

## **‘SCIENCE TRAILS A PROPHET’**

**by George E. Vandeman**

In a race between medical science and a nineteenth-century prophet, who would you expect to win?

Would it surprise you to learn that the prophet took a quick shortcut to the finish line — and science hasn’t caught up yet?

We talk a lot about the “good old days.” We clothe them with an aura of romance — as if all our problems would automatically be solved if we could just return to them. We sometimes let our nostalgia get in the way of our good sense.

You see, I’m not at all sure we’d like such an arrangement — even if time were willing to co-operate. We’d soon be wanting to come back and complain about *now*.

Just suppose you lived in New York City between 1850 and the early 1900’s. Air pollution was severe. There were the thousands of fossil-fueled furnaces and boilers that provided the city with power and heat. There were oil and chemical plants. Garbage often lay on the streets uncollected for weeks. And there were 150,000 horses in the city, each one of them making its unique, 25-pound contribution to the stench every day!

Are you wanting to come back already?

But that isn’t all. Housing conditions in New York were terrible. Landlords were allowed to rent rooms that had no windows or ventilation whatever. Tenements were saturated with disease and with filth. In the year 1862 only two per cent of the homes in New York had water connections. Taking a bath was quite uncommon!

If a child managed to survive all this to the age of eight, he might have to contribute to the family income by being employed in some factory or shop ten hours a day. In 1880 there were thousands of children living on the streets. They had simply been thrown out of their homes!

Conditions of food processing, distribution, and preservation, all over the country, were deplorable. There were no government standards. Chalk, molasses, and even plaster of Paris were commonly added to milk to dilute it or make it look better. Eating food purchased in city markets was risky. And meat was dangerous. Animals were starved on the long trip to eastern markets, and were so near death that slaughter was almost a needless formality!

But believe it or not, fruits and vegetables — the very food that could have brought a degree of health — fruits and vegetables were believed by many people to be carriers of disease, and were shunned!

Health care was very primitive. People went to hospitals only as a last resort. And it isn’t any wonder — for some of the city hospitals were filled with rats and disease — and poorly ventilated. After all, the night air was believed to be dangerous!

Physicians in the mid-1800’s were poorly trained — although more training might have been worse, since most of what doctors were taught was wrong. It is said that the dean of the Harvard Medical School rejected the demands for written examinations. He said most of his students couldn’t write well enough to handle them!

And I know what your thinking. A lot of them don’t write very well now. But probably they could if they tried!

Actually, medical practice was in a terrible state. Its two favorite methods of treatment prior to 1850 were bleeding (often to death) and the use of dangerous drugs and opiates. Superstition, along with unfortunate and ill-founded theory, formed the basis of much that was believed and practiced. True science just hadn’t arrived in the medical profession.

Is it any wonder that one of George Washington’s last deathbed wishes was to be allowed to die without any further interruptions from his physicians? He had already been subjected to three intensive bleedings, along with liberal doses of calomel. He had an intense desire to die — if only to get away from his “heal-masters.”

Dr. J. H. Kellogg, medical superintendent of the famous Battle Creek Sanitarium, wrote in 1876, “Twenty years ago when a man had a fever, the doctors thought that he had too much vitality — too much life — and so they bled him, and purged him, and poisoned him with calomel, blue mass, and sundry other poisons, for the purpose of taking away from him a part of his vitality — his life — in other words, *killing him a little!*”

But Dr. Kellogg was ahead of his time. He had an advantage. He had available the writings of a woman who had no training in medicine whatsoever. Yet he had discovered that everything she wrote was sound. And it worked!

In 1895 Dr. Kellogg was in New York talking to Dr. David Paulson, who was just then completing his medical training. He said: “Do you know how it is that the Battle Creek Sanitarium is able to keep five years ahead of the medical profession?”

Dr. Paulson said he didn’t know. And Dr. Kellogg explained, “When a new thing is brought out in the medical world I know from my knowledge of [her writings] whether it belongs in our system or not.

:If it does,” he said, “I instantly adopt it and advertise it while the rest of the doctors are slowly feeling their way, and when they finally adopt it, I have five years start on them.

“On the other hand,” he continued, “when the medical profession is swept off their feet by some new fad, if it does not fit [what she has written] I simply do not touch it. When the doctors finally discover their mistake, they wonder how it came that I did not get caught.”

Well, who was the doctor talking about? Her name was Ellen White. She had no medical training whatever. She was not a nutritionist. She had only three grades of education.

How would you have reacted — if you lived back there? Here was a woman sounding off with a lot of ideas in conflict with the accepted medical profession. Would you have gone to hear her? Would you have taken her seriously?

There’s something very interesting about her speaking ability, too. She often spoke in public, frequently in the open air. And they didn’t have public address systems in those days. Not only that. At the age of seventeen her doctor had said that she had a weak heart and a diseased lung. He expected her to live less than a year. She died in 1915, by the way, at the age of eighty-seven!

But now, with that background, listen to what the Michigan volume of the *American Biographical History* said of her:

“As a speaker, Mrs. White is one of the most successful of the few ladies who have become noteworthy as lecturers, in this country, during the last twenty years. Constant use has so strengthened her vocal organs as to give her voice rare depth and power. Her clearness and strength of articulation are so great that, when speaking in the open air, she has frequently been distinctly heard at the distance of a mile. Her language, though simple, is always forcible and elegant. When inspired with her subject, she is often marvelously eloquent, holding the largest audiences spell-bound for hours without a sign of impatience or weariness.”

Would you have taken her seriously? Very likely you would — if you were one of those who were following her work and her writings closely. Very likely you would have been convinced that she got her information from a Higher Source — that she was inspired — that she was a messenger to whom God had indeed entrusted a wealth of much-needed information and counsel on health and related topics.

You would have come to that conclusion after submitting her work and her statements to every possible test — and seeing her pass them all. You would have found her in complete agreement with the Bible. You would have found nothing in her life to discredit her claim to be God’s messenger. You would not have found a prophet with a batting average of seventy percent — which is considered good today. Rather, you would have found her consistently on the right side, as of course a prophet or true messenger of God must be — except when the prediction is conditional upon the actions of human beings. You would not have found her concerned with upcoming divorces and assassinations and plane crashes, but with how to live,

with the burning issues of the great controversy between good and evil in which we find ourselves!

How did she get all this information? From a crystal ball? From reading palms? From vibrations that she felt? From numbers or cards or spirit guides? Or from the stars?

No. None of these. She got it from visions and inspired dreams — about two thousand of them in her lifetime. If you check it out, you'll find those are the principle ways God used to communicate with the Bible prophets — with the exception of Moses, with whom He talked face to face. God said, "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make Myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream." Numbers 12:6.

Significantly, these other ways of getting information — the ways so publicized today — are roundly condemned by God. Listen: "There shall not be found among you. . . one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord." Deuteronomy 18:10-12, NASB.

Back to Ellen White. She got her information in visions and dreams — just as the Bible prophets did. And she wrote it all down. Incidentally, she is the world's fourth most widely translated author, ranking next to Shakespeare in that regard. One of her books has been translated into more than a hundred languages, with over twenty million copies sold — of that one book.

What was she writing? She wrote on many subjects, of course. But what was she writing in the medical field that was so startling, so radical in her day? Is it true that she wrote things as long as 110 years ago that medical science is just finding out? Yes, it is!

For instance, she had considerable to say about cancer. She wrote in 1905, "People are continually eating flesh that is filled with tuberculous and cancerous germs." She said, "Tuberculosis, cancer, and other fatal diseases are thus communicated."

Undoubtedly many people shook their heads in pity at such a statement. What did she know about it? Cancerous germs!

The term "virus" was not generally understood in her day, so "germs" was the closest she could come to it. For many years she was laughed at and ridiculed. But in 1956 came the breakthrough in scientific evidence. And today there probably isn't a doctor alive who doubts that a virus is involved in at least many cancers.

But isn't there a species barrier? Isn't it impossible to transmit the cancer virus from animals to humans? Researchers are coming closer and closer to the final proof that there is no such species barrier. In 1964 a cancer research worker "caught" cancer while experimenting with a virus. In that same year a British pathologist transmitted human cancer to laboratory animals. And in 1971 a team of pathologists transferred cells of a human muscular cancer into unborn kittens. After birth, the kittens were found to have muscle cancers. And listen. Those cancers contained human chromosomes!

A species barrier? Do we really want to take the risk? It's especially frightening when we realize that it is sometimes procedure to simply cut away the tumors in cows and chickens and then place the rest of the meat on sale. Maybe we ought to listen to Ellen White!

Did she have anything to say about tobacco? She certainly did. In 1864 she wrote, "Tobacco is a poison of the most deceitful and malignant kind, having an exciting, then a paralyzing influence upon the nerves of the body. It is all the more dangerous because its effects upon the system are so slow, and at first scarcely perceivable. Multitudes have fallen victim to its poisonous influence. They have surely murdered themselves by this slow poison."

Can you imagine how she must have been ridiculed for saying that? Do you realize that at that time the medical world regarded tobacco and cigar smoke as an effective cure for lung diseases? One doctor even emphasized that a person should be careful to inhale deeply so that the lung surfaces would be bathed with the smoke!

In 1969 a team of scientists headed by Dr. Melvin H. Knisely concluded that "every time a person takes a few drinks of an alcoholic beverage — even a few beers or cocktails at a social function — he permanently damages his brain."

This was a revolutionary thought — one that is still being debated. Yet Ellen White said in a lecture in 1905, “The use of liquor or tobacco destroys the sensitive nerves of the brain, and benumbs the sensibilities.”

It was in 1929 that the medical world was startled with the suggestion that we are all individually electric generators. Yet as far back as 1869 Ellen White wrote of the “electric energy that God gave to man at the Creation.” In other statements she credits the electrical force of the brain with the ability to help the body resist disease.

We could go on and on. She wrote of the dangers of air pollution. She cautioned about the unwise use of X-ray. (Does that ring a bell now?) And she questioned hypnosis because it involves the surrender of control of the mind — the will — to that of another.

Ellen White never heard of cholesterol. But in 1868 she warned that those who ate flesh food were “liable to acute attacks of disease and to sudden death.” She said that animal fat would “make a diseased current of blood.” She cautioned against overweight. Probably she didn’t understand the reason for the counsel she was relaying. But today we understand too well about cholesterol and saturated fat and coronary artery disease and heart attack and sudden death.

Ellen White, I say again, was not a nutritionist. She did not understand the reasons behind all that she was told to write. It is interesting that while she warned against the overuse of salt, yet she said, “I use some salt, and always have, because from the light given me by God, this article, in the place of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood.” And she added, “The whys and wherefores of this I know not, but I give you the instruction as it is given me.”

If Ellen White did not understand the whys and wherefores of all that she wrote, neither did Seventh-day Adventists — to whom much of her counsel was especially directed. And yet in a day when her statements were somewhat ridiculed, a day when she spoke in opposition in certain areas to the medical thinking all around her, a day when science had not yet confirmed what she wrote — they followed her counsel anyway!

Was this a blind conformity, a mindless following of a leader? No. They had simply checked out her divine credentials as a messenger of God and found them in perfect order. That was enough!

What has been the result? Because Seventh-day Adventists followed her counsel against the use of tobacco, they have largely escaped lung cancer. And, most likely because of her counsel against the use of flesh food, they have also escaped, to a significant degree, other types of cancer as well. This is being borne out by the results of careful scientific studies.

Some have mistakenly thought that Seventh-day Adventists, in their vegetarianism and their non-smoking, were simply conforming to some church taboo. This is not true. They have simply followed divine counsel given for the purpose of protecting health. The Bible says, “Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established; believe His prophets, and you will succeed.” 2 Chronicles 20:20, RSV.

Believe His prophets. Believe them when you understand the whys and wherefores of what they say? Believe them when science catches up with them and confirms their statements? Believe them when the great men of the world agree with them? No. Believe them as soon as you have checked out their credentials and know that they speak for God!

You see, Ellen White was just as right when she was ridiculed by the medical world, as she is today when medical science agrees with her. It’s so easy to say today, “Oh, So-and -so agrees with her, so she must be right.” But that’s the wrong way around. That’s testing God’s counsel by the opinions of men, instead of testing the opinions of men by God’s counsel. Do you see? The agreement of a thousand great men couldn’t make a prophet right. And the ridicule of a thousand great minds couldn’t make a prophet wrong. God’s messengers are not dependent upon men for their vindication!

But we are so human. And our God is so compassionate. It is so human to wait for scientific confirmation before we believe. And our compassionate God, because He understands our humanity, gives us the confirmation.

It's like it was with Thomas the doubting disciple. Remember? He said he wouldn't believe Jesus had been resurrected until he could actually see the nail marks in His hands and put his hand into His wounded side. And Jesus was grieved. But He let him have the proof. He said, "All right, Thomas, here's the evidence. But blessed are those who don't have all this evidence, and believe anyway."

Would you like to say to Him just now — I know it would cheer His heart — Would you like to say, "Lord, I don't understand all about it. I don't know just where You may choose to lead me — or why. But that's all right with me. I believe You, I trust You, I love You, I want to follow You — anyway!"

Shall we pray.

Loving Lord, thank you for the challenge to our thinking today, and for the warmth and encouragement this message brings to our hearts. Our God evidently hasn't forsaken us. We are so human, Lord. So thank You for the vindication. But help us to trust You anyway. We believe You for what You are doing for humanity. Do it for our hearts right now. In Jesus name. Amen.

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