W. W. Prescott Part 2, 1901-1944

Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, 1901-1903

W. W. Prescott returned from England to attend the GC Session in Battle Creek the spring of 1901. The session appointed him Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, dealing with both home and foreign missions. In this position, he was actually A. G. Daniell’s associate. The board sent out 183 missionaries during the two years Prescott was chairman.

Education Work, 1901-1902

The 1901 GC Session voted to move Battle Creek College. E. A. Sutherland was the college president with P. T. Magan assisting him. Prescott assisted with the closing ceremony of the old college in May, a summer school at the new location in Berrien Springs for teachers in June, and later the same year became first a trustee of the new school and then its chairman of the board. He became alienated from the school administration over the issue of E. J. Waggoner’s call to teach at the new school. Ellen White wrote to Prescott, encouraging support for the new College. She endorsed Sutherland and Magan as “close Bible students” who were achieving success because of their sense of dependence. (6/30/1902, Letter 102; 15MR 118-123)

A week later Sister White wrote urging Prescott, “Let the Berrien Springs school be carried on by those who are now acquainted with it.... Brother Prescott, your place is not to be confined in any school as a manager or a teacher. Your testimony is greatly needed in our large gatherings and important meetings.... The Lord has a message for you to give to His people in regard to the preparation that must be made for the coming of the Lord....” (7/7/1902, Letter 100; 10MR352, 535)

In November of 1902 Prescott resigned from the Board of EMC. His involvement with education over the next 19 years was limited to participating in the education conventions of 1903 and 1906, being a charter member of the new college in Takoma Park, Maryland, and teaching some classes there.

Vice President of the General Conference, 1902-1905

In 1902 the GC Committee named Prescott the church’s first vice-president. He served as vice-president until 1905 when he resigned to focus on the publishing work.

During his administrative term, he received counsel from Ellen White regarding specific and general needs of

continued on page 3
Wondrous Power in the Beginning of this Movement, the Minneapolis Message, and the Remedy of Repentance (Excerpt from April 15, 1901 Sermon at GC Session)

...I want to ask every soul here who has known something of the history of this work, to think a little. Every one who knows the beginning of this movement knows that there was wondrous power in it, not because they had all the truth which God proposed to reveal to his people before he became visible in the clouds of heaven, but because they walked in all the light he gave them, rejecting nothing he sent them. Therefore he gave the witness to their message, and souls were converted, not by the power of eloquence, but by the power of the Spirit of God.

Some are here who remember the time when a mere hymn sung in the Spirit would bring the whole audience to tears, because God’s melting Spirit was there witnessing. Do not the hearts of some long for the ring of those days? That time and experience will not come back by turning backward, and going back to see how much light they had. That experience will come by facing toward him who is the Light, and opening the windows of the soul toward heaven, closing them toward earth, and stopping this listening to man and putting the commandments of man in the place of the commandments of God. The message that we have given, we want to take to ourselves. We have given away the message until we have lost it.

I appeal to you. After that movement, and the Lord did not come, new light broke in—light upon the full truth of what it meant to keep the commandments of God. The Sabbath truth and the sanctuary truth came forward at the same time, because they were inseparable. The reform marched forward with power. But there are many in this audience who can remember when the pendulum began to swing back, and can also remember when, thirteen years ago at Minneapolis, God sent a message to this people to deliver them out of that experience.

What has been the history of this people and this work since that time? Where do we stand now with reference to this message? How far has that truth been received—not simply assented to, but actually received?—Not far, I tell you. How far has the ministry of this denomination been baptized into that Spirit?—Not far, I tell you. For the past thirteen years this light has been rejected and turned against by many, and they are rejecting it and turning from it to-day; and I say to every such one, “Beware lest that come upon you which was spoken of the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish.”

What is the remedy?—The very same as of old, and no other,—repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Lord under those circumstances that I have set forth, what was his message? “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” When Christ himself appeared, and began his work, what did he say?—“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” When he sent out his disciples, the apostles, in his stead, to carry on his work after he ascended, what did they preach?—“Repent ye therefore, and be converted.” What are the messages to the churches?—Repent, repent, repent. What is the message to the Laodicean church?—“Be zealous therefore and repent.”

I have not seen and do not see now in this Conference, that real response to the message that God has sent to us, that will be of any effective result in his work. I am willing to face the fact, but it is a fact. I say that there ought to come upon us, ministers of the word of Jesus Christ, such a spirit of repentance as many of us have not known for many years. There ought to be a work wrought at this Conference that we have seen no signs of yet. I have prayed and prayed, that God would work it; and he is the only one who can work it. I say to my brethren in the ministry, as well as to others, if we go away from this Conference, this crisis in God's work, this time when we, God's people, stand for the third and the last time facing that very experience that we have studied in the scripture—if we go away from this Conference without a decided and most marked change coming over us different from what we have had,—may God pity his people and work! (1901 GC Bulletin, p. 321; compare 8T 97, 98, 104-106)
the church. Her burden for the spiritual condition of the church can be seen in the following example: “I am deeply moved by the unprepared condition of our churches.... The signs of the times are fulfilling in our world, yet the churches generally are represented as slumbering.” (7/30/1903, Letter 161, 15MR228, 229)

Review & Herald Publishing, 1901-1909

By the end of the 1800’s ungodly conditions prevailed in the R&H Publishing House. Ellen White and Prescott worked for change in the 1890’s. Daniells continued the attempt when he became GC president in 1901, having Prescott elected to the R&H board, and pushing to stop commercial work and to have the GC take over ownership from the association. Surprisingly, the long-time Review editor Uriah Smith resisted these moves, publicly opposing them in an editorial January 1902. Smith caused further problems by shortly publishing articles opposing the Minneapolis message regarding the law in Galatians, in spite of Ellen White’s letter to him regarding this in 1896 (Letter 96, 1896, written June 6, 1896; in 1SM 234-235).

At a meeting on February 15, 1902, the GC Committee voted to appoint Prescott as editor of the Review. The decision troubled Prescott, and severely affected Smith, who suffered a stroke the night of the meeting, and never fully regained his health, dying in March 1903.

Immediately upon becoming editor, Prescott used the Review to promote “The Forward Movement” of health reform. He began a nine-month series on the mediatorial work of Christ. He wrote Daniells on 4/10/1902 that his burden as editor was to teach the church “what our gospel message really is.” He stressed the unity of health and gospel. Before the end of the year, he openly began to warn of Kellogg’s views. He emphasized as well the distinctive teaching of our church, religious liberty, and missions, and included source materials in the Review for our ministers.

Prescott’s attempts to reform the Publishing House conditions in 1902 did not accomplish what he wanted. Employee morale declined, and vandalism increased, leading the board to increase fire insurance coverage. On December 30, 1902 the plant was destroyed by fire. Prescott found a temporary location for his office and temporary printers to print the Review. He also had the duty to read the letters from Ellen White to others that indicated that the fires were judgments of God.

At the encouragement of Ellen White, the GC Session in Oakland in March, 1905, voted to move the GC offices to the Washington, DC area. They also voted a recommendation to the R&H Publishing Association to move the publishing work out of Battle Creek. Prescott became president of the newly formed R&H Publishing Association, and responsible for the move.

By July property was purchased in Takoma Park and Washington, D.C. A plethora of legal and organizational obstacles made the transition difficult and drawn out. But by May 31, 1906 the periodical was issued from the new location. Prescott worked to reach a high standard in the publishing work, from the employees chosen and trained, to the printed material itself.

Kellogg, 1902-1907

Prescott’s involvement with the conflicts involving Dr. John Harvey Kellogg paralleled closely his years as Review editor. In January, 1902 the Sanitarium in Battle Creek had burned down. The GC Committee approved using the sale of Dr. Kellogg’s upcoming book for fund-raising to replace the San. This book, The Living Temple, was planned from a collection of health studies commissioned for a church-wide health emphasis. However, Prescott detected pantheism in the manuscript. In the December 2, 1902 issue of the Review, he began to address the Kellogg danger of “substituting a human conception of the presence of God for the reality of his presence in Christ through the Holy Spirit.” Over the next five years more than 100 of his editorials dealt with Kellogg’s concepts.

Prescott wrote to Dr. Kellogg on 10/28/03, specifying the errors he detected. He stated the doctor’s teaching:

1. gave “a wrong view of God and his dwelling place”
2. “set aside any need of atonement and the work of Christ as our High Priest in the Sanctuary above”
3. led to “a breaking down of the distinction between the sinner and the Christian by teaching that every man is a temple of God regardless of his faith in Christ”
At the Lake Union Conference session the spring of 1904 at Berrien Springs, multiple speakers addressed the pantheism issue, including Ellen White, W. W. Prescott, A. T. Jones, and J. H. Kellogg. Ellen White’s first address Wednesday, May 18 dealt with pantheism. (See MS 46, 1904, found in 1SAT 340-348; 5Bio331.)

In the midst of these meetings Ellen White wrote an impressive letter to Prescott and Daniells stating, “Now is our time to save Dr. Kellogg.” She described seeing Christ personally working to reclaim Dr. Kellogg, and added, “Work with all diligence in harmony with Christ. We have not a moment to spend in contention.” (5/20/1904, Letter 165, 1904 in SpTB #2 pp. 30-35)

It appears that the core of the confusion was over the nature of God. Prescott parted with Waggoner on the issue, writing to him 11/14/04, “I did not have the least idea that in your teaching about the revelation of God in nature you intended to set forth the same things as are set forth in that book [The Living Temple]. When therefore both you and Bro. Jones sided with Dr. Kellogg in the controversy over that teaching and openly sustained the book, I was terribly shaken up.” “I certainly did not include such interpretations of scripture and such view of God in my teaching.”

Ellen White wrote more caution and counsel in late 1905 to Prescott regarding the matter. “...Let us hold on patiently for a little while, and let the elements break forth that are struggling into life. Let not too many articles be published in the Review and Herald that are of a character to stir up strife. ... The course of false science led the Jews to strong unbelief. We are filled with grief when we meet the same unbelief in the world today.... Some who have been deceived by men in responsible positions will repent.... And in all our dealings with them, we must remember that none of those who are in the depth of Satan’s snares know that they are there. (10/30/1905, Letter 311; in BCL 122-128)

Kellogg attempted to revise The Living Temple, even trying to enlist Prescott’s help, who found the book impossible to correct. Much party strife ensued as the schism deepened.

**Health Problems and Trip Overseas, 1906-07**

Overwork led Prescott to near collapse, and a trip starting in 1906 to Asia was arranged with the hope that the voyages would bring recuperation of his energies. He met with workers and assessed the need of the church over a five-month period covering fields from China to India, returning through Europe with meetings there. He reported on his activities and observations in 21 editorials in the Review (Jan. 24 to Jul. 25, 1907).

**“The Daily” Controversy, 1907-1909**

The source of the church’s view of “the daily” in the book of Daniel (“the daily” being Roman paganism) dated to William Miller’s interpretation. Joseph Bates, James White, J. N. Andrews, and Uriah Smith all adopted this view. Ellen White in 1850 (EW74,75) said the pioneers had “the correct view of the ‘daily’.”

In Adventism the “new view” (“the daily” being the mediatorial ministry of Christ, the view of most Christian interpreters in the centuries prior to the Advent movement) dated at least to Conradi’s book on prophecy published in German, and to Prescott’s discussions with fellow workers in England in 1899. E. E. Andross, who was also in England, did not agree. Prescott felt the new view was a valuable, Christ-centered interpretation, and better fit the context of Daniel.

January 26, 1908 a meeting on the issue was held in Ellen White’s office at Elmshaven, with Haskell and wife, Loughborough, C. C. Criser, W. C. White, D. E. Robinson, Daniells, and Prescott. The meeting did not result in a meeting of minds, though from the trip Prescott felt he had a green light to proceed to write about his view in the Review. He planned a whole series on Daniel, which began May 14 but due to continued controversy, were stopped in August.

Ellen White wrote Prescott with cautions on June 24, 1908 (Letter 224, 1908; in 6Bio248, 249), and a week later she wrote again stating, “There have been different opinions regarding the ‘daily,’ and there will continue to be. If the Lord has seen fit to let this matter rest for so many years without correcting the same, would it not be wisdom on your part to refrain from presenting your views concerning it?” (Letter 226, 1908; in 6Bio 249; entire letter in 12MR 223-226; through an apparent oversight, these letters were not sent to Prescott until August of 1910.) She did not sense the timing was
right to push the matter.

The issue invaded the GC Session May 13 to June 6, 1909 with the discussions being combative and personal. After the session, Ellen White met with the GC Committee and appealed that Prescott be freed to do evangelism. It was with reluctance and some consternation that they released him.

In the middle of 1910 Ellen White wrote a general letter to those involved with the controversy. Four times she repeated her request “that my writings shall not be used as the leading argument to settle questions over which there is now controversy.” She stated, “It has been presented to me that this is not a subject of vital importance.” She again appealed for work for the cities. (Ms11, 1910, written July 31; found in PH020 5-10; portions in 1SM164-166). Three days later she wrote a letter voicing similar concerns, addressing “Brethren Butler, Loughborough, Haskell, Smith, Gilbert, Daniells, Prescott, and all who have been active in urging their views in regard to the meaning of the ‘daily’ of Daniel 8.” (Letter 62, 1910; in 6Bio649; 1SM168)


At W. C. White’s invitation Prescott contributed in 1910 a list of 105 changes to the book The Great Controversy. Others had recommended changes as well. Many of these were included in the January, 1911 revision of this book. However, such work was not without controversy, as some saw it as unbelief in the work of Ellen White, and an attempt to change the church’s beliefs.

During this time the church found opportunity to revise and refine, with Prescott’s significant contribution, other prominent books such as Daniel and Revelation and Bible Readings for the Home Circle. Prescott’s long-standing opponents, such as J. S. Washburn, G. B. Starr, F. C. Gilbert, and S. N. Haskell continued their personal attacks on him, and used the revision to accuse him of being unreliable.

His work assisting the preparation of Ellen White’s books helped him to see how her gift functioned in this area of her ministry, and made it clear to him that many in the church had mistaken views in regard to this. He, along with W. A. Spicer, encouraged W. C. White to clarify how her prophetic role functioned. White attempted in the 1913 GC Session to do so, but was misunderstood, and pulled back.

Regarding Prescott’s call to do evangelism, it has been observed, “It was not easy to enter into city evangelism when he had never held an evangelistic effort per se. He much preferred a scholarly search for theological truth to active evangelism.” (Howard B. Weeks, Adventist Evangelism, p. 29). “But in February, 1910, he began public meetings in New York City, and worked in a modest way.” (6Bio222). He conducted a series of public meetings in Washington, D.C., on Sabbath and religious liberty, and an evangelistic series in Battle Creek. He had to cancel plans for an evangelistic series in New York for the early summer of 1911 due to his wife’s illness during the preparation time.

Prescott’s wife, Sarah, had been diagnosed with cancer in 1908, with several surgeries, recoveries, and relapses following. Prescott took time to nurse her, as well as do his editorial work. She died June 10, 1910 at the age of 54. Her death devastated him, and he left for a 6-week break to his brother’s home in Maine. In September he was sent to India to attend church business, in the hopes the voyage would help his health.

He still tried to find a way to carry out Ellen White’s instructions to do evangelism, but was thwarted from full involvement. For example, he was planning evangelistic and chaplain work in Boston the summer of 1911, but pneumonia in the spring brought him low again. He spent 3 months at his brother’s place again in Maine, with his 18 year old son Lewis. Later that year, Lewis left to study engineering at MIT. November 27 Prescott married again, to Daisy Orndorf, a woman 24 years younger than he. She was the nurse who had lived with the Prescott’s, providing care for Sarah during her final illness. During this period, his aged parents lived with him at his residence in Takoma Park.

—Religious Liberty

In the first decade of the 1900’s, the Roman Catholic Church was making major advances in the public arena in America. In 1908 Rome decreed the USA a Roman Catholic Christian nation. Prescott had leading editorial duties in the Liberty journal begun in 1906. However, Prescott pushed for another journal more focused than Liberty on the Catholic threat. The R&H board approved The Protestant Magazine in January, 1909.

Prescott vigorously attacked Catholic doctrine and
practice, outlining the history of the papacy, and contrasting Bible truth with its teachings. The scholarly magazine was seen as one of the best, if not the best, defenders of the Protestant and American way of life. The magazine and its editor received national attention, with Prescott conducting public meetings that drew large crowds interested in the issues that the increasing power of Catholics in America stirred up.

However, the magazine struggled to become self-supporting, and was openly opposed by those who disagreed with Prescott on “the daily.” The start of World War I in 1914, with greater tensions in Protestant and Catholic relations, including riots and murders, led the church to pull back from any risk of agitating a crisis situation. Prescott was assigned to other job responsibilities in October, 1915, and the magazine was stopped shortly thereafter.

One positive result of the agitation fulfilled a special burden Prescott had. This was for the church to document more accurately its claims about the papacy and its relation to Bible prophecy, as well as to identify erroneous statements against it. This project resulted in the Source Book for Bible Students in 1919.

The year 1915 was a transitional year for Prescott. In addition to Ellen White’s death, his father J. L. Prescott died, one of the last living pioneers who had witnessed the signs and the passing of the time. In the spring of that year his letter to W. C. White reflected some of his inner conflict between his conscience and his church affiliation: “After giving the best of my life to this movement, I have little peace and satisfaction in connection with it and am driven to the conclusion that the only thing for me to do is to do quietly what I can do conscientiously and leave the others to go on without me.” He felt that erroneous concepts about Ellen White’s ministry were behind the opposition against him. “The way your mother’s writings have been handled and the false impression concerning them which is still fostered” resulted in his “great trial and perplexity.”

**General Conference Field Secretary, 1915 Onward**

Prescott had been the first GC vice president, and in 1915 he was appointed the first field secretary. He was sent immediately to South America to oversee its organization into a Division of the world church.

Prescott continued writing and editorial work. He composed a list of suggestions of how to present the Bible truths the church understood in a way that made Christ the center. He sent the list to Frederick Griggs, GC Education Secretary, who forwarded them to the college Bible departments. Prescott began to develop a textbook for our colleges entitled *The Doctrine of Christ.*

September 1917 he and his wife left for an extended trip to China, to attend union conference sessions and to conduct workers’ institutes, speaking hundreds of times. While there word arrived that his only son was missing April 18, 1918, in action on the battlefields in Europe. His loss was compounded by the fact that Lewis had left Adventism in his late teens.

Prescott returned to the USA in 1919 and participated in several conventions, as well as serving as planning committee chairman for a major Bible conference in July. This significant meeting had 65 attendees. Prescott was the main speaker, giving over 23 presentations focusing on bringing Christ to the center of the Adventist message, a perspective he acquired out of
the Minneapolis experience. His teaching blended with powerful preaching, and the delegates voted appreciation for him at the end of the meetings. Out of the meeting came also a recommendation that he publish his material, which he quickly did in two volumes.

His points regarding prophecy was that it (1) is Christ centered; (2) must be interpreted within the context of the prophetic passage; and (3) can have multiple fulfillments. His was more than a theoretical presentation. The transcript of the conference records his saying, “The preaching of the Gospel is not to persuade people to agree with me in my theological views. The preaching of the gospel, so far as I am concerned, is to bring people into personal association with that Person with whom I have fellowship.”

**Educational and Editorial Work, 1921 Onward**

—Avondale and Australia, 1921-1923

Prescott was called back to Australia in 1921 to help build up the floundering program at Avondale. He persuaded the board to bring Lynn H. Wood to continue the work of carrying out the instructions given Ellen White on education. He traveled the breadth of the Union holding ministerial institutes and speaking at campmeetings.

—Union College, 1924-1928

Prescott was brought to help save Union College in 1924, and succeeded in turning the school around. He remained as a teacher for two more years, as chairman of the theology department. During this time he wrote *The Saviour of the World*. As well, he pioneered an hour-long religious radio broadcast on KFAN in Lincoln.

His qualities of orderliness, refinement, dignity, and academic excellence, combined with a thorough knowledge of Scripture, inspired and challenged students to excellence. To some he was stern, unapproachable, and aloof. Others found beneath the surface a gentleman who was hospitable, kind, and gracious.

—Writing

Prescott wrote a series of articles on the history of the Bible in the *Signs* at the invitation of A. O. Tait who was attempting to counter the position of B. G. Wilkinson, professor at Washington Missionary College. Wilkinson had attacked the American Revised Version in public lectures, as well as in his classes at the college. Wilkinson responded with a document *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*. Some felt Wilkinson was stating that the KJV was the only inspired version of the Bible in English. Prescott wrote a review of the book, feeling it was quite inaccurate, but the church chose two men, L. E. Froom and W. E. Howell, to write a formal review, which recommended the book not be circulated. Wilkinson defended his position, but the officers reaffirmed their request. The book continued to circulate, and the controversy only slowly subsided.

The GC leaders requested Prescott to do a book on the Bible and archaeology. In 1933 *The Spade Confirms the Book* was published by Fleming H. Revell.

—Emmanuel Missionary College, 1932-1934

Prescott joined EMC in 1932 as head of its theology department, with his Dartmouth masters degree helping the school to maintain its threatened accreditation. At 77, he enjoyed teaching and associating with young people.

Theological controversy continued in the church in the 1930s. The new generation of GC leaders contained some who had reservations about Prescott. In 1934 the GC officers asked Prescott to resign from EMC, questioning his harmony with the church’s doctrine of the sanctuary.

This request apparently resulted from Prescott’s comments to some of the officers that Ballanger and Fletcher had not been adequately answered, and from his lack of a blanket condemnation of Conradi. Prescott felt many attempts to answer these controversies reverted to pre-Minneapolis views.

The manner in which the leaders had requested his resignation (without dialoging with him beforehand) led to much difficulty and misunderstanding. In the end, Prescott resigned and could not be persuaded by the EMC board to remain even teaching part time. He returned to Washington, but did not participate in the GC committees until the officers in September formally withdrew their letter requesting his resignation from EMC, apologized, and asked forgiveness.
—More Writing, Dialoguing and Preaching

Prescott assisted L. E. Froom, editor of The Ministry magazine, with research and writing. He was a resource person for other church writers.

The last years of his life involved writing (much of which was not published), preaching his Christ-centered sermons in various campmeetings and churches, recalling his early days in the work with the SDA pioneers, and critiquing church literature that he felt was in error. After his office work and public speaking ended, he continued to write articles for church papers, work in his library and flower garden, visit with old and young friends, including teachers from the nearby seminary.

His views that the church had been raised up for a special mission, and that it must grow in its understanding of truth put him at odds with the questioners that became disloyal to the church, as well as those in the church who refused to consider the need for learning something new. He felt the church did not properly respond to valid criticisms, but instead attempted merely to show its detractors wrong. Controversy continued to follow him.

Surgery in 1939 made him an invalid, with activities significantly restricted. He was able to have visitors and to visit his neighbors some. Influenza in December of 1943 progressed to pneumonia, and he died January 21, 1944 at the Washington Sanitarium.

Next two issues: Prescott's 1895 Armadale Sermons.