

# Smith, Annie Rebekah (1828–1855)

## DAN SHULTZ

Dan Shultz, emeritus professor of music, Walla Walla University, has researched and written extensively about Seventh-day Adventist music history and musicians. His publications include *A Great Tradition*—a history of music at Walla Walla University, and the *Adventist Musicians Biographical Resource*—an encyclopedia with biographies of over 1100 Adventist musicians. He founded the International Adventist Musicians Association, serving as its president for ten years and editing its publications and website for over thirty years. Shultz and his wife, Carolyn (nee Stevens), live in College Place, Washington.

Annie Rebekah Smith was a gifted writer, editor, and artist who devoted her abilities to the early

publishing work of what would become the Seventh-

day Adventist Church. She contributed numerous articles and poems to the church's nascent periodicals during the early 1850s, and wrote several poems that would be used for hymns, some of which are included in the denomination's current hymnal.

## Early Life

Annie was born in West Wilton, New Hampshire, on March 16, 1828, one of the four children of Samuel Keyes and Rebekah Spaulding Smith who survived infancy, and their only daughter.<sup>1</sup> She joined the Baptist Church at age 10, but withdrew from it in 1844 when she, her mother, and youngest brother, Uriah, identified with the Second Advent movement.<sup>2</sup>

When expectations about Christ returning that year were not fulfilled, Annie turned to teaching school and pursuing studies at the Charlestown Female Seminary (CFS) in Massachusetts, which offered studies in English, art, music, and languages. Although she planned to become a teacher of French and painting, the onset of an eye problem in 1850, during her sixth and final term at the CFS, prevented that. Because of her vision, she declined an offer to teach in a seminary at Hancock, a great disappointment for her. She instead briefly became



Annie Smith's painting of Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is believed to be a self-portrait.

Photo courtesy of Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

an agent for and contributor to a monthly magazine, *The Ladies' Wreath*, in New York City. Her pieces published in that periodical were among her first efforts in public writing.<sup>3</sup>

## At the *Advent Review* Office

In 1851, with the encouragement of her mother, Annie Smith attended meetings being held by Joseph Bates in Boston, and accepted the seventh-day Sabbath, joining what would later formally become the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>4</sup> At that time she sent a poem, "Fear Not, Little Flock," to the *Review and Herald*, which led to an immediate invitation from editor James White to assist him as copy editor. She declined because of her vision, but was told to come anyway to Saratoga Springs, New York, where the Whites' home served as publishing office and residence for staff members. After an anointing with prayers offered on her behalf when she arrived, Annie's vision problem cleared up, enabling her to do the work without hindrance. She stayed on at the office, which soon moved to Rochester, New York.<sup>5</sup>

James White, known for demanding a high standard of quality from the workers, sometimes entrusted Annie with full responsibility for editing the *Review* while he was away on travels. In addition to editorial work, she contributed more than forty articles and poems to the *Review* and to the *Youth's Instructor*, first issued in 1852.<sup>6</sup>

In November 1852 she returned home to be with her father, who had become ill and who died in December. Annie and her brother Uriah were invited to take charge of an academy in Mount Vernon, New Hampshire, in January 1853, at a substantial salary. She declined, preferring to return to the *Review* office, without salary, where she felt her efforts could more directly spread the message.<sup>7</sup>

## Final Struggle

Tuberculosis struck the Rochester office, where 18 people lived and worked together in close quarters, in 1852.<sup>8</sup> By the time Annie Smith returned following her father's death, James White's brother, Nathaniel, and sister, Anna, were showing symptoms of the disease, and less than two years later it had taken both of their lives and that of another office worker, Luman V. Masten.<sup>9</sup>

Annie's symptoms had begun in the fall of 1854 and had taken a severe toll on her by the time she arrived back at her family home in West Wilton, New Hampshire, on November 7, 1854. Treatments at a hydropathic institute brought temporary relief but no lasting improvement, so she returned home in February. After a cheering four-day visit from Joseph Bates, her physical condition partially improved for a time. Spiritually renewed as well, she spoke with a new joy and eagerness about preparation for the Lord's return, and did so with a fervency that led others to faith.<sup>10</sup>

Annie prayed for strength to complete a poem, "Home Here and Home in Heaven," that she had begun in January, and was able to do so on May 28. The following day her brother Uriah arranged for it to be printed

along with others she had previously written. He sketched a peony, her favorite flower, and engraved it for printing on the title page. The small volume of poems, *Home Here and Home in Heaven*, was published shortly after Annie's death on July 26, 1855.<sup>11</sup>

## Apparent Disappointment Over J. N. Andrews

In a letter to John N. Andrews on August 26, 1855, Ellen White suggested another factor in Annie's death. Andrews and Angeline Stevens were talking about marriage, and though Ellen White had earlier thought the match ill-advised, she now told John "that after you had gone thus far it would be wronging Angeline to have it stop here." She then stated, "Annie's disappointment cost her her life."<sup>12</sup> This may be evidence that Annie had been attracted to Andrews, who, as a prominent young preacher and author, had also been connected with the publishing office in Rochester. It also implies that in some way Annie thought she had been given reason to hope that he would reciprocate, and thus was heartbroken when he married Angeline. Ellen White gives no further explanation of her cryptic statement, but historian Ronald Graybill has analyzed passages in Annie Smith's poetry and hymn lyrics that may allude to her sentiments about Andrews.<sup>13</sup>

## Contribution

Rebekah Smith, Annie's mother, prepared a book entitled *Poems: With a Life Sketch of the Life and Experience of Annie R. Smith*, published in 1871. She included 77 of her own poems, 16 of her daughter's, and 15 of Uriah's, as well as "A Brief Sketch of the Life, Sickness, and Death of Annie R. Smith."

Ten hymns using Annie Smith's poetry were published in the 1941 *Church Hymnal*. Adventist tradition holds that the first stanza of one of the 1941 hymns, "The Blessed Hope" (renamed "I Saw One Weary" in the 1985 *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*) refers to Joseph Bates, the second to James White, and the third to herself, but using a masculine pronoun for consistency.<sup>14</sup> The three hymns using her poetry that were retained in the 1985 hymnal are: "How Far From Home?" (no. 439), "I Saw One Weary" (no. 441), and "Long Upon the Mountains, Weary" (no. 447).

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## NOTES

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2. Rebekah Smith, *Poems: With a Life Sketch of the Life and Experience of Annie R. Smith* (Manchester, New Hampshire: John B. Clarke, Printer, 1871), 97, Project Gutenberg, accessed December 30, 2019, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34752/34752-h/34752-h.htm>.
3. Ibid., 98.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 98, 99.
6. Ron Graybill, "Annie Smith, Her Life and Love," *ARH*, April 1, 1976, 5.
7. R. Smith, 99,100.
8. Gilbert M. Valentine, *J. N. Andrews: Mission Pioneer, Evangelist, and Thought Leader* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2019), 144, 153, 154.
9. Graybill, 6.
10. R. Smith, 101, 102.
11. Annie R. Smith, *Home Here and Home in Heaven* (Rochester, New York: Advent Review Office, 1855), available at <https://www.practicapoetica.com/adventist-poetry-and-hymns/annie-smith/>.
12. Ellen G. White to John N. Andrews, August 26, 1855, Letter 1, 1855, Ellen G. White Estate.

13. Graybill, 4, 5; Valentine, 173–175.

14. Wayne H. Hooper and Edward E. White, *Companion to the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 14, 437, 438.

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