

Jonathan Edwards: A Study

AN ADDRESS

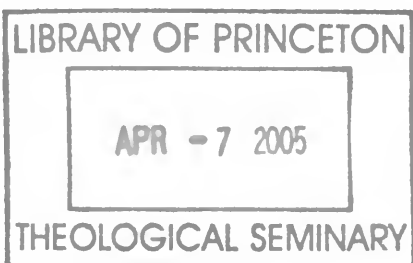
Delivered at Stockbridge, Massachusetts

October 5, 1903

BY JOHN DEWITT

PROFESSOR IN PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BX
7260
.E3
D4
1904



EX 7260 .E3 D4 1904
De Witt, John, 1842-1923.
Jonathan Edwards: a study

Jonathan Edwards: A Study

AN ADDRESS

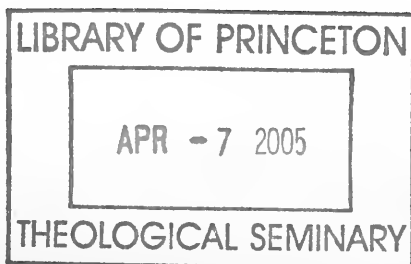
Delivered at Stockbridge, Massachusetts

October 5, 1903

BY JOHN DEWITT

PROFESSOR IN PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Reprinted from The Princeton Theological Review
for January, 1904



JONATHAN EDWARDS: A STUDY.*

I AM deeply indebted to your Committee for the honor they have done me in inviting me to take part in this celebration. My hesitation in accepting their invitation was due solely to the feeling I had that a son of New England could more appropriately than a stranger ask your attention to an appreciation of this great New Englander. This hesitation was overcome, partly by the cordiality with which the invitation was extended, and partly by the consideration that Princeton, where Edwards did his last work and where his body lies to-day, might well be represented on the occasion by which we have been assembled. Moreover, Princeton College, when Edwards was called to its presidency, was largely a New England institution of learning. Both of his predecessors in that office, Jonathan Dickinson and Aaron Burr, were natives of New England, graduates of the College at New Haven and Congregational ministers. Associated with Dickinson and Burr in the planting of the College were not only other Yale men, but Harvard men also: Ebenezer Pemberton and David Cowell and Jacob Green and, above all, Jonathan Belcher, sometime Royal Governor of the Colony of Massachusetts and *ex-officio* Overseer of Harvard, his *alma mater*; who, when afterward he was commissioned Royal Governor of the Province of New Jersey, to repeat his own words, "adopted as his own this infant College," gave to it a new and more liberal charter, and so largely aided it by private gifts and official influence that its Trustees called him its "founder, patron and benefactor." I am glad as a Princeton man to find in the anniversary of the birth of one of its Presidents an opportunity to acknowledge the University's great debt to New England. And, if you will permit a personal remark, I cannot forget that in coming to these services I am returning to the Commonwealth of which I

* Address delivered in the Meeting House of the Parish Church of Stockbridge, Mass., October 5, 1903, at the celebration, by the Berkshire Conferences of Congregational Churches, of the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Jonathan Edwards; and repeated in Miller Chapel, Princeton Theological Seminary, October 16, 1903.

am proud to have been a citizen, and to the Massachusetts Association of Congregational Ministers whose list of pastors for six successive years contained my name.* I should have to efface the memory of a pastorate exceptionally happy, and of unnumbered acts of kindness from the living and the dead, in order not to feel grateful and at home to-day.

But, after all, the highest justification of this commemoration of a man born two centuries ago is not that his genius and character and career reflect glory on the people and the class from whom he sprang, but that they contain notable elements of universal interest and value. The great man is great because in some great way he adequately addresses, not what is exceptional, not what is distinctive of any class or people, but what is human and common to the race; to whose message, therefore, men respond as men; whose eulogists and interpreters are not necessarily dwellers in his district or people of his blood; who is the common property of all to study, to enjoy, to revere and to celebrate. It is, above all, because Jonathan Edwards belongs to this small and elect class that we are gathered to honor his memory by recalling his story and reflecting on the elements of his greatness.

It would be inappropriate, certainly in this place and before this audience, for a stranger to repeat the well-known story of his life. I shall better meet your expectations if I shall reproduce the impressions of the man made on me by a renewed study of his collected writings and his life.

We shall agree that the inward career of Edwards was singularly self-consistent; that from its beginning to its close it is exceptionally free from incongruities and contradictions; that in him Wordsworth's line, "The child is father to the man," finds a signal illustration. When we are brought into contact with a life so unified, whose development along its own lines has not been hindered or distorted by external disturbances as violent even as that suffered by Edwards at Northampton, we naturally look for its principle of unity, the dominating quality which subordinated to itself all the others, or, if you like, which so interpenetrated all his other traits as to become his distinctive note. We are confident that such a quality there must have been, and that if we are happy enough at once to find it, we shall have in our possession the master key which, so far as may be to human view, will open to us the departments of his thought and feeling and activity.

A century later than Edwards there was born another great New

*Pastor of the Central Church, Boston.

Englander—Ralph Waldo Emerson—between whom and Edwards there is a strong likeness as well as a sharp contrast. Because this is his centennial year, Emerson like Edwards is just now especially present to our minds, and one is tempted to compare and contrast the two. To this temptation I shall not yield. But in order that we may properly approach and seize for ourselves a fine formula of Edwards' dominant quality, permit me to recall to you a study of Emerson by a *litterateur* of great charm and wide acceptance. Mr. Matthew Arnold, in his well-known lecture, says that Emerson is "not a great poet," he "is not a great man of letters," he "is not a great philosopher." Mr. Arnold, I think, does great injustice to Emerson in two of these negations. If I did not think so I should not associate him with so great a man as Edwards. I am not, indeed, concerned to defend the claims of Emerson to "a place among the great philosophers." His treatment of particular subjects was marked by discontinuity; and his tendency to gnomic, sententious forms of speech betrayed him not seldom into overstatement or exaggeration. Now, than discontinuity and overstatement there can scarcely be conceived more deadly foes to system-building, to the construction of a world-theory; and the construction of a world-theory is the end of all philosophizing. It may be questioned whether Emerson ever permitted himself to rest in any fixed theory of the universe. I have the impression that for a fixed view of the universe he never felt the need, and that from all actual views of the universe which have been fixed in formulas he revolted. And, therefore, when Mr. Arnold says, "Emerson cannot be called with justice a great philosophical writer—he cannot build, he does not construct a philosophy," I do not know on what grounds we can dissent from his statement.

But when he goes further and, with the same positiveness, says, "We have not in Emerson a great writer or a great poet," Mr. Arnold passes from the region of opinion based on considerations whose force all estimate alike, into the region of opinion which has its source and ground in mere individual temperament and taste. Moreover, greatness is a word so vague as scarcely to raise a definite issue; and this fact might well have prevented so careful and acute a critic from employing it to deny to Emerson a quality which Mr. Arnold would have found difficult to define. Certainly this much can be said. If Emerson is not "a great writer, a great man of letters," yet, in his unfolding of ideas and in his portrayal and criticism of nature and of life, he has nobly fulfilled and is still

fulfilling the function of a great man of letters to thousands of disciplined minds; interpreting for them and teaching them to interpret nature and man, educating their judgments, cultivating their taste, introducing them to "the best that has been thought and written," and stimulating and ennobling their whole intellectual life. And if he is not, as Mr. Arnold says he is not, "sensuous and impassioned" in his poetry, we must not forget that reflective poetry is Emerson's best and most characteristic poetic achievement; that reflective poetry cannot possibly be "sensuous and impassioned"; and that Mr. Arnold is prejudiced against all reflective poetry, and, indeed, does not think it poetry, whether it be Emerson's or Wordsworth's.

But though Mr. Arnold does Emerson injustice in these two negative propositions; I think that, in his positive statement, he has firmly seized and happily formulated Emerson's dominating quality. He has given us the real clue to the significance of Emerson's literary product, regarded as a whole, when he says of him: "Emerson is the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit." The friendship of Emerson for "those who would live in the spirit" is, indeed, his characteristic trait. He is also their "aider," as Mr. Arnold says. But the aid he offers them is conditioned precisely by the fact that he is a man of letters and a poetic interpreter of nature and of life, and that he does not bring to them a philosophy. I say, the aid he offers is conditioned by this lack of a philosophy; and by conditioned I mean limited. For because of it the realm of nature and spirit, as he presents it, is vast indeed, but vague and undefined and, so far forth, unrevealed. And therefore, as Mr. Arnold himself points out, his aid is confined to the sphere of the moral sentiments and action. Mr. Arnold does, indeed, express the opinion that "as Wordsworth's poetry is the most important work done in verse in our language in the nineteenth century, so Emerson's essays are the most important work done in prose." But this is the language of purely personal judgment. Far more important for us in estimating Emerson, with Mr. Arnold's help, as "an aider of those who would live in the spirit," is the sentence in which he formulates the precise content of the aid which Emerson extends. And this is the sentence: "Happiness in labor, righteousness and veracity; in all the life of the spirit; happiness and eternal hope—that was Emerson's gospel." A fair and felicitous description it is. And how clearly it reveals the limit of the aid which Emerson's gospel offers! How clearly it reveals that the aid extended is not the aid of a

great thinker in the sphere of ultimate knowing and absolute being, but is aid confined to the sphere of the moral sentiments and action!

Thus, by a route somewhat circuitous indeed, but I trust not wholly without interest or propriety, we reach, in Mr. Arnold's characterization of Emerson, the formula of which I spoke as finely expressing Edwards' dominating and unifying quality. Edwards like Emerson is, above all else and by eminence, "the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit." Who that knows him at all will deny to him a right equal to that of Emerson to this high title? Of course, they differ widely both in the aid they offer and in their methods of offering it. Emerson's aid is conditioned and limited, as I have already said, by his want of a firm and self-consistent doctrine of the universe, by his want of a philosophy. And we must be just as ready to acknowledge that Edwards' aid is as clearly conditioned and limited by his unfortunate poverty in the humanities, by his notable lack of feeling for poetry and letters. On the other hand and positively I think we may say, that it would be hard to name a man of letters who, having separated himself from all formulated philosophical and religious beliefs, has more nearly than Emerson exhausted the resources of letters and poetry in the service of "those who would live in the spirit." And among the great doctors of the Christian Church, it would be as hard to name one more distinctively spiritual in character and aim than Edwards, or one who, in cultivating the spiritual life in himself and promoting it in others, has more consistently or more ably drawn on the resources of his philosophy, his world-view, his Christian doctrine of the universe.

I am quite sure that this obvious likeness and difference between Edwards and Emerson is the right point of departure for any large study of their affinity and opposition. Such a study the day invites us to mention, but does not permit us to undertake. The day belongs, not to the great Puritan who gave up the Puritan conception of the universe for its interpretation by poetry and letters, but to the great Puritan who denied himself the high satisfactions of literature, that through his distinctively Christian doctrine of God and man he might be "the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit." It is to his spirituality, and to his intellectual gifts and work, that I ask your attention.

I.

How many writers have portrayed what one of them calls the "spirituality of mind" of the Northern and Teutonic peoples! One of the most striking passages in Taine's *English Literature* contrasts in this particular the Latin and Teutonic races. And a New England theologian and man of letters, in unfolding the truth that the Northern nations of Europe, unlike the Southern, were "spiritual in their modes of thought," calls our attention to the fact that "the Northern heathen had fewer gods than the Southern, and could believe in their reality without the aid of visible form. He hewed no idol, and he erected no temple; he worshiped his divinity in spirit, beneath the open sky, in the free air." How far this spiritual temper can be attributed to climate, to "the influences which rained down from the cold Northern sky," we cannot say. Racial character would best be accepted as an ultimate fact. The fact itself is certain, that among the European peoples, the race to which Edwards belonged was most strongly marked by this spiritual quality. Moreover, it was precisely by the greater strength and intensity of this racial quality that the Puritan class was separated as a class from their own people. Spirituality is what the logicians call the specific difference of Puritanism. The unshaken belief in the reality of the spiritual universe, the ability to realize its elements without the aid of material symbols, the strong impulse to find motives to action in the unseen and eternal, to feed the intellect and the heart on spiritual objects, and in distinctively spiritual experiences or exercises to discern the highest joys and the deepest sorrows and the great crises of life—these were the traits of the Puritans. And these traits were exhibited, not by a few cloistered souls who obeyed the "counsels of perfection" and were secluded from their fellows by special vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience, but by the mass of the population in Puritan New England; by countrymen and villagers and citizens and statesmen. This spirituality organized the governments and determined the politics of vigorous commonwealths. Theocratic republics, as spiritual as that which, under Savonarola, had so short a life in Florence, flourished for generations on American soil. It was in this Puritan society that Jonathan Edwards' American ancestors lived. They were typical Puritans, justly esteemed and influential in the communities in which they dwelt. The convictions, traditions and spirit of the class were theirs. This was especially true of both his father and his mother. The simplicity, the sincerity,

the spirituality of Puritanism at its best were incarnate in them; and it was the Puritan ideal of life which, before his birth, they prayed might be actualized in their unborn child.

Belonging to this spiritual race, sprung from this spiritual class, descended from such an ancestry and born of such a parentage, we have the right to anticipate that his dominant quality will be this spirituality of which I have spoken. We have the right to look for what Dr. Egbert Smyth calls, "Edwards' transcendent spiritual personality," and concerning which he says, that "the spiritual element" in Edwards "is not a mere factor in a great career, a strain in a noble character. It is his calmest mood as well as his most impassioned warning or pleading, his profoundest reasoning, his clearest insight, his widest outlook. It is the solid earth on which he treads." Dr. Smyth has thus stated in suggestive phrase the supreme truth concerning Edwards; the truth that his dominating quality, his differentiating trait, his prevailing habit of mind, is spirituality. The time at my disposal does not permit the illustration of this great quality in any adequate way. I can only touch on a few particulars which may help us better to appreciate it.

The careful student of Edwards is deeply impressed, first of all, by his immediate vision of the spiritual universe as the reality of realities. When I speak of the spiritual universe, I am giving a name to no indefinite object of thought. I mean God in His supernatural attributes of righteousness and love, the moral beings created in His image, the relations between them, and the thoughts and feelings and activities which emerge out of these relations. This was the universe in which Edwards lived and moved and had his being. As he apprehended it, it was no mere subjective experience, no mere plexus of sensations and thoughts and volitions. It was the one fundamental substance and the one real existence. It was the one objective certainty which stands over against the shadowy and illusory phenomena that we group under the title matter. And his vision of it was vivid and in a sense complete. He knew it not only in its several parts, but as a whole; as an ordered universe; as the macrocosm which he, the microcosm, reflected and to which he responded.

All this is true in a measure, to be sure, of all the other saints and, indeed, of the sinners also. It is in what I have called the immediacy of his spiritual apprehension that his distinction lies. There is, of course, a sense in which the spiritual world is immediately discerned by all of us. It is of spirit rather than of

matter that our knowledge is direct. That consciousness of a self which cannot be construed in terms of matter, or that idea of self which is a necessary postulate of all our thinking brings us at once into the universe of spirit. But in order to the vivid realization of this spiritual universe, there is necessary for the most of us a special activity or experience. And by this activity or experience our realization of the spiritual world is mediated. Edwards, in this respect, is a remarkable exception in his own class. Consider some great and notable men of the spiritual type. Consider St. Augustine. How true it is that the great elements of the spiritual world became vivid to Augustine through the mediation of his experience of sin! And that these spiritual elements were always interpreted by the aid of that experience his *Confessions* abundantly testify. Or think of Dante. As Augustine reveals in his *Confessions* the instrumental relation to his deepening spirituality of the long period of sinful storm and stress, Dante makes perfectly clear to us in *The New Life* that it was the love of Beatrice which so mediated for him the spiritual world and so brought him under its sway, that in order to repeat and interpret the vision of it he laid under contribution his total gifts and learning. Or take John Calvin. That fruitful conception—more fruitful in Church and State than any other conception which has held the English-speaking world—of the absolute and universal sovereignty of the Holy God as a revolt from the conception then prevailing of the sovereignty of the human head of an earthly Church, was historically the mediator and instaurator of his spiritual career.

Now Edwards is distinguished from Augustine, Dante and Calvin by the fact that his intuition of the spiritual universe was, in the sense in which I have used the word, immediate. To a degree I should be unwilling to affirm of any other man I have studied, except one, his spirituality was natural. That he was a sinner, needing regeneration and atonement, he knew. That these were his blessed experience he was gratefully assured. But except the apostle called by eminence "the Theologian," St. John the Divine, I know no other great character in Church History of whom it can so emphatically be said, that when he "breathed the pure serene" of the spiritual world and gazed upon its outstanding features, or explored its recesses, or studied the inter-relations of its essential elements, he did so as "native and to the manner born." To quote again the words of Dr. Smyth: "It is the solid earth on which he treads, its sleeping rocks and firm-set hills."

The spiritual universe, thus vividly and immediately apprehended as the reality of realities, of course, became, in turn, the interpreter to himself of all he did and felt. It became even the regnant principle of his association of ideas, so that the unpurposed movements of his mind in reverie were determined by it. How influential in his earliest thinking it was, you will see if you study his *Notes* on mind and ultimate being; and how persistent it was, you will see in his latest observations on *The End of God in Creation*. It governed his æsthetics also. The line between æsthetic emotion and spiritual feeling is sharp, and wide, and deep. Often as the two are confounded by those whose sensibilities are strongly stirred by beauty in nature or in fine art, it is still true that they are as distinct as spirit and matter. The æsthetic emotion is ultimate and never can be made over into spiritual affection. No one knew this better than Edwards. But through both reflection and experience he reached and formulated the conclusion, that the highest and most enduring æsthetic emotion is that which is called out not by material beauty but by holiness. And he may be said to have unfolded the great mediæval phrase, "The beatific vision of God," into the doctrine of the highest beauty, in his epoch-making treatise—epoch-making in America certainly the treatise was—on *The Nature of Virtue*. This seems to me a striking instance of the way in which his spirituality permeated and irradiated his thinking.

I think that even the traits of Edwards' style are best explained by this same quality. It has often been said of him that style is precisely what Edwards lacked. We are told that, after reading *Clarissa Harlowe*, he expressed regret that in his earlier years he did not pay more attention to style. We may be thankful certainly that he did not form his style on that of the affluent Richardson. I am unable to share the regret he expressed; unless, indeed, it was a regret that he did not always take pains to make his literary product eminent in the qualities of style which always marked it. Edwards was above all things sincere; and his style is the man. Its qualities are clearness, severe simplicity, movement and force. In these he is eminent, almost as eminent as John Locke; and he is more eminent in his later than in his earlier compositions. They finely fit his theme and his spirit. His theme in substance is one. It is the spiritual universe, in some aspect of it. And his spirit is that of a man dominated by those spiritual affections which he teaches us are a lively action of the will. It was appropriate that his style should be calm and severe, and that even in his sermons it should lack the dilation and rhythm of a rapt prophet's emo-

tional utterance. Edwards was no Montanist. He was a seer, indeed, but a seer with a clear vision; and the spirit of the prophet was subject to the prophet. No man of his day was, so far as I know, the subject of stronger or deeper spiritual affections. But no one knew better just what spiritual affections are. He knew especially how different they are from mere sensibility; and he was always calm under their sway. No other style than his could have so well reflected and expressed this spiritual, unhysterical man. And I must believe that his is the direct fruit of his spiritual quality. Certainly, it was spiritually effective. Never did any one's discourse make a more powerful and at the same time a more distinctively and exclusively spiritual impression on audience or readers. One of the most charming of modern poems is that in which Tennyson portrays the Lady Godiva, that she might take the tax from off her people, riding at high noon through Coventry "naked, but clothed on with chastity." So seem to me the bare and unadorned sermons and discussions of Edwards. Straight through his subject to his goal this master moves; unadorned yet not unclad, but clothed upon with spirituality.

Or consider Edwards' emotional life. Dr. Allen, of Cambridge, in his paper on *The Place of Edwards in History*, has dwelt fondly on what he calls the spiritual affinity between Dante and Edwards. He makes the remark, that "the deepest affinity of Edwards was not that with Calvin or with Augustine, but with the Florentine poet." Now, I am sure, that of his affinity with Augustine and with Calvin Edwards was distinctly conscious. But nowhere, so far as I know, is there the slightest intimation that he had any interest in Dante's *New Life* or *The Divine Comedy*. He was no idealizing poet, no literary artist, no allegorizer; and he seems to have taken little or no pleasure in this kind of literature. Had there been a fundamental sympathy between Dante and Edwards, it would have expressed itself in Edwards' works with Edwards' characteristic distinctness. But not only is Dante not mentioned, but, what is more striking, there is not an allusion, I think, in Edwards' works to the poems of the Puritan John Milton or the allegories of the Puritan John Bunyan. This seems inexplicable on Dr. Allen's theory of a strong affinity between the New England theologian and the Florentine poet. Most unhappy, however, is the palmary instance of this alleged affinity selected by Dr. Allen for remark. It is what he calls the striking spiritual likeness between Dante's words touching his first sight of Beatrice and Edwards' description of Sarah Pierpont. I refer

to them, not to criticise Dr. Allen, but because the striking contrast between them helps us the better to appreciate the regnancy of Edwards' spiritual quality, even when he was under the spell of earthly love.

And the contrast is striking. Dante in noble and beautiful words describes the dress that Beatrice wore. "Her dress on that day was a most noble color, a subdued and goodly crimson, girded and adorned in such sort as best suited with her tender age." He exalts her in a way which Edwards would have severely reprov'd, in the words, "Behold the deity which is stronger than I, who coming to me will rule within me." And he confesses in powerful and poetic phrases the violent effect upon his body which his strong emotion produced. The whole picture is charming, poetic, ideal, and was written in a book for the public years after the boy had seen the girl. The greatest poet of his time, if not of all time, in maturer life looks back upon the meeting and, with consummate art, I do not say with insincerity, transfigures it.

How different is Edwards' well-known description of Sarah Pierpont! It was written in Edwards' youth, four years before his marriage; not in a book for the public, but on a blank leaf for his own eye. In its own way it is as engaging as Dante's. But its way is not artistic or imaginative at all. It is distinctively and exclusively spiritual. There is no idealization, no translation of the object of his love into a symbol, no physical transport, no agitation, no "shaking of the pulses of the body." We learn nothing of Sarah Pierpont's dress or appearance or temperament. All he tells us about her is about her spiritual qualities and her relations to the spiritual universe. And at the last, on his deathbed, he sends to his absent wife, this Sarah Pierpont, his love; and again speaks of the uncommon union between them as, he trusts, spiritual and therefore immortal. Read in connection with the brief references to his household life to be found in his biography, these passages bring before us a man whose closest and tenderest earthly love was transfigured, not by artistic genius, but by what I have called his dominating spirituality. And both passages issue naturally out of that spiritual conception of beauty which he has so finely unfolded in the great essay on Virtue.

This same quality manifests itself in the impartiality and impersonality of his feeling under conditions well calculated to awaken strong partial and personal feelings. Go through the whole history of the unfortunate Northampton controversy. Read the correspondence of Edwards, his speeches before the several Councils and the

Farewell Sermon. Or mark his behavior under the trying conditions of a recrudescence in Stockbridge of the enmity shown at Northampton. And you will see what I mean, when I say that his spirituality is exhibited in the impartiality of his feelings and the impersonality of their objects. You will agree with me that in all of it he was true to his thesis; that private feelings must be subordinated to that benevolence, that spiritual love of being in general, which is the essence of virtue. Indeed, I recall no other instance of a severe and protracted trial, in which the chief figure appears so unconcerned about everything except its spiritual significance.

But it is in the work to which he gave himself, in the subjects on which he labored, in his method of treatment, in the conclusions he reached, that Edwards' spirituality is most impressively revealed. He was interested apparently in nothing but the spiritual universe and the spiritual life. Of course, the whole of Edwards is not known to us. We rarely, if ever, catch sight of him in his avocations, so strong was his sense of vocation. I discover in him no interest in politics, in literature, in the plastic or even the intellectual arts. In distinctively intellectual pursuits other than religious he did at times engage. But he engaged in them, certainly in his maturer years, only in order to the thorough concentration of his powers on his spiritual work. Thus, when his mind was strained by excessive study and would not hold itself to a severely spiritual train of thought, or when his imagination rose in rebellion and tempted him, he whipped each into subjection by setting his powers to the solution of a difficult mathematical problem; and so he regained possession of himself solely for high spiritual purposes. And how spiritual his purposes were let the titles of his works testify, from the first published sermon to the great treatises on Sin, Virtue and the Will, and finally the great Body of Divinity in historical form, which in his letter to the Trustees of Princeton he describes as his coming work, and in describing which his soul expands and his style, almost for the first time, becomes rhythmical. ✓

We are therefore entitled to say with emphasis that the dominant quality of Edwards is spirituality—spirituality of mind, of feeling, of aim and action. The spiritual universe was for him not only the most certain and substantial of realities, but the exclusive object of contemplation. Purely spiritual feeling seems to have filled in his life the great spaces which in the lives of most men are occupied by passionate sensibilities and æsthetic pleasures. Or we may better say, that his exceptional personality was the alembic in which these sensibilities and pleasures were transmuted into the pure

distillate of spiritual feeling; until all his outgoing and active affections rested on spiritual qualities and objects, and all his reactions of emotion were the blessednesses of the spirit. When his will energized and called the great powers of his intellect into action, it was on the most spiritual themes that his mind wrought with the greatest ease and geniality. Distant in manner and reserved on most subjects, whenever he conversed about heavenly and divine things of which his heart was so full, "his tongue," says Dr. Samuel Hopkins, "was as the pen of a ready writer." The spiritual world so completely possessed him that its contemplation and exposition seems never to have tired him. After receiving the invitation to Princeton, he told his eldest son that for many years he had spent fourteen hours a day in his study. Spiritual thinking and feeling were thus both his labor and his recreation.

This exclusive spirituality of Edwards explains his lack of charm and interest. For obviously he is lacking here. Compare with the lack of interest in Edwards the interest the world has always taken in Luther, in the stormy career of Knox, in the incessant and varied activity of Calvin, and earlier than these in the dramatic life of Augustine. Shall we say that he charms us less because he was a more spiritual man, or only because he was more exclusively spiritual; because he was less wealthily endowed with humane sympathies? Is it because of his delicate organization and feeble vitality? Or is it because, under the domination of the spiritual universe, and knowing well his own powers and limitations, he determined to know this one thing only? Or is it, after all, only the defect of his biographers? I do not know. Certainly he presents a striking contrast to the other great spiritual men whom I have named. And I think we are bound to acknowledge that his remarkable separation in spirit from the feelings and tastes and occupations of the people seriously limited his usefulness, and seriously limits it to-day. But when all is said, his spirituality is his strength. And in a world where social charm and sympathy is abundant, and where high and exclusive spirituality is in the greatest men as rare as radium; we ought to rejoice that of one of the greatest it is true that he was bond-slave to the spiritual world.

The clue to Edwards then, his dominating and irradiating quality, the trait which gave unity to his career, is his spirituality. His was indeed, to repeat the fine word of Dr. Egbert Smyth, "a transcendent spiritual personality."

II.

I have detained you so long on this subject that I must treat briefly and inadequately Edwards' intellect and work.

It was as a bond-slave then to the spiritual universe that all his work was done. Now his work was not that of a philanthropist or a missionary. It was the work of a thinker. The instrument with which he wrought was his intellect; and the word which describes the quality as distinguished from the subject of his writings is the word, intellectual. This is as true of his sermons as it is of his elaborate treatises. And, as a whole, his works constitute an intellectual system of the spiritual universe.

Eminently intellectual in his activity, Edwards, so far as I can see, had no intellectual pride. His intellect he regarded simply as an instrument to be employed in the service of the spiritual world. And as such an instrument, if we would do him justice, we must regard it. We must seize and estimate its outstanding traits, as they reveal themselves in this characteristic activity which he solemnly accepted as his vocation. What, then, were the distinctive traits of Edwards' intellect, and what position must we assign to him among intellectual men, especially among theologians?

The genius of Luther and that of Calvin have often been contrasted. There is a general agreement that while Luther saw single truths with the greater clearness and the sooner recognized their capital value, to Calvin must be attributed in greater measure the gift of construction; the great gift by which he organized in a system the principles of the Protestant Reformation. Now though Edwards nowhere shows the boldness and originality of either of these men; though he never inaugurated a new mode of Christianity like Luther or organized its theology like Calvin, and, therefore, holds no place beside them in history; he had both a gift of penetration like Luther's and a gift of construction like Calvin's. It is also true, I think, that in the subtlety of his intellect he was greater than either. The man of all men whom he seems to me most like intellectually and, indeed, every way—in the character of his religious experience, in his genial acceptance of the theological system he inherited, in his philosophical insight, in his power in the exposition of abstract truth, in his fruitfulness, in his constructive ability and in his failure nevertheless to leave behind him a completed system, in his fundamental philosophical and theological views, in his idealism and Platonism—is Anselm of Canterbury. And, having regard to the works they have left

behind them—the one, the *Monologium* and *Proslogium*, the *Tract on Predestination*, the *Prayers and Meditations*, the *Essay on Free Will* and the *Cur Deus Homo*, and the other, the great sermons, the treatises on *The Nature of Virtue*, *The End of God in Creation*, *Original Sin*, *Justification by Faith*, *The Religious Affections* and *The Nature of the Freedom of the Will*—I think that Edwards stands fully abreast of the mediæval philosopher and theologian. Had Dante known Edwards as we know him, he would have given him a place beside Anselm in the Heaven of the Sun.

In saying that Edwards is like Anselm, I have also in mind the fact that there are two great classes of theologians. All Christian theology rests on Holy Scripture. But theologians strikingly differ among themselves in the importance they respectively assign to the history of doctrine and the Church's symbols on the one hand, and to the concord between the Word of God and the reason on the other. In the mediæval Church there were school divines who rested solely on history and authority; who had no confidence in the argument from the reason; who did not believe that there is a *theologia naturalis*. This tendency was strongest, perhaps, in the [Franciscan, Duns Scotus. In modern Protestant Churches, the tendency is, perhaps, strongest in the high Anglican writers. Now while Edwards was in harmony with the Reformed Confessions, the absence of the Confessional or historical spirit is noticeable in all his theological treatises. The lack of it is explained partly by his training. In the curriculum of the American Colonial College historical studies were slight and elementary, while studies which discipline the powers were pursued with a vigor and sincerity which the modern University would do well to promote. We must regret, I think, the lack in this great American theologian of large historical culture and, by consequence, of the historical spirit. Because of it there is, in the positiveness of his assertions, in his strong confidence in logical analysis and dialectic in themselves, and in his historical generalizations in *The History of Redemption*, a quality which it is right to call provincial.

But if he is defective at this point, it is not too much to say, that he is one of the greatest Doctors of the Universal Church by reason of his singular eminence in three capital qualities. In the first place, he is far more powerful than most theologians in his appeal to the reason in man. I mean the reason in its largest sense and as distinguished from the understanding. The reason itself, he held, as if he were a Cambridge Platonist, has a large spiritual content. If

I understand him, he went beyond the Westminster Divines in the value he put upon the Light of Nature. Of his actual appeal to the reason, including under that term the conscience and the religious nature, I have time only to say that it permeates and gives distinction to his entire theological product. He addresses it with large confidence in his sermons, in his essay on *The End of God in Creation*, in his chapter on the *Satisfaction of Christ* written in the very spirit of the *Cur Deus Homo*, in all his endeavors to quicken in reader and hearer the sense of guilt and the fear of its punishment, in his great discourse on *Spiritual Light*, and in his great volume on the *Religious Affections*. In all of them a consummate theologian of the reason distinctly appears. To this we must add his supremacy in the related gifts of clear exposition, subtle distinction, and acute polemic. To this supremacy the world has borne abundant testimony. If he is like Anselm in his high estimate of the reason, he is like Thomas Aquinas in his dialectical acuteness. Nor is this acuteness mere quickness of vision and alertness in logical fence. His two greatest polemic works are probably the essays on *Original Sin* and *The Freedom of the Will*. Both of them are profound as well as acute; both are large in their conception of the subject; and in both he is fair to his antagonist, and, though not so largely, yet as really constructive as he is polemic. To these we must add, finally, a consummate genius for theological construction. No one can go through his collected works even rapidly, as I was compelled to do this summer, without seeing that a self-consistent World-view or theory of the Universe was distinct and complete in the consciousness of Edwards, and that it is the living root out of which springs every one of his sermons and discussions. No theological writer is less atomistic. None is less the prey of his temporary impulses or aberrations. No theological essays less merit the name of *disjecta membra*. The joy of the completed literary presentation of this universal system, this spiritual and intellectual Cosmos, was denied him. But it is in his works, just as completely as Coleridge's system is in the *Biographia Literaria* and the *Table Talk*, just as clearly as Pascal's Pyrrhonism lies open to us in his fragmentary *Thoughts*. Had he lived to complete at Princeton his *History of Redemption*, his "body of divinity in an entire new method," it is my belief that the world would have seen in it the fruit of a constructive genius not less great than that which appears in the *Summa* of St. Thomas or in the *Institutes* of Calvin.

Though no theologian more habitually conceived the spiritual

world as objective, yet his great powers and special talents wrought best, and he produced his best work, when he was writing on the religious life. That life he knew well, because of his own profound and vivid religious experience. But he never wrote out of his experience alone. The spiritual universe as a whole is before him as he writes. It is always therefore the ideal religious life of the redeemed sinner he is describing. Hence its severity, its purity, its deep humility as it measures itself with the absolute ethical and spiritual perfection. If we do not wish to sink into despair, we must not forget this as we read the greatest of his tracts, the essay on *The Religious Affections*.

A theologian, so profound and so individual as Edwards was, could not but have made many contributions of the highest importance to theological science. Now whatever Edwards' distinctive contributions to theology were, it is important to notice that they were contributions to the historical theology of the Christian Church. He was in full concord with the great Ecumenical Councils on the Trinity and the Person of Christ. He thoroughly accepted the formal and material principles of the Reformation. And he was convinced of the truth of the great system known as Calvinism, or the Reformed Theology. His greatness as a theologian and his fruitfulness as a writer are rooted in the consent of his heart, as well as the assent of his mind, to these historical doctrines. And though, as I have said, individually he was not distinctly informed by the historical spirit, yet he is in the line of the historical succession of Christian theologians.

Turning to these distinctive contributions I have time to name only one; but that one has been of immense historical importance in America. Jonathan Edwards changed what I may call the centre of thought in American theological thinking. There were great theologians in New England before Edwards. I mention only John Norton of Ipswich, and Samuel Willard of Harvard. They followed the Reformed School Divines not only in making the decree of God the constitutive doctrine of the system, but in emphasizing it. Edwards did not displace the eternal Decree as the constitutive doctrine; but by a change in emphasis he lifted into the place of first importance in theological thinking in America the inward state of man in nature and in grace. He appears to have been led strongly to emphasize these related themes, partly by the Great Awakening, and partly by the controversy on the Half-way Covenant which followed it. No one, however, but a man of genius could have made this change in emphasis so potent a fact in Ameri-

can Church history. It is impossible to exaggerate the influence thus exerted by Edwards on American theological and religious discussions and on American religious life. If I may so say, here is the open secret of the New England theology from Samuel Hopkins to Horace Bushnell. And more than to any other man, to Edwards is due the importance which, in American Christianity, is attributed to the conscious experience of the penitent sinner, as he passes into the membership of the Invisible Church.

Quite as important as this distinctive contribution is the tremendous stimulus and impetus he gave to theological speculation and construction. When I think of the Edwardean School of New England theologians from Samuel Hopkins to Edwards Park, between whom are included so many brilliant men, too many even to be named at this time; when I think of the Edwardean theologians in my own Church, like Henry Boynton Smith and William Greenough Thayer Shedd; when I think of the fruitful history of his works in Scotland and England, and recall his real mastery over the minds he influenced; it seems to me that it is not too much to say that, up to this time, his influence in the English-speaking world—not on all thinking, but on distinctively dogmatic thinking—has been as great as that of either Joseph Butler or Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

I have thus endeavored to set before you my impressions of Edwards' dominating quality, his intellectual gifts, and the kind of work he did; and to state the place which in my view he holds among the theologians of the Universal Church. I have refrained from eulogy. He is too consummate and sincere a master for us to approach with the language of compliment. But I should incompletely perform the duty you have devolved upon me, did I fail to speak of two of his works which have been violently and repeatedly attacked. One is the essay on *The Freedom of the Will*. The other is the *Sermons on the Punishment of the Wicked*.

The essay on the *Freedom of the Will* is essentially a polemic, and only incidentally a constructive treatise. As a polemic, therefore, it must be judged. He had before his mind, not the whole voluntary nature of man as a subject to be investigated, but the special Arminian doctrine of the liberty of indifference as an error to be antagonized. What, therefore, the essay shows is, not his constructive ability, but his ability as an antagonist. I have read carefully only one other treatise in which the propositions as obviously move forward in procession, with steps as firmly locked together. This other treatise is the *Ethics* of Spinoza. If you dare

consentingly to follow Spinoza through his three kinds of knowledge up to his definition of substance—which, since it is thought not in a higher category but in itself, is self-existent; which is and can be one only; and whose known attributes “perceived to be of the essence of this substance” are infinite thought and infinite extension—if you follow Spinoza thus far; you will soon find yourself imprisoned in a universe of necessity, and bound in it by a chain of theorems, corollaries and lemmas impossible to be broken at any point. Your only safety is in obeying the precept, *Obsta principiis*. Quite equal to Spinoza’s is Edwards’ essay in its close procession of ordered argument. Like Spinoza he begins his treatise with definitions. And I cannot see how anyone, who permits himself to be led without protest through the first of the “Parts” of the essay, can refuse to go on with him at any point in the remaining three. In reading the treatise one should, above all, keep in view the fact that, though it is polemic against a particular theory, it was written in the interest of a positive theological doctrine. I think we shall do justice to this doctrine if we state it in terms like the following: “Man’s permanent inclination is sinful; and his sinful inclination will certainly qualify his moral choices.” This Augustinian doctrine Edwards defended by a closely reasoned psychology of the will. Now I am not sure that this great doctrine, which I heartily accept, was at all aided by Edwards when he involved it with and defended it by a particular psychology. And my doubt is deepened by what seems to me his unnecessary employment, in the spiritual sphere, of terms taken from the sphere of nature, like “cause,” “determination” and “necessity.” I can only call your attention to the fact that the defense of the religious doctrine, and not his psychology, was Edwards’ deepest anxiety. And who of us is not prepared to say, that the bad man’s badness is a permanent disposition certain to emerge in his ethical volitions, and that to revolutionize it there is needed the forth-putting of the power of the Holy Ghost?

But it is Edwards’ sermons on *The Punishment of the Wicked* which have awakened the strongest enmity; an enmity expressed often in the most violent terms. The rational and Scriptural basis of the doctrine and the objections to it need not be set forth here. Edwards accepted, defended and proclaimed it, substantially in the form in which it has been taught in the Greek, the Latin and the Protestant Churches. It is the doctrine of the Fathers, the mediæval Schoolmen and the Protestant theologians. Edwards’ doctrine of Hell is exactly one with the doctrine of Dante.

Now it is of interest to note that there is a widespread revulsion from Edwards, considered as the author of these Sermons, which does not and so far as I am aware never did appear in the case of Dante, considered as the author of the *Inferno*. What is the explanation of the difference? Dante is praised and glorified by not a few of those to whom the name of Edwards is for the same reason a name of "execration and horror." Indeed, Dante has been defended by a great American man of letters for rejoicing in the pain of the damned; while no one of Edwards' sermons, unless it is *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, has been more severely criticised as inhuman than the discourse entitled, *The Torments of the Wicked in Hell no occasion of Grief to the Saints in Heaven*. We shall do well, therefore, to note the contrast between Dante's and Edwards' presentation of the same subject.

When Dante was sailing through the Lake of Mud in the Fifth Circle of Hell, there appeared before him suddenly Philippo Argenti, who in this world was full of arrogance and of disdain of his fellow-men, now clothed only with the lake's muck. Pathetically he answers Dante's inquiry, "Who art thou that art become so foul?" with the words, "Thou seest I am one who weeps." And Dante replies, "With weeping and with wailing, accursed spirit, do thou remain, for I know thee although thou art all filthy." Then Virgil clasps Dante's neck and kisses his face and says, "Blessed is she who bore thee!" And Dante replies, "Master, I should much like to see him ducked in this broth before we depart from the lake." And Virgil promises that he shall be satisfied. "And after this," continues Dante, "I saw such rending of him by the muddy folk that I still praise God therefor and thank Him for it. All cried, 'At Philippo Argenti!' and the raging Florentine spirit turned upon himself with his teeth. Here we left him; so that I tell no more of him." This is one of the passages in Dante's poem of that Hell over whose entrance he read these words; "Through me is the way into eternal woe; through me is the way among the lost people. Justice moved my high creator; the divine Power, the supreme Wisdom, and the primal Love made me. Before me were no things created unless eternal, and I eternal last. Leave every hope, ye who enter here."

There is nothing in Edwards which, so far as I can judge, equals this in its horrid imagery and suggestion. And yet men enjoy Dante and the *Inferno*. They do not "execrate" him for a "monster," as Dr. Allen says they do Edwards. And in his great essay on Dante, Mr. James Russell Lowell makes this very scene the

text of an eloquent laudation of Dante's moral quality, in which he says of him; "He believed in the righteous use of anger, and that baseness was its legitimate quarry." Why is it that the attitude of the general public, thus represented by Mr. Lowell, toward the Hell of Dante is so different from the attitude of the same public toward the Hell of Edwards? I think we shall find an answer to this question in what I may call Edwards' spiritual realism. Of course Dante is a realist also. How often this quality of his poem has been pointed out to us! But Dante's is the realism of the artist, the poet who appeals to our imagination. Our imagination being gratified, we enjoy the picture and even the sensations of horror which the picture starts. Of all this there is nothing in Edwards. There is no picture at all. There is scarcely a symbol. Here and there there is an illustration. But the illustrations of Edwards are never employed to make his subject vivid to the imagination. They are intended simply to explicate it to the understanding. The free, responsible, guilty and immortal spirit is immediately addressed; and the purely spiritual elements of the Hell of the wicked, separated from all else, are made to appear in their terrible nakedness before the reason and the conscience. The reason and the conscience respond. We are angry because startled out of our security. And we call him cruel, because of the conviction forced on us that we are in the presence of a terrible, even if mysterious, spiritual reality. Edwards always spoke, not to the imagination, but to the responsible spirit. Men realized when he addressed them that because they are sinners their moral constitution judicially inflicts upon their personality remorse; and that remorse is an absolute, immitigable and purely spiritual pain, independent of the conditions of time and space and, therefore, eternal.

The Nineteenth Century, in one of its greatest poets,* looking out on nature, sees no relief from this eternity of remorse; that is to say, it sees no evidence, in nature's "tooth and claw" that God will ever interfere to end this spiritual pain and punishment. It only "hopes" that, "at last, far off," "Winter will turn to Spring." I shall not attack any man for a hope, maintained against the evidence of remorse within and nature without, that the mystery of pain and moral evil will be thus dissipated in their destruction. It is not my business to denounce a thoughtful and reverent spirit like Tennyson, because of any relief he may individually find, when facing the most terrible revelation of nature and of his moral con-

* *In Memoriam*, liii-lvi.

stitution, in the "hope" which issues from our sensibility to pain and from the sentiment of mercy which God has implanted in us all. But I do say, that a man's private "hope" should never be elevated to the dignity of a dogma, or be made a norm of teaching, or be proposed as a rule of action. And I do protest that it is the height of literary injustice, while praising Dante, to condemn Edwards the preacher because, in his anxiety to induce men to "press into the kingdom," he preached, not the private hope of Lord Tennyson, but the spiritual verity to which the conscience of the sinner responds. Thus, in his treatment of this darkest of subjects, that spirituality which I have said was his dominant quality is regnant; and here, too, he should be called, "the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit."

With this protest I conclude. Let me say again, that I am deeply grateful to you for the opportunity you have given me to unite with you in this commemoration of the man we so often call our greatest American Divine. He was indeed inexpressibly great in his intellectual endowment, in his theological achievement, in his continuing influence. He was greatest in his attribute of regnant, permeating, irradiating spirituality. It is at once a present beatitude and an omen of future good that, in these days of pride in wealth and all that wealth means, of pride in the fashion of this world which passeth away, we still in our heart of hearts reserve the highest honor for the great American who lived and moved and had his being in the Universe which is unseen and eternal.

Princeton.

JOHN DEWITT.



Date Due



1 1012 01039 1904

The Princeton Theological Review

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY
MACCALLA & COMPANY INCORPORATED
237-9 DOCK ST., PHILADELPHIA

\$3.00 A YEAR

80 CTS. A COPY

EDITORS:

FRANCIS L. PATTON,
JOHN D. DAVIS,
WM. BRENTON GREENE, JR.,
ROBERT DICK WILSON,
HENRY W. SMITH,
JAMES OSCAR BOYD,
FREDERICK W. LOETSCHER,
DAVID DE F. BURRELL.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD,
JOHN DEWITT,
GEERHARDUS VOS,
WM. PARK ARMSTRONG,
JOSEPH H. DULLES,
CASPAR WISTAR HODGE,
KERR D. McMILLAN,

Address ALL Business Communications and make ALL remittances to MacCalla & Co. Incorporated, Publishers, 237-239 Dock Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

Editorial Communications should be addressed to PROF. JOHN DEWITT; communications concerning reviews of Theological Literature, to PROF. WM. BRENTON GREENE, JR., or PROF. GEERHARDUS VOS, Princeton, N. J.

Each author is solely responsible for the views expressed in his article.

DISCONTINUANCES.—Subscribers wishing THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW stopped at the expiration of their subscription must notify us to that effect, otherwise we shall consider it to be their wish to have it continued.

Entered as Second Class Mail Matter at Philadelphia, Pa.



