

POET'S PEN

Anne Dudley Bradstreet (1612-1672) is the most important poet of the American Puritan Movement. Born in Northampton, England to an educated family, she married at age 16 and arrived with her husband, Simon Bradstreet, a founder of Harvard College, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. She was a mother—she bore eight children—and ran a series of homes as the family moved around the colony. A prolific and skilled poet, she is the first published poet from North America and a founding figure of American literature. This poem, deeply reflective of her Puritan faith, commemorates the destruction of the family home by fire in 1666.

Verses upon the Burning of our House

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, behold a space
 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 shall thou lie.
 Adieu, Adieu, all's vanity.
 Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide:
 And did thy wealth on earth abide?
 Didst fix thy hope on mouldring dust?
 The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
 Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
 That dunghill mists away may fly.
 Thou hast a house on high erect;
 Framed by that mighty Architect,
 With glory richly furnished
 Stands permanent though this be fled.
 It's purchased, 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.

— Anne Bradstreet