

# **POEMS FROM LETTERS**

William Blake



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# POEMS FROM LETTERS

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**William Blake**

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- To my dearest Friend, John Flaxman, these lines:
- To my dear Friend, Mrs. Anna Flaxman
- To Thomas Butts
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POEMS FROM LETTERS

**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*

POEMS FROM LETTERS

**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;



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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.

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**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?

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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!

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**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.