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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

*James Edson White, p. 3
Gordale Bell p. 38*

"SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST EDUCATION--
BORN OF NECESSITY"

A TERM PAPER
PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE
CH570 HISTORY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper was written from the following sources: (1) Review articles from 1872 and 1873; (2) the book, The Wisdom Seekers, by Emmett K. Vande Vere; (3) Ellen G. White's testimonies to the Battle Creek church printed in 1869 and 1872; (4) Mrs. White's vision of January, 1872, as recorded in the third volume of her Testimonies to the Church.

The scope of this paper is limited by the time spanning the twenty-one years between 1852-1873. It is also limited by the purpose of the paper which will be explained below.

Little information was found in the Review prior to 1872. The SDA Encyclopedia, SDA Yearbook, and all the available SDA history books were of no help whatsoever.

The purpose of this paper is to discover the true nature of the early educational movement which culminated in the establishment of our first fully denominational school. The attempt to fulfill this purpose was made by: (1) making an historical analysis of the attitude of Seventh-day Adventists toward the founding of the school and toward the educational movement in general; (2) attempting to discover the main reasons for the movement's success; and (3) recognizing the ideas on education (apart from the ones considered in 2) that were a product of the discussion concerning denominational education during those early years.

II. ATTITUDES TOWARD DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION

A. 1852-1867

In 1852 the idea of establishing a school in connection with the Sabbath and Sanctuary movement was completely rejected by its foremost

leader James White. It was his position that the young church had too much "to do in too short a time. The Youth's Instructor, begun in 1852, would have to suffice along that line."¹ Anyway, to provide formal education for the youth might be misinterpreted as a denial of faith in the soon coming of Christ.

During the years 1853-1854, there was a growing desire among this particular group of Adventists "that their children should be educated more directly under the supervision of those of the same faith."² This desire found satisfaction in the establishment of home schools. The children of one or more families would meet in one of their parent's homes. The home school experiment lasted for about two years before the children were sent back to public school.³

Undaunted, the believers at Battle Creek began a school in connection with the local church which lasted for six years (1854-61). When this home school institution finally succumbed, James White had this comment: "we have had a thorough trial of a school at Battle Creek, under most favorable circumstances, and have given it up, as it failed to meet the expectations of those interested."⁴

The early experience of the movement with education was clearly one of a negative character.

B. 1868-1871

In spite of the fact that the educational work saw little progress, the Seventh-day Adventists were moving out on other fronts. By 1868 the publishing work, the most fully developed arm of the message, was

doing a mighty work. Spurred on by Ellen White's testimonies and
 In 1868 the idea of establishing a school in connection with the
 Sabbath and Sanctuary Movement was completely rejected by the denomination

boys had been partly ruined by their association with some of the local church boys.⁷

In spite of the sad spiritual state of the Battle Creek Church, Bell (with the exception of a term or two) managed to keep his "select school" going.⁸

C. 1872

The year 1872 began as 1869 had ended with a special word of testimony from the servant of the Lord for the Battle Creek Church. Her message had been received from the Lord on December 10, 1871. The church had been guilty of mistreating G. H. Bell. Since Bell's brand of teaching required the students to think as well as to memorize, some of the students complained to their folks about the situation. "Their parents sympathized with them when their sympathy should have been wholly with the faithful instructor of their children."⁹ Mrs. White also had some words of admonition for Bell, but she made it clear that she and her husband stood solidly behind Bell's work as an educator.¹⁰ In this same testimony Sister White makes a statement that seems to indicate that she understood it to be God's will that some sort of educational work be begun when she made this statement concerning Sidney Brownsburger. "If those connected with the office (publishing) were awake, and had not been spiritually paralyzed, Brother Brownsburger would long have been connected with the office and might now be prepared to do a good work which needs to be done. He should have been engaged in teaching young men and women, that they might be qualified now to become workers in missionary fields."¹¹

In the spring of that year the question of establishing a denomina-

Most notable among these were James White and G. I. Butler. Butler's articles were full of good argument and strong exhortation while James White's contributions were characterized by their spiritual power and emotional impact. For the purposes of our study we will concentrate upon those articles which dealt with what seemed to be serious objections to the school put forth by the Seventh-day Adventist membership.

In a June 25 article, A. Smith dealt with the Second Coming issue by stating that "Were the period of our Lord's advent deferred for a few years, the want of such an institution would be seriously felt."¹⁷

Over a month later Butler spent time answering two objections which were apparently being voiced by many. The people feared that the proposed school would end up being an imitation of the other denomination's schools and therefore would result in evil. As he began to answer this objection, Butler pointed out that even though evil did exist in other seminaries they were still doing more good than harm. He doubted if it could be demonstrated that educated ministers as a group were less spiritual than the uneducated. He was nevertheless aware of the danger seminarians faced in becoming out-of-touch with the masses. To balance the picture he reminded his readers that the uneducated were faced with the strong possibility of developing bigoted, narrow minds. Butler aptly demonstrated by his reasoning that many of the evils found in other seminaries would be eliminated because of the unique nature of our faith. We would have no use for "Roman mythology, opinions of learned men, the quibbles and dodges of scholastic philosophy...It is no wonder that it takes so long for their course of maturation when we consider what they have to wade through."¹⁸ "Our interpretive method that the Bible interpret

Because of the improved spiritual climate James White could joyfully report in a June 3, article that "difficulties under which we have labored in this city in past years are passing away."³⁰

Student enthusiasm continued to mount to such an extent that a fund-raising campaign was started to provide money for the construction of a new school and a new Health Institute building.³¹ The campaign was spearheaded by James White's July 8 article. On August 26 an interesting comment on the financial situation was made. "On account of the narrow views and tardiness of our people, a debt could be made, to be reduced year by year, as the men of this world do successfully in the execution of worldly schemes."³² No one can really measure the exact impact of this terse little note to the tardy and narrow-minded, but within two months the brethren had rallied to pledge not 50,000 but 52,000 dollars (\$2,000 above the goal) toward the new school.³³ Perhaps the leadership had been rather hasty in their evaluation of the members attitude toward this educational endeavour.

With financial support assured it was only a matter of time before the Educational Society would be formed and our College would be built. 1873 was such a year of triumph, that after the above mentioned August 26 rebuke, no significant problems were even hinted at.

III. MAIN REASONS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENTS SUCCESS

A. The Needs of the Cause

It has already been mentioned that conditions in Battle Creek in the period before 1873 had prevented Sidney Brownsburger from doing his appointed work. The aim or object of this badly needed work was to

true gentleman who possessed excellent traits of character, a good mind, and a valuable knowledge of Hebrew. He was tragically driven from the church by senseless ridicule of his speech and by the gross hypocrisy of those with whom he worked at the press. Ellen White placed the blame for his leaving his new-found faith squarely on the shoulders of his fellow-workers and commented on this sad incident by saying that the church had "lost an effective tool for worldwide work."³⁸

G. I. Butler in his stirring argument for the necessity of having a school speaks to this matter in conjunction with the necessity for the study of Biblical and modern languages. "This truth must go to all the nations around us and to those who come among us especially."³⁹ His vision of an expanded work seems somewhat watered down when compared to Ellen White's worldwide concept, but it gives evidence that the servant of the Lord was not alone in underlining the broadening scope of the work.

Butler's emphasis upon getting the truth to those who came among the brethren from abroad does not seem so egocentric when it is realized that he was speaking with reference to a real situation. One of the main reasons for urgency in the educational movement was the expected arrival of two men from Europe. Their object in coming was to be educated not only in the truth, but in the English language. Actually only one man, Ademar Vuilleumier, did arrive from Switzerland, on June 23, 1872.⁴⁰ Special note of his progress was given from time to time in the Review. A mention of Vuilleumier's progress was usually part of a plug for the school.

James White, when developing some historical reasons in support of the school mentions the case of James Ertzenberger, another Swiss who

Association was formed for that specific purpose. Leading ministers in the cause were to give special lectures after the General Conferences of 1870 and 1871. "But these could be only very brief, be beneficial to only a few, and came at a time when those on whom the Association depended to give lectures were wearied with the labors of the business of the annual sessions of our several societies. And the Ministerial Lecture Association also went down."⁴⁴

The challenges of the work in those years were so overwhelming that the leadership spent days of fasting and prayer to the Lord that He might raise up laborers, and He did. So many responded to the call to the ministry that the brethren "felt the want of a denominational school more than before."⁴⁵

The specifics of James White's burden for ministerial training were voiced in a May 20, 1873 printing of his March 11, 1873 address to the General Conference. A thorough mastery of the English language, aided by the knowledge of several modern foreign languages, and undergirded by the ability to study the Bible thoroughly was stressed as the goal of the proposed ministerial training. There was one thing that White desired most of all. "That all men may learn how to study will help them greatly to go about their work, to preach, study, and search, and with the blessing of God, they can become strong men."⁴⁵

D. The Need to Evangelize the Church's Youth

The aforementioned January, 1872 vision of Ellen White's (printed as Testimony 22) approached the issue of education from the angle that it should provide spiritual, mental, and physical benefit for the young people.⁴⁷

The learning methods taught and used by G. H. Bell involved creative thinking and inspired students to diligent study.⁵⁰ Ellen White considered his method of instruction superior and complete. His classroom method was to reveal the principles involved in a subject by a variety of methods which included impressive illustrations. One is impressed that Bell would have been considered a good teacher even in today's enlightened age.

Scientific training was held in fairly high regard when the theological and eschatological beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are considered. Yet, the attitude toward any type of schooling was that it be practical, thorough, and as short as possible, so that the knowledge gained could quickly be put to use.⁵²

Of concern to the early leaders was the intrinsic influence of the school itself. This involved the influence the school exerted upon the students, the community, and the work of the church.⁵² To guard this influence a policy on discipline had to be formulated. The School Committee, in the August 27, 1872, Review, promised dismissal to those who after due admonition continued to exert a detrimental influence or continued to show a lack of studiousness. The General Conference of March 11, 1873, (in one of its third session resolutions) recommended that each entering student be required to present a certificate of recommendation upon applying for admission. This requirement would help to guard the community against "evil influences which may be imported in the persons of unsanctified and ungovernable pupils."⁵⁴ Even if some of the certified students proved to be reprobates they would not escape censure, but would be promptly discharged.⁵⁵

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

After a very slow and faltering start the movement which culminated in the establishment of the first Seventh-day Adventist school overcame all obstacles in its path. In spite of past failures, fears that the school would be a denial of faith in the nearness of Christ's Second Coming, fears that the school would become as evil as many other private and public schools, and sad spiritual conditions in Battle Creek, the work triumphed. It triumphed because it was necessary. The need for educated ministers, the need to evangelize the church's youth, the needs of a worldwide work, and the needs of the cause in general were so pressing that the few obstacles the movement encountered were easily surmounted. The work and support of people such as G. H. Bell, Butler, Smith, the Whites, and many others helped the growth of the educational movement immensely.

As the plans and discussions on the school took place, a number of significant ideas were expressed which merit serious consideration when adopting a philosophy of education for a church such as ours.

It may be concluded that the Seventh-day Adventist Educational movement was born of necessity. A number of serious, practical objections were answered by practical solutions.

The single serious theological objection lost its meaning in face of the pressing demands of a growing church and an expanding worldwide concept of mission. As the movement gained momentum various ideas pertaining to a philosophy of education were advanced. It may be suggested that when presentday educators formulate a philosophy of education that they study

FOOTNOTES

¹Emmett K. Vande Vere, The Wisdom Seekers (Nashville: Southern Publishing Co., 1972), p. 12

²Ibid., p. 15

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶RH, August 6, 1872

⁷Ellen G. White, Testimony to the Battle Creek Church (Battle Creek: Steam Press of Seventh-day Adventists, 1869).

⁸Vande Vere, p. 17.

⁹Ellen G. White, Testimony to the Battle Creek Church (Battle Creek: Steam Press of Seventh-day Adventists, 1872), p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 3-6.

¹¹Ibid., p. 104

¹²RH, April 16, 1872.

¹³RH, May 14, 1872.

¹⁴RH, April 1, 1873. RH, November 4, 1873. RE, November 25, 1873.

¹⁵RH, May 21, 1872.

¹⁶RH, June 11, 1872.

¹⁷RH, June 25, 1872.

¹⁸RH, July 30, 1872.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹RH, August 6, 1872.

²²RE, October 15, 1872.

²³RH, June 3, 1873.