

sense of duty. Her reasons for avoiding flesh foods also were modified.

In a way, it is not strange that Ellen White in 1849 condemned consultation with physicians. Faith healing was at that time her only recommendation. American medicine was in the 1850s at its lowest ebb in quality and Mrs. White seemed to know it. But, by the 1860s, she was articulating a new view, declaring that “some have carried this matter [the prayer of faith] too far, especially those who have been affected with fanaticism.”

Mrs. White’s first published book on health, *An Appeal to Mothers*, was a forceful assault on social impurity with the focus on the baleful effects of masturbation and marital sexual excesses. In it she quoted extensively from contemporary reformers who, along with her, emphasized F. J. V. Broussais’s “vital force” theory. Thereafter, she wrote less and less about sex until her *Ministry of Healing* (1905) was silent on the subject. J. H. Kellogg supplied the lack in his publications.

In *Prophetess of Health*, Numbers also describes the early history of Adventist medical

institutions, including the relationship between church leadership and Dr. J. H. Kellogg. In his discussion of the beginnings of the medical school at Loma Linda, he unfortunately fails to mention the name of Newton Evans, a distinguished pathologist who, more than anyone else, stimulated the faculty of the new school to emphasize scientific character in their work.

It is rumored that this book will be disturbing, even upsetting to many Adventist readers. I would suggest that the book need be disturbing only to those who have come to exalt Ellen White to a pedestal of inerrancy or infallibility, a position she did not claim for herself or even for the Bible writers.

I note in closing that Numbers utilized some of the most competent medical historians in his description of the state of American society and the delineation of the health reform movement in the nineteenth century, particularly Richard Shyrock and John Blake. It is hoped that he will be judged by his performance as a historian of medicine. The author’s thoughtful treatment of this delicate subject may mark the beginning of a new approach to Adventist history.

II. A Biased, Disappointing Book

Review by the Staff of the Ellen G. White Estate

P*rophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, while skillfully written and profusely documented, comes far short of the promise of its broad title. Rather than presenting a full portrayal of Ellen White’s participation in the successful development of the health work of Seventh-day Adventists, the book focuses on limited and sometimes relatively insignificant experiences and episodes. By failing to cite many of the relevant facts in connection with the history which is recounted, the author has

developed his account in such a way as to put Ellen White in an unflattering light and often portrays the views she advocated as ridiculous and having their origins in the teachings of contemporary health reformers.

Throughout its history, the Seventh-day Adventist church has accepted the proposition that Ellen G. White served as a prophetic messenger through whom God communicated His will, counseled and instructed its members, and guided its activities, and in many instances, as in the case of the health work, initiated them.

George I. Butler, longtime president of the General Conference, observed concerning the visions of Ellen White:

The office of the Ellen G. White Estate is at the headquarters of the General Conference in Washington, D.C.

We have found in a long, varied, and in some instances, sad experience the value of their counsel. When we have heeded them, we have prospered. When we have slighted them, we have suffered a great loss.¹

The author of *Prophetess of Health* states that he has “refrained from using divine inspiration as an historical explanation” for Mrs. White’s teachings and activities. He takes the position that Ellen G. White was merely a child of her times, and that her teachings were simply a reflection of the sentiments of contemporary health reformers; and, second, that her thought and teachings showed progression and change during the course of her life.

It is obvious that this book in its most basic argument is a challenge to the generally understood Adventist view of Ellen White and her work. Adventists have long held that she was divinely inspired. They have believed that she received insight and information from heavenly sources, while not denying that she received ideas from her contemporaries, as would any individual. Thus, the crux of the matter is, Did Ellen White receive her health message from the Lord or from earthly sources?

In keeping with the theses of the book, the author has turned from what to Adventists appear as strong and convincing evidences and has frequently based his conclusions on unsupported assumptions and has ignored the positive exhibits. Of this the casual reader is not made aware and thus may stumble into a pitfall which will result in distorted conclusions. If the White Estate, which hosted the author of *Prophetess of Health* when he came to Takoma Park as an accredited member of the faculty of the School of Medicine at Loma Linda University, and which assisted him in his research, could express one earnest desire it is that every reader of *Prophetess of Health* would examine carefully and take into account the whole record before reaching conclusions. As an aid to this, a carefully documented D. E. Robinson book, *The Story of Our Health Message*, published in 1943, but currently available in a paperback printing, will be valuable.

In this review, we will attempt to present a few illustrations giving support to these introductory remarks.

As one approaches the specific historical events which the book discusses, it is important

to keep the major arguments clearly in mind. The book does not stand or fall on one or two errors of fact or interpretation; it stands or falls on whether its major theses are sustained by the overall weight of evidence.

Historical evidence can rarely be tested and proven with the certainty of a scientific experiment in a laboratory. To deal with historical records is to deal with material that is often incomplete and frequently even ambiguous. Nevertheless, the *weight* of evidence can satisfy the open and candid mind on essential issues. Thus, the truth can be approached only by a conscientious and thoughtful investigation of *all* the available evidence on all sides of a question.

Speaking of the relationship between evidence and doubt, Ellen White observed regarding the inspired messages of Scripture that, “While God has given ample evidence for faith, He will never remove all excuse for unbelief. All who look for hooks to hang their doubts upon will find them.”² “God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. . . . All should decide from the weight of evidence.”³ When there appears to be a conflict, the evidence on both sides must be carefully weighed. The reader might well ask himself the following questions: What were the circumstances surrounding each experience? How credible are the witnesses to these events, and were they in a position to observe all that took place? Have I separated assumptions from documentable facts? Finally, because we are here dealing with the work of a professed prophet, one must ask an important theological question as well: Do I have a correct and adequate concept of inspiration?⁴

Ellen White declares that it was on June 6, 1863, at the home of Aaron Hilliard of Otsego, Michigan, that “the great subject of Health Reform was opened before me in vision.”⁵ On the other hand, *Prophetess of Health*, consistent with its thesis that she was a mere child of her times, claims that “by June of 1863 Seventh-day Adventists were already in possession of the main outlines of the health reform message. What they now needed . . . was not additional information, but a sign from God indicating his pleasure.”⁶ We need to look quite carefully at the relationship between Seventh-day Adventists

and health reform prior to June of 1863, and particularly to those persons named as examples—Joseph Bates, J. N. Loughborough, J. N. Andrews and the Kellogg family. What are the facts?

In the fall of 1848, Mrs. White had her first vision touching on health. Tobacco, tea and coffee were to be discarded. Early in 1854, she received another vision pointing to the dangers of rich and greasy foods and to the need for simple cleanliness. Step by step, Adventists were being led toward a more healthful way of living.

Throughout the 1850s and early 1860s, a few scattered Adventists began to adopt bits and pieces of the health regimens advocated by various health reformers of the day. However, there was insufficient interest among Adventist believers to lead to any general acceptance.

Joseph Bates, of course, was the most thorough of Adventist health reformers prior to 1863. However, Bates “did not mention his

“It is important to note that in her statement Ellen White makes a clear distinction between ‘works,’ by which she obviously means ‘books,’ and ‘papers,’ meaning, of course, periodicals or magazines.”

views of proper diet in public at that time nor in private unless interrogated upon the subject.”⁷

The health ideas Loughborough adopted in 1848 were “vague,” and when he developed “slight hemorrhages of the lungs,” he was “advised” to “smoke a pipe” for relief. He couldn’t tolerate a pipe, so adopted cigars instead!⁸

Loughborough did not consider himself to be a strict health reformer until after the vision given Mrs. White in 1863 and the publication of her first writings on health.

The health program in the Kellogg family was also fragmentary. John Harvey Kellogg remembered how as a youngster one of his favorite foods was oxtails richly browned, and how the Kelloggs kept a keg of ale in their cellar for a “weak stomach.”⁹

The J. N. Andrews family offers an excellent example of the incidental Adventist progress toward health reform in those early years. Mrs. Andrews’ diary for the years 1859 through 1864 opens with the announcement that the family had just butchered a pig.¹⁰

In the fall of 1862, the Andrews’ little daughter, Mary, contracted whooping cough. The mother on several occasions wrapped the baby in wet sheets in an apparent attempt to reduce her fever. The local doctor was called in two or three times and administered a hodge-podge of poisons and herbal remedies. Among these were ipecac, nitre and quinine, the latter given as a “tonic.”¹¹ In her desperation, Mrs. Andrews was willing to try anything.

J. N. Andrews pinpoints the time of his family’s adoption of health reform as nine months after Mrs. White’s vision: “It was March 1864, that myself and wife decided to adopt the principles of health reform.”¹²

The book *Prophetess of Health* offers the reader none of the facts cited here which show that along with their first tentative groping for a more healthful way of life, early Adventists continued to use therapy and indulge in practices which most health reformers of the day would have abhorred. Can the reader gain a true picture of the state of Adventist knowledge and practice of health reform when relevant evidence concerning that knowledge and practice is omitted?

What about Ellen White herself? What can we be reasonably certain she knew about health reform prior to the vision of June 6, 1863?

She was herself the mother of four boys and could not have been oblivious to all matters bearing on health. It is probable that Mrs. White was aware of the five or six brief articles touching on health topics published in the *Review* prior to her vision. We have some evidence that the Whites themselves observed certain elementary health practices prior to the 1863 vision.

An article by James Caleb Jackson on diphtheria appeared in the February 17, 1863, issue. The Whites had found it in a rural newspaper and by following its instructions had successfully nursed two of their children through the disease. James White republished Jackson’s suggestions with an editorial note stating that he

“had a good degree of confidence in his [Jackson’s] manner of treating diseases.”¹³

But what could the Whites have learned from the Jackson article? Its allusions to proper diet and dress are very brief. Jackson did mention the importance of fresh air in the sickroom, at least for the diphtheria patient.

Jackson erroneously claimed in his article that diphtheria was not an infectious disease, but he devoted most of the space to water treatments for the malady. Still, the Whites’ understanding of the value of these treatments must have been quite vague. In December 1863, when their Henry contracted pneumonia, they called a local physician. There is no evidence that they were prepared to employ water treatment or indeed did so. They stood helplessly by while their boy died.¹⁴ Yet, *Prophetess of Health* pictures Mrs. White almost a year before this, beginning to share her faith in hydrotherapy “with the fervor of a convert” (p. 47). Is it not strange that she failed to use her supposed “system of medicine” (*ibid.*) to save the life of her own son?

A clear indication of the tentative nature of the Whites’ early knowledge of health reform is the fact that when Willie contracted pneumonia in the early months of 1864, they confined him to a closed, heated room until Mrs. White was instructed in a vision that “he needs air.” This, in spite of the fact that a year earlier James White had written of the importance of fresh air and mentioned that he and his wife slept with their windows open summer and winter. This is also in spite of the fact that Jackson in his article on diphtheria had clearly and pointedly argued the value of “pure atmospheric air” both as a curative and a great preventive. James White at the time of the diphtheria experience had declared that he had a “good degree” of confidence in Jackson’s methods, but when it came down to the crisis with their own son’s suffering from pneumonia, they failed to generalize and apply his advice.

Why? Apparently their understanding of, or acceptance of, his ideas was anything but firm and fixed. Only when instructed in a vision to do so did Mrs. White act to ventilate the sickroom properly. This episode goes far toward supporting her claim that her light came from the Lord, not from physicians.

In summary, it seems very likely that Mrs. White read a half dozen articles on health, most

of them very brief, before her vision of June 6. But her awareness of the full significance of these things, and her practical knowledge of how to apply them in the treatment of illness remained quite vague.

What is the significance of these facts? Do we claim, as believers in the gift of prophecy, that it is only through visions that God leads His people? By no means. Do we claim that Adventists knew nothing about health prior to 1863? No. As early as 1866, J. H. Waggoner declared:

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 means.¹⁵

“The method of God’s choice” was a vision, and the vision was important, Waggoner argues, not merely because it offered information about health reform, but because it helped Adventists sense the vital importance of adopting the principles of health reform.

Even though the health reform vision of 1863 did constitute a “sign from God indicating his pleasure,” as stated in *Prophetess of Health* (p. 81), we cannot conclude that it was merely a confirmation of what Mrs. White already knew and practiced. She wrote of that experience: “I was astonished at the things shown me in vision. Many things came directly across my own ideas.”¹⁶

Rather than saying, as does the book, that by the time of her vision Adventists were in possession of the “main outlines of the health reform message,” it would be more correct to say that *some* of them were in possession of *some* fragments of health reform, even as they continued to ignore other principles of healthful living. The key word in this statement is “message.” A message is a coherent body of information with a purpose. Bits of scattered information, however correct in themselves, are not a message any more than a jumble of printer’s type is a logical sequence of thought expressed on a printed page.

In Ellen White’s vision of June 6, 1863, the

bits of information, that is, the correct principles of healthful living, came together into a message. It was by means of Ellen White's vision that Adventists gained "a systematic and harmonious body of hygienic truths" as J. H. Kellogg later termed it.¹⁷

Very soon after the 1863 vision, as Mrs. White began to speak against drugs and flesh meats, and in favor of water, pure air and proper diet, those who heard her often remarked: "You speak very nearly the opinions taught in the *Laws of Life*, and other publications by Drs. Trall, Jackson and others. Have you read that paper and those works?" "My reply," Mrs. White says, "was that I had not, neither should I read them till I had fully written out my views, lest it should be said that I had received my light upon the subject of health from physicians, and not from the Lord."¹⁸

Prophetess of Health argues concerning this statement that "in her anxiety to appear uninfluenced by any earthly agency . . . Ellen White failed to mention certain pertinent facts" (p. 84). The book points out that she ignored "her reading of Jackson's article on diphtheria" (*ibid.*).

It is important to note that in her statement Ellen White makes a clear distinction between "works," by which she obviously means "books," and "papers," meaning, of course, periodicals or magazines. Indeed, she was quizzed in the latter category only about the *Laws of Life*. Since she had not studied the books written by contemporary health reformers nor did she know of the magazine *Laws of Life* at the time, she answered her questioners accordingly. In the flood of light provided by the vision, any fainter glimmers paled into insignificance in her mind. She did not list in her response every health item the *Review* had published or that she may have read prior to the vision. She gave the message she received in vision. She gave the message because she had received it in vision, and she had received it independently of other sources. This is the substance of her argument.

Prophetess of Health points out that Mrs. White was incorrect in regard to the exact time when James White ordered health books from Dansville (p. 84). We must remember that she

never laid claim to divine guidance or an infallible memory in recalling biographical events. The point that needs to be emphasized is this: It is of little importance when James White ordered the books, so long as Ellen White did not read them until after she had written out her account of her vision. Her main point is that she got her views from the Lord, not from physicians.

Prophetess of Health asserts that the chapter on "Health" in *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4, "reads in places like L. B. Coles" (p. 83). Now, Mrs. White freely acknowledges that sometime after publishing *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4, and sketching out her six articles on "How to Live," she read the works of other health reformers. Thus, her later employment of similar phraseology is an entirely different question from the alleged similarities between her *Spiritual Gifts* chapter and the writings of L. B. Coles. In a footnote, *Prophetess of Health* cites four brief passages from Ellen White's basic chapter on health in *Spiritual Gifts* and lines them up in parallel columns with extracts from L. B. Coles' books (p. 232, 233). How can these seeming similarities be explained?

In the four brief passages which *Prophetess of Health* cites, in the case dealing with physicians and drugs, the statements are so remote from each other in their linguistic patterns that one strains to see any possible literary relationship. The other three passages all deal with tea, coffee, or tobacco—subjects on which Ellen White had received visions as early as 1848 and about which the *Review* and *Herald* had been publishing articles for years. It is plain, therefore, that Ellen White need not have read Coles to have been well acquainted with these arguments years earlier. Mrs. White freely declares:

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. And 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.¹⁹

By this, Ellen White indicates that along with her own articles in each of the six numbers of *How to Live*, published in 1865, there appeared selections from other writers on similar subjects.

Among the writers which she found to be “so nearly in harmony with what the Lord had revealed” to her were Horace Mann and Larkin B. Coles. All of the parallel passages are found in the writings of one or the other of these two men. Some of the very passages from Coles and Mann that have been found to parallel passages in Mrs. White’s *later* writings (1868-1890) were published by Mrs. White herself in her *How to Live* pamphlets. These appeared as separate articles with the authors’ names attached. It is not surprising that since Mrs. White found these men to be “so nearly in harmony” with what the Lord had revealed to her she would occasionally employ their language in later years when writing on the same subjects. The question of the ethics and legality of her procedure is discussed in the critique referred to in a footnote at the end of the article.

To summarize: In 1864, *after* she had published her account of her June 6, 1863, vision, which Mrs. White declares she received not from men but God, in subsequent writings on health she did borrow phraseology from Mann and Coles, both of whom she includes among those health reformers whose views were “nearly in harmony” with what the Lord had revealed to her. But let it be emphasized, according to all evidence found to date, these borrowings began to appear in her writings only *after* the time she freely acknowledges she read from these very writers.

How do these facts relate to Mrs. White’s claims about the source of her writings? Mrs. White has said, for instance:

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.²⁰

What was Mrs. White’s point? Her point was that she had to find her own words to express the thoughts the Holy Spirit impressed upon her mind. The Holy Spirit only rarely dictated the very words she should use. In a few cases, the process of finding the best language to express truths the Spirit had revealed involved using the phraseology of other writers. Thus, for example, when writing on historical topics the words of historians were sometimes used when their state-

ments afforded “a ready and forcible presentation of the subject.”²¹

We now turn to a review of *Prophetess of Health* as a whole. In this review, we shall mention a few positive contributions which the book makes, then offer a further discussion of its weaknesses and shortcomings. There are some praiseworthy aspects to *Prophetess of Health*. The book is written in a clear, readable style.

The third chapter of the book—on the American health reform movement—constitutes a thorough and illuminating treatment of that subject.

It is also possible that the book will spark interest in Ellen White in scholarly circles outside the church as well as lead Adventists to study Ellen White’s life and work and the function of inspiration more carefully and more deeply.

In these areas, then—style, treatment of the health reform movement in chapter three, and as a spur to further study—the book has merit.

What about its weaknesses, its shortcomings? The book promises to be as objective as possible. It sets out “neither to defend nor to damn but simply to understand” (p. ix). Yet, the book has a tendency throughout to present conclusions and the evidence for such conclusions rather than conflicting evidence and various alternative interpretations. The conclusions presented in the book are negative and consistently leave Ellen White in an embarrassing or unfavorable light.

We have already discussed one example of this tendency when we dealt with health reform experiences of early Adventist pioneers. The reader of *Prophetess of Health* sees the evidence for random Adventist adoption of health reform practices, but not for their continuation of practices inconsistent with health reform.

Another example of the omission of significant evidence occurs in the book’s discussion of the circumstances of 1855 under which James White was replaced by Uriah Smith as editor of the *Review*. The book strongly implies that James White was made a “scapegoat” for the church’s lack of progress in the early 1850s because he had shown a low regard for the Spirit of Prophecy by failing to include the visions in the *Review* and, finally, because in 1855 he is

said to have “exploded” and wrote “angrily” (pp. 28, 29), “What has the *Review* to do with Mrs. White’s views? . . . The *Review* for five years has not published one of them.”²²

Some important evidence is clearly omitted from the treatment of this sequence of events in *Prophetess of Health* or else the evidence is misread. In any event, the book’s reconstruction of the episode is misleading.

James White prefaced his remarks by including in that same October 16, 1855, issue of the *Review* four other articles stressing the importance and perpetuity of spiritual gifts.

These ringing affirmations of the place of the prophetic gift in the church were followed by his article, “A Test,” in which he took up the charge that “the *Review* and its conductors make the views of Mrs. White a test of doctrine and Christian fellowship.”

The sequence of these events is of importance. In the August 7, 1855, *Review*, James White asserted that he must be freed from the responsibilities he had been bearing for the *Review*.²³ In the September 4 issue, he removed his name from the editor’s position on the masthead, leaving the space blank. In this same issue, he happily announced that the brethren in Michigan were taking over the responsibilities of the office and that it would be his “duty and privilege” to be free of the office.²⁴ Finally, it was not until the October 16, 1855 issue that James White’s article, “A Test,” appeared in which, according to *Prophetess of Health*, he “exploded” and “angrily” asked: “What has the *Review* to do with Mrs. White’s views?”²⁵ It is clear, then, that his October 16 article could have nothing to do with his retirement from the editorial chair of the *Review*.

To the book’s credit, evidence contradictory to the author’s conclusions is occasionally included in footnotes, but not in the case just mentioned.

Here and there through *Prophetess of Health* unsupported assumptions are set forth. The “whining complaints” (p. 29) from individuals writing “poisonous letters” referred to in the *Review and Herald* of August 7, 1855 are assumed to relate to James White’s position on the visions while the documentary source of the phrase “whining complaints,” both by context

and text, reveals that the criticisms were leveled against his handling of the financial affairs of the office.

Ellen White, supposedly following the lead of Graham and Fowler, is assumed to have held unrealistic views which would limit sexual relationships between husband and wife to a frequency of no more than once a month (pp. 157-159). Not a line is cited from Ellen White in support of this contention, nor can such be found. Ellen White calls upon husbands and wives to avoid excesses, but writes tenderly of the “privilege of the marriage relation.”²⁶ It is unfortunate that a book which is so largely footnoted would make use of unsupported assumptions or frequently employ such terms as “doubtless,” “ostensibly” and “probably” in its interpretation of various events.

In 1851, Ellen White mentioned in a letter to her friends, the Dodges, that “the visions trouble many. They [know] not what to make of them.”²⁷ *Prophetess of Health* speculates on the

“There seems to be an effort to belittle the efforts and action of Ellen White. More importantly, evidence becomes distorted because of the author’s bias on his subject, a bias that tends to unbalance the book.”

possible causes of this “dissatisfaction” over the visions. Two reasons are advanced: Mrs. White’s “changing stand” on the “shut door” and resentment over her “habit of publishing private testimonies revealing . . . secret sins—and names” (p. 28).

Mrs. White’s letter to the Dodges was written before the publication of Ellen White’s *Christian Experience and Views* in which several of the “shut door” passages were omitted. The question is, therefore, how could anyone have yet been puzzled over a “changed” position when the evidence suggestive of such a change had not been produced? As for the second reason, it was years later—in the late 1850s—that Ellen White published any testimonies containing even the initials of those to whom counsel was directed.

Often a condescending tone can be detected throughout the book, and at times there seems to

be an effort to belittle the efforts and action of Ellen White and her fellow believers. But more importantly, evidence becomes distorted because of the author's bias on his subject, a bias that tends to unbalance the book. Why, for instance, is half a chapter devoted to the most minute details of Ellen White's efforts to encourage dress reform and only a few sentences to her role in the establishment of health care facilities like Loma Linda University? Loma Linda is one of her most enduring and successful ventures, while dress reform, as Mrs. White said, was "among the minor things that were to make up the great reform in health."²⁸

This bias is again shown in the book's emphasis on the distasteful, problematic, controversial and negative. Ellen White's rebuke of the amusements at the Western Health Reform Institute is reported, but not her positive counsel on recreation given during this same period in a discussion of the same issues.

There is one point where the author not only misread completely the evidence, but also engages in some speculation for which it is difficult to see any basis at all. It is claimed that Mrs. White vetoed a chance to obtain the manufacturing rights to Corn Flakes and that this decision cost the church a fortune.

In 1907, after the Battle Creek Toasted Corn Flake Company was incorporated and was no longer a denominational enterprise, Dr. J. H. Kellogg and his brother, Will offered the successful managers of the Sanitarium Health Food Company at St. Helena, California, the chance to buy the West Coast rights to manufacture Corn Flakes. The offer was made, however, to the men themselves as private businessmen, not to the denomination's food company at St. Helena. Indeed, the offer was extended on the specific and firm condition that it would *not* be a denominational enterprise or in any way connected with the denomination. Correspondence at the time makes these conditions very plain.²⁹ So Mrs. White could not have vetoed a chance for the denomination to acquire the rights to Corn Flakes because such a chance was never offered.

Mention has been made of the thrust of the book. The point that Ellen White was a child of her times has been discussed. The second point is that there was a progression and change in Ellen White's counsels over a period of time. We

recognize that there were additions to the content of her teaching through the years, and shifts in emphasis. We attribute this to the fact that God was leading His people along, step by step, as they accepted and lived up to the counsel. Furthermore, as conditions in society changed so as to make some counsels more or less timely than they had formerly been, emphasis changed. As Mrs. White herself said concerning the testimonies, "nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered."³⁰

By now some readers may be thinking: "True enough, *Prophetess of Health* does distort, but haven't some Adventist writers been guilty of distortion in their efforts to create a favorable image of Ellen White? Haven't they too sometimes shied away from introducing contradictory and qualifying evidence? Haven't they, in their zeal to extol and praise her, often oversimplified and overgeneralized?"

This is a tendency that cannot be denied. We could offer extenuations for this tendency, but our effort should be constantly to improve the quality of our writing, not merely to defend or explain what has already been done. We need to take an approach which will allow us candor without condescension, affirmation without distortion.

Seen in this light, this book is not so much a threat as it is a disappointment. One could have hoped that such a book, drawing on a wide array of sources, would have produced a multi-dimensional portrait that would enable us better to understand Ellen White's role as a "prophetess of health." Instead, we are left wondering how anyone so unoriginal, contradictory and vacillating as the book pictures Ellen White to have been could possibly have inspired the confidence she inspired, or met with the success she enjoyed. The attenuated image of Ellen White that emerges from the pages of this book has no reality in the history of the church.

Finally, this book fails to account for Mrs. White's successes as a health reformer and as a founder of the church's medical work. If this portrait of Ellen White is to be credited, then the success of the medical work Ellen White founded and guided can only be attributed to the gullibility of those who have believed in her. And yet, the demonstrably better health that

those followers enjoy today testifies to something other than their gullibility.

Ellen White's counsel has changed the smoking, drinking and eating habits of several million people, and changed them *every day*. Ellen White's influence, rooted in valid Christian experience, is doing daily what the combined influence of almost the entire modern medical establishment is unable to do—it is changing people's health habits and saving people's lives.

Why did people follow Ellen White? Why did people believe in her? How is it that she was so successful?

True, her remarkable success is not, in and of itself, an evidence of providential guidance. After all, other American religious leaders, some of whom claimed direct divine inspiration, have been successful. But the fruits of a prophet's labors should be *one* evidence of divine guidance. And, even in a purely historical sense a book that really portrayed the true image of Ellen White, a book that really attempts to "understand" her, would need to explain the historical dynamics of her success—something which *Prophetess of Health* fails to do.

The book has demonstrated that the task of establishing Adventist health work was more difficult and controversial than some have believed. *Prophetess of Health* has shown that Ellen White

did use the language and many of the concepts of her times. But she did more than that, much more. In the end, the reader of *Prophetess of Health* has the feeling that although the author tried neither to defend nor to damn, but to understand, he had not understood nor has he helped us to understand.

While it is not our duty to pass judgment on individuals or to impugn their motives and integrity, it is our duty to stand in defense of truth and to remind the readers of Ellen White's prediction that "the very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' (Proverbs 29:18)."³¹ Can it be doubted that the enemy of souls will use such a book to accomplish this very work? "Satan will work ingeniously," the servant of the Lord tells us, "to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony."³¹ For whatever purpose the author may have intended that the book should serve, it will no doubt be used by some to undermine confidence in the work of Ellen White.

This book must nevertheless be taken as an opportunity to increase our understanding of our history and our ability to deal with such challenges with appropriate skill, firmness, equanimity and knowledge.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. George I. Butler, "The Visions, How They Are Held by S. D. Adventists" *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, vol. 60 (Aug. 14, 1883) pp. 11, 12. Hereinafter abbreviated *Review and Herald*.

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Note: This review is a condensation of a 24-page double-column document titled, "A Discussion and Review of *Prophetess of Health*," available on request from the Ellen G. White Estate, 6840 Eastern Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20012.

A more lengthy chapter-by-chapter critique may be obtained on request for \$4.00—the cost of duplicating and mailing. In this critique a more detailed analysis as well as much additional documentation will be found. Items dealt with in the full critique include: Ellen White's brush with phrenology, her own practice in the area of diet, her teachings on dress, her discussion of masturbation, Mrs. White's visions, the evaluation of the hostile witnesses, etc., and a host of missing exhibits.

Copies may be secured at the White Estate offices in Washington, D.C., or Berrien Springs, Michigan, or at the Ellen G. White-SDA Research Centers at Loma Linda University, California; Newbold College, England; or Avondale College, Australia. Mail orders in the United States should be directed to the Ellen G. White Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20012.

III. Ellen White's Emotional Life

Review by Fawn M. Brodie

Ellen G. White is described in Ronald L. Numbers' new biography as one of the four 19th century founders of a major American religious sect, the others being Joseph Smith (Mormonism), Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science), and Charles Taze Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses). But it is William Miller who is accorded the role of founder of the Adventist movement in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*; Mrs. White is not mentioned at all. It will come as a surprise to readers of Professor Numbers' biography who have

known little about the Seventh-day Adventist Church to learn that it was indeed this tiny, energetic, resourceful mystic who rescued the Adventist movement—after the staggering disappointments of 1844 when Jesus failed to come as Miller had promised—and welded the scattered fragments into a vital religiomedical organization which still uses her "revelations" as fundamental doctrine.

Professor Numbers, historian at the University of Wisconsin, began his research for this biography at Loma Linda University. He is an Adventist. He writes, however, not as a hagiographer but as a professional intent on a dispassionate examination of the sources of Ellen White's ideas. "This, is, I believe," he writes, "the first book about her that seeks neither to

Fawn M. Brodie teaches history at the University of California at Los Angeles. Among her books are *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*, and a biography of the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith entitled *No Man Knows My History*.