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## *The Philadelphia Press and the Millerites*

THE world which the followers of William Miller expected to end in 1843 seemed made to order for their frenzied activity. The forties have been described as “fabulous” and “mad,” and one doesn’t have to read far to verify either adjective. Feverish political activity, a fluid population with grandiose national and individual dreams overlaid with beliefs in spiritualism, phrenology, mesmerism and divers other fads seemed to invite the one belief that would end all others. The stage demanded vast dramatic plots, and underplaying could denote little more than a lack of ability. Neither the Millerites nor the press in the third row center could be so accused.

Although it was not until late 1842, only six months before the first date set for the end of the world, that the Philadelphia press recorded any real activity, Miller had been preaching his doctrine for more than ten years and had been developing it for thirteen years prior to that. Born in 1782 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, he had turned from the Baptist church of his parents to Deism, but reclaimed his early faith upon coming home from the War of 1812. His new interest in the religion of his youth led him to make a minute study of the Bible to interpret it for himself. He became convinced that it was meant to be read literally, and when he studied the prophecies of Daniel, this approach led him to believe the end of the world was imminent.<sup>1</sup> In 1831 Miller gave his first lecture, and for the next eight years toured the smaller New England towns.<sup>2</sup>

It was Joshua Himes, whom he met in 1839 in Lowell, Massachusetts, who encouraged him to speak in Boston and other big cities.<sup>3</sup> Himes became his chief apostle and organizer and was responsible for the establishment of a newspaper, *The Signs of the Times*, to

<sup>1</sup> Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, D. C., 1945), 41.

<sup>2</sup> William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York, 1930), 401-404.

<sup>3</sup> Nichol, 70-84.

spread the doctrine of the Second Advent. There is reason to believe that it was he who persuaded Miller in 1841 to set a specific date for the culmination of all things, and when time became short he arranged for the camp meetings that were a symbol of all evangelistic activity.<sup>4</sup>

Deciphering the millennium from the prophecies of the Bible was not new or novel with the lecturing of Miller. It had appeared off and on for hundreds of years, and in colonial America such worthies as Jonathan Edwards and Timothy Dwight, among others, had tried their hand at it. Harriet Livermore and Joseph Dylks were preaching it during Miller's lifetime, the former even taking her message to the House of Representatives.<sup>5</sup> The widespread acceptance of the idea as Miller set it forth is almost unfathomable. While it is true that the setting of a date for the end of the world within his own lifetime added more interest, there were a few before and after him who have done so without attracting even a small fraction of the conservatively estimated 50,000 followers who flocked to see his charts and believed his explanation of them.<sup>6</sup> Believers were found from Canada to Kentucky and Virginia and as far west as Illinois. England, Norway, and the Sandwich Islands reportedly had small groups of followers who had seen the doctrine in pamphlets carried by New England sailors.<sup>7</sup>

Despite its being perhaps a little to the right of a general picture of the times, "plainly dressed" Philadelphia<sup>8</sup> with its philosophy- and science-discussing social set apparently was outdone only by Boston and New York in the excitement of Millerite activity and reaction. Here, as in the other two cities, the press in its editorials and reports constituted a goodly percentage of the noise. Caricaturizing and the ascribing of insanity and murders to the effects of Miller's teachings had become popular in New England by 1841, and although in the long run the Philadelphia papers tended to be a little more conservative in their attack, by late 1842 Millerism was a popular topic for humorous and caustic editorials and comment. The "penny press,"

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-103.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Paths to the Present* (New York, 1949), 261-262.

<sup>6</sup> Sweet, 401-404.

<sup>7</sup> Nichol, 141, 155.

<sup>8</sup> Meade Minnigerode, *The Fabulous Forties* (New York, 1924), 10.

represented by the *Public Ledger*, found the movement particularly adaptable to its sensationalism, and even the conservative *United States Gazette* and the "distinctly literary" *North American* added to the uproar with accounts that ranged from sermons to satire.<sup>9</sup>

An examination of the *North American*, *United States Gazette*, *Pennsylvania Inquirer* and *Public Ledger* from the latter half of 1842 to the end of 1844 illustrates in varying degrees the general character of each of these journals in their reporting of the spread of the millennium idea. They indirectly show more than this. Fanatical or radical activity can be seen in two lights: the one stemming from the ludicrous effect of anything odd or out of the general stream of thought, and the other arising from its effects on the social scene. When the latter appears as dominant and evil, the whole idea tends to lose its humorous aspects. The Philadelphia newspapers in this period show this transition in their handling of news and comment regarding the Millerites and, thereby, illustrate to what extent this doctrine was felt in the city.

That he was to encounter doubt and ridicule in Philadelphia became apparent to Miller months before he made his first trip to the city in February, 1843. He had received two anonymous letters postmarked in Philadelphia, one in 1842, and another in January, 1843. The first showed a practical doubt of his character in demanding how much money he was making on his speculations.<sup>10</sup> The second, received while he was ill with an attack of erysipelas and carbuncles, was somewhat more bitter. "Daddy Miller," it asked, "Do you intend to wait the end of the world or go off prematurely? Bah!!"<sup>11</sup>

In August, 1842, the *North American* first noted the increasing numbers of his followers in Philadelphia. On the twenty-second it called attention to the fact that the "doomsday man still keeps together a host of silly people" and that one of his prophets had kept 4,000 people listening to a two-hour lecture.<sup>12</sup> Editorially it was hoping a new prophet would steal some of his thunder and set the date

<sup>9</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York, 1941). In his comments on the Philadelphia press, Mott calls the *Gazette* "conservative," the *North American* "distinctly literary," and the *Ledger* a typical "penny press organ."

<sup>10</sup> Letter from R. D., dated Aug. 15, 1842, quoted by Nichol, 129.

<sup>11</sup> Letter, postmarked Philadelphia, Jan. 22, 1843, *ibid.*, 140.

<sup>12</sup> Aug. 22, 1842.

about one hundred years ahead and thereby save "some worthy folks . . . from a residence in the Insane Asylum."<sup>13</sup>

By November the *Ledger* entered the field with comments in true "penny press" fashion. In an editorial on the fourteenth, it gave half a column to a biography of Miller and half a column to proving his insincerity. The basis of the latter was the fact that he had been offered \$2,000 for his farm, payable now, but possession not to be taken until after the twenty-third of April. It felt that if he were sincere about the date of the end of the world, he would have a perfect business deal and couldn't afford to ignore it. Perhaps the editorial was as much a comment on the values of the times as it was on Miller.

By December lectures and Bible classes were being conducted by the Millerites, and Josiah Litch was in Philadelphia from Boston for a series of talks at Atwood Hall beginning on the twelfth.<sup>14</sup> Earlier, in November, Elder Plummer at the Christian Street Church was disproving Miller's doctrine in weekly talks. A jack-of-all-lectures, he used the millennial topic as subject matter on many occasions in the next two years, at one point challenging all comers to debate.<sup>15</sup>

Stories from other cities were current at this time and used as bases for editorial comment. The building of the new meetinghouse in Boston "in a temporary fashion, ready for destruction" was announced by the *North American* on December 21. The account of a man in New Hampshire who upon becoming a Millerite walked thirty-seven miles to pay back thirteen dollars he had stolen thirteen years before, moved it to state that if Miller's doctrine would work so on all the dishonest, especially in Texas and Europe, the editors would back it.<sup>16</sup>

With the coming of the year of the Second Advent, there was a noticeable increase in news and editorial opinion on Millerite activity. It was apparent even in January, and as the month of the "grand smash" came nearer, it was not uncommon to have two editorials and two or three items of news in the same edition.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Public Ledger*, Dec. 12, 1842.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 29 and Nov. 5, 19, and 26, 1842.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1842.

The number of converts in the northern section of the city was alarming to the editors of the *Gazette* in particular. Notwithstanding the fact that they thought "the earth [would] outlast all its present inhabitants," they were much concerned with the number of people leaving their employment and "yielding to the persuasion."<sup>17</sup> Domestic troubles were frequent in families where either husband or wife joined the new faith without the other, and on January 2 a man was taken to the insane asylum, and the cause laid to Miller's teaching.<sup>18</sup> Two days later another jumped into the Delaware River screaming, "The world an't come to an end yet."<sup>19</sup>

Paid notices advertising lectures increased greatly, the *Ledger* carrying five on January 14 for talks to be held on the following day.<sup>20</sup> The Callowhill Church and the Chinese Museum were the centers of the activity, and it was to the latter that Miller was coming "for the purpose of explaining the error he fell into with regard to the end of the world."<sup>21</sup>

Just before he arrived, the *Ledger* presented the first of a number of editorials in which it attempted to employ scientific facts to disprove Miller's theory. Having noted the reaction of his followers to the northern lights, the paper recounted a history of the superstitions that derived from natural phenomena.<sup>22</sup> This became a popular method of attack for this paper on days when there was nothing to ridicule.

Miller's lectures in February, although evoking no editorial opinion, were reported in the *Ledger* and *North American*. Both papers agreed on the essential facts. There were between four and five thousand people present at the meetings, who for the first five days listened "with much decorum" to the two-hour lectures and question periods. However, on the ninth of February things got out of hand. Women screamed and fainted, men fought, and rowdies smashed the windows with ice. The stockholders of the museum asked Miller to leave three days before his contract was up,<sup>23</sup> and he was hardly out

<sup>17</sup> Jan. 3, 1843.

<sup>18</sup> *North American*, Jan. 3, 1843.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 5, 1843.

<sup>20</sup> It is perhaps significant that all the paid notices of meetings showed up in the penny-press organ.

<sup>21</sup> *North American*, Jan. 27, 1843.

<sup>22</sup> Jan. 31, 1843.

<sup>23</sup> *Public Ledger*, Feb. 8, 1843, and *North American*, Feb. 11, 1843.

of town when *Miller, Or the End of the World* opened at one of the theaters with a local comedian playing the lead.<sup>24</sup>

While Miller was in Philadelphia he wrote to his son that the “. . . priests, clergy and editors are out upon us with all their ribaldry and lies.”<sup>25</sup> Except for the comment after the near riot on the ninth, the segment of the press used in this study does not bear him out.

The *Ledger* gave over its front page on February 23 to a short story by James Kirk Paulding entitled “The End of the World: A Vision.” Satire and humor ran throughout, and the story was as much directed to the people in general as it was to the Millerites. In it Paulding dreams that the fatal day has arrived and, although the world is being consumed by fire, people are still thinking in worldly terms and of the things they could have done had they really known the end was at hand. Many bewail the loss of the good wine that remains in their cellars. Even the prophet is content with the thought that history will remember him as a true seer. The story closes with the author awakening to cries of “April Fool!”

In the remaining weeks there was an increase in the number of tales that have since become most associated with Millerism. Insanity cases and attempted suicides ascribed to the unsettling effects of Miller's teachings were popular items of news.<sup>26</sup> The night watchman at Spring Garden was reported (though with reservations) to have heard three groans which he was certain were Gabriel's preparatory blasts.<sup>27</sup>

Editorials ranged from pointing out that the world was really still in its teens and the Millerites shouldn't be in a hurry,<sup>28</sup> to using the toleration of Miller and his followers as evidence that the age of reason had truly arrived. At any other time in history such activity would have been persecuted.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Lowell Courier* (Mass.), Feb. 23, 1843, quoted by Nichol, 131.

<sup>25</sup> Manuscript letter dated Feb. 2, 1843, *ibid.*, 129.

<sup>26</sup> Even the *Gazette* was given to printing such reports in this period.

<sup>27</sup> *Public Ledger*, Mar. 1, 1843. This is the first of four times that the *Ledger* took issue with the weird tales that were being spread by gossip.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Apr. 7, 1843.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 4, 1843. The paper further felt that the toleration of Miller's teachings was all the more astounding since he was obviously “a cunning fellow, intent on notoriety and profit.”

Although there is evidence of confusion within the ranks of his followers as to the correct date, the twenty-third of April was generally accepted.<sup>30</sup> During the week prior to the expected Second Advent, lectures or discussions were held every night at the Wilbur Fisk Literary Institute.<sup>31</sup> There was some concern about the increasing number of sober-minded men being affected, and the conservative *Gazette* took occasion on the eve of the Advent to express its fears for the people. Too many were turning from planting and harvesting, and although it felt everyone had a right to believe what he wanted, the editors saw nothing but evil in the millennium concept. The inevitable collapse of the idea would make people skeptical of all religion. The next day would tell and people had better remember “‘that tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.’”<sup>32</sup>

Comparing this sermon-editorial with the *Ledger*'s account of legislation pending at Harrisburg to prohibit Millerites, Mormons, assemblymen, locomotives and locofocos, etc., from riding on the tails of comets,<sup>33</sup> gives a fair picture of two distinct attitudes toward the movement at this time. The *Ledger* continued its facetiousness and ridicule, if only between the lines of editorials that were aimed at disproving the idea scientifically, while the *Gazette* refrained from speaking until it had decided that socially Millerism was evil and should be spoken against.

One of the factors illustrating the extreme fanaticism of the Millerites and their tenacious belief in the prophet's word is their continued and more intensive activity after the uneventful April 23, 1843. It is fair to assume that a movement centering on belief in a prophecy would collapse when the prophecy was proved wrong. Whether it was the perseverance of Miller that belies this assumption, or the organizational genius of Himes, or merely that the forties were credulous enough to believe anything, is impossible to say. But the apparent ease with which activity was continued and a new date set and believed is certainly one of the things that has set the Millerites off from other believers in the Second Advent. Miller's followers in

<sup>30</sup> *Public Ledger*, Feb. 22, 1843, and *North American*, Apr. 15, 1843.

<sup>31</sup> Notices appeared in both the *Ledger* and the *North American* announcing the Fisk discussions.

<sup>32</sup> Apr. 22, 1843.

<sup>33</sup> Apr. 22, 1843.

Philadelphia announced lectures for the evening of April 24, "God willing,"<sup>34</sup> and on the following day claimed that Miller had never actually set a date and that they would wait to see what the future disclosed.<sup>35</sup>

In an editorial on the twenty-fourth, the *North American* was "happy to announce to [its] readers that the earth [was] in status quo." The *Ledger* was unimpressed with the notices of planned meetings printed on its own pages, and in an editorial on the twenty-fourth entitled "Miller's Last Day," it was bringing down the curtain.

Some of our readers may doubtless experience a little surprise at waking up this morning and finding themselves alive and kicking, instead of being as crisp and as shivelled [*sic*] as an old boot or a burnt corn-field. Yesterday was the period fixed by the Reverend Windmill Miller for the grand "smash," the final "bust up" and total extinction of terrestrial things, and the commencement of the existence of celestial ones. . . . The failure of the prediction . . . but proves the folly and conceit of the individual who made it. . . .

The *Gazette* was still concerned with the social effects of the movement and presented its attitude in a short story on the twenty-sixth written by its publisher, Joseph R. Chandler, for *Godey's Lady's Book*. "Gertrude; or, The Fatal Prophecy" is the tale of a girl who had been taken in by Miller's teaching and had collapsed on the day set for the end. Upon awakening a year later and being told she wasn't in heaven and the world hadn't ended, she died. In effect, it continues the tone set by the *Gazette's* editorial of the twenty-second.

The next few months were practically void of any comment or acknowledgment by the press that the Millerites even existed. The statements in *The Signs of the Times* that Miller's error lay in not using the Jewish year for his computations and that October, 1844, was now the new date, caused little comment beyond the *Ledger's* pointing out that "if any were congratulating themselves upon an escape, they will find that they are hallooing before they are out of the woods."<sup>36</sup> One paper went so far as to state it could see no point in paying any attention to the whole affair.<sup>37</sup> The general attitude seemed to be that it was defunct everywhere except in Boston where odd notions seemed to live longer.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Public Ledger*, Apr. 24, 1843.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Apr. 25, 1843.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Apr. 27, 1843.

<sup>37</sup> *Pennsylvania Inquirer*, Apr. 28, 1843.

<sup>38</sup> *Public Ledger*, May 15, 1843.

There are two possible reasons for this silence of the newspapers from late April until July, but investigation would seem to invalidate one of them. The most obvious assumption would be that activity in Philadelphia virtually ceased and that there was no longer any public interest in the millennium. Two factors rule this out. The acquisition of a new and larger meetinghouse on Julianna Street in this period hardly points to any great diminishing of activity by Miller's followers. Furthermore, a letter written by Himes from Philadelphia in July suggests a constantly growing interest in the doctrine following the disappointment in April. Intermittent notices of lectures appear which fortify this fact.

It would seem, then, that newspaper policy was the factor behind the lack of coverage. A movement of this sort tends to lose reader appeal if kept constantly before the public, and without the interest in the day of reckoning being close at hand, editors might do well to refrain from using the topic. The climax had passed, to all intents and purposes, and the supposed denouement did not make good copy.

Notices inviting the people of Philadelphia to board the steamboat *Mayflower* with their tents and come to a camp meeting in New Jersey were the only recorded summer activity.<sup>39</sup> Even this evoked no editorial comment or news items, although a week of excessively heavy rains and floods may have ended the encampment before interested reaction could be aroused.

The press continued its desultory treatment of the topic throughout the once fateful year of 1843. Baptisms in the canal at Southwark in October<sup>40</sup> and a cry against the rowdies of Bridgeport, Connecticut, dispersing a Millerite meeting with rocks and bats, reported in a suddenly righteous *Ledger*, constituted two of the three printed articles.<sup>41</sup> A Thanksgiving dinner was planned for the poor, but this, unaccountably, took place three weeks late and "people of color only partook of it."<sup>42</sup>

Articles regarding the Millerites continued to be rare well into 1844, although lectures were held every night in February. The an-

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, July 29, 1843. The actual camp site was near Centerton, on Rancocas Creek, about six miles from Mount Holly.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 13, 1843.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 11, 1843.

<sup>42</sup> *North American*, Dec. 23, 1843.

nouncements continued the old caption that "The Second Coming of Christ in 1843" was to be discussed, but added "Jewish Year" in parentheses after it. They later turned to likening Miller's error to that of a captain who had not reached port in the estimated time: "Would . . . [he] conclude there was *no such port* . . . ?"<sup>43</sup> Lectures and baptisms were the only activities recorded until March. The Reverend Stoddard at one point immersed one hundred converts in the Delaware River during a blizzard.<sup>44</sup>

On March 14 some of Miller's followers were in the streets awaiting the Advent, and the *North American* thought the new date had arrived.<sup>45</sup> This confusion over dates throughout the period of Miller's preaching in urban areas gives some weight to the claim in 1843 and again in 1845 that he had never set an actual day, but that his followers had chosen one for themselves. All those who have written on the topic, however, are convinced that Miller was responsible for at least the two major dates.<sup>46</sup>

It wasn't until September that there was any appreciable journalistic activity. Both Miller and Himes were coming on the fifteenth and the public was invited to hear the prophet's "confession on 1843."<sup>47</sup> No record was made by any of the four papers of what went on at these lectures, but accounts from out-of-town meetings that were broken up by rock-throwing crowds made the *Ledger* cry against the odious practice of persecution: "However strange and fanatical their conduct may seem . . . , " people had the right to believe as they wanted.<sup>48</sup>

By the first part of October, the papers were aghast at the extent to which the mania had suddenly grown in Philadelphia.<sup>49</sup> All carried accounts of the tailor at Fifth and Market streets who had left his shop and hung a sign on his door welcoming the King of Kings.<sup>50</sup> A notice signed by one of Miller's followers announcing that all had better prepare, appeared in the *Ledger* for two days.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Public Ledger*, May 1, 1844.

<sup>44</sup> *North American*, Mar. 19, 1844.

<sup>45</sup> Mar. 14, 1844.

<sup>46</sup> Sweet and Nichol, and Clara Endicott Sears, *Days of Delusion: A Strange Bit of History* (Boston, 1924), all agree on this point.

<sup>47</sup> *Public Ledger*, Sept. 13, 1844.

<sup>48</sup> Sept. 16, 1844.

<sup>49</sup> *North American*, Oct. 5, 1844.

<sup>50</sup> This was carried in all four papers for Oct. 5, 1844.

<sup>51</sup> Oct. 10 and 11, 1844.

Meetings at the Julianna Street center were attended by thousands as the day drew nearer, and even with the election news and the paper's vigorous campaign for the Whigs, the *North American* found room for an item or two each day from Philadelphia or other cities. The movement was prevailing "with increasing fearfulness in this city."<sup>52</sup> Lands and businesses were being sold by the Millerites to get funds to distribute among needy followers so they could settle their accounts with the world.<sup>53</sup> Excitement and consternation permeated the reports of the week before the twenty-second, and large crowds at the Julianna Street Church brought out the mayor and the police. The movement's formidable growth after having been "knocked in the head once" caused editors to give it more than passing thought.<sup>54</sup>

But for a facetious statement on the twelfth in which it thought "the feast of trumpets . . . the day of election at the same time—and the feast of the successful party in November, will have a tendency to circumblustrificate the prosonority of the confredunction," the *Ledger* turned completely away from ridicule and went so far as to editorialize against this method of attack. In four articles from the eleventh to the twenty-third, it presented arguments aimed at destroying the idea with logic. God made science, but man set up his own faiths. If the latter refuted the former, it was obviously wrong.<sup>55</sup> "When the amount of injury done by the inane speculation has been completed and exposed, it will astonish people by the magnitude of its results."<sup>56</sup> An extra edition of the Millerite paper in Philadelphia was alarming enough "to frighten the poor souls who believe in it out of their wits."<sup>57</sup>

On the twentieth it took a sheriff's posse to break up a riot at the Miller Chapel,<sup>58</sup> and the following day the *Ledger* printed two editorials on the incident.

The Millerites moved out of the city on October 21 to await the Second Advent in the country, some crossing over to New Jersey.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *North American*, Oct. 18, 1844.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 21, 1844.

<sup>55</sup> Oct. 18, 1844.

<sup>56</sup> Oct. 21, 1844.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *United States Gazette*, Oct. 21, 1844.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 22, 1844.

They left with the *Gazette* asking that something be done to stop the evil they were doing, and with the Reverend Mr. Rood sermonizing in the *Ledger* against predictions, the failure of which "multiplies sinners, infidels and scoffers."<sup>60</sup>

The climax of reaction was reached in the *Ledger's* editorial on the twenty-fourth. Completely ignoring the chance to scoff at the second disappointment, the editorial stated that "When madness and suicide . . . are literally rioting, it is time for the press to be serious." It called upon

magistrates and grand juries to consider this business seriously. Can the laws reach these impostors? . . . If society cannot protect itself against such mischiefs, it is deficient in a very essential element of self-defence . . . [at least] the relations and friends of the deluded, fanatic followers . . . can have them put under guardianship. . . .

Some of the Millerites came back to the city late at night on the twenty-second, others waited until next morning, and some never returned. One paper claimed that one of the latter was a preacher who went "to parts unknown" with \$1,960 from the treasury.<sup>61</sup> Meetings were again held during the next few weeks,<sup>62</sup> but the fire of enthusiasm was gone. No attempt was made to set a new date, and without the force of fear and preparation for the end, the ranks thinned considerably. The remaining followers, in Philadelphia and elsewhere, contented themselves with the general idea that the end was imminent and maintained a loose organization that in 1845 became the Seventh Day Adventists.<sup>63</sup>

It is not strange that a movement called by one author "the most spectacular evangelistic crusade of the Middle Period"<sup>64</sup> should show up even in science- and philosophy-loving Philadelphia. Nor is it too surprising that the movement came about at all, if we give weight to the thesis of this same author, Ralph Gabriel, or to that of Arthur Schlesinger.<sup>65</sup> Both of them see it as a logical, though extreme,

<sup>60</sup> *Public Ledger*, Oct. 23, 1844. This was the first published sermon.

<sup>61</sup> *North American*, Oct. 23, 1844.

<sup>62</sup> *United States Gazette*, Nov. 29, 1844.

<sup>63</sup> Schlesinger, 261-262.

<sup>64</sup> Ralph Henry Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought* (New York, 1940) 35-38.

<sup>65</sup> Schlesinger, 261-262.

manifestation of established streams of American attitude. Whether in retrospect it presents itself as evidence of "the hold upon popular American thought of the dream of the coming new world," or as part of an ingrained propensity in Americans for prognostication of any sort, is hardly traceable in its reception by four diverse levels of journalism in the city of Philadelphia.<sup>66</sup> However, certain other trends and ideas are apparent in analysis.

Without a doubt the movement made measurable inroads on the Philadelphia scene. Even subtracting the number of people who attended the meetings and lectures motivated solely by curiosity, the attendance figures for the prophet's lectures are large enough to point up a considerable following for such a radical teaching. The concern of the press for the large numbers accepting the belief in Philadelphia shows up too many times for it to be invalid. Within the movement, the fervor of the believers is best seen in their ability to rally after the uneventful passing of the 1843 date to the point of establishing a new and larger meetinghouse and of being active enough to command an even larger following by the second date in October, 1844.

The very nature of the movement made it good copy for the press. The penny papers in particular would find the activities of a group of religious fanatics of special interest. Any news events that lent themselves to sensational reporting or facetious editorials were welcomed by those publishers who were aiming their journals at interesting the lower classes and the barely literate. The Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, as a member of this group, carried by far the most articles and editorials on Millerite activity. In true "penny press" fashion, it was content most of the time to treat the whole idea with ridicule and scorn. However, as the movement grew to new strength in 1844 and took on the appearance of a social problem, the *Ledger* swung gradually over to serious discussions of the idea and consciously tried to develop arguments to disprove Miller's thesis that would appeal to its level of readers. By the second date the paper was as conservative and as concerned with its effect on the people as the *Gazette* had been throughout the period.

Although this was a move out of character for the *Ledger*, perhaps it was not as extreme as it might seem at first glance. At no time were

<sup>66</sup> These are the ideas of Ralph Gabriel and Arthur Schlesinger, respectively.

the papers in Philadelphia as given to ascribing to Millerism every bit of abnormal activity in the city as were the papers of Boston.<sup>67</sup> The tales of people trying to fly from trees or buying the ascension robes that have become associated with the movement are conspicuously absent from the pages of all the papers studied. Nor was it uncommon for them to call the journals of other towns to task for their spreading of such stories.

Perhaps it was only logical that the second largest city in the country with its 220,000 inhabitants, conscious of their own moral and intellectual superiority, should turn to a cool appraisal of the effects of Miller's teachings, if only because Boston and New York seemed content to laugh at him. The early sneers and laughs of the *Ledger* and *North American* could be excused since they, together with the *Gazette* and the *Inquirer*, realized later they were playing a role in a social drama that the critical audience of Philadelphia had long since ceased to regard as comedy.

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<sup>67</sup> Ira V. Brown, in his "Millerites and the Boston Press," *New England Quarterly*, XVI (1943), 592-614, offers a picture of the reception given to Millerism by the papers of Boston.