





## The First Decade



The round-faced, pudgy-kneed boy barely noticed the sunlight beating down on his dark brown hair as he intently studied the approaching stagecoach. As it rumbled closer, Dwight fingered the money in his pocket. When he could taste the dust in the air and hear the horses breathing heavily, he waved his arms wildly. The stagecoach stopped a few feet up the road, and Dwight ran to the driver's box.

“Can I help you, young man?” the driver asked kindly.

“I need a ride to my grandmother's house, please, sir,” Dwight answered.

“Do you have money for the fare?”

Dwight pulled his money out and held it out, squinting up at the driver.

“I'm sorry,” the driver said, shaking his head. “The fare is ten cents, and you only have five cents there. If my stagecoach was empty, I might consider it. But as you can see...”

The driver waved his arm at the crowded stage, and Dwight's small shoulders slumped. It was a sweaty,

*One Devoted Man*

exhausting, four-mile walk to Grandmother Holton's house. He chewed his lip in concentration. Then he gave an excited hop.

"Would five cents buy me a seat on top?"

Giggles rippled through the passenger compartment, and the driver looked down at Dwight.

"I beg your pardon, young man—what do you mean 'on top'?"

Dwight pointed to the luggage on the roof of the stagecoach, and said, "Up there—with the bags, sir."

There were more giggles as the driver tipped his head and considered Dwight's proposal. Dwight shifted his weight from foot to foot and looked down at the dusty road. It was the longest few seconds of his five-year-old life! Finally, the driver smiled down at him.

"I suppose five cents could buy you a seat up there," he said, pulling Dwight up and settling him among the bags and boxes. "Welcome aboard...and hang on!"

After a day with Grandmother Holton and his cousins, aunts, and uncles, Dwight had spent time formulating a plan for the trip home. His cousins urged him to head home early so he would reach the house safely before dark. But Dwight dawdled on the road, armed with a bushy bouquet of wildflowers and caraway. When he heard the familiar rumble of the stagecoach headed toward him, Dwight smiled his best smile.

When Dwight waved his arms, the driver pulled over. He looked down and rolled his eyes.

*D.L. Moody*

“You again! Do you have the fare this time young man?”

Dwight smiled widely and held his bouquet high. The driver laughed and shook his head.

“I should have known,” he muttered, chuckling softly. “The luggage rack again?”

“Yes, please, sir,” Dwight answered.

The driver hoisted him up to the roof of the stagecoach and patted Dwight’s head fondly, saying, “You are a very persuasive young man!”

Persuasion was always one of Dwight’s greatest resources. Born February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1837, as the sixth of nine children with a widowed mother, Dwight’s young life sometimes felt like a struggle to survive. Before his father died, things had been fairly normal and routine, with a sense of comfort and plenty. But when Dwight was just four years old, his father died unexpectedly. Then the twins were born, the debt collectors came, and everything turned upside down.

Edwin Moody, Dwight’s father, was deep in debt when he died, and he left no money to pay what he owed. The creditors took everything but the house, which was protected by law. Dwight’s mother, Betsy, had just had twins, and found herself without food or supplies for her large family. The creditors even took the kindling for the fire.

Betsy’s family immediately came to her aid. Dwight woke up one frosty morning to the chop-chop-chop of Uncle Cyrus cutting wood. He worked for hours,



*One Devoted Man*

making sure there was plenty of wood to get Betsy and her children through the long, cold New England winter. As the midmorning sun began to warm the landscape, Dwight slipped outside and watched Uncle Cyrus chopping tirelessly

“Why are you chopping wood for us?” Dwight asked.

Uncle Cyrus stopped working and mopped his brow with his jacket sleeve. “Because I love you. And because you have a need. When you love people, you take care of them.”

Dwight turned that idea over and over in his little head as Uncle Cyrus returned to his chopping. It was a new concept, but it was one Dwight would never forget. Just like Uncle Cyrus, a local minister helped reinforce the lesson by providing food and clothes for the Moody family that summer and enrolling the older children in Sunday School.

In the Moody household, church attendance was not optional on Sundays, and they always dressed their best. In fact, Dwight and the other boys walked to church barefoot to keep their shoes clean. When they were within sight of the church, the boys would stop and slip on their socks and shoes. Then they walked into church, clean and tidy.

As Dwight grew older, he learned to put on a good show. Although he occasionally fell asleep during services—and once even had the preacher send a messenger to wake him up!—Dwight was

*D.L. Moody*

generally the picture of good behavior. He was angelic when his mother was around, but when Mrs. Moody wasn't watching, Dwight was constantly looking for opportunities for mischief.

One winter day, Dwight gathered a group of boys after school. Several of them squeezed into a box-shaped toboggan and rode it down a steep hill, right behind Old Man Squires' house. The speed of the toboggan as it crashed through a fence, coupled with the boys' raucous laughter, terrified the old man's cattle. They stampeded through fences and trampled fields. Dwight and the other boys abandoned the toboggan and pretended to be just as shocked and indignant as everyone else.

Another cold, dreary day, Dwight posted a fake notice on the schoolhouse door about a guest speaker who was coming to town. On the night listed on the notice, the schoolhouse was lit and warmed, and most of the town showed up. The time for the meeting came and went. Soon, the people began to grumble, and Dwight—who had seated himself in the middle of the crowd—grumbled louder than anyone. Of course, the fictional speaker never showed up, and only Dwight knew why!

It was a carefree life, and Dwight was determined to enjoy every minute of it. But he was almost ten years old, and everything was about to change.