

Cant. I.

*Fayre Britomart saues Amoret,
Duessa discord breedes
Twixt Scudamour and Blandamour:
Their fight and warlike deedes.*

[1]

OF louers sad calamities of old,
Full many piteous stories doe remaine,
But none more piteous euer was ytold,
Then that of *Amorets* hart-binding chaine,
And this of *Florimels* vnworthie paine:
The deare compassion of whose bitter fit
My softened heart so sorely doth constraîne,
That I with teares full oft doe pittie it,
And oftentimes doe wish it neuer had bene writ.

[2]

For from the time that *Scudamour* her bought
In perilous fight, she neuer ioyed day,
A perilous fight when he with force her brought
From twentie Knights, that did him all assay:
Yet fairely well he did them all dismay:
And with great glorie both the shield of loue,
And eke the Ladie selfe he brought away,
Whom hauing wedded as did him behoue,
A new vnknownen mischiefe did [her] from him remoue.

[3]

For that same vile Enchauntour *Busyran*,
The very selfe same day that she was wedded,
Amidst the bridale feast, whilest euery man
Surcharg'd with wine, were heedlesse and ill hedded,
All bent to mirth before the bride was bedded,
Brought in that mask of loue which late was shoven:
And there the Ladie ill of friends bestedded,
By way of sport, as oft in maskes is knowen,
Conueyed quite away to liuing wight vnknownen.

[4]

Seuen moneths he so her kept in bitter smart,
Because his sinfull lust she would not serue,

Vntill such time as noble *Britomart*
Released her, that else was like to sterue,
Through cruell knife that her deare heart did kerue.
And now she is with her vpon the way,
Marching in louely wise, that could deserue
No spot of blame, though spite did oft assay
To blot her with dishonor of so faire a pray.

[5]

Yet should it be a pleasant tale, to tell
The diuerse vsage and demeanure daint,
That each to other made, as oft befell.
For *Amoret* right fearefull was and faint,
Lest she with blame her honor should attaint,
That euerie word did tremble as she spake,
And euerie looke was coy, and wondrous quaint,
And euerie limbe that touched her did quake:
Yet could she not but curteous countenance to her make.

[6]

For well she wist, as true it was indeed,
That her liues Lord and patrone of her health
Right well deserued as his duefull meed,
Her loue, her seruice, and her vtmost wealth.
All is his iustly, that all freely death:
Nathlesse her honor dearer then her life,
She sought to saue, as thing reseru'd from stealth;
Die had she leuer with Enchanters knife,
Then to be false in loue, profest a virgine wife.

[7]

Thereto her feare was made so much the greater
Through fine abusion of that Briton mayd:
Who for to hide her fained sex the better,
And maske her wounded mind, both did and sayd
Full many things so doubtfull to be wayd,
That well she wist not what by them to gesse,
For other whiles to her she purpos made
Of loue, and otherwhiles of lustfulnesse,
That much she feard his mind would grow to some excesse

[8]

His will she feard; for him she surely thought

To be a man, such as indeed he seemed,
And much the more, by that he lately wrought,
When her from deadly thraldome he redeemed,
For which no seruice she too much esteemed,
Yet dread of shame, and doubt of fowle dishonor
Made her not yeeld so much, as due she deemed.
Yet *Britomart* attended duly on her,
As well became a knight, and did to her all honor.

[9]

It so befell one euening, that they came
Vnto a Castell, lodged there to bee,
Where many a knight, and many a louely Dame
Was then assembled, deeds of armes to see:
Amongst all which was none more faire then shee,
That many of them mou'd to eye her sore.
The custome of that place was such, that hee
Which had no loue nor lemman there in store,
Should either winne him one, or lye without the dore.

[10]

Amongst the rest there was a iolly knight,
Who being asked for his loue, auow'd
That fairest *Amoret* was his by right,
And offred that to iustifie alowd.
The warlike virgine seeing his so prowde
And boastfull chalenge, wexed inlie wroth,
But for the present did her anger shrowd;
And sayd, her loue to lose she was full loth,
But either he should neither of them haue, or both.

[11]

So forth they went, and both together giusted;
But that same younker soone was ouerthrowne,
And made repent, that he had rashly lusted
For thing vnlawfull, that was not his owne:
Yet since he seemed valiant, though vnknowne,
She that no lesse was courteous then stout,
Cast how to salue, that both the custome showne
Were kept, and yet that Knight not locked out,
That seem'd full hard t'accord two things so far in dout.

[12]

The Seneschall was cal'd to deeme the right,
Whom she requir'd, that first fayre *Amoret*
Might be to her allow'd, as to a Knight,
That did her win and free from chalenge set:
Which straight to her was yeilded without let.
Then since that strange Knights loue from him was quitted,
She claim'd that to her selfe, as Ladies det,
He as a Knight might iustly be admitted;
So none should be out shut, sith all of loues were fitted.

[13]

With that her glistring helmet she unlaced;
Which doft, her golden lockes, that were vp bound
Still in a knot, vnto her heeles downe traced,
And like a silken veile in compasse round
About her backe and all her bodie wound:
Like as the shining skie in summers night,
What time the dayes with scorching heat abound,
Is creasted all with lines of firie light,
That it prodigious seemes in common peoples sight.

[14]

Such when those Knights and Ladies all about
Beheld her, all were with amazement smit,
And euery one gan grow in secret dout
Of this and that, according to each wit:
Some thought that some enchantment faygned it;
Some, that *Bellona* in that warlike wise
To them appear'd, with shield and armour fit;
Some, that it was a maske of strange disguise:
So diuersely each one did sundrie doubts deuse.

[15]

But that young Knight, which through her gentle deed
Was to that goodly fellowship restor'd,
Ten thousand thanks did yeeld her for her meed,
And doubly ouercommen, her ador'd:
So did they all their former strife accord;
And eke fayre *Amoret* now freed from feare,
More franke affection did to her afford,
And to her bed, which she was wont forbear,
Now freely drew, and found right safe assurance there.

[16]

Where all that night they of their loues did treat,
And hard aduentures twixt themselues alone,
That each the other gan with passion great,
And grieffull pittie priuately bemone.
The morow next so soone as *Titan* shone,
They both vprose, and to their waies them dight:
Long wandred they, yet neuer met with none,
That to their willes could them direct aright,
Or to them tydings tell, that mote their harts delight.

[17]

Lo thus they rode, till at the last they spide
Two armed Knights, that toward them did pace,
And ech of them had ryding by his side
A Ladie, seeming in so farre a space,
But Ladies none they were, albee in face
And outward shew faire semblance they did beare;
For vnder maske of beautie and good grace,
Vile treason and fowle falshood hidden were,
That mote to none but to the warie wise appeare.

[18]

The one of them the false *Duessa* hight,
That now had chang'd her former wonted hew:
For she could d'on so manie shapes in sight,
As euer could Cameleon colours new;
So could she forge all colours, saue the trew.
The other no whit better was then shee,
But that such as she was, she plaine did shew;
Yet otherwise much worse, if worse might bee,
And dayly more offensiue vnto each degree.

[19]

Her name was *Ate*, mother of debate,
And all dissention, which doth dayly grow
Amongst fraile men, that many a publike state
And many a priuate oft doth ouerthrow.
Her false *Duessa* who full well did know,
To be most fit to trouble noble knights,
Which hunt for honor, raised from below,
Out of the dwellings of the damned sprights,
Where she in darknes wastes her cursed daies & nights.

[20]

Hard by the gates of hell her dwelling is,
There whereas all the plagues and harmes abound,
Which punish wicked men, that walke amisse,
It is a darksome delue farre vnder ground,
With thornes and barren brakes enuirond round,
That none the same may easily out win;
Yet many waies to enter may be found,
But none to issue forth when one is in:
For discord harder is to end then to begin.

[21]

And all within the riuen walls were hung
With ragged monuments of times forepast,
All which the sad effects of discord sung:
There were rent robes, and broken scepters plast,
Altars defyl'd, and holy things defast,
Disshiuered speares, and shields ytorne in twaine,
Great cities ransackt, and strong castles rast,
Nations captiued, and huge armies slaine:
Of all which ruines there some relicks did remaine.

[22]

There was the signe of antique Babylon,
Of fatall Thebes, of Rome that rained long,
Of sacred Salem, and sad Ilion,
For memorie of which on high there hong
The golden Apple, cause of all their wrong,
For which the three faire Goddesses did striue:
There also was the name of *Nimrod* strong,
Of *Alexander*, and his Princes fiue,
Which shar'd to them the spoiles that he had got aliue.

[23]

And there the relicks of the drunken fray,
The which amongst the *Lapithees* befell,
And of the bloodie feast, which sent away
So many *Centaures* drunken soules to hell,
That vnder great *Alcides* furie fell:
And of the dreadfull discord, which did driue
The noble *Argonauts* to outrage fell,
That each of life sought others to depriue,
All mindlesse of the Golden fleece, which made them striue.

[24]

And eke of priuate persons many moe,
That were too long a worke to count them all;
Some of sworne friends, that did their faith forgoe;
Some of borne brethren, prov'd vnnaturall;
Some of deare louers, foes perpetuall:
Witnesse their broken bandes there to be seene,
Their girlonds rent, their bowres despoyled all;
The moniments whereof there byding beene,
As plaine as at the first, when they were fresh and greene.

[25]

Such was her house within; but all without,
The barren ground was full of wicked weedes,
Which she her selfe had sowen all about,
Now growen great, at first of little seedes,
The seedes of euill wordes, and factious deedes;
Which when to ripenesse due they growen arre,
Bring foorth an infinite increase, that breeds
Tumultuous trouble and contentious iarre,
The which most often end in bloudshed and in warre.

[26]

And those same cursed seedes doe also serue
To her for bread, and yeeld her liuing food:
For life it is to her, when others sterue
Through mischieuous debate, and deadly feood,
That she may sucke their life, and drinke their blood,
With which she from her childhood had bene fed.
For she at first was borne of hellish brood,
And by infernall furies nourished,
That by her monstrous shape might easily be red.

[27]

Her face most fowle and filthy was to see,
With squinted eyes contrarie wayes intended,
And loathly mouth, vnmeete a mouth to bee,
That nought but gall and venim comprehended,
And wicked wordes that God and man offended:
Her lying tongue was in two parts diuided,
And both the parts did speake, and both contended;
And as her tongue, so was her hart discided,
That neuer thought one thing, but doubly stil was guided.

[28]

Als as she double spake, so heard she double,
With matchlesse eares deformed and distort,
Fild with false rumors and seditious trouble,
Bred in assemblies of the vulgar sort,
That still are led with euery light report.
And as her eares so eke her feet were odde,
And much vnlike, th'one long, the other short,
And both misplast; that when th'one forward yode,
The other backe retired, and contrarie trode.

[29]

Likewise vnequall were her handes twaine,
That one did reach, the other pusht away,
That one did make, the other mard againe,
And sought to bring all things vnto decay;
Whereby great riches gathered manie a day,
She in short space did often bring to nought,
And their possessours often did dismay.
For all her studie was and all her thought,
How she might ouerthrow the things that Concord wrought.

[30]

So much her malice did her might surpas,
That euen th'Almightie selfe she did maligne,
Because to man so mercifull he was,
And vnto all his creatures so benigne,
Sith she her selfe was of his grace indigne:
For all this worlds faire workmanship she tride,
Vnto his last confusion to bring,
And that great golden chaine quite to diuide,
With which it blessed Concord hath together tide.

[31]

Such was that hag, which with *Duessa* roade,
And seruing her in her malicious vse,
To hurt good knights, was as it were her baude,
To sell her borrowed beautie to abuse.
For though like withered tree, that wanteth iuyce,
She old and crooked were, yet now of late,
As fresh and fragrant as the floure deluce
She was become, by chaunge of her estate,
And made full goodly ioyance to her new found mate.

[32]

Her mate he was a iollie youthfull knight,
That bore great sway in armes and chivalrie,
And was indeed a man of mickle might:
His name was *Blandamour*, that did descrie
His fickle mind full of inconstancie.
And now himselfe he fitted had right well,
With two companions of like qualitie,
Faithlesse *Duessa*, and false *Paridell*,
That whether were more false, full hard it is to tell.

[33]

Now when this gallant with his goodly crew,
From farre espide the famous *Britomart*,
Like knight aduenturous in outward vew,
With his faire paragon, his conquests part,
Approching nigh, eftsoones his wanton hart
Was tickled with delight, and iesting sayd;
Lo there Sir *Paridel*, for your desart,
Good lucke presents you with yond louely mayd,
For pitie that ye want a fellow for your ayd.

[34]

By that the louely paire drew nigh to hond:
Whom when as *Paridel* more plaine beheld,
Albee in heart he like affection fond,
Yet mindfull how he late by one was feld,
That did those armes and that same scutchion weld,
He had small lust to buy his loue so deare,
But answerd, Sir him wise I neuer held,
That hauing once escaped perill neare,
Would afterwards afresh the sleeping euill reare.

[35]

This knight too late his manhood and his might,
I did assay, that me right dearely cost,
Ne list I for reuenge prouoke new fight,
Ne for light Ladies loue, that soone is lost.
The hot-spurre youth so scorning to be crost,
Take then to you this Dame of mine (quoth hee)
And I without your perill or your cost,
Will chalenge yond same other for my fee:
So forth he fiercely prickt, that one him scarce could see.

[36]

The warlike Britonesse her soone address,
And with such vncouth welcome did receaue
Her fayned Paramour, her forced guest,
That being forst his saddle soone to leaue,
Him selfe he did of his new loue deceaue:
And made him selfe then sample of his follie.
Which done, she passed forth not taking leaue,
And left him now as sad, as whilome iollie,
Well warned to beware with whom he dar'd to dallie.

[37]

Which when his other companie beheld,
They to his succour ran with readie ayd:
And finding him vnable once to weld,
They reared him on horse backe, and vpstayd,
Till on his way they had him forth conuayd:
And all the way with wondrous grieve of mynd,
And shame, he shewd him selfe to be dismayd,
More for the loue which he had left behynd,
Then that which he had to Sir *Paridel* resynd.

[38]

Nathlesse he forth did march well as he might,
And made good semblance to his companie,
Dissembling his disease and euill plight;
Till that ere long they chaunced to espie
Two other knights, that towards them did ply.
With speedie course, as bent to charge them new.
Whom when as *Blandamour* approching nie,
Perceiu'd to be such as they seemd in vew,
He was full wo, and gan his former grieve renew.

[39]

For th'one of them he perfectly descride,
To be Sir *Scudamour*, by that he bore
The God of loue, with wings displayed wide,
Whom mortally he hated euermore,
Both for his worth, that all men did adore,
And eke because his loue he wonne by right:
Which when he thought, it griued him full sore,
That through the bruises of his former fight,
He now vnable was to wreake his old despight.

[40]

For thy he thus to *Paridel* bespake,
Faire Sir, of friendship let me now you pray,
That as I late aduentured for your sake,
The hurts whereof me now from battell stay,
Ye will me now with like good turne repay,
And iustifie my cause on yonder knight.
Ah Sir (said *Paridel*) do not dismay
Your selfe for this, my selfe will for you fight,
As ye haue done for me: the left hand rubs the right.

[41]

With that he put his spurres vnto his steed,
With speare in rest, and toward him did fare,
Like shaft out of a bow preuenting speed.
But *Scudamour* was shortly well aware
Of his approach, and gan him selfe prepare
Him to receiue with entertainment meete.
So furiously they met, that either bare
The other downe vnder their horses feete,
That what of them became, themselues did scarsly weete.

[42]

As when two billowes in the Irish sowndes,
Forcibly driuen with contrarie tydes
Do meete together, each abacke rebowndes
With roaring rage; and dashing on all sides,
That filleth all the sea with some, diuydes
The doubtfull current into diuers wayes:
So fell those two in spight of both their prydes,
But *Scudamour* himselfe did soone vprayse,
And mounting light his foe for lying long vpbrayes.

[43]

Who rolled on an heape lay still in swound,
All carelesse of his taunt and bitter rayle,
Till that the rest him seeing lie on ground,
Ran hastily, to weete what did him ayle.
Where finding that the breath gan him to fayle,
With busie care they stroue him to awake,
And doft his helmet, and vndid his mayle:
So much they did, that at the last they brake
His slomber, yet so mazed, that he nothing spake.

[44]

Which when as *Blandamour* beheld, he sayd,
False faitour *Scudamour*, that hast by slight
And foule aduantage this good Knight dismayd,
A Knight much better then thy selfe behight,
Well falles it thee that I am not in plight
This day, to wreake the dammage by thee donne:
Such is thy wont, that still when any Knight
Is weakned, then thou doest him ouerronne:
So hast thou to thy selfe false honour often wonne.

[45]

He little answer'd, but in manly heart
His mightie indignation did forbear,
Which was not yet so secret, but some part
Thereof did in his frowning face appeare:
Like as a gloomie cloud, the which doth beare
An hideous storme, is by the Northerne blast
Quite ouerblowne, yet doth not passe so cleare,
But that it all the skie doth ouercast
With darknes dred, and threatens all the world to wast.

[46]

Ah gentle knight then false *Duessa* sayd,
Why do ye striue for Ladies loue so sore,
Whose chiefe desire is loue and friendly aid
Mongst gentle Knights to nourish euermore?
Ne be ye wroth Sir *Scudamour* therefore,
That she your loue list loue another knight,
Ne do your selfe dislike a whit the more;
For Loue is free, and led with selfe delight,
Ne will enforced be with maisterdome or might.

[47]

So false *Duessa*, but vile *Ate* thus;
Both foolish knights, I can but laugh at both,
That striue and storme with stirre outrageous,
For her that each of you alike doth loth,
And loues another, with whom now she goth
In louely wise, and sleepes, and sports, and playes;
Whilest both you here with many a cursed oth,
Sweare she is yours, and stirre vp bloudie frayes,
To win a willow bough, whilest other weares the bayes.

[48]

Vile hag (sayd *Scudamour*) why dost thou lye?
And falsly seekst a vertuous wight to shame?
Fond knight (sayd she) the thing that with this eye
I saw, why should I doubt to tell the same?
Then tell (quoth *Blandamour*) and feare no blame,
Tell what thou saw'st, maulgre who so it heares.
I saw (quoth she) a stranger knight, whose name
I wote not well, but in his shield he beares
(That well I wote) the heads of many broken speares.

[49]

I saw him haue your *Amoret* at will,
I saw him kisse, I saw him her embrace,
I saw him sleepe with her all night his fill,
All manie nights, and manie by in place,
That present were to testifie the case.
Which when as *Scudamour* did heare, his heart
Was thrid with inward grieve, as when in chace
The Parthian strikes a stag with shiuering dart,
The beast astonisht stands in midst of his smart.

[50]

So stood Sir *Scudamour*, when this he heard,
Ne word he had to speake for great dismay,
But lookt on *Glauce* grim, who woxe afeard
Of outrage for the words, which she heard say,
Albee vntrue she wist them by assay.
But *Blandamour*, whenas he did espie
His change of cheere, that anguish did bewray,
He woxe full blithe, as he had got thereby,
And gan thereat to triumph without victorie.

[51]

Lo recreant (sayd he) the fruitlesse end
Of thy vaine boast, and spoile of loue misgotten,
Whereby the name of knight-hood thou dost shend,
And all true louers with dishonor blotten,
All things not rooted well, will soone be rotten,
Fy fy false knight (then false *Duessa* cryde)
Vnworthy life that loue with guile hast gotten,
Be thou, where euer thou do go or ryde,
Loathed of ladies all, and of all knights defyde.

[52]

But *Scudamour* for passing great despight
Staid not to answer, scarcely did refraine,
But that in all those knights and ladies sight,
He for reuenge had guiltlesse *Glauce* slaine:
But being past, he thus began amaine;
False traitour squire, false squire, of falsest knight,
Why doth mine hand from thine auenge abstaine,
Whose Lord hath done my loue this foule despight?
Why do I not it wreake, on thee now in my might?

[53]

Discourteous, disloyall *Britomart*,
Vntrue to God, and vnto man vniust,
What vengeance due can equall thy desart,
That hast with shamefull spot of sinfull lust
Defil'd the pledge committed to thy trust?
Let vgly shame and endlesse infamy
Colour thy name with foule reproaches rust.
Yet thou false Squire his fault shalt deare aby,
And with thy punishment his penance shalt supply.

[54]

The aged Dame him seeing so enraged,
Was dead with feare, nathlesse as neede required,
His flaming furie sought to haue assuaged
With sober words, that sufferance desired,
Till time the tryall of her truth expyred:
And euermore sought *Britomart* to cleare.
But he the more with furious rage was fyred,
And thrise his hand to kill her did vpreare,
And thrise he drew it backe: so did at last forbear.

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