



# The Revell Story

Offering Hope and Help to Readers for 150 Years



ANN BYLE



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# Welcome

From the safe distance of retrospect, it is clear that the year 1992 divided the history of the Baker Book House Company in two. In June of that year, Richard Baker's family publishing business accepted responsibility for the assets of the Fleming H. Revell Company.

At the time, Richard Baker's team lacked experience in trade publishing, and Revell had been badly enervated by serial ownership transitions. Revell assets became affordable—albeit barely—to an independent competitor such as us. Baker Book House Company was prepared—albeit barely—to accept a larger role in our profession. Richard Baker glimpsed the future and jumped at the opportunity, and the rest of us jumped too (or perhaps we hopped). We did not exactly form an executive chorus line, and we stumbled often as Richard conducted the score.

By the time Richard transferred company leadership to me five years later, our financial risks had been diminished. We had learned a few things, mostly the hard way, and new capital was available to invest. The timing was ideal to make the next generation of leaders



Dwight Baker

look sharp, but we wobbled all the same. Revell sales remained flat for seven years as we struggled behind the curtains. Some seasons were awful. New books were ignored. Mistakes were made. People quit.

Yet a core team remained committed to Revell, and it was clear that they woke every day determined to press Revell back into a leading role. Everything became more interesting after 2004 when Revell published *90 Minutes in Heaven* by Don Piper. This success brought resources and capital, and it transformed Richard Baker's future vision into full-speed reality.

In 1992, the historical self-isolation of the Christian book business was drawing to a close just as truckloads of Revell inventory arrived in Grand Rapids. Since then, media conglomerates have acquired or launched six major Christian book imprints. These new publishing companies are smart and well resourced, and they raise the professional standards for all of us.

This is a good development for the church. It means that by one method or another, fine Christian books will continue to reach those who seek them. The hand of God is at work in all this frenetic activity, and his hand is steady. No matter who the participants may be, God unfailingly provides his church with Scripture-based literature. But the value of Revell having an independent owner is singular both for the company and for the church. With experienced leaders who are deeply embedded within our faith communities and with a commitment to its mission, Revell will continue to introduce emerging writers of the next generation as it has done so well for the past 150 years.



Dwight Baker  
President/CEO  
Baker Publishing Group

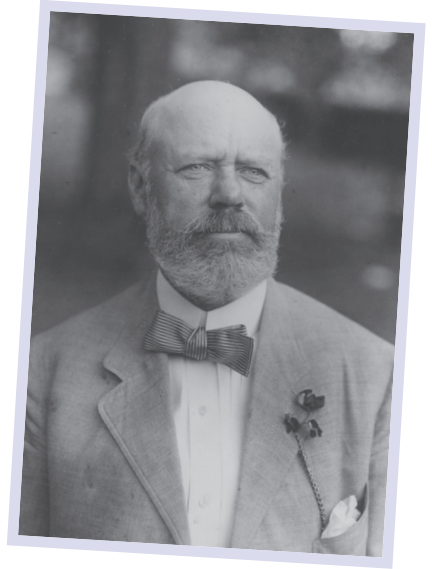
## CHAPTER 1

# The Early Years

**B**orn in 1849 in Chicago, Illinois, Fleming Hewitt Revell was just twenty-one years old when he stepped into the publishing business by starting the Fleming H. Revell Company in 1870. The move into publishing wasn't a huge stretch for the young man.

The year before, in 1869, he'd taken over printing his famous brother-in-law's *Everybody's Paper*, intended for use in the many Sunday schools around the country. Dwight Lyman Moody, by then a well-known evangelist, had married Revell's sister Emma in 1862. Moody was eager to reach as many people as possible with God's Word and knew just the man to help him.

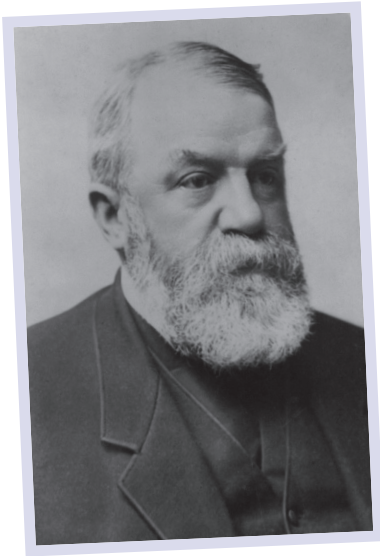
Revell set up offices in the Arcade Court Building on Chicago's Madison Street, an area then known as Bookseller's Row, at a time when business was booming in the thirty-three-year-old city. The meat industry was going strong, rail lines crisscrossed the city,



Fleming H. Revell



and steel mills flourished. Industry was fed by the thousands of refugees from the post–Civil War South and immigrants from around the world. These were the days of Philip Danforth Armour, Gustavus Franklin Swift Sr., Cyrus McCormick, and Marshall Field, all businessmen and entrepreneurs who helped build Chicago into the metropolis it came to be.



D. L. Moody

Tragedy struck hard on October 8, 1871. The Great Chicago Fire—its origins are officially unknown, but legend has it that Catherine O’Leary’s cow kicked over a lantern in her barn—destroyed more than seventeen thousand structures, including the Arcade Court Building. Revell’s business was in ashes.

Not even two years old, the Revell Company faced a turning point, but Fleming Revell wasn’t to be beaten. He

decided to begin publishing books along with Moody’s Sunday school papers, a decision that continues to reverberate 150 years later.

## Business Beginnings

The first book to carry the Revell colophon was ‘*Grace and Truth Under Twelve Different Aspects*’ by W. P. Mackay. The book was originally released by a Glasgow publisher, but Revell released an edition for North American readers at Moody’s request in 1872. Mackay was a pastor in the English seaport of Hull and wrote a preface to Revell’s edition.

Moody, along with knowing Mackay, also knew author and evangelist C. H. Mackintosh, who became known for his premillennialist views. Revell published Mackintosh's *Notes on the Book of Exodus* in 1873. And in keeping with Moody's and others' premillennialist views, Revell published *Jesus Is Coming* by William Blackstone in 1878. Blackstone, a Chicago businessman, helped establish Moody Bible Institute in 1886, first as the Chicago Evangelization Society and later as MBI.

While Revell was busy publishing books, his brother-in-law was traveling the United States and England, preaching to tens of thousands of people and leading many to Christ. Moody's sermons began to appear in collections he hadn't authorized (two were released in 1877), so Moody named Revell his official publisher. Revell never published any books written by Moody because Moody didn't write any. The evangelist preferred to preach.

In 1880, Revell began releasing full-length books of sermons by Moody, including *Twelve Select Sermons* and *Heaven*; the former



Compilations of D. L. Moody's sermons as well as biographies of the evangelist

sold 120,000 in its first year. By 1890, Revell had released thirteen books of Moody's sermons. The next decade saw eleven more, then after Moody's death in 1899 came six more books that bore his name. Revell also published the authorized biography of D. L. Moody written by Moody's son Will.

Another British pastor added to the Revell pantheon was F. B. Meyer, who first visited the United States in 1891. In 1892, Revell began releasing American editions of Meyer's books, including *Christian Living*, *The Present Tenses of the Blessed Life*, and *The Shepherd Psalm*. By 1903, Revell's list included forty-two titles by Meyer and twenty-nine with Moody's name attached.

Before the turn of the century, Revell's author list included titles by R. A. Torrey, an associate of Moody's; Henry Drummond; C. H. Spurgeon; and Hannah Whitall Smith, as well as novels by Charles Gordon under the pen name Ralph Connor. Revell published religious fiction and missionary biographies as well as books for Sunday school workers, musicians, women, youth, and children. It had offices in Chicago, New York, Toronto, London, and Edinburgh. In less than thirty years, the company started by a man barely out of his teens had become the largest American publisher of religious books.

## Reaching a Broader Audience

D. L. Moody had long thought that more people would read quality Christian books if they were less costly. To that end, he and Revell collaborated on the Colportage Library series of mass-market paperbacks that retailed for ten to twenty cents each. Colporteurs—those who peddled books, newspapers, and other materials—sold the books door-to-door across the country and in England to an eager public. In the early years, some sellers rode horseback to peddle their wares.

## Hannah Whitall Smith

By the mid-1870s, Hannah Whitall Smith and her husband, Robert Pearsall Smith, had established themselves as popular speakers in the Holiness movement. The pair, both raised as Quakers, had left the Quaker church; Smith was ultimately disowned by her wealthy Philadelphia family, though in later years they relented and welcomed her back. She remained a devotee of the Holiness movement, following her husband to England to preach as part of that country's Higher Life movement, akin to the United States' Holiness tradition. The pair moved back to Philadelphia in 1875 when her husband was implicated in a scandal. At that point she turned to writing.

While she might have been perceived as a peaceful and God-fearing matriarch, Smith's life was anything but serene. Her husband suffered nervous breakdowns and had affairs, ultimately calling himself an agnostic. Though the pair never divorced, they were never able to resolve their issues. Smith also lost four of her children—one at age eighteen to typhoid fever, one at age five to unknown causes, one at age nine to scarlet fever, and one stillborn—and her three living children rejected the Christian faith.

Yet through it all Smith remained steadfast in her faith and her zest for life, never giving in to what could have devastated her. She was hurt, of course, but truly trusted God in all things. She was a strong supporter of women's suffrage and joined forces with Susan B. Anthony and others to give speeches supporting a woman's



right to vote. She bought property in the state of Wyoming when it became the first state to grant women the right to vote.

Smith's book *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* was published by Revell in 1875. In its first ten years, the book sold thirty-five thousand copies; by 1943 it had sold five hundred thousand. The book was translated into several languages and sold two million copies around the world.

She also wrote *Every-Day Religion, or The Common-Sense Teaching of the Bible* (1893), and *The Unselfishness of God and How I Discovered It: A Spiritual Autobiography* (1903). She helped found the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in 1874. Smith and her husband eventually moved back to England in 1888; she died there in 1911.

In all, around two hundred titles were in the Colportage Library, many by familiar names such as Moody, Mackay, Meyer, Spurgeon, and Torrey. Women such as Mrs. O. F. Walton, Hesba Stretton, Sara C. Palmer, and Anna P. Wright also contributed volumes to the series that included stories for children, short novels, poetry, Moody's sermons, and theological texts. Some books in the series have been reprinted with new covers, and some are available for purchase on Amazon, eBay, and other sites.

The Bible Institute Colportage Association was founded in 1894 with help from Fleming Revell and with the publisher handling trade sales. It became Moody Publishers in 1941.

In the prosperous years before and after the turn of the century, Revell moved into publishing more general-market titles, such as *The Bondage of Ballinger* by Roswell Field, and contemplated an even bigger move.

It is hereby agreed by and between S. H. Revell  
 of Missouri County, State of Missouri of the first  
 part, and F. H. Bunnell of Chicago in the State of  
 Illinois party of the second part, that whereas  
 the party of the first part is the author of  
 a certain book entitled "Discovery of  
 the Yosemite and the Indian War of 1841  
 which led to that event, an edition of  
 which has been printed from plates  
 type, illustration and ornamentation  
 now in the possession of the said F. H. Revell,  
 and whereas the copy right and all of said plates  
 are the property of said F. H. Revell, and whereas  
 as other editions of said work may be required,  
 it is then agreed,  
 1. That for all copies of said work which said  
 F. H. Revell shall sell, said F. H. Revell shall pay  
 to said F. H. Bunnell twenty five cents for each  
 and every copy - and  
 2. All copies which shall be required and  
 taken by said F. H. Bunnell shall be paid  
 for by said Bunnell at the rate of fifty cents  
 per volume.  
 3. That said party of the second part, shall  
 furnish complete, all copies of said book  
 finished in good order and style,  
 and of material equal to said first  
 edition which said Bunnell may require.

F. H. Bunnell  
 1895

It is hereby agreed by and between Lafayette H. Bunnell  
 of Missouri County, State of Missouri of the  
 first part, and the Fleming & Revell Company  
 of Chicago and New York Cities party of the second  
 part, that whereas the party of the first  
 book entitled "Discovery of the Yosemite" owned  
 by Lafayette H. Bunnell, is the author of  
 the illustration and ornamentation now  
 in the possession of said company, of the  
 second part, it is then agreed,  
 1. That for all copies of said book which  
 said company shall sell, they shall  
 pay to said Bunnell, and legal heirs or assigns,  
 of said company, ten cents for each  
 copy for each and every plate, twenty five  
 cents for each and every copy, and every  
 copy sold, when  
 2. All copies which shall be required and  
 ordered by said Bunnell, shall be required  
 and taken by said company, to be paid for by  
 said Bunnell, at the rate of fifty cents per  
 volume in cloth, and of other binding  
 to be required by said Bunnell, it is to be  
 furnished and a special agreement as  
 to price.  
 3. Said party of the second part shall  
 furnish complete, all copies of said book  
 finished in good order and style, and

Revell's 1880 and 1892 contracts  
 with Lafayette H. Bunnell for  
 his books about the discovery of  
 Yosemite

1.

This agreement entered into this  
 31st day of May 1886 between Mr. F. H.  
 Bunnell of Chicago, party of the first  
 part, and Dr. J. L. Barlow of St. Louis the  
 party of the second part. Whereas  
 that party of the first agreed to give  
 1000 copies of a book entitled "Endless Being" in a  
 neat volume of 130 pages of the following  
 description:  
 The work to be set in small press  
 type, size of type page 5 1/4 by 2 1/2 in-  
 ches, electrotype plate to be made and  
 the work to be printed on 100 lb paper  
 antique, and bound in full cloth with  
 gilt, die on back, and a seal of the  
 front cover. The whole to be in uniform  
 like shape equal to that of his own  
 line of general publications, for the  
 sum of \$2800.  
 The party of the second part  
 agrees to furnish the same complete  
 to read proofs promptly, and make  
 payments of above mentioned sum  
 as follows: \$150. cash upon the signing  
 of this agreement, the balance to be  
 paid within 30 days from date.  
 It is further agreed by the

1886 contract with  
 J. L. Barlow for a book  
 entitled Endless Being

Revell had long had an office in New York City, considered to be the center of American publishing. The New York office was managed by S. Edgar Briggs and maintained its own editorial, business, and production departments.

Revell's vice president, George H. Doran, advocated both the move into the general market and consolidating offices. Fleming Revell resisted such efforts at first, but he liked the idea of operating more economically, and he wanted to live in New York anyway. Soon the move was made, with the publishing company taking up residence at 158 Fifth Avenue, the Presbyterian Building, where it remained from 1905 to 1950.