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Edited by Jonathan Edwards  
Excerpt  
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THE DIARY OF  
DAVID BRAINERD



PART I.

FROM HIS BIRTH, AND DURING HIS PREPARATION  
FOR THE MINISTRY.

[MR. DAVID BRAINERD was born April 20, 1718, at Haddam, a town belonging to the county of Hartford, in the colony of Connecticut, New England. His father, who died when this his son was about nine years of age, was the worshipful Hezekiah Brainerd, Esquire, an assistant, or one of his Majesty's council for that colony, and the son of Daniel Brainerd, Esquire, a Justice of the Peace, and a deacon of the Church of Christ in Haddam. His mother was Mrs. Dorothy Hobart, daughter to the Rev. Jeremiah Hobart, who preached a while at Topsfield, and then removed to Hampstead on Long Island, and afterwards removed from

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Hampstead, by reason of numbers turning Quakers, and many others being so irreligious that they would do nothing towards the support of the ministry, and came and settled in the work of the ministry at Haddam; where he died in the 85th year of his age: of whom it is remarkable, that he went to the public worship in the forenoon, and died in his chair between meetings. And this reverend gentleman was son of the Rev. Peter Hobart, who was, first, minister of the Gospel at Hingham, in the county of Norfolk in England; and, by reason of the persecution of the Puritans, removed with his family to New England, and was settled in the ministry at Hingham in the Massachusetts. He had five sons, viz., Joshua, Jeremiah, Gershom, Japheth, and Nehemiah. The mother of Mrs. Dorothy Hobart, who was afterwards Brainerd, was daughter to the Rev. Samuel Whiting, minister of the Gospel, first at Boston in Lincolnshire, and afterwards at Lynn in the Massachusetts, New England; he had three sons that were ministers of the Gospel.

Mr. David Brainerd was the third son of his parents. They had five sons and four daughters. Their eldest son is Hezekiah Brainerd, Esquire, a Justice of the Peace, and for several years past a representative of the town of Haddam, in the General Assembly of Connecticut colony; the second was the Rev. Nehemiah Brainerd, a worthy minister at Eastbury in Connecticut, who died of

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a consumption, November 10, 1742; the fourth is Mr. John Brainerd, who succeeds his brother David as Missionary to the Indians, and pastor of the same church of Christian Indians in New Jersey; and the fifth was Israel, lately student at Yale College in New Haven, who died since his brother David. What account he has given of himself, and his own life, may be seen in what follows] :—

I was, I think, from my youth, something sober, and inclined rather to melancholy than the contrary extreme; but do not remember anything of conviction of sin, worthy of remark, till I was, I believe, about seven or eight years of age; when I became something concerned for my soul, and terrified at the thoughts of death, and was driven to the performance of duties. But it appeared a melancholy business, and destroyed my eagerness for play. And, alas! this religious concern was but short-lived. However, I sometimes attended secret prayer; and thus lived *at ease in Zion, without God in the world*, and without much concern, as I remember, till I was above thirteen years of age. But, some time in the winter 1732, I was something roused out of carnal security, by I scarce know what means at first; but was much excited by the prevailing of a mortal sickness in Haddam. I was frequent, constant, and something fervent in duties, and took delight in reading, especially Mr. Janeway's *Token for Children*. I felt sometimes

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much melted in duties, and took great delight in the performance of them; and I sometimes hoped that I was converted, or, at least, in a good and hopeful way for heaven and happiness, not knowing what conversion was. The Spirit of God at this time proceeded far with me; I was remarkably dead to the world, and my thoughts were almost wholly employed about my soul's concerns; and I may indeed say, *Almost I was persuaded to be a Christian*. I was also exceedingly distressed and melancholy at the death of my mother, in March 1732. But afterwards my religious concern began to decline; and I, by degrees, fell back into a considerable degree of security, though I still attended secret prayer frequently.

About the 15th of April 1733, I removed from my father's house to East Haddam, where I spent four years, but still *without God in the world*; though, for the most part, I went a round of secret duty. I was not exceedingly addicted to young company, or frolicking as it is called. But this I know that, when I did go into company, I never returned from a frolic in my life with so good a conscience as I went with; it always added new guilt to me, and made me afraid to come to the Throne of Grace, and spoiled those good frames I was wont sometimes to please myself with. But, alas! all my good frames were but self-righteousness, not bottomed on a desire for the glory of God.

About the latter end of April 1737, being full

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nineteen years of age, I removed to Durham, and began to work on my farm, and so continued the year out, or nearly, till I was twenty years old; frequently longing, from a natural inclination, after a liberal education. When I was about twenty years of age, I applied myself to study; and, some time before, was more than ordinarily excited to and in duty; but now engaged more than ever in the duties of religion. I became very strict and watchful over my thoughts, words, and actions; and thought I must be sober indeed, because I designed to devote myself to the ministry; and imagined I did dedicate myself to the Lord.

Some time in April 1738, I went to Mr. Fiske's, and lived with him during his life.<sup>1</sup> And I remember, he advised me wholly to abandon young company, and associate myself with grave elderly people: which counsel I followed; and my manner of life was now exceeding regular, and full of religion, such as it was. For I read my Bible more than twice through in less than a year; I spent much time every day in secret prayer, and other secret duties; I gave great attention to the Word preached, and endeavoured to my utmost to retain it. So much concerned was I about religion, that I agreed with some young persons to meet privately on Sabbath evenings for religious exercises, and thought myself sincere in these duties; and, after our meeting was ended, I used to repeat the

[<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fiske was the pastor of the church in Haddam.]

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discourses of the day to myself, and recollect what I could, though sometimes it was very late in the night. Again, on Monday mornings, I used sometimes to recollect the same sermons. And I had sometimes considerable movings of affections in duties, and much pleasure, and had many thoughts of joining to the Church. In short, I had a very good outside, and rested entirely on my duties, though I was not sensible of it.

After Mr. Fiske's death, I proceeded in my learning with my brother; and was still very constant in religious duties, and often wondered at the levity of professors; it was a trouble to me that they were so careless in religious matters. Thus I proceeded a considerable length on a self-righteous foundation; and should have been entirely lost and undone, had not the mere mercy of God prevented.

Some time in the beginning of winter, *anno* 1738, it pleased God, on one Sabbath-day morning, as I was walking out for some secret duties, as I remember, to give me on a sudden such a sense of my danger, and the wrath of God, that I stood amazed, and my former good frames that I had pleased myself with all presently vanished; and, from the view that I had of my sin and vileness, I was much distressed all that day, fearing the vengeance of God would soon overtake me. I was much dejected, and kept much alone, and sometimes begrudged the birds and beasts their happiness, because they were not

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exposed to eternal misery, as I evidently saw I was. And thus I lived from day to day, being frequently in great distress. Sometimes there appeared mountains before me to obstruct my hopes of mercy; and the work of conversion appeared so great, I thought I should never be the subject of it; but used, however, to pray and cry to God, and perform other duties with great earnestness, and hoped by some means to make the case better. And though I hundreds of times renounced all pretences of any worth in my duties, as I thought, even in the season of the performance of them, and often confessed to God that I deserved nothing for the very best of them but eternal condemnation; yet still I had a secret latent hope of recommending myself to God by my religious duties. And when I prayed affectionately, and my heart seemed in some measure to melt, I hoped God would be thereby moved to pity me; my prayers then looked with some appearance of goodness in them, and I seemed to mourn for sin. And then I could in some measure venture on the mercy of God in Christ, as I thought, though the preponderating thought and foundation of my hope was some imagination of goodness in my heart-meltings, and flowing of affections in duty, and sometimes extraordinary enlargements therein. Though at some times the gate appeared so very strait that it looked next to impossible to enter, yet at other times I flattered myself that it

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was not so very difficult, and hoped I should by diligence and watchfulness soon gain the point. Sometimes, after enlargement in duty and considerable affection, I hoped I had made a good step towards heaven, and imagined that God was affected as I was, and that He would hear such sincere cries as I called them. And so sometimes, when I withdrew for secret duties in great distress, I returned something comfortable; and thus healed myself with my duties.

Some time in February 1738–9, I set apart a day for secret fasting and prayer, and spent the day in almost incessant cries to God for mercy, that He would open my eyes to see the evil of sin and the way of life by Jesus Christ. And God was pleased that day to make considerable discoveries of my heart to me. But still I trusted in all the duties I performed; though there was no manner of goodness in the duties I then performed, there being no manner of respect to the glory of God in them, nor any such principle in my heart. Yet God was pleased to make my endeavours that day a means to show me my helplessness in some measure.

Sometimes I was greatly encouraged, and imagined that God loved me and was pleased with me, and thought I should soon be fully reconciled to God; while the whole was founded on mere presumption, arising from enlargement in duty, or flowing of affections, or some good



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resolutions, and the like. And when, at times, great distress began to arise, on a sight of my vileness and nakedness, and inability to deliver myself from a sovereign God, I used to put off the discovery as what I could not bear. Once, I remember, a terrible pang of distress seized me, and the thoughts of renouncing myself and standing naked before God, stripped of all goodness, were so dreadful to me, that I was ready to say to them as Felix to Paul, *Go thy way for this time*. Thus, though I daily longed for greater conviction of sin, supposing that I must see more of my dreadful state in order to a remedy; yet, when the discoveries of my vile hellish heart were made to me, the sight was so dreadful, and showed me so plainly my exposedness to damnation, that I could not endure it. I constantly strove after whatever qualifications I imagined others obtained before the reception of Christ, in order to recommend me to His favour. Sometimes I felt the power of a hard heart, and supposed it must be softened before Christ would accept of me; and when I felt any meltings of heart, I hoped now the work was almost done. And hence, when my distress still remained, I was wont to murmur at God's dealings with me; and thought, when others felt their hearts softened, God showed them mercy; but my distress remained still.

Sometimes I grew remiss and sluggish, without

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any great convictions of sin, for a considerable time together; but, after such a season, conviction sometimes seized me more violently. One night, I remember in particular, when I was walking solitarily abroad, I had opened to me such a view of my sin that I feared the ground would cleave asunder under my feet, and become my grave, and send my soul quick into hell, before I could get home. And though I was forced to go to bed, lest my distress should be discovered by others, which I much feared; yet I scarce durst sleep at all, for I thought it would be a great wonder if I should be out of hell in the morning. And though my distress was sometimes thus great, yet I greatly dreaded the loss of convictions, and returning back to a state of carnal security, and to my former insensibility of impending wrath; which made me exceeding exact in my behaviour, lest I should stifle the motions of God's Spirit. When at any time I took a view of my convictions of my own sinfulness, and thought the degree of them to be considerable, I was wont to trust in my convictions. But this confidence, and the hopes that arose in me from it, of soon making some notable advances towards deliverance, would ease my mind, and I soon became more senseless and remiss; but then again, when I discerned my convictions to grow languid, and I thought them about to leave me, this immediately alarmed and distressed me. Sometimes I expected to take