

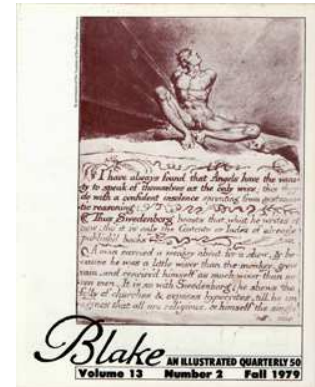
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

M I N U T E
P A R T I C U L A R

Almost Blake

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

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ALMOST BLAKE

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Occasionally works not by William Blake seem momentarily as intriguing and alluring as those genuinely by him. I offer three examples:

(1) A letter said to be by our William Blake was listed in the American Art Association Catalogue of First Editions and Autographs of 13-14 March 1928, lot 37, with the explanation that it is "to his old friend John Thomas Smith." It reads:

Wedⁿ
morn.
24th Ap[*ril* 1811].

My dear Sir,

I am just returned from taking another look at the little picture of the Pope--*it wont do for me upon any terms cheap or dear--*

Have the goodness therefore to inform M^r Christie that I have no wish to possess it--

---I long for the Grimthorpe display--when we may hope to see a few genuine pictures in good condition-- Ever yrs, my d^r Sir,
most cordially W B--

The picture in question seems to be (as the catalogue says) the one of Pope Leo X sold at Christies on 25 May 1811--and 24 April, when the letter was written, *was* a Wednesday in 1811. William Blake *was* a friend of J. T. Smith, who wrote a brief anecdotal life of him some years later (1828), and he was of course interested in pictures. But he certainly was not a buyer of such expensive pictures, especially in 1811 when his fortunes were at a particularly low ebb, and the handwriting of the letter (reproduced in the catalogue) is not his. Smith was doubtless being consulted in his capacity as Keeper of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. I suggest that this W. B. the buyer may have been the opulent collector William Beckford.¹

(2) The letter of 15 June 1806 from Blake's friend Ozias Humphry to "d^r William" quoted in *Blake Records* (1969), 178, is not to our William. The suggestion there that it is concerned with "applying for permission to dedicate his *Grave* designs to the Queen" (and this is the letter's only clear connection with William Blake) is irrelevant, for this application to the Queen was not made until April 1807 (see "Blake and Cromek: The Wheat and the Tares," *Modern Philology*, 71 [1974], 566-79).

(3) In *The New Yorker* for 26 February 1979, p. 3, and doubtless elsewhere, appeared an advertisement for Florence Eiseman, evidently a designer of children's clothing, with the following inspirational motto:

To be a child is to live in a world where everything is new and exciting and beckoning us toward delight--*William Blake*

This somewhat flabby statement does not sound like Blake to me, and certainly Blake did not use either "exciting" or "beckoning" at all in his writings, according to the *Concordance*. Perhaps some hard-pressed copy-writer thought Blake *ought* to have written it--or was companioned by Blake and was told it by him.

Clearly the name of William Blake is an almost irresistible lure to authors of some auction catalogues, *New Yorker* advertisements, and *Blake Records*.

¹ Another work signed "W B" attributed to our William Blake is an undated manuscript headed "Directions for 'Landscape Painting'" (8 pp.), on preparing a palette, reproducing the effect of shadows, bark, etc. (Anderson Galleries, 3 April 1928, lot *13). The hand and contents are quite unlike Blake's.

THE DEAN OF MOROCCO:
GEORGE CUMBERLAND?

Göran Malmqvist

In note 34 to his interesting paper "Mr. Jacko 'knows what riding is' in 1785: dating Blake's *Island in the Moon*" (*Blake*, 48 (xii, 4):250) R. J. Shroyer refers to Erdman's statement that it is "hard to think who" Cumberland might be in *An Island* (*Prophet*, p. 100, fn. 22) and himself suggests that "it would seem logical to identify Cumberland with Quid on the evidence Erdman presents." I tentatively suggest that Cumberland, who was a professional "morocco man," may be identified as the Dean of Morocco. Stung by the poisonous honey-bee, Quid may well resent that an aim-at-your printer has had the nerve to invent a printing method which a cunning-sure like himself has been unable to develop. In the passage "Then," said he, "I would have all the writing Engraved instead of Printed, & at every other leaf a high finish'd print--all in three Volumes folio--& sell them a hundred pounds apiece. They would print off two thousand." Quid may well give good-humoured vent to his resentment, while at the same time indulging in self-irony.

In a recent annotated translation of *An Island* into Swedish I daringly suggest--well aware of the fact that the suggested anagrammatical transformation yields a residue of N--that Nannicantipot is an anagram for *Cannotpaint*, a suitable epithet for Catherine who is said to have been able to neither read nor write at the time when she married William Blake. My suggestion that Sicknaker stands for *Kick'n arse* is highly tentative.