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Blake's Insanity: An Unrecorded Early Reference

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EVENING HYMN. L.M.

Glo - ry to thee, my God, this night, For
all the blessings of the light; Keep me O keep me
King of Kings, un - der thy own Al - migh - ty wings.

2 Forgive me Lord for thy dear son,
The ills which I this day have done;
That with the world, myself, and thee,
Here I sleep, at peace may be.

3 Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed;
Teach me to die, that so I may
With joy behold the Judgment Day.

G L O R I A.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow
Praise him all creatures here below;
Praise him above angelic host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

The *Evening Hymn* in a contemporary hymnbook.

For I though base believe that Thou for me
Hast better things prepared than village gardens
be:

By streams of life, and th'ever blooming tree,
To walk, and sing with antique saints, and see
Bliss above all, dear Lord thy face eternally.¹²

Thus we might imagine the Ancients singing:
Finch leading the round with his alto voice, Palmer's
baritone,¹³ then Calvert and the others joining with
the words,

Glory to Thee my God this night
For all the blessings of the light
Keep me o keep me King of Kings
Beneath thy own almighty wings.

¹ A. H. Palmer, *The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer*, 1892, p. 53.

² Raymond Lister, *Samuel Palmer, a Biography*, 1974, p. 28.

³ Eliza Finch, *Memorials of the Late Francis Oliver Finch*, 1865, pp. 331, 356.

⁴ A. H. Palmer, p. 28n.

⁵ Finch, p. 45.

⁶ A. H. Palmer, p. 42.

⁷ Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 26-27.

⁸ *The Letters of Samuel Palmer*, ed. Raymond Lister (Oxford, 1974) I, 77.

⁹ Finch, pp. 355-56.

¹⁰ For this and other information, I am indebted to Dr. Richard Luckett and Mr. Richard Andrewes, both of the University of Cambridge.

¹¹ A. H. Palmer, p. 13.

¹² Lister, pp. 70-71.

¹³ In the notes of A. H. Palmer, communicated by Mr. Raymond Lister.

BLAKE'S INSANITY: AN UNRECORDED EARLY REFERENCE

Jenijoy La Belle

Published references to William Blake prior to the appearance of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* in 1863 are uncommon, generally brief, all too often inaccurate—but still worthy of notice as curious bits of Blakeana. G. E. Bentley, Jr., in his monumental *Blake Books*, attempts to list "all works published before 1863 which refer to Blake at all, except catalogues," as he states in his Introduction.¹ A previously unnoticed reference appears in Thomas John Gullick and John Timbs, *Painting Popularly Explained*, first published in London in 1859 by "Kent and Co. (late Bogue), Fleet Street." A two-page overview of "The Rise of Modern Water-Colour Painting" appears towards the end of this 318-page discussion of painting techniques. There (pp. 302-04), the authors note the early masters of the British school of watercolorists, including Paul Sandby, John Cozens, and Thomas Girtin. The section concludes with the following two sentences:

[Joseph Mallord William] Turner is even greater in water-colours than in oil; but several other eminent oil painters have distinguished themselves also in water-colour painting. The following are some of the principal deceased masters of this branch of art, viz., [William] Blake, and [Richard] Dadd (who both died insane), [Thomas] Rowlandson (the caricaturist), [George Fennel] Robson, [George] Barrett, [John] Varley, Samuel Prout, [Peter] Dewint, and Copley Fielding.²

It is surprising to find Blake included in an 1859 list of "principal deceased masters" in water-color; his appearance here suggests that Blake's

artistic reputation was being quietly resurrected shortly before the publication of Gilchrist's biography. But the most remarkable feature of the passage is the symmetry of its errors: Blake was dead, but did not die insane; Dadd was insane, but did not die until 1886.

Gullick and Timbs very probably lifted some of their misinformation from *A Handbook to the Water Colours, Drawings, and Engravings, in the [Manchester] Art Treasures Exhibition, Being a Reprint of Critical Notices Originally Published in "The Manchester Guardian"* (London, 1857).³ In this work, pp. 12-13, the anonymous author compares Blake and Dadd and asserts that "both were mad . . . [but] Blake's fancies were lovely, rather than terrible."⁴

The statement--premature by a mere twenty-seven years--that Dadd was deceased may have resulted from a misreading of other published statements. The *Art-Union* of October 1843 took note of Dadd's insanity, his murder of his father in August 1843, and his subsequent confinement. The journal apostrophizes the unfortunate man as follows: "The late Richard Dadd. Alas! . . . for, although the grave has not actually closed over him, he must be classed among the dead."⁵ Perhaps Gullick and Timbs misconstrued this (or some other) elegy for Dadd's psychological demise, and this prompted them to list him, along with Blake, among the principal, insane, and deceased British masters of watercolor.

¹ Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 10. Selections from brief references to Blake, 1831-62, are reprinted in Bentley, ed., *William Blake: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 220-69.

² p. 304. Blake's name does not appear in the highly selective index. Timbs later wrote a sketch of Blake's life, based mostly on Gilchrist, in his *English Eccentrics and Eccentricities* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), pp. 339-50.

³ First noted in connection with Blake in Suzanne R. Hoover, "Fifty Additions to Blake Bibliography: Further Data for the Study of His Reputation in the Nineteenth Century," *Blake Newsletter*, 5 (Winter, 1971-72), 169. See also Bentley, ed., *Blake: The Critical Heritage*, p. 258; Bentley, *Blake Books*, p. 660 no. A563. The original "Notices" in the *Manchester Guardian* have not been traced. On p. 297 of their book, Gullick and Timbs refer to the *Catalogue* (different from the *Handbook*) of the 1857 Manchester exhibition and on p. 303 they refer to the *Handbook*, the authorship of which they attribute to "Mr. Tom Taylor."

⁴ p. 12; quoted from Bentley, *Blake Books*, p. 660.

⁵ Vol. 5, p. 267; quoted from Patricia Allderidge, *The Late Richard Dadd*, exhibition catalogue (London: The Tate Gallery, 1974), p. 9. Allderidge notes the reference to Dadd in *Painting Popularly Explained*, but does not record its authors or the reference to Blake.

A NEWLY DISCOVERED WATERMARK AND A VISIONARY'S WAY WITH HIS DATES

Martin Butlin

Recent conservation treatment at the Tate Gallery has revealed that the Gallery's large color print of "Newton," signed and dated by Blake in his own hand "1795 WB inv [in monogram]", is watermarked "JWHATMAN/1804".¹ The watermark, in the margin of the actual design, was only found when the fine canvas on which the print had been mounted was removed.² Eight of the other large color prints in the Tate Gallery, also from the collection of Thomas Butts, were similarly mounted on canvas though "Pity" was lifted from its canvas preparatory to being lent to an exhibition in 1980.³ It is expected that others will be similarly treated in due course, when further watermarks may be discovered; "Hecate" is already known to be watermarked "1794/JWHATMAN" but was not dated by Blake.

The first documentary record of any of the twelve designs is the inclusion of eight in an account between Blake and Thomas Butts of 3 March 1806, apparently as having been delivered, four at a time, on 5 July and 7 September 1805; "Newton" was apparently delivered on the latter date. All the works delivered in 1805 are in fact dated "1795", with the possible exception of the copy of "Christ Appearing to the Apostles" now in the Yale University Art Gallery, the only print from these eight not in the Tate Gallery. Nine prints from the Butts collection (seven of those listed in the account, including "Newton," together with two titles not listed in any account) were sold by Butts's grandson, Captain F. J. Butts, to W. Graham Robertson in 1905 or 1906 and were presented by him to the Tate Gallery in 1939.

A number of cases of what may be called conceptual, mythical or even wishful pre-datings by Blake are already known. There are several examples of the later state of an engraving bearing the date of the first state.⁴ It is also highly likely that the version of "The Penance of Jane Shore" that Blake claimed in the catalogue of his exhibition in 1809 had been "done above Thirty Years ago" was not the small, immature example from his series of watercolors of subjects from English history now in a British private collection--that version is easily reconcilable with a date of c. 1779--but the larger, more finished and more accomplished version in the Tate Gallery that seems to date from about 1793.⁵ But what, in the case of this print of "Newton," is the original to which the date "1795" applies? Many people, including myself, have supposed that Blake printed more than one example of each color print at one time, by a sort of monotype process, finishing each print in pen and watercolor on demand at a later date.⁶ This would mean that the two known versions of "Newton," like the (up to three) known versions of the other prints in the series,