

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

**BRIEF STATEMENTS
REGARDING
THE WRITINGS OF
ELLEN G. WHITE**

W. C. WHITE / D. E. ROBINSON

**Brief Statements
Regarding the Writings
of Ellen G. White**

Ellen G. White

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Information about this Book

Overview

This eBook is provided by the [Ellen G. White Estate](#). It is included in the larger free [Online Books](#) collection on the Ellen G. White Estate Web site.

About the Author

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.

Further Links

[A Brief Biography of Ellen G. White](#)
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Further Information

For more information about the author, publishers, or how you can support this service, please contact the Ellen G. White Estate at mail@whiteestate.org. We are thankful for your interest and feedback and wish you God's blessing as you read.

This statement was prepared by W. C. White and D. E. Robinson at
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About This Pamphlet

In 1933, only 18 years after Ellen White's death, W. C. White and D. E. Robinson prepared the statement embodied in this pamphlet. Elder White was Mrs. White's son and Secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate; Elder Robinson was for many years one of Ellen White's secretaries, and in the early 1930's assisted Elder White at the Elmshaven office. Though the document was issued nearly 50 years ago, it sounds as current as today's newspaper, for it takes up and deals with many of the same questions that are being raised today about Ellen White's literary work.

The 27-page typewritten document was offered for sale for 25 cents. Just how many copies were produced and sold is not known. Apparently there was little demand for it, hence it dropped out of sight; but its existence has a bearing on the charge that the church has tried to cover up facts or suppress information.

In only one respect does the document need updating: The authors underestimated the amount of material in *Sketches from the Life of Paul* that shows a likeness to the Conybeare and Howson book, *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*. But this in no way undercuts the thrust of the very candid, remarkable statement produced and circulated nearly half a century ago.

Herein is reproduced this timely and overlooked treatise in its entirety without change, except for the deletion of a long paragraph from Ellen White's Introduction to [The Great Controversy, 7](#). Punctuation and grammar have been left essentially unchanged. In the current milieu of discussion, the document may be read with profit.—The Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate, May 7, 1981.

Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White

How did they come into Existence?

What has been their Influence?

Are they worthy of our Confidence?

Introduction

[2]

In the month of December 1844, about fifty days after the great disappointment of the Adventist people, a heavenly vision was given to Ellen Gould Harmon of Portland, Maine. This vision was of great import to the Adventist band in Portland and other places where it was related, because it confirmed their faith in their past experience which had been very precious to them, and at that time was hard to be understood. About a week later, the Lord gave her a second vision, in which she was commanded to go and relate to others the things that had been revealed to her. She was then only seventeen years old, small for her age, and very frail in health.

She prayed earnestly that the work might be given to some other person. But the words of the angel resounded in her ears, “Make known to others what I have revealed to you.”

After much hesitation and distress of mind, she undertook to obey the command, and in so doing she experienced spiritual and physical blessing from heaven.

After a time the command came to her to write the things that were revealed to her. This experience she has described as follows:

“Early in my public labors I was bidden by the Lord, ‘Write, write the things that are revealed to you.’ At the time this message came to me, I could not hold my hand steady. My physical condition made it impossible for me to write. But again came the word, ‘Write the things that are revealed to you.’ I obeyed; and as the result it was not long before I could write page after page with comparative ease. Who told me what to write? Who steadied my right hand, and made it possible for me to use a pen?—It was the Lord. . . .

“The light that I have received, I have written out, and much of it is now shining forth from the printed page. There is, throughout my printed works, a har-

mony with my present teaching. Some of the instruction found in these pages was given under circumstances so remarkable as to evidence the wonder-working power of God in behalf of His truth. Sometimes while I was in vision, my friends would approach me, and exclaim, ‘Why, she does not breathe!’ Placing a mirror before my lips, they found that no moisture gathered on the glass. It was while there was no sign of any breathing, that I kept talking of the things that were being presented before me.

“These messages were thus given to substantiate the faith of all, that in these last days we might have confidence in the Spirit of prophecy. I thank God that He has preserved my voice, which in my early youth physicians and friends declared would be silent within three months.

[3] “The God of heaven saw that I needed to pass through a trying experience in order to be prepared for the work He had for me to do. For the past half century my faith in the ultimate triumph of the third angel’s message and everything connected with it, has been substantiated by the wonderful experiences through which I have passed. This is why I am anxious to have my books published and circulated in many languages. I know that the light contained in these books is the light of heaven.”—[The Review and Herald, June 14, 1906.](#)

In 1890, she wrote as follows regarding the basis of her confidence, and regarding the attacks that would be made upon her work:

“I testify the things which I have seen, the things which I have heard, the things which my hands have handled, of the Word of Life. And this testimony I know to be of the Father and the Son. We have seen and do testify that the power of the Holy Ghost has accompanied the presentation of the truth, warning with pen and voice, and giving the messages in their order.

To deny this work would be to deny the Holy Ghost, and would place us in that company who have departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits.

“The enemy will set everything in operation to uproot the confidence of the believers in the pillars of our faith in the messages of the past, which have placed us upon the elevated platform of eternal truth, and which have established and given character to the work. The Lord God of Israel has led out His people, unfolding to them truth of heavenly origin. His voice has been heard, and is still heard, saying, Go forward from strength to strength, from grace to grace, from glory to glory. The work is strengthening and broadening, for the Lord God of Israel is the defense of His people.”—[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 430](#).

In 1905, she wrote,—

“Today we must rehearse the instruction that God has given to us as a people. The warfare between the forces of light and darkness is going on. Those who think that the powers of evil are asleep are very much mistaken. The enemy is constantly seeking to bring in things that will unsettle the confidence of God’s people. These things may appear very inoffensive, but they contain grave errors and dangers which must be met. We must take our stand firmly in defense of the truth given us after the passing of the time. The Holy Spirit gave us an understanding of these truths.”—*MS-113-1906*.

Chapter 1—How Does She Know?

“The question is asked, How does Sister White know in regard to the matters of which she speaks so decidedly, as if she had authority to say these things? I speak thus because they flash upon my mind when in perplexity like lightning out of a dark cloud in the fury of a storm. Some scenes presented before me years ago have not been retained in my memory, but when the instruction then given is needed, sometimes even when I am standing before the people, the remembrance comes sharp and clear, like a flash of lightning, bringing to mind distinctly that particular instruction. At such times I cannot refrain from saying the things that flash into my mind, not because I have had a new vision, but because that which was presented to me perhaps years in the past, has been recalled to my mind forcibly.”—*MS-33-1911*.

In 1902, looking over fifty years of unremitting labor, she said:

“In the night season many things are passing before me. The Scriptures, full of grace and richness, are presented before me. The word of the Lord to me is, ‘Look on these things, and meditate on them. You may claim the rich grace of truth, which nourishes the soul. Have naught to do with controversy and dissension and strife, which bring darkness and discouragement to your soul. Truth is clear, pure, savory. Avoid all council-meetings where there is dissension, and where men will neither credit my words and obey my lessons, nor heed your counsel. Speak the truth in faith and love, leaving the result with God. The work is not yours, but the Lord’s. In all your communications, speak as one to whom the

[4]

Lord has spoken. He is your authority, and He will give you His sustaining grace.”—*W-186-1902*.

Regarding the wording of her writings, she says:

“Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.”—[The Review and Herald, October 8, 1867](#).

Let this statement be kept in mind. It is in perfect harmony with her later utterances, and if remembered will help in the study of her work.

What has been the Influence of Mrs. White’s Writings

[5]

Regarding the character and influence of the writings of Mrs. White, we extract a few paragraphs from an extended statement made by Elder Uriah Smith, many years editor of *Review and Herald*:

“Their fruit is such as to show that the source from which they spring is the opposite of evil.

“1. They tend to the purest morality. They discountenance every vice, and exhort to the practice of every virtue. They point out the perils through which we are to pass to the kingdom. They reveal the devices of Satan. They warn us against his snares. They have nipped in the bud scheme after scheme of fanaticism which the enemy has tried to foist into our midst. They have exposed hidden iniquity, brought to light concealed wrongs, and laid bare the evil motives of the false-hearted. They have warded-off dangers from the cause of truth upon every hand. They have aroused and rearoused us to greater consecration to God, more zealous efforts for holiness of heart, and greater diligence in the cause and service of our Master.

“2. They lead us to Christ. Like the Bible, they set Him forth as the only hope and only Saviour of mankind. They portray before us in living characters His holy life and His godly example, and with irresistible appeals they urge us to follow in His steps.

“3. They lead us to the Bible. They set forth that book as the inspired and unalterable word of God. They exhort us to take that Word as the man of our counsel, and the rule of our faith and practice. And with a compelling power, they entreat us to study long and diligently its pages, and become familiar with its teaching, for it is to judge us in the last day.

“4. They have brought comfort and consolation to many hearts. They have strengthened the weak, encouraged the feeble, raised up the despondent. They have brought order out of confusion, made crooked places straight, and thrown light on what was dark and obscure.”—[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 469-470](#).

The more complete rehearsal of the statement made by Elder Smith, will be found in the last chapter of the book *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*.

Are Mrs. White’s Writings Worthy of Confidence?

There are men who assert that the writings of Mrs. White are not worthy of confidence, because she has copied from other writers. Let us study this matter in a thorough and fair minded way.

When in the early days of her public labors, Ellen White was bidden to write the things that had been revealed to her in heavenly vision, it appeared to her to be an impossibility. The views were amazing in their character. Many things were presented in figures and many things in panorama. Spiritual truths were presented in a brilliancy that human language could hardly describe, and historical events were vividly pictured, sometimes with clear geographical and chronological setting, and sometimes without such setting.

What an overwhelming task! How could she find courage to make a beginning? Her command of language was inadequate,—What could she do?

Much of her time was occupied with traveling and preaching, and much time was demanded for personal labor with individuals. Nevertheless, the burden was constantly pressed upon her to write, write, write for publication.

She must study the Bible and church history to find the correct geographical and chronological setting of some of the scenes and events revealed to her. She must strive to improve her language, both in speaking and in writing. She must endeavor to give proper expression to the deep spiritual truths vividly revealed to her in vision. She must battle with weakness and disease, that she might have power to successfully minister.

By faith she battled, battled, battled with difficulties, with sickness in the family, with a wayward and backslidden church, with an unbelieving world. Time and again she was told by physicians that she had but a few months to live and then in a most marvelous way, she was snatched from the edge of the grave in answer to prayer. Steadily she advanced in knowledge, and by the blessing of God, in power for service.

The one who gave her the wonderful views told her to write them. He told her whom she could trust to copy and prepare them for publication and He gave her counsel regarding the plan of her books.

In her early experience when she was sorely distressed over the difficulty of putting into human language the revelations of truths that had been imparted to her, she was reminded of the fact that all wisdom and knowledge comes from God and she was assured that God would bestow grace and guidance. She was told that in the reading of religious books and journals, she would find precious gems of truth expressed in acceptable language, and that she would be given help from heaven to recognize these and to separate them from the rubbish of error with which she would sometimes find them associated.

In her writings regarding the events of ancient and modern history, and especially the history of the great reformation of the sixteenth century, she sometimes made quotations from historians.

These were usually enclosed in quotation marks, but without giving specific credit to the historians from which they were taken. Where the historian stated what she desired to present but in language too extended for her use, she would in some cases paraphrase the statement, using some of the words of the book and some of her own words. In this way she was able to present forceful and comprehensive statements in a brief way.

[6] Regarding this use of matter which she copied from reliable authors, she said,—

“The great events which have marked the progress of reform in past ages, are matters of history, well known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world; they are facts which none can gainsay. This history I have presented briefly, in accordance with the scope of the book, and the brevity which must necessarily be observed, the facts having been condensed into as little space as seemed consistent with a proper understanding of their application. In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but except in a few instances no specific credit has been given, since they are not quoted for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject. In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has occasionally been made of their published works.”—*Introduction to Great Controversy*, pp. 11, 12, printed in 1888.

Mrs. White never claimed to be an authority on the details of history. She never wrote to correct historians. She never wrote history merely for the entertainment of her readers. She regarded a knowledge of history as helpful to a proper understanding of the great conflict going on in heaven and earth over the eternal destinies of men. She regarded the records of the conflicts and victories of

men in past days, as intended for our instruction upon whom the ends of the earth have come.

She recognized that there was a difference of opinion among historians regarding some historical events and was not surprised or perturbed when she was told that in some detailed description she had used statements from the pen of some writers which were disputed by other historians.

How Shall We Regard Her Writings?

A candid study of the experience and writings of Mrs. White show them to be the earnest, persistent and conscientious effort to present to the church and the world, a clear and impressive view of the things revealed to her in heavenly vision,—an effort to present them in the very best language that she could find.

Thousands of the readers of her books longing for spiritual help, feel that her writings appeal to their hearts as do no other writings outside of the Bible.

There are some persons who, after sharing the blessings which accompany the study of these writings and enjoying the conviction that the truths presented are the voice of inspiration, have been shaken in their confidence in the heaven-sent truths, because the writer presented the divine thoughts in imperfect language. And others have lost confidence because the writer in her intense desire for the best forms of expression sometimes clothed the thoughts in language previously used by other writers. By some this feature of her writings has been criticized,—the extent of her use of others' phraseology is greatly exaggerated, and the use of expressions borrowed from others, held up to contempt as plagiarism.

One who freely appropriates the writings of another without giving credit is called a plagiarist. If this is done with the intent to deceive or to increase financial gain, it is plainly censurable. [7]

An unprejudiced consideration of all the facts bearing upon the work of Mrs. White in writing out for the people the wonderful things revealed to her, permits the charge of plagiarism, as a shadow on her work, to sink into insignificance.

That this was not the case in Mrs. White's work may be easily discerned, for when some questioned her use of historical matter

from other authors, she herself made a statement explaining the use she had made of such matter. This appears in the introduction to *Great Controversy* 1888 edition and all subsequent editions. The statement follows:

[[The Great Controversy, 11, 12](#) is quoted. See above, p. 6, where the identical passage appears.]

The Pioneers in the Seventh-day Adventist Work Regarded Truth as Common Property

The fundamental doctrines constituting what we speak of as Present Truth, were the result of much concerted study, following prayerful individual study.

It is interesting to observe the way in which the early workers in the Seventh-day Adventist cause regarded the use of one another's writings.

When tracts and pamphlets were published, the expositions of truth therein presented, frequently represented the results of united, concerted study, and the forms of expression by the several writers were very similar and sometimes identical. All felt that the truths to be presented were common property and wherever one could help another or get help from another in the expression of Biblical truths, it was considered right to do so. Consequently there were many excellent statements of present truth copied by one writer from another. And no man said that aught which he wrote was exclusively his own.

In the process of time many things which Sister White wrote and said were used by others without credit, and she in turn when dealing with prophetic exposition or doctrinal statements felt free to use without credit the statements and teachings of leading writers among the pioneers when she found in their writings the exact thought that she wished to present.

We might point out that this class of matter formed only a small part of the writings of Mrs. White, the great mass of her writings being on a different plane than that of other writers, consisting chiefly of spiritual exhortation, messages of encouragement and reproof, and divine prediction of future events.

When she was writing *Great Controversy*, Volume IV, in 1882-1884, she was instructed regarding the general plan of the book. It was revealed to her that she should present an outline of the controversy between Christ and Satan as it developed in the first centuries of the Christian era, and in the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, in such a way as to prepare the mind of the reader to understand clearly the controversy as it is going on in our day.

While Mrs. White was writing this book, many of the scenes were presented to her over and over again in visions of the night. The vision of the deliverance of God's people, as given in Chapter XL, was repeated three times; and on two occasions, once at her home in Healdsburg, and once at the St. Helena Sanitarium, members of her family, sleeping in nearby rooms, were awakened from sleep by her clear, musical cry, "They come! They come!" (See [The Great Controversy, 363.](#))

[8]

Several times we thought that the manuscript of the book was all ready for the printer, and then a vision of some important feature of the controversy would be repeated, and she would again write upon the subject, bringing out the description more fully and clearly. Thus the publishing was delayed, and the book grew in size.

Some Questions Considered

The question may be asked: "Can the descriptions of scenes and events copied from other writers, find a proper place in the inspired writings of a messenger of God?" We find that writers of the Bible used the language of other Bible writers without giving credit and the fact that in the writings of one who gives abundant evidence of being a chosen messenger of God, we find phrases copied from the other writers constitutes an answer in the affirmative.

When in the early days inquiries came to Mrs. White regarding the passages in her books that she had copied from historians, they were presented as questions regarding the authenticity of the statements. The inquiry was: "Are these passages that which had been shown her in vision, or were they what she had learned by the reading of histories?"

She dismissed these questions with few words, stating that what she had presented in her books was a delineation of that which had

been presented to her in vision, and that her copying from historians was a matter of convenience, and not a matter of necessity.

In later years when Mrs. White became aware that some of the readers of her books were perplexed over the question as to whether her copying from other writers was an infringement on somebody's rights, the inquiry was raised, "Who has been injured?" No injustice or injury could be named. Nevertheless, she gave instruction that, lest anyone should be offended or led to stumble over the fact that passages from historians had been used without credit, in future editions of her book *Great Controversy*, a faithful effort should be made to search out those passages that had been copied from historians which had not been enclosed in quotation marks, and that quotation marks should be inserted wherever they could be used. This instruction was conscientiously followed.

How Mrs. White Regarded Her Books

With great satisfaction Mrs. White looked upon the results of her labors in bringing out her writings during the fifteen years of her residence in St. Helena. Much of the time during the last five years of her life, a small stand, loaded with her more recent books stood near her writing chair. These she read and reread from time to time and often when her son entered her room she would say, "Willie, I have been reading again what I have written in these books. It is published just as I want it to be. How glad I am that so much is in print!"

The Story of a Much Loved Book

One of the best loved books written by Mrs. White was *Sketches From the Life of Paul*.

[9] This book, in its thirty-two chapters, comprises 334 pages. It was printed in 1883, and was advertised and sold by *Review and Herald* and *Pacific Press*, through all their agencies for more than twelve years.

Thus two or three editions were exhausted, and when in the later nineties the Manager of *Review and Herald* asked Mrs. White's consent to print another edition, she said, "No; that book contains

only a part of what I desire to present, and I wish you to wait until I can write out the matter more fully." This she did later, in her book *Acts of the Apostles*.

When it was learned by our brethren that another edition of this book would not be printed and that the supply in the hands of our Tract Societies was exhausted, advertisements appeared in the *Review*, asking that anyone having a copy to spare, should send it in that those wishing to secure a copy might be supplied. A few copies thus changed hands. In 1911, *Acts of the Apostles* was published and that took its place.

The fact that copies of *Sketches from the Life of Paul* were advertised for in *Review and Herald* together with the fact that there are in the book some passages which are copied from, and others which parallel very closely statements to be found in Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, has opened the way for criticism and many wild rumors. One reckless critic has asserted that almost the entire book is the product of other authors. Another has declared that the book has gone out of circulation because of threatened prosecution by the American publishers of *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, and that Mrs. White and the publishers in order to avoid prosecution, had to work lively to recall the copies of the book which had been sold.

If this were true, it would be very serious. But it is not true. It is assumption, gross misrepresentation and falsehood.

Here are some facts. There never was a lawsuit instituted or threatened by the publishers of Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*. Furthermore, no publisher in any land has ever brought suit against Mrs. White's books, on the ground that rights of publishers or authors had been infringed upon.

There never was an effort made by the author or the publishers of *Sketches from the Life of Paul* or by any of their agents, to call in copies of the book that they might be kept away from the people.

Here is the simple story of this little book, now thirty-five years out of print.

During the years 1881 and 1882, our Sabbath-school lessons were on the life of Christ. In connection with these lesson studies, we used for reference *Spirit of Prophecy*, Volumes II and III, also

Geikie's *Life and Words of Jesus*. We offered Geikie's book as a premium with the *Signs* and handled about three thousand copies.

It was planned that the Sabbath-school lessons for 1883 should be upon the acts of the apostles. Therefore, we offered *The Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul* by Conybeare and Howson as a premium with the *Signs* and disposed of about two thousand copies.

[10] Thus many of our ministers, Sabbath-school teachers and other studious persons were supplied with this wonderful book. Then Sabbath-school teachers and laymen complained that this work was too voluminous and too heavy, and that the writings of Mrs. White, in their simplicity, would be such more acceptable to the majority of our people; and it was urged that Mrs. White bring out a book that could be used as a lesson help.

The publishers requested that copy be furnished very soon because they wished to publish the book while our people were studying the life of Paul in the Sabbath-school lessons.

At that time, Mrs. White's manuscripts had not been so classified and arranged that she could readily find all that she had previously written upon a given subject. Nevertheless, in response to the appeal, she undertook to do quickly that which was requested.

In her search for material to be used that she had written in past years, she found in [The Spirit of Prophecy 3:117](#) pages that exactly suited her purpose. Some of what was needed was found in her manuscripts. She found, however, that same important links in the history needed to be supplied with new matter. This she did and there was added to what had appeared in [The Spirit of Prophecy 3:227](#).

In her former writings, she had used Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, as a help in the description of Paul's movements, and in her new chapters she continued to use passages from this book that were in perfect harmony with those things that had been revealed to her.

Mrs. White made no effort to conceal the fact that she had copied from other writers statements that exactly suited her purpose. And in her handwritten manuscripts, most of the passages that she had copied word for word, were enclosed in quotation marks. But there were also many passages that were paraphrased. These paraphrased

passages were usually shortened by the use in part of her own words. This brought the descriptive passages into briefer form.

The question arose, How shall these passages be handled? Much time would be required to study each passage and mark it consistently. The printers were waiting for copy, and the public were waiting for the book.

Then it was decided to leave out quotation marks entirely. And in that way the book was printed.

Regarding the amount of matter copied or paraphrased from or even paralleling the thoughts of Conybeare and Howson, a greatly exaggerated idea has been set forth by our critics. In the list of parallel passages printed by them are to be found six citations, involving 31 lines, or a little less than one page of the book. We are convinced by our own comparison of the two books that many hours were spent by these critics in finding these parallelisms to support their charge of "plagiarism."

An exhaustive study may show that the amount of matter thus copied or paralleled would amount to five or ten pages, which is, however, only a small part of the entire book of 334 pages. For the spiritual lessons drawn from the experiences of the apostle Paul, Mrs. White was not dependent on any human author. And it is this phase of her writings that puts them in a class of themselves, and gives them untold value to the Christian reader,—not the few descriptive passages copied from other writers.

Sketches from the Life of Paul became popular among our people, and sold well for twelve or thirteen years. Then the manager of *Review and Herald* asked Mrs. White's consent to their printing another edition. She was in Australia closing her work on the life of Christ, and hoped to soon begin writing on the *Acts of the Apostles*. Therefore, she replied, "Do not print another edition of *Sketches from the Life of Paul*. I have much to write on the *Acts of the Apostles* which will make a book to take its place." [11]

It was after this decision of Mrs. White's not to reprint *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, that she was informed that a letter had been received by the *Review and Herald* from the T. Y. Crowell Publishing Company of Boston asking regarding their plans for the reprinting of this book. This letter was written in a kindly spirit. It contained no threats of prosecution, nor any complaints as to plagiarism from

Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*. Reply was made that further editions were not contemplated and there the correspondence closed.

The Case in Brief

In conclusion, let us briefly summarize a few important features of Mrs. White's work as herein presented.

It was at the command of God, and in the face of insurmountable difficulties that she undertook to write for the church and for the world.

Through the years the work grew and multiplied beyond all expectations. In addition to many messages of counsel and reproof and exhortation to the church, there were opened to her mind many graphic scenes connected with the age-long controversy beginning in heaven, and continuing till the final restoration of all things.

Mrs. White read such books as she considered would be helpful to her in acquiring skill in presenting in clear, forceful language the instruction she had to give. Here was not, however, a case of one void of the thoughts she wished to present, and consulting books for the purpose of finding themes upon which she might write. On the contrary abundant light had been given her and she was looking for helpful and concise forms of expression and for gems of truth tersely expressed. This she did with the divine assurance that she would be guided in distinguishing the true from the false.

In some instances she copied or paraphrased statements that exactly suited her purpose from historians of good repute, especially descriptive passages where she found them to be in exact accord with what had been revealed to her. In some instances these sentences were enclosed in quotation marks and in some instances they were not, especially where she paraphrased the wording to better express her thoughts.

Mrs. White's copying from others was not a necessity, but was done chiefly to conserve time and in the interests of brevity and forcefulness.

She acted without knowledge of the literary standards that would count a moderate use of others' writings as unfair or worthy of condemnation.

Moreover, it is a fact that the present literary standards are not in all respects what they were a half century ago when the matter in question was written. We should do injustice to many an author who wrote fifty years ago were we to measure his work by the rules and standards of today.

We must also recognize the fact that there is no evidence of intention on the part of Mrs. White to deceive her readers. Had she been largely dependent upon the writings of others for her thoughts, and had she endeavored to use as her own their ideas, and to keep this as a secret, she would not have chosen standard books such as D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation*, Wylie's *History of Protestantism*, and Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, which were and are in wide circulation, and many of which she knew to be in the libraries of the prospective buyers of her books. [12]

Not only have Mrs. White's critics given a greatly exaggerated idea as to the quantity of matter found in her books that closely parallels the writings of other authors, but they have drawn most unwarranted conclusions therefrom. We feel assured that those who are familiar with the nature of Mrs. White's writings as a whole and who candidly consider the facts herein set forth will not lightly accept as against her the charge that she was a "plagiarist," as that term is generally understood.

We should point out more clearly the fact that the class of matter written by Mrs. White, in which she used the writings of others, is comparatively small, when considering the vast field covered by her writings. It is in the delineation in prophetic and doctrinal exposition that we find that she used the words of others or had closely paraphrased them. In the vast field covering thousands of pages of messages of encouragement, reproof, and spiritual instruction, she worked independent of all other writers, also in her divine prediction of future experiences through which the church must pass. This is very evident by the nature of the matter written.

Her use of historical matter was a means to the greater end,—to bring into brief form the indisputable facts of history, so as to emphasize the thoughts revealed to her, and to lay the foundation for the understanding of future events. Truly it will be a great misfortune if any reader shall allow the question of her use of some passages from the writings of others, to blind his mind that he cannot

appreciate the great truths which are invaluable to the church and the world today.

Chapter 2—Regarding Changes of Wording in Later Editions

Much criticism has been brought to bear against Mrs. Ellen G. White and her writings because in later presentations of the subjects covered in some of her earliest volumes, some of which are now out of print, some changes in the wording has been made. Her critics say, If the first writing was a correct statement of what was shown her, what right had she to change the wording?

All will agree that if the matters revealed to Mrs. White in vision, were all presented as word for word statements that she was to repeat, and continue to repeat without variation, expansion, or abbreviation, she would not be justified in making any changes in the wording.

But this is not the way in which the revelations were given to her. No one associated with her held such a view of her work, and her own clear statements were to the contrary. In 1867, she stated through the *Review and Herald*, the facts regarding this matter in the following words:

“Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.”—[The Review and Herald, October 8, 1867](#).

In 1889, Mrs. White wrote about the manner in which revelations [13] were made to her on some occasions, thus:

“The question is asked, How does Sister White know in regard to the matters of which she speaks so decidedly, as if she had authority to say these things? I speak thus because they flash upon my mind when in perplexity like lightning out of a dark cloud in the fury of a storm.

“Some scenes presented before me years ago have not been retained in my memory, but when the instruction then given is needed, sometimes even when I am standing before the people, the remembrance comes sharp and clear, like a flash of lightning, bringing to mind distinctly that particular instruction. At such times I cannot refrain from saying the things that flash into my mind, not because I have had a new vision, but because that which was presented to me perhaps years in the past, has been recalled to my mind forcibly.”—*MS-33-1911*.

As we study the writings of Mrs. White with this understanding of how the revelations of truth were imparted to her, we can more easily comprehend her motive in changing words and forms of expression. This was sometimes done to remove grammatical errors. It was often done to enable her thought to be more clearly understood.

She viewed with sorrow the imperfections of expression in some of her writings. These imperfections incident to her lack of experience and scholarship she counted it her privilege to correct. Therefore in many passages she so changed the wording for the future editions as to present the identical thought in better language.

Moreover in a few passages where she saw that some of her statements were misunderstood or misconstrued, she endeavored to present the matter as revealed to her by a more accurate or fuller statement in which her view of the matter under consideration could be clearly understood.

When the question of her making grammatical corrections in the printed volumes of the *Testimonies to the Church* came before the General Conference of 1883, the delegates took action as follows:

“32. Whereas, Some of the bound volumes of the *Testimonies to the Church* are out of print so that full sets cannot be obtained at the office: and

“Whereas, there is a constant and urgent call for the reprinting of these volumes; therefore,—

“Resolved, that we recommend their republication in such a form as to make four volumes of seven or eight hundred pages each.

“33. Whereas, many of these testimonies were written under the most unfavorable circumstances, the writer being too heavily pressed with anxiety and labor to devote critical thought to the grammatical perfection of the writings, and they were printed in such haste as to allow these imperfections to pass uncorrected; and,—

“Whereas, we believe the light given by God to His servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed; therefore,—

“Resolved that in the re-publication of these volumes, such verbal changes be made as to remove the above-named imperfections, as far as possible, without in any measure changing the thought.”—*See Review and Herald, November 27, 1883.*

[14]

In harmony with this, she authorized the changes of wording which appear in later editions of some of her earliest books, and in a few places, where she deemed it best, she herself presented new wording which better represented what had been revealed to her.

When discussing this matter with her helpers, she often said that there was no real virtue in bad grammar, or clumsy wording. She faithfully examined all the corrections proposed, and only those which she fully approved were adopted.

Chapter 3—The Responsibilities Of A Messenger For God

Has a prophet of God a duty to use wisdom regarding the time, the manner and the extent to which he shall proclaim the truths revealed to him?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, was the teacher of the prophets and the example to the Apostles regarding the impartation of truth. The study of His life reveals that with divine wisdom He found the right time to impart His lessons. The character of the people composing His audience and their condition of mind had much to do with the character and scope of His lessons. At one time He said to His disciples, “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.”

“It requires much wisdom and sound judgment, quickened by the Spirit of God, to know the proper time and manner to present the instruction that has been given.”—*The Writing and Sending Out of the Testimonies*, p. 5.

In the same article, she wrote,—

“There are some who think they are able to measure the character and to estimate the importance of the work the Lord has given me to do. Their own mind and judgment is the standard by which they would weigh the testimonies.

“My instructor said to me, ‘Tell these men that God has not committed to them the work of measuring, classifying, and defining the character of the testimonies. Those who attempt this are sure to err in their conclusions. The Lord would have men adhere to their appointed work. If they will keep the way of the Lord,

they will be able to discern clearly that the work which He has appointed me to do is not a work of human devising.’

“Those who carefully read the testimonies as they have appeared from the early days, need not be perplexed as to their origin. The many books, written by the help of the Spirit of God, bear a living witness to the character of the testimonies.

“In the early days of our experience in the message, the Spirit of God often came upon a few of us as we were assembled, and I was taken away in vision. The Lord gave such light and evidence, such comfort and hope and joy, that His praises were upon our lips.

“While my husband lived, he acted as a helper and counselor in the sending out of the messages that were given to me. We traveled extensively. Sometimes light would be given to me in the night season, sometimes in the daytime before large congregations. The instruction I received in vision was faithfully written out by me, as I had time and strength for the work. Afterward we examined the matter together, my husband correcting grammatical errors and eliminating needless repetition. Then it was carefully copied for the persons addressed, or for the printer.

“As the work grew, others assisted me in the preparation of matter for publication. After my husband’s death, faithful helpers joined me, who labored untiringly in the work of copying the testimonies and preparing articles for publication. But the reports that are circulated, that any of my helpers are permitted to add matter or change the meaning of the messages I write out are not true.”—*Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.

“I have been told that many who give heed to the false science of the enemy would denounce my work as that of a false prophet, and would place upon the testimony such interpretations as tend to change the truth of God into a lie. Satan is on the alert, and some who in the past have been used by the Lord in doing

His work, but who have permitted themselves to be deceived, will be stirred up to make an improper use of the messages given. Because they do not wish to listen to the words of reproof, because they will not hear counsel, and improve their course of action, and do their appointed work, they will misconstrue the messages to the church, and confuse many minds.”—*The Writing and Sending Out of the Testimonies*, pp. 7, 8.

Authority to Present An Appropriate Message

Had Mrs. White the authority and right to make changes in her published writings either by addition, or by any change whatever in the forms of expression, the manner of description, or the plan of the argument? She said, “Yes, indeed; that is my duty.”

It is generally admitted that in Mrs. White’s discourses, spoken to the people, she used great wisdom in the selection of the subject to be presented and in her way of making plain the lesson she was presenting. And she rarely ever repeated a discourse in identical language.

And she always said that it was her duty to use the same wisdom in the selection of matter for her books, that she used in the selection of matter for her discourses. She often said, “Time and circumstances must always be taken into account.”

The Books Grew in Size

As time advanced her books grew in size. In her first visions the lives of the patriarchs, the mission and teachings of Christ and His apostles, and the controversy as carried forward by the Church of Christ from the ascension to our day, were at first presented to her in outline, and were written out in brief, comprehensive articles, as we find them in *Early Writings*.

In later years one group of subjects after another was more fully presented to her in vision, and each time the revelation bringing out more clearly the details of the scenes and subjects presented. Consequently, her views on the various phases of the great controversy were rewritten several times, and each time more fully.

That which was published in *Early Writings* regarding the fall of Satan, the fall of man, and the plan of salvation, occupied only eight pages. The same subjects as published in *Patriarchs and Prophets* occupied thirty larger pages.

That which was published in 1858 about the life of Christ, as found in *Early Writings* occupied forty pages. The same as published in 1878 fills over six hundred pages of *Spirit of Prophecy*, Volumes II and III. The life and teachings of Jesus as now published in *Desire of Ages*, *Mount of Blessing*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, and *Steps to Christ*, fills more than a thousand pages.

[16]

Not only in additions, but in subtractions were changes made, as books were prepared for different classes of people.

In *Great Controversy* Volume IV, published in 1884, in the chapter "Snares of Satan," there are three pages or more of matter that was very helpful to the church, which was left out of the later editions because they were being prepared to be sold to the multitude. It is most excellent and interesting reading for Sabbath-keepers, as it points out the work that Satan will do in persuading popular ministers and church-members to elevate the Sunday Sabbath, and to persecute Sabbath-keepers. But it was not appropriate for a book that was to be sold by our canvassers to multitudes of readers who might be offended and not benefited. It can now be found in the book [Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 472-475](#).

It was not left out of the later editions because it was less true in 1888 than in 1884, but because it was not wisdom to say these things to the multitudes for whom the book was then being prepared.

With reference to this, and to other passages in her writings which have been omitted in later editions, she in substance said, These statements are true and they are useful to our people; but to the general public for whom the bode is now being prepared, they are out of place. Christ said, even to His disciples, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." And Christ taught His disciples to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Therefore, as it is possible that more people will be benefited by the book without this passage than with it, let it be omitted.

Regarding changes in forms of expression, Mrs. White often said, Essential truths must be plainly told; but so far as possible they

should be told in language that will win rather than in language that will offend.

Regarding certain passages that were likely to be the occasion of bitter and unprofitable controversies on the part of Roman Catholics and others, she has said, All that is said in *Great Controversy* regarding the assumptions of the pope and the claims of the papacy, is true. Much historical evidence regarding these matters has been designedly destroyed by the Roman Catholics; nevertheless, that the book may be of the greatest benefit to all, and that needless controversies may be avoided, it is better to have all statements regarding the assumptions of the pope and the claim of the papacy, stated so moderately as to be easily within the range of proof from authentic histories that are within the reach of our ministers and students. In harmony with this instruction a few passages of this character were left out when *Great Controversy* was revised in 1911.