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William Muir

Raymond Lister

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Robert Essick's review of the Manchester Etching Workshop's Blake facsimile, in which he says that "little is known about Muir and why he labored so long and hard on Blake facsimiles," reminds me that in 1961, when I was running the Golden Head Press at Cambridge, and was experimenting, among other things, with hand-colored books, I planned to write and publish a small book on Muir. Unfortunately I was, owing to other commitments, unable to do this, but the plan did produce some comments in a letter from the late Kerrison Preston which, in view of the small amount known about Muir, ought to be placed on record.

The Georgian House
Rockshaw Road
Merstham, Surrey
22 August, 1961

Dear Mr. Lister,

Many thanks for your letter to-day. I congratulate you on getting Muir's "Visions," which is well worth having. If it is the same as Lot 467 at Sotheby's on the 1st August, I think Quaritch paid £16 for it, so they are not making an unfair profit. The Lot included a loosely inserted letter from Muir to the Editor of *The Academy*, which would be interesting.⁽¹⁾

I had many letters myself from Muir, some of which I still have.⁽²⁾ When I knew him he was a little, wizened old man, uneducated (like Blake) and very quiet and calm in spite of his great enthusiasms. He lived with his little old wife in East London and I think he had a Chemist's shop there. I happened to mention this to Geoffrey⁽³⁾ the other day but he did not seem to know of any shop.

I never went to Muir's house or shop, but he used to come to see me at Bournemouth. He talked incessantly about Blake who was his great hero but in spite of this he always struck me as having more of a scientific than artistic cast of mind. He made these remarkable facsimiles with the aid of his wife and other helpers, using any mechanical means available as well as his artistic skill.

I knew nothing of Chemistry or the scientific side in which he was so interested, but he often used to go on from Bournemouth to Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset where he had a great scheme for extracting oil from shale, which he thought might become enormously valuable and lucrative. But he was by no means a money-grubber and his ideas were mostly unworldly, like Blake's. He lived in a very modest way and was utterly unpretentious.

There—that is about all I know about Muir. I have very friendly and admiring recollections of him, but I am afraid they do not amount to enough to help you with constructing a Biography. I should be greatly interested to hear what contributions there might be from other people to a composite portrait of him. He must have had a number of Blake friends through his Agent, Quaritch, and others, but his facsimiles were, of course, laborious and therefore limited in number. Their artistic success, especially in colour, depends largely on which of the Blake originals he happened to get hold of. He would not have a wide choice in that. I think the "America" is the best, with its brilliant colouring.

I hope you will have a go at making at least a sketch of his

life. It might, as you say, make a "pretty little booklet," if not more.

I will remember (probably) not to pester you in September. I hope you will have the thoroughly good holiday you deserve, despite the Welsh language.

Kindest regards,
Yours sincerely,
Kerrison Preston

¹ Apparently my copy of the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* was not this same lot; there was no letter in it from Muir when I acquired it.

² I do not know the present whereabouts of these, but it is probable that they are in the Westminster Public Library with Preston's Blake collection.

³ Sir Geoffrey Keynes.

Improving the Text of *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*

David V. Erdman

Despite the extended cooperative effort of several Blake scholars to make it a faithful and accurate as well as complete edition, the Doubleday and California text of 1982 retained a sprinkling of misprints and even a few mistranscriptions. By the summer of 1983, *Blake* 17 (1983), 14, could report about a score of mostly simple errata and note the problems of some of Blake's Hebrew lettering.

By the autumn of 1984 a sizable list of errata was sent to Doubleday and to California. And now that the Doubleday (paperback) is in a second printing, it is comforting to find that proper corrections have been made of that first score and another two score errata. When the California hardback goes into its next printing, we can expect these to be attended to there.

It is a curious thing, however, that one mistake, which the California printers corrected before their first printing, has been left alone by the Doubleday printers. Illustration 2, *The Laocoön*, facing page 272, as first printed gives a negative instead of a positive impression: the text reads white on black instead of black on white as Blake wanted it. Let's hope that the *third* Anchor printing will get the joke.

In the list that follows, it seems best to include the earlier as well as the later errors discovered—so that possessors of the first printing (hard or soft) will not