

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69675-4 - Edmund Spenser: The Faerie Queene: Book 1

Edited by Lilian Winstanley

Excerpt

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THE FIRST BOOKE OF THE
FAERIE QUEENE

CONTAYNING

THE LEGENDE OF THE
KNIGHT OF THE RED CROSSE,

OR

OF HOLINESSE

1

Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
As time her taught, in lowly Shepherds weeds,
Am now enforst a far unfitter taske,
For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds,
And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds;
Whose prayes having slept in silence long,
Me, all too meane, the sacred Muse areeds
To blazon broad emongst her learned throng:
Fierce warres and faithfull loves shall moralize my song.

2

Helpe then, O holy Virgin chiefe of nine, 10
Thy weaker Novice to performe thy will,
Lay forth out of thine everlasting scryne
The antique rolles, which there lye hidden still,
Of Faerie knights and fairest *Tanaquill*,
Whom that most noble Briton Prince so long
Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,
That I must rue his undeserved wrong:
O helpe thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong.

W. S. L.

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And thou most dreaded impe of highest *Jove*,
 Faire *Venus* sonne, that with thy cruell dart 20
 At that good knight so cunningly didst rove,
 That glorious fire it kindled in his hart,
 Lay now thy deadly Heben bow apart,
 And with thy mother milde come to mine ayde :
 Come both, and with you bring triumphant *Mart*,
 In loves and gentle jollities arrayd,
 After his murdrous spoiles and bloody rage allayd.

4

And with them eke, O Goddesse heavenly bright,
 Mirrour of grace and Majestie divine,
 Great Lady of the greatest Isle, whose light 30
 Like *Phœbus* lampe throughout the world doth shine,
 Shed thy faire beames into my feeble eyne,
 And raise my thoughts too humble and too vile,
 To thinke of that true glorious type of thine,
 The argument of mine afflicted stile :
 The which to heare, vouchsafe, O dearest dred a-while.

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 silver shilde,
 Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,
 The cruell markes of many' a bloody fielde ;
 Yet armes till that time did he never wield :
 His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
 As much disdayning to the curbe to yield :
 Full jolly 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, 10
 The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,
 For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,
 And dead as living ever him ador'd :
 Upon his shield the like was also scor'd,
 For souveraine 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 ever was ydrad.

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Upon a great adventure he was bond,
 That greatest *Gloriana* to him gave, 20
 That greatest Glorious Queene of *Faerie* lond,
 To winne him worship, and her grace to have,
 Which of all earthly things he most did crave;
 And ever as he rode, his hart did earne
 To prove his puissance in battell brave
 Upon his foe, and his new force to learne;
 Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne.

4

A lovely Ladie rode him faire beside,
 Upon a lowly Asse more white then snow,
 Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide 30
 Under 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 heavie sat upon 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 and innocent, as that same lambe,
 She was in life and every vertuous lore,
 And by descent from Royall lynage came
 Of ancient Kings and Queenes, that had of yore 40
 Their scepters stretcht from East to Westerne shore,
 And all the world in their subjection held;
 Till that infernall feend with foule uprore
 Forwasted all their land, and them expeld:
 Whom to avenge, she had this Knight from far compeld.

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Behind her farre away a Dwarfe did lag,
 That lasie seemd in being ever last,
 Or wearied with bearing of her bag
 Of needments at his backe. Thus as they past,
 The day with cloudes was suddeine overcast, 50
 And angry *Jove* an hideous storme of raine
 Did poure into his Lemans lap so fast,
 That every wight to shrowd it did constrain,
 And this fair couple eke to shroud themselves were fain.

7

Enforst to seeke some covert nigh at hand,
 A shadie grove not far away they spide,
 That promist ayde the tempest to withstand :
 Whose loftie trees yclad with sommers pride,
 Did spred so broad, that heavens light did hide,
 Not perceable with power of any starre : 60
 And all within were pathes and alleies wide,
 With footing worne, and leading inward farre :
 Faire harbour that them seemes ; so in they entred arre.

8

And fourth they passe, with pleasure forward led,
 Joying to heare the birdes sweete harmony,
 Which therein shrouded from the tempest dred,
 Seemd in their song to scorne the cruell sky.
 Much can they prayse the trees so straight and hy,
 The saying Pine, the Cedar proud and tall,
 The vine-prop Elme, the Poplar never dry, 70
 The builder Oake, sole king of forrests all,
 The Aspine good for staves, the Cypresse funerall.

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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 Olive, and the Platane round, 80
 The carver Holme, the Maple seeldom inward sound.

10

Led with delight, they thus beguile the way,
 Untill the blustering storme is overblowne ;
 When weening to returne, whence they did stray,
 They cannot finde that path, which first was showne,
 But wander too and fro in wayes unknowne,
 Furthest from end then, when they nearest 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. 90

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 cave,
 Amid the thickest woods. The Champion stout
 Eftsoones dismounted from his courser brave,
 And to the Dwarfe awhile his needlesse spere he gave.

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Be well aware, quoth then that Ladie milde, 100
 Least suddaine mischiefe ye too rash provoke :
 The danger hid, the place unknowne and wilde,
 Breedes dreadfull doubts : Oft fire is without smoke,
 And perill without show : therefore your stroke
 Sir knight with-hold, till further triall made.
 Ah Ladie (said he) shame were to revoke
 The forward footing for an hidden shade :
 Vertue gives 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, 110
 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 living men.

14

But full of fire and greedy hardiment,
 The youthfull knight could not for ought be staide,
 But forth unto the darksome hole he went, 120
 And looked in : his glistring armor made
 A litle glooming light, much like a shade,
 By which he saw the ugly monster plaine,
 Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
 But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine,
 Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.

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And as she lay upon the durtie ground,
 Her huge long taile her den all overspred,
 Yet was in knots and many boughtes upwound,
 Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred 130
 A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
 Sucking upon her poisonous dugs, each one
 Of sundry shapes, yet all ill favored :
 Soone as that uncouth light upon them shone,
 Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone.

16

Their dam upstart, 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 entraile.
 She lookt about, and seeing one in mayle 140
 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 perceiv'd, he leapt
 As Lyon fierce upon the flying pray,
 And with his trenchand blade her boldly kept
 From turning backe, and forced her to stay :
 Therewith enrag'd she loudly gan to bray,
 And turning fierce, her speckled taile advaunst, 150
 Threatning her angry sting, him to dismay :
 Who nought aghast, his mightie hand enhaunst :
 The stroke down from her head unto her shoulder glaunst.

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Much daunted with that dint, her sence was dazd,
 Yet kindling rage, her selfe she gathered round,
 And all attonce her beastly body raizd
 With doubled forces high above the ground :
 Tho wrapping up her wrethed sterne arownd,
 Lept fierce upon his shield, and her huge traine
 All suddenly about his body wound, 160
 That hand or foot to stirre he strove 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 unto 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 disdain,
 And knitting all his force got one hand free,
 Wherewith he grypt her gorge with so great paine, 170
 That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine.

20

Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw
 A fload 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. 180

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

22

The same so sore annoyed has the knight, 190
 That welnigh choked with the deadly stinke.
 His forces faile, ne can no longer fight.
 Whose corage when the feend perceiv'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 legs did crall,
 And him encombred sore, but could not hurt at all.

23

As gentle Shepheard in sweete even-tide,
 When ruddy *Phæbus* gins to welke in west, 200
 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 striving to infixe their feeble stings,
 That from their noyance he no where can rest,
 But with his clownish hands their tender wings
 He brusheth oft, and oft doth mar their murmurings.