

## *missionary heroes*

### **David Brainerd**

Missionary to the Indians at Twenty-Four

by Julia H. Johnston

Do you know how it is possible to live a very long life in a very few years? Perhaps you have heard the secret told in these words: "He liveth long, who liveth well." The young missionary to the Indians of long ago proved this to be true by his short, heroic, useful life.

In 1718 the little village of Haddam, Connecticut, [United States] was indeed a small one, but there, in April of that year, a baby was born who grew up into the man and the missionary that all who know anything of missions today, love to think about.



When David Brainerd was only nine, his father died, and five years later the death of his mother left him a lonely orphan. For a while he became a farmer's boy, and earned his living by his work out-of-doors. Then he went to live with a good minister, who gave him a chance to study, for the boy was very anxious to go to college. To Yale he went, while still quite young, and remained three years. There were no theological seminaries then, as now, to prepare young men to be ministers, but they studied with older ministers, and were made ready to preach in this way. Young Brainerd studied with different ministers, until the year 1742. Although he was then but twenty-four, he was considered ready to preach, and was sent out upon his chosen life-work as a missionary to the Indians.

At first, the intention was to send him to the tribes in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, but, because of some trouble among them there, the young missionary was sent instead to the Stockbridge Indians in Massachusetts.

Oh, but he had a hard time in the very beginning. You know, perhaps, that Solomon, the wise man, says that it is "good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." It was certainly given to this young man to do this. No comfortable home was open to him, and he lived with a poor Scotchman, whose wife could hardly speak a word of English. Nothing better than a heap of straw laid upon some boards was provided for lodging, and as for food — what do you think he had? We know exactly, for the missionary kept a journal, and in it he wrote — "My diet is hasty pudding (mush), boiled corn, bread baked in the ashes, and sometimes a little meat and butter." He adds, "I live in a log house without any floor. My work is exceedingly hard and difficult. I travel on foot a mile and a half the worst of ways, almost daily, and back again, for I live so far from my Indians." He writes that the presence of God is what he wants, and he longs to

"endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus." The Indians, from the first, seemed to be generally kind, and ready to listen, but, in the beginning, the work was slow.

The young missionary's heart was troubled for his poor red men, because the Dutch claimed their lands, and threatened to drive them off. They seemed to hate him because he tried to teach the Indians the Way of Life. At this time there was but a single person near with whom he could talk English. This person was a young Indian with eighteen letters in his last name, which was far enough from being "English." You may do your best at pronouncing it. It was "Wauwaumpequennaunt." Fortunately his first name was John!

The exposure and hardships of these days brought on illness from which the missionary suffered all through his brief life. He tells in his journal of spending a day in labour to get something for his horse to eat, after getting a horse, but it seems as if he had little use of it, for he was often without bread for days together, because unable to find his horse in the woods to go after it. He was so weak that he needed something besides boiled corn, but had to go or send, ten or fifteen miles, to get bread of any kind. If he got any considerable quantity at a time, it was often sour and moldy before he could eat it all.

He did not write complainingly of all this, but he did make a *joyful* entry one day, giving thanks to God for His great goodness, after he had been allowed to bestow in charitable uses, to supply great needs of others, a sum of over one hundred pounds New England money, in the course of fifteen months. It was truly, to him, "More blessed to give than to receive." He was thankful, he said, to be a steward to distribute what really belonged to God.

After two years' labour among the Stockbridge Indians, Mr. Brainerd went to New Jersey, his red brothers parting from him sorrowfully. The commissioners unexpectedly sent him to the Delaware Forks Indians. This meant that he must return to settle up affairs in Massachusetts and go back again to the new field. The long rides must be taken on horseback, the nights spent in the woods, wrapped in a greatcoat, and lying upon the ground. The missionary had flattering offers of pulpits in large churches where he would have had the comforts of life, but he steadfastly refused to leave his beloved Indians.

In the midst of difficulties and hardships he gladly toiled on. Traveling about as he did, he was often in peril of his life along the dangerous ways. On one trip to visit the Susquehanna Indians, the missionary's horse hung a leg over the rocks of the rough way, and fell under him. It was a narrow escape from death, but he was not hurt, though

the poor horse's leg was broken, and, being thirty miles from any house, he had to kill the suffering animal and go the rest of the way on foot.

The last place of heroic service was in New Jersey, at a place called Crossweeksung. Here the missionary was gladly received, and spent two busy and fruitful years, preaching to the red men, visiting them in their wigwams, comforting and helping them in every way, being their beloved friend and counselor at all times. At last he became so weak that he could not go on. A church and school being established, the way was made easier for another.

Hoping to gain strength to return to his red brothers, David Brainerd went to New England for rest, and was received gladly into the home of Rev. Jonathan Edwards. Here he failed very rapidly, but his brave spirit was so full of joy that his face shone as with the light of heaven. He said, "My work is done." He died, October 9, 1747, at the age of twenty-nine.

He opened the way for others to serve his Indians, and his life has helped many, and has sent others into the field through all these years since the young hero was called and crowned. The story of his life influenced William Carey, Samuel Marsden and Henry Martyn to become missionaries. Through these, David Brainerd spoke to India, to New Zealand and to Persia.

Copied by Jason Butte for [www.SowingtheWord.org](http://www.SowingtheWord.org) from Fifty Missionary Heroes Every Boy and Girl Should Know by Julia H. Johnston. New York: Fleming Revell Co., 1913.