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Uriah Smith’s “Great Globetrotting Trip:” Scandinavia

In the wake of the controversies over prophetic interpretation and righteousness by faith coming out of the 1888 General Conference session, Seventh-day Adventist denominational officials sought to restore peace by sending or encouraging the principal antagonists to travel abroad. Most famously, Ellen White went to Australia, where she stayed for nearly a decade. A. T. Jones travelled to Asia Minor. And Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*, along with his son Wilton, took a trip through Europe and the Middle East. Smith’s trip, the subject of this paper, was not in itself of particular historical significance, but it is the best documented part of his life, for we have his letters to his wife Harriet, his weekly reports in the *Review*, and his son’s daily diary and letters. The following account describes the early portion of the trip, involving primarily Scandinavia and provides a glimpse of Smith’s personality as he expresses his views of food, understanding of Protestantism and Catholicism, and his concern with establishing the viability of Adventist doctrine.

The Smiths had left Battle Creek on May 1 and arrived in Great Britain on May 24, traveling to London, where Uriah’s son Leon was serving the church, the following day. On Friday, May 27, Uriah and his two sons toured the British museum, which Wilton reported as “a place well worth the visit.” On Sabbath, Uriah spoke in the morning to the Adventist group at their chapel on Duncombe Road while Haskell, who had travelled with them across the Atlantic, spoke in the afternoon. Sunday morning Uriah and Wilton went to St. Margaret’s Church, next to Westminster Cathedral, to hear Arch-deacon Farrar, whose sermon Uriah liked quite well, and that evening Uriah spoke again in the Adventist chapel. On Monday they resumed their sightseeing, visiting the London Tower, the Museum of Natural History, and Madame Tusaud’s wax museum, which disappointed Wilt “perhaps because I had heard them [the figures] cracked up so highly.” Although noting that they “could just take a glance at a whole forest of objects of interest, which we could not stop to study, “ Uriah enjoyed these sites very much, stating that “if I should see nothing more, it has well repaid me for the trip.” That evening Dr. W. M. Jones, a Seventh Day Baptist who had lived in Palestine for several years, and his wife visited and gave them “many points in reference to both country and people “in anticipation of their visit.” On Tuesday, May 30, they repacked their things and in the evening, together with Haskell, took a train to Harwich and boarded a small steamer crossing to the Hook of Holland. Although they had second class tickets, Wilt led them directly to the first class cabins, where they went immediately to bed, thinking that if they were asleep it was less likely that they would be routed out. No one bothered them, however, and the next morning they paid an extra six schillings. “The better accommodations for a good night’s rest,” Wilt told his mother, “were well worth the difference in price.” About 7:00 the next morning they reached the Hook, where they boarded a train for Hamburg.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Travelling through Holland, Wilt observed the freshness of the vegetation, the well-cultivated gardens, “old-fashioned Dutch windmills,” and large herds of cattle, the latter he noted were “all black and white. It was very seldom I saw one of the reddish-brown color so common in America.” Reaching Hamburg a little after 10:00 p.m., they were met by Louis R. Conradi, who took them to his home at the Adventist mission. At about 3:00 p.m. the next day, they took a train for an hour and a half trip to Lubeck where they immediately boarded a steamer for Copenhagen. This time they actually had first-class tickets. They arrived at Copenhagen about 7:00 the next morning, June 2, and were met by M. M. Olsen, who took them to his home.[[2]](#endnote-2) For the next two months, beginning with Copenhagen, their travel plans were organized around the meetings of the various European conferences, which provided them with lodging and board. Mixing pleasure with business, Uriah and Wilton worked in as much sight-seeing as they could.

Work began the very next day as both Haskell and Uriah presented Bible lessons in the morning and the afternoon. Some time into the meetings, Wilt observed that his father had “spoken several times, once in the evening, which is rather tiresome for him; and he cannot sleep well after it. They had him on to talk this evening, but he told them he wished they would get somebody else, and so they have.” Reflecting more broadly regarding the impact the trip was having on Uriah, Wilt stated that “this is certainly a change for pa. It breaks up his old rut, and I believe will do him good. He don’t have any office to go to at just such a time every day, has to take his meals when he can get them, and cannot get off into his private office and read and wright [sic] all the evening, but has to sit around with the brethren and talk.” He also noted that his father was nervous about traveling in a foreign country where few people spoke English, worrying about what they would do if someone failed to meet them as planned or if they missed the train. Of course, it was in part to help in situations such as these that he had brought Wilt along. Meanwhile, his father told Harriet that he was becoming more comfortable speaking through an interpreter. [[3]](#endnote-3)

But they were able to get away from the meetings at times to visit the National Museum, where Uriah was particularly impressed with the ethnography department’s exhibits depicting various cultures around the world, as well as the Museum of Natural History, the Thorwaldsen sculpture museum and Christianborg Palace, among other things. Observing Danish culture, Uriah told his *Review* readers that “it seems to be the universal idea that whatever is drunk must come out of a bottle; and if one were to ask for water except for bathing purposes, it would hardly be known what was wanted. Of course there are mild and temperate drinks, but the most that is used is of the stronger kind. Good water can be had, but many of the people are apparently total strangers to a good draught from nature’s own brewery.” He also noted the secular character of the country, pointing out that Sunday was used primarily for business and pleasure rather than religion. Nonetheless, he believed that Satan would find a way even in such a society to persecute Sabbath-keepers.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Their Danish Conference meetings over, together with several others who had attended, on June 11 at 2:00 p.m. the Smiths and Haskell left by boat for Christiana, Norway, arriving there some seventeen hours later. The conference had arranged rooms for them just across the street from the mission, which Uriah noted was located between a Roman Catholic Church and the state church. “Thus our work is sandwiched in between the old mother of apostasy,” he told readers of the *Review*, “and the oldest daughter, which, being only partially reformed and stopping there, might as well not be reformed at all.” That evening they ate a salmon and omelet dinner at a hillside restaurant that gave them an excellent view of the city and harbor. The fish prompted Uriah to observe to his wife that Denmark and Norway were a paradise for good fish, which “are brought in alive, & so kept till the customer takes. So we can be sure of having them fresh. Flounders are excellent. I had two of that kind at a restaurant in Copenhagen, fried; they were excellent and are cheap too. But our people are being made to believe that they must not eat fish!”[[5]](#endnote-5)

The meetings began the next morning, Wednesday, June 13, with Uriah speaking twice daily. On Sunday he and Wilt were able to get away to visit a museum and art gallery, a castle built by King Oscar I, a Catholic church from the eleventh or twelfth centuries, and an early Norwegian house. The following day the church members rode in carriages to hold a meeting on the mountainside of Hollen Kollen. “The city with its pleasant suburbs, the bay with its many islands, and the more distant ocean, lay spread out as a panorama at our feet,” Uriah wrote, “and the subjects which naturally suggested themselves to the different speakers were the beauties of nature and the power of God as manifested in his works, together with what awaits the people of God in that rest that remains for them.” After the meeting, most of the church members walked to the top of the mountain to view the country from an observation tower. Wilt wrote in his diary that “the mountains were mostly covered with pine trees. Little mountain streams were dashing along here and there and picturesque little lakes nestled in the valleys. Beneath us to the south lay Christiania, with its green cultivated fields around it and the fjord beyond, dotted with islands and covered with sailboats and steamers, [sic] Clouds were flitting across the sky, which gave the landscape that checkered appearance off sunshine and shadow, which only enhanced its beauty.[[6]](#endnote-6)

On Wednesday, June 21, a businessman who supplied the publishing house with paper, treated the American visitors and the mission staff to a dinner at a restaurant in St. Anne’s Park. “It was a splendid affair,” Uriah wrote Harriet, got up in such a style as ‘Ole Moses,’ never engaged in before. The table was beautified with flowers, & the dishes came on decorated in the most ornate manner.” Although Uriah told his *Review* readers “that respect was had to our well-known principles on the subject of proper articles of food, so that during its nine courses nothing could be accounted as offensive to those principles was urged upon either sight or palate,” it was hardly a meal of which Dr. Kellogg would have approved. “The first course was boiled salmon, with new potatoes in cream; second course mutton chop, with green peas; third course, young chickens served in halves; fourth course, roast veal, with Saratoga chips; fifth course, Lettuce & egg salad; sixth course, a pudding, like a corn starch pudding, with some kind of a red dressing; the nature of which in my verdancy, I did not know; but the more initiated afterward said that it was a rum pudding. Whew! But it was good all the same. Seventh course, fruit, strawberries, pineapple, melons & cherries; eighth course, nuts of all kinds, with cream dressed cookies; ninth course, ice cream, which was cream. For drink we had raspberry juice in water, and raspberry & apricot soda water. When we got through we felt as if we had had a “genteel [?] sufficiency.’” Wilt commented that he had never attended “a more elaborate banquet or one where the food was better cooked or tasted nicer. It was an occasion long to be remembered.” Of course, he could not refrain from observing that “the vegetarians all went back on their colors except Eld. Haskell.” Afterwards, the group was taken for a carriage ride of about three hours to a park on the opposite side of the city from what they had previously visited. Uriah commented that “this was also a most enjoyable ride.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

Meanwhile, Uriah had been reading the railroad guides and decided that “it was essential that he should spend the Sabbath where the sun does not set, and thus demonstrate positively that it can be kept there.” The conference leaders were not much impressed by this argument and were concerned about the expense, but shortly thereafter, Wilt reported to his sister, “they went down and procured us first class tickets on a first class steamer.” The following Sunday, June 24, together with a “brother Olsen,” Uriah and Wilt left Copenhagen at 1:55 p.m. to take the train to Throndhjim, where they arrived at about 7:00 the next morning and were met by several church members. They visited St. Olaf’s cathedral that afternoon and Uriah spoke at the Adventist church in the evening before they boarded the excursion steamer, which left the dock at 10:00 p.m.[[8]](#endnote-8)

The eight-day round trip began smoothly, although they encountered some rough water on the night of June 24, Uriah saying that the boat “bobbed like a popinjay & I could not keep my feet at all.” Despite experiencing seasickness, Uriah was impressed with the scenery. “And so it goes day by day (for there is no night),” he wrote Harriet, “more mountains, more fjords, mountains higher, fjords deeper, mountains larger, fjords broader, mountains multiplying, fjords multiplying, till it seems there is no end of them.” At about 10:00 p.m. on June 25 they crossed the Arctic Circle near Hestmando Island, the event celebrated by the firing of a “bomb.” Uriah wrote in the *Review* that “the sun hung low in the northern sky, and apparently two hours high, not dropping down to the horizon in a nearly perpendicular line, as it would appear in a more southern latitude, but slowly approaching the horizon directly north, at a very acute angle. The sky and a bevy of fleecy clouds that hovered around were tinged with all the gorgeous coloring of an evening sunset. A few rocky islets lifted their heads slightly above the water in the far distance, and cast their long, dark shadows toward us over a sea of fire. It was a scene not calculated soon to fade from memory. The hour of midnight at length came, and the sun shone with a full disk on the horizon directly from the north.” Wilt, who seems to have prepared Uriah’s reports for submission to the church paper, thought that his father had engaged in some literary license, telling his sister that he spoke “about some islands that I didn’t know anything about, ‘casting their long dark shadows toward us over a sea of fire’ was about as firy [sic] as Goguag {the lake near Battle Creek] would be perhaps half an hour before sunset when it is a little cloudy.’”[[9]](#endnote-9)

The excursion next crossed the Vestfjord to the Lofoten Islands, arriving at Tromso on June 27, where they visited a Lap encampment and viewed a recently caught whale at a whaling station. “The smell all around the place was terrific,” Wilt commented, “and it was quite amusing to see the ladies and some of the men standing around holding their noses.” The following day they arrived at Hammerfest, the northernmost town in the world. After leaving Hammerfest, rough weather threatened to force them back. “We got the full benefit of the ‘Washoe zephur’ that was careering around in that locality at the time,” Wilt wrote his sister. “The boat stood first on one end and then on the other and rolled over on her side and dipped her rail under water. Pa was in his bunk but got pitched out onto the floor, and my type-writer also went smash off the table onto the floor. I staid up on deck and really enjoyed seeing the boat pitch around. There was a fascination and a charm for me in seeing the great billows roll up and break in seething whitecaps. The boat seemed to rush at the waves like an angry animal and get tossed about in playful scorn. It was grand to see the water churned to foam, boil and whirl, and break over our bow as we dashed through it.” Uriah, meanwhile, was seasick much of the time, telling Harriet that he had skipped a number of meals. Nonetheless, “I was glad to have some bad weather,” he remarked, “because I wanted to see all sorts; but of course we could have got along with a little less than we had.” [[10]](#endnote-10)

On June 29, a Sabbath, they sailed to the North Cape. Wilt “climbed to the top of the Cape in a drizzling and driving rain with the wind blowing about 40 knots an hour,” while his father stayed on deck and viewed the cliff through his glass. Thoroughly soaked, on returning to the ship Wilt and Mr. Hutchinson, a passenger from San Francisco, got a bottle of beer for one of the stokers, who allowed them to sit by the furnace door until they dried out. Uriah, of course, was especially interested in the midnight sun and its implications for Sabbath-keeping. He told Harriet that he imagined he “could detect the transition from evening twilight to morning twilight as the new day began. But Wilton thinks that is a great stretch of the imagination.” After another stop at Tromso, on July 1 the boat arrived at the Svartisen glacier. Wilt went out on the glacier and “found it very difficult and dangerous walking, the surface being a succession of steep ridges and deep fissures and gorges at the bottom of some of which there was water—no knowing how deep. Had it not been for the little dirt on the ice it would have been impossible to get over it at all, prepared as we were.” Afterwards, Wilt took a boat ride on Spring Lake, at the foot of the glacier, which took him close to the edge of the ice. Again, Uriah could not go out on the glacier but reported to Harriet that “the sight of a great valley between high mountains filled with solid ice, & running back & rising higher & higher till it was lost in the clouds, was a grand sight.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

On July 3, their excursion trip over, they arrived a Throndhjeim. While Uriah spent part of the day writing, Wilt walked around the city with Mr. Peterson, a furniture manufacturer from Chicago and later in the day visited the Lefossen Falls, about five miles outside the city. “It was a warm and dusty, but pleasant drive,” he wrote in his diary. “It was just haying time and in many fields they were cutting and hanging it up on racks to dry. The falls are well worth a visit.” That evening Uriah and Wilt left by train at about 7:00 p.m. for Christiana, accompanied by “Quite a number of our tourist friends from the ‘Sigurd Jarl.’“ “We pulled the seats together for a bed,” Wilt wrote, “and made ourselves quite comfortable for the night.”[[12]](#endnote-12)

Several of the elements that appear in this account of the trip to Scandinavia show up throughout the remaining tour of Europe and the Middle East: Smith’s strong views of Protestantism and Catholicism, his private skepticism of aspects of Adventist health reform, and his concern to show that Adventist doctrine could be established and lived out anywhere. The trip does not seem to have changed his mind about anything; he understood what he saw and experienced through a well-established Adventist lens.

1. Smith diary, May 25-May 31. Uriah Smith to Harriet Smith, May 29, 1894, Collection 146, Smith/Bovee Collection, Box 2a, Fld. 50, Wilton Smith to Harriet Smith, June 5, 1894, Collection 146, Smith/Bovee Collection, Box 2a, Fld. 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Smith diary, May31-June 2. Wilton Smith to Harriet Smith, June 5, 1894. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. Smith diary, June 2-5, 1894. Uriah Smith to Harriet Smith, June 18, 1874, Collection 146, Smith/Bovee Collection, Box 2a, Fld. 52. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. [Smith], “Editorial Correspondence—Letter 4—Copenhagen,” *Review and Herald*, 71 (July 17, 1894), 456-57. Smith diary, June 7-11, 1894. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Smith diary, June 12, 1894. Uriah Smith to Harriet Smith, June 12, 1894. [Uriah Smith], “Editorial Correspondence—Letter 5—Conference in Christiania, Norway,” *Review and Herald*, 71 (July 24, 1894), 472. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. [Uriah Smith], “Editorial Correspondence—Letter 5—Concluded,” *Review and Herald*, 71 (July 31, 1894), 488. Smith diary, June 17-18, 1894 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Uriah Smith to Harriet Smith, June 24, 1894, Collection 146, Smith/Bovee Collection, Box 2a, Fld. 54. Smith diary, June 21,1894. [Smith], “Editorial Correspondence—Letter 5—Concluded.” [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Smith diary, June 10, 1894, June 24, 1894 [the transcript has both Sunday and Monday identified as June 24]. “Editorial Correspondence—Letter 6—Norway—The Midnight Sun—There Shall be no Night There,” *Review and Herald*, 71 (August 7, 1894), 504. Wilton Smith to Annie Smith, June 24, 1894, Collection 146, Smith/Bovee Collection, Box 2a, Fld. 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Uriah Smith to Harriet Smith, July 4, 1894, Collection 146, Smith/Bovee, Box 2a, Fld. 55. Smith diary, June 25, 1894. [Uriah Smith], “Editorial Correspondence—Letter 6—Concluded,” *Review and Herald*, 71 (August 14, 1894), 520. Wilton Smith to Annie Smith, July 28, 1894, Collection 146, Smith/Bovee, Box 3, Fld. 1 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Smith diary, June 27-28, 1894. Wilton Smith to Annie Smith, July 28, 1894. Uriah Smith to Harriet Smith, July 4, 1894. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Smith diary, June 28-July 1. Wilton Smith to Annie Smith, July 28, 1894. Uriah Smith to Harriet Smith, July 4, 1894. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Smith diary, July 3, 1894. Wilton Smith to Annie Smith, July 28, 1894. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)