‘Making of a Woman Minister’ Rev. Annis Ford Eastman and Elmira, New York

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‘Making of a Woman Minister’

Rev. Annis Ford Eastman and Elmira, New York

An honors thesis presented to the
Department of History,
University at Albany, State University of New York
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in History
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Abstract

This paper explores the life and career of one of the United States’ first female ministers, Rev. Annis Ford Eastman (1852-1910). Remembered today as being the author of Mark Twain’s eulogy and as the mother of American writer Max Eastman and co-author of the Equal Rights Amendment Crystal Eastman, the Reverend Eastman had a career that was exceptional in its own right. Reverend Eastman was ordained when it was practically unheard of for a woman to preach. Not only was she ordained but she was invited to speak at national conferences and was frequently published in religious and civic journals. Despite her skills as an orator, author, and theologian, her career was actualized, in part, because of her relationship with her husband, Rev. Samuel Eastman. Another contributing factor to her ordination was its location. The Eastmans moved around New York State’s Burned-Over District before settling in Elmira, just north of the Pennsylvania border. While the Burned-Over District had a rightful reputation for militant progressivism, Elmira was unique in its political situation. Mid-nineteenth-century Elmira was a hotbed for radical religious and political thought under the control of a politically progressive railroad tycoon. Annis Eastman’s career reached its peak in the 1890s, as the United States transitioned between the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era. Her position as a woman minister and the politics that she espoused given her platform are emblematic of that shift.
‘Making of a Woman Minister’: Annis Ford Eastman and Elmira, New York

On October 22, 1910, Reverend Annis “Bertha” Ford Eastman died suddenly in her home in Elmira, New York after a two-day struggle with uremic poisoning.1 Her ashes were spread on a family plot in the Woodlawn Cemetery in Canandaigua, New York after holding no funeral. If one were to visit this grave today, it would not stand out as unusual in any capacity. There is no commemorative plaque and her husband Samuel is listed on the headstone before she is. No matter what the simplicity of her headstone may suggest, Annis Ford Eastman led a revolutionary life. Her ministerial career was unique in its duration and influence, especially because she was preaching as a woman when that was still considered unorthodox. A tribute given after her death describes her as “earnest in her purpose to aid, eloquent in the utterance of the heavy truths which her fruitful intelligence germinated and gave forth like the gentle dews from Heaven. In prayer, Mrs. Eastman was a power, and in her strictly pastoral work, her people placed supreme reliance.”2 Although her gravestone and modern legacy may be quaint, Reverend Annis Ford Eastman led a life that was anything but.

Eastman’s legacy as a pastor is constituted primarily by accomplishments from her last parish in Elmira, New York’s Park Church. As the Revered Thomas K. Beecher grew older and weaker, he knew that he needed to choose a successor for his church and his choice of his successors would continue the progressive legacy of the Park Church established during the Depression. Not only would Beecher choose two people to co-pastor after his death but one of those people was a woman. Annis’s ordination, however, was not just the result of her skills as

1 “Mrs. Eastman Falls on Sleep after Illness of Two Days,” folder labeled “Eastman,” Park Church Archives, The Park Church, Elmira, New York.
an orator or her religious philosophies but her responsibilities to her husband, who was too sickly to sustain a career on his own. She was often viewed by those in her parish not as a minister in her own right but as a minister by proxy of her husband. She had an awareness of this perception but navigated her career intending to clear the path for women who would come after her. This frustrating view, additionally, did not prevent her from becoming published nationally or from speaking at some of the largest religious and feminist conventions in the country. Her career, as a result, can be seen as transitional between the United States’ Gilded Age and Progressive Era, as it advanced the role of women in the ministry but did so in a way that reinforced existing gender roles that suffragettes and first-wave feminists would disagree with.

The story of Annis Eastman could not be told without including the stories of her four children. Two of these children would follow in their mother’s political footsteps and eventually far outshine her. Crystal Eastman was born the third of four children on June 25, 1881. Her biographer describes her as “one of the most conspicuous Progressive reformers in America. Her militant suffragism, insistent antimilitarism, gregarious internationalism, support of the Russian Revolution, and uncompromising feminism led some in the press to brand her notorious.”

Remembered now as one of the founders of the precursor to the American Civil Liberties Union and co-author of the Equal Rights Amendment, Crystal asserted that “the story of my background is the story of my mother.”

Max, the last of Annis and her husband Samuel’s children, was born on January 4, 1883. He, like his sister, would go on to outshine his mother in the political spotlight, eventually

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becoming acquaintances with the likes of Ernest Hemingway, Charlie Chaplin, and John Dewey. Best known for his left-leaning political writings, Max was born in Canandaigua, a town near Rochester and about two hours away from Elmira using modern transportation. He, like his sister, credited his successes to his mother.

It is important to introduce Crystal and Max early in Annis’s story, not to over-emphasize her role as a mother, but to explain where much of the information regarding Annis and Sam’s early lives comes from. Max Eastman was a prolific writer, both politically and autobiographically. This writing included extensive tracking of his family history, much of which will be used in this exploration of his mother. It is necessary to recognize that much of the information about a young Annis Ford is not coming from objective third parties but from the recollections of a loving son.

**Bertha Before Ordination**

Annis “Bertha” Ford was born in Peoria, Illinois on April 24, 1852, the youngest of five daughters. In the early years of her life, she went by her middle name, Bertha.⁶ Her great-grandfather was a Henry Ford, and as Max later wrote, a wealthy man “as Henry Fords logically must be.”⁷ The only information that Max Eastman shares about his great-great-grandfather is that “he contributed $74 toward the purchase of a milldam… he also contributed $66 toward the new court house.”⁸ Max, however, has fewer kind things to say about his grandfather. George Ford was a gunsmith who had earned a reputation in the Midwest for making fine rifles. Nevertheless, “he also had a violent temper, and one that did not die down after wrecking

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everything like a storm at sea, but kept right on raging over the wreckage for years.” This is the environment that Bertha Ford grew up in, as well as where the first sparks of her political passion began to burn. Her father’s insistence on patriarchal values was so strong and constant that all five of his daughters would grow up to advocate for women’s rights. While George tried to force these principles on his daughters, it seems that it was his emphasis that his daughters were lesser-than combined with his propensity toward physical abuse that instilled completely opposing ideas into his daughters’ minds. It was at this early point in her life that Bertha began her political writing. In his collection of biographical essays, Max mentions his mother’s graduation essay.

[It] was entitled “Oh, Femina Femina!” I am sure it expressed the smiling wish that women would buck up and be something, and the opinion that it was their own fault and men’s loss as well as theirs if they didn’t. It was this at least in after years that made her feminism so uniquely persuasive and undidactic.

It is important to note that, as this essay demonstrates, Bertha’s propensity towards women’s rights did not begin during her time in New York’s Burned-Over District or even while she was at college, but emerged much earlier and somewhat independently during her childhood. While those undoubtedly affected the way that her ideologies that are apparent in her published works from later in her life, Bertha Ford went into her adult life with an attitude about the role of women in the United States that many would have deemed radical.

In 1870, Bertha arrived at Oberlin College in Ohio, intending only to stay one year, mostly because that was all that she had funds for. It was there that she met her future husband, Samuel Elijah Eastman who had finished his undergraduate program and had just begun at the

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10 Max claims that Annis was born as one of five girls but Crystal maintains that she was born one of six. I make the assumption that Max is correct here as Elmira mayor Zebulon Brockway said that Annis was one of five girls in his memorial address following Annis’s passing.
Divinity School. Samuel was a relative of George Eastman of Eastman-Kodak fame. While it was not commonplace for women and men to be able to attend college together, Oberlin had earned a reputation for its progressive advocacy, which was controversial within the Christian church at the time. The couple would go on to heavily participate in this kind of advocacy, no doubt influenced by the political attitudes that surrounded their schooling. Bertha and Samuel met around a common table where students would have their meals. The year they met, the couple were both prolific writers; Annis wrote in the student paper on topics as varied as Christmas, Egotism, and “Things that Used to Delight Us.”

Because Bertha intended to stay at Oberlin for only one year, she left to teach at a small school in Erie, Pennsylvania in 1871. She and Samuel began a long letter correspondence. They would visit one another whenever possible but did not marry until August 25, 1875, after Samuel had graduated and had received a job offer from a Congregationalist Church in Swampscott, Massachusetts.

Like their mother, Crystal and Max Eastman have very few things to say about their father that reflect poorly on his character. In an essay titled “My Sainted Father” Max describes that “notwithstanding the dignity and nobility of his public character, there was to us who knew him intimately… a pathos about my father that often brought tears to our eye.” Samuel was a Civil War veteran who volunteered to join the Union Army after he finished high school and,

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12 Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Living, 31.
14 Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Living, 30.
15 Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Living, 37.
16 Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Living, 15.
while serving, contracted typhoid pneumonia, from which he lost a lung and never fully recovered.  

Samuel Eastman (left) and Annis Eastman (right). Courtesy of the Chemung County Historical Society  

Although the couple would remain devoutly loyal to one another, their marriage was not an easy one. Annis, as was traditional in marriages in the nineteenth century, was placed in a subservient position. Perhaps reminded of her childhood and patriarchal father, Annis had a “frustrated awareness of her own intellectual gifts and she found it difficult to accept masculine

17 “Mrs. Eastman Falls on Sleep”
dominance.”\textsuperscript{18} In one of his autobiographies, Max recalled how his mother had a constant aspect of melancholy:

Too often the very substance of it, was that disappointment in the intimacies of love which was so commonly the lot of women in that day when ignorance was holy. In her the recoil of passion from this disappointment was acute and terrible, and he was grief-stricken by her moods and tempers.\textsuperscript{19}

However, these issues were temporarily alleviated after the birth of their first child.

Morgan Eastman was born in Swampscott and named after Samuel’s father.\textsuperscript{20} Morgan was a sweet child and Annis and Samuel temporarily viewed him as the solution to any problems in their marriage.

Over the next six years, Annis and Samuel moved twice. In 1878 the couple moved to a parish in Newport, Kentucky, and then to Canandaigua, New York in 1881.\textsuperscript{21} In that same period of time, they had three more children: Anstic, Crystal, and Max, the latter of whom was born in Canandaigua after Samuel received an offer to preach at the First Congregational Church there. Max described Canandaigua as “a lazy leaf-abounding village reclining on a green slope with its feet in the lake… I think it is the only town in the United States which had room for automobiles when they came.”\textsuperscript{22} Their life in Canandaigua was quiet and the Eastman children had a happy childhood there.

Anstic Ford did not have the same sweet temperament as his older brother. He was “a scowling, stormy little sinful compact of very earthbound energy; but he had an almost precocious mind and energy.”\textsuperscript{23} Crystal and Max, however, seemed to share Morgan’s more

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 38.
\item Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 39.
\item Conway, “Eastman, Annis Bertha Ford,” 542.
\item Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 40.
\item Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 41.
\end{enumerate}
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quiet and thoughtful inclinations. In Max’s autobiography, he claims that their life in Canandaigua was “the very picture of a happy family.”

Shortly after moving to this ideal little town, however, tragedy struck the Eastmans. As Annis recalled in her diary, Morgan and Anstice left with Samuel to visit a family friend in the countryside for a few days. They returned unexpectedly early, “Samuel with Morgan in his arms, the child’s face pale, and his little head dropped over in his father’s breast in a way which [Annis had] never noticed in any other child, and which always made [her] think instantly of a dead bird.” A doctor came to the home and determined that the child had malignant scarlet fever. By noon the next day, Crystal had come down with it as well. By midnight, Morgan had died. Crystal was in such poor condition that Annis could only stop by the burial for a few moments.

In Annis’s letters and Max’s autobiographical works, Morgan is constantly referred to as a meditative and almost angelic presence, although this perception is likely affected by his premature death.

Morgan’s death, as is expected of the death of a child, had an enormous effect on Annis and Sam. For the first recorded time in her life, Annis's faith was tested. Max recalls how Annis “cried to an unbelieved-in God to help with her unbelief.” This marks the beginning of a trend that would continue throughout the rest of Annis’s life. Although, as a minister, she was very involved in the church and the religious community, she struggled with her belief consistently, which would culminate in a decision to leave the church toward the end of her life.

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24 Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living*, 41.
After the death of her eldest child, Annis’s relationships with her children began to shift. Her grief over Morgan never abated, remaining a constant in her life until her death. According to her youngest, she would tell her children “Oh, how I love you all, but nothing can cure the ache and longing in my heart for Morgan. Eternity can not be long enough to make up for these years without him.”\textsuperscript{28} The remaining children, then, had to deal with their mother’s change in character as well as the loss of a beloved sibling. Anstice, now the eldest child “was rash, reckless, agile, and muscular, of prodigious endurance, and, as far as anyone could see, by far the ‘brightest’ of [the] children.”\textsuperscript{29} Anstice would grow up to become a surgeon and settle in Erie, Pennsylvania. According to Max, Anstice enjoyed fighting with his family members and there was seemingly ample opportunity to do so with his mother after Morgan died: “My mother and Anstice used to go into surly glooms against each other like two lovers quarreling. For as long as three of four days, they would not speak, nor their eyes meet. The house for me during those days would be a place of misery.”\textsuperscript{30}

This was not the case, however, with Crystal or Max. Both Crystal and Max’s biographers point to there being a pseudo-incestuous relationship between the two. When discussing the death of his sister, Max agrees that “[o]f all Freud’s plain and fancy inventions, the concept of an ‘incest barrier’ is the one most easily verifiable in my experience. My mother and sister were both beautiful women.”\textsuperscript{31} Crystal seemed to reciprocate Max’s attraction. After she had left to attend Vassar College, Crystal sent Max a seemingly purposely sexual letter describing “dear pretty girls grabbing each other and hugging and kissing frantically.”\textsuperscript{32} Max

\textsuperscript{28} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 347.
\textsuperscript{29} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 85.
\textsuperscript{30} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 89.
Eastman does nothing to deny these claims, especially about his mother; in fact, he confirms them. When talking about his early childhood, Max admits that “it would be folly to pretend that I am not afflicted with the ‘mother complex’ in its most seizing form. I am afflicted, too, with the fact that I was her youngest child, the last one to be her baby.”

It is important to establish what Annis’s relationships with her children looked like, as their success partially defines her legacy. Both Crystal and Max, the most famous of the Eastman family, say that their political successes began because of the influence of their mother. While Anstice grew up to become a successful surgeon, he had no national influence as his siblings did. Perhaps it was the tumultuous relationship with his mother that discouraged him from following in her religious or political footsteps. Crystal and Max, however, took advantage of their mother’s successes and connections to eventually far surpass her in acclaim and prominence. Their mother’s unwavering support may have been a motivating factor in their choice to pursue a similar path.

Morgan’s death deeply affected his father as well and Samuel’s health began to decline. Because of his illness contracted during the Civil War, Samuel was prone to bouts of weakness; however, Max called this particular affliction “[his] father’s neurasthenia,” implying that it was brought on by the death of his eldest child. Because Samuel would often come home from church barely able to stand, Annis began writing his sermons for him, and on August 9, 1886,

Although some of the Eastman sibling’s biographers suggest a pseudo-incestuous relationship between the two, there is some evidence that Crystal Eastman might have been a lesbian. Crystal married a Jeffrey Fuller and had two children with him, one of whom she named after her mother. Amy Aronson, however, mentions in her biography of Crystal Eastman her particularly close relationship with a fellow student named Lucy Burns. Christoph Irmscher agrees in his biography of Max, mentioning how Crystal went to a ball in college with a woman called “Miss Janice” on her arm and calling her her fiancee.

33 Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Living, 91.
34 Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Living, 51.
she wrote his letter of resignation for him.\textsuperscript{35} This is likely the first time Annis wrote for Samuel, but it would not be the last due to the chronic nature of his conditions. More importantly, however, this was likely the first time that she wrote a sermon that was delivered to an audience in a church. Max did not disclose whether or not Samuel announced that his wife was the one who had been writing the sermons but the idea of women’s written word in the church was still considered unorthodox.

Samuel’s conditions continued to get worse, forcing his resignation. To support the family, Annis decided to make use of her brief religious education and attempted to find her own parish. She wrote about this shift in an essay called “Making of a Woman Minister,” expressing that Samuel was enthusiastic about her decision: “a thought suddenly came to me which I as suddenly expressed, although only in fun: ‘Sam, I believe I’ll preach!’ … The minister raised himself right up and said… ‘It’s what you were made for!’”\textsuperscript{36} In this essay, though, Annis recalls receiving much less support from the community than she had from her husband. People were so averse to the idea of a woman minister that they would avert their eyes from her in public. She spoke on people’s reactions to her speaking in an article published in 1904: “‘If we have come to that’… ‘we might as well lock the church door and throw the key in the well.’”\textsuperscript{37} Not only did Annis need to convince people to listen to a woman but she also lacked credibility in the eyes of the people as she only had one year of religious education and she never received a degree. Nevertheless, she delivered two sermons on the following Sunday, which physically and mentally exhausted her. She was paid the small sum of $12 for the weekend.\textsuperscript{38} However, feeling

\textsuperscript{35} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 52.
\textsuperscript{36} Annis Ford Eastman, “Making of a Woman Minister,” in \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 68.
\textsuperscript{38} Eva Taylor, “The Park Church History,” The Park Church, 1946. \url{https://www.theparkchurch.org/history-publications}
that she needed to do her duty to support her family, she persisted and kept her parish for three years. Her endurance paid off as people recognized her skill as a speaker. In her words, “in the truly religious, prejudice melts away before truth.”

Although the norms of the mid-nineteenth century were a challenge, her success did not come as a surprise to her children. Crystal wrote about the fact that she and her brothers “suffered when father preached” but paid rapt attention when their mother was speaking:

when my mother preached we hated to miss it. There was never a moment of anxiety or concern; she had that secret of perfect platform ease which takes all strain out of the audience. Her voice was music; she spoke simply, without effort, almost without gestures, standing very still. And what she said seemed to come straight from her heart to yours. Her sermons grew out of her own moral and spiritual struggles. For she had a stormy troubled soul, capable of black cruelty and then again of the deepest generosities. She was humble, honest, striving, always beginning again to try to be good.

Based on the fact that she won over her parish, despite her lack of formal theological education and their existing conceptions of her gender, it is clear that her children were not the only people who shared this idea.

In the meantime, Sam turned to small-scale farming. Crystal mentions that he “cheerfully… had begun, on days when he was well enough, to peddle eggs and butter at the back doors of his former parishioners.” Butter and eggs were traditionally part of the women’s economy. While their marriage may not have been a fairy-tale romance, this decision from Sam indicates not only his support of his wife adopting the masculine duties of breadwinning but also his acceptance of “female” responsibilities for himself. This career decision demonstrates a thread that was evident throughout their entire marriage: Annis and Samuel made a conscious

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40 Crystal Eastman, “Mother-Worship,” 44.
41 Crystal Eastman, “Mother-Worship,” 41.
effort to divide domestic and business labor up equitably. While many men may have considered it emasculating to perform traditionally female labor, Samuel’s willingness to contribute to his family in ways that were compatible with his illnesses meant that his wife was able to begin her career and manage the pressures of being a woman in a male-dominated field without the pressures of being the sole breadwinner.

In her diary entry, Annis mentions how, during her time at the Congregational Church, her colleagues organized a council to ordain her. She modestly fails to mention that this was the first time in history that a Congregational council had gathered to ordain a woman. She also fails to mention the most famous member of that temporary council, Thomas K. Beecher of Elmira, New York.

**Elmira and the ‘Gospel of Revolt’**

In an essay describing the town that he grew up in, Max Eastman coined the term “the Gospel of Revolt.” This was to say that, when it came to convention or tradition, Elmira, New York scored poorly. Instead, it was filled with progressive champions and was “the exact center of one of the most interesting clusters of people that American churchdom ever produced or found the room to contain.” While it may seem that there is an extensive cast of characters that influenced the political climate in Elmira, and therefore Annis Eastman’s career there, it is almost impossible to do so without mentioning them. As Max Eastman wrote, “I have spoken only of the Beechers, the Langdons, and the Fassetts, but I could extend the list until I would believe it would show that, in proportion to the total population, the number of highly developed,

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42 Annis Ford Eastman, “Making of a Woman Minister,” in *Enjoyment of Living*, 70.  
sensitive, progressive and thinking minds in that upstate town was larger than in the metropolis.” The modern congregants of the Park Church recognized four families as instrumental to their foundation; the Eastmans were one of these families. The other three were Olivia and Jervis Langdon, Olivia and Samuel Clemens, and Thomas and Julia Beecher.

Thomas Kinnicut Beecher was born in 1824 to one of the most famous families in America. His sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, is remembered in history textbooks around the nation as the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and his brother, Henry Ward Beecher, was one of the most well-known preachers in the country. He, following in the footsteps of his father and many of his brothers, became a preacher and became very well-known in Elmira for his liberal thought. Until the 1870s, Beecher was the minister of Elmira’s Independent Congregational Church. The Independent Congregationalist Church was founded in 1846 after some of the members of a local Presbyterian Church had broken off after its failure to condemn slavery. Although its minister was not necessarily sold on the concept, abolition would become one of the foundational pillars of Beecher’s parish.

However, that had less to do with the religious beliefs of the clergy than the political beliefs of major donors. In 1871, the members of the Congregation pledged over $40,000 to build a new church, as Beecher’s sermons had become too popular for the existing building to contain the crowds. This new building would eventually, when it was completed in 1876, become the Park Church. During his forty-six-year tenure both at the Congregational Church and at the Park Church, Beecher never had any employment contract, which he preferred. When he

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44 Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living*, 114.
45 Taylor, “The Park Church History.”
was invited to the Congregational Church “in 1854, he replied with a letter laying down in most imperious terms the conditions on which he would serve. ‘Do you remember that I do not think good can be done by a preacher’s preaching? It must be by Christians working that good is done, if at all.’” Beecher’s encouragement of action over theory would be physically expressed in the completion of his church, one of the first institutional churches in the country. These churches, most of which emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, offered social services to their largely poor, urban communities, such as concerts, lectures, day nurseries, and public kitchens.

Completed in 1876 while the industrial town was still struggling with the aftermath of the 1873 Depression, “the new building cost over $130,000… Its imposing exterior was an eclectic mixture of Victorian Gothic and Romanesque Architecture, capped by a Byzantine-like dome.”

The Center for Mark Twain Studies at Elmira College asks Elmira’s nonnatives to “try to imagine a cathedral that’s three-quarters the size of Notre Dame but plopped down in the middle of a town of 30,000.” Funded by Mark Twain’s father-in-law, Jervis Langdon, Thomas K. Beecher’s goal in creating the Park Church was to promote “an experiment in Christian Socialism.” This experiment came just in time to aid those in Elmira suffering from the effects of the Great Depression of 1873. Because Park Church opened these social programs to an increasingly desperate public, it quickly became an Elmira institution and its policies would foreshadow much of the policy changes called for in the Progressive Era.

In 1876, the same year that the Park Church was officially opened, Washington Gladden echoed this sentiment and published *Working People and Their Employers*, marking the first

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time that a nationally notable pastor spoke in favor of unions and encouraged employees to unionize.\textsuperscript{52} This publication marks the beginning of the Social Gospel, an offshoot of the theological liberalism movement that originated in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in which proponents advocated for the use of theology as the basis of structural political change. The term “Social Gospel” would not become a popular term until decades later, but Washington Gladden’s name was synonymous with the term “Social Christianity” used in the 1880s.\textsuperscript{53} Notably, Gladden was raised on a farm in Owego, New York, only about thirty miles from Elmira.

The Social Christianity movement could be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century in England. Early Social Christians organized residential communities in poor areas of urban England. Toward the end of the century, “the theological and social ideals surrounding [the] earlier nineteenth-century British Christian socialists increasingly had an impact on American clergy and laity, especially in the Episcopal Church. Many Episcopal leaders supported the development of institutional churches.”\textsuperscript{54} Park Church and the residents of Elmira were ahead of this trend by almost twenty years.\textsuperscript{55}

Other than Washington Gladden, two names stand out as the faces of the Social Gospel movement in the United States: Charles Sheldon of Wellsville, New York and Walter Rauschenbusch of Rochester, New York. Charles Sheldon’s work \textit{In His Steps} popularized the phrase “What Would Jesus Do?” While Sheldon was, admittedly, afraid of socialism, \textit{In His

\textsuperscript{53} Evans, \textit{The Social Gospel in American Religion}, 21.
\textsuperscript{54} Evans, \textit{The Social Gospel in American Religion}, 52.
\textsuperscript{55} Washington Gladden actually had heard both Thomas K. Beecher and his brother, Henry Ward Beecher, speak on multiple occasions. He said on their speaking abilities “I have heard from him [Thomas] more persuasive and convincing a speech than I ever heard from his more famous brother.” Max Eastman, “Mark Twain’s Elmira,” in \textit{Heroes I Have Known}, 112.
Steps encouraged many theological liberals to suffer in the same way that Jesus did. This turned many Christians toward socialist ideals.\textsuperscript{56} One of those Christian socialists influenced by In His Steps was none other than Thomas K. Beecher. Max Eastman later recalled how “his thought was to live and be helpful in the community as a modern Jesus would, a downright, realistic, iconoclastic, life-loving Jesus with a scientific training and a sense of humor and a fund of common sense.”\textsuperscript{57}

Walter Rauschenbusch published Christianity and the Social Crisis, which helped solidify to theological liberals that adherence to the values espoused in the New Testament required progressive social reform.\textsuperscript{58} Samuel Eastman, after his wife’s death, went on to publish several sermons and essays, including one where he specifically references Christianity and the Social Crisis.\textsuperscript{59} Other than their connections to the church and their commitment to progressive politics, the main thing connecting these men is where they were raised and lived. Gladden, Sheldon, and Rauschenbusch were all raised in Western New York or New York’s Burned-Over District.

The Burned-Over District, as defined in Whitney Cross’s definitive book on the area, lies west of the Catskill and Adirondack Mountains.\textsuperscript{60} The Burned-Over District was a hotbed for radical social politics and where the new religious movements of the Second Great Awakening formed: it was not unheard of for women to lead these religious movements. Mother Ann Lee was the prophet and founder of Shakerism, which began in Watervliet, a few miles outside of

\textsuperscript{56} Evans, The Social Gospel in American Religion, 49.
\textsuperscript{57} Max Eastman, “Mark Twain’s Elmira,” in Heroes I Have Known, 112.
\textsuperscript{58} Evans, The Social Gospel in American Religion, 78.
Albany. Cross also mentions Jemima Wilkinson, the founder of the Community of the Public Universal Friend, as a female religious leader during the time.⁶¹ Not only were there some women leaders but women made up most of the membership of early churches in the area and began to form female societies “which often proved the main support of the various local chapters.”⁶² Beecher’s wife Julia was instrumental in the day-to-day operation of the Park Church.

In his study of Mark Twain, Van Wyck Brooks provided a somewhat scathing description of Elmira as part of the upstate community. The following quote is what prompted Max Eastman to write his essay, “Mark Twain’s Elmira” in which he originates the term “gospel of revolt.”

Perhaps you know Elmira? Perhaps, in any case, you can imagine it? Those “up-State” towns have a civilization all their own; without the traditions of moral freedom and intellectual culture which New England has never quite lost, they had been so salted down with the spoils of a conservative industrial life that they had attained by the middle of the nineteenth century, a social stratification as absolute as that of New England itself.⁶³

This idea is complicated, however, by those who lived in Elmira during the period. Lyman Beecher Stowe, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s grandson, illuminates that “the Sunday congregations of between thirteen hundred and fifteen hundred people were made up not only of all denominations but of the unchurched and even agnostics. Traveling salesmen so routed their

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⁶¹ It is important to note that Wilkinson, at the time of her religious leadership, did not respond to the name “Jemima” and would not respond to feminine pronouns. The Universal Friend, who inhabited Wilkinson’s body reported that Jemima Wilkinson died after struggling with an illness but that the spirit of the Universal Friend had entered her body as ordained by God. While The Friend occupied a female body, the members of the Community of the Publick Universal Friend did not acknowledge the Friend as a woman but that he was a masculine spirit. Contrary to Cross’s claims that the Friend was a female religious leader, the Public Universal Friend is considered to be the oldest recorded nonbinary or transgender individual in the United States. Paul B. Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend: Jemima Wilkinson and Religious Enthusiasm in Revolutionary America*, (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 2015), 3.

⁶² Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 38.

trips so that they might...hear Thomas K. Beecher preach." What, then, made Elmira an exception to this pattern proposed by Brooks? The answer can be found in the observation that Brooks himself makes about Elmira’s absolute social stratification.

Jervis Langdon was, almost unquestionably, the most influential man in Elmira in the mid-nineteenth century. The only other men who might have claimed that title were Congressional Representative John Arnot or Langdon’s son-in-law, Samuel Clemens, better known by his pen name, Mark Twain. Langdon had a coal monopoly in New York’s Southern Tier as well as a system of railroads. While Elmira might not be a household name in the twenty-first century, it was certainly more well-known in the nineteenth. Elmira is located around sixty miles west of Binghamton and sits firmly near the Pennsylvania border. Because of its location, Elmira is a reasonable distance from a large number of major cities; Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York City, Syracuse, Albany, Buffalo, and Rochester are all well within a radius of a current five-hour drive. This meant that Elmira was a large convergence point for railroads in the Northeast. Subsequently, Langdon’s business eventually expanded so much that he started a partnership with and provided coal for Cornelius Vanderbilt.

Jervis Langdon did not only ship coal or paying passengers on his trains, however. In political terms, Langdon lines connected the Mason-Dixon line to the Canadian border. As a staunch abolitionist, “Langdon lines were outfitted with baggage cars designed to carry stowaways.” Langdon hired black Elmira local John W. Jones to work as a “baggage carrier.” Between 1851 and 1856, Jones transported over 800 escaped slaves across the Canadian

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64 Lyman Beecher Stowe quoted in “Mark Twain’s Elmira,” in Heroes I Have Known, 122.
66 Reigstad, “Mark Twain’s Father-in-Law’s Monopoly”
67 Seybold, “The Gospel of Revolt: Mark Twain in Elmira”
Langdon and his wife Olivia, unsurprisingly, were the ones who spearheaded a movement to split from the Presbyterian Church after its failure to condemn slavery.\(^6^9\)

As upstate royalty, there were very few things in Elmira that existed in a way that Jervis Langdon was unhappy with. In the late 1860s, *The Buffalo Express* asserted its outrage at the J. Langdon Coal Company’s monopoly. Very shortly after, however, Samuel Clemens became a co-owner of *The Express*, and “within four days he engineered an abrupt editorial about-face” to present a more favorable view of Langdon.\(^7^0\) This is not to say that Jervis Langdon got his way all of the time. In fact when he was sued by an attorney in Philadelphia, “he gathered up and sent to him all the documents that would be of help to the plaintiff, saying that he wanted the case to be decided only on its merits.”\(^7^1\)

Yet, Langdon often used his wealth for good; Max Eastman described him as “the most un-coal-dealer-and-mineownerlike characters that ever got ahead in business.”\(^7^2\) He helped fund the Elmira Opera House and the Langdons were the primary donors for the foundation of the Park Church.\(^7^3\) He was also one of the primary donors to the foundation of Elmira College which originally began as a women’s college and was the first educational institution in the United States that granted women degrees that were equivalent to those of men. However, his true influence on Elmira came from his ability to bend the law to his will.

Take, for example, the case of Juda Barber. In 1853, three years before the Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott* decision, a Missouri family insisted that escaped slave Juda Barber be arrested. Under the Fugitive Slave Act which had passed three years prior, Juda Barber should

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\(^6^8\) Seybold, “The Gospel of Revolt: Mark Twain in Elmira”  
\(^6^9\) Max Eastman, “Mark Twain’s Elmira,” in *Heroes I Have Known*, 110.  
\(^7^0\) Reigstad, “Mark Twain’s Father-in-Law’s Monopoly”  
\(^7^1\) Max Eastman, "Mark Twain's Elmira," in *Heroes I Have Known*, 110.  
\(^7^2\) Max Eastman, "Mark Twain's Elmira," in *Heroes I Have Known*, 109.  
\(^7^3\) Seybold, “The Gospel of Revolt: Mark Twain in Elmira”
have been arrested and those who aided in her escape would have been fined significantly. Barber herself did not deny that she escaped slavery, so the case should have been cut and dry. Nevertheless, Jervis Langdon petitioned for her release in front of Judge Arial Thurston and hired two representatives from Elmira’s most prestigious law firms; these lawyers would not advocate for her freedom in the legal sense but ostensibly bullied Judge Thurston into letting her go free.⁷⁴ Langdon’s extralegal strategy worked and, in open defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act, Juda Barber was declared free on August 10, 1853.⁷⁵ One of the men in the audience at the Chemung County Court was Thomas K. Beecher.

Van Wyck Brooks claimed that Elmira was an industrial town with a social stratification so strict that it could almost be an aristocracy. He was correct in this observation. However, nineteenth-century Elmira had the exceptional circumstances of a “king” who truly wanted to use his money to do good. The physical testament to his will to do good with his money still stands today, right across from where his mansion used to stand. The Langdons lived right across the street from the Park Church and “were not only the central pillars but the foundation stones upon which the church had been built.”⁷⁶

This is the environment in which the decision to ordain Annis Eastman was made. While it might be easy to simplify the decision to ordain a woman in a time where that was uncustummary to the militantly progressive area in which the ordination took place, it is more complicated than that. Jervis Langdon, although personally progressive, was a railroad tycoon and political boss with the ability to operate extralegally if he felt the need. Thomas K. Beecher, although partially responsible for creating the nontraditional and forward-thinking church that

Annis would go on to lead, was in the palm of this tycoon. The Burned-Over District, including Elmira, has a tradition of radical change. It could be easy to reduce Annis’s ordination as a continuation of this tradition but it seems more plausible that it was the result of the unusual combination of tradition married with a personally progressive political boss.

Left to right: Thomas K Beecher, Annis Eastman, and Samuel Eastman. Courtesy of the Chemung County Historical Society

Annis’s Ordination

In November of 1889, Thomas K. Beecher gathered a council of Congregational ministers to ordain Annis Ford Eastman into the ministry. When discussing the beginning of the reverend’s career, it is important to answer one of the common questions surrounding Annis’ ordination: “Was she the first ordained female minister in New York State?” In 2019, a representative from the Center for Mark Twain Studies spoke at the Park Church and claimed
that she was.\textsuperscript{77} Her faithful son also claimed that she was,\textsuperscript{78} but this may not be the case. She may instead have been one of a small group of women in the country who were ordained in the late nineteenth century.

The first American woman to be ordained into the ministry was Antoinette Brown Blackwell. Not only was she the first, but she was also ordained in New York State as a Congregationalist, just as Annis Eastman was, but in September 1853, well over three decades before Eastman. However, Blackwell remained in the ministry for less than a year, as she found it difficult to be “fully successful in a job that was implicitly masculine.”\textsuperscript{79} After her ministerial career, Blackwell dove into the sciences and argued with Darwin over the equilibrium of the sexes in the animal kingdom.\textsuperscript{80}

While Annis Eastman may not have been the first ordained female minister in New York, she still became a first. Reverend Eastman’s career and influences on her parishes would have been notable regardless of whether she was first, second, or third but Annis Eastman was the first woman whose ordination was acknowledged by the Congregationalist Church. While Blackwell was a Congregationalist and ordained decades before Eastman, the Congregational clergy was hesitant to ordain women, so she was ordained by a Methodist minister.\textsuperscript{81} This was an attitude that Thomas Beecher himself was guilty of. When speaking to a friend on the subject, he claimed

\textsuperscript{77} Matt Seybold, “Mark Twain's Music Box’ & Cosmopolitan Twain,” Center for Mark Twain Studies, 7 February 2019, \url{https://marktwainstudies.com/mark-twains-music-box-cosmopolitan-twain/}
\textsuperscript{78} Max Eastman, “The Hero as Parent,” in \textit{Heroes I Have Known}, 1.
\textsuperscript{80} Munson and Dickinson, “Hearing women speak,” 118
that, if it were allowed, women would seek ordination “in order to get in the pulpit where they can talk.”

Beecher’s biographer Myra C. Glenn proposed that his attitude changed, in part, because of the similarities between himself and his wife and Annis and Samuel:

Like Samuel Eastman, Beecher increasingly suffered from ill health and found it difficult to fulfill his ministerial duties. Fortunately for him and Park Church Julia Beecher remained in excellent health and played an increasingly large role in running the Sunday School and other church activities.

Because Julia had taken on such a productive role in running the church, Beecher understood the role of a wife as supplementary to the husband, including when it came to any career work. Therefore, he saw Annis first as a dutiful woman going to extremes to help her husband. If Annis had been preaching completely independently and was not one half of a heterosexual unit, Beecher likely would never have considered her for ordination in the first place. However, because she was working to aid her sickly husband and support her family, Beecher was able to see parallels in his own life and listen to her speak. Her skills as an orator are what encouraged him to make the Eastmans his associate pastors.

This again demonstrates that Annis’s career was not a result of people intentionally advancing the role of women or progressive intentions. While Blackwell’s ordination, as the first, was more a result of progressive ideals, she only remained in the ministry for a year; Annis’ career would last until her death. Her career may have been able to flourish for so long because she was not seen as a minister in her own right. Instead, she was seen as a wife who was going to extremes to fulfill her responsibilities to her husband. While her ordination broke some of the boundaries placed in front of women, it did so in a way that reinforced others.

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During the mid-to-late nineteenth century, a tradition that historians have come to call “the cult of domesticity” was the standard for female behavior. According to this philosophy, a True Woman’s primary duty was to accept submission to her husband. Women were seen as largely asexual and responsible for dismissing men’s sexual advances unless for married procreation. It was also at this time that the home became a distinct sphere that women were almost completely responsible for. Women were entirely responsible for cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing. Men were meant to be the breadwinners but their responsibility ended there. A woman’s work, on the other hand, never had an end.

As she expressed in her writings, Annis Eastman found these expectations stifling and incredibly frustrating. Her feelings and the fact that this was not exactly her experience within the home did not change that this standard was what she was held to societally. Notably, Samuel shared her opinions about the role of women in society. Samuel voiced opinions in favor of divorce, equal work opportunities, and equal pay, though these beliefs were not published until after Annis’s death. Though Annis was discontented with the social standard, it seems that the standard did not completely follow her to her home life. It is also important to note that, although frustrating for Annis, the social standards within the cult of domesticity are what allowed for her ordination in the first place. Though neither Annis nor Samuel thought of her that way, members of the council who ordained her believed her to be a helpmeet of the most extreme variety.

Nevertheless, Beecher’s personal inclinations alone would not have been enough to convince an entire denomination to change its philosophy. We can look to Beecher’s words to determine why the attitude of the Congregationalist Church might have changed. In 1870,

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Beecher delivered a series of speeches in which he defined and reflected on the thoughts and traditions of the denominations of the Christian church. In these speeches, he reflects fondly on the age and consequent respectability of the Presbyterian Church. He mentions that “it has always been difficult to keep the fences in good repair between the congregationists and Presbyterian.” He described the Presbyterians as sober and solemn and reminded his listeners that the oldest church in Elmira was the Presbyterian Church of Christ. He, however, recognized that there were some disadvantages to belonging to a large denomination: “A Congregational Church can act promptly and heartily, not being entangled with side interests. Great denominations are unwieldy. They cannot stop, start, turn out, or change. Indeed they brag of this in their bigness. When a man falls overboard, a row-boat can reach him quicker than a ship.”

He saw the small size of a Congregational church to be an advantage, even though his sermons attracted thousands. The fact that there is no higher institutional authority means that they were able to be more flexible in their interpretation of religious texts. He goes on to say that any changes within the larger denominations should be tested out by Congregationalists first: “All doubtful ventures and experiments should be tried by Congregationists first, as little boats go ahead of great ships to make soundings and buoy out the channel.” A female minister was an unorthodox concept in the late nineteenth century, but, by Beecher’s account, a Congregational church seemed like the best place to do a trial run. It was only a few years after this that Beecher would go on to ordain Annis Eastman. A council of ministers gathered in Brockton, New York, and ordained Annis Ford Eastman into the Congregationalist church in 1888. This decision

86 Beecher, *Our Seven Churches*, 93.
seemingly worked out very well for them, as their first female champion gained a good name for herself swiftly.

**Reverend Eastman Before Elmira**

At the dawn of the 1890s, a small church near Rochester, New York was in need of a pastor. The previous pastor of West Bloomfield’s Congregational Church, Rev. Samuel B. Sherill, began working for the church on May 2, 1880. However, like Samuel Eastman, he was plagued with health issues that often prevented him from preaching. To combat this, the Congregational Church would hire guest speakers, including a Mrs. C. A. Weaver. While there is very little information available about what Mrs. Weaver spoke about, the fact that a woman was able to speak at all was unusual. A woman speaker may have warmed the Congregation to the idea of a woman minister, as they signed a one-year contract with Annis Eastman on January 31, 1891. She was to be paid $800 for the year with a parsonage provided. Bloomfield found themselves very happy with their reverend, however, and Annis stayed in Bloomfield until July of 1894 when she and her husband were asked to become the Associate pastors of Beecher’s Park Church.

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89 Eva Taylor, “The Park Church History,” The Park Church, 1946. [https://www.theparkchurch.org/history-publications](https://www.theparkchurch.org/history-publications)
By 1893, Annis had gained enough national acclaim that she was invited to speak at the Congress of Women in Chicago. She was introduced by Susan B. Anthony, who called Annis the “movement’s main orthodox woman minister.” The last time the two met, Annis was still in high school and was introducing Anthony before a speech; decades later, their roles had switched. Her speech “The Home and its Foundations” emphasized how the sexes are dependent on one another but the way that society is structured prevents this cooperation. Instead, she said sarcastically that “marriage is the foundation of the home, marriage and the long continued infancy and helplessness of man.” She went on to question the foundations of marriage as an institution and the argument that men assume the dominant position in a domestic relationship because male animals are often stronger and more vigorous. She responds by saying that “a

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species of spider has been discovered of which the female devours her consort when he is of no further use to her. These things prove nothing. Our progress is away from nature. What is natural in this sense is not the best.”

She extended her speech to the role of children in the home and encouraged parents not to have double standards for their children: “there must not be two standards of conduct in the home- one seemly for the little boy, unseemly for the little girl. The same social verdict must be pronounced against sinners.” Although the term was coined decades later, Annis argued here against the cult of domesticity. Not only was the lack of division of domestic labor unfair for adult women, but the standard that young girls are held to is also unrealistic and unattainable. In this speech, however, Annis used her societal role within the cult to her advantage. Although disheartened by a woman’s position during the late nineteenth century, she was able to use it to establish her ethos. Who would know better about what is good and fair for children than those who are solely responsible for their upbringing? Though this was not the case in her own home, the audience had no way of knowing that, which likely served as a tool to give her points legitimacy.

Only a few months later, Annis returned to Chicago as she was invited to speak at the World’s Parliament of Religions. She took this opportunity to speak on the influence of religion on women. While Eastman was not the only woman who spoke, she was the only person at the multiple-day-long conference to focus her talk on women. This speech also reveals some of the early seeds of possible religious skepticism. Her speech focuses on the fact that most popular organized religions teach “the headship of man that involves, in some measure and degree, the

subjugation of woman and her consequent inferiority.”⁹⁴ She traces through religious history, moving from Plato to the Vedas, explaining how “religion was made for man and by man, not man for or by religion.”⁹⁵ While this was a place for people of all different religions to speak about religion freely, this questioning seems directly against the text of the Bible. By acknowledging that religion was made by man, she contradicts the concept that the Ten Commandments, the central tenets of the Christian faith, were delivered to man by God. This skeptical seed, which was planted in her head at the time her son Morgan died, would continue to follow her throughout her life.

She also used this opportunity to again talk about women’s suffrage. The World Parliament of Religions was held three years after Wyoming became the first state in the Union that allowed women to vote. However, it would still take over two decades for New York and then the rest of the nation to follow.⁹⁶ Unsurprisingly, Annis Eastman’s career reached its peak during the 1890s, as this is when the United States transitioned between the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era. Her career helped to advance the role of women in the ministry but did so in a way that also reinforced existing gender roles. Because of the existing standards, Annis Eastman could not have been taken seriously as an ordained minister on her own, especially considering her radical politics. Nevertheless, because of her association with her husband, she was able to get ordained and spread a feminist message.

**The Eastmans’ Park Church**


By 1894, Thomas K. Beecher was still the sole pastor of the Park Church. He had recently turned 70 years old and decided that he needed associate pastors to keep the Park Church running as it should. After his brief trial runs, Beecher decided to ask Annis and Samuel Eastman if they would like to be his associate pastors. If they said yes, they would be paid $2,000 a year and given two corridors of rooms to live in above the church parlors. The Eastmans accepted the offer and moved to Elmira, New York. Crystal and Max were thirteen and eleven years old respectively. They both attended the Elmira Free Academy, an institution still running today. Although this town was neither of their birthplaces, both Max and Crystal came to consider Elmira as their hometown.

The early years of their associate co-pastorship were relatively uneventful. The first big event that Annis would help facilitate took place two years in. In 1896, Mark Twain and Olivia Langdon’s daughter Susy died of spinal meningitis at the age of 26. The funeral was held at the Park Church and was co-officiated by Thomas K. Beecher and Annis Eastman. Twain and his family summered at Quarry Farm, his sister-in-law’s home located only a few miles away from the Park Church on East Hill. It was during these summers in Elmira that Twain would write his most famous works. Twain’s relationship with religion was everchanging and relatively inconsistent. As the husband of Jervis Langdon’s daughter, however, Twain would attend Park Church services frequently with his family, so it is unsurprising that Susy’s service was held in Elmira. Although they may have met before, this is the first recorded time when Annis Eastman met Mark Twain.

This meeting facilitated one of Annis’s modern claims to fame. Other than being one of the first ordained women in the United States, Annis is remembered as the person who authored Mark Twain’s eulogy. The Clemens family plot is located in Elmira’s Woodlawn National Cemetery. Although Twain lived in Hartford and was born in Missouri, by the time of his death, three of his four children had died and were buried with their mother’s family. Twain wanted to be buried with his children, so was buried in Elmira as a result. Annis and Samuel had taken over as co-pastors at the time of Twain’s death, so Annis took on the responsibility of writing the eulogy of one of the most famous men of her time.

During the service, Annis spent most of her time reading from the Book of Matthew. However, she ended the funeral with a surprisingly distressing tone. She says “we pray for thy blessing upon them that mourn and sit to-day in the midst of their shattered plans, seeing how many bright and beautiful hopes go out in darkness.” Typical of a Christian funeral service, Beecher spoke mostly of having faith in God and Christ during a trying time. Rev. Eastman, however, seemed to take a more sympathetic, if not despondent, tone. This may have been a result of the fact that she had also lost a child. Beecher himself had no children, but Annis was persistently affected by Morgan’s death. Perhaps this is an insight as to how she felt about losing her eldest child, even a decade later.

It was around this time that Annis began to be published in national religious and women’s journals. In 1896, she published her article “The Minister’s Helpmeet,” a response to a minister’s ideas about the role of a minister’s wife, in The Independent. In this article, she lists out what this minister expected his wife, and all ministers’ wives, to do: “She must keep the

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accounts, pay the bills, train the children, and, in fact, stand between him and all the hard realities of life, so that he may be free to dwell in that upper and better air of divine contemplation in which sermons are supposed to germinate.”

She goes on to point out that these ministers have, either intentionally or unintentionally, gone on to create a new commandment: “Six days shalt thou labor and do all the work nor rest on the seventh day; for it is thy lord’s, and in it he requires thy undivided service.” This essay calls back to one of the primary expectations for women that existed within the cult of domesticity: piety. Instead of challenging this assumption altogether, Eastman claims here that the way that worship is divided within the family, especially a pastoral family, is inequitable.

Annis had a perspective on this issue that few, if anyone else, had. As a minister’s wife, she knew the amount of work that was required in that role, even though her husband shared her attitude about the role of women in society. She was also a minister who came home to a spouse and children, the way that male ministers traditionally did. If she were only the wife of a minister, this article could just be seen as a helpmeet complaining about the role that she was given. While the issues that Annis outlines would be fair grounds for criticism and subsequent reform, it is hard to imagine that many ministers or Christian men would see this article as much other than a complaint. However, her experience as a minister helps to establish her ethos, especially when she goes on to explain what habits benefit those behind the pulpit.

Not only did she believe that the existing relationship between a pastor and his wife was an unfair division of labor for women but for men as well. This idea that existing barriers that made women societally unequal to men were detrimental to both sexes had become a standard in

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her writing. She believed that this version of religion was inaccessible and too theological. Because the helpmeet takes care of every worldly issue, the pastor thus loses his connection to the everyday world. To understand what the average man goes through, and thus become a better religious figure, she identifies that “too much helpmeet is what ails a good many ministers… It is not more coddling, but less that you need. Face the bore, the butcher, and the baby, with your wives- and then preach.”102 This attitude is likely a result of her lack of religious education. Because she only attended Oberlin for a year and never received a degree higher than a high school diploma, her sermons were all derived from practical experience. In this article, she does not diminish the value of theological education but emphasizes the fact that, without the practicality of everyday life, sermons will become largely ineffective. This also calls back to her first recorded speech. As previously mentioned, her graduation speech “Oh Femina, Femina” laments over the fact that patriarchal structures not only negatively affect women but men as well.

Along with articles for adults, she also began publishing sermons for children. In 1896, she published “Hide the Text” in which she encourages young girls to become active in their lives:

“Here is a girl upon whom the vision of a refined, accomplished and gracious womanhood has arisen… But within her is a tendency to ‘dream noble things, not do them,’ or a little disposition to be cruel just once to somebody she dislikes, or a little spirit of vanity that must always be fed with praise. These tendencies she sees in herself do not make her ideal impossible to attain; they are to be overcome, that is all.”103

Unlike “The Minister’s Helpmeet,” this article was specifically targeted at children. She addresses both boys and girls in this article, but the introduction focuses more on the feminine. Here, she tells girls that they must follow their passions separate from men to achieve their full potential. She recognizes that girls have been socialized to put their individual aspirations aside to become a supporting unit for a family. She also recognizes here that these girls are not perfect; they will be selfish and cruel. While this seems like a simple observation, it is an observation made at a time when women were held to a standard of perfection that was largely unachievable. In this article, she attempts to provide much-needed flexibility and room for failure.

It was around this time that she published “Have Salt in Yourselves: To Young Ladies.” Similar to “Hide the Text,” this article is addressed to young girls. However, her language is more explicitly feminist and radical here: “It is no longer enough for women to suffer in silence, to cry to Him who seeth in secret, for the sins and sorrows of their native land and the world, -- the call for action has been heard and women have arisen to obey it.”104 Not only did Annis claim that the existing social order was wrong and used strong language to describe the plight of the early twentieth-century woman but she claimed that change was already underway. This phrasing makes it seem that Annis was aware that the United States was going through a time of great transition. Despite the fact that she could not have known how rights would advance throughout the twentieth century, it was apparent that she could sense the progressive trends that were to come. Though she would die before the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was passed,

granting women across the nation the right to vote, it seems that Annis had an astute intuition when it came to this subject.

In 1900, Thomas K. Beecher passed away, having designated the Eastmans as his successors. As a result, Annis and Samuel became co-pastors of the Park Church. Although his health had improved, Samuel was still not strong enough to constantly take on the duties of a revered, so Annis primarily handled the daily goings on in the church. She continued to write for national journals. In 1901, she had a brief correspondence with Booker T. Washington, telling him how the children at the Park Church Sunday School were saddened by the fact that he did not have a birthday on record. They fundraised for his annual scholarship fund and sent him the $70 raised. He responded by thanking them for their kindness.\textsuperscript{105}

In 1903, Annis attended a summer school session at Harvard studying contemporary philosophy with peers such as philosophers William James, Josiah Royce, and George Santayana.\textsuperscript{106} In going to this session, she attempted to “define intellectually the Christian discipline which she had hitherto adhered to by emotion and will. The result was a deepening of doubt.”\textsuperscript{107} This summer program accelerated a questioning of faith that had consistently been present in Annis’s mind since the death of her eldest child.

In late 1906, Annis and Samuel changed the Park Church from Congregationalist to Unitarian. This decision was likely influenced by her time at Harvard, which is unsurprising

\textsuperscript{106} Pollick, “Biographical Sketch of Annis Ford Eastman.”
\textsuperscript{107} Conway, “Eastman, Annis Bertha Ford,” 542.
considering that Unitarianism started in eastern Massachusetts only a century before.\footnote{Trisha Posey, “Unitarianism,” in \textit{American Religious History: Belief and Society Through Time Vol. 1: Colonial Era through the Civil War}, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2021), 288.} Even though this was largely Annis’s decision, it had to be delivered through Sam. In a correspondence to Max, she expressed that “they would never take it from a woman.”\footnote{Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 277.} Although Annis was the primary speaker during sermons and she was regularly asked to speak or write for national publications, the congregants of the Park Church, in line with the rest of early twentieth-century American society, still believed that Samuel had a husbandly authority over Annis. This sentiment is in line with Annis’s understanding of the work that she was doing. Although she believed her religious work to be important, she took into consideration her secular concerns as well. Although nationally published, she was not a national figure and she never intended to be one. Nevertheless, she did intend to clear the way for the women she knew would come after her. As Max’s biographer expresses, “Annis saw her appointment as a step forward not so much for herself as for the women who would come after her: ‘It will make the way easier for some better one who will come after me- for Crystal or some other beautiful girl who ought to be a minister.’”\footnote{Christoph Irmscher, \textit{Max Eastman: A Life} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 13.}

Weeks later, on February 13, 1907, the Eastmans changed the church’s creed again, this time to simplify it and to alleviate any tensions between religious belief and new scientific developments. This new creed is one of the only places in which Annis’s religious beliefs were explicitly recorded following her summer program at Harvard in 1903. It reads as follows:
We believe in God, who is revealed in nature in human experience, in the life of the spirit and in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

We believe that God is to be reverenced, loved, and obeyed and that in Him we have eternal life.

We believe in Jesus Christ as the Supreme Embodiment of the Spirit of God in the soul of man, and our Divine Teacher and Guide.

We desire to follow Him in our lives by obedience to God and service to men.

We believe in the unity of the Christian Church, the observation of the Christian Sabbath, and the ordinances of baptism, and the Lord's Supper as aids to Christian living.\textsuperscript{111}

During their time as associate pastors, Rev. Beecher was adamantly against having a written creed. However, the Eastmans felt that they needed to disseminate an explicitly liberal message while leaving room for debate.\textsuperscript{112}

A few months after the creed changed, an organ was installed in the Park Church. Mark Twain came down for the installation and, as the main donors to the Park Church, there were several Langdons there. It was quite a large piece of equipment being installed, so many of Elmira’s “aristocracy” made an appearance, including Mayor Zebulon Brockway. This gathering was also the first time that Max Eastman met Mark Twain.\textsuperscript{113} To commemorate the occasion, those present gathered to take a picture on the steps of the church. This photo is notable, not because of who is in it but who is not. Samuel, Twain, and Brockway all stand in the middle accompanied by Langdons and organists but Annis is notably absent. Annis was definitely there;

\textsuperscript{111} Eva Taylor, “The Park Church History.”
\textsuperscript{112} Eva Taylor, “The Park Church History.”
\textsuperscript{113} Max Eastman, “Mark Twain’s Elmira,” in Heroes I Have Known, 134.
she introduced Max to Twain. Why be excluded from the photo then? This seems to be a physical representation of the way that Annis and Samuel were perceived in Elmira. Samuel is standing front and center, the face of the Park Church. Annis was excluded from this public presentation. There are no women.

*Left to right: Mark Twain (front row, third from left), Zebulon Brockway, Rev. Samuel Eastman, and Jervis Langdon II accompanied by visiting organists and the Hope-Jones organ company, 1907. Courtesy of the Center for Mark Twain Studies, Elmira College, Elmira, New York*

During their time in Elmira, the Eastmans began summering on Seneca Lake in New York’s Finger Lakes region. In 1901, Samuel built a cottage on a ten-acre plot on the lake which

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114 Max Eastman, “Mark Twain’s Elmira,” in *Heroes I Have Known*, 134.
he called Cherith Cottage, a reference to the story in the Bible wherein ravens feed Elijah.\textsuperscript{115} Many of Elmira’s notable families bought property adjacent to the Eastmans’, including a Dr. Willis, the man on whom the character Laurie in Louisa May Alcott’s \textit{Little Women} was based. This association became known as the Glenora Community and all costs and chores were shared communally, as organized by Annis.\textsuperscript{116}

Other than enjoying the lake and the upstate scenery, those who stayed with the Glenora Community were there to engage intellectually with the residents. On Mondays and Thursdays, people would gather for “Supposiums,” in which someone would explain something that they knew about, no matter the topic, and then be questioned extensively. Crystal read a paper on “Woman” which reflected some of her mother’s own thoughts: “the only way to be happy is to have an absorbing interest in life which is not bound up with any particular person. Children can die or grow up, husbands can leave you. No woman who allows husband and children to absorb her whole time and interest is safe against danger.”\textsuperscript{117} When it came to Sunday sermons, Annis would almost exclusively read secular literature and, if the mood struck her, she would let Max “preach” instead.\textsuperscript{118}

In 1909, during a summer on Cherith Farm, Max brought a girlfriend, Inez Milholland. It was during a conversation with Inez that Annis decided that she needed to leave the ministry. According to Max, Inez was “ruthlessly truth-telling,” and shared his socialist political beliefs, but Inez is likely not to credit for this decision. Annis had increasingly been drawn toward socialist ideals, which was exacerbated by the death of Mark Twain in 1910, as Max lamented

\textsuperscript{115} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 274.
\textsuperscript{116} Crystal Eastman, “Mother-Worship,” 43.
\textsuperscript{117} Crystal Eastman, “Mother-Worship,” 43.
\textsuperscript{118} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 278.
over the death of one of whom he considered to be one of the four great American men, including Lincoln, Whitman, and Emerson. Instead of mourning the loss of individuals, however, this death encouraged Annis to look at the whole: “O Max, nobody can talk about individuals as long as society is so bad a machine- blundering away, tearing people to pieces- women and girls glad to get a chance to work from six to six for five dollars a week!”\textsuperscript{119} Although distressed by the state of the world, she chose not to leave the ministry immediately, however, and phased her departure instead.

\textbf{Death and Legacy}

In early October 1910, Max and Crystal, who were living together in New York’s Greenwich Village, received a call from Elmira. As Max picked up the phone, he heard his father’s voice telling him “your mother has had a stroke and is very sick. You and Crystal must pack your things and take the first train home.”\textsuperscript{120} The night before, Samuel had heard his wife call for him, though she sounded as if she were being strangled. He found her clinging to a bedpost to keep herself from falling. By the time Samuel called his children, Annis had lost consciousness and she would not regain it again.\textsuperscript{121} Her calling out for her husband were her last recorded words.

This sickness came unexpectedly, as Annis had been very active in the last year of her life. During her time at Cherith Farm, she had learned to swim and had begun seeing Dr. Abraham Brill, the first psychotherapist to open an office in America.\textsuperscript{122} She had also been asked

\textsuperscript{119} Annis Ford Eastman quoted in \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 330.
\textsuperscript{120} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 343.
\textsuperscript{121} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 344.
\textsuperscript{122} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 344.
to become the dean of Barnard College, an all woman’s liberal arts branch of Columbia University.\textsuperscript{123} This offer delighted her especially, as accepting it would allow her to leave the church seemingly without losing her faith in God, which she always tried to hold on to. She was never able to accept this offer and she never officially left the ministry. After her passing, Dr. Brill told Max that “she had so sound a view of things and so much melancholy that I did not think I could help her. To go into it deeply would have disturbed more than relieved her.”\textsuperscript{124} It seems that her stubbornness and deep understanding of the inequality of her world had not changed since the early years of her marriage.

Despite her melancholy, Max described how it took days for his mother to pass. He says that watching her was a violent experience and that “few bodies would have fought so hard for breath as my mother’s did. Her mind’s everlasting thirst for experience must have reflected a highly dynamic conjunction of physical forces.”\textsuperscript{125} She had written to Max that, although Samuel wanted to stay in Elmira and that she was happy there, she was not going to get “stuck” anywhere. She had only very recently begun speaking without a manuscript and made her decision to eventually leave the church. Her failing body triumphed over her will, though, and Annis Ford Eastman passed away at 11:50 AM on October 22, 1910, in her home in Elmira. She was fifty-eight years old. Other than her husband and three living children, she was survived by two sisters, both of whom had moved to California.\textsuperscript{126}

The Eastmans did not believe in funerals. Despite speaking at hundreds of funerals, Annis herself thought that the autopsy process was barbaric and had written an essay on her

\textsuperscript{123} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 276.
\textsuperscript{124} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 344.
\textsuperscript{125} Max Eastman, \textit{Enjoyment of Living}, 344.
\textsuperscript{126} “Mrs. Eastman Falls on Sleep.”
dislike of funerals, but no journal had picked it up. She had expressed to her family that she wished her body be “burned and disposed of as useless.”¹²⁷ Her body was cremated and her ashes were spread in Canandaigua, the same city that Morgan was buried in. Despite not living there together for long, all of the Eastmans’ headstones, other than Anstic, are located in Canandaigua’s Woodlawn Cemetery.¹²⁸

![Annis at Cherith Farm, 1910. Courtesy of the Chemung County Historical Society.](image)

¹²⁸ Like her mother, Crystal Eastman is not buried in Canandaigua. However, this was not for any ideological or religious reasons. She passed away on July 28, 1928 in Erie, Pennsylvania. Her body was transported to Buffalo the same day. In Buffalo, her body went missing. No one knows where Crystal Eastman was laid to rest. Aronson, *Crystal Eastman*, 2.
Despite her personal reservations about funerals, the members of the Park Church still felt the need to hold a memorial in her memory. Former Elmira mayor Zebulon Brockway and Unitarian minister William C. Gannett were the primary speakers. In Brockway’s address, he laments not over the fact that Park Church lost a pastor, but that “the disseverance of the woman from the dual partnership is especially regrettable.” He goes on to say that “the union of the masculine and the womanly has been most serviceable and the loss in the respect will never be completely compensated in any single individual minister.” It is clear from this memorial that Thomas K. Beecher’s reasoning for ordaining Annis remained in the minds of his parish, even after he had passed. While she may have been an exceptional speaker and was primarily delivering the sermons due to her husband’s continuing health issues, she was viewed not as an individual but as half of a pair.

Eulogies in local newspapers share a similar sentiment. An Elmira newspaper published an obituary the day that she died acknowledging her prowess as a speaker: “Mrs. Eastman as pastor was earnest in her purpose to aid, eloquent in the utterance of the heavy truths which her fruitful intelligence germinated and gave forth like the gentle dews from heaven. In prayer Mrs. Eastman was a power, and in her strictly pastoral work her people placed supreme reliance.” However, this is immediately undermined in the next paragraph: “Great, however, and useful as she was in the church, none but those whose place inside the home can tell how large a sphere she there had filled.” Notably, this article never refers to Annis by the title “Reverend.”

Furthermore, a group of local pastors published a statement following her death that followed an

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130 Brockway et al., "Annis Ford Eastman Memorial Service."
131 "Mrs. Eastman Falls on Sleep."
132 "Mrs. Eastman Falls on Sleep."
almost identical pattern. They mention first that Mrs. Eastman was an extraordinary orator and that she was gifted with prophetic insight. They then go on to say that “Mrs. Eastman had preserved unbroken a simple womanliness of manner that always appeared her greatest charm.”

Annis Eastman today is not remembered for any of her writings or her status as the first woman ordained by the Congregationalist church but as the mother of two of the most vocal suffragists of the twentieth century. Max Eastman was such a prolific writer that most of his writings are still unprocessed, despite his seemingly endless connections to twentieth-century celebrity. His biographer claims that there are eighty boxes of writings in his literary archive. Anyone who was anyone politically knew Max Eastman in his prime; by the time his mother died, he was known as the Prince of Greenwich Village and Joseph Stalin once called him a “gangster of the pen.” While his mother never explicitly expressed sympathy with communist ideologies, Max maintained that it was his time in Elmira that put him on his political path.

Annis’ legacy was fully realized, however, in her daughter’s career and influence. Like her brother, she had collected her own group of celebrity contacts; she had correspondences and friendships with the likes of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jacob Riis, and Virginia Woolf. Crystal became one of the first women to attend New York University Law School. She co-published the Liberator and The Masses with her younger brother, helped found what would become the National Woman’s Party and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and, after the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, cowrote the Equal Rights Amendment.

133 “Local Pastors Feel Big Loss.”
134 Irmscher, Max Eastman, 4.
135 Irmscher, Max Eastman, 1.
136 Aronson, Crystal Eastman, 5.
137 Aronson, Crystal Eastman, 5.
Eastman is not remembered for her religious thought, but, by the end of her life, Annis would not have wanted her to have been. Instead, Crystal took advantage of the strides that her mother had made to become one of the foremost feminists of her day. Like her mother, Crystal died relatively early, at the age of forty-seven. Both of her brothers were present when she died.

Samuel and Anstice’s legacies are much less well known on the national scale than Crystal and Max’s, but both went on to lead successful lives. Anstice became a physician and surgeon in Erie, Pennsylvania. Samuel became the sole pastor of the Park Church. During his solo tenure, he received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Oberlin in 1912 and an honorary Doctor of Literature degree from Alfred University in 1915. After his wife’s death, he began publishing more of his own essays and sermons. Like his wife and his children, Samuel used his platform to advocate for women’s and labor rights. In a 1912 essay titled “Our Twentieth Century Obligations” Samuel chastises the male public for their inactivity: “We men who vote and feel our sovereignty and deny the vote to women, fifty-nine percent of whom, between the ages of eighteen and thirty, are at work outside the home and need it for protection against greed, because our chivalry is not equal to the task of their protection?” While both Crystal and Max spoke of their father as being reserved, it seems that this tone changed when he had the sole responsibility for Park Church. In 1912, Samuel chose Reverend Albert G. Cornwell to be his assistant and successor. He retired in 1917 and was given the title of Pastor Emeritus, one of the Congregational Church’s highest honors. Samuel Eastman died on February 7, 1925. He was cremated and memorialized in Canandaigua next to his wife.

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138 Taylor, “The Park Church History.”
139 Samuel Eastman, “Our Inherited Values.”
140 Taylor, “The Park Church History.”
Following her death, the Park Church established a class in honor of Rev. Eastman called the Annis Ford Eastman Class. Following her purpose in preaching, the Annis Ford Eastman Class set out to follow in her footsteps. The women of Park Church recognized Annis as a woman with constant interest and endless sympathy for joys and sorrows. To honor this memory, they vowed to “take up the dropped threads of her ministry and, as far as possible, carry forward the various forms of her activity.”*141* By 1915, this class began printing essays, including some from Samuel, in the interest of world peace.

Almost one hundred and fifty years after its construction, the Park Church is still an active part of the Elmira Community. Though the Church has changed denominations from Unitarian to the United Church of Christ, the LGBT pride flags that sit on the railings of the entrance are a testament to its consistent commitment to progressive politics. The Park Church regularly holds lectures by Elmira or Twain historians and remains one of the most active institutions in which Elmira natives can connect to their history, as well as an active church. Along with the Langdons and the Beechers, the congregants of the Park Church today recognize the Eastmans and one of their founding families.

From the time that she was a young girl up until her death, Annis Ford Eastman was constantly frustrated by the position that she held in the world. Although remembered by all who heard her speak as a fantastic orator and theologian, she was rarely viewed as a minister in her own right. Though she was a nationally published author on theological topics, any changes to church doctrine had to be issued by her husband. Despite her frustrations, she knew that the United States was undergoing a great transition and that her career would help to pave the path

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for those who would come after her and she was successful in that endeavor, as demonstrated by the national success of her daughter and “male-suffragette” son. Annis Ford Eastman is not a household name and she knew that it likely never would be. Nevertheless, her legacy is still felt today as women across the world continue in her footsteps.
Bibliography


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