

In 1727 he was appointed assistant minister to his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, the renowned minister of the church at Northampton, Massachusetts. Two years later, when Stoddard died, Edwards became chief minister to the congregation, a position he filled for more than twenty years. At Northampton, he stirred his congregation into a series of intense religious "awakenings," revivals that achieved a climax during the Great Awakening; the eighteenth-century religious wildfire that burned the length of the Colonies, from New England to Georgia.

Stunned by the violence of the "awakening," Edwards warned against the excesses of emotion-torn congregations. He attacked the "beastly brayings" of revival preachers who stirred their listeners into striking mobs. But he also welcomed the Great Awakening as a way to lift religion out of the cool formalism into which Puritanism had declined. He sought to teach men and women their utter dependence on God and to arouse their yearning for an inner sense of God's spirit. Sermons like his "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" terrorized his listeners with visions of unregenerate men helplessly damned over the pit of hell by a wrathful God, but Edwards intended not to dismay his listeners; rather he wanted to awaken in them a true sense of their sins and to prepare them to receive God's grace.

Edwards' preaching brought him renown throughout New England as the "greatest pillar in this part of Zion's building." "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" became the most famous (even notorious) sermon in American history. But the Great Awakening eventually collapsed from its own excesses and from the exhaustion of its believers. Doctrinal disputes arose from its ruins. At Northampton, arguments over church membership and public resentment of Edwards' indictments of backsliders created a furor that led to his dismissal.

In 1751 he left his congregation to become minister in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, an Indian mission village on the western frontier. There, retired from the controversies of Northampton (though new exasperations beset him in Stockbridge), he wrote his greatest and most complex philosophical works, including *Freedom of the Will* (1754), *The Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758), and *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765). They were strenuous efforts to show the relations between religious emotions and virtue, and they attempted to resolve the question of the existence of free will in a predestined universe. Publication of his great works brought Edwards renown far beyond the limits of New England. In 1758, he became the president of Princeton, but after less than two months in office, and while he was at the peak of his powers as a theologian, the "arousal of death" flew "unseen at noon," and he died abruptly from a smallpox inoculation that went bad.

At Edwards' death, more than a thousand sermons, notebooks (including *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*), and fragments of longer works still remained unpublished. But in his lifetime he had published nine major works and numerous sermons, written in close-textured, precise prose that qualifies him as the most sensitive stylist of American Puritanism. He became, aside from Benjamin Franklin, the most influential of all colonial American writers.

Edwards was the country's greatest theologian, one of the most penetrating minds ever produced in America. His faith was both mystical and logical. He taught that the world was moving toward a millennium that would begin in America. He preached the power of God and the depravity of man, and he argued that God's grace might be recognized by the mystical, inward "supernatural sense" that God gave to regenerate believers.

Edwards was a brilliant anachronism who refurbished Calvinism, he thought, for a new life. But he demanded faith in divine omnipotence and in human limita-

the Enlightenment and the age of romanticism, the exaltation of man and the worship of nature become articles of faith. The power of Edwards' teaching declined. His words filled the shelves of libraries but no longer the minds of the people he had yearned to save. For his knowledge of the new science and the new psychology, for his awareness of a world lighted by Newton and revealed by Locke, Edwards has been called the first modern American. But as a relic of Puritanism, oppressed by the thunderbolts of God, he remains America's last great medieval man.

FURTHER READING: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. J. Smith et al., 23 vols. to date, 1994; *Jonathan Edwards' Scientific and Philosophical Writing*, ed. W. Anderson, 1980; C. Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 1990; G. McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society, The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 1992; S. Yarbrough and J. Adams, *Delightful Conviction, Jonathan Edwards and the Rhetoric of Conversion*, 1993; S. Daniel, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards*, 1994; *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. J. Smith and H. Stout, 1995; J. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture*, 1996; L. Chai, *Jonathan Edwards and the Limits of Enlightenment Philosophy*, 1998; G. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 2000; S. Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards, A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*, 2001; R. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 2002; G. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life*, 2003.

TEXT: *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, ed. P. Miller, 1948. Other texts are from *The Works of President Edwards*, ed. S. Dwight, 10 vols., 1829–1830. Spelling, punctuation, and usage have been changed to conform more nearly to modern practice.

SARAH PIERREPONT¹

They say there is a young lady [in New Haven] who is loved of that Great Being, who made and rules the world; and that there are certain seasons in which this Great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight; and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on Him; that she expects after a while to be received up where He is, to be raised up out of the world and caught up into heaven, being assured that He loves her too well to let her remain at a distance from Him always. There she is to dwell with Him, and to be ravished with His love and delight forever. Therefore, if you present all the world before her, with the richest of its treasures, she disregards it, and cares not for it, and is unmindful of any pain or affliction. She has a strange sweetness in her mind and singular purity in her affections; is most just and conscientious in all her conduct; and you could not persuade her to do anything wrong or sinful, if you would give her all the world, lest she should offend this Great Being. She is of a wonderful sweetness, calmness, and universal benevolence of mind, especially after this Great God has manifested Himself to her mind. She will sometimes go about from place to place, singing sweetly; and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure; and no one knows for what. She loves to be alone, walking in the fields and groves, and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her.

1729

1829

¹Edwards' future wife. At the time he wrote this brief tribute, Edwards was twenty and Sarah