

week by different gangs of street robbers." The materials of his comparatively little known volume, "The Life of Jonathan Wild," were collected during this period of crime and outrage; nor does the work, as a whole, exaggerate the actual state of things at the time. Another of his works he entitled an "Inquiry into the Increase of Thieves and Robbers,"—"a work which contains several hints," says Sir Walter Scott, "which have been adopted by succeeding statesmen, and some of which are worthy of still more attention than they have received." If an "increase" of the robber class actually took place at the time, as the title indicates, matters must have been bad indeed; for, about an age earlier, so sadly were the roads that approach the metropolis infested by highwaymen, as to be scarce at all passable by the solitary traveller. "Whatever might be the way in which a journey was performed," says Macaulay, "the travellers, unless they were numerous and well armed, ran considerable risk of being stopped and plundered. The mounted highwayman,—a marauder known to our generation only by books,—was to be found on every main road. The waste tracts which lay on the main routes near London were especially haunted by plunderers of this class. Hounslow Heath, on the great western road, and Finchley Common, on the great northern road, were perhaps the most celebrated of these spots. The Cambridge scholars trembled when they approached Epping Forest, even in broad daylight; and seamen who had just been paid off at Chatham were often compelled to deliver their purses on Gadshill." Long after the times that Macaulay describes,—long after the times of Fielding too,—even in country districts, the law served but imperfectly to protect the peaceable subject from the house-breaker and the highwayman. Cowper's graphic description, written in the year 1783, must be familiar to all our readers.