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17th and 18th century Congregational
Preachers in New England

History Manuscripts, -1907

Nathaniel Emmons

Earl Clement Davis

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a student, and like Hopkins seems to have²
been more studious, though social, and
paid but little attention to his early favorite
interests outside of his studies.

~~At the age~~ when he was 12 years old his
mother died, and just before he graduated
from college his mother died, and he
was left quite to himself. He says, "According
ly when I left college I found myself
in a state of entire poverty. I had nothing
I could call my own, except very few books
and very few clothes. My parents being
both dead I was destitute of any place
I could call my home." For two years he
studied divinity with parish ministers
and in 1769 he was examined before the
South Association in Hartford county, who
gave him a license to preach the Gospel.
Of his early life he says, "I was never
voted for job school. For ever, both

making, or a great purchase for vain³
conformity."

But he continued to conduct for four
years until April 1773, when he was
settled over the second church in Wrentham
Mass. This later became the Parish and
town of Franklin, here he remained
until his death in 1840, at the ripe old
age of 95.

Emmons life was not one of great ease.
He had many sorrows to bear. His first
marriage which was a very happy one
while it lasted, was never taken one of
care and burden. Not long after the
birth of the second child, his wife died
and soon after both children died. He
was so much a man of the study
and books that he hardly knew how
to carry such a burden. But in two
years time he had married a second

Time, and of the six children by this marriage
three died before Mr. Ervone himself.

The disturbances of the Revolutionary war
gave him his burdens as well as to
others, and chiefly through financial
embarrassments, which came upon him
as a result of war conditions, he had
a big burden of a worldly kind to carry.

While all these social disturbances were
going on about him, he did not seem to
enter into them, for his manner of life
was studious and ascetic. In his auto-
biography he speaks of his habits of life
in the following manner: - "As soon as
I entered into the ministry, I resolved to
devote my whole time to the sacred
work, without even being myself
with the cares and concerns of the
world. I expected, however, that I should

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need great firmness and vigilance, to
guard against the solicitations of ease, in-
terest, and seeming necessity, to neglect the
proper business of my calling. Upon this
consideration I determined not to begin to
do the least manual labor, nor even superin-
tend my secular concerns; but to work,
my study my home, and my ministerial duties
my whole employment. Soon after my
ordination, I was invited by one of my
parishoners to spend several weeks at his
house, ~~for a part~~ for free cost: I declined
the offer, for fear my acceptance would
obstruct my studies. After I had been settled
about a year I employed some of my friends
to purchase me a house and farm. The
house needed repair, and I employed certain
persons to repair it, and others to superintend
the business: so that scarcely a man in
the parish had less concern in it with it

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thus I had. The next year, I entered into a
family state, in which a great many worldly
affairs invited my attention: but I kept my
resolutions, and confined myself wholly to
my study without doing so much as an
hour labor in the garden, and so in the
field."

Thus we come to see the extreme unnot-
wonder to which the religious ideas of
Calvinism had led. This Hof/Kinsion
movement was unnoted, and confined
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Emmaus remains a very fine example of its
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He never made pastoral calls, ~~but~~ unless in
case of sickness, and then only upon invita-
tion. He encouraged his people to call at
his house, and if he especially desired
to see anyone, he sent for him to come

to his love.

But these studies habits, and his great intellectual activity were not without avail. He gives in a very clear way his conception of his duties, and when I entered into the ministry. I resolved to discharge all the pastoral services, which are usually and justly expected of a minister and to pursue such studies as I deemed most intimately connected with my professional usefulness. I imagined, that people generally were becoming more fond of superficial, than of doctrinal preaching, and were imperceptibly falling into a state of gross ignorance of the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel. This led me to preach doctrinally to my people for a number of years, etc."

The fact is that Emerson realized the chaotic state of religious thought, and saw clearly that only clear thinking

But his emphasis upon the intellect is not merely speculative. Man is not active when he is acted upon. The active intellect is ^{not} active when God is acting upon it. This is mystical the direct influence of God upon the soul of man, and it is in this idea that Emerson is regarded as the follower and interpreter of that aspect of Edwards' theology which is called mystical.

But I have left for the last one aspect of his nature, which is more known, and deal thru these other things that we have been speaking of, and leaves a better taste in the mouth, and even gives the other better flavor. He had a keen sense of humor, and I quote two of his keen replies to show it. He was once asked what was the best system of Rhetoric for a minister to adopt. He replied "There two rules

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On another occasion his sermon on the
prediction of Judas was reviewed by
a Unitarian minister, and both
the review and Furrows' sermon were
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question was put to him, "What do you
think of sewing out together, before the
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and a Unitarian's Reply?" "It is against
the law" was his sudden answer "for it
is said in Deuteronomy (22¹⁰) Thou shalt
not plow with an ox and an ass together.

Nathanael Emmons¹

Earl Clement Davis

Harvard University or Pittsfield, MA²

No Date

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When he was 12 years old his mother died, and just before he graduated from college his father died, and he was left quite to himself. He says, "Accoringly when I left college I found myself in a state of entire poverty. I had nothing I could call my own except a very few books and very few clothes. My parents being both dead, I was totally destitute of any place which I could call my home."³ For two years he studied divinity with parish ministers and in 1769 he was examined before the South Association in Hartford county, who gave him a license to preach the Gospel. Of his early life he says, "I was never noted for falsehood, profaneness, Sabbath breaking, or a great fondness for vain company."⁴

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¹ Unfortunately this manuscript is missing its first page. The contents, however, make it clear that it focuses on Nathanael Emmons, and the paper is the same as the other biographical sketches that Earl Davis wrote on other 17th and 18th century New England Congregational preachers.

² The manuscripts in this series covering early New England Congregational preachers have no date. They are hand-written, dating them before Earl Davis started typing his manuscripts in 1907. So, they date either from his time at Harvard University, or the first year or two of his ministry in Pittsfield.

³ This quotation can be found in *The Works of Nathanael Emmons, D.D., Third Pastor of the Church in Franklin, Mass. with A Memoir of His Life*, edited by Jacob Ide, Boston: Congregational Board of Publication, 1861, p. 32.

⁴ *The Works of Nathanael Emmons*, p. 35.

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Thus we come to see the extreme unnaturalness to which the religious ideas of Calvinism had led. This Hopkinsinian movement was unnatural, and confined to small isolated country parishes, and Emmons remains a very fine example of its strange and clearly worked distinctions between sacred and secular.

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The fact is that Emmons realized the chaotic state of religious thought, and saw clearly that only clear thinking and sound study would clear up the situation. It is here that he takes his place in the development of New England theology in his emphasis upon the intellectual side of religious life. One can imagine the influence he must have

⁵ *The Works of Nathanael Emmons*, pp. 57-8.

⁶ *The Works of Nathanael Emmons*, pp. 271.

had upon the 80 or more young men who prepared for the ministry at his home. He was a man of keen mind and his acuteness, and his prophetic insight stands clearly in the following pithy remark which is still of great value: "Associationism leads to Consociationism; Consociationism leads to Presbyterianism; Presbyterianism leads to Episcopacy; Episcopacy leads to Roman Catholicism; and Roman Catholicism is an ultimate fact."⁷ That is the practical substance of two of the important religious books of the last year, and is interesting in connection with the religious tendencies of the present.

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On another occasion his sermon on the perdition of Judas was reviewed by a Universalist minister, and both the review and Emmons' sermon were published under the same cover. This question was put to him, "What do you think of sending out together, before the world two such things as your sermon and a Universalist's reply? It is against the law," was his sudden answer, "for it is said in Deuteronomy (22:10) 'Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.'"⁹

⁷ *The Works of Nathanael Emmons*, pp. 168.

⁸ A slightly modified version of this quotation can be found in *The Works of Nathanael Emmons*, pp. 328.

⁹ *The Works of Nathanael Emmons*, pp. 453.