

This photo is available  
in the print version  
of *Inklings of Glory*.

**Memorialized in fourth-century churches from Macedonia to Egypt, George probably was a Roman soldier martyred in about 303 for speaking out against Emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians. He became a heroic knight in medieval Christian legends.**

*Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Bart. (1883-98), ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON, 1868. Gouache on paper, 61.9 x 48.4 cm. William Morris Gallery, London. Photo © William Morris Gallery, London.*

---

# St. George and the Dragon

---

The city of Silene, Libya is being ravaged by a dragon, according to the famous legend in Jacopo da Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (1275). When the beast is no longer satisfied with eating sheep, the people draw lots and sacrifice their children to it. The lot falls to the King's daughter to be the next victim, so he places her in wedding finery near the dragon's lair. Saint George, a knight from Cappadocia, rides by and sees the princess. The dragon rushes toward them. With his sword George stabs the fiend, and then he and the princess lead it into the city. The terrified townspeople flee to the mountains, crying "Alas! We shall be all dead," but George reassures them, "believe in God, Jesus Christ, be baptized, and I shall slay the dragon." They are baptized and George severs the dragon's head. When the grateful people offer him all of their wealth, George refuses their gold and orders them to distribute it among the poor.

"Saint George was a man who abandoned one army for another: he gave up the rank of tribune to enlist as a soldier for Christ. Eager to encounter the enemy, he first stripped away his worldly wealth by giving all he had to the poor. Then, free and unencumbered, bearing the shield of faith, he plunged into the thick of the battle, an ardent soldier for Christ," observes Peter Damian (1007-1072). "Clearly what he did serves to teach us a valuable lesson: if we are afraid to strip ourselves of our worldly possessions, then we are unfit to make a strong defense of the faith."

In Elizabethan times, Edmund Spenser models the Redcrosse Knight in *The Fairie Queene* (1596) on George, whose shield is a martyr's cross on a white field: "But on his brest a bloudie Crosse he bore, / The deare remembrance of his dying Lord, / For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore, / And dead as liuing euer him ador'd." To protect his queen, the knight must prove himself "upon a foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne."

The legend echoes in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), where Christian resists the dragon Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation. Christian celebrates the victory: "Great Beelzebub, the captain of this fiend, / Designed my ruin; therefore to this end / He sent him harness'd out; and he, with rage / That hellish was, did fiercely me engage: / But blessed Michael helped me, and I, / By dint of sword, did quickly make him fly: / Therefore to Him let me give lasting praise, / And thank and bless his holy name always."