

Cant. X.

*Prince Arthur takes the enterprize
for Belgee for to fight,
Gerioneos Seneschall
he slayes in Belges right.*

[1]

Some Clarke doe doubt in their deuicefull art,
Whether this heauenly thing, whereof I treat,
To weeten Mercie be of Iustice part,
Or drawne forth from her by diuine extreate.
This well I wote, that sure she is as great,
And meriteth to haue as high a place,
Sith in th'Almighties euerlasting seat
She first was bred, and borne of heauenly race;
From thence pour'd down on men, by influence of grace.

[2]

For if that Vertue be of so great might,
Which from iust verdict will for nothing start,
But to preserue iniolated right,
Oft spilles the principall, to saue the part;
So much more then is that of powre and art,
That seekes to saue the subiect of her skill,
Yet neuer doth from doome of right depart:
As it is greater prayse to saue, then spill,
And better to reforme, then to cut off the ill.

[3]

Who then can thee, Mercilla, throughly prayse,
That herein doest all earthly Princes pas?
What heauenly Muse shall thy great honour rayse
Vp to the skies, whence first deriu'd it was,
And now on earth it selfe enlarged has,
From th'vtmost brinke of the Armericke shore,
Vnto the margent of the Molucas?
Those Nations farre thy iustice doe adore:
But thine owne people do thy mercy prayse much more.

[4]

Much more it praysed was of those two knights;
The noble Prince, and righteous Artegall,

When they had seene and heard her doome a rights
Against Duessa, damned by them all;
But by her tempred without grieffe or gall,
Till strong constraint did her thereto enforce.
And yet euen then ruing her wilfull fall,
With more then needfull naturall remorse,
And yeelding the last honour to her wretched corse.

[5]

During all which, those knights continu'd there,
Both doing and receiuing curtesies,
Of that great Ladie, who with goodly chere
Them entertayn'd, fit for their dignities,
Approouing dayly to their noble eyes
Royall examples of her mercies rare,
And worthie paterns of her clemencies;
Which till this day mongst many liuing are,
Who them to their posterities doe still declare.

[6]

Amongst the rest, which in that space befell,
There came two Springals of full tender yeares,
Farre thence from forrein land, where they did dwell,
To seeke for succour of her and of her Peares,
With humble prayers and intreatfull teares;
Sent by their mother, who a widow was,
Wrapt in great dolours and in deadly feares,
By a strong Tyrant, who inuaded has
Her land, and slaine her children ruefully alas.

[7]

Her name was Belgae, who in former age
A Ladie of great worth and wealth had beene,
And mother of a frutefull heritage,
Euen seenteene goodly sonnes; which who had seene
In their first flowre, before this fatall teene
Them ouertooke, and their faire blossomes blasted,
More happie mother would her surely weene,
Then famous Niobe, before she tasted
Latonaes childrens wrath, that all her issue wasted.

[8]

But this fell Tyrant, through his tortious powre,

Had left her now but fiue of all that brood:
For twelue of them he did by times deuoure,
And to his Idols sacrifice their blood,
Whylest he of none was stopped, nor withstood.
For soothly he was one of matchlesse might,
Of horrible aspect, and dreadfull mood,
And had three bodies in one wast empight,
And th'armes and legs of three, to succour him in fight.

[9]

And sooth they say, that he was borne and bred
Of Gyants race, the sonne of Geryon,
He that whylome in Spaine so sore was dred,
For his huge powre and great oppression,
Which brought that land to his subiection,
Through his three bodies powre, in one combynd;
And eke all strangers in that region
Arryuing, to his kyne for food assynd;
The fayrest kyne aliue, but of the fiercest kynd.

[10]

For they were all, they say, of purple hew,
Kept by a cowheard, hight Eurytion,
A cruell carle, the which all strangers slew,
Ne day nor night did sleepe, t'attend them on,
But walkt about them euer and anone,
With his two headed dogge, that Orthrus hight;
Orthrus begotten by great Typhaon,
And foule Echidna, in the house of night;
But Hercules them all did ouercome in fight.

[11]

His sonne was this, Geryoneo hight;
Who after that his monstrous father fell
Vnder Alcides club, streight tooke his flight
From that sad land, where he his syre did quell,
And came to this, where Belge then did dwell,
And flourish in all wealth and happinesse,
Being then new made widow (as befell)
After her Noble husbands late decesse;
Which gaue beginning to her woe and wretchednesse.

[12]

Then this bold Tyrant, of her widowed
Taking aduantage, and her yet fresh woes,
Himselfe and seruice to her offered,
Her to defend against all forrein foes,
That should their powre against her right oppose.
Whereof she glad, now needing strong defence,
Him entertayn'd, and did her champion chose:
Which long he vsd with carefull diligence,
The better to confirme her fearelesse confidence.

[13]

By meanes whereof, she did at last commit
All to his hands, and gaue him soueraine powre
To doe, what euer he thought good or fit.
Which hauing got, he gan forth from that howre
To stirre vp strife, and many a Tragicke stowre,
Giuing her dearest children one by one
Vnto a dreadfull Monster to deuoure,
And setting vp an Idole of his owne,
The image of his monstrous parent Geryone.

[14]

So tyrannizing, and oppressing all,
The woefull widow had no meanes now left,
But vnto gracious great Mercilla call
For ayde, against that cruell Tyrants theft,
Ere all her children he from her had reft.
Therefore these two, her eldest sonnes she sent,
To seeke for succour of this Ladies giest:
To whom their sute they humbly did present,
In th'hearing of full many Knights and Ladies gent.

[15]

Amongst the which then fortun'd to bee
The noble Briton Prince, with his braue Peare;
Who when he none of all those knights did see
Hastily bent, that enterprise to heare,
Nor vndertake the same, for cowheard feare,
He stepped forth with courage bold and great,
Admyr'd of all the rest in presence there,
And humbly gan that mightie Queene entreat,
To graunt him that aduenture for his former feat.

[16]

She gladly graunted it: then he straight way
Himselfe vnto his iourney gan prepare,
And all his armours readie dight that day,
That nought the morrow next mote stay his fare.
The morrow next appear'd, with purple hayre
Yet dropping fresh out of the Indian fount,
And bringing light into the heauens fayre,
When he was readie to his steede to mount;
Vnto his way, which now was all his care and count.

[17]

Then taking humble leaue of that great Queene,
Who gaue him roiall giftes and riches rare,
As tokens of her thankfull mind beseene,
And leauing Artegall to his owne care;
Vpon his voyage forth he gan to fare,
With those two gentle youthes, which him did guide,
And all his way before him still prepare.
Ne after him did Artigall abide,
But on his first aduenture forward forth did ride.

[18]

It was not long, till that the Prince arriued
Within the land, where dwelt that Ladie sad,
Whereof that Tyrant had her now depriued,
And into moores and marshes banisht had,
Out of the pleasant soyle, and citties glad,
In which she wont to harbour happily:
But now his cruelty so sore she drad,
That to those fennes for fastnesse she did fly,
And there her selfe did hyde from his hard tyranny.

[19]

There he her found in sorrow and dismay,
All solitarie without liuing wight;
For all her other children, through affray,
Had hid themselues, or taken further flight:
And eke her selfe through sudden strange affright,
When one in armes she saw, began to fly;
But when her owne two sonnes she had in sight,
She gan take hart, and looke vp ioyfully:
For well she wist this knight came, succour to supply.

[20]

And running vnto them with greedy ioyes,
Fell straight about their neckes, as they did kneele,
And bursting forth in teares; Ah my sweet boyes,
(Sayd she) yet now I gin new life to feele,
And feeble spirits, that gan faint and reele,
Now rise againe, at this your ioyous sight.
Alreadie seemes that fortunes headlong wheele
Begins to turne, and sunne to shine more bright,
Then it was wont, through comfort of this noble knight.

[21]

Then turning vnto him; And you Sir knight
(Said she) that taken haue this toylesome paine
For wretched woman, miserable wight,
May you in heauen immortall guerdon gaine
For so great trauell, as you doe sustaine:
For other meede may hope for none of mee,
To whom nought else, but bare life doth remaine,
And that so wretched one, as ye do see
Is liker lingring death, then loathed life to bee.

[22]

Much was he moued with her piteous plight,
And low dismounting from his loftie steede,
Gan to recomfort her all that he might,
Seeking to driue away deepe rooted dreede,
With hope of helpe in that her greatest neede.
So thence he wished her with him to wend,
Vnto some place, where they mote rest and feede,
And she take comfort, which God now did send:
Good hart in euils doth the euils much amend.

[23]

Ay me (sayd she) and whether shall I goe?
Are not all places full of forraine powres?
My pallaces possessed of my foe,
My cities sackt, and their sky-threatening towres
Raced, and made smooth fields now full of flowres?
Onely these marishes, and myrie bogs,
In which the fearefull ewftes do build their bowres,
Yeeld me an hostry mongst the croking frogs,
And harbour here in safety from those rauenous dogs.

[24]

Nathlesse (said he) deare Ladie with me goe,
Some place shall vs receiue, and harbour yield;
If not, we will it force, maugre your foe,
And purchase it to vs with speare and shield:
And if all fayle, yet farewell open field:
The earth to all her creatures lodging lends.
With such his chearefull speaches he doth wield
Her mind so well, that to his will she bends
And bynding vp her locks and weeds, forth with him wends.

[25]

They came vnto a Citie farre vp land,
The which whylome that Ladies owne had bene;
But now by force extort out of her hand,
By her strong foe, who had defaced cleene
Her stately towres, and buildings sunny sheene;
Shut vp her hauen, mard her marchants trade,
Robbed her people, that full rich had beene,
And in her necke a Castle huge had made,
The which did her co~maund, without needing perswade.

[26]

That Castle was the strength of all that state,
Vntill that state by strength was pulled downe,
And that same citie, so now ruinate,
Had bene the keye of all that kingdomes crowne;
Both goodly Castle, and both goodly Towne,
Till that th'offended heauens list to lowre
Vpon their blisse, and balefull fortune frowne.
When those gainst states and kingdomes do coniure,
Who then can thinke their hedlong ruine to recure.

[27]

But he had brought it now in seruile bond,
And made it beare the yoke of inquisition,
Stryuing long time in vaine it to withstond;
Yet glad at last to make most base submission,
And life enjoy for any composition.
So now he hath new lawes and orders new
Imposd on it, with many a hard condition,
And forced it, the honour that is dew
To God, to doe vnto his Idole most vntrew.

[28]

To him he hath, before this Castle greene,
Built a faire Chappell, and an Altar framed
Of costly Iuory, full rich beseene,
On which that cursed Idole farre proclaimed,
He hath set vp, and him his God hath named,
Offering to him in sinfull sacrifice
The flesh of men, to Gods owne likenesse framed,
And powring forth their bloud in brutishe wize,
That any yron eyes, to see it would agrize.

[29]

And for more horror and more crueltie,
Vnder that cursed Idols altar stone;
An hideous monster doth in darknesse lie,
Whose dreadfull shape was neuer seene of none
That liues on earth; but vnto those alone
The which vnto him sacrificed bee.
Those he deuoures, they say, both flesh and bone:
What else they haue, is all the Tyrants fee;
So that no whit of them remaying one may see.

[30]

There eke he placed a strong garrison,
And set a Seneschall of dreaded might,
That by his powre oppressed euery one,
And vanquished all ventrous knights in fight;
To whom he wont shew all the shame he might,
After that them in battell he had wonne.
To which when now they gan approach in sight,
The Ladie counseld him the place to shonne,
Whereas so many knights had fouly bene fordonne.

[31]

Her fearefull speaches nought he did regard,
But ryding streight vnder the Castle wall,
Called aloud vnto the watchfull ward,
Which there did wayte, willing them forth to call
Into the field their Tyrants Seneschall.
To whom when tydings thereof came, he streight
Calls for his armes, and arming him withall,
Eftsoones forth pricked proudly in his might,
And gan with courage fierce addressse him to the fight.

[32]

They both encounter in the middle plaine,
And their sharpe speares doe both together smite
Amid their shields, with so huge might and maine,
That seem'd their soules they wold haue ryuen quight
Out of their breasts, with furious despight.
Yet could the Seneschals no entrance find
Into the Princes shield, where it empight;
So pure the mettall was, and well refynd,
But shiuered all about, and scattered in the wynd.

[33]

Not so the Princes, but with restlesse force,
Into his shield it readie passage found,
Both through his haberieon, and eke his corse:
Which tombling downe vpon the senselesse ground,
Gauē leaue vnto his ghost from thraldome bound,
To wander in the griesly shades of night.
There did the Prince him leaue in deadly swound,
And thence vnto the castle marched right,
To see if entrance there as yet obtaine he might.

[34]

But as he nigher drew, three knights he spyde,
All arm'd to point, issuing forth a pace,
Which towards him with all their powre did ryde,
And meeting him right in the middle race,
Did all their speares attonce on him enchace.
As three great Culuerings for battrie bent,
And leueld all against one certaine place,
Doe all attonce their thunders rage forth rent,
That makes the wals to stagger with astonishment.

[35]

So all attonce they on the Prince did thonder;
Who from his saddle swarued nought asyde,
Ne to their force gauē way, that was great wonder,
But like a bulwarke, firmly did abyde,
Rebutting him, which in the midst did ryde,
With so huge rigour, that his mortall speare
Past through his shield, & pierst through either syde,
That downe he fell vpon his mother deare,
And powred forth his wretched life in deadly dreare.

[36]

Whom when his other fellowes saw, they fled
As fast as feete could carry them away;
And after them the Prince as swiftly sped,
To be aueng'd of their vnknightly play.
There whilst they entring, th'one did th'other stay,
The hindmost in the gate he ouerhent,
And as he pressed in, him there did slay:
His carkasse tumbling on the threshold, sent
His groning soule vnto her place of punishment.

[37]

The other which was entred, laboured fast
To sperre the gate; but that same lumpe of clay,
Whose grudging ghost was thereout fled and past;
Right in the middest of the threshold lay,
That it the Posterne did from closing stay:
The whiles the Prince hard preased in betweene,
And entraunce wonne. Streight th'other fled away,
And ran into the Hall, where he did weene
Him selfe to saue: but he there slew him at the skreene.

[38]

Then all the rest which in that Castle were,
Seeing that sad ensample them before,
Durst not abide, but fled away for feare,
And them conuayd out at a Posterne dore.
Long sought the Prince, but when he found no more
T'oppose against his powre, he forth issued
Vnto that Lady, where he her had lore,
And her gan cheare, with what she there had vewed,
And what she had not seene, within vnto her shewed.

[39]

Who with right humble thanks him goodly greeting,
For so great prowesse, as he there had proued,
Much greater then was euer in her weeting,
With great admiraunce inwardly was moued,
And honourd him, with all that her behoued.
Thenceforth into that Castle he her led,
With her two sonnes, right deare of her beloued,
Where all that night them selues they cherished,

And from her balefull minde all care he banished

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