

Valentine, Gilbert M. *The Shaping of Adventism: The Case of W. W. Prescott*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992. xiv + 307 pp. \$19.95.

W. W. Prescott (1855-1944) served the Seventh-day Adventist denomination for 52 years in many prominent positions. Nevertheless, his life has not received a comprehensive biographical treatment until Valentine's work. *The Shaping of Adventism: The Case of W. W. Prescott* is based on the author's two-volume, 660-page Ph.D. dissertation (Andrews University, 1982). A comparison with the dissertation shows that the book has been thoroughly revised, but the chapter structure and sequence have been preserved, facilitating access to the more extensive documentation of the dissertation.

Prescott's career in denominational service began with his appointment to the presidency of Battle Creek College in 1885. He eventually presided over five colleges, headed the General Conference Department of Education, served as vice-president of the General Conference, edited the *Review and Herald* and *The Protestant Magazine*, and held numerous other administrative, editorial, and teaching responsibilities.

Valentine's sympathetic, richly-detailed account portrays Prescott as "an avant-garde committed to the pursuit of truth," who was "evangelistic" in his zeal to share his insights (202). His zeal could become a liability, however. Valentine opines that Prescott was "too ready to try to correct error," "too vigorous in defending" his perceptions of truth, and "too easily drawn into church controversies" (268).

One of the controversies in which he was a protagonist concerned the "daily," a point of interpretation of Dan 8:11-13. Prescott saw his view as more congruous with the "biblical context and with the facts of history." Moreover, it made the interpretation of Daniel 8 "thoroughly Christocentric" (186-187). Opponents of his view, however, perceived it as undermining key points of denominational theology. The resulting conflict "created an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust" (224) that clung to Prescott for the rest of his life (184, 203, 268).

A common weakness, but crucial for a person of Prescott's intellect and zeal, was his tendency to accept too many responsibilities. Being repeatedly overextended, once to the point of nervous breakdown (54-55, 183, 194, 205, 210), exacerbated his tendencies to depression (205-211) and probably his potential for conflict.

Throughout the work Valentine evidences a thorough grasp of his subject and its extended context. Fluently written, the book is studded with pithy quotations from a variety of church leaders with whom Prescott interacted. Endnotes (286-297), illustrations (133-144), and an index (299-307) further enhance the value of the volume.

This biography will be an excellent resource for anyone with an interest in the late 19th- and early 20-century *Shaping of Adventism*.