

A Bimonthly Publication of the Ellen G. White Seventh-day
Adventist Research Centre, Northern Caribbean University

Spirit of Prophecy Newsletter

SOME OF WHAT MRS. WHITE *REALLY* THOUGHT AND TAUGHT ABOUT---

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Gosnell Yorke

The Spirit of Prophecy Newsletter

The *Spirit of Prophecy Newsletter* is a publication dedicated to the promotion of the truth concerning God's revelation through Jesus Christ and the Spirit of Prophecy. This Newsletter is published by the Ellen G. White SDA Research Centre, NCU, to encourage and equip readers to participate in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church especially throughout the English-speaking Caribbean.

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INTRODUCTION

In the recently published *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013), Tim Poirier, Vice-Director of the Ellen G. White Estate at the General Conference, wrote an article entitled: "Apocryphal Visions and Statements Mistakenly Attributed to Ellen G. White" (pages 606-612). Among the many such apocryphal or false statements mistakenly attributed to the Lord's Messenger is that she predicted the burning of the Twin Towers as a result of the 9/11 terrorist assault on New York City.

There might also be those within and beyond the readership reach of this bi-monthly Newsletter who might well be harboring false thoughts about what Mrs. White might or might not have thought and taught about other matters—matters which we might choose to address in subsequent issues of the Newsletter. One such matter has to do with the whole issue of marriage, divorce and remarriage—an issue which at times can be both intensely private and personal but, yet, still very public.

During her long and illustrious 70-year prophetic ministry to the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1844-1915), Mrs. White found herself having to deal with the inevitable disconnect between the divine ideal and the human real—between the "is" and the "ought" as she sought to be relevant, reasonable, consistent, compassionate and Spirit-inspired in her work and writings. Although remaining stubbornly steered to principle as the needle to the pole, she sought to be prudent and practical in her counsel to those in need of it—be they clergy or laity. This was no less true of how she dealt with the thorny, troubling and, for many, shame-laden issue under discussion, to wit, marriage, divorce and remarriage.

MRS. WHITE'S VIEW OF MARRIAGE

Mrs. White held a consistently high and holy view of marriage. Such a view was informed by some key biblical texts such as the following: Gen. 2: 24; Mal. 2: 16; Mat. 5: 31-32; 19: 9; Mk. 10: 10-11;



Lk. 16: 18; Rom. 7: 2-3; 1 Cor. 5: 1-5; 7: 1-16; Eph. 5: 21-33; and Rev. 21: 1-2. For her, marriage was meant to be a life-long union and commitment between one man and one woman. Any variation from that was considered less than the ideal. Her counsel on such nuptial matters and home life in general can be found in her voluminous writings (and subsequent compilations) such as the *Testimonies* (Volumes 1-9), *The Adventist Home*, *Child Guidance*, *Ministry of Healing*, *Testimonies to Ministers*, and, most recently, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (1989).

(continued on p.2)

**SOME OF WHAT MRS. WHITE REALLY THOUGHT AND TAUGHT ABOUT---
MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE (continued from p. 1)**

In 1854, for example, eight years into her own marriage to James White, she had reason to send counsel to a local church where it was alleged that the commandment (against adultery) was being violated by some members of the church. For her, this clearly elicited God’s disapproval and was a form of behaviour which was having “a corrupting influence on the young...and [that] the one who commits this horrid sin thinks that all he has to do is to confess that he was wrong and is sorry, and he is then to have all the privileges of the house of God” (see *Adventist Home*, page 248). Like the Apostle Paul (see 1 Cor. 5:1-5), she counselled that breakers of the seventh commandment “should be suspended from the church” but that

“Mrs. White found herself having to deal with the disconnect or disjuncture between the divine ideal and the human real.”

thorough repentance should eventually lead to their reacceptance into the church (*ibid.*). And as for ministers who committed adultery, she

counselled: “Cleanse the camp of this moral corruption, if it takes the highest men in the highest position....There is much we will never know; but that which is revealed makes the church responsible and guilty unless they show a determined effort to eradicate the evil” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pages 427-428). She therefore advised that prolonged and repeated breakage of the seventh commandment by ministers of the gospel should lead to their dismissal from the ministry” (*Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery and Divorce*, page 240; also see Jerry Moon, “Marriage and Divorce”, In *The Ellen G. White*

Encyclopedia, page 965). Further, in seeking her counsel on whether or not a couple should separate, an Adventist Pastor by the name of Charles H. Bliss (1847-1925) sought Mrs. White’s counsel in 1891 on the matter. In response, the inspired Messenger of the Lord wrote against separation and counselled that the couple “be left to God and their own consciences and that the Church shall not treat them as sinners until they have evidence that they are such in the sight of a holy God” (*Testimonies on Sexual Behavior*, pages 218-219).

In spite of her consistently high and holy view of marriage, however, Mrs. White found herself, at times, having to deal with the perplexing problems induced by the presence and power of sin at work in the world and in the life of the struggling believer—one who, in the language of Dr. Martin Luther, the German Reformer (1483-1546), is *simul justus et peccator* (saint and sinner at the same time). In this relatively brief article, I will make use of three scenarios or “case studies”, which, perhaps, best exemplify how Mrs. White found herself having to deal with the disconnect or disjuncture between the divine ideal and the human real.

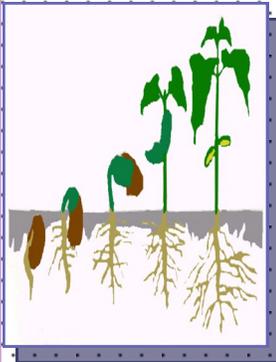
As for ministers who showed genuine post-seventh commandment-breaking humility and repentance, for example, she found herself pleading with G. I. Butler, General Conference President, to give an opportunity to a particular minister to “prove himself” and to another, “a chance for his life” (*Testimonies on Sexual Behavior*, page 240). Now to the three specific scenarios or case studies.

**SCENARIO OR CASE STUDY #1—
STEPHEN BELDEN (1829-1906)**

Sarah was Mrs. White’s older sister. She was married to Stephen Belden and they had five children, ages 6-11. When Sarah died from tuberculosis leaving

Stephen a widower, he wanted to remarry so that the children could be properly cared for. Unfortunately, the second wife (Charlotte Alley) succumbed to a serious bout of measles, suffered cerebral damage as a result of it and was eventually rendered insane. She was then committed to a mental asylum in Middletown, Connecticut. Though still alive and, therefore, in “clear violation” of the biblical principle of “till death do us part”, Stephen decided to marry a third time, to Melvina Mignells Devereaux, and remained so for the rest of his life. His local church, however, in its commendable desire to be faithful to God’s Holy Word, wanted to discipline him by disfellowshipping him. When word got to Mrs. White and her counsel was sought on the matter, she simply said: “Let them alone” (see *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior* ., pages 224-225). In fact, Stephen and Melvina later joined Mrs. White in Australia in 1891—at her invitation. Not only did Mrs. White support them throughout their marriage in various ways—including financially and via her counsel such as to Stephen, at one time, advising him to preach shorter sermons----but they later migrated to Norfolk Island (close to Australia) where they lived and served faithfully as missionaries until the very end of their lives. In fact, they now rest buried beside each other on Norfolk Island awaiting the loud, glorious, spectacular and imminent return of their Lord and Redeemer. (continued on p. 6)

FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH



"There is no evidence of genuine repentance unless it works reformation. If he restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, confess his sins, and love God and his fellow men, the sinner may be sure that he has passed from death unto life." *Steps to Christ*, p. 59.

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Guard Against Overindulgence

The Expenditure of Vital Energy. Many parents do not obtain the knowledge that they should in the married life. They are not guarded lest Satan take advantage of them and control their minds and their lives. They do not see that God requires them to control their married lives from all excesses. But very few feel it to be a religious duty to govern their passions. They have united themselves in marriage to the object of their choice, and therefore reason that marriage sanctifies the indulgence of the baser passions. Even men and women

professing godliness give loose rein to their lustful passions, and have no thought that God holds them accountable for the expenditure of vital energy, which weakens their hold on life and enervates the entire system. *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery and Divorce*, p. 110.

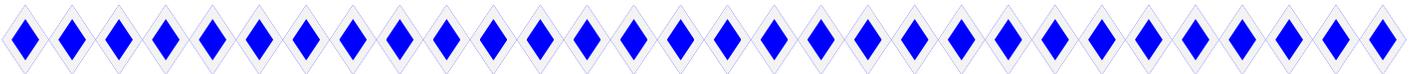


YOUTH ISSUES

How do you keep happy when facing problems?



“Those who give their lives to Christlike ministry know the meaning of true happiness. Their interests and their prayers reach far beyond self. They themselves are growing as they try to help others. They become familiar with the largest plans, the most stirring enterprises, and how can they but grow when they place themselves in the divine channel of light and blessing? Such ones receive wisdom from heaven. They become more and more identified with Christ in all His plans. There is no opportunity for spiritual stagnation. Selfish ambition and self-seeking are rebuked by constant contact with the absorbing interests, the elevated aspirations, which belong to high and holy activities.” *Testimonies for the Church Vol. 9*, p. 106.



“In the surroundings of the holy pair (Adam and Eve) was a lesson for all time-- that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. If men would give less attention to the artificial and would cultivate greater simplicity, they would come far nearer to answering the purpose of God in their creation. Pride and ambition are never satisfied, but those who are truly wise will find substantial and elevating pleasure in the sources of enjoyment that God has placed within the reach of all.” *Adventist Home*, p. 132.

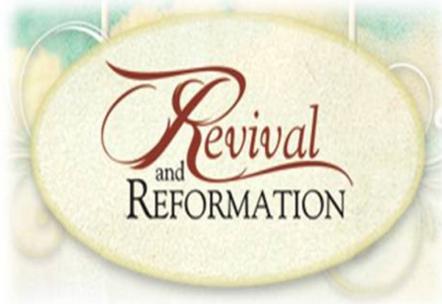


REVIVAL AND REFORMATION

In Josiah's Reign

Josiah, from his earliest manhood, had endeavored to take advantage of his position as king to exalt the principles of God's holy law. And now, while Shaphan the scribe was reading to him out of the book of the law, the king discerned in this volume a treasure of knowledge, a powerful ally, in the work of reform he so much desired to see wrought in the land. He resolved to walk in the light of its counsels, and also to do all in his power to acquaint his people with its teachings and to lead them, if possible, to cultivate reverence and love for the law of heaven. *{Prophets and Kings p. 398.1}*.

But was it possible to bring about the needed reform? Israel had almost reached the limit of divine forbearance; soon God would arise to punish those who had brought dishonor upon His name. Already the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people. Overwhelmed with sorrow and dismay, Josiah rent his garments and bowed before God in agony of spirit, seeking pardon for the sins of an impenitent nation. *Prophets and Kings, p. 398.2}*.



Josiah now proposed that those highest in authority unite with the people in solemnly covenanting before God to co-operate with one another in an effort to institute decided changes. "The king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His



testimonies and His statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book." The response was more hearty than the king had dared hope for: "All the people stood to the covenant." 2 Kings 23:3. *{Prophets and Kings, p. 400.3}*.

In the reformation that followed, the king turned his attention to the destruction of every vestige of idolatry that remained. So long had the inhabitants of the land followed the customs of the surrounding nations in bowing down to images of wood and stone, that it seemed almost beyond the power of man to remove every trace of these evils. But Josiah persevered in his effort to cleanse the land. Sternly he met idolatry by slaying "all the priests of the high places;" "moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did

Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord." 2 Kings 23: 20, 24. *{Prophets and Kings, p. 401.1}*.

"The king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His Commandments"

**SOME OF WHAT MRS. WHITE *REALLY* THOUGHT AND TAUGHT ABOUT---
MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE (continued from p.2)**

**SCENARIO OR CASE STUDY #2—
SIDNEY BROWNSBERGER (1845-
1930)**

Sidney Brownsberger was born in Perrysburg, Ohio, and was among the more educated of our productive Pioneers. He earned both a Bachelor's and a Master's Degree from the University of Michigan. In 1873, Church leaders invited him to lead the Church School which G.H. Bell had established in Battle Creek a year earlier (1872). He also served as Secretary of the General Conference for one year. In 1874, he not only became the first Principal of Battle Creek College where, among other things, he created courses in business, teaching, ministry, and developed the College library and a School of Hygiene but, later that year (1874), he also married Florinda Camp. In 1882, the Brownsbergers moved to California where he became President of Healdsburg College. While there, and during their less-than-happy marriage, Mrs. White had reason to counsel them about the need to discipline their children (see Letter 29a, 1886). In 1886, Brownsberger resigned from Healdsburg College and returned to the Eastern United States where he was self-employed for a year. During that year, his wife filed for divorce which he chose not to contest. A year later in October 1887, he reconnected with Edith Donaldson whom he had met sometime before and, one month later (November), they were married. About nine years later, Mrs. White invited them to join her in Australia where she thought they could find work. They chose not to take up her offer. Instead, in 1909, after Brownsberger and Arthur Spalding, another outstanding Pioneer, founded the Ashville Agriculture School and Mountain Sanitarium in North Carolina, Mrs. White encouraged Brownsberger "to be of still greater service to the cause of God" (Letter 56, 1910).

**SCENARIO OR CASE STUDY #3—
JOSEPH HARVEY WAGGONER
(1820-1889)**

Joseph Waggoner is not to be confused with his physician son, Ellet (1855-1916), of the 1888 Minneapolis

General Conference Righteousness by Faith fame—along with Alonzo T. Jones (both of whom, incidentally, later lost their way and left the Church). In stead, father Waggoner was basically a self-taught, former Baptist printer who became a Sabbath-keeper in 1851 after listening to some Sabbatarian Adventist preachers in Wisconsin. In spite of his relative lack of formal education, the elder Waggoner has bequeathed to us a number of important books such as, *The Kingdom of God* (1859) and *From Eden to Eden* (1888). Over a period of a quarter of a century, Mrs. White had reason to counsel him either in terms of his relationship with his wife, Mariette (1823-1908), or in terms of his sometimes harsh, overbearing and critical disposition. Echoing the situation with which the Apostle Paul found himself grappling in 1 Corinthians 7:1-16, it seems that Waggoner's wife was also unconverted in heart and proved to be a real source of constant distraction and frustration to him in his work for the Lord. So much so that Mrs. White counselled him that it was because of his wife's negative attitude towards him that he came across as being so judgmental and harsh in his dealings with others at times (see Letter 3, 1872). Mrs. White's strongest rebuke came to Waggoner, however, when it became clear that he was in an adulterous relationship with Lottie Chittenden, a married woman. This was while they were both working at Pacific Press in California. Mrs. White wrote to Waggoner as follows: "There are but few who know to what extent this intimacy has gone, and God forbid it shall be known and your influence lost to God's cause and your soul lost. I beg of you to not take upon you to pronounce judgment against anyone but yourself" (see *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior*, pages 183-184). In response to Mrs. White's counsel, Waggoner left California for Battle Creek (Michigan) where Mrs. White continued to urge him to show more and more signs of genuine repentance and sorrow for his grievous

sin. This he did and so in 1886, Mrs. White invited him to Europe where she was at the time (1885-1887). There, Waggoner served the Church with distinction in that he worked as Editor-in-Chief of both our French and German periodicals until his death, three years later, in 1889. He is now buried in Switzerland beside J.N. Andrews, our first official missionary to Europe. (1874). And like the Brownsbergers on Norfolk Island, J.N. Andrews in Switzerland, Mrs. White herself who is now buried beside her husband, James, in Battle Creek, along with uncountable millions of others who are now asleep in Jesus awaiting His soon return, father Waggoner is also now resting in that blessedness and peace which come to those who, in spite of life's ups and downs, chose to die to sin and self and, in the end, die in the Lord (see Rev. 14: 13).

CONCLUSION

In the language of Qoheleth, the Preacher (see Ecclesiastes 12:13), here then is the conclusion of the whole matter. As Mrs. White was forced to do in her own day and, before her, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, was forced to do in his (see 1 Cor. 7: 6, 12), our Church, perhaps, is being summoned to continue to grapple, in the Spirit, and on a case-by-case basis, with the sin-induced disjuncture or disconnect which inevitably occurs between the divine ideal and the human real—whether it be in the realm of marriage, divorce and remarriage or in any other realm of human life and behavior which is now clamoring for the principled but compassionate attention of the Church.

MAIN SOURCES CONSULTED

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Pioneer of the Month

William Clarence White (1854-1937)



He was editorial assistant and publishing manager for his mother, Ellen G. White. The third son of the family, widely known as W. C. (and to his intimates as Willie), he was born August 24, 1854, at Rochester, New York, where his father was then publishing the *Review and Herald* and the *Youth's Instructor*, and grew up in Battle Creek and Greenville, Michigan, attending the public schools and for a time a school taught by G. H. Bell in Battle Creek. Reared in a home that was largely the centre of the growing work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he listened with increasing interest and comprehension to conversations regarding the plans and methods of work for the advancement of the young church. He was baptized at Greenville, Michigan, at the age of 12.

He was associated with his father as the plans developed for the establishment of the Pacific SDA Publishing Association. Then, at the age of 21, at a constituency meeting held while James White was in the East (1876), William was elected president of the Board and business manager of the enterprise. He accepted with reluctance, but carried the work through

commendably, and with a balance sheet at the end of the business year (the second for the association) showing net earning of \$2,000. In the meantime, on February 11, 1876, he was united in marriage with Mary Kelsey, a talented employee at the office of the publishing house. His wife, who had contracted tuberculosis while doing editorial work in the publishing house in Switzerland, died in 1890 at the tender age of 33.

Later, in 1895, White married Ethel May Lacey, from Tasmania, Australia. In September 1900, when Ellen White returned to the United States and acquired the Elmshaven property near the St. Helena Sanitarium, he also returned and resided nearby.

After the death of his father, James White, in August 1881, certain responsibilities of assisting his mother in her travels and in the publishing of her books fell upon his shoulders; a responsibility that was to draw more heavily on his time and strength until it would become his principal occupation. With his mother, White attended the General Conference session held in April 1901 at Battle Creek, Michigan, and was made chairman of the committee on reorganization of the General Conference. At the session he was again elected a member of the General Conference Committee, a position he held for the next 36 years.

White was named in his mother's will as one of the five men appointed by her to act as Trustees in the care and publication of her writings after her death. Since he had carried the burden of the

business interests of her publishing work for many years, it was but natural that he should be asked to continue. As secretary of the Board he led in the preparation of a number of books compiled in harmony with the provisions of Mrs. White's will, and in the making of a comprehensive index to the current works (1926).

Of White's four sons and three daughters, three served overseas, and one, Arthur, served as secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate. White's death occurred September 1, 1937. Funeral services were held in California and at the Battle Creek Tabernacle. He was buried in the family plot in the Oak Hill Cemetery, Battle Creek, Michigan.

He was son of Ellen White affectionately called Willie.

Excerpts taken from: Neufeld, Don. (Editor) 1996. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 11: 897-899.



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Sabbath Programmes at the Research Centre



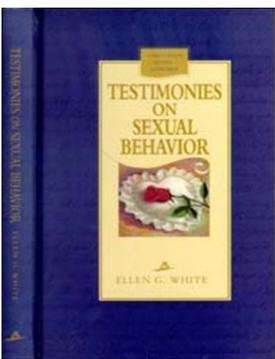
The Centre opens its doors to one church per month to worship on a Sabbath at our facilities. We also conduct seminars and AY programmes at local churches. For appointments call or e-mail us at the address on this page



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<http://egw-sdaresearch.ncu.edu.jm/>

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery and Divorce



This book does not offer a rigid set of rules for dealing with issues related to marriage, divorce and remarriage. Moral problems are complex, and the Holy Spirit must serve as a divine Guide and Counsellor to help those who are grappling with difficulties in this area of life. Many of the letters in this volume were addressed to ministers and other gospel workers. Yet, in spite of the faults and sins of those to whom she wrote,

Ellen White had great confidence in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She was concerned to elevate moral standards and also to provide encouragement and hope to those who felt their situation was beyond human solution. Thus her letters dealing with moral problems contain counsel and continue to have relevance in the church today.

Do you have any questions or comments on Spirit of Prophecy matters?

If you do, please call us or send your questions to:

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