

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

# 1888: THE “FORGOTTEN” ISSUE

ROGER W. COON



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# **Minneapolis—1888: The “Forgotten” Issue**

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**Roger W. Coon**

**1988**

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Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

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by Roger W. Coon <sup>1</sup>

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## “Minneapolis—1888!”

That those two words should stir even a flicker of recognition in the eyes of the average Seventh-day Adventist church member a century later, in 1988, is probably and primarily due to the efforts of two Adventist ministers who, almost singlehandedly and for the past three decades, have persistently prodded their church by writing tractates, organizing a study committee, sponsoring field workshops, and publishing a journal devoted to the two landmark convocations held in that northern city a hundred years ago, and their aftermath.

Whether one accepts or rejects the basic assumptions and conclusions of Robert J. Wieland and Donald K. Short (and there are many who, while readily acknowledging the industrious, single-minded, persistent dedication, and commendable, undoubted spirit and commitment of these two servants of the Lord, do *not* view things quite as they do), yet perforce one must admit, I think, that were it not for Wieland and Short, the interest generated today in our church by Minneapolis/1888 would be substantially less. Consider the following:

[2]

- The Review and Herald Publishing Association this year published a spate of historical and theological books this year in their “1888 Centennial Series”:

- The Adventist Review (in January) and Ministry (February) devoted virtually entire issues of their respective journals to the drama that was Minneapolis/1888.

- The Ellen G. White Estate undertook its unprecedented mammoth venture in collecting from its substantial archives 1821 pages of Ellen White letters and manuscripts which it published in four

volumes <sup>1</sup> (and to which the Pacific Press added a fifth volume of 591 pages of non White “manuscripts and memories”) <sup>2</sup>

- And Loma Linda University and Andrews University are this week each holding their own major lectureship in commemoration (if not celebration) of the events of that bygone era.

At the outset, then, let us fulfill our ethical and Christian obligation to “render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor” ([Romans 13:7](#)). And let us in charity give Wieland and Short their due.

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<sup>1</sup>Endnotes The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, four volumes (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1988), 1821 pp.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White Estate, Compilers, Manuscripts and Memories of Minneapolis 1888 (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1988), 591 pp. (cited hereafter as MMM/1888).

## Introduction

And let us retrace again the footsteps of our pioneer forebears who made their way to Minneapolis by horse-and-buggy that fateful autumn of 1888 where two historic series of meetings would convene, back-to-back. The Ministerial Institute, perhaps the first of its kind among us, though now a regular staple preceding General Conference sessions, opened at 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 10, and continued for seven days. The 27th (then annual) Session of the General Conference followed immediately, convening at 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, October 17, and continued through Sunday, November 4. The combined meetings spanned a period of four weeks, less two days. [3]

The venue was the newly constructed Seventh-day Adventist church edifice in Minneapolis, Minn.; and the attendees numbered perhaps as many as 500, including 96 delegates representing 27,000 church members in North, Central, and South America, plus Britain and Scandinavia.

Because General Conference President George I. Butler was absent, lying ill at home back in Battle Creek, the principal leadership of these two gatherings devolved upon three men: (1) Stephen N. Haskell, world leader and troubleshooter who, curiously, held his delegate credentials jointly from California and the British Field (and was the recipient of more personal letters from Ellen White than any non-family member during the prophet's lifetime), chaired both the Ministerial Institute and the General Conference Session which followed as "presiding officer". (2) Franklin E. Belden, secretary of the denomination's Central Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association at Battle Creek (and a nephew of Ellen White), acted as secretary of the institute. And (3) Uriah Smith, General Conference secretary, served as secretary of the session. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"General Conference Proceedings, 27th Annual Session," Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook of Statistics (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association,

The theological problems *formally* discussed in public, both in the institute and in the studies and debate which continued into the session, were principally three: the identity of the 10 horns of [Daniel 7](#)—especially the 10th kingdom (Uriah Smith favored the Huns, while A. T. Jones championed the Alemanni); the identity of the “law” in Galatians—the “schoolmaster” of [Galatians 3:34](#) (Butler and Smith favored the ceremonial law, while Dr. E. J. Waggoner held for the moral law of 10 commandments); and righteousness by faith (the chief presenters were Jones and Waggoner).

The leading proponents of what came to be called the “New View” were Jones and Waggoner, co-editors of the *Signs of the Times*, published by the Pacific Press at Oakland, California; and they were supported by Ellen White and her son, William C. (“Willie”). Opposing them with the “Old View” were Smith (who served both as General Conference secretary and as editor of the *Review and Herald*); the absent Butler; and state conference presidents James Harvey Morrison <sup>2</sup> (Iowa), Robert Mead Kilgore (Illinois), and Rufus A. Underwood (Ohio).

Various denominational historians have seen as many as four basic problems surfacing at Minneapolis: (1) the rapid polarization of attendees into one of two soon-to-be warring camps; (2) cavalier (and sometimes even war-like) attitudes on the part of probably the majority—a totally non-Christian spirit which came to dominate most discussions; (3) the partial withdrawal of the presence of the Holy Spirit because of attitudes held; and (4) a growing challenge to Ellen White’s credibility and legitimacy as an authentic prophet of the Lord—a subject upon which this presentation will primarily focus.

And those same historians, though sometimes coming from quite different perspectives, definitely agree that these meetings were a watershed in the life of the church, though admittedly for differing reasons.

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1889), p. 45 ff; William C. White to Taylor G. Bunch, December 30, 1930, p. 1, in MMM/1888, p. 333.

<sup>2</sup>For a definitive and highly readable biographical sketch of Morrison by his grandson, see “The Case for Jim Morrison,” by Warren L. Johns, General Conference general counsel and founding editor, in JD 1988, pp. 58-113.

C. Mervyn Maxwell, recently retired professor of church history at Andrews University, calls it “one of the most important” General Conference sessions, ranking along with 1863 [organization] and 1901 [reorganization].<sup>3</sup>

[5]

LeRoy Edwin Froom viewed it as “epochal,”

standing out like a mountain peak, towering above all other sessions in uniqueness and importance. It was a distinct turning point. Nothing like it had occurred before, and none has since been comparable to it. It definitely introduced a new epoch.... 1888 was not a point of defeat, but a turn in the tide for ultimate victory. It was the beginning of decades of clarification and advance—despite struggles and setbacks.<sup>4</sup>

“Willie” White saw both a positive and a negative side. Writing to Smith Sharp two days before the session closed, White characterized the conference as “very interesting, ... perhaps as profitable a meeting as was ever held, for many important principles were made prominent, and some conclusions arrived at.”<sup>5</sup>

Twenty-five days later, writing to newly elected General Conference President O. A. Olsen (whose surrogate he would be for the next six months until Olsen could return from church duties in Scandinavia), White commented on “certain influences,” at work for some time in the church, which at Minneapolis “culminated ... in the manifestation of a spirit of pharisaism. So mother named it.”<sup>6</sup>

His mother was perhaps not as optimistic. To daughter-in-law Mary Kelsey-White, on the closing day of the session, Ellen White characterized events as “the hardest and most incomprehensible tug of war we have ever had among our people,”<sup>7</sup> And to a “Brother

<sup>3</sup>Tell It to the World (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1977), p. 232.33

<sup>4</sup>Movement of Destiny (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1971), p. 187.

<sup>5</sup>W. C. White to Smith Sharp, November 2, 1888, WOW LB D, p. 1; cited by Arthur L. White in *The Lonely Years, 1876-1891* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1984), pp. 410, 411.

<sup>6</sup>W. C. White to O. A. Olsen, November 27, 1888, WOW LB D, pp. 20, 21.

<sup>7</sup>Letter 82, November 4, 1888, p. 1.

Bollman,” some 14 years later, she stated unequivocally, “I have been instructed [by God] that the terrible experience at the Minneapolis Conference is one of the saddest chapters in the history of the believers in present truth.”<sup>8</sup>

[6] Robert W. Olson sees the convocation of 1888 as significant for two reasons. Writing an extremely helpful introductory background article to a special 64-page edition of *Ministry* devoted to the theme “1888/1988: Advance or Retreat?” the secretary of the White Estate observes, first, that:

In many ways the Minneapolis meeting was a disaster. The church hit bottom spiritually at that session. Ellen White called it “the saddest experience of my life”<sup>9</sup> and “the most grievous trial of my life.”<sup>10</sup> It is the only General Conference session in Adventist history that was marked by open rebellion against Ellen White [in person] on the part of a large number of our ministers.<sup>11</sup>

Then, on a more positive note, Olson joins Froom and others in noting that:

From that date—1888—there began a new emphasis in our preaching—less of legalism and more of the righteousness of Christ. This steamed largely from the messages on righteousness by faith ... by E. J. Waggoner.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of the writings of Wieland and Short, and reactions by nearly a dozen different denominational historians, it is not surprising that most Adventists, when they think of Minneapolis/1888, generally think of two men and one issue: A. T. Jones and E.

<sup>8</sup>Letter 179, November 19, 1902, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>Ellen G. White *Manuscript 21*, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Ellen G. White *Manuscript 30*, 1889, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>“1888—issues, outcomes, lessons,” *Ministry*, February 1988, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup>“The 1888 General Conference,” unpublished monograph (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, June 16, 1987), p. 1.

J. Waggoner, and the subject of righteousness by faith. And this, certainly, is appropriate.

Without desiring to deflect such an emphasis in the slightest, I would, however, like to add another dimension—a different set of two men and another (often, in the minds of many, a “forgotten”) issue—not as a substitution, but rather as an additional relevant element, necessary to an adequate understanding of what happened at Minneapolis and afterward.

My two candidates are: Franklin E. Belden, as already noted a prominent leader in the denomination’s publishing enterprise at Battle Creek, composer of two score Adventist hymns and tunes, and nephew of the prophet; and Rufus A. Underwood, president of the Ohio Conference. Underwood was elected to the General Conference Executive Committee first in 1885 (when it had five members) and was re-elected in 1888 (when it was enlarged to seven members); and he would continue to serve in this capacity until his retirement from the ministry in 1920. <sup>13</sup> [7]

And the often “forgotten issue”? Did Adventism *really* have a legitimate, authentic, divinely inspired prophet of the Lord? Was God *really* bringing *His* messages to and through Ellen White before, during, and after 1888? Or was she only merely voicing her own private, personal opinions, which—some even boldly said out loud—were influenced by her son and his loyalty to his youthful friends, A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner?

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<sup>13</sup>“R. A. Underwood,” Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, Revised Edition (1976): 1513 (cited hereafter as SDAE); obituary in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 5, 1932, p. 429.

## Chapter 1—Background of the Issues

**The Issue Explicated**—What must have been the ultimate issue for Ellen White was clearly spelled out by her in correspondence with our two principals, Belden and Underwood. And she left them—as well as the more recent reader of her words—in no doubt as to how she viewed matters, and where she stood.

Writing to Franklin Belden and his wife, the former Harriet McDearmon (Harriet married Belden in 1881; her sister, Emma, had wed Ellen White’s eldest surviving son, James Edson, 11 years earlier in 1870), Mrs. White commented in 1892 concerning the events of four years earlier:

Never before have I seen among our people such firm self-complacency and unwillingness to accept and acknowledge light as was manifested at Minneapolis....

[8] When I purposed to leave Minneapolis, the angel of the Lord stood by me and said: “Not so; God has a work for you to do in this place. The people are acting over the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. I have placed you in your proper position, which those who are not in the light will not acknowledge; they will not heed your testimony; but I will be with you; My grace and power shall sustain you. It is not you they are despising, but the messengers and the message I sent to My people. They have shown contempt for the word of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

And to Underwood, in two different letters seven days apart, both in January of 1889, she came right to the point. The issue? “My brethren thought that I was influenced in my judgment and work by W. C. White, A. T. Jones, or Dr. Waggoner.”<sup>2</sup>

Declining Underwood’s invitation to speak at his Ohio camp meeting the following spring, she gave the reason succinctly:

<sup>1</sup>Letter 2a, November 5, 1892, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup>Letter 22, January 18, 1889, p. 11.



You did not recognize the voice of the True Shepherd speaking through His servant. Again and again did I bear my testimony to those assembled in a clear and forcible manner. But that testimony was not received....

I stated my experience and work for the last 45 years before you at Minneapolis and [subsequently at] Battle Creek. But since some of my brethren hold me in the light they do, that my judgment is of no more value than that of any other, or of one who has not been called to this special work, and that I am subject to the influence of my son Willie, or of some others, why do you send for Sister White to attend your camp meetings or special meetings? I cannot come. I could not do you any good, and it would only be trifling with the sacred responsibilities the Lord has laid upon me. <sup>3</sup>

Then, three pages later, she amplified her concern:

I expect to have these words [of mine] distorted, misapprehended by unbelievers, and it is no surprise to me. But to have my brethren, who are acquainted with my mission and my work, trifle with the message that God gives me to bear, grieves His Spirit. It is discouraging to me to have them pick out portions in the testimonies that please them which they construe to justify their own course of action and give the impression that that portion they accept as the word of God, and then when other testimonies come that bring rebuke upon their course, when words are spoken that do not coincide with their opinions and judgment, they dishonor God's work by saying, "Oh, this we do not accept—it is only Sister White's opinion, and it is no better than my opinion or that of anyone else." This is dishonoring to God and grievous to His Spirit. <sup>4</sup>

[9]

**Two Precipitating Questions**—Two resolutions were brought before the session for action by the delegates, which illustrate the nature of the "forgotten" issue: (1) the content of religion courses to be taught subsequently at Battle Creek College, and (2) a proposed requirement that no man be allowed to enter the gospel ministry

<sup>3</sup>Letter 3, January 25, 1889, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

who had not first proved himself successful in the sale of truth-filled literature as a colporter.

Ellen White, as we shall note below, opposed both proposals. What seems little short of incredible today is that *after* the prophet voiced her objections in the strongest possible terms, the chairman *still brought the motions to the floor for a vote by the delegates!* As it turned out, the first resolution failed to muster a majority vote, but the second was actually passed! What were the specifics of these two proposals?

**(1) Content of Religion Courses at Battle Creek College:** A resolution was proposed at an afternoon education-interest meeting to the effect that “nothing be taught in our school at Battle Creek contrary to what has been taught in the past, or as approved by the General Conference Committee.”

[10] Ellen White, present in the meeting, pricked up her ears upon hearing this, and promptly requested a re-reading of the motion. Following this, she then inquired, “in a very decided tone” (in the memory of one eyewitness), as to whether or not such a resolution had ever come before the conference previously. The silence that followed was, to some, painful and reportedly “could be felt.”

Pursuing the point, she pressed Uriah Smith, secretary of the session, on the point of whether or not he was aware of a precedent for such an action. “He seemed uncertain.”

R. B. Craig, one of four delegates from Indiana, tried to be helpful by pointing out to Mrs. White that, earlier, a call had been voted for A. T. Jones to transfer from editorial duties on the *Signs of the Times* to teach Bible at Battle Creek College the next year. The framers of this resolution were attempting, in Craig’s word, to “control” (or, perhaps more accurately, to nuzzle) Jones in the classroom.

Mrs. White responded by cautioning delegates concerning the substantial danger inherent in the resolution of “binding about the Lord’s work,” and warned them away from this ground.

Jones, who was also present, quite understandably (and quite properly) protested this infringement of his academic freedom.

When brought to a vote, the motion failed of majority support, though one delegate—perhaps attempting to make up for this lack—

reportedly voted in favor with both hands upraised! <sup>5</sup> (Some have since surmised that this enthusiastic voter was Morrison.)

Whether or not this is so, it is known that Rufus Underwood actively joined in the effort to curb Jones' freedom in the classroom; for, with the experience still vivid in her memory, Ellen White wrote him this stinging rebuke less than three months later:

I stated these things [her reasons for opposing the notion] clearly [in the meeting], but *still* you urged that the resolution should be carried into effect. You made it evident that if God was leading me, He was certainly not leading you. Your resistance to my words, and the manifestation of so much feeling expressed in your lowering countenance and your determined words impressed me very unfavorably. <sup>6</sup>

[11]

At least two reasons can be deduced for Ellen White's opposition to this particular proposal, apart from the more obvious issue of the ethics of academic freedom:

(a) Such action might imply—and be construed to support the notion—that nothing but truth had, heretofore, been taught in the classrooms of Battle Creek College; but such, demonstrably, had not been the case. Error and wrong sentiments had been taught, four years earlier (1884), by none other than the president of the General Conference, George I. Butler!

Butler was a principal exponent of the curious view that there are “differences in degrees” of inspiration in the Scriptures (for example, the prophetic books are heavy with inspiration; the historical books have somewhat less; and the poetical books have little or none—because, allegedly, they don't need any).

Butler's series of 10 articles, which ran in the *Review and Herald* from January 15 through June 3, prompted Mrs. White, five years later, to write to Underwood, to explain, in part, her opposition:

Both in the [Battle Creek] Tabernacle and in the college the subject of inspiration has been taught, and finite men have taken it upon themselves to say that some things in the Scriptures were inspired and some

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<sup>5</sup>Based on a letter R. B. Craig to L. E. Froom, May, 1930, cited by L. E. Frown in op. cit., pp. 253, 254.

<sup>6</sup>Letter 22, 1889, p. 10, emphasis supplied.

were not. I was shown that the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the *Review*, neither did He approve their endorsement before our youth in the college. When men venture to criticize the Word of God, they venture on sacred, holy ground, and had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness. God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word, selecting sore things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired. The testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this. <sup>7</sup>

[12] Addressing Underwood's own support for the proposal to nuzzle A. T. Jones in the classroom, Mrs. White bluntly told this conference president:

You seem to be surprised that I look at matters in the light that I do.... Now my dear brother, I would not wound your feelings, I would not grieve your soul or discourage you; but I must lay some things open before you. I told the conference [Minneapolis/1888] what had been shown me in the past in reference to resolutions which covered the same ground. I stated that many things had been taught in the college that was as seed sown in minds and would yield a harvest which would not be pleasant to reap. I stated that I had light in reference to this matter. <sup>8</sup>

Then, amplifying these words, she added:

Infidel arguments have been brought into the college for the purpose of instructing our youth how to argue against infidelity. The seeds of infidelity may not at once be developed yet they will manifest their existence when temptation arises. I have been shown that doubts will enter the heart, arguments in favor of infidelity will

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9; cited in [Selected Messages 1:23](#) (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958).

<sup>8</sup>[Letter 22, January 18, 1889](#), p. 9.

fasten in the mind that will finally lead to skepticism as a result of this course.<sup>9</sup>

(b) A second reason for Ellen White's opposition to the controlling of content in religion classes at Battle Creek College was that additional new, "special light" was yet to come to God's people "as they neared the closing scenes of this earth's history," and "it would be impossible for us to state just how this additional light would come."

It might come in a very unexpected manner, in a way that would not agree with the ideas that many have conceived. It is not at all unlikely, or contrary to the ways and work of God, to send light to His people in unexpected ways. Would it be right that every avenue should be closed in our school so that the students could not have the benefit of this light? The resolution was not called for.<sup>10</sup>

There were other reasons for Ellen White's opposition to the resolution, which remained unstated at the time. In an 1890 manuscript she added: "I protested, for there had been many things presented to me which I could not at that time present before the Conference, because they were not prepared for it."<sup>11</sup>

[13]

**(2) Colporteur Work a Prerequisite to Gospel Ministry:** A second resolution brought before the delegates on Thursday, November 1, on the 12th day (of 19) of the session was introduced by none other than Ellen White's nephew, Franklin E. Belden. Its effect was to require "a practical experience in the canvassing [colporteur, or gospel literature sales work] field before persons are encouraged to enter the Bible work or the ministry."<sup>12</sup>

The motion apparently was introduced late in the day, and seems initially to have been discussed only briefly. Then, for reasons not clear from the published minutes (though one suspects it was either the lateness of the hour, or opposition of the prophet—or both), the

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Ellen G. White *Manuscript 5, 1890*, p. 2.34

<sup>12</sup>The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, November 13, 1888, p. 713.

motion was referred back for further consideration by the Committee on Resolutions.

On the succeeding day (November 2) the item was brought back at 10:30 a.m. as a first item of business. Perhaps to assuage the anxiety of Ellen White, and to nullify her supporters, someone proposed the resolution be amended to include the prefatory limitation "as far as reasonable." And with that revision the recommendation was adopted forthwith, despite the prophet's continued objection.

[14] Writing to Underwood (who strongly supported this measure at Minneapolis) less than three months later, Mrs. White made it clear that despite the amendment, which (on paper, at least) softened the severity of the prior requirement, the regulation would nevertheless still be viewed—and applied—by local conference officials as a rule with virtually no exceptions. And in words as strong as she ever employed, she inveighed against this resolution which, having been passed, was now official church policy:

This was to be an absolute rule, and notwithstanding all I had to say against this resolution, it was carried. It was not right for the conference to pass it. It was not in God's order, and this resolution will fall powerless to the ground. I shall not sustain it, for I would not be found working against God. This is not God's way of working, and I will not give it countenance for a moment. <sup>13</sup>

If Underwood (and the other delegates at Minneapolis) were surprised, even startled, at Mrs. White's opposition to this measure, they could perhaps—at least in some small measure—have been forgiven their astonishment. For, at least in the last decade, none other than Ellen White was in the forefront of lauding the importance of literature sales work (known first as "canvassing," and then as "colportering"), not only as a splendid avenue of soul-winning work in its own right, but also as an excellent, praiseworthy preparation for the gospel ministry.

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<sup>13</sup>Letter 22, January 18, 1889, pp. 10, 11.

She would come to characterize it, variously, as an “elevated” and “elevating” work,<sup>14</sup> a “most blessed ... work,”<sup>15</sup> a “sacred work,”<sup>16</sup> a “work of great responsibility,”<sup>17</sup> an “important field for labor,”<sup>18</sup> —in short, “a great and good work.”<sup>19</sup>

Its importance, further, would be explicated as “missionary work of the highest order” (if conducted properly!),<sup>20</sup> “equal to that of the gospel minister,”<sup>21</sup> the “most successful way of saving souls,”<sup>22</sup> to which she added this superlative benediction: “If there is one work more important than another, it is that of getting our publications before the public.”<sup>23</sup>

More startling, it was none other than Ellen White who had publicly taken the stand that young men planning and preparing for the ministry should take up gospel literature sales work,<sup>24</sup> for it is “an excellent school for those who are qualifying themselves to enter the ministry.”<sup>25</sup> In short, she viewed it as “a good work ... which will educate men and women to do pastoral labor.”<sup>26</sup>

[15]

But, conditioned as they were (colporteur work in the church traces its genesis to an 1879 Ellen White testimony and Dr. John Harvey Kellogg’s subsequent experimentation the next year with the sales promotion of his 1600-page *Home Handbook* on health<sup>27</sup>), these men had perhaps not also read from the same pen additional cautionary caveats. For, while it is true that “to everyone ... the Lord

<sup>14</sup>Testimonies for the Church 4:603, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948) (cited hereafter as 4T, etc.); Colporteur Ministry (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1953), p. 77 (cited hereafter as CM).

<sup>15</sup>Colporteur Ministry, 20.

<sup>16</sup>Colporteur Ministry, 29.

<sup>17</sup>Colporteur Ministry, 14, 37.

<sup>18</sup>Testimonies to Ministers (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1962), p. 317 (cited hereafter as TA).

<sup>19</sup>Testimonies for the Church 6:340.

<sup>20</sup>Testimonies for the Church 6:313.

<sup>21</sup>Colporteur Ministry, 8, 45, 97; Testimonies for the Church 6:321. 37. CM

<sup>22</sup>Testimonies for the Church 6:313; 1M 316.

<sup>23</sup>Testimonies for the Church 4:390.

<sup>24</sup>Testimonies for the Church 6:471, 321.

<sup>25</sup>Colporteur Ministry, 31, 32; Gospel Workers, 96, 97 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948); Testimonies for the Church 4:603, 604; Testimonies for the Church 6:322.

<sup>26</sup>Testimonies for the Church 4:390.

<sup>27</sup>“Literature Evangelist,” SDAE (1976): 792.

appoints a work for others,"<sup>28</sup> it is equally true that "not all can fill the same place in the work ... [though, indeed,] there is a place and a work for all."<sup>29</sup>

Why? Because, as she herself had said, "All ... do not receive the same gifts."<sup>30</sup> God does not expect each Christian to be prepared for "any and every" position in the work of the church.<sup>31</sup> And—face it—not everyone is fitted for colporteur work.<sup>32</sup> It is, indeed, in this very context that Ellen White added, "We cannot lay out an undeviating line for everyone to follow. Circumstances alter cases."<sup>33</sup>

And while it is true that some who are adapted to make a success of colporteur work "are not adapted to the work of the preacher,"<sup>34</sup> it is equally true that "it is not correct to think that everyone can be a canvasser. Some have no special adaptability for this work."<sup>35</sup>

[16] And so Ellen White objected to making colporteur work the "knot-hole" through which *all*, without exception, must be dragged before they can engage in the work of Bible instructor or gospel preacher.

In view of these expanded counsels, it is, then, all the more interesting to discover that the world church yet today continues to be of the opinion of the majority of the delegates at Minneapolis in 1888! For this very same requirement is still on the policy books in 1988 (although in practice it is not applied consistently throughout the church). *The General Conference Working Policy*<sup>36</sup> and the *North American Division Working Policy*<sup>37</sup> continue to require, that *eligibility prerequisites for ministerial internship*

<sup>28</sup>*Prophets and Kings*, 222 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943).

<sup>29</sup>*Christ's Object Lessons*, 300, 301 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941) (cited hereafter as 13Q).

<sup>30</sup>*Christ's Object Lessons*, 327.

<sup>31</sup>*Testimonies for the Church* 6:334

<sup>32</sup>*Testimonies for the Church* 4:390.

<sup>33</sup>*Colporteur Ministry*, 42. 35

<sup>34</sup>*Testimonies for the Church* 6:323.

<sup>35</sup>*Testimonies for the Church* 6:333, 334.

<sup>36</sup>1987/1988 edition, Section L-15-45-1j, p. 267.

<sup>37</sup>1987/1988 edition, Section L-25-30-1h, p. 276.



shall include [along other things] ... three months or 350 hours of experience as a literature evangelist. (Exceptions should be allowed only after careful study of the individual case and should be very few.)

It is interesting to ponder a curious question at this point. Why did the delegates pass the colporteur prerequisite to gospel ministry over Ellen White's stated (and vehement) objections, when they had earlier acceded to her wishes and counsel in the matter of not muzzling teachers in the classrooms of Battle Creek College?

At least three possible answers came quickly to mind:

(a) Is it possible that the delegates, as with Ellen White, were just a trifle uncertain about the avenues through which God might yet choose to reveal new and further light to His people? That He might just use the religion department of Battle Creek College—heaven forbid, He might just even use A. T. Jones himself! And that the delegates were perhaps a bit leery of “binding about the Lord's work” in such uncertain, uncharted areas? The hypothesis does not seem all that unreasonable.

(b) Then, is it possible that in the case of the colporteur prerequisite to gospel ministry the delegates felt on somewhat “safer” ground? That this might, indeed, be a “safe” issue (with no potentially horrendous consequences immediately visible on the horizon), and, at the same time, it could provide them with a handy vehicle for demonstrating their personal displeasure at Ellen White's stubbornly siding with Jones and Waggoner in their opposition to the more traditional theological position of the mainstream church? Such, indeed, might helpfully serve to illustrate tangibly their unhappiness with her failure to support “properly” (at least in their view) the constituted top leadership of the church?

(c) Finally, because some of those ministerial delegates may have been required to perform colporteur work themselves as a sort of “rite of passage” (“good discipline”) before being allowed to enter ministe-

[17]

rial labors, did those workers want to force on other, younger men coming along behind them, the same “experience” or “discipline” as prerequisite to doing pastoral and evangelistic labor?

While one cannot, of course, be dogmatic at this point, it *is* a fact that a similar spirit dominated others in the closing days of the 19th century. There was a spirit to force fellow Seventh-day Adventist church members to wear something Ellen White had labeled the “reform dress”—and had recommended highly. But she protested the spirit of coercion manifested in that area, as well:

Some who adopted the reform [dress] were not content to show by example the advantages of the dress, giving, when asked, their reasons for adopting it, and letting the matter rest there. They sought to control others’ conscience by their own. If they wore it, others must put it on. They forgot that *none were to be compelled* to wear the reform dress. <sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Testimonies for the Church 4:636, emphasis supplied.

## Chapter 2—The Case Of Franklin E. Belden

[18]

As we come, now, to examine more closely and in greater degree the experience of Franklin E. Belden and Rufus A. Underwood, we do well at the outset to remind ourselves that Ellen White has clearly warned all Christians from the ground of “judging” a fellow Christian’s character or motivation. <sup>1</sup> She does, however, highly recommend reasoning from cause to effect, <sup>2</sup> and of tracing of effect back to cause. <sup>3</sup>

And in that which follows, we will not be so much interested in *assigning* motivation as in *exploring* possible reasons as to why these two leaders in the church opposed the servant of the Lord when she stood against certain measures, declaring that her opposition had its genesis in the messages she had received from the Lord.

Why did Franklin Belden oppose one whom he, at least earlier, apparently had accepted as a divinely inspired prophet of the Lord? There are at least six possible answers to this probing question:

**1. Family Connection?**—Upon several occasions Jesus said that prophets are not without honor except in their own country, house, and kin. <sup>4</sup> Was it not the fabler Aesop, five centuries before Christ, who first reminded us that “familiarity breeds contempt”? <sup>5</sup>

There seems to be some evidence that Frank Belden resented the familial relationship he sustained toward Ellen White. Writing to him from Australia in 1895 she referred to an earlier interview:

When I talked with you in my own room at Battle  
Creek, you stated to me things you may have imagined

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<sup>1</sup>Christ’s Object Lessons, 71.

<sup>2</sup>The Ministry of Healing, p. 44 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1942).

<sup>3</sup>Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), p. 285.

<sup>4</sup>Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; John 4:44.

<sup>5</sup>John Bartlett, Familiar Quotations, 15th edition (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), p. 66.

were true, but they were false. You said you did as much to recommend my books as you did for other publications, but that you dared not make a specialty of my books, lest others should say it was because I

[19] was your "Auntie." I was disgusted at this talk.... This was the flimsy excuse. <sup>6</sup>

Two years earlier, in a letter of stern reproof not calculated to endear her nephew to herself, Ellen White had tenderly poured out her heart in these words: "Your Aunt Ellen loves your soul too well to gloss over your present condition. God has a work for you to do, and you can do it if you are truly and genuinely converted." <sup>7</sup>

Was Franklin Belden so "turned off" by his lineal proximity to Mrs. White, in the aunt/nephew relationship, that it served to goad him to reject her office in the church, even as he appears to have rejected the family link? Perhaps only Belden himself, and God, know for sure.

**2. Simple Retaliation?**—Or, perhaps, was his negative attitude simply a cause-effect result of his smoldering anger at her stinging rebukes he certainly deserved (but which, nonetheless, do not make it any easier for a normal human being to accept)? If one surveys the correspondence between Mrs. White and Franklin Belden, one is struck by the strong terms in which she called "sin by its right name," and yet, always, of course, tempered with entreating words of love.

Did Belden reject her simply out of reaction, and in a subconscious spirit of retaliation of which perhaps even he himself was unaware? Again, only God knows.

**3. Disapproval of Father's Remarriage?**—Did Belden resent the fact that his father, Stephen, had contracted a third marriage after 1868, and his aunt—the prophetess—refused to join with those Adventists who sought both to discipline Stephen Belden (for what they viewed as an unbiblical divorce which terminated his second marriage), and to cause him to separate from this third wife?

[20]

I have seen no evidence, one way or the other, as far as Franklin Belden is concerned; but there is much evidence that this marital

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<sup>6</sup>Letter 15, June 8, 1895, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Letter 9, December 7, 1893, p. 6.

situation was of continuing concern to a number within Adventism during the final quarter of the 19th century. These are the facts:

Stephen Belden married Sarah B. Harmon in August, 1851, when he was 22 and she was 28 (her sister Ellen was then 23). A total of five children were born to this union, Franklin coming along in 1858. Sarah died at age 45 of consumption [tuberculosis] on November 25, 1868.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Stephen remarried, the lady having been the one who nursed his first wife through her terminal illness and who had been a faithful household servant for many years. Obviously Belden felt he needed help in raising five lively children; and he may, indeed, have truly been in love with his new bride.

Tragically, the second Mrs. Belden contracted measles shortly after their marriage. She became insane, and in the end was admitted to an asylum. In this situation Stephen Belden secured a divorce and married a third time.

In 1927 Willie White wrote a letter in which he reflected upon the tragedy in his Uncle Stephen's life:

At various times, individuals where he [Stephen Belden] lived, undertook to secure his exclusion from the [Seventh-day Adventist] church because he had married without separation from his [second] wife on the charge of adultery. When appealed to [for support] regarding this matter, Sister White said, "Let them alone."<sup>9</sup>

Stephen Belden and his third wife went to Australia shortly after Ellen White herself had arrived "down under," to give nearly a decade of service to the church in the South Pacific. Arriving in 1892, he assisted his sister-in-law in various lines of church work on that continent. Then, before the prophet returned to the United States in 1900, Stephen and his wife were sent to Norfolk Island (about 1,000 miles northeast of Australia) to do missionary work.

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<sup>8</sup>Obituary, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 22, 1868, p. 286.

<sup>9</sup>W. C. White Letter to W. D. Frazee, February 21, 1927; cited in White Estate Manuscript Release #448.

He subsequently died there, and the widow remained for some time to continue her own ministry. <sup>10</sup>

How did Franklin Belden react to all of this? Did he object to his father's third marriage? Was he one of the group who, periodically, tried to have the man disfellowshipped, and to withdraw from a marriage widely viewed in the church as unscriptural? I have seen no evidence, one way or the other; but he may well have had negative feelings toward his stepmother—and toward his father, as well. And he also may have had harsh feelings toward Ellen White for not "standing for principle"—others certainly did.

(It should probably be noted in passing, at this point, that Mrs. White's reported firm declaration, "Let them alone," should not necessarily be taken as evidence of her approval of this apparently unscriptural marriage. It *does* show that she strenuously objected to attempts made to break up a marriage which, now, was a *fait accompli*. And it also reveals her conviction that there was still a place, not only in the church but in the work of that church, for one who had earlier experienced a tragic chain of circumstances.)

[22] **4. Misguided Loyalty?**—Was Franklin E. Belden possibly possessed of a misplaced sense of loyalty to the publishing house of which he was a prominent leader—did he reason within himself that his motion to require all prospective ministers to first spend a season as colporteurs would "be good," not only for them by way of training, but be good for the publishing house as well, in that it unquestionably would bring more literature evangelists (if conscripts) into the field, and thus more books would be sold?

Again, I have seen no evidence on this, pro or con, but the possibility is not unreasonable.

**5. Disappointment and Anger?**—Or was Belden's attitude toward Ellen White the product of disappointment, anger, and even disillusionment stemming from her lack of solicited support on his behalf in a copyright dispute within the Review and Herald Publishing House?

There is a brief, curious, oblique reference to this dispute in the short biographical sketch in the revised *Adventist Encyclopedia*:

<sup>10</sup>Obituary, [Australasian Union Conference Record, December 3, 1906](#), p. 8.

At the turn of the century he entered into certain business transactions relating to songbook publishing, which, although faithfully carried out by the publishers, led him to feel that he had been unfairly treated. This supposed grievance laid the foundation for a course of action that led to his separation from the church about 1907. <sup>11</sup>

The author of that biographical sketch may not have had prior access to the letter Mrs. White wrote her nephew on June 9, 1895, in which she flatly declares that, in fact, he had not “been treated fairly, and in an unselfish manner, Christlike manner, I know.” But she then went on to tell him he was just as guilty before God for his own attitudes and actions which were as bad as those of his publishing employers!

The letter, which also refers to another charge by Belden of the prophetess having been unduly influenced by others, is illuminating:

Dear Nephew,

I am very glad that the Lord is meeting you where you are, but I was sorry to read your words denying any selfishness connected with your leaving the [publishing] Office, and charging me with saying that the Lord had shown me things when some one had reported them to me.... My words had no influence upon you when we were at Minneapolis, and they may have no more effect now....

[23]

The spirit that leavened you at Minneapolis was with you during your service in the [Review and Herald] Office at Battle Creek; it was the confederacy formed with the very men you now condemn which led you to do many things contrary to the principles of the commandments of God. Selfishness was inwrought in your course of action, and this is why you are not connected with the Office today. The Lord’s hand was in the whole matter.

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<sup>11</sup>“Franklin E. Belden,” p. 142.

That you have not been treated fairly, and in an unselfish manner, Christlike manner, I know. The same spirit that your confederacy exercised toward others, has been exercised toward you, and it will continue to be manifest until the cleansing, refining influence of the Holy Spirit shall make a decided change in the characters of men now connected with the work of God.

<sup>12</sup>

6. Finally, did Franklin Belden come to a position of disbelief, in his own heart, that his aunt was not, indeed, a genuine, authentic, legitimate, divinely inspired prophet of the Lord? There seems to be evidence to support such a hypothesis.

It is, unhappily, an established fact that after Mrs. White had returned from Australia, Belden wrote her an anonymous letter (in 1907), the transparent purpose of which appears to have been to trick her in an attempt to demonstrate and prove she was influenced by her advisers. The effort proved abortive, thwarted as it was by Battle Creek church leader George Amadon who discovered—and diverted—the letter. Amadon then personally exposed Belden in a public meeting in Battle Creek, much to the latter's personal embarrassment. <sup>13</sup>

[24] On one occasion Ellen White challenged her nephew by declaring that he and Captain Clement Eldridge, general manager of the publishing house in Battle Creek, <sup>14</sup> had secretly conspired to suppress her two books, *Great Controversy* and *Patriarchs and Prophets*. When Belden denied all, she responded by quoting to him a private conversation between himself and Eldridge in which they (1) contrived a publishing house policy that only one major, large book at a time could be promoted in the field by colporteurs. (2) They then decided that the book to be thus promoted should be *Bible Readings*, because, said Belden, "I have not known of one soul being converted through the reading of *Great Controversy*, and I have known many

<sup>12</sup>Letter 10, June 9, 1895, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>Statement of Mrs. Cleora Webster (daughter of Lucinda Hall, probably Ellen White's closest female friend), at Livingston, New York, in May, 1963, in Mite Estate Document File, #421.

<sup>14</sup>See "Clement Eldridge," SW: 421, 422, (1976). 68.



souls converted through *Bible Readings*.”<sup>15</sup> She had observed all of these private conversations and machinations in vision!

In the same letter in which she revealed these “secrets” of God (Arms 3:7), she made one more appeal to reach her nephew’s heart. And in so doing she had recourse to a gripping, graphic, memorable metaphor which, in the end, may have turned out to be prophetic. She wrote Belden:

A man cannot continue in sin, and be a Christian. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. Men may labor in connection with the work of God, as did Noah’s carpenters, and yet resist the divine influences [and be lost at last].<sup>16</sup>

Ellen White had used this cryptic reference to “Noah’s carpenters” only once before, in 1887;<sup>17</sup> and she would use it but once again, in 1896,<sup>18</sup> in her correspondence and writings.

Did Franklin Belden become one of “Noah’s Carpenters”? Of course, only God knows for sure. But the question (“Did he ... or did he not?”) continues to generate contrary opinions to this day. Divergent positions concerning his relationship to his church and its prophet have been published in two books which have come out earlier this year. [25]

James R. Nix, director of the Ellen G. White Research Center at Loma Linda University, in his *Advent Singing*, in a biographical sketch, comments: “Unfortunately, he eventually left the church and actually spent the last years of his life very antagonistic toward the church of his youth.”<sup>19</sup>

Wayne Hooper disagrees. In a parallel sketch he observes:

Unfortunately, a misunderstanding arose between him and Adventist leaders concerning royalties for his books. The matter was not really satisfactorily settled, but Franklin, in spite of stories to the contrary, did not

<sup>15</sup>Letter 15, June 8, 1895, pp. 2-6.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup>Letter 36, February 10, 1887, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup>Letter 108, October 14, 1896, pp. 1-4.

<sup>19</sup>(Washington, DC: North American Division Office of Education, 1988), p. 145.

forsake his allegiance to the church or to the Lord. After his death on December 2, 1945, all his papers and manuscripts were donated to the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.<sup>20</sup>

Belden's 83-year-old niece, Ellen F. Kennedy, strongly agrees with Hooper. Citing family tradition and personal experience, she stoutly affirms that "he did not depart from the faith. It was that he felt he could not fellowship with the brethren, and he had good reason." As to his being disfellowshipped from the Battle Creek Tabernacle membership, this, she claims, was the action of a relatively small clique in the church which also ousted other loyal Seventh-day Adventists in a "railroading"-type operation.

[26] She adds that her uncle, despite his being denied membership, continued to attend the Seventh-day Adventist church; and on a certain Sabbath in 1916 (when he was 56, and she was 12), she and her uncle attended services at the Summit Avenue Seventh-day Adventist church in Pasadena, California. During this extended visit to her home, Mrs. Kennedy reports, he did not utter one word of unkindness or criticism of his brethren. That is more than I can say of those who continually drag his skeleton out of the closet ... to shake around happenings of over a hundred years ago.<sup>21</sup>

Belden's niece also offers his public "confession," published in the *Review and Herald* in 1895,<sup>22</sup> as evidence of a rebirth of belief in Mrs. White's prophetic ministry following 1888; but a number of his problems with Mrs. White and his fellow denominational workers and members came months, even years, after this 1895 recantation of disbelief.

On the other hand, Willie White was so offended and affronted by the treatment accorded him when, in November, 1932, he came to visit his cousin Franklin (Belden refused to shake White's outstretched hand and summarily ordered him from the premises), that four months later Willie wrote "Dear Cousin Frank:" "When I think

<sup>20</sup>Companion to the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988) p. 628.

<sup>21</sup>Ellen F. Kennedy to Miriam Wood, Days Creek, Oregon, August 31, 1988, pp. 1, 2; Ellen F. Kennedy to Roger W. Coon, September 18, 1988, pp. 1-4.

<sup>22</sup>"Believe His Prophets, So Shall Ye Prosper," September 17, 1895, pp. 594, 595.

about my last visit at your home [in Battle Creek], and the way you received me, I have no desire to accomodate you with documents from our files” (which Belden had earlier requested).<sup>23</sup>

And in 1945, according to the personal testimony of Kenneth H. Wood, today chairman of the White Estate Trustees, Belden made a very disparaging remark concerning his aunt, the prophetess, within weeks of his demise.

Wood was a young pastor in Cleveland, Ohio, at the time. On one particular occasion he was joined by another minister, Carlyle B. Haynes, then 63 and a General Conference departmental director in Washington, in making a Christian call upon Franklin Belden at the latter’s retirement home nearby.

As Belden recognized them at the door he was about to shut it in their faces, but relented and allowed them to enter his parlor when they asked to visit with him. Making little apparent headway in spiritual efforts to restore the man to the church of his childhood, they finally, as a last recourse, asked Belden if they could offer a short prayer before departing.

[27]

Belden immediately shot back with, “Do you still believe in *that woman?*” They acknowledged the truthfulness of his suspicion. He then refused to allow them to pray in his home, and forthwith showed them the door. Tragically, Franklin Belden died scant weeks later, at the age of 87, following this last known effort to effect his spiritual restoration.<sup>24</sup>

Was he one of “Noah’s Carpenters”? Of course, only the Lord knows. But the evidence, especially from the correspondence of “that woman,” is overwhelmingly conclusive that one wrong step prepared the way for the next in the man’s progressive downfall.

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<sup>23</sup>W. C. White to F. E. Belden, March 3, 1933, p. 1. Same 17 months later Belden belatedly replied in a handwritten missive to WW to “tell you plainly some of the reasons” for his ungentlemanly behavior “when you called on me and my family uninvited and unwelcome.” FEB to WOW, August 29, 1934, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>Roger W. Coon, “The Ultimate Question,” *Adventist Review*, March 10, 1988, p. 10.

## Chapter 3—The Case Of Rufus A. Underwood

The experience of Ohio Conference President Rufus A. Underwood presents an interesting subject for a study in comparison and contrast vis-a-vis that of Franklin E. Belden.

Both men could—and did—exhibit traits of pettiness, headstrong attitudes, and vindictiveness. And both had major confrontations in head-to-head controversy with the church's prophet, and received strong testimonies from her.

[28] Both loved their church; but in disgust (and probably in some disillusionment) Belden finally left it, while Underwood remained a member and a leader to the day of his death. Both, at least initially, appear to have accepted the prophetic gift of Ellen White; but Belden seems finally to have turned his back upon it, while Underwood acceded to her counsels, remaining loyal to then to the end of his days.

The testimonies to Underwood were every bit as strong—in some instances, perhaps even stronger—than those Ellen White wrote to her nephew. And one cannot help but wonder why Underwood opposed her in 1888 (and for a number of months following Minneapolis), though ultimately he did manifest a complete turnabout and loyally accepted her appeals.

Who was this man anyway?

Rufus A. Underwood was born February 18, 1850, in Wayne, Ohio. His father became a convert to Adventism in 1864 about the time of the close of the Civil War, under the preaching of J. H. Waggoner, father of Dr. E. J. Waggoner. Rufus, five years later, at the age of 19, himself was brought into the church through the aegis of a series of *Review and Herald* articles written by Uriah Smith. In 1873 he was elected Missionary Director of District 3 (several northeastern counties) in Ohio, and in 1877 he entered regular ministerial work at the age of 27. He was ordained to the gospel ministry May 5, 1879, at the age of 29, by D. M. Canright,

among others, and was successful in evangelism for several years before he was elected president of the Ohio Conference in 1882.

From 1889 to 1893 he served as “superintendent” for three different General Conference “Districts” (roughly equivalent to a union conference today). And from 1893 until retirement in 1920 he was president, respectively, of the Wisconsin and Pennsylvania Conferences, the Northern Union Conference, the West Pennsylvania Conference, and the Central Union Conference.

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A biographer has noted that he was a strong advocate of the tithing system, having had much to do with its adoption in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Because of his administrative and financial acumen, he was often called to lead fields where institutional debt was a particularly pressing problem. He lived another 12 years following his retirement from the ministry in 1920 at the age of 70. <sup>1</sup>

Why did Underwood reject the prophetic leadership of Ellen White at Minneapolis, and for a period immediately thereafter? The data extant seems to suggest perhaps three possible reasons:

**1. Anger at Reproof and Rebuke?**—The contents of some of the letters Ellen White wrote Underwood make the ears of a modern reader, looking over his shoulder, fairly tingle even today. For she seldom minced words, usually coming directly to the point. Her reproof and rebuke generally appear to fall into two categories: concern with the man’s personality and character defects, and complaints about administrative errors as conference president in Ohio.

*a. Personality and Character Defects.* On January 10, 1887, nearly two years before Minneapolis, Mrs. White wrote to Underwood <sup>2</sup> concerning a “sharp, domineering attitude” which she characterized by such words as “tyranny,” “hard dealing,” and “sharp dictation,” as far as his subordinate workers in office and field were concerned.

She zeroed in on his demonstrated need to be “patient, kind, and respectful” in dealings with fellow workers and church laity, adding that he needed “kindness, courtesy, meekness, and the lowliness

<sup>1</sup>Underwood obituary, loc. cit.; biographical sketch, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Curiously, the letter is given the classification designation of [Letter 3a, 1888](#), though it was written in 1887!

[30] of Christ." He was urged to avoid "harshness and severity" in his treatment of others.<sup>3</sup>

More seriously, ultimately, was Underwood's marked lack of spirituality, a point to which Ellen White would return again and again in this and other letters.

*b. Administrative Errors.* As conference president, Underwood had discouraged and alienated a number of his fellow workers because of his heavy-handed administrative style.

He would hire men for positions of leadership in his field (whom Mrs. White bluntly told the leader were a hindrance to the cause of God), and then stubbornly continue to support them in office rather than discipline them when their mistakes were pointed out by the Lord's messenger.<sup>4</sup>

On one occasion the president had bulldozed through his executive committee an action to create a sanitarium at Mt. Vernon, Ohio, when there were more urgent and pressing needs in his field for the limited financial resources available (a new church building in Cleveland, for example). He persuaded one layman to refuse to give to a mission project in Europe upon Ellen White's direct solicitation, instead asking him to give the money to the sanitarium project. Then, after the project had foundered financially, he tried to get the General Conference to take over the program and fund it. Ellen White called the whole venture a mistake from the start.<sup>5</sup>

[31] **2. A Desire to Keep Her in Her Place?**—Was Rufus Underwood's resistance to accepting and implementing Ellen White's counsel at Minneapolis a subconscious (or, even worse, a conscious) desire to "keep her in her place" on a relatively "safe" issue (the colporteur prerequisite for ministerial labor)?

Did he reason that this issue was not really a major matter, and that a vote against her, and in favor of the notion, would in reality be only as a "slap on the wrist," yet serve to signal his (and others') displeasure at the support Mrs. White was giving Jones and Waggoner and withholding from the "established" leadership from

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 2, 6, 5, 1. Interestingly, many of the sentences of this letter are repeated, almost verbatim, subsequently in [Letter 3, January 10, 1888](#); and [Letter 22, January 18, 1889](#).

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

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General Conference President Butler on down the line? It is difficult to know, for sure.

**3. A Male Chauvinist at Heart?**—And, finally, did he, perhaps, resent a *woman* trying to tell him what to do—maybe a throwback to childhood days when he may have resented his mother telling him both what to do and how to do it? Again, motivation is a tricky thing for one human being to determine in another; perhaps this is why Ellen White has warned us off this ground. But it seems safe to recognize that such attitudes *were* probably extant in that day, held by others, if not by Underwood.

## Conclusion

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.”

[32] If Paul had been at Minneapolis in 1888, and had read the correspondence that ensued, and the subsequent “Monday-morning-quarterbacking” of the denominational historians in succeeding eras, he might have included Minneapolis/1888 among the incidents concerning which, he said, “happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

While the Minneapolis/1888 meetings are often rightly thought of in terms of the issue of righteousness by faith, and the principal actors are seen to be A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, it is also true that there were other issues—with other principal actors—playing out their roles on the stage of this significant meeting.

One such ultimate (and often “forgotten”) issue was the existence and the integrity of the prophetic gift given Ellen G. White. And it was challenged by many, including Franklin E. Belden and Rufus A. Underwood. And to be *completely* understood, the 1888 experience must be viewed in this additional setting.