

MOODY STILL LIVES

WORD PICTURES OF D. L. MOODY

by

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CHAPTER ONE

THREE WORD PICTURES OF MR. MOODY

MY FIRST INTERVIEW

THE scene is laid in Edinburgh Temperance Hotel on O'Connell (once Sackville) Street in Dublin, Ireland, in October 1892. It is after 10 p.m. I am waiting at the hotel desk. Presently the street door opens, and in walks briskly a broad-shouldered, stockily-built bearded man, dressed in an unassuming black suit and overcoat, with a Bible in his hand. It is D. L. Moody, returning after his meeting in the Rotunda.

I am there by appointment, and introduce myself. We step into the "lift," and go up to his room. While I am apologizing for coming at this late hour because I was reading hard for my impending final gold medal degree examination in Dublin University, Mr. Moody goes to the center table, takes up a dish of lovely hothouse grapes which friends had sent him, and wants me to take them.

"Good for a dry throat when you are reading under a lamp," he urges.

That kindly thoughtfulness was a never-failing characteristic of his.

Major D. W. Whittle, his associate in evangelistic work, whom I had met the previous Christmas vacation, had written me a note some days before saying Mr. Moody wanted to see me; so I asked what he wanted to see me about.

"I want you to come to America as my secretary during the World's Fair in Chicago for six months next summer . . . Great opportunity for a young man . . . The whole world will come to Chicago . . . Worth a year's travel. ... I will pay all your expenses and give you \$100 a month. . .

It was a generous offer, but did not attract me specially, because my prospects at the Irish Bar were good. Besides, I had not even heard him preach, as I was too occupied to go to even one of his meetings. And I had never been markedly active in church relations or Christian work.

That interview must have lasted about an hour.

I watched him every moment, studied him, was amazed at his simplicity, sincerity and kindness as he parried my hesitations. Finally he said: “Well, come anyway, and you can return home at any time if you are not satisfied!”

Who could resist such generous pressure from so prominent a man, of whom I had heard all my life from my older brothers and sisters and friends in admiring and respectful terms? I knew of the mighty spiritual results God had wrought through him in Great Britain and Ireland in 1873-5, and again in 1881-4. I was raised on *Sankey’s Songs and Solos*. The upshot was that after receiving my degree I sailed for America in January 1893, and have been with him ever since.

My respect for his position and ministry as an evangelist, and the spiritual values in being associated with him, together with his winning and commanding personality as revealed in our interview, were the weighty factors in my decision. They outweighed personal considerations. And I was not to be disappointed.

If some reader asks if that was the crazy way Mr. Moody picked up his young associates, my answer is, I don’t know; I am telling about his dealings with me. But it was not so unbelievable as it seemed to me at the time. The background of his action was this. He and Mr. Sankey had held meetings in the city of Limerick, my home town, in the visit of 1881-4. My older brother Frank was secretary of the meetings; he was bright, full of proverbial Irish wit and rollicking stories. Mr. Moody and Mr. Sankey used to have him come to the hotel after the evening meetings, and they would swap stories until they were ready for sleep. Neither of them ever forgot Frank: the mention of his name would bring reminiscent smiles to their faces.

Again in 1892 Mr. Moody held meetings in Limerick, with Frank as local secretary. Mr. Moody wanted him to join him in evangelistic work, with the World’s Fair Evangelistic Campaign in mind, but Frank was now settled in a good law business—he was one of the smartest younger lawyers in Ireland, which is saying a good deal—was married, and had a family.

Mr. Moody’s next question was, were there any younger brothers. Frank told him I was soon to graduate at Dublin University. So Mr. Moody sent for me when he came to Dublin, on the strength of being Frank’s brother, and apparently sized me up as worth the risk. Doubtless he had made other inquiries and knew my record in school and college, for he was a Yankee with both feet on the ground, and generally knew what he was doing. He seems to have had some reputation for acting on impulse, or by intuition, but in most cases, as here, he had given careful thought and had previous knowledge on which to form a quick decision when the time came.

And when he wanted anything he usually had his way.

MR. MOODY IN ACTION

The next time I saw Mr. Moody was in action.

He wrote to me in New York to join him in Wilmington, Delaware, where he and Mr. Sankey were to hold a series of meetings.

It was the first time I heard him preach. I also served him at close quarters as his secretary—answering correspondence, attending to details of the meetings, interviewing callers and in other ways.

He had more power over an audience, day in and out, than any man I have ever observed. The moment he stepped up to the rostrum you felt he was master of the situation. A meeting never got out of hand, not even a few times when a serious accident happened; he usually turned such occurrences to account. His eye caught everything that was taking place. He would ask an usher to seat a person who was at a loss, or to hand someone a hymn book. If the air became oppressive—close air would give him a headache—he would have the windows opened during the singing of a hymn, or if he noticed people were getting restless because of a draught he would have the windows closed. He knew the importance of having his audience at ease while he preached, free from physical discomfort, hence his attention to such details.

There was nothing sensational about his preaching in matter or method, rather the reverse; but his downright sincerity and spiritual power won the people and led them to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord, whether in the big meeting or in the smaller after-meeting.

He never preached anything but the Bible, at its face value, as the revelation of God. He never left the people up in the air, but always pressed for immediate decision under the plain preaching of the gospel, his one object in life was to awaken men to their standing before God and win them to Him. The masses attended his meetings to hear him preach, but after the mass meeting he and his fellow workers dealt one by one with those who professed a willingness to receive Christ. He had no specious pulpit or platform artifices, but he had an uncanny flair—was it not the ready gift of the Holy Spirit?—for saying the right thing in the right way at the right moment.

His speech was vivid and moving. He spoke straightforward, loud enough always to be heard distinctly to the end of the sentence. He used few gestures, except when reliving some dramatic episode like Elijah's translation. Without ever having heard of psychology he learned and practiced the best ways to move hearts and consciences, and so to get decision and surrender to Christ. He regarded seriously his commission from God. One listened to what he was saying, and forgot the speaker. Often an indescribable hush would brood over a meeting, everybody still and listening intently.

He knew the value of hymns in preparing the audience for his message. Singing opens the heart's door for faith. He could not sing a note himself, or rather, all he ever did was to sing-song along on one note, perhaps speaking the words of the hymn. He used to say he could sing as well as Mr. Sankey. "I sing as well as I can, and Sankey can do no better." He watched how a hymn took or failed to take with the people, and would announce one hymn after another, choosing the character of it carefully, until his audience was fused into spiritual preparedness. At times he would himself be completely bowed under the words of some hymn that specially touched him.

Here let me pause to speak of Mr. Sankey, identified more or less for some 30 years with Mr. Moody! Of all the gospel singers I have heard Ira D. Sankey was the greatest, and I have heard them all except P. P. Bliss, who was killed in a railroad accident in 1876.

Others have had more polished voices, more musical technique, but even at the age of about 50 Mr. Sankey could capture an audience more quickly with his resonant voice and hold them spell-bound or Spirit-bound more fully than any singer I ever heard. He had to be great to fill the great opportunity Mr. Moody gave him.

Is it beyond the facts to say that he sang to more people (in person, I mean: with the radio it is different) than any man or woman who ever lived? I think not. He sang to multitudes twice a day or oftener, six days a week, from fall to spring, and sometimes during the summer, over a long course of years. True, his solos were not grand music, yet they had the grandeur of simplicity, and they captured the people.

Hearers did not come expecting a glorious rendition of anthem or oratorio. His simple hymns and tunes gripped hearts and consciences with the directness of their message, wrought a sense of the divine presence, and frequently brought people to decision. Mr. Moody fully recognized his colleague's power in song, and gave him plentiful opportunity. As with Mr. Moody himself, the secret was spiritual power. What would human accomplishment be without that in the serious work of saving men?

I met Mr. Sankey first at the Wilmington meetings. He liked me, and I liked him, ever afterward. After Wilmington we went to Baltimore, Charlotte and Wilmington, North Carolina. What a rare privilege it was to be intimately associated with those two servants of God, so mighty in action, so simple and straightforward and kind at all times!

What a privilege to meet the finest Christian people in those cities! For the leading business and professional men and the preachers and church people had confidence in Mr. Moody and Mr. Sankey and rallied to their side.

It was an unusual introduction to America, to the best in America, for a young fellow. I have never forgotten the kindnesses and courtesies I received myself, especially in Baltimore, where Mr. Moody had spent the winter of 1878-9 (his younger son Paul was born then), and where he had multitudes of dear friends. They loved him and trusted him. They opened their hearts and their homes. Mrs. Moody joined him in Baltimore. All four of us were entertained in private homes, not in hotels. Madame ("Grandma") Levering took me as her guest and gave me a suite of rooms convenient for my secretarial duties in her lovely home on Eutaw Place. The whole Levering family showed me great kindness and hospitality. A complete stranger, I was thus favoured because I was associated with Mr. Moody.

In Baltimore I learned another thing about him. He wanted me to take in everything that was worthwhile wherever we were so he sent me over to Washington to see the inauguration of Grover Cleveland. Boss Croker led the Tammany cohorts, the retiring president Harrison was in the open carriage with Cleveland, and all the leading politicians were on view. It was an effective introduction to American political life. It was a gala day for a college boy used to occasional ructions in Dublin in the days of Balfour and Parnell. Mr. Moody was keen on those things, and had me tell him all about it when I got back to Baltimore; and he laughed over my reactions and remarks.

Mrs. Moody was her husband's treasurer. She settled with me for salary and expenses. Mr. Moody never kept any money. He turned over all his income to his wife. They were always kindness personified to me. A cloud never arose between them and myself.

April was to be a month of rest before going to Chicago, May 1, for the six months World's Fair Evangelistic Campaign. So we found ourselves in Northfield, Massachusetts, the town where he was born and had his home.

AT HOME IN NORTHFIELD

Mr. Moody at home, with his family and neighbors and schools, presented a different picture, not in his personal character, but in his habits, occupations—and his clothes. He laid aside his black suit in favour of some informal free-and-easy suit. His character remained always the same, simple and unassuming. He never posed, he never put on a false front in public or in private. His life was an open book. Nothing subtle or changeful or temperamental in his character or conduct. Always frank, open-hearted, open-minded. Built solidly enough to inspire confidence, capable of a hearty laugh, enjoying a joke, even on himself. Greatly loving and beloved in his own family. True and loyal as a friend, kindly and generous with his relatives and neighbours. Those who knew him best loved him most. Tactful and sympathetic as a benefactor. Paternal in his relations with students of his schools at Northfield and Mount Hermon. Always far and broad visioned in temporal and spiritual affairs.

Forceful in performance when it came time to act. Undismayed by difficulties, rather, spurred to attack them courageously. I never went to him with a problem but he would clear the air with a few words. All because of his Christlike nature, his spiritual insight, his filling with the Holy Spirit. The nearer we can get to the truth about Mr. Moody, the more rigid the examination of the spiritual, ethical and social results of his work, the greater is the impression of him as a remarkable living demonstration of the grace and power of God.

From Northfield I went to Chicago the first of May, travelling with D. B. Towner, one of Mr. Moody's singer colleagues, from whom I learned much about the new life I was facing.

In a later chapter I will give a brief survey of the World's Fair Evangelistic Campaign that occupied the next six months: a gigantic enterprise that brought me in continuous contact not only with the faculty and students and business staff of the Bible Institute, but also with a host of ministers, evangelists and singers, Bible teachers, and Christian leaders generally from all over the world, who cooperated more or less in the campaign under Mr. Moody's direction.

The impression made upon me by Mr. Moody himself, and by the whole personnel, was that here was a sphere of usefulness of a higher order than even a successful career at the Irish or English Bar. It would mean the surrender of good prospects for a life of sacrificial service, such as Mr. Moody and his associates lived. But I made the higher choice, and have never regretted it. As long as Mr. Moody lived he gave me his confidence and more than friendship. I remained with him till his death—and ever since. For he is as living and real to me to-day as ever, only absent, away, until I join him again.

I am not alone in this vivid sense of Mr. Moody's reality and influence, all these years after he went away. I know numbers living who are bound to him still with bands of love and loyalty. His personality and character inspired that attachment, especially on the part of men.

I do not feel that another formal "Life" of Mr. Moody is needed just now. Immediately after his death I wrote a *Shorter Life*, which is still in print. Later that same year his elder son, William Revell Moody, issued the official Life of Dwight L. Moody, fully illustrated. Again in 1930 Will wrote his father's life, D. L. Moody, having made a study of backgrounds and added some new data that had come to light.

Dr. Charles R. Erdman of Princeton Theological Seminary delivered and published a series of lectures on D. L. Moody, *His Message for To-Day* in 1928, a balanced and discerning book by one who knew Mr. Moody personally. And yet his life story has not been worn threadbare; innumerable incidents and anecdotes not put in print remain to be assembled.

What is needed now and always is to know the secret of his life and power, that a multitude of other hearts and lives may be quickened. I wish I could portray the man as he was and the highlights of his career so realistically that generations that have grown up since he died might visualize him and understand him. They would like him, and believe in him.

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