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N O T E

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3. Some Analogues or Sources

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A curious item, not in the British Museum: Cain's Lamentations Over Abel by R.C. Rogers, London, Sabine & Son, n.d. (1811-25). It is a bad prose-poem-sermon, and fairly short; quite readable, being bad. An interesting point is that the words "Is this death?" are twice repeated by Cain, and are the words of Adam in G.A.: moreover, they express Cain's first predominant thought, as Adam's in Blake. Rogers stresses the certainty of divine forgiveness, and his Cain becomes penitent, and dies a venerable old man, beloved of his relations, the further progeny of Adam & Eve. I've been able to find out nothing about the author, who seems to be unknown to the reference books. He lived in Warminster, and has a strong scent of parson (or curate).

Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. has an interesting note, "Blake's Philosophy of Contraries: A New Source", in English Language Notes, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Dec., 1966), pp. 105-110. The "New Source" is in Milton's Reason of Church-Government, backed up by other statements in Milton's prose as well as Paradise Lost IX, 120-3. Milton offers a more immediate source than Boehme for the doctrine of contraries put forward by Blake in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. Both Boehme and Milton point out that the strife of contraries alone produces motion or change; thus they do not stop short at the familiar concept of the contraries as producing harmony. I suspect that further sources or analogues may turn up: for what it is worth, I mention an idea in Sir Thomas Browne's Religio Medici (1643: Everyman Edition, p. 71):

They that endeavour to abolish Vice, destroy also Virtue; for contraries, though they destroy one another, are yet the life of one another.

In the same note, Wittreich says that Areopagitica (as well as Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce) is behind The Marriage. One particular hint from Areopagitica may perhaps be seen in proverb 45: "Expect poison from the standing water" and its echo in the harper's song in the fourth "Memorable Fancy": "The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind." Milton has a similar idea: "Truth is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition." (Everyman Edition of Prose Writings, 1958, p. 172.)