

"Childhood"

By Anne Bradstreet

*Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and markup
by Staff and Research Assistants at The University of Virginia*

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SEVERAL
POEMS

Compiled with great variety of Wit and
Learning, full of Delight;
Wherein especially is contained a compleat
Discourse, and Description of
The Four { ELEMENTS
CONSTITUTIONS,
AGES of Man,
SEASONS of the Year.
Together with an exact Epitome of
the three first *Monarchyes*
Viz, The { ASSYRIAN,
PERSIAN,
GRECIAN.

*And beginning of the Romane Common-wealth
to the end of their last King:*
With diverse other pleasant & serious *Poems* ,
By a Gentlewoman in *New-England* .
*The second Edition, Corrected by the Author,
and enlarged by an Addition of several other
Poems found amongst her Papers
after her Death.*

Boston , Printed by *John Foster* , 1678.

Childhood, ^{title}

1 Ah me! conceiv'd in sin, and born in sorrow,
2 A nothing, here to day, but gone to morrow.
3 Whose mean beginning, blushing cann't reveale,
4 But night and darknesse, must with shame conceal.
5 My mothers breeding sickness, ^{breeding}, I will spare;
6 Her nine months weary burden not declare.
7 To shew her bearing pangs, I should do wrong,
8 To tel that paine, which cann't be told by tongue;
9 With tears into this world I did arrive
10 My mother still did waste, as I did thrive:

11 Who yet with love, and all alacrity, ^{alacrity},
12 Spending was willing, to be spent for me;
13 With wayward cryes, I did disturb her rest;
14 Who sought still to appease me, with her brest,
15 With weary armes, she danc'd, and By, By, ^{by}, sung,
16 When wretched I (ungrate) had done the wrong!
17 When Infancy was past, my Childishnesse,
18 Did act al folly, that it could expresse.
19 My sillinesse did only take delight,
20 In that which riper age did scorn, and slight:
21 In Rattles, Bables, and such toyish fluffe.
22 My then ambitious thoughts, were low enough.
23 My high borne soule, so straitly was confin'd
24 That its own worth, it did not know, nor mind.
25 This little house of flesh, did spacious count:
26 Through ignorance, all troubles did surmount.
27 Yet this advantage, had mine ignorance,
28 Freedome from Envy, and from Arrogance,
29 How to be rich, or great. I did not carke, ^{carke};
30 A Baron or a Duke, ne'r made my mark.
31 Nor studious was, Kings favours how to buy,
32 With costly presents, or base flattery.
33 No office covered, wherein I might
34 Make strong my selfe, and turne aside weak right.
35 No malice bare, to this, or that great Peer,
36 Nor unto buzzing whisperers, gave ear.
37 I gave no hand, nor vote, for death, or life:

38 I'd nought to do, 'twixt Prince, and peoples strife., ^{authority}
39 No Statist, ^{statist} I: nor Marti'list, ^{martialist} i'th field;
40 Where e're I went, mine innocence was shield.

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41 My quarrels, not for Diadems, ^{diadem} did rise;
42 But for an Apple, Plumbe, or some such prize,
43 My stroks did cause no death, nor wounds, nor skars.
44 My little wrath did cease soon as my wars.
45 My duel was no challenge, nor did seek.
46 My foe should weltering, ^{weltering}, with his bowels reek., ^{bowels}
47 I had no Suits at law, ^{suits}, neighbours to vex.
48 Nor evidence for land, did me perplex.
49 I fear'd no stormes, nor al the windes that blows,
50 I had no ships at Sea, no fraughts, ^{fraughts} to loose.
51 I fear'd no drought, nor wet, I had no crop,
52 Nor yet on future things did place my hope.
53 This was mine innocence, but oh the seeds,
54 Lay raked up, of all the cursed weeds,
55 Which sprouted forth, in my insuing, ^{insuing} age,
56 As he can tell, that next comes on the stage.
57 But yet let me relate, before I go,
58 The sins, and dangers I am subject to.
59 From birth stayned, with Adams sinfull fact, ^{sin};
60 From thence I'gan, ^{gan} to sin, as soon as act.
61 A perverse will, a love to what's forbid:
62 A serpents sting in pleasing face lay hid.
63 A lying tongue as soon as it could speak,
64 And fift Commandement, ^{fifth} do daily break.
65 Oft stubborn, peevish, sullen, pout, and cry:
66 Then nought can please, and yet I know not why.
67 As many was my sins, so dangers too:
68 For sin brings sorrow, sicknesse, death, and woe.
69 And though I misse, the tossings of the mind:
70 Yet griefs, in my fraile flesh, I still do find.

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71 What gripes of wind, mine infancy did pain?
72 What tortures I, in breeding teeth sustain?
73 What crudities, ^{crudities} my cold stomach hath bred?
74 Whence vomits, wormes, and flux, ^{flux} have issued?
75 What breaches, knocks, and falls I daily have?
76 And some perhaps, I carry to my grave.

77 Sometimes in fire, sometimes in waters fall:
78 Strangely preserv'd, yet mind it not at all.
79 At home, abroad, my danger's manifold.
80 That wonder tis, my glasse till now doth hold.
81 I've done, unto my elders I give way.
82 For 'tis but little, that a child can say., ^{little}

Footnotes

- title This poem is the first of four poems in a larger work called *Of the Four Ages of Man* .
- breeding Breeding sickness is referring to her pregnancy. Source: Oxford English Dictionary
- alacrity Alacrity means cheerful readiness or willingness. Source: Oxford English Dictionary
- by "By, By" is the title of a song, probably a lullaby.
- carke To cark means to labour anxiously. Source: Oxford English Dictionary
- authority Bradstreet had no place in disputes between the people and the royal family. This is likely an allusion to the English Civil War, which she discussed in other poems. (Bradstreet, "A Dialogue between Old England and New; concerning their present Troubles")
- statist A statist is someone who believes that the state should control either economic or social policy, or both, to some degree. Source: Wikipedia
- martialist Martialist is another word for soldier. Source: Oxford English Dictionary
- diadem This use of diadem, which is another word for crown, is likely a metonym for royalty. She did not fight for royalty as a child.
- weltring To welter means to wither. Source: Oxford English Dictionary
- bowels This line is likely referring to when a person's bowels empty after they die.
- suits Suits at law refers to lawsuits. Bradstreet had no legal troubles as a child.
- fraughts Fraught is equivalent to the modern word freight. Source: Oxford English Dictionary
- insuing Insuing is equivalent to the modern word ensuing, meaning following. Source: Oxford English Dictionary
- sin Adam's sinful fact refers to original sin from the Creation story of the Book of Genesis.
- gan 'gan is an abbreviation of "began".
- fifth Anne Bradstreet was Puritan. The Fifth Commandment refers to "Honoring thy father and mother." Source: Wikipedia
- crudities Imperfect Humours or indigestibles. Source: Oxford English Dictionary
- flux Flux is an abnormally copious flowing of blood, excrement, etc. from the bowels or other organs. Source: Oxford English Dictionary

little After this, Bradstreet begins the second poem in *Of the Four Ages of Man* , "Youth."