

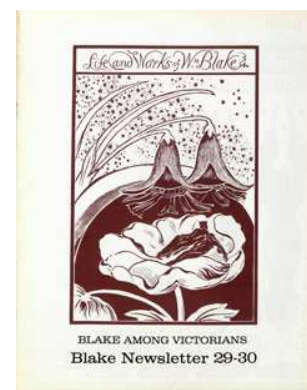
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

A R T I C L E

John Todhunter's Lectures on Blake, 1872-1874

Ian Fletcher

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 8, Issue 1-2, Summer-Fall 1974, pp.
4-14



John Todhunter's Lectures on Blake, 1

In January 1960, through the generosity of the poet's son, some of the literary manuscripts of John Todhunter (1839-1916) were presented to the University of Reading. Best remembered as a friend of John Butler Yeats and later of his son William Butler Yeats, and as one of the first poets to adopt the "programme" of the "Irish Renaissance" by the use of Celtic myth in his volume *The Banshee* (1888), Todhunter was also a member of the Rhymers' Club. More than an accomplished minor poet, Todhunter was a dramatist who, if not successful was at least adventurous: the range of his work extends from pastoral to the Ibsenite "problem" play. As a critic, he was as adventurous and more gifted: he anticipates Yeats in promoting non-naturalist drama; while his *Study of Shelley* (1880) has been warmly commended by Professor Harold Bloom.

Among the unpublished manuscript material at Reading are four lectures on William Blake: MS 202/4/3. This altogether consists of fifty-five leaves.

- Lecture VII (12 leaves) dated 31 October 1872
- Lecture VIII (13 leaves) dated 5 November 1872 (incomplete)
- Lecture XVI (24 leaves) dated 10 March 1874
- Lecture XVIII (6 leaves) dated 12 March 1874

In the text I give here, ampersands have been expanded, spelling has been normalized and editorial punctuation is enclosed by a square bracket.

These lectures form part of a cycle on the English poets delivered at Alexandra College, Dublin. Of this cycle, only the lectures on Blake appear to have survived.

Alexandra College¹ had been founded in 1866 by R.C. Trench, Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, friend of F. D. Maurice and Tennyson, jointly with

the remarkable Anne Jellicoe, pioneer in modes of training women for suitable employment. Alexandra had been preceded in the "higher" education of ladies by Queen's (1848) and Bedford Colleges, London. It was an "Ascendancy" institution closely linked to Trinity College, Dublin. Its primary aim, indeed, was to persuade Trinity to admit women to degrees and itself to become an associated College of the new bisexual model. In this it was to be oddly disappointed: women were admitted to Trinity in 1904 but Alexandra College, despite an admirable academic record, was left to its own devices. Those involved becoming a grammar school, even if an extraordinary one. Alexandra's ambition accounts for the distinction of its lecturers and the demanding quality of their lectures. In the 1870s lectures were given by, among others, J. P. Mahaffy and Edward Dowden and we are told that Dowden's *Shakespeare: His Mind and Art* was first given in the form of a series of lectures to the ladies of Alexandra College. The series itself formed part of the "Saturday Lectures" given between 1869 and 1877 in Trinity and by Trinity staff.

Todhunter had been appointed Professor of English Literature at Alexandra in 1870 and is shown also as an Examiner for Certificates of

1 I am much indebted to Miss Honor Stuart, Librarian of Alexandra College, for furnishing me with information and with literature, particularly *Alexandra College, Dublin, Jubilee Record 1866-1916*. My thanks are also due to the Todhunter family and to the Librarian of the University of Reading.

Ian Fletcher, Reader in English Literature at the University of Reading, is currently Visiting Professor at the University of Illinois. He has published monographs on Pater, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Swinburne; edited two collections of essays; and edited the poems of Lionel Johnson, John Gray, and Victor Plarr.

1872-1874

EDITED BY IAN FLETCHER



Education in the *Calendar* for 1874.² It seems unlikely that the Blake lectures formed part of the "Saturday" or any other formal series. More plausibly, they come under the rubric for the English Literature Division and would have been given in Alexandra itself at 5, 6 and 7 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin:

a series of Lectures on the history of English Literature from the earliest times to the present, the lives and writings of the more important and representative poets and prose writers; the successive variations of our literature in connexion with national history.³

Todhunter clearly used the cycle delivered in 1872 two years later, occasionally rewriting and correcting. This would account for the cancelled beginning of Lecture VI (24 October 1872), which was superseded by two new pages of introductory matter. The whole now became Lecture XVI of the new cycle and was repaginated. The cancelled passage runs:

Instead of giving my intended lecture on the poems of Burns today, I think it better to introduce you at once to a much more remarkable man--William Blake whose name perhaps many of you may never have heard of before.

This historically interesting statement is substantially repeated on the first page of the new lecture (here p. 11).

These lectures, brief though they are, document a discriminating enthusiasm at a moment when Blake's reputation was still equivocal. Nine years had elapsed since the publication of Gilchrist's life of the "Pictor Ignotus" and on Gilchrist Todhunter depends heavily for his

biographical material. R. H. Shepherd had furnished two editions of the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience* in 1866 and in 1868 respectively, and in that latter year Swinburne's brilliant essay had appeared. In January of the following year, James Smetham, painter, poet and associate of Rossetti, published his long notice of Gilchrist in *The London Quarterly Review*. Like the Rossettis and Swinburne, Todhunter's response to Blake was that of a practicing poet; in his first collection *Laurella* there are distinct tinges of the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. Two of the poems there had been published as affectionate parodies of Blake in *Kottabos* of 1871. But Todhunter's involvement with Blake goes back to his association with John Butler Yeats's "Brotherhood" in the last years of the 1860s (E. J. Ellis was also associated with the group) for the Brotherhood had its own cult of Blake.

Occasionally profound in generalization, Todhunter's main gift is for a judicious closeness. He compares favorably with his immediate contemporaries: Smetham is not without interest on the painting, but has a Methodist distrust of all Blake's poetry after the *Songs of Innocence*. For Smetham, indeed, Blake is painfully mad, almost in the sense of diabolic possession. Swinburne "kidnaps" Blake, finally imprisoning him in sterile dialectic between Aestheticism and Puritanism. Todhunter's reading of *The Marriage*

2 See pp. 18 and 28. Other Professors in the earlier years included T. Kells Ingram, incongruously author of that famous nationalist lyric, "Who fears to speak of Ninety-Eight!" and G. A. Greene, later a fellow member of the Rhymers' Club.

3 See *Alexandra College Dublin, Calendar for the Year 1874* . . . , p. 29.

of *Heaven and Hell* is usefully conditioned by interest in Hegel and Whitman. His interpretation of Blake's paradoxes takes Todhunter beyond Swinburne into a synthetic view of Blake's moral vision, a vision that is certainly not that of the coterie poet. Blake is seen as prophet of a Whitmanesque "democracy" with the caveat that this "democracy" is a preparation for, rather than the realized, Kingdom of Heaven. Interestingly, Todhunter uses the word "modern" polemically, not as synonym for "contemporary" but to describe Blake's *avant garde* qualities. In reading these lectures, we ourselves experience the wrestlings and rewards of a sympathetic and acute mid-Victorian reader of Blake, whose occasional insights are "modern" in his own challenging sense.

Lecture VII, 31 October 1872

Songs of Innocence

I daresay many of you who listened to my most meagre and fragmentary sketch of the life of Blake on Tuesday,¹ taking it in connection with the great admiration which I expressed for the man, thought that I was a little mad myself, to say nothing of Blake. Today I hope to give you some grounds for this admiration of mine, which no doubt appears rather extravagant. I must however declare at starting that I feel it to be the most difficult thing in the world to give a lecture on Blake which shall be at all satisfactory to myself or intelligible to you. With other poets I assume you have some acquaintance but Blake is quite a new discovery even for literary men. Other poets speak a language not very far removed from our ordinary speech, but he has a mystical vocabulary of his own, which no one has as yet thoroughly mastered. Other poets speak in metaphors which are more or less easy of solution; but he speaks in dark myths which tax the highest imagination to read clear. Besides this Blake is constantly dealing with abstruse psychological ideas rather than the phenomena of the external world. He is probably the most intensely subjective of all our poets. You can easily perceive how hard it is adequately to treat of the works of such a man in one or two lectures. The most I can hope for is, that some of you may be induced to study him for yourselves.

Let me first try to give you some idea of the position which Blake occupies in our literature and of the nature of these psychological ideas which he is so constantly handling. I have called Blake a modern, and I daresay you are a little puzzled by the term. To understand this we must study a little the ideas upon which we find the great poets most constantly dwelling and the problems which most occupy their attention. We may class these ideas under two heads viz. the idea of the revolt of passion against restrictions, and the idea of the revolt of the individual

against social tyrannies. Every great poet of the last half century is loud in his demand for liberty of passion and liberty of action--freedom of the individual will. But if the individual be thus free, what guarantee is there that he will not injure his neighbour and reduce society to chaos? The answer is that love is the harmonizer of the passions, and that large idea of friendship--the universal brotherhood of democracy--the harmonizer of human action. But this introduces the further question how we are to attain to these? And this gives rise to the endless practical problems which are constantly agitating society--the relations between the sexes, between peoples and their rulers, and between nation and nation. All these problems have two sets of answers--the one prosaic and practical, the other poetical and utopian--the one belonging to the domain of morality, the other to the domain of poetry. It is the difference between the Law and the Prophets. Hence arises the perplexing paradox that Art which is not moral (the rigid moralist would say immoral) is yet a good and great thing--and the further paradox that poets who are constantly leaping the barriers of morality are yet our highest teachers. The fact is that if you want to become moral you must go to the moralist, if you want to be filled with divine aspirations you must go to the poet. The moralist points to the stern path of duty, the poet makes your heart beat with intenser life. But at bottom the two are in accord and are necessary to each other. Morality rises to its highest pitch when through the impulse communicated by the poet duty becomes delight. Love is the only perfect fulfilling of the law. Morality is a rigid law imposed from without, love is the perfect law of liberty imposed from within. The poet, so far as he is a poet acknowledges and can acknowledge no law from without--hence the moral difficulties in which he is perpetually plunged--if he does not attain to love he plays the devil with morality and society which is based upon it. We find this antagonism between law and liberty--which is in fact ultimately the antagonism between necessity and free will--taking its highest philosophical form in the antagonism between Science and Religion, science acknowledging nothing but the Reign of Law. Religion nothing but the reign of miracle. The progress of mankind is a struggle for the reconciliation of these two principles--what Blake calls the Marriage of Heaven and Hell. Poetry is constantly dashing ahead in pursuit of some golden impossibility. Morality and Science come toiling after striving to make this impossibility possible. Poetry revolts against morality and morality against poetry. We see this all through history--We see it on a grand scale at the time of the Reformation. The Medieval Catholic Church was the incarnation of mystical poetry--the Protestant Church is the incarnation of prosaic morality. The Mediaeval Church in its

¹ This refers back to the cancelled opening of Lecture VI (29 October 1872), which has not survived, now at the top of f. 3.[f.1.] of Lecture XVI.

decay gave birth to Jesuitry and the whole system of immorality of which the Sale of Indulgences in Luther's time was the culminating point. Protestantism in decay gives birth to the whited sepulchre morality of modern society--against which the poets are in revolt.

Now the ideas which I have just been endeavouring to put in an intelligible form are emphatically modern ideas. They underlie all literature of course, and in the Bible they are constantly recurring in various forms--but formerly they were the mystical secrets dimly understood by a few, now they are the discoveries of the whole race--seen in all their length and breadth by mere thinkers as well as by poets. They are the very essence of Blake's Philosophy. In his "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" he uses Heaven in the sense of Law and order, and Hell in the sense of passion and energy. In the marriage of the two, the liberty of perfect law and the perfect law of liberty become one.

To descend from these perplexing abstractions to particulars, Blake is emphatically a modern in several of his favourite ideas and feelings which we shall come across in due course in considering his poems. In speaking of these, I shall confine myself almost entirely to the "Songs of Innocence and of Experience", which are to be had separately for a few shillings;² but before going to them let me say a few words about Blake's mere poetical style, which in itself is such a remarkable phenomenon in the 18th century. As illustrations of that I shall take a number of poems prefixed to the Songs of Innocence in Gilchrist's *Life*. One of them was written before he was 14, and while perhaps recalling some of the Chatterton poems in general form, is quite unique as a piece of poetic imagination and melody of versification (How sweet I roamed etc. p. 8).³ Others of these poems are quite Elizabethan in character (one called "My silks and fine array" and Song p. 9). Others again seemed to have been inspired by Collins but are much more spontaneous and imaginative than his poems. (To the Muses (p. 10) contains such expressions as these

"The chambers of the sun that now
From ancient melody have ceased"

and

"Or the blue regions of the air,
Where the melodious winds have birth".

To the Evening Star, To Spring, and To Summer--also surpass Collins in his own style--Keats if he had lived in those days might almost have written "To Summer" (p. 13).

The Song "I love the jocund dance" breathes the very spirit of Anti-Puritanic innocent mirth. It is apparently addressed to his wife (p. 6). To the pure all things are pure.

"Love and harmony combine" is a mystical poem on marriage (p. 5). These two poems are eminently Blake's own.

The "Mad Song" (p. 7) is unsurpassed by anything in the language for subtle melody of versification.

The fragment of a drama entitled *King Edward the Third* written when Blake was quite young shows a good deal of dramatic power, and is wonderfully Shakespearean in its imagery.

In all these poems we find this illiterate, unappreciated painter writing with a felicitous spontaneity which it is difficult to parallel elsewhere--just at a time when false polish and false sentiment were the great characteristics of our literature. In Blake we find a return to nature and inspiration in despite of all frigid rules.

We now come to the "Songs of Innocence". This series is in direct contrast to the other series called "Songs of Experience". The former are full of childlike simplicity and unquestioning faith, innocent happiness--the latter of paradox and mystery and questioning and passion. To go from the Songs of Innocence to the Songs of Experience is like turning from Haydn to Beethoven. But the "Songs of Innocence" close with a hint that the highest truth and its highest happiness is a thing of the childlike mind: and the Songs of Experience are full of suggestions of a solution of all these doubts and antagonism, and end with a poem which speaks of a regeneration and spiritual resurrection of mankind.⁴

The Songs of Innocence are thus quaintly introduced (p. 27).⁵

The "Echoing Green" is a song of Innocent mirth, like "I love the jocund dance."

"The Lamb" expresses the child's idea of creation and of life-seeking no solution of problems but taking the love and fatherhood of God on trust (p. 29).

"The Chimney-sweeper" is the child's solution of the miseries which so soon come upon him (p. 32). The spirit of adoption by which every Abba-Father⁶ is the child's spirit.

2 Probably a reference to Richard Herne Shepherd's editions of 1866 and 1868. "Separately" means separately from Blake's other works.

3 The references here and later, unless otherwise stated, are to the second volume of A. Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, Pictor Ignotus* (1863).

4 The poem alluded to is "To Tirzah."

5 "Piping down the valleys wild" on p. 26 of Gilchrist, Volume II.

6 Abba. The word is a transliteration of the Aramaic for "Father" and is found at *Mark* 14:36, at *Romans* 8:15 and at *Galatians* 4:6.

In "the Divine Image", this feeling of the fatherhood of God makes the child's heart throb with brotherly love toward all men.

"All must love the human form
In heathen, Turk, or Jew;
Where mercy, love, and pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too."

The theologian of the tract-shops has a number of epithets Deist, Atheist, Infidel, which he loves to brand men with, when he wishes to put them outside the pale of our sympathy--much as boys tie a kettle to a dog's tail and then cry mad dog after him. Blake regards such men as Paine and Godwin with sympathy so far as they are striving after truth and with pity so far as they are plunged in error and blindness. He apparently alludes to such men in the closing poem of the Songs of Innocence (p. 46).

The poem called "Night" is more mystical than any of these, and expresses the child's trust that though Nature be apparently as Tennyson says "one with rapine"--yet even evil itself is a means with God.

In the Cradle Song, and Infant Joy, Blake enters into the feelings of a mother as few poets have done before. There is no namby-pambyism in these songs, and no effort to be dramatic. In Tennyson's "Sea Dreams" there is a mother's song which is full of artificial prettiness--he condescends to the mother's standpoint, and the result is painful. Blake's songs are almost as far above this as his religious poems are above the hymns which every idiot who is pious and can rhyme thinks himself justified in deluging the world with. In Infant Joy (p. 42) the mother holds a dialogue with her little nameless baby of two days old--and then sings over it as it smiles in her face.

I shall close with the lines called Spring which are full of the spiritualized essence of a child's open-air animal spirits. (p. 40).

Next week I hope to lecture on the "Songs of Experience".

Lecture VIII, 5 November 1872 Songs of Experience

The "Songs of Experience", as I told you in my last lecture, are in direct contrast to the "Songs of Innocence". The "Songs of Innocence" are full of unquestioning childlike faith--the "Songs of Experience" are full of faith also; but it is sceptical faith, struggling with the hard problems which experience brings. There all is cheerful gazing upon the face of God, and trustful rest upon His bosom--here all is indignant appeal and restless questioning, and solemn musing. The faith of the "Songs of Innocence" is a rapturous belief in the

reality of things seen and felt--what the hands have actually handled of the Word of Life.⁷ The faith of the Songs of Experience is something more--it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen".⁸ The poet of the Songs of Experience still sings in the presence of the Most High, but now He has withdrawn himself behind the clouds which veil his sanctuary.

The contrast between the two series is made more definite by the same titles being in several instances repeated in both--the subjects being handled very differently in the latter series. Poems entitled "Holy Thursday", "The Chimney Sweeper", "A Cradle Song", and "Nurse's Song" occur in both; while "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found" of the Songs of Innocence correspond to some extent to "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" and the shorter poems "A Little Boy Lost" and "A Little Girl Lost" of the Songs of Experience. The "Lamb" of the one contrasts with the "Tiger" of the other as does "Infant Joy" with "Infant Sorrow".

In the Introduction to the "Songs of Experience" the voice of the Bard is heard calling to the Earth in transgression--

"Calling the lapsed soul,
And weeping in the evening dew."

The burthen of this call is similar to that of John the Baptist "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" although differently worded.

The answer of the Earth, whose locks are "covered with grey despair," is to the effect that "cruel jealous selfish fear" has bound "free love" with bondage. This is Blake's perpetual complaint--the human heart is bound down by the bitter restrictions of the moral law. Love and faith laugh consequences to scorn, Prudence and doubt dwell in constant fear of consequences, and give rise to the moral law. Hence Blake's constant scorn of prudence and doubt. But we must distinctly understand Blake on this point. He does not mean to say that the moral law is unnecessary and rashly to be cast off in practice. He knows that the present world is what St. Paul calls "under the law". He expressly says: "Many persons, such as Paine and Voltaire, with some of the ancient Greeks say 'We will not converse concerning good and evil; we will live in Paradise and Liberty.'⁹ You may do so in spirit, but not in the mortal body, as you pretend, till after a Last Judgement". But the whole creation groans and travails to be delivered from this moral law--and will be by this last

7 The hands have handled. Compare 1 John 1:1. "Our hands have handled" in allusion to the human person of the Divine Word.

8 The substance of things hoped for. Hebrews 11:1. The definition of faith.

9 "Many persons, such as Paine and Voltaire etc." from A Vision of the Last Judgment.

Judgment. By this Last Judgment Blake means something very different from what our worthy but prosaic friend the tract shop theologian means. He does *not* mean a melodramatic coming of angels blowing trumpets and sitting on clouds, visible with opera-glasses from the top of the Merriam Hall and other such tabernacles. He means a tremendous spiritual convulsion of men's minds through which their bodies shall become temples of the Holy Ghost--the Lord descending to shake terribly the earth no less really because not visible to the carnal but the spiritual sense. The tract shop theologian is in fact a gross materialist, Blake like the great Hebrews a mystical poet. He speaks of a Last Judgment passing upon a man every time he renounces error and begins to live in the truth.

The next poem in the series--"The Clod and the Pebble" introduces us to one of those paradoxes which we are constantly meeting in our lives (p. 49). The solution of this is that love is what Hegel would call an identity of opposites. It is at once the highest self-interest and the highest self-renunciation.

The "Holy Thursday" of the "Songs of Experience" contrasts with the "Holy Thursday" of the Songs of Innocence. In the earlier series the poet sees only the beauty of this modern idea of philanthropy, and rejoices in the happiness of the little charity school children singing in St. Pauls. Now he sees only the reverse side--the show of our philanthropies and the horrors of Beadledom (50), Poverty, Blake would seem to say, is the result of worldly prudence and Mammon worship. If we were all living in Christian charity there would be no necessity for what we in the hardness of our hearts *call* charity.

The "Little Girl Lost" and the "Little Girl Found" are rather obscure, and I can only suggest an interpretation. They seem to be in general terms an allegory of the purification of the human soul through passion and the consequent regeneration of morality--ascetic Puritanism becoming non-ascetic purity. But I am inclined to think that Blake had something more definite in view, and that the little girl Lyca typifies the feminine soul in its progress from mere innocence to purity. Lyca is led away from her parents by the song of the wild birds, and is lost in the "desert wild". She lies down under a tree and tries to sleep, but cannot, while thinking of the unhappiness of her parents. That is to say she has not lost her innocence, although she has left the regions of conventional morality--she keeps her parents in her heart although she has left their home. She is still faithful to the domestic religion of the affections. At last she sleeps in all the fearlessness of innocence and the wild beasts come prowling round her, but gambol about without harming her. The lion which is love weeps, the lioness or the chastity of love strips her naked, and they carry her off, still sleeping, to their caves. The meaning of this appears to be that an innocent woman is unconscious of the dangers which assail her, and that the passage from innocence to purity takes place in her soul unconsciously. The passions come raging harmlessly

around her, merely stripping her of her conventionality and self-concealment, and carry her off without her feeling shame or self-consciousness. There seems to be a special truth in this myth as applied to a woman. The ordinary life of a woman is full of concealments--her soul shrinks from every self revelation, like the Venus de Medici. It is only in the self-forgetfulness of some great passion that it dares to stand naked but not ashamed. (p. 51).

In "The Little Girl Found" the parents seek her through the night, weeping--meet the lion, are terrified and stricken down by him. The domestic moralities are outraged by the advent of a great passion. But he licks their hands and stands by them silent, and when they have to look up they find "a spirit armed in gold" who bids them follow him, and shows them Lyca sleeping unharmed amid the tigers.

"To this day they dwell
In a lonely dell,
Nor fear the wolvis howl
Nor the lion's growl."

The pure, to show all things are pure, dwell "In a lonely dell" apart from the everyday morality of the world.

The two poems "The sick rose" and "The sunflower" appear to me to express the one this death of delight through the canker of selfishness, and the other the aspiration of the soul after the delight of pure love--

"The youth pined away with desire
And the pale virgin shrouded in snow"

are as Shakespeare says "lamenting some enforced chastity". This enforced chastity of morality, the chastity of Ophelia is a thing of snow, the chastity of love--the chastity of Imogen--a thing of fire. (p. 56-p. 60). The Rose expresses the sickness of creation, the Sunflower the groaning and travailing of creation to be delivered. The Rose expresses the bitterness of regret--the Sunflower the melancholy of aspiration.

"The Tiger" is the converse of "The Lamb" of the "Songs of Innocence". The man recoils in awe before the mystery of evil which the child does not see. The child trusts--the man questions. (p. 59).

The lines "My pretty Rose tree" may possibly have been suggested by one of Mrs. Blake's little attacks of jealousy. (p. 60).

"The Garden of Love" is another lamentation for "enforced chastity"--a wail over the "thou shalt nots" of the moral law (p. 61).

"The little Vagabond" expresses dissatisfaction at the separation between religion and the wholesome pleasures of life. It is dramatic in form and full of quaint humour. The poor little vagabond's only idea of pleasure is drinking in the Alehouse--and he looks upon the Devil as an honest poor fellow

kept down and ill-treated by Church and State. (p. 62).

"London" is full of horror at the results of the lusts of the flesh and the wars and fightings which spring from them. (p. 63).

"The Human Abstract" is a revolt against the Utilitarian philosophy which makes self-interest the rule of life--and against the gospel of diplomatists that "mutual fear brings peace". Blake did not believe that large capitalists were the greatest benefactors to their species, nor that peace was produced by the keeping up of huge standing armies. The best form of this poem is in an appendix, not in the Songs of Experience. "The Angel" is the gospel of Christ. The devil, the gospel of worldly wisdom (p. 81). It is called here "The two Songs".

"A Little Boy Lost" is a story of religious persecution. The little boy is a rationalist and utilitarian--it may be Tom Paine with his "Rights of Man" and "Age of Reason". Blake is no friend to his philosophy but he is still less a friend to religious persecution. Error is a venial sin compared with hypocrisy and he is a practical hypocrite and the cause of hypocrisy in others who tries to crush out ideas by force instead of investigating and sifting them. The true way of dealing with Error is to bring it to the light not to force it to take refuge in darkness, by blind persecution (p. 66).

"A little girl Lost" expresses the crushing out of love by mistaken parental care. These two poems are complementary, the one showing how *men* are made either hypocrites or martyrs by religious persecution, the other how *women* are made either hypocrites or martyrs by the persecution of parental authority. The religious bigot acknowledges no truth outside his own creed, the parental bigot acknowledges no higher duty than filial obedience.

The "Cradle Song" of the "Songs of Experience" of course expresses the opposite side of the subject to that expressed in the one in the "Songs of Innocence". In that the mother sees in her child only what, in spite of the tract-shop theologian, I shall venture to call original grace; in this she sees the germs of what is called original sin. (p. 68)

The next poem "The Schoolboy" takes up the child during his period of education, and is a remonstrance against that false system of education which by going directly contrary to all the healthy instincts of childhood makes learning a hateful task instead of a delight. The brutal ignorance of parents and teachers which is born of want of sympathy crushes the genius out of the child and makes him either a blockhead or a learned prig--crammed with the husks of knowledge.

The book ends with a strange mystical poem "To Tirzah", which is a commentary on David's text "In sin did my mother conceive me". In this Blake preaches the doctrine of regeneration, by which man rises above the infirmity of the flesh and

inherits eternal life. This is the spiritual resurrection which solves all the riddles, theoretical and practical, of the world.

A remarkable feature of Blake's poetry is his constant impatience under the restrictions of the moral law. He never in his poetry acknowledges with St. Paul that the law is "holy and just and good". The reason probably is that St. Paul was a practical man and an orator, not a poet like Blake. St. Paul is occupied necessarily with the temporary condition of things in which not one jot or tittle of the law can be dispensed with till all be fulfilled, whereas Blake is constantly occupied with the eternal world of pure beauty and love, in which all *is* fulfilled. The sphere of the practical is the sphere of moral duty, the sphere of the ideal is the sphere of unfettered spiritual force.

I have not time now to dwell upon that exquisite poem "The Book of Thel". I have not myself quite fathomed this as yet, but Thel would appear to be a human soul perplexed with the problems of life and dissatisfied with man's lot so unsatisfactory and transitory. At last she descends into the grave and finds it also resounding with terrible questions. She shrieks and flies back to life. The problems of life can only be solved and the questions of death answered by living in faith--"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof". She has to learn this, and also that "as her day her strength shall be".

There are just one or two more of Blake's poems which I must speak of before we part. Mr. William Rossetti thus writes of "Broken Love" (p. 76-79).¹⁰

10 The reference is actually to pp. 76-77 of Gilchrist, Volume II. The relevant paragraph is:

Never perhaps have the agony and perversity of sundered affection been more powerfully (however singularly) expressed than in the piece called *Broken Love*. The speaker is one whose soul has been intensified by pain to be his only world, among the scenes, figures, and events of which he moves as in a new state of being. . . . There is his 'spectre,' the jealous pride which scents in the snow the footsteps of the beloved rejected woman; his 'emanation' which silently weeps within him, for has not he also sinned? So they wander together in 'a fathomless and boundless deep,' the morn full of tempests and the night of tears. . . . Also this woe of his can array itself in stately imagery. He can count separately how many of his soul's affections the knife she stabbed it with has slain, how many yet mourn over the tombs which he has built for these: he can tell, too, of some that still watch around his bed, bright sometimes with ecstatic passion of melancholy, and crowning his mournful head with vine. All these living forgive her transgressions: when will she look upon them, that the dead may live again? Has she not pity to give for pardon? nay, does he not need her pardon too? He cannot seek her, but oh! if she would return! Surely her place is ready for her, and bread and wine of forgiveness of sins. I have dwelt on the meaning of this poem, because it . . . might be accounted specially obscure. But in reality, it is perhaps the only instance in which Blake has dealt with any of the deeper phases of human passion; . . . the result . . . gives me to regret that this poet did not oftener elect to walk in the ways not of spirits or children, but of living men.

"The Defiled Sanctuary" expresses the horrible pollution produced by the entrance of lust into the temple of love (82).

"The Mental Traveller" is one of Blake's longest poems, and contains a philosophy of History which Goethe himself might have been proud to own (98),

I shall conclude with a few passages from an epigrammatic poem called "Auguries of Innocence" in which¹¹

Lecture XVI, 10 March 1874 William Blake

In this lecture I wish to introduce to you a man, who almost unknown to the general public as he is, is a more remarkable man even than Burns himself[.] I mean William Blake, the painter of sacred pictures that nobody bought, and singer of incomprehensible songs that nobody read. Mad as Blake was esteemed by the *connoisseurs* and literary critics of his time, and mad as most people would no doubt consider him even now--there is at least a wonderful amount of method in this so-called madness of his. His designs, rude as some of them are in point of technical skill, fairly entitle him to rank beside Michael Angelo as far as mere genius is concerned--although in the development of his genius Michael Angelo is a giant beside poor Blake, who was cramped in every possible manner that the cruelty of fortune could suggest. Indeed I am not sure that it would be speaking extravagantly if I were to say that the native genius of our own Blake was broader and deeper than that of the great Italian. He often seems to combine the spiritual beauty and grace of Fra Angelico with the sublimity of M. Angelo. But this is a question which we may leave to painters to determine. As a lyric poet I unhesitatingly place Blake among the first singers of all ages. For mere melody, his best poems may fairly compete with anything that the language can produce[.] They are flawless gems of spontaneous song--song which, as the Germans say, "rushes out of the throat as the bird sings". These lyric poems of Blake are, like those of Burns, real songs, made to be sung to real music; but while Burns was but a poor musician, picking up the popular airs, for which he wrote words, with difficulty, Blake had, according to the verdict of those who knew him, a musical gift no less exquisite than his poetic gift. His songs had their musical part in the shape of original melodies as unstudied as the words themselves. He sang them himself just as they came into his head.

In Burns, great as he undoubtedly was, there was still a good deal of the savage element remaining. He is a transition man, not a pure modern like Blake. He is in rebellion against

Puritanism, but he has no better religion to offer. He revolts against asceticism but there is no sacred fervour in his revolt. His passion is often of a chaotic kind--an earthly lust rather than a divine ardour. And yet there are everywhere in him gleams of better things. Many of his songs such as "a man's a man for a' that" are full of splendid democratic *élan*, or of fiery indignation[.]

His hatred of hypocrisy is no show against meanness and falseness--others again are pure as dew-drops and tender as tears. You feel his heart beating with love for all created things--and then perhaps he seems to sink into lower regions[.] flashes out into outrageous mirth, or cynical humour, until all at once some touch of pathos reveals the true meaning of all this. What is great in Burns is his perfect simplicity and naturalness. What is in him, good and bad, (or both mingled) flows out in song. There is little high poetic imagination in Burns--his poetry is poetry of passion rather than imagination[.] With Blake on the contrary there is that perfect fusion of passion and imagination which is only found in the very highest poetic geniuses. He lives habitually in regions which Burns never reaches in his highest flights.

Carlyle has called Burns a hero,¹² and we may heartily grant him the title; but, as compared with Blake's, his heroism is of an ordinary and commonplace kind. His whole life was, as compared with Blake's, chaotic, "like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh." He was *not* "o'er all the ills of life victorious" as Blake was, His drunken revellings with their boisterous mirth, were very far removed from the serene happiness of Blake with his songs and his visions. Blake too brought love down from the heaven of imagination, and made it incarnate in his daily life as Burns never did; and vanquished poverty, and trampled its horrible degradations under foot, as Burns never did. It must, however[.] be confessed that Burns was much more in harmony with the most of the people than Blake--and that by virtue of his weaknesses and shortcomings, as well as by virtue of his heroism--Burns was a man of his time, Blake a man in advance of his time[.] Burns was the poet of real life, Blake the idealist and mystic, who reveals for us the eternal forms and types which underlie real life . . .¹³

Blake indeed had the sense to perceive that a man's wife does not come ready made to his hand, but that she must be created by him out of the raw material of womanhood which he may wisely or

11 The lecture breaks off at this point.

12 Carlyle has called Burns a hero: "One of those men . . . who take rank with the Heroic among men." "The Hero as Man of Letters," *Heroes and Hero Worship*, 1869, p. 222.

13 At this point Todhunter condenses Gilchrist, Volume I, pp. [5]-38.

foolishly select for the purpose. He also saw very clearly that the tendency of the average woman is to draw her husband away from all ideal aims, and to degrade the inspired artist into a conventional paterfamilias drudging for his daily bread. Now Blake had not the smallest notion of sacrificing his ambition to his love, knowing well that in so doing he would have been cutting the wings of love himself and turning him into a barn-door fowl--good for little else than to make giblet soup of. His art was for him a divine thing, and he felt very strongly that to love wife or children or comfort or respectability or success in life, more than this, was to be unworthy of it. He knew also that being faithful to his art was in reality being faithful to love. He might have said with Lovelace

"I could not love thee, dear, so well
Loved I not honour more".

using the word *honour* in the highest possible sense.

Accordingly when the lovers were married in August 1782--Blake being in his 25th, and his bride in her 21st year--a great struggle had to be gone through before the poor little woman who had with a woman's splendid temerity engaged to love honour and obey this mad artist was at all capable of doing so. The process of becoming a wife is not an easy one for a woman, even if her husband be the average man of everyday life.--and the man of genius is not a whit less, but infinitely more exacting in his demands. Blake was not the man to countenance the idea that holy matrimony was a mere profession with routine duties and routine affections. This might do well enough for the world at large, but he was not of the world at large, and his theory of marriage was that it was one of the highest of the fine arts, which had for its end the cultivation of that genius for love which exists in a germinal form in each of us. Blake took an aesthetic and utopian, not a utilitarian and practical view of marriage. The love of such a man is terrible--a woman might nearly as well marry the angel with the fiery sword that guards the gate of Paradise. We may imagine the tumult of poor little Mrs. Blake's mind during the process of her coming into existence as Blake's wife. Fancy a woman being called upon to resign comfort, orthodoxy, respectability, success in life, and conventionality of all kinds--at one fell swoop--and to look starvation straight in the face without blenching! It must have cost not a few tears. But at bottom every woman not a fool (and there are a good many such women scattered about thro' the world) cares more about love than all these things put together--and we find Mrs. Blake developing rapidly under her husband's tuition--firmly believing in his visions--sitting by his side silent and awestruck, when some one of more than ordinary grandeur comes to him by night and he has to rise and work, lest the pressure of it may kill him--learning herself to engrave and even to make designs, nearly as good as his own. If ever there was a man to whom his wife's love clung like a garment, that man was Blake. The course of their true love seems to have run perfectly smooth from this time forth, so far as their inner life was concerned--except that Mrs. Blake was inclined to be jealous of her husband's friends, and on one

occasion, as the story goes, was a good deal disturbed by a remarkable and characteristic notion of his. He had been living in imagination in Patriarchal times and was ravished with the beauty of the Patriarchal life, and his wife having no children, he is said to have entertained the idea of taking another wife. This relapse into barbarism--this madness of the prophet Mrs. Blake forbade, not like a dumb ass speaking with man's voice, but like a splendid high-spirited little woman as she was. Her obedience was not the obedience of a slave but of a wife, and she had no notion of being put off with half-a-husband.

Flaxman had already got married and had been taken up by a literary lady of the name of Matthews--once a celebrity in aesthetic circles. To her Flaxman introduced Blake and at her soirees he appears to have made his debut in society. At these Blake used to sing his poems to airs composed by himself--if we can call airs composed which flowed as spontaneously as the exquisite poems themselves. Some of these are reported by an auditor to have been "most singularly beautiful", and "noted down by musical professors," but all trace of them appears to have vanished from this earth.

These early poems were printed by subscription, Flaxman poor as he was paying half the cost. The edition was never published however. Soon after this Blake dropped out of the Matthews circle, his "unbending deportment" not being pleasant to the fine ladies and gentlemen[.]

Meanwhile Stothard was getting on in the world and Blake was employed to his great disgust in engraving his designs--many of which were suggested by his own works. He managed just to keep himself from starvation by doing such jobs as this--appearing even as an engraver of caricatures! But in 1784 he made a second appearance in the Academy with two designs in which he preached one of his favourite doctrines--and one which marks him as an advanced modern--namely the supreme atrocity and stupidity of war . . .¹⁴

In 1789 the year of the engraving of Songs of Innocence Wordsworth then 19 was beginning to write his early poems.

The same year Blake wrote and etched his delicious mystical poem in the style of Ossian entitled "The Book of Thel" and in 1790 he wrote the "Marriage of Heaven & Hell" the first of his Prophetic Books--the subject of it is the Mystery of Evil, and in it occur a number of aphorisms (on the model of Lavater) which he whimsically calls Proverbs of Hell--that is to say they are Proverbs of revolt for the most part (p. 81). A good deal of the Marriage of Heaven & Hell is in prose. Of this as of his other Prophetic Books

14 Here, Todhunter condenses Gilchrist, Volume I, pp. 55-70.

only fragments have been hitherto published, and no one has as yet fathomed their meaning. To the great majority of readers they are very Midsummer madness, and yet even these fragments excite the deepest interest in the mind of any serious reader (p. 83) . . .¹⁵

For the next 3 or 4 years to 1793 Blake busied himself with new Prophetic Books "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" "America" "Europe" & "Jerusalem". No one has yet seriously studied these books and the extracts published although full of poetry are mysterious and unintelligible--some passages in them would seem to mark Blake as a worthy predecessor of Walt Whitman. We may almost surmise that Blake in these books gives a mystical history of the progress of religion and of the regeneration of society--democracy being for him rather the preparation for the Kingdom of Heaven than the Kingdom of Heaven itself. Every page of these books glows with magnificent designs in colour and gold . . .¹⁶

About 1800 Flaxman introduced him to Hayley,¹⁷ the friend of Cowper, who employed him in making designs for some of his works, and Blake removed to a cottage at Felpham to be under Hayley's eye--and Hayley appears to have done all he could to help him. This Felpham was in Sussex and close to the sea, and Blake walked by shore and saw visions and held converse with Moses and the Prophets, Homer, Dante, and Milton--"All" as he said when asked about them "majestic shadows, grey but luminous, and superior to the common height of men." (Fairy's funeral p. 159.)

In 1803 Blake's peaceful life at Felpham was disturbed in a strange way. A drunken soldier broke into his garden one day, behaved in a violent manner and refused to quit the place when requested. Blake in a divine fury rushed at him and thrust him out before he well knew where he was. In the scuffle some words passed between them. The soldier claimed to be the King's soldier whereupon Blake in the heat of his spirit exclaimed "Damn the King and you too"--for which seditious language, he had to stand his trial for High Treason (no less) at the next Quarter Sessions. Hayley, kind-hearted man as he was, spite of broken head (the consequence of a fall from his horse caused by an eccentric habit of his of suddenly unfurling an umbrella over his horse's head) came to give evidence in his favour; and Blake himself on the soldier coming out with some outrageous charge against him, shouted "false!" in such a tremendous voice as "electrified the court and carried conviction with it". The result was that Blake was acquitted.

At Felpham he worked away at drudgery for his daily bread with honest patience, until Hayley took it into his head that he might make his fortune by miniature paintings, and he was even tempted by the offer of a regular salary as drawing master in a nobleman's family. But this was like selling his birthright for a mess of pottage--he felt his visionary power failing[.] "The visions were angry" as he said--and he fled back to London and poverty.

In 1804 he wrote and engraved "Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant Albion" and the same year "Milton--a poem in two Books"--apparently a continuation of Jerusalem.

For the next two years he worked for a publisher named Cromek who has left a bad name behind him. He ground and cheated Blake on pretence of patronizing him, and he appears further to have done the widow of Burns out of the copyright of some of his poems. Blake wrote the following epigrams upon him (p. 208).

In 1800 he made a last grand appeal to the public in the shape of an exhibition of his designs. This was by no means a success and he appears to have given up the public as hopelessly dead to true art. The remainder of his life was passed in quiet work, and patient drudgery. He made a few disciples and gained some patrons--and supported himself chiefly by selling copies of his Songs of Innocence & Experience.

His mode of life (p. 306)
His unworldliness (p. 309)
His "blasphemy"
"Damn the money" (p. 313)
His death (p. 360)

Lecture XVIII, 12 March 1874 William Blake

Before commencing our study of the "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience", which will form the principal subject of today's lecture, I wish to say something with regard to Blake's general position in our literature (Old Section p. 1).¹⁸

In contrasting Blake with Burns in my last lecture, I spoke of Blake as being filled with the *modern* spirit, and a few words will be necessary to explain my meaning in this phrase. Blake is a modern by virtue of his independence. He is full of reverence indeed for the things of the past--the splendid poetry of the Bible, the great architecture of the middle ages, the art of the early Renaissance; but he looks upon all these things, however great the inspiration of the men through whom they come

¹⁵ Here, Todhunter condenses Gilchrist, Volume I, pp. 93-95.

¹⁶ A brief paragraph is omitted. This condenses Gilchrist, Volume I, pp. 119, 130, 132, 135, 139 and 217.

¹⁷ The passage that follows is condensed from Gilchrist, Volume I, pp. 145-83; pp. 199-208; pp. 255 ff.; p. 247. As it rounds off the lecture, however, I print it.

¹⁸ Old section p. 1. At this point Todhunter indicates that he wishes to repeat the second paragraph of Lecture VII delivered fifteen months earlier.

to us, as of no infallible authority in themselves. The spirit of truth and beauty in himself is always Blake's final appeal--these things are good and great because they are the works of the same spirit of God which works in himself. He is a modern also by virtue not of his morbidity, for he was not morbid, but by virtue of his hopeful forward-looking glance, which finds the golden age, even in advance. not in the past but in the future. He is a modern in his faith in the power of human nature to make progress. He is a modern in his sympathy with the great social revolutions by which alone this progress can be attained--and in his broad tolerance and philanthropy, his horror of the oppressions of the poor, and of all suffering, whether of man or beast, of war, of field sports, of poverty itself, he is emphatically a modern. But unlike many of our modern men the genius of Blake led him not in the direction of rationalism and materialism, but in that of spiritualism and mysticism. He lives perpetually in the presence of the Most High--His heaven is not a thing merely of a future state--He sees the courts of it stretching away infinitely upon all sides of him. His religion is not got at second hand--the very prophets and apostles are for him but everlasting doors thro' which the light shines. He may use the orthodox formulae but he does not use them in the orthodox sense. They become in his hands filled with subtle spiritual meanings of which the prosaic dogmatist never dreams. In the poetry of the Bible Blake breathes his native spiritual air, full of sunshine and exhilaration[.] It is not for him, as for so many pious but thoroughly prosaic and materialistic people of Saxon race, a species of exhausted receiver,¹⁹ in which they seem to gasp for breath, until they can concentrate its rarefied atmosphere, so full of warmth and light, into oppressive dogma. The gospel which seizes upon his imagination, is not the gospel of damnation, of which the cardinal point is the utter corruption and innate perdition of the human race, the world sweeping thro' space impelled by the pursuing storm of the divine wrath; but the gospel of hope and joy, of the perpetual forgiveness of sins, of the birthright not of damnation but salvation, the motive power of creation being infinite love not infinite wrath. It must not be supposed however that Blake's religion excludes the idea of divine wrath--far from it, but for him the wrath is but the purifying fire of love burning up all lies and leaving the soul that has clung to them naked and pierced with the anguish of shame in the presence of intolerable purity. It would seem so far I can understand Blake, as if he looked upon falsehood as the sin of sins, loveless malignity being the resultant of the blindness produced by persistence in falsehood--love of darkness and hatred of light.

The minor poems of Blake, as indeed most of his published writings[,] deal chiefly with but one side of our spiritual nature. They are in the main poems of aspiration and revolt, and hence his teaching if accepted with prosaic literalness could be likely to lead to the most immoral results[.] With his hatred of hypocrisy and belief in the deep instincts of humanity, there is nothing that he hates more than the whited-sepulchre morality of much of our respectable English life, which binds

our liberty with burthens grievous to be borne.-- And living as he did in a dreamland of his own, it must be confessed that he is inclined to worship liberty too much at the expense of law, and instinct and passion at the expense of reason and self-control. With great natural power of self-control himself he appears to be quite unaware of how deficient most men are in this respect--and to ignore the great practical fact that liberty is preserved by law, instinct rectified and re-created by reason, and passion intensified by self-control. Without self-control there can properly speaking be no passion, but merely appetite and outrageous lust[.] Blake sometimes apparently forgets this, but only apparently--for the ultimate idea of his philosophy is the intimate union and mutual dependence of law, and liberty--what he symbolises under the figure of the "Marriage of Heaven and Hell". In reading Blake, then, we must always keep this in mind, that such expressions of violent revolt as are contained in some of the "Proverbs of Hell"--for example "Damn braces, bless relaxes"--"The Tigers of wrath are better than the horses of instruction", etc., etc., give us but one half--although a most important one of Blake's philosophy.

19 Todhunter appears to be using the word in the sense of the glass vessel of an air-pump in which the vacuum is formed. Cf. Young, "Like cats in air-pumps to subsist we strive."

