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THE LETTERS OF JOHN ERSKINE TO THE RYLANDS

JONATHAN YEAGER

In 1999 Edinburgh University Library acquired ninety-one letters written by the Scottish Presbyterian minister, John Erskine, to the Baptists, John Collett Ryland and his son John Ryland Jr.¹ The letters are extremely fragile and, due to Erskine's poor handwriting and portions missing on some of the pages, are almost impossible to read at times. Nonetheless, there is some valuable information to be gleaned for those who have the patience to plod through them. Countless books sent by Erskine are evidence of a common bond between these men that was based on a love of knowledge as well as an admiration for the theology of Jonathan Edwards.² After reviewing the letters, one must conclude that Erskine was a crucial contact for the pair. It was this Presbyterian minister who constantly forwarded works by American ministers, such as Joseph Bellamy, and particularly Jonathan Edwards, to these Baptists. The Scot, for instance, sent the younger Ryland Edwards' *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer* (Boston, 1747), which was the inspiration for the famous "Prayer Call of 1784" among Northamptonshire Baptists, and it was Erskine who introduced the son to Jonathan Edwards Jr, who was at the time working with the Edinburgh minister on publishing various posthumous editions of his father's manuscripts.³ Indeed, William Carey rightly credits Erskine with keeping the son abreast of not only Edwards' works, but "other Transatlantic divines."⁴ The books by these American ministers that Erskine sent to the Baptists had a remarkable effect. Andrew Fuller, writing to Erskine's

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son-in-law, Charles Stuart, reminisced that:

In 1776 I became acquainted with Mr. Sutcliff, who had lately come to Olney; and soon after with Mr. John Ryland, Jun., then of Northampton. In them I found familiar and faithful brethren; and who, partly by reflection, and partly by reading the writings of Edwards, Bellamy, Brainerd, etc., had begun to doubt the system of false Calvinism to which they had been inclined when they first entered on the ministry, or rather to be decided against it.⁵

Although Erskine wrote to a number of Baptist ministers, including Fuller and Sutcliff, judging by the frequency and longevity of the letters, the Presbyterian divine's friendship with Ryland Jr appears to be the most significant among his Baptist correspondents.⁶ The following article is a synopsis of this collection.

Of the ninety-one letters, the first six were written primarily to the father, beginning on November 1, 1779. The recurring theme was the latest and most interesting books that could be procured. "You have recommended in your contemplations Calamy on inspiration, and Flavel on the soul," Erskine remarked in his first letter to the elder Ryland, "which tho' long in my possession I have not read, but purpose now to read. Let me recommend to you Flavel's Token for Mourners, which I think the best book of the kind I ever read... I have frequently perused it."⁷ With "great pleasure" Erskine had studied the elder Ryland's *Contemplations* and praised the author for his "amazing conformity" in his "views and impressions as to zeal for propagating the Gospel." The Scot compared the elder Ryland "with one of the ablest and humblest ministers I ever knew, the late Mr [John] Mclaurin." Erskine concluded, "I can only ascribe to your having drank into one spirit."⁸ In his second letter to John C. Ryland on February 27, 1781, Erskine proclaimed, "I am indebted to you for acquainting of the publication of Mr Ryland Juniors sermon and of Bennet against Popery."⁹ I have purchased different copies of the last for myself and others and much esteem it, and shall endeavor by showing the preface and index to recommend this new edition." Erskine also was "happy to be a subscriber to [Robert Hall's] help for Zion's Travelers as well as to the 2nd, 3rd and following volumes of your contemplations," books that the elder Ryland assuredly recommended in previous letters.¹⁰

One of the reasons why Erskine was such a favorite correspondent

among many eighteenth-century Evangelicals like the Rylands was his frequent inclusion of “pacquets” of books. In almost every letter written, he sent complimentary, unsolicited works to the father and son. Erskine seemed to always be looking out for literature that he thought his friends would enjoy. In the postscript to his letter on October 19, 1781, for instance, he reminded the elder Ryland that “You have never mentioned what of Crawford of Wilton and of Mr Mclaurin of Glasgow’s books you have. I wish to know that I may procure you the rest.” Erskine simply asked that his correspondents “be informed” of the latest new pamphlets or recently published sermons. He gave very specific instructions: “I should wish when you write me to know the various doctrinal and practical pieces newly published by yourself or by the worthy ministers of Northamptonshire with whom you are connected.” Admittedly, not all of his theological positions were congruent with that of his Baptist friends, but overall, there was an awareness that these differences were only minor and did not infringe on their united efforts for spreading the gospel message.¹¹ “It gives me the sincerest joy, that such men as your son, Mr Hall, Mr C. Evans &c are raised up to plead for the great truths of the Gospel and for vital holiness,” Erskine affirmed, despite there being “little probability we shall meet in this world, and tho’ our sentiments as to the subjects and mode of baptism differ, I rejoice in their gifts and graces; and love them (I hope in truth) for the truths some which is in them, and shall be with them forever.”¹² A common love of books and an evangelical outlook became the glue that bound these ministers together.

Contrary doctrinal views did not deter Erskine from using his influence to publish his friends’ works in Scotland. For instance, he propositioned the Edinburgh bookseller, William Gray, to publish Ryland’s *Contemplations* even though this particular attempt did not end in success. Writing on August 18, 1781, the disappointed man informed his English correspondent, “Tho’ I have applied to Dr [Andrew] Hunter our divinity Professor and some others whom I thought most disposed to favour such things, yet from the scarcity of money, and I’m afraid the coldness of love to divine things, I found little could be done.” But, Erskine did promise to “encourage” Gray “so far as my influence can, to commission and forward the spread of such things,” a pledge that he upheld in later years. Since he had a commanding knowledge of the literary world, knew many booksellers and printers, and had established a solid reputation of publications himself, it was only natural that Erskine

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would assist others in their endeavors.

This interest in literature and theology carried on in the correspondence with the younger Ryland, which appears to have commenced in the early 1780s and lasted until shortly before the Scot's death in 1803.¹³ The number of books sent to his young impressionable friend was astounding. In the eighty-six known letters to the younger Ryland, Erskine sent over 400 works. At least ten items alone were included in a letter dated April 25, 1782: Samuel Hopkins's *Sin through Divine Interposition, an Advantage to the Universe* (Edinburgh, 1773); Charles Chauncy's *The New Creature Described and Considered* (Edinburgh, 1742); Benjamin Colman's *Souls Flying to Jesus Christ* (Glasgow, 1742); Samuel Finley's *Christ Triumphant and Satan Raging* (Edinburgh, 1741); Thomas Prince's *Extraordinary Events the Doings of God* (Edinburgh 1746); Joseph Bellamy's sermon on "early piety"; Jonathan Parsons's *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Asserted and Explained* (Boston, 1748); Richard Elvins's *True Justifying Faith Producing Evangelical Obedience* (Boston, 1747), "which the sentiments and reasonings will much please you"; Mather Byles's *The Glorious Rest of Heaven* (Boston, 1745); and John Foot's *Messages of Importance to the Souls of Youth* (New Haven, 1769). He also made arrangements for one of Samuel Hopkins's works to be given to Robert Hall, since the price had dropped from 1 s. 6d. to only one shilling and so he "could not let slip the opportunity of sending this." On February 15, 1787, Erskine sent to the son "2 pieces, long out of print, which I happily picked up lately." These were two of his favorite books: James Bannatyne's *Mistakes about Religion* (1737) and James Fraser's *A Treatise Concerning Justifying or Saving Faith* (1722).¹⁴ "Both authors were worthy and able men," Erskine summarized; even though "Fraser writes less elegantly and agreeably," he does so "with perhaps greater depth of thought." Since these texts were "on subjects well suited to the present state of religion" there was reason enough to believe that they would be edifying. Fraser seemed particularly suited to Ryland's interests. "You will find in Fraser p.256 a sentiment resembling one you expressed in a late letter: 'Christ by one indivisible action, satisfied for all men's sins, tho' for the elect and reprobate he had diverse ends' thus suffering."¹⁵ The Edinburgh minister scoured the countryside for books that would be appreciated by his correspondents.

Staying up-to-date with the book trade was Erskine's favorite pastime, an interest which extended across the Atlantic. He was well aware of the difficult circumstances for obtaining publications throughout the years

of conflict between Britain and America. Reflecting on the challenges of securing American works, he informed the Baptist that “Even when communications with New England was open, books and still more single sermons or pamphlets could rarely be gotten 10 years after their publication.” Furthermore, “American divinity books except those reprinted in Britain, never are to be gotten in shops, and seldom in auctions.”¹⁶ He also periodically updated the younger Ryland with transcriptions of letters sent to him in Scotland. This was information from Americans, such as the independent minister William Gordon, who moved from Ipswich to Boston; the Presbyterians, John Rodgers of New York and Alexander McWhorter of New Jersey; the New Divinity men, Samuel Hopkins, Jonathan Edwards Jr, and Joseph Bellamy; the President of Yale, Ezra Stiles; and the President of the College of New Jersey (Princeton), and fellow Scot, John Witherspoon.¹⁷ All of these men could count on Erskine for the same favor of letters and books that the Rylands were accustomed to receiving regularly.

The influence that this material had on the younger Ryland cannot be underestimated. The research of scholars like Bruce Hindmarsh shows that junior was a key transitional figure among eighteenth-century Evangelicals. He and Andrew Fuller helped steer Baptist theology from the high Calvinism of the previous generations under John Gill and John Brine.¹⁸ Erskine was aware of the changing tide that was taking place in Baptist theology and sought to relay the next generation of Baptists with the chief works by Edwards and other more moderate Calvinists in order to encourage this transition. This procurer of Edwardian theology sent the son on March 15, 1784 Edwards’ *Humble Attempt*, which proved to be the catalyst for the prayer revival that took place among the Northamptonshire Baptists in 1784. “I beg your acceptance of President Edwards on prayer for the revival of religion,” the Presbyterian wrote, “I know not if there is another copy in Scotland.” In a letter a few months later on August 31, he reported that the “concert which took place about the time of Edwards book on prayer has long since expired.” Although there “have been occasional concerts, differing in their circumstances and more narrow in their extent since,” the Scot lamented, “prayer for the revival of religion cannot be too warmly inculcated.” His analysis was that “A bigotted zeal... whose sentiments were different as to church government and the subject and mode of baptism, was the disease 50 years ago. But now the disease is an indifference about the most fundamental doctrines.” This gloomy outlook of

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the state of religion in Britain might have inspired Ryland, Sutcliff, and Fuller to revive the idea of a concert of prayer in addition to their reading of Edwards' treatise. Even though it was Edwards' ideas which inspired change among many of the leading Baptists in Britain, the broker of this American's theology was Erskine.

Ryland's Scottish correspondent was his chief source for acquiring works by American authors. "I send you with this Edwards sermons on justification &c, Dying Exercises of Mrs. Deborah Prince &c. and Six sermons by Mr Thomas Prince, lately republished or printed here," Erskine reported in his June 18, 1785 letter: "The first is, retailed at 2 sh. 6d the 2nd at 4d., and the 3rd at 9 d. stitched." Since the Edinburgh minister recently edited the texts by Thomas and Deborah Prince they were easily obtainable.¹⁹ Additionally, "four copies of very ill drawn proposals for publishing Mr Edwards Life and the posthumous sermons" were included since he reasoned, "We cannot be too active in promoting the spread and publication of such works." Erskine was also responsible for introducing Ryland to Edwards the younger, a correspondence that began in 1785.²⁰ The Scot had previously explained that it was Edwards' son "who sent me in manuscript his treatise on redemption" and "was busy in transcribing for the press two volumes of his practical sermons," which the American War of Independence had unhappily "interrupted our correspondence."²¹ The Edinburgh minister's own views deviated from Edwards on such topics as faith, but the former was not deterred from his goal to publish the works of America's leading philosopher and theologian. The Edinburgh editions of *The Life of David Brainerd* (1765), *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1774), *Sermons on Various Important Subjects* (1785), *Practical Sermons* (1788), *Twenty Sermons* (1789), *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects* (1793), and *Remarks on Important Theological Controversies* (1796) were all edited by Erskine.²² Further, his relationship with the elder Edwards was followed by one with the younger Edwards as well as Timothy Dwight.

In sending books to his friends, Erskine did not hesitate to recommend authors who were not favorable to the revival of religion on both sides of the Atlantic. On March 30, 1782, for instance, Charles Chauncy's *Compleat [sic] View of Episcopacy* (1771) was posted, "which has been much and I think justly esteemed in America, and of which I know only one other copy in Scotland of which I am possessor." Men like Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew, who were generally hostile to the Great Awakening, were regular contacts for the Scottish Evangelical, despite

their different opinions.²³ This did not imply that Erskine agreed with such critics, only that he saw fit to allow their ideas to circulate as a way of sharpening the minds of his fellow Evangelical Calvinists. By studying their works, more cogent arguments could be developed to refute them. In addition to his affinity for Edwards' works, Ryland was interested in the writings of the "New Divinity" men, Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy in particular. In the same letter, Erskine reported that "None of the books by Messrs Edwards or Bellamy, which you are so desirous of procuring have as yet cast up," adding the commentary that "These which you name are the whole of their more capital works except Edwards on prayer for the success of the gospel of which I believe there are not 3 copies in Scotland." *New Light or Old Light*, books by authors that were deemed acceptable for reading were sent without any caveat.

Erskine also received books by the son, such as the Baptist minister's own *Christ Manifested and Satan Frustrated* (1782). "I am much indebted to you for your 25 December sermon," the Presbyterian commented, so much "that I have put that and your former sermon into the hands of Mr Wm Gray bookseller."²⁴ Erskine made arrangements for Gray to send "your father and you, which you might need of Edwards Life of Brainerd and thoughts on the revival and of [James] Robertson's Hebrew Grammar, and getting in return copies of your father's 3rd volume, Hall's Help to Zions Travellers, Mathers Monuductio, your 25 December sermon &c." The Edinburgh publication of *The Life of David Brainerd* was probably the copy that Bruce Hindmarsh noted that the Rylands cherished, the son writing in the margins that this was a book "which he prizes above all other."²⁵ "I want no remittance in money for any of them," Erskine constantly assured his correspondents. But there was no hesitation to mention that he would be happy to receive works in exchange, such as "Hall's Help for Zions Traveller, his book on the Sabbath, and any of his practical sermons, (except those on God's approbation of faith ministers, and on the faith and patience of saints which I have already)." He "should also wish to have" John Tommas's *Serious Advice to Students and Young Ministers* (1774), Hugh Evans's *Charge and Sermon; Delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Thomas Dunscombe* (1773), and Robert Robinson's *Lecture on a Becoming Behaviour in Religious Assemblies* (1773).²⁶ Their love of theological books was the foundation of this relationship.

One of the son's favorite authors was Robert Hall and his *Helps to Zions Traveller*, which he along with his father urged Erskine to examine.

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Reporting back on July 15, 1783, the Scot wrote that “I have read with singular pleasure Mr Hall’s *Help to Zion’s Travellers*, tho’ I wish that it had been printed in the same comprehensive way as your sermons, that its price might have been lower, and its spread and usefulness more extensive.” On March 15, 1784, Erskine again praised Hall’s book. “I have before me your very instructive letter without date, written when Dr Bellamy’s sermons were sent to the press,” Erskine began, and “2 weeks ago received your letter with the 2 copies of said book. What a pity that Mr. Hall’s help was not printed in the same cheap and comprehensive manner,” which Erskine estimated “might have rendered the sale and spread of that useful work much greater. This is in general too little attended to in otherwise useful publication.” Hall’s *Helps to Zion’s Traveller* was recognized as an achievement in moderate Calvinism, but Erskine believed that it had not been marketed as such to reach its full potential.

Andrew Fuller’s name surfaced several times, predominately in the last fifteen years of Erskine’s correspondence with the son. Fuller’s *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785), which revealed the author’s struggle to overcome his former high Calvinism, impressed Erskine.²⁷ Writing to Ryland on June 18, 1785, the Presbyterians judged that “Mr Fuller discovers that ability and acquaintance with divine things, which makes me long for his larger work.” When the high Calvinist William Button wrote his *Remarks on a Treatise, Entitled, the Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785) as a response to Fuller, Erskine analyzed the arguments and offered his own opinion, concluding that a “solid answer to Mr Fuller appears to me impossible.”²⁸ A few months later the Edinburgh minister again gauged Fuller’s theological battle with Button. “When I wrote you Saturday,” he began, “I had not time to say any thing on the duty of the unconverted to believe. On a 2nd attentive perusal Mr Fuller’s reasoning appears to me as conclusive as ever.” Erskine was particularly pleased with the Baptist’s “idea of faith as respecting the goodness as well as the truth of the gospel, which I hinted in my dissertation on that subject and which I think has not been duly attended to in the Sandemanian controversy.”²⁹ It was suggested that Button “through either art or inadvertency” had “often passed over what was strongest in it,” such as in his examination of Psalm 2 and John 12:36. The historian J.W. Morris seems correct then in assessing that Fuller was “highly esteemed” by Erskine, even if the two Evangelicals disagreed on the administration of baptism.³⁰

The Presbyterian was so supportive of the ideas of Fuller, Hall, and

Ryland that he sent their works to one of his Dutch correspondents. On August 31, 1789, Erskine reported that “Dr [Gijbert] Bonnet one of the Professors of Divinity at Utrecht and a man of great learning and zeal” was sent “all that has been published by Mr Fuller” relating to “the controversy on the extent of the gospel call... as well as Mr Hall’s book and your publications.” The Scot also received from Ryland, Fuller’s *Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared* (1793), which he thought important enough to use his connections to recommend that it be published in Holland. In early October 1793, he stated that “a few days ago your letter accompanied with Mr Fuller’s book came to hand. I think it much the usefulest book which has been published against Dr Priestley’s Socinian tenets, and in hopes it may be translated to Dutch, have sent a copy to the Hague Society for purity of doctrine, and another to Professor Bonnet at Utrecht.” The work of the Baptists against Socinianism and their efforts to curb the negative effects of high Calvinism were appreciated and every effort was made to publish their ideas outside of Britain.

Ryland and Erskine shared similar sentiments of tolerance to most Evangelicals of other denominations, the exception being John Wesley and his form of Methodism. In his desire to resurrect a concert of prayer, Ryland welcomed “any other christian societies of our own or other denominations” to “unite with us... in the attempt.”³¹ But the son’s tolerance for other Evangelicals was limited when it came to Wesleyan Methodism. Writing to Sutcliff in 1774, he was confident that it is “the wisdom as well as the duty of the dissenters to be friendly with the *orthodox* Methodists.” However, pertaining to the Wesleyans, “both their Doctrin [sic] and Policy are inimical to the Dissenters and I think contrary to the Word of God.”³² Erskine’s views towards Wesley were equally closed-minded, which is somewhat surprising given his more charitable opinion towards other Christians, which included his theologically liberal colleagues in the Moderate Party of the Church of Scotland.³³ In the preface to *Mr Wesley’s Principles Detected* (1765), Erskine mounted a thorough and devastating attack on the Anglican itinerant and his perceived devious attempts to gain a foothold in Scotland.³⁴ This justified the Scot’s comment to Ryland that “I heartily regret the rashness of the Weslian Methodists with you, in so suddenly concluding people converted.” Erskine wished that “Christians of all denominations were more cautious of laying an improper stress on impressions without strictly examining their sources.” The solution to this problem was Edwards’

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Thoughts on the Revival (1742) and his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), which “ought to be carefully read by all who have much occasion of conversing with distressed and awakened sinners, especially such of them who have in their own opinion received the comforts of the spirit.”³⁵ The message was clear, moderate theology was to be promoted, but only of the Calvinistic variety.

The last letter was dated December 4, 1802 and revealed the poor health of the elder Scotsman in his final days. “It is now near a year since I have been able to preach, or even to attend public worship,” Erskine wrote. “Tho’ free from violent pain or sickness, at least of any continuance, I am become very weak and little exertion either in writing or speaking soon exhausts. Indeed deafness for some weeks has also unfitted me for conversation.” Thus ended the over twenty years of correspondence between Erskine and the Rylands.

Although these letters are not very personal in nature, they do reveal the significance of learning and intellectual activity among some key Evangelicals in the eighteenth century. The book trade was a vital source for transmitting new ideas in theology that could be used to foster the growth of Moderate Calvinism. Edwards was heralded as the ideal example of piety and erudition who remained faithful to the fundamental tenets of orthodoxy amidst the Enlightenment. His literary contributions ended up being the catalyst for the next generation of Baptist leaders and inspired a revival of prayer. While the works of Edwards and other American divines were widely read and influential to the English Baptists, their chief resource for these pieces was Erskine. It was this Enlightened Evangelical minister from Scotland who relentlessly supplied countless publications in order to encourage the growth of religion on both sides of the Atlantic. **E**

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ENDNOTES

1 EUL special collections, E.99.14. Note: there are also two letters by Erskine to John Ryland Jr, dated August 13, 1801 and January 26, 1802 in the Isaac Mann Autograph Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, OSB MSS 46:1: 18. The younger Ryland also had extensive correspon-

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dences with other Evangelicals, such as the Anglican John Newton. L. G. Champion, "The Letters of John Newton to John Ryland," *Baptist Quarterly* 27 (1977): 157–63.

2 For Erskine's relationship with Edwards, see Sir Henry Moncreiff Wellwood, *Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine, D. D., Late One of the Ministers of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1818), 196–231; Christopher Wayne Mitchell, "Jonathan Edwards' Scottish Connection and the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Evangelical Revival, 1735–1750" (PhD Dissertation, St. Mary's College, University of St Andrews, 1997), 313.

3 For the influence of Edwards and on the Northamptonshire Baptists, helpful publications are Ernest A. Payne, *The Prayer Call of 1784* (Edinburgh, Scotland: The World Mission of the Church: Scotland's Week of Witness, 1942); Chris Chun, "A Mainspring of Missionary Thought: Andrew Fuller on 'Natural and Moral Inability,'" *American Baptist Quarterly* 25 (2006): 335–55; D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "The Reception of Jonathan Edwards by Early Evangelicals in England," in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*, eds. David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 207–10; David W. Bebbington, "The Reputation of Edwards Abroad," in *Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 240; David W. Bebbington, "Remembered Around the World: The International Scope of Edwards' Legacy," in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad*, 183–4; and Michael Haykin, "A Habitation of God, Through the Spirit: John Sutcliff (1752–1814) and the Revitalization of the Calvinistic Baptists in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Baptist Quarterly* 34 (1992): 309–10.

4 John Ryland, *Pastoral Memorials: Selected from the Manuscripts of the Late Revd. John Ryland, D. D. of Bristol: With a Memoir of the Author in Two Volumes* (London, 1826–28), 26, 49.

5 Quoted by Arthur H. Kirkby, *Andrew Fuller, 1765–1815* (London, England: Independent Press, 1961), 7.

6 Erskine had contact with Fuller. For instance, J. W. Morris reprinted a letter from Fuller to Erskine in *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, Late Pastor of the Baptist Church at Kettering, and Secretary to the Baptist Missionary Society* (London, 1816), 417. There is also evidence that Erskine wrote Sutcliff. See letters forty-two and forty-five in the Erskine-Ryland correspondence, dated August 10, 1790 and March 9, 1791 respectively, as well as the letter from Erskine to Sutcliff at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Isaac Mann Autograph Collection, OSB MS 46:1: 19, dated October 14, 1799.

7 Edmund Calamy, *Inspiration of the Holy Writings* (1710) and John Flavel, *Treatise on the Soul of Man* (London, 1685) and his *Token for Mourners* (1674).

8 His likening the elder Ryland with John Maclaurin was a high compliment. In his funeral sermon for his colleague William Robertson on June 16, 1793, Erskine listed the Scottish Evangelical minister John Maclaurin as one of the best preachers of the first half of the eighteenth century. See "The Agency of God in Human Greatness," in *Discourses Preached on Several Occasions*, vol. 1, ed. John

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Erskine (Edinburgh, 1798), 270.

9 John Ryland Jr, *God's Experimental Probation of Intelligent Agents* (Northampton, 1780) and Benjamin Bennet's *Several Discourses against Popery* (first edition, 1714, London, 1781).

10 Robert Hall, *Help to Zion's Travelers* (Bristol, 1781) and John Collett Ryland's *Contemplations on the Beauties of Creation* (Northampton, 1779–82).

11 There are four characteristics of Evangelicals, according to David W. Bebbington in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, England: Routledge, 2005), 2–19.

12 October 19, 1781. See also Fuller's letter to Erskine on February 25, 1800 in Morris, *Memoirs*, 417.

13 The first letter in the EUL collection is dated January 14, 1782, but there is insufficient evidence to conclude that this was the definitive start to his correspondence with the younger Ryland. But since Erskine died in 1803, William Carey's comment that Ryland's communication with Erskine lasted twenty years indicates that 1782 is a logical starting date. See Ryland, *Pastoral Memorials*, 26.

14 Further comments by Erskine on these books may be found in "Agency," 270.

15 Fraser of Brae has long since been recognized by modern theologians as a precursor of the moderate Calvinism that emerged in the Enlightenment. See, for example, Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 181–200.

16 Erskine to Ryland Jr, January 14, 1782.

17 See the letters dated, March 15, 1784; June 18, 1785; November 29, 1785 and December 30, 1791; July 7, 1792 and July 20, 1795; August 19, 1786; November 5, 1787; October 18, 1790 and December 30, 1791 respectively. For a sample of Erskine's interests in collecting American sermons for the benefit of Evangelicals in Britain, see *Select Discourses from the American Preacher*, ed. John Erskine (Edinburgh, 1796).

18 D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition*, 1996 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 146.

19 Thomas Prince, *Six Sermons by the Late Thomas Prince*, ed. John Erskine (Edinburgh, 1785) and *Dying Exercises of Mrs. Deborah Prince and Devout Meditations of Mrs. Sarah Gill*, ed. John Erskine (Edinburgh, 1785).

20 Ryland, *Pastoral Memorials*, 49.

21 Erskine to Ryland Jr, March 30, 1782.

22 A list of Erskine's works, including those that were edited by him, are in the appendix to Moncreiff Wellwood, *Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine and A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*, ed. Robert Chambers (Glasgow, 1870), 262–4.

23 For Chauncy and Mayhew, this bond was largely based on similar anti-Catholic sentiments. See Erskine's praise for Mayhew in the former's *Considerations on the Spirit of Popery, and the Intended Bill for the Relief of Papists in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1778), 38–40. But, there was also a shared interest in missionary work. This is evident, for example, in Chauncy's letter to Erskine on November 2, 1762 in

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An Account of Some Late Attempts by the Correspondents of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, to Christianize the North American Indians (Edinburgh, 1763). Erskine appreciated the genuine character of these men and their Protestantism. See Alden Bradford's reproduction of part of a letter from Erskine to Chauncy, sometime in 1767, where the Scot stated that "I was extremely sorry to hear of the death of Dr. Mayhew. Your liberties, civil and sacred, have lost an able defender, whose place cannot be easily supplied. The honest boldness and strength and spirit, with which he wrote, greatly pleased me, even when our sentiments were considerably different." On Mayhew: *Memoir of the Life and Writings of Rev. Jonathan Mayhew, D.D., Pastor of the West Church and Society in Boston, from June, 1747, to July, 1766* (Boston, 1838), 443.

24 Erskine to John Ryland Jr, June 7, 1782

25 Hindmarsh, "Reception," 202.

26 Erskine to John Ryland Jr, June 7, 1782

27 Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Northamptonshire and *The Modern Question: A Turning-Point in Eighteenth-Century Dissent*," *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1965): 101.

28 Erskine to John Ryland Jr, May 22, 1786.

29 Erskine to John Ryland Jr, August 21, 1786. Erskine's view of faith is in his "The Nature of Christian Faith," in *Theological Dissertations* (London, 1765).

30 Morris, *Memoirs*, 109.

31 *The Nature, Evidences and Advantages of Humility* (1784), 12, quoted by Haykin, "Habitation," 310.

32 Letter to John Sutcliff, August 26, 1774, quoted by Haykin, "Habitation," 308.

33 See for example, Erskine's letter to the Moderate Presbyterian, George Campbell in Erskine's, *A Narrative of the Debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, May 25, 1779: Occasioned by Apprehensions of an Intended Repeal of the Penal Statutes Against Papists* (Edinburgh, 1780), iii-iv and Erskine's funeral sermon for William Robertson in Erskine, "Agency."

34 John Erskine, *Mr Wesley's Principles Detected: Or, a Defence of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of Aspasio Vindicated* (Edinburgh, 1765).

35 Erskine to John Ryland Jr, December 12, 1794.