

Reading 2: St. George and the Dragon

[11] IN the country of Libya in Asia Minor there was a town called Silene, and near the town was a pond, and this pond was the roving place of a monster dragon. Many times had great armies been sent to slay him, but never had they been able to overcome him. Instead, he had driven them back to the walls of the city.

Whenever this dragon drew near the city walls, his breath was so full of poison that it caused the death of all who were within reach of it; and so, to save the city, it was the custom to throw each day two sheep to feed the dragon and satisfy his hunger. So it went on, until not a sheep was left, and not one could be found in the neighborhood.

Then the people took counsel, and they drew lots, and each day a man or a woman and one of their cattle were given to the dragon, so that he might not destroy the whole city. And their lot spared no one. Rich or poor, high or low, some one must each day be sacrificed to the dreadful dragon.

[12] Now it came to pass one day that the princess herself was drawn by lot. The king was filled with horror. He offered in exchange his gold, his silver, and half his realm if she might but be spared. All he could obtain was a respite of eight days, in which to mourn the fate of the girl. At the end of that time, the people came to the palace and said:—

"Why do you spare your daughter and kill your subjects? Every day we are slain by the breath of the monster." So the king knew he must part with his daughter. He dressed her in her richest apparel, and kissed her, and said:

"Ah, my dearest daughter! what an end is this! I had thought to die and leave you happy. I hoped to have invited princes to your wedding, and to have had music and dancing. I hoped to see your children, and now I must send you to the dragon."

The princess wept and clung to her father, and begged him to bless her. So he did, weeping bitterly, and she left him, and went, like those before her, to the lake where the dragon dwelt.

Now these people of Libya were heathen, but in Cappadocia, not far away, was a Christian named George, and this George was a young [13] man of noble bearing. He heard in a vision that he was to go to Libya, and so he rode his horse toward the city, and he was hard by the lake, when he saw the princess standing alone, weeping bitterly. He asked her why she wept, and she only said:—

"Good youth, mount your horse again quickly and fly, lest you perish with me." But George said to her:—

"Do not fear. Tell me what you await, and why the vast crowd yonder are watching you."

Again she begged him to fly.

"You have a kind and noble heart, sir, I perceive," said she, "yet fly, and at once."

"Not so," said George; "I will first hear your tale."

Then she told him all.

"Be of good courage," said he. "It was for this I was sent. In the name of Jesus Christ I will defend you."

"I do not know that name, brave knight," said she. "Do not seek to die with me. It is enough that I should perish. You can neither save me nor yourself from this terrible dragon." At that moment, the dragon rose with a great bellowing from the lake. "Fly! fly!" said the trembling princess. "Fly, sir knight!"

[14] But George, nothing daunted, made the sign of the cross, and went forward boldly to meet the dragon, commending himself to God. He raised his spear, and flung it with all his force at the neck of the monster. So surely did the spear fly that it pierced the neck and pinned the dragon to the ground.

Then he bade the princess take her girdle and pass it round the spear, and fear nothing. She did so, and the dragon rose and followed her like a docile hound. George led his horse and walked beside her, and thus they entered the city. The people began to flee when they saw the dread beast, but George stayed them.

"Fear not," said he. "This monster can no longer harm you. The Lord sent me to deliver you;" and so the multitude followed, and they came before the palace, where the king sat sorrowing. And when the king heard the mighty rejoicing, he came forth and saw his beloved daughter, safe, with the dragon at her heels.

Then George took his sword and smote off the dragon's head, and all the people hailed him as their deliverer. But George bade them give glory to the Lord; and he remained and taught [15] them the new faith, so that the king and the princess and all the people were baptized. And when George died he was called St. George, and it fell out finally that he became the patron saint of merry England.