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"Blake and England"

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Blake and England*

KATHLEEN RAINE

I have chosen for the theme of this lecture 'Blake and England' because I believe that Blake would have wished it. Blake lived and died within 'Albion's ancient Druid rocky shore'; he never crossed the borders of Wales or Scotland, nor visited 'Ireland, ancient nation'. Like the mental prince he knew himself to be, he never set foot outside his own kingdom. He called himself 'English Blake', and, first and last, saw himself as the prophet of the English people, speaking on matters of national concern. He addressed himself sometimes—as a Mental Prince he had the right to do so—to neighbouring nations: to France, whose revolution he applauded in a poem that even the left-wing publisher Johnson dared not print; to the American colonies, whose war of independence he celebrated as the first triumph of a new kind of human liberty.

Yeats, with an understandable desire to claim for Ireland his poetic master, gave currency to an ill-founded story that Blake's father had come to London from Rathmines. But if we cannot find in Ireland Blake's ancestors, it is there that we must look for his spiritual descendants. Yeats and Joyce are the true heirs of his eclectic yet traditional symbolism; both inherit his genius in the use of myth; and above all, the prophetic voice that speaks from the imagination of a race, to the imagination of a race. Yeats wrote of 'a nation-wide multiform reverie, every mind passing through a stream of suggestion, and all the streams acting and reacting upon one another', and asks, 'if a nation, as distinguished from a crowd of chance-comers, is not bound together by this exchange among streams and shadows?' One may perhaps ask whether such poetry would now be possible, in England, whether the nation (using the word in Yeats's sense) has not already disintegrated into 'a crowd of chance-comers', whether, perhaps, the imaginative unity of race, which alone makes possible prophetic speech, still living

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in Ireland, and lingering, perhaps, in Wales and Scotland—Edwin Muir’s poetry catches that old sense of a tribal unity of culture—may not be fast vanishing from the modern world. But for Blake, Albion was still a nation, living with a corporate life. Like Joyce’s Finnegans, Albion is a giant whose body extends through many lives, whose memory lives through history. Yet he is not, like Hobbes’s Leviathan, an artificial man, an aggregate of component members; the reverse is nearer the truth—the single life is in Albion, and the individual man is ‘but a form and organ of life’, moved and inspired by the group soul of the nation. ‘The deeds of Arthur’, Blake says, are ‘the deeds of Albion’; he remembers the Druids; the poetry of Milton and Shakespeare, of Blake himself, is the work of Albion’s imagination; and the philosophy of ‘Bacon, Newton and Locke’ a sickness of the national mind ‘sunk in deadly sleep’. Blake saw Albion as lying near to death of this disease; and his labours as poet and prophet were towards a resurrection of the English soul that shall stir through all his human members.

his left foot near London
Covers the shades of Tyburn; his instep from Windsor
To Primrose Hill stretching to Highgate and Holloway.
London is between his knees, its basements fourfold.
His right foot stretches to the sea on Dover cliffs, his heel
On Canterbury’s ruins; his right hand covers lofty Wales
His left Scotland; his bosom girt with gold involves
York, Edinburgh, Durham and Carlisle, and on the front
Bath, Oxford, Cambridge, Norwich; his right elbow
Leans on the rocks of Erin’s land, Ireland, ancient nation
His head bends over London . . .

This Joycean figure, who, as Blake would say, ‘from a distance’ appears as one man, is in fact made up of multitudes; and within the life of the whole, the life of every part is in turn a living whole,

for cities
Are men, fathers of multitudes, and Rivers and Mountains
Are also men; everything is Human, Mighty! Sublime!

So indeed is the world itself, a whole made up of wholes, since life is indivisible and entire in all its parts:

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 from afar.

Or, by an expansion of the imagination to include the whole,

The Jewels of Light,
 Heavenly men beaming bright
 Appear'd as One Man –

the figure that Blake, following Swedenborg, calls the Divine Humanity in whose single life live 'all the innumerable multitudes of eternity'. In the earliest draft of Blake's first long Prophetic Book, *Vala*, the subject of his myth was not at first limited to the group soul of England, but was the story of 'the eternal man', a symbol of all mankind; but very soon he realised that his vision was in reality more specific: 'the eternal man' became Albion. As Blake wrote of Albion, so also he spoke to Albion. 'Mr. B appeals to the public', he wrote in the catalogue of his one exhibition. The public, as usual, took no notice. Yet, two hundred years after his birth, the most solid of the Daughters of Albion are strangely uplifted when they sing *Jerusalem* from the useful activities of the Women's Institutes into a world of fiery chariots, burning gold, and arrows of desire. Nobody knows quite what it was that Blake prophesied, but every one venerates him as our single national prophet.

For Blake is a poet of national life in a sense very far different from Dryden or from Kipling. These poets also wrote of public persons and events; but they saw events but as events, persons as persons. Hardy, in *The Dynasts*, viewed history, indeed, as it were from some giant time-scale; but his record remains a panorama; he has altered, as Blake would have said, only the ratio. For Blake, as for Ezekiel and Isaiah (close friends who, he tells us, 'dined' with him), events were but shadows or reflections of a spiritual drama; 'correspondences' – to use Swedenborg's term, or, in the alchemical language of Blake's other master, Jakob Boehme, 'signatures'. If he describes great events, Paine

and Lafayette, Wesley and the Queen of France are but the 'forms and organs' of the life of the greater forces who live, as Plato and his followers say of the gods, our lives. When Blake paints Pitt and Nelson he surrounds them not with ships and portfolios, but with mythical beasts of seas and land, Behemoth and Leviathan, whose powerful life they for a moment guide. Nor are these spiritual powers abstractions, allegories drawn from persons and events but, as Blake believed, the real agents, the eternal moods, who act through individual men.

Dr Bronowski in this country and Dr Erdman in America—to name only two among recent scholars—have banished for ever an earlier view of Blake as a mystic whose visions, personal and subjective to the point of madness, related to a private world. These scholars have shown how precise are his references to current affairs; he was, to use a current French phrase, 'engaged', no less than was Milton, in politics. Dr Bronowski has said that Blake 'disguised' his views as myth just because they were so dangerously relevant; but it is more true to say that he gave his thought the form of myth because, for him, the real drama is in the soul. Wars and revolutions, schools of scientific and philosophic thought, are but incidents in the spiritual drama. Myth is not an abstraction from history, but history a shadow of myth. Edwin Muir in his autobiography distinguishes the Story—the life history of any individual man—as only a fragmentary attempt to realise what he calls the Fable—the story of Man. So Blake also saw it; and he attempted to write entire that fable of which we, as individuals, can but hope to catch a momentary and fleeting glimpse.

Thus the description of events, or of the physical appearances of the world was, for Blake, necessarily a means and not an end. Events and appearances not only can be used symbolically, but are in their nature symbolic, since they are the signatures and correspondences of an informing life; and if nature is the sacramental signature of the divine mind, what is made by man is the signature of the human drama, of the soul's fall, suffering, and redemption. The city, above all, is the human symbol, because the work of man; and it is in his evocation of the City as the symbol of what Dante has called the Divine Comedy, that Blake is supreme; and the city, for Blake, is London:

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
 In every Infant's cry of fear,
 In every voice, in every ban,
 The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
 Every black'ning Church appalls;
 And the hapless Soldier's sigh
 Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
 How the youthful Harlot's curse
 Blasts the new-born infant's ear
 And blights with plagues the marriage-hearse.

Like the Christian and Buddhist hells and purgatories, the city, even in this early poem, is not so much a place as a state of being. This description of London recalls, deliberately it may be, Virgil's Hades, where

... long contracted filth still in the soul remains.
 The relics of inveterate vice they wear,
 And spots of sin obscene, in every face appear.

T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* was not the first poem to describe London as a scene in hell. Yet London is not only Hell, to Blake, but contains all the possible spiritual states of man, the whole wheel of life:

I behold London, a Human awful wonder of God
 He says, 'Return, Albion, Return! I give myself for thee!
 My streets are my Ideas of Imagination.
 Awake, Albion, awake! and let us awake-up together.
 My houses are thoughts: my Inhabitants, Affections,
 The children of my thoughts walking within my blood-vessels.'

The inhabitants do not live *in* the city: they *are* the city: one might say that the apparent city lives only in them. The blackened grandeur of London, its chimney-sweepers, its soldiers and harlots, the cold charity of St Paul's, the aloof politeness of 'polish'd palaces, dark, silent'. London has its heavens as well—Blake's own household in

Lambeth where he lived with his Catharine, was one,—a palace of love, unnoticed and obscure, as such palaces often are:

This is a Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find,
Nor can his watch-fiends find it, 'tis translucent and has
many Angles,
But he who finds it will find Oothoon's palace; for within
Opening into Beulah, every angle is a lovely heaven.

London, like Albion, is a giant whose life is made up of many lives, a whole made up of wholes: 'What are those golden builders doing?' Blake asks, and sees London

Becoming a building of pity and compassion. Lo!
The stones are pity, and the bricks well-wrought affections
Enamel'd with love and kindness, and the tiles engraven gold,
Labour of merciful hands: the beams of rafters are forgiveness
The mortar and cement of the work, tears of honesty: the nails
And the screws and iron braces are well wrought blandishments
And well contrived words, firm-fixing, never forgotten,
Always comforting the remembrance: the floors, humility;
The ceilings, devotion: the hearths, thanksgiving.
Prepare the furniture, O Lambeth, in thy pitying looms,
The curtains, woven tears and sighs wrought into lovely forms
For comfort; there the secret furniture of Jerusalem's chamber
Is wrought —

—always Lambeth is a place of peculiar grace, home of Blake's early happiness. In contrast, there are places of misery, where all the goodness there is in men and women goes to waste:

. . . he came to old Stratford, & thence to Stepney and the Isle
Of Leutha's Dogs, thence thro' the narrows of the River's side,
And saw every minute particular: the jewels of Albion running down
The kennels of the streets and lanes as if they were abhorr'd
And all the tenderesses of the soul cast forth as filth and mire.

The familiar 'Isle of Dogs' becomes 'the Isle of Leutha's dogs', placed under the influence of a goddess. Leutha is sin, and her 'dogs' those

same passions that bark round Milton's Sin in the famous passage in *Paradise Lost*; for Blake could never see the place otherwise than as the expression of the spirit that has built it.

In several designs he has personified London as an old man leaning on a crutch and led by a ragged child, an emblem that expresses that essence of the nineteenth-century city of Dickens and Doré.

Above London with its human states, its golden builders and its filth and mire, the eternal world remains. Everywhere there are unseen gates by which the souls enter and leave the order of time and space.

'There is in Albion a gate of precious stones and gold,' Blake writes:

Bending across the road of Oxford Street, it from Hyde Park
To Tyburn's deathful shades admits the wandering souls
Of multitudes who die from earth . . .

And over all the human states shines the divine light of 'Jesus the Imagination', the *logos*. 'The Imagination is not a state,' Blake says. 'It is the Human Existence Itself', the incorruptible divine essence that Blake, in common with the Neoplatonists and the authors of the Vedas, held to be present in, and to, every soul. His Jesus is, like Albion the temporal man, a composite figure in whose life live 'all the innumerable multitudes of eternity'. As the light of the soul, his emblem is the sun. Albion's sun Blake called 'clouded' and 'setting' in no merely descriptive sense; when in London skies

The Divine Vision like a silent sun appear'd above
Albion's dark rocks, setting behind the gardens of Kensington
On Tyburn's river in clouds of blood . . .

A silent sun, as the vision of the divine becomes remote and obscure—not like Blake's own sun, in whose round disk he saw an innumerable company of the heavenly host, crying 'holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty'. Perhaps because he was a Londoner Blake loved the sound of human voices, the shouting and laughter of children, 'the noise of rural works'; his very plants 'cry out in joy of existence'. In his verse, silence is always a sign of sorrow, unkindness, and spiritual death.

Blake's city, like Plato's world, is 'an image flowing according to number of eternity abiding in one', an imperfect and fluctuating

image; for the holy city that visionaries have seen 'coming down from heaven', although, unlike the human city, it 'eternally exists', is never, as Plato said of his Republic, realised on earth; but still something of the holy city of Jerusalem may, even at the very worst, be found in the human city, 'ever building, ever consuming'. Every city is a sadly imperfect, yet not wholly vain, attempt to build Jerusalem:

London is a stone of her ruins, Oxford is the dust of her walls,
Sussex and Kent are her scattered garments, Ireland her holy place,
And the murdered bodies of her little-ones are Scotland and Wales.

I must quickly say that Cambridge fares a little better than Oxford. She is not mere dust on the walls of the *civitas dei*; for Blake, Cambridge was the home of the poetic genius:

Los was the friend of Albion who most lov'd him. In Cambridgeshire
His eternal Station.

Put in plain prose, England has been most blessed in her poets; and of those Blake himself most admired—Spenser, Milton, Gray, Coleridge, Wordsworth—how many have walked by the 'little stream' of Cam?

To leave London, in a final image of Blake's lifelong love and hope for his native city, we see that though the bodies of her inhabitants are made of common clay, the heavenly Jerusalem is the mother of the souls.

The fields from Islington to Marybone,
To Primrose Hill and Saint John's Wood,
Were builded over with pillars of gold,
And there Jerusalem's pillars stood.

Her Little-ones ran on the fields,
The Lamb of God among them seen,
And fair Jerusalem his Bride,
Among the little meadows green.

Pancrass & Kentish-town repose
Among her golden pillars high,
Among her golden arches which
Shine upon the starry sky.

The Jew's-harp-house & the Green Man,
 The Ponds where Boys to bathe delight,
 The fields of Cows by Willan's farm
 Shine in Jerusalem's pleasant sight.

Blake's Jerusalem is a city of the innocent, the young, the self-forgetful; unlike Plato's Republic, it has no hierarchy; it is an anarchy of the perfect and uninhibited freedom of the joy and energy of life.

Blake, like every prophet, spoke to his nation of its spiritual state, and called upon Albion to turn from his errors to the worship of the true God. We may congratulate ourselves, if we will, that child-labour, the slave-trade, and several other evils that Blake denounced, have been abolished. Blake was a prophet in his day, no doubt, but we are well out of earshot of his 'thus saith the Lord'. But Blake's prophetic message to Albion was by no means the age-old denunciation of the seven deadly sins in their ever-modern dress. Indeed, he was warmly on the side of the 'sins', as the giant energies of life in bondage to moral abstractions. The sickness of the national mind, as he saw it, was not primarily moral at all; it was, rather, a deep-rooted philosophical error, one might say a heresy. Modern western civilisation has been called by the French metaphysician René Guénon 'the reign of quantity'; and it is precisely the dominance of scientific—that is to say, quantitative—thought, since Descartes, that Blake dared to question.

I turn my eyes to the Schools and Universities of Europe
 And there behold the loom of Locke, whose woof rages dire,
 Wash'd by the water-wheels of Newton: black the cloth
 In heavy wreaths folds over every Nation: cruel works
 Of many wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic
 Moving by compulsion each other, not as those in Eden, which
 Wheel within wheel in freedom revolve in harmony and peace.

Wheels, cogs, black cloth woven on a raging loom—evocative images indeed of the landscape of the industrial revolution; but not mere images. The Dark Satanic Mills of industry are but a reflection of the universe of Newtonian astronomy, whose causality the Deists conceived as a great machine of mechanistic cause for ever producing mechanistic effect. With this view of the phenomena Blake contrasts

the 'wheels within wheels' of Ezekiel's vision, 'for every natural effect has a spiritual cause, and not a natural', he wrote: 'natural cause only seems'.

In his tempera painting of Newton, now in the Tate gallery, he showed the great mathematician, his face expressive of the abstract beauty of his thought, his skilful hand designing some model of the solar system upon a great scroll; but seated upon an 'oozy rock' at the bottom of the sea of matter, that shuts out the light of heaven.

In the name of what did the son of a London hosier dare to question the metaphysics of the son of a Lincolnshire farmer? Not, obviously, because he questioned, or wished to question, Newton's mathematics. On the contrary, there is evidence that he admired the elegance—one may say the artistry—of Newton's thought. He questioned not the observations of the phenomena, as such; but he did question the assumptions made about the nature of those phenomena. Newton was, like Galileo, 'saving the appearances'. In more modern terms, he was constructing a model by which the phenomena might be more conveniently understood—the legitimate task of the scientist. What Blake does call in question—as the Church had done before him—is the assumption that those phenomena possess a substantial existence in a space and time whose reality is independent of the mind that conceives them. Nor was this some personal oddity of thought; still less was it mysticism. Blake was but reaffirming what traditional metaphysics has always affirmed. His arguments were essentially those of Berkeley, whom he frequently paraphrases very closely. 'Where is existence outside mind or thought?' he asks; 'where is it but in the mind of a fool?' The question is Berkeley's, the answer Blake's warm endorsement of the God-appointed philosopher who re-stated in the language of the eighteenth century the metaphysics of the Vedas, the Platonists, and the Hermetica. 'Mental things are alone real; what is called corporeal, nobody knows its dwelling place. It is in fallacy,' says Blake. In prose and in verse, in syllogism and in myth, he returned to this central point of all his thought: the phenomenal world exists in mind that perceives it:

In your own Bosom you bear your Heaven
And Earth, and all you behold. Tho' it appears without it is within,
In your Imagination, of which this world of mortality is but a shadow.

This, it cannot be said too strongly, is not mysticism; Blake is engaged in the discussion that had occupied philosophers continuously from Descartes to Locke, from Locke to Berkeley: does mind exist in space, or space in mind? Descartes, you will remember, distinguished between what he called the primary and secondary qualities of objects; the secondary qualities—colour, taste, smell and so forth—he allowed to exist in mind; but extension in time and space he held to be a real property of bodies, and independent of mind. Locke in this distinction followed Descartes; but Berkeley held that time and space are likewise mental categories, with no absolute existence. Blake, following Berkeley, rejected the ‘soul-shuddering vacuum’ of infinite extension and duration, described with such zest and vividness by Locke, as a nightmare of Albion’s sick brain. The last appearance in literature of that soul-shuddering eternity of space and time is, of course, in Joyce’s Jesuit sermon on Hell—very fittingly, Blake would have said. But for Blake ‘Nothing is more capacious than that which is incorporeal,’ as the Asclepian Dialogue says—that is, mind; a view more comprehensible, certainly, to modern scientific thought than to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. For science need by no means be committed to some one interpretation of the phenomena; and Blake may be said to have perceived the problem with a philosophic subtlety far in advance of his time. There is much in his thought on the nature of time, space, and events that is nearer to the scientific philosophy of Einstein, Whitehead or Schroedinger than to the thought of his own century. Blake was never more philosophic—nor was he more a poet—than when he wrote in these beautiful visionary lines from *Milton* his considered answer to Newton’s definition of the nature of fixed space, whose very phrases and terms he echoes as he answers them:

The sky is an immortal tent, built by the hands of Los:
 And every space that a man views about his dwelling-place
 Standing on his own roof or on his garden on a mount,
 Of twenty-five cubits in height, such space is his Universe:
 And on its verge the sun rises and sets, the clouds bow
 To meet the flat earth and the sea in such an ordered space:
 The starry heavens reach no further, but here bend and set
 On all sides, and the two poles turn on their valves of gold;
 And if he moves his dwelling-place, his heavens also move

Where'er he goes, and all his neighbourhood bewail his loss.
Such are the spaces call'd earth, and such its dimension.

It is the fallen rational faculty, Urizen, who in Blake's myth is shown labouring to create a universe outside the mind of man, a fixed space occupied by what Blake calls 'globes rolling through voidness'. Vala is the Goddess Nature, the 'veil' of the phenomena worshipped by the Deists as a reality whose laws are the laws of the universe. Los and Enitharmon, who, in unfallen man, create times and spaces as imaginative experiences,

Contracting or expanding their all flexible senses
At will to murmur in the flowers small as the honey bee
At will to stretch across the heavens, and step from star
to star

become, under the tyrannical illusion of mechanistic science, 'shrunk into fixed space', dead and petrified:

Their senses unexpansive in one stedfast bulk remain.

Blake's myth of Albion's sickness is no product of wild fancy, but a closely reasoned, and imaginatively realised, criticism of the mechanistic philosophy. The fall of Albion is from a qualitative to a quantitative world; his resurrection will be when, once more, he knows the mental existence of his world,

. . . creating space, creating time according to the wonders
divine
Of Human Imagination.

What at first may seem a prophecy too vague to be heeded, proves, on closer examination, too specific to be acceptable.

The *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* attacks what Blake saw as the central error of modern western thought: that there are two existing principles, body and soul, mind and matter. What Blake found in the writings of the Alchemists, whom he so greatly admired—Paracelsus he ranked with Shakespeare—was the affirmation of 'one thing' as the foundation of all. Dr Jung has recently turned to the philosophy of

alchemy for somewhat similar reasons. A body that has a merely quantitative existence; and a soul that has no body—a material desert, and an abstract heaven—such is the world that modern man has made for himself. But, says Blake, ‘man has no body distinct from soul. For that call’d body is a portion of soul discern’d by the five senses, the chief inlets of soul in this age.’ Some modern scientific thinking—one may cite Teilhard de Chardin—is again beginning to conceive mind and matter as but different forms of a basic universal energy; and to insist, as did Blake, upon the inseparability of matter and the mind perceiving it. ‘All things are comprehended in their eternal forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the true vine of eternity, the Human Imagination.’

Body is ‘a portion of soul’; Marxist admirers of Blake have tried to work it the other way, but Blake’s ‘one thing’ is not matter but life, spirit, the divine imagination. The universe is alive with the life of the logos, the mind that perceives it. ‘All beams from him, and as he himself has said, all dwells in him.’ There is no such thing as lifeless matter, ‘and every particle of dust breathes forth its joy’. Blake was first and last a Christian, but he is far more startling in his orthodoxy than in his deviations from the doctrine of the Creeds.

Man formerly contained in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven
and Earth

But now the starry heavens are fled from the mighty limbs of Albion.

This line re-echoes like a knell through the later poems, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. The physical universe, that man should experience as ‘a portion of soul’, living and human, has become a ‘dark abyss’, the ‘soul-shuddering vacuum’ filled with ‘rocks and solids’, the globes rolling through voidness of Newton’s absolute space.

For the Eye altering alters all;
The Senses roll themselves in fear,
And the flat Earth becomes a Ball;

The stars, sun, Moon, all shrink away,
A desert vast without a bound,
And nothing left to eat or drink,
And a dark desert all around.

As matter, torn apart from mind, becomes merely quantitative, so man likewise is diminished by the philosophic disaster

Which separated the stars from the mountains, the mountains
from man,
And left man a little grovelling root outside of himself.

Albion is called a 'giant' not only because he contains many lives; but also because he contains his universe. An illustration to *Jerusalem* shows the Giant Albion with sun, moon and stars in his limbs. For this cosmic figure, Blake had precedent: there is Swedenborg's 'Grand Man', who contains the heavens; the Jewish Adam Kadmon; the Frost-giants of the Eddas, from whose body heaven and earth were made. Boehme has a fine description of man as a microcosm. His flesh is the earth, his blood the ocean, his breath the air. 'The veins signify the powerful flowings out from the stars', the heart is fire, the head heaven, the lungs earth, and so on. What Boehme is describing is not mere resemblance, but cosmic analogy; and such a figure was unfallen Albion; but now

the Blue

Of our immortal veins and all their hosts fled from our limbs,
And wander'd distant in a dismal Night clouded and dark.
The sun fled from the Briton's forehead, the moon from his mighty loins.

This externalisation of the phenomena, for Blake, was nothing less than the fall of man from Paradise. He imagined the event in two ways: as a 'shrinking' of man from giant to worm, and as a 'wandering away' of the creatures.

They send the dove and raven in vain the serpent over the mountains
And in vain the eagle and lion over the fourfold wilderness,
They return not, but generate in rocky places desolate,
They return not, but build a habitation separate from man.
The sun forgets his course like a drunken man; he hesitates
Upon the Cheseldon hills, thinking to sleep on the Severn.
In vain: he is hurried afar into an unknown night.

Sometimes the externalisation is presented under the symbolism of the closing of the gate of Eden; and again, the idolatrous worship of the phenomena—for what is idolatry but the supposition that physical objects—stocks and stones—can be causal agents—is likened to the savage worship of idols; but worse, Blake says; for

Albion's sleep is not
Like Africa's, and his machines are woven with his life.

His machines are woven with his life; are we, in our technological Utopia, the triumphant Reign of Quantity praised by Sir Charles Snow, after all out of earshot of Blake's prophecy? Is not our material Paradise Blake's desert where the soul finds nothing to eat or drink? Technology works the miracle refused by Jesus in the wilderness (so Blake, in his illustrations to *Paradise Regained*, presents it) and makes bread out of stone. 'Real, taxed, substantial money-bought bread', Blake called it. But such merely quantitative prosperity offers but dust and ashes to the soul:

For dust and clay is the Serpent's meat,
That never was meant for man to eat.

Man's true food is 'the bread of sweet thought and the wine of delight', qualitative, not quantitative. It is not even true, Blake believed, that material prosperity must come first, and that the spiritual and imaginative life will follow as a matter of course; and he attacked this specious argument of commercial Great Britain: 'Commerce', he says, 'is so far from being beneficial to Arts or to Empires, that it is destructive of both, as history shows'. 'It is not arts that attend upon Empire, but Empire that attends and follows the Arts'—and he cites the wide empire of Christianity as a triumph of pure imagination that in the figure of Jesus 'conquers enemies and governs kingdoms'. Jesus and his disciples were, Blake said, 'all artists', as follows from his conception of 'Jesus the Imagination'. Their miracles were qualitative, not measurable. Nor did Blake despair of his native country. In a mood of energy and optimism he wrote, in 1801 to his friend Flaxman, 'The kingdoms of this world are now become the kingdoms of God. The Reign of Literature and the Arts commences.' The reign of the Divine

Humanity, as the reign of the Imagination, must bring back 'Painting, Music and Poetry, Man's three ways of conversing with Paradise'; the Reign of Quantity Blake gave a worse name; for him it is 'Satan's kingdom'.

From an early period, Blake identified the Sickness of Albion with the afflictions of Job. Blake's Job is a symbolic figure of the man whose world is progressively lost to him as a result of this same fall from a qualitative and imaginative, to a quantitative vision. The world becomes dead to him as it comes to seem external to mind and spirit. Thus it is that twenty years before he conceived his most famous work, the twenty-two engravings of the Book of Job, we find Albion, like Job,

... left prostrate upon the crystal pavement
Cover'd with boils from head to foot . . .

—and like Job losing his children; they become dead to him when they are seen as mere objects, 'distinct from soul'; and Albion's lament parallels that of Job; like the old nomad, we find our Father Albion, surprisingly enough, living on our English mountains in tents, in a pastoral landscape part Biblical, part English:

O weakness and O weariness O war within my members
My sons exiled from my breast pass to and fro before me
My birds are silent on my hills flocks die beneath my branches.
My tents are fallen, my trumpets and the sweet sounds of my harp
Is silent on my clouded hills that belch forth storms and fire.
My milk of cows and honey of bees and fruit of golden harvest
Are gather'd in the scorching heat and in the driving rain
My robe is turned to confusion and my bright gold to stone.

—for gold, seen quantitatively, is only stone. The parallel with Job continues:

First fled my sons and then my daughters, then my wild animations
My cattle next, last ev'n the dog at my gate; the forests fled,
The cornfields and the breathing gardens outside separated,
The sea, the stars, the sun, the moon, driv'n forth by my disease.
All is eternal death . . .

It is by externalisation that Albion, like Job, loses all that he has; and a world whose nature, like the universe of Locke, Newton and the Deists, is merely quantitative, may justly be called 'eternal death' since it is in its nature composed of so-called lifeless matter, 'distinct from soul' and merely measurable. 'God us keep,' Blake exclaimed on more than one occasion, from the Newtonian universe.

It is with a shock of realisation therefore, that we discover that Blake was never more the prophet of England than when he chose as the theme of his last completed work the story of Job. Job is Albion; and as the earlier Albion lived in tents, so now the later Job sits among the ruins of Stonehenge, with a Gothic cathedral in the distance and a Scots sheepdog at his feet, visited by neighbours whose wives are dressed in the style of London fashions at the turn of the century. Reading the engravings in the light of the earlier poem, we may conclude that Job is Albion; that his sickness is the philosophy of scientific materialism that externalises the phenomena and divides body from soul. Job's return to happiness, wealth, and spiritual paternity follows upon his return to wisdom in the realisation that soul and body are not two but one. In the twelfth plate of the series stars appear, dim and 'wandering in an unknown night'; they are Newton's 'globes rolling through voidness'; but to the regenerate Job they return to their qualitative existence within the imagination, 'all the unfathomable non-ens of nature', as he elsewhere says, 'humanizing' and 'cloud meteor and star are men seen afar'. In the fourteenth engraving, 'when the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy' the stars are represented as angels, while sun and moon, as a god and a goddess, drive out their chariots, drawn by the everliving horses of day and the dragons of night.

How far Blake's prophetic vision is applicable—and how far unheeded—at the present time, it is not for me to say. But to understand *what* he said is already, inevitably, to share his vision; and to share his vision is to recover something of the lost Paradise. Samuel Palmer recalls the old Interpreter pointing to some children playing below his window, and saying, 'that is Heaven'; for no visionary was ever less other-worldly than was Blake.

'I feel that a man may be happy in this world', he wrote in a letter, 'and I know that this world is a world of imagination and vision. I see everything I paint in this world, but everybody does not see alike. To

the eyes of a miser a guinea is far more beautiful than the sun, and a bag worn with the use of money has more beautiful proportions than a vine filled with grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing in the way . . . Some see Nature all ridicule and deformity, and some scarce see Nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, so he sees. As the eye is formed, such are its powers. You certainly mistake, when you say that the visions of fancy are not to be found in this world. To me this world is all one continued vision of fancy or imagination.'

Yeats, whose thought on mythology was so deeply influenced by Blake, asked, 'Have not all races their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill', imaginative stories which the uneducated classes knew and even sung, that might be shared by 'artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer?'. He was thinking of Ireland, whose peculiar genius in this respect Blake himself recognised when he called her (before Home Rule) Albion's 'holy place': Holy Ireland because she has not forgotten her ancient gods and saints, with the tomb of Queen Maeve on Knocknarea and the chapel of St Patrick on the mountain that bears his name—symbols that represent a recognition of those qualitative presences that make a land and a history. But where are the holy places of England? One may ask, with David Jones, 'To what degree, for instance, is it possible for the "name" to evoke the "local habitation" long since gone?'

Already in Blake's lifetime the old gods of England had departed beyond remembrance; the saints, too, had been banished. In his attempt to wed the imagination of his race once more to land and history, he had all to do as from the beginning; he had, as it were, to re-create the mythical prehistory. Did he succeed?

In his last and longest poem *Jerusalem*, he made a systematic attempt to give back a qualitative dimension to England's green and pleasant land by placing her counties and regions under the tutelage of the twelve Hebrew patriarchs; Rahab and Tirzah, Hoglah and Milcah, and a host of yet more outlandish figures are let loose upon our familiar countryside; but in this attempt to create a British Israel he all but destroyed himself as a poet, without making the slightest impression upon the national imagination. In his Job engravings, it is true, the old patriarch is made to inhabit Albion's druid temples, and in the identity

of Job and Albion Blake has made a splendidly living vehicle for his myth. Perhaps he has restored some holiness to our highest peak where live his Immortals

Consulting as One Man above the Mountain of Snowdon Sublime
And that One Man Jesus the Christ.

In his paintings of Bible subjects, and above all of Jesus, it is surprising that Blake did not attempt, as has Stanley Spencer in our own day, to wed the Christian mythology to English landscape, as had the Italian and French painters for centuries before him. Yet if 'those feet in ancient time/Walk upon England's mountains green' it is Blake that has made it so; and one cannot say that, at all events, in the figures of Jesus and Jerusalem his Bride, Blake has not brought those figures into the poetic landscape of Albion's land.

What of those gods and goddesses, Los and Urizen, Enitharmon and Vala, whose great forms overshadow Avebury, or keep watch over London? Los, walking the rounds of his seven furnaces, with tongs and hammer; Enitharmon and her maidens toiling at the 'looms' are the presiding daimons of the Industrial Revolution, one might say, and Orc a spirit of revolution modern enough. These, with Tharmas, the Oceanus of the Thames and the Atlantic, Blake would have said, are none of his invention, but true visions of the spiritual forces within the soul of the nation, as they were at the time of writing. There is nothing archaic in these gods, howling among the din of the machines, or labouring among the brick-kilns and potteries. Yet I would say that Blake never succeeded so well as when it was himself who performed the miracle of marrying the imagination of the race to rock and hill. Neither Los nor Enitharmon possess the divine power of immortalising mountain or city, as did the old engraver, when on Hampstead Hill he 'touched Heaven with his walking stick' or conversed with the spirit of Milton in his cottage garden at Felpham. If the names we read on the London 'buses have a certain heavenly radiance it is because in Peckham Rye Blake saw angels among the harvesters, because in 'Lambeth Vale' love had her secret palace. Hyde Park, Oxford Street, Kensington, Tyburn, Blake revealed them all in their spiritual nature. It is not the presence of Los, or Enitharmon, or Orc that transfigures London so much as that of the poet whom Palmer and Richmond and Linnell, his young disciples, called the Interpreter.

Blake, too, was fond of quoting Shakespeare's words about the power of the poet 'to give to airy nothing/A local habitation and a name'; only, he said, the essences that the poet incarnates are not nothings, but the most real things of all, 'of which this vegetable world is but a shadow'. The local habitation may be, as David Jones says, irrecoverable; but those airy nothings of the imagination do not perish because the bulldozers obliterate the traces of their shrines; they may be recalled by a poet whose words have the power to evoke them from their abiding dwelling-place, in the human imagination, and compel them into some new shrine:

In Felpham I heard and saw the visions of Albion,
I write in South Molton Street what I both see and hear
In regions of Humanity, in London's opening streets.

Already Blake's London, with Plato's Athens, Dante's Florence, Balzac's Paris, and Joyce's Dublin, no longer exists in time and place; but, in his own words (or commenting, it may be, upon a phrase from Spenser), 'The ruins of time build the mansions of eternity'.

