

## *Canto I.*

*The Patron of true Holinesse,  
Foule Errour doth defeate:  
Hypocrisie him to entrape,  
Doth to his home entreate.*

[1]

A Gentle Knight was pricking on the Plaine,  
Y cladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde,  
Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,  
The cruell markes of many' a bloody fielde;  
Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield:  
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt;  
As much disdainig to the curbe to yield:  
Full iolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,  
As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt.

[2]

But on his brest a bloudie Crosse he bore,  
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,  
For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,  
And dead as liuing euer him ador'd:  
Vpon his shield the like was also scor'd,  
For soueraine hope, which in his helpe he had:  
Right faithfull true he was in deede and word;  
But of his cheere did seeme too solemne sad:  
Yet nothing did he dread; but euer was ydrad.

[3]

Vpon a great aduenture he was bond,  
That greatest *Gloriana* to him gaue,  
That greatest Glorious Queene of *Faerie* lond,  
To winne him worship, and her grace to haue,  
Which of all earthly things he most did craue;  
And euer as he rode, his heart did earne  
To proue his puissance in battell braue  
Vpon his foe, and his new force to learne;  
Vpon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne.

[4]

A louely Lady rode him faire beside,  
Vpon a lowly Asse more white then snowe;

Yet shee much whiter, but the same did hide  
Vnder a vele, that wimpled was full low,  
And over all a blacke stole she did throw,  
As one that inly mournd: so was she sad,  
And heauie sat vpon her palfrey slow;  
Seemed in heart some hidden care she had,  
And by her in a line a milke white lambe she lad.

[5]

So pure an innocent, as that same lamb,  
She was in life and euery vertuous lore;  
And by descent from Royall lynage came  
Of ancient Kings and Queenes, that had of yore  
Their scepters stretcht from East to Westerne shore,  
And all the world in their subiection held;  
Till that infernall feend with foule vprore  
Forwasted all their land, and them expeld:  
Whom to avenge, she had this Knight from far compeld.

[6]

Behind her farre away a Dwarfè did lag,  
That lasie seemd in being euer last,  
Or wearied with bearing of her bag  
Of needments at his backe. Thus as they past,  
The day with cloudes was suddeine ouercast,  
And angry *Ioue* an hideous storme of raine  
Did poure into his Lemans lap so fast,  
That euery wight to shrowd it did constrain,  
And this faire couple eke to shroud themselues were fain.

[7]

Enforst to seeke some couert nigh at hand,  
A shadie groue not far away they spide,  
That promist ayde the tempest to withstand:  
Whose loftie trees yclad with sommers pride,  
Did spred so broad, that heauens light did hide,  
Not perceable with power of any starre:  
And all within were paths and alleies wide,  
With footing worne, and leading inward farre:  
Faire harbour, that them seemes; so in they entred arre.

[8]

And forth they passe, with pleasure forward led,

Ioying to heare the birdes sweet harmony,  
Which therein shrouded from the tempests dred,  
Seemd in their song to scorne the cruell sky.  
Much can they praise the trees so straight and hy,  
The sayling Pine, the Cedar proud and tall,  
The vine-prop Elme, the Poplar neuer dry,  
The builder Oake, sole king of forrests all,  
The Aspine good for staues, the Cypresse funerall.

[9]

The Laurell, meed of mightie Conquerours  
And Poets sage, the Firre that weepeth still,  
The Willow, worne of forlorne Paramours,  
The Eugh, obedient to the benders will,  
The Birch for shaftes, the Sallow for the mill,  
The Mirrhe sweete bleeding in the bitter wound,  
The warlike Beech, the Ash for nothing ill,  
The fruitfull Oliue, and the Platane round,  
The caruer Holme, the Maple seeldom inward sound.

[10]

Led with delight, they thus beguile the way,  
Vntill the blustering storme is ouerblowne;  
When weening to returne, whence they did stray,  
The cannot finde that path, which first was showne,  
But wander too and fro in wayes vnknowne,  
Furthest from end then, when they neerest weene,  
That makes them doubt, their wits be not their owne:  
So many pathes, so many turnings seene,  
That which of them to take, in diverse doubt they been.

[11]

At last, resolving forward still to fare,  
Till that some end they finde or in or out,  
That path they take, that beaten seemd most bare,  
And like to lead the labyrinth about;  
Which when by tract they hunted had throughout,  
At length it brought them to a hollow caue,  
Amid the thickest woods. The Champion stout  
Eftsoones dismounted from his courser braue,  
And to the Dwarfè a while his needlesse spere he gaue.

[12]

Be well aware, quoth then that Ladie milde,  
Least suddaine mischief ye too rash prouoke:  
The danger hid, the place vnknowne and wilde,  
Breedes dreadfull doubts: Oft fire is without smoke,  
And perill without show: therefore your hardy stroke  
Sir knight with-hold, till further triall made.  
Ah Ladie (said he) shame were to reuoke  
The forward footing for an hidden shade:  
Vertue giues her selfe light, through darkenesse for to wade.

[13]

Yea but (quoth she) the perill of this place  
I better wot then you, though now too late  
To wish you backe returne with foule disgrace;  
Yet wisdomes warnes, whilst foot is in the gate,  
To stay the steppe, ere forced to retrate.  
This is the wandring wood, this *Errours den*,  
A monster vile, whom God and man does hate:  
Therefore, I read beware. Fly fly (quoth then  
The fearefull Dwarfe:) this is no place for liuing men.

[14]

But, full of fire and greedy hardiment,  
The youthfull knight could not for ought be staide;  
But forth vnto the darksome hole he went,  
And looked in: his glistring armor made  
A litle glooming light, much like a shade,  
By which he saw the vgly monster plaine,  
Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,  
But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine,  
Most lothsome, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdain.

[15]

And, as she lay vpon the durtie ground,  
Her huge long taile her den all ouerspred,  
Yet was in knots and many boughtes vpwound,  
Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred  
A thousand yong ones, which she daily fed,  
Sucking vpon her poisonous dugs, each one  
Of sundry shapes, yet all ill faured:  
Soone as that vncouth light vpon them shone,  
Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone.

[16]

Their dam vpstart, out of her den effraide,  
And rushed forth, hurling her hideous taile  
About her cursed head, whose folds displaid  
Were stretcht now forth at length without entraille.  
Shee lookt about, and seeing one in mayle  
Armed to point, sought backe to turne againe;  
For light she hated as the deadly bale,  
Ay wont in desert darknesse to remaine,  
Where plaine none might her see, nor she see any plaine.

[17]

Which when the valiant Elfe perceiu'ed, he lept  
As Lyon fierce vpon the flying pray,  
And with his trenchand blade her boldly kept  
From turning backe, and forced her to stay:  
Therewith enrag'd shee loudly gan to bray,  
And turning fierce, her speckled taile aduaunst,  
Threatning her angry sting, him to dismay:  
Who nought aghast, his mightie hand enhaunst:  
The stroke down from her head vnto her shoulder glaunst.

[18]

Much daunted with that dint, her sense was dazd;  
Yet kindling rage, her selfe she gathered round,  
And all at once her beastly body raiz'd  
With doubled forces high aboue the ground:  
Tho wrapping vp her wreathed sterne arownd,  
Lept fierce vpon his shield, and her huge traine  
All suddenly about his body wound,  
That hand or foot to stirre he stroue in vaine:  
God helpe the man so wrapt in *Errours* endlesse traine.

[19]

His Lady, sad to see his sore constraint,  
Cride out, Now now Sir knight, shew what ye bee,  
Add faith vnto your force, and be not faint:  
Strangle her, else she sure will strangle thee.  
That when he heard, in great perplexitie,  
His gall did grate for grieffe and high disdaine,  
And knitting all his force got one hand free,  
Wherewith he grypt her gorge with so great paine,  
That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraene.

[20]

Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw  
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,  
Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,  
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke  
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:  
Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,  
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,  
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:  
Her filthy parbreake all the place defiled has.

[21]

As when old father *Nilus* gins to swell  
With timely pride about the *Aegyptian* vale,  
His fattie waues do fertile slime outwell,  
And ouerflowe each plaine and lowly dale:  
But when his later ebbe gins to auale,  
Huge heapes of mudd he leaues, wherein there breed  
Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male  
And partly female of his fruitfull seed;  
Such vgly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man reed.

[22]

The same so sore annoyed has the knight,  
That welnigh choked with the deadly stinke,  
His forces faile, ne can no longer fight.  
Whose corage when the feend perceiu'd to shrinke,  
She poured forth out of her hellish sinke  
Her fruitfull cursed spawne of serpents small,  
Deformed monsters, fowle, and blacke as inke,  
Which swarming all about his legges did crall,  
And him encombred sore, but could not hurt at all.

[23]

As gentle Shepheard in sweete euen-tide,  
When ruddy *Phoebus* gins to welke in west,  
High on an hill, his flocke to vewen wide,  
Markes which do byte their hasty supper best;  
A cloud of combrous gnattes do him molest,  
All striuing to infix their feeble stings,  
That from their noyance he no where can rest,  
But with his clownish hands their tender wings  
He brusheth off, and oft doth mar their murmurings.

[24]

Thus ill bestedd, and feare full more of shame,  
Then of the certaine perill he stood in,  
Halfe furious vnto his foe he came,  
Resolv'd in minde all suddenly to win,  
Or soone to lose, before he once would lin;  
And strooke at her with more then manly force,  
That from her body full of filthie sin  
He raft her hatefull head without remorse;  
A streame of cole black bloud forth gushed from her corse.

[25]

Her scattred broode, soone as their Parent deare  
They saw so rudely falling to the ground,  
Groning full deadly, all with troublous feare,  
Gathred themselues about her body round,  
Weening their wonted entrance to haue found  
At her wide mouth: but, being there withstood,  
They flocked all about her bleeding wound.  
And sucked vp their dying mothers blood,  
Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good.

[26]

That detestable sight him much amazde,  
To see th'vnkindly Impes of heauen accurst,  
Deuoure their dam; on whom while so he gazd,  
Hauing all satisfide their bloody thirst,  
Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst,  
And bowels gushing forth: well worthy end  
Of such as drunke her life, the which them nurst;  
Now needeth him no longer labour spend,  
His foes haue slaine themselues, with whom he should contend.

[27]

His Ladie seeing all, that chaunst, from farre  
Approcht in hast to greet his victorie,  
And said, Faire knight, borne vnder happy starre,  
Who see your vanquisht foes before you lye:  
Well worthy be you of that Armorie,  
Wherein ye haue great glory wonne this day,  
And prou'd your strength on a strong enimie,  
Your first aduenture: many such I pray,  
And henceforth euer wish, that like succeed it may.

[28]

Then mounted he vpon his Steede againe,  
And with the Lady backward sought to wend;  
That path he kept, which beaten was most plaine,  
Ne euer would to any by-way bend,  
But still did follow one vnto the end,  
The which at last out of the wood them brought.  
So forward on his way (with God to frend)  
He passeth forth, and new aduenture sought;  
Long way he trauelled, before he heard of ought.

[29]

At length they chaunst to meet vpon the way  
An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad,  
His feete all bare, his beard all hoarie gray,  
And by his belt his booke he hanging had;  
Sober he seemde, and very sagely sad,  
And to the ground his eyes were lowly bent,  
Simple in shew, and voyd of malice bad,  
And all the way he prayed, as he went,  
And often knockt his breast, as one that did repent.

[30]

He faire the knight saluted, louting low,  
Who faire him quited, as that courteous was:  
And after asked him, if he did know  
Of strange aduentures, which abroad did pas.  
Ah my deare Sonne (quoth he) how should, alas,  
Silly old man, that liues in hidden cell,  
Bidding his beades all day for his trespas,  
Tydings of warre and worldly trouble tell?  
With holy father sits not with such things to mell.

[31]

But if of danger which heereby doth dwell,  
And homebred euill euill ye desire to heare,  
Of a straunge man I can you tidings tell,  
That wasteth all this countrey farre and neare.  
Of such (said he) I chiefly doe inquere,  
And shall you well reward to shew the place,  
In which that wicked wight his dayes doth weare:  
For, to all knighthood it is foule disgrace,  
That such a cursed creature liues so long a space.

[32]

Far hence (quoth he) in wastfull wilderness  
His dwelling is, by which no liuing wight  
May euer passe, but thorough great distresse.  
Now (sayd the Lady) draweth toward night,  
And well I wote, that of your later fight  
Ye all for wearied be: for, what so strong,  
But wanting rest will also want of might?  
The Sunne that measures heauen all day long,  
At night doth baite his steedes the *Ocean* waues emong.

[33]

Then with the Sunne take Sir, your timely rest,  
And with new day new worke at once begin:  
Vntroubled night they say gues counsell best.  
Right well Sir knight ye haue aduised bin  
(Quoth then that aged man;) the way to win  
Is wisely to aduise: now day is spent;  
Therefore with me ye may take vp your In  
For this same night. The knight was well content:  
So with that godly father to his home they went.

[34]

A little lowely Hermitage it was,  
Downe in a dale, hard by a forests side,  
Far from resort of people, that did pas  
In trauell to and froe: a little wyde  
There was an holy Chappell edifyde,  
Wherein the Hermite dewly wont to say  
His holy things each morne and euentide:  
Thereby a Christall streame did genly play,  
Which from a sacred fountaine welled forth alway.

[35]

Arriued there, the little house they fill,  
Ne looke for entertainment, where none was:  
Rest is their feast, and all things at their will;  
The noblest mind the best contentment has.  
With faire discourse the euening so they pas:  
For that old man of pleasing wordes had store,  
And well could file his tongue as smooth as glas;  
He told of Saintes and Popes, and euemore  
He strowd an *Aue-Mary* after and before.

[36]

The drouping Night thus creepeth on them fast,  
And the sad humour loading their eye liddes,  
As messenger of *Morpheus* on them cast  
Sweet slombring deaw, the which to sleep them biddes.  
Vnto their lodgings then his gwestes he riddes:  
Where when all drownd in deadly sleepe he findes,  
He to his studie goes, and there amiddes  
His Magick bookes and artes of sundry kindes,  
He seekes out mighty charmes, to trouble sleepy mindes.

[37]

Then choosing out few wordes most horrible,  
(Let none them read) thereof did verses frame,  
With which, and other spelles like terrible,  
He bad awake blacke *Plutoes* griesly Dame,  
And cursed heauen, and spake reprochefull shame  
Of highest God, the Lord of life and light;  
A bold bad man, that dar'd to call by name  
Great *Gorgon*, Prince of darknesse and dead night,  
At which *Cocytus* quakes, and *Styx* is put to flight.

[38]

And forth he cald out of deepe darknesse dred  
Legions of Sprights, the which like little flies  
Fluttring about his euer damned hed,  
A-waite whereto their seruice he applyes,  
To aide his friends, or fray his enimies:  
Of those he chose out two, the falsest twoo,  
And fittest for to forge true-seeming lyes;  
The one of them he gaue a message to,  
The other by him selfe staide other worke to doo.

[39]

He making speedy way through spersed ayre,  
And through the world of waters wide and deep,  
To *Morpheus* house doth hastily repaire.  
Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe,  
And low, where dawning day doth neuer peepe,  
His dwelling is; there *Tethys* his wet bed  
Doth euer wash, and *Cynthia* still doth steepe  
In siluer deaw his euer-drouping hed,  
Whiles sad Night ouer him her mantle black doth spred.

[40]

Whose double gates he findeth locked fast,  
The one faire fram'd of burnisht Yuory:  
The other all with siluer ouercast;  
And wakefull dogges before them farre do lye,  
Watching to banish Care their enemy,  
Who oft is wont to trouble gentle sleepe.  
By them the Sprite doth passe in quietly,  
And vnto *Morpheus* comes, whom drowned deepe  
In drowsie fit he findes: of nothing he takes keepe.

[41]

And more, to lull him in his slumber soft,  
A trickling streame from high rocke tumbling downe,  
And euer-drizling raine vpon the loft,  
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne  
Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne:  
No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,  
As still are wont t'annoy the walled towne,  
Might there be heard: but carelesse Quiet lyes,  
Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemyes.

[42]

The messenger approaching to him spake,  
But his waste wordes returnd to him in vaine:  
So sound he slept, that nought mought him awake.  
Then rudely he him trust, and pusht with paine,  
Whereat he gan to stretch: but he againe  
Shooke him so hard, that forced him to speake.  
As one then in a dreame, whose dryer braine  
Is tost with troubled sights and fancies weake,  
He mumbled soft, but would not all his silence breake.

[43]

The Sprite then gan more boldly him to wake,  
And threatned vnto him the dreaded name  
Of *Hecate*: whereat he gan to quake,  
And lifting vp his lumpish head, with blame  
Halfe angry asked him, for what he came.  
Hither (quoth he) me *Archimago* sent,  
He that the stubborne Sprites can wisely tame,  
He bids thee to him send for his intent  
A fit false dreame, that can delude the sleepers sent.

[44]

The God obeyde, and calling forth straight way  
A diuerse dreame out of his prison darke,  
Deliuered it to him, and downe did lay  
His heauie head, deuoid of carefull carke,  
Whose senses all were straight benumbd and starke.  
He backe returning by the Yuorie dore,  
Remounted vp as light as chearefull Larke,  
And on his little winges the dreame he bore  
In haste vnto his Lord, where he him left afore.

[45]

Who all this while, with charmes and hidden artes,  
Had made a Lady of that other Spright,  
And fram'd of liquid ayre her tender partes  
So liuely, and so like in all mens sight,  
That weaker sence it could haue rauisht quight:  
The maker selfe, for all his wondrous witt,  
Was nigh beguiled with so goodly sight:  
Her all in white he clad, and ouer it  
Cast a blacke stole, most like to seeme for *Vna* fit.

[46]

Now when that ydle dreame was to him brought,  
Vnto that Elfin knight he bad him fly,  
Where he slept soundly void of euill thought,  
And with false shewes abuse his fantasy,  
In sort as he him schooled priuily:  
And that new creature borne without her dew,  
Full of the makers guile, with visage sly  
He taught to imitate that Lady trew,  
Whose semblance she did carrie vnder feigned hew.

[47]

Thus well instructed, to their worke they hast,  
And comming where the Knight in slomber lay,  
The one vpon his hardy head him plast,  
And made him dreame of loues and lustfull play,  
That nigh his manly hart did melt away,  
Bathed in wanton blis and wicked ioy:  
Then seemed him his Lady by him lay,  
And to him playnd, how that false winged boy,  
Her chast hart had subdewd, to learne Dame Pleasures toy.

[48]

And she her selfe of beauty soueraigne Queene,  
Faire *Venus* seemde vnto his bed to bring  
Her, whom he waking euermore did weene,  
To be the chastest flower, that ay did spring  
On earthly braunch, the daughter of a king,  
Now a loose Lemman to vile seruice bound:  
And eke the *Graces* seemed all to sing,  
*Hymen ió Hymen*, dauncing all around,  
Whilst freshest *Flora* her Yuie girlond crownd.

[49]

In this great passion of vnwonted lust,  
Or wonted feare of doing ought amis,  
He started vp, as seeming to mistrust,  
Some secret ill, or hidden foe of his:  
Lo there before his face his Lady is,  
Vnder black stole hyding her baited hooke,  
And as halfe blushing offred him to kis,  
With gentle blandishment, and louely looke,  
Most like that virgin true, which for her knight him took.

[50]

All cleane dismayd to see so vncouth sight,  
And halfe enraged at her shamelesse guise,  
He thought haue slaine her in his fierce despight:  
But hastie heat tempring with sufferance wise,  
He stayde his hand, and gan himselfe aduise  
To proue his sense, and tempt her faigned truth.  
Wringing her hands in wemens pitteous wise,  
Tho can she weepe, to stirre vp gentle ruth,  
Both for her noble bloud, and for her tender youth.

[51]

And said, Ah Sir, my liege Lord and my loue,  
Shall I accuse the hidden cruell fate,  
And mightie causes wrought in heauen aboue,  
Or the blind God, that doth me thus amate,  
For hoped loue to winne me certaine hate?  
Yet thus perforce he bids me do, or die.  
Die is my dew: yet rew my wretched state  
You, whom my hard auenging destinie  
Hath made iudge of my life or death indifferently.

[52]

Your owne deare sake forst me at first to leaue  
My Fathers kingdome; There she stopt with teares:  
Her swollen heart her speach seemd to bereaue,  
And then againe begun, My weaker yeares  
Captiu'd to fortune and frayle worldly feares,  
Fly to your faith for succour and sure ayde:  
Let me not dye in languor and long teares.  
Why Dame (quoth he) what hath ye thus dismayd?  
What frayes ye, that were wont to comfort me affrayd?

[53]

Loue of your selfe, she said, and deare constraint  
Lets me not sleepe, but wast the wearie night  
In secret anguish and vnpittied plaint,  
Whiles you in carelesse sleepe are drowned quight.  
Her doubtfull words made that redoubted knight  
Suspect her truth: yet sith no'vntruth he knew,  
Her fawning loue with foule disdainfull spight  
He would not shend, but said, Deare dame I rew,  
That for my sake vnknowne such grieffe vnto you grew.

[54]

Assure your selfe, it fell not all to ground;  
For all so deare as life is to my hart,  
I deeme your loue, and hold me to you bound;  
Ne let vaine feares procure your needlesse smart,  
Where cause is none, but to your rest depart.  
Not all content, yet seemd she to appease  
Her mournefull plaintes, beguiled of her art,  
And fed with words that could not chuse but please,  
So sliding softly forth, she turn'd as to her ease.

[55]

Long after lay he musing at her mood,  
Much grieu'd to thinke that gentle Dame so light,  
For whose defence he was to shed his blood.  
At last dull wearinesse of former fight  
Hauing yrockt a sleepe his irkesome spright,  
That troublous dreame gan freshly tosse his braine,  
With bowres, and beds, and Ladies deare delight:  
But when he saw his labour all was vaine,

With that misformed spright he backe returnd againe.

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