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Revival Memories.—D. L. Moody's First Visit to Liverpool, 1875.

By the Rev. Canon W. HAY M. H. AITKEN, M.A.

THE obvious point of contrast between the religious movement of 1859 and that in the early seventies, which will always be associated with the name of D. L. Moody, would probably be considered by most observers to lie in this, that the former was a revival and the latter a Mission. Such an antithetical statement, however, would be somewhat misleading, and would only represent a part of the truth. Undoubtedly that wonderful movement, by far the most remarkable this country has ever seen since the time of the Wesleys and of Whitfield, centred round the person of one rugged and forceful man, who seemed specially raised up of God to do the greatest spiritual work of the century; but, on the other hand, there was all over the land at that time a certain spirit of responsiveness that made evangelizing work easy. The fields were ripe unto the harvest, and when the reaper came he found everything ready for the marvellous sweep of his scythe.

I disentombed the other day from amongst my old letters a note from Moody to myself, the circumstances of which have entirely passed from my memory. It runs thus:

"York, England,
"*July* 1, 1873.

"Dear Brother Aitken,

"Yours received. Thanks for your kindness. Go on with Brothers Robinson and Nash, and get all things ready, so that when we throw the Gospel net, should the Lord fill it, we may have plenty of help to draw the fish ashore. Will see you in October.

"Yours truly,
"D. L. Moody."

To me this seems a particularly interesting and characteristic letter. It was written at a time when the fortunes of the great spiritual campaign to which he had committed himself had reached their low-water mark, and all seemed to suggest failure.

He had arrived in England a few weeks before to find that the two prominent men who had invited him to this country had both passed away, and he began his work at York, without any proper support either from Church-people or Nonconformists, in an almost empty chapel, which I believe he never succeeded in filling. Yet his faith was strong that the net would be so filled that plenty of help would be required to drag it ashore. Curiously enough, I have no recollection of what it was that led to this correspondence; with respect to which, however, it is interesting to notice, in passing, that the "Brother Robinson" referred to was the father of the present Dean of Westminster. But I very vividly recall his visit to Liverpool about a year later, when it was determined to erect the "Victoria Hall" for his gatherings.

We—that is to say, most of the leading men in Liverpool who were in favour of the movement—met Moody in the little hall at Hackins Hey to discuss the principal details of his proposed visit. After a few preliminary utterances he was asked what sort of a building he would require. "Well," he replied, "I guess you'd better erect a hall that will accommodate from 10,000 to 12,000 people." We looked aghast at each other, and someone ventured upon a more or less feeble expostulation. "Well," he replied, "we have had 14,000 to 15,000 at the Exhibition Hall, Dublin, and Dublin is a Roman Catholic city. I guess I'm not asking too much when I name 10,000 for a great Protestant town like Liverpool." "I'm afraid, Mr. Moody, you weren't heard in the Exhibition building in Dublin," said someone almost timidly. "Well," he replied, "that depends very much upon who it was that heard me. A gentleman came up to me the other night and remarked: 'I'm sorry to have to tell you, Mr. Moody, that you're not heard in this hall.' 'Is that so?' I said, 'Where did you sit?' 'I beg your pardon?' (Then raising his voice considerably), 'Where did you sit?' 'What did you say?' (Then with a tremendous shout), 'WHERE DID YOU SIT?'" Of course we were all convulsed with laughter, and incontinently voted him his 12,000,

which was what Victoria Hall would hold when it was well crowded.

It was in the month of February, 1895, that the great effort commenced with an early morning gathering attended by several thousands of Christian workers, and we had a most inspiring time. Before the Mission was ended the great hall was crammed even at that early hour. The evening meeting was announced for 8 p.m., so as not to interfere with the regular services of the various places of worship. It happened that Mr. Eugene Stock was staying with me at the time, and, after a very short evening service at our church, I strode off with him for the hall at a pace that he had some difficulty in keeping up with, and reached it before the clock had struck eight. We entered from behind through the anteroom, and found ourselves standing in a crowded gangway just by the platform. All was stillness and silence, and I whispered to my companion, "Just in time!" supposing that this was the moment of silent prayer before the opening of the service. Imagine our feelings, however, when the silence was broken by the voice of a minister pronouncing the benediction. The hall had been crowded by half-past six, and Moody, finding that no more could be got in, very sensibly proceeded with the service and preached his opening sermon.

The Mission lasted for four full weeks—indeed, it included five Sundays. I remember Moody's saying that it would have been a comparative failure had it only lasted for a fortnight. It was evident that the work deepened, and became more and more satisfactory as the time passed on. In a week the interest had so greatly increased that it became necessary on Sundays to have the women in the afternoon and only men in the evening. It was one of the sights of a lifetime to see that huge hall crammed with some 14,000 men the next Sunday evening. I see it noted in my diary that 350 men crowded into the room set apart for anxious inquirers after the sermon on that second Sunday night. Even so, overflow meetings had to be arranged, and St. James's Hall was filled with a gathering which I addressed. The following night thousands could not get in, and overflow meetings became necessary on week-days as well as Sundays.

It may be as well to say a word about the method adopted by Moody in dealing with the multitudes that were reached by the preaching. There was a large lean-to room at the back of the hall which might hold, perhaps, when packed, about 400 persons. Into this "the anxious" were invited immediately after Moody had asked them to rise for a moment to their feet, in token of their determination to yield to the claims of Christ. Each minister joining was requested to furnish such helpers as he could rely upon for the responsible work of directing these "inquirers," and there would usually be from 100 to 200 of these, either waiting in the room or scattered through the hall. This arrangement was at once the strength and the weakness of the movement—its strength, because provision was thus made for the giving of individual help to each seeking soul; its weakness, because necessarily some of those thus selected were not properly trained for this difficult and delicate work.

Still, I am persuaded that, with all its drawbacks, this was the best and wisest method of dealing with this problem; and on the whole it worked well. Where an awakened soul fell into the hands of an unskilful worker, he might not receive at once the help that he needed; but, as the evening passed on, other more experienced helpers would become free, and probably the incompetent worker, feeling that he was not succeeding in his well-intentioned efforts, would call in the assistance of someone better qualified than himself, and thus the needed help would at length be obtained. No doubt, too, many who began by being very inefficient, because inexperienced, workers, acquired a new efficiency ere those memorable weeks had passed away. On the whole, I am bound to say that I think that Moody's method was, probably, the best that he could have employed, and I regard it as much more satisfactory than some of the more wholesale ways of dealing with the awakened that have been adopted by certain more recent evangelists.

Towards the end of his visit the interest became really quite wonderful. Moody himself was greatly touched at the eagerness of the people. I see the following entry in my diary for

March 5—a Friday, too, which is usually a *dies non* for religious meetings all through the North of England: "In the evening an immense multitude was gathered outside and in the hall. Moody was much affected, and there was a general softening. The inquiry-room was crammed with the anxious, while Moody gathered 200 or 300 more around him in the gallery of the hall." The following Sunday I see this entry: "This has been a most wonderful day. Moody thought it the greatest day of his life. The hall was crammed, of course, all through the day. A blessed meeting in the early morning; but the 'inquirers' meeting' was the most touching. I should hope that thousands have been seeking and finding during this Mission. The number of men at the evening meeting was immense. The inquiry-room was crammed in a few minutes, and upwards of 400 men rose to their feet almost at once in response to Moody's final appeal."

So the great movement came to an end, and the next morning some 400 or 500 people assembled in the station to see the dear evangelist off, and give him a parting cheer; but the work did not stop with his departure. I was the unfortunate person to whose lot it fell to resume the work on that Monday night after his departure, and never did sermon of mine seem to fall more flat, and never was I conscious of a more trying reactionary influence. But before two or three days had passed these experiences gave place to fresh manifestations of spiritual power, and during the weeks that followed, in which the work was continued by one preacher after another, numbers of souls came under the power of the word, until the grape-gleanings of Ephraim must have nearly equalled the vintage of Abiezer.

I left Liverpool in the course of that year, and so am not able to speak from my own personal observation of the lasting character of the effects of the movement; but I have no hesitation in saying that the permanence of a very large proportion of these results was beyond question, and I believe that this would have been the testimony of most of the ministers who participated in the work. In some cases there was hardly any

perceptible backsliding. For example, I well remember a conversation that I had several years after with a former curate of mine, who had become the vicar of an important Liverpool church. He told me that about forty names had been sent to him of persons who had been conversed with in the after-meetings and who either belonged to or wished to join his congregation. He thought that he might have lost sight of perhaps half a dozen of them owing to change of residence, but with the exception of these he stated that he could give a good and satisfactory account of all who had thus professed to benefit by the services.

As I have already said, this was something more than a Mission, it was doubtless a time of revival all over the land. In looking through the notes that I made in my diary, I see that during that month I was pressed to go and hold special meetings in large halls in several big towns of the North, and in each case the crowds that thronged to hear me were so great that the buildings were unable to accommodate them. And also in each case there were not only crowds, but excellent spiritual results from a single meeting. Undoubtedly the Spirit of God was moving all the land as it has never been moved since, certainly not in either of Moody's subsequent visits.

No sketch of that wonderful season of blessing would be at all complete, even as a sketch, that made no reference to Moody's companions in travel and labour. The Mission of those two years was the introduction of the ministry of song into evangelizing work, and Mr. Sankey, I have no doubt, reached many whom Moody's strenuous appeals had failed to touch. I shall never forget a scene at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, which occurred some little time before the Liverpool Mission. Moody had preached upon "the Excuses," which he described in the vernacular as "a pack of lies." The last of them was, "It's no use my coming, I'm too bad; I don't believe He will receive me." In answering this, he gave us a most touching story of his own early domestic life, of an elder brother who had run away from home, and of a mother's patient love that never would give up the hope of his return. He went on to describe that return,

how a tall, dark, sun-bronzed man stood before the window where the mother sat working, and how she knew him by his tears. "Mother," exclaimed the penitent prodigal, as he gently held the arms that were stretched out to embrace him, "I've vowed to God Almighty that I'll never cross your threshold till you forgive me!" "Do you think," exclaimed Moody, with a sort of ring of triumph in his voice—"do you think that she was long in forgiving him?" As he sat down Mr. Sankey's voice was heard in the first notes of that thrilling hymn, "Come home, come home, you are weary at heart!" The emotional effect was simply overwhelming, and strong men wept like children, myself amongst the number; but the emotion was but the vehicle to carry the great love-lesson home to the heart, and I cannot doubt that the Spirit of God spoke through the song as well as through the touching story.

His other companion-in-arms was Henry Drummond. "Drummond is as pure a soul as I have ever met with in all my life"—that was Moody's testimony to Drummond. "Moody is the biggest human that I have ever known"—that was Drummond's testimony to Moody. Those were the days in which Drummond used to deliver a simple Gospel message and gave no presage of his later developments. His influence with the young men was extraordinary, and after his work it was not to be wondered at that Moody's last act, ere he took his leave of Liverpool, was to secure the erection of new buildings for the local branch of the Y.M.C.A. In the next issue I hope to give some account of what I saw of Moody's work in London.