The Origins of the William Blake Trust

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by George Goyder

In Sir Geoffrey Keynes's autobiography *The Gates of Memory*, the origins of the William Blake Trust are ascribed to the year 1948 and the desire to make a worthy facsimile of *Jerusalem*. This was not as it happens the beginning of the idea. More than two years earlier (1 November 1945) I drafted a letter to Dr. Thomas Jones asking that the Pilgrim Trust help in a project to reproduce Blake's engravings, paintings and prophetic books. As the text of the letter shows, our first priority was to reproduce the *Milton* series of drawings, secondly the Bible illustrations in tempera and watercolor, and thirdly, *Jerusalem*. Before mailing this letter I sent a draft to Geoffrey which he returned with a few minor corrections. Dr. Jones replied asking for time to consider the matter, so on 4 June 1947 I wrote again mentioning my previous letter and this time put forward *Jerusalem* as our first priority as the unique copy of that book had meantime become available for reproduction.

The original objectives of the William Blake Trust were very broadly defined and at no time has its aims been abandoned. It is more a case of the Trust using the technical expertise of Arnold Fawcus and his Trianon Press to the best advantage. Now that the William Blake Trust has successfully completed the long-awaited *Job* engravings in their several states it might be thought that the Trust has fulfilled the task for which it was formed. This is not the case. Three of the four original aims of the Trust remain uncompleted and some have not even been begun. There is work aplenty for the Trust still to do.

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**Dear Dr. Jones,**

You kindly sent me a copy of the Annual Report of the Pilgrim Trust. I was struck with the help you are giving to the encouragement of literature and art, prompted by it to put a suggestion to you which has been in my mind for some time.

William Blake is not only a great English poet but equally a great English painter—his greatest. His work is hardly known except to a small number of people. The reason is, I believe, partly that some of his best paintings are still in private hands such as those of Graham Robertson and Mrs. Stirling in this country, and Philip Hofer in America; partly because no adequate reproductions have been made.

The *Picture Morgan Library*

In 1936 the *Morgan* undertook the reproduction of the three known coloured copies of the *Job*, together with the original pencil sketches and the engravings. This magnificent production in six sections enabled the student to see Blake's work in a form hardly distinguishable from the original works. I understand the price to the trade was 10 guineas a copy, and that the total expense of production was between £8,000 and £8,000. 300 copies were sold in America and 200 in England. By now the original outlay should have been recovered. If you have not seen the Job I would like to show you a set next time you are in London. Geoffrey Keynes, who is the leading authority on Blake, wrote the introduction, and in every way the work is superb. We owe a great debt to *Morgan* for this enterprise.

My suggestion is that to encourage artists in this country and U.S.A. to study Blake (I believe there is no more inspiring master than Blake—he literally teems with inspiration), plans should now be made for reproducing the other great Blake series in the same way as was done for the *Book of Job* by *Morgan* through the National Art Collections Fund for the Dante drawings.

My first priority is to reproduce the *Milton* series. Some of these are in Boston, some in the Huntington Library, and some at Cambridge. The series include *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *The Nativity*, and *Comus*. It will be necessary to obtain the loan of the American originals and this will take time; hence the need to start now.

The second great work cycle never hitherto reproduced is the series of Biblical tempera illustrating the Life of Our Lord. All the paintings need putting together and reproducing in fine collotype, as used for the *Job*. When they are seen together the world may appreciate for the first time the glorious beauty and religious creative vision of this wonderful artist. You probably know some of Blake's paintings of Christ's Life, such as the infant John riding on the Lamb. No more tender presentation of the God-head—Divine Humanity and Human Divinity—can be imagined. There is nothing else I know of in Western art since the Reformation which conveys such deep religious feeling in form, colour and composition, as do these temperas, some of the finest of which are still in private collections. Nathan Todd's catalogue will help in tracing these.

Thirdly, there is the magnificent coloured *Jerusalem* in the possession of Mr. Stirling. Joseph Wickstead is still available to write the introduction for this book, but he is getting on in years and there is no young Blake scholar with the same understanding and learning.

Then there are the eighteen paintings illustrating Bunyan's Pilgrim which Lord Crewe sold recently to America.
They have been poorly reproduced in the United States, but the book is unobtainable in England.

It may be many months before Emsly Walker & Co. can re-assembly their expert son, but it is not too early to start planning the undertaking.

Geoffrey Keynes tells me he would give all help possible in the project. I imagine the cost would be twice or three times as great as before the war. The outlay for the Milton series might, therefore, be £10,000 to £15,000. A standard figure would cover the Biblical series. These are outside figures. As I understand it, Mr. Murray has already covered the whole of the outlay for the first volume of the Trust. The question for the Pilgrim Trust should be one of outlay rather than of expenditure. I am very anxious to interest you in the project, for I know of nothing else so calculated to inspire the present generation of artists and to link England and U.S.A. in creative unity as a noble and really very present-day presentation of Blake's work to the public here and in America for the first time.

I should like to talk further with you about this project and would be grateful if you will let me know when you are coming to London.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Tom Jones,
The Pilgrim Trust,
Harlech,
N. Wales.

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2nd November 1945

Dear Goyder,

I have read with much interest your letter about the Blake drawings, and fully share your sense of their great importance in the art life of this country.

The Trust is at the present moment deeply committed to the publication of several very expensive works. You may have seen the first volume of *MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTING*; it is only the first of several volumes. Then we have *RECORDING BRITAIN* on the stocks, and *RECORDING SCOTLAND* to follow. The range of present costs is very high, and that is another reason why we should delay for a year or two sounding the Trustees on a project of this kind.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

George Goyder, Esq.

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*Notes*

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*Copy of Remember Me!* Dr. Goyder, different from the others?

I sent you an interesting little story of painting at Cheetham's today. You could have laughed your heads off, with humorous anecdotes, flowery phrases, and facts, (most from Gladder Hall) for the price of two pints.

Yours affectionately, Geoffrey