed it except in hot weather, or in places where the sun shines powerfully, and from which the air is excluded. I had a strong poetical desire to describe it when I was writing the Common-scene in *The Task*, but feared lest the unfrequency of such a singular property in the earth should have tempted the reader to ascribe it to a fanciful nose, at least to have suspected it for a deliberate fiction.

I have been as good as my word, and have sent for the doctor; but having left him the whole week to choose out of, am uncertain on what day I shall fall under his consideration. I have been in his company. He is quite a gentleman, and a very sensible one; and as to skill in his profession, I suppose that he has few superiors.

Mrs. Unwin (who begs to be mentioned to you

with affectionate respect) sits knitting my stockings at my elbow with a degree of industry worthy of Penelope herself. You will not think this an exaggeration when I tell you that I have not bought a pair these twenty years, either of thread, silk, or worsted.

Adieu, my most beloved cousin; if you get this before I have an answer to my last, let me soon have an answer to them both.—Truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Dec. 7 [1785].*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—At this time last night I was writing to you, and now I am writing to you again. Had our correspondence been renewed a year ago, it is possible that, having found a more agreeable employment, it might never have occurred to me to translate Homer for my amusement. I have no doubt that my friend Bagot will do his utmost to circulate my proposals. There is a warmth in his manner, and he takes an interest in the success of my enterprise that leaves me without excuse if I should doubt it. But his sphere of influence and yours are entirely distinct. He will recommend me to the men, and you, I suppose, principally to the ladies. The literati will probably have some curiosity to see in what manner I have conducted an attempt in which Pope went before me; but, after all, a translation of Homer must be chiefly a lady's book. It just presents itself to me to ask if Mr. Arnott, whose name I have not heard these many years, except from my own lips, be of your connections? He, I should suppose, has pretty

extensive ones himself, and for certain reasons would not unwillingly contribute what he could to the furtherance of a work undertaken by a man who bears my name. But all these matters I leave entirely to your discretion, as secure both of that and your zeal to serve me, as if I were at your side throughout all the business. By the way, a neighbour of ours, being this day at Newport, saw a letter addressed to me in the window of the inn, and delivered it to me while I was at dinner. It proved to be a letter from Mr. Bagot, which he had left there in his way home, in hope that it would find a bearer. It is conceived in terms altogether worthy of the friendship that he professes for me, and contains a fresh assurance of his exertions in my favour as soon as I shall have sent him my proposals. He is a man of taste and of learning, and sees as plainly as I that there is a fair opening for such a work. My intention is to write to Johnson, my publisher, in the course of a few days, in order to settle with him the necessary preliminaries; which done, I shall order him to put the Proposals to the press immediately. The season is favourable,—London is full, or will be so by the time when they shall be ready, which will hardly be till after the holidays, and by that time, if nothing hinders, I shall have finished the *Iliad*. I shall then revise it carefully, comparing it all the way with the original, and shall have given it the last hand probably by the month of March. It is likewise probable that by the month of March we shall have felt our ground a little, and be able to form a reasonable judgment how far the subscription will be likely to fill. For so expensive a business must

not be finally determined upon till that be known. If the subscription should fail of the needful amount, I am but where I was, and shall have nothing to do but to return the money, and to comfort myself with reflecting that I have not thrown away another year in translating the *Odyssey* also. But though not naturally addicted to much rashness in making conclusions favourable to myself, I have a certain lightness of heart upon the subject, that encourages me to hope for and to expect a very different event.

My dear, you say not a word about the desk in your last, which I received this morning. I infer from your silence that you supposed it either at Olney or on its way thither, and that you expected nothing so much as that my next would inform you of its safe arrival ;—therefore, where can it possibly be? I am not absolutely in despair about it, for the reasons that I mentioned last night ; but to say the truth, I stand tottering upon the verge of it. I write, and have written these many years, upon a book of maps, which I now begin to find too low and too flat, though till I expected a better desk I found no fault with *them*. See and observe how true it is, that by increasing the number of our conveniencies, we multiply our wants exactly in the same proportion! neither can I at all doubt that if you were to tell me that all the men in London of any fashion at all wore black velvet shoes with white roses, and should also tell me that you would send me such, I should dance with impatience till they arrived. Not because I care one farthing of what materials my shoes are made, but because any shoes of your sending would interest me from head to foot.

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I have never had the pleasure to see Mr. Jekyll, and probably never shall. I have been repeatedly at Gayhurst; but we went only to amuse ourselves with a walk in the pleasure-grounds when the family were out. I was last year in company with Mrs. Wrighte. We met at Mr. Throckmorton's, and were both highly pleased with her; but Mr. Wrighte himself is such a keen sportsman that he would doubtless find me a most insipid animal, who have not the least relish of what he admires so much. For the same reason as well as for some others, I have never had a connection in the visiting way with any other of the gentlemen in the country. With Mr. Throckmorton indeed I had like to have formed acquaintance last year, but he left the country soon after we began to know each other, and is in general so little at home that I have no room left to suppose I shall ever know him better.

Mrs. Unwin, my dearest cousin, is *overgoved* (you remember that word), that the *pullen*<sup>1</sup> (you remember that also) proved so good. She begs me also to say how sensible she is of your kind offer to execute any of her commissions in town; but to say *how* sensible she is of it, would take up more room than I can spare at present, for which reason I decline it. I allot the rest of my paper to Dr. Kerr, whom I shall expect to see to-morrow, or shall conclude that my letter has not reached him. Good night, therefore, my dear! I will fill up the little space that remains when I shall either have to tell you that I have seen him, or must write to him again. I am on the same account obliged to postpone my

<sup>1</sup> Words noticed by Cowper when, as a youth, he visited his friends in Norfolk. *To overgive* is to exude or ferment. *Pullen*, poultry.

answer to certain passages in your last, to another opportunity.

*Thursday evening.*

Oh that this letter had wings, that it might fly to tell you that my desk, the most elegant, the compactest, the most commodious desk<sup>1</sup> in the world, and of all the desks that ever were or ever shall be, the desk that I love the most is safe arrived. Nay, my dear, it was actually at Sherington, when the waggoner's wife (for the man himself was not at home) croaked out her abominable *No!* yet she examined the bill of lading, but either did it so carelessly, or as poor Dick Madan used to say, with such an *ignorant eye*, that my name escaped her. My precious cousin, you have bestowed too much upon me. I have nothing to render you in return, but the affectionate feelings of a heart most truly sensible of your kindness. How pleasant it is to write upon such a green bank! I am sorry that I have so nearly reached the end of my paper. I have now, however, only room to say that Mrs. Unwin is delighted with her box, and bids me do more than thank you for it. What can I do more at this distance but say that she loves you heartily, and that so do I? The pocket-book is also the completest that I ever saw, and the watch-chain the most brilliant.

Adieu for a little while. Now for Homer.—My dear, yours,  
WM. C.

*N.B.* I generally write the day before the post

<sup>1</sup> A present from his old sweetheart 'Theodora Cowper.' She sent him many other presents, but he never found out to whom he was indebted. He refers to the sender as 'Anonymous' and 'he.'

sets out, which is the thing that puzzles you. I do it that I may secure time for the purpose, and may not be hurried. On this very day twenty-two years ago left I London.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 10, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—What you say of my last volume gives me the sincerest pleasure. I have heard a like favourable report of it from several different quarters, but never any (for obvious reasons) that has gratified me more than yours. I have a relish for moderate praise, because it bids fair to be judicious; but praise excessive, such as our poor friend ——'s<sup>1</sup> (I have an uncle also who celebrates me exactly in the same language),—such praise is rather too big for an ordinary swallow. I set down nine-tenths of it to the account of family partiality. I know no more than you what kind of a market my book has found; but this I believe, that had not Henderson died, and had it been worth my while to have given him a hundred pounds to have read it in public, it would have been more popular than it is. I am at least very unwilling to esteem *John Gilpin* as better worth than all the rest that I have written, and he has been popular enough.

Your sentiments of Pope's *Homer* agree perfectly with those of every competent judge with whom I have at any time conversed about it. I never saw a copy so unlike the original. There is not, I believe, in all the world to be found an uninspired poem so simple as those of *Homer*; nor in all

<sup>1</sup> Probably Teedon's.

the world a poem more bedizened with ornaments than Pope's translation of them. Accordingly, the sublime of Homer in the hands of Pope becomes bloated and tumid, and his description tawdry. Neither had Pope the faintest conception of those exquisite discriminations of character for which Homer is so remarkable. All his persons, and equally upon all occasions, speak in an inflated and strutting phraseology, as Pope has managed them; although in the original, the dignity of their utterance, even when they are most majestic, consists principally in the simplicity of their sentiments and of their language. Another censure I must needs pass upon our Anglo-Grecian, out of many that obtrude themselves upon me, but for which I have neither time to spare, nor room; which is, that with all his great abilities he was defective in his feelings to a degree that some passages in his poems make it difficult to account for. No writer more pathetic than Homer, because none more natural; and because none less natural than Pope in his version of Homer, therefore than he none less pathetic. But I shall tire you with a theme with which I would not wish to cloy you beforehand.

If the great change in my experience, of which you express so lively an expectation, should take place, and whenever it shall take place, you may securely depend upon receiving the first notice of it. But whether you come with congratulations, or whether without them, I need not say that you and yours will always be most welcome here. Mrs. Unwin's love both to yourself and to Mrs. Newton joins itself as usual, and as warmly as usual, to that

of—Yours, my dear friend, affectionately and faithfully,  
WM. COWPER.

The following this moment occurs to me as a possible motto for the *Messiah*, if you do not think it too sharp:—

‘ — *Nunquam inducunt animum cantare, rogati ;  
Injussi, nunquam desistunt.*’

TO LADY HESKETH

*Thursday, Dec. 15, 1785.*

DEAREST COUSIN,—My desk is always pleasant, but never so pleasant as when I am writing to you. If I am not obliged to you for the thing itself, at least I am for your having decided the matter against me, and resolving that it should come in spite of all my objections. Before it arrived, Mrs. Unwin had spied out for it a place that exactly suits it. A certain fly-table in the corner of the room, which I had overlooked, affords it a convenient stand when it is not wanted, and it is easily transferred to a larger when it is. If I must not know to whom I am principally indebted for it, at least let me entreat you to make my acknowledgments of gratitude and love. As to my frequent use of it, I will tell you how that matter stands. When I was writing my first volume, and was but just beginning to emerge from a state of melancholy that had continued some years (from which, by the way, I do not account myself even now delivered), Mrs. Unwin insisted on my relinquishing the pen, apprehending consequences injurious to my health. When ladies

insist, you know, there is an end of the business ; obedience on our part becomes necessary. I accordingly obeyed, but having lost my fiddle, I became pensive and unhappy ; she therefore restored it to me, convinced of its utility, and from that day to this I have never ceased to scrape. Observe, however, my dear, that I scrape not always. My task that I assign myself is to translate forty lines a day ; if they pass off easily I sometimes make them fifty, but never abate any part of the allotted number. Perhaps I am occupied an hour and a half, perhaps three hours ; but generally between two and three. This, you see, is labour that can hurt no man ; and what I have translated in the morning, in the evening I transcribe.

Imagine not that I am so inhuman as to send you into the field with no coadjutor but Mr. Bagot. He is indeed one of my great dependencies, but I have others, and not inconsiderable ones besides. Mr. Unwin is of course hearty in my cause, and he has several important connections. I have, by his means originally, an acquaintance, though by letters only, with Mr. Smith, member for Nottingham. My whole intercourse with my bookseller has hitherto been carried on through the medium of his parliamentary privilege. He is pleased to speak very handsomely of my books, and, I doubt not, will assist my subscription with ardour. John Thornton the great, who together with his three sons, all three in parliament, has, I suppose, a larger sweep in the city than any man, will, I have reason to hope, be equally zealous in my favour. Mr. Newton, who has a large influence

in that quarter also, will, I know, serve me like a brother. I have also exchanged some letters with Mr. Bacon, the statuary, whose connections must needs be extensive, and who, if I may judge from the sentiments that he expresses towards me, will not be backward in my service. Neither have I any doubt but that I can engage Lord Dartmouth. These, my dearest cousin, except the last (and I mention it for your greater comfort), are all, to a man, Pittites. Mr. Smith, in particular, is one of the minister's most intimate friends, and was with him when the turnpikeman had like to have spoiled him for a premier for ever. All this I have said by way of clapping you on the back, not wondering that your poor heart ached at the idea of being almost a solitary Lady Errant on the occasion.

With respect to the enterprise itself, there are certain points of delicacy that will not suffer me to make a public justification of it. It would ill become me avowedly to point out the faults of Pope in a preface, and would be as impolitic as indecent. But to you, my dear, I can utter my mind freely. Let me premise, however, that you answered the gentleman's inquiry, whether in blank verse or not, to a marvel. It is even so: and let some critics say what they will, I aver it, and will for ever aver it, that to give a just representation of Homer in rhyme, is a natural impossibility. Now for Pope himself:—I will allow his whole merit. He has written a great deal of very musical and sweet verse in his translation of Homer, but his verse is not universally such; on the contrary, it is often lame, feeble, and flat. He has,

besides, occasionally a felicity of expression peculiar to himself; but it is a felicity purely modern, and has nothing to do with Homer. Except the Bible, there never was in the world a book so remarkable for that species of the sublime that owes its very existence to simplicity, as the works of Homer. He is always nervous, plain, natural. I refer you to your own knowledge of his copyist for a decision upon Pope's merits in these particulars. The garden in all the gaiety of June is less flowery than his Translation. Metaphors of which Homer never dreamt, which he did not seek, and which probably he would have disdained if he had found, follow each other in quick succession like the sliding pictures in a show box. Homer is, on occasions that call for such a style, the easiest and most familiar of all writers: a circumstance that escaped Pope entirely, who takes most religious care that he shall every where strut in buckram. The speeches of his heroes are often animated to a degree that Pope no doubt accounted unmannerly and rude, for he has reduced numbers of them that are of that character to the perfect standard of French good-breeding. Shakespeare himself did not excel Homer in discrimination of character, neither is he more attentive to exact consistence and preservation of it throughout. In Pope, to whatever cause it was owing, whether he did not see it, or, seeing it, accounted it an affair of no moment, this great beauty is almost absolutely annihilated. In short, my dear, there is hardly any thing in the world so unlike another, as Pope's version of Homer to the original. Give me a great corking pin that I may stick your faith upon my sleeve. There—

it is done. Now assure yourself, upon the credit of a man who made Homer much his study in his youth, and who is perhaps better acquainted with Pope's translation of him than almost any man, having twenty-five years ago compared them with each other line by line throughout; upon the credit of a man, too, who would not for the world deceive you in the smallest matter, that Pope never entered into the spirit of Homer, that he never translated him,—I had almost said, did not understand him: many passages it is literally true that he did not. Why, when he first entered on his task, did he (as he did, by his own confession) for ever dream that he was wandering in unknown ways, that he was lost upon heaths and forests, and awoke in terror? I will tell you, my dear. His dreams were emblems of his waking experience; and I am mistaken, if I could not go near to prove that at his first setting out, he knew very little of Greek, and was never an adept in it, to the last. Therefore, my beloved cousin, once more take heart. I have a fair opportunity to acquire honour; and if when I have finished the *Iliad*, I do not upon cool consideration think that I have secured it, I will burn the copy.

A hundred things must go unanswered, but not the oysters unacknowledged, which are remarkably fine. Again I leave space for Kerr, not having seen him yet. I cannot go to him now, lest we *should meet in the midway between*.

*Saturday.*

I must now huddle up twenty matters in a corner. No Kerr yet: a report prevails in our town that he is very ill, and I am very sorry if he is. I

were no better than a beast could I forget to thank you for an order of oysters through the season. I love you for all your kindnesses, and for this among the rest. I wrote lately to Johnson on the subject of Homer. He is a knowing man in his trade,<sup>1</sup> and understands booksellers' trap as well as any man. He wishes me not to publish by subscription, but to put my copy into his hands. He thinks he can make me such proposals as I shall like. I shall answer him to-day, and not depart from my purpose. But I consider his advice as a favourable omen. The last post brought me a very obliging letter from the abovesaid Mr. Smith. I shall answer it to-day, and shall make my intended application for his interest in behalf of my subscription. I always take care to have sufficient exercise every day. When the weather forbids walking, I ring a thousand bob-majors upon the dumb-bells. You would be delighted to see the performance. Again, I say that I love you, and I do so in particular for the interest that you took in the success of the passages that you say were read in the evening party that you mention. I know the friendly warmth of your heart, and how valuable a thing it is to have a share in it. The hare was caught by a

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Johnson, whose principal title to fame is that he was Cowper's publisher, was also the publisher of the scientific writings of Priestley and the poetical works of Darwin. Yet the Rev. John Newton, who was at the opposite pole of thought, had confided the publication of the *Olney Hymns* to him in 1779, and, indeed, describes him in a letter as 'My old friend Joseph Johnson, in St. Paul's Churchyard.' His biographer, Aiken, says of him that: 'His true regard for the interests of literature rendered him an enemy to that typographical luxury which, joined to the necessary increase of expense in printing, has so much enhanced the price of new books as to be a material obstacle to the indulgence of a laudable and reasonable curiosity by the reading public.'

shepherd's-dog that had not the fear of the law before his eyes; was transferred by the shepherd to the clerk of the parish, and by him presented to us. Mrs. Unwin is ever deeply sensible of your kind remembrances of her. Her son is sometimes in Town, and if you permit him, will, I doubt not, rejoice to give a morning rap at your door, upon the first intimation of such permission from me, whenever opportunity shall offer.

Now, farewell, my dearest cousin, and deservedly my most beloved friend, farewell.—With true affection yours,  
WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—The long-expected visitor has at length appeared. On Sunday, at two o'clock, in came Kerr, having taken the very first opportunity that great pain, and indisposition, the consequence of it, afforded him. The poor man has been a great sufferer, as his looks declare, and when I had heard the whole matter I did not wonder at it. The original hurt, indeed, was trivial, but having occasion, the next morning after the squirrel bit him, to lance a tumour for a patient in the infirmary, the contents of which were infectious, and the matter of it happening to come in contact with the small puncture that Scrug had made in his finger, a terrible inflammation ensued, and he expected nothing less than that the finger must have been cut off. Even when he was here, he was in pain, and had a considerable swelling upon his shoulder, and another under his arm. I relate the

story for his justification, because it accounts but too satisfactorily for his delay.

As for myself, he catechised me on the subject of my own case with so much accuracy of intelligence as proved him perfect master of all my sensations and uneasinesses, before I told them. Which having done, he in a moment enabled me to understand it also. My stomach, he says, of which all my complaint is made, is in itself a very good stomach, and by no means in fault *originally*. But it has the misfortune to belong to a habit, the juices of which are in an acrid and unhealthy state; that these juices occasion a little lurking fever, from which I am never free, and being transmitted into the stomach through the coats of it, make a regular digestion impossible. That all these mischiefs, from the first to the last, proceed from an obstruction of insensible perspiration. I am therefore to proceed as follows: *imprimis*, in order to set the said insensible discharge going again, I am to furnish myself with half a dozen flannel waistcoats,—not to be worn all at once, my dear, far from it, but one at a time, and next my personage: *secondly*, I am to take (oh terrible!) an emetic weekly; when I find myself a little better, every fortnight, and less frequently as matters mend with me, till at length I shall get excused for one in three months: *thirdly*, he has prescribed for me a tincture, a spoonful of which I am to take in peppermint tea about noon, and another at going to bed. And *lastly*, I am to drink no wine at night, but, instead of my usual supper, am to regale myself with half a pint of oatmeal gruel, made very good with spice, and into which he graciously admits four table

spoonfuls of brown port. I should have a restlessness in the night, he said, for about a fortnight perhaps, on foregoing the glass to which I had been always accustomed, but that then I should sleep the better for it. Herein, however, he has been happily a little mistaken, for I have used it two nights and have slept much more than usual. Thus you see, my dear, that drinking lying-in lady's liquor I am likely soon to be as well *as can be expected*.

Mrs. Unwin makes my caudle, and, by the Doctor's own desire, my tincture also; for he said she would be more exact than the apothecaries (in which he said true), and that much depended on exactness. It happens luckily enough that, being much a gardener, I have a hot-bed newly made, for something like a sand-heat being necessary, in order to digest the ingredients properly, and there being nothing of the sort at any of our physical people's in the town, a hot-bed is the only thing in the world to supply the deficiency. I am to let him know in about three weeks what progress I make in the way of amendment, and he will answer me; and when his business shall at any time bring him this way, will be sure to call.

And now, my dear, I have given you plentiful information upon the subject—must not, however, forget to add what it is a comfort to me to know that you will be glad to hear, that when Mrs. Unwin asked him in my absence (for I happened to leave the room a moment) whether he thought I should soon recover health again, he answered that he saw no reason to doubt it.

[Part of this letter has been cut off.]

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Dec. 24, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You would have found a letter from me at Mr. Smith's, according to your assignation, had not the post, setting out two hours sooner than the usual time, prevented me. The *Odyssey* that you sent has but one fault, at least but one that I have discovered, which is, that I cannot read it. The very attempt, if persevered in, would soon make me as blind as Homer was himself. I am now in the last book of the *Iliad*; shall be obliged to you, therefore, for a more legible one by the first opportunity.

I wrote to Johnson lately, desiring him to give me advice and information on the subject of proposals for a subscription; and he desired me in his answer not to use that mode of publication, but to treat with him; adding, that he could make me such offers, as (he believed) I should approve. I have replied to his letter, but abide by my first purpose.

Having occasion to write to Mr. Smith, concerning his princely benevolence, extended this year also to the poor of Olney, I put in a good word for my poor self likewise, and have received a very obliging and encouraging answer. He promises me six names in particular, that (he says) will do me no discredit, and expresses a wish to be served with papers as soon as they shall be printed.

Having announced you to Lady Hesketh, and signified that nothing was wanting but intimation from me to induce you to rap at her door when you

should next find yourself in town, she writes as follows:—Before I go one step farther let me stop to say how glad I shall be at any and at all times to have the pleasure of seeing your friend and the son of Mrs. Unwin. You say he is sometimes in town: pray do not fail to assure him that he will do me a great favour by calling on me in Norfolk Street. And as I should be extremely sorry that he should call in vain, and I lose the pleasure that I propose to myself from his visit, I must add that he will be almost certain of finding me at home if he is so obliging as to call on me about eleven o'clock. I seldom go out before twelve at this season of the year, because it is neither pleasant nor wholesome, at least I fancy not, and I shall be sure it is best for me to be at home at that hour if my being there affords me the pleasure of seeing your estimable friend.

In a *P.S.* she adds: 'I shall be very impatient for the pleasure of seeing and conversing with Mr. Unwin.'

I meet with encouragement from all quarters, such as I find need of indeed in an enterprise of such length and moment, but such as at the same time I find effectual. Homer is not a poet to be translated under the disadvantage of doubts and dejection.

Let me sing the praises of the desk which my dear cousin has sent me. In general, it is as elegant as possible. In particular, it is of cedar, beautifully lacquered. When put together, it assumes the form of a handsome small chest, contains all sorts of accommodations, is furnished with cut glass for ink and sand, and is hinged, handled, and mounted

with silver. It is inlaid with ivory, and serves the purpose of a reading-desk. It came stored with stationery of all sorts, and this splendid sheet is a part of it. I despatch four letters by this post. Permit me, therefore, now to conclude myself with our true love to all yours.—Your affectionate

W. C.

The snuff-box, a present to your mother, is also very handsome. French paper, with a gold hinge, and bordered with an inlay of *concatenated gold*, as the gods call it, but as men, with a gold chain.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Dec. 24, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Till I had made such a progress in my present undertaking, as to put it out of all doubt that, if I lived, I should proceed in, and finish it, I kept the matter to myself. It would have done me little honour to have told my friends that I had an arduous enterprise in hand, if afterwards I must have told them that I had dropped it. Knowing it to have been universally the opinion of the literati, ever since they have allowed themselves to consider the matter coolly, that a translation, properly so called, of Homer, is, notwithstanding what Pope has done, a desideratum in the English language, it struck me, that an attempt to supply the deficiency would be an honourable one; and having made myself, in former years, somewhat critically a master of the original, I was by this double consideration induced to make the attempt myself. I am now translating into blank verse

the last book of the *Iliad*, and mean to publish by subscription.  
W. C.

In order to obtain subscriptions to his Homer, Cowper wrote again to Colman and Thurlow.

TO GEORGE COLMAN

Dec. 27, 1785.

DEAR COLMAN,—For though we have not had any intercourse for more than twenty years, I cannot find in my heart to address you by any other style ; and I am the rather encouraged to the use of that in which I formerly addressed you, by a piece of intelligence that I received not long since from my friend Hill, who told me that you had inquired after me of him, and had said something about an intention to write to me. I took pretty good care that you should not be ignorant of my having commenced author, by sending you my volume. The reason why I did not send you my second, was because you omitted to send me your *Art of Poetry*, which, in a splenetic mood, I suppose, I construed into a prohibition. But Hill's subsequent information has cured me of that malady, as far as you were concerned.

Once an author, and always an author : this you know, my friend, is an axiom, and admits of no dispute. In my instance, at least, it is likely to hold good, for I have more leisure than it is possible to dispose of without writing. Accordingly I write every day, and have every day been writing since I last published, till at last I have made such a progress in a new translation of Homer into

blank verse that I am upon the point of publishing again. Hitherto I have given away my copies, but having indulged myself in that frolic twice, I now mean to try whether it may not prove equally agreeable to get something by the bargain. I come, therefore, humbly to solicit your vote and interest, and to beg that you will help me in the circulation of my Proposals, for I shall publish by subscription. On such occasions, you know, a man sets every wheel in motion; and it would be strange indeed if, not having a great many wheels to move, I should leave unattempted so important a one as yourself. As soon as I have your permission I shall order my bookseller to send you some papers.

The news informed me of your illness, which gave me true concern, for time alone cannot efface the traces of such a friendship as I have felt for you,—no, not even time with distance to help it. The news also told me that you were better; but to find that you are perfectly recovered, and to see it under your own hand, will give the greatest pleasure to one who can honestly subscribe himself to this day, your very affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

I enclose this with a letter to Johnson, my publisher, to whom I am obliged to have recourse for your address.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Dec. 31, 1785.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—You have learned from my last that I am now conducting myself upon the

plan that you recommended to me in the summer. But since I wrote it I have made still farther advances in my negotiation with Johnson. The proposals are adjusted. The proof-sheet has been printed off, corrected, and returned. They will be sent abroad as soon as I can make up a complete list of the personages and persons to whom I would have them sent; which in a few days I hope to be able to accomplish. Johnson behaves very well, at least according to my conception of the matter, and seems sensible that I have dealt liberally with him. He wishes me to be a gainer by my labours, in his own words, 'to put something handsome in my pocket,' and recommends two large quartos for the whole. He would not (he says) by any means advise an extravagant price, and has fixed it at three guineas; the half, as usual, to be paid at the time of subscribing, the remainder on delivery. Five hundred names (he adds) at this price will put above a thousand pounds into my purse. I am doing my best to obtain them. I have written, I think, to all my quondam friends, except those that are dead, requiring their assistance. I have gulped and swallowed, and I have written to the Chancellor, and I have written to Colman. I now bring them both to a fair test. They can both serve me most materially if so disposed. Mr. Newton is warm in my service, and can do not a little. I have of course written to Mr. Bagot, who, when he was here, with much earnestness and affection entreated me so to do, as soon as I should have settled the conditions. If I could get Sir Richard Sutton's address I would write to him also, though I have been but once in his company since I left

Westminster, where he and I read the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* through together. I enclose Lord Dartmouth's answer to my application, which I will get you to show to Lady Hesketh, because it will please her. I shall be glad if you can make an opportunity to call on her during your present stay in town. You observe, therefore, that I am not wanting to myself; he that is so has no just claim on the assistance of others, neither shall myself have any cause to complain of me in other respects. I thank you for your friendly hints and precautions, and shall not fail to give them the guidance of my pen. I respect the public, and I respect myself, and had rather want bread than expose myself wantonly to the condemnation of either. I hate the affectation so frequently found in authors, of negligence and slovenly slightness; and in the present case am sensible how especially necessary it is to shun them, when I undertake the vast and invidious labour of doing better than Pope has done before me. I thank you for all that you have said and done in my cause, and beforehand for all that you shall say and do hereafter. I am sure that there will be no deficiency on your part. In particular I thank you for taking such jealous care of my honour and respectability, when the Mann you mention applied for samples of my translation. When I deal in wine, cloth, or cheese, I will give samples, but of verse, never. No consideration would have induced me to comply with the gentleman's demand, unless he could have assured me that his wife had longed.

I have frequently thought with pleasure of the summer that you have had in your heart, while you have been employed in softening the severity of

winter in behalf of so many who must otherwise have been exposed to it. I wish that you could make a general gaol-delivery, leaving only those behind who cannot elsewhere be so properly disposed of. You never said a better thing in your life, than when you assured Mr. Smith of the expediency of a gift of bedding to the poor of Olney. There is no one article of this world's comforts, with which, as Falstaff says, they are so heinously unprovided. When a poor woman, and an honest one, whom we know well, carried home two pair of blankets, a pair for herself and husband, and a pair for her six children; as soon as the children saw them, they jumped out of their straw, caught them in their arms, kissed them, blessed them, and danced for joy. An old woman, a very old one, the first night that she found herself so comfortably covered, could not sleep a wink, being kept awake by the contrary emotions, of transport on the one hand, and the fear of not being thankful enough on the other.

It just occurs to me, to say, that this manuscript of mine will be ready for the press, as I hope, by the end of February. I shall have finished the *Iliad* in about ten days, and shall proceed immediately to the revision of the whole. You must, if possible, come down to Olney, if it be only that you may take the charge of its safe delivery to Johnson. For if by any accident it should be lost, I am undone,—the first copy being but a lean counterpart of the second.

Your mother joins with me in love and good wishes of every kind, to you, and all yours.—Adieu,  
my dear William, W. C.

*P.S.*—Two booksellers are engaged by Johnson as auxiliaries—Debrett in Piccadilly, and Walker at Charing Cross.

TO THE REV. MATTHEW POWLEY, DEWSBURY, NEAR  
LEEDS

[*About 1786.*]

DEAR SIR,—You judge wisely, I believe; it is certainly best that we should cease to discuss a matter which neither you nor I are qualified to adjust. It is very possible that I might misstate a circumstance which happened so long ago as last March twelve-month, for I keep no letters, except such as are recommended for preservation by the importance of their contents, and consequently had none to refer to. By *important contents*, I mean what is commonly called *business* of some sort or other. In the destruction of all other epistles I consult the good of my friends; for I account it a point of delicacy not to leave behind me, when I die, such bundles of their communications as I otherwise should, for the inspection of I know not whom; and as I deal with theirs, for the very same reason, I most heartily wish them all to deal with mine. In fact, there seems to be no more reason for perpetuating or preserving what passes the pen in the course of a common correspondence, than what passes the lips in every day's conversation. A thousand folios of the latter are forgotten without any regret; and octavos, at least, of the former are frequently treasured till death, for no use whatever either to ourselves or others. They then, perhaps, go to the grocer's, and serve to amuse such of his

customers as can read *written hand*, as they call it; or now and then, which is fifty times worse, they find their way to the press; a misfortune which never, at least seldom, fails to happen, if the deceased has been so unfortunate as to leave behind him a friend more affectionate to his memory than discreet in his choice of means to honour it.

I have run on thus long on a subject which I did not purpose to have mentioned when I began, merely for lack of news. You have received, I presume, by this time, Mr. Newton's last publication. I am reading it, but, as I read aloud, proceed not very rapidly, for I have not lungs to hold forth long; consequently I have made no great progress. The letters seem, however, by what I have seen of them, to hold out an example of a kind of which I have seen many, and which proves that a man may truly love and serve God, and yet have a snug little idol in a corner of his heart at the same time.

Is it possible to love *much* without loving *too much*? I never could. My experience has always answered—No.

Mr. Postlethwaite<sup>1</sup> is come to serve for Mr. Bean,<sup>2</sup> who has rambled westward, either to Bath or Bristol, or both. The aforesaid is about to publish a Grammar,<sup>3</sup> in which he proposes to go beyond Lowth and Beattie. I am a subscriber, and you may be so if you please. The price is to be three shillings. No great matter for settling the claims of twelve tenses. What they can be I am

<sup>1</sup> The curate of Olney who succeeded Mr. Scott.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. James Bean, curate of Olney. He succeeded the Rev. Moses Browne as vicar in 1788.

<sup>3</sup> A copy of Postlethwaite's *Grammatical Art Improved* (London, 1795) was among the books in Cowper's library at the time of his death.

not at present able to imagine. Half of the number are as many, I believe, as I ever use myself.

Mrs. U. unites with me in love to you both, and I remain, sincerely yours,  
WM. COWPER.

## TO LADY HESKETH

MY DEAR,—I have a neighbour at Newport Pagnell, the Rev. Mr. Bull, master of an academy there, a man of genius, fine taste, and consummate erudition,—I will say of him, that he has few if any superiors in learning in this country. He is my intimate friend, and dines with us once a fortnight the year round. To him I have already read a part of my translation, and should be ashamed to repeat the terms in which he praised it. If any difficulty should occur, he is my Delphic oracle, to which I shall resort. He is affectionately at my service, and his erudition is a bank upon which I can draw at pleasure. What interest he has is mine also, and he has already sent me names that will do honour to my list of subscribers.

Would you advise me to write to the Madans, Martin, and Spencer? Of the former, I have heard that my *Task* is his theme in all companies; but that terrible book of his<sup>1</sup> has made me more than half afraid to meddle with him, lest he should tease me for my opinion of it, in which case I should be obliged to execrate it even to his face. I gave him a broad look of disapprobation in my *Progress of Error*, and he was the only man who did not comprehend my purpose,—at least, he seemed insensible

<sup>1</sup> *Thelyphthora*.

of it. I have learned from good authority that his connections are most of them broken, and that since the publication, he has lived perforce pretty much to himself. So far, therefore, as he alone is concerned, it might not be worth while to trouble him ; but my dear Doctor of Buttercrambe<sup>1</sup> would, I dare say, serve me to his utmost, and must have pretty extensive interest, especially among the clergy. Yet to him I cannot make application, unless I apply to Martin also, without hurting the latter more than I would wish.—Advise me.

Does dedication to King or Queen import any thing like an obligation for Author to present Author's book with Author's own hands? If so, woe to mine Authorship, for it cannot be done. I would not dedicate to the Emperor of the Moon upon those conditions, though he should promise me Mount Saint Catherine for my reward.

You did perfectly well, my 'dear, to make *Task* take the lead of his elder brother, when their attendance on the General was in question. The first volume is a confession of my faith, concerning which he will probably not feel himself greatly interested : but the second giving some account of my manner of life, together with other diverting matters, may possibly please him. I shall be glad if it should, for I know him to be a man of excellent taste ; but at the same time do not expect him to say much.

Hours and hours and hours have I spent in endeavours altogether fruitless to trace the writer of the letter that I send, by a minute examination of the character, and never did it strike me till this

<sup>1</sup> Buttercrambe, village nine miles north-east of York.

moment that your father wrote it. In the style I discover him, in the scoring of the emphatical words—his never-failing practice, in the formation of many of the letters, and in the adieu at the bottom so plainly, that I could hardly be more convinced had I seen him write it. Tell me, my dearest cousin, if you are not of my mind? How much am I bound to love him if it be so! Always much, but in that case, if possible, more than ever.

Farewell, thou beloved daughter of my beloved anonymous uncle.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, Monday, Jan. 2, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Be under no concern about me or my stomach. The remedy is certainly a most detestable affair, but when taken early in the morning, and without slip-slops, is attended with less labour than could be supposed.

If I did not know that you have a better taste than ninety-nine readers in a hundred, whether of your sex or ours, I should have less pleasure than I have in your approbation. One thing is to be considered, I did not always read Pope's translation with so critical an eye as lately; if, therefore, I spy blemishes that escape you, it is not to be ascribed to my better judgment, but to that closeness of attention that the occasion naturally inspires. I well remember when the lines which have charmed you so long, delighted me as much; and had I not at last examined them by the light of Homer's lamp, their defects, to this moment, had been hidden from me; such a fascinating command of language was Pope endued with. But

Homer's accuracy of description, and his exquisite judgment never, never failed him. He never, I believe, in a single instance sacrificed beauty to embellishment. He does not deal in hyperbole (a figure so frequently occurring in his translator, that one would imagine it Homer's favourite one); accordingly, when he describes nature, whether in man or in animal, or whether nature inanimate, you may always trust him for the most consummate fidelity. It is his great glory that he omits no striking part of his subject, and that he never inserts a tittle that does not belong to it. Oh! how unlike some describers that I have met with, of modern days, who smother you with words, words, words, and then think that they have copied nature; while all the while nature was an object either not looked at, or not sufficiently: as if a painter, having a beautiful woman to draw, should give you, indeed, something like the outline of her face, but should fill it up with all the colours of the rainbow.

Your letter, my dearest cousin, gives me the greatest pleasure: it is full of matter that could not fail to do so. So indeed are all yours; for which reason it is that I ever wait with impatience for them. But I was especially pleased with what you say of General Cowper. Before I say more about him, let me premise that I have followed your good counsel, and that an epistle to him, of pretty handsome length, will set out by the same post that takes charge of this. The subjects of it are merely an explanation of my motives to this enterprise, and an application to him for his interest and assistance.

I know not how it could happen that my brother should have been so misinformed, but misinformed he must have been, and on the following occasion. Very soon after I had taken up my quarters at Mr. Unwin's at Huntingdon, I received a letter from your dear father, giving me to understand, though in the gentlest terms, and in such as *he* was sure to choose, that the family were not a little displeas'd at having learned that I kept a servant, and that I *maintained* a boy whom I had carried thither with me from St. Albans. I have not room here to relate what pass'd between me and my uncle, nor the reasons by which my conduct in those two articles had been determin'd. It is sufficient to say, that I did not alter my plan, though my uncle told me, as softly as he could, that there was danger lest the offence taken by my relations should operate to the prejudice of my income. I cannot proceed in my narrative without taking the opportunity to say, that at this moment it was, though I had not been ten months in the family, that Mrs. Unwin generously offer'd me my place under her roof, with all the same accommodations (and undertook to manage that matter with her husband), at half the stipulated payment. You may be sure that I made my brother privy to this business. Soon after my uncle and I had exchanged two or three letters about it, and I had ceased to hear any more of the matter, my brother went to town, where his stay was short, and when I saw him next, he gave me the following intelligence. That my cousin, mentioned above, had been the mover of this storm; that finding me inflexible, he

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had convened the family on the occasion, had recommended it to them not to give to one who knew so little how to make a right use of their bounty, and declared, for his own part, that he would not; and that he had accordingly withdrawn his contribution. My brother added, however, that my good friend Sir Thomas had stepped into his place, and made good the deficiency. Being thus informed—or, as it seems now, misinformed, you will not wonder, my dear, that I no longer regarded the Colonel as my friend, or that I have not enquired after him from that day to the present. But when, speaking of him, you express yourself thus—*who, you know, has been so constantly your friend*,—I feel myself more than reconciled to him, I feel a sincere affection for him; convinced that he could not have acted towards me as my brother had heard, without your knowledge of it.

I have a word or two more to say on the same subject. While this troublesome matter was in agitation, and I expected little less than to be abandoned by the family, I received an anonymous letter, in a hand entirely strange to me, by the post. It was conceived in the kindest and most benevolent terms imaginable, exhorting me not to distress myself with fears lest the threatened event should take place, for that whatever reduction of my income might happen, the defect should be supplied by a person who loved me tenderly and approved my conduct. I wish I knew who dictated this letter; I have seen, not long since, a style most excessively like it.

How kind are you, my cousin, to think for me as you do. Propose what you will, and I am prepared

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to adopt it, for you have given me no counsel yet, of which I have not instantly seen the propriety. My dedicatory powers (which what they may be I know not), are perfectly disengaged. Of all patrons upon earth I should choose a Lady-patron, and of all ladies to whom I can properly dedicate, Lady Spencer. Should I dedicate to a Lord, by giving the preference to one, I might offend two; for I hope not to have less than three in my train,—Dartmouth, Bagot, Thurlow. To the last-mentioned of this noble triumvirate I have written, but do not much expect an answer, for he writes, as I am told, to nobody. But then I have so contrived that his silence shall stand for consent. The answer of Lord Dartmouth to my application I have sent to Unwin, who, I hope, will have shown it to you by the time that this letter reaches you. I have great pleasure in the thought of your interview with him; and Mrs. Unwin is only sorry that she cannot put her eyes into her son's head while he is with you. He intends to be in London to-day. Possibly indeed he may not be able to call on you to-morrow, but I make little doubt that he will before he returns.

I have so managed that the General cannot possibly suspect me of having been directed to write to him. I conclude that if he be not in town himself, there will yet be somebody in his house to receive the letter. Where is his country house? and, is Mrs. Cowper living?

This has been one of my terrible days, and I begin to feel myself exhausted. You never had a correspondent before who, when he was about to write to you, prepared himself for it by an emetic.

This, however, as it has happened, is the second time that I have done so.—Yours, my beloved cousin, with Mrs. Unwin's affectionate respects,

WM. COWPER.

My Proposals will be ready for publication in a very few days. I design writing by this post to Johnson, on purpose to set the press to work.

Adieu! May every thousand years of your life be happier than the foregoing.

We are eating the second barrel of *Our Lady's* oysters, which are excellent.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

*Olney, Sat., Jan. 7, 1786.*

CHARISSIME,—I thank you heartily for catching at all opportunities to serve me on the present poetical occasion. The terms are now finally adjusted, and in such manner as you will less object to. Two large vols., quarto, royal paper, three guineas; common paper, two guineas. I verily do not think it an unreasonable price considering the length and labour of the work. If you should call at Johnson's the latter end of next week, I conclude that you will find the papers in readiness. I mention this, because when we saw you last, you expressed a wish that you might be able to procure some.

Thanks for the lamp. Remember coffee. Go and return in peace!—Yours, my very good friend, with Mrs. Unwin's remembrances,

WM. COWPER.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*Jan. 10, 1786.*

It gave me great pleasure that you found my friend Unwin, what I was sure you would find him, a most agreeable man. I did not usher him in with the marrow-bones and cleavers of high-sounding panegyric, both because I was certain that whatsoever merit he had, your discernment would mark it, and because it is possible to do a man material injury by making his praise his harbinger. It is easy to raise expectation to such a pitch, that the reality, be it ever so excellent, must necessarily fall below it.

I hold myself much indebted to Mr. —, of whom I have the first information from yourself, both for his friendly disposition towards me, and for the manner in which he marks the defects in my volume. An author must be tender indeed to wince on being touched so gently. It is undoubtedly as he says, and as you and my uncle say. You cannot be all mistaken, neither is it at all probable that any of you should be so. I take it for granted, therefore, that there are inequalities in the composition, and I do assure you, my dear, most faithfully, that if it should reach a second edition, I will spare no pains to improve it. It may serve me for an agreeable amusement perhaps when Homer shall be gone and done with. The first edition of poems has generally been susceptible of improvement. Pope, I believe, never published one in his life that did not undergo variations; and his longest pieces, many. I will only observe that inequalities

there must be always, and in every work of length. There are level parts of every subject, parts which we cannot with propriety attempt to elevate. They are by nature humble, and can only be made to assume an awkward and uncouth appearance by being mounted. But again, I take it for granted that this remark does not apply to the matter of your objection. You were sufficiently aware of it before, and have no need that I should suggest it as an apology, could it have served that office, but would have made it for me yourself. In truth, my dear, had you known in what anguish of mind I wrote the whole of that poem, and under what perpetual interruptions<sup>1</sup> from a cause that has since been removed, so that sometimes I had not an opportunity of writing more than three lines at a sitting, you would long since have wondered as much as I do myself, that it turned out any thing better than Grub Street.

My cousin, give yourself no trouble to find out any of the Magi to scrutinise my Homer. I can do without them; and if I were not conscious that I have no need of their help, I would be the first to call for it. Assure yourself that I intend to be careful to the utmost line of all possible caution, both with respect to language and versification. I will not send a verse to the press that shall not have undergone the strictest examination.

A subscription is surely on every account the most eligible mode of publication. When I shall have emptied the purses of my friends and of their friends into my own, I am still free to levy contributions upon the world at large, and I shall then

<sup>1</sup> See next letter to Lady Hesketh (16 Jan. 1786).

have a fund to defray the expenses of a new edition. I have ordered Johnson to print the proposals immediately, and hope that they will kiss your hands before the week is expired.

I have had the kindest letter from Josephus<sup>1</sup> that I ever had. He mentioned my purpose to one of the masters of Eton, who replied that 'such a work is much wanted.'—Affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Jan. 14, 1786.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I never wrote under greater disability than at this moment, having undergone physician's discipline this morning till I have no strength left either of mind or body. I have no reason for mentioning it, but merely to account for the diminutive sheet that I send you.

I am glad that you have seen Lady Hesketh. I knew that you would find her everything that is amiable and elegant. Else, being my relation, I would never have shown her to you. She also was delighted with her visitor, and expects the greatest pleasure in seeing you again; but is under some apprehensions that a tender regard for the drum of your ear may keep you from her. Never mind! You have two drums; and if she should crack both I will buy you a trumpet.

General Cowper having much pressed me to accompany my proposals with a specimen, I have sent him one. It is taken from the twenty-fourth book of the *Iliad*, and is part of the interview

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Joseph Hill.

between Priam and Achilles. Tell me, if it be possible for any man to tell me, why did Homer leave off at the burial of Hector? Is it possible that he could be determined to it by a conceit, so little worthy of him, as that, having made the number of his books completely the alphabetical number, he would not for the joke's sake proceed any farther? Why did he not give us the death of Achilles and the destruction of Troy? Tell me also if the critics, with Aristotle at their head, have not found that he left off exactly where he should; and that every epic poem, to all generations, is bound to conclude with the burial of Hector? I do not in the least doubt it. Therefore, if I live to write a dozen epic poems, I will always take care to bury Hector, and to bring all matters at that point to an immediate conclusion.

I had a truly kind letter from Mr. Smith, written immediately on his recovery from the fever. I am bound to honour James's powder, not only for the services it has often rendered to myself, but still more for having been the means of preserving a life ten times more valuable to society than mine is ever likely to be.

You say—'Why should I trouble you with my troubles?' I answer—'Why not? What is a friend good for, if we may not lay one end of the sack upon his shoulders, while we ourselves carry the other?'

You see your duty to God, and your duty to your neighbour; and you practise both with your best ability. Yet a certain person accounts you blind. I would that all the world were so blinded even as you are! But there are some in it who,

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like the Chinese, say—‘We have two eyes; and other nations have but one!’ I am glad, however, that in your one eye you have sight enough to discover that such censures are not worth minding.

I thank you heartily for every step you take in the advancement of my present purpose.

Contrive to pay Lady H. a long visit, for she has a thousand things to say.—Yours, my dear William,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Jan. 14, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You never suffered your sermons to interfere with our correspondence, much less ought I to permit my poetry to do so. Neither do I; for though I have many unanswered letters, at least several, and am at this time particularly intent upon the preparation of the *Iliad* for the press, these are not the reasons why I am at this time shorter than usual. I told you, I believe, that I have been obliged to put my stomach under the care of a physician. A part of the discipline that he has enjoined me is an emetic every ten days or fortnight. This happens to be the very day dedicated to that exercise, and the abominable drug not choosing to return the way it went, has kept me in a state of continual sickness, so that I am at present altogether unqualified to do what I have here undertaken.

My proposals are already printed. I ought rather to say that they are ready for printing, having near ten days ago returned the correction of the proof. But a cousin of mine, and one who will, I dare say,

be very active in my literary cause (I mean General Cowper), having earnestly recommended it to me to annex a specimen, I have accordingly sent him one, extracted from the latter part of the last book of the *Iliad*, and consisting of a hundred and seven lines. I chose to extract it from that part of the poem because if the reader should happen to find himself content with it, he will naturally be encouraged by it to hope well of the part preceding. Every man who can do anything in the translating way is pretty sure to set off with spirit; but in works of such a length there is always danger of flagging near the close.

My subscription, I hope, will be more powerfully promoted than subscriptions generally are. I have a warm and affectionate friend in Lady Hesketh; and one equally disposed, and even still more able to serve me, in the General above-mentioned. The Bagot family all undertake my cause with ardour; and I have several others, of whose ability and good-will I could not doubt without doing them injustice. It will, however, be necessary to bestow yet much time on the revisal of this work, for many reasons: and especially because he who contends with Pope upon Homer's ground can, of all writers, least afford to be negligent.

Mr. Scott brought me as much as he could remember of a kind message from Lord Dartmouth; but it was rather imperfectly delivered. Enough of it, however, came to hand to convince me that his Lordship takes a friendly interest in my success. When his Lordship and I sat side by side in the sixth form at Westminster, we little thought that in process of time one of us was ordained to give

a new translation of Homer. Yet at that very time, it seems, I was laying the foundation of this superstructure.

We were greatly pleased with your account of Mr. W. May your new disciple's conduct ever do honour to his principles, and to the instructions of the spiritual counsellor whom he hath chosen. Mr. Unwin in his last letter takes notice of the change in him that you have spoken of. Your letter is at this moment in the flames, according to your desire.

Many thanks for oysters, and much love upon all accounts to you and yours.—Adieu, my friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

*Jan. 15, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have just time to give you a hasty line to explain to you the delay that the publication of my proposals has unexpectedly encountered, and at which I suppose that you have been somewhat surprised.

I have a near relation in London and a warm friend in General Cowper; he is also a person as able as willing to render me material service. I lately made him acquainted with my design of sending into the world a new Translation of Homer, and told him that my papers would soon attend him. He soon after desired that I would annex to them a specimen of the work. To this I at first objected, for reasons that need not be enumerated here, but

at last acceded to his advice; and accordingly the day before yesterday I sent him a specimen. It consists of one hundred and seven lines, and is taken from the interview between Priam and Achilles in the last book. I chose to extract from the latter end of the poem, and as near to the close of it as possible, that I might encourage a hope in the readers of it, that if they found it in some degree worthy of their approbation they would find the former parts of the work not less so. For if a writer flags any where, it must be when he is near the end.

My subscribers will have an option given them in the proposals respecting the price. My predecessor in the same business was not quite so moderate. . . . You may say, perhaps (at least if your kindness for me did not prevent it, you would be ready to say), 'It is well;—but do you place yourself on a level with Pope?' I answer, or rather *should* answer—'By no means,—not as a poet; but as a translator of Homer, if I did not expect and believe that I should even surpass him, why have I meddled with this matter at all? If I confess inferiority, I reprobate my own undertaking.'

When I can hear of the rest of the bishops, that they preach and live as your brother does, I will think more respectfully of them than I feel inclined to do at present. They may be learned, and I know that some of them are; but your brother, learned as he is, has other more powerful recommendations. Persuade him to publish his poetry, and I promise you that he shall find as warm and sincere an admirer in me as in any man that lives.—Yours, my dear friend, very affectionately,  
W. C.

## TO LADY HESKETH

Jan. 16, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I have sent, as I hope you have heard by this time, a specimen to my good friend the General. To tell you the truth, I begin to be ashamed of myself that I had opposed him in the only two measures he recommended, and then assured him that I should be glad of his advice at all times. Having put myself under a course of strict self-examination upon this subject, I found at last that all the reluctance I had felt against a compliance with his wishes proceeded from a principle of shame-facedness at bottom, that had insensibly influenced my reasonings, and determined me against the counsel of a man whom I knew to be wiser than myself. Wonderful as it may seem, my cousin, yet it is equally true, that although I certainly did translate the *Iliad* with a design to publish it when I had done, and although I have twice issued from the press already, yet I do tremble at the thought, and so tremble at it that I could not bear to send out a specimen, because, by doing so, I should appear in public a good deal sooner than I had purposed. Thus have I developed my whole heart to you, and if you should think it at all expedient, have not the least objection to your communicating to the General this interpretation of the matter. The specimen has suffered a little through my too great zeal of amendment; in one instance, at least, it will be necessary to restore the original reading. And, by the way, I will observe that a scrupulous nicety is a dangerous thing. It

often betrays a writer into a worse mistake than it corrects, sometimes makes a blemish where before there was none, and is almost always fatal to the spirit of the performance.

You do not ask me, my dear, for an explanation of what I could mean by *anguish of mind*, and by *the perpetual interruptions* that I mentioned. Because you *do not* ask, and because your reason for not asking consists of a delicacy and tenderness peculiar to yourself, for that very cause I will tell you. A wish so suppressed is more irresistible than many wishes plainly uttered. Know then that in the year '78 the same scene that was acted at St. Alban's, opened upon me again at Olney, only covered with a still deeper shade of melancholy, and ordained to be of much longer duration. I was suddenly reduced from my wonted rate of understanding to an almost childish imbecility. I did not indeed lose my senses, but I lost the power to exercise them. I could return a rational answer even to a difficult question, but a question was necessary, or I never spoke at all. This state of mind was accompanied, as I suppose it to be in most instances of the kind, with misapprehension of things and persons that made me a very untractable patient. I believed that every body hated me, and that Mrs. Unwin hated me most of all; was convinced that all my food was poisoned, together with ten thousand megrims of the same stamp. I would not be more circumstantial than is necessary. Dr. Cotton was consulted. He replied that he could do no more for me than might be done at Olney, but recommended particular vigilance, lest I should attempt my life:—a caution for which there was

the greatest occasion. At the same time that I was convinced of Mrs. Unwin's aversion to me, I could endure no other companion. The whole management of me consequently devolved upon her, and a terrible task she had; she performed it, however, with a cheerfulness hardly ever equalled on such an occasion; and I have often heard her say, that if ever she praised God in her life it was when she found that she was to have all the labour. She performed it accordingly, but, as I hinted once before, very much to the hurt of her own constitution. It will be thirteen years in little more than a week, since this malady seized me. Methinks I hear you ask,—your affection for me will, I know, make you wish to do so,—‘Is it removed?’ I reply, in great measure, but not quite. Occasionally I am much distressed, but that distress becomes continually less frequent, and I think less violent. I find writing, and especially poetry, my best remedy. Perhaps had I understood music, I had never written verse, but had lived upon fiddle-strings instead. It is better, however, as it is. A poet may, if he pleases, be of a little use in the world, while a musician, the most skilful, can only divert himself and a few others. I have been emerging gradually from this pit. As soon as I became capable of action, I commenced carpenter, made cupboards, boxes, stools. I grew weary of this in about a twelvemonth, and addressed myself to the making of birdcages. To this employment succeeded that of gardening, which I intermingled with that of drawing, but finding that the latter occupation injured my eyes, I renounced it, and commenced poet. I have given you, my dear, a

little history in shorthand; I know that it will touch your feelings, but do not let it interest them too much. In the year when I wrote *The Task*, (for it occupied me about a year), I was very often most supremely unhappy, and am under God indebted in good part to that work for not having been much worse. You did not know what a clever fellow I am, and how I can turn my hand to any thing.

I perceive that this time I shall make you pay double postage, and there is no help for it. Unless I write myself out now, I shall forget half of what I have to say. Now, therefore, for the interruptions at which I hinted.—There came a lady into this country, by name and title Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister, about a mile from Olney; but in a few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of our house are interposed, our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company, and we, fearing that she would find such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice obtained at length of our dining with each other alternately every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden-walls<sup>1</sup> abovesaid, by which

<sup>1</sup> The doorways are now closed with brick and stone, but their position is clearly indicated.

means we considerably shortened the way from one house to the other,<sup>1</sup> and could meet when we pleased without entering the town at all, a measure the rather expedient, because in winter the town is abominably dirty, and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began *The Task*,—for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten, and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy: long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect *The Task* to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill health, and before I quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol. Thus, as I told you, my dear, the cause of the many interruptions that I mentioned, was removed, and now, except the Bull that I spoke of, we have seldom any company at all. After all that I have said upon this matter, you will not completely

<sup>1</sup> For the privilege Cowper paid a guinea a year. Hence the name of the orchard 'Guinea Field.' Sometimes Cowper calls it Mrs. Aspray's orchard.

understand me perhaps, unless I account for the remainder of the day. I will add, therefore, that having paid my morning visit, I walked; returning from my walk, I dressed; we then met and dined, and parted not till between ten and eleven at night.

My cousin, I thank you for giving me a copy of the General's note, of which I and my publication were so much the subject. I learned from it better than I could have learned the same thing from any other document, the kindness of his purposes towards me, and how much I may depend on his assistance. I am vexed, and have been these three days, that I thwarted him in the affair of a specimen; but as I told you, I have still my gloomy hours, which had their share, together with the more powerful cause assigned above, in determining my behaviour. But I have given the best proof possible of my repentance, and was indeed in such haste to evince it, that I sent my despatches to Newport, on purpose to catch the by-post. How much I love you for the generosity of that offer which made the General observe that your money seemed to burn in your pocket, I cannot readily, nor indeed at all, express. Neither is Mrs. Unwin in the least behind me in her sense of it. We may well admire and love you, for we have not met with many such occurrences, or even heard of many such, since we first entered a world where friendship is in every mouth, but finds only here and there a heart that has room for it.

I know well, my cousin, how formidable a creature you are when you become once outrageous. No sprat in a storm is half so terrible. But it is all in vain. You are at a distance, so

we snap our fingers at you. Not that we have any more fowls at present. No, no; you may make yourself easy upon that subject. The coop is empty, and at this time of year cannot be replenished. But the spring will soon begin to advance. There are such things as eggs in the world, which eggs will, by incubation, be transformed, some of them into chickens, and others of them into ducklings. So muster up all your patience, for as sure as you live, if we live also, we shall put it to the trial. But, seriously, you must not deny us one of the greatest pleasures we can have, which is, to give you now and then a little tiny proof how much we value you. We cannot sit with our hands before us, and be contented with only saying that we love Lady Hesketh.

The little item that you inserted in your cover, concerning a review of a certain author's work, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, excited Mrs. Unwin's curiosity to see it in a moment. In vain did I expostulate with her on the vanity of all things here below, especially of human praise, telling her what perhaps indeed she had heard before, but what on such an occasion I thought it not amiss to remind her of, that at the best it is but as the idle wind that whistles as it passes by, and that a little attention to the dictates of reason would presently give her the victory over all the curiosity that she felt so troublesome. For a short time, indeed, I prevailed, but the next day the fit returned upon her with more violence than before. She would see it,—she was resolved that she would see it that moment. You must know, my dear,

that a watchmaker lives within two or three doors of us, who takes in the said magazine for a gentleman at some distance, and as it happened it had not been sent to its proper owner. Accordingly the messenger that the lady despatched, returned with it, and she was gratified. As to myself, I read the article indeed, and read it to her; but I do not concern myself much, you may suppose, about such matters, and shall only make two or three cursory remarks, and so conclude. In the first place, therefore, I observe that it is enough to craze a poor poet to see his verses so miserably misprinted, and which is worse if possible, his very praises in a manner annihilated, by a jumble of the lines out of their places, so that in two instances, the end of the period takes the lead of the beginning of it. The said poet has still the more reason to be crazed, because the said magazine is in general singularly correct. But at Christmas, no doubt, your printer will get drunk as well as another man. It is astonishing to me that they know so exactly how much I translated of Voltaire. My recollection refreshed by them tells me that they are right in the number of the books that they affirm to have been translated by me, but till they brought the fact again to my mind, I myself had forgotten that part of the business entirely. My brother had twenty guineas for eight books of English *Henriade*, and I furnished him with four of them. They are not equally accurate in the affair of the Tame Mouse. That I kept one is certain, and that I kept it, as they say, in my bureau,—but not in the Temple. It was while I was at Westminster. I kept it till it produced six young ones,

and my transports when I first discovered them cannot easily be conceived,—any more than my mortification, when going again to visit my little family, I found that mouse herself had eaten them ! I turned her loose, in indignation, and vowed never to keep a mouse again. Who the writer of this article can be, I am not able to imagine, nor where he had his information of these particulars. But they know all the world and every thing that belongs to it. The mistake that has occasioned the mention of Unwin's name in the margin would be ludicrous if it were not, inadvertently, indeed, and innocently on their part, profane. I should have thought it impossible that when I spoke of One who had been wounded in the hands and in the side, any reader in a Christian land could have been for a moment at a loss for the person intended.

Adieu, my dear cousin. I intended that one of these should have served as a case for the other, but before I was aware of it, I filled both sheets completely. However, as your money burns in your pocket, there is no harm done. I shall not add a syllable more except that I am and, while I breathe, ever shall be.—Most truly yours, WM. COWPER.

Yes ; one syllable more. Having just finished the *Iliad*, I was determined to have a deal of talk with you.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, Monday, Jan. 23, 1786.*

MY DEAR,—Anonymous<sup>1</sup> is come again ; may

<sup>1</sup> Theodora Cowper was one of the three daughters of Ashley Cowper, and was a sister of Lady Hesketh. In his early years—in 1755—Cowper

God bless him, whosoever he be, as I doubt not that he will. A certain person said on a certain occasion (and he never spoke a word that failed), Whoso giveth you a cup of cold water in my name, shall by no means lose his reward. Therefore anonymous as he chooses to be upon earth, his name, I trust, will hereafter be found written in heaven. But when great princes, or characters much superior to great princes, choose to be incog., it is a sin against decency and good manners to seem to know them. I, therefore, know nothing of anonymous, but that I love him heartily and with most abundant cause. Had I opportunity I would send you his letter, though yourself excepted, I would indulge none with a sight of it. To confide it to *your* hands will be no violation of the secrecy that he has enjoined himself, and consequently me. But I can give you a short summary of its purport.—After an introduction of a religious cast, which does great honour to himself, and in which he makes a humble comparison between himself and me, by far too much to my advantage, he proceeds to tell me that being lately in company where my last work was mentioned, mention was also made of my intended publication. He informs me

had professed devotion to Theodora. The cousins were practically engaged to be married, but her father refused his sanction, probably from a recognition of Cowper's mental troubles, although Lady Hesketh told Hayley that the objection was the want of income on both sides. Theodora never married, but she continued to be devoted to Cowper, and when Lady Hesketh renewed his acquaintance, her sister anonymously assisted him with money, although he had become so oblivious of his old love story as never to recognise that she was his benefactress. Theodora died on October 22, 1824, and certain poems of Cowper's addressed to her, which she had preserved, were published in the following year.

of the different sentiments of the company on that subject, and expresses his own in terms the most encouraging; but adds, that having left the company, and shut himself up in his chamber, an apprehension there seized him, lest, if perhaps the world should not enter into my views of the matter, and the work should come short of the success that I hope for, the mortification might prove too much for my health; yet thinks that even in that case I may comfort myself by adverting to similar instances of failure where the writer's genius would have insured success, if any thing could have insured it, and alludes in particular to the fate and fortune of the *Paradise Lost*. In the last place he gives his attention to my circumstances, takes the kindest notice of their narrowness, and makes me a present of an annuity of fifty pounds a year, wishing that it were five hundred pounds. In a *P.S.* he tells me, a small parcel will set off by the Wellingborough coach on Tuesday next, which he hopes will arrive safe. I have given you the bones, but the benignity and affection which is the marrow of those bones, in so short an abridgment, I could not give you. Wonder with me, my beloved cousin, at the goodness of God, who, according to Dr. Watts' beautiful stanza,

—' can clear the darkest skies,  
Can give us day for night,  
Make drops of sacred sorrow rise  
To rivers of delight.'

As I said once before, so say I again, my heart is as light as a bird on the subject of Homer. Neither without prayer, nor without confidence in the providential goodness of God, has that work been under-

taken or continued. I am not so dim-sighted, sad as my spirit is at times, but that I can plainly discern his Providence going before me in the way. Unforeseen, unhopèd-for advantages have sprung at his bidding, and a prospect, at first cloudy indeed and discouraging enough, has been continually brightening ever since I announced my intentions. But suppose the worst;—suppose that I should not succeed in any measure proportioned to my hopes;—how then? Why then, my dear, I will hold this language with myself: To write was necessary to me. I undertook an honourable task, and with upright intentions. It served me for more than two years as an amusement, and as such was of infinite service to my spirits. But God did not see it good for me that I should be very famous. If he did not, it is better for me that I am not. Fame is neither my meat nor my drink; I lived fifty years without it, and should I live fifty more and get to heaven at last, then I shall not want it.—So, my dear, you see that I am armed at all points. I do not mean that I should feel nothing, but that thus thinking I should feel supportably.

I knew that my last letter would give you pain, but there is no need that it should give you so much. He who hath preserved me hitherto, will still preserve me. All the dangers that I have escaped are so many pillars of remembrance to which I shall hereafter look back with comfort, and be able, as I well hope, to inscribe on every one of them a grateful memorial of God's singular protection of me. Mine has been a life of wonders for many years, and a life of wonders I in my heart believe it will be to the end. Wonders I have seen in the

great deeps, and wonders I shall see in the paths of mercy also. This, my dear, is my creed.

My eyes, you know were never strong, and it was in the character of a carpenter that I almost put them out. The strains and the exertions of hard labour distended and relaxed the blood vessels to such a degree that an inflammation ensued so painful that for a year I was in continual torment, and had so far lost the sight of one of them that I could distinguish with it nothing but the light, and very faintly *that*. But a medicine of Elliot's, which I had never tried before, though two of his medicines I had used for many years, through God's mercy cured me almost in an instant, and my eyes are for the most part stronger and clearer now than they were when you used to see me daily. I shall write to Sephus soon for a supply of this medicine, for though I do not often want it, I would never be without it. He has always procured it for me.

I am heartily glad that your thoughts and ours coincided so exactly on the subject of the Madans. I should be very sorry to see Signors and Signoras in the list of my subscribers; yet such a sight, as those warblers have so much the command of his purse, it is not at all impossible that I might encounter. He will necessarily hear of the work, and if he subscribes himself, it shall be quite sufficient. I rejoice at my success with Dr. Maty.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paul Henry Maty (1745-1787) was assistant-librarian in the British Museum, and afterwards under-librarian in the department of natural history and antiquities. In 1778 he became principal secretary to the Royal Society. In 1782 he commenced a 'New Review,' which aimed at giving a bird's-eye view of foreign publications. His connection with the Royal Society was of a contentious character, and he resigned the secretaryship in 1784.

He was probably that friend of Dr. Johnson's, who revised my first volume, and made a favourable report of it. But that the knowledge of this last has diffused itself so much further, has been owing, my dear, principally to yourself. If Dr. Maty applied to you for permission to mention my Homer in his next Review, it is plainly enough to be seen that from you he received, or by your means, my last publication. *Vous avez beaucoup de courage, ma cousine*, in my cause. Neither the asperity of a critic professed, nor the frowns of a whole university whom I have censured, have any terrors for you, where you apprehend my interest is concerned.<sup>1</sup> If Dr. Jackson should not call me also a d—d fool, as well as Pope, I should not wonder if he were to give me as hard a name, or if my book were to be burnt at Carfax.<sup>2</sup> But, never mind, the book will do them no harm, if they do not quarrel with good counsel; and if they should, their resentment will do me none.

I must not conclude without a word in answer to your affectionate inquiries concerning the success of Dr. Kerr's regimen. It has done all that in the course of so short a time I could expect from it. I have bid adieu to indigestions and heartburn. A spasmodic affection of the stomach in the night I

<sup>1</sup> Cyril Jackson (1746-1819) was educated at Manchester Grammar School and at Westminster. In 1783 he became Dean of Christ Church, where Canning and Sir Robert Peel were among the young men who came under his influence. He was a very distinguished Greek scholar, and hence had peculiar qualifications for judging Cowper's efforts as a translator. He assisted, indeed, at the production of a *Herodotus*, printed at the Clarendon press.

<sup>2</sup> Carfax.—The spot where the four principal streets of Oxford meet. There is said to be only one other Carfax—namely that at Horsham in Sussex.

am still troubled with, but in a less degree. In short, I have little doubt that perseverance in the course he has prescribed shall, by the blessing of God, restore me entirely. I have added to my dumb-bells a rope, through which I jump, if I do not flatter myself, with as much agility as when a boy. This is much the best domestic exercise of the two.

I have a large interest in Staffordshire by means of the Bagot family; and yesterday brought me another letter from Walter Bagot, entreating me to hasten my specimen through the press, for that the nobs and the gents were all upon the point of flying to London. Lord Dartmouth is equally anxious on the same subject. Richard Howard, formerly Richard Bagot, has subscribed another twenty pounds, and his brother Walter desires me to present him with my two volumes handsomely bound, to secure him the more in my interest.—My ever beloved cousin, adieu. Perfectly yours.

W. C.

Oysters attend us duly. Thanks.

Thank you, my dear, for galloping John. He rides well.

*P.S.*—I kept my letter unsealed to the last moment, that I might give you an account of the safe arrival of the expected parcel. It is at all points worthy of the letter-writer. Snuff-box, purse, notes, Bess, Puss, Tiney, all safe. Again, may God bless him!

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Jan. 23, 1786.

MY DEAR AND FAITHFUL FRIEND,—The paragraph that I am now beginning will contain information of a kind that I am not very fond of communicating, and on a subject that I am not very fond of writing about. Only to you I will open my budget without reserve, because I know that in what concerns my authorship you take an interest that demands my confidence, and will be pleased with every occurrence that is at all propitious to my endeavours. Lady Hesketh, who, had she as many mouths as Virgil's Fame, with a tongue in each, would employ them all in my service, writes me word that Dr. Maty of the Museum has read my *Task*. I cannot even to you relate what he says of it; though, when I began this story, I thought I had courage enough to tell it boldly. He designs however to give his opinion of it in his next monthly Review; and being informed that I was about to finish a translation of Homer, asked her Ladyship's leave to mention the circumstance on that occasion. This incident pleases me the more, because I have authentic intelligence of his being a critical character in all its forms, acute, sour, and blunt; and so incorruptible withal, and so unsusceptible of bias from undue motives, that, as my correspondent informs me, he would not praise his own mother, did he not think she deserved it.

The said *Task* is likewise gone to Oxford, conveyed thither by an intimate friend of Dr. Jack-

son's, with a purpose of putting it into his hands. My friend, what will they do with me at Oxford? Will they burn me at Carfax, or will they anathematise me with bell, book, and candle? I can say with more truth than Ovid did,—*Parve nec invidéo*.

The said Dr. Jackson has been heard to say, and I give you his own words (stop both your ears while I utter them), 'that Homer has never been translated, and that Pope was a fool.' Very irreverent language to be sure; but in consideration of the subject on which he used them, we will pardon it, even in a dean. One of the masters of Eton told a friend of mine lately, that a translation of Homer is much wanted. So now you have all my news.—  
Yours, my dear friend, cordially, W. C.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, Jan. 31, 1786.*

It is very pleasant, my dearest cousin, to receive a present so delicately conveyed as that which I received so lately from Anonymous; but it is also very painful to have nobody to thank for it. I find myself, therefore, driven by stress of necessity to the following resolution, viz. that I will constitute you my Thank-receiver-general for whatsoever gift I shall receive hereafter, as well as for those that I have already received from a nameless benefactor. I therefore thank you, my cousin, for a most elegant present, including the most elegant compliment that ever poet was honoured with; for a snuff-box of tortoise-shell, with a beautiful landscape on the lid of it, glazed with crystal, having the figures of three hares in the foreground, and inscribed above with

these words, *The Peasant's Nest*; and below with these, *Tiney, Puss, and Bess*. For all and every of these I thank you, and also for standing proxy on this occasion. Nor must I forget to thank you, that so soon after I had sent you the first letter of Anonymous, I received another in the same hand.—There! Now I am a little easier.

I have almost conceived a design to send up half a dozen stout country fellows to tie by the leg to their respective bedposts the company that so abridges your opportunity of writing to me. Your letters are the joy of my heart, and I cannot endure to be robbed, by I know not whom, of half my treasure. But there is no comfort without a drawback, and therefore it is that I, who have unknown friends, have unknown enemies also. Ever since I wrote last I find myself in better health, and my nocturnal spasms and fever considerably abated. I intend to write to Dr. Kerr on Thursday, that I may gratify him with an account of my amendment; for to him I know it will be a gratification. Were he not a physician, I should regret that he lives so distant, for he is a most agreeable man; but being what he is, it would be impossible to have his company, even if he were a neighbour, unless in time of sickness; at which time, whatever charms he might have himself, my own must necessarily lose much of their effect on him.

When I write to you, my dear, what I have already related to the General, I am always fearful lest I should tell you that for news with which you are well acquainted. For once, however, I will venture. On Wednesday last I received from Johnson the ms. copy of a specimen that I had

sent to the General; and, enclosed in the same cover, notes upon it by an unknown critic. Johnson, in a short letter, recommended him to me as a man of unquestionable learning and ability. On perusal and consideration of his remarks I found him such; and having nothing so much at heart as to give all possible security to yourself and the General, that my work shall not come forth unfinished, I answered Johnson that I would gladly submit my ms. to his friend. He is, in truth, a very clever fellow, perfectly a stranger to me, and one who I promise you will not spare for severity of animadversion where he shall find occasion. It is impossible for you, my dearest cousin, to express a wish that I do not equally feel a wish to gratify. You are desirous that Maty should see a book of my Homer, and for that reason if Maty *will* see a book of it he shall be welcome, although time is likely to be precious, and consequently any delay that is not absolutely necessary as much as possible to be avoided. I am now revising the *Iliad*. It is a business that will cost me four months, perhaps five: for I compare the very words as I go, and if much alteration should occur must transcribe the whole. The first book I have almost transcribed already. To these five months Johnson says that nine more must be added for printing; and upon my own experience, I will venture to assure you that the tardiness of printers will make those nine months twelve. There is danger, therefore, that my subscribers may think that I make them wait too long, and that they who know me not may suspect a bubble. How glad shall I be to read it over in an evening, book by book, as fast as I settle

the copy, to you and to Mrs. Unwin! She has been my touch-stone always, and without reference to her taste and judgment I have printed nothing. With one of you at each elbow I should think myself the happiest of all poets.

The General and I, having broken the ice, are upon the most comfortable terms of correspondence. He writes very affectionately to me, and I say everything to him that comes uppermost. I could not write frequently to any creature living upon any other terms than those. He tells me of infirmities that he has which make him less active than he was. I am sorry to hear that he has any such. Alas! alas! he was young when I saw him, only twenty years ago.

I have the most affectionate letter imaginable from Colman, who writes to me like a brother. The Chancellor is yet dumb.

May God have you in His keeping, my beloved cousin.—Farewell.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, Feb. 9, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I have been impatient to tell you that I am impatient to see you again. Mrs. Unwin partakes with me in all my feelings upon this subject, and longs also to see you. I should have told you so by the last post, but have been so completely occupied by this tormenting specimen that it was impossible to do it. I sent the General a letter on Monday that would distress and alarm him; I sent him another yesterday that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apolo-

gised very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures; and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that, I doubt not, we shall jog on merrily together. And now, my dear, let me tell you once more that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects, the hovel,<sup>1</sup> the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks, everything that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors, but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May or beginning of June, because before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. *Imprimis*, as soon as you have entered the vestibule,<sup>2</sup> if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which

<sup>1</sup> The Moss House.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper's hall, now with the parlour used as a Cowper Museum.

have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present: but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made: but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour,<sup>1</sup> into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my cousin, to the Swan at Newport, and there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney.

My dear, I have told Homer what you say about casks and urns, and have asked him whether he is sure that it is a cask in which Jupiter keeps his wine. He swears that it is a cask, and that it will never be any thing better than a cask to eternity. So if the god is content with it, we must wonder at his taste, and be so too. Adieu! my dearest, dearest cousin,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, Feb. 11, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—It must be, I suppose, a fortnight or thereabout since I wrote last, I feel myself so alert and so ready to write again. Be

<sup>1</sup> The parlour is unaltered, except that this door is now nearer to the street-door.

that as it may, here I come. We talk of nobody but you. What we will do with you when we get you, where you shall walk, where you shall sleep; in short, every thing that bears the remotest relation to your well-being at Olney, occupies all our talking time,—which is all that I do not spend at Troy.

I have every reason for writing to you as often as I can, but I have a particular reason for doing it now. I want to tell you that by the Diligence on Wednesday next, I mean to send you a quire of my Homer for Maty's perusal. It will contain the first book, and as much of the second as brings us to the catalogue of the ships, and is every morsel of the revised copy that I have transcribed. My dearest cousin, read it yourself, let the General read it; do what you please with it, so that it reach Johnson in due time. But let Maty be the only *critic* that has anything to do with it. The vexation, the perplexity, that attends a multiplicity of criticisms by various hands, many of which are sure to be futile, many of them ill-founded, and some of them contradictory to others, is inconceivable, except by the author, whose ill-fated work happens to be the subject of them. This also appears to me self-evident, that if a work have passed under the review of one man of taste and learning, and have had the good fortune to please him, his approbation gives security for that of all others qualified like himself. I speak thus, my dear, after having just escaped from such a storm of trouble, occasioned by endless remarks, hints, suggestions, and objections, as drove me almost to despair, and to the very verge of a resolution to drop my undertaking for ever. With infinite difficulty I at last sifted the chaff from the

wheat, availed myself of what appeared to me to be just, and rejected the rest, but not till the labour and anxiety had nearly undone all that Kerr had been doing for me. My beloved cousin, trust me for it, as you safely may, that temper, vanity, and self-importance, had nothing to do in all this distress that I suffered. It was merely the effect of an alarm, that I could not help taking, when I compared the great trouble I had with a few lines only, thus handled, with that which I foresaw such handling of the whole must necessarily give me. I felt beforehand that my constitution would not bear it. I shall send up this second specimen in a box that I have had made on purpose; and when Maty has done with the copy, and you have done with it yourself, then you must return it in said box to my translatorship. Though Johnson's friend has teased me sadly, I verily believe that I shall have no more such cause to complain of him. We now understand one another, and I firmly believe that I might have gone the world through, before I had found his equal in an accurate and familiar acquaintance with the original.

A letter to Mr. Urban in the last *Gentleman's Magazine*, of which I's book is the subject, pleases me more than any thing I have seen in the way of eulogium yet. I have no guess of the author.

I do not wish to remind the Chancellor of his promise. Ask you why, my cousin? Because I suppose it would be impossible. He has, no doubt, forgotten it entirely, and would be obliged to take my word for the truth of it, which I could not bear. We drank tea together with Mrs. C—e, and her sister, in King Street, Bloomsbury, and

there was the promise made. I said—‘Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be Chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are.’ He smiled, and replied, ‘I surely will.’—‘These ladies,’ said I, ‘are witnesses.’ He still smiled, and said—‘Let them be so, for I will certainly do it.’ But alas! twenty-four years have passed since the day of the date thereof; and to mention it now would be to upbraid him with inattention to his plighted troth. Neither do I suppose he could easily serve such a creature as I am, if he would.—Adieu, whom I love entirely,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Feb. 18, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I feel myself truly obliged to you for the leave that you give me, to be less frequent in writing, and more brief than heretofore. I have a long work upon my hands; and standing engaged to the public (for by this time I suppose my subscription papers to be gone abroad), not only for the performance of it, but for the performance of it in a reasonable time, it seems necessary to me not to intermit it often. My correspondence has also lately been renewed with several of my relations, and unavoidably engrosses now and then one of the few opportunities that I can find for writing. I nevertheless intend, in the exchange of letters with you, to be as regular as I can be, and to use, like a friend, the friendly allowance that you have made me.

My reason for giving notice of an *Odyssey* as well

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as an *Iliad*, was this:—I feared that the public, being left to doubt whether I should ever translate the former, would be unwilling to treat with me for the latter; which they will be apt to consider as an odd volume, and unworthy to stand upon their shelves alone. It is hardly probable, however, that I should begin the *Odyssey* for some months to come, being now closely engaged in the revisal of my translation of the *Iliad*, which I compare, as I go, most minutely with the original. One of the great defects of Pope's translation is, that it is licentious. To publish, therefore, a translation now that should be at all chargeable with the same fault,—that were not indeed as close and as faithful as possible, would be only *actum agere*, and had therefore better be left undone. Whatever be said of mine, when it shall appear, it shall never be said that it is not faithful.

I thank you heartily, both for your wishes and prayers, that should a disappointment occur, I may not be too much hurt by it. Strange as it may seem to say it, and unwilling as I should be to say it to any person less candid than yourself, I will nevertheless say, that I have not entered on this work, unconnected as it must needs appear with the interests of the cause of God, without the direction of His Providence, nor altogether unassisted by Him in the performance of it. Time will show to what it ultimately tends. I am inclined to believe that it has a tendency to which I myself am, at present, perfectly a stranger. Be that as it may, He knows my frame, and will consider that I am but dust; dust, into the bargain, that has been so trampled under foot and beaten, that a storm less

violent than an unsuccessful issue of such a business might occasion, would be sufficient to blow me quite away. But I will tell you honestly, I have no fears upon the subject. My predecessor has given me every advantage.

As I know not to what end this my present occupation may finally lead, so neither did I know, when I wrote it, or at all suspect, one valuable end, at least, that was to be answered by *The Task*. It has pleased God to prosper it; and being composed in blank verse, it is likely to prove as seasonable an introduction to a blank verse Homer, by the same hand, as any that could have been devised: yet when I wrote the last line of *The Task*, I as little suspected that I should ever engage in a version of the old Asiatic tale, as you do now. Let me now boast of some favours that *The Task* has procured me from benefactors at present unknown, and likely to continue so. In the first place I am indebted to it, at least I have every reason to think so, for a most elegant writing-desk: it is of cedar, and mounted with silver. Lady Hesketh sent it, but assured me that she is not the giver, neither will he be known. In the next place it has been the occasion unequivocally, of my receiving from another anonymous donor a handsome snuff-box, embellished on the lid with a landscape overlaid with a crystal. The background of the drawing, which is extremely neat, consists of a hill with a cottage on its top surrounded by trees, and in the foreground are seen the figures of three hares. Above, it is inscribed with these words—*The peasant's nest*; and below with these—*Puss, Tiney, and Bess*. My benefactor learned those names from a history of these three

captives that I published two years since in the *Gentleman's Magazine*,<sup>1</sup> and has characterised them exactly according to that account of them.

I should choose for your general motto,

*Carmina tum melius, cum venerit ipse, canemus.*

For vol. i.

*Unum pro multis dabitur caput.*

For vol. ii.

*Aspice, venturo latentur ut omnia sæclo.*

It seems to me that you cannot have better than these.

Our best love to Mrs. Newton, with thanks for Russia tongues.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

*P.S.*—We wish S. Johnson<sup>2</sup> very happy, and think that if a good Christian husband and a rural retreat can make her so, she has every thing on her side.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, Feb. 19, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Since so it must be, so it shall be. If you will not sleep under the roof of a friend, may you never sleep under the roof of an enemy! An enemy, however, you will not presently find. Mrs. Unwin bids me mention her affectionately, and tell you that she willingly gives up a part, for the sake of the rest, willingly, at

<sup>1</sup> June, 1784.

<sup>2</sup> Sally Johnson, Newton's maid.

least, as far as willingly may consist with some reluctance. I feel my reluctance too. Our design was that you should have slept in the room that serves me for a study, and its having been occupied by you would have been an additional recommendation of it to me. But all reluctances are superseded by the thought of seeing you ; and because we have nothing so much at heart as the wish to see you happy and comfortable, we are desirous, therefore, to accommodate you to your own mind, and not to ours. Mrs. Unwin has already secured for you an apartment, or rather two, just such as we could wish. The house<sup>1</sup> in which you will find them is within thirty yards of our own, and opposite to it. The whole affair is thus commodiously adjusted ; and now I have nothing to do but to wish for June ; and June, my cousin, was never so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand to say, and they will all rush into my mind together, till it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing. But no matter,—sooner or later they will all come out ; and since we shall have you the longer for not having you under our own roof (a circumstance that more than any thing reconciles us to that measure), they will stand the better chance. After so long a separation, a separation that of late seemed likely to last for life, we shall meet each other as alive from the dead ; and for my own part I can truly say that I have not a friend in the other world whose resurrection would give me greater pleasure.

<sup>1</sup> No doubt the draper's.

I am truly happy, my dear, in having pleased you with what you have seen of my Homer. I wish that all English readers had your unsophisticated, or rather unadulterated taste, and could relish simplicity like you. But I am well aware that in this respect I am under a disadvantage, and that many, especially many ladies, missing many turns and prettinesses of expression that they have admired in Pope, will account my translation in those particulars defective. But I comfort myself with the thought that in reality it is no defect; on the contrary, that the want of all such embellishments as do not belong to the original will be one of its principal merits with persons indeed capable of relishing Homer. He is the best poet that ever lived for many reasons, but for none more than for that majestic plainness that distinguishes him from all others. As an accomplished person moves gracefully without thinking of it, in like manner the dignity of Homer seems to cost him no labour. It was natural to him to say great things, and to say them well, and little ornaments were beneath his notice. If Maty, my dearest cousin, should return to you my copy with any such strictures as may make it necessary for me to see it again before it goes to Johnson, in that case you shall send it to me, otherwise to Johnson immediately; for he writes me word he wishes his friend to go to work upon it as soon as possible. When you come, my dear, we will hang all these critics together, for they have worried me without remorse or conscience: at least one of them has. I had actually murdered more than a few of the best lines in the specimen, in compliance with his requisitions, but plucked up my

courage at last, and in the very last opportunity that I had, recovered them to life again by restoring the original reading. At the same time I readily confess that the specimen is the better for all this discipline its author has undergone; but then it has been more indebted for its improvement to that pointed accuracy of examination, to which I was myself excited, than to any proposed amendments from Mr. Critic; for as sure as you are my cousin whom I long to see at Olney, so surely would he have done me irreparable mischief if I would have given him leave.

My friend Bagot writes to me in a most friendly strain, and calls loudly upon me for original poetry. When I shall have done with Homer, probably he will not call in vain. Having found the prime feather of a swan on the banks of the *smug and silver Trent*, he keeps it for me.—Adieu, dear cousin,

W. C.

I am sorry that the General has such indifferent health. He must not die. I can by no means spare a person so kind to me.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

*Olney, Feb. 27, 1786.*

ALAS! alas! my dear, dear friend, may God himself comfort you! I will not be so absurd as to attempt it. By the close of your letter it should seem that in this hour of great trial He withholds not His consolations from you. I know by experience that they are neither few nor small; and though I feel for you as I never felt for man before,

yet do I sincerely rejoice in this, that whereas there is but one true Comforter in the universe under afflictions such as yours, you both know Him, and know where to seek Him. I thought you a man the most happily mated that I had ever seen, and had great pleasure in your felicity. Pardon me if now I feel a wish that, short as my acquaintance with her was, I had never seen her. I should have mourned with you, but not as I do now. Mrs. Unwin sympathises with you also most sincerely, and you neither are nor will be soon forgotten in such prayers as we can make at Olney. I will not detain you longer now, my poor afflicted friend, than to commit you to the tender mercy of God, and to bid you a sorrowful adieu!—Adieu! ever yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Mond., Feb. 27, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—As I sat by the fireside this day after dinner, I saw your chamber windows<sup>1</sup> coated over with snow, so that the glass was hardly visible. This circumstance naturally suggested the thought that it will be otherwise when you come. Then the roses will begin to blow, and perhaps the heat will be as troublesome as the cold is now. The next thought of course was this,—three long months must pass before we shall see her! I will, however, be as patient as I can, and comfort myself with the thought that we shall meet at last. You said in one of your letters that you had resolved to dream of nobody but of Homer and his translator. I hope

<sup>1</sup> The proposed lodgings at the draper's.

you keep your resolution, for I can assure you that the last-mentioned dreams most comfortably of you. About three nights since I dreamed that, sitting in our summerhouse, I saw you coming towards me. With inexpressible pleasure I sprang to meet you, caught you in my arms, and said,—‘ Oh my precious, precious cousin, may God make me thankful that I see thy face again !’ Now, this was a dream, and no dream ;—it was only a shadow while it lasted ; but if we both live, and live to meet, it will be realised hereafter. Yet, alas ! the passages and events of the day as well as of the night are little better than dreams. Poor Bagot ! whom I love sincerely because he has a singular affection for me. Ten days since he wrote me a letter, by which it appeared he was cheerful and happy. Yesterday brought me another, consisting of only about six lines, in which he tells me that his wife is dead. I transcribe it, for it is impossible to do it justice any other way.

‘ OH, MY DEAR FRIEND,—Things are much altered with me since I wrote last. My harp is turned into mourning, and my music into the voice of weeping. Her whom you saw and loved,—her whom nobody ever yet saw and knew that did not love ;—her have I lost. Pray to God for me, that for Christ’s sake He would continue to comfort and support both me and mine under our great affliction.—Yours ever,  
WALT. BAGOT.’

‘ *Blithfield, Feb. 23, 1786.*’

Poor man ! I can attest the truth of what he says from my own knowledge of her, however short. There are people whose characters we penetrate and

fully comprehend in a moment: she was one of those. Her character was so strongly marked in the gentleness of her aspect, her voice, her carriage, that the instant she was seen she was beloved. My knowledge of her was two hours' long, and no more; yet when I took leave of her, I could not help saying, God bless you, madam! Indeed, my cousin, I never felt so much for any man. His own sensibilities are naturally of the quickest, and he was attached to her in the extreme, as it was impossible but that he must be. Mr. Madan's book happened to be mentioned when he was here, when all he said of it was—'I know not how Mr. Madan finds it, but the longer I know my wife, the more I love her.' At that time I had never seen her, but when I did I wondered not.

I hardly know how to leave this subject for another, but it is necessary that I should. So farewell, poor Bagot, for the present; may God comfort thee and thy seven children!—Now for Homer, and the matters to Homer appertaining. Sephus<sup>1</sup> and I are of opinions perfectly different on the subject of such an advertisement as he recommends. The only proper part for me is not to know that such a man as Pope has ever existed. I am so nice upon this subject that in that note in the specimen, in which I have accounted for the anger of Achilles (which, I believe I may pay myself the compliment to say was never accounted for before), I have not even so much as hinted at the perplexity in which Pope was entangled when he endeavoured to explain it, nor at the preposterous and blundering work that he has made with it. No, my dear, as I told you

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Hill.

once before, my attempt has itself a loud voice, and speaks a most intelligible language. Had Pope's translation been good, or had I thought it such, or had I not known that it is admitted by all whom a knowledge of the original qualifies to judge of it, to be a very defective one, I had never translated myself one line of Homer. Dr. Johnson is the only modern writer who has spoken of it in terms of approbation, at least the only one that I have met with. And his praise of it is such as convinces me, intimately acquainted as I am with Pope's performance, that he talked at random, that either he had never examined it by Homer's, or never since he was a boy. For I would undertake to produce numberless passages from it, if need were, not only ill translated, but meanly written. It is not therefore for me, convinced as I am of the truth of all I say, to go forth into the world holding up Pope's translation with one hand as a work to be extolled, and my own with the other as a work still wanted. It is plain to me that I behave with sufficient liberality on the occasion if, neither praising nor blaming my predecessor, I go right forward, and leave the world to decide between us.

Now, to come nearer to myself. Poets, my dear (it is a secret I have lately discovered), are born to trouble, and of all poets, translators of Homer to the most. Our dear friend, the General, whom I truly love, in his last letter mortified me not a little. I do not mean by suggesting lines that he thought might be amended, for I hardly ever wrote fifty lines together that I could not afterwards have improved, but by what appeared to me an implied censure on the whole, or nearly the whole quire

that I sent to you. It was a great work, he said; it should be kept long in hand;—years, if it were possible; that it stood in need of much amendment, that it ought to be made worthy of me, that he could not think of showing it to Maty, that he could not even think of laying it before Johnson and his friend in its present condition. Now, my dear, understand thou this: if there lives a man who stands clear of the charge of careless writing, I am that man. I might prudently, perhaps, but I could not honestly, admit that charge: it would account in a way favourable to my own ability for many defects of which I am guilty, but it would be disingenuous and untrue. The copy which I sent to you was almost a new, I mean a second, translation, as far as it went. With the first I had taken pains, but with the second I took more. I weighed many expressions, exacted from myself the utmost fidelity to my author, and tried all the numbers upon my own ear again and again. If, therefore, after all this care, the execution be such as in the General's account it seems to be, I appear to have made shipwreck of my hopes at once. He said, indeed, that the similes delighted him, and the catalogue of the ships surpassed his expectations: but his commendation of so small a portion of the whole affected me rather painfully, as it seemed to amount to an implied condemnation of the rest. I have been the more uneasy because I know his taste to be good, and by the selection that he made of lines that he thought should be altered, he proved it such. I altered them all, and thanked him, as I could very sincerely, for his friendly attention. Now what is the present state of my mind on this sub-

ject? It is this. I do not myself think ill of what I have done, nor at the same time so foolishly well as to suppose that it has no blemishes. But I am sadly afraid that the General's anxiety will make him extremely difficult to be pleased: I fear that he will require of me more than any other man would require, or than he himself would require of any other writer. What I can do to give him satisfaction, I am perfectly ready to do; but it is possible for an anxious friend to demand more than my ability could perform. Not a syllable of all this, my dear, to him, or to any creature—Mum!

Your question, your natural, well warranted, and most reasonable question concerning me and Mrs. Unwin, shall be answered at large when we meet. But to Mrs. Unwin I refer you for that answer; she is most desirous to give you a most explicit one. I have a history, my dear, belonging to me, which I am not the proper person to relate. You have heard somewhat of it,—as much as it was possible for me to write; but that *somewhat* bears a most inconsiderable proportion to the whole.

All intercourse has ceased between us and Lady Austen almost these two years. This mystery shall also be accounted for when you come. She has left Bristol, and is at present settled within a mile of us with her sister. You are candid, and will give me credit when I say that the fault is not with us.

I have disposed of thirty-three papers of Proposals,—even I. Mr. Throckmorton has most obligingly given me his name, and has undertaken the disposal of twelve. Lord Archibald Hamilton has also subscribed, at the instance of a neighbour of mine, and does me the honour to say that he

subscribes with pleasure. Adieu, my beloved cousin ; thank you for all your welcome intelligence. I had need of it. Yours most truly,

WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON

*Olney, March 5, 1786.*

SIR,—I ought sooner to have acknowledged the receipt of Mr. Fuseli's<sup>1</sup> strictures, and had I been at leisure to consult my own gratification, should have done so. The work will be greatly indebted to him, and I cannot help adding, although, I believe I said so before, that I consider myself singularly happy in the advantages I shall derive to my translation from his fine taste, and accurate acquaintance with the original.

I wish much for an answer to my question concerning my subscribers' payment at Bristol. Have you a correspondent there, who can negotiate it? Again I remind you, though perhaps unnecessarily, of the two volumes for Richard Howard, Esq.

I have this day sent to Lady Hesketh the remaining half of book 2, and the whole of books 3, 4, and 5. From her they will pass to General Cowper, and from him, I suppose, to Mr. Fuseli in a short time. In the interview he had with that gentleman, he was highly pleased with him. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

WM. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> Henry Fuseli (1742-1825), the well-known painter, was born at Zurich. He came to England in 1763 and received encouragement from Sir Joshua Reynolds. His two hundred paintings included illustrations to Shakespeare and Milton.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, March 6, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Your opinion has more weight with me than that of all the critics in the world; and to give you a proof of it, I make you a concession that I would hardly have made to them all united. I do not indeed absolutely covenant, promise, and agree, that I will discard *all* my elisions, but I hereby bind myself to dismiss *as many* of them as, without sacrificing energy to sound, I can. It is incumbent upon me in the meantime to say something in justification of the few that I shall retain, that I may not seem a poet mounted rather on a mule than on Pegasus. In the first place, *The* is a barbarism. We are indebted for it to the Celts, or the Goths, or to the Saxons, and perhaps to them all. In the two best languages that ever were spoken, the Greek and the Latin, there is no similar incumbrance of expression to be found. Secondly, the perpetual use of it in our language is to us miserable poets attended with two great inconveniences. Our verse consisting only of ten syllables, it not unfrequently happens that a fifth part of a line is to be engrossed, and necessarily too, (unless elision prevents it), by this abominable intruder; and, which is worse in my account, open vowels are continually the consequence—*The* element—*The* air, etc. Thirdly, The French, who are equally with the English chargeable with barbarism in this particular, dispose of their *Le* and their *La* without ceremony, and always take care that they shall be absorbed, both in verse and in prose, in the vowel that

immediately follows them. Fourthly, and I believe lastly (and for your sake I wish it may prove so), the practice of cutting short a *The* is warranted by Milton, who of all English poets that ever lived, had certainly the finest ear. Dr. Warton, indeed, has dared to say that he had a bad one; for which he deserves, as far as critical demerit can deserve it, to lose his own. I thought I had done, but there is still a fifthly behind, and it is this,—that the custom of abbreviating *The* belongs to the style in which, in my advertisement annexed to the specimen, I profess to write. The use of that style would have warranted me in the practice of much greater liberty of this sort than I ever intended to take. In perfect consistence with that style I might say I' th' tempest, I' th' door-way, etc., which, however, I would not allow myself to do, because I was aware that it would be objected to, and with reason. But it seems to me for the causes abovesaid, that when I shorten *The*, before a vowel, or before *wh*, as in the line you mention,

‘Than th' whole broad Hellespont in all his parts,’

my licence is not equally exceptionable, because *W*, though he rank as a consonant in the word *whole*, is not allowed to announce himself to the ear; and *H* is an aspirate. But as I said at the beginning, so say I still,—I am most willing to conform myself to your very sensible observation, that it is necessary, if we would please, to consult the taste of our own day; neither would I have pelted you, my dearest cousin, with any part of this volley of good reasons, had I not designed them as an answer to those objections which you say you have heard from

others. But I only mention them. Though satisfactory to myself, I waive them, and will allow to *The* his whole dimensions, whensoever it can be done.

Thou only critic of my verse that is to be found in all the earth, whom I love, what shall I say in answer to your own objection to that passage,—

‘Softly he placed his hand  
On th’ old man’s hand, and push’d it gently away.’

I can say neither more nor less than this, that when our dear friend, the General, sent me his opinion of the specimen, quoting those very words from it, he added, ‘With this part I was particularly pleased; there is nothing in poetry more descriptive.’ Such were his very words. Taste, my dear, is various; there is nothing so various, and even between persons of the best taste there are diversities of opinion on the same subject, for which it is not possible to account. So much for these matters.

You advise me to consult the General, and to confide in him. I follow your advice, and have done both. By the last post I asked his permission to send him the books of my Homer as fast as I should finish them off. I shall be glad of his remarks, and more glad than of any thing to do that which I hope may be agreeable to him. They will of course pass into your hands before they are sent to Johnson. The quire that I sent is now in the hands of Johnson’s friend. I intended to have told you in my last, but forgot it, that Johnson behaves very handsomely in the affair of my two volumes. He acts with a liberality not often found

in persons of his occupation, and to mention it, when occasion calls me to it, is a justice due to him.

I am very much pleased with Mr. Stanley's<sup>1</sup> letter. Several compliments were paid me, on the subject of that first volume, by my own friends; but I do not recollect that I ever knew the opinion of a stranger about it before, whether favourable or otherwise. I only heard by a side wind, that it was very much read in Scotland, and more than here.

Farewell, my dearest cousin, whom we expect, of whom we talk continually, and whom we continually long for.

W. C.

Your anxious wishes for my success delight me, and you may rest assured, my dear, that I have all the ambition on the subject that you can wish me to feel. I more than admire my author. I often stand astonished at his beauties. I am for ever amused with the translation of him, and I have received a thousand encouragements. These are all so many happy omens, that I hope shall be verified by the event.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON

*Olney, March 8, 1786.*

SIR,—You are very happy in being so intimately connected with Mr. Fuseli, a gentleman of such exquisite taste, and I also account myself very happy that by your means my work has found its way into the hands of a person, in all respects so perfectly well qualified to revise it. I am only sorry that my distance from town permits me not

<sup>1</sup> Error for Mr. Hornby's. See letter of March 20, 1786.

(at least at present) the pleasure of an introduction to one to whom I am to be so much indebted. I very sincerely thank you for interesting yourself so much in my comfort, as to write to me principally with a view to inform me of his approbation. You may take my word for it that I find your intelligence on that head a great and effectual encouragement. I have had some anxious thoughts upon the matter, as you may suppose; and they are guests that I am always glad to dismiss when I can; and immediately after reading your letter, accordingly dismissed them.

Mr. Fuseli will assuredly find room for animadversion. There are some objectionable lines, and others that are improvable, of which I am myself aware. When I receive the ms. again I shall give it a close examination, both that I may avail myself of Mr. Fuseli's remarks to the utmost, and give to the whole of it the best finishing that I can.

I learn with pleasure from my friends in town, that the subscription prospers, and is likely to be brilliant and numerous. It is very little that in my situation I can contribute to it myself. I have, however, disposed of most of my papers, and some time about Easter, a friend of mine will attend you with two or three names and payments that have been picked up in this part of the world. The name of that friend is Bull. He is a humorist—and in some respects an oddity, but at the same time a man of excellent qualities and of much learning. Him I can see but seldom, for he lives at the distance of five miles from Olney, and he is the only neighbour of mine with whom I can converse at all.

I have a relation at Bristol who subscribes for

three sets, common paper. She wishes me to ask you whether you have not some correspondent at that place through whose hands the money may be remitted to you. If you can direct me how to advise her in this respect, when I write to her next,—which will be soon, I will send her the necessary information.—I am sir, your most humble servant,

WM. COWPER.

The following memorandum was found among Cowper's papers after his death:—

'*Tuesday, March 9, 1786.*—This day died poor Puss,<sup>1</sup> aged eleven years, eleven months. He died between twelve and one at noon, of mere old age, apparently without pain.'<sup>2</sup>

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*March 13, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I seem to be about to write to you, but I foresee that it will not be a letter, but a scrap that I shall send you. I could tell you things that, knowing how much you interest yourself in my success, I am sure would please you; but every moment of my leisure is necessarily spent at Troy. I am revising my translation, and bestowing on it more labour than at first. At the repeated and earnest solicitation of General Cowper, who had doubtless irrefragable reason on his side, I have put my book into the hands of the most extraordinary critic that I have ever heard of. He is a Swiss, a painter in the historical way; has an accurate know

<sup>1</sup> The last of Cowper's three tame hares.

<sup>2</sup> See letter of 7th March 1783.

ledge of English, and for his knowledge of Homer has, I verily believe, no fellow. Johnson recommended him to me. I am to send him the quires as fast as I finish them off, and the first is now in his hands. I have the comfort to be able to tell you, that he is very much pleased with what he has seen. Johnson wrote to me lately on purpose to tell me so. Things having taken this turn, I fear that I must beg a release from my engagement to put the ms. into your hands. I am bound to print as soon as three hundred shall have subscribed, and consequently have not an hour to spare.

People generally love to go where they are admired, yet Lady Hesketh complains of not having seen you.

Remember us both with the warmest affection to all your family.—Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

*P.S.*—I forgot to tell you that my critic's name is Fuseli, and that he lives in St. Martin's Lane.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Monday, March 20, 1786.*

THOSE mornings that I set apart for writing to you, my dearest cousin, are my holiday mornings. At those times I give myself a dispensation from all poetical employments, and as soon as I cease to converse with you, betake myself to a walk in the garden. You will observe, therefore, that my health cannot possibly suffer by such a procedure, but is rather likely to be benefited; for finding it easy as

well as pleasant to write when I write to you, I consequently spend less time at my desk than when Homer lies before me, and have more opportunity of taking exercise and air. Though you *seem* to be so, you are not *in fact* beforehand with me in what you say of my letters, for it has long been an agreed point between me and Mrs. Unwin that yours are the best in the world. You will say—‘that is impossible, for I always write what comes uppermost, and never trouble myself either about method or expression.’ And for that very reason, my dear, they are what they are, so good that they could not be better. As to expression, you have no need to study it; yours is sure to be such as it ought; and as to method, you know as well as I, that it is never more out of its place than in a letter. I have only to add on this subject, that not a word of all this is designed as a compliment to you, but merely as a justification of our opinion.

I begin heartily to wish that Signor Fuseli had accomplished his critique of what now lies before him. You have twice been disagreeably constrained to apologise to Mr. Burrows for the delay, and I am very unwilling that you should be a third time reduced to that necessity. I shall be obliged when it comes to my hands again to bestow on it perhaps two or three sittings, in order to accommodate the copy to his remarks, and to give it such further improvements of my own as it shall appear to me to be still susceptible of: which done, I shall remit it instantly to you. Should you have occasion any time to send your Samuel cityward, I shall be glad if you will charge him with my poetry-box for Johnson, that he may pack the papers in it. This

however is not necessary, for they will probably come equally safe under any such cover as he will give them. I bestowed two mornings in the last week, on the extirpation of elisions only. And from all that part of the second book, which you have not seen, and from the third and fourth completely, have so effectually weeded them out, that in all those quarters you cannot find above three; and those not only pardonable on account of necessity, but such as you would yourself approve, I believe, rather than the vacuity that would be occasioned by their removal. I displaced, I suppose, not less than thirty, some of them horrible creatures, and such as even I myself was glad to be rid of. The same care I shall take throughout the whole translation. I am also a very good boy in another respect: I use all possible diligence to give a graceful gait and movement to such lines as rather hobbled a little before, with this reserve however, that when the sense requires it, or when for the sake of avoiding a monotonous cadence of the lines, of which there is always danger in so long a work, it shall appear to be prudent, I still leave a verse behind me that has some uneasiness in its formation. It is not possible to read *Paradise Lost*, with an ear for harmony, without being sensible of the great advantage which Milton drew from such a management. One line only occurs to me at present as an instance of what I mean, and I cannot stop to recollect more; but rumbling and rough as it is, it is in my mind, considering the subject, one of the finest that ever was composed. He is describing hell; and as if the contemplation of such a scheme had scared him out of all

his poetical wits, he finishes the terrible picture thus,—

‘ *Abominable, unutterable, and worse*  
Than fancy yet had formed, or fear conceived,  
Gorgons and hydras and chimæras dire.’

Agree with me, my dear, that the deformity of the first of these three lines is the greatest beauty imaginable. This, however, is only an instance of uncouthness where the *sense* recommends it. Had I the book before me, I could soon fill my sheet with quotations of irregular lines taken from the most beautiful parts of his poem, which he used partly as foils to the rest, and partly to relieve the ear, as I said, from the tedium of an unvaried and perpetual smoothness. This I understand to be one of the great secrets of verse-writing in a piece of great length. Uncritical readers find that they perform a long journey through several hundred pages perhaps without weariness; they find the numbers harmonious, but are not aware of the art by which that harmony is brought to pass, much less suspect that a violation of all harmony on some occasions is the very thing to which they are not a little indebted for their gratification. Half strained critics are disgusted; they discover that this line and that line limps, but cannot enter into the poet's reasons for making it do so; and critics indeed, who have a well-formed ear and a true classical taste, are pleased, and know how to account for it. I know, my beloved cousin, that you will not allow yourself to be of the last mentioned order. You disdain all intelligence in these matters, and I have no doubt of the sincerity with which

you do it. But you must pardon me if I estimate your judgment in poetry at a much higher rate than yourself. Of this at least I am sure, that of all the remarks you have made upon mine, not one has bespoke any deficiency of taste or judgment in the maker. On the contrary, I have seen good reason to acquiesce in them all, the *task* excepted, which is a word that the Greek makes necessary, and the '*gently away*,' which I do not pretend to be no blemish, but an excusable one.

'Than the broad Hellespont in all his parts,'

—so it shall stand, my dear, in the volume, you may rest assured; for though I have in my own mind stickled much for the insertion of the word *whole*, as in that place emphatical, I am become now a convert to your opinion, and judge the line mended by the change: smoother it is, no doubt, and sufficiently emphatical into the bargain.

Many thanks for Mr. Hornby's note (whom, by the way, I before called Stanley, not being able to read his name, even in his own handwriting); every such piece of information is a clap on the back, the effect of which I feel instantly in my head, and write the better for it. *The Task* has succeeded beyond my utmost expectations; if Homer succeed as well,—and it shall not fail through any negligence of mine, I shall account my fortune, as a poet, made for ever.

You must not think too highly of my loyalty. A true Whig always loves a good King. But this by way of parenthesis.—I was going to observe that the day puts me in mind of June,—clear sun and soft air. Mrs. Unwin never walks in the garden

without looking at the borders to consider which of all the flowers will be blown in June. She has my fear of strangers, but she has no fear of *you*. *Au contraire*, she, as well as somebody else, most heartily loves and longs to see you.—Adieu, my dear coz. ever yours,  
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

March 29, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Animated by the hope that, if you could be furnished with an abode at Olney, you might possibly make it in some sort the place of your residence, at least in the summer season, Mrs. Unwin and I have talked, thought, and inquired to the very bottom of that subject, and have been constantly occupied in it, ever since the receipt of your dear letter, which contains nothing but what is comfortable, and which contains some encouragement of an expectation that is more comfortable than all the rest. Olney, you are to understand, though much improved since our first acquaintance with it, is rather a poor town, and contains but one house except our own, that is not occupied by a trade, and that one is by no means to be got at. But we are just now come home after having taken an exact survey of such a one as is in many respects the very thing we wish, though not in all. It has what may fairly be called in the country, a very good parlour, and very neatly furnished. Over it is a very good chamber, large and in good order; and in it a *very good bed*. It has also a kitchen, roomy enough, with a good fireplace close to a good sash window,

and I believe in all respects commodious. There is also a very pretty garden, that has been famous in Olney these many years, for its neatness and smartness; and therein is a root-house, which will be at your service, and where you may drink tea if you choose it. It is so situated that you may walk into the country in three different directions, without having any part of the town to traverse.<sup>1</sup> The rooms that you will occupy are all well sashed; the parlour window and the chamber window are both Venetian. The people themselves are very honest, sober, elderly folks, and quite respectable. They carry on a trade, but a very neat and silent one—they are dealers in lace. The house has a modern face, and was rebuilt but a short time before we came to Olney. For these accommodations they ask twenty pounds a year. All this, my dear, is well, and pleases us at the heart. But now comes a difficulty; servants must be provided for, and how shall we find room for them? Adjoining to your chamber, for so I call it, I hope, prophetically, is a very decent room in which your own maid might repose herself to her wish. But then there is an apprentice in the case who at present has possession of it, for whom, while he stays, there is no other; and of whose departure there is no hope till the end of August. One of the maids might sleep with the maid of the house, if she has no objection to it; but the room that I have just mentioned is the only spare servant's-room that the house affords. It might possibly be easy to find lodging for two servants at no

<sup>1</sup> The house described is probably Etolia House, Bridge Street. See also letter of April 10.

great distance—perhaps at the next door, but your own woman should certainly be within call. Thus stands the case, my beloved cousin. But you will come, and you will see it all with your own eyes, and then we shall be able to remedy any defects better than we can without you. Do like it if you can. I should tell you that the situation is such that you will never be troubled with an afternoon or evening sun. It is within five minutes' walk of our door. There is not in Olney, nor in all the neighbourhood of Olney, a ready-furnished house or lodging to be found besides. As to the rooms once occupied by Lady Austen, they are, alas! out of the question. She furnished them herself, and at present the walls are bare. They are in the vicarage, which at that time was occupied by curate, wife, and family. But that curate has removed to London, and now preaches at the Lock; and the present one is a single man, and has not, I suppose, much more furniture than the Shunamite bestowed upon Elisha when she lodged him on the wall of her house. We have learned, however, on inquiry, that two rooms excepted, the whole is vacant. The house that I have described, as far as parlour, chamber, and kitchen are concerned, is so exactly the thing that I think would suit you, that neither I nor Mrs. Unwin can help cherishing a hope that some way or other matters may be made to fadge.

I knew, my dear, that I should alarm you with my panegyric upon rough verses, and when I had ended all that I had to say upon this subject, I laughed, and said to myself, now will my poor cousin expect nothing but rumble, rumble, rumble.

I have said so much in praise of hobbling lines, that if she meets with a line that does not halt like a lame post-horse, she will think herself happy, and will say, Well done, cousin, that's something like! I wish it were always such! Well then, my cousin, as much of it shall be smooth and graceful, as I can possibly make so, and Mrs. Unwin can witness for me that I spare no labour. You are perfectly right in all that you have said on the matter; there can be no dignity in simplicity unless I have elegance also, and that is the point at which I drive continually. Fear not that you will take me from my business. For two hours every morning, and for the same time every evening, I determine to forget that you exist, and that to converse with you is to me worth more than all that Homer ever composed. You say I flatter you. I never did in my life. You have an admirable memory,—recollect if you can a single compliment that I ever paid you. No, my cousin, I did not flatter you, neither do I now, when I tell you that I never could find an opportunity.

Your kindness in visiting Johnson for my sake I feel sensibly, as I do, indeed, the whole long series of your unwearied and most friendly services. Though I hear from you but once a week, I have the comfort of knowing to a certainty that I am every day of the week in your thoughts, and if I wish at any time with more than common ardour for fame and honour, it is as much with a view to your gratification as my own. In truth, I believe I may say more, for I not unfrequently feel a most unaccountable stupidity on that subject, and such a one as makes me wonder that I should ever acquire

the smallest portion of either. But it is not always so. I rejoice that the General is pleased; if it pleases him to know that I have a warm and sincere affection for him, he may safely indulge himself in that persuasion.—Adieu, my ever beloved,

WM. COWPER.

See what habit has done, it has made me skip over the middle of the page without occasion. But I have two or three things in reserve that will fill it sufficiently. First for my health. Mrs. Unwin and I are both agreed that I have pumped as long as pumping is good. The last emetic sensibly did me harm. It is a week this day since I took it, and I have not yet recovered the effect of it. I have more fever and a more uneasy stomach than I had before. I mean therefore to discontinue the use of them for the present. I boasted that I was growing fat, but I may now boast that I am grown lean, which at my time of life is perhaps the prouder boast of the two. There is no better air in the world than the air of Olney in summer-time. The whole country is either rock or gravel at the depth of a few feet. But in the winter I suspect that it is rather aguish, for such distempers are very frequent here at that season; not that we rich rogues are ever so affected, the evil is confined merely to the poor. But we are built on the river's brink, and in the winter the adjoining meadows are often laid under water, which is, I suppose, the cause of it. I send you all that I have to send in the complimentary style. A note of Lord Hamilton's that was rather flattering, I have burnt. Certain sayings of my poor friend Bagot when he was here, I do not

send, because I have not the courage to write them. I have heard nothing more from him since the death of his amiable wife, but I have thought sometimes of writing to him again.—I have read Hannah More's *Sacred Dramas* with great pleasure; I honour her both for her subjects, and for the manner in which she has set them forth.—I could add, but want room. Good-bye, neighbour.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME





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