

ANNALS

OF THE

AMERICAN PULPIT;

OR

COMMEMORATIVE NOTICES

OF

DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN CLERGYMEN

OF

VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS,

FROM THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE COUNTRY TO THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR
EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIVE.

WITH HISTORICAL INTRODUCTIONS.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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District of New York.

It was these qualities, added to his ardent piety, that inspired his people with the almost unbounded confidence they appear to have reposed in him, and made him what he undoubtedly was in his day and generation,—a distinguished public benefactor.

Believe me, dear Sir,

With high respect and regard,

Faithfully yours,

A. CONKLING.

DAVID BRAINERD.*

1742—1747.

DAVID BRAINERD was born at Haddam, Conn., April 20, 1718. His father was Hezekiah Brainerd, a man of considerable note in the Colony. His mother was a daughter of the Rev. Jeremiah Hobart, who, in the latter part of his life, was a settled minister in Brainerd's native place.

While he was quite a child, he was the subject of strong religious impressions, and was accustomed to meet with several others of about his own age, for purposes of devotion and Christian improvement. But, though he evidently imagined himself, at the time, the subject of a radical spiritual change, he was subsequently convinced that this was but a delusive experience. And this conviction was accompanied with the most humbling sense of his own sinfulness, and of the justice and holiness of God. After a protracted season of mental agony, which he describes as arising from inward resistance to the terms of the Gospel, he found peace and joy in believing. As he was walking in a retired place, on a summer evening, in 1739, for purposes of serious meditation, fully convinced of his absolute ruin and entire dependance on God's grace, a great and wonderful change came over his mind, which he considered as marking, at least, the first perceptible operation of the renovated nature. His views of the character of God, of the character and mediation of Christ, and of the office of the Holy Spirit, became clear, elevating and rapturous; he breathed a new atmosphere; he lived for new objects; in every action that he performed he desired to hide himself, that God might be all in all.

In September, 1739, shortly after this stage of his experience, he was admitted a member of Yale College. The extravagance which prevailed in connection with the great revival of that period, had the effect, as was to be expected, of driving a portion of the religious community to the opposite extreme; and Yale College, with President Clap at its head, seems to have been thrown into somewhat of an opposing attitude. Hence the religious atmosphere about the College was cold; and the government even went so far as to enact severe penalties against those students who should be heard of at a "New-Light" meeting. Brainerd, from the natural fervour of his spirit, as well as from his deep sense of the importance of eternal things, was inclined to sympathize with the more zealous party, and looked upon this procedure of the government as an unreasonable and tyrannical infringement.

* Brainerd's Journal.—Edwards' Fun. Sermon.—Life by Edwards.—Do., by S. E. Dwight.—Do., by W. B. O. Peabody.—Assemb. Miss. Mag. II.—Bacon's Historical Discourses.

ment of his liberty; and he attended the "Separate" meeting, without any regard to the offensive enactment. About the same time, he was overheard to say, in conversation with several of his fellow-students, in respect to one of the Tutors, that he did not believe he had any more religion than the chair on which he sat. The individuals with whom he was conversing having been required by the Rector to state the conversation, Brainerd was ordered to make a public confession of his fault in the chapel. But, regarding the requirement as unreasonable and vindictive, he refused to submit to it; and, in consequence of this, was expelled from College. There is no doubt that the course which the government adopted in relation to him, was, in some measure, the result of sensitiveness to the prevailing religious excitement, and was designed as a strong expression of their opposition to Whitefield and his coadjutors; but, however much they may have been in fault, it must be acknowledged that Brainerd's course was justly liable to reprehension. Indeed, he was himself afterwards fully sensible of it; and, though he always considered himself as having been treated with undue severity, he never hesitated to acknowledge his fault, and it is evident that he profited not a little by his reflections upon it.

This untoward circumstance occurred while he was in his Junior year; and, as he never returned to College afterwards, he of course failed to receive a degree. In the spring of the same year in which he left College, he commenced the study of Divinity under the direction of the Rev. Jedediah Mills of Ripton, Conn., and, on the 20th of July following, (1742,) was licensed to preach by the Association of ministers holding its session at Danbury. From the commencement of his theological course, he had felt a deep interest in the deplorable condition of the heathen, especially the aborigines of our own country—his heart burned to follow in the footsteps of the apostle Eliot, in bringing the Gospel in contact with their darkened understandings; and, accordingly, in the autumn after he was licensed, he went to New York, by invitation from the Correspondents of the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, and, after being duly examined, received a regular appointment from them as a missionary among the Indians.

The first scene of his missionary labours was at an Indian village called Kaunaameek, about half way between Stockbridge and Albany. Here he lived in the woods nearly a year, lodging, during a part of the time, in a wigwam with the Indians, and subsisting altogether upon Indian fare. Though he was subject to the greatest deprivations, and often suffered not a little from bodily debility and disease, he persevered, without interruption, in his benevolent labours, until the Indians, among whom he resided, agreed to remove to Stockbridge, and place themselves under the care of the Rev. Mr. Sergeant. In consequence of this arrangement, he was obliged to look out for another field of labour, and forthwith directed his attention towards the Delaware tribe.

Having been ordained by the Presbytery of New York, at Newark, N. J., in June, 1744,—on which occasion the Rev. Mr. Pemberton of New York preached,—he immediately stationed himself near the Forks of the Delaware, in Pennsylvania, where he laboured, with comparatively little apparent effect, for about a year. At the end of this period, he visited the Indians at a village called Crosweeksung, in the neighbourhood of Freehold,—the residence of the celebrated William Tennent. Here was the scene of his

greatest success. A wonderful Divine influence accompanied his labours, and, in less than a year, he baptized seventy-seven persons, thirty-eight of whom were adults, whose subsequent life furnished satisfactory evidence of a true conversion. There seems no reason to doubt that this was not only a very powerful, but very genuine, revival of religion. In a letter addressed to the Rev. Dr. Wheelock, he says—"The good work which you will find largely treated of in my journal, still continues among the Indians; though the astonishing Divine influence that has been among them is, in a considerable measure, abated. Yet there are several instances of persons newly awakened. When I consider the doings of the Lord among these Indians, and then take a view of my journal, I must say 'tis a faint representation I have given of them. Among those who witnessed to the remarkable character of this work were the Rev. William Tennent and the Rev. Charles McKnight,* both of whom lived in the immediate neighbourhood, and could testify from actual observation.

During his residence at the Forks of the Delaware, he twice visited the Indians on the Susquehanna; and he paid them a third visit in the summer of 1746. But, on his return to the village where he had been recently labouring, his physical energies were so far exhausted, that he found it exceedingly difficult to preach, and, in pursuance of medical advice, he determined to travel, and visit his friends in New England. He went as far as Boston, and in July returned to Northampton, and became domesticated in the family of Jonathan Edwards, to whose daughter he was engaged to be married. Here he continued, undergoing a gradual decline, accompanied, towards the close, with the most intense suffering, till October 9, 1747, when he closed his earthly course at the early age of twenty-nine.

His last illness is represented as a most calm and yet triumphant exhibition of Christian faith. His views of Divine truth were never so vivid and glorious, as when he had nearly reached the threshold of that world, where the objects of his faith were to become the objects of his vision. He saw nothing but worthlessness and emptiness in himself, nothing but worthiness and fulness in his Redeemer; and while he was yet lingering at the gate of death, he seemed to be entranced with the glories of Heaven. He forgot not, even amidst his dying agonies, and the anticipation of the crown that awaited him, the prosperity of Christ's Church on earth; and the poor Indians especially, among whom he had laboured, came in for a

* CHARLES MCKNIGHT was the son of a Presbyterian clergyman in Ireland, and is supposed to have come to this country about the year 1740. He was taken under the care of the New Brunswick Presbytery, June 23, 1741, and was probably licensed before the close of that year. Having received calls from both Staten Island and Basking Ridge, he was ordained, October 12, 1742. In May, 1744, he was called to the united congregations of Cranberry and Allentown, and was installed, at the latter place, as pastor of these two churches, on the 19th of July following. In 1748, his pastoral relation to Allentown was dissolved, and he became the pastor of Cranberry alone. Here he remained till October, 1756, when he requested to be liberated from the pastoral charge of Cranberry, which the Presbytery accordingly granted, as the state of his health was deemed insufficient for the full discharge of his duties. Where he laboured during the eight or ten following years, does not appear—possibly his health was too infirm to admit of his accepting a pastoral charge. About 1767, he became the pastor of the united neighbouring congregations of Shrewsbury, Middletown, and Shark River, and remained in this charge about nine years. On account of his warm sympathy with the cause of American Independence, and the active part which his sons took in the contest, he was imprisoned by the British, and subjected to the most barbarous treatment. He died, soon after his release, January 1, 1778. He left two sons—Richard, who held a commission as Captain in the American army, and became one of the "prison ship martyrs," at the age of twenty-five; and Charles, who was a Surgeon in the Revolution, and was afterwards distinguished as a surgical and medical practitioner in the city of New York. Mr. McKnight was a member of the Board of Trustees of the College of New Jersey from 1757 till his death.

share of his tender remembrances, as he was on his way through the dark valley. With his last breath he exclaimed—"My work is done—Oh to be in Heaven, to praise and glorify God with his holy angels!"

The funeral of Mr. Brainerd, at which Mr. Edwards preached, was an occasion of the deepest interest to the inhabitants, not only of Northampton, but of the whole surrounding country. His mortal remains repose in the burying place at Northampton, and the spot is hallowed to the hearts of thousands by the most grateful associations. The stranger who only passes through the town, is often heard inquiring the way to "Brainerd's grave;" and many a Christian, and many a minister, whose home is on the other side of the ocean, has stood over the spot with tender and sublime emotions, and with a moistened eye. It is within the last few years that, on some public occasion at Northampton, which called together a large number of ministers, a clerical procession walked early in the morning into the grave-yard, to visit this hallowed spot, and, as they stood over it, they offered up thanksgiving to his God and their God, for having made him what he was, and supplications that the remembrance of his example might cheer them onward in their labours, and assist them to win the immortal crown.

The following is an extract from the Sermon preached at Brainerd's funeral:—

"His convictions of sin, preceding his first consolations in Christ, (as appears by a written account he has left of his inward exercises and experiences,) were exceeding deep and thorough: his trouble and exercise of mind, through a sense of guilt and misery, very great and long continued, but yet sound and solid; consisting in no unsteady, violent and unaccountable hurries and frights, and strange perturbations of mind; but arising from the most serious consideration and proper illumination of the conscience to discern and consider the true state of things. And the light let into his mind at conversion, and the influences and exercises that his mind was subject to at that time, appear very agreeable to reason and the Gospel of Jesus Christ; the change very great and remarkable without any appearance of strong impressions on the imagination, sudden flights and pangs of the affections, and vehement emotions in animal nature; but attended with proper intellectual views of the supreme glory of the Divine Being, consisting in the infinite dignity and beauty of the perfections of his nature, and of the transcendent excellency of the way of salvation by Christ. This was about eight years ago, when he was about twenty-one years of age.

"Thus God sanctified and made meet for his use that vessel that he intended to make eminently a vessel of honour in his house, and which he had made of large capacity, having endowed him with very uncommon abilities and gifts of nature. He was a singular instance of a ready invention, natural eloquence, easy flowing expression, sprightly apprehension, quick discerning, and a very strong memory; and yet of a very penetrating genius, close and clear thought, and piercing judgment. He had an exact taste. His understanding was (if I may so express it) of a quick, strong and distinguishing scent.

"His learning was very considerable. He had a great taste for learning, and applied himself to his studies in so close a manner, when he was at College, that he much injured his health, and was obliged, on that account, for a while, to leave the College, throw by his studies, and return home. He was esteemed one that excelled in learning in that Society.

"He had an extraordinary knowledge of men, as well as things; had a great insight into human nature, and excelled most that ever I knew in a communicative faculty. He had a peculiar talent at accommodating himself to the capacities, tempers, and circumstances of those that he would instruct or counsel.

"He had extraordinary gifts for the pulpit. I never had opportunity to hear him preach, but have often heard him pray. And I think his manner of addressing himself to God, and expressing himself before Him, in that duty, almost inimitable; such (so far as I may judge) as I have very rarely known equalled. He expressed himself with that exact propriety and pertinency, in such significant, weighty, pungent expressions, with that decent appearance of sincerity, reverence, and solemnity, and great distance from all affectation, as forgetting the presence of men, and as being in the immediate presence of a great and holy God, that I have scarcely ever known paralleled. And his manner of preaching, by what I have often heard of it from good judges, was no less excellent; being clear and instructive, natural, nervous, forcible

and moving, and very searching and convincing. He nauseated an affected noisiness and violent boisterousness in the pulpit; and yet much disrelished a flat, cold delivery, when the subject of discourse and matter delivered required affection and earnestness.

“Not only had he excellent talents for the study and the pulpit, but also for conversation. He was of a sociable disposition, and was remarkably free, entertaining and profitable in his ordinary discourse, and had much of a faculty of disputing, defending truth, and confuting error.

“As he excelled in his judgment, and knowledge of things in general, so especially in Divinity. He was truly, for one in his standing, an extraordinary divine. But, above all, in matters relating to experimental religion. In this, I know I have the concurring opinion of some that have had a name for persons of the best judgment. And, according to what ability I have to judge of things of this nature, and according to my opportunities which, of late, have been very great, I never knew his equal, of his age and standing, for clear, accurate notions of the nature and essence of true religion, and its distinctions from its various false appearances; which I suppose to be owing to these three things meeting together in him;—the strength of his natural genius, and the great opportunities he had of observations of others, in various parts, both white people and Indians, and his own great experience.

“His experiences of the holy influences of God’s Spirit were not only great, at his first conversion, but they were so, in a continued course, from that time forward: as appears by a record or private journal he kept of his daily inward exercises, from the time of his conversion until he was disabled by the failing of his strength, a few days before his death. The change which he looked upon as his conversion, was not only a great change of the present views, affections, and frame of his mind, but was evidently the beginning of that work of God on his heart, which God carried on in a very wonderful manner, from that time to his dying day. He greatly abhorred the way of such as live on their first work, as though they had now got through their work, and are thenceforward, by degrees, settled in a cold, lifeless, negligent, worldly frame. He had an ill opinion of such persons’ religion.”

JOHN BLAIR.*

1742—1771.

JOHN BLAIR was born in Ireland in the year 1720. He was a younger brother of the Rev. Samuel Blair, and like him was an alumnus of the Log College, and a pupil of the elder William Tennent. He was licensed to preach by the New Side Presbytery of Newcastle, and was ordained, December 27, 1742, pastor of Middle Spring, Rocky Spring, and Big Spring, in Cumberland County, Pa. During his ministry here, he made two visits to Virginia,—the last in 1746,—preaching with great power in various places, organizing several new congregations, and leaving an enduring impression of his piety and eloquence. As he had his residence in a frontier settlement, exposed to the hostile incursions of the Indians, he found it necessary, after a while, to retreat into the more populous and civilized part of the Colony. Accordingly, he resigned his pastoral charge on the 28th of December, 1748; and he seems to have remained without a settlement till 1757, when he accepted a call from the church at Fagg’s Manor, which had been rendered vacant by the death of his brother. Here he continued nearly ten years; and succeeded his brother not only as pastor of the church, but as head of the school which his brother had established. In this latter capacity, he assisted in the preparation of many young men for the ministry.

* Hist. Log Coll.—Webster’s MSS.