

## Chapter 1

President Dwight was a native of Northampton, Massachusetts, where he was born in the year 1752. His father was a merchant, a man of sound understanding and of fervent piety. His mother was the daughter of President Edwards, one of the most distinguished divines--if not the most distinguished--that American ever produced. Like her father she possessed uncommon powers of mind, and in the extent and variety of her knowledge [she] has rarely been exceeded by any of her sex in this country. She also proved a most tender, faithful, and pious mother.

It is a happy circumstance for a child to be blessed with such a mother. Her instructions, example, and prayers are of greater value than the richest earthly legacy. Without such a mother, of how little importance to the world would John Newton have been. He had a pious mother, and it was her piety which, under God, laid the foundation for his eminent usefulness. After her death he indeed became irregular and wicked. But the instructions, prayers, and tears of his mother often came to his recollection, and were as an anchor to check him in his downward course to ruin. And it was the recollection of those instructions and prayers and tears which, by the blessing of God, finally saved him and made him one of the most pious and eminent ministers of the gospel ever known in England. Such facts, and they are not few, confirm the sentiment so beautifully expressed by Dr. Watts,

Though seed lie buried long in dust,  
It shan't deceive our hope,  
The precious grain can ne'er be lost,  
For grace insures the crop.

The mother of young Dwight was much like the mother of Newton. Her piety was of an elevated character, and she evinced its influence in early directing the minds of her children to the great truths of religion. Her husband being much engaged in business, the education of this son, and of her other children, chiefly devolved upon herself; and well did she perform the duty. She was equally faithful towards all her children, but it is my province only to relate her management of her oldest son, the subject of the following pages.

At that day young children were wont to be neglected for several years, from an opinion which prevailed that they could not learn at so early an age. Mrs. Dwight thought otherwise, and more correctly. She therefore began to instruct her son almost as soon as he was able to speak. She found him attentive and even eager for improvement. At a single lesson he is said to have mastered the alphabet, and before he was four years old was able to read the Bible with ease and correctness. At that day this was an uncommon attainment, for the reason we have mentioned. At this day, such an occurrence is not rare. Were parents as attentive to children as they might be, and should be, such early

attainments would be as common as they are now infrequent.

And in respect to good behavior and religious conduct, Mrs. Dwight was faithful in the instruction of her son. She taught him from the very dawn of his reason to fear God and keep his commandments. "Always, my son," said she, "be just, be kind, be affectionate, be charitable, be forgiving. Abhor sin, love and ever speak the truth." Seldom was there a mother more faithful; seldom was there a son who profited more by religious instruction. The impressions made upon him at this early age appear never to have been effaced.

The writer well recollects to have heard him speak on one occasion of his mother, and particularly of her early injunctions, that he should always speak the truth. This was after his accession to the Presidency of Yale College, in the course of his instruction to the students. He had a fine black eye, and it shone with double brilliancy when he alluded to his mother and spoke of the impressions he had received from her in early life as to the importance and sacredness of truth. On no topic was he more eloquent than on this.

Until he was six years of age, young Dwight continued at home with his mother. Her schoolroom was the nursery. Twice every day she heard him repeat his lesson. When he had finished that, he was permitted to read such books as he chose. His choice usually fell upon the Bible, in the historical parts of which he was deeply interested. Of what he read he gave an account to his mother. Thus early he became acquainted with the best of all books, and he well remembered the minutest incidents related in the sacred volume.

At the age of six he left the nursery for the grammar school. At this time he began to importune his father for permission to study Latin. He was thought too young, however, to engage in that study, and the master was requested not to indulge him. It was in vain, however, to assail his resolution. He seems to have had the same thirst for knowledge which urged forward the celebrated Dr. Franklin in his youth. No difficulties discouraged, no impediments deterred. Where such zeal exists it should not be kept too much in check, but be wisely directed. Otherwise it may lead youths of genius to venture upon a course of concealment, if not of deception.

To some extent this was true of young Dwight. Although prohibited from studying Latin, he nevertheless contrived to borrow a Latin grammar of the elder boys; and while they were at play he became master of it without his father's knowledge or his teacher's consent. His progress was at length discovered and strenuous efforts were made to direct his attention to other studies. But his father found it expedient to discontinue these efforts. His progress was then so rapid that he might easily have been prepared for admission into college at the early age of eight years.

His Latin studies were sometime interrupted for the purpose of attending to the study of Geography and History. These branches of study he pursued under the direction of his mother. After becoming acquainted with the former, he read Rollin's Ancient History, histories of Rome, Greece, and England, and accounts of the first settlers of New England

and of their wars with the Indians, together with various other authors. The knowledge of Geography and History, which at this early age he acquired, was doubtless afterwards much enlarged; but his minute acquaintance with these subjects had its foundation at this time.

While thus pursuing his studies under the parental roof, he had an opportunity of seeing and listening to the conversation of men of education and intelligence who frequently resorted to his father's house. A deep impression was thus made upon his youthful mind of the value of knowledge and of a ready conversation, and at this early age he seems to have formed the resolution of improving his talents to the utmost of his power.

This resolution, excepting for a short period, he never forgot. How far a worldly ambition influenced him at this time we shall not attempt to say. Whatever was the character of that ambition, through the overruling providence of God it was made to subserve the cause of knowledge and piety in the world.

We are not advocates for an unholy ambition, but we delight to see a becoming ardor in youth in relation to every honorable pursuit which they attempt. And such an ardor is essential to great success, to great distinction in the world. A few there are, indeed, who begin late in life to apply themselves and who ultimately attain to an honorable eminence. But the majority of distinguished men begin early and labor perseveringly. This was strikingly true of the celebrated Dr. Franklin, and not less true of President Dwight. We mention this not to discourage those who are under the necessity of beginning late, but as a motive to those who are able to commence early to be diligent. The former *may* become distinguished; the latter surely will by a proper zeal and perseverance.

During his twelfth year, young Dwight was placed under the care of the Rev. Enoch Huntington, the minister of Middletown, by whom he was instructed in the Latin and Greek languages. To this latter place he carried with him the same ardor and zeal which had marked his application in the nursery at home. The hours allotted to recreation, and which are usually devoted by boys exclusively to that purpose, he passed in his room in attention to his books. His fondness for learning, even at this early age, was a passion. So absorbed was he that often when he was called by someone of the family, he heard not, nor did he appear to notice anyone who passed through his room.

After a residence of about two years at Middletown, he entered Yale College. At this time he had read not only the authors necessary for admission into College, but those also which were studied during the two first years of a collegiate life.

Owing to peculiar and unfortunate circumstances, the two first years of his college life were in a great measure lost. The freshman class at this time had no tutor. The other officers of the college heard them recite their lessons, but their recitations were irregular and superficial. Added to his, during the winter he had the misfortune to break his arm, by which, and by sickness during the spring and summer, he was seriously interrupted in

his studies.

Towards the close of the year the state of things in college became exceedingly unpleasant. Discipline was much relaxed; the morals of the students had become loose and their religious principles were unsettled. President Clapp resigned his office, and for a time the students were dispersed.

The reputation of young Dwight for genius and acquirements, notwithstanding these disadvantages, stood high. But for a time he came well nigh being lost as to usefulness and respectability to his family and to the world.

In consequence of the loose state of morals which prevailed among the students, many of them had fallen into the sinful and odious practice of gambling. Young Dwight was powerfully tempted to the same amusement. He was courted, caressed, and flattered. For a time he happily resisted the temptation, and indeed was never prevailed upon to play for money. But, at length, he yielded to the practice as an amusement, and as a necessary consequence wasted much of his time.

This was a critical period of his life. He was within the influence of a vortex, which had well nigh destroyed the hopes of his parents and conducted him to ruin. Through the timely influence of a friend, he was made to see his danger; [he was] influenced to pause, and thus was saved. But for the interference of that friend, his career might have been a short one and his history a sad one. But Providence had destined him to a measure of usefulness, the happy lot of a few in this world's history, and he was rescued.

On commencing his Junior year (the Sophomore year having in part been wasted, and his studies necessarily interrupted for four months in consequence of being poisoned), he returned to his studies with all his former delight, ardor, and resolution. Temptation no longer successfully assailed him. His energies, for a time paralyzed by the immoral atmosphere by which he had been surrounded, recovered their tone. His wonted ambition returned, and, under the influence of better principles and of a finer tone of moral feeling, he determined to redeem his loss and in the remaining period of the college life to lay the foundation of usefulness and respectability.

This was the goal from which he now started, and we doubt not it will be pleasant to our readers to be informed of the rapid manner in which he moved from it in his career of intellectual improvement. At that time it was the custom to attend prayers in the chapel at half past five o'clock in the winter and at half past four in the summer. Although summoned thus early to college duties, he had risen at a still earlier hour and had construed and parsed a hundred lines in Homer. This was a great effort for a youth of fifteen, and most minds, even of maturer years, would have found it difficult to accomplish. Yet he was soon not satisfied with this, but greatly increased his task. The consequence of such intense application however, made as it was wholly by candlelight, seriously affected his eyes and probably laid the foundation of that weakness in them

which caused him so much distress during the remainder of his life.

While thus employed in the acquisition of what may be considered the more important branches of knowledge, he found time to devote himself to other useful and interesting objects. Without the instructions of a master, he attained a degree of excellence in penmanship that has rarely been equaled. Some of his specimens of writing have been thought equal, if not superior, to the handsomest engravings. About this time also he cultivated a taste for poetry and music. To this latter he paid great attention, particularly to sacred music. His voice was melodious and powerful, and his ear exquisitely discriminating. Even after he had passed the meridian of life, and while the college choir were singing the usual evening hymn, he would join them, lead them, and catching as it were the inspiration of the heavenly world, would unconsciously draw the attention of the students and fix them on himself; and hard and insensible was that heart which did not feel the thrill by which his own heavenly spirit was animated.

Often on such an occasion as this, at the close of the day when the sun was going down, shedding its mellow light through the windows of the college chapel, have we listened to this pious man while his voice was ascending in strains of heavenly music to God, whither his fine rolling eye was directed, and we doubt not his heart also. On such an occasion he often read, and oftener we think than any other, the hymn beginning with the following line, "Hark, the glad sound, the Savior comes."

This was usually sung to the tune of Coronation. He would accompany the choir to the last stanza, when he would be obliged to pause in order to wipe from his eyes the flowing tears and to repress his feelings in preparation for the prayer that followed. None that remember the spirit of piety which he then manifested will doubt that he is now celebrating in a higher song, "Hosannas to the Prince of Peace," and is assisting in a better world in making "heaven's eternal arches ring with that beloved name."

From this notice of a scene which we delight to recall, and which we wish all our youthful readers could have witnessed, we go back to his more youthful days. We were speaking of the intensity of his application and naming some of the objects to which he directed his attention, beyond the ordinary duties of a college life. From this time until the period of his graduation, he devoted, with scarcely any exceptions, fourteen hours each day in close application to his studies.

As a natural consequence, his reputation as a scholar was soon established. In 1769 he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts when he was a little past seventeen years of age. At the public commencement for that year, but one of his class was appointed to speak in public. The honor lay between Dwight and Strong, the latter of whom was afterwards the distinguished minister of Hartford. The officers of the college for a time hesitated upon which to confer that honor, and at length gave it to Strong, only in consideration that he was the elder of the two.

During the two years next his leaving college, he had in charge a grammar school in New Haven. In this new situation he acquired much reputation. He became greatly endeared to his pupils; and to those who were qualified to judge, he gave evidence of a peculiar tact of quickening the ambition and enlarging the minds of those who were committed to his care. Unlike many young men in a similar situation, he did not neglect the cultivation of his own powers. Little is ever accomplished in the absence of system. As a general rule, men who have arrived at great eminence in any branch of science have employed their time methodically. This was eminently true of President Dwight during his whole progress from the commencement of his Junior year in college to the time of his death. At the period we now speak of, six hours in each day were devoted to his school, eight to close and severe study, and the remaining ten to exercise and sleep.

In 1771 Mr. Dwight was invited to become a tutor in Yale College. At this time he was a little more than nineteen years of age. This is always a responsible station, and he was quite young to take charge of youthful minds at so interesting a period as that of a college life. More than half the members of his class were older than himself. At that day it was customary for one of the freshmen to act in the capacity of a waiter to the tutor. The student who waited upon him was more than twelve years older than himself. Yet young as he was, he commanded the respect and affection not only of his class but of the students generally, and also of the officers with whom he was associated.

He was eminently qualified to instruct; and in respect to good government, he early discovered the grant *secret--viz.* to know when to be *firm* and when to *condescend*. He appeared to understand the avenues to the young man's heart, and delighted rather to win by his kindness and eloquence than to coerce by his authority. Even at this early day his elevation to the presidency was predicted. Such at that period was his acknowledged superiority, and the dignity of his whole demeanor, that men much older than himself approached him as they would one of more years and superior wisdom.

As it is not the object of these pages to present to our youthful readers a complete biography of this distinguished man, we must pass over several incidents of his life, which, however, are interesting as showing the amount of intellectual labor which a vigorous and determined mind can accomplish.

We must not, however, neglect to notice an experiment which he made during the second year of his tutorship to enable him to neglect bodily exercise and still enjoy health. The story will furnish a useful lesson to the young man who, like him, is devoted to the acquisition of knowledge.

He well knew the importance of bodily exercise to a vigorous state of the mind. But he imagined that much less exercise would answer by diminishing the quantity of food. This experiment he now made, and in the course of a few months [he] so lessened the quantity of his food at dinner that at length he confined himself to twelve mouthfuls. At the same time, his application to study was more intense. He was at his books so early in the

morning as to require candlelight, and a late hour of the night found him still engaged in his intellectual toil.

The system which he had thus adopted was too much, even for his vigorous constitution. And before he was aware of it, he was so much enfeebled as to be obliged to leave college; and, with extreme difficulty, was he conveyed to his father's residence at Northampton. On leaving New Haven, his friends and his pupils took an affectionate leave of him, and, as they supposed, for the last time. In his own mind also it appeared doubtful whether he should see them again on this side of the grave.

A merciful Providence, however, was kind to him. He was destined to occupy an extended sphere of usefulness in the literary world and in the Church of God. Through the advice of a medical friend, he adopted a regular course of bodily exercise, and within a twelve-month he walked two thousand miles and rode on horseback upwards of three thousand. By means of this relaxation and exercise his constitution recovered from the shock it had sustained. The lesson thus taught him, he never forgot.

During the remainder of his life he habituated himself to a steady course of vigorous bodily exercise. After he became settled in life, he pursued the same course, sometimes walking a considerable distance, or riding on horseback, or cultivating a large fruit and kitchen garden. In no part of the year did he neglect exercise, not even in the severest seasons. In winter, when no other mode of exercise was convenient, he would cut his fire wood. After he became President of Yale College, he usually employed his vacations in traveling, either horseback or in a sulkey, and in these various journeys it is computed that he rode more than twenty thousand miles.

In respect to the importance of bodily exercise, he was afterwards eminently qualified to impart advice. The writer of this notice has often heard him dwell upon this subject; and powerfully would he urge upon his pupils the necessity of a vigorous, and systematic, and persevering course of exercise. To the sedentary man, especially to the young student, nothing scarcely can be of greater importance; and yet few points are wont to be more neglected. Owing to such a neglect, many vigorous constitutions have been completely prostrated; and the minds which inhabited them and which might have shed light upon the [most] abstruse subjects of science, and indeed have been ornaments of every sphere of action in which they moved, have been hurried to an untimely grave.