

## Letter to Raleigh and Commendatory Poems, &c.

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### A Note on the Renascence Editions text:

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Letter of the Authors expounding his  
*whole intention in the course of this worke, which*  
for that it giueth great light to the Reader, for  
the better vnderstanding is hereunto  
annexed.

*To the Right noble, and Valorous, Sir Walter Raleigh knight,  
Lo. Wardein of the Stanneryes, and her Maiesties lieftenaunt  
of the County of Cornewayll.*

**S***Ir knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be  
construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled the  
Faery Queene, being a continued Allegory, or darke conceit,  
I haue thought good aswell for auoyding of gealous opinions  
and misco[n]structions, as also for your better light in  
reading thereof, (being so by you commanded) to discouer  
vnto you the general intention and meaning, which in the  
whole course thereof I haue fashioned, without expressing of  
any particular purposes or by accidents therein occasioned.  
The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a  
gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline:  
Which for that I conceiued shoulde be most plausible and  
pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction, the which  
the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of*

*matter, then for profite of the ensample: I chose the historye of king Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person being made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the daunger of enuy, and suspition of present time. In which I haue followed all the antique Poets historicall, first Homere, who in the Persons of Agamemnon and Vlysses hath ensampled a good gouernour and a vertuous man, the one in his Ilias, the other in his Odysseis: then Virgil, whose like intention was to doe in the person of Aeneas: after him Ariosto comprised them both in his Orlando: and lately Tasso disseuered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons, namely that part which they in Philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a priuate man, coloured in his Rinaldo: The other named Politice in his Godfredo. By ensample of which excellent Poets, I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelue morall vertues, as Aristotle hath deuised, the which is the purpose of these first twelue bookes: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged, to frame the other part of polliticke vertues in his person, after that hee came to be king. To some I know this Methode will seeme displeasaunt, which had rather haue good discipline deliuered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large, as they vse, then thus clowdily enrappd in Allegoricall deuises. But such, me seeme, should be satisfide with the vse of these dayes seeing all things accounted by their showes, and nothing esteemed of, that is not delightfull and pleasing to commune sence. For this cause Xenophon preferred before Plato, for that the one in the exquisite depth of his iudgement, formed a Commune welth such as it should be, but the other in the person of Cyrus and the Persians fashioned a gouernment such as it might best be: So much more profitable and gracious is doctrine by ensample, then by rule. So haue I laboured to doe in the person of Arthure: whome I conceiue after his long education by Timon, to whome he was by Merlin deliuered to be brought vp, so soone as he was borne of the Lady Igrayne, to haue seene in a dream or vision the Faery Queen, with whose excellent beauty rauished, he awaking resolved to seeke her out, and so being by Merlin armed, and by Timon thoroughly instructed, he went to seeke her forth in Faerye land. In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent*

and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet in some places els I do otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe ezpresse in Belphoebe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana). So in the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence in particular, which vertue for that (according to Aristotle and the rest) it is the perfection of all the rest, and conteineth in it them all, therefore in the whole course I mention the deedes of Arthure applyable to that vertue, which I write of in that booke. But of the xii. other vertues, I make xii. other knights the patrones, for the more variety of the history. Of which these three bookes contayn three. The first of the knight of the Redcrosse, in whome I express Holynes. The seconde of Sir Guyon, in whome I sette forth Temperaunce: The third of Britomartis a Lady knight, in whome I picture Chastity. But because the beginning of the whole worke seemeth abrupte and as depending vpon other antecedents, it needs that ye know the occasion of these three knights seuerall aduentures. For the Methode of a Poet historical is not such, as of an Historiographer. For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions, but a Poet thrusteth into the midst, euen where it most concerneth him, and there recouring to the thinges forepaste, and diuining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all. The beginning therefore of my history, if it were to be told by an Historiographer should be the twelfth booke, which is the last, where I deuise that the Faery Queene kept her Annuall feaste xii. dayes, vppon which xii. seuerall dayes, the occasions of the xii. seuerall aduentures, hapned, which being vndertaken by xii. seuerall knights, are in these xii. books seuerally handled and discoursed. The first was this. In the beginning of the feast, there presented himselfe a tall clownish younge man, who falling before the Queen of Faries desired a boone (as the manner then was) which during that feast she might not refuse: which was that hee might haue the atchieuement of any aduenture, which during that feaste should happen: that being graunted, he rested him on the floore, vnfitte through his rusticity for a better place. Soone after entred a faire

*Ladye in mourning weedes, riding on a white Asse, with a dwarfe behind her leading a warlike steed, that bore the Armes of a knight, and his speare in the dwarfes hand. Shee falling before the Queene of Faeries complayned that her father and mother an ancient King and Queene, had bene by an huge dragon many years shut vp in a brasen Castle, who thence suffred them not to yssew: and therefore besought the Faery Queene to assygne her some one of her knights to take on him that exployt. Presently that clownish person vpstarting, desired that aduenture: whereat the Queene much wondering, and the Lady much gainesaying, yet he earnestly importuned his desire. In the end the Lady told him that vnlesse that armour which she brought, would serue him (that is the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul v. Ephes.) that he could not succeed in that enterprise, which being forthwith put upon him with dewe furnitures thereunto, he seemed the goodliest man in al that company, and was well liked of the Lady. And eftesoones taking on him knighthood, and mounting on that straunge Courser, he went forth with her on that aduenture: where beginneth the first booke, vz.*

A gentle knight was pricking on the playne, &c.

*The second day ther came in a Palmer bearing an Infant with bloody hands, whose Parents he complained to haue bene slayne by an Enchauntresse called Acrasia: and therfore craued of the Faery Queene, to appoint him some knight, to performe that aduenture, which being assigned to Sir Guyon, he presently went forth with that same Palmer: which is the beginning of the second booke and the whole subiect thereof. The third day there came in a Groome, who complained before the Faery Queene, that a vile Enchaunter called Busirane had in hand a most faire Lady called Amoretta, whom he kept in most grieuous torment, because she would not yield him the pleasure of her body. Whereupon Sir Scudamour the loue of that Lady presently tooke on him that aduenture. But being vnable to performe it by reason of the hard Enchauntments, after long sorrow, in the end he met with Britomartis who succoured him, and reskewed his loue.*

*But by occasion hereof, many other aduentures are*

*intermedled, but rather as Accidents, then intendments. As the loue of Britomart, the ouerthrow of Marinell, the misery of Florimell, the vertuousnes of Belphoebe, the lasciuiousnes of Hellenora, and many the like.*

*Thus much Sir, I haue briefly ouerronne to direct your vnderstanding to the wel-head of the History, that from thence gathering the whole intention of the conceit, ye may as in a handfull gripe al the discourse, which otherwise may happily seeme tedious and confused. So humbly crauing the continuaunce of your honorable fauour towardes me, and th'eternall establishment of your happines, I humbly take leaue.*

*23 Ianuary, 1589.*

Yours most humbly affectionate  
Ed. Spenser.

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## **Commendatory Poems and Sonnets to Persons of Rank**

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### **A Vision vpon this conceipt of the *Faery Queene*.**

**M**E thought I saw the graue where *Laura* lay  
Within that Temple, where the vestall flame  
Was wont to burne, and passing by that way,  
To see that buried dust of liuing fame,  
Whose tombe faire loue, and fairer vertue kept,  
All suddenly I saw the Faery Queene:  
At whose approach the soule of *Petrarke* wept,  
And from thenceforth those graces were not  
seene.

For they this Queene attended, in whose steed  
Obluion laid him downe on *Lauras* herse:  
Hereat the hardest stones were seene to bleed,  
And grones of buried ghostes the heuens did  
perse.  
Where *Homers* spright did tremble all for  
griefe,  
And curst th'accesse of that celestiall theife.

### Another of the same.

*The prayse of meaner wits this worke like  
profit brings,  
As doth the Cuckoes song delight when  
Philumena sings.  
If thou hast formed right true vertues face  
herein:  
Vertue her selfe can best discerne, to whom  
they writen bin.  
If thou hast beauty praysd, let her sole looks  
diuine  
Iudge if ought therein be amis, and mend it by  
her meine.  
If Chastitie want ought, or Temperaunce her  
dew,  
Behold her Princely mind aright, and write thy  
Queene anew.  
Meane while she shall perceiue, how far her  
vertues sore  
Aboue the reach of all that liue, or such as  
wrote of yore:  
And thereby will excuse and fauour thy good  
will:  
Whose vertue can not be exprest, but by an  
Angels quill.  
Of me no lines are lou'd, nor letters are of  
price,  
Of all which speak our English tongue, but  
those of thy deuice.*