The Letters of William Blake

together with His Life

by

F. Tatham

Edited by

A. G. B. Russell

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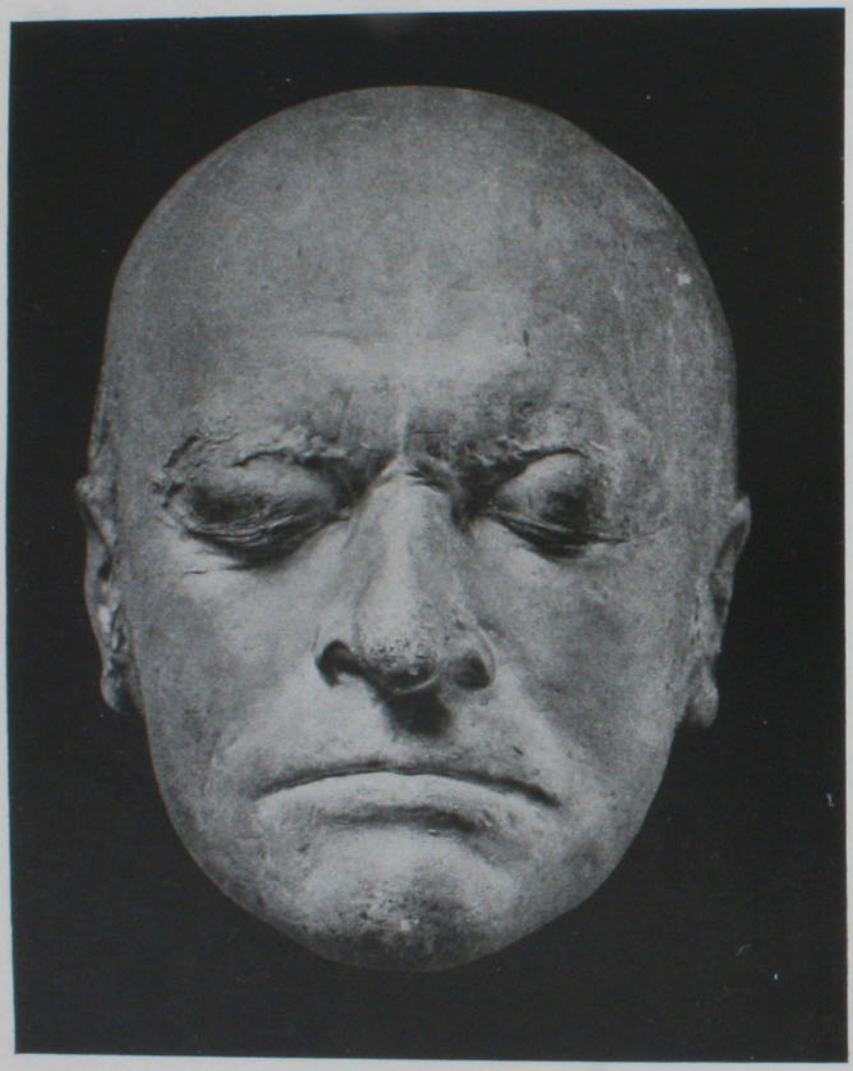
THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM BLAKE



WILLIAM BLAKE

THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

TOGETHER WITH A LIFE BY FREDERICK TATHAM

EDITED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

ARCHIBALD G. B. RUSSELL

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
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First Published in 1906

To M.

"LES DIEUX SONT CEUX QUI NE DOUTENT JAMAIS"

COMTE DE VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM

PREFACE

THE "Life of Blake," by Frederick Tatham, now for the first time published, has been printed verbatim and in full from the original manuscript, which was prefixed by its author to a coloured copy of Blake's *Jerusalem* and bound up with it. The volume is now the property of Captain Archibald Stirling, and it is by his most courteous permission that the editor has been able to avail himself, on the present occasion, of this valuable biography.

The series of Blake's letters has been made as complete as possible; and though the editor is indeed aware of several omissions, he has some knowledge, in almost every case, of the contents of those which he has been unable to trace, and is confident that, at anyrate of all those which have been *known* to exist, none of any serious moment are absent. The letters, too, have been edited, wherever it has been possible, from the originals, and especial attention has been given to the accuracy of the text. In both Life and Letters, however, the punctuation, the spelling, and the use of capitals

have (except in the case of the poems which occur in the letters) been brought, as far as possible, into conformity with the modern practice, as it was felt that any attempt (even if it had been possible to make it throughout) to reproduce the originals in these respects would only be a source of irritation and confusion to the majority of readers.

A certain number of letters from Blake's friends and acquaintances have been added to the collection, wherever they have seemed to give it greater coherence, or to shed new light upon his life and character; and for this purpose extracts have often been sufficient.

The notes are intended partly to clear up any allusions to events or persons which might present difficulties to the reader, and partly to connect the letters with Blake's other writings, and to explain the ideas which they embody in reference to the whole of his work. They have been made as brief and serviceable as possible.

The illustrations have been carefully chosen in regard to the text.

The editor wishes to express his most grateful thanks to the owner of the Life, and all owners of unpublished letters, for courteously placing them at his disposal; and to Messrs. Macmillan & Co. for their very kind permission (given through his friend Mr. George A. Macmillan) to print the letters to

Linnell and several of those to Hayley from the second edition of Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*, as well as to all those who have so generously contributed towards the illustrations of the book. His thanks also are especially due to his friend Mr. W. Graham Robertson for much kind help, and above all for his gift of the beautiful sketch of Blake's Cottage; and to his friend Mr. E. R. D. Maclagan for invaluable advice.

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INTRODUCTION

LETTERS are of two kinds, reflective and impulsive. The writer may be concerned with the analysis of his impressions and the choice of words, or he may simply rely upon the sheer intensity of his passions or emotions to carry conviction to the reader's imagination. The Letters of William Blake are of the latter sort. That very impatience and impetuosity which so often mars the perfection of his achievement in other directions, is their incomparable distinction. His personality reveals itself in them in its most charming aspect. They are filled with a delightful freshness and spontaneity; and at the same time his most intimate ideas, in regard to both religion and art, are expressed with a clearness and simplicity which is scarcely to be found anywhere else in his writings. He never tires of writing exultantly and triumphantly of the supreme joy of the visionary life. "He had a devil," Mr. Swinburne has said, "and its name was faith"; and his letters are everywhere inspired with the child-like enthusiasm

and god-like energy begotten of this faith. The union with the Divine through Art and Love—that is the central fact of his life and work, his one and ever-present ideal; and it is not surprising to find it his principal topic when he is writing to his friends. The only possible redemption was, he believed, through the imagination; he was, therefore, continually occupied with casting out from himself everything that was not imagination, and adjuring others to do the same, that the same eternal life, which he already possessed in himself, might be theirs too. "I know of no other Christianity," he writes in *Jerusalem*, "and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body and mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination: Imagination, the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, and in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more. . . . Is the Holy Ghost any other than an Intellectual Fountain? . . . Is God a Spirit, who must be worshipped in Spirit & in Truth, and are not the Gifts of the Spirit Everything to Man? . . . What is Mortality but the things relating to the Body, which Dies? What is Immortality but the things relating to the Spirit, which Lives eternally? . . . Answer this to yourselves, & expel from among you those who pretend to despise the labours of Art

& Science, which alone are the labours of the Gospel: Is not this plain & manifest to the thought? Can you think at all, & not pronounce heartily: That to Labour in Knowledge is to Build up Jerusalem; and to Despise Knowledge is to Despise Jerusalem & her Builders. And remember: He who despises & mocks a Mental Gift in another, calling it pride & selfishness & sin, mocks Jesus the giver of every Mental Gift, which always appear to the ignorance-loving Hypocrite as Sins; but that which is a Sin in the sight of cruel Man, is not so in the sight of our kind God. Let every Christian, as much as in him lies, engage himself openly & publicly before all the World in some Mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem." In such words he sums up "the Everlasting Gospel," which he believed himself and all other creative artists in duty bound to deliver to humanity.

The series of letters begins with an extract from a letter from Flaxman to Hayley (now for the first time printed), which has some importance if only to refute the common idea that Blake's art found no acceptance among the artists of his own day. This delusion has doubtless arisen from the story of the conflict with Sir Joshua Reynolds, who is said to have criticised adversely some of his earliest essays in painting, and to have recommended

him "to work with less extravagance and more simplicity, and to correct his drawing." This most excellent advice was, however, resented by Blake, not on its own merits but because of the lips from which it came; for since the method of painting adopted by Reynolds was wholly opposed to his own ideal, which was that of Dürer, Michel Angelo, and the rest of the linear school, he not unnaturally considered it an extreme impertinence on the part of one who, in his opinion, was ignorant of the very essence of the highest kind of art to criticise work which was at anyrate conceived on right lines. Besides Romney, Flaxman himself, Fuseli, Lawrence—to mention the chief names only—were enthusiastic admirers of Blake's designs. In connection with the last of these, it is worth while correcting an error on the part of Gilchrist, who speaks of him, among others, as considering it "almost giving the money" whenever he gave Blake a commission either for a drawing or for one of his illuminated books. That this was certainly not the case is shown by the honour paid by him to a replica of the beautiful water-colour (done originally for Butts) of "The Wise and Foolish Virgins," which he had ordered from him. I find a note in the diary of the present owner's grandfather, who was a personal friend of that eminent artist and collector, and purchased

the drawing for a high price at his sale, stating that "it was Sir Thomas's favourite drawing," and that "he commonly kept it on his table in his studio, as a study"—which is high praise, when we remember that Lawrence's collection of drawings by the old masters was one of the finest that has ever been brought together. Blake's poems also were found worthy of honour by a tribunal from which there can be no appeal—Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Lamb.

About the time at which Flaxman writes, Blake's work was beginning to appear at the Royal Academy exhibitions. He was there for the first time in 1780 with the "Death of Earl Goodwin," for which the sketch alone survives. In 1784 were shown two sombre designs of a didactic tendency, "War unchained by an Angel: Fire, Pestilence, and Famine following," and "A Breach in a City: the Morning after a Battle." The first of these seems to have disappeared; but the second, of which there are two versions still in existence (that in the possession of Mr. Stopford Brooke being probably the one exhibited), is amply prophetic of his later manner and typical of the kind of work which elicited such extravagant praise from Romney's lips. It is the grey of early dawn. Before the breach, among fragments of the wall, is a heap of slain, with a woman prostrate upon one of the

bodies, and a young woman kneeling and embracing her dead knight. A mourning mother and an aged father, who is wiping away his tears with a fold of his mantle (the latter an anticipation of the patriarchal type so often to reappear), stand close by. Through the breach a young woman is seen, searching frantically for her dead lover. High upon the wall is a hungry bird of prey. An intensity of dramatic feeling which belongs to the greatest achievements of Blake's inventive faculty is present in the design : where the woeful state of the fallen on the one side is vividly contrasted with the vertical lines of the mourners and of the wall on the other; while the dismal twilight of the morning serves to increase the lamentable aspect of the scene. It will appear from many of Blake's letters that the admiration evinced by Romney was fully reciprocated, especially in the case of the various historical studies and cartoons which were undertaken by the latter at this period. These have even left a visible mark upon Blake's style. An India-ink drawing, done about the date of this meeting, entitled "Har and Heva bathing : Mnetha looking on" (one of a set of twelve illustrations to his own poem "Tiriel"), is a good example of the Romney influence, which is clearly distinguishable in the curves of the figures, in the breadth of the light effects, and in the character of the forest back-

ground; and from the designs of the latter from "Shakespeare" and "Milton" it is sufficiently clear that the gain was not on Blake's side alone. I have even identified a sketch by Romney from *Paradise Lost* bearing Blake's signature forged upon it.

In the same letter from Flaxman, just alluded to, there is mention of another matter, which has hitherto escaped the notice of Blake's biographers, which is a proposal to send him to Rome. It is difficult to be thankful enough that this most generous offer was never carried into effect, when we consider the disastrous influence of the Sistine Chapel in annihilating the very considerable ability of such artists as Barry and Fuseli, not to mention a host of others of inferior rank. This terrible neo-michelangelism is responsible for many of the worst excesses of the school to which they belonged. As it was, the only way in which Blake was able to become acquainted with the works of Michel Angelo was through the medium of engravings and studies from them, and that he made use of his opportunities is shown by some copies (now in the Print Room of the British Museum) executed at this period, after Adam Ghisi's Sistine prints.

The death of his brother, Robert, in 1787, may be taken to mark the beginning of a new era in Blake's artist career; since the publication of the books of songs and prophecies, with which his name

is generally associated, is intimately connected with this event. For it was not long before his brother returned one night in a vision and revealed to him the method of relief-etching, which enabled him to print and illuminate them for an expense which his slender means would permit. The nature of these books is well known through the facsimiles which have been published; and it is only necessary to mention them here, for the reason that they are the first decisive step in his career as a visionary artist, and also because it was the mode of their production which gave rise to what is in many ways the most distinctive and characteristic section of the whole of his artistic productions — his *Printed Drawings*; since it is reasonable to believe that it was the satisfactory result obtained on a small scale in these books and in certain other small designs separately printed in a similar manner, which led him to the idea of modifying his method for the treatment of independent subjects on a larger scale. The date of this further invention is probably 1795 (or a little earlier), as this is the year of all the dated prints known to me; and it was upon their production that he was engaged at the time when his correspondence with George Cumberland begins. The "Creation of Adam" is, from its nature, the most conspicuous of them, and is perhaps the greatest extant monument of Blake's

genius as an artist. The Creator, a grand and terrific figure, ancient and winged, like some monument of an Oriental imagination, clothed about the body with flowing drapery, his hair streaming behind, with all the agony of creation upon his face, is forming Adam, who lies prostrate below him, out of the four elements. With his left hand he is taking up a clod of clay, and moulding his head with his right. Adam's left arm is stretched out towards the water beneath, with the palm of the hand open; about one of his legs, which are as yet only partially formed from the natural wood, are the coils of an immense worm, the emblem of nature and of mortality. Behind the hovering figure of the Almighty is a vast sun (representing *Fire*), a lurid yellow and red disk surrounded with red and black rays. Above are thick rolling clouds (*Air*) of a purplish black colour. Below Adam is the green *Earth*, with the dark blue *Water* lapping the edge.

At the same time as he was at work upon the *Printed Drawings*, Blake was engaged upon a number of small pictures (chiefly biblical in subject), painted in oil upon a gesso ground, which continue down to the end of the century, when he ceased to employ an oily vehicle. That he had not yet made up his mind to alienate himself from the influences, Greek, Flemish, and Venetian, which were to

become so odious to him, is clearly discernible from many of those works; even if we had not his own explicit declaration on the point in a letter written as late as 1799, where he says: "The purpose for which alone I live, . . . is . . . to renew the lost art of the Greeks," and at the same time professes himself willing to execute "a number of cabinet pictures, which I flatter myself will not be unworthy of a scholar of Rembrandt and Teniers" (both soon to be included in the same category with the Venetians and Correggio), "whom I have studied no less than Raphael and Michael Angelo." The "Christ blessing little Children" and the "Flight into Egypt," both dated 1790, are the earliest of the series known to me. In the former of these the Venetian feeling is strongly perceptible, especially in a standing female figure, clothed in bluish green, with an infant in her arms, and in the landscape background; while the diminutive children vividly recall some Greek reliefs of the fifth century. Somewhat later in date is the strange "Nativity," which is one of the artist's boldest and most beautiful inventions. Mary, swooning in the miraculous childbirth, is sustained by Joseph; while the Divine Infant, clothed with supernatural light, leaps forth upon the air. Elizabeth holds out her arms to receive Him; and the tiny Baptist, upon her knees, folds his hands in adoration. The

star of the Nativity sheds a flood of light through a window in the stall. A less striking but not less beautiful work of the same type is "The Angel appearing to Zacharias," where the sense of solemnity pervading the whole is enhanced by the richness of the ornaments and the jewelled colour. The effect of light both in this and in the preceding picture has a distinctly Rembrandtesque quality. But perhaps the most remarkable of the whole group is Captain Archibald Stirling's "Temptation of Eve." Eve is a beautiful nude figure, with luxuriant yellow hair, standing in the midst with her right arm uplifted; her face is radiant, charmed by the serpent whose golden yellow coils surround her, circling upwards behind, its crested head lifted high above her head, and holding the fruit in its mouth. Adam lies stretched in sleep upon the grass, by the writhing folds of the serpent's tail, one hand resting upon a spade at his side. The dark trunk of the Tree of Mystery stands massively on the left, overarching the composition with its deadly branches. In the background is a rocky landscape, with a waterfall. Above, in the dark blue sky of night, the moon is being eclipsed.

It was not long after the designs for Young's *Night Thoughts* had been completed (in 1797) that Blake entered upon his friendship with Butts, who in 1799 gave him an order for fifty small

pictures at one guinea each. This and one or two other commissions about the same time were sufficient to induce him once and for all to turn his attention seriously to the art of painting, and for the future to make engraving, which had until now been his principal pursuit, merely a means of earning bread. Thomas Butts remained ever a true friend to Blake, and became the purchaser, for small sums, of practically all his most important works from this date until about 1810, when sheer lack of room on his walls prevented him from being for the future anything more than an occasional buyer. He was an amiable, if somewhat commonplace individual, and if the letter to Blake, printed in the present collection, does not point to a very high level either of humour or intelligence, it shows him to have been greatly attached to his protégé, and he has certainly earned the gratitude of all Blake-lovers in giving to the world, through his patronage, so many of the artist's greatest designs. He is above all to be commended for leaving Blake an entirely free hand in regard to the execution of all his commissions. Of the supreme benefit of this freedom, "his just right as an artist and as a man," Blake was ever most sensible, and his sincere thanks are gratefully recorded in one of his letters to his friend, where he says: "If any attempt should be made to

refuse me this, I am inflexible, and will relinquish any engagement of designing at all, unless altogether left to my own judgment, as you, my dear friend, have always left me; for which I shall never cease to honour and respect you." The greater part of the magnificent collection brought together by this patron was dispersed, about the middle of the last century, by his son, Thomas, who was for a time Blake's pupil, and instructed by him in the art of engraving. The whole of the remainder, including many of the artist's noblest productions, has been recently disposed of by the present representative of the Butts family.

In September 1800, Blake left London to work for Hayley at Felpham. The prospect of life in the country filled him with unbounded delight. He had dreams of the beginning of a new life, in which he has to emerge at last from the confusion and unrest of his past existence into a state of freedom and spiritual felicity. With no care but art, he imagined that he would be able, unmolested, to "converse in heaven and walk with angels." His wife was overwhelmed with the same enthusiasm. "My dear and too-overjoyous woman," he wrote to Hayley just before their departure from London, "has exhausted her strength. . . . Eartham will be my first temple and altar; my wife is like a flame

of many colours of precious jewels whenever she hears it named." The first undertaking after his arrival was a frieze of poet heads for his employer's library at Felpham, whither the latter had just removed from Eartham. The *Little Tom* broadsheet was also produced at the same time; and it was not long before he was set to work by his patron (through whom he obtained commissions among the neighbouring gentry) upon the uncongenial task of miniature painting; and in addition to all this he was occupied with the engraving of plates for Hayley's *Life of Cowper*. Any time that could be spared from these labours was devoted to the completion of his commission for Butts. Among the drawings which he did for the latter about this time is one entitled "The Soldiers Casting Lots for Christ's Garment" (dated 1800), which from its extraordinary qualities of invention and energy, we may suppose to belong to the first enthusiasm of his new life. In the foreground three soldiers are dicing excitedly for the seamless coat; while several others leaning upon the shafts of their partizans are bending over and watching the game intently. Beyond is the crucifixion, seen from behind, with the group of holy women, etc., at the feet of Christ. In the distance, upon the terrace of the Temple, which rises up with its many pinnacles mysteriously in the back-

ground, is a multitude of spectators, darkly suggested; many, too, are crowding up beneath a portcullis gate, below the steep rock upon which the crucifixion has taken place. Of a different character to this sombre design is the charming and beautifully coloured drawing of "The Vision of Jacob's Ladder," which there is good reason to assign to the same date; indeed, it is difficult to dissociate it from the vision of the ladder in the song addressed to Mrs. Flaxman, and it is for this reason that it has been reproduced here to accompany it. The youthful Jacob, propped upon a pillow of large stones, is stretched in sleep upon a grassy hill-top, his shepherd's crook in his hand. Ending by his pillow, and descending from a vast golden sun on high, whence emanate floods of bright yellow beams, is a white spiral stairway or ladder, upon which countless angels and girls and little children are passing up and down. Foremost among them is a winged angel bearing a basket of bread upon his head, and followed by a damsel with a jug of wine. Others are engaged in various delights: embracing one another, leading little children, one carrying a scroll, others a book, compasses, or a musical instrument, — all joyful and beautiful. Beneath the rays of the sun is deep blue sky, star spangled. Many of those for whom the symbolism of art

is, as it was for Blake, inseparable from its reality, will be reminded in this lovely invention of the striking words in *The Obscure Night of the Soul*, where St. John of the Cross tells of how the Ladder of Contemplation ascends to the Sun, which is God.

It was not destined that this new-found happiness should remain for long unclouded. The "brotherly affection" with which he was at first received by his benevolent patron, soon unmasked itself as the charity of an *elder* brother, or in other words a tyranny of a peculiarly exasperating kind; and even the mild and ever-patient Blake could not long endure the "genteel ignorance and polite disapprobation" which he encountered continually by reason of the visionary quality of his inventions. How many of us have suffered from those who "do unkind things in kindness: with power armed to say the most irritating things in the midst of tears and love!" as Blake afterwards wrote in his *Milton*, a poem which is almost wholly devoted to describing, under a close disguise, the events, or the "herculean labours," as he calls them, of his life at Felpham; and how many of us have cried out with him: "O God, protect me from my friends, that they have not power over me: Thou hast giv'n me power to protect myself from my bitterest enemies." At last he could

conceal the truth no more. "He is as much averse," he complains of Hayley in a letter to Butts, "to my poetry as he is to a chapter in the Bible," and "approves of my designs as little as he does of my poems." This attitude on the part of his patron soon convinced him that he was in serious danger from an enemy of his soul, who was urging him in the name of worldly wisdom to forsake his allegiance to Imagination, that he might devote himself to the imitation of nature. So after three dark years he was forced to return to London. The experience had not, however, been an altogether fruitless one. "One thing," he writes, "of real consequence I have accomplished by coming into the country, which is to me consolation enough, namely, I have recollected all my scattered thoughts on art, and resumed my primitive and original ways of execution in both painting and engraving, which in the confusion of London I had very much obliterated from my mind." And again, "My heart is full of futurity; I perceive that the sore travail which has been given me these three years leads to glory and honour; I rejoice and tremble." The clarification of ideas, and the return to those principles of technique which were latent in his youthful pieces, and which preceded the attempt at eclecticism, when it was his intention to incor-

porate into his work all the graces of Venice and Flanders as well as the linear austerity of the Florentines, and when his mind was perturbed by a hundred conflicting doubts and fears, were clearly things to be thankful for, and he was by no means oblivious of his debt. The three years at Felpham were years of retreat, during which he was enabled to devote himself to bringing to an end the period of mental war; and the conflict was there fiercest because it had passed into the ultimate world of vision. The book of *Milton*, in which the story of this final struggle is chronicled, was begun during the last days at Felpham and finished in London. The year 1804, however, upon the title-page must be taken to mark the completion of the composition rather than the date of publication; since the engraving of the poem seems to have been delayed, by pressure of other work, for several years; and even in the end the original plan had to be modified considerably, and the number of books reduced from twelve to two. That the whole labour of producing the book was not over at any rate before 1808, is shown by the following allusion to it in the *Public Address* belonging to that year. "The manner in which my character has been blasted these thirty years, both as an artist and a man, may be seen particularly in a

Sunday paper called *The Examiner*, . . . and the manner in which I have rooted out the nest of villains will be seen in a poem concerning my three years' herculean labours at Felpham, which I shall soon publish." But it seems to have been ready not long after these words were written, as in every copy known to me the paper is watermarked with the year 1808, a coincidence which must, I think, fix the approximate date of its appearance. The intention of the book is clearly stated on p. 36, ll. 21–25:

> "For when Los join'd with me he took me in his firy whirlwind;
> My Vegetated portion was hurried from Lambeth's shades;
> He set me down in Felpham's Vale, & prepared a beautiful
> Cottage for me, that in three years I might write all these visions,
> To display Nature's cruel holiness: the deceits of Natural Religion."

The story of the events at Felpham having reached the dwellers in eternity, the poet Milton receives a heavenly command to return to earth, with the double purpose both of redeeming his own imagination from the state of bondage into which it had fallen during his lifetime owing to the detestable nature of his religion, and of delivering Blake from the tyranny of his oppressors. He comes as "the Awakener," to overthrow "the idiot Reasoner," who "laughs at the Man of Imagination." Visionary art is to be restored once more, and the poetry of vision is to silence

for ever those "who pretend to Poetry, that they may destroy Imagination by imitation of Nature's Images drawn from Remembrance." Such an one as Hayley, the mere "Polypus of soft affections without Thought or Vision," is no longer to have dominion over those whose care is alone for the things of the Spirit.

It is well to point out here that Blake's *Jerusalem*, though in all probability it was not published before about 1818, has also the date 1804 upon its title-page, and is also largely concerned with the author's sojourn at Felpham, and has therefore a considerable amount of autobiographical interest; in fact, Blake seems to have transferred a good deal of the material originally intended for *Milton* to its pages.

We have now reached the period of Blake's artistic maturity, following upon the elaboration of the theory of art, which had been constructed during these three years, and on account of which, as has been already pointed out, in spite of the incompatibility of their intelligences, he never ceased to be grateful to his patron. In 1804 came the visit to the Truchsessian Picture Gallery of old masters (of which a description may be found in Gilchrist), accompanied by a new burst of intellectual vision. The history of mysticism provides countless similar instances of the way in

which an apparently trivial circumstance may be possessed of the highest spiritual significance: and a reference to the letter to Hayley, of 23rd October 1804, will show that we are justified by Blake himself in regarding this visit as a landmark in his career, when he became able to carry out his new code of art with all the joy and enthusiasm which inspired the productions of his youth. Evidence style induces me to assign to the beginning of the new period a water-colour drawing entitled "The River of Life," which for the purity and beauty of its colouring as well as the sheer inspiration of its joyous and life-giving qualities, rather than for any definable superiority of design or execution, has found a number of admirers at two recent exhibitions of Blake's work. Its subject is Revelation xxii. 1, 2. The lovely clear blue river of water of life is flowing by a winding course, proceeding out of the throne of God, which is represented by a vast yellow sun encircled by a glory of angelic figures. Upon its banks are the tree of life, with its twelve manner of fruits, and the many "tents and pavilions, gardens and groves" of Paradise, "with its inhabitants walking up and down, in conversations concerning mental delights." Over the midst of the stream is a male figure flying downwards towards his wife, who, with her two infants, is stemming

the current towards the sources of light. Near these, a woman in a pale yellow dress, who is floating above the river, is bending down and taking up water in a cup to drink. On either side of these central figures is a beautiful female figure piping to them. In the latter part of the year 1804, Blake began the series of drawings for Blair's *Grave*, which he completed the following year, and of which a selection were, in 1806, engraved by Schiavonetti. The originals have now almost all disappeared, and the reference to them in the letter from Flaxman to Hayley, dated 18th October 1805, is particularly interesting, as among those mentioned by him as being the most striking is a drawing with the remarkable title of "The Gambols of the Ghosts according with their Affections previous to the Final Judgment," now lost. A good deal of Blake's time at this period was also taken up with the collection of materials for Hayley's *Life of Romney* and the engraving of a plate for this work, as well as of a portrait of Romney, which was not used. He still found time, however, for some original work as well; for in May 1805 he was able to deliver a dozen water-colours to Butts. Among them was the admirable design of "The Wise and Foolish Virgins," of which he afterwards executed the replica for Sir Thomas Lawrence, already alluded to. To 1806

belongs the second of his designs for "The Last Judgment," which comes nearer to that which is described in the letter to Ozias Humphrey than the previous one engraved by Schiavonetti for Blair's *Grave*. The subject is, however, much less elaborately treated than in the Petworth picture, finished two years later. A second commission from Lady Egremont was carried out about the same time as the other; it was an experiment picture in the *fresco* medium, entitled "Satan calling up his Legions," from *Paradise Lost*. This magnificent work is still also at Petworth. It is the "more perfect picture afterward executed for a lady of high rank," alluded to in the *Descriptive Catalogue*. The scene is in lurid darkness at the brink of the fiery lake: everywhere sheets of flame are mounting from gulfs and fissures, and down a sheer cliff a torrent of molten flint is streaming, to join the seething lava flood below. The nude form of Satan, with uplifted arms, stands erect on high, in the midst, against a background of fire. Beelzebub, a crown of gold upon his head, is reclining deep in thought upon a rock below him. Overhead, on either side, is a cluster of rebels pursued headlong from heaven by flaming arrows and hail and many lightnings. All around Satan are the leaders of his host, princes and deities and demons, some of

them still stupefied by their fall, many of them bound and wallowing in liquid fire. The painting of the fire throughout is a wonderful achievement. Some years later, after Blake's death, a third work from his hand found its way to Petworth, being purchased by Lord Egremont from Mrs. Blake. It is an illustration of the characters in Spenser's *Faery Queen*, and was intended to be the companion to the famous picture of the Canterbury Pilgrimage, which is the principal item in the *Descriptive Catalogue*.

From the year 1809, in which the *Descriptive Catalogue* was published, until the time of his introduction to Linnell, we have no letters from Blake's pen. It is not likely, indeed, that many were written by him during these years, as he seems for some time to have isolated himself from nearly all his friends, and to have lived a solitary life. His commissions became fewer and fewer, and it is certain that he was sadly oppressed by poverty.

It was in 1818 that Blake first made the acquaintance of John Linnell the painter, through the introduction of his old friend, George Cumberland. One of the first things which Linnell did for Blake was to present him to his own former master, John Varley, who, both as astrologer and artist, was able to take a lively interest in the genius of his new friend. A considerable intimacy

arose between the two, and it was at Varley's instigation that Blake embarked upon the remarkable series, alluded to by Tatham in the Life, of visionary portraits of historical personages and others, which covers the years 1818–1820. The facsimiles given in Gilchrist will be sufficient to show the character of these productions. Two of the finest of those which I have seen are the heads of King John, and of Lais of Corinth, mistress of Apelles,—the former, a noble visage with a grim look, the head narrowing curiously above the eyes, with a short beard, waving hair down to the neck, and large eyes; the latter, a strangely Lionardesque representation of a woman of very low type. About 1820, Blake took in hand his last and most elaborate picture of "The Last Judgment," 7 feet by 5 feet in dimensions, and containing upwards of a thousand figures, but did not complete it until the year of his death. It has not been seen for a good many years, but it is said to have been sumptuously coloured and much worked up with gold. In 1822 he did replicas of some of his early *Paradise Lost* designs for Linnell. About the same time he was engaged upon one of his last commissions for Butts, a set of water-colour drawings illustrating the Book of Job. He had been attracted from early days by the history of the patriarch, which he would often parallel by the course of his own

life; and ever since his publication in 1793 of a large engraving of Job in affliction, he had from time to time turned his attention to the book. In 1823 be began to make a duplicate set of the designs for Linnell, who had offered to publish a book of engravings to be done from them by the artist. For any account of these illustrations the reader must be referred to Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*; and it is only necessary to mention here that, magnificent as the original water-colour drawings unquestionably are, they are in every case inferior to the final version in the engraving, and that both they themselves and the many existing studies for them are mainly interesting as showing the evolution of the design in the mind of the artist, and the marvellous certainty of judgment that guided him in every elimination or change. The only one of the *Job* designs of this period known to me which can in any way be compared with the engraving, is a varnished water-colour on panel of "Satan smiting Job with sore Boils," in the possession of Sir Charles Dilke, in which the effect of colour is one of the most splendid that Blake ever attained. To 1825 belong a beautiful series of twelve water-colour drawings from *Paradise Regained*, in which the design is at once simple and dignified, while the colour has all the delicacy and finish which characterises his latest

works; for towards the end of his life he departed in some measure from the very austere method of colouring which he originally employed, and permitted himself a more liberal use of the subtleties and varieties of tint of which his medium was capable.

The last great labour of his life, and one of the most remarkable evidences of his extraordinary genius for the invention of design, is the series of ninety-eight illustrations which he made for the *Divine Comedy*, an undertaking which occupied him until the very end, even upon his deathbed, for the prodigious intellectual energy which characterised his whole life, remained to the last creative; and in a letter to Linnell, shortly before death, he wrote: "I am too much attached to Dante to think much of anything else." Though he did not live long enough to bring more than a few of the whole number to completion, yet in every instance, even where the merest pencil outline is all that exists, he never failed to convey all the essentials of his idea, with a vigour and comprehension that showed no signs of decay. Seven of the set only were engraved by him, including the "Paolo and Francesca, with the Whirlwind of Lovers," which is here reproduced, and which is the most beautiful of them. Of the remainder, which he did not live to engrave, the most striking designs among those which approach a finished state are "Dante

conversing with Farinata degli Uberti among the fiery Tombs"; "Antæus setting down Dante and Virgil in the last Circle," in which the giant, who is a grandly drawn figure, clinging on to the rock with his left hand, is bending over the precipice, as, with his right, he puts the two down together upon a rocky platform below; "The Ascent of the Mountain of Purgatory"; and "Dante and Statius sleeping, Virgil watching," with the vision of Rachel and Leah in the moon. The last engraving ever executed by Blake was the message card which he did for his friend Cumberland. It is signed "W. Blake, inv. & sc. A. Æ. 70, 1827." A minutely executed allegorical design surrounds the name "Mr. Cumberland," printed in bastard Gothic letters, showing the punishment which awaits cruelty to animals, and the reward of industry and innocence. On one side, below, are two figures; one with a snare, the other flying two birds at the end of strings, upon whom a reaping angel with a sickle is descending,—the intention being shown by some growing oats close by. On the other side, three rejoicing angels are appearing to an upward floating figure with a distaff. Near them a child is bowling a hoop through the sky. The story of how, at the very end, upon his death-bed, he finished for Tatham the illuminated print of "The Ancient of Days striking the first Circle

of the Earth," may be left to be told by Tatham himself. On the 12th August 1827, Blake's body died; and we may leave his work with a few beautiful words about the man from a letter written by Linnell to Bernard Barton three years later: "He was more like the ancient patterns of virtue than I ever expected to see in this world; he feared nothing so much as being rich, lest he should lose his spiritual riches. He was at the same time the most sublime in his expressions, with the simplicity and gentleness of a child."

Frederick Tatham, author of the Life which follows, was the son of an architect to whom Blake had been introduced by Linnell; he was himself a sculptor and miniature-painter. He was about twenty years of age when he made Blake's acquaintance, only two or three years before the death of the latter. He soon became on most intimate terms with him, and saw him continually until the end. He thus enjoyed unique opportunities of gathering reliable material for the Life, which, together with the brief sketch of the early life given by Malkin in his *Father's Memoirs of His Child*, must always remain the principal contemporary sources, outside his own writings, for the particulars of Blake's biography. After the death of the widow, the whole stock of drawings, en-

gravings, etc., which still remained unsold, as well as a good many copper plates, passed into Tatham's hands. He also came in for a considerable quantity of MS. material, the greater part of which he unhappily destroyed on conscientious grounds, having been told by certain members of the Catholic Apostolic Church, to which he belonged, that many dangerous and pernicious doctrines were contained in them. He furnished an explanation for Gilchrist's *Life* of the method in which Blake's printed drawings were executed. The accuracy of this account was disputed by Linnell, and has been generally doubted. My own investigations have led me to believe it to be substantially correct; and as Linnell seems to have had a particular dislike for Tatham, and was at the same time either unwilling or unable to provide a more exact description, it may be concluded that it was its incompleteness rather than its inaccuracy which led him to a vehement denial of its veracity. Some experiments made by my friend Mr. Graham Robertson, based upon a somewhat fuller account of the process given to him by myself, have been remarkably successful, and certainly reproduce very closely the quality of Blake's own productions. Owing to the very intelligible indignation aroused among Blake-lovers by his destruction of the MSS., Tatham's honesty has also been unjustly

called into question. I have even heard it said that he was in the habit of forging Blake's signature upon drawings of his own manufacture. This I am in a position to deny absolutely. His act of destruction is indeed greatly to be deplored; but weakness and narrow-mindedness are the worst things that he can be accused of on that account. There can be no doubt of the genuineness of his love and admiration of Blake, and I can see no reason to question his sincerity in other matters. His Life, if it is somewhat lacking in both scholarly exactness and literary grace, is on the whole a valuable and trustworthy document; and if it is often marred by the false sentiment belonging to the time at which it was written, it is also full of fine appreciation, and contains some passages of real feeling and beauty. The copy of *Jerusalem* with which the Life is bound up, is a magnificent one, illuminated with extreme beauty by Blake himself; it is the only copy which he ever lived to finish in colours. It is printed in orange, and measures $13\frac{3}{8} \times 10\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The portrait of Mrs. Blake, by George Richmond, here reproduced, is also contained in it; and it has for frontispiece two rather uninteresting likenesses of Blake, at the ages of twenty-eight and sixty-nine years, both drawn by Tatham himself, the former after a sketch from life by Mrs. Blake.

THE LIFE OF WILLIAM BLAKE

BY FREDERICK TATHAM

WILLIAM BLAKE was born on the 20th[1] of November 1757, at 28 Broad Street, Carnaby Market, London, a house now inhabited by Mr. Russell, apothecary; he was the second of five children. His father, James Blake, was a hosier of respectable trade and easy habits, and seems to have been a man well-to-do, of moderate desires, moderate enjoyments, and of substantial worth: his disposition was gentle, and, by all accounts, his temper amiable, and was,

[1] Gilchrist gives the date correctly as the 28th November. The late Dr. Garnett wrote in his monograph on Blake (Seeley & Co., 1895, p. 7, n.): "November 20 has been stated as the date, but the above is shown to be correct by the horoscope drawn for November 28, 7.45 p.m., in *Urania* or the *Astrologer's Chronicle*, 1825, published therefore in Blake's lifetime, and undoubtedly derived from Varley."

by his son's description, a lenient and affectionate father, always more ready to encourage than to chide. Catherine Blake, his wife, and the mother of the artist, has been represented as being possessed of all those endearing sympathies so peculiar to maternal tenderness. The eldest son, John, was the favourite of his father and mother; and, as frequently in life, the object least worthy is most cherished, so he, a dissolute, disreputable youth, carried away the principal of his parent's attachment, leaving the four others, William, James, Catherine, and Robert, to share the interest between them. William often remonstrated, and was as often told to be quiet, and that he would by and by beg his bread at John's door; but, as is sometimes proved to parents' sorrow, their pet will not be petted into honour nor their darling into any other admiration than their own. John was apprenticed to a gingerbread baker, with an enormous premium, served his apprenticeship with reluctance, became abandoned and miserable, and literally, contrary to his parents' presage, sought bread at the door of William. He lived a few reckless days, enlisted as a soldier, and died. James continued the business at the death of his father and mother, and having a saving, somniferous mind, lived a yard and a half life, pestered his brother, the

artist, with timid sentences of bread and cheese advice, got together a little annuity, upon which he supported his only sister, and, vegetating to a moderate age, died about three years before his brother William. Robert, the youngest son, was the affectionate companion of William; they sympathised in their pursuits and sentiments; like plants, planted side by side by a stream, they grew together and entwined the luxuriant tendrils of their expanding minds. They associated and excelled together, and, like all true lovers, delighted in and enhanced each other's beauties.

> "For they were nursed upon the self-same hill,
> Fed the same flock by fountain, shade, and rill."

Robert was of amiable and docile temper, and of a tender and affectionate mind, and like many of those who appear born for early death, his short life was but as the narrow porch to his eternal lot: he died of consumption at twenty-four years of age. Miss Catherine, the only daughter, is still living, having survived nearly all her relations.

William, the artist, appears to have possessed from a child that daring, impetuous, and vigorous temper which was in latter life so singularly characteristic both of him and his sublime inventions. Although easily persuaded, he despised

restraints and rules, so much that his father dared not send him to school. Like the Arabian horse, he is said to have so hated a blow that his father thought it most prudent to withhold from him the liability of receiving punishment. He picked up his education as well as he could. His talent for drawing manifesting itself as spontaneously as it was premature, he was always sketching; and, after having drawn nearly everything around him with considerable ability, he was sent to draw with Pars, a drawing master in the Strand, at ten years of age. He used also at this time to frequent Langford's, the auctioneer, where he saw pictures and bought prints from Raphael, Michael Angelo, Albert Durer, Julio Romano, and others of the great designers of the Cinquecento, and refused to buy any others, however celebrated. Langford favoured him by knocking down the lots he bought so quickly, that he obtained them at a rate suited to the pocket savings of a lad. Langford called him his little connoisseur. Even at this time he met with that opposition and ridicule from his contemporaries (many of whom have since become men of note) that harassed him afterwards: they laughed at his predilection for these great masters. His love for art increasing, and the time of life having arrived when it was deemed necessary to place him under some tutor, a painter of eminence was proposed,

and necessary applications were made; but from the huge premium required, he requested, with his characteristic generosity, that his father would not on any account spend so much money on him, as he thought it would be an injustice to his brothers and sisters. He therefore himself proposed engraving as being less expensive, and sufficiently eligible for his future avocations. Of Basire, therefore, for a premium of fifty guineas, he learnt the art of modern engraving. The trammels of this art, which he never till his very last days overcame, he spent money and time to learn, and had it not been for the circumstance of his having frequent quarrels with his fellow apprentices, concerning matters of intellectual argument, he would perhaps never have handled the pencil, and would consequently have been doomed for ever to furrow upon a copper plate monotonous and regular lines, placed at even distances, without genius and without form. These quarrels existing between the three boys, Basire thought he could not do better than to send Blake out drawing; as he was about to engrave a work for the Antiquarian Society, he sent him, therefore, to Westminster Abbey. "There he found a treasure which he knew how to value. He saw the simple and plain road to the style of art at which he aimed, unentangled in the intricate mazes of modern practice. The monuments of kings and queens in

Westminster Abbey, which surround the Chapel of Edward the Confessor, particularly that of Henry the Third, the beautiful monument and figure of Queen Eleanor, Queen Philippa, and Edward the Third, King Richard the Second and his Queen, were among his first studies; the heads he considered as portraits, and all the ornaments appeared as miracles of art." (See Malkin's life of his child,[1] in which there is a short sketch of Blake, written during his lifetime.) If all his drawings were enumerated from Westminster Abbey, as well as many other churches in and about London, the multitude would no doubt astonish the calculator, for his interest was highly excited and his industry equally inexhaustible. These things he drew beautifully; ever attentive to the delicacies and timorous lineaments of the Gothic handling, he felt and portrayed their beauties so well that his master considered him an acquisition of no mean capacity. An incident showing the suddenness of his temper is related. The Westminster boys were then permitted to roam and loiter about the Abbey at their leisure, and, among their jokes, they chose to interrupt the careful and young student, whose riveted attention and absorbed thought became an object

[1] *A Father's Memoirs of His Child*, by Benj. Heath Malkin, Esq. (London, 1806), contains, at pp. xviii–xli, an account of Blake's "early education in art, derived from his own lips."

of their mischievous envy. One of them is said, after having already tormented him, to have got upon some pinnacle on a level with his scaffold in order better to annoy him. In the impetuosity of his anger, worn out with interruption, he knocked him off and precipitated him to the ground, upon which he fell with terrific violence. The young draughtsman made a complaint to the Dean, who kindly ordered that the door should be closed upon them, and they have never since been allowed to extend their tether to the interior of the Abbey. Blake pursued his task, and his absorption gathered to itself impressions that were never forgotten. His imagination ever after wandered as in a cloister, or clothing itself in the dark stole of mural sanctity, it dwelt amidst the Druid terrors. His mind being simplified by Gothic forms, and his fancy imbued with the livid twilight of past days, it chose for its quaint company such sublime but antiquated associates as the fearful Merlin, Arthur and the knights of his Round Table, the just and wise Alfred, King John, and every other hero of English history and romance. These indigenous abstractions for many of the following years occupied his hand, and ever after tinctured his thoughts and perceptions. The backgrounds of his pictures nearly always exhibited Druidical stones and other symbols of English antiquity. Albion was the hero

of his pictures, prints, and poems. He appeared to be the human abstract of his mystical thoughts. He recounted his deeds, he exhausted the incidents of his history, and when he had accomplished this "he then imagined new." He made him a spiritual essence; representing the country of Britain under this one personification, he has made him the hero of nearly all his works. He has connected Albion with Jerusalem,[1] and Jerusalem with other mysterious images of his own fancy, in such a manner as will be difficult to unravel, but not entirely impossible, it is imagined, after reading the remainder of his writings, which will absorb time and pains, much indeed of both, for his pen was quite as active in his indefatigable hand as was his graver or his pencil; he used all with equal temerity and complete originality.

Between the age of twelve and twenty he wrote several poems, afterward published[2] by the advice and with the assistance of Flaxman, Mrs. Matthews, and others of his friends. They are succinct, original, fanciful, and fiery; but, as a general criticism, it may be said that they are more rude than refined, more clumsy than delicate. Two of them are equal to Ben Jonson.

[1] Cp. *Jerusalem, The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, 1804, *passim*.

[2] *Poetical Sketches*, by W. B., London: Printed in the year MDCCLXXXIII.

SONG[1]

"How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the prince of love beheld,
Who in the summer beams did glide.

He showed me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow,
He led me thro' his gardens fair,
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

With sweet May-dew my wings were wet,
And Phœbus fired my vocal rage,
He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then laughing sports and plays with me,
And stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty."

SONG[2]

"Love and harmony combine,
And around our souls entwine:
While thy branches mix with mine,
And our roots together join.

Joys upon our branches sit,
Chirping loud and singing sweet,
Like gentle streams beneath our feet,
Innocence and virtue meet.

Thou the golden fruit dost bear,
I am clad in flowers fair,
Thy sweet boughs perfume the air,
And the turtle buildeth there.

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[1] *Poetical Sketches*, p. 10. Malkin, who quotes this song, says it was written before the age of fourteen.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Then she sits and feeds her young:
  Sweet I hear her mournful song;
And thy lovely leaves among,
  There is love, I hear his tongue.

There his charming nest doth lay,
  There he sleeps the night away,
There he sports along the day,
  And doth among our branches play."

The others, although well for a lad, are but moderate. His blank verse is prose cut in slices, and his prose inelegant, but replete with imagery. The following is a specimen:[1]

"Who is this with unerring step doth tempt the wilds, where only nature's foot hath trod. 'Tis Contemplation, daughter of Grey Morning. Majestical she steppeth, and with her pure quill on every flower writeth Wisdom's name. Now lowly bending, whispers in mine ear: O man, how great, how little art thou. O man, slave for each moment, Lord of eternity, Seest thou where mirth sits on the painted cheek; doth it not seem ashamed and grow immoderate to brave it out? O what a humble garb true joy puts on. Those who want happiness must stoop to find it: it is a flower that grows in every vale. Vain, foolish man that roams on lofty rocks! where, because his garments are swollen with wind, he fancies he is grown into a giant."

The aphorism on happiness is worthy of his after days; he seems at this time to have sighed after something invisible, for he complains in these words: "I am wrapped in mortality, my flesh is a prison, and my bones the bars of death."[2]

About this time Blake took to painting, and

[1] *Poetical Sketches*, p. 63.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

his success in it being a matter of opinion, it will require some care to give a fair account. Oil painting was recommended to him as the only medium through which breadth, force, and sufficient rapidity could be obtained. He made several attempts, and found himself quite unequal to the management of it. His great objections were that the picture, after it was painted, sunk so much that it ceased to retain the brilliancy and luxury that he intended, and also that no definite line, no positive end to the form could, even with the greatest of his ingenuity, be obtained: all his lines dwindled and his clearness melted. From these circumstances it harassed him; he grew impatient and rebellious, and flung it aside, tired with ill success and tormented with doubts. He then attacked it with all the indignation he could collect, and finally relinquished it to men, if not of less minds, of less ambition. He had Michael Angelo on his side, without doubt, and a great many of the old genuine painters. Desiring that his colours should be as pure and as permanent as precious stones, he could not with oil obtain his end. The writer of this being a sculptor, he has not had the opportunity of collecting materials for Mr. Blake's defence, but he has no doubt that his hatred to oil as a vehicle was produced by some great defect in it, as he has also no doubt, in spite of what cavillers

have irritated Blake to say, that he possessed too much sound sense and judgment to be absolutely wrong, although he might in his violence have said more than he could prove. Blake seemed intended for the fifteenth century, when real energy of mind gained the appropriate rapidity of hand, and when the vehicle, if not such as he invented, was in much better command for sublime compositions; there might have been some variation in the vehicle that was enough to make all the difference, and that vehicle might have been such an one as he would not have complained of. The author has seen pictures of Blake's in the possession of Wm. Butts, Esq., Fitzroy Square, that have appeared exactly like the old cabinet pictures of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, where he has touched the lights with white composed of whiting and glue, of which material he laid the ground of his panel. Two of these pictures are of the most sublime composition and artistic workmanship; they are not drawings on canvas, as some of his others, but they are superlative specimens of genuine painter-like handling and force, and are little inferior in depth, tone, and colour to any modern oil picture in the country.

During these paroxysms of indignation he is said to have come in contact with Sir Joshua Reynolds, but it is very odd that the man whose

pictures were already cracked and split, and likely to be much more so, from the insufficiency or the misuse of his vehicle, turned his deaf side to his remarks; nay, he is said to have been quite angry with him for scrutinising so tender a subject. Sir Joshua Reynolds was indeed a clever painter, but he was too fond of the comforts of life to give even an hour a day for any other experiments but those which would enable him to paint with greater celerity. Sir Joshua made experiments, they say. No doubt he did. Well, then, the least that can be said is, that he began at the wrong end, like any other blunderer, and concluded in making his colours so bad that many of his pictures now possess no other quality than those which they still would have had if they had been always divested of colour: bold handling, fine judgment, able delineation of form, and great knowledge of nature. Some of his pictures were coloured once, but are not coloured now, for they have cracked and split and flown worse than those of any other painter extant. Was he, then, the man to sneer at what might have been an improvement if it had been tried by more than one. It is irritating to hear a sick man curse the salve of his sore place. Very singular it is to know that many of the best painters do not paint with the oil vehicle, or, if they do, in a very small quantity. Fuseli painted with

very little oil, but then oil painters consider Fuseli no colourist. What is colouring? It is a most vague term, and is generally used in a still more vague manner. Blake wrote thus upon it:[1]

"The eye that can prefer the colouring of Titian and Corregio and Rubens ought to be modest, and doubt its own powers. Connoisseurs talk as if Raphael and Michael Angelo have never seen the colouring of Titian and Corregio; they ought to know that Corregio was born two years before Michael Angelo, and Titian but four years after: both Raphael and Michael Angelo knew the Venetian, and contemned and rejected all he did with the utmost disdain, as that which is fabricated for the purpose of destroying art. The eyes of stupid cunning will never be pleased with the work any more than the look of self-devoting genius. The quarrel of the Florentine with the Venetian is not because he does not understand drawing, but because he does not understand colouring. How should he, when he does not know how to draw a hand or foot, know how to colour it? Colouring does not depend on where the colours are put, but on where the lights and darks are put, and all depends on form or outline, on where that is put; where that is wrong the colouring never can be right."

[1] *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures, Poetical and Historical Inventions*, painted by William Blake, 1809: preface.

Fuseli was expected to paint his Witches with the carnations of Flora and Venus, and the author of the cavern depths of the Sistine Chapel is deemed unworthy to hold the palette or to use the brush. Because Fuseli coloured a witch like a witch, and Michael Angelo coloured a prophet like a prophet, these men are called no colourists. That the greatest men should colour worst is an enigma perfectly inexplicable; but after apologising for the digression, if the reader should want any more light upon this obscure subject, he must ask the picture dealers or their fry: it will of them be learnt that nobody can colour well but those that can draw ill, in an equivalent ratio. Blake painted on panel or canvas covered with three or four layers of whitening and carpenter's glue, as he said the nature of gum was to crack; for as he used several layers of colour to produce his depths, the coats necessarily in the deepest parts became so thick that they were likely to peel off. Washing his pictures over with glue, in the manner of a varnish, he fixed the colours, and at last varnished with a white hard varnish of his own making. It must, however, be confessed that his pictures mostly are not very deep, but they have an unrivalled tender brilliancy. He took infinite pains with them, coloured them very highly, and certainly, without prejudice, either for or against, has pro-

duced as fine works as any ancient painter. He can be excelled by none where he is successful. Like his thoughts, his paintings seem to be inspired by fairies, and his colours look as if they were the bloom dropped from the brilliant wings of the spirits of the prism. This may appear too much to be said of the mad Blake, as he was called by those too grovelling and too ignorant to discern his merits. Mr. Butts' collection is enough in all conscience to prove this, and more, and whoever does not perceive the beauties of this splendid collection ought indeed to find fault with modesty and censure with a blush.

In his twenty-fourth year he fell in love with a young woman, who by his own account and according to his own knowledge was no trifler. He wanted to marry her, but she refused, and was as obstinate as she was unkind. He became ill, and went to Kew, near Richmond, for a change of air and renovation of health and spirits, and as far as is possible to know lodged at the house of a market gardener whose name was Boutcher. The Boutchers appear to have been a respectable and industrious family. He was relating to the daughter, a girl named Catherine, the lamentable story of Polly Wood, his implacable lass, upon which Catherine expressed her deep sympathy, it is supposed, in such a tender and

affectionate manner, that it quite won him. He immediately said, with the suddenness peculiar to him, "Do you pity me?" "Yes, indeed I do," answered she. "Then I love you," said he again. Such was their courtship. He was impressed by her tenderness of mind, and her answer indicated her previous feeling for him: for she has often said that upon her mother's asking her who among her acquaintances she could fancy for a husband, she replied that she had not yet seen the man, and she has further been heard to say that when she first came into the room in which Blake sat, she instantly recognised (like Britomart in Merlin's wondrous glass) her future partner, and was so near fainting that she left his presence until she had recovered. After this interview, Blake left the house, having recruited his health and spirits, and having determined to take Catherine Boutcher to wife. He returned to his lodgings and worked incessantly that he might be able to accomplish this end, at the same time resolving that he would not see her until he succeeded. This interval, which she felt dolefully long, was one whole year, at the expiration of which, with the approbation and consent of his parents, he married this interesting, beautiful, and affectionate girl. Nimble with joy and warm with the glow of youth, this bride was presented to her noble bridegroom. The morning of their married

life was bright as the noon of their devoted love, the noon as clear as the serene evening of their mutual equanimity. Although not handsome, he must have had a noble countenance, full of expression and animation; his hair was of a yellow brown, and curled with the utmost crispness and luxuriance; his locks, instead of falling down, stood up like a curling flame, and looked at a distance like radiations, which with his fiery eye and expansive forehead, his dignified and cheerful physiognomy, must have made his appearance truly prepossessing. After his marriage he took lodgings in Green Street, Leicester Square.

It is now necessary to mention somewhat concerning the fanciful representations that Blake asserted were presented to his mind's eye. Difficult as this subject is, it cannot be omitted without a sacrifice to the memory of this great man. He always asserted that he had the power of bringing his imaginations before his mind's eye, so completely organised, and so perfectly formed and evident, that he persisted that while he copied the vision (as he called it) upon his plate or canvas, he could not err, and that error and defect could only arise from the departure or inaccurate delineation of this unsubstantial scene. He said that he was the companion of spirits, who taught, rebuked, argued, and advised with all the familiarity of personal inter-

course. What appears more odd still, was the power he contended he had of calling up any personage of past days, to delineate their forms and features, and to converse upon the topic most incidental to the days of their own existence. How far this is probable must be a question left either to the credulity or the faith of each person. It is fair, however, to say that what Blake produced from these characters, in delineating them, was often so curiously original, and yet so finely expressed, that it was difficult, if prejudices were cast away, to disbelieve totally this power. It is well known to all inquiring men that Blake was not the only individual who enjoyed this peculiar gift. A great and learned German, Emanuel Swedenborg, whose writings, as well as being so peculiar, are so interesting, saw visions of eternity, a full account of which he gives in his voluminous writings. After having applied himself, in early life, to the minutest studies of philosophy, mathematics, mechanics, and every skilful and theoretical occupation, after having been employed by his country in the most conspicuous and responsible offices, he suddenly (being as suddenly called by a vision) devoted his life to the most abstruse theological discussions and dilations, which, after having developed in vision, he wrote. Such things, indeed, are they, that unquestionably could not be invented by one ever so ingenious

(vide *Life of Swedenborg*). Swedenborg was not a madman, nor does he appear to have been considered so by his contemporaries. His tenets after his death propagated, and, like all religious creeds, soon formed a sect, which sect has at some periods been very numerous. Flaxman belonged to them, as have many other as judicious men. Although it would not be irrelevant, it would be tedious to narrate Swedenborg's opinions, or rather Swedenborg's visions, for he asserted that he only gave a detail and history of what he saw and heard. All that is necessary to prove now is, that other men, other sensible men, such as scarcely could be designated as mad or stupid, did see into an immaterial life denied to most. All that is proposed here, further, is that it is a possible thing, that it does not require either a madman to see or an idiot to believe that such things are. Blake asserted, from a boy, that he did see them; even when a child, his mother beat him for running in and saying that he saw the prophet Ezekiel under a tree in the fields. In this incredulous age it is requisite, before this possibility is admitted, even as a doubt or question, that it should be said that he who inefficiently attempts to defend this power, never has been accustomed to see them, although he has known others besides Blake, on whose veracity and sanity he could equally well rely, who have been thus favoured. The Cock

Lane ghost story, the old women's tales, and the young bravo who defies the ghost in the tap-room, that he shudders at in his walk home, are foolishly mixed up with Blake's visions. They are totally different; they are mental abstractions, that are not necessarily accompanied with fear, such as ghosts and apparitions, which either appear to be, or are, seen by the mortal eyes, which circumstance alone horrifies. These visions of Blake seem to have been more like peopled imaginations and personified thoughts; they only horrified where they represented any scene in which horrors were depicted, as a picture or a poem. Richard Brothers has been classed as one possessing this power, but he was really a decided madman; he asserted that he was nephew to God the Father, and in a mad-house he died, as well indeed he might. Brothers is only classed with Swedenborg in order to ridicule Swedenborg and bring him into contempt. Blake and Brothers, therefore, must not be placed together.

Again, in reference to the authenticity of Blake's visions, let anyone contemplate the designs in this book.[1] Are they not only new in their method and manner, but actually new in their class and origin? Do they look like the localities of common circumstances, or of lower worlds? The combinations are

[1] *Jerusalem, The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, 1804. The present *Life* being bound up with a coloured example of this work.

chimerical, the forms unusual, the inventions abstract; the poem not only abstruse, but absolutely, according to common rules of criticism, as near ridiculous as it is completely heterogeneous. With all that is incomprehensible in the poem, with all that might by some be termed ridiculous in the plan, the designs are possessed of some of the most sublime ideas, some of the most lofty thoughts, some of the most noble conceptions possible to the mind of man. You may doubt, however, the means, and you may criticise the peculiarity of the notions, but you cannot but admire, nay, "wonder at with great admiration," these expressive, these sublime, these awful diagrams of an eternal phantasy. Michael Angelo, Julio Romano, or any other great man, never surpassed Plates 25, 35, 37, 46, 51, 76, 94, and many of the stupendous and awful scenes with which this laborious work is so thickly ornamented.

> "Visions of glory, spare my aching sight;
> Ye unborn ages, crowd not on my soul."

Even supposing the poetry to be the mere vehicle or a mere alloy for the sake of producing or combining these wonderful thoughts, it should at all events be looked upon with some respect.

But to return to the biography. Blake continued to apply himself, as heretofore, to the art he so dearly loved and so implicitly followed. He

removed to a house in Poland Street,[1] Oxford Street, where he lived some years. He then changed his residence to Hercules Buildings,[2] Lambeth, at which place he wrote and designed some of his largest and most important works. It was here that Flaxman used to come and see him, and sit drinking tea in the garden under the shadow of the grape vine which Mrs. Blake had very carefully trained. Mr. and Mrs. Flaxman were highly delighted with Blake's Arcadian arbour, as well indeed they might, for they all sat with ripe fruit hanging in rich clusters around their heads. These two great men had known each other from boyhood. Flaxman was a cheerful, lively young man, was very good company, and sang beautifully, having an excellent and musical voice, as well as almost all of the qualities requisite for good fellowship and innocent convivial mirth. This house and garden was adjoining the old Astley's Theatre, and an anecdote showing his courage, as well as his utter detestation of human slavery, is too interesting and characteristic to remain untold. Blake was standing at one of his windows, which looked into Astley's premises (the man who established the theatre still called by his name), and saw a boy hobbling along with a log to his foot, such an one as is put on a horse or ass to prevent their straying. Blake called

[1] In 1787. [2] In 1793.

his wife and asked her for what reason that log could be placed upon the boy's foot. She answered that it must be for a punishment for some inadvertency. Blake's blood boiled, and his indignation surpassed his forbearance. He sallied forth, and demanded in no very quiescent terms that the boy should be loosed, and that no Englishman should be subjected to those miseries, which he thought were inexcusable even towards a slave. After having succeeded in obtaining the boy's release in some way or other, he returned home. Astley by this time, having heard of Blake's interference, came to his house and demanded, in an equally peremptory manner, by what authority he dare come athwart his method of jurisdiction. To which Blake replied with such warmth, that blows were very nearly the consequence. The debate lasted long, but, like all wise men whose anger is unavoidably raised, they ended in mutual forgiveness and mutual respect. Astley saw that his punishment was too degrading, and admired Blake for his humane sensibility, and Blake desisted from wrath when Astley was pacified. As this is an example truly worthy of imitation to all those whose anger is either excited by indignation or called forth by defence, it may not be out of place to say, if all quarrels were thus settled, the time would shortly come when the lion would lie down with the lamb, and the little child would lead them.

Blake resided in Hercules Buildings in a pretty, clean house of eight or ten rooms, and at first kept a servant, but finding (as Mrs. Blake declared, and as everyone else knows) the more service the more inconvenience, she, like all sensible women who are possessed of industry and health, and only moderate means, relinquished this incessant tax upon domestic comfort, did all the work herself, kept the house clean and herself tidy, besides printing all Blake's numerous engravings, which was a task alone sufficient for any industrious woman. But, however, as there is no state, or scheme, or plan without its accompanying evil, Blake had reason to regret his having left no one in possession of his house during his and Mrs. Blake's absence, for one day, paying some friendly visit, some thieves entered it and carried away plate to the value of £60 and clothes to the amount of £40 more. Some persons may say, Had poor Blake ever in his whole life £60 worth of plate to lose? Had poor half-starved Blake ever a suit of clothes beyond the tatters on his back? Yes!!! he enjoyed in the early part of his life not only comforts but necessaries, and in the latter part of his life, be it said, in vindication of a Divine Providence, that never forsakes the devout and excellent, he always possessed such external and substantial means of solace and happiness that, together with

his own contented disposition and Mrs. Blake's excellent management, left him even in person, although far from gross, round and comfortable, and at one time nearly what may be called portly. By way of contradiction to the report of Blake's poverty, be it known that he could even find money enough to lend; for when a certain free-thinking speculator, the author of many elaborate philosophical treatises, said that his children had not a dinner, Blake lent him £40, nearly all he had at that time by him, and had the mortification upon calling upon him on the following Sunday, to find that his wife, who was a dressy and what is called a pretty woman, had squandered some large portion of the money upon her worthless sides. She had the audacity to ask Mrs. Blake's opinion of a very gorgeous dress, purchased the day following Blake's compassionate gift: for there is little doubt so great a difficulty as the payment of a debt never was attempted by such careless ones as those. Such people are a prey upon the assiduous, and a heavy drag to the never-failing industry of the active man, whose sagacity is wealth, whose energy is gain, and whose labours are ever blessed with the abundance they deserve. Industry and frugality accompany each other through lands fat with plenty, and meadows fed with the streams of exuberance; they enjoy and praise, are satisfied and rejoice. Idleness and

extravagance prowl through the deserts of want, and where it should happen they find a repast, in unthankfulness and ignorance they gorge and gormandise; they then loiter during the interval of their sloth until their wants have again returned, and their ungrateful entrails are demanding more. Emptiness is indeed their curse, and repletion the utmost paradise of their vacant thoughts.

Another anecdote may be given to shew that Blake could not have suffered much from absolute want. About this time he taught drawing, and was engaged for that purpose by some families of high rank; which, by the bye, he could not have found very profitable, for after his lesson he got into conversation with his pupils, and was found so entertaining and pleasant, possessing such novel thoughts and such eccentric notions, together with such jocose hilarity and amiable demeanour, that he frequently found himself asked to stay to dinner, and spend the evening in the same interesting and lively manner in which he had consumed the morning. Thus he stopped whole days from his work at home; but nevertheless he continued teaching, until a remarkable effort and kind flirt of fortune brought this mode of livelihood to an inevitable close. He was recommended, and nearly obtained an appointment, to teach drawing to the Royal Family. Blake stood aghast: not, indeed,

from any republican humours, not from any disaffection to his superiors, but because he would have been drawn into a class of society superior to his previous pursuits and habits; he would have been expected to have lived in comparative respectability, not to say splendour—a mode of life, as he thought, derogatory to the simplicity of his designs and deportment. He had again, as about oil painting, Michael Angelo on his side, who, though rich, preferred living as a poor man, the habits of whom, it must be confessed, are the most conducive and congenial to study and application.

His friends ridiculed and blamed him by turns, but Blake found an excuse by resigning all his other pupils, and continued to suffice himself upon his frugality, to find plenty in what others have called want, and wealth in the efforts of his own mind. Another anecdote for the same purpose. His friend Hayley, as will afterwards be more fully shown, begged him to take to painting miniatures, which he could do, and had before done so beautifully. He painted and he pleased; his connection increased without much effort, and he obtained sufficient to occupy the whole of his time. But, sighing after his fancies and visionary pursuits, he rebelled and fled fifty miles away for refuge from the lace caps and powdered wigs of his priggish sitters, and resumed his quaint dreams and immeasurable phantasies,

never more to forsake them for pelf and portraiture.

A beautiful story may be related in which Blake's means as well as his sympathetic nature may be further established. A young man passed his house daily whose avocations seemed to lead him backward and forward to some place of study, carrying a portfolio under his arm. He looked interesting and eager, but sickly. After some time Blake sent Mrs. Blake to call the young man in; he came and told them that he was studying the arts. Blake from this took a high interest in him, and gave him every instruction possible; but, alas! there was a worm lying at the root, whose bite, however, Blake was raised up to assuage. The young man shortly after fell sick, and was laid upon his bed; his illness was long and his sufferings were great, during which time Mrs. Blake or Blake never omitted visiting him daily and administering medicine, money, or wine, and every other requisite until death relieved their adopted of all earthly care and pain. Every attention, every parental tenderness was exhibited by the charitable pair. Blake could not, therefore, have been poor, or at all events he could not possibly be in starvation, to have been able to have rendered such timely and such benevolent assistance to others. Besides, it is a fact known to the writer, that Mrs. Blake's frugality

always kept a guinea or sovereign for any emergency, of which Blake never knew, even to the day of his death. This she did for years, and when a man has always got a sovereign in his pocket, and owes nothing, he is in this land of debt decidedly otherwise than poor.

Through the medium of Flaxman he was introduced to Hayley, who, being much interested, requested him to come down to Felpham,[1] in Sussex, to a cottage near his residence, to engrave plates from his poems, and also to assist him in gathering his materials for the life of Cowper, afterwards published. During his stay of three years he was thus occupied, and also in making life-sized circular portraits of all the great poets[2] for the library of Felpham House; but in consequence of Hayley's acquaintances being so desirous to possess miniatures by him (as before mentioned) he left for No. 3 Fountain Court[3] (a house belonging to his wife's brother), the lodging in which he lived during the whole of his latter days, and in which he died. Blake had in this house two good-sized rooms and kitchens. He fixed upon these lodgings as being more congenial to his habits, as he was very much accustomed to get out of his bed in the

[1] In 1800.

[2] See note 1, p. 85.

[3] On his return from Felpham, in 1803, Blake took rooms at 17 South Molton Street; and it was not until some years later (1821) that he removed to 3 Fountain Court, Strand. See p. 227.

night to write for hours, and return to bed for the rest of the night after having committed to paper pages and pages of his mysterious phantasies. He wrote much and often, and he sometimes thought that if he wrote less he must necessarily do more graving and painting, and he has debarred himself of his pen for a month or more ; but upon comparison has found by no means so much work accomplished, and the little that was done by no means so vigorous.

He was a subject of much mental temptation and mental suffering, and required sometimes much soothing. He has frequently had recourse to the following stratagem to calm the turbulence of his thoughts. His wife being to him a very patient woman, he fancied that while she looked on at him as he worked, her sitting quite still by his side, doing nothing, soothed his impetuous mind; and he has many a time, when a strong desire presented itself to overcome any difficulty in his plates or drawings, in the middle of the night risen, and requested her to get up with him and sit by his side, in which she as cheerfully acquiesced.

When roused or annoyed he was possessed of a violent temper; but in his passions there was some method, for while he was engraving a large portrait of Lavater, not being able to obtain what he wanted, he threw the plate completely across the room. Upon his relating this he was asked

whether he did not injure it, to which he replied with his usual fun: "Oh! I took good care of that!" He was a subject often of much internal perturbation and over-anxiety, for he has spoilt as much work (which every artist knows is not only easy, but common) by over-labour as would take some a whole life of ordinary industry to accomplish. Mrs. Blake has been heard to say that she never saw him, except when in conversation or reading, with his hands idle; he scarcely ever mused upon what he had done. Some men muse and call it thinking, but Blake was a hard worker; his thought was only for action, as a man plans a house, or a general consults his map and arranges his forces for a battle. His mental acquirements were incredible; he had read almost everything in whatsoever language, which language he always taught himself. His conversation, therefore, was highly interesting, and never could one converse on any subject with him, but they would gain something quite as new as noble from his eccentric and elastic mind. It is a remarkable fact that among the volumes bequeathed by Mrs. Blake to the author of this sketch, the most thumbed from use are his Bible and those books in other languages. He was very fond of Ovid, especially the *Fasti*. He read Dante when he was past sixty, although before he never knew a word of Italian, and

he drew from it a hundred such designs as have never been done by any Englishman at any period or by any foreigner since the fifteenth century, and then his only competitor was Michael Angelo.

It now becomes, from the brevity of the present manuscript, the painful duty of the biographer to traverse to the period to which Blake's own lines are immediately applicable. His pilgrimage was nearly at an end, and of such he thus spoke:[1]

> "But when once I did descry
> The Immortal man that cannot die,
> Thro' evening shades I haste away
> To close the labours of my day."

It has been supposed his excessive labour without the exercise he used formerly to take (having relinquished the habit of taking very long walks) brought on the complaint which afterwards consumed him. In his youth he and his wife would start in the morning early, and walk out twenty miles and dine at some pretty and sequestered inn, and would return the same day home, having travelled forty miles. Mrs. Blake would do this without excessive fatigue. Blake has been known to walk fifty miles in the day, but being told by some physicians that such long walks were in-

[1] For children, *The Gates of Paradise*, 1793. Published by W. Blake: ll. 41–44.

jurious, he discontinued them, and went so far to the other extreme that it has been said he remained in the house so long that [it] was considered far from extraordinary his days were shortened. About a year before he died, he was seized with a species of ague (as it was then termed), of which he was alternately better and worse. He was at times very ill, but rallied and all had hopes of him; indeed, such was his energy that even then, though sometimes confined to his bed, he sat up drawing his most stupendous works. In August he gradually grew worse and required much more of his wife's attention; indeed, he was decaying fast. His patience, during his agonies of pain, is described to have been exemplary.

Life, however, like a dying flame, flashed once more, gave one more burst of animation, during which he was cheerful, and free from the tortures of his approaching end; he thought he was better, and, as he was sure to do, asked to look at the work over which he was occupied when seized with his last attack. It was a coloured print of the Ancient of Days striking the first circle of the Earth,[1] done

[1] See plate, which is taken from the actual example (now in the Whitworth Institute, Manchester), done for Tatham on the present occasion. The original is printed in yellow, from a plate executed in Blake's own peculiar method of relief-etching, and coloured by hand. The colouring is vivid, but carefully put on—red, yellow, and deep

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS STRIKING THE FIRST CIRCLE
OF THE EARTH

expressly by commission for the writer of this. After he had worked upon it he exclaimed: "There, I have done all I can! It is the best I have ever finished. I hope Mr. Tatham will like it." He threw it suddenly down and said: "Kate, you have been a good wife; I will draw your portrait." She sat near his bed, and he made a drawing which, though not a likeness, is finely touched and expressed. He then threw that down, after having drawn for an hour, and began to sing Hallelujahs and songs of joy and triumph which Mrs. Blake described as being truly sublime in music and in verse; he sang loudly and with true ecstatic energy, and seemed so happy that he had finished his course, that he had run his race, and that he was shortly to arrive at the goal, to receive the prize of his high and eternal calling. After having answered a few questions concerning his wife's means of living after his decease, and after having spoken of the writer of this as a likely person to become the manager of her affairs, his

blue above, deep blue and black below; gold is also used. The subject is taken from *Paradise Lost*, book vii. ll. 225–31:

> "He took the golden Compasses, prepar'd
> In God's Eternal store, to circumscribe
> This Universe, and all created things:
> One foot he center'd, and the other turn'd
> Round through the vast profunditie obscure;
> And said, thus farr extend, thus farr thy bounds,
> This be thy just Circumference, O World."

spirit departed like the sighing of a gentle breeze, and he slept in company with the mighty ancestors he had formerly depicted. He passed from death to an immortal life on the 12th of August 1827, being in his sixty-ninth year. Such was the entertainment of the last hour of his life. His bursts of gladness made the room peal again. The walls rang and resounded with the beatific symphony. It was a prelude to the hymns of saints. It was an overture to the choir of heaven. It was a chaunt for the response of angels.

No taught hymns, no psalms got by rote from any hypocritical sty of cant, no sickly sanctified buffoonery, but the pure and clear stream of divine fervour, enlivened by firm faith and unrelenting hope. "By the rivers he had sat down and wept: he had hung his harp upon the willow: for how should he sing the Lord's song in a strange land"; but he is now on the borders of his promise, he is tuning his strings, he is waking up his lyre, he is lifting up the throat as the lark in the clouds of morn. He is rising, he is on the wing: sing, ye sons of morning: for the vapours of night are flown, and the dews of darkness are passed away.

> "There entertain him, all the saints above,
> In solemn troops and sweet societies,
> That sing, and singing in their glory move,
> And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes."

He was buried on the 17th, and was followed to the grave by Mr. Calvert of Brixton, painter and engraver; Mr. Richmond, painter; the writer of this; and his brother, a clergyman. He was interred in Bunhill Fields. His complaint turned out to be the gall mixing with the blood.

William Blake in stature was short, but well made, and very well proportioned; so much so that West, the great history painter, admired much the form of his limbs; he had a large head and wide shoulders. Elasticity and promptitude of action were the characteristics of his contour. His motions were rapid and energetic, betokening a mind filled with elevated enthusiasm; his forehead was very high and prominent over the frontals; his eye most unusually large and glassy, with which he appeared to look into some other world. The best and only likeness of this glowing feature that can be produced is Shakespeare's description of the eye of the inspired poet in his *Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> "The poet's eye with a fine frenzy rolling—
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven:
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name."

In youth he surprised everyone with his vigour and activity. In age he impressed all with his

unfading ardour and unabated energy. His beautiful grey locks hung upon his shoulders; and dressing as he always did in latter years in black, he looked, even in person, although without any effort towards eccentricity, to be of no ordinary character. In youth, he was nimble; in old age, venerable. His disposition was cheerful and lively, and was never depressed by any cares but those springing out of his art. He was the attached friend of all who knew him, and a favourite with everyone but those who oppressed him, and against such his noble and impetuous spirit boiled, and fell upon the aggressor like a water-spout from the troubled deep. Yet, like Moses, he was one of the meekest of men. His patience was almost incredible: he could be the lamb; he could plod as a camel; he could roar as a lion. He was everything but subtle; the serpent had no share in his nature; secrecy was unknown to him. He would relate those things of himself that others make it their utmost endeavour to conceal. He was possessed of a peculiar obstinacy, that always bristled up when he was either unnecessarily opposed or invited out to show like a lion or a bear. Many anecdotes could be related in which there is sufficient evidence to prove that many of his eccentric speeches were thrown forth more as a piece of sarcasm upon the inquirer than from his real opinion. If he thought

a question were put merely for a desire to learn, no man could give advice more reasonably and more kindly; but if that same question were put for idle curiosity, he retaliated by such an eccentric answer as left the inquirer more afield than ever. He then made an enigma of a plain question: hence arose many vague reports of his oddities. He was particularly so upon religion. His writings abounded with these sallies of independent opinion. He detested priestcraft and religious cant. He wrote much upon controversial subjects, and, like all controversies, these writings are inspired by doubt and made up of vain conceits and whimsical extravagances. A bad cause requires a long book. Generally advocating one in which there is a flaw, the greatest controversialists are the greatest doubters. They are trembling needles between extreme points. Irritated by hypocrisy and the unequivocal yielding of weak and interested men, he said and wrote unwarrantable arguments; but unalloyed and unencumbered by opposition, he was in all essential points orthodox in his belief. But he put forth ramifications of doubt, that by his vigorous and creative mind were watered into the empty enormities of extravagant and rebellious thoughts.

He was intimate with a great many of the most learned and eminent men of his time, whom he

generally met at Johnson's, the bookseller of St. Paul's Churchyard. It was there he met Tom Paine, and was the cause of his escaping to America, when the Government were seeking for him for the punishment of his seditious and refractory writings. Blake advised him immediately to fly, for he said: "If you are not now sought, I am sure you soon will be." Paine took the hint directly, and found he had just escaped in time. In one of his conversations, Paine said that religion was a law and a tie to all able minds. Blake, on the other hand, said what he was always asserting, that the religion of Jesus was a perfect law of liberty. Fuseli was very intimate with Blake, and Blake was more fond of Fuseli than any other man on earth. Blake certainly loved him, and at least Fuseli admired Blake and learned from him, as he himself confessed, a great deal. Fuseli and Flaxman both said that Blake was the greatest man in the country, and that there would come a time when his works would be invaluable. Before Fuseli knew Blake, he used to fill his pictures with all sorts of fashionable ornaments and tawdry embellishments. Blake's simplicity imbued the minds of all who knew him; his life was a pattern, and has been spoken of as such from the pulpit. His abstraction from the world, his power of self-denial, his detestation of hypocrisy and gain, his

hatred of gold and the things that perish, rendered him indeed well able to have exclaimed :

"In innocency I have washed my hands."

His poetry (and he has written a great deal) was mostly unintelligible, but not so much so as the works written in the manner of the present one. Generally speaking, he seems to have published those most mysterious. That which could be discerned was filled [with] imagery and fine epithet. What but admiration can be expressed of such poetry as this :

LONDON.[1]

"I wander thro' each chartered street,
  Near where the winding Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
  Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
  In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice of every ban,
  The mind-forged manacles I hear.

How the chimney sweepers cry,
  Every blackening church appals,
And the hapless soldier's sigh
  Runs in blood down palace walls.

But most through midnight streets I hear
  How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born infant's tear,
  And blights with plagues the marriage hearse."

[1] From *Songs of Experience*, 1794.

THE TIGER.[1]

"Tiger, Tiger, burning bright
In the forest of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire,
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart,
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand and what dread feet?

What the hammer, what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil, what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did He smile His work to see,
Did He who made the lamb make thee?

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?"

A beautiful stanza selected from the following work:[2]

"The Rhine was red with human blood,
The Danube rolled in purple tide,
O'er the Euphrates Satan stood,
And over Asia stretched his pride."

---

[1] From *Songs of Experience*, 1794.

[2] *Jerusalem*, 1804: p. 27.

Another:[1]

> "For a tear is an intellectual thing,
> And a sigh is the sword of an angel king,
> And the bitter groan of a martyr's woe
> Is an arrow from the Almighty's bow."

It may be well said of such poetry as this, such thrilling lines as these, that they are "Thoughts that breathe and words that burn." There is another, very tender:[2]

THE LAMB.

> "Little lamb, who made thee?
> Dost thou know who made thee,
> Gave thee life and bid thee feed
> By the stream and o'er the mead,
> Gave thee clothing of delight,
> Softest clothing woolly light,
> Gave thee such a tender voice,
> Making all the vales rejoice?
> Little lamb, who made thee?
> Dost thou know who made thee?
>
> Little lamb, I'll tell thee,
> Little lamb, I'll tell thee,
> He is callèd by thy name,
> For He calls himself a lamb,
> He is meek and He is mild,
> He became a little child;
> I a child and thou a lamb,
> We are callèd by His name.
> Little lamb, God bless thee,
> Little lamb, God bless thee."

There is another in which is beautifully related the tender and exquisite circumstance of a mother

[1] *Jerusalem*, p. 52.

[2] *Songs of Innocence*, 1789.

looking on her sleeping infant, which he calls a cradle song:[1]

"Sweet babe, in thy face
Holy image I can trace;
Sweet babe, once like thee,
Thy Maker lay and wept for me.

Wept for me, for thee, for all,
When He was an infant small;
Thou His image ever see,
Heavenly face that smiles on thee.

Smiles on thee, on me, on all,
Who became an infant small,
Infant smiles are His own smiles,
Heaven and earth to peace beguiles."

These quotations are from the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, engraved on type plates, which work the author of this is now in possession of, by the kindness of Mr. Blake, who bequeathed them to him, as well as all of his works that remained unsold at his death, being writings, paintings, and a very great number of copperplates, of whom impressions may be obtained.

Catherine Blake, the buttress of her husband's hopes, the stay to his thoughts, the admirer of his genius, the companion of his solitude and the solace of his days, was now left without the protecting hand of the most affectionate of husbands. She grieved much, but she had a hopeful and a

[1] *Songs of Innocence.*

CATHERINE BLAKE

trustful mind in the providence of her Maker. She endured with almost unexampled fortitude this afflicting dispensation of Almighty Power. No children to soothe, scarcely a relation to console, no one with whom she had ever been accustomed to assimilate, she thus stood with every outward mark of widowhood. Her heaviness was great and her trial excessive; but she was indeed a tower standing in a desert plain. She had in the cellars of her faith an army of courageous defenders, who, had she been ever so encamped against, should, must, and would have prevailed, through Him who is of the widow the protector and to the fatherless a friend. Always, like a true wife, leaning on her husband for advice and for all spiritual strength, her shaft broken and her prop dismembered, she had been forlorn, she had been withered, she had drooped, nay she had fallen, but for the guard of her faithful Saviour and her pitiful Redeemer. So let it tell against the day of fear, so let it tell against the hour of bereavement that your Saviour holds the salver for your tender tears. Hear this, oh wife, cherishing your sickly partner, dreading the hour of separation and division! Hear this, ye children, looking at your only parent sinking into dust! God is a husband to the widow and a father to those whose parents

are departed to His heavenly bosom. A cry is heard, a voice of joy is sounding in the streets. The bereaved widow has found a husband and the fatherless family a trustworthy friend: touch not their little ones, trample not upon their borders, break not down their hedges, for their friend is a strong foe and their defender a mighty man.

She suffered the remains of her dear husband to leave the house and went through the awful day of separation with a fortitude nearly unprecedented and a courage by no means to be expected. She who afterwards fretted herself, pining like Rachel for her little ones, into a grave ere long to be inhabited by that temple of obedience, those hands of unwearied labour, and those limbs of constant exercise, set out herself the refreshments of the funeral, saw with her own eye the last offices of concealment, and parted with him with a smile.

The widow losing her husband so constantly in her company, so continually by her side, was no common circumstance in her days. She who during a marriage of more than forty years never parted with him, save for a period that would make altogether about five weeks, who soothed and in return was cherished, who waited upon and in return was protected, found this trial too great to be endured as a trivial calamity; it

consumed her body, although she maintained her mind. Such a husband as he was a treasure, that sweeping the house with the utmost industry would not again restore. It was hidden, it was lost—until it shall be again found, set in a precious and eternal ore, to be worn upon the fair neck of a descending Church, bedecked and jewelled for her wedding with the Lamb.

Such was she at his death, and however needless this history may render it to inquire what she was during his life, it is now a pleasure to record the intrinsic worth of such a character. Was she a woman dressed in all the frippery of fashion? No! She was clean, but in the plainest attire. Was she an idle drab that brings nought but ruin and disgrace? No! Nor was she the medium between all these things. She was the hard-working burden-bearer to her industrious husband. She fetched with a free will and brought with the spirit of a willing mind the materials with which he was to build up the fabric of his immortal thoughts. She even laboured upon his works, those parts of them where powers of drawing and form were not necessary, which from her excellent idea of colouring was of no small use in the completion of his laborious designs. This she did to a much greater extent than is usually credited.

After the death of her husband she resided for some time with the author of this, whose domestic arrangements were entirely undertaken by her, until such changes took place that rendered it impossible for her strength to continue in this voluntary office of sincere affection and regard. She then returned to the lodging in which she had lived previously to this act of maternal loveliness, in which she continued until she was decayed by fretting and devoured with the silent worm of grief, which, not from any distrust of the providence of her heavenly protector, but from that pathetic clinging to the stem of her existence, wasted her, and she withered only from holding fast to those dead branches which were her former life and shadow. Ever since his death her stomach had proved restless and painful, and on the morning of the 17th of October last she was attacked with cramp and spasms, and after having exhibited great patience and endured great pain for twenty-four hours, on the following morning, at half-past seven o'clock, being the 18th of October 1831, she yielded up the ghost, having survived her husband only four years. Her age not being known but by calculation, sixty-five years were placed upon her coffin.

She was buried, according to her own directions, at Bunhill Fields, with the same funeral

decorations as her husband, which also was her desire, and was followed to her grave by two whom she dearly loved, nay almost idolised, whose welfare was interwoven with the chords of her life and whose well-being was her only solace, her only motive for exertion, her only joy. The news of any success to them was a ray of sun in the dark twilight of her life. Their cares were hers, their sorrows were her own. To them she was as the fondest mother, as the most affectionate sister, and as the best of friends. These had the satisfaction of putting into her trembling hands the last cup of moisture she applied to her dying lips, and to them she bequeathed her all. But as the affectionate remembrances would call forth as many pages as can now be afforded in words, some future and more lengthened praises must exhibit that gratitude which nothing but a whole book could expiate.

Four other friends, being Mr. Bird, painter, Mr. Denham, sculptor, Mr. and Mrs. Richmond, followed with them the remains of this irradiated saint.

THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

I.

Extract from a Letter from JOHN FLAXMAN[1] to WILLIAM HAYLEY.[2]

WARDOUR STREET, SOHO,
26th April.[3]

. . . I have left a pamphlet of poems[4] with Mr. Long,[5] which he will transmit to Eartham;

[1] John Flaxman (1755–1826), the celebrated sculptor and draughtsman. He was one of Blake's earliest friends and admirers, and was the means of introducing him to Hayley. Some years later an unhappy misunderstanding put an end to their friendship.

[2] William Hayley (1745–1820), poetaster and littérateur. He settled at Eartham in 1774. In 1800, on his removal to a house at Felpham, close by, he sent for Blake from London to do engraving and other work for him.

[3] The year is not given. Flaxman lived at 27 Wardour Street from his marriage in 1782 until his departure for Rome in August 1787. He became acquainted with Hayley very soon after the first of these events; and as *Poetical Sketches* came out in 1783, it seems reasonable to ascribe the letter to that or the following year.

[4] *Poetical Sketches*, by W. B. London: Printed in the year MDCCLXXXIII; produced at the expense of Flaxman and another, who presented the whole edition to the author.

[5] William Long (1747–1818), eminent surgeon, one of the most

they are the writings of a Mr. Blake you have heard me mention: his education will plead sufficient excuse to your liberal mind for the defects of his work, and there are few so able to distinguish and set a right value on the beauties as yourself. I have before mentioned that Mr. Romney[1] thinks his historical drawings rank with those of Michael Angelo. He is at present employed as an engraver, in which his encouragement is not extraordinary. Mr. Hawkins, a Cornish gentleman, has shown his taste and liberality in ordering Blake to make several drawings for him; and is so convinced of his uncommon talents that he is now endeavouring to raise a subscription to send him to finish studies in Rome:[2] if this can be at all, it will be determined on before the 10th of May next, at which time Mr. Hawkins is going out of England. His generosity is such that he would be at the whole charge of Blake's travels; but he is only a younger brother, and can therefore only bear a large proportion of the expense. . . .

intimate friends of the painter, Romney: a member of the Unincreasable Club, to which Hayley also belonged.

[1] The painter.

[2] This plan was never carried into effect.

2.

To George Cumberland.[1]

Lambeth,[2] *6th December* 1795.

Dear Sir,—I congratulate you, not on any achievement, because I know that the genius that produces the designs can execute them in any manner, notwithstanding the pretended philosophy which teaches that execution is the power of one and invention of another.[3] Locke says it is the same faculty that invents judges, and I say he who can invent can execute.

[1] The letter is addressed to Bishopsgate, near Egham, Surrey. It is not known when Cumberland first became acquainted with Blake, but it is certain that he remained until the last the truest and most generous of friends. He was the means of introducing him to several of his best patrons, particularly John Linnell. He had a fine taste and a keen enthusiasm in regard to matters of art. He learned from Blake the art of engraving, and with his help published, in 1796, his *Thoughts on Outline*, embellished with twenty-four designs of classical subjects. He seems, later, to have resided at Bristol, and only to have seen Blake from time to time. Almost the last piece of work that Blake ever did was a *message card* for his friend, inscribed *W. Blake inv. & sc. A. Æ.* 70, 1827 (see note 3, p. 223).

[2] Blake moved to 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, in 1793, and remained there until his departure to Felpham in 1800.

[3] "Invention," he points out elsewhere, "depends altogether upon execution or organisation; as that is right or wrong, so is the invention perfect or imperfect:"—"Execution is the chariot of genius"; and in the *Public Address* (see Gilchrist, 1880, vol. ii. p. 168): "Execution is only the result of invention."

As to laying on the wax, it is as follows:[1]

Take a cake of virgin wax (I don't know what animal produces it), and stroke it regularly over the surface of a warm plate (the plate must be warm enough to melt the wax as it passes over), then immediately draw a feather over it, and you will get an even surface which, when cold, will receive any impression minutely.

NOTE.—The danger is in not covering the plate *all over*. Now you will, I hope, show all the family of antique borers, that peace and plenty and domestic happiness is the source of sublime art, and prove to the abstract philosophers that enjoyment and not abstinence[2] is the food of intellect.—Yours sincerely, WILL BLAKE.

Health to Mrs. Cumberland and family.

The pressure necessary to roll off the lines is the same as when you print, or not quite so great. I have not been able to send a proof of the bath, though I have done the corrections, my paper not being in order.

[1] The directions, which follow, have to do with the transference of a drawing to a metal plate for engraving. The plates in question are, doubtless, those of the *Thoughts on Outline* which appeared the next year.

[2] cp. "Abstinence sows sand all over
The ruddy limbs & flaming hair,
But Desire Gratified
Plants fruits of life & beauty there."—Rossetti MS.

3.

Extract from a Letter from RICHARD COSWAY[1] to GEORGE CUMBERLAND.

27th December 1795.

. . . I have contemplated with pleasure the outline you was so good as to leave with Mrs. C. of the picture of Leonardo, and do not hesitate to pronounce it one of the most beautiful compositions I ever beheld of that great man. I hope it will not be long before I shall be able to request a sight of the picture. Why do you not get Blake to make an engraving of it?[2] I should think he would be delighted to undertake such a work, and it would certainly *pay him very well* for whatever time and pains he may bestow upon such a plate, as we have *so very few* of Leonardo's works well engraved, and the composition of this picture is so very graceful and pleasing, I am convinced he might put almost any price on the print and assure himself of a very extensive sale. . . .

[1] The celebrated miniaturist.
[2] As far as I know, Blake never did so.

4.

To George Cumberland.

Lambeth, 23*rd December* 1796.

Dear Cumberland,—I have lately had some pricks of conscience on account of not acknowledging your friendship to me immediately on the receipt of your beautiful book.[1] I have likewise had by me all the summer six plates which you desired me to get made for you. They have laid on my shelf, without speaking to tell me whose they were, or that they were at all, and it was some time (when I found them) before I could divine whence they came or whither they were bound, or whether they were to lie there to eternity. I have now sent them to you to be transmuted, thou real alchymist!

Go on! Go on! Such works as yours Nature and Providence, the eternal parents, demand from their children. How few produce them in such perfection! How nature smiles on them; how Providence rewards them; how all your brethren say: "The sound of his harp and his flute heard from his secret forest cheers us to the labours of life, and we plow and reap, forgetting our labour."

[1] *Thoughts on Outline* (see note 1, p. 53).

as now is [illegible]

Let us see you sometimes as well as sometimes hear from you & let us often see your Works

Compliments to Mr. Cumberland & Family

Lambeth
23 Decemr 1796
a Merry Christmas

Yours in head & heart
Will Blake

Dear Cumberland

I have lately had some pricks of conscience on account of not acknowledging your friendship to me ~~before~~ immediately on the receipt of your beautiful book. I have likewise had by me all the Summer 6 Plates which you desired me to get made for you. they have laid on my shelf without speaking to tell me where they were or that they were ~~there~~ at all & it was some time (when I found them) before I could divine whence they came or whether they were bound or whether they were to lie there to eternity. I have now sent them to you to be transmuted, thou real Alchymist!

Go on Go on. such works as yours Nature & Providence the Eternal Parents demand from their children how few produce them in such perfection how Nature smiles on them. how Providence rewards them. How all your Brethren say, The sound of his harp & his flute heard from his secret forest cheers us to the labours of life. & we plow & reap forgetting our labours

Let us see you sometimes as well as sometimes hear from you & let us often see your Works

Compliments to Mrs Cumberland & Family

yours in head & heart

Lambeth
23 Decemr 1796
a Merry Christmas

Will Blake

Let us see you sometimes as well as sometimes hear from you, and let us often see your works.

Compliments to Mrs. Cumberland and family. —Yours in head and heart, WILL BLAKE.

A merry Christmas.

5.

To the Revd. Dr. TRUSLER.[1]

HERCULES BUILDINGS, LAMBETH,
16th August 1799.

REVD. SIR,—I find more and more that my style of designing is a species by itself, and in this which I send you have been compelled by my Genius or Angel to follow where he led; if I were to act otherwise it would not fulfil the purpose for which alone I live, which is, in conjunction with such men as my friend Cumberland, to renew the lost art of the Greeks.[2]

[1] John Trusler (1735–1820), divine, compiler of *Hogarth Moralized*, author of *The Way to be Rich and Respectable*, and many other works. He was living at Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey, close to George Cumberland.

[2] At a later time Blake freely criticised the art of the Greeks, mainly on account of their supposed use of a canon of proportion for the human figure, which he condemned as being founded upon memory rather than upon imagination. This is the meaning of the remark (among those which surround his print of the "Laocoon"), the Gods of Greece " . . . were mathematical diagrams."

I attempted every morning for a fortnight together to follow your dictate, but when I found my attempts were in vain, resolved to show an independence which I know will please an author better than slavishly following the track of another, however admirable that track may be. At any rate, my excuse must be—I could not do otherwise; it was out of my power!

I know I begged of you to give me your ideas, and promised to build on them. Here I counted without my host. I now find my mistake!

The design I have sent is:[1]

A father, taking leave of his wife and child, is watched by two fiends incarnate, with intention that when his back is turned they will murder the mother and her infant. If this is not Malevolence with a vengeance, I have never seen it on earth; and if you approve of this, I have no doubt of giving you Benevolence with equal vigour, as also Pride and Humility, but cannot previously describe in words what I mean to design, for fear I should evaporate the spirit of my invention.

[1] The watercolour drawing described here was formerly in the possession of Mrs. Alexander Gilchrist, and now belongs to her daughter, Mrs. Frend. The scene is a cave mouth by the side of a lake, on a moonlight night. A young traveller, staff in hand, is parting from his wife and infant. Two assassins (a man and a woman) of hideous aspect, with daggers in their hands, are crouched behind rocks at the mouth of the cave.

But I hope that none of my designs will be destitute of infinite particulars[1] which will present themselves to the contemplator. And though I call them mine, I know that they are not mine, being of the same opinion with Milton when he says[2] that the Muse visits his slumbers and awakes and governs his song when morn purples the east, and being also in the predicament of that prophet who says: "I cannot go beyond the command of the Lord, to speak good or bad."[3]

If you approve of my manner, and it is agreeable to you, I would rather paint pictures in oil[4] of the same dimensions than make drawings, and on the same terms. By this means you will have a number of cabinet pictures, which I flatter myself

[1] The importance which Blake attached to "minute particulars" will be well known to readers of the "prophetical books": cp. *Jerusalem*, p. 55, ll. 60–64: "He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars, | General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite, & flatterer: | For Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely organised Particulars, | And not in generalising Demonstrations of the Rational Power. | The Infinite alone resides in Definite & Determinate Identity"; *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (see Gilchrist, 1880, vol ii. p. 193): "General knowledge is remote knowledge: it is in particulars that wisdom consists"; and the *Public Address* (Gilchrist, 1880, vol. ii. p. 168): "Ideas cannot be given but in their minutely appropriate words, nor can a design be made without its minutely appropriate execution."

[2] *Paradise Lost*, book vii. ll. 29, 30.

[3] Numbers xxiv. 13.

[4] Blake afterwards abandoned the oily vehicle, finding a species of tempera, which he invented, more suitable to his purpose.

will not be unworthy of a scholar of Rembrandt[1] and Teniers, whom I have studied no less than Raphael and Michael Angelo. Please to send me your orders respecting this, and in my next effort I promise more expedition.—I am, revd. sir, your very humble servant,

WILLM. BLAKE.

6.

To the Rev. Dr. TRUSLER.

13 HERCULES BUILDINGS, LAMBETH,
23rd August 1799.

REVD. SIR,—I really am sorry that you are fallen out with the spiritual world, especially if I should have to answer for it. I feel very sorry that your ideas and mine on moral painting differ so much as to have made you angry with my method of study. If I am wrong, I am wrong in good company. I had hoped your plan comprehended all species of this art, and especially that you would not regret that species which gives existence to every other, namely, visions of eternity. You say that I want somebody to elucidate my ideas. But you

[1] In the *Descriptive Catalogue* and elsewhere Blake roundly denounces the methods of Rembrandt; and, in the notes to Reynolds's *Discourses*, writes: "Rembrandt was a generaliser," and to generalise "is to be an idiot."

ought to know that what is grand is necessarily obscure to weak men. That which can be made explicit to the idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the ancients considered what is not too explicit as the fittest for instruction, because it rouses the faculties to act. I name Moses, Solomon, Esop, Homer, Plato.

But as you have favoured me with your remarks on my design, permit me in return to defend it against a mistaken one, which is, that I have supposed Malevolence without a cause. Is not merit in one a cause of envy in another, and serenity and happiness and beauty a cause of malevolence? But want of money and the distress of a thief can never be alleged as the cause of his thieving, for many honest people endure greater hardships with fortitude. We must therefore seek the cause elsewhere than in want of money, for that is the miser's passion, not the thief's.

I have therefore proved your reasonings ill-proportioned, which you can never prove my figures to be. They are those of Michael Angelo, Raphael and the antique, and of the best living models. I perceive that your eye is perverted by caricature prints, which ought not to abound so much as they do. Fun I love, but too much fun is of all things the most loathsome. Mirth is better than fun, and happiness is better than

mirth. I feel that a man may be happy in this world, and I know that this world is a world of imagination and vision.[1] I see everything I paint in this world, but everybody does not see alike. To the eyes of a miser a guinea is far more beautiful than the sun, and a bag worn with the use of money has more beautiful proportions than a vine filled with grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing which stands in the way.[2] Some see Nature all ridicule and deformity, and by these I shall not regulate my proportions; and some scarce see Nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, Nature is Imagination itself.[3] As a man is, so he sees. As the eye is formed, such are its powers. You certainly mistake, when you say that the visions of fancy are not to be found in this world. To me this world is all one continued vision of fancy or imagination, and I feel flattered when I am told so. What is it sets Homer, Virgil, and Milton in

[1] "The nature of my work is visionary, or imaginative," Blake wrote, many years later, in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (see Gilchrist, 1880, vol. ii. p. 186).

[2] "A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees" (Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*).

[3] The significance of these words is accurately defined by a sentence referring to the prophetical books in Dr. Rudolf Kassner's brilliant essay on Blake: "Die Worte des Dichters können nicht nur das bedeuten, was er mit ihnen sagen will, sondern sie sind es auch."

so high a rank of art? Why is the Bible more entertaining and instructive than any other book? Is it not because they are addressed to the imagination, which is spiritual sensation, and but mediately to the understanding or reason? Such is true painting, and such was alone valued by the Greeks and the best modern artists. Consider what Lord Bacon says: "Sense sends over to imagination before reason have judged, and reason sends over to imagination before the decree can be acted." (See *Advancement of Learning*, part ii. p. 47 of first edition.)

But I am happy to find a great majority of fellow-mortals who can elucidate my visions, and particularly they have been elucidated by children, who have taken a greater delight in contemplating my pictures than I even hoped. Neither youth nor childhood is folly or incapacity. Some children are fools, and so are some old men. But there is a vast majority on the side of imagination or spiritual sensation.

To engrave after another painter is infinitely more laborious than to engrave one's own inventions. And of the size you require my price has been thirty guineas, and I cannot afford to do it for less. I had twelve for the head I sent you as a specimen; but after my own designs I could do at least six times the quantity of labour in the same

time, which will account for the difference of price, as also that *chalk engraving* is at least six times as laborious as *aqua tinta*. I have no objection to engraving after another artist. Engraving is the profession I was apprenticed to, and should never have attempted to live by anything else, if orders had not come in for my designs and paintings, which I have the pleasure to tell you are increasing every day. Thus if I am a painter it is not to be attributed to seeking after. But I am contented whether I live by painting or engraving.—I am, revd. sir, your very obedient servant,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

Marked by the recipient: "Blake, dim'd with superstition."

7.

TO GEORGE CUMBERLAND.

HERCULES BUILDINGS, LAMBETH,
26th August 1799.

DEAR CUMBERLAND,—I ought long ago to have written to you to thank you for your kind recommendation to Dr. Trusler, which, though it has failed of success, is not the less to be remembered by me with gratitude.

I have made him a drawing in my best manner;

he has sent it back with a letter full of criticisms, in which he says it accords not with his intentions, which are to reject all fancy from his work. How far he expects to please, I cannot tell. But as I cannot paint dirty rags and old shoes when I ought to plan naked beauty[1] or simple ornament, I despair of ever pleasing one class of man. Unfortunately our authors of books are among this class; how soon we shall have a change for the better I cannot prophesy. Dr. Trusler says: "*Your fancy*, from what I have seen of it, and I have seen a variety at Mr. Cumberland's, seems to be in the other world, or the world of spirits, which accords not with my intentions, which, whilst living in this world, wish to follow *the nature of it.*" I could not help smiling at the difference between the doctrines of Dr. Trusler and those of Christ. But, however, for his own sake I am sorry that a man should be so enamoured of Rowlandson's caricatures as to call them copies from life and manners, or fit things for a clergyman to write upon.

Pray let me entreat you to persevere in your designing; it is the only source of pleasure. All your other pleasures depend upon it: it is the tree; your pleasures are the fruit. Your inventions of

[1] "Art can never exist without Naked Beauty displayed" (one of the "Laocoon" sentences).

intellectual visions are the stamina of everything you value. Go on, if not for your own sake, yet for ours, who love and admire your works; but, above all, for the sake of the arts. Do not throw aside for any long time the honour intended you by nature to revive the Greek workmanship. I study your outlines[1] as usual, just as if they were antiques.

As to myself, about whom you are so kindly interested, I live by miracle. I am painting small pictures from the Bible. For as to engraving, in which art I cannot reproach myself with any neglect, yet I am laid by in a corner as if I did not exist, and since my Young's *Night Thoughts*[2] have been published, even Johnson[3] and Fuseli[4]

[1] *i.e.* in the *Thoughts on Outline.*

[2] *The Complaint and the Consolation; or, Night Thoughts*, by Edward Young. London: Printed for R. Edwards, 1797: folio, with 43 illustrations designed and engraved by Blake.

[3] Joseph Johnson (1738–1809), bookseller and publisher in St. Paul's Churchyard. He commissioned engravings from Blake on several occasions, and in 1791 published for him, anonymously, *The French Revolution: a Poem in seven Books*, Book the First; and again, in 1793, in conjunction with Blake himself, *The Gates of Paradise.*

[4] Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), painter, was a native of Zurich. He came to England as a young man, and, with the exception of ten years spent in Italy, remained there for the rest of his life. In the year in which this letter was written he succeeded Barry as Professor of Painting to the Royal Academy, in which capacity he delivered a remarkable series of lectures on painting. Though a great deal of his work is mannered and unpleasant, he was nevertheless a powerful and imaginative draughtsman. The beautiful "Titania and

have discarded my graver. But as I know that he who works and has his health cannot starve, I laugh at fortune, and go on and on. I think I foresee better things than I have ever seen. My work pleases my employer,[1] and I have an order for fifty small pictures at one guinea each, which is something better than mere copying after another artist. But above all, I feel happy and contented. Having passed now nearly twenty years in ups and downs, I am used to them, and perhaps a little practice in them may turn out to benefit. It is now exactly twenty years since I was upon the ocean of business,[2] and, though laugh at fortune, I am persuaded that she alone is the governor of worldly riches, and when it is fit she will call upon me. Till then I wait with patience, in hopes that she is

Bottom," in the National Gallery, is one of the finest of his oil paintings. It is, however, in some of his small sketches and studies, many of them in water-colours, that his ability really asserts itself.

He is likely to have made Blake's acquaintance in 1780, when he returned from Italy and settled down in Broad Street, Carnaby Market, close to Blake's own home. It was under Blake's influence that his imaginative quality first began to develop itself, and that his style underwent a change in the direction of restraint and refinement. He remained Blake's constant friend and admirer. He is said to have been the author of the *Advertisement* of the designs to Young's *Night Thoughts*, and he afterwards composed the prospectus of the illustrations of Blair's *Grave*. Several of his designs were engraved by Blake's hand.

[1] Thomas Butts.

[2] In 1778, Blake left Basire for the Royal Academy school, and two years later exhibited for the first time at the Royal Academy exhibition.

busied among my friends.—With mine and my wife's best compliments to Mrs. Cumberland, I remain, yours sincerely, WILLIAM BLAKE.

8.

To WILLIAM HAYLEY.[1]

LAMBETH, *6th May* 1800.

DEAR SIR,—I am very sorry for your immense loss,[2] which is a repetition of what all feel in this valley of misery and happiness mixed. I send the shadow of the departed angel,[3] and hope the likeness is improved. The lips I have again lessened as you advise, and done a good many other softenings to the whole. I know that our deceased friends are more really with us than when they were apparent to our mortal part. Thirteen years ago I lost a brother,[4] and with his spirit I converse daily and

[1] See note 2, p. 51.

[2] Alludes to the death of his illegitimate son, Thomas Alphonso Hayley, born 5th October 1780, pupil of Flaxman, who executed a memorial of him in Eartham Church.

[3] The reference may be to a carefully finished pencil drawing of Thomas Hayley, by Blake, subsequently bound up in a volume of miscellaneous Blake items, now in the possession of B. B. MacGeorge, Esq. ; or, as is more likely, to an engraving which Blake did of the youth after a medallion by Flaxman, published 14th June 1800, in the father's *Essay on Sculpture*.

[4] Robert Blake died February 1787. Not long after his death he returned one night in a vision and revealed to his brother the method of relief etching employed in the illuminated books.

hourly in the spirit, and see him in my remembrance, in the regions of my imagination. I hear his advice, and even now write from his dictate. Forgive me for expressing to you my enthusiasm, which I wish all to partake of, since it is to me a source of immortal joy, even in this world. By it I am the companion of angels. May you continue to be so more and more; and to be more and more persuaded that every mortal loss is an immortal gain. The ruins of Time build mansions in Eternity.

I have also sent a proof of "Pericles"[1] for your remarks, thanking you for the kindness with which you express them, and feeling heartily your grief with a brother's sympathy.—I remain, dear Sir, your humble servant, WILLIAM BLAKE.

9.

Extract from a Letter to GEORGE CUMBERLAND.[2]

LAMBETH, *2nd July* 1800.

. . . I have to congratulate you on your plan for a National Gallery being put into execution. All

[1] "Pericles," from a bust in the possession of Charles Townley, Esq., published 14th June 1800, by Cadell & Davis, Strand. It is the frontispiece to *An Essay on Sculpture*, in a series of Epistles [in verse] to John Flaxman, by William Hayley, 1800.

[2] The original autograph (2½ pp. 4to) of this letter was sold at Sotheby's, 11th April 1893. I have been unable to trace its present whereabouts, and so print so much of it as is given in the sale catalogue.

your wishes shall in due time be fulfilled. The immense flood of Grecian light and glory which is coming on Europe will more than realise our warmest wishes. . . . I begin to emerge from a deep pit of melancholy,—melancholy without any real reason,—a disease which God keep you from. Our artists of all ranks praise your outlines and wish for more. Flaxman is very warm in your commendation. Mr. Hayley has lately mentioned your work on outline[1] in notes to an *Essay on Sculpture.*[2] . . . Poor Fuseli, sore from the lash of envious tongues, praises you and dispraises with the same breath. . . . I am still employed in making designs and little pictures, with now and then an engraving, and find that in future to live will not be so difficult as it has been. . . .

10.

To John Flaxman.[3]

12th September 1800.

My dearest Friend,—It is to you I owe all my present happiness.[4] It is to you I owe perhaps the

[1] See note 1, p. 53.

[2] Published in 1800, with three engravings by Blake (see note 1, p. 69).

[3] See note 1, p. 51.

[4] Flaxman had been the means of introducing him to Hayley, and thus of his going to Felpham.

principal happiness of my life. I have presumed on your friendship in staying so long away and not calling to know of your welfare, but hope now everything is nearly completed for our removal to Felpham, that I shall see you on Sunday, as we have appointed Sunday afternoon to call on Mrs. Flaxman at Hampstead. I send you a few lines, which I hope you will excuse. And as the time is arrived when men shall again converse in Heaven and walk with angels, I know you will be pleased with the intention, and hope you will forgive the poetry.

TO MY DEAREST FRIEND, JOHN FLAXMAN, THESE LINES:

I bless thee, O Father of Heaven and Earth, that ever I saw Flaxman's face.[1]
Angels stand round my Spirit in Heaven, the blessed of Heaven are my friends upon earth.
When Flaxman was taken to Italy, Fuseli was given to me for a season,
And now Flaxman hath given me Hayley his friend to be mine, such my lot upon Earth.
Now my lot in the Heavens is this, Milton[2] lov'd me in childhood and shew'd me his face.
Ezra came with Isaah[3] the Prophet, but Shakespeare in riper years gave me his hand,

---

[1] Flaxman met Blake, through Stothard, about 1780. In 1787 he went to Italy, and remained there until 1794.

[2] Milton is several times alluded to in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), and afterwards gave his name to one of the prophetical books, dated 1804.

[3] See *Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*

Paracelsus and Behmen[1] appeared to me, terrors appeared in the Heavens above,
And in Hell beneath, and a mighty and awful change threatened the Earth.[2]
The American war[3] began. All its dark horrors passed before my face
Across the Atlantic to France. Then the French Revolution[4] commenc'd in thick clouds,
And my Angels have told me that seeing such visions I could not subsist on the Earth,
But by my conjunction with Flaxman, who knows to forgive nervous fear.

I remain, for ever yours,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

II.

From Mrs. BLAKE to Mrs. FLAXMAN.

H[ERCULES] B[UILDINGS], LAMBETH,
14th September 1800.

MY DEAREST FRIEND,—I hope you will not think could forget your services to us, or anyway neglect to love and remember with affection even the hem

[1] "Any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante or Shakespeare, an infinite number" (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*). Crabb Robinson tells us that Blake particularly admired the designs to Law's edition of Behmen.

[2] See *Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*

[3] See *America: a Prophecy.* Blake, 1793.

[4] *The French Revolution: a Poem in Seven Books.* Book the First, published anonymously for Blake by J. Johnson in 1791. No example of this work is at present forthcoming.

THE VISION OF JACOB'S LADDER

of your garment. We indeed presume on your kindness in neglecting to have called on you since my husband's first return from Felpham. We have been incessantly busy in our great removal; but can never think of going without first paying our proper duty to you and Mr. Flaxman. We intend to call on Sunday afternoon in Hampstead, to take farewell; all things being now nearly completed for our setting forth on Tuesday morning. It is only sixty miles, and Lambeth one hundred; for the terrible desert of London was between. My husband has been obliged to finish several things necessary to be finished before our migration. The swallows call us, fleeting past our window at this moment. Oh! how we delight in talking of the pleasure we shall have in preparing you a summer bower at Felpham. And we not only talk, but behold! the angels of our journey have inspired a song to you:

TO MY DEAR FRIEND, MRS. ANNA FLAXMAN.

This song to the flower of Flaxman's joy;
To the blossom of hope, for a sweet decoy;
Do all that you can and all that you may,
To entice him to Felpham and far away.

Away to sweet Felpham, for Heaven is there;
The Ladder of Angels descends through the air;[1]

[1] The lovely water-colour of *Jacob's Dream*, here reproduced, is surely inspired by the vision told in this song. It is at anyrate of about the same date.

On the Turret[1] its spiral does softly descend,
Through the village then winds, at my cot it does end.

You stand in the village and look up to Heaven;
The precious stones glitter on flights[2] seventy-seven;
And my brother is there, and my Friend and Thine,
Descend and ascend with the Bread and the Wine.

The Bread of sweet thought and the Wine of delight
Feed the village of Felpham by day and by night;
And at his own door the bless'd hermit[3] does stand,
Dispensing, unceasing, to all the wide land.

W. BLAKE.

Receive my and my husband's love and affection, and believe me to be yours affectionately,

CATHERINE BLAKE.

12.

TO JOHN FLAXMAN.

FELPHAM,
21*st September* 1800, *Sunday morning.*

DEAR SCULPTOR OF ETERNITY,—We are safe arrived at our cottage,[4] which is more beautiful than I thought it, and more convenient. It is a perfect

[1] The turret of Hayley's house.

[2] All editions have hitherto read *flight*, which makes nonsense of this line. The plural of the MS. makes the sense quite clear: since it is natural to suppose the use of a symbolical number in the construction of a heavenly ladder.

[3] Hayley, often called the Hermit of Eartham, or the Hermit of the Turret, by himself and his friends.

[4] See Plate.

BLAKE'S COTTAGE AT FELPHAM

model for cottages, and I think for palaces of magnificence, only enlarging, not altering its proportions, and adding ornaments and not principles. Nothing can be more grand than its simplicity and usefulness. Simple without intricacy, it seems to be the spontaneous expression of humanity, congenial to the wants of man. No other formed house can ever please me so well; nor shall I ever be persuaded, I believe, that it can be improved either in beauty or use.

Mr. Hayley[1] received us with his usual brotherly affection. I have begun to work. Felpham is a sweet place for study, because it is more spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all sides her golden gates; her windows are not obstructed by vapours; voices of celestial inhabitants are most distinctly heard, and their forms more distinctly seen; and my cottage is also a shadow of their houses. My wife and sister[2] are both well, courting Neptune for an embrace.

Our journey was very pleasant; and though we had a great deal of luggage, no grumbling. All was cheerfulness and good humour on the road, and yet we could not arrive at our cottage before half-past eleven at night, owing to the necessary shifting of our luggage from one chaise to another; for we had seven different chaises, and as many

[1] See note 2, p. 51. [2] Catherine.

different drivers. We set out between six and seven in the morning of Thursday, with sixteen heavy boxes and portfolios full of prints.

And now begins a new life, because another covering of earth is shaken off. I am more famed in Heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies and chambers filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life; and those works are the delight and study of archangels. Why, then, should I be anxious about the riches or fame of mortality? The Lord our Father will do for us and with us according to His divine will for our good.

You, O dear Flaxman! are a sublime archangel, —my friend and companion from eternity. In the Divine bosom in our dwelling place, I look back into the regions of reminiscence, and behold our ancient days before this earth appeared in its vegetated[1] mortality to my mortal vegetated eyes. I see our houses of eternity, which can never be separated, though our mortal vehicles should stand at the remotest corners of heaven from each other.

Farewell, my best friend! Remember me and my wife in love and friendship to our dear Mrs.

[1] For Blake's use of the word, cp. *Jerusalem*, p. 77: "Imagination, the real and eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, and in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more."

Flaxman, whom we ardently desire to entertain beneath our thatched roof of rusted gold.—And believe me for ever to remain your grateful and affectionate, WILLIAM BLAKE.

13.

TO THOMAS BUTTS.[1]

23rd September 1800.

DEAR FRIEND OF MY ANGELS, — We are safe arrived at our cottage without accident or hindrance, though it was between eleven and twelve o'clock at night before we could get home, owing to the necessary shifting of our boxes and portfolios from one chaise to another. We had seven different chaises and as many different drivers. All upon the road was cheerfulness and welcome. Though our luggage was very heavy there was no grumbling at all. We travelled through a most beautiful country on a most glorious day. Our cottage is more beautiful than I thought it, and also more convenient, for though small it is well proportioned, and if I should ever build a palace it would only be my cottage enlarged. Please to tell Mrs. Butts that we have dedicated a chamber for her service, and

[1] Thomas Butts (1759–1846), Muster Master General. Blake's friend for over thirty years, and a continual buyer of his productions.

that it has a very fine view of the sea. Mr. Hayley received me with his usual brotherly affection. My wife and sister are both very well, and courting Neptune for an embrace, whose terrors this morning made them afraid, but whose mildness is often equal to his terrors. The villagers of Felpham are not mere rustics; they are polite and modest. Meat is cheaper than in London; but the sweet air and the voices of winds, trees, and birds, and the odours of the happy ground, make it a dwelling for immortals. Work will go on here with God-speed. A roller and two harrows lie before my window. I met a plough[1] on my first going out at my gate the first morning after my arrival, and the ploughboy said to the ploughman, "Father, the gate is open." I have begun to work, and find that I can work with greater pleasure than ever. Hoping soon to give you a proof that Felpham is propitious to the arts.

God bless you! I shall wish for you on Tuesday evening as usual. Pray give my and my wife's and sister's love and respects to Mrs. Butts.

[1] The symbolical use of the plough and the harrow in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* show how easily natural incidents translate themselves with Blake into visionary experience, cp. *Milton*, p. 4, ll. 12, 13: " . . . the instruments | of Harvest: the Plow and Harrow to pass over the Nations"; *ibid.* p. 3*, l. 1: " . . . the Plow of Rintrah and the Harrow of the Almighty"; *Jerusalem*, p. 46, ll. 14, 15: "Till the Plow of Jehovah, and the Harrow of Shaddai, | Have passed over the Dead, to awake the Dead to Judgment."

Accept them yourself, and believe me, for ever, your affectionate and obliged friend,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

My sister will be in town in a week, and bring with her your account, and whatever else I can finish.

Direct to me: Blake, Felpham, near Chichester, Sussex.

14.

Extract from a Letter from THOMAS BUTTS to BLAKE.

DEAR SIR,— . . . I am well pleased with your pleasures, feeling no small interest in your happiness; and it cannot fail to be highly gratifying to me and my affectionate partner to know that a corner of your mansion of peace is asylumed to her, and when invalided and rendered unfit for service, who shall say she may not be quartered on your cot. But for the present she is for active duty, and satisfied with requesting that if there is a snug berth unoccupied in any chamber of your heart, her portrait may be suspended there—at the same time well aware that you, like me, prefer the original to the copy. Your good wife will permit, and I hope may benefit from the embraces of Neptune, but she

will presently distinguish betwixt the warmth of his and yours, and court the former with caution. I suppose you do not admit of a third in that concern, or I would offer her mine even at this distance. Who, alas! of us, my good friend, could have thought that so virtuous a woman would ever have exchanged Hercules Buildings for Neptune's bed?—

> So virtuous a woman would ever have fled
> From Hercules Buildings to Neptune's bed?

. . . I have much to congratulate you on: Meat cheap, music for nothing, a command of the sea, and brotherly affection fluttering around ye. The Arts have promised to be propitious, and the Graces will courtesy to your wishes.

> Happy, happy, happy pair,
> On earth, in sea, or eke in air,
> In morn, at noon, and thro' the night
> From visions fair receiving light.
> Long may ye live, your Guardian's care,
> And when ye die may not a hair
> Fall to the lot of demons black,
> Be singed by fire or heard to crack.
> But may your faithful spirit upward bear
> Your gentle souls to Him whose care
> Is ever sure and ever nigh
> Those who on Providence rely.

. . . . . .

I have no more nonsense for you just now, but must assure you that I shall always sincerely devote myself to your service when my humble endeavours may be useful. Mrs. Butts greets your wife and

charming sister[1] with a holy kiss, and I with old Neptune bestow my embraces there also for yourself. I commend you to the protection of your Guard,[2] and am, dear sir, yours most cordially and faithfully.

15.

To Thomas Butts.

Felpham, *2nd October* 1800.

Friend of Religion and Order,—I thank you for your very beautiful and encouraging verses, which I account a crown of laurels, and I also thank you for your reprehension of follies by me fostered. Your prediction will, I hope, be fulfilled in me, and in future I am the determined advocate of religion and humility—the two bands of society. Having been so full of the business of settling the sticks and feathers of my nest, I have not got any forwarder with "The Three Maries"[3] or with any other of your commissions; but hope, now I have commenced a new life of industry, to do credit to that new life by improved works. Receive from me

[1] Catherine.

[2] An allusion to the opening paragraph of the letter, which, commenting upon Blake's apostrophe: "Dear friend of my angels," states the writer's uncertainty as to the nature of the angels.—"On the whole . . . I have considered you more immediately under the protection of the black-guard."

[3] See note 3, iii. p. 118.

a return of verses, such as Felpham produces by me, though not such as she produces by her eldest son.[1] However, such as they are, I cannot resist the temptation to send them to you.

To my Friend Butts I write
My first Vision of Light,
On the yellow sands sitting.
The Sun was Emitting
His Glorious beams
From Heaven's high Streams.
Over Sea, over Land,
My Eyes did Expand
Into regions of air,
Away from all Care;
Into regions of fire,
Remote from Desire;
The Light of the Morning,
Heaven's Mountains adorning:
In particles bright,
The jewels of Light
Distinct shone & clear.
Amaz'd, and in fear,
I each particle gazèd,
Astonish'd, Amazèd;
For each was a Man
Human-form'd. Swift I ran,
For they beckon'd to me
Remote by the Sea,
Saying: "Each grain of sand,[2]
Every Stone on the Land,
Each rock & each hill,
Each fountain & rill,
Each herb & each tree,
Mountain, hill, earth, and sea,

[1] Hayley.

[2] The phenomenal world, which is the Human Imagination "petrified into rock and sand" by the stony eye of Reason, clothes itself again in the mind of the visionary with the human shape and infinite existence proper to its original state.

Cloud, Meteor, and Star,
Are Men seen Afar."
I stood in the Streams
Of Heaven's bright beams,
And saw Felpham sweet
Beneath my bright feet,
In soft Female charms;
And in her fair arms
My Shadow[1] I knew,
And my wife's Shadow too,
And My sister, & Friend.
We like Infants descend
In our Shadows on Earth,
Like a weak mortal birth.
My Eyes, more & more,
Like a Sea without shore,
Continue Expanding,
The Heavens commanding,
Till the Jewels of Light,
Heavenly Men beaming bright,
Appear'd as One Man,
Who complacent began
My limbs to infold
In his beams of bright gold;
Like dross purg'd away,
All my mire & my clay.
Soft consum'd in delight,
In his bosom Sun-bright
I remain'd. Soft he smil'd,
And I heard his voice Mild,
Saying: "This is my Fold,
O thou Ram, horn'd with gold,
Who awakest from Sleep
On the Sides of the Deep.
On the Mountains around
The roarings resound
Of the lion & wolf,
The loud Sea and deep gulf.
These are guards of my Fold,
O thou Ram horn'd with gold!"

---

[1] The body.

And the voice faded mild,
I remain'd as a Child;
All I ever had known
Before me bright Shone!
I saw you & your wife
By the fountains of Life.
Such the Vision to me
Appear'd on the sea.

Mrs. Butts will, I hope, excuse my not having finished the portrait.[1] I wait for less hurried moments. Our cottage looks more and more beautiful. And though the weather is wet, the air is very mild, much milder than it was in London when we came away. Chichester is a very handsome city, seven miles from us. We can get most conveniences there. The country is not so destitute of accommodations to our wants as I expected it would be. We have had but little time for viewing the country, but what we have seen is most beautiful; and the people are genuine Saxons, handsomer than the people about London. Mrs. Butts will excuse the following lines:

TO MRS. BUTTS.

Wife of the Friend of those I most revere,
Receive this tribute from a Harp sincere;
Go on in Virtuous Seed sowing on Mold
Of Human Vegetation,[2] & Behold
Your Harvest springing to Eternal Life,
Parent of Youthful Minds, & happy Wife!—W. B.

I am for ever yours, WILLIAM BLAKE.

[1] A miniature of her husband. See note 1, p. 90, and Plate.
[2] See note 1, p. 76.

LITTLE TOM THE SAILOR

16.

To William Hayley.

Felpham, 26*th November* 1800.

Dear Sir,—Absorbed by the poets[1] Milton, Homer, Camoens, Ercilla, Ariosto, and Spenser, whose physiognomies have been my delightful study, *Little Tom*[2] has been of late unattended

[1] Blake was at work upon a series of heads of the poets, to be a frieze for Hayley's new library at Felpham. On the 11th September 1801 he writes again: "Mr. Hayley's library . . . is still unfinished, but is in a finishing way and looks well." Within twenty years of Hayley's death, the villa was sold and the heads were taken down and dispersed. Eighteen of them subsequently came into the possession of William Russell, who lent four of them to the Burlington Fine Arts Club Exhibition (1876). I have been unable to trace their present whereabouts, and it is even rumoured that they have perished by fire. They are said to have been painted in oil (or possibly "fresco") upon canvas. They were nearly life-size and almost colourless, resembling sculptural busts: each, however, was accompanied by illustrative accessories in colour. When Gilchrist wrote they were blistered and cracked, and injured by exposure to dust and gas. The heads of Ercilla and Ariosto were not among those which formerly belonged to William Russell.

[2] *Little Tom the Sailor*, a broadsheet, Printed for & Sold by the Widow Spicer of Folkstone for the benefit of her Orphans: October 5, 1800. Four plates were used: one for each of the designs (measuring—upper, $4\frac{3}{8} \times 6\frac{3}{8}$ in.: lower, $4\frac{3}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ in.); one for the Ballad ($8\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$ in.); and one for the imprint ($1\frac{3}{8} \times 4\frac{5}{8}$ in.). The Ballad and imprint are executed in the ordinary method of relief-etching employed by Blake in the engraved books. The designs are examples of what Blake called *wood-cutting on pewter*: for which process his own receipt is noted down by him in the Rossetti MS. (now the property of Mr. W. A. White of Brooklyn, U.S.A.): "To wood-cut on pewter: Lay a ground on the plate, and smoke it as for etching. Then trace your outlines, and, beginning with the

to, and my wife's illness not being quite gone off, she has not printed any more since you went to London. But we can muster a few in colours and some in black, which I hope will be no less favoured, though they are rough like rough sailors. We mean to begin printing again to-morrow. Time flies very fast and very merrily. I sometimes try to be miserable that I may do more work, but find it is a foolish experiment. Happinesses have wings and wheels; miseries are leaden-legged, and their whole employment is to clip the wings and to take off the wheels of our chariots. We determine, therefore, to be happy and do all that we can, though not all that we would. Our dear friend Flaxman is the theme of my emulation in this of industry, as well as in other virtues and merits. Gladly I hear of his full health and spirits. Happy son of the immortal Phidias, his lot is truly glorious, and mine no less happy in his friendship and in that of his friends. Our cottage is surrounded by the

spots of light on each object, with an oval-pointed needle scrape off the ground, as a direction for your graver. Then proceed to graving, with the ground on the plate; being as careful as possible not to hurt the ground, because it, being black, will show perfectly what is wanted." Some examples of the print were issued plain, and some were coloured by hand; the former are generally preferable. The Ballad was written by Hayley, 22nd September 1800, for the widowed mother of a Folkstone sailor boy, named Tom Spicer, who had been drowned.

same guardians you left with us; they keep off every wind. We hear the west howl at a distance, the south bounds on high over our thatch, and smiling on our cottage says: "You lay too low for my anger to injure." As to the east and north, I believe they cannot get past the Turret.[1] My wife joins with me in duty and affection to you. Please to remember us both in love to Mr. and Mrs. Flaxman, and believe me to be your affectionate, enthusiastic, hope-fostered visionary, WILLIAM BLAKE.

17.

Extract from a Letter from WILLIAM HAYLEY to GEORGE ROMNEY.

3rd February 1801.

. . . I have taught him [Blake], he says, to paint in miniature, and in truth he has made a very creditable copy from your admirable portrait of the dear departed bard, from which he will also make an engraving.[2] . . .

[1] Of Hayley's house.

[2] The original drawing was executed by Romney while on a visit to Hayley at Eartham in 1792, and was the inspiration of Cowper's sonnet To George Romney, Esq.; it has recently passed from the possession of Bertram Vaughan Johnson, Esq., into the National Portrait Gallery. It was engraved by Blake, and appears as the frontispiece of the first volume of Hayley's *Life of*

18.

To Thomas Butts.

Felpham, 10*th May* 1801.

My dear Sir,—The necessary application to my duty, as well to my old as new friends, has prevented me from that respect I owe in particular to you. And your accustomed forgiveness of my want of dexterity in certain points emboldens me to hope that forgiveness to be continued to me a little longer, when I shall be enabled to throw off all obstructions to success.

Mr. Hayley acts like a prince. I am at complete ease. But I wish to do my duty, especially to you, who were the precursor of my present fortune. I never will send you a picture unworthy of my present proficiency. I soon shall send you several. My present engagements are in miniature-painting.[1] Miniature has

Cowper, inscribed: From a Portrait in Crayons Drawn from the Life by Romney in 1792: Engraved by W. Blake, 1802. Blake's miniature is now in the possession of Canon Cowper Johnson.

[1] Six miniatures from Blake's hand are all that are at present known about. These are likenesses of Cowper (see note 2, p. 87), Thomas Butts, senior (see note 1, p. 90, and Plate), the Rev. John Johnson (see note 2, p. 92), Romney (see p. 167), Mrs. Butts, his patron's wife (dated 1809, see Plate), and Thomas Butts, Junior (? c. 1810, see Plate). We are ignorant even of the names of the rest of his sitters, except that members of the Egremont, Bathurst, and other households in the

become a goddess in my eyes, and my friends in Sussex say that I excel in the pursuit. I have a great many orders, and they multiply. Now, let me entreat you to give me orders to furnish every accommodation in my power to receive you and Mrs. Butts. I know my cottage is too narrow for your ease and comfort. We have one room in which we could make a bed to lodge you both; and if this is sufficient, it is at your service. But as beds and rooms and accommodations are easily procured by one on the spot, permit me to offer my service in either way; either in my cottage, or in a lodging in the village, as is most agreeable to you, if you and Mrs. Butts should think Bognor a pleasant relief from business in the summer. It will give me the utmost delight to do my best.

Sussex is certainly a happy place, and Felpham in particular is the sweetest spot on earth; at least it is so to me and my good wife, who

vicinity of Felpham are likely to have been among their number. It is curious to see that in the report of the proceedings of his trial on the charge of sedition in August 1803, Blake is described as a Miniature Painter; and that he himself in the course of his own defence remarks that Scholfield had called him a *Military* Painter, "I suppose mistaking the words Miniature Painter, which he might have heard me called." There are, doubtless, a fair number of Blake's miniatures in existence remaining for an industrious collector to unearth. The specimens with which I am acquainted, if they lack the delicacy and grace of the finest, compare favourably enough with ordinary work of the period.

desires her kindest love to Mrs. Butts and yourself. Accept mine also, and believe me to remain your devoted WILLIAM BLAKE.

19.

TO THOMAS BUTTS.

11*th September* 1801.

MY DEAR SIR,—I hope you will continue to excuse my want of steady perseverance, by which want I am still your debtor, and you so much my creditor; but such as I can be, I will. I can be grateful, and I can soon send some of your designs which I have nearly completed. In the meantime, by my sister's hands, I transmit to Mrs. Butts an attempt at your likeness,[1] which I hope she, who is the best judge, will think like. Time flies faster (as seems to me here) than in London. I labour incessantly. I accomplish not one half of what I intend, because my abstract folly hurries me often away while I am at work, carrying me over mountains and valleys, which are not real, into a land of abstraction where

[1] Gilchrist (1880) vol. ii. p. 212, No. 39. In the possession of Mrs. Butts, at Parkstone. Bust: full face, slightly turned to left: powdered, curly hair: blue uniform, with gold buttons and shoulder piece, a red collar: holding a book in his right hand (see Plate).

MRS. BUTTS

THOMAS BUTTS

THOMAS BUTTS (JUNIOR)

spectres of the dead[1] wander. This I endeavour to prevent; I, with my whole might, chain my feet to the world of duty and reality. But in vain! the faster I bind, the better is the ballast; for I, so far from being bound down, take the world with me in my flights, and often it seems lighter than a ball of wool rolled by the wind. Bacon and Newton[2] would prescribe ways of making the world heavier to me, and Pitt[3] would prescribe

[1] cp. *Milton*, p. 3 (invocation): "Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poet's Song | . . . Come into my hand | By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm | From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry | The Eternal Great Humanity Divine planted his Paradise, | And in it caus'd the Spectres of the Dead to take sweet form | In likeness of himself."

[2] Types of rational philosophy and empirical science, both enemies of Imagination. cp. *Jerusalem*, p. 54, ll. 15–18: "But the Spectre like a hoar frost & a Mildew rose over Albion, | Saying, I am God, O Sons of Men! I am your Rational Power! | Am I not Bacon & Newton & Locke who teach Humility to Man? | Who teach Doubt and Experiment"; *Milton*, p. 43, ll. 1–8: "To bathe in the waters of Life: to wash off the Not Human. | I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration, | To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour, | To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration, | To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albion's covering, | To take off his filthy garments & clothe him with Imagination, | To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration | That it shall no longer dare to mock with the aspersion of Madness, cast on the Inspired"; and the remark quoted by Crabb Robinson in his journal (Gilchrist, 1880, vol. i. p. 384): "Bacon, Locke and Newton are the three great teachers of atheism, or Satan's doctrine." The subject of one of Blake's "printed drawings" is Newton overshadowed by utter darkness, drawing a geometrical figure with compasses on a scroll upon the earth.

[3] The promoter of war. cp. "The Spiritual Form of Pitt guiding Behemoth," in the National Gallery: Behemoth representing war by land.

distress for a medicinal potion. But as none on earth can give me mental distress, and I know all distress inflicted by Heaven is a mercy, a fig for all corporeal! Such distress is my mock and scorn. Alas! wretched, happy, ineffectual labourer of Time's moments that I am! who shall deliver me from this spirit of abstraction and improvidence? Such, my dear Sir, is the truth of my state, and I tell it you in palliation of my seeming neglect of your most pleasant orders. But I have not neglected them; and yet a year is rolled over, and only now I approach the prospect of sending you some, which you may expect soon. I should have sent them by my sister; but, as the coach goes three times a week to London, and they will arrive as safe as with her, I shall have an opportunity of enclosing several together which are not yet completed. I thank you again and again for your generous forbearance, of which I have need; and now I must express my wishes to see you at Felpham, and to show you Mr. Hayley's library,[1] which is still unfinished, but is in a finishing way and looks well. I ought also to mention my extreme disappointment at Mr. Johnson's[2] forgetfulness, who appointed to call

[1] See note 1, p. 85.

[2] Rector of Yaxham with Welborne, Norfolk: cousin and friend of Cowper. Blake made a miniature of him when he was on a visit to

on you but did not. He is also a happy abstract, known by all his friends as the most innocent forgetter of his own interests. He is nephew to the late Mr. Cowper the poet. You would like him much. I continue painting miniatures, and I improve more and more, as all my friends tell me. But my principal labour at this time is engraving plates for Cowper's *Life*,[1] a work of magnitude, which Mr. Hayley is now labouring at with all his matchless industry, and which will be a most valuable acquisition to literature, not only on account of Mr. Hayley's composition, but also as it will contain letters of Cowper to his friends—perhaps, or rather certainly, the very best letters that were ever published.

My wife joins with me in love to you and Mrs. Butts, hoping that her joy is now increased, and yours also, in an increase of family and of health and happiness.—I remain, dear Sir, ever yours sincerely, WILLIAM BLAKE.

Hayley in 1802 (see note 1, p. 88): the Johnson family are unable to say what has become of this likeness.

[1] *The Life and Posthumous Writings of William Cowper* . . . by William Hayley . . . 1803 [–1804]. 3 vols. 4to. Contains the following plates by Blake: i. Portrait of Cowper, after Romney; ii. Portrait of Mrs. Cowper, mother of the poet, after D. Heins; iii. Portrait of Cowper, after Lawrence; iv. The Pheasant's Nest, Cowper's tame Hares; v. A View of St. Edmund's Chapel, in the Church of East Dereham, containing the Grave of William Cowper; vi. A Sketch of the Monument Erected in the Church of East Dereham in Norfolk, In Memory of William Cowper.

20.

To Thomas Butts.

Felpham Cottage (of cottages the prettiest),
11*th September* 1801.

Next time I have the happiness to see you, I am determined to paint another portrait of you from life in my best manner, for memory will not do in such minute operations; for I have now discovered that without nature before the painter's eye, he can never produce anything in the walks of natural painting. Historical designing is one thing, and portrait-painting another: and they are as distinct as any two arts can be. Happy would that man be who could unite them!

P.S.—Please to remember our best respects to Mr. Birch,[1] and tell him that Felpham men are the mildest of the human race. If it is the will of Providence, they shall be the wisest. We hope that he will, next summer, joke us face to face. God bless you all!

[1] John Birch (1745–1815), surgeon: chiefly remarkable for his enthusiastic advocacy of electrical treatment. He attended Mrs. Blake several times, and is mentioned more than once again in the Letters.

21.

To John Flaxman.

19*th October* 1801.

Dear Flaxman,—I rejoice to hear that your great work is accomplished. Peace[1] opens the way to greater still. The kingdoms of this world are now become the kingdoms of God and His Christ, and we shall reign with Him for ever and ever. The reign of literature and the arts commences. Blessed are those who are found studious of literature and human and polite accomplishments. Such have their lamps burning and such shall shine as the stars.

Mr. Thomas, your friend to whom you was so kind as to make honourable mention of me, has been at Felpham and did me the favour to call on me. I have promised him to send my designs for *Comus*[2] when I have done them, directed to you.

Now I hope to see the great works of art, as they are so near to Felpham: Paris being scarce

[1] Buonaparte opened negotiations of peace at the close of 1801, and the Peace of Amiens was concluded in the following March.

[2] There are two sets of eight drawings each for *Comus*, one of them formerly in the collection of Alfred Aspland, the other, from J. C. Strange's collection, now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts—neither of them of extraordinary merit. It is uncertain which of the two is the one mentioned here.

farther off than London. But I hope that France and England will henceforth be as one country and their arts one, and that you will ere long be erecting monuments in Paris—emblems of peace.

My wife joins with me in love to you and Mrs. Flaxman.—I remain, yours sincerely,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

I have just seen Weller. All your friends in the south are willing to await your leisure for works of marble, but Weller says it would soothe and comfort the good sister and the upright Mr. D. to see a little sketch from your hand. Adio.

22.

TO THOMAS BUTTS.

10th January 1802.

DEAR SIR,—Your very kind and affectionate letter, and the many kind things you have said in it, called upon me for an immediate answer; but it found my wife and myself so ill, and my wife so very ill, that till now I have not been able to do this duty. The ague and rheumatism have been almost constant enemies, which she has combated in vain almost ever since we have been here; and her sickness is always my sorrow, of course. But

what you tell me about your sight afflicted me not a little, and that about your health, in another part of your letter, makes me entreat you to take due care of both. It is a part of our duty to God and man to take due care of His gifts; and though we ought not to think *more* highly of ourselves, yet we ought to think *as* highly of ourselves as immortals ought to think.

When I came down here, I was more sanguine than I am at present; but it was because I was ignorant of many things which have since occurred, and chiefly the unhealthiness of the place. Yet I do not repent of coming on a thousand accounts; and Mr. H[ayley], I doubt not, will do ultimately all that both he and I wish—that is, to lift me out of difficulty. But this is no easy matter to a man who, having spiritual enemies of such formidable magnitude, cannot expect to want natural hidden ones.

Your approbation of my pictures is a multitude to me, and I doubt not that all your kind wishes in my behalf shall in due time be fulfilled. Your kind offer of pecuniary assistance I can only thank you for at present, because I have enough to serve my present purpose here. Our expenses are small, and our income, from our incessant labour, fully adequate to them at present. I am now engaged in engraving six small plates for a new edition of

Mr. Hayley's *Triumphs of Temper*,[1] from drawings by Maria Flaxman, sister to my friend the sculptor. And it seems that other things will follow in course, if I do but copy these well. But patience! If great things do not turn out, it is because such things depend on the spiritual and not on the natural world; and if it was fit for me, I doubt not that I should be employed in greater things; and when it is proper, my talents shall be properly exercised in public, and hope they are now in private. For, till then, I leave no stone unturned, and no path unexplored that leads to improvement in my beloved arts. One thing of real consequence I have accomplished by coming into the country, which is to me consolation enough: namely, I have recollected all my scattered thoughts on art, and resumed my primitive and original ways of execution,[2] in both painting and engraving, which in the confusion of London I had very much lost and obliterated from my mind. But whatever

[1] *The Triumphs of Temper.* A Poem: In Six Cantos. By William Hayley, Esq. The Twelfth Edition, Corrected. With New Original Designs, by Maria Flaxman, 1803. 12mo, with six plates, engraved by Blake.

[2] For some time past Blake had been endeavouring to incorporate into his work all the graces of Venice and Flanders as well as the linear austerity of the Florentines. There is about this date a distinct return to those principles of technique which are latent in his youthful pieces and precede this attempt at eclecticism; that is to say, to that uniformity of colour and long continuation of lines to which he alludes in Letter 23.

becomes of my labours, I would rather that they should be preserved in your greenhouse (not, as you mistakenly call it, dunghill) than in the cold gallery of fashion. The sun may yet shine, and then they will be brought into open air.

But you have so generously and openly desired that I will divide my griefs with you, that I cannot hide what it has now become my duty to explain. My unhappiness has arisen from a source which, if explored too narrowly, might hurt my pecuniary circumstances; as my dependence is on engraving at present, and particularly on the engravings I have in hand for Mr. H[ayley]: and I find on all hands great objections to my doing anything but the mere drudgery of business, and intimations that if I do not confine myself to this, I shall not live. This has always pursued me. You will understand by this the source of all my uneasiness. This from Johnson and Fuseli[1] brought me down here, and this from Mr. H. will bring me back again. For that I cannot live without doing my duty to lay up treasures in heaven is certain and determined, and to this I have long made up my mind. And why this should be made an objection to me, while drunkenness, lewdness, gluttony, and even idleness itself, do not hurt other men, let Satan himself explain. The thing I have most at heart—more

[1] See notes 3 and 4, p. 66.

than life, or all that seems to make life comfortable without—is the interest of true religion and science. And whenever anything appears to affect that interest (especially if I myself omit any duty to my station as a soldier of Christ), it gives me the greatest of torments. I am not ashamed, afraid, or averse to tell you what ought to be told: that I am under the direction of messengers from heaven, daily and nightly. But the nature of such things is not, as some suppose, without trouble or care. Temptations are on the right hand and on the left. Behind, the sea of time and space[1] roars and follows swiftly. He who keeps not right onwards is lost; and if our footsteps slide in clay, how can we do otherwise than fear and tremble? But I should not have troubled you with this account of my spiritual state, unless it had been necessary in explaining the actual cause of my uneasiness, into which you are so kind as to inquire; for I never obtrude such things on others unless questioned, and then I never disguise the truth. But if we fear to do the dictates of our angels, and tremble at the tasks set before us; if we refuse to do spiritual acts because of natural fears or natural desires, who can describe the

[1] cp. *Milton*, p. 14, ll. 39, 40: "The Sea of Time & Space thunder'd aloud | Against the rock [the death-couch of Albion]."

dismal torments of such a state! I too well remember the threats I heard!—"If you, who are organised by Divine Providence for spiritual communion, refuse, and bury your talent in the earth, even though you should want natural bread, sorrow and desperation pursue you through life, and after death shame and confusion of face to eternity. Everyone in eternity will leave you, aghast at the man who was crowned with glory and honour by his brethren, and betrayed their cause to their enemies. You will be called the base Judas who betrayed his friend!" Such words would make any stout man tremble, and how then could I be at ease? But I am now no longer in that state, and now go on again with my task, fearless, though my path is difficult. I have no fear of stumbling while I keep it.

My wife desires her kindest love to Mrs. Butts, and I have permitted her to send it to you also. We often wish that we could unite again in society, and hope that the time is not distant when we shall do so, being determined not to remain another winter here, but to return to London.

> I hear a Voice you cannot hear, that says I must not stay,
> I see a Hand you cannot see, that beckons me away.

Naked we came here—naked of natural things—and naked we shall return; but while clothed with

the Divine mercy, we are richly clothed in spiritual, and suffer all the rest gladly. Pray give my love to Mrs. Butts and your family.—I am, yours sincerely, WILLIAM BLAKE.

P.S.—Your obliging proposal of exhibiting my two pictures likewise calls for my thanks; I will finish the others, and then we shall judge of the matter with certainty.

23.

TO THOMAS BUTTS.

FELPHAM, 22*nd November* 1802.

DEAR SIR,—My brother[1] tells me that he fears you are offended with me. I fear so too, because there appears some reason why you might be so; but when you have heard me out, you will not be so. I have now given two years to the intense study of those parts of the art which relate to light and shade and colour, and am convinced that either my understanding is incapable of comprehending the beauties of colouring, or the pictures which I painted for you are equal in every part of the art, and superior in one, to anything that has been done since the age of Raphael. All

[1] James.

Sir J. Reynolds' Discourses to the Royal Academy will show that the Venetian finesse in art can never be united with the majesty of colouring necessary to historical beauty; and in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Gilpin, author of a work on picturesque scenery, he says thus:[1] "It may be worth consideration whether the epithet picturesque is not applicable to the excellences of the inferior schools rather than to the higher. The works of Michael Angelo, Raphael, etc., appear to me to have nothing of it; whereas Rubens and the Venetian painters may almost be said to have nothing else. Perhaps *picturesque* is somewhat synonymous to the word taste, which we should think improperly applied to Homer or Milton, but very well to Prior or Pope. I suspect that the application of these words is to excellences of an inferior order, and which are incompatible with the grand style. You are certainly right in saying that variety of tints and forms is picturesque; but it must be remembered, on the other hand, that the reverse of this (*uniformity of colour* and a *long continuation of lines*[2]) produces grandeur." So says Sir Joshua, and so say I; for I have now proved that the parts of the art which I neglected to display, in

[1] *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty*, by William Gilpin, 1792. The words quoted will be found on p. 35.

[2] Both of these are characteristic of Blake's formed style.

those little pictures and drawings which I had the pleasure and profit to do for you, are incompatible with the designs. There is nothing in the art which our painters do that I can confess myself ignorant of. I also know and understand, and can assuredly affirm, that the works I have done for you are equal to the Caracci or Raphael (and I am now some years older than Raphael was when he died). I say they are equal to Caracci or Raphael, or else I am blind, stupid, ignorant, and incapable, in two years' study, to understand those things which a boarding-school miss can comprehend in a fortnight. Be assured, my dear friend, that there is not one touch in those drawings and pictures but what came from my head and my heart in unison; that I am proud of being their author, and grateful to you my employer; and that I look upon you as the chief of my friends, whom I would endeavour to please, because you, among all men, have enabled me to produce these things. I would not send you a drawing or a picture till I had again reconsidered my notions of art, and had put myself back as if I was a learner. I have proved that I am right, and shall now go on with the vigour I was, in my childhood, famous for. But I do not pretend to be perfect: yet, if my works have faults, Caracci's, Correggio's, and Raphael's have faults also. Let

me observe that the yellow-leather flesh of old men, the ill-drawn and ugly old women, and, above all, the daubed black-and-yellow shadows that are found in most fine, ay, and the finest pictures, I altogether reject as ruinous to effect, though connoisseurs may think otherwise.

Let me also notice that Caracci's pictures are not like Correggio's, nor Correggio's like Raphael's; and, if neither of them was to be encouraged till he did like any of the others, he must die without encouragement. My pictures are unlike any of these painters, and I would have them to be so. I think the manner I adopt more perfect than any other. No doubt they thought the same of theirs. You will be tempted to think that, as I improve, the pictures, etc., that I did for you are not what I would now wish them to be. On this I beg to say that they are what I intended them, and that I know I never shall do better; for, if I were to do them over again, they would lose as much as they gained, because they were done in the heat of my spirits.

But you will justly inquire why I have not written all this time to you. I answer I have been very unhappy, and could not think of troubling you about it, or any of my real friends. (I have written many letters to you which I burned and did not send.) And why I have not before now

finished the miniature[1] I promised to Mrs. Butts. I answer I have not, till now, in any degree pleased myself, and now I must entreat you to excuse faults, for portrait-painting is the direct contrary to designing and historical painting, in every respect. If you have not nature before you for every touch, you cannot paint portrait; and if you have nature before you at all, you cannot paint history. It was Michael Angelo's opinion, and is mine. Pray give my wife's love with mine to Mrs. Butts. Assure her that it cannot be long before I have the pleasure of painting from you in person, and then she may expect a likeness. But now I have done all I could, and know she will forgive any failure in consideration of the endeavour. And now let me finish with assuring you that, though I have been very unhappy, I am so no longer. I am again emerged into the light of day; I still and shall to eternity embrace Christianity, and adore Him who is the express image of God; but I have travelled through perils and darkness not unlike a champion. I have conquered, and shall go on conquering. Nothing can withstand the fury of my course among the stars of God and in the abysses of the accuser. My enthusiasm is still what it was, only enlarged and confirmed.

[1] See note 1, p. 90.

I now send two pictures, and hope you will approve of them. I have enclosed the account of money received and work done, which I ought long ago to have sent you. Pray forgive errors in omissions of this kind. I am incapable of many attentions which it is my duty to observe towards you, through multitude of employment, and through hope of soon seeing you again. I often omit to inquire of you, but pray let me now hear how you do, and of the welfare of your family. Accept my sincere love and respect.—I remain yours sincerely, WILLM. BLAKE.

A piece of seaweed serves for barometer, and gets wet and dry as the weather gets so.

24.

TO THOMAS BUTTS.

22nd November 1802.

DEAR SIR,—After I had finished my letter, I found that I had not said half what I intended to say, and in particular I wish to ask you what subject you choose to be painted on the remaining canvas which I brought down with me (for there were three), and to tell you that several of the drawings were in great forwardness. You will

see by the enclosed account that the remaining number of drawings which you gave me orders for is eighteen. I will finish these with all possible expedition, if indeed I have not tired you, or, as it is politely called, *bored* you too much already; or, if you would rather cry out: "Enough, off, off!" Tell me in a letter of forgiveness if you were offended, and of accustomed friendship if you were not. But I will bore you more with some verses which my wife desires me to copy out and send you with her kind love and respect. They were composed above a twelvemonth ago, while walking from Felpham to Lavant, to meet my sister:

With happiness stretch'd across the hills,
In a cloud that dewy sweetness distills,
With a blue sky spread over with wings,[1]
And a mild sun that mounts & sings;
With trees & fields, full of Fairy elves,
And little devils who fight for themselves—
Remembering the Verses that Hayley sung
When my heart knock'd against the root of my tongue—
With Angels planted in Hawthorn bowers,
And God Himself in the passing hours;
With Silver Angels across my way,
And Golden demons that none can stay;
With my Father hovering upon the wind,
And my Brother Robert[2] just behind,
And my Brother John,[3] the evil one,
In a black cloud making his mone;

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[1] cp. *Jerusalem*, p. 19, l. 44.
[2] See note 4, p. 68; and Life, p. 3.
[3] See Life, p. 2.

Tho' dead, they appear upon my path,
Notwithstanding my terrible wrath:
They beg, they entreat, they drop their tears,
Fill'd full of hopes, fill'd full of fears—
With a thousand Angels upon the Wind,
Pouring disconsolate from behind
To drive them off, & before my way
A frowning Thistle[1] implores my stay.
What to others a trifle appears
Fills me full of smiles or tears;
For double the vision my eyes do see,
And a double vision[2] is always with me.
With my inward eye, 'tis an old Man grey;
With my outward, a Thistle across my way.
"If thou goest back," the thistle said,
"Thou art to endless woe betray'd;
For here does Theotormon[3] lower,
And here is Enitharmon's[4] bower;

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[1] cp. *Milton*, p. 24, ll. 26, 27: "The indignant Thistle, whose bitterness is bred in his milk, | Who feeds on the contempt of his neighbours."

[2] cp. "The Everlasting Gospel" (*The Poetical Works of William Blake*, ed. John Sampson, 1905: pp. 254–5, ll. 101–104): "This life's Five Windows of the Soul | Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole, | And leads you to Believe a Lie | When you see with, not through, the Eye."

[3] Theotormon, together with Rintrah, Palamahon, and Bromion, were "the Four Sons of Jerusalem that never were Generated" (*Jerusalem*, p. 71, l. 51), that is to say, never descended to corporeal existence. They remain in the Visionary World, and so are the children of Prophecy, or of Los, who is the Spirit of Prophecy. They are the guardians of the spiritual life, and labour at the furnaces of Los, continually building the great City of Art, called Golgonooza, where "the stars are created & the seeds of all things planted" (*Milton*, p. 24, l. 53). (cp. also, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *passim*; *Milton*, p. 23, l. 12 and *passim*; *Jerusalem*, p. 16, l. 8; p. 72, l. 11; p. 73, l. 5; *Vala*, book viii. l. 352.)

[4] Enitharmon is the Emanation and wife of Los: and where he appears under the aspect of Time, she is Space (cp. *Milton*, p. 23, l. 68).

And Los[1] the terrible thus hath sworn,
Because thou backward dost return,
Poverty, Envy, old age, and fear,
Shall bring thy Wife upon a bier;
And Butts shall give what Fuseli gave,
A dark black Rock, and a gloomy Cave."[2]
I struck the Thistle with my foot,
And broke him up from his delving root.
"Must the duties of life each other cross?
Must every joy be dung and dross?
Must my dear Butts feel cold neglect
Because I give Hayley his due respect?
Must Flaxman look upon me as wild,
And all my friends be with doubts beguil'd?
Must my Wife live in my Sister's bane,
Or my Sister survive on my Love's pain?
The curses of Los, the terrible shade,
And his dismal terrors make me afraid."

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[1] Los, the Spirit of Prophecy (*Jerusalem*, p. 44, l. 31) is symbolised in the natural world by the Sun (the name itself being a transposition of the word *Sol*); and just as the Sun, as light, is the vehicle, and so in a certain sense the *creator* of phenomenal life: so Los is the vehicle and creator of inspiration, in the human brain. cp. *Milton*, p. 23, ll. 68–76: "Los is nam'd Time, Enitharmon is nam'd Space: | But they depict him bald & aged, who is in eternal youth, | All powerful, and his looks flourish like the brows of morning: | He is the Spirit of Prophecy, the ever apparent Elias. |Time is the mercy of Eternity; without Time's swiftness, | which is the swiftest of all things, all were eternal torment. | All the Gods of the Kingdoms of Earth labour in Los's Halls: | Every one is a fallen son of the Spirit of Prophecy: | He is the Fourth Zoa that stood around the Throne Divine" (cp. also *Milton*, p. 20, ll. 6–25).

[2] The Cave and the Rock are always, with Blake, evil and gloomy symbols: they represent the dark, hard, and contracted life of Reason—"For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through the narrow chinks of his cavern" (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*). (cp. *Jerusalem*, p. 31, l. 6: "Caves of solitude and dark despair"; p. 43, l. 60: "I see a Cave, a Rock, a Tree deadly and poisonous, unimaginative.")

So I spoke, and struck in my wrath
The old man weltering upon my path.
Then Los appear'd in all his power:
In the sun he appear'd, descending before
My face in fierce flames; in my double sight,
'Twas outward a Sun, inward Los in his might.
"My hands are labour'd day and night,
And Ease comes never in my sight.
My Wife has no indulgence given,
Except what comes to her from heaven.
We eat little, we drink less;
This Earth breeds not our happiness.
Another Sun[1] feeds our life's streams,—
We are not warmèd with thy beams;
Thou measurest not the Time to me,
Nor yet the space that I do see;
My Mind is not with thy light array'd,
Thy terrors shall not make me afraid."

When I had my Defiance given,
The Sun stood trembling in heaven;
The Moon, that glow'd remote below,
Became leprous & white as snow;
And every soul of man on the Earth
Felt affliction, & sorrow, & sickness, & death.
Los flam'd in my path, and the sun was hot
With the bows of my Mind and the Arrows[2] of Thought—
My bowstring fierce with Ardour breathes,
My arrows glow in their golden sheaves;
My brother & father march before;
The heavens drop with human gore.
Now I a fourfold vision[3] see,
And a fourfold vision is given to me;

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[1] *i.e.* Los in his spiritual and not in his temporal aspect.

[2] cp. *Milton*, p. 2: "Bring me my Bow of burning gold! | Bring me my arrows of desire!"

[3] The state of fourfold vision occurs when the whole visible creation is transfigured before the visionary, who has put off "the rotten rags of" sense and "memory" and put on Imagination, uncorrupted: when the symbol becomes the reality and nature *is* Imagination itself. In it are produced those "sublime" works of art

'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight,
And threefold in soft Beulah's night,
And twofold Always May God us keep
From Single vision, & Newton's sleep!

I also enclose you some ballads by Mr. Hayley, with prints to them by your humble servant.[1] I should have sent them before now, but could not get anything done for you to please myself; for I

which are "addressed to the intellectual powers," while they are "altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding:" that is to say, where the appeal is directly to Imagination and not through the senses. This state, generally called *Eden* by Blake, is the one to which he held that all art should aspire. But, not unnaturally, the critics "trembled exceedingly . . . | . . . and wept, | crying with one voice: Give us a habitation & a place | In which we may be hidden. . . . | For if we, who are but for a time & who pass away in winter, | Behold these wonders of Eternity we shall consume" (*Milton*, p. 30, ll. 21–27); accordingly, a second state or threefold vision was "given in mercy to those who sleep" (*Vala*, book i. l. 199), that is to say, those who have spiritual aspirations indeed, but who are continually deceived by the apparent solidity of the external world and endowing it with a material existence. It is the state in which imaginative creation is usually found, where the purity of the inspiration is obscured and contaminated by numberless delusions of a corporeal nature. It is the atmosphere through which those who are not strong enough to bear the naked Light become recipients of the divine proceeding. Its name is *Beulah*. The third state, called in *Jerusalem*, *Generation*, "the image of regeneration," is the normal, uncreative state, in which those who have any imagination at all commonly reside. The last, named *Ulro*, is "a self-devouring monstrous Human Death" (*Milton*, p. 34, l. 26), and embraces those whose bosoms are "opake against the Divine Vision" (*Milton*, p. 7, l. 30), either through the soul-destroying influences of Science and Reason, or, worst of all, through "the cruel and hypocritic holiness" of Puritanism.

[1] *A Series of Ballads* (about animals): Chichester: Printed by J. Seagrave for W. Blake, Felpham, 1802; 4to, issued in four parts, in blue paper covers, with 14 engravings (including head and tail-pieces) by Blake from his own designs.

do assure you that I have truly studied the two little pictures I now send, and do not repent of the time I have spent upon them. God bless you.—Yours,

W. B.

P.S.—I have taken the liberty to trouble you with a letter to my brother,[1] which you may be so kind as to send, or give him, and oblige yours,

W. B.

25.

To Thomas Butts.

Felpham, 25*th April* 1803.

My dear Sir,—I write in haste, having received a pressing letter from my brother. I intended to have sent the picture of the "Riposo,"[2] which is nearly finished—much to my satisfaction, but not quite. You shall have it soon. I now said the four numbers[3] for Mr. Birch, with best respects to him. The reason the *Ballads* have been suspended is the pressure of other business, but they will go on again soon.

Accept of my thanks for your kind and heartening letter. You have faith in the endeavours of me, your weak brother and fellow-disciple; how

[1] James. [2] See note 1, p. 117.
[3] Of the *Ballads* alluded to in the last letter.

great must be your faith in our Divine Master! You are to me a lesson of humility, while you exalt me by such distinguishing commendations. I know that you see certain merits in me, which, by God's grace, shall be made fully apparent and perfect in eternity. In the meantime I must not bury the talents in the earth, but do my endeavour to live to the glory of our Lord and Saviour; and I am also grateful to the kind hand that endeavours to lift me out of despondency, even if it lifts me too high.

And now, my dear sir, congratulate me on my return to London, with the full approbation of Mr. Hayley and with promise. But, alas! now I may say to you—what perhaps I should not dare to say to anyone else: that I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoyed, and that I may converse with my friends in eternity, see visions, dream dreams, and prophesy and speak parables unobserved, and at liberty from the doubts of other mortals; perhaps doubts proceeding from kindness; but doubts are always pernicious, especially when we doubt our friends. Christ is very decided on this point: "He who is not with Me is against Me." There is no medium or middle state; and if a man is the enemy of my spiritual life while he pretends to be the friend of my corporeal, he is a real enemy[1]; but the man may be the friend of

[1] cp. *Milton*, p. 3*, l. 26: "Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies."

my spiritual life while he seems the enemy of my corporeal, though not *vice versa.*

What is very pleasant, every one who hears of my going to London again applauds it as the only course for the interest of all concerned in my works; observing that I ought not to be away from the opportunities London affords of seeing fine pictures, and the various improvements in works of art going on in London.

But none can know the spiritual acts of my three years' slumber on the banks of ocean, unless he has seen them in the spirit, or unless he should read my long poem[1] descriptive of those acts; for I have in these years composed an immense number of verses on one grand theme, similar to Homer's *Iliad* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*; the persons and machinery entirely new to the inhabitants of earth (some of the persons excepted). I have written this poem from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without

[1] The *Milton* (dated 1804, but not given to the world until about 1808) deals especially with the acts at Felpham: cp. *Public Address* (Gilchrist, 1880, vol. ii. p. 175), "The manner in which I have rooted out the nest of villains will be seen in a poem concerning my three years' herculean labours at Felpham, which I shall soon publish"—(he is speaking of the attack made upon him in *The Examiner*). From the title-page we learn that Blake's original intention was to publish twelve books of this poem. Two only, however, were engraved; and a good deal of the material seems to have been transferred to *Jerusalem*. The latter is also dated 1804, but seems not to have been ready for publication until about 1818 (see note 1, p. 223).

premeditation, and even against my will. The time it has taken in writing was thus rendered non-existent, and an immense poem exists which seems to be the labour of a long life, all produced without labour or study. I mention this to show you what I think the grand reason of my being brought down here.

I have a thousand and ten thousand things to say to you. My heart is full of futurity. I perceive that the sore travail which has been given me these three years leads to glory and honour. I rejoice and tremble: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." I had been reading the cxxxix. Psalm a little before your letter arrived. I take your advice. I see the face of my Heavenly Father. He lays His hand upon my head, and gives a blessing to all my work. Why should I be troubled? Why should my heart and flesh cry out? I will go on in the strength of the Lord; through Hell will I sing forth His praises; that the dragons of the deep may praise Him, and that those who dwell in darkness and in the sea coasts may be gathered into His kingdom. Excuse my, perhaps, too great enthusiasm. Please to accept of and give our loves to Mrs. Butts and your amiable family, and believe me, ever yours affectionately,

WILL. BLAKE.

26.

To Thomas Butts.

Felpham, *6th July* 1803.

Dear Sir,—I send you the "Riposo,"[1] which I hope you will think my best picture, in many respects. It represents the Holy Family in Egypt, guarded in their repose from those fiends the Egyptian gods.[2] And though not directly taken from a poem of Milton's (for till I had designed it Milton's poem did not come into my thoughts), yet it is very similar to his "Hymn on the Nativity," which you will find among his smaller poems, and will read with great delight. I have given, in the

[1] The picture has, unhappily, disappeared. It may probably be identified with a *fresco* until recently in the Butts collection, but which has now perished, together with a number of others (said to have been devoured by rats !). The latter is thus described in Gilchrist (1880 ed., vol. ii. p. 238, No. 161): "*Tempera.* The Holy Family are within a tent; an angel at its entrance; the donkey outside. Very dark by decay of the surface, and otherwise injured" (see, also, Gilchrist, vol. ii. p. 213, No. 43).

[2] The symbolical significance of the *Egyptian gods* is made clear by the following sentences (among those which surround Blake's print of the "Laocoon"):

"The Gods of . . . Egypt were Mathematical diagrams" (alluding to the supposed use of a canon of proportion for the human figure by the Egyptian artists).

"Egypt . . . whose Gods are the Powers of this World: Goddess, Nature; who first spoil and then destroy Imaginative Art. For their Glory is War and Dominion."

"Spiritual war. Israel delivered from Egypt is Art delivered from Nature and Imitation."

background, a building, which may be supposed the ruin of a part of Nimrod's tower,[1] which I conjecture to have spread over many countries; for he ought to be reckoned of the giant brood.[2]

I have now on the stocks the following drawings for you[3]: 1. "Jephthah sacrificing his Daughter";

[1] Nimrod was the traditional builder of the Tower of Babel (cp. Dante, *Inf.* c. xxxi, 46–81). The typical warrior and huntsman, he is with Blake the personification of violence, tyranny, and cruel religion. His war and hunting are of a corporeal nature, and utterly opposed to mental strife and the pursuit of spiritual sustenance. The building of the tower is symbolical of the state of those people who pretend to reach heaven by natural means.

[2] The giants are the representatives of brutish and sensual existence.

[3] i. Gilchrist (1880), vol. ii. p. 213, No. 48. Now in the possession of W. Graham Robertson, Esq. Water-colour, $14\frac{1}{8} \times 12\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The maiden is kneeling naked, with folded hands, upon the altar, between two curtains of cloud, one bluish and the other dark brown. Her lute and tambourine lie at her side. Jephthah kneels below with outspread arms, and gazes up at her. Two virgins in white stand on either side.

ii. G. ii. p. 214, No. 50. Blake's *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809), No. xv. Now in the possession of W. Graham Robertson, Esq. Water-colour, $13\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Ruth, who is a tall slender figure, with long yellow hair and clothed in white, is embracing Naomi, who is dressed in blue. Orpah, a very tall figure clothed in pink, turns away along a road, winding by a river among trees and mountains. Pale in colour, and of a greyish tone.

iii. G. ii. p. 213, No. 45. Now in the possession of W. Graham Robertson, Esq. Water-colour, $14\frac{1}{2} \times 15\frac{7}{8}$ inches. The angel (l.) in shining white raiment, floats forth, on shadowy wings, from the doorway of the tomb, his left arm uplifted and pointing upwards. The three women, clothed in dark grey-blue robes, stand in a row (r.), each with a vase of spices. They cling together with expressions of bewilderment and fear. A dark grey hill, with a building upon it, and, above, a pale grey and blue sky, make the background.

iv. G. ii. p. 213, No. 27. Now in the possession of W. Graham

2 "Ruth and her Mother-in-Law and Sister"; 3. "The Three Maries at the Sepulchre"; 4. "The Death of Joseph"; 5. "The Death of the Virgin Mary"; 6. "St. Paul Preaching"; and 7. "The Angel of the Divine Presence clothing Adam and Eve with Coats of Skin."

These are all in great forwardness, and I am satisfied that I improve very much, and shall continue to do so while I live, which is a blessing I can never be too thankful for both to God and man.

We look forward every day with pleasure toward our meeting again in London with those

Robertson, Esq. Water-colour, $14\frac{5}{8} \times 13\frac{7}{8}$ inches. Joseph, on the point of death, lies, clothed in white, with clasped hands, his head resting on Our Lady's knees, upon a bed covered with a purple coverlet. Our Lord, white-robed, bends anxiously over him. Above is a bright rainbow, in which many angelic heads appear.

v. G. ii. p. 213, No. 46. Now in the possession of W. Graham Robertson, Esq. Water-colour, $14\frac{5}{8} \times 14\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Companion and similar in design to the preceding. Two white-robed angels kneel at Our Lady's head and two at her feet. St. John, also in white raiment, stands over her with clasped hands.

vi. G. ii. p. 213, No. 44. Sold by Thomas Butts (Junior) at Sotheby's, 26th March 1852. Subsequently in the possession of Mrs. de Putron; present whereabouts unknown. Water-colour.

vii. G. ii. p. 214, No. 49. Now in the possession of W. Graham Robertson, Esq. Water-colour, $15\frac{3}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The Angel of the Divine Presence, an ancient figure of great stature, with white hair and beard, and robed in white, encircles Adam and Eve with his arms, as they stand before him, girt about with sheep skins, their heads reverently bended and their hands clasped. A flaming altar stands on either side, and two palms by each of these overarch the central figures with their green fronds.

All of the above (with the possible exception of No. 6, which I have not seen) are signed and dated 'W. B. inv. 1803.'

whom we have learned to value by absence no less perhaps than we did by presence; for recollection often surpasses everything. Indeed the prospect of returning to our friends is supremely delightful. Then, I am determined that Mr. Butts shall have a good likeness of you, if I have hands and eyes left; for I am become a likeness-taker, and succeed admirably well. But this is not to be achieved without the original sitting before you for every touch, all likenesses from memory being necessarily very, very defective. But nature and fancy are two things, and can never be joined; neither ought any one to attempt it, for it is idolatry,[1] and destroys the soul.

I ought to tell you that Mr. H[ayley] is quite agreeable to our return, and that there is all the appearance in the world of our being fully employed in engraving for his projected works, particularly Cowper's *Milton*—a work now on foot by subscription, and I understand that the subscription goes on briskly. This work is to be a very elegant one, and to consist of all Milton's Poems, with Cowper's Notes, and translations by Cowper from Milton's Latin and Italian Poems.[2] These works will

[1] Blake used to reproach Wordsworth for his worship of nature; in his view, equivalent to atheism (see Crabb Robinson's *Journal*. Gilchrist, 1880, vol. i. p. 387).

[2] *Latin and Italian Poems of Milton translated into English Verse, and a Fragment of a Commentary on "Paradise Lost,"* by the late

be ornamented with engravings from designs by Romney, Flaxman, and your humble servant, and to be engraved also by the last-mentioned. The profits of the work are intended to be appropriated to erect a monument to the memory of Cowper in St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey. Such is the project; and Mr. Addington and Mr. Pitt are both among the subscribers, which are already numerous and of the first rank. The price of the work is six guineas. Thus I hope that all our three years' trouble ends in good luck at last, and shall be forgot by my affections, and only remembered by my understanding; to be a memento in time to come, and to speak to future generations by a sublime allegory, which is now perfectly completed into a grand poem.[1] I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be any other than the secretary; the authors are in eternity. I consider it as the grandest poem that this world contains. Allegory addressed to the intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding, is my definition of the most sublime poetry.[2] It is also somewhat in the same manner defined by Plato. This poem shall, by Divine assistance, be progressively printed

William Cowper, 1808: edited by Hayley, with two plates engraved by Raimbach after Flaxman.

[1] See note 1, p. 115.

[2] See note 3, p. 111.

and ornamented with prints, and given to the Public. But of this work I take care to say little to Mr. Hayley, since he is as much averse to my poetry as he is to a chapter in the Bible. He knows that I have writ it, for I have shown it to him, and he has read part by his own desire, and has looked with sufficient contempt to enhance my opinion of it. But I do not wish to imitate by seeming too obstinate in poetic pursuits. But if all the world should set their faces against this, I have orders to set my face like a flint (Ezekiel iii. 9) against their faces, and my forehead against their foreheads.

As to Mr. H., I feel myself at liberty to say as follows upon this ticklish subject: I regard fashion in poetry as little as I do in painting; so, if both poets and painters should alternately dislike (but I know the majority of them will not), I am not to regard it at all. But Mr. H. approves of my designs as little as he does of my poems, and I have been forced to insist on his leaving me, in both, to my own self-will; for I am determined to be no longer pestered with his genteel ignorance and polite disapprobation. I know myself both poet and painter, and it is not his affected contempt that can move to anything but a more assiduous pursuit of both arts. Indeed, by my late firmness I have brought down his affected loftiness, and he

begins to think I have some genius: as if genius and assurance were the same thing! But his imbecile attempts to depress me only deserve laughter. I say this much to you, knowing that you will not make a bad use of it. But it is a fact too true that, if I had only depended on mortal things, both myself and my wife must have been lost. I shall leave every one in this country astonished at my patience and forbearance of injuries upon injuries; and I do assure you that, if I could have returned to London a month after my arrival here, I should have done so. But I was commanded by my spiritual friends to bear all and be silent, and to go through all without murmuring, and, in fine, hope, till my three years shall be almost accomplished; at which time I was set at liberty to remonstrate against former conduct, and to demand justice and truth; which I have done in so effectual a manner that my antagonist is silenced completely, and I have compelled what should have been of freedom—my just right as an artist and as a man. And if any attempt should be made to refuse me this, I am inflexible, and will relinquish any engagement of designing at all, unless altogether left to my own judgment, as you, my dear friend, have always left me; for which I shall never cease to honour and respect you.

When we meet, I will perfectly describe to you

my conduct and the conduct of others towards me, and you will see that I have laboured hard indeed, and have been borne on angel's wings. Till we meet I beg of God our Saviour to be with you and me, and yours and mine.—Pray give my and my wife's love to Mrs. Butts and family, and believe me to remain, yours in truth and sincerity,

WILL. BLAKE.

27.

TO MR. BUTTS.

FELPHAM, 16*th August* 1803.

DEAR SIR,—I send seven drawings,[1] which I hope will please you. This, I believe, about balances our account. Our return to London draws on apace. Our expectation of meeting again with you is one of our greatest pleasures. Pray tell me how your eyes do? I never sit down to work but I think of you, and feel anxious for the sight of that friend whose eyes have done me so much good. I omitted (very unaccountably) to copy out in my last letter that passage in my rough sketch which related to your kindness in offering to exhibit my two last pictures in the gallery in Berners Street. It was in these words: "I

[1] See note 3, p. 118.

sincerely thank you for your kind offer of exhibiting my two pictures. The trouble you take on my account, I trust, will be recompensed to you by Him who seeth in secret. If you should find it convenient to do so, it will be gratefully remembered by me among the other numerous kindnesses I have received from you."

I go on with the remaining subjects which you gave me commission to execute for you; but I shall not be able to send any more before my return, though perhaps I may bring some with me finished. I am, at present, in a bustle to defend myself against a very unwarrantable warrant from a justice of peace in Chichester, which was taken out against me by a private in Captain Leathe's troop of 1st or Royal Dragoons, for an assault and seditious words. The wretched man has terribly perjured himself, as has his comrade; for, as to sedition, not one word relating to the king or government was spoken by either him or me. His enmity arises from my having turned him out of my garden, into which he was invited as an assistant by a gardener at work therein, without my knowledge that he was so invited. I desired him, as politely as possible, to go out of the garden; he made me an impertinent answer. I insisted on his leaving the garden; he refused. I still persisted in desiring his departure. He then threatened to

knock out my eyes, with many abominable imprecations, and with some contempt for my person; it affronted my foolish pride. I therefore took him by the elbows, and pushed him before me till I had got him out. There I intended to have left him, but he, turning about, put himself into a posture of defiance, threatening and swearing at me. I, perhaps foolishly and perhaps not, stepped out at the gate, and, putting aside his blows, took him again by the elbows, and, keeping his back to me, pushed him forward down the road about fifty yards—he all the while endeavouring to turn round and strike me, and raging and cursing, which drew out several neighbours. At length, when I had got him to where he was quartered, which was very quickly done, we were met at the gate by the master of the house, the Fox Inn[1] (who is the proprietor of my cottage), and his wife and daughter, and the man's comrade, and several other people. My landlord compelled the soldiers to go indoors, after many abusive threats against me and my wife from the two soldiers; but not one word of threat on account of sedition was uttered at that time. This method of revenge was planned between them after they had got together into the stable. This is the whole outline. I have for witnesses: the gardener, who is hostler at the Fox, and who

[1] The inn still flourishes.

evidences that, to his knowledge, no word of the remotest tendency to government or sedition was uttered; our next-door neighbour, a miller's wife (who saw me turn him before me down the road, and saw and heard all that happened at the gate of the inn), who evidences that no expression of threatening on account of sedition was uttered in the heat of their fury by either of the dragoons. This was the woman's own remark, and does high honour to her good sense, as she observes that, whenever a quarrel happens, the offence is always repeated. The landlord of the inn, and his wife and daughter, will evidence the same, and will evidently prove the comrade perjured, who swore that he heard me, while at the gate, utter seditious words, and d— the k—, without which perjury I could not have been committed; and I had no witnesses with me before the justices who could combat his assertion, as the gardener remained in my garden all the while, and he was the only person I thought necessary to take with me. I have been before a bench of justices at Chichester this morning; but they, as the lawyer who wrote down the accusation told me in private, are compelled by the military to suffer a prosecution to be entered into: although they must know, and it is manifest, that the whole is a fabricated perjury. I have been forced to find bail. Mr. Hayley was

kind enough to come forward, and Mr. Seagrave,[1] printer at Chichester; Mr. H. in £50, and Mr. S. in £50; and myself am bound in £100 for my appearance at the quarter-sessions, which is after Michaelmas. So I shall have the satisfaction to see my friends in town before this contemptible business comes on. I say contemptible, for it must be manifest to everyone that the whole accusation is a wilful perjury. Thus, you see, my dear friend, that I cannot leave this place without some adventure. It has struck a consternation through all the villages round. Every man is now afraid of speaking to, or looking at, a soldier; for the peaceable villagers have always been forward in expressing their kindness for us, and they express their sorrow at our departure as soon as they hear of it. Everyone here is my evidence for peace and good neighbourhood; and yet, such is the present state of things, this foolish accusation must be tried in public. Well, I am content, I murmur not, and doubt not that I shall receive justice, and am only sorry for the trouble and expense. I have heard that my accuser is a disgraced sergeant; his name is John Scholfield.[2] Perhaps it will be in your power to learn somewhat

[1] Printer of Hayley's *Ballads*, *The Life of Cowper*, *The Triumphs of Temper*, etc. etc.

[2] The name past in Blake's mythology, and occurs frequently in *Jerusalem*, and once in *Milton*.

about the man. I am very ignorant of what I am requesting of you; I only suggest what I know you will be kind enough to excuse if you can learn nothing about him, and what, I as well know, if it is possible, you will be kind enough to do in this matter.

Dear Sir, this perhaps was suffered to clear up some doubts, and to give opportunity to those whom I doubted to clear themselves of all imputation. If a man offends me ignorantly, and not designedly, surely I ought to consider him with favour and affection. Perhaps the simplicity of myself is the origin of all offences committed against me. If I have found this, I shall have learned a most valuable thing, well worth three years' perseverance. I *have* found it. It is certain that a too passive manner, inconsistent with my active physiognomy, had done me much mischief. I must now express to you my conviction that all is come from the spiritual world for good, and not for evil.

Give me your advice in my perilous adventure. Burn what I have peevishly written about any friend. I have been very much degraded and injuriously treated; but if it all arise from my own fault, I ought to blame myself.

O why was I born with a different face?
Why was I not born like the rest of my race?
When I look, each one starts; when I speak, I offend;
Then I'm silent and passive, & lose every Friend.

Then my verse I dishonour, My pictures despise;
My person degrade, & my temper chastise;
And the pen is my terror, the pencil my shame;
All my Talents I bury, & dead is my Fame.
I am either too low or too highly priz'd;
When elate I am envy'd, When Meek I'm despis'd.

This is but too just a picture of my present state. I pray God to keep you and all men from it, and to deliver me in His own good time. Pray write to me, and tell me how you and your family enjoy health. My much-terrified wife joins me in love to you and Mrs. Butts and all your family. I again take the liberty to beg of you to cause the inclosed letter to be delivered to my brother, and remain sincerely and affectionately yours,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

28.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY.

SOUTH MOLTON STREET,[1]
26th October 1803.

DEAR SIR,—I hasten to write to you by the favour of Mr. Edwards. I have been with Mr. Sanders, who has now in his possession all Mr.

[1] Blake took lodgings at 17 South Molton Street on his return to London in 1803, and remained there until his removal to 3 Fountain Court, Strand, in 1821.

Romney's[1] pictures that remained after the sale at Hampstead; I saw "Milton and his Daughters,"[2] and "'Twas where the Seas were Roaring,"[3] and a beautiful Female Head. He has promised to write a list of all that he has in his possession, and of all that he remembers of Mr. Romney's paintings, with notices where they now are, so far as his recollection will serve. The picture of "Christ in the Desert" he supposes to be one of those which he has rolled on large rollers. He will take them down and unroll them, but cannot do it easily, as they are so large as to occupy the whole length of his workshop, and are laid across beams at the top.

Mr. Flaxman is now out of town. When he returns I will lose no time in setting him to work on the same object.

I have got to work after Fuseli for a little *Shakespeare*.[4] Mr. Johnson, the bookseller, tells

[1] The inquiries in regard to Romney, upon which Blake was engaged about this time, have to do with *The Life of Romney*, published by Hayley in 1809.

[2] A picture representing Milton—blind—dictating to his daughters. Canvas square, 6 ft. 9 in. each way. At Southhill (S. H. Whitbread, Esq.) (see *Romney*, by Humphry Ward and W. Roberts, 1904, vol. ii. p. 163).

[3] Susan, a scene from the ballad *When the Seas were Roaring*: a despondent female, seated on a rock, overpowered with grief, unfinished (see Ward and Roberts' *Romney*, vol. ii. p. 202).

[4] Blake engraved two plates after Fuseli for Alexander Chalmers's *Shakespeare*, 1805; they are—"Queen Katherine's Dream" (vol. 7, facing p. 235), and "Romeo and the Apothecary" (vol. 10, facing p. 107).

me that there is no want of work. So far you will be rejoiced with me, and your words, "*Do not fear you can want employment*!" were verified the morning after I received your kind letter; but I go on finishing Romney[1] with spirit, and for the relief of variety shall engage in other little works as they arise.

I called on Mr. Evans,[2] who gives small hopes of our *Ballads*; he says he has sold but fifteen numbers at the most, and that going on would be a certain loss of almost all the expenses. I then proposed to him to take a part with me in publishing them on a smaller scale, which he declined, on account of its being out of his line of business to publish, and a line in which he is determined never to engage, attaching himself wholly to the sale of fine editions of authors and curious books in general. He advises that some publisher should be spoken to who would purchase the copyright: and, so far as I can judge of the nature of publication, no chance is left to one out of the trade. Thus the case stands at present: God send better times! Everybody complains, yet all go on cheerfully and with spirit. The shops in London

[1] Blake engraved a portrait of Romney, but it was not used for *The Life*.

[2] The name of R. H. Evans (bookseller), Pall Mall, London, appears on the title-page of the quarto edition of Hayley's *Ballads*, as having the book on sale (see note 1, p. 112).

improve; everything is elegant, clean, and neat; the streets are widened where they were narrow; even Snow Hill is become almost level, and is a very handsome street; and the narrow part of the Strand near St. Clement's is widened and become very elegant.

My wife continues poorly, but fancies she is better in health here than by the seaside. We both sincerely pray for the health of Miss Poole, and for all our friends in Sussex, and remain, dear sir, your sincere and devoted servants,

W. and C. Blake.

29.

From John Flaxman to William Hayley.

Buckingham Street, Fitzroy Square,
2nd January 1804.

Dear and kind Friend,—Mr. Blake's opinion that the drawing sent from Norfolk may be advantageously engraved for the ensuing volume of Cowper's *Life*, as an agreeable perspective of the situation, seems very just, whilst the Monument itself may be represented on a larger scale in a vignette,[1] and for the materials on this subject, he

[1] See Hayley's *Life of Cowper* (1803–1804), (1) vol. iii. Frontispiece. "A View of St. Edmund's Chapel in the Church of East

will be at no loss. I sincerely wish with you that the trial was over, that our poor friend's peace of mind might be restored; although I have no doubt from what I have heard of the soldier's character and the merits of the case, that the bill will at least be thrown out by the Court as groundless and vexatious. Blake's irritability, as well as the association and arrangement of his ideas, do not seem likely to be soothed or more advantageously disposed by any power inferior to That by which man is originally endowed with his faculties. I wish all our defects were fewer; certainly my own among the rest. But if we really are desirous this should come to pass, we are told to whom and by what means we should apply.

I wonder, my good friend, as you admired the genius of Romney so much, that you do not remember the whole catalogue of his chalk cartoons; as I think it was your opinion, in common with other sufficient judges, that they were the noblest of his studies. Besides, they were but few in number. The following were the subjects: "A Lapland Witch raising a Storm"; "Charity and her Children"; "Pliny and his Mother flying from

Dereham, containing the Grave of William Cowper, Esq." Francis Stone, del.; W. Blake, sculpt. (2) Plate facing p. 416, "A Sketch of the Monument Erected in the Church of East Dereham in Norfolk, in Memory of William Cowper, Esqre." Etch'd by W. Blake from the original Model by John Flaxman.

the eruption of Vesuvius"; the following from Æschylus: "Raising the Ghost of Darius"[1]; "Atossa's Dream"[2]; "The Furies." I hope they exist in a perfect state; and if they do, they are all well worth etching in a bold manner, which I think Blake is likely to do with great success, and perhaps at an expense that will not be burthensome. But, at any rate, give him one to do first for a trial. The exhibition of a painter's noblest sentiments and grandest thoughts must certainly become as striking and interesting in his life as their several poems in the lives of Milton, Homer, or Virgil. I am glad you are satisfied with the introduction; in this you have had the success of a friend both zealous and skilful. I confess, great as my regard was for the man, to write his life and speak the truth without offence seems attended with considerable difficulty. I am not at all surprised that many passages in this eminent man's letters were truly eloquent and beautiful. Indeed I should have been confounded had they not been so; because whatever advantages educa-

[1] This fine cartoon is now in the Roscoe collection at Liverpool. The crowned head and outstretched arms of the aged Darius arise from a cloud in the midst. Atossa stands (r.) with amazed look. Three bowed and kneeling figures in front are very Blake-like in character, and, in the light of the extract printed on p. 52, are not improbably due to his influence. The date of the cartoon is about 1780.

[2] A fine cartoon, of the same date as the preceding, also in the Roscoe collection at Liverpool.

tion can bestow, they are but so many modifications of the light of the understanding and the feelings and affections of the heart. I am sure Romney's memory will want no grace or decoration which your pen cannot give, and therefore any effort of mine would be comparatively poor and tedious, like "the shuffling gait of a tired nag." Yet I am not so churlish that I would not lend an endeavour, however weak, to honour a departed friend; but even this must be independent, and not comparative. I do not remember Mr. Robinson, but I rejoice in his success and the inspiration of his son. The works I am employed on at present are Earl Howe and Captain Montague. I have troubled you, by Mr. Blake, with a short tract written for Dr. Rees's *Cyclopedia*, on "Basso Relievo," with one of the prints referred to at the end of the article; the rest are not yet engraven.[1]

I do not send it from the vanity of giving information to you, because I daresay you are well acquainted with all it contains: but because I would not publish anything of this kind without sending a copy, even though it should not be worth your notice. A happy release from his afflictions to poor Blake; and to you, my dear friend, many happy years unclouded by misfortune

[1] Four engravings from Blake's hand ultimately appeared with the article.

or sorrow.—I have the honour to remain, your ever affectionate and much obliged,

JOHN FLAXMAN.

I thank kindly for the remembrance of I. Denman: he is not my nephew, he is whole brother to Maria and half-brother to my wife.

30.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY.

LONDON, 14*th January* 1804.

DEAR SIR,—I write immediately on my arrival, not merely to inform you that in a conversation with an old soldier, who came in the coach with me, I learned that no one, not even the most expert horseman, ought ever to mount a trooper's horse. They are taught so many tricks, such as stopping short, falling down on their knees, running sideways, and in various and innumerable ways endeavouring to throw the rider, that it is a miracle if a stranger escape with his life. All this I learned with some alarm, and heard also what the soldier said confirmed by another person in the coach. I therefore, as it is my duty, beg and entreat you never to mount that wretched horse again, nor again trust to one who has been so

educated. God, our Saviour, watch over you and preserve you.

I have seen Flaxman already, as I took to him, early this morning, your present to his scholars. He and his are all well and in high spirits, and welcomed me with kind affection and generous exultation in my escape from the arrows of darkness. I intend to see Mr. Lambert and Mr. Johnson, bookseller, this afternoon. My poor wife has been near the gate of death, as was supposed by our kind and attentive fellow inhabitant, the young and very amiable Mrs. Enoch, who gave my wife all the attention that a daughter could pay to a mother; but my arrival has dispelled the formidable malady, and my dear and good woman again begins to resume her health and strength. Pray, my dear sir, favour me with a line concerning your health; how you have escaped the double blow both from the wretched horse and from your innocent humble servant, whose heart and soul are more and more drawn out towards you, Felpham, and its kind inhabitants. I feel anxious, and therefore pray to my God and Father for the health of Miss Poole, and hope that the pang of affection and gratitude is the gift of God for good. I am thankful that I feel it; it draws the soul towards eternal life, and conjunction with spirits of just men made perfect by love and gratitude,—

the two angels who stand at heaven's gate, ever open, ever inviting guests to the marriage. O foolish philosophy! Gratitude is heaven itself. There could be no heaven without gratitude; I feel it and I know it. I thank God and man for it, and above all, you, my dear friend and benefactor, in the Lord. Pray give my and my wife's duties to Miss Poole; accept them yourself. —Yours in sincerity, WILLIAM BLAKE.

31.

To WILLIAM HAYLEY.

27th January 1804.

DEAR SIR,—Your eager expectation of hearing from me compels me to write immediately, though I have not done half the business I wished, owing to a violent cold which confined me to my bed three days and to my chamber a week. I am now so well, thank God, as to get out, and have accordingly been to Mr. Walker,[1] who is not in town, being at Birmingham, where he will remain six weeks or two months. I took my portrait of Romney as you desired, to show him. His son

[1] Adam Walker (1730 or 1731–1821), distinguished inventor, astronomer, and lecturer on philosophy; an old friend of Romney, and one of the few with whom the artist was really intimate (see *Romney*, by Humphry Ward and W. Roberts, 1904, vol. ii. p. 163).

was likewise not at home, but I will again call on Mr. Walker, Jun., and beg him to show me the pictures and make every inquiry of him, if you think best. Mr. Sanders has one or two large cartoons. The subject he does not know. They are folded up on the top of his workshop: the rest he packed up and sent into the north. I showed your letter to Mr. John Romney[1] to Mr. Flaxman, who was perfectly satisfied with it. I sealed and sent it immediately, as directed by Mr. Sanders, to Kendall, Westmoreland. Mr. Sanders expects Mr. Romney in town soon. Note, your letter to Mr. J. Romney; I sent off the money after I received it from you, being then in health. I have taken your noble present to Mr. Rose,[2] and left it with charge, to the servant, of great care. The writing looks very pretty. I was fortunate in doing it myself, and hit it off excellently. I have not seen Mr. Rose, though he is in town. Mr. Flaxman is not at all acquainted with Sir Alan Chambrè;[3] recommends me to inquire concerning him of Mr. Rose. My brother says he believes Sir Alan is a Master

[1] 1758–1832, only surviving son of the painter; quarrelled with Hayley, and in 1830 published a Life of his father, in which Hayley is bitterly attacked.

[2] Samuel Rose, who defended Blake on his trial for sedition.

[3] Sir Alan Chambrè (1739–1823), Recorder of Lancaster; Baron of the Exchequer, 2nd July 1799; succeeded Sir Francis Buller at the Court of Common Pleas; resigned 1815. He was painted by Romney (see Ward and Roberts' *Romney*, vol. ii. p. 27).

in Chancery. Though I have called on Mr. Edwards twice for Lady Hamilton's[1] direction, was so unfortunate as to find him out both times. I will repeat my call on him to-morrow morning. My dear sir, I wish now to satisfy you that all is in a good train; I am going on briskly with the plates,[2] find everything promising; work in abundance; and, if God blesses me with health, doubt not yet to make a figure in the great dance of life that shall amuse the spectators in the sky. I thank you for my "Demosthenes,"[3] which has now become a noble subject. My wife gets better every day. Hope earnestly that you have escaped the brush of my evil star, which I believe is now for ever fallen into the abyss. God bless and preserve you and our good Lady Paulina with the good things both of this life and of eternity. And with you, my much admired and respected Edward,[4] the bard of Oxford, whose verses still sound upon my ear like

[1] Emma Hart, Lady Hamilton, Nelson's mistress and Romney's most frequent sitter.

[2] See note 1, p. 133.

[3] Probably "The Death of Demosthenes," engraved by Blake after Thomas Hayley, in William Hayley's *Essay on Sculpture*, published in 1800.

[4] See Gilchrist (1880), vol. i. p. 203: "Diligent research as to who 'Edward the Bard of Oxford' might be, yields no other suggestion than that he was a certain young Mr. Edward Marsh, of Oriel College, who, when visiting Hayley while Blake was also his frequent guest and fellow-labourer, had been wont to read aloud to them the Hermit's own compositions in a singularly melodious voice."

the distant approach of things mighty and magnificent, like the sound of harps which I hear before the sun's rising, like the remembrance of Felpham's waves and of the glorious and far-beaming Turret, like the villa of Lavant,[1] blessed and blessing. Amen. God bless you all, O people of Sussex, around your hermit and bard. So prays the emulator of both his and your mild and happy temper of soul.—Your devoted

WILL. BLAKE.

32.

To WILLIAM HAYLEY.

23rd February 1804.

I called yesterday on Mr. Braithwaite,[2] as you desired, and found him quite as cheerful as you describe him, and by his appearance should not have supposed him to be near sixty, notwithstanding he was shaded by a green shade over his eyes. He gives a very spirited assurance of Mr. John Romney's interesting himself in the great object of

[1] *i.e.* Miss Poole's villa.

[2] Daniel Braithwaite, for many years controller of the Foreign department of the Post Office, was Romney's earliest patron, when the latter came up to London in 1762; and it was to him that Hayley dedicated his *Life of Romney* (see *Romney*, by Humphry Ward and W. Roberts, 1904, vol. ii. p. 17).

his father's fame, and thinks that he must be proud of such a work in such hands. As to the picture from Sterne,[1] which you desired him to procure for you, he has not yet found where it is; supposes that it may be in the north, and that he may learn from Mr. Romney, who will be in town soon. Mr. B[raithwaite] desires I will present his compliments to you, and write you that he has spoken with Mr. Read concerning the *Life of Romney*. He interests himself in it, and has promised to procure dates of premiums, pictures, etc., Mr. Read having a number of articles relating to Romney, either written or printed, which he promises to copy out for your use, as also the Catalogue of Hampstead sale. He showed me a very fine portrait of Mrs. Siddons,[2] by Romney, as the Tragic Muse; half-length, that is, the head and hands, and in his best style. He also desires me to express to you his wish that you would give the public an engraving of that medallion by your son's matchless hand,[3] which is placed over

[1] Probably this is "The Introduction of Dr. Slop into the Parlour of Mr. Shandy," a scene from *Tristram Shandy*, painted *c.* 1757 (canvas, 30 in. × 26 in.), which was engraved for the *Life of Romney* by W. Haines. It was then in the possession of Sir Alan Chambrè (see Ward and Roberts' *Romney*, vol. ii. p. 200).

[2] Mrs. Sarah Siddons, the great tragic actress; to waist, leaning on her hand, wreath in her hair. Canvas, 30 in. × 25 in. Painted in 1783, and presented to Daniel Braithwaithe (see Ward and Robert's *Romney*, vol. ii. p. 200).

[3] The medallion of Romney by Thomas Hayley was engraved for the *Life* by Caroline Watson.

his chimney-piece between two pretty little pictures, correct and enlarged copies from antique gems, of which the centre ornament is worthy. He says that it is by far, in his opinion, the most exact resemblance of Romney he ever saw. I have, furthermore, the pleasure of informing you that he knew immediately my portrait of Romney, and assured me that he thought it a very great likeness.

I wish I could give you a pleasant account of our beloved Counsellor;[1] he, alas! was ill in bed when I called yesterday at about 12 o'clock; the servant said that he remains very ill indeed.

Mr. Walker, I have been so unfortunate as not to find at home, but I will call again in a day or two. Neither Mr. Flaxman nor Mr. Edwards know Lady Hamilton's address. The house which Sir William lived in, in Piccadilly, she left some time ago. Mr. Edwards will procure her address for you, and I will send it immediately. I have enclosed for you the twenty-two numbers of Fuseli's *Shakespeare*[2] that are out, and the book of *Italian Letters* from Mrs. Flaxman, who with her admirable husband present their best compliments to you. He is so busy that I believe I shall never see him again but when I call on him, for he has

[1] Samuel Rose (see note 2, p. 140).
[2] See note 4, p. 131.

never yet, since my return to London, had the time or grace to call on me. Mrs. Flaxman and her sister give also their testimony to my likeness of Romney. Mr. Flaxman I have not yet had an opportunity of consulting about it, but soon will.

I enclose likewise the academical *Correspondence* of Mr. Hoare[1] the painter, whose note to me I also enclose. For I did but express to him my desire of sending you a copy of his work, and the day after I received it, with the note expressing his pleasure in your wish to see it. You would be much delighted with the man, as I assure myself you will be with his work.

The plates of Cowper's monument[2] are both in great forwardness, and you shall have proofs in another week. I assure you that I will not spare pains, and am myself very much satisfied that I shall do my duty and produce two elegant plates. There is, however, a great deal of work on them that must and will have time.

> "Busy, busy, busy, I bustle along,
> Mounted upon warm Phœbus' ray,
> Thro' the heavenly throng."

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[1] Prince Hoare, painter, studied in Rome under Mengs in 1776, with Fuseli and Northcote for companions. The book alluded to is the *Extracts from a Correspondence with the Academies of Vienna and St. Petersburg on the Cultivation of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture*, published when he was made Foreign Secretary of the Royal Academy in 1799 (see Gilchrist (1880), vol. i. p. 205).

[2] See note 1, p. 133.

But I hastened to write to you about Mr. Braithwaite. Hope when I send my proofs to give as good an account of Mr. Walker.

My wife joins me in respects and love to you, and desires with mine to present hers to Miss Poole.

33.

To William Hayley.

12th March 1804.

Dear Sir,—I begin with the latter end of your letter, and grieve more for Miss Poole's ill-health than for my failure in sending the proofs, though I am very sorry that I cannot send before Saturday's coach. Engraving is eternal work. The two plates[1] are almost finished. You will receive proofs of them from Lady Hesketh,[2] whose copy of Cowper's *Letters* ought to be printed in letters of gold and ornamented with jewels of Heaven, Havillah, Eden, and all the countries where jewels abound. I curse and bless engraving alternately, because it takes so much time and is so intractable, though capable of such beauty and perfection. My wife desires me to express her love to you,

[1] See note 1, p. 133.

[2] Cousin of Cowper, and the intimate friend of his latter days.

praying for Miss Poole's perfect recovery, and we both remain, your affectionate,

WILL. BLAKE.

34.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY.

2nd April 1804.

Mr. Flaxman advises that the drawing of Mr. Romney's which shall be chosen instead of "The Witch" (if that cannot be recovered), be "Hecate," the figure with the torch and snake, which he thinks one of the finest drawings. The twelve impressions of each of the plates which I now send ought to be unrolled immediately that you receive them and put under somewhat to press them flat. You should have had fifteen of each, but I had not paper enough in proper order for printing. There is now in hand a new edition of Flaxman's *Homer*, with additional designs, two of which I am now engraving. I am uneasy at not hearing from Mr. Dally, to whom I enclosed £15 in a letter a fortnight ago, by his desire. I write to him by this post to inquire about it. Money in these times is not to be trifled with. I have now cleared the way to Romney, in whose service I now enter again with great pleasure, and hope soon to show you my zeal with good effect. Am in hopes that Miss

Poole is recovered, as you are silent on that most alarming and interesting topic in both your last letters. God be with you in all things. My wife joins me in this prayer.—I am, dear Sir, yours sincerely affectionate, WILLM. BLAKE.

35.

TO WILLIAM HAYLEY.

7th April 1804.

DEAR SIR,—You can have no idea, unless you were in London as I am, how much your name is loved and respected. I have the extreme pleasure of transmitting to you one proof of the respect, which you will be pleased with, and I hope will adopt and embrace. It comes through Mr. Hoare, from Mr. Phillips[1] of St. Paul's Churchyard. It is, as yet, an entire secret between Mr. P[hillips], Mr. H[oare], and myself, and will remain so till you have given your decision. Mr. Phillips is a man of vast spirit and enterprise, with a solidity of character which few have; he is the man who applied to Cowper for that sonnet in favour of a prisoner at Leicester, which I believe you thought

[1] Richard Phillips, bookseller, publisher of the 1805 edition of Hayley's *Ballads* with Blake's plates; editor of the *Monthly Magazine*. For further particulars see Gilchrist (1880), vol. i. p. 206. The scheme here broached was never carried out.

fit not to print; so you see he is spiritually adjoined to us. His connection throughout England, and indeed Europe and America, enable him to circulate publications to an immense extent, and he told Mr. Hoare that on the present work, which he proposes to commence with your assistance, he can afford to expend £2000 a year. Mr. Phillips considers you as the great leading character in literature, and his terms to others will amount to only one quarter of what he proposes to you. I send, enclosed, his terms, as Mr. Hoare, by my desire, has given them to me in writing. Knowing your aversion to reviews and reviewing, I consider the present proposal as peculiarly adapted to your ideas. It may be called a defence of literature against those pests of the press, and a bulwark for genius, which shall, with your good assistance, disperse those rebellious spirits of envy and malignity. In short, if you see it as I see it, you will embrace this proposal on the score of parental duty. Literature is your child. She calls for your assistance! You, who never refuse to assist any, how remote soever, will certainly hear her voice. Your answer to the proposal you will, if you think fit, direct to Mr. Hoare, who is worthy of every confidence you can place in him.—I am, dear Sir, your anxiously devoted,

WILL. BLAKE.

36.

To William Hayley.

27th April 1804.

Dear Sir,—I have at length seen Mr. Hoare, after having repeatedly called on him every day and not finding him. I now understand that he received your reply to P[hillips']s proposal at Brighton, where he has a residence, from whence he sent it to London to Mr. Phillips; he has not seen P. since his return, and therefore cannot tell me how he understood your answer. Mr. H. appears to me to consider it as a rejection of the proposal altogether. I took the liberty to tell him that I could not consider it so, but that as I understood you, you had accepted the spirit of P's intention, which was to leave the whole conduct of the affair to you, and that you had accordingly nominated one of your friends and agreed to nominate others. But if P[hillips] meant that you should yourself take on you the drudgery of the ordinary business of a review, his proposal was by no means a generous one. Mr. H[oare] has promised to see Mr. Phillips immediately, and to know what his intentions are; but he says perhaps Mr. P. may not yet have seen your letter to him, and that his multiplicity of business may very well account for

the delay. I have seen our excellent Flaxman lately. He is well in health, but has had such a burn on his hand as you had once, which has hindered his working for a fortnight; it is now better. He desires to be most affectionately remembered to you; he began a letter to you a week ago; perhaps by this time you have received it; but he is also a laborious votary of endless work. Engraving is of so slow process, I must beg of you to give me the earliest possible notice of what engraving is to be done for the *Life of Romney*. Endless work is the true title of engraving, as I find by the things I have in hand day and night. We feel much easier to hear that you have parted with your horse. Hope soon to hear that you have a living one of brass, a Pegasus of Corinthian metal; and that Miss Poole is again in such health as when she first mounted me on my beloved Bruno. I forgot to mention that Mr. Hoare desires his most respectful compliments to you. Speaks of taking a ride across the country to Felpham, as he always keeps a horse at Brighton. My wife joins me in love to you.—I remain, yours sincerely,

WILLIAM BLAKE.

37.

To William Hayley.

4th May 1804.

Dear Sir,—I thank you sincerely for Falconer,[1] an admirable poet, and the admirable prints to it by Fittler. Whether you intended it or not, they have given me some excellent hints in engraving; his manner of working is what I shall endeavour to adopt in many points. I have seen the elder Mr. Walker. He knew and admired without any preface my print of Romney, and when his daughter came in he gave the print into her hand without a word, and she immediately said, "Ah! Romney! younger than I knew him, *but very like indeed.*" Mr. Walker showed me Romney's first attempt at oil painting; it is a copy from a Dutch picture—"Dutch Boor Smoking"; on the back is written, "This was the first attempt at oil painting by G. Romney." He shewed me also the last performance of Romney. It is of Mr. Walker and family,[2] the draperies put

[1] *The Shipwreck*, a poem by William Falconer, 1804, contains three plates and five vignettes engraved in line by J. Fittler, A.R.A., after N. Pocock. Blake's plate of "The Shipwreck" has certainly some traces of Fittler's manner of engraving.

[2] Adam Walker, his wife and daughter, sitting at a table; the three sons standing in the background; the father explaining a diagram; landscape background. Canvas, 65 × 53 in. Now in the National Portrait Gallery (see *Romney*, by Humphry Ward and W. Roberts, 1904, vol. ii. p. 163).

in by somebody else. It is a very excellent picture, but unfinished. The figures as large as life, half length; Mr. W., three sons, and, I believe, two daughters, with maps, instruments, etc. Mr. Walker also showed me a portrait of himself (W.), whole length, on a canvas about two feet by one and a half; it is the first portrait Romney ever painted. But above all, a picture of "Lear and Cordelia,"[1] when he awakes and knows her,—an incomparable production, which Mr. W. bought for five shillings at a broker's shop. It is about five feet by four, and exquisite for expression; indeed, it is most pathetic. The heads of Lear and Cordelia can never be surpassed, and Kent and the other attendant are admirable. The picture is very highly finished. Other things I saw of Romney's first works: two copies, perhaps from Borgognone, of battles; and Mr. Walker promises to collect all he can of information for you. I much admired his mild and gentle benevolent manners; it seems as if all Romney's intimate friends were truly amiable and feeling like himself.

I have also seen Alderman Boydell,[2] who has

[1] "King Lear awakened by his Daughter Cordelia." Canvas, 52 × 42 in. Romney's wife sat for Cordelia (see Ward and Roberts' *Romney*, vol ii. p. 196).

[2] John Boydell, Alderman, Sheriff, and Lord Mayor of London; engraver and printseller, organiser of the Shakespeare Gallery "of pictures purposely painted by the first artists," and afterwards engraved to the number of one hundred.

promised to get the number and prices of all Romney's prints as you desired. He has sent a catalogue of all his collection, and a scheme of his lottery. Desires his compliments to you; says he laments your absence from London, as your advice would be acceptable at all times, but especially at the present. He is very thin and decayed, and but the shadow of what he was; so he is now a shadow's shadow;—but how can we expect a very stout man at eighty-five, which age he tells me he has now reached? You would have been pleased to see his eyes light up at the mention of your name.

Mr. Flaxman agrees with me that somewhat more than outline is necessary to the execution of Romney's designs, because his merit is eminent in the art of massing his lights and shades. I should propose to etch them in a rapid but firm manner, somewhat, perhaps, as I did the "Head of Euler"; the price I receive for engraving Flaxman's outlines of *Homer* is five guineas each. I send the "Domenichino," which is very neatly done. His merit was but little in light and shade; outline was his element, and yet these outlines give but a faint idea of the finished prints from his works, several of the best of which I have. I send also the French Monuments, and inclose with them a Catalogue of Bell's Gallery, and another of the