
THE MIRROR OF MODESTY

Wherein appeareth as in a perfect glass how the Lord delivereth the innocent from all imminent perils, and plagueth the bloodthirsty hypocrites with deserved punishments.

Showing that the grey heads of doting adulterers shall not go with peace into the grave, neither shall the righteous be forsaken in the day of trouble.

By R. G., Master of Arts.

Imprinted at London by Roger Ward, dwelling at the sign of the Talbot near unto
Holborn conduit.
1584.

To the gentlemen readers, health.

Being requested, gentlemen, of a certain gentlewoman whose suit I durst not deny to pen out this story of Susanna more largely than it is written in the Apocrypha, I stood in a doubt whether I should deny her request or put myself to your judgments. To stand upon so small a trifle with my friend seemed unto her curiosity; to trouble your ears with such trash I thought was to strain too much upon your courtesy. Fearing thus to displease the one or offend the other, I determined rather to abide her brunt than to seem over-rash, until at last she persuaded me that to trouble your patience was but a small crack, but to deny a gentlewoman and my friend so reasonable a request a great discredit.

To prove this her censure was a sentence, & in this her will stood as a law, so that to feed her fancy I have showed myself to be too fond. But hoping when you weigh what a spur I had, you will wink if you spy a spot, I rest upon this point, and so bid you farewell.

Yours to use, R.G.

To the right honourable and virtuous lady, the Lady Margaret, Countess of Derby, Robert Greene wisheth happy health, with increase of honour and virtue.

The poet Homer (right honourable and virtuous lady) took pains to pen the travels of Ulysses because he was wise, and [+I] have applied my small skill to level out the life of Susanna because she was chaste. He sought to pleasure others by the show of Ulysses' wisdom, and I (if I might) to profit all by Susanna's chastity. Divers followed Ulysses' steps (although they suspected it for a feigned tale); then I hope most will tread Susanna's trace in that they know it an unfeigned truth.

But your Honour may think I play like Aesop's crow, which decked herself with others' feathers, or like the proud poet Batillus, which subscribed his name to Virgil's verses, and yet presented them to Augustus. In the behalf therefore of this my offence, I excuse myself with the answer that Varro made when he offered Ennius' works to the Emperor: I give, quoth he, another man's picture, but freshly flourished with mine own colours.

Well, Diana's present was ever a bow because she loved hunting; Pallas' gift was a shield in that she was valiant, and I think no fitter present for your Ladyship's personage than this Mirror of Chastity because you are virtuous, the renown of whose virtuous qualities is such and so great that your very foes (if you have any) shall be forced, maugre their face, to speak well whatsoever their spiteful minds do think. The fame therefore (right honourable) of this your virtuous life, and the report of your Ladyship's surpassing courtesy, encouraged me to present this pamphlet to your Honour's protection, hoping that as the goddess Themis thankfully accepted the frankincense which Deucalion willingly offered at her altar, so your Ladyship will vouchsafe of my will, whatsoever the work be, and take this pamphlet in good part, though for want of skill it be unperfect.

Resting thus upon your Ladyship's courtesy, I commit your Honour to the Almighty.

Your Honour's most humbly to command,
Robert Greene.

A PRINCELY MIRROR OF PEERLESS MODESTY

In the days of King Astyages there dwelt in Babylon a certain man called Joachim, loved particularly of each one for his virtue & honoured generally of all men for his parentage and progeny, more adorned with virtuous perfections than endued with wealthy possessions, and yet counted one of the greatest wealth in all Babylon, so that he was feared of most for his riches, and renowned above all for his justice. This Joachim, willing to take a wife and to link himself in the holy league of matrimony, coveted [sic?] carefully to find out such a match that he might neither have cause to rue his chance nor repent him of his choice, knowing that after that knot was once knit, had-I-wist would come too late. He therefore sought out one Susanna, the daughter of Helchias, a man who carefully sought to keep the law and took surpassing pains in the diligent instructing of his daughter, knowing that her virtuous qualities would be a comfort to him and a credit to herself.

This Susanna was endued with such exquisite beauty and exceeding virtue as it was hard to judge whether the pure complexion of her body or the perfect constitution of her mind held the supremacy. Joachim, first noting the godly disposition of her parents, began to think that such tree, such fruit; that if the stock were good, the graft would be the better; that seldom out of a right olive grew a wild branch; that the best vine beareth the best grapes and the honestest parents the most virtuous children. Then hearing the singular report that all Babylon made of her virtuous qualities (for he counted it ye point of a wise man rather to love by ear than like by the eye), he thought himself fortunate that it was his chance to make so good a choice, knowing that a peaceable woman and of a good heart is a gift of the Lord and there is nothing so much worth as a woman well instructed, that a shamefast and faithful woman is a double grace & there is no treasure to be compared to her continent mind, that as the glittering beams of the sun when it ariseth decketh the heaven, so the glistering beauty of a good wife adorneth the house, and that as golden pillars do shine upon the sockets of silver, so doth a fair face with a virtuous mind.

Joachim, I say, considering this, and finding in Susanna beauty to feed his fancy and virtue to content his heart, by the consent of her parents took her to his wife, who whiles they lived and loved together in fortunate prosperity, it happened that there were elected two of the most ancient of the people to be judges, such as the Lord speaketh of that the iniquity came from Babylon and from the ancient judges that seemed to rule the people. These two patterns of unrighteousness and mirrors of mischief had under the pens of a dove covered the heart of a kite, under their sheep's skins hidden the bloody nature of a wolf, thinking under the shadow of their grey hairs to cover the substance of their treacherous minds, in a painted sheath to hide a rusty blade, in a silver bell a leaden clapper, & in their aged complexion most youthful concupiscence, hoping their hoary hairs would keep them without blame, and their grey heads without suspicion.

Indeed, age is a crown of glory when it is adorned with righteousness, but the dregs of dishonour when it is mingled with mischief. For honourable age consisteth not in the term of years, nor is not measured by the date of a man's days, but godly wisdom is the

grey hair, and an undefiled life is old age. The herb grace, the older it is, the ranker smell it hath; the sea-star is most black, being old; the older the eagle is, the more crooked is her bill, and the more age in wicked men, the more unrighteousness, which in time these two judges tried true, for they daily frequented the house of Joachim, as also all other which had anything to do in the law.

Now Susanna, seeking oftentimes to be solitary, whether to muse upon her worldly business or to meditate upon some heavenly motions I know not, but it was her custom continually about noon to walk into her husband's garden, which was hard adjoining to the house and most pleasantly situate, seeming a second paradise for the most fruitful trees and fragrant flowers that there passing curiously were planted. These two elders, seeing her daily to pass away the time with walking in that pleasant plot, noting the exquisite perfection of her body and how she was adorned with the most singular gifts of nature, began to fix their eyes upon the form of her feature, and to be snared within the fetters of lust. Lascivious concupiscence had already charmed their thoughts, and they were drunken suddenly with the dregs of filthy desire; they were scorched with the beams of her beauty, and were inflamed towards her with inordinate affection. Fond fancy had already given them the foil, and their aged hair yielded unto vanity, so that they turned away their minds from God and durst not lift up their eyes to heaven lest it should be a witness of their wickedness or a corrosive to their guilty conscience, for the remembrance of God is a terror to the unrighteous, and the sight of his creatures is a sting to the mind of the reprobate.

These therefore feeling their devilish hearts to be perplexed with such hellish passions, cast off carelessly the fear of God from before their eyes, neither remembering that they were elders to give good example, nor judges of the people to minister right. Their hoary hairs could not hale them from sin, nor their calling convert them from filthiness, but they greedily drunk up the dregs of unrighteousness, and carefully busied their brains to oppress the simple. Yet although they had wholly sold themselves over to sin, and yielded their necks to the yoke of iniquity, they durst not so much as in countenance show what their wicked wills did pretend. For albeit they were linked together in the league of amity, and were such professed friends as the consent of the one was a constraint to the other, and although they were both fettered in the snare of her beauty and scorched with the like flame, yet they durst not bewray their grief, how fondly fancy had bewitched them, neither unfold how fleshly desire had drawn them to disordinate lust, for the wicked is ashamed more of man than of God, and feareth to be detected of that which he careth not to commit in the sight of the Almighty.

While thus they stood in dread to bewray their doting desires, they daily watched very diligently to feed their eyes with the sight of her beauty, and to gaze on the perfection of her body, neither fleeing that which bred their own bane, nor remembering the counsel of the wise, who wisheth a man not to gaze upon the glittering beauty of a woman lest he fall through that which is precious in her, nor to yield to the alarums of inordinate lust, that he both destroy not himself and his heritage.

This wholesome doctrine nothing cooling their desires, they still wallowed with the sow in their wickedness; yea, their former custom in sinning had so taken away the feeling of their offence that although their own conscience drave them from attempting openly such a fault, yet they greedily sought in secret to commit so heinous a fact, each of them carefully conjecturing by what means he might best bring to pass his pretended purpose, so that the one said to the other: Seeing that our business is done, and our office diligently executed let us not debate any longer, but hie us home to dinner, either of them seeking by this subtle shift to shake off the other's company, that he might find fit opportunity to give the onset.

They being therefore departed, and having taken their leave, went home with a flea in their ears, having the prick of lascivious lust as a continual spur in their side, neither of them taking any rest till they returned and met in the same place from whence before they parted, which sudden and unlooked for meeting drave them both into such a dump as they stood amazed at this strange chance, until at last the eldest of them burst forth into these speeches:

Brother, quoth he, I cannot but both muse and marvel what wind hath driven you so suddenly into this coast. Have you such serious business with Master Joachim, or are you pestered with such importunate suitors that your return is so speedy? But 'tis hard, brother, to delay when the devil drives, or to pull back the foot when love or necessity sounds the march. I am not such a dunce but I can divine by a little motion what the mind meaneth, nor so bad a physician but I can conjecture by the water what the patient's pain is. I see, brother, by imagination what you feel in act, and 'tis hard to halt before a cripple. I therefore adjure you by the sacred bond of friendship which hath and shall remain unviolable betwixt us, that you (without feigning) unfold unto me ye cause of your sudden coming, swearing unto you by the God of our fathers that be it never so weighty, I will be as secret as a brother, & be it never so dangerous, I will help thee as a friend.

The other judge, hearing this strange salutation, made him this answer:

Brother, quoth he, I smell your fetch, but 'tis hard to catch the fish when the hook is bare, ad ill taking of the fox when the traps is descried. He that will juggle without art must play his feats under the board lest want of cunning crack his credit. You cannot by musing at my speedy arrival, and by inquiring the cause, make me cease from marveling at your so sudden coming, and to examine the case, for your speed is as suspicious as my haste. But in a needful matter, to leave this needless niceness which bewitcheth [sic for between?] friends is frivolous, trusting upon your troth, and reposing my confidence on your professed friendship, I will freely without feigning unfold unto you my unfortunate state. I call it unfortunate because I am half past hope to obtain my purpose, and if I get that I gape for, yet my greatest gain shall be loss. So it is, brother, that the beauty of Susanna hath so bleared mine eyes, and her comely perfection so bewitched my senses, her singular feature hath so fired my fancy, and her sweet face so fettered my freedom, that I am perplexed with a thousand contrary passions. The fear of God persuades from such wicked fondness, but the desire of her beauty drives me to such wretched folly; my

conscience continually exhorteth me not to attempt such a fact, but concupiscence persuadeth me to persist in my purpose. But he that is so scrupulous for the observing of the law shall both pass his days without pleasure, and yet at last be found a sinner. I mean therefore, whatsoever ye law wisheth, at this time to have mine own will.

In troth, quoth the other, 'tis folly to cover smoke, and more fondness to conceal love, but he is most fool of all that feareth to bewray a serious matter to a secret friend. Know therefore, brother, that we are both feathered of one wing, & thy love exceedeth not my lust, thou(?) burnest not more than I do. Susanna is the saint whom I do serve, and her exquisite perfection hath enchanted me. Thy sore is my sorrow, and the same pain doth pinch us both alike. As therefore we have one malady, we will both have one medicine, and as we have both happened on one pretence, so we will friendly hazard to extain [sic for attain?] one purpose.

These two cursed caitiffs of the seed of Canaan, soothing one another in this devilish imagination, concluded, when they might find her alone, to suck the blood of this innocent lamb, and with most detestable villainy to assail the simple mind of this silly Susanna. Persisting therefore in this hellish purpose, many days were not passed ere they spied fit opportunity (as they thought) to obtain their desire, for the season being very hot and the tender body of Susanna being sore parched with heat, she, supposing that none of her household, much less any stranger, had been in the garden, went in as her use was with two maidens, only thinking there secretly to wash herself, and seeing the coast clear and herself solitarily [sic for solitary?], said thus unto them:

Bring me, quoth she, oil and soap wherewith to wash, and see that you shut the doors surely.

The maidens, carefully obeying their mistress' command, shut the garden gates and went out themselves at a back door to fet what their mistress had willed them, not seeing the elders because they were hid, who no sooner saw the maidens gone, and Susanna a fit prey for their filthy purpose, but they rose up and ran unto her, the one of them beginning to persuade her on this manner:

Be not amazed, Mistress Susanna, quoth he, to see us thus suddenly and secretly arrived, neither let our presence appall your senses, for we come not cruelly as foes, but courteously as friends. If our coming be strange, the cause is as strait, and where necessity forceth, there it is hard to strive against the stream. He that seeketh no way against his own will oft-times kicketh against the prick, and he that striveth to withstand love hoppeth against the hill. These things considered, if we offend in being too bold, your beauty shall bear the blame as the only cause of this enterprise, for to omit all frivolous circumstances and to come to the matter, so it is that [+by] your divine parts we have so been perplexed with the passions of love, and have been so deeply drowned in the desire of your person, that there is no torment so terrible, no pain so pinching, no woe so grievous as the grief which hath griped us since we have burned in love towards you. Sith therefore our liking is such, let it be repaid again with love; let our firm fancy be requited with mutual affection, and in lieu of our goodwill, consent unto us, and lie

with us. That sin which is secretly committed is always half pardoned; she liveth chastely enough that liveth warely. The garden gates are surely shut; no man can see us whereby to detect us of the crime. The credit which we carry in Babylon shall be sufficient to shroud you from shame; our office shall be able to defend you from mistrust, and our grey hairs a shield to defend you from suspicion, and by this small offence you shall both pleasure us and purchase to yourself two such trusty friends as you may in all dutiful service command.

Susanna, hearing this subtle serpent to breathe out such brutish reasons, wondered to see two of their calling so blinded with the veil of lascivious lusts as to blaspheme so devilishly against their own conscience, insomuch that for a good space she stood astonished, until at last gathering her wits together, she burst forth into these speeches:

'Tis a saying, quoth she, not so common as true, that whoso sinneth against his conscience sinneth against his own soul, and he that knoweth the law and wilfully disobeyeth it deserveth many stripes, which sacred sentence I wish you to consider, and no doubt it will be a sufficient cooling card to your inordinate desire. Hath God placed you as judges over his people to punish sin, and will you maintain wickedness; is it your office to uphold the law, and will you destroy it; nay, are you commanded to cut off this sin with death, & yet will you persuade a woman to defile her husband's bed? Is it your duty to drive us from all unclean lust and will you seek to draw a daughter of Judah to such folly; is this the office of a judge, or beseemeth such unclean thoughts the mind of an elder? Do the summons of death appear in your grey head, and yet fleshly desire reign in the heart; doth your old age import a clear conscience, and is your inward mind fraught with concupiscence; are you still young in virtue, and old in vice? Oh how pleasant a thing it is when grey-headed men minister judgment, and the elders can give good counsel, but how perilous a thing is it for the ruler to be unrighteous, and the judge of the people to delight in sin. Such a man shall have coals heaped upon his head, and the wrath of the Lord shall consume his heritage. Three sorts of men the Lord hateth, and he utterly abhorreth the life of them: a poor man that is proud, a rich man that is a liar, and an old adulterer that doteth and is unchaste. Hath not God with his own finger set down that whoso committeth adultery shall die the death, and will you wilfully despise the Lord by neglecting his commandments? Have you so sold yourselves unto sin, and sworn to work wickedness, that you will prefer fading pleasure before lasting pain, and for the fulfilling of your filthy lust purchase perpetual damnation?

But put case I were so careless of mine honour and honesty as to condescend to your request, should not even yourselves be witnesses against my corrupt conscience? Would not mine own works cry out for vengeance to plague my wickedness? Yes, no doubt, after you had glutted your fancy with the loathsomeness of the sin, and the spirit of God had touched your heart with the prick of the offence, you would both detest me as a mirror of immodesty, and account me forever as a common harlot, for the Lord suffereth not the wicked to go unrewarded. She, saith the wise man, that is not continent, but common in her love, and yieldeth that which is proper to her husband into the possession of a stranger, disobeyeth the law, maketh breach of her plighted faith, and lastly playeth the whore in most hellish adultery. Her children shall not take root, nor her branches shall

bring forth no fruit; her name shall be spotted with infamy, and her discredit shall not quite be forgotten. And shall I then, knowing this, wilfully work mine own woe? Shall I repay the troth my husband reposeth in me with such treachery, shall I requite his love with such disloyalty, shall such guileful discourtesy be a guerdon for his unfeigned goodwill? No, the fear of God is a fortress unto me against such folly, the love I bear to my husband is a shield to fence me from such shameless fancy, and the care of mine own honour is a conserve against such filthy concupiscence.

Whereas you say that the sin which secretly is committed is half pardoned, and that she liveth caste which liveth caute, that the gates are shut, that no man can espy our folly, and that the place is so secret that the offence cannot be prejudicial to my good name, I answer that I more esteem the wrath of God that the words of men, and I dread more to commit such a devilish fact before the sight of the Almighty than before the eyes of all the world. Man judgeth but the body, but God the soul, the one being but a small pinch, the other a perpetual pain. He (saith the wise man) that breaketh wedlock and thinketh thus in his heart: Who seeth me? The misty clouds have covered me and I am compassed about with a cloudy darkness. My offence shall not be an object unto any man's eyes neither can any man discern my doings. I am secretly closed within the walls. Whom need I to fear? And as for the Lord, he is merciful, and will not remember any man's sins. He is slow unto wrath, and promiseth speedily to pardon the faults of the wicked. Such a one, that feareth more the eye of a mortal man than the sight of an immortal God, and knoweth not that the eyes of the Lord is ten thousand times brighter than the glittering beams of the sun, beholding the very thoughts of men and searching the heart and the reins, the same man shall be punished with earthly plagues and hellish torments; he shall suddenly be taken in his own trap, and he shall fall before the face of every man because he preferred his own pleasure before the fear of the Lord.

But alas, it is unfit for the young fawn to lead the old buck, for a blind man to be a guide to him which hath his sight, nor meet for a seely simply woman to instruct the elders and judges of the people. Is it my part to exhort you unto virtue, or rather is it not your duty to persuade me from vice? But I hope this proffer is but to make a trial of mine honesty, and to sift out my secret intent. If otherwise, your wills and your words be alike. Cease your suit, for you may well gape, but never gain you look for.

The judges, hearing seely Susanna thus cunningly to confute their devilish conclusions, seeing she had infringed their reasons, by the power of the law thought to wrest her upon a higher pin, and to lay such a blot in her way as she should hardly wipe out. For although they knew she did rightly refel their frantic folly, and perfectly perceive her godly counsel was a cooling card to their inordinate desires, yet they were so blinded with the veil of lascivious vanity, and so dimmed with the cloud of concupiscence, that the fear of God was of no force to hale them from this hellish folly, but that the other elder gave Susanna this sharp and wicked answer:

Susanna, quoth he, Helias' [=Elias'] counsel did little prevail to persuade Ahab from enjoying the vineyard of Naboth [=Nabaoth] but that he both obtained his desire and rewarded such an obstinate subject with cruel death. Barsabe [=Bathsheba] could not

withhold David both from sacking her honour and honesty, and also from murdering cruelly her loving husband Urias [=Uriah], neither shall these painted speeches prevail against our pretended purpose, for he is a coward that yieldeth at the first shot, and he not worthy to wear the bud of beauty that is daunted with the first denial. We have the tree in our hand, and mean to enjoy the fruit. We have beaten the bush, and will not now let the birds escape, and seeing we have you here alone, your stern looks shall stand for no sterling, but if you consent, be assured of two trusty friends; if not, hope for no other hap but death for your denial. 'Tis a saying not so common as true that a woman's chiefest treasure is her good name and that she which hath cracked her credit is half hanged, for death cutteth off all miseries but infamy is the beginning of all sorrows. Sith then loathsome discredit is worse than loss of life, assure thyself, if thou deny us we will beat thee with the rod, for we both will witness against thee that we took thee committing adultery with a young man, and that the more covertly to cloak thy whoredom thou didst secretly send away thy maids, that so thou mightest enjoy thy pleasure and they not espy thy practice. Our office and authority, our age and honour shall suffice to witness our words to be true, so that thou shalt purchase to thy friends and thy fame perpetual discredit, and to thy body without pardon a most pinching and shameful death. Seeing therefore by consent thou shalt still keep the report of thy chastity, and by [+denial] thou shalt reap death and discredit, show thyself a wise woman, and of the two evils, choose the best.

Susanna, hearing the mischievous pretence of these subtle serpents, and seeing that they had so laid the train that she could no way escape the traps, but either she must incur the danger of the body or the destruction of the soul, was perplexed with such doubtful passions and cumbered with such careful thoughts that she burst forth into trickling tears, sorrowful sighs and woeful wailings, which, poor soul, she blubbered forth in this wise:

Alas, quoth she, most vild and unjust wretches, is the fear of God so far from your minds as you seek not only to sack mine honour but to suck my blood? Is it not injury enough in that you covet to spoil mine honesty, but that you long to spill my life? Hath this sweet love you pretend such bitter taste; is this the fruit of your feigned fancy? No doubt the cause must be pernicious when the effect is so pestilent. Flatter not yourselves in this your folly, nor soothe not yourselves in your sins, for there is a God that seeth and will revenge, and hath promised that whoso bindeth two sins together shall not be unpunished in the one. But alas, what availeth it to talk of wisdom to the fool, or of the wrath of God to a wilful reprobate? The charmer, charm he never so wisely, charms in vain if the adder be deaf, and the wise casteth stones against the wind that seeketh to draw the wicked from his folly.

Let me therefore, poor soul, more narrowly consider mine own case. I am, alas, perplexed with divers doubtful passions, and grievous troubles assaileth me on every side. If I commit this crime, though never so secretly, yet the eyes of the Lord seeth the very inward thoughts, and mine own conscience shall continually be a witness against me of this wickedness. The reward of sin is death; then what other hap can I hope for but perpetual damnation if I do this wicked deed, sith the Lord himself hath promised to be a swift witness against all wi[l]ful adulterers. And If I consent not unto these unrighteous

judges, I am like to be unjustly accused of the like crime, so that both I shall suffer death without cause, & yet (which is most grief) not die without shame. By this means what dishonour shall I bring to my parents, what discredit to my husband, and what infamy to myself and my seely children? The hoary hairs of my father Helchias shall be brought with sorrow unto the grave, Joachim shall be ashamed to show his face in the streets of the city, and my poor babes shall be counted as the seed of an harlot, and yet, alas, I myself altogether sackless.

Why, my secret offence shall prevent all this open shame. The Lord is slow to wrath, and his mercy exceedeth all his works. He wisheth not the death of a sinner, and hearty repentance pacifieth his displeasure.

But O, vild wretch that I am, why do I thus blaspheme against the Lord & his law, why do I breathe out these hellish speeches? Can I say I will repent at my pleasure, or shall I therefore sin in hope because the Lord is merciful? No, no, it is better for me to fall into your hands and not commit the offence than to sin in the sight of the Lord. Shall I not rather fear God than man, & dread him more that killeth both body & soul than him that hath power but to kill the body only? Yet his fear shall be my defence.

And with that she cried in a loud voice, and the two elders cried out against her, and the one of them ran and opened ye gate the more to verify their vild intent. Now when the servants heard the cry in the garden, they hastily rushed in at the back door to see what violence was offered to their mistress. But when ye elders had declared the matter unto them, ye servants were greatly ashamed, for such an infamous report had never been bruited of Susanna. The fame of this heinous fact being spread throughout all Babylon, every man began diversly to conjecture as fancy led them. Her friends, sorrowing, suspected ye cankered minds of ye cruel judges; her foes, laughing, said that dissembled holiness was double sin, & that the holiest countenance hath not always ye honestest conscience, both friend & foe notwithstanding wondering at the strange chance.

Well, as ye nature of man is desirous of novelty, so on the morrow after ye people flocked to Joachim's house to hear this case throughly canvassed, & thither came the two elders also, having their minds fraught with fury and their hearts full of hate, mischievously imagining against Susanna to put her to death. They therefore commanded presently before all the people to send for Susanna, the daughter of Helchias, Joachim's wife, & immediately they sent for her, who came accompanied with her father and mother, her children, and all her kindred. The judges, seeing Susanna to be come, and that she had her face covered with a veil, commanded presently to uncover her face, that so they might satisfy their filthy lust with the sight of her beauty and feed their doting fancy with the glistening hue of her divine feature. The people, now more narrowly noting her exquisite perfection and singular beauty, taking pity of her mishap, sorrowed and wept. But the two elders stood up in the midst of the assembly, and laying their hands upon Susanna's head, which poured forth tears, and heaved up her eyes towards heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord, begun their tale of this manner:

We are sorry, quoth they, that we have cause this day to accuse Susanna, the daughter of Helchias, and wife of our friend Joachim, neither would we willingly be witness against her if our own conscience did not compel us to bear true testimony. We are judges & elders of the people, appointed by God and chosen by the multitude, and constrained by the law to have no respect of persons, but to do justice unto all men, neither to be partial to our friends nor envious to our foe, but with the balance of equity to measure every man according to his merit, and with the sword of justice to uphold virtue and to beat down vice.

This considered, we are driven of force to bewray a heinous offence which this Susanna hath committed as followeth. We both having occasion secretly to consult of weighty affairs, and often frequenting the house of our friend Joachim, coveting solitarily to confer of our secret business, thought it best (as our custom before had been) to walk in the garden, where we had not walked long but Susanna came in accompanied with two of her maids, whom presently she sent away from her, most surely shutting the garden gates, and they were no sooner gone but a young man which had secretly hid himself in the garden came unto her and lay with her. We standing in a corner and seeing this wickedness were astonished to see such a strange fact, & remembering what report was spread abroad of Susanna's chastity stood in doubt whether we dreamed of such a deed or no, but at last we hastily ran unto them and saw them as they were together. Willing, therefore, such wickedness should not be unpunished, nor that such adulterous wretches should escape without the penalty of the law, assayed to take this young man, that he might have tasted of the torments due for such an offence, but he was stronger than we, and in despite of us he opened the gate and leaped out. Well, although he had escaped our hands, yet we laid fast hold upon Susanna and demanded of her what the young man was, of what tribe and what was his name, but she held her peace and said nothing. Thus, quoth they, have you heard this heinous crime whereunto we are witnesses, sorrowing that such sin should be found in Israel, and especially in the child of so honest a father, & in the wife of so honest a husband.

The judges having finished this their forged tale, the people gave credit to their words, and believed them as they that were judges and leaders of ye people, thinking that such subtile shifts could never lie hid in such simple age, that such hoary hairs would never devise such devilish practices, & upon their credit they condemned her to death.

Susanna, hearing the fatal doom pronounced against her by these unjust judges, cried out unto the Lord with a loud voice, and said:

O God which seest the secrets of all hearts and knowest all things before they come to pass, which descrieth the very inward thoughts and triest the heart and the reins, thou knowest that because I would not consent unto the filthy lust of these doting lechers, nor agree by defiling my husband's bed to fulfil their fleshly desires, that they have slandered me with that crime whereof I was never guilty, that they have unjustly accused of that fault whereas not so much as in thought I committed such a fact. They have, to satisfy their malicious minds, without cause invented this false crime. I confess myself, O Lord, to be a most grievous offender, but not in this fault; to deserve death, but not for this

deed. Hear, then, O Lord, my prayer, and let the innocency of my case plead before thy majesty. If it be thy will, prevent their practices, confound their counsels, and let them which have digged the pit for others fall into the snares themselves. Thou hast never, O Lord, yet left the innocent without help, but hast delivered them which fear thee from all adversity. Thou didst deliver Joseph from the hands of his brethren which sought to spill his blood, and didst prevent the practices of Saul, which pretended to slay his servant David. Elizeus [=Elisha], being besieged within Dothan, was not only freed from his foes, but also guarded about with a troop of holy angels. Elias was preserved from the cruelty of Jezebel and fed with ravens. Nay, who hath trusted in thy mercy which hath come to mishap, or who hath put his hope in thee which hath suffered harm? So, O Lord, if it be thy will, thou canst disclose the devises of these dotting judges, and unfold the folly of the false witnesses. Help, then, O Lord, for in thee is my hope.

The people, hearing the solemn protestation of sorrowful Susanna, thought she had spoken these words to excuse her fault, but not that she was guiltless of the fact, giving more credit to the reverend age of the judges than to the young years of a simple woman, supposing that her speech was more of custom to cloak her folly than of conscience to clear her of that crime, and therefore they led her to the place of execution. But the Lord, who never leaveth them in distress that put their trust in him, heard her voice and raised up the holy spirit of a young child whose name was Daniel, who seeing Susanna carried by her false accusers to be put to death, cried with a loud voice: [*+I am clear*] *from the blood of this woman!*

Then all the people, astonished at this strange cry and amazed at the words of this young child, turning toward him said: *What mean these words that thou hast spoken?* Then Daniel, emboldened by the spirit of God, made this answer:

*Are you such fools, O ye Israelites, quoth he, that you will confirm the cause before you have discussed the case, or a supposed truth without sufficient trial, or condemn any person without due proof? Will you accept the witnesses of any man touching life before you have sifted him by secret examination? Know you not how that party is seen condemned whose death the judges do conspire, and where the elders do bear evil will or seek revenge, there the innocent is ever oppressed, for the weakest (as the old proverb saith) is always thrust to the wall? Will you admit him which is an accuser to be a condemner? What justice can there be, then, in judgment? Shall he which cometh in as plaintiff determine the defendant doubts [*sic?*]? Who then will look for equity? If the witness' will and words may stand for a law without contradiction, then right shall be wrested according to the wish of every wilful wretch. No, let him which is an elder of the people and cometh in to be a witness not be a judge also, lest the innocent perish and true justice be perverted, which now, O ye fond Israelites, ye shall try by experience, for ye have suffered these unjust judges to condemn a daughter of Israel without cause, and have let them been [*sic?*] wicked witnesses to betray the innocent blood. The sentence pronounced against Susanna is unjust, and the witness of the judges is devilish perjury. Therefore return to judgment, and the Lord will disclose who rightly deserveth the death.*

The people, hearing this, turned again in all haste, and the elders said thus unto him:

Since it hath pleased God, quoth they, that there is wisdom found in thy lips and understanding in thine heart, and that thou hast knowledge given thee from above to search out that which hath been hidden from us all, come sit down amongst us and execute the office of an elder, that through thee the justice of God may be made manifest in rewarding the wicked and defending the innocent.

Then, said Daniel unto them, put these two aside from one another, and I will examine them.

So when they were separated, he called one of them, to whom he uttered these words:

'Tis a saying, quoth he, not so common as true, that he which looketh continually on the sun shall at last be blind, that whoso handleth pitch must needs be defiled therewith. The tree that abideth so many blasts at last falleth by the carpenter's axe; the bird that striketh at every stale cannot long escape the snare; so long goeth the pitcher to the brook that at last it comes broken home, and he that securely swimmeth in sin shall surely be drowned in iniquity. Whoso bindeth two sins together shall never be unrevenged in the one, and he that delighteth to offend in youth shall no doubt feel the punishment in age. The p[r]roverb is old, and yet very true: Quod desertur non aufertur, Though god for a time suffer a man safely to wallow in his own wickedness, and to say unto his soul: Tush, the Lord regardeth not the way of sinners, nor suspecteth not the misdeeds of men; he is slow to wrath and prone to pity, yet at last the Lord looketh down from heaven and revengeth all his sins with a grievous plague. Yea, he rooteth him out from the face of the earth, and his place is no more seen. Consider this, then, thou miserable caitiff who hast gathered thy treasure with iniquity and builded up thine house with sin, that wert in thy youth addicted unto vanity and art now waxen old in vice, how those sins which in thy young years thou didst commit secretly are now in thy hoary age revealed openly. Yea, the Lord hath deferred his punishment that his mercy may seem the more, and thy sin the greater. He that hath the dropsy drinketh while he bursteth, and yet not satisfied; the [+horse-]leech hath two daughters that never crieth enough; he that is stung with the serpent dipsas burneth, but can never be cooled, and who is so [sic for whoso is?] inflamed with sin [-which?] thirsteth continually after wickedness until he hath supped the dregs of God's displeasure to his own destruction, which now is verified in thee, for thou hast pronounced false judgments and hast condemned the innocent. Thou hast taken bribes to pervert justice, and thou hast weighed the law in a false balance, but the Lord shall send upon thee cursing, trouble and shame in all that which thou settest thy hand to do until thou be destroyed and perish quickly because of the wickedness of thy works wherein thou hast forsaken him, for thou art commanded not to overthrow the poor in his suit, but to defend the cause of the needy. 'Tis the duty of a judge to keep him far from a false matter and to measure all things in the balance of equity, and not to deal unjustly with the innocent and righteous but to hear the plaint of the poor, lest the Lord take their cause in hand and consume him in his heavy displeasure. But thou, who from thy youth hast sworn to do wickedly, hast let the guilty go free and borne false witness against the sackless soul, and hast ever perverted the seat of judgment.

Well, if thou hast seen Susanna commit this heinous crime and defile the bed of her husband, if thou hast taken her in adultery and seen her in the very act, tell me under what tree thou didst see them commit the offence. The judge answered, Under a lentisk tree. Then, said Daniel, Verily thou hast lied against thine own life. Thou hast, in betraying the innocent, blasphemed against God, offended in bearing false witness, and sold thy soul to Satan by committing wilful perjury, so that the angel of God hath received the sentence to cut thee in two.

Daniel had no sooner uttered these words but the people presently put him aside and brought forth the other, to whom Daniel uttered these bitter speeches:

O thou cursed seed of Canaan, quoth he, and not of Judah, who hast been nursed up in sin and nuzzled up in wickedness, the glittering hue of beauty hath blinded thee, & lascivious lust hath bewitched thy heart. Fond fancy hath given thee the foil, and fleshly desire hath charmed thy affection; thou hast spent thy youth in folly, and now meanest to end thine age in wickedness. But as it is impossible for a fool to scape without reproach, so as hard it is for a wilful sinner to escape without revenge. Dost thou not know that the law forbiddeth adultery, and yet wilt thou entice a daughter of Judah to such folly; nay, art thou not driven by duty to reward this sin with death, and yet wilt thou persuade the innocent to such a devilish deed? Is the fear of God so far from thine eyes as thou wilt willingly work such wickedness; hast thou so small regard to the law as thou wilt suffer thy heart to be subverted by lust? The lion so abhorreth this crime as he killeth the lions for committing this fact; the stork never meddleth but with his mate; nay, the stone jacinth will not be worn on the finger of an adulterer, neither will the olive-tree grow if it be planted by him that leadeth his life in unlawful lusts, and wilt thou, vild wretch, show thyself more careless in this crime than brute beasts, more [re]ckless than unreasonable creatures, more savage than senseless stones, yea, far less in virtue than a man, and far more in vice than a beast? The Lord shall look down from heaven upon this thy lewdness, & cross thee with such a grievous curse as thou(?) shalt be rooted out from among the people. Is thy mind so misled with ingratitude, or art thou so devoid of humanity as thou wilt repay the goodwill that Joachim showeth thee with such guileful treachery; is thy conscience such as to requite his courtesy with wilful cruelty? Hath he fostered thee as a friend, and wilt thou abuse him as a foe; hath he wished thy bliss, and wilt thou work his bane? Hath he sought thy weal, and wilt thou seek his woe; wilt thou without cause accuse his wife of adultery because she would not stoop to thy lure? If this be the duty of a judge or the devotion of an elder, let all Babylon judge. But perhaps thou wilt say these words are wind, and this long parle tends little to the purpose, that thou art greatly abused for reprehending of sin to be so roughly reproved. Well, if it be so that thou hast weighed thy friend's case in the balance of equity, & hast had such a zeal to the executing of thine office that no force of friendship could prevail to pervert true justice, but that thou hast of a clear conscience accused Susanna of this filthy fact, tell me under what tree didst thou see them commit this crime?

The judge, although that he had wrongfully sought to oppress the guiltless person, yet he never shrunk from his purpose, but boldly answered, *Under a myrtle-tree.*

Daniel, hearing this doting lecher to make so loud a lie answered:

Art thou so senseless, quoth he, to suppose that although thou canst keep thy sin secret from men, yet thou canst hide it from God, who not only knoweth the deed but seeth the very inward thought? No, for although thou hast hitherto covered the substance of vice with the veil of virtue, and hast cloaked thine iniquity with the visor of equity, yet the Lord, willing to unrip up [sic?] this thy folly, hath now discovered thy doings. Yea, thou art fallen into the pit which thou hast prepared for others; thou art taken in thine own trap, and snared in the net which thou didst lay to entangle the innocent. Yea, thou hast lied against thine own head, and the angel of God waiteth with the sword to cut thee in two.

With that the whole multitude, hearing how the elders were trapped in their own talk, and that the Lord had mightily wrought by the means of a child to discover the hellish practice, cried out with a loud voice and praised God that saveth them which put their trust in him. Yea, seeing that Daniel had convict the elders of false witness by their own mouth, according to the law of Moses the people dealt with them as they sought to deal with Susanna, for the Lord hath promised that a false witness shall not be unpunished and he that speaketh lies shall perish, so they were put to death, and the innocent blood was saved the same day.

Helchias and his wife, seeing that their daughter was by the power of God preserved from the wicked pretence of these unjust judges, and Joachim, her husband, hearing his wife cleared of this crime, yea, all her kindred seeing that there was no dishonesty found in her, but that she was without spot and their stock unstained, they all praised God that the innocent lamb was delivered, and the faithful [sic for faithless?] hypocrites so fitly detected. And from that day forth Daniel was in great reputation amongst all the people.

FINIS.

London.

Printed by Roger Ward, dwelling at the sign of the Talbot near unto Holborn conduit.
1584.