



Donald E. Stanford, Editor

The
Poems
of
EDWARD
TAYLOR

THE POEMS OF

Edward Taylor

EDITED BY

Donald E. Stanford

NEW HAVEN AND LONDON

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THE POEMS OF EDWARD TAYLOR

29: 67
1708 83. Meditation. Can. 5. 1. I am terrified in

A Garden, you a Garden, Lord, in Eden. 82.
Of all Delightfull & beautiful flowers & sweet
A cloud of rich perfumences did proceed
Frome sweet & fragrant plants, for I had been was to keep
And singing his from the Garden with.
And the Garden, Lord, thou comest to, is a Garden Style

A Garden: Heart, set with choiced Herbs & flowers.
Here sign of life, & the Tree of life.

Here trees of Frankincense & Myrrh & Tormentil:
Here's Saffron, Rose, & Lillie: & beautiful Strife.
Here's Clove, Cinnamon, Storax, Nutmeg, & Rose
Sweet Balsam: & all Heavens herbs of Grace.

There's Order choiced, & so, all in print.
Here's such sweet blushing & from, sparkling
And beautiful rich & fragrant flowers, & spirit
Which any Adversarial and their spirit have
Of Anomalous Vapors: Spiritual Drops.

This Garden, & is, thy Church, this Paradise
Thou comest into, with thy choiced spirits, Lord,
Warding all Planks of Grace gust out of thy spirit.
Thine sweet perfume breatheth through the air,
And suppleth these spirits sweet upon
Thine beauties alter to thee, Holy One.

This Garden too is of Soules of thy Redeem'd:
When thou thy spirit plants them in light
In their dispersion, now, & choicedly adorned
In beautified with Grace & gold
That my Soule thy Paradise once be:
I shall with my paradise be one with thee.

When thou madest the Garden, Lord, thy Grace my plant:
When thou madest the Vineyard, & my plants the Vine:
Then come into the Garden: & with thy spirit
And make my Grace bloom in the desert
When thou comest in, thy Garden flowers with spirit
And from Anomalous Traits thou wilt

FOR YVOR WINTERS

Among the first and farthest

Contents

Abbreviations, ix

Introduction by Donald E. Stanford, xi

Prologue, 1

Preparatory Meditations (first series), 3

Preparatory Meditations (second series), 81

Gods Determinations, 261

Miscellaneous Poems:

1. *When Let by rain*, 339; 2. *Upon a Spider Catching a Fly*, 340; 3. *Upon a Wasp Child with Cold*, 341; 4. *Huswifery*, 343;
5. *Another upon the Same*, 344; 6. *Upon Wedlock, and Death of Children*, 344; 7. *The Ebb and Flow*, 346; 8. *Upon the Sweeping Flood*, 347

Glossary, 349

Abbreviations

- C** "Christographia." A manuscript by Edward Taylor in the Yale University Library.
- Cent.** *The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia*, 12 vols. New York, Century, 1889-1911.
- Conj.** Conjectural reading.
- CP** "Commonplace Book." A manuscript by Edward Taylor in the Massachusetts Historical Society Collection of manuscripts.
- CR** Westfield "Church Record." A manuscript by Edward Taylor in the Westfield Athenaeum.
- DAE** *A Dictionary of American English*, ed. Sir William A. Craigie and James R. Hulbert, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1938-44.
- DB** Sir William Smith, *Dr. William Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, rev. and ed. by H. B. Hackett, New York, Hurd and Houghton, 1868-70.
- DTP** "Diary, Theological Notes, and Poems." A manuscript by Edward Taylor in the Redwood Athenaeum.
- EDD** *The English Dialect Dictionary*, 6 vols. London, Henry Frowde, 1898-1905.
- ETG** Thomas H. Johnson, "Some Edward Taylor Gleanings," *New England Quarterly*, 16 (1943), 280-96.
- ETP** Thomas H. Johnson, "Edward Taylor: A Puritan 'Sacred Poet,'" *New England Quarterly*, 10 (1937), 290-322.
- HG** "Harmony of the Gospels." A manuscript by Edward Taylor in the Redwood Athenaeum.
- MGG** Morris A. Neufeld, "A Meditation upon the Glory of God," *Yale University Library Gazette*, 25 (1951), 110-11.
- orig:** Originally (used in textual notes to indicate words canceled by Taylor).
- PET** Barbara Damon Simison, "Poems by Edward Taylor," *Yale University Library Gazette*, 28 (1954), 93-102, 161-70; 29 (1954), 25-34, 71-80.
- PW** The "Poetical Works" of Edward Taylor. Manuscript in the Yale University Library.
- SMT** Donald E. Stanford, "Sacramental Meditations by Edward Taylor," *Yale University Library Gazette*, 31 (1956), 61-75.

- UPT Donald E. Stanford, "Nineteen Unpublished Poems by Edward Taylor," *American Literature*, 29 (1957), 18-46.
- W Thomas H. Johnson, *The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor*, Rockland Editions, 1939; Princeton University Press, 1943.
- WDB *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1944.
- WNI *Webster's New International Dictionary*, Springfield, Mass., Merriam, 1956.
- Z Copies of poems by Edward Taylor found in the binding of the "Poetical Works."

Introduction

I

The poems in this collection were written over a period of approximately forty years by the "Venerable, Learned, and Pious Pastor of the Church of Christ" in the small frontier town of Westfield, Massachusetts. Here the Congregational minister Edward Taylor labored from 1671 until his retirement in 1725, ministering to the souls and the bodies of his parishioners (he was a physician as well as a preacher of the gospel), helping to organize defenses against Indian attack, farming to provide for his large family, preaching lengthy sermons at least once a week, and writing thousands of lines of poetry. His best verses are a kind of secret diary, a record of his spiritual experiences, his communion with God. Like his New England spiritual heir, Emily Dickinson, he did not write for publication. Indeed, there was a tradition among his descendants that he forbade publication of his poems.¹

Edward Taylor was born in Sketchley, Leicestershire, England, during the English civil wars, probably in the year 1642. There is no entry in the Burbage parish church register concerning his birth or baptism and it is probable that none will be discovered. The Burbage register, which includes the records for Sketchley, is incomplete. During the civil disturbances of the sixteen forties, church records were frequently destroyed or not kept at all. However, the wills of Taylor's father, William Taylor, and of his eldest brother, Richard, are extant, and they provide us with information concerning the poet's childhood and early youth.² He was brought up in the family of a midland yeoman farmer who was somewhat more prosperous than the average man of his class. The poet's father owned a two-story house with barn and garden. At the time

1. There is no document by Taylor to prove the truth of this tradition. Perry Miller's statement in *The American Puritans* (New York, 1956), p. 302, that Taylor "left instructions in his will that nothing ever be published" is incorrect. Taylor died intestate. See Francis Murphy, "Edward Taylor's Attitude Toward Publication: A Question Concerning Authority," *American Literature*, 34 (1962), 393-94.

2. See Donald E. Stanford, "The Parentage of Edward Taylor," *American Literature*, 33 (1961), 215-21.

of his death in 1658 he possessed fifty sheep as well as hogs, pigs, calves, horses, bees, and a store of barley, malt, corn, and peas. Taylor undoubtedly took an active part in the independent hardy life of the seventeenth-century English yeoman. The Taylor family brewed their own ale, sheared and spun their own wool, raised their own honey, poultry, meat, milk, and vegetables. The village of Sketchley, a hamlet of less than forty inhabitants, lay in the beautiful green rolling fields of Leicestershire which maintain much of their rural character to this day, and where the spire of the Burbage parish church still dominates the landscape. The images of farm life and rural landscape which appear in Taylor's poetry written long after he left England are probably, in part, recollections of his Leicestershire childhood. Also, frequent references of the poet to the art of weaving and a score or so of technical terms used in weaving suggest his familiarity with the new industry of the neighboring town of Hinckley, where frame knitting began in 1640 and where the hosiery industry flourished after 1670. It is probable that Taylor worked in a Hinckley weaver's shop.

Leicestershire was a hotbed of non-conformity during the seventeenth century, and dissenters of the generation of the poet's father had vivid memories of the Cavalier Prince Rupert's storming of Leicester in 1645. Taylor's dislike of Anglicanism began early. He was educated under a non-conformist schoolmaster, receiving a good foundation in theology and in the learned languages. The typical curriculum of that time included the Westminster Catechism, Calvin's *Institutes* and *Epistles*, the New Testament in Greek, Augustine's *Soliloquies* in Latin, elementary Hebrew, and studies in Job and Canticles. Verse writing in Latin was standard practice for grammar school students, but English poets were also studied—Francis Quarles and George Herbert being considered particularly suitable for Leicestershire students.³ Thus Taylor was introduced at an early age to two of his favorite poets, who were to have a lasting influence on him—the author of Canticles and the author of *The Temple*, George Herbert.

3. See Foster Watson, *The English Grammar Schools to 1660: Their Curriculum and Practice*, Cambridge, 1908; M. Claire Cross, *The Free Grammar School of Leicester*, Leicester, 1953.

At the time of the Restoration in 1660 Taylor was about eighteen years old. His puritan character and convictions had been formed during the regime of Oliver Cromwell. With the return of Charles II to the throne of England, the young man faced a bleak future. He was qualified to teach, and for a short time he kept a school at Bagworth, Leicestershire. But he would not subscribe to the Act of Uniformity of 1662.⁴ His religious convictions prevented him from taking the oaths necessary to procure a license to continue his teaching. This refusal was the turning point of his career. He could not preach, teach, or attend the universities of Cambridge or Oxford. He and his friends were harried and persecuted. Their difficulties are hinted at in the diary Taylor kept on his voyage to America:

After dinner, I reading the fourth chapter of John in Greek, was so sleepy that when I had done I lay down, and dropping into a sleep, and dreaming of my brethren, was so oppressed with sorrow that I had much to do to forbear weeping out.⁵

On April 26, 1668, Taylor embarked from Execution Dock, Wapping, for a new country and a more hopeful life. Delayed for many days by unfavorable winds, Taylor's ship did not reach the open sea until the 21st of May. During the rough ocean journey, the poet "exercised" from Scripture for the edification of the passengers, read his New Testament in Greek, and kept a journal which is a curious mixture of religious piety, "scientific" observation, and folk superstition:

We saw a pair of sunfish lie flapping on the water. They say that this kind of fish is thus that it cannot sink while the sun shines.

Land was sighted on July 4th with "Plymouth on the left, and Salem on the right." On July 5th, seventy days after he boarded ship at Execution Dock, he disembarked at Boston.

4. See Taylor's obituary in the *Boston News Letter* for August 7-14, 1729.

5. Taylor's diary is in the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, R.I. It has been published in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 18 (1880), 5-18.

Taylor was well received in Boston. He lodged for two nights with the famous Increase Mather and for over two weeks with John Hull, mintmaster and one of Boston's most important merchants, before enrolling as an upperclassman in Harvard College; there he was invited to stay over night in the house of the president of the college, Charles Chauncy. During his three years at Harvard, Taylor was the college butler, responsible for keeping account of kitchen and dining room utensils, for providing candles for prayer and supper, and for collecting weekly payments for food and drink. The position was usually given to a mature and responsible upperclassman. The award of this position and his favorable reception by Mather, Hull, and President Chauncy indicate that Taylor was held in good repute by his superiors. When he graduated in 1671, he was chosen one of four seniors to declaim in College Hall. His declamation was a long poem full of fantastic conceits and diction which was supposed to demonstrate the superiority of English to the learned languages.

After his graduation, Taylor decided to remain at Harvard. In the fall of 1671 he settled in college and was instituted scholar of the house. However, the arrival of Thomas Dewey from Westfield changed his plans. Dewey, upon the advice of Increase Mather, offered the pastorate of the Congregational Church of Westfield to Taylor who, after considerable hesitation, accepted the call. On November 27 Dewey and Taylor set out on horseback on the difficult hundred-mile journey through deep snow to the frontier town near the Connecticut River, reaching it four days later.

The settlement in which the new minister took up his duties was a farming community of about twenty-five or thirty families occupying a township of forty square miles in the valley of the Westfield River. Each family was given allotments of meadowland and plowland. Taylor eventually received at least three separate lots and a parsonage built, in all probability, of unhewn logs. The first meeting house in which he preached and administered the Lord's Supper was a fortified building, square in shape, with a pyramidal roof, on top of which was a turret used as a watch tower during Indian troubles. His congregation was summoned to worship by the roll of a drum.

This congregation was made up of housewives and farmers of

little learning. Of the original settlers, only two were distinguished in the Westfield town records by the term "Mr." Only one "library" is mentioned—that of John Root, who owned twenty-two books with such titles as *Groans of the Damned*, *Thirsty Sinner*, and *Heavenly Passtime*.⁶ After the intellectual companionship he enjoyed at Harvard, Taylor must have felt somewhat isolated in his new environment. He was discouraged with the task of organizing a church in a frontier town, and in 1673 several members of his congregation requested that David Wilton, a distinguished citizen of Northampton, be allowed to settle in Westfield "for further encouraging of Mr. Taylor." Solomon Stoddard, Northampton's pastor, refused the request.⁷

In 1674 Taylor married Elizabeth Fitch, daughter of the Reverend James Fitch of Norwich, Connecticut. During their fifteen years of married life she bore him eight children, five of whom died in infancy. Mrs. Taylor died in 1689. Approximately three years later, Taylor married Ruth Wyllis of Hartford, Connecticut. They had six children, all of whom grew to maturity. One of his daughters, Keziah, married Isaac Stiles of New Haven. She was the mother of Ezra Stiles, who became president of Yale College.

Shortly after Taylor's first marriage, in 1675, King Philip's War broke out. Upon the shoulders of the minister fell much of the responsibility for organizing the defense against Indian raids. It was probably Taylor who was instrumental in making the decision to keep the townspeople in Westfield rather than to remove them to Springfield or Hartford for their protection. The decision turned out to be the right one. Westfield survived as an independent town, and although there was widespread devastation throughout the Bay Colony, Westfield suffered very little from Indian attacks.

With the termination of King Philip's War, Taylor was at long last able to organize his congregation into "a church state." Foundation services were held on August 27, 1679. Taylor was ordained minister, and he then preached his foundation sermon, "A Particular Church is God's House."

6. John H. Lockwood, *Westfield and Its Historic Influences* (2 vols. Springfield, Mass., 1922), I, 98.

7. Donald E. Stanford, *The Poems of Edward Taylor* (New Haven, 1960), p. 513.

For the next forty-six years, Taylor carried on his public duties as a small town minister, preaching sermons with learned allusions that few in his congregation could understand,⁸ and in the secrecy of his study (which contained a substantial library)⁹ writing poems in the metaphysical style of a previous generation. He retired in 1725, an invalid, worn out with his labors. No extant poems bear a date later than this year. According to the testimony of his life-long friend, the diarist and witchcraft judge, Samuel Sewall, and according to a family tradition, Taylor was almost completely incapacitated, mentally and physically, during his final years. He died June 24, 1729, and was interred in the old burying ground at Westfield where his tombstone still stands.

Ezra Stiles was only two years old when his grandfather Edward Taylor died, and he therefore could not have remembered him. However, Stiles collected considerable information about his ancestor and composed the best description we have of Taylor. He says that Taylor was "a man of small stature, but firm; of quick Passions, yet serious and grave. Exemplary in Piety, and for a very sacred Observance of the Lord's Day." He was "Very curious in Botany, Minerals and Natural History. He was an incessant student. He was a vigorous Advocate for Oliver Cromwell, civil and religious Liberty. A Congregationalist in opposition to Presbyterian Church Discipline." He "greatly detested King James [II], Sir Edmond Andross, and Randolph: gloried in King William and the Revolution of 1688."¹⁰ Taylor's diary, letters, and sermons substantiate Stiles' description. In a curious love letter in which he tells his first wife that he cannot give her all his heart because the greater part of it is promised to Christ, Taylor pushes piety to the verge of the ludicrous.¹¹ His later years were disturbed by difficulties with his townsmen which reveal Taylor to have been a stubborn disciplinarian, set in his ways. In a sermon on church

8. See Norman Grabo, *Edward Taylor's Christographia* (New Haven, 1962).

9. Books in Taylor's library are listed in Thomas H. Johnson, *The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor* (Princeton, 1943), pp. 204-20.

10. Written by Ezra Stiles in blank leaves of Taylor's manuscript book "Metallographia," in the Yale Library.

11. See W. B. Goodman, "Edward Taylor Writes His Love," *New England Quarterly*, 27 (1954), 510-15.

discipline preached in 1713 he relates how he sternly suppressed a faction in his church by withholding the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and admonishing them as follows:

I here in the name and Magisty of Christ Commande you to repent of these your Sins and greate Evill, And to manifest your Repentance to the Church in due time that you may beg them to forgive you, and this I charge you to do upon your perill as you shall answer it at the day of Jesus Christ.¹²

We learn from Sewall's diary and from the town records that there was a long protracted struggle concerning the location of the new Westfield meeting house. When the matter was settled and the church completed in 1721-22 Taylor put up considerable resistance to preaching in it. He preferred the location of the old meeting house and wanted to preach there.¹³ Stephen Williams, pastor of Longmeadow Church, who knew Taylor during his declining years, refers in his journal to a dispute that Taylor had with his townspeople over the choice of a constable. "Old Mr. Taylor is very fond of his own thoughts and I am afraid will make a very great difficulty and division in the town." Taylor's stubbornness caused "a mournfull countenance among the people again. Their Spirits Seem to be quite Sunk and depressed, and I fear the ruine (i.e. in a great measure) of Town and church by reason of the old Gentleman's resolution."¹⁴

Taylor, then, seems to have been endowed with most of those qualities usually connoted by the word *puritan*. He was learned, grave, severe, stubborn, and stiff-necked. He was very, very pious. But his piety was sincere. It was fed by a long continuous spiritual experience arising, so he felt, from a mystical communion with Christ. The reality and depth of this experience is amply witnessed by his poetry.

12. In the Prince Collection, Boston Public Library, p. 66.

13. "The Letter Book of Samuel Sewall," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 6th ser., 2 (1886-88), 145-46.

14. See Alexander Medlicott, Jr., "Notes on Edward Taylor from the Diaries of Stephen Williams," *American Literature*, 34 (1962), 270-74.

II

Taylor's first poems, composed in England, copied into a commonplace book, and bound up with the manuscript of his diary, are of biographical and historical interest but of little literary value.¹⁵ A letter to his brother Joseph expresses commonplace pious ejaculations in the ingenious acrostic form which fascinated seventeenth-century poets: it is the first of a series of acrostic poems by Taylor. "The Lay-man's Lamentation" attacks the Act of Uniformity of 1662; a poem on Maypole dancing attacks that custom as being both pagan and Popish; another poem places the responsibility for the London fire of 1666 on the Catholics. Taylor's lifelong aversion to the church of Rome is expressed in hundreds of lines of verse in his *Metrical History of Christianity*, a poem of over 21,000 lines, paraphrased mainly from the Latin of the Protestant church history of the sixteenth century known as the *Magdeburg Centuries*.¹⁶

Taylor is at his best, however, when, instead of attacking others, he is expressing his own doctrine in *Gods Determinations*, and his spiritual experience of communion with Christ in the *Preparatory Meditations*. These are the poems which have established Taylor as America's first major poet and as the last important representative of the metaphysical school of poetry founded by John Donne and continued by George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, and Henry Vaughan. The doctrine which informs Taylor's verse is fundamentally Calvinistic. It is in accord with the Westminster Catechism and Confession, Calvin's *Institutes*, the sermons of the Mather dynasty, and Michael Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom*. Taylor, in the age of Newton and Locke, still believed in the God of Calvin—an all powerful sovereign deity who, before the foundations of the world were laid, arbitrarily decided to save and glorify certain souls (the elect) from the just punishment of original sin. Christ, God's only begotten son, purchased by his active and pas-

15. See Donald E. Stanford, "The Earliest Poems of Edward Taylor," *American Literature*, 32 (1960), 136-51.

16. See Donald E. Stanford, "Edward Taylor's *Metrical History of Christianity*," *American Literature*, 33 (1961), 279-95; *A Transcript of Edward Taylor's Metrical History of Christianity* (Cleveland, Micro Photo Inc., 1962).