

WILLIAM ALLINGHAM'S NOTEBOOK OF POEMS

BY BLAKE

One of the library's most recent acquisitions is a small manuscript volume of poems by William Blake, compiled in the 1850's by the poet William Allingham. The volume as at present bound is made up of seventy leaves of writing paper, measuring in folio 7.1 in. x 4.5 in. The first six leaves, which are watermarked 1856, are blank; the next seventeen leaves bear extracts from the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*; then follow twelve leaves of 'Extracts from a Manuscript Book of William Blake's'; two further leaves bear extracts from the *Songs of Innocence*; next come sixteen leaves of poems from the *Poetical Sketches*; and finally a further seventeen blank leaves, also watermarked 1856.

Those poems written out by Allingham from earlier printed texts are of little interest, although it may be noted that in copying from the *Poetical Sketches* he must have had access to a copy corrected in part by Blake himself, for of the 11 emendations inked into the Turnbull copy, Allingham follows five¹. The central section of excerpts from Blake's own manuscript volume is, however, of more interest.

In his study of Blake's manuscript notebook, Sir Geoffrey Keynes quotes D. G. Rossetti's account of how it came into his possession: 'I purchased this original M.S. of [William] Palmer, an attendant in the Antique Gallery at the British Museum, on the 30th April, 1874. Palmer knew Blake personally, and it was from the artist's wife that he had the present M.S. which he sold me for 10s. Among the sketches there are one or two profiles of Blake himself. D.G.C.R.'².

As Sir Geoffrey also records, Rossetti had ideas of publishing part of the notebook, but he had still done nothing about it when he was approached by Alexander Gilchrist in 1860. A letter from Rossetti to Allingham on 1 November of that year, however, suggests a prior interest on Allingham's part: 'A man — one Gilchrist, who lives next door to Carlyle, and is as near him in other respects as he can manage — wrote to me the other day, saying he was writing a life of Blake, and wanted to see my manuscript by that genius. Was there not some talk of *your* doing something in the way of publishing its contents?'³

Allingham's interest in Blake may be traced back to at least 1849. In his diary for 16 August of that year he records meeting Coventry Patmore at the British Museum and talking with him about Blake. The next day, a Friday, his entry reads: 'To Slater, publisher, and talked to him about a new edition of Blake's poems: civil, and seems inclined to publish.' And on the Saturday Allingham went again to the British Museum: 'Mr Patmore. He helps me to look up Blake, but without success; they seem to have nothing of his.'⁴ During this year he pub-