

literary atmosphere of the day, amid his friends, — the Lloyds, Colmans, and Bonnel Thorntons, — was a clever and tasteful imitator, but an imitator merely, both in his prose and his verse. His prose in "The Connoisseur" is a feeble echo of that of Addison; while in his verse we find unequivocal traces of Prior, of Philips, and of Pope, but scarce any trace whatever of a poet at least not inferior to the best of them, — Cowper himself. Events over which he had no control suddenly removed him outside this atmosphere, and dropped him into a profound retirement, in which for nearly twenty years he did not peruse the works of any English poet. The chimes of the existing literature had fairly rung themselves out of his head, ere, with a heart grown familiar in the interval with all earnest feeling, — an intellect busied with ever ripening cogitation, — an eye and ear conversant, day after day, and year after year, with the face and voice of nature, — he struck, as the key-notes of his own noble poetry, a series of exquisitely modulated tones, that had no counterparts in the artificial gamut. Had his preparatory course been different, — had he been kept in the busy and literary world, instead of passing, in his insulated solitude, through the term of second education, which made him what we all know, — it seems more than questionable whether Cowper would have ever taken his place in literature as a great original poet.* His two coadjutors in the work of

* Cowper himself seems to have been thoroughly aware that his long seclusion from the world of letters told in his favor. "I reckon it among my principal advantages as a composer of verses," we find him saying, in one of his letters to the younger Unwin, "that I have not read an English poet these thirteen years, and but one these twenty years. Imitation even of the best models is my aversion. It is servile and mechanical, — a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not written upon the pattern of some one indeed original. But when the ear and taste have been much accustomed