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COWPER'S  
JOHN GILPIN

AND

THE TASK—BOOK I.

WITH

*Life and Notes*



W. & R. CHAMBERS  
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

1880

## LIFE OF COWPER.

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**WILLIAM COWPER** (1731—1800), a gentleman originally educated for the law, from some constitutional weaknesses, occasionally affecting his reason, retired in the prime of life to reside with a private family in the country, where, till his fiftieth year, he seems to have been hardly conscious of possessing the gift of poetry. His first volume, containing pieces entitled *Table Talk*, *Hope*, *The Progress of Error*, and others, appeared in 1782; two years later he published a long poem, entitled *The Task*; and he subsequently gave to the world a translation of Homer in blank verse. The whole of his works were written between the years 1780 and 1792, which may be described as only a lucid interval in a life, the greater part of which was the prey of a diseased melancholy. The most conspicuous peculiarity of Cowper's poetry is the unaffected and unrestrained expression of his own feelings, enjoyments, and reflections, all of which, as it happens, are of a kind calculated to engage the attention, and awaken the sympathies of the reader. Cowper, without condescending to personalities, was a great moral satirist; and among his other characteristics, was a rich yet chastened humour, which pervades most of his writings, and constitutes the entire merit of his well-known tale of *John Gilpin*. His works are strongly tinged with religious feeling, and also with the melancholy which so greatly embittered his existence.





# THE DIVERTING HISTORY OF JOHN GILPIN;

SHEWING HOW HE WENT FARTHER THAN HE INTENDED,  
AND CAME SAFE HOME AGAIN.

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1.

JOHN GILPIN was a citizen  
Of credit and renown,  
A trainband captain eke was he  
Of famous London town.

2.

John Gilpin's spouse said to her dear,  
' Though wedded we have been  
These twice ten tedious years, yet we  
No holiday have seen.

3.

' To-morrow is our wedding-day,  
And we will then repair  
Unto the Bell at Edmonton  
All in a chaise and pair.

4.

' My sister, and my sister's child,  
Myself, and children three,  
Will fill the chaise ; so you must ride  
On horseback after we.'

5.

He soon replied, ' I do admire  
 Of womankind but one,  
 And you are she, my dearest dear,  
 Therefore it shall be done.

6.

' I am a linendraper bold,  
 As all the world doth know,  
 And my good friend the calender  
 Will lend his horse to go.'

7.

Quoth Mistress Gilpin, ' That 's well said ;  
 And for that wine is dear,  
 We will be furnished with our own,  
 Which is both bright and clear.'

8.

John Gilpin kissed his loving wife ;  
 O'erjoyed was he to find,  
 That, though on pleasure she was bent,  
 She had a frugal mind.

9.

The morning came, the chaise was brought,  
 But yet was not allowed  
 To drive up to the door, lest all  
 Should say that she was proud.

10.

So three doors off, the chaise was stayed,  
 Where they did all get in ;  
 Six precious souls, and all agog  
 To dash through thick and thin.

11.

Smack went the whip, round went the wheels,  
 Were never folk so glad,  
 The stones did rattle underneath,  
 As if Cheapside were mad.

12.

John Gilpin at his horse's side  
 Seized fast the flowing mane,  
 And up he got, in haste to ride,  
 But soon came down again ;

13.

For saddletree scarce reached had he,  
 His journey to begin,  
 When, turning round his head, he saw  
 Three customers come in.

14.

So down he came; for loss of time,  
 Although it grieved him sore,  
 Yet loss of pence, full well he knew,  
 Would trouble him much more.

15.

'Twas long before the customers  
 Were suited to their mind,  
 When Betty screaming came down-stairs,  
 'The wine is left behind!'

16.

'Good lack!' quoth he—'yet bring it me,  
 My leathern belt likewise,  
 In which I bear my trusty sword  
 When I do exercise.'

17.

Now Mistress Gilpin (careful soul!)  
 Had two stone bottles found,  
 To hold the liquor that she loved,  
 And keep it safe and sound.

18.

Each bottle had a curling ear,  
 Through which the belt he drew,  
 And hung a bottle on each side,  
 To make his balance true.

19.

Then over all, that he might be  
 Equipped from top to toe,  
 His long red cloak, well brushed and neat,  
 He manfully did throw.

20.

Now see him mounted once again  
 Upon his nimble steed,  
 Full slowly pacing o'er the stones,  
 With caution and good heed.

21.

But finding soon a smoother road  
 Beneath his well-shod feet,  
 The snorting beast began to trot,  
 Which galled him in his seat.

22.

So, 'Fair and softly,' John he cried,  
 But John he cried in vain;  
 That trot became a gallop soon,  
 In spite of curb and rein.

23.

So stooping down, as needs he must  
 Who cannot sit upright,  
 He grasped the mane with both his hands,  
 And eke with all his might.

24.

His horse, who never in that sort  
 Had handled been before,  
 What thing upon his back had got  
 Did wonder more and more.

25.

Away went Gilpin, neck or nought;  
 Away went hat and wig;  
 He little dreamt, when he set out,  
 Of running such a rig.

26.

The wind did blow, the cloak did fly,  
 Like streamer long and gay,  
 Till, loop and button failing both,  
 At last it flew away.

27.

Then might all people well discern  
 The bottles he had slung;  
 A bottle swinging at each side,  
 As hath been said or sung.

28.

The dogs did bark, the children screamed,  
 Up flew the windows all;  
 And every soul cried out, 'Well done!'  
 As loud as he could bawl.

29.

Away went Gilpin—who but he?  
 His fame soon spread around,  
 He carries weight! he rides a race!  
 'Tis for a thousand pound!

30.

And still, as fast as he drew near,  
 'Twas wonderful to view,  
 How in a trice the turnpike men  
 Their gates wide open threw.

31.

And now, as he went bowing down  
 His reeking head full low,  
 The bottles twain behind his back  
 Were shattered at a blow.

32.

Down ran the wine into the road,  
 Most piteous to be seen,  
 Which made his horse's flanks to smoke,  
 As they had basted been.

33.

But still he seemed to carry weight,  
 With leathern girdle braced;  
 For all might see the bottle necks  
 Still dangling at his waist.

34.

Thus all through merry Islington  
 These gambols he did play,  
 Until he came unto the Wash  
 Of Edmonton so gay;

35.

And there he threw the wash about  
 On both sides of the way,  
 Just like unto a trundling mop,  
 Or a wild goose at play.

36.

At Edmonton, his loving wife  
 From the balcony spied  
 Her tender husband, wondering much  
 To see how he did ride.

37.

'Stop, stop, John Gilpin!—Here's the house!'  
 They all at once did cry;  
 The dinner waits, and we are tired:  
 Said Gilpin—'So am I!'

38.

But yet his horse was not a whit  
 Inclined to tarry there;  
 For why?—his owner had a house  
 Full ten miles off, at Ware.

39.

So like an arrow swift he flew,  
 Shot by an archer strong;  
 So did he fly—which brings me to  
 The middle of my song.

40.

Away went Gilpin out of breath,  
 And sore against his will,  
 Till at his friend the calender's  
 His horse at last stood still.

41.

The calender, amazed to see  
 His neighbour in such trim,  
 Laid down his pipe, flew to the gate,  
 And thus accosted him:

42.

'What news? what news? your tidings tell;  
 Tell me you must and shall—  
 Say why bareheaded you are come,  
 Or why you come at all?'

43.

Now Gilpin had a pleasant wit,  
 And loved a timely joke!  
 And thus unto the calender  
 In merry guise he spoke:

44.

'I came because your horse would come,  
 And if I well forebode,  
 My hat and wig will soon be here,  
 They are upon the road.'

45.

The calender, right glad to find  
 His friend in merry pin,  
 Returned him not a single word,  
 But to the house went in ;

46.

Whence straight he came with hat and wig,  
 A wig that flowed behind,  
 A hat not much the worse for wear,  
 Each comely in its kind.

47.

He held them up, and in his turn  
 Thus shewed his ready wit :  
 ‘ My head is twice as big as yours,  
 They therefore needs must fit.

48.

‘ But let me scrape the dirt away  
 That hangs upon your face ;  
 And stop and eat, for well you may  
 Be in a hungry case.’

49.

Said John, ‘ It is my wedding-day,  
 And all the world would stare,  
 If wife should dine at Edmonton,  
 And I should dine at Ware.’

50.

So turning to his horse, he said,  
 ‘ I am in haste to dine ;  
 ’Twas for your pleasure you came here,  
 You shall go back for mine.’

51.

Ah, luckless speech, and bootless boast !  
 For which he paid full dear ;  
 For, while he spake, a braying ass  
 Did sing most loud and clear ;

52.

Whereat his horse did snort, as he  
 Had heard a lion roar,  
 And galloped off with all his might,  
 As he had done before.

53.

Away went Gilpin, and away  
 Went Gilpin's hat and wig ;  
 He lost them sooner than at first,  
 For why ?—they were too big.

54.

Now Mistress Gilpin, when she saw  
 Her husband posting down  
 Into the country far away,  
 She pulled out half-a-crown ;

55.

And thus unto the youth she said,  
 That drove them to the Bell,  
 'This shall be yours, when you bring back  
 My husband safe and well.'

56.

The youth did ride, and soon did meet  
 John coming back amain ;  
 Whom in a trice he tried to stop,  
 By catching at his rein ;

57.

But, not performing what he meant,  
 And gladly would have done,  
 The frightened steed he frightened more,  
 And made him faster run.

58.

Away went Gilpin, and away  
 Went postboy at his heels,  
 The postboy's horse right glad to miss  
 The lumbering of the wheels.

59.

Six gentlemen upon the road  
 Thus seeing Gilpin fly,  
 With postboy scampering in the rear,  
 They raised the hue and cry :

60.

'Stop thief ! stop thief !—a highwayman !'  
 Not one of them was mute ;  
 And all and each that passed that way  
 Did join in the pursuit.



61.

And now the turnpike gates again  
 Flew open in short space ;  
 The toll-men thinking as before,  
 That Gilpin rode a race.

62.

And so he did, and won it too,  
 For he got first to town ;  
 Nor stopped till where he had got up  
 He did again get down.

63.

Now let us sing, long live the king,  
 And Gilpin, long live he ;  
 And when he next doth ride abroad,  
 May I be there to see !

## THE TASK.—BOOK I.

### THE SOFA.

THE ARGUMENT.—Historical deduction of seats, from the stool to the sofa—A Schoolboy's ramble—A walk in the country—The scene described—Rural sounds as well as sights delightful—Another walk—Mistake concerning the charms of solitude corrected—Colonnades commended—Alcove, and the view from it—The wilderness—The grove—The thresher—The necessity and benefits of exercise—The works of nature superior to, and in some instances inimitable by, art—The wearisomeness of what is commonly called a life of pleasure—Change of scene sometimes expedient—A common described, and the character of Crazy Kate introduced—Gipsies—The blessings of civilised life—That state most favourable to virtue—The South Sea islanders compassionated, but chiefly Omai—His present state of mind supposed—Civilised life friendly to virtue, but not great cities—Great cities, and London in particular, allowed their due praise, but censured—Fête champêtre—The book concludes with a reflection on the effects of dissipation and effeminacy upon our public measures.

I SING the Sofa. I who lately sang  
 Truth, Hope, and Charity, and touched with awe

The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand,  
 Escaped with pain from that adventurous flight,  
 Now seek repose upon an humbler theme ; 5  
 The theme though humble, yet august and proud  
 The occasion—for the Fair commands the song.  
 Time was, when clothing sumptuous or for use,  
 Save their own painted skins, our sires had none.  
 As yet black breeches were not ; satin smooth, 10  
 Or velvet soft, or plush with shaggy pile :  
 The hardy chief upon the rugged rock,  
 Washed by the sea, or on the gravelly bank  
 Thrown up by wintry torrents roaring loud,  
 Fearless of wrong, reposed his weary strength. 15  
 Those barbarous ages past, succeeded next  
 The birthday of Invention ; weak at first,  
 Dull in design, and clumsy to perform.  
 Joint-stools were then created ; on three legs  
 Upborne they stood,—three legs upholding firm 20  
 A massy slab, in fashion square or round.  
 On such a stool immortal Alfred sat,  
 And swayed the sceptre of his infant realms :  
 And such in ancient halls and mansions drear  
 May still be seen ; but perforated sore, 25  
 And drilled in holes, the solid oak is found,  
 By worms voracious eating through and through.  
 At length a generation more refined  
 Improved the simple plan ; made three legs four,  
 Gave them a twisted form vermicular, 30  
 And o'er the seat, with plenteous wadding stuffed,  
 Induced a splendid cover, green and blue,  
 Yellow and red, of tapestry richly wrought  
 And woven close, or needlework sublime.  
 There might ye see the peony spread wide, 35  
 The full blown rose, the shepherd and his lass,  
 Lapdog and lambkin with black staring eyes,  
 And parrots with twin cherries in their beak.

Now came the cane from India, smooth and bright  
 With Nature's varnish ; severed into stripes 40  
 That interlaced each other, these supplied  
 Of texture firm a lattice work, that braced  
 The new machine, and it became a chair.  
 But restless was the chair ; the back erect  
 Distressed the weary loins, that felt no ease : 45  
 The slippery seat betrayed the sliding part  
 That pressed it, and the feet hung dangling down,  
 Anxious in vain to find the distant floor.  
 These for the rich : the rest, whom fate had placed  
 In modest mediocrity, content 50  
 With base materials, sat on well tanned hides,  
 Obdurate and unyielding, glassy smooth,  
 With here and there a tuft of crimson yarn,  
 Or scarlet crewel,\* in the cushion fixed,  
 If cushion might be called, what harder seemed 55  
 Than the firm oak of which the frame was formed.  
 No want of timber then was felt or feared  
 In Albion's happy isle. The lumber stood  
 Ponderous and fixed by its own massy weight.  
 But elbows still were wanting ; these, some say, 60  
 An alderman of Cripplegate contrived ;  
 And some ascribe the invention to a priest,  
 Burly and big, and studious of his ease.  
 But, rude at first, and not with easy slope,  
 Receding wide, they pressed against the ribs, 65  
 And bruised the side ; and, elevated high,  
 Taught the raised shoulders to invade the ears.  
 Long time elapsed or e'er our rugged sires  
 Complained, though incommodiously pent in,  
 And ill at ease behind. The ladies first 70  
 'Gan murmur, as became the softer sex.  
 Ingenious Fancy, never better pleased

\* Worsted yarn slackly twisted.

Than when employed to accommodate the fair,  
 Heard the sweet moan with pity, and devised  
 The soft settee ; one elbow at each end, 75  
 And in the midst an elbow it received,  
 United yet divided, twain at once.  
 So sit two kings of Brentford on one throne ;  
 And so two citizens, who take the air,  
 Close packed, and smiling, in a chaise and one. 80  
 But relaxation of the languid frame,  
 By soft recumbency of outstretched limbs,  
 Was bliss reserved for happier days. So slow  
 The growth of what is excellent ; so hard  
 To attain perfection in this nether world. 85  
 Thus first Necessity invented stools,  
 Convenience next suggested elbow chairs,  
 And Luxury the accomplished SOFA last.  
 The nurse sleeps sweetly, hired to watch the sick,  
 Whom snoring she disturbs. As sweetly he, 90  
 Who quits the coach-box at the midnight hour,  
 To sleep within the carriage more secure,  
 His legs depending at the open door.  
 Sweet sleep enjoys the curate in his desk,  
 The tedious rector drawling o'er his head ; 95  
 And sweet the clerk below. But neither sleep  
 Of lazy nurse, who snores the sick man dead,  
 Nor his who quits the box at midnight hour,  
 To slumber in the carriage more secure.  
 Nor sleep enjoyed by curate in his desk, 100  
 Nor yet the dozings of the clerk, are sweet,  
 Compared with the repose the Sofa yields.  
 Oh, may I live exempted (while I live  
 Guiltless of pampered appetite obscene)  
 From pangs arthritic, that infest the toe 105  
 Of libertine Excess ! The Sofa suits  
 The gouty limb, 'tis true ; but gouty limb,  
 Though on a Sofa, may I never feel :

For I have loved the rural walk through lanes  
Of grassy swarth, close cropped by nibbling sheep, 110  
And skirted thick with intertexture firm  
Of thorny boughs ; have loved the rural walk  
O'er hills, through valleys, and by rivers' brink,  
E'er since a truant boy I passed my bounds  
To enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames ; 115  
And still remember, nor without regret  
Of hours that sorrow since has much endeared,  
How oft, my slice of pocket store consumed,  
Still hungering, penniless, and far from home,  
I fed on scarlet hips and stony haws, 120  
Or blushing crabs, or berries that emboss  
The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere.  
Hard fare ! but such as boyish appetite  
Disdains not ; nor the palate, undepraved  
By culinary arts, unsavoury deems. 125  
No Sofa then awaited my return ;  
Nor Sofa then I needed. Youth repairs  
His wasted spirits quickly, by long toil  
Incurring short fatigue ; and though our years,  
As life declines, speed rapidly away, 130  
And not a year but pilfers as he goes  
Some youthful grace, that age would gladly keep ;  
A tooth or auburn lock, and by degrees  
Their length and colour from the locks they spare ;  
The elastic spring of an unwearied foot, 135  
That mounts the stile with ease, or leaps the fence,  
That play of lungs, inhaling and again  
Respiring freely the fresh air, that makes  
Swift pace or steep ascent no toil to me,  
Mine have not pilfered yet ; nor yet impaired 140  
My relish of fair prospect ; scenes that soothed  
Or charmed me young, no longer young, I find  
Still soothing, and of power to charm me still.  
And witness, dear companion of my walks,

Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive 145  
 Fast locked in mine, with pleasure such as love,  
 Confirmed by long experience of thy worth  
 And well-tried virtues, could alone inspire—  
 Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long.  
 Thou know'st my praise of nature most sincere, 150  
 And that my raptures are not conjured up  
 To serve occasions of poetic pomp,  
 But genuine, and art partner of them all  
 How oft upon yon eminence our pace  
 Has slackened to a pause, and we have borne 155  
 The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,  
 While Admiration, feeding at the eye,  
 And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene!  
 Thence with what pleasure have we just discerned  
 The distant plough slow moving, and beside 160  
 His labouring team that swerved not from the track,  
 The sturdy swain diminished to a boy!  
 Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain  
 Of spacious meads, with cattle sprinkled o'er,  
 Conducts the eye along his sinuous course 165  
 Delighted. There, fast rooted in his bank,  
 Stand, never overlooked, our favourite elms,  
 That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;  
 While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,  
 That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale, 170  
 The sloping land recedes into the clouds;  
 Displaying on its varied side the grace  
 Of hedgerow beauties numberless, square tower,  
 Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells  
 Just undulates upon the listening ear, 175  
 Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.  
 Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily viewed,  
 Please daily, and whose novelty survives  
 Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years—  
 Praise justly due to those that I describe. 180

Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,  
 Exhilarate the spirit, and restore  
 The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,  
 That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood  
 Of ancient growth, make music not unlike 185  
 The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,  
 And lull the spirit while they fill the mind ;  
 Unnumbered branches waving in the blast,  
 And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.  
 Nor less composure waits upon the roar 190  
 Of distant floods, or on the softer voice  
 Of neighbouring fountain, or of rills that slip  
 Through the cleft rock, and, chiming as they fall  
 Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length  
 In matted grass, that with a livelier green 195  
 Betrays the secret of their silent course.  
 Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,  
 But animated nature sweeter still,  
 To soothe and satisfy the human ear.  
 Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one 200  
 The livelong night : nor these alone, whose notes  
 Nice-fingered Art must emulate in vain,  
 But cawing rocks, and kites that swim sublime  
 In still-repeated circles, screaming loud,  
 The jay, the pie, and even the boding owl 205  
 That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.  
 Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,  
 Yet heard in scenes where peace for ever reigns,  
 And only there, please highly for their sake.  
 Peace to the artist whose ingenious thought 210  
 Devised the weather-house, that useful toy !  
 Fearless of humid air and gathering rains,  
 Forth steps the man—an emblem of myself !  
 More delicate his timorous mate retires.  
 When Winter soaks the fields, and female feet, 215  
 Too weak to struggle with tenacious clay,

Or ford the rivulets, are best at home,  
 The task of new discoveries falls on me.  
 At such a season, and with such a charge,  
 Once went I forth ; and found, till then unknown, 220  
 A cottage, whither oft we since repair :  
 'Tis perched upon the green hill-top, but close  
 Environed with a ring of branching elms,  
 That overhang the thatch, itself unseen  
 Peeps at the vale below ; so thick beset 225  
 With foliage of such dark redundant growth,  
 I called the low-roofed lodge the *peasant's nest*.  
 And, hidden as it is, and far remote  
 From such unpleasing sounds as haunt the ear  
 In village or in town, the bay of curs 230  
 Incessant, clinking hammers, grinding wheels,  
 And infants clamorous whether pleased or pained,  
 Oft have I wished the peaceful covert mine.  
 Here, I have said, at least I should possess  
 The poet's treasure, silence, and indulge 235  
 The dreams of fancy, tranquil and secure.  
 Vain thought ! the dweller in that still retreat  
 Dearly obtains the refuge it affords.  
 Its elevated site forbids the wretch  
 To drink sweet waters of the crystal well : 240  
 He dips his bowl into the weedy ditch,  
 And, heavy laden, brings his beverage home,  
 Far fetched, and little worth ; nor seldom waits,  
 Dependent on the baker's punctual call,  
 To hear his creaking panniers at the door, 245  
 Angry and sad, and his last crust consumed.  
 So farewell envy of the *peasant's nest* !  
 If solitude make scant the means of life,  
 Society for me !—thou seeming sweet,  
 Be still a pleasing object in my view ; 250  
 My visit still, but never mine abode.  
 Not distant far, a length of colonnade



Invites us : Monument of ancient taste,  
 Now scorned, but worthy of a better fate.  
 Our fathers knew the value of a screen 255  
 From sultry suns ; and, in their shaded walks  
 And long protracted bowers, enjoyed at noon  
 The gloom and coolness of declining day.  
 We bear our shades about us ; self-deprived  
 Of other screen, the thin umbrella spread, 260  
 And range an Indian waste without a tree.  
 Thanks to Benevolus,\* he spares me yet  
 These chestnuts ranged in corresponding lines ;  
 And, though himself so polished, still reprieves  
 The obsolete prolixity of shade. 265  
 Descending now,—but cautious, lest too fast,—  
 A sudden steep, upon a rustic bridge,  
 We pass a gulf, in which the willows dip  
 Their pendent boughs, stooping as if to drink.  
 Hence, ankle-deep in moss and flowery thyme, 270  
 We mount again, and feel at every step  
 Our foot half sunk in hillocks green and soft,  
 Raised by the mole, the miner of the soil.  
 He, not unlike the great ones of mankind,  
 Disfigures earth : and, plotting in the dark, 275  
 Toils much to earn a monumental pile,  
 That may record the mischiefs he has done.  
 The summit gained, behold the proud alcove  
 That crowns it ! yet not all its pride secures  
 The grand retreat from injuries impressed 280  
 By rural carvers, who with knives deface  
 The panels, leaving an obscure, rude name,  
 In characters uncouth, and spelt amiss.  
 So strong the zeal to immortalise himself  
 Beats in the breast of man, that even a few, — 285  
 Few transient years, won from the abyss abhorred

\* J. C. Throckmorton, Esq. See Notes at end of book.

Of blank oblivion, seem a glorious prize,  
 And even to a clown. Now roves the eye ;  
 And, posted on this speculative height,  
 Exults in its command. The sheepfold here 290  
 Pours out its fleecy tenants o'er the glebe.  
 At first, progressive as a stream, they seek  
 The middle field ; but, scattered by degrees,  
 Each to his choice, soon whiten all the land.  
 There from the sunburnt hay-field homeward creeps 295  
 The loaded wain ; while lightened of its charge,  
 The wain that meets it passes swiftly by,  
 The boorish driver leaning o'er his team  
 Vociferous and impatient of delay.  
 Nor less attractive is the woodland scene, 300  
 Diversified with trees of every growth,  
 Alike, yet various. Here the gray smooth trunks  
 Of ash, or lime, or beech distinctly shine,  
 Within the twilight of their distant shades ;  
 There, lost behind a rising ground, the wood 305  
 Seems sunk, and shortened to its topmost boughs.  
 No tree in all the grove but has its charms,  
 Though each its hue peculiar ; paler some,  
 And of a wannish gray ; the willow such,  
 And poplar, that with silver lines his leaf, 310  
 And ash far stretching his umbrageous arm ;  
 Of deeper green the elm ; and deeper still,  
 Lord of the woods, the long-surviving oak.  
 Some glossy-leaved, and shining in the sun,  
 The maple, and the beech of oily nuts 315  
 Prolific, and the lime at dewy eve  
 Diffusing odours ; nor unnoted pass  
 The sycamore, capricious in attire,  
 Now green, now tawny, and, ere autumn yet  
 Have changed the woods, in scarlet honours bright. 320  
 O'er these, but far beyond (a spacious map  
 Of hill and valley interposed between),

The Ouse, dividing the well-watered land,  
 Now glitters in the sun, and now retires,  
 As bashful, yet impatient to be seen. 325

Hence the declivity is sharp and short,  
 And such the re-ascent ; between them weeps  
 A little Naiad her impoverished urn  
 All summer long, which winter fills again.

The folded gates would bar my progress now, 330  
 But that the lord of this enclosed demesne,  
 Communicative of the good he owns,  
 Admits me to a share : the guiltless eye

Commits no wrong, nor wastes what it enjoys.  
 Refreshing change ! where now the blazing sun ? 335  
 By short transition we have lost his glare,  
 And stepped at once into a cooler clime.

Ye fallen avenues ! once more I mourn  
 Your fate unmerited, once more rejoice  
 That yet a remnant of your race survives. 340  
 How airy and how light the graceful arch,  
 Yet awful as the consecrated roof

Re-echoing pious anthems ! while beneath  
 The checkered earth seems restless as a flood  
 Brushed by the wind. So sportive is the light 345  
 Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance,  
 Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,  
 And darkening and enlightening, as the leaves  
 Play wanton, every moment, every spot.

And now, with nerves new braced and spirits cheered,  
 We tread the wilderness, whose well-rolled walks, 351  
 With curvature of slow and easy sweep—

Deception innocent—give ample space  
 To narrow bounds. The grove receives us next ;  
 Between the upright shafts of whose tall elms 355

We may discern the thresher at his task.  
 Thump after thump resounds the constant flail,  
 That seems to swing uncertain, and yet falls

Full on the destined ear. - Wide flies the chaff :  
 The rustling straw sends up a frequent mist 360  
 Of atoms, sparkling in the noonday beam.  
 Come hither, ye that press your beds of down  
 And sleep not ; see him sweating o'er his bread  
 Before he eats it.—'Tis the primal curse,  
 But softened into mercy ; made the pledge 365  
 Of cheerful days, and nights without a groan.  
 By ceaseless action all that is subsists.  
 Constant rotation of the unwearied wheel,  
 That Nature rides upon, maintains her health,  
 Her beauty, her fertility. She dreads 370  
 An instant's pause, and lives but while she moves.  
 Its own revolvency upholds the world.  
 Winds from all quarters agitate the air,  
 And fit the limpid elements for use,  
 Else noxious : oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams, 375  
 All feel the freshening impulse, and are cleansed  
 By restless undulation : even the oak  
 Thrives by the rude concussion of the storm ;  
 He seems indeed indignant, and to feel  
 The impression of the blast with proud disdain, 380  
 Frowning, as if in his unconscious arm  
 He held the thunder : but the monarch owes  
 His firm stability to what he scorns—  
 More fixed below, the more disturbed above.  
 The law, by which all creatures else are bound, 385  
 Binds man, the lord of all. Himself derives  
 No mean advantage from a kindred cause,  
 From strenuous toil his hours of sweetest ease.  
 The sedentary stretch their lazy length  
 When custom bids, but no refreshment find, 390  
 For none they need : the languid eye, the cheek  
 Deserted of its bloom, the flaccid, shrunk,  
 And withered muscle, and the vapid soul,  
 Reproach their owner with that love of rest

- To which he forfeits even the rest he loves. 395  
 Not such the alert and active. Measure life  
 By its true worth, the comforts it affords,  
 And theirs alone seems worthy of the name.  
 Good health, and, its associate in the most,  
 Good temper : spirits prompt to undertake, 400  
 And not soon spent, though in an arduous task ;  
 The powers of fancy and strong thought are theirs ;  
 E'en age itself seems privileged in them,  
 With clear exemption from its own defects.  
 A sparkling eye beneath a wrinkled front 405  
 The veteran shews, and, gracing a gray beard  
 With youthful smiles, descends toward the grave  
 Sprightly, and old almost without decay.  
 Like a coy maiden, Ease, when courted most,  
 Farthest retires—an idol, at whose shrine 410  
 Who oftenest sacrifice are favoured least.  
 The love of Nature and the scenes she draws  
 Is Nature's dictate. Strange ! there should be found,  
 Who, self-imprisoned in their proud saloons,  
 Renounce the odours of the open field 415  
 For the unscented fictions of the loom ;  
 Who, satisfied with only pencilled scenes,  
 Prefer to the performance of a God  
 The inferior wonders of an artist's hand !  
 Lovely indeed the mimic works of Art ; 420  
 But Nature's works far lovelier. I admire,  
 None more admires, the painter's magic skill,  
 Who shews me that which I shall never see,  
 Conveys a distant country into mine,  
 And throws Italian light on English walls. 425  
 But imitative strokes can do no more  
 Than please the eye—sweet Nature every sense.  
 The air salubrious of her lofty hills,  
 The cheering fragrance of her dewy vales,  
 And music of her woods—no works of man 430

May rival these ; these all bespeak a power  
 Peculiar, and exclusively her own.  
 Beneath the open sky she spreads the feast ;  
 'Tis free to all—'tis every day renewed ;  
 Who scorns it starves deservedly at home. 435  
 He does not scorn it, who, imprisoned long  
 In some unwholesome dungeon, and a prey  
 To sallow sickness, which the vapours, dank  
 And clammy, of his dark abode have bred,  
 Escapes at last to liberty and light : 440  
 His cheek recovers soon its healthful hue ;  
 His eye relumines its extinguished fires ;  
 He walks, he leaps, he runs—is winged with joy,  
 And riots in the sweets of every breeze.  
 He does not scorn it, who has long endured 445  
 A fever's agonies, and fed on drugs.  
 Nor yet the mariner, his blood inflamed  
 With acrid salts, his very heart athirst  
 To gaze at Nature in her green array.  
 Upon the ship's tall side he stands, possessed 450  
 With visions prompted by intense desire :  
 Fair fields appear below, such as he left  
 Far distant, such as he would die to find—  
 He seeks them headlong, and is seen no more.  
 The spleen is seldom felt where Flora reigns ; 455  
 The lowering eye, the petulance, the frown,  
 And sullen sadness, that o'erashade, distort,  
 And mar the face of beauty, when no cause  
 For such immeasurable woe appears,  
 These Flora banishes, and gives the fair 460  
 Sweet smiles and bloom less transient than her own.  
 It is the constant revolution, stale  
 And tasteless, of the same repeated joys,  
 That palls and satiates, and makes languid life  
 A pedlar's pack, that bows the bearer down. 465  
 Health suffers, and the spirits ebb ; the heart

Recoils from its own choice—at the full feast  
Is famished—finds no music in the song,  
No smartness in the jest; and wonders why.  
Yet thousands still desire to journey on, 470  
Though halt and weary of the path they tread.  
The paralytic, who can hold her cards,  
But cannot play them, borrows a friend's hand  
To deal and shuffle, to divide and sort  
Her mingled suits and sequences; and sits, 475  
Spectatress both and spectacle, a sad  
And silent cipher, while her proxy plays.  
Others are dragged into the crowded room  
Between supporters, and, once seated, sit,  
Through downright inability to rise, 480  
Till the stout bearers lift the corpse again.  
These speak a loud memento. Yet even these  
Themselves love life, and cling to it, as he,  
That overhangs a torrent, to a twig.  
They love it, and yet loathe it; fear to die, 485  
Yet scorn the purposes for which they live.  
Then wherefore not renounce them? No—the dread,  
The slavish dread of solitude, that breeds  
Reflection and remorse, the fear of shame,  
And their inveterate habits, all forbid. 490  
Whom call we gay? That honour has been long  
The boast of mere pretenders to the name.  
The innocent are gay—the lark is gay,  
That dries his feathers, saturate with dew,  
Beneath the rosy cloud, while yet the beams 495  
Of dayspring overshoot his humble nest.  
The peasant too, a witness of his song,  
Himself a songster, is as gay as he.  
But save me from the gaiety of those  
Whose headaches nail them to a noon-day bed; 500  
And save me too from theirs whose haggard eyes  
Flash desperation, and betray their pangs

For property stripped off by cruel chance ;  
 From gaiety, that fills the bones with pain,  
 The mouth with blasphemy, the heart with woe. 505

The earth was made so various, that the mind  
 Of desultory man, studious of change,  
 And pleased with novelty, might be indulged.  
 Prospects, however lovely, may be seen  
 Till half their beauties fade ; the weary sight, 510  
 Too well acquainted with their smiles, slides off  
 Fastidious, seeking less familiar scenes.

Then snug enclosures in the sheltered vale,  
 Where frequent hedges intercept the eye,  
 Delight us ; happy to renounce awhile, 515  
 Not senseless of its charms, what still we love,  
 That such short absence may endear it more.

Then forests, or the savage rock, may please,  
 That hides the sea-mew in his hollow clefts  
 Above the reach of man : his hoary head, 520  
 Conspicuous many a league, the mariner,  
 Bound homeward, and in hope already there,  
 Greeted with three cheers exulting. At his waist  
 A girdle of half-withered shrubs he shews,  
 And at his feet the baffled billows die. 525

The common, overgrown with fern, and rough  
 With prickly gorse, that, shapeless and deformed,  
 And dangerous to the touch, has yet its bloom,  
 And decks itself with ornaments of gold,  
 Yields no unpleasing ramble ; there the turf 530  
 Smells fresh, and, rich in odoriferous herbs  
 And fungous fruits of earth, regales the sense  
 With luxury of unexpected sweets.

There often wanders one, whom better days  
 Saw better clad, in cloak of satin trimmed 535  
 With lace, and hat with splendid ribbon bound.  
 A serving maid was she, and fell in love  
 With one who left her, went to sea, and died.



Her fancy followed him through foaming waves  
To distant shores ; and she would sit and weep 540  
At what a sailor suffers ; fancy too,  
Delusive most where warmest wishes are,  
Would oft anticipate his glad return,  
And dream of transports she was not to know.  
She heard the doleful tidings of his death— 545  
And never smiled again ! and now she roams  
The dreary waste ; there spends the livelong day,  
And there, unless when charity forbids,  
The livelong night. A tattered apron hides,  
Worn as a cloak, and hardly hides, a gown 550  
More tattered still ; and both but ill conceal  
A bosom heaved with never-ceasing sighs.  
She begs an idle pin of all she meets,  
And hoards them in her sleeve ; but needful food,  
Though pressed with hunger oft, or comelier clothes, 555  
Though pinched with cold, asks never.—Kate is crazed !  
I see a column of slow-rising smoke  
O'ertop the lofty wood that skirts the wild.  
A vagabond and useless tribe there eat  
Their miserable meal. A kettle, slung 560  
Between two poles upon a stick transverse,  
Receives the morsel—flesh obscene of dog,  
Or vermin, or at best, of cock purloined  
From his accustomed perch. Hard-faring race !  
They pick their fuel out of every hedge, 565  
Which, kindled with dry leaves, just saves unquenched  
The spark of life. The sportive wind blows wide  
Their fluttering rags, and shows a tawny skin,  
The vellum of the pedigree they claim.  
Great skill have they in palmistry, and more 570  
To conjure clean away the gold they touch,  
Conveying worthless dross into its place ;  
Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal.  
Strange ! that a creature rational, and cast

In human mould, should brutalise by choice 575  
 His nature ; and, though capable of arts  
 By which the world might profit, and himself,  
 Self-banished from society, prefer  
 Such squalid sloth to honourable toil !  
 Yet even these, though, feigning sickness oft, 580  
 They swathe the forehead, drag the limping limb,  
 And vex their flesh with artificial sores,  
 Can change their whine into a mirthful note  
 When safe occasion offers ; and with dance,  
 And music of the bladder and the bag, 585  
 Beguile their woes, and make the woods resound.  
 Such health and gaiety of heart enjoy  
 The houseless rovers of the sylvan world ;  
 And, breathing wholesome air, and wandering much,  
 Need other physic none to heal the effects 590  
 Of loathsome diet, penury, and cold.  
 Blest he, though undistinguished from the crowd  
 By wealth or dignity, who dwells secure,  
 Where man, by nature fierce, has laid aside  
 His fierceness, having learnt, though slow to learn, 595  
 The manners and the arts of civil life.  
 His wants indeed are many ; but supply  
 Is obvious, placed within the easy reach  
 Of temperate wishes and industrious hands.  
 Here Virtue thrives as in her proper soil ; 600  
 Not rude and surly, and beset with thorns,  
 And terrible to sight, as when she springs  
 (If e'er she spring spontaneous) in remote  
 And barbarous climes, where violence prevails,  
 And strength is lord of all ; but gentle, kind, 605  
 By culture tamed, by liberty refreshed,  
 And all her fruits by radiant truth matured.  
 War and the chase engross the savage whole ;  
 War followed for revenge, or to supplant  
 The envied tenants of some happier spot : 610

The chase for sustenance, precarious trust !  
His hard condition with severe constraint  
Binds all his faculties, forbids all growth  
Of wisdom, proves a school, in which he learns  
Sly circumvention, unrelenting hate, 615  
Mean self-attachment, and scarce aught beside.  
Thus fare the shivering natives of the north,  
And thus the rangers of the western world,  
Where it advances far into the deep,  
Towards the Antarctic. Even the favoured isles, 620  
So lately found, although the constant sun  
Cheer all their seasons with a grateful smile,  
Can boast but little virtue ; and, inert  
Through plenty, lose in morals what they gain  
In manners—victims of luxurious ease. 625  
These therefore I can pity, placed remote  
From all that science traces, art invents,  
Or inspiration teaches ; and enclosed  
In boundless oceans, never to be passed  
By navigators uninformed as they, 630  
Or ploughed perhaps by British bark again.  
But, far beyond the rest, and with most cause,  
Thee, gentle savage ! whom no love of thee  
Or thine, but curiosity, perhaps,  
Or else vain-glory, prompted us to draw 635  
Forth from thy native bowers, to shew thee here  
With what superior skill we can abuse  
The gifts of Providence, and squander life.  
The dream is past ; and thou hast found again  
Thy cocoas and bananas, palms and yams, 640  
And homestall thatched with leaves. But hast thou  
found  
Their former charms ? And, having seen our state,  
Our palaces, our ladies, and our pomp  
Of equipage, our gardens and our sports,  
And heard our music ; are thy simple friends, 645

Thy simple fare, and all thy plain delights,  
 As dear to thee as once? And have thy joys  
 Lost nothing by comparison with ours?  
 Rude as thou art (for we returned thee rude  
 And ignorant, except of outward show), 650  
 I cannot think thee yet so dull of heart  
 And spiritless as never to regret  
 Sweets tasted here, and left as soon as known.  
 Methinks I see thee straying on the beach,  
 And asking of the surge that bathes thy foot, 655  
 If ever it has washed our distant shore.  
 I see thee weep, and thine are honest tears,  
 A patriot's for his country : thou art sad  
 At thought of her forlorn and abject state,  
 From which no power of thine can raise her up. 660  
 Thus fancy paints thee, and though apt to err,  
 Perhaps errs little when she paints thee thus.  
 She tells me, too, that duly every morn  
 Thou climb'st the mountain-top, with eager eye  
 Exploring far and wide the watery waste 665  
 For sight of ship from England. Every speck  
 Seen in the dim horizon turns thee pale  
 With conflict of contending hopes and fears.  
 But comes at last the dull and dusky eve,  
 And sends thee to thy cabin, well prepared 670  
 To dream all night of what the day denied.  
 Alas! expect it not. We found no bait  
 To tempt us in thy country. Doing good,  
 Disinterested good, is not our trade.  
 We travel far, 'tis true, but not for nought; 675  
 And must be bribed to compass earth again  
 By other hopes and richer fruits than yours.  
 But though true worth and virtue in the mild  
 And genial soil of cultivated life  
 Thrive most, and may perhaps thrive only there, 680  
 Yet not in cities oft: in proud, and gay,

And gain-devoted cities. Thither flow,  
 As to a common and most noisome sewer,  
 The dregs and feculence of every land.  
 In cities foul example on most minds 685  
 Begets its likeness. Rank abundance breeds,  
 In gross and pampered cities, sloth and lust,  
 And wantonness, and gluttonous excess.  
 In cities vice is hidden with most ease,  
 Or seen with least reproach; and virtue, taught 690  
 By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there  
 Beyond the achievement of successful flight.  
 I do confess them nurseries of the arts,  
 In which they flourish most; where, in the beams  
 Of warm encouragement, and in the eye 695  
 Of public note, they reach their perfect size.  
 Such London is, by taste and wealth proclaimed  
 The fairest capital of all the world:  
 By riot and incontinence the worst.  
 There, touched by Reynolds, a dull blank becomes 700  
 A lucid mirror, in which Nature sees  
 All her reflected features. Bacon there  
 Gives more than female beauty to a stone,  
 And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips.  
 Nor does the chisel occupy alone 705  
 The powers of sculpture, but the style as much;  
 Each province of her art her equal care.  
 With nice incision of her guided steel  
 She ploughs a brazen field, and clothes a soil  
 So sterile with what charms so'er she will, 710  
 The richest scenery and the loveliest forms.  
 Where finds Philosophy her eagle eye,  
 With which she gazes at yon burning disk  
 Undazzled, and detects and counts his spots?  
 In London. Where her implements exact, 715  
 With which she calculates, computes, and scans  
 All distance, motion, magnitude, and now

Measures an atom, and now girds a world?  
 In London. Where has commerce such a mart,  
 So rich, so thronged, so drained, and so supplied, 720  
 As London—opulent, enlarged, and still  
 Increasing London? Babylon of old  
 Not more the glory of the earth than she  
 A more accomplished world's chief glory now.  
 She has her praise. Now mark a spot or two 725  
 That so much beauty would do well to purge;  
 And show this queen of cities, that so fair  
 May yet be foul; so witty, yet not wise.  
 It is not seemly, nor of good report,  
 That she is slack in discipline; more prompt 730  
 To avenge than to prevent the breach of law;  
 That she is rigid in denouncing death  
 On petty robbers, and indulges life  
 And liberty, and oft-times honour too,  
 To peculators of the public gold: 735  
 That thieves at home must hang; but he, that puts  
 Into his over-gorged and bloated purse  
 The wealth of Indian provinces, escapes.  
 Nor is it well, nor can it come to good,  
 That, through profane and infidel contempt 740  
 Of holy writ, she has presumed to annul  
 And abrogate, as roundly as she may,  
 The total ordinance and will of God;  
 Advancing Fashion to the post of Truth,  
 And centering all authority in modes 745  
 And customs of her own, till Sabbath rites  
 Have dwindled into unrespected forms,  
 And knees and hassocks are well-nigh divorced.  
 God made the country, and man made the town.  
 What wonder then that health and virtue, gifts 750  
 That can alone make sweet the bitter draught  
 That life holds out to all, should most abound  
 And least be threatened in the fields and groves?

Possess ye, therefore, ye who, borne about  
 In chariots and sedans, know no fatigue 755  
 But that of idleness, and taste no scenes  
 But such as art contrives, possess ye still  
 Your element ; there only can ye shine ;  
 There only minds like yours can do no harm.  
 Our groves were planted to console at noon 760  
 The pensive wanderer in their shades. At eve  
 The moonbeam, sliding softly in between  
 The sleeping leaves, is all the light they wish,  
 Birds warbling all the music. We can spare  
 The splendour of your lamps ; they but eclipse 765  
 Our softer satellite. Your songs confound  
 Our more harmonious notes ; the thrush departs  
 Scared, and the offended nightingale is mute.  
 There is a public mischief in your mirth ;  
 It plagues your country. Folly such as yours, 770  
 Graced with a sword, and worthier of a fan,  
 Has made, what enemies could ne'er have done,  
 Our arch of empire, steadfast but for you,  
 A mutilated structure, soon to fall.

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## NOTES.

### NOTES ON JOHN GILPIN.

Cowper was subject to fits of profound melancholy, sometimes ending in temporary insanity, and it was when he was in one of his saddest moods, that his friend, Lady Austen, in order to dissipate his gloomy fancies, told him the story of John Gilpin. Its effect on the poet was as of enchantment. On retiring to rest he was kept awake by thinking over and laughing at the incidents of the little history, and as anything that strongly moved him invariably took the form of verse, the highly humorous ballad given above was the result of his night's reflections.

#### VERSE

1. *Train-bands* (or more properly *Trained Bands*), a kind of militia substituted by James I. for the old English *Fyrd*, or national militia. In the civil wars, the train-bands

- sided with the Parliament, and Charles II. restored the old militia in their place.—*Eke, adv.* also.
3. *The Bell at Edmonton*, an inn with the sign of a bell, at Edmonton, a village to the north of London.
4. *After us. We for us*, for the sake of the rhyme and humorous effect. We are reminded by it that grammar was hardly a branch of female education in Mrs Gilpin's school-days.
6. *Calender* (or rather *Calendrer*), one whose business it is to calender linen or cotton cloth—that is, to finish its surface by pressure. Calendering is usually done by passing the fabric between cylinders; hence the term, which is a corruption of *cylindering*.
10. *Agog, adv.* very eager, excited with expectation.
11. *Cheapside*, one of the principal thoroughfares of London, long famous for its silk-mercers, linen-drapers, and hosiers.
25. *Neck or nought*, neck or nothing, desperate, at the risk of everything.—*Rig*, a piece of folly or fun.
29. *He carries weight, &c.*, in allusion to the stone bottles at his belt. In horse-racing, the older, more seasoned horses, and those that have won races before, have to carry extra weight, so as to give the inferior animals a chance of victory.
30. *Trice*, a very short time, an instant. (Perhaps from *thrice*, while you can count *three*.)—*Turnpike men*, the toll-keepers.
34. *Islington*, a village of Middlesex, now forming one of the northern suburbs of London.
38. *Ware*, a town in Hertfordshire, situated on the Lea.
45. *Pix*, mood, humour.

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NOTES ON THE TASK.—BOOK I.

We owe *The Task*, as well as *John Gilpin*, to Lady Austen, who demanded a poem in blank verse from Cowper, and gave him the Sofa as a subject. The poet obeyed, began with the Sofa, and pursuing the train of thought into which it led him, produced *The Task*, which was published in 1785.

LINE

2. *Truth, Hope, and Charity* are the names of three poems in Cowper's first published volume of poetry (1782).
3. *With a trembling hand*, is, like *with awe*, an adverbial phrase qualifying *touched*.
4. *Escaped*. I, having escaped, seek repose.
- 6, 7. *Is* is twice understood: though the theme is (or be) humble, yet the occasion is august and proud.



7. *The Fair*, one of the fair sex, a lady. This method of using an adjective in the singular number is uncommon. Generally *The Fair* is plural, and means the fair sex. Compare *the sick* in line 89, and *the paralytic* in line 472.
8. *Sumptuous* forms a contrast to *for use*.
9. *None*, adjective qualifying *clothing*. *No*, which we always use as the adjective, leaving *none* as the noun, or to be used absolutely, is just a shortened form of *none*, to which it stands in the same relation as *a* to *an*, and *my* and *thy* to *mine* and *thine*. *None* was once always used before a vowel; see Deut. v. 7, where we would now say *no* other.
15. *Strength*, put by metonymy for strong body, strong limbs.
26. *Those barbarous ages past*, absolute clause, *being* understood.
- 17, 18. *Weak, dull, and clumsy*, qualify *Invention*.
22. *Alfred*, Alfred the Great, king of England from 872 to 901.
- 25—27. But the solid oak is found sorely perforated and drilled in holes by voracious worms eating through and through.
29. This poetical description of the progress of seats must be looked upon as entirely playful; otherwise, it might be objected that four-legged stools are better than three-legged ones, only when the floor is even. Three-legged stools are still used in cow-houses, &c.
30. *Vermicular*, like a worm. (Lat. *vermiculus*, dim. of *vermis*, a worm.)
32. *Induced*, spread. This is a use of the word approaching the original meaning of the Latin *induco*, which is to *lead* or *bring into* or *upon*, *place upon*, and hence, *spread upon*.
44. *Restless*, not affording rest, uncomfortable.
- 55, 56. Construe: If what seemed harder than the firm oak of which the frame was formed might be called a cushion. From *what* to *formed* is a noun-clause forming the nominative to *might be called*.
56. Observe the alliteration.
58. *Albion's happy isle*. Albion was an old name for England. Before the universal use of coal as fuel, a great deal of timber was burned in England; and some people, when Cowper wrote, believed that our forests would soon be exhausted.—*Lumber*, timber.
61. *Cripplegate*, a district of London, named after one of the old city gates, which was so called on account of the *cripples* who sought charity there, as at the Beautiful gate of the Temple, in the time of the apostles. See Acts, chap. iii.
68. *Or e'er*, ere ever. *Or* is an old form of *ere*, and the use of *ever* here corresponds to its use in such compounds as

*whatever, wherever*—that is, gives a touch of universality and indefiniteness to the sense. See Dan. vi. 24.

72. *Fancy*, an instance of the figure Personification. There are many other examples in the poem, as in lines 86—88.
- 75, 76. It received one elbow at each end, and one in the middle.
78. *Two kings of Brentford*. The allusion is to an old farce called the *Rehearsal*, by the Duke of Buckingham. In act ii. scene 2, the two kings of Brentford enter 'hand in hand;' and the actors, to heighten the absurdity, generally made them 'smelling at one nosegay.'
88. *Accomplished*, complete in comfort. An *accomplished* person is properly one who is the possessor of all the instruction and polish that education can bestow; so the poet calls the sofa accomplished, as being the form of seat which exhibits in the highest degree comfort and elegance.
105. *Arthritic*, gouty (Gr. *arthron*, a joint, gout being an inflammation of the joints). Gout generally first attacks the great toe.
106. *Libertine Excess*, the free liver. *Excess* is used by metonymy for *He who exceeds*.
109. The poem now glides away from its title-theme, the sofa, to descriptions of rural scenes, the charms of solitude, &c. Observe how the transition is effected. Sofas are useful for gouty limbs; the poet, nevertheless, hopes that, though he likes a sofa, he may never have gout, for he is fond of walking; when he walks, he sees rural scenes; so he launches out into a description of such scenes: and, except in the link of connection in lines 126, 127, the sofa is entirely forgotten.
110. *Swarth*, sward, turf.
115. *Banks of Thames*. Cowper was at Westminster School, London, for eight years.
118. *My . . . consumed*, absolute clause, *being understood*.
121. *Crabs*, crab-apples.—*Embout*, stud the bramble bush like the bosses upon a shield.
122. *Austers*, acid, bitter.
123. *Hard fare*, in apposition with the various wild-fruits mentioned in the previous sentence, taken collectively. *As* here would be parsed by many as a relative pronoun, nominative to *disdains*, but perhaps it is better to fill in what is wanting: *such (fare) as (the fare that) boyish appetite*.
- 129—140. Construe: Though our years, as life declines, speed rapidly away, and each one pilfers, as he goes, some useful grace, that the person growing aged would gladly keep, such as a tooth or auburn lock, and though by degrees they (the

- years) pilfer the colour from those locks which they spare (do not pilfer), mine (my years) have not yet pilfered the elastic spring of an unwearied foot, &c. The first or introductory part of the sentence, all under the influence of *though*, ends at *spare*, the second and principal part of the sentence, which makes the assertion, begins at *mine*.
142. The first *young* in this line is in the objective case, agreeing with *me*; the second *young* is in the nominative, qualifying *I*.
144. *Companion*, Mrs Unwin, with whom Cowper lived from 1765 till her death in 1796.
150. *That* is required after *know'st*, and *is* after *nature*.
153. Supply *thou* before *art*, which is co-ordinate with *know'st*, and not under the influence of *that*.
154. *Yon eminence*, a hill called the Cliff, overhanging the Ouse, near Cowper's home at Olney.
163. *Ouse*. Olney is in Buckinghamshire, on the Ouse.
167. *Never overlooked*, never unnoticed by the poet and his companion when they viewed the scene.
169. *Overtwart*, across, on the other side of.
173. *Hedgerow beauties*, simple, rural beauties.—*Square tower*, that of the church at Clifton.
174. *Tall spire*, at Olney.
175. *Undulates*, reaches the ear now softer, now louder, thus rising and falling like a wave (Lat. *wada*).
- 188, 189. Absolute phrases. These occur so often that they will not be pointed out in the remainder of the poem.
203. *Sublime*, adv. aloft, high up in the air. (The original meaning of the Lat. *sublimis*.)
205. *The boding owl*. The owl has in almost all countries been considered to be a messenger of evil, a bird of ill-omen.
211. *Weather-house*, a toy, which serves for a *hygrometer*, or moisture indicator, consisting of a house, with the figures of a man and woman who come out alternately as the air is moist or dry. Its action is due to the susceptibility of catgut to moisture. When the air is *moist*, the catgut in the weather-house lengthens, and the man comes out; when the air is dry, it contracts, pulls in the man, and pushes out the woman, who is at the other end of the lever on which the man stands, and which moves on a pivot in the centre.
228. *Hidden* and *remote* are adjectives qualifying *covert* in line 233.
249. *Sweet* is here a noun, equal to *sweet* or *pleasant object*, and in apposition with *thou*.
251. *Visit*, here, *place visited*.
252. *Colonnade*, a fine avenue of chestnut trees in Weston Park.

- 259, 260. We, self-deprived of other screen, spread the thin umbrella.
262. *Benevolus* (Lat. benevolent, kind), John Courtney Throckmorton, Esq., of Weston Underwood. When this gentleman succeeded to Weston Underwood, on the death of his brother, he continued to Cowper (though personally unknown to him) the privilege of a key to admit him to his pleasure-grounds.
- 264, 265. And though he is himself a man of great polish and fashion, yet he allows the old-fashioned, long, shady, avenue to remain.—*Prolixity*, the state of being prolonged to tediousness, is here used simply in the sense of *length*.
289. *Speculative* is here used in the entirely Latin sense of *commanding a view*. (Lat. *specular*, to see, look around.)
291. *Glebe*, here simply the ground, the grass. (Lat. *gleba*, a clod.)
293. *The middle field*, a Latinism for the middle of the field = *medium campum*.
320. *Have changed*, perfect subjunctive after the conjunction *ere*.
328. *Naiad*, in mythology, a water-nymph or goddess that presides over a river or stream.—*Urn* the channel of the stream. In sculpture, a river is represented by a figure pouring water out of an urn.
329. *Summer*, objective expressing the duration of time.
344. *The checkered earth*, the grass marked in a checkered or check-like manner by the shadow of the branches.
349. *Moment*, objective of point of time.—*Spot*, objective governed by *darkening*, *enlightening*.
357. *Thump* is here not the stroke, but the peculiar sound it makes; the flail sends out one such sound after another.
364. *The primal curse*. 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread' (Genesis iii. 19).
372. *Revolvency*, act or state of revolving, revolution.
385. *Else*, here an adjective = *other*.
396. *Measure* is strictly a verb in the imperative mood; but it is really equal to *if you measure*: if you measure life by its true worth—namely, the comforts it affords—then the life of the alert and active will alone seem worthy of the name.
411. *Who*, those who; a Latinism which occurs again in line 435.
- 413, 414. *Strange! there should be found who*. Strange! that there should be found some who. *There should be found who* is a Latinism—*sunt qui*, there are some who.
416. *Fictions of the loom*, scenes represented on tapestry.
- 443, 444. These lines present, both in sound and sense, a fine *climax*, rising in interest up to the crowning point.
454. Cowper here describes a mariner suffering from a calenture (Span. *calentura*), a species of temporary delirium or fever

- occurring on board ship in hot climates, and fancying, in his delirium, that he sees green fields in the sea. Compare Swift's *South Sea Project*.
455. *The spleen*, ill-humour; properly, a gland supposed by the ancients to be the seat of anger and melancholy (Gr. *splên*). — *Flora*, in Roman mythology, the goddess of flowers.
481. *Corpse*. Though this word (from the Latin *corpus*) literally signifies no more than a human body, whether alive or dead, yet Cowper, in using it here, hints that the person spoken of is no better than a dead body.
482. *Memento*, here, warning.
494. *Saturate*, though it be called an adjective, is rather a more classical form of the past participle *saturated*.
- 495, 496. The rays of the rising sun, striking the earth in a direction nearly parallel to its surface, pass over the little hollow in which the nest of the lark lies.
501. *Theirs whose haggard eyes*, &c., gamblers.
521. *League*, objective, without a preposition, to express space.
534. The following description is a sketch from real life. *Better* in this line is an *adjective*; in the following, an *adverb*.
569. The pedigrees of noble families are kept written out on vellum or parchment, and the poet here says fancifully that the brown parchment-like skin of the gipsies shews, as clearly as any pedigree, the race they claim to be descended from; referring to the belief, implied in the name, that they came from Egypt. It is now believed they came from India.
585. *Music of the bladder and the bag*, music of the timbrel or drum and the bagpipe.
608. *Whole*, wholly.
611. *Precarious trust*, in apposition with *chase*, a precarious or uncertain thing in which to trust.
620. *The favoured isles*, the Society and Friendly Islands in the South Pacific Ocean. The Society Islands are said to have been reached in 1606, but Cowper alludes here to the visit of Captain Cook in 1769, who gave them the name they now bear. The Friendly Islands were discovered by Tasman in 1643, but received their collective name from Cook.
623. *Inert* agrees with *isles*, used by metonymy for *the inhabitants*.
631. The half-prophecy of this line has certainly not been confirmed, a striking proof of its fallacy being the recent annexation by the British crown of the Fiji Islands, usually reckoned a part of the Friendly Islands group. Tahiti, the chief of the Society Islands (which are under French rule), carries on a considerable export and import trade.

633. *Gentle savage*, Omai, a native of the Friendly Islands, who acted as interpreter to Captain Cook in his third voyage, and came with him to England in 1775. He became an object of great interest in London society, and charmed every one by his intelligence, modesty, and self-reliance. Cowper's supposition, that, after his return, he pined for English refinement, though merely a supposition, turned out to be correct.
641. *Homestall*, the same as *homestead*; here, simply *home*.
642. *Having seen*, a participle qualifying *thou* in line 647: *Are thy simple friends as dear to thee, having seen (who hast seen)!*
654. *Methinks*, an impersonal verb, it seems to me.
658. *Patriot's*, possessive case in apposition with the possessive pronoun *thine*.
- 685, 686. In cities a bad example is sure to produce a correspondingly bad effect on most people.
700. *Reynolds*, Sir Joshua Reynolds, generally acknowledged the head of the English school of painting. Born 1723; died 1792.
702. *Bacon*, John Bacon, an eminent sculptor. The monument to Lord Chatham in Westminster Abbey was his work, and had been finished in 1783. Born 1740; died 1799.
704. *Chatham*, William Pitt, Lord Chatham, the famous orator and statesman, and father of the still more famous William Pitt, the younger. Born 1708; died 1778.
- 705, 706. The chisel does not alone occupy the powers of sculpture, but the style occupies it as much.—*Style*, pointed tool of the engraver, the graver or burin. The allusion is to engraving on copper and steel.
710. *What charms so'er*, for *whatsoever charms*, is an example of the figure of *tnesis*, the inserting of a word between the parts of a compound word.
712. *Eagle eye*, the telescope. The allusion is to the Royal Observatory at Greenwich.
- 727, 728. *Fair, foul, witty, wise*, adjectives, used as nouns.
733. *Indulges*, here equal to *gives indulgently*.
738. This is directed against Lord Clive, the founder of our Indian Empire, who returned from India with immense wealth, and whose proceedings in India were made the subject of parliamentary inquiry in 1772-73. Though acquitted, Clive never got over the disgrace implied in the trial, and committed suicide in 1774. He was born in 1725.
756. *But*, a preposition, *except*. In line 765 it is an adverb, *only*.
766. *Our softer satellite*, the moon.









