

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

ELLEN G. WHITE THE PERSON



ARTHUR L. WHITE

**Ellen G. White the
Person**

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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by Arthur L. White
Taken from *Spectrum*, Spring 1972, p. 7-27

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Editor's Note: Ellen G. White emerges as a person in this article partially from the memory of acquaintances, but primarily from documentary sources, those of her own composing and those of her contemporaries. The memory of the author, a grandson, figures lightly, for he was but a child at her death in 1915. Arthur L. White, however, was closely associated with his father, William C. White, who, after the death of James S. White in 1881, traveled with his mother and assisted her in the publication of her writings.

Ellen G. White the person steps right out of a "Biographical Information Blank" furnished to the General Conference in 1909. We see her—five feet two inches tall, weighing 140 pounds, with complexion rather dark, and with eyes gray and hair gray. Those who knew her earlier would tell us that her hair then was brown and her weight somewhat less than in 1909.

She was married to James S. White on August 30, 1846. He died thirty-five years later. Under children, four, all boys, were listed: Henry Nichols White, "deceased" (he died of pneumonia at the age of sixteen); James Edson White, William Clarence White, and John Herbert White (he lived only three months), also "deceased."

The entry under the item "summary of labor" reads: "From 1845-1852, New England and New York; 1853-1872, east of Mississippi; 1873-1885, California and Northern and Eastern States; 1885-1887, Europe; 1888-1891, California, Michigan, and elsewhere; 1892-1900, Australia and New Zealand; 1901-1909, California, and Southern, Middle, and Eastern States."

She was a Methodist "before accepting present truth." The answer to the question "By what means particularly were you brought into the truth?" is: "Study of the Bible, listening to gospel preachers, and by revelation."

She was born November 26, 1827, in Gorham, Maine, and "attended public school in Portland, Maine, until nine years old; spent short times in private school when twelve years old."

The question, "When, where, and in what capacity did you begin laboring in the cause?" is answered, "In Maine, 1842, laboring for young friends; 1844-1845 began public labors, relating visions, etc."

A simple "X" is the only mark in the two lines allotted for information "If ordained, state when, where, and by whom." Down through the years, in yearbooks and General Conference bulletins,

her name appears with the “Ordained Ministers.” On her periodically issued ministerial credentials the word *ordained* was at times neatly crossed out, at other times standing. Her brethren were faced with a dilemma. Since she was uniquely and unquestionably ordained by God as he had laid his hand upon her, it would be anticlimactic were men to set her apart to the ministry by “the laying on of hands.” At no time did she perform those functions reserved to the ordained minister.

But the two-page biographical blank could hardly reveal the whole story.

Chapter I

What kind of person was this little woman who had three years in school, at the age of seventeen was called to the prophetic office, married, reared a family, wrote and published books, traveled as a speaker and church leader the world over, and died at the age of eighty-seven?

In partial answer we could employ a number of adjectives: cordial, outgoing, resourceful, persevering, sympathetic, economical, discerning, open, trustful, dedicated. We would expect to see reflected in the life of a prophet those qualities, virtues, and characteristics which she extolled and urged the dedicated, joyous Christian to emulate.

In 1909 she was eighty-one years of age and had lived at Elmshaven in northern California for nine years. It was her own house, and she loved it. She believed in home ownership. She and her husband had owned first a little cottage in Battle Creek in which they initially invested \$500; but with additions and accrual in value in early Civil War days, they had seen its market value rise until they could sell it and acquire something a little better and a little more convenient to the publishing house. While never speculating in real estate, yet alert to opportunities as they came, the Whites had owned several properties through the years. Financial gains they had enjoyed had placed in their hands means that could be used in building up the cause of God. [2]

The Elmshaven home in 1909 was surrounded by a vineyard, a garden, and two orchards—one a family orchard the other a 2,000-tree commercial prune orchard. Nearby there was a stable and barn for the horses and cows. Ellen White took an active interest in all of the features of the farm and garden. The flower beds close to the house she especially delighted in. And so it had been at her Sunnyside home in Australia, and before that her Healdsburg home in California (near the college), and the Battle Creek homes. Well into her sixties, she was often an active participant in the

agricultural activities—planting, nurturing, and harvesting the crops that supplemented the food supplies for an ever-large family that included some of her helpers.

Ellen White had a good working knowledge of soils and gardening. As she looked over a piece of land, in her mind she would assign appropriate crops to the different areas. She was conscious of the proper timing of agricultural procedures. She had a good working knowledge of animal husbandry. She could select a good cow or horse. She knew how to feed and treat such animals with affection to gain their fullest cooperation, whether she was milking the cow or driving the team. She abhorred any practice that brought pain or discomfort to animals, and she had firm words of disapproval for anyone who misused a horse or abused a cow.

The home was ever open to visitors, and it was seldom that the Whites did not have guests. As they traveled, they stayed in the homes of the believers; and when these believers came to the centers where the Whites were located, it was but natural that they should stay with them. To run a “free hotel” was a strain on the family, from the standpoint of finances and from that of surrendering the privacy and relaxation a home usually provides, but guests were always welcome, and as a hostess Ellen White was alert to their needs and comforts. James and Ellen were careful, however, to reserve a little wooded place of seclusion to which they could escape for prayer.

Of course under these circumstances, and with her traveling and writing, Ellen White had to have some domestic help. They had no daughters on whom to rely, and so this help usually came from young women who were drawn in as part of the family. But not until her family members were grown and gone did she surrender the close supervision of the day-to-day activities of the home.

Chapter II

Making believe that we are guests of the Whites in Battle Creek, let us observe closely what is going on. Joining the family at the noon meal, we find the food simple and appetizing, but carrying out well the principles set before Ellen White in the visions. Here is a statement in which she describes the circumstances:

I have a well-set table on all occasions. I make no change for visitors, whether believers or unbelievers. I intend never to be surprised by an unreadiness to entertain at my table from one to half a dozen extra who may chance to come in. I have enough simple, healthful food ready to satisfy hunger and nourish the system.... No butter or flesh meats of any kind come on my table. Cake is seldom found there. I generally have an ample supply of fruits, good bread, and vegetables. Our table is always well patronized, and all who partake of the food do well, and improve upon it. All sit down with no epicurean appetite, and eat with a relish the bounties supplied by our Creator. ¹

It had not been easy for her to change her own dietetic habits [3] to this simpler way of living, as she had determined to do a few years earlier when the health reform vision was given to her in 1863. She had enjoyed meat, and she badly missed it; but she had been shown the disadvantage of its use, and she would put into practice in her own life the light God had given to her. When she came to the table, she was unable to relish the simple, meatless meal and excused herself without eating. After the second or third such attempt, she

¹Endnotes Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church 2:487* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1958). (Except 10, 24, 36, 40, and 41, all references that follow are books, letters, and manuscripts by Ellen G. White. EDITOR)

put her hands on her stomach and, addressing it, declared, “You may wait until you can eat bread!”²

While there were times in travel that this program could not be wholly adhered to, Ellen White found that through the last two decades of her life there was no need to compromise, and in 1909 she wrote: “It is reported by some that I have not followed the principles of health reform as I have advocated them with my pen; but I can say that I have been a faithful health reformer. Those who have been members of my family know that this is true.”³

So different from many who are inclined to be fanatical on the subject of food, she was careful to recognize that not all would enjoy and thrive on the same articles of diet. Within the broad outline of healthful nutrition, she found her way and she granted others the same privilege. She explained this in 1904: “Other members of my family do not eat the same things that I do. I do not hold myself up as a criterion for them. I leave each one to follow his own ideas as to what is best for him. I bind no one else’s conscience by my own. One person cannot be a criterion for another in the matter of eating. It is impossible to make one rule for all to follow.” Expanding the matter a little more, she added two specific examples: “Butter is never placed on my table, but if the members of my family choose to use a little butter away from the table, they are at liberty to do so. Our table is set twice a day, but if there are those who desire something to eat in the evening, there is no rule that forbids them from getting it.”⁴

She might have eaten some butter when traveling, but refrained, saying, as reported by a neighbor and close acquaintance, “If I eat a little butter, some people will take it as an excuse to eat a lot of butter.” The absence of butter from her table did not mean that she either called for or followed a fat free diet. She explained: “As for myself, I have settled the butter question. I do not use it. This question should easily be settled in every place where the purest

²[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 484](#) (Takoma Park, Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1946).

³[Testimonies for the Church 9:159](#).

⁴[Letter 127](#) published in [Counsels on Diet and Foods, 491](#).

article cannot be obtained. We have good milk cows, a Jersey and a Holstein. We use cream, and all are satisfied with this.”⁵

In the course of a visit, Ellen White might pick up some knitting or sewing. She grew up in the setting of the textile industry, her father being a hatmaker. On close observation one would see that the materials with which she worked and from which her garments were made were of good quality. She knew how to select good fabrics, and there was no place in her experience for anything shoddy, whether dress goods, suit materials, building materials, or character.

Life was not strained in the White home. There was no place for a long-faced, smileless religion. Instead, religion was a very practical element that entered into every activity, and it was a joyous religion in a joyous home.

Ellen White would join in a hearty laugh at an amusing or awkward situation or a nice turn of words. She was anything but moody or morose. With her inspired insight, and in her own personal struggles, there was sufficient to sadden her heart, but she determined to be cheerful, and this was observed in her smiles. Once she wrote: “Do you ever see me gloomy, desponding, complaining? I have a faith which forbids this.... It is the want of genuine religion that produces gloom, despondency, and sadness.... A hearty, willing service to Jesus produces a sunny religion. Those who follow Christ most closely have not been gloomy.”⁶

In Sweden in the mid-1880s a friend translated for her an amusing little jingle printed on the back of the boxes of a popular brand of matches. Hearing it, she burst into a hearty laugh, and on several occasions she called for a repeated translation, each time by her laugh showing her reaction. Youthful Dores Robinson, who had been employed as one of her copyists, was shocked at his first meal at the White table at her Cooranbong home. Sara McEnterfer, Ellen White’s traveling companion and nurse, offered her the greens, saying, “Mother, here is your horse feed.” Glancing over the food on the table, she quickly retorted, “I don’t know that my horse feed is any worse than your cowpeas!”

[4]

⁵Letter 45, 1903 published in *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, 357.

⁶Manuscript 1, 1867.

Although inclined to feelings of depression, she steadfastly resisted. “I can sympathize with you in your feelings of doubt and perplexity,” she wrote to an acquaintance in 1912, “for there are times when Satan seeks to bring to me the same trouble of mind, and I have to guard myself, that the tempter may not gain the advantage.”⁷ Earlier she declared, “I am determined to bring all the sunshine into my life that I possibly can.”⁸

If our visit to the home were in the early Battle Creek days, we would find quite well-disciplined boys. As a mother, Ellen White endeavored to avoid crises and sought constantly to lead the minds of her children in such a way as to strengthen character and develop willpower. Suitable, simple rewards encouraged obedience and good behavior. The inducements outside the home were often offset by innocent pleasures in the home. Seldom was corporal punishment administered, and then only after a quiet talk and earnest prayer.

Of course problems arose. The boys were not model children. But issues were dealt with promptly and decisively, yet also with restraint: “I never allowed my children to think that they could plague me in their childhood. Never did I allow myself to say a harsh word.... When my spirit was stirred, or when I felt anything like being provoked, I would say, ‘Children, we shall let this rest now; we shall not say anything more about it now. Before you retire, we shall talk it over.’ Having all this time to reflect, by evening they had cooled off, and I could handle them very nicely.”⁹

Having to be away from home much of the time, she kept in close touch with her children by frequent letters; but at best the situation was a difficult one. Not many mothers are called to make such special sacrifices. Some have conjectured that it would have been better had she not married or had she remained childless. But if this were the case, how effective would her counsel to parents have been? She knew a mother’s problems, joys, and sorrows—she knew them well.

⁷Letter 44, 1912, p. 1.

⁸Letter 127, 1903, p. 4.

⁹Manuscript 82, 1901, published in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington, D. C.: Ellen G. White Publications 1954), p. 104. [The book *Messenger to the Remnant* is hereafter noted simply as *Remnant*. EDITOR.]

Chapter III

The Whites knew what affliction and bereavement meant. Two children were buried in the family plot in the Oak Hill cemetery at Battle Creek. But the great loss came when James White died in 1881 at the age of sixty. Were we to crowd into the Battle Creek Tabernacle on the early August afternoon for the funeral—and 2,500 people did—we probably would be a bit surprised during the closing moments of the service to see Ellen White arise from her cot (for she was ill and had been carried to the Tabernacle), walk over to the casket, and then address the audience for ten minutes in a clear strong voice. She expressed her bereavement, reaffirmed her confidence in her Saviour, and declared that with his help she would pick up her burden alone. “My husband has found rest,” she said, turning toward the coffin; “but I have yet to battle. I cannot yet lay off the armor of the Lord. When I fall, let me fall at my post of duty; let me be ready; let me be where I can say as he said, ‘All is well. Jesus is precious.’”¹

Her fortitude was shown in a conversation with her husband’s older brother, John, a Baptist minister, just before the funeral service.

“God help you, my dear sister, God help you on this occasion,” he said.

She replied, “Brother John, you do not know me. The more trying the situation, the more fortitude I possess.”

And she continued:

“I shall give way to no outbursts of grief if my heart break. I serve God not impulsively but intelligently. I have a Saviour who will be to me a very present help in time of trouble. I am a Christian. I know in whom I have believed. He expects from me implicit unwavering

submission. Undue grief is displeasing to God.

[5]

¹In Memoriam; A Sketch of the Last Sickness and Death of Elder James White (Battle Creek, Michigan: Review and Herald Press 1881).

“I take up my appointed cross and will follow the Lord fully. I will not give myself to abandonment or grief. I will not yield to a morbid and melancholy state of feeling. I will not complain or murmur at the providence of God. Jesus is my Saviour. He lives. He will never leave me nor forsake me.”²

Her fortitude came especially into play twelve years later. Having just nicely started her work in Australia, she was stricken with a long-drawn-out, painful ailment, sometimes referred to as neuritis and sometimes as inflammatory rheumatism. Having done all she could do to bring relief, she called in the leading ministers to anoint her and pray for her healing. She fully expected that God’s blessing would free her for the work she had traveled 8,000 miles to accomplish. She was greatly helped by the prayer season, but she was not healed. She traced her thoughts in her diary: “I have done all that I can to follow the Bible directions, and I shall wait for the Lord to work.... I shall hold fast to the assurance then given me: ‘I am your Redeemer; I will heal you.’”³

The healing process was slow and gradual. At the end of eight months of suffering she wrote Ole A. Olsen, president of the General Conference:

When I first found myself in a state of helplessness I deeply regretted having crossed the broad waters. Why was I not in America? Why at such expense was I in this country? Time and again I could have buried my face in the bed quilts and had a good cry. But I did not long indulge in the luxury of tears.

I said to myself, “Ellen G. White, what do you mean? Have you not come to Australia because you felt that it was your duty to go where the conference judged it best for you to go? Has this not been your practice?”

I said, “Yes.”

²Letter 9, 1881.

³Manuscript 19, 1892, published in *Selected Messages 2:235* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1958).

“Then why do you feel almost forsaken and discouraged? Is not this the enemy’s work?”

I said, “I believe it is.”

I dried my tears as quickly as possible and said, “It is enough. I will not look on the dark side any more. Live or die, I commit the keeping of my soul to Him who died for me.”

I then believed that the Lord would do all things well, and during this eight months of helplessness, I have not had any despondency or doubt. I now look at this matter as a part of the Lord’s great plan, for the good of His people here in this country, and for those in America, and for my good. I cannot explain why or how, but I believe it. And I am happy in my affliction. I can trust my heavenly Father. I will not doubt His love. I have an ever watchful guardian day and night, and I will praise the Lord; for His praise is upon my lips because it comes from a heart full of gratitude. ⁴

Thus she lifted herself above suffering with a determination to trust firmly in God and press on in her work.

⁴Letter 18a, 1892, published in [Selected Messages 2:234](#).

Chapter IV

If we were visiting at the White home in Battle Creek before she went to Australia in 1891, she might invite us to accompany her to an auction sale. She had to have some breaks in her pressing work, and she enjoyed attending auctions. She would look over the items to be sold, pick out a good bedstead or table or chair, and make up her mind what she would be willing to pay for each item. When the sale got under way she might be a successful bidder. She did not personally need what she bought, but she would have it sent home to the shed; and when she found a family in need, she could help in a substantial way.

She was sensitive to the needs and suffering of those about her, and from early years the family shared food, clothing, bedding, and money with the destitute. She studied how to help people in a way that would not embarrass or demean them. She would often employ an out-of-work head of the family, or a widow, pointing out how much she needed their help. She had a way of making people feel that they would be doing her a favor by accepting what she had to offer in helping them.

While she was in Australia (in depression years when to accept the Sabbath often meant the loss of employment), her help reached out in many ways. She would buy bolts of dress materials in several textures and colors, and when she found a family in need she would send an attractive dress piece as a serviceable gift. If the woman of the house could not sew, Ellen White might dispatch a secretary and a sewing machine for a day or two, to see that proper garments were made. She gave a number of such dress pieces to several young women in school, helping to fill out their scanty wardrobes. To one she gave a piece of red material, telling the girl that, with her complexion, she should always have a red dress in her wardrobe. "I can't wear red," she said, "but you can, and it will look well on you."

To be able to meet the needs of her own family, to entertain as she was called on to do, and still have something to give to those in

need, called for strict economy and a careful study of what would be bought and what would not be bought. During the stringent days in Rochester, New York, James White and his associates were getting under way with the publication of Adventist literature on their own new printing press. The *Review and Herald* was sent out gratis and supported by donations that were sometimes slow to come in. Unknown to her husband, Ellen White had hung, behind a cupboard door in the kitchen of their rented house, a stocking into which she periodically slipped a few coins carefully saved from the weekly household allowance. She had determined to put away something each week, for she knew that one day there would come an emergency.

And it did. James White came home from the office saying that the shipment of paper needed for the next issue of the *Review* was at the express office, but he did not have the money to pay for the COD charges. Without comment, the eyes of her husband following her, Ellen went to the cupboard, opened the door, and took down the hidden stocking. The eyes of James grew big as she emptied it and counted out money sufficient to meet the emergency expense. The next issue of the *Review* came out on time.

She counseled young housewives, as she did my mother, to save a little something every week, no matter how little. By diligent care they could save something for a financial emergency that was bound to come. All down through the years Ellen White kept an eye on family purchases, saving all she could. “I do not profess to be the owner of any money that comes into my hands,” she wrote in 1895. “I regard it as the Lord’s money for which I must render an account.”¹ This is illustrated by an order to the Pacific Press: “Please pay to the order of _____ \$100.00 (One Hundred Dollars) as a gift from the Lord who has made me His steward of means. Ellen G. White.”² While building her Sunnyside home in Cooranbong, she explained: “I study every pound which I invest in buildings for myself, lest I shall in any way limit the resources which I can invest in the upbuilding of the cause of God. I do not regret that I have

¹Letter 41, 1895, published in *Remnant*, p. 122.

²Letter 28, 1889, published in *Remnant*, p. 122.

done this. We have seen some trying times, but amid all we say, ‘It pays.’”³

To an old friend, Uriah Smith, she once confided: “If I should relate to you the experiences I have had in regard to money matters since I returned home, you would laugh, I know. I can laugh now, but I assure you in the pinch it was no laughing matter.”⁴ On another occasion when money was in short supply she philosophized: “To be restricted for want of means is, as I can testify, a great inconvenience, but prosperity too often leads to self-exaltation.”⁵

Many an Adventist youth was helped through school by Ellen White; and before the days of sustentation, there were aged or infirm workers whom she helped in a time of special need.

³Letter 130, 1897, published in *Remnant*, p. 123.

⁴Letter 19, 1895.

⁵Manuscript 29, 1895, published in *Remnant*, p. 123.

Chapter V

[7]

Ellen White received a salary from the General Conference commensurate with that paid an ordained minister, and in her later years it equaled that paid an officer of the General Conference. At the time of her death this was \$22 per week.

As an author she received a royalty on her books. This fluctuated. Had it been income without expense, she could have become quite well off. But she personally met most of the expense of the operation of her office and the preparation of her books. This called for the employment of several secretaries, and the outgo eventually came to exceed the income. At one time this led her to contemplate dismissing her helpers and ceasing book preparation; but she could not lay aside the responsibility of getting her message before the church and the world. Her alternative was to accept loans from Seventh-day Adventists who were willing to invest in her books.

At the time of her death she was quite heavily in debt. This has been the cause for some criticism, but perhaps no more than if she had died in possession of a great estate. In 1904 she wrote:

Sometimes it has been reported that I am trying to get rich. Some have written to us, inquiring, "Is not Mrs. White worth millions of dollars?" I am glad that I can say, "No." I do not own in this world any place that is free from debt. Why?—Because I see so much missionary work to be done. Under such circumstances, could I hoard money?—No, indeed. I receive royalties from the sale of my books; but nearly all is spent in missionary work.

The head of one of our publishing houses in a distant foreign land, upon hearing recently from others that I was in need of means, sent me a bill of exchange for five hundred dollars; and in the letter accompanying the money, he said that in return for the thousands upon

thousands of dollars royalty that I turned over to their mission field for the translation and distribution of new books and for the support of new missionary enterprises, they regarded the enclosed five hundred dollars as a very small token of their appreciation. They sent this because of their desire to help me in time of special need; but heretofore I have given, for the support of the Lord's cause in foreign lands, all the royalties that come from the sale of my foreign books in Europe; and I intend to return this five hundred dollars as soon as I can free myself from debt. ¹

After mentioning a gift for a thousand dollars to help young men train for the ministry she wrote, "This is how Sister White is becoming rich. I have been laying up my treasure in heaven." ²

The debt on her estate, as she anticipated, was cleared by the sale of assets she left and by royalty income. This amount was not incurred by reckless spending and accruing debts with no provision for their retirement. She was the proprietor of a going business enterprise—one for the Lord, it is true—which called for investment. According to her expectations, it paid itself out. Managing matters in this way left her free to press hard with her literary work while she could care for it.

Royalty income on the White books today goes entirely to the General Conference, which in turn provides an annual budget for support of the office of the Ellen G. White Estate. With all foreign language books excused from royalty obligations, such income meets about one-half the total White Estate budget.

There were times when Ellen White, in attempting to please her brethren or to accommodate their urging, was overpersuaded and yielded her best judgment. Such instances in no way involved the messages she bore; they merely revealed human traits. On one occasion she set out to secure a comfortable chair for her husband during his convalescence from severe stroke. Looking around, she found the chair which she felt exactly met the need, but the price of \$17 seemed a little too high to some of her brethren, and they

¹Manuscript 8, 1904, published in *Remnant*, p. 124.

²Letter 106, 1908, published in *Remnant*, p. 124.

persuaded her to shift her choice to one for \$14 which they assured her would be adequate. But it came woefully short of being the article of furniture that would fill the important place she saw for it in contributing to the recovery of her husband. “Had I the same to do over again,” she wrote, “I would rely upon my own judgment, and purchase a chair costing a few dollars more, and worth double the one I got.”³ [8]

Another instance of overpersuasion that she was to regret occurred when, under pressure from those who were leading in the newly established sanitarium in Battle Creek, she released only a portion of the instruction God had given to her as to that work. At the time she was unable to write out fully what God had revealed to her in vision, for the care of her partially paralyzed husband made very heavy demands on her time and strength. But the brethren insisted that her written message was needed to lead the church members to see the importance of giving financial support to the new enterprise, and she allowed an incomplete presentation to go into print. She explained this in the *Testimonies*: “Under these circumstances I yielded my judgment to that of others and wrote what appeared in No. 11 in regard to the Health Institute, being unable then to give all I had seen. In this I did wrong. I must be allowed to know my own duty better than others can know it for me.”⁴

³Testimonies for the Church 1:594.

⁴Testimonies for the Church 1:563.

Chapter VI

Both her writing and her speaking brought Ellen White before the public. There were large demands for the services of both James and Ellen White at the camp meetings held from year to year in the various states. She developed into an eloquent and much-sought-after public speaker, both inside and outside of Seventh-day Adventist circles.

Her usual schedule included eight, ten, or twelve camp meetings each summer. On invitation she occasionally spoke in other Protestant churches, as she did in the Methodist church in Portland, Oregon. We find her also in the state prison in Oregon addressing the convicts. She spoke at the Sunday afternoon evangelistic street meetings held in the resort town of Calistoga, nine miles from her Elmshaven home. In 1870 she spoke on a Mississippi riverboat on the subject "Heaven, the Reward of the Faithful."

In Battle Creek in 1877 she was invited by a committee of prominent citizens to be the speaker at a mass temperance rally Sunday evening, July 1. The meeting was held in the Michigan Conference camp meeting tent borrowed for the occasion, and an audience of 5,000 gave almost breathless attention as she spoke for ninety minutes. This was her home town. This was where she reared her family and did her shopping.

In those days before the electronic amplifiers, she developed a firm, sustained speaking voice that carried out over the crowd. People who heard her speak thirty-two years later at the General Conference session in Takoma Park reported that those who sat in the front rows in the big tent heard her comfortably and easily. She was just as easily heard by those in the back rows and even beyond the bounds of the tent. Such a speaking voice was one which she developed as she complied with instruction God gave to her in vision.

She once recounted that in her younger days she used to talk too loud, but the Lord showed her that she could not make the proper

impression on people by getting the voice to an unnatural pitch. Christ's manner of speaking was presented to her: "There was a sweet melody in His voice." ¹ She learned to use her abdominal muscles in breathing to support her voice and to avoid straining her vocal chords. Thus she was able to speak for long periods to very large audiences without undue weariness. A report published in 1878 said:

As a speaker, Mrs. White is one of the most successful of the few ladies who have become noteworthy as lecturers, in this country, during the last 20 years. Constant use has so strengthened her vocal organs as to give her voice rare depth and power. Her clearness and strength of articulation are so great that, when speaking in the open air, she has frequently been distinctly heard at the distance of a mile. Her language, though simple, is

always forcible and elegant. When inspired with her subject, she is often marvelously eloquent, holding the largest audiences spellbound for hours without a sign of impatience or weariness.... She has frequently spoken to immense audiences, in the large cities, on her favorite themes, and has always been received with great favor. ² [9]

¹[Evangelism, 670](#) (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1946).

²American Biographical History of Eminent and Self-Made Men of the State of Michigan, Third Congressional District (1878), p. 108, published in *Remnant*, p. 114.

Chapter VII

James White was a publisher and administrator, a man of deep convictions, strong will, and forceful personality. There were characteristics and traits, together with the conviction of a strong call of each to his own work, that could have laid the foundation for friction and conflict between husband and wife. But both were determined that this should not be. For thirty-five years, they worked closely and harmoniously, and they shared a very tender relationship. Evidence of this crops out spontaneously in correspondence between them.

In early October 1860, just three weeks after the birth of their fourth child (a boy who remained unnamed for a month or two), and, in spite of the fact that his wife was suffering from malaria, James left to meet appointments at conferences to be held in the Midwest. Three days after his departure Ellen wrote: “You may be assured I miss your little visits in my room, but the thought you are doing the will of God, helps me to bear the loss of your company.”¹ A few days later she reported her steps toward recovery, announced the weight of “nameless one,” as eleven pounds and three-quarters, and then (after expressing gratitude that she could again take her place in the family), she wrote, “but your place at the dining room table is vacant.”²

On November 19 she wrote: “Dear Husband, the time of your absence is nearly ended. One week more brings you home. We shall all be rejoiced to see you home again.” The letter reports that the “babe is fat and healthy, weighed last Thursday 15 pounds. He promises to be a very rugged boy.” Then the nursing mother added, “I’ll tell you one thing, he is so hearty it will cost you quite a bill to keep me and him.... My appetite is good. Food sets well.”³

Near the close of his life the husband could write, “Marriage marks an important era in the lives of men. ‘Whoso findeth a wife

¹Letter 10, 1860.

²Letter 12a, 1860.

³Letter 14, 1860.

findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord,' is the language of wisdom. [Proverbs 18:22](#).... We were married August 30, 1846, and from that hour unto the present she has been my crown of rejoicing.”⁴

A few weeks after his death, as Ellen White sought a little rest and retirement in a cabin they held as a retreat in the Rocky Mountains, she commented in a letter to her son William: “I miss father more and more. Especially do I feel his loss while here in the mountains. I find it a very different thing being in the mountains with my husband and in the mountains without him. I am fully of the opinion that my life was so entwined or interwoven with my husband’s that it is about impossible for me to be of any great account without him.”⁵

Her understanding of the proper relationship between husband and wife stands out in a letter written to a friend in her early married life: “We women must remember that God has placed us subject to the husband. He is the head and our judgment and views and reasonings must agree with his if possible. If not, the preference in God’s Word is given to the husband where it is not a matter of conscience. We must yield to the head.”⁶ She would not stand in the pulpit to speak at the Sabbath morning worship service if James White was present. He would take the Sabbath morning service, and she would speak in the afternoon. Only when he was stricken with paralysis in 1865 and for some time could not take his place in public work did she depart from this procedure.

It might be easily assumed that in this very tender and close relationship the strong will and firm opinions of James might have influenced Ellen in her writing. But this was not so. They both took great pains to see that her work was not influenced by him. For a short time in the late 1870s when she sensed a threat in this respect, she chose to work for a time in California while her husband carried responsibilities at Battle Creek. She wrote to him:

⁴*Life Sketches. Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience and Extensive Labors of Elder James White, and His Wife, Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, Michigan: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Association 1880), pp. 125-126.

⁵Letter 17, 1881.

⁶Letter 5, 1861.

[10]

Although I miss you very, very much, and love you, yet I feel at present I belong to God to wait for and do His will. I tell you freely it is a great sacrifice to my feelings to have you separated from me as you are, and yet it seems to be that it is as God would have it, and I must be reconciled. It has been hard, so hard.

I wept and prayed and pondered and wept again, and the steady conviction forces itself upon me that it is right as it is. God's work is great. It demands our first attention. Separated as we are, we shall not be influenced by each other but we shall look to God separately and do our work in His fear and to His glory.

⁷

And looking back two decades after her husband's death, she wrote on this question of the possibility of her being influenced and of how she must stand alone:

I have not given anyone man or woman any right to have the least control over my work the Lord has given me to do. Since twenty-one years ago, when I was deprived of my husband by death, I have not had the slightest idea of ever marrying again. Why? Not because God forbade it. No. But to stand alone was the best for me, that no one should suffer with me in carrying forward my work entrusted to me of God. And no one should have a right to influence me in any way in reference to my responsibility and my work in bearing my testimony of encouragement and reproof.

My husband never stood in my way to do this, although I had help and encouragement from him and oft his pity. His sympathy and prayers and tears I have missed so much, so very much. No one can understand this as myself, but my work has to be done. No human power should give the least supposition that I would be influenced in the work God has given me to do in

⁷Letter 32, 1878.

bearing my testimony to those for whom He has given me reproof or encouragement.

I have been alone in this matter, severely alone with all the difficulties and all the trials connected with the work. God alone could help me. The last work that is to be done by me in this world will soon be finished. I must express myself plainly, in a manner, if possible, not to be misunderstood. I have not one person in the world who shall put any message in my mind, or lay one duty upon me ⁸

But the aloneness which she felt so severely never led her to be aloof or to be withdrawn. She engaged in the normal activities of the church, the home, and the community. She took particular pains to speak to children whenever she might meet them.

⁸Manuscript 227, 1902.

Chapter VIII

In the spring and summer Ellen White often worked in the garden with her husband, tending the flowers and cultivating the vegetables. We find them setting out strawberry and raspberry plants. We find her trading roots and plants with neighbors. We find her on shopping trips downtown often accompanied by Adventist neighbors who greatly admired her good judgment in making purchases and valued her practical counsel. We find her busy with her sewing, making clothes for her own family and for neighbors who were in need.

But also, she believed in recreation. Her first writing on this subject points out that “Sabbath-keepers as a people labor too hard without allowing themselves change or periods of rest. Recreation is needful to those who are engaged in physical labor and is still more essential for those whose labor is principally mental.”¹ But she drew a line between “recreation” and “amusement.” One she saw as beneficial, the other at times fraught with peril.

[11] We find her attending a day of recreation planned for the employees and guests of the Battle Creek Sanitarium at nearby Lake Goghuac. She commented on the good midday meal and noted the improvement on the grounds with the addition of swings for the children. She wrote of the people assembling to hear her husband speak “in regard to Colorado and California.” She herself addressed a crowd of 200 on one such occasion.

She always found it easy to relax in the mountains. On several summers she and her husband took working vacations in the Rocky Mountains in the vicinity of Boulder, Colorado. On such occasions she might be seen in the saddle riding along a mountain trail with her husband and relatives or friends, or she might be found stretched out on a blanket or buffalo robe on a grassy spot, where she would read and then doze off in restful sleep. She enjoyed the wild flowers, the rushing streams, the towering rocky cliffs, the lofty trees, the

¹[Testimonies for the Church 1:514.](#)

varicolored sunset. In nature she saw the majestic work of the Creator.

She loved the water and was a pretty good sailor. As a young woman she had often journeyed by coastal boat on trips between Portland, Maine, and Boston or New York City, and on the canal boats of New York state. Later she sailed twice between San Francisco and Portland, Oregon, then across the Atlantic, and later across the Pacific.

On one day dedicated to recreation in northern California in the early days of the Pacific Press, the time was divided between the beach and a sailboat trip. Invited to join the group, she took her helpers and her nieces, for whom she was caring, leaving her writing behind and joining wholeheartedly in the activities. An Adventist captain, owner of a sailboat, entertained the large group by taking them out through the Golden Gate for a trip on the open ocean. In the absence of a favorable wind they were towed by a steam tug through the Golden Gate and to the open sea. Some were seasick. But not Ellen White.

She had just reached the point in her writing on the life of Christ where she was to deal with the stilling of the tempest on Galilee, and the experience on the open ocean made a deep impression. The captain looked at her and commented, "She doesn't say a word to anyone." What she wrote her husband in Battle Creek reveals what was going through her mind:

The waves ran high, and we were tossed up and down so very grandly. I was highly elevated in my feeling, but had no words to say to anyone. It was grand. The spray dashing over us, the watchful captain giving his orders, the ready hands to obey. The wind was blowing strong and I never enjoyed anything so much in my life....

I was filled with awe with my own thoughts. Everything seems so grand on the ocean, the waves running so high. The majesty of God and His works occupied my thoughts. He holds the winds in His hands, He controls the waters.... In the sight of God [we] were mere specks upon the broad, deep waters of the Pacific.... Yet angels

of heaven were sent ...to guard that little sailboat that was careening over the waves. O the wonderful works of God...

How vividly before my mind was the boat with the disciples buffeting the waves. I'm glad I went upon the water. I can write better than before ²

²Letter 5, 1876.

Chapter IX

Perseverance characterized Ellen White from her childhood to the sunset years. It was evident in her earnest labors for the conversion of her teen-age friends when she was a girl. All except one gave their hearts to God.

Perseverance was also evident when her son Willie (twenty-one months old) nearly drowned in a tub of dirty washwater. Cutting the garments off the seemingly lifeless child, she took him out on the front lawn and, against the protests of neighbors, who felt that she was mauling a dead baby, rolled little Willie on the grass until the water gurgled out of his lungs and he finally gasped for breath. His life was saved.

Perseverance was evident in her efforts to reclaim her stricken husband when at the age of forty-four he suffered a paralytic stroke so severe that the doctors said they had never seen a case of this kind make a recovery. But the message from God was that his mind and body could be restored only if the faculties were brought into use. In defiance of the physicians, who counseled that her husband should not exercise either mind or body, she dedicated her time and strength for nearly two years to working toward his restoration. During this period they retired to a little farm, where she devised ingenious means to lead him to engage in daily walks, to harness the horses, to work in the garden, to get the hay in. Depressed, he preferred to be withdrawn from people, but she drew him into positions where he had to converse with others, answer questions, give counsel. [12]

Speaking to a group of medical workers in St. Helena in 1902, she described the final victory:

After eighteen months of constant cooperation with God in the effort to restore my husband to health, I took him home again. Presenting him to his parents, I said, "Father, Mother, here is your son."

“Ellen,” said his mother, “you have no one but God and yourself to thank for this wonderful restoration. Your energies have accomplished it.” After his recovery, my husband lived for a number of years, during which time he did the best work of his life. Did not those added years of usefulness repay me manifold for the eighteen months of painstaking care? ¹

Perseverance manifested itself again in connection with a journey to the Williamsport, Pennsylvania, camp meeting in June 1889, the year of the Johnstown flood. She and Sara McEnterfer left Battle Creek in a pouring rain. The nearer they approached Pennsylvania, the more disturbing became the reports of the devastating flood. At Elmira, New York, they heard that no trains would leave for Williamsport, for bridges were washed out, embankments had crumpled, and the floodwaters were rising, causing destruction and death. They were advised to stop over at a hotel; but when they learned the train was to proceed as far as it could go, they got aboard. After a few miles the train crawled to a halt on a siding. The track ahead was gone. Retreat they could not, for the track was washed out behind them. Food was growing short, and the Sabbath was drawing on. They spent the day in an unoccupied coach.

After the Sabbath they attempted to find anyone with a team who would take them through. Someone suggested that they might get through on a mountain road. One man they approached declared that he wouldn't do it for \$100. Another said that if someone gave him \$1,000 he might consider it. But the two women didn't give up. Finding some Adventists with a team, they proceeded on the mountain road. They decided, “When we should come to an insurmountable obstacle, we would return ...but not before.” ² They prayed for God's protection and pressed on. The wagon broke down in an attempt to pull over fallen trees, but with makeshift repairs they pressed on.

Finally a swollen stream seemed to bring an end to the journey. The bridge was gone, and local bystanders declared the stream could not be forded. But Ellen White replied, “Do what you can for us. We

¹[Selected Messages 2:308.](#)

²Advent Review and Sabbath Herald (July 30, 1889).

must be put across the river.” From the floating debris a raft was built to ferry the wagon. With a swimmer at the bridle, one horse was taken across, and then the other, the animals swimming the stream and finally gaining foothold on the other side. The passengers were then rowed across in a little boat—and they were on their way.

They reached the camp meeting a day late. The camp had been repitched on higher ground, the tents were soaked, the bedding was wet, the clothing was damp, and the food supplies were limited. But Ellen White reported, “We had no disposition to murmur.” She spoke thirteen times, and the people declared it to be the best camp meeting they had ever attended.

Perseverance led to the opening of the new school in Australia on the advertised date. Although the land was being cleared, and the buildings were going up, it was evident from the rate of progress that school would never open on the day announced. Sensing the importance of following the schedule to maintain the morale of the people, Ellen White called an early morning meeting in the church and declared that the school must open on time. She pledged the assistance of all her helpers. For a few days Sara McEnterfer nailed floorboards in the dining hall, the wife of the school principal assisted, and the whole community pitched in with zeal. School opened on time. Ellen White wrote that “you must work with perseverance, constancy, and zeal if you would succeed.”³

[13]

³Testimonies for the Church 4:439.

Chapter X

People enjoyed conversing with Ellen White. She kept abreast of world happenings; she was alert to the historical significance of places she visited on her journeys; she was intensely interested in every facet of the advancement of the cause; and she loved people and was interested in their welfare, physical and spiritual. She conversed freely on the activities in and about the home, the members of the family, the trips to town, the welfare of the animals on the farm, the weather. But she was not one to engage in gossip. In her conversation she watched for opportunities to drop a word that would encourage or help.

Those who visited with her were quick to discern that being favored with the gift of prophecy did not divest her of her natural abilities of reasoning, devising, reading, or communicating. As anyone, she could engage in a discussion of ordinary matters, and neither she nor those she conversed with understood that her words in these circumstances were inspired. The many visions surely had a bearing on her reasoning and decisions, but she was not shorn of the use of her ordinary faculties, nor was she relieved from responsibility for their use.

And also in her letters, those portions dealing with everyday matters carried no special weight of inspiration. She would report on the weather, the happenings in the family, her feelings, and the plans for journeys. She noted that

there are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God. Questions are asked at times that are not upon religious subjects at all, and these questions must be answered. We converse about

houses and lands, trades to be made, and locations for our institutions, their advantages and disadvantages. ¹

But sometimes in her conversation and often in her letters she would present instruction and light given to her by God. Where, then, did she and her contemporaries—and where do we today—draw the line? In the same manuscript just quoted, she established the criterion: the line was drawn between the “common” and the “sacred.” ²

She constantly exercised diligent care to avoid setting forth her own ideas in such a way that they could be taken as being of divine origin. Time and again when she had no light from the Lord in regard to a matter on which she was questioned, she refrained from giving an answer. In 1914, when a doctrinal question was placed before her, she replied, “Please tell my brethren that I have nothing presented before me regarding the circumstances concerning which they write, and I can set before them only that which has been presented to me.” ³

¹Selected Messages 1:39.

²Selected Messages 1:38-39.

³Quoted in C. C. Crisler letter to E. E. Andross, December 8, 1914.

Chapter XI

[14] A noticeable quality of Ellen White was her confidence in people. The special work to which God called her often gave her a knowledge of the inmost character of men and women who made up the church and constituted its working force. At times secret sins known only to those involved were clearly portrayed to her, and she was called on to be the channel through which messages of reproof and correction were given. Such insights could easily lead to a great impairment, or a total loss, of confidence, and arouse suspicion and bring about rejection. But not so with Ellen White. She saw the individual as a fallible human being fighting the battle of life—with the Holy Spirit prompting to high motives, firm purpose, and a righteous life, and with the great adversary endeavoring to undermine, to discourage, to lead into ill-advised moves, errors, and sometimes gross sins. She saw the messages which exposed and reproved sin, calling for a change of life, as omens of God’s grace and love to save discouraged, wayward, or misled souls.

So Ellen White kept before her mind the potentially victorious experience, with the individual walking the streets in the city of God. She treated those with whom she communicated in the light of their “gaining the victory.” She had insights into the experience of strong men who sometimes yielded under temptation—whether in regard to misleading philosophies, their relationship to their fellow men, or a violation of the moral code—and she saw them as succumbing in the great controversy between Christ and his angels and Satan and his angels. But to the close of her life she could still relate herself to the individuals involved with confidence, and at the same time she could encourage confidence in them on the part of others.

Clarence C. Crisler, her leading secretary and the one who in the last months of Ellen White’s life conducted family worship in her home, stated it well to her son William soon after her eighty-seventh birthday:

Even when exceedingly brain-weary, your mother seems to find great comfort in the promises of the Word, and often catches up a quotation and completes it when we begin quoting some familiar scripture.... I do not find her discouraged ...over the general outlook throughout the harvest field where her brethren are laboring. She seems to have strong faith in God's power to overrule, and to bring to pass His eternal purpose through the efforts of those whom He has called to act a part in His great work. She rises above petty criticism, above even the past failures of those who have been reproved, and expresses the conviction, born, apparently, of an innate faith in the church of the living God, that her brethren will remain faithful to the cause they have espoused, and that the Lord will continue with them to the end, and grant them complete victory over every device of the enemy.

Faith in God's power to sustain her through the many weaknesses attendant on old age; faith in the precious promises of God's words; faith in her brethren who bear the burden of the work; faith in the final triumph of the third angel's message, this is the full faith your mother seems to enjoy every day and every hour. This is the faith that fills her heart with joy and peace, even when suffering great physical weakness, and unable to make progress in literary lines. A faith such as this would inspire anyone who could witness it. ¹

This was Ellen White the person—known to her family, to Seventh-day Adventists, and to the world.

¹C. C. Crisler to W. C. White, December 23, 1914, published in [Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 436-437](#) (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1959).