

Cant. VII

*Britomart comes to Isis Church,
Where shee strange visions sees:
She fights with Radigund, her slaies,
And Artegall thence frees.*

[1]

NOught is on earth more sacred or diuine,
That Gods and men doe equally adore,
Then this same vertue, that doth right define:
For th'heuens themselues, whence mortal men implore
Right in their wrongs, are rul'd by righteous lore
Of highest Ioue, who doth true iustice deale
To his inferiour Gods, and euermore
Therewith contains his heauenly Common-weale:
The skill whereof to Princes hearts he doth reueale.

[2]

Well therefore did the antique world inuent,
That Iustice was a God of soueraine grace,
And altars vnto him, and temples lent,
And heauenly honours in the highest place;
Calling him great *Osyris*, of the race
Of th'old Aegyptian Kings, that whylome were;
With fayned colours shading a true case:
For that *Osyris*, whilst he liued here,
The iustest man aliue, and truest did appeare.

[3]

His wife was Isis, whom they likewise made
A Goddess of great powre and souerainty,
And in her person cunningly did shade
That part of Iustice, which is Equity,
Whereof I haue to treat here presently.
Vnto whose temple when as *Britomart*
Arriued, shee with great humility
Did enter in, ne would that night depart;
But *Talus* mote not be admitted to her part.

[4]

There she receiued was in goodly wize
Of many Priests, which duely did attend

Vppon the rites and daily sacrificize,
All clad in linnen robes with siluer hemd;
And on their heads with long locks comely kemd,
They wore rich Mitres shaped like the Moone,
To shew that *Isis* doth the Moone portend;
Like as *Osyris* signifies the Sunne.
For that they both like race in equall iustice runne.

[5]

The Championesse them greeting, as she could,
Was thence by them into the Temple led;
Whose goodly building when she did behould,
Borne vppon stately pillours, all dispred
With shining gold, and arched ouer hed,
She wondred at the workemans passing skill,
Whose like before she neuer saw nor red;
And thereuppon long while stood gazing still,
But thought, that she thereon could neuer gaze her fill.

[6]

Thence forth vnto the Idoll they her brought,
The which was framed all of siluer fine,
So well as could with cunning hand be wrought,
And clothed all in garments made of line,
Hemd all about with fringe of siluer twine.
Vppon her head she wore a Crowne of gold,
To shew that she had powre in things diuine;
And at her feete a Crocodile was rold,
That with her wreathed taile her middle did enfold.

[7]

One foote was set vppon the Crocodile,
And on the ground the other fast did stand,
So meaning to suppressse both forged guile,
And open force: and in her other hand
She stretched forth a long white sclender wand.
Such was the Goddessse, whom when *Britomart*
Had long beheld, her selfe vppon the land
She did prostrate, and with right humble hart,
Vnto her selfe her silent prayers did impart.

[8]

To which the Idoll as it were inclining,

Her wand did moue with amiable looke,
By outward shew her inward sence desining.
Who well perceiuing, how her wand she shooke,
It as a token of good fortune tooke.
By this the day with dampe was ouercast,
And ioyous light the house of *Ioue* forsooke:
Which when she saw, her helmet she vnlaste,
And by the altars side her selfe to slumber plaste.

[9]

For other beds the Priests there vsed none,
But on their mother Earths deare lap did lie,
And bake their sides vppon the cold hard stone,
T'enure them selues to sufferance thereby
And proud rebellious flesh to mortify.
For by the vow of their religion
They tied were to stedfast chastity,
And continence of life, that all forgon,
They mote the better tend to their deuotion.

[10]

Therefore they mote not taste of fleshly food,
Ne feed on ought, the which doth bloud containe,
Ne drinke of wine, for wine they say is blood,
Euen the bloud of Gyants, which were slaine,
By thundring *Ioue* in the Phlegrean plaine.
For which the earth (as they the story tell)
Wroth with the Gods, which to perpetuall paine
Had damn'd her sonnes, which gainst them did rebell,
With inward griefe and malice did against them swell.

[11]

And of their vitall bloud, the which was shed
Into her pregnant bosome, forth she brought
The fruitfull vine, whose liquor blouddy red
Hauing the mindes of men with fury fraught,
Mote in them stirre vp old rebellious thought,
To make new warre against the Gods againe:
Such is the powre of that same fruit, that nought
The fell contagion may thereof restraine,
Ne within reasons rule, her madding mood containe.

[12]

There did the warlike Maide her selfe repose,
Vnder the wings of *Isis* all that night,
And with sweete rest her heauy eyes did close,
After that long daies toile and weary plight.
Where whilst her earthly parts with soft delight
Of sencelesse sleepe did deeply drowned lie,
There did appeare vnto her heauenly spright
A wondrous vision, which did close implie
The course of all her fortune and posteritie.

[13]

Her seem'd, as she was doing sacrificize
To *Isis*, deckt with Mitre on her hed,
And linnen stole after those Priestes guise,
All sodainely she saw transfigured
Her linnen stole to robe of scarlet red.
And Moone-like Mitre to a Crowne of gold,
That euen she her selfe much wondered
At such a chaunge, and ioyed to behold
Her selfe, adorn'd with gems and iewels manifold.

[14]

And in the midst of her felicity,
An hideous tempest seemed from below,
To rise through all the Temple sodainely,
That from the Altar all about did blow
The holy fire, and all the embers strow
Vppon the ground, which kindled priuily,
Into outragious flames vnwares did grow,
That all the Temple put in ieopardy
Of flaming, and her selfe in great perplexity.

[15]

With that the Crocodile, which sleeping lay
Vnder the Idols feete in fearelesse bowre,
Seem'd to awake in horrible dismay,
As being troubled with that stormy stowre;
And gaping greedy wide, did streight deuoure
Both flames and tempest: with which growen great,
And swolne with pride of his owne peerelesse powre,
He gan to threaten her likewise to eat;
But that the Goddess with her rod him backe did beat.

[16]

Tho turning all his pride to humblesse meeke,
Him selfe before her feete he lowly threw,
And gan for grace and loue of her to seeke:
Which she accepting, he so neare her drew,
That of his game she soone enwombed grew,
And forth did bring a Lion of great might;
That shortly did all other beasts subdew.
With that she waked, full of fearefull fright,
And doubtfully dismayd through that so vncouth sight.

[17]

So thereuppon long while she musing lay,
With thousand thoughts feeding her fantasie,
Vntill she spide the lampe of lightsome day,
Vp-lifted in the porch of heauen hie.
Then vp she rose fraught with melancholy,
And forth into the lower parts did pas;
Whereas the Priestes she found full busily
About their holy things for morrow Mas:
Whom she saluting faire, faire resaluted was.

[18]

But by the change of her vnchearefull looke,
They might perceiue, she was not well in plight;
Or that some pensiuenesse to heart she tooke.
Therefore thus one of them, who seem'd in sight
To be the greatest, and the grauest wight,
To her bespake; Sir Knight it seemes to me,
That thorough euill rest of this last night,
Or ill apayd, or much dismayd ye be,
That by your change of cheare is easie for to see.

[19]

Certes (sayd she) sith ye so well haue spide
The troublous passion of my pensiuie mind,
I will not seeke the same from you to hide,
But will my cares vnfolde, in hope to find
Your aide, to guide me out of errour blind.
Say on (quoth he) the secret of your hart:
For by the holy vow, which me doth bind,
I am adiur'd, best counsell to impart
To all, that shall require my comfort in their smart.

[20]

Then gan she to declare the whole discourse
Of all that vision, which to her appeared,
As well as to her minde it had recourse.
All which when he vnto the end had heard,
Like to a weake faint-hearted man he fared,
Through great astonishment of that strange sight;
And with long locks vp-standing, stifly stared
Like one adawed with some dreadfull spright.
So fild with heauenly fury, thus he her behight.

[21]

Magnificke Virgin, that in queint disguise
Of British armes doest maske thy royall blood,
So to pursue a perillous emprize,
How coulst thou weene, through that disguised hood,
To hide thy state from being vnderstood?
Can from th'immortall Gods ought hidden bee?
They doe thy linage, and thy Lordly brood;
They doe thy sire, lamenting sore for thee;
They doe thy loue, forlorne in womens thraldome see.

[22]

The end whereof, and all the long euent,
They doe to thee in this same dreame discouer.
For that same Crocodile doth represent
The righteous Knight, that is thy faithfull louer,
Like to *Osyris* in all iust endeuer.
For that same Crocodile *Osyris* is,
That vnder *Isis* feete doth sleepe for euer:
To shew that clemence oft in things amis,
Restraines those sterne behests, and cruell doomes of his.

[23]

That Knight shall all the troublous stormes asswage,
And raging flames, that many foes shall reare,
To hinder thee from the iust heritage
Of thy sires Crowne, and from thy countrey deare.
Then shalt thou take him to thy loued fere,
And ioyne in equall portion of thy realme:
And afterwards a sonne to him shalt beare,
That Lion-like shall shew his powre extreame.
So blesse thee God, and giue thee ioyance of thy dreame.

[24]

All which when she vnto the end had heard,
She much was eased in her troublous thought,
And on those Priests bestowed rich reward:
And royall gifts of gold and siluer wrought,
She for a present to their Goddessse brought.
Then taking leaue of them, she forward went,
To seeke her loue, where he was to be sought;
Ne rested till she came without relent
Vnto the land of Amazons, as she was bent.

[25]

Whereof when newes to *Radigund* was brought,
Not with amaze, as women wonted bee,
She was confused in her troublous thought,
But fild with courage and with ioyous glee,
As glad to heare of armes, the which now she
Had long surceast, she bad to open bold,
That she the face of her new foe might see.
But when they of that yron man had told,
Which late her folke had slaine, she bad the~ forth to hold

[26]

So there without the gate (as seemed best)
She caused her Paultion be pight;
In which stout *Britomart* her selfe did rest,
Whiles *Talus* watched at the dore all night.
All night likewise, they of the towne in fright,
Vppon their wall good watch and ward did keepe.
The morrow next, so soone as dawning light
Bad doe away the dampe of drouzie sleepe,
The warlike Amazon out of her bowre did peepe.

[27]

And caused streight a Trumpet loud to shrill,
To warne her foe to battell soone be prest:
Who long before awoke (for she ful ill
Could sleepe all night, that in vnquiet brest
Did closely harbour such a iealous guest)
Was to the battell whilome ready dight.
Eftsoones that warriouresse with haughty crest
Did forth issue, all ready for the fight:
On th'other side her foe appeared soone in sight.

[28]

But ere they reared hand, the Amazone
Began the streight conditions to propound,
With which she vsed still to tye her fone;
To serue her so, as she the rest had bound.
Which when the other heard, she sternly frownd
For high disdain of such indignity,
And would no lenger treat, but bad them sound.
For her no other termes should euer tie.
Then what prescribed were by lawes of cheualrie.

[29]

The Trumpets sound, and they together run
With greedy rage, and with their faulchins smot;
Ne either sought the others strokes to shun,
But through great fury both their skill forgot,
And practicke vse in armes: ne spared not
Their dainty parts, which nature had created
So faire and tender, without staine or spot,
For other vses, then they them translated;
Which they now hackt & hewd, as if such vse they hated,

[30]

As when a Tygre and a Lionesse
Are met at spoyling of some hungry pray,
Both challenge it with equall greedinesse:
But first the Tygre clawes thereon did lay;
And therefore loth to loose her right away,
Doth in defence thereof full stoutly stond:
To which the Lion strongly doth gainesay,
That she to hunt the beast first tooke in hond;
And therefore ought it haue, where euer she it fond.

[31]

Full fiercely layde the Amazon about,
And dealt her blowes vnmercifully sore:
Which *Britomart* withstood with courage stout,
And them repaide againe with double more.
So long they fought, that all the grassie flore
Was fild with bloud, which from their sides did flow,
And gushed through their armes, that all in gore
They trode, and on the ground their liues did strow,
Like fruitles seede, of which vntimely death should grow.

[32]

At last proud *Radigund* with fell despight,
Hauing by chaunce espide aduantage neare,
Let driue at her with all her dreadfull might,
And thus vpbrayding said; This token beare
Vnto the man, whom thou doest loue so deare;
And tell him for his sake thy life thou gauest.
Which spitefull words she sore engrieu'd to heare,
Thus answer'd; Lewdly thou my loue deprauest,
Who shortly must repent that now so vainely brauest.

[33]

Nath'lesse that stroke so cruell passage found,
That glauncing on her shoulder plate, it bit
Vnto the bone, and made a griesly wound,
That she her shield through raging smart of it
Could scarce vphold; yet soone she it requit.
For hauing force increast through furious paine,
She her so rudely on the helmet smit,
That it empierced to the very braine,
And her proud person low prostrated on the plaine.

[34]

Where being layd, the wrothfull Britonesse
Stayd not, till she came to her selfe againe,
But in reuenge both of her loues distresse,
And her late vile reproch, though vaunted vaine,
And also of her wound, which sore did paine,
She with one stroke both head and helmet cleft.
Which dreadfull sight, when all her warlike traine
There present saw, each one of sence bereft,
Fled fast into the towne, and her sole victor left.

[35]

But yet so fast they could not home retrate,
But that swift *Talus* did the formost win;
And pressing through the preace vnto the gate,
Pelmell with them attonce did enter in.
There then a piteous slaughter did begin:
For all that euer came within his reach,
He with his yron flae did thresh so thin,
That he no worke at all left for the leach:
Like to an hideous storme, which nothing may empeach.

[36]

And now by this the noble Conqueresse
Her selfe came in, her glory to partake;
Where though reuengefull vow she did professe,
Yet when she saw the heapes, which he did make,
Of slaughtred carkasses, her heart did quake
For very ruth, which did it almost riue,
That she his fury willed him to slake:
For else he sure had left not one aliue,
But all in his reuenge of spirite would depriue.

[37]

Tho when she had his execution stayd,
She for that yron prison did enquire,
In which her wretched loue was captiue layd:
Which breaking open with indignant ire,
She entred into all the partes entire.
Where when she saw that lothly vncouth sight,
Of men disguiz'd in womanishe attire,
Her heart gan grudge, for very deepe despight
Of so vnmanly maske, in misery misdight.

[38]

At last when as to her owne Loue she came,
Whom like disguise no lesse deformed had,
At sight thereof abasht with secrete shame,
She turnd her head aside, as nothing glad,
To haue beheld a spectacle so bad:
And then too well beleeu'd, that which tofore
Iealous suspect as true vntruely drad,
Which vaine conceipt now nourishing no more,
She sought with ruth to salue his sad misfortunes sore.

[39]

Not so great wonder and astonishment,
Did the most chast *Penelope* possesse,
To see her Lord, that was reported drent,
And dead long since in dolorous distresse,
Come home to her in piteous wretchednesse,
After long trauell of full twenty yeares,
That she knew not his faouours likelinessse,
For many scarres and many hoary heares,
But stood long staring on him, mongst vncertaine feares.

[40]

Ah my deare Lord, what sight is this (quoth she)
What May-game hath misfortune made of you?
Where is that dreadfull manly looke? where be
Those mighty palmes, the which ye wont t'embrew
In bloud of Kings, and great hoastes to subdew?
Could ought on earth so wondrous change haue wrought,
As to haue robde you of that manly hew?
Could so great courage stouped haue to ought?
Then farewell fleshly force; I see thy pride is nought.

[41]

Thenceforth she streight into a bowre him brought,
And caud him those vncomely weedes vndight;
And in their steede for other rayment sought,
Whereof there was great store, and armors bright,
Which had bene reft from many a noble Knight;
Whom that proud Amazon subdewed had,
Whilest Fortune fauourd her successe in fight,
In which when as she him anew had clad,
She was reuiu'd, and ioyd much in his semblance glad.

[42]

So there a while they afterwards remained,
Him to refresh, and her late wounds to heale:
During which space she there as Princes rained,
And changing all that forme of common weale,
The liberty of women did repeale,
Which they had long vsurpt; and them restoring
To mens subiection, did true Iustice deale:
That all they as a Goddesses her adoring,
Her wisdom did admire, and hearkned to her loring.

[43]

For all those Knights, which long in captiue shade
Had shrowded bene, she did from thraldome free;
And magistrates of all that city made,
And gawe to them great liuing and large fee:
And that they should for euer faithfull bee,
Made them sweare fealty to *Artegall*.
Who when him selfe now well recur'd did see,
He purposd to proceed, what so be fall,
Vppon his first aduventure, which him forth did call.

[44]

Full sad and sorrowfull was *Britomart*
For his departure, her new cause of griefe;
Yet wisely moderated her owne smart,
Seeing his honor, which she tendred chiefe,
Consisted much in that aduentures priefe.
The care whereof, and hope of his successe
Gave vnto her great comfort and reliefe,
That womanish complaints she did repressse,
And tempred for the time her present heauinesse.

[45]

There she continued for a certaine space,
Till through his want her woe did more increase:
Then hoping that the change of aire and place
Would change her paine, and sorrow somewhat ease,
She parted thence, her anguish to appease.
Meane while her noble Lord sir *Artegall*
Went on his way, ne euer howre did cease,
Till he redeemed had that Lady thrall:
That for another Canto will more fitly fall

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