

**A REVIEW OF DR. A.V.G.
ALLEN'S BIOGRAPHY OF
JONATHAN EDWARDS**

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A review of Dr. A.V.G. Allen's biography of Jonathan Edwards by J. W. Wellman

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*With the sincerest regards of
J. P. P.*

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OF

DR. A. V. G. ALLEN'S BIOGRAPHY
OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

BY
REV. J. W. WELLMAN, D. D.

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A NEW BIOGRAPHY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS.¹

THE publishing house of Houghton, Mifflin and Company has generously planned to issue three series of biographies. One series gives account of American Men of Letters, another of American Statesmen, and yet another of American Religious Leaders. So far as this plan shall prove to have been judiciously executed, these publishers will again have made the reading public largely their debtors. This announcement is made of the third series:—

It will include biographies of eminent men who represent the theology and methods of the various religious denominations of America, yet the object of the Series does not contemplate emphasizing personal character and history except as these are related to the development of religious thought or the quickening of religious life.

The success of this series, however it may be with the other two, will depend almost entirely upon the ability of the publishers to select and procure writers who shall be, not only able and scholarly, but also happily fitted to present *justly* the beliefs and labors of the religious leaders assigned to them. It is indispensable that the biographer of a great theologian should have some sympathy with the religious beliefs which he is to define and set in order for the information of the public. Biography is not criticism. It deals with facts, with actual personal life, faith, and achievements. Few men are stronger than their prejudices, especially their theological prejudices. No one, perhaps, has the moral ability to write with exact truthfulness of theological beliefs which he abominates. The religious world would be startled to hear that Robert Ingersoll had written *The Life of Moses Stuart*, or that Dr. Herrick Johnson had written *The Life of Theodore Parker*. A similar sensation

¹ AMERICAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS: JONATHAN EDWARDS, a Biography. By Alexander V. G. Allen, D. D., Professor in the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Mass. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company; The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1889.

was quite general in the theological world, when it was announced that Dr. A. V. G. Allen was the author of a new Biography of Jonathan Edwards, for Dr. Allen with all his eminence as a scholar and writer belongs to a school of religious thought which is violently and even bitterly opposed to the theology of Edwards and of his followers. Professor Allen, invited to write the life of Jonathan Edwards, felt at liberty to write as a critic, yet evidently not without a latent conviction that it was hardly congruous for *him* to put into critical statement, for the information of the public, a theology at which his whole nature revolted. He says:—

The aim of my work is a critical one. . . . Criticism, however, should be sympathetic to a certain extent with its object, or it will lack insight and appreciation. I have not found myself devoid of sympathy with one who has filled so large a place in the minds of the New England people. Edwards is always and everywhere interesting, whatever we may think of his theology. (Preface, pp. v, vi.)

This must be understood to be a gentle warning to the reader, that the author will be found to have written, not as a biographer, but as a critic, and with no sympathy whatever with the Edwardian theology. But how, then, according to his own confession, can he fail to "lack insight and appreciation"?

In recent years, a few men in Scotland, a few in England, and a few in our own country, chiefly in New England, have been attempting, not always by honorable methods, to promulgate what is variously called, "Advanced Thought," "The fresh thought of to-day," "The New Departure," "The New Theology," "Progressive Orthodoxy." Dr. Allen, so far as we know, has given no intimation of his approval of certain dishonorable methods which have been adopted to force this "New Theology" upon the acceptance of Christian churches and other Christian institutions. But all the same, he belongs theologically with this class of men. He is laboring for the general abandonment of what has commonly been called the evangelical faith, and for the adoption, in its place, of another gospel which the great mass of orthodox Christians believe to be a false gospel and hazardous to the souls of men. It is a radical and cardinal doctrine in the evangelical faith that men are divided into two

classes, the regenerate and the unregenerate; that men in their natural or unregenerate state are at enmity with God, separate from Christ, who Himself is declared to be separate from sinners; and that no man can come into spiritual and vital union with Christ except through the new birth, repentance, and faith in Christ as his Lord and Redeemer. But the radical and cardinal principle in the supplanting faith which is proposed is, that men are not divided into two classes, the regenerate and the unregenerate; that no member of the human race is separate from Christ; that all men are organically, constitutionally, and inseparably united to Christ; and that they are thus united to Him without the new birth or any other spiritual or moral change, and previous to any personal repentance, or personal faith in the Lord Jesus. Some of these advanced divines are fond of describing this fundamental principle of their theology as the Divine Immanence, or the indwelling of Deity, in all men. This notion is emphasized to the disparagement of the Divine Transcendence. Sometimes it seems to be denied that God has any existence above, or apart from, the world and men. The great and grand biblical doctrine of the Divine Omnipresence is not recognized. It is strangely assumed that we are compelled to choose between the theory of the organic union and real identification of God with the world, and the theory that God exists only in absolute separation from the world, far above and away from it, in lonely isolation, leaving the world to be governed by the power of established laws and second causes. These men, with irreverent audacity, are thus contemptuously forgetful of the sublime revelation in the Scriptures, that God, in the entirety of his personality, is everywhere in the world and beyond the world, and that He is thus omnipresent without any organic union or identification of his being with what He has created, and without the least loss of his distinct personality.

But most of these advanced thinkers, so called, have thus far confined their thought to the union and identification of God in Christ with the *human race*. Christ, they say, is in every man, and every man is in Christ. No man exists apart from Christ. Humanity is the body of which Christ is the Head.

Every member of the human race, by virtue of that membership, is a member of the body of Christ. The Church, which is the body of Christ, is the human race in its *solidarity*. This solidarity of the race is emphasized. Individualism is despised and discarded, and this, in the face of the fact, that it is constantly insisted upon and emphasized in the teachings of Christ and the apostles, and, indeed, is made conspicuous everywhere in the Bible.

Two things should be said of this radical and dominating principle, in the new theology, of the organic union and actual identification of Christ with the human race. First, it is Universalism. If all men are organically and constitutionally united to Christ, then no man can perish unless so much of the very soul, or essence of Christ perishes. Can a man be a member of the imperishable body of Christ and not be saved? But all men are members of Christ's body, therefore all are saved. It would be frank and honest, on the part of new-departure men, if they would say openly that their belief is Universalism, and would preach it explicitly *as* Universalism. It is anything but frank and honorable to conceal this fact, or to deny it. Secondly, this notion of the identification of Christ with the human race is pantheistical. It belongs to that system of philosophy which holds that God and the world are identical. This philosophy is pantheism, *pagan* pantheism. To hold that God in Christ is organically and constitutionally united to the human race *tends* to pantheism, or, in other words, is pantheistical. It is pantheistic Universalism. No other name can more accurately or justly describe it. A few new-departure men are frank enough to admit that pantheism is the root of their theology. Rev. J. B. Heard, in his book, entitled, "Old and New Theology," affirms that the New Theology must be called "Christian Pantheism" (p. 58). To prefix the word "Christian," however, does not change the theology. It is pantheism still. A concert of music, which, when given on the evenings of the six working days of the week, is known by everybody to be a concert of *secular* music, is not changed in character by being given on Sabbath evening and called a concert of *sacred* music. The prefixing of the word "sacred" is only designed

to deceive simple-minded people. So when the new theology is called by some of its advocates "Christian Pantheism," it is not changed in the least by prefixing the word "Christian." It may deceive a few unwary minds, but all the same, it is pantheism.

Dr. Allen accepts and is attempting to revive the theology, long dead, of certain Greek Fathers, and he admits that "the Christ of the early Church," as he calls it, meaning the Greek Church, "is organically related to nature and to man," — not only to man, but to *nature*, to the world (p. 357). Such doctrine is not merely pantheistical, it is *pantheism*; it is not distinctively Christian pantheism, it is *pantheism*, simple and pure. Some of these retrogressive theologians, though self-styled, in certain quarters, progressives, are fond of telling us, in vague and unintelligible phrase, that "Christ is the conscience of humanity," yet that this conscience is not individual, but diffused through the entire human race. The one great human conscience, according to this conception of it, is possessed by no one man, but, as a vast, monstrous mentor, envelops and possesses all human beings alike, the dead as well as the living. Says Principal Shairp, in his reminiscences of one of the chief leaders in this school, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: —

The conscience in each man is the Christ in each man. It is the ray of light coming straight from the great Fountain of light. . . . The universal diffusion of conscience through all men is Christ in all men, — "Christ in you the hope of glory." "There is in each man a continual inflowing of the Logos. It is by virtue of Christ being in all men that conscience is universal in men." "It is of the true nature of conscience not to be individual. Conscience is not mine; I am conscience's. Each man does not possess it, but is possessed by it. It speaks in virtue of a higher light than itself, of which it declares itself to be but a ray. . . . Therefore this light never can cut itself off from its source, for this would be to abdicate its own nature." "Christ is the great universal conscience." He "is, as it were, again incarnate in each man." "Christ came once, and was made manifest eighteen hundred years ago; but both before and since that time He has been, as it were, diffused through humanity, lying at the bottom of every man as the basis of his being." ("Letters of Thomas Erskine," pp. 515-519.)