Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White

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DEDICATION

To My Friend Vern
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Abbreviations

EGW    Ellen G. White

HR     Health Reformer

LLU-HR Heritage Room, Loma Linda University Library

MHC    Michigan Historical Collections, University of Michigan

MSU    Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections

R&H    Advent Review and Sabbath Herald

SDA    Seventh-day Adventist
Ellen G. White,* Seventh-day Adventist prophetess, ranks with the Mormon Joseph Smith, the Christian Scientist Mary Baker Eddy, and Charles Taze Russell of the Jehovah’s Witnesses as one of four nineteenth-century founders of a major American religious sect. Yet, outside her own church of two and a half million members, she is probably the least known. Her comparatively unsensational life and her church’s reticence to expose her private papers to the scrutiny of critical scholars have contributed to this undeserved obscurity. By her death in 1915 she had founded one of the nation’s largest indigenous denominations, created a string of sanitariums and hospitals stretching from Scandinavia to the South Pacific, and inspired an educational system without peer in the Protestant world today. She had traveled widely, lectured extensively, and written dozens of books on a variety of subjects. Few contemporaries, male or female, accomplished more.

Her charisma sprang largely from frequent “visions,” which she began to experience in 1844 at the age of seventeen. In dramatic trances lasting from a few minutes to several hours she received heavenly messages regarding events past and present, celestial and terrestrial. Her disciples accepted her “testimonies” as genuine revelations from God and, with her encouragement, accorded her a status equal to the biblical prophets.

* Ellen White always used the initial from her middle name Gould rather than from her maiden name Harmon.
On the evening of June 5, 1863, in the little Michigan town of Otsego, Ellen White had a special vision on health. There God revealed his hygienic laws, to be kept as faithfully as the Ten Commandments given to Moses. Seventh-day Adventists, Mrs. White learned, were to give up eating meat and other stimulating foods, shun alcohol and tobacco, and avoid drug-dispensing doctors. When sick, they were to rely solely on Nature's remedies: fresh air, sunshine, rest, exercise, proper diet, and—above all—water. Adventist sisters were to give up their fashionable dresses for "short" skirts and pantaloons similar to the Bloomer costume, and all believers were to curb their "animal passions." The terrible consequences of masturbation, to which Mrs. White devoted her first book on health, the Lord illustrated in graphic detail. "Everywhere I looked," she reported, "I saw imbecility, dwarfed forms, crippled limbs, misshapen heads, and deformity of every description."

The content of this vision was hardly new. Since the 1830s Sylvester Graham and his fellow health reformers had been preaching virtually the same thing, extolling vegetarianism and damning drugs, corsets, and intemperance of every kind. The following decade many water enthusiasts, called hydropaths, joined the hygienic crusade, offering baths, packs, and douches as the way to health. Within a few years water-cure establishments fairly littered the American landscape, and health-reform books and magazines could be found in countless homes from Maine to California. Mrs. White steadfastly denied being influenced by these works; but, as we shall see, her writings often betray more than a passing acquaintance with contemporary authors.

This study of Ellen White's activities as a health reformer began in the summer of 1972, while I was teaching the history of medicine at Loma Linda University. In an effort to find material that might interest my students, I turned to the health writings of Mrs. White, whose visions were responsible for the founding of the school and whose
influence could still be seen. Modern drugs had long ago replaced water therapy, but such items as meat, tea, and coffee still made only surreptitious appearances.

My initial goal was modest: to look at Mrs. White’s major writings within the context of nineteenth-century health reform. My scope expanded, however, when I accidentally ran across a copy of Dr. L. B. Coles’s *Philosophy of Health* in the Loma Linda medical library. Scattered throughout the margins of this book were shorthand notes and page numbers in the hand of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, former owner of the volume and a onetime protégé of the prophetess. Unable to find anyone who could decipher the shorthand, but suspicious that the page numbers referred to one of Mrs. White’s works, I began a volume-by-volume search for a correlation. A check of her *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* finally revealed what Dr. Kellogg had discovered three-quarters of a century before: a strikingly close similarity between Dr. Coles’s language and Mrs. White’s. This serendipitous discovery spurred me to undertake a thorough examination of Ellen White’s development as a health reformer, the result of which is this book.

Although this work at times ranges beyond her health-related activities, it falls far short of a full-fledged biography. Detailed studies of her endeavors in education and theology, for example, remain to be done. Nevertheless, this is, I believe, the first book about her that seeks neither to defend nor to damn but simply to understand. As one raised and educated within Adventism, I admittedly have more than an academic interest in Mrs. White’s historical fate; but I have tried to be as objective as possible. Thus I have refrained from using divine inspiration as an historical explanation.

In so doing, I have parted company with those Adventist scholars who insist on the following presuppositions: (1) that the Holy Spirit has guided the Advent movement since the early 1840s, (2) “that Ellen Harmon White was chosen by God as his messenger and her work embodied that of a prophet,” (3) “that as a sincere, dedicated Chris-
tian and a prophet, Ellen White would not and did not falsify," and (4) that the testimony of Mrs. White's fellow-believers "may be accepted as true and correct to the best of the memory of the individuals who reported."* It seems to me that such statements, particularly the last two, are more properly conclusions than presuppositions.

I have also departed from traditional Adventist scholarship in occasionally using the testimony of individuals who rejected Mrs. White's claim to inspiration. I have done so—with some hesitance and much care—because to ignore them on a priori grounds seemed methodologically irresponsible. These individuals offer a perspective of Mrs. White not found in the writings of her followers. While some of them may have placed undue emphasis on the negative aspects of her life, their inclination to do so seems to have been no greater than the tendency of her disciples to emphasize the positive. Certainly no Adventist would hesitate to use critical accounts of Joseph Smith or Mary Baker Eddy; Mrs. White should be treated no differently.

In trying to understand Ellen White, I have consciously shied away from extended analyses of her mental health and psychic abilities. Someday this should be done, but the present does not seem like an appropriate time. First, my training has not qualified me to make anything like a retrospective diagnosis; and second, I do not want discussions of this work to focus on such controversial and emotionally laden issues.

It is no exaggeration to say that this book never could—or would—have been written without the assistance of numerous institutions and individuals, only a few of whom can be named here. To each I offer my sincere thanks, but hasten to add that none bears any responsibility for the views I have expressed. (Some of my benefactors I know

disagree strongly with my interpretations.) Despite extraordin-
dary efforts—by my critics as well as by myself—to catch
all possible errors, some mistakes undoubtedly have
slipped by. For these I have only myself to blame; how-
ever, I would appreciate their being brought to my atten-
tion.

During the summer of 1972 a grant from the Walter E.
Macpherson Society of the Alumni Association of the
Loma Linda University School of Medicine enabled me to
tavel East collecting documentation. One of the greatest
pleasures of this trip was meeting William D. Conklin of
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shared both his time and his unparalleled knowledge of
Our Home on the Hillside. The staff of the Ellen G. White
Estate in Washington, D.C., assisted me in locating and
using the unpublished Ellen White papers housed in their
vault. Kenneth P. Scheffel provided similar assistance with
the records of John Harvey Kellogg in the Michigan Histor-
tical Collections at the University of Michigan.

The Loma Linda University School of Medicine
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Mote permitted me to examine his unique files of Advent-
stist documents.

In the final stages of preparing this book, I benefited
greatly from the criticisms and suggestions of friends and
colleagues, some of whom waded through multiple drafts.
Lengthy discussions with Richard W. Schwarz of Andrews
University saved me from a number of embarrassing errors
and proved once again that honest persons can look at the
same evidence and see fundamentally different things.
Three of my sternest—and most helpful—critics were my
cousins Roy Branson of Georgetown University, Bruce
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John B. Blake kindly allowed me to borrow the title "Prophetess of Health" from an earlier article of his on Mary Gove Nichols. Janet Schulze provided moral support and editorial assistance. Charlotte McGirr typed and retyped the manuscript, and Kathryn Shain typed it again.

Finally, this volume is dedicated to Vern Carner, friend and former colleague at Loma Linda University, who convinced me to write this book one fateful Saturday afternoon and who shared fully the pain and excitement that resulted from that decision.

Madison, Wisconsin
November 1975
1. A Prophetess Is Born

"a true prophet"
J. N. Loughborough

"a wonderful fanatic and trance medium"
Isaac C. Wellcome

She was a mere child of not more than ten when a scrap of paper and a stone altered the course of her entire life. Walking to school one morning, Ellen Harmon spied a piece of paper lying by the wayside. Picking it up, the horrified little girl read that an English preacher was predicting the end of the world, perhaps in only thirty years. "I was seized with terror," she later wrote; "the time seemed so short for the conversion and salvation of the world." For several nights she tossed and turned, hoping and praying that she might be among the saints ready to meet Christ at his Second Coming.³ Little did she dream that for the next seventy-five years she would work and wait expectantly for her Savior's return.

Within a short time of this frightening episode, another incident nearly ended Ellen's life. With her twin sister, Elizabeth, and a friend, Ellen was passing through a public park when an older schoolmate, angry "at some trifle," hurled a rock at the girls. Ellen was struck squarely on the nose and knocked to the ground unconscious. For three weeks she lay in a stupor, oblivious to her surroundings, while friends and relatives sadly waited for her to die.
When she finally regained her senses, she suffered not only acute physical pain but also anxiety over her prospects for salvation should she die.

Somehow she passed safely through the valley of death, but time never fully erased the traces of these two childhood experiences. For the remainder of Ellen’s long life, good health and Christ’s Second Coming were uppermost on her mind.

Ellen Gould Harmon and her sister, Elizabeth, were born on November 26, 1827, in the village of Gorham, Maine, a few miles west of Portland. Their father, Robert, a hatter of modest means, followed the common practice of having his children, six daughters and two sons, assist him in the home industry. Mother Eunice was a pious homemaker with strong theological convictions. When the twins were still preschoolers, the Harmon family moved into the city, where the girls eventually enrolled in the Brackett Street School.

Portland in the 1830s was a picturesque New England seaport with a population approaching fifteen thousand. Horse-drawn carts and carriages filled its famous tree-lined streets, and hoop-skirted ladies could still be seen on its crowded sidewalks. The city’s location on a neck of land jutting into Casco Bay made it ideal for the West Indian maritime trade that supported the economy. Ships from Maine sailed to the south loaded with lumber or marine products and returned filled with sugar, molasses, rum, and other Caribbean goods. With so ready a supply of alcohol, it is not surprising that temperance became a burning local issue and that “intemperance” was a commonly cited cause of death. The greatest killers, however, were consumption, which accounted for over one-fourth of all mortality, and scarlet fever, which took another 20 percent. In religious matters, Portland had long been a Congregational stronghold, but Baptist and Methodist churches were beginning to attract sizable numbers.4

The Harmon family lived in the far southwestern out-
Ellen White and her twin sister, Elizabeth Bangs.
skirts of the city, not far from Ellen’s school. Their neighbors on Spruce Street were working class or petty bourgeoisie. Among them were a merchant, a distiller, a truckman, a cordwainer, a shipcarpenter, a ropemaker, two stevedores, and a couple of laborers—the same type of hard-working people who later filled the Adventist ranks and became followers of Ellen White.\(^5\)

It was in Portland, when Ellen was nine or ten, that the rock-throwing incident occurred. Despite the efforts of well-meaning physicians, Ellen’s injuries continued to plague her for years. Her facial disfigurement—so bad that her own father could scarcely recognize her—caused frequent embarrassment and made breathing through her nostrils impossible for two years. Frayed nerves rebelled at simple assignments such as reading and writing. Her hands shook so badly she was unable to control her slate marks, and words became mere blurs on a page. Try as she might, she could not concentrate on her studies. Perspiration would break out on her forehead, and dizziness would overcome her.

The girl responsible for her suffering, now contrite and anxious to make amends, tried tutoring Ellen, but to no avail. Finally it became apparent to her teachers that she simply could not cope with schoolwork, and they recommended that she withdraw from classes. Later, in about 1839, she again attempted to resume her studies, at the Westbrook Seminary and Female College in Portland, but this, too, ended in disappointment and despair. “It was the hardest struggle of my young life,” Ellen later lamented, “to yield to my feebleness, and decide that I must leave my studies, and give up the hope of gaining an education.”

Her formal education ended, she resigned herself to the life of a semi-invalid, passing the time of day propped up in bed making hat crowns for her father or occasionally knitting a pair of stockings. In this way she could console herself with the knowledge that she was at least contributing to the family economy.

It is uncertain what effect, if any, her hat-making had
upon her health. Some evidence suggests that about this time American hatters began using a mercury solution to treat the fur used in felt hats, a practice that frequently led to chronic mercurialism. This disease manifested itself in various psychic and physical disturbances: “abnormal degrees of irritability, excitability, irascible temper, timidity, depression or despondency, anxiety, discouragement without cause, inability to take orders, self-consciousness, desire for solitude, and excessive embarrassment in the presence of strangers.” Tremor, making it difficult to control handwriting, was especially common. Hallucinations sometimes occurred in advanced cases. While it is impossible to know for sure if Ellen were exposed to mercury poisoning, and both unnecessary and unwise to assume that this malady would account for all of her unusual behavior, it might explain her trembling hands.⁶

In March, 1840, life took on new meaning for Ellen. In that month William Miller paid his first visit to the citizens of Portland to warn them of Christ’s soon return. Miller, a captain in the War of 1812, retired from the army in 1815 to take up farming in Low Hampton, New York. A decade or so earlier he had abandoned Christianity for deism, but growing concern about his fate after death drove him to intense Bible study and a return to the faith of his youth. His interest focused on the biblical prophecies, particularly Daniel 8:14: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” On the assumption that each prophetic day represented a year, that the cleansing of the sanctuary coincided with the Second Coming of Christ, and that the 2300 years began in 457 B.C., when Artaxerxes of Persia issued a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, Miller concluded that events on this earth would terminate “about the year 1843.”⁷

For thirteen years Miller kept his views largely to himself; but as the end inexorably approached, he could no longer remain silent. In the summer of 1831, at the age of forty-nine, he took to the pulpit; two years later the Baptists granted him a license to preach. By mid-1839 he had
delivered over eight hundred lectures in towns throughout New York and New England. His disturbing message often held audiences for prolonged periods, but aside from his earnestness and gravity he was an undistinguished speaker. “There is nothing very peculiar in the manner or appearance of Mr. Miller,” wrote the editor of a Massachusetts newspaper. “Both are at least to the style and appearance of ministers in general. His gestures are easy and expressive, and his personal appearance every way decorous. His Scripture explanations and illustrations are strikingly simple, natural, and forcible . . .”

During the early years of his ministry Miller made no attempt at organization and limited his preaching to the small churches that invited him. This changed in 1840 when Joshua V. Himes, the energetic young pastor of the Chardon Street Chapel in Boston, teamed up with Miller to coordinate a national crusade, with Himes assuming responsibility for organization and publicity. At the peak of the movement about two hundred ministers and five hundred public lecturers were spreading the Millerite message, and an estimated fifty thousand believers were waiting expectantly for their Savior’s return.

Little is known about the social characteristics of these Millerites, but one historian has recently concluded that, unlike other apocalyptic millenarians, “They do not seem to have been people deprived of power, nor potential revolutionaries, nor, most significantly, threatened with destruction.” Many, including Miller and Himes, were respected and influential members of their communities. Nevertheless, the Millerites were acutely aware of social unrest and religious apostasy, which they interpreted to be signs of the end. In contrast to the optimistic postmillennialists, like the popular evangelist Charles G. Finney, who expected soon to usher in a thousand years of peace and prosperity, the pessimistic Millerites saw only evidence of a world in decay.

What they did share with the postmillennialists was a fondness for enthusiastic revivals and camp meetings, with
emotional sermons, spirited songs, and fervent prayers. The Millerites held their first camp meeting in the summer of 1842 in East Kingston, New Hampshire, near the home of Ezekiel Hale, Jr., a friend of Sylvester Graham’s who took care of local arrangements. A chance visitor, John Greenleaf Whittier, described the event, which attracted between ten and fifteen thousand individuals:

Three or four years ago [he wrote in 1845], on my way eastward, I spent an hour or two at a camp-ground of the Second Advent in East Kingston. The spot was well chosen. A tall growth of pine and hemlock threw its melancholy shadow over the multitude, who were arranged upon rough seats of boards and logs. Several hundred—perhaps a thousand people—were present, and more were rapidly coming. Drawn about in a circle, forming a background of snowy whiteness to the dark masses of men and foliage, were the white tents, and back of them the provision-stalls and cook-shops. When I reached the ground, a hymn, the words of which I could not distinguish, was pealing through the dim aisles of the forest. I could readily perceive that it had its effect upon the multitude before me, kindling to higher intensity their already excited enthusiasm. The preachers were placed in a rude pulpit of rough boards, carpeted only by the dead forest-leaves and flowers, and tasselled, not with silk and velvet, but with the green boughs of the sombre hemlocks around it. One of them followed the music in an earnest exhortation on the duty of preparing for the great event. Occasionally he was really eloquent, and his description of the last day had the ghastly distinctness of Anelli’s painting of the End of the World.

Suspended from the front of the rude pulpit were two broad sheets of canvas, upon one of which was the figure of a man, the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly of brass, the legs of iron, and feet of clay,—the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. On the other were depicted the wonders of the Apocalyptic vision,—the beasts, the dragons, the scarlet woman seen by the seer of Patmos, Oriental types, figures, and mystic symbols, translated into staring Yankee realities and exhibited like the beasts of a travelling menagerie. One horrible image, with its hideous heads and scaly caudal extremity, reminded me of the tremendous line of Milton, who, in speaking of the same evil dragon describes him as ‘swindging the scaly horrors of his folded tail.’
"The white circle of tents; the dim wood arches; the upturned, earnest faces; the loud voices of the speakers burdened with the awful symbolic language of the Bible; the smoke from the fires, rising like incense"—all left an indelible impression on the poet and presumably struck fear in the hearts of many who attended this and similar meetings.\(^{11}\)

According to Ellen White, "Terror and conviction spread through the entire city" of Portland during Miller's 1840 visit. Believers and skeptics alike packed into the Casco Street Christian Church to hear his strange but plausible interpretations of Bible prophecy. News of Father Miller's lectures again caused fear to well up in Ellen's heart as it had that day about four years earlier when she picked up the scrap of paper announcing the impending end of the world. Yet she wanted to hear what the farmer-preacher had to say. Accompanied by several friends, Ellen made her way to the Casco Street Church and took her place among the crowds of listeners who filled the sanctuary. When Miller invited sinners to step forward to the "anxious seat," Ellen, under conviction, pressed through the congested aisles to join the "seekers" at the front. Still, she was not comforted, and doubts of her unworthiness haunted her day and night.

In the summer of 1841 she traveled with her parents to a Methodist camp meeting in Buxton. Here the constant exhortations to godliness only heightened her sense of sinfulness. Throughout the meetings she became increasingly distressed by her failure to experience an ecstatic conversion. In desperation one day she fell before the altar and pleaded for God's mercy. There, kneeling and praying, her burden of guilt suddenly vanished. The dramatic change in her countenance moved a lady nearby to exclaim, "His peace is with you, I see it in your face!" To Ellen, the whole earth now "seemed to smile under the peace of God."

Upon returning home, she decided to join her parents' Chestnut Street Methodist Church and requested baptism.
After a probationary period, during which William Miller returned to Portland for a second series of lectures and reawakened Ellen's interest in the Second Advent, she and eleven other candidates were immersed in the waters of Casco Bay. On June 26, 1842, with the wind blowing and the waves running high, she symbolically buried her sins in the watery grave. She emerged from the bay emotionally spent: "When I arose out of the water, my strength was nearly gone, for the power of God rested upon me. Such a rich blessing I never experienced before. I felt dead to the world, and that my sins were all washed away."

But her beautiful day was nearly ruined in only a few hours when she went to the church to receive the official welcome into membership. There, standing next to the plainly dressed Ellen, was another candidate decked out in gold rings and a fancy bonnet. To Ellen's dismay, her minister, the Reverend John Hobart, went right on with the service without so much as mentioning the offending adornments. This experience proved to be a great trial to young Ellen, whose faith in the popular churches was already being shaken.

Even her conversion and baptism failed to bring lasting peace to Ellen's troubled mind. At times she became discouraged and sank into deep despair. With sins so grave as hers, she felt certain no forgiveness could be granted. Sermons vividly depicting the red-hot flames of hell only intensified her torment and pushed her closer to the breaking point. "While listening to these terrible descriptions, my imagination would be so wrought upon that the perspiration would start, and it was difficult to suppress a cry of anguish, for I seemed already to feel the pains of perdition."

In addition, she began experiencing terrible feelings of guilt over her timidity to witness publicly for Christ. She especially wanted to participate in the small Millerite prayer services but feared her words would not come out right. Her burden of guilt grew to such proportions that
even her secret prayers seemed a mockery to God. For weeks depression engulfed her. At night she would wait until Elizabeth had fallen asleep, then crawl out of bed and silently pour out her heart to God. “I frequently remained bowed in prayer nearly all night,” she wrote, “groaning and trembling with inexpressible anguish, and a hopelessness that passes all description.”

While in this state of mind she began having religious dreams similar to those that followed her through life. In the first one recorded she saw herself failing to gain salvation, prevented by pride from humbling herself before “a lamb all mangled and bleeding.” She awoke certain that her fate had been sealed, that God had rejected her. But then she had a second dream. In this, Jesus touched her head and said, “Fear not.” Filled with renewed hope, Ellen at last confided in her mother, who advised talking things over with Elder Levi Stockman, a local Methodist minister who had become a Millerite. With tears in his eyes he listened to her unusual story and then said, “Ellen, you are only a child. Yours is a most singular experience for one of your tender age. Jesus must be preparing you for some special work.”

Although encouraged by Elder Stockman’s words, Ellen continued to brood over her inability to pray publicly. One evening during a prayer meeting in the home of her uncle Abner Gould, she determined to break her silence. While the others prayed, she knelt, trembling, waiting her chance. Then before she really knew what was happening, she, too, was speaking. As the pent-up words spilled out, she lost touch with the world and collapsed on the floor. Those around her suggested calling a physician, but Ellen’s mother assured the group that it was “the wondrous power of God” that had prostrated her daughter. Ellen herself said, “The Spirit of God rested upon me with such power that I was unable to go home that night.” The next day she left her uncle’s home a changed person, full of peace and happiness, and for six months she was in “perfect bliss.”
Ellen launched her public ministry the night following her prayer-meeting victory. Before a congregation of Millerite believers she tearfully related her recent experience. All fear disappeared as she spoke, and before long she “seemed to be alone with God.” Soon she received an invitation to speak at the Temple Street Christian Church, where her story again moved many in the audience to weep and praise God. Ellen also began holding private meetings with her friends, whom she feared were not ready to meet the Lord. At first some questioned her childish enthusiasm and ridiculed her experience, but eventually she converted every one of them. Often she would pray till nearly dawn for the salvation of a lost friend, before drifting off to sleep and dreaming of another in spiritual need.

As the Millerite movement gathered momentum, more and more of its followers found themselves in doctrinal conflict with their local churches. The Harmon family was no exception. By 1843 hostility had grown to the point where members would groan audibly when Ellen got up to speak in class meetings; so she and her teen-age brother, Robert, quit attending. Finally the Reverend William F. Farrington, pastor of the Chestnut Street Methodist Church, called on the family to inform them that their divergent teachings would no longer be tolerated. He suggested that they quietly withdraw from the church and thus avoid the publicity of a trial. Mr. Harmon, seeing no reason to be ashamed of his beliefs, demanded a public hearing. Here charges of absenteeism from class meetings were brought against the Harmons, and the following Sunday seven members of the family—including Ellen—were formally dismissed from the Methodist church.

Excitement and anticipation mounted as the months and days of 1843 slipped by. Throughout March a brilliant comet hovered in the southwestern sky, like a heavenly messenger announcing the impending end of the world. Although Father Miller would say only that he expected the Lord to come sometime during the Jewish year extend-
ing from March 21, 1843, to March 21, 1844, less cautious
men were all too willing to provide the faithful with spe-
cific dates for the great event. A favorite of many was April
14, the beginning of Passover and the anniversary of
Christ’s crucifixion. With the passing of each appointed
time, a new wave of disappointment spread through the
Millerite camp, allegedly driving some distraught souls to
suicide or insanity.  
In Ellen’s hometown of Portland the Millerites gathered
nightly in Beethoven Hall to renew their courage and to
make a final appeal to the still unconverted. Often these
sessions continued late into the night as one after another
Spirit-filled Millerite rose to give a spontaneous “exhorta-
tion.” One evening Ellen watched in awe as the Reverend
Samuel E. Brown, moved by a colleague’s testimony, sud-
denly turned porcelain white and fell from his chair on the
platform. In a few minutes, after regaining his composure,
he stood up and with his face “shining with light from
the Sun of Righteousness” gave what Ellen thought was “a
very impressive testimony.” As they made their way home
through the darkened streets of the city, the Millerites
filled the night air with joyful shouts of praise to God,
undoubtedly much to the annoyance of nearby sleeping
residents.
March 21, 1844, came and went with no sign of Christ’s
appearance. Obviously a mistake had been made, and on
May 2, William Miller confessed that his prophetic calcula-
tions had been in error. At the same time he reassured his
followers that he still believed the Second Coming was
not far off. While some of the faint-hearted now deserted
the movement, a surprising number, including most of the
Millerite leaders, adopted an exegetical solution offered
by Samuel S. Snow, a Congregational-Millerite preacher.
According to Snow, a correct reading of the prophecy in
Daniel upon which Miller had based his dates indicated
that Christ would not come until the “tenth day of the
seventh month” of the Jewish calendar, that is, October
22, 1844. Renewed energy surged through the Millerite ranks. By mid-August all hopes were pinned on October 22. No sacrifice—family, job, or fortune—seemed too great, for time on this earth would soon end. For Ellen, this was the happiest period of her life. Free from discouragement, she went from home to home earnestly praying for the salvation of those whose faith was wavering, or retired with friends to a secluded grove for quiet seasons of prayer.\textsuperscript{15}

Few today can imagine the bitter disappointment of those devout Millerites who watched in vain through the night of October 22 for their Savior’s appearance. Hiram Edson, a farmer in upstate New York, recorded those agonizing hours. He and his friends had waited hopefully until midnight, then burst into uncontrollable sobs. “It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.” Millerite reactions varied from resentment to puzzlement. Some bitterly renounced their former hopes in the Second Coming as a cruel delusion. Others, including a large group led by Miller and Himes, admitted their mistake but nevertheless clung to the certainty of Christ’s soon return. But a resolute few insisted that their sacrifices had not been in vain, that an event of cosmic significance had taken place on October 22.\textsuperscript{16}

This was the position of Hiram Edson. Early in the morning after the disappointment, he and some Millerite brothers had gone out to a barn to plead with God for an explanation. Their prayers were not long in being answered. After breakfast, while passing through a nearby field, Edson had a vision of heaven. He saw that the cleansing of the sanctuary foretold in Daniel 8:14 did not coincide with the Second Coming but rather with Christ’s entry into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary just prior to his return. This view was taken a step farther by two Millerite preachers, Apollos Hale and Joseph Turner, in a paper called the \textit{Advent Mirror}, published in January,
1845. According to Hale and Turner, Christ had ended his ministry for the world on October 22 and, upon entering the most holy place of the sanctuary, had shut the "door of mercy" on those who had rejected the Millerite warning.¹⁷

On a wintry day in December, 1844, seventeen-year-old Ellen Harmon met with four friends in the Portland home of a Mrs. Haines to pray for divine guidance. As the women knelt in a circle, the "Holy Spirit" rested upon Ellen in a new and dramatic way. Bathed in light, she seemed to be "rising higher and higher, far above the dark world." From her vantage point she saw the Advent people traveling a straight and narrow path toward the New Jerusalem, their way lighted by the October 22 message. When some "rashly denied the light behind them, and said that it was not God that had led them out so far," they stumbled in the darkness and fell to "the wicked world below which God had rejected." The meaning of her vision was clear: October 22 had been no mistake; only the event had been confused.¹⁸

The following February, while visiting in Exeter, Maine, Ellen received a second vision on the importance of October 22. Subsequent to the publication of the *Advent Mirror*, dissension had arisen among the Exeter Millerites over the shut-door question. Had God really closed the door of salvation to sinners on October 22? As Ellen sat listening to an Adventist sister express her doubts on the shut door, a feeling of intense agony came over her and she fell from her chair to the floor. While others in the room sang and shouted, the Lord showed Ellen that the door had indeed been closed. Most of those who witnessed this apparently heaven-sent answer "received the vision, and were settled upon the shut door." Within a day or so Ellen discussed what she had seen with Joseph Turner and was overjoyed to discover that he, too, had been proclaiming the same view. Although his *Advent Mirror* had been in the house where she was staying, she said that she had never seen a word of it prior to her vision.¹⁹
In the spring of 1846 Ellen met a retired sea captain named Joseph Bates who had broken with his former Millerite brethren and was now observing the seventh-day Sabbath. At first the wary Bates doubted Ellen’s reputed visionary experiences, but in November a special vision on astronomy, a favorite subject of his, won him over completely. In his presence Ellen described various details of the solar system and the so-called gap in the constellation Orion, then a topic of great interest because of the telescopic observations of William Parsons, the third earl of Rosse. Just months earlier, Bates himself had written a tract, “The Opening Heavens,” relating Lord Rosse’s discoveries, but Ellen assured him she had had no prior knowledge of astronomy.20

The captain’s faith in the young prophetess was doubly strengthened when she had another vision, giving divine sanction to his views on the Sabbath. In heaven, she said, Jesus had allowed her to see the tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. To her amazement, the fourth commandment, requiring observance of the seventh day, was “in the very center of the ten precepts, with a soft halo of light encircling it.” An angel kindly explained to the puzzled young woman that the Millerites must begin keeping the “true Sabbath” before Christ would come. By embracing the seventh-day Sabbath and making it a new “test,” Ellen placed herself in direct opposition to the moderate wing of Millerites, who at the Albany (New York) Conference of April, 1845, had officially condemned the doctrines Ellen had come to represent: visions, the shut door, and the seventh-day Sabbath. For the next few years she and the small band of fellow believers, generally drawn from Millerites with little formal education, were designated the “sabbatarian and shut-door” Adventists.21

To most Millerites, Ellen’s visions were simply another manifestation of the unfortunate religious drift of the times toward “fanaticism.” Early nineteenth-century America abounded with “prophets” of every description, from lit-
tle-known frontier seers in Ellen Harmon’s own Methodist church to prominent sectarian leaders. Mother Ann Lee of the Shakers had long since passed away, but her devoted followers perpetuated her reputation as the female Messiah. In the 1830s an epidemic of visions spread through the Shaker communes as young girls “began to sing, talk about angels, and describe a journey they were making, under spiritual guidance, to heavenly places.” Frequently those afflicted “would be struck to the floor, where they lay as dead, or struggling in distress, until someone near lifted them up, when they would begin to speak with great clearness and composure.” Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend who founded the religious community of Jerusalem in western New York, was known for her visions and religious dreams. Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet from Palmyra, New York, began having visions at age fourteen and continued to receive divine revelations until his death in 1844. During the second quarter of the century the Mormons were highly visible in Missouri and Illinois, and when Ellen White went west in the 1850s, she was often mistaken for a Mormon. 22

Even the Millerite movement in its final days was so infected with religious enthusiasm that Joshua V. Himes complained of being in “mesmerism seven feet deep.” 23 The most notorious case was that of John Starkweather, assistant pastor of Himes’s Chardon Street Chapel, whose “cataleptic and epileptic” fits greatly embarrassed his more subdued colleagues. Eventually he was expelled from the chapel when his spiritual gifts proved to be contagious. Despite the best efforts of Father Miller—who himself had religious dreams—to maintain decorum, his followers often got so emotionally worked up that their meetings seemed to him “more like Babel, than a solemn assembly of penitents bowing in humble reverence before a holy God.” 24

Fanaticism continued to plague the Millerites even after the October 22 disappointment, and it seemed to be particularly prevalent among shut-door believers. In Springwa-
ter Valley, New York, a black shut-door advocate named Houston set up a commune called the Household of Faith and the Household of Judgment and declared that "Jesus Christ in him was judging the world." At times God spoke directly to him in visions—"no vain imagination of a crazy mind," he assured William Miller—but his authoritarian manner, irrational acts, and practice of "spiritual wifery" soon alienated even his most ardent supporters.\textsuperscript{25} The shut-door group in Portland, Maine, was even more notorious in Millerite circles for its "\textit{continual} introduction of \textit{visionary nonsense}," as Himes called it. In March of 1845 Himes informed Miller that a Sister Clemons of that city "has become very visionary, and disgusted nearly all the good friends here." But only a couple of weeks later he reported that another Portland sister had received a vision showing that Miss Clemons was of the Devil. "Things are in a bad way at Portland," he concluded.\textsuperscript{26}

Ellen Harmon may not have been involved in these episodes, but she could hardly have been unaware of them. And there were at least two persons she met in Maine whom she regarded as authentic prophets. As a girl in the early 1840s she had gone with her father to Beethoven Hall to hear a tall, light-skinned mulatto named William Foy relate his "extraordinary visions of another world." Reputable Millerites testified to his genuineness, and a physician who examined him during one of his trances found no "appearance of life, except around the heart." After the Great Disappointment, Foy turned out one evening to hear Ellen give her testimony. While she was speaking, he began jumping up and down, praising the Lord, and insisting that he had seen exactly the same things. Ellen took this as an indication that God had chosen her as Foy's replacement.\textsuperscript{27}

Closer to home was Ellen's relationship with Hazen Foss, her sister Mary's brother-in-law and the brother of her dear friend Louisa Foss. Shortly before October 22, 1844, Hazen had received a vision similar to Foy's which the Lord had instructed him to relate to others. However,
after the disappointment he became bitter and refused to carry out his duty. If he said anything to his family about his experience, it seems likely that Ellen learned of it by the time she had her first vision; but apparently she did not talk with him until after her third one, when she visited Mary and Samuel Foss in Poland, Maine. In the course of their long conversation Hazen told Ellen the Lord had warned him that the light would be given to someone else if he refused to share it. Upon hearing Ellen’s story, he reportedly said to her, “I believe the visions are taken from me, and given to you.” He died an atheist.²⁸

Physically and conceptually Ellen’s early visions closely resembled those of her contemporaries Foy and Foss. The episodes were unpredictable; she might be praying, addressing a large audience, or lying sick in bed, when suddenly and without warning she would be off on “a deep plunge in the glory.”²⁹ Often there were three shouts of “Glory! G-l-o-r-y! G-l-o-r-y!”—the second and third “fainter, but more thrilling than the first, the voice resembling that of one quite a distance from you, and just going out of hearing.” Then, unless caught by some alert brother nearby, she slowly sank to the floor in a swoon. After a short time in this deathlike state, new power flowed through her body, and she rose to her feet. On occasion she possessed extraordinary strength, once reportedly holding an eighteen-pound Teale Bible in her outstretched hand for one-half hour.³⁰

During these trances, which came five or ten times a year and lasted from a few minutes to several hours, Ellen frequently described the colorful scenes she was seeing. One eyewitness recalled that

She often uttered words singly, and sometimes sentences which expressed to those about her the nature of the view she was having, either of heaven or of earth. . . . When beholding Jesus our Saviour, she would exclaim in musical tones, low and sweet, “Lovely, lovely, lovely,” many times, always with the greatest affection. . . . Sometimes she would cross her lips with her finger,
meaning that she was not at that time to reveal what she saw, but later a message would perhaps go across the continent to save some individual or church from disaster. ... When the vision was ended, and she lost sight of the heavenly light, as it were, coming back to the earth once more, she would exclaim with a long drawn sigh, as she took her first natural breath, “D-a-r-k.” She was then limp and strengthless, and had to be assisted to her chair ... 31

According to the testimony of numerous physicians and curiosity seekers, her vital functions slowed alarmingly, with her heart beating sluggishly and respiration becoming imperceptible. Although she was able to move about with complete freedom, not even the strongest men could forcibly budge her limbs. On occasion she was subjected to indignities. For example, her husband, James White, let one young man—later a leading Adventist minister—see if she could survive for ten minutes while he simultaneously pinched her nose and covered her mouth. 32 Many visions left Ellen in total darkness for short periods, but usually her eyesight returned to normal after a few days.

The cause of her visions was a matter of dispute. Both she and her followers considered them genuine revelations from God, identical in nature to those of the biblical prophets. But skeptics offered various other explanations. Many attributed them to mesmerism, or hypnotism, which her friends attempted to refute by pointing out that “she has a number of times been taken off in vision, when in prayer alone in the grove or in the closet.” Some physicians diagnosed her condition as hysteria, an ill-defined disease known sometimes to produce deathlike trances and hallucinations, especially in women. The two Kellogg doctors, Merritt and John, believed she suffered from catalepsy, which, as the latter described it, “is a nervous state allied to hysteria in which sublime visions are usually experienced. The muscles are set in such a way that ordinary tests fail to show any evidence of respiration, but the application of more delicate tests show that there are slight breathing movements sufficient to maintain life. Patients
sometimes remain in this condition for several hours.” 33

A special angel always guided Ellen on her heavenly
tours, directing her attention to events past and future,
cestial and terrestrial. Today her descriptions of the
other world might seem somewhat fanciful, but to her liter-
listic nineteenth-century followers they had the familiar
ring of truth. Her verbal portrait of Satan, for example, was
not unlike those that had terrified her as a church-going
child:

I was then shown Satan as he was, a happy, exalted angel.
Then I was shown him as he now is. He still bears a kingly form.
His features are still noble, for he is an angel fallen. But the
expression of his countenance is full of anxiety, care, unhappi-
ness, malice, hate, mischief, deceit, and every evil. That brow
which was once so noble, I particularly noticed. His forehead
commenced from his eyes to recede backward. I saw that he had
demeaned himself so long, that every good quality was debased,
and every evil trait was developed. His eyes were cunning, sly,
and showed great penetration. His frame was large, but the flesh
hung loosely about his hands and face. As I beheld him, his chin
was resting upon his left hand. He appeared to be in deep
thought. A smile was upon his countenance, which made me
tremble, it was so full of evil, and Satanic slyness. This smile is
the one he wears just before he makes sure of his victim, and as
he fastens the victim in his snare, this smile grows horrible.34

Not all of Ellen’s revelations were accompanied by phy-
sical manifestations. She often had dreams at night, espe-
cially as she grew older, which she thought were as much
inspired as her daytime visions. Naturally some skeptics
suspected that her dreams might not be very different from
their own, but she assured them that she could tell when
her dreams were of divine origin: “the same angel mes-
enger stands by my side instructing me in the visions of the
night, as stands beside me instructing me in the visions of
the day.” 35 Unlike the angel Moroni who appeared to the
Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, Ellen’s heavenly visitor
never seems to have identified himself by name.
The reception of her heavenly messages was only the
first step in the line of communication from God to the Advent believers. Either orally or in writing, these had to be relayed to those for whom they were intended. Ellen steadfastly claimed that in this work she did not rely on her own faulty memory. Whenever a previous revelation was needed, the scenes she might have seen years before would come to her “sharp and clear, like a flash of lightening, bringing to mind distinctly that particular instruction.” She professed to be “just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision. It is impossible for me to call up things which have been shown me unless the Lord brings them before me at the time that he is pleased to have me relate or write them.” In this way she was able to guarantee that her words of counsel came free from any contaminating earthly influences.  

In her second vision, late in 1844, Ellen had been told that part of her work as God’s messenger would be to travel among the scattered flock of Millerites, relating what she had seen and heard. The task might be painful at times, but God would see her through the ordeal. Although somewhat shy, Ellen was not embarrassed by her assignment. Religious work was socially acceptable for a young woman, and she was not without personal ambition. Indeed, she feared that her new responsibility might make her proud. But when an angel assured her that the Lord would preserve her humility, she determined to carry out his will. Only one obstacle stood in her way: the need for a traveling companion. Since her childhood accident, her health had never been good. At five feet, two inches, and barely eighty pounds, she was literally skin and bones. Lately an attack of “dropsical consumption” had damaged her lungs and made breathing difficult. Fatigue from long trips on steamboats and railway cars frequently brought on dangerous fainting spells, during which she might remain breathless for minutes. Obviously she could not travel alone, but who would go with her? Robert, her closest brother, was himself too feeble to be of much assistance
and seemed to be self-conscious of his sister’s gift. Mr. Harmon had too many mouths to feed at home even to consider chaperoning his daughter on her travels.\footnote{37}

Her hopes thus thwarted, Ellen once again sank into depression and wished to die. Then a miracle happened. One evening, while prayer was being offered in her behalf, “a ball of fire” struck her over the heart, knocking her to the floor helpless. As the dark cloud of oppression rolled away, an angel repeated her commission: “Make known to others what I have revealed to you.” Ellen now knew that God would somehow find a way.\footnote{38}

Her first opportunity to travel came almost providentially a short time later when Samuel Foss, her brother-in-law, offered to take her to visit her sister in Poland, Maine. Thankfully she accepted this chance to give her testimony, despite her inability for the past months to speak above a whisper. Her faith was rewarded. As she related her experience to the small band of Poland Adventists, her voice cleared up perfectly. Soon she was traveling throughout New England—accompanied by her sister Sarah or by Louisa Foss, the sister of Samuel and Hazen—exhorting the disappointed Millerites to hold fast for the Lord was coming soon.\footnote{39}

One of Ellen’s greatest trials as she went from place to place was the oft-repeated suggestion that her trances were mesmeric in origin. Mesmerism, or animal magnetism, originated in Germany in the 1770s with Dr. Franz Anton Mesmer’s “discovery” of an invisible fluid, like electricity, that coursed through the human body. According to Mesmer, obstructions to the flow of this animal magnetism caused disease, which could be cured by the magnetic emanations from another person’s hands or eyes. This treatment often put the subject in a deep trance, with unpredictable and sometimes entertaining results. Mesmer’s novel therapy attracted little American interest until 1836 when a French medical school dropout named Charles Poyen landed in Portland and began lecturing, with notable success, on the topic. Among his converts was Phineas Park-
hurst Quimby, mentor of Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science. By the early 1840s traveling mesmerists were a popular attraction throughout New England, and Boston alone claimed “two or three hundred skilful [sic] magnetizers.”

At times even Ellen was plagued with doubts about the nature of her revelations. Were they possibly the effect of mesmerism or, worse yet, a Satanic delusion? She was somewhat comforted by her discovery that the visions continued even when she retreated to a secluded spot away from any human influence. But the doubts continued to haunt her. One morning as she knelt for family prayers, she felt a vision coming on. For an instant she wondered if this could be a mesmeric force—and was immediately struck dumb. As divine punishment for questioning, she was unable to utter a word for twenty-four hours and had to communicate by means of a pencil and slate. There was a hidden blessing in this experience; to her great delight, she was now able for the first time since her childhood accident to hold a writing instrument without shaking. The next day her speech returned, and never again did Ellen doubt the source of her visions.

Her critics were not so easily silenced. Joseph Turner, with whom she had previously shared her views on the shut door, was among those convinced that mesmerism accounted for her strange behavior. He felt sure that, given the opportunity, he could put her in a mesmeric trance and control her actions. He soon had his chance when Ellen again visited her sister in Poland. While Ellen described what her angel had recently shown her, Turner sat nearby intently staring at her eyes through his spread fingers, hoping in this way to bring her under his hypnotic power. In the midst of her testimony Ellen sensed “a human influence” being exerted against her and remembered God’s promise to send a second angel if ever she were in danger of falling under an earthly influence. Raising her arms heavenward, she cried, “Another angel, Father! Another angel!” At once she was freed from Turner’s sinister
power and went on speaking in peace. Her contemporary Mrs. Eddy was less successful in dealing with malicious animal magnetism—M.A.M. she called it—and repeatedly went to great lengths to protect herself from its influence.42

During a trip to eastern Maine in 1845 Ellen struck up a friendship with a twenty-three-year-old Millerite minister named James White, whom she had casually met sometime earlier in Portland. He was six years her senior, but the two young Adventists soon discovered they had much in common. Like Ellen, James came from a large New England family, being the fifth of nine children. He, too, had been a sickly child, with such poor vision that he had been unable to attend school until nineteen years of age. Then in twelve weeks of intensive study at St. Albans Academy he had obtained a teaching certificate.43

In September, 1842, after teaching school off and on for a couple of years and spending another seventeen weeks in attendance himself, James White listened to Miller and Himes speak at a camp meeting and soon afterward abandoned the classroom to become a full-time Millerite preacher (with credentials from the Christian Connection, the church of his parents). Borrowing a horse from his father and worn-out saddle and bridle from a minister friend, he set out that first winter "thinly clad, and without money." His assets consisted of a cloth chart illustrating the biblical prophecies, three prepared lectures, a strong voice, and plenty of determination. By April he had traveled hundreds of miles; his horse was ill, his clothes were worn, and he was still penniless. Yet he continued to proclaim the Millerite message, displaying the perseverance and fortitude that would serve him so well during the formative years of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Though apparently successful as a Millerite evangelist, young White never occupied a prominent or influential position in the movement.44

It did not take James long to become a firm believer in
Ellen’s supernatural powers—or to see the dangers of her traveling unescorted. Several times during her early ministry, warrants had been issued for her arrest, and hostile groups occasionally threatened her. As James saw it, it was “his duty” to accompany Ellen on her visits to the widely scattered Adventists of New England. Mrs. Harmon, however, saw it differently. When she got wind of the arrangement, she immediately ordered her daughter home in hopes of sparing her reputation. But James and Ellen were not to be separated, and before long they were back on the road with their friends, contacting the faithful in Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire. With Christ coming in such a short time—possible dates were still being suggested—marriage seemed out of the question. James looked upon the idea as “a wife of the Devil” and warned another couple contemplating such a move that they would be denying their faith in the Second Coming. Unfortunately, some people misunderstood the innocent relationship between James and Ellen, and ugly rumors began to circulate. It was clear, said James to Ellen one day, that “something had got to be done.” So on August 30, 1846, they set their reservations aside and presented themselves before a Portland justice of the peace to become man and wife.45

Married life for the newlyweds was far from glamorous. Since James’s ministry did not provide him with a steady income, the nearly destitute couple was forced to move in with the Harmon’s, who had returned to Gorham. Here the Whites set up headquarters for about a year, until after the birth of their first child, Henry, in August, 1847. About this time an Adventist family from Topsham, Maine, the Stockbridge Howlands, took pity on the struggling young prophetess and her husband and invited them to occupy a rent-free room upstairs in their home. The Whites gratefully accepted the offer and with borrowed furniture set up housekeeping in Topsham. James put in long hours hauling rock or chopping cordwood at fifty cents a day, and with assistance from the Howlands he managed to keep
food on the table. These trials and tribulations were heaven sent, the Lord explained to Ellen, to keep them from settling down to a life of ease.46

Before little Henry reached his first birthday, his parents reluctantly decided to leave him with friends and become itinerant preachers. The separation nearly broke Ellen’s heart, but she vowed not to let her motherly affection keep her “from the path of duty.” For four years, from 1848 to 1852, the Whites crisscrossed New England and New York, preaching their “sabbath and shut-door” message and living from hand to mouth on the meager contributions of their Adventist supporters. For lack of money, they “traveled on foot, in second-class cars, or on steamboat decks.” The arrival of their second son, James Edson, in the summer of 1849 brought only a brief interruption to their nomadic life. He, too, was left while still a baby with a kind Millerite sister in Oswego, New York.47

No doubt encouraged by the more literate James, Ellen began in 1846 to publish her visions. Already one of her revelations had appeared unexpectedly in a Cincinnati paper, the Day-Star, edited by Enoch Jacobs, who later led a small group of Millerite defectors into a Shaker commune. Ellen had written him a private letter describing her first vision, which to her surprise he had published. It was apparent that the only way to control what got printed was for the Whites to do it themselves. So as they traveled about the country, Ellen would write out as best she could what she had seen, and then James would carefully go through the manuscript, correcting grammar and polishing style, until it came up to his standards for publication. Some critics suspected James contributed more than his editorial talents to the production of Ellen’s testimonies, but she always insisted that only God influenced the content. By 1851 the Whites had turned out three broadsides and a small pamphlet and had launched a succession of periodicals culminating in the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald.48

The year 1851—seven years after the Great Disappointment—had special meaning for the sabbatarians. For
some time Joseph Bates had been suggesting that this might be the year of their Savior’s return. Early in 1849 Ellen had warned against thinking that time might “continue for a few years more,” and in June of the following year her angel informed her that “Time is almost finished.” The doctrines she and James had thoughtfully studied out over the past several years would now have to be learned by others “in a few months.” But again Christ did not appear. Surely the Whites, who had sacrificed so much, could not be blamed for his delay. In Ellen’s mind the responsibility rested squarely on the shoulders of those Millerites who, at the Albany Conference of 1845, failed to endorse the seventh-day Sabbath and visions like her own.\(^{49}\)

By 1851 the Whites had abandoned much of their shut-door doctrine. They would still grant no opportunity for salvation to those who had heard and rejected the 1844 message, but they allowed the door might be cracked sufficiently to permit the entrance of children, Millerites who were willing to accept the seventh-day Sabbath, and a few other honest-hearted souls who had not rejected the October 22 message. The problem was what to do with all of Ellen’s inspired testimonies indicating the door of mercy had been shut. In an attempt to take care of this embarrassment, she and James collected her early writings, systematically deleted passages that might be construed as supporting the shut door, and published the edited version as Ellen’s first book, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (1851). From then on the Whites publicly denied that Ellen had ever been shown that the door was shut, although James apparently admitted on occasion that perhaps young Ellen had been unduly influenced by shut-door advocates at the time of her first vision.\(^{50}\)

A crisis over Ellen’s visions also developed in 1851. In July she wrote her friends, the Dodges: “The visions trouble many. They [know] not what to make of them.” The causes for this dissatisfaction are complex. Among the sabbatarian Adventists, some were doubtless puzzled by her
changing stand on the shut door, while others resented her habit of publishing private testimonies revealing their secret sins—and names. Nonbelievers frequently charged that the visions were being elevated above the Bible. This criticism particularly galled James. In an effort to keep the visions as inconspicuous as possible, he decided in the summer of 1851 not to print his wife’s testimonies in the widely distributed *Review and Herald*. In the future her prophetic writings were to be confined to an “Extra,” for limited circulation among “those who believe that God can fulfill his word and give visions *in the last days.*” The “Extras” were scheduled for every two weeks, but only one issue ever appeared. For the next four years Ellen White lived in virtual exile among her own people, being allowed to publish only seven *Review and Herald* articles, none relating a vision. Most of these brief communications admonished readers to shun worldliness in dress, speech, and action.\(^{51}\)

Her visions unappreciated, Ellen White again grew discouraged. The divine revelations came less and less frequently, until she feared her gift was gone. Since her public ministry had depended almost entirely on the visions, she now resigned herself simply to being a Christian wife and mother, a role to which she always attached great significance. James provided little or no encouragement. Over the years he had become increasingly resentful of accusations that he had made his wife’s visions a “test” among the Advent Sabbath-keepers and that his *Review and Herald* promoted her views. Finally, in October, 1855, he exploded. “What has the REVIEW to do with Mrs. W.’s views?” he asked angrily. “The sentiments published in its columns are all drawn from the Holy Scriptures. No writer of the REVIEW has ever referred to them as authority on any point. The REVIEW for five years has not published one of them. Its motto has been, ‘The Bible, and the Bible alone, the only rule of faith and duty.’” It was nobody’s business, he went on, whether or not he accepted his wife’s testimonies.\(^{52}\)
The same issue of the *Review and Herald* containing this outburst also announced that a group of Battle Creek Adventists were taking over publication of the paper, ostensibly because James White's heavy responsibilities had broken his constitution. In recent months he had come to fear that his editorial burdens were threatening his health, and he had publicly expressed a desire to relinquish his position. He especially wanted to free himself from the "whining complaints" of critics who were writing "poisonous letters" against him. The content of these letters is unknown, but they probably criticized him for his attitude toward the visions. We do know that a short time later he was asked in the *Review and Herald* to apologize for his low estimate of his wife's gift.53

With Ellen White in the shadows during the early 1850s, the sabbatarian Adventists had not prospered; and her husband's outspokenness made him a likely scapegoat. At a general meeting of sabbatarian leaders in November, 1855, his colleagues replaced him with a twenty-three-year-old convert, Uriah Smith. Then a committee of elders went before the assembly and sorrowfully confessed the church's unfaithfulness in ignoring God's chosen messenger. They made a special point of repudiating James's position on the vision: "To say they are of God, and yet we will not be tested by them, is to say that God's will is not a test or rule for Christians, which is inconsistent and absurd." One of Smith's first acts as the new editor was to reopen the journal's pages to Mrs. White, who happily predicted that God would now smile on the church and "graciously and mercifully revive the gifts." Her humiliation was over; her prophetic role, now secure.54

The lessons of this experience were not lost on Ellen White, who was now emerging as the dominant force among the sabbatarians. In the future the mere threat of divine displeasure helped to sustain her influence. "I saw that God would soon remove all light given through visions unless they were appreciated," she warned the Roosevelt, New York, church in 1861.55 Through the re-
minder of Ellen’s life Adventist leaders coveted her approval and submitted, in public at least, to the authority of her testimonies. Despite her occasional inconsistency and insensitivity, most members clung to the belief that she represented a divine channel of communication. To them, dramatic visions, supernatural healings, and revelations of secret sins were persuasive evidences of a true prophet.

Domestic life for the Whites was scarcely more tranquil than their public life. In April, 1852, the impoverished couple, worn out by years on the road, settled down to a semipermanent home in Rochester, New York, a popular “way station for westward migrants.” With the opening of the Erie Canal in the 1820s, thousands of families like the Whites moved into Rochester, stayed for a short time, and then pushed on toward the West. Here, in an old rented house, James and Ellen collected their children about them and set up headquarters for their fledgling church. There were no luxuries. One room housed the press; the others were furnished with pieces of junk Ellen repaired. Food was cheap and simple—turnips instead of potatoes, sauce in place of butter.56

In August, 1854, Ellen’s responsibilities increased with the birth of her third child, Willie. After the years of separation she was thankful to be with her children, but their occasional misdeeds caused her so much anxiety her health suffered. For over three years the Whites “toiled on in Rochester through much perplexity and discouragement,” receiving little help or sympathy from their erstwhile friends in upstate New York. Their cause was not prospering, but the bills continued to mount. At times James seemed near death, and Ellen feared he might leave her with three children to raise and a debt of two or three thousand dollars. Two visits to Michigan convinced them there were greener pastures to the West; so in the fall of 1855 they shipped press and belongings around Lake Erie to the little town of Battle Creek, thus ending what Ellen called their “captivity.” The years of struggle now lay largely in the past; days of fulfillment were just ahead.57
2. IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

“If any among us are sick, let us not dishonor God by applying to earthly physicians, but apply to the God of Israel. If we follow his directions (James 5: 14, 15) the sick will be healed. God’s promise cannot fail. Have faith in God, and trust wholly in him.”

Ellen G. White

Through the years of uncertainty and hardship one constant in Ellen White’s life was poor health. From childhood to middle age she enjoyed few periods without some physical or mental suffering. The story of her life fairly abounds with one sickness after another. She began her public ministry in 1844 with shattered nerves and broken body, “and to all appearance had but a short time to live.” Her lungs were racked with consumption, her throat so sore she could barely speak above a whisper. On her extended travels through New England she frequently fainted and remained breathless “several minutes.” Her mind on one occasion wandered aimlessly for two weeks. Accidents added to her misery; on one excursion to New Hampshire she fell from the wagon and injured her side so badly she had to be carried into the house that night.

On several occasions seemingly miraculous healings saved her from imminent death. Not long after her marriage to James in 1846 she became so violently ill for three weeks that “every breath came with a groan.” While she hovered between this world and the next, her friends gath-
ered around her bed to pray for divine healing. As one young man, Henry Nichols, pleaded with God on her behalf, a supernatural power seemed to possess him. Ellen described what happened next: He “rose from his knees, came across the room, and laid his hands upon my head, saying, ‘Sister Ellen, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole,’ and fell back prostrated by the power of God.” The following day, while solicitous neighbors inquired about her funeral, she rode thirty-eight miles through a storm to Topsham.³

During a visit to New York City in the summer of 1848 Ellen’s cough grew so serious she knew she “must have relief, or sink beneath disease.” For weeks she had not slept peacefully through a single night. In desperation she remembered the biblical instructions found in the fifth chapter of James: “Is one of you ill? He should send for the elders of the congregation to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer offered in faith will save the sick man, the Lord will raise him from his bed, and any sins he may have committed will be forgiven.” In accordance with these directions, she called in some Adventist brethren and asked for anointing and prayer. The next morning her cough was gone—and did not return until the end of her journey.⁴

With divine help so readily available, Ellen saw no reason to resort to physicians. In the concluding paragraph to an 1849 broadside “To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God,” she counseled her readers not to seek medical assistance:

If any among us are sick, let us not dishonor God by applying to earthly physicians, but apply to the God of Israel. If we follow his directions (James 5:14, 15) the sick will be healed. God’s promise cannot fail. Have faith in God, and trust wholly in him, that when Christ who is our life shall appear we may appear with him in glory.⁵

Given the low state of the medical arts at the time, her advice probably did little harm. But it was not the poor
quality of medical care that prompted her to write what she did; she simply believed it was a denial of faith and a dishonor to God to go to physicians when God’s promise was so explicit.

For at least a few years Ellen White had nothing to do with physicians of any persuasion, regular or irregular. In times of sickness, which were frequent, she trustingly placed her life and the lives of her children in the hands of God. Once, during a temporary stay in Centerport, New York, little Edson became so gravely ill that he fell unconscious and the “death dampness” appeared on his brow. Prayers were offered, but with little apparent effect. His mother grew increasingly concerned. Her greatest fear was not that her baby might die—if that were the Lord’s will—but that her enemies would taunt her with cries of “Where is their God?” At last she said to James, “There is but one thing more that we can do, that is to follow the Bible rule, call for the elders.” Unfortunately, the only available elder (besides James) had just departed for Port Gibson on the Erie Canal. Undaunted, Ellen sent her husband racing down the towpath five miles to catch him. The good brother willingly got off the boat, returned to the house, and anointed Edson, who responded by regaining consciousness. His thankful mother reported that “A light shone upon his features, and the blessing of God rested upon us all.”

Relying on prayer instead of physicians became common practice among sabbatarian Adventists of the early 1850s. In 1853 Anna White, who assisted her brother James in editing the Youth’s Instructor, wrote: “I am now living with a people who believe that God is able and willing to heal the sick now, and who when sick, apply nowhere else for aid.” The experience of L. V. Masten, a non-Adventist hired by James White to take charge of printing the Review and Herald, illustrates this characteristic. In the summer of 1852 he was dying from cholera under the care of a regular physician when the Whites rescued him and took him into their own home. There he vowed to
become an Adventist if God would heal him. He discharged his doctor and “held fast the arm of God and the faith of Jesus.” Recovery soon followed. In relating his experience in the Review and Herald, Masten noted the large number of Sabbath-keepers who had “already been snatched from the jaws of death, and in a very short time restored to perfect health, by no other means than by the prayer of faith!” With great passion he urged his new brethren and sisters to have complete faith in God’s healing power and to shun even roots and herbs when ill.

In condemning the use of simple botanic remedies, Masten was going to a greater extreme than Ellen White, though there were times when she refused to administer any medication at all. When her first child, Henry, became very sick as a baby, friends recommended Townsend’s sarsaparilla, a popular patent medicine. Ellen retired to her room alone and asked for divine guidance. In a vision the Lord showed her that no earthly medicine could save her little boy; so she “decided to venture the life of the child upon the promise of God.” When James entered the room and asked if he should send a man for the sarsaparilla, she replied: “No. Tell him we will try the strength of God’s promises.” That evening Henry was anointed, and the next day he was up on his feet.

Many times during her early public career Ellen White was blessed with the power to heal. Often members of her family were the beneficiaries of her gift. Both her husband, James, and her son Edson, for example, recovered from some form of “cholera” after Ellen had laid her hands on their heads and rebuked the disease in the name of Jesus. But perhaps her most satisfying miracle was the spectacular healing of her ailing mother. In late September, 1849, Mrs. Harmon accidentally ran a rusty nail through her foot and developed a nasty wound. The limb swelled frighteningly and lockjaw seemed certain. Upon hearing of the mishap, Ellen hastened to her mother’s side. There, she wrote, “With the Spirit of the Lord resting upon me, I bid her in the name of the Lord rise and walk. His power was in the room, and shouts of praise went up
to God. Mother arose and walked the room declaring the work was done, all the soreness gone, and that she was entirely relieved from pain."  

Sometime in the early 1850s Ellen’s attitude toward physicians underwent a marked change. The first indication of a move toward a more moderate position came in 1851 with the publication of her first book, Experience and Views, which brought together her earlier writings. Deleted, along with the embarrassing shut-door passages, was the admonition from her 1849 broadside never to apply to earthly physicians. No explanation was given.  

A few years later a tragic incident in Camden, New York, led Ellen White publicly to repudiate her former stand. It seems that a devout Adventist from that town, Sister Prior, had been allowed to die without receiving medical aid of any kind. Immediately rumors began circulating that responsibility for the death lay with Mrs. White, who was known to have counseled against going to doctors of medicine. When word of the incident reached the prophetess, she vehemently protested that she could not possibly be accountable for the sister’s death since at the time in question she had been in Rochester, over a hundred miles away. On her next visit to Camden she received a vision, indicating that poor judgment had been used in not obtaining medical help for Sister Prior. “I saw,” she said, “that they [the Adventists attending the sister] had carried matters to extremes, and that the cause of God was wounded and our faith reproached, on account of such things, which were fanatical in the extreme.”  

In 1860, in the second volume of her Spiritual Gifts, Ellen White carefully articulated her new posture on medical care:

We believe in the prayer of faith; but some have carried this matter too far, especially those who have been affected with fanaticism. Some have taken the strong ground that it was wrong to use simple remedies. We have never taken this position, but have opposed it. We believe it to be perfectly right to use the remedies God has placed in our reach, and if these fail, apply to
the great Physician, and in some cases the counsel of an earthly physician is very necessary. This position we have always held.\textsuperscript{12}

In view of her counsel just eleven years earlier, the last sentence of this statement is puzzling.

Indicative of Ellen White's changing attitude was her visit to an itinerant doctor in early 1854, apparently her first consultation with a physician since childhood. Throughout the previous winter she had suffered miserably from a variety of complaints: heart problems, inability to breathe while lying down, recurrent fainting spells, and a cancerlike inflammation on her left eyelid. The pain was so intense she had not experienced "one joyful feeling" for months. When a "celebrated physician" came to Rochester offering free examinations, she set aside her reservations and went to see him. The doctor was most discouraging; in three weeks, he predicted, she would suffer paralysis and then apoplexy. His prognosis was not far off the mark. In about three weeks she fainted and was unconscious for a day and a half. A week later an apparent stroke left the left side of her body paralyzed, her head cold and numb, and her speech impaired. She thought this time she would surely die, but after a fervent season of prayer one night, she awoke the next morning free from pain and paralysis. Her physician, upon seeing her, could only exclaim: "Her case is a mystery. I do not understand it."\textsuperscript{13}

Despite Ellen White's softening attitude toward physicians, the leading sabbatarian Adventists continued for many years to shun the medical profession.\textsuperscript{14} Their preference for prayer over medicine is more understandable if we bear in mind that many of them—including the Whites—regarded illness as sometimes satanic in origin. For instance, when Mrs. White in the spring of 1858 suffered her third "stroke" shortly after receiving a vision on the "great controversy between Christ and his angels and Satan and his angels," she was shown that Satan had tried to take her life to prevent her from writing out what she had seen about him. Against such diabolical attacks, prayer was obviously more efficacious than any medicine.\textsuperscript{15}
Like so many women reformers in America, Ellen White was an enthusiastic advocate of temperance and healthful living—and with good reason. Both at home and abroad Americans were notorious for their hard drinking. Cider flowed as freely as water, and every farmer was at liberty to distill his own spirits. “While the means of intoxication were so abundant,” observed one critic, “the gregarious and social habits of the people tended to foster drunkenness.” In response to this problem, a growing number of Americans joined local and national societies to promote temperance either by persuasion or by legislation. Among the most successful and colorful of such organizations was the Washingtonian Temperance Society, created in 1840 by six reformed drinkers in Baltimore. In cities and towns across the country Washingtonian orators “mounted upturned rum-kegs from which vantage point they related their numerous experiences with the demon, rum.” Their approach proved effective; within a few years hundreds of thousands of well-intentioned drinkers had signed the Washingtonian total abstinence pledge.18

Given her background, Ellen White could scarcely have avoided joining the temperance crusade. Her home town of Portland, an import center for West Indian rum, was a hotbed of reform activity; Elizabeth Oakes Smith once called it a “pet City to the divine eye.” During Ellen’s childhood, the indefatigable Neal Dow kept the city astir with his campaign against “Demon Rum,” which culminated in 1851 in the passage of the Maine Liquor Law, the first of many statewide prohibition laws in America. Her church, the Methodist, was likewise swept up in the temperance movement. By the 1840s no “good” Methodist would touch a drop of alcohol, and the very pious had left off tobacco as well. Young Ellen would no more have taken a drink or a smoke than she would have uttered a word of profanity.17

The Millerite movement exemplified the natural affinity between revivalism and temperance in nineteenth-century America. Father Miller, who saw the hand of the Lord in the temperance societies springing up around the country,
warned the expectant saints that those who drank would be “wholly unprepared” for the Second Coming. Among his followers were reformers of every stripe, including many temperance enthusiasts. As a young Millerite preacher, James White never touched alcohol, tobacco, tea, or coffee, and a Cincinnati believer went even further by adding flesh foods to the list of forbidden articles.\(^{18}\)

One of the most committed Millerite advocates of temperance and dietetic reform was Captain Joseph Bates, who later united with the Whites in founding the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In 1821, while returning from a voyage to South America, he resolved never again to drink a glass of ardent spirits. Over the next few years he swore off wine, then tobacco, and finally even beer and cider. In 1827 during a visit to his home in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, he was caught up in a local revival and joined the Christian church. The day of his baptism he proposed the formation of a temperance society and before long had twelve or thirteen names on his list of subscribers. On his next, and final, voyage the teetotaling captain announced to his shocked crew that there would be no intoxicating drinks on board and invited them instead to morning and evening prayers. Following his retirement from the sea Bates continued his personal reformation by espousing the cause of Sylvester Graham, a popular health reformer, and laying aside tea and coffee, meat, butter, cheese, greasy foods, and rich pastries. Although he never pushed his peculiar views on his Adventist friends, his healthy life was a constant reminder to those around him of the possible benefits of abstemious living. It seems probable that he was a major factor in leading Ellen White in 1848 to begin speaking out against the use of tobacco, tea, and coffee.\(^{19}\)

In the fall of 1848 Mrs. White received the first of her many visions on healthful living. According to her husband's testimony twenty-two years later, she was then shown that tobacco, tea, and coffee should be put away by those looking for the Second Coming of Christ. (Appar-
ently alcohol was such an obvious evil, or so little abused, it was not mentioned.) Ellen did not identify this vision specifically, but presumably she was referring to it when she wrote: “I saw all those who are indulging self by using the filthy weed [tobacco], should lay it aside, and put their means to a better use. And if all would study to be more economical in their articles of dress, and deprive themselves of some things which are not actually necessary, and lay aside such useless and injurious things as tea, &c., and give what they cost to the cause, they would receive more blessings here, and a reward in heaven.” In a private letter to a brother struggling with the tobacco habit Ellen White added that her “accompanying angel” told her that the weed was not to be used even for medicinal purposes, because doing so greatly dishonored God. Although she regarded tobacco and tea as physically harmful, it is significant that in her early years she was clearly much more concerned about the money squandered on such needless items than she was about their possibly injurious effects.

Now that God had spoken, tobacco began disappearing from among the sabbatarian Adventists. In September, 1849, while Bates was roaming the state of Maine seeking out “the scattered sheep,” he happily reported that “pipes & Tobacco are travling [sic] out of sight fast I tell you.” With the Second Coming so close, it seemed to him that nothing was “to[o] dear or precious to let go in end of the cause now.” A couple of months later James White gave a similarly encouraging account of progress in New York. “Tobacco and snuff are being cleared from the camp with few exceptions,” he wrote following a conference at Oswego.

Aside from the individual labors of Bates and the Whites, there seems to have been little antitobacco activity among the Adventists in the early 1850s. In fact, little was said about health at all until after February, 1854, when Ellen White received a second heavenly message on the subject, notably broader in scope than her first. In words
that echoed Sylvester Graham she told of seeing that Sabbath-keepers were making “a god of their bellies,” that instead of eating so many rich dishes they should take “more coarse food with little grease.” “I saw,” she said, “rich food destroyed the health of the bodies and was ruining the constitution, was destroying the mind, and was a great waste of means.” It was also brought to her attention that the Sabbath-keepers were not as clean and tidy as God wanted them to be. Uncleanliness was not to be tolerated, and those persisting in their filthy ways were to “be put out of the camp.”

The Adventists launched their campaign against tobacco in the summer of 1855 with two lead articles in the Review and Herald on “the filthy, health-destroying, God-dishonoring practice of using tobacco.” In this way they joined the growing number of antitobacco crusaders who had begun in the 1830s to speak out against the undesirable habits of their fellow citizens. Americans had long been fond of their pipes and snuffboxes, but with the rise of the common man in the Jacksonian era they took to the unsightly but time-saving practice of chewing. The ever-practical American, it was pointed out, “can saw wood, or plow, or hoe corn, at the same time while he is chewing a good ‘cud’ of tobacco. He can, if need be, plead before a jury, or preach a sermon, while at the same time he holds the precious bolus in one side of his mouth.” Tobacco consumption increased in the late 1840s with the popularization of the cigar during the war against Mexico. Now, complained an irritated non-smoker, from one end of the country to the other there was “one mighty puff,—puff,—puff.” Critics began calling attention to the dire consequences—from insanity to cancer—of so much tobacco using and in 1849, in conscious imitation of the temperance workers, organized the American Anti-Tobacco Society. With the outbreak of the Civil War, however, their movement came to an untimely end.

A few months after the appearance of the Review and Herald articles, the editor noted that the subject of tobacco
was “engaging the attention of many of our brethren in different places.” It had certainly caught the attention of the brethren in Vermont. At a general meeting in Morris-town, October 15, 1855, representatives from churches throughout the state voted resolutely to withdraw “the hand of fellowship” from any member who, after being “properly admonished,” continued to use tobacco. Upon returning to their home churches, however, they discovered that their enthusiasm for reform was not shared by their fellow members. Consequently, at a statewide conference a year later they rescinded their previous action and in its place unanimously adopted a milder resolution more compatible with the practices of their constituency: “Resolved, That the use of Tobacco is a fleshly lust, which wars against the soul; and therefore we will labor in the spirit of meekness, patiently and perseveringly to persuade each brother and sister who indulge in the use of it, to abstain from this evil.”

Adventist leaders worked strenuously for years to get their members to break the tobacco habit. Ellen White even wrote personal testimonies on occasion to those shown her in vision as being in special need. The editors of the Review and Herald pursued an “uncompromising course” in presenting the evils of tobacco to their readers. They filled their pages with articles by prominent sabbatarian ministers like J. N. Andrews, J. H. Waggoner, and M. E. Cornell, urging the faithful to overcome “this inexcusable worldly lust.” Perhaps the most persuasive argument came from the pen of James White, who pointed out the economic advantages of not using tobacco and tea. According to his calculations, if the one thousand Sabbath-keeping families all discarded those two items, ten thousand dollars would be saved annually, enough “to sustain thirty Missionaries in new fields of labor.” How shameful it was, he said, that some members too poor to take the Review and Herald or to support the ministry nevertheless found sufficient cash to purchase tobacco and tea.

By the late 1850s Adventist ministers no longer smelled
of tobacco, and it was impossible for users to obtain a “card of recommendation” licensing them to preach. But among the laity, who could not so easily be controlled, tobacco continued to be a problem for years. In 1858 Elder Cornell wrote of being distressed by “the thought that some among us, who are called brethren, after all that has been written on the subject, should still persist in using the infamous weed.” Three years later Elder Isaac Sanborn complained of finding tobacco among professed Sabbath-keepers in Wisconsin. And as late as 1867 there were still some members in northern Michigan who had not yet gained the victory.

With the spotlight focused on tobacco, other aspects of health reform tended to get lost in the shadows. Even some of the practices Ellen saw condemned in vision received scant attention. Coffee, which had recently replaced tea as “the American beverage,” was seldom mentioned. Tea was definitely frowned upon, but still too widely used to be made a test of fellowship. Often the conscience-smitten rationalized their actions by taking “part of a cup,” having it “just colored,” or making it “weak.” Such laxity about a drink God had specifically forbidden naturally bothered some of the more scrupulous members. In an open letter appearing in the Review and Herald in 1863 Elder A. S. Hutchins took his erring brethren and sisters to task for not heeding the light the Lord had given. “Are we ashamed of the position that we as a people and organized churches have taken in regard to the use of this herb?” he asked. “If not let us live out our faith, when with tea-drinkers, as well as when with those who drink cold water.”

The dietary reforms of the 1854 vision seem to have been wholly ignored. The only serious question relating to food was whether or not, in light of the Old Testament ban against swine’s flesh, Sabbath-keepers could properly eat pork, a staple of the American diet. On this issue the Whites stood firmly against the extremists who wanted the church to take a position against eating it. When the
problem first arose in the early days of the sabbatarian movement, James wrote in the *Present Truth* that, although too much pork-eating could be harmful, he did “not, by any means, believe that the Bible teaches that its proper use, in the gospel dispensation, is sinful.” Referring to the decision of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem not to impose certain Mosaic practices on converted Gentiles (Acts 15), he asked, “Shall we lay a greater ‘burden’ on the disciples than seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and the holy apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ? God forbid. Their decision, being right, settled the question with them ... and it should forever settle the question with us.”

With some believers, however, the question was far from settled. They failed to see why the church should abide by one part of the Old Testament—the seventh-day Sabbath—and not another. Thus agitation over swine’s flesh continued until 1858 when a vision settled the controversy. Ellen White was shown, she said, that while it was all right for individuals to refrain from eating pork, the church should not make a test of it. “If it is the duty of the church to abstain from swine’s flesh,” she wrote to a couple who were urging the extreme position, “God will discover it to more than two or three.” Later, she answered another sister’s inquiry about what course to take with the reply that “if it is your husband’s wish to use swine’s flesh, you should be perfectly free to use it.” And to make sure the point got across, James scribbled on the back of the letter: “That you may know how we stand on this question, I would say that we have just put down a two hundred pound porker.”

The revival of hoop skirts in the 1850s prompted Ellen White to speak out on still another reform of the day—dress. Since childhood she had associated austere attire with true Christianity, and she wanted her followers to be known by their simplicity of dress. She herself always wore plain, durable clothing, devoid of any “unnecessary bows and ribbons.” Hoops she found particularly objectionable. They were not only “ridiculous” and “disgust-
ing” but immoral, having been devised (as she thought) by
the prostitutes of Paris as “a screen to iniquity.” Sabbath-
keepers were to have nothing to do with this godless
fashion. “Do not put on hoops by any means,” she admon-
ished one minister’s wife; “let us preserve the signs which
distinguish us in dress, as well as articles of faith.”

By the early 1860s the sabbatarian Adventists numbered
thirty-five hundred members scattered over the territory
east of the Missouri River and north of the Confederacy.
Since Christ still had not come, some of the brethren—led
by James White—now turned their attention to estab-
lishing a church on earth. Resistance to such a move was
great, however, and as a result James grew “desperately
discouraged.” He and his wife had invested their lives in
the Advent movement, and it was difficult for them to take
a detached view of things. Ellen explained their feelings
in a poignant letter to her friend Lucinda Hall:

The cause of God is a part of us. Our experience and lives are
interwoven with this cause. We have no separate existence. It has
been a part of our very being. The believers in present truth have
seemed like our children. When the cause of God prospers, we
are happy. But when wrongs exist among them, we are unhappy
and nothing can make us glad. The earth, its treasures and joys,
are nothing to us. Our interest is not here. Is it then strange that
my husband with his sensitive feelings should suffer in mind?

The acquisition of church buildings and a publishing
house made it imperative to set up some kind of legal
entity. Thus the first step toward organization was taken in
the fall of 1860 when the leaders met and, over the opposi-
tion of those who disliked any compromise with the world,
selected a name. Some favored the “Church of God,” but
the majority finally settled on the less pretentious but
more distinctive “Seventh-day Adventists.” Three years
later delegates from several states met in Battle Creek to
complete the organizational process by adopting a constitu-
tion, approving general and state conferences, and choos-
ing officers. Unanimously elected as first president of the General Conference was James White, who tactfully declined the appointment to forestall criticism that he had created the new institution for his own political purposes. In his place the delegates selected Elder John Byington, an ardent antislavery man, who had been one of the first in the church to speak out against current trends in ladies’ fashions.\textsuperscript{37}

Although the early Seventh-day Adventists found the very idea of a creed anathema—\textit{"The Bible is our creed,"} they insisted—all members were expected to subscribe to certain doctrines and practices. Among their basic beliefs were the imminent return of Christ, the seventh-day Sabbath, the divine inspiration of Ellen White’s visions, the unconscious state of the dead, and the importance of October 22, 1844, as the date on which the “investigative judgment” began in heaven. In addition, good Adventists practiced baptism by immersion, foot-washing, and “systematic benevolence,” whereby members were required to give “at the rate of two cents each week upon every one hundred dollars worth of property which they possess,” plus weekly donations of twenty-five cents or more. In this way the church was able to support its ministers, who had previously been sustained by gifts or their own labors.\textsuperscript{38}

After years of poverty the Whites had settled down to a relatively comfortable life in the west end of Battle Creek, where they purchased an acre-and-a-half plot and built their first home. Battle Creek at midcentury was a village of a few thousand, only a decade or two removed from the wilderness. Its fame in those days before corn flakes and Rice Krispies rested on the flour and woolen mills that occupied much of the downtown area, which still had the appearance of a frontier community. Cows, pigs, and horses roamed at will through the often muddy streets, and garbage was everywhere. Churches and saloons provided for the social needs of the villagers, whose cultural lives were enriched by an occasional lecture on abolition, women’s rights, or temperance. The arrival of the railroad
and telegraph in the 1840s made Battle Creek an ideal center from which the Adventists could evangelize the West.\(^39\)

Since moving to Michigan, James had held a steady job as president of the Publishing Association and usually doubled his income (seven to ten dollars a week) selling Bibles, concordances, Bible dictionaries, and Bible atlases on the side. Ellen not only served as wife and mother to a growing family but continued to fill speaking engagements and to write her pamphlets of *Testimonies for the Church*, nine of which had appeared by 1863. Her diary for this period reveals a woman of extraordinary strength and adaptability. At home in Battle Creek she sewed, worked with the children in the garden, and even assisted her husband at the office folding papers or stitching book signatures. She loved her family, yet felt guilty for missing them so much whenever absent. On one trip to northern Michigan she “had a weeping time before the Lord.” Her writing, so important to her, often had to be squeezed in while riding the train or visiting in the homes of others.\(^40\)

On September 20, 1860, Ellen White gave birth to her fourth baby boy, John Herbert. The delivery was apparently difficult and left her with a weak back and lame legs, which confined her to the house. She used this time unselfishly to collect clothes for some needy families and once crawled up the stairs on her knees “to get these things together for the poor.” Her own suffering was increased when three-month-old Herbert contracted erysipelas and, after weeks of intense pain, passed away. His heartbroken mother was so emotionally spent by this time that she could no longer cry, but fainted at the funeral. Following the burial at Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek she remained disconsolate. “This is a dark, dreary world,” she confided to her diary after the death of the Loughboroughs’ child that same year. “The whole human family are subject to disease, sorrow, and death.”\(^41\)

The Civil War that engulfed the nation during the early 1860s seldom touched the White household directly. Al-
though Ellen was an outspoken abolitionist sympathetic to the Union cause, she counseled the church against active participation in the conflict. As editor of the *Review and Herald*, James reported on the progress of the war but limited his personal involvement to raising bounties for volunteers, securing conscientious objector status for Adventist draftees, and speculating on writing paper and envelopes, which netted him a quick 100 percent profit on an initial investment of twelve hundred dollars.\textsuperscript{42}

During the winter of 1862–63 a diphtheria epidemic swept through the country, bringing renewed anxiety to Ellen White for the safety of her remaining three sons. When two of the boys actually came down with sore throats and high fevers, her alarm increased, for medical science seemed so inadequate. Then one day she read an article from the *Yates County Chronicle* (Penn Yan, New York) in which a Dr. James C. Jackson described his highly successful water treatments for curing diphtheria. Hopefully she applied the hydropathic fomentations to her sick boys and met “with perfect success.”\textsuperscript{43} At last she had stumbled onto a system of medicine that really worked. With the fervor of a convert she began sharing her faith in hydropathy, and to her death she remained one of its staunchest advocates. The following chapter traces the rise and development of the movement she so enthusiastically joined in 1863.
3. **THE HEALTH REFORMERS**

"The Water-Cure revolution is a *great* revolution. It touches more interests than any revolution since the days of Jesus Christ."

*James C. Jackson*¹

For all its apparent vitality, America in the early nineteenth century was a sick and dirty nation. Public sanitation was grossly inadequate, and personal hygiene, virtually nonexistent. The great majority of Americans seldom, if ever, bathed. Their eating habits, including the consumption of gargantuan amounts of meat, were enough to keep most stomachs continually upset. Fruits and green and leafy vegetables seldom appeared on the table, and the food that did appear was often saturated with butter or lard. A “common” breakfast consisted of “Hot bread, made with lard and strong alkales, and soaked with butter; hot griddle cakes, covered with butter and syrup; meats fried in fat or baked in it; potatoes dripping with grease; ham and eggs fried in grease into a leathery indigestibility—all washed down with many cups of strong Brazil coffee.” It is no wonder that one writer called dyspepsia “the great endemic of the northern states.”²

When sickness inevitably came, the bleedings and purgings of regular physicians or the self-dosed patent medicines only compounded the misery. Few specific remedies were known, and many drugs in common use did more
harm than good. As late as 1860 the distinguished Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote that “if the whole materia medica, as now used, could be sunk to the bottom of the sea, it would be all the better for mankind,—and all the worse for the fishes.”

This unhappy state of affairs gave rise to a growing body of literature on preventive measures aimed at preserving life and health. Some of the most influential early writings were imported from abroad, especially from Scotland: George Cheyne’s *The Natural Method of Cureing the Diseases of the Body* (1742), George Combe’s *The Constitution of Man* (1828), and his brother Andrew’s *The Principle of Physiology Applied to the Preservation of Health* (1834). Inspired in part by these works, American authors joined their foreign colleagues in crying out against the popular dietary and therapeutic abuses. Health journals appeared in Boston and Philadelphia, and books with titles like *Dyspepsy Forestalled & Resisted* (by Professor Edward Hitchcock of Amherst) rolled from the presses. Through all these publications ran a common theme: the importance of a proper (often meatless) diet, plenty of sunshine and fresh air, regular exercise, adequate rest, temperance, cleanliness, and sensible dress.

These first sporadic attempts at reeducating the American public gave way in the 1830s to a full-blown health crusade led by the egotistical and controversial Sylvester Graham. Like many a health reformer, Graham had suffered through years of repeated illnesses, including a severe nervous collapse at age twenty-nine. By his early thirties he had recovered sufficiently to enter the Presbyterian ministry in New Jersey, where he acquired a reputation as a powerful and successful evangelist, especially when speaking on his favorite subject of temperance. In the summer of 1830 the Pennsylvania Society for Discouraging the Use of Ardent Spirits invited Graham to move to Philadelphia and lecture under its auspices. He accepted and soon was packing large crowds into area churches to hear his scientific and moral arguments against the use of alcohol. Also preaching in Philadelphia was the Reverend William
Metcalfé, author of the first American tract on vegetarianism, who had brought his English congregation to this country in 1817 and set up the vegetarian Bible Christian Church. Perhaps influenced by Metcalfé, Graham now began adding the blessings of a meatless diet to his material on temperance. By the late spring of 1831 he had broken with the Pennsylvania Society and was lecturing independently at the Franklin Institute on “the Science of Human Life,” a broad spectrum of topics ranging from proper diet to control of the natural passions. His fame spread, and when “an urgent invitation” came from New York, he removed to that city and remained to lecture for an entire year.  

The cholera epidemic of 1832 vaulted Graham and his program of health reform into the national spotlight. Several months before the disease reached the shores of North America, he revealed to a New York audience, estimated at two thousand, an almost sure way to ward off an attack: by abstaining “from flesh-meat and flesh soups, and from all alcoholic and narcotic liquors and substances, and from every kind of purely stimulating substances, and [by observing] a correct general regimen in regard to sleeping, bathing, clothing, exercise, the indulgence of the natural passions, appetites, etc.” When the dreaded disease finally did strike in June, he repeated his lecture on cholera to crowds of anxious listeners who had not heard him previously. After the epidemic had subsided, he happily reported “that of all who followed my prescribed regimen uniformly and consistently, not one fell a victim to that fearful disease, and very few had the slightest symptoms of an attack.”

During the 1830s Graham visited most of the major Eastern cities and won a widespread following among those Americans who had lost faith in the more traditional methods of preserving health. In 1839 he wrote out his oft-repeated Lectures on the Science of Human Life, published in Boston in two volumes. By far the most distinctive of his ideas related to diet. Borrowing liberally from the French pathologist François J. V. Broussais, whose
Treatise on Physiology he had read in his leisure hours as a pastor, he theorized that irritation of the gastrointestinal tract, particularly the stomach, was responsible for most of man's ailments. Since the nervous system linked all the organs of the body together in "a common web of sympathy," anything that adversely affected the stomach also affected the rest of the body. Following what was too often the custom of his day, Graham insisted on his own originality and refused to acknowledge his indebtedness to Broussais or any other writer.⁷

The best way to stay healthy, advised Graham in his Lectures, was to avoid all stimulating and unnatural foods and to subsist "entirely on the products of the vegetable kingdom and pure water"—"the only drink that man can ever use in perfect accordance with the vital properties and laws of his nature." An ideal food, and one that came to be associated with Graham's name, was bread made from unbolted wheat flour and allowed to sit for twenty-four hours. Because of the "intimate relation between the quality of the bread and the moral character of a family," loaves from the hands of "a devoted wife and mother" were preferable to those sold in public bakeries, which were generally unfit for human consumption. Naturally, bakers did not take too kindly to this suggestion, and on one occasion, while he was lecturing in Boston, they stirred up such an unruly mob outside the hall that the Grahamites within had to disperse the protesters by dumping slaked lime out the windows on their heads.⁸

Graham regarded most dairy products as little better than meat. Butter was especially objectionable. In support of his position, he cited the recent experiments of the army surgeon William Beaumont on the unfortunate Alexis St. Martin, whose stomach had been accidentally opened for scientific observation by a shotgun blast. When butter had been introduced into Martin's stomach, it had simply floated "upon the top of the chymous mass" until most of the digesting food had passed on to the small intestine. If butter were to be used at all, said Graham, it should be "very sparingly, and never in the melted form." In its
place he recommended using a moderate amount of sweet cream, which was soluble in water and thus "very far less objectionable than butter as an article of diet." Fresh milk and eggs were frowned upon but not proscribed although the latter, being "somewhat more highly animalized than milk," were consequently more "exciting to the system." Cheese was permitted only if mild and unaged.\(^9\)

To avoid overworking the digestive system, meals were to be taken no more frequently than every six hours and never before retiring. If this schedule could not be met, then the third meal was to be eliminated. No irritating substances were ever to appear on the table. This ban covered not only condiments and spices like pepper, mustard, cinnamon, and cloves—"all highly exciting and exhausting"—but even common salt, which was "utterly indigestible." Tea and coffee, like alcohol and tobacco, stunted growth and poisoned the system. And most pastries, with the possible exceptions of some custards and fruit and berry pies, were "among the most pernicious articles of human aliment" and incomparably more harmful than simply prepared meats.\(^10\)

In his Lectures Graham ranged far beyond the subject of diet to comment on just about every area of human activity, emphasizing the importance of rest, exercise, cleanliness, dress—and of never resorting to medicines. Regular hours were to be set aside for sleeping, preferably before midnight and always in a well-ventilated room. Frequent physical exercise was absolutely necessary for a healthy circulation of the blood; thus dancing, "when properly regulated," was of great medicinal value. Growing children particularly needed to exercise their bodies, and for that reason Graham opposed confining them to schoolbooks at an early age, recommending instead that they be allowed to romp outdoors like calves and colts. A sponge bath every morning upon rising was highly desirable, but better still was the "exceedingly great luxury" of standing in a tub and pouring a tumbler of water over the body. Clothing was to be both morally and physiologically unobjectionable, with no restrictive corsets, stays, or garters of any
kind. Shaving the beard, Graham warned his male readers, was to be practiced only at the risk of lessening one’s manly powers and shortening the life span. If, after following this regimen, a person did succumb to illness, the cardinal rule to remember was that “ALL MEDICINE, AS SUCH, IS ITSELF AN EVIL.” The safest policy when sick was simply to let nature take its own beneficent course.¹¹

The public outcry against Graham’s strange reforms was more than matched by its outrage at his views on sex. In fact, one of his fellow reformers was convinced that “while the public odium was ostensibly directed against his anti-fine flour and anti-flesh eating doctrines, it was his anti-sexual indulgence doctrines, in reality, which excited the public hatred and rendered his name a by-word and a reproach.” According to one (possibly apocryphal) story, the shock of seeing mixed bathing at the ocean one day first aroused his interest in sexual abuses and prompted him to sit down and write A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity, published in 1834. As Stephen Nissenbaum has pointed out, this work broke with the older moralistic literature on the subject in two ways: It was based largely on scientific rather than biblical arguments, and it focused not on the sins of adultery and fornication but on the previously neglected problems of masturbation and marital excess, which Graham defined for most people as intercourse more than once a month. In his mind, diet and sex were intimately related since stimulating foods inevitably aroused the sexual passions. Thus one of the best means of controlling these unwholesome urges was to adopt a meatless diet and forsake condiments, spices, alcohol, tea, and coffee.¹²

Despite the animosity of butchers, bakers, and corset-makers, “Bran-Bread Graham”—as one Boston paper named him—won numerous converts throughout the nation, including members of the educated and upper classes. In 1837 he began publishing a monthly called the Graham Journal of Health and Longevity, edited by a Boston disciple, David Cambell (or Campbell), who later
engaged William Miller in a protracted debate on the interpretation of Bible prophecies. To meet the dietary needs of his growing following, he encouraged the opening of temperance boarding houses in the larger cities of the East and personally wrote a set of strict rules and regulations governing such establishments. All boarders were expected to sleep on hard beds, rise promptly at four o’clock in the morning—five during the winter months—and retire by ten each evening. Before breakfasting on ripe fruit and whole wheat or corn mush, they were to exercise for at least a half hour and attend morning prayers. Meat was permitted at dinner, but strongly discouraged. Suppers were light and simple. Pure soft water was “earnestly recommended as the exclusive drink of a Graham Boarding House,” and those caught drinking alcoholic beverages, tea, coffee, or hot chocolate were thrown out. Baths were required at least once a week, three times a week in the summer. These boarding houses became a favorite haunt of many reformers, especially abolitionists. One out-of-town visitor reported that the guests in New York City were “not only Grahamites, but Garrisonites—not only reformers in diet, but radicals in Politics.” Horace Greeley resided for some time at the New York house and married one of the women boarders.\textsuperscript{13}

While the abolitionists flocked to the Graham boarding houses, other reformers tried to adapt the Graham system to different institutions. The revivalist Charles G. Finney and his fellow pioneers at Oberlin turned that college into a Grahamite stronghold in the 1830s, allowing the students “only plain & wholesome food” with little variety. But their experiment ended in the spring of 1841 after dissidents held a mass meeting protesting the all-vegetable fare in the dining hall. Bronson Alcott founded his utopian colony of Fruitlands on Grahamite principles, leaving his little daughter Louisa May with memories of rising at five in the morning, showering in cold water, and subsisting on Graham bread and fruit. At nearby Brook Farm there was always a popular “Graham table” for vegetarians. And many Shaker communities, whose “Millennial Laws” pro-
hibited such health-destroying habits as taking fruit after supper and eating freshly baked bread, embraced the Graham way of life.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1836, while lecturing in Boston, Graham met William A. Alcott, cousin of Bronson and a prominent health reformer in his own right. In contrast to the impetuous, largely self-educated Graham who reveled in the limelight, Alcott was a thoughtful Yale-trained physician who enjoyed teaching school most of all. A constant sufferer from pulmonary disorders, he decided in 1830 to try to regain his health by giving up all drinks but water and all animal foods except milk. When his health improved, he turned to writing manuals for the benefit of his fellow citizens and soon became one of the most widely read authors of his day. Over the years he produced no fewer than eighty-five volumes on a multitude of subjects, including most of the reforms advocated by Graham. Perhaps his most popular work was his \textit{Young Man's Guide}, which passed through twenty-one editions between its appearance in 1833 and 1858. In 1835 he began editing the \textit{Moral Reformer}, a journal dedicated to wiping out the evils of intemperance, gluttony, and licentiousness.\textsuperscript{15}

Alcott shared with Graham an extreme reluctance to acknowledge any intellectual debts—especially to the flamboyant crusader for bran bread whom he at first found offensive. “Now let it be distinctly understood, once and for all,” he wrote in 1837, “that . . . we have nothing to do, either directly or indirectly, with Mr. G. or his doctrines. Nay more . . . we adopted nearly all our present views as independently of Mr. G. as if he had never written on the subject.” That same year, however, Alcott buried his misgivings and joined with Graham in forming the first of many health reform associations, the American Physiological Society, which aimed to promote all reforms involving “Air, Temperature, Clothing, Exercise, Sleep, Dress, Diet, and Drink.” Alcott was elected president, Graham’s associate David Cambell, corresponding secretary. The health reform movement now had a united front.\textsuperscript{16}
Women, who joined the movement in large numbers, accounted for almost one-fourth of the American Physiological Society’s membership. They were among the most effective evangelists for health reform, organizing societies from Maine to Ohio and lecturing widely on the gospel of health. As Regina Markell Morantz has recently shown, health reform held special significance for the American woman:

In a society in which women were expected to play an increasingly complex role in the nurture of children and the organization of family life, health reform brought to the bewildered housewife not just sympathy and compassion, but a structured regimen, a way of life. In an era characterized by weakening ties between relatives and neighbors, health reform lectures, journals, and domestic tracts provided once again the friendly advice and companionship of the now remote kinswoman. Women were promised a way to end their isolation and make contact with others of their sex. At lectures, study groups and even through letters to the various journals, they shared their common experiences with other women. A deep sense of sisterhood was evidenced by the frequent use of the term. No longer must woman bear her burden alone.\(^1\)

Allied with the women health reformers in the work of educating the American public were many men. Of particular importance for our story are three whose writings later had a noticeable influence on the thinking of Ellen White: Horace Mann, Dio Lewis, and Larkin B. Coles. Mann, best remembered as the champion of public schools during his tenure as secretary to the Massachusetts State Board of Education, was an eloquent spokesman for the causes of temperance and personal hygiene. Apparently inspired by William Alcott, he urged the state board in his annual report for 1842 to require the teaching of “physiology” in all common schools. By this term he meant the laws of health relating to fresh air, pure water, and proper diet. His campaign culminated in 1850 in the passage of an act by the Massachusetts General Court requiring that the principles
of physiology and hygiene be taught in all public schools by properly certified teachers.\textsuperscript{18}

Dio (Dioclesian) Lewis, a younger contemporary of Mann’s, was an active temperance, health, and educational reformer, whose greatest contributions lay in the areas of physical education and gymnastics. In 1845 he enrolled in the medical department of Harvard College, only to be forced out by financial difficulties before receiving his diploma. Not one to let such a minor setback deter him, he returned to his home in New York City and went into partnership with his family doctor, a homeopath. (In 1851 the Homeopathic Hospital College in Cleveland, Ohio, awarded him an honorary M.D. degree.) He first caught the nation’s eye in the 1850s as a highly successful temperance lecturer, who on one foray into Michigan managed to close down all but one of the forty-nine drinking places in the town of Battle Creek. In his lectures and writings he espoused most of the same reforms as Graham and Alcott, regarding it “an honor and privilege” to range himself with such conscientious and abused men. However, on two relatively minor issues he broke with many of the older reformers and took positions also advocated by Ellen White: He recommended the use of salt in moderation and came out strongly in favor of only two meals a day.\textsuperscript{19}

Larkin B. Coles, although never as prominent a reformer as Mann or Lewis, is of special interest because of his background as a Millerite preacher-physician. A native of New Hampshire, he graduated from Castleton Medical College in 1825 during that institution’s heyday as New England’s most popular medical school. He is reputed also to have been trained as a minister.\textsuperscript{20} As early as 1836 he seems to have been associated with William Miller, and at the height of the Millerite movement he was actively distributing Miller’s books and writing theological articles for the \textit{Signs of the Times}. Shortly after the Great Disappointment of 1844 he settled in Boston and joined both the Boston Medical Association and the Massachusetts Medical Society as an orthodox physician in good and regular
standing. His two great loves seem to have been preaching and traveling. For years he occupied a pulpit every Sabbath and traveled extensively up and down the Ohio and Mississippi valleys, once going as far from home as Galveston, Texas. He died in January, 1856, while visiting Louisville, Kentucky.\footnote{21}

Coles’s claim to a place among the health reformers rests on two books: *Philosophy of Health: Natural Principles of Health and Cure* and *The Beauties and Deformities of Tobacco-Using*. The former volume was remarkably successful, selling thirty-five thousand copies during its first five years and another nine thousand before Coles’s death. When the twenty-sixth edition appeared in 1851, one medical journal joked that it seemed “as though the friends of reform not only read, but eat the books.”\footnote{22} Taking as his theme the proposition that “it is as truly a sin against Heaven, to violate a law of life, as to break one of the ten commandments,” he went on to develop the now-traditional arguments of the health reformers for fresh air and exercise, a vegetarian diet, the nonuse of stimulants, reform in dress, sexual purity, and drugless medicine. On this last point—drugless medicine—he failed to go far enough to suit some of the more radical reformers who wanted him to come out against medicine of any kind.\footnote{23} But his generally moderate stance won him the respect of his peers in the medical community. “Dr. Coles hails from the ranks of the vegetable eaters,” noted the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, “but if he really abominates beef-steaks and butter, he is modest and unobtrusive with regard to his opinion, which should be regarded as a virtue in this age of radicalism.”\footnote{24}

*The Beauties and Deformities of Tobacco-Using* elicited praise from reformers and nonreformers alike. The *Water-Cure Journal* called it “the best looking work on the subject,” while the orthodox *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* highly recommended it as a devastating attack on “the vile weed.” In Coles’s opinion as a physician and minister, tobacco was doing far more damage than alcohol
to the health and welfare of Americans, whose per capita consumption of the stuff was eight times higher than the French and three times more than the English. Epileptic fits, weak eyesight, and insanity were just a few of its many frightening physical effects. Morally it was no less insidious, for it formed an unholy "triplet union" with rum and profanity. "RARELY CAN A PROFANE OATH BE FOUND ISSUING FROM A CLEAN MOUTH AND A PURE BREATH," he observed. Obviously the only safe course was never to take up this body- and soul-destroying habit.25

Coles's moralistic view of health reform, as seen in his elevation of hygienic laws to equality with the Ten Commandments, was not unique among health reformers. William Alcott, for example, also emphasized the moral obligation to preserve health. Yet the theological assumptions and expectations of the two men differed significantly. While Alcott and other Christian perfectionists looked forward to the virtual eradication of disease in a millennium of perfect health, the millenarian Coles—and later Ellen White—saw obedience to the laws of health primarily as a requirement for entry into heaven and only secondarily as a means of living a more enjoyable life on earth. The rewards in either case, however, provided ample motivation to live more hygienically.26

By the mid-1840s the health reformers had developed a comprehensive system for maintaining good health; what they lacked was an effective means of restoring health once it was lost. Several reformers had attended regular medical schools, but the heroic therapy they had learned—bleeding, blistering, and purging—no longer seemed worthy of confidence. The Adventist printer L. V. Masten, whose cholera had not responded to blood-letting and calomel, was expressing a popular opinion when he called such treatment "sure death!" Most health reformers agreed with him on the risks of regular medicine and thus chose one of the safer sectarian systems: Thomsonianism, homeopathy, or hydropathy.27
Samuel Thomson, the New Hampshire farmer who founded the Thomsonian medical sect, substituted “natural” botanic remedies for the bleeding and mineral drugs of regular physicians. Early in his healing career he became convinced that the cause of all disease was cold and that the only cure was the restoration of the body’s normal heat. This he accomplished by steaming, peppering, and puking his patients, with heavy reliance on lobelia, an emetic long used by Native Americans.28

Not one to ignore the commercial possibilities of his discovery, Thomson in 1806 began selling “Family Rights” to his practice, patented in 1813. For twenty dollars purchasers enrolled in the Friendly Botanic Society and received a sixteen-page instruction booklet, Family Botanic Medicine, later expanded into a more substantial New Guide to Health. The section on preparing medicines contained various botanical recipes, but with key ingredients left out. Agents filled in the blanks only after buyers pledged themselves to secrecy “under the penalty of forfeiting their word and honour, and all right to the use of the medicine.”29

During the 1820s and 1830s Thomsonian agents fanned out from New England through the southern and western United States urging self-reliant Americans to become their own physicians. Almost everywhere they met with success. By 1840 approximately one hundred thousand Family Rights had been sold, and Thomson estimated that about three million persons had adopted his system. In states as diverse as Ohio and Mississippi, perhaps as many as one-half of the citizens were curing themselves the Thomsonian way. And as Daniel Drake observed, the devotees of Thomsonianism were not “limited to the vulgar. Respectable and intelligent mechaniks, legislative and judicial officers, both state and federal barristers, ladies, ministers of the gospel, and even some of the medical profession ‘who hold the eel of science by the tail’ have become its converts and puffers.”30

By the 1840s internal squabbles were fragmenting the
Thomsonians; and as botanic strength began to wane, a new sect, homeopathy, rose to national prominence. Homeopathy was the invention of a regularly educated German physician, Samuel Hahnemann, who had grown dissatisfied with the heroics of orthodox practice. During the last decade of the eighteenth century he began constructing an alternate system based in large part upon the healing power of nature and two fundamental principles: the law of similars and the law of infinitesimals. According to the first law, diseases are cured by medicines having the property of producing in healthy persons symptoms similar to those of the disease. An individual suffering from fever, for example, would be treated with a drug known to increase the pulse rate of a person in health. Hahnemann’s second law held that medicines are more efficacious the smaller the dose, even as small as dilutions of one-millionth of a gram. Though regular practitioners—or allopaths, as Hahnemann called them—ridiculed this theory, many patients flourished under homeopathic treatment, and they seldom suffered.  

Following its appearance in this country in 1825, homeopathy rapidly grew into a major medical sect. By the outbreak of the Civil War there were nearly twenty-five hundred homeopathic physicians, concentrated largely in New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and the Midwest, and hundreds of thousands of devoted followers. Homeopathy’s appeal is not difficult to understand. Instead of the bleedings and purgings of the regulars, or the equally rigorous therapy of the Thomsonians, the homeopaths offered pleasant-tasting pills that produced no discomforting side effects. Such medication was particularly suitable for babies and small children. As the orthodox Dr. Holmes observed, homeopathy “does not offend the palate, and so spares the nursery those scenes of single combat in which infants were wont to yield at length to the pressure of the spoon and the imminence of asphyxia.” Perhaps because of its suitability for children, homeopathy won the support of large numbers of American women, who constituted ap-
proximately two-thirds of its patrons and who were among its most active propagators.  

Both Thomsonianism and homeopathy attracted some health reformers. For example, Alva Curtis of Cincinnati combined Thomsonianism with Grahamism, and Elisha Bartlett observed that a "non-resistant, transcendentalist, and Grahamite, makes the most devoted disciple, and the stanchest [sic] advocate of homeopathy." But by and large the health reformers distrusted all medicines, in large or small doses, botanical or mineral. Thus the majority of them opted for the one system of therapeutics that offered healing without drugs: hydropathy.

Hydropathy was a mélange of water treatments devised by a Silesian peasant, Vincent Priessnitz, to heal his wounds after accidentally being run over by a wagon. His therapy proved to be so successful, he opened his home in Graefenberg as a "water cure" and invited his ailing neighbors to submit their bodies to a bewildering variety of baths, packs, and wet bandages. When news of his methods reached the United States in the mid-1840s, it touched off a "great American water-cure craze" that continued unabated until the outbreak of the Civil War. Part of the popularity of hydropathy undoubtedly stemmed from the inadequacies of nineteenth-century medicine, but equally significant was the fact that it harmonized perfectly with the Jacksonian spirit of the times. "The water treatment of disease may fairly be said to originate with an un-titled man," wrote one devotee. "This is the people's reform. It does not belong to M.D.'s of any school." The three persons most responsible for introducing Americans to hydropathic techniques—Joel Shew, Russell T. Trall, and Mary Gove—all had previous histories as reformers and succeeded, as Richard H. Shyrock pointed out, in superimposing "Grahamism upon hydropathy, and later, in the most catholic spirit imaginable, in [adding] every other hygienic procedure available."  

The first American water cures appeared in New York City about 1844 under the proprietorship of Drs. Shew and
Trall, both graduates of regular medical schools. When Trall's first patients, "a set of desperate cases from Broadway Hospital," all recovered, the success of hydropathy was guaranteed. Within three or four years twenty-odd water cures were operating in nine states, largely concentrated in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, and numbering among their patrons such luminaries as Horace Greeley, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and James Fenimore Cooper. At first, Shew, who made two early pilgrimages to Graefenberg, simply duplicated Priessnitz's methods, but Trall soon went beyond the simple water treatments of the Austrian peasant to develop a fairly sophisticated system of "hygienic medication," embracing not only hydropathy but surgery and health reform as well. In December, 1845, Shew began publishing a Water-Cure Journal aimed broadly at providing the general reader with up-to-date information on "BATHING AND CLEANLINESS . . . CLOTHING . . . AIR AND VENTILATION . . . FOOD AND DRINKS . . . TOBACCO . . . TEA AND COFFEE . . . THE WATER-CURE . . ." and all other worthy reforms. Later, Trall took over the editorship and instituted such practical features as a matrimonial section where love-starved Grahamites and hydropaths could advertise for like-minded spouses.35

In the spring of 1846 Mary Gove arrived in New York City and opened a third water cure in competition with Shew's and Trall's. A long-time Grahamite and women's lecturer, Mrs. Gove had spent most of the previous year observing other water cures in operation before setting up her own. Through her lectures and writings she did much to popularize hydropathy in its early days. In 1851 she and her second husband, Thomas Low Nichols (M.D., New York University), decided the time was ripe to launch a water-cure school to meet the ever-increasing demand for trained hydropaths. That fall the American Hydropathic Institute admitted its first class of twenty-six students, and three months later graduated twenty of them—eleven men, nine women. After three fairly prosperous terms the
Nicholsons suddenly lost interest in their educational venture and drifted off in the direction of free love and spiritualism, much to the dismay of their former colleagues. With the Nicholsons gone, Trall wasted no time in opening his own hydropathic school in New York. His institution, christened the New York Hygeio-Therapeutic College after receiving a state charter in 1857, quickly became the water-cure center of the United States, while Trall himself, following the death of Shew in 1855 and the defection of the Nicholsons, won recognition as dean of American health reformers.\textsuperscript{36}

Listed among the original faculty of Trall’s college was Lorenzo N. Fowler, lecturer on phrenology and mental science, whose presence symbolized the close union that had been forming between health reformers and phrenologists. Phrenology was the “science” of the human mind developed by two German physicians, Franz Joseph Gall and his student Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, and brought to the United States in the 1830s by Spurzheim and a Scottish convert, George Combe. According to phrenological theory, the human brain was made up of a number of different “organs”—some counted thirty-seven—each corresponding to an exotically named mental “faculty” like amativeness, acquisitiveness, or philoprogenitiveness. The organs governing man’s “animal” or “domestic” propensities were located in the back and lower part of the head, while the organs of intellect and reason occupied the frontal region. Since the relative strength of any propensity could be determined by measuring the size of its matching organ, it was not difficult for the initiated to “read” a person’s character by carefully examining the skull.\textsuperscript{37}

Mistakes, however, did occur. The following incident supposedly took place when William Miller accompanied a friend to see a Boston phrenologist in March, 1842. The phrenologist, who had no idea he was examining the famous preacher’s head,

...commenced by saying that the person under examination had a large, well-developed, and well-balanced head. While examining the moral and intellectual organs, he said to Mr. Miller’s friend:
"I tell you what it is, Mr. Miller could not easily make a convert of this man to his hair-brained theory. He has too much good sense."

Thus he proceeded, making comparisons between the head he was examining and the head of Mr. Miller, as he fancied it would be.

"Oh, how I should like to examine Mr. Miller's head!" said he; "I would give it one squeezing."

The phrenologist, knowing that the gentleman was a particular friend of Mr. Miller, spared no pains in going out of the way to make remarks upon him. Putting his hand on the organ of marvelousness, he said: "There! I'll bet you anything that old Miller has got a bump on his head there as big as my fist"; at the same time doubling up his fist as an illustration.

The others present laughed at the perfection of the joke, and he heartily joined them, supposing they were laughing at his witticisms on Mr. Miller. . . .

He pronounced the head of the gentleman under examination the reverse, in every particular, of what he declared Mr. Miller's must be. When through, he made out his chart, and politely asked Mr. Miller his name.

Mr. Miller said it was of no consequence about putting his name upon the chart; but the phrenologist insisted.

"Very well," said Mr. M.; "you may call it Miller, if you choose."

"Miller, Miller," said he; "what is your first name?"

"They call me William Miller."

"What! the gentleman who is lecturing on the prophecies?"

"Yes, sir, the same."

At this the phrenologist settled back in his chair, the personation of astonishment and dismay, and spoke not a word while the company remained. His feelings may be more easily imagined than described.38

The amazing popularity of phrenology during the 1840s and 1850s was in large measure the work of its two American high priests, Orson Squire Fowler and his brother Lorenzo. From their headquarters at Clinton Hall in New York City the Fowler brothers created a phrenological empire that reached into every segment of American society. Each month twenty thousand families poured over their
American Phrenological Journals, one of the nation’s most successful magazines, while thousands of others went out and purchased the multitude of guides and manuals the Fowlers annually published on all aspects of mental and physical health. As part of their effort to improve the human race, they rapidly branched out from phrenology to embrace the whole gamut of health reforms then in vogue: hydropathy, Grahamism, temperance, chastity, and even the Bloomer costume, named after a friend of Lorenzo’s wife, Lydia.\(^{39}\)

Through the years a close relationship developed between the leading phrenologists and health reformers. Shew and Trall became familiar figures at Clinton Hall and issued many of their books through the publishing house of Fowlers and Wells. Graham and Alcott also visited the Fowlers’ phrenological palace, as did Horace Mann, who cheerfully submitted to a head reading. When the Water-Cure Journal almost folded in the spring of 1848, the Fowlers stepped in and promptly raised its circulation twenty-fold. In May, 1850, Clinton Hall was the setting for the organizational meeting of the American Vegetarian Society, which brought together many of the biggest names in health reform. Among the officers elected were William Alcott, president; Sylvester Graham and Joel Shew, vice-presidents; R. T. Trall, recording secretary; William Metcalfe, corresponding secretary; and Samuel R. Wells, brother-in-law and associate of the Fowlers, treasurer. Indeed, by the 1850s, as Sidney Ditzion has observed, “the vegetarians, phrenologists, water-cure doctors, and anti-tobacco, anti-corset, and temperance people” were so often crossing paths, “they began to look like participants in a single reform movement.”\(^{40}\)

The outbreak of civil war in 1861 diverted much of the nation’s attention from bran bread, baths, and Bloomers to other, more pressing, issues. From time to time die-hards attempted to revive interest in health reform—they actually founded a World’s Health Association in Chicago in June, 1862—but the movement as a whole had already
James Caleb Jackson, from Jackson, *The Sexual Organism* (Boston: B. Leverett Emerson, 1862).
crested. In the postwar years, as spectacular breakthroughs in scientific medicine drew more and more patients back to the regular fold, patronage at the water cures fell off markedly. Many went under, but a few did manage to survive until late in the century. Among the most flourishing was Dr. James Caleb Jackson’s “Home on the Hillside” in Dansville, New York.41

James Caleb Jackson was born on March 28, 1811, in the little town of Manlius, New York, near Syracuse. Recurring poor health ended his formal education at age twelve, and his father’s untimely death only a few years later left him with the onerous responsibility of managing the family farm. As he went about his daily chores, he dreamed of exchanging his dreary, bucolic life for the excitement of the public arena. Opportunity came in 1834, when he began receiving invitations from nearby towns to lecture on temperance and slavery. As his speaking engagements multiplied, time for farming vanished, and before long he was on the road full time. The rigors of the lecture circuit, however, proved to be too much for his frail constitution and forced him to take less physically demanding jobs editing antislavery papers and serving as secretary to abolitionist societies. Through his antislavery activities, he formed a warm friendship with Gerrit Smith, a New York philanthropist, who readily lent his wealth and prestige to virtually every reform that came along, from abolition and temperance to Sunday schools and bloomers. Inevitably Smith joined the health reformers; and when Jackson’s health failed so completely in 1847 that he “went home to die,” Smith encouraged him to go to Dr. Silas O. Gleason’s water cure in Cuba (New York) and personally raised the funds to pay his expenses there.42

Although Gleason’s water treatments were often so harsh Jackson feared for his very life, his health did improve, and his interest in hydropathy grew correspondingly. By the end of his stay in Cuba, he and Gleason had agreed to go into partnership and open another water cure, Glen Haven, at the south end of Skaneateles Lake. Unfor-
tunately, this venture turned out to be something of a disappointment, and after a few years Gleason sold his interest and moved elsewhere with all but two of the patients, leaving Jackson, the business manager, with a practically vacant building and no physician. Prospects for the future looked bleak indeed, but Jackson was not one to throw in his towels without a fight. He temporarily closed down the institution for the winter, enrolled in an eclectic medical college in Syracuse, and returned in three months, diploma in hand, to run the water cure himself.43

One day Dr. Harriet N. Austin, an alumna of Mary Gove Nichols’s shortlived hydropathic college who was now practicing in nearby Owasco, called on Jackson for a professional consultation. She made such a favorable impression, he invited her to join the staff of Glen Haven, now doing so thriving a business that the assistance of a second physician was needed. Eventually Jackson adopted the young woman as his daughter, and together they turned Glen Haven into a thoroughly hygienic institution where only vegetarian meals were served and only reform dresses were worn. Women’s clothing received their special attention, convinced as they were that current styles were doing irreparable harm to the health of American women. Inspired by the so-called Bloomer costume—actually designed by Gerrit Smith’s daughter Elizabeth Smith Miller—they devised their own short dress-and-trousers combination, dubbed the “American costume.” To display their handiwork and to promote its adoption elsewhere, they entertained a convention of dress reformers at Glen Haven in February, 1856, which resulted in the founding of a National Dress Reform Association.44

In 1858 a disastrous fire swept through Glen Haven, leaving Jackson and Austin not only without a water cure but also without compensation, since their insurance company had just gone bankrupt. Undaunted, the two hydropaths somehow scraped together sufficient cash to purchase a defunct cure about fifty miles south of Rochester outside the town of Dansville, and on October 1 they
proudly opened the doors of “Our Home on the Hillside” for patients. At first the local townspeople seemed less than delighted with their eccentric new neighbors who lived communally and dressed so queerly, and Jackson took precautionary measures to avoid undue hostilities. He later described the situation:

All the women who came with us to enter into our employment wore the American Costume. A style of dress of this kind had never been seen in the town and so I issued an edict, forbidding any of our helpers to go into the village at all, until I gave the word, knowing that this would be the point around which opposition could rally and it would be impossible to keep our women from being stared at and perhaps insulted if they undertook to walk the streets. . . . At that day, for a woman to wear the American Costume was to so apparel herself as to lead everyone to suppose she was loose in virtue.45

Eventually the novelty wore off, and the health reformers and the citizens of Dansville settled down to a life of peaceful coexistence.

Our Home was not a resort for pleasure seekers. The physical facilities were comfortable, but nothing more. Long, narrow corridors wound through the rambling main building leading to small, uncurtained rooms, heated in winter by wood-burning “box stoves.” Each day began promptly at six o’clock with the ritual beating of a Chinese gong and, for the hearty, a cold plunge in sometimes icy water. A half-hour after rising all residents gathered in the large parlor for “Father” Jackson’s daily exhortation on the laws of life. Then it was on to the dining hall for a vegetarian breakfast around long, common tables, where seats were assigned by lot each week to ensure a properly democratic mix at mealtime. Jackson’s water cure was one of the very few that served only two meals a day—breakfast at eight, dinner at two-thirty. Food, plentiful but plain, consisted principally of a variety of “Graham” dishes, vegetables, and piles of fresh fruit. Meat, butter, white-flour bread, tea and coffee were positively not allowed on the
premises. A miscellany of water treatments, simple exercises, and amusements filled the remaining hours of the day. By eight-thirty all kerosene lamps were extinguished, and the weary patients tumbled into their hard beds of sea-grass and cotton mattresses on wooden slats.\(^{46}\)

In the early days of Our Home specific treatments were “limited chiefly to half-baths, packs, sitz baths, plunges and dripping sheets.” Under no circumstances would Jackson prescribe drugs. “In my entire practice,” he once boasted, “I have never given a dose of medicine; not so much as I should have administered had I taken a homeopathic pellet of the seven-millionth dilution, and dissolving it in Lake Superior, given my patients of its waters.” His medical faith rested implicitly on ten natural remedies: “First, air; second, food; third, water; fourth, sunlight; fifth, dress; sixth, exercise; seventh, sleep; eighth, rest; ninth, social influence; tenth, mental and moral forces.”\(^{47}\)

Through the 1850s and the following decades Jackson wrote compulsively on all facets of health reform. “This reformation has gotten my soul by a grip as strong as death,” he explained, “and woe is me if I falter.” For years his by-line graced virtually every issue of the Water-Cure Journal, and after moving to Dansville in 1858 he began publishing his own health paper, first called the Letter Box, then Laws of Life. His most popular book, How to Treat the Sick without Medicine, enjoyed widespread use among those who distrusted physicians, while his numerous little pamphlets circulated throughout the country. His favorite subject and professional specialty was sexual disorders. In eleven years he treated over four thousand cases of spermatorrhea alone, and grew so astute at diagnosing sexual abuses, he could spot masturbators merely by the gait of their walk or the flatness of their breasts. For those who could not afford a personal consultation with the doctor, he provided a series of cheap six-cent tracts dealing with various sexual problems, as well as a special fifty-cent “private circular” on “How to Rear Beautiful Children.”\(^{48}\)
Of all Jackson's writings, probably the most influential in terms of long-range effects was a modest-looking article on diphtheria published January 15, 1863, in a rural New York newspaper, the *Yates County Chronicle*. At the time of the article's appearance, a severe diphtheria epidemic was raging through much of the United States, and by a twist of fate the paper fell into the hands of an anxious mother who was nursing her two sons through an apparent attack. When the simple water treatments described by the Dansville physician proved successful, the grateful mother at once began sharing her discovery with others and thus embarked upon a lifelong career as a prophetess of health reform. Her name was Ellen G. White.\textsuperscript{49}
4. Dansville Days

"... it is as truly a sin against Heaven, to violate a law of life, as to break one of the ten commandments."

L. B. Coles¹

"It is as truly a sin to violate the laws of our being as it is to break the ten commandments."

Ellen G. White²

Ellen White’s chance reading of Jackson’s article on diphtheria in January, 1863, was by no means the first Adventist encounter with health reform. Adventist involvement actually went back to the days before the Great Disappointment of 1844 when prominent Millerites such as the Reverend Charles Fitch, Ezekiel Hale, Jr., and Dr. Larkin B. Coles publicly allied themselves with the reformers. Such an alliance was not at all unusual; as Charles E. Rosenberg has pointed out, the unorthodox in religion commonly displayed a marked affinity for heterodox medicine, which they tended to view in a moral rather than in a scientific light.³

In the early 1860s Jackson’s water cure in Dansville became a favorite retreat for ailing Sunday-keeping Adventists. Daniel T. Taylor, Adventist hymnist and minister, resided at Our Home for an entire year while undergoing the water treatment—“mostly hot or warm externally & internally perpetually.” He in turn influenced Joshua V. Himes, formerly Miller’s top assistant, to join him when the latter’s health broke early in 1861. Elder and Mrs.
Our Home on the Hillside, Dansville, New York, as it appeared in the 1860s (courtesy of Mr. William D. Conklin).
Himes had been friends of the Jacksons for some time, but it was Joshua’s remarkable cure at Our Home that finally made wholehearted health reformers out of them. Favorable notices of Jackson’s books and water cure began appearing in Himes’s *Voice of the Prophets*, and later, after Himes moved to Michigan and changed the name of his paper to *Voice of the West*, each issue for a while featured a “Health Department,” to which Jackson was an occasional contributor.⁴

Even the sabbatarians displayed more than passing interest in the health reform movement. Joseph Bates, as we have already noted, adopted Grahamism in 1843 and spent decades as a temperance crusader. John Loughborough took to eating Graham bread and reading the *Water-Cure Journal* in 1848, after learning about health reform from an uncle in western New York. J. P. Kellogg, of Tyrone, Michigan—father of Merritt, John Harvey, Will Keith, and thirteen other children—raised his sizable brood by the *Water-Cure Journal* and sent three of his older sons, including Merritt, to reform-minded Oberlin College. Roswell F. Cottrell, who served on the editorial committee of the *Review and Herald* after the move to Battle Creek, began experimenting in the late 1840s with a vegetarian diet and a daily bath.⁵ All these men were closely associated with the Whites and undoubtedly spoke to them of their experiences in health reform.

And there were others. J. W. Clarke, of Green Lake County, Wisconsin, turned to vegetarianism and hydropathy in the late 1840s. William McAndrew in Michigan and an anonymous sister in Rhode Island embraced health reform in the early 1850s. Uriah Smith’s sister Annie, after copy-editing the *Review and Herald* in Saratoga Springs and Rochester, spent several months at a water cure before her death in 1855. H. F. Phelps and H. C. Miller were reading water-cure publications and taking their first steps toward health reform in the early 1860s. And by early 1863 Marietta V. Cook, of Kirkville, New York, was dressing in the American costume, enjoying meals of “plain food,” and corresponding with the doctors at Dansville.⁶
Despite these early signs of interest, Seventh-day Adventists as a body did not awaken to the cause of health reform until 1863, a period during which a major change in attitudes toward health occurred among the leaders of the sect. One of the first indications of a health-reform awakening was the reprinting of Dr. Jackson’s “Diphtheria, Its Causes, Treatment and Cure” on the front page of the February 17 issue of the *Review and Herald*, accompanied by a note from the pen of James White recommending the hydropathic approach to medicine. On the basis of Ellen’s recent experience using Jackson’s treatments on her two boys, as well as on the six-year-old child of Elder Moses Hull, James had come to place “a good degree of confidence in [Jackson’s] manner of treating diseases.” He failed to mention that over two years earlier, while suffering from lung fever in Wisconsin, he had had another successful encounter with the water cure.7

The Jackson article not only described specific treatments for diphtheria, it spelled out the basic principles of health reform in tips on eating properly, dressing sensibly, and breathing lots of fresh air. We know that James White was beginning to recognize the importance of these measures, for in the February 10 *Review and Herald* he called air, water, and light “God’s great remedies,” preferable to “doctors and their drugs.” He reported proudly that both he and his wife slept year-round with the windows wide open and took “a cold-water sponge-bath” every morning. Four pages later he inserted an article on the evils of sleeping in poorly ventilated rooms, taken from an exchange publication. The language appears to be Dr. W. W. Hall’s, but the selection is not found in earlier issues of *Hall’s Journal of Health*.8

During the month of May, James White continued to focus on hygienic living in the *Review and Herald* with a note from Dio Lewis on dress reform and two extracts from *Hall’s Journal of Health*, one urging a meatless, low-fat diet during spring and summer, the other recommending two meals a day.9 Thus by June of 1863 Seventh-day Ad-
ventists were already in possession of the main outlines of the health reform message. What they now needed to become a church of health reformers was not additional information, but a sign from God indicating his pleasure.10

Divine approval of the health crusade came on the evening of June 5, 1863, while Ellen White and a dozen friends were kneeling in prayer at the home of the Aaron Hilliards, just outside the village of Otsego, Michigan. Earlier that Friday the Whites had driven up from Battle Creek with several carriages full of Adventists to lend their support to a series of tent meetings being held in the village. At sundown the Battle Creek visitors gathered in the Hilliard home to usher in the Sabbath with prayer. Ellen, the first to speak, began by asking the Lord for strength and encouragement. Lately, neither she nor James had been well. Her familiar fainting spells were recurring once or twice a day, while excessive cares and responsibilities had brought James to the verge of a mental and physical collapse.11

As Ellen prayed, she slipped to her husband’s side and rested her hands on his bowed shoulders. In a short time she was off in vision, receiving heaven-sent instructions on the preservation and restoration of health. She and James were directed not to assume such a heavy burden in the Adventist cause, but to share their responsibilities with others. She was to curtail her sewing and entertaining; James was to quit dwelling on “the dark, gloomy side” of life. In a less personal vein, she saw that it was a religious duty for God’s people to care for their health and not violate the laws of life. The Lord wanted them “to come out against intemperance of every kind,—intemperance in working, in eating, in drinking, and in drugging.” They were to be his instruments in directing the world “to God’s great medicine, water, pure soft water, for diseases, for health, for cleanliness, and for luxury.”12

For a couple of weeks following her vision Ellen White seemed reluctant to say much about its contents. Then one day while riding in a carriage with Horatio S. Lav. a self-
styled Adventist physician from Allegan, she briefly men-
tioned some of the things she had seen. What he heard
whetted his curiosity. When the Whites visited Allegan for
a funeral a few days later, he took the opportunity to invite
them and nine-year old Willie home to dinner. After the
meal he immediately began pumping Mrs. White for more
details of her recent vision. As Willie recalled seventy-
three years later, his mother at first demurred, saying “that
she was not familiar with medical language, and that much
of the matter presented to her was so different from the
commonly accepted views that she feared she could not
relate it so that it could be understood.” Lay’s persistence
eventually overcame her hesitance, however, and for two
hours she related what she had witnessed. According to
Willie,

She said that pain and sickness were not ordinarily, as was
commonly supposed, due to a foreign influence, attacking the
body, but that they were in most cases an effort of nature to
overcome unnatural conditions resulting from the transgression
of some of nature’s laws. She said that by the use of poisonous
drugs many bring upon themselves lifelong illness, and that it
had been revealed to her that more deaths had resulted from
drug taking than from any other cause.

At this point Lay interrupted to say that certain “wise and
eminent physicians” were currently teaching exactly what
she had been shown. Thus encouraged, she went on to
condemn the use of all stimulants and narcotics, to caution
against meat eating, and to emphasize “the remedial value
of water treatments, pure air, and sunshine.”

Ellen White’s first published account of her June 5 vi-
sion, a short thirty-two-page sketch tucked into the fourth
volume of Spiritual Gifts, did not appear until fifteen
months after the event. She had hoped to provide a fuller
report, but other duties and poor health had made that
impossible. For the past year she had labored at her desk
almost constantly, often writing twelve hours a day. At
times her head continually ached, and for weeks she sel-
dom got more than two hours’ sleep at night.
In her essay "Health," which reads in places like L. B. Coles, she recited the established principles of health reform, attributing them to her recent vision. Willful violations of the laws of health—particularly "Intemperance in eating and drinking, and the indulgence of base passions"—caused the greatest human degeneracy. Tobacco, tea, and coffee depraved the appetite, prostrated the system, and blunted the spiritual sensibilities. Meat-eating led to untold diseases; swine's flesh alone produced "scrofula, leprosy and cancerous humors." Living in low-lying areas exposed one to fever-producing "poisonous miasma."\(^{15}\)

Her strongest language, however, was reserved for the medical profession: "I was shown that more deaths have been caused by drug-taking than from all other causes combined. If there was in the land one physician in the place of thousands, a vast amount of premature mortality would be prevented." All drugs, vegetable as well as mineral, were proscribed. The Lord specifically and graphically forbade the use of opium, mercury, calomel, quinine, and strychnine. "A branch was presented before me bearing flat seeds," Ellen recalled. "Upon it was written, Nux vomica, strychnine. Beneath was written, No antidote." Of all the medical sects, only drugless hydropathy received divine sanction. Since medicines were so dangerous and had "no power to cure," the only safe course was to rely on the natural remedies recommended by the health reformers: pure soft water, sunshine, fresh air, and simple food—preferably eaten only twice a day.\(^{16}\)

In the months following her June 5 vision, as Ellen White traveled about the Midwest and Northeast speaking on her favorite topic of health, curious listeners sometimes inquired if she had not previously read the Laws of Life, the Water-Cure Journal, or any of the works of Drs. Jackson and Trall. Her stock reply was that she had not and would not until she had fully written out her views, "lest it should be said that I had received my light upon the subject of health from physicians, and not from the Lord." But the embarrassing questions persisted until finally she issued a formal statement in the Review and Herald dis-
claiming any familiarity with health reform publications prior to receiving and writing out her vision. Referring specifically to Jackson’s, she said: “I did not know that such works existed until September, 1863, when in Boston, Mass., my husband saw them advertised in a periodical called the *Voice of the Prophets*, published by Eld. J. V. Himes. My husband ordered the works from Dansville and received them at Topsham, Maine. His business gave him no time to peruse them, and as I determined not to read them until I had written out my views, the books remained in their wrappers.”¹⁷

In her anxiety to appear uninfluenced by any earthly agency—“My views were written independent of books or of the opinion of others”—Ellen White failed to mention certain pertinent facts. Not only did she ignore her reading of Jackson’s article on diphtheria nearly six months before her vision, but she incorrectly gave the time when James had first learned of Jackson’s other works. On August 13, 1863, one month before James supposedly had any knowledge of Dansville, Dr. Jackson wrote him apologizing for his long delay in replying to White’s request for information about his books. It seems that James had written Jackson sometime in June, for in December of 1864 he stated that eighteen months earlier (June, 1863) he had sent off to Dansville “for an assortment of their works, that might cost from ten to twenty-five dollars. Then we knew not the name of a single publication offered for sale at that house. We heard from reliable sources that there was something valuable there, and resolved to put in for a share.”¹⁸

If James’s account is accurate, then Ellen was also wrong in implying that her husband first learned of the Dansville publications from an advertisement in the *Voice of the Prophets*. James said that he knew not “the name of a single publication” when he wrote Dr. Jackson; but had he read the notice in Himes’s journal, he would have known at least three titles: *Consumption* and *The Sexual Organism* by Jackson, and *Pathology of the Reproductive Organs* by Trall.¹⁹
Two other details bear on the accuracy of Ellen White’s disclaimer. She insisted that the books from Dansville remained in their wrappers after arriving in Topsham, but already by December 12 James was mailing Jackson’s Consumption from Topsham to a friend in Brookfield, New York. And if Ellen White regularly read the Review and Herald that her husband edited, as surely she did, then she saw in the October 27 issue an article by Dr. Jackson on hoops, taken from the Laws of Life.20

Ellen White’s conversion to health reform did much to change the eating habits of Seventh-day Adventists. The revolution began in her own household. She desperately wanted to switch all at once to the two-meal Graham system, but her stomach rebelled. Having been a self-confessed “great meat-eater,” she found the substitution of unbolted wheat bread intolerable. For a few meals she could eat nothing, but a last the victory was gained when she resolutely placed her hands on her recalcitrant stomach and warned it, “You may wait until you can eat bread.” Before long she actually came to enjoy the once-hated article and accorded it a central place, along with fruit and vegetables, in the White family diet. “Our plain food, eaten twice a day, is enjoyed with a keen relish,” she was able to write by 1864. “We have no meat, cake, or any rich food upon our table. We use no lard, but in its place, milk, cream, and some butter. We have our food prepared with but little salt, and have dispensed with spices of all kinds. We breakfast at seven, and take our dinner at one.” On this regimen, her health took a marked turn for the better. Her periodic “shocks of paralysis” ceased; her “dropsy and heart disease” abated; and her weight dropped by twenty-five unneeded pounds she had gained since her youth. For years she had never felt better.21

Unfortunately, not all the members of her family shared her experience. Her husband’s health improved at first but then declined alarmingly in the next couple years, and during the winter of 1863–64 two of her boys came down with critical cases of pneumonia. Despite (or because of)
the efforts of a physician, her eldest son, Henry, died of
the disease at age sixteen and was laid to rest beside his
baby brother, Herbert, in the Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle
Creek. A short time after the funeral Willie, too, caught
“lung fever.” This time his frightened parents decided not
to consult a physician, but to administer water treatments
and pray for his recovery. For five anxious days he lin-
gered near death, but then his mother had an inspired
dream in which a heavenly physician assured her that Wil-
lie would not die, “for he has not the injurious influence of
drugs to recover from.” All he needed was cool, fresh air,
said the messenger; “Stove heat destroys the vitality of the
air, and weakens the lungs.” By the next day Willie was
feeling better and was soon fully recovered. Needless to
say, these two events substantially increased Ellen
White’s faith in the curative power of water over that of
earthly physicians.22

For most Adventists, acceptance of health reform meant
principally three things: a vegetarian diet, two meals a
day, and no drugs or stimulants. Its progress among them
was immortalized in a song, “The Health Reform,” com-
posed by Elder Roswell Cottrell:

When men are beginning the work of reform,
Casting off their gross idols, as ships in a storm
Cast off the most cumbersome part of their freight,
They feel the improvement and progress is great.

Oh, yes, I see it is so,
And the clearer it is the farther I go.

First goes the tobacco, most filthy of all,
Then drugs, pork and whisky, together must fall,
Then coffee and spices, and sweet-meats and tea,
And fine flour and flesh-meats and pickles must flee.

Oh, yes, I see it is so,
And the clearer it is the farther I go.

Things hurtful and poisonous laying aside,
The good and the wholesome alone must abide;
And these with a moderate, temperate use,
At regular seasons, avoiding abuse.
Oh, yes, I see it is so,  
And the clearer it is the farther I go.

A proper proportion of labor and rest,  
With good air and water, the purest and best,  
And clothing constructed to be a defense,  
Not following custom, but good common sense.  
Oh, yes, I see it is so,  
And the clearer it is the farther I go.

Our frames disencumbered, our spirits are free,  
Our minds once beclouded now clearly can see;  
Brute passions no longer our natures control,  
But instead we act worthy a rational soul.  
Oh, yes, I see it is so,  
And the clearer it is the farther I go.

Faith, patience and meekness, more brightly now shine  
Evincing the human allied to divine;  
And religion, once viewed as a shield against wrath,  
Becomes a delightful and glorious path.  
Oh, yes, they know it is so,  
Who have chosen this light-giving pathway to go.23

Since so few knew anything about preparing meatless meals or giving fomentations, the Review and Herald undertook the task of educating the uninitiated by regularly excerpting appropriate selections from the writings of prominent reformers like Russell Trall, Dio Lewis, and L. B. Coles. Individuals who desired additional help could send in to the Review Office in Battle Creek for cookbooks by Trall and Jackson or for special irons to make “Graham gems,” a popular form of whole-wheat bread. A handful of Adventists were able to draw upon their own experiences to assist their fellow members through the transition. Martha Byington Amadon, daughter of the General Conference president, thoughtfully provided readers of the Review and Herald with hints on “How to Use Graham Flour,” a ubiquitous substance used in making everything from bread and biscuits to puddings and cakes. By the time of the 1864 Michigan State Fair some Battle Creek sisters
were so proficient at vegetarian cookery that they hauled stoves to the fairgrounds and publicly demonstrated their newly acquired skills.24

Right from the beginning of their health reform days the Seventh-day Adventists, like their Sunday-keeping brethren, displayed a singular fondness for the Jackson water cure in Dansville. The person apparently most responsible for establishing this relationship was John N. Andrews, an itinerant preacher—later General Conference president and pioneer missionary—who in the early sixties was pitching his evangelistic tent in the towns and villages of western New York. It is not clear how or when he first learned of Our Home, but he possibly heard of it through Daniel T. Taylor, whom he had come to know while writing his History of the Sabbath, and whose brother Charles was a colleague of his in the ministry. The unpublished diary of Mrs. Andrews reveals that she and her husband were routinely using water treatments in their home by the spring of 1863 and that in January, 1864, John’s co-laborers offered to send him to Our Home for a few weeks of rest and treatment. John, “loath to quit” his preaching, declined the invitation, but a few months later sent his badly crippled six-year-old son Mellie (Charles Melville) for a fifteen-week stay. After several weeks Mrs. Andrews joined her boy at Dansville, and although she at first felt “like a stranger in a strange land” amid so many dress reformers, she eventually came to respect the place and its dedicated physicians. Mellie’s leg improved remarkably at the water cure, and by July he was able to return home nearly normal. Meanwhile, both his parents had become zealous health reformers, and as his father preached throughout the state, he also solicited subscriptions for the Laws of Life in order to earn a free copy of Trall’s Hydropathic Encyclopedia.25

Possibly encouraged by the Andrewses, James and Ellen White decided in late autumn, 1864, that the time was right for a firsthand look at the Dansville facilities. They had contemplated such a visit since shortly after Ellen’s
The White family and Adelia P. Patten about the time of their first visit to the Dansville water cure. Willie is between his parents; Edson is standing in the rear.
June 5 vision when James had written Jackson inquiring about a ministerial discount; but the trip had been postponed until Ellen had sketched out most of her vision, to avoid insinuations that she had come under the influence of the Dansville reformers. At last on Monday, September 5, following a weekend stopover in Rochester with the Andrewses, the Whites arrived at Our Home. Within a few days they were joined by Edson and Willie and their chaperone, Adelia Patten. Although the local press ignored the presence of the prophetess and her family, Dr. Jackson welcomed them all warmly and even invited Mrs. White to address a health reform convention then in progress. Unlike Mrs. Andrews only a few months earlier, she had little reason to feel like a stranger, for already a colony of Adventists was forming at the water cure. Besides her family and Miss Patten, at least seven other Sabbath-keepers were there, including Dr. and Mrs. Horatio Lay, John Andrews, and Hiram Edson.²⁶

For three weeks the Whites remained as guests of Our Home, gleaning all the information they could from daily observations of hydrotherapy and from Jackson’s frequent lectures. Adelia Patten described the doctor’s style: “he combines his theology, his medical instructions, his comical nonsense and his theatrical gestures all into his discourses. He flies about like a young man, and will come into the lecture hall with an old blue woolen cap on [,] which he takes off and puts under his arm and walks along and mounts the rostrum with all the firmness of an experienced lecturer.”²⁷

Fascinating to Ellen White was the “science” of phrenology, which Dr. Jackson practiced at five dollars a reading. Soon after the arrival of Edson and Willie she took them to the doctor for evaluations of their “constitutional organization, functional activity, temperament, predisposition to disease, natural aptitudes for business, fitness for connubial and maternal conditions, etc., etc.” Writing to friends, she could scarcely conceal her elation with Jackson’s flattering analysis: “I think Dr. Jackson gave an accurate ac-
count of the disposition and organization of our children. He pronounced Willie’s head to be one of the best that has ever come under his observation. He gave a good description of Edson’s character and peculiarities. I think this examination will be worth everything to Edson.” Presumably she was not so pleased with the doctor’s diagnosis of her condition as hysteria.  

The American costume of “short” skirts over pants, worn by Dr. Harriet Austin and the other women of Our Home, also caught Ellen’s fancy. The outfits did strike her as being on the mannish side, but she thought slight modifications could easily remedy that. “They have all styles of dress here,” she wrote from Dansville.

Some are very becoming, if not so short. We shall get patterns from this place, and I think we can get out a style of dress more healthful than we now wear, and yet not be bloomer or the American costume. Our dresses according to my idea, should be from four to six inches shorter than now worn, and should in no case reach lower than the top of the heel of the shoe, and could be a little shorter even than this with all modesty. I am going to get up a style of dress on my own hook which will accord perfectly with that which has been shown me [in vision]. Health demands it. Our feeble women must dispense with heavy skirts and tight waists if they value health.

“[D]on’t groan now,” she told her correspondent. “I am not going to extremes, but conscience and health requires a reform.”

The Battle Creek visitors found the food at Our Home plain even for their tastes. “We have the crackers,” wrote Miss Patten; “they don’t furnish ‘gems’ only in case of a wedding or some other extra occasion. They don’t have salt. The pudding is thin and fresh squash and cabbage without salt or vinegar and oh such times. I had a little salt dish this noon and wanted to pocket the salt that was left and as none of our company had an envelope so had Bro. White] tip it into his pass book.”

Even with an offended palate, Ellen White was so impressed with the overall program at Dansville that she be-
Title page of the first number of *How to Live*, Mrs. White’s second volume on health reform.
gan toying with the idea of setting up a similar institution in Battle Creek, "to which our Sabbath keeping invalids can resort." At their own water cure the strait-laced Adventists could avoid certain problems encountered at Our Home. Dr. Jackson, she reported regretfully, allowed his patients to "have pleasureable excitement to keep their spirits up. They play cards for amusement, have a dance once a week and seem to mix these things up with religion." While such activities might be appropriate for those who had "no hope for a better life," they surely could not be condoned by Christians looking for Christ's return.31

Following three profitable weeks at Dansville, the Whites headed home to Battle Creek, brimming with enthusiasm for sitz baths, short skirts, and Graham mush. On the return trip they once again stopped for a brief visit with the Andrews and indulged themselves in a little fresh fish, which James thoughtfully went out and purchased for breakfast one morning. Visions or not, vegetarianism was going to be a battle! For the next eleven months, while Sherman marched through Georgia and Grant pursued Lee in Virginia, James and Ellen campaigned throughout the Northern states proclaiming the gospel of health and salvation—at times, complained some dissident members, to the exclusion of other more pressing issues. It was difficult for these critics to understand why "nothing was shown about the duty of the brethren in view of the draft, but a vision was given showing the length at which women should wear their dresses."32

During these years before the Adventists had their own water cure, Ellen White could often be seen in Battle Creek going from house to house giving hydropathic treatments. In addition to this and her frequent speaking engagements, she found time to assemble six pamphlets on health reform, which were then bound together into a little volume called Health; or, How to Live, the subtitle being borrowed from a work recently issued by the house of Fowler and Wells. Each pamphlet focused on a single aspect of healthful living—diet, hydropathy, drugs, fresh
air and sunlight, clothing, and exercise—and included ma-
terial written both by Mrs. White and by other reformers. 
Most of the major names were there: Graham, Trall, Dio 
Lewis, Jackson, Coles, Mann, and many more. Although 
their selections were carefully chosen to avoid the in-
clusion of objectionable passages, like Coles’s recom-
modation of bowling as an excellent form of exercise, crude 
phrenological analyses and sweeping statements about 
prenatal influences remained untouched. Ellen White’s 
contribution, a six-part essay on “Disease and Its Causes,” 
dealt with “Health, happiness and [the] miseries of domes-
tic life, and the bearing which these have upon the pros-
cpects of obtaining the life to come.” And to give an indica-
tion of the state of health reform among Adventists, James 
White told of his recent visit to Dansville.33

To round out the volume, twelve of Battle Creek’s finest 
reformed cooks assembled a special collection of recipes 
for pies, puddings, fruits, and vegetables. Among their fa-
vorites were:

Gems.—Into cold water stir Graham flour sufficient to make a 
batter about the same consistency as that used for ordinary gridd-
le cakes. Bake in a hot oven, in the cast-iron bread pans. The 
pans should be heated before putting in the batter.

Note.—This makes delicious bread... If hard water is used, 
they are apt to be slightly tough. A small quantity of sweet milk 
will remedy this defect.

Graham Pudding.—This is made by stirring flour into boiling 
water, as in making hasty pudding. It can be made in twenty 
minutes, but is improved by boiling slowly an hour. Care is 
needed that it does not burn. It can be eaten when warm or cold, 
with milk, sugar, or sauce, as best suits the eater.

When left to cool, it should be dipped into cups or dishes to 
mold, as this improves the appearance of the table as well as the 
dish itself. Before molding, stoned dates, or nice apples thinly 
sliced, or fresh berries, may be added, stirring as they are 
dropped in. This adds to the flavor, and with many does away 
with the necessity for salt or some rich sauce to make it 
eatable....

When cold, cut in slices, dip in flour, and fry as griddle-cakes. 
It makes a most healthful head-cheese.
In the opinion of the experts, this dish, next to Graham bread, was the most popular staple on health reform tables.34

According to Ellen White, the selections accompanying her essay in *How to Live* were included not to indicate her sources but solely to show the harmony of her views with what she regarded as the most enlightened medical opinion of her day. "[A]fter I had written my six articles for *How to Live,*" she stated, "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. . . . I determined to publish *How to Live,* in which I largely extracted from the works referred to." Even the casual reader must agree that a striking similarity does exist between Mrs. White's ideas and those commonly expressed by the health reformers. But the similarity may not be as coincidental as she implies. If we accept the testimony of John Harvey Kellogg, who as a teenager set type for *How to Live,* Ellen White was more than passingly familiar with at least Coles's *Philosophy of Health* by the time she wrote her articles. It seems that she shared with Sylvester Graham (and others) a reluctance to acknowledge her intellectual and literary debts.35

Although the church leaders probably never realized their goal of placing *How to Live* in every Adventist home, Mrs. White's little digest of health reform literature sold well at $1.25 a bound copy and generally elicited a positive response. The only serious problem it encountered was the tendency of some readers to ascribe to the prophetess every notion contained in its pages. This created awkward situations at times and once moved her to protest that she did not endorse Coles's opinion, expressed in *How to Live,* that babies should be nursed only three times a day. With her blessing upon them, the various works of the health reformers began circulating freely among Adventists, and the Publishing Office in Battle Creek was soon reporting the sale of large quantities of books by Trall, Jackson, Graham, and Mann—and "tons" of pans for baking Graham bread.36
Despite the ground swell of reform, many Adventists continued to suffer from poor health. Physically speaking, church leadership reached its nadir in the summer of 1865 when a wave of sickness prostrated many of the leaders and brought activities at headquarters to a virtual standstill. James White and John Loughborough were both forced to their beds, causing the three-man General Conference committee to suspend meetings indefinitely. At the same time sickness prevented the Michigan state conference committee from carrying on its business and compelled Uriah Smith temporarily to relinquish his duties as editor of the Review and Herald.37

James White was the most critically ill of all. During the past year he had exhausted himself helping his wife prepare the pamphlets on How to Live, assisting Adventist boys drafted into the Union army, making arrangements for a general conference session in May, and attempting to put out the fires of rebellion in Iowa, where dissidents were splintering off to form a rival sect, the Church of God (Adventist). The strain of these additional duties severely taxed his already weakened system and literally drove him to the brink of death. Early in the morning of August 16, while he and Ellen were out walking in a neighbor’s garden, a sudden “stroke of paralysis” passed through the right side of his body, leaving him practically helpless. Somehow his wife managed to get him into the house where she heard him mutter, “Pray, pray.” Her prayers seemed to help a little, but still his right arm remained partially paralyzed, his nervous system shattered, and his brain “somewhat disturbed.” Shock treatments with a galvanic battery were tried for a while; but this seemed like such a denial of faith in God’s healing power, Ellen resolved to rely solely on the simple hydropathic techniques she had recently learned. For nearly five weeks she tenderly nursed James at home until she was too weak to continue the effort herself and could find no one else in Battle Creek willing to assume the responsibility for her husband’s life. After much prayer she finally decided to
take him back to Dansville and place him under the care of the skilled physicians at Our Home.  

Sympathetic friends and relatives waved sadly from the platform as the "Seventh-day invalid party" pulled slowly out of Battle Creek station on the morning of September 14. Accompanying the Whites on the trip to New York were Loughborough, Smith, Sister M. F. Maxson, and Dr. Horatio Lay, who had come from Dansville to escort the ailing Adventists to Our Home. After an arduous week-long journey that included a stopover in Rochester the pathetic little band, apparently no worse for the wear, arrived at their destination, where Dr. Jackson warmly greeted them. The day after arrival the doctor examined his new patients and issued the long-awaited prognoses, which Uriah Smith reported in the *Review and Herald*. James White, clearly the most critical case, would have to remain at the water cure for six to eight months, during which time Ellen White would also take treatments. Loughborough might recover in five or six months. "But the Editor of the *Review*, unfortunately for its readers, is to be let off in five or six weeks."  

The Whites soon settled into the Dansville routine. Small rooms were found close by the institution where Ellen could set up housekeeping and nursing operations. Daily she made the beds and tidied the rooms, not only for her husband and herself, but also for the other Battle Creek ministers who occupied an adjoining room. She insisted on spending as little time indoors as possible. When not taking water treatments, she and James strolled about the grounds basking in the sunlight and fresh autumn air. Three times each day they met with their brethren—including Elder D. T. Bourdeau from Vermont—for special seasons of prayer in James's behalf. Nights were the worst. Constant pain made sleep almost impossible for James, and Ellen sacrificed hours of her own much-needed rest rubbing his shoulders and arms to provide temporary relief. Often prayer proved to be the only effective therapy in bringing sleep to the weary preacher.
Understandably, the Whites were somewhat embarrassed by their present state of health, especially in view of their outspoken praise of health reform over the past couple of years. Certainly their own lives were not very effective witnesses to the power of abstemious living. Ellen feared that her husband’s “professed friends” would secretly rejoice in his affliction and chalk it up to sin in his life. To assist in meeting possible criticism, she wrote home to her children in Battle Creek asking them to send “the health journal in which [Sylvester] Graham gives his apology for being sick.” As far as the Whites were concerned, James’s illness had not resulted from personal sin but from prolonged and unceasing labor for the Lord.41

Early in October James’s colleagues on the General Conference committee called on Seventh-day Adventists everywhere to set aside Sabbath, the fourteenth, as a day of fasting and prayer for their stricken leader. At Dansville the Whites retreated a short distance from Our Home to a beautiful grove, where they spent the afternoon united in prayer with Elders Loughborough, Bourdeau, and Smith. The experience filled James with renewed hope, and the following day he appeared to be on the road to recovery. By mid-November, however, he had again slipped to a critical condition, and friends despaired for his very life. When he grew so weak he could no longer walk the short distance up the hill to the dining hall, John Loughborough kindly volunteered to bring baskets of food to the Whites’ room.42

By this time Ellen was beginning to show signs of strain and left Dansville for a few days to be with her two boys, who had recently arrived in Rochester from Michigan. But even away from the water cure she could not get her mind off her suffering husband or the physicians caring for him. Her first night in Rochester she dreamed of being back at Dansville “exalting God and our Saviour as the great Physician and the Deliverer of His afflicted, suffering children.” Apparently friction was already developing between her and the staff of Our Home, for in this dream, she told
James, "Dr. Jackson was near me, afraid that his patients would hear me, and wished to lay his hand upon me and hinder me, but he was awed and dared not move; he seemed held by the power of God. I awoke very happy." In a less dramatic tone she also reported that her diet was about the same as at Dansville—"Mornings I eat mush, gems, and uncooked apples. At dinner baked potatoes, raw apples, and gems"—and that she was confident James would "astonish the whole [medical] fraternity by a speedy recovery to health."  

Mrs. White remained in Rochester only briefly before returning to her husband's side. On her thirty-eighth birthday, November 26, she celebrated with a dinner of "Graham mush, hard Graham crackers, applesauce, sugar, and a cup of milk." The next day she and James met with Loughborough for an emotional season of prayer. "For more than one hour we could only rejoice and triumph in God," she later wrote. "We shouted the high praise of God." This "heavenly refreshing" had a cheering effect on James, but only temporarily.  

Shortly after this experience Ellen White became impressed with the advantages of removing James to Battle Creek, where he could recover in the more congenial atmosphere of his own home. Besides, several aspects of Dansville life were causing her deep concern. First, the inactivity prescribed for James was obviously not working. What he needed, she thought, was "exercise and moderate, useful labor." Second, James's mind was being "confused" by the religious teachings of Dr. Jackson, which did not conform with what Ellen had "received from higher and unerring authority." Third, the amusements encouraged by the management, especially dancing and card-playing, seemed out of harmony with true Christianity. Although Jackson always exempted his Adventist patients from such activities, Ellen still felt uneasy around such blatant manifestations of worldliness. One day when she was mistakenly approached in the bathroom for a donation to pay the fiddler at the dances, she declared to the doubtless startled
solicitor that as a "follower of Jesus" she could not contribute and then proceeded to give an impromptu lecture on Christian principles to the ladies in the room.\footnote{45}

By early December Ellen's own strength was rapidly slipping away; and when James suffered through a particularly bad night on the fourth, she abruptly decided the time had come to leave. The doctors were notified, trunks were packed, and early the next morning in driving sleet she departed for Rochester with a bundled-up James. For three weeks the Whites stayed in that city, enjoying the hospitality of Adventist friends. At James's request, other believers were summoned from surrounding churches to come to Rochester and join with the family in prayer for his recovery.\footnote{46}

While praying on Christmas evening, Ellen White was "wrapped in a vision of God's glory." To her immense relief, she saw that her husband would eventually recover. She also received a message of lasting importance: Seventh-day Adventists should open their own home for the sick, so that they would no longer have "to go to popular water-cure institutions for the recovery of health, where there is not sympathy for our faith." Adventists were to "have an institution of their own, under their own control, for the benefit of the diseased and suffering among us, who wish to have health and strength that they may glorify God in their bodies and spirits which are his." Although she appreciated "the kind attention and respect" she had received from the staff at Our Home, she wanted no more sad treks to Dansville, where "the sophistry of the devil" prevailed.\footnote{47}

New Year's Day the Whites boarded the train in Rochester and departed for home and friends in Michigan. Aided by his wife and sustained by Graham mush and gems, James survived the difficult trip to Battle Creek and arrived in good spirits. He was now fifty pounds below his normal weight, but fresh air, moderate exercise, and Ellen's gentle prodding soon had him up and about again. Still, his mental and physical health remained below par;
so in the spring of 1867 he and Ellen purchased a small farm in Greenville, Michigan, where she could more effectively implement her philosophy of useful labor for the sick. Although she was fairly successful in getting James to do simple chores about the garden, he rebelled at the prospect of bringing in the hay, hoping instead to rely on the good will of nearby friends. Ellen, however, outwitted him by getting to the neighbors first and persuading them not to help her husband when he came calling on them. Thus by hook or by crook she made sure James obtained the exercise she thought he needed.\textsuperscript{48}

According to James, his sickness led Ellen to ease up for a while in her written and oral pronouncements on health reform. Nevertheless, personal hygiene remained one of her “favorite themes,” and one she regarded as being as “closely connected with present truth as the arm is connected with the body.”\textsuperscript{49} Meanwhile, during James’s recuperation, exciting developments were under way in Battle Creek. There, in response to Mrs. White’s Christmas vision, church leaders were laying plans to open the Western Health Reform Institute, a water cure modeled after Our Home and the first link in what was to become a worldwide chain of Seventh-day Adventist medical institutions.
5. THE WESTERN HEALTH REFORM INSTITUTE

"More deaths have been caused by drug-taking than from all other causes combined. If there was in the land one physician in the place of thousands, a vast amount of premature mortality would be prevented."

*Ellen G. White*¹

"Were I sick, I would just as soon call in a lawyer as a physician from among general practitioners. I would not touch their nostrums, to which they give Latin names. I am determined to know, in straight English, the name of everything that I introduce into my system."

*Ellen G. White*²

September 5, 1866, marked the fulfillment of one of Ellen White’s fondest hopes: the grand opening of the Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek. Since her first visit to Dansville in the fall of 1864, she had dreamed of founding an Adventist water cure where Sabbath-keeping invalids could receive treatments in an atmosphere compatible with their distinctive faith. Her disillusionment with Our Home during James’s illness and the subsequent Christmas vision of 1865 convinced her that the time had finally arrived to take positive action. Vigorous support came from the denomination’s leaders, especially the numerous Dansville alumni, who shared her enthusiasm for an Adventist medical center. Uriah Smith, the influential
The original Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek.
editor of the *Review and Herald*, regarded his few weeks at Our Home as one of the most valuable experiences of his life and saw the establishment of a similar institution in Battle Creek as "a present necessity," both for treating the sick and for educating the church in the principles of health reform. Thus while politicians in Washington quarreled bitterly over the best method of healing a divided and scarred nation, the Adventists of Battle Creek dedicated themselves to curing mankind with water.³

At the annual general conference session in May, 1866, attended by church representatives from throughout the country, Ellen White announced the Lord's instruction to establish an Adventist water cure. The response was immediate and favorable. In the absence of the recuperating James White, John Loughborough, president of the Michigan conference, assumed overall responsibility for the fund-raising drive and took personal charge of the campaign in the West. John Andrews, another Dansville man, directed operations in the East, while the remaining ministers at the conference volunteered to serve as agents, selling stock in the proposed institute at twenty-five dollars a share. As soon as sufficient funds were on hand, arrangements were made to purchase an eight-acre site on the outskirts of town. Although existing buildings on the property could accommodate up to fifty patients, it was necessary to build an additional two-story structure to house a "packing room, bath room, dressing room, and a room to contain a tank of sufficient capacity to hold two hundred barrels of water."⁴

The plans to pour large sums of money into a water cure led some members to question the judgment of the brethren in Battle Creek. For years Mrs. White had been warning against heavy investments in this world, and the establishment of a big, permanent medical facility struck the critics as nothing less than "a denial of our faith in the speedy coming of Christ." To squash such sentiments, both Elders Loughborough and D. T. Bourdeau (still another former patient of Our Home) took to the pages of the
Review and Herald to point out that the Health Reform Institute, far from being a denial of faith, would be the means of "bringing thousands to a knowledge of present truth." The institute, Loughborough predicted, "will fill its place in this cause, from the fact that scores who come to it to be healed of temporal maladies, who learn the lesson of self-denial to gain health, may also, by being brought into a place where they become acquainted with the character and ways of our people, see a beauty in the religion of the Bible, and be led into the Lord's service."

Circulars describing the Western Health Reform Institute went out to all Adventist churches and potential stockholders and appeared in the Review and Herald as well. "In the treatment of the sick at this Institution," read the announcement,

no drugs whatever, will be administered, but only such means employed as NATURE can best use in her recuperative work, such as Water, Air, Light, Heat, Food, Sleep, Rest, Recreation, &c. Our tables will be furnished with a strictly healthful diet, consisting of Vegetables, Grains, and Fruits, which are found in great abundance and variety in this State. And it will be the aim of the Faculty, that all who spend any length of time at this Institute shall go to their homes instructed as to the right mode of living, and the best methods of home treatment.

In language typical of American nostrum vendors, prospective patients were glibly assured that "WHATEVER MAY BE THE NATURE OF THEIR DISEASE, IF CURABLE, THEY CAN BE CURED HERE." All bills were to be paid in advance, and individuals unable to visit the institute in person could receive a prescription by letter for five dollars, the same fee charged for a personal examination.

Chief physician at the institute, and one of the few Adventists with medical experience of any kind, was thirty-eight-year-old Horatio S. Lay, a man "thoroughly conversant with the latest and most approved Hygienic Methods of Treating Disease." As a youth Lay had apprenticed himself to a local doctor in Pennsylvania and acquired the
fundamentals of the trade. In 1849, feeling sufficiently knowledgeable to assume the title of doctor, he moved to Allegan, Michigan, a small town northwest of Battle Creek, and began practicing as an allopathic physician. About 1856 he joined the Seventh-day Adventists, and a few years later became interested in the health reform movement. Following Ellen White’s 1863 vision on health, it was Lay who first drew her out on the subject and who informed her of the remarkable similarity between her revelation and the teachings of the health reformers.\(^7\)

Shortly after his conversations with Mrs. White, Lay took his consumptive wife to the Dansville water cure, a move the prophetess saw in vision as being providentially arranged to train him for future work as a health reformer. At Dansville he quickly won the respect of the hydropaths. He was invited to join the staff of Our Home and in 1865 was elected a vice-president of the National Health Reform Association (along with Joshua V. Himes). During this time he toyed with the idea of "of going to N. York City to Dr. Trall’s college and attend lectures, obtain a diploma and come out a regular [sic] M.D.,” but he never went. In fact, it was not until 1877, long after he had severed his ties with Battle Creek, that he finally attended school and received an authentic medical degree from the Detroit Medical College.\(^8\)

The Western Health Reform Institute was a booming success. Within months of its opening patients from all over the country filled its rooms to overflowing. But prosperity also bred problems: the need for additional space and trained personnel. During the first years of the institute Lay seems to have been the only member of "the Faculty" with significant medical experience, and even he had never seen the inside of a medical school. Several others on his staff called themselves doctors, but the term was loosely used in those days. The institute’s lady physician, Phoebe Lamson, had spent some time at Dansville with her ailing father and may have picked up a rudimen-
tary knowledge of hydropathic medicine. To qualify herself more fully "to act her part in the Institution," she obtained Ellen White’s permission to spend the winter 1867–68 term at Trall’s Hygeio-Therapeutic College in New Jersey and returned a few months later proudly displaying an "M.D." after her name.9

In addition to his duties at the Health Reform Institute, Lay took on the editorship of a new monthly journal, the *Health Reformer*. During the summer of 1865, while still at Dansville, he had furnished the *Review and Herald* with a series of essays on "Health," outlining the main tenets of the reform movement. The church leaders liked his work so well that they voted at the next general conference session to have him write a second series on the same topic. But before any of his articles appeared, they ambitiously decided instead to have Lay edit "a first class Health Journal, interesting in its variety, valuable in its instructions, and second to none in either literary or mechanical execution." According to the prospectus, the journal was to be nondenominational in orientation and dedicated to curing diseases "by the use of Nature’s own remedies, Air, Light, Heat, Exercise, Food, Sleep, Recreation, &c."10

The first issue of the *Reformer* came off the press in August, 1866, carrying the motto "Our Physician, Nature: Obey and Live." Though distinctly second class in literary quality, it was an attractive publication by nineteenth-century standards. Because of the dearth of medical writers in the church, most articles were from the pens of ministers like Loughborough, Andrews, and Bourdeau. Even Ellen White contributed a composition, "Duty to Know Ourselves," based on L. B. Coles’s theme that to break one of the laws of life is "as great a sin in the sight of Heaven as to break the ten commandments." To avoid charges of religious sectarianism, the editors of the *Reformer* printed little by or about the Adventist seer in the first several volumes. Nevertheless, Mrs. White had high hopes for the magazine. "The *Health Reformer* is the medium through
which rays of light are to shine upon the people,” she wrote in an 1867 testimony. “It should be the very best health journal in our country.”

Among the most readable features of the Reformer were the “Question Department,” where readers’ queries on home treatment were answered, and numerous testimonials to the curative powers of health reform. Although the medical men in Battle Creek were prone to complain of apathy among the membership as a whole, glowing reports of how two meals a day and no butter had restored health and strength filled the pages of the Reformer. Typical was the progressive reform of Brother Isaac Sanborn, president of the Illinois-Wisconsin conference, who for years had suffered painfully from “inflammatory rheumatism”:

I concluded I would leave off the use of meat, which I did by leaving pork first: then beef, then condiments, fish, and mince pies. Then I adopted the two meals a day, had breakfast at seven A.M., and dinner at half past one P.M.; used no drug medicines of any kind, lived on Graham bread, fruit and vegetables, using no butter, but a little cream in place of butter. I drink nothing with my meals, and I relish and enjoy my meals as I never have before; and the result is, I am entirely well of the rheumatism, which I used to have so bad by spells that I could not walk a step for days; and although I travel through all kinds of weather, and speak often in crowded assemblies, in ill-ventilated schoolhouses, and am exposed in various ways, yet I have not had a bad cold for more than two years.

Throughout its early history the Reformer exuded antipathy toward regular medicine, leaving no doubt of the medically sectarian loyalties of its Battle Creek promoters. This hostility reflected not only a genuine distrust of orthodox physicians but also deep-seated feelings of inferiority. “Some people seem to think that nobody can talk on Health but an M.D., and nobody on Theology but a D.D.,” wrote the self-conscious and degreeless editor. “But how ever much there is in a name, or in a title, everybody will admit that all knowledge of health should not be left with the doctors, nor all theology with the ministers.” J. F.
Byington, Lay’s associate at the institute, became almost vitriolic in denouncing the “old school,” calling its therapy a “terrible humbug” and its practitioners “too bigoted and self-conceited to learn.” Even the Whites were not much kinder. Ellen charged “popular physicians” with deliberately keeping their patients in ignorance and ill-health for monetary reasons, while James ridiculed “the superstitious confidence of the people in doctors’ doses.” Ironically, these bitter attacks on the regular medical profession came at the very period when that school was finally abandoning its long-practiced customs of bloodletting and calomel-dosing.  

For several months the future of the fledgling Battle Creek health institutions looked bright indeed. But it was not long before ominous storm clouds rolled in, casting shadows not only on the institute and the Reformer, but on Ellen White herself. The first episode began innocently in January, 1867, with an announcement by Dr. Lay that the institute was already filled to capacity and would soon be turning away incoming patients for lack of room. “What shall be done?” he inquired of readers in the Review and Herald. His own answer was to erect at once an additional “large” building capable of housing “at least one hundred more patients than we now have.” The estimated cost was twenty-five thousand dollars—a figure seven times the General Conference budget for that year.  

Before the month was out, Uriah Smith had thrown the weight of the Review and Herald behind the project, and interest in Lay’s proposal was running high in Adventist circles. The immediate problem, as the institute’s backers saw it, was how to gain a public endorsement from Mrs. White. One solution came from John Loughborough, who had just returned from a trip with Ellen and had heard her give a “good testimony” regarding the institute and its superintendent. Why not, he suggested, ask her to write out this message for Testimony No. 11, then going to press. This plan met with general approval, and Smith was nominated to carry out the assignment.
On February 5 Smith sent a letter to Mrs. White urging her to sanction additional investments in the institute. He reminded her that a widely distributed circular had promised a statement in her next Testimony relative to the medical work in Battle Creek and pointed out that such a communication would be expected:

. . . a great many are waiting before doing anything to help the Institute, till they see the Testimony and now if it goes out without anything on these points, they will not understand it, and it will operate greatly against the prosperity of the Institution. The present is a most important time in this enterprise, and it is essential that no influence should be lost, which can be brought to bear in its favor.

In closing he offered to hold up the printing of the last pages of Testimony No. 11 until she could rush her manuscript to him. Then, as if he had not already prompted her enough, the brash young Smith went on to add a postscript suggesting that she particularly emphasize the connection between the health work and "the cause of present truth." We think, he said, this relationship "should be made plainly to appear."  

Thus prodded, Ellen White hurriedly wrote out the desired testimony. First, following Smith's suggestion, she commented on the intimate relationship between theology and health: "The health reform, I was shown, is a part of the third angel's message [that is, Seventh-day Adventism], and is just as closely connected with it as are the arm and hand with the human body." Then, after describing the Battle Creek water cure, she stated that God had shown her in vision that the institute "was a worthy enterprise for God's people to engage in,—one in which they can invest means to his glory and the advancement of his cause." Institutions like that in Battle Creek could play a vital role in directing "unbelievers" to Adventism, for by "becoming acquainted with our people and our real faith, their prejudice will be overcome, and they will be favorably impressed." Here was "a good opportunity," she advised, for those with financial security "to use their means
for the benefit of suffering humanity, and also for the advancement of the truth.”¹⁷

Given this divine blessing—and the fact that investments were rumored to be returning an annual dividend of 10 percent—institute stock enjoyed healthy sales throughout the spring and summer months. By mid-August the basement and first floor of the new building were completed, and lumber was on hand for the remaining three stories. But the money had run out. While construction was temporarily halted, the directors of the institute appealed once again to the church membership, urging them to recall Mrs. White’s counsel in Testimony No. 11 and buy more shares in the institution.¹⁸

Though the directors undoubtedly did not know it, Mrs. White was at that time preparing to back away from her previous endorsement of the expansion plans. Her private correspondence reveals that by August she was having qualms that the institute might be growing too rapidly for a man of Lay’s limited abilities. “Dr. Lay is not qualified to carry on so large a business as you are laying out for him,” she cautioned one of the institute’s directors. “Dr. Lay has done well to move out in this great work, but he can bear no heavier burdens.” In addition to Lay’s limitations, she and her husband feared that the institute’s supporters were moving too fast too soon, given the available money and personnel. Some poor Adventists, she pointed out, were taking unsound financial risks, putting “from one-fifth to one-third of all they possess into the Institute.” In response to these and other problems, by mid-September she had prepared Testimony No. 12 modifying her earlier statements in Testimony No. 11. Now, she said, the Lord had shown her that the institute should be “small at its commencement, and cautiously increased, as good physicians and helpers could be procured and means raised.” She pointed out, correctly, “that out of many hygienic institutions started in the United States within the last twenty-five years, but few maintain even a visible existence at the present time.”¹⁹

This virtual repudiation of what the church considered
to be a divinely inspired testimony demanded an explanation. Uncharitable critics later hinted that James had been behind the change, but Ellen placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of Uriah Smith and his associates. Smith’s importunate letter of February 5 had caused her mental suffering “beyond description,” she explained. “Under these circumstances I yielded my judgment to that of others, and wrote what appeared in No. 11 in regard to the Health Institute, being unable then to give all I had seen. In this I did wrong.” Still, she refused to withdraw “one sentence” from what she had written in Testimony No. 11, admitting only that she had acted prematurely. Her lament that the entire affair had been “one of the heaviest trials” of her life surely evoked only sympathy. Yet her admitted wavering under pressure raised long-lasting questions about her susceptibility to human influences.20

Testimony No. 12 apparently caught the institute’s directors by surprise. The secretary, E. S. Walker, immediately wrote James White protesting that “it would require a great amount of labor and be attended with considerable expense to undo what we have already done.” The directors, he said, thought it best to proceed as soon as possible with putting a roof over the new building and then to complete the interior as funds became available. To do this, they needed the Whites’ public approval. On behalf of the directors he promised a reform in the management of the water cure, so that the Whites could once again “feel to work for the Institute as [they] did at its commencement.”21

But James White did not back down. Instead, a very strange thing happened—“a real hocus pocus,” remembered one old-timer. At White’s insistence, and apparently with the concurrence of at least two directors, the entire structure was torn down stone by stone until not a trace remained where shortly before there had stood the proud beginning of a new sanitarium. Some placed the loss at eleven thousand dollars, but a portion of this sum was undoubtedly recovered through the sale of salvageable ma-
terials. The complex motives behind this seemingly irrational act will never be fully known. Years after the event, John Harvey Kellogg discussed the incident with White and concluded that the building had been razed “for no other reason than because James White was not consulted” at the time of its planning. By then the aging elder had come to regret his impetuous decision and confided to the young doctor that “if I had known how much power and strength there was in this thing, I never would have torn that thing down.”

At no time during this unpleasant episode did Ellen White allude in print to her husband’s erratic behavior. Although privately concerned for his mental health during this period of his life, she publicly defended him as a man chosen of God and given “special qualifications, natural ability, and an experience to lead out his people in the advance work.” James himself, instead of apologizing for throwing away the institute’s money, condescendingly appealed to the church to forgive the men in Battle Creek “who have moved rashly, and have committed errors in the past for want of experience.” The “large building is given up for the present, and the material is being sold,” he announced matter-of-factly in the Review and Herald a month after his election in May, 1868, to the institute’s board of directors. Then, after complaining of the large debt recently incurred, he audaciously went on to request thirteen thousand dollars for a modest two-story building and two cottages, a figure just two thousand dollars shy of what it would have cost to finish the original structure. “Send in your pledges, brethren, at once, and the money as soon as possible,” he urged. “It is a SAFE INVEST-MENT.”

To Ellen White, the extravagant plans for physical expansion were only the tip of the iceberg threatening the institute. Much more disturbing were the ubiquitous signs of worldliness: patients and staff enjoying Dansville-style amusements, physicians demanding higher wages than ministers, and workers calling each other “Mister” and
"Miss" rather than "Brother" and "Sister." (Until the 1880s some Adventists refused even to use the common, but pagan, days of the week, substituting instead First-day, Second-day, etc.)

The institute directors considered amusements, "when conducted within proper limits, as an important part of the treatment of disease." Their celebration of the first Thanksgiving at the water cure included songs, charades, pantomime, nonalcoholic toasts, and attempts at poetry:

    Hoops on barrels, tubs, and pails,
    Are articles indispensible;
    But hoops as they puff out woman's dress,
    Making the dear women seem so much less,
    Are most reprehensible.

Such activities upset Mrs. White, especially since the Western Health Reform Institute had been established precisely to get away from such unchristian practices. And the topic became personally embarrassing when reports began circulating that Ellen White herself had taken to occasional game playing. Is it true, inquired some Adventist elders, "that you have taken an interest in the amusements which have been practiced at the Health Institute at Battle Creek, that you play checkers, and carry a checker-board with you as you visit the brethren from place to place?" Absolutely not, she replied in the Review and Herald. Since her conversion at the age of twelve she had forsaken all such frivolities as checkers, chess, backgammon, and fox-and-geese. "I have spoken in favor of recreation, but have ever stood in great doubt of the amusements introduced at the Institute at Battle Creek, and have stated my objections to the physicians and directors, and others, in conversation with them, and by numerous letters."

By the fall of 1867 Ellen White was so disgusted with the health institute she regarded it as "a curse" to the church, a place where sincere Christians became infidels and believers lost faith in her testimonies. But later that year a spiritual revival swept through the Adventist com-
munity in Battle Creek and rekindled her enthusiasm for the water cure. The following spring she pledged renewed support, and James became a director. Her blessing and her husband’s business acumen were not sufficient, however, to keep the institute solvent. By the autumn of 1869 only eight paying patrons remained. A surplus of charity patients and other factors had contributed to this situation, but so had Mrs. White’s harsh criticisms that had tarnished the institute’s reputation among Adventists. She naturally saw it differently and later blamed the institute’s decline entirely on the managers, especially Dr. Lay, whom she had come to regard as too proud and self-centered for his position. The directors at their 1869 annual meeting meekly acknowledged their guilt and absolved the Whites of any culpability. Within a year Dr. J. H. Ginley had replaced the unfortunate Dr. Lay as superintendent, and businessmen had taken the place of the ministers on the board of directors.26

At the height of the institute controversy Merritt Kellogg paid the Whites a surprise visit. The former Oberlin student, now in his mid-thirties, was on his way back to California after attending the winter term at Trall’s Hygeio-Therapeutic College and picking up an M.D. degree. The Whites, ever suspicious of close contacts with outsiders, fully expected that someone so “fresh from Dr. Trall’s school” would be polluted with extreme and objectionable views. They were “happily disappointed,” however, to discover that Kellogg was free from all such fanaticism. And they were delighted when he explained the remarkable harmony between what the Lord had revealed to Ellen White and what Trall taught his students. Here was just the man, thought James, to go around to the churches and revive flagging interest in health reform.27

At first the unknown Kellogg merely accompanied the Whites on their speaking tours, presenting the scientific side of the reform question. But at the May general conference session, through the influence of Elder White, the church officers asked Kellogg to remain in the East as a
full-time health lecturer, speaking to local churches upon request. Kellogg agreed to this arrangement, but after only three series of talks in small Michigan towns, no more invitations came in. Disheartened, he wrote Mrs. White complaining of this strange “dumbness” on the part of the churches “after so much has been shown in vision concerning the importance of this health movement.” He felt the Whites had already said more than enough in his behalf, and he refused “to beg the privilege of lecturing.” When still no calls came, the discouraged man returned to his home in California and joined an evangelistic campaign.28

Kellogg’s few months in Michigan did produce one significant result: a union between the Battle Creek reformers and Dr. Trall, the foremost American hydropath. Undoubtedly inspired by Kellogg’s favorable account of Trall’s teachings, the Whites arranged to bring the prominent health reformer to Battle Creek for a course of lectures at the close of the annual general conference meetings. After an opening address to the conference delegates on Sunday evening, May 17, Trall spoke twice a day for four days to somewhat smaller crowds that included many Adventist ministers in town for the conference. Thursday afternoon was reserved for a private meeting with women only and was attended by hundreds of ladies attired in the reformed “short” dress. This display of the costume, the greatest Trall had ever seen, he credited to the influence of Mrs. White, who “not only advocates the dress-reform, but practices it.”29

The only account we have of Trall’s relationship with Ellen during this visit is curious indeed. Years after the event John Loughborough (a sometimes unreliable witness) wrote that although Ellen had refused to attend Trall’s public lectures she had invited him on daily carriage rides during which “it was understood that he was to listen to her ideas of hygiene, disease and its causes, the effects of medicines, etc.” After the second day’s conversation Trall reportedly asked her where she had studied medicine and was told she had received all her information
from God in vision. "He assured her that her ideas were all in the strictest harmony with physiology and hygiene, and that on many of the subjects she went deeper than he ever had." By their last session together the amazed doctor is supposed to have remarked that his hostess could just as well have given the lectures on health as he. At least this is what Loughborough claimed to have heard from John Andrews, who rode along with the Whites and Trall through the streets of Battle Creek.30

The rapport thus established between the Whites and Trall resulted in the doctor's being asked to become a regular contributor to the Reformer. The addition of a distinguished name—"admitted by all to stand at the head of the health reform in this country, so far as human science is concerned"—was calculated to pump new life into an unexciting publication and was part of an overall plan of James White's for revamping the journal. Beginning with the first issue of the third volume (July, 1868), the number of pages was increased, a disgraced Lay was replaced by an "Editorial Committee of Twelve," and Trall's "Special Department" was inaugurated. For his part, Trall cooperated by folding his monthly Gospel of Health and turning over its subscription list to the Reformer, with the assurance to his readers that it would "be managed by those who are, head and heart, in full sympathy with the true principles of the great health reformation." With this merger Battle Creek for the first time assumed national importance in the health reform movement.31

The new arrangement, begun with such high hopes, proved to be less than ideal. Numerous readers, it soon turned out, resented Trall’s strictures against the use of salt, milk, and sugar. And to make matters worse, the managing editor of the Reformer, known by insiders to use these articles of food himself, backed Trall editorially and thus prompted the pioneer reformer to speak out stronger than he otherwise would have done. The Whites, who personally respected Trall’s opinions on diet, first detected signs of discontent while on a speaking tour through some
Western states. There they found that many Westerners regarded the *Reformer* as “radical and fanatical” and had no interest at all in becoming subscribers. Upon returning to Battle Creek the dismayed Whites learned that letters were pouring in from disgruntled readers canceling their subscriptions. Clearly, the journal was “going away from the people, and leaving them behind.”  

No doubt encouraged by Ellen, James assumed the helm of the *Reformer* himself and pledged to steer a course away from all extremes. Trall, however, stayed. His department alone was, in the elder’s opinion, “worth twice the subscription price of the *Reformer*.” During his illness in the mid-1860s James White had given up milk, salt, and sugar, and he believed “the time not far distant” when Trall’s position on the use of these items would “be looked upon by all sound health reformers with more favor than they are at the present time.” To placate disgruntled subscribers, and to give the journal an air of doctrinal orthodoxy, James had Ellen begin a second “Special Department” in the March, 1871, issue, at the same time warning readers not to “feel disturbed on seeing some things in these departments which do not agree with their ideas of matters and things.” Even without the sections by his wife and Dr. Trall, there were “pages enough where all can read tenfold their money’s worth.” With Ellen’s monthly department, regular articles by James, and advertisements for son Willie’s “Hygienic Institute Nursery,” the new *Reformer* at times took on the appearance of a White family production.

Whatever his personal problems, James White was an effective promoter. Within two years he had raised subscriptions to the *Reformer* from three thousand to eleven thousand, and by 1875 an official report showed it to have “by far the largest circulation of any journal of its kind in the world.” The previous year both special departments, having served their purpose, were discontinued. The fact that Trall left the *Reformer* at the height of its success, and apparently with the White’s blessing, gives the lie to later
charges by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg that Trall was responsible for the magazine’s earlier difficulties.\textsuperscript{34}

By the early 1870s the financial outlook of the institute and the \textit{Reformer} appeared fairly bright; yet a dire shortage of Adventist physicians continued to threaten the medical work. Before there could be any significant expansion, it was obviously necessary, said James White, to “Hustle young men off to some doctor mill.”\textsuperscript{35} As far as Adventist needs were concerned, the best “mill” was Trall’s Hygeio-Therapeutic College in Florence Heights, New Jersey, where the medical course was not only hydropathic but quick.

Although Trall’s school may have been one of the weakest in America, it had many competitors. As Dr. Thomas L. Nichols remarked in 1864, Americans did everything in a hurry, including the training of their physicians:

Nominally, it is required that the student shall read three years, under some regular physician, during which time he must have attended two courses of medical lectures. If, however, he pay his fees, exhibit a certificate as to the time he has studied, or pretended to study, and pass a hasty examination, made by professors who are very anxious that he should pass, he gets a diploma of \textit{Medicinæ Doctor}. He has full authority to bleed and blister, set broken bones and cut off limbs.

Most states did not require a diploma, or even a license, to practice medicine; but with medical degrees so accessible, there was little reason for any aspiring doctor to go without one.\textsuperscript{36}

Thus in the fall of 1872 James White arranged with Merritt Kellogg, of the class of ’68, to return to Florence Heights with four carefully chosen Battle Creek students: John Harvey Kellogg, a protégé of the Whites and Merritt’s younger half-brother; Jennie Trembley, an editorial assistant with the \textit{Reformer}; and the two White boys, Edson and Willie. For several years Ellen White had dreamed of Edson’s becoming a physician, but he had turned out to be such a poor health reformer she had fi-
dents, and that some were not legally old enough to prac-
tice medicine, Trall awarded them each a handsome
diploma and sent them out to ply their trade on an unsuspect-
ing world.39

Since most of the Battle Creek students went into fields
other than medicine, few patients in this instance suffered
from Trall’s lax standards. John Kellogg, the only one of
the four to make a full-time career of medicine, wisely
went on to study for two additional years at orthodox and
reputable institutions: the College of Medicine and Sur-
gery of the University of Michigan (1873–75) and the Bel-
levue Hospital Medical School in New York City (1874–
75). Although his decision to attend Bellevue initially
went against the “urgent advice” of James White, who
“had the impression that so long as nature had to do the
healing work anyway, it was quite unnecessary for the doc-
tor to worry about so much minute detail,” he eventually
won the elder’s moral and financial backing. Upon receiv-
ing his degree, five-foot, four-inch John proudly wrote Wil-
lie White that he now felt “more than fifty pounds bigger
since getting a certain piece of sheepskin about two feet
square. It’s a bonafide sheep, too, by the way, none of your
bogus paper concerns like the hygieo-therapeutic docu-
ment.”40

Young Kellogg had a right to be proud, for he had pulled
himself up from his sectarian roots to become the first
Seventh-day Adventist worthy of the title “doctor.” In the
spring of 1875 he returned to Battle Creek and joined the
staff of the Western Health Reform Institute. Being poli-
tically astute—and perhaps grateful—he at once allied him-
self with the Whites in their efforts to maintain control of
an expanding church organization. That winter he joined
Uriah Smith and Sidney Brownsberger, principal of the
Adventist’s Battle Creek College, in pledging to assist the
Whites in bringing “discipline and order” to the work in
Battle Creek. The alliance paid off handsomely the follow-
ing year when the group secured his appointment, at age
twenty-four, to the superintendency of the health institute,
Young John Harvey Kellogg shortly after he assumed the superintendency of the Western Health Reform Institute, from Kellogg, *Plain Facts for Old and Young* (Burlington, Iowa: I. F. Segner, 1882).
replacing Dr. William Russell, who left with over one-fourth of the patients to run a water cure in Ann Arbor. For the next four years Kellogg thrived as James White’s “fair-haired boy,” but he eventually came to resent the elder’s dictatorial ways.41

Kellogg’s fondest wish was to turn the poorly equipped Battle Creek water cure into a scientifically respectable institution where a wide variety of medical and surgical techniques would be used. In this task he found a ready and powerful ally in Ellen White, who was beginning to resent having “worldlings sneeringly [assert] that those who believe present truth are weak-minded, deficient in education, without position or influence.” A first-rate medical center would prove her detractors wrong and bring fame and honor to Seventh-day Adventists. In several respects the time seemed propitious for such a move. A handful of Adventist young people were coming out of recognized medical schools, patients were flocking to the institute, and the old debts were finally off the books. So when Kellogg approached the prophetess with plans for a large multistoried sanitarium, he met a warm response. And when Ellen had a dream sanctioning the erection of a large building, it was all James needed to volunteer to raise the necessary funds. “Now that we have men of ability, refinement, and sterling sense, educated at the best medical schools on the continent,” he wrote glowingly in the Review and Herald, “we are ready to build.”42

By the spring of 1878 an imposing new Medical and Surgical Sanitarium stood on the old institute grounds. But the Whites were not pleased. Construction costs had once again plunged the church heavily into debt and disturbed the tranquillity of Elder and Mrs. White. She had originally called for a first-class medical institution, but now that the building was finished, it reminded her of “a grand hotel rather than an institution for the treatment of the sick.” Out went a testimony reprimanding the prodigal sanitarium managers for their “extravagant outlay” in aiming at the world’s standards,” and for other misdeeds. Al-
The new Western Health Reform Institute in the mid-1870s. Note Mrs. White (in her reform dress) and Elder White standing to the right of the trees.
though Kellogg felt some of the charges leveled against him were grossly unfair, he attributed the outburst more to the machinations of James than to Ellen herself. In the fall of 1880 he retaliated by uniting with two of James White’s rivals, Elders S. N. Haskell and G. I. Butler, to force the aging leader off the sanitarium board and to elect Haskell chairman in his place. Within a year James White lay dying in Battle Creek as a reconciled Dr. Kellogg labored in vain to save the patriarch’s life.43

Through the following years Kellogg struggled to escape his sectarian past by identifying with the “rational medicine” of such distinguished practitioners as Jacob Bigelow and Oliver Wendell Holmes. The “rational” physician, said Kellogg, adopts “all of hygieo-therapy and all the good of every other system known or possible,” not just the water cure. His ties to hydropathy were too strong to sever entirely, however; and in the mid-1880s local physicians, led by a former student and associate, Dr. Will Fairfield, tried (unsuccessfully) to oust him from the county medical society for sectarianism. Kellogg’s vindication came sometime later when Dr. Henry Hurd, medical director of the Johns Hopkins University Hospital, publicly lauded him for “having converted into a scientific institution an establishment founded on a vision.” But even after he had become a national figure, and his sanitarium world famous, Kellogg never forgot that the institution’s “real founder and chief promoter” was Ellen White.44
6. **Short Skirts and Sex**

“God would not have his people adopt the so-called reform dress.”

*Ellen G. White (1863)*¹

“God would now have his people adopt the reform dress...”

*Ellen G. White (1867)*²

Ellen White took great interest in the affairs of the Western Health Reform Institute, but she did not allow the water cure to monopolize her attention. In the decades following her 1863 vision and the subsequent visits to Dansville she spoke out frequently and forcefully on the other facets of health reform: dress, sex, and diet. Of all the causes she urged on her followers, perhaps none was more personally frustrating than her ten-year effort to put the Adventist sisters into “short” skirts and pants. The need for dress reform was self-evident. Fashionable layers of long skirts and petticoats, weighing as much as fifteen pounds, swept floors and streets, while vise-like corsets tortured midriffs into exaggerated hourglass shapes, resulting in frequent fainting and internal damage. And to make American women even more uncomfortable and immobile, the steel-wired hoop skirt staged a revival in the mid-1850s.³

About 1850 Elizabeth Smith Miller quietly launched a revolt to free women from their “clothes-prison.” Encouraged by her reform-minded father, Gerrit Smith, she broke with fashion and donned a short skirt over pantaloons. Her unusual attire attracted little attention until she
Elizabeth Smith Miller in the costume she designed, from Carrie A. Hall, *From Hoopskirts to Nudity* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938).
Amelia Bloomer, who lent her name to Mrs. Miller’s invention, from Carrie A. Hall, *From Hoopskirts to Nudity* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938).
visited her cousin Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Seneca Falls, New York, and caught the eye of Amelia Bloomer, editor of a women’s temperance magazine, the *Lily*. When the *Lily* began advocating Libby Miller’s outfit, the national press dubbed it the “Bloomer.” Seneca Falls in the 1850s was a hotbed of feminist activity, and the women’s rightsers eagerly adopted the Bloomer as their distinctive uniform. Among the Bloomerites were such leading feminists as Sarah and Angelina Grimke, Lucy Stone, and Susan B. Anthony.⁴

Health reformers, who had long condemned the evils of tight corsets and dragging skirts, shared the feminists’ enthusiasm for the Bloomer. It became especially popular at water cures, where cumbersome long dresses were definitely out of style. Almost inevitably, Gerrit Smith’s protégé James Caleb Jackson supported the reform, promoting the short skirt first at Glen Haven and then at Our Home. Not being completely satisfied with the original style, he and his associate Harriet N. Austin slightly modified the Bloomer and renamed it the “American costume.” Although the casual observer could scarcely distinguish their design from Mrs. Miller’s, Jackson heatedly insisted that it was no more like the Bloomer than “an elephant is like a rhinoceros.”⁵

Despite the advantages of comfort and mobility it gave its wearers, the Bloomer and its variations met with universal ridicule and abuse. A hostile press characterized Bloomerites as “strong minded” and associated them with “free love” and “easy divorce.” On one occasion Ellen Beard Harman, Trall’s associate, was even arrested for wearing pants on the streets of New York City. To avoid such unpleasantries, both Libby Miller and Elizabeth Stanton experimented with skirts at various lengths below the knee, and Mrs. Stanton once went so far as to discard the controversial trousers. This latter act elicited a strong re- buke from Susan Anthony who feared that it would “only be said the Bloomers have doffed their Pants the better to display their legs.” Discouraged, the feminists one by one
Harriet N. Austin in the American Costume (courtesy of the Dansville Area Historical Society).
abandoned their reform. “We put the dress on for greater freedom,” explained Mrs. Stanton, “but what is physical freedom compared with mental bondage?” By the 1860s the costume was no longer capturing headlines, but its influence could still be seen among hard-working housewives in the West and at places like Our Home on the Hillside, the Dansville water cure twice visited by Ellen White.⁶

Since her girlhood days Ellen had been a plain dresser —no bows, no ribbons, no rings. Among the strict Christians with whom she associated, outward adornment was not only a sure sign of a corrupt heart but a sinful waste of means as well. Thus for her, modesty in dress was not originally a matter of health but of religion. When she damned the “disgusting” hoop skirt in the early 1860s, her reason for doing so was that God would have a “peculiar” people. It was not until after her 1863 vision that she began associating the subject of dress with health.⁷

The question of whether Adventists should embrace the reform dress arose as soon as Ellen White began preaching her health message in 1863. No doubt inspired by the divine call for reform, a few Adventist sisters pressed for the immediate adoption of the American costume. But Mrs. White would have none of it. “God would not have his people adopt the so-called reform dress,” she stated unequivocally in Testimony No. 10. “Those who feel called out to join the movement in favor of women’s rights and the so-called dress reform, might as well sever all connection with the third angel’s message.” In her recent vision God had shown her that the American costume specifically violated the biblical injunction in Deuteronomy 22:5 against women wearing “that which pertaineth unto a man.” Besides being mannish, the outfit induced “a spirit of levity and boldness” unbefitting a Christian.⁸

There was also a more personal reason for Ellen White’s opposition to the American costume: she feared identification with Bloomer-wearing spiritualists. Since the 1848 experiments of Kate and Margaret Fox with the rappings of
“Mr. Splitfoot,” spirit communication had become an American sensation. Because of Mrs. White’s ability to communicate with the supernatural world, early Seventh-day Adventists were often “branded as Spiritualists.” Eli Curtis, a Millerite turned spiritualist, had upset the young prophetess by failing to discriminate between her divine revelations and the diabolical work of “the Dixboro Ghost.” She was afraid that the adoption of the American costume would only add to such confusion and destroy whatever influence the Adventists had. To avoid this possibility, she recommended that Adventist women simply wear their dresses “so as to clear the filth of the streets an inch or two.” In this way they would appear neither “odd or singular.”

Within a year or so of writing these words Ellen White paid her first visit to Dansville and began having second thoughts about the reform dress. Up close it did not appear nearly as inappropriate as she had imagined. Harriet Austin’s masculine appearance repulsed her; but, she wrote friends, some of the dresses were “very becoming, if not so short.” Using patterns from Dansville, she planned to devise a dress “from four to six inches shorter than now worn” that would “accord perfectly” with what she had seen in vision. Of necessity it would have to be distinct from the previously condemned American costume. “We shall imitate or follow no fashion we have ever yet seen,” she promised. “We shall institute a fashion which will be both economical and healthy.”

In the last of her How to Live pamphlets, probably completed soon after returning from Our Home, Ellen White provided the first public indication of her weakening opposition to the reform dress. Addressing her sisters in the church, she made her case for joining the dress reformers. “Christians should not take pains to make themselves gazing-stocks by dressing differently from the world,” she told them. “But if, in accordance with their faith and duty in respect to their dressing modestly and healthfully, they find themselves out of fashion, they should not change
their dress in order to be like the world.” The pressing issue was what course to take, for the extremely short skirts of some reformers seemed scarcely less objectionable than the notorious whalebones and heavy dresses of fashionable ladies. Her solution was to lengthen the skirt of the American costume. “The dress should reach somewhat below the top of the boot; but should be short enough to clear the filth of the sidewalk and street, without being raised by the hand.” No specific length was given, but alert readers were not slow in pointing out that “the top of the boot” was a good deal higher than “an inch or two” from the street.¹¹

Verbally accepting the reform dress was one thing; actually putting it on was something else again. Month after month Ellen postponed the dreadful moment, praying for the perfect occasion. Her opportunity came in September, 1865, when she accompanied her ailing husband for a second visit to Our Home. There, mingling with others in short skirts and pants, she would not attract any undesirable attention. During the stopover in Rochester, shortly before arriving in Dansville, she put the finishing touches on her new wardrobe. Anxious not to appear singular in any way, she wrote home asking her children to send a dozen steel-rimmed buttons. “I need them up and down my short dress,” she explained. “That is the way they all have them.” Presumably her Dansville debut took place without incident; yet for over a year she remained self-conscious whenever appearing in the eye-catching garb. Under no circumstances would she wear it “at meetings, in the crowded streets of villages and cities, and when visiting distant relatives.”¹²

Mrs. White no doubt would have pursued this half-hearted course indefinitely had not the eruption of an interminable conflict forced her hand. The controversy broke out when physicians at the newly opened Western Health Reform Institute, acting in harmony with the counsel in How to Live, urged incoming patients to dress in the manner revealed by God. This policy, identifying Adventism
with the disreputable short skirt, aroused the ire of some Battle Creek brethren and their fashion-conscious wives. Had not Mrs. White in Testimony No. 10 pointedly condemned the reform dress? they asked. As the debate heated, it became clear that the authority of Ellen White’s visions was at stake. Openly siding with the physicians, she lamented that among her critics, whom she characterized as possessing “a strange spirit of blind and bitter opposition,” were “some who professed to be among the firmest friends of the testimonies.” When news of the dissension spread beyond the confines of Battle Creek in the fall and winter of 1866, a flood of letters descended on Ellen White, demanding an explanation of the apparent contradiction between Testimony No. 10 and How to Live. Which instruction was the church to follow: the 1863 admonition not to adopt the reform dress, or the later advice to wear a lengthened American costume?13

Deserted by friends and besieged by enemies, Mrs. White in late December withdrew with her ailing husband to the less hostile territory of northern Michigan. Here in the small town of Wright they remained six weeks attempting to recoup their lost health and influence. At first even the Adventists in Wright suspected there “was not full harmony in Mrs. White’s testimony, especially on dress.” But, reported James, “as she was present to speak for herself, she was able to show a perfect harmony in her testimonies, and the church seems to be thoroughly aroused and prepared to receive the truth [on dress reform].” Her first two weekends in Wright Ellen cautiously kept on her “long dress” while she explained the benefits of the short skirt and pants. Then, after all prejudice had disappeared, she slipped into her reform dress. The response from the sisters was heartening, and for several years thereafter she consistently wore the divisive short skirt.14

During her sojourn at Wright, Ellen White wrote out a new testimony (No. 11), which she hoped would set the record straight and end the unpleasant controversy that had engulfed her. Petulantly she attributed the confusion
Ellen White in her short skirt and pants, about 1874.
surrounding her views on dress to “those who do not wish to believe what I have written” and thus fail to see the accord between Testimony No. 10 and How to Live. “I must contend,” she wrote, “that I am the best judge of the things which have been presented before me in vision; and none need fear that I shall by my life contradict my own testimony, or that I shall fail to notice any real contradiction in the views given me.” Her two statements on dress could not possibly disagree, she asserted, for they were both based on the same vision. Therefore, “if there is any difference, it is simply in the form of expression.” Her allusion to “the top of the boot” seemed to be the most troublesome. But since she had obviously been referring to those commonly worn by women—not men’s high-topped boots—she professed to see no basis for misunderstanding.  

Elsewhere, she recalled in detail what she had seen four years earlier on the evening of June 5:

... three companies of females passed before me, with their dresses as follows with respect to length:

The first were of fashionable length, burdening the limbs, impeding the step, and sweeping the street and gathering its filth; the evil results of which I have fully stated. This class who were slaves to fashion, appeared feeble and languid.

The dress of the second class which passed before me was in many respects as it should be. The limbs were well clad. They were free from the burdens which the tyrant, Fashion, had imposed upon the first class; but had gone to the extreme in the short dress as to disgust and prejudice good people, and destroy in a great measure their own influence. This is the style and influence of the “American Costume,” taught and worn by many at “Our Home,” Dansville, N.Y. It does not reach to the knee. I need not say that this style of dress was shown to me to be too short.

A third class passed before me with cheerful countenances, and free, elastic step. Their dress was the length I have described as proper, modest and healthful. It cleared the filth of the street and side-walk a few inches under all circumstances, such as ascending and descending steps, &c.
Since she had not seen a lady's boot, and since the angel with her had not quoted a particular length, she went on, "I was left to describe the length of the proper dress in my own language the best I could, which I have done by stating that the bottom of the dress should reach near the top of a lady's boot, which would be necessary in order to clear the filth of the streets under the circumstances before named." 16

Essential to Ellen White's defense was the alleged shortness of the American costume. Having previously denounced it as displeasing to God, she now found it desirable to put as much distance as possible between her own design and that associated with Dansville. To get this message across, she insisted that the American costume did "not reach to the knee," that it fell "about half-way from the hip to the knee," or that Dr. Harriet Austin wore her skirts about "six inches" above the knee. In contrast, her own dresses cleared the floor by only about nine inches and thus clearly represented a distinct style. 17

There is evidence, however, that her zeal to appear independent of any Dansville influence led her to exaggerate the differences between Dr. Austin and herself. In her writings on dress reform Dansville's lady physician consistently advocated wearing the skirt of the American costume "a little below the knee"—not six inches above—and contemporary photographs show that this is in fact the length she wore her dresses (see photo, p. 133). Her friend Charlotte A. Joy, first president of the National Dress Reform Association, likewise advised wearing the skirt "just below the knee." When asked once about the accuracy of the Whites' description of her dress, Dr. Austin replied that "it was not the first time she had heard of Eld. White and wife making misstatements about her dress, but that she had always worn, and in her descriptions and advice to others had recommended a dress which covers the knee in walking, and which reaches six or eight inches below the knee in sitting; and that neither Eld. nor Mrs. White ever saw her in a dress which in standing or walking did not
cover the bend of the knee.” Some years after the controversy over his wife’s testimonies had simmered down, James White, in a moment of candor, granted that Ellen’s vaunted innovation had consisted principally of lowering the skirt of the American costume a few inches: “The style of dress introduced by Mrs. W. and adopted by our sisters, with very few exceptions, is about the same as the American Costume of Our Home, with this difference, the skirt of the American Costume reaches hardly to the bend of the knee, while that introduced by Mrs. W., reaches within nine or ten inches of the floor.”

Following the publication of Testimony No. 11 early in 1867, Ellen White devoted considerable energy to establishing uniformity in dress among Adventist women. Since her 1863 warning that “God would not have his people adopt the so-called reform dress,” her views had changed significantly. It was currently her opinion that “God would now have his people adopt the reform dress,” but not the “deformed” outfits some of the sisters were putting on in the name of reform. Above all, a standard length needed to be set. “I would earnestly recommend uniformity in length,” she wrote in Testimony No. 12 (1867), “and would say that nine inches as nearly accords with my views of the matter as I am able to express it in inches.” Only a few months earlier, while still in northern Michigan, she had finally settled on that figure. When the question of a proper length had arisen, someone had brought out a ruler, measured a number of reform dresses, and simply taken the average. “Having seen the rule applied to the distance from the floor of several dresses, and having become fully satisfied that nine inches comes the nearest to the samples shown me,” she explained, “I have given this number of inches in No. 12, as the proper length in regard to which uniformity is very desirable.” Why the dress had seemed to be only “an inch or two” from the street immediately following her 1863 vision, she did not explain, except to say that “the length was not given me in inches.”
Two young Adventist sisters, Hannah Sawyer and Josie Chamberlain, in their reform dresses (courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate).
To assist the sisters in dressing alike, Ellen White began peddling approved patterns as she traveled from church to church. Those unable to make the purchase directly could order them through the mail, as suggested in the following advertisement for “Reformed Dress Patterns” appended to the back of one of her Testimony pamphlets:

I will furnish patterns of the pants and sack, to all who wish them; free to those not able to pay; to others for not less than 25 cents a set. The paper costs me 6 cents a pattern. Address me at Greenville, Montcalm Co., Mich. I shall take them with me wherever I travel, until all are supplied.

Assisting—or competing with—her in the pattern business was Dr. Phoebe Lamson of the Western Health Reform Institute who advertised her design in the Health Reformer at fifty cents a set.20

As an additional means of bringing about the desired uniformity, Mrs. White prepared a small tract listing the dos and don’ts of dress reform. Gracing the front page was an engraving of a model sister neatly attired in her short skirt and pants. Just because a skirt fell eight or nine inches from the floor did not mean it was a reform dress, Ellen wrote. To qualify fully, it should “be cut by an approved pattern” and meet certain other criteria. Bright, figured materials, reflecting “vanity and shallow pride,” were to be shunned. Mixed colors, “such as white sleeves and pants with a dark dress,” were likewise in bad taste. As for accessories, hats and caps were to be preferred over shawls and bonnets. The high point of Ellen White’s short-skirt crusade came in 1869 when the General Conference at its annual session officially endorsed the dress standards laid down in this little tract.21

Despite the nominal backing of the church leadership and her own tireless efforts on its behalf, the reform dress—or “woman-disfigurer,” as her niece called it—never won the affection of the rank and file. Some of the Adventist brothers did seem to like it on their wives and daughters, but the women who had to wear it found the experience
AN APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE IN ITS BEHALF.

We are not Spiritualists. We are Christian women, believing all that the Scriptures say concerning man’s creation, his fall, his sufferings and woes on account of continued transgression, of his hope of redemption thro’ Christ, and of his duty to glorify God in his body and spirit which are his, in order to be saved. We do not wear the style of dress here represented to be odd,—that we may attract notice. We do not differ from the common style of woman’s dress for any

truly humbling. "The world is cold and distant," wrote one discouraged sister; "my neighbors seem to me sometimes to be afraid of me. (My husband says it is because I wear the short dress)... I cannot mingle with them in their social parties... My folks do not like to have me go out much. They feel ashamed of my dress. What shall I do?" 22

In 1873 Ellen White complained bitterly that, notwithstanding her many testimonies, the dress reform continued to be "treated by some with great indifference, and by others with contempt." The pants, especially, were a source of great embarrassment, even for those who generally favored the short skirt. But Mrs. White never quite understood this attitude. How, she wondered, could one who did not even blush at the "immodest exposure" of a lady's naked ankle honestly profess shock at the sight of "limbs thoroughly dressed with warm pants"? 23

Other factors also contributed to the growing (or continuing) unpopularity of the short skirt and pants. Fanatical "extremists," for whom "this reform seemed to constitute the sum and substance of their religion," brought disrepute upon themselves and the dress by constantly pressing the issue on their less-reform-minded sisters. Lovers of the world tried to lighten "the cross" by adding superfluous trimmings or by deviating in other ways from the approved pattern. Then, with Dr. Kellogg's rise to power, the medical work passed into the hands of one who had never felt anything but chagrin at seeing the reform dress. Finally, even Ellen White, who regarded dress as a "minor" part of health reform, grew weary of the incessant bickering and longed for peace at almost any price. "Perhaps no question has ever come up among us," she noted ironically, "which has caused such development of character as has dress reform." 24

January 3, 1875, effectively marked the end of Ellen White's ten-year struggle to impose radical dress reform upon the Adventist church. On that date God mercifully removed her burden to continue wearing and promoting
the short skirt and pants. In vision she saw that the dress reform had become “an injury to the cause of truth.” Rather than a blessing, it “had been made a reproach, and, in some cases, even a disgrace.” The testimony calling for its adoption was now “to become silent.” Journeying to California, Mrs. White discreetly left her pants behind. The ordeal was over.\(^{25}\)

Freed at last from the much-despised reform costume, Adventist sisters returned to wearing apparel of their own design. But it was not long before evidences of “pride in dress” reappeared, making it necessary for Ellen White once again to lay down rigid dress standards. This time she offered a “less objectionable style”:

It is free from needless trimmings, free from the looped-up, tied-back over-skirts. It consists of a plain sacque or loose-fitting basque, and skirt, the latter short enough to avoid the mud and filth of the streets. The material should be free from large plaids and figures, and plain in color.

“Will my sisters accept this style of dress, and refuse to imitate the fashions that are devised by Satan, and continually changing?” she inquired pleadingly. She was no longer in a mood for compromise. “All exhibitions of pride in dress,” she declared, should lead to disciplinary action by the church, for continuing manifestations of such pride constituted prima facie evidence of an unconverted heart.\(^{26}\)

Late in the century, when certain members tried to reintroduce the long-discarded reform dress, Ellen White wanted nothing to do with it. The Lord was not in the movement, she said. The controversies of the past were to be left behind. No “singular forms of dress” were to embarrass God’s cause. “[D]o not again introduce the short dress and pants,” she admonished one correspondent, “unless you have the word of the Lord for it.” By now the fires of reform that had once burned so brightly within her were slowly flickering out. There would be no more patterns, no more hard-and-fast rules. Mellowed by age and experi-
ence, she advised simply to let the “sisters dress plainly, as many do, having the dress of good material, durable, modest, appropriate for this age, and let not the dress question fill the mind.”

Although the short skirt and pants attracted by far the most attention, dress reform for Ellen White “comprised more than shortening the dress and clothing the limbs. It included every article of dress upon the person.” Through the years she offered her sage advice on every conceivable item. “Superfluous tucks, ruffles, and ornaments of any kind,” for example, were positive indications “of a weak head and a proud heart.” Cosmetics injured health and endangered life itself. “Breast-paddings” inhibited natural growth and dried up the supply of milk in the breasts. Once she served on a committee to select “a proper style and manufacture of hats,” an appropriate assignment in view of her childhood labor as a hatmaker.

Hair styles—both men’s and women’s—were a favorite subject of health reformers. Ellen White herself said little or nothing about the wearing of beards, but presumably she supported the action of the General Conference in 1866 condemning brethren for shaving and coloring their beards and for wearing only mustaches and goatees, which betokened “the air of the fop.” A man’s face was to appear either clean shaven or with full beard, “as nature designed it.” As the Health Reformer pointed out, a man’s facial hair did more than merely improve his personal appearance. “The hair of the moustache not only absorbs the moisture and the miasma of fogs, but it strains the air from dust and the soot of our great smoky cities.” Similarly, the beard served as a “respirator” and a “comforter,” protecting the neck against heat and cold.

Mrs. White’s general silence on male beards was more than offset by her outspoken criticism of the wigs and hairpieces commonly worn by women. The artificial chignons and braids then so popular were particularly distasteful to her. The chignon or “waterfall” could be formed naturally by attaching a horsehair frame to the back of the head with
an elastic band, brushing the hair down over it, and tucking the ends up underneath. But much time could be saved by simply purchasing one ready-made and securing it in place with hairpins. Braids, pinned up over the back of the head, were another favorite of the 1860s and could also be bought as hairpieces.30

These “monstrosities” were known to be an excellent breeding ground for “pestiferous vermin,” but Ellen White saw even more terrible consequences—“horrible disease and premature death”—resulting from wearing these contrivances. Addressing “Christian Mothers” in the Health Reformer, she described the dire physiological effects:

The artificial hair and pads covering the base of the brain, heat and excite the spinal nerves centering in the brain. The head should ever be kept cool. The heat caused by these artificialics induces the blood to the brain. The action of the blood upon the lower or animal organs of the brain, causes unnatural activity, tends to recklessness in morals, and the mind and heart is in danger of being corrupted. As the animal organs are excited and strengthened, the morals are enfeebled. The moral and intellectual powers of the mind become servants to the animal.

In consequence of the brain being congested its nerves lose their healthy action, and take on morbid conditions, making it almost impossible to arouse the moral sensibilities. Such lose their power to discern sacred things. The unnatural heat caused by these artificial deformities about the head, induces the blood to the brain, producing congestion, and causing the natural hair to fall off, producing baldness. Thus the natural is sacrificed to the artificial.

Many have lost their reason, and become hopelessly insane, by following this deforming fashion.31

Mrs. White’s fears in this instance were based upon her understanding of the so-called science of phrenology, widely current among health reformers. According to phrenological theory (discussed in Chapter 3), the animal organs of the brain were located in the back and lower part of the head, while the organs of intellect and sentiment
occupied the frontal region. Heating the back of the head thus stimulated the sexual passions—"amative-ness," the phrenologist would say—and depressed the spiritual sentiments.

Her flirtation with phrenology seems to have begun during that first, critical visit to Dansville in 1864 when she took her two sons to Dr. Jackson for head readings and physical examinations. Only two years earlier she had denounced phrenology, along with psychology and mesmerism, as a tool of Satan. Although "good in their place," these sciences became in Satan's hands "his most powerful agents to deceive and destroy souls." In the years following her contacts with Dansville, however, phrenological allusions began appearing frequently in her writings. During her husband's extended illness, for instance, she complained that his "large and active" bumps of "caution-ness, conscientiousness, and benevolence," all assets in time of health, were in sickness "painfully excitable, and a hindrance to his recovery." And in an 1869 testimony regarding a brother's inordinate love of money, she attributed his problem to satanic excitation of "his organ of acquisitiveness." 32

Ellen White's proclivity for phrenology was, of course, not atypical, especially for a health reformer. As one author has recently noted, the science had, "by the mid-1860's, filtered deeply into the common life of the country." Even among Adventists, it commanded widespread respect. Such prominent figures as William Miller and George I. Butler, twice president of the General Conference, unashamedly submitted to head readings, and the editors of the Health Reformer openly admired the work of the American Phrenological Journal. Mrs. White herself was reported to be "a woman of singularly well-balanced mental organization," notable for her traits of benevolence, spirituality, conscientiousness, and ideality. 33

Phrenological theory also helps in understanding her sweeping statements on prenatal influences. It was her firm conviction—based on two divinely sent messages—
that parents transmitted to their children not only physical characteristics but intellectual and spiritual ones as well. If they were selfish and intemperate, their children would likely tend toward selfishness and intemperance; while if they were loving and kind, these traits would be reflected in their offspring. Such notions, commonly found in the writings of health reformers, had long been a part of folklore, but nineteenth-century phrenology gave them a respectable scientific basis. The argument went this way: mental traits correspond with the physical organs of the brain; physical characteristics are known to be inheritable; therefore, mental traits can be passed from one generation to the next. Thus, in terms of both science and revelation, Mrs. White’s statements made considerable sense to her contemporaries.34

Ellen White followed another well-marked trail when she ventured into the potentially hazardous field of sex. From the appearance of Sylvester Graham’s Lecture to Young Men on Chastity in 1834 this subject had played an integral and highly visible role in health reform literature. Alcott, Coles, Trall, and Jackson, among others, had all spoken out on the dangers of what they regarded as excessive or abnormal sexual activities, particularly masturbation, which was thought to cause a frightening array of pathological conditions ranging from dyspepsia and consumption to insanity and loss of spirituality. By carefully couching their appeal in humanitarian terms, they had largely avoided offending the sensibilities of a prudish public. Theirs was a genuinely moral crusade against what Jackson called “the great, crying sin of our time.”35

Given this background, and the knowledge that she possessed both Trall’s and Jackson’s books on sex by late 1863, it is not surprising that Ellen White’s very first book on health was a little volume entitled An Appeal to Mothers: The Great Cause of the Physical, Mental, and Moral Ruin of Many of the Children of Our Time (1864). As customary in such works, she began by emphasizing her
Title page of Mrs. White’s first book on health reform, based on her vision of June 5, 1863.
strictly humanitarian and spiritual concern “for those children and youth who by solitary vice [masturbation] are ruining themselves for this world, and for that which is to come.” Her explanation for writing on this delicate subject was a recent vision, apparently the one on June 5, 1863, in which her angel guide had directed her attention to the present corrupt state of the world. “ Everywhere I looked,” she recalled with obvious horror, “I saw imbecility, dwarfed forms, crippled limbs, misshapen heads, and deformity of every description.” Sickened by the sight before her, she learned that it had resulted from the practice of solitary vice, so widespread that “a large share of the youth now living are worthless.” And many adults, she might have added, for she was also shown a pitiful Adventist brother of her acquaintance who had been brought near death by this mind- and body-destroying habit.  

To assist parents in detecting the presence of this vile practice, she offered a list of potentially incriminating symptoms: absentmindedness . . . irritable disposition . . . forgetfulness . . . disobedience . . . ingratitude . . . impatience . . . disrespect for parental authority . . . lack of frankness . . . a strong desire to be with the opposite sex . . . a diminished interest in spiritual things. She also warned of dire physical consequences, calculated to strike fear in the most hardened of hearts. Continued masturbation, she warned, produced not only hereditary insanity and deformities, but a host of diseases, including “affection of the liver and lungs, neuralgia, rheumatism, affection of the spine, diseased kidneys, and cancerous humors.” Not infrequently, it led its victims “into an early grave.”

She went on to offer a number of tips on combatting this terrible curse. Speaking as a parent, she wrote that it was vitally important to “teach our children self-control from their very infancy, and learn them the lesson of submitting their wills to us.” Special care should be taken to protect the young from the contaminating influence of other children. In recent years she had come to view her crippling childhood accident as a blessing in disguise that had pre-
served her in pristine innocence. According to her account, she had grown up in “blissful ignorance of the secret vices of the young” and had learned about them only after marriage from “the private death-bed confessions of some females.” To maintain the purity of her own offspring, she had never permitted them to associate with “rough, rude boys” or to sleep in the same bed or room with others their age. Her letters confirm that she did in fact keep a tight reign on their activities. In one note to sixteen-year-old Edson she forbade him from associating with a young Adventist friend suspected of keeping “dissolute company” and reprimanded him for going out riding with a girlfriend. “[Y]ou are well aware that we would not approve of your showing partiality or attention to any young miss at your age,” she advised. “When you are old enough to begin to manifest a preference for any particular one we are the ones to be consulted and to choose for you.”

Like Graham before her, Ellen White regarded a bland diet as one of the best means of curbing the urge to masturbate. All stimulating substances like “Mince pies, cakes, preserves, and highly-seasoned meats, with gravies” were proscribed since they created “a feverish condition in the system, and inflame[d] the animal passions.” In addition to watching their children’s diets, parents were to be constantly on the lookout for overt signs of self-abuse. If apprehended in the act, the children were to be told “that indulgence in this sin will destroy self-respect, and nobleness of character; will ruin health and morals, and its foul stain will blot from the soul true love for God, and the beauty of holiness.”

Appended to Mrs. White’s appeal was an anonymous twenty-nine page essay on “Chastity” citing persons “of high standing and authority in the medical world” who agreed with the prophetess. Among those quoted were many stalwarts of the reform movement: Sylvester Graham, L. B. Coles, James C. Jackson, Mary Gove Nichols, the phrenologist O. S. Fowler, and—for good measure—
Dr. William C. Woodbridge, superintendent of the Massachusetts Lunatic Hospital. So closely did the views of these individuals parallel those of Ellen White, the publishers felt it necessary to add a note denying prior knowledge on her part. Taking her word at face value, they asserted that “she had read nothing from the authors here quoted, and had read no other works on this subject, previous to putting into our hands what she has written. She is not, therefore, a copyist, although she has stated important truths to which men who are entitled to our highest confidence, have borne testimony.”

Ellen White’s sexual attitudes, as even her publishers recognized, were far from unique. In fact, they rested squarely on the popular vitalistic physiology of Broussais that Sylvester Graham had been preaching since the early 1830s. Puzzled by the organic processes that sustained life, the vitalists had invented a mysterious “vital force” (or energy) that supposedly interacted with inanimate matter to produce the vital functions of the body. According to Elder John Loughborough’s necessarily vague definition, vital force was simply “that power placed in the human body, at its birth, which will enable the body, under favorable circumstances, to live to a certain age.” Since the initial endowment was limited, and since each sexual act used up an irreplensishable amount, it behooved those who coveted a long life to keep their sexual activities to a minimum.

To illustrate the concept of vital force, nineteenth-century authors frequently compared it to capital in a bank account, gradually depleted over the years by repeated withdrawals. Again Mrs. White was no exception. As she saw it, God had made the original deposit by granting each individual, according to sex, “a certain amount of vital force.” (For some inscrutable reason he had been more generous with men than women.) Those who carefully budgeted their resources lived a normal lifetime, but those who by their intemperate acts used “borrowed capital,” prematurely exhausted their account and met an early
death. In her *Appeal to Mothers* she explained how continued self-abuse wasted “vital capital” and shortened life:

The practice of secret habits surely destroys the vital forces of the system. All unnecessary vital action will be followed by corresponding depression. Among the young, the vital capital, the brain, is so severely taxed at an early age, that there is a deficiency, and great exhaustion, which leaves the system exposed to diseases of various kinds. But the most common of these is consumption. None can live when their vital energies are used up. They must die.\(^{42}\)

Although Ellen White could have acquired her knowledge of vitalism from any number of sources, a close examination of her writings reveals that she was particularly indebted to Horace Mann and L. B. Coles, whose works she had read no later than 1865.\(^{43}\) Often she appropriated passages from them with only cosmetic changes, as the following parallel readings show:

**Ellen G. White:** Man came from the hand of God perfect in every faculty of mind and body; in perfect soundness, therefore in perfect health. It took more than two thousand years of indulgence of appetite and lustful passions to create such a state of things in the human organism as would lessen vital force.\(^{44}\)

**Horace Mann:** Man came from the hand of God so perfect in his bodily organs ... so surcharged with vital force, that it took more than two thousand years of the combined abominations of appetite and ignorance ... to drain off his electric energies and make him even accessible to disease.\(^{45}\)

**Ellen G. White:** If Adam, at his creation, had not been endowed with twenty times as much vital force as men now have, the race, with their present habits of living in violation of natural law, would have become extinct.\(^{46}\)

**Horace Mann:** ... if the race had not been created with ten times more vital force than it now possesses, its known violations of all the laws of health and life would, long ere this, have extinguished it altogether.\(^{47}\)

Her curious doubling of Adam’s vital force no doubt stemmed from her reading of biblical history, which has early man living approximately twenty times longer than modern man.
Her reliance on Coles is evident in her discussion of a corollary to the doctrine of vitalism: the electrical transmission of vital force through the nervous system. In his Philosophy of Health Coles had shown how the nerves, branching out from the brain, acted “like so many telegraphic wires” carrying the electrical current to the various parts of the body. Ellen White not only employed the same simile, but followed the Millerite physician in positing an intimate electrical relationship between mind and body.48

Ellen G. White: The sympathy which exists between the mind and the body is very great. When one is affected, the other responds.49

Ellen G. White: The brain nerves which communicate with the entire system are the only medium through which Heaven can communicate to man, and affect his inmost life. Whatever disturbs the circulation of the electric currents in the nervous system, lessens the strength of the vital powers, and the result is a deadening of the sensibilities of the mind.52

L. B. Coles: The sympathy existing between the mind and the body is so great, that when one is affected, both are affected.50

L. B. Coles: Whatever mars the healthy circulation of the electric currents in the nervous system, lessens the strength of the vital forces; and, through them, deadens the native susceptibilities of the soul. The nervous system is the only medium through which truth can reach Interior man. Divinity himself uses no other medium through which to reach the human heart.53

On the basis of the reciprocal arrangement, she concluded that nine-tenths of all diseases originated in the mind.51

She also adopted Coles’s electrical explanation of why masturbation deadened a person’s spiritual sensibilities. In the Philosophy of Health he had argued that since God’s only means of communicating with man was through the nervous system, any unnatural burden upon that system impeded the flow of divinely sent messages. Ellen White liked the idea so much that she worked it into an 1869 testimony on “Moral Pollution,” but neglected, as she so often did, to cite her earthly source.
On October 2, 1868, five years after her first view of the world’s corrupt state, Ellen White had a second major vision on sex, which left her confidence in humanity “terribly shaken.” As the sordid lives of “God’s professed people” passed before her, she became “sick and disgusted with the rotten-heartedness” of the church. Reputable brethren were shown leaving the “most solemn, impressive discourses upon the judgment” and returning to their rooms to engage “in their favorite, bewitching, sin, polluting their own bodies.” Adventist children were pictured “as corrupt as hell itself.” Speaking to the Battle Creek church in March, 1869, she reported that “Right here in this church, corruption is teeming on every hand.” Privately, she estimated “that there is not one girl out of one hundred who is pure minded, and there is not one boy out of one hundred whose morals are untainted.” So nearly universal seemed the practice of masturbation, she grew suspicious of almost everyone and even began refusing requests for prayers of healing for fear she might be asking the Lord’s blessing upon a self-abuser.54

In addition to the many who were abusing themselves, there were others, she learned, who were abusing their spouses. In her second How to Live pamphlet she had urged couples to “consider carefully the result of every privilege the marriage relation grants,” but until 1868 the brunt of her sexual advice had been directed to masturbators. Now, however, she warned that even married persons were accountable to God “for the expenditure of vital energy, which weakens their hold on life and enervates the entire system.” In phrenological language she counseled Christian wives not to “gratify the animal propensities” of their husbands, but to seek instead to divert their minds “from the gratification of lustful passions to high and spiritual themes by dwelling upon interesting spiritual subjects.” Husbands who desired “excessive” sex she regarded as “worse than brutes” and “demons in human form.” Although she never defined exactly what she meant by excessive, it seems likely—since she generally agreed with earlier health reformers in such matters—that she
would have frowned on having intercourse more frequently than once a month. That was the maximum Sylvester Graham had condoned, and his disciple O. S. Fowler, who personally favored sex for procreation only, had stated to “to indulge, even in wedlock, as often as the moon quarters, is gradual but effectual destruction of both soul and body.”55

The Whites seem to have agreed in principle with the New York phrenologist, for they reprinted this bit of marital advice in an expanded version of Appeal to Mothers, published in 1870 under the revealing title of Solemn Appeal Relative to Solitary Vice, and the Abuses and Excesses of the Marriage Relation. In addition to Fowler’s essay and the material from the original edition, Solemn Appeal contained an account of how sexual disorders were treated at the Western Health Reform Institute, an article by a Dr. E. P. Miller on “The Cause of Exhausted Vitality,” the complete second chapter of Ellen’s “Disease and Its Causes” from How to Live, and several selections from testimonies based on the 1868 vision—with all references to their supernatural origin carefully edited out for non-Adventist consumption.56

Although Mrs. White never wrote specifically on contraception and family planning, her restrictions on the frequency of sexual intercourse no doubt served as a brake on unwanted pregnancies among Adventists, who had few other options. According to one 1865 manual, there were four known ways “to prevent child-getting”: (1) withdrawing “the male organ just before the discharge of Semen takes place,” (2) using a douche of cold water or white vitriol (zinc sulfate) immediately after coition, (3) inserting a walnut-sized sponge soaked in a weak solution of sulphate of iron and attached to a fine silk string, or (4) covering the penis with a sheath of India-rubber. Given these choices, and their respective liabilities, many families may have considered monthly intercourse an expedient and satisfactory policy.57

Following the spate of sex-oriented testimonies in 1869
and 1870, some of which she published with the guilty identified by name, Ellen White wrote surprisingly little on the subject for the rest of her life. Her volume on Christian Temperance, compiled in 1890 largely from her previously published writings, did include a chapter on “Social Purity,” but the familiar topics of masturbation and marital excess were notably absent from The Ministry of Healing (1905), her last major work on health. In the meantime, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg kept Adventists sexually informed with his best-selling editions of Plain Facts about Sexual Life, a somewhat sadistic manual originally written in fourteen days that recommended such measures as frequent nighttime raids and circumcision without anesthesia to put an end to masturbation.58

Throughout her long life Ellen White remained generally antipathetic toward sex, though unlike Ann Lee and Jemima Wilkinson she always stopped short of advocating celibacy. In her waning years she looked forward expectantly to an idyllic existence in the new earth free from such unpleasant activities. When some members inquired in 1904 if there would be any children born in the next life, she replied sharply that Satan had inspired the question. It was he, she said, who was leading “the imagination of Jehovah’s watchmen to dwell upon the possibilities of association, in the world to come, with women whom they love, and of their raising families.” As for herself, she needed no such prospects.59
7. **Whatsoever Ye Eat or Drink**

We bear positive testimony against tobacco, spiritous liquors, snuff, tea, coffee, flesh-meats, butter, spices, rich cakes, mince pies, a large amount of salt, and all exciting substances used as articles of food.

*Ellen G. White*\(^1\)

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To the typical Seventh-day Adventist in the 1860s, health reform meant essentially a twice-a-day diet of fruits, vegetables, grains, and nuts. Since Ellen White’s vision on June 5, 1863, meat, eggs, butter, and cheese had joined alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee on her index of proscribed items. The discontinuance of these articles was as much a religious as a physiological duty, for, as Mrs. White repeatedly said, health reform was as “closely connected with present truth as the arm is connected with the body.” Many responded to the call for radical reform, and by the summer of 1870 James White was able to boast that Adventists from Maine to Kansas, “with hardly an exception,” had discarded flesh-meats and suppers.\(^2\)

During the early days of Adventist health reform the two-meal-a-day system shared equal billing with the vegetarian diet. Two meals had long been the rule at places like Dr. Jackson’s water cure in Dansville, but the Whites seem to have adopted the practice several months before their first visit to Our Home. What inspired them to do so
is not entirely clear. Ellen indirectly tied the change to her June 5 vision, while James, never wanting to appear overly dependent on his wife, appealed to the Bible, arguing tenuously that "the New Testament recognizes but two meals a day." At any rate, by mid-1864 the Whites were taking breakfast at 7:00 A.M., dinner at 1:00 P.M., and no supper. Fruits, grains, and vegetables filled their pantry:

**Vegetables.**—Potatoes, turnips, parsnips, onions, cabbage, squashes, peas, beans, &c., &c.

**Grains.**—Wheat, corn, rye, barley, and oatmeal bread and puddings, rice, farina, corn starch, and the like.

**Fruits.**—Apples, raw and cooked, pears, and peaches, canned and dried, canned strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, huckleberries, grapes, cranberries, and tomatoes.

In addition to these items, the Whites kept a supply of raisins for cooking purposes, and their family cow provided them with about ten quarts of fresh milk per day.³

Once or twice, for the children's sake, James and Ellen experimented with a light evening meal, but found that it resulted only in bad breath and unpleasant dispositions. To provide ample time for digestion, Ellen White recommended spacing meals at least five hours apart and eating not "a particle of food" in between. According to countless testimonials in the *Health Reformer* and the *Review and Herald*, her sparse regimen brought renewed vigor and strength to those who adopted it. "Praise God for the Health Reform" was the universal sentiment.⁴

The rationale behind Mrs. White's ban on flesh-foods was not kindness to animals, which she never mentioned at this time, but her belief, expressed in *Appeal to Mothers* and subsequent writings, that meat caused disease and stirred up the "animal passions." The supposed relationship between diet and sexuality had been noted earlier by Sylvester Graham and others, but Ellen White seems to have learned of it primarily from Dr. L. B. Coles's *Philosophy of Health*, with which she was well acquainted.⁵ In a testimony sent to a "Bro. and Sister H.", whose children
she had seen in vision as having strong “animal propensities,” she made free (and unacknowledged) use of Coles’s phrenologically loaded language on the animalizing tendency of meat.

Ellen G. White: ... flesh-meat is not necessary for health or strength. If used it is because a depraved appetite craves it. Its use excites the animal propensities to increased activity, and strengthens the animal passions. When the animal propensities are increased, the intellectual and moral powers are decreased. The use of the flesh of animals tends to cause a grossness of body, and benumbs the fine sensibilities of the mind.⁷

L. B. Coles: Flesh-eating is certainly not necessary to health or strength. ... If it be used, it must be used as a matter of fancy. ... it excites the animal propensities to increased activity and ferocity. ... When we increase the proportion of our animal nature, we suppress the intellectual. ... the use of flesh tends to create a grossness of body and spirit.⁷

Continuing to follow Coles, she went on in the same testimony to discuss the connection between meat-eating and disease:

Ellen G. White: Those who subsist largely upon flesh, cannot avoid eating the meat of animals which are to a greater or less degree diseased. The process of fitting animals for market produces in them disease; and fitted in as healthful manner as they can be, they become heated and diseased by driving before they reach the market. The fluids and flesh of these diseased animals are received directly into the blood, and pass into the circulation of the human body, becoming fluids and flesh of the same. Thus humors are introduced into the system. And if the person already has impure blood, it is greatly aggravated by the eating

L. B. Coles: When we feed on flesh, we not only eat the muscular fibres, but the juices or fluids of the animal; and these fluids pass into our own circulation—become our blood—our fluids and our flesh. However pure may be the flesh of the animals we eat, their fluids tend to engender in us a humorous state of the blood. ... The very process taken to fit the animals for market, tends to produce a diseased state of their fluids. ... Some of our meat is fatted in country pastures; but, by the time it reaches us, the process of driving to market has produced a diseased action of the fluids. ... Animal food exposes the system more effectually to
of the flesh of these animals. The liability to take disease is increased tenfold by meat-eating. The intellectual, the moral, and the physical powers are depreciated by the habitual use of flesh-meats. Meat-eating deranges the system, beclouds the intellect, and blunts the moral sensibilities.8

the causes of acute disease. Where the fluids are in a diseased state, the ordinary causes of disease find a more easy prey.

... The objections, then, against meat-eating, are three-fold—intellectual, moral, and physical. Its tendency is to check intellectual activity, to depreciate moral sentiment, and to derange the fluids of the body.9

In view of Ellen White’s indignant assertions that her testimonies were not subject to human influences—“I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them”—her manifest reliance on Coles is, to say the least, puzzling.10

The prohibition against meat-eating proved to be a trifle embarrassing for a church that put so much stock in biblical prophecies. Enemies pointed accusingly to the passage in Saint Paul’s first epistle to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:1–3), where the apostle predicted that “in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, ... commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.” Were Seventh-day Adventists fulfilling that prophecy? Not at all, replied James White, for they did not command their members to refrain from eating meat, but simply recommended the change from “a physiological point of view.” Besides, he added, the word meats really meant food, not flesh-meats. “The articles of food which God has permitted us to use are good; and they should be received with thanksgiving.”11

For at least a decade after her June 5 vision Ellen White made little or no distinction between the use of meat and such animal products as butter, eggs, and cheese. They all aroused man’s animal nature and were thus to be condemned indiscriminately. Her unyielding attitude toward these items is revealed in representative statements made between 1868 and 1873:
Cheese should never be introduced into the stomach.\textsuperscript{12}

You place upon your tables butter, eggs, and meat, and your children partake of them. They are fed with the very things that will excite their passions, and then you come to meeting and ask God to bless and save your children. How high do your prayers go?\textsuperscript{13}

No butter or flesh-meats of any kind come on my table.\textsuperscript{14}

Children are allowed to eat flesh-meats, spices, butter, cheese, pork, rich pastry, and condiments generally. . . . These things do their work of deranging the stomach, exciting the nerves to unnatural action, and enfeebling the intellect. Parents do not realize that they are sowing the seed which will bring forth disease and death.\textsuperscript{15}

Eggs should not be placed upon your table. They are an injury to your children.\textsuperscript{16}

These were hardly the words of a moderate; yet Mrs. White did not regard herself as an extremist. That epithet she reserved for the fanatics who wished to add milk, sugar, and salt to the list of forbidden foods. Throughout the early 1870s Adventist reformers argued incessantly over these three products. The disciples of Dr. Trall demanded their immediate discontinuance, while others professed to see no harm in them. In the middle stood Ellen White. She admitted that their free use was "positively injurious to health," and that it would probably be better never to eat them, but she refused to press additional restrictions on an unwilling church. Her husband, though obviously sympathetic to the Trall faction, concurred in this pragmatic decision and supported her policy of simply recommending a sparing use of all three articles, especially combinations of milk and sugar, which she considered to be worse than meat.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite reservations about milk and her belief that the time would soon come when it would have to be discarded, she continued in her own home to use moderate amounts of both milk and sweet cream. At the same time she forbade butter, cheese, and eggs from appearing on
her table. This apparent inconsistency toward dairy products actually placed her in good health-reform company. Years earlier, in his *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, Sylvester Graham had made a similar distinction, arguing that cream was preferable to butter because its solubility made it more easily digestible, and that eggs were more objectionable than milk because they were “more highly animalized.”

The one item on which Ellen White broke with established health-reform opinion was salt. Her reason for this minor departure, she once wrote, was that God had given her special “light” showing its importance for the blood. Consequently she had disregarded Dr. Jackson’s advice against its use. A private letter written in 1891, however, tells a somewhat different story:

Many years ago, while at Dr. Jackson’s, I undertook to leave it [salt] off entirely, because he advocated this in his lectures. But he came to me and said, “I request you not to come into the dining hall to eat. A moderate use of salt is necessary to you; without it you will become a dyspeptic. I will send your meals to your room.” After a while, however, I again tried the saltless food, but was again reduced in strength and fainted from weakness. Although every effort was made to counteract the effect of the six-weeks’ trial, I was all summer in so feeble a condition that my life was despaired of. I was healed in answer to prayer, else I should not have been alive today.

In this account the oft-maligned Dansville physician emerges as the source of inspiration for Mrs. White’s tolerance of salt.

Far worse than meat, eggs, butter, and cheese were what Ellen White called the “poisonous narcotics”: tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol. With these items, she wrote, the “only safe course is to touch not, taste not, handle not.” Apparently she got the idea of classifying tea and coffee with alcoholic beverages from reading Coles’s *Philosophy of Health*, in which all three are said to produce similar effects. Throughout her writings on the subject Coles’s influence is unmistakable.
Ellen G. White: Tea is a stimulant, and to a certain extent produces intoxication. . . . Its first effect is exhilarating, because it quickens the motions of the living machinery; and the tea-drinker thinks that it is doing him a great service. But this is a mistake. When its influence is gone, the unnatural force abates, and the result is languor and debility corresponding to the artificial vivacity imparted.  

L. B. Coles: Tea . . . is a direct, diffusable, and active stimulant. Its effects are very similar to those of alcoholic drinks, except that of drunkenness. Like alcohol, it gives, for a time, increased vivacity of spirits. Like alcohol, it increases, beyond its healthy and natural action, the whole animal and mental machinery; after which there comes a reaction—a corresponding languor and debility. 

Still following Coles, she described the woeful effects of coffee on mind and body:

Ellen G. White: Through the use of stimulants, the whole system suffers. The nerves are unbalanced, the liver is morbid in its action, the quality and circulation of the blood are affected, and the skin becomes inactive and sallow. The mind, too, is injured. The immediate influence of these stimulants is to excite the brain to undue activity, only to leave it weaker and less capable of exertion. The after-effect is prostration, not only mental and physical, but moral.

L. B. Coles: [Coffee] affects the whole system, and especially the nervous system, by its effects on the stomach. But, besides this, it creates a morbid action of the liver . . . . It affects the circulation of the blood, and the quality of the blood itself, so that a great coffee-drinker can generally be known by his complexion; it gives to the skin a dead, dull, sallow appearance. Coffee affects not only the body to its injury, but also the mind. It . . . excites the mind temporarily to unwonted activity . . . [But afterward] come prostration, sadness, and exhaustion of the moral and physical forces.

Certainly the most intriguing insight she borrowed from Coles was that tea and coffee were responsible for the rampant gossip at women’s social gatherings:

Ellen G. White: When these tea and coffee users meet together for social entertainment, the effects of their pernicious habit are

L. B. Coles: See a party of ladies met to spend an afternoon . . . Toward the close of the afternoon . . . come the tea and eatables . . .
manifest. All partake freely of the favorite beverages, and as the stimulating influence is felt, their tongues are loosened, and they begin the wicked work of talking against others. Their words are not few or well chosen. The tidbits of gossip are passed around, too often the poison of scandal as well.  

the drooping mind becomes greatly animated, the tongue is let loose, and the words come flowing forth like the falling drops of a great shower... Then is the time for small thoughts and many words; or, it may be, the sending forth, of fire-brands of gossip and slander.  

Of all the “poisonous narcotics,” tobacco struck Ellen White as being the most sinister. Even after most Adventists had given up smoking and chewing, she continued to remind them of the weed’s pernicious effects. Writing in 1864 about her vision the previous year, she described tobacco as a “malignant” poison of the worst kind, responsible for the death of multitudes. She did not say specifically that it caused cancer, but she may well have had that thought in mind since Coles and others had already noted the relationship between prolonged tobacco use and carcinomas. Of equal, if not greater, concern to her was the fact (as she saw it) that tobacco created a thirst for strong drink and often laid “the foundation for the liquor habit.”

No health topic aroused Mrs. White to more fervent activity than abstinence from alcoholic drinks, or “temperance” as it was euphemistically called. Basically her position was that of a teetotaler, opposed even to a moderate consumption of fermented and distilled beverages. But on occasion both she and her husband grudgingly allowed a limited use of “domestic wine.” In an 1869 testimony reproving a brother in Wisconsin for his extremist approach to health reform that had deprived his family of the necessities of life, she suggested that “a little domestic wine,” or even a little meat, would have done his pregnant wife no injury. Presumably James went along with this advice, for only a few years earlier he had protested strenuously against the “disgusting” practice of substituting molasses
and water for wine at communion. “This objecting to a few drops of domestic wine with which to only wet the lips at the Lord’s supper, is carrying total-abstinence principles to great length,” he commented in the Review and Herald. While not recommending that wine be purchased from local liquor-vendors, he saw nothing wrong with having the church deacons make it themselves. That way the purity and alcoholic content could be controlled.28

There were no signs of compromise, however, when Ellen White mounted the lecture platform, as she frequently did. In a clear, strong voice she vividly portrayed the horrors of alcoholism and carefully explained the cause-and-effect relationship between diet and drink. Temperance was her favorite theme, and she happily accepted the many speaking invitations that came her way. In the summer of 1874, for example, she joined the temperance forces in Oakland, California, and in several public appearances helped to defeat the liquor interests by the narrow margin of two hundred sixty votes. Three years later “fully five thousand persons” turned out in her hometown to hear her speak at a mass temperance rally co-sponsored by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Battle Creek Reform Club. But her greatest triumph as a temperance lecturer came in September, 1876, when she drew an estimated twenty thousand to a camp meeting in Groveland, Massachusetts. So impressed were the officers of the nearby Haverhill Reform Club, they invited her to talk again the next day in their city hall. Before a packed house of eleven hundred, including “the very elite of Haverhill’s society,” she “struck intemperance at the very root, showing that on the home table largely exists the fountain from which flow the first tiny rivulets of perverted appetite, which soon deepen into an uncontrollable current of indulgence, and sweep the victim to a drunkard’s grave.” Enthusiastic applause punctuated her talk.29

In addition to her lecturing, Ellen White was continually turning out temperance articles for various Adventist publications. Even the children were not forgotten. In her
four-volume collection of *Sabbath Readings for the Home Circle* she included a selection of sentimental temperance stories with such titles as “Father, Don’t Go,” “Affecting Scene in a Saloon,” and “The Major’s Cigar.” Typical was one tale entitled “Made a Drunkard by His Cigar,” which told of a promising young clergyman whose intemperate habits killed his wife, made a beggar of his child, and eventually sent him to a mad-house.30

Adventist efforts on behalf of temperance culminated in 1879 in the formation of the American Health and Temperance Association, a denominational organization presided over by Dr. John H. Kellogg. The principal goal of the sponsors of the association was to acquire as many signatures as possible on their two pledges: a “teetotal pledge” for those swearing to abstain from “alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, opium, and all other narcotics and stimulants forever,” and a less comprehensive “anti-liquor and tobacco pledge” for the faint-hearted. Ellen White was among the first to affix her name to the teetotal pledge and one of the most active in signing up others as she traveled from place to place.31

Kellogg’s presidency of the American Health and Temperance Association symbolized his ascendancy to the leadership of the Adventist health reform movement. From the time of his appointment in 1876 as superintendent of the Western Health Reform Institute, he had begun slowly to eclipse the prophetess as the church’s health authority. By 1886 he could without embarrassment describe himself in a letter to Mrs. White as “a sort of umpire as to what was true or correct and what was error in matters relating to hygienic reform, a responsibility which has often made me tremble, and which I have felt very keenly.” For her part, she seems to have willingly abdicated her previous role, having had her fill of trying to change the habits of a recalcitrant church. The noncontroversial temperance lectures continued, but there were few words about the short skirt, sex, or radical changes in diet. The less she said, the more her followers reverted to their former ways, and before
long there were unmistakable signs of “a universal backsliding on health reform.” As early as 1875 she noticed the drift and commented ruefully that “Our people are constantly retrograding upon health reform.” Young Kellogg tried valiantly to stem the onrushing tide, but without Mrs. White’s support, his efforts were doomed to failure.32

Evidence of dietary backsliding was particularly noticeable at the summer camp meetings, where provision stands prominently displayed “whole codfish, large slabs of halibut, smoked herring, dried beef and Bologna sausage.” For years Kellogg waged a one-man crusade to cleanse the camps of these odious items, on occasion even buying up the entire stock and destroying it. But flesh-loving campers and ministers constantly hampered his efforts. At one statewide meeting in Indiana he paid fifteen dollars to have “the whole stock of meat, strong cheese and some detestable bakery stuff” thrown in the river, only to discover later that the conference ministers had surreptitiously salvaged the goods and divided the spoil among themselves.33

As this incident illustrates, the Adventist clergy were often the greatest enemies of reform. Many refused to preach against the evils of meat-eating and by their own example discouraged others who looked to them for guidance. At one point Kellogg estimated that all but “two or three” Adventist ministers ate meat. It was routinely served at their annual general conference banquets, where even the leading brethren partook. Uriah Smith, the respected editor of the Review and Herald, was known to love a good steak and an occasional bowl of oyster soup, and others in the hierarchy apparently shared his tastes. By the turn of the century the reform movement had plunged to such depths, vegetarianism was more the exception than the rule in Adventist households.34

Although Ellen White liked to blame this great “backsliding” on extremists in the church who had given health reform a bad name, she herself was not guiltless. For when it came to meat-eating, she was for a time the most promi-
nent backslider of all. (Charges that she also imbibed a little tea were resolutely denied.) We do not know precisely when she first resumed eating meat, but certainly it was not before March, 1869, when she assured the Battle Creek church that she had not changed her course “a particle” since first adopting the twice-a-day vegetarian diet: “I have not taken one step back since the light from Heaven upon this subject first shone upon my pathway.” Only four-and-one-half years later, however, she was eating duck while vacationing in the Rockies. And by 1881 she was no longer willing to make an issue of eating meat and dairy products, against which she had once borne such “positive testimony.” Meat, eggs, butter, and cheese, she now said, were not to be classed with the poisonous narcotics—tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol—which were to be discarded entirely.35

According to Dr. John Kellogg, Mrs. White celebrated her return from Europe in 1887 with a “large baked fish.” When she visited the doctor at the Battle Creek Sanitarium during the next several years, she “always called for meat and usually fried chicken,” much to the consternation of Kellogg and the cook, both thoroughgoing vegetarians. At the various camp meetings she attended, her lax dietary habits became common knowledge, thanks in no small part to her own children, who were prone to indulge their “animal passions.” Kellogg recalled once hearing Edson (J. E.) White,

standing in front of his mother’s tent, call out to a meat wagon that visited the grounds regularly and was just leaving, “Say, hello there! Have you any fresh fish?”

“No,” was his reply.

“Have you got any fresh chicken?”

Again the answer was “no,” and J. E. bawled out in a very loud voice, “Mother wants some chicken. You had better get some quick.”

It was obvious to Kellogg that Edson, never much of a health reformer, wanted the chicken every bit as much as his mother did.36
When the inevitable rumors began circulating that the prophetess had not always lived up to her own standards, Ellen White protested that she had indeed been “a faithful health reformer,” as the members of her family could testify. But even her favorite son Willie related a different story. Years after his mother’s death he told of the many setbacks in her struggle to overcome meat, of the difficulties in finding competent vegetarian cooks, and of lunch baskets filled with turkey, chicken, and tinned tongue. Yet despite these lapses, both he and his mother seem to have regarded themselves as true vegetarians—in principle if not in practice.37

The rumors of Mrs. White’s fondness for flesh were not based on hearsay alone; in 1890 she confessed in print to occasionally using meat. “When I could not obtain the food I needed, I have sometimes eaten a little meat,” she admitted in the book Christian Temperance. She went on to add that she was “becoming more and more afraid of it” and was looking forward hopefully to the time when meat-eating would eventually disappear among those expecting the Second Coming of Christ. The very next year she advised a Brother H. C. Miller that “a little meat two or three times a week” would be preferable to “eating so largely of [Graham] gems and potatoes, and gravies, and strong sauce.”38

It was not until January, 1894, that Ellen White finally gained the victory over her appetite for meat. She had just completed a temperance lecture in Brighton, Australia, when a Catholic admirer in the audience came forward and inquired if the speaker ate any meat. Upon hearing that she did, the woman fell on her knees at Mrs. White’s feet and tearfully pleaded with her to have compassion on the unfortunate animals. The incident proved to be a turning point in the life of the prophetess, who described it in a letter to friends in the United States: “when the selfishness of taking the lives of animals to gratify a perverted taste was presented to me by a Catholic woman, kneeling at my feet, I felt ashamed and distressed. I saw it in a new
light, and I said, I will no longer patronize the butchers. I will not have the flesh of corpses on my table.” From that time until her death in 1915 she apparently never touched another piece of meat.39

Now that she was once again in the vegetarian fold, Ellen White joined Dr. Kellogg in fighting the apathy and hostility that many members felt toward dietary reform. It seemed to her that the very success of the church depended upon an immediate “revival in health reform.” In a 1900 testimony on the need for such a reawakening, she attributed the low state of the church to the fact that her earlier testimonies had “not been heartily received” and that many of the brethren were “in heart and practice opposed to health reform.” “The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth,” she wrote, “because of the church-members who have never been converted [to health reform], and those who were once converted but who have backslidden.” Ministers and conference presidents in particular were admonished to place themselves “on the right side of the question.”40

By far the most controversial of her plans for reviving health reform was the so-called antimeat pledge, modeled after those used in the temperance work. In a March 29, 1908, letter to Elder A. G. Daniells, then president of the General Conference, she urged that a pledge be circulated requiring total abstinence from “flesh meats, tea, and coffee, and all injurious foods.” Daniells, no vegetarian himself, balked at this unwelcome assignment, fearing that its implementation would unnecessarily divide the church and even split families. But not being anxious to offend the prophetess by an outright refusal, he countered with a less drastic proposal of his own calling for “an extensive well-balanced educational work . . . carried on by physicians and ministers instead of entering precipitately upon an Anti-Meat Pledge Campaign.”41

Deferring to the president, Ellen White quietly withdrew her suggestion and took steps to prevent its publication. At the quadrennial session of the General Conference
in 1909 she came out in support of Daniells’s educational plan and pointedly discouraged any attempt to make the use of flesh food a “test of fellowship.” Although her address closely paralleled her original communication to Daniells, there was no mention of a pledge this time. But the pledge episode did not end there. In 1911 some medical workers in California somehow obtained a copy of the March 29 letter and disclosed its contents at an Adventist camp meeting in Tulare. In harmony with its advice they circulated the following pledge: “In compliance with the revealed will of the Lord, and trusting in His help, we pledge ourselves to abstain from the use of tea, coffee, and flesh foods, including fish and fowl.” Needless to say, this unauthorized version did not please either Mrs. White or her son Willie, who quickly saw to it that the pledge-signing movement died an early death.\(^{42}\)

Ellen White’s twentieth-century health reform revival differed in many respects from the crusade she had originally launched in the 1860s. In the case of meat, the focus shifted from its animalizing tendencies to the diseased condition of animals and the “moral evils of a flesh diet,” an argument made by her Catholic admirer in Australia. Nowhere is this change in emphasis more apparent than in *The Ministry of Healing* (1905), her last major work on health. Among the “reasons for discarding flesh foods” one searches in vain for any of the old references to animal passions or sexuality. In their place are two other arguments: that meat transmits cancer, tuberculosis, and “other fatal diseases” to man and is thus unfit for human consumption; and that meat-eating is cruel to the animals and destroys man’s tenderness. In Australia Mrs. White had adopted a mongrel dog named Tiglath Pileser, and in her old age she grew increasingly fond of the intelligent and affectionate members of the animal kingdom. The thought of eating any of them now repulsed her. “What man with a human heart, who has ever cared for domestic animals, could look into their eyes, so full of confidence and affection, and willingly give them over to the butcher’s knife?”
she asked with obvious emotion. “How could he devour their flesh as a sweet morsel?”

A similar evolution can be seen in her attitude toward eggs, butter, and other dairy products. In the early days she roundly condemned these items and indiscriminately lumped them together with meat and the poisonous narcotics. In 1872 she wrote:

We bear positive testimony against tobacco, spirituous liquors, snuff, tea, coffee, flesh-meats, butter, spices, rich cakes, mince pies, a large amount of salt, and all exciting substances used as articles of food.

But just nine years later she refused to classify meat, eggs, butter, and cheese with the poisonous narcotics:

Tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol we must present as sinful indulgences. We cannot place on the same ground, meat, eggs, butter, cheese and such articles placed upon the table.

By the turn of the century (1902) she was drawing a line between meat, on one hand, and milk, eggs, and butter on the other, even allowing that the latter three might have a salutary effect:

Milk, eggs, and butter should not be classed with flesh-meat. In some cases the use of eggs is beneficial.

Again, in 1909, she cautiously recommended using eggs, butter, and milk to prevent malnutrition. By this time her greatest fear was the likelihood that these foods were diseased, not that they acted as aphrodisiacs.

Mrs. White’s intellectual development created “a good deal of controversy” among those who found the notion of progressive revelation difficult to understand. The gradual acceptance of butter was particularly troublesome in view of her once uncompromising stand against its use. At a meeting in 1904 Willie White helpfully explained to his aging mother why she had formerly condemned but now condoned the consumption of this product:
Now, when that view was given you about butter [in 1863], there was presented to you the condition of things—people using butter full of germs. They were frying and cooking in it, and its use was deleterious. But later on, when our people studied into the principle of things, they found that while butter is not best, it may not be so bad as some other evils; and so in some cases they are using it.

Actually Mrs. White had not seen “germs” in 1863, only disease-producing humors. But in anachronistically substituting the more modern term, Willie was merely reflecting his mother’s changing vocabulary. In her early writings she had described how flesh-meats filled the blood “with cancerous and scrofulous humors.” Within a few decades, however, scientists like Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch had convinced the world of the existence of germs, and Mrs. White’s language changed accordingly. The familiar humors disappeared from her works, and she began writing instead of meat filling the body with “tuberculous and cancerous germs.”

Many factors had a moderating effect on Mrs. White’s dietary views. Her own struggle with meat had demonstrated that thoroughgoing reform was not easy, and her family’s experience had taught her the impossibility of making “one rule for all to follow.” Fanatics in the church, who carried reform to extremes, had shown her the potential for harm. Travels in Europe and the South Pacific had impressed on her the importance of international differences in a church rapidly expanding beyond the bounds of North America. But most significant of all were her frequent contacts with the growing number of Adventist physicians, especially her friend John Kellogg. Until his expulsion from the church in 1907 (discussed in the following chapter), Dr. Kellogg made a point of supplying the prophetess with the latest data from his laboratories and apprising her of developments in medicine and nutrition. Whenever visiting Battle Creek, she stopped by the doctor’s office to learn of any new scientific discoveries relating to health. At other times, she relied on his multi-
tudinous publications or corresponded with him by mail. Whatever his influence on her, it certainly was not negligible.46

Ellen White lived out her last years as a true health reformer, happily subsisting on a simple twice-a-day diet of vermicelli-tomato soup or thistle greens “seasoned with sterilized cream and lemon juice”—“horse feed” a companion good-naturedly called it. Meat, butter, and cheese never appeared on her table. She no longer objected to a moderate use of butter, but feared that if she ate a little, others would use it as an excuse to eat a lot. With the eating habits of a hundred thousand persons virtually hanging on her every bite, her fears were not unfounded. Once during an illness in Minneapolis she tried a small piece of cheese, only to have it “reported in large assemblies that Sister White eats cheese.” It was taken for granted that whatever she ate, others were free to eat also. And at her age she had no desire to be a “stumbling block” to anyone.47
8. Fighting the Good Fight

In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.

Ellen G. White

We discard nothing that the visions have ever taught from beginning to end, from first to last. Whenever we give up any, we shall give up all; so let this point be once for all distinctly understood.

Uriah Smith

The 1870s were among the best years of Ellen White’s life. The previous decade, marred by perpetual sickness and strife, had not been a particularly happy one for the Whites. It had left their reputations so tarnished that the leaders of the church felt obliged in 1870 to publish a “vindication of their moral and Christian character,” explaining James’s new-found success and refuting libelous stories about Ellen’s having given birth to an illegitimate child named Jesus and having once proposed swapping husbands with Sister S. H. King. But by the mid-1870s the worst of their troubles had passed, and the Whites were again basking in the love and affection of the Advent believers. “We are appreciated here,” the thankful prophetess wrote her son from Battle Creek. “We can do more
good when we are appreciated than when we are not. We never had greater influence among our people than at the present time. They all look up to us as father and mother.”

While winning appreciation at home, Ellen White was also acquiring limited national recognition through her coast-to-coast lecturing on temperance—thanks in large part to her own niece, Mary L. Clough, who joined the White entourage in 1876 as press agent. It was Miss Clough's job to see that her aunt received favorable newspaper coverage wherever she went, instead of the silence or sneers that had formerly greeted her. Apparently she carried out her assignment well, for the Health Reformer reported at the close of the year that Mrs. White had receive “the highest encomiums from the press in nearly all parts of the United States,” publicity her thrifty husband valued at over ten thousand dollars. Whatever fame Ellen White enjoyed outside the Adventist community seems to have come primarily from her temperance work rather than from her activities as a health reformer. Despite her personal acquaintances with Drs. Jackson, Trall, and Dio Lewis, whom she visited in 1871, she always remained an obscure and isolated figure in non-Adventist reform circles.

The Whites spent much of the 1870s away from Battle Creek in the more relaxed surroundings of the Far West. In the summer of 1872 they took a much-needed vacation in the Colorado Rockies, visiting the family of Mary Clough’s sister, Lou Walling. The climate was so invigorating that the Whites decided to purchase some property near Boulder and put up a small mountain cabin, to which they retreated in succeeding years. However, Mrs. White’s first visit to Colorado almost proved to be her last. While riding horseback with relatives and friends through the Snowy Range, she was thrown from her frightened pony. When the others reached her, she could scarcely speak or breathe. Their first thought was to find water and towels and try “the virtues of hydropathy.” The emergency treat-
ments and prayer allowed the injured prophetess to continue her journey and taught her husband a valuable lesson: “Faith and hydropathy harmonize; faith and drugs, never.”

Shortly after this incident the Whites boarded a west-bound train for northern California to meet with the growing number of believers in that state. On this first foray the Whites remained five months, then returned in late 1873 to take up residence, first in Santa Rosa and later near Oakland. Ellen White loved northern California and found sailing on San Francisco Bay the greatest pleasure of her life. With her encouragement, James established a western publishing house and launched a new weekly journal, The Signs of the Times, to aid in proselytizing the Pacific Coast. For the next several years the Whites divided their time between East and West and occasionally found themselves separated. Ellen never liked staying home by herself, and James’s poor letter-writing did not make it any easier. “Dear Husband,” she wrote in the spring of 1876:

We received your few words last night on a postal card: “Battle Creek, April 11. No letter from you for two days. James White.”

This lengthy letter was written by yourself. Thank you for we know you are living.

No letter from James White previous to this since April 6. . . . I have been anxiously waiting for something to answer.

The 1870s also marked the end of Ellen White’s dramatic daytime visions, the last one coming about 1879 at age fifty-two. Years earlier Dr. Trall had privately predicted that the visions would end after menopause, and—whatever the cause—they did. In the summer of 1869 Mrs. White wrote Edson that she was going through the change of life and fully expected to die, as her sister Sarah had done.

I am not in good health. . . . I have more indications of going down into the grave than of rallying. My vitality is at a low ebb. Your Aunt Sarah died passing through this critical time. My lungs are affected. Dr. Trall said I would probably go with consump-
tion in this time. Dr. Jackson said I should probably fail in this

time. Nature would be severely taxed, and the only question

would be, were there vital forces remaining to sustain the change

of nature. My lungs have remained unaffected until last winter.
The fainting fit I had on the cars nearly closed my life. My lungs

are painful. How I shall come out I cannot tell. I suffer much

pain.

Somehow she survived the ordeal, which may have

lasted until the mid-1870s; but thereafter her public

visions apparently grew less and less frequent. For the

remainder of her life she received her heavenly communica-

tions by means of dreams—“visions of the night”—unac-

 companied by any outward physical manifestations. When

her son Willie once asked how she knew that her dreams

were not of the ordinary variety, she explained that the

angel guide in her visions of the night was the same heav-

enly being who previously instructed her during her day-

time trances. Thus she had no reason to doubt their divine

origin.7

On August 6, 1881, Ellen White suffered one of the sev-
erest blows of her life: the tragic loss of her husband,

James. Only two weeks earlier he had seemed in perfect

health. But a trip to Charlotte, Michigan, had chilled him,

and the best efforts of Dr. Kellogg and the sanitarium staff

proved in vain. Ellen’s thirty-five-year marriage to James

had been a good one, but not without its trials. On the one

hand, James was not the easiest man to get along with.

“He was of an eager, impetuous nature, and not seldom
gave offense,” wrote one pioneer Adventist historian. He

was also excessively jealous of his wife’s friendship with

real or imagined rivals in the church hierarchy and refused

on occasion to sleep in the same house with her. On the

other hand, he was a person quick to forgive and to make

amends, and he had his own cross to bear—living with a

woman whose criticisms and reproofs came backed with

divine authority.8

Whatever his failings, Ellen White loved and respected

him and leaned on him in her hours of need. Without him,
her career as a prophetess would probably never have gotten off the ground. Since the 1840s, publishing had been his passion—and the key to her success. In those early days it was he who insisted on printing her visions, after patiently correcting her grammar and polishing her style. It was through his journals and publishing houses that thousands received her testimonies and joined the church. And it was his efforts that culminated in a strong central organization, over which he served as president for ten critical years, founding both the Western Health Reform Institute and Battle Creek College. Seventh-day Adventism would not have been the same without Ellen White; it would not have existed without James.\(^9\)

Following her husband’s death, the grief-stricken widow sank into a year-long depression. She struggled to remain active, but at nights “deep sorrow” came over her as she expectantly awaited her own demise. Then one night the Lord appeared to her in a dream and said: “LIVE. I have put My Spirit upon your son, W. C. White, that he may be your counselor. I have given him the spirit of wisdom, and a discerning, perceptive mind.” Comforted by these words and the knowledge that her favorite son Willie would remain by her side, she resumed her ministry with renewed zeal.\(^10\)

In her widowhood Ellen White literally followed the spread of Adventism around the world, from Europe to the South Pacific. From 1885 to 1887 she made her home in Switzerland, where John N. Andrews had gone in 1874 as the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary. Within two years he had founded a magazine, *Les Signes des Temps*, and set up headquarters in Basel, centrally located near France and Germany. By 1884 Switzerland alone had over two hundred Adventist believers, a publishing house was under construction, and the leaders in Europe were anxious for a visit from Mrs. White and her son Willie, who had been associated with the publishing work in Battle Creek and Oakland. Thus on August 8, 1885, Ellen White and family sailed from Boston on the steamer *Cephalonia*,

and a month later were setting up housekeeping in an apartment above the new Basel press. For the next two years the thrill of sightseeing and speaking in new places tended to divert Mrs. White's attention from health reform although she did squeeze in an occasional temperance lecture, drawing an estimated thirteen hundred in Christiania (Oslo) Norway.  

The years 1887 to 1891 found her back in the United States fighting a doctrinal battle to shift the focus of Adventist theology from the Ten Commandments to the love and righteousness of Christ. But late in 1891, in response to an earnest appeal for her presence, she departed with a clutch of assistants for Australia and New Zealand, where she remained until 1900. Adventist missionaries had arrived in Melbourne only six years earlier and had, as usual, immediately set about to start a periodical and publishing house. By the time of Mrs. White's arrival the greatest need was for a school to train workers, and it was this task to which the sixty-four-year-old prophetess put her hand. One night in a dream the Lord showed her the ideal spot for a Bible training school, and a short time later it was discovered in the country about seventy-five miles of north Sydney. There in rural Cooranbong Mrs. White served as a true "medical missionary," opening her home as "an asylum for the sick and afflicted." (Her favorite remedy for everything from fevers to bruises was the charcoal poultice.) Her frequent acts of kindness won the love and affection of all around her and prompted one grateful recipient of a sack of flour to follow her back to America to take care of her farm.

A painful bout of rheumatism during her first year in Australia caused her to wonder at times why she had ever left the comforts of home. But she refused to let her suffering curtail her writing, and produced twenty-five hundred pages of manuscript under the most awkward conditions: "First my hair-cloth chair is bolstered up with pillows, then they have a frame, a box batted with pillows which I rest my limbs upon and a rubber pillow under them. My
table is drawn up close to me, and I thus write with my paper on a cardboard in my lap.  

With the exception of this rheumatic attack, which lasted about eleven months, Ellen White enjoyed remarkably good health for a woman her age and with her history. When illness did come, she no longer followed her former practice of calling in the brethren to pray for her recovery. Since she was never healed outright as a result of such prayers, she feared that allowing others to pray for her would only produce disappointment and skepticism, as she explained to the General Conference committee in 1890: “I never yet have been healed out and out; and that is why I do not call on any one to pray for me, because they will expect that I will be healed, and I know from the past I will not be healed; that is, that I shall not have the work done right then and there . . .” Through the years she had also grown reluctant to pray for the sick herself because those healed often turned out to be unworthy: “One, after having grown to years, became a notorious thief; another became licentious, and another, though grown to manhood, has no love for God or his truth.”

While living in Australia, Mrs. White noted that the medical work was an excellent means of breaking down prejudice toward Adventism. From time to time prominent citizens, who had little or no interest in doctrine, would come to the Seventh-day Adventists with a request to establish a sanitarium or treatment room in their town. Once in operation these institutions created a positive image for Adventists and made it easier for their evangelists to come in and preach what was commonly called “the third angel’s message.” So successful was this approach, Ellen White declared in 1899 that nothing converted “the people like the medical missionary work.” The following year she published a volume of testimonies urging that the health work be used as “an entering wedge, making a way for other truths to reach the heart.” Henceforth, gospel and medical workers were to join hands in converting the world.

Upon returning to America in 1900, Mrs. White pur-
Water treatments at the Battle Creek Sanitarium near the turn of the century.
chased a comfortable farm near St. Helena, California, and returned to the mountains north of San Francisco to live on her royalties and her ministerial salary. Now well past seventy, she appeared to be nearing the end of a long and colorful career. But instead of quietly fading away, she entered one of her most productive periods, writing voluminously and directing a major campaign to establish Adventist sanitariums “near every large city.” In addition to the main sanitarium in Battle Creek, the church was already operating several other hydropathic institutions. In 1878 Dr. Merritt Kellogg, hoping to attract invalids and pleasure seekers from the San Francisco Bay area, had opened a Rural Health Retreat in St. Helena. The success of his venture and especially that of his brother in Battle Creek encouraged others, and by 1900 Adventists were running medical centers of one kind or another in more than a half-dozen locations, including Portland, Oregon; Boulder, Colorado; Copenhagen, Denmark; and Sydney, Australia. Behind all these early efforts Ellen White’s influence could be seen, but it was not until the first decade of this century that she began sanitarium-building in earnest.16

The event that triggered her twentieth-century campaign was the burning of the Battle Creek Sanitarium early in the morning of February 18, 1902. To Dr. Kellogg and his colleagues, the fire was a personal and denominational tragedy, but Ellen White saw it as a sign of divine displeasure with overcentralization in Battle Creek. Instead of supporting Kellogg’s plan to rebuild in the same location, she seized this God-given opportunity to push for the opening of many smaller sanitariums in rural settings outside large cities. “My warning is: keep out of the cities,” she declared in 1903. This insistence on country settings stemmed partially from a desire to return to nature—“God’s physician”—and partially from a deep-seated fear of the labor unions that were beginning to infest urban areas. The Lord had shown her that these organizations would be used by Satan to bring about the “time of trou-
ble" predicted for God’s people in the last days, and she wanted “nothing to do with them.” Union membership is a violation of the commandments of God, she told the church, “for to belong to these unions means to disregard the entire Decalogue.”

The scene of Mrs. White’s most intensive sanitarium-building was Southern California, where the financial disaster of 1887 had sent real estate prices plummeting. By the turn of the century defunct tourist and health resorts littered the landscape, priced at a fraction of their original cost. Guided by revelations from the Lord “in the night season,” Ellen White helped to select three choice sanitarium sites in the years 1904 and 1905: in Paradise Valley outside San Diego, in Glendale on the outskirts of Los Angeles, and in Loma Linda near Redlands and Riverside. During the same decade she also assisted, directly or indirectly, in establishing sanitariums near the cities of Washington (Takoma Park), Chicago (Hinsdale), Boston (Melrose), and Nashville (Madison), as well as in several other places both in America and abroad.

Her involvement with these new institutions went far beyond mere verbal encouragement. She personally inspected many of the locations and sometimes helped raise the necessary funds. When the Southern California conference officers hesitated to purchase property in drought-stricken Paradise Valley, Ellen White herself borrowed two thousand dollars to help close the deal and later took a keen interest in the sanitarium’s day-to-day operations. She was also intimately connected with the financing and staffing of the Loma Linda Sanitarium, where she was a frequent and popular visitor.

Even this late in her life she advised sanitarium personnel to use only natural, drugless remedies, and to avoid such newfangled (and expensive) electrical devices as the X-ray machine, which God had shown her was “not the great blessing that some suppose it to be.” Her sanitariums were not intended to compete with “worldly” hospitals and health resorts, but were to serve as unique med-
ical missionary centers ministering as much to spiritual as physical needs. "Our sanitariums," she stressed over and over again, "are to be established for one object,—the advancement of present truth." If they failed in that mission, she could see no reason for their existence. On this point she parted company with Dr. John Kellogg, who had been fighting this "narrow sectarian spirit" for years. As early as 1893 he had spoken out against the feeling in some Adventist quarters "that work for the needy and suffering unless done with a direct proselytizing motive was of no account and that it was not in the interests of the cause."²¹

To "serve as feeders to the sanitariums located in the country," Ellen White advocated setting up an urban network of hygienic restaurants and treatment rooms. These establishments would not only recruit patients but, more important, would acquaint city dwellers with the principles of Adventism. According to her divine instructions, "one of the principal reasons why hygienic restaurants and treatment-rooms should be established in the centers of large cities is that by this means the attention of leading men will be called to the third angel's message." However, the restaurant business never lived up to her early expectations, largely because proprietors tended to place economic above spiritual interests. As the prophetess put it, they "lost the science of soul saving." When vegetarian restaurants in Los Angeles and San Francisco failed to win many converts during their first years of operation, her enthusiasm for this phase of the health work began to flag noticeably.²²

Because of her undying belief in the imminent return of Christ, Ellen White found it difficult to support projects not directly related to hastening that longed-for event. And in that category fell Dr. John Kellogg's numerous "health food" inventions. Dissatisfied with the sanitarium's "meager and monotonous" vegetarian diet, in the 1880s he launched a lifetime search for palatable supplements, ultimately inventing peanut butter, dry cereals, and "meat substitutes" made from nuts and wheat gluten. One of his first
creations, a multigrained cereal named Granola, turned out to be nutritious and pleasant tasting—but also tough enough to crack dentures. After one irate patient demanded ten dollars for her broken false teeth, he returned to his laboratory to develop a product more easily masticated. Assisted by his younger brother Will Keith, he finally came up with a flaked wheat cereal, Granose Flakes, for which he obtained a patent in 1894.23

When the commercial value of his Granose Flakes became apparent, as it soon did, Kellogg unselfishly offered to turn over production rights to the Adventist church, accurately predicting that it could “make enough money out of it to support the entire denominational work.” But Mrs. White ignored his offer, and a decade later vetoed a chance to obtain the rights to the even more successful corn flakes. She feared tying up so much time and talent in manufacturing mere temporal foods when they might better be spent supplying “the multitudes with the bread of life.” Besides, she was not especially fond of Dr. Kellogg’s cereals. “When a thing is exalted, as the corn flakes have been, it would be unwise for our people to have anything to do with it,” she warned. “It is not necessary that we make the corn flakes an article of food.” Her decision cost the church a fortune, which ultimately went into the pockets of Kellogg’s enterprising brother, W. K.24

To staff their ever-growing collection of health-related institutions, Seventh-day Adventists found it necessary to set up their own educational programs. The leader in this work was also Dr. Kellogg. Beginning in 1877, he organized a school of hygiene at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, where in a twenty-week course students could either prepare for medical school or learn how to become health lecturers. In 1883 he added a second school to train young women in “nursing, massage, the use of electricity, and other branches of the practical medical department.” And just six years later he opened still a third school which offered nontechnical training for hygienic cooks and “health missionaries.”25
But always the most pressing need was for qualified Adventist physicians. For almost twenty years, from about 1875 to the early 1890s, Kellogg simply tutored promising pupils at Battle Creek for a year and then sent them on to some "outside" medical school like the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor to complete their education. Each summer they were expected to return to Battle Creek and keep the sanitarium supplied with cheap help. Eventually the Adventists had so many of their young people going through Ann Arbor, the church purchased a home near the university where their students could live with fellow believers and get proper vegetarian meals. To prevent opportunists from taking advantage of this work-study plan and then turning their backs on the church, it finally became necessary to have prospective students sign a pledge swearing to work for the denomination at least five years after graduation and to "uphold by precept and example, the principles of hygienic and temperance reform presented in the Testimonies of Sister White, and promulgated by the Sanitarium and its managers." 26

Try as they might, Adventist leaders were incapable of shielding their medical students from all heterodox influences. Time and again young doctors returned from their stay at Ann Arbor tainted by heretical medical or theological views. The risk was so great that Mrs. White finally advised not sending any more Adventists to the University of Michigan "unless it is a positive necessity." Even Kellogg began to have doubts about his arrangement with Ann Arbor. After laboring repeatedly to correct "errors"—like the use of "strychnia and other poisonous drugs"—imbibed at the university, he concluded it would be less trouble to train the physicians himself. Earlier, when James White had made a similar suggestion, Kellogg had wanted nothing to do with what would obviously be a second-rate institution, but now he was convinced he could offer a respectable four-year curriculum "equal to that of the best medical schools in the country." Instruction in the basic sciences would be given at Battle Creek,
while much of the clinical work would be taken in Chicago, where there were several large hospitals and an Adventist dispensary. By the fall of 1895 he had obtained a charter from the State of Illinois and was welcoming first-year students to the American Medical Missionary College. During its fifteen-year existence, before being absorbed by the University of Illinois, Kellogg's medical school awarded a total of 194 doctorates in medicine and furnished the Adventist church with a generation of much-needed physicians.\(^{27}\)

For over a quarter century Ellen White and her protégé John Kellogg had worked harmoniously to turn an obscure Midwestern water cure into the center of a rapidly expanding international medical organization, which by the turn of the century controlled more employees than the General Conference. True, they had had their occasional differences, but a bond of mutual affection had always drawn them together. "I have loved and respected you as my own mother," the doctor wrote in 1899. "I have the tenderest feeling toward you," the prophetess replied a short time later. Though he found the scientific accuracy of her testimonies more persuasive than their visionary origin, he had since youth accepted her claims to divine inspiration. He had appreciated her counsel and tolerated her rebukes. But in the late 1890s, when she started accusing him of pride, selfishness, and other sins, the relationship began to sour noticeably. On November 10, 1907, Dr. Kellogg was disfellowshipped from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The charges: being antagonistic "to the gifts now manifest in the church" and allying himself "with those who are attempting to overthrow the work for which this church existed."\(^{28}\)

The story behind Kellogg's sensational excommunication is a complex affair, replete with unsubstantiated charges of doctrinal heresy and sexual misconduct. In retrospect it appears to have been basically an unfortunate personal and political struggle between the sometimes haughty czar of the Adventist medical institutions and a
group of ministers that included A. G. Daniells, General
Conference president and former associate of Mrs. White’s
in Australia; W. W. Prescott, editor of the Review and Her-
ald; and Willie White. Caught in the middle was an aging
and sometimes bewildered prophetess, whose authority be-
came the focal point of the conflict.29

No later than the first months of 1906 Mrs. White be-
came aware that certain doctors and ministers in Battle
Creek were raising embarrassing questions about the valid-
ity of her testimonies. In a nighttime “vision” she saw
the faces of many of her critics, including Dr. Kellogg,
Elder A. T. Jones, and William S. Sadler, an ordained
preacher recently graduated from the American Medical
Missionary College. “I was directed by the Lord to re-
quest them and any others who have perplexities and
grievous things in their minds regarding the testimonies
that I have borne, to specify what their objections and
criticisms are,” she related, adding that the Lord had also
promised to help her answer their queries. Accordingly,
she sent a letter to several of those she had seen, as well
as to Kellogg’s associate Dr. Charles E. Stewart, asking
them to “place upon paper a statement of the difficulties
that perplex their minds.” Kellogg refused to reply, but
both Sadler and Stewart obliged Mrs. White by sending in
long lists of “perplexities,” which—regardless of their
accuracy—shed considerable light on the puzzling es-
trangement between Ellen White and her former friends
in Battle Creek.30

Uppermost in the minds of both Sadler and Stewart
were the apparent inconsistencies and manipulations of
her purportedly divine messages, called testimonies. For
example, in 1899 or 1900 Mrs. White, disgruntled with Dr.
Kellogg for not sending her sufficient money to support
the work in Australia, wrote a testimony reproving him for
squandering sanitarium funds on an elaborately furnished
building in Chicago. In one of her special dreams she had
seen “a large building in Chicago, which in its erection
and equipment, cost a large sum of money.” Kellogg pro-
tested his innocence, but to no avail. The prophetess insisted her information was correct and cited an article in the New York Observer as proof. Upon returning to America, she reportedly even asked to visit the Chicago building the Lord had shown her. Only when it could not be found did she concede that perhaps a slight mistake had been made. After learning from Judge Jesse Arthur, legal counsel for the sanitarium, that plans for the erection of a large building in Chicago had indeed been discussed (while Kellogg was away in Europe), she suggested that the real purpose of her vision had not been to condemn an accomplished fact, as she had previously thought, but to serve as “an object-lesson for our people, warning them not to invest largely of their means in property in Chicago, or any other city.” But the damage had been done. A man had been falsely accused on the basis of a vision, and Stewart, for one, was not willing to blame God for the mistake.31

Another point of contention related to the handling of testimonies regarding the building of the Battle Creek Sanitarium following the disastrous fire of February 18, 1902. After four new stories had gone up, a testimony appeared in 1905 publicly censuring Kellogg and his colleagues for going against “the expressed will of God” in rebuilding another large sanitarium instead of several smaller ones. At the same time Mrs. White released an earlier testimony, dated just two days after the fire, indicating divine opposition to raising another “mammoth institution.” Kellogg was mystified. He knew he had received no such testimony; yet the impression was deliberately being given that he had. On being asked to explain what was going on, Mrs. White’s secretary confirmed that the earlier testimony, though written in manuscript form on February 20, 1902, had never been sent to him and in fact had never left the office until December, 1905, when it had been taken to the printers. “It is difficult to comprehend,” said Stewart in his letter to Mrs. White, “why such a vital message as this should have been withheld, and since it was
withheld, it is still quite difficult to imagine what good purpose was served by publishing it three years later . . . especially when a false impression has been created by its appearance in this connection.”

In view of Ellen White’s continuing insistence that “There is, throughout my printed works, a harmony with present teaching,” it was practically inevitable that questions would also be asked about her inconsistency as a health reformer. Predictably, Dr. Stewart inquired not only about her apparently contradictory statements on the use of milk, butter, and eggs, but also about her personal eating habits. How, he asked, did she harmonize her own years of meat-eating with her assertion that “God gave the light on health reform and those who rejected it, rejected God”? Was he to conclude that testimonies written during “the period between 1868 and 1894 in which you ate meat and oysters and served meat on your table . . . contrary to the light God had given you” were not truly of the Lord?

The Battle Creek dissidents were also perplexed by Mrs. White’s practice of appropriating the writings of others and passing them off as her own. In one of her own books alone, Sketches from the Life of Paul (1883), Stewart had discovered “over two hundred places” that corresponded remarkably with passages from Conybeare and Howson’s Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul (3rd ed., 1855). Similar parallels existed between her volume on The Great Controversy and certain histories of the Protestant Reformation. He had even found a few sentences from testimonies on health reform that seemed to be lifted right out of L. B. Coles’s Philosophy of Health. “Is that special light you claim to have from God revealed to you, at least to some extent through reading the various commentaries and other books treating of religious subjects?” he queried.

The parallels between Mrs. White’s writings and the works of others, so disturbing to Stewart, scarcely bothered most Adventists, including some of the doctor’s colleagues at Battle Creek. When Dr. Daniel Kress stumbled onto a
copy of Coles’s *Philosophy of Health* in the 1890s, he readily explained the puzzling similarities to Ellen White’s *How to Live* in terms of multiple inspiration. Isn’t it wonderful, he remarked to Dr. Kellogg, “that the Lord should put this into two minds at different times.” Kress’s reaction is reminiscent of the response of Jemima Wilkinson’s disciples to the discovery that she had copied one of her books almost word for word from a Quaker preacher named Isaac Penington. “Could not the Spirit dictate to her the Same Word as it did to Isaac?” asked one of her followers hopefully.35

According to one of Mrs. White’s former literary assistants, Frances (Fanny) Bolton, many of her employer’s publications were not only paraphrased from other sources but written in their final form by privately hired editors. The material coming from Ellen White’s own hand she described as being “illogically written, full of illiteracies, awkward writing, and often wrong chronology.”36 Upon divulging these secrets, she promptly lost her job. As Dr. Merritt Kellogg, who was in Australia with Mrs. White at the time, described the incident, Fanny came to him one day and said:

“Dr. Kellogg I am in great distress of mind. I come to you for advice for I do not know what to do. I have told Elder [George B.] Starr what I am going to tell you, but he gives me no satisfactory advice. You know,” said Fanny, “that I am writing all the time for Sister White. Most of what I write is published in the *Review and Herald* as having come from the pen of Sister White, and is sent out as having been written by Sister White under inspiration of God. I want to tell you that I am greatly distressed over this matter for I feel that I am acting a deceptive part. The people are being deceived about the inspiration of what I write. I feel that it is a great wrong that anything which I write should go out as under Sister White’s name, as an article specially inspired of God. What I write should go out over my own signature, then credit would be given where credit belongs.” I gave Miss Boulton [sic] the best advice I could, and then soon after asked Sister White to explain the situation to me. I told her just what Fanny had told me. Mrs. White asked me if Fanny told me what
I had repeated to her, and my affirming that she did she said, “Elder Starr says she came to him with the same thing.” Now said Sister White, with some warmth, “Fanny Boulton shall never write another line for me. She can hurt me as no other person can.” A few days later Miss Boulton was sent back to America.\(^{37}\)

In reply to such accusations, Mrs. White admitted that her husband had routinely edited her writings and that after his death “faithful helpers joined me, who labored untiringly in the work of copying the testimonies, and preparing articles for publication.” But it was absolutely untrue, she insisted, “that any of my helpers are permitted to add matter or change the meaning of the messages I write out.”\(^{38}\)

For Dr. Sadler, the “most serious of all the difficulties” concerning the testimonies was Willie White’s alleged influence over them. “I have been hearing it constantly,” he wrote Mrs. White, “from leaders, ministers, from those sometimes high in Conference authority, that Willie influenced you in the production of your Testimonies.” For a long time he had simply passed it off as loose gossip, but recently someone had shown him a letter written by Mrs. White herself telling of how Willie had talked her out of sending a particular message to Elder A. G. Daniells. His suspicions were aroused further by a conversation with Edson White in which “he spoke very positively against his brother Willie and his relation to you, and [told] how Willie was seeking to manage things in his way, and make them come his way, by his influence over you.” Family relationships had deteriorated to such an extent that Willie was refusing to let his older brother even talk to his mother in private. If the Lord did not do something to prevent Willie and others from perverting his mother’s gift, Edson told Dr. Sadler, he thought “it would be necessary for him to expose his brother, and others who were doing those things.”\(^{39}\)

Ellen White freely granted that someone had been manipulating her writings—but it was not Willie. “It is One
who is mighty in counsel, One who presents before me the condition of things." Her position had not changed since 1867 when she had said: "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." For his part, Willie steadfastly denied ever trying to affect his mother's testimonies. If her views were similar to his, he explained, it was because he had been influenced by her. But in spite of these denials, some of the most respected Adventist brethren remained unconvinced. Dr. John Kellogg, a confessed manipulator himself, even saw a kind of poetic justice in now being the target of her testimonies: "I have doubtless been myself guilty with others in this matter, and it is right that I should be punished as I am being punished."  

The pointed criticisms of Stewart and Sadler were apparently more than Mrs. White had bargained for when she solicited them. Instead of answering their perplexities, as she had promised the Lord would help her to do, she remained silent, saying only that "a messenger from heaven" had directed her "not to take the burden of picking up and answering all the sayings and doubts that are being put into many minds." 

The very frankness of the Battle Creek letters played directly into the hands of Kellogg's enemies. Willie White saw to it that a copy of Stewart's confidential communication reached his friend A. G. Daniells, who in turn used it to incite the church against the so-called apostates in Battle Creek. When the contents of his letter began leaking out and he had still received no reply, Stewart arranged for its anonymous publication. This called for a strategy session among Mrs. White's associates, who judiciously decided not to issue a formal reply. However, in regard to the specific charge of plagiarism, it was agreed "that W. C. White shall prepare quite a full and frank statement of the plans followed in preparing manuscripts for publication in
book form, including (if Sister White gives her consent) a statement of the instruction which Sister White received in early days as to her use of the productions of other writers.” Unfortunately, the precise nature of Ellen White’s divine literary license was never revealed.42

The Battle Creek schism profoundly altered the Seventh-day Adventist church, doctrinally as well as institutionally. As a result of the clash between the forces of Daniells and Kellogg, acceptance of Mrs. White’s testimonies for the first time became an accepted “test of fellowship,” a development unthinkable in the early days of the church. But this innovation had its price. Besides creating widespread internal dissension, the new test directly or indirectly resulted in the loss of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, the American Medical Missionary College, and a number of leading ministers and physicians, including Drs. Stewart, Sadler, and Kellogg, the most prominent Seventh-day Adventist in the world.43

Kellogg’s fall from grace was not, however, without its humor. During the heat of the controversy Merritt Kellogg learned that Mrs. White had predicted that his brother, “like Nebuchadnezzar . . . would be humbled, and driven out to eat grass like an ox.” “I think it is a good thing for you that you have been a vegetarian so many years,” Merritt told John. “You will not miss the savory roasts and juicy joints at that time, as will many of the S.D.A. preachers when they have to eat grass like an ox, as many of them will, or starve, when the fallacies of their teaching is revealed, as it will be in God’s own good time.”44

Without the Battle Creek Sanitarium and the American Medical Missionary College, “orthodox” Adventists had no place to send their young people who aspired to medical careers. Thus Mrs. White determined in 1906 to turn the Loma Linda Sanitarium into an educational center, beginning with a College of Evangelists to train “gospel medical missionaries.” At first there was no course for physicians because she felt it was folly “to spend years in preparation” when time on this earth was so short. But the need
for a continuing supply of doctors became so acute that she finally decided it would be wiser to set up an Adventist medical school than to send students to some worldly institution or, God forbid, to the American Medical Missionary College. On September 29, 1910, the College of Medical Evangelists, as the Loma Linda school was now called, opened its classrooms to a student body of ninety-two: ten second-year medical, twenty-four first-year medical, six cooks and bakers, and fifty-two nurses. The American Medical Association deemed it worthy of only a “C” rating, but at least it was legally chartered and doctrinally orthodox. Under the guidance of Dean (later president) Percy Magan it evolved into a respectable and thoroughly regular institution, which today, as part of Loma Linda University, has the distinction of being the only medical school in America to have come out of the hydropathic tradition.\(^{45}\)

During the last few years of her life Ellen White labored incessantly to ensure that the College of Medical Evangelists fulfilled its divinely appointed mission. Repeatedly she urged its graduates to pattern themselves after Christ, the Great Physician, and to stick by three of the reforms Adventist medicine had come to represent. First, it meant “treating the sick without the use of poisonous drugs.” Since her vision of June, 1863, she had discovered no better remedies than those freely provided by nature: pure air, sunlight, rest, exercise, proper diet, water, and perhaps some “simple herbs and roots.” Second and “just as important as the discarding of drugs,” it meant that Adventist doctors were not to “follow the world’s methods of medical practice, exacting large fees that worldly physicians demand for their services.” The Christian physician, she wrote, “has no more right to minister to others requiring a large remuneration than has the minister of the gospel a right to set his labors at a high money value.” Third, it meant following “the Lord’s plan” of having men treat men and women treat women. The custom of ignoring sexual distinctions in the practice of medicine was the source of “much evil” and an offense to God. Times were rapidly
changing, however, and it was not long before scarcely a trace of these three reforms could be found among Seventh-day Adventist physicians, many of whom continued to revere the prophetess.⁴⁶

On July 16, 1915, five months after a broken thigh bone confined her to a wheelchair, Ellen White, age 87, passed away. After a lifetime of illness and frequent brushes with death she finally succumbed to chronic myocarditis, complicated by arteriosclerosis and asthenia resulting from her hip injury. In a fundamental way her life had been a paradox. Although consumed with making preparations for the next world, she nevertheless devoted much of her energy toward improving life and health in this one. Despite the Battle Creek tragedy, she left behind at the time of her death thirty-three sanitariums and countless treatment rooms on six continents. Over 136,000 devoted followers mourned her passing. In a fitting tribute to the fallen health reformer, the women of the Seventh-day Adventist church pledged themselves in 1915 to raise funds for an Ellen G. White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles, which served for years as the principal clinical facility of the College of Medical Evangelists.⁴⁷

At the time of Ellen White’s death only one other woman—Mary Baker Eddy—had contributed more to the religious life of America. Yet the Adventist leader died relatively unknown outside her church, having never sought or received the worldly recognition accorded Mrs. Eddy. Although she never thought highly of the founder of Christian Science, whom she regarded as little better than a spiritualist, she had much in common with her. Both women were born in New England in the 1820s. As children they both experienced debilitating illnesses, which curtailed their formal schooling; and as young women they suffered from uncontrollable spells that left them unconscious for frighteningly long periods of time. They both sought cures in Grahamism and hydrotherapy. Early in 1863 Mrs. White found hers through Dr. Jackson’s essay on diphtheria, but just six months earlier Mrs. Eddy had left a New
Hampshire water cure in disappointment. Abandoning hydrotherapy for the mind cure of Phineas P. Quimby, she did for Quimbyism what Ellen White did for health reform: she made a religion out of it. Both she and Mrs. White claimed divine inspiration, and both succeeded in establishing distinctive churches. But despite their many similarities, the two women had basically different goals: Ellen White longed for a mansion in heaven, Mary Baker Eddy wanted hers here on earth. Thus while Mrs. Eddy died one of the richest and most powerful women in America, Mrs. White lived her last days in comfortable, but unpretentious surroundings, still waiting for the Lord to come.⁴⁸

Today the memory of Ellen White lives on in the lives of nearly two and one-half million Seventh-day Adventists, many of whom continue to believe “that she wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that her pen was literally guided by God.” In the years since her death sales of her two most popular health books, The Ministry of Healing and Counsels on Diet and Foods, have topped a quarter-million. Most of her disciples abstain entirely from alcohol and tobacco, and many will not touch meat, tea, or coffee; and, if we are to believe recent scientific reports, they enjoy better health for it. As of 1970, Seventh-day Adventists were operating a worldwide chain of 329 medical institutions stretching from Kingston to Karachi, from Bangkok to Belém—each a memorial to the life and work of Ellen G. White, prophetess of health.⁴⁹
APPENDIX:

THE 1864 DANSVILLE VISIT

Ellen G. White to Bro. and Sister Lockwood, September 14, 1864, from "Our Home," Dansville, N.Y. (L-6-1864, White Estate.)

Dear Bro. and Sister Lockwood:

I have been trying to find time to write you for some days but there is so much to be done I cannot do half I wish to do.

Adelia and the children have been examined today. The doctor pronounces Adelia sick. We shall leave their written prescriptions this week, then you can know more in regard to them. I think Dr. Jackson gave an accurate account of the disposition and organization of our children. He pronounces Willie's head to be one of the best that has ever come under his observation. He gave a good description of Edson's character and peculiarities. I think this examination will be worth everything to Edson.

They have all styles of dress here. Some are very becoming, if not so short. We shall get patterns from this place, and I think we can get out a style of dress more healthful than we now wear, and yet not be bloomer or the American costume. Our dresses according to my idea, should be from four to six inches shorter than now worn, and should in no case reach lower than the top of the heel of the shoe, and could be a little shorter even than this with all mod-
esty. I am going to get up a style of dress on my own hook which will accord perfectly with that which has been shown me. Health demands it. Our feeble women must dispense with heavy skirts and tight waists if they value health.

Brother Lockwood, don't groan now. I am not going to extremes, but conscience and health requires a reform.

We shall never imitate Miss Dr. Austin or Mrs. Dr. York. They dress very much like men. We shall imitate or follow no fashion we have ever yet seen. We shall institute a fashion which will be both economical and healthy.

You may ask what I think of this institution. Some things are excellent. Some things are not good. Their views and teachings in regard to health are, I think, correct. But Dr. Jackson mixes up his theology too much with health question [sic] which theology to us is certainly objectionable. He deems it necessary for the health of his patients to let them have pleasureable excitement to keep their spirits up. They play cards for amusement, have a dance once a week and seem to mix these things up with religion. These things of course, we should not countenance, yet, when I view the matter from another standpoint, I am led to inquire, What better can be done for the feeble sick who have no hope of heaven, no consolation received by the Christian. Their source of enjoyment must be derived from a different source, while the Christian has the elevating influence of the power of grace, the sinner must draw from another source his enjoyments. If I ever prize Christ and the Christian hope, it is here, while looking upon poor invalids with but little prospect before them of ever recovering their health and have no hope for a better life.

Dr. Jackson carries out his principles in regard to diet to the letter. He places no butter or salt upon his table, no meat or any kind of grease. But he sets a liberal table. Waiters are constantly in attendance and if a dish is getting low, they remove it and replenish. The food I call liberal and good. All the difficulty is, there is danger of eating too much. All our food is eaten with a keen relish. If any one
requires a little salt they have it supplied for the asking. A little bell sits by their plate which they use to call the waiter who provides them what they ask.

From 12 o’clock to quarter before two are resting hours. Everything is quiet. All undress and go to bed. But I forgot to state at half past ten comes the taking of baths. All patients who take treatment enter a large carpeted room with stove in it. All around the room are hooks. Upon these hooks are the sheets of the patients. Each has their [sic] particular hook and their number over the hook.

Upon entering this room, the one who undresses first, wraps a sheet about her and signifies her readiness for a bath. By removing a tin from a hook painted on the back side with brown paint, they hold that tin until the bath tending women ask, What does No. 1 want? She then tells them either sitz bath, half bath or dry rubbing according to their prescription. They say, All ready. Then the patient turns this tin brown side out and goes to her bath. This saves all confusion for it is known when all are served.

The bath women put on old duds reaching to the knees, are barefooted and bare-legged and look bad. Yet their manner of dress is according to their work.

I do think we should have an institution in Mich. to which our Sabbath keeping invalids can resort. Dr. Lay is doing well. He is in the very best place he could be in to learn. He is studying all his leisure moments and is coming out a thorough convert. His wife is doing well. She is gaining, walks well for her. She is one hundred per cent better than when she came here. Dr. Lay is respected in this institution. He ranks among their physicians. I think they [would] be unwilling to have him leave them. Dr. Lay thinks some of going to N. York City to Dr. Trall’s college and attend lectures, obtain a diploma and come out a regular M.D. I believe the Lord’s hand is in our coming to this place. We shall learn all we can and try to make a right use of it.

Yesterday we attended the celebration of a wedding conducted in a style, worthy of imitation. Dr.’s only son James was married to Miss Katie Johnson. They were married in
their father’s cottage and then came to the hall where all the patients were congregated and all the members of the household, also sick patients confined to their rooms were brought out, laid upon sofas and placed in rocking chairs upon the large platform occupied by those who lecture. Some were cripples, some diseased in various ways. The hall was decorated in tasteful style, nothing superfluous or silly. After the bridegroom and bride walked in, then Mrs. Dr. York conducted us to them and gave all who desired an introduction to them. There was a long table arranged with food which was placed upon the plates and passed around to each one. The waiters were constantly passing around with a supply if any more was required. Grapes were passed around in abundance. Everything was liberal, yet plain. They did not even on this occasion depart from their principles of diet which made the thing consistent and admirable. They had extras, graham pudding with dates in it, gems mixed with raisins, custard, apple pie and baked apples, a few other simple things, nothing like fine flour was seen, even upon this extra occasion.

I am afraid as a people we should not carry out our principles as well. After we had eaten Mr. Clark a great musician, sung and played upon an instrument of music, cabinet organ. His song was very amusing, but enough of this.

I don’t know when you will get another letter. I meant to send the price of those shoes so if any wanted cheap shoes they could get them for their children. But there are so many hands and so many different prices and kinds of shoes that I think it would be impossible to tell you so that you could understand in regard [to] them. They had better remain until we return, I think.

We hope you will enjoy yourselves well in our absence. Be cheerful, above all things be happy. Look on the bright side and may the blessing of God rest upon you in rich abundance.

In love,
Ellen G. White
Description of Character of Willie C. White, by James C. Jackson, M.D., Our Home, Dansville, N.Y., September 14, 1864 (DF 783, White Estate).

This boy is of the nervous-bilious constitution and gets his peculiarities almost entirely from his father or from his father’s mother’s side. He is of good stock and good blood—he is “thorough bred.” He has got a woman’s temperament, and will be kind, loving and courteous. He has an excellent head, and will make a kind, good, true man. He will always make friends wherever he goes. He has a fine physical build throughout, with the exception of his bowels which are too large. He is of scrofulous habit and decidedly predisposed to enlargement of the mesenteric glands, and is in danger, under bad habits of living, of having them so increase in size as to break down his nutritive capacity. He should live upon the simplest food, making fruit an essential or staple of his aliment. He should not be pushed in school, but be permitted to learn largely from out of door things or inductively, cultivating his special senses rather than his abstract capacity for learning until he is twelve or fifteen years of age. If he is cared for with proper heed and propriety, there is no reason why he may not live, but he is liable to diseases of the glandular system, and bad habits of living (indicated by gross food and the use of stimulants and spices) would, in the long run, be very prejudicial to his health.

He has a very fine organization. His bone and brain, muscle and sinew and blood are all of fine quality. If he can be reared to manhood, he will take rank as a lover of whatever is good and true in any community where he may be. He naturally takes to the right and true. Of his own accord he would sustain loving relations to those of his own age or more advanced in years.

His education we could hardly speak of at present until he is older. That needs to be decided by what he will, in years to come, exhibit. He should eat but twice a day have his body kept clean, be brought up to industrious habits, and taught to regularity in their exhibition.
Adelia P. Patten to Sister Lockwood, September 15, 1864, from "Our Home" on the Side of a Mountain (DF 127b, White Estate).

Dear Sister Lockwood:

I don't think it would be serving you very pretty not to write you a letter as soon as opportunity presents itself. I wrote about half a letter to Anna, and now as I have got through with what I had to do on the Instructor I take time to tell you how I stand Cure life. I must say I am interested in hearing Dr. Jackson lecture, but he combines his theology, his medical instruction, his comical nonsense and his theatrical gestures all into his discourses. He flies about like a young man, and will come into the lecture hall with an old blue woolen cap on, which he takes off and puts under his arm and walks along and mounts the rostrum with all the firmness of an experienced lecturer.

We passed examination a day or two ago. As my turn came he set me [in] a chair, and said "My dear, you are sick ain't you." Bro. White gave him a little sketch of our Graham life during the past summer and of what my cares and labors had been. He said that I had evidently overworked, that I must make a decided change, and take a rest or it would tell seriously by and by. He gave advice &c. and said when I got thoroughly initiated to their style of living if I took proper exercise and rest I would enjoy better health than ever before. I have their system about one half of it practically learned.

We have the crackers, they don't furnish "gems" only in case of a wedding or some other extra occasion. They don't have salt. The pudding is thin and fresh squash and cabbage without salt or vinegar and oh such times. I had a little salt dish this noon and wanted to pocket the salt that was left and as none of our company had an envelope so had Bro. W[hite] tip it onto his passbook.

Yours in haste and love,
Adelia P. Patten
A NOTE ON SOURCES

The starting point for any study of Ellen G. White is the large collection of her unpublished manuscripts and letters housed in the vault of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc., Washington, D.C. Many of these documents are restricted, however, and may be used only with the permission of the trustees. More accessible are several other collections, which duplicate some of the materials held by the White Estate: the C. Burton Clark Collection, recently acquired by the Heritage Room, Loma Linda University Library; the John Harvey Kellogg Papers, Michigan Historical Collections, Ann Arbor; the John Harvey Kellogg Collection in the Archives of Michigan State University; and the Ballenger-Mote Papers, a private collection in the possession of Mr. Donald F. Mote, Riverside, California, especially rich in documents relating to dissident Seventh-day Adventists.


There are no satisfactory secondary studies of Mrs. White, all previous accounts having been written either by detractors or apologists. In the former category fall D. M. Canright’s Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1919), a polemical if sometimes perceptive volume by a disillusioned former Adventist minister; and Henry E. Carver’s Mrs. E. G.


The best recent studies of Millerism are David L. Rowe's


Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and the Battle Creek health reformers are the subjects of several excellent studies. One of the finest examples of recent Adventist scholarship is Richard W. Schwarz’s “John Harvey Kellogg: American Health Reformer” (Ph.D. diss.,


Among the many journals consulted in preparing this book, four were of particular value. The Advent Review and Sabbath Her-
and the Health Reformer (1866–1878), both published by the Seventh-day Adventists, carry many articles by Mrs. White and chronicle the progress of health reform among Adventists. The Water-Cure Journal (1845–1862), edited by Joel Shew and R. T. Trall, is undoubtedly the richest source for health reform and hydropathy before the Civil War. The Letter Box (1858–1859) and its successor Laws of Life (1860–1893), put out by Dr. Jackson and his colleagues at Dansville, reveal much about life at Our Home on the Hillside; but no library has a complete run of this journal, and it was impossible to locate certain issues from the 1860s.
REFERENCES

1. A Prophetess Is Born


13. Dr. Amariah Brigham, superintendent of the New York Lunatic Asylum in Utica, attributed the insanity of thirty-two patients in three northern asylums to Millerism, which he regarded as a greater threat to the country than yellow fever or cholera; “Millerism,” *American Journal of Insanity*, 1 (January, 1845), 249–53. The accuracy of Brigham’s diagnosis may be questioned, but nineteenth-century American psychiatrists generally believed that excessive religious zeal often precipitated insanity in those already predisposed to mental illness; see Norman Dain, *Concepts of Insanity in the United States*, 1789–1865 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1964), p. 187. See also Everett N. Dick, “William Miller and the Advent Crisis, 1831–1844” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1932), pp. 147–51, 194–95; Nichol *Midnight Cry*, p. 145; and David L. Rowe, “Thunder and Trumpets: The Millerite Movement and Apocalyptic Thought in Upstate New York, 1800–1845” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1974), pp. 201–5. In his “defense” of the Millerites, Nichol discounts the charges of insanity and suicide (pp. 355–88), while the Seventy-day Adventist historian Dick concludes that “Notwithstanding the numerous false reports it is evident that there was an increase in the number of cases of insanity from religious causes and there were numerous instances of suicides” (p. 194). Rowe’s position is similar to Dick’s.


19. EGW to Joseph Bates, July 13, 1847 (B–3–1847, White Estate). This important letter was recently discovered in the White Estate vault by Professor Ingemar Lindén. For his views on the shut door, see his *Biblicism, Apokalyptik, Utopi: Adventisemens historia utveckling i USA samt dess svenska utveckling till o. 1939* (Uppsala, 1971) pp. 71–84, 449–50; and his unpublished paper in English, "The Significance of the Shut Door Theory in Sabbatarian Adventism, 1845–ca. 1851." Arthur White in "Ellen G. White and the Shut Door Question," recently prepared as an appendix to his forthcoming biography of his grandmother, argues that Ellen White did not mean by the term "shut door" what her contemporaries meant; he ignores the fact that she herself claimed to be in agreement with Joseph Turner. The doctrine of the shut door was particularly popular among Portland Millerites. See Sylvester Bliss to William Miller, February 11, 1845; and J. V. Himes to William Miller, March 12, March 29, and April 22, 1845 (Joshua V. Himes Letters, Massachusetts Historical Society). See also Otis Nichols to William Miller, April 12, 1846 (Miller Papers, Aurora College).


26. J. V. Himes to William Miller, March 12 and March 29, 1845 (Joshua V. Himes Letters, Massachusetts Historical Society). The second woman may have been Sister Durben, who witnessed Ellen's shut-door vision at Exeter in February, 1845.


28. EGW to Mary Harmon Foss, December 22, 1890 (F–37–1890, White Estate); EGW, Life Sketches, p. 77.


30. For descriptions of Ellen in vision, see Loughborough, Great Second Advent Movement, pp. 204–11; Martha D. Amadon, "Mrs. E. G. White in Vision," November 24, 1925 (DF 105, White Estate); Wellcome, History of the Second Advent Message, pp. 397–402. Although Wellcome remembered catching Ellen twice "to save her from falling upon the floor," she could not recall in later years ever being around Wellcome at the time of a vision; EGW to J. N. Loughborough, August 24, 1874 (Letter 2, 1874, White Estate).


33. [Uriah Smith], The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White: A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scriptures (Battle Creek: SDA Publish-
ing Assn., 1868); White, Life Incidents, p. 273; H. E. Carver, Mrs. E. G. White’s Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined (2nd ed.; Marion, Iowa: Advent and Sabbath Advocate Press, 1877), pp. 75–76; Dr. W. J. Fairfield to D. M. Canright, December 28, 1887, in Canright, Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1919), p. 180; Merritt Kellogg to J. H. Kellogg, June 3, 1906; J. H. Kellogg to R. B. Tower, March 3, 1933 (Ballenger-Mote Papers). Canright (p. 181) also quotes Dr. William Russell of the Western Health Reform Institute as writing on July 12, 1869 “that Mrs. White’s visions were the result of a diseased organization or condition of the brain or nervous system.” According to Carver, Ellen White in 1865 said that Dr. James Caleb Jackson of Dansville, New York, had “pronounced her a subject of Hysteria.” On hysteria, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th-Century America,” Social Research, XXXIX (Winter, 1972), 652–78.

34. EGW, Spiritual Gifts: The Great Controversy, between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels (Battle Creek: James White, 1858), pp. 27–28; cf. EGW, Life Sketches, p. 30.


37. EGW, Life Sketches, pp. 69–72; EGW, Spiritual Gifts (1860), p. 30; James and Ellen G. White, Life Sketches: Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors, of Elder James White, and His Wife, Mrs. Ellen G. White (Battle Creek: SDA Publishing Assn., 1880), p. 238. The career of a prophetess was in some ways similar to that of a spiritualist medium; and, as R. Laurence Moore has recently pointed out, mediumship was “one of the few career opportunities open to women in the nineteenth century.” Moore, “The Spiritualist Medium: A Study of Female Professionalism in Victorian America,” American Quarterly, XXVII (May, 1975), 202.

38. EGW, Life Sketches, pp. 70–71.

39. Ibid., pp. 72–73, 77.


41. EGW, Life Sketches, pp. 88–90.


47. Ibid., pp. 110–41; White, *Life Incidents*, p. 292; James White to Brother and Sister Hastings, August 26, 1848, and October 2, 1848 (White Estate). The Whites possibly abandoned the shut-door doctrine shortly before 1852.


51. EGW to Brother and Sister Dodge, July 21, 1851 (D-4-1851, White Estate); EGW, *Spiritual Gifts* (1860), p. 294; Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald . . . Extra, II (July 21, 1851), 4. For a typical statement by James White on the independence of his theology from the visions, see
REFERENCES

“Palisshaw, Mich.,” _R&H_, XXIV (August 23, 1864), 100. Mrs. White’s seven articles appeared in the following issues of the _R&H_: III (June 10, 1852), 21; III (February 17, 1853), 155–56; III (April 14, 1853), 192; IV (August 11, 1853), 53; V (July 25, 1854), 197; VI (September 19, 1854), 45–46; VI (June 12, 1855), 246. Her April 14, 1853, note, in which she compares herself with the writers of the Bible, corrects an error regarding one of her visions.


55. EGW to the Church in Roosevelt and Vicinity, August 3, 1861 (R-16a-1861, White Estate).


2. In Sickness and in Health

1. EGW, “To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God” (broadside dated January 31, 1849, Topsham, Maine). From a copy in LLU-HR.


3. EGW, _Spiritual Gifts_ (1860), pp. 84–85.

4. Ibid., p. 97; James 5:14, 15 (NEB).

5. EGW, “To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God.”


10. To my knowledge, the 1849 statement has never been reprinted in any of EGW’s works.

11. Ibid., p. 134. The date of Sister Prior’s death is uncertain, but circumstantial evidence suggests sometime in 1853 or 1854.

12. Ibid., p. 135.

13. Ibid., pp. 184–88. In a letter to Mrs. C. W. Sperry, September 26, 1861, Ellen White reports having placed Edson, afflicted with dysentery, under a doctor’s care (S-8-1861, White Estate). The “celebrated physician” was probably a quack “cancer doctor” or some other “specialist”; see Edward C. Atwater, “The Medical Profession in a New Society: Rochester, New York (1811–60),” Bulletin of the History of Medicine, XLVII (May–June, 1973), 228. It seems unlikely that Mrs. White suffered a real stroke, as we understand the term today. Nineteenth-century physicians probably would have attributed her symptoms to hysteria.

14. Evidence of this practice can be readily found in both Ellen’s writings and the pages of the Review and Herald. See, for example, EGW, Spiritual Gifts (1860), pp. 206–7; EGW, “Communication from Sister White,” R&H, VII (January 10, 1856), 118; and Joseph Bates, “Obituary,” R&H, XII (September 2, 1858), 127. By the early 1860s many Battle Creek Adventists were patronizing a woman physician, Miss M. N. Purple; “Remarkable Answer to Prayer.” R&H, XIX (April 22, 1862), 164.

15. EGW, Spiritual Gifts (1860), pp. 271–72. Ellen’s vision was first published as Spiritual Gifts: The Great Controversy, between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels (Battle Creek: James White, 1858). Just a few months earlier a “first-day” Adventist from Rochester, H. L. Hastings, had published a similar volume entitled The Great Controversy between God and Man, Its Origin, Progress, and End (Rochester: H. L. Hastings, 1858).


20. The drinking habits of Adventists in this period are difficult to determine. John H. Kellogg once recalled that in the early 1860s “some good ministers, saintly men, kept kegs of ale and beer in their cellars.” During these years his own father used both beverages. “The Significance of Our Work,” Medical Missionary, XIV (March, 1905), 82.


23. EGW, MS dated February 12, 1854 (MS-1-1854, White Estate). An exception to the general silence on tobacco was a selected article entitled “Tobacco” that appeared in the Review and Herald, IV (December 13, 1853), 178.


33. EGW, “Errors in Diet.” Testimonies, I, 205–6, from a letter originally written October 21, 1858.


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43. Editorial introduction to James C. Jackson, “Diphtheria, Its Causes, Treatment and Cure,” R&H, XXI (February 17, 1863), 89. Jackson’s essay was later published in pamphlet form as Diphtheria [sic]: Its Causes, Treatment and Cure (Dansville, N.Y.: Austin, Jackson & Co., 1868).

3. The Health Reformers


4. Robert Samuel Fletcher, A History of Oberlin College: From Its Foundation through the Civil War (Oberlin: Oberlin College, 1943), I, 316–17. Chapter XXII of this work is entitled "Physiological Reform: The Health Movement." Among the earliest health reform periodicals were the Boston Medical Intelligencer (1823–28), the Journal of Health (Philadelphia, 1829–33), and the Moral Reformer, renamed the Library of Health in 1837 (Boston, 1835–43).


13. The nickname given by the Boston Traveller is mentioned in [William A. Alcott], "Mr. Graham," Moral Reformer, I (October, 1835), 322; Graham's rules and regulations are found in [Asenath Nicholson], Nature's Own Book (2d ed.; New York: Wilbur & Whipple, 1835), pp. 13–22; the comment on Garrisonites is in a letter from William S. Tyler to Ed-


form Movement,” pp. 94–98. See also Mann’s Two Lectures on Intemperance (Syracuse: Hall, Mills, and Co., 1852).


20. Frederick Clayton Waite, The First Medical College in Vermont: Castleton, 1818–1862 (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1949), p. 204, lists Coles as a graduate of both Castleton and Newton Theological Seminary. However, a check of the records of The Newton Theological Institution by Mr. Ellis E. O’Neal, Jr., librarian of Andover Newton Theological School, turned up no mention of Coles.


22. “Philosophy of Health,” Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, XLV (November 26, 1851), 358. For an earlier comment on Coles’s manuscript in this same journal, see XXXVII (November 10, 1847), 305.


24. “Philosophy of Health,” Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, XXXVIII (February 2, 1848), 26. When his Philosophy of Health first appeared in 1848, Coles received a congratulatory message from William
REFERENCES  


26. See Coles, Philosophy of Health, pp. 214, 286; and Whorton, " 'Christian Physiology.' "


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45. James Caleb Jackson, autobiographical memoir, quoted in Conklin, The Jackson Health Resort, p. 116. In addition to espousing socialism, Jackson wanted to modify the traditional marriage and family structure; “Letter from Dr. Jackson,” Laws of Life, X (December, 1867), 185.

46. This account of life at Our Home is based on personal reminiscences collected in Conklin, The Jackson Health Resort, pp. 31–32, 79–81, 171. On the number of meals per day at the water cures, see J. C. Jackson, “Clifton Springs and Our Home,” Laws of Life, III (September, 1860), 137; and “Two Meals a Day,” ibid., III (November, 1860), 174.

47. Conklin, The Jackson Health Resort, p. 81; Jackson, How to Treat the Sick Without Medicine, pp. 25–26.


49. J. C. Jackson’s article was reprinted, with an editorial introduction, in the R&H, XXI (February 17, 1863), 89–91.
4. Dansville Days


2. EGW, Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene (Battle Creek: Good Health Publishing Co., 1890), p. 53.


the Month of March,” ibid., VI (April, 1863), 53. See also “The People’s Estimate of the ‘Laws,’ “ ibid., VI November, 1863), 176. In 1858 a Joseph Clarke recommended “Plain, coarse food at regular intervals, regular rest and exercise, habits of temperance in all things”; “Health,” R&H, February 11, 1858), 106. I have been unable to prove that J. W. Clarke, Phelps, and Miller were Seventh-day Adventists, but it is likely that they were.

7. James C. Jackson, “Diphtheria, Its Causes, Treatment and Cure,” R&H, XXI (February 17, 1863), 89–91; James White, “Western Tour,” R&H, XVI (November 13, 1860), 204. Jackson reprinted White’s endorsement in the Laws of Life, VI (April, 1863), 64. How the Whites ran across Jackson’s essay, first published in Penn Yan, New York, is not certain; it is possible that the newspaper clipping was sent to them by Elder John N. Andrews, an Adventist evangelist then preaching in western New York, who caught diphtheria during the 1863 epidemic and who was among the earliest sabbatarians to visit Our Home. See Diary of Mrs. Angeline Stevens Andrews, entry for February 17, 1863 (C. Burton Clark Collection).


10. J. H. Waggoner offered a similar interpretation in 1866. The Adventist contribution to health reform was not adding new knowledge, he said, but making it “an essential part of present truth, to be received with the blessing of God, or rejected at our peril.” Waggoner, “Present Truth,” R&H, XXVIII (August 7, 1866), 76–77.


15. EGW, *Spiritual Gifts* (1864), pp. 120–51. The similarities between Ellen White and L. B. Coles can be seen in the following passages taken from EGW, *Spiritual Gifts* (1864), and Coles, *Philosophy of Health* (43rd ed.; Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1855):

EGW, p. 128: Tobacco is a poison of the most deceitful and malignant kind, having an exciting, then a paralyzing influence upon the nerves of the body.

EGW, p. 129: The whole system under the influence of these stimulants [tea and coffee] often becomes intoxicated. And to just that degree that the nervous system is excited by false stimulants, will be the prostration which will follow after the influence of the exciting cause has abated.

EGW, p. 133: I was shown that more deaths have been caused by drug-taking than from all other causes combined. If there was in the land one physician in the place of thousands, a vast amount of premature mortality would be prevented. Multitudes of physicians, and multitudes of drugs, have cursed the inhabitants of the earth, and have carried thousands and tens of thousands to untimely graves.

Coles, p. 84: [Tobacco’s] first influence is felt upon the nervous system. It excites and then deadens nervous susceptibility.

Coles, p. 79: [Tea] is a direct, diffusible, and active stimulant. Its effects are very similar to those of alcoholic drinks, except that of drunkenness. . . . Like alcohol, it increases, beyond its healthy and natural action, the whole animal and mental machinery; after which there comes a reaction—a corresponding languor and debility.

Coles, p. 207: It has been my settled conviction, for many years, as before stated, that there is more damage than good done with medicine . . . it has been, for many years, my belief that the standard of health and longevity of our land would now be far above its present position, if there had never been a single physician or a single drug in it. . . . Dr. Johnson says: “I declare my conscientious opinion . . . that if there were not a single physician, surgeon, apothecary, chemist, druggist, or drug, on the face of the earth, there would be less sickness and less mortality than now.”
REFERENCES

Compare also Ellen White with Coles, The Beauties and Deformities of Tobacco-Using (Rev. ed.; Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1855):

EGW, p. 126: [Tobacco] affects the brain and benumbs the sensibilities, so that the mind cannot clearly discern spiritual things.

Coles, p. 97: [Tobacco-users] so deaden the natural sensibilities of body and mind, by using it, that they are not immediately susceptible of the impulses of the Holy Spirit, by which alone a true spirit of devotion and religious enjoyment are induced.

19. “Two Important Books on Health,” Voice of the Prophets, IV (January, 1863), 16. If James White did see an advertisement in the Voice of the Prophets in September, 1863, this was undoubtedly the one. In an attempt to harmonize the statements of James and Ellen White, Ron Graybill of the White Estate has suggested “that James called her attention to the ad in Voice of the Prophets during their stay in Boston in September of 1863 and stated to her that he had ordered these books. She could easily have assumed that he meant that he had ordered them on that occasion—September of 1863—when in fact he had ordered them earlier.” (Ron Graybill to the author, March 11, 1975.) This explanation raises the question of why James made no effort to correct Ellen’s wrong impression when the true sequence of events was so important an issue.
20. James White to Ira Abbey, December 12, 1863 (White Estate); J. C. Jackson, “Which Will You Have, Hoops or Health?” R&H, XXII (October 27, 1863), 176. Although James White was editor of the Review and Herald in 1863, he was traveling in the East when Jackson’s article appeared in October. During the second half of 1863 the Review and Herald carried several other articles on health reform that Ellen White probably read before writing out what she had seen in her June 5 vision: “Keep Your Teeth Clean,” R&H, XXII (July 28, 1863); Dio Lewis, “How to Prevent Colds,” R&H, XXII (August 4, 1863), 75; Lewis, “Eating when Sick,” R&H, XXII (August 11, 1863), 86-87; Lewis, “Talks about Health: A Word to My Fat Friends,” R&H, XXII (August 25, 1863), 98-99; W. T. Vail, “Eating and Sleeping,” R&H, XXIII (December 8, 1863), 11.
22. EGW, “Our Late Experience,” R&H, XXVII (February 27, 1866), 97; EGW, Spiritual Gifts (1864), pp. 151-53; Dores E. Robinson, The

23. R. F. Cottrell, “‘Oh, Yes, I See It Is So,’” HR, I (February, 1867), 105. For what it meant to be an Adventist health reformer, see the scores of testimonials in the early volumes of the Health Reformer.


26. Jackson to White, August 13, 1863; Diary of Mrs. Andrews; James White, “‘Eastern Tour,’” R&H, XXIV (November 22, 1864), 205; EGW to Edson and Willie White, June 13, 1865 (W-3-1865, White Estate). A search of the Dansville Advertiser and the Herald for 1864 and 1865 turned up no mention of the Whites. Mr. William D. Conklin, of Dansville, kindly assisted me in going through these newspapers.

27. Adelia P. Patten to Sister Lockwood, September 15, 1864 (White Estate).


29. EGW to Bro. and Sister Lockwood, September [14], 1864.

30. Adelia P. Patten to Sister Lockwood, September 15, 1864.

31. Ibid., Ellen was not the first visitor to be disturbed by Jackson’s advocacy of “worldly” amusements. The Rev. John D. Barnes, a Union chaplain who recuperated at Our Home in the summer of 1862, recalled
being approached by “a delegation of long faced very serious looking men,” who wanted him to sign a petition protesting the dancing and card playing. He refused, to Jackson’s great delight. John D. Barnes, MS Autobiographical Memoir (Huntington Library, San Marino, California). This document was brought to my attention by Wm. Frederick Norwood.


34. EGW, How to Live, No. 1, pp. 31–51.

35. EGW, “Questions and Answers,” p. 260; John H. Kellogg, autobiographical memoir, October 21, 1938; “Interview between George W. Amador, Eld. A. C. Bourdeau, and Dr. J. H. Kellogg, October 7, 1907,” and J. H. Kellogg to E. S. Ballenger, January 15, 1929 (Ballenger-Mote Papers). In her How to Live essays Ellen White incorporated some ideas that had recently appeared in the Review and Herald. Compare, for example, her comments on the necessity of clothing the arms of babies (No. 5, p. 68) with Dio Lewis, “Talks about Health,” p. 203; or her advice on two meals a day (No. 1, pp. 55–57) with [W. W. Hall], “Eating and Sleeping,” p. 195.


37. General Conference Committee, “God’s Present Dealings with His People,” R&H, XXVII (April 17, 1866), 156; U[riah] S[mith], “Notes by the Way. No. 2,” ibid., XXVI, (October 3, 1865), 140.


39. R&H, XXVI (September 19, 1865), 128; Smith, “Notes by the Way,” p. 140.

40. EGW, “Our Late Experience,” R&H, XXVII (February 20, 1866),
89–91, (February 27, 1866), 97–99; EGW to Edson White, October 19, 1865 (W-7-1865, White Estate); EGW, “The Sickness and Recovery of Elder James White,” *circa* 1867 (MS-1-1867); D. T. Bourdeau, “At Home Again,” *R&H*, XXVI (November 14, 1865), 192.


44. EGW, “Our Late Experience,” p. 97.

45. Ibid., pp. 90, 97–98; EGW, “The Sickness and Recovery of Elder James White”; EGW to Brother Aldrich, August 20, 1867 (A-8-1867, White Estate). On amusements at Dansville, see also Smith, “Notes by the Way. No. 3,” p. 164. Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, described the dances at Our Home in a letter to Jere Learned, July 15, 1876: “There is an amusement society, and one of its features is a beautiful dance once a week from 5 till 8 P.M. Piano and violin music—no round dances—but cotillions and all dances which are *not* injurious, and the prettiest and most elegant dancers in the hall are from among the help.” Quoted in William D. Conklin, *The Jackson Health Resort* (Dansville, N.Y.: Privately distributed by the author, 1971), p. 184.


47. EGW, “Our Late Experience,” pp. 91, 98; EGW, “The Health Reform,” *Testimonies*, I, 485–93; EGW, “Health and Religion,” ibid., I, 565. Ellen White’s Christmas vision in Rochester was truly seminal. In addition to revealing the prospects for James White’s recovery and the need for an Adventist water cure, it prompted testimonies on subjects as diverse as the taking of usury, erroneous political views, Sabbath observance, the Adventist cause in Maine, the duties of parents, the business interests of ministers, and the spiritual condition of several brethren and sisters. See *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1963), III, 2980.


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5. The Western Health Reform Institute

3. EGW to Bro. and Sister Lockwood, September [14] 1864 (L-6-1864, White Estate); [Uriah Smith], “The Health-Reform Institute,” R&H, XXVIII (July 10, 1866), 48. The Review and Herald was outspokenly critical of President Andrew Johnson, whom they openly called “a rebel and traitor.” See R&H, XXVII (February 27, 1866), 104.
9. “Items for the Month,” HR, I (February, 1867), 112; Diary of Mrs. Angeline S. Andrews, entry for January 2, 1865 (C. Burton Clark Collection); EGW to Edson White, November 9, 1867 (W-14-1867, White Estate); R. T. Trall, “Visit to Battle Creek, Mich.,” HR, III (July, 1868), 14. The original Institute staff seems to have been composed of three “doctors”: Lay, Lamson, and John F. Byington, son of the first General Conference president. William Russell joined the staff in the fall of 1867; and in the next few years J. H. Ginley and Mary A. Chamberlain also connected with the institute. Except for the two women, who briefly at-
tended Trall’s hydropathic college (Mrs. Chamberlain at some time in her life also graduated from the homeopathy course at the University of Michigan), none of these individuals seems to have had formal medical training. For obituaries of Byington, Chamberlain, and Ginley, see RH, XL (June 25, 1872), 5; ibid., LXXVII (April 17, 1900), 256; and ibid., LXXXI (February 4, 1904), 23.

10. “Fourth Annual Session of General Conference,” RH, XXVIII (May 22, 1866), 196; “Prospectus of the Health Reformer,” ibid., XXVIII (June 5, 1866), 8. For Lay’s “Health” series, see ibid., XXVI (July 4, 1865), 37; (July 25, 1865), 61; (August 15, 1865), 85; (September 12, 1865), 117.


15. [Uriah Smith], “The Health Reform Institute,” ibid., XXIX (January 29, 1867), 90; Uriah Smith to EGW, February 5, 1867 (White Estate).

16. Ibid.


20. Ibid., I, 559–64; D. M. Canright, Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted (Nashville: B. C. Goodpasture, 1953), pp. 77–78. Canright errs in implying that Mrs. White wrote Testimony No. 12 to justify her husband’s tearing down of the sanitarium building.

21. E. S. Walker to James White, September 24, 1867 (White Estate). In this letter the institute directors offer to buy some property from the Whites for six thousand dollars at 7 percent interest if James White will agree “to cooperate with us in raising means to pay for your place and to erect and inclose the new building at as early a day as possible.”
REFERENCES

22. “Interview between Geo. W. Amadon, Eld. A. C. Bourdeau, and Dr. J. H. Kellogg, October 7, 1907,” p. 88 (Ballenger-Mote Papers). The “old-timer” mentioned was Amadon. James White may not have been consulted about plans for the new building, and he was absent the morning general conference delegates voted to enlarge the institute; but he did attend the 1867 general conference session and certainly was aware of plans for a new building before construction began. James White, “The Conference,” R&H, XXIX (May 28, 1867), 282; “Business Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” ibid., pp. 283–84.


24. EGW, “The Health Institute,” Testimonies, I, 633–43. For the persistent use of First-day, etc., see the masthead of the Review and Herald.


26. EGW, “The Health Institute,” Testimonies, I, 634; EGW, “The Health Institute,” ibid., III, 165–85; EGW to Dr. and Mrs. Lay, February 13, 1870 (L-30-1870, White Estate); “Second Annual Meeting of the Health Reform Institute,” R&H, XXXI (May 26, 1868), 258; “The Health Reform Institute,” R&H, XXXIII (May 25, 1869), 175; “Health Institute,” R&H, XXXV (May 3, 1870), 160; Gerald Carson, Cornflake Crusade (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1957), p. 82. This was not a happy time for the Whites. Criticism of their conduct reached such proportions that in 1870 the church felt it necessary to publish a 112-page Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: Vindication of Their Moral and Christian Character (Battle Creek: SDA Publishing Assn., 1870), countering charges of misusing funds, illicit sex, and other “shameful slanders.”


T. Trall], "Dress Reform Convention," *HR*, IV (September, 1869), 57. Dr. Jackson had been invited to lecture in Battle Creek in March of 1866, but a death at Dansville forced a cancellation; "Lectures at Battle Creek," *Laws of Life*, IX (March, 1866), 43; and "Going to Battle Creek," ibid., IX (April, 1866), 58.


35. James White to G. I. Butler, July 13, 1874 (White Estate).


37. M. G. Kellogg, memoir dictated to Clara K. Butler, October 21, 1916 (Kellogg Papers, MHC). On Edson's medical aspirations, see the following letters in the White Estate: EGW to Edson White, December 29, 1867 (W-21-1867); EGW to Edson White, June 10, 1869 (W-6-1869); EGW to Edson and Emma White, n.d. (W-14-1872); and EGW to Edson and Willie White, February 6, 1873 (W-6-1873).


REFERENCES

Kellogg's at Bellevue, and the only other health reformer, was Jim Jackson, son of the founder of Our Home; see Kellogg, "My Search for Health," p. 9; and Kellogg to Willie White, March 3, 1875.


42. [J. H. Kellogg], "The Health Institute," HR, X (June, 1875), 192; EGW, Testimony for the Physicians and Helpers of the Sanitarium (n.d. [1880?]), p. 8; J. H. Kellogg, autobiographical memoir, October 21, 1938 (Kellogg Papers, MHC); [James] W[hit]e, "Home Again," ibid., XLIX (May 24, 1877), 164.

43. "Interview between Geo. W. Amason, Eld. A. C. Bourdeau, and Dr. J. H. Kellogg," pp. 88–89; EGW, Testimony for the Physicians and Helpers of the Sanitarium, pp. 52–55; Schwarz, "John Harvey Kellogg: American Health Reformer," p. 177. When this testimony was reprinted for general circulation, Kellogg's name and several criticisms were deleted; see EGW, Testimonies, IV, 571–74.


6. Short Skirts and Sex

2. EGW, "The Reform Dress," Ibid., I, 525. Ellen White was referring here to her own reform dress as opposed to the "so-called reform dress" of Harriet Austin and others.
5. James C. Jackson, How to Treat the Sick without Medicine (Dans-
costume, see also William D. Conklin, The Jackson Health Resort (Dans-
the distinction between the Bloomer and the American costume, see
Harriet N. Austin, “Various Things,” Laws of Life, IX (August, 1866),
115. In 1852 Mrs. M. Angeline Merritt suggested naming the reform dress
the “American dress”; see her Dress Reform, Practically and Physiologi-


6. Stanton and Others, History of Woman Suffrage, I, 470; “Patrick
vs. ‘The Am. Costume’,” Herald of Health, V (June, 1865), 155; Kraditor,
Up from the Pedestal, p. 124; Lutz, Created Equal, p. 86; Robert E.
Riegel, “Women’s Clothes and Women’s Rights,” American Quarterly,
XV (Fall, 1963), 394. Susan Anthony is quoted in Sinclair, Emancipation
of the American Woman, p. 106. Elizabeth Stanton’s comment is found in
Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in
the United States (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 84. On dress reform in
the West, see “Dress Reform Pic-Nic,” HR, IV (November, 1869), 84; and
Mrs. S. W. Dodds, “Dress Reform and Health Reform in Kansas,” HR, IV
(February, 1870), 157–58.

7. EGW, Spiritual Gifts; My Christian Experience, Views and Labors
(Battle Creek: James White, 1860), pp. 13–14; EGW, “A Question An-
swered,” Testimonies, I, 251–52; EGW to Mary Loughborough, June 6,
1861 (L-5-1861, White Estate). Mrs. White shortly thereafter condemned
the view that “oddity and carelessness in dress” were virtuous; EGW,

Dress,” Testimonies, I, 424–25. Marietta V. Cook was wearing and promot-
ing the American costume by early 1863; see “A Good Beginning,” Laws
of Life, VI (March, 1863), 43.

spiritualism in America, see R. Laurence Moore, “Spiritualism and
Science: Reflections on the First Decade of the Spirit Rappings,” Ameri-
can Quarterly, XXIV, (October, 1972), 474–500; and Moore, “Spiritual-
Row, 1974), 79–103.

10. EGW to Bro. and Sister Lockwood, September [14], 1864 (L-6-
1864, White Estate). James White expressed serious doubts about the
American costume shortly after arriving at Dansville, but by the time he
departed he reportedly told his hosts: “If we cannot produce a better
style of dress reform than that worn here, you may expect to see my wife
dressed in your style.” James White to Mrs. Myrta E. Steward, September
6, 1864 (White Estate); H. E. Carver, Mrs. E. G. White’s Claims to Divine
Inspiration Examined (2nd ed.; Marion, Iowa: Advent and Sabbath Advo-

11. EGW, Health: Or, How to Live (Battle Creek: SDA Publishing