A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner (1560)

Anne Locke

Note: The sonnet sequence *A meditation of a penitent sinner* was appended, with a separate title page, to *Sermons of John Calvin, vpon the songe that Ezechias made after he had been sicke* (1560), translated from French into English, with a translator's dedication signed by "A.L." The translator was Anne Vaughan Locke (*b.* ca. 1533, *d.* before 1607), a writer of strong Protestant convictions and a friend and correspondent of John Knox. Scholarly recognition that Locke was also the author of the [unsigned] *Meditation* was slow in coming, however, despite the lack of credible alternative candidates, largely because of Locke's attention-deflecting note stating that the poems were "deliuered me by my frend." It is only in the last 15 years that Locke has received due credit as the author, not only of the first English sonnet sequence by a woman, but of the first English sonnet sequence.


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A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner

A MEDITATION OF A PENITENT SINNER: WRITTEN IN MANNER OF A Paraphrase upon the 51. Psalme of Dauid.

I have added this meditation following unto the end of this boke, not as parcell of maister Caluines worke, but for that it well agreeeth with the same argument, and was deliuered me by my frend with whom I knew I might be so bolde to vse & publishe it as pleased me.

The preface, expressing the passioned minde of the penitent sinner.

The hainous gylt of my forsaken ghost
So threatens, alas, vnto my febled sprite
   Deserued death, and (that me greueth most)
Still stand so fixt before my daseld sight
The lothesome filthe of my disteined life,
The mighty wrath of myne offended Lorde,
My Lord whos wrath is sharper than the knife,
And deper woundes than dobleedged sworde,
That, as the dimmed and fordulled eyen
Full fraught with teares & more & more opprest
With growing streames of the distilled bryne
Sent from the fornace of a grefefull brest,
Can not enioy the comfort of the light,
Nor finde the waye wherin to walke aright:

So I blinde wretch, whome Gods enflamed ire
With pearcing stroke hath throwne vn to [the] grou[n]d,
Amidde my sinnes still groueling in the myre,
Finde not the way that other oft haue found,
Whome cherefull glimse of gods abounding grace
Hath oft releued and oft with shyning light
Hath brought to ioy out of the vgglye place,
Where I in darke of euerlasting night
Bewayle my woefull and vnhappy case,
And fret my dyeng soule with gnawing paine.
Yet blinde, alas, I groape about for grace.
While blinde for grace I groape about in vaine,
My fainting breath I gather vp and straine,
Mercie, mercie to crye and crye againe.

But mercy while I sound with shreking crye
For grau[n]t of grace and pardon while I pray,
Euen then despeir before my ruthefull eye
Spredes forth my sinne & shame, & semes to saye
In vaine thou brayest forth thy bootlesse noyse
To him for mercy, O refused wight,
That heares not the forsaken sinners voice.
Thy reprobate and foreordeined sprite,
For damned vessell of his heauie wrath,
(As selfe witnes of thy beknowyng hart,
And secrete gilt of thine owne conscience saith)
Of his swete promises can claime no part:
But thee, caytif, deserued curse doeth draw
To hell, by iustice, for offended law.

This horror whe[n] my tre[m]bling soule doth heare,
When markes and tokens of the reprobate,
My growing sinnes, of grace my senslesse cheare,
Enforce the profe of euerlastying hate,
That I conceiue the heauens king to beare
Against my sinfull and forsaken ghost:
As in the throte of hell, I quake for feare,
And then in present perill to be lost
(Although by conscience wanteth to replye,
But with remorse enforcing myne offence,
Doth argue vaine my not auaillyng crye)
With woefull sighes and bitter penitence
To him from whom the endlesse mercy flowes
I cry for mercy to releue my woes.
And then not daring with presuming eye
Once to beholde the angry heauens face,
From troubled sprite I send confused crye,
To craue the crummes of all sufficing grace.
With foltring knee I fallyng to the ground,
Bendyng my yelding handes to heauens throne,
Poure forth my piteous plaint w[ith] woefull sound,
With smoking sighes, & oft repeted grone,
Before the Lord, the Lord, whom synner I,
I cursed wretch, I haue offended so,
That dredyng, in his wrekefull wrath to dye,
And damned downe to depth of hell to go,
Thus tost with panges and passions of despeir,
Thus craue I mercy with repentant chere.

A Meditation of a penitent sinner, vpon the 51.
Psalme.

Haue mercie vpon me (o God) after thy great merci

Haue mercy, God, for thy great mercies sake.
O God: my God, vnto my shame I say,
Beynge fled from thee, so as I dred to take
Thy name in wretched mouth, and feare to pray
Or aske the mercy that I haue abusde.
But, God of mercy, let me come to thee:
Not for iustice, that iustly am accusde:
Which selfe word Iustice so amaseth me,
That scarce I dare thy mercy sound againe.
But mercie, Lord, yet suffer me to craue.
Mercie is thine: Let me not crye in vaine,
Thy great mercie for my great fault to haue.
Haue mercie, God, pitie my penitence
With greater mercie than my great offence.
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And according
unto the multitude
of thy mercies do
away myne
offences.

My many sinnes in nomber are encreast,
With weight wherof in sea of depe despeire
My sinking soule is now so sore opprest,
That now in peril and in present fere,
I crye: susteine me, Lord, and Lord I pray,
With endlesse number of thy mercies take
The endlesse number of my sinnes away.
So by thy mercie, for thy mercies sake,
Rue on me, Lord, releue me with thy grace.
My sinne is cause that I so nede to haue
Thy mercies ayde in my so woefull case:
My synne is cause that scarce I dare to craue
Thy mercie manyfolde, which onely may
Releue my soule, and take my sinnes away.

Wash me yet more
from my
wickednes, and
clense me from my
sinne.

So foule is sinne and lothesome in thy sighte,
So foule with sinne I see my selfe to be,
That till from sinne I may be washed white,
So foule I dare not, Lord, approche to thee.
Ofte hath thy mercie washed me before,
Thou madest me cleane: but I am foule againe.
Yet washe me Lord againe, and washe me more.
Washe me, O Lord, and do away the staine
Of vggly sinnes that in my soule appere.
Let flow thy ple[n]tuous streames of clensing grace.
Washe me againe, yea washe me euery where,
Bothe leprous bodie and defiled face.
Yea washe me all, for I am all vnclene,
And from my sin, Lord, cleanse me ones againe.

For I knowledge
my wickednes, and
my sinne is euer
before me.

Haue mercie, Lord, haue mercie: for I know
How muche I nede thy mercie in this case.
The horror of my gilt doth dayly growe,
And growing weares my feble hope of grace.
I fele and suffer in my thralled brest
Secret remorse and gnawing of my hart.
I fele my sinne, my sinne that hath opprest
My soule with sorrow and surmounting smart.
Drawe me to mercie: for so oft as I
Presume to mercy to direct my sight,
My Chaos and my heape of sinne doth lie,
Betwene me and thy mercies shining light.
What euer way I gaze about for grace,
My filth and fault are euer in my face.
A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner

Against thee
onelye haue I
sinned, & don
euill in thy sight.

Graunt thou me mercy, Lord: thee thee alone
I haue offended, and offendying thee,
For mercy loe, how I do lye and grone.
Thou with allpearcing eye beheldest me,
Without regard that sinned in thy sight.
Beholde againe, how now my spirite it rues,
And wailes the tyme, when I with foule delight
Thy swete forbearing mercy did abuse.

My cruell conscience with sharpned knife
Doth splat my ripped hert, and layes abrode
The lothesome secretes of my filthy life,
And spredis them forth before the face of God.

That thou mightest be founde iust in thy sayinges, and maiest ouer come when thou art judged.

But mercy Lord, O Lord some pitie take,
Withdraw my soule from the deserued hell,
O Lord of glory, for thy glories sake:
That I may saued of thy mercy tell,
And shew how thou, which mercy hast behight
To sighyng sinners, that haue broke thy lawes,
Performest mercy: so as in the sight
Of them that iudge the iustice of thy cause.

For loe, I was shapen in wickednes, and in sinne my mother co[n]ceiued me.

For lo, in sinne, Lord, I begotten was,
With sede and shape my sinne I toke also,
Sinne is my nature and my kinde alas,
In sinne my mother me conceiued: Lo
I am but sinne, and sinfull ought to dye,
Dye in his wrath that hath forbydden sinne.

Such bloome and frute loe sinne doth multiplie,
Such was my roote, such is my iuyse within.

I plead not this as to excuse my blame,
On kynde or parentes myne owne gilt to lay:
But by disclosing of my sinne, my shame,
And nede of helpe, the plainer to displaye
Thy mightie mercy, if with plenteous grace
My plenteous sinnes it please thee to deface.

But lo, thou hast eloued trueth, the hidden and secrete thinges of thy wisedome thou haste opened vnto me.

Thou louest simple sooth, not hidden face With trutheles visour of deceiuing showe.
Lo simplie, Lord, I do confesse my case, And simplie craue thy mercy in my woe. This secrete wisedom hast thou graunted me, To se my sinnes, & whence my sinnes do growe: This hidden knowledge haue I learnt of thee, To fele my sinnes, and howe my sinnes do flowe With such excesse, that with vnfained hert, Dreding to drowne, my Lorde, lo howe I flee, Simply with teares bewailyng my desert, Releued simply by thy hand to be. Thou louest truth, thou taughtest me the same. Helpe, Lord of truth, for glory of thy name.

Sprinkle me, Lorde, with hisope and I shalbe cleane: washe me and I shalbe whiter then snow.

With swete Hysope besprinkle thou my sprite: Not such hysope, nor so besprinkle me, As law vnperfect shade of perfect lyght Did vse as an apointed signe to be Foreshewing figure of thy grace behight. With death and bloodshed of thine only sonne, The swete hysope, cleanse me defyled wyght, Sprinkle my soule. And when thou so haste done, Bedeawd with droppes of mercy and of grace, I shalbe cleane as cleansed of my synne. Ah wash me, Lord: for I am foule alas: That only canst, Lord, wash me well within, Wash me, O Lord: when I am washed soe, I shalbe whiter than the whitest snowe.

Thou shalt make me heare ioye and gladnesse, al the bones which thou hast broken shall reiyoysye

Long haue I heard, & yet I heare the soundes Of dredfull threates and thonders of the law, Which Eccho of my gylty minde resoundes, And with redoubled horror doth so draw My listening soule from merchies gentle voice, That louder, Lorde, I am constraynde to call: Lorde, pearce myne eares, & make me to reiyoys, When I shall heare, and when thy mercy shall Sounde in my hart the gospell of thy grace. Then shalt thou geue my hearing ioy againe, The ioy that onely may releue my case. And then my broosed bones, that thou with paine
Hast made to weake my febled corps to beare,
Shall leape for ioy, to shewe myne inward chere.

Turne away thy face from my sinnes, and do away all my misdedes.

Loke on me, Lord: though trembling I beknowe,
That sight of sinne so sore offendeth thee,
That seing sinne, how it doth ouerflowe
My whelmed soule, thou canst not loke on me,
But with disdaine, with horror and despite.
Loke on me, Lord: but loke not on my sinne.
Not that I hope to hyde it from thy sight,
Which seest me all without and eke within.
But so remoue it from thy wrathfull eye,
And from the iustice of thyne angry face,
That thou impute it not. Looke not how I
Am foule by sinne: but make me by thy grace
Pure in thy mercies sight, and, Lord, I pray,
That hatest sinne, wipe all my sinnes away.

Create a cleane hart within me, O God: and renew a stedfast spirit within my bowels.

Sinne and despeir haue so possest my hart,
And hold my captiue soule in such restraint,
As of thy mercies I can fele no part,
But still in languor do I lye and faint.
Create a new pure hart within my brest:
Myne old can hold no liquour of thy grace.
My feble faith with heauy lode opprest
Staggring doth scarcely creepe a reeling pace,
And fallen it is to faint to rise againe.
Renew, O Lord, in me a constant sprite,
That stayde with mercy may my soule susteine,
A sprite so setled and so firmely pight
Within my bowells, that it neuer moue,
But still vphold thassurance of thy loue.
Cast me not away from thy face, and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Loe prostrate, Lorde, before thy face I lye,
With sighes depe drawne depe sorow to expresse.
O Lord of mercie, mercie do I crye:
Dryue me not from thy face in my distresse,
Thy face of mercie and of swete relefe,
The face that fedes angels with onely sight,
The face of comfort in extremest grefe.
Take not away the succour of thy sprite,
Thy holy sprite, which is myne onely stay,
The stay that when despeir assaileth me,
In faintest hope yet moueth me to pray,
To pray for mercy, and to pray to thee.
Lord, cast me not from presence of thy face,
Nor take from me the spirite of thy grace.

But render me my wonted ioyes againe,
Which sinne hath reft, and planted in theyr place
Doubt of thy mercy ground of all my paine.
The tast, that thy loue whilome did embrace
My chearfull soule, the signes that dyd assure
My felyng ghost of fauor in thy sight,
Are fled from me, and wretched I endure
Senslesse of grace the absence of thy sprite.
Restore my ioyes, and make me fele againe
The swete retorn of grace that I haue lost,
That I may hope I pray not all in vayne.
With thy free sprite confirme my feble ghost,
To hold my faith from ruine and decay
With fast affiance and assured stay.

I shall teach thy waies vnto the wicked, & sinners shall be turned vnto thee.

Lord, of thy mercy if thou me withdraw
From gaping throte of depe deuouring hell,
Loe, I shall preach the iustice of thy law:
By mercy saued, thy mercy shall I tell.
The wicked I wyll teache thyne only way,
Thy wayes to take, and mans diverse to flee,
And suche as lewd delight hath ledde astray,
To rue theyr errour and returne to thee.
So shall the profe of myne example preache
The bitter frute of lust and foule delight:
So shall my pardon by thy mercy teache
The way to finde swete mercy in thy sight.
Hyue mercy, Lorde, in me example make
Of lawe and mercy, for thy mercies sake.
**Deliuer me from bloud o God, God of my helth & my tong shall joyfullye talke of thy iustice.**

O God, God of my health, my sauing God, 
Haue mercy Lord, and shew thy might to saue, 
Assoile me, God, from gilt of giltlesse blod, 
And eke from sinne that I ingrowing haue 
By fleshe and bloud and by corrupted kinde. 
Vpon my bloud and soule extende not, Lorde, 
Vengeance for bloud, but mercy let me finde, 
And strike me not with thy reuengyng sworde. 
So, Lord, my ioying tong shall talke thy praise, 
Thy name my mouth shall vtter in delight, 
My voice shall sounde thy iustice, and thy waies, 
Thy waies to iustifie thy sinfull wight. 
God of my health, from bloud I saued so 
Shall spred thy prayse for all the world to know.

**Lord, open thou my lippes, and my mouth shal shewe thy praise.**

Lo straining crampe of colde despeir againe 
In feble brest doth pinche my pinyng hart, 
So as in greatest nede to cry and plaine 
My speache doth faile to vtter thee my smart. 
Refreshe my yeldying hert, with warming grace, 
And loose my speche, and make me call to thee. 
Lord open thou my lippes to shewe my case, 
My Lord, for mercy Loe to thee I flee. 
I can not pray without thy mouyng ayde, 
Ne can I ryse, ne can I stande alone. 
Lord, make me pray, & grau[n]t whe[n] I haue praide, 
Lord loose my lippes, I may expresse my mone, 
And findyng grace with open mouth I may 
Thy mercies praise, and holy name display.

**If thou haddest desired sacrifice, I wold haue geuen thou deleyst not in burnt offringes.**

Thy mercies praise, instede of sacrifice, 
With thankfull minde so shall I yeld to thee. 
For if it were delitefull in thine eyes, 
Or hereby mought thy wrath appeased be, 
Of cattell slayne and burnt with sacred flame 
Vp to the heauen the vaprie smoke to send: 
Of gyltlesse beastes, to purge my gilt and blame, 
On altars broylde the sauour shold ascend, 
To pease thy wrath. But thy swete sonne alone, 
With one sufficing sacrifice for all 
Appeaseth thee, and maketh the at one 
With sinfull man, and hath reypad our fall. 
That sacred hoste is euer in thine eyes.
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The praise of that I yield for sacrifice.

\textbf{The sacrifice to God is a troubled spirit: a broken and an humbled hart, o god, thou wilt not despise.}

I yield myself, I offer up my ghoste, My slayne delightes, my dyng hart to thee. To God a troubled sprite is pleasing hoste. My troubled sprite doth drede like him to be, In whome tastlesse languor with lingring paine Hath febled so the starued appetite, That foode to late is offred all in vaine, To holde in fainting corps the fleing sprite. My pining soule for famine of thy grace So feares alas the faintnesse of my faihte. I offre vp my troubled sprite: alas, My troubled sprite refuse not in thy wrathe. Such offering likes thee, ne wilt thou despise The broken humbled hart in angry wise.

\textbf{Shew fauour, o lord in thy good will vnto Sion, that th[e] walles of Hierusalem may be bylded.}

Shew mercie, Lord, not vnto me alone: But stretch thy fauor and thy pleased will, To sprede thy bountie and thy grace vpon Sion, for Sion is thy holly hyll: That thy Hierusalem with mighty wall May be enclosed vnder thy defense, And bylded so that it may neuer fall By myning fraude or mighty violence. Defend thy chirch, Lord, and aduaunce it soe, So in despite of tyrannie to stand, That tre[m]bling at thy power the world may know It is upholden by thy mighty hand: That Sion and Hierusalem may be A safe abode for them that honor thee.

\textbf{Then shalt thou accept the sacrifice of righteousness, burnt offeringes and oblations. then shall they offre yonge bullockes vpon thine altare.}

Then on thy hill, and in thy walled towne, Thou shalt receaue the pleasing sacrifice, The brute shall of thy praised name resoune In thankfull mouthes, and then with gentle eyes Thou shalt behold vpon thine altar lye Many a yelden host of humbled hart, And round about then shall thy people crye: We praise thee, God our God: thou onely art The God of might, of mercie, and of grace. That I then, Lorde, may also honor thee, Releue my sorow, and my sinnes deface: Be, Lord of mercie, mercifull to me:
Restore my feling of thy grace againe:
Assure my soule, I craue it not in vaine.

FINIS.