

MOODY STILL LIVES

WORD PICTURES OF D. L. MOODY

by

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CHAPTER NINE

LATER MINISTRY, 1893-9

SOME thoughtful reader may like to ask questions:

- Did Mr. Moody reduce his pace these last years?
- Did his earlier zeal for God grow cool?
- Did he rest on his laurels and plan to take life more leisurely?
- Did he change in his convictions and let down his evangelistic urge?
- Were the churches and cities less eager to have his missions?
- Were the people less drawn to hear his message?

No, to the last he stood firm and steadfast on the old and well tried Bible foundation, he was just as concerned as ever over men and women without Christ, just as single-minded to win souls, just as tireless in preaching the gospel, more mature and riper in Christlike character, fully assured that his Christian experience was the only true reality. His sermons and his actions will be scanned in vain for any other conclusion. One must get behind my brief story in order to have the full record. He had more invitations to hold meetings than he could accept, and his multiplied responsibilities in his schools and conferences were not a hindrance.

Indeed, they supported each other. The Toronto meetings in 1893, at the close of the World's Fair, were largely due to a Mount Hermon man, T. B. Hyde, a minister there. The Kansas City campaign in 1899 was initiated by three other Hermon men, D. Baines-Griffiths, Sydney Bishop, secretary of the local Y.M.C.A., and Charles M. Vining, a banker. And so with many other engagements.

His reputation was now so widespread, and so many people who had heard him once wanted to hear him again, that he always held afternoon meetings which would be filled with these friends.

As he was addressing mostly Christians at these gatherings, his messages would be chosen accordingly. He tried to arouse church people to action, holding that if believers would go to work, a thousand times more would be accomplished in the long run than if he should try to do it all himself. But he used to urge committees to fill the buildings at evening services with unsaved and non-church-going people to whom he might preach the gospel.

Where this was accomplished, he followed his old plan and found it still effective: the gospel message the net drawn; the enquiry meeting following. The newspapers always reported his meetings, and so spread his sermons through the countryside.

The pastor of a downtown New York City church reported that when Mr. Moody spent a month in a rundown Presbyterian church in lower New York City, now known as Labor Temple, his work was a failure, his methods were not successful. But if the neighborhood was anything like what it is to-day, filled with non-English-speaking aliens, extreme radicals in political thought, mostly anti-Christian or anti-Protestant, without knowing further details one can see how he might be a misfit there.

A long list of new achievements during these last years can be compiled. He retained his elevation of character and his commanding influence to the end.

AT NORTHFIELD

The schools and conferences at Northfield and Mount Hermon had a healthy growth during the years under consideration. He hoped to live to see a thousand students in each of the schools. A Young Women's Conference was begun in 1893, and met annually.

The need of a larger and more convenient meeting place for the August Bible conference led to the erection of a new Auditorium in 1894. It seemed like a huge building for a small village, and many thought Mr. Moody had over-calculated. But the first Sunday it was used it was crowded and overcrowded. It was before the day of fire laws. Seats and aisles on the floor were filled, also platform and choir loft. There were no pews in the gallery as yet, only tiers that were packed solid with people. More than 3,000 had seats, and there were literally hundreds who were standing downstairs and upstairs. Northfield had not dreamed of anything like it!

A magazine, *Northfield Echoes*, began in 1894 to publish reports of addresses delivered at the conferences.

Camp Northfield was opened in Cathedral Pines on the easterly hills in 1895, and ran for many years as a boys' and men's camp. It is now used as a fresh air camp for underprivileged girls from New York City.

The Bible Institute Colportage Association of Chicago had been organized, and its Eastern depot was opened in Northfield in 1895. This was later merged in the Bookstore, a subsidiary of the Northfield Schools.

Another project due to the growth of the conferences was the development of the nearby hillsides as a summer colony. They were only rough, rocky pastures, with some natural growth of timber. Dr. Arthur N. Thompson, now a permanent resident of the town, had been a minister in the West. He acquired a plot of ground and erected a bungalow for summer occupation. The idea took like wildfire. It was seen that such a development would solve the problem of housing hundreds of summer visitors.

To-day Rustic Ridge and the Highlands are dotted with summer homes in eight or nine levels. Some of the houses, indeed, are substantially built, and have all modern household conveniences. The Mount Hermon constituency used to attend the Trinitarian Church at Northfield, having no school chapel. It meant a four-mile walk there and back for the boys.

There is a rocky prominence on Hermon hill, which Mr. Moody called Temptation Point in the hope that someday someone would be tempted to build a chapel there. The hint was not taken, but as his sixtieth birthday approached (1897), certain friends in this country and England, who wanted to signalize it by some gift and who knew a personal gift would not be welcome, decided to raise money for a memorial chapel. This was done, but Mr. Moody would not allow his name to be attached to it.

At Mount Hermon the schedule of studies was rearranged to cover the whole year by adding a summer term. This plan had many practical advantages, and worked well. The buildings over there were not used for conferences as at Northfield Seminary.

One day Mr. Moody came home and told us that he had offered to buy a large tract on Main Street. What for? For the purpose of starting a school for younger boys. Thinking of the extra burden involved at his age, we were relieved a week later to learn that the owner stood out for a higher price, so Mr. Moody cancelled his offer.

In 1898 the monthly magazine, *Record of Christian Work*, was acquired to be the Northfield organ, with W. R. Moody as editor. In addition to religious news it reported conference addresses, and printed daily Bible notes by Major D. W. Whittle, which Mr. Moody used to urge people everywhere to read.

When the Spanish War broke out and thousands of young men again gathered into army camps, Mr. Moody's interest went out to them as it had to the soldiers in the Civil War. He became chairman of the evangelistic wing of the Army and Navy Christian Commission, and advanced the preaching of the gospel in the camps by prominent preachers and evangelists and singers, and the supply of religious literature.

The last August conference over which he presided, in 1899, was possibly the largest ever assembled. Weston Hall was reserved for the presbytery of New York, and over 60 ministers and members were entertained, a plan that had never been undertaken before.

Further, special meetings for young people were held for a week under the direction of John Willis Baer, general secretary of the Christian Endeavor movement. This evolved later into a separate state Christian Endeavor Conference at Northfield.

As in all his other activities, Mr. Moody saw expansion and added usefulness right up to the last.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL IN PRINT

"Pick out ten of those books," said a mother to her daughter in a frontier town in Minnesota.

The books were copies of the Moody Colportage Library, which had been brought to their door by an agent of the Association. He had found it hard to interest this family. No, they did not want any books; they had more than they could read already; they had no time for books anyway.

Might he read to them? Reluctantly they gave consent, but kept at work washing the dishes and pans, seemingly making as much noise as possible.

Presently, after he had read for a little while, they stopped work, and when the colporter finished, the mother said to her daughter:

“Pick out ten of those books! We must have some reading of that kind.”

The next day the father met the agent on the road and said:

“Mr. M—, we must have a Bible too.”

This incident is a sample of the circulation of those books all over the country, in crowded cities as well as on the Western prairies, and among all classes of society.

Mr. Moody was holding meetings in a Wisconsin town in the fall of 1894, and wanted some books to give to enquirers, as he had been used to doing all through the years of his ministry. He called at a local bookstore, but though the shelves were loaded with fiction of all kinds, he could not find a single religious book. This led him to make investigation, and he found that such few bookstores as existed outside of the large cities, hardly ever pretended to carry religious books.

Should not something be done, he asked himself, to counteract the flood of degrading and demoralizing literature that was poisoning the minds of the young and vitiating their tastes? While the devil sows tares, should not the Church sow wheat?

He returned to Chicago determined to do something to fill the new gap he had discovered. He consulted prominent Christian workers about it, who said:

“People won’t buy religious books. They are too expensive.”

“Then their price must come down,” he said.

But the only way to bring down the price on a self-supporting basis would be to print large editions, and no publisher felt justified in taking the risk in the absence of any demand. Mr. Moody therefore proceeded to organize a Colportage Association in connection with the Bible Institute at Chicago. It was the last large project that he started.

In the spring of 1895 the distinctive feature of the enterprise was begun, the Colportage Library, a series of 128 page books that were to combine these salient points: low retail price; popular, readable style; good workmanship; well known authors, or books of existing reputation; strictly evangelical and nonsectarian character.

In order to cut the retail price to ten cents to compete with dime novels, without depreciating the quality of the paper and general make-up, editions started at 25,000, but 100,000 copies of Mr. Moody's own book of sermons, "*The Way to God, and How to Find It*," were ordered.

He did not go into this enterprise blindly and ignorantly. He was not a novice at publishing and distributing books and papers. He had done it ever since his early days in Christian work. Among the souvenirs now in possession of Mrs. W. R. Moody is a small hymn book, words only, "adapted to church, Sunday school and revival services," entitled *The Northwestern Hymn Book*," which he compiled and published in 1868. That same year he was publishing a periodical called *Heavenly Tidings*. In the British campaign of 1873-5 it became necessary to publish a book containing the American hymns and tunes which Mr. Sankey introduced.

No English publisher would accept the risk at the time, so Mr. Moody assumed the financial liability: but the publisher was soon glad to take over the project. In the height of that campaign he raised £2000 to have copies of *The Christian* with reports of the meetings, mailed every week for three months to ministers throughout the land to spread the fire.

On his return to America he got his brother-in-law, Fleming H. Revell, to publish certain English books that he had been giving to converts. Business foresight was natural to Mr. Moody, and he enjoyed promoting the business end of publications calculated to spread the gospel and instruct believers: but he was never personally interested financially in these ventures.

There are two main channels by which the gospel message can be mediated to mankind, the living voice and the printed page. The former can never be dispensed with, but the latter has always been a powerful ally, and may often reach places where the human messenger cannot or does not penetrate.

If two-thirds of the population never go inside a church, the gospel must be carried to them, if they are to be won for Christ. Can this be better done than by books? There are still vast areas where church privileges are practically non-existent. In every community there are many who cannot go to church if they would: mothers with young children, shut-ins, those engaged in certain occupations; but these can all be reached by printed matter.

So this colportage work grew quickly to such proportions that it spread not only over this continent, but also extended to foreign lands. In 1898, appeals reached Mr. Moody from several quarters in India, for instance, for books for distribution in that great empire. There were estimated to be five millions of English-speaking natives there, in addition to the English soldiers and civilians. There was nothing elevating or satisfying in the native literature. A steady supply of suitable literature was felt to be an urgent need.

Workers on the field said the Colportage books were just suited for the purpose. Mr. Moody therefore invited contributions for a special fund, so that books could be given free to the missionaries. In this way 30,000 volumes were presently shipped to India, and the stream continues as long as contributions permit. Other foreign lands, especially in South America, have also been supplied.

But it is in penal institutions in this land that most has been done outside the primary work through colporters. The way Mr. Moody's interest was enlisted illustrates once again how he proceeded to meet the challenge of a need when it was brought home to him. Prison work was not new to him. He preached in a penal institution every Sunday morning the winter he spent in Baltimore. He said:

"In 1895 I heard to my amazement that no less than three-quarters of a million men in this country belong to the criminal class, that is, the number in and out of our jails. I could hardly believe it until I made investigation. I began to visit the jails and prisons wherever I went. In the state penitentiaries they have reading matter, though not always live religious books, but a great many jails that I visited, and one jail in Texas with no less than 300 inmates, I found had not a solitary thing to read. I asked the prisoners if they would read sermons or religious books. They said yes; anything to kill time. So I sent some books into that prison. Before long I began to hear of men being converted. . . .

"It must not be supposed that all prisoner are hardened criminals. Records show that nearly half the prisoners are under 25 years of age. At that time of life a young man is not supposed to have become set in character. If he can be reached by the gospel message before he sinks lower and lower, there is every hope for his salvation for this life and the life to come.

"Now just stop and think for a moment! Isn't it just the nick of time to reach a man? He is away from his old haunts, from his old associates, away from whiskey and gambling. He gets sobered up, and has nothing to do but read and think. That is what you want to get a man to do. What brought home the prodigal? He began thinking. Prisoners are glad of a book or paper to occupy their minds, and Christian influences may be brought to bear on them by this channel, and their whole destiny may be changed for good. . . .

"The work in jails and prisons has been about the most encouraging thing I have done outside of regular evangelistic work."

This prison distribution appealed strongly to Mr. Moody during his remaining years. He often took offerings at his meetings to help the Prison Fund supply chaplains and Christian workers with books free.

LARGE CITIES REVISITED

During these last years he revisited many of the largest cities.

In Boston he crowded Tremont Temple in 1897. We stayed in the Bellevue Hotel. One day a bellboy brought up a card, "Wilfred T. Grenfell, M.D." Mr. Moody did not know him.

"Oh," said I, "I know about him. Our Sunday school contributes toward a bed in his hospital on the Labrador."

Mr. Moody asked me to bring him up. Dr. Grenfell introduced himself, and told him that his life purpose had been changed through a meeting of his in the London campaign in 1883.

“Good! What have you been doing ever since?” was the question Mr. Moody shot at him.

Dr. Grenfell told him of his work from the Bay of Biscay to the coast of Labrador, instead of staying in London. “Regret it?”

“No, sir, I should rather say not!”

“Could you come and tell them about it in the afternoon service in Tremont Temple in three minutes?” “I can try.”

“Then I’ll be grateful if you’ll do so.”

“If not the actual words used,” wrote Dr. Grenfell, “yet that is the impression left in my mind of that interview, and I loved the man for it. There was no unctuousness, no snobbery, no cant; and yet again he had moved my heart to want to do things more than ever.”

It was the only time those two met face to face.

In New York Mr. Moody held meetings in Cooper Union in 1896, and at another time in the old Grand Central Palace. He enjoyed both engagements because in both places the neighborhood was such that numbers of unsaved people did attend.

In Philadelphia Mr. Moody interested a number of leading laymen in a summer tent movement, such as he had launched in Chicago in 1886. He said he had long before stopped using the hymn, “*Hold the Fort.*” He had come to the conclusion that holding the fort was wrong, they should get out from behind their breastworks and attack. As a result Mr. John H. Converse established summer tent services in the city.

In Chicago one of the most striking demonstrations of his power occurred in 1897. Morning and afternoon meetings were arranged for a Tuesday-Friday series in the Auditorium, the largest hall in Chicago. The crowd began to assemble at 8 a.m., two hours before the beginning of the morning meeting. Six thousand people jammed the hall at every meeting, with thousands unable to get in. This in a city where Mr. Moody was well known and a frequent visitor! He was still front-page news. Dr. Newell Dwight Hillis said of these meetings:

“No preacher in the land is comparable to Mr. Moody in personal popularity or in power to influence and hold the masses.”

Early in 1899 he sent me to Kansas City, Missouri, to see the Civic Auditorium, in which he was invited to hold a campaign. It was the largest hall of its kind I was ever in, seating about 15,000 people; its capacity was later reduced, I believe.

The only man who had ever filled it was William Jennings Bryan. I reported the facts, and Mr. Moody promised to go. The strain of that huge hall proved too much for his heart, already weakened.

“Some people say the old gospel has lost its power,” he used to say toward the close of his life. “I have not found it so.” To make a test he preached his old sermon, “Sowing and Reaping,” to four different types of audiences within a couple of weeks: at a men’s meeting in Denver, in a Western penitentiary, at Yale University, and in one of the leading churches in New York. “It seemed to me to bring greater results than ever,” was his verdict.

In the call for his last August Conference in North-field, in 1899, he said:

“Many thoughtful men have come to feel strongly that the hope of the church to-day is in a deep and widespread revival. The enemy has come in like a flood; it is time for those who believe in a supernatural religion to look to God to lift up a standard against him. Oh for a revival of such power that this tide of unbelief and worldliness that is sweeping upon us shall be beaten back, that every Christian shall be lifted to a higher level of life and power, and multitudes, of perishing souls be converted to God!

“Why not? God’s arm is not shortened, nor his ear heavy . . .”

He made an address on “Revivals” at this conference, in which he said:

“There is nothing I am more concerned about just now than that God should revive his church in this country. I believe it is the only hope for our republic. I don’t believe a republican form of government can last without righteousness, and it seems to me that every patriot, every man that loves his country, ought to be anxious that the Church of God should be quickened and revived . . .

“If I should live ten thousand years I could not be a pessimist. I haven’t any more doubt about the final result of things than that I stand on this platform. I believe the time is coming when God’s will is going to be done on earth as it is in heaven. I am not under the juniper tree, either. If I look on the dark side, it is to stir you up and get you to fighting. . . .”

While on his way to Kansas City, on his last mission, he stopped over in Philadelphia to see about plans they were making for him to hold a series of meetings there in the beginning of 1900. Said he to his friend Mr. John Wanamaker:

“I want to capture one of the large Eastern cities for Christ before I go hence, because I believe that if one gets stirred, the movement will spread all over the country.”

Does it look, from these incidents and quotations as if Mr. Moody was slowing up in his ministry, or losing his vision, or toning down his message?

His first Sunday meetings in Kansas City were filled, and thousands were unable to gain admittance.

He preached both afternoon and evening on “Sowing and Reaping,” from the text Galatians 6:7, 8. Thursday of that week was the last day he preached. In the afternoon his subject was “Grace in a Threefold Aspect,” from Titus 2. 11-14. His last sermon was on “Excuses,” based on the parable in Luke 14:16-24.

It ended with a most urgent and characteristic appeal for immediate decision for Christ.

“Be wise to-night and accept the invitation! Make up your mind that you will not go away till the question of eternity is settled!”

He died as he had lived in the full faith of the gospel.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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