

POEMS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649162260

Poems by William Blake

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

WILLIAM BLAKE

POEMS

Red Letter Library

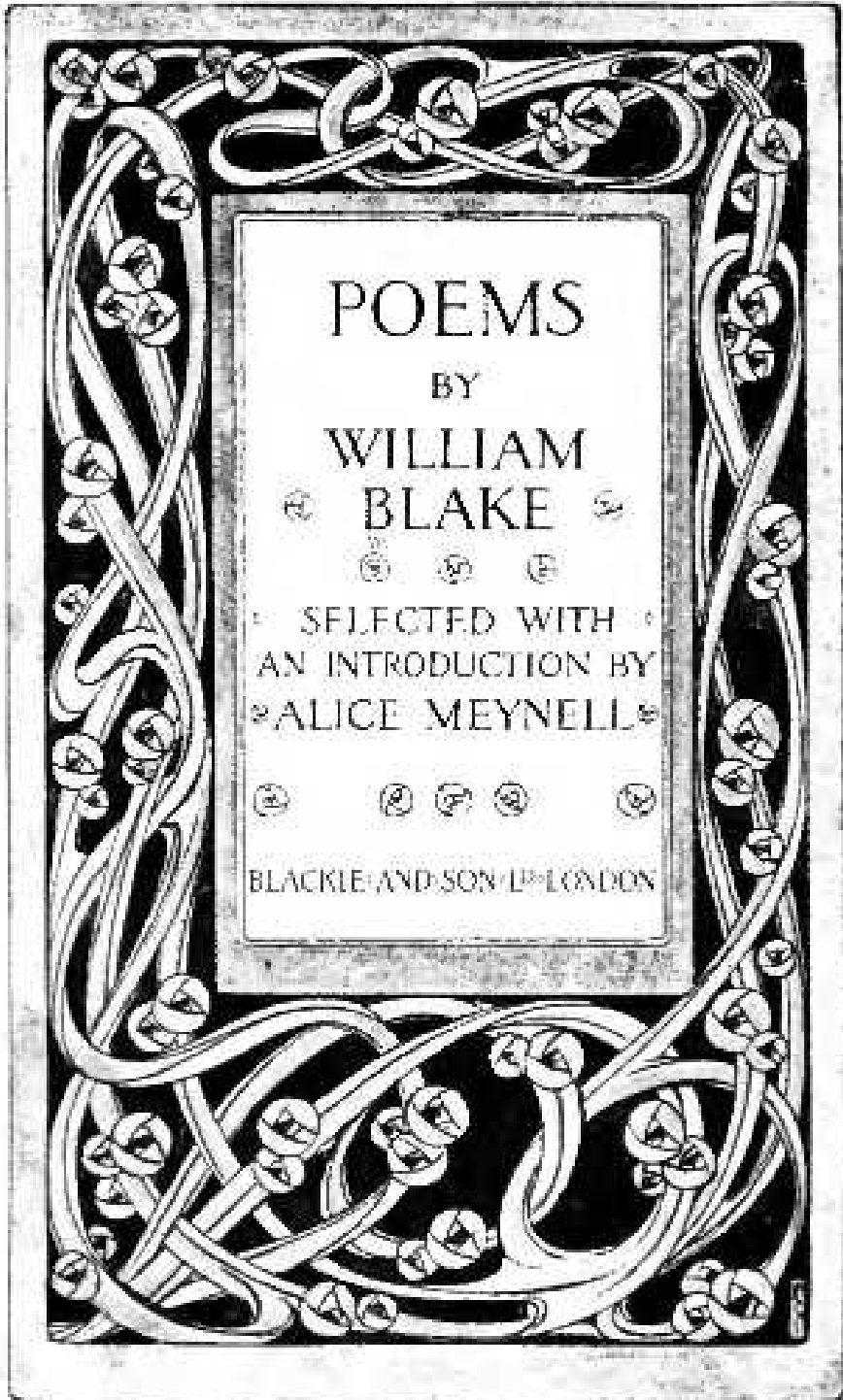
3

8180-

POEMS BY
WILLIAM BLAKE

First printed, September, 1911





POEMS

BY

WILLIAM
BLAKE

SELECTED WITH
AN INTRODUCTION BY
ALICE MEYNELL

BLACKIE AND SON, LTD., LONDON

"I amused myself this spring", writes Henry Crabb Robinson in 1810, "by writing an account of the insane poet, painter, and engraver, Blake." To-day a man of letters who should roundly call Blake a mad-man would be thought to have cast away his literary reputation. Not for this, however, should such a one be condemned, but for having thus "amused himself". Blake's intellect did, terribly and portentously, overpass the limits of normal sanity; but we must watch its distractions gravely, with a serious thought askance upon our arbitrary or merely habitual definitions of normal sanity—our delimitations which serve well enough for every day, but which we might distrust in the case of Blake's day, a day more than naturally luminous with a more than natural sun. It is a grave question for Blake, but a graver one for humanity, this question whether Blake was sane. Nor is it possible to solve it, for we have at the outset a difficulty of which his readers never can and never will be quit: I mean the difficulty of his terms. His vocabulary has never

been interpreted for us—there is no interpreter. Or, to speak more precisely, there are many "interpreters", but there is no translator. There is no one to authorize its equivalent in the speech of other Englishmen. When Blake tells us of his great friendship with an Angel who had become a Devil, or promises us an infernal Bible if we will deserve it, and again tells us he has "the Bible of Hell which the world shall have whether they will or no", he uses substantives for which no man has a key. When, on the other hand, he says that the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with him, we have the terms definite enough, but are little the wiser.

Blake's genius, in fact, is entangled with his insanity. A sign and proof of the purity and singleness of that genius is precisely that it is entangled with his high insanity, and with nothing else: with none of the adulterations wherewith other men of name have mingled their fancy. No slight or suspicion is cast upon the poetry of Blake by those who have to confess that he was, in unknown measure, at undated times, in transcendent moods, a madman; but who have not to confess that he was a man of the world, a secondary man, a waiter upon literary fashions, a weakling trusting to the strength of num-

bers of a literary company, a wearer of other men's passions, or so much as capable of an insincerity. All these have been characters of poets who did not believe that they saw Ezekiel sitting in a field, and of painters who never thought St. Joseph had taught them how to dilute glue for water-colour drawing.

All "interpreters" of Blake—and they have been many, and most eager, most able—are constrained to make their own use of his terms, and therefore in some measure to think for Blake instead of fulfilling the harder duty of suffering Blake to think for them.

As a philosopher, therefore—and Blake seems to be much more important as a philosopher than as the "poet, painter, and engraver" of Crabbs Robinson's phrase—he seized the scheme of "things entire", not, like the intellectual sensualist, to make the days of mortality more pleasant, but to invert, to shatter, to re-conceive. ("Seems to be", I have written, because it is not for any mind, seeking to reflect his, to do more than conjecture.) Blake recast the whole of morality, he laid his hand upon the very inner and innermost sacred centre of right and wrong—with what more than Satanic purpose, or to what more than archangelic