

# MOODY STILL LIVES

WORD PICTURES OF D. L. MOODY

by

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## CHAPTER SIX

### IMPRESS UPON AMERICA, 1875-93

MANY people are living to-day who attended Mr. Moody's meetings and conferences and who can witness to the powerful impress he made upon this country on his return from overseas in 1875 up to the end of his life. His campaigns were covered by the newspapers when he laid siege to the largest cities in the United States and Canada, for Mr. Moody was front-page news, and newspaper men had full faith in his honesty and sincerity. To read a description of one series, say in the New York Hippodrome in 1876, is to get the technique of all his campaigns. For his plans were simple, and modified only by local conditions.

As the work of Mr. Moody and Mr. Sankey overseas in the seventies leaped into power and prominence, religious leaders in America of course began to hear of it. Several volumes that can be found in the older libraries were hurriedly published over here containing extracts from English papers describing the meetings and giving reports of Mr. Moody's sermons. Satisfied that such a reception would never be given the evangelists in sober England and Scotland unless their work was genuine and thorough and lasting, many ministers and Church men on this side of the Atlantic became eager to see the same results realized in their own communities. So even before they returned to America they received numerous invitations to hold meetings. Here let us pause a moment to ask what was Mr. Moody's bearing and character now that he was back in America a world-famous evangelist. Let us follow him to Northfield!

### AT HOME AGAIN IN NORTHFIELD

Two days after landing in New York he and his family took train for Northfield. No special fuss was made over their arrival. They stayed in the old home with his mother. He and Mrs. Moody had corresponded with her fairly regularly while abroad, and had sent her newspapers with accounts of his meetings. Back again under the old roof he was a loving and dutiful son as ever.

His heart was in Northfield, and almost immediately, as we have seen, he bought a homestead adjoining his mother's place. Here he could spend the summer months, he figured, resting and studying and preparing new sermons and Bible readings for the next winter campaigns, while his two children Emma and Will could enjoy the blessings of life in the country. Apparently a week or more passed by quietly, but complete isolation and leisure were not to be his. He reached Northfield on August 16.

The county paper, the *Greenfield Gazette and Courier*, said in its issue of August 23 that he would “preach for the first time since his return to this country in the Trinitarian Church, Sunday, September 5, at 5 p.m.” The issue of September 13 had this to say:

“To the Sunday afternoon meeting of the 5th large delegations came from surrounding towns to hear Mr. Moody, making an audience of some 800, too great for the church, so that Mr. Moody spoke from the church steps. He read for the Scripture lesson the story of Cornelius, found in the 10th chapter of Acts . . . The text was taken from Acts 11:14, ‘**Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved,**’ then followed a very earnest practical address urging the danger of leading an indifferent life. He talked in very plain language. Though simple, his discourse was pointed and effective, and produced a marked impression, the audience, which had come mostly out of curiosity, going away in noticeably solemn mood.”

Analyze that paragraph and you get a graphic word picture: the crowds driving in from long distances; moving out of the small church to the open air to accommodate them; the immediate and urgent challenge of salvation; the speaker’s earnest, practical, plain language; the simple, pointed, effective discourse; the marked impression; the solemnized audience. What more could one ask for as an index of the present Mr. Moody as a man and as an evangelist? And this impromptu gathering was held on Main Street in a small New England village, without any publicity or organized effort, within a month of having addressed literally millions in the largest city in the world!

The next week’s issue had this bit of correspondence: “Moody and Sankey held services in Northfield on Sunday the 12th, the people coming from all over the country around, so that the Orthodox Church proved too small, and Mr. Moody spoke from the church steps to an audience of a thousand in the morning. At 5 o’clock he preached again to an audience of 2,000. The town has been thronged with strangers during the week who have come mainly from curiosity to see the evangelist.”

Remember, the town of Northfield and the neighboring towns were predominantly Unitarian at this time. An audience of 2,000 would be considered large to-day, with all the accumulated prestige and publicity of sixty years.

Not all the visitors were curiosity-mongers. Mr. Moody had written to several of his fellow workers to come to Northfield to confer about the work of the coming winter: Ira. D. Sankey, D. W. Whittle, P. P. Bliss, and others. Urgent invitations were reaching him from many cities.

Prominent ministers, leading laymen, and “Y” secretaries came in person to secure the promise of dates. So great was the local interest and attendance of people that meetings were held every night, led by Mr. Moody or some of his associates. The *Gazette and Courier* correspondent wrote in the issue of October 25:

“Mr. Moody delivered his last discourse Wednesday evening. It was delivered in the north church, which was filled to overflowing. An extra train came down from Brattleboro with a crowd to hear him.”

A revival was started in the little old white church, since destroyed by fire, which is remembered by many still living. A number professed conversion and joined the church, among them, his mother and other members of the family. An active Y.M.C.A. was formed, which functioned among the young men for some years. Summer after summer Mr. Moody had the spiritual interests of the village at heart. One year when the little church at Warwick, about six miles back in the hills, had no pastor he preached there every Sunday, of course without compensation.

Judge from such indications as these what manner of man D. L. Moody was, in spite of his worldwide fame and power, as he took up work in America!

### **CAMPAIGNING IN AMERICA**

Messrs. Moody and Sankey—neither of them was ordained —began in the Brooklyn Rink in October 1875, and afterward went to Philadelphia, November 21, 1875 to January 21, 1876. Their next point was New York, where meetings in the Hippodrome, February 7 to April 19, 1876, commanded nation-wide attention and interest. That fall Chicago was visited, October 1876 to January 16, 1877. Then Boston. A number of the larger New England towns were visited in the fall and winter of 1877-8. The next three winters were on a different plan. Mr. Moody spent the winter of 1878-9 in Baltimore evangelizing at different points and building up the churches, 1879-80 in St. Louis, 1880-1 in San Francisco. The years 1881-4 were given to England. Their campaigns continued every winter, sometimes Mr. Moody and Mr. Sankey together, later Mr. Moody with some other gospel song leader, until even smaller towns in most of the States were visited.

As a result of this work, Mr. Moody became the recognized leader of a galaxy of evangelists and Bible teachers and gospel singers, of whom the sweet-spirited and musically cultured George C Stebbins is the only present survivor.

Some evangelist would occasionally work in a large city with Mr. Moody. More often the other would follow him and continue the good work begun, gathering up and stabilizing the results. Other evangelists would be recommended to committees whose invitations Mr. Moody himself could not accept. It was the heyday of evangelism.

Compensation never entered into his dealings with a committee. He would not allow any sum to be set, or any collections to be taken for him. Before he left town the treasurer of the meetings usually handed him a sealed envelope, which he put in his pocket without looking at it; and no one but his wife, to whom he handed all his income, ever knew what compensation he received.

Even when he received no personal compensation, which happened a few times, he never said a word.

The largest halls in the country could not hold the crowds that flocked to the meetings. The intense public interest drew many not especially interested in religion. The size of the gatherings was in itself a magnet for many. The program appealed to others: a chorus of several hundred voices, hearty congregational singing, plenty of life and action at all times. As soon as the hall

filled up, the song service would begin.

Always, in communities large or small, there are heart-hungry and sin-sick people who never go near a church, but who would not feel conspicuous or out of place in a theatre or hall. Straight gospel preaching, followed by a challenge to immediate decision for Christ, gets a response from such people and accounts for many most interesting cases of conversion in Mr. Moody's ministry. Whatever the motive that drew the crowds, they responded to the spell of the speaker and singer as each in his own way heralded the gospel message. But they did not claim credit for results. Once when someone spoke of results to Mr. Moody he said:

“For weeks past people in this city have been praying for these meetings, praying in groups, and congregations, and alone, and here is the answer of the Holy Spirit!”

### **MEMORIES PERSIST**

Writing in Princeton, New Jersey, I am continually reminded of his visits to this town.

Dr. McCosh was the first president of an American college to throw open his institution to Mr. Moody, and give him most cordial cooperation. While the Philadelphia campaign was in progress in 1876 Dr. McCosh went there to invite him to conduct the “Day of Prayer for Colleges” meetings in Princeton College. He accepted, and had a warm reception, and spiritual results were marked.

President Patron is quoted by one who heard him as having rated Mr. Moody among those who “come along only once in about 400 years.”

Dr. Frederick G. Coan, veteran Presbyterian missionary to Persia, was a student in Princeton Theological Seminary in 1884 when Mr. Moody held meetings in New Brunswick, seventeen miles distant. Dr. Archibald Hodge suspended his classes one day in order that the young theologues might attend the meetings.

Next day in class he said:

“Gentlemen, I would give all I am and all I know if I could preach like that man!”

Dr. John Finley Williamson president of Westminster Choir School, says he owes a debt of gratitude to Mr. Moody accruing before he was born. His father was a Methodist minister in Gateshead, England, in 1873, when Messrs. Moody and Sankey held meetings in those parts. His father was caught up in the revival, and never lost the blessing, so that he was born into and grew up as a lad in that atmosphere.

In one Princeton family a brother was converted under Mr. Moody. Another resident remembers as a lad climbing up to a window of the First Presbyterian Church to see and hear him preach. A Princeton graduate recalls incidents of his own student days when Mr. Moody held meetings here. Somehow he so often burned himself into the memory of those who heard him preach: they remember him after the lapse of forty or fifty years. Of how many preachers can that be so

widely said?

A recent writer in a Chicago paper has this to say:

“I remember Moody. I recall when an adolescent youth sitting as one of an audience that packed a great hall in my native city while Moody held the multitude enthralled by his homely eloquence. The subject of his address I have forgotten. It was some variation of his favorite theme, no doubt, some vital application to men’s souls of the message of ‘Go ye.’ But I can still see the speaker in the vision of memory—a stocky, bearded man, who held in his hands an open Bible, and talked to your heart in a voice flexible to every thought and emotion. An inner light illuminated his face as he touched the chords that sounded the music of human redemption. There was no suggestion of oratorical artifice, no striving for brilliance of phrase. He was a man with a message in which he manifestly believed with his whole being, a man who felt that his message must be told to others because it meant so much to him.”

### **INTERDENOMINATIONAL FRATERNITY**

Denominationalism was excluded from Mr. Moody’s meetings. He believed in the Church. He was a church member himself, but he never preached any church. He, preached Christ and those who were quickened spiritually were urged to seek a church home of their own choice. Hence sectarian issues were avoided, denominational differences did not arise, not even antagonism between Protestantism and Romanism was aroused.

The relations between Mr. Moody and Romanism throw a pleasing light on what he was and what he stood for. When he had trouble in his Sunday school activities in Chicago, he overcame annoyance and hostility by going straight to the Roman Catholic bishop. To the credit of both men the outcome was mutual understanding and good will. When he held meetings in Dublin the leading Roman Catholic paper frowned upon hostility to the campaign and wrote:

“Let Messrs. Moody and Sankey do all they can to make Protestants earnest in religion! Irish Catholics desire to see Protestants imbued with religious feeling rather than tinged with rationalism and infidelity. So long as the religious services of our Protestant neighbors are honestly directed to quickening religious thought in their own body, without offering aggressive or intentional insult to us, it is our duty to pay the homage of our respect to their conscientious convictions: in a word, to do as we would be done by.”

At Northfield, where some thirty Irish Roman Catholic families had settled in the 1850’s, the relations were always cordial. Mr. Moody paid for a number of their boys and girls in Mount Hermon School and Northfield Seminary after these schools were started. Some of them are still living in Northfield.

After I joined Mr. Moody, a letter arrived one day from someone in England, bitterly assailing him for aiding and abetting Romanism by helping to build their church. My Irish was up as I read the exaggerated and unwarranted importance he gave to the neighborly action, and I proposed to answer the attack in kind. Mr. Moody just laughed at me; the writer was entirely

misinformed; he had had his say anyway; throw the letter in the waste basket! He would never engage in a scrap with anyone, even when the other was in the wrong.

One day in the 1880's an old priest called at the house in Northfield to see Mr. Moody.

Unfortunately he was not in town, and his daughter received the priest instead. He said he had heard her father preach on "Sowing and Reaping" twelve years before, and knew about his work, and had come up from Boston just to meet him face to face. His disappointment was great.

At the time of Mr. Moody's death several of the Roman Catholic hierarchy spoke cordially of him, and said they had heard him preach and had read his sermons and knew of his work.

### **THE KEY TO HIS CAREER**

Examine his sermons and campaigns in the British Isles and throughout the length and breadth of this continent, and what do you find? The same personal Christian experiences as in his letters home after his conversion, and in the same vocabulary. The same seed convictions and plans as he used in his earliest work in Chicago, expanded and embellished by his enlarged experience, the same Bible doctrines and methods, and more of them.

In Chicago he developed a technique that suited his temperament, energy and ability. He learned by doing; he learned what not to do a second time. He used his tact and his wits, subject to God's guidance. He also found by experience how to grip his hearers and bring them to the one grand decision which was his aim in life. He used many of his best sermons right through his career, adding new sermons as the result of study and experience and the demands of new needs. Why should he discard effective sermons based on foundation Bible teachings when he was preaching all the time to changing audiences?

The characteristics that brought success in his early Chicago career proved successful in broader and more complex fields, if that were possible. No situation ever fazed him. He met and mastered every situation that presented itself.

As to the man himself, he became readier with his Bible, more skilled in personal work with individuals and in capturing great crowds, more of a general in the conduct of meetings; but off the platform, right up to the end of his life, he was the same single-hearted person, only more mature, more experienced, more human. Get an understanding of his personality and his religious convictions, and you have the key to his whole career. I believe that if he were alive today he would be the same D. L. Moody, only greater, wiser, mellow, more likable, more understanding of others, firmer in his belief in the Bible and more intense in his zeal for God.

**~ end of chapter 6 ~**

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