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## Prophecy, Gender, and Culture: Ellen Gould Harmon [White]\* and the Roots of Seventh-day Adventism

Jonathan M. Butler

"... the weakest of the weak..."<sup>1</sup>

Ellen G. White, *nee* Harmon (1827-1915), is among the least known of the prophet-founders of major American religious movements.<sup>2</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist prophet has received neither the celebrity nor the notoriety of Mormonism's Joseph Smith, Shakerism's Ann Lee, or Christian Science's Mary Baker Eddy. Yet she deserves at least the recognition of these other sect founders. Ill, introverted, and undereducated, White ultimately asserted the most forceful influence on Seventh-day Adventism and ensured it a place among the major American sects. Her long and resourceful career as the Adventist visionary inspired the transformation of a single-minded, other-worldly, Millerite off-shoot into a complex and established denomination with wide-ranging interests in sabbatarianism, eschatology, health reform, temperance, medicine, child nurture, education, and religious liberty. Her legacy includes an impressive global network of sanitariums and hospitals and a vast educational system unparalleled in contemporary Protestantism. Her writings number eighty printed volumes, circulated among an Adventist world membership of over five million.<sup>3</sup>

This study explores White's childhood and adolescence against the cultural backdrop of the 1830's and 1840's. To uncover her Ellen Harmon years, between 1827 and 1846, is an indispensable step toward an adequate understanding of this neglected figure. This was her critically formative period when, as a sick and troubled girl, she lifted herself from a sickbed and took her first, feeble, tentative steps toward becoming both a Victorian woman and an Adventist prophet. As sheer narrative this story holds inherent interest, but it begs for analysis as well. For Ellen Harmon, as not only a young woman but an ill young woman who found her vocation in prophecy, provides an ideal historical vehicle to test assumptions on the nature of prophecy

and its relationship to gender. Her individual biography in this period also carries broader religious and cultural implications. Harmon's rite of passage occurred at the same time her religious community and the wider culture were undergoing their own dramatic transformations. Millerism evolved into Seventh-day Adventism, the most significant institutional outgrowth of the Millerite movement, just as American culture at large experienced its profound paradigm shift from Calvinism to Victorianism. Harmon's early life, although in many respects novel and marginal, was an integral part of the religious and cultural changes of her time.<sup>4</sup>

Certain traits of Ellen Harmon's personality may have predisposed her to prophesy, but it proves impossible to isolate these personal characteristics from her cultural matrix. Aspects of her temperament or personality that may conform to the usual stereotype of the charismatic figure seem to have functioned less as a catalyst within her cultural milieu than as a response to its collective impulses. In terms of the relative influence of heredity and environment on Ellen Harmon as a prophet, she appears to have been largely made, not born. This influence becomes especially clear when one views her charismatic origin within its wider setting of social unrest and cultural ferment. Millennial movements and the prophets who epitomize them typically emerge in a period of cultural change that has been characterized as a transition from the "old rules" to "no rules" to "new rules." Harmon's call to prophesy occurred in the highly chaotic and creative no-rules period which fell between the breakdown of America's Calvinist hegemony (the old rules) and its replacement with the new rules of Victorianism. Harmon internalized this development by way of her own break from a Calvinist-slanted Methodism and her eventual establishment of a Victorian Adventism. In this period, the limbo between an old world and a new spawned the likes of Mormonism, Shakerism, and Oneida Perfectionism. For Harmon it was Millerism that provided the seedbed of enthusiasm and ecstasy which she came to personify. Her ability both to embody her no-rules era and transcend it ensured her durability as a prophet. But in order to demonstrate this assertion it is necessary to turn directly to her story.<sup>5</sup>

Born in southeastern Maine on November 26, 1827, in the little village of Gorham, near Portland, Ellen and her twin sister, Elizabeth, were the last two of Robert and Eunice Harmon's eight children. Her father had descended from some of the earliest and most successful landowners in the state. But prior to Ellen's birth he resided with his family in the Moose Alley section of the seaport city of Portland. In this poorest part of the city near the docks, Robert engaged his wife and children in the cottage industry of hat making. A local recession in the

late 1820's then drove the family to Ellen's country birthplace, where Robert supplemented his hat-making income with farming.<sup>6</sup>

Insofar as a prophet's origins merit mentioning in the hagiographies, they are mostly lowly and unfortunate. But Ellen Harmon's early life showed steady upward mobility. Her family returned to Portland in the early 1830's, when she was four or five years old, and lived on Spruce Street in a solidly working class neighborhood.<sup>7</sup> Her petit bourgeois upbringing did encounter the hardships of the 1837 Panic as well as setbacks for the Harmon's when silk replaced fur as fashionable headgear. Indeed, the tangible ill effects for her family of a change in vogue may have reinforced her natural social and religious bias against fashion. But despite economic difficulties, the Harmon's Yankee enterprise produced enough relative prosperity to ensure a largely bourgeois outlook in the later visionary.

The Harmon's religion did more to shape a future prophet than their economic situation. Robert and Eunice maintained membership in Portland's Chestnut Street Methodist Episcopal Church. Robert served as an exhorter whose lay preaching Ellen White later eulogized as clear and fruitful on Bible topics. He led out in Methodist social meetings where Ellen gained her first exposure to those familiarly intrusive probes into the spiritual lives of the membership. She heard the tearful testimonials of Methodists abandoning their "besetting sins." The Chestnut Street Church resonated the usual "shouting" Methodism, although a breach developed between the more staid folk in the pews on the main floor and the shouters in the backless benches of the gallery. The enthusiastic members eventually broke off from the main body and briefly established the "Goose Church," as it was derogatorily labeled, where robust "Hallelujahs" and "Amens," along with instrumental music, animated the services. Although the Harmon's remained at Chestnut Street, at least Ellen and her mother evidently identified with the shouters. Not all of the shouting spirit had been siphoned from their church, for the first pipe organ of any Methodist Church in the United States was introduced there when Ellen was eight years old. With an organ loud enough to be heard "all the way to New York," according to one Methodist bishop, Chestnut Street Methodists probably wooed back some of the members from the abortive Goose Church.<sup>8</sup>

The most vivid memory of Ellen Harmon's childhood had less to do with social or familial background than a startling event in her personal life. Beginning her first autobiography with a chapter on "My Mixture," she wrote, "At the age of nine years an accident happened to me which was to effect my whole life." In keeping with Victorian convention, Ellen had introduced herself with immediate reference to the physical frailty and chronic illness, which plagued her

throughout her life, although in her case its onset was most unusual and dramatic. Returning home from school, Ellen, Elizabeth, and a friend were pursued by a thirteen-year-old schoolmate who, "angry at some trifle," threw a stone which struck Ellen on the nose. There was no indication from Ellen's account of what had provoked the incident or which of the girls had actually been the target of the attack.<sup>3</sup>

Ellen fell senseless, hemorrhaging profusely, and for three weeks remained in a stupor, her body reduced almost to a skeleton. Victorians were rather morbid folk by any standard, and the fact that Ellen's mind became full of her own death in this period seems hardly improbable. Bedridden for weeks, she longed to see Jesus and looked to the wintry sky for portents of his coming. But in time her physical condition dealt its sharpest blow to her self image. When she glimpsed her face in the mirror, she was shocked by the grotesque sight of a broken nose which spread its ruin into every facial feature. It could serve as no consolation to the child then that later photographs of her alongside Elizabeth would show that her disfigurement was not permanent. While a thick-featured, somewhat homely adult, Ellen was no more unattractive than her twin. Yet the injury cast a long, gloomy shadow over her childhood. Pious Victorian girls were extolled for the virtues of sobriety, self-abnegation, and humility; Ellen's invalid childhood denied her the luxury of temptations toward anything else. In time she would see the affliction that darkened her early years as a means by which God turned her from the unsatisfying pleasures of the world toward heaven.<sup>10</sup>

Despite her failed health, Ellen described an heroic attempt to continue her education. For two years, however, she could not breathe through her nose and attended school only sporadically. Racked by a severe cough and frayed nerves in addition to her breathing problems, she struggled over the simplest reading and writing exercises. Perspiring profusely, growing faint and dizzy, she watched words blur on the page. A tremulous hand thwarted her writing. The girl who had injured her, now remorseful, tutored Ellen in her work, but without success. At about twelve years of age, she returned to school at the Westbrook Seminary and Female College in Portland. But her health abruptly declined again and she viewed the studies as life-threatening. Her teachers advised her to quit school until her health improved. Commenting that her "ambition to become a scholar had been very great," Ellen remarked, "It was the hardest struggle of my young life to yield to my feebleness, and decide that I must leave my studies, and give up the hope of gaining an education."<sup>11</sup> Although her schooling ended, she sustained for life that magical regard for letters of many of the undereducated.

Throughout most of her teen years, Ellen Harmon's spiritual torments appear at least as painful and significant as the physical and, in more to foreshadow a prophet. Her adolescent rite of passage gripped her, for a brief, torturous interval, between the world that made her and a "new world" of her own making. The immediate agent of Harmon's religious anxiety was William Miller, himself a Calvinist Baptist, who passed through Portland for the first time in March, 1840, to warn of Christ's return in a few short years. Miller's attempt to revive the waning Second Awakening with apocalyptic pyrotechnics was rewarded in her hometown when, according to Harmon, "Terror and conviction spread through the entire city. Prayer meetings were established, and there was a general awakening among the various denominations." Her own religious response proved typical. She answered Miller's call and, along with hundreds of other "mourners" at the "anxious bench," grew convicted by the "darkness and despair" of the almost Christian.<sup>12</sup>

In the summer of 1840, she accompanied her parents to a camp meeting in Buxton where she longed for salvation but felt distressed over her failure to experience spiritual ecstasy, the tangible result of a true conversion. During the camp meeting clouds and rain prevailed, and Harmon's mood fit the weather. Her melancholy fostered turn of and guilt. "When thunderstorms would arise, O, what a dreadful suffering I passed through in my mind," she recalled. "Nights I would often awake and cry, not daring to close my eyes in sleep, for fear the judgment might come, or lightning kill me, and I be lost forever." She was haunted by ghost rappings and terrorized by death and eternal damnation. Her fear of an "eternity suffering a living death" was superseded only by her horror of a tyrannical God "who delighted in the agonies of the condemned." "I frequently remained bowed in prayer nearly all night," she said, "groaning with inexpressible anguish and a hopelessness that passes all description."<sup>13</sup>

From childhood through her mid-teens, many personal aspects of Ellen Harmon's life had conformed to the popular profile of someone suited to the visionary role. Intensely religious, her inner spiritual terrain had presented her with nothing but deep valleys of enveloping depression and high ridges of exhilaration and ecstasy. Her rugged spiritual thrubs had released the "endorphins" of the religious athlete; she had shouted and swooned, prostrated herself, and dreamed rapturously. She had appeared typecast socially, too, for the prophetic part. Although not poor, as both an invalid and a girl she had been as surely disenfranchised as the poor Seventh-day Adventists would come to look upon her unpromising origins as those of "the weakest of the weak," which referred to the fact that she was not only a woman, but an ill woman. Although she was in fact only one of many

sick girls whose visions lifted them from sickbeds, Adventists viewed the incongruity of so weak a vessel brimming with God's power as a singularly miraculous evidence of her calling. Yet it is the mistake of her devotees, along with her more detached observers, to identify such individual qualities, labeled either supernatural or natural, as decisive components of the prophetic vocation. Against a broader cultural backdrop, these qualities seldom appear as individualistic as they do at close range. Ellen Harmon's early life proved more typical than atypical of antebellum New England girlhood, yet she emerged as a prophet and church founder, while many others like her were lost to obscurity. The explanation for this course of events lies less in the isolation of her personal characteristics than in the complex ways whatever predispositions she possessed to prophecy interacted with her cultural environment. One can still appreciate the virtuosity of her prophetic voice while acknowledging that it drew upon a universal language and adapted itself also to a particular idiom of expression. Harmon functioned as a prophet because she fulfilled certain cultural expectations.<sup>14</sup>

The Millerite movement that peaked in 1843 and 1844 gave shape initially to the cultural sources of her prophecy. In the late 1830's, William Miller aroused audiences in the northeastern United States with his own evangelistic "new measure." While a sense of eschatological immediacy pervaded evangelical culture, Miller's novel prediction that the world would end "about 1843" brought spectacular "results." But with the passing of two popular dates among them in the spring of 1844, Millerites suffered their "first disappointment." This disappointment only sharpened and intensified their millenarianism, however. The so-called "seventh-month" faction, made up of youthful, undereducated Millerite "radicals," usurped or bypassed the movement's leadership and by August predicted the second advent on a specific day of the Jewish seventh month—October 22, 1844.<sup>15</sup>

In the late summer of that fateful year, then, resurgent Millerites enjoyed as purely millenarian an expectation of the world's end as any movement in American history. As radical millenarians, they reflected the common patterns found in cross-cultural characterizations of such movements. Come-outers from the old order, they embraced each other in a warmly communal new order. "Brothers" and "sisters" celebrated their egalitarianism by restoring, as informal sacraments, the early Christian practices of footwashing and the "holy kiss." They also looked for the end on a specific day. This intense belief in "the time" precipitated outbursts of ecstasy and enthusiasm among them. While the reserved Millerite leaders largely disparaged charismatic phenomena, as they did the October 22 prediction, the unruly rank and file "lost its head" in the late summer of 1844 as the world's "Midnight" approached. These seventh-month Millerites enjoyed

prophesyings, tongues, healings, and other "signs and wonders" for which they had found biblical precedent. In the book of Daniel, the Jewish prophet lay prostrate and breathless in panoramic vision of the end-time. Moreover, Joel 2 had promised that in the end not just sons but daughters would prophesy. The seventh-month Millerites, among whom women, the young, and the obscure came to play a conspicuous part, had been not only disfranchised within the larger social order, but lacked status among Millerites themselves. Heretofore denied a voice, they had found, in trance states, glossolalia, and other spiritual "exercises," a language in which to express themselves.<sup>16</sup>

In Harmon's hometown of Portland, Matthew J. Whittier observed an eruption of "ultra-millerism" in September of 1844, where Adventist meetings were "seized with the fierce frenzy, and swelled the tumultuous ranks of the Low Hampton seer." Here Harmon entered her first formal schooling in prophecy. In this lively and emotionally expansive phase of Millerism, she met several striking role models (acknowledged or not) which serve to illustrate that prophets invariably require precursors. The existence of forerunners indicates that a prophet emerges from a cultural milieu. Prophecy originates less from an individual mind than from the collective impulses of a community which flow forcefully through an unusually receptive person. In Harmon's state of Maine alone, where seventh-month enthusiasm sustained itself into the following year, at least five Millerite women surfaced as visionaries with enough prominence to be covered in the secular press of the early 1840's. Whittier noted that among Portland's self-proclaimed "children of light . . . nothing was more common than visions." Commenting on the city's enthusiasm, Millerite organizer Joshua V. Himes disapproved of the "continual introduction of visionary persons" he found there. He wrote to Miller that a Sister Clemons had "become very visionary, and disgusted nearly all the good friends here," and then reported in a letter to him two weeks later that another Portland woman had seen in vision that Miss Clemons was of the Devil. Although Harmon herself seemed indistinguishable from such women, she ironically proved no more sympathetic to them than did Himes. The sickly Dorinda Baker, for example, had claimed personal healings and visions, but Harmon said she had been shown by God that Baker had feigned both her illness and her visions.<sup>17</sup>

Despite antagonism within the movement not only toward female prophets but among them, Millerism clearly had proven increasingly typical of new prophetic groups, which are known for the predominance of women and most notably women visionaries. Once again ecstasy proved to be a great social leveler between men and women. In this regard, Millerism had most immediately built upon the Second Awakening in which pietist and democratic forces had con-



bined to narrow the gender gap. Evangelical women had publicly prayed and borne testimonies in the open atmosphere of frontier camp meetings. These actions had smoothed the way for Adventist women to become speakers, usually accompanied on their circuits by husbands or fathers. As with evangelicalism, however, the Millerite leadership remained a male hierarchy. A number of Adventist women could assert themselves, then, only on the basis of extraordinary claims. They could command an audience with no less than direct messages from God. Although the condescension of a leader like Himes toward a woman prophet is understandable, it is less obvious why Harmon would dismiss one of her own. From this distance, it is only conjecture to psychoanalyze her opposition to a Dorinda Baker, or other women throughout her career, as a form of female self-hatred. Yet it is no more satisfying to account for it as simply a prophet's defensiveness in the face of a potential rival, since Harmon accepted two men in this period, William Foy and Hazen Foss, as forerunners whose analogous experiences she used to legitimize her own.<sup>16</sup>

With the uneventful passing of October 22, 1844, the Great Disappointment enveloped Millerites in gloom. The vast majority of Adventists deserted the movement and dragged back to their farms, still standing with unharvested crops, or returned to businesses that had posted closing signs scrawled with "The King is Coming!" Among the Millerites who sought to salvage their faith, most admitted, with Miller and Himes, that the October 22 prediction had been a rude miscalculation. These faithfuls, who eventually formed the Advent Christian Church, abandoned time-setting and looked for the end, as Miller intoned, "Today, TODAY, and TODAY, until He comes."<sup>17</sup>

But the rump group, for whom seventh-month enthusiasm had been such a palpable evidence of God's presence, could not fully renounce belief in the prediction that had precipitated it. These Adventists, probably numbering less than a hundred, from whom Seventh-day Adventism emerged, refused to discard their expectation for October 22 as a complete fiasco. Instead, they invested the date with special spiritual significance in the history of salvation, as important as any date since Christ's death and resurrection in 31 A.D. The cleansing of the sanctuary foretold in Daniel 8:14 had not heralded Christ's return to earth but the "High Priest's" entrance into the "most holy place" of the heavenly sanctuary to judge the world just prior to his coming. What Adventists had not seen with their natural eyes they continued to "see" through the eyes of faith as an "invisible," "spiritual," and, of course, historically non-falsifiable "event."<sup>18</sup>

During this period in which Adventist brethren tried to make sense of prophecies gone awry, Harmon was prostrate with severe illness. Suffering reportedly from tuberculosis, she spoke in a whisper or

broken voice. With one lung collapsed and the other partially damaged, she found it difficult to breathe lying down and slept nearly upright. She coughed up blood. She developed heart trouble. Her physician expected her to die soon. But while her brethren deliberated over ancient prophecies, Harmon's highly stressful and perilous physical condition augured the birth of a living prophet, for visionary experiences are generally occasioned by severe physical problems, such as sickness or starvation, insomnia or fatigue. Without the social and religious turmoil among Adventists over the past several months, there would have been, to be sure, no demand for a revelation, and Harmon would have remained a mere invalid. Given these conducive circumstances, however, her physical "handicap" was transfigured into a gift of extraordinary social significance.<sup>21</sup>

Still precariously ill in December, she had been invited by a close friend, Elizabeth Haines, to her Portland home for a prayer meeting. This modest setting showcased a dramatic event for her and other Adventists. Although a daughter of seventh-month enthusiasm, Harmon insisted that it had not been "an exciting occasion" for the five present. Nor had ecstasy resulted from the energizing effect of a mixed gathering of the sexes, for they were "all females." Nevertheless, "while praying, the power of God came upon me as I never had felt it before." In open vision, "surrounded by light" and "rising higher and higher from the earth," a thin, frail, seventeen-year-old ecstatic mounted a social podium of considerable influence.<sup>22</sup>

The millenarian "remnant scattered abroad" to whom she related her vision, first orally and then in print, thought of it as a celestial window through which God had revealed the meaning of the Adventist experience. The vision certainly was at least a mirror of that experience and reflected what Adventists wanted, *needed* to see. Their seventh-month Millerism had been a "midnight cry," a last, shrill proclamation of the world's imminent end. Far from the fiasco that most had taken it for, their message had shone a single, steady beam of light by which Adventists made their way up a short, narrow path toward heaven.<sup>23</sup>

But visions alone do not a prophet make. Indeed, countless visionary experiences never materialize as prophetic vocations, and many prophets function without mystical or trance states to sustain them, particularly in the later stages of their lives. Although visions lend credibility to the prophetic claim, they are at most sporadic, peak moments in the midst of the often onerous social obligations of a prophetic career. The place of ecstasy in the total life of a prophet is, in some ways, not unlike that of sexuality in a marriage. It is no more realistic to equate prophecy and ecstasy than to define marriage as sheer sexual excitement. Yet Harmon never adjusted to the way her

resplendent open visions repeatedly deserted her in a "dark, dark" world. As she put it after the first vision, "I had seen a better world, and it had spoiled me for this one."<sup>24</sup>

She did understand, from the beginning, that being a prophet involved dealing with this world's uncomfortable realities. About a week after her first vision, another revelation called for her to pass from mere visionary to prophet. The Lord showed "the trials through which I must pass," she said, "and that it was my duty to go and relate to others what God had revealed to me." She learned that "my labors would meet with great opposition, and that my heart would be rent with anguish . . ." Her reticence to prophesy was not based on feelings of spiritual inadequacy, but stemmed from practical considerations. Her dreams and visions were to be no longer the mannerisms of an impressionable adolescent girl, but the makings of a taxing career. Considering herself physically handicapped and socially inept, she anguished over the prospect of arduous travel and talking to strangers. The unhappy sense of alienation brought on by her sick, reclusive teen years would now only be intensified by the reproaches that being a prophet was sure to incite. She said, "My heart shrank in terror from the thought." She would rather die than prophesy. For days and well into the nights, she beseeched God to relieve her of the prophetic burden. Yet, at the same time, it attracted her, and the quietly ambitious Harmon feared that becoming a prophet would make her proud. But her Lord persisted. She should make known to others what had been revealed to her. His strength would sustain her. He would also preserve her humility. Here she learned a way in which illness related to her prophetic office, for if she succumbed to "sinful exaltation" as a result of her calling, the Lord's antidote for hubris would be her physical affliction.<sup>25</sup>

The call came not only vertically, as it were, in visions from God, but extended itself horizontally, from the Portland Adventists who acknowledged the visions as divine. About sixty home town folk testified to the authenticity of her experience. Harmon had at first resisted social pressures to prophesy. When supporters met in her home she had absented herself. But when John Pearson, an elder, finally persuaded her to attend such a gathering, prayers were offered that she might have the "strength and courage to bear the message." It was then that the essential reciprocity between the prophet and her community evinced the most vivid of images. For "the thick darkness that had encompassed me willed back," she remembered, "and a sudden light came upon me. Something that seemed to me like a ball of fire struck me right over the heart. My strength was taken away, and I fell to the floor. I seemed to be in the presence of the angels." One of these

angels then repeated the command: "Make known to others what I have revealed to you."<sup>26</sup>

Resistance to the prophetic call has occurred so commonly cross-culturally as to appear archetypal. Prophets typically find their initial call to be a disturbing, even traumatic, experience. Endangered and terrified by what amounts to an assault, they do all that they can to withstand it. But they are badgered with afflictions and adversity until they relent and accept their vocation. In the making of a shaman, for example, the essential process involves the invasion of the human body by spirits. The host personality is forced aside, at times almost violently, and replaced by the possessing spirit.<sup>27</sup>

Harmon herself could not have been aware of the universality of this cultural idiom, beyond the examples of it among classic biblical figures. But her own reluctance to accept God's call assumed a regional dialect with which she was all too familiar, that of mesmerism (termed hypnotism today). Originating in Europe in the 1770's, mesmerism, also known as animal magnetism, took hold in America in the 1830's when a French practitioner began peddling it in Harmon's home town. From there, mesmeric displays proliferated into a national pastime whereby Americans gained exposure to trances and the spirit communication that sometimes accompanied them. After a number of visions in 1845, Harmon had been swayed by the folk opinion that her visions were induced by mesmerism. With that in mind, she tried to dismiss them. No sooner had this happened than she was "struck dumb." In vision, she learned that she would remain mute for nearly twenty-four hours, but while speechless she must describe her vision in writing. Once out of trance, she immediately asked for a slate and wrote for the first time in years.<sup>28</sup>

From a modern psychological perspective, the initial symptoms of her prophetic call suggest no more than a fine line, if indeed there was a line at all, between prophecy and pathology. As a sick girl, after all, she had been especially susceptible to ecstasy, and her ambivalence to it made her sicker. Harmon was, therefore, a conflict-torn personality who was either seriously neurotic or perhaps even psychopathic. What her naive followers took to be supernatural interventions in her life, a more sophisticated clinical approach would recognize as pathologic behavior. It is not just "modern," however, to provide this sort of naturalistic explanation. Even so-called "primitive" societies acknowledge both natural and supernatural forms of causation and carefully scrutinize individuals who make prophetic claims in order to determine the actual basis for them. It is a modern distortion, then, to assume that prophets in one culture would be pathologic figures in another. For whatever the culture, people never embrace

someone as a prophet whom they judge to be a lesser person, a mere hysteric, or paranoid, or schizophrenic.<sup>29</sup>

Within Adventism some regarded Harmon as merely sick, while others thought of her as a defective vessel filled with God's spirit. Her eventual colleague, Joseph Bates, was at first vexed by her visions. He examined her when she was "freed from excitement (out of meeting)" and questioned not only her but her friends "to get if possible at the truth." While in the midst of "exciting scenes," he intensely "listened to every word, and watched every move to detect deception, or mesmeric influence." Although he could "see nothing in them that militated against the Word," for a long time he believed that Harmon's trances had been produced by nothing more than the "protracted debilitated state of her body." For the more typical Adventist, however, the physical infirmities, which implied a naturalistic basis for her visions to the incredulous Bates, served as miraculous evidence of Harmon's divine calling. When in April, 1846, her first vision was published as a broadside, Otis Nichols sent a copy of it to William Miller with an accompanying letter that urged him to accept the visionary. Clearly oblivious to the many historical and contemporary analogies to Harmon's experience, Nichols was impressed that "the manner and circumstances" of it were "unlike anything I have seen or read since the days of the apostles." He found that "her calling was most remarkable" due to her youthful age, her "dropsical consumption," and the fact that she "could not speak with an audible voice" when God called her to tell the flock of her revelations.<sup>30</sup>

Granted, then, that ecstasy and prophecy relate in complex ways to illness, even more noteworthy is the way in which they produce startling physical and emotional cures. For prophets, visions are a form of self-therapy. Under psychiatrists today, patients undergo a wide range of therapies (through the use of drugs or hypnosis) designed to induce trance or trance-like states. Titled abreaction techniques, these serve as an emetic whereby patients discharge repressed traumatic experiences. Freed of emotional blockages, they thereby achieve valuable personal reconstruction. Although most psychiatrists would see nothing inherently mystical in such clinically controlled trances, they at the same time do not view them as manifestations of pathology but as a form of treatment. Prophetic visions purport sudden and dramatic changes in personality that are strikingly similar to that which patients experience with such therapy.<sup>31</sup>

Beginning with her earliest trances, Harmon monitored numerous instances in which visions relieved her ailments, at least temporarily. Her revelations were ratified by personal healings. In 1845, as an early example, she fell from her wagon, seriously injured her side, and had to be carried into the house. That night her suffering

was so acute that Sister Foss joined her in "pleading for God's blessing, and for relief from pain." About midnight, both the blessing and the relief settled upon her, and "those in the house were awakened by hearing my voice while in vision." In 1868, James White, by then her husband of twenty-two years, reflected on "the effect of the visions upon her constitution and health." He recalled that in 1844 she had been "an emaciated invalid." At five feet two inches tall, she "weighed but eighty pounds." Her "nervous condition" not only precluded her writing, but even her drinking unaided from a cup. Although her adult life had been marked by the "anxieties and mental agonies" of her calling, as well as "home labors and cares," he reported that her "physical and mental strength have improved from the day she had her first vision."<sup>17</sup>

The call to prophecy exploited Harmon's physical and psychological problems, but at the same time it introduced her to a vocation that stabilized them. The role of prophet offered her a culturally defined way to speak and to write, relieving her illnesses rather than aggravating them. Her initiation to prophecy, then, should be understood less as a sickness than as a vocational struggle. As with so many exceptional people, she may have paid a price for her gifts in the form of nervous instability and internal conflicts, but prophecy provided perhaps the only social role whereby she could use her gifts constructively. This was particularly true for her as a frail woman. Society had severely limited her options. The more extraordinary her gifts, the more intense and frustrating her vocational crisis was bound to be. As for so many women in just such a dilemma, prophecy presented a radical resolution to her problems. Nevertheless, it was a last resort. She hardly pursued a prophetic career; it pursued her. Yet, however traumatic the induction process, prophecy promised, subliminally of course, immense personal rewards. Through it, a physical and emotional weakling might gain enormous strength of personality. A shy, dependent girl might assume complete self-possession and independence. A life destined for obscure mediocrity might achieve significance.<sup>18</sup>

For Harmon, passage into the prophetic role was a kind of puberty rite. Prophecy freed her from dependence on her family (perhaps especially her mother), and so she embarked on a career prior to marriage. For a time she traveled to the far-flung Adventist fellowships with her sister Sarah and a girl friend. She rebuffed the overture of one gentleman to escort her on her travels, although he drove a "beautiful conveyance." "This man wanted to get some power over me," she concluded, "but he did not get it because I would not ride a rod with him." Prophecy gave her the spiritual and emotional means to personal independence. It coaxed her out of a childhood sickbed and invigorated her

life with a single, compelling interest. She became her own person. Suspicious of any attempts to influence or manipulate her life, she claimed total reliance on direct visions from God. She allowed herself to be led by no one but the "same angel messenger" who appeared in each of her visions, whom she referred to variously as "the angel," "my guide," "my instructor," or "the young man." She had purchased her individual identity at the high cost of a prophetic initiation. Throughout her life, then, she equated her personal independence with her prophetic role.<sup>14</sup>

This concern for autonomy first surfaced against charges of mesmerism. In the 1840's, the argument that her visions were a product of mesmerism was, in a quaint way, a sociology of ecstasy. Harmon, however, construed it as unacceptable reductionism: "If I had a vision in meeting, many would say that it was excitement and that someone had mesmerized me," she complained. Once while bearing her testimony, she "felt a human influence being exerted against [her]," when a skeptic sought to mesmerize her. With his hand over his face, he peered through his parted fingers, and compressed his lips as "a low groan now and then escaped him." But Harmon prayed for "another angel" and thwarted the malevolent influence. To discount the accusations that she had succumbed to mesmerism, she went alone into the woods where God sometimes rewarded her with a vision. "I then rejoiced," she said, relieved that the charge had been bogus, "and told them what God had revealed to me alone, where no mortal could influence me." She then heard that she had mesmerized herself. It "wounded" and exasperated her that so many believed "there was no Holy Ghost and that all the exercises that holy men of God have experienced were only mesmerism or the deceptions of Satan."<sup>15</sup>

Although her sensitivity with respect to being manipulated no doubt betrayed a personal insecurity, she grew increasingly assured of her calling. For, once she had resolved the torturous vocational struggle within her own mind, her career proved salutary. In the first place, it gave her a voice. A month after her first vision she set out with her brother-in-law for Poland, Maine, to tell others what she had seen. Having the bitter cold and her poor health, she huddled at the bottom of the sleigh with a buffalo robe pulled over her head. When relating her message, she could speak "in only a whisper" for five minutes, "then her voice broke clear and she addressed the audience for nearly two hours." Afterwards, she observed, "my voice was gone until I stood before the people again, when the same singular restoration was repeated." She therefore "felt a constant assurance" that she was doing God's will.<sup>16</sup>

Even more important than the voice it gave her, prophecy handed her a pen. Before being made mute for resisting the call, she

said, "my trembling hand was unable to hold a pen steadily." Obeying the angel's command to write the vision, she exclaimed, "My nerves were strengthened, and from that day to this my hand has been steady." It could not have been more significant that her personal recovery entailed writing. From then on, no matter how physically debilitated or emotionally distraught she became, she managed to write almost continuously.<sup>27</sup>

Provided with a millenarian ambience and a culturally acceptable idiom by which to prophesy, Ellen Harmon had made prophetic claims that were taken seriously. She still faced, however, formidable obstacles to fulfilling them. Her radically Adventist cohorts had renounced the old order. They then explored new avenues and new assumptions in quest of a new form of existence. Although their lack of inhibition and high degree of experimentation resulted in ostensibly bizarre behavior, it made sense to them in light of the loftiest of goals, a new world, a new humanity; Harmon's shouts and swoons, trances and healings were themselves a product of the unbridled impulses of her community. She did not stand discreetly apart from a disorderly Adventism, as an ideal observer, but drew upon it for her own sense of identity. Nonetheless, if her gift for prophecy originated amid chaotic enthusiasm, it would endure only if she somehow transcended these origins. "Where there is no vision the people perish," to be sure, but where there is nothing but visionary or other ecstatic phenomena the people perish as well.<sup>28</sup>

In the precarious prelude to her career, then, Harmon had to pass through the hazardous no-rules phase, the crucial testing ground of any prophet. For no matter how spectacular the signs of her calling, unless she could take command and wrest order from anomy, she would become just another "false prophet." Only by way of a single, successful prophetic figure could cacophony blend into one voice, one channel of revelation. Only such a revelatory voice could speak into existence a coherent movement.<sup>29</sup> Although a no-rules period proves characteristic of cultures in transition, and unleashed the "freedom's ferment" of a pre-Victorian American culture, Harmon's spiritual neighborhood of so-called "Down East Fanatics" in southeastern Maine gave it a colorful regional slant. The eschatological impetus of this offshoot of Millerism was its rationalization of the October 22, 1844, prophecy.

By far the most conspicuous element within this group was that of the spiritualizers, who believed that Christ had come spiritually on October 22 and had inaugurated His millennial reign on earth in the person of His perfected saints. In their case, millennial perfection placed them above temptation and sin in a state of "holy flesh" and released them from all sorts of conventional social obligations. Their



belief that they had entered the millennium, like the angels, led some to adopt "spiritual wifery," in which they maintained marital relations with their own or others' spouses "without sexual connection." In keeping with Christ's command to leave father, mother, spouse, or children for the kingdom, others deserted their families for alternative marriages. The fact that the millennium also ushered in the "Great Sabbath" meant for some that the saints rested from all secular labor, which sanctioned an apparently *no-er-do-well* existence. Although so-called "spiritualizers," still others adopted a peculiarly literalistic interpretation of the text in Matthew 18 which required them to become as little children to enter the kingdom. Disposing of tables and chairs, they crawled on hands and knees about their houses, on the streets, over bridges, and inside their churches. Because they believed that millennial bliss allowed for no more death, they refused to bury an infant that died, for they expected its immediate resurrection. The sheriff finally had to deal with the problem. In fact, the flouting of old rules raised the ire of the law against the spiritualizers on numerous occasions. They reportedly moved from one small Maine town to the next, unemployed and neglectful of their families, holding raucous religious meetings. Warrants for their arrest thus pursued them with charges amounting to vagrancy, idleness, and disorderly conduct.\*

But no area disturbs social mores like that of sexuality, whether through gratification or renunciation, scandal or rigor. The millenarian expression of some form of sexual revolution not only assaults old rules by reiterating a primordial golden period, when seemingly no rules were necessary, but it also bonds the marginal community with new rules of love conveyed at the most intense level of intimacy. In early Victorian America, no more than sexual innuendo on the part of spiritualizers was required to scandalize the public. Notwithstanding the spiritualizers' claim of a primitive Christian precedent for it, those men and women who washed one another's feet and kissed each other transgressed the usual notions of decorum. Millenarian critics pointed out that there was no mention in the New Testament of men washing women's feet and "Now, in the modern feet-washing, men, who call themselves brethren, deem it a religious ordinance, to draw off the stockings of females, and then proceed to wash their feet!" And invariably, "a bad and impure man," who engages in this "ridiculous, revolting, and indecent" practice of "promiscuous" foot washing, selects "as his victim a YOUNG GIRL! Why, if his heart is pure, and his desires holy, did he not choose a male, or a matron in the presence of her husband?" Add to this the inappropriety of "a (holy! ah! what mockery!) kiss." Mixed gatherings of spiritualizers also sat or lay together on the floor as an act of humility and comradeship. Spiritual wifery intuded celibacy, leading some into the Shakers. But the best of

intentions failed under such an arrangement and left outsiders understandably dubious. It did not relieve suspicions when spiritualizers enacted the essence of millennial innocence by attending public meetings in the nude. In 1845, Himes charged that they often "live in continual association in exciting and social meetings, which has degenerated into *fleshy*, and selfish passions."<sup>41</sup>

Harmon could not have established herself within this context had she not, in certain respects, epitomized the no-rules experience before taking it upon herself to exercise it from the community. Isaac Wellcome, a Maine convert to Millerism who became an Advent Christian minister and historian, probably aptly described her in this period (if his derogatory tone can be ignored) as "a wonderful fanatic and trance medium" who in meetings spoke "with great vehemence and rapidity until falling down." Not only did she fully share in the trances and other exercises, but she earned special acclaim as a healer. Her partisan Nichols wrote to William Miller of her "remarkable manner in healing the sick through the answer to prayers," and some of these miracles were as impressive "as any that are recorded in the New Testament." She herself reported the healings of Miss Frances Howland from rheumatic fever and Brother William Hyde, who had been "very sick with dysentery" and pronounced "almost hopeless" by a physician.<sup>42</sup> Harmon was no spiritualizer, however. Her point of agreement with spiritualizers on the importance of October 22 was likewise the source of her sharpest contention with them. She believed that the critical date brought the close of probation, not the commencement of the millennium. With other "literalists," she looked for an imminent, physical return of Christ to the earth. Such a doctrinal distinction was as easily lost on the public, however, as was the difference between literalists and spiritualizers in social practice. Harmon, after all, dignified foot washing and the holy kiss in her first vision as marks of the true remnant of God. Moreover, based on the New Testament practice, she formally approved of women washing men's feet, although not vice versa. As for herself, however, she insisted, "I never could do it." She opposed spiritual wifery as well. But while still seventeen, her small traveling party included a twenty-four-year-old Adventist preacher named James White, whom the Lord had instructed her to trust. Rumors flared and Harmon's mother ordered her daughter home. Soon White and Harmon were together again, however; the rewards of their relationship evidently outweighed for them the awkward notoriety that it aroused. One scurrilous rumor rooted in this period had the visionary giving birth to two illegitimate children, with one named Jesus. Harmon and White might have dispelled such rumors with a conventional marriage, but they believed that to marry implied a denial of faith in an imminent second coming. And just as their

refusal to marry associated them with spiritual wifery, their lack of ordinary employment or "visible means of support" might have identified them with the no-work party. Harmon's itinerancy from one emotion-laden gathering to the next was also easily construed by locals as vagrancy and disturbing the peace. Indeed, there were a number of warrants for her arrest.<sup>41</sup>

Harmon's autobiographical account of this brief, turbulent period self-portrayed her as aloof to and condemnatory of the era's excesses. A remarkable secular source, however, exposed a more complex picture. Adventist elder Israel Dammon stood trial in Dover, Maine, in February, 1845, for vagrancy, neglect of family, and disturbing the peace after leading out in a home meeting of Adventist spiritualizers in nearby Atkinson. Witnesses Dorinda Baker and Ellen Harmon, along with James White, participated. The court proceedings of the State of Maine vs. Israel Dammon, loosely transcribed in a local newspaper, showed Harmon to have been in physical and psychological proximity to the enthusiasm she later adamantly opposed. Witnesses depicted a clamorous, allegedly "promiscuous" scene in which, as one put it, "I never saw such a confusion, not even in a drunken frolic." Adventist men and women hugged, kissed, washed each other's feet, rolled on the floor together, and crawled on hands and knees. Women kissed the feet of men, lay in their laps or entwined between their legs. Dorinda Baker, called a sickly young visionary whose father had spent a thousand dollars in doctoring, was said to have disappeared into the bedroom with a man in light-colored pants. (James White's dark pants cleared his name.) As they reappeared, embracing and kissing, Dorinda supposedly said, "That feels good." When a deputy sheriff and his men arrived to arrest Dammon, a number of women clung to him with such force that four officers could not drag him from the room. The corollary of such a frenzied and emotional sense of community surfaced in hostile references to damned outsiders as "hugs." Dammon further "called the churches whoremasters, liars, thieves, scoundrels, wolves in sheep's clothing, murderers."<sup>42</sup>

Through it all, Harmon passed in and out of trance while lying on the floor with a jallow propping her head. She saw revealed the personal "cases" of the people around her and awakened to relate her visions to them. She ordered one girl to "be baptized that night or go to hell," and after protesting that she already had been baptized, the girl reluctantly departed for sub-freezing baptismal waters. Several witnesses insisted that Dammon and others called Harmon "Imitation of Christ." But Adventists at the trial viewed this as pejorative and denied any foundation for it. Not an "idol," she was rather, with Dorinda, a genuine visionary. In passive repose, with her head at times in the hands of a solicitous White, Harmon posed no threat to the

spiritualizers' tune that evening. On the contrary, she uniquely contributed to it. Without objecting to the behavior of the Atkinson Adventists, she quarreled only with the outsiders' indictment of it. Indeed, she pronounced their attacks to be "a trial of our faith." Her memory of Dammon at his arrest, tinted by the trance twilight, recalled that "The spirit of the Lord rested upon him, and his strength was taken away, and he fell to the floor helpless." The four officers could not remove him because "The men could not endure the power of God, and it was a relief to them to rush out of the house." After glorifying God by resisting twelve men for another forty minutes, Dammon then "further glorified" God by allowing himself to be carried out like a child.<sup>46</sup>

Despite her involvement in the Atkinson episode, however, in perhaps in part because of it, Harmon vociferously campaigned elsewhere against no-rules fanatism, from "shouting and hallooing" to sexual promiscuity. The spiritualizers' version of "sanctification had lost its charm in my eyes," she said. It suggested to her a kind of social pathology. She believed that as a result of revival "excitement and tumult . . . some became insane." One no-work man from Paris, Maine, "denounced [her] visions as being of the devil, and continued to follow his impressions, until his mind was deranged and his friends were obliged to confine him. At last he made a top of some of his bed clothing, with which he hanged himself," she reported, "and his followers were brought to realize the fallacy of his teachings." Harmon's historical sense that the enthusiasm of this period caused insanity appears to have bordered on autobiography. She became so mentally distraught at this time that her "mind wandered" for two weeks in what she self-diagnosed as "extreme sickness" until she was "taken off in vision." Her visions, not the "impressions" of others, would relieve the psychological and social instability of this period.<sup>47</sup>

While most odd or neurotic people resign themselves to lives of social insignificance, prophets see their singularity in cosmic terms. Instead of viewing themselves as abnormal and inadequate by the world's standards, they proceed to set their own standards for the world, or at least their corner of it. In order for Harmon to fulfill herself vocationally, then, she had to create a world out of the materials at hand and occupy a unique place in it. One of the ways she accomplished this was by re-creating her past. Her memory of the enthusiastic community from which she arose underwent a subtle but significant change within the various revisions and expansions of her autobiography. At first she counted herself as just one of the many souls slain by a pervasive spirit. "My experience was like most of God's people at that time," she recalled. Her later accounts, however, excised nearly all but the spurious enthusiasts. In its place, she seemed to have monopolized the true spiritual outpourings. Her recollection of

Elder Stockman's remark set the tone: "Ellen, you are only a child. Yours is a most singular experience for one of your tender age. Jesus must be preparing you for some special work." The explanation for such revisionism is clear. She could not, on the one hand, accept herself as an extraordinary spiritual talent and, on the other, consider the restful experiences which constituted her credentials as commonplace. Nothing less than her personal identity was at stake. Those who persisted in rivaling her claims necessarily became "false prophets." And the communal expressions of enthusiasm that finally failed to coalesce in her became "fanatical." She thus could not indefinitely share the same floor, so to speak, with Lorinda Baker and the boisterous household of faith in Atkinson.<sup>45</sup>

"False prophets" and "fanatics" threatened her identity in another way. Harmon could not tolerate any further notoriety than her own role as a prophet had already aroused. "My testimony causes such opposition," she brooded. Why invite contempt of the movement with unnecessary eccentricity? Harmon's preoccupation with propriety probably testified, then, to her own sense that she was peculiar. The circumspect, almost banal conventionality of her personal life apart from her visions had to compensate for the public dispute that inevitably surrounded her as not simply a prophet, but a female Victorian prophet. In the face of gossip and libel regarding her, Otis Nichols found it necessary to say: "I have never seen the least impropriety of conduct in her since our first acquaintance." Harmon's harsh criticism of impropriety in others followed; those within her spiritual clique who thought "religion consisted of great excitement and noise . . . would irritate unbelievers (and) arouse hatred against themselves and the doctrines they taught. Then they would rejoice that they suffered persecution." She saw that strange and promiscuous behavior left "a fearful stain . . . upon the cause of God which would cleave to the name Adventist like leprosy." This was more than a moralistic Victorian woman standing guard over reputation. It was a prophet who understood that the proliferation of no rules imperiled her and her community. Throughout her career, Harmon remained alert to the way heterodoxy deteriorated into heteropraxy, especially sexual misconduct. This awareness might well be psychoanalytically interpreted as the surfacing of her own subliminal fantasies. But the no-rules context of her budding career reveals such attitudes to have been deeply imbedded in her sense of vocation. Any misbehavior or immorality undermined her as a visionary.<sup>46</sup>

Harmon was almost immediately embarrassed by the no-rules enthusiasm that had produced her and did what she could to distance herself from it. This distancing included repressing or laundering the memory of it. But this aim is understandable given the genuinely

precarious state in which she had first found herself as a visionary. Without disowning or reinventing her past, she had little hope for a future. Nothing about her origins or her revisionist accounts of them, however, suggested anything of which to have been ashamed. To look back now on the pre-history of Seventh-day Adventism is to witness her creation of a new culture from the primordial soup, as it were, of millenarian beginnings. In a world without form and void, she spoke, and a new world came into existence. However homely her materials, she made use of them as a folk artist.

The luxury of historical hindsight now removes the suspense from Harmon's story. As for its setting, not only did Victorianism impose order and discipline on an unruly social scene but, in a subplot to the larger story, Seventh-day Adventism emerged from the Millerite debacle. As for Harmon herself, she not only survived but prospered. A neurotic, adolescent girl blossomed into the matriarch of an important religious group. Herself a child of ephemeral enthusiasm, she became the midwife in the birth of a new and permanent denomination. By way of Seventh-day Adventism she fulfilled herself, then, as both a Victorian woman and a prophet. The uncertainty of this amazing cultural and religious achievement goes easily unappreciated. Harmon could have failed, as others like her did. The spiritual power of so physically and psychologically weak a woman might have been an illusion. She could have been buried in the bone yard of antebellum America's many defunct cultural and religious enterprises. But she succeeded, and the Ellen Harmon years mark the beginning of her unlikely success story.

## Notes

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\* Born Ellen Gould Harmon, she married James White in 1846 and thereafter generally used the name Ellen G. White. This study confines itself to her life prior to marriage and generally refers to her in early childhood as Ellen and in adolescence as Harmon.

1. Although Seventh-day Adventist historian John Loughborough did not coin this reference to Ellen White, he gave it currency among his Adventist readers in *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909), 182.

2. No full-fledged, scholarly biography of her has yet appeared. Still the best source on White, which examines her as a health reformer, is Ronald L. Numbers, *Propphetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). Arthur L. White, her grandson, has produced an official biography which, although severely limited by its apologetic stance, contains a wealth of

fresh information on her in Ellen G. White, 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981-86). For important insights into her domestic life and her role as a denominational leader, see Ronald D. Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century," (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1983). Reliable biographical sketches on her appear in Ronald L. Numbers, "Ellen Gould White," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 15:377-79; C.C. Green, "Ellen Gould Harman White," *Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Edward F. James (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 3:585-88; "Ellen Gould (Harmon) White," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, ed. Don F. Neufeld (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 1584-92. The extensive collection of her unpublished manuscripts and letters is housed at The Ellen G. White Estate, Washington, D.C., and is replicated in large part at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, and in the Heritage Room of Inna Linda University, Loma Linda, California. Her voluminous published works have been indexed in *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*, 7 vols. (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1962-1963).

3. While there is not yet a standard history of Seventh-day Adventism, general histories of the movement include Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Beams to the Remnant!* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979); Gary Land, ed., *Adventism in America: A History* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966); Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989); for a brief historical summary of the movement, see Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, "Seventh-day Adventism," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 13:179-83.

4. For an important anthropological perspective on prophets, see Kenneth Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), esp. 151-64. I.M. Lewis provides a social anthropologist's view of ecstasy and its preponderance among ill women in *Ecstasy Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971). On the American shift around mid-century from Calvinism to Victorianism, see John Eligham, *From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848-1860* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: William L. Clements Library, 1969). A characterization of Victorianism, which informs this study is Daniel Walker Howe, "Victorian Culture in America," in *Victorian America*, ed. Daniel Walker Howe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 3-28.

5. Max Weber's emphasis on the individual qualities of the charismatic personality is found in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1947), 358-59. For a critique of this approach which points to millenarian prophecy as a social response, see Peter Worsley, *The Tramp and Saint: A Study of "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia*, 2d ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 12-21. Burridge discusses old rules—no rules—new rules in *New Heaven, New Earth*, 165-69; drawing upon the Burridge formula, I trace Adventist history within the antebellum American context in "The Making of a New

Order: Millerism and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventism," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 189-208.

6. The first few chapters of the various versions of White's autobiography provide detailed information on her early life beginning with Ellen G. White (hereafter EGW), *Spiritual Gifts: My Christian Experience, Views and Labors* (Battle Creek, Mich.: James White, 1860). She revised her account in *Life Sketches, Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors of Elder James White and His Wife, Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press, 1880) and the *Later Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1915) (hereafter *Life Sketches* refers to this 1915 work). See also "A Biographical Sketch of Ellen G. White," in her *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1949), 9-112. For historical discussions of her first nineteen years, see Numbers, *Prophecies of Health*, 4-14; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White, vol. 1: The Early Years, 1827-1852*, 15-109; see also Ronald Graybill, "Ellen G. White: The Hidden Years" (Typescript, White Estate, 1977); Bernadine L. Irwin provides little new information on her in "A Psychobiography of the Young Ellen White: A Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," (Ph.D. diss., United States International University, 1984).

7. *The Portland Directory* (Portland: Arthur Sturley, 1854), passim.

8. For Ellen Harmon's Methodist background, consult Ronald Graybill, "Adventist Roots in Methodist History," (Typescript, White Estate, 1974). Her comment on her father appears in EGW, "They Sleep in Jesus," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 31 (April 21, 1868): 29. Willoughb Hudson describes Methodist enthusiasm in "Shouting Methodists," *Encounter* 29 (Winter 1968): 73-84.

9. She describes her injury in EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 7-12.

10. On the comparison in appearance to her sister, Elizabeth Bangs, observe the photo of the two together in Numbers, *Prophecies of Health*, 3. While only fraternal twins, Ellen and Elizabeth looked alike locally in middle age, although Ellen was heavier-set. Her reference to the providential value of her affliction may be found in *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:19, 31.

11. EGW, *Life Sketches*, 19, 28.

12. For an introduction to William Miller, see David L. Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1809-1850* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1965), 1-16. White describes Miller's impact on Portland, Maine, in *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:14.

13. Ellen G. White, "Communications," *Knath's Instructor* 1 (December 1852): 20-22; see also *Life Sketches*, 30. Barbara Walter unveiled similar sentiments in the diaries of contemporary adolescent girls in *Dimity Convictions* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 15.

14. For contemporary Adventist reactions to White, see *Witness of the Witnesses Concerning the Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1963). Numerous illustrations of sickly spiritualist mediums who were invigorated by their trances are noted in R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White*



*Cross: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 102-29, esp. 124.

15. Recently the Millenites have finally received the attention they deserve from contemporary scholars of millenarianism. In addition to the regional study by Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, the movement has been broadly analyzed in Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned Over District of New York in the 1840's* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986); Numbers and Butler, eds., *The Disappointed*; and Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millenialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

16. For a characterization of the seventh month movement, see the writings of David T. Arthur, "Millirism," in *The Rise of Adventism, Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth Century America*, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 154-72; "After the Great Disappointment: To Albany and Beyond," *Adventist Heritage* 1 (January, 1974): 5-10, 58, and "Come Out of Babylon: A Study of Millenite Separatism," (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1979); see also Schwarz, *Light Beams to the Remnant*, 49-51. The same intense community spirit enjoyed by these Adventists emanated from abolitionist "intimacy circles" described in Lawrence J. Friedman, *Georgiana Stouts: Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830-1879* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982). For the view that the "linguistic nonsense" of glossolalia communicates important emotions, see William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

17. The journalistic reflections of Matthew F. Whittier, a brother of Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier, appeared in the *Portland Transcript*, November 1, 1845, 228-29, generously rited in Frederick Hoyt, "We Lifted Up Our Voices Like a Trumpet: Millenites in Portland, Maine," *Spectrum* 17 (August, 1987): 18-20. Hoyt and Ronald Graybill name the visionaries that they have located in Maine newspapers, in addition to Ellen Harmon, as Dorinda Baker, Emily Clemons, Mary Handus, and Phoebe Knapp, in Jonathan Butler and others. "Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Damonian Trial," *Spectrum* 17 (August, 1987): 28-29. The *Himes* comments surfaced in letters from J.V. Himes to William Miller, March 17 and March 29, 1845 (Joshua V. Himes Letters, Massachusetts Historical Society), quoted in Numbers, *Prophecies of Health*, 17. White's dismissal of Dorinda Baker was noted in a later letter to the prophet, M.C. Stowell Crawford to EGW, October 9, 1908 (DF 739, White Estate).

18. Rowe comments on the Millenite women in *Thunder and Trumpets*, 136; see also, Carole Ann Kayburn, "Women in Millerism, 1820-1970," (Typescript, Andrews University Seminary, 1979). William Foy's relationship to Harmon is discussed in Tim Parlier, "Black Forerunner to Ellen White: William E. Foy," *Spectrum* 17 (August, 1987): 23-28. On Hazen Foss, see EGW to Mary Harmon Foss, December 22, 1890 (DF 37, White Estate).

19. The Miller reference is found in Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 278.

20. For their influential study on failed prophecy, see Leon Festinger, Henry W. Rorson, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and*

*Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956; reprint ed., New York: Harper & Row, 1964). An alternative approach appears in Lawrence Foster, "Had Prophecy Failed? Contrasting Perspectives of the Millerites and Shakers," in *The Disappointed*, ed. Numbers and Butler, 173-88.

21. E.G.W. *Spiritual Gifts*, 30. A FC Wallace correlates physical infirmity and prophecy in, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 271-72.

22. E.G.W. *Life Sketches*, 61.

23. Harmon's first vision was printed in *A Word to the "Little Flock"*, ed. James White (Brunswick, Maine: Privately printed, 1847), 14-16. A photographic reproduction of this account of the vision is included in Arthur L. White, "Ellen G. White and the Shut Door Question," *Typescript*, Ellen G. White Estate, 1971), 45-48.

24. E.G.W. *Life Sketches*, 68. Robert R. Wilson touches on the relation of ecstasy to prophetic activity among Hebrew prophets in *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 5-8; see also, Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 47-65, 122-37, 216-19.

25. E.G.W. *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:62-63; E.G.W. *Life Sketches*, 69-72.

26. *Ibid.* James White estimated the number of her supporters in *A Word to the "Little Flock"*, 22.

27. I. M. Lewis provides a comparative account of this experience among the spirit possessed in *Ecstatic Religion*, 66, 187-90.

28. American mesmericism is studied in Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982). Its relevance to Ellen White is mentioned by Ronald L. Numbers and Ronnie B. Schoepflin in "Ministries of Healing: Mary Baker Eddy, Ellen G. White, and the Religion of Health," in *Women and Faith in America: Historical Readings*, ed. Judith Walter Leavitt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 376-89, esp., 376-77. White's resistance to the call is reported in her *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1882), 22-23.

29. Lewis addresses this point in his discussion of possession and psychiatry, *Ecstatic Religion*, 178-205; see also Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth*, 162.

30. James White, ed., *A Word to the "Little Flock"*, 21. One Nichols to William Miller, April 20, 1846 (LF 105, White Estate); quoted at length in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 1:74-6.

31. Among William Sargent's many writings on the physiology of such behaviors, see especially, *Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brain Washing* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957).

32. James White, *Life Incidents, in connection with the Great Advent Movement as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation XIV* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 273.

33. Dorothy Emmelt describes prophecy in vocational terms as "Prophets and Their Societies." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 86 (1956): 13-23, esp. 14-18.

34. Harmon's exchange with the gentleman is mentioned in *Interview with E.G. White*. Re *Early Experiences*, August 13, 1906. Arthur L. White refers to the aliases of the "angel messenger" in *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969), 7.

35. EGW, *Early Writings*, 21-22.

36. EGW, *Life Sketches*, 72.

37. EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 60.

38. See, once again, Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth*, 165-69.

39. *Ibid.*, 168.

40. On the spiritualizers, see *Interview with E.G. White*, Re *Early Experiences*, August 13, 1906, M.C. Simwell Crawford to EGW, October 9, 1908, Ronald Graybill, "Foot Washing and Fanatics," *Insight*, 4 (2 January 1973): 9-13; Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 146-47; Schwarz, *Light Beams to the Remnant*, 56; Arthur White, Ellen G. White, [82-83].

41. The derogatory references to foot washing and the holy kiss appeared in *Morning Watch* 1 (May 1, 1845): 141, and *Advent Journal* 10 (November 19, 1845): 119, cited in Graybill, "Foot Washing and Fanatics," 12. Lawrence Foster traces the spiritual pilgrimage of Fnoch Jacobs from Millerism to Shakerism in "Had Prophecy Failed? Contrasting Perspectives of the Millerites and Shakers," in *The Disappointed*, ed. Numbers and Butler, 173-89. Himes characterizes spiritualizer meetings in *Himes to Miller*, March 27, 1845, cited in Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets*, 147.

42. Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People* (Yarmouth, Maine: I.C. Wellcome, 1874), 402; Nichols to Miller, April 20, 1846; EGW, *Life Sketches*, 74-76.

43. Her position on "promiscuous" foot washing and her early opposition to marriage, as well as her approval of James White, appear in two 1906 interviews, *Interview with Mrs. E.G. White*, Re *Early Experiences*, August 13, 1906 (DF 733c, White Estate), and *Interview of E.G. White*, December 12, 1906 (DF 733c, Lorra Linda University Heritage Room). For her view that women may wash men's feet, see EGW, *Early Writings*, 117. The libel regarding an illegitimate child dogged her until at least 1870, when church leaders attempted to lay it, along with other "shameful slanders," to rest in *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: vindication of Their Moral and Christian Character* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1870), 103. The warrants for her arrest are mentioned in Nichols to Miller, April 20, 1846.

44. Harmon's memory of the Atkinson, Maine, enthusiasm may be found in EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 40-42. In sharp contrast to her account, however, is the recorded testimony which appears in "Trial of Elder L. Harmon," *Piscataquis Farmer* (March 7, 1845), and has been reproduced in Frederick Hoyt, ed., "Trial of Elder L. Harmon Reported for the *Piscataquis Farmer*," *Spectrum* 17 (August, 1992): 29-36; the first hand descriptions of the Atkinson episode in the next several paragraphs of my text are taken from this transcript. For interpretive comment on the trial, see Butler and others, "Scandal or Rite of Passage," *ibid.*, 37-50.

45. EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 40.

46. Harmon implicates enthusiasm with mental illness in *Selected Messages From the Writings of Ellen G. White*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 2:34. The parallel between Harmon's mental problems and the "unbalanced" minds of her enthusiastic community is noted in Ronald L. Numbers and Janet S. Numbers, "Mullerism and Madness: A Study of 'Religious Insanity' in Nineteenth-Century America," in *The Disappointed*, ed. Numbers and Butler, 109-110.

47. An example of her early emphasis on the commonality of the penitential experience can be seen in EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 26-30. The quotation of Elder Stockman's appears in EGW, *Life Sketches*, 36.

48. EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 26; Nichols to Miller, April 20, 1846; EGW to John Loughborough (Letter 2, 1874, White Estate).