

William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence"

Blake (1757 - 1827) is one of the major cultural figures of the Romantic period, although he was almost entirely unknown as a poet in his own time and had only a minor reputation as an engraver and illustrator. He was a mystic and political radical, which in that time meant a fervent supporter of democratic reform of a political system that was seen by many as autocratic and repressive. This poem is one of Blake's most well-known and often-cited works today.

TO see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

A Robin Red breast in a Cage 5
Puts all Heaven in a Rage.
A dove house fill'd with doves & Pigeons
Shudders Hell thro' all its regions.

A dog starv'd at his Master's Gate 10
Predicts the ruin of the State.
A Horse misus'd upon the Road
Calls to Heaven for Human blood.

Each outcry of the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear.
A Skylark wounded in the wing, 15
A Cherubim does cease to sing.

The Game Cock clipp'd and arm'd for fight¹
Does the Rising Sun affright.
Every Wolf's & Lion's howl
Raises from Hell a Human Soul. 20

The wild deer, wand'ring here & there,
Keeps the Human Soul from Care.
The Lamb misus'd breeds public strife
And yet forgives the Butcher's Knife.

The Bat that flits at close of Eve 25
Has left the Brain that won't believe.
The Owl that calls upon the Night
Speaks the Unbeliever's fright.

He who shall hurt the little Wren 30
Shall never be belov'd by Men.
He who the Ox to wrath has mov'd
Shall never be by Woman lov'd.

The wanton Boy that kills the Fly

¹ Cock fighting was legal in England until 1835.

Shall feel the Spider's enmity.
He who torments the Chafer's sprite² 35
Weaves a Bower in endless Night.

The Catterpillar on the Leaf
Repeats to thee thy Mother's grief.
Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly,
For the Last Judgement draweth nigh. 40

He who shall train the Horse to War
Shall never pass the Polar Bar.
The Beggar's Dog & Widow's Cat,
Feed them & thou wilt grow fat.

The Gnat that sings his Summer's song 45
Poison gets from Slander's tongue.
The poison of the Snake & Newt
Is the sweat of Envy's Foot.

The poison of the Honey Bee
Is the Artist's Jealousy. 50
The Prince's Robes & Beggars' Rags
Are Toadstools on the Miser's Bags.

A truth that's told with bad intent
Beats all the Lies you can invent.
It is right it should be so; 55
Man was made for Joy & Woe;

And when this we rightly know
Thro' the World we safely go.
Joy & Woe are woven fine,
A Clothing for the Soul divine; 60

Under every grief & pine
Runs a joy with silken twine.
The Babe is more than swadling Bands;
Throughout all these Human Lands

Tools were made, & born were hands, 65
Every Farmer Understands.
Every Tear from Every Eye
Becomes a Babe in Eternity.

This is caught by Females bright
And return'd to its own delight. 70
The Bleat, the Bark, Bellow & Roar
Are Waves that Beat on Heaven's Shore.

² Chafer: any of a large family of beetles; sprite: spirit, usually, although Blake may be using the term to refer to young beetles, or beetles in their grub stage

The Babe that weeps the Rod beneath
Writes Revenge in realms of death.
The Beggar's Rags, fluttering in Air, 75
Does to Rags the Heavens tear.

The Soldier arm'd with Sword & Gun,
Palsied strikes the Summer's Sun.
The poor Man's Farthing is worth more
Than all the Gold on Afric's Shore. 80

One Mite^o wrung from the Labrer's hands *° a small amount, a pittance*
Shall buy & sell the Miser's lands:
Or, if protected from on high,
Does that whole Nation sell & buy.

He who mocks the Infant's Faith 85
Shall be mock'd in Age & Death.
He who shall teach the Child to Doubt
The rotting Grave shall ne'er get out.

He who respects the Infant's faith
Triumph's over Hell & Death. 90
The Child's Toys & the Old Man's Reasons
Are the Fruits of the Two seasons.

The Questioner, who sits so sly,
Shall never know how to Reply.
He who replies to words of Doubt 95
Doth put the Light of Knowledge out.

The Strongest Poison ever known
Came from Caesar's Laurel Crown.³
Nought can deform the Human Race
Like the Armour's iron brace. 100

When Gold & Gems adorn the Plow
To peaceful Arts shall Envy Bow.
A Riddle or the Cricket's Cry
Is to Doubt a fit Reply.

The Emmet's^o Inch & Eagle's Mile 105 *° an ant*
Make Lane Philosophy to smile.
He who Doubts from what he sees
Will ne'er believe, do what you Please.

If the Sun & Moon should doubt
They'd immediately Go out. 110
To be in a Passion you Good may do,
But no Good if a Passion is in you.

³ In classical Rome, laurel boughs were worn around the head as a token of victory.

The Whore & Gambler, by the State
Licenc'd, build that Nation's Fate.
The Harlot's cry from Street to Street *115*
Shall weave Old England's winding Sheet.

The Winner's Shout, the Loser's Curse,
Dance before dead England's Hearse.
Every Night & every Morn
Some to Misery are Born. *120*

Every Morn & every Night
Some are Born to sweet Delight.
Some are Born to sweet Delight,
Some are born to Endless Night.

We are led to Believe a Lie *125*
When we see not Thro' the Eye
Which was Born in a Night to Perish in a Night
When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light.

God Appears & God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in the Night, *130*
But does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of day.