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Josiah Pratt and Jonathan Edwards

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Life of the Rev. David Brainerd

David Brainerd dedicated much of his short life to preaching the gospel to Native American peoples. Josiah Pratt's 1834 biography uses Brainerd's own journal and letters to examine the character of an extraordinary man and expose the discrepancy between Brainerd's self-lacerating writings and the exceptional fortitude made evident by his deeds. It includes Brainerd's moving and eloquent account of his own conversion, his chronic illness and the privations he suffered during a life he described as 'a constant mixture of consolations and conflicts.' This fascinating insight into the private thoughts and struggles of a remarkable figure charts his ceaseless pursuit of God and the battle between his inexhaustible religious fervour and his chronic physical infirmity. The book also includes Brainerd's reflections on the process of conversion and the signs of godliness, and his description of the difficulties he faced in converting Native Americans.

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Missionary to the North American Indians

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JONATHAN EDWARDS



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THE LIFE OF
THE
REV. DAVID BRAINERD,

MISSIONARY TO THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS.

COMPILED FROM THE MEMOIR PUBLISHED BY PRES. EDWARDS,

BY THE REV. JOSIAH PRATT, B.D.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Life of **DAVID BRAINERD** here offered to the reader, is taken, by permission of the Rev. **JOSIAH PRATT**, Editor of the *Missionary Register*, from that work, with the addition of some farther passages from **President Edwards' Memoir**, which seemed too valuable to be omitted.

The Editor of this volume, in prefixing a few Introductory remarks, will first give one or two general reflections occasioned by the Memoir, and then such particulars respecting its usefulness in the cause of Missions, and respecting the congregation over which Brainerd laboured, and the present state of the North American Indians, as he has collected from other sources. He adds also a slight sketch of the progress of Missionary labours.

The **DEVOTEDNESS** of Brainerd to our Heavenly Master was the most striking peculiarity of his character. He gave up himself entirely to his work, abandoning every thing for it. While he himself underwent all sort of privations, he surrendered his own private property without reserve to educate others. God always honours such devotedness. Self-sacrifice for the sake of Christ has a present reward in the good done, as well as a future reward from the Lord of all. The success with which it pleased God to crown Brainerd's labours, perfectly corresponded to that patient zeal and holy earnest-

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ness, that vehemence and devotedness, which the same God bestowed on him to enable him with unwearied labour steadily to seek success in the faithful, self-denying, and diligent use of means.

The DISTRESSING EXPERIENCE through which Brainerd passed, his times of sorrow and despondency, his disappointed hopes and his sensibility to sin, make his history much more generally useful and interesting than it would otherwise have been. Sorrow makes up so large a portion of the lives of men, and all God's children have to pass through so much conflict and tribulation, that they cannot realize the blessedness of sympathy of feeling with those who have never felt sorrow. When a most eminent Christian like Brainerd goes through those afflictions and trials which are common to all, he is brought nearer to us. The Lord of glory himself chose to be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" and for ever blessed be our God for all the comfort that this gives to his suffering people,—they know that he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

Yet while our interest in this work is increased by the distressing experience which it records, we should guard against those peculiarities which occasion needless distress.

Constitutional melancholy was a part of Brainerd's character, and no doubt tended to aggravate those seasons of depression to which his life shews that he was subject. He seems to the Editor, also to have suffered unnecessarily from the endeavour, in the great aim and scope of his labours, to separate, as a motive of his conduct, God's glory and his own personal interest: things which are perfectly united together, and should never be disjoined as if they were inconsistent. If glory to God in the highest be the first part of the Angelic Song on the birth of the Saviour, it is inseparably joined with peace

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on earth, and good-will towards men. God's glory, and his creatures' happiness while seeking that glory, form one blessed result that need never be disjoined.

The SUCCESS which attends a free and full declaration of the Grace of the Gospel, after other means have been tried in vain, is a very striking and instructive feature in the history of the Church. The well-known fact in the commencement of the Greenland Mission, after a considerable trial of other means, of the happy effect of a simple declaration of the sufferings of Christ, accords with Brainerd's History as given in page 233. Mr. Newton records a similar instance in a letter to Hannah More, mentioned in the interesting biography just published of that valuable female. The fact is as follows:—

Mr. Newton says, 'A friend of mine was desired to visit a woman in prison,—he was informed of her evil habits of life, and therefore spoke strongly of the terrors of the Lord, and the curses of the law; she heard him awhile, and then laughed in his face; upon this he changed his note, and spoke of the Saviour, and what he had done and suffered for sinners; he had not talked long in this strain, before he saw a tear or two in her eyes; at length she interrupted him by saying, 'Why sir, do you think there can be any hope of mercy for me?' He answered 'Yes, if you feel your need of it, and are willing to seek it in God's appointed way. I am sure it is as free for you as for myself.' She replied, 'Ah! if I had thought so, I should not have been in this prison. I long since settled it in my mind that I was utterly lost; that I had sinned beyond all possibility of forgiveness; and that made me desperate.' He visited her several times, and when she went away, (for she was transported) he had good reason to hope that she was truly converted. He gave me this relation more than forty years ago, and it has been, I hope,

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of some use to me through the course of my ministry. Christ crucified, is the wisdom and power of God.'

This should not lead us to withhold the law of God, but it should lead us freely and fully to state the good tidings of grace for the most sinful. But one of the chief USES OF THIS LIFE has been to foster a missionary spirit. Missionary Biography, since the days of the Apostles, is comparatively of recent origin. The life of Eliot was published in 1691, by Cotton Mather. The success attending his labours and those of Mayhew and Sheppard, who laboured at the same period, gave rise, (Dean Pearson has remarked) to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, which was incorporated by charter in 1701. Ziegenbalg landed in Tranquebar, in 1706, and was followed by Grundler and others, to whose labours God gave a manifest blessing.

The Memoir of Brainerd published in 1749, followed next in the course of Missionary Biography. His career was brief. He died at the age of 30; but he has left an imperishable memorial. The scene of his labours was very obscure, limited, and remote, but his usefulness has extended through the churches of Christ over the world.

The peculiar devotedness of heart to his Saviour which it pleased God to bestow upon him, and his ardent and unquenchable spirit of zeal for the enlargement of his kingdom, have been one great means by which God has kindled that missionary zeal, which is now spreading through the Protestant Churches of Christ.

There have been few devoted labourers since the publication of Brainerd's life who have not been greatly benefited by it.

It is well known how highly Henry Martyn valued this work. His mind was directed to missions by a remark of Mr. Simeon's. Soon after this, perusing

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the life of David Brainerd, who preached with apostolical zeal and success to the North American Indians, and who finished a course of self-denying labours for his Redeemer, with unspeakable joy, at the early age of thirty-two, his soul was filled with a holy emulation of that extraordinary man: and, after deep consideration and fervent prayer, he was at length fixed in a resolution to imitate his example. His subsequent course shows how much he made this life his model.

The remarks of another devoted Missionary, the Rev. Levi Parsons, shew its beneficial influence on his mind; they are extracted from his private journal, printed in his life.

‘ Much refreshed this day by perusing the life of Brainerd. How completely devoted to God, how ardent his affections! What thirstings after holiness! What love for souls! His life was short, but brilliant and useful. He ushered in a glorious day to the church. Counting pain and distress, and every bodily infirmity as dross, he patiently encountered difficulties and dangers, and at last sweetly resigned his all to his Saviour. Multitudes will have reason to call him blessed. Many perishing Indians well remember his earnest desire for their good, with gratitude and love. He has taught the world an important lesson, and enforced it by a powerful example.’

Indeed, almost every devoted missionary who has laboured in extending the kingdom of God since the days of Brainerd, has been quickened by his heart-stirring and fervent spirit for enlarging the kingdom of Christ.

The reader will be both interested and affected by the accounts which have been given of the NATIVE CONGREGATION over which he laboured. His missionary labours at Cranberry, the town in the central

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part of New Jersey, whither he had removed with the whole body of his Indians before his death, were afterwards carried on by his younger brother, John Brainerd, for years, with much success.

Dr. Brown, in his *History of the Propagation of the Gospel*, has collected the fullest account of this congregation. ‘Many of those who appeared to have been converted under the ministry of David Brainerd not only persevered in the profession of religion, but adorned it by a holy life; though several fell away. Other Indians were also truly converted.

‘During the American war, Mr. John Brainerd’s correspondence with the society in Scotland for propagating Christian knowledge was suspended, and toward the close of it he died. In 1783, he was succeeded in the charge of his Congregation by Mr. Daniel Simon, an Indian, who had been ordained to the ministry; but it was soon found necessary to suspend him from his office, on account of drunkenness and other irregularities. No missionary was appointed to succeed him; but the congregation was occasionally supplied by the neighbouring ministers.

‘In July 1802, some commissioners from New Jersey conducted eighty-five Delaware Indians, the remains of Mr. John Brainerd’s congregation, to New Stockbridge, to place them under the ministry of Mr. Sergeant, the missionary in that town. For many years past they had been left entirely to themselves, having no spiritual guide to watch over them, no meetings for divine worship on the Sabbath, and no school for their children. Hence, they in general grew very wicked, and had been long in a very miserable state, scattered through the country, and excessively addicted to drinking. To this, however, there might be some exceptions: mention, at least, is made of one old woman dying after they removed to Stock-

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bridge, who dated her conversion from the time of the great awakening under Mr. David Brainerd, and who was distinguished for her piety to the day of her death.

‘Such a result of those bright, those pleasing prospects, which once dawned on the tribe of Indians, is truly deplorable. Few of these individuals, however, could have belonged to Mr. David Brainerd’s congregation, and such as did, must, in general, have been little more than children at the time. Indeed, though there certainly was an extraordinary work of grace among his people, yet it was never supposed they were all converted. Of adults, he baptized only between forty and fifty, and though there were many others, as we have already mentioned, under deep concern for their souls, yet as they did not give satisfactory evidence of a saving change, he judged it expedient to defer their baptism. Now, as the Christian Indians, in general, continued for several years at least to adorn their profession by a holy exemplary conversation; as some of them died in the Lord; as twenty-seven years after Mr. Brainerd’s death, there were still, even according to the most unfavourable accounts, ten or twelve, who were considered as fit for admission to the Lord’s Supper, it is probable there were as many, or even a greater number than he ever supposed, who were truly converted to Christ, maintained a Christian deportment to the last, and now join with him in heaven, in celebrating the praises of God and of the Lamb. It gives us much pleasure to state, that the late Dr. Witherspoon, president of New Jersey College, in referring to these Indians, assures us that it was fully attested, that they had persevered with scarcely any exceptions, in their profession of religion, and even adorned it by their exemplary conversation.’

This history has been given as calculated to show

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us the vast importance of continuing the means of grace, and of the persevering efforts which only Religious Societies are calculated to make. The continued and renewed manifestations of Divine grace are needful to maintain the work of grace.

The INDIAN TRIBES in North America gradually became intermingled with the Europeans, or were driven back further and further from the coasts of the ocean, which they once occupied.

It is gratifying to know that American Missionary Societies have zealously taken up the important work of evangelizing these native tribes, and have extended and successful missions amongst them.

An account of these may be seen in that truly valuable publication the Missionary Register, and especially in the Annual Survey published at the commencement of the year. From the volume for 1823, p. 76—79, it appears that there were then 471,417 North American Indians, as follows:—

East of the Mississippi.....	120,625
Between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains...	179,592
West of the Rocky Mountains.....	171,417
	<u>471,417</u>

The Congress of the United States vote an annual sum of 10,000 dollars for maintaining schools among them.

It is very interesting to mark THE PROGRESS of Missionary labours. There was a considerable preparation by the foundation of several societies for Missionary exertions, before the time of Brainerd. The New England Company was incorporated in 1661, and Boyle, in 1691, left a legacy to it. It still exists, though but little known; and it is hoped that it may yet rise to increased usefulness. The Society for Propagating the Gospel was formed in

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1701; the Danish Mission College, in 1706; the Scotch Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was incorporated in 1709. It was under this Society that the Missionaries, John and David Brainerd, laboured for the conversion of the North American Indians. The United Brethren began their noble exertions in 1732, and have furnished a gratifying example of what may be done with but feeble means by Christian zeal.

Though there was this large preparation of materials, the progress of Missionary labours, before the time of Brainerd, was very limited. Gradually, however, since then, the church has been awakening to its duties to the heathen world. The apostolic Schwartz entered on his labours in 1750, soon after the death of Brainerd, and continued, with the companions who soon joined them, and the Moravian Brethren, to sustain almost alone, for nearly half a century, the whole labour of missions to the heathen. The close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century will ever be memorable for the more extended revival of Missionary zeal in the Christian churches. The Baptist Missionary Society led the way; the London Missionary Society, in 1795; the Edinburgh Missionary Society, in 1796; and the Wesleyan Missionary Society, from an early day in the labours of Mr. Wesley, succeeded. The Netherlands Missionary Society, in 1797, and the Church Missionary Society, in 1800, followed in their steps. American Christians, and various kindred Societies, in foreign countries, have much strengthened these works of love; and all are sending forth yearly an increasing number of faithful labourers to the heathen.

These things show us that we witness that which the Apostle beheld in prophetic vision: *I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting*

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gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. And let us never forget that this angel says, with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountain of waters. It is our clearest duty and our richest privilege, to labour with indefatigable zeal in propagating the gospel, thus obeying the last command given by Christ, on his leaving this world, Matt. xxviii. 19, 20; and looking to the future reward at his return, Dan. xii. 3. But while it is so, let us still bear in mind it is the hour of his judgment to the wicked. Every thing is shaking around us, and with the general propagation of the gospel, and with the universal establishment of the kingdom of Christ, is connected the breaking in pieces and consuming of all those kingdoms which have preceded it, (Dan. ii. 44.)

As Christians, it becomes us to seek to have a clear view of what the scriptures have told us is before us, that we may not labour for the most blessed of all objects, unprepared for those judgments which precede its accomplishment. May we now so fight the good fight, and finish our course, and keep the faith, that we may receive the *crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give at that day, to all them that love his appearing*, 2 Tim. iv. 8.

EDWARD BICKERSTETH.

*Watton Rectory,
Oct. 20, 1834.*