

**The Spirit in the City:
The Chicago Mission, William and Lena Sadler,
and the Urantia Movement**

by

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Opening Remarks

Reading early Adventist history for several years, I found an interesting and almost incontestable fact: when Adventists held meetings, the Spirit occasionally fell in the mornings, more often late at night, but not usually after lunch or at 2:30 in the afternoon!

When I saw that my paper was slated for this spiritually-destitute hour, I decided it needed a little spicing up. After all, if the choice is between sleep and getting the Spirit, I will try to keep you from the first, but with no guarantee that I will bring you the second.

Instead I want to tell you the story of William ((1875-1969) and Lena Sadler (1875-1939) who associated with the Kellogg's Chicago City Mission and later birthed the Urantia Movement.

Some twenty years after Mrs O'Leary's cow kicked over a lantern and burned a third of the city of Chicago, a new "white city" arose on the shores of Lake Michigan to show off America's progress on the prairie. The choice of Chicago, described in Erik Larson's thrilling treatment, *The Devil in the White City*, reflected the architect Daniel

Burnham and the city's "yearning to show the world that the city could do much more than butcher cattle and hogs."¹ The Columbian Exposition of 1893 showcased the best and latest ideas in agricultural reform, technology, manufacturing and neo-colonial architecture. Millions of visitors from all over the world attended entertainments, lectures, and exhibition halls, and the first ever Parliament of the World's Religions.

What an amazing place Chicago was!

In the same year, William T. Stead wrote his famous call for Christian benevolence. *If Christ came to Chicago*, Stead argued, he would not come in shining glory, but in compassion and love for the destitute, the poor, the immigrants, and those enslaved by wretched circumstances beyond their control. "For religion," he said, "is the life of man going out of himself to unite itself to the life of other men so that they may all be one in Love, which is God."²

The same year also, revivals of religion swept college campuses, including Battle Creek College, just 150 miles from Chicago, where it left the students and teachers there burning with desire to change the world. The Sanitarium had recently become famous and its supporters were eager to spend their social capital.³ John Harvey Kellogg, director of the Sanitarium, and now a nationwide celebrity, visited the Chief of Police in Chicago and asked for very worst part of town. He was sent to the Harrison Street Station, located

¹ See Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* (N.Y.: Vintage, 2004). Quotation from an interview with Larson, <http://www.randomhouse.com/crown/devilinthewhitecity/interview.html>

² William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago* (Chicago: Laird & Lese, 1894). [Reprint: Chicago Historical Bookworks, Evanston, Illinois, n.d.], 444.

³ Milton Raymond Hook, *Flames Over Battle Creek* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1977), 88-98.

in the in South Loop, in the middle of some 150 saloons, gambling dens and “houses of ill-fame”.⁴ After negotiations with Jane Addams, ministers, and city officials, Kellogg and a few dozen others established within a few months a handful of relief institutions including the Chicago Branch Sanitarium, a Working Men’s Home, the Life Boat Mission, the Star of Hope Mission, and a visiting nursing service. Others such as David and Mary Paulson, (founders of Hinsdale Hospital), and William Sadler and Lena Kellogg soon joined in what became the hey-day of Adventist city missions.⁵ In 1895, Kellogg founded at 1926 S. Wabash Avenue the American Medical Missionary College, with classes in both Battle Creek and Chicago.⁶

Soon the Chicago Mission further expanded to more than twenty local institutions, including homes for working men, pregnant girls, prostitutes, and a dispensary. Adventists were players in the social gospel game, with a unique method of working for the poor and marginalized, called “medical missionary work”. The model was apparently successful and quickly spread to San Francisco and more than ten other cities across America.

⁴ See the “Blacklist” in Appendix A of Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago*.

⁵ The story has never been well told, but the recent honors thesis by Amy Lee Sheppard offers an outline and rationale for what I hope will become an in-depth study of this important topic. See Amy Lee Sheppard, *Doers of the Word: Seventh-day Adventist Social Christianity in Thought and Practice during the Gilded Age*. B.A. Honors Thesis, Department of History, University of Michigan, 2007.

⁶ See Richard W. Schwarz, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spring, 1964), pp. 5-22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4019007>

William Sadler: Medical Missionary, Physician, Professor

William Sadler grew up in Wabash, Indiana, homeschooled by his parents who after his sister died from a communicable disease, feared the same might happen to him. At fourteen, he left home to work as a bellboy at the Battle Creek Sanitarium where he soon began to sell newly invented cornflakes. In 1895, Kellogg sent him to head the Chicago Medical mission where he worked teaching health and religion to the indigent, attended Moody's Bible School and the University of Chicago, and founded and edited the *Life Boat Magazine* that expanded to a circulation of 150,000. He eventually headed for the whole enterprise,

While working in the Mission, he met and in 1897 married Lena Kellogg, but when their first child Willis died in 1899, they headed to San Francisco to attend medical school where he taught exegesis at the SDA Seminary and was ordained an SDA minister. As if not busy enough, he specialized in both forensic medicine and surgery, and was soon offered the top position in what became the FBI. In 1904 they returned to Battle Creek to complete their medical studies, working at the Chicago Mission in the summers, and both graduated with their medical degrees in 1906 and set up medical offices on State Street, downtown Chicago. To support Lena's work at the Suburban Maternity Home in Hinsdale, they moved to the middle class suburb of La Grange where in 1907 Lena gave birth to their second son, Bill, Jr. Drs. William and Lena Sadler also lectured for the Chataqua circuit, lecturing on health and popular medical topics, and published books using the Hinsdale publishing company, the Health Press. In 1908 they

bought a three-story house they lived in until they moved to another three-story home at 533 W. Diversey, in Chicago.

Upon returning to Chicago area from San Francisco, William Sadler moved from surgery to psychiatry, spending the next fifty years in clinical practice with his wife Lena. William became a popular national lecturer on topics of health, mental hygiene, maternity and family topics. He wrote and lectured against medical hoaxes, against spiritualism and claims of life after death. He traveled with the famous magician Howard Thurston, exposing fraudulent claims of entertainers and debunking claims of supernaturalism. William Sadler also went to Europe to study with Freud. He returned convinced that he had a mission to the world in the field of mental health, and, and as Professor at the Medical School of the University of Chicago and of Pastoral Counseling at McCormick Theological Seminary. His published books run to forty-two.⁷

Lena Sadler and the Advancement of Women's Medicine

Lena Celesta Kellogg was born in Wet Prairie, Michigan, daughter of Smith Moses Kellogg and Susan Dickinson. Smith had moved to Battle creek along with James and Ellen White in 1856 and there met his wife and mother to Lena, a nurse. Lena attended Battle Creek College and went to work for the Chicago Medical Mission where she was in charge of rescue ministries for women arrested by the police....for what?

To give some flavor of who Lena was, I want to quote from Bertha van Hoosen (1863-1952), whose honorary epitaph is located in the foyer of the Fine Arts Building

⁷ Biographical data condensed from Meredith Sprunger, "A Short Biographical Sketch of Dr. William S. Sadler," and files of the Urantia Book Historical Society at <http://www.ubhistory.org/UBHS/StoriesandPeople/Lena&WillSadler.html>

on Michigan Avenue, the same building where I have conducted my clinical practice as a psychotherapist. In her biography, van Hoosen wrote:

In 1892, Chicago and the practice of medicine were so new to me that I was not even aware of the fight that medical women staged at that time for representation at the Columbian World's Fair. When Dr. Sarah Hackett Stevenson found out that medical women were to be allowed no part in that greatest of all fairs, she gathered her forces together and succeeded in getting a state appropriation for a Woman's Hospital exhibit. A building was erected in which the women doctors gave first aid and treated thousands of patients.

Forty years later, when arrangements for the Century of Progress were completed, the medical women were again excluded. In protestation, Dr. Lena Sadler and I appealed to the management for representation and space for some exhibit in the Hall of Science. We were told that, as there had been no arrangements for an exhibit on Maternal Hygiene, we might make an application for such an exhibit. However, there were a dozen applicants for the space, and if we wanted it, we would have to compete by presenting a perfect model of a maternal hygiene exhibit with all specifications. With the help of a hastily organized group of the medical, dental, and allied science women, we presented such a fascinating model that we were given the space.

The financing was more difficult — so difficult that Dr. [Lena] Sadler and I found ourselves almost alone on the project. My democratic program was to collect one dollar from every medical, dental, and allied science woman in the United States, but Dr. Sadler said, 'No, no. That's too long and hard a job. Go to Lane Bryant and ask them to allow you to exhibit their maternity dresses. I will go to Vanta, and then there's the Camp maternity corset. These firms ought to pay \$500 for the privilege of exhibiting their products.

To my amazement, Dr. Sadler's plan brought us \$6,000 in a few weeks so that the Medical, Dental, and Allied Science Women's Association for the Century of Progress was able to sponsor and furnish a booth on Maternal Hygiene in the Hall of Science, a booth on History of Women in Medicine in the Hall of Social Science, and a booth devoted to Child Welfare on the Enchanted Island.⁸

⁸ Bertha Van Hoosen, *Petticoat Surgeon* (1947; New York: Arno Press, 1980, p. ____ [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/lhbum:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(lhbum08820div37\)\)#08820289](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/lhbum:@field(DOCID+@lit(lhbum08820div37))#08820289)

Lena worked at her medical practice, promoted women's medicine, lectured on health topics, assisted the State of Illinois develop guidelines for health education for women, wrote ten books on topics from weight loss to infant nutrition, and became an active member and believer in the Urantia revelation. Lena became so prominent that in the 1920s she served as State Chairman of Public Health and Child Welfare, a post that enabled her to promote the health of children as well as women. She passed away in 1939.⁹

Ellen White's Inspiration and the Problem of Revelation

In 1906, Ellen White, living in St. Helena, California, caught wind of a new round of criticism concerning her "testimonies" and her claims to special revelation. She sent a letter to Kellogg, Paulson, Sadler and a few others inviting them to write their concerns to her.¹⁰ Dr Paulson replied almost immediately to W.C. White, Ellen's son who, performed as her Secretary of State.¹¹ His letter to Ellen White is an eloquent and revealing piece describing his early implicit faith in Ellen White, which he held with "absolute tenacity," and the moment when he recognized a human element to her inspiration, and his recent perplexities.¹²

⁹ Obituary: "Dr. Lena Sadler Dies, Practiced in City 30 years," Chicago Daily Tribune, Aug 9, 1939, 14.

¹⁰ Ellen White to Ministers at Battle Creek, March 30, 1906

¹¹ David Paulson to W. C. White, Apr 19, 1906

¹² David Paulson to Mrs. E. G. White, Apr 19, 1906. It took more than a year for Dr Charles Stewart to compose his response to White, a lengthy examination of White's claims and an expose of White's heavy literary reliance on published authors such as Conybeare and Howson, L. B. Cole, Merle D'Aubigne, Wylie and other Protestant authors.¹² Others who replied included Merritt Kellogg.

The Sadlers had recently completed their medical education at the new Chicago-based American Medical Missionary College, which Kellogg had founded close to his mission territory in Chicago. William Sadler, however, was rather interested in the practical matters of administration at the Battle Creek Sanitarium and the Chicago-based American Medical Missionary College. In the 1890s White had written to Kellogg forbidding him to advise students to go to Ann Arbor or other “worldly” medical schools, and now, Sadler asked, she was apparently discouraging students from attending Chicago. “Where would you advise me to recommend Seventh-day Adventist young men and women to go to obtain a medical education?”

A week later, Dr Sadler worked a different vein of perplexities. Recalling the “systematic study” of her writings he conducted in the mid-1890s, he wrote: “The study of your writings did wonders for me; my soul was set ablaze with their value and power....” Sadler was apparently unconcerned about White’s alleged plagiarisms. But a letter from Mrs White to Dr Kellogg, written when he was merely considering the construction of buildings in Chicago, had raised questions about the accuracy and validity of White’s testimonies in the minds of many of Kellogg’s associates. In her answer to an objection about a vision regarding women’s clothing styles, Ellen had repeated the distinction between visual and verbal inspiration that she had voiced since the 1850s, that “although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as am in receiving them, yet the words that I employ in describing what I have seen are my own....” Similarly, Willie White’s habit of running interference on behalf of his mother Ellen raised suspicions regarding his overall influence on her writings. “To what extent and in just what ways are the Testimonies edited after they leave your pen before they are

crystallized into type?” Sadler asked as he rehearsed all these incidents and concerns. Apparently human language and intervention left much too room for error even if the Spirit had sourced the visions.

For many years, Sadler confessed, he had “stood unmoved” before apparent contradictions in White’s attitudes and inspired writings. But now he found himself persistently questioned by others, and his own difficulties with her inconsistencies remained unresolved. It had “saddened our hearts to see these difficulties and perplexities descend upon you in your declining years,” he wrote, yet he would “await from you that which the Lord may direct you to offer as a means of answering, explaining, denying, or making clear these things....”

Like a poker player who gets the other players to show their hands and then begs off, Ellen failed to reply, claiming that another vision had instructed her to refrain.¹³ The lacuna in her communications, after such a display of seeming openness, made a lasting impression on William Sadler and the others, despite her letter explaining her lack of explanation.¹⁴ One historian has suggested that Sadler and his wife were “profoundly shaken by their awareness of Mrs White’s flawed testimonies” and this “painful loss of childhood faith left a huge void” in their hearts.¹⁵

Most Adventist commentators believe that the Sadlers thereafter gradually drifted away from Adventism. In truth, the Sadlers never lost their Adventist roots or beliefs; they simply reframed them in a new revelation.

¹³ June 3, 1906

¹⁴ Ellen G. White to W.S. Sadler and D. Paulson, Jun 11, 1906.

¹⁵ Martin Gardner, *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery. With a New Postscript by the Author* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2008), 274.

William Sadler and the Eugenics Movement

By 1910 or so, the science of genetics was sweeping away traditional ideas concerning heredity from the practice of medicine. Its social application, named eugenics, offered a new vision of the human future in which various forms of population control would assure that only the “fit” would emerge. I have not yet found evidence that Sadler attended these conferences, but in his published books, he echoes many of the ideas of Major Leonard Darwin, son of Charles Darwin, who presided over two of the three International Eugenics Conferences of 1912, 1921, and 1932. There is some evidence that three additional conferences, named “Race Betterment Conferences” (1914, 1915, 1928) were organized and funded by none other than John Harvey Kellogg, who adopted eugenics as his new religious ideology and published on the topic as early as 1910.

For Kellogg, eugenics was a religious, scientific, and social idea that countered “race degeneration” caused primarily by poor diet.¹⁶ It was a material spirituality that achieved many of the millennial ideals promoted by Ellen White. Anyone who did not measure up to Kellogg’s moral or physiological ideals was not “fit” for the kingdom, and the parallels with Darwinism should not be missed.

Of the many forms of eugenics, we can distinguish those that aimed at human improvement through the gradual elimination of various genetic defects and disabilities, “proper breeding”, and “population control”, and those that extended these ideas to

¹⁶ See Dennis L. Durst, “Evangelical Engagements with Eugenics, 1900-1940,” *Ethics and Medicine* (Summer 2002).

“racial purity”. I shall let you decide which type William Sadler promoted in his books and lectures. In 1927 he published a medical school textbook which included lectures on the history of the idea of evolution, the work of Darwin, Mendel, Weisman (germ plasm theory) and others, and references to the Urantia-based plan for social progress. What view of human nature and race does Sadler seem to propound?

On **Genetics**: “ a science which constitutes the very foundation of our efforts toward human betterment and race improvement.” (xi)

On **eugenics**: “...add something to the creation of that new and vital interest in the cause of ‘race improvement’ which must certainly precede the dawn of that better day and generation for the whole human species.” (373)

On **race**: “The racial composition of America is undergoing a change. The inferior elements of our citizenry are reproducing three times faster than the superior. These conditions of racial change are worse in the great cities; and are little better in most European countries.” (190)¹⁷

The “Sleeping Subject” and the Appearance of the Urantia Papers

Somewhere around 1911, when the Sadlers were living in La Grange, Illinois, they were awakened by a woman living downstairs from them who claimed that her husband had fallen into a trance and was murmuring strange words. As the “sleeping subject,” as he was known, began to speak, someone was called to write down the words. Over the next decade or so, hundreds of pages were thus transcribed and kept by the Sadlers. When they moved to Chicago around 1922, the Sadlers slowly introduced the material to their regular Sunday afternoon Forums, held in their home at 533 Diversey. The attendees were encouraged to write down questions, which Sadler organized and presented to the “sleeping subject” who recited answers that clarified and expanded the

¹⁷ *The Truth about Heredity*, (1927, p. xi)

existing materials. When he awoke, the subject remembered absolutely nothing and conducted his life in complete dissociation from the experience. Sadler himself probably edited the answers he brought back to the Forum group, who then provided more questions. In the 1930s, a new series of revelations, the Jesus Papers, were introduced and eventually became part of the Urantia Book, published by a committee of 70, in 1955 at over 2,000 pages.

The identity of the “sleeping subject” was kept a secret for many decades, but is believed by many to be Wilfred Kellogg, Lena’s brother.

The Urantia Book: Cosmos, Theology, Movement

The Urantia Book reads like a blend of science fiction, modernist philosophy of religion, and the Bible. I see it as the second of three major new American revelations in the modern era, alongside the *Book of Mormon*, and more recently, *A Course in Miracles*. In many ways, the whole enterprise takes ideas propounded by Ellen White, Kellogg and others, and expands them into a cosmotheology far beyond anything else written (except perhaps for Hindu mythology and cosmology). It looks very much the mind of the modernist William Sadler, but without the humanitarian impulse that founded the Chicago Medical Mission.

The revelations described the organization of the universe, the throne of God beyond the constellation Orion, and the complex system of beings inhabiting the cosmos. The Jesus Papers place Jesus as Michael of Nebadon, a Son of God with special care for this section of the Universe. He is also a member of the Trinity, which is a perfect trinity of trinities, or nine sources of infinite energy and intelligence.

Today the Urantia movement operates reading groups in more than 50 countries, and believes it has 150,000 readers. The Urantia Foundation, which published the Urantia Book in 1955, is translating the UB into several foreign languages, beginning with Spanish. The movement, lacking brick and mortar institutions, has quickly adapted to the internet. The discovery of the internet may have been foretold in the UB.

Questions:

1. There is no doubt that both Sadler and Kellogg promoted eugenics. Did they, in fact, cooperate in any way after their break with Ellen White and the SDA church? What was it about their immersion in Adventism that made the Kelloggs and Sadlers attracted to eugenics and human betterment? How did their break with Ellen White shape their life after Seventh-day Adventism? These relationships need more basic research and interpretation.

2. How were Sadler's eugenics views encoded into the Urantia Book?

3. As historians what status should we give to the claims regarding the sleeping subject and the materialization of the Urantia Book? What standards of proof are required to take seriously Sadler's claims? If, hypothetically, historians felt that there was sufficient evidence to believe the story of the sleeping subject, what explanatory models are available to account for the evidence?

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