

John H.N. Tindall

and the Field Training School

By
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At the 1930 General Conference in San Francisco my father was a delegate from Korea, and I, [James Lee] at 18, was one of four messenger boys needed in that pre-electronic era. It was then I first heard of a Field Training School for laymen who wanted to qualify themselves to win souls by means of medical missionary work. It was being carried on right there in San Francisco under the leadership of Elder J.H.N. Tindall.

Since that school might serve as a model for the training programs urgently needed right now for Seventh-day Adventist church members, we will devote a chapter to its founder and its operation.

The school had been started in 1928 by Elder G.A. Roberts, president of the Central California Conference. In his youth he had taken the nurses course in Battle Creek, but soon developed into a church leader. As one who had known Ellen White and was a deep student of her writings, he knew that every Seventh-day Adventist should learn to be a medical missionary. This would prepare them for the great crisis ahead, when all regular schools among us will be closed (see *Special Testimonies*, Series B #2, 63), and there will be no more ministerial work done, only medical missionary work.

As Conference president he had a burden to start such a training school to fill the need. He could think of no one better qualified to lead such a school than Elder J.H.N. Tindall.

In his youth John Tindall had been terrified by the pagan teaching of an eternally burning hell, and had come to hate God for such cruelty. He became an atheist. For several years he made his living by going from city to city, interviewing the civic and business leaders about the history and progress of each city, then making attractive books and selling them to these leaders.

He was living in San Diego in a palatial home with his own riding horses, in 1907 when the following story begins.

One day a friend came to tell him of a gold strike down near the Mexican border. Wouldn't he like to come along and stake out a claim? So he bought a miner's pick and other equipment and accompanied his friend down to a little valley. On the way his friend told him that they would be staying with a very strange old man who went by the name of Daddy Bell. He was the nicest, kindest man he knew but he was just queer in several ways. He wouldn't smoke, drink, or use pork. And strangest of all, he kept Saturday for the Sabbath. So John's friend warned him to be very careful of his language—no profanity or obscenity.

The two men roamed the hills for several days looking for gold, then John hurt his leg. So Daddy Bell nursed his leg with hot-and-cold fomentations, while his friend continued prospecting. With nothing to do, Tindall decided to find out what kind of a Christian Bell was. Using his lawyer-mind, he heckled Bell all day with atheistic questions. Bell was ever respectful in his replies. Finally Tindall asked Bell to give him something to read about this man Jesus. Daddy Bell gave him *The Desire of Ages*. John started to read, and was soon fascinated. Here was pictured a loving God such as he had never heard of before—certainly not the kind of God he had been told of as a child. As he read of the life and ministry of Christ, something happened to John the atheist.

It was over 60 years later when Elder Tindall went over this story several times with us. With tears he told how his heart was melted as his imagination grasped the scenes of Christ's sufferings in Gethsemane, on Calvary, His triumphant resurrection, and intercessions at His Father's throne on Easter morning (typified by Moses, Aaron, and later Solomon, in the dedication of the earthly sanctuaries.) Tindall finally got down on his knees, and, beating the bed with his fists in heart-broken re-

pentance, he confessed his sins and accepted Jesus as his personal Savior.

From that day on John Tindall was a new creature in Christ, and everyone who met him knew it. No longer the hardened atheist and self-confident business man, he soon became a Seventh-day Adventist—like Daddy Bell.

After returning home, a new Seventh-day Adventist friend suggested that he go to Union College to take their ministerial course. But Tindall was not impressed. Then someone told him about a new school for medical evangelists being started near Redlands. Tindall told us it seemed that a great fire ignited in his heart, which hastened him to Loma Linda to find the true “gold strike” which Elder John Burden was sharing under the practical instruction of Ellen White. Tindall was thrilled with the budding faculty and with the beauty of the simple sanitarium perched on the top of the Hill Beautiful.

Tindall Studies at Loma Linda

There he sat at the feet of Elder John Burden, whom Ellen White called “the Lord’s burden bearer.” He heard from Burden’s own lips the story of the providential purchase of that hill just three years earlier.

On several occasions Ellen White visited Loma Linda and would gather the students out under the pepper trees and share with them the love of Jesus and the place of true medical missionary work in the finishing of God’s work in the world.

In February 1910, in her home at Elmshaven, Ellen White was instructed in vision that there should be an entire change in our evangelistic strategy. Medical missionary work must be included. When Elder Burden received a copy of this vision he discussed it with his fellow-workers, R.S. Owen G.B. Starr, W.C. White and others. They decided that of all their graduates John Tindall was the one who should go out and demonstrate this kind of program. He was a mature, married man, had experience in business affairs, and was a good speaker.

Looking for a place to live, he was directed to an Adventist builder who was working on a house for one of the new faculty members. John asked the man how much it would cost to build for him a similar house. When the carpenter told him, he pulled out his wallet and gave him the money. He returned to San Diego, sold his horses and his house and promptly moved with his wife to Loma Linda.

The Medical Evangelistic course was starting in a few weeks. There John met Elders Warren Howell, Stephen Haskell, Luther Warren, and R.S. Owen whom Ellen White defended as the best Bible teacher in the denomination. Tindall learned medical evangelistic skills from Drs. Lillis Starr, Julia White, Daniel Kress, Dr. George Abbott, Dr. Archie Truman, and other dedicated standard-bearers. Most of these individuals came to Loma Linda at the invitation of Elder John Burden and Ellen White.

The leaders called in John Tindall and told him they had decided he should be the first one to demonstrate this new approach to medical missionary evangelism. He felt the hand of the Lord heavy upon him, much as Paul and Barnabas must have felt when the Antioch leaders ordained them to go out and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He realized he had a special work to do. (Our next frame gives Elder Burden’s record of Ellen White’s first description of God’s plan for Loma Linda.)

Tindall chose a married couple who were nurses and later others to make up his team. They started a long chain of medical evangelistic crusades all across America. But after a few years he realized he needed more scientific knowledge to speak authoritatively on health. So he went back to Loma Linda in 1923 and took the dietetics course they were offering especially for ministers, missionaries, and physicians. By this time John Tindall was into his forties, and the chemistry class was difficult for him.

In his class was a young man in his late teens who proved to be a great help. Wilmont Frazee (Bill) and his older brother Titus had been home-schooled by their parents who were both teachers, rooted and grounded in the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Both parents encouraged the boys to memorize whole books of Scripture and the writings of Ellen White. Although considered "uneducated," Bill had a "rarer wisdom," (*Gospel Workers* [1892 edition], 388-389) and with his keen memory had no problem with chemistry. So he could give John Tindall the help he needed.

Elder G.A. Roberts knew of Tindall's successful evangelistic experiences all across America. Two years after Tindall finished his course at Loma Linda, Elder Roberts asked him to come to San Francisco and start the Field Training School mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. He offered Tindall anyone of his conference workers he might choose as an assistant. But Tindall asked for Bill Frazee. "Who is he?" Elder Roberts asked.

"He's a young man who studied with me at Loma Linda." When Elder Roberts learned that Bill was home-schooled and had never attended academy or college, and had no experience in public evangelism, he was puzzled, to say the least. But John Tindall insisted. "That's why I want him. He is fully dedicated to the Lord. He fully believes the Spirit of Prophecy, has grown up working in the family garden, has a printing press and publishing business, and is faithful in health reform. And because he has no professional experience, I can train him the way I want to. I won't have to re-educate him." That answer wilted Elder Robert's opposition, and John Tindall and Bill Frazee became a team in the Field School in San Francisco, at 1844 Broderick Street. For four years they carried on a successful evangelistic school.

An examination of their catalog reveals an interesting variety of subjects taught. In addition

to Bible work and Evangelism, there were lectures on journalism, gospel salesmanship, public speaking and voice culture. In health lines the students learned about anatomy and physiology, diseases and diagnosis, rational treatments, hydrotherapy, chemistry, hygiene, cooking, and foods and nutrition.

Evangelistic efforts were held in various parts of the city where the students practiced what they were studying in classes. There was close cooperation between the school and the doctors at the Saint Helena Sanitarium. W.C. White, believing that the program was fully in harmony with his mother's instruction, enthusiastically supported it, and gave Tindall scores of carbon copies of Ellen White's letters. He encouraged church leaders to investigate Tindall's school, and let those who were critical know what Tindall's team was really doing.

Scores of men and women, often missionaries on furlough, attended the school. Then in 1932 Elder Roberts was moved to another position. The new conference president, under the pressures of the depression, had less interest in the program, and it died an untimely death.

But Elder Frazee soon had invitations from several Conference leaders to continue holding crusades in their States, using a corps of self-supporting helpers. They ranged the country holding efforts during the Depression years, winning many hundreds of souls to Christ.

In 1941 Bill Frazee, while holding a series in New Orleans, visited the Chattanooga area. There he found the location for what is now Wildwood Institute.

Elder Tindall divided his retirement years between Wildwood and Loma Linda, until his death in 1973 at age 92. It was at Loma Linda that we made his acquaintance in 1966. He seemed to adopt us as ones who could carry on the torch of medical missionary work, and left us his library and the material he had collected for over half a century.

Tindall Explains Outpost Ministry

When we met Elder Tindall in 1966 we had already visited Oak Haven, Eden Valley, Madison, and Wildwood, but we still knew almost nothing about outpost centers and their place in the Lord's work. Nor had we had any experience in Church-Supportive educational and health ministries. It was Tindall who not only informed us but also inspired us to promote what we are calling Sani-School Outpost-to-City Ministries, as God's means for sharing Christ's "Gospel of the Kingdom."

Tindall shared God's promise in *Medical Ministry*, 331: "When the cities are worked as God would have them, the result will be the setting in operation of a mighty movement such as we have not yet witnessed."

We asked him "What is this method God wants us to use to work the cities?" Certainly the cities are where the people are, and we should work them as God would have us. We wanted to find out what that method was.

He went on to read to us from *Evangelism*, 75, where we are told that it is God's design that our people should locate outside the cities, and from these outposts warn the cities and raise in them memorials for God.

"Okay, so what is an outpost?" we asked.

Then he gave us little by little, the instruction the Lord has given about outposts. The first step is explained in *Selected Messages*, book two, 258: "Se-

cure country properties at a low figure and from these outpost centers we are to work the cities."

"What do we put on these country properties?" was our next question.

"Sanitariums should be established near every large city." *Medical Ministry*, 326. "Schools must be established in connection with the sanitariums." *Loma Linda Messages*, 164. "Clear light has been given that our educational institutions should be connected with our sanitariums wherever this is possible." *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, 450.

"You mean something like Siamese twins?" we asked. "Yes!" He said. "That's it!" "But how do you get people to come to these places out in the country?" we asked.

He always answered with a quote from the Lord.

"I have been given light that in many cities it is advisable for a restaurant to be connected with treatment rooms. The two can cooperate in upholding right principles. In connection with these it is sometimes advisable to have rooms that will serve as lodgings for the sick. These establishments will serve as feeders to the sanitariums located in the country." *Testimonies*, vol. 7, 60

And from *Testimonies*, vol. 7, 234 he also read: "Centers of influence may be established in many places by the opening up of health food stores, hygienic restaurants, and treatment rooms. "

General Conference Leaders Acknowledge Tindall's Success

One of the many stories he told is relevant here. One time some General Conference officers came to him and said, "Elder Tindall, we have been following your work for several years, as you have gone from city to city with your health evangelistic efforts. Each year you bring several hundred people into the church. But Charles Everson, our leading evangelist in America, has been baptizing more than you. But we are perplexed because many more of your people remain faithful. What is your secret?"

"Well, I explain very carefully that Adventism has two characteristics—we keep all the commandments and have the testimony of Jesus—the Spirit of Prophecy. Before attempting to evangelize a community, I focus on seeking the thorough conversion of local Adventists. I tell them of the life and work of Ellen White, and I tell them of my own experience of listening to her as a student at Loma Linda.

"Sometimes people would ask, 'Did you ever talk to her personally?' I would have to confess

that I never had. But on one occasion when Ellen White visited the school, and stayed in one of the five little bungalows on the hill, I went to have a personal visit with her. As I raised my hand to knock, I was overwhelmed with a feeling of unworthiness. How could I, a poor sinful human being, talk to that saintly lady who had listened to Gabriel's instructions? I dropped my hand and walked away with tears streaming down my face. I would tell my audience that I knew without any question that the angel Gabriel from heaven had come to her bedside many times during her lifetime, and had given her instruction for His people, how they were to use the medical missionary health approach in all their evangelistic work. I told my listeners of God's call for His people to sign a pledge against the use of meat, tea, and coffee (*Spalding-Magan Collection*, 426-429), so that they might be prepared to stand before Him as a perfected people at His Coming (See *Testimonies*, vol. 9, 153-160).

"I taught my listeners the importance of all aspects of health reform, how our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and how we are not only to keep God's seventh day holy but we are equally to keep holy His human soul temple. Along with this I of course taught the sacredness of tithing, and the importance of sharing their faith with their neighbors and friends. You see, brethren, I didn't want to bring people into the church standing on one leg—just believing in the seventh-day Sabbath—and not believing in the Spirit of Prophecy which promotes a

healthy, happy lifestyle. It was only then that I baptized them."

One of Elder Tindall's practices in evangelism was to work closely with the WCTU (Women's Christian Temperance Union) and with other community service organizations such as the health department, fire and police departments, chamber of Commerce, agricultural department, the Grange association, men's business clubs, etc.

Another of his principles was to not baptize converts until the fruits of conversion were evident. In *Gospel Workers*, 370, we read: "God would be better pleased to have six thoroughly converted to the truth than to have sixty make a profession and yet not be truly converted."

Having a team to follow-up and thoroughly establish converts was another element in his success. Tindall was definitely not a hireling who cared but little about the daily lives of his converts. He eschewed the popular "hit-and-run gypsy" evangelism which is more concerned about filling empty pews than about pews filled with empty people. These self-centered "pseudo-gospel" movements push the "gospel" backwards two-thousand years: "Jesus did it all and there is nothing we can do to help our salvation." Likewise, they push Christ's "kingdom" away up there, someday soon. But Christ taught and demonstrated His "gospel of the kingdom" by living and working and sharing food, clothing, shelter, and other facilities which His own two hands had raised and built.