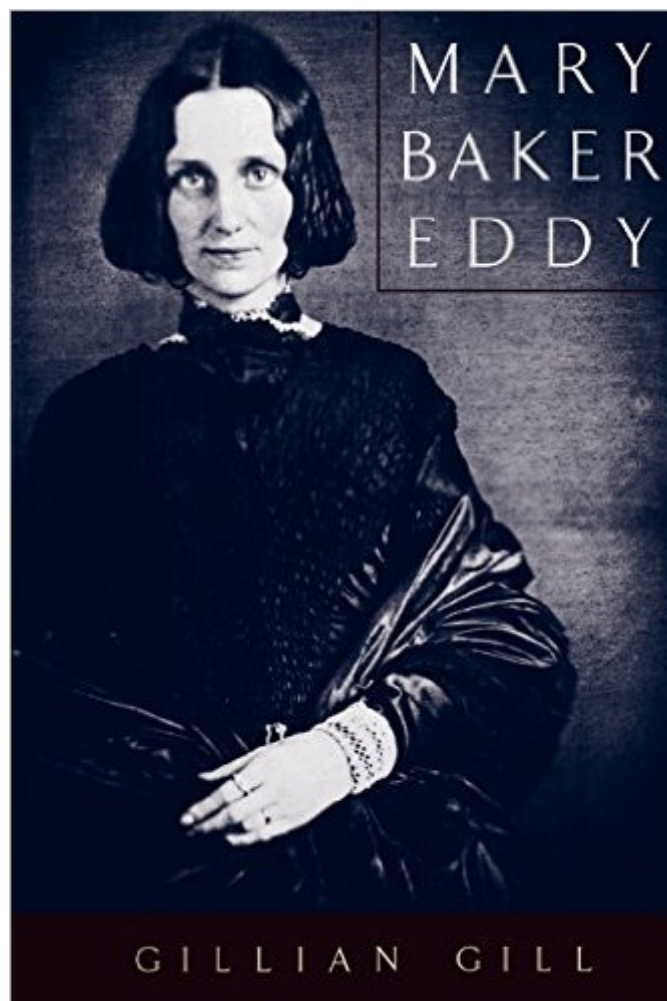


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Mary Baker Eddy (Radcliffe Biography Series)



Synopsis

In 1866, a frail, impoverished invalid, middle-aged, widowed and divorced, rose from her bed after a life-threatening fall, asked for her Bible, and took the first steps toward the founding of the Christian Science Church. Four decades later, she was revered as their leader by thousands of churches in the U.S. and Europe, had founded a national newspaper, and had become probably the most powerful woman in America. Who was this astonishing woman, the mother of the Mother Church? How did she prepare for her illustrious career during her years of obscurity, and what was her inspiration for the healing practices and doctrine of Christian Science? Gillian Gill, a non-Christian Science Scientist scholar, who managed to win unparalleled access to the Church archives, offers here an entirely new look at Mary Baker Eddy. For the first time readers will see the extraordinary leadership skills exercised by Mrs. Eddy despite the repressive forces facing women in her time. For the first time we learn the full story of the bizarre attack on Mrs. Eddy by Joseph Pulitzer and his New York World, alleging that she was at least senile and possibly not even alive. In this enthralling biography, we rediscover Mary Baker Eddy as a radical Christian thinker, pioneer in the recognition of mind/body connections, survivor of scandal, and target of both admiration and scorn from such eminent contemporaries as Mark Twain. Gillian Gill's sense of drama, her critical acumen, and her delicious wit bring to life a brilliant religious leader whose message has new meaning in our time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was so impressed by this book. In a way, it changed my life. I've read many, many biographies of Eddy, from Tomlinson to Peel to the newest one authorized by her church (Mary Baker Eddy: Christian Healer), and this was the first I could relate to directly. Others have been less than completely frank about Eddy's early life-they either idolize her or mock her. I was also fascinated to learn more details about Eddy's parents and siblings-with all their foibles and weaknesses. Gill's biography comes up to my standard of straightforward honesty, without either the apologetics of a follower or the sarcasm of a detractor. Gill weaves contextual information about life in the 1800s throughout her work, yet as a woman of the late 20th century, I found myself relating to Eddy and her struggle in so many ways. She was a single mom. She wrote romantic fiction and poetry. She lived through both widowhood and divorce. She had financial struggles, and, for a long time, no place to call home. She would get angry on occasion, yet she was also sublimely loving. She retained a girlish pleasure in clothes and fashion-she loved ice cream! Her life was not perfect, nor was she a perfect human being, yet she still rose to the heights of spiritual healer and religious leader-all in the face of intense opposition that would be difficult for anyone today, let alone a woman of her time period. Each challenge she faced was turned into an opportunity; each relationship that ended was grist for the mill of her own spiritual growth. As someone who is learning to practice spiritual healing, I found it inspiring to know that, if Eddy is any example, I don't have to be a perfect human being in order to get started.

Gill debunks the past so-called 'facts' of the inaccurate and false Milmine and others, traditions about an 'evil' Mary Baker Eddy. She includes a great Appendix to juxtapose these different biographies. She uncovers outright misogyny toward Mary Baker Eddy and the Christian Science Church's own error of a sugar coated mythologizing of Mary Baker Eddy which doubtless, she would not have approved of herself, from all her own admonitions for others to stop being preoccupied with her personality. She shows how the inaccurate information of a certain biographical tradition about Eddy, based in the beginnings of yellow journalism, served the interest of sensationalism of an early era of low class profit driven tabloid journalism - which even Willa Cather was later ashamed to admit she participated in, by evidence of her own last will and testament. Gill makes Eddy human, which in no way detracts from her revelations as a religious discoverer and healer. You do not learn so much about Eddy's own personal preoccupation with healing, however, but you do learn why she felt the need to end suffering in her own life and others. I loved the chapter on Mark Twain, whose daughter was healed in Christian Science; -- if you be sure to read all Gill's

copious footnotes, you'll find this out. Gill sees Twain with more sophistication than those who would merely lump him against Mary Baker Eddy and uncovers his great ironic admiration through his ambivalence as a 19th century male (who must have felt some competition with her.) It is a sober balance to the poor scholarship - where it serves Ms. Frasier's purposes - in her book, 'God's Perfect Child', which is a wholly different kind of book - a catharsis of the disenchanting and wounded feelings.

I agree with the person who said that this book is probably better for non-Christian Scientists. On the positive side, it MAY help to undo some of the damage done by dishonest authors and may inspire others to investigate further the life of the greatest discoverer of our age. An honest look at what Mrs. Eddy "had to meet" is necessary and parallel to one's own progress in Christian Science, because she met it all. This context is hard to grasp for "non-Scientists" of course. No one who begins to understand Christian Science could miss the idea that Mrs. Eddy's experience was not "sugar-coated." But that's just the beginning, or rather the beginning of the beginning. It wasn't human effort, and it wasn't a magic wand. Ms. Gill's biography barely begins to convey what she went through, other than the social constrictions of the era. This understanding of what she did and how she did it, has to run parallel with one's growing understanding of Christian Science, or one is not understanding it. A person more familiar with the teachings of Christian Science will want more spiritual perspective, and be mindful of what Mrs. Eddy herself says, in her own autobiography, "Retrospection and Introspection," that the mere recital of the events of a life without providing its spiritual nexus -- (I'm paraphrasing)-- is meaningless. Although I was endeavoring to respect the author's intentions of being fair, when I got to the end, it was like a big "clunk". I felt like, where was God in all of this? Where is the sense of how God was working in Mrs. Eddy's life? (If this is what they mean by "sugar-coating", then give me the sugar-coating every time.

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