

ELLEN G. WHITE—

Racist or Champion of Equality?

(See editorial, "A Plea for Objectivity," page 11.)

HOW does one resolve the apparent contradiction in the following statements from Ellen G. White?

"Christ came to this earth with a message of mercy and forgiveness. He laid the foundation for a religion by which Jew and Gentile, black and white, free and bond, are linked together in one common brotherhood, recognized as equal in the sight of God."¹

"The colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people."²

Was Mrs. White inconsistent? Was her true position equality of race? If so, why did she urge in volume nine of the *Testimonies*, "Let the white believers and the colored believers assemble in separate places of worship"?³

In order to understand Mrs. White's statements urging segregation at the turn of the century, it is necessary to recreate their context. What were her racial views as a whole? What were Adventist contemporaries saying about race? What were the changing social and political conditions of nineteenth and early twentieth-century America? Finding answers to these questions leads one to conclude that to her contemporaries Mrs. White could never have appeared to be a racist. In fact, throughout much of her life, radicals on race relations would have assumed that she was one of their own.

Today, denouncing slavery and its advocates does not seem revolutionary. But the majority did not oppose slavery in midnineteenth-century America. So many good and regular members of the Methodist denomination condoned slavery that the church split in 1844. A year later, slavery divided the Baptists. These denominations provided most of the

members for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which at that time was working largely in the North. In 1857 the New Side Presbyterians could no longer agree on the Christian attitude toward slavery. So many Christians defended slavery in 1861 that three denominations were torn apart: Old Side Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians.

While many fine Christians defended slavery or insisted that it was an economic or political issue, certainly not a moral one, Mrs. White called slavery "a sin of the darkest dye."⁴ Furthermore, she demanded its public defenders be disfellowshipped from the Advent Movement.

A Strong Position

"You have never looked upon slavery in the right light, and your views of this matter have thrown you on the side of the Rebellion, which was stirred up by Satan and his host. Your views of slavery cannot harmonize with the sacred, important truths for this time. You must yield your views or the truth. Both cannot be cherished in the same heart, for they are at war with each other. . . . Unless you undo what you have done, it will be the duty of God's people to publicly withdraw their sympathy and fellowship from you, in order to save the impression which must go out in regard to us as a people. We must let it be known that we have no such ones in our fellowship, that we will not walk with them in church capacity."⁵

At a time when slavery was an open question for Americans, Mrs. White declared that Adventists holding pro-slavery views were anathema.

It would have been possible to denounce slavery in the strong terms Mrs. White used and still have stopped short of being an abolitionist. In fact,

Adventists were abolitionists at a time when most opponents of slavery were advocating other solutions. Some who attacked the existing system of slavery advocated dispersion of blacks throughout the country. Others proposed separating American blacks into "Africanized states" in the deep South.⁶ Until 1833, most opponents of slavery supported colonization of American blacks in Africa, Central America, or the Caribbean Islands. At different times in its history, the American Colonization Society boasted among its officers such men as Secretary of the Treasury William H. Crawford, Speaker of the House of Representatives Henry Clay, and former Presidents James Madison and James Monroe.⁷ President Lincoln called a group of free blacks to the White House in August, 1862, and urged them to support colonization. Right to the end of the war, he thought colonization would help relieve the racial problem in America.⁸ A further indication that abolition was not synonymous with antislavery sentiment was the fact that the official position of the Republican Party was not abolition of slavery but its nonextension into new States.⁹

Even in the North, abolitionists were considered extremists. A few days after Pennsylvania Hall, built especially for abolitionist meetings in Philadelphia, was first opened, a pro-slavery mob burned it to the ground. William Lloyd Garrison, commemorated today by a statue in Boston, was mobbed by Bostonians trying to tar and feather him for abolitionist agitation. As one historian has said, "To be an abolitionist in Boston, Philadelphia, or Cincinnati meant courting social ostracism, business ruin, and physical assault."¹⁰ North and South, abolitionists were considered almost as extreme as demonstra-

By ROY BRANSON

tors in American cities today. "The abolitionist movement never became the major channel of Northern anti-slavery sentiment. It remained in 1860 what it had been in the 1830's: the small but not still voice of radical reform."¹

Among the variety of antislavery groups, Adventists identified themselves with the radical abolitionist minority. Sojourner Truth, one of the black heroines of abolition, visited a Millerite camp meeting in 1843, though she did not agree with them. Years later she settled in Battle Creek. There she had Seventh-day Adventist friends, and early Battle Creek College students often visited her. At least one edition of her biography was printed by the Review and Herald for its author, Frances Titus.

Joseph Bates, the former sea captain who had so much to do with Adventists' accepting the Sabbath, first supported the American Colonization Society, later helped found the abolitionist society in his home town.²

Even within this extreme reformist segment of American society, some were more radical than others, and Adventists stood with the most activist. "Abolitionists were also divided on the matter of devoting time and energy to assisting fugitive slaves."³ Prominent Adventists had no such qualms. John Preston Kellogg, the father of John Harvey Kellogg and W. K. Kellogg, was one of the incorporators of the Seventh-day Adventist publishing association and a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the end of his life. He used his farm in Michigan to harbor slaves fleeing their former owners.⁴ John Byington, the first president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, had earlier left the Meth-

odist Episcopal Church because it did not take a stand against slavery. At his farm in Buck's Bridge, New York, he maintained a station of the Underground Railroad, illegally transporting fugitive slaves from the South to Canada.⁵

Anyone who thinks these men were aberrations with the Adventist Church should remember that Mrs. White herself said that "the law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey."⁶ While even some of the abolitionists refused to go so far as breaking the fugitive slave law, Mrs. White advocated disobeying this Federal statute. She did this on the basis that this law conflicted "with the word and law of God." She may have had in mind Deuteronomy 23:15: "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee."

Lincoln's Position

When the North elected Lincoln, the fugitive slave law was still the law of the land. In his first inaugural address Lincoln went out of his way to promise that he would enforce that law specifically. He also reminded the country that they had not voted for abolition. Quoting from his own campaign speech, he pledged anew that "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so."⁷

Even when war broke out, Lincoln refused to proclaim emancipation. In fact, he ordered Union officers to stop harboring fugitive slaves escaping to advancing Union armies. Abolition leaders such as Wendell Phillips, Henry Sumner, and William Garrison exploded into attacks on Lincoln and his administration.⁸

Mrs. White, too, complained that "thousands have been induced to enlist with the understanding that this war was to exterminate slavery; but now that they are fixed, they find that they have been deceived, that the object of this war is not to abolish slavery."⁹

Not only had American citizens been alienated, but potential allies as well. "I was shown that if the object of this war had been to exterminate slavery, then, if desired, England would have helped the North. But England fully understands the existing feelings in the Government, and that the war is not to do away with slavery, but merely to preserve the Union."¹⁰ Failure of the North to declare emancipation of slaves its goal had not only led to the undermining of morale and loss of allies but even

worse, to outright subversion. "There are commanding officers who are in sympathy with the rebels. While they are desirous of having the Union preserved, they despise those who are anti-slavery. . . . It seems impossible to have the war conducted successfully, for many in our own ranks are continually working to favor the South, and our armies have been repulsed and unmercifully slaughtered on account of the management of these proslavery men."¹¹

Mrs. White's statement could most likely have been applicable to General George B. McClellan, General-in-Chief of the Union Army, who was persistently attacked by abolitionists for not strongly opposing slavery, and for not executing the war more vigorously.¹²

Mrs. White rose to the heights of indignation when Northern leaders, indifferent to the cause of abolition, returned slaves to their former owners and simultaneously issued pious proclamations for national fasts and prayer. Such hypocrisy must be condemned. "I saw that these national fasts were an insult to Jehovah. He accepts of no such fasts. . . .

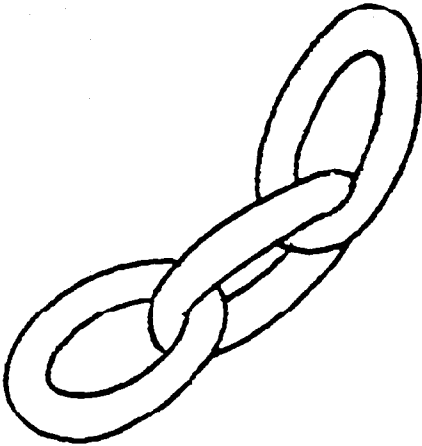
"Great men, professing to have human hearts, have seen the slaves almost naked and starving, and have abused them, and sent them back to their cruel masters and hopeless bondage. . . . They have deprived them of the liberty and free air which heaven has never denied them, and then left them to suffer for food and clothing. In view of all this, a national fast is proclaimed! Oh, what an insult to Jehovah!"¹³

Clearly, Mrs. White stood with that abolitionist minority in the North which condemned those who hesitated or equivocated on the emancipation issue. ++

(Continued next week)

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- ⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 339.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 359, 360.
- ⁶ Robert F. Durdan, "Ambiguities in the Anti-Slavery Crusade of the Republican Party," *The Anti-Slavery Vanguard* (1965), pp. 375, 376.
- ⁷ P. J. Stauderaus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1864* (1961), p. 281.
- ⁸ Durdan, *op. cit.*, p. 365.
- ⁹ Frank Thistlethwaite, *America and the Atlantic Community* (1959), p. 116.
- ¹⁰ Martin Duherman, "Northern Response to Slavery," *The Anti-Slavery Vanguard*, p. 395.
- ¹¹ Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (1868), pp. 232, 233, 236-238.
- ¹² Larry Gara, "Who Was an Abolitionist?" *The Anti-Slavery Vanguard*, p. 39.
- ¹³ *SDA Encyclopedia* (1966), pp. 650, 1060.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- ¹⁵ *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 202.
- ¹⁶ Roy P. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 4 (1953), p. 243.
- ¹⁷ Franklin, *op. cit.*, p. 273.
- ¹⁸ *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 234.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.
- ²¹ C. Ransdall, *Lincoln the President*, vol. 2 (1943), pp. 108-125, especially pp. 123, 124.
- ²² *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 257.



Slavery and Prophecy

By ROY BRANSON

MANY prominent Adventist leaders held views on slavery similar to those of Mrs. White. Through the Civil War years, such revered names as James White, Uriah Smith, and J. N. Andrews used the pages of the *REVIEW AND HERALD* to attack laggards who did not endorse the emancipation position. An example is Uriah Smith's explicit criticism of President Lincoln. Tacitly acknowledging his own position to be radical, Smith censured the President for "following his present conservative, not to say suicidal, policy." With emancipation still not official, Smith's hostility toward Lincoln was unrelenting.

"He has to stand up against the 'enthusiasm for freedom' which reigns in nearly twenty millions of hearts in the free North, and against the prayers of four millions of oppressed and suffering slaves. If he continues to resist all these, in refusing to take those steps which a sound policy, the principles of humanity, and the salvation of the country, demand, it must be from an infatuation akin to that which of old brought Pharaoh to an untimely end." Smith could not know that Lincoln's assassination would, in retrospect, make his analogy downright grisly.

When the North was losing major battles, Mrs. White complained because "the rebellion was handled so carefully, so slowly." Later, when the North was consistently winning, her husband, James, jubilantly wrote in the *REVIEW* that "appropriate retribution seems to be at last overtaking the fearfully guilty parties who have for long years held multitudes

of their fellow beings in bondage."¹

Introducing a reprinted news article about the exploits of former slaves, now in the Union Army, who pursued slave owners into North Carolina swamps, Elder White asked, "What could be more appropriate than that the slaves themselves should be the instruments used to punish the merciless tyrants who have so long ground them to the dust." He was convinced that "justice, though seemingly long delayed, is nevertheless following with relentless steps upon the heels of the oppressor."²

In the Forefront of Reconstruction

After the war, former abolitionists were in the forefront of Reconstruction. Such men as Thaddeus Stevens in the House of Representatives, Charles Sumner and Benjamin Wade in the Senate, and Edwin Stanton in the Cabinet, came to be known as radical Republicans because they "seemed bent on engineering a sweeping reformation of southern society."³

A recent history of the period insists that idealism was part of the motivation for Reconstruction, and that "a genuine desire to help the Negro, was one of the mainsprings of radicalism."⁴ Radical Senators and Congressmen led in passing civil rights laws to ensure that blacks would be able to vote and enjoy full civil liberties. Some radicals went farther. "They believed that it would be essential to give the Negroes not only civil and political rights but some initial economic assistance as well."⁵

It is interesting to note that during the height of Reconstruction, 1867-1877, quotations in the *REVIEW* con-

cerning national affairs seem to have been taken exclusively from well-known, radical Republican publications. The attempt to impeach President Andrew Johnson was reported in detail.⁶

More significantly, when Mrs. White later addressed herself to the needs of the South, she lamented the miserliness and briefness of the Government's concern for the emancipated black man. She endorsed the humanitarian ideas of the most progressive wing of the radical Republicans—those who felt an obligation to help the black man politically, legally, and economically.

"Much might have been accomplished by the people of America if adequate efforts in behalf of the freedmen had been put forth by the Government and by the Christian churches immediately after the emancipation of the slaves. Money should have been used freely to care for and educate them at the time they were so greatly in need of help. But the Government, after a little effort, left the Negro to struggle, unaided, with his burden of difficulties."⁷

Undoubtedly, the "little effort" Mrs. White commended took place during the brief period from 1867 to 1877 when Reconstruction Governments included blacks, and some improvement was achieved in education, medical care, and welfare. She may also have referred to activities of the Freedman's Bureau. Organized and funded by a Federal Government dominated by radicals, it operated for only four years, until 1869. During that time the bureau gave medical care to a million people, spent \$5 million for black schools, supervised

labor contracts for black workers, and administered special courts to protect freedmen's civil rights." Mrs. White felt more should have been done, but Reconstruction ended too soon for the radicals to accomplish their sweeping reforms.

Within a little more than a decade after the Civil War, eight of the Southern States had voted out of office political leaders supporting radical Republican policies. In the elections of 1876 Democrats claimed victory in the remaining three States of the Confederacy—South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana. The spring of the following year, President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew the last Federal troops from the South. Reconstruction had ended. The Republican coalition of blacks, Northern carpetbaggers, and white Southern turncoats had lost its dominance. Southerners called the new era Redemption.

Some persistent comparisons between Mrs. White (and other Adventist writers) and abolitionists and radical Republicans may leave the impression that Adventists merely adopted the outlook on national problems they found around them: that their religion had little to do with their views on social and moral issues. But this is far from the truth. If anyone had told the founding fathers of our denomination that their attitudes toward race had nothing to do with their theology, they would have shaken their heads in disbelief. For Ellen and James White, Uriah Smith, and J. N. Andrews, proper attitudes toward race relations were part of a true understanding of the Bible and its doctrines.

Emancipation an Official Fact

Emancipation was an official fact January 1, 1863. For the next three months 12 issues of the REVIEW began with front-page excerpts from Luther Lee's *Slavery Examined in the Light of the Bible*. The book went through controversial texts in the Old and New Testaments, arguing strenuously that the Bible, far from condoning slavery, condemned it.

Both Uriah Smith and James White related slavery to prophecy. Just as the United States was divided into two camps, so the lamb in Revelation 13:11 had two horns. Oppression of blacks in America was more significant evidence that the beast in Revelation 13 was the United States. Revelation describes a beast that looks like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon. James White made the ap-

"Its [United States'] outward appearance and profession is the most pure, peaceful, and harmless, possible. It professes to guarantee to every man liberty and the pursuit of happiness in temporal things, and freedom in matters of religion: yet about four millions of human beings are held by the Southern States of this nation in the most abject and cruel bondage and servitude, and the theological bodies of the land have adopted a creed-power, which is as inexorable and tyrannical as is possible to bring to bear upon the consciences of men. Verily with all its lamblike appearance and profession, it has the heart and voice of a dragon; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."¹

Uriah Smith pointed to the "white-washed villainy of many of the pulpits of our land," pulpits supporting slavery; evidence that "the dragonic spirit of this nation has of late years developed itself in accordance with the prophecy in Revelation 13:11."² Far from being a purely secular concern, Adventists thought race relations were intimately involved with a proper understanding of prophecy and last-day events.

Mrs. White also saw slavery as one of the signs of the times. She cited the defense of slavery by ecclesiastical institutions as proof that churches in America were part of apostate Babylon. "God will restrain His anger but a little longer. His anger burns against this nation, and especially against the religious bodies who have sanctioned, and have themselves engaged in this terrible merchandise."³ God will remember the suffering slave and others who are oppressed. "The names of such are written in blood, crossed with stripes, and flooded with agonizing, burning tears of suffering. God's anger will not cease until He has caused the land of light to drink the dregs of the cup of His fury, and until He has rewarded unto Babylon double. . . . All the sins of the slave will be visited upon the master."⁴

It would have been possible for Adventists to have opposed slavery, seen its evil as one of the signs of the end, and still not preached equality between blacks and whites. By the time of the collapse of Reconstruction and the birth of Redemption, when Mrs. White launched her appeals for the Southern work, even radical Republican papers assumed the inferiority of the black man. "It was quite common in the 'eighties and 'nineties to find in the *Nation*, *Harper's Weekly*, the *North American Review*, or the *Atlantic Monthly* Northern liberals and former abolitionists mouthing the shibboleths of white supremacy regard-

ing the Negro's innate inferiority, shiftlessness, and hopeless unfitness for full participation in the white man's civilization."⁵ During this same period of the eighties and nineties, Mrs. White was adamant: blacks and whites are equal.

In addition to eschatology, or the study of last-day events, Mrs. White based her discussion of race on two other doctrines: redemption and creation. Christ's atoning and reconciling work meant that all men were saved, and none were more saved than others: "Christ came to this earth with a message of mercy and forgiveness. He laid the foundation for a religion by which Jew and Gentile, black and white, free and bond, are linked together in one common brotherhood, recognized as equal in the sight of God."⁶ For Mrs. White, Christ had brought men into a new relationship where each was equally related to Him. Christians, therefore, must look on other Christians as equals.

But what about those who were not Christians? If men were not converted, if they were not within the brotherhood created by Christ's redeeming life, could they properly relate as superior to inferior, master to slave? "No," was Mrs. White's emphatic response. The doctrine of creation prevents it. God wants whites who relate to black persons to remember "their common relationship to us by creation and by redemption, and their right to the blessings of freedom."⁷ Elsewhere she insisted that "man is God's property by creation and redemption."⁸

It is significant that Mrs. White did not support equality simply on the basis of redemption. Even if men were unconverted, the doctrine of creation means that all men, whether they acknowledge Christ or not, belong to God. Where man's equality and freedom are violated, it is not God acting, but man's sinful nature. "Prejudices, passions, Satanic attributes, have revealed themselves in men as they have exercised their powers against their fellow men."⁹ ++

(Concluded next week)

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- ³ *Review and Herald*, Jan. 26, 1864, p. 68.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- ⁵ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (1965), p. 16. Stampp is one of what is now the dominant school of Reconstruction historians called "revisionists." They have consciously attempted to correct earlier writers who interpreted Reconstruction as totally evil and oppressive.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- ⁸ Farrell Gilliland II, "Seventh-day Adventist Sentiment Toward Reconstruction After the Civil War," Andrews University unpublished manuscript, 1963.
- ⁹ *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 205.
- ¹⁰ Stampp, *op. cit.*, pp. 134, 135.
- ¹¹ "Thoughts on Revelation," XXIII, *Review and Herald*, Nov. 11, 1862, p. 188.

¹² Note before "The Degeneracy of the United States," *ibid.*, June 17, 1862, p. 22; cf. note before "The Cause and Cure of the Present Civil War," *ibid.*, Aug. 19, 1862, p. 89.

¹³ *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, p. 191.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 192, 193.

¹⁵ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1966), p. 70; cf. Vincent P. Desantis' *Republicans Face the Southern Question* (1959), pp. 24-52.

¹⁶ *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 225.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁸ Letter 80-a, 1895, to J. E. White and wife, Aug. 16, 1895.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Many Thousand Gone

No more peck o' corn for me,
 No more, no more,
 No more peck o' corn for me,
 Many thousand gone.

No more driver's lash for me,
 No more, no more,
 No more driver's lash for me,
 Many thousand gone.

No more pint o' salt for me,
 No more, no more,
 No more pint o' salt for me,
 Many thousand gone.

No more hundred lash for me,
 No more, no more,
 No more hundred lash for me,
 Many thousand gone.

No more mistress' call for me,
 No more, no more,
 No more mistress' call for me,
 Many thousand gone.

Ellen G. White—Racist or Champion of Equality?—3

The Crisis of the NINETIES

By ROY BRANSON

WITH Adventists advocating views similar to those of the most active champions of black men's rights from before the Civil War through Reconstruction, with Mrs. White providing firm theological underpinning for equality among races, how can one explain her statements such as these, that endorse segregation?

"Let the colored people work chiefly for those of their own race. . . . The best thing will be to provide the colored people who accept the truth, with places of worship of their own, in which they can carry on their services by themselves. . . . Schools and sanitariums for colored people should be established."¹

"Let white and colored people be labored for in separate, distinct lines."²

In what seems a further reversal of attitudes, Mrs. White, who wanted the Civil War prosecuted more vigorously, now cautioned that "we are not to agitate the color line question, and thus arouse prejudice and bring about a crisis."³

What changed Mrs. White's approach was not her theology. She never retreated from her position that all men are equal in creation and redemption. Nor did she change her ideas as to what was necessary to implement the principle of racial equality. In the early 1890's, long after Reconstruction and the establishment of Democratic, Redemptionist South, Mrs. White addressed the leading men of the General Conference, saying we needed an expanded work in the South. Her plans were similar to those advocated by the radical Republicans 20 years be-

fore. Expanded welfare services were needed to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Sanitariums and schools should be established. As the radicals and other progressive thinkers had insisted, the black man needed jobs. Mrs. White suggested that industries could be started both in and out of cities. Above all, blacks should be taught how to grow crops other than cotton.⁴

The Crisis of the Nineties

Mrs. White's ideas and plans were as bold as ever. What caused her to counsel caution in practice was what one historian has called the "Crisis of the Nineties." The conservatives, Democrats, once again dominant in the South, "persuaded themselves that the crisis of the nineties was as desperate as that of the seventies had been. The South must be redeemed again, and the political ethics of redemption—which justified any means used to achieve the end—were pressed into service."⁵

Many factors contributed to the crisis of the nineties. The North had lost interest in stopping white Southerners from disfranchising the black man. Even liberals felt they should no longer protect Negroes; it was time for Negroes to prove themselves. Republicans discovered that they did not need black voters to win the Presidency. Business interests who had supported even the radicals in the Republican Party decided it was good business to have harmony between Northern and Southern whites.

Branches of the Federal Government were endorsing the idea that too much had been given too fast to

the Negro. By 1898 the Supreme Court had been handing down, for 25 years, a series of opinions progressively limiting the civil rights laws extended to black people during Reconstruction by radical Republican Congresses. In *Plessy v. Ferguson* the Court said, "Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts," and it justified segregation under the "separate but equal doctrine." The capstone was the *Williams v. Mississippi* decision which approved the 1890 Mississippi plan for disfranchising the black voters. Rapidly the entire South erected barriers between the black man and the ballot box. Literacy tests that could be (and were) administered to provide loopholes only for illiterate whites were followed by poll taxes and the white primary system. The effectiveness of this program of the nineties can be measured by the rapid decline of black registered voters in Louisiana. In 1896 there were 130,334 black men registered to vote. By 1904 there were only 1,342—a 99 per cent decrease in eight years.⁶

Economic conditions in the Southern agrarian economy were a fundamental reason for the crisis of the nineties. Depression had hit the farms. "A great restiveness seized upon the populace, a more profound upheaval of economic discontent than had ever moved the Southern people before, more profound in its political manifestations than that which shook them in the Great Depression of the 1930's."⁷

In their frustration the various elements of Southern white society—conservative Democrats who had supported secession, Southerners who

Mrs. White was one of those spiritual leaders who saw Christian duty leading into reform of slavery, as well as other problems, such as temperance, education, and public health.

had collaborated with Reconstruction, and Populists who had at first championed Negro rights even after the start of Redemption had come—all now united in making the black man the scapegoat in order to cure the disunity of the white South.

"If the psychologists are correct in their hypothesis that aggression is always the result of frustration, then the South toward the end of the 'nineties was the perfect cultural seedbed for aggression against the minority race. Economic, political, and social frustrations had pyramided to a climax of social tensions."

Jim Crow segregation laws were one important result of white aggression. Jim Crow laws had begun in 1875 with bars to inter-racial marriages, followed by the construction of some separated schools in 1885. But in the late nineties new Jim Crow laws spread rapidly to trains, streetcars, employment, and hospitals.

At the height of this "Second Redemption" of the nineties, Edson White tried to implement the comprehensive plans for the South proposed earlier by his mother. Having read some of his mother's appeals, Edson responded by constructing a 70-foot steamboat, the *Morning Star*, and sailing it down the Mississippi River. Arriving in Vicksburg, Mississippi, January 10, 1895, Edson made the *Morning Star* a floating headquarters (complete with chapel and print shop) for publishing, evangelistic, educational, and agricultural work among Mississippi black people.

In a thesis written at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and in a subsequent book (to be published soon by the Review and Herald Publishing Association) Ron Graybill has examined Mrs. White's

statements on race and the Mississippi venture of her son Edson. He argues persuasively that Mrs. White's first calls for segregation came after white Adventists, working primarily with blacks in Mississippi river towns, faced looting, shooting, and burning mobs of whites.

On May 25, 1899, Edson reported to his mother in a letter: "Two weeks ago tonight a mob of about 25 white men came to our church at Calmer at about midnight. They brought out Brother Stephenson, our worker, and then looted the church, burning books, maps, charts, etc. They hunted for Brother Casey, our leading colored brother of that place, but he had escaped in time so they did not reach him. They then went to the house of Brother Olvin, called out, and whipped him with a cowhide. I think they would have killed him if it had not been for a friendly white man who ordered them to stop whipping after they had struck a few blows. They did not pay any attention to him at first, but he drew his revolver, and said the next man who struck a blow would hear from him, and then they stopped. During this time they shot at Brother Olvin's wife, and struck her in the leg, but did not hurt her seriously. They took Brother Stephenson to the nearest railway station, put him on the cars, and sent him out of the country. They posted notice on our church forbidding me to return, and forbidding the steamer *Morning Star* to land between Yazoo City and Vicksburg.

"The whole difficulty arose from our efforts to aid the colored people. We had given them clothing where in need, and food to those who were hungry, and taught them some better ideas about farming, introducing different seeds such as peanuts, beans, etc., that bring a high price, and this the whites would not stand."

Only a few days after receiving her son's letter from Mississippi, Mrs. White wrote on June 5, 1899 to A. F. Ballenger on the subject of race. She included sentences repeated verbatim later in her 1908 essay on "The Color Line." "So far as possible, everything that will stir up the race prejudice of the white people should be avoided. There is danger of closing the door so that our white laborers will not be able to work in some places in the south."

Graybill points out that much of the material on race appearing in volume nine was written almost immediately after the Mississippi persecutions. He specifically places in this setting her most puzzling sentence.

"In the case of the statement that 'colored people should not urge that

they be placed on an equality with white people,' it is, as mentioned above, possible to look with some validity to Mississippi and the incidents in Yazoo City and Calmer for historical settings, or at least the general conditions pointed to in the Ballenger letter, for it was evidently some time before 1903 that she first made the statement."¹¹ Elsewhere in his thesis, Graybill analyzes Mrs. White's use of the terms equality and social equality. He devotes a chapter to the meaning of social equality in Mrs. White's time and the manner in which Mrs. White used the phrase.

Historical Background

It cannot be said too emphatically that Mrs. White's statement that "colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people" referred to certain social arrangements—forms of integration—she considered not possible during the crisis of the nineties. She did not want to move too rapidly at that precise moment when Adventists were being physically attacked, but she most definitely was not talking about the possibilities of social and civil integration in the United States of the 1970's. Nor, most assuredly, was she discussing the fundamental nature—physical, mental, or spiritual—of the black man. As we have seen earlier, on that point Mrs. White was definite: all men are equal brothers.

Some may feel that Mrs. White, at the turn of the century, did not extend her basic principle of equality into the life of Southern Adventism with sufficient firmness and boldness. But there should be no doubt as to the answer to the first part of the title for this essay. Concerning the nature of the black man, Mrs. White was no racist.

As to the other half of the title, whether or not Mrs. White vigorously championed equality, the record shows Mrs. White taking two approaches. When Jim Crow laws swept into law books in the nineties, when Adventist ventures into the South were met with whips and torches, Mrs. White urged a moderate stance in race relations. "Shall not His [Christ's] followers, for His sake, be willing to submit to many things unjust and grievous to be borne, in order to help the very ones who need help?"¹²

Mrs. White's counsel was a concession to a specific problem that she hoped would be temporary. Referring to black believers who were to have their own churches, she said, "Let them understand that this plan is to be followed until the Lord shows us a better way."¹³

When at 76 Mrs. White referred to the "color question" and wrote in a 1903 letter that "in different places and under different circumstances, the subject will need to be handled differently," she may well be remembering her earlier role of vigorous leadership in race relations.¹ Forty-one years before, when Mrs. White was 35, she and her young associates leading the Adventist denomination felt that the North was guilty of being too moderate in its pursuit of the war. At that time Mrs. White had complained about "the prosecution of this war—the slow, inefficient moves, the inactivity of our armies." Here was no gradualist, no moderate. Here was a zealous reformer, vivid and full-blown.

Mrs. White was one of those spiritual leaders who saw Christian duty leading into reform of slavery as well as other problems, such as temperance, education, and public health. In midnineteenth-century America revivalism had often led to social reform.

"The militant anti-slavery movement that had developed by 1831 was, in itself, a powerful religious crusade. . . . It was closely connected, in many respects, with movements for peace, women's rights, temperance, and other reform programs that developed simultaneously. In the West, it was connected with the Great Revival, of which Charles G. Finney was the dominant figure, emphasizing the importance of being useful and thus releasing a powerful impulse toward social reform."²

A recent historian of American religion feels that Adventists have dramatically demonstrated how a revivalistic longing for the hereafter can be combined with a concern for the whole man, here and now. Noting that Adventists have built and operated hospitals, publishing houses, homes for the aged, and a complete school system, Winthrop Hudson

quotes approvingly one observer's comment "that seldom while expecting a kingdom of God from heaven has a group worked so diligently for one on earth."³

Today, as we go to Mrs. White for guidance in race relations, let us take seriously her commitment to the basic equality of all men, whatever their race. As we further study her to find clues to the proper pace for implementing equality, let us remember that she supported achievement of racial justice at the earliest moment possible. Judging what is possible is, of course, the nub of the problem. Here the more mellow Mrs. White, advising caution in the crisis of the nineties, should not obscure the younger, more zealous Mrs. White of the Civil War and Reconstruction. If we are to learn one lesson from this brief glance at our denominational forebears, it is that circumstances sometimes dictate moderation in achieving justice, but that equally often, the times demand we be nothing less than militant reformers.

Although he was referring to the issue of slavery, J. N. Andrews accurately described how many of us still avoid our moral obligation to attack the evils confronting us today.

"This sin is snugly stowed away in a certain package which is labeled 'Politics.' They deny the right of their fellow men to condemn any of the favorite sins which they have placed in this bundle; and they evidently expect that any parcel bearing this label, will pass the final custom-house, i.e. the judgment of the great day—without being examined. Should the All-seeing Judge, however, inquire into their connection with this great iniquity, they suppose the following answer will be entirely satisfactory to Him: 'I am not at all censurable for anything said or done by me in behalf of slavery; for O Lord, Thou knowest, it was a part of my politics! Will this plea be offered by any reader of this article?'"⁴

(Concluded)

REFERENCES

- ¹ *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 206, 207.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 279.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, pp. 227, 228; Ms. 24, 1891, "The Work in the Southern Field," quoted in Ron Graybill, "Historical Context of Ellen G. White's Statements Concerning Race Relations" (unpublished thesis, SDA Theological Seminary, 1968), p. 90.
- ⁵ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 1944, p. 78.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ⁹ James Edson White to Ellen G. White, May 22, 1890, quoted in Graybill, p. 50.
- ¹⁰ *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 214.
- ¹¹ Graybill, p. 32; cf. 51n3, p. 53.
- ¹² *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 209.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 207. (Italics supplied.)
- ¹⁴ Letter 165, 1903, Ellen G. White to W. C. White, Aug. 3, 1903, in Graybill, p. 32.
- ¹⁵ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, pp. 244, 245.
- ¹⁶ Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York, 1965), p. 347.
- ¹⁷ J. N. Andrews, "Slavery," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 25, 1844, p. 172.

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