

THE POEMS OF
ANNE BRADSTREET

With an Introduction by Douglas Wilson

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The Poems of Anne Bradstreet

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INTRODUCTION

Anne Bradstreet was born the year after the King James Version of the Bible was published, in 1612. She was the daughter of Thomas Dudley, a man who was soon to become the steward for the Earl of Lincoln. She never attended a formal school, but nevertheless received an outstanding education from her father, who was a man of considerable learning. So as a girl, from 1619 to 1630, she lived on the estate of the Earl of Lincoln, on account of her father's position. And the earl had an extensive library, one that the young Anne clearly utilized.

When she was around sixteen, she married a man named Simon Bradstreet, a recent graduate from Cambridge (a hot bed of Puritans), and who was also employed by the Earl of Lincoln. Although the Dudleys were not of the nobility, they lived and worked in aristocratic circles and so naturally enjoyed the comforts of an aristocratic life.

This was all given up in 1630 when they sailed on the *Arbella* to Massachusetts—which was, at that time, a howling wilderness. The ship they sailed on, the *Arbella*, was named for Lady Arbella, who was the daughter of that same Earl of Lincoln. Lady Arbella died shortly after their arrival in New England, and her husband died a month later. The conditions of New England at that time were

not at all for the faint of heart. For someone of Anne Bradstreet's upbringing, those conditions were obviously a trial, but as her poetry attests, she was a woman who knew how to practice Christian contentment in the face of adversity. In this volume, you will read poems about the death of a child, and about the time her house burned down, and how she learned in all of it to trust in the sovereignty of a gracious God.

Although they were pioneers in the most profound sense, they were highly educated and theologically literate pioneers. When they landed in 1630, they were in effect the founders of Boston. And Harvard University was founded just six years later in Cambridge. This is not the kind of thing that the first trappers in the Rocky Mountains did.

Anne was married to one of the leading men in the colony, one who later became its governor. Her father was also one of the leading men in the colony, and so she was close to the action. She labored faithfully over the years as a wife and as a mother, and put her education on display in her poetry.

I say "on display," but it was a private collection of poems, not meant for publication at *all*. Unbeknownst to her, a friend of the family smuggled a copy of her poems to England, where he had them published. Anne was embarrassed, appalled, *and* aghast. The book was an unpretentious event, and generally well-received, but the title they gave the book was pretentious indeed—*The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*. Anne did not have any prior knowledge that the book was being published, and did not have a chance to make any edits or corrections. In response, she wrote another poem for the second edition, "The Author to Her Book," which gives us some idea of her emotional reaction.

POEMS

TO HER MOST HONORED FA- THER THOMAS DUDLEY, ESQ., THESE HUMBLY PRESENTED¹

Dear Sir, of late delighted with the sight
Of your four Sisters clothed in black and white,
Of fairer dames the sun ne'er saw the face,
Though made a pedestal for Adam's race.
Their worth so shines in these rich lines you show,
Their parallels to find I scarcely know.
To climb their climes I have nor strength nor skill;
To mount so high requires an eagle's quill.
Yet view thereof did cause my thoughts to soar—
My lowly pen might wait upon these four!
I bring my four times four, now meanly clad,
To do their homage unto yours, full glad:
Who for their age, their worth, and quality
Might seem of yours to claim precedency:
But by my humble hand thus rudely penned,
They are your bounden handmaids to attend.

1. On the Four Parts of the World.

These same are they from whom we being have;
These are of all the life, the nurse, the grave;
These are the hot, the cold, the moist, the dry,
That sink, that swim, that fill, that upwards fly;
Of these consist our bodies, clothes, and food,
The world, the useful, hurtful, and the good.
Sweet harmony they keep, yet jar ofttimes—
Their discord doth appear by these harsh rhymes.
Yours did contest for wealth, for arts, for age;
My first do show their good, and then their rage.
My other Fours do intermixéd tell
Each other's faults, and where themselves excel;
How hot and dry contend with moist and cold,
How air and earth no correspondence hold,
And yet, in equal tempers, how they agree,
How divers natures make one unity.
Something of all, though mean, I did intend,
But feared you'd judge Du Bartas was my friend.
I honor him, but dare not wear his wealth.
My goods are true, though poor; I love no stealth;
But if I did I durst not send them you,
Who must reward a thief but with his due.
I shall not need mine innocence to clear:
These ragged lines will do it when they appear.
On what they are, your mild aspect I crave;
Accept my best, my worst vouchsafe a grave.

From her that to yourself more duty owes
Than water in the boundless ocean flows.

March 20, 1642.

Anne Bradstreet

THE PROLOGUE

To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings,
Of cities founded, commonwealths begun,
For my mean pen are too superior things:
Or how they all, or each, their dates have run;
Let poets and historians set these forth,
My obscure lines shall not so dim their worth.

But when my wondering eyes and envious heart
Great Bartas' sugared lines do but read o'er,
Fool I do grudge the Muses did not part
'Twixt him and me that overfluent store;
A Bartas can do what a Bartas will,
But simple I according to my skill.

From school-boys' tongues no rhetoric we expect,
Nor yet a sweet consort from broken strings,
Nor perfect beauty where's a main defect:
My foolish, broken, blemished Muse so sings;
And this to mend, alas, no art is able,
'Cause nature made it so, irreparable.

Nor can I, like that fluent, sweet-tongued Greek
Who lisped at first, in future times speak plain;
By art he gladly found what he did seek—
A full requital of his striving pain.
Art can do much, but this maxim's most sure:
A weak or wounded brain admits no cure.

OF THE FOUR HUMORS IN MAN'S CONSTITUTION

The former four now ending their discourse,
Ceasing to vaunt their good, or threat their force,
Lo, other four step up, crave leave to show
The native qualities that from them flow.
But first they wisely showed their high descent,
Each eldest daughter to each element:
Choler was owned by Fire, and Blood by Air;
Earth knew her black swarth child, Water her fair.
All having made obeisance to each mother,
Had leave to speak, succeeding one the other.
But 'mongst themselves they were at variance
Which of the four should have predominance.
Choler first hotly claimed right by her mother,
Who had precedency of all the other;
But Sanguine did disdain what she required,
Pleading herself was most of all desired.
Proud Melancholy, more envious than the rest,
The second, third, or last could not digest;
She was the silentest of all the four;
Her wisdom spake not much, but thought the more.
Mild Phlegm did not contest for chiefest place,
Only she craved to have a vacant space.
Well, thus they parle and chide; but, to be brief,
Or will they nill they Choler will be chief.
They, seeing her impetuosity,
At present yielded to necessity.

CHOLER

“To show my high descent and pedigree
Yourselves would judge but vain prolixity.
It is acknowledged from whence I came;
It shall suffice to show you what I am—
Myself and mother one, as you shall see,
But she in greater, I in less, degree.
We both once masculines, the world doth know,
Now feminines awhile, for love we owe
Unto your sisterhood, which makes us render
Our noble selves in a less noble gender.
Though under fire we comprehend all heat,
Yet man for choler is the proper seat;
I in his heart erect my regal throne,
Where monarch-like I play and sway alone.
Yet many times, unto my great disgrace,
One of yourselves are my compeers in place,
Where if your rule prove once predominant,
The man proves boyish, sottish, ignorant;
But if you yield subservience unto me,
I make a man a man in the highest degree.
Be he a soldier, I more fence his heart
Than iron corslet ’gainst a sword or dart.
What makes him face his foe without appall,
To storm a breach, or scale a city wall;
In dangers to account himself more sure
Than timorous hares whom castles do immure?
Have you not heard of worthies, demi-gods?
’Twixt them and others what is it makes the odds
But valor? Whence comes that? From none of you.
Nay, milksops, at such brunts you look but blue.

THE FOUR SEASONS OF THE YEAR

SPRING

Another four I've left yet to bring on,
Of four times four the last quaternion,
The Winter, Summer, Autumn, and the Spring;
In season all these seasons I shall bring.
Sweet Spring, like man in his minority,
At present claimed and had priority.
With smiling face, and garments somewhat green,
She trimmed her locks, which late had frosted been;
Nor hot nor cold she spake, but with a breath
Fit to revive the numbéd earth from death.
"Three months," quoth she, "are allotted to my share—
March, April, May of all the rest most fair.
Tenth of the first, Sol into Aries enters,
And bids defiance to all tedious winters;
Crosses the line, and equals night and day;
Still adds to the last till after pleasant May;
And now makes glad the darkened northern wights
Who for some months have seen but starry lights.
Now goes the plowman to his merry toil
He might unloose his winter-lockéd soil.
The seedsman, too, doth lavish out his grain
In hope the more he casts the more to gain.
The gardener now superfluous branches lops,
And poles erects for his young clambering hops;
Now digs, then sows his herbs, his flowers, and roots,
And carefully manures his trees of fruits.
The Pleiades their influence now give,

THE FOUR MONARCHIES

*The Assyrian being the first, beginning under Nimrod, one hundred
and thirty-one years after the flood*

When time was young, and the world in infancy,
Man did not proudly strive for sovereignty;
But each one thought his petty rule was high
If of his house he held the monarchy.
This was the Golden Age; but after came
The boisterous son of Cush, grandchild to Ham,
That mighty hunter who in his strong toils
Both beasts and men subjected to his spoils,
The strong foundation of proud Babel laid,
Erech, Accad, and Calneh also made.
These were his first; all stood in Shinar land.
From thence he went Assyria to command,
And mighty Nineveh he there begun,
Not finished till he his race had run;
Resen, Calah, and Rehoboth, likewise,
By him to cities eminent did rise.
Of Saturn he was the original,
Whom the succeeding times a god did call.

DAVID'S LAMENTATION FOR SAUL AND JONATHAN

II Samuel 1. 19

Alas, slain is the head of Israel,
Illustrious Saul, whose beauty did excel!
Upon thy places mountainous and high
How did the mighty fall, and, falling, die!
In Gath let not these things be spoken on,
Nor published in the streets of Askelon,
Lest daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the uncircumcised lift up their voice.
O Gilboa mounts, let never pearléd dew
Nor fruitful showers your barren tops bestrew,
Nor fields of offerings ever on you grow,
Nor any pleasant thing e'er may you show;
For there the mighty ones did soon decay,
The shield of Saul was vilely cast away;
There had his dignity so sore a foil
As if his head ne'er felt the sacred oil.
Sometimes from crimson blood of ghastly slain
The bow of Jonathan ne'er turned in vain;
Nor from the fat and spoils of mighty men
With bloodless sword did Saul turn back again.
Pleasant and lovely were they both in life,
And in their death was found no parting strife.
Swifter than swiftest eagles so were they,
Stronger than lions ramping for their prey.
O Israel's dames, o'erflow your beauteous eyes
For valiant Saul, who on Mount Gilboa lies,
Who clothéd you in cloth of richest dye,

TO THE MEMORY OF MY DEAR
AND EVER HONORED FATHER
THOMAS DUDLEY, ESQ.

who deceased July 31, 1653, and of his age 77

By duty bound, and not by custom led
To celebrate the praises of the dead,
My mournful mind, sore pressed, in trembling verse
Presents my lamentations at his hearse
Who was my father, guide, instructor, too,
To whom I ought whatever I could do.
Nor is it relation near my hand shall tie;
For who more cause to boast his worth than I?
Who heard, or saw, observed, or knew him better,
Or who alive than I a greater debtor?
Let malice bite, and envy gnaw its fill,
He was my father, and I'll praise him still.
Nor was his name or life led so obscure
That pity might some trumpeters procure,
Who after death might make him falsely seem
Such as in life no man could justly deem.
Well known and loved, where'er he lived, by most,
Both in his native and in foreign coast,
These to the world his merits could make known,
So need no testimonial from his own.
But now or never I must pay my sum;
While others tell his worth, I'll not be dumb.
One of thy founders him, New England, know,
Who stayed thy feeble sides when thou wast low,
Who spent his state, his strength, and years with care