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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

JONATHAN EDWARDS AND SCOTLAND

AMERICA and Scotland were in contact in the thirties and forties of the eighteenth century through commerce, and especially through the Glasgow tobacco trade. As a result there developed an intimate relationship between Evangelicals in the two countries; and the correspondents exerted spiritual influence upon one another across the Atlantic. The most interesting and outstanding personality concerned was Jonathan Edwards, then a fervent young preacher and pastor at Northampton in New England, and later recognised as mainly responsible for the "Great Awakening" in religion and for the "New England Theology" which in its day presented such an acute apologetic for Calvinism.

December 1734 had witnessed the beginning of a religious revival at Northampton, and this Edwards described in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprizing Work of God in the Conversion of many hundred Souls in Northampton and the neighbouring Towns and Villages*, which appeared in London in 1737. Through this publication and in other ways Scotland heard of the outbreak. Later developments proved even more sensational.

George Whitefield journeyed to America in 1739 and took a characteristic part in the revival movement which now intensified and spread. Referring to one occasion he reports: "The Spirit of God gave me freedom, till at length it came down like a mighty rushing wind and carried all before it. Immediately the whole congregation was alarmed. Shrieking, crying, weeping and wailing were to be heard in every corner." Violent physical agitations were amongst the startling features of the excitement and offered a serious problem to the devout in those pre-psychological days. Similar phenomena had marked revivals since the times of the Montanists, and Scotland had experienced them in connection with the millennial warning mission of the French Prophets or Camisards at Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1710. Revival symptoms appeared in the West of Scotland in 1741, where William McCulloch, the evangelical minister of Cambuslang, had been telling his congregation about what was

happening in America. Whitefield in that year came to Scotland—the first of his fourteen visits—and after his disagreement with the Seceders he helped at Cambuslang and elsewhere by his amazingly powerful preaching, and gave his new friends in the Church of Scotland the benefit of his American experiences. That the Scottish and New England revivals had much in common is suggested by John Wesley's condemnation of both as the work of bigots. "Mr. Edwards himself," he says, "was not clear of this. But the Scotch bigots were beyond all others."

Scots ministers were now corresponding with leading evangelicals in the States. Thus we find John Hamilton of the Barony Church, Glasgow, whom a contemporary declares to have been "as eminent for the soundness and vigour of his understanding as for the steadiness and respectability of his pastoral character", writing in September 1742 to Thomas Prince of Boston, and making reference to Jonathan Edwards's sermon, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, with a preface by a New England clergyman, William Cooper; a discourse which must have made considerable impression for another edition of it was immediately published at Edinburgh with a preface by John Willison who found it "a most excellent, solid, judicious and scriptural performance". During 1742 the *Glasgow Weekly History* and later the *Monthly History* found their way to America, and were thoughtfully pondered by Edwards and others of the group. Prince in his *Christian History* which appeared in weekly parts at Boston in 1743 gave much space to Scottish religious occurrences, printing, for example, *A Faithful Narrative of the Extraordinary Work of the Spirit of God at Kilsyth*, by James Robe; an advertisement of a pamphlet by Alexander Webster of Edinburgh reprinted in America; various letters from John Willison of Dundee; letters from John Hamilton and John McLaurin of Glasgow; an account of Scottish Praying Societies; letters relating to Whitefield's efforts at Edinburgh, Aberdeen and elsewhere; descriptions by McCulloch of Cambuslang; an English translation of the preface to a Dutch account of the Cambuslang revival by Hugh Kennedy of the Scots Kirk, Rotterdam; attestations by various ministers throughout Scotland with regard to converts; and much else that had to do with the situation in Scotland. The corresponding volume for 1744 includes letters from Robe, Hamilton, McLaurin and Willison to Prince; long extracts from the *Glasgow Monthly*

History; an account of the revival at Muthil, "transmitted hither in the last ship from Scotland"; and other Scots items.

Jonathan Edwards was personally in touch with several Scottish ministers. There is in print a letter of his to McCulloch in May 1743, and letters to him from McLaurin, Robe and McCulloch dated August 1743 were printed in the *Christian History*. Edwards wrote again to McCulloch in March 1744. The ablest of these early correspondents in Scotland was John McLaurin of the Ramshorn Church in Glasgow, a highlander of great energy, strong intellect and considerable enterprise, deeply concerned for the people of the growing industrial community on the Clyde. He seems to have been an amiable and sensible man, a well-read scholar and an active and consecrated pastor. Dr. John Brown who edited some of his writings does not hesitate to call him "the most profound and eloquent Scottish theologian of the last century". Like Robe and McCulloch he kept in touch with Edwards and he was amongst those who organised in the Scottish Praying Societies a plan for concerted prayer along with friends in America. A dozen Scottish ministers sent over a Memorial on the subject. Edwards took up the scheme; and in 1747 published his *Humble Attempt to promote explicit agreement and visible union of God's people in extraordinary prayer*. When the New England divine was strangely deprived of his parish and was in some financial embarrassment McLaurin was one of those who in 1751 arranged for money to be sent and also a shipload of goods to be sold in America for his benefit. McCulloch and Erskine were likewise concerned in this plan. It was McLaurin again who spoke about having a portrait of Edwards painted in Boston and copperplate copies forwarded to Scotland to be sold for Edwards's advantage. There was even an idea of bringing Edwards to Edinburgh to address the Assembly; but this did not materialise. Assistance, however, for New Jersey College, in which Edwards was interested and of which at the time of his death he was President, was eventually obtained through a collection in the Scottish Churches authorised by the Assembly in 1754. Edwards was writing to McLaurin before he set out on his mission to the Indians, and sent him copies of his farewell sermon for distribution among friends.

John Willison, whose name has already been mentioned and who was amongst the occasional correspondents of Jonathan

Edwards, was a leading Scottish evangelical whose numerous catechetical writings continued to be popular long after his death. He held an important charge at Dundee and was a model of diligence, earnestness and modesty. Two sentences indicate his point of view. "A blunt iron, if hot, will sooner pierce the wood, than a sharper iron that is cold." "Commend me to a Jesus Christ exalting and soul winning minister, whatever be his denomination." In Willison's writings there are quite a number of references to Edwards and the New England revival.

Of Edwards's Scottish correspondents none is better known to-day than John Erskine, minister at Kirkintilloch and later at Greyfriars, Edinburgh, where he was the Evangelical colleague of the Moderate leader, Principal William Robertson. Erskine was of good family and broad education, high principle and evangelical fervour. He has been eulogised even by Sir Walter Scott. Whitefield's successes interested him and in 1742 he published *The Signs of the Times Considered; or the High Probability that the present appearances in New England and the West of Scotland are a prelude to the glorious things promised to the Church in the latter ages*. Next year we find him writing to a gentleman in New England regarding what had occurred in Edinburgh, Kilsyth and Cambuslang. His appointment to his first parish in 1744 brought him even more definitely into touch with persons who had been influenced by the revival, for Kirkintilloch had been much affected. In 1745 Erskine published three sermons under the general title, *The People of God considered as all righteous*, and he was at pains to indicate that he owed much to the volume of Jonathan Edwards's *Discourses on Various Important Subjects*, published in 1738. Here we have the beginning of the distinctively theological influence of Edwards. The personal correspondence commenced in 1747 and continued till the death of the American divine in 1758. Erskine passed on a copy of his own published *Sermons*. He sent also his *Meditations and Letters of a Pious Youth lately deceased* (James Hall) which he had published in 1746; and Edwards acknowledged this gift in a sympathetic letter and sent his new correspondent his recent *Treatise concerning the Religious Affections* in which he attempts as a result of his revival experiences to distinguish between "saving affections and experiences and those manifold fair shows and glistening appearances by which

they are counterfeited". It was on this occasion that Edwards mentioned first his intention of writing on *The Freedom of the Will*, a work which was not ready for publication till 1754 but which has probably been his chief claim to honour as a theologian. In reply Erskine sent out to him some relevant books which Edwards acknowledged as likely to be of great use to him; and there was later correspondence on the subject. After the rupture between Edwards and his congregation Erskine proposed that Edwards should bring his family to Scotland and seek a charge there; but the plan appeared to the American to be too full of risks and it was abandoned.

When Erskine had read Edwards on *The Freedom of the Will* he sent him a copy of a work which had recently created a sensation in Scottish ecclesiastical quarters. This was the *Essays on the Principles of Moral and Natural Religion*, by Lord Kames. Edwards had as it happened read this book already, as well as the work of David Hume which Kames had set out to refute but which in the view of many he had only succeeded in emulating in heterodoxy. Edwards in 1757 sent Erskine a long letter on the subject of Lord Kames's book and this letter was published in an Edinburgh edition of Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* (1768). Edwards was anxious to distinguish carefully between his point of view and that of Kames. That philosophical lawyer, however, had not such an acutely analytic mind and was quite ready to accept a number of Edwards's points, expressing his admiration for Edwards's treatise and making use of it in the 1779 edition of his own work. In the autumn of 1757 Erskine was still in correspondence with Edwards on the difficult metaphysical problems involved. A letter which Erskine at this time received has been printed in an Appendix to Wellwood's *Life of Erskine*, and has the special interest of being the last received. Incidentally it shows that Erskine had sent out two pamphlets connected with the lively discussion that had taken place in the General Assembly with regard to the theological opinions of Lord Kames. The letter has a reference to Mr. Gillies, son-in-law of John McLaurin, another of those Scottish ministers with whom Edwards was in friendly relation. Edwards died in March 1758; and some months later Erskine in a note to McCulloch refers to the unexpected early death as an irreparable loss to the whole Church. "I do not

think our age has produced a divine of equal genius or judgment." So deep was Erskine's reverence for his friend that he was at pains to edit several of his works, in particular his *Life of Brainerd* (Edin., 1765), his *History of the Work of Redemption* (Edin., 1774) which had to be reshaped for publication, *Sermons on Various Important Subjects* (Edin., 1785), and *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Controversies* (1796).

Another Scottish friend and correspondent of Jonathan Edwards was Thomas Gillespie, minister of Carnock, founder of the Relief Church which in 1847 became a constituent part of the United Presbyterian Church. Gillespie had received part of his training in an Independent College in England and he was never entirely at home under the Scottish tradition. He was, however, a devout Christian and a staunch Calvinist, and held strong views against Patronage and for liberty of conscience. Attestations by Gillespie in connection with revival conversions in Scotland appear in the 1743 *Christian History* published in Boston, for Gillespie had taken an interested and helpful part in the events at Kilsyth and was an admirer of the work of Whitefield. Robe, who was minister at Kilsyth at this exciting period, says, "Of all others the Rev. Mr. Thomas Gillespie, Minister of the Gospel at Carnock, was most remarkably 'God's send' to me".

In 1746 and 1748 we find Gillespie writing to Edwards about immediate revelations of facts and future events, a subject upon which Gillespie himself later developed an Essay that was edited in 1771 by John Erskine, whose grandfather was patron of Carnock parish and who was intimate with the author. Gillespie brought to the notice of Edwards certain difficulties which occurred to him as a result of reading the *Religious Affections*; and the two lengthy epistles which the American theologian wrote in reply were afterwards printed in the *Quarterly Magazine* and appear in some editions of Edwards's *Works*. Writing in April 1750 Edwards explains that because of the unhappy controversy with his congregation he has had no leisure or opportunity for writing to Scotland since the last summer when he had answered a batch of letters from Scottish correspondents. Gillespie and Edwards exchanged letters in 1751. Next year came the unfortunate occurrence of Gillespie's deposition by the General Assembly as a victim of Principal Robertson's Moderate policy in connection with the authority of Church

Courts as against the conscience of the individual minister. Edwards, on the evidence provided by his Scottish evangelical friends, wrote to Gillespie, very heartily sympathising with him under "persecution", and in October 1753 Edwards wrote again, giving Gillespie the prophetic assurance: "Your name will doubtless be mentioned hereafter with peculiar respect, on account of these sufferings, in ecclesiastical history."

Although Jonathan Edwards would now be placed in a very different category of distinction from any of his Scottish acquaintances, there is no doubt that he treated them as equals, wrote to them with respect and heard from them with genuine interest. One may go farther and say that he learned from them. McLaurin, Erskine and Gillespie were all men worth listening to. And there were other Scottish influences at work upon the mind of Edwards. In one letter he mentions "that eminent holy man, Samuel Rutherford". In another he reports that he has been reading Thomas Boston's *Fourfold State* "and liked it exceeding well. I think he herein shows himself to be a truly great divine". Other Scottish religious writers whose productions were known to Edwards include Robert Fleming, Scots minister at Rotterdam, "of singular worth and piety", "a diligent and careful observer of the providences of God", whose *Fulfilling of the Scriptures* he quotes; Alexander Moncrieff of Abernethy, one of the first Seceders and one of those who refused the co-operation of the un-Covenanted Whitefield, to whose *Review and Examination* he refers; and a number of authors whose works were amongst the books which John Erskine regularly shipped to his friend, as, for example, James Fraser of Brea, whose *Treatise of Justifying Faith*, written long before, had only lately been published; Professor Archibald Campbell of St. Andrews, whose *Apostles no Enthusiasts* had caused some stir in the Assembly; John Glas of Tealing, the originator of the Glasite sect, one of whose series of *Notes on Scripture Texts* thus found its way to America; and also some of the contributors to recent ecclesiastical controversy in Scotland whose pamphlets were suited to his seriousness.

There must finally be mentioned a much more curious link between Jonathan Edwards and Scottish thought, one which he discovered for himself and one which it was unlikely that any of his correspondents would have dreamed of recommending. From an extensive account in the *Monthly Review*

Edwards had become interested in certain points suggested by Andrew Michael Ramsay's posthumous *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1748-49); and he seems to have taken the trouble to procure the two handsome volumes published by Foulis, and to have made extracts from the section of the first volume that in a quasi-Spinozistic mathematical manner treats of the attributes of God. He was specially taken with what Ramsay had to say about the doctrine of the Trinity as an expression of the essential unity of the divine nature within itself, and something of this is said to be reflected in his *Observations on the Scriptural Œconomy of the Trinity*, which foreshadows some possibility of development in Edwards's Theology and which was first published in 1880. Jonathan Edwards can have found little to inspire him in the rest of Ramsay's book, for it is the work of an eccentric Romanist whose particular antipathy was the doctrine of Predestination as it had been taught to him from the pulpit in Ayr and as he had learned to criticise it under Deistic influences as a student at Edinburgh. Ramsay, whom the Old Pretender called "an odd body" had, in revolt from the Calvinism so dear to Edwards, given up the idea of becoming a minister of the Church of Scotland and under the influence of some Episcopalian friends had been introduced to the Quietism of Madam Bourignon, which led him to visit Poiret in Holland and so to become an inmate of the archiepiscopal palace at Cambrai, where Fénelon induced him to become a Romanist. He was later Fénelon's biographer and Secretary to the Quietist Madam Guyon; for a short period tutor to the very youthful Prince Charles Edward Stuart at Rome; a keen propagandist for Freemasonry in France; the author of a best-seller, *The Travels of Cyrus*; a disciple of Cudworth whom he freely imitated; and a believer in Transmigration of Souls and Universalism and a number of other heterodoxies which, but for the devotion and determination of his widow, would for ever have kept out of print his "Great Work" of which Jonathan Edwards was one of the few readers. There was extremely little in common between Edwards and Ramsay, though both had acute philosophical insight and some originality and both were profoundly religious men not too happy in their religious environment.

If Scottish influences were not altogether wanting in the development of Edwards's mind, there can be no doubt as to

the importance of the influence he himself has exerted upon Scotland. Erskine contributed to the extension of the fame of Edwards in Scotland in the later eighteenth century, and in the first half of the nineteenth century Edwards had a strong upholder and advocate in Dr. Thomas Chalmers. At one period of his youthful career, Chalmers, as David Masson reports, "was in a dogmatic frenzy of Necessitarianism", the cause being the teaching of Jonathan Edwards on Freewill. Others who knew Chalmers have confirmed this tale of enthusiasm for Edwards, and he himself referred to that time as "nearly a twelvemonth in a sort of mental elysium". Nor was it merely a passing craze, for one of his last recorded utterances in 1847 was: "My Theology is that of Jonathan Edwards." In 1815 he read Edwards on the *Religious Affections* and wrote: "He is to me the most exciting and interesting of all theological writers; combining a humility and a plainness and a piety which the philosophers of the day would nauseate as low and drivelling, with a degree of sagacity and talent which, even on their own field, places him at the head of them all." In 1832 he described the same book as "one of the most correct and instructive works in the *Therapeutica Sacra* which has ever been published". In 1834 he is wondering how the theology of Edwards shows such "talent and profoundness and correctness withal, and yet he does not seem to have been indebted for it to knowledge or skill in Exegesis". Late in his life, in 1845, we find him "reading with great interest Edwards on the *End of God in Creation*". There are numerous references to Edwards in the writings of Chalmers and particularly a number of important allusions and discussions in the *Institutes of Theology*.

Chalmers tells that it was an important event when he came across Edwards's "mediate imputation", a view in which he found evangelist and metaphysician in accord. Edwards's *Justification by Faith Alone* is largely quoted, and Chalmers says: "I cannot fancy a more impressive spectacle than Edwards rightly dividing the word of truth to the hearers of his homely congregation, with no other stimulus than that of conscience, which put their understanding on its utmost stretch while their pastor told the footing of a sinner's acceptance, or how it was that man obtained justification from God." "With the greatest satisfaction and pleasure" he confirms an opinion of his own

by a passage in Edwards's sermon on *Pressing into the Kingdom of God*. With regard to *Freedom of the Will* he relates how his first predestinarian convictions were upheld by Edwards, "who, I think, has succeeded not only in rationalizing, but in moralizing and evangelizing, the whole of this argument". In this connection there is a long and emphatic testimony to the greatness of the contribution made by Edwards, "far the highest name which the New World has to boast of", and declaring: "Never was there a happier combination of great power with great piety." Chalmers concludes with the highest commendation of such as copied the virtues and imbibed the theology of Edwards. He adds with reference to the Letter to Erskine called forth by the Kames dispute: "By far the most conclusive piece of reasoning on this single topic that I ever met with has been compressed by Edwards within half an hour's reading."

Of importance also was the part played by Jonathan Edwards in stimulating the mind of John McLeod Campbell, whose *Nature of the Atonement*, one of the few great books produced by Scottish theological effort, is based upon a very appreciative though critical study of the American scholar's teaching. The liberal-minded Thomas Erskine of Linlathen writing to McLeod Campbell in 1856 says: "You have been most happy in finding in such a universally recognised Calvinistic authority as Edwards the basis of your great argument." McLeod Campbell himself in a letter refers to the English bishop who replied to Chalmers's commendation of Edwards by declaring that he had never heard of him; and elsewhere he speaks of his "occupation with Edwards". In his *Nature of the Atonement* he writes of "Owen's clear intellect and Edwards's no less unquestionable power of distinct and discriminating thought, combined with a calmer and more weighty and more solemn tone of spirit". Dr. A. B. Macaulay selects in particular the following two passages in Edwards's *On Satisfaction for Sin* as those which inspired McLeod Campbell's theory. "Sin must be punished with an infinite punishment. . . . The majesty of God requires this vindication. It cannot be properly vindicated without it, neither can God be just to Himself without this vindication; unless there could be such a thing as a repentance, humiliation, and sorrow for this, proportionable to the greatness of the majesty despised. . . . An equivalent punishment, or an equivalent sorrow and repentance." "A very

strong and lively love and pity towards the miserable tends to make their case ours; as in other respects, so in this in particular, as it doth in our idea place us in their stead, under their misery, with a most lively feeling sense of that misery, as it were feeling it for them, actually suffering it in their stead by strong sympathy." It appeared to McLeod Campbell that there were important principles in Edwards's doctrine that had been overlooked by others who had considered the matter, and while not by any means accepting his general position, he takes pains to explain and defend some of the points he makes.

A text-book which was a special favourite in Scotland and was used by Chalmers and other teachers was *Lectures in Divinity*, by Principal George Hill of St. Andrews. In more than one place in this volume there is appreciative mention of Jonathan Edwards. The bookcase of the shepherd's cot where Principal John Cairns was brought up contained Edwards's *History of Redemption*, and the distinguished Scot was later well acquainted with other works by the same author as occasional references show, and when in America he visited some of the scenes associated with Edwards's career. He could both admire and criticise and had early written: "Calvin gains upon me. His theology as an evolution of Scripture texts is far more masterly than as a set of inferences from philosophical principles. This latter service is what Edwards did for Calvinism—in many points, I think, with little felicity."

W. G. Blaikie was another who made pilgrimage to Northampton in New England, having long before been stirred by Chalmers to interest in Jonathan Edwards, while Professor John Eadie when on tour sent home a violet "from near the tomb of Jonathan Edwards". Alexander Whyte was another keen admirer; and Norman McLeod once wrote: "How my morning readings in Jonathan Edwards make me long for a revival."

In the Introduction to the *Works of Thomas Haliburton*, published in 1833, Dr. Robert Burns of Paisley wrote: "It is not an unpromising symptom of the theological taste of the present age that the writings of such men as Owen and Baxter and Howe and Haliburton and Edwards are rising in demand." If such a statement can no longer be made of Scotland the story we have traced at least witnesses to the fact that Edwards

was in close touch with Evangelical Scotland and not uninfluenced by Scottish friends and Scottish books, while on the other hand he certainly by his patient letter-writing gave encouragement and stimulus, and by the theological genius displayed in his numerous works he undoubtedly left a permanent impression upon Scottish thought.

G. D. HENDERSON.

University of Aberdeen.