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Anna Wharton Morris. "Elias Hicks and Walt Whitman." *Friends Intelligencer*, vol 73, October 21, 1916, 649.

In reading "The Complete Prose Works of Walt Whitman" recently, I was particularly impressed by three things: his high ideal of democracy for the future of this country, his deeply religious nature, and his description of Elias Hicks.

Whitman was born in 1819, at West Hills, Long Island. His grandmother, Amy Williams, was a Friend; and in his own home, the plain language and Friendly customs were maintained. During his boyhood, he naturally heard a great deal about Elias Hicks, who came from the same part of Long Island, and who used to speak at the meetings which his parents attended.

Walt himself heard him speak one night in Brooklyn. He writes, "I can remember my father coming home toward sunset from his day's work as carpenter, and saying briefly, as he throws down his armful of kindling-blocks with a bounce on the kitchen floor, 'Come, Mother, Elias preaches to-night.' Then my mother, hastening the supper and the table-cleaning afterward, gets a neighboring young woman, a friend of the family, to step in and keep house for an hour or so—puts the two little ones to bed, and as I had been behaving well that day, as a special reward I was allow'd to go also."

This meeting was held in the handsome, showy ballroom of a hotel, for Elias preached anywhere — no respect to buildings — private or public houses, school-rooms, barns, even theatres — anything that would accommodate. After describing the company, Walt says, “At length, after a pause and stillness becoming almost painful, Elias rises and stands for a moment or two without a word. A tall, straight figure, neither stout nor very thin, dress’d in drab cloth, clean-shaved face, forehead of great expanse, and large and clear black eyes, long or middling-long white hair; he was at this time between 80 and 81 years of age, his head still wearing the broad-brim. A moment looking around the audience with those piercing eyes, amid the perfect stillness. (I can almost see him and the whole scene. now.) Then the words come from his lips, very emphatically and slowly pronounc’d, in a resonant, grave, melodious voice, ‘What is the chief end of man? I was told in my early youth, it was to glorify God, and seek and enjoy him forever.’

“I cannot follow the discourse. It presently becomes very fervid, and in the midst of its fervor he takes the broadbrim hat from his head, and almost dashing it down with violence on the seat behind, continues with uninterrupted earnestness. But, I say, I cannot repeat, hardly suggest his sermon. Though the differences and disputes of the formal division of the Society of Friends were even then under way, he did not allude to them at all. A pleading, tender, nearly agonizing conviction, and magnetic stream of natural eloquence, before which all minds and natures, all emotions, high or low, gentle or simple, yielded entirely without exception, was its cause, method and effect. Many, very many were in tears.”

Again, “Then a word about his physical oratory, connected with the preceding. If there is, as doubtless there is, an unnamable something behind oratory, a fund within or atmosphere without, deeper than art, deeper even than proof, that unnamable constitutional something Elias Hicks emanated from his very heart to the hearts of his audience.”

Walt says, “Always E. H. gives the service of pointing to the fountain of all naked theology, all religion, all worship, all the truth to which you are possibly eligible — namely in yourself and your inherent relations. Others talk of Bibles, saints, churches, exhortations, vicarious atonements — the canons outside of yourself and apart from man — E. H. to the religion inside of man’s very own nature. This he incessantly labors to kindle, nourish, educate, bring forward and strengthen. He is the most democratic of the religionists — the prophets.”

Whitman makes this very interesting allusion to the division in the society, “Probably it had been preparing some time. One who was present has since described to me the climax, at a meeting of Friends in Philadelphia crowded by a great attendance of both sexes, with Elias as principal speaker. In the course of his utterance or argument he made use of these words: ‘The blood of Christ — the blood of Christ — why, my friends, the actual blood of Christ in itself was no more effectual than the blood of bulls and goats — not a bit more — not a bit.’ At these words, after a momentary hush, commenced a great tumult. Hundreds rose to their feet. . . Canes were thump’d upon the floor. From all parts of the house angry mutterings. Some left the place, but more remain’d, with exclamations, flushed faces and eyes. This was the definite utterance, the overt act, which led to the separation. Families diverg’d — even husbands and wives, parents and children, were separated. Of course what Elias promulg’d spread a great commotion among

the Friends. Sometimes when he presented himself to speak in the meeting, there would be opposition — this led to angry words, gestures, unseemly noises, recriminations. Elias, at such times, was deeply affected — the tears roll'd in streams down his cheeks — he silently waited the close of the dispute. 'Let the Friend speak; let the Friend speak!' he would say when his supporters in the meeting tried to bluff off some violent orthodox person objecting to the new doctrinaire. But he never recanted."

Whitman considers Elias Hicks to be "the most mark'd individual result" of the society founded by George Fox. Curiously enough, when Fox was in America, he preached many times on Long Island, near the county which was later to be the home of both Whitman and Hicks.

All through these prose writings, Whitman shows the influence of his Quaker upbringing, and the evidence of his sincere belief in the *inner light*.

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