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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 sick* (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.

Modern editions of Locke's work include "*A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*": *Anne Locke's Sonnet Sequence with Locke's Epistle*, ed. Kel Morin-Parsons (1997), and *The Collected Works of Anne Vaughan Lock*, ed. Susan Felch (1999).

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A MEDITA TION OF A PENI- TENT SINNER : VV RIT- TEN IN MANER OF A *Paraphrase vpon the* 51. Psalme of Dauid.

I haue added this meditation folowyng vnto the ende of this boke, not as parcell of maister Caluines worke, but for that it well agreeth 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 threatnes, 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 vnto [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 thybeknowyng 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 euerlastyng 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 auailyng 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.

*Hau mercie vpon
me (o God) after
thy great merci*

Hau mercie, 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 Justice 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.
Hau mercie, God, pitie my penitence
With greater mercie than my great offence.

*And according
vnto 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 nomber of thy mercies take
The endlesse nomber 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 cleensing grace.
Washe me againe, yea washe me euery where,
Bothe leprous bodie and defiled face.
Yea washe me all, for I am all vncleane,
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.

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

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

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

Graunt thou me mercy, Lord: thee thee alone
I haue offended, and offendyng 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 spredes them forth before the face of God.
Who[m] shame fro[m] dede shamelesse cold not restrain,
Shame for my dede is added to my paine.

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
Thou onely iust be demed, and no moe,
The worldes vniustice wholy to confound:
That damning me to depth of during woe
Iust in thy iudgement shouldest thou be found:
And from deserued flames releuyng me
Iust in thy mercy mayst thou also be.

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
loued 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 leard 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 dropes 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 shal
reioyse*

Long haue I heard, & yet I heare the soundes
Of dredfull thretes and thonders of the law,
Which Eccho of my gylty minde resoundes,
And with redoubled horror doth so draw
My listening soule from mercies gentle voice,
That louder, Lorde, I am constrainde to call:
Lorde, pearce myne eares, & make me to reioyse,
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 tre[m]bling Ibeknowe,
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 firmly 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 desperie 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.

*Restore to me the
comforde of thy
sauing helpe, &
stablishe me with
thy free spirit.*

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 clearfull 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 retorne 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 shal teach thy
waies vnto the
wicked, & sinne[r]
s shall be tourned
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 sauad, thy mercy shall I tell.
The wicked I wyll teache thyne only way,
Thy wayes to take, and mans deuise 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.

*Deliuier me from
bloud o God, God
of my helth & my
tong shall
ioyfullye talke of
thy iustice.*

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

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

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 sauod so
Shall spred thy prayse for all the world to know.

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 yeldyng 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 prade,
Lord loose my lippes, I may expresse my mone,
And findyng grace with open mouth I may
Thy mercies praise, and holy name display.

Thy mercies praise, instede of sacrifice,
With thankfull rninde 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 repaird our fall.
That sacred hoste is euer in thine eyes.

The praise of that I yeld for sacrifice.

*The sacrifice to
God is a trobled
spirit: a broken
and an humbled
hart, o god, thou
wilt not despise.*

I yeld my self, I offer vp my ghoste,
My slayne delightes, my dyeng hart to thee.
To God a trobled sprite is pleasing hoste.
My trobled 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 faithe.
I offre vp my trobled sprite: alas,
My trobled sprite refuse not in thy wrathe.
Such offring likes thee, ne wilt thou despise
The broken humbled hart in angry wise.

*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 vpholden by thy mighty hand:
That Sion and Hierusalem may be
A safe abode for them that honor thee.

*Then shalt thou
accept the
sacrifice of
righteousnesse,
burnt offringes
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 resoun
In thankfull mouthes, and then with gentle eyes
Thou shalt behold vpon thine altar lye
Many a ydden 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 vain.

F I N I S.

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