

Gen. Conf. Authority of

DF. 291

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December 3, 1969

MEMORANDUM

Concerning: E. G. White statement in Testimonies, Vol. 3, pp. 492, 493  
Concerning the General Conference

The Review and Herald of February 4, 1875 carried a notice that Testimony Number 25 was ready for distribution. It lists the articles which appeared, among them one entitled "Leadership." This article is addressed to Brother A, and apparently was written in January, 1875 for there are articles both before and after this which bear reference to the vision of January 3, 1875.

In this article Ellen White states: "I have been shown that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered." This communication addressed to Brother A was written to Elder George I. Butler. George I. Butler resided at this time at Mount Pleasant, Iowa. He had served as President of the General Conference from December 29, 1871 to August 10, 1874. Elder Butler was elected to the presidency of the Iowa Conference in 1865. He was a layman. Two years later he was ordained to the ministry. The next year, 1868, he moved to Mount Pleasant, Iowa and continued to make his home there for a number of years.

He continued to serve as president of the Iowa Conference even while serving as President of the General Conference, so made his home at Mount Pleasant, Iowa, but occasionally went to Battle Creek to attend general meetings or on business.

During his term of office as President of the General Conference he had written an article entitled "Leadership" which appeared in the Review and Herald of November 18, 1873, p. 180 and onward.

In this article he set forth the proposition that God has always had a visible leader for His work upon the earth. He carries us down through Bible history and to the present day. He strongly intimates but does not come out and state that God's chosen leader for the Seventh-day Adventist Church was James White. James White responded to this on June 4, 1874 in an editorial in the Signs of the Times, which he disclaimed any special appointment to this office, but recognized that he had willingly served to the positions which God had called him.

This article was repeated in the Review and Herald of December 1, 1874. As an Appendix item to Testimony Number 25 published February 4, 1875 is a reproduction of a large part of James White's Leadership, and then two pages dealing with Butler's position that James White was the leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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He starts out: "I have never professed to be the leader in any other sense than that which makes all of Christ's ministers leaders. James White deals with this more fully in an editorial in the Review and Herald of May 23, 1878.

The question is, Does reference to the General Conference in Ellen White's article on p. 492, 493 refer to the General Conference Minority Committee or to the General Conference in session? We would point out that the General Conference Committee at that time consisted of three men and its personnel in 1872 was: George I. Butler, Ira Abbey, S. N. Haskell; 1873: George I. Butler, S. N. Haskell, Harmon Lindsey; 1874: George I. Butler, S. N. Haskell, Harmon Lindsey; 1875: James White, George I. Butler, S. N. Haskell; 1876: James White, J. N. Loughborough, J. N. Andrews.

In the case of 1876 Andrews was in Europe and Loughborough in California, James White in Battle Creek.

It was hardly be consistent that Ellen White would be writing to one who had served as president to the General Conference and was a member of the General Conference Committee, reproving him for his position on leadership and his hesitancy to follow the counsel of the General Conference if she was referring to the General Conference Committee of which he was a member. Reference must have been to the General Conference in session.

Now let us follow through a bit. The tenure of the message as it opens in the early pages. The article opened with: "Brother A, your experience in reference to leadership two years ago was for your own benefit and was highly essential to you. You had very marked, decided views in regard to individual independence and right to private judgment. These views you carry to extremes. You reason that you must have light and evidence for yourself in reference to your duty."

That after indicating that personal judgment should not be set up against the judgment of the General Conference she states: "Your error was in persistently maintaining your private judgment of your duty against the voice of the highest authority the Lord has upon the earth. After you had taken your own time, and after the work had been much hindered by your delay, you came to Battle Creek in answer to the repeated and urgent calls of the General Conference." He was elected to the presidency on December 29, 1871. He continued to reside in Iowa through 1872. He was re-elected to the presidency of the General Conference in early 1873, and continued to reside in Iowa. This is made clear by the following documentation:

On June 19, 1872, E. G. White was at the White home in Washington, Iowa and she reports that George I. Butler came from his home in Mount Pleasant to visit the Whites. Mount Pleasant is some thirty miles southeast of Washington. See E. G. White Letter 5, 1872.

On May 6, 1873 Ellen White, writing from Battle Creek, reports that "Brother Butler is here and went to the lake with us. He has come in good time. Many important matters were to be settled. Manuscript 4, 1873. There are references to interviews with him on May 9 and May 10, 1873, at Battle Creek.

On October 21, 1873, James White wrote a long letter to George I. Butler at Mount Pleasant. Manuscript 12, 1873, p. 9

On July 2, 1874 Ellen White reports that Elder Butler has gone to his old home at Mount Pleasant.

On June 6, 1875 Ellen White reports: "My husband was very anxious to stop at Mount Pleasant on our way to Michigan to see you." (G. I. Butler). Manuscript

Manuscript 4, 1873 reports some stormy meetings between the White and Elder Butler and some of his friends, and then finally a reconciliation which was based upon certain confessions made by Elder Butler. This ties in with a reference in Testimonies, Vol. 3, p. 492, where she says: "Your experience in reference to leadership two years ago." This was written in January, 1875 and takes us back apparently to May, 1873.

~~That~~ Butler continued to reside in Mount Pleasant while serving as President of the General Conference is indicated by minutes of the session of November 25, 1873 in which it is reported in the election of the President of the General Conference, George I. Butler, Mount Pleasant, Iowa, p. 190, Col. 2.

It would seem logical to conclude that when Ellen White, on p. 493 of Vol. 3 states: "If you should let the power in the church, the voice and judgment of the General Conference, stand in the place you have given my husband, there could then be no fault found with your position. But you greatly err in giving to one man's mind and judgment that authority and influence which God has invested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference."

We repeat again, The General Conference Committee at that time consisted of James White, George I. Butler, and S. N. Haskell. When she refers to the General Conference she must be referring to the General Conference is session.

Arthur L. White  
Washington, D. C.  
December 2, 1969

