

History of "The Quiet Hour"

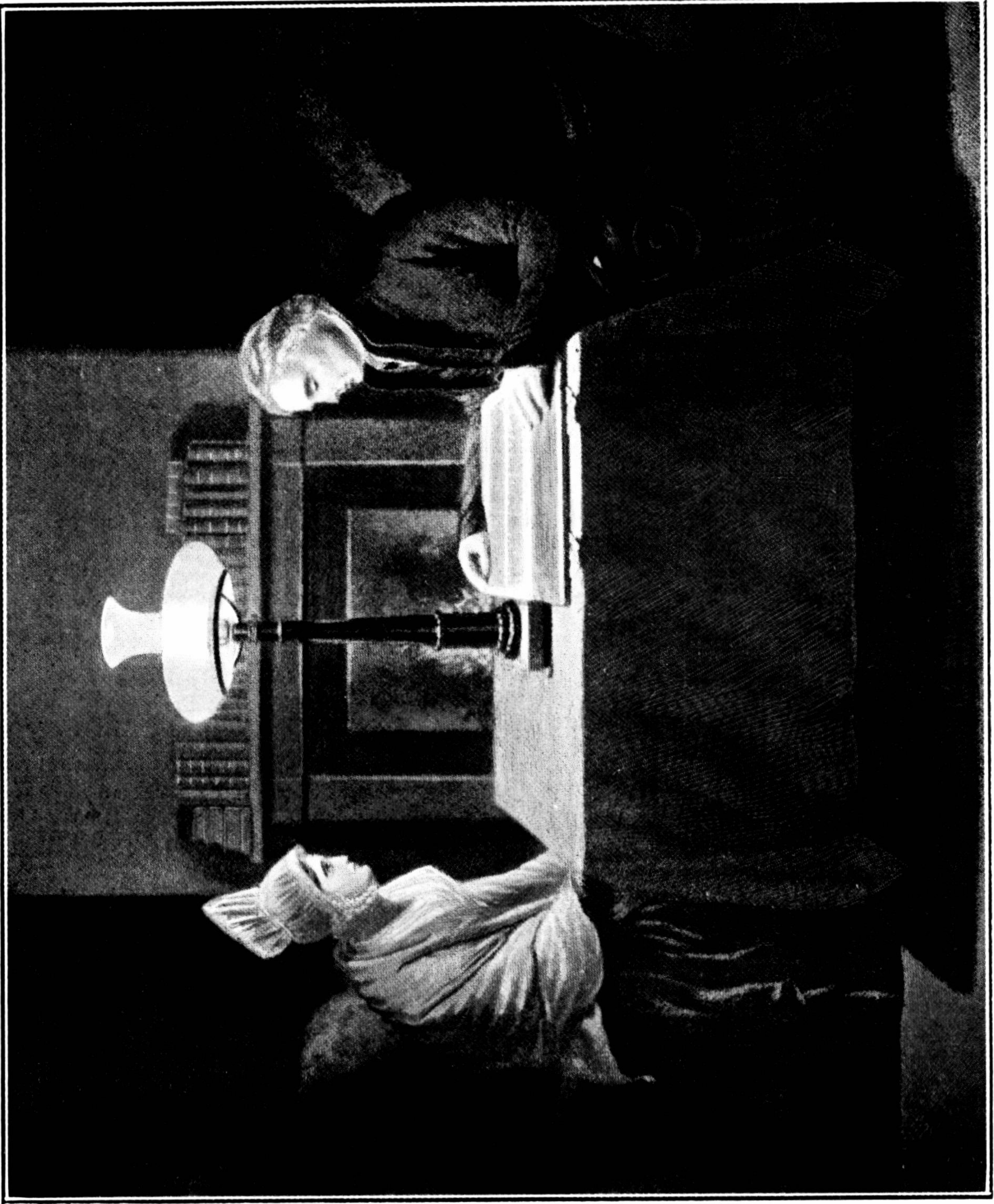
ESTHER M. PICKARD has kindly placed on loan at Friends House the oil painting by Benjamin Robert Haydon (1796-1846) called *The Quiet Hour*, or sometimes, *Reading the Scriptures*, which is well known by engravings to several generations of Friends. The painting depicts the lender's grand-parents, Edward and Eliza Smith (née Gundry), at their home at 29, The Haymarket, London.

There is some uncertainty as to whether Haydon painted two pictures of this kind. The following notes taken from MSS. now belonging to Gertrude Beck, of Streatham, suggest that two pictures were painted and that they differed considerably.

A rough pen and ink sketch signed "B.R.H. 1832" in the same ownership as the notes, contains eight figures gathered about the book and the lamp on the table, four of them children. A MS. note by William Beck written in 1893 states that the picture, for which this sketch was made, was the result of a commission obtained for Haydon by the writer's father, Richard Low Beck (1792-1854), in the following way. Edward Smith (1787-1834) in early life devoted his leisure time to literary and artistic interests and was well acquainted with the artist, who introduced his portrait into a number of his paintings. Haydon in one of his periods of financial difficulty wrote to Edward Smith asking him for an introduction to someone who would give him a commission for any subject agreed upon, in return for the advance of a sum of money. Through the good offices of Richard L. Beck (who had formerly been apprenticed to Edward Smith's father), Frederic Janson, of Stoke Newington (1803-1832), out of compassion, agreed to advance the money in return for a picture of a family reading the scriptures. The condition was laid down that the family was not to be painted in Quaker costume. The sketch referred to was handed in as the basis for the picture. When



SKETCH SIGNED "B.R.H. 1832."



"THE QUIET HOUR," BY BENJAMIN R. HAYDON

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completed, said Richard L. Beck, the picture did not agree with the sketch.

It was sold instead of being delivered to Frederic Janson, who refused the discourteous offer of a replica. Whether a replica was painted or not is not known, but James Foster, of Stamford Hill, possessed a painting of this kind by Haydon.

A letter dated Leeds, 1907, to William Beck from Lucy Anne Pickard (1830-1910), daughter of Edward and Eliza Smith, relates that Haydon painted the picture which at present hangs at Friends House for her father in lieu of repayment of a loan of money. The picture was to portray her parents sitting in their own back parlour, but they would not agree to sit for the portraits, which had to be painted from memory. The writer described them as very good likenesses both as to face and dress.

The following remarks by Haydon's biographer, in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, show that, besides the faults which marred his career as a painter, he had qualities which would endear him to the simple and saintly Edward Smith, and account for the real intimacy which appears to have existed between them :

He was pure in thought and act, generous, lofty in aim, a good husband, father, and friend. His mind was wide in its grasp and well cultivated, his judgment sound in matters unconnected with himself and his art. His life, like his art, was heroic at least in scale and intention. If his vanity and his unscrupulousness in money-matters transcended all ordinary standards, so also did his energy and his power of endurance. Unfortunately his dreams for the glory of his art and the glory of his country were so bound up with the glory of Haydon as to taint his whole career with egotism. . . . The year before his death he wrote, "The moment I touch a great canvas I think I see my Creator smiling on my efforts—the moment I do mean things for subsistence I feel as if he had turned his back, and what's more, I believe it."

Lucy Anne Pickard, in the letter referred to above, says :

I know my dear father was much concerned about him and was anxious to influence him. . . . I believe they used to have many talks in that same little parlour.

In a world full of enemies Haydon must have valued the friendship of the Quaker chemist, terminated by the latter's death in 1834. Overwhelmed by adversities, the artist put an end to his own life in 1846.

JOHN L. NICKALLS.