

Niv2 Your bold Petition Mortalls I have seene

Notes. This poem takes the form of an answer to “If Saints in heaven cann either see or heare” (and/or its second section, “If bleeding harts dejected soules find grace”). It is unclear when and by whom it was written, although one contemporary thought the poet of “If Saints in heaven” had in fact “answer’d it himselve” (M., T. 66). It was printed, following “If bleeding harts dejected soules find grace”, in *The Commons Petition of Long Afflicted England (1642)*.

“A Gracious answeere from that blessed Saint to her whilome¹ Subjects with a divine admonition and a prophetique conclusion.”

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 5
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 10
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 15
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 20
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 weere soe farr from feare that you deny'd 25
To pay him feare that gave you cause of pride²
You must be humbl'd Heaven ever punisht yet
All kinde of Rankenes with an opposite
Hee that hath surfett ere hee gaine his heilth
Must strictly fast, had you satt still in wealth 30
You never would have bowed your stubborne knee
Either to God, or Saint, to heaven or Mee
I will not greive your troubled soules too much
Yet gently your ingratitude I'le touch
And that you may better knowe your errors 35
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. 40
I found you³ like a humbled scattered flocke
Your very soules beating against the rocke
Of ignorance and superstition⁴
Just in the way to blacke pardition
I plaid the shephard, and the Pylate too 45
And yet noe lambe nor fleece more then my due
Was ere exacted from the common store
Wee all alike weere rich alike weere poore
Though thyne and myne, and myne & thine weere things
Not to be knowne twixt subjects and their kings 50
Princes like the Sunn should from the Earth exhall
That which they raise, then in a showre 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 55
 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 60
 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'd⁵ 65
 Englands Exchequour is no better coyn'd
 Sure there is false play I fear the younger brother⁶
 Is growne too wise too craftie for the other
 It is an ill made marriage where the bride
 Spend faster then the husband cann provide⁷ 70
 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 75
 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 men⁸ what servant ever went 80
 Without his hyre; what pention was denyed
 From the first houre unto the hower I dyed
 In breife I seldome borrowed oft did lend

Yet left enough to give enough to spend
 How comes it then since neith fleet nor fort 85
 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 90
 I noe lesse muse to see the woods cutt downe
 The antient lands Revenues of the Crowne⁹
 Disposed of soe to favorite to freind
 That should hereditarily discend
 From king to king as doth the diadem 95
 The land of the crown is the Crowne cheifest geme
 Customes subsidies, 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 100
 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 105
 Be onely toucht by those are putt in trust
 But you an answeare 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 blast¹⁰ 110
 Your sorrowes yet alas like womans throwes¹¹
 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 115
 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 sunne¹² shall loose his glorious light
 And ignorance¹³ as black as darkest night 120
 Shall spread her sable wings about this Isle
 And Babilons proud whore¹⁴ once more defile
 Albions white cliffes, the Israelites must double
 The bricks they made, yet be allowed noe stubble¹⁵
 An Egiptian with an Hebrew must contend 125
 Oh th'Ebrewe wants a Moses¹⁶ 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 130
 Before the men of Ai you shall not stand¹⁷
 Nor shall ought prosper that you take in hand
 The husband from his wife shalbe divorc't
 And every poore mans Virgin shalbe forced
 Uria¹⁸ shalbe murthered for his wife 135
 And Naball¹⁹ sleepe in dainger of his life
 You thirsted for a King,²⁰ 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 140
 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 145

The Lyon's rouzed from's Denn that shall lye wast
Your townes, and citties, and who stands up at allas²¹
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 150
Yet know his end and last conclusion
Shalbe in miserie, and confusion.²²

Hark hark Heavens organs summons me away
My comission's ended I dare not stay
The blessed Querresters²³ of heaven I heare 155
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. 160

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 reprove you
Greive for what's past with a resolution 165
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. 14-48²⁴

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

- ¹ *whilome*: one-time.
- ² *You weere...cause of pride*: i.e. in their arrogance, the English forgot to fear God, the author of their prosperity.
- ³ *I found you*: i.e. at the time of Elizabeth's accession in 1558.
- ⁴ *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.
- ⁵ *since Scotland with it joyn'd*: i.e. since the Stuart succession in 1603.
- ⁶ *younger brother*: Scotland.
- ⁷ *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.
- ⁸ *neighbour states...men*: Elizabeth lent (intermittent) financial and military support to Protestants in the Netherlands and France.
- ⁹ *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.
- ¹⁰ *is but a sparke a blast*: i.e. is like a mere spark compared to a blast.
- ¹¹ *throwes*: throes; labour pains.
- ¹² *The Gospell sunne*: Protestantism.
- ¹³ *ignorance*: Catholicism, popery.
- ¹⁴ *Babilons proud whore*: the Church of Rome, the Papacy.
- ¹⁵ *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 *Uria*: 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 *Naball*: 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.
