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FROM THE COLLECTIONS
QUEEN CATHERINE'S ROSE, By Elizabeth Akers Allen

Stephanie Philbrick

Queen Catherine's Rose is a forgotten and quite rare volume of poetry by Elizabeth Akers Allen, one of Maine's successful nineteenth-century writers. Over the course of her life, Allen wrote several volumes of verse and published poems and letters in *Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribners*, and other magazines. Her first book was *Forest Buds* (1856) and her famous "Rock Me to Sleep" was published anonymously in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1860.

Backward, turn backward, O time, in your light,
Make me a child again just for tonight.

"Rock Me to Sleep" and several other previously published poems were included in *Queen Catherine's Rose*, a small, plain book published in Dublin and London in 1886. The book is only occasionally listed among Allen's works, and little is known about it. In 1953 *The Bibliography of American Literature* reported that no copies of the book could be found in libraries throughout Britain. Currently, the Maine Historical Society copy is one of two found on the nationwide library system OCLC.

Allen was born Elizabeth Chase in Strong, Maine, on October 9, 1832. She began writing as a teen and published poems in local newspapers throughout New England. Her frequent need to support herself took her through several jobs by the time she was in her mid-twenties. All the while, she was writing and publishing. Elizabeth Akers Allen's *Poems* was published by Ticknor and Fields in their prestigious "Blue and Gold" series in 1866, making her the only American-born female author in this series, which included Longfellow, Poe, and Tennyson.

Queen Catherine's Rose bears a resemblance to *Poems*. Not only are many of the same pieces included, but the unusual way that Allen's name appeared is the same in both books. She had asked the publishers not to use her nom de plume Florence Percy and she had married for the third time and wanted to publish as Elizabeth Akers Allen. Ticknor and Fields wanted the recognizable Florence Percy, and so a compromise was struck. The title page lists the author as Elizabeth Akers with Florence Percy in parenthesis underneath. Her name was given the same way in *Queen Catherine's Rose*, twenty years later. Like *Poems*, this book



QUEEN CATHERINE'S ROSE.

IN a Russian meadow, a wild rose fair
Bloomed sweet, in the olden days ;
And proud Queen Catherine, passing there,
Beheld, admiring, its beauty rare,
And crowned it with royal praise.

“This rose is worthy,” she smiling said,
“To bloom in our garden bowers—
And hence transferred to a nobler bed,
Its boughs shall flourish, its blossoms spread
In the shade of our palace towers.”

She posted a soldier to guard its bloom,
And shield it from chance of harm,—
So, in its circle of sweet perfume
The sentinel waited, in light and gloom,
With musket across his arm.

may be a collection of her most popular works, but whether or not it was distributed in the United States is unknown.

Some of the mystery surrounding *Queen Catherine's Rose* results from the misspelling of Allen's pseudonym and her erroneous inclusion in *Poets of Ireland*. Presumably, the editor was misled by the Dublin publication of Allen's book. This confusion is compounded by an obituary in 1911 that stated *Queen Catherine's Rose* was published as a single poem in 1886 — the same year the volume of poems was published in Dublin and London.

Despite her popularity as a poet during her life, the work of Elizabeth Akers Allen has not endured, and she is unknown to most people now. “Rock Me to Sleep” was set to music and is familiar to some as a lullaby and thereby has become her legacy. *Queen Catherine's Rose* and most of her other works do not carry the timeless or sentimental appeal that some of her more famous contemporaries managed to create. Allen herself has become an object of interest for historians, though it seems that her marriage to sculptor Paul Akers has drawn as much study as her poetry. But Allen's successful career as a poet and as a newspaper editor illustrates an interesting episode in Maine history.