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Newell Dwight Hillis And His Fight For Democracy During World War I

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NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS AND HIS FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY
DURING WORLD WAR I

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BACHELOR OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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This honors thesis has been approved for recognition by the Department of History.

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INTRODUCTION

Few events in history are as emotional and thought provoking as war. World War I, 1914-1918, was no exception. The United States remained neutral for the first two and a half years of "The Great War," as it was called. In the beginning, popular belief held that the war would end quickly; however, the four-year struggle proved to be a defensive war fought in trenches separated by "No Man’s Land." With the introduction of submarine warfare, the battles at sea were no less destructive. Warring nations exhibited unprecedented nationalism. Battles were fought to preserve or install democracy in all countries of the world. This ideological aspect of the war prompted many to support the war effort. One such supporter was Newell Dwight Hillis, pastor of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York. Through his captivating oratorical skills, Hillis generated popular support for the war. He raised millions of dollars through the First and Second Liberty Loan drives for the war effort. These contributions made Hillis "the most famous of all American clergymen to call upon the Almighty to hurl the Germans into an eternity of fire and brimstone." 

Hillis’s role in World War I represented a struggle involving trust that he also faced in his personal life. He lacked a competent business sense but desired to earn money for his family through land speculation. He put his faith in a financial director that ended up cheating him out of money. Throughout "The Great War" Hillis lectured around the country asking for trust from Americans in the war effort. He asked for financial support from them. He wanted trust from people who were at first reluctant to
give it to him. Some historians might say that Hillis used the American public to create
fame and fortune for himself. Others might say that he too was used by outside forces to
get the United States to join the war. Regardless of the way Hillis is viewed, he
is an interesting historical figure. He was a man who believed in the importance of being
well-informed about current issues and events. He perceived it to be his role as preacher
to inform his congregation about the evils in the world. In the case of World War I, he
explained to them why, in the eyes of God, Germany’s actions were wrong. Unlike most
preachers in 1914, he told his religious community that the only thing for the United
States to do was to enter into the fight against autocracy. Hillis was a reformer with a
progressive attitude who eventually accomplished a great deal during the Liberty Loan
drives.

Hillis is especially remembered for the time he spent as a preacher in Brooklyn
and for the money he raised during the war. However, there is more to this man than
those achievements. He was the son of a farmer who rose from a meager upbringing to
reach the pulpit of a famous church; he was a man who believed a woman’s place was in
the home; he was a scholar who had a passion for reading; he was a minister who gave
his life to God, and he was an American who desired the American dream.
CHAPTER 1
THE ROAD FROM MAGNOLIA TO PLYMOUTH

Newell Dwight Hillis was born on September 2, 1858, in Magnolia, Iowa, to Samuel Ewing Hillis and Margaret Hester Hillis. He was the ninth of ten children, three of whom died before the age of two. His parents moved from Kentucky in a covered wagon and settled in Magnolia after having been “stirred by the plans of the so-called Yale College Band for a center of culture and education farther west.”¹ Both Samuel and Margaret sincerely valued education and were devout Christians.

From the very beginning of his life, Hillis’s parents instilled in him the value of a good education. A farmer by trade, Samuel Hillis was described as “a sweet-natured and dreamy scholar, rather than an up-and-coming farmer.”² Although the Hillis’s were not a family rich in money, the Hillis family household was enriched by many conversations on foreign missionary work and religion. Their house contained many books on these as well as various other subjects. Hillis himself “was named after Harriet Newell, a missionary, and the well-known Dr. [Timothy] Dwight of Yale,” who had served as the college’s president from 1795 until 1817.³ Amazingly, all seven of the Hillis children, including the women, attended college. While Newell, the youngest son, went on to be an avid reader, preacher, and self-proclaimed scholar, the oldest child, Hester, went on to graduate from Grinnell (then called Iowa College). She travelled to India where she
eventually died of cholera while working as a missionary. Her experiences are believed to have been a major influence on Hillis’s decision to enter into the ministry.\(^4\)

In his early years, Hillis attended the Magnolia Academy where he had a reputation among his classmates for having a studious attitude at a young age. His experiences in class proved helpful as later in his life he would give thousands of speeches. In a letter to Hillis’s daughter in 1939, one of his classmates, Myra Rice Case, recalled:

> Your dad was very bright and normal play-fellow and thoroughly enjoyed sports as a child, but early became a great reader and student. At H.S. he preferred to read at this desk at recess time than to play ball, and I think only at the instigation of a teacher was he made to go out for air recreation. I well remember his wonderful oral recitations, in history especially.\(^5\)

When Hillis was just six and a half years old, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. This event had a profound effect on him. Of the experience he said, “it was as if an eclipse had passed over the sun. . . . I remember the minister’s grief, the people’s sobs and tears, and especially the terror of certain women whose husbands were at ‘the front.’”\(^6\) Hillis was reminded of his first memory of war after learning about Henry Ward Beecher and his legacy at Plymouth Church where Hillis would eventually become preacher. Beecher was an ardent abolitionist who spoke throughout Europe and the U.S. before, during, and after the Civil War. Beecher and Hillis both had faith in all-embracing liberty that was clearly evident in their sermons preached from the pulpit. The United States Civil War was, for Beecher, what World War I would become for Hillis.

In the summer of 1880, before attending Lake Forest University in Illinois, Hillis traveled by horse and buggy through Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming, organizing 44 schools for the American Sunday School Union.\(^7\) At Lake Forest he met his future wife,
Anna Louise Patrick, and married her in April 1887. A newspaper article about the wedding gave this description of the couple: “The bride is a lady of culture and refinement, eminently fitted to adorn high social positions. Mr. Hillis is a young man of superior abilities. . . .”

The Hillis-Patrick wedding took place just one week after Hillis’s graduation from the McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. While studying at McCormick, Hillis was first introduced to Henry Ward Beecher. He heard Beecher deliver a sermon at Chicago’s Central Church. Hillis’s son and daughter later described the event as both “coincidental and prophetic, for within a few short years the younger man was to become pastor of Central Church, and some four years after that he was to go to Brooklyn as the second of Henry Ward Beecher’s successors in Plymouth.”

After the wedding, the young couple spent three years in Peoria, Illinois, where Hillis was the preacher for the First Presbyterian Church of Peoria. They then spent four years at the First Presbyterian Church of Evanston in Illinois. His experience in Evanston was a new one for Hillis. It “was then the richest suburb of the Middle West and the church members included many prominent Chicago business men.” His life had changed dramatically from his childhood days in rural Iowa, and it is fair to say that both his professional and personal ambitions grew while in Evanston. While there he was able to make a trip to both tour England and visit a hero of his, John Ruskin. Upon returning from this trip he is said to have been “all afire with new ideas for social betterment.”

One area that Hillis believed needed “betterment” was that of labor. While he was studying at McCormick, in Chicago, the famous Haymarket riot had taken place and “awoke in [him] . . . a lifelong concern for the laboring man.” Witnessing events like
the riot started the development of the progressive attitude that would become apparent later on in his life.

After four years in Evanston, Hillis was called to preach at Central Church in Chicago. He succeeded Professor David Swing at Central Independent Church which held its sole weekly service in Central Music Hall. It was in this hall that two members of Plymouth Church’s search committee heard him speak and were entranced by his charm and charisma.

As in Evanston, Hillis’s professional and personal ambitions grew steadily in Chicago. His social circle consisted of men of wealth and power like those who sat on Central’s Board of Trustees. They included Lyman J. Gage, who later became President William McKinley’s Secretary of the Treasury, H. Gordon Selfridge, “the department store genius who later went to London, and Herman Kohlsaat, the newspaper publisher.”

While in Chicago, Hillis’s popularity began to expand outside the local region. His weekly sermons were printed every Monday in the Chicago Inter-Ocean. People throughout the Midwest who subscribed to this paper could read his sermons, and for those who did not have one, they could find compilations of these sermons in the first three of the more than forty books he wrote in his lifetime. These three books were: The Investment of Influence (1896), A Man’s Value to Society (1896), and Great Books as Life Teachers (1898).

In A Man’s Value to Society, Hillis covered such topics as the “elements of worth in the individual, the mind and duty of right thinking, and the uses of books and reading.” Hillis praised education through reading, declaring, “the supreme privilege of our
generation is not rapid transit, nor the increase of comforts and luxuries. Modern
civilization hath its flower and fruitage in books and culture for all through reading."¹⁴ In
the second book Hillis wrote essays on men whom he considered the most important
authors of contemporary society, ranging from Hawthorne to Tennyson and Hugo.¹⁵

As recognition for his speaking abilities began to spread, Hillis was invited to
speak at Chautauqua meetings, along with other lecturers of the time such as Russel H.
Conwell and the famous William Jennings Bryan, with whom Hillis shared a progressive
attitude. The Chautauqua platform provided listeners throughout the Midwest with both
religious and secular lectures by musicians, writers, and political leaders of the time.¹⁶

Finally, in 1899, Hillis was called by the search committee to preach at Plymouth
Church in Brooklyn, New York. This Presbyterian church had first opened its doors in
1847 with the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, newly arrived from Indianapolis, as its
preacher.¹⁷ The fact that Beecher and Hillis shared the same pulpit is but one of many
similarities found in their lives. When called, Hillis moved his son, daughter and
pregnant wife to Brooklyn to begin his career.

Less than six weeks before Hillis gave his first sermon in Brooklyn, The Sunday
Times-Herald of Chicago composed a feature article on him and his family. The
descriptions in the article give a detailed picture of Hillis and his lifestyle:

In the book-packed study of Newell Dwight Hillis is an old copy of the Iliad,
marked literally to pieces. Near by is a copy of Ruskin, worn through with much
use; a little work on biology, a volume of the sermons of Henry Ward Beecher,
"the Truths of 'To-day," by David Swing, and a slim volume of Shakespeare's
works. These are a collection by themselves, frayed, battered, soiled and worn
out as books seldom come to be with constant reading.¹⁸

In his 25 years as pastor at Plymouth Church Hillis made many contributions to
the lives of people in his congregation, his city, his state, and his country. Although their
new church community was different from that of Chicago, both Hillis and Annie jumped whole-heartedly into their roles as pastor and pastor's wife at the famous church. They maintained and participated in men's, women's, and children's groups and prayer meetings; they organized the Sunday school, helped with Thanksgiving baskets, and hosted many social gatherings both at the church and in their home.19

Just as his sermons had been reprinted in a Chicago paper, Hillis's Sunday sermons at Plymouth were reprinted in the Monday edition of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle. Instead of giving the paper his sermon notes or the version taken by a shorthand reporter, Hillis chose to "re-preach" the sermon to his secretary each Monday. "One explanation, of course, for this incredible expenditure of energy was that it gave Dr. Hillis a chance to reconstruct his argument with an eye to the printed page."20 He wisely understood the difference between hearing a sermon and reading one.

In addition to submitting his sermons to the newspaper each week, Hillis also wrote various articles for other newspapers and magazines. Examples of these, including a "series of five sermons, dealing with the ethics and duties of home life" reflected the time period in which Hillis lived. Two of the installments in this series were entitled "What Woman Brings to the Home" and "The Traits of an Ideal Husband." In these installments he put forth statements such as, "It is a sin for a young woman to study French and German and music unless she can bake better bread, pies and cake than any cook that her husband's money can hire. A girl has no more right to expect to learn how to run a house after she is married than the young husband has to learn how to run a business. . . ." Articles such as these provided Hillis with an opportunity to spread his beliefs to those outside of his congregation as well as those outside of New York.
In commenting on a husband’s duty to provide companionship for his wife, Hillis wrote,

The first ten years of life in the house means the mother’s disappearance from the world in which she has been hitherto a centre of beauty and delight. . . . It is the man who is abroad, among men and events. . . . For him the world without is endlessly rich, and the husband must have eyes for two. . . . He must learn to bring home all the treasures of the day.\textsuperscript{21}

To the members of his congregation and their descendants, Hillis made a great contribution. In 1902 he began “the Henry Ward Beecher Memorial Plan” that included the construction of an institute to be called the “Arbuckle Institute,” stained glass windows, and the raising of an endowment fund of $100,000. To begin the campaign for this great project a meeting of many important people, including former president Grover Cleveland, United States Supreme Court Justice David J. Brewer, and Hillis himself, was held at the Academy of Music on March 8, 1903. The style exhibited in this particular speech was one that Hillis would use many times throughout his career as a preacher and lecturer. In a rousing talk given at the Academy of Music Hillis said to the audience:

What Independence Hall is to Philadelphia, what the Old South Church is to Boston, what Mount Vernon is to Washington, what the shrine of John Wesley and his old church are to London, we wish to make this Memorial Hall of Patriotism, Plymouth Church, and Beecher Park to all men, without regard to race, class or creed and especially to the children and youth of this country.\textsuperscript{22}

Hillis’s greatest pride came from the three series of stained glass windows he had commissioned for the church. They essentially described “the history of Puritanism and its influence upon the institutions and people of the republic. The broader theme, however, is concerned with political, intellectual, and religious liberty—a theme peculiarly appropriate for Plymouth Church.” The windows had depictions of Oliver Cromwell, “the Signing of the Compact on Board the Mayflower,” “the Founder of Harvard College,” “William Penn: Peace Movement in Pennsylvania,” “Manasseh

In addition to the improvements he made on Plymouth Church, Hillis also started the “Better Brooklyn Movement.” Based on his observations of beautification of both European and American cities and his discussions with men of power in Brooklyn, Hillis devised a plan to beautify Brooklyn. Had World War I not broken out and had his plan not been met with some resistance, it is likely that many of his improvements would have been carried out.

In his early years at Plymouth, Hillis continued to compose books from his sermons. These included The Quest of Happiness (1902), Success through Self-Help (1903), and The Contagion of Character (1911), and many others based on his opinions of World War I.

Besides preaching, writing books, making improvements upon his church, and beautifying his city, Hillis also engaged in some financial ventures which, although they fulfilled his desire for the American dream, proved to be detrimental to his own financial affairs as well as to those of some members of his congregation.

After Hillis’s death, his son, Richard Dwight Hillis, found a newspaper article taped to the door of his father’s safe. Until his father’s death, Richard had never seen it. The article told the reader how to earn an annual income of just under $12,000 a year by the age of 50 by investing $5,000 a year, starting at age 30. This may seem an odd article for a church minister to have, but when Hillis’s life style is taken into consideration it makes sense.
In a short essay about his father Richard wrote, “He had been brought up in an atmosphere of bitter economy, so he brought his children up in luxury. As the years went by it ran to tutors, and expensive boarding schools and eastern colleges and foreign travel. My father was a ‘successful’ man in the American sense of the word.”25 Hillis, as with many parents, wanted to raise his children with the things he never had growing up in Iowa; but there was more to his financial goals than just his childhood. The experiences he had growing up on the farm made him a strong man, both physically and in his work ethic. But, while working in Evanston and Chicago, Hillis met many successful, powerful, and wealthy men after whom he tried to pattern his own life in later years. He had seen what money could buy for a man and his family, and he wanted the same for himself. He wanted the American dream of making a good living by his own means, and living out the end of his life financially worry free.

Beyond what the church paid him, Hillis earned money from his many speaking engagements around the city, state, and country, and in 1905 he entered into land speculation. According to Richard, his father had earned close to $30,000 a year for the previous twenty years. This was a remarkably high income for the time period. However, when a former schoolmate visited him in Brooklyn and told of the $50,000 he had earned through real estate in Chicago, Hillis could not pass up the chance to go with his friend to Saskatchewan to look at some wheat land.

In a history of his father’s financial affairs, Richard described Hillis’s “philosophy of profits” that he had learned from his former schoolmate. This “philosophy” is explained by three basic rules. Hillis followed these basic rules, but his lack of
knowledge and experience in business ended up hurting him in the long run, contrary to what rule number two suggested.

1. The great investment opportunities are always at the frontier, the rim of the wheel, where the majority of men don’t go, and where the world’s great natural resources, timber, iron, coal, oil and minerals are still available.

2. The ownership of such great natural resources demands no elaborate and technical knowledge, no real experience in business. Once acquired the title paper to the property can be stowed in one’s safe and forgotten. Its value will rise automatically and steadily til in that twenty years or so the owner will be rich.

3. The only great requirement is a man must have the vision—he must see the chance and he must agree to go to the rim of the wheel, find this chance and he must have the capital (not necessarily large) to make the investment and keep it alive.26

Hillis bought some wheat land in Canada, and less than a year later he sold it for a handsome profit. In the spring of 1906, Hillis’s friend returned to him with another business venture further west in Canada—timber in British Columbia. Hillis bought more land and hoped to also make a good deal of money from it. On paper, his holdings were worth close to a million dollars, and this, according to Richard, caused a marked change in Hillis’s personality.

He was forever whistling, radiating good cheer and for the first time in memory he began to take an interest in life and living outside of his profession. He talked of travel, escape, ‘release,’ ‘of living like another man.’ The eternal grind of worry and long hours was going to end. We would all go around the world, take a house in England, spend our winters in Capri, etc.27

Hillis dreamed about the life he wanted to live—a life uncharacteristic of a preacher. He lived with these grand hopes for many years, and had he developed a business sense, and had a cheating financial advisor not entered his life, he might have died a rich man instead of a man in debt. Hillis continued to preach, lecture, and invest in land until World War I broke out in 1914. At that point his professional career reached
its pinnacle and generated for him the national recognition for which he would earn a place in history.
To understand the way Newell Dwight Hillis looked at the world one must understand the world in which he lived. During Hillis’s lifetime, both the United States and Europe experienced many great changes. In Europe, Italy and Germany both became unified nations; Walter Gropius established the Bauhaus; Austria was the world’s cultural and intellectual center; many Europeans immigrated to the United States; Europe experienced the effects of Karl Marx’s The Communist Manifesto that was written only ten years before Hillis was born; and Europe engaged in World War I.

In his lifetime, Hillis watched as J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and Cornelius Vanderbilt rose to the top of the business and industrial worlds. He watched as the United States became a nation that relied on trains and automobiles for transportation instead of the horse and buggy. He watched as Gustavus Swift and Gail Borden revolutionized the meat and milk industries. He also saw the introduction of Colgate, Pillsbury Flour, Quaker Oats, and Proctor and Gamble. He lived through the “roaring twenties,” the Scopes Trial, and he watched as congress passed anti-trust legislation, prohibition, and granted suffrage to women. Hillis lived through both the American Civil
War and World War I, but the most intriguing thing he witnessed was the ushering in of a new way of life for many Americans.

This new way of life for Americans involved a new attitude. The country’s industrial tycoons proved that an extraordinary amount of money could be made through business ventures, and with Borden’s introduction of condensed milk, society had the opportunity to become more mobile. People formed labor unions to improve their working conditions as they began working longer hours in the factories for the tycoons. Industrialization caused people to desire an easier way of life. New things were invented; people began to travel further away from home and more frequently. Technology was brought into the home through Thomas Edison’s light bulb and Alexander Graham Bell’s telephone, and people began to save their money in an effort to live a more luxurious lifestyle. Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby is a good example of these changes, as were Hillis’s speculations in land.

Another change in American society that had a profound effect on the attitude of both the United States and Hillis was immigration. As America became an industrialized country, jobs in factories opened up, attracting millions of immigrants to the “land of opportunity.” In 1860, two years after Hillis was born, the country’s population was 31,443,321, and one year after he died in 1929 the population had risen to 122,775,046. Primarily because of immigration, the population almost quadrupled in seventy years.

During the 1880s and the 1890s more than eight million immigrants from southern and eastern Europe arrived in the United States. Earlier in the 19th century immigrants had come primarily from western Europe. With the arrival of people from different regions came the arrival of new religions. Up until this point in time the United
States had been a predominantly Protestant country, but the wave of immigration in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century brought over many Roman Catholic and Jewish people. This proved to be a point of great distress for many Americans. "Both old-stock Protestant Americans, who considered the newcomers racially inferior, and segments of organized labor, which disliked the added competition for jobs, favored attempts to restrict immigration." Both of these issues concerning immigration influenced Hillis.

It is unknown exactly how Hillis felt about immigrants. He may have seen them as "racially inferior," as many Americans did, but he might not have. He did not slander immigrants in his lectures and sermons. However, because he was a Protestant minister, he was probably troubled by the arrival of Catholics and Jews. Many of these immigrants came from Germany and Austria which might explain why Hillis was so anti-German during World War I. It is possible he thought that in encouraging Americans to join in the war effort against Germany, he was also encouraging them to make an effort to curb the immigration of people of different religions.

Anti-German sentiment was a major element in Hillis's lectures during World War I. Between 1820 and 1944 close to six million Germans immigrated to the United States, and in 1904 alone the number of German and Austrian immigrants to the United States was 46,380. As a man with progressive leanings, Hillis probably also had difficulty accepting immigrants "taking" jobs from Americans. On this subject Roger Daniels said, "Most Germans, whether urban or rural, were seen as having achieved significant economic and social success, though there was a vast gulf between the German-American intellectuals and professionals of, say, New York City and
Chicago... "Despite their success, and partly because of it, many German immigrants were looked down upon.

Immigration and industrialization were two issues that greatly influenced the rise of the Progressive Party around the turn of the century. Although Hillis did not claim to be a party member, many of his beliefs were similar to those of other Progressives of the time, and just as there were conflicting ideologies within the party, many of Hillis’s actions conflicted with those of other Progressives.

Members of the Progressive Party could have been called reformers just as easily as they were called progressives. Reform was the party’s major goal. Some of the issues the party included in its platform in 1912 were women’s suffrage, prohibition of child labor, a living wage as opposed to a minimum wage, an eight-hour work day, and a six-day work week. The 1912 party platform accurately summed up the motives and intentions of the Progressives when it said,

The conscience of the people, in a time of grave national problems, has called into being a new party, born of the nation’s sense of justice. We of the Progressive party here dedicate ourselves to the fulfillment of the duty laid upon us by our fathers to maintain the government of the people, by the people and for the people whose foundations they laid....

Within the party itself there existed many conflicting ideals, making it an un-unified party. Members squabbled over whether more power should be granted to the people or to experts; they fought over a slow growing economy versus embracing a “big business” economy, and they fought over the welfare of immigrants versus the process of “Americanization.” They agreed that “they were determined to use their knowledge and skills to solve the problems caused by industrialization and to impose order upon a nearly chaotic society,” but they disagreed on how to implement these goals.
Hillis can easily be compared to Theodore Roosevelt and William Jennings Bryan, two well known Progressives of his time. Although all three were Progressives, Hillis had more in common with Roosevelt than Bryan. It is unclear exactly how well Roosevelt and Hillis were acquainted, but many aspects of their personalities and their orating skills were the same. Roosevelt was described as outspoken and having had a “flair for the dramatic . . . and inspired strong feelings.”9 Hillis is remembered in much the same way. Roosevelt and Hillis were born in the same year and both lived in New York during the war, so it is very possible that they came in contact with each other at various social and political gatherings, and if nothing else, they knew of each other by reputation.

Williams Jennings Bryan and Hillis shared a traditional, conservative, and Protestant background. Both were deeply religious men, and yet their views on World War I differed. In 1915 Bryan was Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of State, but he resigned after a disagreement with Wilson over how to handle the sinking of the Lusitania. In his letter of resignation to Wilson, Bryan said, “Alike desirous of reaching a peaceful solution of the problems arising out of the use of submarines against merchantmen, we find ourselves differing irreconcilably as to the methods which should be employed.”10 Unlike Bryan, a lifelong pacifist, Hillis agreed with Wilson’s threat of war in 1915. The only thing Hillis disagreed with Wilson over was the possible need to go to war against Germany as early as 1915.

It is ironic that two men as religious as Bryan and Hillis would differ so dramatically in their views on World War I. It is possible that Hillis supported the war because Roosevelt did, or because of his views of the new religious immigrants, or
possibly because he was a vehement anglophile. Maybe his support stemmed from his belief that the war was truly was a fight for democracy. It is most likely, however, that he supported the war for a combination of these reasons.

Hillis, unlike Bryan, seems to be the one to have strayed from the expected actions of a strict Protestant Progressive, and yet he was not the only Progressive to do so. He just did it before any one else. Before the United States declared war on Germany, Hillis was an active participant in a "propaganda campaign." He lectured across the country before America joined the war, and after the American declaration of war, he continued his efforts on behalf of the Liberty Loan drives.

Although the war smoothed the passage of political, moral, and economic reforms long sought by Progressives, it also led to government actions that conflicted sharply with Progressive values. Perhaps the best example of this was wartime propaganda. More than anything else progressivism meant faith in an informed citizenry and a conviction that government should assist in the educative process. . . However, the Wilson administration conducted a massive propaganda campaign, one designed to inspire rather than instruct.11

Hillis's views of World War I and social justice also differed with those of another group with which he identified—the followers of the social gospel. Although Hillis worked hard to make a great deal of money for himself, he often preached about social reform. He strongly encouraged people to strengthen their family ties, and he encouraged them to be an active member of their church, doing community service activities. Hillis participated in these activities himself, but in trying to accumulate personal wealth, he somewhat failed to follow his own preachings.

Hillis also greatly differed with the followers of the social gospel in regards to World War I. Most followers of the social gospel were opposed to the idea of war, but they saw World War I as an extension of the fight for social justice. While most
supported the war for this reason, Hillis strongly supported it for the advancement of democracy. Hillis and other followers of the gospel supported the war effort for ideological reasons, but these reasons differed from each other. As a minister, Hillis was not alone in his support of the war, but he was definitely in the minority. Of the war, Walter Rauschenbusch, a well-known “prophet” of the social gospel said,

The Great War has dwarfed and submerged all other issues, including our social problems. But in fact the war is the most acute and tremendous social problem of all. All whose Christianity has not been ditched by the catastrophe are demanding a christianizing of international relations. The demand for disarmament and permanent peace, for the rights of the small nations against the imperialistic and colonizing powers, for freedom of the seas and of trade routes, for orderly settlement of the grievances,—these are demands for social righteousness and fraternity on the largest scale. Before the War the social gospel dealt with social classes; to-day it is being translated into international terms. The ultimate cause of the war was the same lust for easy and unearned gain which has created the internal social evils under which ever nation has suffered. The social problem and the war problem are fundamentally one problem, and the social gospel faces both.12

At the turn of the century industrialization, immigration, and Progressivism influenced the lives of all Americans. By 1914 these issues had also influenced the way people viewed World War I. Despite America’s status as a rising political and industrial power, many Americans opposed the United States’s entrance into the war. Many believed that it was a European affair, and that the United States should not get involved. But by 1917 public sentiment had changed due to a combination of events in foreign and military relations. This eventually led to the United States declaration of war on Germany. At that point the problem of how to finance the war arose, and Hillis was asked to help solve that problem by lecturing across the country on behalf of the Liberty Loan drives.
When the war first began in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson issued his Neutrality Proclamation. In it he warned Americans to abstain “from engaging to serve in the military or naval services of belligerents while within United States territory, . . . furnishing supplies to ships of war in the service of any belligerent or beginning or setting on foot or aiding any military expedition or enterprise to be carried on from the territory or jurisdiction of the United States.”\(^{13}\) This steadfast policy of neutrality was severed only when, in the eyes of Hillis, innocent American lives had been lost, a threat against U.S. soil had been made, and when Germany had reintroduced unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917.

The war in Europe began with the Dual Empire’s declaration of war against Serbia on July 28, 1914. A Serbian youth had assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand a month before the war officially began. Because of alliance treaties, this act prompted Russia, France, Germany, Great Britain, and other countries to engage in war, making it a truly world war. Although the United States chose to remain outside the battle, it still engaged in trade with many of the belligerent nations. This proved to be extremely profitable for the United States. In the early stages of the war, one man wrote, “Still there is a streak of silver, even in this sombre cloud. The warring millions will have to be fed and clothed some-how.”\(^{14}\) In 1914 trade with the Entente Powers was worth about $800 million, but by 1916, it had grown to about $3 billion. Conversely, trade with the Central Powers dropped dramatically during this same period of time due to the British naval blockade.

Germany would eventually take actions in the second half of the war to keep the United States from trading with the Entente Powers, but long before 1917 Germany took
other aggressive actions against the United States. The most well-known example of this was the sinking of the *Lusitania*. On May 7, 1915, a German U-boat sank the steamship, killing 128 Americans. Two years later the United States declared war on Germany.

After the *Lusitania* was sunk, Germany wisely stopped its use of U-boats, knowing that if it sank more American ships it risked the United States joining in the war. England, on the other hand, continued its naval blockade against Germany, making submarine warfare by the Germans inevitable.

Less than one year later, in February 1916, Germany declared a restricted form of submarine warfare against all properly armed ships. Shortly thereafter, the *Sussex* was torpedoed, injuring many Americans. The United States gave Germany an ultimatum, and again Germany wisely backed off. Germany and the United States agreed to “friendly relations,” but Wilson warned that if any submarine warfare was renewed by Germany, the United States would declare war. One author said,

But whatever can be said as to the pacific instincts of Congress can be repeated with heightened emphasis of Wilson... Again and again he made clear that the United States ought not to be involved except upon the single issue of submarine sinkings. The fact was clear to the Germans. If they started the submarine campaign, it meant war with America. If they held back the campaign, there was no danger of American intervention.15

By January 1917, Germany was painfully aware of its economic crisis due to the British naval blockade and re-instituted unrestricted submarine warfare, knowing this meant war with the United States. No longer would it refrain from attacking neutral ships in the war zone. This act seriously hindered American trade, and it, as well as the infamous Zimmermann Telegram, were primary reasons for the United States’s entrance into the war.
Just three and a half weeks after the reintroduction of unrestricted submarine warfare, the British government intercepted and turned over a telegram to President Wilson. It was a note from the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, to the German ambassador of Mexico, offering to return to Mexico its lost territory in the southwest part of the United States if Mexico would ally itself with Germany should the United States become involved in the war. Wilson made the telegram public, adding to the people's growing disdain for the Central Powers.

Finally, with the democratic revolution in Russia in March 1917, President Wilson believed the United States could now enter the fight to "make the world safe for democracy," and on April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany.

Although the sinking of the Lusitania happened within the first year of the war, it had made a lasting impression on both Hillis and other American citizens. Events such as this and the Zimmermann Telegram prompted Hillis and other leaders to campaign for broad public support for the war. Hillis believed it was the duty of United States citizens to finance all military forces that were fighting for democracy and liberty, principles the United States had fought for 150 years earlier. For Hillis, there was no question about United States's involvement in the war.

The outbreak of World War I marked a new period in Newell Dwight Hillis's life. It was a time when his name became known from coast to coast; it was a time when his sermons changed from topics on how Christians should live their lives to why the United States should enter the war; it was a time when he temporarily relinquished his duties at Plymouth Church; and it was, above all else, to be the pinnacle of Hillis's career and life as a public speaker.
CHAPTER 3

"LET US CARRY ON THIS WAR UNTIL WE END ALL WAR"

After the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, it became necessary for the U.S. to find a way to finance its war efforts. The option of taxation was discussed but passed over so as not to put a heavy tax burden on the citizens, or to decrease their morale. On April 24, 1917, President Wilson approved the sale of war bonds, and the First Liberty Loan drive lasted from May 14 until June 15. The document from the House of Representatives read: "The bonds herein authorized shall first be offered at not less than par as a popular loan, under such regulations prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury as will give all citizens of the United States an equal opportunity to participate therein. . . ."2

Once the government had decided to sell bonds, the next task was to get the people to buy them. In The Story of the Liberty Loans, Labert St. Clair said, "The task of bringing about the education of people unfamiliar with government securities . . . was one well worthy of the talent which it called into the three integral parts of the Liberty Loan army—the sales, publicity and speaking branches."3 Men and women like Newell Dwight Hillis helped to publicize and convince Americans that buying a war bond was of vital importance in fighting for democracy on the homefront.

Within five days of America’s entrance into the war, the American Bankers’ Association, the organization in charge of the first Liberty Loan, asked Hillis to write a
Within a month he began a lecture tour of the country with a banker named Lawrence Chamberlain and gave talks on behalf of the first loan drive. He visited twenty-two states and gave many addresses.

After the First Liberty Loan ended on June 15, 1917, Hillis visited French and Belgian battle sites to obtain first-hand accounts from soldiers to electrify his speech material. When Hillis returned he wrote more lectures, and with the beginning of the Second Liberty Loan on October 1, 1917, he engaged in another speaking tour. From his research in Europe he wrote a lecture called The Stake of the Republic in the Issues of the Great War. Nine million copies of this address were published and distributed in England, making it the “largest issue of any single war document in England.”

Lectures and pamphlets, however, were not the only methods used to convey the pro-war message. During the four Liberty Loans and the final Victory Loan, rallies, buttons, street car advertising, movies, posters, confiscated German war material, and uniformed soldiers representing the major allied countries were used to persuade the American public.

One of the most frequently used forms of propaganda was the poster. “In a world without radio and television, and where newspapers were still the preserve of a literate minority, the poster was the one big instrument of mass communication. It was a medium that was accepted and understood by the public at large. . . .” These war posters carried four major themes. Some asked for money while others asked for men to enlist in the armed forces. As the war continued, the posters that were produced called for women to work in the factories. They also asked for help for wounded soldiers, orphans of those killed while fighting the war, and help for fleeing refugees of war torn
nations. Hillis even had his own poster made. It was a painted picture of him dressed in a preacher's robe while standing in front of a church with a smoking bomb next to it. He pointed his index finger at the sky with the quote, "let us carry on this war until we end all war" beneath the picture.

Hillis also composed three books expressing his views on World War I. In these books he gave two major reasons that the United States should enter into the war. First, Hillis believed the United States owed a debt to both England and France. In the case of England, Hillis said that various ideologies came from British intellectuals, were adopted by Americans, and supplied the country with it's democratic foundation. He believed the American revolution stemmed from the ideas of Oliver Cromwell, John Pynn, and John Hampden; that the idea of freedom of the press, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution came from John Milton. Hillis also made the argument, even before April 1917, that the conflict was just as much America's war as it was England's and that the United States should waste no more time in neutrality. Hillis believed the bond of a common ideology, democracy, should have united England and the United States from the outset of the war. He then credited England for making America a democratic nation. He believed that "Great Britain has been the mother of many republics; all the harvest of our liberty came from seed corn gathered in England's harvest fields." Hillis also advocated support from the United States because of the many advancements France had given the world in the areas of literature, music, clothing, and her example of heroism. Hillis also proposed the idea that French aid during the American Revolution was cause for support from the United States during World War I. In his book, German Atrocities, he said:
In 1781 France, a kingdom rich and powerful, found the handful of American colonists in the condition of a boy, poor, friendless, obscure, and threatened by a powerful enemy. At the moment when our fortunes were at the lowest ebb, France sent us her greatest admiral, with a fleet of two battle-ships, three destroyers, thirty-eight transports, and seven thousand soldiers, with muskets, powder, shot, shoes, clothing and medical supplies.11

Second, Hillis saw the war as a true fight for democracy, and for him, this was justification for his support of the United States’s entry into the war. He vehemently opposed non-democratic governments, especially the autocracy in Germany. German Atrocities and The Blot on the Kaiser’s ‘Scutcheon, both published in 1918, were compilations of the lectures he gave on behalf of the First and Second Liberty Loan drives. In each book Hillis’s anti-German sentiments were clearly visible. In the latter book he commented on the “arch criminal,” “the Judas among nations,” “the black soul of the Hun,” and the “Pan-German scheme.”12 This “Pan-German” scheme was one issue that greatly bothered Hillis. He felt the Kaiser desired to take over much of Europe and had been successful in persuading the people of Germany to feel the same way.

Hillis believed:

Little by little the germ of world-ambition became a fever, burning in the soul of every German at home or abroad. It took twenty years to thoroughly inculcate every individual of the German race with this feverish ambition, but when 1914 came every German had gone over to the Pan-German scheme and was ready to die for it.13

Hillis’s distinction between the “Pan-German” scheme and British imperialism is found in his first sermon at Plymouth Church. Hillis saw a difference in motive between the British and the Germans. He believed the British were spreading Christianity, and therefore education and eventually democracy, through their rule in India, while Germany, according to Hillis, only wanted to have supreme rule over the world.

There are three million other young men and women in India in Christian
colleges, academies and schools. Soon this will mean a free press, libraries in every village of that land, railways, manual training schools, free institutions—and after that "the flood" of knowledge. And so of Africa and China; the columns of light are marching straight for the heart of each continent. Christianity is a young giant that in three centuries leaped to the throne of the Caesars.14

As mentioned, Hillis's disdain for the Germans was characteristic of many reformers around the turn of the century. In The American Century: A History of the United States Since the 1890's, the authors said that "Many Progressives believed that only in orderly societies could the United States hope to find political cooperation and long-term markets for the glut of goods and capital American corporations produced."15

Hillis, a typical white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, believed in many of the Progressive movement's ideals. In lecturing on America's "moral obligation" to join the war and German atrocities, he furthered the Progressive platform, although not all Progressives agreed with him. William Jennings Bryan was just one of many examples of a Progressive who disagreed with the American war effort.

Unlike other Americans, Hillis formed his strong anti-German sentiments long before the United States entered the war. Stewart Halsey Ross, in his book, Propaganda for War: How the United States was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918, and H.C. Peterson, in "Propaganda as the Cause of War," argued that anti-German sentiments were formed in the minds of Americans through a propaganda campaign instigated by the British government. Peterson accurately described the roles of figures like Hillis when he declared:

The Great success of British propaganda in the United States should not be attributed to a professional group of propagandists but to native Americans—volunteer propagandists. These were individually enlisted in some cases, but in the main were regimented into "soldiers of the king" by a process of eliminating, or at least curtailing, enemy interpretations of the war and by dominating the news.
with exaggerated and warped pro-Ally accounts of what was happening or had happening.\textsuperscript{16}

Hillis's support for the war in 1914 was uncharacteristic of a preacher, but his progressive leanings heavily influenced his thoughts on the war. His support for the Entente Powers was not the first time he strayed from the path of standard religious teachings. In the early years of his career at Plymouth Church, he gave a sermon called "The Automatic Judgement Seat in Man," in which he scorned the Presbyterian doctrine of infant damnation. Had he not resigned from the Presbytery, he would have probably been tried for heresy.\textsuperscript{17} Hillis, like other Progressives such as Woodrow Wilson and William Jennings Bryan, was not afraid to speak his mind.\textsuperscript{18}

In examining the seemingly contradictory views that Hillis held, the legacy Henry Ward Beecher left at Plymouth Church cannot be overlooked. As a supporter of social justice during the Civil War, Beecher traveled through the United States and Europe gathering support for the North. In an effort to carry on Henry Ward Beecher and Plymouth Church's legacy as supporters of equality and democracy, Hillis may have felt compelled to be an outspoken supporter of America's entrance into the World War I.

From the day war broke out in Europe, Hillis spoke about America's moral obligation to join in the war effort in more than two hundred and fifty cities. In addition to the support he received from the general public, he also experienced a great deal of criticism. Many thought it was not right for a preacher to promote the violence of war, but Hillis refuted this notion when he said,

\begin{quote}
I am perfectly willing to choose between militarism and Jesus. My fathers chose eighteen centuries ago. They left the law of the pack behind . . . and I see the march of Napoleon and the kaiser's regiments ravaging fields, burning villages, looting Belgium, despoiling France. And over against these who lead the return to savagery, to the law of the pack, to brute force, I see Jesus, standing before the
\end{quote}
mailed host, and with his out-stretched and bleeding hands making himself a shield, and I hear the voice of an unseen God, "Here stay thy proud march—thus far and no farther..." But remember, God is abroad. If you are recreant to the convictions of your fathers, God will raise up children to Lincoln and Washington, to Cromwell and Luther, out of the very stones of the streets, and these will cry out against you.\textsuperscript{19}

Hillis also received a great deal of criticism from Americans of Irish, German, and Austrian descent. Many were torn between their heritage and the country that gave them religious, intellectual, and social freedoms. Although many were opposed to the actions of Germany and the Dual Empire, they also disagreed with the harsh comments made about the citizens of those countries even after the U.S. had declared war. While lecturing throughout the U.S. in 1917, Hillis was reportedly challenged to a duel by the Austrian violinist, Fritz Kreisler. In an article that explained Hillis's refusal to retract comments he made about Kreisler during a sermon, Hillis said, "It is well known that Kreisler is an Austrian captain. An Austrian rifle costs $20. Every night that Kreisler is paid $1,000, Austria can buy fifty rifles which Germany can kill our American boys." Kreisler was said to have responded, "Dr. Hillis' statement [was] cowardly, irresponsible and unethical."\textsuperscript{20}

One explanation for why Newell Dwight Hillis made such an impact on the Liberty Loan drives was his ability to arouse the people in his audience. He reportedly raised thirteen million dollars in twenty minutes in Baltimore and a total of one hundred million dollars on his forty-six day tour.\textsuperscript{21}

Many factors contributed to Hillis's ability to raise such extraordinary amounts of money. Having seen Henry Ward Beecher preach, Hillis knew what it took to keep an audience attentive. He successfully played on the people's emotions through his careful explanation of German atrocities. One of the most startling stories he told, although it
was later proved false, was about German sexual offenses against women. Hillis explained that when German soldiers entered the army, they were tested for syphilis. If they did not have the disease, they were free to engage in sexual activity with women kept in their camps. However, if the soldier tested positive for syphilis, it was customary for him to take advantage of women in defeated cities and cut off their breasts as a warning to succeeding soldiers that she had been contaminated with the disease.22

Hillis used the Bryce Report as one source for his lecture material. These reports supplied him with information about German soldiers and their sexual activities, but as Stewart Halsey Ross pointed out, this report was "purportedly proved systematic" after the war, while other sources of atrocities were even proved completely false.23 When Hillis used these reports he believed them to be true, but one must also note that the Bryce Report and others like it played a conveniently crucial role in supplying Hillis with emotional information about the alleged atrocities of war.

Hillis also told horrific stories he heard from soldiers that depicted for the audience what life was like in a war-torn country. He did this with the hope that it would make Americans want to finance the war to keep it from their country. Stories such as this induced the American people to buy war bonds in order to end injustice in Europe and, most importantly, to keep these atrocities from happening to them. From his battle site notes, Hills reiterated a conversation between a few English soldiers as well as a French soldier. The English soldiers basked in thoughts about what it would be like for them to go home and how excited they were for it. When asked about his feelings, the French soldier responded:

When do I go home? You Englishmen do not understand! Your land has never been invaded. Go home! To what could I go? The Germans have been in my
land for a year. My little town is gone, quite gone. My little house is gone, and
gone my little shop! My wife is still a young woman! My little girl,—she is just
a little, little girl! Why, I never thought of her as a woman! And now our priest
writes me that my young wife and my little girl will have babes in two months by
these brutes!  

Another characteristic of Hillis’s speeches that made him effective was his use of
historical examples and analogies. To many people in his audience he came across as a
well read man, and as a result, they respected him and his opinions. His use of history
also stirred in them a sense of nationalism. In a lecture given to the firm isolationists of
Butte, Montana, he said, “Not since Fort Sumter was fired upon have thoughtful men
been so disturbed as today. . . . All the issues vital to democracy—indipendence, freedom
and self-government, are at stake.” In a speech in Oregon he reiterated his belief that
the United States was in great debt to France for its help during the revolution. He
believed that “the place for the Stars and Stripes right now is in the trenches with the tri-
color of France.”

Though well read, Hillis’s version of events was often different from reality. Of
Hillis, Stewart Halsey Ross said, “According to his contorted understanding of history,
the United States also had an obligation to England—to repay ‘our immeasurable debt to
the motherland’ and to ‘pay our debt to France,’ because France once had ‘helped
Washington expel thousands of German invaders from America.’” Regardless of the
accuracy of his historical facts, Hillis proved to be extremely successful in raising money
for the war effort.

All of these characteristics of Hillis’ speeches made him a successful lecturer and
earned him the gratitude of many people, including Theodore Roosevelt. In a letter to
Hillis, Roosevelt wrote,
Will you permit me as an American citizen to thank you with all my heart for what you have done. There is not a man in this country who has accomplished more along the line of patriotic achievement than you have accomplished during the last few months...all this makes every one of us your debtor.28

A letter from the American Bankers’ Association stated, “Your tour of the United States...was of inestimable value to the United States and to the common cause of world-wide democracy.”29 Overall, the Liberty Loan drives were successful because of people like Newell Dwight Hillis, who alone has been credited with raising approximately $100 million. The goal for the first drive was $2 billion, and when that first drive ended, it had earned $3,035,226,850. The Second Liberty Loan drive, with which Hillis was also involved, lasted through October 27, 1917. The goal for this drive was $3 billion, but it actually raised $4,617,532,300.30 Much to the satisfaction of the program’s leaders, the Third, Fourth, and Victory Liberty Loan drives all earned far more than their quotas.

At first glance, it would seem surprising that Hillis discontinued his active support for the Liberty Loan drives within the first year America was at war. After spending two and a half years trying to generate support for the war, events in his personal life gradually forced him to refocus his energy. However, once Hillis had taken care of those personal issues he returned to his work in furthering the ideals of democracy and patriotism.
As Hillis was touring the country raising money for the war effort, events outside the public specter gradually became the center of his life. With the close of the Second Liberty Loan drive, Hillis’s active efforts to raise money significantly decreased. He did not change his opinion about the purpose of the war or the need for the United States’s involvement in it, but he was forced to focus on more pressing personal matters.

As previously mentioned, Hillis, along with his childhood friend, bought land in Saskatchewan and later sold it for a generous profit. Hillis initially made a great deal of money through land speculation, and this prompted him to buy timber land in British Columbia in 1906. Hillis’s success in the business world was a goal he had made for himself early in his career as a minister. Despite his lack of business sense, he earned a good deal of money early on through his land speculating. This increased his confidence in the potential to earn even more. Hillis continued to make large sums of money, and his son Richard noted how it effected the family’s lifestyle:

This feverish, hectic, singularly unreal period lasted for several years. Mother and the girls went abroad for the winter, I joined them for a summer vacation. The girls attended expensive boarding schools and I got an allowance that would be extravagant today. Father wanted us to have the best. He had that pathetic, generous, loving and mis-guided desire to give his children every advantage which so many parents have.  

The first sign of trouble for Hillis came in the spring of 1910. Before leaving for school that fall, Richard and his mother had pleaded with Hillis to stop his business
ventures. Annie had brought it to Richard’s attention that the margin between the cost of their luxurious lifestyle and the total amount of Hillis’s income was miniscule. In the previous year his timber holdings had alone cost him and his family nearly $6,000. Both mother and son believed that they had been successful in persuading Hillis to stop his speculating, but they in fact had failed to do so. Around Thanksgiving of that fall Hillis bought a new tract of timber by going “on another man’s note,” and in the spring he was forced to meet that note. Luckily, he was able to sell the land and did not go into great debt. Richard believed that this experience scared his father, but only temporarily. “He had no more idea of business, ordinary trade tradition or common risk, than a child in the cradle. He was wide open for trouble. . . . For the moment he thought of it merely as a bump and a scare.”

In that same spring Hillis appointed Frank L. Ferguson to the Board of Trustees to direct the financial affairs of Plymouth Church. He was so impressed with Ferguson’s work that Hillis granted him power of attorney over his own financial affairs. A few years later Hillis would realize what a grave mistake this was.

During the summer of 1910, Hillis experienced his second “serious cyclone,” as Richard called it. In an effort to reorganize their timber holdings, Hillis and his childhood friend ordered reports on their land to be sent to them. “The new cruises brought bad news. For certain sections, some of the supposedly best, appeared in these reports as worthless—‘inaccessible,’ or ‘rock. . . .’ Worse—among these worthless units were sections he had sold to friends, or co-owned with friends, in the height of enthusiasm.” Earlier, Hillis had put his brother Whima’s twin sons, Harry and Percy, through Oberlin College and sent them to work in the Northwest to look at the lands he
was buying. It is thought that their inexperience and failure to check all of the land he bought contributed to Hillis’s purchase of “worthless” acreage.

Hillis suffered a great deal financially from this, but he believed that with Ferguson’s help he could work through it. And for a long time Hillis was sure that Ferguson was helping him. Ferguson convinced Hillis that the solution to his problems was to buy and sell more timber. Hillis, with his lack of business knowledge, agreed with this and gave Ferguson access to his personal funds. It was believed by Hillis’s personal secretary that over the years Ferguson stole close to $27,000 of Hillis’s money and used it for his own benefit.

As the years went by Ferguson continued to buy and sell land for Hillis, and although he was repeatedly asked, Ferguson never produced a financial statement for Hillis. In spite of this, Hillis still trusted Ferguson and the work he was doing. If Hillis had pushed for a financial statement from Ferguson early on, perhaps many of their problems might have been cut short or even resolved amicably.

In February of 1915, Hillis finally took away Ferguson’s power of attorney, and one month later Ferguson claimed that Hillis owed him money. In September of that same year Hillis’s nephew, Percy, who had supposedly been “taken in” by Ferguson, charged Hillis with larceny. The suit brought the controversy to the public eye, but it was eventually dropped when the courts realized that Hillis had justification for bringing his own suit against Ferguson. In October of 1915, state Supreme Court Justice Callaghan required Ferguson to “submit to examination before R[e]feree Dickey . . . in reference to his conduct of Dr. Hillis’ affairs.” Hillis charged Ferguson with fraud, and Referee
William D. Dickey heard testimony on the case from November 1916 to June 1918 and made his ruling two months later.

Throughout this whole time Hillis toured the country to generate support for America's entrance into the war and even made trips to Europe to gather new material for his lectures. After America's entry into the war, Hillis actively participated in the Liberty Loan drives for another six months. However, with the close of the Second Liberty Loan drive in October 1917, Hillis decreased his involvement in the effort. He still supported the war but was forced to focus on his legal dispute with Ferguson.

In an effort to prove that Hillis owed him money, Ferguson had brought in nearly 3,500 letters on the last day of testimony. Hillis's lawyer objected to them, but Judge Dickey allowed them in as evidence. Ironically, the letters helped the judge in deciding against Ferguson. Testimony continued to June 1918, and on August 1, 1918, the Brooklyn Eagle reported that Judge Dickey found in favor of Hillis and that Ferguson owed him $70,000. The article read:

According to the decision Judge Dickey finds that Ferguson falsified his accounting; finds that he is not entitled to one cent of the $3,000 he charged Dr. Hillis for services; finds that he is entitled to only a small part of the $20,000 he charged for "expenses" and finds that the basis on which he was to represent Dr. Hillis entitled him to charge only 5 per cent commission on sales instead of the 10 per cent he alleged. . . . Throughout the decisions Dr Hillis' main allegation that Ferguson defrauded him while acting as his business administrator is entirely supported. Also, Judge Dickey leaves no room for doubt that Ferguson resorted to all kinds of trickery to avoid an accounting and padded his statement of account, when finally compelled to make one, so that he could cover up large sums he had taken from the minister.5

Even though the judge did decide against Ferguson, he suggested that Hillis's actions as a minister were not above reproach. Hillis took to heart what the judge said and
used the reproach in his decision to personally pay back all of the members of his
congregation who lost money on the timber lands he encouraged them to purchase.

Of Judge Dickey one article declared,

... he finds place in his opinion to express his failure to understand why the
clergyman did not come into court and defend himself, and he has this to say
regarding Dr. Hillis: “The temptation is strong to preach a sermon on the
impropriety, to use no harsher term, of ministers, while they are ministers,
engaging in any speculative business where the speculation is to be carried on
with money of others who entrust their earning and savings to a ministerial office,
but I refrain.”6

Judge Dickey’s response to Hillis’s actions was not the first time that their
minister had been criticized. From the moment Hillis was notified of the $50,000 lawsuit
against him by his nephew Percy, he endured criticism from many people. However,
Hillis was most harsh on himself. He was served with the papers of the lawsuit on a
Saturday in September 1915, and the day after, in his sermon at Plymouth, he made the
following remarks to his congregation:

Often I have loved my books more than the poor; often I have loved position, and
sometimes I have thought of my own interests when every drop of blood, every
ounce of strength and every thought of my mind belonged to our schools, home
missions, the sick, the poor, the friendless, and to boys and girls of hungry minds.
Perhaps I have taken honors offered me when I should have chosen solitude and
dwelt part and listened to the voice of God, that I in turn might repeat to you that
message and so be to you a true prophet. For several years I have had a growing
conviction that a minister has little right to make money, and perhaps does his
best work without it.7

The response from his congregation was supportive. Assuredly some members
were upset with him, but the vast majority overwhelmingly supported him by raising
money to pay his legal fees. This support for Hillis also came from around the country.

Williams Jennings Bryan, who had resigned as Secretary of State after the sinking of the
Lusitania less than six months before and who strongly opposed Hillis’s position on the
war, called Hillis the day after he apologized to his congregation. This is just one example of the support Hillis received in his time of great personal turmoil.

One newspaper reported the call for the reader.

Good morning, Dr. Hillis, I have just read the morning newspapers and have been deeply impressed by your statement. You have done right, and no matter how harsh critics may be, remember there is a sense of justice in the world that is all but wider than religion itself. You have made a host of friends in this country. They have confidence in you and love you. But you have more friends today than you ever had before. I have been the subject of criticism and the centre of storm, but I have lived to see the right increasingly recognized and grow. If criticism could kill a man I would have been slain a million times. But the more you stamp on the truth, the deeper you plant the seed of justice. . . . do not for one moment allow this to interfere with your work in Plymouth Church or in the country. Goodby and God bless you.8

After the lawsuit was resolved Hillis was able to return to lecturing and preaching, but by this time the war had almost ended. He continued to write more books, and although he did not participate in the final drives of the Liberty Loan, his “fight for democracy” did not end with the war. He produced another lecture series, accompanied by a slide show, called the “Better America Lectures.” This series was aimed at the education of immigrants and children to “enlighten” them on the ideals of democracy and liberty by using historical figures to make them more aware of the evils of communism and autocracy. In the introduction to his book, entitled The Better America Lectures (1921), Hillis stated, “We believe it is possible to make our youth immune to revolution, and, as it were, to vaccinate them against radicalism. There is but one solution of all wrongs, injustice and discontent, and that is, knowledge and wisdom.”9 The program gained some initial success, but in the long run it failed to reach the national goal Hillis hoped it would. Nonetheless, Calvin Coolidge and Thomas Edison, who also had
conservative leanings, praised Hillis for his efforts. They wanted order and stability, both at home and abroad, just as much as Hillis did. In a letter to Hillis, Edison wrote:

I have read with deep interest your lectures for a Better America, and I earnestly hope that the President, the Cabinet and Congress will, without delay, promote this movement, not only for patriotism and a Better America, but for a better creative intellect and imagination, in the children of our country. These are very perilous days, and our hope for the future is in the school house, visual education, and the better America that will come, with the arrival of a better education, and a better quality of manhood.10

On January 11, 1924, Hillis suffered a stroke and was forced to go to Battle Creek, Michigan, to recover. While he was there members of Plymouth Church held a twenty-fifth anniversary dinner to celebrate his and his wife's quarter-century spent there. Despite his absence at the occasion held in his honor, Hillis was repeatedly praised and thanked for the many years of work he put into the church. The “toastmaster” was Colonel William C. Beecher, who had served as Hillis’s lawyer throughout the “Ferguson Affair.” The speakers that evening included the Reverend Charles H. Parkhurst, the Reverend L. Mason Clarke, Mr. Herbert F. Gunnison, and Hillis’s secretary, Miss Lucie L. Whitlock.11

In her speech Whitlock spoke about the many books and articles Hillis wrote, his work during the war, his work in building up and beautifying Plymouth Church, his oratorical skills, the compassion he had for his fellow human beings, and the effect he had on both the average citizens of the United States and other ministers around the country. She concluded her speech saying,

Plymouth Church has a blessed memory and heritage beyond that of most churches, in its history and traditions, of which it may indeed be proud, and the rank and file of this wing of the Christian army can well take courage and press forward to new heights of achievement and usefulness when it thinks of its great leaders in the past and rejoice in what these twenty-five years have brought to us under our beloved standard-bearer, Newell Dwight Hillis.12
In March of 1924, Hillis resigned as pastor of Plymouth Church. It was difficult for him to give up preaching, especially after twenty-five years of great success at Plymouth. Although he no longer preached on a weekly basis, he was made pastor emeritus of his church and continued to give selected lectures on an irregular basis. He never wanted to give up talking to and educating people. His son, Richard, wrote a short story on his experience in accompanying his father, in June of 1928, to Rock Hill, South Carolina, where Hillis gave a commencement speech at a women’s college. Richard was sure his father would lose his voice or collapse in the heat while giving the speech, but much to Richard’s surprise, his father delivered “one of the finest commencement addresses I’d ever heard him give—completely at ease, completely in voice again and obviously relishing the chance to do once more what he had done so often and could do so well.”

Newell Dwight Hillis lived until February 25, 1929, when he died after being in a coma for four months. His death brought an end to a life focused on informing the American people of the concepts of Christianity, liberty and freedom. The pinnacle of his career had come when he was asked to tour the country to generate support for the First and Second Liberty Loan drives. During this time he visited more than two hundred and fifty cities and raised approximately $100 million for the war effort. His skilled storytelling, his use of historical evidence supporting America’s entry into the war, and his charismatic style made him a successful representative of the American Bankers Association during the war. His great accomplishments as a preacher and Progressive lecturer earned him his rightful place in history.
CONCLUSION

Newell Dwight Hillis was a man who had difficulty balancing his life as a minister in a country that was expanding in foreign affairs, economics, and industry. His life could easily be a study of the American character around the turn of the century. In addition, his personality and contributions to both his church and his country are notable and well worth reflection.

The effects Hillis had on Presbyterianism and Plymouth Church were monumental. He made great changes to both the physical aspect of Plymouth and the spiritual feeling of community. By installing the stained-glass window series he improved the aesthetic value of the sanctuary and made his congregation proud of the building in which they worshipped. His success as a secular lecturer also increased the "faith" members of Plymouth Church had in their leader. Hillis’s public fame drew people to his Sunday sermons, during which he could express his thoughts on the proper Christian life or the duties of American citizens.

According to Dr. W. C. Gray, editor of the leading Presbyterian newspaper of the time, Hillis’s sermon on “The Automatic Judgment Seat in Man” brought about a whole new, and relatively liberal, movement within the church. Even though Hillis was almost tried for heresy for giving the sermon, its long-term effects were valuable.

Hillis also had a tremendous influence on other preachers and ministers of his time. When approached by young men who questioned him on whether a life of ministry was a way of life he advocated, Hillis always said no. “And the reason he gave for this was his conviction that if a man could be deterred by any sort of advice or dissuasion, he
had no real ‘call’ to the Christian ministry, and should not be encouraged to try it.”¹ One
might argue that his involvement in land speculation was contrary to this point, but Hillis
rightfully made young men think twice about their devotion to a life in the church.

As grand and far-reaching as his effects were through his preaching, the influence
Hillis had on the broad public through his lecturing cannot be overlooked. His “Better
Brooklyn Movement” made his congregation known to the community. This project
proposed the creation of a more beautiful living environment for the people of his city.
Through his lecturing on the war from an anglophile’s point of view, Hillis reminded
Americans of their country’s history. He reminded them that in spite of some of the
negative sentiments toward Europeans, Europe had played a significant role in United
States history. Moreover, he helped raise a tremendous amount of money to fund
America’s war effort. His country’s support for its soldiers would have gone on without
Hillis, but his contributions arguably had a serious impact on the rapid success of the
Liberty Loan drives.

For the historian, Hillis’s life easily serves as a window into white, Anglo-Saxon,
Protestant America at the turn of the century. He struggled in reconciling his desire to
become a wealthy land speculator with his career as a Presbyterian preacher. At the end
of the nineteenth century America’s population grew dramatically, the rise of
corporations took place, suburbs formed, and immigration changed the make-up of
American society. For both European immigrants and American citizens, the United
States was often the “Land of Opportunity.” America was the place where a person could
go from “rags to riches.” It was the country where many, if not all, could make a
substantial living in the manner in which they chose.
Hillis represented many of the opportunities available to white, middle-class Americans. He was a husband, a father, a self-motivated business man, a foreign traveler, a preacher, and a public figure. Hillis saw himself as an example of the American ideal of individualism. Hillis’s life, beginning in rural Magnolia, Illinois, and ending in Brooklyn, New York, could easily represent America’s transition from a rural and small town society to one that would eventually have urban areas containing millions of people.

Hillis’s life was packed with sermons, lectures, and traveling, and yet for him the best part of life was its end. As a religious man who had led a successful life and had arguably lived the American dream, Newell Dwight Hillis went gracefully into death. If “man’s life is like a summer day” as Hillis believed, his life was like a summer day in Montana. It began with a bright sunrise, suffered through a short rainstorm in the afternoon, and ended with a clear and quiet sunset. In an essay written at the end of his life he wrote:

Now comes the afternoon of life’s long day, the hour when the soul sits on the western piazza and waits for the sunset gun to boom. Not all of us can be exalted or rich, but most of us have to be old. For many reasons the last epoch of man’s career should be the happiest, the wisest and the most influential. Human life is like a goodly orchard, and the best period for an orchard is not the time of April blossoms nor that of the green branch; the best hour is that of maturity, when the husbandman puts forth his hand and plucks the ripe fruit waiting to be garnered. Man’s life is like a summer’s day, but the day is never at its best in the morning, before the sun has cleared itself of mist, nor even at noon when the fierce heat blisters the fields; the most beautiful hour comes at the end, when the sun begins to slant, when the flame is tempered and the soft light turns every bough into a wand of gold, when the happy harvesters, their day’s work done, go singing homeward.
ENDNOTES

Introduction


Chapter 1


2Roulston and Hillis, A Church in History, 89.

3Ibid., 89; George W. Pierson, Yale: A Short History (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1979), 16.

4Roulston and Hillis, A Church in History, 91.

5Myra Rice Case, LaVerne, California, to Marjorie Hillis (location unknown), 6 February 1939, transcript in the hand of Betty Rasmussen, copy of transcript in author’s possession, Helena, Montana.

6Newell Dwight Hillis, autobiographical sketch in unknown source, subsection titled “One of Magnolia’s Favorite Sons,” 2.

7Roulston and Hillis, A Church in History, 92.

8Marengo (Illinois) Republican, 22 April 1887.

9Roulston and Hillis, A Church in History, 93.

10Ibid., 95.

11Ibid.

12Ibid., 93-94.

13Ibid., 96.


17Plymouth Church, Plymouth Chimes (Brooklyn, New York: Plymouth Church, 1909), 4; Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims. "Historical Notes," pamphlet issued by the Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims. Exact date and place of publication unknown, in author's possession, Helena, Montana.

18The Sunday Times-Herald (Chicago), 8 January 1899.

19Roulston and Hillis, A Church in History, 102.

20Ibid., 105.


22Roulston and Hillis, A Church in History, 107-8.

23Ibid., 110-11.

24Ibid., 111-13.


26Ibid., 4.

27Ibid., 5.

Chapter 2


3LaFeber, Polenberg and Woloch, The American Century, 12.

4Ibid.


6Daniels, Not Like Us, 64.


Chapter 3


5 Ibid., 117.


9 Ibid., 122-123.

10 Ibid., 128.

11 Ibid., 127.


13 Ibid., 34.


17 Roulston and Hillis, A Church in History, 106.

18 William Jennings Bryan resigned his position of Secretary of State over a dispute with Woodrow Wilson on how the Lusitania incident should have been handled.

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22 Newell Dwight Hillis, German Atrocities, 55.

23 Stewart Halsey Ross, Propaganda for War, 24.

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25 The Butte (Montana) Miner, 5 June 1917.

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27 Stewart Halsey Ross, Propaganda for War, 191.


29 General Committee of the American Bankers Association, New York, to Newell Dwight Hillis, Brooklyn, New York, 18 June 1917, in author’s possession, Helena, Montana.


Chapter 4

1 Richard Dwight Hillis, “The Infamous Frank L. Ferguson Affair As Seen By My Father,” p.6, in author’s possession, Helena, Montana.
2 Richard Dwight Hillis, “The Infamous Frank L. Ferguson Affair As Seen By My Father,” p.6-7, in author’s possession, Helena, Montana.

3 Ibid., p.7.

4 Brooklyn (New York) Daily Eagle, 1 August 1918.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 “Dr. Hillis May Sue Ferguson,” New York. Exact source and date of article unknown, in author’s possession, Helena, Montana.


10 Thomas A. Edison, Orange, New Jersey, to Newell Dwight Hillis, Brooklyn, New York, 7 March 1921, copy in author’s possession, Helena, Montana.

11 "Dinner in Recognition of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Coming of the Reverend Newell Dwight Hillis, D.D., LL.D. and Mrs. Newell Dwight Hillis to Plymouth Church” dinner program, in author’s possession, Helena, Montana.

12 Speech recognizing "Dr. Hillis’s Twenty Five Years In Plymouth Church,” written in 1924 in New York, p 15, in author’s possession, Helena, Montana.


Conclusion

1 Roulston and Hillis, A Church in History, 126.

2 Ibid., 129.
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