

Hyde, William Henry (1828–1915)

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William Henry Hyde.

Photo courtesy of Michael W. Campbell.

William Henry Hyde was an earlier Millerite who observed Ellen Harmon in vision and wrote the lyrics to a beloved hymn.

Early Life

William Henry Hyde was born January 14, 1828, in Portland, Maine, to William (1788-1870) and Julia (1792-1891) Hyde. His ancestors had immigrated from France. His father was a prominent printer with a bookshop located at 13 Exchange Street in Portland.¹ A survey of extant imprints shows that he primarily printed books between 1819 to 1855, and after 1851 started to add the imprint “William Hyde & Son.”² William H. Hyde appears to have branched out into new directions starting a melodeon store, and then later, a “cheap store” for inexpensive goods.

In the spring of 1845, after the Great Disappointment, Hyde became involved in fanaticism. Some Adventists argued that they could “show their love for one another” by remaining pure while laying down together on the same bed.³ At the time, Hyde was living in Topsham, just north of Portland. He became ill with dysentery. Ellen White recounted of his illness: “At this time Brother Wm. Hyde was very sick. . . His symptoms were alarming, and the physicians pronounced his case almost hopeless.”⁴ She warned him:

Now Brother Hyde, you have sent for us to come and pray for you as a last resort. I want to tell you that we cannot do anything of the kind unless you shall give up all this great fanaticism of the enemy, that God has

nothing to do with it. You have no right to lie on the bed, women and men together. If you will receive the message that God gives you and turn right around, then the Spirit of the Lord will come in.⁵

According to Ellen White, he renounced this fanaticism.⁶ Ellen White described what happened next:

We visited with him and prayed with him, but he had come under the influence of certain fanatical persons, who were bringing dishonor upon our cause. We wished to remove him from their midst, and petitioned the Lord to give him strength to leave that place. He was strengthened and blessed in answer to our prayers, and rode four miles to the house of Brother Patten. But after arriving there seemed to be rapidly sinking. The fanaticism and errors into which he had fallen through evil influence seemed to hinder the exercise of his faith. He gratefully received the testimony borne him, and made humble confession of his fault. Only a few who were strong in faith were permitted to enter the sick-room. The fanatics . . . were positively forbidden to come into his presence, while we prayed fervently for his restoration to health. I have seldom known such a reaching out to claim the promises of God. The salvation of the Holy Spirit was revealed, and power from on high rested upon our sick brother and upon all present. Brother Hyde immediately dressed and walked out of the room praising God, with the light of heaven shining upon his countenance.⁷

As a result, Hyde was miraculously healed.⁸ Ellen White described his recovery as "perfect and lasting."⁹

Hyde was also present for Ellen Harmon's third major vision about the new earth. Some historians have confused this with her first vision, six months earlier, that also offered a glimpse about the new earth. She described the glories of heaven and walked with Jesus. Hyde wrote a poem, published first under the name "The Better Land," recounting her vision.¹⁰ This title refers to Ellen Harmon's vision (published in *Early Writings* 17-20). In 1849 the hymn was published in James White's *Hymns for God's Peculiar People That Keep the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus* and Joshua V. Himes' *The Advent Harp; Designed for the Believers in the Speedy Coming of Christ*. In this latter hymnbook, the tune is identified as "Carrier Dove."¹¹ When Ellen White's first book, *Experience and Views* (1851) appeared, this song was printed on the back cover of the paperback edition.

James White offered some background in the November 1850 issue of *The Present Truth*.

Some may be interested in learning the origin of the hymn on the first page of this number. In the spring of 1845, the author of the vision, published in this paper, was very sick, nigh unto death. The elders of the church were finally called, and the directions of the apostle [James 5:14-15] were strictly followed. God heard, answered, and healed the sick. The Holy Spirit filled the room, and she had a vision of the "city," "life's pure river," "green fields," "roses of Sharon," "songs" of "lovely birds," the "harps," "palms," "robes," "crowns," the "mount" Zion, the "tree of life," and the "King of that country" mentioned in the hymn. A brother took up his pen, and in a very short time composed the hymn from the vision. It has been published in two or three Second Advent papers, Smith's collection of hymns, and finally found its way into the *Advent Harp*, published by J. V. Himes in 1849. Let those who "despise prophesyings," and reject the fulfillment of God's word in visions of the

"LAST DAYS," remember, when they sing this hymn, that it was composed from a vision.¹²

James White in 1878 noted that this popular song that had "gone the rounds of the religious papers" and appeared "in several hymn books" was written in response to "a vision of a girl, persecuted for her humble testimony."¹³

The hymn has been a mainstay of Adventist hymnals since its publication. James White included the lyrics again in his 1852 hymnal. The hymn appears for the first time with an associated tune in the 1855 *Hymns for Those Keep the Commandments of God, and the Faith of Jesus*¹⁴ The 1869 *Hymnal* identifies the tune as the "Better Land," utilizing the "Carrier Dove" melody.¹⁵ By 1886, the words and tune appear simultaneously together in the Seventh-day Adventist hymnal, *Hymns and Tunes*.¹⁶

By late 1845, Hyde appears to have largely left Adventism following the views of Emily Clemons, a Millerite preacher.¹⁷ In his later years, he ran a mercantile store and became a prominent member of his community. Even though Hyde left Adventism, this song became a personal favorite of Ellen G. White. "Mrs. White loved this song," wrote Stella Parker Peterson, "During her last illness, in 1915, the helpers at work about her home and offices at Elmshaven, in California, often heard her eighty-seven-year-old voice raised in the strains of the song of the beautiful land whose glories she had been shown."¹⁸

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. The father's name consistently always appears as "William Hyde" and never with an initial helping to differentiate the father from the son.
2. Survey of 113 imprints extant under "William Hyde" and "Portland" on October 2, 2022.
3. "An Interview Between Ellen G. White and C. C. Crisler," c. 1906, Ellen G. White Estate.
4. Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches: Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors, of Elder James White, and His Wife, Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1888), 200.
5. "An Interview Between Ellen G. White and C. C. Crisler," c. 1906, Ellen G. White Estate.
6. Ibid.
7. *Life Sketches*, 1888, 201.
8. "William H. Hyde," in *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Jerry Moon and Denis Fortin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013) 420-421. (2013), 420-421. See also 2SG 44; LS80 200-201; 1Bio 82.
9. Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 1888, 201.
10. Arthur W. Spalding asserts that this hymn was the "first published poetic effusion of a Seventh-day Adventist." Arthur W. Spalding, *Captains of the Host: First Volume of a History of Seventh-day Adventists Covering the Years 1845-1900* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1949), 183. Nix rightly points out that some people have incorrectly asserted this was the first Sabbatarian Adventist hymn. This designation more properly belongs to Heman Gurney. For a discussion, see: James R. Nix, *Early Advent Singing: A Collection of 52 Early Adventist Hymns with Illustrating Stories* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 140-142.
11. Courtesy of James R. Nix, who identified the original tune. An original copy of the music is available in the White Estate DF 245c.
12. [James White], *The Present Truth*, November 1850, 88.
13. J[ames] W[hite], "Life Sketches: Chapter V—Continued. Parentage and Early Life," *The Signs of the Times*, May 23, 1878, 155.

14. [James White], *Hymns for Second Advent Believers Who Observe the Sabbath of the Lord* (Rochester, NY: James White, 1852), 17-18; [James White], *Hymns for Those Who Keep the Commandments of God, and the Faith of Jesus* (Rochester, NY: Advent Review Office, 1855), 312-314; [James White], *Hymns for Those Who Keep the Commandments of God, and the Faith of Jesus* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Review and Herald Office, 1861), 312-13.
 15. [James White], *Hymns and Tunes for Those Who Keep the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1869), 374-375. The words appear as hymn #370 on pg. 210-211.
 16. The General Conference, *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymn and Tune Book for Use in Divine Worship* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing House, 1886), 346 [hymn #1010].
 17. See discussion in *The Day-Star*, October 11, 1845, 46, 48.
 18. Stella Parker Peterson, "Story of an Adventist Song," *Australasian Record*, May 15, 1950, 2; *The Church Officers' Gazette*, January 1949, 17-18.
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