

Ellen Gould Harmon to Age Sixteen

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II. Introduction

B. Three Facts about Ellen's Spiritual Experience

1. Before her accident at age 9, there was apparently nothing about her to suggest any extraordinary spiritual potential.

2. Her accident precipitated a spiritual struggle that lasted for 6 years.

3. In order to find peace, she had to wrestle with and settle for herself, all the conversion/discipleship issues that every Christian faces.

Therefore a study of her first 16 years not only prepares us to better read her writings, but also provides help and insights into our own spiritual journey.

II. Birth and Death Dates

1. Born: Nov. 26, 1827, at Gorham, Maine (just west of Portland)

2. Died: July 16, 1915 (7-16-15), at Elmshaven, near St. Helena, California

III. Racial Ancestry

A. Data Supporting the Possibility of Mixed Racial Heritage.

1. Her facial features.

2. Her complexion, "dark," according to her response on a General Conference Biographical Information Blank, 1909.

3. There are Goulds known to be of African and European heritage.

4. There are Harmons known to be of European, African, and Native American heritage.

B. Limitations of the Evidence

1. The known descendants of the African American Goulds do not include the names of Eunice Gould-Harmon's parents or grandparents.

2. A definitive study done by a professional genealogist for the White Estate, May 8, 2002, found no ancestral links between Ellen Harmon's parents and the known families of African American Goulds and Harmons. It confirmed the previous study of 1983 tracing the Gould and Harmon ancestors of Ellen White to immigrants from England.

C. Source: Craig Newborn, Director of White Estate Research Center, Oakwood College, "Ellen Gould Harmon White's Genealogy: A Colorful Subject," paper presented at the First International Conference on Ellen G. White and Adventist History, Battle Creek, Michigan, May 16, 2002. See also Charles E. Dudley, Sr., *The Genealogy of Ellen Gould Harmon White* (Nashville: Dudley Publishing, [1999]), and White Estate genealogical records.

IV. The Harmon Family

A. Parents: Robert F. Harmon Sr. (1786-1866), farmer and hat maker
Eunice Gould Harmon (1787-1863)

B. Children: 6 daughters and 2 sons

1. Caroline Harmon Clough (1812-1883), married a Methodist minister.

2. Harriet Harmon McCann (1814-before 1883), also a minister's wife

3. John B. Harmon (1815-1883), businessman
4. Mary Plummer Harmon Foss (1823-1912), married Samuel Foss, brother to Hagen Foss, making Ellen G. White brother-in-law (x2) to Hazen Foss.
5. Sarah Harmon Belden (1822-1868), married Stephen T. Belden. Their son, Franklin E. Belden, wrote 600-800 gospel songs and hymns. Thus E. G. White was aunt to F. E. Belden. Sarah died of tuberculosis.
6. Robert F. Harmon Jr. (1825-1853), died of tuberculosis at age 27. He became SDA shortly before his death.
7. Elizabeth ("Lizzie") N. Harmon Bangs (1827-1891), Ellen's fraternal twin who married a grocer in Portland, Maine.

On Lizzie's spiritual experience see Merlin Burt, "Ellen G. Harmon's Three Step Conversion between 1836 and 1843 and the Harmon Family Methodist Experience" (research paper, AU, 1998), 31; in Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University. The family was expelled from the Methodist Church just before Lizzie's scheduled baptism as a Methodist, and she never joined any church after that.

8. Ellen Gould Harmon

C. Religious Summary: Ellen's Family of Origin

1. Originally Methodists
2. 3 of the daughters married ministers (2 Methodists, one Seventh-day Adventist).
3. The parents, 3 daughters, and one son became Seventh-day Adventists

D. Ellen before Conversion

1. "Naturally proud and ambitious" (*Life Sketches*, 39).
2. Embarrassed and secretive about spiritual concerns (YI, December 1, 1852 par. 9).
3. Terrified of dying and being lost (*ibid*, par. 2).
4. Convicted by her mothers' prayer's (*ibid*, par. 6).
5. Put on a brave front to conceal her anxiety about salvation (*ibid*, par. 7).
6. Her retrospective assessment: "I might not have been inclined to give my heart to Jesus, had it not been for the sore affliction that had cut me off . . . from the triumphs and vanities of the world" (*Life Sketches*, 39).

V. The Accident: at age 9 (fall of 1836), Ellen was struck in the face by a stone thrown by an angry classmate.

A. Physical Results of the Accident

1. Nose broken, extensive loss of blood (2SG, 7).
2. In coma 3 weeks, bedridden in a "great cradle" for "many weeks" (LS 18).
3. She was "reduced almost to a skeleton" (LS 18; 2SG, 8-9).
4. No one but her mother thought she would live (LS 18; 2SG, 8).
5. For two years she could not breathe through her nose (LS, 18).
6. "Nervous system was prostrated."
 - a. Hands trembled.
 - b. Even at the table she could not pour a beverage from cup to saucer without spilling it.
 - c. Difficulty focusing eyes on printed material. When she attempted to study, "the letters in the page would run together" and she grew faint and dizzy (LS, 19).
7. Her immune system was so weakened ("my whole system seemed debilitated," LS, 19), she

developed what appeared to be terminal tuberculosis (2SG, 29-30).

B. Loss of Physical Attractiveness

1. Friends and neighbors saw her as “ruined.”
2. Her own father, returning from a business trip, did not recognize her.
3. Ellen’s reaction on first looking in a mirror:
“I was shocked at the change in my appearance. Every feature of my face seemed changed. The sight was more than I could bear. . . . The idea of carrying my misfortune through life was insupportable” (2SG, 8-9).
4. Not obvious in photos, because earliest photos come from more than 20 years later.
5. By middle age the only trace of the injury was a slight dip in the bridge of her nose.
6. But during her teen years, when physical attractiveness was a major factor in social relationships, Ellen was pale, sickly, extremely underweight, and not considered attractive by her peers.

C. Loss of Social Acceptance

“I was forced to learn this bitter lesson, that *looks* make a difference in the feelings of many.”
“How changeable the friendship of my young companions. A pretty face, dress, or good looks, are thought much of. But let misfortune take some of these away, and the *friendship is broken*” (*Spiritual Gifts*, 2:10-11; see also 1T 12).

D. Loss of Opportunity for Education

1. Hands trembled, making writing difficult, and fine penmanship impossible
2. Eyes had difficulty focusing on small print for any extended time.
3. Persistent cough, sign of developing tuberculosis, caused her to miss many days of school.
4. Teachers advised her to leave school until her health should improve. *Spiritual Gifts*, 2:11-12.

E. Summary of Losses

1. Loss of health
2. Loss of physical attractiveness
3. Loss of friends
4. Loss of hope for an education
“It was the hardest struggle of my young life to yield to my feebleness, and decide that I must leave my studies, and give up the hope of gaining an education” *Life Sketches*, 19.
5. Loss of any expectation for a normal life.

VI. Conversion

B. First stage: A Deathbed Surrender to Jesus

1. Convinced she was dying, 9-year-old Ellen began to pray that the Lord would prepare her to die (2SG 9).
2. “I desired to be a Christian, and prayed for the forgiveness of my sins as well as I could” (2SG 9).
3. As a result she “felt peace of mind,” (2SG 9) “and loved everyone, feeling desirous that all should have their sins forgiven and love Jesus as I did” (LS 18).
4. “Ellen’s deathbed conversion understandably was not complicated by questions of how to live for Jesus and deal with life. When she discovered she was not going to die she was led to the next step in her conversion process.” Merlin Burt, “Ellen White’s Conversion and

Early Relationship with Jesus” (guest lecture handout, GSEM534, May 12, 1998), 3.

A. Second Stage in Conversion: Understanding Justification

1. Preparatory Factors

- a. Three years after accident, fall of 1839
- b. Forced to abandon hope of education
- c. Blamed God for her misfortune
- d. Felt guilty for her bad attitude toward God
- e. Lost her peace of mind and again feared she would be eternally lost.
- f. Told no one of this inner turmoil.

2. Factors in Deepening Depression

- a. Belief in an eternally burning hell contributed to Ellen’s feeling that God was angry with her
- b. “She had read devotional books from the church library that described little girls as living saintly lives free from doubts, sins, or weaknesses. She believed this was the correct expression of Christian experience and became convinced she could never be like them (Burt, 3).
- c. During this period of her experience, she first attended meetings by William Miller (March 11-23, 1840). Conviction that Jesus was coming soon, made her fear even more intense.

3. The Breakthrough at the Buxton, Maine, Methodist Camp Meeting

- a. Late in the summer of 1841 (Ellen was now almost 14), she attended her only Methodist camp meeting
- b. A minister preached on righteousness by faith from Esther 4:16, “I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.” The minister encouraged those who feared that God would not accept them, to go to Him anyway. First, they had nothing to lose, because if they didn’t go to God they would certainly perish as sinners. But second, they had nothing to fear. If the ruthless king of Persia had mercy on Esther, how much more would a loving God have mercy on the repentant believer.
- c. When the minister urged his hearers not to wait, hoping to “make themselves more worthy,” but to come to God as they are, Ellen went forward in the altar call, and found peace, then joy. 1T 17-18.
- d. “Again and again I said to myself: ‘Can this be religion? Am I not mistaken?’ . . . “I felt that the Saviour had blessed me and pardoned my sins.” 1T 17-18.

4. From Pardon to Baptism

- a. Sept. 20, 1841, shortly after the camp meeting, Ellen was accepted into the Methodist Church on six months’ probation.
- b. After fulfilling her probation, the church voted May 23, 1842, to recommend her for baptism.
- c. On June 26, 1842, she was baptized in Casco Bay.

B. Third Stage: Finding Assurance

1. Misconceptions about sanctification, hellfire, and the character of God.

- a. June 4-12, 1842, two weeks before Ellen’s baptism, William Miller again visited Portland. By now Ellen was an ardent believer in the Millerite message, and with her parents would soon be expelled from the Methodist church for their Millerite convictions.

- b. But as the year 1843 grew nearer, she became more concerned over her failure to experience sanctification. She would later teach clearly that sanctification is an ongoing process that would continue as long as life should last. But the Methodists at that time taught instantaneous sanctification, by which one received holiness of heart and perfect love, resulting in complete victory over sin.
- c. According to this teaching Ellen felt she could claim only justification, but not sanctification.
- d. She also still believed in an eternally burning hell, and
- e. saw God “as a tyrant, who delighted in the agonies of the condemned.” 1T 23, 26.
- f. Her misconceptions about sanctification, hellfire, and a tyrannical God again brought her into “condemnation,” “despair,” “gloom,” and such “anguish” and “hopelessness” that she was losing weight, yet again, she kept all this to herself. 1T 23, 26.

2. Two Dreams

- a. In the midst of this renewed depression she had two dreams.
- b. First dream made her fear her “doom was fixed” and “that the Spirit of the Lord had left” her forever. 1T 28.
- c. Second dream gave her hope through meeting a loving Jesus 1T 29.
- d. Ellen confided these dreams to her mother, who referred her to Levi Stockman, a Methodist minister in his twenties who had terminal tuberculosis. Ellen was now 16 and she also had tuberculosis. Merlin Burt portrays these two young Christians as coughing their way through a deep theological conversation.
- e. Levi Stockman introduced her to a loving God. Ellen told Elder Stockman everything. With tears in his eyes he assured her that she had not committed the unpardonable sin. He portrayed God as a loving Father, who does not rejoice in anyone’s destruction. He encouraged her to see the hand of God in all the hardships of her life.
 - “Go free, Ellen,” he said; “return to your home trusting in Jesus, for He will not withhold His love from any true seeker” (1T 30).
 - Ellen later wrote that “During the few minutes” spent with Elder Stockman, she “obtained more knowledge on the subject of God’s love and pitying tenderness than from all the sermons and exhortations to which I had ever listened” (1T 30).
- f. Dared to pray in public. That evening at a small prayer meeting she dared to lift her voice in audible prayer and the Spirit of God rested on her in such power that she could not go home that night. When she did return home, she felt she was “hardly the same person” that had left her father’s house the previous evening.

3. Conversion Climaxed in Assurance

- a. "I felt the **assurance** of an **indwelling** Saviour" (LS 39).
- b. "I could even praise God for the misfortune . . ."
- c. "It seemed to me as if I had been rescued from hell and transported to heaven."
- d. For six months not a shadow clouded my mind, nor did I neglect one known duty" (1T 31-32).

C. Results of Her Conversion

1. She gave public testimony to her experience and found joy in doing so. 1T 34.
2. She had a great desire to help others who were struggling under a sense of God's displeasure and the burden of sin.
3. She arranged meetings with her friends and prayed and appealed to them until "everyone was converted to God."
4. She dreamed about specific individuals needing conversion. Seeking them out and praying with them, she persuaded all but one to yield themselves to Christ.
5. She was also sharply criticized by those who could not understand the power of God upon her.
6. This criticism led her to silence her testimony in order to avoid offending people, but Ellen became convicted that by this silence she grieved the Spirit and separated herself from God (1T 44-48).
7. These are the normal results of full conversion.
"This spirit [of service and witness] is the sure outgrowth of a soul truly converted. No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus" (SC 78).

D. Retrospect: Multiple Temporary Losses but One Eternal Gain

Fifty years later, Ellen revisited Portland and the site of her accident, and reflected in retrospect:

"This misfortune, which for a time seemed so bitter and was so hard to bear, has proved to be a blessing in disguise. The cruel blow which blighted the joys of earth, was the means of turning my eyes to heaven. I might never have known Jesus, had not the sorrow that clouded my early years led me to seek comfort in him" (*Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1884, par. 2).

VI. The Importance of Assurance for Victory and Witness

A. *Bible Assurance is essential to a normal, vibrant Christian life and witness.*

It is essential to have faith in Jesus, and to believe you are saved through Him; but there is danger in taking the position that many do take in saying, "I am saved." Many at the present day say, "Believe, only believe" *Review and Herald*, Nov. 1, 1892, reprinted in *Selected Messages*, 1:373.

B. *Assurance is not based on human merit or good behavior.*

"Are you expecting that your merit will recommend you to the favor of God, and that you must be free from sin before you trust His power to save? If this is the struggle going on in your mind, I fear you will gain no strength, and will finally become discouraged

"It makes all the difference in the world with us spiritually whether we rely upon God

without doubt, as upon a sure foundation, or whether we are seeking to find some righteousness in ourselves before we come to Him. Look away from self to the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. It is a sin to doubt. The least unbelief, if cherished in the heart, involves the soul in guilt, and brings great darkness and discouragement" (*Review and Herald*, April 22, 1884, reprinted in *Selected Messages*, 3:149-150).

C. *Justification and Assurance are Essential to Growth in Sanctification.*

"Some seem to feel that they must be on probation and must prove to the Lord that they are reformed before they can claim His blessing. But these dear souls may claim the blessing of God even now. **They must have His grace, the spirit of Christ to help their infirmities, or they cannot form Christian characters.** Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are—sinful, helpless, dependent. We claim to be children of the light, not of the night nor of darkness; what right have we to be unbelieving?" (*Review and Herald*, April 22, 1884, reprinted in *Selected Messages*, 3:149-150, emphasis added).

D. *We are not to be in doubt whether we are saved.*

"Each one of you may know for yourself that you have a living Saviour, that he is your helper and your God. **You need not stand where you say, "I do not know whether I am saved."** Do you believe in Christ as our personal Saviour? If you do, then rejoice. We do not rejoice half as much as we should." *General Conference Bulletin*, April 10, 1901, par. 14.

"You are not to look to the future, thinking that at some distant day you are to be made holy; it is now that you are to be sanctified through the truth

"We are to receive the Holy Ghost. We have had an idea that this gift of God was not for such as we are, that the gift of the Holy Spirit was too sacred, too holy for us; but the Holy Spirit is the Comforter that Christ promised to his disciples to bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them. Then let us cease to look to ourselves, but look to him from whom all virtue comes. **No one can make himself better, but we are to come to Jesus as we are,** earnestly desiring to be cleansed from every spot and stain of sin, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **We are not to doubt his mercy, and say, "I do not know whether I shall be saved or not."** By living faith we must lay hold of his promise, for he has said, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." *Signs of the Times*, April 4, 1892, par 3. See also: *Selected Messages*, 1:392, 394.

E. *Assurance Especially Necessary for Ministers*

"Has your character been transformed? Has darkness been exchanged for light, the love of sin for the love of purity and holiness? **Have you been converted, who are engaged in teaching the truth to others?** Has there been in you a thorough, radical change? Have you woven Christ into your character? **You need not be in uncertainty in this matter.** Has the Sun of Righteousness risen and been shining in your soul? **If so, you know it; and if you do not know whether you are converted or not, never preach another discourse from the pulpit until you do.** How can you lead souls to the fountain of life of which you have not drunk yourself? Are you a sham, or are you really a son of God? Are you serving God, or are

you serving idols? Are you transformed by the Spirit of God, or are you yet dead in your trespasses and sins? To be sons of God means more than many dream of, because they have not been converted. Men are weighed in the balance and found wanting when they are living in the practice of any known sin. It is the privilege of every son of God to [p. 441] be a true Christian moment by moment; then he has all heaven enlisted on his side. He has Christ abiding in his heart by faith" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, 440-441).

F. *By faith we are to resist Satan's doubts.*

"All have just as much as they can do to resist our wily foe, and with earnest prayers and unyielding faith each must **rely upon the merits of the blood of Christ** and claim His saving strength.

The powers of darkness gather about the soul and shut Jesus from our sight, and at times we can only wait in sorrow and amazement until the cloud passes over. These seasons are sometimes terrible. Hope seems to fail, and despair seizes upon us. **In these dreadful hours we must learn to trust, to depend solely upon the merits of the atonement, and in all our helpless unworthiness cast ourselves upon the merits of the crucified and risen Saviour. We shall never perish while we do this—never!**" *Testimonies*, 1:309-310 (1862).

G. *What to pray when you feel like all else has failed.*

"If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.' [Mark 9:22]. How many a sin-burdened soul has echoed that prayer. And to all, the pitying Saviour's answer is, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." It is faith that connects us with heaven, and brings us strength for coping with powers of darkness. In Christ, God has provided means for subduing every sinful trait, and resisting every temptation, however strong. But many feel that they lack faith, and therefore they remain away from Christ. Let these souls, in their helpless unworthiness, cast themselves upon the mercy of their compassionate Saviour. Look not to self, but to Christ. He who healed the sick and cast out demons when He walked among men is the same mighty Redeemer today. Faith comes by the word of God. **Then grasp His promise, "Him that cometh to Me I will in nowise cast out." John 6:37. Cast yourself at His feet with the cry, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." You can never perish while you do this—never.**" *Desire of Ages*, 429.

VII. **Review Questions for Exam Preparation, "Ellen Harmon to Age Sixteen"**

1. What was the month, day, and year of Ellen G. Harmon White's birth? Questions based on this information might take the form: "If EGW had her first vision in December 1844, how old was she at that time?" To answer it, you put down:

$$\begin{array}{r} 1844 \quad \text{December} \\ \text{Subtract:} \quad - 1827 \quad \text{November} \\ \hline \text{And find the result:} \quad = 17 \text{ years, 1 month} \end{array}$$

Drill with various dates until this becomes easy for you, because this is the purpose of knowing her birth date.

2. What 3 stages did she go through in her conversion process?

3. What is Ellen White's counsel to a minister who doesn't know whether or not he or she has experienced conversion?

VIII. Bibliography

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