Songs of Innocence, Keynes 1921 Copy U, Keynes-Wolf 1953 Copy U

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Songs of Innocence,

Keynes (1921) Copy U,

Keynes-Wolf (1953) Copy U

This copy of Songs of Innocence, in the Houghton Library, Harvard University (see Newsletter 19, p. 214, and Newsletter 24, p. 96) requires, perhaps, just one more note to present it properly to contemporary students of Blake. Physical examination of the volume as it now exists reveals the following details to be added to the standard bibliographical descriptions cited above:

1. pl. 29, the first of two plates of "The Little Black Boy." For this copy two pulls were made from this plate. Consequently two leaves for pl. 29 appear in this copy. The leaves were not numbered by Blake, but numbers in pencil have been added in the upper right-hand corners of the leaves. Because of the extra print of or pull from pl. 29, these numbers run from 1-32, not from 1-31 as the bibliographies cited above declare.

2. Included in this copy, but unnoticed in either of the bibliographies cited in my title are three leaves from Songs of Experience numbered in pencil in the upper right-hand corners 1a, 2a, 3a. These are:

   (a) Experience pl. 29, Title page to Experience on which is written in pencil: "Taken in 1838: From the original plates in possession of Mr. Tatham."

   (b) Experience pl. 30, "Introduction" to Experience.

   (c) Experience pl. 37, "The Chimney Sweeper" of Experience.

3. Also originally bound into this copy are many leaves containing excerpts from the "Prologue" to The Canterbury Tales with modernized versions on facing leaves.

A corrected description of this copy of Songs of Innocence reads as follows:

U 31 plates on [32] leaves. Watermark WHATMAN, on one leaf. Printed in black. Uncoloured. Formerly arranged: 2, 1, 3, 10-11, 29-30, 9, 22, 28, 13, 14, 8, 20, 21, 16-17, 27, 24, 18-19, 12, 23, 25-26, 31, 4, 15, 5-7. Size: 19 x 11.7 cm. Now loose in binding together with the Descriptive Catalogue, 1809, and the Canterbury Pilgrims, 1812; fly-leaf with watermark dated 1818. [Uncoloured prints of pls. 29, 30, 37 of Songs of Experience bound in after Songs of Innocence. The following notation in pencil appears on pl. 29 (Experience), Title page to Experience: "Taken in 1838: From the original plates in possession of Mr. Tatham." Excerpts from Chaucer's "Prologue" with modernized texts facing the originals have also been bound into this copy.]

Formerly in the possession of Robert Balmanno, an English journalist, who emigrated to New York. He had been friendly with Stothard and Fuseli and other artists who knew Blake, and may have had the books direct from him. Afterwards in the collection of E.W. Hooper, of Boston. Reproduced in 1883 by Little, Brown, and Co. For many years in...
the possession of Hooper's daughter, Mrs. Greely S. Curtis, Jr., of Boston, and given by her sister, Mrs. Ward Thoron to the Houghton Library, Harvard University, in 1951 in memory of her father.

Further pencil notations, that are not necessarily essential to the physical description of Copy U, appear as follows:

(1) On the verso of pl. 3 "Introduction" to Imagoes appears the following notation: "Typo 6500 (50-208-210)".

(2) Inside the front cover is a history of the ownership of this copy.

(3) On the verso of pl. 21 ("The Little Boy found") appears the notation: "H. D. Chapin 60 Beacon St. Boston High 3-4 40 inches - 11246".

(4) On p. 30 of the Descriptive Catalogue in the margin opposite "H. S says" in the text appears the name, "Hoppner".

(5) On p. 32 of the Descriptive Catalogue in the margin opposite "Mr. S ________ " appears the name, "Stothard".


One does not know when the pages of this copy became loose. They may have been loosened sometime between 1921 and 1953. The extra leaf for "The Little Black Boy" may have been inserted after Keynes originally described this copy, but it is unlikely. Similarly, the three leaves from Experience may have been added subsequent to 1921, again unlikely. If the three leaves from Experience were actually added to this copy in 1838 or shortly thereafter, as the pencil note indicates, the pages of this copy may have been loosened before Keynes originally described it in 1921.

What was Blake's point in alluding to Prussian blue in this passage? David Erdman suggests that Plate 65 was revised at about the time of Napoleon's Hundred Days.6 In the Belgian campaign—that final assault by the sons of Albion against Luvah—England's chief ally was Prussia. It was the arrival of Prussian troops under Blücher that determined the outcome of the battle at Waterloo. In describing the sacrificial death of Luvah, Blake saw the appropriateness of identifying the blue dye of the Druids with the poison-based color named for Prussia.

3 His account of the experiments is included in The Chemical Essays of Charles-William Scheele, trans. Thomas Beddoes (London: John Murray, 1786).


5 Partington, III, 234. In 1803, the poison derived from laurel leaves was identified as prussic acid. Was it coincidental that in this year (probably) Blake wrote: "The Strongest Poison ever known / Came from Caesar's Laurel Crown"? (K 433) Or had he read somewhere an account of the discovery?