

My Years with John Harvey Kellogg

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I was closely associated with John Harvey Kellogg from September 1939 to June 1942, serving in the dual capacity of field secretary for his eugenics and genetics organization, the Race Betterment Foundation, and associate editor of his monthly journal, *Good Health*. In the span of those thirty-three months I spent many, many hours with the venerable doctor as he went over the details of his connection with the Seventh-day Adventists, from that day in 1876 when he became medical superintendent of the Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek down to his expulsion from the church thirty-one years later in 1907.

I

In 1907 I was thirteen years old and a seventh-grade student at the Healdsburg, California, Adventist church school, then adjunctive to Healdsburg College. I was being reared by an older sister, Alma E. McKibbin, who was a Bible teacher at the college. We lived in a house belonging to Ellen G. White. She had built a commodious two-story, four-bedroom, four-fireplace home on Powell Avenue at the dead end of Johnson Street in Healdsburg, a mile and a quarter from the north campus of the college. She and her family lived there for some time; but when she left for a long stay in Australia, the house became a rental property, and my sister was the renter. When Mrs. White and her family and helpers returned from Australia, she elected to live near the "health institute" (later St. Helena Sanitarium) forty miles east of Healdsburg, but periodically she came to Healdsburg to speak in the large Adventist church and to visit her property where "Sister McKibbin and her little brother Lonnie" lived.

The house was set on three acres of good soil that had been planted to almond, cherry, pear, and plum trees and an assortment of table grapes. There was also a large plot for vegetable gardening, a barn with stalls for six horses, a shed for carriages, and plenty of room for hay storage. All this Mrs. White had completed before her Australian sojourn. On her return she was most anxious to see how the trees and grapes had grown. The first time she came to visit us, she spent little time in the house but was out and all over those three acres, with a running commentary: "How is the fruit off that Bellflower apple tree? You know Bellflowers are my favorite apple. They don't have that variety in Australia. I can scarcely wait until apple season comes this year and I can have a Bellflower apple to munch on! . . . Has late frost or freeze often killed your Tartarian and Royal Ann cherries?"

I had a flock of forty chickens which were my own property. Mrs. White asked, "How many eggs do you get each day? Do you sell eggs to your neighbors? How much a dozen do you get? To what use do you put your egg money?" When I told her that all the money I earned from the chickens and from hoeing weeds for the neighbors went to pay my tuition at the church school, she patted me on the shoulder and said, "Work, thrift, and responsibility for a boy of your age are all so essential," then said to my sister, "I commend you for teaching your little brother how to work and become responsible and dependable." Mrs. White came to see us several times. I was always elated and awestruck, for my sister had told me many times that Mrs. White was a prophet of God in our time just as Isaiah and Elijah and Nehemiah were God's prophets for their day.

One Sabbath afternoon some of my sister's teaching colleagues came to visit our invalid mother, and discuss the "big news" — the expulsion of Doctor Kellogg from the Seventh-day Adventist church. They and my sister discussed the situation for most of an hour. Finally, Warren E. Howell, secretary of the General Conference Department of Education, said, "Perhaps none of us here this afternoon knows enough of the facts to pass final judgment on Doctor Kellogg, but one thing I am certain of: the General Conference brethren would not have taken such drastic action except they were fully justified in doing so; and in so acting they were in reality doing the will of God, for we all know that the General Conference is one of God's agencies for finishing the work."

All this time I was sitting in the far corner of the living room listening intently. I had no idea of the import of the Kellogg affair, but after Howell's speech I considered the Kellogg matter settled, and settled correctly for all time to come.

In September 1910 I was enrolled in the preparatory school at Pacific Union College (the successor of Healdsburg College). Soon after the fall term began, Arthur G. Daniells, president of the General Conference, spent a weekend at the college, speaking several times. That was the first time I had ever seen or heard a president of the General Conference, and in awe I sat in my seat in the chapel throughout the several sermons, listening with much the same attitude as a devout Roman Catholic would listen to the voice of the holy pontiff. During seven years at PUC I sat at the feet of such dedicated Adventist teachers as Charles W. Irwin, Harry W. Washburn, Eugene W. Farnsworth, Charles C. Lewis, M. Wallace Newton, E. J. Hibbard, and Arthur O. Tait. (Later I was associated with Tait for twenty-one years in the editorship of the *Signs of the Times*.)

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From this background one may correctly conclude that in 1939, when I arrived in Battle Creek to work with Kellogg, I was wary of what the attitudes of Kellogg might be toward the Adventist church.

II

In the nearly three years I was with Kellogg, the total time he spent talking of the sequence of events (from the 1890s down to 1907) which led to "the break" surely reached the 1,000-hour mark. And he had documentation for some of his assertions. For example, the resolution of expulsion from the church has no reference whatever to the alleged heresy of pantheism. He showed me copies of letters from church officials in Battle Creek and Mrs. White in Australia, telling Mrs. White that he had "purchased large buildings" in downtown Chicago and was planning to start another Battle Creek Sanitarium there, whereas the truth was that he had leased a building in Chicago for the purpose of housing, feeding and giving medical care to plus providing evangelism for some of the very poor in Chicago's slums, chronic alcoholics, prostitutes, and "slum bums" in general.

Kellogg's concluding statement at all such seminars with me was, "You see, Baker, I did not leave the denomination; the denomination left me." I never accepted that terse summation a hundred percent, although the longer I lived in Battle Creek, the more I was convinced there were two sides to the 1907 break. And by no means did I accept at face value all of Kellogg's asseverations concerning his onetime relation to the church. I checked around the Battle Creek community, particularly among Adventists there.

For example: Mrs. Baker and I were friends of the Judds and the Steinels. Judd was then first elder of the Tabernacle Church and had been for years, and his wife was, or had been, a leader in most activities of the church and

of Battle Creek Academy. The Steinels were also staunch Adventists and longtime bearers of major responsibilities in the Tabernacle Church. Both Judd and Steinel had been officers of the Battle Creek Sanitarium for most of their lives and were close associates of Doctor Kellogg. The Judds and Steinels, and at least a score of other longtime officers and pillars in the Tabernacle Church, all told us that in their judgment the break of 1907 was basically a personality clash between John Harvey Kellogg and Arthur Grosvenor Daniells, the General Conference president in 1907. They said, in sum: Doctor Kellogg was intellectually the most brilliant man the Adventist church had in his day. (At that time most of the ministers and officials rarely had more than a grammar school education.) He was a creative personality. He had new methods for the healing arts. He wanted to expand the health work. He was aggressive when he had plans he wanted carried out. His thought processes, comprehension, and imagination usually outran those of "the brethren." This made him impatient with those of slower thought and action.

On the other hand, the General Conference officials doted on conformity. To them a nonconformist was unthinkable, and a nonconformist who could and did think faster than they, who had greater visions for a health program than they could imagine at that time, was doubly unthinkable. Hence they said, "Let us be rid of this troubler in Israel." So they did rid themselves of him!

Not only persons long associated with Kellogg in the Battle Creek Sanitarium both before and after the break, but many graduates of Kellogg's medical school, the American Medical Missionary College, felt much sympathy for him, most of them insisting that if a more Christlike spirit had been used in dealing with Kellogg, rather than the spirit of retaliation and vindictiveness, the parting of the ways could have been avoided.

Among AMMC graduates whose devotion to Adventism has never been doubted and who feel "the brethren" were not blameless in the Kellogg affair are Archie W. Truman and Henry W. Vollmer, each in his nineties now. Percy T. Magan, onetime president of the College of Medical Evangelists (with whom I shared the editorship of *Health*, a monthly publication of the Pacific Press), several times summed up his version of the Kellogg affair in his inimitable Irish brevity: "That was a fight between Daniells and Kellogg; no kingdom can have two kings at one time." Magan's cryptic words may tend to oversimplify a very complex situation existing in the early twentieth century, but more people who were on the spot in those troubled days have agreed than disagreed.

III

Seventh-day Adventism stands in great debt to John Harvey Kellogg.

Ellen G. White declared the Adventist health program to be the "right arm of the third angel's message." Who gave this health program a scientific, laboratory, experimental basis? John Harvey Kellogg.

Upon whom did Ellen G. White rely for many of her expositions on healthful living? John Harvey Kellogg. In Battle Creek she often dropped by his office to ask, "Well, doctor, what have you been doing in your laboratory recently? What new light do you have on vegetarianism? Do you have any additional findings on drugless treatment by hydrotherapy?" During the years he was developing his health regimen, Kellogg spent much time explaining it all to Mrs. White. He gave her scores of papers he prepared on health topics. These she used as a basis for much of her writings on health.

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Who was the inventor, discoverer, and developer of many health foods? John Harvey Kellogg. It was in his laboratory that the first dry breakfast cereal, cornflakes, was developed. He pioneered in developing coffee substitutes, meat substitutes, and (as a prime source of protein) peanut butter. The very words *Granola* and *Zwieback* were words coined by Kellogg for two of his well known foods.

Who among Adventists launched the medical missionary idea and program? John Harvey Kellogg. He was the first to advocate the training of medical doctors and nurses who would combine the healing arts with soul-saving. And he did more than advocate it. When he set up his medical missionary center in the Chicago slums, and later the American Medical Missionary College, he practiced what he preached.

Who put the Seventh-day Adventists on the map more than any one person? John Harvey Kellogg. Because of his reputation and influence as a physician and surgeon, because of the efficacy of many of his healing methods, and because of his compelling personality, Kellogg was the first Seventh-day Adventist to have world renown. More people heard about John Harvey Kellogg, Seventh-day Adventist, than ever heard of all the General Conference officials put together up to the "great schism" of 1907.

One may ask, "But what about after the Adventists dropped his name from the church rolls?" Kellogg kept the Sabbath right up to the last Sabbath of his life. His two institutions, one in Michigan and one in Florida, always observed the seventh-day Sabbath. When I was in his employ, he would ask almost every Sunday, "Baker, did you go to church yesterday? What did the preacher talk about? Did you get a blessing from the service?"

I spent three winters with him at his sanitarium at Miami Springs, Florida.

Frequently on Sunday afternoon it was the custom to have a lecture outside on the beautiful grounds. The free lectures were open to the patients and also to the people of the entire Miami area. Inasmuch as his hearing was somewhat impaired during the three winters I was with him, he had me introduce the speakers and preside at the question periods after the lectures.

Kellogg's national and international reputation was so great, even though he was in his ninetieth year, that men and women of distinction were happy to speak for him without charge. He often invited them as his guests at the institution for a week in return for their lectures. The last winter I was with him, Kellogg had such illustrious speakers as these: Will Durant, then in the concluding phases of writing his famous ten-volume *The Story of Civilization*; Sir Wilfred Grenfell, famous Labrador explorer and missionary; Dr. E. Stanley Jones, Methodism's most successful missionary to India; Roger W. Babson, noted economist and a longtime friend and patron of Kellogg; and John L. Lewis, then head of the United Mine Workers.

Every one of the long and varied list of speakers was in the sanitarium when the Sabbath came and things slowed down and closed up. They all knew the reason: Kellogg was a Sabbathkeeper and once a Seventh-day Adventist. Whether in the church or not, Doctor Kellogg kept the faith.

IV

One Sunday morning in Battle Creek after his usual inquiry about my attendance at church on Sabbath, I asked, "And just what did you do all day yesterday, Doctor, if I may ask?"

"In the morning," he replied, "I read from my Bible in John's story of the life of Christ. John, as you know, Baker, was closer to Christ than any other of the twelve. In the afternoon I had Freddie [his masseur and chauffeur] drive me out to the cemetery, for I wanted to pray beside Mrs. White's grave there. After I read from the book of John in the morning, I took down *The Desire of Ages* and read a chapter there which dilates on what I had read from John. You know, don't you, Baker, that Mrs. White's book on the life of Jesus is the greatest ever written?"

By a strange coincidence the grave of Ellen White and the grave of John Harvey Kellogg are not too distant from each other — symbolic perhaps of the fact that Doctor Kellogg and Ellen White were warm friends during her lifetime. More than a quarter of a century after Mrs. White's death in 1915, Kellogg still found comfort in reading from *The Desire of Ages* and praying beside the grave of his longtime friend.