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I.

JONATHAN EDWARDS.

THE 5th of October marked the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of this great and good man. In many parts of the country notice has been taken of this fact. Especially in New England, the region of his birth, and to which the labors of his life belonged, have fresh laurels been wreathed for his brow. But it is doubtful if any part of the country, or any section of the church, can pay him as sincere a tribute as the Southern Presbyterian Church. He thought as we still think on the great doctrines of grace, being a zealous Calvinist, and was in accord with the Presbyterian Church in his views of government, though he lived and wrought and died in the Congregational Church. If, therefore, any class of persons should honor the name and cherish the memory of Edwards, those should do so who hold Calvinistic views of doctrine, and Presbyterian principles of polity.

Moreover, while Edwards commands our admiration on many grounds, yet his chief title to our esteem is the almost unparalleled excellence of his Christian character. His life was radiant with the beauty of Christ, sweet and fragrant with all the tender and winsome graces of the Holy Spirit. To pass his life in review, and reflect on those qualities that marked him as the eminent Christian, must be a wholesome spiritual exercise.

The story of his life, quiet and uneventful for the most part, is quickly told. He did not figure as the hero in any great and thrilling conflict; there were few dramatic episodes to give variety to the usually smooth tenor of his career; but his days

were passed for the most part in the seclusion of his humble study, and in the routine of a village pastorate. Whatever of interest belongs to his life is due to the rare quality of the man and his work.

Jonathan Edwards was born 5th of October, 1703, at Windsor, in Connecticut. His parents were Timothy Edwards and Esther Stoddard Edwards. This worthy couple walked together as man and wife for more than sixty years. Eleven children were born to them, ten of whom were daughters, Jonathan being the only son. He entered Yale College in his thirteenth year, and graduated in his seventeenth. He was licensed to preach when only nineteen years of age, and served a congregation in New York with great acceptance for eight months. Shortly before he was twenty years of age he received the Master of Arts degree from Yale, and accepted an appointment in that institution as tutor. He remained in this position above two years; and then being urged by the people of Northampton to become assistant pastor to his aged grandfather, Dr. Solomon Stoddard, he consented, and was ordained to that work on the 15th of February, 1727, being in the twenty-fourth year of his age. At the end of two years his grandfather died, and then the whole work of the pastorate devolved on him. In that day change of pastorates was not by any means an every-day occurrence. The rule was for a pastorate to last a life-time. It was not the fault of Edwards, nor the want of desire on his part that this rule did not hold good in his case. He was constrained by conscience to cross the views of his parishioners touching one or two matters that gave rise to much feeling, and ultimately necessitated his giving up his work among them, after having toiled and prayed for them more than twenty-three years. No other church was available at the time. The commissioners for carrying on work among the Indians asked him to take charge of the mission at Stockbridge, Mass. He was formally inducted into his work there by a council, called for that purpose, on the 8th day of August, 1751. It goes without saying that he was faithful in the discharge of the lowly duties belonging to this sphere, and would cheerfully have spent the remainder of his days there, being fully persuaded that he was where God had

placed him. This would have made any place acceptable to him, so perfectly submissive was he to the divine will. When he had been there a little over six years, he received a call from the trustees of Princeton College to become the President of that young, but hopeful institution. It would seem that he was much more reluctant to accept this position of honor than he had been to accept work among the unlettered Indians of Stockbridge. The place was made vacant by the death of his son-in-law, Rev. Aaron Burr, and Edwards expressed himself as fearing that the contrast between him and his distinguished son-in-law would prove the unwisdom of the trustees in his selection. After mature consideration, however, and under the urgent advice of his friends, he accepted the presidency, and entered upon his duties in January, 1758. The small-pox was then at Princeton, and "as Mr. Edwards had never had it, and inoculation was then practiced with great success in those parts, he proposed to be inoculated, if the physicians should advise to it, and the corporation should give their consent. Accordingly, by the advice of the physicians and the consent of the corporation, he was inoculated February 13th. He had it favorably, and it was thought all danger was over; but a secondary fever set in, and by reason of a number of pustules in his throat, the obstruction was such that the medicines necessary to check the fever could not be administered. It, therefore, raged till it put an end to his life, on the 22nd of March, 1758, in the fifty-fifth year of his life."

Such are the leading facts which lie on the surface, and mark off his earthly span into different stages. There is nothing in the recital of these facts to suggest greatness, or to furnish the prophecy of enduring fame. But there were qualities in the man and elements in the work which he did that will perpetuate his name to the latest posterity.

1. HIS WORK. When Edwards began his work at Northampton, religion in New England was at a low ebb. The severe and fervent piety of the hardy pioneers had given place, in large measure, to a cold and feeble formalism; and the lofty morality of Pilgrim and Puritan, born of a profound reverence for the majesty and holiness of God, and supported by a conscience

thoroughly under the dominion of God's law, was yielding to a condition of life where human passions were allowed much freer scope. This decline was due especially to two things. One was the "half-way covenant"—a device by which those who had been baptized in infancy might have their children baptized. The condition which it imposed was not a profession of personal faith in Christ, and obedience to his requirements, but merely assent to the church covenant, and the promise of submission to church discipline. A little later the further step was taken of admitting these persons to the Lord's Supper as a "means of grace." Thus the conception of the church as a society of saints was obscured, and there was introduced into the church an unconverted element, with the inevitable result of lowering the tone of spirituality. The other cause of decline was the rise of Arminianism; not the red-hot, evangelical Arminianism of Wesley and his followers, but an Arminianism which, while confessing the need of the new birth, laid stress on human ability and the efficacy of the means of grace. On this subject, Williston Walker, in his history of the American Congregational Churches, very pertinently says: "It was but following out of the characteristics of human nature that when regeneration was looked upon as a change beyond human power, and at the same time many religious acts within a man's attainment were declared to be adapted to put the soul in a position of hopeful expectation, emphasis should be placed, in men's thinking, on the 'means' which man could employ, even while it was still affirmed that the divinely wrought change was the all-essential matter. Nor is it surprising that as time advanced, some ministers and some congregations began to question the extent of human inability, and query whether God had not so conditioned regeneration on the employment of 'means' that a 'sincere,' though necessarily imperfect, obedience would bring saving grace to him who rendered it." The spread of such doctrine deadened the sense of sin, and made place for a spirit of legalism. Under these blighting influences, already a number of churches in Eastern Massachusetts had ceased to feel the need of the atonement, had practically denied the Lord that bought them, and had formally embraced Unitarianism.

Such was the shadow resting on New England Puritanism when Edwards, a beardless youth, began to lift his voice in God's behalf in the church of Northampton. There was no uncertain sound in that voice. It rang out strong and clear on the doctrine of total depravity, and the sinner's absolute dependence on sovereign and invincible grace. Behind the voice was a heart warm and tender with the fulness of divine love. For a time his preaching had no perceptible effect. But by diligence in pastoral work and catechising of the children, he was getting a grip on all hearts. By days and nights of almost ceaseless prayer he was keeping his grip on the hand of God. At the end of seven years the seed which had been so faithfully sown, and which had been growing in secret, was now ready to put forth the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear. In December, 1734, in a series of sermons, Edwards set forth the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and exhorted to immediate repentance. God's Spirit gave effect to the truth. Hearts began to break, tears to overflow the eyes, and soon the whole town was stirred to the deepest spiritual concern. Religion was almost the sole topic of conversation; young and old were alike affected, and in the course of five months more than three hundred persons were believed to have been renewed by the power of God. News of this great awakening spread. Soon revivals occurred elsewhere. By request of friends, Edwards published a *Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. This was published and circulated on both sides of the Atlantic. The Spirit was poured out on some of the Presbyterian Churches of New Jersey. Dr. Coleman, of Boston, invited Whitefield to visit New England. Soon this flaming evangelist, with his consuming zeal and thrilling oratory, was kindling all New England into religious excitement, and lighting fires here and there along the Atlantic seaboard from Savannah to New York. For years the "great awakening" continued, with more or less of power. It has been estimated that in the ten years between 1734-1744, out of a total population in New England of three hundred thousand, from twenty-five to fifty thousand were converted and added to the churches. Like results followed elsewhere. If we grant that the smaller of the two figures presents an exaggerated statement

of the case, still the fact remains that never has this country witnessed such a manifestation of religious feeling as the "great awakening." While connected with it there was an excess of emotional excitement, and some temporary evils, the main impulse was of incalculable value. It wrought a transformation that has continued to color church life from that day till this. The chiefest human instrumentality in this mighty spiritual upheaval was Jonathan Edwards. Had God used him for no other purpose, the churches of America would still have cause to hold him in grateful remembrance.

God did use him, however, for another purpose. Great as he was as a preacher, and blessed as was his work as evangelist, greater still was Jonathan Edwards as metaphysician and theologian; and more blessed still was his work as profound thinker and writer. Born just one year before John Locke died, he came into the inheritance of that great man's intellectual treasures. At the age of fourteen he read Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding with the avidity," to use his own comparison, "with which the miser counts his gold." He became, in a sense, the disciple of Locke, but avoided the snare of materialism which Locke unintentionally spread. He carried his logical processes to profounder depths and to safer conclusions than did Locke, and has probably said the last word on one of the most perplexing questions with which the human mind deals—the relation of motive to volition. Since his day, ambitious intellects have broken away from his leading, and have tried to escape from his logic, but Edwards remains the master, and will probably remain so till the light of another life shall remove the limitations which God has imposed on us here. He published quite a number of his writings, among them as especially worthy of mention: *Thoughts on the Revival*, *Religious Affections*, *On Qualifications for Communion*, and *On the Freedom of the Will*. This last is the one most widely read, and which has contributed most to his fame as philosopher. He left in the press when he died a treatise on Original Sin, which bears the impress of all his other works—patient, painstaking and profound thought. If it were read slowly and prayerfully by every young man entering the ministry,

of the American churches, we might confidently predict a mighty reaction toward the best days of Calvinistic orthodoxy and of Puritan morality. Quite a number of his other works were published after his death: *History of Redemption*, *On the Nature of Virtue*, *God's Last End in the Creation*, *Miscellaneous Observations*, *Miscellaneous Remarks*, etc. In his letter to the trustees of Princeton College, he mentions as a reason for hesitating to accept their call, the work which he was doing with his pen. "I have already," he says, "published something on one of the main points in dispute between the Arminians and Calvinists, and have it in view, God willing (as I have already signified to the public), in like manner to consider all the other controverted points, and have done much towards the preparation for it. But besides these, I have had on my mind and heart, which I long ago began (not with any view to publication), a great work, which I call a *History of the Work of Redemption*, a body of divinity in an entirely new method, being thrown into the form of a history: considering the affair of Christian theology, as the whole of it, in each part, stands in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ, which I suppose, of all others, to be the grand design of God, and the *summum* and *ultimum* of all the divine operations and decrees; particularly considering all parts of the grand scheme in their historical order. The order of their existence, or their being brought forth to view, in the course of divine dispensations, or the wonderful series of successive acts and events; beginning from eternity, and descending from thence to the great work and successive dispensations of the infinitely wise God in time, considering the chief events coming to pass in the church of God, and revolutions in the world of mankind, affecting the state of the church and the affairs of redemption, which we have account of in history and prophecy; till at last we come to the general resurrection, last judgment and consummation of all things, when it shall be said, 'It is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.' Concluding my work with the consideration of that perfect state of things, which shall be finally settled to last for eternity. This history will be carried on with regard to all three worlds, heaven, earth and hell;

considering the connected successive events and alterations in each, so far as the Scriptures give any light; introducing all parts of divinity in that order which is most scriptural and most natural; a method which appears to me the most beautiful and entertaining, wherein every divine doctrine will appear to greatest advantage, in the brightest, in the most striking manner, showing the admirable contexture and harmony of the whole."

It may be worth while to pause and reflect for a moment on what is here brought to our attention. It required a capacious brain to project such a vast and original system of biblical theology as is here proposed. The conception was a bold one, and the attempt to realize it bordered on rashness. But what shall we think of the man who deliberately sets this task before him, not as impelled by any demand of his calling, nor as inspired by any ambition of authorship, but merely as a means of delightful and profitable pastime! Nor was this great undertaking enough to satisfy his craving for such pastime. "I have also," he writes, "for my own profit and entertainment, done much toward another great work, which I call the Harmony of the Old and New Testaments in three parts." It is matter for thankfulness that his great work on the *History of Redemption*, while not intended by the author to see the light, was given to the press by Jonathan Edwards, Jr., sixteen years after his father's death. It was first published in Edinburgh, the manuscript having been secured for that purpose by John Erskine, a predecessor and precursor of Thomas Chalmers. The extent to which Edwards influenced both of these eminent men can never be known; but Chalmers testified that Edwards' *Freedom of the Will* "had given him convictions that had never changed during forty-seven years, since he first read the book, and that it had helped him more than any book, excepting the Bible."

Elegance of style was not cultivated in Edwards' day as it is at present. Hence his writings lack that element of attractiveness. Some one has asserted, and probably with truth, that the more recondite the subject the more profound and abstract the reasoning, the more acute the logic, the more agreeable his style. He never moves so smoothly and gracefully as when boring his

way through regions of thought as dark and apparently impenetrable as the deep forests of Central Africa. But however rugged his style, as in the case of Aristotle, his matter is of such rare value that thoughtful students will not neglect it. Men are willing to dig through rough strata, if assured that gold is to be their reward.

II. HIS CHARACTER. Man is always greater than his greatest achievement. In the case of Edwards, this fact is easily recognized. In the formation of character he had a good start in that he was descended from a line of ancestors noted for piety and intelligence. His father was a minister of the gospel, who had taken the college honors at Cambridge, having received on the same day the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts. His mother was the daughter of one of the most influential ministers of his day, the Rev. Solomon Stoddard. She was finely educated for that day, there being no institutions for the higher education of women. She was a woman of much refinement and polish of manner. By the law of heredity, Jonathan Edwards came into possession, as his birthright, of rare gifts of head and heart. Soon these were exalted and transfused by unusual measures of God's grace. He left a manuscript containing an elaborate account of his conversion. He says that from childhood he was much concerned about his soul, but was especially aroused on two occasions. The first was during a revival in his father's congregation when he was a mere boy. At this time his religious exercises were of a very delightful kind. He found pleasure in prayer and religious conversation with other boys. By and by his interest abated, and he finally concluded that it did not originate with the Spirit of God. His second awakening was while at college, and this time the prominent element was a most painful and overwhelming conviction of sin. It was during an illness, and he says, "God brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell." The season of spiritual agony continued for quite a while, when it gradually gave way to a sweet and settled peace, and a joyous complacency in the character of God. He notes that a remarkable change passed over his feelings in respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty in choosing

some men to life, and leaving others to perish eternally. From childhood his mind had been full of objections against the doctrine; but after his conversion he not only became reconciled to it, but actually found himself rejoicing in it. "The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. But my first conviction was not so."

Shortly after entering on the work of the ministry, he wrote out a number of resolutions according to which his conduct was to be framed. These resolutions form an impressive testimony to the depth of his earnestness and consecration. The list is too long to be given entire, but a few may be noted as specimens.

"1. Resolved, That I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory and my own good, profit and pleasure, ON THE WHOLE, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriad ages hence; to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great soever."

"2. Resolved, to be continually endeavoring to find some new contrivance to promote the forementioned things."

"4. Resolved, never to BE, DO OR SUFFER anything in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God."

"5. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time, but improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can."

These are samples of a list which numbered seventy, and he charged himself to "remember to read over these resolutions once a week." He prefixed to them a short prayer recognizing his dependence on God, "Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake."

Endeavoring with unwearied diligence to keep his vows, and constantly seeking help of God, he rose to a height of gracious experience to which few Christians of any age have attained. He combined the mysticism of St. Bernard with the keen dialectic

tical spirit of Abelard. He never tired of reasoning on the mysteries of redemption, but while he reasoned, his soul "floated amid the cherubim." Hear him give an account of himself: "Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception—which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour, which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him, and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure with a divine and heavenly purity. I have several times had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects. I have many times had a sense of the glory of the third person in the Trinity in his office of sanctifier, in his holy operations, communicating divine light and life to the soul. God, in the communication of his holy Spirit, has appeared as an infinite fountain of divine glory and sweetness, being full and sufficient to fill and satisfy the soul, pouring forth itself in sweet communications; like the sun in its glory, sweetly and pleasantly diffusing light and life."

While his religious experience had its extraordinary raptures, lifting him to summits that touched the borderland of heaven, yet his daily life, his common experience might be described as a dwelling with God on the "delectable mountains." Let no one suppose, however, that these sweet ecstasies were unattended with a sense of unworthiness. He was poles apart from his great cotemporary, John Wesley, touching the matter of Christian perfection. "I have often," he says, "had very affecting views

of my own sinfulness and vileness, very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together, so that I have often been forced to shut myself up. I have a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness and the badness of my heart than ever I had before my conversion. It has often appeared to me that if God should mark iniquity against me, I should appear the very worst of all mankind, of all that have been since the beginning of the world to this time, and that I should have by far the lowest place in hell."

Not only was Jonathan Edwards a marvellous combination of wrapt mystic and acute logician, he was also a combination of the scholarly recluse and the soul-stirring evangelist. He almost lived with pen in hand. "My method of study," he explains, "from my first beginning the work of the ministry has been very much by writing, applying myself in this way to improve every important hint; pursuing the clue to my utmost, when anything in reading, meditation or conversation has been suggested to my mind that seemed to promise light in any weighty point, thus penning what appeared to me my best thoughts on innumerable subjects for my own benefit." Thus it happened that besides publishing thirty-three works, he left more than fourteen hundred manuscripts, most of them comparatively brief, "which he wrote for his own private satisfaction."

About eighteen months ago, it was my privilege to walk through the Hall of Fame, annexed to the University of New York. One of the first names to greet my eyes was the name of Jonathan Edwards. My gratification was not greater than my surprise. The choice of the few immortals, whose names are thus to be perpetuated, has devolved on an age far removed in thought and feeling from the age on which Edwards stamped his impress. His rigid Calvinism is not popular in the highest literary circles, nor does his manner of life commend itself for imitation to the men of a softer and more luxurious civilization. It was, therefore, surprising and all the more significant to find the name of Jonathan Edwards chosen to shine among the stars of the first magnitude. His name led all the rest among the

preachers and theologians voted for, he receiving eighty-two out of the ninety-seven ballots cast, Henry Ward Beecher coming next with sixty-four. What a contrast between these two men during their life-time! Henry Ward Beecher was the very incarnation of the sentiment of the section in which he lived, and voiced that sentiment with a tongue that filled the civilized world with his fame. No man in any profession has stood in a more resplendent blaze of glory than that which enveloped Henry Ward Beecher when at the zenith of his wonderful career. The people of two continents paid homage to his genius, and thrilled under the spell of his matchless oratory. Jonathan Edwards spent most of his years as a village pastor. In the prime of his powers, because he was faithful to conscience and to the Word of God, his people rose up, and drove him from his home in poverty and sorrow, the only field open to him in which to serve his Master and earn his daily bread, an obscure mission among the Indians. This was succeeded by six or eight weeks of presiding over the then doubtful destiny of a young college; then small-pox and death. How strange that these two should be entered as contestants for the laurel wreath! How stranger still that this age—so near to the one, with vivid memories of his magic charm, so far from the other, when called upon to judge—should crown the village pastor as victor! The modest mystic, the humble missionary, comes out from the shadows of the distant past, and in the race for enduring fame outstrips the great metropolitan orator, the mighty apostle of freedom and loyalty, even while the latter's voice is lingering like sweet music in the chambers of the mind. How account for it? The explanation is to be found in the fact that the one was dealing with the transient, the other with the permanent. Beecher was the champion of a cause, which, however absorbing for a time, was short-lived in its issues. He voiced the sentiment of a passing hour. Edwards wrought in a quiet, but masterful way on problems that belong to all time. As long as men continue to be religious animals they must think on the mysteries out of which they came, through which they are passing, and into which they are going. And the man who, in the sphere of these mysteries, can answer their questionings with clearest and truest

voice is the one whom they will declare most worthy to be called a man of God, an ambassador of Christ. The fame of Edwards has been growing since his body turned to dust, and possibly the verdict of Robert Hall may yet become universal: "I consider Jonathan Edwards the greatest of the sons of men, not excluding any country or any age, since the apostolic."

R. C. REED.