

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS

By REV. DR. L. RUMBLE. M.S.C.

RECENTLY, handbills were widely distributed in Sydney, and much space booked up in the daily papers advertising a series of lectures to be given throughout Australia by one Clifford A. Reeves, of London. [1950] The public was invited to “Hear About the World-Wide Search for a Missing Bible Text.” The leaflets built up an atmosphere of mystery and thrill by a series of breath-taking declarations. “The Greatest Religious Predicament of All Time. Thousands Baffled. Ministers Perplexed. Your Interest Keeps on Increasing Right up to the Conclusion Which Leaves You Wondering in Astonishment.” Under whose auspices the lectures were being given was in no way indicated, save by the label, “Signs. Print.” Few would identify that with the Seventh Day Adventists and guess that Clifford A. Reeves wanted to tell them that he could not find a text in the Bible to prove that Christians should observe Sunday instead of the Jewish Sabbath!

Seventh Day Adventists, in their dealings with the public, would appear to have adopted the policy of concealing their identity as long as possible. Hosts of people patronize Sanitarium Health Foods, or dine at the Sanitarium Restaurants, without realizing that they are customers of the Seventh Day Adventists—unless, as did a friend of mine, one were occasionally to find a tract under the salt-cellar containing the startling information that the Pope is the “Beast” of Revelation!

Travellers go from door to door selling a two-volume book called “The Desire of Ages.” [Now often promoted in a one volume edition.] This book purports to have been written by Mrs. E. G. White, and to have been printed by the “Signs Publishing Company.” To induce Catholics to buy it, despite its many erroneous interpretations of Scripture, agents tell them that it is a beautifully illustrated life of Christ, quote references (in at least one case obtained by misrepresentation, as the writer later alleged) in praise of it, and issue receipts for payments in the name of “Local Distributors of Desire of Ages”. There is not the slightest hint that the books are being sold on behalf of the Seventh Day Adventists, and all enquiries are met by evasion. The salesmen may say that they represent “Interdenominational Missions,” or fall back on some other subterfuge. One thing they will not say, and that is that they are Seventh Day Adventists.

ORIGIN OF ADVENTISM

In the year 1740, George Whifefield, a Methodist preacher who had been John Wesley’s companion in England, went to America and fanned the flames of a revivalist movement which swept through the ranks of the colonists there, with the result in many cases of what can be described only as religious frenzy. Wandering exhorters kept people in a state of uninterrupted excitation. An epidemic of Bible reading spread on all sides; and the Apocalypse, or Book of Revelation (the last book in the Bible), which has ever been the happy hunting-ground of religious cranks, proved most attractive to fanatics.

The Book of Revelation is of course as much the inspired Word of God as any other part of the Bible; but owing to its mystical and symbolical character, it is one of the most difficult to understand. St. John, writing in his own perilous age of general persecution by pagan emperors, wished to strengthen Christians by his prediction of the ultimate victory of good over evil. And he has left us the legacy of his inspired assurance that Christ will indeed come to judge mankind, overthrowing Satan and redeeming the good from this worldly-arena of strife and struggle and sacrifice.

Concentrating on an unwarranted literal interpretation of apocalyptic passages, many made a central feature of their religion an expectation of the imminent return of Christ to reign for a thousand years on earth, with His headquarters at Jerusalem. They taught that, after this Millennium, the wicked, including Satan and all evil spirits, will be annihilated, whilst Christ and the Saints will ascend to eternal bliss in Heaven.

Those who held to these general ideas of the imminent second advent of Christ, though with many variations as to detail, became known as “Adventists.”

WILLIAM MILLER

Amongst these new explorers of the Apocalypse was a man named William Miller. William Miller was born on

February 15, 1782, at Pittsfield, Massachusetts, U.S.A. Four years after his birth, the family moved to Low Hampton, N.Y., where William grew up a farmer, and a quite irreligious one at that.

When thirty-four years of age, however, William Miller was converted at a revivalist meeting and became a Baptist. An ardent study of the Bible—for which he was in no way fitted—qualified him as a Baptist preacher, and more and more he devoted himself to expositions of biblical prophecy. Combining the prophecies of the Book of Daniel with those of the Apocalypse, he concluded that the Papacy was Antichrist. Reading in Daniel (8: 14), “And he said unto me, ‘Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed’,” he decided that the “cleansing of the sanctuary” referred to the second advent. of Christ, and that this personal return of Christ to purge the world would take place on March 21, 1843.

In 1818, therefore, he began to preach that, in about 25 years from then, the present state of the world would come to an end, and the reign of Christ would be established. For ten years he lectured up and down the country, carrying on a vigorous propaganda by means of a paper he had founded and called “The Signs of the Times,” winning thousands over to his belief that the world would end in 1843. Before long he had broken with the Baptists altogether, and he and his followers became known as the “Millerites”.

As March 21, 1843, drew near, terrific excitement prevailed amongst them; but, alas, the day came and went, and nothing happened. Miller went back to his calculations, checked them over, and discovered that he had mistaken the year. March 21, 1844, was the correct date. When that, too, failed, he moved the date forward to October 22, 1844. Failure this time destroyed his confidence in his own predictions, and he declared that the second advent would certainly take place soon, but that he could not say when.

FIRST ADVENTIST CHURCH

On April 29, 1845, the Millerites held a Conference at Albany. N.Y., to define their views and plan for the future. They decided upon a congregational basis of organization, and drew up a statement of faith which included belief in the ‘Bible only’, in the imminent second coming of Christ, in the overthrow of the Papacy, and in the early establishment of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth.

No date was set for the second advent; but it is certain that if they had been told that the world would still be going on as usual in 1950, over a hundred years later, they would have been completely incredulous and scornful. It is to be noted, also, that the Millerites had no idea that there was anything wrong with ‘the Christian observance of Sunday. In fact, Adventists who had taken up the observance of Saturday instead of Sunday, were excluded by the. Albany Conference. Poor William Miller, who died on December 20, 1849, had no idea that he had all along—according to modern Seventh Day Adventists—been subject to a Satanic deception by his Sunday observance!

In 1858 another Conference was held at Boston where the name “American Millennial Association” was adopted, to be altered a few years later to “The Evangelical Adventist Association.” But through all these changes the number of adherents was steadily diminishing. The failure of William Miller’s prophecy that the second advent of Christ would occur on October 22, 1844, seemed too great an obstacle for the Adventist movement ever to overcome.

New life. however. came with the remarkable discovery by one Hiram Edson, of Port Gibson. He declared that William Miller’s calculations were correct after all. But Miller had misunderstood the nature of Christ’s second coming. Hiram Edson got a “revelation” that the “sanctuary to be cleansed,” according to Daniel 8: 14, “is in Heaven, not on earth.” He quoted Hebrews (8: 1-2), “We have a High Priest . . . in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary.” On October 22, 1844, he declared, Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary to cleanse it! It is true that Christ entered Heaven at the ascension; but—said Hiram—He did not then enter the Inner Sanctuary. That event took place in 1844, when Christ began investigating the records of all mankind, already dead or still living. In 1884 Mrs. Ellen G. White—of whom we shall see more later—wrote in explanation of this, “The judgement is now passing in the sanctuary above. Forty years has this work been in progress. Soon—none knows how soon—it will pass to the cases of the living” (SP., Vol. 4, p. 315). When this auditing of the books is finished “Christ will return to earth to execute judgement accordingly.”

Faithful Adventists grasped eagerly at this assurance that William Miller was not mistaken about the date of the second advent, and easily overlooked the unscriptural and absurd details of Hiram Edson’s explanation. So the

Adventist movement survived, though not as a Unified body; for it went the way of all such man-made sects, dissolving into many broken fragments.

ADVENTIST DIVISIONS

The extent of the disagreements and dissensions amongst the Adventists is evident from the mere list of different denominations to which they gave rise. Thus we find in America the "Life and Advent Union"; the "Seventh Day Adventists"; the "Advent Christian Church"; the "Church of God (Seventh Day)"; the "Churches of God in Jesus Christ"; the "Church of God (Oregon, Illinois)"; the "Church of God, Adventist"; the "Church of the Blessed Hope"; the "Brethren of the Abrahamic Faith"; the "Restitutionists"; the "Age-to-come Adventists"; and the "Primitive Advent Christian Church."

Each of these Churches either disagreed with some already accepted teaching, or tried to introduce new doctrines of its own. Thus John T. Walsh broke away from the Millerites in 1848 to form the "Life and Advent Union," because he held that there is to be no resurrection of the wicked; and that this earth, not heaven, is to be the eternal abode of the righteous.

Joseph Bates, James White and Mrs. White, relying on visions Mrs. White claimed to have received, insisted not only on the imminent second coming of Christ, but also on the observance of Saturday instead of Sunday; and in 1860 they established the Seventh Day Adventists.

In 1861 Jonathan Cummins departed from the Millerites and founded the "Advent Christian Church," because he disbelieved in the theory of the "heavenly sanctuary," which had been concocted to safeguard William Miller's prediction of the second advent of Christ on October 22, 1844.

In 1865, Elder Gilbert Cranmer abandoned the "Seventh Day Adventists" to found the "Church of God, Adventist," as a protest against Mrs. White's claim to divine inspiration.

Most of the breakaway sects, however, never attained to significant proportions. The most progressive and active of them all today, is that of the "Seventh Day Adventists," the denomination which has succeeded in establishing itself here in our own midst in Australia. And with that branch of the Adventists, this booklet is mainly concerned.

MRS. ELLEN G. WHITE

In 1842 a Miss Ellen G. Harmon was converted at an Adventist revivalist meeting conducted by the Millerites, and at once began to have what she claimed to be divinely-inspired dreams. In 1844, when Miller's predictions failed to eventuate, she had a vision of Adventists going straight to Heaven; and all rejoiced, many accepting her as a prophetess.

Miss Harmon herself admitted that she had suffered severe head-injuries as a young girl, and since then had been given to fainting and epileptic fits. It was invariably after having swooned that she claimed to have received during a trance new and heavenly communications.

With other Adventists she had eagerly accepted Hiram Edson's interpretation of the "cleansing of the sanctuary," but was soon adding further doctrines of her own. In 1846 she married Elder James White, gaining both prestige in the movement and an ardent advocate of her teachings.

Before very long she claimed to have had a vision in which Christ in Heaven showed her the Tables of Stone, with the commandment, "Remember that you keep holy the sabbath day," surrounded by a halo of light. At the same time a nearby angel assured her that Saturday and not Sunday is the day to be observed by Christians.

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS

It was this last-mentioned vision which led to a break with the followers of William Miller, whose adventism had never for a moment questioned Sunday observance; and in 1860, at Battle Creek, Michigan, under the leadership of Joseph Bates, Elder James White and Mrs. Ellen G. White, the "Seventh Day Adventist" denomination was formed.

For more than fifty years, until her death in 1915, Mrs. White was the accepted prophetess of the new Church: Although she was a woman of little education, her visions and writings have become fundamental with Seventh Day Adventists. They are placed on the same level as Sacred Scripture, and are quoted as infallible utterances.

Her “Testimonies for the Church” are regarded as the only authentic interpretation of the Bible. “It is God,” she says, “and not an erring mortal, who has spoken.” She devoted 38 pages of her “Testimony No. 33” to vindicating her divine inspiration—a claim to infallibility far in excess of any ever made by the Pope!

In his book, “Seventh Day Adventism Renounced,” D. M. Canright says, “Mrs. White claims that the very words in which her visions are recorded are divinely inspired. I know they are not, for she often changes what she has written, scratching out a whole page at times. She reads her Manuscripts to her husband, while he suggests changes which she makes. As she is ignorant of grammar, she has employed an accomplished writer to correct the manuscript, improve its style, and polish it up generally. She also copies largely from other writings.”

Another ex-Seventh Day Adventist, Warren Latham, of Spokane, Washington, U.S.A., writes, “The denomination regards her writings as the voice of God, and in their public teaching they will not admit that she made any mistakes in her published writings. They place her writings on an equality with the Bible, although they emphatically deny this statement. Like a man trying to catch a horse in an open field, with feed in one hand and a halter behind his back in the other, so are these Adventist evangelists who preach from an open Bible, but keep the “Testimonies” concealed. After the converts are made, and the halter on, the “Testimonies” always take precedence above the Scriptures, because they are used to interpret the Bible.” And Warren Latham adds, ““What does Sister White say?” is a stock term with all good Adventists.”

The credulity of Adventists where Mrs. White is concerned is proof against all reasoning and evidence to the contrary. Dr. William Russell, a physician at the Seventh Day Adventist Sanitarium, Battle Creek, Michigan, wrote in 1869 that her visions were the result of a diseased brain. Dr. Fairfield said in 1887 that they were due to hysterical trances. But to this day Mrs. White is accepted as an infallible prophetess by Seventh Day Adventists.

ADVENTIST TEACHINGS

The Seventh Day Adventists, originated by Protestants in a Protestant environment, and drawing its recruits mainly from Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists, began with the usual profession of belief in the ‘Bible only’, and in salvation by faith alone. But under the guidance of William Miller, and later of Mrs. White, they soon developed distinctive doctrines, which really meant the negation of both those fundamental Protestant tenets. Mrs. White’s writings became a substitute for the Bible, whilst she herself expressly rejected salvation by faith alone. “Those who accept the Saviour,” she wrote, “however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or feel that they are saved. This is misleading” (“Christ’s Object Lessons,” p. 155).

Seventh Day Adventists claim to believe in the Divinity of Christ, though their other doctrines implicitly deny it over and over again. They insist, without any real warrant at all from the Bible, that baptism must be by immersion. They say also that the Levitical code for foods (Lev. 11) must be observed. Strictly speaking, all Seventh Day Adventists are expected to be vegetarians, and on no account to take alcoholic drink or indulge in the use of tobacco. Devotion to “Health Foods” is part of their religion, and a condition for their translation to the Millennial Kingdom.

Most important of all, the seventh day, Saturday, is to be observed, and not Sunday. All Churches except that of the seventh Day Adventists have been deceived by Satan through the agency of the Papacy into the observance of Sunday. All of them constitute “Babylon,” and are rejected by God. But, this is particularly true of the Catholic Church, presided over by “Antichrist” or the “Beast” in the person of the Pope.

Needless to say, the Seventh Day Adventists claim that they alone correctly understand the prophecies, to which they give most attention and according to which they say they are called by God to give a last warning to the world.

JUDGEMENT NOW

A basic doctrine of the Adventists is that the second coming of Christ is imminent. Though William Miller was wrong in his expectations of what would happen on October 22, 1844, he rightly calculated that the prophecy of Daniel referred to that date.

What did happen, say the Adventists, was that Christ then entered into the heavenly sanctuary to begin the “Investigative Judgement” of all mankind. As soon as He has made Himself aware of all the iniquities of each of the living, and the dead—and it may be at any moment now, for He has already been engaged in the task for over a

hundred years—He will come again to this world in all His majesty and glory, the first resurrection will take place, and the Millennium, or a special period of a thousand years will begin. It must be noted here that, according to the Seventh Day Adventists, man's soul is not naturally immortal. When a man dies, all consciousness ceases. But the souls of men continue to exist in a kind of coma, waiting for the resurrection. At the first resurrection only Christ's chosen ones will be raised from the dead to have immortality conferred upon them. These will then go to Heaven with Christ, reigning with Him there and spending the thousand years of the Millennium going through the records and judging the wicked.

During these thousand years the world will be in great distress, and Satan will be made to bear the sins of the saved as a kind of scapegoat. After this Millennium, all others will be raised from the dead; the Final Judgement will take place, Satan and all evil spirits and wicked human beings will be annihilated (there's no hell), the earth will be reconditioned, and the Holy City will descend from Heaven. The world will then be the eternal home of the saved, under the rule of Christ and of 144,000 Seventh Day Adventists.

Such, in brief outline, is the Seventh Day Adventist system. With its every item it will be impossible to deal in this booklet. But let us take at least some of its outstanding features.

On the sanctuary question we need not delay. That there is any sanctuary in Heaven that needs to be cleansed, that Christ is there engaged in investigating the records to discover who is worthy of love and who of hatred, and that He entered upon this task in 1844—all this is not only fiction without a trace of Scriptural support, but also such utter nonsense that no intelligent person could even be expected to accept it. It is obviously an invention to rescue William Miller's prediction of the second coming of Christ in 1844 from the consequences of its failure.

IMMORTALITY OF MAN'S SOUL

When we turn to the nature of the human soul, Mrs. White tells us that the souls of the dead are quite unconscious, apparently existing in a state of coma or trance. The doctrine of "consciousness in death"—she declares—rests upon "the fundamental error of natural immortality, a doctrine opposed to the teaching of the Scriptures."

But that the human soul is by nature immortal happens to be the teaching of the very Scriptures by which she claims to be guided! When Christ said, "Fear you all not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul" (Matt. 10: 28), He taught both the difference between the material body and the spiritual soul, and also the immunity of the latter from the processes of death. And that the souls of the departed are conscious is certainly stressed in Christ's parable of the rich man who died and who, after death, was granted a vision of Lazarus in Heaven and made the agonizing appeal, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me!" (Luke, 16: 24.) Again, when Christ on Calvary said to the repentant thief, "This day you shall be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23: 43), the promise was one of conscious happiness. So, too, when St. Paul wrote to the Philippians of his desire to be dissolved and "to be with Christ, a thing by far the better" (Phil., 1: 23), his words would be meaningless if death meant the lapsing of his soul into complete unconsciousness!

The Adventist doctrine that Satan and all evil spirits and the souls of the wicked will be annihilated at the Last Judgement is equally opposed to the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. Christ warned men to take the most drastic precautions and be prepared to make any sacrifices in this life rather than "go into hell, into unquenchable fire, where their worm dies not, and the fire is not extinguished" (Mark, 10: 42-43). And the end of the drama of the wicked will be, "these shall go into everlasting punishment; but the just into life everlasting." (Matt. 25: 46.) The one fate is just as interminable as the other!

THE MILLENNIUM

The Millennial views of the Seventh Day Adventists are based on a mistakenly-literal interpretation of the twentieth chapter of the book of the Apocalypse. There St. John speaks of a reign of Christ for "a thousand years."

In the early Church there were some who interpreted St. John's words to mean that the power of pagan Rome would be overthrown, to be followed by a "Millennium," or rule of the Saints with Christ upon earth for a thousand years, during which time the activities of Satan would be greatly restricted. Then Satan would be permitted for a brief time to organize the wicked for a final attack upon the Saints, God Himself stepping in to end the conflict by the Last

Judgement.

But this literal interpretation is quite opposed to the method the rest of the Book demands. St. John's language throughout is not literal, but allegorical. The number "1,000" must be regarded symbolically, and not numerically, as signifying an indefinitely long period. St. Augustine, in Book 20, of his "City of God," written in the Fourth Century, refuted the early literalists, and gave the true explanation of the Millennium. He declared that the advent of Christ into this world in the first place brought with it a grace more than sufficient to cripple and defeat the work of Satan, and that the Millennium is the whole interval from that time till the Last Judgement. To teach a literal Millennium is to go against the voice of the Church of all the ages, and to support from one apocalyptic passage what is opposed to the general teaching of the Bible as a whole. For in Sacred Scripture the second advent of Christ is clearly predicted as coinciding- with the Last Judgement, the Church suffering till the end of time and enjoying no pleasant interval of freedom from trials for any period of a thousand years.

The reign of the Saints with Christ represents the entire course of the Church's existence as the Kingdom of God on earth. That is the only Millennial reign St. John had in mind. In spite of any appearances to the contrary, God's plans are being fulfilled, and the will of Christ is really being carried out, so that those who have made their wills one with His, and love Him and live for Him, reign upon the earth as He does.

St. Augustine's explanation gave the death-blow to Millenarian speculations, and the subject was practically ignored until revived by the Anabaptists in Germany during the Protestant reformation; and it has continued as a delusion amongst many of the smaller Protestant sects, including the Seventh Day Adventists.

But a far greater delusion, and one which the Seventh Day Adventists themselves regard as a matter of supreme importance, is the peculiar idea that the Jewish Law of Sabbath observance is still binding upon Christians.

SABBATH OBSERVANCE

We have seen earlier that the original Adventists, as founded by William Miller, had no idea that the observance of Sunday was in any way sinful. But some of his followers had been associated with the Seventh Day Baptists, who had derived the custom of observing Saturday from the Anabaptists in Germany. In 1844 a group of Adventists, therefore, adopted the Seventh day Baptist teaching on the subject; and as we have seen; were excluded from the newly-formed Adventist Church, which resulted from the Conference at Albany, N.Y., in 1845.

The dissident group of Adventists, in their advocacy of Saturday, quoted the account of creation in Genesis, the appointment of the Sabbath by God in honour of His creative work, the commandment, "Remember that you keep holy the Sabbath day," and the message of the third angel, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." (Rev, 14: 12.) They declared that the expression, "the commandments of God," included that of the Jewish Sabbath every bit as much as any of the others.

Mrs. Ellen G. White affiliated herself with this group, and conveniently had her vision, in which she claimed to have had revealed to her that observance of the Jewish Sabbath is the crucial thing that makes a person a Christian, and that all observers of Sunday are apostates, deceived by Antichrist.

She declared Saturday observance to be essential to salvation. The Mosaic Law binds for all time. "God is eternally the same," she argued. Does He not say, in Psalm 89: 34, (88: 34) "My covenant I will not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of My lips"? She did not advert to the fact that, although God is eternally the same, things are not necessarily willed by Him to be eternally the same! He may eternally will that people who are faithful will inherit blessings, but forfeit them if they fail in their fidelity. And she quite overlooked the prediction, "Behold the days shall come, said the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; the covenant which they made void" (Jer. 31: 31-32).

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

Appealing to the New Testament, Mrs. White denied that any record can be found there indicating a distinct command of God that Sunday should be substituted for Saturday (in which she happened to be right), and declared that Antichrist, operating through the Papacy, and with the assistance of the Roman Emperor, Constantine, in 321

A.D., was responsible for the change (in which she was as wrong as she could possibly be).

Let us admit at once that if the New Testament insists anywhere that Christians are obliged to observe Saturday, then the Catholic Church is undoubtedly in error; though that would not make the Seventh Day Adventists right as a Church, with all their other omissions and violations of New Testament teachings, both in doctrine and practice.

But the New Testament nowhere declares that followers of Christ are obliged to observe the Jewish Sabbath. In fact, it teaches the abrogation of the Jewish Dispensation in favour of the New Law established by Christ.

The Book of Exodus makes it very clear that the observance of the Sabbath was a special prescription for the Jews only, and that it was inseparably connected with the Old Covenant. But Christians live under the New Testament or New Covenant, which insists that those who have accepted the full and perfect revelation and grace of Christ are no longer bound by the laws and customs of the Jews. Thus St. Paul, speaking, of the higher ideals of the Christian religion as compared with the Law “graven with letters upon stones,” declares; “if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remains is in glory” (II Cor. 3: 7-11).

Mrs. White has to agree that Our Lord abolished the ancient “Jewish Law,” but she says that this refers to the “ceremonial” or ritualistic elements of the “Law,” not to the moral law found in the Ten Commandments. But the fact is that, with the institution of His own Church by the Messiah, the whole of the Jewish dispensation lapsed, including all ten commandments viewed as part of that dispensation. If Christians are bound to observe the basic moral principles taught in the Ten Commandments, it is not because they are contained in the Decalogue, but because they are of their very nature part of the natural moral law—a natural law which is permanently binding in any case. But even granted Mrs. White’s distinction, her position is not improved, for Jewish Sabbath observance was patently “ceremonial” in character.

ATTITUDE OF CHRIST

“But,” urge Seventh Day Adventists, “Jesus Himself observed the Jewish Sabbath.” Of course He did: He purposely complied with all the requirements of the preparatory Old Law prior to completing and perfecting it by the fullness of His own new revelation and dispensation. But He Himself prepared the way for the abolition of the Jewish Sabbath.

He defended His disciples when the Jews accused them of not observing the Sabbath strictly in the traditional sense, adding, “For the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12: 1-8). He rebuked a too severe interpretation of the Sabbath law. (Luke, 13: 10-16; 14: 1-5; John 5: 9-18; 7: 22.) He showed His authority to do as He pleased with the Sabbath (Mark 2: 27-28.)

Nowhere, moreover, did He reassert the obligation of observing the Jewish Sabbath. Never did He quote this Jewish Law. In enumerating the commandments to the rich young man who asked what must be done for salvation, He omitted all reference to it (Mark 10: 19).

THE EARLY CHURCH

The Apostles certainly understood the mind of Christ on the subject, and the account of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 shows that they had no intention of imposing the obligation of the Jewish Sabbath on Gentile converts. It is true that Jewish converts, from sheer force of custom, continued to observe the Jewish day. They were free to do so. But they were not obliged to do so. And when some of them began to speak of obligation in this matter and showed signs of wishing to impose it on others, St. Paul at once denounced such Judaizing tendencies. Again and again he stressed the fact that Christians are not under the Jewish Law but under grace (Rom. 6: 14): he warned the Galatians that a return to the Jewish Law on their part would render his work among them in vain (Gal. 4: 11) ; and he told the Colossians to pay no attention to those who blamed them for not observing Jewish Sabbaths (Col. 2: 16). Yet Mrs. White comes forward with a revival of the first century Judaism St. Paul so strongly condemned! D. M. Canright, in his book “Seventh Day Adventism Renounced,” speaking of their Jewish legalism, says of the Seventh Day Adventists, “Their constant theme is law, law, law. They preach it ten times as much as they preach Christ.”

But if Christians are not obliged to observe the Jewish Sabbath, what day were they obliged to observe as a day of rest? The answer is—no particular day. It is true that, from the very beginning, they gave special honour to the first

day of the week. Christ had risen from the dead, thus completing the work of redemption, on the first day of the week; He had chosen the first day of the week for His appearances to the Apostles; and fifty days after His resurrection He had sent the Holy Ghost upon them on the first day of the week. What wonder that the early Christians held that day in particular esteem! So we read, in Acts, 20: 7, "On the first day of the week, when we were assembled to break bread." To the Corinthians, St. Paul wrote that collections were to be made amongst them when they met "on the first day of the week" (I Cor. 16: 2). And St. John, in the Apocalypse, referred to the first day of the week as "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1: 10).

But the first Christians did not regard the first day of the week as a substitute for the Jewish Sabbath. There was no question of transferring Jewish obligations from one day to another. The obligation of the Jewish Sabbath had lapsed, even as the Old Law generally had ceased to oblige. They did not regard it as necessary to abstain from secular pursuits on the first day of the week. They engaged in business as usual. But from motives of devotion they began that day by meeting for the celebration of the Eucharist which Christ had left to them as His last legacy and command on the eve of His crucifixion and death.

LAW FOR CHRISTIANS

That custom became the Christian tradition. As early as 107 A.D., St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, could write, "If we still live according to the Jewish observances, we confess that we do not accept the grace of Christ. Those who once lived according to the Old Law have come to a new hope, no longer observing the Jewish Sabbath, but the Lord's Day on which our Life rose from the dead." St. Justin Martyr, who died in 167 A.D., wrote, "On Sunday we meet to celebrate the Lord's Supper and read the Gospels and Sacred Scriptures, the first day on which God changed darkness, and made the world, and on which Christ rose from the dead."

But no Christians at that time dreamed of relating the observance of the Lord's Day to the Decalogue, nor of identifying it with the Jewish Sabbath.

In the year 321 A.D., the Roman Emperor Constantine decreed that the first day of the week, Sunday, was to be observed as a civic day of rest from ordinary work and business. That did not impose any obligations of religious observance upon Christians. But in 336 A.D., the Catholic Church, at the Council of Laodicea, made the ecclesiastical law obliging the faithful to attend Mass and to abstain from servile works on Sundays. And all Christians accepted that law in virtue of the divine authority Christ gave to His Church when He said, "Whatsoever you bind upon earth shall be bound also in Heaven; and whatsoever you loose upon earth shall be loosed also in Heaven" (Matt. 18: 18).

ADVENTIST POSITION

What does all this mean? It means that the Seventh Day Adventists are wrong in saying that the Jewish Sabbath still obliges, for there is clear authority in the Bible for its abrogation.

Seventh Day Adventists are right, however, in accusing other Protestants of inconsistency who speak of any obligation of Sunday observance whilst rejecting the authority of the Catholic Church. It is not that there is no authority in the Bible for Sunday observance. But there is no direct authority for it as an obligation. The only direct authority for the obligation of Sunday, is that of the Catholic Church; but that involves the authority of the Bible at least indirectly in so far as the Bible itself teaches clearly that the Catholic Church is directly authorized by Christ to legislate in His name.

Seventh Day Adventists, however, rather than accept the authority of the Catholic Church, prefer to accept that of Mrs. Ellen G. White.

Christ had said, "I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16: 18). To His Church He had made the promise, "I will be with you all days even till the end of the world" (Matt., 28: 20).

Yet George Burnside, an Adventist evangelist, in his lecture, "Who claims to have changed the Sabbath?" says, "The Apostles were scarcely cold in their graves ere apostasy began to sweep into the Church." According to Mrs. White, the gates of hell did prevail against the Church, Christ did not fulfil His promise of protection, and all Christendom fell into error. After over 1800 years, Mrs. Ellen G. White had to be called upon in America to rectify the work of Christ, and upon her the true Church has at last been built, that of the Seventh Day Adventists! Who can believe it?

HATRED OF ROME

From all that has been said, it can easily be guessed that prejudice against the Catholic Church and a consuming hatred of the Pope are part of the religion of the Seventh Day Adventists. Side by side with their efforts to restore the Sabbath observance of the ancient Jewish Law go fierce denunciations of the Papacy for having, as they say, changed the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week.

All the colourful epithets used of Antichrist and of his pagan kingdom which Adventists can find in the Book of Revelation are applied to the Catholic Church. She is the “Scarlet Woman,” the “Harlot,” and “Babylon the Great.” To her they apply the words of St. John, “Upon her forehead was a name written: Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and abominations of the earth” (Rev. 17: 5). And to her members they address the appeal, “Come out of her, my people, that you all be not partakers of her sins, and that you all receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18: 4).

This is not an exaggeration of the Adventist attitude towards the Catholic Church. In 1929 Alonzo L. Baker, associate editor of the “Signs of the Times” in California, published a book entitled “The Pope King Again,” and subtitled “Is the Deadly Wound Healing?” In it he uses these gentle expressions: “The papal system is the very antithesis of Christianity, and the Pope is indeed the Antichrist” (p. 83). “The Pope of Rome opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God” (p. 87). “The Roman Catholic Mass is nothing more than idolatry of a wafer, and a means of obscuring the true place of Christ” (p. 96). “Rome attempts to destroy the very essence of Christianity” (p. 98). “The vital question at issue,” he writes, “is one of loyalty to Jesus Christ, or to the man on the Tiber who declares he holds the place of God on earth” (p. 109). And again, “In the Day of Judgement there will be two classes only on the earth—those who have worshipped the beast, and those who have gotten the victory over the beast. The first will go to eternal destruction with the beast; the others will receive eternal salvation at the hands of Jesus Christ” (p. 109). (Consistently ‘the Beast’ is the Pope in this work.)

It seems incredible that there are people who can think and speak in such a way in these days. Yet these are not isolated utterances. Mr. George Burnside, an American Seventh Day Adventist evangelist, lecturing in New Zealand in 1949, said in an appeal to Protestants to cease observing Sunday and to become Seventh Day Adventists, “You can see it is more than a question of days; it is a matter of obedience to Christ or obedience to Antichrist. Christ says the Sabbath is His ‘Sign.’ It is the Union Jack of Jesus Christ. Flags mean a great deal today. It is time you stepped out from underneath the Babylonian flag of apostasy, and stood for Christ under His bloodstained banner.”

Nowhere did Christ ever say that the Sabbath is His “Sign.” And to become a Seventh Day Adventist would not be obedience to Him but to Mrs. Ellen G. White! Understanding of Scripture, however, and knowledge of history, and the demands of reason seem utterly foreign to Seventh Day Adventists.

“THE PAPAL BEAST”

One of their most treasured “proofs” that the Pope is the “Beast” is drawn from the words of St. John: “Here is wisdom. Let him that has understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six Hundred Three Score and Six.” (Rev. 13: 18).

Overlooking the warning that wisdom and understanding are required, Seventh Day Adventists rush in where angels fear to tread. “The Pope,” they say, “has engraved on his Tiara his official title, “Vicarius Filii Dei,” Latin for “Vicar of the Son of God.” Now some of the letters of the Latin alphabet have numerical equivalents. Taking the title “Vicarius Filii Dei,” this is what we get:

V (5) I (1) C (100) A (0) R (0) I (1) U (5) S (0) = 112

F (0) I (1) L (50) I (1) I (1) D (500) E (0) I (1) = 554

112 + 554 = 666 = THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST = 666

Now that may be all very satisfying to Seventh Day Adventists. But not to anybody else. For St. John wrote in Greek, and certainly had not the numerical equivalents of the Latin alphabet in mind. There is no justification whatever for the transition to Latin lettering. Also, there is no inscription at all on the Papal Tiara. Furthermore, the title “Vicarius Filii Dei” is not, never has been, and never will be a title, official or otherwise, of the Pope. That title was invented by some Protestant genius because it worked out in the way required for the sake of the argument he

thought he could base upon it. But what is the use of an argument which starts off from a bit of fantastic guesswork which happens to be quite wrong? Not a reputable scholar in the world would dream of incorporating such rubbish in a commentary on Sacred Scripture.

Most of such scholars interpret the number of the beast, 666, as a cryptic reference to the pagan Emperor Nero. It certainly cannot refer to the Pope. For whatever be the true interpretation of this mystical number, it is the number of "a man," and undoubtedly indicates, some one individual person. If it referred to a particular Pope, it could refer to none of the others. To which Pope will people refer it? To a past Pope? Then he is dead and gone; and we need not worry about him.

However, the number does not refer to any of the Popes at all. In his Commentary on the Book of Revelation in the Cambridge Bible Series, an Anglican scholar, the Rev. W. H. Simcox, M.A., says, "It is most unjust and unreasonable, in fact, hardly less than blasphemy, to treat the Papacy as the champion and representative of Antichrist. In fact., the identification of the Papacy with Antichrist admits of direct refutation. 'He is Antichrist,' say St. John, 'who denies the Father and the Son.' He defines the spirit of Antichrist as the 'spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.' Now, whatever the errors of the Papacy and of the Roman Church, it is certain that no Pope has ever denied the truth of the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation" (p. 57).

Those words of a Cambridge scholar who obviously had no leanings towards Rome; yet who rejects absolutely charges prompted by ignorance and prejudice, should suffice for any thinking person.

BEHIND THE TIMES

Seventh Day Adventists speak much of the "Signs of the Times"; but more than almost any other non-Catholic denomination they are behind the times.

It is wonderful, of course, what people can find in the Bible, if they decide beforehand what they want to find there. One doesn't need training and scholarship for that. One needs only unlimited credulity. But this much is certain. All who have training and scholarship unanimously declare that what the Seventh Day Adventists claim to find in the Bible is not really there, whilst an immense amount of teaching that is there they ignore and contradict.

Their efforts to re-impose Jewish observances are but a reflection of the Judaizing tendencies among a few of the early Jewish converts to the Church which earned the reproach from St. Paul, "O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth?" (Gal., 3: 1). St. Paul would certainly rank the followers of Mrs. Ellen G. White amongst the "bewitched." Their attitude towards the Papacy, with all their "Beast" nonsense, is evidence enough for that.

It has been no pleasure, in writing this booklet, to dwell upon the bitterly anti-Catholic position the Seventh Day Adventists have been led by their religion to adopt. Charity begets charity, whilst hatred engenders hatred. To read of their prejudice and animosity can only make it more difficult for Catholics to be patient with them, though all Catholics realize that it is still their duty to manifest nothing but charity towards the persons even of the professed enemies of their religion. Positive support of the business enterprises established by the Seventh Day Adventists, the profits of which are devoted to the further propagation of attacks upon the Catholic Church, is, however, another matter. That Seventh Day Adventists cannot reasonably expect of Catholics, even though they seek it.

But why do they feel impelled to continue their campaign against the Catholic Church, and their vilification of the Catholic religion? If they themselves wish to observe Saturday instead of Sunday, even though they are mistaken, they give others no cause for complaint. If they preach the love of God, ideals of Christian virtue, and goodwill and charity towards their neighbours, no one will object. But surely it is not too much to ask that they should cease to vilify the religion of others, spreading the poison of prejudice and fostering bigotry and anti-Catholic bitterness.

As a matter of fact, no sane and balanced person speaks of the Catholic Church today as do the Seventh Day Adventists. Prejudice and bigotry are dying. A wiser outlook is beginning to prevail. Thus, writing in the London "Times," of November 10, 1949, the Anglican Bishop Cecil J. Wood, of Malvern, Worcestershire, said:

"The primacy of the Roman Church is readily acknowledged as a matter of history. First in the early centuries and then in these later days the Roman Church has maintained the 'faith once delivered to the saints' without compromise with changing thought. . . . Also it has maintained standards of morality in face of attempts to lower them. Most

Christians are sincerely thankful for this whether they are members of the Roman Catholic Communion or not. The disastrous effect of the lowering of moral standards and of the manifold private judgements has become clear: There is a widespread desire, and a new sincerity in the desire, that the way may be opened for renewal of communion between Rome and England.”

Those words indicate a new and better tendency. But if, as Bishop Wood declares, the Catholic Church has maintained through all the centuries the “faith once delivered to the saints,” the implication is, surely that the road to the full Christian truth is an actual return to that Catholic Church which the Protestant reformers should never have left in the first place. That suggestion, however—which non-Catholic readers should not dismiss too easily—leads beyond the scope of this booklet.. Its purpose has been to show that the full Christian truth is not to be found .in Seventh Day Adventism, and that one cannot be both a follower of Mrs. Ellen G. White and at the same time a genuine (100%) follower of Christ.

Nihil Obstat:

D. P. MURPHY,
Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur:

* D. MANNIX,
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis
