

written. She must have been a brave singer who could find heart for song amid the danger and hardships incident upon life in the New World at that time. Her poems are quaint and curious. They contain beautiful and original thoughts, some of which are not badly expressed and they form an odd and valuable relic of the earliest literature of our country. The listener must bear in mind that no congenial and gifted minds were near to

cheer or inspire her, no circle of brilliant wits to sharpen and brighten her intellect. She had no beautiful environments, no famous works of art to elevate or direct her taste, but the country was a barren wilderness, destitute of all poetical associations. Life was then a series of hard, obstinate facts, and the people among whom our songstress was called to dwell were the last in the world to encourage or appreciate a poet.

The Burning of Rea Tavern, Topsfield, October, 1836.

A paper prepared by Mrs. T. K. Leach and read before the Topsfield Historical Society, Friday evening, April 5th, 1895.

In the year 1836, Mr. Leach and myself were married and came to Topsfield the second day of May. We moved into Mr. Fred Perley's new house, the one owned by Mr. Andrew Gould today. In the house lived four families; in the upper tenements lived the families of Nehemiah Balch and Joseph Lovett, and Dea. John Wright, and our family occupied the lower floor. Mr. John Wright manufactured shoes and employed many men, some of whom he boarded in his own family. Of the many who lived in the house at that time, I know of but two besides myself who are alive today, Mr. David Adams of Lynn, and Mr. Nehemiah Balch's son Charles of Lowell, who was a mere child three years old, at that time. On the opposite side of the street from which we lived, stood the Rea tavern, which was a large two-story square house, a barn or stable owned by Mr. John Rea, and a two-story building, which was occupied by the firm of Herrick & Perkins (Charles Herrick & Amos Perkins) in the manufacture of shoes.

At the time of which I write, we were all young and full of life, and the calls we made on one another were numerous and not very ceremonious. I often ran

across the street to see Eliza Bradstreet, the house-keeper of Mr. John Rea, and Betsey Gould, the maid servant, who afterwards became Mrs. Samuel Adams. As Mr. Rea was a widower and Eliza his house-keeper, we often joked with Eliza at the prospect of her becoming Mrs. Rea, which Eliza would promptly resent. Betsey was not slow, and with what aid I could give her, we made the tavern ring with laughter and mirth.

Now, about the fire which consumed the tavern, stable and shoe factory, in the fall of the year 1836. I was awakened one Monday morning in October, about one o'clock, by a noise, arousing my husband, who sprang up and looking out of the window, said, "We are all afire," I asked him if I had time to dress, and he said, "It is Rea's," and gave the alarm in the house, which was alive instantly. I went to the front room and looked out, and the flames were just bursting out of the Northwest end of the tavern, and no one was astir but the hostler, Joseph Hastings, who was in the act of leading out one of the horses. Mr. Rea had two, both of which were led out, but one rushed back and perished.

Mr. Hastings slept in the attic of the

tavern next to the barn, and being suddenly awakened spang from his bed and rushed down stairs and in his descent his first impulse was to awaken the inmates. Opening the door of a side room occupied by Mr. Rea's brother's family to give the alarm, he was surprised to see Mr. Rea dressed in his Sunday clothes, with that huge black breast pin on, of which so much was said in the trial which followed, a dress which people remarked about as hardly fitting in which to fight a fire. Mrs. Rea was dressed in a flannel night gown, a garment which her husband, who said he could not tell what would happen before morning, had advised her to wear. This was testified to by Mrs. Charles H. Holmes in the court, being so informed by Mrs. Rea. Mr. Rea had packed his trunk, which he took up to Mr. Moses Wildes' house, and threw into the window by the end door. Mr. Hastings then opened the door to Eliza's room; she was fast asleep with Mr. Rea's little son.

In no time the whole village was aroused, and a man was despatched on horse back to Salem for an engine and ladders, which came with all due speed. The engine was attached to the town well (the one in use today,) and strange to say, it never sucked air but once. Rev. McEwen stood guard over the well, that no water should be wasted. Mr. Samuel Gould's two wells and Capt. Munday's one supplied all the water used at the fire.

The house in which we lived was in constant peril, and the manner in which we saved it was by carrying tubs of water to the attic and taking the clothes stripped from the bed, putting them into the tubs, and laying them thoroughly saturated with water on the roof and keeping them so until the engine arrived from Salem.

Mr. Perley's other house (now Mr J. B. Poor's) was used by Mr. Perley's brother Nat and himself as a variety store; it was filled with goods, and in his anxiety to save it, Nat, who went to the roof for that purpose, slipped and fell to the L, injuring himself seriously.

Mr. Benjamin Kimball had nearly fin-

ished his house, and with shavings and boards lying around the ground it seemed almost sure of destruction, but the timely arrival of the engine and ladders, which brought a large number of canvas sails, saved that and the other building.

When I came from the attic after assisting in wetting the blankets, I met Mr. Perley at the foot of the stairs; he said that we must clear the house as it was sure to go, we could not save it. I commenced to pack; I took a very large band box, (large enough to hold a dozen bonnets like those worn now-a-days) and put into it my dinner-set, comprising two dozen cups and saucers, milk pitcher, sugar bowl, two dozen plates, glass cup-plates, and preserve dishes, that filled the box. This I did in my parlor, and took them to the outer door. Then somebody said, "Here, Mrs. Leach, let me take the basket." Of this I was thankful, it was so heavy. The man carried it to Mr. Benjamin Kimball's land, and just as he was in the act of setting it down, out came the bottom of the box. I was fortunate in this accident, as but two glass dishes were broken, a fact which I discovered when I went to get them after the danger from the fire had passed. I was thoroughly surprised, however, to find that I could not lift the box, try as hard as I could, when I attempted to take it into the house. We got it back at last, and as they were bringing it in, a terrible crash came. I thought my dishes had gone at last, but it happened to be the ladder that went through the window as they were taking them from the house.

Many amusing things occurred while we were preparing to leave the house. I wanted to save my milk pitcher, so turned the milk which it contained on the floor. Mrs. Balch, in saving her linen, tied it up in a sheet, and her camphor-bottle she emptied into the sink, and the odor of camphor was present with us long after the fire. I looked for my wedding-dress, which was a lavender silk, and found it in the wood-basket, and a rug tucked into a bureau drawer.

So after the fire, as in all country towns, things quieted down and we thought but little about it till the next Sunday morning, when my husband came in and said,

"Two men were hung last night on the sign-post." I had another scare, but he laughed and added, "only in effigy." I went to the front window and sure enough, there hung what appeared to be two men; one had on a breast-pin made of leather, which was conspicuous by its immensity. Our good man Samuel Hood, learning of this, and as it was our good old New England Sabbath when all were expected to go to church, hurried to the scene with ladder in hand, and soon brought them to the ground, and laid them away. Other eyes saw this, and when the opportunity came, as it did after the people were in church, brought out the deposed effigies, and laid them across the wall that *fronted the burnt district*.

Of course the fire was the one theme talked about for a long time, and it leaked out that Rea found a letter threatening him if he continued his visits to see Ann Sawyer, that his buildings would be burnt over his head. He said that he picked the letter up on returning from one of his visits to the lady, and that he also knew who wrote it. People remarked very generally that it was high time such folks were brought to justice, and if he or his brother Samuel knew who it was that did such a thing, he should be brought out in a trial. It became so uncomfortable for those immediately interested that a warrant was sworn out, and Eliza Bradstreet was arrested by Sheriff Sprague of Salem on a charge of arson. Parson McEwen tendered to the Sheriff his house (now owned by Mrs. Ephraim Peabody), while he had Eliza in charge, which was accepted by them. They remained there during the whole trial.

The court assembled in the upper part of the Academy building, and lasted eleven days. J. W. Proctor, Esq., of South Danvers presided. Ashael Huntington of Salem was counsel for the government and Leveret Saltonstall, Esq., of Salem, appeared for Eliza. The attorneys King and Mack of Salem assisted in the trial, but in what capacity I am unable to write. There was little work done at home; every lady in the town attended court. I was there every day.

Mr. Huntington made the opening ad-

dress, during which he held aloft the letter that Mr. John Rea said that he had found, and in a high and powerful voice, declared that he should prove the charge by it, she, Eliza, having gone over it with her pen after it was written, which was called "painting." Mr. Samuel Rea had the severest examination. I think he was on the stand four or five days, and that beautiful breast-pin was often alluded to.

The trial waxed warm and bitter, lasting, as I have written, eleven days, days that, as the sun went down, grew darker and darker for Eliza, but confidence in his client, and satisfaction in the result that he would prove to the world that Eliza Bradstreet was innocent of the charge of arson,—a charge actuated by selfish and unkind motives,—spurred on Saltonstall. The thunder clap came when her brother took the stand, and in answer to the question. "Did your sister ever write to you?" replied with an emphatic "No." "Did she give any reason?" continued Saltonstall, to which he replied, "Yes." "Dear brother, my will is good enough, but I cannot write." Others testified to this fact, which appeared to be the deciding point in the trial.

When the trial was ended, the court adjourned to the church for the closing pleas. Two days elapsed before we got the verdict, but on the morning of the 4th of March, 1837, Eliza Bradstreet was acquitted of the charge of arson. The verdict was, "Could not sustain the charge."

The bells pealed forth the joyful news. It was the day that President Van Buren was inaugurated, and people out of town thought Topsfield was getting unusually patriotic.

In closing this paper, I will say that this is written from memory, and not from notes. I do not think that I have misquoted anyone, or misstated any of the facts. Of the principals in this famous trial,—a trial which was never recorded save by Him who knoweth all things that are done in this earth,—I will say that Mr. John Rea married Ann Sawyer, and moved to the British Provinces, and Eliza Bradstreet became Mrs. Silas Cochrane.