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MEMORIES AND RECORDS*W. C. White*

I remember very distinctly some conversations in which James and Ellen G. White took part, about sixty years ago, regarding the efforts and struggles of a young man named Robert Holland, who undertook, some time prior to 1858, to conduct a private school, in Battle Creek, for the children of Seventh-day Adventists.

Robert Holland had been a public school teacher and he gathered a small group of children, and began his work with the hope that the tuition would furnish him a moderate support. But in this he was disappointed.

His discipline was weak and unsatisfactory, and the brethren who were more free to criticise, than pay tuition sufficient to keep the teacher in necessary food, saw the premature effort, die of starvation.

One of the stories told regarding the frugality and straightened circumstances of the family runs as follows, - His young wife went one day to a neighbor, and begged a little vinegar, explaining that Robert's income was so small that they were obliged to live mostly on beans and molasses, and she was so tired of the molasses, and longed for some vinegar to eat with the beans. This anecdote was often told in connection with the story about the frugal fare of the workers in the Review and Herald Office in its early days of poverty in Rochester, when Uriah Smith declared that he did not mind eating beans three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, but when it came to depending upon them as a regular diet, he objected.

A DULY AUTHORIZED EFFORT

Early in 1858, it was planned that a school should be conducted by one in whom all the church had confidence, who could be depended upon to enforce strict discipline.

In the Review of Jan. 14, we find the following notice: -

SCHOOLS AT BATTLE CREEK

Bro. J. F. Byington designs commencing a school in Battle Creek the first day of February, 1858, for the benefit of the children of Sabbath-keepers in the place, and also those abroad. Much anxiety has been expressed by several brethren and sisters in other towns in regard to sending their children to a good school in Battle Creek.

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This, and the wants of our children, has induced us to invite Bro. Byington to open a school here.

Bro. Byington has worked in the Office several years. His success in teaching has been good. Teaching is the business of his choice, and we expect he will teach an excellent school.

Youth and children sent here to school will have to comply with the rules of the Teacher, and the wishes of the committee, out of school, as well as in school, who will find them boarding places with brethren on reasonable terms. Those wishing to send scholars, will please write immediately to

(Signed) Elder James White.

But those who were expected to support the school were slow to respond, and it was not until November that the school was opened. In the Review of October 14, we read: -

A SCHOOL IN BATTLE CREEK

It is now expected that a school will be commenced in Battle Creek the second Monday in November. An invitation is here given to all who wish to attend school, to come. The tuition for a term of twelve weeks will be two dollars and twenty-five cents, per scholar. Any information respecting the school can be had by addressing Bro. J. F. Byington of this place.

C. Smith
J.P. Kellogg

The high hopes of Elder White and the officers of the Battle Creek Church regarding this school effort were never realized. The people who criticised Robert Holland for too little discipline, criticised Fletcher Byington for too much discipline, and after a brief and stormy experience, the enterprise was abandoned.

Elder White was greatly disappointed. He hired a private teacher for his own children, at times, as his finances would permit. But when it was proposed by Wm. Russell that a school be opened in Battle Creek he wrote Sept. 24, 1861 :-

"Wm Russell: 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. We therefore wish to be excused from acting any part in reference to your enterprise."

Editor.

During the following year, 1862, the city of Battle Creek, built a new school building, known for years as Number Three on Champion Street, at head of Cass Street. This was in the center of the section where most of the Adventist families lived. Teachers of superior merit were chosen, and urgent appeals were made to the Seventh-day Adventist parents to send their children to this school.

Quite generally our people responded to this request, and reasonably so, because great effort was made by the teachers to conduct the school in harmony with Christian principles.

After four years of this satisfactory experience, the older students began to pass from Number Three to the High School, and parents became perplexed and anxious as they observed that the worldly and irreligious influences were moulding the character of their children.

In 1866 the Health Institute was established, the work at the Review & Herald was expanding and the Church had grown to a congregation of nearly four hundred. And at such a time God sent a man of His choosing to Battle Creek, to be a teacher, and assist in laying the foundation of our Battle Creek College.

Godloe H. Bell, a young teacher from East Central Michigan came to the Health Institute, a confirmed dyspeptic, and there recovered his health. He also embraced the faith, and began teaching grammar and writing to the young people employed in the Review Office. Thus his ability became known to the Church and in 1867 the Church employed him to teach a day school.

The financial burden of the school led to its abandonment by the Church after one year, and it was carried another year by Brother Bell at his own financial risk. After this, for a couple of years, the day school was discontinued.

At this time 1869 and 1870 there were a large number of young men and young women of superior ability employed in the publishing house and the health institution. They were constantly pleading for educational advantages. Early morning classes in penmanship, and evening grammar classes, were eagerly attended. And the necessity for instruction in Bible doctrines, and the sciences, was urged upon the leaders in the cause.

And at such a time, Elder and Mrs. White came back to Battle Creek, after two years residence in Greenville, and entered heartily into planning, and preparation for a school, that should grow into a Training School for Christian Workers, and finally into a denominational college.

With the utmost degree of earnestness and zeal, they were joined in their labors for a school by Elders Butler and Haskell, and by Elders Smith, Waggoner and Andrews.

With more than ordinary discernment, they saw the many difficulties that would surround the school, and they worked untiringly to secure such conditions at Battle Creek, the heart of our work, as would safeguard the spiritual interests of the proposed school.

For a period of more than three years, a plan presented first in a testimony to the Church at large by Sister White, and afterwards advocated by leading men, and finally embodied in General Conference Resolutions, providing that men of sound principles, broad experience, and true devotion, be selected and brought to Battle Creek, to take part in the management and work of the institutions, and general interests centering there. In response to this effort, some fifteen families moved to Battle Creek.

The Battle Creek Church was instructed most thoroughly regarding its responsibilities, and thus a firm foundation was laid, for right influences.

In the Review of August 27, 1872, we read the following from the School Committee appointed by the General Conference: -

"Vigilant efforts will be made to have all the influence without and within of the right kind; and we shall trust God to work in matters which human foresight cannot discern, and restrain where human influence cannot reach.

We cannot feel otherwise than that the school has an important place to fill in the work of God, and that it must therefore succeed. The way for the people of God to sustain it, is first for those to come, who have been called upon, to stand as a body-guard around this and the other institutions located here; and secondly, for those to patronize it who need its immediate benefits.

School Committee."

In May, Elder Butler had written, "The School must commence at the earliest point practicable. Two brethren are coming from Europe, to be educated in the English language, and become more fully acquainted with our faith, who are now probably on the way.

As to the nature of the school, it is not designed to be a local affair, designed for the children of Sabbath-keepers here in Battle Creek. If it were such, the Battle Creek Church would take it wholly upon themselves, and no appeal would be made to brethren abroad. There are schools here already of a secular nature, probably as good as can be found in the United States. But this movement is designed for the general benefit of the cause.

Review & Herald, May 7, 1872.