

L

Samuel Hopkins.

We are approaching a critical, and a disintegrating period in the history of New England theological thought as it has developed within the Congregational Churches.

We have already seen how the movement has exhibited two tendencies, one marked by Channing and the liberals, and the other by Edwards and the reactionists. In Edwards we have seen a tendency towards speculative theology which gave rather undue freedom to the imagination, and left out of consideration the facts of life, and had no place for the ordinary common sense. In Samuel Hopkins of Great Barrington, we have a man who carried this speculative, unreal system of theology to its full limit. In his theological system sometimes spoken of as the Berkeleyan

12

Divinity, there is a system of thought about
as far removed from human life as one could
wish. Edwards represented two ideas. (1) his
emphasis upon the ethical side of religion, i.e. the
moral fruits of the spirit. (2) his mystical idea
of man's relation to a sovereign God. Hopkins
follows in Edwards' path, emphasizing the
moral fruits of the spirit in what he calls
disinterested benevolence.

Hopkins wrote an account of his own life
and I quote his own words. "I was born
at Waterbury Connecticut on the Lord's day,
Sept. 17. 1721. My parents were professors of
religion; and I was descended from Christian
ancestors, both by my father and my mother
as far back as I have been able to trace my
descent.... As soon as I was capable of
understanding, and attending to it, I was
told that my father, when he was in-
formed that he had a son born to him
said, if the child should live, he would

32

give him a public education, that he might
be a minister or a Sabbath day man, alluding
to my being born on the sabbath." ^{P. 23. 24 & 25.}
At the age of 16 he entered Yale, and thus
speaks of his college life.

While a member of the college, I believe, I had
the character of a sober studious youth, and
of a better scholar than the bigger half of my
the members of that society; and had the
approbation of the governors of the college.
I avoided the intimacy and company of
the worldly vicious: and indeed kept but
little company, being attentive to my studies.
In the eighteenth or nineteenth year of my
age, I cannot now certainly determine which,
I made a profession of religion, and joined the
church to which my parents belonged in Waterbury.
I was senior, and was thought to be a pious
youth, and I had this thought and hope of myself.
I was constant in reading the Bible, and in
attending on public and secret religion.

And sometimes at night, in my retirement⁴ and devotion, when I thought of confessing the sin I had been guilty of that day, and asking pardon, I could not recollect that I had committed one sin that day. Thus ignorant was I of my own heart, and of the spirituality, strictness, and extent of the divine law."

After his graduation he went to Mr. Houghtal to live with Edwards, and finish his preparation for the ministry.

In July 1743, he began his duties as pastor of the church in Housatonic, later known as Barrington. It was a most unfriendly community in which to begin work. His parish consisted of thirty-four families, half of them New Englanders, and the remainder Dutch, who could not understand English. They were a poor people, lax in their religion and several habits, and the fact that the Dutch could not understand his preaching, and were still forced to pay for the support of the church, was a source

of discord in his church.

Indeed is our characteristics were not such as to have great influence among such a people. Of himself he says "I have loved retirement, and have taken more pleasure alone than in any company. And have often chosen to ride alone, when on a journey, rather than in the best company. He was an ascetic also in his diet, living on the most frugal fare. He never took any exercise, and worked in his study from 14 to 18 hours each day, aside from that he was a poor preacher. Channing said of him that he was the very ideal of bad delivery." This limitation Hopkins himself realized, and in his old age said "My preaching has always appeared to me as poor, low and miserable, compared with what it ought to be.... I have felt often as if I must leave off and never attempt any more."

Such was Hopkins from one point of view, yet if we look at him from another point of view we feel very different about him. His other side appears in his devotion to duty, the practical application of his great theme of disinterested Benevolence.

The natural disadvantages of his parish conflicted with the bitter controversies into which his theological opinions carried him lead to an unsatisfactory relationship in the church, and he sought for new fields of work. On April 11. 1770 he became former pastor of the church at Newgate R. I.

It was during this pastorate that the very noble characteristics of his personality appear. The Revolutionary war had a very disastrous influence on the trade at Newgate, and he was forced to be absent from the city town from 1776-80. When he returned to his parish in 1780. he found it entirely

scattered, the favosage buried, and the ⁷
meeting house unfit for use. In the face
of all these difficulties, to which was added
the further consideration that his invalid
wife and family must be cared for, he
refused a call to a very comfortable parish
in Middleborough, and took up his claret
at Newfane, relying upon the weekly contribution
for his support. At times these amounted only to
about two hundred dollars per year.

Not only was ^His church in poor condition
but he was not afraid of losing his most
substantial supporters financially in his
severe and persistent attack on the slave
trading interests. Newfane was of course the
most important slave trading port of New
England, and the wealth of the city was due
to this business. But ^His disinterested
penevolence would hardly permit him
to view with complacency such an in-
stitution. While other ministers of New England

were tolerating, and even taking part in ⁸
the slave institution, Hopkins was denouncing it
from his pulpit, and working every possible effort
to secure freedom for individual slaves, and
out of his scanty salary he contributed one \$100
lump sum to a missionary society for carrying
the Gospel to Africa.

From this point of view we can see that Hopkins
was a great man, and did much to start the
philanthropic reform of the 19th Century. There is
suggested something of grandeur of character
in the man in the following sentences taken
from Mr. Bee's lecture on Hopkins. He is speaking of
the closing years of his life. "For him they were
years of trial, and of increasing perplexity
due to old age. His congregation was small
and composed mostly of those advanced in life.
His church membership included few men. His
sermons were refuted day and abstracted by
the young people of his flock who wandered
to other churches. His unanointed delivery

became less attractive with years; and his ^{L. G.} bodily weakness was greatly augmented by a paralytic stroke which he suffered in January, 1799. Still he continued to preach till October 1803, though with feeble voice and needing the assistance of his colored protégé, the sexton, Newfort Gardner, to enter the pulpit, and sometimes even to rise to deliver the sermon." Tr. U. S. Leader, P. 356. Dec. 20. 1803. he died.

Such was ^{L. G.} of his life, but his theology was not so attractive, although it was quite as severe. His Kinsianism, or the Berkshire Divinity is Colvin-
ian colvinized. There is a great deal of light thrown on his theology by the following taken from his Inquiry concerning the future state of those who die in their sins." He says. "severe punishment reflects such light on the divine character, government and works, especially the work of redemption; and makes such

10

a bright display of the worthiness and
grandeur of the Redeemer, and of divine
love and grace to the redeemed; and is
the occasion of ~~so~~ so much happiness in
heaven; and so necessary, in order to the
highest glory, and the greatest increasing
felicity of God's everlasting Kingdom; that,
should it cease, and this fire could be
extinguished, it would, in a great measure,
obscure the light of heaven."

But his strong emphasis upon the former of
the regenerate for disinterested Benevolence
is his great contribution, and marks a
long step in advance of Edwards. It is
at this point that chancing touches upon
Hofkins