

GNOMIC VERSES

William Blake

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i

Great things are done when men and mountains meet;
This is not done by jostling in the street.

ii. To God

If you have form'd a circle to go into,
Go into it yourself, and see how you would do.

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iii

They said this mystery never shall cease:
The priest promotes war, and the soldier peace.

iv. An Answer to the Parson

Why of the sheep do you not learn peace?
Because I don't want you to shear my fleece.

v. Lacedaemonian Instruction

Come hither, my boy, tell me what thou seest there.
A fool tangled in a religious snare.

vi

Nail his neck to the cross: nail it with a nail.
Nail his neck to the cross: ye all have power over his tail.

vii Love to faults is always blind;
Always is to joy inclin'd,
Lawless, wing'd and unconfid'd,
And breaks all chains from every mind.

Deceit to secrecy confin'd,
Lawful, cautious and refin'd;
To anything but interest blind,
And forges fetters for the mind.

viii There souls of men are bought and sold,
And milk-fed Infancy for gold;
And Youth to slaughter-houses led,
And Beauty, for a bit of bread.

ix. Soft Snow

I walkèd abroad on a snowy day:
I ask'd the soft Snow with me to play:
She play'd and she melted in all her prime;
And the Winter call'd it a dreadful crime.

x

Abstinence sows sand all over
The ruddy limbs and flaming hair,
But Desire gratified
Plants fruits of life and beauty there.

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xi. Merlin's Prophecy

The harvest shall flourish in wintry weather
When two Virginities meet together:
The king and the priest must be tied in a tether
Before two Virgins can meet together.

xii

If you trap the moment before it's ripe,
The tears of repentance you'll certainly wipe;
But if once you let the ripe moment go,
You can never wipe off the tears of woe.

xiii

An Old Maid early ere I knew
Aught but the love that on me grew;
And now I'm cover'd o'er and o'er,
And wish that I had been a whore.

O! I cannot, cannot find
The undaunted courage of a virgin mind;
For early I in love was crost,
Before my flower of love was lost.

xiv

The sword sung on the barren heath,
The sickle in the fruitful field:
The sword he sung a song of death,
But could not make the sickle yield.

xv

O lapwing! thou fliest around the heath,
Nor seest the net that is spread beneath.
Why dost thou not fly among the corn fields?
They cannot spread nets where a harvest yields.

xvi

Terror in the house does roar;
But Pity stands before the door.

xvii. Several Questions Answered

1. Eternity He who bends to himself a Joy
Doth the wingèd life destroy;

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But he who kisses the Joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.

2

The look of love alarms,
Because it's fill'd with fire;
But the look of soft deceit
Shall win the lover's hire.

3

Soft deceit and idleness,
These are Beauty's sweetest dress.

4. The Question answered

What is it men in women do require?
The lineaments of gratified desire.
What is it women do in men require?
The lineaments of gratified desire.

5. An ancient Proverb

Remove away that black'ning church,
Remove away that marriage hearse,
Remove away that man of blood
You'll quite remove the ancient curse.

xviii

If I e'er grow to man's estate,
O! give to me a woman's fate.
May I govern all, both great and small,
Have the last word, and take the wall.

xix

Since all the riches of this world
May be gifts from the Devil and earthly kings,
I should suspect that I worshipp'd the Devil
If I thank'd my God for worldly things.

xx. Riches

The countless gold of a merry heart,
The rubies and pearls of a loving eye,
The indolent never can bring to the mart,
Nor the secret hoard up in his treasury.

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xxi

The Angel that presided o'er my birth
Said `Little creature, form'd of joy and mirth,
Go, love without the help of anything on earth.'

xxii

Grown old in love from seven till seven times seven,
I oft have wish'd for Hell, for ease from Heaven.

xxiii

Do what you will this life's a fiction,
And is made up of contradiction.