

**REVIEW OF THE LIFE,
CHARACTER, AND
WRITINGS OF ELIAS HICKS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649261154

Review of the Life, Character, and Writings of Elias Hicks by George W. Burnap

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

GEORGE W. BURNAP

**REVIEW OF THE LIFE,
CHARACTER, AND
WRITINGS OF ELIAS HICKS**

REVIEW
OF THE
LIFE, CHARACTER, AND WRITINGS

OF
ELIAS HICKS.

By GEORGE W. BURNAP.

[Reprinted from the Christian Examiner for November.]

CAMBRIDGE.

1851.

REVIEW.

1. *A Series of Extemporaneous Discourses, delivered in the several Meetings of the Society of Friends, in Philadelphia, Germantown, Abington, Byberry, Newtown Falls, and Trenton*; by ELIAS HICKS, a Minister in said Society. Taken in short-hand by M. T. C. Gould. Philadelphia: Joseph and Edward Parker. 1825. pp. 322.
2. *Journal of the Life and Religious Labors of ELIAS HICKS*. Written by himself. New York: Isaac T. Hopper. 1832. pp. 461.
3. *Letters of ELIAS HICKS, including also a few short Essays written on several Occasions, mostly illustrative of his Doctrinal Views*. New York: Isaac T. Hopper. 1834. pp. 234.

THE name of Elias Hicks has attained a notoriety by himself wholly unanticipated, and probably undesired. He has been made, against his will, as it seems to us, an heresiarch, and has been placed at the head of a sect, to which his name has been attached. The consequence has been, that his character has been the subject of the most contradictory representations. His friends and admirers have thought him almost an apostle, while his enemies and opposers seem to regard him as a sort of Lucifer, a man largely endowed by nature, but using his powers chiefly for mischief; not satisfied with wandering off into error himself, but drawing after him, like the old Dragon, a third part of the stars by the sweep of his tail.

The facts are these. Elias Hicks exercised the func-

tions of a minister among the Quakers for more than fifty years, beginning about the year 1772, a few years before the Revolutionary war, and continuing till 1830, with the greatest acceptance. No suspicion of heresy, or any unsoundness of faith, seems to have attached to him for more than forty years. It was then discovered that he was a heretic, and was teaching to the community the most pernicious and soul-ruining errors. He and his opinions were denounced, and a separation took place in the Society of Friends. All who refused to join in the clamors against him were driven out as aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise. It did not stop there. His religious character was set at naught, the most revolting opinions were attributed to him, and the most shocking sentiments put into his mouth. He was classed with almost every condemned errorist that has ever appeared in the Christian Church.

In fact, his enemies have succeeded in fixing upon him the opprobrium of deism, and with those who have had no means of informing themselves throughout the country, the opinion now prevails, that he renounced and disregarded the Scriptures altogether. This charge was so often and confidently repeated, that we confess that we ourselves supposed there must be truth in it, until, in the year 1828, we heard him preach. Nothing could well be further from infidelity than the discourse to which we listened.⁴ The deepest reverence was expressed for the Sacred Scriptures. He also made a distinct and emphatic recognition of the Divine authority of Jesus Christ. His whole demeanor was more that of a humble saint, than of a scoffing infidel. If he was not a man of unaffected piety, he was one of the profoundest hypocrites that ever lived. No moral inconsistency or scandal has ever, so far as we are informed, attached to his name, and if a life of fourscore years of Christian obedience cannot establish a man's integrity, then there is no trust to be put in any evidence that man can give of devotion to God.

It is gratifying to us to find that our impression of his opinions was not a mistake, and that he has left on record

ample testimony that the charge of deism, so freely brought against him, is wholly false. In a letter written to Charles Stokes, of New Jersey, in the year 1829, the year before his death, there is the following passage :—

“As for the Scriptures of truth, as recorded in the book called the Bible, I have ever believed that all parts of them that could not be known but by revelation were written by holy men as they were inspired by the Holy Ghost, and could not be known through any other medium, and that they are profitable for our encouragement, comfort, and instruction, in the very way that the Apostle Paul testifies; and I have ever accounted them, when rightly understood, as the best books extant. I have always delighted in reading them, in my serious moments, in preference to any other book, from my youth up, and have made more use of their contents to confirm and establish my ministerial labors in the Gospel, than most other ministers that I am acquainted with.”—*Letters*, p. 215.

As to the Divine mission and supernatural character and credentials of Christ, the testimony of his correspondence with his most intimate friends is no less explicit. In the same letter he says of Christ :—

“I have always believed, since I have been a man, and reflected on the subject, in the miraculous conception of Jesus, as far as history can give belief; and no man, I conceive, is possessed of a higher belief. And as to his divinity, I am fully convinced that he was truly the Son of God, and that he could not be so, unless he fully partook of the very nature, spirit, likeness, and divinity of his Heavenly Father.”

In a letter, dated the same year, to Thomas Legget, of New York, he further says :—

“As respects the divinity of Jesus Christ, I apprehend no minister in the Society of Friends has more often in his public communications asserted the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, than I have, assuring my hearers, that he was fully swallowed up into the divine nature and complete divinity of his Heavenly Father.”

These testimonies, written so near the time of his decease, must be considered as expressing his last sentiments, and for ever put to rest the charges of deism and infidelity so often brought against him.

Why, then, were these charges made, and sought to be fixed upon him so industriously? This inquiry leads us to a history of his life, and to a development of the cir-

circumstances which, in his later years, brought him so prominently before the ecclesiastical body to which he belonged, and the religious public at large.

Who was Elias Hicks? Elias Hicks was born in the township of Hempstead, in Queens County, on Long Island, on the 19th of March, 1748. His parents, John and Martha Hicks, belonged to reputable families, and were at the time of his birth in connection with the Society of Friends. He tells us in his Journal, that he was exposed at an early age, like most young people, to the perils of light and gay companionship; and in his own words, "being of a lively, active spirit, and ambitious of excelling in my play and diversions, I sometimes exceeded the bounds of true moderation, for which I often felt close conviction and fears on my pillow in the night season." While he was yet very young, his father removed to a farm he had inherited on the south side of the island, near the sea-shore. The shore, he says, abounded with fish and fowl, "and I soon began to occupy myself with angling for the former and shooting the latter." "These amusements," continues he, "gained an ascendancy in my mind, and although they were diversions for which I felt condemnation at a later period, yet I am led to believe that they were at this time profitable to me in my exposed condition, as they had a tendency to keep me more at and about home, and often prevented me from joining loose company, which I had frequent opportunities of doing, without my father's knowledge." Another benefit, we feel confident, that he derived from these sports, was the development and formation of a sound and vigorous constitution. We saw him at the age of eighty, and a more erect and commanding form or nobler presence we have seldom seen.

About the age of seventeen, he was apprenticed to the trade of a carpenter. Here he was beset as before by temptations, and so far yielded to them that "he learned to dance, and pursue other frivolous and vain amusements." It was at a dance that he was first struck under such serious convictions, as to lead him to renounce all light and frivolous amusements for ever. At

the age of twenty-two, he took to wife, according to God's ordinance, Jemmima Seaman, daughter of Jonathan and Elizabeth Seaman, of Jericho, with whom he seems to have lived in the greatest harmony and happiness for nearly sixty years.

Soon after his marriage, his religious convictions increased upon him, and in a few years he became a recognized minister in the Society of Friends, and began to travel, as he was moved, from place to place, in the exercise of his gift as a speaker and counselor in their public meetings. He was hardly settled in life when the Revolutionary struggle commenced, and Long Island became the seat of war. Quakers, as well as others, were involved in the perils and privations which hostile armies are wont to inflict on friend and foe. It was in connection with an incident growing out of that war, that Hicks first left home in an official capacity. The occurrence, as related in his Journal, bears strong testimony to the conscientious consistency of the Quakers of that period. Under their meeting-house in New York there was a large cellar, which was usually rented as a store. When the king's troops took possession of the city, they used this store for the purpose of depositing in it their arms and ammunition. They, however, sought out those persons who had the disposal of it, and offered to pay them rent. Without much reflection, these Quakers took the money. When it came to the ears of the Society at large, it caused much dissatisfaction, and a complaint was entered, in the yearly meeting of 1779, against the proceeding. Those who had taken the money justified the act, and on being required to refund it, appealed for justification to the conduct of their brethren in Philadelphia, in similar cases. It was finally agreed to refer the subject to the meeting in Pennsylvania. Hicks was one of the delegation to lay the matter before the proper authorities. The result was, that it was determined to refund the money. Thus the original testimony of the Society against war was consistently maintained.

It was during this absence, that Elias began what might almost be called his "apostolical visitations" of the churches, which terminated only with his life. At this

early period, it would seem that, wherever he came, he was listened to with great attention, and began to be considered a man of mark. Before his return, he had attended meetings of Friends in no less than twelve different places on the mainland, besides three on Long Island. On this first journey he was absent nine weeks, and rode more than eight hundred miles. Thus commenced the ministerial career of Elias Hicks.

The discipline and usages of the Quakers greatly favor the manifestation, the development, and the cultivation of whatever native talent or spiritual gifts there may spring up among them. Every man is allowed to speak, but they only *continue* to speak whom experiment proves to have been endowed with that illumination which enables them to "profit withal." In this sense as they say, their ministry is ordained by God. No favoritism, no wealth, no influence of caste or clique, can uphold a man, or give him currency, without solid endowments; and every man rises to precisely that degree of influence that his character, his mind, his eloquence, his person, his manner, spontaneously command. Learning has very little to do with it, for there is little or no citation of authority. How can there be, when the appeal is to the light that is given to *every* man, and that shineth in every mind? Books may be quoted, the Scriptures may be quoted, but nothing, on Quaker principles, can be admitted as truth on authority, or which does not carry its own evidence along with it. The Quaker Society presents, therefore, the very state of things in which a profound thinker will make himself most felt. His power is precisely commensurate with the conviction he produces in the minds of his hearers. There being no special ordination over any community, the able and eloquent man has a currency where ability and eloquence are appreciated, and that is every where.

His second ministerial journey was made in the year 1781, still during the war. It was made in company with one William Valentine, and lay chiefly in the eastern parts of the State of New York. It was early in the spring, and, as the country was new and rough, it was accompanied by not a little suffering and privation. In