

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE
SERMONS OF
ELIAS HICKS: IN
SEVERAL LETTERS TO HIM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649336760

Observations on the Sermons of Elias Hicks: In Several Letters to Him by Robert Wain

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

ROBERT WALN

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE
SERMONS OF
ELIAS HICKS: IN
SEVERAL LETTERS TO HIM**

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
SERMONS OF ELIAS HICKS,
IN
SEVERAL LETTERS TO HIM;
WITH
SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS,
ADDRESSED TO THE
JUNIOR MEMBERS
OF THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

BY A DEMI-QUAKER.

Robert Wake

“To expect that we should be informed of the divine economy with the same distinctness as of our own duty, would be a piece of arrogance above ordinary.”—*Burgh.*

“Dim, as the borrowed beams of moon and stars
To lonely, weary, wandering travellers,
Is reason to the soul: and as on high,
Those rolling fires discover but the sky,
Not light us here: so reason's glimmering ray
Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,
But guide us upward to a better day.”—*Dryden.*

PHILADELPHIA:

.....

1826.



TO
THE JUNIOR MEMBERS
OF THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

THE situation in which the Society of Friends has of late been placed, has, I have no doubt, attracted the attention of all its members; and that even those among you who have not been in the habit of attending its meetings for discipline, are no strangers to their proceedings, although you have not yet felt it your duty to take any part in them: And to you more especially I submit the observations contained in the following letters.

When in my early days I sometimes attended these meetings, my mind was filled with admiration at the harmony and prudence with which their affairs were conducted, and that genuine christian forbearance, one with another, which enabled them to triumph over all the difficulties which are imposed by conflicting opinions, and generally to unite in the adoption of such measures as true wisdom dictated; and it was gratifying to me to observe that it was, to other sects, a subject of wonder, how any numerous association could conduct their business without the intervention of votes or other substitutes, to ascertain the opinions of the majority of the assembly.

The form is, I have no doubt, yet preserved, and the language of forbearance and humility retained by many who in their hearts entertain far different feelings; and the proceedings have in several instances proved, that the spirit which formerly pervaded these assemblies, no longer prevails in some of them.

Why this great change has taken place, will no doubt be ascribed to different causes by the parties more immediately interested: an impartial spectator may form conclusions different from many of them, and may be permitted to ask, whether the leading causes may not have been produced by some of that class, to

whom the great majority of the members of the society look for instruction.

The situation of a christian teacher is of awful responsibility, and in the Society of Friends peculiarly beset with dangers, not only because of the high claim on which their ministry is founded, and which seems to require a degree of unremitting watchfulness with which it is difficult for man to comply; but also, because it requires a constant attention to keeping the mind in that state of lowliness and humility, which can alone preserve them from mistaking the wanderings of the imagination for a call of duty; and from those feelings which lead them to seek after the applause of men. Hence it must necessarily follow, that but few among them are always preserved in such a state of mind, as not to require the caution and advice of their friends: and consequently, that some portion of the society must be selected to watch over their conduct; and as this is an office of the greatest importance to their well being, the greatest care ought to be observed in the appointment. The elders are the depositaries of this power, so essential to the very existence of the society; and as the most prudent and cautious use of it cannot always prevent the objects of their attention from feelings of resentment, so it will naturally follow, that those to whom the exercise of it is most necessary, will always be the most zealous in abridging it.

This impatience of control is increased by a ranting spirit which seems of late to have infected a portion of the society, and which, in its consequences, is always more injurious than infidelity itself; and generally arises from a restlessness of disposition, which not content with the measure of light which may have been imparted, is always aspiring after greater things. It arises from a desire after distinction; and as this disposition must prevent a growth in genuine religion, the delusions of self-love easily enable a man to substitute his own imaginations for revelations; and as every passion is strengthened by indulgence, he proceeds from one step to another, until he fancies himself under the constant and peculiar guidance of the spirit, not only in his religious duties, but in all the temporal concerns of life. It naturally follows, that when he has persuaded himself that he is thus gifted and endowed, he will feel himself above the advice of men, and regard all regulations which may have a tendency

to restrain his wanderings, as obstructing him in his duties, and it will be one of his favourite objects to relieve himself from all control. How individuals actuated by such passions can subject the minds of others to their illusions, would indeed be wonderful, did not history furnish sufficient proof that it is difficult to calculate too largely on the credulity of a portion of mankind.

Whenever this disposition of mind is discovered, especially in any part of the ministry, every reflecting member of society must perceive the necessity of adopting means to prevent the injurious consequences of it; and as that duty more especially devolves on the elders, (who are, and always have been, the true and efficient support of the society,) they soon become objects of dislike to the sublimated spirits opposed to them, and the diminution of their power and authority, the first and favourite scheme.

That they will not succeed, I am fully persuaded; because I think it must be evident to every unclouded mind, that without such salutary interference as they often find it necessary to exercise, all order and propriety would be banished from the society.

Cunning is not more inconsistent with fanaticism, than it is with lunacy; for however perverted the mind may be in relation to particular subjects, we often see individuals in both situations, adopting the most plausible means for the accomplishment of the most irrational objects. It is not therefore to be expected that any attempts will be made totally to abolish the eldership: such a proposal would hardly be successful; but if means are found to render that body less independent, and to diminish the weight and authority which they have long and deservedly possessed, it may subserve the cause, and lead to ultimate success in their projects: and here, if any where, the danger seems to be.*

* Since writing the above, I have been informed that this attempt has actually been made in the yearly meetings in Philadelphia and New York, under the pretext of a necessity of subjecting all important appointments to change at stated periods. No measure could be devised more injurious to the society, and every friend to its welfare must rejoice that it was rejected. I know there are many very pious labourers in the ministry of this people, yet I think it must be evident to every observing mind, that there never was a period since the existence of the society, in which there was greater necessity of unremitting watchfulness on the part of the elders, and that so far from its being expedient to diminish their control, it ought, if possible, to be rendered more efficient. There is a spirit now abroad, which if not checked,

It is with this disposition that such extraordinary solicitude has been manifested, to induce the youth of the society and others of its members, who had before silently attended to its proceedings, to take part in its deliberations, and to flatter them into a belief that they are qualified to administer to its affairs and direct its proceedings; instead of recommending an endeavour to discipline the mind to the weighty business of the society, and cautioning them against indulging a spirit of judging without a serious and solemn consideration of the subject; and against interrupting the business by their councils, unless it is under a solemn impression of duty.

The effect has been such as might be expected, and was probably intended. Individuals who had before taken no part in the deliberations of the society, and who, (however respectable in life,) had never evinced that disposition of mind which had before been thought a necessary qualification of an active member, are now among the most busy; and some of the younger portion of the society forgetting that modesty is the most becoming ornament of youth, are found opposing their unripe notions with unhesitating pertinacity, to the wisdom and experience of age.

Under these circumstances is it not proper for you to consider whether you have not a part to act? When you look back to the history of your society and consider its admirable organization: and when you reflect on the respectable standing, to which the unostentatious propriety by which all its transactions have been governed, has raised it; you must be impressed with an honest zeal for its welfare; and that reverence which every ingenuous mind feels for the institutions and practices of their ancestors, strengthened as it is in this case by the best of all tests, a long experience, must induce you to oppose the innovations of the restless agitators of the present day: and your good sense will, I trust, enable you to distinguish between true religion and fa-

will devastate this society. Who would be the principal agents is not for me to say; but one thing is certain, that if there is any disposition on the part of its ministers to relieve themselves from this control, it is sufficient evidence of the necessity of it. Such a disposition must proceed from a mind not imbued with true christian humility, but presumptuously confident in itself. It is spiritual pride, than which nothing is more injurious and odious in a christian professor.

naticism, and not permit you to lose your reverence for the one, in contemplating the wild deformity of the other.

And perhaps you may be induced to believe that your attendance at the meetings for discipline, may not be without its use; that your presence may give additional strength and encouragement to the long tried standard bearers, and though you may not feel yourselves called upon to take a very active part in their deliberations, your example may be of use to some of those forward spirits, who, whatever may be their exterior appearance, are less qualified for the important business than many of yourselves.

I know there are individuals in every stage of life, who judge of preaching as others do of music, by the concord of sweet sounds; and who are convinced more by the harmony of a well turned sentence, than by the sentiment it is intended to convey; whose religion is founded on sensation rather than reflection, and is an affair of feeling instead of a deliberate sense of duty. To these I have nothing to say. My endeavour has been to show the inconsistencies into which men are led, by unfounded pretensions to a state of perfectability,* and an acquaintance with the inscrutable workings of Providence, (which all experience proves to be unattainable by man;) to show that such lofty aspirations are not in accordance with the genuine principles of the religion of Jesus Christ; and that it is by a submissive acquiescence in the measure of knowledge communicated, and an anxious endeavour to fulfil the obligations it imposes, rather than by curious researches into hidden things, that we best perform our duties here; and as no intelligent mind among you can believe that the suggestions of infinite wisdom are ever contradictory, it was part of my plan to show the inconsistencies in the doctrines of the great leader of the illuminati of your society.

* Perfection, in the sense in which it is understood by some people, frequently leads to great extravagance on religious subjects, by inducing men to believe that they have eradicated from their hearts every propensity to evil, and have arrived at a state of stainless purity. There is a great difference between the perfection of the Creator and man. The perfection of man consists in his possessing all that is requisite to attain the end of his creation; and the proper question for him to consider, is not whether he has arrived at that perfection which is the promised reward in another state of being, but whether he has by careful diligence and attention secured for himself that reward.

If I have succeeded in this, and to your deliberate examination I submit it, my task is accomplished; for if we are permitted to judge of the sermons as the arguments of a simple individual, sure I am, there are none among you habituated to reflection, who will not discover that they abound with inconsistencies, and are totally irreconcilable with reason, and the authority of the Scriptures. And you must unite with me in lamenting the strange illusion which induced the author of such discourses to declare that "he dare not speak at random, otherwise he should show # that he departed from God's illuminating spirit."

LETTER I.

When I some time since addressed you, I expressed an anxious wish that you would submit to the consideration of your friends, your scheme of religion, in such a form as would enable them to examine it with deliberation; because I did believe that on this momentous subject, too much care could not be exercised. My wish has been gratified, not by your immediate agency, but by the zeal of your followers, who have caused a number of your discourses to be printed and published to the world.

When I sat down to read them, I did not expect to find a regularly concocted system, because I did not believe you had a mind capable of very extensive combination; but I did imagine you had given to your plan some semblance of consistency, and that if there was no adhesion, there would be no striking incongruity in its parts. In this I have been disappointed; for in it, nothing can be discovered but disjointed effusions, and attempts to give to different passages of Scripture novel constructions; to amuse the fancy, and engage the mind in useless enquiries after hidden things; to withdraw it from its proper business; to entangle it in the web which the vanity and restlessness of man has woven; and to substitute for that pure and simple worship which consists in prostration of spirit before the throne of grace, a grateful acknowledgment of his goodness, and humble thankfulness for the measure of light received; lofty speculations on subjects more