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N O T E

Thomas Johnes, “Ancient Guardian of Wales”

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begun to figure to myself the miseries of confinement. . . . I took a single captive, and having first shut him up in his dungeon, I then look'd through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture.

I beheld his body half wasted away with long expectation and confinement, and felt what kind of sickness of the heart it was which arises from hope deferr'd. Upon looking nearer I saw him pale and feverish: in thirty years the western breeze had not once fann'd his blood -- he had seen no sun, no moon in all that time -- nor had the voice of friend or kinsman breathed through his lattice -- his children--

--But here my heart began to bleed -- and I was forced to go on with another part of the portrait. . . .

The passage on *America* plate 6 is as different as possible in character, but the imagined situation of the languishing prisoner is remarkably similar to Sterne's. Orc is predicting the apocalypse:

The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their stations;  
The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapp'd up.  
The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk & dry'd  
Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! awakening!  
Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are burst;

Let the chained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing,  
Whose face has never seem a smile in thirty weary years;  
Rise and look out, his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open  
And let his wife and children return . . .

Probably the association is only one of coincidence, but it is in some respects a striking coincidence of minds which one might otherwise say were as different as imaginable.

Lawrence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. G. D. Stout, Jr. (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1967), 201-202; the italics here and below are mine.

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3. THOMAS JOHNES, "ANCIENT GUARDIAN OF WALES"

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In July of 1968, Ruthven Todd sent me an extremely interesting suggestion about the reference of *Jerusalem* 41 [46] 3-4:

Hereford, Ancient Guardian of Wales, whose hands  
Builted the mountain palaces of Eden, stupendous works!

Mr. Todd wrote, "It is quite clearly Thomas Johnes, who built himself an Eden

at Hafod. . . . Malkin's *Memoirs* is dedicated to him, he was Lord Lieutenant of Cardiganshire, &c." As Mr. Todd did not have library facilities available to him, he asked me to pursue the subject, which I did with great curiosity.

I soon found, in the Keynes and Wolf *Census*, another link between Johnes and Blake: copy P of *Songs of Innocence* belonged to Johnes, having been given to him by Malkin. A third connection is provided by Blake's lifelong friend George Cumberland, who in 1796 published *An Attempt to Describe Hafod* (the end paper advertizes *Thoughts on Outline*, for which Blake engraved eight plates). It is clear, then, that Blake must have been aware of Johnes's projects, both aesthetic and social.

Thomas Johnes began building his estate in Cardiganshire in the early 1780's. The mansion, designed in Gothic style by William Baldwin of Bath, was completed in 1788 (it has been beautifully drawn by Turner). By the time Cumberland visited Hafod in 1794, an octagonal library in the Moorish style had been added to the building. The chapel contained an altar piece by Fuseli; Johnes also planned to build a little druid temple. There was an extensive collection of painting, displaying the cultivated taste of a wealthy gentleman of the time--which is to say, it included some things Blake might have appreciated and much that he would have despised. Among much else, there were animal paintings by Opie and by Gilpin, a portrait of Richard Payne Knight by Thomas Lawrence, "A Ruined Alchemist by Salvator Rosa," Rembrandt's *Elijah*, "a Descent from the Cross, by Vandyck," and a picture of the Johnes family by Romney (see Malkin, *The Scenery, Antiquities, and Biography of South Wales* [London, 1804], pp. 350-55). When the house was rebuilt following a disastrous fire in 1807, Fuseli painted murals there and Stothard painted eight panels in the library.

Johnes's projects were not limited to patronizing the arts and to translating Froissart and publishing beautiful editions of the translations on his own press. He was also a humanitarian of considerable vision. According to a memoir published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* after Johnes's death,

Previous to 1783, when Mr. Johnes began to erect his first residence, the roads were impassable; there was not a post-chaise in the county: the miserable huts of the peasantry he transformed into comfortable habitations, and he supplied medical attendants; he employed the population in planting millions of forest trees upon the cheerless barrenness of the waste and mountains, as well as in other improvements; and instituted schools, which he and Mrs. Johnes personally attended. . . . So intent was he in improving the agriculture of this forlorn county, that he brought farmers from Scotland and other districts. . . and he distributed an excellent tract, entitled *A Cardiganshire Landlord's Advice to His Tenants*.<sup>2</sup>

These undertakings are likely to have impressed Blake as much as they did his friends Cumberland and Malkin.

Let us return to the lines in *Jerusalem*. "Hereford, Ancient Guardian of Wales. . ." Why should an English county be chosen as Wales's guardian? The answer lies in Johnes's biography. Thomas Johnes's father, also named Thomas, married Elizabeth Knight in 1746, and he left his native Cardiganshire to live at the Knights' home--Croft Castle in Hereford.<sup>3</sup> The younger Thomas grew up in

England, and although he became M.P. for Cardigan in 1774, he did not visit Wales until the summer of 1780. Blake's line therefore refers to the history of the family and can only apply to Johnes of Hafod.

It is perhaps significant that in calling Hereford's works "the mountain palaces of Eden," Blake uses an expression similar to those favored by admirers of Hafod. Cumberland, for example, refers to Hafod as "his Elysium" (p. viii) and closes his book with a quotation from *Paradise Lost*: "...Paradise/Now nearer crowns with her enclosure green,/ As with a rural mound, the champion's head,/ Of a steep wilderness. . ." (p. 50). Malkin wrote: ". . .the sheep-walks on either side the Istwid, topped by rocks, that thrust their projections among the very clouds, remind us by what a style of nature we are surrounded, in the midst of an artificial paradise."<sup>4</sup> And of the Johnes' private garden, Malkin says:

. . .the mountain rises higher, and is covered with dwarfish growth, to which alone the ridges of these hills give birth. In the centre of the thicket is planted a flower garden, so carefully sheltered and judiciously disposed, as to realise a paradise in the wilderness.<sup>5</sup>

According to Miss Inglis-Jones, "There was a real little garden of Eden hidden among the woods at the end of a shady path along the river, entered by a stone gateway carved with the figures of Adam and Eve."<sup>6</sup> And according to the *Gentlemen's Magazine*, after the great fire "Mr. Johnes still 'resolved to inhabit his Eden, although driven out by the flaming minister.'" (p.564)

Mr. Todd's intuition about Hereford, ancient Guardian, is almost certainly correct, and the name of Thomas Johnes may be added to those of two other contemporaries whom Blake made Friends of Albion--Richard Warner (Bath) and Edward Marsh (Oxford). Perhaps the identities of other Friends on plate 41 will one day be discovered.

<sup>1</sup> See Elizabeth Inglis-Jones, *Peacocks in Paradise* (London, 1950), p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> LXXVI, pt. 1. (1816), 563-4.

<sup>3</sup> See Inglis-Jones, p. 31, and *DNB*, X, 890; also Rev. Charles J. Robinson, *A History of the Castles of Herefordshire and Their Lords*, London (1869), p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> *The Scenery. . .of South Wales*, 341-42.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>6</sup> *Peacocks in Paradise*, p. 95.

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