

105TH ANNIVERSARY

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of the First Health Vision

By ARTHUR L. WHITE
Secretary, *Ellen G. White Estate*

**Commemorating
Ellen G. White's
First
Major Vision
on
Healthful Living**

**Otsego, Michigan
June 6, 1863**

THE obituaries in the REVIEW AND HERALD in the 1850's and early 1860's bore witness to a tragically short average life span (nearer to 30 years than to 40).* On an average, one child in four would die before the age of seven. It was so in the home of James and Ellen White. John Herbert, their fourth son, was laid to rest at the age of three months (December, 1860).

Annie Smith, Uriah's talented sister, died at the age of 27. Nathaniel and Anna, brother and sister of James White, died at the ages of 21 and 26, respectively, one in 1853 and the other in 1854, while living with the White family at Rochester, New York. Robert Harmon, Ellen White's brother, closed his life at the age of 27. If, in the winter of 1853 to 1854, Ellen White had not been providentially relieved of a serious heart condition and of a threatening cancer of the eve, she would have closed her lifework at the age of 27. Ill health and suffering were expected and frequent. Death was ever close.

One of the factors making it urgent

* NOTE: The obituaries for 1862 report 63 deaths. Of these 18 were children under seven years of age. 9 were between 7 and 20, 14 between 21 and 40, 14 reached 60 years, and only 8 passed the 60 mark.

that the work of the church, particularly the publishing work, be organized speedily (consummated in 1861) was the uncertain condition of James White's health. At the age of 40 he alone carried responsibilities for the operation of the publishing plant and for its obligations. If death should claim him—and an early death in that period was a real possibility—who would pay the debts?

Those were days of great ignorance in regard to physiology and nutrition. Epidemics of diseases such as smallpox, diphtheria, and yellow fever repeatedly swept through cities and across the land, decimating the population. Youth faced the coming of winter with terror. Germs as a cause of disease were unknown; night air was thought to be poisonous. A physician attending a patient with a fever might deny him a refreshing drink of water. Assuming that the patient had too much blood, he might draw a pint or two from the sufferer's veins. As to remedies, the physician found his mainstays to be opium, mercury, strychnine, quinine, alcohol, and tobacco.

There was lack of knowledge concerning the preservation of perishable foods. While root vegetables could be kept in specially constructed cellars, meat could be salted down, and fruit could be dried, most attempts at canning fruit failed miserably. People expected to suffer a poor-health spell in late spring before fresh fruits and vegetables would again be available.

Our forefathers, giving but little attention to health, took the situation in stride. Little known to them at that time was the fact that health was close to religion, and that God, who was leading a people who were preparing to meet their Lord through the means of His choice, was about to lead His people into a new and helpful experience.

Through the late 1840's the major doctrines we hold were brought together into a unified body of truth, and a beginning was made in publishing these truths. By God's hand, through the 1850's, the need for organization was increasingly felt, culminating in 1860 in the selection of a

denominational name and in the organizing of churches in 1861 and onward. In 1862 the Seventh-day Adventist churches in several States had formed State conferences and the delegates from these conferences, in turn, had on May 20, 1863, organized the General Conference. It had been a taxing struggle on the part of the leaders, but God's hand was clearly seen in the steps taken.

The Vision at Otsego

In the early years of development, the church had been led to make certain reforms bearing on individual health. In the fall of 1848 Ellen White in vision was shown the injurious effects of tobacco, tea, and coffee. In the succeeding decade, most believers gained the victory in these lines. In 1854 the importance of cleanliness in person and premises was stressed with the warning from the Lord that "God would not acknowledge an untidy, unclean person as a Christian" (Ellen G. White manuscript 1, 1854). Step by step, God was leading His people, giving light as they could bear it, and make good use of it.

Now in the practical setting of the needs of the people and especially with reference to the greatly overworked ministers in the distraught Civil War days, God chose to lead His people in another advance step—one that would help them better to enjoy this life, and be better prepared for the life to come.

In simple terms Ellen White describes the experience, stating that "it was at the house of Brother A. Hilliard, at Otsego, Mich., June 6, 1863, that the great subject of health reform was opened before me in vision" (*Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1867, p. 260). Elders R. J. Lawrence and M. E. Cornell had opened evangelistic meetings at Otsego ten days before. With the Civil War excitement rampant, interest in the meetings lagged. Several Battle Creek families chose to drive to Otsego to spend the weekend in bringing encouragement and support to the evangelists. They were the Whites, the Smiths, the Amadons, and possibly others—mostly from the Review office. The trip was made by carriage on Friday.

Having time to think and talk as they drove their carriage the 30 miles to Otsego on that balmy early summer day, Elder and Mrs. White most likely talked about the progress of the Civil War. Things were still going badly. Under General Burnside the Army of the Potomac had lost the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Now Hooker was in command, and Lincoln urged him to press on and bring some victory, but under his leadership the Union forces were still suffering defeat. Many were deserting from the Army. There was some talk of ousting Lincoln and putting in a military dictator.

While some of these matters seemed far away from Battle Creek, there were the problems of the repeated calls for men, and this touched our churches everywhere. What would the Adventists do when faced with the military draft? Joseph Clarke, in Ohio, a frequent contributor to the REVIEW, had expressed his confidence a few months earlier in stating, "We have the gift of prophecy, and if we look to God, He will guide our leaders, and they will walk in the light" (*Review and Herald*, Sept. 23, 1862, p. 134).

However, this confidence did not relieve these leaders of earnest, prayerful study and diligent efforts in meeting the ever-mounting problems created by the war. Evangelistic work had been made difficult. The burden was heavy, especially upon James White. At times he and his close friends despaired for his very life. The visions given to Ellen White made it clear that the war would extend for a time, but with ultimate victory for the North.

There were some encouraging matters to talk about, especially the General Conference session, now two weeks in the past, a meeting described by Uriah Smith as the best meeting of its kind ever held by the Sabbath-keeping Adventists. With the organization of the General Conference there was every prospect of a steadily growing work in the proclamation of the third angel's message. Now the church as a whole would shoulder the burdens.

Reaching Otsego, the travelers pressed through the town and drove two miles west to the Hilliard home. At the beginning of the Sabbath they assembled in the living room for the Friday evening worship. Ellen White was asked to lead in prayer, and as she did so her mind turned especially to James White and his waning physical strength. We are told that while on her knees she moved to the side of her worn and depressed husband, laid her hand on his shoulder, and pleaded for God's special

healing blessing upon him. At this point she was taken off in vision, a vision that lasted 45 minutes.

Martha Amadon, who had come with her husband from Battle Creek, later wrote that "those present at the time this vision was given will never forget the heavenly influence that filled the room." And she reports, "The cloud passed from the mind of Elder White, and he was full of praise to God."—*Story of Our Health Message*, pp. 76, 77.

It was often the case that many important but seemingly unrelated matters were opened up to Ellen White in one vision. So it was at this Sabbath evening hour. From the handwritten account, penned the next day, presenting one phase of the vision, and the part we are particularly concerned with here, we sense the practical setting of the light given in regard to health. The record states:

"Sabbath, June 6th, 1863, I was shown some things in regard to my husband and myself. I saw that Satan was persevering in his efforts to destroy our usefulness. . . . I saw that now we should take special care of the health God has given us, for our work was not yet done. . . .

"I saw that it was duty for everyone to have a care for his health, but especially should we turn our attention to our health, and take time to devote to our health that we may in a degree recover from the effects of overdoing and overtaxing the mind. The work God requires of us will not shut us away from caring for our health. The more perfect our health, the more perfect will be our labor. . . .

"It is not safe nor pleasing to God to violate the laws of health and then ask Him to take care of our health and keep us from disease when we are

living . . . contrary to our prayers. I saw that it was a sacred duty to attend to our health, and arouse others to their duty. . . .

"We have a duty to speak, to come out against intemperance of every kind—intemperance in working, in eating, in drinking, and in drug-ging—and then point them to God's great medicine, water—pure, soft water—for diseases, for health, for cleanliness, and for a luxury. . . .

"I saw that we should not be silent upon the subject of health but should wake up minds to the subject."—Ellen G. White manuscript 1, 1863.

The scope of the vision at Otsego became apparent in the ensuing months as Ellen White spoke and wrote of what she was shown. There was the view of our first parents in Eden in all their vigor and beauty, with a description of the food God had provided for them—the products of the garden. Note the following points:

Mankind suffered as, turning from God's plan, they made flesh food a part of the diet; intemperance in eating and in drinking and the indulgence of base passions had benumbed the fine sensibilities; the use of intoxicating beverages had beclouded men's reasoning faculties; tobacco in whatever form it was used was a slow poison; tea and coffee were stimulating, with effects similar to those of tobacco; in harmony with morbid appetite, rich desserts and every hurtful thing had been crowded into the stomach, bringing pain and various ills; appetite was to be denied, and they were to eat sparingly of food that was healthful; the use of swine's flesh had ever been forbidden and hurtful, and there were other animals that God had forbidden man to eat; children had been led by their parents to



CECIL DAVIS

A. Hilliard's house at Otsego, Michigan, scene of Ellen White's first major health vision.

eat improperly and had suffered greatly; drug taking was baneful, resulting in more deaths than all other causes combined—strychnine, opium, mercury, and quinine were specifically named as having destroyed their millions; in sickness, nature was to be aided by the common blessings of pure air, pure water, and a simple diet, and this would result in a speedy and safe cure; water was especially beneficial, but many had never experienced its helpful effects; multitudes remained in inexcusable ignorance, wondering why the race was feeble and life short; there were many who had neglected personal cleanliness; strict habits of cleanliness should be observed, and this involved the proper disposal of body wastes; houses were to be built with the value of sunlight taken into account; rooms, especially those slept in, should be well ventilated; healthful dress was an important factor; a diseased body affects the brain; Satan triumphs in the ruinous work of causing members of the human family to destroy themselves through wrong habits; all are required to preserve healthy bodies and sound minds.

"I was astonished," Ellen White wrote later, "at the things shown me in vision. Many things came directly across my own ideas."—Undated manuscript 149. The work before her called first for changing the living habits in their own home and then setting about to change the living habits of the denomination—3,500 strong. How could this be accomplished? She was deep in the work of writing *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 3, presenting early Bible history. There was a family to care for. There were the many personal testimonies to be written, and work to do in the churches. There was the anticipated journey east.

As in the ensuing months she labored in Michigan, New York State, and New England, Ellen White tells us that she began to speak "against drugs and flesh meats, and in favor of water, pure air, and a proper diet" (*Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1867, p. 260). In her own personal experience it was the changes in diet practices that she found the most difficult. The use of meat had relieved her of feelings of faintness, and she had decided that its use was indispensable. But with the vision of June 6, 1863, she, with the family, turned from its use, even though to do so entailed a struggle and called for firm determination to eat only that which, as revealed to her in the vision, would best supply the needs of the body. At the end of a year's trial she could re-

port that her health had "never been better than for the past six months" (*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4, pp. 153, 154).

Tragedy in the family quickly drove home the importance of the instruction in the line of the use of poisonous drugs in the treatment of the sick. Just six months after the vision, while the family was residing temporarily in the East, Henry White, their first-born and 16 years of age, took sick with pneumonia. The physician called to care for the lad followed the usual procedures employed

at that time with dependence on drugs. The boy quickly worsened and died. With sad hearts James and Ellen White, in December 1863, returned to Battle Creek to lay Henry by the side of John Herbert in Oak Hill Cemetery. Then, a few months later, when nine-year-old Willie came down with pneumonia, the parents prayerfully ventured to administer simple hydrotherapy treatments, and the child made a speedy recovery. It was a lesson not easily forgotten.

(To be continued)

BRIBING THE GATEKEEPER

(Continued from page 1)

that any outside influence should control man's will. God will not control it without invitation. Satan cannot control it without permission. It is man who decides.

God never enters the sacred precincts of the conscience uninvited. Satan would like to enter. Family or friends would sometimes like to enter. But God says to the watching universe, "See that man. He is about to make a decision. By that decision he may live or die. But he alone must make it. Stand back! The soul must be free!"

God paid a terrific price to keep the soul free. That price was the death of His Son. It cost the life of Jesus to preserve for you and me the right to choose. God will never force the will. He will only accept it. He wants only willing allegiance.

The enemy, on the other hand, will use any subterfuge, any hellish device, to force the will of man.

And so the battle continues. The enemy wants the will of man—to enslave it. God wants the will—to set it free.

What are some of the forces that try to bribe their entry into the mind?

Take hypnotism, for instance. Hypnotism, once regarded as only a harmless parlor game, now comes to us in cap and gown. It professes to free man from undesirable habits. It poses as a great benefactor. But what about the mind? What about the will? When the will is surrendered to another, placed under the control of another, is it not to some extent enslaved and weakened? Is it ever so strong again?

You trust your friend. You trust your counselor. You trust your dentist. But is it ever safe to surrender the will to another? Suppose that in some hypnotic session another intel-

ligence than that of the one you trust should take over. DeWitt Miller has put the question this way: "When the subconscious mind, under hypnosis, becomes susceptible to outward suggestions, how can we be sure that some astral interloper of the spirit world will not intrude upon the subconscious mind, in its hypnotic trance-state, and ply its occult arts, as it does with an entranced medium?"

It has happened. That is the possibility. That is the danger. Hypnotism is a perilous passkey to the mind. Could it be that hypnotism is delivering on a silver platter what psychic forces have been seeking through the ages—the control of the will?

Is it any wonder that Solomon said, "Keep thy heart [mind] with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

And what of the pills that our contemporaries swallow by the billions? Are they strengthening the mind, making it more secure against temptation? Or are they subtle bribers at the gate?

Dr. Paul Tournier, the famous Swiss psychiatrist, says, "Man's need for religion is so great that if the true one is taken from him, he makes up others for himself. There is a religion of the medicine bottle, and there are others, more naive still. It is surprising to see how many strong characters, who reject all recourse to divine help in life's difficulties as being the relic of an outmoded past, fasten their hope of salvation on some drug simply because it is the product of scientific progress. Having been told that this progress has no bounds, that it would make it possible to conquer all disease, men have been imbued with the fallacious hope that, thanks to science, they will be able to live completely disordered lives with impunity." (Emphasis supplied.)

Do you see the philosophy? Live as