

THE THIRD BOOKE OF THE FAERIE QVEENE.

Contayning

THE LEGEND OF BRITOMARTIS.

OR

Of Chastitie.

[1]

IT falles me heere to write of Chastity,
That fairest vertue, farre aboue the rest;
For which what needs me fetch from *Faery*
Forreine ensamples, it to haue exprest?
Sith it is shrined in my Soueraines brest,
And form'd so liuely in each perfect part,
That to all Ladies, which haue it profest,
Need but behold the pourtraict of her hart,
If pourtrayd it might be by any liuing art.

[2]

But liuing art may not least part expresse,
Nor life-resembling pencill it can paint,
All were it *Zeuxis* or *Praxiteles*:
His dædale hand would faile, and greatly faint,
And her perfections with his error taint:
Ne Poets wit, that passeth Painter farre
In picturing the parts of beautie daint,
So hard a workmanship aduenture darre,
For fear through want of words her excellenc to marre.

[3]

How then shall I, Apprentice of the skill,
That whylome in diuinest wits did raine,
Presume so high to stretch mine humble quill?
Yet now my lucklesse lot doth me constraine
Hereto perforce. But ô, dred Soueraine
Thus farre forth pardon, sith that choicest wit

Cannot your glorious pourtraict figure plaine
That I in colourd showes may shadow it,
And antique praises vnto present persons fit.

[4]

But if in liuing colours, and right hew,
Your selfe you couet to see pictured,
Who can it doe more liuely, or more trew,
Then that sweet verse, with *Nectar* sprinckeled,
In which a gracious seruaunt pictured
His *Cynthia*, his heauens fairest light?
That with his melting sweetnesse rauished,
And with the wonder of her beames bright,
My senses lulled are in slomber of delight.

[5]

But let that same delitious Poet lend
A little leaue vnto a rusticke Muse,
To sing his mistresse prayse, and let him mend,
If ought amis her liking may abuse:
Ne let his fayrest *Cynthia* refuse,
In mirrours more then one her selfe to see,
But either *Gloriana* let her chuse,
Or in *Belpheobe* fashioned to bee:
In th'one her rule, in th'other her rare chastitee.

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