

Adventism's Social Gospel Advocate John Harvey Kellogg

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"The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones," Shakespeare had Marc Antony declaim over the bier of Julius Caesar. Antony's statement can be illustrated, at least in part, in the way in which John Harvey Kellogg is remembered by Seventh-day Adventists. To most, he appears a shadowy figure vaguely connected with the golden days of the Battle Creek Sanitarium and the early development of "health foods." For others, his theological aberrations and organizational controversies have left a tarnished memory and a figure better forgotten. Almost unnoticed today are Kellogg's efforts to launch Seventh-day Adventists on an extensive program for alleviating many of society's social ills.

During the 1890's, just as what historians call the Social Gospel Movement was getting under way, Kellogg developed a project that would utilize Chicago as a laboratory for testing ideas for improving the lot of urban slum dwellers. In harmony with the Adventist program for healthful living, which stresses a vegetarian diet and the use of natural remedies such as water, fresh air, and sunshine, Kellogg's approach to slum problems was simple and practical. It was one that he believed deserved the support of all church people.

One of the most forceful of his statements to this effect was made in an address at Northwestern University on October 11, 1896. Kellogg was speaking before a conference called to consider the problems of Chicago's unemployed, homeless, and destitute. He shared the platform with Jane Addams, C. R. Henderson, pioneer University of Chicago sociologist, C. C. Bonney, chief promoter of the Parliament of Religions at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, and other civic leaders.

"I have no scheme of social reform to propose," Kellogg stated. "I am not sure that I understand the causes of the unfortunate state of things which it is the purpose of this meeting to discuss. But I take it to be the duty of every Christian community to see that every homeless, hungry man is fed." Speaking of the city's down-and-outers, he said: "These men need not only shelter and food, but brotherly kindness, encouragement, and instruction. They need to be taken by the hand and lifted up. The homeless, destitute man is always a sick man. He is sick morally, mentally, and physically. He needs the physical tonic of good food and cleanliness." After touching on the need to bring to such persons the consolation offered by religion, Kellogg went on to suggest that if Chicago's churches would contribute as much to help the poor at home as they did to the cause of foreign missions, "more would be accomplished for the heathen at home than is now being done for the heathen abroad."¹

It was not just the whole family of Christians in general that Kellogg saw as having the responsibility for helping society's unfortunates. He believed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had a special calling along these lines. In the Adventist vocabulary of those days the social services about which Kellogg spoke to the Chicago conference were referred to as "medical missionary work." To a church conference in Battle Creek in 1899 he stated, "I believe the Lord intended *we* should be a medical missionary people."² Several years later, writing to his longtime friend, S. N. Haskell, Kellogg said, "For thirty years I have dreamed that the whole Seventh-day Adventist denomination would sometime become . . . medical missionaries, and that we should be the medical missionary people of the world."³ In another letter he spoke of his desire that Seventh-day Adventists should be "the Good Samaritan to all the world."⁴

Kellogg's desire to be of personal service to the unfortunate and to prepare other Adventists in this work led in 1893 to the establishment of a medical mission on Chicago's near south side. Within several years this had expanded into half a dozen different enterprises in the city, and similar activities were being carried on under the auspices of Seventh-day Adventists in many other urban areas.⁵ Just what inspired Kellogg to begin city mission work is not altogether clear. Probably several experiences combined to point his natural humanitarian instincts in that direction.

The first of these may well have occurred in 1888 at the Minneapolis General Conference session. There Kellogg was profoundly affected by the "righteousness by faith" studies of A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner. Years later Ellen G. White stated, "After the meeting at Minneapolis, Dr.

Kellogg was a converted man, and we all knew it. We could see the converting power of God working in his heart and life.”⁶ It seems likely that this experience may have set Kellogg to thinking of a more definite way in which to bring spiritual and temporal aid to those who needed both.

Shortly thereafter, Kellogg chanced upon a little missionary paper in which George Dowkontt told of his mission activities in New York City. Dowkontt had come to the United States from England around 1880 and had immediately opened a mission in New York similar to one he had conducted in London. It included a medical clinic, a day nursery, and religious services. Up to this time Kellogg had never had an opportunity to see city mission work. Now on a trip to New York in early 1891 he contacted Dowkontt and spent some time observing his activities. He returned to Battle Creek convinced that this was “a most blessed kind of work, and a most fruitful field of labor.”⁷

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Whether or not Kellogg examined other city missions at the same time he visited that of Dowkontt is uncertain. It is known that the next year he spent some time observing the famous Bowery Mission begun by Jerry McCauley and operated at that time by Sam Hadley. Some of his associates in the work he was soon to begin in Chicago felt that it was his visit to the McCauley Mission that led to his real decision to start work for Chicago’s unfortunates.⁸

Kellogg’s interest in welfare work in Chicago was undoubtedly reinforced by his church activities. He was one of the first Adventists actively to promote foreign work; in 1893 he and General Conference President O. A. Olsen discussed the need for practical training for future missionaries and concluded that Chicago would make a good training center.⁹ In after years George Wharton James, the famous journalist and publicist of the American Southwest, was to claim that it was he who first suggested Chicago mission work to Kellogg as early as 1889.¹⁰

Kellogg’s opportunity for beginning in a small way some kind of special work in Chicago came in 1892 through the generosity of a Chicago banker whose daughter had spent some weeks as a patient at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Her health had deteriorated too far for recovery, and she returned to Chicago to die. Her stay in the sanitarium had impressed her, however, and on her deathbed she secured a promise from her father that he would support a sanitarium nurse to work among Chicago’s poor. Arrangements were made with Kellogg to carry out the request, and in 1892 an experienced sanitarium nurse was sent to work with the Chicago Visiting Nurses Association.¹¹ Her reports stirred up interest among sanitarium

personnel, and before long several others joined her in Chicago. Part of this group worked privately among the wealthy people and then contributed a portion of their salaries to support the others who worked gratuitously among the city's poor.¹²

Before Kellogg could begin an extensive work of the kind he envisioned, he had to raise money. Adventists generally were not wealthy, but early in 1893 two relatively new Adventists, Francis and Henry Wessels, whose family lands in South Africa had been the site of a rich diamond strike, informed Kellogg that they had been impressed by his work and were considering giving him a substantial sum of money.

18 What would he do with \$40,000, they asked. His reply was immediate: "I would use it to begin work among Chicago's heathen." This idea met with the brothers' approval, and soon a check for the proffered amount was in Kellogg's hands.¹³

For some time wealthy Chicago patients at Battle Creek had been urging Kellogg to open a branch of the sanitarium in their city, and he now conceived the plan of using the Wessels' gift to establish such a branch and then use the expected profits from the new institution to finance a mission for the destitute. Thus the Wessels' \$40,000 could be made into a kind of endowment, and Chicago's wealthy would indirectly contribute to the welfare of the city's poor.¹⁴ On Kellogg's urging, the 1893 General Conference session set up the Seventh-day Adventist Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association to operate the Chicago work and any similar activities that might result. Kellogg was made president of the association.¹⁵

By May 1, 1893, a suitable building large enough to accommodate seventy patients had been acquired at 26 College Place, and the Chicago Branch Sanitarium was launched. Patronage was good, not only from Chicago residents, but from former Battle Creek patients who had been drawn to Chicago by the World's Fair and had decided to take advantage of sanitarium diet and treatments during their stay.¹⁶ Within a month, prospects were so favorable that Kellogg began plans for launching his work for the unfortunates. At first he considered joining forces with Jane Addams and in fact carried on some preliminary negotiations with her. Miss Addams was afraid, however, that his religious views might obscure the objectives she had in mind; so Kellogg developed his own program.¹⁷

According to his account, Kellogg visited Chicago's police chief and asked to be directed to the "dirtiest and wickedest place" in the city. He was sent to the skid row district at the south end of the Loop.¹⁸ After unsuccessfully canvassing the area for a suitable location, he finally persuaded

Henry Monroe, superintendent of the Pacific Garden Mission, to let him share its building at 98-100 West Van Buren Street, and on Sunday, June 25, 1893, the Chicago Medical Mission was officially opened.¹⁹ It offered a free medical dispensary, free baths, free laundry, an evening school for Chinese, and a visiting nurse service. Religious services were held in cooperation with the Pacific Garden Mission.

The medical dispensary was on the street level and was staffed all day with sanitarium-trained nurses. A doctor from the Branch Sanitarium was on duty for at least two hours a day, and Kellogg himself spent each Sunday at the mission for a number of years. The dispensary provided free obstetrical care for the neighborhood's poor and unemployed. It also offered a diet service, with special foods supplied free by Kellogg's Sanitarium Health Food Company. These were available on a doctor's prescription.

The basement of the mission building housed the free laundry and baths, which some mission workers considered unnecessary accessories. If the gospel were preached, they maintained, it would lead men to clean up of their own accord. Kellogg's thesis, however, was that if the men were cleaned up first, they would be easier to reach with Christian teachings. Since hundreds of Chicago unfortunates had only the clothes they wore and no place to wash, they soon became filthy. It was not long until they came crowding into the mission basement to wash both themselves and their clothes. In connection with the free baths, special sanitarium water treatments and electrical treatments were also dispensed to those who called at the clinic. These were found to be particularly effective for "sobering-up purposes." Three days a week the baths and laundry were reserved for women and children.

During the first month, an average of a hundred men and women a day came to the mission for one or more of its services. The Pacific Garden Mission director told Kellogg, "The moral atmosphere of this community has visibly brightened within the last few days, and it is improving every day, as the result of the influence of your practical presentation of the gospel of cleanliness." Within six months the constant services of ten nurses and doctors were needed to meet the continually increasing patronage. The work was broadened to include a modest free kindergarten for the benefit of working mothers and a series of mothers' meetings for instruction in the physical and moral training of children.²⁰

One of the more interesting features of the mission was the penny lunch counter inaugurated in the fall of 1893. Shortly after the mission opened, Kellogg made a practice of offering a bowl of bean soup with zwieback

crackers for one cent at noon on Sundays. With a larger number of unemployed after the close of the World's Fair, this program was expanded into a daily feature. During the fall and winter months an average of five to six hundred people took advantage of the penny lunch daily, and some days the total went as high as fifteen hundred. The penny lunch was discontinued in the spring of 1894 but was reinstated periodically when funds and personnel were available.²¹

Kellogg insisted that no free meals be given, although he often put up the penny for a destitute man himself. In one instance, he liked to relate, this had far-reaching results. His penny convinced a down-and-outer named Tom Mackey that someone still had faith in him. Mackey attended religious services at the mission, was converted, and immediately launched into mission activities himself. For a time he ran the separate Star of Hope Mission on West Madison Street for Kellogg. Later he went out on his own initiative, first in Chicago and later in several other major cities.

Kellogg even devised a way to help panhandlers resist the temptation to spend their receipts in the local saloons: he sold books of penny tickets to businessmen for distribution to panhandlers, who thus got hot soup and zwieback at the penny lunch counter instead of the price of a cup of coffee.²²

Soon after getting the mission underway, Kellogg set out to provide better clothing for the patrons of the free laundry. Here was a program that could be supported by church members across the country. He advertised for good used garments in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, and in the *Medical Missionary*. Four years after the Chicago Mission was begun, Kellogg reported that more than 200,000 persons had made use of the free laundry and 75,000 of them had been given new clothing as the result of church members' gifts.²³ Kellogg's work in Chicago can thus be seen as the genesis of modern Adventist welfare activities.

By the summer of 1896 it was clear that the mission had outgrown its location. During the first three years of operation the records show that some 38,000 baths and 26,000 other treatments had been given. Nurses connected with the mission had made 9,000 home visits; an estimated 75,000 penny dinners had been served; 17,000 "gospel conversations" had been recorded; and 13,500 tracts had been distributed.²⁴ In the summer of 1896 the mission program was expanded in two major directions. An old church at 42 Custom House Place, which had been converted into a flophouse during the World's Fair, was rescued from this indignity and named the Workingmen's Home. Farther south, at 1926 Wabash Avenue, a five-story



building, which had been acquired the previous year, was converted into the American Medical Missionary College Settlement Building.²⁵

The original free laundry, baths, and dispensary were continued in connection with the Workingmen's Home, where dormitory-style rooms accommodated up to four hundred persons a night. To be eligible for a bed the applicant had to agree to take a bath and have his clothing fumigated. For ten cents a laborer could be assured of a clean bed and nightshirt and, if he checked in early enough, a bowl of soup and crackers as well. In the morning he could get breakfast for an average of five cents. Inflation had caused the penny meals to be advanced in price to a penny per item. The Workingmen's Home also included a reading room and a hall for religious services. The major religious activities, however, were conducted from the Life Boat Mission located not far away at 436 South State Street.²⁶

As the Workingmen's Home was designed to help rehabilitate down-and-outers, a portion of the building was set aside as an industrial department where temporary work for men seeking jobs in the city was provided. By working at either rug or carpet weaving or broommaking, a man could earn enough to meet his expenses at the home until he found other employment. Readers of Adventist journals were soon being requested to ship their old carpets and rugs to the Workingmen's Home and were informed that they might also purchase freshly woven rugs from the same institution.²⁷

The operation of the College Settlement Building resulted from the founding of the American Medical Missionary College by the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association in the summer of 1895. A medical college was a logical extension of the educational work Kellogg had begun soon after he went to the Battle Creek Sanitarium. From the start he had conducted private courses which, according to the customs of the times, were recognized by most schools as fulfilling the first part of a medical course.

In 1884 a training program for nurses had been started at the sanitarium. Four years later it was reorganized on a missionary basis. Only students were accepted who would pledge to uphold the health principles taught at the Sanitarium and agree to work for at least five years after graduation under the direction either of the sanitarium management or of the executive committee of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference.

By 1895 many young Adventists were in training to become physicians. The church even operated a private dormitory in Ann Arbor for those attending the University of Michigan medical school. Kellogg and his associates had become convinced, however, that a different type of medical school was needed, one that would stress rational medicine rather than the exces-

sive use of drugs, one at which the students might acquire practical missionary experience.²⁸

The American Medical Missionary College enrolled forty students in its first class in the fall of 1895. The cost of operating the college was borne jointly by the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association and the Battle Creek Sanitarium. A four-year course was inaugurated. Initial classes were to be taken in Battle Creek, and the last third of the work, which stressed clinical experience, was to be carried on in Chicago. Acceptance in the college was not limited to Seventh-day Adventists, but all students were required to sign a missionary pledge. Only a nominal tuition was charged, and students might earn the cost of board and room by working two or three hours a day at the sanitarium. In the fifteen years of its existence the college became a recognized medical school and graduated about two hundred physicians. After Kellogg broke with Adventist leaders in 1907 over matters of theology and organization, enrollment declined. Wholly dependent on his own resources to finance the college, Kellogg arranged for the merger of AMMC with the University of Illinois medical school.²⁹

The AMMC Settlement Building acquired in 1895 not only provided a dormitory for the medical students while they were in Chicago but served as home base for eight visiting nurses who worked in the low-income residential area surrounding the building. Other activities sponsored at the settlement were a day nursery, a kindergarten, a kitchengarten, a free laundry for women, a school of health for instruction in first aid and home hygiene, and a women's discussion club (which considered correct methods of child training and principles of healthful dress, diet, and cookery). Working out of the Settlement Building, the medical students organized seventy-five clubs among the newsboys and bootblacks of the city. Upon invitation they also began gymnastic and moral instruction for boys being detained in the city jail.³⁰

The AMMC Settlement Building ran a free employment agency and a placement service for orphans and men and women who had been reclaimed from skid row. Medical students engaged in this work became convinced of the need for a mission farm where men could be sent to work and be free from urban temptations. When they so informed Kellogg, he advised them to make it a matter of prayer. Within a week a wealthy patient at the sanitarium, Edward S. Peddicord, approached Kellogg and asked if there were some need in connection with the Chicago work to which he might contribute. Kellogg immediately mentioned the idea of the mission farm, and before the interview was completed, Peddicord offered 160 acres in La Salle

County, Illinois. Peddicord died shortly thereafter, and his heirs sought to reclaim the farm; but eventually the Illinois Supreme Court awarded it to Kellogg to be used in his charitable enterprises.³¹ It has been impossible to ascertain just how many rehabilitated alcoholics and vagrants were employed on the Peddicord farm during the years truck garden produce was raised there, but it is doubtful that it ever accommodated a number anywhere near the four hundred men Kellogg hoped it would support.

The more deeply he became involved in city mission work, the more convinced Kellogg was of its usefulness. During these years he carried on a regular correspondence with Mrs. White, who was then in Australia. In 1897 Kellogg wrote her, "What a pity it seems that of the many thousands of dollars raised by our people there is such a small proportion used in such a way as to really advance the cause of Christ for the relief and saving of sinners."³² The next year he informed her that, under the auspices of the Medical Missionary Association, work similar to that in Chicago, but on a smaller scale, had been begun in Milwaukee; St. Louis; Omaha; Kansas City; Lincoln, Nebraska; Denver; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco; Clinton, Iowa; Terre Haute and Indianapolis, Indiana; Rochester and Buffalo, New York; Nashville; Salt Lake City; and Butte, Montana. And that fall a mission was launched in Brooklyn.³³

In 1898 Kellogg prepared a handbook of nearly a hundred pages on the operation of city medical missions.³⁴ In it he stressed that "the one sole object of the medical mission, as well as of other missions, is the salvation of men, but here the intimate relation of mind and body, of health and morals, is recognized as an important factor requiring careful attention and consideration."³⁵ He stated that the mission was no place to teach theology, but rather a place to emphasize the saving power of Christ. Denominational activities as such were to be kept in the background.³⁶ It was this accent on the nondenominational status of the missions, together with problems of finance, that was to lead to increasing tension between Kellogg and Adventist leaders.

Kellogg's plans to support the Chicago Medical Mission from the earnings of the Branch Sanitarium had proved unsuccessful. There were simply not enough profits. By the spring of 1897 some hundred workers were connected with the various enterprises in Chicago. While approximately nine-tenths of them were students working for board, room, and experience, still \$500 a month was needed to keep the mission activities going.³⁷ In 1894, Kellogg had assured Mrs. White that he intended to make all medical missionary work self-supporting so as not to draw on the limited funds of the

church.³⁸ But by 1897 he was forced to admit that up to that time at least one-half the cost of the Chicago work had been met by the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association,³⁹ which in turn had received its funds largely from solicitations among Seventh-day Adventists. In December 1898 Kellogg wrote Mrs. White that he was at his "wits end to know how to keep the Chicago work going financially." Several years earlier he had indicated a belief that profits of \$100,000 could be realized annually from the health food business to support the medical missionary work. Now he had to confess, "The profits . . . have not yet been sufficient to pay for machinery necessary to manufacture the foods or a place in which to manufacture them, but the prospect is fair that there will be enough outside sales to do this and furnish a little income besides with which to help the various charities which we are trying to promote."⁴⁰

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1895 Kellogg had begun to advocate a special fund-raising program for medical mission work. Through the *Medical Missionary* and the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* he began suggesting to the largely rural Adventist laity that they dedicate a piece of ground to some project of the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association. They were to plant some vegetable or grain and turn over the proceeds from the harvest to the association. Kellogg offered to supply seeds to those who had the land but could not afford the necessary seed. This project, easily recognized for its similarity to the later Sabbath school investment program, grew and was soon designated the Missionary Acre Fund.⁴¹ Kellogg persuaded the General Conference to commit this money to the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association. But three years after the project was started, he complained that some of the local conference presidents, having found the Missionary Acre Fund to be a good producer, were devoting its proceeds to other work. He therefore planned to ask the General Conference to allow the tithe paid by sanitarium employees in Battle Creek to be used for medical missionary work.⁴² This was a rather drastic step, for it was Adventist policy that the tithe be used only for the support of the ministry. No record exists to show that the request was approved.

Such lack of support convinced Kellogg that the Adventist leaders were not in sympathy with his work. To Mrs. White he had written in 1896, "There is a great jealousy of our work on the part of many because the Lord has seemed to prosper it so much, and because it has gotten along without asking for help."⁴³ In fact, of course, the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association was appealing directly to the Adventist membership for financial aid.

Kellogg's social welfare activities alone did not precipitate his break with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but they undoubtedly played a part. Church leaders became more and more convinced that his work, though commendable, would in no special way promote the distinctive doctrinal truths they felt called on to present to the world. On his part, Kellogg came to feel that denominational emphasis on points of difference with other Christians was too great and that the important thing was to follow the work of Jesus in healing the sick, aiding the destitute, and teaching the un-informed.

Around 1899 Kellogg began to bear the primary financial responsibility for the Chicago Medical Mission work himself, through the income from his books, health foods, and inventions. He therefore began to restrict the mission's work to those activities that would provide students of the American Medical Missionary College with the clinical and practical experience he felt necessary. With the end of the college as a separate institution in 1910, the Chicago Medical Mission work was discontinued.⁴⁴

Three years earlier Kellogg had been dropped from membership in the Adventist Church. He had terminated most of his connections with the denomination's farflung home and foreign mission activities before that time. Only the Battle Creek Sanitarium remained firmly under his control.

Kellogg's activities with the Chicago Medical Mission are but an episode in the life of a man who devoted more than seventy years to humanitarian service and to a crusade to make America health conscious. But they also provide an interesting glimpse of what one man interpreted to be a prime mission of the church — they present John Harvey Kellogg as a practitioner of his own interpretation of the social gospel.

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- 5 KELLOGG, The American Medical Missionary College — Its Origins and Development, *Medical Missionary* 15, 54 (August 7, 1906); *ibid.* 3, 123 (June 1893); author's interviews with William S. Sadler, September 22, November 13, 1960. Sadler was director of the Chicago mission for several

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