

Chapter 3

We are now to contemplate him in the difficult and responsible station of a minister of the gospel. Fortunately he had for his charge a people whom he ardently loved, and by whom he was ardently loved in turn. Here, to this people, for the space of twelve years he continued to preach with a great and growing reputation. He had not entered the ministry by constraint. It was his *choice*, and that choice was made when another course of life, if adopted, was almost sure to secure to him wealth and fame. But his heart had obviously been drawn to a nobler work by the Spirit of God; and now, with sincerity and zeal, did he enter upon it.

It is recorded that after his settlement the people of the neighboring towns often resorted to Greenfield to hear his discourses; and an intimation that he was to preach in any particular place rarely failed to attract a full audience. But even when as a preacher his reputation was at the highest, and when the knowledge of that reputation could not be concealed from himself, he appeared emulous to preach, not himself, but Christ and him crucified.

The honor of his Divine Master, it is believed, was dearer to him than earthly praise. And though not stupidly insensible to a desirable reputation, the salvation of the souls committed in trust to him was of greater moment than all the earthly honors which could be heaped upon him. It is worthy of notice that, often learned as his discourses were and embellished with the ornaments of a rich and flowing style, he had the rare faculty of making them perfectly intelligible, and also instructive, to the humble and illiterate.

Soon after his settlement it was apparent that his salary would prove inadequate to the support of his family and of the expenses growing out of a liberal hospitality, a propensity which had characterized him from early life. To supply the deficiency he soon established an academy at Greenfield; and to instruction in that he regularly devoted six hours a day until his removal from that place.

Few seminaries in our country, of a similar kind, have enjoyed a higher reputation than this. It was established at an interesting period--the close of the revolutionary war, when the public seminaries of the land, at that time few, were struggling for existence, and the education of youth had for a long time been seriously and necessarily neglected.

A well conducted seminary, begun at such a time and in a village so delightfully situated, was almost sure to attract attention. But the unexampled reputation which "Greenfield Academy" soon acquired, and which it continued to enjoy for twelve years (the whole time during which Mr. Dwight had the charge of it) can be explained only by the admission of the superiority of his character and exertions.

Upon these it depended, indeed, entirely for its support. He had no funds to give it

impulse, and patronage was extended only as it was seen and felt to be merited. Upwards of one thousand pupils of both sexes received the benefit of his instructions, and among them were to be found the sons and daughters of the most influential citizens not only of New England but of the Middle and Southern States. Nay, although Greenfield had before this been comparatively an obscure village, it now became distinguished as the resort of families of distinction and refinement. "Never, probably," it has been justly remarked, "did a single individual, and especially one in an inconsiderable village, both concentrate and diffuse a greater flood of light."

In this situation and at this time began that superior system of female education, which at the present day is disseminating abroad its blessings and forms one of the striking features of the age. Previously to this period the subject of female education had been deplorably neglected in this country. There were females, indeed, of cultivated minds, but they were a favored few. To the great majority the avenues to the higher branches of literature were entirely closed, and perhaps in truth we might add that to many it was doubtful whether the female mind was susceptible of great intellectual expansion.

Those doubts are now dissipated, and towards the removal of them no one individual in the country ever probably contributed more by his exertions and influence than this distinguished and benevolent man.

It is a declaration of the wise man that "one sinner destroys much good." It is equally true that a good man under certain circumstances may accomplish much good. He may do this even when numerous and disheartening obstacles arise to impede the execution of his plans.

One powerful obstacle which was continually present to Mr. Dwight should not in this place be forgotten--a distressing weakness of the eyes, which had attended him from the period of his tutorship in college. Besides the pain which he often suffered, he was in a great measure deprived of the pleasure and advantage of reading, and for years was obliged to preach without writing his discourses. The method which he adopted was to write the heads of his discourse and the leading thoughts of which it was to be composed, and to fill up the body of it at the time of delivery. What was committed to writing occupied him but a few minutes. Under all the disadvantages which he experienced from the weakness of his eyes, and notwithstanding the variety of his avocations and duties, he composed and preached while at Greenfield about one thousand sermons, which, deducting the time he was absent during that period, will differ very little from two each week.

The majority of men, it is conceded, are unable to put forth such efforts because they possess not the requisite energy of character. But how many might accomplish much more than they do! There may be, indeed, an original difference between the intellectual powers of different individuals, as there is in bodily strength and vigor. But that difference, it is believed, is smaller than many imagine. All start from nearly the same

goal, and the wide distance which separates men after a few years is often owing to the superior application, the systematic and untiring assiduity of those who leave others behind. To the young man, a powerful motive is here presented to put forth and continue in constant exercise the intellectual faculties which God has given him. His Maker has created among men no disheartening intellectual aristocracy. That aristocracy, where it exists, is rather formed by men themselves and belongs to those who are disposed to make the requisite application.

As it belongs not to our design to notice more than the prominent incidents in the life of this distinguished man, and such incidents as will serve rather to elicit the moral and religious excellencies of his character, we shall next view him as the President of Yale College.