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The Origins of the William Blake Trust

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The Origins of the William Blake Trust by George Goyder

In Sir Geoffrey Keynes's autobiography *The Gates of Memory*, the origins of the William Blake Trust are ascribed to the year 1948 and the desire to make a worthy facsimile of *Jerusalem*. This was not as it happens the beginning of the idea. More than two years earlier (1 November 1945) I drafted a letter to Dr. Thomas Jones asking that the Pilgrim Trust help in a project to reproduce Blake's engravings, paintings and prophetic books. As the text of the letter shows, our first priority was to reproduce the *Milton* series of drawings, secondly the Bible illustrations in tempera and watercolor, and thirdly, *Jerusalem*. Before mailing this letter I sent a draft to

Geoffrey which he returned with a few minor corrections. Dr. Jones replied asking for time to consider the matter, so on 4 June 1947 I wrote again mentioning my previous letter and this time put forward *Jerusalem* as our first priority as the unique copy of that book had meantime become available for reproduction.

The original objectives of the William Blake Trust were very broadly defined and at no time have its aims been abandoned. It is more a case of the Trust using the technical expertise of Arnold Fawcus and his Trianon Press to the best advantage. Now that the William Blake Trust has successfully completed the long-awaited *Job* engravings in their several states it might be thought that the Trust has fulfilled the task for which it was formed. This is not the case. Three of the four original aims of the Trust remain uncompleted and some have not even been begun. There is work aplenty for the Trust still to do.

November 1st, 1945.

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Dear Dr. Jones,

You kindly sent me a copy of the Annual Report of the Pilgrim Trust. I was struck with the help you are giving to the encouragement of literature and am prompted by it to put a suggestion to you which has been in my mind for some time.

William Blake is not only a great English poet but equally a great English painter - if not the greatest. His work is hardly known except to a small number of people. The reason is, I believe, partly that some of his best paintings are still in private hands such as those of Graham Robertson and Mrs. Stirling in this country, and Philip Hofer in America; partly because no adequate reproductions have been made.

In 1935 ~~John~~ ^{The Pierpont Morgan Library} undertook the reproduction of the three known coloured copies of the *Job*, together with the original pencil sketches and the engravings. This magnificent production in six sections enabled the student to see Blake's work in a form hardly distinguishable from the original works. I understand the price to the trade was 10 guineas a copy, and that the total expense of production was between £5,000. and £8,000. 300 copies were sold in America and 200 in England. By now the original outlay should have been recovered. If you have not seen the *Job* I would like to show you a set next time you are in London. Geoffrey Keynes, who is the leading authority on Blake, wrote the introduction, and in every way the work is superb. We owe a great deal to ~~Miss~~ ^{The Pierpont Morgan Library} for this enterprise.

My suggestion is that to encourage artists in this country and U.S.A. to study Blake (I believe there is no more inspiring master than Blake - he literally teems with

P.T.O.

inspiration), plans should now be made for reproducing the other great Blake series in the same way as was done for the Book of *Job* by Morgan and by the National Art Collections Fund for the Dante drawings.

My first priority is to reproduce the *Milton* series. Some of these are in Boston, some in the Huntington Library, and some at Cambridge. The series include *Paradise Lost and Regained*, *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso*, *The Nativity*, and *Comus*. It will be necessary to obtain the loan of the American originals and this will take time; hence the need to start now.

The second great work cycle never hitherto reproduced is the series of Biblical temperas illustrating the Life of Our Lord. All the paintings need putting together and reproducing in fine collotype, as used for the *Job*. When they are seen together the world may appreciate for the first time the glorious beauty and religious creativeness of this wonderful artist. You probably know some of Blake's paintings of Christ's Life, such as the Infant John riding on the Lamb. No more tender presentation of the God-head - Divine Humanity and Human Divinity - can be imagined. There is nothing else I know of in Western art since the Reformation which conveys such deep religious feeling in form, colour and composition, as do these temperas, some of the finest of which are still in private collections. Ruthven Todd's catalogue ~~will~~ ^{will} help in tracing these.

Thirdly, there is the magnificent coloured *Jerusalem* in the possession of Mrs. Stirling. Joseph Wickstead is still available to write the introduction for this book, but he is getting on in years and there is no young Blake scholar with the same understanding and learning.

Then there are the eighteen paintings illustrating Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* which Lord Crew sold recently to America.

Progress ^{the late}

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They have been poorly reproduced in the United States, but the book is unobtainable in England.

It may be many months before Emery Walker & Co. can re-assemble their expert men, but it is not too early to start planning the undertaking.

Geoffrey Keynes tells me he would give all help possible in the project. I imagine the cost would be twice or three times as great as before the war. The outlay for the Milton series might, therefore, be £10,000. to £15,000. A ~~smaller~~ ^{smaller} figure would cover the Biblical series. ~~These~~ ^{These} are outside figures. As I understand ~~the~~ ^{Morgan} recovered the whole of the outlay for the Job, the question for the Pilgrim Trust should be one of outlay rather than of expenditure. I am very anxious to interest you in the project, for I know of nothing else better calculated to inspire the present generation of artists and to link England and U.S.A. in creative amity than a noble and really worthy presentation of Blake's work to the public here and in America for the first time.

I should like to talk further with you about this together with Geoffrey Keynes, and will be grateful if you will let me know when you are coming to London.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Tom Jones,
The Pilgrim Trust,
Harlech,
N. Wales.

GAG:MB

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2 Nov 1945

My dear George,

I return your draft with some suggested alterations. I am not sure about the "first priority" - it would be much easier to get hold of the Jerusalem than any of the others.

Yesterday I secured my sixth

copy of Remember Me! It is, of course, different from the others.

I went to an interesting sale of pictures at Christie's today. You could have peopled your halls with handsome ancestors, flower pieces, bird pieces, etc. (mostly from Whaddon Hall) for the price of two shill. (or one) ^{two} affectionate Geoffrey

THE PILGRIM TRUST

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8th November 1945

Dear Goyder,

I have read with much interest your letter about the Blake drawings, and fully share your sense of their great importance in the art life of this country.

The Trust is at the present moment deeply committed to the publication of several very expensive works. You may have seen the first volume of MEDIAEVAL WALL PAINTING; it is only the first of several volumes. Then we have RECORDING BRITAIN on the stocks, and RECORDING SCOTLAND to follow. The range of present costs is very high, and that is another reason why we should delay for a year or two sounding the Trustees on a project of this kind.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Jones

George Goyder, Esq.