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CHAPTER 1

ONE OF GOD'S TOOLS

I want to be a giant for God—"BILLY" SUNDAY.

HEAVEN OFTEN PLAYS JOKES on earth's worldly-wise, when a shockingly unconventional John the Baptist comes along, who does not follow the prescribed rules in dress, training, methods or message.

In a day full of blatant worldly wisdom, prosperity, churchliness, and a flood of "advanced" theology overwhelming the pulpit, God needed a prophet, to call his people to simple faith and righteousness. A nation was imperiled by luxury, greed, love of pleasure and unbelief. Surely such a day required a great man, learned in all the ways of the world, equipped with the best preparation of American and foreign universities and theological seminaries, a man trained in Church leadership, and approved and honored by the Church. So worldly wisdom decreed. But God laughed and produced, to the scandal of the correct and conventional, "Billy" Sunday, a man from the common people, who, like Lincoln, wore the signs and savor of the soil.

That he was God's tool is the first and last word about "Billy" Sunday. He was a "phenomenon" only as God is forever doing the phenomenal, and upsetting men's plans. He was simply a tool of God. For a special work he was the special instrument. God called, and he answered. All the many attempts to "explain" "Billy" Sunday on psychological and sociological grounds fall flat when they ignore the fact the he was a handy man for the Lord's use.

"Billy" Sunday led more persons to make a public confession of discipleship to Jesus Christ than any other man for a century. Approximately three hundred thousand persons, in twenty-five years, took Sunday's hand in token that thenceforth their lives belonged to the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

That amazing statement is too big to be grasped at once. It requires thinking. The huge total needs to be broken up into component parts of living people. Tens of thousands of the men were husbands —hundreds of whom had been separated from their wives and children by sin. In reunited homes, whole families blessed the memory of the man of God who gave them back their husbands and fathers. Other tens of thousands were sons, over many of whom parents had prayed long. It would be hard to convince those mothers, whose sons had been given back to clean living and to Christian service, that there was anything seriously wrong with Mr. Sunday's language or methods or theology. Businessmen who found that a Sunday revival meant the paying up of the bad bills of old customers were ready to approve a man whose work restored integrity in commercial relations.

Every conceivable type of humanity was included in that total of over a quarter of a million of converts. The college professor, the prosperous busi-

nessman, the eminent politician, the farmer, the lawyer, the editor, the doctor, the author, the athlete, the "man about town," the criminal, the drunkard, the society woman, the college student, the workingman, the school boy and girl—the whole gamut of life was covered by the stream of humanity that "hit the sawdust trail"—a phrase which chilled the marrow of the theological seminaries. But the trail led Home to the Father's House.

He, above all others of his time, broke through the thick wall of indifference which separated the church from the world. The church's problem was how to smash, or even to crack, the partition which shut off the world from the church.

"Billy" Sunday did it. He set all sorts and conditions of men to talking about religion. In the lowest dive in New York's "Tenderloin" or in San Francisco's "Barbary Coast," the name "'Billy' "Sunday," was recognized, and denizens were ready to discuss the man and his message. Stand before a session of the American Philosophical Society and pronounce the words, "Billy" Sunday, and every one of the learned savants present would be able to talk about the man, even though few of them knew who won last season's baseball championship or who held the world's ring championship.

That was a feat of magnitude. All levels of society were made aware of "Billy" Sunday and his gospel. When the evangelist went to New York for an evening address, early in the year 1914, the throngs were so great that the police were surprised by surging thousands. Mr. Sunday himself could not obtain admittance to the meeting for more than half an hour. Andrew Carnegie could not get into the hall that bears his name. Probably a greater number of persons tried to hear the evangelist that night than were gathered in all the churches of

greater New York combined on the preceding Sunday night. To turn thousands of persons away from his meetings was a common experience. More than ten thousand, mostly men, tried in vain to get into the overcrowded Scranton tabernacle at a single session.

That generation had not seen a great city shaken by the gospel until "Billy" Sunday went to Pittsburgh. The report was unanimously given by the press, preachers and businessmen. Literally that whole city was stirred to its sluggish depths by the Sunday campaign. No baseball series or political campaign ever moved the community so deeply. Everywhere one went the talk was of "Billy" Sunday and his meetings. From the bell boys in the hotels to the wealthy in the Duquesne Club, from the workmen in the mills and the girls in the stores to the women in exclusive gatherings, Sunday was conversation. Philadelphia more than duplicated this experience.

Day by day, all the newspapers in that city gave pages to the Sunday meetings. The sermons were fully reported. No other topic had received such full attention for so long a time at the hands of the press. The issues of the papers were subscribed for by persons in all parts of the world. Men and women were converted who never heard the sound of the evangelist's voice. This series of Philadelphia meetings, more than anything else in his experience, impressed the power of Sunday upon the metropolitan centers of the nation at large; the country folk had long before learned of him.

Any tabulation of Mr. Sunday's influence must give a high place to the fact that he made good press "copy": he put religion on the front pages of the dailies; and made it an issue with the millions.

All of this proved the popular interest in vital,

contemporaneous religion. Men's ears were dulled by the "shop talk" of the pulpit. They were weary of the worn platitudes of professional piety. Nobody cared for the language of Canaan, in which many ministers, with reverence for the dead past, tried to envelope the living truths of the Gospel, as if they were mummies. In the colloquial tongue of the common people, Jesus first proclaimed His gospel, and "the common people heard him gladly." Many of the learned and aristocratic ecclesiastics of his day were scandalized by Sunday's free and popular way of putting things, by his stories, and by his disregard for the precedents of the schools. Whatever else may be said about "Billy" Sunday's much-discussed forms of speech, this point was clear, and denied by nobody: he made himself and his message clearly understood by all classes of people. However much one might disagree with him, nobody failed to catch his meaning. He harnessed the common words of the street to the chariot of divine truth.

College students liked him as much as did farmers and mechanics. In a single day's work at the University of Pennsylvania, when thousands of students crowded his meetings, and gave reverent, absorbed attention to his message, several hundred of them openly dedicated their lives to Christ, and publicly grasped his hand. Dr. John R. Mott, one of the world's greatest student leaders, once said: "'You cannot fool a great body of students. They get a man's measure. If he is genuine, they know it, and if he is not, they quickly find it out. Their devotion to Mr. Sunday is very significant."

His appeal was to the mass of the people. The housekeepers who seldom ventured away from their homes, the mechanics who did not go to church, the "men about town" who professed a cynical disdain

for religion, the "down and outs," the millionaires, the society women, the business and professional men, the young fellows who felt "too big" to go to Sunday school—all these, and scores of other types, were found night after night in the barn-like, wooden tabernacles which were always erected for the meetings.

CHAPTER 2

UP FROM THE SOIL

If you want to drive the devil out of the world, hit him with a cradle instead of a crutch—"BILLY" SUNDAY.

SUNDAY MUST BE ACCEPTED as an American type before he can be understood. He was of the average American sort. He was one of the "folks." He had more points of resemblance to the common people than he had of difference from them. His mind was their mind. The keenness of the average American was his in an increased degree. He had the saving sense of humor which marked the West. The extravagances and recklessnesses of his speech would be incredible to a Britisher. Americans understood them.

Sunday was not over-fastidious. He was not made of special porcelain clay, but of the same red soil as the rest of us. He knew the barnyards of the farm better than the drawing rooms of the rich. The normal, everyday Americanism of this son of the Middle West, whom the nation knew as "Billy"

Sunday, is to be insisted upon if he is to be understood.

Early apprenticed to hardship and labor, he had a sympathy with the life of the toiling people which mere imagination cannot give. His knowledge of the American crowd was sure and complete because he was one of them. He understood the life of everyday folk because that had always been his life. While he had obvious natural ability, sharpened on the grindstone of varied experience, his perceptions and his viewpoints were those of the normal American. As he had seen something of life on many levels, and knew city ways as well as country usages, he never lost his bearings as to what sort of people made up the bulk of his country. To them his sermons were addressed. Because he struck this medium level of common conduct and thought, it was easy for those in all the levels of American life to comprehend him.

"Horse sense" was Sunday's to an eminent degree. Because he was "rich in saving common sense," Sunday understood the people and trusted them to understand him. His most earnest defenders from the beginning of his public life were the rank and file of the common people. His critics were from the extreme edges of society—the scholar, or the man whose business was hurt by righteousness.

The life of William A. Sunday covered the period of American history from the Civil War to 1935. He never saw his father, for he was born the third son of pioneer parents on November 19, 1862, four months after his father had enlisted as a private in Company E, Twenty-third Iowa Infantry Volunteers, from which he never returned.

There is nothing remarkable to record as to the family. They were one with the type of the middle-

western Americans who wrested that empire from the wilderness, and counted poverty honorable. In those mutually helpful, splendidly independent days, Democracy came to its flower.

Real patriotism is always purchased at a high price; none pay more dearly for wartime loyalty than the women who send their husbands and sons to the front. Mrs. Sunday bade her husband answer the call of his country as only a brave woman could do. He went to the service and sacrifices which soon ended in an unmarked grave. Four months after she had bidden farewell to her husband, she bade welcome to his son. To this third child she gave the name of her absent husband.

The mother's dreams of the returning soldier's delight in his namesake child were soon disspelled by the tidings that Private William Sunday had died of disease contracted in service, at Patterson, Missouri, on December 22, 1862. A little more than a month later the boy was born who was to lift the name out of the obscurity of the hosts of those who gave "the last full measure of devotion" to their nation.

Then the mother was called upon to take up that heaviest of all burdens of patriotism—the rearing of an orphan family in a home of dire poverty. The three children in the Sunday home at Ames, Iowa—Roy, Edward and William—were unwitting participants in another aspect of war, the lot of soldiers' orphans. For years, Mrs. Sunday, was able to keep her family together under the roof of the two-roomed, log cabin which they called home. In those early days their grandfather, Squire Corey, was of unmeasured help in providing for and training the three orphan boys.

Experience is a school teacher who carries a rod, as Sunday could well testify. He earned life's funda-

mental lessons in the school of poverty and toil. To the part which his mother played in shaping his life and ideals he has borne eloquent tribute on many platforms. When the youngest son was twelve years old, he and his older brother were sent off to the Soldiers' Orphanage at Glenwood, Iowa. Later they were transferred to the Davenport Orphanage, which they left in June of 1876, making two years spent in the orphanages. Concerning this experience Sunday says:

"I was bred and born in Iowa. I am a rube of the rubes. I am a hayseed of the hayseeds, and the malodors of the barnyard are on me yet. It beats Pinadu and Colgate. I have greased my hair with goose grease and blacked my boots with stove blacking. I have wiped my old proboscis with a gunny-sack towel; I have drunk coffee out of my saucer, and I have eaten with my knife; I have said 'done it,' when I should have said 'did it,' and I 'have saw' when I should 'have seen,' and I expect to go to Heaven. I have crept and crawled out from the university of poverty and hard knocks, and have taken postgraduate courses.

"My father went to the war four months before I was born. I have butted and fought and struggled since I was six years old. That's one reason why I wear that little red, white and blue button. I know all about the dark and seamy side of life, and if ever a man fought hard, I have fought hard for everything I have ever gained.

"The wolf scratched at the cabin door and finally mother said: 'Boys, I am going to send you to the Soldiers' Orphans' Home.' At Ames, Iowa, we had to wait for the train, and we went to a little hotel, and they came about one o'clock and said: 'Get ready for the train.'

"I looked into mother's face. Her eyes were red,

her hair was disheveled. I said: 'What's the matter, Mother?' All the time Ed and I slept mother had been praying. We went to the train; she put one arm about me and the other about Ed and sobbed as if her heart would break. People walked by and looked at us, but they didn't say a word.

"Why? They didn't know, and if they had they wouldn't have cared. Mother knew; she knew that for years she wouldn't see her boys. We got into the train and said, 'Good-by, Mother,' as the train pulled out. We reached Council Bluffs. It was cold and we turned up our coats and shivered. We saw the hotel and went up and asked the woman for something to eat. She said: 'What's your name?'

" 'My name is William Sunday, and this is my brother Ed.'

" 'Where are you going?'

" 'Going to the Soldiers' Orphans' Home at Glenwood.'

"She wiped her tears and said: 'My husband was a soldier and never came back. He wouldn't turn any one away and I wouldn't turn you boys away.' She put her arms about us and said: 'Come on in.' She gave us our breakfast and our dinner, too. There wasn't any train going out on the 'Q' until afternoon. We saw a freight train standing there, so we climbed into the caboose.

"The conductor came along and said: 'Where's your money or ticket?'

" 'Ain't got any.'

" 'I'll have to put you off.'

"We commenced to cry. My brother handed him a letter of introduction to the superintendent of the orphans' home. The conductor read it, and handed it back as the tears rolled down his cheeks. Then he said: 'Just sit still, boys. It won't cost a cent to ride on my train.'

"It's only twenty miles from Council Bluffs to Glenwood, and as we rounded the curve the conductor said: 'There it is on the hill.'

"I want to say to you that one of the brightest pictures that hangs upon the walls of my memory is the recollection of the days when as a little boy, out in the log cabin on the frontier of Iowa, I knelt by Mother's side.

"I went back to the old farm some years ago. The scenes had changed. Faces I had known and loved had long since turned to dust. Fingers that used to turn the pages of the Bible were obliterated and the old trees beneath which we boys used to play and swing had been felled. I stood and thought. The man became a child again and the long weary night of sin and of hardships became as though they never had been.

"Once more with my gun on my shoulder and my favorite dog trailing at my heels I walked through the pathless wood and sat on the old familiar logs and stumps. As I sat and listened to the wild, weird harmonies of nature, a vision of the past opened. The squirrel from the limb of the tree barked defiantly and I threw myself into an interrogation point, and when the gun cracked, the squirrel fell at my feet. I grabbed him and ran home to throw him down and receive compliments for my skill as a marksman. I saw the tapestry of the evening fall. I heard the lowing herds and saw them wind slowly o'er the lea and I listened to the tinkling bells that lulled the distant fowl. Once more I heard the shouts of childish glee. Once more Mother drew the trundle bed out from under the larger one, and we boys, kneeling down, shut our eyes and, clasping our little hands, said: 'Now, I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord, my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray thee,

Lord, my soul to take. And this I ask for Jesus' sake, Amen.'

Backward, turn backward, O time in thy flight,
Make me a child again, just for tonight,
Mother, come back from that echoless shore,
Take me again to your heart as of yore.
Into the old cradle I'm longing to creep,
Rock me to sleep, Mother, rock me to sleep.

"I stood beneath the old oak tree and it seemed to carry on a conversation with me. It seemed to say:

" 'Hello Bill. Is that you?'

" 'Yes, it's I, old tree.'

" 'Well, you've got a bald spot on the top of your head.'

" 'Yes, I know, old tree.'

" 'Won't you climb up and sit on my limbs as you used to?'

" 'No, I haven't got time now. I'd like to, though, awfully well.'

" 'Don't go, Bill. Don't you remember the old swing you made?'

" 'Yes, I remember; but I've got to go.'

" 'Say Bill, don't you remember when you tried to play George Washington and the cherry tree and almost cut me down? That's the scar you made, but it's almost covered over now.'

" 'Yes, I remember all, but I haven't time to stay.'

" 'Are you comin' back, Bill?'

" 'I don't know, but I'll never forget you.'

"Then the old apple tree seemed to call me and I said: 'I haven't time to wait, old apple tree.'

I want to go back to the orchard,
The orchard that used to be mine,
The apples are reddening and filling
The air with their wine.

I want to run on through the pasture
And let down the dusty old bars,
I want to find you there still waiting,
Your eyes like the twin stars.
Oh, nights, you are weary and dreary,
And days, there is something you lack;
To the farm in the valley,
I want to go back.

"I tell it to you with shame, I stretched the elastic bands of my mother's love until I thought they would break. I went far into the dark and the wrong until I ceased to hear her prayers or her pleadings. I forgot her face, and I went so far that it seemed to me that one more step and the bands of her love would break and I would be lost. But, thank God, friends, I never took that last step. Little by little I yielded to the tender memories and recollections of my mother; little by little I was drawn away from the yawning abyss, and one dark and stormy night in Chicago, I groped my way out of darkness into the arms of Jesus Christ and I fell on my knees and cried, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' "

Of formal education the boy Sunday had but little. He went to school intermittently, like most of his playmates, but he did get into high school, though he was never graduated. Early in life he began to work for his living, even before he went off to the Soldiers' Orphanage. Concerning these periods of early toil he says:

"When I was about fourteen years old, I made application for the position of janitor in a school.

"I used to get up at two o'clock, and there were fourteen stoves to which coal had to be carried. I had to keep the fire up and keep up my studies and sweep the floors. I got twenty-five dollars a month salary. One day I got a check for my salary and I went right down to the bank to get it cashed.

Right in front of me was another fellow with a check to be cashed, and he shoved his in, and I came along and shoved my check in, and I was handed forty dollars. My check called for twenty-five dollars. I called on a friend of mine who was a lawyer in Kansas City and told him: 'Frank, what do you think, Jay King handed me forty dollars and my check only called for twenty-five dollars.' He said, 'Bill, if I had your luck, I would buy a lottery ticket.' But I said, 'The fifteen dollars is not mine.' He said, 'Don't be a chump. If you were shy ten dollars and you went back you would not get it, and if they hand out fifteen dollars, don't be a fool, keep it.'

"Well, he had some drag with me and influenced me. I was fool enough to keep it, and I took it and bought a suit of clothes. I can see that suit now; it was a kind of brown with a little green in it and I thought I was the goods. That was the first suit of store clothes I had ever had, and I bought that suit and I had twenty-five dollars left.

"Years afterward I said: 'I ought to be a Christian,' and I got on my knees to pray, and the Lord seemed to touch me on the back and say: 'Bill, you owe that Farmers' Bank fifteen dollars with interest.' I said: 'Lord, the Bank don't know that I got that fifteen dollars,' and the Lord said: 'I know it.' So I struggled along for years, probably like some of you, trying to be decent and honest and right some wrong that was in my life, and every time I got down to pray the Lord would say, 'Fifteen dollars with interest, Nevada County, Iowa; fifteen dollars, Bill.' So years afterward I sent that money back, enclosed a check, wrote a letter and acknowledged it. I have the peace of God from that day to this, and I have never swindled anyone out of a dollar."

There are other kinds of education besides those which award students a sheepskin at the end of a stated term. "Billy" Sunday's school was a diversity of work, where he came face to face with the actualities of life. He early had to shift for himself. He learned the priceless lesson of how to work, regardless of what the particular task might be, whether it was scrubbing floors (he was an expert scrubber of floors!), or preaching a sermon to twenty thousand persons. He had a long hard drill in working under authority: that is why he was able to exercise authority like a major-general. Because personally he experienced, with all of the sensitiveness of an American small boy, the bitter injustice of overwork and underpay under an oppressive taskmaster, he was a voice for the toilers of the world. In this same diversified school of industry he learned the lesson of thoroughness which was echoed by every spike in his tabernacle and every gesture in his sermons. A person like Mr. Sunday could not have come from a conventional educational course. It needed this hard school to make a hardy man.

It was while a youth in Marshalltown, Iowa, playing baseball on the lots, that Sunday came to his own. Captain A. C. Anson, the famous leader of the Chicago "White Sox" chanced to see this youth of twenty, whose phenomenal base running had made him a local celebrity. It was no new experience for Sunday to be a center of public interest. He had known this since boyhood. The local baseball "hero" was as big a figure in the eyes of his own particular circle as ever a great evangelist gets to be in the view of the world. Because his ears early became accustomed to the huzzas of the crowd, Sunday's head was not turned by much of the fool-

ish adulation which was his when he became an evangelist.

A level head, a quick eye, and a body which was such a finely trained instrument that it could meet all drawings upon it, was part of Sunday's inheritance from his life on the baseball diamond.

Most successful baseball players enter the major leagues by a succession of steps. With Sunday it was quite otherwise. Because he fell under the personal eye of "Pop" Anson he was transferred directly from the fields of Marshalltown, Iowa, to the great park of the Chicago team. That was in 1883, when Sunday was not yet twenty-one years of age. His mind was still formative—and his entrance into the larger field of baseball trained him to think in broad terms. It widened his horizon and made him reasonably indifferent to the comments of crowds.

A better equipment for the work he was to do could not have been found; for above all else Sunday "played ball." While others discussed methods and bewailed conditions he kept the game going. Such a volume of criticism as no other evangelist, within the memory of living men, ever received, fell harmless, because he did not stop to argue with the umpire, but kept on the job.

There is no call for tears over the early experiences of Sunday. His life was normal; no different from that of tens of thousands of other American boys. He himself was in no wise a phenomenon. He was possessed of no special abilities or inclinations. He came to his preaching gift only after years of experience in Christian work. It is clear that a divine Providence utilized the very ordinariness of his life and training to make him an ambassador to the common people.