

# Mrs. Eddy as a Spiritual Thinker

Robert Peel

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We're all familiar with a sentence on the very first page of *Science and Health*: "The time for thinkers has come." Mrs. Eddy obviously didn't mean to confine the word "thinkers" to intellectuals, though intellectual liveliness is certainly one of the elements of good thinking. So what did she mean by thinkers?

For an answer, let's take a quick look at her own life.

In our mind's eye perhaps we see her as she was in the famous balcony picture taken at the end of the last century – a little old lady with white hair arid a little Victorian bonnet and a funny little ermine cape – a sweet, gentle, motherly person. But nothing there suggests that one is looking at one of the boldest thinkers of all history, what one might call a spiritual and intellectual revolutionary. How are we to account for the fact that this woman, who had started life as a little farm girl with a pretty informal education, was in the first decade of the twentieth-century asking her thousands of followers to give deep thought in their church services every six months to the question, "Is the Universe, Including Man, Evolved by Atomic Force?" And this was some years before the emergence of relativity theory, quantum physics and microbiology.

Well, from her earliest years she had shown a lively interest in ideas as well as in the world around her. In fact, as a very small girl she puzzled so much over human life that she burst out to one of her Cousins: "Oh, I wish I could cut my thinker off." But she continued to think and

question and challenge through all the vicissitudes of her girlhood and young womanhood. For instance, by the time she was in her mid-twenties – a young widow with a small child of her own – she had lost several of the best-loved members of her family by death and had skirted pretty close to death herself through one illness after another. But she couldn't stop thinking about what that *meant*, and consequently you find her at the age of twenty-five raising some pretty basic questions in a magazine article she wrote on the immortality of the soul. It starts off:

Who does not sometimes conjecture what will be his condition and employment in eternity? Will the mind be continually augmenting its stock of knowledge, and advancing toward complete perfection? It cannot be otherwise. We shall there apprehend fully the relations and dependencies incomprehensible to understandings encircled by clay.

“Understanding encircled by clay!” She’s already beginning to resist the concept of mind in matter. Then she goes on to consider the possibilities that will open up as thought moves closer to perfection. Let me read you a bit of what follows.

The result of all experiments will then be satisfactory, since they will accord with the deductions of enlarged and enlightened reason. Most authors have but dimly shadowed forth their own imaginings, and much of what they intended is involved in obscurity...The imperfection of language will be no hindrance to the acquisition of ideas, as it will no longer be necessary as a medium of thought and communication. Intelligence, refined, etherealized, will converse directly with material objects, if, indeed, matter be existent.

Now Emerson just a few years before that had written that “Intellectual science has been observed to beget invariably a doubt of the existence of matter” – and he quoted a French philosopher to the effect that anyone who had never questioned the existence of matter could be sure he had no aptitude for metaphysical inquiry. But I can assure you that very few young women tucked away in New England villages were raising that sort of question.

Furthermore, for Mrs. Eddy this was no mere intellectual inquiry. At the heart of all her thinking and living and feeling was the Bible, with its profound confrontations of the great questions of God and man, life and death, good and evil. In this connection, it's important to

remember the depth of her feeling, for one can't be the deepest sort of thinker without feeling deeply the needs of the poor, struggling human race. So it's not surprising to find her at that early period writing occasional poems and articles full of compassion and indignation about such things as the tragic failure of the great 1848 revolutions against tyranny in continental Europe and the harsh social injustice involved in the terrible potato famine in Ireland.

Here we get a faint foreglimpse of the deep-lying impetus that 60 years later caused her to launch *The Christian Science Monitor* as a newspaper for the world.

And that brings us smack-bang up to the sort of world we face today and Mrs. Eddy's role in it as scientific thinker and doer.

Let's take a look at a passage she wrote many decades ago in *Science and Health*.

Before error is wholly destroyed, there will be interruptions of the general material routine. Earth will become dreary and desolate, but summer and winter, seedtime and harvest (though in changed forms), will continue unto the end, – until the final spiritualization of all things. "The darkest hour precedes the dawn."

This material world is even now becoming the arena for conflicting forces. On one side there will be discord and dismay; on the other side there will be Science and peace. The breaking up of material beliefs may seem to be famine and pestilence, want and woe, sin, sickness, and death, which assume new phases until their nothingness appears. These disturbances will continue until the end of error, when all discord will be swallowed up in spiritual Truth.

Those are not the words of a sweet old lady with a Victorian bonnet. They're the words of a visionary and a prophet, a realistic thinker and an inspired Christian leader for today. (I might add that she was a great Leader because she was a humble disciple of the greatest spiritual revolutionary of all time – Jesus the Christ – who lived the Science that she taught.)

In the passage I've just read she's talking about a recognizable world of tremendous change and upheaval. But when she speaks of a lethal struggle between a good side and a bad side,

she's obviously pointing to something far more fundamental than two giant competitive political, socioeconomic, military systems. It's the underlying battle between materialism and spirituality in every part of the earth and every phase of experience – a battle to be fought, in the last analysis, within each one of us.

This astonishing thinker, Mary Baker Eddy, foresaw the fantastic progress that would enable men to look out from the stars instead of up to them. But she also foresaw – and these are her own words – that “Marvels, calamities, and sin will much more abound as truth urges upon mortals its resisted claims; but the awful daring of sin destroys sin, and foreshadows the triumph of Truth.” And what a reassuring vision that is! It tells us that it's truth that has the initiative, truth that's stirring up the belief of life in matter to its own ultimate and total self-destruction.

We hear a great deal today about the possibility of a nuclear disaster that could destroy civilization or conceivably wipe every vestige of life of any sort from our planet. But this threat is only an acute or pocket version of the eventual death of the whole solar system, as current cosmology presents it. And in turn that solar catastrophe is thought to be only one small event in a universe that is destined by the inexorable action of the Second Law of Thermodynamics through further billions of years to final and total self-destruction.

And to this theory of total extinction, Mrs. Eddy has offered a total challenge. She too saw that matter would finally vanish into its native nothingness, but she saw that would happen through the recognition and demonstration of the allness of God, the allness of infinite Spirit, the total goodness of divine Mind's indestructible spiritual universe, the universe as it really is.

What a startling view to extend to a human race dazzled but terrified by its own technological skills. But there's something else to remember. The Discoverer of Christian Science was a woman, and women are apt to have a very practical turn of mind – a practicality motivated by love. So this inspired spiritual leader didn't advance Christian Science as a beautiful, awe-inspiring theory (as a male philosopher might have done) but as a way of life, as practical Christianity, as a healing and regenerating power, demonstrable by each one of us within our own immediate experience.

And that's a very important point to grasp. Just think of the fantastic power that the human mind claims to have tapped in the microscopic nucleus of the atom. So, in what may sometimes seem no more than a microscopic understanding of divine Science – or in Jesus' words, a grain of mustard seed – lies a mighty potential. This is the potential of experiencing and expressing in increasing measure a Love that not only transforms our own lives but reaches out to heal the world.

Don't forget that, in that picture of the little lady on the balcony, she has her arms stretched out as though to embrace the world.