

THE SECOND ADVENTISTS, OR MILLERITES.

To present a better idea of the local history of this peculiar religion, I shall devote some space to the rise and growth of the Second Adventists throughout the United States, giving such facts concerning their general belief which I could obtain from a diligent research, with rather meagre printed material at my command.

The Founders of the Faith.

The belief in a second coming of Christ was no doubt indulged in by some religious enthusiasts in the early part of the nineteenth century, but it cropped out actively in 1833, when William Miller, a farmer, of Low

* His father was Captain Wm. Miller, a soldier of the Revolution and of the War of 1812. His mother was the daughter of Elnathan Phelps, of Pittsfield, Mass., a Baptist clergyman. Religious meetings were often held in his father's house, and these revivals had much to do in shaping the life of the future Adventist leader. He also served as a Captain at Plattsburg, in the War of 1812. In his early manhood he read Hume, Voltaire and Paine, and even advocated their teachings. He was a ready and smooth versifier, and was known as the "poet of Low Hampton." Afterwards he professed faith in Christianity, uniting with the Baptists at that place. He became deeply absorbed in Bible study, and wrote of this period that he "lost all taste for other reading." He was very sincere and indefatigable in his researches, using his private judgment in his interpretations. In 1831, after his prolonged study, he became convicted that Christ would appear in person in the world between the dates of March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. He was licensed by the Baptists to preach, but never ordained. Churches were freely thrown open to his use, and not a few Protestant clergymen advocated his belief. (Extract from Appleton's Cyclopaedia of Biography.)

Hampton, N. Y. (who was born February 5, 1781, or 1782, at Pittsfield, Mass., and died December 20, 1849), after some examination of the Scriptures, began lecturing and writing for the press in Eastern New York and Vermont, his belief in the speedy and personal coming to earth, for the second time, of the Lord Jesus Christ, at which time the present Christian dispensation would terminate. The date for the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in regard to this important event, computed Biblically and mathematically, he placed at some period of time A. D. 1843. Some of Miller's articles were reprinted in pamphlet form and distributed gratuitously, one of these editions being published in 1836.

Early in 1840, Joshua V. Himes, afterward an Episcopal clergyman, but then a preacher or exhorter in the "Christian Connection," became a firm believer in Miller's views, and began the publication of a bi-weekly paper called the Signs of the Times. Later this was changed to the Advent Herald and issued weekly, which attained a wide circulation, although I have never been able to trace up a single copy of it. The publishing of this doctrine or belief created a horde of lecturers and admirers in various parts of this country, especially along the States of the Atlantic Coast.

Bad Results From the Craze.

The effects of this vigorous campaign among the illiterate whites and superstitious colored folks of the South led to insanity in many cases; and those who gave away their personal property, in anticipation of the second advent (after which event, of course, they would not need it), were at last brought to their senses by the non-fulfillment of the false prophecy.

Beggary stared some people in the face and they committed suicide; others even parted with their lives prior to the expected date, through helpless insanity.

The Adventist leaders knew that impostors worked all sorts of schemes and practices upon the people. These were exposed to some extent, but fanaticism prevailed until it had run its course.

Many people lost faith in Miller and Himes when the year 1843* passed without any unusual spiritual event occurring; yet some whose spirits were kept buoyant under new calculations of their leaders continued to set other dates, from time to time, for the second coming; and in this way Second Adventism became a religious denomination.

Despite frequent failures of predictions, the new church became organized and grew, with distinguishing principles, thriving all over the country. Second Adventists are divided, rather naturally from their failures, into several classes: Some are fixed "timists," and their leaders set particular dates for the second coming; while others do not, but wait patiently for Christ's coming in His own good time. There is a large body of others, with an educational institution and other advantages, at Battle Creek, Mich., who observe the Jewish Sabbath, or seventh day of the week, instead of the regulation Sunday.

The prophecies of Daniel and Revelations are prime favorites in the ground-work and structure of this denomination. The second coming of

*In acknowledging his mistake of the year 1843, "Father" Miller, at Low Hampton, afterward fixed the time as being October 24-25, 1844, thus giving a certain date. 1843 was the Jewish time and 1844 was Roman time. His new date, however, failed to fulfill his promises, and the multitude of converts gradually lost faith in his prophecies.

Christ they conclude will be pre-millennial, and the Adventists believe there will be two distinct resurrections, a thousand years apart. The first one, the resurrection of life and of the just; the last one, the resurrection of the dead, of damnation and of the unjust, the separating period being named only in Revelations 20.

Adopting Belief and Doctrine.

A "Mutual Conference of Adventists" was held in Albany, N. Y., in 1845, when they agreed upon associated church action and belief. This was contrary to their original design, yet circumstances rendered it necessary. They commended the formation of Christian churches, and announced their religious belief to be a unity in church fellowship throughout the country, with no other creed or form of discipline than the written word of God, which they deemed sufficient for their faith and duty.

Side Doctrines and Government.

Conferences of the Second Adventists were and are held as often as deemed necessary, for discussion and consideration of anything deemed necessary to espouse their cause. The body is simply voluntary and advisory, claiming no authority over the conscience of anyone. The Advent doctrine looks upon the visible coming and reign of Christ on earth as the only view which will explain and harmonize the book of God. They believe in the speedy coming of Christ; that He is near at hand; and this is their great source of anxiety and eventual comfort.

Among the side doctrines grafted into the Second Advent organizations are those which claim that the soul, after death, remains insensible, like in sleeping, until the resurrection morn, and that none but the righteous souls

will be raised and endowed with immortality, etc.

I have given this outline of their belief and progress, aided partly by the writings of Thomas E. Hill, author of "Hill's Album," to present the latter part of this paper in a clear light to the local historians. As regards their regulation, it was resolved, years afterward, in August, 1875, at the sixteenth annual meeting of the Advent Christian Association, at Springfield, Mass., to convoke a general conference to complete the congregational form of government adopted by them.*

The Millerites at Landisville.

And now I shall lead you to the most interesting part of this sketch—the story of the local meeting place of the Millerites, as the Second Adventists were called in Lancaster county. †Little does the growing generation of the people of our rural districts know of the early history of its inhabitants and stamping-grounds, except what can be gleaned from the lips of our living fathers and grandfathers; and these occasional scraps of old-time local occurrences are eagerly sought for

*After this paper was prepared, Mr. George Steinman loaned the writer his copy of "Denominations in the United States," published by John Winebrenner, V.D.M., in 1848. This old book gives an excellent sketch of "The Adventists," by Josiah Litch, of Philadelphia, together with a steel portrait of William Miller. This history coincides with that already written, giving the Second Advent belief in full detail. This book contains a fine portrait of I. Daniel Rupp, the historian, taken from a daguerreotype by C. M. Johnston, of Lancaster; also, a full page plate of J. Winebrenner, the first "speaker" of the Church of God, residing at Harrisburg, and includes historical articles on "The Mennonites," by Rev. Christian Herr, of Pequea, Lancaster county, and of "The Reformed Mennonite Society," by Rev. John Herr, of Strasburg, this county.

†A part of this portion of the present paper was first contributed by the writer to the Village Vigil, of Landisville, September 20, 1883.

and relished even when simply told. That I have often been enchanted with these narratives need scarcely be stated; and, above all other tales, this one concerning a very odd kind of religious zeal called Millerism, that attacked our inhabitants, is listened to with the greatest interest—interest because of the wonder that just sixty-one years back (1843) people could live in such an apparently enlightened community as the Hempfield townships and be led to believe the world would come to an end at a stated time during the fall of that year.

Millerite religion was a new thing to the citizens of Landisville at that time, and it, perhaps, need hardly be wondered at, when several scholarly and well-dressed divines suddenly came to the village from the region of somewhere, but nowhere in particular, and made themselves at home, that some of the people took up the belief and helped to further the ends of what was one of the most gigantic frauds, as well as ridiculous demonstrations, ever witnessed hereabouts.

A Meeting Ground Established.

These wily preachers soon after their arrival made arrangements with a prominent farmer, George Gamber by name, living southwest of Landisville, within less than a mile of the present campmeeting grounds, for holding a series of out-door meetings in a strip of woodland belonging to him not far from the present Reading and Columbia Railroad. Having been successful in this, they soon erected temporary buildings there, including a stand or pulpit, for their own use, and hung up large colored pictures, or charts, illustrative of their new doctrine, representing dragons, the day of judgment and equally terrible and unsightly drawings.

The Millerites soon made known far and wide that meetings would be held there, and everybody was invited to come and be convinced that the world would surely end in a few weeks at three o'clock on a fixed night.* (A few old people recently spoken to claim this hour was earlier, some time after nightfall, or exactly at midnight; my father states, however, that it was beyond midnight, as it was a long wait.) People marveled at this unexpected turn of things. The idea seemed only part natural—bordered strongly on the supernatural. A goodly portion of the inhabitants living there were disciples of John Winebrenner (Church of God members by faith), and the traveling preachers soon conferred with them and got their consent to attend these meetings and help spread the news of the last approaching day on earth.

Nearly with one accord the church people took up the belief that the Millerite preachers had announced. People were sought in their own homes by the bogus apostles, and convinced and satisfied by reference to the Revelations in the Scriptures that the last day was fast approaching. Need it be wondered, then, that in an incredibly short time almost everybody pushed business aside and joined in the great revival exercises in the Gamber grove? People came from far and near, Lancaster citizens among the rest; and, as the day of exit to another sphere

*In endeavoring to locate the exact date of the Millerites' "last day," S. M. Sener, Esq., could find no account of it in the old files of the Examiner office; while the writer found only one small item in the Lancaster Intelligencer and Journal, of June 13, 1843, headed "A Hypocrite," and telling of a Millerite preacher, already wedded, having a wife and family at Utica, who married a respectable young woman in Michigan. The "last day," I am assured, was in the fall, during the school period, in September, and at seeding time; and there are people living who ought to be able to establish the date.

drew nigh, everybody was trying to do what could yet be done for his soul's salvation, and the saving of his friends and neighbors.

Crafty Work of the Preachers.

The preachers plainly told the people to lay aside all worldly affairs, to throw away their goods, to make use of what they had, to give their money to them, and to do nothing but pray and praise and sing and shout hosanna! And there were scores of persons who were hoodwinked enough to do this. Some of these could be mentioned, but I shall restrain this personality as far as possible, my only object being to descriptively give these facts as a matter of history.* People, however, did throw their dried fruit out into the streets, gave alms liberally to the poor (of course, the ready preachers were included in this); money was even thrown away (some of which has since been ploughed up on what is known as the Trout farm); fine hard-wood for making wagons was used for the stove; doors were left unbolted and unlocked night and day, and general unconcern was given to business, all remaining time being devoted to preparation for the great transition that was soon to take place.

The writer's grandfather, a good Winebrennarian, long since mingled with the dead, then kept the village store, in the same house where Fred. Metzger's confectionery is now located, that building being erected of logs and since weather-boarded. One day a Millerite apostle appeared there with an open Bible in his extended arms, and struck up a conversation with the storekeeper on the all-important mat-

*It is stated that the Gamber family, upon whose property the meetings were held, became greatly reduced in financial circumstances, before their death.

ter of leaving his property and joining in their exercises in the woods. This the merchant stoutly objected to do, and said very plainly that they were false prophets, and that he (the preacher) could not show or convince him by any chapter or sentence in the Scriptures to the contrary. Of course, the reverend man soon left, urging the storekeeper, in the meantime, to attend their meetings and to consider the matter carefully before neglecting it too long.

As before stated, meetings were held regularly in the woods; converts were made, eloquent and loud-spoken exhortations were given, and awe-inspiring words and expressions told to the many spellbound listeners. It is a fact that even little children were in mortal fear of the last day. One elderly relative recently told me that in her vicinity, whenever the grown-up folks spoke of the dreaded event, the children about them invariably shuddered or went out of hearing. It seemed to put the sensitive ones all on their nerves.

Old-Time Diversions.

In those days religious campmeetings generally had several fist-fights around and about them. Roughts would congregate, and, under the influence of copious draughts of "tangle-foot," retailed to them by neighboring hucksters, Rome would soon "howl," and a few men would be whipped and hurt in the general hubbub of these disgraceful outbreaks. It is needless to chronicle that a fight also ensued at the Millerite meetings, and one pursued individual actually ran and hid himself underneath the shelter of the pulpit to avoid the attacks of the frenzied fighters.

When the "last" day came, finally, crowded meetings and deserted homes

resulted. Everybody and everything seemed awaiting that thrilling time when it was said the angel, called Gabriel, would sound a blast on his far-reaching trumpet, to call the just to their glory and send sinners to their doom. Some of the officers and older members of the present Historical Society can bear me out in the way things were then. Right here in Lancaster more than one person was specially robed ready for the final flight. Some were on the upper stories and even roofs of their houses, where they could see and be prepared for the best or worst for them. The afternoon was dark and dreary, with signs of clouds hovering in the air. Children at school were more or less in fear, and, as the hours dragged by, young and old were alike on the tip-toe of suspense.

At Landisville, a stout mulatto, known as "Sam Patch," employed in the smithy, was among the unbelievers of the prophets, and, being of a light-hearted and joking turn of mind, he concocted a huge plan for his own amusement, as well as to gratify the expectant multitude, on that never-to-be-forgotten night. He waited till after dusk, and then, equipping himself with a "snail-horn," which, it is said, he could handle proficiently, he started out for the scene of the humming Millerite encampment. When there, he carefully surveyed the surroundings, and, watching his opportunity, climbed stealthily up a large tree overhanging the great concourse of people. Ensconcing himself high up among the branches, he waited patiently for the solemn hour of three o'clock.

The preaching and excitement are said to have been wonderful while the hours passed by, and possibly were at their highest pitch when it was announced that the time had arrived and everybody cautioned to be ready.

The Warning and Collapse.

Just then a blast was rent upon the still night air, loud, long and sonorous, by the colored "angel" overhead. Again it was repeated and again, and then silence reigned supreme for a short time.

When the suspense was growing terribly annoying, the Millerite preachers were looked for. They prepared to vanish! Before leaving, however, among other excuses they stated that they were in duty bound to go to the Carolinas and inform the people there, too, or else they would be lost, and as money would be worthless to the people in this vicinity, they should give them (the preachers) some to reach those then far-distant States.

The money was given, the prophets left, and, it is superfluous to add, the people in the woods near Landisville soon returned to their neglected homes, sadder, yet by far wiser, than they had been before.

Later Events of a Similar Character.

In conclusion, it seems worthy to note that the dissolution of this old earth 's expected by some persons as each decade of years rolls by, or once in a generation or score of years. Poetry helps to paint and prop up this popular tendency, for who has not read or heard of the couplet:

"The world to an end shall come
In eighteen hundred and eighty-one."

For some reason or other, influence of planets, puzzling to divine, shortly after the advent of a decade of years, the inevitable "to an end shall come in the sometime and one" bobs up serenely with a smile which refuses to rub off. And the expectant enthusiasts are always "ready for the next round," if you will permit this pleasantry.

The falling of heavenly bodies, meteors and innumerable stars have ever been the warning symbols for the credulous ones, more especially the weak-kneed colored brethren south of Mason and Dixon's line, where on more than one starry night these dusky denizens of our national life have wept and crept in awe to some well or secluded outbuilding, where, strange to realize, they seemed secure and immune from the fiery phantoms of their unhappy vision.

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Author: Landis, David Bachman, 1862-

Title: The Second Adventists, or Millerites / by D. B. Landis.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Miller, William, 1782-1849.
Millerite movement--Pennsylvania--Lancaster County.
Lancaster County (Pa.)--Religion.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society,
1904/1905

Description: [47]-58 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 9,
no. 3

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.9

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

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