

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

WHY DID ELLEN G. WHITE BORROW?



PAUL A. GORDON

Why Did Ellen G. White Borrow?

Ellen G. White

**Copyright © 2018
Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.**

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](#)
[About the Ellen G. White Estate](#)

End User License Agreement

The viewing, printing or downloading of this book grants you only a limited, nonexclusive and nontransferable license for use solely by you for your own personal use. This license does not permit republication, distribution, assignment, sublicense, sale, preparation of derivative works, or other use. Any unauthorized use of this book terminates the license granted hereby.

Further Information

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

Contents

Information about this Book	i
She Was A Traveler	v
Prophetic Insights	vii
Economy of Revelation	viii
An Avid Reader	xi
As A Writer	xii
Literary Helpers	xxi
As An Editor	xxiii
In Summary	xxv
Abbreviations used:	xxvii

Paul A Gordon
Ellen White Estate

Every human being has certain powers of observation. The five physical senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell enable us to understand the world around us. Prophets are people with these senses. But God also spoke to them in dreams and visions. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White had the prophetic gift. It can also be demonstrated that she had more than average ability to observe and record what she saw and heard. Frequent illustrations in her speaking and writing show this fact.

Because Ellen White quoted not only heavenly messengers, but human writers, some questions have been frequently raised. Why did she occasionally borrow thoughts and words from others? Was it literary dependence? Were they her source, or only convenient aids? How does her use of these and other things such as literary helpers affect her claim to divine inspiration? These questions deserve reasonable answers. We examine a few evidences from her life.

1. She Was A Traveler	1
2. Prophetic Insights	2
3. Economy of Revelation	3
4. An Avid Reader	4
5. As A Writer	5
6. Literary Helpers	10
7. As An Editor	11
8. In Summary	12
9. Abbreviations used:	13

She Was A Traveler

From her diaries we discover that Ellen White was always an interested observer of people and places. These diaries often reveal highly detailed accounts. Traveling in the United States she wrote:

Our curiosity is excited somewhat in seeing mud cabins, adobe houses, and sage brush in abundance ([Letter 18, 1873](#)).

She was, of course, speaking of her own curiosity. She continues:

Fears are expressed of danger because of the wind in crossing the Dale Creek bridge—650 feet long and 126 feet high (*Ibid*).

Her detailed report continues:

We come to the Devil's Slide. There are flat rocks set up like grave stones of nearly equal depth running from the river up the mountainside far above us a quarter of a mile, which mountain is covered with grass and shrubs. The stones are from fifty to two hundred feet high, standing upon their edge as though malleted into the rocky mountain (*Ibid*).

As she traveled across the United States on her way to Europe in 1885, Ellen White took the time to note that she had made this trip “26 times.” After her arrival in Europe she summed up the journey:

I had traveled more than seven thousand miles, written over 200 pages, and spoken thirteen times ([Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists, 162](#)). ¹

[2] While in the Swiss Alps she was captivated by their beauty:

Mountain peaks rise above mountain peaks, the massive curiously splendid rocks that were heaped up by mighty agencies and sculptored by the storms of ages (*Ms 62, 1886*).

Often Ellen White gave detailed descriptions of places where she spoke. One such description is of a meeting hall in Drammen, Norway. She said it was a hall sometimes “used for balls and concerts, about 36 by 80 feet in size.... Six beer tables... served to make a platform, and another table set on top for light stand and pulpit, while steps were made with chairs and stools.”

She concludes her description, probably with a smile:

We doubt if the hall or beer tables were ever put to so good use before ([Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists, 207](#)).

Such illustrations of attention to detail could be multiplied. It is clear that she was a perceptive observer with a very good memory. She was a good tourist. What she saw, she remembered, and often writing of the experience in remarkable detail. Such attention to what she saw obviously was reflected in her other writing.

¹Full titles for all sources used in this study are listed at the close of this article.

Prophetic Insights

Frequently Ellen White recognized people that she had seen in vision. At times, rather startling experiences took place. Once, after hearing only a voice in vision she recognized the voice when she heard the man personally and gave him a message. While preaching, at Bushnell, Michigan, and Washington, New Hampshire, she gave counsel to individuals in her audience she had never seen. Letters were often sent long distances that arrived at exactly the time needed. In all of these instances the counsel was accurate.

When she arrived at Basel, Switzerland in 1885, she recognized the headquarters building from vision. At the printing room she gave counsel to a man recognized from vision. As she planned for expansion of *The Great Controversy* while in Europe, her son tells of an experience often repeated:

Mother's contact with European people had brought to her mind scores of things that had been presented to her in vision during past years, some of them two or three times, and other scenes many times. Her seeing of historic places and her contact with the people refreshed her memory ([Selected Messages 3:438](#)).

He mentions one specific instance:

I was with Mother when we visited Zurich and I well remember how thoroughly her mind was aroused by seeing the old cathedral and the market place, and she spoke of them as they were in the days of Zwingli ([Selected Messages 3:465](#)).

And so there were visions. Yet seeing people and places was important too. Such personal observation helped her to give the counsel that was needed. It also provided a framework at times for her historical writing. [3]

Economy of Revelation

It seems that there is an “economy of revelation” in the experience of prophets. That is to say, the Lord does not tell the prophet what he can discover for himself. The apostle Paul was told by others of a problem in the house of Chloe. Then he sent counsel based on vision. See [1 Corinthians 1:11](#).

Ellen White, too, was not always given all details in vision. She advocated a reform dress suggesting that the skirt should hang about nine inches from the floor. In related counsel she had said that the skirt should reach a little below the top of a ladies’ boot. In still another place she said the skirt should clear the street an inch or two without being lifted by hand. Some Adventist women saw an apparent contradiction, so she dealt with the question:

The proper distance from the bottom of the dress to the floor was not given to me in inches ([The Review and Herald, October 8, 1867](#)).

She then described a vision in which she had seen three groups of women with skirts of varying lengths—too long, too short, and just right. She made a dress like she had seen and wore it. Other Adventist ladies followed her lead. But the question lingered—How many inches from the floor was correct? Her comment was:

When the subject of inches came up, in order to secure uniformity as to the length everywhere, a rule was brought and it was found that the length of our dresses ranged from eight to ten inches from the floor (*Ibid*). (Emphasis supplied.)

Is it surprising that the prophetic messenger went to the aid of a ruler to determine a proper dress length? Not if we know that prophets were left to describe visions in their own words. Ellen

White later dropped her advocacy of this exact style of dress. One style was not to be adopted for all time.

In this same article Ellen White made a familiar statement:

Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation (*Ibid*).

Some who have read these comments have interpreted her to mean that she claimed never to use any human aids in her writing. But we can see she used a rule to find the length of a dress. When she says here that “the words... are my own” she obviously means *words of her own choosing*. At times this clearly includes quoting others.

At another time someone was disturbed because she had written that there were forty rooms in a hospital. He said he had lost confidence in her because there were only thirty-eight rooms. Her reply was: [4]

There has never been revealed to me the exact number of rooms in any of our sanitariums; and the knowledge I have obtained of such things I have gained by inquiring of those who were supposed to know ([Selected Messages 1:38](#)).

Speaking of her writing on the life of Christ and *The Great Controversy*, her son, W C White, says:

The great events occurring in the life of our Lord were presented to her in panoramic scenes as also were the other portions of the *Great Controversy*. In a few of these scenes chronology and geography were clearly presented, but in the greater part of the revelation ... she was left to study the Bible and history, and the writings of men ... to get the chronological and geographical connection ([Selected Messages 3:459, 460](#)).

There clearly was an “economy of revelation.” W C White wrote at another time:

She was left to study the Bible and history to get dates and geographical relations and to perfect her description of details ([Selected Messages 3:462](#)).

An Avid Reader

Ellen White was an avid reader. Her son says she was “a rapid reader,” “read diligently,” was “an interested reader of religious journals,” and sometimes “read aloud” to her husband. He says she was “led to examine books” by impressions from God. Also, her “reading of history refreshed to her mind that which she had seen” in vision. (See [Selected Messages 3:462-465](#).)

Note how W C White describes her selectivity:

The revelations which she had received enabled her to grip subjects regarding which she read in a vigorous way. This enabled her to select and appropriate that which was true and to discard that which was erroneous and doubtful ([Selected Messages 3:462](#)).

With her limited formal education of only three years, she felt a certain lack. Writing about her desires for her own sons’ education, she no doubt reflected how she had learned:

If the moments were employed by the children in study that they spend in reading with no particular object in view of benefiting the mind or of obtaining useful knowledge, very many could obtain a good education without ever entering a school room ([Letter 28, 1871](#)).

Ellen White had still another interesting reading habit. She wanted her young sons to have good reading, so she gleaned stories from magazines that no doubt came to the Battle Creek publishing house. These stories she pasted into scrapbooks that provided many hours of reading for them. [5]

What do we learn from her reading habits? It is evident that her reading aided her in writing, but was not the primary source of her messages.

As A Writer

Ellen White obviously was not isolated from others. She was ever an interested observer. Her writing was large in quantity, with more than 25 million words preserved. This writing was of great variety as well. It included insights into the secret lives of her contemporaries. There was educational counsel, inspirational writing, detailed commentary on Bible doctrines, and practical counsel for the home. But we will concentrate on two areas—health counsel and the controversy theme. These subjects are ones where she apparently did most borrowing, so will best illustrate her use of aids.

1. Health

Ellen White was given several health visions, beginning in 1848. They gradually opened up the important relation that exists between a healthy body and spiritual experience. Her major vision on this subject, given on June 6, 1863, greatly changed her personal habits:

I was astonished at the things shown me in vision. Many things came directly across my own ideas (*Ms 1, 1863; Selected Messages 3:281*).

She determined to write out her message of health *before* she compared it with others:

I did not read any works upon health until I had written *Spiritual Gifts*, Volumes 3 and 4, *Appeal to Mothers*, and had sketched out most of my six numbers of *How to Live* (*The Review and Herald, October 8, 1867; Selected Messages 3:276*).

Then she took a further step:

After I had written my six articles for *How to Live*, I then searched the various works on hygiene, and was surprised to find them so nearly in harmony with what the Lord had revealed to me (*Ibid*).

Finally, after this search through other authors she did the following:

To show this harmony, and to set before my brethren and sisters the subject as brought out by able writers, I determined to publish *How to Live* in which I largely extracted from the works referred to (*Ibid*).

In 1864 James and Ellen White visited a “water cure” institution in Dansville, New York, operated by a Doctor Jackson. He was not an Adventist. They wanted to observe his methods.

The next year the Whites returned to Dansville. James White had suffered a physical breakdown because of overwork. Again [6] Ellen White compared the work of this institution with what she had seen in vision. She found many things that were in agreement. But much that disturbed her. After three months there she left, and wrote the following caution to other Adventists who might consider such a place for treatment:

They have to carry along with them at all times the gospel sieve and sift everything they hear, that they may choose the good and refuse the bad ([Testimonies for the Church 1:490](#)).

She summed up her experience at Dansville as follows:
We did not feel that the three months passed at this institution was in vain. We did not receive all the ideas and sentiments and suggestions advanced, but we did gather many things of value from those who had obtained an experience in health reform (*Ibid*).

She then concluded:

We did not feel that there was any necessity of gathering the chaff with the wheat (*Ms 1, 1867; The Story of Our Health Message, 135*).

Some of the points of disagreement were the following:

The American costume (dress). Ellen White said it was too mannish and immodest. She developed an alternate style earlier noted. (Ibid, 126, 127)

Salt. They called it poison. She said that some salt should be used. (Ibid, 135; and [Counsels on Diet and Foods, 344](#))

Amusements, dancing, card playing, and theater going. These were encouraged, but Ellen White saw dangers. (Ibid, 136)

Prayer was forbidden because it was suggested that too much religion had made some invalids. She believed in prayer for healing. (Ibid, 138)

Complete mental and physical inaction was prescribed for invalids. Ellen White rejected this concept. (*Ibid*)

After leaving Dansville, the Whites went to Rochester, New York, where she had a vision on December 25, 1865, which included the following instruction:

I was shown that we should provide a home for the afflicted and those who wish to learn how to take care of their bodies that they may prevent sickness.... Sabbathkeepers should open a way for those of like precious faith to be benefited without their being under the necessity of expending their means at institutions where their faith and religious principles are endangered ([Testimonies for the Church 1:489, 490](#)).

[7] What did she do? Evaluating, comparing, she saw that everything must be accepted based on vision. It was necessary to use the “gospel sieve.” There was to be no gathering of “the chaff with the wheat.” It is evident that there was no dependency on other health reformers as sources of truth. Some of what they did was accepted, and some rejected—based on what God had shown her.

D E Robinson, one of Ellen White’s secretaries, and author of the book *The Story of Our Health Message*, acknowledges that other health reformers were lecturing and writing in many of the same areas she was, but observed:

That fact was not left for the discovery of critics many years later, who might thereby assume that Mrs White merely copied from others in her advocacy of health principles ([The Story of Our Health Message, 80](#)).

J H Waggoner made the following observation at the time:

We do not profess to be pioneers in the general principles of the health reform. The facts on which this movement is based have been elaborated, in a great measure, by reformers, physicians, and writers on physiology and hygiene, and so may be found scattered through the land. But we do claim that by the method of God's choice it has been more clearly and powerfully unfolded, and is thereby producing an effect which we could not have looked for from any other source.

As mere physiological and hygienic truths, they might be studied by some at their leisure, and by others laid aside as of little consequence, but when placed on a level with the great truths of the third angel's message by the sanction and authority of God's Spirit, and so declared to be the means whereby a weak people may be made strong to overcome, and our diseased bodies cleansed, and fitted for translation, then it comes to us as an essential part of present truth, to be received with the blessing of God, or rejected at our peril ([The Review and Herald, August 7, 1866; The Story of Our Health Message, 79, 80](#)).

Early in her experience as a health reformer, Ellen White said she avoided reading what others had written "lest it should be said that I had received my light upon the subject of health reform from physicians and not from the Lord ([The Review and Herald, October 8, 1867; Selected Messages 3:277](#))."

In her later writing, however, she *purposely* compared what others had written with what she had written. Her health message was a unique program, and not a duplication of any health reformer of her day.

2. *History and the controversy theme*

Ellen White wrote history of several kinds. She recorded the early Advent experience in which she participated. She made detailed commentary on the Bible record. She also traced church history after Bible times, with special focus on the Protestant reformation. Important differences can be noticed between her early and later writing of history.

[8] First, the early history was filled with such phrases as “I saw,” “I was shown,” or “I was carried back,” indicating that her writing was based on visions. The earliest controversy account, written in 1858, contained many such phrases. Written for an Adventist audience, this account is today the latter part of the book *Early Writings*. The first half of this same book is a reproduction of her first book published in 1851. It also contains many of the same phrases.

Second, as Ellen White developed the controversy story into the books we call the “Conflict of the Ages,” which include *The Desire of Ages* and *The Great Controversy*, these phrases disappeared. She did this deliberately. As later readers included many non-Adventists, she did not want such phrases to raise questions or bring confusion to those who were not acquainted with visions.

Third, she did something else. She concentrated in later writing on well-known historical events, both in the Bible and secular history. Marian Davis, her major literary assistant in the preparation of *The Desire of Ages*, makes this point:

Since these books are sent out without explanation as to the authority by which the author speaks, it was thought best to avoid, as far as we could, statements for which the Bible seems to furnish no proof, or which to the ordinary reader appear to contradict the Bible. Better to give the reader what they will accept and profit by than to excite criticism and questioning that will lead them to discredit the whole (Marian Davis letter to Edson White, December 22, 1898).

What is Marian Davis saying? Simply that as *The Desire of Ages* was prepared with a large non-Adventist readership likely, that Ellen White chose to comment only on clear Bible accounts.

The same procedure was followed in *The Great Controversy* in its later editions. When the 1888 edition appeared after her years in Europe, Ellen White wrote an introduction that really serves for the entire expanded controversy story in the five books of the “Conflict of the Ages” series. In this introduction she speaks of her use of historians as follows:

In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject. In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works (*GC* xii).

W C White, her son, supports these comments:

She expressed confidence in the historians from whom she had drawn, but never would consent to the course pursued by a few men who took her writings as a standard and endeavored by the use of them to prove the correctness of one historian as against the correctness of another. From this I gained the impression that the principle use of the passages quoted from historians was not to make a new history, not to correct errors in history, but to use valuable illustrations to make plain important spiritual truths (Letter to L E Froom, February 18, 1932).

[9]

Ellen White, then, commented on historical events that could be clearly substantiated from available accounts. When the 1911

edition of *The Great Controversy* was being prepared, there was some changing of historical references. In a statement approved by Ellen White, her son spoke of what was done:

In a few places where there were statements regarding the papacy which are strongly disputed by Roman Catholics, and which are difficult to prove from accessible histories, the wording of the new edition has been so changed that the statement falls easily within the range of evidence that is readily available (see [Selected Messages 3:434-440](#)).

W C White then quotes her:

Mother has often said: “What I have written regarding the arrogance and assumptions of the papacy is true. Much historical evidence regarding these matters has been designedly destroyed; nevertheless, that the book may be of the greatest benefit to Catholics and others, and that needless controversies may be avoided, it is better to have all statements regarding the assumptions of the pope and the claims of the papacy stated so moderately as to be easily and clearly proved from accepted histories that are within the reach of our ministers and students” (*Ibid*).

As work on the 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy* continued, it was noted that there were discrepancies in some quotations because more than one translation had been used. W C White says:

She [Ellen White] instructed us to verify the quotations, and to correct any inaccuracies found; and where quotations were made from passages that were rendered differently by different translators, to use that translation which was found to be most correct and authentic. (*Ibid*).

In early years, when Ellen White wrote for an Adventist audience, the visions were prominent. In fact, her work in early years

was often referred to by her and others as “the visions.” The visions continued all her life. But her later writing, especially in the controversy story, made more use of other writers. But from beginning to end she did something that other writers could not do. She spoke of the actions of Christ and Satan behind the scenes. Her description of the Bible certainly fits her own experience as a modern prophetic voice:

In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-Merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will ([Prophets and Kings](#), 499, 500).

[10]

In her historical writing, Ellen White clearly did not intend her account to be the standard by which all histories should be judged. After all, she had used *their* accounts to help tell the story. When she was writing *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, she supported an advertisement for a book from which she had quoted often:

The Life of St Paul by Conybeare and Howson I regard as a book of great merit, and one of rare usefulness to the earnest student of the New Testament history ([The Signs of the Times](#), February 22, 1883).

Earlier she recommended L’Aubigne’s *History of the Reformation*, from which she borrowed material for *The Great Controversy*. (See [The Review and Herald](#), December 25, 1882.) An obvious conclusion may be drawn—she had no intention of covering up or hiding her borrowing from others.

Ellen White’s closing comments in *The Great Controversy* introduction sum up her purpose in historical writing:

To unfold the scenes of the great controversy between truth and error; to reveal the wiles of Satan, and the means by which he may be successfully resisted; to present a satisfactory solution of the great problem of evil, shedding such a light upon the origin and final disposition of sin as to make fully manifest the justice and benevolence of God in all His dealings with His creatures; and to show the holy, unchanging nature of His law, is the object of this book ([The Great Controversy, 12](#)).

Literary Helpers

In recognition of her own lack of professional training, Ellen White wrote:

I am not a scholar.... I must see if I cannot become a scholar. I am not a grammarian (*Ms 3, 1873; Selected Messages 3:90*).

Those who heard her speak and worked with her would understand these comments to refer to the *technical* side of her writing, and not to her skills as a presenter of truth. She often held large audiences in rapt attention as she spoke, and her style and beauty of expression are well known by thousands of readers of her books. We know the language was hers from the hundreds of pages of handwritten material preserved. As would be true of any writer, there were times when she wrote hurriedly, or was ill, and the work was not done as carefully as usual, but there is a style that was distinctly hers. She said of those who copied her writing for publication: “They do not change my language. It stands as I write it” (*Letter 61a, 1900; Ibid*).

She referred to Marian Davis as her “bookmaker,” and yet when she had some suggestions on *The Desire of Ages* while it was being prepared in Australia, Ellen White wrote:

[11]

Marian specifies chapters and subjects for me to write upon that I do not see really need to be written upon. I may see more light in them. These I shall not enter upon without [unless] the Lord’s spirit seems to lead me (*Letter 131, 1893; Selected Messages 3:116*).

There were times, however, when Ellen White did accept suggestions from Marian:

Tell her that she has a point about Zedekiah's having his eyes put out. That needs to be more carefully worded—also the rock, when the water flowed ([Letter 38, 1885](#); [Selected Messages 3:121, 122](#)).

Such help was occasionally sought from others. In 1876, while she was preparing *Spirit of Prophecy*, Volume 2, she wrote:

How will it do to read my manuscript to Elders [J H] Waggoner and [J N] Loughborough? If there is any wording of doctrinal points not so clear as might be, he might discern it (Waggoner, I mean) ([Letter 4a, 1876](#); [Selected Messages 3:104](#)).

It is of interest to note that at least three of Ellen White's helpers were shown to her in vision. Two of them, Mary Clough, and Fannie Bolton, were dismissed from their work at God's direction. (See [Selected Messages 3:455-457](#).) Her son, W C White, on the other hand, was shown in vision to be her special helper after her husband, James White, died:

I have several times received instruction that the Lord has given me W C White to be my helper, and that in this work the Lord will give him of His Spirit ([Selected Messages 1:50](#)).

As An Editor

In the previous section we have noted the place that literary helpers filled in the work of Ellen White. As with other areas, we note that they were aids, and not sources for her message. But we look at a final part of her work that is not often emphasized.

It has been suggested by some that Ellen White wrote only in rough form, and helpers did major rewriting of her messages for print. This is just not true. They certainly provided technical help, but even in this area she was a careful final editor of her own work all her life. W C White writes that “she was remarkably acute in detecting any error made by copyists or by copy editors” ([Selected Messages 3:461](#)). While preparing *Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 6, in 1901 she said of her editorial procedures:

I must select the most important matters for the “Testimony” and then look over everything prepared for it, and be my own critic; for I would not be willing to have some things which are all truth to be published; because I fear that some would take advantage of them to hurt others ([Letter 32, 1901](#); [Selected Messages 3:98](#)).

[12]

This same concern for the reader is evident in her preparation of the 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy*:

When I heard that *The Great Controversy* must be re-set, I determined that we would have everything closely examined, to see if the truths it contained were stated in the very best manner, to convince those not of our faith that the Lord had guided and sustained me in the writing of its pages ([Letter 56, 1911](#); [Selected Messages 3:123, 124](#)).

She then refers to her editing:

As a result of the thorough examination by our most experienced workers, some changing in the wording has been proposed. These changes I have carefully examined and approved (*Ibid*).

Speaking of this same book, W C White tells how he personally observed inspiration working in Ellen White's writing:

Mother has never laid claim to verbal inspiration.... If there were verbal inspiration in writing her manuscripts, why should there be on her part the work of addition or adaptation? It is a fact that Mother often takes one of her manuscripts, and goes over it thoughtfully, making additions that develop the thought still further ([Selected Messages 3:437](#)).

Dozens of her manuscripts so marked as she carefully edited them can be seen at the White Estate office. Some of them marked three times and more. In this area as in all others we have considered, Ellen White was the final authority and had the last word in regard to what appeared in print.

In Summary

We have considered the two areas of Ellen White's writing where her quoting or paraphrasing of other writers is largest. The principles we have considered surely would have application to those other subjects where she borrowed considerably less. Was her use of other writers or helpers an act that made her less inspired, or less a prophetic messenger? The evidence would indicate not.

It is clear that Ellen White was open about such use of others, as her introduction to *The Great Controversy* testifies, written almost one hundred years ago. The historians quoted, she said, provided a convenient framework in which to tell what God was doing in history. Their chronologies, and accounts were an aid to the telling of the controversy story. Many events were shown to her in vision, but we cannot know with exact precision which details she saw and which she quoted from the historical record. This was not important, for her purpose was to give God's perspective, not man's.

Her use of the writing of health reformers seems most often to be for comparison with her visions. She saw the necessity of sifting what they said with the "gospel sieve."

[13]

The work of her helpers, too, was secondary. Though Ellen White occasionally lamented her lack of literary skills, that lack seems to be largely a technical one, and not of ability to write beautifully.

Ellen White used authorities in various fields *by design*. There was no intent to deceive as is suggested by the charge of plagiarism. Sometimes she liked their gift of expression. At other times she used sequence or chronology, or paraphrased. But at all times her prime Source was the Lord.

Anyone might discover through research, or even by accident, a health habit that is correct. Ellen White developed a health *message* that was comprehensive, avoiding the extremes of her contemporaries. There are skilled historians, but none of them wrote history

with the prophetic perspective and insights into the purposes of God and Satan as she did.

When a person looks merely at the mechanics of her writing it may seem that some of Ellen White's writing is to be attributed to human sources. But when we search what she has written looking for truth, we hear the voice of God speaking to our hearts. The words may be human and imperfect, but the message is divine, with a power that convicts and changes the life.

Ellen White would be the last to take the glory to herself. She said it as plainly as possible:

I have no special wisdom in myself; I am only an instrument in the Lord's hands to do the work He has set for me to do. The instructions that I have given by pen or voice have been an expression of the light that God has given me ([Testimonies for the Church 5:691](#)).

May, 1981

Abbreviations used:

CD	Counsels on Diet and Foods
GC	The Great Controversy
HS	Historical Sketches
PK	Prophets and Kings
RH	The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald
1SM, etc.	Selected Messages, Volume 1, etc.
ST	The Signs of the Times
1SG, etc.	Spiritual Gifts, Volume 1, etc.
SHM	The Story of Our Health Message
1T, etc.	Testimonies for the Church, Volume 1, etc.