

Cant. V.

*The Ladies for the girdle striue
of famous Florimell:
Scudamour comming to Cares house,
doth sleepe from him expell.*

[1]

IT hath bene through all ages euer seene,
That with the praise of armes and cheualrie,
The prize of beautie still hath ioyned beene;
And that for reasons speciall priuitie:
For either doth on other much relie.
For he me seemes most fit the faire to serue,
That can her best defend from villenie;
And she most fit his seruice doth deserue,
That fairest is and from her faith will neuer swerue.

[2]

So fitly now here commeth next in place,
After the prooue of prowesse ended well,
The controuerse of beauties soueraine grace;
In which to her that doth the most excell,
Shall fall the girdle of faire *Florimell*:
That many wish to win for glorie vaine,
And not for vertuous vse, which some doe tell
That glorious belt did in it selfe containe,
Which Ladies ought to loue, and seeke for to obtaine.

[3]

That girdle gaue the vertue of chast loue,
And wiuehood true, to all that did it beare;
But whosoeuer contrarie doth proue,
Might not the same about her middle weare,
But it would loose, or else a sunder teare.
Whilome it was (as Faeries wont report)
Dame *Venus* girdle, by her steemed deare,
What time she vsd to liue in wiuely sort;
But layd aside, when so she vsd her looser sport.

[4]

Her husband *Vulcan* whylome for her sake,
When first he loued her with heart entire,

This pretious ornament they say did make,
And wrought in *Lemno* with vnquenched fire:
And afterwards did for her loues first hire,
Giue it to her, for euer to remaine,
Therewith to bind lasciuious desire,
And loose affections streightly to restraine;
Which vertue it for euer after did retaine.

[5]

The same one day, when she her selfe disposd
To visite her beloued Paramoure,
The God of warre, she from her middle loosd,
And left behind her in her secret bowre,
On *Aridalian* mount, where many an howre
She with the pleasant *Graces* wont to play.
There *Florimell* in her first ages flowre
Was fostered by those *Graces*, (as they say)
And brought with her from thence that goodly belt away.

[6]

That goodly belt was *Cestas* hight by name,
And as her life by her esteemed deare.
No wonder then, if that to winne the same
So many Ladies sought, as shall appeare;
For pearelesse she was thought, that did it beare.
And now by this their feast all being ended,
The iudges which thereto selected were,
Into the Martian field adowne descended,
To deeme this doutfull case, for which they all contended.

[7]

But first was question made, which of those Knights
That lately turneyd, had the wager wonne:
There was it iudged by those worthie wights,
That *Satyrane* the first day best had donne:
For he last ended, hauing first begonne.
The second was to *Triamond* behight,
For that he sau'd the victour from fordonne:
For *Cambell* victour was in all mens sight,
Till by mishap he in his foemens hand did light.

[8]

The third dayes prize vnto that straunger Knight,

Whom all men term'd Knight of the Hebene speare,
To *Britomart* was giuen by good right;
For that with puissant stroke she downe did beare
The *Saluage* Knight, that victour was whileare,
And all the rest, which had the best afore,
And to the last vnconquer'd did appeare;
For last is deemed best. To her therefore
The fayrest Ladie was adiudgd for Paramore.

[9]

But thereat greatly grudged *Arthegall*,
And much repynd, that both of victors meede,
And eke of honour she did him forestall.
Yet mote he not withstand, what was decreede;
But inly thought of that despightfull deede
Fit time t'awaite auenged for to bee.
This being ended thus, and all agreed,
Then next ensew'd the Paragon to see
Of beauties praise, and yeeld the fayrest her due fee.

[10]

Then first *Cambello* brought vnto their view
His faire *Cambina*, couered with a veale;
Which being once withdrawne, most perfect hew
And passing beautie did eftsoones reueale,
That able was weake harts away to steale.
Next did Sir *Triamond* vnto their sight
The face of his deare *Canacee* vnheale;
Whose beauties beame eftsoones did shine so bright,
That daz'd the eyes of all, as with exceeding light.

[11]

And after her did *Paridell* produce
His false *Duessa*, that she might be seene,
Who with her forged beautie did seduce
The hearts of some, that fairest her did weene;
As diuerse wits affected diuers beene.
Then did Sir *Ferramont* vnto them shew
His *Lucida*, that was full faire and sheene,
And after these an hundred Ladies moe
Appear'd in place, the which each other did outgoe.

[12]

All which who so dare thinke for to enchace,
Him needeth sure a golden pen I weene,
To tell the feature of each goodly face.
For since the day that they created beene,
So many heauenly faces were not seene
Assembled in one place: ne he that thought
For *Chian* folke to pourtraict beauties Queene,
By view of all the fairest to him brought,
So many faire did see, as here he might haue sought.

[13]

At last the most redoubted *Britonesse*,
Her louely *Amoret* did open shew;
Whose face discouered, plainely did expresse
The heauenly pourtraict of bright Angels hew.
Well weened all, which her that time did vew,
That she should surely beare the bell away,
Till *Blandamour*, who thought he had the trew
And very *Florimell*, did her display:
The sight of whom once seene did all the rest dismay.

[14]

For all afore that seemed fayre and bright,
Now base and contemptible did appeare,
Compar'd to her, that shone as Phebes light,
Amongst the lesser starres in euening cleare.
All that her saw with wonder ravisht weare,
And weend no mortall creature she should bee,
But some celestiall shape, that flesh did beare:
Yet all were glad there *Florimell* to see;
Yet thought that *Florimell* was not so faire as shee.

[15]

As guilefull Goldsmith that by secret skill,
With golden foyle doth finely ouer spread
Some baser metall, which commend he will
Vnto the vulgar for good gold insted,
He much more goodly glosse thereon doth shed,
To hide his falshood, then if it were trew:
So hard, this Idole was to be ared,
That *Florimell* her selfe in all mens vew
She seem'd to passe: so forged things do fairest shew.

[16]

Then was that golden belt by doome of all
Graunted to her, as to the fayrest Dame.
Which being brought, about her middle small
They thought to gird, as best it her became;
But by no meanes they could it thereto frame.
For euer as they fastned it, it loos'd
And fell away, as feeling secret blame.
Full oft about her wast she it enclos'd;
And it as oft was from about her wast disclos'd.

[17]

That all men wondred at the vncouth sight,
And each one thought, as to their fancies came.
But she her selfe did thinke it doen for spight,
And touched was with secret wrath and shame
Therewith, as thing deuiz'd her to defame.
Then many other Ladies likewise tride,
About their tender loynes to knit the same;
But it would not on none of them abide,
But when they thought it fast, eftsoones it was vntide.

[18]

Which when that scornefull *Squire of Dames* did vew,
He lowdly gan to laugh, and thus to iest;
Alas for pittie that so faire a crew,
As like can not be seene from East to West,
Cannot find one this girdle to inuest.
Fie on the man, that did it first inuent,
To shame vs all with this, *Vngirt vnblest*.
Let neuer Ladie to his loue assent,
That hath this day so many so vnmanly shent.

[19]

Thereat all Knights gan laugh, and Ladies lowre:
Till that at last the gentle *Amoret*
Likewise assayd, to proue that girdles powre;
And hauing it about her middle set,
Did find it fit, withouten breach or let.
Whereat the rest gan greatly to enuie:
But *Florimell* exceedingly did fret,
And snatching from her hand halfe angrily
The belt againe, about her bodie gan it tie.

[20]

Yet nathemore would it her bodie fit;
Yet nathelesse to her, as her dew right,
It yeelded was by them, that iudged it:
And she her selfe adiudged to the Knight,
That bore the Hebene speare, as wonne in fight.
But *Britomart* would not thereto assent,
Ne her owne *Amoret* forgoe so light
For that strange Dame, whose beauties wonderment
She lesse esteem'd, then th'others vertuous gouernment.

[21]

Whom when the rest did see her to refuse,
They were full glad, in hope themselues to get her:
Yet at her choice they all did greatly muse.
But after that the Iudges did arret her
Vnto the second best, that lou'd her better;
That was the *Saluage* Knight: but he was gone
In great displeasure, that he could not get her.
Then was she iudged *Triamond* his one;
But *Triamond* lou'd *Canacee*, and other none.

[22]

Tho vnto *Satyrane* she was adiudged,
Who was right glad to gaine so goodly meed:
But *Blandamour* thereat full greatly grudged,
And litle prays'd his labours euill speed,
That for to winne the saddle, lost the steed.
Ne lesse thereat did *Paridell* complaine,
And thought t'appeale from that, which was decreed,
To single combat with Sir *Satyrane*.
Thereto him *Ate* stird, new discord to maintaine.

[23]

And eke with these, full many other Knights
She through her wicked working did incense,
Her to demaund, and chalenge as their rights,
Deserued for their perils recompense.
Amongst the rest with boastfull vaine pretense
Stept *Braggadocchio* forth, and as his thrall
Her claym'd, by him in battell wonne long sens:
Whereto her selfe he did to witnesse call;
Who being askt, accordingly confessed all.

[24]

Thereat exceeding wroth was *Satyrans*;
And wroth with *Satyrans* was *Blandamour*;
And wroth with *Blandamour* was *Eriuan*;
And at them both Sir *Paridell* did loue.
So all together stird vp strifull stoure,
And readie were new battell to darraigne.
Each one profest to be her paramoure,
And vow'd with speare and shield it to maintaine;
Ne Iudges powre, ne reasons rule mote them restraine.

[25]

Which troublous stirre when *Satyrane* auiz'd:
He gan to cast how to appease the same,
And to accord them all, this meanes deuiz'd:
First in the midst to set that fayrest Dame,
To whom each once his chalenge should disclame,
And he himselfe his right would eke releasse:
Then looke to whom she voluntarie came,
He should without disturbance her possesse:
Sweete is the loue that comes alone with willingnesse.

[26]

They all agreed, and then that snowy Mayd
Was in the midst plast among them all;
All on her gazing wisht, and vowd, and prayd,
And to the Queene of beautie close did call,
That she vnto their portion might befall.
Then when she long had lookt vpon each one,
As though she wished to haue pleasd them all,
At last to *Braggadochio* selfe alone
She came of her accord, in spight of all his fone.

[27]

Which when they all beheld they chaft and rag'd,
And woxe nigh mad for very harts despight,
That from reuenge their willes they scarce asswag'd:
Some thought from him her to haue reft by might;
Some proffer made with him for her to fight.
But he nought car'd for all that they could say:
For he their words as wind esteemed light.
Yet not fit place he thought it there to stay,
But secretly from thence that night her bore away.

[28]

They which remaynd, so soone as they perceiu'd,
That she was gone, departed thence with speed,
And follow'd them, in mind her to haue reau'd
From wight vnworthie of so noble meed.
In which poursuit how each one did succeede,
Shall else be told in order, as it fell.
But now of *Britomart* it here doth neede,
The hard aduentures and strange haps to tell;
Since with the rest she went not after *Florimell*.

[29]

For soone as she them saw to discord set,
Her list no longer in that place abide;
But taking with her louely *Amoret*,
Vpon her first aduenture forth did ride,
To seeke her lou'd, making blind loue her guide.
Vnluckie Mayd to seeke her enemye,
Vnluckie Mayd to seeke him farre and wide,
Whom, when he was vnto her selfe most nie,
She through his late disguizement could him not descrie.

[30]

So much the more her grieffe, the more her toyle:
Yet neither toyle nor grieffe she once did spare,
In seeking him, that should her paine assoyle;
Whereto great comfort in her sad misfare
Was *Amoret*, companion of her care:
Who likewise sought her louer long miswent,
The gentle *Scudamour*, whose hart whileare
That stryfull hag with gealous discontent
Had fild, that he to fell reueng was fully bent.

[31]

Bent to reuenge on blamelesse *Britomart*
The crime, which cursed *Ate* kindled earst,
The which like thornes did pricke her gealous hart,
And through his soule like poysned arrow perst,
That by no reason it might be reuerst,
For ought that *Glauce* could or doe or say.
For aye the more that she the same reherst,
The more it gauld, and grieu'd him night and day,
That nought but dire reuenge his anger mote defray.

[32]

So as they trauelled, the drouping night
Couered with cloudie storme and bitter showre,
That dreadfull seem'd to euery liuing wight,
Vpon them fell, before her timely howre;
That forced them to seeke some couert bowre,
Where they might hide their heads in quiet rest,
And shrowd their persons from that stormie stowre.
Not farre away, not meete for any guest
They spide a little cottage, like some poore mans nest.

[33]

Vnder a steepe hilles side it placed was,
There where the mouldred earth had cav'd the banke;
And fast beside a little brooke did pas
Of muddie water, that like puddle stanke,
By which few crooked sallowes grew in ranke:
Whereto approaching nigh, they heard the sound
Of many yron hammers beating ranke,
And answering their wearie turnes around,
That seemed some blacksmith dwelt in that desert ground.

[34]

There entring in, they found the goodman selfe
Full busily vnto his worke ybent;
Who was to weet a wretched wearish elfe,
With hollow eyes and rawbone cheekes forspent,
As if he had in prison long bene pent:
Full blacke and griesly did his face appeare,
Besmeard with smoke that nigh his eye-sight blent;
With rugged beard, and hoarie shagged heare,
The which he neuer wont to combe, or comely sheare.

[35]

Rude was his garment, and to rags all rent,
Ne better had he, ne for better cared:
With blistred hands emongst the cinders brent,
And fingers filthie, with long nayles vnpared,
Right fit to rend the food, on which he fared.
His name was *Care*; a blacksmith by his trade,
That neither day nor night, from working spared,
But to small purpose yron wedges made;
Those be vnquiet thoughts, that carefull minds inuade.

[36]

In which his worke he had sixe seruants prest,
About the Andvile standing euermore,
With huge great hammers, that did neuer rest
From heaping stroakes, which thereon soused sore:
All sixe strong groomes, but one then other more;
For by degrees they all were disagreed;
So likewise did the hammers which they bore,
Like belles in greatnesse orderly succeed,
That he which was the last, the first did farre exceede.

[37]

He like a monstrous Gyant seem'd in sight,
Farre passing *Bronteus*, or *Pynacmon* great,
The which in *Lipari* doe day and night
Frame thunderbolts for *Ioues* auengefull threate.
So dreadfully he did the anduile beat,
That seem'd to dust he shortly would it driue:
So huge his ham mer and so fierce his heat,
That seem'd a rocke of Diamond it could riue,
And rend a sunder quite, if he thereto list striue.

[38]

Sir *Scudamour* there entring, much admired
The manner of their worke and wearie paine;
And hauing long beheld, at last enquired
The cause and end thereof: but all in vaine;
For they for nought would from their worke refraine,
Ne let his speeches come vnto their eare.
And eke the breathfull bellows blew amaine,
Like to the Northren winde, that none could heare
Those *Pensifenesse* did moue; & *Sighes* the bellows weare.

[39]

Which when that warriour saw, he said no more,
But in his armour layd him downe to rest:
To rest he layd him downe vpon the flore,
(Whylome for ventrous Knights the bedding best)
And thought his wearie limbs to haue redrest.
And that old aged Dame, his faithfull Squire,
Her feeble ioynts layd eke a downe to rest;
That needed much her weake age to desire,
After so long a trauell, which them both did tire.

[40]

There lay Sir *Scudamour* long while expecting,
When gentle sleepe his heauie eyes would close;
Oft chaunging sides, and oft new place electing,
Where better seem'd he mote himselfe repose;
And oft in wrath he thence againe vprose;
And oft in wrath he layd him downe againe.
But wheresoeuer he did himselfe dispose,
He by no meanes could wished ease obtaine:
So euery place seem'd painefull, and ech changing vaine.

[41]

And euermore, when he to sleepe did thinke,
The hammers sound his senses did molest;
And euermore, when he began to winke,
The bellowes noyse disturb'd his quiet rest,
Ne suffred sleepe to settle in his brest.
And all the night the dogs did barke and howle
About the house, at sent of stranger guest:
And now the crowing Cocke, and now the Owle
Lowde shriking him afflicted to the very sowle.

[42]

And if by fortune any litle nap
Vpon his heauie eye-lids chaunst to fall,
Eftsoones one of those villeins him did rap
Vpon his headpeece with his yron mall;
That he was soone awaked therewithall,
And lightly started vp as one affrayd;
Or as if one him suddenly did call.
So oftentimes he out of sleepe abrayd,
And then lay musing long, on that him ill apayd.

[43]

So long he muzed, and so long he lay,
That at the last his wearie sprite opprest
With fleshly weaknesse, which no creature may
Long time resist, gaue place to kindly rest,
That all his senses did full soone arrest:
Yet in his soundest sleepe, his dayly feare
His ydle braine gan busily molest,
And made him dreame those two disloyall were:
The things that day most minds, at night doe most appeare.

[44]

With that, the wicked carle the maister Smith
A paire of redwhot yron tongs did take
Out of the burning cinders, and therewith,
Vnder his side him nipt, that forst to wake,
He felt his hart for very paine to quake,
And started vp auenged for to be
On him, the which his quiet slomber brake:
Yet looking round about him none could see;
Yet did the smart remaine, though he himselfe did flee.

[45]

In such disquiet and hartfretting payne,
He all that night, that too long night did passe.
And now the day out of the Ocean mayne
Began to peepe aboue this earthly masse,
With pearly dew sprinkling the morning grasse:
Then vp he rose like heauie lumpe of lead,
That in his face, as in a looking glasse,
The signes of anguish one mote plainely read,
And ghesse the man to be dismayd with gealous dread.

[46]

Vnto his lofty steede he clombe anone,
And forth vpon his former voiage fared,
And with him eke that aged Squire attone;
Who whatsoeuer perill was prepared,
Both equall paines and equall perill shared:
The end whereof and daungerous euent
Shall for another canticle be spared.
But here my wearie teeme nigh ouer spent
Shall breath it selfe awhile, after so long a went.

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