

The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in Britain

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The name of Jonathan Edwards does not loom large in histories of theology in Britain. The American is usually ignored, as in Bernard Reardon's study of *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age*, or relegated to a single allusion, as in Tudur Jones's *Congregationalism in England, 1662-1962*.¹ By contrast, accounts of parallel developments in the United States give Edwards pride of place. That is true of general overviews such as Mark A. Noll's *America's God* and E. Brooks Holifield's *Theology in America* as well as more specialist works such as Allen C. Guelzo's *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* and Joseph A. Conforti's *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition & American Culture*, both of which examine the subsequent reputation of the theologian.² It is not surprising that American authors should lay stress on a home-grown product, but it is more culpable that writers about Britain should neglect him. The lacuna may be laid at the door of multiple presuppositions. One is a certain insularity, the silent assumption that Britain was self-contained in its doctrinal concerns, or, if affected at all, then swayed almost exclusively by influences emanating from Germany. Another is that the Church of England led the way in Christian intellectual affairs to the extent that patterns of thinking in other denominations

¹ Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A Survey from Coleridge to Gore* (London: Longman, 1980). R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662-1962* (London: Independent Press, 1962), p. 170.

² Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). Allen C. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989). Joseph A. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition & American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

were of little or no importance. And a third is that what mattered in Anglican thought in the nineteenth century was the emergence of the Oxford Movement and of liberal theology because they shaped the developments of the twentieth century, a belief that has discouraged the scrutiny of Evangelical thought at the time. All these notions may be detected in Reardon's lucid book on Victorian theology, the standard work of the last generation. Yet in reality British readers frequently absorbed American texts, which after all were written in their own language. Many of these readers were outside the Church of England, for at mid-century nearly half the population at worship in England and Wales was Nonconformist and Scotland was overwhelmingly Presbyterian. And Evangelicalism, though it was to be eclipsed during the twentieth century, was in the ascendant in British society at large during much of the nineteenth century. Hence at that period an American who was a non-Anglican Evangelical was likely to enjoy a wide influence. Despite the general neglect of Jonathan Edwards in the literature, his legacy to subsequent generations in Britain is amply worth exploring.

The near silence about Edwards in nineteenth-century Britain contrasts starkly with contemporary opinion. The two Congregationalists who edited the first collection of Edwards's works, which appeared in 1806-11 in Britain rather than in America, could assert that the theologian 'ranks with the brightest luminaries of the christian church, not excluding any country, or any age since the apostolic'.³ If that bold claim might be considered the partisan appraisal of co-religionists, we can point to the judgement of Henry Rogers, the editor of the more popular selection from Edwards's works issued in 1834, that the American was 'held in profound veneration by thinking men of all parties'.⁴ This selection reached a twelfth edition by 1879, demonstrating the wide circulation of the texts composed by

³ *The Works of President Edwards, in Eight Volumes* [ed. Edward Williams and Edward Parsons] (London: For James Black and Son, 1817 [originally 1806-11]), 1, p. iv.

⁴ Henry Rogers, 'An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Jonathan Edwards', in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A. M.*, 12th edn (London: William Tegg & Co., 1879 [originally 1834]), p. i. Again, however, Rogers was a Congregationalist.

Edwards. Rogers's verdict is further confirmed by the publications of the Religious Tract Society (RTS), a pan-Evangelical agency that printed much of the popular Christian literature of the time. The society put into print a range of titles by Jonathan Edwards. It published *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* by 1831; *The History of Redemption* appeared in that year, followed two years later by *Select Sermons of President Edwards*; the *Exchange of Christ* and the *Life of David Brainerd* came out around the same time; and at about mid-century the Society went so far as to publish the *Treatise concerning Religious Affections* in 500 pages, an exceptionally long book for it to put on its list.⁵ As late as the 1880s the Society issued *Pardon for the Greatest Sinners* and a life of Edwards in its 'New Biographical Series'.⁶ There was clearly a demand for the writings of the theologian and even an interest in his own story down to around 1890. By comparison the American Tract Society, the equivalent of the RTS in the United States, removed Edwards from its publication lists in 1892.⁷ We can therefore conclude that British attention to the American lasted virtually as long as in his own country.

Edwards appealed to the British public not just because he was a profound explorer of Christian doctrine. As the titles printed by the RTS suggest, he was valued as a stirring preacher who could challenge unbelievers. His life of Brainerd, the pioneer evangelist among the Native Americans, exercised a fascination over a missionary-minded public. And his warm encouragement of spiritual experience, as in the *Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, acted as an aid to devotion. This book was, according to Rogers, 'one of the most valuable works on practical and experimental piety ever published'.⁸ Yet it was as an authority shaping theological discourse that his influence was greatest. The Edwardsean paradigm was the framework within which a great deal of nineteenth-century theology was

⁵ Thomas H. Johnson, *The Printed Works of Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758: A Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), pp. xi, 26, 91, 106, 96, 59, 43.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Pardon for the Greatest Sinners* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1882). J. Radford Thomson, *Jonathan Edwards* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1889).

⁷ Conforti, *Edwards, Religious Tradition & American Culture*, p. 143.

⁸ Rogers, 'Essay', p. xlvii.

conceived. The doctrinal inheritance of Calvinist teaching remained powerful within most of the non-Anglican denominations, whether in England, Scotland or Wales. For the ministers in the Calvinist traditions of the Baptists, Independents and Presbyterians, the great task was to adapt their received body of doctrine to the currents of thought associated with the Enlightenment. The fresh ideas associated with light, liberty and progress needed to be accommodated if the message of the gospel was to receive a hearing. Edwards taught that new light dawned in revival, that liberty was compatible with necessity and that the Almighty willed the progress of the gospel for the welfare of humanity. So Edwards defended Calvinism in a way intellectually acceptable to the age. British preachers appreciated the writings of others associated with Edwards for the same reason. In particular Joseph Bellamy's *True Religion Delineated* (1750), with its teaching of a governmental theory of the atonement, gained widespread endorsement. 'Were I forced to part with all mere human compositions but three', wrote John Ryland, later president of Bristol Baptist Academy, in 1790, 'Edwards's "Life of Brainerd," his "Treatise on Religious Affections," and Bellamy's "True Religion Delineated,"... would be the last I should let go.'⁹ So it might be more accurate to speak of an Edwardsean legacy rather than simply the legacy of Edwards. But it is plain that this mode of thinking provided the way in which Evangelical Calvinists in Britain conceptualised their ideas.

The British reception of Edwards began during the eighteenth century. He first came to notice as a spokesman of revival. His *Faithful Narrative* (1737) was initially published in London, not America, and by 1750 ran to as many as seven British editions. John Wesley, though a stern foe of Calvinism, enthusiastically abridged Edwards's books relating to religious revival, including several of them in the Christian Library he commended to his Methodist followers. A circle of Scottish Presbyterian ministers identified with revival

⁹ John Ryland to Joseph Kinghorn, [1790], in Martin H. Wilkin, *Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich* (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander, 1855), p. 183.

became Edwards's enthusiastic correspondents and one of them, John Erskine, minister of Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh, turned into his chief promoter globally, sending his writings to the Netherlands and Germany as well as England. It was Erskine who worked up a set of Edwards's sermons into the *History of the Work of Redemption*, first published in Edinburgh in 1774.¹⁰ Erskine also drew the attention of the Particular Baptists of the English east midlands to Edwards' writings. John Ryland was at the heart of a group of ministers in the Northamptonshire Baptist Association who were fired by the American's vision. In 1784 they issued an English edition of Edwards's *Humble Attempt* and, in accordance with its principles, recommended monthly prayer meetings for the advance of the gospel throughout the world. It was from this circle that William Carey emerged to found in 1792 the Baptist Missionary Society, the first of the Anglo-American missions.¹¹ Through this British initiative, the modern missionary movement can claim Jonathan Edwards as its spiritual progenitor.

Edwards's theological influence, however, was much more widespread. A survey of its dimensions from the later eighteenth century onwards can usefully begin with the Baptists. During their early years in the seventeenth century, the Particular Baptists had found no difficulty in reconciling their Reformed beliefs with evangelistic practice, but in the following century many of their ministers, especially in London, adopted a higher form of Calvinism. The sovereignty of God, they believed, entailed the belief that the Almighty would unquestionably bring about his purpose of gathering the elect into his church. Human intervention seemed unnecessary, even impious. Free offers of the gospel from the pulpit seemed subversive of their confidence in divine providence. Yet preachers wanted to lead their hearers to salvation. How could they proclaim the need for repentance and faith without

¹⁰ Jonathan Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism: The Life and Thought of John Erskine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 171-2.

¹¹ Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), pp. 4-6.

infringing their Calvinist convictions? Jonathan Edwards provided a solution to their dilemma through the distinction between natural and moral inability in his *Freedom of the Will*. Human beings, according to Edwards, possessed the natural ability to believe the gospel. If they had suffered from natural inability, they would have been made by an arbitrary Creator with no opportunity for salvation, a charge often mounted by opponents of Calvinism. Instead, Edwards argued, some people showed a moral inability to embrace the gospel. Their refusal to repent and embrace the salvation offered them was the result of their own persistence in sin and so their eventual perdition was their own responsibility. Everybody was summoned to believe and so preachers could call on their hearers to respond. The message was one of 'duty faith'. Ministers therefore need have no inhibitions about making every effort to spread the gospel. Not only could they make free offers from the pulpit; they could also undertake fresh measures like the missionary society. The Reformed faith was rendered consistent with vigorous evangelism.

The most significant disseminator of the resulting Evangelical Calvinism among the Baptists was Andrew Fuller. As a leading member of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association, Fuller participated in the excitement of discovering Edwards's ideas during the 1770s. In 1785 he published *The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation*, which was built on the contrast between natural and moral inability. The distinction, Fuller explained, was 'calculated to disburden the Calvinistic system of a number of calumnies with which its opponents have loaded it'.¹² He argued that all hearers of the gospel were under an obligation to believe and so all preachers should make free offers of salvation. This was the theology of the Baptist Missionary Society, of which Fuller became secretary. He went further than Edwards in modifying his Calvinist inheritance. In debate after the publication of *The Gospel Worthy*, Fuller went on to accept that in one sense the atonement was universal in

¹² Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, preface, in H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), p. 133.

scope. The work of Christ, he held, was sufficient for all. Yet he did not move from the traditional Calvinist belief that only the elect would be saved, for the application of the atonement depended on ‘the sovereign pleasure of God’.¹³ Thus, although Fuller’s position was not identical with Edwards’s, he was still defending a form of Calvinism. Moreover he retained his admiration for the American until the end of his life. In his last letter to John Ryland before his own death in 1815, Fuller wrote that if critics of Edwards’s theology ‘preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did...their usefulness would be double what it is’.¹⁴ Although exercising freedom as a theologian, Fuller was loyal to the Edwardsean paradigm.

Other men played a similar part to Fuller. During the eighteenth-century tendency towards a higher type of Calvinism, Bristol Baptist Academy, the only denominational seminary in the country, had preserved a more moderate form that did nothing to discourage evangelism. Already in 1772 its president, Caleb Evans, was teaching the difference between natural and moral inability on the basis of Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will*.¹⁵ Evans’s successor as president, John Ryland, was a particularly zealous advocate of the Edwardsean standpoint. In 1780 he published the theologian’s sermon on ‘The Excellency of Christ’ at the low price of fourpence each or ‘3 shillings per Dozen to those who give them away’.¹⁶ He even called his sons ‘David Brainerd Ryland’ and ‘Jonathan Edwards Ryland’.¹⁷ The students who passed through the academy in preparation for Baptist ministry, roughly two hundred in the period of Ryland’s presidency from 1793 to 1825, were imbued with the theology of Edwards. Ryland’s assistant in his last seven years and subsequently his

¹³ Andrew Fuller, ‘Three Conversations’, in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Andrew G. Fuller, 6 vols (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832), 2, p. 520.

¹⁴ Andrew Fuller to John Ryland, 28 April 1815, in John Ryland, *Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (Charlestown, MA: Samuel Etheridge, 1818), pp. 332-3.

¹⁵ Roger Hayden, ‘Evangelical Calvinism among Eighteenth-Century British Baptists with particular reference to Bernard Foskett, Hugh and Caleb Evans and the Bristol Baptist Academy, 1690-1791’ (Ph. D. dissertation, Keele, 1992), p. 217.

¹⁶ Johnson, *Printed Works*, p. 95.

¹⁷ Conforti, *Edwards, Religious Tradition & American Culture*, p. 69n.

successor, Thomas Crisp, adopted exactly the same point of view. So did two of the products of the academy who went on to be founding presidents of the next two Baptist academies to be established. William Steadman built up Horton Academy near Bradford to be a powerhouse of evangelism in the north of England between 1805 and 1835; and William Newman did the same for Stepney Academy between 1810 and 1826, making it a centre for the diffusion of moderate Calvinism in London and its vicinity. These men did not offer varied theological standpoints, wanting students to evaluate their relative merits with a critical eye. On the contrary, they taught dogmatically and required acquiescence. Crisp, for example, according to the memories of one of his students, when conducting examinations ‘looked rather for an exact repetition of what he had said than for our own impressions’.¹⁸ College-trained Baptist ministers of the early nineteenth century were uniformly shaped in an Edwardsean mould.

The transition from a high Calvinism to the moderate version represented by Edwards was sharply contested in Wales. The first Baptist academy to be set up in Wales, at Abergavenny in 1807, had another Bristol graduate trained by John Ryland, Micah Thomas, as its president. Thomas was a keen advocate of the Edwardsean approach to theology as embodied in Fuller’s writings. As a result he was charged by the high Calvinists of south Wales as veering towards Arminianism. In 1811 he published a sermon called *Salvation of Sovereign Grace* in order, as he put it, to ‘refute groundless insinuations’.¹⁹ The rumours of his defection from sound doctrine, however, continued to circulate and in 1834 critics were given ammunition by five disaffected students. They complained that at worship he used John Wesley’s notes on scripture, claiming that they were superior to the comments of John Gill, the doughty eighteenth-century champion of high Calvinist orthodoxy among the Baptists. The affair was complicated by petty attacks on Thomas for refusing permission for

¹⁸ Frederick Trestrail, *Reminiscences of College Life in Bristol* (London: E. Marlboro and Co., n.d.), p. 22.

¹⁹ D. Mervyn Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College (1807-1957)* [Cardiff: South Wales Baptist College, 1957], p. 22.

students to attend the local Welsh society and requiring residents to be in their rooms by 8 p.m. The resulting controversy brought down the academy. The local Baptist association refused further financial support, a rival institution was planned, Thomas resigned, the academy closed and a new institution had to be created elsewhere, at Pontypool. There, under a president trained at Stepney and a tutor from Bristol Academy, the position of Edwards, Fuller and the newer Calvinism was reinstated.²⁰ This episode reveals clearly that contemporaries recognised the sharp difference between the model of theology of Gill and the type associated with Edwards. Micah Thomas contrasted the two. The point of view embodied in Gill's thought was 'that stringent and exclusive system' which was designed 'to guarantee the orthodoxy of the preacher', differing from 'the universally benign atmosphere of that blessed economy, which is... "good tidings of great joy to all people"'.²¹ In the end this warm-hearted Edwardseanism triumphed.

The newer pattern was enduring among the Baptists. It is true that the older style of Calvinism remained strong in areas other than Wales. In East Anglia, for example, a body of Strict and Particular Baptists separated from the associations that endorsed Fullerism, denouncing duty faith unsparingly.²² It is also true that a newer form of anti-confessional teaching began to outflank Edwards's moderate brand of Calvinism. Some began to propose that the Bible only was a sufficient grounding for a preachable theology. At Regent's Park College, the new president inducted in 1844, Benjamin Davies, a biblical scholar, refused to teach systematic theology, preferring to approach doctrine only through biblical exegesis.²³ At Horton Academy, James Acworth, president from 1836 to 1863, who was described as 'impatient of system and formulas', urged his students to make 'your own system' based on

²⁰ Himbury, *South Wales Baptist College*, pp. 31-43

²¹ Himbury, *South Wales Baptist College*, p. 36.

²² Tim Grass, *'There My Friends and Kindred Dwell': The Strict Baptist Chapels of Suffolk and Norfolk* (Ramsey, Isle of Man: Thornhill Media, 2012).

²³ Robert E. Cooper, *From Stepney to St Giles': The Story of Regent's Park College, 1810-1960* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1960), p. 52. *Report of the Committee of the Baptist College at Stepney for MDCCCXLIV* (London: H. Teape and Son., 1844), p. 8.

study of the word of God.²⁴ Yet the prevailing mode of theological instruction remained indebted to Edwards. Joseph Angus, president of Regent's Park from 1849, reverted to having first- and second-year students read two of Fuller's works.²⁵ Angus was still endorsing the views of Edwards and Bellamy on the tests of regeneration as late as 1895.²⁶ When Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher at what from 1861 became the Metropolitan Tabernacle, took up the task of ministerial training six years earlier, he insisted that Calvinistic teaching should be given in his college. Despite Spurgeon's love of seventeenth-century Puritan writings, the type of Calvinism inculcated was that of Edwards. The principal of Spurgeon's institution from 1881 to 1893, David Gracey, recommended Edwards rather than Charles Hodge, the American Presbyterian exponent of a higher Calvinism, on the subject of the imputation of sin. Gracey quoted Edwards with approval and praised the American's theological method.²⁷ Many of the Baptists remained attached to the outlook of Edwards down to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond.

The same is true of the Congregationalists. The figure among them equivalent to Andrew Fuller among the Baptists was Edward Williams, president of Oswestry Academy from 1781 to 1791 and of Rotherham Academy from 1795 down to his death in 1813. It was Williams who, with Edward Parsons, produced the first collected edition of Jonathan Edwards's works. The notes, signed 'W', were from Williams's pen, recasting Edwards's often ungainly prose into a more assimilable form. 'There is', Williams remarks at one point in a note to a sentence by Edwards, 'a little intricacy in this mode of expression', before going on to give a concrete illustration of the point.²⁸ Readers were undoubtedly helped in their understanding. 'I esteem EDWARDS'S works', wrote a correspondent from Wales, 'a

²⁴ William Medley, *Centenary Memorial of Rawdon Baptist College* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1904), p. 26.

²⁵ *Report of the Committee of the Baptist College at Stepney for MDCCCLIV*, (London: H. Teape and Son, 1854), p. 9.

²⁶ Joseph Angus, *Six Lectures on Regeneration* (London: Alexander and Shephard, 1897), p. 68.

²⁷ David Gracey, *Sin and the Unfolding of Salvation* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1894), pp. 109, 118, 28.

²⁸ *Works of President Edwards*, 1, p. 187n.

far more valuable possession, on account of your notes'.²⁹ Williams concentrated particularly on passages in *Freedom of the Will* explaining the nub issue of the relationship between liberty and necessity. Arminians, he points out at one point, wrongly supposed that 'to allow any kind of necessity, is the same as to allow an infallible *decree*'.³⁰ Edwards showed, however, that events need not be decreed even though they are caused. Human beings could be at once necessitated by causes and free in their actions. This principle, Williams explained in his *Essay on the Equity of the Divine Government* (1809), was the kernel of the defence of Calvinism against its detractors. He was faithfully reproducing Edwards's central contention. The point is repeated in his other weighty book, *A Defence of Modern Calvinism* (1812). Reading Williams was said to have reclaimed whole churches in England from a higher Calvinism.³¹ Just as Fuller persuaded many Baptists to adopt Edwards's version of the faith, so Williams convinced a large number of Congregationalists.

Because Williams was Welsh, his writings made a particular impact in the principality. One of Williams's former students, John Roberts of Llanbryn-mair, Montgomeryshire, spread his tutor's views in the Welsh language. In 1807 Roberts published a *Friendly Address* to Arminians arguing that they mistook the claims of Calvinists such as himself. They did not contend that the Almighty was the author of perdition, but that human beings were themselves responsible for their everlasting loss.³² The principle reflected Edwards's teaching on natural and moral inability. Two years later Roberts showed the source of his views by issuing extracts from Edwards's *Religious Affections*.³³ His next publication, called a *Humble Attempt*, again drew, even in its title, from Edwards. His central

²⁹ John Roberts to Edward Williams, 20 July 2008, in Joseph Gilbert, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late Edward Williams, D. D.* (London: For Francis Westley, 1825), p. 440.

³⁰ *Works of President Edwards*, 1, p. 241n.

³¹ Gilbert, *Edward Williams*, p. 467.

³² William Evans, *An Outline of the History of Welsh Theology* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1900), p. 126.

³³ John Roberts, *Cyfarwyddiadau ac Anogaethau i Gredinwyr... a Gasglwyd yn Benauf Allan o Waith Jonathan Edwards* (Bala: R. Sanderson, 1809). I am grateful to Profesor Densil Morgan of Lampeter for this reference.

case this time, in the manner of Fuller, was that the benefits of the atonement are universal.³⁴ Roberts was advocating a moderate Calvinist body of theology, differing on the one hand from the Arminianism of the Wesleyan Methodists and the high Calvinism that prevailed in Wales. He identified it as identical with Edward Williams's position, reporting to his former tutor that hundreds of 'our poor Welsh pious people' approved his views.³⁵ This 'New System', as it was called, grew rapidly in favour and gave the impetus to the rapid expansion of the Congregationalists in north Wales. In the south of the principality David Davies, tutor at the college in Carmarthen from 1835 to 1855, did much to propagate the views of Williams.³⁶ The high standing of Edwards in the estimation of the school of Edward Williams gave rise to a demand for the publication of Edwards's works in Welsh. A succession of titles appeared: the *History of Redemption* in 1829, the *Religious Affections* in 1833, the *Freedom of the Will* in 1865, the *Two Dissertations* at about the same time and *Original Sin* in 1870.³⁷ Each of them was translated by a Congregational minister. Virtually the whole Welsh denomination became committed to the standpoint of Jonathan Edwards.

The most distinguished student of Edward Williams was John Pye Smith, tutor at the Congregationalists' Homerton Academy in London from 1800 onwards and president from 1806 to 1850. Pye Smith was most celebrated for his book *The Scripture Testimony to the Messiah* (1818-21), a powerful refutation of Unitarian belief, but was a remarkable polymath, publishing on geology and the Bible in 1839 and mounting a reasoned defence of pacifism before it became respectable.³⁸ He thought nothing of delivering a lecture at the opening of a series on the divine decrees in 1832 with an elaborate statement about the gradual communication of revelation. His diary records that on that occasion he gave an 'Account of the theory of Spinoza, Simon, Beck, De Wette, Vater, Gesenius, Gramberg, & Hartman,

³⁴ Evans, *Welsh Theology*, pp. 131-2.

³⁵ Gilbert, *Edward Williams*, p. 442.

³⁶ *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* (Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1959), p. 114.

³⁷ Johnson, *Printed Works*, pp. 90, 43, 71, 82, 76.

³⁸ Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *New College, London, and its Library* (London: Dr Williams's Trust, 1977), p. 10.

concerning the O. T.³⁹ Pye Smith continued Williams's enterprise of propagating Edwards's views. The London tutor's regular lectures on systematic theology made frequent reference to Edwards's collected works but also to other writings, the *Miscellaneous Observations* (1793) and the *Remarks on Important Theological Controversies* (1796). Pye Smith endeavoured to explain Edwards's terminology in language more comprehensible to his students, for example by turning the American's definition of virtue as 'love for being in general' into 'voluntary obedience to the known will of God'. In his zeal to communicate the substance of Edwards's teaching, he went so far as to criticise Edward Williams's notes. His admiration for Edwards shines through the lectures. On natural depravity he comments that 'President Edwards has so established and elucidated the subject as, in my humble opinion, to leave no just ground for doubt'. Since Pye Smith also valued the piety of the New Englander, he also recommended his students to read Edwards's resolutions for life '*frequently, and with self-application*'.⁴⁰ Because of his role in teaching students for half a century, the influence of Pye Smith was pervasive in his denomination. Two of the first three tutors at the Lancashire Independent College, founded in 1843 to strengthen Congregational witness in the north-west of England, were Pye Smith's trainees.⁴¹ In the next decade Pye Smith's bust was placed in the new library of Spring Hill College, Birmingham.⁴² When one of his former students went out with the London Missionary Society to India, a portrait of Pye Smith was the most conspicuous object in the drawing room of the missionary's home in Bangalore.⁴³ This highly influential figure cast his weight behind the intellectual synthesis provided by Edwards.

It is true that the sway of Edwards was not uniform across Congregationalism. Thus when F. J. Falding was inaugurated as president of its Rotherham College in 1853, he

³⁹ Diary of John Pye Smith, Congregational Library, London, L/18/23, 26 March 1832.

⁴⁰ John Pye Smith, *First Principles of Christian Theology*, ed. William Farrer (London: Jackson and Walford, 1854), pp. 354, 155, 389, 5.

⁴¹ Frederick J. Powicke, *David Worthington Simon* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), p. 77.

⁴² Elaine Kaye, *Mansfield College, Oxford: Its Origin, History and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 20.

⁴³ Edward P. Rice, *Benjamin Rice or Fifty Years in the Master's Service* (London: Religious Tract Society, n.d.), p. 20.

declared ‘his decided preference for the older English theology’.⁴⁴ By that he meant Owen and Howe, Bunyan and Baxter, the Puritan divines of the age before Edwards. Others such as the prominent publicist John Campbell shared a taste for the Puritans.⁴⁵ Again, in the 1860s candidates for Airedale College were expected to show some knowledge of A. A. Hodge’s *Outlines of Theology*, which inculcated a much sterner form of Calvinism than that of the New England school stemming from Edwards.⁴⁶ Yet the predominant debt of Congregational theologians for much of the century was to the Edwardsean approach. David Bogue, president of Gosport Academy in Hampshire, referred to Edwards more than to any other author in his lectures and, as the chief trainer of candidates for the London Missionary society in the first quarter of the century, laid stress on the life of Brainerd as an exemplar.⁴⁷ George Payne, tutor of the Western Academy in Exeter and then Plymouth from 1829 to 1848, was deeply swayed by Edward Williams, with whom he corresponded before 1812, and owed much directly to Edwards. Payne’s *Lectures on Divine Sovereignty, Election, the Atonement, Justification and Regeneration*, published in 1836, the year he held the chair of the Congregational Union, transmitted the same outlook to others.⁴⁸ Ralph Wardlaw, who taught at the Glasgow Congregational Academy from 1811, produced the nearest approximation to an Edwardsean body of divinity for Congregationalism in his *Systematic Theology* (1856-57), and his three-volume treatise was used at both Airedale and Lancashire Independent Colleges shortly after publication.⁴⁹ But perhaps the greatest Congregational advocate of Edwards was Henry Rogers, an erudite man with an attractive personality who briefly in the 1830s held the chair of English Language and Literature at the new University

⁴⁴ *British Banner*, 21 September 1853, p. 681.

⁴⁵ Robert Ferguson and A. Morton Brown, *Life and Labours of John Campbell* (London: Richard Bentley, 18667), p. 404.

⁴⁶ Lucy A. Fraser, *Memoirs of Daniel Fraser, M. A., LL. D. (Glasgow)* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., 1905), p. 71.

⁴⁷ David Bogue, *Lectures on Theology*, Congregational Library, London, L14/3. I am grateful to Dr Cullen Clark for this reference.

⁴⁸ Kaye, *Mansfield College*, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Ralph Wardlaw, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1856-57). Kaye, *Mansfield College*, p. 108. *Lancashire Independent College... Report ...1859* (Manchester: Septimus Fletcher, 1860), p.10.

College, London, before going on to the Congregational Spring Hill College, Birmingham, (1840) and Lancashire Independent College (1858), where he served as president. Unusually for a Dissenter, Rogers was accepted as a man of letters in society at large.⁵⁰ Consequently his edition of Edwards's works, the standard Victorian version, containing a discriminating introductory essay, was a respected monument to the American theologian. It confirmed the importance of Edwards to the British branches of the denomination to which he had belonged.

In Scottish Presbyterianism the reputation of Edwards had been established by John Erskine during the eighteenth century, but it was Thomas Chalmers, the leader of the Evangelical party within the Church of Scotland in the early nineteenth century, who did most to disseminate the perspective of the American. As a student at St Andrews University Chalmers grappled with the *Freedom of the Will*, a text valued by his professor of divinity, George Hill, who, though not an Evangelical, saw Edwards as a capable champion of Reformed doctrine, especially on original sin.⁵¹ After Chalmers's subsequent embracing of Evangelical faith, Edwards came alive for him. 'The American divine', Chalmers wrote in 1821, 'affords, perhaps, the most wondrous example, in modern times, of one who stood richly gifted both in natural and in spiritual discernment.' Edwards combined 'deep philosophy' with a 'humble and child-like piety', showing that Evangelicals could deploy an acute intelligence in the service of the gospel.⁵² Like so many of his contemporaries, Chalmers found in Edwards the solution to the resolution of the debate between freedom and necessity and so a vindication of moderate Calvinism.⁵³ There was no book he recommended more strenuously, he avowed, than Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*.⁵⁴ As professor of divinity at Edinburgh from 1828 to 1843 and afterwards as the undisputed leader of the Free

⁵⁰ *Congregationalist*, 6 (1877), pp. 654-64.

⁵¹ George Hill, *Lectures in Divinity*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: For Waugh and Innes, 1821), 2, p. 372; 3, p. 101.

⁵² Thomas Chalmers, *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, 3 vols in 1 (Glasgow: For William Collins, n.d.), 1, p. 318.

⁵³ [Thomas Chalmers], 'Edwards' Inquiry, with Introductory Essay', *Presbyterian Review*, 2 (1831), pp. 252-3.

⁵⁴ Conforti, *Edwards, Religious Tradition & American Culture*, p. 52.

Church of Scotland, Chalmers set the doctrinal tone of Scottish Presbyterianism. His influence extended more widely too. Chalmers's *Prelections*, in which he argued for Edwards against his own former professor Hill, was used at the Congregationalists' New College in 1854.⁵⁵ Joseph Angus, who was to lead Regent's Park College for the Baptists and take a favourable view of Edwards, attended Chalmers's lectures in Edinburgh.⁵⁶ Lewis Edwards, a theologian who came to exercise unparalleled sway over the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales, also studied at Edinburgh and made Chalmers his hero.⁵⁷ Chalmers reinforced the sway of Jonathan Edwards over theological minds throughout Britain.

The Presbyterians of Scotland showed an enduring appreciation of Edwards. Two extra volumes of the theologian's works were published in Edinburgh to add to the Edward Williams edition in 1847 and they were reissued in 1875.⁵⁸ The practical and devotional works also appeared in fresh editions from the Scottish press. The *Life of Brainerd*, which stimulated the Scottish minister Robert Murray McCheyne to throw himself into missionary work, was republished in five new Scottish editions between 1824 and 1851.⁵⁹ Edwards's *Religious Affections* was widely valued by the Presbyterians of the middle years of the century.⁶⁰ The Evangelical Calvinism of Edwards, as transmitted through Chalmers, continued to exercise its sway. William Cunningham, Chalmers's successor as principal of the Free Church college in Edinburgh, praised Edwards's 'great work on Original Sin'.⁶¹ In resisting the critique of Calvinism by Sir William Hamilton, the leading Scottish philosopher of his day, Cunningham denied on Edwardsean grounds that necessity implied fatalism. Yet, he surmised, the doctrine of necessity did seem likely, because the argument of Edwards

⁵⁵ Thomas Chalmers, *Prelections on Butler's Analogy, Paley's Evidences of Christianity and Hill's Lectures in Divinity* (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1849), p. 131. *New College, London...Report...1854* (n.p.: no pub., 1854), p. 8.

⁵⁶ Ian Randall, 'Conscientious Conviction': *Joseph Angus (1816-1902) and Nineteenth-Century Baptist Life* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2010), p. 2.

⁵⁷ *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, p. 191.

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Printed Works*, p. 112.

⁵⁹ Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (Dundee: William Middleton, 1844), p. 19. Johnson, *Printed Works*, pp. 54-8.

⁶⁰ *Congregationalist and Christian World*, 3 October 1903, p. 467.

⁶¹ William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1870), 1, p. 339.

against the self-determining power of the will had not been answered.⁶² Cunningham's colleague in the Free Church college, John Duncan, expressed his admiration that 'Jonathan Edwards and the New-Englanders' managed to combine the elements of law and ethics that other theologians prised apart. Edwards, he believed, contained elements of pantheism, a view that, because of early sympathies for that position, Duncan appreciated.⁶³ Nineteenth-century Presbyterians respected Edwards for a variety of reasons, but there is no doubt that he continued to occupy a firm place in their affections.

The Church of England had a less vigorous tradition of Reformed theology. Despite the firm attachment of its Reformers and many subsequent seventeenth-century divines to Calvinist doctrine, in the eighteenth century the principles of Calvin were associated with the Puritans who had killed King Charles I. Consequently the early Evangelicals who adopted a Calvinist position commonly played down their allegiance, preferring to stress their loyalty to Bible teaching. Jonathan Edwards also seemed too much of a metaphysician for many of them. John Newton, the former slave ship captain who became one of the most influential Evangelical clergy, at first enthused over Edwards, but subsequently regretted recommending his *Freedom of the Will* because the American school was too addicted to 'Scheme, System, & Notion'.⁶⁴ Thomas Scott, known as a biblical commentator but also a writer on doctrine, explained the distinction between natural and moral inability in a way clearly indebted to Edwards, and yet avoided mentioning the American.⁶⁵ One of the Evangelical Anglicans most attached to Edwards was Isaac Taylor, a *littérateur* of interdenominational sympathies, who in 1831 issued an edition of the *Freedom of the Will* which compared the American's 'athletic force of intellect' to that of Aristotle. He went further. 'We claim Edwards as an

⁶² William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1862), pp. 471, 512.

⁶³ David Brown, *Life of the Late John Duncan, LL.D.* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872), p. 69.

⁶⁴ Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 167, 154.

⁶⁵ Thomas Scott, *Remarks on the Doctrines of Original Sin, Grace, Free-Will, Justification by Faith, Election and Reprobation, and the Final Perseverance of the Saints*, 2nd edn (London: A. Macintosh, 1817), p. 94.

Englishman', he wrote: 'he was such in every respect but the accident of birth in a distant province of the empire.'⁶⁶ Taylor praised Edwards for redeeming Calvinistic doctrines from scorn, yet was wary of the abstract metaphysics so prominent in the New Englander's pages. The controversy over freewill, Taylor claimed, did not affect common life. Nor had Edwards settled the debate with the Arminians. Instead pious Calvinists and pious Arminians, Taylor predicted, would meet on the common ground of the Bible.⁶⁷ Taylor held similar views to those of Charles Simeon, the Cambridge don who set the course of mainstream Anglican evangelicals in the first half of the nineteenth century. Simeon repudiated the theoretical structure of Calvinism for the sake of insisting on the teaching of scripture alone. 'Be Bible Christians', he urged, 'not system Christians'.⁶⁸ For most Evangelicals in the Church of England, Edwards did not erect the theological framework of their thinking that was so powerful among non-Anglicans.

Yet the relative weakness of Edwards's doctrinal influence does not mean that Anglicans failed to value him. The *Life of Brainerd* was the inspiration for the quixotic journey of Henry Martyn as a pioneer missionary to Iran.⁶⁹ Through Martyn's example, Brainerd became the model for many another Anglican missionary of the nineteenth century. Josiah Pratt, secretary of the Church Missionary Society from 1802 to 1824, abridged Edwards's *Life of Brainerd* for publication and his successor as secretary, Edward Bickersteth, issued a fresh edition in 1834.⁷⁰ The other text by Edwards to achieve wide popularity among Anglicans was the *Religious Affections*. In 1802 William Wilberforce found it an 'excellent book'. It used 'simple and clear' reasoning to make 'close scrutiny of

⁶⁶ Isaac Taylor, 'Introductory Essay', in Jonathan Edwards, *An Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions respecting the Freedom of the Will* (London: James Duncan, 1831), pp. xx, xxi n.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xxv, xxvi, xlii, lii.

⁶⁸ Abner W. Brown, *Recollections of the Conversation Parties of the Rev. Charles Simeon, M. A.* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1863), p. 269.

⁶⁹ Conforti, *Edwards, Religious Tradition & American Culture*, p. 69n.

⁷⁰ Josiah Pratt, *The Life of the Rev. David Brainerd* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1834), p. vii.

the heart, and accurate observations of its workings'.⁷¹ Charles Bradley, shortly to become incumbent at St John's, Clapham, through Wilberforce's patronage, published an edition of *Religious Affections* in 1827, claiming it as the most valuable of Edwards's works. 'Indeed', he wrote, 'there is not a work in the English language, in which a greater knowledge of the human heart is manifested'.⁷² Nor did esteem for the *Religious Affections* fade away in the second half of the century. J. C. Ryle, Bishop of Liverpool from 1880 to 1900, also highly estimated its worth.⁷³ Thus Edwards was respected among Anglican evangelicals more for his encouragement of Christian activism and devotion than for his divinity. They aligned with the Methodists, who, as Arminians, maintained a principled objection to Edwards's doctrinal position while appreciating his practical works. The standard nineteenth-century edition of the *Life of Brainerd* was an adaptation of John Wesley's drastic abridgement.⁷⁴ Edwards formed the piety of Evangelicals even when he did not mould their theology.

Edwards, however, did not go unscathed by criticism. Because of his wide influence, opponents of Calvinism sometimes singled him out for censure. In 1827 Edward Grinfield, a traditional High Churchman associated with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, condemned Edwards's *History of Redemption*, which he described as 'one of the most popular manuals of Calvinistic Theology', for showing narrowness in restricting salvation to the elect.⁷⁵ Later in the century the eminent theologian F. D. Maurice, the most significant inspirer of the Broad Church tradition in the Church of England, offered strong praise for the *Freedom of the Will*. This philosophical formulation of Old Calvinism, Maurice wrote in 1862, 'still remains its most original and in some respects its most important product'. Yet Maurice went on to offer trenchant criticism of its capitulation to eighteenth-century modes

⁷¹ Robert I. and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 5 vols (London: John Murray, 1839), 3, p. 66.

⁷² Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise concerning the Religious Affections in Three Parts* (London: for L. B. Seeley and Son, 1827), ed. Charles Bradley, p. vii.

⁷³ John C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 3rd edn (London: William Hunt and Co., 1887), p. vi.

⁷⁴ Conforti, *Edwards, Religious Tradition & American Culture*, p. 69.

⁷⁵ Edward W. Grinfield, *The Nature and Extent of the Christian Dispensation with reference to the Salvability of the Heathen* (London: For C. & J. Rivington, 1827), pp. 427-8, quoted at p. 427.

of thought by depicting the Almighty as a ‘happy Being’ with no participation in the miseries of his creatures. The incarnation of the ‘Man of sorrows’, the express image of his Father, revealed on the contrary, according to Maurice, that God feels intense sympathy for suffering humanity.⁷⁶ Maurice heralded a revolution in theology, a shift from a cross-centred perspective associated with Evangelicals to a more liberal way of thinking focused on the incarnation. Two of the other leading figures in the transformation, both Scots, developed their ideas by critiquing Edwards. Thomas Erskine, who wrote *The Doctrine of Election* (1837) as a lay Episcopalian, praised Edwards as ‘a good and holy man’ but argued that *Freedom of the Will* mistakenly appealed to logic rather than conscience. It therefore limited the love of God to a few, whereas the coming of Jesus to earth showed that his Father was ‘the common Father of men, prodigals and all’. Hence Edwards’s book was ‘directly opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ’.⁷⁷ Erskine’s friend John McLeod Campbell, deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland and subsequently a Congregationalist, undertook a sophisticated analysis of Calvinist teaching in his book *The Nature of the Atonement* (1856). McLeod Campbell found Edwards more satisfactory than later writers of the same school such as Pye Smith and Chalmers, but ultimately condemned him for describing the work of Christ in the language of the law rather than the family.⁷⁸ Both critics were attacking the whole Calvinist tradition, but recognised that Edwards was among its most powerful advocates. Edwards remained a representative figure even for those who broke from the school that he defended.

The Edwardsean paradigm was gradually supplanted on both sides of the Atlantic in the later years of the nineteenth century. In his classic study of the process in America, Frank H. Foster dated the crucial shift to the years 1880-95. At the start of that period the New

⁷⁶ Frederick D. Maurice, *Modern Philosophy* (London: Griffin, Bohn and Co., 1862), pp. 469, 470-1.

⁷⁷ Thomas Erskine, *The Doctrine of Election*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1878), pp. 347, 348 (quoted).

⁷⁸ John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, introd. Edgar P. Dickie (London: James Clarke and Co., 1959), pp. 50-1, 72, 101.

England theology stemming from Edwards reigned in the seminaries of the Congregationalists; by the end, it had vanished.⁷⁹ The last vigorous exponent of the New England scheme, Edwards A. Park, retired as president of Andover seminary in 1868 and as professor of theology there in 1881, and within five years it was rocked by a controversy over the liberal position upheld by those in command of the institution.⁸⁰ In Britain there was a parallel process. Thomas Crisp retired as president of Bristol Baptist Academy in 1868 and Henry Rogers as president of Lancashire Independent College in 1869. Both were exponents of Edwards's general standpoint. The Leicester Conference controversy of 1877-78 over the possibility of defining the bounds of Christian fellowship by religious experience rather than doctrine, a position inimical to Edwards's point of view, showed the emergence of a significant school of theological liberals within Congregationalism by that date. In 1880 R. W. Dale, emerging as the denomination's leading theologian, pronounced Calvinism dead.⁸¹ Nevertheless what requires stress is the enduring influence of the moderate Calvinism stemming from Edwards. At some of the colleges it was still dominant until late in the century. It was being taught by Robert Thomas at the Congregationalists' Bala College down to his retirement in 1880 and by Joseph Angus at the Baptists' Regent's Park College down to 1892.⁸² Those trained at these and similar institutions would have ministries that extended long afterwards. Although a number of them would no doubt modify the views they had imbibed at college, others would not. Some would certainly have preached essentially Edwardsean theology until well into the twentieth century.

The virtual silence of the secondary literature about the legacy of Jonathan Edwards in Britain is unjustified. Commentators during the nineteenth century were well aware of the stature of the American theologian and his works were in wide demand. Edwards and his

⁷⁹ Frank H. Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1907).

⁸⁰ Daniel D. Williams, *Andover Liberals: A Study in American Theology* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1941).

⁸¹ Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), chap. 3, p. 53.

⁸² *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, p. 963. Cooper, *From Stepney to St Giles*, p. 71.

successors in the tradition of New England theology enabled ministers to adapt their inherited Calvinism to the enlightened spirit of the age. In the eighteenth century Edwards was warmly received by several groups including the Baptists who launched the modern missionary movement. In particular, his distinction between natural and moral inability provided a way of reconciling the divine sovereignty of Calvinism with the imperative to preach the gospel. Andrew Fuller and the tutors of the Baptist colleges adopted his moderate Calvinist standpoint, though there was resistance, especially in south Wales. The Congregationalists were led in the same direction by Edward Williams, whose views scored a notable triumph in Wales. John Pye Smith propagated Edwards's position, as did other tutors within the Congregational denomination. Thomas Chalmers was primarily responsible for a vogue for Edwards in Scotland, where his writings were widely appreciated. In the Church of England there was less enthusiasm for the theological core of Edwards's teaching, but Anglican Evangelicals, like Methodists, valued his missionary and devotional texts. Critics of Calvinism naturally turned their fire on Edwards because he was seen as its champion. As a more liberal theology came into fashion, Edwardseanism faded in Britain, just as it did in the United States, but some trained in that moderate Calvinist tradition will have retained their principles into the twentieth century. Later in that century there was to be a revival of interest in Jonathan Edwards through the work of Martyn Lloyd-Jones and the Banner of Truth Trust. Edwards once more became a favoured theologian.⁸³ At an earlier period, however, and over a long time, Edwards provided the foundations for the normative scheme of Evangelical Calvinist theology. Jonathan Edwards exerted a profound effect on Britain.

⁸³ Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones (eds), *Engaging with Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Life and Legacy of 'the Doctor'* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2011).