

An Interview with J. S. Washburn

Signed and attested by him, Hagerstown, Maryland, June 4, 1950

Interviewed by Robert J. Wieland

The Minneapolis Conference, 1888: Elder J.H. Morrison was put up to answer E.J. Waggoner, to defend the "old" view of the Law in Galatians. I was present at the Conference. E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones were about 35 then (actually, Jones was 38). Morrison defended the law as ceremonial, and Uriah Smith defended the Huns as one of the ten horns. When A.T. Jones made his bold remark asking the delegates not to blame him for what Uriah Smith said he did not know, Ellen G. White rebuked him saying, "Not so sharp, Brother Jones, not so sharp!"

A.T. Jones had a wonderful Christian experience. I went to the Conference prejudiced in favor of the Old view of the "Law" in favor of Morrison and Elder G.I. Butler. I felt that Jones and Waggoner were undermining the faith. But I was perplexed to hear Jones praying, and said to myself, "That man prays as though he knows the Lord!" I couldn't understand how such a bad man as Jones must be in opposing Uriah Smith so sharply, could pray like that. Jones was very keen, and logical. But Uriah Smith was sort of an idol to me.

(James White was the head of his household, let his wife know he was. Ellen G. white was a great walker. She was walking down the street near the office in Battle Creek, when James called, "Ellen!" and she returned obediently. Often she would rebuke her husband, saying, "Too sharp!" and he would always take it.)

J.H. Morrison was father to Elder H.A. Morrison of Takoma Park [in 1950, H.A. Morrison was prominent there]. "Why, that man who talks to Uriah Smith as he does, certainly talks like he knows the Lord!" I thought.

When my wife saw Ellen G. White she said, "Isn't she homely!" Sister White would stand by A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner and would say, "Brethren, there's great light here." She would hear Waggoner all the way through, but would get up and go out before Morrison would finish his rebuttal. So I asked Morrison, "I know those two men are wrong." "Of course they are," he said. "They were all in California together, including Sister White, and came on the train together, so they influenced Sister White to go with them."

"Well," I thought, "she's no prophet if she will be persuaded by men to follow them. We don't really have a prophet!"

At that meeting, I received a call to go to West Virginia. I went with J.H. Morrison [president of the Iowa Conference at the time] to see Sister White about my going to West Virginia. She would give no counsel, said, "Brethren, my counsel has no weight in Iowa!"

Morrison, in his belittling the Spirit of Prophecy, would reason that not all that Ellen G. White said was inspired. When she said, "I saw," all right; but otherwise, she is not inspired any more than other people's utterances. "Is 'pass the potatoes' inspired, simply because she would say so?" he would ask.

So I decided to go to her alone. She was always talking about faith. "What is faith?" I asked her. "Why," she replied, "don't you believe what your father and mother tell you?" "Yes. I do." "Well, believe God in just that way!" I marveled at such a simple answer.

I was on the wrong side at Minneapolis. But I couldn't understand how A.T. Jones could pray as he did, if Jones were so wrong.

Afterwards, in a discussion with a Campbellite preacher in my work, I won out. But soon afterwards, the old doubts of Minneapolis came back. "We don't have a prophet! She can't be one, and those two men influence her like that," I reasoned to myself. Then I went West to College Springs, to have a series of meetings. The National Reformers came to fight against us, at the time of my meetings there. The National Reform agitator said there were four steps to be taken in making this nation "Christian": 1st, agitation; 2nd, petition; 3rd, ballot; 4th, sword and bullet if necessary. I answered him sharply and strongly, but lost my crowd. I only baptized four or five from that meeting. The old doubts returned strongly.

I knelt outside one starlight night, praying desperately. I reasoned out that if this people keep the commandments of God, they must also have the Spirit of Prophecy. But they couldn't have it if the prophet were swayed by two young men, to go their way. And if we don't have a prophet, how can we believe the Bible is truly inspired either? "If there be a God, let me believe!" I prayed. It seemed like a voice reasoned with me, "Well, look at the stars." But the devil replied, "How do you know they are stars? How do you know they are not just a dream?"

J.H. Morrison had said he would go home before the session [1888] was ended. He said: "They are going to try to force me to acknowledge that I am wrong. So I am leaving." So I went to my father, a worker, a "stubborn debater," a wrestler. I told him of Morrison's going home. My father said, "If he is right, why is he going home? He ought to stay and defend the right!"

Ellen G. White tried desperately to bring a revival before the close. S.N. Haskell ... stood loyally with Jones and Waggoner, but three-fourths of the workers stood against the new light.

Later, Sister White accompanied Jones and Waggoner in revival meetings. They went to Ottawa, Kansas. I was among the delegates who went to that Institute. I went on the train, with my wife.

A.T. Jones had been to Washington for a hearing on the Blair Sunday bill. Jones was too much for Senator Blair. He was a great historian, also a great man for faith. When I got on the train, lo, there was A.T. Jones! It was the Spring of 1889. I was only 26. I had been interested in being a lawyer, and in politics. Jones' victory at Washington had impressed me in spite of the fact I had doubts about his being "straight." "There is something to that man," I reasoned, "in spite of the fact that he is wrong along with Waggoner."

I introduced myself to Jones somewhat fearfully, but found him very friendly and kind. I learned to like him, went with him to meeting, spent a week-end with him, walked up and down the river with him, talking a great deal. Jones preached that Sabbath, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." He preached the truth clearly, showed how Christ had sinful flesh as we have, tempted in all points just as we are, yet without sin. Thus He was our righteousness, He could live in our flesh. Previous to the Minneapolis meeting, I had read D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation*, and had rejoiced in an understanding and acceptance of "justification by faith" from reading that work. This

preaching of Jones recalled that experience, and the warmth and joy of it returned. I then recognized that what Jones was preaching was truth. All the previous horror of a great darkness was now gone.

Then Ellen G. White came. She was "great" on early morning meetings. "We don't want any of that Minneapolis spirit down here!" she said. "If J.H. Morrison and Henry Nicola don't repent and become converted, they'll never be saved, she added. I was shocked to hear her talk so bluntly of their Iowa leaders. "She's wrong!" I was upset again, and the old doubts returned, the old Minneapolis spirit returned to me. I determined to have a visit with Sister White, to settle matters. So I wrote her a note, asked if she would see me. She replied in the kindest manner, with a note inviting me. [He said he did not think he still had the note.]

So I went to have a visit with her in her tent at the Ottawa meeting. I told her I had always thought and believed that she was a prophet. But I was disturbed by the Minneapolis episode. I had thought Uriah Smith and J.H. Morrison were right. "Do you know why J.H. Morrison left the Conference early?" she asked me. I replied, "Yes." Then she told me just what Morrison had said to me—and the revelation of her apparently superhuman knowledge of that private, confidential conversation frightened me. I realized that here was one who knew secrets.

Sister White told me of her Guide in Europe, who had stretched His hands out, and said, "There are mistakes being made on both sides in this controversy." Then she added that the "Law in Galatians" is not the real issue of the Conference. The real issue is Righteousness by faith! (That apparently to Washburn was a deeper insight than he had yet realized as to the fundamental issue at Minneapolis.) "E.J. Waggoner can teach righteousness by faith more clearly than I can," said Sister White. "Why, Sister White," I said, "do you mean to say that E.J. Waggoner can teach it better than you can, with all your experience?" Sister White replied, "Yes, the Lord has given him special light on that question. I have been wanting to bring it out more clearly, but I could not have brought it out as clearly as he did. But when he brought it out at Minneapolis, I recognized it."

(Signed) True Report of Interview, J.S. Washburn.

"When Brother Waggoner brought out these ideas in the Minneapolis Conference, it was the first clear teaching of the subject from any human lips I had heard, excepting the communication between myself and my husband. I have said to myself, it is because God has presented it to me in vision that I see it so clearly, and they (the brethren at Battle Creek) cannot see it because they have not had it presented to them as I have, and when another presented it, every fiber of my heart said Amen."—MS 5, 1889