THE HOPEFUL

Hope Is on the Way

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HOPE STUDIOS

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STORIES THAT PROVOKE

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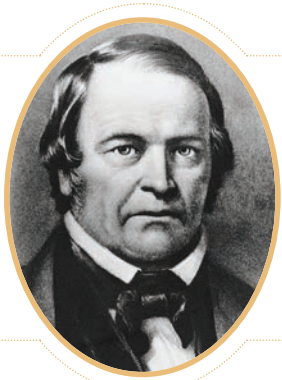

William Miller

"Today, Today, and Today, Till He Comes"

Red-faced and panting from his wild ride on his father's fastest horse, the young man rapped smartly on the back door of the Miller home. William Miller flung open the door to his nephew Irving Guliford, his sister's son.

"Why, Irv," exclaimed Miller in alarm, "whatever are you doing here, and so early in the morning? Is something wrong? How are your parents?"

Why would Irving be here so early?

"Oh, no, Uncle William," the boy eagerly replied, "everything's just fine. But Father sent me with a message, and oh, Uncle William, he let me ride his new horse. Is he ever fast! Man, we flew like the wind."

"Irv?" Miller said sternly, still a little apprehensive. "What's the message?"

"Oh, sorry," Irving apologized. "There's no preaching in our church tomorrow, and Father wants to know if you'll come and talk to our neighbors about the prophecies you've been studying. Will you come?"

Nothing could have shocked Miller more. Without a word he stormed out of the house and hurried up the little hill into the grove of maple trees that had become his refuge. He would not do it. *He could not.* But after a fierce battle with God, the farmer who went into the maple grove came out a preacher. Humbly he went home with his nephew. The following day, at Dresden, 16 miles from his home, he preached his first sermon on the second advent of Christ.

◆◆◆

The oldest of 16 children, William worked hard helping his father run the farm, but his great love was reading and learning. The family owned only

three books: a Bible, a Psalter, and a Prayer Book—books that young William read over and over. But the time came when he wanted more, so he went about borrowing books from anyone in the neighborhood who had them. He had an insatiable curiosity to learn.

William Miller, just as Abraham Lincoln did many years later, stayed up after the family had gone to bed, then read into the wee hours of the morning. Candles were too expensive to waste for such frivolity as reading long into the night, but there were plenty of pine knots, and all he had to do was gather them from the woods. So it was that William formed the habit of burning "pine 'ots," as they were called locally, in the fireplace for his nightly reading light.

His highest priority was being sure there were plenty of pine 'ots on hand for his excursions into the world of learning. Always on the lookout for pine stumps that would make good light, he brought them to the wood lot and chopped them into the size and shape that best suited his nightly lighting requirements. He even commandeered a special hideaway where he stored the chunks of pine.

When William was a little older, his pine 'ots caused a commotion late one night. His father, also named William, felt that his son's late-night reading would cut into his energy and efficiency for the next day's work. And the farm required every ounce of work he could get from his son. He insisted that William retire for the night when the rest of the family did. And for all that his father knew, the growing boy slept soundly through the night, the same as everyone else.

William's "secret life" continued for some time. Night after night he read as long as he dared, then made his way back upstairs—avoiding the step that squeaked—and slept until it was time to do the morning chores. But one night he got something he hadn't bargained for. His father awoke and saw a glow downstairs. Thinking the house was on fire, he came rushing down the stairs to save his home and family from going up in flames. But instead of a house fire he saw his son William lying peacefully before the fireplace, reading some book he'd borrowed from a neighbor. His father grabbed his horse whip and took his son for a little chase around the room, using words that William remembered well for quite some time: "Young man, if you don't get to bed right now, I'm gonna horsewhip you!"

William went up to bed, at least for this night. He was only trying to get an education—a broader education than he could get from the teachers who came to their community during the first three or four months of winter, taught a few classes, and moved on.

It was this self-education that earned young Miller the distinction of being the community's "scribbler general."

And what is a scribbler general? Most of the people in that area were not very well educated, and a young man who wanted to say something special to a young lady usually didn't have the right words at his command to impress her. So these young suitors would come to Miller and describe the young lady they wanted to know better, and William would write flowery

words and phrases that would make her heart go pitter-patter. The suitor would pass the note or poem along to the damsel of his choice as his own creation, and sometimes the fair heart was won.

LUCY, HIS LOVE

Growing up in isolated Low Hampton was a lonely experience. Eventually William found a summer job in Poultney, Vermont, a few miles from Low Hampton. There he met Miss Lucy Smith, and from that time on he often found excuses to visit Poultney. Miss Smith returned the romantic interest and became his bride.

They soon moved to her hometown, and wonder of wonders, Poultney had a library. It was the first village in Vermont to have a free public library, and William often could be found here, reading to his heart's content. Lucy knew she'd married a farm boy, and she thought that the more he read, the more refined he would become, and the better husband and father he would be. She encouraged her sweetheart to go to the library as often as possible. Unfortunately, it seems to be this library that introduced William to the writings of Voltaire, David Hume, Thomas Paine, and Ethan Allen—all considered great deist writers. He turned his back on religion and began to subscribe to the philosophy of deism. (Deists believe that God created a universe according to certain laws of cause and effect, put some people on this world, set it in motion, and then took no further interest in it.)

William began to meet with a group of deists in Poultney. His doubts about the Bible grew more and more serious, until he finally concluded that "the Bible was only the work of designing men, and I discarded it accordingly." He remained a deist for 12 years.

In spite of following deists views, William Miller was a man of high principles, fair-minded, and just. His neighbors and friends liked and trusted him. He became quite involved in politics, joining the Masons, and becoming an active Democrat. Year after year he was elected to local offices such as justice of the peace, constable, and deputy sheriff. An up-and-coming young man, he was on his way to being one of the most prominent citizens of Poultney.

In 1987 more than 1,000 documents—all in William Miller's own handwriting—were recovered from a barrel in the attic of his home in Low Hampton. Dating from the time Miller was a justice of the peace, the papers range from loans and repayment of loans, tax collection slips, and orders for arrest, to anything else that a justice of the peace might be called upon to adjudicate. They lay entombed in a barrel for 150 years or so, with no one being aware of the precious cache of history.[1]

WAR AND LOVE

Things were looking up for William and Lucy Miller, even though he'd given up his interest in religion. Then their world changed. The War of 1812 loomed large on the horizon, and while Miller had no interest in religion

he still had a strong sense of patriotism, duty, and honor. Naturally, when the president of the United States called for men to defend the honor of the United States, William—just as his father had done during the Revolutionary War—volunteered.

And now we see just how highly the Poultney community valued William. One of his duties was to collect taxes. He must have been a fair and reasonable collector, because when word came from the president that volunteers were needed to defend the United States, 47 men in Poultney said they would go on one condition. That condition was that William Miller—local tax collector, census taker, deputy sheriff, and all the other things he was—be appointed their officer. The original roster of those 47 men who signed their names to go to war with Captain William Miller now hangs in the William Miller home in Low Hampton, New York.

Before William left Lucy and home to go to war, the two of them agreed to write each other at least once a week. But Lucy wasn't quite the faithful letter writer that her husband thought she should be. Far from home, up near the Canadian border, he didn't hear from Lucy as often as he'd have liked. And so he wrote her this letter:

"Dear Lucy: Have you departed this life? Or are you so engaged that you

could not devote one hour in a week to your humble servant? The following are the words you wrote me not long since. To wit, 'If I am alive I shall write to you weekly and put a letter in the post office every Monday morning.' Ever since Wednesday noon I have been dressed in mourning. Shall I ever see my Lucy again, I have often exclaimed. Ah, no! She could not tell me a falsehood. She must be dead. What can I write if she's gone? I cannot write anything; she cannot hear me. I can only write to my children, into whose hands I hope this letter will fall. Dear children, you have lost your mother and in but a little while your father must follow; perhaps before you receive this he will be no more. Prepare, then, my children, to meet the frowns of fortune, and learn, in your youth, to repel the shafts of adversity. . . .

"If Lucy is no more, or if she has forgotten Wm. Miller, then this letter is directed to Wm. S. Miller, his oldest son." Apparently, this note was sufficient to get the ink on Lucy's pen flowing again.

A captain in the United States Army, William was at the Battle of Plattsburg when a shell exploded within two feet of him and three other men. The others sustained injuries, but Miller walked away unscathed. At that notable moment, with the battle still raging, he didn't have time to wax philosophical. But that cannonball incident kept coming back to him, and he eventually realized that the God of heaven had protected him from harm.

THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION

Not only had Miller been given the gift of a bright, inquiring mind, but he also seemed to have had the gift of reconciliation. He had a wonderful ability to persuade people to put aside their differences and work side by side.

Two men in his regiment had grown up in the same area, and had been the best of friends. During the war they'd remained friends and looked out for each other. Sometime later the two soldiers moved up near the Canadian border—probably near each other—and a major disagreement destroyed their friendship. Knowing how close they'd been and how unhappy they were to be enemies, possibly it was their families who suggested that they go see Captain Miller and ask him to be their mediator. After all, they both held him in high regard. Somewhere down deep in their souls they must have wanted to be friends again, for they agreed to this plan.

Having no other mode of transportation, the two former friends walked all the way to Miller's farm to ask him to help settle their differences. So sharp was their disagreement that rather than make the journey together they actually went by separate routes, each traveling alone, with only his hostile thoughts for company.

Of course, Captain Miller was glad to see them, but sorry they'd become such bitter enemies. As he listened to each of their stories, the God he didn't acknowledge gave him the wisdom to prevail on their common sense and fairness. After spending a few days at the Miller farm, and undoubtedly having several conversations with the good captain, the two traveled home together—once again good friends.

On another occasion, when one of the local political parties asked permission to hold its Fourth of July picnic on Miller's property, he persuaded the committee to invite the other political party to join in the fun too. And so the day of picnicking on Miller's farm became a holiday celebration rather than a political one.

He apparently had another gift—that of mimicking others in both voice and mannerisms. He used this "gift" to the considerable amusement of his friends and at the expense of several clergymen of his acquaintance, including his grandfather Phelps and his uncle Elihu. It's quite likely that his mischief wasn't limited to the clergy, and it does show that even though he was studious and serious, he had a wide streak of humor. It's not quite the picture we usually have of William Miller.

THE SERMON THAT CHANGED MILLER'S LIFE

After the death of Miller's father, William and Lucy moved back to Low Hampton so he could be near his mother and take care of her. While his years in the war had caused him to begin questioning the teachings of deism, he still didn't believe in a God who was personally interested in each of His created beings.

A devout Christian, his mother went to church every week. To please her, William sometimes attended church too. After all, a deist went to church so that he could be seen as honorable and upstanding in the community. And Miller wanted his wife and children in church. It was the proper thing to do. Besides, he didn't mind listening to Uncle Elihu speak on Sundays.

But when Uncle Elihu was called away to preach in one of his other churches, the deacons had to take turns reading the sermons from a book. The deacons weren't very well educated and didn't read very well, and Miller found it rather tedious to listen to them. When he knew his uncle was going to be absent from the pulpit, William didn't go to church with his mother.

One Sunday she asked him why he wasn't going, and he explained that it was a real chore for him to listen to the stumbling attempts of some of the men who were asked to read. He said that if *he* could read the sermons, then he certainly would be there.

Of course, Mrs. Miller did what any self-respecting mother would do under those circumstances. She let the board of deacons know that her son William would be willing to read the sermons on the days the preacher was absent. The deacons were delighted. It was a chore to them, too. From then on, when Uncle Elihu was in another of his churches, his deacons selected the Sunday sermon, and William Miller was pleased to read it.

Things continued in this way for quite some time—Miller still holding his deist views, and—although somewhat uncomfortably—reading the sermons on Sunday. He still considered Scripture just the writings of men.

On September 15, 1816, the deacons chose the reading titled "Importance of Parental Duties," a sermon written by Alexander Proudfit. But as Mr.

Miller read aloud, he suddenly broke down weeping, so overcome with emotion that he couldn't continue. He was forced to hand over the reading to one of those unlearned deacons and to take his seat in the congregation.

In this sermon Mr. Proudfit speaks of the way we should discipline children. He speaks about the fact that if we want our children to believe in God, we must believe. If we want them to believe in the value of prayer, we ourselves must believe in prayer. If we want them to get anything out of the worship service, we must go there expecting to get something out of it ourselves, and not just be there in body only.

It probably was on this point that the Holy Spirit was able to reach William Miller. God knew that he didn't believe in prayer, even though he sat through prayers at his home and in church. He knew he didn't believe there was any value in going to church, and yet he was there. He didn't believe in Bible study or anything that goes along with the Christian life. For a logical, rational-thinking deist, this would be a likely spot for the Holy Spirit to make contact with him. Miller could see the inconsistency of his own life.

Soon after this experience Miller wrote, "Suddenly the character of a Savior was vividly impressed upon my mind. It seemed that there might be a Being so good and compassionate as to Himself atone for our transgressions, and thereby save us from suffering the penalty of sin. I immediately felt how lovely such a Being must be; and imagined that I could cast myself into the arms of, and trust in the mercy of, such a One."

Later he said that "God opened my eyes; and Oh, my soul, what a Savior I discovered Jesus to be!"

He was forced to admit that the Bible presented just such a Savior as he needed, and that the "Scriptures must be a revelation from God."

He found that "the Scriptures became my delight, and in Jesus I found a friend." The Bible now became his chief study, and he searched it diligently. As he was going through all this change, Miller thought about the cannon shell that exploded so close to him, and yet he was not injured. He could come to no other conclusion than that there is a God who is interested in us as individuals; there is a God who does take an interest in the affairs of nations. And, yes, there is a God who looks after each person, and who loved him—William Miller.

Beginning with Genesis 1:1, he began to study his Bible in every spare moment. He didn't use any commentaries or Bible dictionaries, or any books that had been written about the Scriptures. He wanted only to find out what kind of God the Bible itself revealed.

For the next two years—1816 to 1818—using only his Bible and his *Cruden's Concordance,* Miller worked his way through the Scriptures. When he came across a word he didn't understand, he would look it up in his concordance, and then look up each of the texts that used that particular word. By the time he had looked at all the words in their context he knew how the Bible used that word.

It was during this time that Miller discovered the 2300-day prophecy of

Daniel 8:14: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." As he studied and pondered and allowed the Holy Spirit to lead him, he came to the conclusion that the earth was the sanctuary to be cleansed by fire when Jesus comes.

He had fallen in love with Jesus, fallen in love with the Bible! He put it like this: "I saw the Bible did bring to view just such a Savior as I needed, and I was perplexed to find out how an uninspired book should develop principles so perfectly adapted to the wants of a fallen world. I was constrained [forced!] to admit that the Scriptures must be a revelation from God. They became my delight, and in Jesus I found a friend."

His deep love for his new Friend, Jesus Christ, was the force that kept him going when he began to preach the soon coming of Jesus. As he studied the Scriptures he arrived at the conclusion that Jesus would come about 25 years from that time. Jesus, his newfound friend, was going to come back to earth in about 25 years! Being an honest man, Miller studied and restudied his findings. By 1818 he had concluded that Christ would come about 1843.

For the next 13 years the conviction grew that he must tell others of the soon coming of his Best Friend, Jesus, but he didn't want to leave his home to preach. He didn't want to be made fun of, to be the butt of jokes. Oh, he had lots of reasons for not going public. He finally did come to the point where he was willing to talk with people one on one, but remained unwilling to stand up and preach to an audience.

HE TALKED OF NOTHING ELSE

It was about this time that a physician in the neighborhood began to say that William Miller was a monomaniac. We've already established that he was well respected and well liked in the community, so probably the physician didn't really mean any harm. He just didn't like hearing even a little bit of Miller's findings about the Bible, so he was known to say something to this effect: "We all like Esquire Miller [a title of respect], but when you get him started on this prophecy business, he's nothing but a monomaniac."

In other words, when you get him going, he's way off base on this prophecy business. Of course, the danger of saying things behind someone's back is well known—some kindly soul will tell him what's being said. And that's what happened in this case. Someone squealed on the good doctor.

We've already seen a little glimpse of Miller's humor in that exchange of letters with his wife. So now let's see how he handled the situation with the doctor who said he was a monomanic on the prophecies.

With 10 children in the family, it wasn't too long before one of them became ill, and that same doctor was called to attend the child. He took care of the youngster and was about to make a quick escape. He certainly didn't want to get into a discussion with Esquire Miller.

But there he sat beside the door, looking rather ill—in fact, he was doing his best to look as ill as possible.

The doctor asked if there was something wrong with him, and Miller admitted that maybe there was, but he didn't know just what. The physician checked his pulse, and that seemed to be all right. So he asked Miller what he thought the problem might be.

"Well," Miller replied, "I'm not totally sure, but could it be that I'm a monomaniac?" The doctor had the grace to turn all shades of the rainbow.

But Miller kept on. "Doctor, would you know a monomaniac if you really saw one?"

"Yes, I think I would."

"Then I'd like you to examine me to find out if I'm really a monomaniac. If I am, I want to be treated for it—for my peace of mind, for my mental health."

There was no way out for the poor, embarrassed doctor. How could he give an examination for such an ailment? As he was looking for a way to get past Mr. Miller and out the door, he heard Miller say, "Oh, and Doctor, feel free to charge your regular fee for this examination."

Of course, Miller knew that the only way Doctor X could examine him for this particular ailment was for Miller himself to give the doctor a Bible study. He was so concerned about that man's soul that it was worth it to

pay for an examination just so he could sit down with him and describe from Daniel why he thought the 2300-day prophecy was about to end, and Jesus was about to return.

Escape seemed impossible. At last the doctor sat down, and one by one Miller went through all those familiar texts in Daniel. Gradually, as they worked out the chronology, Doctor X saw that it wasn't just a bunch of mumbo-jumbo. It actually made sense. He was so agitated that he jumped up and ran out the door. William Miller smiled in anticipation of their next meeting—which came even sooner than he expected. Bright and early the next morning there was a knock at the door.

When William saw him, he exclaimed, "Why, Doctor, you look like you haven't slept a wink all night."

"No, I haven't," replied the doctor. "If all you've told me is true, I have to know more. I'm not ready to go to heaven. You need to study with me until I know all there is to know."

So Doctor X and Mr. Miller arranged to have more Bible studies. By the end of the studies the doctor went away rejoicing—as much a monomaniac on the prophecies as William Miller himself.

Yet Miller was not willing to go public with his findings. With the prodding of the Holy Spirit, the certainty was growing that he should—indeed, *must*—go and tell it to the world. But who, he reasoned, would listen to a farmer preach that Jesus was coming soon?

Sometimes the Lord, to get His children to do something they should, has to start convicting them far in advance of His timetable for getting it done. For 13 years the Holy Spirit had been urging him to share his findings that Jesus was coming soon. Still Miller struggled, back and forth, unwilling to commit himself to preaching the good news of his findings.

But the Holy Spirit wouldn't let him off the hook. As he went about his business, he continually heard the words ringing in his ears: "Go and tell the world of their danger."

Finally giving up in despair, he told the Lord that he would go and preach if anyone asked him. He felt perfectly safe in making this promise because he felt quite sure no one would ask a 50-year-old farmer to preach on the second coming of the Lord. But God's clock was ticking. The time had come, and God had a surprise for Farmer Miller.

You see, it was within a half hour of his promise to the Lord that his nephew Irving Guliford knocked at the door with the invitation for Miller to come to Dresden and preach.

And there in the maple grove, like Jacob of old, Miller wrestled and argued with the Lord. He'd promised he would go if invited; but he hadn't expected to be invited! Now he tried to find a way out of his promise to the Lord.

At last, reason prevailed. Even as a deist he had been a man of his word, and God surely knew that. Whatever he said he would do, he did.

He finally submitted, promising God that if the Lord would sustain him,

he would go. It was God, not Miller himself, who wanted him to preach. The following day, at Dresden, he preached his first sermon on the Second Advent. The meetinghouse was well filled, and the audience attentive. At first Miller was uncomfortable and nervous, but as soon as he began speaking his unease vanished.

The interest was so great that the people of Dresden asked him to stay through the following week and give lectures every day. With every passing day more people came from neighboring towns to hear the good news that Jesus was coming soon. A revival began, and it was said that in 13 families all but two persons were converted.

Arriving home the following week, Miller found a letter from a pastor in Poultney, Vermont, asking him to lecture in his church on the same subject. That pastor hadn't heard of the Dresden experience, and from that time on, invitations poured in for the 50-year-old farmer to preach on the second coming of Jesus. The word was out that if a pastor wanted a great revival series, William Miller was the man who would draw big crowds with good results.

Miller's reputation as "the greatest evangelistic influence in the northeastern United States between 1840 and 1844" is well deserved. But no man is an island, and he didn't act alone.

TO THE CITIES

Joshua V. Himes entered the picture in 1839. He heard Miller preach and believed his message. Himes himself would continue to spread that message until his death at the age of 91. Miller had been going only to the towns and villages where he had been invited. *But what about the cities?* Himes wondered. He asked Miller if he would preach in cities if he had an invitation, and the answer was yes.

Himes seemed to be a public relations genius. He started the Millerite *Signs of the Times,* and he edited the *Millennial Harp,* a collection of Second Advent hymns. He ran a column in the paper that printed all the falsehoods about Miller's teachings, and urged people to send in their evidence of false teaching or claims. He was an organizer par excellence and gave the Millerite movement the structure and leadership it needed as it became a mighty force directed by God Himself.

Another of Miller's followers was Josiah Litch—a Methodist preacher whose life was transformed when he heard the message of Christ's soon return. Litch became the leading Millerite theologian, writing pamphlets and books, and editing at least one Advent newspaper, *Trumpet of Alarm.*

And there were others. Millerism was a team effort. Its leaders represented different states, different churches, and different personality types. Each person made a significant contribution to the movement. They did their best to prepare a people for Christ's soon return.

At the beginning of this chapter is a picture of William Miller, but a few words may add understanding to the following story. When he was about

62, Miller's personal appearance was described as being about medium height and a little overweight. He had blue eyes that regarded one with an expression of kindhearted warmth. Even at 62, his hair was not gray, but a light auburn; his voice was full and distinct. But his head shook as though he had palsy. His dress was plain and ordinary.

A certain pastor, Timothy Cole, in Lowell, Massachusetts, hearing of Miller's work and of its results, invited him to come and preach in his church. He'd never met Miller, but expected to see a fashionably dressed gentleman when he went to the depot to meet him. He had heard that Miller wore a camel cloak and a white hat.

At the train station Timothy Cole stood on the platform closely inspecting everybody who got off the train. Not one man fit his image of Mr. Miller. Finally, he watched the last person step down from the train— an old man, shaking with palsy.

No, no, he thought. *No. This can't be* the *William Miller.*

But . . . this man *did* have a white hat and a camel cloak. Fearing that this indeed might be Mr. Miller, and if so, regretting that he had invited him to lecture in *his* church, Cole stepped up to him and whispered in his ear, "Is your name Miller?"

Miller nodded.

With a sigh, Cole said, "Well, follow me."

And he walked on ahead, leaving Mr. Miller to keep up the best he could until they finally reached the Cole home. There was no conversation. Cole neither asked him whether he'd had a good trip nor thanked him for coming. There were no pleasantries at all. Cole was embarrassed that he had invited a man of Miller's appearance. Surely this man could know nothing of the Bible; his lecture would be his own fancies.

They probably had some kind of light supper—perhaps soup and a sandwich, with a cup of something warm to drink. Kind, loving William Miller, shaking with palsy, was doing his best to eat his soup without spilling it. The conversation was sparse, limited to the most basic necessities. It was a great trial to all concerned. Cole was mentally kicking himself for having to deal with what he felt certain was a mistake, while Miller sat at the table of his ungracious host knowing he was unwelcome and trying to control his trembling hands and not spill his food and drink. Perhaps Cole's wife tried to put Miller at ease. It can only be hoped that she had a little more compassion than her husband did at that point.

After they ate, Pastor Cole told Mr. Miller that he supposed it was about time to go to the church. Again, he strode ahead without regard for his visitor. At the church Cole showed his guest to the platform, but took his seat with the congregation. He did not even introduce the visiting speaker. Miller was on his own in a strange congregation, with no support from the minister who'd invited him. It was an awkward situation to say the least.

In his strong, mellow voice, Mr. Miller read a hymn. After it was sung, he prayed and read another hymn, which also was sung. To say that he felt

uncomfortable at being left on the platform alone would be a gross understatement. But he plowed ahead and read his text. It was his favorite: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ."

Launching into his sermon, Miller forgot all the unpleasantness as he warmed to his topic. He spoke with authority, proving all his points from the Scriptures. Timothy Cole listened for about 15 minutes, then seeing that only the Word of God was presented—with authority—and that the Scriptures were opened in a knowledgeable way, he walked up and took his seat on the platform.

Was Timothy Cole thoroughly ashamed of himself for the callous way he had treated God's servant? Did he make humble apologies for his lack of hospitality in the pulpit, as well as in his home? If he did, William Miller accepted them, for he was a true Christian gentleman.

The matter surely must have been smoothed over, because Miller spoke in Cole's church for nine days that May, and during another six days in June. A wonderful revival followed, and in late July Cole wrote to Mr. Miller that about 60 people had joined the church.

Timothy Cole learned that one cannot always judge the measure of a man by his outward appearance.

In early 1844 Miller himself reported that during the past 12 years he had preached about 4,500 sermons to at least 500,000 people. It was his chief aim to tell others of his Best Friend, Jesus. Nothing was more precious to him than the thought of Christ's soon return. Although Miller's mistaken belief that Jesus would return about 1843 or 1844 gave an urgency to his preaching, time was not his entire message. He longed for people to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and to be ready to meet Him when He returned—whenever that would be. From the time of his conversion—that Sunday when he read that sermon at his mother's church—his life revolved around being with Jesus and doing all in his power to help others be ready for His return.

Miller and his fellow preachers labored on and on, warning the world of the soon coming of Christ. But October 22, 1844, came and went without the appearance of the Lord Jesus. There was mighty disappointment throughout the ranks.

Actually, William Miller accepted the October 22 date only about two weeks before the time. In all his preaching he had been reluctant to give an exact date for the Second Advent. He preached a constant readiness, whatever the day. And that was the tenor of a letter to his old friend Joshua V. Himes, about two weeks after the Disappointment:

"I have fixed my mind upon another time, and here I mean to stand until God gives me more light—And that is *Today, Today,* and *Today,* until He comes."

In 1848 Miller had a small chapel[2] built on his farm, close to his house, where those who continued to be loyal to the Advent message could

worship. Most of them had been disfellowshipped from the churches in which they had had membership, as he himself had been.

About that same time Miller began to lose his sight. One of his greatest sorrows came the day he could no longer see to read and write. As a boy he'd read by the light of pine 'ots in the fireplace. When he married and moved to Poultney, he'd reveled in the many books its public library held. At last he could read all he wanted to. And now the privilege of reading his beloved Bible was denied him. His daughter-in-law knew how hard this was for him, but reported that he never complained. His Best Friend was Jesus, and Jesus helped him to bear this cross with grace.

He wrote to his close friend Joshua V. Himes:

"It would, indeed, be a sad and melancholy time with me were it not for the 'blessed hope' of soon seeing Jesus. Although my natural vision is dark, yet my mind's vision is lit up with a bright and glorious prospect for the future." After the disappointment of 1844, William Miller was never really well. From then on his health steadily declined. Sometimes he became better, even going out to preach, but finally his last illness came upon him. When it seemed that Miller was near death, a telegram was sent to Joshua Himes. He arrived on December 17, and although Mr. Miller was very ill, he recognized Himes's voice. He could hardly believe his old friend was there, and kept exclaiming, "Oh, is it really you, Elder Himes? Is it really Elder Himes? Oh, I'm so glad to see you." He spoke of the Advent cause, of their work together, and charged his friend to be faithful in his duties.

On his last day, Miller was not able to talk much. But from time to time uttered expressions such as "Mighty to save!" "Oh, I long to be there," and "Victory! Victory!" The glorious scenes going through his mind can only be imagined. Surely the Lord was very near to him during those final hours of his life. He fell asleep in Jesus on December 20, 1849, without seeing his fondest hope realized.

He was laid to rest in the Low Hampton cemetery, just a little distance from his home. There he awaits the call of his Best Friend. On his tombstone is a quotation from Daniel 12:13: "But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

Ellen White, shown God's eventual reward for His dedicated servant, wrote: "Angels watch the precious dust of this servant of God, and he will come forth at the sound of the last trump."

On the great resurrection day, Miller will realize his heart's desire: to be with his Friend, Jesus, to "see his Lord a-coming."

[1] Samples can be seen at the Ellen G. White Estate.

[2] That small chapel remains today. It's owned by the Advent Christian Church, and is jointly maintained by them and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Tour groups and others visit there on a regular basis, especially during the summer months.