BLAKE AMONG VICTORIANS
Blake Newsletter 29-30
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The International Standard Serial Number of the Blake Newsletter is 0006-453X.
This issue is entirely devoted to new material on Blake's reputation and influence in the later nineteenth century. We are indebted to Dr. Ian Fletcher for valuable assistance in assembling this special issue.

John Todhunter's Lectures on Blake, 1872-1874, edited by Ian Fletcher

Michael J. Tolley, John Todhunter: A Forgotten Debt to Blake

Frances A. Carey, James Smetham (1821-1889) and Gilchrist’s Life of Blake

Suzanne R. Hoover, The Public Reception of Gilchrist’s Life of Blake


Malcolm Kingsley Macmillan, Dialogue between Blake and Wordsworth

Our back cover shows Frederick J. Shields’ preliminary drawing for the cover design of Gilchrist’s Life of William Blake, 2nd ed., 1880; from the collection of David Bindman. The front cover shows a proof on paper of the final design; the color of the ink here has been matched to the color of the ink on the proof. The design appeared stamped in gold on the cover of Gilchrist’s book, as was the design for the spine of the book, a proof of which is reproduced on pages 2-3 of this issue of the Newsletter. The proofs are from the collection of Robert N. Essick.

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In January 1960, through the generosity of the poet's son, some of the literary manuscripts of John Todhunter (1839-1916) were presented to the University of Reading. Best remembered as a friend of John Butler Yeats and later of his son William Butler Yeats, and as one of the first poets to adopt the "programme" of the "Irish Renaissance" by the use of Celtic myth in his volume The Banshee (1888), Todhunter was also a member of the Rhymers' Club. More than an accomplished minor poet, Todhunter was a dramatist who, if not successful was at least adventurous: the range of his work extends from pastoral to the Ibsenite "problem" play. As a critic, he was as adventurous and more gifted: he anticipates Yeats in promoting non-naturalist drama; while his Study of Shelley (1880) has been warmly commended by Professor Harold Bloom.

Among the unpublished manuscript material at Reading are four lectures on William Blake: MS 202/4/3. This altogether consists of fifty-five leaves.

Lecture VII (12 leaves) dated 31 October 1872
Lecture VIII (13 leaves) dated 5 November 1872 (incomplete)
Lecture XVI (24 leaves) dated 10 March 1874
Lecture XVIII (6 leaves) dated 12 March 1874

In the text I give here, ampersands have been expanded, spelling has been normalized and editorial punctuation is enclosed by a square bracket.

These lectures form part of a cycle on the English poets delivered at Alexandra College, Dublin. Of this cycle, only the lectures on Blake appear to have survived.

Alexandra College had been founded in 1866 by R.C. Trench, Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, friend of F. D. Maurice and Tennyson, jointly with the remarkable Anne Jellicoe, pioneer in modes of training women for suitable employment. Alexandra had been preceded in the "higher" education of ladies by Queen's (1848) and Bedford Colleges, London. It was an "Ascendancy" institution closely linked to Trinity College, Dublin. Its primary aim, indeed, was to persuade Trinity to admit women to degrees and itself to become an associated College of the new bisexual model. In this it was to be oddly disappointed: women were admitted to Trinity in 1904 but Alexandra College, despite an admirable academic record, was left to its own devices. Those involved becoming a grammar school, even if an extraordinary one. Alexandra's ambition accounts for the distinction of its lecturers and the demanding quality of their lectures. In the 1870s lectures were given by, among others, J. P. Mahaffy and Edward Dowden and we are told that Dowden's Shakespeare: His Mind and Art was first given in the form of a series of lectures to the ladies of Alexandra College. The series itself formed part of the "Saturday Lectures" given between 1869 and 1877 in Trinity and by Trinity staff.

Todhunter had been appointed Professor of English Literature at Alexandra in 1870 and is shown also as an Examiner for Certificates of

1 I am much indebted to Miss Honor Stuart, Librarian of Alexandra College, for furnishing me with information and with literature, particularly Alexandra College, Dublin, Jubilee Record 1866-1916. My thanks are also due to the Todhunter family and to the Librarian of the University of Reading.
Education in the Calendar for 1874. It seems unlikely that the Blake lectures formed part of the "Saturday" or any other formal series. More plausibly, they came under the rubric for the English Literature Division and would have been given in Alexandra itself at 5, 6 and 7 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin:

a series of Lectures on the history of English Literature from the earliest times to the present, the lives and writings of the more important and representative poets and prose writers; the successive variations of our literature in connexion with national history.

Todhunter clearly used the cycle delivered in 1872 two years later, occasionally rewriting and correcting. This would account for the cancelled beginning of Lecture VI (24 October 1872), which was superseded by two new pages of introductory matter. The whole now became Lecture XVI of the new cycle and was repaginated. The cancelled passage runs:

Instead of giving my intended lecture on the poems of Burns today, I think it better to introduce you at once to a much more remarkable man--William Blake whose name perhaps many of you may never have heard of before.

This historically interesting statement is substantially repeated on the first page of the new lecture (here p. 11).

These lectures, brief though they are, document a discriminating enthusiasm at a moment when Blake's reputation was still equivocal. Nine years had elapsed since the publication of Gilchrist's Life of the "Pictor Ignotus" and on Gilchrist Todhunter depends heavily for his biographical material. R. H. Shepherd had furnished two editions of the Songs of Innocence and the Songs of Experience in 1866 and in 1868 respectively, and in that latter year Swinburne's brilliant essay had appeared. In January of the following year, James Smetham, painter, poet and associate of Rossetti, published his long notice of Gilchrist in The London Quarterly Review. Like the Rossettis and Swinburne, Todhunter's response to Blake was that of a practicing poet; in his first collection Laurelia there are distinct tinges of the Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience. Two of the poems there had been published as affectionate parodies of Blake in Kottabos of 1871. But Todhunter's involvement with Blake goes back to his association with John Butler Yeats's "Brotherhood" in the last years of the 1860s (E. J. Ellis was also associated with the group) for the Brotherhood had its own cult of Blake.

Occasionally profound in generalization, Todhunter's main gift is for a judicious closeness. He compares favorably with his immediate contemporaries: Smetham is not without interest on the painting, but has a Methodist distrust of all Blake's poetry after the Songs of Innocence. For Smetham, indeed, Blake is painfully mad, almost in the sense of diabolic possession. Swinburne "kidnaps" Blake, finally imprisoning him in sterile dialectic between Aestheticism and Puritanism. Todhunter's reading of The Marriage

2 See pp. 18 and 28. Other Professors in the earlier years included T. Kells Ingram, incongruously author of that famous nationalist lyric, "Who fears to speak of Ninety-Eight!" and G. A. Greene, later a fellow member of the Rhymers' Club.

3 See Alexandra College Dublin, Calendar for the Year 1874 ..., p. 29.
of Heaven and Hell is usefully conditioned by interest in Hegel and Whitman. His interpretation of Blake's paradoxes takes Todhunter beyond Swinburne into a synthetic view of Blake's moral vision, a vision that is certainly not that of the coterie poet. Blake is seen as prophet of a Whitmanesque "democracy" with the caveat that this "democracy" is a preparation for, rather than the realized, Kingdom of Heaven. Interestingly, Todhunter uses the word "modern" polemically, not as synonym for "contemporary" but to describe Blake's avant garde qualities. In reading these lectures, we ourselves experience the wrestlings and rewards of a sympathetic and acute mid-Victorian reader of Blake, whose occasional insights are "modern" in his own challenging sense.

Lecture VII, 31 October 1872
Songs of Innocence

I daresay many of you who listened to my most meagre and fragmentary sketch of the life of Blake on Tuesday, taking it in connection with the great admiration which I expressed for the man, thought that I was a little mad myself, to say nothing of Blake. Today I hope to give you some grounds for this admiration of mine, which no doubt appears rather extravagant. I must however declare at starting that I feel it to be the most difficult thing in the world to give a lecture on Blake which shall be at all satisfactory to myself or intelligible to you. With other poets I assume you have some acquaintance but Blake is quite a new discovery even for literary men. Other poets speak a language not very far removed from our ordinary speech, but he has a mystical vocabulary of his own, which no one has as yet thoroughly mastered. Other poets speak in metaphors which are more or less easy of solution; but he speaks in dark myths which tax the highest imagination to read clear. Besides this Blake is constantly dealing with abstruse psychological ideas rather than the phenomena of the external world. He is probably the most intensely subjective of all our poets. You can easily perceive how hard it is adequately to treat of the works of such a man in one or two lectures. The most I can hope for is, that some of you may be induced to study him for yourselves.

Let me first try to give you some idea of the position which Blake occupies in our literature and of the nature of these psychological ideas which he is so constantly handling. I have called Blake a modern, and I daresay you are a little puzzled by the term. To understand this we must study a little the ideas upon which we find the great poets most constantly dwelling and the problems which most occupy their attention. We may class these ideas under two heads viz. the idea of the revolt of passion against restrictions, and the idea of the revolt of the individual against social tyrannies. Every great poet of the last half century is loud in his demands for liberty of passion and liberty of action—freedom of the individual will. But if the individual be thus free, what guarantee is there that he will not injure his neighbour and reduce society to chaos? The answer is that love is the harmonizer of the passions, and that large idea of friendship—the universal brotherhood of democracy—the harmonizer of human action. But this introduces the further question how we are to attain to these? And this gives rise to the endless practical problems which are constantly agitating society—the relations between the sexes, between peoples and their rulers, and between nation and nation. All these problems have two sets of answers—the one prosaic and practical, the other poetical and utopian—the one belonging to the domain of morality, the other to the domain of poetry. It is the difference between the Law and the Prophets. Hence arises the perplexing paradox that Art which is not moral (the rigid moralist would say immoral) is yet a good and great thing—and the further paradox that poets who are constantly leaping the barriers of morality are yet our highest teachers. The fact is that if you want to become moral you must go to the moralist, if you want to be filled with divine aspirations you must go to the poet. The moralist points to the stern path of duty, but at bottom the two are in accord and are necessary to each other. Morality rises to its highest pitch when through the impulse communicated by the poet duty becomes delight. Love is the only perfect fulfilling of the law. Morality is a rigid law imposed from without, love is the perfect law of liberty imposed from within. The poet, so far as he is a poet acknowledges and can acknowledge no law from without—hence the moral difficulties in which he is perpetually plunged—if he does not attain to love he plays the devil with morality and society which is based upon it. We find this antagonism between law and liberty—which is in fact ultimately the antagonism between necessity and free will—taking its highest philosophical form in the antagonism between Science and Religion, science acknowledging nothing but the Reign of Law. Religion nothing but the reign of miracle. The progress of mankind is a struggle for the reconciliation of these two principles—what Blake calls the Marriage of Heaven and Hell. Poetry is constantly dashing ahead in pursuit of some golden impossibility. Morality and Science come toiling after striving to make this impossibility possible. Poetry revolts against morality and morality against poetry. We see this all through history—We see it on a grand scale at the time of the Reformation. The Medieval Catholic Church was the incarnation of mystical poetry—the Protestant Church is the incarnation of prosaic morality. The Mediaeval Church in its
To the pure all things are pure.

Blake's own.

on marriage (p. 5). These two poems are eminently

To the Evening Star, To Spring, and To Summer—also

surpass Collins in his own style—Keats if he had

the very spirit of Anti-Puritanic innocent mirth. In his "Marriage

of Heaven and Hell" he uses Heaven in the sense of

Law and order, and Hell in the sense of passion

and energy. In the marriage of the two, the

liberty of perfect law and the perfect law of

liberty become one.

To descend from these perplexing abstractions

to particulars, Blake is emphatically a modern in

several of his favourite ideas and feelings which

we shall come across in due course in considering

his poems. In speaking of these, I shall confine

myself almost entirely to the "Songs of Innocence

and of Experience", which are to be had separately

for a few shillings; but before going to them let

me say a few words about Blake's mere poetical

style, which in itself is such a remarkable

phenomenon in the 18th century. As illustrations

of that I shall take a number of poems prefixed to

the Songs of Innocence in Gilchrist's Life. One

of them was written before he was 14, and while

perhaps recalling some of the Chatterton poems in
general form, is quite unique as a piece of poetic
imagination and melody of versification (How sweet
I roamed etc. p. 8). Others of these poems are

quite Elizabethan in character (one called "My
silks and fine array" and Song p. 9). Others again

seemed to have been inspired by Collins but are

much more spontaneous and imaginative than his

poems. (To the Muses (p. 10) contains such

expressions as these

"The chambers of the sun that now
From ancient melody have ceased"

and

"Or the blue regions of the air,
Where the melodious winds have birth".

To the Evening Star, To Spring, and To Summer--also

surpass Collins in his own style--Keats if he had

lived in those days might almost have written "To

Summer") (p. 13).

The Song "I love the jocund dance" breathes

the very spirit of Anti-Puritanic innocent mirth.

It is apparently addressed to his wife (p. 6).

To the pure all things are pure.

"Love and harmony combine" is a mystical poem

on marriage (p. 5). These two poems are eminently

Blake's own.

The "Mad Song" (p. 7) is unsurpassed by any­thing in the language for subtle melody of

versification.

The fragment of a drama entitled King Edward

the Third written when Blake was quite young shows

a good deal of dramatic power, and is wonderfully

Shakespearean in its imagery.

In all these poems we find this illiterate,

unappreciated painter, writing with a felicitous

spontaneity which it is difficult to parallel

elsewhere--just at a time when false polish and

false sentiment were the great characteristics of

our literature. In Blake we find a return to

nature and inspiration in despite of all frigid

rules.

We now come to the "Songs of Innocence". This

series is in direct contrast to the other series
called "Songs of Experience". The former are full

of childlike simplicity and unquestioning faith,

innocent happiness--the latter of paradox and

mystery and questioning and passion. To go from

the Songs of Innocence to the Songs of Experience

is like turning from Haydn to Beethoven. But the

"Songs of Innocence" close with a hint that the

highest truth and its highest happiness is a thing of

the childlike minds: and the Songs of Experience

are full of suggestions of a solution of all these

doubts and antagonism, and end with a poem which

speaks of a regeneration and spiritual resurrection

of mankind.

The Songs of Innocence are thus quaintly

introduced (p. 27).

The "Echoing Green" is a song of Innocent

mirth, like "I love the Jocund dance."

"The Lamb" expresses the child's idea of

creation and of life-seeking no solution of problems

but taking the love and fatherhood of God on trust

(p. 29).

"The Chimney-sweeper" is the child's solution

of the miseries which so soon come upon him (p. 32).

The spirit of adoption by which every Abba-Father

is the child's spirit.
In "the Divine Image", this feeling of the fatherhood of God makes the child's heart throb with brotherly love toward all men.

"All must love the human form
In heathen, Turk, or Jew;
Where mercy, love, and pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too."

The theologian of the tract-shops has a number of epithets Deist, Atheist, Infidel, which he loves to brand men with, when he wishes to put them outside the pale of our sympathy—much as boys tie a kettle to a dog's tail and then cry mad dog after him. Blake regards such men as Paine and Godwin with sympathy so far as they are striving after truth and with pity so far as they are plunged in error and blindness. He apparently alludes to such men in the closing poem of the Songs of Innocence (p. 46).

The poem called "Night" is more mystical than any of these, and expresses the child's trust that though Nature be apparently as Tennyson says "one with rapine"—yet even evil itself is a means with God.

In the Cradle Song, and Infant Joy, Blake enters into the feelings of a mother as few poets have done before. There is no namby-pambyism in these songs, and no effort to be dramatic. In Tennyson's "Sea Dreams" there is a mother's song which is full of artificial prettiness—he condescends to the mother's standpoint, and the result is painful. Blake's songs are almost as far above this as his religious poems are above the hymns which every idiot who is pious and can rhyme thinks himself justified in deluging the world with. In Infant Joy (p. 42) the mother holds a dialogue with her little nameless baby of two days old—and then sings over it as it smiles in her face.

I shall close with the lines called Spring which are full of the spiritualized essence of a child's open-air animal spirits. (p. 40).

Next week I hope to lecture on the "Songs of Experience".

Lecture VIII, 5 November 1872
Songs of Experience

The "Songs of Experience", as I told you in my last lecture, are in direct contrast to the "Songs of Innocence". The "Songs of Innocence" are full of unquestioning childlike faith—the "Songs of Experience" are full of faith also; but it is sceptical faith, struggling with the hard problems which experience brings. There all is cheerful gazing upon the face of God, and trustful rest upon His bosom—here all is indignant appeal and restless questioning, and solemn musing. The faith of the "Songs of Innocence" is a rapturous belief in the reality of things seen and felt—what the hands have actually handled of the Word of Life. The faith of the Songs of Experience is something more—it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". The poet of the Songs of Experience still sings in the presence of the Most High, but now He has withdrawn himself behind the clouds which veil his sanctuary.

The contrast between the two series is made more definite by the same titles being in several instances repeated in both—the subjects being handled very differently in the latter series. Poems entitled "Holy Thursday", "The Chimney Sweeper", "A Cradle Song", and "Nurse's Song" occur in both; while "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found" of the Songs of Innocence correspond to some extent to "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" and the shorter poems "A Little Boy Lost" and "A Little Girl Lost" of the Songs of Experience. The "Lamb" of the one contrasts with the "Tiger" of the other as does "Infant Joy" with "Infant Sorrow".

In the Introduction to the "Songs of Experience" the voice of the Bard is heard calling to the Earth in transgression—

"Calling the lapsed soul,
And weeping in the evening dew."

The burden of this call is similar to that of John the Baptist "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" although differently worded.

The answer of the Earth, whose locks are "covered with grey despair," is to the effect that "cruel jealous selfish fear" has bound "free love" with bondage. This is Blake's perpetual complaint—the human heart is bound down by the bitter restrictions of the moral law. Love and faith laugh consequences to scorn, Prudence and doubt dwell in constant fear of consequences, and give rise to the moral law. Hence Blake's constant scorn of prudence and doubt. But we must distinctly understand Blake on this point. He does not mean to say that the moral law is unnecessary and rashly to be cast off in practice. He knows that the present world is what St. Paul calls "under the law". He expressly says: "Many persons, such as Paine and Voltaire, with some of the ancient Greeks say "We will not converse concerning good and evil; we will live in Paradise and Liberty." You may do so in spirit, but not in the mortal body, as you pretend, till after a Last Judgement". But the whole creation groans and travails to be delivered from this moral law—and will be by this last

7 The hands have handled. Compare 1 John 1:1. "Our hands have handled" in allusion to the human person of the Divine Word.
9 "Many persons, such as Paine and Voltaire etc." from A Vision of the Last Judgment.
Judgment. By this Last Judgment Blake means something very different from what our worthy but prosaic friend the tract shop theologian means. He does not mean a melodramatic coming of angels blowing trumpets and sitting on clouds, visible with opera-glasses from the top of the Merrion Hall and other such tabernacles. He means a tremendous spiritual convulsion of men's minds through which their bodies shall become temples of the Holy Ghost--the Lord descending to shake terribly the earth no less really because not visible to the carnal but the spiritual sense. The tract shop theologian is in fact a gross materialist, Blake like the great Hebrews a mystical poet. He speaks of a Last Judgment passing upon a man every time he renounces error and begins to live in the truth.

The next poem in the series--"The Clod and the Pebble" introduces us to one of those paradoxes which we are constantly meeting in our lives (p. 49). The solution of this is that love is what Hegel would call an identity of opposites. It is at once the highest self-interest and the highest self-renunciation.

The "Holy Thursday" of the "Songs of Experience" contrasts with the "Holy Thursday" of the Songs of Innocence. In the earlier series the poet sees only the beauty of this modern idea of philanthropy, and rejoices in the happiness of the little charity school children singing in St. Paul's. Now he sees only the reverse side--the show of our philanthropies and the horrors of Beadledom (50), Poverty, Blake would seem to say, is the result of worldly prudence and Mammon worship. If we were all living in Christian charity there would be no necessity for what we in the hardness of our hearts call charity.

The "Little Girl Lost" and the "Little Girl Found" are rather obscure, and I can only suggest an interpretation. They seem to be in general terms an allegory of the purification of the human soul through passion and the consequent regeneration of morality--ascetic Puritanism becoming non-ascetic purity. But I am inclined to think that Blake had something more definite in view, and that the little girl Lyca typifies the feminine soul in its progress from mere innocence to purity. Lyca is led away from her parents by the song of the wild birds, and is lost in the "desert wild". She lies down under a tree and tries to sleep, but cannot, while thinking of the unhappiness of her parents. That is to say she has not lost her innocence, although she has left the regions of conventional morality--she keeps her parents in her heart although she has left their home. She is still faithful to the domestic religion of the affections. At last she sleeps in all the fearlessness of innocence and the wild beasts come prowling round her, but gambol about without harming her. The lion which is love weeps, the lioness or the chastity of love strips her naked, and they carry her off, still sleeping, to their caves. The meaning of this appears to be that an innocent woman is unconscious of the dangers which assail her, and that the passage from innocence to purity takes place in her soul unconsciously. The passions come raging harmlessly around her, merely stripping her of her conventionality and self-concealment, and carry her off without her feeling shame or self-consciousness. There seems to be a special truth in this myth as applied to a woman. The ordinary life of a woman is full of concealments--her soul shrinks from every self-revelation, like the Venus de Medicis. It is only in the self-forgetfulness of some great passion that it dares to stand naked but not ashamed. (p. 51).

In "The Little Girl Found" the parents seek her through the night, weeping--meet the lion, are terrified and stricken down by him. The domestic moralities are outraged by the advent of a great passion. But he licks their hands and stands by them silent, and when they have to look up they find "a spirit armed in gold" who bids them follow him, and shows them Lyca sleeping unharmed amid the tigers.

"To this day they dwell
In a lonely dell,
Nor fear the wolvish howl
Nor the lion's growl."

The pure, to show all things are pure, dwell "in a lonely dell" apart from the everyday morality of the world.

The two poems "The sick rose" and "The sunflower" appear to me to express the one thing death of delight through the canker of selfishness, and the other the aspiration of the soul after the delight of pure love--

"The youth pined away with desire
And the pale virgin shrouded in snow"

are as Shakespeare says "lamenting some enforced chastity". This enforced chastity of morality, the chastity of Ophelia is a thing of snow, the chastity of love--the chastity of Imogen--a thing of fire. (p. 56-60). The Rose expresses the sickness of creation, the Sunflower the groaning and travelling of creation to be delivered. The Rose expresses the bitterness of regret--the Sunflower the melancholy of aspiration.

"The Tiger" is the converse of "The Lamb" of the "Songs of Innocence". The man recoils in awe before the mystery of evil which the child does not see. The child trusts--the man questions. (p. 59).

The lines "My pretty Rose tree" may possibly have been suggested by one of Mrs. Blake's little attacks of jealousy. (p. 60).

"The Garden of Love" is another lamentation for "enforced chastity"--a wail over the "thou shalt nots" of the moral law (p. 61).

"The Little Vagabond" expresses dissatisfaction at the separation between religion and the wholesome pleasures of life. It is dramatic in form and full of quaint humour. The poor little vagabond's only idea of pleasure is drinking in the Alehouse--and he looks upon the Devil as an honest poor fellow
kept down and ill-treated by Church and State. (p. 62).

"London" is full of horror at the results of the lusts of the flesh and the wars and fightings which spring from them. (p. 63).

"The Human Abstract" is a revolt against the Utilitarian philosophy which makes self-interest the rule of life—and against the gospel of diplomatists that "mutual fear brings peace". Blake did not believe that large capitalists were the greatest benefactors to their species, nor that peace was produced by the keeping up of huge standing armies. The best form of this poem is in an appendix, not in the Songs of Experience. "The Angel" is the gospel of Christ. The devil, the gospel of worldly wisdom (p. 81). It is called here "The two Songs".

"A Little Boy Lost" is a story of religious persecution. The little boy is a rationalist and utilitarian—it may be Tom Paine with his "Rights of Man" and "Age of Reason". Blake is no friend to his philosophy but he is still less a friend to religious persecution. Error is a venial sin compared with hypocrisy and he is a practical hypocrite and the cause of hypocrisy in others who tries to crush out ideas by force instead of investigating and sifting them. The true way of dealing with Error is to bring it to the light not to force it to take refuge in darkness, by blind persecution (p. 66).

"A little girl Lost" expresses the crushing out of love by mistaken parental care. These two poems are complementary, the one showing how men are made either hypocrites or martyrs by religious persecution, the other how women are made either hypocrites or martyrs by the persecution of parental authority. The religious bigot acknowledges no truth outside his own creed, the parental bigot acknowledges no higher duty than filial obedience.

The "Cradle Song" of the "Songs of Experience" of course expresses the opposite side of the subject to that expressed in the one in the "Songs of Innocence". In that the mother sees in her child only what, in spite of the tract-shop theologian, I shall venture to call original grace; in this she sees the germs of what is called original sin. (p. 68)

The next poem "The Schoolboy" takes up the child during his period of education, and is a remonstrance against that false system of education which by going directly contrary to all the healthy instincts of childhood makes learning a hateful task instead of a delight. The brutal ignorance of parents and teachers which is born of want of sympathy crushes the genius out of the child and makes him either a blockhead or a learned prig—crammed with the husks of knowledge.

The book ends with a strange mystical poem "To Tirzah", which is a commentary on David's text "In sin did my mother conceive me". In this Blake preaches the doctrine of regeneration, by which man rises above the infirmity of the flesh and inherits eternal life. This is the spiritual resurrection which solves all the riddles, theoretical and practical, of the world.

A remarkable feature of Blake's poetry is his constant impatience under the restrictions of the moral law. He never in his poetry acknowledges with St. Paul that the law is holy and just and good. The reason probably is that St. Paul was a practical man and an orator, not a poet like Blake. St. Paul is occupied necessarily with the temporary condition of things in which not one jot or title of the law can be dispensed with till all be fulfilled, whereas Blake is constantly occupied with the eternal world of pure beauty and love, in which all is fulfilled. The sphere of the practical is the sphere of moral duty, the sphere of the ideal is the sphere of unfettered spiritual force.

I have not time now to dwell upon that exquisite poem "The Book of Thel". I have not myself quite fathomed this as yet, but Thel would appear to be a human soul perplexed with the problems of life and dissatisfied with man's lot so unsatisfactory and transitory. At last she descends into the grave and finds it also resounding with terrible questions. She shrieks and flies back to life. The problems of life can only be solved and the questions of death answered by living in faith—"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof". She has to learn this, and also that "as her day her strength shall be".

There are just one or two more of Blake's poems which I must speak of before we part. Mr. William Rossetti thus writes of "Broken Love" (p. 76-79).

Never perhaps have the agony and perversity of sundered affection been more powerfully (however singularly) expressed than in the piece called "Broken Love". The speaker is one whose soul has been intensified by pain to be his only world, among the scenes, figures, and events of which he moves as in a new state of being. . . . There is his 'spectre,' the jealous pride which scents in the snow the footsteps of the beloved rejected woman; his 'emanation' which silently weeps within him, for has not he also sinned? So they wander together in 'a fathomless and boundless deep,' the morn full of tempests and the night of tears. . . . Also this woe of his can array itself in stately imagery. He can count separately how many of his soul's affections the knife she stabbed it with has slain, how many of his soul's transgressions: when will she look upon them, that the dead may live again? Has she not pity to give for pardon? nay, does he not need her pardon too? He cannot seek her, but oh! if she would return! Surely her place is ready for her, and bread and wine of forgiveness of sins. I have dwelt on the meaning of this poem, because it . . . might be accounted specially obscure. But in reality, it is perhaps the only instance in which Blake has dealt with any of the deeper phases of human passion; . . . the result . . . gives me to regret that this poet did not oftener elect to walk in the ways not of spirits or children, but of living men.
In this lecture I wish to introduce to you a man, who almost unknown to the general public as he is, is a more remarkable man even than Burns himself. I mean William Blake, the painter of sacred pictures that nobody bought, and singer of incomprehensible songs that nobody read. Mad as Blake was esteemed by the connoisseurs and literary critics of his time, and mad as most people would no doubt consider him even now—there is at least a wonderful amount of method in this so-called madness of his. His designs, rude as some of them are in point of technical skill, fairly entitle him to rank beside Michael Angelo as far as mere genius is concerned—although in the development of his genius Michael Angelo is a giant beside poor Blake, who was cramped in every possible manner that the cruelty of fortune could suggest. Indeed I am not sure that it would be speaking extravagantly if I were to say that the native genius of our own Blake was broader and deeper than that of the great Italian. He often seems to combine the spiritual beauty and grace of Fra Angelico with the sublimity of M. Angelo. But this is a question which we may leave to painters to determine. As a lyric poet I unhesitatingly place Blake among the first singers of all ages. For mere melody, his best poems may fairly compete with anything that the language can produce. They are flawless gems of spontaneous song—which, as the Germans say, "rushes out of the throat as the bird sings". These lyric poems of Blake are, like those of Burns, real songs, made to be sung to real music; but while Burns was but a poor musician, picking up the popular airs, for which he wrote words, with difficulty, Blake had, according to the verdict of those who knew him, a musical gift no less exquisite than his poetic gift. His songs had their musical part in the shape of original melodies as unstudied as the words themselves. He sang them himself just as they came into his head.

In Burns, great as he undoubtedly was, there was still a good deal of the savage element remaining. He is a transition man, not a pure modern like Blake. He is in rebellion against Puritanism, but he has no better religion to offer. He revolts against asceticism but there is no sacred fervour in his revolt. His passion is often of a chaotic kind—an earthly lust rather than a divine ardour. And yet there are everywhere in him gleams of better things. Many of his songs such as "a man's a man for a' that" are full of splendid democratic élan, or of fiery indignation.

His hatred of hypocrisy is no show against meanness and falseness—others again are pure as dew-drops and tender as tears. You feel his heart beating with love for all created things—and then perhaps he seems to sink into lower regions, flashes out into outrageous mirth, or cynical humour, until all at once some touch of pathos reveals the true meaning of all this. What is great in Burns is his perfect simplicity and naturalness. What is in him, good and bad, (or both mingled) flows out in song. There is little high poetic imagination in Burns—his poetry is poetry of passion rather than imagination. With Blake on the contrary there is that perfect fusion of passion and imagination which is only found in the very highest poetic geniuses. He lives habitually in regions which Burns never reaches in his highest flights.

Carlyle has called Burns a hero, and we may heartily grant him the title; but, as compared with Blake's, his heroism is of an ordinary and commonplace kind. His whole life was, as compared with Blake's, chaotic, "like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh." He was not "o'er all the ills of life victorious" as Blake was. His drunken revels with their boisterous mirth, were very far removed from the serene happiness of Blake with his songs and his visions. Blake too brought love down from the heaven of imagination, and made it incarnate in his daily life as Burns never did; and vanquished poverty, and trampled its horrible degradations under foot, as Burns never did. It must, however, be confessed that Burns was much more in harmony with the most of the people than Blake—and that by virtue of his weaknesses and shortcomings, as well as by virtue of his heroism—Burns was a man of his time. Burns was the poet of real life, Blake the idealist and mystic, who reveals for us the eternal forms and types which underlie real life.

Blake indeed had the sense to perceive that a man's wife does not come ready made to his hand, but that she must be created by him out of the raw material of womanhood which he may wisely or

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11 The lecture breaks off at this point.

12 Carlyle has called Burns a hero: "One of those men... who take rank with the Heroic among men." "The Hero as Man of Letters," Heroes and Hero Worship, 1869, p. 222.

13 At this point Todhunter condenses Gilchrist, Volume I, pp. [5]-38.
foolishly select for the purpose. He also saw very clearly that the tendency of the average woman is to draw her husband away from all ideal aims, and to degrade the inspired artist into a conventional paterfamilias drudging for his daily bread. Now Blake had not the smallest notion of sacrificing his ambition to his love, knowing well that in so doing he would have been cutting the wings of love himself and turning him into a barn-door fowl—good for little else than to make giblet soup of. His art was for him a divine thing, and he felt very strongly that to love wife or children or comfort or respectability or success in life, more than this, was to be unworthy of it. He knew also that being faithful to his art was in reality being faithful to love. He might have said with Lovelace—'I could not love thee, dear, so well Loved I not honour more'.

Accordingly when the lovers were married in August 1782—Blake being in his 25th, and his bride in her 21st year—a great struggle had to be gone through before the poor little woman who had with a woman's splendid temerity engaged to love honour and obey this mad artist was at all capable of doing so. The process of becoming a wife is not an easy one for a woman, even if her husband be the average man of everyday life—and the man of genius is not a whit less, but infinitely more exacting in his demands. Blake was not the man to countenance the idea that holy matrimony was a mere profession with routine duties and routine affections. This might do well enough for the world at large, but he was not of the world at large, and his theory of marriage was that it was one of the highest of the fine arts, which had for its end the cultivation of that genius for love which exists in a germinal form in each of us. Blake took an aesthetic and utopian, not a utilitarian and practical view of marriage. The love of such a man is terrible—a woman might nearly as well marry the angel with the fiery sword that guards the gate of Paradise. We may imagine the tumult of poor little Mrs. Blake's mind during the process of her coming into existence as Blake's wife. Fancy a woman being called upon to resign comfort, orthodoxy, respectability, success in life, and conventionality of all kinds—at one fell swoop—and to look starvation straight in the face without blenching! It must have cost not a few tears. But at bottom every woman not a fool (and there are a good many such women scattered about thro' the world) cares more about love than all these things put together, and we find Mrs. Blake developing rapidly under her husband's tuition—firmly believing in his visions—sitting by his side silent and awestruck, when some one of more than ordinary grandeur comes to him by night and he has to rise and work, lest the pressure of it may kill him—learning herself to engrave and even to make designs, nearly as good as his own. If ever there was a man to whom his wife's love clung like a garment, that man was Blake. The course of their true love seems to have run perfectly smooth from this time forth, so far as their inner life was concerned—except that Mrs. Blake was inclined to be jealous of her husband's friends, and on one occasion, as the story goes, was a good deal disturbed by a remarkable and characteristic notion of his. He had been living in imagination in Patriarchal times and was ravished with the beauty of the Patriarchal life, and his wife having no children, he is said to have entertained the idea of taking another wife. This relapse into barbarism—this madness of the prophet Mrs. Blake forbade, not like a dumb ass speaking with man's voice, but like a splendid high-spirited little woman as she was. Her obedience was not the obedience of a slave but of a woman, and she had no notion of being put off with half-a-husband.

Flaxman had already got married and had been taken up by a literary lady of the name of Matthews—once a celebrity in aesthetic circles. To her Flaxman introduced Blake and at her soirees he appears to have made his debut in society. At these Blake used to sing his poems to airs composed by himself—if we can call airs composed which flowed as spontaneously as the exquisite poems themselves. Some of these are reported by an auditor to have been "most singularly beautiful", and "noted down by musical professors," but all trace of them appears to have vanished from this earth.

These early poems were printed by subscription, Flaxman poor as he was paying half the cost. The edition was never published however. Soon after this Blake dropped out of the Matthews circle, his "unbending deportment" not being pleasant to the fine ladies and gentlemen. [14]

Meanwhile Stothard was getting on in the world and Blake was employed to his great disgust in engraving his designs—many of which were suggested by his own works. He managed just to keep himself from starvation by doing such jobs as this—appearing even as an engraver of caricatures! But in 1784 he made a second appearance in the Academy with two designs in which he preached one of his favourite doctrines—and one which marks him as an advanced modern—namely the supreme atrocity and stupidity of war . . .

In 1789 the year of the engraving of Songs of Innocence Wordsworth then 19 was beginning to write his early poems.

The same year Blake wrote and etched his delicious mystical poem in the style of Ossian entitled "The Book of Thel" and in 1790 he wrote the "Marriage of Heaven & Hell" the first of his Prophetic Books—the subject of it is the Mystery of Evil, and in it occur a number of aphorisms (on the model of Lavater) which he whimsically calls Proverbs of Hell—that is to say they are Proverbs of revolt for the most part (p. 81). A good deal of the Marriage of Heaven & Hell is in prose. Of this as of his other Prophetic Books

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14 Here, Todhunter condenses Gilchrist, Volume I, pp. 55-70.
only fragments have been hitherto published, and no one has as yet fathomed their meaning. To the great majority of readers they are very Midsummer madness, and yet even these fragments excite the deepest interest in the mind of any serious reader (p. 83). 16

For the next 3 or 4 years to 1793 Blake busied himself with new Prophetic Books "Visions of the Daughters of Albion," "America," "Europe," & "Jerusalem." No one has yet seriously studied these books and the extracts published although full of poetry are mysterious and unintelligible—some passages in them would seem to mark Blake as a worthy predecessor of Walt Whitman. We may almost surmise that Blake in these books gives a mystical history of the progress of religion and of the regeneration of society—democracy being for him rather the preparation for the Kingdom of Heaven than the Kingdom of Heaven itself. Every page of these books glows with magnificent designs in colour and gold. 16

About 1800 Flaxman introduced him to Hayley, 27 the friend of Cowper, who employed him in making designs for some of his works, and Blake removed to a cottage at Felpham to be under Hayley's eye—and Hayley appears to have done all he could to help him. This Felpham was in Sussex and close to the sea, and Blake walked by shore and saw visions and held converse with Moses and the Prophets, Homer, Dante, and Milton—"All" as he said when asked about them "majestic shadows, grey but luminous, and superior to the common height of men." (Fairy's Funeral p. 159.)

In 1803 Blake's peaceful life at Felpham was disturbed in a strange way. A drunken soldier broke into his garden one day, behaved in a violent manner and refused to quit the place when requested. Blake in a divine fury rushed at him and thrust him out before he well knew where he was. In the scuffle some words passed between them. The soldier claimed to be the King's soldier whereupon Blake in the heat of his spirit exclaimed "Damn the King and you too"—for which seditious language, he had to stand his trial for High Treason (no less) at the next Quarter Sessions. Hayley, kind-hearted man as he was, spite of broken head (the consequence of a fall from his horse caused by an eccentric habit of his of suddenly unfurling an umbrella over his horse's head) came to give evidence in his favour; and Blake himself on the soldier coming out with some outrageous charge against him, shouted "false!" in such a tremendous voice as "electrified the court and carried conviction with it". The result was that Blake was acquitted.

At Felpham he worked away at drudgery for his daily bread with honest patience, until Hayley took it into his head that he might make his fortune by miniature paintings, and he was even tempted by the offer of a regular salary as drawing master in a nobleman's family. But this was like selling his birthright for a mess of pottage—he felt his visionary power failing[,] "The visions were angry" as he said—and he fled back to London and poverty.

In 1804 he wrote and engraved "Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant Albion" and the same year "Milton—a poem in two Books"—apparently a continuation of Jerusalem.

For the next two years he worked for a publisher named Cromek who has left a bad name behind him. He ground and cheated Blake on pretence of patronizing him, and he appears further to have done the widow of Burns out of the copyright of some of his poems. Blake wrote the following epigrams upon him (p. 208).

In 1800 he made a last grand appeal to the public in the shape of an exhibition of his designs. This was by no means a success and he appears to have given up the public as hopelessly dead to true art. The remainder of his life was passed in quiet work, and patient drudgery. He made a few disciples and gained some patrons—and supported himself chiefly by selling copies of his Songs of Innocence & Experience.

His mode of life (p. 306)
His unworldliness (p. 309)
His "blasphemy"
"Damn the money" (p. 313)
His death (p. 360)

Lecture XVIII, 12 March 1874
William Blake

Before commencing our study of the "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience", which will form the principal subject of today's lecture, I wish to say something with regard to Blake's general position in our literature (Old Section p. 1). 18

In contrasting Blake with Burns in my last lecture, I spoke of Blake as being filled with the modern spirit, and a few words will be necessary to explain my meaning in this phrase. Blake is a modern by virtue of his independence. He is full of reverence indeed for the things of the past—the splendid poetry of the Bible, the great architecture of the middle ages, the art of the early Renaissance; but he looks upon all these things, however great the inspiration of the men through whom they come...
to us, as of no infallible authority in themselves. The spirit of truth and beauty in himself is always Blake's final appeal—these things are good and great because they are the works of the same spirit of God which works in himself. He is a modern also by virtue not of his morbidty, for he was not morbid, but by virtue of his hopeful forward-looking glance, which finds the golden age, even in advance. not in the past but in the future. He is a modern in his faith in the power of human nature to make progress. He is a modern in his sympathy with the great social revolutions by which alone this progress can be attained—and in his broad tolerance and philanthropy, his horror of the oppressions of the poor, and of all suffering, whether of man or beast, of war, of field sports, of poverty itself, he is emphatically a modern. But unlike many of our modern men the genius of Blake led him not in the direction of rationalism and materialism, but in that of spiritualism and mysticism. He lives perpetually in the presence of the Most High—His heaven is not a thing merely of a future state—He sees the courts of it stretching away infinitely upon all sides of him. His religion is not got at second hand—the very prophets and apostles are for him but everlasting doors thro' which the light shines. He may use the orthodox formulae but he does not use them in the orthodox sense. They become in his hands filled with subtle spiritual meanings of which the prosaic dogmatist never dreams. In the poetry of the Bible Blake breathes his native spiritual air, full of sunshine and exhilaration[.] It is not for him, as for so many pious but thoroughly prosaic and materialistic people of Saxon race, a species of exhausted receiver, in which they seem to gasp for breath, until they can concentrate its rarefied atmosphere, so full of warmth and light, into oppressive dogma. The gospel which seizes upon his imagination, is not the gospel of damnation, of which the cardinal point is the utter corruption and innate perdition of the human race, the world sweeping thro' space, impelled by the pursuing storm of the divine wrath; but the gospel of hope and joy, of the perpetual forgiveness of sins, of the birthright not of damnation but salvation, the motive power of creation being infinite love not infinite wrath. It must not be supposed however that Blake's religion excludes the idea of divine wrath—far from it, but for him the wrath is but the purifying fire of love burning up all lies and leaving the soul that has clung to them naked and pierced with the anguish of shame in the presence of intolerable purity. It would seem so far I can understand Blake, as if he looked upon falsehood as the sin of sins, loveless malignity being the resultant of the blindness produced by persistence in falsehood—love of darkness and hatred of light.

The minor poems of Blake, as indeed most of his published writings[,] deal chiefly with but one side of our spiritual nature. They are in the main poems of aspiration and revolt, and hence his teaching if accepted with prosaic literalness could be likely to lead to the most immoral results[.] With his hatred of hypocrisy and belief in the deep instincts of humanity, there is nothing that he hates more than the whited-sepulchre morality of much of our respectable English life, which binds our liberty with burthens grievous to be borne.-- And living as he did in a dreamland of his own, it must be confessed that he is inclined to worship liberty too much at the expense of law, and instinct and passion at the expense of reason and self-control. With great natural power of self-control himself he appears to be quite unaware of how deficient most men are in this respect—and to ignore the great practical fact that liberty is preserved by law, instinct rectified and re-created by reason, and passion intensified by self-control. Without self-control there can properly speaking be no passion, but merely appetite and outrageous lust[.] Blake sometimes apparently forgets this, but only apparently—for the ultimate idea of his philosophy is the intimate union and mutual dependence of law, and liberty—what he symbolises under the figure of the "Marriage of Heaven and Hell". In reading Blake, then, we must always keep this in mind, that such expressions of violent revolt as are contained in some of the "Proverbs of Hell"—for example "Damn braces, bless relaxes"—"The Tigers of wrath are better than the horses of instruction", etc., etc., give us but one half—although a most important one of Blake's philosophy.

19 Todhunter appears to be using the word in the sense of the glass vessel of an air-pump in which the vacuum is formed. Cf. Young, "Like cats in air-pumps to subsist we strive."
John Todhunter: A Forgotten Debt to Blake

John Todhunter, the Anglo-Irish poet (1839-1916) is known to Yeats scholars, being mentioned several times in Autobiographies and associated with Yeats in several dramatic and literary ventures. He is remembered chiefly for some of his later work and for his interest in Shelley. His early debt to Blake, perceived in the nineteenth century, is now forgotten. Perhaps this debt is less pervasive in the later work (which I do not know), if Yeats’ interesting assessment is accurate: “If he had liked anything strongly he might have been a famous man... but with him every book was a new planting, and not a new bud on an old bough” (Autobiographies [London, 1955], p. 117).

Certainly in the early poetry (which is sometimes impressive), he ranges widely in style and subject. Todhunter figures in Evelyn Noble Armitage’s The Quaker Poets of Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1896), though by that time he was, we are told, no longer in membership of the Society of Friends. Introducing the short selection of Todhunter’s poems, Armitage writes that “He is a strong poet; full of vigour and imagination, and yet with a delicate beauty of workmanship and touch, which render his poems delightful to read and remember, apart from their essential truth of thought and imagery.” She goes on to note that “In the two poems ‘Lost’ and ‘Found,’ he has caught the very spirit of Blake, and the strange mystical charms of that singer of dreams and visions” (pp. 266-67). The poems in question are reprinted from Todhunter’s first book, Lauvalla and Other Poems (London, 1876), pp. 274-75. They are a kind of pastiche of Blake’s loose octosyllabic quatrains, borrowing rhythm, diction and imagery from (at least, I think) “A Dream,” “William Bond,” “The Crystal Cabinet,” “Mary,” “The Mental Traveller,” “A Little Boy Lost” and other “lost” and “found” poems, as well as (I suspect) the poem “To My Dear Friend, Mrs Anna Flaxman” in Mrs. Blake’s letter of 14 September 1800 and also the letter of Blake’s to Flaxman of 21 September 1800.

Lost

I WANDERED from my mother’s side
In the fragrant paths of morn;
Naked, weary, and forlorn,
I fainted in the hot noon-tide.

Found

NAKED, bleeding, and forlorn,
I wandered on the mountain
To hide my wounds from shame and scorn,
I made a garment of my pride.

Till there came a tyrant grey,
He stript and chained me with disgrace,
He led me by the public way,
And sold me in the market-place.

To many masters was I bound,
And many a grievous load I bore;
But in the toil my flesh grew sound,
And from my limbs the chains I tore.

For I had met a maiden wild,
Singing of love and love’s delight;
And with her song she me beguiled,
And her soft arms and bosom white.

I followed fast, I followed far,
And ever her song flowed blithe and free;
‘Where Love’s own flowery meadows are,
There shall our golden dwelling be!’

I followed far, I followed fast,
And oft she paused, and cried, ‘O here!’
But where I came no flower would last,
And Joy lay cold upon his bier.

I wandered on, I wandered wide,
Alas! she fleeted with the morn;
Weary, weeping, and forlorn,
She left me in the fierce noontide.

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1 See, however, Ian Fletcher’s recent article in The Book Collector, 21 (Spring 1972), pp. 72-94, “The Ellis-Blake-Yeats Manuscript Cluster,” which has a short section on Todhunter and Blake.
I ran to seek my mother's cot,
And I found Love singing there,
And round it many a pleasant plot,
And shadowy streams and gardens fair.

Like virgin gold the thatch I see,
Like virgin gold the doorway sweet;
And in the blissful noon each tree
A ladder for the angel's feet.

In Lauvella itself, "Lost" and "Found" are but two of several lyrics in the Blakean manner: indeed, two similar poems, "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Found," are stated in a fictional preface to be the work of Blake himself! These and other Blakean poems are in a section of Lauvella entitled "The Mystic," the fictional author of the section, who is "a crazy Atheist" named "M.--." The lengthy preface to the section records the Mystic's opinions and character in a manner heavily reminiscent of passages in Gilchrist's Life of the late Dr. A. B-----, whose passion for collecting 'charactere' rivalled in intensity the china-mania of the present day. He was not the lion of the evening, having been collected some time previously; but I at once felt that he was no ordinary eccentric. His dress was shabby, and, without being sordid, had a pleasant student-like slovenliness about it, like the well-worn binding of some precious old volume; to which his sensitive face, with its delicate curves of suffering and wrinkles of thought, formed a fitting title-page. The whole man had, indeed, a Faust-like look of antiquity—an aging older than his years, which had grizzled his hair and beard somewhat before their time; and, as he stood a little apart, sometimes turning over the pages of a book, sometimes letting his dreamy grey eyes wander absentely around the room, I gazed at him with a strange fascination,—

'Like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken.'

I felt that I was in the presence of what Goethe would have called a 'Nature.'

His views about the Bible were peculiar and paradoxical. 'To fools only is it an ordinary book. It is more even than the literature of an inspired nation. It contains a real revelation as no other book does.' Yet he was no Bibliolater, and gave full play to his critical faculties in his reading of it. 'It is not a perfect mirror reflecting the face of God. It is full of flaws; but the best we have as yet. As a final authority the Bible abrogates itself. It is not that light of which it bears witness—the Logos indwelling in our hearts. A church built upon its infallibility is a house built on the sand; an ark ready to go to pieces when the wind of change blows roughly. Then the passengers must make shift to escape, 'some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship'—as the Protestants are doing now. But it is the breath of God that raises the storm. Does not the wind of a new Pentecost begin to blow over this world that faints for a new revelation?'

He frequently expressed himself in rather Antinomian language: 'What is this nonsense about the Moral Law? God is not a moral being at all. The universe exists for beauty, not for good and evil.' Yet, like most theoretic Antinomians, he acknowledged the practical necessity of morality in the finite world; and his life was, so far as my observation reaches, singularly pure.

For Blake, as some of his poems prove, he had a profound admiration. "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Found" are his, not mine,' he declared. 'He sang them to me one night. I wrote them down on the spot.' 'As a painter Blake would have been much greater, if Raffaelle had not clung round him like a serpent, breathing academic poison. What had he to do with Raffaelle? When his drawing is wrong, it is wrong from academic vanity and bad taste rather than ignorance and weakness. In his instinctive impulses he is greater than Michael Angelo—much greater than every one else.'
of the same suggestive theme, is *Let loose the Dogs of War*—a Demon cheering on blood-hounds who seize a man by the throat; of which Mr. Ruskin possesses the original pencil sketch, Mr. Linnell the water-colour drawing.

During the summer of 1784, died Blake's father, an honest shopkeeper of the old school, and a devout man—a dissenter. He was buried in Bunhill Fields, on the fourth of July (a Sunday) says the Register. The eldest son, James,—a year and a half William's senior,—continued to live with the widow Catherine, and succeeded to the hosier's business in Broad Street, still a highly respectable street, and a good one for trade, as it and the whole neighbourhood continued until the era of Nash and the 'first gentleman in Europe.' Golden Square was still the 'town residence' of some half-dozen M.P.'s—for county or rotten borough; Poland Street and Great Marlborough Street of others. Between this brother and the artist no strong sympathy existed, little community of sentiment or common ground (mentally) of any kind; although indeed, James—for the most part an humble matter-of-fact man—had his spiritual and visionary side too; would at times talk *Swedenborg*, talk of seeing Abraham and Moses, and to outsiders seem like his gifted brother 'a bit mad'—a mild madman instead of a wild and stormy.

On his father's death, Blake, who found Design yield no income, Engraving but a scanty one, returned from Green Street, Leicester Fields, to familiar Broad Street. At No. 27, next door to his brother's, he set up shop as printseller and engraver, in partnership with a former fellow-apprentice at Basire's: James Parker, a man some six or seven years his senior. An engraving by Blake after Stothard, *Zephyrus and Flora* (a long oval), was published by the firm 'Parker and Blake' this same year (1784). Mrs. Mathew, still friendly and patronizing, though one day to be less eager for the poet's services as Lion in Rathbone Place, countenanced, nay perhaps first set the scheme going—in an ill-advised philanthropic hour; favouring it,

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James Smetham (1821-1889)
and Gilchrist’s *Life of Blake*

**BY FRANCES A. CAREY**
James Smetham's claim on posterity has largely rested upon his 1869 review of Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* which was incorporated in the second edition at Rossetti's instigation. This sympathetic but conventional mid-Victorian interpretation of Blake only represents a minor aspect of Smetham's career; his letters and paintings do far greater justice to the complexity of a man, whom Geoffrey Grigson has described as "an imaginative artist who surpasses almost all his time in England." This article will concentrate upon Smetham's visual imagination seen in the light of the marginal illustrations with which he annotated his own copy of the *Gilchrist Life*.

An almost overwhelming degree of spirituality pervades Smetham's small scale biblical and landscape compositions, which prompted Rossetti to invoke parallels with the work of Blake and Palmer: "In all these he partakes greatly of Blake's immediate spirit, being also often allied by landscape intensity to Samuel Palmer." The emotional energy required to achieve such an effect, did, however, contain the seeds of self-destruction as Ruskin prophesied in 1854, and Smetham was eventually to subside into an endogenous depressive illness from 1878 until his death of 1889. The Smetham correspondence exhibits some of the same

2. Collection of Dr. Gerald Bindman.

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intimate, revelatory quality as the Haydon diaries, unfolding a personality which partook of "Blake's immediate spirit" transmuted by a powerful strain of Methodist piety; this bifurcated influence clearly emerges in the unifying theme of the letters, Smetham's concept of destiny in terms of a Pilgrim's Progress which, in visual form, was poignantly summarized by one of his last paintings, Going Home, depicting an old man on the road to death. Smetham's endeavor to develop a fully integrated imagination combining "art, literature and the religious life all in one," was reflected in a self-imposed regime of intense, disciplined study, the results of which were enshrined in a system of monumentalism; the grandiose designation of monumentalism was in fact applied to a tiny, squared pen drawing, encapsulating in the margin Smetham's thoughts on the text in question. Shakespeare, the Bible, Tennyson and Gilchrist's Life of Blake were all subjected to this approach, which was initiated by the artist at eleven o'clock on the evening of 18 February 1848. The creative fervor and elevation of purpose infusing the thumbnail sketches, is eloquently expressed by Smetham's account of how, in later years, he would revisit his monuments, "pouring the oil of joy on the shapeless stone in which I saw my thought as Michael Angelo in his marble saw hidden the gigantic shapes of Night and Day." Smetham's copy of Gilchrist is a peculiarly apt example of monumentalism since he had been recommended by Rossetti in 1861 as a suitable draughtsman for the line drawings in the text. In the event Smetham was deprived of the commission but in July 1867 supplied his own miniature cycle of the life of Blake, which paid a self-conscious

left p. 39: "away I go, / And the vale darkens at my pensive woe."  
right p. 69: "In a vision of the night, the form of Robert stood before him, and revealed the wished-for secret, directing him to the technical mode by which could be produced a fac-simile of song and design."

6 Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.  
8 Smetham, Letters, p. 92.
homage to the marginal illustrations of medieval manuscripts. For Smetham an illuminated book was "a mystery, like the Microcosm" into whose borders were wrought "the whole life and soul and history of the men who did them; but thinly veiled." The *Gilchrist* marginal designs provide just such a documentation of the artist's inner life concealed beneath the commentary on Blake's spiritual history; author portraits of Smetham himself periodically intrude upon the Blakean cycle, again reminiscent of the practice of medieval scribes and illuminators. The main pictorial narrative includes not only episodes and personalities from Blake's material existence but also those from his visionary world; "majestic shadows, grey but luminous and superior to the common height of men" encountered on the Felpham shore (p. 159), have as much substance as Mrs. Mathew's bluestockings (p. 45) or the Godwin circle of radicals (p. 92); a corporeal Robert Blake plays leap-frog with J. T. Smith on one page (p. 57), then later appears in spiritual form to reveal to his elder brother the secret of stereotype printing (p. 69), while funeral processions, whether they be for fairies (p. 159) or Sir Joshua Reynolds (p. 96), are all treated to the same loving delineation. In the second volume the monuments are almost exclusively confined to William Michael Rossetti's annotated catalogue, where Smetham used the descriptions attached to each item as a basis for illustration; his own knowledge of Blake's visual art was probably limited to the reproductions in *Gilchrist*. Smetham's naive, literal renderings of poetic images constitute a further category of monument; punctuating the line from the *Poetical Sketches*, "And the vale darkens at my pensive woe," a lonely figure is represented wandering amidst gloomy obscurity (p. 39). These evocative visual annotations serve to underline the unifying links between the "whole life and soul and history" of Smetham and his subject, which are perhaps epitomized by his impression of Blake's soul finding "refuge amid the slights of the outward vulgar throng" in the invisible world (p. 245).

9 Smetham,* Letters*, p. 93.

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above p. 83: Blake's vision of Isaiah and Ezekiel in "A Memorable Fancy," *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*
Above p. 85: "A Memorable Fancy." "Here I stayed to rest, and then leaped into the void between Saturn and the fixed stars."
above p. 92: The radicals in Johnson's house.
top p. 157: Blake at Felpham. "Often, in after years, Blake would speak with enthusiasm of the shifting lights on the sea he had watched from those windows."

bottom p. 159: "majestic shadows, grey but luminous, and superior to the common height of men."
top  p. 159: A fairy funeral.

bottom  p. 245: Blake's soul finding refuge in the invisible world amid the slights of the outward vulgar throng.
above  p. 248: Blake drawing the Laocoon in the Royal Academy.
Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* did not rescue its subject from oblivion, as is usually stated; rather, it served greatly to widen the knowledge of Blake and his works beyond the limited circle of his admirers. If in the past we have misapprehended the precise nature of Gilchrist's service to Blake's reputation, that is in part because we have been misled by Gilchrist's own over-dramatization of the case, manifested in his subtitle, "Pictor Ignotus"--a phrase conveniently, if inaptly, borrowed from Browning. Having thus misrepresented the situation Gilchrist set his volumes before the reader with this challenge: actively dissociate yourself from the philistinism responsible for the neglect of Blake, or else give evidence to show that he was justly neglected. In short, Gilchrist made criticism of Blake an issue and a cause. Reviewers of the biography rose to the challenge; indeed, to declare oneself on "the Blake question" became almost a necessity of London cultural life. It is little wonder, therefore, that an astonishing amount of journalism was produced on the subject of the *Life of William Blake*.

Between the appearance of the biography in the autumn of 1863 and the end of the year, at least four reviews were published. [See appended list for full citations of all reviews and articles.] The earliest of these was a notice in the *Athenaeum*. The author, possibly Augustus De Morgan, was not at all happy with Gilchrist's work. Blake had been damaged in the biography, he thought, by such errors of judgment as over-praising the artist and ignoring his faults. In fact, the notes on Blake's conversations and habits of life which Mr. Gilchrist obtained from Mr. Robinson's 'Reminiscences' are by much the most graphic pages in the book; since it is obvious that, without superstition, their writer admired as keenly as he observed a man of genius who, whether sane or insane, was a poet of Titanic mould. Mr. Robinson's few truths serve the memory of Blake far more essentially than Mr. Gilchrist's manifold rhapsodies. (It is interesting to note that De Morgan and Robinson were acquainted.)

Although the three other reviews of 1863 are somewhat shorter than this one--between two and three thousand words apiece--they express forcefully their authors' gratitude to Blake's biographer for doing justice to the genius of one of England's greatest artists. In the *Spectator* R. H. Hutton perceives Blake's "essential function" in terms which imply the highest praise: "to recall by painting,--now and then by poetry,--that lost sense described by Wordsworth. . . ." In the *Saturday Review* Gilchrist's judgments are held to be "generally discriminating and well-reasoned." The writer in the *London Review*, who had known Blake's engraved *Illustrations of the Book of Job*.

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"since childhood," believed that "something very similar of rapt, transcendental imagination was exhibited, in their respective spheres of art, by Shelley, and Turner, and Beethoven." (As we shall see, the photolithographic reproductions of the Job engravings that were included in the second volume of Gilchrist's Life, even though reduced in size and inferior in quality to the originals, made a very strong impression on the reviewers. With two exceptions all those who mentioned the Job considered it to be Blake's finest work.) The possibility that William Bell Scott was the author of either the London Review or the Saturday Review piece is suggested by a passage from a letter of 1863 from Anne Gilchrist to W. M. Rossetti: "I was very pleased with the Spectator's review—have not yet seen Mr. Scott's. . . ."

Of the eleven known reviews of Gilchrist that appeared in 1864, seven were long, one was brief, two were merely one-paragraph notices, and one had its say in a single sentence. The two-hundred-word notice in the Annual Register for 1863 called the volumes "an addition to biographical literature of some importance." The fact that Blake was "ever at least upon the borders of insanity" did not detract from the interest that the subject held for the writer. In the British Quarterly Review of January, one unenthusiastic sentence disposes of the question: "The life of an eccentric man of genius, poet and artist, full of anecdotes concerning artists and literary people, and written in the spirit of hero-worship."

One of the most readable of all the commentaries, that in the Westminster Review, was notable for its interest in the philosophical issues raised by Gilchrist's work: "Not only does [Blake's] whole life thrust upon its readers a consideration of the true relations between an artist and the public; but his practice and methods can only be judged in relation to the fundamental conceptions of Art itself." What immediate personal inspiration was to Behmen and Law, the imagination was to Blake; the result was self-worship and intellectual chaos. "Art is the interpreter of Nature, and not a new language of the imagination," asserts the writer, who may have been William Allingham. His favorite Blake works are the Songs of Innocence and the Job ("the variety and originality of the compositions are miraculous"). Blake was "unquestionably one of the greatest [colorists] that ever lived."

Gilchrist is criticized by this reviewer, as by some others, for unfairness in recounting the Cromek dispute and for intolerance of the public's indifference to Blake. Various circumstances, among them the publication of a biography of Stothard in 1851, had combined to keep interest in the Cromek matter alive.

The New Monthly Magazine also accused Gilchrist of misrepresenting Cromek and Stothard in their relations with Blake. But this was a wholly unfavorable review, one which considered it "incredible" that two volumes should have been devoted to Blake's life and works; Cunningham's account in his Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, some thirty years earlier, was surely all that was needed.

The author of this piece, W. M. Tartt, finds neither beauty nor sublimity in the Job engravings. He chooses the Grave designs as Blake's best work. He departs from the usual view of the reviewers, also, in his verdict that Blake was mad. Setting Blake against Stothard, he reminds the reader that "the recent appearance of both their designs [for the Canterbury Pilgrimage] in the International Exhibition gave us an opportunity, such as rarely occurs, of comparing the wooden formality of the disappointed artist with the graceful and flowing lines of his successful rival."

The Balaetic Magazine review, with its unmingled praise for the biography and its worshipful consideration of Blake, is remarkable for extensive quotation of Blake's poetry and a summarizing judgment that "some centuries will have to pass before the human race will be in a condition rightly to appreciate a man like William Blake." A notice of one paragraph in Notes and Queries blandly commends both Gilchrist and Blake; for example, "we have a valuable selection from his published and unpublished writings."

The Art-Journal, in which only two years before there had appeared an unfavorable comparison of Blake with Stothard, now printed an enthusiastic review which included a brief tribute to Linnell. Gilchrist was "eminently qualified to rescue from oblivion the name of one of the most remarkable men that lived, and moved, and had his being, among the many great men who, early in the present century, glorified the intellectual world." Blake is "not to be esteemed only as an artist; he was a poet of rare order." Another favorable review, written for the Atlantic Monthly by Mary Abigail Dodge, took "Arthur" Gilchrist to task for bad writing, but applauded his insight and judgments. (Gilchrist's unhappy imitation of Carlyle, especially of the Life of Sterling, was a frequent complaint of the reviewers.) The author, a professional journalist, strikes an extravagantly Romantic note, that takes us a good deal further than the "rapt, transcendental imagination" of the Spectator review, quoted earlier. The reader is tantalized with:

wild, fragmentary, gorgeous dreams ... that throb with their imprisoned vitality. The energy, the might, the intensity of Blake's lines and figures it is impossible for words to convey. It is power in the fiercest, most eager action--fire and passion, the madness and the stupor of despair, the frenzy of desire, the lurid depths of woe, that thrill and rivet you even in the comparatively lifeless rendering of this book.

Throughout the review Blake is admired as an iconoclast of unquestioned sincerity and nobility.

A more profound, but in other respects similar, review, by Horace Ellicot Scudder, also an American, appeared in the North American Review (then edited by Charles Eliot Norton, who was later to write on Blake). Forging Gilchrist "certain affectations of style, bungling English, and what we think an occasional ill-mannered air" by virtue of his "affectionate interest" in Blake and his "confident belief in Blake's genius and sanity," Scudder apprehends in the biography "a life which was more wonderful and more lovely than all the creations to which it gave birth." Even though Scudder believes that in poetry Blake failed oftener than he succeeded (whereas in design he succeeded far oftener than he failed), he is willing to attend seriously to the meaning of Blake's work. Such problems as the work presents lie in this, that "Blake's faculty of seeing [that is, understanding] and his faculty of constructing are constantly betraying each other, leading him to veil his really profound spiritual discoveries in forms that refuse to symbolize anything for ordinary minds." (Emphasis mine.) Scudder makes two especially interesting observations in this review: that the Job designs "are by no means chance illustrations of the most striking points in the Book of Job; there is an epic unity, independent of the book illustrated"; and that Blake must be classed "in the small number of distinctively Christian men of genius."

Once again, in the Fine Arts Quarterly Review, Gilchrist's style was disparaged: "a striking example of how a book intending to give pleasure as well as convey information should not be written." Except for the Job engravings ("in every way the most remarkable of his works") and the Songs ("genuine and wonderful poems" which "now find eager purchasers at twelve guineas"), the reviewer, W. F. Rae, remains cool and unimpressed. As to Blake's mental condition, he finds him neither as sane as Gilchrist would have it, nor as mad as others suppose, simply "the victim of frequent attacks of monomania."

If, instead of indulging in silly tirades against the general public for treating Blake with indifference, and against a portion of it for denying his sanity: if, instead of adducing pitiful arguments to prove that he was in every way constituted like other men, Mr Gilchrist had maintained that Blake's mental weakness was the source of his genius and furnished the only rational explanation of his exceptional power, he would have ... upheld what was indisputable.

E. S. Dallas, in Macmillan's Magazine, agreed that it was the fault of Blake himself that he was not widely appreciated. Writing in November 1864, a year after the publication--by Macmillan's--of the book, Dallas adds one new thought to the accumulating body of Blake commentary--a significant point even today: "To understand the man well he ought to be studied as a whole, and his occasional ill-mannered air" by virtue of his "affectionate interest" in Blake and his "confident belief in Blake's genius and sanity," Scudder apprehends in the biography "a life which was more wonderful and more lovely than all the creations to which it gave birth." Even though Scudder believes that in poetry Blake failed oftener than he succeeded (whereas in design he succeeded far oftener than he failed), he is willing to attend seriously to the meaning of Blake's work. Such problems as the work presents lie in this, that "Blake's faculty of seeing [that is, understanding] and his faculty of constructing are constantly betraying each other, leading him to veil his really profound spiritual discoveries in forms that refuse to symbolize anything for ordinary minds." (Emphasis mine.) Scudder makes two especially interesting observations in this review: that the Job designs "are by no means chance illustrations of the most striking points in the Book of Job; there is an epic unity, independent of the book illustrated"; and that Blake must be classed "in the small number of distinctively Christian men of genius."

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6 In connection with the International Exhibition; see my article, "Pictures at the Exhibitions," Blake Newsletter 21 (Summer, 1972), p. 11.
admirers ought to make some attempt to bring his innumerable works together." In most respects, this is an ambivalent review, dealing out praise with one hand and blame with the other, and concluding that "perhaps [Gilchrist and the Rossettis] overrate Blake's merits, but their opinion, if exaggerated, is worth examining; and they have done really a good work in rescuing from oblivion one of the most extraordinary men of our nation."

Dallas's rather unimaginative response to Blake descends to prosaic literalmindedness in the comment on Blake's lines, "A robin redbreast in a cage / Puts all heaven in a rage." That, marvels the reviewer, "is a rather wild way of saying that redbreasts ought not to be caged." This is not so much an isolated instance, as an extreme form of one common reaction to Blake.

In 1865 there were two reviews of Gilchrist, one in Blackwood's Magazine, written by William Henry Smith, and another in the Quarterly Review, by Francis Turner Palgrave. Smith, like Tartt in the New Monthly Magazine, thought that Cunningham's sketch of Blake's life was "all that the subject required"; Gilchrist's fuller study, "indulgent" and "idolatrous," dissipates the "charm" of Cunningham. Offended by Blake's "inordinate conceit, the ignorance, the presumption, the wilful self-deception, and general want of truthfulness," the reviewer finds little to praise. Of the job designs "the prevailing impression more nearly approaches the grotesque than the sublime"; the Songs contain almost all the true poetry that Blake ever wrote. A long and surprisingly sympathetic discussion of Blake's mental condition, by far the most careful and illuminating of all the comments on this subject at the time, concludes that Blake knew perfectly well that his "visions" were merely vivid imaginings, but that he liked to astonish his friends for the sake of the "effect."

As Palgrave had already written twice about Blake's art in connection with the International Exhibition of 1862, we know that both his admiration of Blake's work, and his reservations about it, antedated Gilchrist's biography. Palgrave now expressed in the Quarterly Review his judgment that Blake's poetry declined steadily after the completion of the Poetical Sketches; that the Songs, "by their melody and a certain suppressed symbolism of meaning, remind us of Shelley" and, considered as graphic works, invite comparison with Turner's etchings for his Liber Studiorum. The seriousness which Palgrave brought to his task of criticism is most apparent in his judicious--even painsstaking--discussion of the question of "spiritual enthusiasm" in art. Citing Goethe's and Flaxman's "mastery" of enthusiasm, and Socrates' guarded approval of it, Palgrave exposes the dialogue in his own soul between Apollonian and Dionysian values in art. As for Blake, although "everywhere in his art he fell short of completeness, often of moderation, we do not impair his claim to the extraordinary gift in which he probably has no superior . . . --the gift of imaginative intensity." Thus for Palgrave, Blake's example raises a characteristically Victorian question, that of self-mastery.

I have commented briefly on seventeen known reviews of Gilchrist published before the end of 1865. Taken together, they constitute a small book on Blake, in which were formulated the judgments of a new generation already attuned to Browning, Tennyson, Emerson, and Poe--a generation, we must remember, from whose members all but fragments of the Prophetic Books were still withheld, failing a friendship with Lord Houghton or a visit to the British Museum (which in any case did not as yet possess an entire set). Although Blake--and Gilchrist--were by no means unanimously appreciated, their admirers among reviewers were in the majority. We might account for this situation, so changed from that of Blake's own day, in several ways. First, the Rossettis, by their "sponsorship" of the volumes, lent their authority to Gilchrist's judgments. Second, a sufficient time had elapsed since Blake's death to throw a veil of nostalgia and romance over the era of his lifetime, and to heighten a sense of the fabulous about Blake and his contemporaries. Other reasons concern Blake's works more specifically. One is struck in these reviews by recurrent references to the Immortality Odes. For the reader of the 1860's Blake was the poet of the Songs of Innocence, and the perspective from which the Songs were seen was that of Wordsworth. The celestial light of the child's intuitive spirituality, supposedly flitted the grown man, had--miraculously--been recalled by Blake as a mature artist, in something like its original brightness. It seemed almost that he had returned, through the agency of Gilchrist, to banish the Wordsworthian melancholy and, not only to reaffirm the vision of childhood innocence, but also to bring it closer than before. There was in Blake's favor, moreover, the easily-apprehended excellence of certain of his works--not just the Songs, but also the Poetical Sketches, The Grave, and the Illustrations of the Book of Job. If the Songs of Innocence were appreciated for their intimations of immortality, the Job was cherished for its intimations of a divine plan, as well as for its chaste sublimity.

So much for actual reviews of the biography; but Gilchrist vibrated on through the rest of the decade: in five long general articles on Blake, one book, and one quasi-review (as well as some short reviews of new editions of Blake's poems). In 1866 the Temple Bar printed an article on Blake by Alfred T. Story, who was many years later to write a biography of John Linnell that contained material on Blake and later still a book-length study of Blake himself. In their description of Story's piece in A Blake Bibliography Bentley and Nurmi say that it "begins as a review of Gilchrist." In fact, Gilchrist is not mentioned until the third page of this ten-page study; he is then allotted only three sentences and not mentioned to any effect again. The piece by Story is one of several of its kind: a post-

Gilchristian non-review, an article about Blake suggested by Gilchrist's work. An article of the same kind by James Thomson, the poet, appeared in 1866 in the National Reformer. (Sentient and Nurmi identify this article, too, as "a review of Gilchrist." Thomson himself referred to it as "some notes on the poems of William Blake." 

In April of this year H. E. Scudder wrote to W. M. Rossetti, proposing a condensation of Gilchrist's Life for American readers. As far as I know, Scudder never published his sketch about Blake, even though he informed Rossetti in the same letter that an announcement of his intention to do so had already been made in an American literary journal.

More articles on Blake appeared in 1867 and 1868. The Cambridge magazine, Light Blue, carried an article on Blake in three installments in 1867 that is notable for printing for the first time three fragments from An Island in the Moon. Sharpe's London Magazine also published an article in that year, which I have not seen. In 1868 an American Journal then in its third year, the Radical, printed an enthusiastically religious article on Blake signed "W. A. Cram"; also in 1868 the publisher J. C. Hotten issued two Blake books, a facsimile edition in color of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and Swinburne's brilliant, quixotic, still-readable study, William Blake: A Critical Essay. Swinburne had begun his book in 1862. Its connection with Gilchrist's biography is worth recounting.

In a letter to W. M. Rossetti written in 1862, in which he declined a request that he write about the Prophetic Books for Gilchrist's forthcoming book, Swinburne stated his intention of preparing an independent commentary on those works. By the end of 1863 the project was half-finished, and had taken the form of an extended review of Gilchrist to appear in installments. In 1864 Swinburne put it aside for other work and a trip to Italy but did not abandon it. He described the as-yet-expanding undertaking modestly: 'My book will at least handle the whole question of Blake's Life and work with perfect fearlessness.' In 1866 he wrote in a letter of his "forthcoming book on the suppressed works" of Blake, whose philosophy "has never yet been published because of the abject and faithless and blasphemous timidity of our wretched English literary society; a drunken clerical club dominated by the spurious spawn of the press." 

Certainly the most important contribution of Swinburne's William Blake was its attempt to read the Prophetic Books as poems, something Gilchrist had failed to do. Of the need to explore the more difficult poetry Swinburne wrote:

For what are we to make of a man whose work deserves crowning one day and hooting the next? If the "Songs" be so good, are not those who praise them bound to examine . . . what merit may be latent in the "Prophecies"? . . . On this side alone the biography appears to us emphatically deficient.

Why deficient? Because "a biographer must be capable of expounding the evangel . . . of his hero, however far he may be from thinking it worth acceptance." Naturally, the biography did not fail in public esteem because Swinburne considered it conservative.

The last known review of the first edition of Gilchrist's Life of William Blake—a review, really, only by virtue of its format—appeared in the London Quarterly Review early in 1869. Its author, James Smetham, was an artist whom D. G. Rossetti had befriended, a Wesleyan who studied the Bible every morning. He thought that Blake was "mad but harmless," that the only merits of the Prophecies were pictorial, and wished that "to his mighty faculties of conception Blake had added that scientific apprehensiveness which . . . never fails to issue in an absolute and permanent greatness." This forty-seven-page article is mainly concerned with Blake as an artist. With the exception of such criticisms as those just mentioned, it is a gentle and highly appreciative meditation on Blake, which occasionally erupts in unconscious humor. It was included, with other new material, in the second volume of the second edition of Gilchrist in 1880.

As for that edition: further interest in Blake had developed in the seventies, assisted by a number of Blake events, principally W. M. Rossetti's 1874 Aldine edition of the poems, with its long introductory essay, and the popular exhibition of three hundred and thirty-three pieces of Blake's work at London's Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1876. Copies of the Life had become rare; there was a demand for a new edition. We have only to look at the haunting cover design for the volumes of 1880 to understand that the Victorians had, in the process of transforming Blake in their own image, taken him securely to their hearts.
Gilchrist's Life: A List of Reviews and Articles

All items can be found in Bentley and Nurni's Blake Bibliography, except those identified as in "Keynes, Bibliography, 1921," or those with a single asterisk or double asterisks. A single asterisk follows items first noted by Deborah Dorfman in Blake in the Nineteenth Century (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969); double asterisks follow items first noted in my article, "Fifty Additions to Blake Bibliography," Blake Newsletter 19 (Winter, 1971-72). The review by W. M. Tartt was noted by G. E. Bentley, Jr., in Blake Newsletter 2; see footnote 5.


Anon. "Retrospect of Literature, Art, and Science, in 1863." Annual Register [for 1863], p. 352.**

Anon. "On Books." British Quarterly Review, 77 (1864), 245.**


Anon. "Notes on Books, Etc." Notes and Queries, 5 (April 1864), 312.**


P. M. "William Blake." Light Blue, 2 (1867), 146-51, 216-26, 286-94.


The critical reception of Swinburne's book is a subject that has been virtually ignored up to the present time. Only two reviews are mentioned in William Blake in the Nineteenth Century by Deborah Dorfman, and one of these is unaccountably not a review of Swinburne's book but a short essay by W. A. Cram which mentions neither Swinburne nor his William Blake. Clyde Kenneth Hyder lists seven reviews in Swinburne's Literary Career and Fame; the discussion of these is brief and, appropriately, centers on Swinburne's literary reputation rather than Blake's. There are actually at least nine reviews, all published in 1868, forming an interesting spectrum of mid-Victorian critical opinion on Blake. At times we find the reviewers longing wistfully for the less threatening Blake presented by Gilchrist, and there occurs the

1 All known title-pages, however, are inscribed William Blake / A Critical Essay.
2 The Athenaeum's review actually appeared on 4 January.
3 Cram's essay appeared in The Radical (Boston), 3 February 1868, pp. 378-82.
4 Durham, N.C., 1933, pp. 133-34.

Morton D. Paley is a Fellow at the Huntington Library for the winter term. He is doing further work on John Camden Hotten as well as on Jerusalem.
predictable dismissal of Blake's visionary qualities. Still, two of the reviews are highly discerning ones, and even the more negative reviewers had to take Blake seriously. Swinburne had made great claims for Blake as both poet and artist. After this, Blake might still be condemned, but he could no longer be ignored.

Perhaps the first review to appear was that in *The Athenaeum* for 4 January 1868 (No. 2097), pp. 12-13. The anonymous reviewer takes what might be called an intermediate position. He does not accept Swinburne's high claims for Blake's art, and he finds "a strange contradiction of feeling and outrage of that taste which we should expect to be innate in Blake, which, nevertheless, affected his Art of all kinds, pictorial as well as poetic, and seemed to be derived from the very root of his genius, inexplicable and marvellously offensive." The reviewer is sophisticated enough to realize that some of Blake's views had been distorted in order to make them conform to Swinburne's--"What the subject and his critic mean by 'rebellion' may not be the same"--and he rightly sees the argument for "the alleged 'uselessness' of the Fine Arts" as Swinburne's rather than Blake's. This reviewer, though critical of both author and subject, has enough sympathy for the enterprise to make the book seem worth reading. The same cannot be said of the *Saturday Review* critic, who has been identified as J. R. Green, "clergyman, historian, and librarian at Lambeth Palace." The *Saturday Review* had in 1866 published John Morley's savage review of Swinburne's Poems and Ballads; Green must have been chosen to do a similar job on William Blake. "Have you seen the *Saturday Review* on me and Blake?" wrote Swinburne to W. M. Rossetti. "Of course I'm dead."

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**Essay**

**BY MORTON D. PALEY**

**WILLIAM BLAKE.**

A Critical Essay.

*By ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.*

With illustrations from Blake's designs in facsimile.

Collected and edited.


London: JOHN CAMBIE HOTEN, PICCADILLY. 1868.

[All rights reserved.]

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left The first issue of William Blake bears below the vignette the caption "Zamiel / From the Book of Job." This was followed by a second issue indicated only by the deletion of the caption and the substitution of a new one: "'Going to and fro in the Earth.'" This is in turn followed by the so-called "Second Edition," bearing the caption of the second issue; this was really not a second edition at all but merely involved the substitution of a new title page. According to Thomas J. Wise, there was prior to all these a cancelled title page bearing the caption "Ithuriel / From the Book of Job." Wise claims that not more than six copies were printed (*A Bibliography . . . of Algonon Charles Swinburne*, London, 1919, I, 185; reproduced p. 183).

The title pages from the first and second issue of the first edition are reproduced from the collection of Robert N. Essick, and with his permission.
Green pretends to believe that Swinburne wrote the book in order to avenge himself on Philistine critics. "Free as the rest of the world may be to toss them, after a moment's perusal, to the butter-shop, Mr. Swinburne must have felt a secret satisfaction, as he penned these three hundred pages, in the thought that his reviewers would at least be bound to read him." The attack, unfair as it may be, has some point, for Swinburne's dithyrambic style is vulnerable to thrusts like

How does it help us to appreciate the Songs of Innocence to know that 'every page has the smell of April,' or that if 'these have the shape and smell of leaves and buds,' the Songs of Experience 'have in them the light and sound of fire and the sea'? This is just the sort of vapid twaddle which has hitherto passed current for criticism in music alone, where we ask for some explanation of the relation of Sterndale Bennett to Mendelssohn, and are told that the first is a fountain and the second a star.

Green does express admiration for Blake himself, but professes anger at Swinburne's having used his subject for "a 'shy' at 'Philistia' and morality." According to Green, "The wrong done is done to Blake. Strange as his life was, stranger as was his talk, we are among those who are ready to bow down before one who was at once a great artist and a great poet."

By far the most interesting and thoughtful response to William Blake came from the Fortnightly Review for February 1868 (pp. 216-20). The author was Moncure D. Conway, who was later to write a biography of Thomas Paine. Conway had been born in Virginia and raised as a Methodist, but he had gone on to attend the Harvard Theological School and to become a Unitarian. He was an active abolitionist and a friend of Walt Whitman's; it was Conway who acted as the intermediary in the correspondence that led to the first volume of Whitman's poems to be published in England, a selection edited by William Michael Rossetti and published in 1868 by John Camden Hotten in an edition "Uniform with Mr. Swinburne's Poems." Conway had emigrated to England, become minister to a Unitarian congregation at Finsbury, and had defended Swinburne in the New York Tribune in 1866. In return he received a friendly letter in which Swinburne discussed Whitman, Blake, sea bathing, and other matters of mutual interest. Clearly the Fortnightly wanted a critic friendly to Swinburne just as the Saturday had wanted an unfriendly one, and it is ironical that by January 1868 the editor of the Fortnightly was none other than John Morley, now grown friendly to Swinburne and his works. Indeed, the original choice of reviewer may have been Rossetti himself, for Swinburne and Rossetti had discussed the idea of the latter's reviewing William Blake for an unnamed periodical; the idea was dropped because Rossetti felt too closely associated with the book, which in the end was dedicated to him. Conway proved a good choice, for he not only wrote what George Meredith termed a "eulogistic" review but also provided a critical perspective of his own.

Swinburne's critical strategy is, in effect, to re-create the effect of Blake upon his own sensibility in a rush of euphoric language. Inevitably he transforms Blake's major themes into Swinburnian ones, just as in a quite different way Yeats was to produce a Yeatsean Blake a quarter of a century later. Conway does not contradict Swinburne but he does draw upon his own experience of religious dissent and republican radicalism to provide certain insights which Swinburne does not. For example, when Swinburne refers to "the type-yard infidelities of Paine" Conway remarks:

... The first time I ever heard the name of William Blake mentioned, was on the occasion of an assembly of the friends of Thomas Paine in a city of the Far West, to celebrate the anniversary of his birth. He was there named with honor as a faithful friend of Paine, whom he had rescued from his political pursuers; but no one in the meeting seemed to have any further association with Blake. Immediately after the disciple who made this allusion, there arose a 'spiritualist', who proceeded to announce that the work of Paine was good, but negative; he was the wild-honey-fed precursor of the higher religion; he prepared the way for the new revelation of the Spirits. So close did Paine and Blake come to each other again, without personal recognition, in the New World, where each had projected his visions. America was, indeed, the New Atlantis of many poets and prophets: Berkeley, Montesquieu, Shelley, Coleridge, Southey, and many others, saw the unfulfilled dreams of Humanity hovering over it; but thus far only the dreams of Paine and Blake have descended upon it--that of the former in its liberation from the governmental and religious establishments of the Old World--that of Blake, in the re-ascent of mystical beliefs which have taken the form of transcendentalism among the cultivated, and spiritualism with the vulgar.

The episode of the spiritualist is worthy of Henry James, and there is a fine perception here of, to use a later writer's phrase, the politics

7 Hotten's "New Book List" for 1868; this item is followed immediately by William Blake.
8 Morley's predecessor was G. H. Lewes, also friendly to Swinburne: Lewes had wanted to publish part of William Blake in the Fortnightly. See Letters, I, 149, VII, 349-50; also W. M. Rossetti, Rossetti Papers (New York, 1903), pp. 243, 245.
9 See Letters, I, 284.
10 It's interesting to note that this anecdote was circulating among Paine's admirers before the publication of Gilchrist's Life, published in 1863--the year in which Conway emigrated to England. The story is of course in Tatham's MS biography, but this was not published until 1906.
of vision. In making his journey from Southern Methodism to a Unitarian chapel in the north of London, Conway had allied himself with a noncomformist tradition in some ways similar to Blake's. This accounts for his ability to explain Blake's theology. For example, Swinburne had declared that Blake's belief "That after Christ's death he became Jehovah" was "the most wonderful part of his belief or theory." Conway observes:

But this would seem to be the logical necessity of his position, supposing that the place and not the nature of Jehovah is meant . . . . A religion victorious in any country over the previous religion of that country, outlaws the divinities of the conquered rival religion, and gradually converts those divinities into devils. The serpent was worshipped as a god before it was cursed as a devil. The god Odin is now the diabolical wild huntsman of the Alps; and every Bon Diable, clad in fruitful green, may trace his lineage to Pan. Jehovah, whom so-called Christianity worships still even under the name of Christ, really crucified Christ, and Christ is the leader of the outlawed Gods--theologically, devils--of Nature. Pharisaism, now surviving as Morality, represents the dominion of Jehovah; that Jesus, the Forger, overthrows, restoring the passions and impulses to freedom and power.

This is a strikingly successful explanation of Blake's gnomic statement; even the one point that seems somewhat wrong, the use of the term "Nature," seems less so when we remember that Conway is speaking of a passage in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, not of Blake's later attitude toward Nature. Blake would no doubt have used the word "Energy," while Conway's idea of Nature is perhaps tinged with Emersonian connotations.

Although Conway praises William Blake as "a very important contribution to both the poetical and philosophical literature of our time," he is nevertheless aware of certain lacks.

It could have been wished that Mr. Swinburne had felt equal to the rather heavy task of showing the relation of Blake to Swedenborg. Superficially there is reason enough for Blake's dislike of Swedenborg, whose temperament was without poetry or humour, and acted like a Medusa upon his hells, heavens, and angels . . . . Nevertheless, hard as were the fetters of Calvinism upon him, Swedenborg, in sundry passages, ingeniously overlooked by his followers, had the germs of an optimist faith in him. He sees spirits in hell quite happy in a belief that they are in heaven, and giving thanks. And where they were suffering he saw hope brooding over them . . . . With Blake the soul of the current theology which still haunted Swedenborg is utterly dead and trampled on; but he has not been able to rid himself of its body of language and images, however he may force these to strange and suicidal services.

Here again we see an awareness of Blake's complex relationship to his tradition, an awareness rare before our own century. Also, Conway is one of the few contemporary reviewers to appreciate the facsimile illustrations to A Critical Essay, remarking that "the publisher, and the artist who has reproduced in it some of the most characteristic works of Blake's pencil, have spared no pains to present worthy things of which poor Blake, sitting in his comfortless room, said "I wrote and painted them in ages of eternity, before my mortal life.""

The next dated review to appear is that in The Examiner for 8 February 1868, pp. 84-6. The anonymous critic praises Swinburne condescendingly for having undertaken the unattainable task of making Blake's works intelligible. There is nostalgia for Gilchrist, who did no such thing. "Mr. Gilchrist . . . was too sensible to the faults and follies of the man, and too honest to deny or ignore them." Blake was of course a writer of beautiful lyrics, "some of which are worthy of being read on the same day with the lyrics of Keats and Shelley," But he over-reached himself, much as Mr. Swinburne, who "like the subject of his eulogy . . . would seem to be possessed of a lust of paradox, insatiable and irrepressible." The comments on Blake's symbolic works are worthy of Urizen himself, as the reviewer describes Blake "in his wanderings through trackless space and his allegoric readings of the battle between abstract good and evil, his nightmare transfigurations of darkness into light and light into darkness,--his revolting phantasies regarding sex, and his unconscious blasphemies of all that is called God and that is worshipped--." The Examiner's writer is unable to distinguish Swinburne's views from Blake's, and part of his review (unlike the Athenæum's) is devoted to attacking views on art that were not Blake's at all. Swinburne had defended "art for the sake of art"; The Examiner replies with a defense of art in the service of religion. This review shows no particular knowledge of Blake and merely repeats commonplace assumptions.

One review which appeared at about this time now has a merely spectral existence. The Imperial Review, a weekly that was published for only two years, has so far been located only in the British Museum; but the Museum's copies were, we are informed, destroyed by bombing in World War II. It is to be hoped that a copy of this review may one day be found elsewhere, but meanwhile we do have a portion of it reprinted in an American periodical, The Round Table (No. 161, 22 February

11 The British Union Catalogue records 105 numbers published from 5 January 1867 to 26 December 1868.
1868, pp. 124-25). The Imperial accuses Swinburne of wishing to totally sever the good and the beautiful, but then, in a strange reversal of expectation, goes on to condemn Blake and praise Swinburne. "What has Blake to do with Swinburne? Blake, whose mad uncouth rhapsodies are such a contrast to our latest poet's voluptuous music; Blake, whose weird designs are such a contrast to the sharp classical figures over which Mr. Swinburne loves to throw a new glow." Despite Swinburne's lack of moral principles, the reviewer finds A Critical Essay redeemed by Swinburne's literary excellences.

Of this book we wish to speak in high praise; it shows a subtle power of analyzing character, a faultless style. Accept the 'data,' and it is a perfect work. If we could only take of it and Mr. Swinburne in general the view which dear old Charles Lamb takes of the Caroline Dramatists—that they belong to an airy world in which our ordinary moral rules have no place—we should be able to go further and pronounce it a valuable contribution to literary biography.

As this is, however, not the case, the reviewer expresses "A doubt whether the author of Atalanta was quite the man to put the finishing touch to what poor Gilchrist left incomplete, and to draw out for us what lessons can be drawn out from the life of William Blake, painter and poet." The Round Table shares this doubt and much more.

Swinburne's style is pronounced "too florid to be faultless," and as for what the Imperial calls "the vagaries which all regret, but which cannot destroy his excellence," The Round Table objects:

Vagary is a somewhat mild term to that mental and moral depravity in which Mr. Swinburne glories—the worship of license, the apotheosis of lust, which he would make the guiding rule of life ... A poet who fails in art by choosing such subjects as art revolts at; a philosopher who, less wise than Lord Lytton, dismembers the Good from the Beautiful; a moralist whose code of perfection is completed by a world made one vast brothel, can, it seems to us, be called excellent only by a curious twist of language.

Of William Blake, painter and poet, The Round Table has nothing to say.

On 1 March 1868 "Mr. Swinburne's Essay on Blake" was the subject of an article in The Spectator, one which was both longer—close to three thousand words—and more interesting than most. Though it displays a remarkable sense of Swinburne's strengths and weaknesses, the view of Blake is the conventional one: "... He has written a few little poems that will last as long as English literature ... through all his poems there are distributed—at rare intervals,—lines of wonderful beauty and marvellous power, but it is also true that nine out of ten of his poetical compositions are fuller of deformity than of beauty, overloaded with chaotic rubbish, smoky with confused and laboring thought, disfigured by windy and grandiloquent nonsense, choked with unmeaning names, with an insane mythology, and an anarchic philosophy." So far this is the usual Philistine rhetoric, but the reviewer does have an interesting critical point to make, one which may remind us of more recent attacks on Blake and on the Romantic tradition such as those of Yvor Winters and W. K. Wimsatt. ... His poetry ... habitually uses things which, as real things, have necessarily a dozen different attributes and accidents, in the place of some one of those attributes or accidents, and that one so often so arbitrarily chosen, and so frequently varied, that even his profoundest admirers, like Mr. Swinburne, are generally compelled to confess that it is pure haphazard to guess at the exact purport of Blake's wild myths and dim allegories." In the century that has passed since this was written, we have learned how to read Blake; but we must remember that Swinburne himself had not claimed that the long poems were consistent, successful, or even understandable—not until the Ellis-Yeats Works of 1893 was an attempt made to do this. The Spectator critic accurately describes a general problem in the interpretation of Blake but mistakenly assumes that the problem cannot be solved. He is also, with Conway, one of the few contemporaries to appreciate the value of the first color facsimile plates of Blake ever published. Finally, he takes care to discriminate between author and subject, attempting to do justice to both:

On the whole, this volume is a real addition to the knowledge of Blake's great genius as an artist. Some of the illustrations—particularly the tender and sweet fancy taken from the book of Thel, of the marriage of the dewdrop and the raindrop, and the strange frontispiece in which the crescent moon, like the mystic eye of God, looks down on Blake's three great enemies, the representatives of inductive reason (Bacon, Newton, and Locke), with a weird expression of intellectual scorn and penetrating insight—will fascinate even those who prefer a more intelligible style of art. Mr. Swinburne—though, with something of the feeling of a discoverer, he attaches far more importance than it deserves to Blake's prophetic rhodomontade, has profoundly studied his subject. Impertinent and shallow though he often is,—though he too often manages to cast a sense of impurity on Blake which Blake would never produce for himself,—he yet interprets Blake subtly on the whole, and with more of a sincere disinterestedness...
of admiration, than he has hitherto bestowed in print on any other poet.

The Westminster Review for April 1868 (pp. 587-88) makes the refreshing admission that "not having read Mr. Gilchrist's Life of Blake, nor the poems of Blake, to which Mr. Swinburne constantly refers, we are for these, if for no other reasons, incompetent to give anything like a complete or final verdict." This omission does not prevent the reviewer from asserting that Blake wrote some beautiful lyrics—he is favorably compared with Keats and Shelley—but that his other compositions are "doggerel rhapsodies" which bear out Allan Cunningham's view that Blake "was subject to constant hallucinations." Blake's ideas were in his own case pure, but "with all allowance for poetical anticipation, the antinomianism of Blake is dangerous and his mysticism heretical, partial, and disintegrating." The reviewer then passes from Blake's disintegrating mysticism to the Life and Letters of Fred K. W. Robertson, M. A., Incumbent of Trinity Chapel, Brighton.

The last review to be considered was by an anonymous writer who had read Blake and read him sympathetically. It appeared in The Broadway annual (London and New York) for 1868, pp. 728-30. The critic recommends the Gilchrist Life to those "who would learn more about a very remarkable—and despite his peculiarities—a very loveable man," and he refutes the charge of insanity. "Blake, though eccentric, was by no means mad, for he knew that his visions were not matters of fact, but phenomena seen by his imagination, nor did he expect other people to see what he saw. Insane persons, on the contrary, believe in the literal existence of their visionary fancies." And he perceptively points out that the very publication of Swinburne's book has significance: "The star of a hitherto neglected genius must be in the ascendant when the most distinguished of our youthful poets devotes a volume of 300 pages to a careful analysis of his various compositions." The Broadway is also unusual in recognizing, with Swinburne, the interdependence of Blake's text and his designs. "The only proper way to study these 'Prophecies' is in the original copies, where Blake's flowingly-engraved words are aided by his wondrously fanciful and suggestive designs. Separated from these designs, the letter-press loses more than half its fervency and strength." The last part of the review is addressed particularly to American readers, who are told that "Had Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, set his eyes on these writings, he would assuredly have adopted them as the sacred canon of his new revelation..." The "Visions of America" [sic] is discussed, and there follows an interesting parallel:

Finally, let us observe two points in which this remarkable triumvirate of lyrists, Blake, Whitman, and Swinburne, all agree. They are all insurgents against the commonly-recognized dogmas of religion and social life; and they are all diligent Bible-students. Blake writes like a modern Ezekiel; Whitman, though his language is more nineteenth-century and vernacular, is suffused with Biblical influences; while in Mr. Swinburne's essay, Biblical metaphors and turns of expression may be found in almost every page.

The Broadway's critic thus joins Conway in anticipating some modern trends in the understanding of Blake and his tradition, trends which have their origin in Swinburne's Critical Essay.
Notes on Blake and Wordsworth Dialogue


Scene. A broad plain covered with high spreading plants, flowering into small blossoms of a dull rose colour. A slow black river seems to gird it round. From a sky, like the roof of a cavern, a skirt of water is pouring down.

William Wordsworth, in a white smock and gray hat, is seated a few yards from the river.

William Wordsworth (murmuring)—

"Apart from happy ghosts, that gather flowers Of blissful quiet 'mid unfading bowers."

Such was the doom to which the gods, Protesilaus, and I condemned the hapless Laodamia. But here am I in the very high tide of Elysium, the equable and utter quietude, the unfading Asphodels, and yet I am the only ghost who seems at all happy in it. A chorus of heroes and heroines performs daily at noon, and there is much rhythmical and regulated reunion. But no one seems to appreciate the bliss except myself. A number of indignant shades cross my path; but they shout for ichor and blood and all kinds of unseemly revivifications. Who can that be, walking impatiently on, and regarding a large-leaved waterplant which he holds in his hand? I protest it is no other than William Blake, the mad painter and songwriter. Most excellent shade, I prithee pause a moment!

Blake. Not an instant. This devilish dulness is bad enough without the conversation of the worst of all devils, a dull rascal.

Wordsworth. Rascal!

Blake. A renegade, a presumer, a blasphemer.

Wordsworth. I was always true to my principles. I sought something which I could not find realised in the sanguinary orgies of the Revolution.

Blake. You sought death; you sought the glorification of your dead self. The Revolution was a manuscript which God wrote in an ink too red for your liking. God heard the wail of the children, the fettering of the captives, the champings of cruel giants; and He bade Freedom unloosen with flame and steel. You fled to Nature, the ancient enemy of God and man, and bade her quench and blunt the flashing edges. By the side of the blotching devil Rubens and the blearing devil Titian I can now see the bleating devil, Wordsworth.

Wordsworth (smiling). Strong language, Mr. Blake.

Blake. Coin of God's realm, Mr. Deputy-Stamp-Collector.

According to Ian Fletcher, Malcolm Kingsley Macmillan belonged to the publishing family but published little himself, though he had a remarkable range of knowledge of literature and art. The privately printed edition of his Selected Letters appeared in 1888. In an appendix it contains miscellaneous literary remains. Kingsley published anonymously a novel entitled Dagonet the Jester in 1888. He disappeared 11 July 1889 while climbing Mount Olympus—a mystery which has never been resolved.
Wordsworth. Yet I have ever considered that your own early lyrics were anticipations of my own humble and proud efforts to emancipate English verse from the fetters of a "poetic diction."

Blake. Ah, hm! "Humble and proud" is pretty well. You had considerable talents, Mr. Wordsworth.

Wordsworth. How am I to understand you, Mr. Blake?

Blake. As you please, sir. For my own part I can see more clearly than I could formerly. Under the guise of a liberator you bound the human spirit to the tethering-post of blockheadism. But neither a tethering-post "under Government" nor a bribed and brief posterity can put the stamp of immortality on atheistic balderdash.

Wordsworth. The gods are good to us here. That old vagary of yours, to accuse me of atheism, is singularly out of keeping with this--

"Elysian beauty, melancholy grace."

Blake. Pah! The simper of one of Worlett's engravings! I tell you we are mere apprentices here. We are put in these lifeless fields among these watery shadows and broken colours, that we may find out afresh the divine art of living in truth and pity and justice.

Wordsworth. Excellent maxims. But surely the first step is gained here by the subduing of passion and the preparation of the heart for wisdom?

Blake. God only is wise, and before Him alone is it any merit to subdue our passion. Our passion comes from Him. He is a consuming fire.

Wordsworth. And whence comes our endurance?

Blake. From our cowardice, and very often from the devil himself, who is the most enduring of creatures, as long as the Divine Order seems able to endure him. As for you, sir, you look at a large stone, or at a sheep couched on the grass, and you say, "How enduring! how permanent! how patient!" And I tell you the very stone would smite you, if it could, and the sheep would tumble you over. I have seen and drawn sheep with their necks bowed. But it is under the mighty hand of God. And He spreads His hands over them in tenderness, and joy springs in their hearts and love. They will see their lambs skipping with the angels. But you sing of their aches and ills, and how they weigh on the earth, and soon the earth will weigh on them. Weight and weight! Blind effort and hopeless suffering! The meekness of an idiot and the self-worship of a duck-pond!

Wordsworth. I cannot help thinking, Mr. Blake, that your impatience deprives you of many sources of pure and refined pleasure.

Blake. There can be no pleasure without passion. A straw tickling one's nose may be amusing, but pleasantness comes only with dreams and desires.

Wordsworth. I choke my resentment, Mr. Blake. I have great hope we may ultimately agree. Let me ask you, as a slight diversion, what you now think of that very clever young lord, who used to speak of my humble productions much as you do. He wrote verses himself, I believe.

Blake. Lord Byron was half one of the original giants of Albion! He climbed out of this elemental Greek hell and had one foot on the Greek Parnassus. He caught the splendour of Jehovah's face, and was in the train of Satan when he asked leave to tempt Job. He worked too much in mezzo-tint, and could not draw the pure and firm lines of Dante and
Chaucer. He was troubled too much with the shadows of good and evil. Nevertheless he had the love of freedom and of the "high passions" that dwell in the reasonable soul.

Wordsworth.

"Wisdom and spirit of the universe,
Thou soul which art the eternity of thought."

Blake. Doubtless, Mr. Wordsworth, you could write noble lines. Ah! et elo omnia! But you were a Pagan, a worshipper of stocks and stones, of natural life and growth, with no intuition of Jehovah and Jesus, the creative Mind and the redeeming Activity.

Wordsworth. I felt those august Presences diffused and interfused through all things.

Blake. Yes, and lost in the "Elements of this world," which the apostle tells us are not "according to Christ."

Wordsworth. And Lord Byron, doubtless, was a more orthodox preacher of apostolic truth.

Blake. He never at any rate bowed before natural force, or confused it with God. His Prisoner of Chillon is surrounded with as much harsh material as one of your own gaping peasants; but he preserves his manhood and the dignity of his sufferings.

Wordsworth. I trust that his lordship's own sufferings are borne with dignity. I hear that he is at present yoked with Sisyphus, and rolling uphill that rock of offence, his very singular biography.

Blake. O Pharisee! O interminable Scribe! when will you learn that it is not by passions resisted that men inherit a glory, but by good done?

Wordsworth. I thought, Mr. Blake, that you attributed just now to the "noble poet" too much preoccupation with the "shadows of good and evil."

Blake. I did, sir. That was his error. But he recognised at the same time that the material universe is nothing--

"The mind which is immortal makes itself
Requital of its good and evil deeds,
Is its own origin of ill and end,
And its own place and time."

That is Manichean, if you will. But it is not atheistic. For it declares the mind, which is of God, to be alive and active for the punishment of its failures and the joy of its triumphs. Lord Byron's "sense of sin" was excessive and paralysing. But it at any rate showed that his mind and reasonable faculties were awake.

Wordsworth. But have not I too said of the winds and waves that they "in themselves" are nothing?

Blake. Yes; but you keep that "in themselves" to ride off on when the winds and waves frighten you very much. How can a wave "roll Deity"? You make the Eternal a sport of chance.

Wordsworth. Of law rather--

"One control
Gave laws to them, and said that by the soul
Only the nations should be great and free."

Blake. Nations are great by their thoughts, and their enterprises, and their visions. Those are the expression of their soul. But your whole work ties them to the earth and the soil. You think of them as growing, and then as buried--

"Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees."

Wordsworth. Those lines are doubtless a stumbling-block. But taken in connection with the whole chain of my thought, they sin neither against Christianity nor imagination. Humility is the first of religious virtues, and nothing encourages it so much as remembering that on one side we are dust.

Blake. To the imaginative artist the most literal fact may be spiritual; but it must be used symbolically. Our five senses give the limit to the energy and fire of soul, making some embodiment seem bare, and outside of us, and dead. That is the dust; but out of the dust we must behold the glory. Otherwise where is the contrast which art and truth demand? The prophet Ezekiel lay in the dung that he might have a vision of Jehovah, the God made human. But you lie in the dust out of a dastardly love for humility and quietness.

Wordsworth. But Lord Byron surely, infected doubtless by the prevailing poetic inspiration of his time, my own, filled his verses with mountains and seas and clouds as much as I did.

Blake. Yes, but with this difference, that he scales the Summits and rides on the waves,— he is for ever aspiring towards something. You, sir, with an original capacity for imaginative expression infinitely greater than his, succumbed to the delusion and lie of Nature, asserting mendaciously that she

"Never did betray
The heart that loved her,"

and have done your best to leave the human spirit in the art-destroying and blind limbo of the Greek and Roman sophists.

Wordsworth.

"The Sacred laws
Framed in the schools, where wisdom dwelt retired,
Intent to trace the ideal path of right."

Are those the lines you are thinking of?

Blake. Partly; but still more of your pervading Greek spirit, servile to the two most
damnable forms of death, nature and temperance. All truly great artists see and create better when they are drunk.²

Wordsworth. I am no advocate for excluding any simple pleasure, any touching weakness from the domain of poetic sympathy.

Blake. You can concede a great deal, doubtless; but it is all in the way of balance and moderation. The wine-cup, the strong and fiery juices are not conceded by our enemy, Nature; they are wrenched from her.

Wordsworth. Turbulence and revolt and distraction—the storm-clouds of the wine-cup—are these to be eternal? [Blake makes the gesture of drinking.] You are satiated with bliss, I see, and long for battle. Hence your assault on me. But there is one knotty point which I should like to propose to you, Mr. Blake. You speak perpetually of Nature as accursed, the enemy of God and of art, and yet advocate those forms of licence which are generally defended on the plea that they are natural.

Blake. And on that plea wrongly defended, whatever they may be. But explain yourself further.

Wordsworth. It is not generally known that I have myself had conceptions and hauntings of erotic imagery and orgiastic poesy which would have been among the most tremendous feats of that kind which the literature of the world can show. So strong was the impulse towards this vein of composition, that, short of yielding to it, my only alternative was rigidly to exclude the voice of amatory passion from the almost perfect diapason of my poetical production. You, on the other hand, have given free expression to this side of life, not only in your lyrics, but, as I understand, still more in your "designs" and "inventions." You must justify to yourself, as best you can, this laying anew on the human race "the weight of chance desires." But my puzzle meanwhile, without the solution of which I cannot so well defend myself against charges which I can only imperfectly understand, is this: Do not these desires and impulses belong to nature? Is it not the function of imagination and religion to control them?

Blake. Sir, I am a painter and draughtsman as well as a poet. I can best explain myself by lines and images.

1 v. "Marriage of Heaven and Hell," reprinted in the Hobby-Horse for October 1887.
LIFE AND WORKS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

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WILLIAM BLAKE

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