

MOODY STILL LIVES

WORD PICTURES OF D. L. MOODY

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

PERSONALIA

I HAVE thought that a chapter with the title “What Mr. Moody Was Not” would help to limn his character and career in sharp outline.

- He was not narrow or bigoted.
- He was not soft or sentimental.
- He was not ascetic unsociable, unapproachable.
- He never showed the least sign of professionalism.
- He was never small or undignified.

Though full of fun and good humor, he had a serious purpose in life, and never forgot it or prostituted it. He picked up good stories as he picked up good illustrations for his sermons. He could unbend with young and old. He could throw back his head and laugh all over, wiping the tears from his eyes. How he enjoyed the stories told by newer associates like Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, for instance!

- He was not a hard taskmaster.

He was a hard worker himself, but was solicitous that others should not overwork. In his relations with his fellow workers he was never nagging, or dictatorial, or domineering. It was easy to work for him. When he wanted something done he told someone what to do and how to do it, and let it go at that.

“Get there in your own way, but get there,” he would say. When he died the evangelists and singers who had been his associates thanked God for his life and leadership. No one was jealous of him. They felt he was a true friend, and made it easier for all of them.

- He was not a formal theologian or creed-maker. The answer is well known that he gave to a committeeman in London, who wanted to know what his creed was:

“You will find it in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah.”

It satisfied the committee, and it satisfied multitudes ever after, who listened to his preaching of the suffering and exalted Saviour.

- He was not critical of others. He knew how to keep silent.
- He was not censorious or bitter against those who differed from him.

After hearing a speaker denounce with great severity those who differed from him he said:

“I am doubtful if you get anywhere by calling people names. When I began to preach I prepared a sermon on the Devil, in which I called him all the names I could think of, and ripped and tore with all my power. When I got through the people seemed to think the Devil was not so bad after all, and I put away that sermon and confined myself to preaching Jesus Christ.”

“I used to be afraid I would hurt somebody’s feelings,” he said again. “I’ve got over that. I am afraid now that I won’t, for if folks are not living right, I want to make them know it.”

- He was not a controversialist.

He did not pose as a Bible scholar. He accepted the assured results of devout scholarship regarding the Bible, and assimilated both meaning and application. But while he was not a controversialist, he had no use for cheap, destructive speculation about the Bible. He preached the truth as he understood it, and never advertised another’s doubts and speculations. If necessary, he might refer to views he disapproved, but he never attacked individuals by name. An interesting revelation of his openness and honesty of mind is seen in his relations with Dr. Henry G. Weston, then president of Crozer Theological Seminary.

Like other men of the learned type, Dr. Weston was prejudiced against Mr. Moody because he found his students were guilty of faulty exegesis which they defended on the ground that Mr. Moody had preached on certain texts as though such exegesis was correct.

When he was finally induced by friends to come to Northfield, and Mr. Moody learned he was there, he asked Dr. Weston to speak. The latter said he was not a public speaker, and they compromised on an afternoon service when Dr. Weston was to give a Bible reading. Mr. Moody attended, and sat in front under the speaker. Dr. Weston had not been speaking long when Mr. Moody remarked:

“There goes one of my sermons!”

Dr. Weston asked him what he meant.

“I have always treated that text as if it meant something else, and you have shown me that I was wrong, and I cannot use it again.”

This happened more than once, and it completely altered his attitude toward Mr. Moody, of whom he became a great admirer and friend.

Asked once if John 3:16 was uttered by our Lord or was John's expression, Mr. Moody made the interesting and illuminating reply that he always wished he could regard it as the utterance of Jesus, but his judgment told him it was a comment made by John himself.

- He was not a schismatic. Throughout his whole career he used his strength and energy in support of existing churches and other institutions, and never initiated anything new until he found a great need which was not and would not be met by existing agencies. He believed in the Church as the home and power-house of Christianity, and all his evangelistic efforts had for their definite objective the building up of bigger and better churches.

One secret of his large accomplishments, as also of his readiness of mind, was that he never procrastinated. If anything had to be done he did it. He never postponed attention to business matters, meeting obligations, running errands, writing or answering letters, or anything else that ought to be done. His mind was not cluttered with held-over matters. He kept the docket clear, and so was ready for the next call upon his time and attention. He was always punctual at appointments.

It was not always smooth sailing. Problems common to school life and administration everywhere would be brought to him by the principals. Financial burdens were continuous. Disappointments with plans or persons would appear. But he kept on top at all times, never lost his faith and nerve, and won out. One could not be downhearted or defeated in his presence. He could always pray if no open door presented itself. He was emphatically a man of prayer.

SUNDRY WORD PICTURES

At home in Northfield Mr. Moody was often mistaken for a local farmer, to his own amusement and the embarrassment of the other party. In his public relations he wore a plain black suit because he did not want to draw attention to himself—for the same reason he wore no jewelry—but at home he got into old clothes. Just as he slipped his watch into a waistcoat pocket without any fob or chain, so he slipped his glasses (pince-nez) into a breast pocket of his waistcoat.

They say that as a younger man he was fleet of foot. In my day his chief diversion was buggy-riding. It enabled him to get around quickly and to see everything and everybody. For exercise he would walk a mile or two a day at least. His kitchen garden, which was half a mile from the house, was his hobby. Mrs. Moody or his daughter looked after the flower beds and lawns around the house, but he loved to putter around the vegetable garden with the help of a hired man, and to feed the chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, swans, or whatever he happened to have from year to year. It was his ambition to beat everyone in Northfield with the earliest vegetables and berries. He gave away everything he raised, after his own household needs were met.

One Christmas we gave him a krokinole set when that game was new. He never got tired of playing it, and could usually win the game. Halma was another game he liked to play. Both had the elements of action, competition, skill, without too arduous mental effort. He liked to play Halma after a night meeting, to rest his mind before retiring.

A photo of Mr. Moody exists which was taken at the time he left Northfield as a lad of 17. Half a dozen more photos were taken in the '60s in Chicago. But after he became prominent in Christian work he would not be photographed again, partly because he shrank from publicity, and largely because in the big English campaigns fake photographs of him were sold by peddlers on the streets. Only twice did he yield to sit again. Once was in 1882, when he placed his daughter in a boarding school in Paris, and she insisted on his being photoed for her sake. Two poses were taken, one standing, one his bust. He got the plates from the photographer and broke them in the presence of the family. The second time was in 1894, when his daughter was to be married and to live in Chicago. He went up town in New York to a photographer who did not know him, had three poses taken, ordered three dozen copies of each, and brought them home to Mrs. Moody with the plates. Only a few copies were given out at the time, but after his death the full supply was released. This was known as his latest photograph, and showed him as he looked during the last years. We have those plates in our possession. After grandchildren were born, his daughter, who had foresight to appreciate the value of photos, took him to the photographer again and again for a number of family groups, including Mrs. Moody and Grandma Moody and others at times. How thankful everybody was that she did! Snapshots of him became more numerous after the invention of kodaks.

On one occasion when he was in New York, some firm persuaded him to make two disc phonograph records when that invention was in its infancy. One is the 91st Psalm, the other the Beatitudes. We have both discs in our possession.

Mr. Moody was careful about his mail. It was remailed to him if he was away from home. He opened it himself, and disposed of it at once. Letters were never neglected or allowed to accumulate. When a letter contained a check for school work, he immediately endorsed it to the proper treasurer and dispatched it to him by mail. Ordinary correspondence he turned over to me to answer. Sometimes I would dictate an answer for him to sign, but usually he left it to me to answer in his name. Letters in confidence, or seeking advice, he might hand to Mrs. Moody to answer, especially if the writer was a woman. I see him now sitting at the desk in the library opening his mail. If other members of the family were present he might hand them unimportant letters to attend to. If someone asked him what he should say in reply, he might look at him over his glasses, which would be poised low down on his nose, and say with a chuckle:

“I don't intend to hire a dog and do the barking!”

He always wrote his letters by hand. I never knew him to dictate to a stenographer; he never had a stenographer. He wrote with a large script. His letters were usually short and to the point, unless it was a letter of condolence or the like. An idea would come to his mind, a suggestion for some phase of his enterprises perhaps, and he would sit down and write the proper party about it.

This promptness and directness were one secret of how he was able to accomplish so much and keep the machines running smoothly.

He always signed his name, “D. L. Moody.”

To those who knew him and worked with him he was plain “Mr. Moody.” Strangers thought to show him courtesy by giving him the professional ministerial title “Doctor Moody,” but it always fell flat. He did not like the name Dwight, and would not let Mrs. Moody use it. He declined several honorary degrees that were offered to him.

His personal tastes and habits were simplicity itself. His personal expenses were trifling, but he had a generous hand and hobbies that cost something. He was never on the payroll of any of his institutions, and never received a cent of compensation for his services on their behalf. Instead, they were a continual drain on him as he paid his own expenses.

Since he turned over all his income to Mrs. Moody, he had no bank account. She paid all the bills and benefactions. He was “money-clean,” quite free from the love of money and the will to amass it. Money never weighed with him as a motive or inducement. But he knew that money had value and utility. He raised uncounted sums for Y.M.C.A. buildings in this country and Great Britain, and for other causes. He had to raise many thousands of dollars every year for his own institutions. Though he never solicited his friends on his own behalf, he laid the needs of the work before them. People of means, large or small, knew he was personally disinterested in his appeals. They knew, too, that their gifts would be carefully and conscientiously expended, without waste or extravagance. Prayer in faith was his underlying reliance in all this, but to faith he added works by soliciting any likely donor in person or by letter.

To get nearest to his early pulpit style and language, the volumes of sermons preached in the British Isles and in the large cities of this country in the ‘70s are best. These were reported and first printed in leading newspapers, but were not subjected to much editing. None of these volumes are now in print, but copies can sometimes be picked up in second hand bookstores, or may be found in older public libraries. Mr. Moody was not a book author, a writer in the usual sense. He never wrote out even a sermon, preaching from brief notes, catchwords and phrases.

His books are all compilations of sermons or of other material like anecdotes, notes from his Bibles, and so on. During his last seven years I was usually his “ghost” writer, but not exclusively; as his sons and colleagues might undertake to prepare calls for the conferences, articles for magazines, etc.

I remember my first attempt. It was during the first month I was with him in Wilmington, Delaware. The editor of some small *Christian Endeavour* monthly wrote and asked him for an article on one of the *Christian Endeavour* topics. He gave me the letter, told me to prepare the article, and he would sign it. I had never done such a thing before, but I looked through his sermon notes and reports, and compiled something that suited him. It was his way to test people by setting them to work. I heard later that he told Mrs. Moody how pleased he was that I had gone ahead and done my best to get his thoughts without pestering him.

All but one or two of his books that were published after 1893 were compiled by me. I came to know his vocabulary and mannerisms of language so well that I could do him justice and reproduce his true flavor.

He had the English Bible on the tip of his tongue.

Often, when I asked him what this or that meant, he would answer without a moment's hesitation. He knew it by personal experience; that is how he was able to make it relive in his preaching. Experience verified, certified his understanding of it. He was a practical, not a speculative student of the Bible. He had not an analytical mind or training. At least, I never knew him to sit down with pencil and paper to analyze a passage, or indeed any problem that presented itself.

He was careful, but not narrow, as to whom he invited to speak on his platform, requiring loyalty to Christ and the Bible and enough common sense and courtesy not to get off on sidetracks. Occasionally he had to cut off speakers.

One year a lady who was holding successful Bible classes in New York was warmly commended to him for Bible classes for women at the August Conference. He put her on for an afternoon hour. After the first session, several came to him and asked if he knew that the teacher had discredited the opening chapters of Genesis by branding them myths and legends. He got his buggy and called on the lady. She left town on the five o'clock train.

Another year an Indian national was present and gave some helpful talks on Round Top on the deeper life. The following year he came again, sponsored by a New York lawyer. But Mr. Moody was quietly informed of immoral acts during his past winter's work, and he too left town on the first train.

A converted Hebrew who was making some stir in New York made censorious remarks about Unitarians one year. Next morning Mr. Moody publicly repudiated this censoriousness, and that speaker never came back.

During the World's Fair Campaign in Chicago it was naturally considered that a prominent younger evangelist should be invited as a speaker. But Dr. Torrey said No, he was not sound on the atonement, so he was not invited. Within a year or two he announced his adherence to the Unitarian persuasion.

SOME REVEALING ANECDOTES

President Mary E. Woolley of Mount Holyoke was one of several guests at breakfast at Mr. Moody's home one morning. Breakfast was followed by morning prayers as usual. Mr. Moody read a portion of Scripture, then knelt and led in prayer. Immediately after the "Amen" he turned to his son and said:

"Paul, be sure those cows don't get into the corn!"

"I have never forgotten that picture," says President Woolley. "It showed both his spiritual and practical character."

Once at a gathering he was leading, someone suggested a clever plan in Sunday school work.

“What do you think of it?” Mr. Moody asked a superintendent who was present.

“We’ve been aiming to do it for two years,” was the reply.

“Don’t you think it’s about time to fire?” Mr. Moody queried.

A Bible Institute student has told how after having been refused by three theological seminaries in his desire to become a Christian minister, he applied to Mr. Moody, through a mutual friend, for admission to the Bible Institute. When the friend met Mr. Moody and put the case up to him he asked one question:

“Has he sand?”

What did he mean by “sand” in this connection? Well, if a man has it he can acquire the necessary knowledge and training and consecration to make a success.

Another Institute student tells this story on himself. His assigned work brought him in daily contact with Mr. Moody, who one day related an anecdote of Charles H. Spurgeon of London. Spurgeon was dismissing his theological students for the Christmas vacation and said he would like to make them each a present. “For instance, here’s Smith. I would like to give him a corkscrew. He has a good deal in him, but it wants letting out. As for Jones, I’d give him a funnel, so that he could get more in. . . .”

In applying this Mr. Moody said: “You know, I’d like to fasten about quarter of a pound of gunpowder to the tail of your coat and set fire to it!”

The student, now a city missionary in London, caught the lesson and loved Mr. Moody all the more for it.

Once when D. B. Towner was helping Mr. Moody with the singing in meetings in Boston, he suffered from a bad throat.

“Thank God, Towner,” said Mr. Moody, “when the Almighty created me, he set my head so close to my body that he gave me hardly any throat, and what little there was he macadamised.”

Mr. George Irving, secretary of the Spiritual Emphasis department of the Y.M.C.A., says that the only time he got next to Mr. Moody was when he was holding meetings in Montreal. He was a student in McGill University, and wanted to ask advice, so at the close of a meeting he went forward to speak to Mr. Moody, who shook hands and shot at him the question:

“Young man, are you a Christian?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then speak to this young man,” and he handed Irving over to speak to the other, who happened to be a student of McGill and a leading athlete. Mr. Irving uses the incident to show how Mr. Moody got people to work, not by discussing and lecturing, but by setting them to witness as to what they know.

President Woodrow Wilson told this story:

“I was in a very plebeian place. I was in a barber shop, sitting in a chair, when I became aware that a personality had entered the room. A man had come quietly in upon the same errand as myself, and sat in the chair next to me. Every word that he uttered, though it was not in the least didactic, showed a personal interest in the man who was serving him; and before I got through with what was being done for me, I was aware that I had attended an evangelistic service, because Mr. Moody was in the next chair. I purposely lingered in the room after he left and noted the singular effect his visit had upon the barbers in that shop. They talked in undertones. They did not know his name, but they knew that something had elevated their thoughts. And I felt that I left that place as I should have left a place of worship.”

Asked to verify the truth of that incident, President Wilson did so, and added:

“My admiration and esteem for Mr. Moody were very deep indeed.”

THIS CHANGING WORLD

Of course, he realized that he lived in a changing world. He is quoted as having said:

“Thirty years ago pretty much everybody believed that the Bible was true. They did not attack it or question it. They believed that the Lord Jesus Christ by dying on the cross had done something for them, and that if they received Him they would be saved. And my work was to bring them to a decision to do what they already knew they ought to do. But all is different now. The question mark is raised everywhere, and there is need for teachers who shall teach and show the people what the gospel is. I believe that God will raise up a teaching evangelism through which this work shall be done.”

Did that mean that he would change the content of his message, as distinct from his method? By no means!

“Ministers are abreast of the time if they preach the old gospel faithfully . . . The gospel has stood the test of nineteen centuries, and it has never failed once. I know what the gospel will do for sin-sick souls, for I have seen its power for 40 years. Why should I try a new remedy of whose value I know nothing? Why should I spend years in studying up a possible cure for sin when I have a sure remedy. . .? I have only one message for men of every class. The gospel is fitted for all people. So long as men sin, there will need to be sermons on repentance and faith. All alike need to be born again . . .”

Those who say he would change his convictions if he was alive to-day, are not fair to him. They do not know him.

- Had there not been outward changes from the year one?
- Were not these changes just history repeating itself in different dress?
- But has the world changed in its basic attitude to God?
- Has human nature changed, for the better?
- Did not social and religious and political conditions change during his own ministry of over 40 years?
- Did not the people who crowded his meetings represent all sorts and conditions of men in different lands?
- Did he not live and preach through learned and popular attacks of infidelity and atheism, of scientific and Biblical speculation?
- Did he not see the rise and wane of plausible religious fanaticisms and follies?

Then why should he change now? To which of the transient and conflicting opinions should he change? Has not his position on the Bible and the gospel been increasingly buttressed by devout scholarly research and by the findings of archeology, no less than by triumphant Christian experience? On all sides to-day we hear a call for a revival of the old affirmations and honesties, the well approved essentials of the Christian faith, issuing in honest and helpful lives.

Nothing in the present moral condition of society the world over would surprise him to-day. A few years before he died he said:

“The facts which everyone who is not blinded by prejudice must see about him on every hand, as well as the teaching of Scripture, clearly indicate that in the last days perilous times shall come. There is every indication that the present dispensation will end in a great smash-up. But I believe that out of the smash-up the most glorious age in the world’s history will come. So I look into the future not with despair, but with unbounded delight.”

He was so vitally human in his living and preaching that he would be abreast of the times, in touch with the needs of each day and generation, whatever changes came.

Dr. Gaius Glenn Atkins said in a Founder’s Day address at Northfield:

“If he lived to be a hundred and were here to-day, he would belong to our world, he would understand our minds, and his gospel would meet our needs.”

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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