

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY  
**BLAKE**

Q U E R Y

An Early, Hand-made Facsimile of the Songs of  
Innocence and of Experience

John Howell

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## QUERIES

1. AN EARLY, HAND-MADE FACSIMILE OF THE SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE (The following description and query comes to us from a leading rare book dealer, Mr. John Howell /434 Post Street, San Francisco/).

An album containing 54 water-colour drawings of very high quality (each about 122 by 78 mm). These drawings tally exactly with those reproduced in William Muir's two volumes of facsimiles; i.e. Songs of Innocence 28 drawings; Songs of Experience 22 from the Beaconsfield copy in the B.M., plus 4 more from the other B.M. copy. There are separate title-pages to each work and another title-page for the joint volume. The additional plate reproduced by Muir in his Appendix - "A Divine Image" - not included in either book, nor known in any coloured copy, is not present here.

The drawings are lightly mounted onto large sheets of Whatman paper watermarked 1821; the front end-paper is watermarked 1813. The album (13 3/8 by 1/4 ins.) is bound in early 19th century red straight-grained morocco, the sides filled with gilt and blind tooling surrounding a central panel; the spine is divided into compartments by five raised bands and decorated with gilt and blind tooling. Two panels of the spine are lettered in gilt: SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE --- BY W. BLAKE. Edges gilt. The style of this binding is contemporary with the date in the watermarks; 1821.

The text varies in minute details from the printed version: e.g. a happy song - my happy song, '&' in place of 'and', cheer for cheer, etc.. But the differences in the drawing and colouring are considerable. In 'Piping Down the Valleys Wild' the paper wears a pink coat, in the printed version this is brown. In other pages some figures are depicted in a far more finished style; while border patterns sometimes differ considerably in both layout and colour from the printed version.

Mr. Martin Butlin, who specialises in Blake at the Tate Gallery examined the album containing contemporary copies of Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience. He did not think that the drawings are by Blake himself. For one thing, Blake was little interested in drawing his figures in the round, his characters having an almost flat surface; while the artist who made these drawings endeavoured to give them both roundness and depth. The drawing is by some person who, although not academy trained, had very considerable ability and technique. The colouring, on the other hand, is extraordinarily Blakean, and this makes it certain not only that these drawings were made early in the nineteenth century, but that they are by someone in the circle of Blake himself. It is known, for example, that Linnell himself made copies of Blake's drawings and set his family to do the same. Thomas Butts, the other of Blake's major patrons, did a certain amount of amateur engraving, while Blake gave drawing lessons to Butts' son.



It is probable that the person who did the drawings also mounted them in the album, or at least that this was done at much the same time. Evidence for this lies in the second drawing for The Little Black Boy which has been cut rather close (bottom left) and extended in matching water-colour on the mount itself. Incidentally Thomas Butts commissioned Blake to make water-colour Biblical illustrations and someone in the Butts family mounted these, wrote appropriate texts underneath, drew frames around the pictures, and in some cases extended the painted surface to touch the frames.

Mr. Butlin gave it as his opinion that this album is 'absolutely fascinating' and calls for a considerable amount of research. He suggested, as a line to follow, that the various copies of the twin edition of Songs of Innocence and Experience are bound up in different orders and the colouring varies. Is it possible to locate an original copy which interlocks with the order and colouring of the drawings in this album, and if so, does it, perhaps, stem from the Linnell or Butts families?

## 2. A PROJECTED NEW EDITION OF THE GILCHRIST-TODD LIFE OF BLAKE

Mr. Ruthven Todd writes that he is planning to revise and augment his edition of Gilchrist's Life, originally published by Everyman's Library in 1942. The extensive notes to this edition are, even after 25 years, invaluable, and now Mr. Todd proposes to bring them up-to-date. He writes:

What I would like to do is produce, at first, a hard cover edition which could then be reproduced for cheaper sale. I have also come to an agreement with J.M. Dent so that I can buy the electrotypes of the Virgil woodcuts which, by a private wangle between myself and the Linnell family, were made directly from the blocks in the BM, so that they are not reproductions, but as near to the originals as one can get. Then, too, only Keynes and myself have the right to ask for electrotypes of the Songs which I rediscovered and which are in the BM. I think that these, printed on decent paper, should almost in themselves attract a hard-cover public.

I quite realize that I, unaided, cannot hope to make the book as good as it should be, but I am quite sure that there must be many scholars who have thought of extra notes and corrections, and who, in return for being given full credit, would be willing to help me produce a book which would not again need revising for many years. I would welcome all notes, corrections, and so on, and in every case the donor would receive full credit for his/ her help. I would like, for instance, not only to acknowledge all corrections, but also, in the case of new notes, to sign them by the names of the contributors.

Mr. Todd's address is: Ca'n Bielo, Galilea, Mallorca, Spain.