

Philosophy in America.



THE present essay is an historical rather than a summary. It is an attempt to present and explain the prevalent philosophical doctrines rather than to judge them.

The first period in the history of philosophy in America, is the colonial (1607-1765). It was a period when struggle for existence precluded much philosophical speculation. "Prius esse quam philosophari." One philosopher at least was produced, Jonathan Edwards, (1704-1758). In all this time the Southern States practically did nothing intellectually. Ten years before the Declaration of Independence there was but one printing press in all Virginia. Of the middle states Pennsylvania alone was important as a centre of culture. Indeed, towards the middle of the eighteenth century it eclipsed New England and retained its pre-eminence till the nineteenth. But during the early colonial period, it was the Puritans, who, by their faith, moral vigor and untiring energy, really formed the root of the American nation. From 1629, in all their establishments except Rhode Island, education was obligatory. Harvard was founded in 1636, and was controlled by ministers. It set up a printing press, three years later (under religious censorship). Many works of Puritan divines were published. Consequently it is to New England that we must turn for what philosophy there was during that period.

Two men alone deserve mention, Franklin and Edwards. Benjamin Franklin was a genius with a philosophical spirit, but not properly a philosopher. He is a fitting representative of the eminently practical nature of the times. It may be remarked that even the surnames of these men, Benjamin and Jonathan, proclaim them to be of Puritan stock.

Edwards' first work "Notes on Mind," is something like Pascal's *Pensées*, though needless to say of vastly inferior importance. It is very suggestive however, and shows a thinker. Many scholastic doctrines are found in the book. Edwards is an