



Ellen Gould Harmon White (1827-1915)

Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. "With His stripes we are healed."

~*Desire of Ages*, p. 25

When Ellen White was a young girl growing up in southern Maine, she little realized how complicated, how influential, how inspirational, how international, how amazing her life would become. She was known to be shy and sickly as a child, yet she would one day command the attention of thousands as an adult without any earthly assistance. Revered by many on the one hand, but reviled by many on the other, the mistruths about her are as fantastic as the reality. And yet the truth. The truth needs no garnishing. The truth needs no defense. When you strip down her story to the bare minimum, all you see is all you need to know: a young girl so in love with her Savior that she gave her life over to that passion and was able to inspire thousands to do the same.



So what was it about this girl that drew God's attention? What was it about her subconscious that found its home in other-worldly visions? What was it about her heart that made it possible to overcome incredible obstacles to bring hope and encouragement to Christians all over the world?

Ellen Gould Harmon was born a twin on November 26, 1827. Her family was large, with six siblings competing for their parents' attention. When the twins were three, the family moved from their farm in the village of Gorham, ME to the busy city of Portland on the coast. There, her father worked as a hat manufacturer. One day while on their way home from school, a classmate threw a rock that struck Ellen in the nose causing her to fall unconscious. She stayed so for three weeks and never enjoyed full health again. Nor did she go to school again. In fact, Ellen's doctors



and family did not expect her to live long, so compromising was the result of the injury. She was just nine at the time. But Ellen and God had other plans. Despite the pain that she suffered for the rest of her life from this and other health issues, Ellen did not let



go of life that easily. And when she was 12, she claimed eternal life as well, giving her heart to God. She was baptized in Casco Bay one summer day in 1842, becoming a member of the Methodist Church in so doing.

That same year, though, Ellen attended some meetings that William Miller was holding in Portland. His views on the Bible and his confidence that Jesus was coming soon excited her. She wanted to do her part to tell everyone about Christ's soon coming, and she did so with enthusiasm. But then—the Great Disappointment in 1844. Something that great could have stopped many another young believer cold, but not Ellen. Instead, she put her mind to studying the Bible more seriously than ever, praying for guidance and for understanding. It was then that God



stepped in and answered Ellen's prayers in a way she never expected: He gave her a vision one morning while she was worshipping with some friends. She saw other Advent believers on a journey, a journey to heaven. She describes this vision in detail in her book *Early Writings*. What would have frightened another, frightened Ellen, too. She was only 17 after all! But she knew she needed to share what she had seen. And so she did, travelling all around New England and New York sharing this and other visions that came to her, revealing the character of God and the hope of salvation for His people.

This was good news for the believers who had been sorely tested when Jesus did



not come on that now famous day in October. The days following in the wake of His non-appearance were not easy for them. They were under constant ridicule from friends, family and foe alike. They didn't know what to think, nor did they know what to do. Ellen knew, though, because God told her. And He gave this frail girl the tremendous responsibility of bringing His people together when they felt nothing but chaos, inside and out.

It was about this time that Ellen met James White, a young Adventist preacher about six years her senior. They began traveling together, preaching and encouraging the believers they met. They were careful not to travel alone, as it would be destructive to both their reputations, to say nothing of destroying the credibility of their work. But talk persisted, and even though there was some concern on James' part that marriage was not



necessary in the face of Christ's still imminent return, he put this aside, acknowledging their mutual feelings as well as Ellen's need for protection and care. They were married in August 1846. Ellen was not yet 19.

Within weeks of their marriage, James and Ellen came to the conclusion that the seventh day was God's intended day of rest and worship. They had read and studied Joseph Bates' tract, *Seventh-day Sabbath*. The Biblical support that he laid out in this tract convinced them that they should keep Saturday as the Sabbath instead of Sunday. Some months later, God gave Ellen a vision that laid the truth out about the Sabbath so beautifully and clearly, giving confidence to her and those she shared the vision with.



Ellen and James were very busy, traveling from place to place, speaking with fellow Christians and sharing the things they were discovering. This didn't leave much time for homemaking or wage-earning, though, and the couple found themselves in dire straits financially much too often. James did his best to support them, working

wherever and whenever he could. But it was not easy, and they had no church or conference organization to support them in their real work, the work that filled their hearts and souls.

The Whites' first son, Henry, was born on August 26, 1847. Ellen loved her baby, but knew she could not forsake her work to take care of him, so she often left him with

friends while she traveled to meet with the quickly-growing, but widely-scattered companies of believers. It made her sad to leave him, but her passion for Jesus and His church was greater than her need to mother her child. This would be the case with all of her four boys, although two of them died quite young. As they boys got old enough,



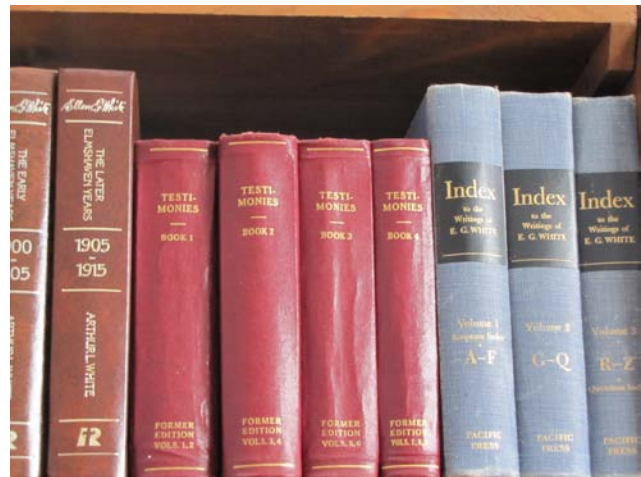
though, they were able to travel with their parents, easing the guilt and loneliness Ellen had felt when she had to leave them behind.

When Ellen was 22, James began publishing a semimonthly paper called *The Present Truth*. With this publication, Ellen's writing career got its start. Here, her prophecies and warnings were given permanency as well as a larger audience. Two years later, Ellen's



first book was published, a short work entitled *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*. During this time, two key Adventist publications were getting their start. James and Ellen both believed that publishing was critical to spreading the message farther and wider. But those days of getting the *Review and Herald* and the *Youth's Instructor* off the ground were difficult. The answer to their struggles came when a group in Michigan asked the Whites to come to Battle Creek where they would build a printing house for them to run. And so in November of 1855, the Review and Herald Publishing Association, along with James and Ellen White, moved to Battle Creek.

All the while, Ellen was still speaking and writing. And receiving visions from God. Shortly after their arrival in Battle Creek, there was a conference to work on issues of concern to the fledgling church. God revealed to Ellen a message to share with the church members who, in turn, voted to have it published. This was the first of a series of "testimonies" that Ellen recorded and published over the next 55 years of her life under the title of *Testimonies for the Church*. By the end of its run, this series totaled nine volumes and nearly 5,000 pages of advice to both individuals and congregations alike. But in the



meantime, the work pressed on. James and Ellen now had two burdens to bear: both the written and spoken message, both of which took a toll on them physically if nothing else. They traveled from one end of the country to the other by every means of transportation possible. They walked, they rode horses, they bumped along in sleighs, wagons, and carriages. They took boats and, finally, trains. Trains opened the entire breadth of the country to them; and by the time she died, Ellen had traversed the United States more than a dozen times, had been several times to Europe, and had spent nine years establishing the work in Australia.

Everyone wanted a piece of the two dedicated ambassadors for this new church. There were the believers who wanted to hear first hand what God wanted for them. There were the doubters who needed to hear first hand that God had a plan for them. There were the dissenters who went out of their way to hear first hand what they considered blasphemy and then attacked the messengers for their words. There were times when the extremities of the weather were the easiest part of what they had to face. And yet they did it all willingly because they loved Jesus so much and they wanted everyone to know Him the way they did.

On a Sunday afternoon during a funeral service in March, 1858, Ellen received a vision so powerful that Satan literally tried to kill her before she could share it with others. It was what would eventually become what we know today as *The Great*



Controversy, but was published initially as *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels*. The next several years were filled with travel for speaking engagements, with writing, and with considerable effort to establish and encourage new congregations. The White family was growing, too. And then, in 1863, Ellen received a vision about health that was decades ahead of its time. The insight into the connection between mental, physical, and emotional health was radical even to the Adventist leaders, but they made the connection as they watched colleagues drop from overwork. And then Henry White died at age 16 and James became so ill he couldn't work for three years. Ellen continued to receive and give instruction about health reform, resulting in the founding of Western Health Reform Institute in 1866.

Unfortunately, James' health did not improve. The Whites moved to a farm so he could rest, giving Ellen more time to write. But the work in the field was progressing.



Camp meetings were held in Wisconsin and Michigan. James couldn't stay idle long, and soon he and Ellen were on the road again preaching and encouraging believers as far away as California. Ellen continued to receive revelations about spreading the message to the West and Europe. James helped establish the magazine *Signs of the Times*. In 1875, the Whites were on hand for

the dedication of Battle Creek College, the first Adventist educational institution.

Ellen was now engaged in writing volumes two and three of *The Spirit of Prophecy*, and James was helping to set up the Pacific Press in Oakland, CA. He was also helping to raise money for the Battle Creek Sanitarium and the Tabernacle in Battle Creek. Back and forth between Michigan and California they traveled. August 1877 found them in Massachusetts with Ellen speaking to more than 20,000 people at one meeting. But the travel and continued overwork was taking its toll, and in August 1881, James passed away. Even the death of her husband and partner did not deter Ellen. She was soon on the West Coast working on the last volume of the *Spirit of Prophecy* books. Then came the first of a number of trips to Europe, and the translation of her works into several European languages. In 1888, she fleshed out and published her vision about the great controversy between God and Satan; and two years later *Patriarchs and Prophets* came.

In between books and travel to Europe, there was the pivotal General Conference of 1888 in Minneapolis, Minnesota and its controversial discussions on righteousness by faith. Ellen then received a call to go to Australia to help start the work there. She and



her son, Willie, who was a minister himself by then, answered that call and stayed for nine years, establishing a Bible school, Avondale college, a medical missionary program, and the first union conference in the denomination, all the while still writing for the *Review, Signs of the Times*, and the *Youth's Instructor*. *The Desire of Ages, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, Christ's Object Lessons* and *Testimonies for the Church*, volume six were published during this time as well. During this time, she was also instrumental in supporting the founding of Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, a college for African-Americans.



Finally, in 1900, Mrs. White returned to America, upon divine urging. She found a home at Elmshaven, just down the mountain from Pacific Union College in northern California. During the remaining years of her life, Ellen continued to travel and write, speaking to crowds wherever she went, encouraging laymen and leaders alike as they continued to hone and refine the organization and structure of the church. At the General

Conference session of 1901, plans for organizing the administrative aspects of the church were discussed. By 1903, the church and publishing headquarters were moved to Takoma Park, Maryland. Ellen White spent about five months there, giving her blessing and support to the move. It was during this time that she urged the founding of a sanitarium in Loma Linda, CA which has since grown into one of the most influential medical hospitals and universities in the world.

In her last years of life, Ellen traversed the country between Takoma Park and Elmshaven several times. She also took the time to visit her childhood home and friends in Portland, ME, the place where her incredible journey had begun 65 year earlier. Upon returning to Elmshaven for the last time, Ellen pressed herself into finishing up the books that had been in the works. The last volume of *Testimonies for the Church* was published. So were *The Acts of the Apostles, Counsels to Parents and Teachers, Gospel Workers, and Prophets and Kings*. Finally, on July 16, 1915, Ellen White passed to her rest, never recovering from a fall five months earlier. Even though those last months were spent either in bed or a wheelchair, Ellen's positive attitude and desire to share the truth that she knew about her friend Jesus never wavered.





This timeline of key events in Ellen White's life doesn't begin to do it, or her influence, justice. What was initially a handful of hearty New Englanders who had given their lives to spread the news of Jesus' soon coming and the seventh-day as Sabbath in 1845, had grown to a world membership of more than 136,000 at her death and now counts more than 14 million. Ellen White, the girl who had to leave school before she was ten, wrote more than 5,000 articles and 40 books. Today, with compilations and translations, more than 100 books have been published from more than 50,000 handwritten pages. She is, according to the White Estate, "the most translated woman writer in the entire history of literature and the most translated American author of either gender." During her 70-year ministry, she received some 2,000 visions that ranged from seconds to hours in length.

The quality of her writing is undisputed, although some of her key books have been "updated" to appeal to readers some 95 years later. This shy and sickly woman, whose death was expected nearly



eight decades before she finally closed her eyes, was able to reveal God's character and God's mission to men, women, and children of every age, nationality, and denomination in



such a way that they craved eternal life over the earthly life they were leading, using the written word as God revealed it to her to accomplish this. Once, when a teacher at Atlantic Union College was engaged in a discussion with her students about Ellen White's writing, she commented that "of all writings, ancient, medieval, or modern, there are no writings so full of beauty, so pure, so perfect in every way, and yet so simple, outside the Bible, as the writings of Mrs. E. G. White."

The shy and humble young woman of Portland, Maine would have been surprised to know how her life would turn out. She would have been amazed to know how God would use her. She might even have shrunk from what turned out to be an all-consuming life's work. She never wanted to be the center of attention of any kind. It was always about Jesus, always about God and His unconstrained love for His people. And it was this that gave her the courage and strength to accomplish all that God needed from her.