

HOW TO UNDERSTAND SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Miscellaneous Writings ~ Mary Baker Eddy

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My Dear Friend H.: — Your good letter of the 26th ult. came duly to hand several days ago, and I am not greatly surprised at its contents. You say, in substance, that you procured the book, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," which I recommended, and that to your surprise and disgust you found it to be a work on faith-cure, and ask by what process of reasoning I could possibly bring myself to adopt or accept such visionary theories. In answer to your very natural question, I will try, in my own way, to give you what appears to me to be a reason for the hope that is in me.

My religious views of fifteen years ago are too familiar to you to need any exposition at my hands at this time. Suffice it to say that the religion of the Bible, as taught by the churches, to my mind appeared to be self-contradictory and confusing, and their explanations failed to explain. During the next eleven years my convictions underwent little change. I read everything that came in my way that had any bearing upon, or pretended in any degree to explain, the problem of life; and while I gained some knowledge of a general nature, I was no nearer the solution of life's problem than when I began my investigations years ago, and I had given up all hope of ever being able to come to a knowledge of the truth, or a satisfactory explanation of the enigma of life.

In all my intellectual wanderings I had never lost my belief in a great First Cause, which I was as well satisfied to call God as anything else; but the orthodox explanations of His or its nature and power were to my mind such a mixture of truth and error, that I could not tell where fact left off and fancy began. The whole effort of the pulpit being put forth, seemed directed to the impossible task of harmonizing the teachings of Jesus Christ with the wisdom of the world; and the whole tendency of our religious education was to befog the intellect and produce scepticism in a mind that presumed to think for itself and to inquire into the why and the wherefore. I fully believe that the agnosticism of yourself and myself was produced by the futile attempt to mix and harmonize the wisdom of the world with the philosophy of the Christ.

In my investigations into the researches of the savants and philosophers I found neither any satisfactory explanation of things as they seemed to exist, nor any solution of the great and all-absorbing question, "What is Truth?" Their premises appeared to be sound, and their reasonings faultless; but in the nature of things, no final conclusion of the whole matter could be reached from premises based wholly on material knowledge. They could explain "matter" and its properties to their own satisfaction, but the intelligence that lay behind or beyond it, and which was manifested in and through it, was to them as much of a mystery as it was to the humblest of God's creatures. They could prove pretty conclusively that many of the generally accepted theories had no basis in fact; but they left us as much in the dark regarding Life and its governing Principle as had the divines before them.

About four years ago, while still in the mental condition above indicated, my attention was called to what at that time appeared to me to be a new phase of spiritism, and which was called by those who professed to believe in it, Christian Science. I thought that I had given some attention to about all the isms that ever existed, and that this was only another phantasm of some religionist lost in the labyrinths of mental hallucination.

In my reflections at that time it seemed to me that life was an incomprehensible enigma; that the creator had placed us on this earth, and left us entirely in the dark as to His purpose in so doing. We seemed to be cast upon the ocean of time, and left to drift aimlessly about, with no exact knowledge of what was required of us or how to attain unto the truth, which must certainly have an existence somewhere. It seemed to me that in the very nature of things there must be a great error somewhere in our understanding, or that the creator Himself had slipped a cog when He fitted all things into their proper spheres. That there had been a grand mistake somewhere I had no doubt; but I still had doubt enough of my own capabilities and understanding to believe that the mistake, whatever it was, was in me and not in the creator. I knew that, in a fair measure at least, I had an honest desire to live aright, as it was given me to see the right, and to strive to some extent to do the will of God, if I could only know certainly just what it was.

While in this frame of mind, I inwardly appealed to the great unseen power to

enlighten my understanding, and to lead me into a knowledge of the truth, promising mentally to follow wherever it might lead, if I could only do so understandingly.

My wife had been investigating Christian Science to some extent, but knowing my natural antipathy to such vagaries, as I then thought them, had said very little to me about it; but one day, while discussing the mysteries of life with a judge of one of our courts, he asked me whether I had ever looked into the teachings of the Christian Scientists. I told him that I had not, and he urged me very strongly to do so. He claimed to have investigated their teachings, and said that he had become a thorough believer in them. This aroused my curiosity, and I procured the book called "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," and read it. Before reading very far in it, I became pretty thoroughly nauseated with what I thought the chimerical ideas of the author, but kept on reading, — more because I had promised to read the book than because of interest in its teachings; but before I had gotten through with it, I did become interested in the Principle that I thought I discovered the author was striving to elucidate; and when I got through it, I began again and reread it very carefully. When I had finished reading this book the second time, I had become thoroughly convinced that her explanation of the religion taught by Jesus Christ, and what he did teach, afforded the only explanation which, to my mind, came anywhere near harmonizing and making cohesive what had always seemed contradictory and inexplicable in the Bible. I became satisfied that I had found the truth for which I had long been seeking, and I arose from the reading of the book a changed man; doubt and uncertainty had fled, and my mind has never been troubled with a serious doubt upon the subject from that day to this.

I do not pretend to have acquired the power it is claimed we may attain to; but I am satisfied that the fault is in me, and not in the Principle. I think I can almost hear you ask, What! do you believe in miracles? I answer unhesitatingly, Yes; I believe in the manifestations of the power of Mind which the world calls miraculous; but which those who claim to understand the Principle through which the works are done, seem to think not unnatural, but only the logical result of the application of a known Principle.

It always did seem to me that Truth should be self-evident, or at least susceptible of unmistakable proof, — which all religions seemed to lack, at least in so far as I had known them. I now remember that Jesus furnished

unmistakable proofs of the truth of his teachings, by his manifestations of the power of Mind, or, as some might call it, Spirit; which power he plainly taught would be acquired by those who believed in the Principle which he taught, and which manifestations would follow as signs that an understanding of his philosophy had been reached. It does seem to me, that where the signs do not follow professing Christians which Christ said should follow them, there must be something wrong, either in his teachings or their understanding of them; and to say the least, the foundations of their faith require a careful re-examination, with a view to harmonizing them with the plain teachings of the Christ in whose footsteps they profess to follow.

I never could understand how God could be ever-present as a personal Being, but I think I can and do understand how divine Principle can pervade every thing and place.

I never could understand how heaven could be a place with gorgeous fittings, but I think I can and do understand how it might be a spiritual (or if you please mental) condition. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

"Knowledge (or understanding) is power." Since adopting the views of life as set forth in "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," I have seen proofs of what can be accomplished through a knowledge of the truth, which to my mind amount to demonstrations, and which no longer seem incredible, but which I do not ask another to accept upon my statements. Every one must see or feel for himself in order to be convinced; but I am satisfied that any who will lay aside their preconceived notions, and deal honestly with themselves and the light they have, will come to a knowledge of the truth as illustrated in the teachings and life of Jesus Christ; that is, that Mind, or Soul, or whatever you may be pleased to call it, is the real Ego, or self, and that mortal mind with its body is the unreal and vanishing, and eventually goes back to its native nothingness.

Truth is, and ever has been, simple; and because of its utter simplicity, we in our pride and selfishness have been looking right over it. We have been keeping our eyes turned toward the sky, scanning the heavens with a far-off gaze in search of light, expecting to see the truth blaze forth like some great comet, or in some

extraordinary manner; and when, instead of coming in great pomp and splendor, it appears in the simpleness of demonstration, we are staggered at it, and refuse to accept it; our intellectual pride is shocked, and we are sure that there has been some mistake. Human nature is ever the same. The Jews were looking for something transcendently wonderful, and the absence of it made the Christ, Truth, to them a stumbling-block. It was foolishness to the Greeks, who excelled in the worldly wisdom of that day; but in all ages of the world it has ever been the power of God to them that believe, not blindly, but because of an enlightened understanding.

I always did think that there was something beautiful in the philosophy of life as taught by Jesus Christ, but that it was impracticable and not susceptible of application to the affairs of life in a world constituted as this appeared to be. As I now view it, that belief was the result of ignorance of the real power that "moves the universe," — too much faith in matter or effect, and not enough in Mind or cause, which is God.

To one who can accept the truth that all causation is in Mind, and who therefore begins to look away from matter and into Mind, or Spirit, for all that is real and eternal, and for all that produces anything that is lasting, the doubts and petty annoyances of life become dissolved in the light of a better understanding, which has been refined in the crucible of charity and love; and they fade away into the nothingness from whence they came, never having had any existence in fact, being only the inventions of erring human belief.

Read the teachings of the Christ from a Christian Science standpoint, and they no longer appear vague and mystical, but become luminous and powerful, — and, let me say, intelligible.

It is true, as you intimate, that this theory of life is much more generally accepted by women than by men, and it may be true that as a rule their reasoning is much less rigid in its nature than that of the sterner sex, and that they may be liable to scan their premises less keenly; but may it not also be true, that they are of finer texture and more spiritual in their natures, and that they may be just as likely to arrive at the truth through their intuitions, in connection with their logic, as we are through the more rugged courses? If it be true that man is the more logical, the fallibility of our own reasonings very frequently becomes painfully apparent

even to ourselves, and they are therefore not the safest gauge by which to judge others.

I believe, myself, that when it comes to standing up for Truth in the face of the world, and possibly at the sacrifice of position and popularity, women possess the necessary courage in a much greater degree than do men.

I had not intended to weary you with such a long letter, but after getting into the subject, I hardly knew where to stop. As an old and loved friend, I have given you a glimpse of my inner life, because I hardly knew how to explain my mental condition to you in any other way.