

Mary Baker Eddy and *The Christian Science Monitor*

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. . . so I'm going to stop in plenty of time for you to fire all sorts of questions. As a matter of fact your committee gave me a few of the sorts of questions you might be interested in, so I thought I'd give you a little rundown of how Mrs. Eddy started the *Monitor* and how the newspaper idea, you might say, grew, and I might be able to answer some of those along the way.

The first indication I found of the possibility of a newspaper being in her thought was in 1878 when she was under some ghastly attacks from the papers, and she made a statement to the effect that "If I had a newspaper of my own, a pulpit of my own, the slanderer and others would have far less to do," or something of that sort. She was obviously thinking of a newspaper then as being a sort of desirable adjunct to what she was then getting started. It was just slightly before she started the church. So she was thinking of the fact that she needed something to support the Christian Science movement, you might say.

Then in 1883 when she started the *Journal of Christian Science*, or as it would later be titled, *The Christian Science Journal*. She didn't originally call it a newspaper, although that's the way it reads in *Miscellaneous Writings* today. She originally said, an "organ has become a necessity for our Cause." But she changed the word "organ" to "newspaper" when she put that article in *Miscellaneous Writings* in 1896.

I think that's significant, because the periodical she started in 1883 was definitely a church organ. But by 1896 Christian Science had grown around the world. She was certainly having letters from all over the world. She was thinking in a large way about the world. She always had written for a lot of newspapers from her girlhood on, and always subscribed to a number of newspapers. So a newspaper was to her a natural medium of communication to think about.

So when she suddenly chose the word “newspaper” in revising the 1883 statement, it showed that somehow or other the thing was building up in her thought.

Then two years later she started the weekly *Christian Science Sentinel*. The *Sentinel* at that time included a full page of news items, plus various little odds and ends of news scattered throughout. It included occasional editorials on the news. In other words, she was moving in the direction of comments on the news, but this was still of course within the church setting, you might say. In 1902, when she changed the editor of the *Journal*, she made the rather ambiguous statement that, “Until I start a widespread press, we should have in Boston a born editor.” I suppose she meant she wanted to have a born editor in reserve for when she started a different sort of publication. So that shows that something was simmering in her thought through those years.

Then, four years later, in 1906, she was again the attention of vast newspaper publicity when the *New York World* launched its famous or infamous attack on her, and the headlines appeared in papers all over the country at that time and put her in the worst possible light. That continued through the next year when the Next Friends suit was brought against her, also through the agency of the *New York World*, alleging that she was mentally incompetent to manage her own affairs, that she was suffering from senile dementia, paranoia, and various other terribly detailed signs of general imbecility. So she was the cynosure of news attention during those two years, 1906, all of 1907. And that undoubtedly made her think a great deal more about the role of the press.

The next year she moved back from Concord, where she was living, to Chestnut Hill. Here – and a lot of this is in Erwin Canham’s book, but perhaps I can add a little touch here and there to throw more light on it – she received a letter from a Boston newspaperman who was a Christian Scientist, suggesting that a Christian Science newspaper be started. He said it should not have Christian Science in the title, but should be run by Christian Scientists and should be wholesome and nonsensational and all that sort of thing. She immediately dashed off on the bottom of his letter a reply to him which was never actually sent, in which she said, “Yes, this newspaper scheme has been in my thought for some time and I hereby give my name for it. The Christian Science Monitor.” So she was pretty much on the ball at that point. She had obviously thought about a newspaper, and this letter touched the thing off, you might say.

In the next month or two she wrote two other letters that she also never sent, including one to her publisher. She didn't send them because she evidently felt it wasn't quite the right time. The Publishing Society building which was then being built was still being paid for, and she thought they'd better get the financial issues out of the way before she started the *Monitor*.

But more than that, she was feeling enormous opposition to this step. She acknowledged that she could always feel the importance of any undertaking that she started on by the degree of mental opposition it seemed to rouse. And she could feel a great deal this time. As a matter of fact, she had a rather bad time in the summer of 1908 at Chestnut Hill. She was obviously having quite a struggle over this step spiritually and physically.

Not that she talked to anybody about it yet. July 18, I think it was, she had a very bad night. She'd had a very serious physical difficulty several days before, and during that night her household despaired almost of her living until the morning. At midnight one of the Boston Herald editors called up and said, "What time did Mrs. Eddy die tonight?" The members of the household expressed some amazement at that, and the editor told them that rumors were around everywhere "that she has died." One of her secretaries noted in his diary that immediately after they got that news, the difficulty cleared up considerably, and she was perfectly all right by the morning. But the first thing in the morning she then sent the letter to the Directors saying that the time had come when they should start the newspaper, and that it was to be called The Christian Science Monitor. The illness, to her, was the effect of things coming to a head, you might say, when she felt it was almost a life-and-death struggle to get this newspaper started.

A week later she had another bad night, and the next morning she again sent a letter, or rather had her secretary send it, this time to the editor of *The Christian Science Journal* and *Christian Science Sentien*. The secretary informed the editor said that Mrs. Eddy wanted an article written for the periodicals that would state what her spiritual leadership had meant through the years – how it had conquered one difficulty after another, how her vision and leadership had opened the way for one important step to be taken after another. Of course the reason for this article, he said, was to break down the opposition which will come forth when she announces the starting of the newspaper. She said that there was opposition when she started the weekly *Sentinel* and there will be far more this time.

In the meantime, the Directors had gotten in touch with her and told her they were staggered with all their responsibilities and unsure how they were going to get the thing started with all the other things they had to do. They asked if it wouldn't be better to have the Trustees get the newspaper going. So she wrote them that famous letter to the Trustees on the immediate starting of *The Christian Science Monitor*. The whole initiative was something, obviously, to which she gave a vast amount of thought and which to her was an extraordinarily important part of what she was doing.

You all know the story about when the first issue of the *Monitor* came after only four months of preparation. It was an amazing achievement to have put the whole thing together in that time. You remember how Mrs. Eddy looked out and said, "This is the brightest moment. This is the day our *Monitor* goes forth to lighten the world." Then there's the other statement that has been questioned but which has also been at least verbally supported by several people who were in the household. According to these reports, she said at one point that starting the *Monitor* was the most important single step she had taken since writing *Science and Health*.

The more I looked into and considered this, the more it seems to me very probable that she did make that statement. You see, the building of the church itself, the forming of the church organization, the writing of the *Manual*, was not a single step, it was a series of steps. Whereas here was a single, decisive step. If she had passed on 1908, her followers would have said, Well her work was complete. The church was in its present form, the *Manual* in essentially its present form her work was completed and that was that. But it wouldn't have been complete. Because that vital link represented in the *Monitor* would have been missing. A link which meant an outreaching to the world in all its heterogeneousness, all its secular variety and challenge. The enormity of the world and what it constituted was there, and it demanded something, demanded direct confrontation in a way.

Now it has always struck me as very remarkable that only one month after the *Monitor* appeared, one of her students wrote an article in the *Sentinel* which caught the spiritual significance of the newspaper just about as well as it has ever been expressed. In fact, the author must have written the article even earlier than that; it appeared four weeks after the start of the *Monitor*, so she must have done it after a couple of weeks before.

The author was Mrs. Helen Andrews Nixon, whom I knew a little – she countersigned my

application for membership in the church. Her husband had been Mrs. Eddy's publisher for a time and then turned venomously against Mrs. Eddy, although he came back at the end. Mrs. Nixon, at any rate, saw very clearly what the church was all about, what Mrs. Eddy was all about, and what Christian Science was all about. She wrote this in the *Sentinel*. I'll only read one paragraph of it.

“Our Leader's request that every Christian Scientist subscribe for and read our daily newspaper is a call to a higher privileged and the significance of this request is gradually assuming more and more definite proportions. The first conspicuous effect of this wonderful gift to ourselves and to the world has been to lift one's eyes to a horizon far beyond one's own doorstep. The call to help in the world's thinking is no longer something that can pass unheeded, it is an imperative duty. Things we did not like to look at nor think of, problems we did not feel able to cope with, must now be faced manfully and correct thinking concerning the world's doings cultivated and maintained.”

I think that's as clear a statement as has ever been made about what the starting of the *Monitor* meant as far as the Christian Science movement was concerned. And so far I've been talking purely about the movement.

Think how easy it would have been for some very good Christian Scientists, some busy practitioners for instance, to say, “Well, I have a great stream of patients coming in, I'm healing all the time, I'm giving my whole attention to that essential work, and I just can't be troubled with what's going on in the world at large.”

But from the moment Mrs. Eddy started the *Monitor*, whether every Christian Scientist did subscribe for and read it or not, it stood as a challenge to that sort of thinking. Its very existence says to them, in effect. No, this is your job, this is your world. Don't think you can stand in metaphysical isolation from it. You are involved in its rescue, each one of you. These are topics that touch you not just in little personal ways; they are topics that demand your deepest concern, your clearest thinking.

Now that in itself is a tremendous thing, and perhaps Mrs. Eddy saw that as the basic purpose of the *Monitor*— the educational aspect, you might say, the educating of Christian Scientists'

thinking out to the world where they could bring their understanding of the healing power of Principle to bear on problems of the world.

She also, obviously, from the beginning hoped not only that all Christian Scientists would subscribe for and read it, but also as many others as possible. She was thinking of it not being a denominational newspaper in any way, manner or form. She meant it to be a newspaper for the world.

She didn't want it to be written in denominational language, didn't want little bits of Christian Science to be slipped in all over the place! She made provision for one clearly religious article a day. And then of course she expected that Christian Science would so lift the thinking of those who were working on the paper that they would be able to bring to whatever they did for it a clearer insight, a better sense of balance, a truer sense of values, a deeper understanding of underlying causes, a more acute perception of what was at work in human consciousness. But it was not that the *Monitor* was to point the way in which Christian Scientists should pray with these things; if anything was to do that explicitly, it was surely the other church periodicals.

The paper was to bring to Christian Scientists, or to any person who was interested, a balanced and percipient view of what was going on in the world. By the mere fact of keeping its balance, keeping its cool, it would be able to focus on possible solutions more than those publications that were playing up the sensations of the moment, the enormous, instant, daily reaction to events. Reaction was never a good word, so far as Mrs. Eddy was concerned; she always uses it in a negative sense, because she was always thinking of divine Mind as active intelligence, acting not reacting. Therefore she hoped to see a greater degree of enlightened intelligence brought to bear in presenting the world's problems, achievements, and possibilities – and its dangers and horrors, if you will, in the sort of way that would make for the maximum of intelligent thought and a minimum of merely sensational reaction.

All right. With both Christian Scientists and the world in her thought, she evidently didn't expect the *Monitor* to be tailored to the middle class prejudices of the people who probably constituted the largest number of its readers. One of the first things she did was to bring Frederick Dixon over from London, two days after the *Monitor* was started, to be in charge of the editorial page. Now, Frederick Dixon was a brilliant newspaperman, also a man of very broad culture. As the church's Committee on Publication for London, he had written

distinguished and quite delightful replies to criticisms of Christian Science in print. Some of these replies had been published in the *Christian Science Sentinel* and *Journal* with Mrs. Eddy's comment that this was how she wanted to see the job done.

So she knew who and what she was bringing over for that important editorial position. She was bringing a man with considerable intellectual capacity and very broad culture, and that was what she wanted. She wanted that sort of thinking there. As a matter of fact, somebody who knew him well told me that when Dixon first arrived, Mrs. Eddy set him to work writing book reviews for a while. And presumably the reason her doing that was that she wanted to see how as an intelligent and perceptive Christian Scientist he would write about books dealing with the currents of thought of the day, and what sort of insight he would bring to his evaluations. Again, not giving what you might call a denominational review, but simply bringing to bear some further degree of insight than would have been possible without his background of spiritual understanding and practice.

Now, his appointment didn't work out too well at the start. Early on, Mrs. Eddy wrote a little letter to Archibald McLellan, who was not only Chairman of the Board of Directors but also editor-in-chief of all the periodicals, including the *Monitor*; and in speaking about Frederick Dixon, whom she described as "our star in England," she remarked that he would make a splendid editor, but "we do not want to change our present chief Editor." Apparently Dixon must have turned out to be too bright a star for the *Monitor* staff at that time, for within six months Mrs. Eddy returned him to London, telling him that his present opportunities for good were better there than in Boston. So he went back, became Committee on Publication again, built up a superlative *Monitor* staff in London, and as you know returned in a few years to be the *Monitor's* editor-in-chief.

I tell you that story for one reason. Mrs. Eddy had her eye on excellence. We sometimes hear it said that all she wanted was gentle folksiness. Well, she didn't. She wanted the *Monitor* to be a distinguished newspaper as well as a newspaper that would speak to people of all sorts – including, of course, those with simple education and interests. When I first came here more decades ago than I care to think of at this time, it seemed to me that one was always hearing people at Wednesday evening meetings say with immense gratitude that although they had never been to college, the *Monitor* had been their college education. The educational value of the *Monitor* was one of its chief assets in those days. We don't seem to hear such remarks from

Christian Scientists nowadays, but again they point to one of the things Mrs. Eddy had in mind when she started it.

That's all in the way of general background. I'm sure that you have particular questions that you want to ask.

Q: How can we reach that goal for the *Monitor* that she had an idea of. Do you have an answer to that?

A: No, I think that's one for the editors here to answer rather than for me. I think it helps tremendously to get the greatest clarity of vision possible from Mrs. Eddy's own vision of the thing. Now it was enormously big. Sometimes it has been said, "Oh, she didn't expect it to be a big paper." That she expected it to be 8 pages and be a lot cheaper, and that sort of thing. Yes, she did at the beginning, but she was delighted when she found that those working on the paper wanted it bigger. She had that sort of vision, and I think she felt that if all Christian Scientists caught and supported it, then one wouldn't have to worry about what the rest of the world might at first think of the newspaper. That this vision would give it the basic impetus, the core of support that it needed.

Perhaps one thing we need is to get more widespread support for the paper among people from whom we should expect the greatest support. A friend of mine said to me once, "You know, so many Christian Scientists just don't see how the *Monitor* fits into the whole thing." He said, "Take my father, who was a real estate broker, who was an ardent church member. He'd been a Reader, he'd served in all sorts of positions in the branch church, and almost became a Christian Science practitioner. He was a devoted Christian Scientist and he subscribed to the *Monitor*, but as far as he was concerned it was just a newspaper." It didn't seem to have anything to do with what he was thinking about when he thought of the church, but was just something you took because you were obedient. He wasn't particularly interested in reading it, he had his own local paper that he liked better. My friend said to me, "I think that there are a lot of people like that, and they need to see this as an integral part of her vision for the world." I don't where to start except with oneself on that. I think each church member has to start with himself.

Q: Bob, did Mrs. Eddy give any indication of what kind of advertising she wanted in the

Monitor herself?

A: Not that I know of. She was pleased and happy that there was such a good flow of advertising in the beginning. I may have to say “not that I know of” to questions on a lot of these points, because there were a lot of things that she never put down in writings. She probably spoke to the editors or other managers on some of these matters at different times, but she hasn’t said a great deal in writing about specifically what she wanted.

Q: Does she give any indication of how involved she was in the operation?

A: No, beyond the fact that a marked copy of the editorial page was taken to her each day so that she could read the editorials. I don’t know how detailed her interest was. William P. McKenzie, who was a Trustee of the Publishing Society when the newspaper was started, paid her a visit in 1910. You can find a description of the visit in *Historical Sketches* by Clifford P. Smith. Mr. McKenzie hadn’t seen Mrs. Eddy for two or three years, and he had a very quiet talk with her. He mentioned to her that during these last few years with the *Monitor* there have been many times when they had asked her for specific direction and she had not given it. And so, he continued, “we’ve had to turn to Mind for the answer.” He said a rare and beautiful smile came to her face at that point and she said, “That’s exactly what I wanted you to do.” During those years she was trying to put more and more responsibility in the hands of those who actually were doing the work, so I don’t think she got too deeply involved. On the other hand, Frederick Dixon, in the opus he wrote after her passing, said that he and the staff were constantly receiving clear and incisive direction from her, so they must have been verbal directions because they don’t exist in writing.

Q: Was it Mrs. Eddy or someone after her who used the term “missionary” in reference to the *Monitor*?

A: I think it was Alfred Farlow, the church’s first Committee on Publication. He wrote her a letter after the paper had been going for about a year, and he said really the *Monitor* was turning out to be our best missionary. He said it’s much better than many Christian Scientists, because it doesn’t say the silly things that so many of them do!

Q: What was her attitude on the financial operations of the paper and their relation to the

finances of the church as a whole?

A. Apart from the *Manual* statement that the Publishing Society will turn over its profits to the church, I know of nothing she put in writing on that subject. She did delay the starting of the *Monitor* until the Publishing House had been paid for, so there is evidence, you might say, of her Yankee caution. On the other hand, she could be bold beyond words once she was absolutely sure a step was right; she would move forward even if there wasn't a cent in view with the absolute assurance that the need would be met. That was the way she started building this Original Edifice – with nothing like the money that was necessary. She wrote, you remember, at that time to 40 of her students and asked each of them for a contribution of \$1,000. They were people in modest circumstances and of course one thousand dollars in 1895 was the equivalent of \$10,000 or more today. Yet almost every one of them made the demonstration and got the funds to her. So she was convinced that when something was God-directed or “scientifically” right, the means could and would come forth.

Her attitude on the financial operation of the *Monitor* is really evident only in terms of her references to the Publishing Society. She saw it as a complete operation. And of course, as we know and as she presumably knew, many business concerns, many corporations carry some activities which make a great deal of money and others which don't, but which for prestige reasons or personal reasons of cultural or societal benefit are carried on and are paid for out of the profits the business makes. We just have the sort of guidance she gives in the books on a matter like that.

Q. I heard that in one of the earlier issues the editors had run a two-column portrait of someone in the *Monitor* and she sent a letter off to the editor objecting to that.

A. I don't think I've ever run across that. It's possible. Again one has to remember that styles change. Typographically the *Monitor* was so much more conservative in those days. Solid pages of print with very few pictures would normally be unacceptable today. I think in matters of taste of that sort she would not intend to impose her taste as a permanent ruling of the paper.

Q. In 1908 there was a tremendous need for this paper throughout the world. Today there are many good newspapers. Except for the religious article in the *Monitor*, which points would

you say make the *Monitor* outstanding and different from other newspapers, and is there still that same need?

A. Yes, I think there is and always will be. In the early days, apart from Mrs. Nixon's article already quoted, most references to the *Monitor* by Christian Scientists were about its wholesomeness and freedom from sensationalism. This still remains one of its virtues, though newspapers as a whole have improved in that respect. Over the years there has been an increasing emphasis on journalistic excellence – the *Monitor's* reading of events, long-range perceptiveness, realistic balance, etc. I'm quite sure that this is in accord with Mrs. Eddy's thinking, because she was very realistic. But there are a lot of newspapers that are realistic today, and there are lots that bring clear thinking and a balanced point of view.

So what can the *Monitor* bring us? Well, I can't answer for her, except to point out that everything she has written shows that she didn't see intangibles as being simply vague and unimportant. To her, if the people bringing out the *Monitor* were thinking in terms of healing the world – not saying things that sound all preachy and platitudinous to other people, but if they were thinking in terms of seeking healing, the "healing of the nations," that somehow that would be reflected, that spirit would convey itself. And I really do think that if the *Monitor* has accomplished anything over the years, it has been the fact that many quite perceptive non-Scientist readers have themselves felt something that they couldn't quite express about the spirit the *Monitor* conveyed. I'd hate to see that ever lost.

Q: Do you know when the words "an international daily newspaper" came to be?

A. No, it was some time after Mrs. Eddy's passing early in the 1910's, I think. I believe Canham tells about that in his book. Certainly from the beginning, great stress was paid to the fact that it was not a local newspaper, and not only merely not local, but I'm quite sure in her own thinking, not "national." Because she did have an extremely universal thought in her last years, the universality came out again and again. I think those who were very close to her at that time when that was put on were quite certain in their own minds that it was fully in accord with her concept of the paper.

Q. How do you think Mrs. Eddy would have handled the conflict which probably comes up more and more today in events springing to the fore in the world, types of human behavior

which are very repugnant to maybe most of the readers and to Christian Scientists' own moral codes? The coverage of those events versus the feeling the editor may have that the readership doesn't want to hear about these things?

A. All I can say is that she did speak, not in connection with the *Monitor*, but in connection with practically everything that she wrote, about not going to extremes, one way or the other. She spoke of the fact that while Christian Scientists took a strong, you might say extreme metaphysical position, that this manifested itself often in balanced human positions – not always, but she would say, ordinarily. I would say that she would have looked for a balance between the sort of realism that would take account of the world's thinking and where it is today, and the sort of restraint that is not swept away by the extreme passion that we've got to be right in there with it, just immerse ourselves in it. She would want the paper again to have a healing purpose, and part of the healing would be the reporting of the condition and part of the healing would be perhaps bringing some solutions to some of those very things.

Q. Have you been struck by any of her views of issues of her day that may be related to similar issues today?

A. That's a good one, worthy of an editorial writer! There are so many little hints lying around here and there. Actually, I've never gone through, for instance, all the markings that she made in magazines and so forth, and tried to find out from the comments she made in the margins exactly where she stood on various issues of the day. I haven't had time to do that, I'd like to do it sometime. All I can say is that they show the catholicity of her interests, the catholicity of her taste. Whenever she found things that seemed to her sharp perceptions, she would mark them, but I don't think that they offer much in the way of guidance. I don't think she intended them to. She was very careful when she made pronouncements on public affairs to make clear that they weren't issued as papal bulls. She didn't expect the *Monitor's* editorial position to be binding on all Christian Scientists, God forbid. She expected it to represent the best thinking that the *Monitor* people could bring to bear on the situation and therefore to be worthy of very careful thought and attention even if one disagrees. In the same way, when she spoke about foreseeing different things, she expected that to be listened to and taken very seriously. To some she sounded like William Jennings Bryan, to some like Roosevelt and to others she sounded like someone else whom they happened to agree with. When someone asked what her politics were, she said, "I have no politics except to help support a righteous

government.” It was as though she deliberately withheld her own expression of views as much as possible on those things.

Q: [Question not audible.]

A: I’m absolutely sure of it. What she did with having Dixon write book reviews, for instance, was an illustration, in fact. She expected Christian Scientists to be distinguished thinkers, not common thinkers, and she expected them to have insights a little out of the common. She was expecting Christian Scientists to do that unexpected thing, to bring that sort of fresh insight or illumination that Christian Science naturally should bring to all these things, including, certainly, the features.

Q: What do you know about the “little Monitor” movement at that early period – the notion some espoused that the *Monitor* exists mainly for Christian Scientists only, rather than for the whole world. ? What was its basis? Is there anything in Mrs. Eddy’s writings?

A: Well, I know one or two names associated with it. When I’ve heard this view expressed, it was always on the basis of her being surprised, when she saw the first dummy of the Monitor, to realize that it was going to be such a big paper, she expected it was going to be smaller, a few pages. I think that is the sole basis, as far as I know of it. But the fact is that far from saying “Oh I think you’re making it too elaborate,” she invited them to go ahead and do it. She was right with it, put up no opposition, and everything else in her letters and in her conversations of that kind, everything that I’ve seen, seems to support a larger view of things.