

# Review and Herald Literary Society

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The Review and Herald Literary Society was established in response to challenges that arose in the publishing work in the 1860s and early 1870s.

## Historical Background

The *Review and Herald* magazine was lengthened twice during Jotham M. Aldrich's administration of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association in the 1860s. The paper first increased from eight to twelve pages on December 11, 1866, and then, from twelve to sixteen pages on June 18, 1867. Doubling the size of the *Review* increased printing costs. During the same time employee wages were raised as well. However, subscription prices did not rise in corresponding measure to the additional expenses. Within a short period of time the Publishing Association had incurred a large debt.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to unmet financial demands, the editor, Uriah Smith, was also challenged to double the content of the *Review*. In spite of his efforts, some believed that the *Review* began to suffer, perhaps because increased quantity often results in decreased quality. The trustees of Publishing Association began to address financial concerns and content issues in September 1868. During this month Aldrich was removed from the presidency and the paper shrank to its original size, eight pages.<sup>2</sup>

The *Review* was not the only periodical that struggled during the late 1860s and early 1870s. In fact, the *Health Reformer* likely suffered the most. In 1868, Dr. Russell T. (R. T.) Trall began to write a regular column for the *Reformer*, which was initially well received. Trall was quite radical, however, and began to admonish his readers to take some extreme positions, particularly in reference to sugar, salt, butter, milk, and eggs. Since readers found these views unappealing, subscriptions rapidly declined.<sup>3</sup>

In the midst of these struggles, a crisis occurred in late 1870 that almost ended the Seventh-day Adventist publishing work entirely. As sickness spread throughout Battle Creek, Ellen White lamented, "We are amid the dying and the dead . . . Typhoid fever rages to a fearful extent."<sup>4</sup> The publishing office was particularly affected by this epidemic. *Review and Herald* editor, Uriah Smith; publishing association secretary, Adelia P. (A. P.) Van

Horn; press foreman, William C. (W. C.) Gage; and *Youth's Instructor* editor, Goodloe Harper (G. H.) Bell, all contracted the fever around the same time and were unable to work. When the Whites returned to Battle Creek on November 7, 1870, they found that the printing presses had essentially stopped because the office was nearly deserted.<sup>5</sup>

## The Review and Herald Literary Society

In response to these issues, James White stated, "We have long felt the need of an organized effort to raise a general interest among our people for the improvement of our periodicals, and for a more extensive circulation of them."<sup>6</sup> White hoped that such an organization would ameliorate financial and qualitative concerns as well as attract more subscribers. Therefore, on March 21-22, 1871, the Review and Herald Literary Society was established.<sup>7</sup>

In its broadest definition, a literary society is an organized group of people that share a devotion to literature and a commitment to promote a specific genre of writings. These groups were imported from Europe to the United States in the eighteenth century and became an important component of academic institutions in the nineteenth-century.<sup>8</sup>

The stated purpose of the Review and Herald Literary Society was "to promote the literary interest of our various periodicals by gleaning from the wide field of moral and religious literature the choicest selections, and furnishing original contributions, for their columns: and by interesting others to engage in the same work."<sup>9</sup> James White also hoped that the literary society would grow into "a school for education," but this new venture quickly fizzled out. Membership was restricted to employees of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association and they "thought it rather dull work." White also served as president of the society, but was often absent. Without active leadership, the society failed to thrive.<sup>10</sup>

In December 1872, the Review and Herald Literary Society was re-organized. Membership was opened to anyone who wished to join and, in addition to reviewing literature, members in the society also began to debate theological topics. Members would write and present essays, and others would offer constructive criticism. Sometimes subjects were discussed for several weeks before the society moved on to a different topic. The literary society also promoted non-English languages. On several occasions passages of Scripture were memorized and recited in Chaldaic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, German, and Danish.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Review and Herald Literary Society may not have accomplished all of its original goals, Adventist periodicals were strengthened throughout the 1870s, perhaps partially due to the society's efforts. The society was no longer mentioned in denominational periodicals after 1873, yet it did not die out. Battle Creek College opened in 1874 and the society was apparently re-organized a third time under the name, Fide-Delectian Society of Battle Creek College, which remained in "a prosperous condition" at least into the 1880s.<sup>12</sup> Though the Review and Herald Literary Society did not "become a school of education" as James White had hoped, it did become an

important component of the first Seventh-day Adventist educational institution. Similar societies were added, such as the Soronians and the Bible Lyceum, and associations of this nature became an integral part of student life in other Adventist schools in the latter part of the nineteenth-century.<sup>13</sup>

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