

Lives that Lift

C L Paddock 1935



Moody, The Fisher Of Men

None of those who knew Dwight L. Moody in boyhood even dreamt of his ever becoming one of the world's greatest preachers. Like many other great missionary workers, he was born in a humble home and reared in poverty. It was in 1837 that his eventful life had its beginning; the place was on a stony farm near Northfield, Massachusetts. When only four years old, his father died, leaving the mother with seven children. The farm on which they lived was heavily mortgaged, and the creditors took everything, "even the kindling from the woodpile." When the firewood was taken the children were put to bed early in the evening, and had to remain there until schooltime next day, in order to keep warm. One thing which made an indelible impression on the boy's mind at this time in his life, was a load of wood which his uncle brought to them. Dwight thought it was the biggest load of wood he had ever seen.

To add to the mother's already heavy burden, twins were born after the father's death. Mrs. Moody was urged to break up the home and let friends take the children and make homes for them. While her possessions were few and simple, she had a strong faith in God, and trusted Him who feeds the sparrow and clothes the lily of the field. Often the family knelt together and told God of their needs. In their tender years those boys and girls learned to love God and to trust Him implicitly. No doubt the foundation for Moody's greatness was laid in that humble Christian home by a godly mother.

The mother always insisted that the children attend church services, and they were often seen trudging barefoot to the meeting-house, carrying their shoes and stockings in their hands. These they put on when they came in sight of the church. Since there was service in the morning and again in the afternoon, they took their lunch and stayed all day so as not to miss any of the meetings. Dwight thought it was not fair that he should work in the field all week and then have to go to church all day on the one day when he did not need to work; and he determined when he became his own boss he would not go to church. But the habit formed in childhood remained with him all through his life.

He was knocked about "from pillar to post," and had few chances to go to school. In the family library there were only three books-the Bible, a book of devotions, and a catechism. So his education from books was limited.

When he became a minister his grammar was far from perfect and he was sometimes criticized for his faulty speech. Many who have had more privileges have attempted nothing in life and pleaded a lack of opportunity as an excuse. Moody used what he had.

"You should not speak in public," one of his critics advised, "you make too many mistakes in your grammar."

Mr. Moody's reply is characteristic of the man and explains why he did such a great work. "I know I make mistakes, and I lack a great many things," he said, "but I'm doing the best I can with what I've got. But look here, friend, you've got grammar enough, what are *you* doing with it for the Master?"

As he worked on the stony New England farm his ambitious mind wandered afar. He longed to go out into the world and do bigger things. One day, when he was seventeen, he and his brother Edwin were in the goods cutting and hauling logs. "I'm tired of this," he said to his brother. "I'm not going to stay around here any longer. I'm going to Boston."

And to Boston he went, determined that he would make a hundred thousand dollars and become a great merchant. After walking the streets for days, penniless and seeking work, an uncle hired him to work in his store on condition that Dwight would attend Mount Vernon church regularly, and not drink or gamble. He became one of the best salesmen in the store.

It was while working in this store that his Sunday-school teacher, Mr. Edward Kimball, called one day and talked to Moody about being a Christian. The young man gave his heart to the Lord. From that day on his Christianity was woven into every experience of his life. He wondered if a young man could be a Christian and a good salesman too. He feared if he were upright and truthful he might lose sales. But he found in three months' time he had sold more merchandise than any of his fellow clerks. Customers preferred to buy from him because he was honest and trustworthy.

As soon as Moody was converted he began to seek ways of helping others. We find him forming a Sunday-school class from the rowdies in his district. He rented a pew in church and invited the young men from the "highways and byways" of the city to share it with him. When the one pew was full he rented another, and soon was filling four pews with his guests.

In 1856, he moved to Chicago, where he found a good position, and found plenty of opportunity for missionary work. He started a Sunday school in a vacant saloon and his success was phenomenal.

By hard work and careful planning he had managed to save seven thousand dollars toward the one hundred thousand dollars which had been the goal of his boyhood. His desire to make money was now being crowded out of his life by a desire to save men instead. Turning his back on a position yielding him five thousand dollars a year he laid his ambitions for making money on the altar. His relatives and friends felt sure he had lost his mind. "Your money will be gone in no time," they said, and they were right. "Never mind," Moody answered, "I am working for God, and He is rich." With unlimited faith and a tremendous energy he began his life work.

In 1862 he was married to Miss Emma C. Revell, a young woman of ability, who became a true helpmeet in all his undertakings. Another friendship was formed just a little later which proved a real blessing to Mr. Moody in his work. At a prayer-meeting one evening, a stranger near the door started a hymn, and led in the singing. At the close of the service, Mr. Moody shook hands with the man,

who was Ira D. Sankey, then in the employ of the Government, and urged him to unite with him in soul-winning. Sankey left his position and from that time on, the two men worked together in evangelistic work.

It is remarkable how what may seem but a trifling incident, sometimes molds our whole life. We are told that Moody once heard someone remark, "The world has yet to see what God will do with, and for, and through, and in, and by, the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him," and he pondered the saying in his heart.

"He said 'a man,' " thought Moody; "Not a rich man, not a wise man, not a great man, but simply a man. I am a man; I will make that entire and full surrender of my life."

He did make the consecration, and, without a doubt, the name of Dwight L. Moody heads the list as the greatest lay-preacher of all time.

This brief sketch will not permit a recital of all he was able to accomplish in his years of ceaseless toil. At the time of the Civil War we find him on the battlefields ministering to the dead and the dying. After the fire which destroyed Chicago in 1871, he gave himself over to relief work. He traveled abroad, visiting England, Scotland, Ireland, and Palestine. He founded a seminary for young women in Northfield, the town of his birth. He also established the "Mount Hermon School for Young Men." The Moody Bible Institute in Chicago was opened to the public in 1889, as a result of his efforts. During his forty years of arduous labor he preached personally to fifty million people. Eternity alone will tell the results of his work. But this we are sure of, there will be many in heaven as the result of his labors of love.

What were the secrets of his success? First of all, he was a hard worker. He learned early that life has no bargain-counters, and if we would reap, we must first sow. Having done his best, he left the results with his heavenly Father. He was often found in prayer. To God he took not only the big things, but the little problems and perplexities. He talked with God as friend to friend, and God answered his simple petitions. He was naturally a leader of men, and had wonderful ability in getting others to work. "It is better," he said, "to put ten men to work than to try to do the work of ten men."

System seemed to be a part of his nature. He usually arose about daybreak each day and spent the early morning hours in prayer and Bible study. His words touched men's hearts, for he was sincere. He believed and practiced what he preached. One man said of him that he "preached as if there never was to be another meeting, and as if sinners might never hear the Gospel sound again." While he was without doubt the greatest preacher of his time, he was an example in humility. At one time when asked to introduce Henry Ward Beecher, he replied, "Not I. Ask me to black his boots, and I'll gladly do it."

His busy, useful life came to an end in the town of his birth, in the year 1899. The work he began goes on, and his influence still lives in the hearts of men. Truly Dwight L. Moody demonstrated in wonderful fashion what God can do through a life fully consecrated to Him.