11-1908

How Dr. Torrey Became an Evangelist

R. A. Torrey
How Dr. Torrey Became an Evangelist

Written by himself, at the request of the publishers, for circulation in connection with the Los Angeles Revival, November, 1908.
How Dr. Torrey Became an Evangelist

In 1898 or 1899 at the close of the week of prayer, Miss Strong, Superintendent of the Women's Department of the Moody Bible Institute, (Chicago), came to me and said, "Do you not think that we ought to continue these prayer meetings throughout the year, meeting together one night every week to pray for a world-wide revival?" I submitted the suggestion to the faculty of the Institute and it was unanimously voted that we should do so. So every Saturday night from 9 to 10 o'clock at the close of the Saturday night Union Bible Class three or four hundred of us met for prayer in the lecture room of the Bible Institute. This prayer meeting was made up of some of the most earnest Christians from all the churches in and about Chicago. After we had been praying a few weeks, some of the people would come to me and to the one who assisted me in leading the meetings and ask, "Has the revival begun?" And we would reply, "No, not as far as we know." "Well, when is it coming?" "We don't know." "How long do you expect to keep praying?" "Until it comes." A few of the prayers fell out by the way, but the great majority continued week after week, and month after month, and year after year. Now and then tidings of blessing would come to us from other countries, especially Japan. This encouraged our hearts and we kept on praying. After this general meeting had been going on for some weeks, a few of us, sometimes a half dozen, sometimes perhaps a dozen, never more, would meet for a more private meeting after the general meeting was over. We would continue in prayer until God sent us home, which would usually be somewhere about one or two, or three o'clock Sunday morning. These smaller meetings for prayer were especially blessed of God. He wonderfully manifested Himself in our midst. One night in this smaller meeting, I was suddenly led to pray that God would send me around the world preaching the Gospel, and
that I might see thousands of conversions in China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, India, England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany and America. I remember mentioning these countries. Nothing seemed more unlikely than this. It seemed as if I was tied to Chicago for life by the Bible Institute and the Chicago Avenue Church. It seemed as if there was no one to whom I could leave this work, and yet when that prayer was done, I knew I was going around the world and that God was going to do great things. The prayer was not my own. I was quite taken out of myself as I prayed, borne along by the Spirit of God. About this time two strangers from Australia appeared in the lecture room of the Bible Institute day after day. I noticed how steadily they came, but did not think much of it as one of them was the father of a student in the Institute. One day these two men approached me at the close of a lecture and asked for a private conversation. When we went to my office, they said, "When we left Australia, we were commissioned to visit Keswick and other centers in England and America and select some man to invite for a series of evangelistic meetings in Australia. We have been at Keswick and elsewhere and both of us have decided that you are the man to invite. Will you go?" I replied that I could not see how it was possible for me to go, that duties seemed to demand that I should remain at the Institute and at the church and I could see no way to undertake this work. "Well," they said, "You are going," and one of them said, "I would like to meet Mrs. Torrey, as we expect to entertain you in Melbourne." I told them I would be glad to have them meet Mrs. Torrey, but I did not expect to have them entertain her in Melbourne. But he said he expected they would and called at the house and said to Mrs. Torrey, "you are coming to Melbourne and we will entertain you at our home."

Months passed by and the matter was continually in my mind, but I could not see my way to leave Chicago. In October of 1901, while at a Bible Conference in St. Louis, a letter came from Mr. Barber of Melbourne, asking me to cable at once that I would come to Australia,
and begin meetings in March of the following year. I asked the brethren at the conference to pray that I might be guided in answering the letter and went to my room to pray. It soon became clear that I should go and I cabled one word signifying that I was going. Thus the world wide tour began.

When we reached Australia, we found that for twelve years a little group of men had been meeting to pray for a great revival, that as they went on praying year after year they had become assured that the revival was coming. Two of these men had passed away before we reached Australia, one died on his knees the first week of our meetings in Melbourne. He had come to Melbourne to assist in the work and had been greatly used the few days he was there; another who had been praying had seen in vision the people flocking to the Town Hall and came a long distance to see with his own eyes what he had already seen by faith. The people did flock to the Town Hall just as he had seen them, and flocked not only to the Town Hall, but to the Exhibition Hall where 8000 people would crowd in nightly, and thousands often be turned away. Meetings were held in fifty different places each night in Melbourne for two weeks and then for two weeks in the great Exhibition Hall all gathered together. Three meetings were also held in the Town Hall each day, at twelve o'clock, for men only; one o'clock for women only, and three o'clock. In the month that the meetings continued 8642 names were reported to the churches as having professed to accept Christ in the various meetings. So the work began. Every one knows what followed. The fire broke out in many other lands. The story of the great revival in Wales and of the awakenings in the large cities in England and the revival in India and other parts of the world has been told again, and again. God has answered prayer.

For many weeks previous to our beginning work in Melbourne, prayer circles had been organized under the guidance of the wife of one of the two men who visited me in Chicago (Mrs. Dr. Warren) and we found on beginning the work in Melbourne that 1800 prayer
meetings were held weekly throughout the city praying for revival. Many things have been said about the preaching and about the singing, but the revival was far more due on the human side to prayer than to preaching or singing. Mrs. Warren soon afterward visited England and told at the Keswick convention the story of the Melbourne revival. A circle of prayer for world-wide revival was immediately formed. This grew in number until 40,000 people throughout England were praying for world-wide revival. How God has answered these prayers is a matter of history.

"Call unto me and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

(Jer. xxxiii. 3.)

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

(John xv.7.)

"Pray without ceasing."

(I Thess. v.17.)

THE BIBLE HOUSE OF LOS ANGELES
524 LISSNER BUILDING
Los Angeles, California, U. S. A.

Publishers of
THE UNDERSCORED GOSPELS and LEAFLETS
Leaflets by Torrey, Pierson, Spurgeon, Gordon and others. Sound, Unique, Attractive. Sample packet sent postpaid on receipt of 15 cents in stamps.

8