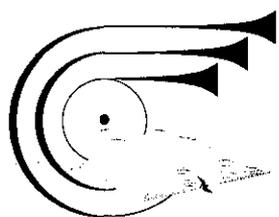


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Lest We Forget

"We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history." LS 196

THE RISE & DECLINE OF ELLET JOSEPH WAGGONER

by Richard Hammond



E. J. Waggoner

The meteoric rise of a medically trained physician who opted for the pulpit, classroom chair, and editor's desk presents a most fascinating study for even a casual student of denominational history, and/or doctrinal development. One of the early Advent pioneers, Ellet J. Waggoner, son of Joseph Waggoner, provides just that.

Waggoner inherited a literary bent from his father which he used effectively in the preparation of editorials, articles, sermons and books. His resident classical studies at Battle Creek College from 1876-1878, were followed by further training, although in a different discipline, at New York's prestigious Bellevue Medical School. For whatever reason, he did not long pursue the practice of medicine as a profession, calling, or livelihood, although he did serve for a time on the staff of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, and later as the manager of St. Helena Sanitarium.¹

At the Healdsburg camp meeting in 1882, Waggoner experienced a most extraordinary conversion, which is almost parallel to that of John Wesley, who on May 24, 1738, while attending a religious service in London's Aldersgate Chapel felt "his heart strangely warmed."

continued on page two

THE RISE & DECLINE of EJW

Like Wesley, Waggoner sensed, as never before, the outpouring of divine love for his own personal salvation. From that mystical, yet very dynamic experience, may be traced this personal testimony: "I saw Christ hanging on the cross, crucified for me. . . [and] that moment, [I] had my first positive knowledge which came like an overwhelming flood, that God loved me and that Christ died for me."² He continued to grow, not only in grace, but in responsibility as a burgeoning minister, writer and editor.

He taught Bible classes at Healdsburg College, then gravitated toward editorial work in the offices of the Pacific Press publisher of *Signs of the Times*, located in Oakland, California.

Waggoner and his close associate, Alonzo T. Jones, were younger men, and held some interpretations of scripture that were viewed with reservation OF many of the older, and more established "guard" in Battle Creek, particularly Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald* and George I. Butler, president of the General Conference. Difference in opinion on some doctrinal matters threatened to fester into a conflict of personalities. As near as we can determine, E. J. Waggoner took the high road, and did not descend into the regrettable lapse by some via rhetoric, caustic barbs, and bristling retaliation.³ Certainly this was true during the 1888 meetings in Minneapolis. Nonetheless he did not escape receiving his share of verbal shrapnel in the crossfire that followed.

It was during these very meetings in 1888 that matters came to a head. Jones and Waggoner presented a series of studies on "Righteousness by faith." During the era preceding, as well as following the 1888 convocation, Sister White had occasion to give counsel to both camps. Notwithstanding, she gave unstinting endorsement to the spiritual thrust of these west coast

continued from page one

editors whose new wine was not cordially received by some custodians of the old bottles. Their presentations rekindled in her own heart the joy of an ever deepening gratitude for that love found in the "matchless charms of Christ." Every nerve ending in her spiritual soul wanted to cry "Amen" to the victory assured in that "most precious message," so ably presented and compelling in its appeal. Following that historic Conference she was not hesitant to endorse their message, nor to appear with them at many camp meetings where their presentations were in demand.

Her repeated endorsements over the following ten years included declarations that this was "the very message the Lord has sent to the people of this time"⁴, "the message that God commanded to be given to the world"⁵, and "the light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory"⁶.

During the ensuing General Conference in 1889, Elder Waggoner was a delegate at large. In addition to the joy of being in "Christ, our righteousness," the doctor was also a champion of religious liberty, and shared A. T. Jones' zeal in this sphere. He knew the power of words fitly spoken and articulated thus: "Truth has a natural, irreconcilable repugnance for error and falsehood, but wickedness can be fostered only by deceit." This declamation accompanied the exposure of the proponents of the Blair Sunday Bill, who were enlisting children in churches on Sunday to sign the petition in favor of the Blair Bill.⁷ It is not insignificant that the messengers of righteousness by faith saw so clearly the application of the gospel principles to the issue of religious freedom in a secular sphere, and were powerfully used by God to help to thwart the attempt to pass a national Sunday law. They realized that the gospel touches all of one's life. Waggoner and Jones had to meet over and over again the heavy handed attempt within the church to restrict their liberty to speak under God. As Ellen G. White repeatedly pointed out during the following

Difference in opinion on some doctrinal matters threatened to fester into a conflict

decade, *"The question of religious liberty needs to be clearly comprehended by our people in more ways than one. With outstretched arms men are seeking to steady the ark, and the anger of the Lord is kindled against them because they think that their position entitles them to say what the Lord's servants shall do and what they shall not do. They think themselves competent to decide what shall be brought before God's people, and what shall be repressed. The Lord inquires of them, 'Who has required this at your hand? Who has given you the burden of being conscience for my people? By what spirit are you guided and controlled when you seek to restrict their liberty? I have not chosen you as I chose Moses—as men through whom I can communicate divine instruction to my people. I have not placed the lines of control in your hands. The responsibility that rested on Moses—of voicing the words of God to the people—has never been delegated to you."*⁸

Not a great deal is recorded of Elder Waggoner's activities between 1888 and 1891, other than in 1889 at the School for Ministers. He taught Bible classes during the summer term, as well as church history and Hebrew. In 1891 at the General Conference he presented a series of 16 Bible studies, all of which are recorded in the GC Bulletin. (See these Bible studies in the "Words of the Pioneers" CD ROM, 2nd Edition.)

Waggoner's advanced views of righteousness by faith, powerfully endorsed by the messenger of the Lord, naturally led him to take a new look at the perspective the church had held on many of its doctrines and practices. The blending of law and gospel was one area to which Ellen G. White had directed attention repeatedly. *"... On the one hand, religionists generally have divorced the law and the gospel, while we have, on the other hand, almost done the same from another standpoint. We have not held up before the people the righteousness of Christ and the full significance of His great plan of redemption. We have left out Christ and His matchless love, brought in theories and reasonings, and preached argumentative discourses."*⁹

It appears from his *Confession* (written the day he died; see WDF File 236.) that Waggoner began to question as early as 1891 the church's views of the sanctuary and pre-advent judgement that *"divorced the law and the gospel."* However, since the Bible concepts that made up our *"pillars"* had been discovered by a group process led by the Lord, any new corporate view needed a united approach, which was never realized. It was particularly this lack of *"pressing together"* that left those in the advance ranks of God's leading particularly vulnerable to misinterpretations and misapplications. This *"aloneness"* was caused by many leaders refusing the light, and resulted in the messengers having to endure both neglect and persecution. It is not surprising then that Waggoner, as well as Jones and Prescott, so ready to accept new light, were more susceptible in later years to concepts that were not part of God's providence. Note how Ellen G. White addressed one instance of this. *"During the General Conference of 1901 the Lord warned me against sentiments that were then held by Brethren Prescott and Waggoner. These sentiments have been as leaven put into meal. Many minds have received them. The ideas of some regarding a great experience supposed to be sanctification have been the alpha of a train of deception. Because of some overdrawn expressions frequently used by Brother E. J. Waggoner at the conference, I was led to speak words intended to counteract their influence."*¹⁰

Following the 1891 General Conference, Elder Waggoner was appointed editor of our publication in England, *The Present Truth*. In 1897 he represented England as a delegate to the General Conference. In retrospect there may be traced in his editorials certain trends that deviated from his posture, so effectively proclaimed just a few years earlier. His was the preference for an unrestricted free spirit, and he did not always take kindly to, nor follow denominational administrative procedure when deployment or employment of personnel were concerned. This trait, the desire to be free from organizational restraints, also surfaced in some of the policy decisions proposed by A. T. Jones, and Dr. John H. Kellogg.

continued on page six

Ellen G. White Reports on the Minneapolis Conference

Selected Messages, Volume 3, 174-177

Questions were asked at that time. "Sister White, do you think that the Lord has any new and increased light for us as a people?" I answered, "Most assuredly. I do not only think so, but can speak understandingly. I know that there is precious truth to be unfolded to us if we are the people that are to stand in the day of God's preparation."

Then the question was asked whether I thought the matter had better drop where it was, after Brother Waggoner had stated his views of the law in Galatians. I said, "By no means. We want all on both sides of the question." But I stated that the spirit I had seen manifested at the meeting was unreasonable. I should insist that there be a right spirit, a Christlike spirit, manifested such as Elder E. J. Waggoner had shown all through the presentation of his views: and that this matter should not be handled in a debating style. The reason I should urge that this matter should be handled in a Christlike spirit was that there should be no thrust made against their brethren differing with them. As Elder E. J. Waggoner had conducted himself like a Christian gentleman they should do the same, giving the arguments on their side of the question in a straightforward manner. . . .

The remark was made, "If our views of Galatians are not correct, then we have not the third angel's message, and our position goes by the board; there is nothing to our faith."

I said, "Brethren, here is the very thing I have been telling you. This statement is not true. It is an extravagant, exaggerated statement. If it is made in the discussion of this question I shall feel it my duty to set this matter before all that are assembled, and whether they hear or forbear tell them the statement is incorrect.

The question at issue is not a vital question and should not be treated as such. The wonderful importance and magnitude of this subject has been exaggerated, and for this reason--through misconception and perverted ideas--we see the spirit that prevails at this meeting, which is unchristlike, and which we should never see exhibited among brethren. There has been a spirit of Pharisaism coming in among us which I shall lift my voice against wherever it may be revealed. . . ."

I could see a great want of wise discrimination and of good judgment. The evil of such things has often been presented before me. The difference of opinion was made apparent to both believers and unbelievers. These things made such an impression upon my mind that I felt that my brethren had met with a great change. This matter had been set before me while I was in Europe, in figures and symbols, but the explanation was given me afterwards so that I was not left in the dark in regard to the state of our churches and of our ministering brethren. . . .

I returned to my room questioning what was the best course for me to pursue. Many hours that night were spent in prayer in regard to the law in Galatians. This was a mere mote. Whichever way was in accordance with a "Thus saith the Lord," my soul would say, Amen, and Amen. But the spirit that was controlling our brethren was so unlike the spirit of Jesus, so contrary to the spirit that should be exercised toward each other, it filled my soul with anguish.

In the next morning's meeting for the ministers I had some plain things to say to my brethren, which I dared not withhold. The salt

had lost its savor, the fine gold become dim. Spiritual darkness was upon the people and many evidenced that they were moved with a power from beneath, for the result was just such as would be the case when they were not under the illumination of the Spirit of God.

What pages of history were being made by the recording angel! The leaven had indeed done its sharp work, and nearly leavened the lump. I had a message of reproof and warning for my brethren, I knew. My soul was pressed with anguish. To say these things to my brethren causes me far greater anguish than they caused those to whom they were addressed. Through the grace of Christ I experienced a divine compelling power to stand before my ministering brethren, in the name of the Lord, hoping and praying that the Lord would open the blind eyes. I was strengthened to say the words which my secretary took in shorthand.

— Manuscript 24, 1888.

The Lord was testing and proving His people who had had great light, whether they would walk in it or turn from it under temptation, for but few know what manner of spirit they are of until circumstances shall be of a character to test the spirit which prompts to action. In many the natural heart is a controlling power, and yet they do not suppose that pride and prejudice are entertained as cherished guests, and work in the words and actions against light and truth. Our brethren who have occupied leading positions in the work and the cause of God should have been so closely connected with the Source of all light that they would not call light darkness and darkness light. . . .

Holding up Christ as our only source of strength, presenting His matchless love in having the guilt of the sins of men charged to His account and His own righteousness imputed to man, in no case does away with the law or detracts from its dignity. Rather, it places it where the correct light shines upon and glorifies it. This is done only through the light reflected from the cross of

Calvary. The law is complete and full in the great plan of salvation, only as it is presented in the light shining from the crucified and risen Saviour. This can be only spiritually discerned. It kindles in the heart of the beholder ardent faith, hope, and joy that Christ is his righteousness. This joy is only for those who love and keep the words of Jesus, which are the words of God.

Were my brethren in the light, the words that the Lord gave me for them would find a response in the hearts of those for whom I labored. As I saw that the hearts with which I longed to be in harmony were padlocked by prejudice and unbelief, I thought best for me to leave them. My purpose was to go from Minneapolis the first of the week. . . .

I wished to meditate, to pray, [that I might know] in what manner we could work to present the subject of sin and atonement in the Bible light before the people. They were greatly needing this kind of instruction that they might give the light to others and have the blessed privilege of being workers together with God in gathering in and bringing home the sheep of His fold. What power must we have from God that icy hearts, having only a legal religion, should see the better things provided for them—Christ and His righteousness! A life-giving message was needed to give life to the dry bones.—Manuscript 24, 1888. (See more on page 8.) ♦

Lest We Forget

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THE RISE & DECLINE of EJW

continued from page three

Waggoner's independence and self-determination brought a letter of timely counsel from Sister White. It was while serving in England that Elder Waggoner apparently re-thought and revised his earlier positions, which later was tantamount to a denial of certain basic tenets of Sabbath-keeping Adventists. Many of his associates, readers and hearers, at first did not perceive any change of significance. Nevertheless it was during these years that Sister White expressed written concern regarding the direction his concepts were leading. Although he was a credentialed minister in good and regular standing, there were small craft warnings that arrested the attention of God's messenger. In 1892 she wrote: *"It is quite possible that Jones and Waggoner may be overthrown by the temptations of the enemy; but if they should be, this would not prove that they had had no message from God, or that the work that they have done was all a mistake. But should this happen, how many would take this position, and enter into a fatal delusion because they are not under the control of the Spirit of God. They walk in the sparks of their own kindling, and cannot distinguish between the fire they have kindled and the light which God has given, and they walk in blindness as did the Jews."*¹¹

Three weeks earlier, in another letter to Uriah Smith, she made this point of responsibility: *"The first thing recorded in Scripture history after the fall was the persecution of Abel. And the last thing in Scripture prophecy is the persecution against those who refuse to receive the mark of the beast. We should be the last people on the earth to indulge in the slightest degree the spirit of persecution against those who are bearing the message of God to the world. This is the most terrible feature of unchristianity that has manifested itself among us since the Minneapolis meeting. Sometime it will be seen in*

*its true bearing, with all the burden of woe that has resulted from it."*¹²

Some two years later, she further explained the reason behind why some stumble. *"Had these men of experience who have failed to do their part, stood in the paths of God's choosing, and followed not the counsel of men but the counsel of God, they would have connected with the men who were chosen to give the message which the people needed in these last days. God would have worked through them, and the work would have advanced much more rapidly and solidly than it has done. They could have done a most precious work, if they had not cherished a spirit that was not pleasing to God, and that did not yield to evidence, but began to question, to find fault and to oppose. This was their attitude, and because of their unbelief, God could not use them to his name's glory. They grieved the Spirit of God time and again. Had they walked in obedience to the light sent them from heaven, their experience in the rise and advancement of the third angel's message would have been of great value in helping to make complete the work for this time; but they refused to fill the position for which they were fitted, and failed to do the work for which God had qualified them, and they stand as criticizers and thought they could discern many flaws in the men whom God was using. The chosen agents of God would have been rejoiced to link up with the men."*¹³

During the General Conference in 1897 he conducted a series of 19 Bible studies. At the Conference in 1899 he was again invited to present a series of studies. During 1899 and 1900 he teamed up with W. W. Prescott in the conduct of a training school.

It was at the General Conference in 1899, held in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, that he detonated a real bomb shell. As a delegate from England, he had gone on record as recently as 1896 as having no brief for pantheism. At this meeting, however, he reflected the undeniable influence of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, who was the pivot man in this new school of thought. Pantheism, when taken to its ultimate

conclusion, nullifies the need of a Saviour. Speaking to the delegates in South Lancaster, Waggoner began: "I thank God, brethren, that the Lord has taught me something in the last few months, and enabled me to teach something of how to live forever." He was asked by some in the audience, "Do you ever expect to be sick?" His reply was, "No. I expect to live forever."¹⁴

Ellen White sent a message from her home in Australia to the delegates at the 1899 meetings. Only God could have revealed to her knowledge or information that pantheistic teachings would be presented in that very session. As Waggoner spoke he framed his thoughts in the structure of pantheistic philosophy. His remarks carried the supportive approval of a least part of the audience.

Elder Waggoner continued his editorial ministry in England until his permanent return to the States in 1903, and as an attendee at the General Conference session. Some changes and detours in his quest for theological truth, led to a departure, not readily apprehended, from many articles of faith he had earlier and vigorously espoused. His embrace of pantheism was but another step in the theological scenario. During those critical years, 1891 to 1894, he received timely messages from Sister White, sent in the hope of saving him from himself.

Before leaving England Elder Waggoner became intrigued, or perhaps fascinated with what became known as "spiritual affinity," which, being interpreted, says "that one not rightfully a marriage partner here might be one in the life to come, and then allowed a present spiritual union."

To such subtle, specious reasoning God's messenger dispatched these lines: "You have been represented to me as being in great peril. Satan is on your track, and at times he has whispered to you pleasing fables, and has shown you charming pictures for one whom he represents as a more suitable companion for you than the wife of your youth, the mother of your children . . . he hopes to wean your affections from your wife for another woman."¹⁵

Perhaps hoping for the unlikely, she appealed to him to join the faculty at Emmanuel Missionary College, the successor to Battle Creek College, now removed to Berrien Springs, Michigan. Perhaps this would provide him both time and opportunity to

reflect on his values and course of action. He remained one term, then returned to Battle Creek, where he would join a community now permeated with pantheistic thinking, combined with an increasing skepticism toward the Spirit of Prophecy. Although he had once declared to the delegates at the General Conference in 1899 that he intended to live forever, he succumbed to a heart attack in late May 1916 at the age of 61.

It is not the purpose of this brief treatise to trace in detail the disappointing changes in Elder Waggoner's journey in search of truth, or to recite the regrettable circumstances that led to the break-up of his home. It is with sincere sadness that we discover his repudiation of the "investigative judgment," and the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, to mention but two. Such reservations as these are often accompanied by the rejection of inspired testimonies God has been pleased to give to his people in the manifestation of the Spirit of Prophecy.

We can be thankful for the joy and freedom in Christ that Elder Waggoner and his associate, A. T. Jones, brought to this church in 1888 and the months immediately following. That message, Christ our Righteousness, will never lose its power, and warrants daily renewal in the experience of each professing disciple. ♦

¹SDA Encyclopedia, Bible Commentary, Volume 10, page 1563.

²George L. Carpenter, "Sketches in the Life of Ellet Joseph Waggoner, January 12, 1855 - May 28, 1916." p. 2.

³Arthur L. White, *The Lonely Years*, pp. 405, 406.

⁴E. G. White, *The 1888 Message*, pp. 267, 1395.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 1336.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 1575.

⁷George L. Carpenter, "Sketches in the Life of Ellet Joseph Waggoner," p. 8.

⁸Manuscript Releases, Vol. 18, pp. 223, 224, 8/1/1895.

⁹*The 1888 Message*, p. 822.

¹⁰10MR87, Letter 269, 1903, to A. G. Daniells.

¹¹*The 1888 Message*, p. 1044.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 1013.

¹³*The 1888 Message*, p. 1247.

¹⁴*General Conference Bulletin*, 1899, p. 53, Arthur L. White, *The Early Elmshaven Years, 1900-1905*, p. 283.

¹⁵E.G.White, Letter 231, 1903, p. 12 (Found in MM 100).

Ellen G. White Reports on the 1888 Minneapolis Conference

From Selected Messages, Volume 3, 181, 182

On Sabbath afternoon, many hearts were touched, and many souls were fed on the bread that cometh down from heaven. After the discourse we enjoyed a precious social meeting. The Lord came very near, and convicted souls of their great need of His grace and love. We felt the necessity of presenting Christ as a Saviour who was not afar off, but nigh at hand. When the Spirit of God begins to work upon the hearts of men, the fruit is seen in confession of sin and restitution for wrongs. All through the meetings, as the people sought to draw nearer to God, they brought forth works meet for repentance by confessing one to another where they had wronged each other by word or act. . . .

There were many, even among the ministers, who saw the truth as it is in Jesus in a light in which they had never before reviewed it. They saw the Saviour as a sin-pardoning Saviour, and the truth as the sanctifier of the soul. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive

us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." . . .

As our brethren and sisters opened their hearts to the light, they obtained a better knowledge of what constitutes faith. The Lord was very precious; He was ready to strengthen His people. The meetings continued a week beyond their first appointment. The school was dismissed, and all made earnest work of seeking the Lord. Elder Jones came from Boston, and labored most earnestly for the people, speaking twice and sometimes three times a day. The flock of God were fed with soul-nourishing food. The very message the Lord has sent to the people of this time was presented in the discourses. Meetings were in progress from early morning till night, and the results were highly satisfactory. . . .

I have never seen a revival work go forward with such thoroughness, and yet remain so free from all undue excitement. (See more on pages 4 and 5.) ♦

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