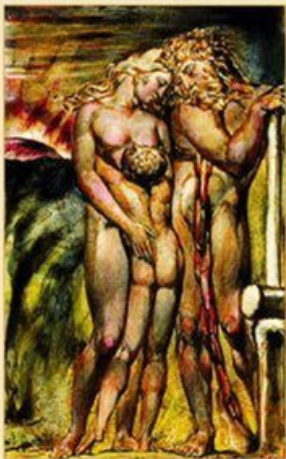


BLAKE'S POETRY AND DESIGNS



Poems From Letters



POEMS FROM LETTERS

William Blake

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To my dearest Friend, John Flaxman, these lines:

I bless thee, O Father of Heaven and Earth! that ever I saw Flaxman's
face:

Angels stand round my spirit in Heaven; the blessèd of Heaven are
my

friends upon Earth

When Flaxman was taken to Italy, Fuseli was given to me for a
season;

And now Flaxman hath given me Hayley, his friend, to be mine —
such my lot upon Earth!

Now my lot in the Heavens is this: Milton lov'd me in childhood and
show'd me his face;

Ezra came with Isaiah the Prophet, but Shakespeare in riper years
gave

me his hand;

Paracelsus and Behmen appear'd to me; terrors appear'd in the
Heavens above;
The American War began; all its dark horrors pass'd before my face
Across the Atlantic to France; then the French Revolution commenc'd
in thick clouds;
And my Angels have told me that, seeing such visions, I could not
subsist on the Earth,
But by my conjunction with Flaxman, who knows to forgive
nervous fear.

12 Sept., 1800

To my dear Friend, Mrs. Anna Flaxman

This song to the flower of Flaxman's joy,
To the blossom of hope for a sweet decoy;
Do all that you can, or all that you may,
To entice him to Felpham and far away.

Away to sweet Felpham, for Heaven is there;
The Ladder of Angels descends thro' the air;
On the turret its spiral does softly descend,
Thro' the village then winds, at my cot it does end.

You stand in the village and look up to Heaven;
The precious stones glitter on flights seventy-seven;
And my brother is there, and my friend and thine
Descend and ascend with the bread and the wine.

The bread of sweet thought and the wine of delight
Feed the village of Felpham by day and by night,
And at his own door the bless'd Hermit does stand,
Dispensing unceasing to all the wide land.

To Thomas Butts

To my friend Butts I write
My first vision of light,
On the yellow sands sitting.
The sun was emitting
His glorious beams
From Heaven's high streams.
Over sea, over land,
My eyes did expand
Into regions of air,
Away from all care;
Into regions of fire,
Remote from desire;
The light of the morning
Heaven's mountains adorning:
In particles bright,
The jewels of light
Distinct shone and clear.
Amaz'd and in fear
I each particle gazèd,
Astonish'd, amazèd;
For each was a Man
Human-form'd. Swift I ran,
For they beckon'd to me,
Remote by the sea,
Saying: `Each grain of sand,
Every stone on the land,
Each rock and each hill,
Each fountain and rill,
Each herb and each tree,
Mountain, hill, earth, and sea,
Cloud, meteor, and star,

Are men seen afar.'
I stood in the streams
Of Heaven's bright beams,
And saw Felpham sweet
Beneath my bright feet,
In soft Female charms;
And in her fair arms
My Shadow I knew,
And my wife's Shadow too,
And my sister, and friend.
We like infants descend
In our Shadows on earth,
Like a weak mortal birth.
My eyes, more and more,
Like a sea without shore,
Continue expanding,
The Heavens commanding;
Till the jewels of light,
Heavenly men beaming bright,
Appear'd as One Man,
Who complacent began
My limbs to enfold
In His beams of bright gold;
Like dross purg'd away
All my mire and my clay.
Soft consum'd in delight,
In His bosom sun-bright
I remain'd. Soft He smil'd,
And I heard His voice mild,
Saying: `This is My fold,
O thou ram horn'd with gold,
Who awakest from sleep
On the sides of the deep.

On the mountains around
The roarings resound
Of the lion and wolf,
The loud sea, and deep gulf.
These are guards of My fold,
O thou ram horn'd with gold!
And the voice faded mild:
I remain'd as a child;
All I ever had known
Before me bright shone:
I saw you and your wife
By the fountains of life.
Such the vision to me
Appear'd on the sea.

To Mrs. Butts

Wife of the friend of those I most revere,
Receive this tribute from a harp sincere;
Go on in virtuous seed-sowing on mould
Of human vegetation, and behold
Your harvest springing to eternal life,
Parent of youthful minds, and happy wife!

To Thomas Butts

With Happiness stretch'd across the hills
In a cloud that dewy sweetness distils;
With a blue sky spread over with wings,
And a mild sun that mounts and sings;
With trees and fields full of fairy elves,
And little devils who fight for themselves —
Rememb'ring the verses that Hayley sung

When my heart knock'd against the root of my tongue —
With angels planted in hawthorn bowers,
And God Himself in the passing hours;
With silver angels across my way,
And golden demons that none can stay;
With my father hovering upon the wind,
And my brother Robert just behind,
And my brother John, the evil one,
In a black cloud making his moan, —
Tho' dead, they appear upon my path,
Notwithstanding my terrible wrath;
They beg, they entreat, they drop their tears,
Fill'd full of hopes, fill'd full of fears —
With a thousand angels upon the wind
Pouring disconsolate from behind
To drive them off, and before my way
A frowning thistle implores my stay.
What to others a trifle appears
Fills me full of smiles or tears;
For double the vision my eyes do see,
And a double vision is always with me.
With my inward eye, 'tis an Old Man grey,
With my outward, a Thistle across my way.
'If thou goest back,' the Thistle said,
'Thou art to endless woe betray'd;
For here does Theotormon lour,
And here is Enitharmon's bower;
And Los the Terrible thus hath sworn,
Because thou backward dost return,
Poverty, envy, old age, and fear,
Shall bring thy wife upon a bier;
And Butts shall give what Fuseli gave,
A dark black rock and a gloomy cave.'

I struck the Thistle with my foot,
And broke him up from his delving root.
'Must the duties of life each other cross?
Must every joy be dung and dross?
Must my dear Butts feel cold neglect
Because I give Hayley his due respect?
Must Flaxman look upon me as wild,
And all my friends be with doubts beguil'd?
Must my wife live in my sister's bane,
Or my sister survive on my love's pain?
The curses of Los, the terrible Shade,
And his dismal terrors make me afraid.'
So I spoke, and struck in my wrath
The Old Man weltering upon my path.
Then Los appear'd in all his power:
In the sun he appear'd, descending before
My face in fierce flames; in my double sight
'Twas outward a sun, inward Los in his might.
'My hands are labour'd day and night,
And ease comes never in my sight.
My wife has no indulgence given
Except what comes to her from Heaven.
We eat little, we drink less,
This Earth breeds not our happiness.
Another sun feeds our life's streams,
We are not warmèd with thy beams;
Thou measurest not the time to me,
Nor yet the space that I do see;
My mind is not with thy light array'd,
Thy terrors shall not make me afraid.'

When I had my defiance given,
The sun stood trembling in heaven;

The moon, that glow'd remote below,
Became leprous and white as snow;
And every soul of men on the earth
Felt affliction, and sorrow, and sickness, and dearth.
Los flam'd in my path, and the sun was hot
With the bows of my mind and the arrows of thought.
My bowstring fierce with ardour breathes;
My arrows glow in their golden sheaves;
My brothers and father march before;
The heavens drop with human gore.

Now I a fourfold vision see,
And a fourfold vision is given to me;
'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight,
And threefold in soft Beulah's night,
And twofold always. — May God us keep
From single vision, and Newton's sleep!

To Thomas Butts

O! why was I born with a different face?
Why was I not born like the rest of my race?
When I look, each one starts; when I speak, I offend;
Then I'm silent and passive, and lose every friend.

Then my verse I dishonour, my pictures despise,
My person degrade, and my temper chastise;
And the pen is my terror, the pencil my shame;
All my talents I bury, and dead is my fame.

I am either too low, or too highly priz'd;
When elate I'm envied; when meek I'm despis'd.