

# Edward Taylor (1642–1729)

Author of "Huswifery"

Puritanism was a religious reform movement that began in England in the sixteenth century. The Puritans sought to reform the Church of England and to reshape English society according to their beliefs. These efforts led to both civil strife and government persecution of the Puritans. In response, many Puritans, including Edward Taylor, fled to the American colonies.

Before his emigration to America, Edward Taylor worked as a teacher in England. Upon arriving in Boston in 1668, Taylor entered Harvard College as a sophomore, graduating in 1671. After graduation, he accepted the position of minister and physician in the small frontier farming community of Westfield, Massachusetts, and then walked more than one hundred miles, much of it through snow, to his new home.

**Harsh Life in a New World** Life in the village of Westfield was filled with hardships. Fierce battles between the Native Americans and the colonists left the community in constant fear. In addition, Taylor experienced many personal tragedies. Five of his eight children died in infancy; then, his wife died while she was still a young woman. He remarried and had five or six more children. (Biographers differ on the exact number.)

Edward Taylor is now generally regarded as the best of the North American colonial poets. Yet, because Taylor thought of his poetry as a form of personal worship, he allowed only two stanzas to be published during his lifetime. Some believe that he chose not to publish his poems because their joyousness and delight in sensory experience ran counter to Puritan attitudes that poetry be for moral instruction only. One of his nineteenth-century descendants donated Taylor's writings to Yale University. The stash of poems was discovered in the 1930s and, in 1939, *The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor* was published. Most of Taylor's poetry, including "Huswifery," uses extravagant comparisons, intellectual wit, and subtle argument to explore religious faith and affection.

*Oh! that I ever felt what I profess.  
'Twould make me then the  
happi'st man alive.*

# Huswifery

Edward Taylor

## Vocabulary

**affections** (ə fek' shenz) *n.* emotions

**ordinances** (órd' nens əz) *n.* sacraments or religious rites

**judgment** (juj' mənt) *n.* power to form an opinion well; good sense

**apparel** (əp per' əl) *n.* clothing

5 Make me, O Lord, Thy spinning wheel complete.  
Thy holy word my distaff<sup>1</sup> make for me.  
Make mine affections Thy swift flyers<sup>2</sup> neat  
And make my soul Thy holy spoole to be.  
My conversation make to be Thy reel  
And reel the yarn thereon spun of Thy wheel.

10 Make me Thy loom then, knit therein this twine:  
And make Thy holy spirit, Lord, wind quills:<sup>3</sup>  
Then weave the web Thyself. The yarn is fine.  
Thine ordinances make my fulling mills.<sup>4</sup>  
Then dye the same in heavenly colors choice.  
All pinked<sup>5</sup> with varnished flowers of paradise.

15 Then clothe therewith mine understanding, will,  
Affections, judgment, conscience, memory  
My words, and actions, that their shine may fill  
My ways with glory and Thee glorify.  
Then mine apparel shall display before Ye  
That I am clothed in holy robes for glory.

1. **distaff** *n.* staff on which flax or wool is wound for use in spinning.

2. **flyers** *n.* part of a spinning wheel that twists fibers into yarn.

3. **quills** *n.* weaver's spindles or bobbins.

4. **fulling mills** *n.* machines that shrink and thicken cloth to the texture of felt.

5. **pinked** *v.* decorated with a perforated pattern.

