

X.
[BLAKE'S CHAUCER: PROSPECTUSES]

[First Prospectus]
BLAKE'S CHAUCER,
THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMS.

THE FRESCO PICTURE,
Representing Chaucer's Characters painted by
WILLIAM BLAKE,
As it is now submitted to the Public,

The Designer proposes to Engrave, in a correct and finished Line manner of Engraving, similar to those original Copper Plates of Albert Durer, Lucas, Hisben, Aldegrave and the old original Engravers, who were great Masters in Painting and Designing, whose method, alone, can delineate Character as it is in this Picture, where all the Lineaments are distinct.

It is hoped that the Painter will be allowed by the Public (notwithstanding artfully disseminated insinuations to the contrary) to be better able than any other to keep his own Characters and Expressions; having had sufficient evidence in the Works of our own Hogarth, that no other Artist can reach the original Spirit so well as the Painter himself, especially as Mr. B. is an old well-known and acknowledged Engraver.

The size of the Engraving will be 3-feet 1-inch long, by 1-foot high.--The Artist engages to deliver it, finished, in One Year from September next.--No Work of Art, can take longer than a Year: it

Begin Page 568

may be worked backwards and forwards without end, and last a Man's whole Life; but he will, at length, only be forced to bring it back to what it was, and it will be worse than it was at the end of the first Twelve Months. The Value of this Artist's Year is the Criterion of Society: and as it is valued, so does Society flourish or decay.

The Price to Subscribers--Four Guineas, Two to be paid at the time of Subscribing, the other Two, on delivery of the Print.

Subscriptions received at No. 28, Corner of Broad-street, Golden Square; where the Picture is now Exhibiting, among other Works, by the same Artist.

The Price will be considerably raised to Non-subscribers. May 15th, 1809.

Printed by Watts & Bridgewater, Southmolton-Street.

[Second Prospectus, Composite Draft]

BLAKES CHAUCER

An Original Engraving by [William Blake] <him> from his Fresco Painting of [Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims]

[Mr B having from early Youth cultivated the two Arts Painting & Engraving & during a Period of Forty Years never suspended his Labours on Copper for a single Day Submits with Confidence to Public Patronage & requests the attention of the Amateur in a Large Stroke Engraving] 3 feet 1 inch long by one foot high <Price Three Guineas> [Containing Thirty original high finishd whole Length, Portraits on Horseback Of Chaucers Characters, where every Character & every Expression, every Lineament of Head Hand & Foot. every particular of Dress or Costume. where every Horse is appropriate to his Rider & the Scene or Landscape with its Villages Cottages Churches & the Inn in Southwark is minutely labourd not by the hands of Journeymen but by the Original Artist himself even to the Stuffs & Embroidery of the Garments. the hair upon the Horses the Leaves upon the Trees. & the Stones & Gravel upon the road; the Great Strength of Colouring & depth of work peculiar to Mr B's Prints will be here found accompanied by a Precision not to be seen but in the work of an Original Artist] Sir Jeffery Chaucer & the nine & twenty Pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury

The time chosen is early morning before Sunrise. when the jolly Company are just quitting the Tabarde Inn. The Knight & Squire with the Squires Yeoman lead the Procession: then the Youthful Abbess her Nun & three Priests. her Greyhounds attend her.

Begin Page 569

“Of small Hounds had she that she fed
With roast flesh milk & wastel bread”

Next follow the Friar & Monk. then the Tapiser the Pardoner. the Sompnour & the Manciple. After these “Our Host” who occupies the Center of the Cavalcade [(the Fun afterwards exhibited on the road may he seen depicted in his jolly face)] directs them to

the Knight [(whose solemn Gallantry no less fixes attention)] as the person who will be likely to commence their Task of each telling a Tale in their order. After the Host, follow, the Shipman, the Haberdasher, the Dyer, the Franklin, the Physician the Plowman, the Lawyer, the [Poor] Parson, the Merchant, the Wife of Bath the Cook. the Oxford Scholar. Chaucer himself & the Reeve comes as Chaucer has described "And ever he rode hinderest of the rout"

These last are issuing from the Gateway of the Inn the Cook & Wife of Bath are both taking their mornings draught of comfort. Spectators stand at the Gateway of the Inn & are composed of an old man a woman & children

<The Inn is yet extant under the name of the Talbot; and the Landlord, Robert Bristow, Esq. of Broxmore near Rumsey, has continued a Board over the Gateway, inscribed, "This is the Inn from which Sir Jeffery Chaucer and his Pilgrims set out for Canterbury."

St. Thomas's Hospital which is situated near to it, is one of the most amiable features of the Christian Church; it belonged to the Monastery [o]f St. Mary Overies and was dedicated to Thomas a Becket. The Pilgrims, if sick or lame, on their journey to and from his Shrine, were received at this House. Even at this day every friendless wretch who wants the succour of it, is considered as a Pilgrim travelling through this Journey of Life.>

The Landscape is an Eastward view of the Country from the Tabarde Inn in Southwark as it may be supposed to have appeared in Chaucers time. interspersed with Cottages & Villages, the first beams of the Sun, are seen above the Horizon. some buildings & spires indicate the situation of the Great City. The Inn is a Gothic Building which Thynne in his Glossary says was the Lodging of the Abbot of Hyde by Winchester. On the Inn is inscribed its title & a proper advantage is taken of this circumstance to describe the Subject of the Picture. the Words written in Gothic Letters over the Gateway are as follow" The Tabarde Inne by Henry Bailly the Lodgyng House for Pilgrims who Journey to Saint Thomass Shrine at Canterbury."

[The Characters of Chaucers Pilgrims are the Characters that compose all Ages & Nations, as one Age falls another rises. different to Mortal Sight but to Immortals only the same, for we see the same Characters repeated again & again in Animals in Vegetables in Minerals & in Men. Nothing new occurs in Identical Existence . . . Accident ever varies Substance can never suffer change nor decay]

Begin Page 570

<Of Chaucer's Characters as described in his Canterbury Tales, some of the Names are altered by Time, but the Characters themselves for ever remain unaltered [a]nd consequently they are the Physiognomies or L[i]neaments of Universal Human Life beyond which Nature never steps. The Painter has consequently varied the heads and forms of his Personages into all Nature's varieties; the Horses he has varied to accord to their riders, the Costume is correct according to authentic Monuments.

Subscriptions received at No. 28, Corner of Broad Street, Golden Square.

G. Smeeton, Printer, 17, St. Martin's Lane, London.>