



The Task and Other Poems (Classic Poetry)

William Cowper

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The Task and Other Poems By William Cowper The Task: A Poem, in Six Books is a poem in blank verse by William Cowper published in 1785, usually seen as his supreme achievement. Its six books are called "The Sofa", "The Timepiece", "The Garden", "The Winter Evening", "The Winter Morning Walk" and "The Winter Walk at Noon". Beginning with a mock-Miltonic passage on the origins of the sofa, it develops into a discursive meditation on the blessings of nature, the retired life and religious faith, with attacks on slavery, blood sports, fashionable frivolity, lukewarm clergy and French despotism among other things. In a letter Robert Burns wrote, Is not The Task a glorious poem? The religion of The Task, bating a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and Nature: the religion that exalts, that ennobles man. He is said to have loved the poem enough to have habitually walked about with a copy in his pocket. The poem is extensively quoted in the novels of Jane Austen, and has been seen as deeply influential on her. The conversational diction of the Lake Poets' works can be seen as stemming directly from The Task. Certainly the young Coleridge wrote of Cowper's "divine Chit chat", and in later years praised The Task's "chastity of diction" and "harmony of blank verse". In a 1796 letter Charles Lamb testified to Coleridge's thorough relish for Cowper, and on his own account wrote of Cowper as an old favourite and of "reading the Task with fresh delight". Wordsworth borrowed a copy while still a schoolboy, and the poem's influence on his Tintern Abbey and The Prelude is widely recognised.

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