

MOODY STILL LIVES

WORD PICTURES OF D. L. MOODY

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

WORLD'S FAIR EVANGELISTIC CAMPAIGN, 1893

AMERICA and England were appalled in November 1892 when the North German Lloyd liner, "Spree," westward bound from Southampton to New York with 700 passengers on board, became overdue. Seven days, eight days, nine days passed without word. Mr. Moody and his son Will were passengers on that boat. Mrs. Moody had gone down to New York to meet them, and was almost beside herself. On the tenth day news was flashed that the "Spree" was limping into Queenstown (Ireland) in imminent danger of foundering at any moment. Three days out, her driving shaft had broken and thrashed a hole in the vessel's stern. The two after compartments filled with water. Three forward bulkheads were closed, but the ship settled down at the stern and her bow tilted high in the air. The engines were useless, the vessel could only drift helplessly. It was long before the day of wireless. The captain's hope was that she might keep afloat and not drift out of the track of other steamers without being seen. She was a thousand miles from Queenstown. And now she had made port safely in tow of the S.S. "Lake Huron," seven days after the accident.

It was with joyful relief that Mr. Moody's multitudes of friends in the British Isles heard of their safety after such a narrow escape.

I mention the terrible experience at this point because it seems to me to be a spiritual prelude to the remaining seven years of Mr. Moody's life. The testimony of Major-General Oliver Otis Howard and other fellow passengers was that he demonstrated moral leadership in this near-tragedy, comparable to that of the apostle Paul in the awful shipwreck of Acts 27. He conducted a service in the saloon on Sunday evening, which nearly every passenger attended, "and I think everybody prayed, skeptics and all."

He said afterwards that he did not want to die. "As my thoughts went out to my loved ones at home—my wife and children, my friends on both sides of the sea, the schools and all the interests dear to me—and as I realized that perhaps the next hour would separate me forever from all these, so far as this world was concerned, I confess it almost broke me down. It was the darkest hour of my life." Relief came in prayer. "God heard my cry and enabled me to say, '**Thy will be done!**'" He went to bed, "almost immediately fell asleep, and never slept more soundly" in all his life.

That was Sunday night, the second night after the accident. About 3 a.m. the lights of the “Lake Huron” were seen drawing near. She had seen the “Spree’s” flaming signals of distress.

The rest of the story, from the “Lake Huron’s” side, has not been incorporated in any biography of Mr. Moody. I give it here, by permission of Mr. J. Ritchie Bell, superintendent of the Montreal Sailors’ Institute, who was a passenger on the “Lake Huron,” en route to help continue the work started by Mr. Moody in Scotland. Captain Carey, a Christian man and a native of County Dublin, asked Mr. Bell to hold a meeting on Sunday evening. All entered heartily into the singing of “*Pull for the Shore, Sailor*,” “*Throw Out the Life Line*,” “*Let the Lower Lights Be Burning*,” and other hymns of the sea.

“Our service ended about 9:30, and I was taking my walk on deck before retiring when the boatswain’s mate accosted me. The meeting had evidently impressed him, for he said:

“I am going around to see our lights are trimmed and burning, for it may be someone will be glad to see those lights before morning.”

The second officer, on the bridge shortly before midnight, was attracted by the illumination caused by the flare-lights of the “Spree.” Thinking it was a ship on fire he called the captain, who came to the conclusion after observation that it was a vessel in distress.

“Change our course, Potter, and let us bear down on her and see if we can render assistance. We may be in need of help some day ourselves.”

The “Lake Huron” came alongside the “Spree” after steaming two and a half hours. About three o’clock Monday morning, after two vain attempts in the dark to throw a line aboard, she signaled:

“I’ll stand by until morning.”

“At dawn God seemed to speak to the waters, the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”

A boat from the “Spree” brought an officer on board to tell of their desperate condition. Captain Carey offered to take them in tow, and if that was impossible, to transfer the passengers and crew to his vessel. He promised with God’s help to save all on board the disabled liner. Soon tow-lines were made fast and a start was made for Queenstown.

“Would the lines hold should a storm break, and would our coal supply last were problems pondered by the captain, with these seven hundred lives now dependent on him. With strong faith he brought us daily nearer land.”

The “Lake Huron” steamed into harbor at 5 a.m. Saturday. She did not have enough coal left to keep steam up another fifteen minutes.

“I made my way immediately to the cable office to notify friends of my arrival,” says Mr. Bell.

“Here I met Mr. Moody, who exclaimed, ‘Hello, Bell, where did you come from?’ I replied that I was on the ‘Lake Huron.’ ‘You were!’ he cried, ‘I was on the “Spree.”’

Calling to the crowd he said, ‘Here’s a friend of mine who was on the “Lake Huron”; he’ll tell us all about it’; and pushing me up on a chair he insisted upon my telling how God had answered their prayers.

“As I got down he said to me, ‘Bell, was your captain a Christian?’ I replied, ‘Oh yes, a splendid Irish Methodist!’ He replied, ‘I thought so. I knew God would have one of his own to send to our rescue.’”

Mr. Moody and fellow passengers sailed for New York on the “Etruria” next day, and landed safely the following Saturday.

What a reception he got when he reached home that night at 10 o’clock! As the train stopped at Mount Hermon station 300 students and teachers and neighbors swarmed around with torches and a brass band and cheers to welcome their benefactor and friend. At the next stop he was met on alighting by a crowd of Northfield friends. The buildings of Northfield Seminary across the valley, as well as many private dwellings, were ablaze with innumerable lights in the windows.

At Revell Hall, first of the Seminary buildings to be reached, all the girls and teachers were assembled to repeat the glad welcome.

Next morning, Sunday, the church was crowded with townspeople and the students of both schools. In place of a sermon, Mr. Moody told in simple, heartfelt words the thrilling story of the accident and their rescue from the jaws of death.

“When the announcement was made that the steamer was sinking and we were in a helpless condition in mid-ocean, no one on earth knows what I passed through as I thought my work was finished, and that I should never again have the privilege of preaching the gospel of the Son of God. And on that dark night, the first night of the accident. I made a vow that if God would spare my life and bring me back to America, I would come to Chicago and at the World’s Fair preach the gospel with all the power that He would give me.”

Let us see how he kept that vow!

A DARING PROJECT

Mr. Moody must be credited with conceiving the idea of a gospel campaign simultaneous with the Columbian Exposition or World’s Fair in Chicago (It was intended to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the landing of Columbus, but was not ready in 1892). He knew Chicago thoroughly. He foresaw a great opportunity to preach the gospel, and that it should be met by a great undertaking. During his visit to the British Isles in 1891 he made frequent public reference to it, and asked Christians to pray for it. He raised money to add two more stories to the men’s building at the Bible Institute.

He arranged with John McNeill, the Scottish evangelist, to spend the six months of the Fair in Chicago. He brought me to America to be his secretary. In other ways he made serious preparation for the campaign, intending to spend the whole summer in Chicago himself. And he did it alone, without any committee.

His vision was justified by results. It proved to be easily the greatest single project he ever undertook. We have already described his marvellous evangelistic campaigns of the '70s and '80s in this country and overseas, but this was not a one-man campaign. It was a six-month campaign of which he was the commanding general, directing the concerted action of a large number of prominent preachers, teachers, evangelists, gospel singers, and a corps of nearly 300 students and their instructors.

There has been nothing in the history of Christianity quite comparable to it before or since. Nothing ever tested so severely his organizing genius, his singular prudence, his fertility and versatility of resource, his skill and power to command, his spiritual might.

The city problem is one of the most serious the Church has to face, and in Chicago the problem was immeasurably increased during the World's Fair period.

Its ordinary cosmopolitan population was swollen by the inflow of thousands, many of whom belonged to the most lawless classes of society. Add to this that in summer there is unfortunately a lull in Christian activity, and you have an outlook anything but promising. Mr. Moody was perfectly cognizant of what he would have to face. He had no precedent to follow.

But difficulties never appalled him, or clouded his faith in God. He believed that if a man is called of God to a certain work, He will be with him in that work, and he will succeed no matter what the obstacles may be. He daringly projected this movement that proved to be unique in its conception and consummation, world-wide in its influence, unparalleled in its success.

He had passed his 56th birthday on February 5, 1893. He had been warned that his heart was weakening, and that he must let up in his work. If he did, nobody noticed it. He never talked of his age or his heart. He did not spare himself under the unceasing responsibility of those six months.

"We shall beat the Fair," he said good-naturedly when he arrived on the ground. That is what he set out to do, by furnishing such gospel attractions, in cooperation with the churches, that the multitudes visiting the Fair, no less than the people of Chicago themselves should be won and kept true to Christ.

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

His plan of campaign was simple in outline. Chicago is naturally divided into three sections by the forking river—the North side, the West side, and the South side. In each section a church center was secured to begin with.

General headquarters was the Bible Institute, with Chicago Avenue Church adjoining, on the North side, but within a mile of the heart of the far-flung city. We lived in the Institute buildings, Mr. Moody occupying his usual suite. Here he had all the strings in his hand.

The campaign opened on the first Sunday in May. Mr. Moody, himself, preached in Chicago Avenue Church morning, afternoon, and evening. During the week following, praise services were held each night in this church. The work expanded weekly, and it was presently necessary to call other churches into use. But churches were not always suitably located to reach the masses, so he determined to hire theatres. It seemed for a time, however, as if desirable halls and theatres could not be secured at any price on account of previous engagements; they were expecting a fortune from the Fair. But a footing was obtained in the Haymarket theatre, and here Mr. Moody preached every Sunday morning until the end of the campaign, with the exception of two Sundays when he was absent from the city.

As the momentum grew, while the amusement trade lagged, other theatres and halls were rented, until ten came under his control, some on Sundays only, but some throughout the week. Five tents were in constant use, being pitched at strategic points in non-churched districts. Two gospel wagons were operated for open air meetings. A vacant store on the West side was rented and fitted up as a mission hall. A number of Institute students lodged overhead, and meetings were held not only every afternoon and evening, but a special squad came on at 10 p.m. in order to try to rescue drunks and harlots who haunted the vicinity far into the morning hours.

Special efforts were made to reach people near the Fair grounds.

Here, on the open prairie, hotels and other buildings had sprung up like mushrooms without any effort to provide church accommodations. But Mr. Moody secured the use of half a dozen tents and hotel parlors.

SOME NOTABLE MEETINGS

The most notable meetings of the campaign, from the popular standpoint, were probably those held in Tattersall's hall and Forepaugh's circus tent. When Mr. Moody announced the meeting in Tattersall's, with seating capacity of ten thousand or more, he said:

"We have something better than a military tournament, and we must get a bigger audience than they do."

Forepaugh's circus came to Chicago in June, and located on the lakefront opposite the heart of the city. The manager rented the tent for Sunday morning, but reserved it for his own shows in the afternoon and evening. This is how he advertised the day's program:

HA! HA! HA!
THREE BIG SHOWS!
Moody in the Morning
Forepaugh in the Afternoon and Evening

The great canvas ellipse covered an immense area, having a seating capacity of ten thousand, with standing room for ten thousand more. In the center of the arena a rude platform was erected for the speakers and a few of the singers, while the rest of the song corps were massed around them. The surroundings were the usual circus furniture and gaudy decorations, while in an adjoining tent was the large menagerie, including eleven elephants. Clowns, grooms, all the circus people mixed in with the visitors, about 18,000 in all.

When that mighty throng took up the hymn, "*Nearer, My God, to Thee*," a sense of awe laid hold of the multitude. After an hour of singing and prayer, Mr. Moody preached on the text, "**The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.**"

The hush of heaven was on the gathering. Toward the close of the address there was a slight disturbance, and a lost child was passed up to the platform. Mr. Moody held her up so that her parents might see her, and when the anxious father reached the platform Mr. Moody placed the child in his arms and said:

"That is what Jesus Christ came to do: to seek and to save lost sinners and restore them to their heavenly Father's embrace."

The circus tent was rented for two Sundays. It was a revelation to Forepaugh that so many people should come to listen to songs and sermons. His afternoon and evening shows were abandoned because they were so thinly attended.

THE HEADQUARTERS STAFF

All this time the regular routine of the Bible Institute went on. Two Bible classes and two music classes were held daily. Several special conferences were held, lasting a week or ten days each. The lecture room of the Institute seated about 500, but the attendance increased during August and September so that the daily lectures were transferred to the church nearby.

For his preaching staff Mr. Moody gathered around him evangelical preachers and Bible teachers and gospel singers of both sexes from the ends of the earth. Pindor of Silesia came to preach to the Poles; Rabinowitz of Russia, to the Jews; Monod of Paris, to the French; Stocker of Berlin, to the Germans. John G. Paton of the New Hebrides, Thomas Spurgeon and Henry Varley of Australia, and many from England and Scotland also took part.

As months passed by and the Fair brought increasing numbers to Chicago the gospel campaign also gathered momentum. At the beginning of September, the Central Music Hall was rented for two months for a two hours service daily from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Even on Labor Day the hall was overcrowded.

As October, the last month of the Fair, approached, Mr. Moody urged his hearers everywhere to pray and labor with unremitting diligence. "It seems as if we have been only playing the past weeks, now we are going to work," he said. "We have just been fishing along the shore, now we are going to launch out into the deep."

“Friends, help fill up the churches! Let us see whether we can’t wake up the whole city! . . . We want to press the battle these closing days of the Fair as never before. Now is our time and opportunity!”

On several of the last Sundays Mr. Moody controlled as many as 125 different meetings, assuming the expenses of rent and incidentals when necessary, furnishing speakers and singers and working up the attendance, which would aggregate upward of a hundred thousand per Sunday. High water mark of attendance on week-days was reached on Chicago Day, October 9.

Chicago determined to celebrate the twenty-second anniversary of the Great Fire on a colossal scale. The Fair arranged special attractions and drew over seven hundred thousand visitors that day. Mr. Moody determined to keep pace with it. Continuous meetings were held in Central Music Hall and two other downtown halls, and so great was the crush that in some cases the speakers could not push their way in.

The entire expense of the six months work was \$60,000, exclusive of the ordinary expenses of the Institute. It was met by collections taken at the meetings, and by voluntary contributions of Christian friends.

The management of the campaign involved an immense amount of organization and adjustment. Mr. Moody always looked on the bright side. He inspired others with his faith and courage, and spurred them on by word and deed. No man or woman worked harder than he those six months.

The results?

“When we commenced work six months ago,” said Mr. Moody at the closing meeting of the campaign, “the question was, Can we reach the people who are coming up to attend the Fair? Would they have the heart for religious services? . . . God has outdone all our expectations. He has gone away beyond our faith.”

Millions heard the simple gospel preached by some of the most gifted preachers in the world. Apparently thousands were genuinely converted to God. Christianity was proved to be a living thing. The summer was proved to be a good time for Christian work, and also the masses can be reached if we “go and reach them.”

Men often formed seventy-five per cent of audiences. Sin in its vicious forms was not left to reign in the city. Ministers attended and cooperated in great numbers. In a sentence, the gospel was found to have its old power over human hearts, In spite of the tumultuous activities and distractions of that great enterprising city of Chicago during the busiest period of its existence up to that time.

AT THE CLOSE OF THE CAMPAIGN

How Mr. Moody stood the physical strain for six months in the heat of a Chicago summer is a mystery. He observed one day of rest each week, but spoke or presided at one or two meetings every other day, in addition to all his other responsibilities.

Being a strict observer of the Lord's Day, he would not use a public means of transportation on Sundays, so a horse and cab were bought for the exclusive purpose of driving speakers to their meetings, and horse and driver had Monday religiously as a day of rest.

Imagine yourself in my shoes in relation to Mr. Moody, if you can, at the close of the World's Fair Campaign! Six months, from May to October inclusive, of downright hard but happy religious work at his call and under his direction. Living with him and sharing his confidence and comradeship, I observed his strong and masterful personality at all points and under most diverse conditions: aggressive, authoritative, but kindly, gentle, persuasive, magnetic; wholly bringing Christ to men and men to Christ; possessed of contagious moral and spiritual enthusiasm that balked at no obstacles; always eager to learn and to sharpen his tools; never shrinking from any duty or opportunity; humble before God, but undaunted before men; speaking with authority as the messenger of God, yet so humanly as to find entrance into people's hearts.

Human and friendly at all times, he enjoyed amusing incidents that occurred, finding relief in laughter and happiness in the midst of the exacting cares and burdens of the campaign. Living a healthy, normal life with the rest of us, eating and sleeping well, he was absolutely free from irritation and nerve strain. I do not recall his being laid aside by sickness for a single day during the six months.

Commanding the hearty cooperation of numerous strong and successful men, who willingly submitted to his direction because they believed in his purpose and sincerity and ability as a born leader. Sane, forceful, tactful, considerate.

He was easily the biggest drawing card in the campaign. People wanted to hear D. L. Moody. Yet he shrank from prominence and publicity as much as he could, and put others to the front. He was glad to preside at meetings addressed by lesser known speakers. He rejoiced in the success of others: that was what he wanted.

Looking back in the perspective of the years I see his figure looming up more massive and imposing than ever.

At the close of the campaign Mr. Moody resumed his evangelistic work in a month's mission in Toronto. He rewarded me with a gold watch with the inscription, "A. P. Fitt, from Mr. and Mrs. D. L. Moody. 1893."

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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