

Adventists and Albury Park

by Dean Giles

Such were the six days we spent under the holy and hospitable roof of Albury house, within the chime of the church bell, and surrounded by the most picturesque and beautiful forms of nature, but the sweetest spot was the council-room where I met the servants of the Lord.”

These words were written some 170 years ago by Edward Irving—at the conclusion of a prophetic council studying themes of the Second Coming. The council was the first of its kind, and its conclusions reflect closely the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Held at Albury Park, Surrey, England, 20 of the religious thought leaders of the Old World met for six days of intensive study during Advent 1826.

The council shows that the Advent Awakening took place in England just a little before it began under William Miller and others in the United States.

Each year from 1826 to 1830 the owner of Albury Park, Henry Drummond, a 19th century banker and member of parliament, convened gatherings of eminent scholars for uninterrupted study and discussion.

An illustrious group came together in 1826. Foremost among the number whom Henry Drummond invited were Hugh M’Neile, rector of Albury and chairman of the meetings; Edward Irving, brilliant and dynamic minister of London; Daniel Wilson, afterward bishop of Calcutta; and Joseph Wolff (1795-1862), Jewish Christian “missionary to the world,” a herald of the advent to many nations.

In sending out the invitations to attend, Drummond asked these careful and mature Bible students to compare their views regarding the “present crisis,” and to discuss “great prophetic questions, which do at present most instantly concern Christendom.”²

He then invited these ministers and laymen to see “how far they coincided in understanding the mind of the Spirit on these momentous subjects.”³

The prophetic conferences were pre-eminently times of Bible study and prayer.

Notes were taken throughout and were later issued by Henry Drummond and named “Dialogues on Prophecy.” Among the conclusions reached from the deliberations were:

1. That the present Christian dispensation is “not to pass insensibly into the millennial state by gradual increase of preaching of the gospel; but that it is to be terminated by judgments, ending in the destruction of this visible church and polity.”

2. That the “termination of these judgments” will be succeeded by the millennium.

3. That the second advent “precedes or takes place at the commencement of the millennium.”

4. That the 1260 years “commence in the reign of Justinian and terminate at the French Revolution.”⁴

The predictions of Daniel, Paul and John were recounted at Albury Park, and the warnings and appeals confronted. Time was also given to other subjects, such as the place of the Jewish people in the divine plan.

But the central and connecting theme was the Second Coming of Christ. Irving had recently translated from Spanish the monumental work of Lacunza, *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, one of the greatest single influences in the 19th century to promote the study of prophecy.

A Jesuit priest, Manuel Lacunza, writing under the pseudonym Ben-Ezra, was one of God’s heralds moving Catholics and Protestants alike.

What Might Have Been

The visitor to Albury Park today can stand in the large library and ponder many things.

A Seventh-day Adventist visitor would



surely question what might have been if these earnest Christians had followed through on prophetic study.

The council members lacked cohesion, evidenced by the fragmentation of Irving’s ministry through excesses and imbalance.

As Seventh-day Adventist historian LeRoy Edwin Froom has recorded: “The Old World awakening never became an integrated movement. It was strongly individualistic. There was little unification of position by the leaders. While there were warnings and entreaties, there was no general break or withdrawal from the churches. . . .

“The development went so far and then stopped, and began to wane. It was like the glorious dawn that precedes the full glow of the morning sun, but it faded out before the high noon of the distinctive movement of these latter days filled the heavens of the New World.”⁵

What was not accomplished at Albury Park bore fruit in America. But the buildings remain in Surrey as a witness to what was, in its time, a worldwide interest and proclamation of prophetic study. □

1. R Charles Walmsley, *Albury Park, A Description of the Mansion and Grounds*, 1977.

2. LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol 3, page 451.

3. *ibid*, page 276.

4. *Years of Ferment, The Story Behind the Building of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (no author listed), pages 12, 13.

5. Froom, *ibid*, page 269.

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