

Niv Saint Elizabeth

Niv1 If Saints in heaven cann either see or heare

Notes. At least two copies of this poem provide a date. One source states that the poem “was founde in the hand of Queen Elizabeths tombe at West[minster] 22 of June 1623” (Folger MS V.a. 275), while the source we have chosen to use confusingly dates it “Anno domini 1621. ultimo Martii. 1623” (that is, either 1621 or the last day of March 1623). Internal evidence in the poem, however, makes it clear that the poem was composed some time in 1623. It is possible to read the section beginning “If bleeding harts dejected soules find grace” as a separate poem, and it was eventually printed in this form, in *The Commons Petition of Long Afflicted England (1642)*. Nonetheless, since the two pieces were almost always transcribed together, and since the opening section here is clearly introductory, we choose to publish it and the following section as a single poem. A third item, “Your bold Petition Mortalls I have seene”, which takes the form of an answer-poem, is found in most of the same sources, and is also printed in *The Commons Petition*; however, it remains unclear when and by whom it was written.

“The Coppie of a Libell put into the hand of Queene Elizabeths statue¹ in Westminster by an unknowne person Anno domini 1621. ultimo Martii. 1623

To the blessed Saint² Elizabeth of most famous memory.

The humble petition of her now most wretched and most Contemptible, the Commons of poore distressed England.”

If Saints in heaven cann either see or heare
Or help poor Mortalls, O then lend thin eare
Looke downe blest Soule, and heare oh heare us nowe
Whose humble harts lowe as our knees doe bowe
Looke on our sufferings, thinke but on our wrongs
That hardly can be spoke by mortall tongues
O be not nowe lesse gracious then of old:
When each distressed Vassall might be bold
Into thyne open hand to putt his greife
And thence receive tymely and faire releife

Be not lesse good, less gracious then before
 In heaven the supplications of the poore
 Are heard assoone as suits of greatest kings
 If our petitions then blest soule want wings
 To mount them to the Judge of Judges throne 15
 O helpe them mightie soveraigne with thine owne
 Carry our just complaints since just they are
 And make a tender of them at the barr
 Where noe corruption, noe fraud, noe bribe
 Noe griping lawyer, avaritious scribe 20
 Noe favorite, noe parasite, noe Mynion³
 Cann lead, or alter the opinion
 Of that great Chancellour, their o lay them downe
 And merritt praise in heaven, on earth a crowne.
 Where to begin (deserver of all glorie) 25
 Or howe to tell our unexampled storie
 Heaven knowes we do not knowe, nay which is worst
 Thy once best subjects have so oft bene curst
 For offering upp Petitions of this kinde
 As see wee trimble till wee call to mynde 30
 Thy wonted goodnes that oh that doth cheere us
 That onely gives us hope that thou wilt heare us.
 When heaven was pleas'd honor'd soule to call thee hence⁴
 And soe make wretched for some great offence
 This little land. oh then begunn our feares 35
 And had wee then the kingdome drown'd with teares,
 And in those floods convay'd our soules to heaven
 To waite on thyne, wee had not now bene driven
 To cry, and call thee from thy fellowe Saints
 To heare and pittie those our just complaints. 40
 O Pardon blest; but that our grosse omission

And daigne to further this our poore petition,
And wee will make the name of blest Eliza
Equall the Avies of that great Maria⁵
Noe snuffeling rascall through his hornepie⁶ nose 45
Shall tell thy storie in his ill tun'd prose,
Nor shewe thy stature to each princes Groome
The Monuments wee le build shall make proud Rome
On pilgrimage to come, and att thy shrine
Offer their guifts as to a thing divine 50
And on an alter framed of richest stones
Weele daylie tender sighes teares and groanes.
Eternitie shall sleepe and long tongued Fame
Forgett to speake ere wee forgett thy name
Read blessed Soul, oh read it and beleive us 55
Then give it to his hands that cann relieve us.

The faithfull Beadsmen⁷ and dayly oratours the poore distressed Commons of dejected England.

The most humble Petition of the nowe most miserable the Commons of Long afflicted England.

If bleeding harts dejected soules find grace
Then all disposer turne not backe thy face
From us thy Suppliants thrice seaven sonnes⁸ have worne 60
Their Summer suits since wee begann to mourne
Ægypt's tenn plagues⁹ wee have endured twice told
Since blest Eliza was with Saints enrowl'd
Thy Messingers of wrath their vialls powre
Each day upon our heads no howre 65
Plagues begett plagues & vengeance fruitfull growes
As if there weere noe period for our woes
Have our black sinns great God rais'd such a cloud
Twixt us and heaven as cries though neere soe loud

Can get no passage to thy mearcie seate 70
 Are our iniquities good God soe great
 Soe infinite as neither groanes nor teares
 Cann entrance gett Remember but the yeares
 Of our affliction, then forgett wee crave
 Our crying sinnes bury then in the grave 75
 Of darke oblivion thrust them in the syde
 Of our Redeemer,¹⁰ oh lett them be tyde
 In chaines that they may never rise againe
 Lett us noe longer begg and sue in vaine
 Lett this our supplication, this complaint 80
 Tendred by our late sovereigne now thy Saint
 Att last find grace, was't not wee humbly pray
 Enough that first thou took'st that Queene away
 Was not that dove, that lambe of innocence
 Sufficient sacrifice for our offence 85
 Oh no! our sins out liv'd her, & our crimes
 Did threaten to outlast the last of tymes
 Thou did'st remove her that she might not see
 The sadd beginning of our miserie.
 Then like a showre of hailestones¹¹ fell thy darts 90
 Oh angrie death¹² how many thousand harts
 Weere wounded in one yeare? how many bleed
 And wisht to dye when all they lov'd weere dead
 Mothers left childlesse children quite bereft
 Of carefull parents, Nay there was not left 95
 A paire of frends to comfort one another
 Who wanted not a sister or a brother.
 Where was the husband, where the wife could say
 Wee should not be devour'd this night this day
 Death so his rage, and awful power shewed 100

That men on earth as corne on ground lay strowed
 The sadd remembrance of it still remaines
 Then thy stretcht arme of Vengeance bound in chaines
 The fruitfull fields¹³ till birds, beasts, hearbs plants trees
 Did famish, faint, dry, droop, yea wither and frees 105
 And nothing issued from the barren earth
 But that leane monster, and thinnefaced death
 Next inundations¹⁴ rose such as before
 Since Noahs flood¹⁵ neere topt ore British shoare
 Where men and beasts alike ingrave their bones 110
 In the moyst waves instead of Marble stones
 How often hath the sunn withdrawne his light
 And turn'd our day into the shape of night
 Had Egipt thicker darknes¹⁶ than had wee
 When cleerest eyes at midday could not see 115
 Unholosome mists, strange foggs rumors of warrs
 Evill portending commets blazing starrs¹⁷
 Prodigious birthes¹⁸ unnaturall sea-seasons
 Spurning Philosophers beyond their reason
 Frighting the poore, the rich exhorting 120
 From their downe bedds where they do lye snorting
 Heaven in combustion seemed¹⁹ the sky in armes
 The starrs beat drummes the spheares did sound alarms
 The ayre did often bloodie cullours spread
 And all to rouze us from the puft upp bedd 125
 Of base securitie, yet nought would fright us
 Till hee had robed us, oh what did delight us
 Henry²⁰ our joy, Henry whose every limbe
 Threatned to conquer death and not death him,
 Henry our pride even Henry the blest 131
 In whome great Brittain once sett upp his rest

Who had not in that one, all ample share?
 What subject had not rather lost his heire?
 What tender mother did not wish that dart
 Had glanc'd from him and strooke her darlings hart 135
 All that weere vertuous, all that weere good
 Turn'd their eyes rivers into streames of blood
 The Egiptian waters bitter weare,²¹ but knowe
 This toucht the very Soule that did not soe²²
 O pardon heaven all plagues that went before 140
 Had lost themselves in this and weere noe more
 To be remembred, that oh that alone
 Might well have made us weepe ourselves to stone²³
 The spawn of Pharo could their blood bee prized
 All the first borne that soe weere sacriefized²⁴ 145
 All that base frie compar'd to this our Henry
 Deserves noe mention, noe thought, noe memory,
 Lusting Sodome²⁵ such hath thy mercie bene
 Although it did abound in crying sinne
 Could not take fire untill they weere removed²⁶ 150
 That thou in mercy like in goodnes loved
 And thyne anoynted shee must leave this cittie
 Before't cann be destroyed such was thy pittie
 Such thy goodnes: oh is there yet full tenn
 Is there great God a number yet of men 155
 Whose innocence may slacke thy kindled Ire
 And keep this Sodom-Brittaine from the fire
 Of thy just anger, is there yet a soule
 Whose vertue power hath but to controule
 Thy heav'd upp hand of Justice if there bee 160
 For his, or her sake rouse thy clemencie
 Awake thy mercie lett thy Justice slumber

And save the greater by the lesser number
 For his or her sake we do humblie pray
 Respite of tyme give us a longer day 165
 And then enabled by thy grace and favour
 Wele purchase pardon by our good behaviour
 Plague, Famine, darknes, inundations
 Wee have endured feare of innovations
 With expectation of the worst cann followe 170
 Dayly torments us and wee houely swallowe
 Our very spiritts with feare and horror
 Wee nightly sleepe in dread awake in terror
 Nor are we all this while from Vermyn free
 The caterpillers²⁷ hang on every tree 175
 Lousie Projectors,²⁸ Monopoly mongers²⁹
 A crewe of upstart³⁰ Rascalls whose hungers
 Cann never be satisfied a sort of slaves
 More insatiable farr then whores or graves
 Things without soule bredd onely of the slyme 180
 Of this old age this base decrepitt tyme
 A crewe of upstart parasites that ryse
 And doe more mischief then the Egiptian flies³¹
 These in our gardens in our houses swarme
 One drinks a Mannor another eats a farme 185
 This with a lordshipp warmes his lusting whore
 That by the sale of Justice doth procure
 A tennement or two which having gott
 By violence hee drownes them in a pott³²
 They enter citties corporations 190
 Worke not, yet live by occupations
 They have not trade, and yet thers none are free
 From paying them a tax a fyne a fee

Ægipt had skipping grashoppers³³ I yeild
 That eate the herbes and fruits of every feild 195
 And wee have skipjack³⁴ courtiers I dare say
 That doe devoure farr more in one poore day
 Than they in Pharoas age could ere have done
 The boundemen³⁵ were paid but from some to some
 But these for three apprentishipp³⁶ have eate 200
 The fruite of all our labours all our sweet
 Have we not froggs³⁷ oh yes in every ditch
 Devouring poore, impoverishing the rich,
 Busie intelligencers³⁸ Base informers
 Like toades and froggs lye croaking in all corners 205
 Promooting Rascalls whose invenom'd tongues
 Have done thy suppliants infinite wrongs
 Where they desire to enter theirs noe defence
 No antient title noe inheritance
 Cann keepe them out, they wrest and strech the lawe 210
 Keepe officers and magistrates in awe
 They pluck the ballance from faire justice hand
 And make her ministers to their commaunds
 The lawefull sceptre of soveraigntie
 Is a mercinarie Baude to Villanie 215
 There is noe equitie noe lawe nor right
 All causes goe by favour, or by might
 O God of mercie, what cann more be said
 Justice is bought, and sold become a trade
 Honors confirr'd on base unworthie groomes 220
 And clownes for coyne may pearch on highest roomes³⁹
 Power Job had many scabbs⁴⁰ yet none soe badd
 As wee this one and twentie yeares have had
 Egipt had botches, Murraines sores that smarted⁴¹

But yet they lasted not they soone departed 225
 Halfe fortie yeares and more are gone, and past
 Since these our vexed Soules tooke light repast
 Bowman and Jowler...mate⁴²
 Compared to us are in a better state
 They cann be heard they cann be rewarded 230
 When we are curst, slighted unregarded.
 Is a people Heavens falne a degree
 Belowe the condition of a dogg but wee
 Was there a nation in the Universe
 More daring, once more bold, more stout, more ferce⁴³ 235
 And is there now upon the earths broad face
 Any that cann be reckoned halfe soe base
 Is there a people soe much scorn'd dispised
 Soe laught soe trodd on soe vassaliz'd
 Wee that all Europe envy'd, wee even wee 240
 Are slaves to those wee kept in slaverie
 Where is our ancient nobilitie become
 Alas they are suppresst, and in their roome
 Like proud usurping lucifers⁴⁴ their sitts
 A sort of upstart fawning parasits⁴⁵ 245
 Where is the gentrie all supprest disgrac'd
 And arrant knight above them nowe are plac'd
 Fiddlers, and fooles with dancers, and with rymers
 Are nowe in England made the greatest clymers⁴⁶
 Wee had a Parliament a salve for soares 250
 A Magna Charta⁴⁷ all cast out of doores
 The bold and hardie Brittaines conquered are
 Without a drumb, a sword or sound of warr
 If without cause just heaven wee doe complaine
 Then send our supplication backe againe 255

More could wee say, and much more could wee speake

But with the thought of this our harts doe breake

As humble then as wee began to crave

A gracious answere oh be pleased to save

The remnant of thy people turne thy face

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And lett us once more tast thy saveing grace

Forsake us not o Lord but give

Newe life to those that onely wishe to live.

To approve themselves readie, and faithfully thy Servant and Beadsmen

Source. Bodleian MS Malone 23, pp. 32-14⁴⁸

Other known sources. *Commons Petition*; “Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript” 150; Bodleian MS Ashmole 36-37, fol. 303r; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.50, fol. 8r; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. f.10, fol. 107r; Bodleian MS Rawl. D. 398, fol. 222r; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 160, fol. 16r; Bodleian MS Top. Cheshire c.7, fol. 3r; BL Add. MS 5832, fol. 202r; BL Add. MS 25707, fol. 76r; BL Add. MS 34217, fol. 39v; BL MS Sloane 363, fol. 11r; BL MS Sloane 1479, fol. 6r; Brotherton MS Lt. 28, fol. 2r; Brotherton MS Lt. q. 44, fol. 2r; Nottingham MS Portland PW V 37, p. 243; St. John’s MS K.56, no. 59 and no. 60; Beinecke MS Osborn b.197, p. 86; Folger MS V.a.275, p. 1; Huntington MS HM 198, 1.62

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¹ *Queene Elizabeths statue*: the effigy on Elizabeth’s tomb in the Henry VII Chapel in Westminster Abbey.

² *Saint*: Elizabeth is addressed as a saint throughout the poem, and is assumed to have the intercessionary powers attributed to saints in Catholic tradition.

³ *Noe favorite...noe Mynion*: although the critique is generalized, James’s favourite Buckingham is clearly implied here.

⁴ *call thee hence*: Elizabeth I died in March 1603.

⁵ *Avies of that great Maria*: allusion to the Catholic prayer to the Virgin, “Ave Maria” (“Hail Mary”).

⁶ *Homepie*: probable scribal error; read “hornpipe”.

⁷ *Beadsmen*: in religious terms, beadsmen were those who were charged with praying for others; the

term was also used as a petitionary salutation from inferiors to superiors.

⁸ *thrice seaven sonnes*: thrice seven suns; i.e. twenty-one years.

⁹ *Ægyptys tenn plagues*: the story of the plagues sent by God to force the Egyptians to free the enslaved Israelites is told in Exodus 7-12.

¹⁰ *the syde / Of our Redeemer*: literally the wound in Christ's side; theologically, the poem alludes to the idea that Christ's blood redeemed mankind's sins.

¹¹ *hailestones*: though used metaphorically here, hail was one of the plagues sent by God to Egypt (Exodus 9.18-34).

¹² *angrie death*: the next dozen lines of the poem allude to the severe visitation of plague in England during 1603-04.

¹³ *bound in chaines / The fruitfull fields*: i.e. created food shortages through bad harvests. Though there were localized crises of dearth in 1608, there were no major harvest disasters between 1598 and 1624.

¹⁴ *inundations*: floods. There were severe floods in South Wales, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Norfolk and elsewhere in 1607 (Walsham 118, 120, 124 n.40).

¹⁵ *Noahs flood*: see Genesis 6-9.

¹⁶ *Had Egipt thicker darknes*: the story of the plague of darkness visited upon the Egyptians is in Exodus 10.21-23.

¹⁷ *Evill portending commets blazing starrs*: the most notorious comet of the early Stuart age was the much discussed "blazing star" of 1618; however, this line probably refers to the comet of 1607. Comets were widely believed to be portents of future disaster.

¹⁸ *Prodigious birthes*: monstrous births were widely interpreted as providential signs of God's displeasure.

¹⁹ *Heaven in combustion seemed*: this and the following two lines refer to meteorological and astrological phenomena interpreted by contemporaries as prodigies and portents.

²⁰ *Henry*: James I's eldest son, Henry, who died in November 1612. Henry's death triggered intense grief among those who saw him as the future hope of a more militant Protestant nation.

²¹ *The Egiptian waters bitter weare*: perhaps an allusion to Exodus 15.23, where the Israelites in the wilderness "could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter".

²² *This toucht...did not soe*: this line is a little obscure. One possible reading would repunctuate it as

“This toucht the very Soule, that did not soe”. Thus, Henry’s death was bitter to the soul, unlike the Egyptian waters whose bitterness did not penetrate as deep.

²³ *weepe ourselves to stone*: perhaps an allusion to the myth of Niobe, who wept for her lost children even after being turned into a stone.

²⁴ *The spawnne...were sacriefized*: allusion to the plague of the deaths of the first-born sons in Egypt (Exodus 11-12).

²⁵ *Sodome*: the city of wickedness, destroyed by God (Genesis 19).

²⁶ *Could not take fire...weere removed*: before destroying Sodom, God had Lot and his family escape (Genesis 19).

²⁷ *caterpillars*: a common term for corrupt courtiers and officials who despoiled the commonweal.

²⁸ *Projectors*: devisers of schemes (“projects”) to raise money for the Crown by delegating enforcement powers to private individuals. Ideally, projects should marry private and public gain; too often, however, they appeared to enable private gain at public expense.

²⁹ *Monopoly mongers*: dealers in monopolies (a common form of project which granted to an individual a monopoly over a manufacturing process or form of economic regulation). Monopolies had been a source of vigorous debate in the Parliament of 1621 (see Section M), and had been used by King and courtiers as rewards to clients and relatives.

³⁰ *upstart*: of low social origins.

³¹ *Egiptian flies*: allusion to the plague of flies visited upon the Egyptians (Exodus 8.20-31).

³² *A tennement...in a pott*: a little obscure, though perhaps can be read as “exhausts the tenements, corruptly obtained, by wasting resources on riotous consumption (of drink)”.

³³ *Ægipt had skipping grashoppers*: for the biblical plague of locusts, see Exodus 10:12-19.

³⁴ *skipjack*: foolish, foppish.

³⁵ *boundemen*: bondmen; serfs or slaves.

³⁶ *for three apprenticeshipps*: apprenticeships were typically seven years long; thus this phrase is best read as a measure of time, twenty-one years.

³⁷ *froggs*: the plague of frogs that afflicted Egypt is described in Exodus 8.1-14.

38 *intelligencers*: sellers of information.

39 *Honors confirr'd...highest roomes*: this couplet alludes generally to the inflation of honours—the profligate granting and sale of titles—under James, and perhaps more specifically to the promotion of socially obscure favourites at the Jacobean court.

40 *Power Job had many scabbs*: among many other afflictions, God gave “Power” (i.e. “poor”) Job a bad case of boils (Job 2.7).

41 *Egipt had botches...smarted*: God inflicted plagues of boils (“botches”) and cattle disease (“Murraines”) upon the Egyptians (Exodus 9.3-6, 9.8-11).

42 *Bowman and Jowler, Ringwood and his mate*: proverbially-used names of dogs. The allusion here is to James’s well-known love for the hunt—and thus to his care for his hunting dogs, instead of care for his people.

43 *More daring...more ferce*: it was a common lament in the 1620s that English martial vigour had decayed since Elizabeth’s death.

44 *lucifers*: devils.

45 *upstart fawning parasits*: generally speaking, courtiers who have risen to authority from outside the old nobility. In this context, Buckingham and his kindred are clearly implied.

46 *Fiddlers...clymers*: compare this couplet to the libel on James I’s merry fools and courtiers, “Listen jolly gentlemen”. Buckingham was known to have charmed the King with his dancing skills.

47 *Magna Charta*: Magna Carta, the document asserting the “liberties” of “free men”, extracted by baronial rebels from King John in 1215.

48 The order of pages in this manuscript has been disrupted in binding.
