

## THE STORY OF "STEPS TO CHRIST"

### ITS HISTORY

In the summer of 1890, Mrs. Ellen G. White laid plans for the preparation of copy for a new book, setting forth simply and clearly the steps to be taken by the sinner in finding his way to Christ.

The revised and enlarged edition of her book "Great Controversy" published in 1888 was beginning its wonderful career in the hands of our energetic canvassers. Its companion book, "Patriarchs and Prophets," had just come forth from the press. Her book, "Life of Christ," in French, German, Danish and Swedish, was being widely sold by subscription in Europe and America.

The work of supplying articles for the *Review and Herald*, the *Signs of the Times* and the *Youth's Instructor* was going forward with much regularity.

The preparation of copy for "Christian Temperance" was also under way. And the burden pressed upon her heart to bring out for English readers a much fuller presentation of the Life of Christ.

And now there came the appeal for smaller books that might be supplied to the people by evangelists and through the book stores.

She well knew that in her articles published during the years in the *Review* and *Signs*, there were precious thoughts presented which, if brought together in a book, would be very helpful to those seeking the way to salvation!

To her trusted secretary, Miss Marian Davis, she assigned the work of gathering together for consideration articles that had been published, also of selecting from her unpublished manuscripts and letters such passages as would help to make up suitable chapters.

After giving careful study to that which was thus gathered from matter in print and

from manuscripts, Mrs. White felt that some subjects should be treated more fully or more feelingly, and she wrote much new matter.

The work of preparing the copy moved very slowly, because Mrs. White was burdened with the writing of articles for our periodicals, and the writing of individual testimonies and because for several months Miss Davis was her only helper in correcting these for mailing out. Miss Fannie Bolton, who previous to this had for some time acted as a helper in copying letters and preparing articles for the periodicals, was then a student in Ann Arbor.

Not until the summer of 1891 was the copy completed and ready for publication. Then it was presented to a group of ministers and teachers in attendance at the Educational Convention at Harbor Heights, Michigan.

Regarding the articles composing the manuscript, it was stated by Miss Davis that the material for some of the chapters had been gathered from articles published in the *Review* or the *Signs* in former years, and other chapters were prepared from some of the more recent writings of Mrs. White as they were found in manuscript.

The brethren who read the manuscript were deeply impressed regarding its powerful appeal. They were enthusiastic regarding its value, and predicted great things regarding its sale. It was then decided that it should be named "Steps to Christ."

That it might be widely sold in book stores, it was suggested that we secure its publication by some very popular book concern and by Elder George B. Starr it was proposed that it be offered for publication to Fleming H. Revell. This was done and the manuscript was accepted by him. Early in 1892, the first edition appeared. From the very first it was popular

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with our people and with others. Many thousands were sold at seventy-five cents.

After seven years the copyright was purchased from the Revell Company by the Review and Herald, and after Mrs. White returned from Australia, the copyright was transferred to her. Then she gave all rights in all languages other than English to the General Conference Corporation.

Since 1900, this much loved book has been issued in four different bindings in the English language, and has been translated and published in more than fifty different languages. Through its study thousands have been helped in their Christian experience.

#### A CORROBORATIVE STATEMENT

In a letter to a brother in Oklahoma, Elder Starr made a statement, October 9, 1931, as follows:

"Regarding 'Steps to Christ,' I can give you the early history of that precious book.

"In 1891, while living with Sister White, in Petosky, Michigan, she handed me a roll of typewritten matter, stating that Miss Marian Davis had compiled from her writings this matter for a pamphlet on Christian experience and she invited me to read and express my opinion as to its value.

"This manuscript, at this time was not yet named 'Steps to Christ.' I read it with the deepest interest. Many of its striking statements, such as 'In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace, as real as the air which circulates around the globe,' (p. 72) were new to me. I had never seen them before.

"Returning it to Sister White, I stated that I had read a number of pamphlets relating to Christian experience; but none of them, to my mind compared with this; and that I hoped it might be speedily published; and that it ought to be in every language.

"Well, this has been partially accomplished. During the first year, seven editions were printed, and since then it has been translated into over fifty languages. The Lord has made it a blessing to thousands of souls.

"I commended Miss Davis' work. She had searched through manuscripts and articles, and personal letters, written by Sister White, and compiled them, with Sister White's assistance,

into this wonderful book. Miss Davis did not write it, but compiled it from Sister White's writings."

#### ITS AUTHORSHIP

The well known book, "Steps to Christ," was published forty-three years ago. The author, Mrs. E. G. White, has been dead for twenty years. One of her former secretaries, Miss Fannie Bolton, died in 1926. And now, years after the death of these two women, we are asked to believe that they held during their life-time, and died without making it right, a guilty secret, which has just come to light.

In September, 1932, there appeared in a little journal published in Southern California,—a journal which is devoted largely to an effort to discredit the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church, and to cast contempt upon the life work and teachings of Ellen G. White, a statement which has been taken up, without proof, and has been printed in Europe, where it is receiving circulation. The charge, as it appeared in the *Gathering Call* for September, 1932, is as follows:

"Just recently we received the best of evidence that Fannie Bolton wrote 'Steps to Christ' without any dictation or assistance from Mrs. White whatever. It was her product in toto, but was published as Mrs. White's production."

Such a statement, unless it can be unequivocally proved, is libelous. It infers much more than literary theft; for if the charge is true, then Mrs. White was guilty of robbery for every penny received in royalty for this book.

The principal facts regarding the early history of "Steps to Christ" have been related. The presentation of this truthful statement should be sufficient to prove the falsity of the foregoing malicious charge. But to settle the matter conclusively, we shall appeal to the internal evidence.

A careful, comparative study of the contents of the book "Steps to Christ" will confirm conviction that it, like some other books published by Mrs. White during the last years of her life, was largely a compilation from her voluminous writings of former days preserved in letters and manuscripts and in periodical articles, including reports of her discourses, and counsels for leaders in the church.

As the result of a few hours spent in scanning Mrs. White's articles in the files of

the *Review and Herald* for the years 1885, 1886, 1887, and 1890, and the *Signs of the Times* for 1888, there was found the equivalent of twelve pages of source material for the book in question.

For the information of any who may desire to check these findings, we will give page references to "Steps to Christ" (illustrated edition, 1908) and reference to the periodical articles where certain portions were first printed.

"Steps to Christ" Periodical  
Page 9, 10 *Review*, Oct. 27, 1885  
Pages 29, 30, 31 *Review*, Apr. 1, 1890  
Pages 42-46 (an entire chapter)  
*Signs*, Mar. 16, 1888  
Page 57 *Review*, Sept. 21, 1886  
Page 85 *Review*, June 7, 1887  
Pages 126-128 *Review*, Feb. 3, 1885

Besides the material drawn from these periodical articles, the chapter in "Steps to Christ" entitled "Confession" is a rearrangement of subject matter in "Testimonies for the Church" Volume 5, pages 635-641. This was published in 1882. Striking statements regarding the will, near the close of the chapter on "Consecration" are closely paralleled in Volume 5, page 513.

It was in the autumn of 1887, that Miss Bolton was first employed by Mrs. White. Most of the references noted above are earlier than this date. This is sufficient to show the absurdity of the claim that this popular book was written by Fannie Bolton.

Notice further, this amplification of a statement written by Sister White before she ever saw Miss Bolton.

"Many, walking along the path of life, dwell upon their mistakes and failures and disappointments, and their hearts are filled with grief and discouragement. While I was in Europe, a sister who had been doing this, and who was in deep distress, wrote to me, asking for some word of encouragement. The night after I had read her letter, I dreamed that I was in a garden and one who seemed to be the owner of the garden was conducting me through its paths. I was gathering the flowers and enjoying their fragrance, when this sister, who had been walking by my side, called my attention to some unsightly briars that were impeding her way. 'O,' she mourned, 'Is it not a pity that this beautiful garden is spoiled by thorns?' Then the guide said, 'Let the thorns alone, for they will only wound you.

Gather the roses, the lilies, and the pinks.'"—*Steps to Christ*, p. 121.

Compare this with part of a letter written to a sister in Europe, under date of February 6, 1887.

"We want to see you trusting fully in the precious Saviour. He loves you, who gave His life for you, because He valued your soul. I had a dream not long since. I was going through a garden and you were by my side. You kept saying, 'Look at this unsightly shrub, this deformed tree, that poor stunted rose bush. This makes me feel bad, for they seem to represent my life and the relation I stand in before God.' I thought a stately form walked just before us and he said, 'Martha, gather the roses, and the lillies and the pinks, and leave the thistles and unsightly shrubs, and bruise not the soul that Christ has in His choice keeping. I awoke. I slept again, and the same dream was repeated.'—*Letter—35—1887.*

The author of "Steps to Christ" is clearly the one who had this personal experience, and who alone could relate it.

Fannie Bolton, prior to her connection with Mrs. White, had written some articles for a Chicago newspaper. But her mind had not produced literature of a deeply spiritual nature. Any one who gives Fannie Bolton the credit for writing "Steps to Christ," should be able to produce something from her pen comparable to it.

On the other hand, Mrs. White had written thousands of pages of spiritual instruction. She had spoken publicly in hundreds of discourses, dwelling upon the subjects presented in "Steps to Christ." The denial of Mrs. White's authorship is not only unreasonable but injurious, for it tends to injure the influence of the book for doing good.

While in Mrs. White's employ, Miss Bolton was not a book editor. She was employed principally for copying on the type-writer the letters and testimonies which Mrs. White sent to individuals. She also prepared for the printers articles for the *Review*, the *Signs*, and the *Instructor*. This is the united testimony of those who were connected with Mrs. White's work when Fannie Bolton was employed by her. We have the following testimony, left on record by Mrs. White herself:

"She (Marian Davis) is my book-maker. Fannie never was my book-maker. How are my books made? Marian does not put in her claim for

recognition. She does her work in this way. She takes my articles which are published in the papers, and pastes them in blank books. She also has a copy of all the letters I write. In preparing a chapter for a book, Marian remembers that I have written something on that special point, which may make the matter more forcible. She begins to search for this, and if when she finds it, she sees that it will make the chapter more clear, she adds it.

"The books are not Marian's productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings. Marian has a large field from which to draw, and her ability to arrange the matter is of great value to me. It saves my poring over a mass of matter, which I have no time to do.

"So you understand that Marian is a most valuable help to me in bringing out my books. Fannie had none of this work to do. Marian has read chapters to her, and Fannie has sometimes made suggestions as to the arrangement of the matter.

"This is the difference between the workers. As I have stated, Fannie has been strictly forbidden to change my words for her words. As spoken by the heavenly agencies, the words are severe in their simplicity; and I try to put the thoughts into such simple language that a child can understand every word uttered. The words of some one else would not rightly represent me."—*Letter—61a—1900.*

As if to forestall false reports which might later be made, Miss Bolton made a truthful statement regarding the character and extent of the editorial work done by her in preparing manuscript for the printer. Writing to a friend in Melbourne, November 11, 1894—three years after the completion of the work on "Steps to Christ," she says:

"Concerning the matter of which I have written you before, I will say that there is no reason why you or anyone else should be thrown into perplexity. Sister White is the prophet of the Lord for the remnant church, and though the Lord has seen fit to choose one for this work who is not proficient in grammar and rhetoric and this lack is supplied by others, yet she is responsible for every thought, for every expression in her

writing. Every manuscript that is edited goes back to her for examination, and this work committed to those who have been called to labor in this branch, is not done without prayer and consecration.

"The word of the Lord comes to her, but if in passing through the human channel, the human imperfection in education, leaves its impress, why should it be a perplexity, if God should lay upon another the trifling duty of putting the subject of a sentence in harmony with its verb, or the number or gender of a thing mentioned in harmony with the fact that determines the number or gender? There are many ways of expressing the same thought. We may say, 'Sit down,' 'Take a chair,' 'The sun shines,' 'It is a bright day,' 'The atmosphere is illuminated, and not mar the thought in using different words.

"Now as far as changing Sister White's expressions are concerned, I can say that just as far as it is consistent with grammar and rhetoric, her expressions are left intact.

"Now I beg of you to study the wonderful truths that have come to you through the 'Spirit of Prophecy' and make them a part of yourselves. They lead not away from God and purity, but toward heaven and perfection. There is no violence done to truth in expressing it in various ways. Even Jesus did not quote exactly the words of the prophet."

At a later date, she stated:

"The editors in no wise change Sister White's expression if it is grammatically correct, and is an evident expression of the evident thought. Sister White as human instrumentality has a pronounced style of her own, which is preserved all through her books and articles, that stamps the matter with her individuality. Many times her manuscript does not need any editing, often but slight editing, and again a great deal of literary work; but article or chapter, whatever has been done upon it, is passed back into her hands by the editor."—*From a "Confession concerning the Testimony of Jesus Christ," addressed to "Dear brethren in the Truth," written about the time of the General Conference of 1901.*