

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

DRAMATIC  
PRODUCTIONS  
IN SDA  
INSTITUTIONS

ARTHUR L. WHITE



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# **Dramatic Productions In SDA Institutions**

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**Ellen G. White**

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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 Arthur L. White

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## Introduction

Inquiries have been received at the Ellen G. White Estate office about materials from the pen of Mrs. White that may bear on the question of using skits, plays, or other types of dramatic programs in Seventh-day Adventist institutions. The Ellen White counsels discussing this question deal with several situations. In so doing, principles are enumerated that should still serve as guidelines for Adventists today.

Throughout the Spirit of Prophecy writings, God has given through Ellen White principles to help us determine what we should do. He then allows us the freedom to best work out our own actions in harmony with these principles. In so doing, it is important to remember that God always points us to the ideal. His supreme desire always is that we reach our maximum spiritually, and in every other way that affects our eternal salvation. This is easy to forget in an increasingly secular world. With other criteria for success continually bombarding us from all sides, often even the church finds it difficult to keep in mind its spiritual priorities.

Being diplomatically correct, or doing what seems expedient to gain immediate attention, all too often supersedes doing what is spiritually correct and what in terms of eternity will most effectively impact lives for God. Toward this latter goal Ellen White always sought to point the readers of her writings. This included the proper use of dramatic productions in our Adventist institutions.

A survey of these counsels fails to reveal an across-the-board condemnation of all dramatic productions. In other words, Ellen White does not condemn a program just because it may be dramatized. In this respect, counsels touching dramatic productions are much like those pertaining to sports. Interestingly, both subjects are treated in two statements of caution.

Mrs. White did not condemn the “simple exercise of playing ball” ([The Adventist Home](#), 499), but as she enumerated the principles involved, she pointed out the grave perils that usually ac-

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company sports activities. Likewise, Mrs. White did not condemn the simple enacted program put on by the Battle Creek Sabbath school in 1888, but in several places she clearly points out the many and almost sure perils that often accompany “plays” and “theatrical programs.”

It would then appear that the questions relating to both sports and dramatic productions in SDA institutions must be settled on the basis of fundamental principles rather than on a simple “yes” or “no.” This poses a real challenge, one that calls for a careful analysis of the principles involved, plus a determination to be guided by them. If Adventist young people can be taught to understand and apply Christian principles in their personal lives, they will be far ahead of many adults who, tragically, never have learned that the life of the Christian is guided not by arbitrary Do’s or Don’ts, but by principle.

[2]

## Chapter 1—The Value of Visual Presentation

Visual presentations have long been known to be an effective means of communication. They were often used by God Himself when enlightening His prophets. Many times in scripture a prophet would preface his description of a scene shown him by God with the words, “I saw.” Ellen White commented on this fact while in Europe where she had to meet some fanatics who were claiming pictures are prohibited by the second commandment, so should be destroyed:

“The second commandment prohibits image worship; but God Himself employed pictures and symbols to represent to His prophets lessons which He would have them give to the people, and which could thus be better understood than if given in any other way. He appealed to the understanding through the sense of sight. Prophetic history was presented to Daniel and John in symbols, and these were to be represented plainly upon tables, that he who reads might understand.”—[Selected Messages 2:319, 320](#).

The Ellen G. White reference is well illustrated in Ezekiel’s experience in which the power of God was dramatized:

“At one time the prophet Ezekiel was in vision set down in the midst of a large valley. Before him lay a dismal scene. Throughout its whole extent the valley was covered with the bones of the dead. The question was asked, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ The prophet replied, ‘O Lord God, Thou knowest.’ What could the might and power of man accomplish with these dead bones? The prophet could see no hope of life being imparted to them. But as he looked, the power of God began to work. The scattered bones were shaken, and began to come together, ‘bone to his bone,’ and were bound together by sinews. They were covered with flesh, and as the Lord breathed upon the bodies thus formed, ‘the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.’”—[The S.D.A. Bible Commentary 4:1165](#).

## Chapter 2—Effective Also for Evil

As is so often the case, something that may be effective for good when rightly used can also, if wrongly employed, be effective for evil, even to the point where the rightful use may have to be curtailed. Note in the description of Satan’s work in the world generally that drama is listed first among the “amusements” that Satan uses to destroy souls.

“Many of the amusements popular in the world today, even with those who claim to be Christians, tend to the same end as did those of the heathen. There are indeed few among them that Satan does not turn to account in destroying souls. Through the drama he has worked for ages to excite passion and glorify vice. The opera, with its fascinating display and bewildering music, the masquerade, the dance, the card table, Satan employs to break down the barriers of principle and open the door to sensual indulgence. In every gathering for pleasure where pride is fostered or appetite indulged, where one is led to forget God and lose sight of eternal interests, there Satan is binding his chains about the soul.”—[Patriarchs and Prophets, 459](#) (1890). [3]

A decade earlier in the *Testimonies*, sensational dramas were pointed out as preoccupying the minds of men and women and thus hindering their reception of the message of truth:

“The world is teeming with errors and fables. Novelties in the form of sensational dramas are continually arising to engross the mind, and absurd theories abound which are destructive to moral and spiritual advancement.”—[Testimonies for the Church 4:415](#) (1880).

The third E. G. White statement we quote here describes the welfare of the Battle Creek College students in the early days before dormitories were provided. At this time students were living in the homes of families residing nearby. This statement involves the legitimate theater, for it was penned in 1881, long before motion pictures were invented. The perils of “theatrical amusements” are clearly enumerated and fundamental principles outlined.

“Among the most dangerous resorts for pleasure is the theater. Instead of being a school of morality and virtue, as is so often claimed, it is the very hotbed of immorality. Vicious habits and sinful propensities are strengthened and confirmed by these entertainments. Low songs, lewd gestures, expressions and attitudes, deprave the imagination and debase the morals. Every youth who habitually attends such exhibitions will be corrupted in principle. There is no influence in our land more powerful to poison the imagination, to destroy religious impressions, and to blunt the relish for the tranquil pleasures and sober realities of life than theatrical amusements. The love for these scenes increases with every indulgence, as the desire for intoxicating drink strengthens with its use. The only safe course is to shun the theater, the circus, and every other questionable place of amusement.”—[Testimonies for the Church 4:652, 653](#).

## **Chapter 3—Seventh-day Adventists Wrestle With the Problem**

As the number of Seventh-day Adventists residing in Battle Creek steadily increased, and as the size of our various church institutions grew, from time to time we found ourselves faced with the question of dramatic productions.

## Chapter 4—At The Battle Creek Sanitarium

[4] The sanitarium with its large number of non-Adventist guests was faced with the problem of entertaining them. The non-Adventist institution in Dansville, New York, under the management of Dr. James C. Jackson had encouraged “plays” as being beneficial to the patients. (See [Testimonies for the Church 3:172](#).) But Ellen White gave firm counsel that this type of entertainment should not come into our sanitarium at Battle Creek. This counsel appeared in 1881 in an article entitled “Position and Work of the Sanitarium,” but its warnings are by no means limited to the sanitarium:

“Those who bear the responsibility at the sanitarium should be exceedingly guarded that the amusements shall not be of a character to lower the standard of Christianity, bringing this institution down upon a level with others and weakening the power of true godliness in the minds of those who are connected with it. Worldly or theatrical entertainments are not essential for the prosperity of the sanitarium or for the health of the patients. The more they have of this kind of amusements, the less will they be pleased unless something of the kind shall be continually carried on. The mind is in a fever of unrest for something new and exciting, the very thing it ought not to have. And if these amusements are once allowed, they are expected again, and the patients lose their relish for any simple arrangement to occupy the time. But repose, rather than excitement, is what many of the patients need.

“As soon as these entertainments are introduced, the objections to theatergoing are removed from many minds, and the plea that moral and high-toned scenes are to be acted at the theater breaks down the last barrier. Those who would permit this class of amusements at the sanitarium would better be seeking wisdom from God to lead these poor, hungry, thirsting souls to the Fountain of joy, and peace, and happiness....

“The managers of the sanitarium may as well conclude at once that they will never be able to satisfy that class of minds that can find

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happiness only in something new and exciting. To many persons this has been the intellectual diet during their lifetime; there are mental as well as physical dyspeptics.”—[Testimonies for the Church 4:577-579](#).

Unfortunately, no information is now available as to the precise nature of the “theatrical entertainments” being given at the sanitarium to which Ellen White is here referring. So her statement must be read and understood in the context of the chapter itself.

## Chapter 5—SDA Literary Societies

At the same time, 1880-1881, in an attempt to provide cultural programs for our church members, “literary societies” were formed at Battle Creek and at some other places. Dramatic productions soon became part of the program. The January 4, 1881, issue of the *Review and Herald* contained an article from Mrs. White reporting on the problems with which the societies were soon confronted:

“In every case where a literary society has been established among our people, its influence has proved to be unfavorable to religious life, and has led to backsliding from God. This has been tried at Battle Creek and in other places, and the result has ever been the same.”

Then she set forth the crux of the problem:

[5] “The purposes and objects which lead to the formation of literary societies may be good; but unless wisdom from God shall control these organizations, they will become a positive evil. Various entertainments are introduced to make the meetings interesting and attractive for worldlings, and thus the exercises of the so-called literary society too often degenerate into demoralizing theatrical performances, and cheap nonsense. All these gratify the carnal mind, that is at enmity with God; but they do not strengthen the intellect nor confirm the morals. Little by little the spiritual element is ruled out by the irreligious, and the effort to harmonize principles which are antagonistic in their nature proves a decided failure. When God’s people voluntarily unite with the worldly and unconsecrated, and give them the pre-eminence, they will be led away from him by the unsanctified influence under which they have placed themselves.

“Many literary societies are in reality young theaters on a cheap scale, and they create in the youth a taste for the stage.”—[The Review and Herald, January 4, 1881](#).

The entire article, now currently available, may be read with profit. See *Ellen G. White Review and Herald Articles* (Facsimile

Reprint), Vol. 1. pp. 224, 225. Significant excerpts appear as Appendix A.

## Chapter 6—Lyceums and Literary Societies

Later, Ellen White dealt with the impact of acts and plays in SDA lyceums and literary societies. In so doing she repeated some of the counsel of the 1881 *Review* article just quoted, and then broadened her scope. She deplored the fact that often individuals of “short religious experience” take the lead. Then “Satan uses men as his agents to suggest, to lead out, to propose different acts and a variety of amusing things which give no strength to the morals or elevation to the mind, but are wholly worldly. Soon the religious element is dropped, and the irreligious elements take the lead.”—[Manuscript Releases 2:244](#) (See Appendix B).

The result was that “low, cheap matters are brought in which are not elevating or instructive but only amuse.” “The mind” was led “away from serious reflection, away from God, away from heaven.” ([Mind, Character, and Personality 2:688, 245.](#)) She counseled:

“If your lyceums and literary societies would be made an opportunity for searching the Bible, it would be far more an intellectual society than it can ever become through the attention being turned to theatrical performances. What high and noble truths the mind may fasten upon and explore in God’s Word! ...

“Those who compose these societies, who profess to love and reverence sacred things, and yet allow the mind to come down to the superficial, to the unreal, to the simple, cheap, fictitious acting, are doing the devil’s work just as surely as they look upon and unite with these scenes.”—[Manuscript Releases 2:246.](#)

Turn to Appendix B, for the full statement depicting the gradual compromising and “vacillating between duty and the world,” including the final results.

## Chapter 7—Counsel Regarding the 1888 Enacted Christmas Program [6]

Early Wednesday morning, December 26, 1888, Ellen G. White wrote about a Christmas program that she had attended the night before put on by the Battle Creek Sabbath School children. It was a simple dramatized program featuring a lighthouse, children wearing costumes, and speeches, poems and songs. Ella M. White, Mrs. White's six year old granddaughter, was in the program, dressed to represent an angel. Ellen White's entire communication appears as Appendix D.

It is significant that the counsel given to the man who organized the program relates to how the features of the program could have been made more effective, but there was no condemnation of the program itself just because it contained enacted scenes. Rather, Ellen White commented, "I was pleased with the lighthouse. The part acted by the children was good. The reading was appropriate."—[Manuscript Releases 19:300](#).

At the same time, she made certain observations:

"The singing was after the order we would expect it to be in any theatrical performance, but not one word to be distinguished. Certainly the tempest-tossed ship would be wrecked upon the rocks if there were no more light coming from the lighthouse than was seen in the exercises. I must say I was pained at these things, so out of order with the very work of reformation we were trying to carry forward in the church and with our institutions that I should have felt better if I had not been present. This was an occasion that should have been gotten up not only for the Sabbath school children, but words should have been spoken that would have deepened the impression of a necessity of seeking for the favor of that Saviour who hath loved them and gave Himself for them. If [only] the precious hymns had been sung, "Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee," and "Jesus lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly, while the billows near me roll, while the tempest still is high."

Whose souls were inspired with new and fresh zeal for the Master in those songs sung whose virtue was in the different performances of the singer?”—[Manuscript Releases 2:236](#) (Appendix D).

Then she asked some very pertinent questions regarding the program, questions that still would be well to ask regarding every planned dramatic production today:

“Will it make those who acted their part in it more spiritually minded? Will it increase their sense of obligation to our heavenly Father who sent His Son into the world at such an infinite sacrifice to save fallen man from utter ruin? Was the mind awakened to grasp God because of His great love wherewith He has loved us?”—*Ibid.* (Appendix D).

If the fact that there was acting in the program was in itself sinful, that certainly would have been made plain. The counsel, rather, related to content and the overall effect on the players.

- [7] This experience would seem to indicate that there is a proper use of skits or plays dedicated to explaining the love of God and the way to salvation. Consecrated individuals are motivated by their service to God and not self-aggrandizement. Also, this does not negate the counsel that Seventh-day Adventist evangelists should refrain from using “theatrical display,” in their work.—See Appendix E, “The Evangelist and Theatrical Display.”

## Chapter 8—The Use of Our Talents in Communication

In 1898 Ellen G. White sent to the leaders of the church a manuscript entitled “To Every Man His Work” in which she deals with the proper use of the talents entrusted to us. The talent of communication was treated at length and in a very enlightening manner. Mrs. White pointed out that this talent might be used to serve self or to serve Christ.

“If we regard the advantages given to us as our own, to be used according to our pleasures to make a display and create a sensation, the Lord Jesus is put to shame by the characters of His professed followers.”—E. G. White, MS 142, 1898 (See [The Review and Herald, June 21, 1898.](#))

Then she asked:

“Can you glorify God by being educated to represent characters in plays, and to amuse the audience with fables? Has not the Lord given you intellect to be used to His name’s glory in proclaiming the gospel of Christ. If you desire a public career, there is a work you may do. Help the class you represent in plays. Come to the reality. The Lord has given evidence of His love for the world.”—*Ibid.*

One key point, almost hidden, is worth pondering.

“All who desire a place of distinction have an opportunity to wear the yoke of Christ.”—*Ibid.*

She urged that the media of communication be employed to communicate “a knowledge of Christ,” not for the glorification of self. See Appendix C for fuller statement.

Training in “pride and a love of display” that leads to self-aggrandizement, may start at a very young age, fostered even by the Sabbath School program. Warned Ellen White in 1893:

“In the Sabbath school, men and women have been accepted as officers and teachers, who have not been spiritually minded, and had no live interest in the work committed to their care; but matters can be set in order only through the aid of the Holy Spirit. The same evil

has existed for years as now exists in our churches. Formality, pride, and love of display have taken the place of true piety and humble godliness.

- [8] “We might see a different order of things should a number consecrate themselves wholly to God, and then devote their talents to the Sabbath school work ever advancing in knowledge, and educating themselves so that they would be able to instruct others as to the best methods to employ in the work; but it is not for the workers to seek for methods by which they can make a show, consuming time in theatrical performances and musical display, for this benefits no one. It does no good to train the children to make speeches for special occasions. They should be won to Christ, and instead of expending time, money, and effort to make a display, let the whole effort be made to gather sheaves for the harvest.”—[Fundamentals of Christian Education, 253](#).

A similar quotation makes the point even more forcefully:

“Pride, self-esteem, and boldness are marked characteristics of the children of this day, and they are the curse of the age. When I see this un-Christlike, unlovely manifestation on every side, and then see parents and teachers seeking to display the ability and proficiency of their children and [students], I am pained to the heart; for I know that it is exactly the opposite course from the one that should be pursued.”—[Counsels on Sabbath School Work, 46](#).

## Chapter 9—Senses Confused by Games and Theatrical Performances

In 1900 Ellen White draws aside the curtain in an article in the *Review and Herald* to show the manner that Satan employs to infatuate youth “in games and theatrical performances.” He confuses the senses of “the young” “while light shines all about them.” Notice Ellen White’s solemn warning:

“The public opinion is that manual labor is degrading. But men may play as hard as they like at cricket, or baseball, or in pugilistic games, without being degraded! Satan is delighted when he sees human beings using their physical and mental powers in that which does not educate, which is not useful, which does not help them to be a blessing to those who need their help. While they are becoming experts in games that are not of the least value to themselves or others, Satan is playing the game of life for their souls, taking from them the precious talents God has given them, and placing in their stead his own evil attributes, which not only destroy them, but through their influence destroy those who have any connection with them.

“Satan’s work is to lead men to ignore God, to so engross and absorb the mind that God will not be in their thoughts. The education they have received has been of a character to confuse the mind, and eclipse the true light. Satan does not wish the people to have a knowledge of God; and if he can set in operation games and theatrical performances that will so confuse the senses of the young that human beings will perish in darkness while light shines all about them, he is well pleased.”—[The Review and Herald, March 13, 1900](#).

See *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, pp. 274, 275 for a paralleling statement.

For the Christian who is seeking to live by principle, Jesus Christ is their example in all things. Ellen White wrote:

[9] “I have not been able to find one instance where He educated His disciples to engage in amusements of football or pugilistic games to obtain physical exercise, or in theatrical performances, and yet Christ was our pattern in all things.”—[Fundamentals of Christian Education, 229](#).

A sound guiding principle to keep in mind when dealing with questions of the kind we have been studying is found in [Testimonies for the Church 5:360](#):

“Our example and influence must be a power on the side of reform. We must abstain from any practice which will blunt the conscience or encourage temptation. We must open no door that will give Satan access to the mind of one human being formed in the image of God.”

# Appendix A—THE PROS AND CONS OF SDA LITERARY SOCIETIES

By Mrs. E. G. White

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## Introduction

It is often asked, Are literary societies a benefit to our youth? To answer this question properly, we should consider not only the avowed purpose of such societies, but the influence which they have actually exerted, as proved by experience. The improvement of the mind is a duty which we owe to ourselves, to society, and to God. But we should never devise means for the cultivation of the intellect at the expense of the moral and the spiritual. And it is only by the harmonious development of both the mental and the moral faculties that the highest perfection of either can be attained. Are these results secured by literary societies as they are generally conducted?

As the question was first stated, it would appear very narrow-minded to answer in the negative; but in every case where a literary society has been established among our people, its influence has proved to be unfavorable to religious life, and has led to backsliding from God. This has been tried in Battle Creek and in other places, and the result has ever been the same. In some cases, long-standing evils have grown out of these associations.

The irreligious and unconsecrated in heart and life are usually admitted, and are often placed in the most responsible positions. Rules and regulations may be adopted that are thought to be sufficient to hold in check every deleterious influence; but Satan, a shrewd general, is at work to mold the society to suit his plans, and in time he too often succeeds...

### **Chapter 1—Can Be Young Theaters on a Cheap Scale**

[10] The purposes and objects which lead to the formation of literary societies may be good; but unless wisdom from God shall control these organizations, they will become a positive evil. Various entertainments are introduced to make the meetings interesting and attractive for worldlings, and thus the exercises of the so-called literary society too often degenerate into demoralizing theatrical performances, and cheap nonsense. All these gratify the carnal mind that is at enmity with God; but they do not strengthen the intellect nor confirm the morals. Little by little, the spiritual element is ruled out by the irreligious, and the effort to harmonize principles which are antagonistic in their nature proves a decided failure. When God's people voluntarily unite with the worldly and unconsecrated, and give them the pre-eminence, they will be led away from Him by the unsanctified influence under which they have placed themselves.

Many literary societies are in reality young theaters on a cheap scale, and they create in the youth a taste for the stage.

### **Chapter 2—An Illustration**

While writing upon this point, my eye falls upon the following striking incident from real life:

“‘It is of no use, Mrs. W., I have tried again and again, and I can not become a Christian.’

“‘So you said a year ago, yet you thought there was nothing in the way.’

“‘I don't think there is now, but I don't feel any different from what I did then, and I don't believe I ever shall be a Christian.’

“The first speaker was a bright girl somewhat over twenty, who, on a previous visit nearly a year before, had confided to her elder

friend her earnest desire to become a Christian. Of her evident sincerity there could be no doubt, and the visitor was sorely puzzled to understand why her young friend had not yet found peace. The two were standing by the half-opened door of the Sunday-school room, where a rehearsal for an ‘entertainment’ was in progress; and the girl, looking in, seemed suddenly to find there a suggestion for further thought.

“‘I believe,’ she said hesitatingly, ‘there is one thing I cannot give up.’

“‘Give it up at once, dear.’

“‘But I can’t.’

“‘Come to Jesus first then, and He will give you the power.’

“‘I don’t want Him to. I believe if I knew I should die and be lost in three weeks from tonight, I would rather be lost than give up my passion.’

“‘And what is this dearly loved thing, worth so much more than your salvation?’

“‘Oh, it isn’t worth more, only I love it more, and I can’t and won’t give it up. It’s that I—I want to be an actress; I know I have the talent; I’ve always hoped the way would open for me to go upon the stage, and I can’t help hoping so still.’

“‘Do you think it would be wrong for you to do so, provided the way did open?’

“‘I don’t know that it would be a sin; but I couldn’t do it and be a Christian; the two things don’t go together.’

“‘How did you come by such a taste? I am sure you do not belong to a theater-going family?’

“‘Oh, no! my father and mother are Methodists; they always disapproved of the theater. I’ve been in Sunday-school all my life. They used to make me sing and recite at the entertainments when I was four years old, and I acted the angel and fairy parts in the dialogues; and when I grew older, I always arranged the tableaux, charades, etc.

“‘Then I joined a set of sociables got up by our church young people. At first we did “Mrs. Jarley’s Wax-works” and sung “Pinafore” for the benefit of the church; and then we got more ambitious, studied, and had private theatricals, and last winter we hired Mason’s Hall and gave a series of Shakespearean performances, which cleared

off a large part of the church debt. But that's only second-class work, after all. I want to do the real thing, to go upon the stage as a profession. My father won't hear of it; but I hope some time the way will be opened that I may realize my heart's desire.'

“‘And meantime, will you not come to Jesus and be saved?’

“‘No, I cannot do it and keep to this hope, and I will not give this up.’

“‘And so the visitor turned sadly away, thinking for what miserable messes of pottage men and women are willing to sell their glorious birthright as children of God; thinking also of the seeds which are being sowed in our Sunday-schools, the tares among the wheat, and the terrible harvest that may yet spring up from this well-meant but injudicious seed-sowing.’”

### **Chapter 3—Attempts at Battle Creek**

It has been our study to devise some plan for the establishment of a literary society which shall prove a benefit to all connected with it—a society in which all its members shall feel a moral responsibility to make it what it should be, and to avoid the evils that have made such associations dangerous to religious principle. Persons of discretion and good judgment, who have a living connection with Heaven, who will see the evil tendencies, and, not deceived by Satan, will move straight forward in the path of integrity, continually holding aloft the banner of Christ—such a class are needed to control in these societies. Such an influence will command respect and make these gatherings a blessing rather than a curse. If men and women of mature age would unite with young persons to organize and conduct such a literary society, it might become both useful and interesting. But when such gatherings degenerate into occasions for fun and boisterous mirth, they are anything but literary or elevating. They are debasing to both mind and morals....

### **Chapter 4—Mind Drawn From the Real and Substantial**

Few realize that it is a duty to exercise control over their thoughts and imaginations. It is difficult to keep the undisciplined mind fixed upon profitable subjects. But if the thoughts are not properly

employed, religion cannot flourish in the soul. The mind must be preoccupied with sacred and eternal things, or it will cherish trifling and superficial thoughts. Both the intellectual and the moral powers must be disciplined, and they will strengthen and improve by exercise....

The intellect, as well as the heart, must be consecrated to the service of God. He has claims upon all there is of us. However innocent or laudable it may appear, the follower of Christ should not indulge in any gratification, or engage in any enterprise, which an enlightened conscience tells him would abate his ardor, or lessen his spirituality.

“Pleasure-seeking, frivolity, and mental and moral dissipation, [12] are flooding the world with their demoralizing influence. Every Christian should labor to press back the tide of evil, and save our youth from the influences that would sweep them down to ruin. May God help us to press our way against the current!”—[The Review and Herald, January 4, 1881.](#)

## **Appendix B—INVOLVEMENTS OF ACTS AND PLAYS IN SDA LITERARY SOCIETIES**

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### **Chapter 1—A Worldly Element Takes the Lead**

The purpose and object for which literary societies are established may be good, but unless wisdom from above and continual reliance upon God is preserved by all, there will be a decided failure in its exerting a saving influence.

When God's professed people voluntarily unite with the world or give men of short religious experience the pre-eminence in these literary societies, they do not have a high estimate of eternal things. They step over the line in the very first movement. There may be boundaries, set rules, and regulations made; but, notwithstanding all this, the worldly element will take the lead. Men on the enemy's ground, led and controlled by his power, will have a controlling influence, unless there is an infinite power to work against them. Satan uses men as his agents to suggest, to lead out, to propose different acts and a variety of amusing things which give no strength to the morals or elevation to the mind, but are wholly worldly. Soon the religious element is ruled out, and the irreligious elements take the lead.

**Chapter 2—Vacillating Between Duty and the World**

Men and women who will not be ensnared, who will move straightforward in the path of integrity, loyal and true to the God of heaven whom they fear, love, and honor, can have a powerful influence to hold the people of God. Such an influence will command respect. But this vacillating between duty and the world gives the world all the advantage and will surely leave its molding power so that religion, God, and heaven, will scarcely enter the thoughts.

If youth, and men and women of mature age should organize a society where Bible reading and Bible study should be made the prominent theme, dwelling upon and searching out the prophecies, and studying the lessons of Christ, there would be strength in the society. There is no book from the perusal of which the mind is so much elevated and strengthened and expanded as the Bible. And there is nothing that will so endow with new vigor all our faculties as bringing them in contact with stupendous truths of the word of God, and setting the mind to grasp and measure those truths.

[13]

**Chapter 3—Lyceum and Literary Societies Can Be Constructive**

If the human mind takes a low level it is generally because it is left to deal with common-place facts and not called out and exercised to grasp lofty, elevated truths, which are enduring as eternity. These literary societies and lyceums are almost universally exerting an influence entirely contrary to that which they claim, and are an injury to the youth. This need not be the case, but because unsanctified elements take the lead, because worldlings want matters to go to please themselves, their hearts are not in harmony with Jesus Christ, they are in the ranks of the Lord's enemies, and they will not be pleased with that kind of entertainment which would strengthen and confirm the members of the society in spirituality. There is brought in low, cheap matters which are not elevating or instructive but which only amuse.

The way these societies have been conducted leads the mind away from serious reflection, away from God, away from heaven. By attending them religious thoughts and services have become dis-

tasteful. There is less desire for fervent prayer, for pure and undefiled religion. The thoughts and conversation are not on elevating themes, but dwelling upon the subjects brought up in these gatherings. What is the chaff to the wheat? The understanding will gradually bring itself down to the dimensions of the matters with which it is familiar, till the powers of the mind become contracted, showing what has been its food.

#### **Chapter 4—Bible and Nature Research Versus Theatrical Performances**

The mind that rejects all this cheapness and is taxed to dwell only upon elevated, ponderous, deep, and broad truths will strengthen. A knowledge of the Bible excels all other knowledge in strengthening the intellect. If your lyceums and literary societies would be made an opportunity for searching the Bible, it would be far more an intellectual society than it can ever become through the attention being turned to theatrical performances. What high and noble truths the mind may fasten upon and explore in God's Word! The mind may go deeper and still deeper in its research, becoming stronger with every effort to comprehend truth, and yet there will be an infinity beyond.

Those who compose these societies, who profess to love and reverence sacred things, and yet allow the mind to come down to the superficial, to the unreal, to simple, cheap, fictitious acting, are doing the devil's work just as surely as they look upon and unite in these scenes. Could their eyes be opened, they would see that Satan was their leader, the instigator, through agents present who think themselves to be something. But God pronounces their life and character altogether lighter than vanity. If these societies should make the Lord and his greatness, his mercies, his works in Nature, his majesty and power as revealed in inspiration their study they would come forth blest and strengthened.—[Manuscript Releases 2:244-246](#)

## **Appendix C—THE USE OF OUR TALENTS OF COMMUNICATION**

From EGW MS 42, 1898, used largely in Review & Herald Supplement of June 21, 1898.

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### **Chapter 1—For Self or For Christ**

Many, many souls might be saved if those who claim to be followers of Christ would work as Christ worked, living not to please self, but to glorify God, acting as missionaries, showing genuine love for the Master by making every possible use of their entrusted talents. From the very nature of work in Christ's lines, those who do it will lose sight of self.

We are called upon to love souls as Christ loved them, to feel a travail of soul that sinners shall be converted. Present the matchless love of Christ. Hide self out of sight. O, what care should be taken by all who claim to be Christians, that they do not call their passions and self-importance religion! By showing vanity, by longing for distinction, many hide the person of Christ and expose themselves to view. There is such self-importance in their own ideas and ways, and they cherish such a pleasing sense of their own smartness, that the Lord can not bestow his Holy Spirit upon them. If He did, they would misinterpret it, and exalt themselves still higher because of it.

Their self-pleasing ideas are a great hindrance to the advancement of the work. Whatever part they act, self is the main picture presented. Their own zeal and devotion are thought to be the great power of truth. Unaware to themselves, all such are unfaithful stewards. They swerve the work into wrong lines. Self-importance leads them where they will be left to make false moves.

We are not to exalt the work of any man, magnifying him and praising his judgment. The first rising of self is the beginning of your fall, your separation from Christ. We can not in any degree exalt self without being humbled. As Christians, we are to make the light of Christ's truth shine. Self is to be kept out of sight. Christ is the Truth and the Light. He is the mirror from which to reflect truly every work done to His name's glory. The world needs light. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." ...

## **Chapter 2—Communication**

[15] God gives more than money to His stewards. Your talent of imparting is a gift. What are you communicating of the gifts of God in your words, in your tender sympathy? Are you allowing your money to go into the enemy's ranks, to ruin the ones you seek to please? Then, again, the knowledge of truth is a talent. There are many souls in darkness that might be enlightened by true, faithful words from you. There are hearts that are hungering for sympathy, perishing away from God. Your sympathy may help them. The Lord has need of your words, dictated by His Holy Spirit....

All natural gifts are to be sanctified as precious endowments. They are to be consecrated to God, that they may minister for the Master. All social advantages are talents. They are not to be devoted to self-pleasing, amusement, or self-gratification. Money and estates are the Lord's, to be used wholly to honor Him; for He has pledged His word that if we use His entrusted goods as faithful stewards, we shall be rich in blessings, of which we shall have a supply to bless others. But if we regard the advantages given to us as our own, to be used according to our pleasure, to make a display and create a sensation, the Lord Jesus, our Redeemer, is put to shame by the characters of His professed followers.

### Chapter 3—The Passion for Theatrical Performances

Has God given you intellect? Is it for you to manage according to your inclinations? Can you glorify God by being educated to represent characters in plays, and to amuse an audience with fables? Has not the Lord given you intellect to be used to His name's glory in proclaiming the gospel of Christ? If you desire a public career, there is a work that you may do. Help the class you represent in plays. Come to the reality. Give your sympathy where it is needed by actually lifting up the bowed down. Satan's ruling passion is to pervert the intellect and cause men to long for shows and theatrical performances. The experience and character of all who engage in this work will be in accordance with the food given to the mind. [Paragraph not in *Review* article; [Manuscript Releases 2:246](#).]

The Lord has given evidence of His love for the world. There was no falsity, no acting, in what He did. He gave a living Gift, capable of suffering humiliation, neglect, shame, reproach. This Christ did that He might rescue the fallen. While human beings were instituting schemes and methods to destroy Him, the Son of the infinite God came to our world to give an example of the great work to be done to redeem and save man. But today the proud and disobedient are striving to acquire a great name and great honor from their fellow men by using their God-given endowments to amuse. This they do instead of calling upon them to behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world.

### Chapter 4—Opportunity for Those Desiring a Place of Distinction

God's great and strange work is to redeem and save, and thus repair the ruin that sin has made. Some see many things in the Bible that to them sanction a course of action that God will never approve. But when God converts human agents, they will flee to Christ, their life, to be hid with Him in God. They will lift up their eyes to the perpetual desolation which sin has made and is making, and will pray that they may be co-laborers with Christ. They will begin to repair the old waste places which have been made by high and low in the law of God.

All who desire a place of distinction have an opportunity to wear the yoke of Christ. “Learn of me,” says the Great Teacher; “for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Let the cry of the soul be, “O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt Thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.... For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.... And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

The gift of correct example is a great thing. But many gather about the soul an atmosphere that is malarious. These know not, in this their day, the things that belong to their peace. They have, to a great degree, lost the faculty of spiritual discernment. They call good evil, and evil good.

### **Chapter 5—Media of Communication**

The gifts of speech, of knowledge, of sympathy and love, communicate a knowledge of Christ. All these gifts are to be converted to God. The Lord stands in need of them; He calls for them. All are to act a part in preparing their own souls and the souls of others to dedicate their talents to God. Every soul, every gift, is to be laid under contribution to God. All are to cooperate with God in the work of saving souls. The talents you possess are given you of God to make you efficient co-laborers with Christ. There are hearts hungering for sympathy, perishing for the help and assistance God has given you to give to them. Our churches are sickly, because they do not do their appointed work. They are not as God would have them be. Oh, that they would awake from their lethargy!

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness

in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

## Appendix D—ENACTED SCENES

[This communication was written early Wednesday morning December 26, 1888, and related to a dramatized Christmas program put on by the Battle Creek Sabbath School. The children wore costumes. Ella M. White, Mrs. White's six year old granddaughter was in the program dressed to represent an angel.]

Dear Brother \_\_\_\_\_:

I have risen at three o'clock this morning to write you a few lines. I was pleased with the lighthouse, and the scene which had required so much painstaking effort was one which could have been made most impressive, but failed to be made as forcible and striking as it might have been when it cost so much time and labor in preparing it. The part acted by the children was good. The reading was appropriate. Then if there had been good solid talk on that occasion in regard to children and teachers in the Sabbath schools laboring earnestly for the salvation of the souls of the children under your charge, presenting the most acceptable offering to Jesus, the gift of their own hearts, and impressive remarks short and right to the point, [on] how they could do this, would it not have been in keeping with the work we have been trying to do in the church?

Every stroke now should be in harmony for the one great purpose, preparing of the hearts, that individually, pupils and teachers should be as a light set on a candlestick that it may give light to all that are in the house, which would be carrying out the idea strikingly of a lighthouse guiding souls that they may not make shipwreck of faith. Can you tell me what marked impression the two poems rehearsed by the two ladies on the stand would have to do with this work?

The singing was after the order we would expect it to be in any theatrical performance, but not one word to be distinguished. Certainly the tempest-tossed ship would be wrecked upon the rock, if there were no more light coming from the lighthouse than was seen in the exercises. I must say I was pained at these things, so out of order with the very work of reformation we were trying to carry

forward in the church and with our institutions that I should have felt better if I had not been present.

This was an occasion that should have been gotten up not only for the Sabbath school children but words should have been spoken that would have deepened the impression of a necessity of seeking for the favor of that Saviour who hath loved them and gave Himself for them. If [only] the precious hymns had been sung, “Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee,” and “Jesus lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly, while the billows near me roll, while the tempest still is high!” Whose souls were inspired with new and fresh zeal for the Master in those songs sung whose virtue was in the different performances of the singer? [18]

While these painstaking efforts were being made to get up the performances, meetings were being held of the deepest interest which should have engaged the attention and which called for the presence of every soul lest they should lose something of the message the Master had sent to them. Now this Christmas has passed into eternity with its burden of record and we are anxious to see the result of it. Will it make those who acted their part in it more spiritually minded? Will it increase their sense of obligation to our heavenly Father who sent His Son into the world at such an infinite sacrifice to save fallen man from utter ruin? Was the mind awakened to grasp God because of His great love wherewith He has loved us?

We hope, now that the Christmas is in the past, that those who have put forth so much painstaking effort will now manifest a decided zeal and earnest, disinterested effort for the salvation of the souls of the teachers in the Sabbath school, that in their turn they may each labor for the salvation of the souls in their classes, to give them personal instruction as to what they must do to be saved. We hope that they will find time to labor in simplicity and in sincerity for the souls of those under their care, and that they will pray with them, and for them, that they may give to Jesus the precious offering of their own souls, that they may make literally true the symbol of the lighthouse in the beams of light shining forth from their own strong efforts in the name of Jesus, which should be put forth in love, they themselves grasping the rays of light to diffuse this light to others, and that there shall be no settling down to a surface work. Show just as great skill and aptitude in winning souls to Jesus as you have

shown in painstaking effort for this occasion just past. Point them in your efforts with heart and soul enlisted, to the Star that shines out to the morally darkened heaven at this time, even the Light of the world. Let your light shine that the tempest-tossed souls may set their eyes upon it and escape the rocks that are concealed beneath the surface of the water. Temptations are lying in wait to deceive them, souls are oppressed with guilt ready to sink into despair. Labor to save them; point them to Jesus who so loved them that He gave His life for them....

The Light of the world is shining upon us that we might absorb the divine rays and let this light shine upon others in good works that many souls shall be led to glorify our Father which is in heaven. He is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and it grieves the heart of Jesus that so many refuse the offers of His mercy and matchless love.

[19] Will all who acted an interested part in the program of last evening work as zealously and interestedly to show themselves approved unto God in doing their work for the Master that they may show themselves intelligent workmen that need not to be ashamed? Oh, let the teachers in the Sabbath school be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the message for this time, carrying that message into all their labor. There are souls to be saved, and while in the Sabbath school work there has been much form and great amount of precious time occupied in reading of reports and records, there has been but little time to really let light shine forth in clear, steady rays in the very instruction needed to save the souls of the children and youth. Less elaborate speeches, less lengthy remarks, and plain pointed truth presented, not one word uttered to exhibit profound knowledge, not one word in any speech, but the greatest evidence of real knowledge is the great simplicity. All who have taken knowledge of Jesus Christ will imitate Him in their manner of instruction.—[Manuscript Releases 19:300-303](#).

## Appendix E—THE EVANGELIST AND THEATRICAL DISPLAY

[Repeatedly Ellen White counseled our ministers and evangelists to avoid theatrical display in the pulpit:]

“Our success will depend on carrying forward the work in the simplicity in which Christ carried it forward, without any theatrical display.”—[Evangelism, 139](#).

The following three statements offer some enlightenment as to what was meant by “theatrical display” in the evangelistic presentation:

“Let there be no oddities or eccentricities of movement on the part of those who speak the Word of truth, for such things will weaken the impression that should be made by the Word. We must be guarded, for Satan is determined, if possible, to intermingle with religious services his evil influence. Let there be no theatrical display, for this will not help to strengthen belief in the Word of God. Rather, it will divert attention to the human instrument.”—[Selected Messages 2:23, 24](#).

“He [a certain evangelist] should cut off from his meetings everything that has a semblance of theatrical display; for such outward appearances give no strength to the message that he bears. When the Lord can cooperate with him, his work will not need to be done in so expensive a manner. He will not need then to go to so much expense in advertising his meetings. He will not place so much dependence on the musical program. This part of his services is conducted more after the order of a concert in a theater than a song service in a religious meeting.”—[Evangelism, 501](#).

“The minister of Christ should be a man of prayer, a man of piety; cheerful, but never coarse and rough, jesting or frivolous. A spirit of frivolity may be in keeping with the profession of clowns and theatrical actors; but it is altogether beneath the dignity of a man who is chosen to stand between the living and the dead, and to be a mouthpiece for God.”—[Testimonies for the Church 4:320](#).

[20]

Again, in 1910 we are counseled very definitely that we are not to use theatrical methods. There appears in the book *Evangelism*:

“I have a message for those in charge of our work. Do not encourage the men who are to engage in this work to think that they must proclaim the solemn, sacred message in a theatrical style. Not one jot or tittle of anything theatrical is to be brought into our work. God’s cause is to have a sacred, heavenly mold. Let everything connected with the giving of the message for this time bear the divine impress. Let nothing of a theatrical nature be permitted, for this would spoil the sacredness of the work.

“I am instructed that we shall meet with all kinds of experiences and that men will try to bring strange performances into the work of God. We have met such things in many places. In my very first labors, the message was given that all theatrical performances in connection with the preaching of present truth were to be discouraged and forbidden. Men who thought they had a wonderful work to do sought to adopt a strange deportment and manifested oddities in bodily exercise. The light given me was, ‘Give this no sanction.’ These performances, which savored of the theatrical, were to have no place in the proclamation of the solemn messages entrusted to us.

“The enemy will watch closely and will take every advantage of circumstances to degrade the truth by the introduction of undignified demonstrations. None of these demonstrations are to be encouraged. The precious truths given us are to be spoken in all solemnity and with sacred awe.”—[Evangelism](#), 137, 138.

*Arthur L. White*

*Ellen G. White Estate*

*Washington D.C.*

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