

A UNIQUE SPECIAL EDITION OF THE TEXTBOOK OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PRESENTED TO THE KENT HISTORY AND LIBRARY CENTRE IN MAIDSTONE

Introduction

Recently a Subscription copy of “Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures”, the text book of Christian Science, was handed over to the Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone. The book was printed in Massachusetts, USA but the paper was sourced from local paper mills in Kent and the history of this project makes for fascinating reading.



Jillie Webb presents ‘Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures’ to Mark Ballard, Archives Service Officer at the Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone in November 2021

About the Subscription Edition of "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy

The project was masterminded by book designer, typographer and author William Dana Orcutt who not only designed the volume but the type as well. Orcutt, from a famous New England family, had a profound respect for Mrs Eddy and her movement. In his 1950 book “Mary Baker Eddy and her Books,” he wrote: “the selection of the paper called for the best pure linen, all rag, handmade paper the world could produce.....”

The story behind this Unique Edition as described by William Dana Orcutt in his book - some extracts

"...The Trustees under the Will of Mary Baker Eddy gave me the contract for the “Subscription Edition” in August 1939. Their only instructions were to use the finest materials that could be obtained, and to make it the most perfect example of book-making which lay within my power. First came the problem of the type. Hand-typesetters no longer existed, so my letters must needs be reproduced for machine typesetting. When I took the problem to the Lanston Monotype Company, they were intensely interested, but announced that it was impossible to include the alphabet within the limitations of what is called the matrix-box. This was the first problem to be solved, and it was solved. Then the paper was ordered from England. The finest hand-made paper in the world was manufactured in a small mill in Kent, which had been in continuous existence the three hundred

years; and the workmen included several instances of three generations in the same family. It was in fact, the same mill which had manufactured the paper for the Kelmscott "Chaucer". (William Morris, the 19th-century designer, social reformer and writer, founded the Kelmscott Press towards the end of his life. He wanted to revive the skills of hand printing, which mechanization had destroyed, and restore the quality achieved by the pioneers of printing in the 15th century).

The next question was the leather. This was to be a large book and there were no skins in America or Europe big enough to complete the binding without piecing; large skins could be obtained in India, and the order was placed. Everything was under way. My design for the type page was indistinct contrast with the Kelmscott "Chaucer", which was overloaded with decoration. I have already said the type was intended to be the vehicle of the thought. This called for absolute simplicity in harmony with the written message. Each line of "Science and Health" is "frozen" and there is distinct variation in the printed copy as to the number of letters in each line. This required the greatest care to balance the lines in order to avoid a variation in colour. My design of the type included variations in the letters 'a', 'e', 'h', 'm', and 'n'. This variation is not noticeable until attention is called to it, but it serves to introduce the quality of hand-written letters. The compositor had to be taught how to make use of these variations intelligently.

The quality of the ink was of paramount importance. The most beautiful results were to be secured by having a dense black and a red which should be absolutely permanent. Most red inks in printing have a tendency to fade. Here, instead of using the regular formula, I applied the rules which the old-time hand-letterers used in mixing their own pigments; and tests of this ink would seem to guarantee its permanence for at least one hundred years, and, I believe, forever.

Then came the declaration of war! The composition was proceeding well, but from England I was advised that the British government had commandeered the mill where my paper was being made to manufacture percussion caps for the Army! When, however, the British government was advised of the importance of this order for paper and the use to which it was to be put, it graciously raised the embargo and allowed the order to be filled. (The paper mill is near Charton Manor at Farningham, Kent). This release was, however, only temporary. After the paper was made, it had to be transported across an ocean infested with U-boats. It was shipped in four consignments under convoy. If any one of the four consignments were to be lost, the other three would be useless as the book could not be completed. Fortunately, after much anxiety, the fourth instalment reached New York.

The same problem applied to the skins from India. These had to be shipped to London for dyeing and to processing, and then shipped to New York, passing through the same dangers of sea transportation as the paper. There were ten consignments of the skins, with the continuing anxiety lest one at least of the consignments might be lost. But eventually everything came through. The book was completed and delivered to the subscribers. My ambition was attained. In it I put everything which half a century of study and experience had taught me. In it, to the best of my ability, I responded to Mrs Eddy's challenge. Can you wonder that a William Morris portrait, and the leaf of the Kelmscott "Chaucer," recall stirring memories as I gaze at them on my library walls?"

About 'Science and Health' and Mary Baker Eddy

"Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures has been improving the health and changing the lives of millions of readers around the world for the last 125 years. Today it remains one of the most enduring books on spirituality and healing and was chosen as one of 75 books by women whose words have changed the world. (Women's National Book Association).

This is a book for thinkers. Whether you are exploring the power of prayer, yearning for health and well-being, or seeking life's deeper meaning, this book can enrich your life. To think and live from a spiritual standpoint is to improve everything.

The last 100 pages of this book are letters from those who have experienced healing simply by reading or studying this textbook of Christian Science.

Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) continues to be one of the most influential authors on the relation of mind body and spirit. She was a remarkable lecturer, reformer, spiritual healer and religious figure whose ideas challenged mainstream beliefs about the nature of existence and the power of prayer to heal. Although she struggled in her early years with poor health, financial difficulties and family hardship her deep love of the Bible and the insights gained transformed her own life and formed the basis for the pioneering ideas in Science and Health".

In Conclusion

These subscription editions of "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science movement were printed in Norwood, Massachusetts. Copies of this special edition are held by the Royal Library at Windsor, the British Library, the British Museum and the Bodleian Library. Another copy of this edition has recently been handed over to the Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone by the librarian of Claygate and Esher Christian Science Church in Surrey, who had been keen to find a good home for this magnificent copy which had been in her church for many years to one of the archivists at the Kent History Centre. For more information about the history subscription edition of Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures can be found at the Mary Baker Eddy Library. www.marybakereddylibrary.org

To find out more about Christian Science in the Maidstone area please check their website www.csm Maidstone.co.uk where you can find out more about the faith as well as other useful links.

Elinor Hutchison
April 2022