

What did Elhanan Bicknell think of his 13th child Clarence?

A sketch written by Marcus Bicknell on 26 October 2017 for his website blog "In Clarence's Time"

"By the Grace of God, John, just look at the Samuel Enderby will you? What a ship. Glorious. And full to the gunwales with sperm oil, I'll be bound. We'll find out tomorrow our share".



Elhanan Bicknell and John Langton, his partner, were in their office in Newington Butts on the south bank of the Thames, looking out of the window across a street thronged with porters, traders, shipmen, an occasional hansom cab and all the hub-bub of Victorian industrial revolution London. The two middle-aged business-men were dressed in long coats with fur collars against the cold, despite being inside. It was the last days of 1845.



"Elhanan, dear friend, do you feel the chill of an industry coming to an end? How many times will we watch with pride a sailing ship returning from the South Pacific Ocean with such a rich cargo? Will London's street lights and the lighthouses of the world burn bright with our whale oil? Will we long see sailing boats plying their trade on the high sea; why, only this August I read that Brunel's iron steamship SS Great Britain crossed from Liverpool to New York with an engine driven by steam and a metal screw rotating faster than the eye can see. The Queen, God bless her, travelled on his Great Western Railway... and survived."

"You are but 8 years older than me John, yet you're sounding like an old man. No, what worries me is the impact of those scoundrels in Westminster on our livelihood. Peel resigns over the Irish famine; Russell is unable to form a government, so Peel has to continue. The Mines

Act is but one new law preventing children under 10 working on the ships. You and I are forced to pay tax on our income to this government. When will it end?"

“You must be happy to have invested in art, not in the whale oil industry. ‘Elhanan Bicknell, patron of the arts’ I see it written in the papers.”

“Indeed, I have been fortunate in my decisions, although I feel God’s hand guide me. I alone saw value in the new artists here, my friends Landseer, Roberts, Landseer, Stanfield, Etty and that



scoundrel Turner. That reminds me, pray, did I recount to you John, the hilarity of our Christmas party last week? Turner deigned to turn up without having answered the invitation, but then he enjoys the opportunity to see my dear wife Lucinda. You know how he hates his own image to be recorded, but Edwin Landseer fair exploded that bunkum; Turner was chatting with our guests over a cup of tea in the drawing-room, and D’Orsay placed himself as a screen beside him to hide, when necessary, Landseer, sketching him at full length in pencil on the back of an envelope. It’s an amusing little drawing and I have encouraged the pair of them to have Hogarth print it for the amusement of the public! Amusement... even my children, peeping into the room, understood the joke, even Clarence who, although he is only 3, spends all his time with Lucinda learning how to draw.”

“So which of your children will take on the business.”

“Sidney? Herman? Percy? I doubt any of the teenagers have a business head. Certainly not that Clarence, my 13th child, that’s for certain. He’s away with the fairies. He’ll be a vicar or will live in a distant land following the scripture of Darwin... or will just paint flowers all his life.”



Images; *The Samuel Enderby*, portrait of Elhanan Bicknell, *Turner* by d'Orsay and *Whalers* by Turner