

ANNE BRADSTREET, 1612-1672

[Puritanism was not an anti-intellectual fundamentalism; it was a learned, scholarly movement that required on the part of the leaders, and as much as possible from the followers, not only knowledge but a respect for the cultural heritage. Being good classicists, they read Latin and Greek poetry, and tried their hands at composing verses of their own. The amount they wrote, even amid the labor of settling a wilderness, is astonishing.]

Of course, the Puritan aesthetic restricted the Puritan poet. He could not surrender himself to sensual delights, and the code of the plain style would apply to his rhythms as well as to his prose. Consequently little of this production speaks readily to the modern reader, but every collection of American poetry must salute the lyrics of Anne Bradstreet.

*The daughter of Thomas Dudley, she lived as a girl in the comfort of the mansion of the Earl of Lincolnshire, was married at sixteen to Simon Bradstreet, and came with the Great Migration in 1630 to New England, "where," she says. "I found a new world and new manners, at which my heart rose." However, she continues: "After I was convinced it was the way of God, I submitted to it and joined the church at Boston." Later the Bradstreets became pioneers of North Andover; she raised a large family and in her few moments of leisure wrote a series of long, recondite poems on such conventional subjects as the seasons and the four monarchies. These are competent, cultured, though to our taste a bit stiff; they show intensive reading in such modern poets as Spenser and Sidney. Her brother-in-law took them to England and published them in 1650 under the revealingly boastful title, *The Tenth Muse Latelysprung up in America. Or, Severall Poems, compiled with great variety of Wit and Learning, full of delight. If these show that a Puritan could combine deep piety with a genial culture, more importantly Anne Bradstreet's occasional lyrics, inspired by the native setting or the homely incidents of her daily life, show that a Puritan could further combine piety with sexual passion, love of children and good furniture, humor--that the female Puritan, in short, could be both a Puritan and a woman of great charm. These lyrics were printed after her death at Boston in 1678 under the title, *Several Poems Compiled . . . By a Gentlewoman in New-England.*]**

SEVERAL POEMS

The Author to Her Book

Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain,
Who after birth didst by my side remain
Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise
than true,
Who thee abroad exposed to public view,
Made thee in rags, halting to th' press to trudge,
Where errors were not lessened (all may judge).
At thy return my blushing was not small,
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call;
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,
Thy visage was so irksome in my sight;
Yet being mine own, at length affection would
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:

I washed thy face, but more defects I saw,
And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.
I stretched thy joints to make thee even feet,
Yet still thou run'st more hobbling than is meet;
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,
But nought save home-spun cloth in th' house I
find.
In this array, 'mongst vulgars mayst thou roam;
In critics' hands, beware thou dost not come.
And take thy way where yet thou art not known.
If for thy father asked, say thou hadst none;
And for thy mother--she, alas, is poor,
Which caused her thus to send thee out of door.

Epitaph on a Patriot

Within this tomb a patriot lies
That was both pious, just, and wise,
To truth a shield, to right a wall,
To sectaries a whip and maul,
A magazine of history,
A prizor of good company,
In manners pleasant and severe;
The good him loved, the bad did fear.
And when his time with years was spent,
If some rejoiced, more did lament.

Before the Birth of One of Her Children

All things within this fading world hath end,
Adversity doth still our joys attend;
No ties so strong, no friends so dear and sweet,
But with death's parting blow is sure to meet.
The sentence past is most irrevocable,
A common thing, yet oh, inevitable.
How soon, my dear, death may my steps attend,
How soon't may be thy lot to lose thy friend
We both are ignorant; yet love bids me
These farewell lines to recommend to thee,
That when that knot's untied that made us one,
I may seem thine, who in effect am none.
And if I see not half my days that's due,
What nature would, God grant to yours and you.
The many faults that well you know I have,
Let be interred in my oblivion's grave;
If any worth or virtue were in me,
Let that live freshly in thy memory;
And when thou feel'st no grief, as I no harms,
Yet love thy dead, who long lay in thine arms.
And when thy loss shall be repaid with gains,
Look to my little babes, my dear remains.
And if thou love thyself, or loved'st me,
Nor are they shadows which I catch,
Nor fancies vain at which I snatch;
But reach at things that are so high,
Beyond thy dull capacity.
Eternal substance I do see,
With which enrichèd I would be;
Mine eye doth pierce the heavens, and see
What is invisible to thee.
My garments are not silk nor gold
Nor such like trash which earth doth hold,

But royal robes I shall have on
More glorious than the glist'ring sun.
My crown not diamonds, pearls, and gold,
But such as angels' heads infold.
The city where I hope to dwell
There's none on earth can parallel;
The stately walls both high and strong
Are made of precious jasper stone;
The gates of pearl both rich and clear;
And angels are for porters there;
The streets thereof transparent gold,
Such as no eye did e'er behold;
A crystal river there doth run,
Which doth proceed from the Lamb's throne;
Of life there are the waters sure,
Which shall remain forever pure;
Nor sun nor moon they have no need,
For glory doth from God proceed;
No candle there, nor yet torchlight,
For there shall be no darksome night.
From sickness and infirmity
For evermore they shall be free,
Nor withering age shall e'er come there,
But beauty shall be bright and clear.
This city pure is not for thee,
For things unclean there shall not be.
If I of heaven may have my fill,
Take thou the world, and all that will."
These O protect from stepdame's injury.
And if chance to thine eyes shall bring this verse,
With some sad sighs honor my absent hearse;
And kiss this paper for thy love's dear sake,
Who with salt tears this last farewell did take.

To My Dear and Loving Husband

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee.
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women, if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole mines of
gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee give
recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay;

The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then, while we live, in love let's so persevere,
That when we live no more we may live ever.

**Verses upon the Burning of Our House,
July 10th, 1666**

In silent night, when rest I took,
For sorrow near I did not look.
I wakened was with thundering noise
And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.
That fearful sound of "Fire!" and "Fire!"
Let no man know, is my desire.
I, starting up, the light did spy,
And to my God my heart did cry
To strengthen me in my distress,
And not to leave me succorless;
Then coming out, beheld apace
The flame consume my dwelling-place.
And when I could no longer look
I blest His name that gave and took,
That laid my goods now in the dust;
Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just--
It was His own; it was not mine.
Far be it that I should repine.
He might of all justly bereft,
But yet sufficient for us left.
When by the ruins oft I passed
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,
And here and there the places spy
Where oft I sat, and long did lie.
Here stood that trunk, and there that chest;
There lay that store I counted best;
My pleasant things in ashes lie,
And them behold no more shall I.
Under thy roof no guest shall sit,
Nor at thy table eat a bit;
No pleasant tale shall e'er be told,
Nor things recounted done of old;
No candle e'er shall shine in thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be.
In silence ever shalt thou lie.
Adieu, adieu; all's vanity.
Then straight I gan my heart to chide:
And did thy wealth on earth abide?
Didst fix thy hope on mouldering dust,
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky,
That dunghill mists away may fly.

Thou hast an house on high erect;
Framed by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnished,
Stands permanent though this be fled.
Its' purchasèd, and paid for, too,
By Him who hath enough to do--
A price so vast as is unknown,
Yet, by His gift, is made thine own.
There's wealth enough; I need no more.
Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store;
The world no longer let me love.
My hope and treasure lie above.