

There were obviously excellent aspects to her health reform program. At a time when doctors regularly killed patients with their bleeding, purging and quack medicines, Ellen White, like many other health reformers, did a public service by persuading people to abandon all drugs, take regular baths, give up alcohol, tobacco and a fatty diet. Her water cure was not original, but was adapted, like her vegetarianism, from popular practices of her time.

Hydrotherapy, diet reform and temperance are not, however, substitutes for a healthy sex life. Her personal inhibitions, her dislike of "sexual excess" in marriage, common enough among women of her own day, unfortunately had a pernicious influence on her writings. In seeking solutions to her private illnesses and psychic conflicts, she used the device of "the revelation," thus generalizing from herself to mankind. The fact that the whole process was an unconscious one, and that she was genuinely self-deluded, did not prevent solutions which were not solutions at all from being formalized and solidified into dogma. Her followers, also seeking solutions for their own ailments or unhappiness, found either the necessary faith

required for their own self-healing, or else sufficient temporary surcease from clinical symptoms to insure their fidelity to the Adventist cause.

To many readers, the pathology in Ellen White will be apparent without further elucidation. But Professor Numbers never labels her as either pathological or as self-deluded. He is content to describe her, and to give us the background of frenetic health reform which provided her with nurture as important as that of her supporting mother. We do see her at her most absurd—when she attacks the long skirts "sweeping up the filth of the streets" as "devised by Satan," and when she warns that anyone wearing hairpieces risks "horrible disease and premature death" (pp. 146, 148). But we also see a compulsively dedicated woman with formidable administrative skills and a sense of mission that brought remarkable consequences. When one reads about her success in starting a worldwide system of medical missions and hospitals, and the continuing services performed by the Adventist groups, one is astonished again that it took so long for Ellen G. White to be written about by an able and dispassionate biographer.

IV. The State of A Church's Soul

Review by Ernest R. Sandeen

Ronald L. Numbers' biographical essay is at the same time a valuable work of social history, a moving personal document and a report on the state of one American denomination's soul. As a historian of American social and religious history, I have appreciated this chance to share in another historian's discoveries. Ronald Numbers' account of Ellen White conforms to the highest canons of historical craftsmanship, and his narrative seems free of special pleading or

bias. His is a mature work of great value outside Adventist circles.

All of the elements which constituted Ellen White's historical environment have been familiar to historians of that epoch—millenarian expectations, health reform faddism, Graham diet, sexual theories, water cures, even direct visions and revelations. It is fascinating, however, to see how each of these elements combined in Mrs. White's own history and how she reacted to them. Numbers does violence neither to Mrs. White or to the general forces at work in the midnineteenth century, but allows us to see Ellen White's own completely individual and idiosyncratic reaction to these forces without depicting her as a puppet or the events as a card-

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board background. If the Marxist historian has tended to fall victim to the first kind of historical error (materialistic determinism), the Christian historian, especially the historian of denominational leaders, has often allowed himself to portray his subject in such heroic proportions that historical conditions appear to possess only superficial relevance and play no real role in controlling or conditioning the person.

How can the historically conditioned also be divine truth? This is obviously the point at which the historian provokes a response from the believer. When the historian and the believer are the same person, the writing of a book can become an enterprise fraught with tension and, occasionally, agony.

One must be an obtuse reader, indeed, not to see this tension and even feel this agony in the pages of Numbers' book. As Van Harvey has argued, the historian and the believer can seldom inhabit the same skin in tranquillity and harmony; the believer's traditional response is trust while the historian's is skepticism. One often regrets the passing of those days (whether medieval or infantile) when trust alone was sufficient, but we would be denying our own historical present, ironically enough, if we were to attempt to escape this dilemma. Whatever the personal pain it produces in the historian, it does produce good historical scholarship. It almost seems like a historiographical law that the best scholarship is produced by the skeptical believer. That Numbers cares deeply about the history of Ellen G. White is apparent on almost every page.

He feels strongly about the importance of his subject, as every good historian must. But he has not accepted tradition or someone else's word concerning the career and teachings of this amazing woman. He has discovered things that appear to shock and surprise him, but he has had the courage to state them clearly.

The question, then, is passed on to the present-day followers of Ellen G. White. What will the Seventh-day Adventists do with this account of their nineteenth-century leader? *Time* has reported the existence of an official response, a kind of rebuttal to Numbers' volume. This is an understandable reaction, of course, but not one which I find characteristic of Adventist history or of the Adventists whom I have known. Numbers, in the last pages of his work, compared Ellen White with Mary Baker Eddy. The similarities are striking, but Numbers was quite right in emphasizing the differences—in the two women and in the denominations which they led. The Christian Scientists, since Mrs. Eddy's death, have labored unswervingly to protect Mrs. Eddy from historical scrutiny and preserve her solely as an object of belief. This has had the effect of creating a series of violently partisan views of Mrs. Eddy and has ultimately done great harm not only to the cause of historical scholarship but also, in my judgment, to the influence of the denomination. Numbers' biography of Ellen G. White has helped the Adventists avoid this trap. He has given Adventists the freedom to struggle with the real problem—what is the truth today for us?

V. On Writing and Reading History

Review by Richard Schwarz

It is sometimes disturbing to the average reader to find that writers of history often differ widely in their portrayal of the same series of past events. Such readers may quickly assume

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that one or the other of the historians in conflict is ignorant, dishonest or both. In actuality, he may be neither.

The lay reader's misconceptions arise largely from a misunderstanding in two basic areas: 1) the nature of historical facts and 2) the methods used in putting these facts together. Sadly, too often we historians have been guilty of contributing to our reader's misunderstanding, instead of