

Knight-Errant of God:
The Story of Saint George
Including the Dragon

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A long time ago there was a knight named George, who was handsome and brave. All the girls in his home town had their eyes on him, and their mamas were scheming to get him into the family, but George wasn't interested. Performing good deeds for God's glory--and with God's help--was all he cared about. Nothing made him happier than to sally forth to settle things with some wicked giant or tyrant, and he didn't mind a bit if settling things involved a good fight. In fact, some people say the name "George" comes from two old Greek words that mean "holy fighter."

One evening as he was nursing a bruise or two at the club, a friend told him about a place in Libya, which was just about the most awful place that friend had ever visited--nothing but heat, sand, flies, high prices, not-very-nice people, and so on. To beat everything, though, there was a putrid lake down there with a dragon in it who ate youths and maidens according to a schedule that the people themselves had established. The idea of the schedule had been to keep the dragon from eating everyone at once, but now there weren't many youths and maidens left. Indeed, the next maiden on the schedule was the beautiful and virtuous daughter of the king, which gave everyone pause, but no one could think of what to do. Whenever the people tried to drive the dragon off, they had ended up getting scared and running away.

George looked thoughtful. The next morning after prayers, he saddled his splendid white charger and set off for Libya, thus disappointing most of the girls in his home town, not to mention their mamas.

It was a long way to Libya, but George spurred hard and when he got there simply followed his nose to the putrid lake. Sure enough, there was the dragon--a big one--cavorting in the shallows and blowing flames at the sky. He was also eyeing a pretty maiden who was walking from a town towards the lake, followed by a crowd.

"Are you the king's daughter?" George asked the maiden, who admitted she was. She spoke in a firm, calm voice that George could not help but admire. He was much less taken by the mix of curiosity and pusillanimity that he detected in the faces of the crowd.

"What is going on here is shameful," he cried so that everyone could hear. "Why don't you people protect this girl?"

"What can we do?" asked one sullen fellow. "That dragon's pretty fierce."

"They're afraid," said the maiden.

"I should say so," said George, who was no diplomat. He was going to say more, but the maiden silenced him with a sweet look.

"It is my turn to die so that they can live," she said. "And you, young knight, who have nothing to do with this, you should run away at once so the dragon doesn't eat you too."

"Maiden," said George, "God put me on earth to do good deeds. I don't run away, and I don't abandon maidens. I will do my best, with God's help, to kill that beast and set you free . . . and them too," he added.

Then he made the sign of the cross, defied the beast, and the fight began. It was a good one, knight and dragon laying on with lance and flame, sword and tooth, fist and claw. George was as brave as a man can be and knew everything about fighting that men in those days understood, but sometimes his heart sank when his best thrusts simply bounced off the dragon's scales. Whenever this happened, however, he remembered to pray.

"God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, now give me strength," he prayed.

And God heard him, bearing him up when he grew faint and directing his blows more and more accurately until at last the dragon fell at George's feet like a ruined castle and died. Then George lifted the maiden onto his charger and carried her back to the town, and all the people fled before him, not knowing what was going to happen next. But he restored the maiden to her father the king, and reassured the people. Then he preached the Gospel, explaining that his courage depended on his faith, and that the glory of his victory belonged truly to God, not to him.

Thousands heard and came to believe--including the maiden and the king. Many also thought that George ought to marry the maiden and stay around to be the next king, but George, though interested, said that he couldn't stay. He had more good deeds to do in far-away places. As for the maiden, she was sad to hear this, but she understood and gave George her blessing. For years he roamed the world, performing great deeds and bringing people to God. In the end, like many of the saints, he suffered persecuted and death, but his courage never faltered. God gave him strength. Truly, "Holy Fighter" was the name George deserved.