

When Time Was Supposed to Be No More^{*}

Part 2

KENT H. ROSS

The Great Disappointment

Immediately their world changed, by not changing! Their world had changed, but not as they had expected. Christ had not come and there was so little that they could say in response to the bitter taunts from those who just hours before had begged the Adventists to pray for their salvation. Now, with great relief, those same people who had cried for mercies became merciless in their biting sarcasm, asking “Haven’t you gone up?”

The Day Passed

October 22, 1844, found Millerites awaiting the Lord in a variety of poses. A number of watchers for the advent left Philadelphia to camp in the country, under the scourge of inclement weather, to look for Jesus’ return. Most Millerites probably gathered in churches or homes. Legend had William Miller standing on a large, flat rock on a hill near his home where he could have taken a last view of the unburned mountains and valleys of New England while preparing for the clouds to burst asunder to reveal the returning Christ. It may not be too much even to credit Millerite stories that a number of scoffers could have been found on their knees. All were disappointed in their hopes and relieved of their fears. The day of the coming of the Lord became the day of the Great Disappointment. Jane Marsh, young daughter of Joseph Marsh, a leading Millerite editor, feared as that day approached that she had not been saved. As her father lay ill in bed, too exhausted from his labors for the Lord to rise, she clung to him in despair. “If anybody was saved I knew he would be and that he would never shake me from his arms into the fire...I meant to have a firm hold on him when the crisis arrived.”

Their disappointment must have been nearly unbearable, and for some, simply unacceptable. Many kept watching the skies from day to day, desperately hoping that Miller had made a small mistake in calculation and that Jesus would come today, or tomorrow.

^{*} This paper was presented at the 2003 Theological Conference held at Atlanta Bible College, and is the beginning of a longer study of Joseph Marsh and the theology of this segment of the Millerite movement.

Their disappointment and their ensuing embarrassment must have been unimaginable. To have to go out in the streets, or to the homes of relatives, or to their place of business and face those who had not shared their hope was a burden beyond understanding. Their personal recollections speak for themselves.

HIRAM EDSON

Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all our earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawned.

JOSEPH BATES

The effect of this disappointment can be realized only by those who experienced it...Hope sunk (sic) and courage died within us. You can have no idea of the feeling that seized me. I had been a respected citizen and had with much confidence exhorted the people to be ready for the expected change. With these taunts thrown at me ("I thought you were going up yesterday?"), if the earth could have opened and swallowed me up, it would have been sweetness compared to the distress I felt.

LUTHER BOUTELLE

It was a humiliating thing and we all felt it alike.

WILLIAM MILLER

It seemed as though all the demons from the bottomless pit were loose upon us. The same ones and many more who were crying for mercy two days before were now mixed with the rabble and mocking, scoffing and threatening in a most blasphemous manner.

Some are taunting by inquiring, "Have you not gone up?" Even little children in the streets are shouting continually to passers-by, "Have you a ticket to go up?" The public prints, of the most fashionable and popular kind, in the great Sodoms of our country are caricaturing in the most shameful manner the "white robes of the saints," Rev. 6:11, the "going up" and the great day of "burning." Even the pulpits are desecrated by the repetition of scandalous and false reports concerning the "ascension robes."

Writing to his children, through his eldest son, "I have often felt how deep must be the wounds your young and tender and unexperienced (sic) hearts must feel when you see the thousand and one falsehoods, which a proud and haughty Priesthood have invented, and a hireling press has circulated."

JOSEPH MARSH

When the day passed our eager eyes saw not the Lord...strong in our confidence we felt the Lord had robed us in wedding garments...some event had transpired equal...to that which our faith had anticipated. We had stumbled over the body of Christ, looking for a littoral (sic) coming which we never shall see.

Three weeks passed before Marsh resumed publication of the *Voice of Truth* (VT). It wasn't until November 7th that Vol. IV No. 3 finally made its appearance. To his credit, Marsh began the issue with an admission and something of an explanation, quoting a lengthy article from the *Advent Herald*:

We have been mistaken in the belief to which we thought ourselves conducted by word and the Spirit and Providence of God. But, the Word stands sure, however we may err: and the promise is true "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it is of God." The Lord will lead his obedient children. We have an unwavering trust that he will cause our disappointment and trial to work together for our good.

Marsh, in his editorial titled "Our Position," proffered his own explanation:

Since the tenth day of the seventh month has passed, and we are disappointed in not seeing our Lord, it seems necessary to define our position again. This we most cheerfully do. But first please indulge us a few moments, in expressing our great disappointment in not seeing our Lord at the time we expected. We did believe he would come at that time: and now, though we sorrow on account of our disappointment, yet we rejoice that we have acted according to our faith. We have had, and still have a conscience void of offence, in this matter, toward God and man. God has blessed us abundantly, and we have not a doubt but that all will soon be made to work together for the good of his dear people and his glory. We cheerfully admit that we have been mistaken in the nature of the event we expected would occur on the tenth of the seventh month; but we cannot admit that our great High Priest did not on the very day accomplish all that the type would justify us to expect. We now believe he did: a short time will decide this case. It will either be proven false by the delay, or true by the coming of the Lord. Let us cheerfully do the will of God, for such only have the promise of knowing the doctrine, whether it be of God or not. And remember that the wise shall understand.

In the same issue, in his article entitled "State of the Cause," Marsh reported:

Near the tenth day of the seventh month, a deep and solemn interest was waked up in all our congregations, on the coming of Christ. Believers were led to consecrate themselves, and all they had, anew to God. Hundreds followed the Lord in baptism, backsliders were reclaimed,

sinner turned to God — a deep solemnity rested on the community, and crowds flocked day and night to our meetings, which were conducted in peace, as a general remark, until not far from the commencement of the month: then the work of disturbance began: and by the tenth, so far as we have learned, the wicked took possession of our places of worship, and broke up our meetings.

Marsh reported briefly on the cited disturbances. In Ithaca their house of worship was burned, while in Danville their tabernacle was torn down, and in Scottsville the seats of their place of meeting were taken outside and burned. In northeast Connecticut, some were violently taken out of their meeting and one brother was severely beaten. Even the “professors of religion countenanced and encouraged” such work as this. One church member reported that the mobs, which took possession of their hall and would not allow their meetings, reminded him of the Sodomites at the door of Lot, the night before their destruction. He said, “And with a single exception or two, we have not heard that such Sodomite acts have met with even a rebuke from any of the professed guardians of the morals and liberties of our country! The pulpit is dumb, the press is silent, the arm of the law is powerless before the wicked throng of our degenerate age.”

It is obvious from the next issue that people were quickly falling away from the movement and giving up not only the “definite time,” but even the very fact of Christ’s coming. In the November 20th issue Marsh exhorted his readers:

This, emphatically, is an hour of temptation which was to come upon all the world, to try them. God’s people are not exempted from trials, and perhaps there is no point now on which they are more strongly and constantly assailed, than on the time of Christ’s coming. They are told by ministers, church members, and the religious press...that our time has passed, and...the whole theory is wrong, is a deception, a delusion — a mistake...and hence they ought to come back to their respective churches. Many, as would be expected, under the sore disappointment they have recently met, hardly know how to resist such deceptive pretences. They know they have been mistaken relative to Christ’s coming at the close of A.D. 1843, and on the tenth day of the seventh month. They think they may be mistaken again, and perhaps the whole theory, on the time, is incorrect, and the sooner they abandon it the better. But pause, my dear brother or sister, a moment before you take this hasty step...Nothing but time, or the passing by of the event, has detected the least mistake in your faith. And even now, the signs of the times are so portentous, that you are constrained to acknowledge that the end of things must be nigh, even at the door.

Marsh wrote of the need to replenish his finances, which had been depleted, and asked the subscribers to endeavor to help. He explained how the hospitality

extended to visitors, the help given to faithful lecturers, and the over 100,000 extra copies of the paper had reduced the \$1000 he had to “financial exhaustion.” He also refuted the reports that Joshua Himes had benefited in the final hours from large gifts from benefactors that reduced them to poverty.

He wrote about the state of “the Cause”:

In this city we are again permitted to worship as usual with but little disturbance from a few of the scum of the lower order of society. Our congregations are full as large as they were before the commencement of the interest waked up on the seventh month. Some who were waked from their slumbers by that movement walk no more with us: but those who had oil in their vessels, as a general remark are still settled and grounded in the truth.

Lecturers and leaders were preaching and endeavoring to keep the believers together. “Br. Johnson is in Springwater and Br. Hill at Geneseo, well engaged in comforting the people of God. Dr. Fassett is proclaiming the word at East Bloomfield. Br. Pinney at the last accounts was giving meat in due season to the saints of Seneca Falls, and Br. Hitchcock is still laboring with success at Oswego.” Bro. O.R. Fassett wrote, “I have entered the field with new vigor, determined not to give up the warfare till the battle is won.” And Marsh added, in another section titled “Reports,” “The report that Bro. Himes and Storrs and other prominent lecturers have given up their faith is false: they are still in the field confidently looking for the Lord hourly.”

But in the November 27th issue of *VT* a letter from J.V. Himes stated, “Dear Bro. Marsh: We have now passed every point of definite time, in which we looked for the beloved Savior. And yet I do not give up the question — I only give up the facts are not to be depended on for literal exactness, as to time.” This was the first break from one of the leaders in holding to the definite time, and yet Himes continued in the letter, “But we are in the circle of a short period, and may look now every hour for the advent. It must be so.” In the December 4th issue of *VT* Marsh wrote again regarding definite time: “Several interesting letters on the future termination of some of the prophetic periods which relate to the coming of the Lord, have recently been received...if we are careful in discriminating between fallible and infallible testimony, and give due weight to each, without doing the least harm, and we believe with much good. Our present time however is, today, hourly — and the great consideration is, are we ready?”

In the December 11th issue appeared a lengthy letter from William Miller to Bro. Himes, in which Miller defended the advent movement’s strong emphasis on a definite time:

Dear Bro. Himes, I have been waiting and looking for the blessed hope, and in expectation of realizing the glorious things which God has spoken of Zion. Yes, and although I have been twice disappointed, I am not cast down or discouraged...I have now much more evidence that I do believe

in God's word: and although surrounded with enemies and scoffers, yet my mind is perfectly calm, and my hope in the coming of Christ is as strong as ever. I would advise you, Bro. Himes, to continue publishing your papers in Boston and New York... This cannot be far from the time. I feel confident that God will justify his word, and the time which we have preached: for we cannot have varied from the truth in our own views of the seven times, the 2300 days, the 1335 days, the trumpets, etc.

In his editorial Marsh addressed the issue of dating and the definite time. He cited correspondence from Bros. Hotchkiss, Tanner of Buffalo, Megennis of Lockport, and Hough of Toronto, who discovered a mistake of one year in the previous calculations, as to whether to count from 1 BC to AD 1 as one year or two years. "If, as Dr. Hotchkiss has clearly shown, that is counting time, where A.D. 1 is, it should have been on 0, and that 1 should be where A.D. 2 now stands...Bro. Litch remarks, 'Had I written the article I should probably have been disposed to look at the date of some of the prophetic periods, as being quite clear and strongly indicating the year 1845, as being the time of their termination.'"

As the Year Progressed

By January 8th, Marsh was writing in a more sober tone:

We have nothing special to say relative to the state of the cause in this city. Our meetings, however, are very well-attended: and a fervent spirit of prayer is manifest among the brethren. The unconverted are seldom seen in our meetings. They have been soundly rocked to sleep by a peace and safety church and ministry, and nothing, we fear, but the deep ___¹ of God will ever break their death-like sleep...All is hilarity and glee now, since "Millerism is dead." The Lord delays his coming, hence they have nothing to fear: therefore they eat and drink and are merry! But oh their end!

In the next issue, January 15th, Marsh was still declaring that "God's people are now doing up their last work in this mortal state." But he also published Bro. B. Morley's call for the brethren "especially to remember Hamburg, Collins, Brant, and Lodi. I think someone should visit these places immediately and strengthen the things which are ready to perish."

It is of interest to note the posting of the "Present Principles on which the advent Cause is based" in the January 22nd issue of *VT*:

1st The word of God teaches that the coming of Christ is yet future: that it will be personal and visible. Acts 3:20, 21; Acts 1:10; Rev. 1:7.

2nd It teaches that his coming is near, even at the door. Matt. 24:29-33;

¹ The blanks indicate places where the text of *The Voice of Truth* is not legible.

Mark 13:24-29; Luke 21:25-31.

3rd It teaches also that this present generation will witness his glorious appearing. Matt. 24:34; Luke 21:32.

4th The prophetic periods that reach to the cleansing of the sanctuary, and the resurrection of the saints, have nearly expired. Dan. 5:13, 14; Ezra 7:12, 13, 21; (see Chron.); Dan. 12:11, 12, 13.

5th According to the visions of Daniel, the next great prophetic events are the coming of the Son of Man, the destruction of the brazen image, representing earthly kingdoms, the burning of the fourth beast with the little horn, representing the Papal government, and the establishment of the kingdom of God. Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45; Dan. 7:7-14.

6th According to the Revelation of John, the sixth trumpet has sounded, and the second woe is past: the seventh trumpet is now sounding, and the third woe cometh quickly, when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign forever. Rev. 9:13-21; 10:5-11; 11:14-18.

In this issue was also the sad story of Pastor E.R. Pinney and his dismissal and ill-treatment by the First Baptist Church of Seneca Falls, who first sent him to preach the soon coming of the Lord, and then shortly thereafter dismissed him, and withheld several hundred dollars of salary which was owed him.

By the January 29th issue Marsh was writing of his fear of having to end the publication of the *VT*, due to lack of income to sustain it. He said, "We feel fully confident that with a little more faithful, united effort on the part of its friends, the *Voice of Truth* would soon have added to its subscription list a sufficient number of responsible names to amply sustain the paper. We have reached so near that point already, that we cannot cherish the thought for a moment, that it is duty to stop the publication of the paper, until one more faithful effort is made to put it on a permanent basis." After the expense of printing 100,000 extra copies prior to the definite time, the paper was not flourishing and was still being subsidized, perhaps by Marsh's other printing, or personal finances.

In the February 5th issue there was a letter from William Miller himself, still encouraging believers to look for the coming of Christ. However, he addressed criticism of himself by "my good brothers Galusha and Mansfield. They administered a good, hearty rebuke to me, and it was over a small enough matter," but it gives us a glimpse of the first evidence of less cohesion among them than there had been previously. It was also here that Marsh proposed cutting back publication of the *VT* to every two weeks, albeit with the idea of increasing the size of the paper. This did not happen, except for one experiment, but with the March 5th issue the paper was enlarged from four pages to eight pages.

In the February 12th issue Marsh addressed the issue of indefinite time, which was coming from different sources as the immediacy of Christ's return receded:

We feel very confident that there must be something wrong in the late communications which have appeared in the *Advent Herald* and *Morning Watch*, on indefinite time, from the pens of our good brethren Brown, Storrs and others...Brethren, let us have confidence in God. This indefinite time theory shows a lack of that confidence. It says we have been disappointed once, yea twice, and now we will provide for the future, so that we will not meet with another mortifying disappointment.

A sense of desperation is evident as some in the movement sought rationalization for the fact that Christ's coming was, at best, delayed. In fact the sense of despair over the religious state of the country was becoming clearer, as in a report from Canandaigua: "Our recent meeting at Canandaigua was one of deep interest to the saints. But few of any other class attended...If this is a true sample of the general state of feeling throughout our country, truly our work is done, so far as the sinner and nominal church are concerned. They have rejected the counsel of God against themselves."

The issue of the shut door then came up as the animosity seemed to be increasing between Adventists and the other churches. Marsh spent his February 26, 1845 editorial posing the question whether or not the door was shut by asking a series of questions: 1) What is the door? 2) Will this door ever be shut? 3) Is the door now shut? (He says it is not.) 4) When will the door be shut? 5) Will the door be shut soon? Of course his answer is in the affirmative. He concluded, "We have no hope of even partially waking up the church and world again to holy things. The sleep of death is upon them: and their death-like slumbers are imperceptibly stealing over few who but recently were looking, with cheering hope, and lively faith, for the coming of the Lord."

Definite vs. indefinite time became a major issue to be debated in the *VT*. In the March 5th issue, the lead article by H.H. Gross strongly defended "definite time." Marsh in his editorial defended Gross' article, and the definite time position: "Some will doubtless demur at the definite time for the Lord's coming to be found in Br. Gross' article. But why complain at this? Oh! say you, what will the church and the world say if we set another time and it should prove a failure? What will they say? nothing new we presume: for it does appear that they have already said everything which human folly and depravity could invent. Hence we have nothing to hope or fear from that quarter."

In the March 12 issue Storrs was taken to task twice for not holding to "definite time" and, in fact, was quoted as saying, "fixing on a definite day or even a year for the advent to occur is a delusion." There was also a lengthy article again explaining the Julian calendar and the issue of fixing the date for a definite time.

As the months went along attempts were made to adjust and re-figure the calendars. In the March 26th issue, Br. Himes was cited: "Br. Himes takes the position that the prophetic periods cannot extend beyond '47 — they may

terminate any day: hence, he is looking for the coming of the Lord momentarily.” Readers were asked to treat Bro. Storr kindly, and not “load him with opprobrious or taunting epithets for his recent mistake and errors.” In the April 16th issue, Bro. Snow wrote to justify himself in regard to the definite time, having been accused by Bro. Gross of deviating from the insight he proclaimed of the seventh month and tenth day theory. A letter from William Miller in the March 26th issue questioned Bro. Storrs’ reasoning in regard to giving up definite time. Storrs, in the April 16th issue, responded strongly to Miller’s letter and insisted he had not given up the soon coming of Christ. But he did say, “But let me ask. Has not God taken away OUR Definite Time?...Hereafter I choose to stand disconnected from any and all bodies of men who make a man’s salvation dependent on believing their peculiarities, whether it be ‘definite time’ for the advent, or any other opinion which has no higher authority than the judgment of a mere man.” Elon Galusha expressed a middle-ground position toward which most finally came:

I have ever felt it my duty to speak with caution, upon the subject of definite time...From the moment I embraced the Advent doctrine to the present time, I have uniformly regarded and represented the real termination of the 2300 days of Daniel and the corresponding prophetic periods as marking the time of the Advent. On that basis has my faith rested. The point of time in modern calculation which synchronizes with the actual termination of those periods has in my view been a matter of opinion, not of positive revelation...Hence, I have never professed to know the specific time of our Lord’s coming.

A measure of divisiveness was becoming more apparent and the movement was already showing signs of splintering. None other than William Miller reported on the Albany Conference, held nearly a month earlier (Tuesday-Thursday, April 29-May 1), in the May 21st *VT*. It has been noted that Marsh did not attend, but did print the report that occupied nearly three pages of the issue. Noted attendees included: William Miller, J.V. Himes, N.N. Whiting, Elon Galusha (President), J. Litch, L.D. Fleming, L.D. Mansfield, J.C. Stoddard, N. Hitchcock, S. Bliss (Secretary), O.R. Fassett (Secretary), a total of sixty-one listed.

Much of the first day was given to reporting on the activities around the country, which was represented from Buffalo on the west to Maryland on the south, to Canada on the north, and to the eastern section of New Hampshire. On Wednesday there was discussion of the report of a committee of twelve, appointed the day before, to “concert and mature a plan of future operations.” There was also a committee of five elders, namely Himes, Litch, L.D. Fleming, Shipman and Powell, appointed to examine candidates who had been presented for the ministry.

That evening J. Litch spoke from Luke 13:24-29, and five candidates “were then duly set apart for the Gospel ministry by prayer, and the laying on of hands, viz. J.M. Smith, of Southbridge, Mass., Walter Pratt, Southbridge, Mass., O.R. Fassett, Providence, R.I., W. Britton of Westboro, Mass., and C.R. Griggs of Brimfield, Mass.”

The next morning the committee of twelve, formed to plan future operations, finished their report. The report presented nine important truths that were of consensus:

1st That the heavens and the earth which are now by the word of God, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men...That the Lord will create new heavens and a new earth, wherein righteousness — that is, the righteous — will forever dwell.

2nd That there are but two Advents or appearances of the Savior to this earth.

3rd That the second coming or appearing is indicated to be emphatically nigh, even at the door.

4th That the condition of salvation is repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

5th That there will be a resurrection of the dead.

6th That the only Millennium taught in the Bible is the thousand years which are to intervene between the first resurrection and that of the rest of the dead, as inculcated in the book of Revelation.

7th That the promises that Abraham should be the heir of the world was not to him, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

8th That there is no promise of this world’s conversion.

9th That it is the duty of the ministers of the Word to continue in the work of preaching the Gospel to every creature, even unto the end.

In other “Associated Actions,” they defined a valid church as “any congregation of believers who habitually assemble for the worship of God, and the due observance of the gospel ordinances, as a church of Christ. As such, it is an independent body, accountable only to the great Head of the Church.”

In their “Plan of Operations,” the committee recommended the continuation of five operations:

1) Our first work is to make straight paths for our feet; 2) to give the household meat in due season, and to build ourselves up on our most holy faith; 3) continue in obedience to the great commission to preach the gospel to every creature — so long as the love of Christ constrains us; 4) we shall not be released...from our obligations to be “workers together with God,” in saving those for whom the Redeemer died; and 5) the duty, which of right devolves on every minister of the gospel, of

proclaiming the hour of God's judgment is, if performed at all, to be done by those who are convinced of its truth.

But interestingly they recommended the cancellation of camp meetings, which had been an ongoing facet of revivalism since the early 1820s.

They concluded with four resolutions:

1st Resolved that the conference opposes to the utmost of its power, the fatal and delusive doctrine of modern days — viz. that the world, or even a majority of it will be converted to Christ.

2nd Resolved that we consider the doctrine of the restoration of the natural Jews, as a nation, either before or after the second advent of Christ, as heirs and inheritors of the land of Canaan, as subversive of the whole Gospel system, by raising up what Christ has taken down — viz. the middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile.

3rd Resolved that we can have no sympathy or fellowship with those things which have only a show of wisdom in will-worship and neglect of the body...and that the act of promiscuous feet-washing and the salutation kiss as practiced by some professing Adventists as religious ceremonies, sitting on the floor as an act of voluntary humility, moving the head to humble one's self, and acting like children in understanding, are not only unscriptural, but subversive, if persevered in, of purity and morality.

4th That we recommend to our brethren to encourage those men only who give evidence that they are called of God to the work, who are of good behavior, who abstain from all appearance of evil, who are vigilant, sober, apt to teach, not greedy of filthy lucre, not brawlers, not covetous, men who will teach the unadulterated word of God, and by manifestation of the truth, commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

As the conference meetings concluded the report stressed the unanimity of opinions and the close harmony that resulted. It is worthy of note, though, that Marsh had not attended and later in the same issue he expressed his concern over what resulted. He commended much of what was done: the reports from around the country were greatly encouraging, the ordering of the household of faith was needed and due, "there was much valuable instruction and advice in the address of the conference," and the union that prevailed "is what should ever characterize the children of God."

However, Marsh continued:

Finally, we trust the conference in Albany will be productive of much good. We ardently pray that it may. But while we thus hope and pray we are not free from fears. Though we find in the acts of the conference to approve, admire, and recommend, we think we see some things

incompatible with our profession as strictly a Bible people.

1. The first objectionable feature, which attracts our notice, is the name, which heads these acts. "Adventists" appears to be the title or name by which our brethren wish to be designated from other religious bodies. Our brethren can take whatever name they choose, and we shall not contend with them about it, but we can never consent a moment to stand identified with any associated Body (than) the church of God, or Christ, and be called "by another name." (1) Because it dishonors the head or Father of the family; (2) Human names when connected with church, such as Catholic church, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Unitarian, Christian and Advent church; and hundreds of others that might be named, are all unscriptural and anti-Christian and should be rejected by every child of God. We cannot for a moment subscribe to one of them. But to the only name given in the New Testament we can and do most heartily subscribe — it is CHURCH OF GOD. (3) Church of God is significant; it denotes property or possessions and points out those ___ church who belong to God.

2. We object to the declaration, in a few short paragraphs, of what our brethren do and do not believe. To the sentiments expressed we have no particular objection to offer: but we do seriously object to any man or body of men, since the days of the apostles, presenting anything short of the perfect law of liberty, the WHOLE of it, without ADDITION, DIMINUTION OR ALTERARATION, in the least, as a test of Christian faith and character...The declaration of "great principles upon which we can unite and act" lies at the very root of every human test which ever has and still does divide the true and professed church of God.

3. The principle of religious bodies voting or resolving that a certain doctrine or practice is true or false we have long objected to. If error, heresy, fanaticism and wrong practices cannot be put down, and the true faith and practice sustained, by proclaiming the truth in power and love, resolutions will never do it.

4. Finally, we object to the doing of the Albany conference because proceedings as a whole look like forming a new sect, under a sectarian name, instead of coming to the order of the New Testament under the name there given to the true church.

He concluded, "It is certain principles, not our dear brethren, which we oppose. Trying circumstances have influenced them to take this step. But we trust they will see that no circumstances will justify a departure from the law of Christ, and will immediately abandon the ground they have taken, or show from the word of the Lord their authority for what they have done." They did not abandon their positions, but Marsh's opposition kept the necessary unity from forming, and the splintering of the movement continued.

In the July 2nd issue, Marsh stated that he was happy to learn that a later conference held in Boston addressed the issues of Albany to which he had objected. He reported:

Resolved, That we do not regard the expression of sentiment, or principles of Associated Action adopted by the Albany Conference, as instituting a test of Christian character, or as having anything to do with church organization, but merely as a disclaiming of erroneous sentiments and practices which are ascribed to us.

Resolved, That this Conference being a voluntary deliberative body, meeting for mutual benefit, and the aid of a common cause, has no right or disposition to interfere with any one's church relation — and that belonging to any one of the evangelical churches, so called, is no barrier to an individual, who is an Adventist, participating in the deliberations of the conference.

Resolved, That this Conference, as a body, disclaims any sanction of the peculiar views entertained by some of our brethren respecting the state of the dead, or the final state of the wicked, or any other peculiarities, which are no part or parcel of the advent doctrine.

In the Months Before the Anniversary of the Great Disappointment

In the August 6th issue of *VT*, Marsh wrote in his column “State of the Cause”:

We have no revivals or conversions to report at home or abroad. We would that this was all we could or had cause to say of the desolation of Zion: but it is not. Sinners have not only ceased turning to God: and the nominal Church not only acknowledge themselves dead and plucked up by the roots: but many in our own once happy ranks, who were looking with joyful hope for the coming of the Lord, now walk no more with us: while others who still hold fast their profession are greatly lacking in spiritual engagedness (sic)...This statement is not made in reference to one place more than another. We believe it is applicable to the cause in general. We are in fearful times.

This article was immediately followed, tellingly, by an article on the Laodicean church.

Marsh's lead article of August 27th revealed the increasing separation between the other churches and the Advent cause. Its title, ironically stated, was “The Exalted and Popular State of the Nominal Church in the Last Days.” His editorial revealed his own feelings in response to others regarding his article on Laodicea in the August 6th issue:

We are rejoiced to learn that the brethren in different places are taking heed to what the Spirit saith unto the churches, especially the Laodicean church. We hope more, nay, all will give this subject a prayerful

examination. It doubtless was specially designed for our benefit. It fits our condition, as a body, to the very spirit and letter. And we had much better frankly and humbly acknowledge it: be zealous and repent — overcome our lukewarmness — hear the knockings of the Savior — open to him the door, that we sup with him here, and reign with him hereafter, than to continue in our lukewarm, backslidden, bickering state — be spewed out of the mouth of the Lord, and rejected forever.

An exchange between Storrs and Marsh provides evidence for that “bickering state.” Storrs wrote, “Dare the *Voice of Truth* do? It is very easy to say ‘not as weighty,’ but will you let your readers weigh for themselves? or must they take your weight, with only one side of the scale filled. Truly this is like the churches you condemn” (*Bible Examiner*, Aug. 16). Marsh responded, “Such kind of daring and complaining always betrays the weakness of the cause of the one from whom they come. Why does Br. Storrs talk thus? Why talk of ‘weight with only one side of the scale filled?’” The Adventist cause was faltering.

In the October 22nd issue, one year from the day when time was to have ended, William Miller wrote, “I think the Advent churches are rising in every place where I am acquainted...and although they are a tried people, they are not forsaken. God is with them, and will be to the end. We have passed the last trial. Now for the Bridegroom...One hundred thousand prayers daily ascending from this country alone will soon reach the throne of God, and he will avenge his elect speedily. Come, Lord Jesus, O, come quickly!”

Marsh himself did not acknowledge the date. He wrote in the issue: “We promised in our previous number, at another time to show on what year of the vulgar era the true A.D. 1847 would fall...From the investigation we have already made, we are very confident: 1st That the 2300 days have not yet terminated. 2nd That they will soon end when the Sanctuary will be cleansed, or justified. 3rd That A.D. 1847 vulgar era is the extreme point of their termination.”

Some Preliminary Conclusions

Cantankerous is a word that we jokingly have ascribed to people of the Church of God and/or biblical unitarians. While the word has negative connotations, it is a valuable word which has legitimacy among us going all the way back to these early years. It is perhaps the genius that allowed this miniscule minority to maintain its identity even in the face of the overwhelming majority.

Marsh was prickly even toward others who were his compatriots in the cause they held so dear. This same dogged determination and deep conviction of the rightness of his position enabled him to stay focused on what he believed the Bible taught, and not to compromise what he believed to be true — even if it meant risking a relationship.

The very strengths that kept the movement focused and strong in the face of a common goal, or enemy — when the goal was unrealized, or no longer the

goal, the passion and energy continued to roil in the church, and eventually infected the internal workings of the group. When this happens the movement breaks into competing components that divide and cause an implosion, resulting in an explosion as individual parts rocket off in different directions.

As we consider these early years, the lessons we draw from them may not have been learned. We value their deep convictions and the strength of their positions. At the same time, we regret their strong convictions and the insistence on their own understandings. But we cannot expect them to have it both ways. It seems it may be unlikely, if not impossible, for the two characteristics — strong enough positions to maintain identity, and gentleness and equanimity enough to get along with one another, and with others — to be contained within a group.

Marsh and those early pioneers have been both glorified and vilified, and both portrayals may be accurate. But perhaps in our day those strong convictions are too strong for our desire to find a cooperative spirit and common ground with others.

It may not be too big a question to ask whether or not the identity of a movement can be maintained without a prickly, cantankerous constituency — people of strong, deeply held convictions, with the strength to maintain those positions even at the risk of alienation from all others.