

THE TONGUE OF SLANDER

(Ascension Robes Lie)

JAMES WHITE

During the rise and progress of the third message, the tongue of slander has not been silent.

Men will use the best arguments they have. When unable from the Bible to meet the positions of those who teach unpopular truth, some will resort to slander as the next best argument. The case is sometimes felt to be urgent and even desperate. Truth is mighty. The people will hear, and some will obey. These are frequently the best members of the various religious bodies. Efforts at argument from the Bible, in opposition, fail to silence the voice of truth, and in some cases turn the minds of many of the people to the truth. Something must be done. And it is painful to record, that in many cases professed ministers of Jesus Christ deal in smut and blacking, and stoop to invent and repeat the vilest slanders to prejudice the people against those who plead for the truth of God.

"There are hundreds of ministers in the United States who, if disturbed in their quiet possession of the ears of the people, by the proclamation of the unpopular truths of the third message in their vicinity, would take delight in repeating the old threadbare falsehoods concerning ascension robes, and the like, to cut off the influence of the servant of God.

"In almost every place where our ministers give discourses upon the second coming of Christ, and the necessary preparation for that event, they have to labor against the prejudices of the people, caused by reports of the inconsistencies of Adventists; one of which is, that at a point of expectation in the past, many of them did prepare robes of white linen, and put them on ready to ascend and meet their coming Lord.

"While all sane persons, who have any knowledge of what the holy Scriptures do teach of the necessary preparation to meet the Lord as he shall descend from Heaven, will agree that to prepare a literal white robe made of cloth as a fitting preparation for the transit from earth to Heaven, from mortality to immortality, must be an indication of downright insanity, none will see in such an act evidences of criminality.

"But I do not believe that anything of the kind ever occurred. I have been actively engaged in the proclamation of the doctrine of the second advent for more than twenty-five years, and have traveled and preached in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode island, New York, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Canada, and have not met a person who has seen an Adventist thus attired, or one that was able to give better proofs that any thing of the kind ever did occur than vague reports. I have never found the place where the thing occurred. It was always in the next town, county, or State.

"Again, reports in relation to this matter, and slanders of a similar nature, have a hundred times been denied in Second-Advent periodicals, and proofs have been called for of the truthfulness of these statements. No one has been able to produce the proofs. But still the tongue of slander takes delight in repeating the old threadbare falsehood. Elders Loughborough and Strong met it at Orange, Michigan, in January, 1868, and Elder Cornell met the same at Johnstown, Michigan, a few weeks later. In both cases the miserable untruth was declared from the pulpit by professed ministers of Jesus Christ.

"The people, generally, credit the statements of these ministers, and conclude that the story of ascension robes is true. Especially do those who are not favorable to Second Advent

views enjoy this sort of clerical slander. And the fact that our people are not always prepared to meet it, is the reason why I have felt called upon to notice the matter at this time.

"In 1847, while on our passage in a steamboat from Portland, Maine, to Boston, Massachusetts, Mrs. W. was speaking to those around her in the ladies' cabin, of the fearful storm we encountered in a recent passage between these two cities. She spoke of the importance of being always prepared for the close of our probation, either at death, or at the coming of Christ. A lady near her replied: " 'That is the way the Millerites talk. I mean to have a jolly good time before I become a long-faced Christian. The Millerites are the most deluded set on earth. On the day they were expecting Christ to come, companies in different places put on their ascension robes, and went into graveyards, and upon the tops of houses and high hills, and there remained, praying and singing till the time passed by.'

"Mrs. W. then inquired of the lady if she saw any of these persons thus attired. She answered: 'No, I did not see them myself, but a friend who saw them told me. And the fact is so well understood everywhere, that I believe it as much as though I saw it myself.'

"At this point another lady, feeling that the testimony of the first should not be questioned, stated: 'It is of no use to deny that the Millerites did put on ascension robes, for they did it in towns all around where I live.' "Mrs. W. asked this lady if she saw them with their robes on. She replied: 'No, I did not see them, as they were not in my immediate neighborhood. But it was commonly reported and generally believed, that they did make ascension robes and put them on.' By this time strong feelings were evidently controlling these two ladies, because Mrs. W. did not seem to credit what they said against the Millerites. And the first in the conversation stated with emotions of excitement and passion:

"I know it was so. I fully believe the testimony of those who have told me these things. I believe what my friends have told me about those fanatical Millerites, the same as though I saw it myself.'

"Mrs. W. then inquired of her for the names of some persons who had figured in this fanatical movement. She stated if the putting on of ascension robes was so very common, certainly she could give the names of some. To this she replied: " 'Certainly I can give you names. There were the twin Harmon girls in Portland. My friends told me that they saw their robes, and saw them going out to the graveyard with them on. Since the time has passed, they have become infidels.'

"A school-mate of Mrs. W., who had never been an Adventist, was in that cabin, and had watched the conversation with mirthful interest. She had been acquainted with the Harmon girls during the entire period of their Second-Advent experience. She could no longer restrain her feelings, and broke out in a laughing mood, as she pointed to Mrs. W.:

"This is one of those twin Harmon girls. I have known them always, and know that this report of their making and wearing ascension robes is all a lie. I never was a Millerite, yet I do not believe that anything of the kind ever took place.'

"The storm that was fast arising in that cabin suddenly abated, and there followed a great calm. Mrs. W. then stated that all the stories about ascension robes were probably as destitute of truth as this one concerning the twin Harmon girls.

"Elder Josiah Litch, lately editor of the *Advent Herald*, Boston, in his history of the rise and progress of Adventism, makes the following statement:

"Those periods came and passed with no unusual occurrence. As soon as they had gone by, a flood of scoffing, reviling and persecution burst forth, not from the infidel world so much, but from the professed friends of the Saviour; the most idle and foolish stories of ascension robes, and going out into the graveyards to watch, going to the tops of the houses, etc., etc. These were

repeated again and again, both from pulpit and press, until the public were, many of them, at least, almost persuaded to believe them true.

'How, or where they originated, except individual falsehood, we cannot devise. Some of the reports of that character, we happen to know, originated with professed ministers of the gospel, who gave date and place when there was not a word of truth in the whole story. others must have originated in a similar way.'

The foregoing, relative to the ascension robes, was given in the *Review and Herald* for April 14, 1868. The article closed with the following paragraph:

"Fifty dollars reward is offered to any person who will present unquestionable proofs of the truthfulness of the statements, that believers in the second advent of Christ, on the day of expectation, did put on ascension robes. Those who can produce such proofs, are requested to forward them immediately to the writer, at Greenville, Montcalm County, Michigan, and receive fifty dollars by return mail."

Up to this date, July 13, 1868, no one has responded in the way of furnishing proofs that anything of the kind ever took place. Why this silence on the part of our friends, as well as our enemies, if there be the least semblance of truth in the statements upon this subject, gravely made by ministers in the desk as a part of the gospel they preach? if proofs exist, why can we not have them? The reader should regard these statements about ascension robes, which opposing clergymen have the credit of repeating, more than any other class, as malicious slanders, until he has reliable proofs that something of the kind occurred.

The Review and Herald for May 20, 1868, has the following from Elder J. H. Waggoner, which fairly represents this matter of ascension robes:

"Brother White's remarks on the falsehoods circulated on the above subject, remind me of an incident that transpired some years since in Wisconsin. A Mr. H., an M.E. preacher, deriding the Adventists, said: 'It is a fact that they prepared and put on ascension robes in 1844.' At the close of his remarks I stated that I was very anxious to learn about the facts on that subject, and asked him to give particulars, as to where, by whom, etc. He said that it was not always convenient to give the evidence on matters, which had transpired years in the past, and he could not then comply with the request. I turned to the congregation and said:" 'He has said it is a fact. Now if he does not know it to be a fact, he has made a false statement. If he knows it to be a fact, he can procure the evidence of the fact. As he has an appointment here four weeks from today, I give notice that I will be here at that time to get his statement; as that will give him time to get the information. If it occurred *anywhere*, it will be easy to prove it in that locality. I hope the people will all be here to get the facts he may present.'

"Being thus pressed to make good his assertion, and having the expectation of the people raised on it, he saw the necessity of doing something, and promptly confessed that he knew nothing about it, but had heard such a report!

"The way the report ran was well illustrated by the following case: A Brother T., who had lived and labored in Buffalo, and attended the Advent meetings there, was working in Erie in the fall of 1844. After the set day passed, the report spread in Erie that the Adventists in Buffalo put on ascension robes. He was so grieved over their folly, and troubled in his mind, that he determined to -visit his friends in Buffalo and talk with them about it. Landing at Buffalo, he met an acquaintance, not an Adventist, who did not know where he came from. He asked if any of the Adventists in Buffalo had put on ascension robes. 'No,' said his friend, 'but they all did in Erie!' A smile by Brother T led to an explanation.

And so it was everywhere. Everybody *knew* it was so -*the place* where it occurred could not be found."

The part which the Spirit of God has led Mrs. W. to act in close connection with the cause of present truth, has called forth against her a spirit of persecution. The apostle says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." Ephesians 4:31. But these have been employed against her by the professed followers of Jesus Christ, with the object to crush her testimony and destroy her influence. In this cruel work, with some the tongue of slander has been "set on fire of hell."

The work of the Lord through her has been to encourage the weak, comfort the desponding, exalt the standard of morality and true piety, and reprove sin in all its forms. And why should not the dragon rage? Why may we not expect to see those who are imbued with the spirit of the father of lies, delighting themselves in the most slanderous falsehoods against one who may be engaged in such a work? Such has ever been the work of Satan in all past time, and ever will be, till he is bound. And he has ever found, and ever will find, willing tools to do his work in opposition to the work of God. And these are more frequently found among ministers than any other class. The following from Elder M. E. Cornell, which occurred on his route from Battle Creek to Ionia, will illustrate the wicked course of some of those who love to be called "Reverend:"

"While on the cars, a circumstance occurred which shows the necessity of Brother White's article on Clerical Slander. A Presbyterian minister from Gratiot County was making special efforts to attract attention to himself by his endeavors to amuse the passengers. Among other things, he states that Mrs. White had a vision at St. Louis, Gratiot County, Michigan, that she was to leave her husband and take another man; that a man might have as many wives as he chose. He then made some, not very refined, remarks and witticisms, which excited laughter in some, but disgust in the pure-minded. In the cars were several clergymen, and many intelligent ladies and gentlemen from several different States. Of course we could not let such a base slander pass, and a wrong impression go to so many different places; we therefore watched for a chance to correct the misstatement.

"An intelligent Jew soon entered into conversation with him, and turned the tables on him by relating an old slander against Martin Luther, that he had a child by his own daughter, etc. The minister was aroused. Said he, 'it is a base slander, invented by his enemies. There is not a particle of proof of any such thing.' He then came down upon the Jew with the most cutting reproof for making such a statement from hearsay evidence. Now our time had come. The measure he had meted to others had been immediately measured to him again.

"We then stated to the passengers that we had known Elder White and his wife for sixteen years, and that the statement made by the clergyman was an unmitigated slander. First, Mrs. White never had a vision in Gratiot County; and second, she never had a vision anywhere, of any such nature as had been stated. We then challenged him to stop at Owasso, with any of his friends as witnesses, and we would secure for him *one thousand dollars*, on the condition that he should make good his statement. We urged him to the task with such earnestness, that all in the car appeared to be convinced that he had uttered a slander. He was embarrassed, and said family, 'I heard so!'

"An intelligent infidel, from Dearborn, Michigan, then rose up, and made some very pointed remarks on hearsay evidence and condemning a whole body of people because of a story about some one of their number. 'Shall I,' said he; 'call the Methodists a set of cut-throats, because several of their preachers are now in our penitentiary? Shall I condemn all ministers because one in our town ran away with Brother M.'s wife last week?' By this time, the tide was turned completely. Several of the passengers expressed themselves very freely to me, and were anxious to know more about it." *Advent Review* for April 28, 1868.

I do not believe that all ministers who differ with us in faith and practice are alike guilty with this man. No decent men, in or out of the ministry, would take pleasure in uttering such vile

slander before a car full of ladies and gentlemen, however much he might feel opposed to the religious sentiments of Seventh-day Adventists. I believe there are God-fearing ministers in all the churches who would no sooner bear false witness of a slanderous character against those who are devoting their lives to the cause of Christ, than they would have the same done to themselves. But while these may be few and far between, the experience of a quarter of a century in teaching unpopular truth has taught me that, where personal interest is concerned, there are but very few ministers who will not stoop to the repetition of the vilest slanders, to injure the influence of those who get the ears of the people, if they differ with them. But in reference to the statements of Elder Cornell, I will say:

1. Mrs. W. never was at St. Louis, Gratiot County, Michigan.
2. She never had a vision in Gratiot County.
3. Her standard of morality ever has been the Ten Commandments.
4. Her views, her public and private labors, her books and oral teachings, have ever been in strict harmony with the law of God, the highest standard of morality on earth.
5. She has ever borne the most decided testimony against any departure from the principles guarded by the ten commandments.
6. She has borne a public testimony for twenty-five years, in the several States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode island, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and in Canada. She has, during this time, written books amounting to more than twenty-one hundred pages, besides many articles for several periodicals. And all who are acquainted with her teachings know that any statement that they are not in strict harmony with God's standard of morality, is a slanderous untruth. Then let her enemies point to one impure sentence in all her writings, or prove that in her religious teachings she has uttered one unchaste word, or cease their slanderous persecution of a self-sacrificing Christian woman.

But I do not indulge the thought that whatever may be said to show the falsity of statements concerning ascension robes, and the views of Mrs. W., will silence the tongue of slander. No. These ministers know the influence they have with the public mind, and the advantages they have over us in this respect. Regardless of justice and truth, they will doubtless continue to do this scandalous work, wherever the glorious doctrine of the coming of Jesus shall be proclaimed. We can only expose their sin in this thing, and disabuse honest minds.

The dragon is wroth with those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. The devil will use any willing tool to slander and abuse the followers of Jesus Christ. Scoffers will scoff, and liars will lie, whether they bear the title of Reverend, or be patrons of brothels. And the higher the position, the greater the criminality. But for all these things will God bring them into judgment. Those who fear God and keep His commandments, and suffer reproach for the sake of Christ and the truth, will have their reward. Those who employ the vile tongue of slander against them, in order to crush their influence and keep others from obeying the commandments that they may live, will perish in all their villainy. They, also, will have their reward. The True Witness has spoken relative to the present controversy and the final destiny of both classes of actors, as recorded by the prophet John.

First Class. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Revelation 22:14. These are doing right. Although they suffer for well doing, all the hate and slander that wicked men and demons can invent, their reward is the holy city and the tree of life.

Second Class. "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." Revelation 22:15. These are

commandment breakers, and commandment-haters, and haters of those who keep the commandments of God. They are also noted for two things in particular, namely, loving and making lies. The application of these two items is so natural to these reports of ascension robes and the like, that no further comment is needed. They make lies, and love to publish them from the pulpit and the religious press. But, thank God, in the judgment they are without. The happiness of those who love God and keep His commandments is then no more to be marred by, their poisonous influence. Would God that they would repent of, and forsake, their wicked course, and live, and finally share the holy city and the tree of life. But as they will not do this work, that they may share that reward, their corrupting influence must be home with Christian patience and fortitude while the controversy lasts.

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