Your bold Petition Mortalls I have seene

Your bold Petition Mortalls I have seene
And finde it full of passion, full of spleene
Prayers that enter Heaven and gaine a heareing
Are wing’d with charity heers noe appearing
For supplications fraught with Ire or gall
I doe confesse poore Soules the truth of all
And wish a period to your miseries
But first your infinite iniquities
Must have an end, alas you must beginn
To love faire vertue as you have lov’d sinne
You must redeeme the tyme thats lost & knowe
As Heaven hath ever bene to vengeance slowe
Soe by degrees is grace and mercie wonne
Eyes that are foule by gazing on the sunne
Increase their greifes, if you wold mercy gaine
From unjust actions you must first refraine
How dare a wicked servant once require
From his just maister either grace or hyre
You must putt of the shoes wherewith you trodd
The wayes of sinne ere you discourse with God
Give mee but ground for commendation
Incouragement, and then your supplication
I shall deliver, I left you rich ‘tis true
But proud withall, you fear’d none all fear’d you
You were soe far from fear that you deny’d
To pay him fear that gave you cause of pride
You must be humbl’d Heaven ever punish’d yet
All kinde of Rankenes with an opposite
Hee that hath surfett ere hee gain’d his heilth
Must strictly fast, had you satt still in wealth
You never would have bowed your stubborne knee
Either to God, or Saint, to heaven or Mee
I will not grieve your troubled soules too much
Yet gently your ingratitude I’le touch
And that you may better knowe your errors
I shall into your memories call the favours
Are by you forgotten, unthankfully forgotten
Long tyme before the flesh I wore was rotten
It is noe ostentation to relate
Curtesies done to such as are ingrate.
I found you like a humbled scattered flocke
Your very soules beating against the rocke
Of ignorance and superstition
Just in the way to blacke pardon’d
I plaid the shephard, and the Pylate too
And yet noe lambe nor fleece more then my due
Was ere exacted from the common store
Wee all alike were rich alike were poor
Though thyne and myne, and myne & thine were things
Not to be knowne twixt subjects and their kings
Princes like the Sunn should from the Earth exhall
That which they raise, then in a shower lett fall
In every place, as they see cause a share,
And not consume it in the wanton ayre
There full Exchequour should like conduits bee
Open to all the rich and poore like free
And subjects should like feilds be full of springs
That naturally fall still towards their kings
The Comon wealth should alwaies be in motion
Seas flowe to brooks & brooks should fall to th’ocean
Such Royall such loyall comunitie
Keepe Kings, and subjects still in unitie
I cannot say I greive this place is free
From passion as from Iniquitie
But yet I muse since Scotland with it joyn’d
Englands Exchequour is no better coyn’d
Sure there is false play I fear the younger brother
Is growne too wise too craftie for the other
It is an ill made marriage where the bride
Spend faster then the husband cann provide
I did mainetaine farr be vaine glorie hence
A well rigg’d Navie still for your defence
A royall fleet that like a Brazen wall
Circl’d this land the armies weere not small
The garrisons and forts I did uphold
Kept you like sheepe in peace within your fold
What welldeserving soldiour went away
Without reward much lesse without a pay.
To neighbour states in amitie wee lent
Money and men what servant ever went
Without his hyre; what pention was denied
From the first houre unto the hower I dyed
In breife I seldome borowed oft did lend
Yet left enough to give enough to spend
How comes it then since neith fleet nor fort
Armie, nor garrison, noe house, noe court
Noe wages, noe debts nothing repair’d nought paid
Nought purchas’d, nought lent, nought built, nought made
And yet there nought remaines nought to be found
All is not perfect sure all is not sound
I noe lesse muse to see the woods cutt downe
The antient lands Revenues of the Crowne
Disposed of soe to favorite to freind
That should hereditarily discend
From king to king as doth the diadem
The land of the crown is the Crowne cheifest geme
Customes subsedies, fines are accedents
Enough is substantiall, but the annuall rents
There are deservers sure that service doe
That must not be made knowne to heaven or you
Princes are Gods on earth, and subjects eyes
Upon their actions must not stand like spies
It is a daingerous and ungodly thinge
To prie into the chamber of a Kinge
The Arke of state is satisfied, and must
Be onely toucht by those are putt in trust
But you an answere crave to your petition
Then knowe poore Soules its given in comission
From heavens great King to tell you all thats past
To whats to come, is but a sparke a blast
Your sorrowes yet alas like womans throwes
Doe goe and come but there must follow woes
Ere England be deliver’d that will make
Your very entralls bleed your soules to quake
The dayes shall come when stowtest men shall mourne
And children wish they never had bene borne
The sword shall eate what plagues have overslipt
And fire consume what famine hath not ript
The Gospell sunne shall loose his glorious light
And ignorance as black as darkest night
Shall spread her sable wings about this Isle
And Babilons proud whore once more defile
Albions white clifles, the Israelites must double
The bricks they made, yet be allowed noe stubble
An Egiptian with an Hebrew must contend
Oh th’Ebrewe wants a Moses to his friend
There is an Execrable thing lies hidd
Such a Sinne as modestie doth forbidd
Mee for to name, till that be brought to light
And Achan punisht, be putto flight
Before the men of Ai you shall not stand
Nor shall ought prosper that you take in hand
The husband from his wife shalbe divorc’t
And every poore mans Virgin shalbe forced
Urias shalbe murthered for his wife
And Naball sleepe in dainger of his life
You thirsted for a King, Heavens King releive you
And grant you pardon as I heere forgive you
You tooke a surfett of my happie raigne
And paid my well deservings with disdaine
But oh you cast not Mee away ’twas not I
You slighted ’twas the lord of hoasts most highe
And therefore you shall call and crye in vaine
Unlesse you shall lament, bootles complaine
From forth the North the plague is come at last
The Lyon’s rouzed from’s Denn that shall lye wast
Your townes, and citties, and who stands up at allas
To stopp the gapp whereat his wrath shall passe
Hee shall by violence, and craft doe more
Then all the world could ever doe before
Yet know his end and last conclusion
Shalbe in miserie, and confusion.

Hark hark Heavens organs summons me away
My comission’s ended I dare not stay
The blessed Querresters of heaven I heare
Tuning their voyces to our Soveraignes eare
Farwell poore Soules goe pray repent & fast
The deafe and unjust Judge is wonn at last
By importunitie much more will hee
That is inclin’d and proane to clemency.

I shall attend your prayers every houre
And to the utmost will extend my power
With him that onely cann, and may releive you
Theirs hope of Pardon if hee once reprise you
Greive for what’s past with a resolution
To amend your lives deferr not the’xecution
Unto the hornes of th’altar tymely flye
Tymely repent least you untimely dye.

Source. Bodleian MS Malone 23, pp. 14-48

Other known sources. Commons Petition; “Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript” 162; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.50, fol. 10v; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. e.14, fol. 49v; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. f.10, fol. 111r; Bodleian MS Rawl. D. 398, fol. 226r and fol. 230r; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 160, fol. 18v; Bodleian MS Top. Cheshire c.7, fol. 6r; BL MS Sloane 363, fol. 15r; Brotherton MS Lt. 28, fol. 6r; Brotherton MS Lt. q.44, fol. 6r; CCRO MS CR 63/2/19, fol. 33r; Nottingham MS Portland PW V 37, p. 249; St. John’s MS K.56, no. 61 and no. 62; Beinecke MS Osborn b.197, p. 92; Folger MS V.a.275, p. 8
whilome: one-time.

You were...cause of pride: i.e. in their arrogance, the English forgot to fear God, the author of their prosperity.

I found you: i.e. at the time of Elizabeth’s accession in 1558.

soules...ignorance and superstition: i.e. at the time of Elizabeth’s succession England had formally been a Catholic country for the previous five years. The theme of the Elizabethan redemption of the nation from the darkness of “popery” was common in the literary, ritual and visual symbolism that comprised the cult of Elizabeth.

since Scotland with it joyn’d: i.e. since the Stuart succession in 1603.

younger brother: Scotland.

the bride...cann provide: the bride is Scotland, the husband England. The charge of Scottish profligacy with English wealth was commonly made (see Section E). Despite James’s best efforts—which often conceived of political union in the language of marital union—England and Scotland were not formally united until 1707.

neighbour states...men: Elizabeth lent (intermittent) financial and military support to Protestants in the Netherlands and France.

woods cutt downe...of the Crowne: the next few lines of the poem lament the felling of trees in the royal forests and the alienation of Crown lands by the Jacobean monarchy.

is but a sparke a blast: i.e. is like a mere spark compared to a blast.

throwes: throes; labour pains.

The Gospell sunne: Protestantism.

ignorance: Catholicism, popery.

Babilons proud whore: the Church of Rome, the Papacy.

the Israelites...noe stubble: allusion to the labours imposed on the enslaved Israelites by the Egyptians (Exodus 1.14), and a prophecy of the enslavement of the English (Israelites, Hebrews) by Catholicism and its worldly champions (the Egyptians). Straw (“stubble”) was used in the making of
bricks.

16  *Moses*: leader of the Israelites in their liberation from the Egyptians.

17  *There is an Execrable thing...not stand*: these five lines allude to the story of Achan in Joshua 7. After Joshua’s victory at Jericho, Achan violated God’s command by secretly stealing an “accursed thing” from the ruins of the defeated city. As a punishment for Achan’s hidden sin, God caused Joshua’s armies to be defeated by the men of the City of Ai. After Joshua identified Achan as the thief, exposed the gold and “Babylonish garment” Achan had stolen, and had Achan and his family stoned to death, God was at last appeased. The burning question here is what the “Execrable thing” is that “lies hidd” in England, but which “modestie doth forbidd” the Queen to name. One solution would be to follow the clue of the “Babylonish garment”, which might suggest that the hidden thing is “popery”, the religion of the Whore of Babylon. But the Queen’s “modestie” would hardly prevent her from naming this—indeed she has already named it. The obvious alternate reading would be to assume that the sin must be sexual in nature. The most likely candidate here might then be the King’s rumoured homosexual relationship with his favourite, Buckingham.

18  *Uriah*: Uriah, husband of Bathsheba, and sent into mortal danger on the orders of King David to allow the King to marry Bathsheba in Uriah’s stead (2 Samuel 11).

19  *Nabal*: Nabal, a rich farmer who mocked King David’s request that he supply his troops with food, and who was saved from David’s violent reprisal only at the behest of his (Nabal’s) wife Abigail’s petition. God, having prevented David soiling his hands with a vengeance killing, then killed off Nabal Himself (1 Samuel 25).

20  *You thirsted for a King*: the following lines suggest that the best reading of this phrase is that while Elizabeth was Queen, the English longed for a male ruler, a king, and disdained their female monarch’s achievements. The phrase might also allude to the famous biblical verse, 1 Samuel 8, in which God instructs Samuel to warn the king-hungry Israelites of the drawbacks of monarchical rule.

21  *who stands up at allas*: possibly should read simply “who stands up, alas,”.

22  *From forth the North...confusion*: these eight lines are couched in the language of prophecy, thus making their meaning deliberately slippery. Yet it is clearly possible to read them in a profoundly anti-Stuart light: if the plague comes from Scotland (“the North”), the destructive lion roused from his den is none other than James I. This reading becomes more secure when the prophecy is placed side-by-side with the so-called “Merlin’s Prophecy” verse (“A Prince out of the North shall come”), in which James, as Lion, emerges from his den to lead a Protestant conquest of Catholicism and Islam.

23  *Querresters*: choristers.

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