

# THE MARY BAKER EDDY LIBRARY

## FOR THE BETTERMENT OF HUMANITY

### **Questions and Answers Regarding Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) and Phineas P. Quimby (1802-1866)**

For years critics have challenged the authenticity of Mary Baker Eddy's discovery of Christian Science, charging that she stole her ideas from Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, the mesmeric healer from Maine. The authority of these critics has often gone unquestioned and their evidence unchecked and repeated by successive generations. At the center of this debate are manuscripts attributed to Quimby. These manuscripts have often been presented as having come directly from Quimby without any input from others, and Quimby is credited as the originator and disseminator of his ideas, which are read as the basis of Mary Baker Eddy's system of healing. More recent scholarship complicates this simple reading of the lineage of the ideas behind Christian Science, provides a more thorough history of the Eddy-Quimby debate and a more complex reading of Eddy's ideas in comparison to those attributed to Quimby. Responding to the questions at the center of the Eddy-Quimby debate, this scholarship offers some fresh answers. This document asks some of these common questions and offers quotations from Eddy and Quimby biographers in response.

#### **1. Did Mary Baker Eddy originate Christian Science or did Phineas P. Quimby?**

“[T]he evidence that Mary Baker Eddy’s healing theology was based to any large extent on the Quimby manuscripts is not only weak but largely rigged” (Gill 146).

“[T]he meaning that she ultimately attributed to the concepts and ideas she adapted from Quimby cannot be assimilated back into the orbit of his thought” (Gottschalk, *Rolling Away the Stone* 72).

“...George Quimby, a strong champion of his father’s originality, wrote, ‘Don’t confuse his method of healing with Mrs. Eddy’s Christian Science, so far as her religious teachings go....The *religion* which she teaches certainly *is hers*, for which I cannot be too thankful; for I should be loath to go down into my grave feeling that my father was in any way connected with “Christian Science”’” (Gottschalk, *Rolling Away the Stone* 72).

“Christian Science is a religious teaching and only incidentally a healing method. Quimbyism was a healing method and only incidentally a religious teaching. If one examines the religious implications or aspects of Quimby’s thought, it is clear that in these terms it has nothing whatever in common with Christian Science” (Gottschalk, *Emergence* 130).

“[Julius] Dresser<sup>1</sup> sees the healing power [of Quimby] as a kind of clairvoyance, an ability to enter into the sick person’s mind and read his or her thoughts; Dresser makes no suggestion that

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<sup>1</sup> Julius Dresser was first a patient and then a follower of Phineas P. Quimby. In 1883 he started a public campaign alleging that Christian Science is based on Quimby’s teachings.

this type of healing involves tapping into a divine strength, as Mrs. Eddy would later claim for her Christian Science" (Gill 159).

## 2. What influence did Quimby have on Eddy? What influence did Eddy have on Quimby?

"The possibility cannot be ruled out that some of Mrs. Patterson's<sup>2</sup> writings, perhaps emended by Quimby, or some of her emended versions of his own writings may be mixed in with what are now known as the Quimby manuscripts. This is the view taken by an English historian who for the most part is highly critical of Mrs. Eddy. Largely on the basis of his study of the manuscripts, H.A.L. Fisher concluded that part of their confusion came from their representing an amalgam of 'Quimby's own processes and convictions' and 'the very opposite religious preconceptions' held by Mrs. Patterson" (Peel 182).

"There can be little question that what she [Eddy] absorbed from Quimby was a powerful stimulus to her own spiritual quest. Expanding and developing some elements of his working concepts and vocabulary, she incorporated what she had learned from him into her own framework, which took shape over the course of several years following his death in January 1866. There is no evidence, to cite several examples, that previous to her encounter with Quimby, she had come to the conclusion that there was a discoverable science of healing underlying Jesus' cures, that because of this Christianity must be linked to science, that disease was an 'error' of the human mind, that there is a fundamental polarity between 'truth' and 'error,' and that physicians and the clergy were both guilty of fastening on humanity the errors that needlessly bound them to disease" (Gottschalk, *Rolling Away the Stone* 72).

"Quotations have been published, purporting to be Dr. Quimby's own words, which were written while I was his patient in Portland and holding long conversations with him on my views of mental therapeutics. Some words in these quotations certainly read like words that I said to him, and which I, at his request, had added to his copy when I corrected it. In his conversations with me and in his scribblings, the word science was not used at all, till one day I declared to him that back of his magnetic treatment and manipulation of patients, there was a science, and it was the science of mind, which had nothing to do with matter, electricity, or physics.

"After this I noticed he used that word, as well as other terms which I employed that seemed at first new to him" (Eddy, *Miscellany* 306-307).

"There seems little doubt that the New Testament dimension of Quimby's work, his distinction between Jesus and the Christ, and his readiness to interpret the Bible and accept or reject Protestant religious orthodoxy had a special resonance for the deeply religious Mary Baker Patterson. Already in November 1862 she was focusing on the triangular relationship among patient, healer, and God as the key to cure, and this idea was not something she learned from Quimby but, if anything, something which she brought to him" (Gill 132).

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<sup>2</sup> At this point in her life, Mary Baker Eddy was married to Daniel Patterson. They were married from 1853 -1873, when she was granted a divorce on the grounds of desertion.

### 3. Are the intellectual originality and documentary authenticity in the Quimby “manuscripts” assured or assumed?

Horatio Dresser<sup>3</sup> claimed in the biographical sketch of *The Quimby Manuscripts*, “Mr. [Julius] Dresser, who understood Quimby’s ideas and methods particularly well, talked at length with her [Mary Baker Eddy], and later loaned her Vol. I of the manuscripts, printed in Chap. XIV” (Dresser 6). Yet, when Eddy wrote to Julius Dresser in 1866 seeking his healing help, his response indicates that he had no understanding of Quimby’s ideas and method of healing and that Quimby had not recorded his theories and techniques: “He [Jesus] did not succeed, nor has Dr. Q. succeeded in establishing the Science he aimed to do. The true way to establish it is, as I look at it, to lecture, & by [sic] a paper make that means, rather more than the curing, to introduce the truth. To be sure, faith without works is dead, but Dr. Q’s work killed him, whereas if he had spare himself from his curing, and given himself partly and considerably, to getting out his theory, he would then have, at least, come nearer success in his great aim than he did.”<sup>4</sup> In her analysis of this letter, Gillian Gill states, “His [Julius Dresser’s] appreciation of Quimby is markedly less fervent than Mrs. Patterson’s, and in this letter he unequivocally calls the Portland doctor a failure, a man who worked himself to death to help other people but failed to make any lasting mark on the world, largely because he did not get his theory of healing down on paper...Dresser’s letter specifies that Quimby’s failure was the result of his inability to disseminate his ideas among the greater public. Furthermore, Dresser gives no indication at all that he knew there to be a cache of Quimby manuscripts in Portland merely awaiting publication” (Gill 159).

“If one compares all the various public accounts put forward about how Quimby produced his ‘manuscripts,’ it becomes clear that the Quimbyites advanced their claims on the basis of a very particular definition of copying. As semiotician Umberto Eco likes to remind us, to call some piece of text a ‘copy’ is to imply that somewhere there exists an ‘original,’ and the defense of Quimby’s intellectual legacy based on the notion of ‘copying’ begins to founder once one confronts the fact that the Quimbyites have never been able to produce originals....Thus there is no documentary proof that Quimby ever committed to paper the vast majority of the texts ascribed to him, no proof that he produced any text that someone could, even in the loosest sense, ‘copy’...By their own testimony the so-called copyists functioned at the very least as stenographers, copy editors, ghost writers, and think-tank participants” (Gill 143-144).

“How, then, did the anonymous author of the [July 10] 1904 *New York Times* article<sup>5</sup> and the authors of the ‘Milmine’ series manage to ‘prove’ Mrs. Eddy’s plagiarism in their famous double-column comparison? The answer is that out of either bad faith or bad scholarship, they added on to the end of what they labeled the original Quimby text a paragraph from the preface which Mrs. Eddy had written to her copy of Quimby’s manuscript. She herself later incorporated this paragraph into her teaching manuscript, most notably in the copy she gave

<sup>3</sup> Horatio Dresser was the son of Julius Dresser. He continued his father’s allegations that Eddy stole her ideas from Quimby. In 1921 Horatio Dresser published *The Quimby Manuscripts*, an incomplete collection of writings attributed to Quimby, some of which were acquired through the widow of Quimby’s son George.

<sup>4</sup> See page 159 in Gillian Gill’s *Mary Baker Eddy* for the complete text of Julius Dresser’s letter.

<sup>5</sup> “True Origin of Christian Science” ran as front page news and offered a supposed comparison between works by Eddy and Quimby, a technique later copied by Georgine Milmine in the work credited to her, *The Life of Mary G. Eddy and the History of Christian Science*.

Addie Spofford, which passed to her husband Daniel, and at last to Georgine Milmine. Thus, Mrs. Eddy's own words were integrated in to the Quimby text, compared against her own manuscript, found, not surprisingly, identical, and cited as a flagrant example of plagiarism" (Gill 231-232).

#### **4. What did Mary Baker Eddy say about the connection that others made between her and Phineas P. Quimby?**

"After treating his patients, Mr. Quimby would retire to an anteroom and write at his desk. I had a curiosity to know if he indited anything pathological relative to his patients, and asked if I could see his pennings on my case. He immediately presented them. I read the copy in his presence, and returned it to him. The composition was commonplace, mostly descriptive of the general appearance, height, and complexion of the individual, and the nature of the case: it was not at all metaphysical or scientific; and from his remarks I inferred that his writings usually ran in the vein of thought presented by these. He was neither a scholar nor a metaphysician. I never heard him say that matter was not as real as Mind, or that electricity was not as potential or remedial, or allude to God as the divine Principle of all healing. He certainly had advanced views of his own, but they commingled error with truth, and were not Science" (Mary Baker Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings* 379).

"It was in Massachusetts, in February, 1866, and after the death of the magnetic doctor, Mr. P. P. Quimby, whom spiritualists would associate therewith, but who was in no wise connected with this event, that I discovered the Science of divine metaphysical healing which I afterwards named Christian Science. The discovery came to pass in this way. During twenty years prior to my discovery I had been trying to trace all physical effects to a mental cause; and in the latter part of 1866 I gained the scientific certainty that all causation was Mind, and every effect a mental phenomenon" (Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* 24).

"Agassiz, the celebrated naturalist and author, wisely said: 'Every great scientific truth goes through three stages. First, people say it conflicts with the Bible. Next, they say it has been discovered before. Lastly, they say they have always believed it.'

"The first attack upon me was: Mrs. Eddy misinterprets the Scriptures; second, she has stolen the contents of her book, 'Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures,' from one P. P. Quimby (an obscure, uneducated man), and that he is the founder of Christian Science. Failing in these attempts, the calumniator has resorted to Ralph Waldo Emerson's philosophy as the authority for Christian Science! Lastly, the defamer will declare as honestly (?), 'I have always known it'" (Eddy, *The First Church and Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany* 304-305).

#### **5. What connection did Eddy and Quimby have?**

"A newly urgent quest for Mary Patterson to find health had already begun in October of 1861 when Daniel Patterson read a circular sent round by the Portland healer Phineas Parkhurst Quimby....[I]n August 1862 she wrote to Quimby again, saying that she was weaker by the day from the water cure: when she had come to the sanitorium, she had been able to walk half a mile; now she could barely sit up for a few minutes. She wrote that she was determined to use her last

strength either to travel to Portland or to return home to die among her family and friends" (Gill 126, 127).

"From the very first session, Mrs. Patterson reacted positively to Quimby's talking cure, as she herself explained in a jubilant letter published in the Portland *Evening Courier* of November 7, 1862, barely a month after her arrival in Maine:

Three weeks' since, and I quitted my nurse and sick room en route for Portland. The belief of my recovery had died out of the hearts of those who were most anxious for it. With this mental and physical depression I first visited P.P. Quimby, and in less than one week from that time I ascended by a stairway of one hundred eighty-two steps to the dome of the City Hall, and am improving as infinitum." (Gill 131)

"During the winter months of 1863-64 Mrs. Patterson spent hours with Quimby almost every afternoon, observing his cases, talking with him, discussing the notes he jotted down on his cases. Mrs. Sarah G. Crosby, a Quimby patient who roomed in the same boarding house with her, told later how Mrs. Patterson would come home at the end of the afternoon and sit up until late at night writing....What she wrote during those long night hours has never come to light. She herself spoke later of leaving certain manuscripts with Quimby. Annetta Dresser wrote in 1895, 'Those interested would in turn write articles about his "theory" or "the Truth," as he called it, and bring them to him for criticism, but there is no record of anyone's actually doing this but Mrs. Patterson" (Peel 181).

"Eddy, it can be said, was involved in a 'creative misreading' of Quimby's beliefs for about a decade after their first encounter in 1862. These encounters, which amounted to a total of about a year of intermittent visits, began in October 1862 when Eddy appeared in his Portland, Maine, office seeking relief from her long-standing physical problems. Though she initially benefited from his ministrations, her health continued to fluctuate in the several years that followed" (Gottschalk, *Rolling Away the Stone* 69-70).

## 6. Did Quimby's teachings pass directly from Quimby to Julius to Horatio Dresser?

"[C]ontrary to the report given by historians such as Charles Braden and Gail Parker, and repeated by critics such as Martin Gardner, the healing legacy left by P.P. Quimby did not pass by male succession from Phineas Quimby to Julius Dresser and from him to Horatio....The father and son duo, for their part, preferred not to remember the years they had left Quimby's name and his papers in the care of the despised Misses [Emma and Sarah] Ware,<sup>6</sup> and not to admit that they began to exploit the legend of Quimby only after Mary Baker Eddy's new Christian Science had shown that mental healing was a paying proposition" (Gill 146).

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<sup>6</sup> Devoted to Quimby, Emma and Sarah Ware worked to make the public more aware of his healing practice and served as copyists of the manuscripts attributed to Quimby. They, like others, may have also contributed intellectually to these documents.

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