
A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

THE NEW ENGLAND THEOLOGY, ITS HISTORICAL PLACE

REVEREND HENRY A. STIMSON, D.D.

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Now that not only the mighty men who created the New England Theology, but the strong-minded men who constituted their audience have passed away, a sketch of the men and their work may be of interest. Though the material is sufficiently abundant, it is not apt to be at hand.

The hundred years from 1730 to 1830 cover the distinctive period of the growth and development of what is known as the New England Theology. It began with the constructive writings of Jonathan Edwards, and, though it called out the most remarkable group of original thinkers that America has produced, it did not get much beyond an elucidation of his views.

The historian, Bancroft, said: "He that will know the workings of the mind of New England in the middle of the last century, and the throbbings of its heart, must give his days and nights to the study of Jonathan Edwards."

Edwards was born at East Windsor, Conn., in the year 1703; graduated at Yale in 1720; and became pastor in Northampton, Mass., in 1727.

It will be recalled that the eighteenth century early produced in Europe, and in England especially, a remarkable group of philosophical and theological thinkers. Hobbes, Locke, Spinazo, Malebrauche, Leibnietz and the Encyclopaedists; Tindal, Woolston, Morgan, Collins and Bolingbroke, the English Deists; Boyle, Newton and others of the scientists of the Royal Society. These exerted a powerful influence on this side of the Atlantic. Milton, who during the preceding century had not been referred to in America, began to be read.

NOTE.—Readers who desire ampler treatment of the subject will find it authoritatively in the volume, The New England Theology, by the late Prof. George Boardman, from which I have freely drawn.

The influence of the Non-Conformists of England who had drifted towards, or into, Unitarism, was strongly felt over here. The state of religion on both sides of the water was very low. Bishop Butler a little later wrote that in a visit to 100 churches in London one could not tell by anything he heard whether the church was Christian, Mahommedan or Buddhist. Patterson, the English historian, says: "Never was mortality so universally preached and never was it so little practiced as in the eighteenth century."

Great laxity of morals everywhere followed the decay of religious doctrine. This continued through the century. Stoddard, Edwards' grandfather and predecessor in Northampton, had adopted the Halfway Covenant, which allowed the reception of unregenerate men into the church, and the young and earnest pastor, Edwards, found himself called to urge his hearers to more definite action in the work of their salvation.

The situation was not new. It had been before the churches for at least seventy-five years. The current Arian and Unitarian views were allied to the older Pelagian and Armenian doctrines which John Robinson had withstood in Leyden. Calvinism was suffering a relapse. The opposing views stood for a certain laxity and indifference in Christian life. Enthusiasm was denounced, and was the term applied to experimental religion and zeal in preaching. Even the State was called upon, as in Connecticut, to suppress the New Lights, as the zealous Calvinist ministers were called.

With the death of Stoddard, in 1730, Edwards found his opportunity. His personal experience of religion led him to strive to win his people at once to Christ. His preaching was direct and powerful in the line of establishing the older doctrines and of enforcing the renewal of both heart and life. To meet the current heresy it had to be highly philosophical. A change soon came over his church, and in 1735 there was a thorough awakening of the community. Some 300 persons were converted. Immediate antagonism was sharp, and the new interest proved brief. The real change began to take shape with

Edwards' published sermons on "Justification by Faith," "Passing into the Kingdom of God," and the like.

George Whitefield's coming to this country in 1740 resulted in an extensive and forceful revival, known historically as "The Great Awakening," which occasioned sharp controversy and severe antagonism of which Edwards was the victim. It called out from him the powerful publications which furnished the basis of the subsequent theological development. His purpose was a vidication of Calvinism by a thorough-going, rational unfolding and application of it to the lives of men. He was driven out of his pulpit in 1750, and after a few years of labor among the Indians in the neighborhood he was chosen to take the presidency of Princeton College in 1758 and died a few weeks later.

His writings were little concerned with his adversaries, but were rather the result of the quiet meditation of a powerful mind filled with the conscious presence of God. Years ago I saw in Professor Park's house in Andover an old trunk filled with small scraps of paper covered with Edwards' minute notes. It had been his custom to carry in his pockets scraps of paper torn from the backs of letters, and as thoughts came to him in his quiet wanderings he would note them down and return to his house with the bits of paper pinned on his sleeve, or the lapel of his coat.

His teaching revolved around two foci, the sovereignty of God as the inevitable and benevolent rule of a holy God in a moral universe; and Sin, as in its last analysis, selfishness, or the arraying of self against obedience to God. The sweep of the thoughts of such a mind around these foci produced emphatic change in three directions. It correlated religion with daily life; it opened a wide field of intellectual speculation that was profoundly metaphysical, and it stood for a doctrinal theology which should be vital. He held up before all men the duty of immediate and energetic effort to seek salvation, thus opening the heart to the access of divine grace. He stood for a definite Christian experience and confession—as against a Half-way Covenant.

All natural phenomena, he said, are the result of the immediate activity of God; and the end of creation is the manifestation of the glory of God. This visible glory is the emergence of God's native glory, of His character and the acting of His power to ends which work His will in love and holiness and joy.

Virtue is for men in accord with God as He reveals Himself in the moral universe. "Being-in-general" was the awkward term adopted to describe the realm in which God is so made manifest; and love towards "Being-in-general" is the phrase used to describe the feeling aroused in the regenerate soul. It meant acceptance of God's mind and rule as revealed in the universe. It is the test for the reality of a man's surrender to a holy God in whom an active outreaching love is ever present and supreme.

Edwards was no "dry-as-dust." His treatise on the Affections is his greatest work; and he made the thorough study of the problem of the freedom of the will, which has been the basis of all subsequent study of that problem. He sought to relieve Calvinists from the embarrassment of attacks on their doctrine of the will as bound. For him responsibility cannot rest on a freedom that implies indifference to the object of choice. Such inability as the sinner has, lies in his unwillingness to do right. He has the natural ability to choose and act, but so long as that disinclination to do right exists it amounts to a moral inability, in which he requires the grace of God. Guilt lies in the *nature* of the act, not in its consequences. Moral character exists rather in the attitude of the soul toward God than in a definite act. The holy God did not introduce sin into the universe nor ordain sin as a means of good. He created man with a nature prepared to serve Him; but as men exist today they give universal evidence of a propensity to run themselves into what is an eternal perdition, as the result of an eternal antagonism to God.

Two of Edwards' pupils, Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins, became his friends and disciples, beginning the series of men of powerful mind who, equipped with his teaching and influence, carried his doctrine much further in many metaphysical investigations and prolonged theo-

logical controversies. Bellamy, in a long pastorate in Bethlehem, Conn., exercised great influence. He was a man of precocious intellect, with rare gifts of eloquence; and was the first of those country pastors who in small charges gathered pupils in their own homes and fitted them for the ministry, sending out in some instances as many as 100 men. Their work prepared the way for the founding of Andover Seminary in 1808, one among the first theological schools, if I am not mistaken, in America.

Samuel Hopkins was Edwards' most literary friend and the best representative of his views. After a long pastorate among the rough settlers on the frontier of western Massachusetts, he settled in Newport, R. I. He was already the object of much distrust doctrinally. He was entrusted with Edwards' manuscripts, after his death, as his literary executor, and spent six years arranging and publishing them. The Revolutionary War drove from Newport the better people of the town, and those who remained were filled with French infidelity. He had there 23 years of cheerless and poorly paid toil. He was retiring and austere in manner and had a disagreeable voice; but he was a man of great intellectual power and after Edwards' death was the most noted theologian of his time. He spent 10 years on a system of doctrine which remains one of the best statements of the New England Theology, one particular phase of which long bore his name as Hopkinsianism.

Nathaniel Emmons, who was for five years pastor in Franklin, Mass., carried on the Edwards tradition, with improvements growing out of those of his predecessors and colleagues. In marked traits he was the most original and the ablest of the group. He delighted to set his audience to discussing. I heard in Massachusetts years ago the story of one of his hearers greeting him one Monday morning with "Dr. Emmons, Dr. Emmons, I want to speak with you. You contradicted yourself yesterday." "How so?" "You said so and so, and a week ago you said just the opposite." "I don't care what I said a week ago. Settle that for yourself," was his short answer; and he passed on. Naturally he was an enigma to his hearers,

as he was to his followers, but he made a most powerful impression. He combined great mental acuteness with capacity for prolonged intellectual labor, and became one of the greatest preachers New England has produced. He was the most fascinating of conversationalists because of a sharp and ready wit; and of the young men who were drawn to him he prepared no less than 87 for the ministry.

John Calvin said of the 6,000 young preachers he had sent forth from Geneva: "Europe sent to me wood and I sent them back arrows."

To appreciate these old time pastors of New England we must note the character of the men they produced. They were all settled in small towns or villages. Senator Hoar once said to me, "I wish you would ask Professor Park to write an account of the Massachusetts judges and prominent lawyers who were made the men they became by their pastors." When I repeated the request to Professor Park he replied, "Tell Senator Hoar he should write that story himself. He and his associates know all about it." It used to be said among these ministers, "When you preach in Boston take your best coat; when in the country, your best sermon."

The election of Rev. Henry Ware as Hollis Professor of Divinity in Harvard College in 1805 brought on the irreconcilable conflict with Unitarianism. The fashion and culture of Boston and Eastern Massachusetts were gathered on its side by the influence of the College and of several highly cultivated city pastors under the lead of Drs. Channing and Buckminster. The churches were sharply divided. The courts turned over many of the largest church edifices to the Unitarians; and the going out from them of their congregations to start anew only quickened the zeal of the "Orthodox," as they were now called. The movement was confined almost exclusively to Massachusetts, where the controversy developed some very able men on both sides; but it did not materially affect the course of the New England theology except perhaps to make its protagonists more zealous. While Moses Stuart and Leonard Woods at Andover were replying to Channing, Dr. Smalley at New Britain, and especially Dr.

Nathaniel W. Taylor in New Haven were carrying on the improvement and defense of the dominant theology. Of course, it began to be attacked outside, particularly by Princeton, and some of the Old School theologians. But the division of the Presbyterians into the Old and the New School gave them sufficient controversial matter at home. The New England teachings which had reached them, especially through the transfer to the Presbyterians of a multitude of Congregational Churches by means of the Plane of Union in the Middle and nearer Western States, crystalized in the New School body. It found its most notable representative after the close of the period we have been considering, in Professor Park of Andover, than whom New England has produced no more brilliant and powerful mind.

Almost all the men who shaped the New England theology were graduates of Yale College. Horace Bushnell, the last of the great line, was also a graduate of Yale and comes into our story rather as ending the tale at a closely subsequent date.

The doctrine of Justification by Faith had been clearly and strongly held, though with various explanations, since the Reformation. Calvanism maintained that sinners are brought to God through Jesus' atoning blood, by his merit being applied to them. Justification is equivalent to forgiveness. Discussion developed the doctrine unto the conception of God not merely as a judge pronouncing the law satisfied, but as the Divine Ruler exercising His superior right and power to forgive and restore. This He does because in Jesus Christ He has opened the way for it, and the sinner believing in Christ has already entered the way of life in which his continuing perpetuates his pardon and insures his sanctification.

Bushnell held to the general Calvinistic theory of atonement and justification, but he interpreted it to mean that the believer is made righteous through the overwhelming demonstration of the divine character through Jesus Christ. This interpretation, though taken up zealously by some men, as Dr. Lyman Abbott, has not been widely accepted and is a sort of by-product of the New England

theology as marking the gap between the men of the New England theology and their opponents, the moderate Calvinists who became the Old School men of the later day.

These New England men held in the main to a definite view of man's responsibility. They insisted that all men need a new birth, and should be called to act, in giving themselves to God; and that the Holy Spirit makes such action possible and effective. To this the means of grace are helpful and preparatory, but are not a substitute for immediate repentance, of which the soul can have glad testimony, as the renewing gift of a loving and pardoning God.

These men valued theology primarily not as an intellectual theory but for its influence on life. Many of their expressions were misunderstood and ridiculed, like God's introducing sin into the world; willingness to be damned for the glory of God; disinterested benevolence as being the only moral good; sin as selfishness; and the like. But some of their phrases like man's "primary predominant choice" as marking his relation to God are luminous and most valuable.

Frequent extensive religious awakenings with the transformation of whole communities, occurred under their preaching. The revival period which began in 1797 and found the colleges with hardly a confessing Christian in them, and New York City given over to infidelity and general profligacy, was followed by similar awakenings for over 40 years which were conspicuously the result of the preaching. It had its limitation. It gave too little prominence to the presence and work of Christ and too little encouragement to those who were seeking the way of life; and it was over emphatic as to the method of approaching God, which was used to justify many strong and thoughtful men in refraining from confessing Christ and uniting with the Churches: but it made religion the great business of life and ennobled life as given that men might have the task and the blessing of obeying the call of God and being accepted by Him.

These New England theologians are widely known only as great dialecticians, but let us not fail to apply to them

the words Chas. Kingsley used of Alexander Pope: "With their whole soul they hated what is evil so far as they recognized it. With their whole soul they loved what is good so far as they could recognize that. With their whole soul they believed that there is a righteous and good God whose order no human folly or crime can destroy; and they would say so; and did say it valiantly, reverently, and mightily."

The America in which we live today has by no means ceased to owe to them a great and permanent debt. They must be judged by the exigencies of their times; like Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They are accused of too great reliance on reason and dogmatic theology. They were striving to rebuild the church of God. That they might build they had to contend, and they must use weapons which their enemies the Deists of England and the Rationalists of the Continent must respect. The weapons, like the flint locks of the Revolution, we need not discuss. Their glory is that they won. Their enemies as an organized force are moribund or has disappeared, and the evangelical churches of today are their children.