THE WOLF DID WITH THE LAMBKIN DWELL

By George P. Winston*

The twentieth century looks at Edward Hicks as a primitive or "master of popular painting," and in examining his works one is not essentially inclined to disagree with this judgment. Nevertheless, this category tends to cover painters all the way from Grandma Moses to Doris Lee (from the truly untaught to the deliberate creator of simplicity). To see Hicks more clearly, it is most helpful to place him and his works in context: that is, to examine not only the Quaker, primitive, and contemporary qualities of his work but also the paintings in relation to his ideas and principles as they are recorded in his writing. Such a study will, I believe, reveal that the simplicity of his various presentations of the Peaceable Kingdom is much closer in many respects to the simplicity of a Thoreau, a Hemingway, or a Gulliver than to the simplicity of a first-grade reader.

Hicks himself would have preferred to be remembered as a Quaker preacher, not as an artist at all. Before turning our attention to his work there are two delightful anecdotes which will give us a quick sketch of his mind and character. In his Memoirs, he writes:

Had another evidence of the important truth that like will beget its like. I took a sign, which I had painted to a storekeeper, and told him my price, but observed that I was afraid it was too much, and if he thought so, I would make it less. The storekeeper paid me cheerfully, only manifesting a fear that I had charged too little. Ah! there is such a thing as dealing on Christian principles, there is such a thing as doing right and being happy in this world.1

*Dr. Winston is assistant professor of English at Lafayette College and has been president of the American Studies Association of the Middle Atlantic States.

The other story is quoted by Alice Ford:

An aged painter . . . was once called upon to paint a sign for a stage proprietor and tavern-keeper, living somewhere in Bucks County. The device was to be a fine coach-and-four, driven by the proprietor himself, who remarked that occasionally he had driven his own stages. The work was done admirably—the proprietor called in to take a preliminary look, and gave his approval. *The likeness of the driver's face was perfect,* but he appeared to be lolling over as if half-inclined to drop from his box. His whip hung slouchingly down—the reins were loosely held; and still he did not appear to be asleep, but had a remarkably good-humored expression all over his ruddy countenance. "But who is this?" said the proprietor. "That is not the way for a driver to sit.” “Doesn’t thee get a little so sometimes?” shrewdly inquired the old Quaker. The man burst into a foaming passion; but the painter called him down, and agreed that if he would promise to quit his cups forever he would rub out the driver and paint him as he should be, and the affair should be hushed up. It appeared that the habit of the man was not generally suspected, and was known only to the painter and a few other friends. The reformation is said to have been prompt and permanent.

Basically the attitude of Edward Hicks towards his painting reflects his religion. Again and again in his *Memoirs* we find such remarks as "My business [as a painter], though too trifling and insignificant for a Christian to follow, affords me an honorable and I hope an honest living." It is true, of course, that in one sense these remarks are more a constant reminder of his own need for humility and his lack of perfection than they are direct reactions to painting or art. Nevertheless, at one point he abandoned his work completely for farming; and he returned to painting only because of sheer financial necessity, still maintaining that farming was "more consistent with the Christian." And he goes on to confess:

If the Christian world was in the real spirit of Christ.
I do not believe there would be such a thing as a fine

---


painter in Christendom. It appears clearly to me to be one of those trifling, insignificant arts, which has never been of any substantial value to mankind. But the inseparable companion of voluptuousness and pride, it has presaged the downfall of empires and kingdoms; and in my view stands now enrolled among the premonitory symptoms of the rapid decline of the American Republic.¹

In spite of these sincere protestations of belief, the aesthetic impulse was clearly present and would not be stilled. Looking back on the “sins” of his youth, Hicks notes that a love of music and dancing were most difficult to overcome. (George Fox himself had heartily condemned music.) Side by side with comments demeaning his art are reassurances: “Diligent at my trade and business, which must be right for me, as it brings peace of mind.”² Perhaps most significant of all is the conclusion to the passage quoted above:

Had I my time to go over again I think I would take the advice given to me by my old friend Abraham Chapman, a shrewd, sensible lawyer that lived with me about the time I was quitting painting: “Edward, thee has now a source of independence within thyself, in thy peculiar talent for painting. Keep to it, within the bounds of innocence and usefulness, and thee can always be comfortable.”³

“Within the bounds of innocence and usefulness”—this is the key phrase, the means of reconciling a “trifling, insignificant art” with the fact that “it brings me peace of mind.” Hicks’s craftwork of sign painting and carriage building was certainly useful; how about the easel paintings? In large part, his works of art focus on subjects which permit him to emphasize ethical, moral, or spiritual values. Over and over he extols love of country in his copies of patriotic scenes. Landscapes such as “The Cornell Farm” and “The Residence of David Twining” underscore the simple values of country living. And the many reinterpretations of “The Peaceable Kingdom” are all of them sermons on canvas.

¹Ibid., p. 71.
²Ibid., p. 205. Close paraphrases of this idea occur regularly; see pp. 72, 149 for example.
³Ibid., p. 71.
In the very highest sense, such work must be called useful; and the strong underlying thematic statement is almost always innocence. Perhaps it is not going too far to suggest that at least in part the often naive drawing, the flat colors learned from his trade, are scrupulously and consciously maintained in order to keep his art clear of artifice; that the simplicity and freshness of Edward Hicks's paintings are as much a deliberate statement of Quaker beliefs as they are evidence of his "primitiveness."

It is, after all, impossible to keep separate the threads of the Quaker, primitive, and the contemporary; they are so thoroughly intertwined. If one assumes, for instance, that Hicks's scornful herating of schools and learning was but a reflection of Quaker anti-intellectualism, one is immediately reminded that the attitude was shared by other Protestant sects. Furthermore, it was typical of the artisan class and thus an integral part of the warp and woof of American society. In fact the attitude was often reinforced by the intellectuals themselves. William Ellery Channing, in 1816, writes:

> Knowledge must now be drawn from the libraries and collections. The difficulties of acquiring which were once encountered, are now done away, and with them the wholesome and invigorating labour... We have masters and schools at our very doors, to teach us everything... Here then is the very mischief of learning, the way to turn great men into confectioners and second-hand caterers.\(^1\)

Channing, of course, was not against learning per se; the attack is rather on what we would call "spoon-feeding" of European models. When we realize that his essay is a cry for a native American art, "no matter for rudeness," we can see how close he was in several respects to Edward Hicks. For Hicks's art is surely native, and in practice he had a great deal more respect for learning—if acquired by "wholesome and invigorating labour"—than he cared to admit. Hicks was not an unlearned man: "The old Newtown Library records show a few of the weighty books that he was reading: Washington's Letters, Murray's America.

---

Cooper’s *Poems*, and by no means least, Voltaire as explained by the Reverend David Williams of London.⁸⁸

If one assumes that a lack of professional training or book knowledge in art theory kept Hicks’s work essentially amateur in quality, one has immediately to admit that to some extent his aesthetic principles were responsible for this lack. Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged that his weakness in formal training had nothing to do with technical ability. As Holger Cahill correctly observes:

> It is remarkable what good technicians many of these painters are, and this is especially true of the shop-trained men of the past. The works of Edward Hicks, for instance, after the lapse of a hundred years, are in a better state of preservation than the works of many other painters of far greater reputation and, presumably, far greater technical knowledge. This is not surprising when one remembers that the tradition out of which the works of Hicks came was in many respects not unlike that of the old masters. That is to say, it was a tradition of craftsmanship which grew out of the handling of tools and materials, rather than an academic tradition passed on by art schools. It was not painting by book or theory.

Shop-trained men like Edward Hicks knew all about their materials, or at least as much as they needed to know as painters. Hicks undoubtedly ground his own colors and so was pretty sure of what he was getting. His methods were traditional and dependable. He knew his materials, probably made his own brushes and painting grounds.⁹

And even though Hicks would have no doubt rejected academic training had it been available, he was in a small way familiar with a number of examples of both contemporary American art and of European art (at least in engraved reproductions), as we can

---

⁸⁸ Ford, *Hicks*, p. 16.

see from his copies of West, Vanderlyn, and Trumbull as well as his borrowings from Raphael, Rigaud, and Westall.

If one contends that this very act of copying is evidence of the amateur, then one must also deal with the fact that far more sophisticated artists were also copyists: West, Dunlap, Cole, Allston, for example. And in several cases these men diligently copied because of the academic traditions; no less a person than Sir Joshua Reynolds insisted on imitation of the old masters as a major path to the command of the painter’s art. (A careful examination of the originals will demonstrate that to some degree at least Hicks’s copying can truly be called imitation—adaptation and modification not entirely governed by limitations of talent or ability.) Whatever may be the response of modern viewers, Hicks himself did not intend to indulge in straight copying. Turning poet, he wrote:

Inferior folk with only munkeys’ art
May immitate but never life impart...10

While it cannot be denied that his strong tendency towards allegory stems from an ingrained habit of mind, probably in large part directed by familiarity with the parable techniques of the Bible, it is still true that the allegorical and historical genres were very much in style. And the Bible was a source of inspiration to men like West and Allston no less than to Hicks. Thus again we see reflected his overall environment as much as his Quakerism.

In fact, even a cursory glance at the entire known Hicks catalogue will indicate that the impression of him as an allegorist rests rather heavily on a single subject, “The Peaceable Kingdom.” Yet he painted this one idea so many times at regular intervals throughout his life that we are thoroughly justified in turning to a close examination of its allegorical levels to round out our portrait of the mind and heart of the Quaker painter. Possibly a work of art which needs program notes cannot claim a place among the greatest works, but when the artist himself has provided such notes, they are invaluable to an understanding of the man and of his painting. In a treatise with a typical nineteenth-century long title, “A Little Present for Friends and Friendly People in the form of a Miscellaneous Discourse by a

Memoirs, p. 270.
Poor Illiterate Mechanic," Hicks has provided these notes for his Kingdoms; or it would really be more accurate to say that here is the same sermon in words as appears on canvas in the Peaceable Kingdom paintings.

Edwards Hicks modestly labels himself a "Poor Illiterate Mechanic"; and the preface of a modern exhibition catalogue which includes Hicks says, "The Painters who concern us in this exhibition were innocent of the world." As far as Edward Hicks is concerned, neither of these statements resembles the whole truth. His discourse opens simply enough with its text, a quotation from Isaiah: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." On the surface this is it, the whole story of the Peaceable Kingdom, meticulously translating Isaiah's words into visual images; not always including Isaiah, almost always adding a contemporary reference such as a variation of the Penn's treaty scene to remind his viewers that he is speaking directly to them; and never failing to pair his symbolic animals as Isaiah describes them. Can a painting in the realistic tradition, even by the most accomplished artist, hope to go much further? But the sermon itself goes on to further levels and forces us to look at the artist, if not his art, with new insight.

Almost immediately Hicks quotes from Edward Young's "Night Thoughts":

Connection exquisite of distant worlds!  
Distinguish'd link in beings' endless chain!  
Midway from nothing to the Deity.

And we are plunged into all of the philosophical and theological implications of the concept of the Great Chain of Being. It would, of course, be naive to argue that this dimension makes Hicks a philosopher or even a student of philosophy, but his use of the idea clearly demonstrates an intelligent understanding of its implications—at least on the level which is necessary to his purpose. As he develops this point through quotation and comment, he shows his grasp of an idea which, as Arthur O. Lovejoy has pointed out, permeated eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought.

In America, for example, the great chain appears most notably in the writing of Emerson—and also in the aesthetics of another painter, Washington Allston. (Hicks wrote in 1837: Allston's
ideas were published in 1843.) The animal-spiritual, body-soul
dichotomy, which is really the basic allegory of Hicks's inter-
pretation of Isaiah, may also be found in a manuscript note left
among Allston's papers. He writes:

... everything, whether spiritual or animal, has its
proper determined end. Man, partaking of both, is nec-
essarily under the dominion of laws pertaining to both.
... Now these ends have no affinity; on the contrary, so
far as we can conceive them, they appear to us directly
antithetical... Yet we know that the distinctive natures
to which they relate do actually coexist in what we call
ourselves, and in their synthesis constitute man. A mutual
relation therefore (whether we can trace it or not) is
the just inference. And it seems not unreasonable further
to conclude that a certain—we will not say balance—but
subordinating harmony between the conflicting [oppos-
ing] natures was the original purpose of our Creator
and that they should thus result in a common end.
... spiritual should dominate once a man becomes
aware of it—not that its inferior animal nature is of
itself bad,—but that it surely would become so if allowed
to hold the place of the superior;—... conclude that,
while retaining its subordinate station, it is good.11

Although Hicks would have been perfectly capable of arguing
the fine points of any theology herein implied, Allston's view is
far too abstract and indirect to be compared with his own methods
of presentation. Yet in general this is the duality which Hicks
accepts in man as "midway between nothing and the Deity." More
concretely, this is what he means in one sense when he sees the
wolf or leopard (animal nature) lying down with the lamb or kid
(spiritual nature): each human being must strive to become aware
of the superiority of the spiritual in him over the animal.

Hicks adds a new dimension to his allegory in the next para-
graph of his treatise:

The animal body of man was the finishing work of all
animated nature, and consequently the highest order of
terrestrial creation; being compounded of the four ele-

11 Animal & Spiritual, manuscript notes in Allston's own hand, Allston
Papers, Craigie House, Cambridge, Massachusetts. There are, of course,
numerous illustrations of these ideas in contemporary American literature;
Hicks might have preferred the level and phrasing of Cooper's Natty
Bumppo in The Prairie. I have chosen Allston largely to show contrast
and comparison in the thinking of another painter.
ments—Earth, Air, Water, and Fire. As either of these predominated in the animal economy, it gave rise to the constitutional character or complexion, called by the physician and philosopher—melancholy, sanguine, phlegmatic, and choleric. 19

This is an old-fashioned bit of classification if you like, but scarcely indicative of an illiterate mechanic. It is characteristic of Hicks that he should immediately tie these abstractions back to the more concrete visual imagery: specifically, Earth or melancholy becomes the wolf; Air, the sanguine, is the leopard; Water, the phlegmatic, the bear; and Fire, the choleric, the lion. The specific personalities and dangers of each of these are treated in detail.

Whether he has captured—or even attempted—these moods in the painted animals is for the individual viewer to determine for himself; yet in the treatise as he describes them, suddenly and delightfully, he exposes the same rustic freshness and simplicity as in his canvases. The subtle, cruel beauty of the leopard, representing the sins of the flesh, is abruptly dropped to this level: "Such poor creatures are too often seen in our country, staggering along the highway, with their black jug and corncob stopper, containing the remains of a quart of whiskey, purchased of some Judas that would sell his Saviour for money." 20 Or there is the quaint mixture of moral sentiment and rural description which describes the enlightenment of a bear:

. . . the wild carniverous nature of the bear must be changed and become like the tame, ruminating nature of the cow; and although self may not be entirely denied, and they may be too much like the dry, fat cow that keeps her substance within herself, yet with more than the strength and power of the bear, they chew the cud and divide the hoof; this is often the source of stupendous works as well as great and useful inventions. But it is when self is entirely denied, and the daily cross taken up, that phlegmatic men, that are rich, witness a thorough change from a state like that of the cold, cruel bear, to that like the noble, generous cow, with her distended udder quietly soliciting the hand of the lovely milk-maid to draw forth the rich nutritious stream that is to feed the helpless, hungry children of men. . . ." 21

19 Memoirs, p. 268.
20 Ibid., p. 288.
21 Ibid., pp. 313-314.
As the discourse unfolds, Hicks, continuing to be specific and visual, describes well-known Biblical figures in the same terms: "the innocent nature of the lamb ruled in Abel . . . the carnivorous nature of the wolf in Cain." Jacob was the lamb, while poor Esau was the wolf, leopard, bear, and lion. In the New Testament Judas and John struggled against the wolf in their natures, Peter against the leopard, Matthew the bear, and Paul the lion.

While much of this has no direct relationship to Hicks's paintings, it does point up two very important factors: first, that a great deal more than a simple rendition of a verse from Isaiah lies behind these paintings, and secondly—as I have said—that the artist's eye is present throughout the sermon; Hicks paints word pictures, speaks in the same visual terms as he uses in paint.

One more point must be re-emphasized. All of the writings of Edward Hicks bear evidence similar to that in the paintings that he was a gifted amateur not a scholar, but equally strong evidence that he had great intelligence and was not unlettered. In spite of his insistent scorn for learning (unless, though he never spells it out, it can serve the Lord), the quotation from Young is not an accident. Throughout the discourse he quotes freely—if not always with complete accuracy—from Pope, Cowper, and other poets, as well as from the Quaker preacher Job Scott, and of course he ranges at will through both the Old and the New Testaments. The minor inaccuracies of quotation suggest that he is citing passages from memory of works well-thumbed. There is further striking parallel between three of Hicks's animals and the three beasts that face Dante at the beginning of The Inferno. The simplest conclusion is that both Dante and Hicks drew from Jeremiah and Isaiah the leopard, the lion, and the wolf, and to extend the conclusions any further is highly conjectural. For a number of reasons it is hard to believe that Edward Hicks could or would have read Dante.15

Of Dante's three beasts, John Ciardi says:

They foreshadow the three divisions of Hell (incontinence, violence, and fraud) which Virgil explains at

---

15 Translations of Dante into English developed rapidly during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, among the first being a blank-verse version of The Inferno in 1782 by Charles Rogers (a poet who might well have been attractive to Hicks). "By 1822 English translations of Dante.
length. . . . I am not sure but what the she-wolf is better interpreted as Fraud and the Leopard as incontinence. Good arguments can be offered either way.16

In comparison, Edward Hicks’s wolf is the hypocrite, the treacherous betrayer—the Judas; these are among the sins assigned by Dante to the symbol of Fraud (the she-wolf if we accept Ciardi’s reversal). The leopard, for Hicks, is unquestionably incontinence: the drunkard, the carouser, the sexually unvirtuous. For both, the lion is unmistakably the symbol of violence. One cannot, of course, carry the comparison too far, as it becomes immediately clear that there are innumerable minor differences and variations; Hicks assigns suicide, for example, to the wolf not the lion, seduction to the leopard, and usury to both the wolf and the bear—a figure which Dante does not even include. On the other hand neither Isaiah nor Jeremiah offers the slightest clue to the characteristics to be assigned to the separate beasts. The striking realism of both Dante and Hicks ought also to be noted, although used on quite different levels. Take, for instance, Hicks’s lively description of the bear:

For the bear is a dull, sluggish, inert creature, and appears more peacable and contented than most of the carniverous tribe, and will seldom if ever prey upon other animals, if they can find plenty of nuts, grain, or even roots; they will, especially in autumn, become very fat, and retire to their den, curl themselves up in their bed of leaves, and live by sleeping, and sucking their paws. In this quiet retreat they may appear inoffensive and entirely harmless, but wo unto any man or beast that would presume to take away one of the leaves that compose their bed, or even disturb their repose; they would soon show their carniverous teeth, and if within

Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso had been reprinted in American editions.” Angelina LaPiana, Dante in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 13. Much earlier an expatriate Italian teacher and bookseller, Lorenzo DaPonte, opened a grocery store in Sunbury, Pennsylvania. Although DaPonte was in the state from 1811 to 1819, he makes no mention of having encountered Hicks. Memoirs of Lorenzo DaPonte (New York: Orion Press, 1959), passim. Hicks was in the Sunbury region but not until September, 1819. Finally, and most conclusively, the well-kept records of the Newtown Library do not mention any volume of Dante during Hicks’s lifetime.

their reach, they might feel the weight of their tremendous paws, or be crushed in their powerful hug.\textsuperscript{17}

Is it at least reasonable to infer, in the light of the evidence that we do have, that Hicks read widely, and that he shares common sources with Dante for the suggestions that led to these vivid descriptions. Although admittedly there are no direct facts to carry us further, it seems to me that we are on solid ground in proposing as one of these sources the medieval bestiary, in itself a fascinating blend of natural history and religious allegory. T. H. White says in the appendix to his translation of a twelfth-century Latin manuscript: "Its influence has extended throughout literature, and, as has been seen in the Notes, country people are still repeating its saws."\textsuperscript{18} Assuming that through various indirect routes both Dante and Hicks could, and probably did, have knowledge of the images in the bestiaries, let us look at our three animals as they appear in White's version. The lion is both the noble king of beasts and the most ferocious.

What creature dares declare himself an enemy to this beast, in whose roar there is such a natural terribleness that many animals, which could escape the charge by their speed, fail to get away from the very sound of its voice—as if dumbfounded and overcome by brute force?\textsuperscript{19}

Comment on the leopard is brief but significant: "Leopards are born from the adultery of a lioness with a pard, which produces a third kind of animal."\textsuperscript{20} Indeed a suitable birthright for the symbol of incontinence. The wolf is not precisely the hypocrite, but his allegorical meaning is clearly defined: "The devil bears the similitude of a wolf: he who is always looking over the human race with his evil eye, and darkly prowling round the sheepfolds of the faithful so that he may afflict and ruin their souls."\textsuperscript{21} To round it off, the bear is presented as a somewhat sluggish or phlegmatic beast given to licking its paws. Whether further study would consolidate or destroy these conjectures is ultimately not important; when all is said, the true value is to point up the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Memoirs, p. 307.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 13-14.
\end{itemize}
complexities of allegorical meaning which lie just beneath the surface of these simple paintings. If one wants more immediate sources for the paintings themselves, Alice Ford has ably demonstrated that the first of the Peaceable Kingdoms, painted in 1826, was adapted from an engraving by Richard Westall (English painter and drawing master to Queen Victoria), a Bible illustration of the verses from Isaiah. Several of the animals are taken almost directly from woodcuts by Anderson, and the background groups are almost always variations on Hicks's copy of West's "Penn's Treaty with the Indians." Edward Hicks was an inventive artist but often not an original one; it is for this reason, as well as because of the close parallels cited above, that I have rejected the possibility that Hicks arrived independently of any sources at the various meanings he assigned to his animals. His freshness and originality lay in his method of painting in clear, bright colors and flat forms—or rather in the application of these sign-painter's techniques to easel pictures; in the permutations and combinations of composition; and in the backgrounds which were taken directly from native American scenery. Many of them almost suggest that Hicks set up his easel out of doors not far from the Delaware Water Gap. However, just as the various beasts were carefully lifted from Westall, Anderson, and others, so I believe were their allegorical meanings borrowed from reading, folklore, and tradition.

My overall intention has been to illustrate the thesis that Edward Hicks was fully a man of his own times, and an excellent example of the Quaker aesthetic in operation: a contradiction in that it denied the aesthetic but could not escape the aesthetic impulse, a synthesis of craftsman and primitive, professional and amateur—above all, innocent in the world, if you will, but never innocent of the world.

The wolf did with the lambkin dwell in peace,
His grim carnivorous nature there did cease:
The leopard with the harmless kid laid down,
And not one savage beast was seen to frown,
The lion with the fatling on did move,
A little child was leading them in love,
When the great PENN his famous treaty made,
With indian chiefs beneath the elm-tree shade.

For a graphic illustration of these borrowings see Ford, *Hicks*, pp. 138 ff.