

CHAPTER SIX Sadler's Disillusionment

I shall now show how Sadler was taken by celestial agencies. They removed him from allegiance to church bodies, and to human organizational structures. Little was Sadler aware how he was being prepared for more important service to God and to his fellow man.

Disillusionment with the world produces alterations in attitude which prepares a human mortal for more profound insights into spiritual realities. For those who can benefit, it reduces naivete and strengthens character, while it molds the mind to more rigorous assessments and firm decisions.

The information from the preceding chapter shows Sadler's status within the Seventh Day Adventist Church. He was a rising star. At the age of 23 he initiated the *Life Boat Journal*, and a year later was in full charge of the Life Boat Mission in Chicago. In the two years between 1899 and 1901 he contributed more than 60 articles, sermons, and reports to the two top official publications of the Church. By the time he was 26 he was a member of important Church committees, a Trustee of John Harvey Kellogg's International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association, and an important influence on the thinking and developing theology of the Church.

At this point Dr. Kellogg asked Sadler to become administrator of the Medical Mission work in San Francisco. Sadler's reasons for accepting the new position were several. After the death of their first son his wife Lena urged him to enter the medical field. This desire by both William and Lena was heavily influenced by their intimate association with Kellogg's medical work, and the opportunity to strike new paths in social service to others. The Cooper Medical College was in San Francisco; they could attend there. Also, Ellen White was then living in the environs of San Francisco; they could become personally acquainted with her. As a dynamic and highly energetic person, Sadler should be able to assume the manifold duties.

However, the environment in San Francisco was considerably different from that of Battle Creek or Chicago. Dr. Kellogg was a major influence on policy in the Midwest medical operations. Although a follower of Seventh Day Adventist doctrines, nevertheless he was his own man. His initiatives had developed the Battle Creek Sanitarium into a world famous operation. Kellogg personally opened the Chicago Mission activities. But already, in the 1890's, major difficulties were being encountered in relationships between the relatively uneducated Church ministers and the general body of believers, and the more sophisticated Doctors and workers in the Medical Missions. There was a distrust by the Church body of the more secular Medical work.

Much of this dichotomy revolved around the influence of Ellen White on one side, and John Harvey Kellogg on the other. Mrs. White was the prophetess of the Seventh Day Adventist Church; she carried powerful theological and spiritual influence. On the other hand Dr. Kellogg had built a strong reputation for physical cures and healthy life styles derived from Seventh Day Adventist philosophies.

The relationships were complicated by the respective ages and experiences of the Kelloggs and the Whites. John Harvey Kellogg, the two White sons, J. Edson White and his brother William C. White, and Jennie Trembly, under the general supervision of Merritt Kellogg, John Harvey's older half brother, had studied together for six months at Trall's medical school in Florence Heights, New Jersey. Furthermore, Willie White had won the heart of the fair lady whom John Harvey Kellogg desired for a wife. James and Ellen White later sponsored young Kellogg; they gave him \$1,000 to attend the Bellevue Hospital Medical College in New York City, a considerable sum in those days(1). These life relationships influenced the manner in which the two driving personalities impacted upon the Church; their intimate histories made them less sensitive about their personal differences and consequent influence upon the general body of believers.

These personal relationships among the Whites and the Kelloggs also impacted upon Sadler. When he married Lena Kellogg he became a nephew to Dr. Kellogg, and a member of the Kellogg family. When the Sadlers moved to California they became intimate with the Whites, visiting many times in the home of Willie White, where his mother lived. Sadler became close friends with Willie.

The two most influential persons in Sadler's life were John Harvey Kellogg and Ellen White. To the one he owed his opportunity for contribution to the Seventh Day Adventist Church; to the other he owed his spiritual allegiance. But now a bitter contest developed between the two. The Church was in the midst of internal strife and warfare. When Kellogg asked Sadler to head up the Mission efforts in San Francisco in 1901 he became Kellogg's personal representative. Furthermore, the environment in San Francisco was different from Battle Creek or Chicago. Sadler moved from a situation where Kellogg had control to one where the Church and Ellen White had control. Thus Sadler's every act was under intense scrutiny.

Kellogg's choice was not without careful thought. Sadler had established himself among the Church body. His spiritual allegiance could not be questioned. But as Kellogg's representative the microscopic eyes of Church leaders focused upon him. He also had personal attributes which rubbed many of those leaders the wrong way; he wanted to do things expertly and professionally — the right way. He was disciplined, he was acute in his thinking, he was loyal, and he was eager to make the Medical Mission work an important contribution to the Church.

His successful experience in Chicago helped push him to that desire. Unfortunately, this attribute exposed him to the personal jealousies and envies of ministers within the Church. They faulted him for his ambitions, and for his extravagance in shaping the San Francisco Medical Mission.

In many policy statements throughout her life Ellen White had emphasized the benefits of Church operations “in the country.” She stressed that Sanitariums, printing establishments, and other Church organizations should be placed “in the country.” It was her urging which led to the move of Battle Creek College to Berrien Springs, Michigan, and her influence which located many of the California operations “in the country.” This led to another basic dichotomy between “Church” policies and Medical Mission goals. At one point she urged Sadler to move the Medical Mission work out of San Francisco. He expostulated with her on the impossibility of reaching the unfortunate souls of the city from operations in the country. Later, after he had settled in La Grange, Illinois, which he called “a quiet country suburb,” he admitted her wisdom of living in the country. He emphasized that he spent only eighteen cents a day on rail commute to downtown Chicago. But by that time, he was no longer serving the “forgotten souls” of the city.

Sadler’s efforts to create an efficient and important Mission operation in San Francisco must be weighed in the context of west coast Church management. San Francisco was under the Church; because of Church experiences with John Harvey Kellogg in Battle Creek and Chicago, new Medical Mission work would not be tolerated outside that control. Kellogg would not, by any means, build an operation in San Francisco that would have independent control, as he had in Battle Creek and Chicago. Therefore, all of Sadler’s decisions were weighed by the San Francisco ministers against that criterion. The personal repercussions can be measured by his use of letterheads, and the contents of his correspondence with Willie White. In Appendix D I provide a summary tabulation of all significant letters to Willie and Ellen White which are preserved in the archives of the Seventh Day Adventist Church headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Sadler first became active in San Francisco in August, 1901. He used California Conference letterheads showing him as Superintendent of Young People’s work, a Church position. In May, 1902 he then began using a letterhead showing him as President of the San Francisco Medical Missionary and Benevolent Society. Sadler was building an independent operation. This use of Medical Mission letter heads continued until some point between September 9, and October 12, 1903, when he reverted to the Church letterhead. By that time events in San Francisco caused the Medical Mission to lose identifiable independent status and to become subservient to Church operations.

In a letter dated May 20, 1903 he states, *Our work in the city is getting along nicely. We have a nice corps of workers here at present, and getting it systematized, and getting new workers started, we are getting along nicely, and our workers are having good success.* There was considerable activity and Sadler was in general charge.

Soon the Whites felt a concern about his methods and aggressive actions to center work around the Medical Mission, rather than directly under the Church organizations. In July, 1902, and in typical Ellen White fashion, she requested that he justify his actions in writing to demonstrate his Church dedication by stating his plans for removal of “old offenders.” She wanted more than concentration on the secular concerns of Mission work. This pressure continued into August, 1902. We have no surviving letters between August, 1902 and April, 1903 to follow developments, but we can see that Sadler was busy with administrative concerns. In a letter dated June 3, 1903 we find that he was highly instrumental in assignment of various medical professionals. He was sensitive to relationships with outside medical activities in San Francisco and was striving to keep good relations with that secular community,

Meanwhile there are repeated references in the letters about J. H. Kellogg. Sadler was doing his best to accommodate the strong personalities, and to emphasize contribution of Kellogg to Seventh Day Adventist spiritual needs. Kellogg had recently published his book, *The Living Temple*; it created momentous concerns in the Church about doctrinal issues. Willie White did not fully express his thoughts directly to Sadler, but the thrust of the concern can be seen in his Sept 23, 1903 letter to A. G. Daniells, then President of the SDA General Conference. Refer to notes in Appendix D. Kellogg was being accused of pantheism, a concept which undermined several crucial SDA doctrines. Although it was not Kellogg’s intent to do so, he inadvertently created a doctrinal crisis; he did not carefully develop the theological ramifications of his remarks before he published. These problems revolved around his statements concerning the personality of God and the divine presence in all living things. Such statements as *there is present in the tree a power which creates and maintains it, a tree-maker in the tree, a flower-maker in the flower* offended Adventist ministers, although most Adventist ministers were willing to believe that Kellogg had not deliberately set out to introduce heresies. Ellen White wrote that there was in pantheism *the beginning of theories which, carried to their logical conclusion, would destroy faith in the sanctuary question and in the atonement*. She admitted that she did not believe Kellogg saw this clearly. She went further to state that she did not think *that in laying this new foundation of faith, he was directing his steps toward infidelity*.

As early as 1898 Ellen White had written letters to Kellogg which pointed in a forceful way what she considered to be errors in the Doctors thinking and blemishes in his character. He was told that *his conversation often tended to cast doubt on fundamental Adventist doctrines, that he should stop undermining the influence of the Adventist ministry, and that he should not harbor thoughts of separating the denomination’s medical endeavors from church control*.

The difficulty with Kellogg was complicated by other factors. His maneuvering to take the Battle Creek Sanitarium out of the hands of legal Church control, his contest with the ministers over control of his cereal food products, jealously guarding that which had become excellent sources of income, which he did not share with the general Church body, and his disagreements with them over health teachings, as well as other matters — all brought great dissension within the Church. These conflicts had already presented themselves as warfare in Chicago before Sadler left for San Francisco.

The theological implications of *The Living Temple* intensified concerns of the Church ministerial body. Something had to be done to remove the Kellogg threats to Church doctrines. Richard Schwarz reviewed the several meetings in which Church leaders attempted to bring Kellogg back into proper doctrinal position, and to reconcile their differences. At the General Conference meeting in Oakland in April, 1903, in executive meetings in Battle Creek later in the month, at a conference of leaders in Washington, DC in October, and a final attempt at Berrien Springs in May, 1904, with Ellen White present, Kellogg repeatedly admitted fault and apologized to the Church. But relations were not good, and insincerity was in more than one heart. As Schwarz stated it, *These men could hardly fail to be aware that the doctor was skeptical of them as a group because, in general, they lacked any formal professional education.* In interviews with Schwarz in November, 1960 and December, 1961, Sadler recalled how *At moments of pique Kellogg would ungraciously refer to his clerical associates as a 'cheap ministry,' composed of men 'of very mediocre ability' who retained their influence through the use of 'psychological trickery.'*

Sadler grew up under Kellogg. In his impressionable youth, from the age of fourteen, to his first field assignments in Chicago at the age of eighteen, Sadler came to respect and love Kellogg. The mission work in Chicago was immensely successful; Sadler was a major participant.

Sadler certainly had comparable expectations when Kellogg asked him to work in San Francisco. The work in Chicago was inspiring to many of its participants. They were a united group, giving of themselves for the downtrodden and helpless of the city. They also were focused in one direction, under Kellogg. The ministerial body did not have direct influence upon the daily Chicago activities; Kellogg was mostly independent in formulating goals. The controversies with the ministerial body had not yet hardened in the 1890's, and influences counter to Kellogg had not yet begun to crystallize.

When Sadler moved to San Francisco he unwittingly placed himself into the middle of the controversy. The difficulties within the Church became focused geographically in San Francisco, and symbolically at Sadler's working level. He was Kellogg's representative; with or without foundation, faulting of the Mission work was directed at him.

Sadler had personal integrity. He fully and devoutly believed in the doctrines of the Church. Because of Ellen White's role as spiritual leader of the Church, her heavy influence on theology, and Sadler's great respect for her and Church doctrines, he became personally subject to the tensions then developing between the Church factions. In fact, there may have been no other individual who was so personally intimate with both leaders, who held both in such great respect, and who was thus personally torn.

Coincident with the leadership meetings with Kellogg, and probably inspired by the ministerial body, Sadler's personal crisis came to a head in October, 1903. The local ministerial group conspired to deprive Sadler of his administrative functions, fearing the structure he was building and, through him, the strength Kellogg was gaining in California. In a letter dated Oct 12, 1903 Sadler pleaded with Willie White to oppose the apparent policy of B. F. Richards, then Vice-President of the San Francisco Medical Mission under Sadler, to destroy the Mission work. By that time he is no longer using the Mission letterhead but has reverted to the California Conference letterhead.

For the interests of reporting I provide the complete text of that letter in Appendix D. I also provide the text of the following letter, and Willie's reply to both.

The great disappointment for Sadler was Kellogg's lack of support. A committee had been formed of three ministers, and of Kellogg, to investigate charges which had been brought against Sadler. These were brought formally in Sabbath meeting, with the Church membership present, certainly a humiliating experience. We do not know the content of the charges; no records exist. They probably revolved around Sadler's seeming independence, and may have used invented incompetence as a pretext. Kellogg did not stand behind Sadler. He had his own Church position as first priority. These possibilities may be inferred from the two letters to Willie. While Sadler indicates a willingness to forsake formal Mission structure, his complaints show that he was being deprived of all managerial authority. By November he had resigned, for the better interests of the Church. He accepted his fate with humility, feeling he had made mistakes. But by the middle of December he packed up and left San Francisco.

Before his departure he sought the advice of Ellen White. In Richard Schwarz's interview with Sadler on Sept 22, 1960 Sadler made remarks which led Schwarz to write: *When the controversy between Kellogg and the Church leaders was at its height, Ellen White showed her concern for the doctor by persuading one of his former close associates, W. S. Sadler, to discontinue his medical studies in San Francisco and to complete them in Battle Creek, where he might be a 'help and encouragement' to Kellogg.* See page 364 of Schwarz's dissertation. Although this remark does not capture the full picture in San Francisco it shows the actions of Sadler before making his decision to leave that work, and also Ellen White's concern over Kellogg, a man who was widely influential and important to the Church, whom she had known from his youth, and whom she had brought into the faith when he was still that youth.

This experience brought deep disillusionment to Sadler. The disillusionment was not to his religious beliefs, but to the persons for whom he held such great respect. His letters of early 1904 from Battle Creek show a continuing evangelistic spirit. But then, in the spring, a definite change in tone occurs. Sadler left San Francisco, not because he found himself without a job, but in general disgust. He abhorred the devious intrigue among Church factions, and the lack of personal integrity of those he had held in high regard. He could have continued his medical studies at Cooper College, while remaining active in the local church, and contributing to the Mission work. Willie White had urged him to do so. But his feelings about the betrayal of Richards and Kellogg were more than he could bear in California. As he states in several letters:

In San Francisco I fear my standards and policies would never have been acceptable. — To Willie White, Apr 7, 1904.

Experiences in the recent past have been such as to make me wish I were off on a farm somewhere and forever delivered of it all. — To Ellen White, Aug 31, 1904.

I really have seen so much trouble and friction over medical work that I would like to get away from it all if possible. — To Willie White, Feb 19, 1906 after White pleads for him to return to Church work.

Although Sadler broke his loyalty to Kellogg, he continued to believe in the divine inspiration of Ellen White. In 1929, in his book *The Mind at Mischief*, he makes favorable oblique references to her heavenly guidance.

The San Francisco experience created a new spiritual orientation in Sadler's life. He no longer trusted the authority of the Church, either from John Harvey Kellogg or Ellen White. By April, 1904 he made up his mind for his new direction. Through acquaintanceships made at Moody Bible School, and because of his scholarly and administrative reputation, he and Lena were offered medical study at the Johns Hopkins Medical facilities in Baltimore. But they rejected the offer in favor of return to the SDA American Medical Mission College in Chicago. Although they could have continued their studies in Battle Creek Sadler elected to remove themselves from proximity to Dr. Kellogg, while still continuing in the SDA environment.

1. The intimate relationship between the Whites and the Kellogg family is surveyed by Richard Schwarz in his *John Harvey Kellogg: American Health Reformer*, University of Michigan PhD Dissertation, 1964.