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### How Far From Home?

Denis Kaiser

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# How Far From Home?



▲ DENIS KAISER

Written by Annie R. Smith (1828–1855), this is one of the oldest Adventist hymns found in our hymnal. She was a gifted artist, writer, and editor. During the 3 1/2 years she worked for the *Review and Herald*, she wrote 45 hymns and poems for the *Review* and the *Youth’s Instructor*, leaving a legacy of spiritual beauty. Her story of God’s guidance in her life illustrates His wonderful care for us.

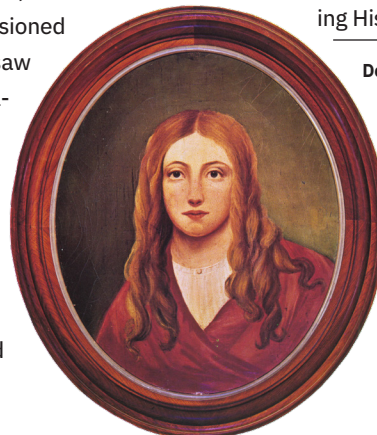
After the Great Disappointment, Annie abandoned her faith and turned to teaching at various schools while studying at Charlestown Female Seminary. In 1850, an eye injury from painting left her vision impaired for eight months, preventing her from securing a desired teaching position. To cope, she turned to writing poetry for magazines. She stayed with friends in Boston and yearned for worldly fame.

Over time, however, her mother, Rebekah Smith, grew increasingly anxious about Annie’s relentless pursuit of success in literature and art, fearing that her daughter was losing sight of matters of spiritual importance. When Joseph Bates, an early Sabbatarian Adventist leader, visited the Smith family in West Wilton, Massachusetts, Rebekah confided her worries to him. Bates listened attentively to her concerns and suggested that his upcoming lectures in Boston could offer Annie the spiritual perspective she was missing. He advised Rebekah to write to her daughter and extend a personal invitation.

The night before the first lecture, Bates had a vivid dream in which he envisioned the lecture he would give. He saw every seat filled except for a solitary chair near the door. After the opening hymn and prayer, Bates opened his Bible to preach when the door creaked open, and a young woman slipped into the last empty chair. That same night, Annie had the very same dream.

Annie set off early for the meeting the next evening but became disoriented on the unfamiliar streets. She finally arrived at the place and walked in at the very moment she had seen in her dream. For both Bates and Annie, the experience felt like a *déjà vu*. He originally intended to speak on a different topic, yet as her arrival reminded him of the dream, he began talking about the heavenly sanctuary. After the lecture, Bates approached Annie with a measured step. “I believe this is Sister Smith’s daughter, of West Wilton,” he said. “I never saw you before, but your countenance looks familiar. I dreamed of seeing you last night.”<sup>1</sup> As Annie recounted her dream to him, both were deeply impressed by this event, believing that God had arranged this meeting and brought them together.

One month after the encounter, Annie sent her first poem, “Fear Not, Little Flock,” to the *Review*, acknowledging her initial reluctance to write on spiritual topics but feeling compelled to fully surrender her skills to God’s work after experiencing His “infinite mercy.”<sup>2</sup> ■



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1 W. A. Spalding, “How Providence Prepared the Way,” *Review and Herald*, December 9, 1909, 4.

2 A. R. Smith, “Extracts of Letters,” *Review and Herald*, September 16, 1851, 31.