

## GERTRUDE SMITH

1874 - 1968

Miss Gertrude Smith was born in Portland, Maine, on June 5, 1874, a daughter of Manasseh and Georgiana Hall Smith. She died at Portland on April 9, 1968.

When Gertrude Smith entered Vassar College as a freshman with the class of 1897, she had bright auburn hair, observant blue eyes, a vigorous joy in life, and an impressionable keen mind. During the four years preceding her graduation as a Phi Beta Kappa member with a major in mathematics, she had developed not only the keen mind, but also an intense loyalty to her college and its ideals. After a few years of teaching in Portland, followed by a year at Miss Gerrish's school in Englewood, New Jersey, where she taught mathematics, English and Greek, she returned happily to Vassar to study for a Master of Arts degree. Following its award in 1901, she became instructor in mathematics, and thus entered upon an association with the college that continued until December, 1944, without interruption except for the year of 1907-'08. That year she spent in further graduate study at Cornell University and at the Sorbonne. In Paris she studied under a fellowship granted by the Associate Alumnae of Vassar College.

Beginning in 1909, Miss Smith became head resident of Davison House, a post in which she continued until her retirement thirty-five years later. She was also Associate Warden of the college from 1913 to 1932. In these positions, she came in contact with hundreds of students besides those whom she taught in her numerous mathematics classes. Each of these students was to Gertrude Smith a very important person. Her interest in their development was candid, penetrating and patient. In later years people recalled the patience with which she guided the slower ones in class; in her younger years, she was known at times to let her red-haired impatience with stupidity give way to the extent of throwing the chalk at a laggard student. Quietly and constantly industrious herself, she never condoned laziness. Yet she was always ready to confer when her help or advice was sought in the friendly apartment at Davison. The students reciprocated with loyalty to match her devotion to them. No promotion ever made her happier than her election to be the honorary faculty member of the class of 1916. From that time, the members of this class became her particular Vassar family. She knew them one and all, and received them eagerly at reunion times. Some of them became close personal friends for her lifetime. Her associations were equally warm with her own class.

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After her retirement she served for twenty-one years as editor of the annual bulletin of the class of 1897. In January, 1966, she wrote with pride: "We are the only class which has sent out an annual bulletin for sixty-five years."

Two nieces of Miss Smith graduated from Vassar; one Miss Katharine Ogden, class of 1918, was a former member of the Vassar chemistry faculty. Her sister, Miss Ruth Patterson Ogden, graduated in 1934.

For an extended period, Miss Smith's association with Vassar's department of mathematics was contemporary with the chairmanship of the distinguished geometer, Professor H. S. White. Later, she became the right-hand partner of Professor Mary E. Wells. For years, Miss Smith taught a course in the analytic geometry of three dimensions that long remained a cornerstone of the mathematics major program. She became assistant professor in 1919, associate professor in 1936, and was made a full professor in 1943. She was a member of the American Mathematical Society, and in 1938 was made a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. For twenty-five years she served as a reader for the college entrance examination board. A promoter of high academic standards, she was a staunch member of the Vassar chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, and served one year as its president. Her earliest teaching experience had included classes in Latin and Greek. She maintained an interest in Greek archaeology which was fostered by her friendships with several archaeologists among Vassar alumnae families. But her own creative ability was most apparent in her considerable talent for drawing and painting, largely self-developed. Subjects for her charming small line-drawings were usually glimpses of the Vassar campus, often in the vicinity of one of the lakes. For two or three years, she regularly attended an evening class conducted by Professor Clarence Chatterton, where some fourteen faculty members followed his instruction in drawing from life, and then reviewed their efforts in serious self-criticism.

Miss Smith was intensely interested in all political developments, national and international. And she did not hesitate to express an opinion. Her travels included many trips to England and Scotland, and a memorable visit to Greece and Italy, GERTRUDE SMITH continued

with briefer sojourns in other European countries. Each of these trips, as well as a trip after retirement to California became a journey of discovery. Always sensitive to beauty, she followed up her discoveries with enthusiasm, whether for the beauties of nature or for those of group theory or geometry.

For as long as health permitted, she traveled from Maine to Poughkeepsie to spend a few weeks each year at Alumnae House. And each year, scores of former students and associates stopped to see their remarkable friend at the Sheraton-Eastland Hotel, where she made her home in retirement, at Portland.

In 1962, the department of mathematics set up the Mary E. Wells and Gertrude Smith prize fund, with awards to be made for excellence in the study of mathematics. This honor brought

real joy to Miss Smith.

An outside opinion is often valuable, and we have one from an American scholar, the late professor Marie J. Weiss, herself a distinguished research mathematician, who taught at Vassar in the nineteen thirties. She declared, "Miss Smith may not be a research mathematician, but she is a superb teacher."

This is how Gertrude Smith, loyal daughter of Vassar, would have liked to be remembered. To quote her own admonition from the 1916 Vassarion: "May your torch burn ever bright".

Respectfully submitted, for all  
the friends of Gertrude Smith, by

Frances E. Baker

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