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More Than Music Composed After Blake by Arthur Farwell

Brice Farwell

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MORE THAN MUSIC COMPOSED AFTER BLAKE BY **ARTHUR FARWELL**

BRICE FARWELL

"Blake is right, 'One thought fills immensity,'" wrote composer Arthur Farwell in the 1940s about the power of Blake's imagery and intuitive quest for "unlimited mental expansion." Farwell is another composer who contributed to the music on Blake's verse, but he did not stop there. He was influenced not only by the lyrical and beautiful (the strong symbolic and philosophical inventiveness of Blake's expression) but was also intensely interested in Blake's creative processes and in what Blake told about them. Like Blake, Farwell recorded an inner consciousness of his own that was possessed with vivid intuitive images, not only of musical ideas but also of both spontaneous and consciously-induced flashes of pictorial or visionary insight, which he was able to illustrate in a somewhat Blakean fashion decades later.

The intuitive process, in Blake, in others and in his own experience, became an object of lifelong study by the composer, my father (trained in electrical engineering, B.S.E.E., M.I.T., 1893) before he embarked on his musical career. In his investigations he sought to objectify the role of intuitive phenomena in his own life and to understand the psychological principles in the general operation of intuition. He developed his work into a practical discipline whereby one might achieve purposeful, directed expansion of consciousness for artistic creation.

In his record of the results of these studies, entitled in manuscript *Intuition in the World-Making*, Farwell explores the insights of numerous creative giants in the history of art, science and thought. Of Blake he concludes, "In the history and on the

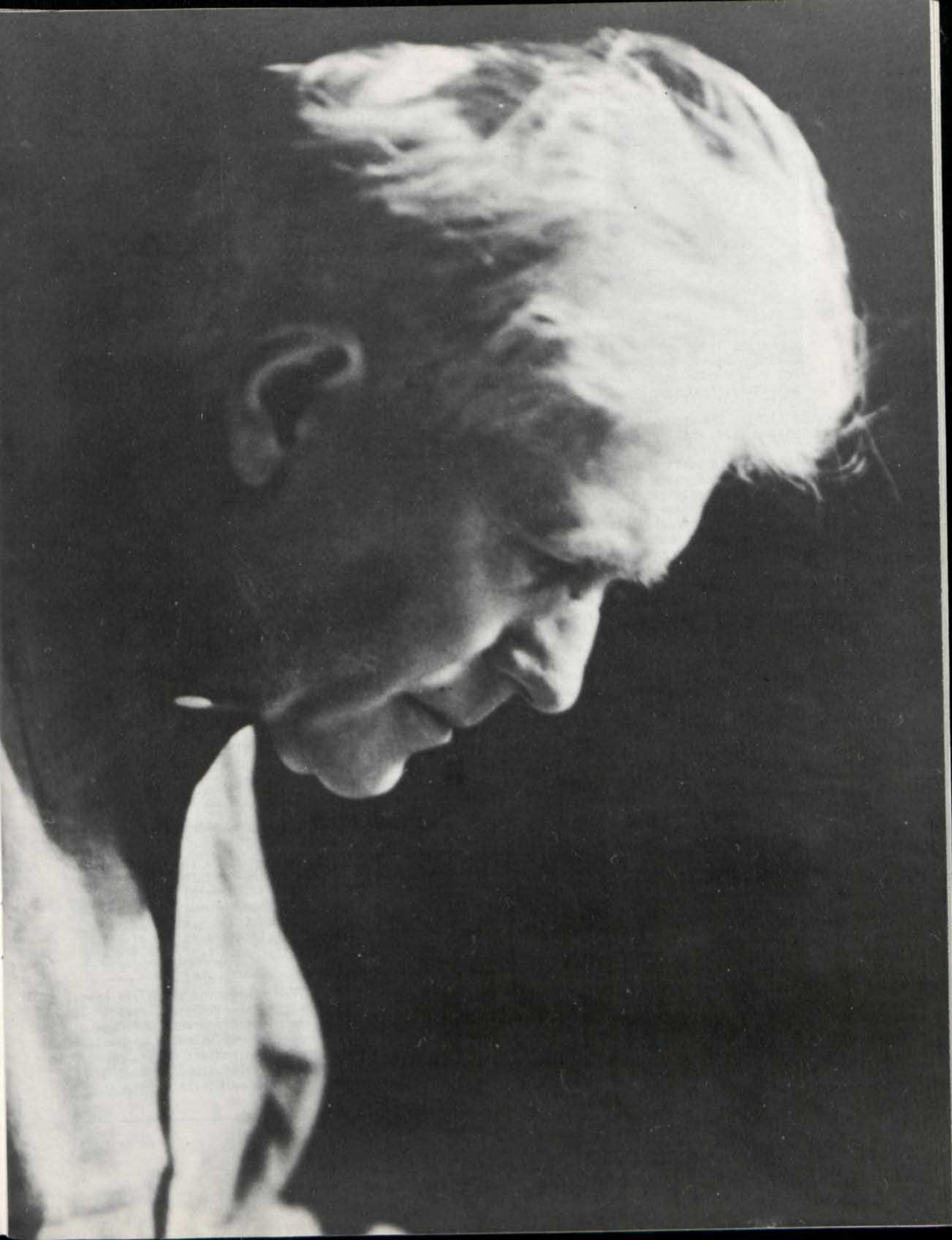
stage of intuition in art, Blake is surely the protagonist"; the thrust of this interpretation of Blake is presented in excerpts following this article.

We may presume Arthur Farwell's musical treatment of Blake's verse to be among many unpublished or unsung Blake settings which no doubt exist. It is not surprising that they did not appear in the article on and checklist of musical settings of Blake's poetry by Peter Roberts (*Newsletter* 28, Spring 1974). There is no more reason for Peter Roberts, or anyone, to know Farwell's Blake music today than for anyone beyond a small circle to have known of Blake the artist before Gilchrist's *Pictor-Ignatus* in 1863. Upon Roberts' invitation for assistance from readers, we introduce below five Blake poems Arthur Farwell set into song.

Farwell, 1872-1952, was a composer better known for his music on American Indian themes than for his Blake settings, and for his efforts on behalf of his colleagues in the early part of this century (see the recent re-issue in 5 volumes of his music and writings from the Wa-Wan Press, edited by Vera B. Lawrence and published by Arno Press in 1970). In order of their composition, his Blake works are settings of *Love's Secret*, *The Wild Flower's Song*, *The Lamb*, a version of *A Cradle Song* and *The Tyger*, the first of which was published by the Wa-Wan Press in 1903. The next Blake poem was not set until after World War I.

The Lamb, *The Tyger*, and *A Cradle Song* were done in the early 1930s, when Farwell was beginning to draft his notes for the text on intuition. *The Tyger* exists only in manuscript, but the other two were published in a curiously Blakean fashion by the composer himself, who learned offset lithography for the purpose, drew the music and title designs on tracing paper, hand coated and exposed the zinc

* Acknowledgement is due my sister Beatrice Farwell for originally suggesting the form of this communication and for a critical editorial review of later drafts.



plates and operated the press himself. (A photo of him engaged in this activity, shown here, is reproduced in Percy Scholes' *Oxford Companion to Music*.) Editions and distribution of the settings were naturally quite limited. Proper bibliographic references are as follows:

- Op. 14 (25): No. 2.--(1) *Love's Secret*, 1903, published by Wa-Wan Press, Newton Center, Mass., 1903.
- Op. 54 (74): *Three Songs for Medium Voice*: No. 2. *The Wild Flower's Song*, 1919, published by John Church, New York, 1920.
- Op. 88 (114): Two Songs on Poems by William Blake, for medium voice and piano: No. 1. *The Lamb*, 1930, published privately, East Lansing, Mich., 1935.
No. 2. *A Cradle Song*, 1930, published privately, East Lansing, Mich., 1935.
- Op. 98 (128): *The Tyger*, for medium voice and piano, 1934, ms. only.

From the earliest setting the music is sensitive to the color, form, mood and meaning of Blake's poetry: *The Lamb* is simple and lyrical, *The Tyger* is quite stormy, and *A Cradle Song* has characteristics of both. The harmonic characteristics of all three are romantic and somewhat "modern" but not avant-garde for the 1930s. These and the early *Love's Secret* were heard on 3 March 1976 in a musical program at the conference on "Blake in the Art of His Time," sponsored by the Departments of Art and English at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Local reviewer Richard Ames considered the Farwell songs the "most subtle settings of the evening." Another piece, without text, composed at about the same time, also printed at Farwell's hand press at East Lansing, was inspired by Blake's visionary mythology: Op. 91 (116), *Vale of Enitharmon*, piano, 1930, published 1935.

Like Blake, Farwell was practically as well as philosophically anti-establishment, which is seen as one motif in his hand-crafted do-it-yourself publishing venture. His choice and treatment of these selections was styled more to seek a working response from devoted amateurs than to serve a virtuoso elite. And, like the poet, he also sought symbolic meanings. He introduced these publications with examples from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. In his own way, Farwell may have borrowed an aspect of Blake's symbolic concepts to subtly represent his own sense of an eternal and revolutionary rejuvenation (akin to what he had found deeply in Boehme) in Blake's mythology and prophecy. Something vital, human and universal governed the function of music for Farwell and colored his musical expression of his inner vision.

He had been driven in this quest since his early student days when he began to experience visionary phenomena, later recorded in drawings (the Blakean influence of which is suggested in the accompanying illustrations). He had also been a very public man in the first half of his musical career and quite a fighter for the independence of American

music. As a music student he immersed himself in the romantic, bohemian ideas of his day, having spent two years in Europe under Humperdinck, Pfitzner and Guilmant. In the Wa-Wan venture he travelled the country, lecturing with the aid of a piano, and energetically organizing music clubs. Coming to New York in 1909, he joined the editorial staff of *Musical America* and became Supervisor of Municipal Concerts. He wrote numerous civic pageants and masques, including "Caliban" for the Shakespeare Tercentenary, with Percy MacKaye. During World War I he was a leader in the community singing movement.

When he went west in 1918 with the beginnings of a family, he left behind much of his public life. He turned to formal teaching, at Berkeley and at Pasadena, and later at East Lansing, where he taught composition at Michigan State until his retirement in 1939. Although he continued with further interpretations of Indian themes into the 1940s, by the California years he had turned substantially toward his own musical ideas, trying to create an identifiably American music. He remained deliberately and constitutionally opposed to the zeitgeist of his day. Some of his work received public performance, such as the orchestral *Symbolistic Study No. 3* Op. 18 (68), on Walt Whitman's "Once I passed through a populous city" and the *Gods of the Mountain* suite, Op. 52 (68). His *Symbolistic Study No. 6, Mountain Vision*, Op. 37 (52), earned a national broadcast in a 1939 competition, the year he retired to New York City. During the 1940s his most advanced American Indian works were heard in the concert repertoire of pianist John Kirkpatrick and the *a capella* choral tours of the Westminster Choir School.

Musicians today, beginning to examine the compositions of Farwell's later years, are finding of interest works which are said to show inventive musical experimentation and growth. Though these works are still only in manuscript (except for the few works of his hand-press venture) several posthumous premieres in the last three years have introduced his *Piano Sonata*, Op. 113 (161), *Sonata for 'Cello and Piano*, Op. 116 (163), *Quintet in E*

Blake songs in hand-made editions announced by the composer. In explaining the venture, Farwell said (on verso), "The present is, generally, a time of mass-thought and mass-action. However desirable or necessary this may be in certain fields, it is nevertheless directly against the spirit of art, which must remain a matter peculiarly individual."

Cover design, in red and black, for two Blake songs, the first issue of Arthur Farwell's hand press. The cover for his Blake-inspired piano work *Vale of Enitharmon* (see ff. pp.) was illustrated with an angelic figure, vignettted in radiant color, reproduced from an original drawing by Irish poet George Russell (A.E.), given to Farwell at an earlier time.

The Editions

Having first examined the possible methods of music reproduction, I finally adopted the process of standard modern lithography, the offset process, with zinc plates.

The music has first been drawn by myself on tracing paper, by a combination of freehand and mechanical drawing processes, to resemble as accurately as possible a regular "engraved" music page.

A Kodolith paper negative is made from this drawing, by direct contact in a printing frame, and the sensitized zinc plate is then printed by arc-light, in direct contact with the negative.

The finished music is finally printed from the plate on a small offset hand lithographic press of the sort commonly used as a "proof press" in large plants. The covers are designed by the composer, and are printed in various colors.

Compositions Published, to April 1936

Works for Voice, Piano, Violin and Violoncello

	Prices net	Postage
1. The Lamb..... Song for medium voice, poem by William Blake	\$.40	\$.02
2. A Cradle Song..... Song for medium voice, poem by William Blake	.60	.03
3. Land of Luthany..... For Violoncello and Piano, after "The Mistress of Vision," by Francis Thompson.	1.25	.03
4. Vale of Enitharmon..... For piano, after Blake.	1.00	.03
5. Melody in E Minor..... For Violin and Piano.	.75	.03
6. Melody in E Minor..... Piano version of No. 5. (In preparation).	.60	.03
7. In the Tetons..... Sketches for piano. (In preparation).	—	—

Arthur Farwell East Lansing Michigan

Thirty years ago I inaugurated my earlier enterprise for the publication of American music, the Wa-Wan Press, at Newton Center, Massachusetts - a movement which aided in placing the recognition of the American composer on a new basis.

To-day, as an avocation and an adventure I am beginning a new enterprise - the printing and publishing of my own works, so far as possible, on my own lithographic press, by somewhat original methods.

My first object in this procedure is to be free to give out my works when and as I wish, without the restrictions which must necessarily condition the activities of publishers. Beyond this I am interested in experimenting with the technical processes by which a composer can arrive at this independence. The music is first drawn by myself, by hand, which will occasion some irregularities, but not sufficient, I believe, to interfere with legibility. It is then subjected to lithographic processes, without the aid of camera or engraved plates. Also, even without the press, I have abolished all necessity for ever copying music.

These two settings of poems by William Blake are the first compositions to be printed by me on my own press. Many other works are in preparation.

Correspondence is invited from any who may be interested in the process or in my music.

Arthur Farwell



COMPOSITIONS OF ARTHUR FARWELL

ISSUED FROM HIS
LITHOGRAPHIC PRESS IN
HAND-DRAWN HAND
PRINTED EDITIONS AT
EAST LANSING MICHIGAN

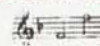
TWO SONGS

for medium voice

on poems by

William Blake

I THE LAMB



40 cents

II A CRADLE SONG



60 cents



Composed
Printed
and
Published
by

ARTHUR FARWELL
East Lansing - Michigan

Page 91 (opposite): sketch in pencil and crayon of "Spirit refusing to reincarnate in such a body," given to Arthur Farwell about 1903. According to a note in Farwell's hand on the back of the drawing, it was given to him by Charles Johnston, who told him it was by the poet A.E. But when A.E. paid a visit to Farwell in 1938, "He couldn't remember, said it could be either by him or Jack Yeats."

Page 92: cover for *Vale of Enitharmon*, using the sketch.

Page 93: first page of *Vale of Enitharmon*, 1935.
On the back of this page is the following explanation:

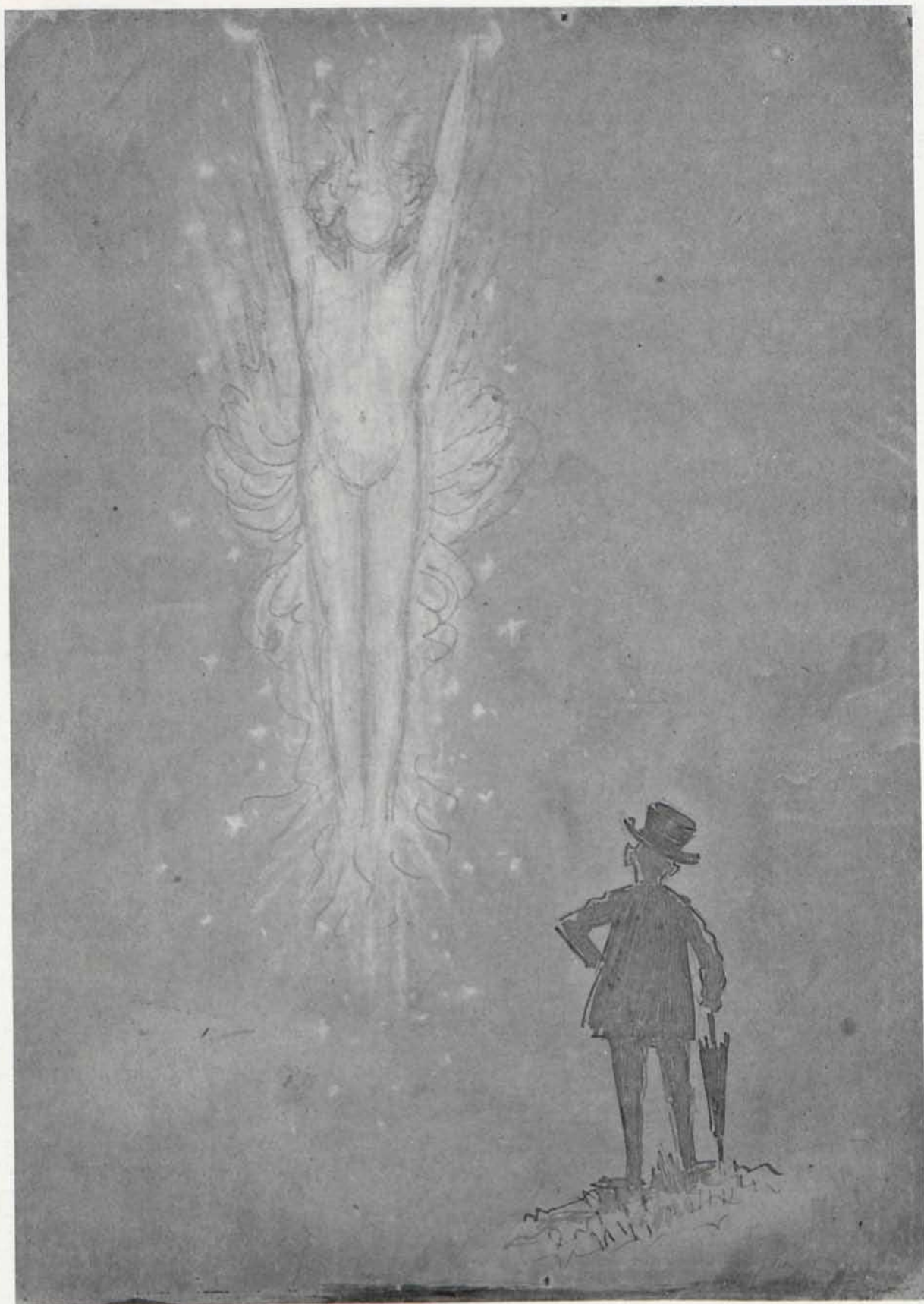
"Vale of Enitharmon" is the fourth of my works to be lithographed by me on my own press at East Lansing, Michigan. The music pages and title lettering have been hand-drawn by myself. The figure on the title is from a sketch by "A.E." (George Russell) in my possession.

Enitharmon, in the unique mythology of William Blake, has been interpreted, in one phase, as Spiritual Beauty.

Arthur Farwell

Pages 94-95: *The Lamb*, first publication of Arthur Farwell's hand press. For uniformity he hand-whittled a cherrywood stamp for the note heads, which he applied on tracing paper using an india-ink stamp pad. Note stems were made with a draftsman's ruling pen.

Pages 96-97: Farwell's music hand, as shown on a manuscript page of *The Tyger*, compared with his hand-copied opening page of the published version of *A Cradle Song*.



h. Towner

VALE OF ENITHARMON

for Piano



Composed
Printed
and
Published
by

ARTHUR FARWELL

East Lansing - Michigan

*Mabel Towner
from
Arthur Farwell
1936*

To Doris Posthumus Houghton

Vale of Enitharmon

Arthur Farwell, Op. 91

Piano

Freely

mf p accel. f broaden ret. pp

Slowly

mp sim ret.

in time

mf p

pp

Ped

Ped

Copyright, 1935 by Arthur Farwell.
International Copyright Secured.

To Victor Prahl

The Lamb

Poem by
William BlakeMusic by
Arthur Farwell, Op. 88, No. 1

Simply.
Voice

Lit-tle Lamb, who made thee? Dost thou know who made thee?
Lit-tle Lamb, I'll tell thee, Lit-tle Lamb, I'll tell thee.

Piano

Gave thee life and bid thee feed, By the stream and o'er the mead:
He is call-ed by thy name, For He called Him - self a Lamb.

Copyright, 1931, as unp. ms., by Arthur Farwell.
Published 1935.

Gave thee cloth-ing of de-light, Soft-est cloth-ing, wool-y, bright;
He is meek and He is mild; He be-came a lit-tle child,

Gave thee such a ten-der voice, Mak-ing all the hills re-joice?
I a child and thou a lamb, We are call-ed by His name.

slower
Lit-tle Lamb, who made thee? Dost thou know who made thee?
Lit-tle Lamb, God bless thee! Lit-tle Lamb, God bless thee!

A Cradle Song

Poem by
William Blake

Music by
Arthur Farwell, Op. 88, No. 2

Quietly, rocking. *p*

Voice

Sleep! sleep! beau-ty bright;

Piano

p

mp

Dreaming o'er the joys of night; Sleep! sleep! in thy sleep

mp

ret. p pp in time

Lit-tle sor-rows sit and weep. Sweet Babe, in thy face

ret. p pp in time

Copyright, 1931, as unpub. ms., by Arthur Farwell.

Published 1936

The Tyger

William Blake

Arthur Farwell
Op. 98.

Fast, impetuously.

f Ty-ger! Ty-ger! burn-ing bright

mf *f*

mp In the for-ests of the night, what im-mor-tal

mp

f hand or eye could frame thy fear-ful sym-met-ry?



No. 3 - Carl Fischer, Inc. New York

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Estate of Arthur Farwell
Brice Farwell, trustee
Briarcliff Manor, New York

Minor, piano and strings, Op. 103 (136) and *What's In an Octave?* Op. 84 (111) for piano. Perhaps his most characteristic works have been his many settings of poems by Emily Dickinson, another individualist and spirited American mystic. These were written from the time of the later Blake settings on through the 1940s and until the end of his life. Farwell worked at the manuscript of his study of intuition and the illustrations of his visionary experience throughout this period. He published several articles on his views of intuition and gave lectures illustrated with slides of his drawings (like those here reproduced) along with some done in water colors.

Farwell asserts that any individual can bring the infinite resources of his own intuitive faculty to bear on any problem, if he will learn meditatively to let the force of universal principles flow and work. From fleeting hunches to visions of "cosmic import," a whole spectrum of inner experience lies along the axis from the particular to the universal. In art, Farwell perceived Blake's visionary experiences to fully embody this process in which Blake "set forth his symbolic dreams in their entirety, just as they came to him." Farwell held that in this portion of Blake's work the direct recording of visionary symbolism accounted for much of what he termed the "unique and problematic place Blake has so long held in the world of art." Farwell was of course unaware of the recent scholarship that has shown Blake's graphic work to be readily understandable in the context of other work in his time. But at any rate Farwell was more interested in the working of Blake's creative mind and its influence on the larger meaning of the work than in particulars per se.

The captioned illustrations in these pages suggest a Blakean influence on several levels in Farwell's work, which exemplify an awareness of craft, a naive artistic style and some analogue of universal intuition furnished in part by his exposure to the inspiration of Blake. Arthur Farwell's contributions have not as yet found a Gilchrist; they may never. Though his name is listed in the musical encyclopedias, most of his works lay undisturbed until his seven children³ were able to find ways to make them accessible beginning in 1972, his centennial year.

ARTHUR FARWELL ON BLAKE

Excerpted from his book manuscript *Intuition in the World-Making*, drafted over the years from about 1933 through 1948 and illustrated by the author with his sketches of symbolic images from his inner experiences, Arthur Farwell dwells on the meaning of Blake's inner experiences for Blake's art.

Each chapter, broadly titled as shown in these pages, is given an analytical list of contents. For Chapter Six, containing Farwell's principal examina-

Title and Table of Contents of Arthur Farwell's discourse on his investigation of intuition. Farwell went on to examine this process, tame it, reduce it to practice and study its context and range of meaning in human experience. Farwell illustrated his treatise with his hand sketches from memory of both his spontaneous visionary experiences and also with some of those he consciously induced. He turned to Blake as a key example of intuition and vision in art; he concluded the study by picturing, narrating and interpreting a vision-like experience which he likens to Blake's visions. Two of his sketches for this example are shown here.

tion of Blake and entitled *Artistic Inspiration as Intuition*, these topics are:

Relation of the artistic to the spiritual. Example of musical intuition. Richard Strauss' testimony. Schubert's phenomenal intuition. Composition in hypnotic state. Composition in semi-trance. Unconscious practice of "consciously induced" intuition. Asking the "infinite" for musical themes. Application of Criteria and Law. Wagner's striking testimony. Transference of artistic intuitive power to life-problems. Artists' lack of understanding of intuition. Testimony of writers. Identity of principle of intuition in all fields, including the spiritual. Testimony of painters. Blake's singular position. Vision as abstract art. Vision vs. dream in painting. Relation of conscious and subconscious minds to imagination. Artistic functioning as field for psychological study. Man's four basic faculties. Intuition and "inspiration." Genius. Despiritualization of art. A new artistic teaching. Potential height of subconscious response.

Farwell's development of Blake's "singular position" is excerpted below, slightly condensed, following these brief opening words in his Introduction, given here to set the author's tone and perspective.

This book, on its first level, is a direct and unqualified account of the experience of myself and others with intuition, and, on my own part, with its conscious control and use. As such, it is a recital of adventure and observation in a region of perception beyond that of reason, though not without a recognition of the organic relation of that region to the total human consciousness, in which reason plays its proper part.

On its second level it presents a formulation of certain principles and laws of intuition and its use, and a record of thoughts, conclusions and outlooks born of this adventure and observation. On its third level it pictures the result upon human life, the larger meanings for the individual and the race, of the full development and use of the intuitive faculty.

The present work in no way seeks to alter or oppose the current general idea of what

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intuition is. But this idea is so . . . narrow and limited . . . that it has become outworn as an aid to the further development of this faculty, with its limitless latent powers of illumination . . . and of creative inspiration. . . . This popular attitude is further devoid of any sense of the spiritual and cosmic implications of the intuitive faculty, and of its immense significance for the future, in human evolution. . . .

Intuition, then, will embrace the commonly understood idea of intuition (inclusive of what is popularly known as the "hunch"), the artistic, scientific, philosophical or spiritual inspiration, in fact all creative revelation in any sphere, the symbolic dream, the vision, and other related subconscious phenomena of a revelatory nature, and all of these reason-transcending illuminations as experienced both in their spontaneous, unexpected manner, and also as the result of the conscious and purposeful inducing of them. The name of none of these so different appearing phenomena, other than "intuition" itself, may suitably be used to include them all.

The present work aims to make progress in laying the foundations of a Science of Intuition.

Leaping from here into the framework of his Chapter Six, as given above, we read of Blake in Arthur Farwell's thought thus:

William Blake's is the name most usually brought forward in connection with the idea of artistic inspiration as intuition, but without the bearing which I shall indicate. His pictorial work, along the line of cleavage which I am considering, divides itself into two classes: one being the work in which he exercised his creative capacities in the usual manner of artist, whether or not intuition played a part; the other being that in which he set forth his symbolic dreams and vision in their entirety, exactly as they came to him, with nothing added from his conscious mind. . . .

In the extensive portion of Blake's art which is a direct and exclusive presentation of that which the subconscious mind puts forth, he was more completely a medium of intuitive revelations than were the other artists mentioned

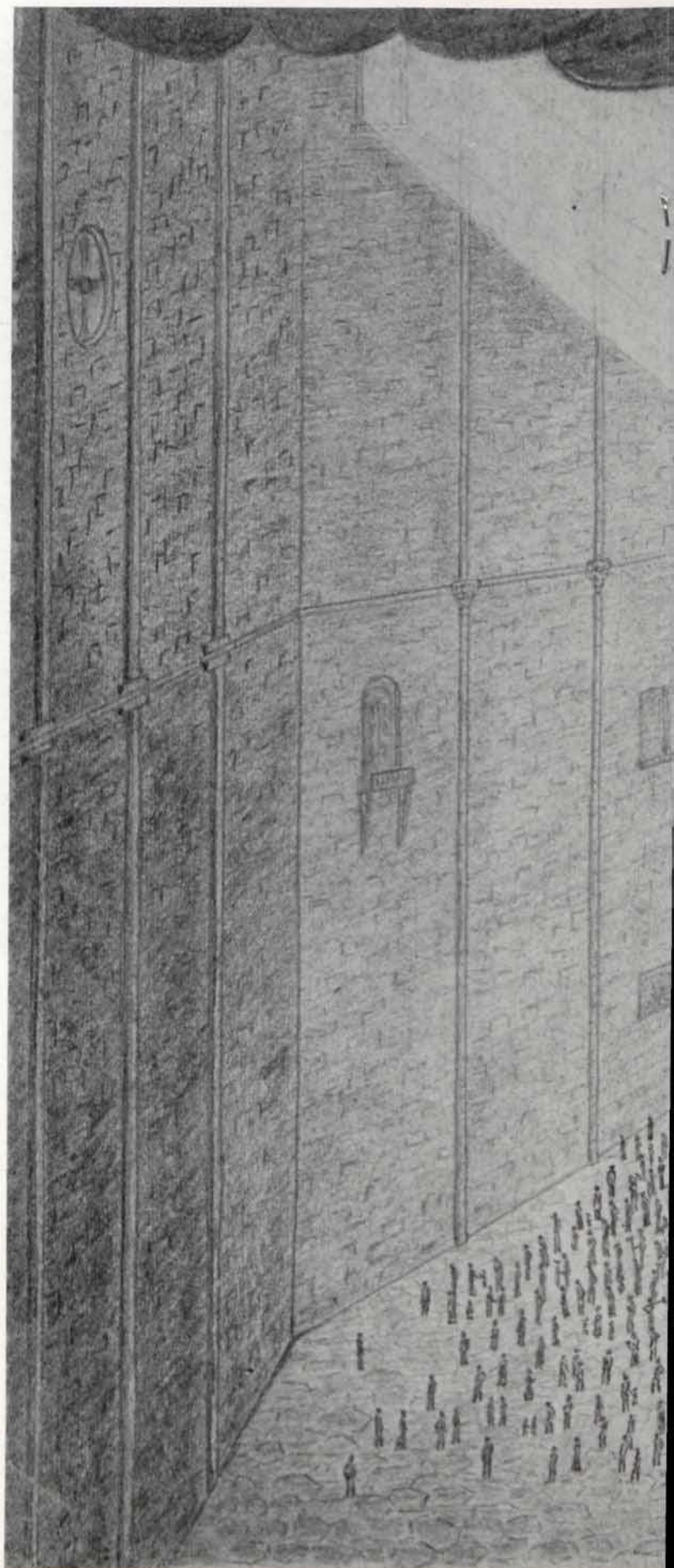
here. Pure intuition is pure truth, clearly revealing itself and readily graspable as such, when not sullied or distorted by . . . the darkness and error to which the objective mind is all too susceptible. Its immediate expression in artistic terms, with no such interferences . . . introduced, will reflect that truth in equal purity. The result of this cosmically involved act of the direct revelation of truth [is] a picture of most decisive outline, authoritative, absolutely irrefutable, and commanding acceptance. And it is precisely these qualities that mark the character of Blake's genuine vision pictures. Blake, quite naturally, is not always at this height.

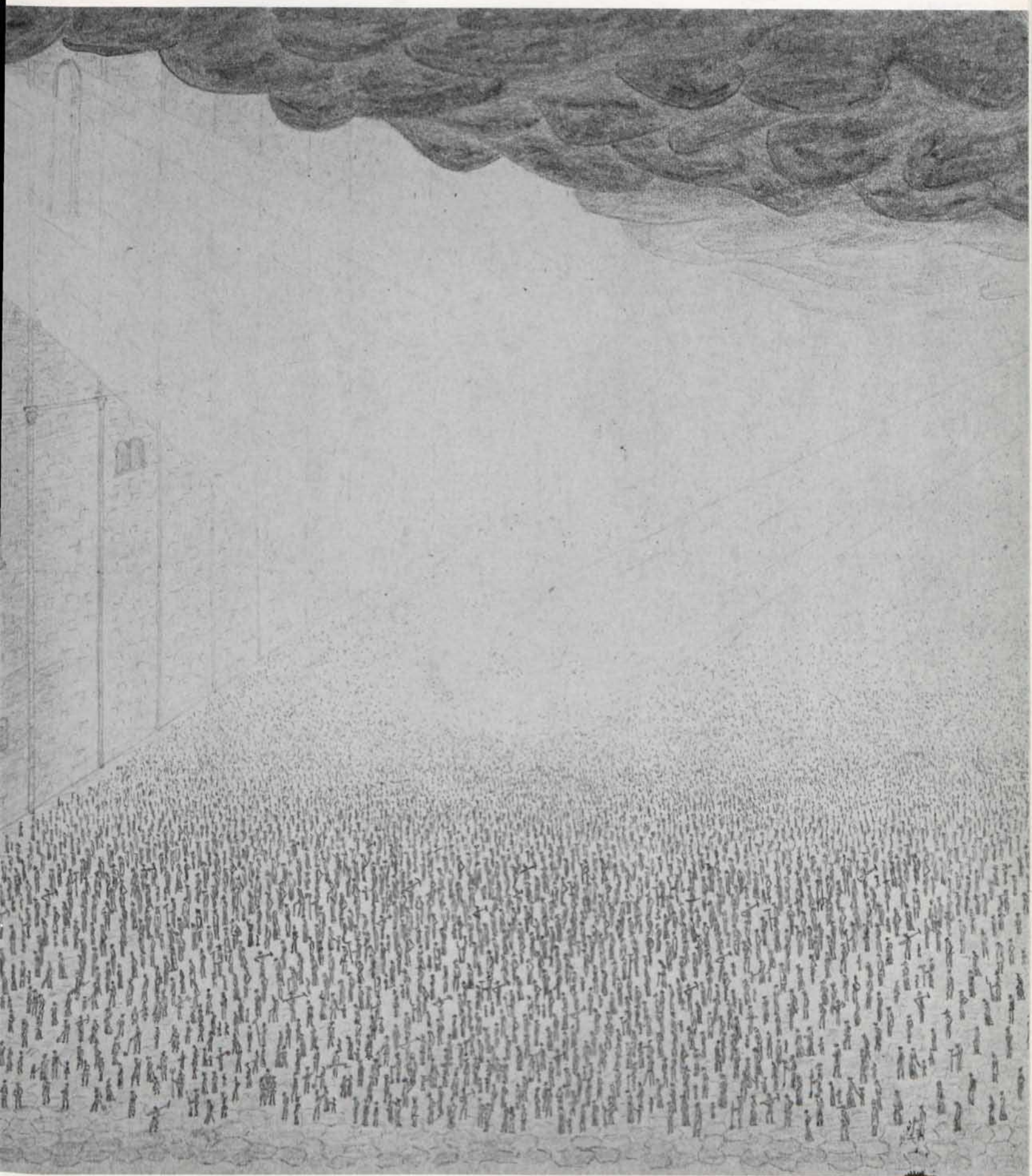
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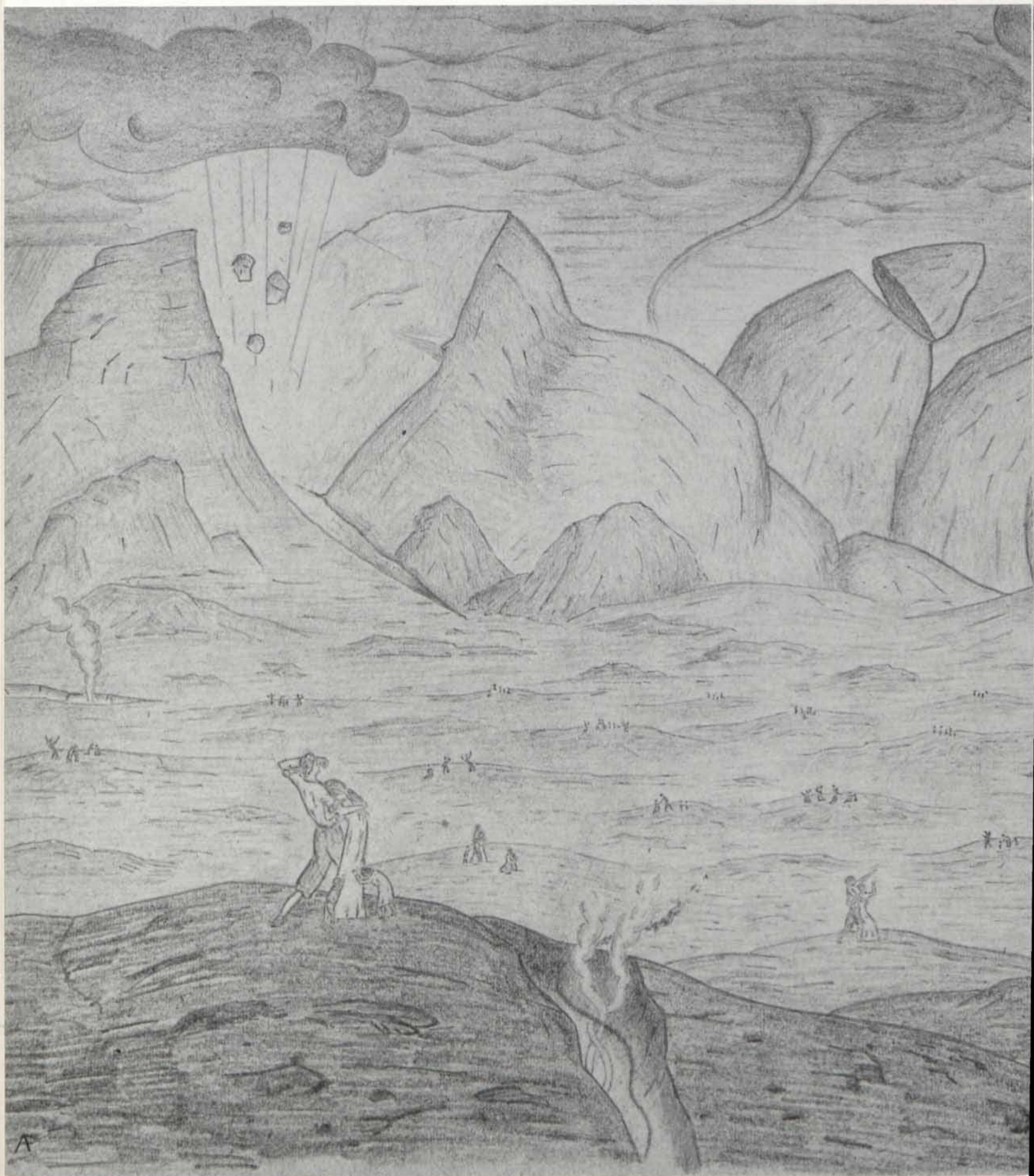
It is this giving straight out of his intuitive visions as they came to him, instead of merely availing himself of the aid of occasional intuitions in the execution of a consciously conceived picture, that accounts for the unique and problematical place which Blake has so long held, and still holds [1948], in the world of art. The many works in which he has followed this course do not appear to reveal a man's conscious devising faculties at play, but rather a superhuman power, as from without, working through the artist's hand. Of these Blake writes, "And though I call them mine, I know they are not mine."

Two of the six somewhat Blake-inspired drawings by the composer illustrating his narration, recorded and drawn in the 1930s from his memory of an experience in the night of 28 December 1905, which he interpreted at length in the final chapter of his book *ms. on intuition*; "The Vision of The Great City," in its most general sense, is a picture of regeneration and reconstruction in its widest human bearings. It is revealed in a five-fold cycle--the end of a certain phase of consciousness with its attendant human order, cataclysm and change, ascent to a higher level, passage through darkness leading to mystical experience, and establishment of a new human order on a higher ground. With the momentary exclusion [1948 writing] of the more obscure fourth phase, it will, I believe, be generally admitted that these are, or contain, issues of first importance to the world today. They are certainly vastly more to the fore now than they were at the time the vision occurred." Farwell's use and illustrations of this experience are a personal example of the sort of occurrence he ascribes to Blake in regard to Blake's more visionary art.

Humanity at a Standstill--Opening scene in Farwell's 1905 "Vision of the Great City." ". . . stood an immense multitude of people, waiting, with dread . . . An age had ended, civilisation collapsed--everything had stopped. Mankind, with its dream--at last--thwarted--beaten. Something must happen, and happen quickly, or the race itself would be at an end."







This is to me the *real* abstract art, as conveying human and cosmic meanings which seldom appear in the art of the day bearing that designation. While we shall probably never do without pictorial art produced in the usual manner, . . . [yet] "without a vision the people perish" is a truth for tomorrow as well as for yesterday. A function hitherto observed chiefly in spiritual seers may very possibly appear and find increasing activity in the sphere of pictorial art. So much did his visions mean to Blake, that when they failed to appear he went to his knees and prayed for them, a quite sufficient testimony to the spiritual character of the man. . . .

In the exercise of imagination without the intuitive possibility, I would merely be fishing around for images in a mind of which I ought to be thoroughly tired. But in the request for intuitive revelations I would be offering myself as a candidate for unlimited mental expansion. Blake was evidently continually tired of what he knew his conscious mind to contain, and so was frequently praying for more visions. The continuous revelation of continually new images of truth is undoubtedly what he justifiably thought of and so greatly exalted as "imagination," and not the former limited and wearying procedure. Hence the amazing divergence and variety of his designs. . . . Blake is right, "One thought fills immensity." . . .

. . . Certain . . . famous painters . . . have had virtually only one pictorial idea or image in their heads. . . . They appear to have spent the best part of their lives seeking to paint this image continually better We doubtless have some of our most perfect specimens of art from such. . . . Blake's mind, on the other hand, was in this respect a *tabula rasa*, ready for the impress of any sort of image whatsoever, of any aspect of the universal diversity. . . . The major attitude and trend, indeed the prayerful urge, of his mind was . . . toward universal imagination--necessarily something beyond his conscious conceptive power. Images from such a super-personal sphere can be communicated to the individual in no other way than through intuition. What comes through intuition *lives*. Thus Blake's art has remained vital, in essential respects "modern," and even prophetic, for a century and a half. In the history, and on the stage, of intuition in art, Blake is surely the protagonist.

Cataclysm--The second vista in Farwell's "Vision of The Great City." In the picture the figures in the foreground he said were himself and "one who was my mother." "It was a period of upheaval and dire events. Occupations had been swept away, and the people thronged the hills. . . . Suddenly there came a great earthquake . . . I and those around me were hurled helplessly about." After a quiet, "Again a mighty earthquake shook and split the earth . . . until in the midst of the convulsions the hills gave way and sank, and mountains rose up from the low places."

