

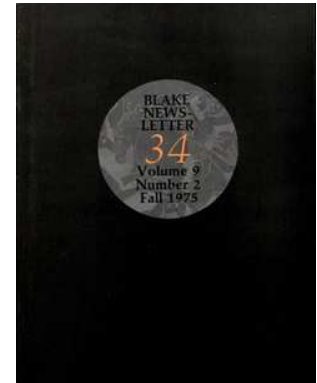
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An Early Allusion to Blake

G. P. Tyson

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to have assumed that his audience was aware of it are, I believe, evidence in support of Wicksteed's reading of "The Blossom." Other less significant supporting details are the repetition of the word "pretty," the substitution of "blossom" for "rosy cheeks and dimpled chin," and the fact that "poor" Robin becomes the "sobbing" Robin of Blake's poem. Finally, the OED records a use of the phrase "merry-bout" in the *Newgate Calendar* of 1780 as slang for "an act of sexual intercourse." Hence the appropriateness of Blake's "merry, merry sparrow."

If this widely known street song was in fact in Blake's mind when he composed "The Blossom" and in the minds of Blake's readers as well, perhaps the poem is more complex and ironic than Stevenson is prepared to admit, even if it was destined to appear "in a book planned for children."

An Early Allusion to Blake

By G. P. Tyson

Among William Blake's first engravings for the booksellers was his head of Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777), which was used as a frontispiece for Thomas Henry's *Memoirs of Albert de Haller, M.D.* (1783). Of Henry's extant letters there is one at the Bodleian to his bookseller, Joseph Johnson, containing a brief allusion to Blake; the letter (Ms. Engl. theol. C.50, f. 182) is dated 13 April 1783, making it one of the earliest known references to the engraver.

Manchester

Dear Sir

The Author of the Sermons which come to you with this letter is a very worthy Clergyman, and the particular Friend of all your Friends here. You will agree with me that the Discourse is an excellent one, and written in a good cause. It will be of some importance to him to have it more known, and you are desired to advertise it in some of the papers and, if you can, introduce it to the London [Unitarian] Association. You will oblige us all by attending to it, and forwarding the Sale.

I hope the Magnesia [Alba] arrived----There had been some accident to one of the Waggon's which delayed it-----

Pray hasten the Head of Haller---- The Book is finished, and very neat, and the Season is advancing rapidly. The heads might come in Clerk's parcel, or in Newton's. The One deals with Bew, the other with Rivington-----¹

I have got Memoires de P. Acad:
from the R[oyal] S[ociety] by Dr.
Simmons²----Yr's very truly
Tho^s Henry

It is conceivable that Henry was familiar with Blake. In 1780 he had engraved a plate for William Enfield's *The Speaker* which Johnson published. At this time Enfield was a tutor at the Warrington Academy, and along with the other teachers there, was certainly known to Henry through their mutual religious, scientific, and literary interests. Concerning the delay in sending the head to Henry, only inference can offer assistance. Johnson had a reputation for being dilatory, but only after about 1795 when his health began to fail. Earlier he enjoyed the confidence of authors and customers for being attentive and honest. Blake's work on the plate, though, falls between his marriage in 1782 and the setting up of his print shop in 1784. So possibly he had other matters on his mind than finishing a small engraving for a bookseller.

1 According to Pendred's *Directory* both Clerk or Clark and Newton were Manchester booksellers.

2 Simmons was Henry's collaborator on the *Memoirs*. The work referred to is Henry's English edition of Lavoisier's essays addressed to the Paris Academy.

A Possible Source for "Thel's Motto"

By Michael Ferber

Several Biblical sources have been offered for the second half of Thel's mysterious "motto:"

Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
Or Love in a golden bowl?

Northrop Frye (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 446, n. 55) connects the golden bowl with the golden cup of Babylon mentioned in Jeremiah 51.7 and Revelation 17.4. He also cites Ecclesiastes 12.6 as a source of both lines: "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken . . ." Though this verse is almost as cryptic as the "motto" itself, it is no doubt generally relevant to *Thel*, for in its context it seems to refer to the death of the body, which Thel shrinks from at the end of the poem. But the context has little about love or wisdom, and of course a cord is not a rod.

Robert Gleckner, in "Blake's *Thel* and the Bible," *BNYPL*, 64 (1960), 573-80, suggests Job 28.12-15:

But where shall wisdom be found? and
where is the place of understanding?
Man knoweth not the price thereof;
neither is it found in the land of the
living.