

Guyon's Voyage to the Bower of Bliss
from Book II, Canto XII of Edmund Spenser's
The Faerie Queene

This pdf is a copy of the HTML etext of *The Faerie Queene* prepared from *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Edmund Spenser* [Grosart, London, 1882] by Richard Bear at the University of Oregon.

Two dayes now in that sea he sayled has,
Ne euer land beheld, ne liuing wight,
Ne ought saue perill, still as he did pas:
Tho when appeared the third Morrow bright,
Vpon the waues to spred her trembling light,
An hideous roaring farre away they heard,
That all their senses filled with affright,
And streight they saw the raging surges reard
Vp to the skyes, that them of drowning made affeard.

Said then the Boteman, Palmer stere aright,
And keepe an euen course; for yonder way
We needes must passe (God do vs well acquight,
That is the Gulfe of Greedinesse, they say,
That deepe engorgeth all this worldes pray:
Which hauing swallowd vp excessiue,
He soone in vomit vp againe doth lay,
And belcheth forth his superfluity,
That all the seas for feare do seeme away to fly.

On th'other side an hideous Rocke is pight,
Of mightie Magnes stone, whose craggie clift
Depending from on high, dreadfull to sight,
Ouer the waues his rugged armes doth lift,
And threatneth downe to throw his ragged rift
On who so commeth nigh; yet nigh it drawes
All passengers, that none from it can shift:
For whiles they fly that Gulfes deuouring iawes,
They on this rock are rent, and sunck in helplesse wawes.

Forward they passe, and strongly he them rowes,
Vntill they nigh vnto that Gulfe arriue,
Where streame more violent and greedy growes:
Then he with all his puissance doth striue
To strike his oares, and mightily doth driue

The hollow vessell through the threatfull waue,
Which gaping wide, to swallow them aliue,
In th'huge abysses of his engulfing graue,
Doth rore at them in vaine, and with great terror raue.

They passing by, that griesly mouth did see,
Sucking the seas into his entralles deepe,
That seem'd more horrible then hell to bee,
Or that darke dreadfull hole of Tartare steepe,
Through which the damned ghosts doen often creepe
Backe to the world, bad liuers to torment:
But nought that falles into this direfull deepe,
Ne that approacheth nigh the wide descent,
May backe returne, but is condemned to be drent.

On th'other side, they saw that perilous Rocke,
Threatning it selfe on them to ruinate,
On whose sharpe clifts the ribs of vessels broke,
And shiuered ships, which had bene wrecked late,
Yet stuck, with carkasses exanimate
Of such, as hauing all their substance spent
In wanton ioyes, and lustes intemperate,
Did afterwards make shipwracke violent,
Both of their life, and fame for euer fowly blent.

For thy, this hight The Rocke of vile Reproch,
A daungerous and detestable place,
To which nor fish nor fowle did once approach,
But yelling Meawes, with Seagulles hoarse and bace,
And Cormoyrants, with birds of rauinous race,
Which still sate waiting on that wastfull clift,
For spoyle of wretches, whose vnhappie cace,
After lost credite and consumed thrift,
At last them driuen hath to this despairefull drift.

The Palmer seeing them in safetie past,
Thus said; Behold th'ensamples in our sights,
Of lustfull luxurie and thriftlesse wast:
What now is left of miserable wights,
Which spent their looser daies in lewd delights,
But shame and sad reproch, here to be red,
By these rent reliques, speaking their ill plights?
Let all that liue, hereby be counselled,

To shunne Rocke of Reproch, and it as death to dred.

So forth they rowed, and that Ferryman
With his stiffe oares did brush the sea so strong,
That the hoare waters from his frigot ran,
And the light bubbles daunced all along,
Whiles the salt brine out of the billowes sprong.
At last farre off they many Islands spy,
On euery side floting the floods emong:
Then said the knight, Loe I the land descry,
Therefore old Syre thy course do thereunto apply.

That may not be, said then the Ferryman
Least we vnweeting hap to be fordonne:
For those same Islands, seeming now and than,
Are not firme land, nor any certein wonne,
But stragglng plots, which to and fro do ronne
In the wide waters: therefore are they hight
The wandring Islands. Therefore doe them shonne;
For they haue oft drawne many a wandring wight
Into most deadly daunger and distressed plight.

Yet well they seeme to him, that farre doth vew,
Both faire and fruitfull, and the ground dispred
With grassie greene of delectable hew,
And the tall trees with leaues apparelled,
Are deckt with blossomes dyde in white and red,
That mote the passengers thereto allure;
But whosoeuer once hath fastened
His foot thereon, may neuer it recure,
But wandreth euer more vncertein and vnsure.

As th'Isle of Delos whylome men report
Amid th'Aegæan sea long time did stray,
Ne made for shipping any certaine port,
Till that Latona traueiling that way,
Flying from Iunoës wrath and hard assay,
Of her faire twins was there deliuered,
Which afterwards did rule the night and day;
Thenceforth it firmly was established,
And for Apolloes honor highly herried.

They to him hearken, as beseemeth meete,

And passe on forward: so their way does ly,
That one of those same Islands, which doe fleet
In the wide sea, they needes must passen by,
Which seemd so sweet and pleasant to the eye,
That it would tempt a man to touchen there:
Vpon the banck they sitting did espy
A daintie damzell, dressing of her heare,
By whom a litle skippet floting did appeare.

She them espying, loud to them can call,
Bidding them nigher draw vnto the shore;
For she had cause to busie them withall;
And therewith loudly laught: But nathemore
Would they once turne, but kept on as afore:
Which when she saw, she left her lockes vndight,
And running to her boat withouten ore,
From the departing land it launched light,
And after them did driue with all her power and might.

Whom ouertaking, she in merry sort
Them gan to bord, and purpose diuersly,
Now faining dalliance and wanton sport,
Now throwing forth lewd words immodestly;
Till that the Palmer gan full bitterly
Her to rebuke, for being loose and light:
Which not abiding, but more scornefully
Scoffing at him, that did her iustly wite,
She turnd her bote about, and from them rowed quite.

That was the wanton Phoedria, which late
Did ferry him ouer the Idle lake:
Whom nought regarding, they kept on their gate,
And all her vaine allurements did forsake,
When them the wary Boateman thus bespake;
Here now behoueth vs well to auyse,
And of our safetie good heede to take;
For here before a perlous passage lyes,
Where many Mermayds haunt, making false melodies.

But by the way, there is a great Quicksand,
And a whirlepoole of hidden ieopardy,
Therefore, Sir Palmer, keepe an euen hand;
For twixt them both the narrow way doth ly.

Scarse had he said, when hard at hand they spy
That quicksand nigh with water couered;
But by the checked waue they did descry
It plaine, and by the sea discoloured:
It called was the quicksand of Vnthriftyhed.

They passing by, a goodly Ship did see,
Laden from far with precious merchandize,
And brauely furnished, as ship might bee,
Which through great disaenture, or mesprize,
Her selfe had runne into that hazardize;
Whose mariners and merchants with much toyle,
Labour'd in vaine, to haue recur'd their prize,
And the rich wares to saue from pitteous spoyle,
But neither toyle nor trauell might her backe recoyle.

On th'other side they see that perilous Poole,
That called was the VWhirlepoole of decay,
In which full many had with haplesse doole
Beene suncke, of whom no memorie did stay:
Whose circled waters rapt with whirling sway,
Like to a restlesse wheele, still running round,
Did couet, as they passed by that way,
To draw their boate within the vtmost bound
Of his wide Labyrinth, and then to haue them dround.

But th'heedfull Boateman strongly forth did stretch
His brawnie armes, and all his body straine,
That th'vtmost sandy breach they shortly fetch,
Whiles the dred daunger does behind remaine.
Suddeine they see from midst of all the Maine,
The surging waters like a mountaine rise,
And the great sea puft vp with proud disdaine,
To swell aboue the measure of his guise,
As threatning to deuoure all, that his powre despise.

The waues come rolling, and the billowes rore
Outragiously, as they enraged were,
Or wrathfull Neptune did them driue before
His whirling charet, for exceeding feare:
For not one puffe of wind there did appeare,
That all the three thereat woxe much afrayd,
Vnweeting, what such horroure straunge did reare.

Eftsoones they saw an hideous hoast arrayd,
Of huge Sea monsters, such as liuing sence dismayd.

Most vgly shapes, and horrible aspects,
Such as Dame Nature selfe mote feare to see,
Or shame, that euer should so fowle defects
From her most cunning hand escaped bee;
All dreadfull pourtraicts of deformitee:
Spring-headed Hydraes, and sea-shouldring Whales,
Great whirlpooles, which all fishes make to flee,
Bright Scolopendraes, arm'd with siluer scales,
Mighty Monoceroses, with immeasured tayles.

The dreadfull Fish, that hath deseru'd the name
Of Death, and like him lookes in dreadfull hew,
The griesly Wasserman, that makes his game
The flying ships with swiftnesse to pursew,
The horrible Sea-satyre, that doth shew
His fearefull face in time of greatest storme,
Huge Ziffius, whom Mariners eschew
No lesse, then rockes, (as trauellers informe,)
And greedy Rosmarines with visages deforme.

All these, and thousand thousands many more,
And more deformed Monsters thousand fold,
With dreadfull noise, and hollow rombling rore,
Came rushing in the fomy waues enrold,
Which seem'd to fly for feare, them to behold:
Ne wonder, if these did the knight appall;
For all that here on earth we dreadfull hold,
Be but as bugs to fearen babes withall,
Compared to the creatures in the seas entrall.

Feare nought, (then said the Palmer well auiz'd;)
For these same Monsters are not these in deed,
But are into these fearefull shapes disguiz'd
By that same wicked witch, to worke vs dread,
And draw from on this iourney to proceede.
Tho lifting vp his vertuous staffe on hye,
He smote the sea, which calmed was with speed,
And all that dreadfull Armie fast gan flye
Into great Tethys bosome, where they hidden lye.

Quit from that daunger, forth their course they kept,
And as they went, they heard a ruefull cry
Of one, that wayld and pittifull[y] wept,
That through the sea the resounding plaints did fly:
At last they in an Island did espy
A seemely Maiden, sitting by the shore,
That with great sorrow and sad agony,
Seemed some great misfortune to deplore,
And lowd to them for succour called euermore.

Which Guyon hearing, streight his Palmer bad,
To stere the boate towards that dolefull Mayd,
That he might know, and ease her sorrow sad:
Who him auizing better, to him sayd;
Faire Sir, be not displeasd, if disobayd:
For ill it were to hearken to her cry;
For she is inly nothing ill apayd,
But onely womanish fine forgery,
Your stubborne hart t'affect with fraile infirmity.

To which when she your courage hath inclind
Through foolish pittty, then her guilefull bayt
She will embosome deeper in your mind,
And for your ruine at the last awayt.
The knight was ruled, and the Boateman strayt
Held on his course with stayed stedfastnesse,
Ne euer shruncke, ne euer sought to bayt
His tyred armes for toylesome wearinesse,
But with his oares did sweepe the watry wildernessse.

And now they nigh approched to the sted,
Where as those Mermayds dwelt: it was a still
And calmy bay, on th'one side sheltered
With the brode shadow of an hoarie hill,
On th'other side an high rocke toured still,
That twixt them both a pleasaunt port they made,
And did like an halfe Theatre fulfill:
There those fiue sisters had continuall trade,
And vsd to bath themselues in that deceitfull shade.

They were faire Ladies, till they fondly striu'd
With th'Heliconian maides for maistry;
Of whom they ouer-comen, were depriu'd

Of their proud beautie, and th'one moyity
Transform'd to fish, for their bold surquedry,
But th'vpper halfe their hew retained still,
And their sweet skill in wonted melody;
Which euer after they abusd to ill,
T'allure weake trauellers, whom gotten they did kill.

So now to Guyon, as he passed by,
Their pleasaunt tunes they sweetly thus applide;
O thou faire some of gentle Faery,
That art in mighty armes most magnifide
Aboue all knights, that euer battell tride,
O turne thy rudder hither-ward a while:
Here may thy storme-bet vessell safely ride;
This is the Port of rest from troublous toyle,
The worlds sweet In, from paine & wearisome turmoyle.

With that the rolling sea resounding soft,
In his big base them fitly answered,
And on the rocke the waues breaking aloft,
A solemne Meane vnto them measured,
The whiles sweet Zephirus lowd whisteled
His treble, a straunge kinde of harmony;
Which Guyons senses softly tickeled,
That he the boateman bad row easily,
And let him heare some part of their rare melody.

But him the Palmer from that vanity,
With temperate aduice discourselled,
That they it past, and shortly gan descry
The land, to which their course they leueled;
When suddeinly a grosse fog ouer spred
With his dull vapour all that desert has,
And heauens chearefull face enueloped,
That all things one, and one as nothing was,
And this great Vniuerse seemd one confused mas.

Thereat they greatly were dismayd, ne wist
How to direct their way in darkenesse wide,
But feard to wander in that wastfull mist,
For tomling into mischiefe vnespide.
Worse is the daunger hidden, then descride.
Suddeinly an innumerable flight

Of harmefull fowles about them fluttering, cride,
And with their wicked wings them oft did smight,
And sore annoyed, groping in that griesly night.

Euen all the nation of vnfortunate
And fatall birds about them flocked were,
Such as by nature men abhorre and hate,
The ill-faste Owle, deaths dreadfull messengere,
The hoars Night-rauen, trump of dolefull drere,
The lether-winged Bat, dayes enemy,
The ruefull Strich, still waiting on the bere,
The Whistler shrill, that who so heares, doth dy,
The hellish Harpies, prophets of sad destiny.

All those, and all that else does horrour breed,
About them flew, and fild their sayles with feare:
Yet stayd they not, but forward did proceed,
Whiles th'one did row, and th'other stifly steare;
Till that at last the weather gan to cleare,
And the faire land it selfe did plainly show.
Said then the Palmer, Lo where does appeare
The sacred soile, where all our perils grow;
Therefore, Sir knight, your ready armes about you throw.

He hearkned, and his armes about him tooke,
The whiles the nimble boate so well her sped,
That with her crooked keele the land she strooke,
Then forth the noble Guyon sallied,
And his sage Palmer, that him gouerned;
But th'other by his boate behind did stay.
They marched fairly forth, of nought ydred,
Both firmly armd for euery hard assay,
With constancy and care, gainst daunger and dismay.