THEL'S MOTTO

1 Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?
2 Or wilt thou go ask the Mole?
3 Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
4 Or Love in a golden bowl?

1.1 The daughters of the Seraphim led round their sunny flocks,
1.2 All but the youngest: she in paleness sought the secret air,
1.3 To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day:
1.4 Down by the river of Adona her soft voice is heard,
1.5 And thus her gentle lamentation falls like morning dew:
1.6 "O life of this our spring! why fades the lotus of the water,
1.7 Why fade these children of the spring, born but to smile and fall?
1.8 Ah! Thel is like a wat'ry bow, and like a parting cloud;
1.9 Like a reflection in a glass; like shadows in the water;
1.10 Like dreams of infants, like a smile upon an infant's face;
1.11 Like the dove's voice; like transient day; like music in the air.
1.12 Ah! gentle may I lay me down, and gentle rest my head,
1.13 And gentle sleep the sleep of death, and gentle hear the voice
1.14 Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time."

1.15 The Lily of the valley, breathing in the humble grass,
1.16 Answer'd the lovely maid and said: "I am a wat'ry weed,
1.17 And I am very small and love to dwell in lowly vales;
1.18 So weak, the gilded butterfly scarce perches on my head.
1.19 Yet I am visited from heaven, and he that smiles on all
1.20 Walks in the valley and each morn over me spreads his hand,
1.21 Saying, 'Rejoice, thou humble grass, thou new-born lily-flower,
1.22 Thou gentle maid of silent valleys and of modest brooks;
1.23 For thou shalt be clothed in light, and fed with morning manna,
1.24 Till summer's heat melts thee beside the fountains and the springs
1.25 To flourish in eternal vales.' Then why should Thel complain?
1.26 Why should the mistress of the vales of Har utter a sigh?"
She ceas'd and smil'd in tears, then sat down in her silver shrine.

Thel answer'd: "O thou little virgin of the peaceful valley,
Giving to those that cannot crave, the voiceless, the o'ertired;
Thy breath doth nourish the innocent lamb, he smells thy milky garments,
He crops thy flowers while thou sittest smiling in his face,
Wiping his mild and meekin mouth from all contagious taints.
Thy wine doth purify the golden honey; thy perfume,
Which thou dost scatter on every little blade of grass that springs,
Revives the milked cow, and tames the fire-breathing steed.
But Thel is like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun:
I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place?"

"Queen of the vales," the Lily answer'd, "ask the tender cloud,
And it shall tell thee why it glitters in the morning sky,
And why it scatters its bright beauty thro' the humid air.
Descend, O little Cloud, and hover before the eyes of Thel."

The Cloud descended, and the Lily bow'd her modest head
And went to mind her numerous charge among the verdant grass.

"O little Cloud," the virgin said, "I charge thee tell to me
Why thou complainest not when in one hour thou fade away:
Then we shall seek thee, but not find. Ah! Thel is like to thee:
I pass away: yet I complain, and no one hears my voice."

The Cloud then shew'd his golden head and his bright form emerg'd,
Hovering and glittering on the air before the face of Thel.

"O virgin, know'st thou not our steeds drink of the golden springs
Where Luvah doth renew his horses? Look'st thou on my youth,
And fearest thou, because I vanish and am seen no more,
Nothing remains? O maid, I tell thee, when I pass away
It is to tenfold life, to love, to peace and raptures holy:
Unseen descending, weigh my light wings upon balmy flowers,
And court the fair-eyed dew to take me to her shining tent:
The weeping virgin trembling kneels before the risen sun,
2.15Till we arise link'd in a golden band and never part, 
2.16But walk united, bearing food to all our tender flowers."

2.17"Dost thou, O little Cloud? I fear that I am not like thee,
2.18For I walk thro' the vales of Har, and smell the sweetest flowers,
2.19But I feed not the little flowers; I hear the warbling birds,
2.20But I feed not the warbling birds; they fly and seek their food:
2.21But Thel delights in these no more, because I fade away;
2.22And all shall say, 'Without a use this shining woman liv'd,
2.23Or did she only live to be at death the food of worms?' "

2.24The Cloud reclin'd upon his airy throne and answer'd thus:

2.25"Then if thou art the food of worms, O virgin of the skies,
2.26How great thy use, how great thy blessing! Every thing that lives
2.27Lives not alone nor for itself. Fear not, and I will call
2.28The weak worm from its lowly bed, and thou shalt hear its voice,
2.29Come forth, worm of the silent valley, to thy pensive queen."

2.30The helpless worm arose, and sat upon the Lily's leaf,
2.31And the bright Cloud sail'd on, to find his partner in the vale.

III

3.1Then Thel astonish'd view'd the Worm upon its dewy bed.

3.2"Art thou a Worm? Image of weakness, art thou but a Worm?
3.3I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lily's leaf
3.4Ah! weep not, little voice, thou canst not speak, but thou canst weep.
3.5Is this a Worm? I see thee lay helpless and naked, weeping,
3.6And none to answer, none to cherish thee with mother's smiles."
3.7 The Clod of Clay heard the Worm's voice and rais'd her pitying head:
3.8She bow'd over the weeping infant, and her life exhal'd
3.9In milky fondness: then on Thel she fix'd her humble eyes.

3.10"O beauty of the vales of Har! we live not for ourselves.
3.11Thou seest me the meanest thing, and so I am indeed.
3.12My bosom of itself is cold, and of itself is dark;
3.13But he, that loves the lowly, pours his oil upon my head,
3.14And kisses me, and binds his nuptial bands around my breast,
3.15 And says: 'Thou mother of my children, I have loved thee
3.16 And I have given thee a crown that none can take away.'
3.17 But how this is, sweet maid, I know not, and I cannot know;
3.18 I ponder, and I cannot ponder; yet I live and love."

3.19 The daughter of beauty wip'd her pitying tears with her white veil,
3.20 And said: "Alas! I knew not this, and therefore did I weep.
3.21 That God would love a Worm I knew, and punish the evil foot
3.22 That wilful bruised its helpless form; but that he cherish'd it
3.23 With milk and oil I never knew, and therefore did I weep;
3.24 And I complain'd in the mild air, because I fade away,
3.25 And lay me down in thy cold bed, and leave my shining lot."

3.26 "Queen of the vales," the matron Clay answer'd, "I heard thy sighs,
3.27 And all thy moans flew o'er my roof, but I have call'd them down.
3.28 Wilt thou, O Queen, enter my house? 'Tis given thee to enter
3.29 And to return: fear nothing, enter with thy virgin feet."

IV

4.1 The eternal gates' terrific porter lifted the northern bar:
4.2 Thel enter'd in and saw the secrets of the land unknown.
4.3 She saw the couches of the dead, and where the fibrous roots
4.4 Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists:
4.5 A land of sorrows and of tears where never smile was seen.

4.6 She wander'd in the land of clouds thro' valleys dark, list'ning
4.7 Dolours and lamentations; waiting oft beside a dewy grave
4.8 She stood in silence, list'ning to the voices of the ground,
4.9 Till to her own grave plot she came, and there she sat down,
4.10 And heard this voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit.

4.11 "Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
4.12 Or the glist'ning Eye to the poison of a smile?
4.13 Why are Eyelids stor'd with arrows ready drawn,
4.14 Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
4.15 Or an Eye of gifts and graces show'ring fruits and coined gold?
4.16 Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
4.17 Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in?
4.18 Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror, trembling, and affright?
4.19 Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?
4.20 Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?"

4.21 The Virgin started from her seat, and with a shriek
4.22 Fled back unhinder'd till she came into the vales of Har.

Notes
1.1] First engraved in 1789, in eight plates. In the engraved lyrical poems, the complete text of the poem and the accompanying design usually go on a single plate; the longer engraved poems take the form of a sequence of plates in which text and design may have any kind of proportion to one another. These longer poems are called "prophecies," the name Blake gave to America and Europe (see below), and they deal with conflicts and interactions of states of the human mind, to which Blake gave names of his own. Thel (perhaps from the Greek thelos, will) is an unborn spirit first seeking, then shrinking back from, birth in the physical world. The "silver rod" and "golden bowl" of the motto are symbols of the physical body divided into two sexes, and are partly derived from Ecclesiastes 12: 6. The motto means: "Is it possible to experience genuine love and wisdom (the world of the eagle) in a physical state (the world of the mole)?"

the Seraphim. Blake etched on the plate "Mne Seraphim," apparently meaning some form of disembodied angelic intelligences.
1.4] Adona: probably the river of Adonis (cf. Paradise Lost, I, 450); the unborn world of Thel is intended to recall both Eden and the Gardens of Adonis in The Faerie Queene.
1.26] vales of Har: the world of imagination before it creates anything: Har is a character in another poem of about the same date, Tiriel, related to The Book of Thel.
2.8] Luvah: here the spirit of the sun, the Greek Apollo; later identified with Orc (see notes to America, below).
4.1] norther. The north is the nadir in Blake's symbolism, and the passage means that Thel is descending from the unborn into the physical world, The symbol is derived from the two entrances to the Cave of the Nymphs in Homer's Odyssey, Book XIII, by way of an allegorical commentary on this episode, Porphyry's De Antro Nymphaorum.
4.9] grave plot: her physical body.