

**TO MEXICO WITH SCOTT;  
LETTERS OF CAPTAIN E.  
KIRBY SMITH TO HIS WIFE**

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To Mexico with Scott; letters of Captain E. Kirby Smith to his wife by Emma Jerome Blackwood & R. M. Johnston

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**EMMA JEROME BLACKWOOD & R. M. JOHNSTON**

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UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

# TO MEXICO WITH SCOTT

LETTERS OF CAPTAIN E. KIRBY SMITH  
TO HIS WIFE

PREPARED FOR THE PRESS  
BY HIS DAUGHTER

EMMA JEROME BLACKWOOD

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

R. M. JOHNSTON, A.M.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

A BRAVE soldier, ready to lay down his life for his country, should require but little introduction. A man of that stamp is known at sight, is promptly recognized by those among us whose hearts still warm at the record of suffering endured patiently, of duty and discipline enforced at all hazards, of death foreseen and encountered without flinching. He requires no panegyric, no praise; merely a statement of what he did, and where and when. These letters of Ephraim Kirby Smith to his wife tell plainly what sort of man wrote them. The addition of only a few details, of a fact or two to make the setting clearer, is all the reader will require by way of introduction.

He was born on the 17th of June, 1807, at Litchfield, Connecticut, the home of his father and grandfather before him. They were all soldiers, all in the Regular service, all in due course promoted to the rank of Captain. The maternal grandfather, Ephraim Kirby, fought at Bunker Hill, and thereafter through the War of Independence to its close. The father, Joseph Lee Smith, fought in the War of 1812, and won special

<sup>1</sup> The text of Captain Kirby Smith's letters has been prepared for publication by members of his family. Omissions have been made; and these are indicated typographically.

distinction at the battle of Lundy's lane; he eventually rose to the rank of Colonel. His son was destined to pay the battle toll for all three, losing his life in the glorious fight at Molino del Rey under Scott.<sup>1</sup>

Kirby Smith's career in the army was wholly uneventful until the outbreak of the Mexican War. And it is on the 28th of August, 1845, "14 miles from Cincinnati," proceeding with his company of the Fifth Infantry to the border, that his letters to his wife take on added interest from the war conditions. Observant, humane, touched by strange scenery and customs, with some gift of description and an all-pervading honesty, he visibly strove to give her a faithful rendering of all he saw and felt during the momentous experiences that now opened before him. The strange scenery and gorgeous vegetation of Mexico, he tried to convey to her; and ranged in his topics from noting the delicate tint of a meadow flower to criticizing the far from delicate methods of the American Government in handling an international question.

On the march from Jalapa to Puebla, he notes: "The sun unobscured by a cloud rose above the horizon, apparently far below us, his first rays lighting the peak of Orizaba and showing us far in the distance the shining spires and domes of the beautiful city of

<sup>1</sup> His brother Edmund, who also fought through the Mexican campaign, was the well-known Confederate general.

Jalapa. The clouds in many colored, gorgeous piles were resting on the summit of the mountains, while the soft mists were lying in the laps of the hills below, the cultivated valleys showing all their beauties between, while here and there a bold precipice or ragged peak gave sublimity to the scene which was beautiful exceedingly. . . . I know not whether I am more susceptible to the effects of fine scenery than others, but this, which was by far the most glorious picture of nature I have ever beheld, completely overcame me, and I dropped on the earth to breathe a prayer and a thanksgiving to a good God who had made such a glorious world."

It was not often that Captain Kirby Smith could find in Mexico conditions of such unalloyed beauty as to provoke this profound religious emotion. Indeed, this is the only passage in these letters, in which the deepest, most sacred chord of his being is revealed vibrating. At such a moment as that when he saw the sun from behind Jalapa striking Orizaba with its rays, the *tierra templada* might seem an earthly paradise; but other moments, far more numerous, quickly followed, in which the perfection of nature was sharply offset by the imperfection of man. Mexicans black-blooded or Spanish, Indians pure or half-breed, even — with shame be it said — American volunteer troops, might all of them, in their times and places, make Eden itself hideous.