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The Diary of David Brainerd

David Brainerd (1718–47) was a colonial American missionary to Native Americans made famous when Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) posthumously edited his journal and other writings into a popular biographical narrative. Having spent time at Yale University, Brainerd entered the ministry in 1742 and dedicated his life to work amongst native peoples in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey before expiring at the age of 29. This 1902 edition of *The Diary and Journal of David Brainerd* provided readers with a broader picture of his life and the source material from which Edwards composed his narrative. Volume 1 focuses mostly upon the diary, which contains Brainerd's discussion of his brief life, including not insignificant reference to the illness that claimed him. Ultimately, the thoughts preserved in this two-volume set are an important resource for those interested in religion in America during the period known as the 'Great Awakening'.

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The Diary of David Brainerd

VOLUME 1

EDITED BY JONATHAN EDWARDS



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THE DIARY OF DAVID BRAINERD



VOLUME I

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TO
DUNCAN CAMPBELL MACGREGOR
AND
WILLIAM M. MACGREGOR
MY COMRADES

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INTRODUCTION



THE *Diary* and the *Journal* of David Brainerd—the former being the delineation of his own innermost life, and the latter the narrative of his missionary work among the Red Indians—are full of interest, for many reasons. But this surely is their principal attraction, that they set before the reader a consummate picture of the saintly character. As he passes from page to page, he feels with a constantly increasing conviction that he is in the company of a man of God. Mr. William James, in his brilliant and yet somewhat inadequate book on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, has recently analysed that gracious and queenly composite which we call Saintliness. One of its ingredients, he says, is the surrender of the will to the Ideal Power, a surrender often so thoroughgoing that it becomes sacrifice and asceticism. Another feature is the strength or equanimity or fortitude, which enables the nature to soar far above both selfishness and fretting anxiety. To these must be added a heavenly

purity that cleanses the man from whatever is low and earthly, and transmutes him more and more into a child in the blameless family of God. There is a fourth essential—the charity, the Christian love, which flows out in an irresistible tide even to enemies, and which extends its welcome to the beggar in his rags as well as to the comrade who is chosen and tried. We are thankful to the philosopher for his dissection of the many-coloured endowment. But those of us who walk and talk with David Brainerd are permitted to see Saintliness, not in the abstract but in the concrete, clothed in our human flesh, breathing upon us with warm breath; and how much better is this representation than the other! For “ideas,” as George Eliot wrote in one of her earliest stories, “are poor ghosts”: it is when they are embodied in living men and women, kinsfolk of our own, that they “move us like a passion.”

Let us remember that Brainerd was no veteran in the sacramental host. He died young, before he had completed thirty summers. His course was finished, when many of us are still engaged in girding ourselves for the race—finished in the noblest sense; for, although he had tarried through eighty slow-moving years, he could scarcely have bequeathed a more impressive example to the Church of Christ. It was as if he compressed into the briefest space that which in other cases is accumulated through the meditation and the ex-

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perience of a protracted life, and even then is not so perfect in its sweetness and grandeur. When the dragon-fly rends his old husk, and harnesses himself in "clear plates of sapphire mail," his is a pilgrimage of one or two sunny days over the crofts and pastures wet with dew. Yet nothing can exceed the marvellous beauty in which he is decked. "No flowers on earth," a careful observer has told us, "have such a blue, heightened as the pure colour is by the metallic shine of the insect's cuirass." So it is sometimes in the higher sphere. The completest spiritual loveliness may be attained in the shortest time, and the stripling may *die a hundred years old* in character and grace. David Brainerd is a conspicuous and inspiring instance of the truth.

There is no need to retell, in these opening pages, the outward events in a biography which hastened down to death and up to heaven at so rapid a pace : these are sufficiently recorded in the *Diary* and the *Journal* themselves. But we may make some attempt to understand the features in this man's Saintliness. The effort will rebuke our own too easy contentment with a meagre second-best. It will perhaps set our feet and our faces towards those mountain-summits on which he had his habitual home. It ought to stir in us the eager prayer for a consecration as unmistakable and as winsome.

One can see that, after the memorable Sabbath

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evening in the July of 1739, when Brainerd “felt himself in a new world and everything about him appeared with a different aspect from what it was wont to do,” he retained still the strong human emotions of his nature. For proof of the fact, it is enough to point to the conviction which he never lost, and which most of us must share, that he was over-harshly treated in his expulsion from Yale. The College authorities did not, of course, dream that they were driving from their precincts one to whom succeeding generations would turn as a white-robed priest in the hierarchy of God; and no doubt it is difficult for University dons to forgive a young man who has spoken contemptuously of his tutor. But they might have tempered their judgment with mercy, especially in the later days when the delinquent made humble acknowledgment of his fault. Certain it is that the severity to which they clung with strange persistence inflicted a painful wound, that the lapse of time did not altogether heal; and Brainerd, supreme as his meekness was, could not persuade his conscience that a punishment so excessive was quite deserved. The lingering regret—for in the end it was scarcely anything more—is a token that, side by side with his transcendent Christliness, he continued a man of like passions with ourselves; and we are thankful to find him touching us with one hand, while the other lies with brother-like intimacy in the grasp of his divine Master and Friend.

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But how transcendent the Christliness was! Some of its qualities stand out in vivid relief, so that we cannot fail to remark them and to catch their message to ourselves.

I

In company with all the saints, David Brainerd regarded the inner life as of much greater consequence than the outer, and eternity as immeasurably more important than time. The spirit within him, the God above him, the future towards which he was travelling straight and fast,—these were the realities of his existence, and other things were but mists and shadows. Once, in a friend's house, when they had been kneeling in prayer, the present with its sights and sounds, its distresses and delights, vanished entirely from his thought. "I launched," he says, "into the eternal world. I got so far out on the broad ocean that my soul with joy triumphed over all the evils on the shores of mortality. Time, with its gay amusements and cruel disappointments, never appeared so inconsiderable." But this was only a more emphatic moment in what was his customary temper and mood. Like him of whom Karshish, the Arab physician, writes wonderingly, "His heart and brain moved there, his feet stayed here."

Thus his chief passion was to be worthy of the

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citizenship in the Heavens which sovereign and unspeakable grace had bestowed on him. He hated that desperate evil of disposition and conduct which, as he bewails in confession after confession, haunted him, and stole the delicate bloom from his religion, and broke his familiarity of communion with God. "I am all sin," he mourned; "I cannot think nor act but every motion is sin." He saw himself pursued by unearthly adversaries, who were resolved, if they could, to rob him of his guerdon; and he knew that he could never quit his armour, and must "lie down to rest with corslet laced." "Thus I have ever found it," he avows; "when I have thought the battle was over and the conquest gained, and so let down my watch, the enemy has risen up and done me the greatest injury." Again and again he lamented his "fiery and intemperate zeal." Again and again he experienced "a sweet season of bitter repentance." To him, as to Juliana of Norwich, there was "showed none harder hell than sin." The stains which marred the perfection of his lustrous dress, the spots of rust on the gleaming shield of our Red Cross knight, are almost imperceptible to our duller vision; but there was hardly a day in which they did not disturb his own peace of mind, and sting him into sorrow and self-abasement and ardency of yearning.

We may read the inscription, *Holiness to the Lord*, carved in the plainest letters over everything

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in Brainerd's history. He had no liking for conversation which did not transport him into the sacrosanct presence of his God, and which was not seasoned with the salt of the better country. Speech that contented itself with sailing round the coasts of the spiritual realm, but shrank from disembarking and penetrating into the deepest heart of the goodly land, was devoid of relish for him, and seemed little better than a mockery. "In the evening," the *Diary* says on one page, "I was visited by a dear Christian friend, with whom I spent an hour or two in conversation on the very soul of religion. There are many with whom I can talk about religion; but, alas! I find few with whom I can talk religion itself. Blessed be the Lord! there are some that love to feed on the kernel rather than the shell." It was the same with the recreations of walking and riding, to which, in his last years, it was needful for him to have recourse. These, too, were sanctified—transmuted by the alchemy of his single-hearted devotion from dull lead into fine gold. "Here is the difference," he writes on an April day in 1745, "between my present diversions and those I once pursued when in a natural state. I then delighted in them, to the neglect of God, and drew my highest satisfaction from them; now I use them as means to help me in living to God, fixedly delighting in Him and not in them, drawing my highest satisfaction from Him. Then they were my all;

now they are only means leading to my All. And those things that are the greatest diversions, when pursued with this view, do not tend to hinder but promote my spirituality; and I see now, more than ever, that they are absolutely necessary." It would solve many of the troublesome questions with which we puzzle ourselves as to what is, and what is not, permissible to Christian men and women, if we cultivated the habit of bringing all our occupations and pleasures to Brainerd's touchstone.

A friend who visited Richard Hooker when he lay dying was told by him that he was meditating on the number and order and obedience of the happy angels, and was himself aspiring to a service as unbroken as theirs. It was the aspiration which throbbed perpetually in David Brainerd's soul. "I thirsted and pleaded to be as holy as the blessed angels," he declares at one time, and, at another, "How I longed to be employed in the glorious work of angels, and with an angel's freedom, vigour, and delight!" So he lingered for a little immediately outside the gates of the Celestial City, enrolled already among its denizens in feeling and spirit, in faith and hope and love.

II

Sometimes he was almost too impatient to cross the threshold and to stand within the gates. If ever

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any one lived *ut migraturus*, it was Brainerd. While he was yet young in his sonship to the divine Father, he “found some satisfaction in the thoughts of bidding a dying farewell to this tiresome world”; and in subsequent years he reiterates frequently the hungering desire to be up and away. He “beseeches the Lord that he may not be too much pleased and amused with dear friends and acquaintances in one place and another”; for the ties which link him and them must be snapped and sundered so very soon. He fore-fancies his departure from earth, the foreign land, the scene of his exile. “I know not that death ever appeared more real to me, or that I ever saw myself in the condition of a dead corpse, laid out and dressed for a lodging in the silent grave, so evidently as at this time. Yet I felt exceeding comfortable; my mind was composed and calm; and death appeared without a sting.” One spring evening he stood in the fields near Ripton, and viewed the lights of the Aurora Borealis; but they spoke only of a better and more lasting radiance, and he was “delighted in contemplation on the glorious morning of the resurrection.” He had his favourites among the heroes of the Bible, and it was an ineffable gladness to anticipate his meeting with them and the matchless exhilaration of their fellowship. “My soul,” he says, “was exceedingly united to the saints of ancient times; especially it melted for the society of Elijah and Elisha”—the

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prophet of the earthquake and the fire and the rushing whirlwind, and his successor of the still, small voice. In varying modes, but with unvarying intensity, David Brainerd utters the pilgrim's passion to have the journey ended and the goal attained.

There are teachers of our modern time who insist that death, instead of being dreaded and denounced, ought to be welcomed by our hearts. Mr. William Morris argues with us, or rather, let us say, with himself, that it will be soft and kind—

This rest from life, from pleasure and from pain,
This rest from bliss we know not when we find,
This rest from love which ne'er its end can gain.

But he does not succeed in quieting the imperious opposition which stirs rebelliously within his own breast, and the attempt at resignation fails.

How can we have enough of life and love?

Mr. Swinburne is bolder. With inimitable music and defiant scepticism he exults in the approach of death, because it will rid us at once of the delusive hopes and the baseless alarms which are engendered by religion.

We have drunken of Lethe at last, we have eaten of lotus ;
What hurts it us here that sorrows arise and die ?

We have said to the dream that caressed and the terror
that smote us,

“ Goodnight and goodbye ! ”

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Brainerd's accent has nothing whatever in common with the paganism, more timorous or more outspoken, of Mr. Morris and Mr. Swinburne. But here is George MacDonald, who will assure us that, if we are sons and daughters in the household of God, death is the homeliest of homely things, and we are foolish to recoil from it.

Little one, you must not fret
 That I take your clothes away;
 Better sleep you so will get,
 And at morn awake more gay—
 Saith the children's mother.

You I must unclothe again,
 For you need a better dress;
 Too much worn are body and brain,
 You need everlastingness—
 Saith the Heavenly Father.

I went down Death's lonely stair,
 Laid My garments in the tomb,
 Dressed again one morning fair,
 Hastened up and hied Me home—
 Saith the Elder Brother.

Then I will not be afraid
 Any ill can come to me;
 When 'tis time to go to bed,
 I will rise and go with Thee—
 Saith the little brother.

And here, again, is Christina Rossetti, who, in one exquisite verse after another, sings of the rich blessedness of dying, passing beyond George

MacDonald's cheerful acquiescence into a positive eagerness and rapture.

Man's life is but a working day,
 Whose tasks are set aright:
 A time to work, a time to pray,
 And then a quiet night;
 And then—please God!—a quiet night,
 Where palms are green and robes are white,
 A long-drawn breath, a balm for sorrow,
 And all things lovely on the morrow.

She beholds with unveiled face the triumphant life which lies on the farther side of death, and therefore she runs to greet that which is its herald and harbinger. Among all the poets of the latter day she it is who has most sympathy with David Brainerd. "O death, death!" he cries, "my kind friend, hasten and deliver me from dull mortality, and make me spiritual and vigorous to eternity!"

But he recognised that it was apt to become overweening—this world-weariness, and insatiable thirst of the spirit for God's incorruptible inheritance. As he advanced in the holy life, he set himself to moderate it as best he could. "When I am in a sweet resigned frame of soul," he wrote, "I am willing to tarry awhile in a world of sorrow; I am willing to be from home as long as God sees fit that it should be so." There is pathos in such enforced and deliberate submission to the lot of the banished; there is indisputable bravery too.

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And the bravery is more and more displayed as the narrative moves forward ; until, in the ebbings and flowings of the last illness, we listen to the sufferer repeating at different moments his perfect readiness to remain on earth that he may accomplish a larger work for God and man. Yet even then the harder alternative for David Brainerd was that which, to nine Christians out of ten, seems much the easier and the more enviable—the alternative of staying rather than of going. In his reckoning, to stay was to be detained in the outer court of the Temple, whereas to go was to enter the Holy of Holies itself—to *be with Christ, which is very far better.*

III

With what an unflagging diligence he filled the period of waiting! There are servants of God who surprise and rebuke us by the amount of their labours. John Wesley is one of them, and Henry Martyn is another, and Catherine Booth is a third. But the most tireless among these dedicated souls does not surpass David Brainerd in fervour and zeal. He is always journeying, always studying, always teaching, always writing, always praying; there is many a day when, like his Master in Galilee, he *has no leisure so much as to eat*; more than once we hear him grudge the few hours which he must devote to sleep. “I was exceedingly restless and perplexed,” he tells us,

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“under a sense of the misimprovement of time. I mourned to see time pass away. I felt in the greatest hurry. I seemed to have everything to do, yet could do nothing, but only grieve over my ignorance and unprofitableness.” We may be sure that the heaven for which we have seen him panting with such avidity was no “uniform universe of Rephan,” whose placid hills and valleys and seas are unacquainted with “strife bright, brisk.” It would be like Earth, in this respect at least, that, there as here, he must “burn and not smoulder.” For he counted it a sin to squander a moment or to let slip an opportunity.

If we leave the *Diary* for the *Journal*, can we imagine a missionary of the Person and the Cross and the Throne of Jesus Christ more absorbed in the work of his high calling? He rides four thousand miles in a year; and many of them are through forest, and over mountain, and up the trackless gorge along which the torrent tumbles and plunges on its way to unite its waters with those of the mightier river. At nights he lies out in the open woods. When he comes to a settlement of the Red Men, he must spend time and patience in striving to answer their frivolous questions and to allay their jealousies, before ever they will accord him permission to unfold the first principles of the Gospel. He preaches in the wigwams in the coldest and windiest weather, when the huts are full of smoke as well as indescribably filthy. One

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or two listen, but the majority laugh and mock ; some are playing with their dogs, some whittling sticks ; all of them wonder what the strange visitor can mean. Yet these initial difficulties never daunt him ; and, little by little, he gains the confidence of the tribes that have learned to suspect the white man and wish to have no friendly intercourse with him and his. Four times over, at different places, he builds for himself a humble house of logs and turf ; he has conquered the distrust of his neighbours, and can live amongst them with their hearty goodwill.

And then, gradually and gently, he leads them from stage to stage in the knowledge of themselves and of the Saviour. He finds “no foundation in their minds to begin upon” ; it is a territory wholly unexplored by them—indeed, altogether undreamt of—through which he has to guide their steps. He must instruct them as to the distinction between body and soul, between present and future, between a plurality of gods and the one God who is living and true. He must endeavour to create an adequate sense of sin. Only then are they prepared to hear of the supernatural remedy and of “the undertaking of Christ.” This, too, is brimful of mysteriousness. They “know of no such thing as one person’s being substituted as a surety in the room of another, nor have they any kind of notion of civil judicatures—of persons being arraigned, tried,

judged, condemned, or acquitted.” Nor do they comprehend how the obedience and suffering of a solitary Sin-bearer can possibly atone for the transgression of multitudes. It is all most novel, most perplexing, most unprecedented. But their teacher gives them line upon line and precept upon precept; and the Spirit of God stands in the shadow, and speaks through his lips and life. By and by, some believe his tidings. But, while his heart is abundantly cheered when this happens, his tasks are by no means concluded. These children must be educated in the faith once for all delivered to the saints. He composes such simple forms of prayer as will be adapted to their circumstances and capacities. He translates several of the Psalms into their language, that they may be able to sing them in the worship of God. There is nothing which he does not plan for them, nothing which he will not do.

Such laboriousness of love could not be futile. It would not have been thrown away, even if the husbandman himself had not seen its harvest so long as he tarried here. But, before He bade him come up higher, God granted him the joy of reaping many golden sheaves from the fields which he had sown with weeping. It is a touching and enthralling recital—the story of the revival at Crossweeksung. We know, when we read it, that, although David Brainerd had but twenty-nine years in this world, his life was complete and

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perfect, and that, as the Talmud says, he “fulfilled a long time in a short time.” He had the reward which he coveted most,—that of capturing men and women for his good Physician and his peerless King. If, more than most, he had been conformed to Jesus in toil and in suffering, he was a partaker in the triumphs of Jesus also; for he had glorified God, and had sought and saved that which is lost.

IV

The steadfast and unremitting exertion was fed from secret fountains. “We enjoyed,” Jonathan Edwards writes, “the comfort and advantage of hearing him pray. He expressed himself with the strictest propriety, with weight and pungency; and yet what his lips uttered seemed to flow from the fulness of his heart, as deeply impressed with a great and solemn sense of our necessities, unworthiness, and dependence, and of God’s infinite greatness, excellency, and sufficiency, rather than merely from a warm and fruitful brain pouring out good expressions.” It may not be our comfort and advantage actually to hearken to these well-ordered and pregnant petitions—perhaps, if we did, they might prove stings and scourges rather than balm and dew and cordial; but, wherever we choose to open this biography, we see its subject on his knees. “One hour with God,” he maintained, while he was still a youth at College, “exceeds

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all the pleasures and delights of this lower world.” It was a belief which he never abjured or revised, and which he translated into his constant practice, until prayer was exchanged for praise, and he who had been a lifelong pleader with the invisible God was lifted into His very presence.

When we look at Brainerd in the attitude of suppliant, there are at least two aspects of his prayers which compel us into admiration and amazement and self-reproach.

One of these is their unselfishness. Edwards remarked the characteristic. “He dwelt much,” he says, “on the prosperity of Zion, the advancement of Christ’s kingdom in the world, and the propagation of religion among the Indians.” He was a master in the rare and blessed art of intercession, and he loved to turn his interviews with his Lord to the best account for every one whom he carried in his heart. Not *mine* and *me*, but *our* and *us*—the plural pronouns of the Master’s pattern prayer were the pronouns most congenial to his soul. There is many an occasion when he relates the overflowing satisfaction which he felt in bearing to his wealthy and liberal Friend in the skies the names of godly ministers whom he knew, of converts and enquirers in his congregation, and of individual saints and sinners. And his anxiety for the promotion of Christ’s cause, his solicitude for the welfare of the whole family of faith,—it burned with a glowing and undecaying flame.

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Even in the upper sanctuary of God, he thought, it would be impossible for him to forget the fellow-soldiers, battle-stained and weary, who were still prosecuting the Holy War below. "O, when I go there," he exclaimed, twelve days before he died, "how will God's dear Church on earth be upon my mind!" It is a large-heartedness which is as unusual as it is beautiful.

But even more astonishing is the importunity, the perseverance, the noble and invincible violence, of his prayers. He would take no denial. *In his manhood he had power with God; yea, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto Him.* Three or four times he speaks of being "quite wet with sweat," though the air was cold and the winds were keen, when he came forth from his agonies of entreaty in the depths of the woods; again we are irresistibly reminded of another and a diviner Petitioner under the sombre screen of the trees, and of the ground reddened with the drops of His bloody sweat: Brainerd drank of His cup, and was baptized with His baptism. Let us recall one of those seasons of masterful wrestling. He had heard that next day the Indians intended to meet together for an idolatrous feast and dance. "My soul was as much drawn out as ever I remember. I was in such anguish, and pleaded with so much earnestness, that, when I rose from my knees, I felt extremely weak and overcome. I could

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scarcely walk straight; my joints were loosed; the sweat ran down my face and body; and nature seemed as if it would dissolve. So far as I could judge, I was wholly free from selfish ends in my fervent supplications for the poor Indians." And, all that night, the solemn transaction went on. "I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through, so that I could but win souls to Christ. While I was asleep I dreamed of these things; and when I wakened, as I frequently did, the first thing I thought of was this great work of pleading for God against Satan." *Quel colosse en prière!*—it is Adolphe Monod's awestricken comment on St. Paul; and the tribute has its application to Brainerd too.

It is no marvel that he was successful. In one of his books Mr. Neil Munro draws the portrait of Baron Lamond of Doom. He was a poor Highland nobleman, a man with all the sensitive and romantic sympathies of the Celt, who lived in the years immediately following the Forty-five. He had perforce to submit to the government of King George. That he might demonstrate his loyalty, he had to wear the hated dress of the Saxon. But, night after night, when his household was asleep, he climbed to one of the highest rooms of his castle, and took from an old chest a suit of Highland clothes. He substituted the kilt, the plaid, the bonnet, the gay tartan of his fathers, for his own dull Sassenach garments. It was, Mr.

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Munro says, the creation of a man from a lay figure. He was no longer the Baron of doleful days and melancholy evenings and sour memories. He was a soldier alert and resourceful. He had become a hero, in the poise of his body, in the set of his limbs, in the sparkle and spirit of his eye. This was the enriching metamorphosis which befel David Brainerd when, it may be during the time that others were sleeping, he “got alone among the bushes,” where his Lord and he met face to face. He put on in his solitude *the whole armour of God*—the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the girdle of truth, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, the sandals of preparedness and alacrity, to proclaim the Gospel of peace. And, when he emerged from the thick darkness where Jehovah was, he had gained and risen a hundredfold, *in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and men.*

V

Was there any shortcoming in this full and inspiring spirituality, any less melodious note in such a concord of sweet sounds? Far as a Christian so mature and accomplished excels most of us, we may perhaps detect a blemish in his piety. *Sorrow*, the Preacher avers, *is better than laughter*; and yet the sons of God may be swallowed up of over-much sorrow. We think of some in the

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goodly fellowship, and these amongst the foremost, who loved the twilight too well, and did not sufficiently rejoice in the splendour and warmth of the noonday. David Brainerd was one of them. He was dogged by persistent melancholy. He lived much under those skies which are “low and positive,” instead of pitching the tent of his earthly sojourn beneath “God’s celestial crystals.” There are few weeks of his *Diary* in which we do not see him busy framing the sharpest and heaviest indictment against himself.

Not that he doubts his personal interest in the love of the Father and the grace of the Son and the communion of the Holy Ghost. That is not the source of his trouble. Once he has found his dwelling-place in God, he is free from tormenting misgivings regarding the reality of his own salvation. The uncertainty whether or no the soul has reached the land of corn and wine, the dread lest at the last it should miss the crown of life and should be doomed to the blackness of darkness,—a dread and an uncertainty which have kept many of the saints *all their lives subject to bondage*,—do not harass him. His poignant pains are traceable to another fountain-head. It is the conviction of his own shameful unworthiness which chases Brainerd, as in the Greek legend the Furies chased Orestes. He to whom we have been looking up as the singular embodiment of those things which are true and honourable and just and