

THE SAINTS IN STORY



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The saints in story

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ST. JEROME IN HIS STUDY

(From the picture by Carpaccio at Venice)

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THE SAINTS IN STORY

BY

MRS. C. R. PEERS

*CONTAINING TEN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PICTURES
BY CARPACCIO, GIOTTO AND SASSETTA, AND
FROM ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS*

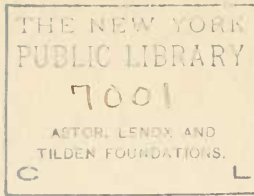


LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1910

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TO
JACK, DICK, MARGARET
AND CHRIS

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ST. JEROME AND THE LION

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ST. JEROME AND THE LION

ST. JEROME was the son of a nobleman named Eusebius, and was born in the town of Stridon, in Dalmatia. When he was still quite young he was sent to Rome, and there he went to school and learnt Greek and Hebrew, and grew up to be a most learned man. St. Jerome was not only very learned, but he was also a very good man, and after a time, like many others, he became convinced that it was impossible to live a good life in the great city of Rome.

In those days it was quite a common thing for men who found it difficult to be good among all the temptations of the city to go away into the desert, and live alone in caves in the rocks. These men were called hermits, which means 'dwellers in desert places.'

St. Jerome decided that he too would be a

hermit, so he left Rome and went into the desert, and there he lived for a long time. Many of the hermits were inclined to be lazy, and to think only of themselves, but St. Jerome was quite different, for he worked very hard indeed. Each day he said his prayers and praised God, and each day he worked at a little garden, in which he grew corn, because, living in the desert far away from other men, he had to find food for himself, or else he would have starved. Beside worshipping God and working in his garden he began the great work of writing out the Bible from the Hebrew and Greek in which it was written into a language which more people could understand.

After many years St. Jerome left the desert, and came back to live among men. Now, at Bethlehem, whither he came, there was a great house called a monastery, where there lived together a number of men called monks. These were people who wanted to worship and serve God peacefully, but instead of going away and living separately in the desert, they joined

together and lived in one house; and one of them was ruler over the others, and he was called the Abbot. Each of the monks had his own little room, called a cell, into which he could go when he wanted to be alone; but most of their time they spent working, or at the services in a church, which was in the monastery.

The monastery in which the monks of Bethlehem lived (as you will see from the picture) was built round a garden. It was a very big and a very beautiful garden; many tall trees gave a pleasant shade, and the air was full of the scent of the flowers that were planted all round the monastery walls. The monks were fond of animals, and here their pets lived happily together. They had a splendid big stag, that was so tame that he would eat from their hands, a timid little gazelle, and a weasel, besides many other living creatures. Birds of all kinds made their nests in the trees, and fluttered round the monks in the hope of being fed. All these wild creatures had become so tame because they knew that the monks loved

them, and that no one would ever harm or frighten them in their quiet garden.

Now St. Jerome came to live in the monastery of Bethlehem, and after a time, because of his great goodness and learning, he was chosen to be the Abbot, and to rule over all the other monks. They lived such a happy, peaceful life in their big monastery and its lovely garden. No one had too much work to do, and yet no one was ever idle. Every day many services were said or sung in their beautiful church, and for the rest of the day St. Jerome set some of the monks to copy his translation of the Bible, and some to work in the garden, while others he taught to be doctors, so that they might help the many sick persons who came to the monastery to ask for food or medicine. Only towards the end of the day were the monks allowed to rest or amuse themselves, and this evening-time they generally spent in their big garden.

One calm and lovely evening, when the sun was setting, St. Jerome left the monks and took his book to the monastery gate, that he might read alone there, and enjoy the cool evening breeze.

ST. JEROME AND THE LION 7

He had not been there long before he was startled by the sound of a low growl, and glancing up he saw a very large and very fierce-looking lion coming from the direction of the desert.

Now you must know, it was a rule with Abbot Jerome himself to welcome any traveller, rich or poor, young or old, who came to the monastery to ask for food or shelter, and though he had certainly not expected a lion as a visitor, yet, as he had come, he was ready to welcome him as kindly as he would any other guest. So St. Jerome waited a moment and then rose from his seat by the monastery gate and went to meet the lion, who, seeing a kind and gentle old man coming towards him, did his best to look kind and gentle too. He tried hard to purr like a cat, but only succeeded in making low, rumbling, grumbling sounds that were almost as alarming as a loud roar. As he came nearer St. Jerome noticed that the lion was limping as though he was hurt, and no sooner did he get close to him than the great beast sat back on his haunches and stretched out his paw for St. Jerome to look


at, and instantly the Abbot understood. The lion had hurt his paw, and had come to the monastery in the hope that the monks would attend to it and make it well. St. Jerome, speaking gently to the lion, bent down and examined the paw, and there, deep in the soft pad, was a large thorn. He saw that it must be taken out and the wound washed and bandaged, so he courteously begged the lion to come into the monastery, where he said the paw could be bathed and bound up. The lion, in answer, bent his great head to show he understood, and followed Abbot Jerome towards the monastery gate.

The garden, as usual, at that hour of the evening, was full of monks, who were strolling about chatting together, or amusing themselves with their pets. Into this calm place walked St. Jerome, followed by the lion. The lion of course could not help it, but unluckily, though he was feeling very quiet and gentle, he looked exceedingly fierce and terrible, and the instant the monks caught sight of him everything was changed. The tame stag that had been feeding





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ST. JEROME BRINGS THE
The monks are seen running into the buildings in the greatest fear.
(From the painting by Carpaccio in the



Anderson, Rome

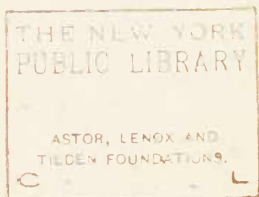
ON INTO THE MONASTERY

the stag and other animals are also shown rushing away from the lion

(of S. Giorgio dei Schiavoni at Venice)

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out of a lame monk's hand, as was his custom each evening, threw up his head and bounded away, and the pheasant that had been happily scratching and scraping in the gravel by the gateway gave a startled cluck and scuttered off, and all the monks rushed for shelter, catching up their long skirts and tumbling over one another in their eagerness to reach a safe place. Even the lame monk seemed to have wings instead of crutches, so quickly did he reach the nearest doorway. The monks who were inside the house, hearing the noise in the garden, hurried to the windows and balconies, and their cries of astonishment and horror made the confusion even greater. Their Abbot called in vain to his monks to come back; nothing would induce any one of them to set foot in the garden as long as the lion was in it, so St. Jerome laid his hand on the lion's mane and led the way into his own cell, and then he fetched a basin of water and some clean white linen, and while the lion sat quiet and still he pulled out the thorn and bound up the wound. When it was done the lion licked St. Jerome's hand and gave low

growls of gratitude and contentment, and for a long time he lay at his feet. At last the Abbot rose and led the lion to the monastery gate, and told him he was free to go back to his desert home, but the lion's only answer was to crouch at the old man's feet and refuse to move, and at last he made St. Jerome understand that he wished to live with him always, and to be not only as strong as a lion, but as faithful and gentle as a dog. At first St. Jerome, fond as he was of animals, thought he could not have a lion in the monastery, but then he remembered that his little dog had just died, and how much he missed him, so at last he made up his mind to take the lion in his place, and putting his hand on the lion's mane he took him as his faithful servant. This pleased the lion very much, for he loved St. Jerome, but it did not please the monks at all. The Abbot, however, did not allow them to make any complaint, and they were obliged to be kind to the lion, but it took them a very long time to get used to the great animal. The lion did not wish to frighten anyone, and when he understood how it terrified

ST. JEROME AND THE LION 11

the monks to hear him roar, he learnt to keep silence in the house and garden.

Soon the lion, like everyone else in that busy house, had his daily task given him to do. He was made to guard and take care of the monks' donkey. Every morning he and the donkey started together from the monastery gate and went to the forest, where the woodmen loaded the donkey with branches and faggots for the monks' fire; and that done, the donkey, still guarded by the lion, returned to the monastery bearing the wood with him.

One day the donkey was given a holiday, and instead of going to the wood, the lion was told to take his companion to a distant pasture, where the donkey was to remain all day. The lion found this a very dull employment, and when he had seen the donkey safely into the field he lay down in the shade of a bush, and, the weather being very warm, he soon fell asleep.

Presently a company of merchants, with a number of loaded camels, came by, and, seeing a donkey grazing alone (for the lion was hidden by the bush), they determined to steal him, so,

putting a halter about his neck, they led him away.

When the lion awoke and could not see the donkey, he thought he had disobeyed his orders, and had strayed to another field. He rose up in a great rage, and, roaring loudly, looked for him in every direction, but of course to no purpose, for by this time the donkey was miles away with the thievish merchants. After a long time the lion began to realize the sad truth, that through his laziness in going to sleep the donkey was lost. At last, late at night, tired and hungry, with hanging head and drooping tail, the lion returned to the monastery, only to be driven with angry words from the door, for the monks, seeing him come back so late and alone, thought at once that he had killed and eaten the donkey.

Even the good Abbot believed he had done it, and the poor lion slunk away to spend the night in one of the monastery out-houses.

The next morning St. Jerome gathered together all the monks, and then he called the lion and scolded him before them all.

ST. JEROME AND THE LION 13

“I shall not allow you any longer to come to my cell, O lion,” said St. Jerome; “you must live in the stables, and as you have killed the donkey, you must now take his place and go every day and fetch us wood from the forest.”

We all know that the lion is the proudest of all the animals, and you can imagine how unhappy this one was at the thought of having to do such humble work, but he determined to take his punishment bravely, for he knew that though he had not killed the donkey he had been lazy and careless in guarding him. Each day he went to the forest, and the woodmen tied a bundle of wood on his back, which he carried back to the monastery. This he did most carefully, but no words can tell how he hated the dull work.

One evening, many weeks later, the lion was walking sadly alone, when, hearing a sound of voices, he looked up, and there coming towards him was a company of men and camels, and in front of the camels was a donkey. The lion did not wait for one moment; he saw directly

that it was his donkey, and with a terrible roar he sprang into the middle of the company. The men all immediately fled, but the camels, braver than their masters, stood firm, wrinkling up their ugly noses, and showing their long teeth. In the olden days it was said that there was only one thing of which camels were afraid, and that was when a lion beat the ground with his tail. Of course, the lion knew this, and he began to strike the ground furiously with his tail, and directly he did that the camels became as gentle as lambs, and allowed themselves to be driven to the monastery by the lion and the donkey.

The monks were much astonished at the arrival of a party of masterless camels, but their astonishment was still greater when they saw they were in charge of the lion and the donkey. One of the monks ran to tell St. Jerome the wonderful news, for they all immediately recognized the monastery donkey.

St. Jerome was delighted with the lion's cleverness in recovering the donkey, and he told the monks that he himself, and they too, ought all

to be ashamed of themselves for so readily believing that the lion had been wicked enough to kill the donkey.

The lion quite understood he was again taken into favour, and he showed his delight by wagging his huge tail and crouching down at St. Jerome's feet ; and then, bounding away, he went straight to his master's cell, from which he had so long been banished.

Before following the lion, St. Jerome told the monks to drive the camels to the stables and to prepare the guest-rooms for the camels' masters, " who," he said, " would shortly come to claim them." The monks did as they were told, and before long the merchants came to the gate, humbly asking to be let in. The porter at once opened the gate and led them to the Abbot's cell. No sooner was the door opened than the lion sprang up with a low, furious growl, his hair standing up in a stiff line all down his back. St. Jerome called him back, and the lion, though he looked extremely disgusted, returned to his master's side. When they saw that he would not hurt them, the merchants came forward, and,

falling on their knees before the Abbot, confessed with tears that they had indeed stolen the donkey. They begged the Abbot to forgive them, and asked him to take as a present the rich merchandise with which their camels were laden.

“My sons,” replied St. Jerome, “I fully and freely forgive you your sin in stealing the donkey, but I cannot take the rich gift you offer for myself. Instead, give each year to the monastery church ten gallons of oil, that the lamps before the altar may always be kept burning.”

The merchants gladly promised to do as the Abbot desired, and still kneeling before him they received his blessing and then bade him farewell.

Year by year they returned to the monastery, faithfully bringing the ten gallons of oil as they had promised.

The lion was never again expected to act as guardian to the donkey, but he lived a happy life with his beloved master. He was never separated from him by day or by night.

ST. JEROME AND THE LION 17

St. Jerome lived to be a very, very old man. He finished his translation of the Bible, and then he arranged the Psalms. It was he who ordered that the verses

“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

“As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.”

should be sung in church at the end of each Psalm, and that is done, as we know, to this day.

At last St. Jerome died. The monks mourned and sorrowed for his loss ; never again, they thought, would so kind and just an Abbot rule over the peaceful monastery of Bethlehem. Then, with many tears, they buried him in their beautiful church.

When the Abbot had drawn his last breath, and was lying calm and still in the sleep of death, the great lion rose from beside his master's body, where he had been keeping watch, and with slow and stately tread he went out from the monastery gate. He never faltered or looked back, but with sad,

drooping head steadily went out to the desert, from whence so many years before he had come. No one knows what became of the lion, for he was never seen again, but he has never been forgotten. Wherever you see a picture of St. Jerome, there be sure you will see the lion too.

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

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ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

LONG, long ago, a little town stood, perched on a high hill by the seashore.

The sparkling blue water stretched away in the distance on one side, and on the other lay the open plain.

Great ships came sailing over the sea, and unloaded their cargoes at the harbour, and from there they were carried up a steep and winding road to the city above. Silene was the name of this city, and many and very beautiful were its buildings, but amongst them all none were so magnificent as the King's palace; its glittering domes and tall spires could be seen for miles and miles across the sea. High walls, with towers every few yards, were built round the town, and inside the towers men with bows and arrows kept watch and ward day and night that no enemy might creep up and surprise

them. From outside those high walls Silene looked a happy and prosperous city, but inside there was nothing but sorrow and tears.

For six years a hideous dragon had been living by the side of a dreary, marshy lake down in the plain. This dragon had a lion's body, and his claws were long and sharp, like a vulture's. He had a bald head covered with warts, and wicked, venomous little eyes, so red and burning you could hardly look upon them. His fierce, beak-like jaws were set full of great teeth, and his tongue was forked, and flickered wickedly to and fro when he opened his mouth. On his back were two great wings, ribbed and pointed with sharp spikes, and his tail alone was as long as a big serpent. Perhaps the most horrible thing about him was that when he pleased he could send flames of fire and poisonous smoke out of his mouth and nostrils, so that his breath alone was able to destroy men.

This monstrous creature killed any living thing that ventured near him, but best of all he enjoyed devouring human beings. By degrees he ate up everything on the plain, and

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON 23

then he looked up with his wicked eye at Silene, surrounded by its high walls, and he said to himself: "There is plenty to eat in there if only I can get it;" and after that, every night he would creep up close to the town and puff out flames and smoke from his mouth till all Silene was filled with a brown, evil-smelling fog that blotted out the light of the sun and the moon, and all the people fell ill.

At last the townsfolk became so exasperated that they determined to go out in a body and kill him, but no sooner did they reach the lake than, with a sudden leap, breathing out fire and smoke and horrid smells, the dragon rushed into their midst. He seized two men in his jaws, and carried them off to his lair, while the rest ran away, and never looked back till they were safe in the town with the city gate locked behind them.

After that the people decided to give the dragon a sheep every day, just to keep him quiet, but after a while all the sheep and animals were eaten, and then they determined to send him one of their children each day to be

devoured. They knew it was a shameful thing to do, but they dared not face the dragon again, so they drew lots, and day after day the child on whom the lot fell was led out of the city and left on a high rock above the lake, there to be torn in pieces by the dragon.

No one knew on whom the lot would fall ; rich or poor, labourer or nobleman, it was all the same. No one was free to escape. At last the lot fell on the King's only child, the Princess Sabra. She was beautiful and good, and her father loved her dearly. The King was nearly mad with grief when he heard on whom the lot had fallen, and he went to the townsfolk and begged them to spare his only child ; he would give them, he said, his crown, his gold, his silver, anything, if only they would spare his daughter. But the townsfolk were very angry with him.

“ For shame, O King ! ” they said ; “ as long as it was merely our poor children who were cast to the dragon you did not mind, but now that the lot has fallen on the Princess you think it very terrible ; it is no worse for you than for

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON 25

us. Give her up, or we will burn you and your house."

Then the King bowed his head, for he knew there was no more hope. The Princess must be given to the dragon. One thing only did he ask, and that was, that she might be given eight days in which to prepare herself to die in a manner worthy of a King's daughter, and this the townsfolk granted. On the eighth day, early, so early that the dawn was just coming across the sea, the Princess rose from her beautiful white bed, and called the maidens who waited upon her, and told them to fetch the loveliest of all her lovely dresses, and her royal mantle. They did as she desired, and, with tears and loving words, the girls dressed their dear Princess. When they had finished, and had combed her golden hair, she placed her crown upon her head, and, last of all, she clasped her silver girdle round her waist. Then, calling her father, she took his hand, and told him to lead her forth before all the people who had gathered before the palace gates.

So stately and beautiful did she look that

directly the townsfolk saw her a cry of despair went up from the crowd. The Princess looked gravely at them, and held up her hand.

“Do not grieve for me, O my people,” she said. “One day of safety at any rate will be gained for you by my death, and perhaps the dragon will be satisfied for a little while when he has devoured the King’s daughter ; I go to die for my country and my people ; I can do no more. Farewell.”

Then with sobs and tears the crowd parted before them, and the Princess and her father led the way to the dragon’s lair, and all the people followed them at a distance. The path to the lake was dry and burnt, for the dragon had lately passed that way. As they drew near the marsh they saw that the great open lake had become a huge stretch of deep, slimy mud, with a little pool of black water in the middle. Nothing bright or cheerful grew beside the marsh, and the only flowers to be seen were of dark, unwholesome brownish-green—hellebore is their name. Here and there were a few blackened stumps that had once been trees ;

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON 27

others were still standing, but the bark was peeling off, leaving the branches looking like white and ghostly fingers pointing to the sky.

Up in the little hill-town the morning air had been sweet and pure, and a fresh breeze had been filling the sails of the big ships out at sea, but down by the marsh not a breath was stirring. On the other side of the great expanse of mud great puffs of brown smoke were rising, and the Princess knew they marked the place where the dragon lay. The smoke crept slowly across the marsh, for the wind could not blow hard, for it was half dead, like everything else that came near the dragon.

The old King led his daughter to the rock, and there, kissing her, with many tears, he blessed her and left her alone in that dreadful place, all strewn with the bones of those who had been already devoured.

The Princess was very brave. On her way to the marsh she had made no complaints, neither had she shed any tears; but now, when her father and all her friends had left her, and

there was no one to see her, she sat down on the ground, and, covering her face with her hands, began to cry most bitterly.

Now there was a young knight of Cappadocia, whose name was George. He was journeying from his home to join his regiment, and by chance he came past the place where the Princess was. He was clothed in a coat of shining armour, all made of silver and polished steel, that glittered brightly when the sun shone upon it; his head was bare—he had taken off his helmet, for the day was hot. He was mounted on a great brown horse, and carried a mighty lance, twelve feet long. Now, as he came riding by, he was aware of someone crying and sobbing, and it was strange in so desolate a place to hear a voice, so he reined in his horse, and looked in the direction from which the sound came. There he saw a fair lady, richly dressed, sitting on the ground and crying as though her heart would break. So he rode up to her and said :

“ Why are you crying all alone in this dismal place, noble lady ?”

Then the Princess hastily dried her tears and

said—for she knew that at any moment the dragon might come upon them :

“ Fly, fly, before it is too late, Sir Knight.”

“ I fly before no mortal foe,” said St. George ;
“ tell me why you are here.”

The Princess clasped her hands together and said imploringly :

“ Do not waste time in talk, but go.”

Now, St. George was determined not to go until the Princess told him why she was there, for he had noticed the skeletons and bones of men lying about. So the Princess, seeing that he would not leave her, told him quickly that she had been left there to be devoured by the dragon. But St. George was not afraid. He smiled, for he loved a fight, and said : “ Fear not, fair lady, the dragon shall do you no harm ; I will fight him and kill him. Do not be unhappy.”

But the Princess remembered how the townsfolk had gone out in their hundreds to fight the dragon, and how he had scattered them all. It was impossible that one man could conquer him, she thought, and her heart was full of pity

for the noble knight who stood so calm and resolute before her ; it could only end in his being killed and devoured as well as herself. Though she felt happier for having spoken to so brave a man, she determined to make one more effort to save him from sharing her fate.

“ You are brave and good, Sir Knight,” she said, “ but go, I beseech you, while there is yet time.”

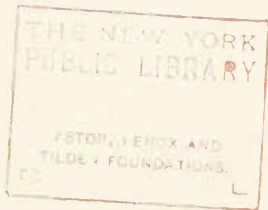
But even as she spoke there was a sudden roar like a herd of bulls rushing together, and the dragon was upon them.

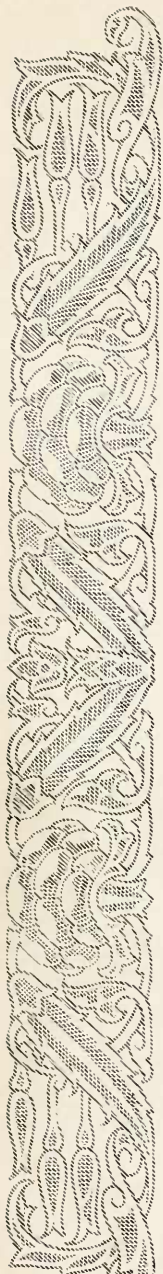
Now, when St. George saw him come he prayed, “ Now God be my helper !” and settled himself in his saddle, and held his lance firmly under his arm. And his good horse, though he had never seen such a terrible creature before, trusted in his master, and obeyed his voice. Then as the dragon came against him St. George rode furiously forward, pointing his lance downwards, so that he might strike the beast in the head, for the dragon came along the ground, keeping his head low, and meaning to dart upwards when he came near enough. And all

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON 31

the time he waved his head to and fro, and flapped violently with his wings, roaring and blowing out flames and smoke. But before he reached St. George and his horse the point of the long lance met him ; only, partly because there was such a cloud of smoke, and partly because the dragon swerved his head to one side at the last moment, the point of the spear did not strike him full, but on the shoulder, and glanced off from the scales on his body, which were as hard and slippery as steel. And if it had not been a stout spear, indeed, it would surely have snapped ; but it held good, and when it struck the scales, sparks of fire flew out. So great was the shock when they met that the dragon rolled over on his side, and St. George was nearly thrown from his horse, which went rushing on, unable to stop itself, until St. George pulled him up on his haunches. Then he turned back, and the dragon, who had recovered himself, came on again. And once more St. George prayed, so that he felt no fear, nor did the flames burn him, nor the poisonous breath of the dragon hurt him. So they fought

together for a long time, and you could not have seen them for the smoke, or have heard yourself speak for the noise of the battle; and the slimy ground was all churned up, so that it was difficult for the horse to keep his feet. Six times did St. George strike the dragon with his lance, and twice did the dragon get near enough to wound the horse. But at last, when it seemed as if the battle could last no longer, because no man's strength could endure so furious a struggle, St. George set himself to make an end of it, one way or another. So going back a little distance, and encouraging his horse, he grasped his lance more firmly than ever, and charged straight at the monster, who, when he saw him coming, beat the air with his wings, and lashed the ground with his tail, and tore it with his claws, and opened wide his jaws, roaring horribly and spitting fire. But this time the point of the lance went into the dragon's mouth and right down his throat and out at the back of his head, and the shaft snapped off short; but it no longer mattered, for the blood was pouring from a fearful wound, and it was plain





ST. GEORGE DEF

On the left is the city of Silene, and on the right



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HEADING THE
The King of Silene, holding the Princess by the hand, is on the left, and

(From the pictures by Carpaccio in the



Anderson, Rome

SLAYING THE DRAGON

Princess Sabra is seen anxiously watching the fight



Anderson, Rome

MARKET DAY IN THE CITY OF SILENE

On either side are the chief inhabitants of the town and the musician
(after S. Giorgione at Venice)

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there was no more fight left in the huge beast.

All this time the Princess Sabra had been watching the combat from a little hillock to which she had run when the dragon fell upon them. You can easily imagine with what breathless anxiety she watched that fight, for on the knight's strength and bravery depended his life and her own. When at length the long lance pierced the dragon's neck, and she knew they were safe, her joy was boundless, and she ran down the little hill to the knight. St. George, seeing her coming, called to her, saying: "Brave and noble lady, this evil beast is now conquered, but I have no chain with which to fasten him; will you come and bind him with your girdle? and then we will lead him up to the city."

It was a hard thing that St. George asked of the Princess, for she did not at all like the idea of going so near the horrid dragon, but no matter what the knight had asked her to do, she would willingly have done it, because she was so grateful to the brave man who had risked his life to

save hers. Without a word she took off her silver girdle and went up to the monster and fastened it round his neck. The dragon did not attempt to hurt her or try to escape, for now that he was beaten there was no more spirit in him, so the knight on his horse, with the Princess walking by his side leading the dragon, went up towards the city of Silene. When the men-at-arms who guarded the city gate saw the dragon coming they did not wait to look at him twice (if they had, they would have seen he was a prisoner); but all deserted their posts and rushed into the town, crying: "The dragon, the dragon is coming! Fly, fly, save yourselves!"

Then followed a furious flight, everyone trying to get the best hiding-place for himself. The King alone played the man, for when he heard the guards shouting that the dragon was coming, he thought that since he had lost his dear daughter it would be very easy to die, so instead of hiding he mounted his big white horse and rode steadily towards the city gate. The King of course expected to see the dragon triumphantly rushing

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON 35

along amid a cloud of fire and smoke, but you may imagine his surprise when he saw a wretched misshapen beast shambling along by the Princess's side, held in leash by her girdle, while riding beside her was a noble knight.

At first the King could not believe his eyes ; he thought he must be dreaming ; but he looked and looked again, and at last became convinced that it was indeed his dear daughter who was approaching, and hastily getting off his horse he took her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

When they were calm enough to speak the Princess told her father how St. George had passed by and found her alone in the dreadful place, and how he had fought a long and desperate fight against the dragon, and how he had at last conquered him. Then the King, still holding his daughter's hand, turned to St. George.

“Never, never can I thank you enough for the noble deed you have done this day, Sir Knight,” he said ; “not only have you given back to me my dearest daughter, whom I

mourned as dead, but you have delivered me and my people from the dreadful pest who has so long plagued us. I should like to give you some great gift to show my gratitude for the brave deed you have done. Come to my palace and choose what you would like; no matter what it is, to the half of my kingdom it shall be yours."

But St. George courteously refused to take any rich gift.

"One thing only do I wish," he said; "I know that you and all your subjects are heathens, and worship false gods. If you would give me a gift, O King, command that all your people gather together in the market-place, and I will baptize them in the name of Jesus Christ: that shall be my reward; then I will kill the dragon, so that he shall trouble you no more."

"It shall be as you desire, most noble knight," replied the King.

Just then St. George noticed that the King, the Princess, and himself seemed the only persons in the city, and he asked the King: "Are not the streets of Silene very quiet to-day?"

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON 37

Nowhere can I see man, woman, or child.
Where are all your subjects, O King?"

"The miserable cowards! They are all in hiding for fear of the dragon," answered the King.

Even as he spoke they saw a little boy timidly peeping over a wall. He had been told many stories of the man-devouring dragon, but secretly he had always longed to know what the terrible fiery creature looked like, and his curiosity had made him gradually creep out of his hiding-place. He was much astonished to see this ugly, crawling beast instead of the frightful dragon of whom he had so often heard.

The King spoke to the child and told him to go round the city. "Tell the townsfolk that this brave knight has conquered the dragon," he said, "and command them that they instantly assemble in the great square of the city."

The little boy rushed away to do the King's bidding, and the good news spread as if by magic. Most of the people looked rather ashamed of their cowardly conduct, but some had the impertinence to pretend that they had not been in hiding at all. The Lord High Chamberlain, for

instance, said he had been shut up in his council-chambers attending to affairs of State.

“You took a very long time, my lord,” said the King dryly, and turned away, for of course nobody was really taken in, and everyone knew the Lord Chamberlain was as great a coward as the rest.

The dragon was shut up safely in a dungeon, and all the inhabitants of Silene gathered together in the market-square. Even the King's favourite hound and the Princess's pet parrot were there, as you can see in the picture. Then St. George took his stand on a flight of steps at the farther end, and he used a large and beautiful bowl as a font. The King took off his turban, and the Princess her crown and mantle, and together they knelt before St. George, who poured water on their heads, signed them with the cross, and baptized them in the name of Jesus Christ. After that he baptized all the inhabitants of Silene, beginning with the Lord Chamberlain and ending with the smallest baby, and there were so many that the great bowl had to be filled again and again with fresh water. The

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON 39

trumpets blared and the people sang and the sun shone, and Silene was the happiest place in the whole world, for the dragon was conquered, and St. George had converted its pagan people to the true faith.

The dog and the parrot could not at all understand what was happening, and got dreadfully tired of the long ceremony. The parrot was passionately fond of flower-buds, but the Princess never would allow him to bite them off, so, when he saw his mistress kneeling with her eyes tight shut, he nipped off all those nearest to him as fast as he could.

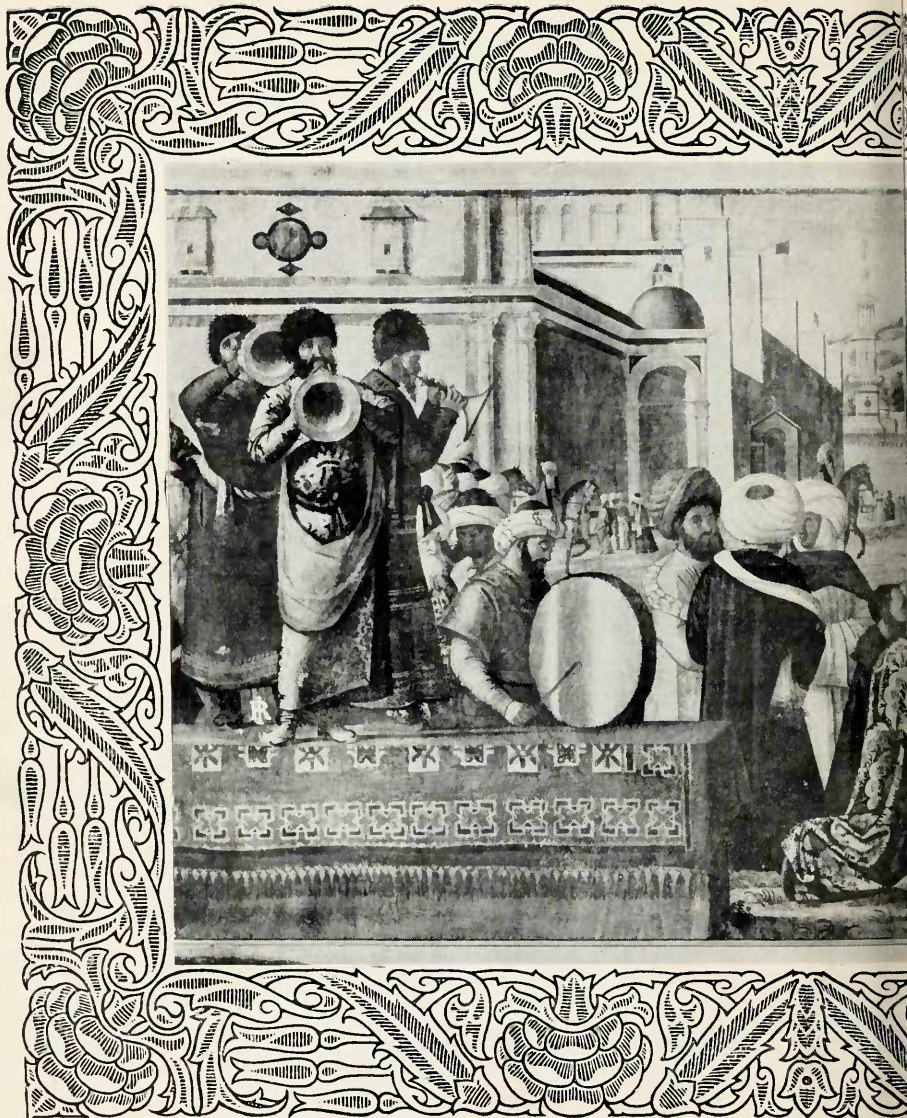
The poor dog did not care for flower-buds, so that he felt even more depressed than the parrot. He hated music, and could hardly refrain from giving way to howls, but he managed to control himself, for he did not wish to hurt his master's feelings. He endured it as well as he could, looking hugely bored all the time, but then he knew no better, for he was a heathen hound.

At last the long ceremony was over, and St. George was to fulfil his promise of slaying the dragon. The King was mounted on his

splendid white horse, and was surrounded by his councillors and Court. The Princess was on foot by her father's side, holding his hand, for the King could not bear her out of his sight. In every direction people were struggling for places, to see the final end of their old enemy the dragon. The miserable crawling animal was led forth into the middle of the square; it seemed impossible that this wretched battered creature, with crumpled, ragged wings, and toes turned inwards, and trailing tail, could be the proud and frightful dragon who had, only a few hours before, been a terror to the whole city; but St. George knew that, if he did not kill him and make an end of him, he would grow bigger and stronger than ever before. So he went up to the dragon, and, taking the girdle in one hand and his great sword in the other, with one tremendous blow he severed the dragon's head from his body.

As the head rolled to the ground the musicians blew a great blast on their trumpets, and all the people shouted together for joy, so that all the world might know the triumph of St. George.





ST. GEORGE BAPTISING

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The king and princess are seen kneeling in front of

Digitized by Microsoft (from the picture by Carpaccio in the church)



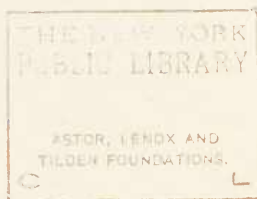
PEOPLE OF SILENE

Anderson, Rensselaer

George, who holds a bowl of water in his

(The People of Silene by Giorgio dei Schiavoni at Venice)

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ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON 41

After that the knight told the people to fetch two carts, with four oxen, and to take the body of the dragon and bury it in a great pit by the side of the marshy lake.

Then, kneeling on one knee, he would have kissed the King's hand and said farewell, but the King would by no means let him do so, but raised him and kissed him on both cheeks, and begged him to stay and be Governor of Silene. But St. George would not.

"I am a soldier," he said, "and serve the Emperor of Rome. Some day, perhaps, when my master has no more need of me, I will return; till then serve the true God, O King, who has this day delivered you from the dragon by my hand."

Seeing that he could not with honour stay with them, the King and Princess bade a sad farewell to the noble knight.

Year after year the people of Silene looked for him, but he never came back, and at last they decided to build a great church in honour of St. George, so that the noble deed he had done should never be forgotten. On the church

tower and on the topmost pinnacle of the King's palace floated by day and by night a great flag, bearing a red cross on a white ground—the banner of St. George.

The church and palace of Silene have long ago crumbled into dust, but St. George is not forgotten. Go out into the streets of any English town to-day and you will see his flag still flying.

Look carefully at the Union Jack, and you will notice that St. George's red cross is the foundation of the whole pattern, and as long as there are English men and English women in the world St. George's flag will fly.

ST. FRANCIS PREACHES TO THE
BIRDS AND TAMES THE
WOLF OF GUBBIO

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ST. FRANCIS PREACHES TO THE BIRDS AND TAMES THE WOLF OF GUBBIO

SEVEN HUNDRED years ago, in the little town of Assisi in Italy, there lived a rich merchant and his only son.

This rich merchant was named Peter Bernardone, and his son's name was Francis. When Francis was young he was very fond of fine clothes, and nice things to eat and drink, and all the good things that money can buy; but when he grew to be a man he ceased to be satisfied with these, and day by day he became more convinced that only two things really mattered, first, how best to serve and honour God; and, second, how best to love and help all the living creatures God has made. When he had once made up his mind he soon decided what to do. He gave back to his father all the beautiful

clothes he had worn, and the fine horse he had ridden, and dressing himself in a long garment of rough cloth, fastened round the waist with a knotted cord, he went barefooted from his home. He travelled from place to place, teaching the people and preaching to them just as Jesus Christ did. Some other men, too, who loved him very much, were persuaded to follow his example ; they also gave up their possessions and went about with him, and the number of them increased so much that before long he was able to send his companions in all directions to teach and help the people.

One day St. Francis was preaching to a great crowd of people. Though it was still early in the morning it was very hot, and all around the country lay parched and dry in the sun. The only place where any shelter from the sun was to be found was close beneath the walls of a great castle which stood up straight and tall like a giant in the plain. Here St. Francis gathered the people together in the shade, and began talking to them and teaching them, as it was his custom to do. Up above them, all along

the castle eaves, were hundreds of swallows' nests set side by side, for year after year the swallows returned and built there. At first the birds were very frightened by the great crowd gathered together beneath them, and all the swallows who were sitting on their nests drew their heads in and disappeared from view. By degrees, however, when they saw that only one man, with a kind and gentle face, spoke, and that all the rest sat still and listened, they regained their courage. First one little head peeped out, and then another, till each nest had an anxious mother-swallow looking over the edge, and after that the father-swallows came cautiously flying back, and all the baby-swallows struggled to peep over the edge of their nests and see what was going on, and then father-swallows, mother-swallows, and baby-swallows all began to talk—and what a noise they made! At last so many birds came flying and wheeling about, and their twitterings and chitterings became so loud, that St. Francis could hardly hear himself speak, so, looking up at them, he said :

“ My sisters, the swallows, you have said enough, now it is time for me to speak ; I command you to make no further sound till I have finished.”

The swallows obeyed, and ceased from their twittering till St. Francis had blessed the people and dismissed them to their homes.

At dawn the next day St. Francis, with some of his companions, was walking along a path that ran beside a little wood, and as the sun came up over the distant hills, chasing the great wisps of white mist before him, the birds awoke, and began their morning songs. Hundreds and hundreds lived in that little wood, and hundreds more were fluttering and hopping in the fields close by. St. Francis loved little birds, and he smiled as he listened to them. Turning off the path he left his companions and entered the wood, and looked up among the branches that were softly stirred by the fresh winds of the dawning day. The birds did not stop their singing, for they felt at once that St. Francis loved them. As he passed through the wood and into the field beyond none of the birds flew

away, and they were so little afraid of him that when his long brown cloak brushed against their wings they did not move. As he looked at the gay, happy little creatures, St. Francis's heart was filled with love for them, and he longed to teach them how to use their voices in praise of God.

“My sisters the birds,” he said, and at the sound of his voice they all stopped singing, and a sudden silence fell on woods and fields—“my sisters the birds,” he repeated, “you should always sing praises and give thanks to God who made you, for see what great things He hath done for you. He has given you wings with which to fly anywhere you please, and He allows you even to go right up into the sky. He has given you mountains and valleys for a refuge, and high trees in which to build your nests; you do not sow or reap, nor can you do any hard work; and yet God feeds you and gives you rivers and fountains in which to drink. You cannot stitch nor clothe yourselves, and yet He has dressed you and your little ones in fine and warm garments. Be sure, then, my sisters

the birds, that God loves you, and never forget to praise Him in your songs."

The birds listened attentively to St. Francis, and when he had done speaking they bowed their heads, and opened their beaks, and fluttered their wings, to show him that they understood him, and would remember his words. After that St. Francis, making over them the sign of the cross, gave them leave to depart, and at once thousands of birds rose into the air. They formed themselves into the shape of a cross, but the arms of the cross soon separated, and the birds flew away in four great companies, north, south, east, and west, that they might sing the praises of God in all parts of the earth ; and St. Francis was left alone, rejoicing to think how sweetly his sisters the birds would sing that day.

Some time after he preached to the birds, St. Francis and his companions came to the little town of Gubbio. It had narrow, crooked streets, and was surrounded by a high wall. The houses of Gubbio seemed to be almost standing one on the top of the other, for the little town was built

on the side of a steep, rocky hill that stood at the entrance of a wooded valley or ravine that ran up between tall mountains, whose tops were covered with snow. From far away up among the ice and snow came a little stream of water that rushed down the ravine of Gubbio, and from thence to the hot, dry plain below. St. Francis noticed that all the people of Gubbio had a frightened, unhappy look, and he inquired the cause of their grief and fear. They answered that a very great wolf, who devoured not only animals but men and women as well, lived in the woods above the city. This wolf was so fierce and terrible that any man who had the courage to venture forth beyond the city walls went fully armed, as though he were going out to battle, and now things had come to such a pass that no one dared to go beyond the gates of the city. St. Francis, surrounded by his companions, said never a word while the people told him their sad story, but when they had finished he told them to dry their tears and be of good cheer, "For I will go out to the wood," he said, "and try to tame this great wolf."

No sooner had he said these words than with one accord the townsfolk and his companions crowded round him, and the people of Gubbio besought him not to run into so great a danger.

“Never, never more shall we see you, O blessed Francis, if you venture out towards the wood,” they said ; “ we beseech you to stay in safety within our city walls.” But St. Francis, without answering a word, put them gently aside, and took the steep path up the valley towards the mountains and the dark pine-wood where the wolf dwelt. Then his companions, seeing him thus determined, left the city also and followed him, choosing to die with their beloved master rather than desert him.

The path wound in and out by the side of a little stream that sparkled gaily as it ran. Presently this path became steeper, and the stream grew black and angry as it hurried under the shadow of the high rocks, or dashed itself furiously into white foam against the boulders that stood in its way. Up and up St. Francis climbed, rejoicing in the beauty of the sparkling water by his side, and the blue sky above him,

ST. FRANCIS AND THE WOLF 53

and as he went he praised God, and besought Him to give him help that he might subdue and tame the wolf. At length a few tall fir-trees were to be seen standing like sentinels or outposts before the main army of the fir-wood, that stretched for miles and miles along the mountain-side. Scarcely had St. Francis reached the wood than out from the shadow of the gloomy trees came the wolf, and at the sight of him his companions, forgetting their determination to be brave, ran away, and did not stay their steps till they were safe within the city walls.

St. Francis did not stir. The wolf was accustomed to see people flying in terror before him, but this strange man did not attempt to run away, and the wolf was extremely surprised. St. Francis, without flinching, calmly raised his hand, and made the sign of the cross, and called in a loud, clear voice: "Come near, brother wolf; in the name of Christ I command that you do no harm to me or to any other." At that the wolf stopped still, and shut his mouth at the Saint's command, and came as quietly as any lamb to his side. "Brother wolf," said

St. Francis sternly, “down there, in the city of Gubbio, men hate you, for truly you have done many evil deeds; you have killed God’s creatures, and have not only devoured sheep and cattle, but you have even dared to kill men. Can you wonder, then, that all the people hate you and would willingly see you die?”

At these words the wolf looked very guilty and unhappy, for he knew that St. Francis’s words were only too true. St. Francis glanced at him, and, seeing how miserable the wolf looked, he continued gently: “I have come, brother wolf, to make peace between you and the men of Gubbio, you must never again be a thief or a murderer, and they in return will never hunt you with men and dogs.” The wolf bowed his head, thus showing he would obey the Saint’s command. Then St. Francis spoke again. “On behalf of the citizens of Gubbio, brother wolf, I promise that as long as you keep this peace they shall give you good and abundant food, as much as you desire, so that you shall never suffer hunger or thirst again. I know well you would never have killed and devoured

ST. FRANCIS AND THE WOLF 55

men unless you had been starving up here in your dark woods. But if the men of Gubbio do this thing for you, you on your side, brother wolf, must promise that you will never hurt or harm any living creature. Do you promise me this?"

Then the wolf looked up at the Saint with grateful eyes, for he felt that this strange man did indeed love and understand him, for it was true that he had been driven from the woods by cold and hunger before he went down in search of food into the lower country about Gubbio. So with grateful, penitent looks the wolf bowed his head and wagged his tail, to show how readily he would give his promise to keep the peace. St. Francis looked steadily at him, and he could see the wolf was very sorry and wanted to be good, so he stooped down and held out his hand to the wolf, saying: "Give me your hand in mine, brother wolf, in token that I have your promise." Then the wolf lifted up his right fore-foot, and put it with friendly confidence in the hand of St. Francis. And St. Francis said: "Brother wolf, in the name of Jesus Christ,

I pray you come with me to the city, and there in peace dwell with the men of Gubbio.”

St. Francis straightway went down the path towards the town, the wolf, nothing doubting, obediently following in his steps. If St. Francis had praised God on his way up the lonely valley, he praised him tenfold more on his journey down, for God had answered his prayer, and the wolf, most savage of all the forest beasts, was walking gently behind him like any lamb.

When St. Francis and the wolf got back to Gubbio, the wonderful news of his return spread instantly through the city, and men, women, and children, rich and poor, great and small, all flocked to the market-place to see this wonderful sight.

When the great square was filled with people, St. Francis stood upon a big stone (which they say you may still see if you go to Gubbio), and spoke to the townsfolk with the wolf standing by his side.

If you look at the picture, you will notice that in the left-hand corner a lawyer is writing down the terms of the bargain between the wolf and

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ST. FRANCIS AND THE WOLF OF GUBBIO

(From the picture by Stefano di Giovanni [Sassetta] in the collection of the
Count de Murtel)

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ST. FRANCIS AND THE WOLF 57

the people, while on the right we see a corner of the gloomy forest, and a bit of the wolf's den with the body of a man slain by him.

And this is what St. Francis said : " Listen, my brothers and sisters, our brother the wolf, who is here before you, is sorry for his sins, and has promised me that he will never again offend you in anything, and I, on your part, have promised that you will each day give him good and sufficient food, so that he may no more suffer hunger or thirst. Will you promise this, my brothers and sisters?" And all the people shouted with one consent : " We do promise, O blessed Francis." St. Francis spoke again before them all, and said to the wolf : " And you, brother wolf, do you promise these people to keep the peace according to the agreement, and not hurt either men or animals, or any living creature?" And the wolf kneeled down, and, with gentle movements of his body and tail, showed, as well as he could, that he wished to be true to his promise. Then said St. Francis :

" Brother wolf, I wish that, even as you gave me your pledge up there on the mountain, so

here you should give it before all these people, and that you will not deceive me, because I have given them a promise for you." Then the wolf lifted up his right fore-foot and placed it in St. Francis's hand, and St. Francis held it in the sight of all men, and all the people shouted for joy.

St. Francis stroked the wolf's rough head, and then turned to the people and stretched out his hands towards them : " Turn you, turn you, most dear ones, to God who loves you," he said ; " repent of your sins, and give glory and praise to Him for the wonderful sight you have seen this day." Then making the sign of the cross over the people St. Francis bade them farewell. The people, throwing themselves on their knees in awe and humility, made a lane for him to pass through and silently let him go, catching at his garment to kiss it as he passed.

The wolf stayed behind in Gubbio, and both he and the citizens honourably kept their promise. The wolf became a great favourite with the townsfolk, and he went familiarly from door to door, sure of being fed whenever he

ST. FRANCIS AND THE WOLF 59

was hungry. At last in a good old age he died, and all the people grieved for him, for they loved him both for himself and for the sake of St. Francis. He was buried near a corner of one of the chief streets of Gubbio, and they built a beautiful tomb over his grave. Long ago this tomb was broken up and destroyed, but men still pointed out the spot where he had been buried, and a few years ago some workmen were digging at the corner of the street, and there they discovered the skull of a huge wolf. One would like to believe that this was really what they supposed it to be, the skull of brother wolf, friend of St. Francis and the men of Gubbio.

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ST. MARGARET AND THE DRAGON

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ST. MARGARET AND THE DRAGON

ST. MARGARET was the daughter of Theodosius, Prince of the Idols at Antioch, a great and beautiful city in Asia Minor, where the people were heathens and worshipped false gods.

It was the custom that the children of rich people should leave their parents and be put under the care of a nurse, who generally lived at a distance from the city; so the little Margaret, when she was quite a baby, was sent to a farm far away in the hills where there lived a good old nurse named Anna, and there she remained for many years.

Her parents were proud and hard and did not trouble much about their daughter, so that she grew up knowing little of them, and when her father heard that she had become a Christian he was so angry that he died of rage; for the people of Antioch hated the Christians, and no

one had been more bitter against them than Theodosius, Prince of the Idols.

St. Margaret lived a happy, peaceful life at the farm. All day long she looked after the sheep, and she grew to be the most beautiful maiden in all the country-side. Early one morning, in company with some other maidens, she was out on the hills minding the sheep; the sun was breaking through the mists, and everywhere the gossamers were glistening, and all the grass was shining and bent down with the weight of the dew, when suddenly a gay company of huntsmen came through a narrow pass in the hills; it was Olybrius King of Antioch and his courtiers, who were out hunting the mountain bears. As they passed by, St. Margaret looked up, and the King, astonished at her beauty, stared at her in silence before he passed on, and for the rest of the day he kept thinking of her lovely face. He soon got tired of hunting and rode back with his courtiers to Antioch, but, try as he would, he could not forget the beautiful girl he had seen standing by her sheep in the morning light. At last Olybrius



1



2



3

THE LEGEND OF ST. MARGARET

1. The Dragon prepares to attack St. Margaret
2. The Dragon swallows St. Margaret
3. The Dragon bursts, and St. Margaret comes forth safely

(From an illuminated manuscript in the British Museum)

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ST. MARGARET AND THE DRAGON 65

could bear it no longer, for he felt that he must see her again, so he sent for his servants and told them to go to the little farmhouse and bring the young girl back with them to his palace. While they were gone he could neither eat nor sleep, and he made up his mind that, no matter how poor and humble this girl might prove to be, he would marry her and keep her with him always. The servants did as they were commanded, and they forced Margaret to say good-bye to the good old Anna. The poor girl cried bitterly at being parted from her friend, but, once she was on the road to Antioch she soon dried her tears, for she suspected she was being taken to the great heathen city, and she was determined to be brave.

King Olybrius was sitting on his throne in his palace when she was brought before him, and as she stood there she seemed to him even more beautiful than when he had seen her for that brief moment on the mountains. He told her not to be frightened, but to answer these three questions : Who was her father ? How was she named ? And what was her religion ? St. Mar-

garet replied that Theodosius, Prince of the Idols, was her father, that her name was Margaret, and that in religion she was a Christian. Then said King Olybrius: "Your two first questions are well answered, O maiden! You come of a great and noble family, and Margaret is a fair name, well suited to so fair a maiden, but," he added sternly, "your third question is *not* well answered. Why are you a Christian? and why do you worship a God who was crucified?" St. Margaret answered calmly: "How do you, a heathen, O King, know of Christ crucified?" And he replied: "By the books of Christian men." Then said St. Margaret boldly: "For shame, O King! If you have read those books, you too should be a Christian. How can you remain a worshipper of false gods?" At that the King grew very angry, and he commanded his servants to shut her up in prison.

The next morning St. Margaret was again brought before the King, and when he looked upon her she seemed to him to grow more beautiful every day, and he longed more than ever to marry her; but first he knew he must force her

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to worship the false gods of Antioch, for it was impossible for him to make a Christian his wife and Queen. He determined to try very hard to persuade her, so he took her alone into an inner room and besought her, saying : “ O Margaret, worship I pray thee our gods of Antioch ; if only you will do this you shall sit beside me on my throne and wear a golden crown, and be my wife and Queen of Antioch. I love you, for you are the fairest of women.” But St. Margaret shook her head : “ O King, it cannot be,” she said. “ I worship the God who made heaven and earth ; how can I worship the false gods of Antioch ?” Then Olybrius the King fell into a great rage, and, calling to his guards, commanded them to take St. Margaret and torture her until she worshipped his gods. The soldiers did as they were commanded, and they took her and fastened her to a stake, and drove nails into her tender hands and feet until the blood flowed from them in streams, but she remained steadfast and utterly refused to worship the false gods of Antioch. And the people who stood about wept to see her suffering, and said :

“O Margaret, truly we are very sorry for you! see how cruelly your body has been torn and hurt! Worship now our gods and you shall live;” but to that she only replied: “O evil counsellors, depart, it is better to die for the truth than to live in dishonour.”

All this time the King stood by, hoping she would at last obey him; and again and again he besought her to do as he desired, but she would not, and for a long time she would not so much as answer him one word. At last, towards the end of the day, she spoke. “Wicked man,” she said, “you have power to hurt and harm my body, but you have no power to hurt my soul, and you cannot make me say what is not true.” Then St. Margaret cried out in a loud voice, so that all who stood by might hear: “Your gods are false, O King; your gods are false!” Olybrius was so infuriated by these words that, instead of loving her, he began to hate her. He called his soldiers, and commanded them, saying: “Throw this obstinate girl into the dragon’s den outside the city walls.” The soldiers were unwilling to carry out the

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King's terrible order, for they were amazed at St. Margaret's courage and determination, but the King threatened to cast them too to the dragon, if they did not obey him instantly. So the soldiers unbound St. Margaret from the stake, and dragged her away through the town, past the city gate, and along a rocky path, until they came near the mouth of a deep, dark cave. There they hastily bound her hands and feet, and left her helpless, while they hurried away for fear the dragon should rush out and devour them. Poor unhappy St. Margaret was alone, and bound hand and foot before the cave of the dragon; it was cold and dark, for the night had come; she could see the monster's breath coming in great puffs from the mouth of the dark cave, but she thought that he must be asleep, for he made no sound. Hour after hour passed by, and at last the moon came up, and then, with a rush and a roar, the dragon, a huge, monstrous creature sprang forth, the moonlight glistening on his brazen wings and lighting up his cruel eyes. He seized St. Margaret in his powerful jaws, and returned to the cave, where, opening wide his

mouth, with one tremendous gulp, he swallowed her. Scarcely had he done so when the rocks trembled and shook, there was a flash of light, and a tremendous roar, and the dragon burst asunder and disappeared, and in his place stood a young and handsome man, dressed in a grand and splendid fashion. St. Margaret, who was unhurt and saved by the bursting of the dragon, took no notice of him, but threw herself on her knees, thanking God for having saved her from the dragon.

While St. Margaret was kneeling, a strange change began to come over this princely-looking man. First he looked pale and frightened at hearing her prayer, then he began to dwindle and grow smaller and smaller, and his face to become uglier and still more ugly, till, in a few moments, the tall, handsome young man had become a hideous imp. St. Margaret rose from her knees, and, looking at him, started back in fear, but she quickly regained her courage, and, making the sign of the cross, she demanded what he wanted. At the sign of the cross the imp shivered before her, and answered that he

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had come in the disguise of a young and princely man that he might the more easily deceive her, and persuade her to do the King's will and worship his idols. St. Margaret answered firmly: "Never will I worship the gods of the heathen; I will die rather than deny my Lord Christ."

Then the demon was conquered by Margaret's courage and the Name of Christ, and he shrank together and tried to slink away, but St. Margaret commanded him to remain, and most unwillingly he did so.

"What is your name?" she asked, and again against his will the demon was forced to answer. "My name is Veltis," he said, "and I am one of the demons who were fastened by King Solomon in a brazen box. After King Solomon died, it happened that the people of Babylon came upon the box, and they thought they had found a great treasure, so they broke open the lid, and when once the box was opened, we demons flew out and rushed away all over the world to plague and tempt good men to do evil deeds."

"You vile creature!" St. Margaret said.

“You disguised yourself as a young Prince on purpose to persuade me to worship the false gods. Begone, wicked demon!” she cried. She stamped her foot upon the ground, and the earth opened, and the demon was swallowed up, and was seen no more.

St. Margaret, tired out, lay down on the hard ground and soon fell asleep. The next morning the soldiers of Olybrius came to the entrance of the dragon's cave. They silently crept forward, in terror lest the dragon should hear them and spring up at them from his lair. When they got near enough to look into the cavern, they were amazed to see St. Margaret lying asleep, resting quite quietly, with her arm doubled beneath her cheek, as though she were at home in the little farmhouse in the hills. Summoning all their courage the soldiers ventured into the cave, but they could find no trace of the dragon beyond the bones of the victims he had devoured. Trembling with fear and astonishment at the wonderful thing that had happened, they woke St. Margaret, and told her to come with them again before the King. As they

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went towards the city, they questioned her about the God whom she worshipped, and St. Margaret told them about Jesus Christ and His beautiful life, and how He loved all men, and gave His life for them. The soldiers, marvelling no less at her words than at the wonderful courage of so young a girl, were convinced that the God whom she served was the true God, and, falling on their knees, they begged her forgiveness, and said they would be Christians. They went straight back to the palace with St. Margaret, and confessed before the King that, convinced by her, they also had become Christians. At that the King's rage and fury knew no bounds, and, calling to his fiercest black soldiers, he told them to take St. Margaret and her guards to the market-place and there strike off their heads.

The market-place was crowded with the town-folk of Antioch, who looked on silently while the headsman's heavy axe fell upon St. Margaret's tender neck, and severed her head from her body. After that, each in his turn, the soldiers who had guarded her were beheaded. The

people watched in dead silence till all was over, and then with one voice they cried : “ We, too, will be Christians ; Margaret’s God is the true God ; we will worship Him.” Then they rushed to the temples of the false gods, and threw down the idols and broke them in pieces. King Olybrius heard the tumult in the city, and sent to inquire the reason of all the noise, and when he heard that all the people had become Christians, he was very much afraid ; so he put off his kingly robes, and disguised himself as a poor man, and fled from the city, and was never seen again. The townsfolk gently took up the body of St. Margaret, and with tears and great sorrow they buried her near the market-place. In after years they built a beautiful church over her grave, and in the church they hung a picture of St. Margaret and the dragon, for the citizens loved to think that anyone so brave had been born in their city of Antioch.

You see, though St. Margaret was only a girl, she conquered the powerful Olybrius, King of Antioch. He thought that by torturing and threatening her with death he could compel her

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to worship his false gods, but St. Margaret chose to die rather than obey him and give up her religion. So by her courage in dying for Christ, she converted the whole city of Antioch to the true faith.

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ST. FRANCIS AND THE SOLDAN

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ST. FRANCIS AND THE SOLDAN

IN the time of St. Francis of Assisi all Christian men hated the Saracens, for they were a rich and powerful nation, and to them belonged the Holy Land. The Christians were continually fighting with them to regain possession of Jerusalem, and as the Saracens were very fierce and cruel, and the Christian fighting-men were not much better, the wars between them were both long and bloody.

Now St. Francis, who loved all living things, could not find it in his heart to hate the Saracens. Instead of hating them he pitied them because they were heathens and had never been taught the faith of Christ, and at last he felt so sorry for them that he could bear it no longer, and he determined to leave his own country and go to the Saracens and tell them the story of the Saviour's life. So taking with him twelve of

his companions, he set sail for the Saracens' land.

All travelling in those days was dangerous, for the roads were few and bad, and thieves and robbers were always on the lookout for any unarmed or lonely travellers; but if travelling on dry land was dangerous, a journey by sea was ten times more so. The ships were very small, and the sailors had no compasses or maps by which they might steer their course, but sailed their ships by the sun by day and by the light of the moon and stars by night, so they never ventured far out to sea, but kept close inshore, thereby running great risk of being wrecked on a rocky coast. St. Francis and his companions passed through many dangers and adventures, and the twelve companions were horribly afraid, and again and again they begged to be put ashore, but St. Francis, though he was so kind and gentle, was as brave as any soldier, and he refused to give the order to turn back, so they were obliged to endure their miseries as best they could till they arrived at their journey's end. At last they reached the

Saracens' land, and, bidding good-bye to the Captain and crew of the little ship, they left the seashore and directed their course inland.

All the passes by which Christian travellers could enter the Saracens' country were guarded by soldiers, especially chosen by their King or Soldan for their fierceness and cruelty, so that any Christian who dared enter his dominions should immediately be caught and tortured or put to death.

St. Francis and his companions had only gone a very short distance when a band of dark-faced warriors clad in bright armour and mounted on swift horses swept down upon them and took them all prisoners. The Captain roughly demanded what St. Francis and his companions were doing in the Saracens' country, and St. Francis answered that he had come to tell them about God and His Son Jesus Christ ; but the Captain did not believe him, and laughed him to scorn. "I know what you are," he said. "You are a spy sent by our enemies the Christians to spy out the land." All in vain St. Francis repeated that he hated war, and

that he had come to tell them about love and peace. The Captain, not believing him, and seeing that St. Francis was the leader of the little band, had him seized and tortured, to try and force him to acknowledge that he was a spy; but it was to no purpose, for St. Francis bore it all as bravely and uncomplainingly as he had done the perils of the voyage across the sea.

The Captain and his soldiers did not know what to think of this brave man, who, no matter how much they hurt him, did not cry out or abuse them, but only said again and again: "I am no spy. I have come to tell you how God loved the world." They were so puzzled that at last they determined to take St. Francis and his companions before the Soldan, who was with the army a few miles away. The soldiers each took one of their prisoners behind him on his horse, and they rode straight for the Soldan's camp, which they soon saw before them in the distance. There were hundreds of white tents on the sand surrounding a little grass lawn, across which

a little stream bubbled and sparkled, and in the middle of this green space was pitched a noble tent, hung with white silk, over which floated the green flag of the Saracens. The Soldan was sitting at the door of his tent in the cool of the evening, surrounded by his lords and captains. A dark and stately man was the Soldan, clad in silken robes, with a crown of gold upon his head. The Captain, halting his troop, dismounted and knelt humbly before his King.

“Speak on, O Captain,” commanded the Soldan.

“Most noble Soldan,” the Captain replied, “we seized these men as they were attempting to enter your dominions. They are Christians, and when I questioned their leader he told me a strange tale of coming to us in love and peace. We all know the love and peace of the Christians—it is the peace of fire and the sharp sword—so I believed him to be a spy; but he denied the charge, so I took him and had him tortured to force him to confess the truth, but he would not, and he steadfastly denies that he is a spy. There-

fore, O King, knowing your wisdom, I thought it well to bring this strange man before you, that you may question him yourself."

"Is this that my servants tell of you true, Francis? Are you a spy?" asked the Soldan sternly.

"I am no spy, O King," replied St. Francis. "I have come from Italy, my own country, to tell you how God loves you, and sent His only Son to die for you."

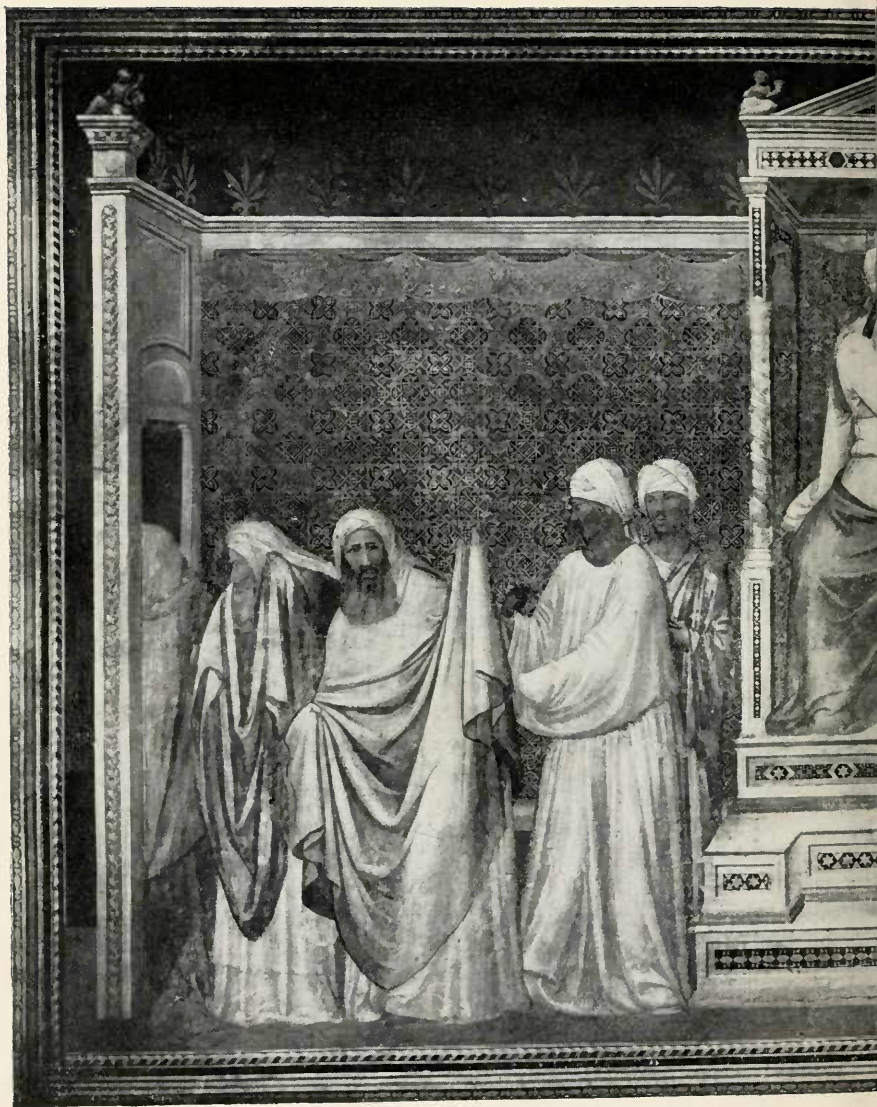
The Soldan was silent for a moment, and then turned to the Captain at his side.

"Have you searched these men? Are they armed?" he asked.

"O King, the only things they carry are these crosses, as you see," he replied, pointing to the wooden crosses St. Francis and his companions wore at their sides.

At that St. Francis, lifting his cross high in his hand (for he was now unbound), stepped boldly forward and spoke thus to the Soldan: "O King, I can prove that I am no spy, but a true servant of God. Cause a big fire to be made here in front of you, and let one of your servants





ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI OFFERING TO WALK THRU

(From the picture by Giotto in

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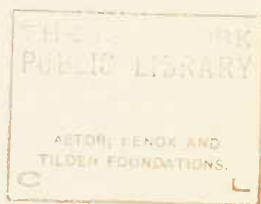
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THE FIRE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE SOLDAN

(Arch of Sta. Croce at Florence)

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walk with me through the fire, and he who is unburnt, his shall be the true God. I know that mine will prevail.”

Now the Soldan was a brave man, and he loved all brave men, and when he heard St. Francis he determined he should not be slain at once, but given a chance of proving the truth of his words; so he ordered a big fire to be got ready, and when it was set alight St. Francis prepared to step into it, but no one came forward to join him from the Saracens' side. The Soldan turned to the lords and captains surrounding him, and said: “Is there no one among my servants who will come forward and enter the fire with this man?” But there was silence, and no one stirred, and the Soldan saw that not one of the Saracens would venture into the fire with St. Francis.

And the great King looked searchingly at St. Francis as he stood before him by the fire. “Many Christian men have I met,” said he, “but I have met them in fair fight, horse to horse and sword to sword, they wishing to kill me and I them; but never before have I met a

Christian like you. I will speak with you alone to-morrow, Francis. Take your prisoners and guard them carefully," he said, turning to the Captain, "and bring the man Francis to my tent at break of day."

The Soldan was a very wise Prince, and he thought to himself, "I know that this Francis is a brave man, but I can see by his torn and ragged garments that he is also very poor. Maybe, if I tempt him with presents of gold and silver he will confess he is a spy, and will tell me which King or Prince among my enemies has sent him." So the next morning the Soldan caused great bags of gold and silver and precious stones to be brought into his tent, and when St. Francis was led before him he took him alone into the tent and there showed him all these riches.

"You see this gold and silver and these precious stones," said the Soldan; "they shall all be yours if you will confess that you are a spy, and if you will tell me whence you came and who sent you."

Then St. Francis, in his rough, torn garments,

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looked at the stately, gorgeous monarch with gentle honest eyes. "Most noble sir," said he, "I do not want your gold and silver and precious stones. I have told you the truth. I am no spy. God, whose poor servant I am, has sent me."

The Soldan now felt sure that St. Francis was speaking the truth. He looked at him, and the longer he looked the more astonished did he become. "Why," thought the Soldan to himself—"why should this man, who is evidently no strong warrior such as I have known among the Christians, why should this man come all the way from Italy to tell us about his God? Truly He must be a wonderful God if He has many servants like Francis." Then, turning to St. Francis, he said: "Say on, Francis, and tell me of your God." And standing before the throne St. Francis told him about the things of God, and when he had finished speaking the Soldan said: "This is a marvellous tale you tell, O Francis, of a God who is not angry with the world, but gave His only Son to die for the people in it. What you say may be true, but who can tell—

who can tell?" he said sadly, and he sighed deeply, and leaned his head upon his hand.

St. Francis waited in silence, and then he humbly and earnestly begged the Soldan to give him permission to speak to the Saracens also of the things of God. For some moments the Soldan did not answer, and then he rose from his throne and called his soldiers to him, and commanded them that they were in no way to harm or molest St. Francis, and he gave him leave to go with his companions to any part of his kingdom; and St. Francis and his companions, with grateful hearts, took leave of the Soldan and quickly departed, and went through all the Saracens' land teaching and preaching to the people. For many months St. Francis journeyed from place to place. He went through sandy deserts and crossed deep rivers, and everywhere he told the people about Christ, but the Saracens were dull and slow to believe his words.

At last St. Francis, seeing he could do no more good among this heathen people, decided he would return to Italy, so he gathered his companions together and took the road to the

sea-coast, but before he left the country he went to the Soldan to bid him farewell. No sooner did the Soldan hear that St. Francis was in the camp than he sent one of his soldiers to lead him before him.

The King had never forgotten this small, delicate man in the ragged coat, who, with so brave a spirit, had come from far-off Italy, and he had thought continually of all St. Francis had told him of the birth and life and death of Jesus Christ, and the more he thought the more wonderful did the story seem, and he was overjoyed to see St. Francis again. After they had talked for a long time alone in the tent, the Soldan, looking gravely at St. Francis, said : “ Brother Francis, I would most willingly belong to the religion of Christ, for I believe that what you tell me of Jesus is true, but I fear to become a Christian because my soldiers would rise up and kill both you and me, with all your companions. Now I do not wish to bring about your death and mine, for you can still do much good in your own country, and were I to die there would be no one left to guard my people

from oppression and wrong. Tell me, therefore, brother Francis, what shall I do ?”

St. Francis thought in silence for some moments, and then he answered gravely : “ You cannot forsake your people, O King, for you are wise and strong, and they are weak and foolish. You must protect the poor and helpless, and see justice done to all your subjects, and rule them in truth and honour. And now, most noble sir, I must go from you and return to my own country ; but when, by the death of my body, I have given back my soul to God, I will not forget you, O King, for when in your turn you come to die, I will send two of my companions, and they shall baptize you in the name of Christ ; and do you, in the meantime, think continually of the things I have taught you, so that you may be ready when my messengers come to you.” And this the Soldan promised to do, and St. Francis bade him farewell, and returned to Italy with the twelve companions.

The Soldan kept his word most truly and faithfully. He took no thought for himself, but

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worked early and late for the good of his people, and he was greatly loved by them and greatly feared by his enemies. At last he grew very old and tired, and he felt that before long the promise St. Francis had made him would be fulfilled. So he told the soldiers who guarded the roads leading to Christian lands to watch for two poor men clothed in long garments, with wooden crosses hanging by their sides, and should these men come by they were to be led before him.

Now, at that time St. Francis, who had died long before, came down from heaven and appeared to two of his companions, and ordered them to go at once to the Soldan and baptize him into the Christian faith. So the companions set out immediately, clad in the long coats such as St. Francis and his companions had worn so many years before, and when they got to the Saracens' country they were stopped by the guards and taken before the Soldan.

The Soldan was very glad when he saw the two companions, for he was tired with his hard work and long life, and he longed to die a

Christian and see St. Francis again; and he said: "Now I know God has sent me his servants to baptize me into the faith of Christ, as the blessed Francis promised," and after he had been baptized, in a great calm and peace he died.

St. Francis of Assisi will always be remembered as one of the most gentle and tender of Christian saints, but the Soldan, who loved him, should not be forgotten either, for he was a brave and noble ruler and a "very perfect knight."

THE FIRST HALLOWING OF
WESTMINSTER ABBEY

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THE FIRST HALLOWING OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY

IN the reign of Sebert, King of the East Saxons, St. Augustine and his monks came over from Rome and converted him and his subjects to the Christian faith.

Sebert then built a church in his chief city, London, and named it in honour of St. Paul, and St. Augustine appointed one of his monks, whose name was Mellitus, to be the first Bishop of London. Then we are told in the old story that Sebert, not satisfied with having built one church, decided that he would build another not far from London, on Thorney Island, a marshy piece of ground lying on the bank of the Thames, all overgrown with reeds and rushes.

This church the King prayed Bishop Mellitus to name in honour of St. Peter. To-day we call Thorney Island Westminster, and the little

church that Sebert built there stood where our beautiful Westminster Abbey now stands. From Westminster it was possible to cross the river at low tide by means of a ford made by the Romans, and on the other side the ford was met by the Roman road called Stangate, which ran straight from London to Canterbury.

One starry night a fisherman was fishing from his little boat close to the river bank, where Lambeth Palace now stands. The fisherman cast his net again and again, but to no purpose, for he did not catch a single fish, there seemed to be none in the river that night. Far across the water, for the tide was high, the fisherman could see the King's new church standing dark against the sky. Bishop Mellitus was to hallow it and to name it St. Peter's early next day.

It was very silent, nothing but the wash of the water among the reeds and the hoot of an owl was to be heard, as the fisherman wearily let down his net. Suddenly, in the quiet, he heard himself called, and looking up saw a traveller standing on the bank at the edge of the ford.





A BISHOP IN THE ACT OF ANOINTING A
CONSECRATION CROSS

(From an illuminated manuscript in the British Museum)

“Row me, O fisherman, across the river in your boat, for I must be in my new church at Westminster to-night,” he said.

The fisherman obediently brought his boat to the bank, and the stranger stepped in and sat down. As the fisherman began to pull across the river in the direction of Westminster, he tried to see what this belated traveller looked like, but by the light of the stars it was impossible to see more than that he was a tall and stately man. When they got to the other side, the stranger turned to the fisherman and said :

“Wait here till I return, and I will reward you well,” and with that he went up the little path that led from the river to the church, and the fisherman soon lost sight of him, for the night was dark, and the path narrow and winding. From where the boat was moored, however, the fisherman could see the dark church clearly, and he had not been waiting long before the whole building seemed lighted up as though with many candles. It was a strange and wonderful sight, when all men were asleep, to see the church so bright, as though some great and glorious

service were being held within. The fisherman was frightened, but stayed where he was, for he had promised the stranger that he would wait for him.

It was a long time before he came down the path again, but when at last he reappeared, in the black darkness that comes before the dawn, the stranger was shining with a bright light, and by that light the fisherman could see that he was no other than the great apostle St. Peter himself. He came to the boat and said to the fisherman: "Have you anything to eat?" but the fisherman was too frightened to answer. And St. Peter was sorry for him, and said: "Brother, do not be afraid, for I, like you, am a fisherman. Have you caught any fish to-night?"

"No fish have I caught to-night, O blessed Saint, for I have been waiting here for you while you have been in the church," answered the fisherman.

"Row me across again, O fisher, but before we reach the other side, let down your net," St. Peter said.

The fisherman did as he was told, and soon

he felt the net dragging in his hand, for it was heavy and full of fish. So heavy was it that St. Peter helped to pull it out of the water. The little boat was quite full of fish, and amongst them was a great one with silver scales. When they had come to land, St. Peter took the big fish from among the rest and gave it to the fisherman, saying: "Take this to Bishop Mellitus, and say that I have hallowed my new church at Westminster to-night, and that it is now all ready to be used, and bid him give praise in it to God to-morrow; but if he will not believe you, tell him to go to my church, and he shall see certain and sure tokens that I have been there. And to you, fisherman, I give the rest of these fish as a reward for your labour."

This said, St. Peter vanished away, and the fisherman was left alone, marvelling at the wonderful sight he had seen.

The sun was rising in a mist over the marshes, and the birds were singing their morning songs, when the fisherman again got into his boat and rowed down the river to St. Paul's. There he sought out Mellitus the Bishop, and gave him

the great fish, as St. Peter had ordered, telling him all that the Saint had said, but the Bishop would not believe his story. Then said the fisherman: "The blessed Apostle St. Peter said, 'If my servant Mellitus will not listen to you, tell him to go to my church at Westminster, and he shall see by certain signs and tokens that I have indeed been there.'"

Now, you must understand that in old days in England a church was hallowed in this manner :

The Bishop, followed by his servers and his singing-boys, went round the outside of the church and made twelve crosses on the walls, marking them with holy oil, and after that went into the church and marked twelve more crosses on the inside in the same way, and in front of each cross they set a lighted candle. These crosses, painted or cut in the stone, you may still see in many old churches if you look with care. The next thing the Bishop did was to mark in the sand, with which the floor had been sprinkled, a great cross from end to end of the church, and then he wrote by its side the alphabet in Greek letters.

HALLOWING OF WESTMINSTER 101

When Mellitus heard that St. Peter had left tokens in the church that he had been there the night before, he called his clergy together, and set out immediately on the path to Westminster, the fisherman following after. The path wound in and out by the side of the river ; underfoot it was wet and marshy, but the wide sky above them was a pale and tender blue, and a faint, fresh smell of the sea, borne on the rising tide, was in the air. All about them the larks sang for joy, and their songs mingled with the hymns of the Bishop and his people, as, with the great cross borne before them, they went their way towards Westminster.

Bishop Mellitus came to the church, and opened the door, and looked in, and there, before him on the floor, drawn in the sand, was a great cross, and by it was written the alphabet in Greek. He looked at the walls, and there, cut plainly for all men to see, were twelve crosses marked with the holy oil, still wet and shining, and in front of the crosses were twelve great wax candles burnt almost to their sockets, for they had been alight all night while St. Peter was in the church.

Then Mellitus no longer doubted, but knew that St. Peter had indeed visited and hallowed his church, and he preached a great and glorious sermon to the people, begging them to join with him in giving thanks and praise to God for the wonderful things that had happened that night. And all men gave praise to God on that spring morning so long ago.

And that was the first hallowing of Westminster Abbey.

THE LEGEND OF THE REBUILDING
OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY

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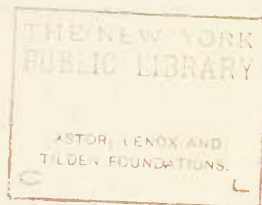
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EDWARD THE CONFESSOR GIVES THE RING OFF HIS FINGER TO ST. JOHN THE
EVANGELIST, DISGUISED AS A PILGRIM

(From an illuminated manuscript in the British Museum)



THE LEGEND OF THE REBUILDING OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY

MANY years after Sebert, King of the East Saxons, had built his church in honour of St. Peter on the banks of the Thames, the fierce and cruel Danes sailed in their long ships over the North Sea to England, and creeping up the rivers burned the villages and killed everyone whom they met; but fortunately the little church at Westminster was so well hidden by the tall reeds and alder bushes growing in the marsh that the Danes sailed past without ever discovering it or the poor houses by which it was surrounded.

At last, four hundred years after Sebert died, the Danes conquered all the land, and Canute their King became King of England. He was deeply hated, for he cruelly oppressed the English, and many of the men were slain while

the women were dragged away from their homes to become the slaves of their conquerors, and in all the country there was great sorrow and misery. The rightful King of England, Edward the Confessor, was living in exile far away in Normandy, and while he was there he vowed that if only God would send him back to England and set him on his father's throne, he would make a pilgrimage to Rome (at that time a long and dangerous journey), and there pray by the tomb of St. Peter his patron Saint ; and each day of his exile he prayed this prayer :

“O good Lord! I have no help but Thee only. My friends are gone from me, and they have become enemies. My father is dead, my brothers also are slain, and I am left poor and alone. O Lord, I beseech Thee and pray Thee to keep me and to bring me safe to England, the kingdom of my father Ethelred. Thou shalt be my God and St. Peter the Apostle my patron Saint, whose tomb, by the grace of God, I will visit and honour in Rome, if Thou, Lord, send me life and health and time.”

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For many years Edward the Confessor prayed this prayer, and at last his prayer was answered. Canute died, and his two sons also, and the great nobles and the common people rejoiced that they were dead, and they thought of their rightful King, the exile in Normandy. So they sent messengers to Edward begging him to return to England and reign over his dutiful subjects. Then Edward took ship and set sail for England, and when he landed, the people received him with joy, and the Archbishop of York with other Bishops anointed him and crowned him King of England. After that, the old stories tell us, all was happiness in England. The Danes were chased out of the land, and all men were content and joyful, and in no country was there such a great and holy King as Edward the Confessor of England. Now the good King, settled on his throne, when all was peace and happiness about him, remembered the vow he had made in the time of his trouble—to go on a pilgrimage to Rome, and there pray at the tomb of St. Peter. So he sent for the great lords of England and told

them how it was his purpose to leave them for a time and go to Rome to fulfil his vow.

Then the great lords, in grief and fear, besought him not to leave them. "Leave us not, most wise and noble King, for what shall we thy servants do without thee? The Danes are gone, but if they hear that thou, our Lord and King, art far away, they will come back again, and we shall surely die. Leave us not, we pray thee, but send thy servants the Bishops to the Lord Pope, and let them ask him if he will absolve thee from thy vow, and stay with us in England." When the lords had done speaking, King Edward the Confessor saw the sorrow of his people, and he had pity on them, and felt he could not leave them. So he sent two Bishops and with them a great company of monks and men-at-arms to the Pope to ask if he would absolve him of his vow and allow him to do some other good deed instead.

When the Bishops and the great company that was with them got to the beautiful and glorious city of Rome, they were kindly received by the Pope, who marvelled to hear of the

wondrous doings of King Edward the Confessor. And the Pope rejoiced to think so good and wise a King should live in such a far-off corner of the world, for he thought that Rome was the centre of the whole universe. Then the Pope wrote a letter to King Edward, telling him that as his people loved him so well and needed him so much, he should not leave them, but stay in England; and instead of performing his vow to come to Rome should give all the money he would have spent on his long journey to the poor, and that he should build or repair a church in honour of St. Peter.

So the Bishops, bearing the Pope's letter with them, hastened back to England, and as soon as they got to London they gave it to the King, and the King when he read it was very glad, but wondered much that the Pope had not told him where to build or repair the Church of St. Peter.

Now at this time, far away in a cave in the midst of a wood, there lived a saintly hermit, an aged man who lived on herbs and fruits, and while the Bishops were in Rome St. Peter him-

self had come to this holy man and spoken to him thus: "Write thou to my servant Edward the King, and say to him that I, Peter the Apostle, absolve him from his vow; and tell him that, instead of making a pilgrimage to Rome, he is to give much money to the poor in England. Write to him also that I remember well that, when he was in Normandy, he chose me as his patron Saint, and that I wish him to repair and set in order my own Abbey Church at Westminster, which I myself hallowed some time since. Tell him he is to make it great and beautiful, and to fill it with good and holy monks, whose prayers, that will never cease, shall be a ladder stretching from earth to heaven. All this thou must write and send to the King."

When St. Peter had finished speaking he vanished away. Then the hermit wrote all that the Apostle had said on a roll of parchment, and sealed it with a big seal of red wax, and gave it to a messenger, telling him to take it with all speed to the King. The messenger did as he was bidden, and gave it to the King, and the King at once compared it with the

Pope's letter, and fell into deep musing and thought. Then at last he began to laugh gently, for he rejoiced to think that St. Peter had told him which church he was to repair and beautify in his honour. For well he knew the little church lying so low among the reeds by the river-side at Westminster, and he determined to rebuild it, and to make it the finest church in the whole country. So he sent for the best master-masons and the best master-carpenters in his kingdom, and then he destroyed the old building and built up a new one from the foundations, and Westminster Abbey, more glorious and beautiful than ever before, rose in its place. So that even in Edward the Confessor's time Westminster Abbey was one of the wonders of the world ; but succeeding Kings of England each in his turn have so altered and rebuilt it that little remains to us of Edward's building but the Chapel of the Pyx, opening out of the cloisters to the south of the Chapter House, and the walls of the monks' dormitory or sleeping-place. Nevertheless, everything in the Abbey centres round the shrine of Edward

the Confessor, which all through the Middle Ages was thronged with pilgrims from all parts of the world, and to be buried near his tomb was an honour reserved only for Royal Princes. And there the good King still lies, surrounded by the tombs of his successors, the first of a long line of English Kings and Queens.

THE LEGEND OF EDWARD THE
CONFESSOR AND THE PILGRIM, AND
OF THE SECOND HALLOWING OF
WESTMINSTER ABBEY

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THE LEGEND OF EDWARD THE
CONFESSOR AND THE PILGRIM, AND
OF THE SECOND HALLOWING OF
WESTMINSTER ABBEY

ONE summer morning, when King Edward the Confessor had lived many years and become an old man, he was riding through the Essex woods, and as he rode, he thought of his past life; of his unhappy childhood and youth spent in exile at his grandfather's Court in Normandy; of the joyful day on which he had first landed in England; of the many long years he had watched over and worked for his people, and, last of all, he thought of his joy and pride—the beautiful Abbey of St. Peter that he was rebuilding at Westminster.

The old King, mounted on a great white horse, rode slowly in front of a long train of courtiers and retainers who followed, laughing and chattering, two or three hundred yards behind.

The path led straight through the forest, and the brushwood grew thick and close, and made a high wall on either side of the grassy road, which was sprinkled all about with primroses. Little rabbits were cropping and nibbling in the dew, but they did not stir till the King on his stately horse came within a few feet of them, when looking up with their bright eyes, they would stare for a second, and then bound off into the bushes, now and again stopping, before making a dash for their burrows, to watch the King as he came slowly on.

Presently the path came to a clearing in the wood, and there, deep in the heart of the forest, stood a little church, and from within there came sounds of music and singing. The King reined in his steed and called to one of his servants and asked what church this might be, buried so deep in the forest. And the servant answered: "This, O King, is the church of Havering; it is a new church, and only just finished, and even now the Bishop is within, and is hallowing it in honour of St. John the Evangelist."

Now, good King Edward's patron saint was St. Peter, but next to St. Peter he loved and venerated St. John the Evangelist, and when he heard this little church was to be named in his honour he got down from his horse and went in. He watched the Bishop make the crosses on the wall and then go in procession round the building, and while he watched, an aged white-haired man entered the church. The old man's face was very beautiful, and his dress was that of a pilgrim from the Holy Land, and he went straight to the King and begged him, for the sake of St. John, to give him some silver money. Now, Edward the Confessor loved pilgrims, and he looked about him for Hugolin, his treasurer, who had charge of his money, but nowhere could he see him. The only thing he had that he could give the poor old man was his big gold ring, and for the sake of St. John the Evangelist he took it from his finger and gave it to the pilgrim, who thanked the King and went on his way, and the King saw him no more.

Some years afterwards, it happened that two English pilgrims who had gone to the Holy

Land to visit the birthplace of our Lord, got separated from their companions and lost their way. In great distress they wandered about, but could find nobody to tell them the way. At last the night came on, and, half dead with hunger and thirst, they lay down in the desert to die. In the distance they could hear the low growlings of fierce wild beasts, and they made sure that they would shortly devour them.

Suddenly in the dark night they saw two lights borne by a bright company all clothed in white, coming towards them, and behind the company walked an aged man with long white hair, and his face was very beautiful. When he came near the two pilgrims, he said: "Be of good cheer, holy pilgrims; from what country and city do you come?" And the pilgrims answered: "We come from England, and from the city of London, O noble old man, and we are separated from our friends, and have lost our way." "Follow me," said the old man, and they followed him and his companions, and he gave them food and milk, and brought them

where they might rest after the toil of the day. The next morning he set them on their way, and showed them how they might rejoin their companions on the road to Bethlehem. And as they went he asked them about their King Edward, and they told him of his kind charity and noble deeds, and how he was building a new and splendid church at Westminster.

The old man listened, smiling, and they wondered why the news pleased him so much ; but when they were about to bid him farewell he told them who he was. “ I am John the Evangelist,” he said ; “ take from me this message to Edward your King, and give him greeting. Tell him to hasten the building of the church of Westminster by all means in his power, for in six months from the time you give him this message he shall die, and come to be with me in Paradise ; and in token of this, give him this ring, which he gave to me in my church at Havering.”

Then the two English pilgrims fell down in fear at the feet of the holy Evangelist and begged him to bless them, which he did, promising them

that they should return to England safe and sound.

Then the pilgrims turned homeward with all haste, bearing with them the precious ring. And as St. John had promised, they had a fair and prosperous voyage ; and when they got to England they went straight to the King. They gave him the message and the ring, and he received them with great joy. Then he fell into deep thought, smiling all the while, as was his wont, and none dared to rouse him. But after a long time he spoke, and sent for his master-masons and his master-carpenters, and commanded that his Abbey of Westminster should be finished within and without as quickly as possible.

Also, during the next six months, the King, with great care, set all things in order throughout his kingdom, and when December came he went to his palace at Westminster. By this time the beautiful Abbey was almost finished, the stonework showing sharp-cut and new in the winter sunshine. And the King was glad when he looked at the stately church, and he thought that St. Peter would be pleased, and think his

poor servant Edward had indeed given him a worthy and beautiful gift ; and the King commanded Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury, to hallow the building, and prepared many treasures to give to the Abbey that day.

At Christmas the King, dressed in his royal robes, and with his crown on his head, showed himself to all the people, as was his custom ; but soon afterwards he fell very ill, and, knowing that the end of his life was near, was glad, because he felt that he would soon be with God and all the Saints.

December 28, the Holy Innocents' Day, was fixed for the hallowing of the great church, but when the morning came the good King was too ill to be carried into the Abbey, and he had only strength to sign the parchment charter giving his rich gifts to his church. The Queen took his place, and all the great nobles of England, with many of the common people, were there to see Westminster Abbey hallowed a second time, and named again in honour of the great Apostle St. Peter. Then, five days after this, his work being finished, the good King Edward the Con-

fessor died, in the words of the old story, “in the hope that he was passing from the land of the dead to the land of the living. And St. Peter his friend, opened the gate of Paradise, and St. John, his own dear one, led him before the Divine Majesty.”

THE LEGEND OF WULFSTAN,
BISHOP OF WORCESTER, AND OF
HOW HIS STAFF WAS FIXED IN THE
CONFESSOR'S TOMB

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THE LEGEND OF WULFSTAN,
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CONFESSOR'S TOMB

WHEN William the Conqueror had got all England into his power, he began to meddle with the Church, and by the advice of Lanfranc his Archbishop he commanded that Wulfstan Bishop of Worcester should be summoned to Westminster, and there forced to resign his see, that it might be given to a man of greater dignity and learning, for Wulfstan was an Englishman, and knew no language but his own.

Now Wulfstan, though he did not know the Norman tongue, was a wise and holy man, and had been a friend of King Edward the Confessor, who had caused him to be made Bishop of Worcester.

He obeyed the King's commands and journeyed to Westminster, and when Lanfranc had told him the King's will, Wulfstan spoke thus to the Archbishop, standing before him and the Bishops in the Council Chamber.

“My Father, I know that I am a simple and unlearned man and not worthy to be the Bishop of Worcester. I knew it when the honour was thrust upon me, but I was compelled to take it by our good King Edward the Confessor. As, my Father, you wish me to resign my see, I will gladly do so, but not to you. I will resign it only to him who compelled me to take it;” and at that the good Wulfstan hurried from the Council Chamber to Westminster Abbey with his Bishop's staff in his hand.

He went straight to the new and beautiful tomb of Edward the Confessor and, kneeling before it, he spoke to King Edward as though he were still alive: “O blessed and holy King, you know well I did not wish to be made a Bishop, but consented only that I might please you and

do your will. 'We have now a King who makes new laws and speaks a new language, and he says, O King, that you were at fault in giving the Bishopric of Worcester to me, a simple and unlearned man, and that I was presumptuous in taking it. When you gave it to me you were only a man as I am, and might well have made a mistake ; but now, O most blessed and holy King, you are with God and cannot be deceived. You gave to me the charge of the Bishopric, and here I resign it to you again. Take this, and give it unto whomsoever it pleases you.'" And with that he smote the staff into the hard stone of the tomb ; and the stone became soft to receive it, and held it so fast that no man might move it.

After that Wulfstan took off his Bishop's robe and dressed himself in a monk's frock and cowl, and went back to his old place amongst the monks of Westminster that had been his before he was made Bishop of Worcester.

When all those at the Council who had demanded his resignation heard what had

happened, they went to the Abbey Church, and one after another strove to pull the staff from the Confessor's tomb; but they could not move it, and when King William heard what Wulfstan had done, he commanded Gundulf Bishop of Rochester to go and fetch the Bishop's staff. Gundulf went at once to the tomb, and there, standing upright in the hard stone, was the staff. He tried to move it, but in vain, for the staff seemed to have grown into the stone, and astounded beyond measure he hastened back to the King and Lanfranc, and told them of the strange and wonderful thing. Together they went to the tomb, and knelt before it in prayer, and then Lanfranc put out his hand and tried to pull the staff from the stone, but he could not move it. At this the King and Archbishop were full of fear, and began heartily to repent that they had driven Wulfstan from his see. The King asked his courtiers who were standing by if anyone had seen the good Bishop, and his courtiers eagerly sought for Wulfstan, and found him seated humbly amongst the monks in the choir. The

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King and the Archbishop went to him, and, kneeling before him, they asked him to pardon them ; but Wulfstan begged them to rise, and, himself kneeling, besought a blessing from the Archbishop. Then Lanfranc spoke thus to him : “ My brother, this day we have despised and made light of you because you are a simple and unlearned man, but the holy King Edward has shown us our fault. God loves humility and truth, wherefore, brother, come to your King and ours, the holy St. Edward, and receive from him your staff, for though he will not give it to us, doubtless he will deliver it to you.”

Then Wulfstan, the servant of God, went to the tomb, where the staff still stood fast, and knelt down, saying : “ O King Edward, blessed Saint of God, if thou still wishest that I, unworthy though I be, remain Bishop of Worcester, give back to me I pray thee this pastoral staff ;” and at that he gently and with great reverence laid his hand on the staff, and immediately the stone gave way, and the staff came away from the tomb. Then all men at Westminster, from

130 THE SAINTS IN STORY

the great King William to the little servers in the choir, gave praise and thanks to God, and honour to his holy servant, King Edward the Confessor, and Bishop Wulfstan returned in peace to Worcester.

THE END

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