

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY

BLAKE

N O T E

The Inscriptions on Blake's Designs to Pilgrim's Progress

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 6, Issue 3, Winter 1972-73, pp. 68-70



THE INSCRIPTIONS ON BLAKE'S DESIGNS TO *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* G.E. Bentley, Jr.

William Blake's designs to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* have always been considerably less well-known than they deserve. Blake made the series during the last few years of his life (the paper is watermarked 1824, when he was 67), and no contemporary reference to them is known.

Blake had of course long known Bunyan before this. About 1794 he made a print of The Man Sweeping The Interpreter's Parlour from *Pilgrim's Progress*, and in his last years his young disciples referred to his flat as The House of the Interpreter. In a letter of 4 December 1804 Blake said, "I shall travel on in the Strength of the Lord God as Poor Pilgrim says" in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and he associated himself directly with Bunyan when he commented that for "two so unequal labourers" as Flaxman and himself to contribute designs for a publication of Hayley's "would be (to say the best of myself) like putting John Milton with John Bunyan." In his *Notebook* he compared his genteel patron Hayley to Bunyan's "Pick thank," and, in his "Vision of the Last Judgment" (1810), he said that "Pilgrim's Progress is full" of vision.¹ But he never referred to his Bunyan designs in writings which survive.

Indeed, nothing was publicly known of the designs until they appeared at an anonymous sale at Sotheby's on 29 April 1862, as lot 187:

A SERIES OF TWENTY-EIGHT DESIGNS FOR THE
 ≡≡≡ ≡≡≡
 PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, nineteen of them highly
 ≡≡≡ ≡≡≡
 finished in colours

when they were sold for £13.10s to [R. M.] Milnes. They were described by W. M. Rossetti in the catalogue of Blake's art which he prepared for Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863), II, 235,² but they were then forgotten by Blake scholars until Sir Geoffrey Keynes saw them about 1928 and later reproduced them in *The Pilgrim's Progress Illustrated* with 29 watercolour paintings by William Blake, ed. G. B. Harrison, Introduction by Geoffrey Keynes (New York, 1941). They were exhibited at The Knoedler Gallery and at The Cleveland Museum in 1941³ and sold to The Frick Collection, where they have been stored in the vault for most of the rest of the time since then. Aside from Keynes' Introduction to his edition of

Pilgrim's Progress (reprinted in his *Blake Studies* [1949, 1971]) and reviews of the Keynes edition and of the exhibitions, there has scarcely been a serious account of these important designs.

Sir Geoffrey remarked casually that "A few of the drawings have a word or two scribbled in the margin by Blake. None has any full inscription. . . . All have been numbered and inscribed with a title by a later unknown hand. . . ." However, these pencil inscriptions have never been recorded; indeed, they had scarcely been visible until the drawings were quite recently dismounted and the margins and versos could once more be examined. The inscriptions, written below the designs except when the margin is too narrow, are as follows:

1⁵ John Bunyan dreams a dream
 Pilgrim's Progress

2--I saw a man clothed in rags with his face from
 his own house / a Book in his hand, & a great
 burden on his back⁶
 Christian begins his pilgrimage

G. E. Bentley, Jr., recently edited and annotated A Handlist of Works by William Blake in the Department of Prints & Drawings of the British Museum for the Newsletter. He is editor of *Blake's Vala or The Four Zoas* (1963) and of *Blake's Tiriel* (1967); compiler of *The Blake Collection of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne* (1971) and, with Martin K. Nurmi, of *A Blake Bibliography* (1964); author of *The Early Engravings of Flaxman's Classical Designs* (1964) and of *Blake Records* (1969).

1 *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. G. Keynes (1957), 549, 604.

2 The relationship between Rossetti's alphabetical order, the pencil numbers, and the Frick reference numbers is as follows:

ROSSETTI ORDER	PENCIL NO.	FRICK REF. NO.
n	1	A419a
a	2	A420a
c	3	A421a
b	4	A422a
d	5	A423a
e	6	A424a
f	7	A425a
g	8	A427a
h	9	A426a
i	10	A428a

- [2 *altered to*] 3 Evangelist gives Christian the roll⁷
- [3 *altered to*] 4 Obstinate and Pliable follow him
- [3 *altered to*] 5⁵ Pliable leaves Xtian in the Slough of Despond
- [7 *altered to*] 6⁵ Help lifts Christian out of / the Slough of Despond
[*On the verso:*] "Help" lifts Xtian out of the Slough of Despond
- [*Number del*] 7--Mr Worldly Wiseman directs Xtian / to the house of Legality, in the village / of Morality
- 8 Christian fears the flashes of fire / from Mt Sinai
- [9] Xtian falls at the feet of Evangelist fearing / the fire from Mt Sinai⁸
- 10 Xtian knocks at the wicket gate
[*The gate in the design is labeled by Blake:*] KNOCK AND IT SHALL BE OPENED
- 11 Good will opens the wicket gate to Xtian Christian returning home
- 12 In the Interpreter's House⁹
- 13 In the Interpreter's House -- the rose[?]¹⁰
Page 20
- [13 *altered to*] 14 Mr Interpreter shows him the man who / had the dream of the Day of Judgement
- 15 Christian's burden falls off at / Sight of the Cross--

b ¹	11	A429a
x	12	A437a
j	13	A430a
k	14	A431a
l	15	A432a
m	16	A433a
o	17	A434a
	18	A435a
p	19	A436a
q	20	A438a
s	21	A439a
r	22	A418a
t	23	A440a
u	24	A441a
v	25	A442a
w	26	A443a
y	27	A444a
a ¹	28	A445a
z	29	A446a

The Keynes order (*Blake Studies* [1971], 167-73) is that of the Frick, except that he omits No. 22. Rossetti omits the un-inscribed No. 18.

3 *Water Colours of William Blake for Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress*: Loan Exhibition October 21 to November 8, 1941, at the Galleries of M. Knoedler and Company; *Water Colours . . .*: Loan Exhibition November 18 to December 14, 1941, Cleveland Museum of Art. Twelve of the designs were reproduced in an edition of *Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. J. T. Winterich (New York, 1942) and sixteen in the edition of A. K. Adams (New York, 1968).

- 16 Page 23 The Shining Ones appear to Christian
- 17 Christian climbs the Hill Difficulty
- 18 Page 26 / 18
- 19 / Page 28 / Christian passes the lions
- [Page 36(?) *del*] 20 [B . . . *written over by*] Christian beaten down by / Apollyon
[*Above the design is:*] Apollyon
- 21 / Faithful relate[s] how Moses / met[?] with him
[*Above the design is:*] Faithfuls Narrative
- 22 / Christ delivers Faithful from Moses
- 23 / Christian & Faithful in / Vanity Fair
[*Above the design is:*] Vanity Fair
- [Page 50(?) *del*] 24¹¹ Faithful taken up / into Heaven
- 25 Christian and Hopeful / in Doubting Castle
- [25(?) *altered to*] 26 They escape from Giant Despair
- 27 The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains
[*on the top margin*]
- 27 [*sic*] [C(hristian?) *del*] Hopeful supports Christian over the river
- [Page 50(?) *del*] 29 Christian & Hopeful enter / the gate of Heaven

The removal of the mounts has also made possible the decipherment of the watermarks, as follows:

4 Keynes, *Blake Studies* (1971), 167. The titles Keynes uses for No. 1, 8-10, 17, 19-21, 23, 25, 27 are the same as at least part of the pencil inscriptions, but since he says that "these inscriptions carry no authority and I have ignored them in making my own descriptions" (p. 167), the similarity must be just coincidental.

5 The number appears above the design, in the corner, and the inscription below the design.

6 The first inscription appears above the design, the second below it.

7 The leaf is cut down almost to the margin of the design, and the inscription appears on the verso.

8 On the verso at the margin in pencil is ". . . card mount[?]".

9 Mr. Martin Butlin suggests to me that the scene seems rather to represent Christian Going Forth Armed, a later episode.

10 The design shows a prisoner in an elaborate iron cage; the queried word is neither "cage" nor "man"; it could be "iron".

11 The number appears to be written over another which was imperfectly erased, so that the remaining number reads "24o", with the "o" significantly smaller than the "24". Similarly, the next number seems to read "205", perhaps written over from "70".

In the right margin of No. 25 is an erasure which seems to read "[p]luckd heaven".

J WHATMAN / 1824 ≡≡	{	No. 27:	J WH	/ 18
			≡≡	
		No. 6, 28:	J WHAT	/ 182
			≡≡	
		No. 1, 15, 21:	TMAN	/ 4
None:		No. 2-5, 7-14, 16-20, 23-26, 29		
Invisible: ¹²		No. 22		

Drawing No. 22 is cut down to the margins and pasted to a larger sheet which is watermarked J WHATMAN / 1828.

The numbers and inscriptions appear to be mostly in the same hand,¹³ which is not Blake's. He rarely spells "Judgement" with two "e"s, as in No. 14, and he never uses the disagreeable spelling "Xtian" which appears in Nos. 5-7, 9-11. The "F", "g", "h", "H", "I", and "M" are significantly unlike his, and the uncertainty of numbering would be difficult to reconcile with his authority. Most telling of all, the inscription on the mount of No. 22, which is in the same hand as that on the other drawings, is on paper watermarked "1828", the year after Blake's death.

Who, then, made the inscriptions? The most obvious candidate is, I believe, the correct one. At Blake's death in 1827, all his property evidently went to his widow Catherine. For a time, Catherine lived with Blake's devoted disciple Frederick Tatham, and, according to Tatham's manuscript "Life of Blake," at her death in 1831 she "bequeathed . . . to him . . . all of his Works that remained unsold at his Death being writings, paintings, and a very great number of Copper Plates".¹⁴ Much later Anne Gilchrist wrote: "Tatham came into possession of so large a stock of Designs and engraved Books, that he has, by his own confession, been selling them 'for thirty years' and at 'good prices.'"¹⁵ Indeed, it is generally assumed that Tatham was the anonymous vendor at the 1862 sale in which the Bunyan drawings first appeared publicly,¹⁶ and it is difficult to imagine who else at that time is likely to have had the enormous number of 182 miscellaneous Blake drawings to sell, not to mention works in Illuminated Printing. And if, as seems very likely, Tatham acquired the Bunyan drawings from Mrs. Blake and sold them in 1862, it seems equally likely that he numbered the drawings (with some difficulty) and identified them, between 1828 and 1863, when Rossetti quoted No. 11.

I have compared photographs of the Bunyan inscriptions with a photocopy of Tatham's "Life of Blake" (now in the possession of Mr. Paul Mellon) and conclude that the hands are very similar. In particular, the "A", "B", "C", "D", "E", "F", "g", "G", "L", "M", and "T" are strikingly like Tatham's and unlike Blake's, and some numbers ("7" and "24") and words ("Faith", "hopeful", "heavenly", "burden") seem to me unmistakably similar. The handwriting, then, seems to confirm Tatham's ownership of the Bunyan drawings.

Tatham's authority as to Blake's intentions may, of course, be good, but it is certainly not infallible. He changed his mind about the order of Nos. 3-7, 14, 26, and he made a few mistakes in order which he never corrected: No. 9 has no number at all, two designs are numbered "27", and none is numbered "28". Further, one of the drawings he numbered with the Bunyan series (No. 22) is generally thought to belong instead with Blake's *Paradise Regained* drawings,¹⁷ the rest of which belonged to John Linnell from October 1825¹⁸ until his posthumous sale in March 1918. We may take Tatham's inscriptions, then, as a useful but errant guide to Blake's intentions in the *Pilgrim's Progress* drawings.

A number of perplexing problems remain. There were "TWENTY-EIGHT DESIGNS" in the series when

Tatham sold it in 1862, but the series now has twenty-nine drawings, the last evidently numbered "29" by Tatham; when did the twenty-ninth drawing join the others, which one is it, and where did it come from? If No. 22 is part of the *Paradise Regained* or another series, when and how did it join the Bunyan drawings? What is the correct order of the drawings? What are the mysterious "Page" references Tatham gives on No. 13, 16, 18-20, 24, 29, none of them higher than "50"? Can they refer to the particular edition of *Pilgrim's Progress* which Blake was using? If so, why are only early pages cited? Are there other Bunyan drawings, finished or unfinished, which belong with the series¹⁹ and which might help to account for Tatham's uncertainties? How reliably do Tatham's inscriptions identify Blake's drawings, and was he using more than the internal evidence available to us? Such questions should, I think, exercise anyone who embarks on the serious study of Blake's illustrations to *Pilgrim's Progress* which is now overdue.²⁰

¹² Drawing No. 22 is pasted down, and the watermark is therefore not visible.

¹³ "Pilgrim's Progress" on No. 1, "Christian returning home" on No. 11, and perhaps "Apollyon" at the top of No. 20 appear to me to be by Blake.

¹⁴ *Blake Records* (1969), p. 533.

¹⁵ *Blake Records* (1969), pp. 416-417. On the verso of No. 1 is "10/6", perhaps Tatham's early price.

¹⁶ *The Blake Collection of W. Graham Robertson*, ed. Kerrison Preston (1952), pp. 39, 74, 114, 133, 136, 138, 140, 142, 167, 170, 173-74, 178. Keynes (*Blake Studies* [1971], pp. 166, 167) is unaware of the appearance of the Bunyan designs in the 1862 sale and suggests they may have belonged to Butts.

¹⁷ Keynes, *Blake Studies* (1971), p. 174.

¹⁸ *Blake Records* (1969), p. 589.

¹⁹ Since this was written, Martin Butlin, "An Extra Illustration to *Pilgrim's Progress*," *Blake Newsletter*, 5 (1972), 213-14, has identified a Blake drawing in the Rosenwald Collection as belonging with the *Pilgrim's Progress* series.

²⁰ Mr. James Willis is now undertaking such a study.