

Timothy Dwight and Greenfield Hill:

A Pastor and His Parish in the Aftermath of the American Revolution

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First, I want to thank Michael Moore and all those who were involved in planning this lecture as part of tricentennial celebration of the Greenfield Hill Congregational Church where Timothy Dwight spent over a dozen years of his life in 1780s and 1790s. As my wife will testify, Timothy Dwight has been a part of my life, and hers, for far more than a dozen years.

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Let me begin with a little background. Born in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1752, Dwight had the advantage of proper ancestors. His great, great grandfather, Solomon Stoddard was pastor of the Congregational Church in Northampton for fifty-five years. In 1729, he was succeeded by his grandson Jonathan Edwards, who in turn was Timothy Dwight's grandfather. For their part the Dwights were also at the top of Northampton society. Timothy Dwight was actually Timothy Dwight IV. His father was known as Major Dwight, to distinguish him from his father Colonel Timothy Dwight. Both Major and Colonel Dwight had served in the Massachusetts Assembly and both served as a judge on the Court of Common Pleas. The Dwights were also among the largest landowners in Hampshire County.

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In 1765, at the age of thirteen, Timothy was sent off to Yale, his father's alma mater. Yale and New Haven would be his home for the next dozen years. A member of the Class of 1769, he remained in New Haven after graduation to serve as rector of the Grammar School (now the Hopkins School) for two years while studying for his master's degree. In 1771, he became a tutor in the College, a position he would hold until he resigned in September, 1777. His marriage

to Mary Woolsey the previous March probably had something to do with his leaving Yale, as was the precarious position of Yale during the revolutionary war. At the time of his resignation, Dwight already expected another position. With the encouragement and facilitation of David Humphreys (Yale, Class of 1772), he was appointed chaplain in General Samuel Holden Parsons' regiment.

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For Dwight, the six years between leaving Yale and becoming the ordained minister of the Greenfield Church in November, 1783, were extremely stressful. Just leaving Yale and New Haven was unsettling. They had been his home during his adolescence and young adulthood and where his most loyal friendships were formed, friendships would play important roles in his life in the years to come. As chaplain, Dwight spent a full year at Phillipstown on the Hudson opposite West Point. Army life introduced Dwight to a world far removed from the sheltered world of Yale. In commissioning chaplains, the Continental Congress sought "to suppress the horrid Sins of Cursing, swearing and other Vices with which our Army vies with the most abandoned of English troops" The enlisted men he encountered might be about the same age or a little older than the students he taught at Yale, but came from more common backgrounds. Dwight later said that in the army he "found persons, who had no solid principle. Their common conversation was often revolting. They had formed a shocking familiarity with war, and would talk of butchering men, as if they had been butchers, talking about slaughtering an ox."

While Dwight did not participate in any battles, he did experience the horrors of war. In the spring of 1778, he visited the site of Fort Montgomery that had been overrun by a loyalist regiment the previous fall. Upon approaching the site, he was "distressed by the fetor of decayed human bodies." In a pond were the bodies of several men, "their faces . . . bloated and

monstrous.” His friends might be accustomed to the horrors of war, he wrote, but “to me, a novice in scenes of this nature, it was overwhelming.”

The conflict with Great Britain took an even heavier toll on Dwight in another and even more personal way. Back in Northampton, his father, Major Dwight, had tried to remain neutral, but as the conflict between England and her colonies grew, he became the target of patriot rage. Having taken an oath of loyalty to the crown, he refused to take an oath of loyalty to the new Massachusetts government. In January, 1775, he and several others were treated to a night in the Northampton jail. Even before that experience, Major Dwight had decided to leave Northampton. He had acquired a land grant covering twenty square miles in West Florida. On May 1, 1776, he sailed from Middletown with two of his sons and his sister to join his brother-in-law Phineas Lyman in West Florida. After clearing some land and making suitable living quarters, he planned to return to Northampton and escort the rest of his family to the new settlement.

In November 1778, however, just as Parsons’ brigade was moving into winter quarters in Redding, Dwight received word that his father and a brother had died almost a year earlier near Natchez along the Mississippi River. He immediately left for Northampton. The oldest of thirteen children, now with two children of his own, Dwight was responsible for settling his father’s estate and caring for his mother and younger siblings. In a letter written five months after arriving in Northampton, he wrote about conditions there: “Our country here sinks inconceivably, while taxes rise. Without a gift of prophecy, I will venture to foretell that the movement which forces farmers to sell their real estate for the purpose of paying taxes, will produce a revolution.” In 1781 letter to Parsons, Dwight wrote about the impact of the problems in Northampton was taking: “I remain as I was, only grown twenty years older than I was when I left you. Toil and anxiety bring a man down faster than his proportion.” Land rich and cash poor, Dwight struggled to provide a level of economic stability for his extended family. He established an academy that

attracted students from the surrounding area and even from Yale. He also received stipends for preaching on the Sabbath at various churches in Western Massachusetts.

If assuring economic stability for his family was stressful, Dwight was also concerned about his own future. As one historian of the era noted, “the worst thing to befall a man seeking his way in the world was to remain unsettled.” For Dwight, deciding on a career path was difficult. Dwight’s father wanted his eldest son to assume his role in Northampton, hopefully as a lawyer, a career Dwight had considered while an undergraduate. But as close friend and fellow Yale tutor, Abraham Baldwin told Yale President Ezra Stiles after a 1781 visit to Northampton, Dwight “had done with studying law.” Timothy’s mother, on the other hand, had always wanted her son to follow in the path of his grandfather Edwards and enter the ministry. Baldwin also informed Stiles, however, that Dwight was “determined against settl[in]g in the Min[ister]y,” and “chagrined & mortified [he] does not intend to spend Life in the N[orth]ampton School.”

While a student at Yale, Dwight did have one ambition – to be a poet. Dwight, along with a small group of tutors and other students, devoted much of their free time to poetry and *belles lettres*. Soon after graduating from Yale in 1769, he composed a poem, *America: or, a Poem on the Settlement of the British Colonies*. Though not published until 1780 it circulated widely in the Yale community. Tutor John Trumbull, the poet not the painter, wrote to Silas Deane that while it was “by way of a tryal [sic] of his genius” it displayed “something original and sublime in his manner of thinking and description . . . Mr. Dwight is to be our American poet.”

Whether spurred on by the positive reception of the poem among his friends or for other reasons, Dwight began writing his epic poem *The Conquest of Canaan* in 1771.

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While many parts of the Old Testament might have lent themselves to poetic retelling, his choice of the story of Joshua and the conquest of Canaan was not random. The epics of Homer and Virgil, in the original languages and in translations by John Dryden

and Alexander Pope were central to his education both before and at Yale. An important influence as well was Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The battles and heroes in these epics provided models for the Israelites he described in his poem. The ancient poets might write about the fall of Troy, he would write about the fall of Jericho, leading to one critic's much quoted assessment that "Dwight's poem was full of eighteenth-century Americans with Hebrew names who talked like Milton's angels and fought like prehistoric Greeks." Such were Dwight's exalted ambitions, and those of Joel Barlow, that John Trumbull wrote a poem entitled, "Lines Addressed to Messrs. Dwight and Barlow, on the projected publication of their poems in London, December 1775," with its opening line, "Pleased with the vision of a deathless name, you seek perhaps a flowery road to fame." Even Dwight's enlistment as a chaplain did not temper his ambition. In March, 1778, in a letter to George Washington, General Parsons was kind enough to enclose a letter from Dwight in his correspondence. With effusive, indeed fawning flattery, Dwight asked for the General's permission to dedicate *Conquest of Canaan* to him. Washington responded in the affirmative.

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Although largely completed by 1775, the war gave him opportunity to expand the poem. For example, he added a tribute to his former student, Nathan Hale, who "bright and generous, found a hapless grave." While at Northampton he also added two whole books to the *Conquest of Canaan*, Books Three and Five, which, he wrote to Noah Webster in 1788, were "added, as an amusement of care & melancholy." In these books Dwight, who rarely expressed his feelings, introduced three new characters to capture his grief over the death of his father. The characters -- Hezron, his son Irad, and Selima, allegorically Major Dwight, Dwight himself, his wife Mary.

Book III begins with a tribute to Hezron, allegorically his father.

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The chief, of simple manners, knew no art;
Truth was his language; honesty his heart:
To bless mankind his life's unvaried end;
His guest the stranger, and the poor his friend.
So fair his strong, and stubborn virtue shone,
Heaven crown'd his wishes with a lovely son.

To mould young Irad was his darling care;

Conquest of Canaan, (III, 3-9)

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The next stanza introduces Irad:

His raptur'd father wish'd no second son,

But found both parent's charms combin'd in one.

His own strong sense, and daring though, refin'd

By the soft graces of a mother's mind.

Conquest of Canaan, III, 29-43

Book V details the romance Irad and Selima, the daughter of Hezron's closest friend Caleb. Mary Woolsey Dwight was the daughter of Major Dwight's Yale roommate. Later in Book VI, Dwight describes Irad's reaction on seeing his dead father,

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. . .at once his nerves congeal'd;

His frozen lip a dumb, dead silence seal'd;

A moveless statue, o'er the sire he hung.

Nor streaming tears releas'd his marbled tongue,

Then round the cor[p]se impassion'd arms he threw,

And wash'd the clotted gore in filial due.

Conquest of Canaan, VI, 697-702.

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And, in the beginning of the next book, Dwight describes Irad, “Lost in mute grief” and in his sleep received visitations from his father’s ghost who offered warnings and advice. When he finally awoke, Irad declares, “And art thou fled forever? this end, Thou best of parents, and thou surest friend.” VII, 2, 91-92.

I provided this extensive background to give you some insight into Dwight on the eve of considering the invitation of the Greenfield parish to be its minister. The war years, the loss of father, the stresses encountered in Northampton are all captured in the line in his letter to Parsons I quoted earlier: “Toil and anxiety bring a man down faster than his proportion.”

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Turning to Greenfield, the parish had been without a minister since November 1781 when the Rev. William Tennant left to become minister at several churches in the Philadelphia area. The separation of Tennant from Greenfield was not an amicable one. The Fairfield West Consociation -- representatives of all the established churches in most of Fairfield County -- sent a group of deacons and ministers to mediate. Their report reveals much about the state of the parish at the time. The visitors were “exceedingly grieved at the too general neglect of public worship, not only in this Society, but through this part of the country,” and they concluded that given “a want of union among a people, and affection to their pastor must greatly tend to obstruct his usefulness.” They, therefore, recommended, “though with grief and reluctance considering our numerous vacancies” at churches in Fairfield County that Tennant’s request for dismissal be granted.

As the report indicated, there was “a want of union among the people,” a situation that might give candidates for the position second thoughts. So too did the report’s recognition of “too

general neglect of public worship.” A full church on the Sabbath meant a general willingness to provide adequate support for the minister. Empty pews signaled trouble. The task of the search committee for a new minister was a daunting one.

Surviving records mention two individuals who preached at Greenfield – Timothy Dwight and Dwight’s fellow tutor and good friend, Abraham Baldwin, who had also succeeded Dwight as chaplain to Parsons’ brigade. Although he preached a sermon at Greenfield while in winter quarters in Redding, Baldwin was not interested in the permanent position. Studying law, he was admitted to the practice of law in Fairfield in 1783. Within a year, however, he up and went to Georgia.

Dwight, however, was a serious candidate. According to parish records, in October 1782, the society voted to send to New Haven and invite Dwight “to preach with us.” Over the next several months, Dwight preached on several Sundays. Although the sermons are lost, the biblical texts that were basis of two are known, Acts 20:18-19; and 2 Corinthians 7:14.

In choosing these verses, Dwight clearly sought to send a message. Chapter 20 of Acts, records the travels of the apostle Paul to visit various Christian communities in Greece and Asia Minor. At Ephesus, he called the elders of the church together.

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Acts, 20:18-19

18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day I came to Asia, after that manner I have been with you at all season,

19 serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: **20** And how I kept back nothing

that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, **21** Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

(King James Version)

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Seventeen centuries after Paul, Dwight was now speaking to the elders and people of Greenfield Hill, noting that he had been with them for some time, “serving the Lord with all humility of mind.” He had “held back nothing” that they needed to know, indeed he went “house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks.” The last verse was key. The choice of minister rested not only with those who attended the Greenfield Hill Church every Sabbath, but all households within the parish, regardless of whether they ever attended the church. By knocking on the doors of both “Jews and Greeks”, Dwight was clearly demonstrating his strong interest in being invited to minister to the parish. He also recognized that without widespread support within the community any pastor was doomed to failure.

The choice of the reading from 1 Corinthians is also telling given the history of the parish. In the epistle Paul addresses dissensions among the faithful and the place of the Christian preacher in the community. The particular verse Dwight chose for explication was also telling in that women in Greenfield, as in much of the rest of New England, were more likely to be full members of the church. It was a verse to be pleasing to them.

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1 Corinthians 7:14

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife,
and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband:

else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

The selection of this passage seems to have been a way of dealing with the issue of the Half-Way Covenant under which only the children of full members of the church could be baptized. Dwight's choices for sermons suggest that he wanted an invitation to serve the Greenfield community.

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If there was any individual who seems to have been Dwight's most ardent supporter, it was Dudley Baldwin, whose name appeared first on the letter offering the pulpit to Dwight. Dudley Baldwin, the older brother of Abraham, had graduated from Yale in 1777. He remained in New Haven where he studied law was admitted to the bar and then moved to Fairfield and bought a house in Greenfield in 1779. On May 19, 1783, the sixty-two men at a town meeting voted unanimously to approve the choice of Mr. Timothy Dwight as pastor of the Greenfield church. They also agreed to an annual salary of one hundred and fifty pounds and offered "to pay Mr. Dwight three hundred pounds for a settlement to be paid over three years, one hundred pounds a year." Finally, they provided Dwight six acres of land for his use and improvement as well as twenty cords of wood annually.

The presence of Baldwin in Fairfield was certainly a factor in Dwight's decision to accept. Also important in Dwight's decision was Greenfield's location. Mary Dwight's large extended family was in Norwalk. Almost equidistant was Yale and New Haven, home two of his uncles and many friends. Finally, there was Dwight's need to provide for his family, noting in his acceptance letter both "the unanimity and friendliness of the call are so agreeable, and the proposals so handsome that I esteem it my duty to accept them." Interestingly, Dwight did not

officially accept the offer until two months later on July 20, although he seemed to have relocated to Greenfield already. He would not officially become pastor, however, until approval of and ordination by the Fairfield West Consociation.

The ordination took place on Wednesday, November 5. As was custom, ordinations were a major event which brought together ministers and laymen from near and far for much socializing and celebrating. Formal responsibility for the ordination and installation of a minister fell to the Consociation whose members would spend two or three days at Greenfield. For Dwight's ordination, members of the Consociation began arriving on Monday and held their first meeting on Tuesday morning. Present were thirteen ministers from the established churches, along with seven deacons and six elders representing churches throughout Fairfield County. First, the Consociation met to receive reports from both the Greenfield Church elders and from the larger Greenfield community.

Everything proceeded smoothly until a "Remonstrance" signed by a number of the inhabitants of Greenfield against Dwight's ordination was laid in before the council. The signers "alleged" that Mr. Dwight held and maintained some religious tenets that in the view of the remonstrants were unscriptural. The records leave no indication of the nature of their specific concerns. It may have been the Half-Way covenant or it may have been the question of universalism. Whatever the issue, the Consociation did not ignore the petitioners as it "proceed[ed] to examine Mr. Dwight as to his views and designs in entering into the work of the Gospel Ministry, his qualifications therefor, such as his knowledge and belief of the doctrines of the Christian Religion and particularly in respect of those doctrines and practices alleged in the above-mentioned remonstrance." They also questioned Dwight "whether he approved of and settle upon the religious constitution upon which the other ministers of the district are settled, called the Say-Brook platform." Dwight agreed.

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Rev. Jonathan Edwards the Younger, Dwight's uncle and pastor of the White Haven Church in New Haven, gave the ordination sermon. The two had been extremely close since Edwards arrived in New Haven in 1768. It was Edwards who prepared Dwight for the ministry. The choice of Edwards was not because of his oratorical gifts. A fellow minister noted that he spoke with a monotone nasal drone and, "in the pulpit, he was too profound to be interesting, or always intelligible to ordinary minds. His own mind was so trained to philosophical disquisition that he seemed sometimes to forget that the multitude whom he was addressing were not metaphysicians." In the sermon, Edwards warned his nephew to avoid the temptation not to preach the evangelical truths upon which salvation depends, "in order [to] maintain friendship with your congregation and thus procure our daily bread." Particularly, he declared that the preacher must condemn both deism and universalism, the view that "God by his goodness is seeking and will secure the eternal happiness of every individual of mankind."

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Whether Dwight totally followed this advice is a matter for debate. What is certain is that the newly ordained Dwight immediately made plans to start an academy similar to one he had started in Northampton.

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On December 31, an advertisement appeared in the New Haven *Connecticut Journal*. "Several, Gentlemen having applied to the Subscriber to provide Instruction for their Children, in various Branches of Knowledge; they and others are informed that so soon as Twenty Scholars shall apply, a School will commence at Greenfield, where the Languages, Geography, English

Grammar, Reading, Writing, Speaking, and the practical Branches of Mathematics will be taught under the direction of Timothy Dwight.”

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Exactly when Dwight had enough enrolment to make the academy a reality is uncertain, but Dwight frequently advertised for new students. In November 1785, Dwight published a notice in another New Haven, adding that “youths are instructed in LATIN and GREEK languages.” In addition, a Gentleman has opened a French School in Greenfield and board may be obtained, in good Families on moderate Terms: and Parents may be assured of having a careful Attention paid to the Morals of their Children by Timothy Dwight. The cost for Boys at 6/6d, and Young Gentlemen at 7 pounds Lawful Money.

The provision of boarding with “good families” and Dwight as guarantor of “good morals” may have brought more students, but it certainly garnered some support in the Greenfield community as opening homes to boarders provided an income for residents still strapped for cash in the unsettled economy of the postwar era.

To provide for the academy, Gershom Hubbell, a tanner who was also justice of the peace, offered Dwight the use of a room in his home. In summer of 1786, a separate building was erected and the cost of room and board now “under thirty pounds a year.” Not only did the academy supplement Dwight’s income, but it had a positive impact beyond the financial as it allowed him to create, even if in a modified form the world he had experienced at Yale. And for the residents of Greenfield and Fairfield more generally, besides income, the academy brought youth and their exuberance to a community. In a real sense, the Academy embodied hope for the future, pushing, as it did for Dwight, the experiences of war behind them.

Although a student might only stay for one or two years, Dwight constantly placed advertisements in regional newspapers. For example, in June 1786, to fill the school being built

an advertisement in the *New York Daily Advertiser* Dwight announced that the school was open to children of both sexes. How many female students applied is unclear, but in the fall of 1787, still another advertisement in the *New-Haven Gazette* stated that if they applied, “Three, or four young ladies . . . will be received into the family and school of Timothy Dwight.” Two years later, an advertisement in New York newspaper announced that “Six young gentlemen, or as many young ladies, if they submitted applications, “would be received into the family and school of Timothy Dwight.”

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I hope that Mary Dwight knew that her husband was welcoming students to board in their home. In any case, even the most well-behaved young ladies and gentlemen, undoubtedly put a strain on Mrs. Dwight, especially because by 1786 she was caring for five sons of her own, the oldest age eight.

The burden on Mary, who soon gave birth to a stillborn son, was probably the reason that in March 1788 Dwight purchased a slave. Naomi, from a deacon at the Norfield Church in what is now Weston. Dwight, however, treated Naomi as an indentured servant who would be free when she provided services at the rate of seven pounds, sixteen schillings, per year until the purchase price was repaid. Naomi’s ultimate fate is unknown.

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Despite spending several hours a day attending to his academy, and other hours in his fields, Dwight does not seem to have neglected his ministerial duties. Sunday services, morning and afternoon, as well as Wednesday lectures were an integral part of the rhythms of Greenfield life. During his pastorate, he probably delivered approximately 1200 sermons. Of course, some were probably repeats. Because of weak eyesight, he delivered them with only a briefly outline

or without any notes. Gardiner Spring, a minister who knew Dwight well said, “If as a preacher, he had a fault, it was that he was too familiar with the decorations of human eloquence – too often suffered his pen to rove amid the scenes of enchantment – too often pleased the taste and imagination of his audience at the expense of probing their consciences, and therefore sometimes failed in the *pungency* of his discourses.” What other kind of sermon could one expect from a poet. Whether Dwight’s poetic eloquence put his listeners to sleep is unknown, but introducing singing late in his pastorship certainly kept them awake. Midst all of this there were the rounds of visiting the sick, counseling the distressed, marrying the young, and providing comfort to families as they grieved for the deceased. All this meant that Dwight played an essential role in the ongoing life of Greenfield.

Poetry, however, was never far from Dwight’s mind. The *Conquest of Canaan* was finally published in Hartford 1785 by Elisha Babcock, a business partner of Joel Barlow. Barlow also would later secure its publication in London in 1788, but the reviews were at best lukewarm. Even before the reviews were in, however, Dwight began another poetic endeavor that would be published in 1794, *Greenfield Hill*. In the introduction to the volume, Dwight wrote,

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“When the writer began the work, he had no design of publishing it, aiming merely to amuse his own mind, and to gain a temporary relief from the pressure of melancholy. Hence it was dropped, at an early period when other avocations, or amusements presented themselves.”

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The source for this bout of melancholy is unclear. Was it simply a continuation of his mental state over the death of his father as expressed in the *Conquest of Canaan* and from his experiences during the war and in Northampton expressed in his letters to General Parsons and

Noah Webster? What is clear, however, that whatever hopes he had that the American Revolution would usher in an era of peace and tranquility went unrealized. In 1787, Dwight wrote “The danger [of the war] over and past, all the little selfish passions, with all their baleful influence, rushed in upon them at once, and with so much greater force the more they had been restrained before.” Whatever the source, just as adding lines to the *Conquest of Canaan* seems to have allayed the melancholy after the death of his father, the composing *Greenfield Hill* was again a kind of poetry therapy.

Writing is by its nature an attempt to provide coherence to one’s thoughts through words, regardless of the subject. When the subject is personal, the writer attempts to place both life’s experiences and aspirations in a narrative. Like any narrative, it is an author’s attempt to find order in complexity and to convince his reader and himself that the narrative captures the present and draws a roadmap to the future. *Greenfield Hill*, a poem of seven parts, is one such effort. It may be a simplistic response to his mental state, but in writing simplicity usually triumphs over complexity.

In *Greenfield Hill*, Dwight describes a world that was the polar opposite of English writer Oliver Goldsmith’s poem “The Deserted Village.” To Dwight, Greenfield was “A world within itself, with order, peace / And harmony, adjusted all its weal” (I, ll. 156-157) and where

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. . .that pure, golden mean, so oft of yore

By sages wish’d, and prais’d, by Agur’s voice
Implor’d, while God th’ improving sanction gave

Of wisdom infinite; that golden mean,
Shines unalloy’d, and here the extended good,
That mean alone secures, is ceaseless found.

(I, ll. 219-24).

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At the end of the first book, the personal breaks through, as Dwight's uses first-person pronouns and references to his own life as the pastor of Greenfield. He labeled these passages "The Happiness of a Clergyman in the Country."

O who can paint, like Nature? who can boast
Such scenes, as here inchant the lingering eye?
Still to thy hand, great parent of the year!
I turn obsequious; still to all thy works
Of beauty, grandeur, novelty, and power,
Of motion, light, and life, my beating heart
Plays unison; and, with harmonious thrill,
Inhales such joys, as AVARICE never knew.

Ah! Knew he but his happiness, of men
Not the least happy he, who free from broils,
And base ambition, vain and bust'ling pomp,
Amid a friendly cure, and competence,
Tastes the pure pleasures of parochial life. (l. ll. 422-34)

In these lines and what follows, Dwight relishes the freedom that he experiences in his parish of Greenfield. His earlier desire for wealth and fame, epitomized in Trumbull's "Lines

Addressed to Messrs. Dwight and Barlow” he now calls “base ambition” and is satisfied with the “golden mean” between wealth and poverty suggested by the word “competence.” He is now free “From all the needless labours, griefs, and cares, That avarice, and ambition, agonize” (l. II.465-6). Though often ridiculed “sufficient good is his.” (1.472) and he finds true happiness in family life and in his role as pastor:

INSERT SLIDE 17 AND AFTER READING GO IMMEDIATELY TO SLIDE 18

Around his board, his wife and children smile;
Communion sweetest, nature here can give,
Each fond endearment, office of delight
With love and duty bleeding. Such the joy,
My bosom oft has known. His, too, the task,
To rear the infant plants, that bud around;
To ope the little minds to truth's pure light;
To take them by the hand, and lead them on,
In that straight, narrow road, where virtue walks;
To guard them from a vain deceiving world;
And point their course to realms of promis'd life.

His too th' esteem of those, who weekly hear
His words of truth divine; unnumber'd acts
Of real love attesting, to his eyes,
Their filial tenderness. Where'er he walks
The friendly welcome and inviting smile

Wait upon his steps, a breathe a kindred joy. (ll.474-90)

The fifth part of *Greenfield Hill* is entitled “The Clergyman’s Advice to the Villagers. In addition to reading the Bible and on the Sabbath “to the Temple turn.” Dwight provides what is a valedictory:

For you my ceaseless toils ye know,
My care, my faithfulness, and woe.
For you I breath’d unnumber’d prayers;
For you I shed unnumber’d tears;
To living springs the thirsty led,
The hungry cheer’d with living bread;
Of grief allay’d the piercing smar,
And sooth’d with balm the doubting heart;
The wayward flock forbade to roam,
And brought the wandering lambkin home.

(V. II, 87-96)

It is clear that in Greenfield, Timothy Dwight had found a home and his *Greenfield Hill* is, as one historian wrote, is “a poetic hymn to New England’s republican village culture.” In Greenfield, he found support and friendship. He found a sense of purpose, a sense of hope. It was in Greenfield that Dwight together with the members of his parish were able to move beyond the traumas of the past into the new world of the future.

While Dwight seems to have been willing to live out his days as pastor in Greenfield, the death of Ezra Stiles in 1795 and the offer of the Yale presidency was an opportunity not to be declined. A visit from the Consociation was instrumental in convincing members of the Greenfield church that permitting Dwight to leave was important to Yale and to the propagation of the Gospel in Connecticut and beyond. Back in 1781, the Consociation had found “a want of union among a people, and affection to their pastor must greatly tend to obstruct his usefulness.” Now they confronted a united parish reluctant to let Dwight go. Over the dozen years of Dwight’s pastorate Greenfield certainly became a better place partly through the efforts of Dwight himself and, in turn, the support and friendship of the people of Greenfield made Dwight a better person.

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