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Elizabeth Oakes Prince Smith Correspondence

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Elizabeth Oakes Prince Smith 1806-1893

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SMITH, Elizabeth Oakes (Prince)
Born at North Yarmouth, 1806.
Died at Long Island, 1893.
Elizabeth Oakes Smith.

Elizabeth Oakes (Prince) Smith was born in North Yarmouth in 1806. She was a remarkable child. Early acquiring a taste for literature she began writing essays and poetry when eight years old. She became acquainted with Seba Smith, who had taken up his residence in Portland and was connected as a contributor with the principal newspaper of the city of which he afterward became editor and in her seventeenth year she married him. It was the most fortunate event of the author's life. All his literary projects received from her hearty support and assistance. She assisted him in establishing the Portland Daily Courier and contributed to its columns both prose and poetry. She developed rapidly and seemed to grasp many subjects intuitively and handle them in a masterly manner. Mrs. Smith could talk in public as well as use the pen in her sanctum. The anti-slavery cause and the rights of women found in her an able champion. Hawthorne and Lowell highly complimented her for her literary productions while her oratory won the praises of Sumner and Phillips. She was the pioneer speaker among American women. In religious faith she was a Swedenborgian. After the family moved to New York she wrote and published her first novel. Their lovely home at Patchogue, L.I., was for many years a social center for people of literary culture and attainments. She was one of the most beautiful and charming of women. It has well been said of her that "She long stood before the public eye as essayist, poet, novelist, lecturer and preacher. In her poem of "The Sinless Child," which she called her best production, there are some of the most beautiful passages to be found in English literature." One who personally knew her has left this statement about her: "She outshone every other person in her grace, beauty and literary attainments." Her fame is more enduring than her distinguished husband's. She outlived him for many years and died at Long Island in 1893 at the age of 87. She left several children and grandchildren, several of whom as might be expected are poets.

Taken from A History of Buckfield by Alfred Cole and Charles F. Whitman.
Elizabeth Oakes (Prince) Smith
(Yarmouth, Me. ?)

Elizabeth Oakes Prince, b. Aug. 12, 1806, d. David and Sophia (Blanchard) Prince was named for her paternal grandmother Elizabeth Oakes.

She was the younger of two children. Her sister Mehphsibah m. Richmond Loring Cutter and died Aug. 16, 1823 at the age of 19.

Their father David Prince, a sea captain, was drowned at sea, Mar. 26, 1809 at the age of 27. Their mother m. (2d) Lemuel Sawyer; (3d) -- Holmes.

Elizabeth Oakes Prince at the age of 16 was a beautiful girl with precocious talent. She became engaged at this time to Seba Smith ("Major Jack Downing"), who at that time was a young lawyer in Portland. They were married Mar. 6, 1823.

Mr. Seba Smith was born in Buckfield, Maine Sept., 1792; graduate of Bowdoin College, 1828; was a writer of prominence. Mr. Smith and his wife have been called the "Howitts" of America. Mr. Smith died at Patchogue, Long Island, N.Y. 1868.

E.P. Whipple, one of the ablest reviewers of his time pays the following tribute in the "North American Review" of Jan. 1844:

"Mrs. E. Oakes Smith, of New York, has written a number of short poems of much beauty, purity, and spirituality. "The Sinless Child" and "The Acorn" manifest qualities of mind and heart, which are worthy of a more thorough development. They display much depth of feeling and affluence of fancy, and singularly pure and sweet in their tone. "The Sinless Child", though deficient in artistic finish, contains many passages of a high order of poetry, and is as stainless as its subject. It gives evidence, also, of a capacity for a more extended sweep over the domain of thought and emotion. Mrs. Smith is not merely a smooth and skilful versifier, indulging occasionally in a flirtation with Poetry, to while away the time, but one whose productions are true exponents of her inward life, and display the freshness and fervor which spring from individuality of character and feeling. She speaks of what she knows and of what she has felt. Her theory of morals does not seem to have come into her soul through the inlet of the ear. Her truthfulness is a prominent characteristic of her genius."

Mrs. Smith published several volumes of prose and poetry, some of which were upon the Duties of Woman. Her first long poem to be published was "The Sinless Child and Other Poems," 1841. She was a pioneer in the new field for female talent, being an advocate of Woman's Rights. She was the earliest woman lecturer of America.

The following is a partial list of her works: Prose, - "Bertha and Lily"; "The Lost Angel"; "Western Captive"; "The "Cowboy"; "Sagamore of Saco"; "Woman and her Needs"; "Beauty and Dress". Poetry, - "The Acorn"; "Destiny"; "Roman Tribute"; "Old New York, or Jacob Leisler, a tragedy"; "The Sinless Child"; "The Aramanth"; "The Downed Mariner"; "Progression"; "The Same Old Song", "Mozart"


References: "Old Times in N. Yarmouth" (where ancestry and crest is also given) pp. 56, 563, 726, 763, 792.

"Mothers of Maine"

"Native Poets of "Maine"

"North American Review", 1844

Stedman's "American Anthology"