

William Blake (1757-1827)

America a Prophecy / A Prophecy

The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent,
Sullen fires across the Atlantic glow to America's shore:
Piercing the souls of warlike men, who rise in silent night,
Washington, Franklin, Paine & Warren, Gates, Hancock & Green;

5 Meet on the coast glowing with blood from Albions fiery Prince.

Washington spoke; Friends of America look over the Atlantic sea;
A bended bow is lifted in heaven, & a heavy iron chain t158
Descends link by link from Albions cliffs across the sea to bind
Brothers & sons of America, till our faces pale and yellow;

10 Heads deprest, voices weak, eyes downcast, hands work-bruis'd,
Feet bleeding on the sultry sands, and the furrows of the whip
Descend to generations that in future times forget.--

The strong voice ceas'd; for a terrible blast swept over the heaving sea;
The eastern cloud rent; on his cliffs stood Albions wrathful Prince

15 A dragon form clashing his scales at midnight he arose,
And flam'd red meteors round the land of Albion beneath
His voice, his locks, his awful shoulders, and his glowing eyes,
Appear to the Americans upon the cloudy night.

Solemn heave the Atlantic waves between the gloomy nations,

20 Swelling, belching from its deeps red clouds & raging Fires!
Albion is sick. America faints! enrag'd the Zenith grew.
As human blood shooting its veins all round the orb'd heaven
Red rose the clouds from the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood
And in the red clouds rose a Wonder o'er the Atlantic sea;

25 Intense! naked! a Human fire fierce glowing, as the wedge
Of iron heated in the furnace; his terrible limbs were fire
With myriads of cloudy terrors banners dark & towers
Surrounded; heat but not light went thro' the murky atmosphere
The King of England looking westward trembles at the vision

30 Albions Angel stood beside the Stone of night, and saw
The terror like a comet, or more like the planet red
That once inclos'd the terrible wandering comets in its sphere.
Then Mars thou wast our center, & the planets three flew round
Thy crimson disk; so e'er the Sun was rent from thy red sphere;

35 The Spectre glow'd his horrid length staining the temple long
With beams of blood; & thus a voice came forth, and shook the temple

The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their stations;
 The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up;
 The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk & dry'd.
 40 Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! awakening!
 Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are burst;

 Let the slave grinding at the mill, run out into the field:
 Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air;
 Let the chained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing,
 45 Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years;
 Rise and look out, his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open.
 And let his wife and children return from the oppressors scourge;
 They look behind at every step & believe it is a dream.
 Singing. The Sun has left his blackness, & has found a fresher morning
 50 And the fair Moon rejoices in the clear & cloudless night;
 For Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease.

 In thunders ends the voice. Then Albions Angel wrathful burnt
 Beside the Stone of Night; and like the Eternal Lions howl
 In famine & war, reply'd. Art thou not Orc, who serpent-form'd
 55 Stands at the gate of Enitharmon to devour her children;
 Blasphemous Demon, Antichrist, hater of Dignities;
 Lover of wild rebellion, and transgressor of Gods Law;
 Why dost thou come to Angels eyes in this terrific form?

 The terror answerd: I am Orc, wreath'd round the accursed tree:
 60 The times are ended; shadows pass the morning gins to break;
 The fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands,
 What night he led the starry hosts thro' the wide wilderness:
 That stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter religion abroad
 To the four winds as a torn book, & none shall gather the leaves;
 65 But they shall rot on desert sands, & consume in bottomless deeps;
 To make the deserts blossom, & the deeps shrink to their fountains,
 And to renew the fiery joy, and burst the stony roof.
 That pale religious lechery, seeking Virginity,
 May find it in a harlot, and in coarse-clad honesty
 70 The undefil'd tho' ravish'd in her cradle night and morn:
 For every thing that lives is holy, life delights in life;
 Because the soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd.
 Fires inwrap the earthly globe, yet man is not consumd;
 Amidst the lustful fires he walks: his feet become like brass,
 75 His knees and thighs like silver, & his breast and head like gold.

Sound! sound! my loud war-trumpets & alarm my Thirteen Angels!
 Loud howls the eternal Wolf! the eternal Lion lashes his tail!
 America is darkned; and my punishing Demons terrified
 Crouch howling before their caverns deep like skins dry'd in the wind.
 80 They cannot smite the wheat, nor quench the fatness of the earth.
 They cannot smite with sorrows, nor subdue the plow and spade.
 They cannot wall the city, nor moat round the castle of princes.
 They cannot bring the stubbed oak to overgrow the hills.
 For terrible men stand on the shores, & in their robes I see
 85 Children take shelter from the lightnings, there stands Washington
 And Paine and Warren with their foreheads reard toward the east
 But clouds obscure my aged sight. A vision from afar!
 Sound! sound! my loud war-trumpets & alarm my thirteen Angels:
 Ah vision from afar! Ah rebel form that rent the ancient
 90 Heavens; Eternal Viper self-renew'd, rolling in clouds
 I see thee in thick clouds and darkness on America's shore.
 Writhing in pangs of abhorred birth; red flames the crest rebellious
 And eyes of death; the harlot womb oft opened in vain
 Heaves in enormous circles, now the times are return'd upon thee,
 95 Devourer of thy parent, now thy unutterable torment renews.
 Sound! sound! my loud war trumpets & alarm my thirteen Angels!
 Ah terrible birth! a young one bursting! where is the weeping mouth?
 And where the mothers milk? instead those ever-hissing jaws
 And parched lips drop with fresh gore; now roll thou in the clouds
 100 Thy mother lays her length outstretch'd upon the shore beneath.
 Sound! sound! my loud war-trumpets & alarm my thirteen Angels!
 Loud howls the eternal Wolf: the eternal Lion lashes his tail!
 Thus wept the Angel voice & as he wept the terrible blasts
 Of trumpets, blew a loud alarm across the Atlantic deep.
 105 No trumpets answer; no reply of clarions or of fifes,
 Silent the Colonies remain and refuse the loud alarm.
 On those vast shady hills between America & Albions shore;
 Now barr'd out by the Atlantic sea: call'd Atlantean hills:
 Because from their bright summits you may pass to the Golden world
 110 An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies,
 Rears its immortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God
 By Ariston the king of beauty for his stolen bride,
 Here on their magic seats the thirteen Angels sat perturb'd
 For clouds from the Atlantic hover o'er the solemn roof.

115 Fiery the Angels rose, & as they rose deep thunder roll'd
Around their shores: indignant burning with the fires of Orc
And Bostons Angel cried aloud as they flew thro' the dark night.
He cried: Why trembles honesty and like a murderer,
Why seeks he refuge from the frowns of his immortal station!
120 Must the generous tremble & leave his joy, to the idle: to the pestilence!
That mock him? who commanded this? what God? what Angel!
To keep the gen'rous from experience till the ungenerous
Are unrestrained performers of the energies of nature;
Till pity is become a trade, and generosity a science,
125 That men get rich by, & the sandy desart is giv'n to the strong
What God is he, writes laws of peace, & clothes him in a tempest
What pitying Angel lusts for tears, and fans himself with sighs
What crawling villain preaches abstinence & wraps himself
In fat of lambs? no more I follow, no more obedience pay.
130 So cried he, rending off his robe & throwing down his scepter.
In sight of Albions Guardian, and all the thirteen Angels
Rent off their robes to the hungry wind, & threw their golden scepters
Down on the land of America. indignant they descended
Headlong from out their heav'nly heights, descending swift as fires
135 Over the land; naked & flaming are their lineaments seen
In the deep gloom, by Washington & Paine & Warren they stood
And the flame folded roaring fierce within the pitchy night
Before the Demon red, who burnt towards America,
In black smoke thunders and loud winds rejoicing in its terror
140 Breaking in smoky wreaths from the wild deep, & gath'ring thick
In flames as of a furnace on the land from North to South
What time the thirteen Governors that England sent convene
In Bernards house; the flames coverd the land, they rouze they cry
Shaking their mental chains they rush in fury to the sea
145 To quench their anguish; at the feet of Washington down fall'n
They grovel on the sand and writhing lie, while all
The British soldiers thro' the thirteen states sent up a howl
Of anguish: threw their swords & muskets to the earth & ran
From their encampments and dark castles seeking where to hide
150 From the grim flames; and from the visions of Orc; in sight
Of Albions Angel; who enrag'd his secret clouds open'd
From north to south, and burnt outstretchd on wings of wrath cov'ring
The eastern sky, spreading his awful wings across the heavens;
Beneath him roll'd his num'rous hosts, all Albions Angels camp'd

155 Darkend the Atlantic mountains & their trumpets shook the valleys
 Arm'd with diseases of the earth to cast upon the Abyss,
 Their numbers forty millions, must'ring in the eastern sky.

 In the flames stood & view'd the armies drawn out in the sky
 Washington Franklin Paine & Warren Allen Gates & Lee:
 160 And heard the voice of Albions Angel give the thunderous command:
 His plagues obedient to his voice flew forth out of their clouds
 Falling upon America, as a storm to cut them off
 As a blight cuts the tender corn when it begins to appear.
 Dark is the heaven above, & cold & hard the earth beneath;
 165 And as a plague wind fill'd with insects cuts off man & beast;
 And as a sea o'erwhelms a land in the day of an earthquake;

 Fury! rage! madness! in a wind swept through America
 And the red flames of Orc that folded roaring fierce around
 The angry shores, and the fierce rushing of th'inhabitants together:
 170 The citizens of New-York close their books & lock their chests;
 The mariners of Boston drop their anchors and unlade;
 The scribe of Pennsylvania casts his pen upon the earth;
 The builder of Virginia throws his hammer down in fear.

 Then had America been lost, o'erwhelm'd by the Atlantic,
 175 And Earth had lost another portion of the infinite,
 But all rush together in the night in wrath and raging fire
 The red fires rag'd! the plagues recoil'd! then rolld they back with fury

 On Albions Angels; then the Pestilence began in streaks of red
 Across the limbs of Albions Guardian, the spotted plague smote Bristols
 180 And the Leprosy Londons Spirit, sickening all their bands:
 The millions sent up a howl of anguish and threw off their hammerd mail,
 And cast their swords & spears to earth, & stood a naked multitude.
 Albions Guardian writhed in torment on the eastern sky
 Pale quivring toward the brain his glimmering eyes, teeth chattering
 185 Howling & shuddering his legs quivering; convuls'd each muscle & sinew
 Sick'ning lay Londons Guardian, and the ancient miter'd York
 Their heads on snowy hills, their ensigns sick'ning in the sky

 The plagues creep on the burning winds driven by flames of Orc,
 And by the fierce Americans rushing together in the night
 190 Driven o'er the Guardians of Ireland and Scotland and Wales
 They spotted with plagues forsook the frontiers & their banners seard
 With fires of hell, deform their ancient heavens with shame & woe.
 Hid in his caves the Bard of Albion felt the enormous plagues.

And a cowl of flesh grew o'er his head & scales on his back & ribs;
 195 And rough with black scales all his Angels fright their ancient heavens
 The doors of marriage are open, and the Priests in rustling scales
 Rush into reptile coverts, hiding from the fires of Orc,
 That play around the golden roofs in wreaths of fierce desire,
 Leaving the females naked and glowing with the lusts of youth
 200 For the female spirits of the dead pining in bonds of religion;
 Run from their fetters reddening, & in long drawn arches sitting:
 They feel the nerves of youth renew, and desires of ancient times,
 Over their pale limbs as a vine when the tender grape appears
 Over the hills, the vales, the cities, rage the red flames fierce;
 205 The Heavens melted from north to south; and Urizen who sat
 Above all heavens in thunders wrap'd, emerg'd his leprous head
 From out his holy shrine, his tears in deluge piteous
 Falling into the deep sublime! flag'd with grey-brow'd snows
 And thunderous visages, his jealous wings wav'd over the deep;
 210 Weeping in dismal howling woe he dark descended howling
 Around the smitten bands, clothed in tears & trembling shudd'ring cold.
 His stored snows he poured forth, and his icy magazines
 He open'd on the deep, and on the Atlantic sea white shiv'ring.
 Leprous his limbs, all over white, and hoary was his visage.
 215 Weeping in dismal howlings before the stern Americans
 Hiding the Demon red with clouds & cold mists from the earth;
 Till Angels & weak men twelve years should govern o'er the strong:
 And then their end should come, when France reciev'd the Demons light.
 Stiff shudderings shook the heav'nly thrones! France Spain & Italy,
 220 In terror view'd the bands of Albion, and the ancient Guardians
 Fainting upon the elements, smitten with their own plagues
 They slow advance to shut the five gates of their law-built heaven
 Filled with blasting fancies and with mildews of despair
 With fierce disease and lust, unable to stem the fires of Orc;
 225 But the five gates were consum'd, & their bolts and hinges melted
 And the fierce flames burnt round the heavens, & round the abodes of men
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