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M I N U T E
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“Blake’s Last Picture”

Leslie Parris

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4. Every Thing Has Its Vermin

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Because Ruthven Todd had suggested the bright idea that among the Cathedral Cities "Hereford, ancient Guardian of Wales," might be Thomas Johnes of Hafod, Esq. M.P. Lord Lieutenant of the County of Cardigan, &c. &c. the "Dear Friend" of B.H. Malkin--and I'm using Johnes' titles as given on Malkin's "title" page (p. i) of *A Father's Memoirs of His Child* (Fleet Street, 1806)--my curiosity led me to the Columbia University copy of the *Memoirs*.

Todd's hunch seemed good. Malkin had visited Johnes in his palaces: "your mountains . . . your magic creation in the wilds of Cardiganshire" where "We were naturally carried forward, from the rugged sublimity of nature, interspersed here with the opening promise, and there with the thriving luxuriance of judicious cultivation . . . into the track of human life" etc.

But what most struck me about this book, this copy inscribed by its first owner "Jabez Legg 1809," was an instant illustration of the rest of the Malkin sentence I've just half quoted: "...human life, implicated as it is with pleasures which blossom but for a season, and pains which are indigenious, and grow rank and wanton in the soil". For Mr. Legg has recorded his pains in the margins with a dry pencil. These notes are few but, read backward in the book (a proper sequence for them) they are climactic. On p. 157 there is a sour note on the impossibility of Malkin's fond boast that his son's particular shape of head tallied "exactly . . . with the established principles of beauty": these, being general, the head cannot have been "any particular head at all." At p. 55 Jabez Legg is wearily unimpressed by an engraved specimen of young Malkin's infant handwriting: "There certainly is nothing remarkable in the writing/ Many Children write better at his age".

But the high point of boredom, where Mr. Legg unmistakably wishes he had his money back, occurs exactly at the point where we others wish we owned the book and that there were more, more. For Malkin has been telling the world (for the first time) about William Blake and quoting his poetry, for twenty-four pages (xviii-xli). The quoting ends with "The Tiger" on page xli. And this, for Mr. Legg, is the last straw. His comment: "This is a little too much about Mr. Blake."

Minute Particulars

Mr. Leslie Parris of the Tate Gallery sends us a copy of "Blake's Last Picture," a hitherto unnoticed poem by George Powell Thomas (*Poems*, London, 1847). According to a footnote by the author, the poem is based on a passage in Allan Cunningham's *Lives of the Painters*. The poem is some 100 lines long and, as Mr. Parris says, "a feeble effort." Thomas was, according to his title page, a Captain in the Bengal Army and author of *Views of Simla*. "So far as I know," Mr. Parris writes, "he was no relative of the Joseph Thomas I've been working on recently."