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The Journals of David Brainerd and of William Carey

In the judgment of many, the journals of David Brainerd and William Carey are not in the same literary class, but they may be usefully studied alongside each other. The early letters and the *Enquiry* of William Carey reveal that he followed Brainerd's lead in several ways. The journals also contain many similarities. It is likely that Carey would have kept no journal but for Brainerd's example. His may be regarded as a sequel to the earlier one. Not only so, but a number of successive Baptist missionaries, notably William Ward, would not have handed down their valuable records had the lead not been given by Brainerd. This would appear to apply also to other denominations and their representatives on the field. In the writer's judgment it is time that we gave full credit to Brainerd as an originator, in this respect, of the most instructive means to a living understanding of the Christian missionary and his work. The journal of the running battle throws a light which little else can. Even the daily trivialities and the repetition of them yield a perspective not gleaned elsewhere. In the case of Brainerd and Carey the double emphasis on some aspects of their experience may both help to understand origins and pass a needed message from two of the greatest pioneers.

David Brainerd recorded his experience amongst North American Indians in journal form covering the period April 1st, 1742, towards the time of his death October 9th, 1747. The journal was kept by order of the Society (in Scotland) for Propagating Christian Knowledge. He also kept a private diary, some of which he ordered to be destroyed a few days before his death. Only the journal is under consideration here although, as usually published, the diary and journal appear to merge a little towards the close. The fact that the two records were originally kept separately carried the great advantage of making the journal ready for publication when written. The falling of this seed could not have been more timely. The soil had been hostile. A few were questioning the use of the theological top-dressing that God would convert the heathen in His own time. What Brainerd sowed through his journal was so utterly innocent and *of the Lord* that it could not be refused. Subsequent keepers of journals would have done better to have

kept the private diary apart. Quotations here are from the 1798 edition edited by Jonathan Edwards and, where so stated, from the 1826 edition. In this study the comparisons made touching the authors are sought to be other than of literary merit. Brainerd's journal, although a beginning, approaches completeness while Carey's is a slender beginning with remarkable possibilities in embryo.

"A journal kept by Mr. Carey from June, 1793, to June, 1795" is the description inscribed in the fly-leaf of Carey's journal by Andrew Fuller. It records his leaving England on June 13th and the arrival in India with Dr. John Thomas and their families till June 14th, 1795. It contains the same and supplementary material as that found in the early letters of the two missionaries. As the journal was not received in England till the latter end of 1795, and long after many letters had been widely circulated, it did not come as news. For this and other reasons noted later, only parts of it were printed. None but the inner circle ever had the benefit derived from the continuity of the complete story. So it has lain since. The public have not had the opportunity of appreciating it as a whole. A journal kept abreast of the time enables one to share the successive problems as they first appear, in fact to live with the man. It carries an insight not found in the beautiful letter written at convenience nor in the history well told. To pass on this insight would be the present writer's ambition could it be done! One can only touch on a few outstanding features of the two journals.

The subject of Brainerd's journal is well known. That of Carey's corresponds largely with the letters mentioned. If the letters stole the real thunder it is a tribute to the weightiness of the matter common to both. For example, the first letter from Carey and Thomas after their arrival in Bengal was read by John Ryland to Rev. David Bogue (Independent minister of Gosport) and Mr. Jas. Steven (of the Scotch Church, Covent Garden.¹ They were greatly exercised by it and its effect, among other things, led on to the founding of the society later known as the London Missionary Society. (See J. C. Marsham's *Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward*, (1859) Vol. 1, p. 71.)

Quotations here are from the manuscript original of Carey's journal in the possession of the Baptist Missionary Society. It consists of 152 large quarto pages, closely written, with contemporary additions at the end. The handwriting is beautiful, the lines usually close. A small portion is affected by damp which has weakened or spread the ink, but ninety per cent is clear still. There are almost no alterations made by Carey. Quite a few lines were struck out, mostly by Andrew Fuller, but never so as to completely obliterate

¹ This incident took place in Bristol about August, 1794.

the original. An important addition is a contemporary copy of an eleven-page letter from "Brother Carey to Reverend S. Pearce, Birmingham, October 2, 1795." The tone suggests the bracing effect of conversing with another powerful mind. In this letter he told Pearce that the latter was needed more at home. Carey never persuaded individuals to go abroad.

It appears that, subsequent to the printing of extracts in the early *Periodical Accounts* of the Baptist Missionary Society, as great a portion of Carey's journal as can be studied in any one volume is in the *Memoirs of William Carey* by Eustace Carey 1836. (Eustace, missionary in India from 1814 to 1824, was the son of Thomas, William Carey's younger brother.) Eustace quotes as do most successive biographers, beyond the dates of the journal, from letters as if from the journal. An example of this is on p. 254 (January 11th, 1796). Otherwise the quotations are extensive and good. A biographer who quotes accurately is George Smith in his *Life of William Carey*. All, of course, carry forward the alterations made in Andrew Fuller's handwriting. Most of these are justified, but not all. Carey's journal as printed in the *Periodical Accounts* runs, Mudnabatty, July 7th, 1794, "all the natives here . . . speaking a dialect which differs as much from the true Bengalee as Lancashire does from true English so that I have hard work to understand them and to make them understand me." Examining the journal closely we find Carey had not written "Lancashire." It is in Fuller's writing; struck out with five lines is Carey's "Yorkshire." Carey must not be allowed to speak for himself on so ticklish a matter! To suggest that Yorkshire is not English! Incidentally the pronunciation of the largest county was a favourite crack of our greatest linguist. In the most beautiful Carey manuscript at the B.M.S., the *Grammar of the Bengalee*, he finds no better description of the letter "t" "than the provincial pronunciation of Butter in Yorkshire." This throws up a point. A close study of the journal reveals a constant pursuit of exactness in such details as pronunciation. It was but part and parcel of the plan ever uppermost in his mind of making the Word of God "understood of the people." All the while, of course, he was developing a multitude of activities. Yet we find him baffled, often beyond words, as to why he so easily felt exhausted!

A word should be said as to how far the admirable biography by S. Pearce Carey tallies with the journal. Perhaps two per cent is quoted by Pearce Carey. He generally gives the sense correctly but does not always hold with the "sacredness of inverted commas." His first four quotations bear this out. A quotation from June 13th, 1793, gives the sense with words changed. For August 23rd, 1793, Pearce Carey quotes, "I am very desirous that my sons may pursue the same work and intend to bring up one in the

study of Sanskrit and another of Persian." But he precedes this quotation by saying "Carey was dangerously ill yet planned for the far future" (p. 137, 1923 Edition). According to the journal Carey was not ill then. On November 9th, 1793, he wrote "I hope I have learned the necessity of beating up in the things of God, against Wind and Tide . . ." Pearce Carey changes the word into "bearing up." He obviously did not know that "beating up" is a nautical term meaning to make way against wind or tide. This exactly fits the context which has to do with the boat's progress. Carey was learning something of the seaman's art and, by a metaphor, applying this term to his own spiritual life. Pearce Carey quotes January 17th, 1794. "Towards evening felt the all sufficiency of God, and the stability of his promises, which much relieved my mind. As I walked home in the night, was enabled to roll all my cares on Him." The journal actually reads "towards evening had a pleasant view of the all sufficiency of God, and the stability of his promises which much relieved my mind and as I walked home in the night, was enabled to roll my Soul, and all my Cares in some measure on God." The words "All . . . in some measure" are typical of the man as often seen through the journal.

The foregoing may have enabled the reader to gauge a little the manner in which the journal of Carey has been conveyed to the public, and to note that among the hero worshippers there has been a slight tendency not to let him speak for himself. Slight as this tendency has been it has been sufficient to prevent the full journal from being published.

One outstanding feature in the unedited journal of both Brainerd and Carey is a sense of spiritual weakness and positive failure. On April 9th, 1794, Carey wrote "no woods to retire to like Brainerd for fear of tygers . . . was much humbled today by reading Brainerd—O what a disparity between me and him; he always constant, I inconstant as the wind." What encouragement Carey might have had if he had known that Brainerd often passed through the same waters! A first reading of Brainerd's journal may not give this impression but observe, for example, the editor's comments for April 22nd, 1743. ("The two following days his melancholy again prevailed—he cried out of his ignorance, stupidity and senselessness and yet he seems to have spent the time with the utmost diligence in study in prayer and in instructing the Indians. On Monday he sank into the deepest melancholy, so that he supposed he never spent a day in such distress in his life; not in fears of hell, but a distressing sense of his own vileness . . .") So it was from time to time with Brainerd till the turn of the tide and success to his labours was evident. Even so "lamentation for unprofitableness" (January 15th, 1746) continued a habit of life. To carry such an investigation further in the case of Brainerd would

be brutal. September 6th, 1746, we read from his diary. "Spent the day in a very weak state: coughing and spitting blood . . ." He was dying of consumption. Even Jonathan Edwards and subsequent publishers (to the best knowledge of the writer) have not thought fit to include too much of this "lamentation for unprofitableness" in print. It would not sell.

Turning to Carey, here is an entry typical of many. February 6th, 1795, "I sometimes walk in my garden and try to pray to God, and if I pray at all, it is in the solitude of a walk; I thought my soul a little drawn out today, but soon gross darkness returned; spoke a word or two to a mahomedan upon the things of God, but feel as bad as they. February 7th. O that this day could be assigned to oblivion, what a mixture of impatience, carelessness, forgetfulness of God, pride, and peevishness have I felt today—God forgive me." That Carey was not writing for effect is evident. He writes similarly to his sister, Ann Hobson, with whom he was in frequent touch on many subjects and with small commissions. He would not talk jargon with her. A letter to her dated March 11th, 1795,² and hitherto unpublished, reads, "I find the rebellion of my Heart against God to be so great as to neglect nay forget him and live in that neglect Day after Day without feeling my soul smitten with compunction, I trust that I'm not forgotten in the prayers of my friends and . . .³ it is anxiety to their requests that the spark of God is not quite extinguished." He refers in the context to his enjoying good health. He continues nevertheless "I hope in time I may have to . . .⁴ some converted to God . . . I remember you all in my poor addresses to God."

Ignore these things or attempt to account for them too much by sickness or hard circumstances (as do most biographers) and we miss something of value. Jonathan Edwards in his preface to Brainerd's journal wrote, "he excelled . . . especially in things appertaining to inward experimental religion, most accurately distinguishing between real solid piety and enthusiasm" and referring to "whimsical conceits and vehement emotions of the animal spirits . . . he was exceedingly sensible . . . of the pernicious consequences of them and the fearful mischief they had done in the Christian world. He was . . . abundant in bearing testimony against it living and dying." Similarly John Ryland in his diary July 8th, 1788, writes, "Asked Brother Carey to preach. Some of our people who are wise above what is written, would not hear him, called him an Arminian, and discovered a strange spirit. Lord pity us! I am almost worn out with grief at these foolish cavils

² It was found beneath floorboards in the old Mission House at Kettering in 1959.

³ Undecipherable words here through effects of mould.

⁴ Words here are indistinct.

against some of the best of my brethren, men of God, who are only hated because of their zeal for holiness." This gives a clue to Brainerd's and Carey's self-dissatisfaction—"zeal for holiness." Their devoted lives accompanied by heart confessions of weakness are the perfect reply to the accusations which, since the Reformation, have been levelled against men of their mettle. Men moved by the Spirit to new and special labour are ever accused of conceited and empty enthusiasm! The unedited journals reveal nothing of the kind. They never assume the wonderful nor presume to know all the answers. In reading their words we find ourselves in the company of those who know with the psalmist not merely dismay at hard circumstances but, spiritually, grief at "the bones which Thou has broken." Could the Christian world appreciate Brainerd and Carey here what a key we should have in our hands! Religious aristocracies could not survive.

A further feature of the journals is the world outlook of these men. Despite absorbing local difficulty the perspective of world evangelization is ever before them. Brainerd evidently knew he had an important message to give to the world through his journal in this respect. Carey's eyes had been increasingly on every quarter of the unfolding world since local people nicknamed him Columbus as a lad. A phrase in the entry for March 22nd, 1794, of Carey's journal illustrates. Referring to a case "something similar to the Scriptural Démoniac" and the performance, passing strange, employed to expel the demon by invoking "the Boot" or the spirit of a man departed, he writes "it is like the Indian Powowing a striking proof of the Power which the Devil exercises . . ." After seeking the meaning of "Indian Powowing" in the East this came to mind from Brainerd's journal, September 2nd, 1744. "I perceived that some of them were afraid to embrace Christianity. lest they should be enchanted and poisoned by some of the Powows . . . I told my people I was a Christian and asked them why the Powows did not bewitch and poison me." Again September 21st, 1745, "the Indians gathered together all their powows (or conjurers) . . . to playing their juggling tricks, and acting their frantic distracted postures, in order to find out why they were so sickly upon the island, numbers of them at that time being disordered with a fever and bloody flux." A man chivied as Carey was in 1794 in local troubles, as all the biographers tell, at once links this peculiar human behaviour of "the Boot" in India with what happens in the other end of the earth among North American Indians. This would not have crossed his mind but for reading Brainerd. Nor would the journal from end to end have breathed a world outlook had he not carried the world commission of the Gospel with him. This commission was intensified by loneliness: April 7th, 1794, "I seem cast out of the Christian world . . . I

have not the blessing of a Christian friend . . . ” Perhaps unknown to him he was viewing, in his loneliness, from a vantage point. A most wonderful feature of Carey’s journal is the perfectly consistent perspective throughout. He sees self as nothing, the world commission of Christ everything. Alone, he views the reality of the non-Christian world he had theoretically surveyed so wonderfully six years previously in his *Enquiry*. The reality clinches his resolves. Indian self-torture was still common. “The swinging by hooks fixed into the back” was done under the impression that they who practice such things “will be abundantly recompensed after death” by “Seeb, one of their Deities,” as they inform him. On April 11th, 1794, he wrote, “Who would grudge to spend his life and his all, to deliver an otherwise amiable people, from the misery and darkness of their present wretched state, and how should we prize that Gospel which has delivered us from hell, and our country from such dreadful marks of Satan’s Cruel Dominion as these?”

As to hope for the success of the gospel, the hopes of Brainerd appear to rise and fall with his own success. August 2nd, 1745, “my rising hopes, respecting the conversion of the Indians, have been so often dashed, that my spirit is as it were broken . . . and I hardly dare hope.” September 21st, 1745, “nothing struck and distressed me like the loss of my hope, respecting their conversion.” October 1st, 1745, in a different district, Grosweeksung, in New Jersey, he writes “O what a difference there is between these and the Indians I had lately treated with upon Susquehannah! . . . How great is the change lately made upon numbers of these Indians . . . There was scarce a dry eye to be seen among them and yet nothing boisterous or unseemly . . . ” November 4th, 1745, “I have now baptized in all forty seven persons of the Indians, twenty three adults and twenty four children . . . ” November 20th, 1745, “may the Lord of the harvest send forth other labourers into this part of his harvest that those who sit in darkness may see great light; and that the whole earth may be filled with the knowledge of himself!”

Throughout the period of the journal and for many years to come Carey’s hopes were tested with little outward success—no conversions that could be counted by heads among natives. February 23rd, 1795, “I felt some encouragement . . . arising from the circumstance of the people coming yesterday for instruction, and was enabled to plead with God for them; I long for their deliverance from their miserable state on two accounts principally because I see God daily dishonoured, and then drowned in sensuality, ignorance and superstition and likewise because I think that news of the conversion of some of them would much encourage the Society, and excite them to double their efforts in other places

for the propagation of the glorious Gospel." No one knew better than he as to the value of concentration on selected places; witness the college plans formed with Thomas and discussed in the journal. Equally the desire to provoke action by Christians in "other places," carries through the journal and throughout his life.

The mastery of language so necessary to the spread of the Gospel is, of course, where Carey is unequalled. Brainerd in his journal is found preaching chiefly by interpreter or in English to Indians who understood some English. In reflections on his labours, bound with the journal (p. 510) we read, "I laboured under very great disadvantage, for want of an interpreter who had a good degree of doctrinal as well as experimental knowledge of divine things . . . It was sometimes extremely discouraging to me when he addressed the Indians in a lifeless indifferent manner . . ." This evidently refers to the earlier period. It raises the question as to how the Gospel took root at all or had he the beseeching nature of a Whitfield which the Indians felt despite the cold interpretation? A great change must have overtaken his interpreter. We read further (November 4th, 1745), "God was pleased to provide a remedy for my want of skill and freedom in the Indian language, by remarkably fitting my interpreter for and assisting him in the performance of his work. It might reasonably be supposed that I must labour under great disadvantage in addressing the Indians by an interpreter . . . yet now it was quite otherwise. . . . when I was enabled to speak with more than common fervency and power, under a lively and affecting sense of divine things, he was usually affected in the same manner almost instantly, and seemed at once quickened and enabled to speak in the same pathetic language, and under the same influence that I did. A surprising energy often accompanied the word at such seasons; the face of the whole assembly would be apparently changed almost in an instant, and tears and sobs became common among them." (p. 321, 1826 edition). What would Carey have given for such native support? His promising and intelligent *moonshi* let him down shortly after the period of the journal with usual besetting sin. But we should not regard Brainerd as lucky in this respect. He had it in him to fire others as indeed he has still to fire those who search his writings for the secrets. In the writer's judgment Carey was fired by him more than by any other.

Brainerd's difficulties in mastering and selecting appropriate dialects of language were akin to those of Carey and in some respects more difficult. He writes: November 20th, 1745, "I am at times almost discouraged from attempting to gain any acquaintance with the Indian languages they are so very numerous . . . and especially seeing my other labours . . . bear exceeding hard on my constitution. However, I have taken considerable pains to learn the

Delaware language and propose still to do so." (p. 326, 1826 edition.)

To return to the practical application of the world commission, the translation of the Scriptures, this might be considered the real theme of Carey's journal. For example, January 16th, 1795. "We formed a plan to introduce the study of the Holy Scriptures . . . we intend also to order Types from England at our expence and print the Bible and other useful things in the Bengal or Hindoostanee languages . . ." When Professor John Foster of Glasgow can say at the annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society (May 4th, 1960) that the achievements of Carey and his circle in the translation of the Bible into new languages was as great as had been the combined efforts of the whole church since apostolic days, it is a privilege to trace this purpose through the slender beginnings of this period. In the light of later achievements it is fabulous to read this from the man long since known as the "Father of Bengalee." April 4th, 1794, "I make so little progress in the Bengalee language . . . that it seems as if I should never be of any use at all!"

One of the values of Carey's journal is not its triumphant assertion but the slenderness of the stem from which grew so wonderful a flower. So low he felt, but his obedience to the greatest of heavenly visions was of a quality rarely witnessed!

For literary value Brainerd's journal, especially under the hand of Jonathan Edwards, would be regarded by most as in a different class from that of Carey. Nevertheless in seeking the roots of great movements literary finesse is not all-important. The fact that Carey evidently never intended to produce this kind carries the force of noted truth. One would like to have drawn analogies on other aspects such as the prayer life of Brainerd who has so much to teach us. But Carey in the journal is silent on anything which could reflect to his spiritual credit. The writer has not come across any serious criticism of Brainerd's journal. It appears that only one of a serious nature has been levelled against Carey's. C. B. Lewis in his life of John Thomas (1873) would place Carey in an invidious light for his statements as to Thomas and finance. (p. 256). But these statements had not been published until by C. B. Lewis himself. The *Periodical Accounts* omitted them on Carey's instructions. The extract below clears the matter and indicates a problem of how much should be excluded from an up-to-date publication of the journal. In the present writer's judgment less than one per cent should be omitted having regard to the lapse of time. August 13, 1795, Carey writes to the Society: "I send my journal by which you will see a little of the manner of my life. Some things in it as Mr. Thomas's engaging in business etc at Calcutta, I desire to have for ever suppressed and

buried in oblivion; as I am convinced it was only occasioned by temporary circumstances and from that time to this the utmost harmony and affection has prevailed between us." Having unravelled this somewhat, one can say that Carey evinces not a little of the forgiving spirit.

Stir the embers of the fire kindled through the journal of Brainerd—sparks will ever rise. As far as this may apply to Carey's journal it implies the need of a vigorous stirring—both of the subject matter and of the reader. As a work by itself it might in parts be interpreted variously. It will always be studied with reward in the light of Carey's whole life purpose.

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NOTE

In the account of "Carey and his Biographers" by Dr. Ernest Payne which appeared in the *Baptist Quarterly*, January, 1961, the statement "the only memorial sermon which found its way into print . . . was one delivered by Christopher Anderson" and further that it "must be regarded as the earliest printed biographical sketch of the great missionary" calls for comment. At the B.M.S. is a reprint with facsimile title page of the original, as follows: *The Efficiency of Divine Grace. A Funeral Sermon for the late Rev. William Carey, D.D. preached at the Danish Church, Serampore, Lords Day, June 15th, 1834.* The appendix indicates that the sermon was in the press in July, 1834. It was normal for the Serampore Press to print matters of importance as and when occasion arose.

Christopher Anderson's memorial sermon was preached in November following and probably printed in that month and not long after the news had reached Britain.

The biographical portion of Marshman's sermon may be regarded as the earliest known sketch of Carey's life in print. Brief tributes to Carey were made by other communions in India even earlier. Marshman's account is not so full as that of Anderson but it is the first to summarise Carey's life and labour. The two, in part, draw upon different information.

Marshman's memorial has not been used as it might by biographers. It briefly traces Carey's life from "Pauler's Perry" (mentioning his conversion through his fellow apprentice John Ward, erroneously printed for Warr) down the years to his passing. It contains delightful sidelights. Appropriate to the article above on the Journals Joshua Marshman writes: "One course he often told me he constantly adopted, after his removal to Leicester . . . was that of carefully reading one chapter of the Sacred Scriptures every morning in English, and in all the languages with which he was acquainted. It was in these last four years of pastoral labour that he gave proof of his power of acquiring a language, which filled Fuller, Sutcliff & Ryland with surprise." From the appendix to Marshman's sermon we catch a glimpse of the contented state of our hero at the end of his life. A few days before his decease, he said to his companion in labour for thirty-four years: "I have no fears; I have no doubts; I have not a wish left unsatisfied!"

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