

William Blake (1757-1827)

4 *The Grey Monk*

'I die, I die!' the Mother said,  
'My children die for lack of bread.  
What more has the merciless tyrant said?'  
The Monk sat down on the stony bed.

The blood red ran from the Grey Monk's side,                   5  
His hands and feet were wounded wide,  
His body bent, his arms and knees  
Like to the roots of ancient trees.

His eye was dry; no tear could flow:  
A hollow groan first spoke his woe.                                   10  
He trembled and shudder'd upon the bed;  
At length with a feeble cry he said:

'When God commanded this hand to write  
In the studious hours of deep midnight,  
He told me the writing I wrote should prove                   15  
The bane of all that on Earth I love.

'My brother starv'd between two walls,  
His children's cry my soul appalls;  
I mock'd at the wrack and griding chain,  
My bent body mocks their torturing pain.                   20

'Thy father drew his sword in the North,  
With his thousands strong he marchèd forth  
Thy brother has arm'd himself in steel,  
To avenge the wrongs thy children feel.

'But vain the sword and vain the bow,                                   25

They never can work War's overthrow.  
The hermit's prayer and the widow's tear  
Alone can free the world from fear.

'For a tear is an intellectual thing,  
And a sigh is the sword of an Angel King, 30  
And the bitter groan of the martyr's woe  
Is an arrow from the Almighty's bow.

'The hand of Vengeance found the bed  
To which the purple tyrant fled;  
The iron hand crush'd the tyrant's head, 35  
And became a tyrant in his stead.'

*c. 1804*

(From *The Poetical Works of William Blake*. Ed. With an  
Introduction and Textual Notes by John Sampson. Oxford  
UP, 1913)