

**My Faith, My Life**  
Major New Series Starts  
September 4

# ADVENTIST REVIEW

Weekly News and Inspiration for Seventh-day Adventists

August 28, 1986

**I** asked what  
buoyed his spirits up,  
**O** this!" said he—  
'the blessed hope.'"

**THE POETRY OF  
ANNIE SMITH  
Page 13**

**Doubts: Stepping-stones  
to Faith  
Page 8**

**Is the REVIEW  
Less Spiritual?  
Page 4**

# ANNIE SMITH'S HYMNS OF THE BLESSED HOPE

Written in the 1850s,  
they speak to us today.

When Annie Smith responded to Joseph Bates's preaching by accepting the Adventist message in 1851, she dedicated her poetic gift to her new faith. Not only did she become an editorial worker for the *Review and Herald*, but her poems, set to music, provided the church with some of its memorable hymns.

Annie Smith's life attained dramatic poignancy—a sensitive, poetic spirit, a life wasted by tuberculosis, a brief existence terminated at age 27. Yet she ranks among those women, beginning with Ellen White, whose talents and devotion immeasurably enriched the Adventist cause.

The new *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* retains three of her more enduring pieces: "How Far From Home," "I Saw One Weary," and "Long Upon the Mountains." The previous 1941 *Church Hymnal* carried the 10 hymns studied in this article.

Not everything that Annie wrote constitutes good poetry. The quality of her work is uneven, with some of her lines sounding either prosaic or overly



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

sentimental. Nevertheless, her writing often displays the skill of a talented poet, showing versatility with form and precision with meter, as well as exact and efficient rhyme. Her themes exhibit the interests of an early Advent believer, yet they retain an appeal for today's worshiping Christian, with their emphasis on faith, devotion, and doctrine.

Annie Smith's poems command our attention not only by their singable quality and familiar themes but

also by their imagery, an inherent element in good poetry. They use figures of speech, primarily metaphors, similes, and personification, to lift their language above abstract generalizations so that singing them becomes a satisfying experience.

"Toil On a Little Longer" presents the metaphor of the Christian as a laborer in the field. The disheartening conditions depicted are reminiscent of those the Israelites experienced under the "rod" of the Egyptians. Here, however, the rod that wounds is sent in love, not from Egyptian masters, but from God, whose presence permeates all of life's experiences. "The deeper wound our spirits feel/The sweeter heaven's balm to heal." She concludes, "Then let us hope; 'tis not in vain;/Though moistened by our grief the soil,/The harvest brings us joy for pain,/The rest repays the weary toil;/For they shall reap who sow in tears,/Rich gladness through eternal years."

In Annie Smith's poetry, *balm* recurs as a metaphor for God's healing presence. "Weeping Endures But for a

COURTESY: SAMUEL A. SMITH, JR.



BY JUDITH P. NEMBARD

# **T**o early Adventists, the “rugged” path and the “bitter cup” constituted ever-present realities, making heaven a highly attractive prospect.

Night” encourages us with the thought that “A joy for every tear is found/A healing balm for every wound.” A contrast between the “joy of heaven” and the absence of a “soothing balm” here on earth occurs in “When Darkness Gathers.” “When by earth’s care and grief and woe/ The anguished heart is riven,/And bitter tears of sorrow flow,/No soothing balm found here below—/How sweet the joy of heaven!”

In one of our most cherished hymns, “How Far From Home?” the “blessed thought” of not being far from the heavenly home brings a “healing balm” to cheer the Christian pilgrim on the way to the kingdom. “Not far from home! O blessed thought!/The traveler’s lonely heart to cheer;/ Which oft a healing balm has brought,/And dried the mourner’s tear./Then weep no more, since we shall meet/Where weary footsteps never roam—/Our trials past, our joys complete,/Safe in our Father’s home.”

One of Annie Smith’s best crafted poems, set to the complementary tune “Autumn,” is “Blessed Jesus, Meek and Lowly.” “Blessed Jesus, meek and lowly,/With us here take Thine abode;/We would fain like Thee be holy,/Humbly walking with our God./We would Thy sweet Spirit cherish,/Welcome in our hearts Thy stay;/Lest without Thine aid we perish,/O, abide with us, we pray!” Its smooth rhythm takes the worshipping

singer through images familiar to the Christian experience: a life of hardship and sacrifice culminating in deliverance in heaven. The path to Paradise is “rugged”; shadows gather along the difficult way, making travel a “dreary night of tears.” Living in favorable circumstances, as many of us do, we may not readily identify with these harsh images, but to early Adventists, the “rugged” path and the “bitter cup” constituted ever-present realities. Sanctuary in heaven, “where the weary are at rest,” became a highly attractive prospect.

“Then with Thee may we for-

ever/Reign with all the good and blest,/Where no sin from Thee can sever,/Where the weary are at rest;/There to praise the matchless Giver,/There with angels to adore/Him who did through grace deliver/Us from death forevermore.” The same longing for future bliss appears in “Weeping Endures But for a Night.” “Weeping endures but for a night,/Joy cometh with the morning light;/Joy cometh of celestial birth,/Unsullied by the blight of earth.”

“Hail, Peaceful Day,” a poem commemorating the Sabbath, directs the worshiper’s attention from the earthly celebration to a concurrent worship scene in heaven: “Hark! through the shining courts above/What rapturous praises echo now?/Around the holy law of love/Seraphs in adoration bow;/Let earth, responsive to the strain,/Exalt alone Jehovah’s name.”

Comparison with Reginald Heber’s “Holy, Holy, Holy” demonstrates Annie Smith’s imaginative insight as well as a commitment to her faith. “Holy, holy, holy! Angels adore Thee,/Casting down their bright crowns around the glassy sea;/Thou-

**H**ail, peaceful day! divinely blest!  
Sweetly thy glories would we sing,  
Memorial of that sacred rest,  
Of vast creation’s mighty King;  
This hallowed time to man was given,  
A foretaste of the bliss of heaven.”

sands, and ten thousands worship low before Thee, Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be." Heber's throng gathers around the sea of glass. For Annie Smith, commandment keeper, God's creatures gather around His holy law to praise Him.

Echoes of early Adventism drift down to our time through the poem "Long Upon the Mountains," which presents the early believers as God's "scattered flock" that has passed through "grievous trials."

The narrative depicts the flock as following "the light of truth," feeding on God's Word, heeding His precepts. The final stanza comprises several images of Adventist theology: "clouds descending," "saints, entombed, arise," and "The redeemed, in anthems blending,/ Shout their victory through the skies."

These words effectively dramatize the Second Coming scenes depicted by Ellen White in the *Great Controversy*: "Graves are opened. . . . All who have died in the faith of the third angel's message come forth from

## **A**nnie Smith's hymn poems demonstrate the contributions women have made to our church and remind us of our Adventist past.

the tomb glorified" (p. 637). "The glory of the celestial city streams from the gates ajar"; the saints raise their voices in triumphant song (p. 639).

Arthur Spalding, chronicler of Adventist history, remarks that Annie Smith's "whole soul was wrapped up in the blessed hope." "I Saw One Weary" accentuates this hope in its refrain. "I asked what buoyed his spirits up, 'O this!' said he—the blessed hope." Despite disagreement in assigning its descriptions to particular pioneers (Joseph Bates, James White, J. N. Andrews, or Annie herself), the images are sharp enough to

be matched with actual personalities.

This Second Coming theme finds eloquent voice in the dialogue "How Far From Home?" "I asked the warrior on the field;/ This was his soul-inspiring song:/ With courage, bold, the sword I'll wield,/ The battle is not long./ Then weep no more, but well endure/ The conflict, till thy work is done;/ For this we know, the prize is sure,/ When victory is won." Note the ascending nature of the images from warrior on the field to victor with the prize. Adventists will doubtless sing this hymn until the Lord returns.

Annie Smith's hymn poems convey a twofold reminder to us today. First, they remind us of the contributions that dedicated Adventist women have made to the church. Hymnologist Wayne Hooper has singled out Annie Smith as the "spiritual ancestor" of Seventh-day Adventist women who are contributing their talents to the church through music and other avenues.

The second reminder is of our Adventist past. Her poems provide the church with a legacy that will serve it until the fulfillment of its mission. Written in the language of the pioneers and for early Adventists, her poems appeal to us today. A significant part of that appeal lies in their simple yet forceful images of the Christian experience in the here-and-now and their hope for the hereafter. □

Judith P. Nembhard is assistant professor of English at Howard University, Washington, D.C.

**F**aith lifts the veil before our eyes,  
And bids us view a happier clime,  
Where verdant fields in beauty rise,  
Beyond the withering blasts of time;  
And brings the blissful moment near,  
When we in glory shall appear."