

## An Encounter with Saint George

I had just left my house to walk to the shops  
And was thinking how proudly flew  
All the flags of St George along all the tops  
Of the streets I was passing through,  
When I suddenly saw a light, which arose  
And grew brighter and brighter till  
I collapsed on a seat and let my eyes close,  
And my mind became calm and still.

Then I felt a cool breeze, and op'ning my eyes  
I beheld there a sea and shore;  
To a rock there was bound a maid whose sad sighs  
Pierced my heart to its very core.  
Then from out of the sea a dragon emerged  
And it sped straight towards the maid.  
To the rocks through the waves and breakers it surged,  
While the maid raised her eyes and prayed.

As the beast reached the shore and oped its great jaws  
Did a knight on his horse appear;  
And he charged with his lance with never a pause  
Nor a doubt nor display of fear.  
And with lance through its mouth, through throat and through gut  
Did he slay the infernal beast;  
When its head from its neck with sword he had cut,  
He the maid from the rock released.

So the knight led the maid unharmed to her folk  
And he brought along too the head  
Of the dragon he'd slain with one single stroke  
So they'd know that the beast was dead.  
Then the king and the people thanked the brave knight  
And they offered him wealth galore.  
"Not to me," said the knight, "I did but what's right.  
"Give your riches to aid your poor."

"You're so noble," they said, "Oh tell us, please, do  
"Why you give your reward away."  
And he told them of Christ whose teachings are true;  
And they all turned to Christ that day.  
Then I heard a great shout that shattered the scene;  
"Oh dear no," it cried out, "not so!  
"It's a fable that's all, through error it's been  
"Told of me. Now the truth I'll show."

As my vision became more focused and clear  
I saw soldiers in Roman dress;  
I saw one standing there who spoke without fear  
“I am loyal to Rome, I stress,  
“And uphold her ideals of concord and peace;  
“But I’ll not offer *her* incense,  
“Nor burn incense before her gods; I’ll not cease  
“To give Christ my full confidence.”

“For it’s Christ who’s my Lord and God, and his word  
“Brings salvation to all mankind.”  
“That’s enough,” cried the general, “Come, we have heard  
“That he’s stubborn and won’t unwind.  
“And so, George, on your knees; and bend down your head  
“So your neck may await the sword.”  
And with that George knelt down, for *he* had no dread  
As he waited to join his Lord.

Then my vision was changed, when George’s head fell,  
And a radiance filled the sky  
Wherein George stood transformed, a saint now to dwell  
With the heavenly hosts on high.  
Then I said, “Glorious Saint, why did it befall,  
“That you died at the swordsman’s stroke?”  
“’Twas the last,” he replied, “and fiercest of all  
“Persecutions of Christian folk.”

“Diocletian, the Emp’ror, wanted to kill  
“Off the church,” added George, “for he  
“Thought by purging the Empire, *he* did the will  
“Of the gods and that cleansed and free  
“Of this non-Roman creed, would Rome find again  
“Its past glories restored anew.  
“But ’twas futile; the church survived, for in vain  
“Does one stifle what’s right and true.”

“And so now,” I replied, “the patron you are  
“Of my country; your flag we fly.”  
“Not just England but other countries afar,  
“Many cities both far and nigh,  
“Many groups also count me patron and saint;  
“There’s a nation also you name  
“After me. But good-bye!” he said growing faint  
As ’twas back to this world I came.

Then I opened my eyes and saw the small park  
That I passed whensoe'er I walked  
To the shops. It was warm; I heard a dog bark,  
And the children who played and talked.  
Oh so blue was the sky; the sun brightly shone.  
"It's so peaceful and pleasant here,"  
Said a voice next to me; and sitting upon  
The same bench was my friend, Amir.

"You dropped off in the sun, I think," said Amir,  
"Were some musings or dreams descried?"  
"Indeed, yes," I told him, "I dreamt of St George."  
"Of Mar Jirjis," Amir replied.  
"Of Mar Jirjis," I said. "Is that what you name  
"Our Saint George, with his cross of red?"  
"He's a prophet of Islam, whom we do claim  
"Is Al-Khader the Green," he said.

"He is wise," added he, "a servant of God,  
"For the Holy Quran says so."  
"Oh dear me," I replied. "It's all very odd.  
"Maybe just to the shops I'll go."  
"Oh why, yes," said Amir. "We'd better not stay  
"Chatting here all the morning through."  
"Yes, my friend," I agreed, "or nothing today  
"Will get done. So, Amir, adieu!"

But that evening I mused on what I had learned  
About George. Was it really true  
That a Christian condemned to death should have earned  
To be honoured by Muslims too?  
"Oh, and not just by them," a voice I did know  
From the morning then said to me;  
"I am counted a saint by Druzes also;  
"In three faiths I'm revered, you see."

"Though I must," he continued, "tell you also  
"It is *not* every Muslim claims  
"I'm Al-Khader at all. For this you should know  
"The Quran gives the seer no names.  
"In the Levant it's where I'm honoured so much  
"For beheaded was I in Lod.  
"And around me has gathered legends and such  
"As a hero who fought for God."

“Where is Lod,” I enquired, “your place of demise?”  
“To the south east of Tel-Aviv,”  
He replied, “on the plain of Sharon it lies;  
“But when *I* from this world took leave  
“It was Lydda we Romans called it back then.”  
Next I asked whence the legends came.  
“From confusion,” he said, “of Bible and men  
“Of Quranic and pagan fame.”

“With Elijah,” he said, “have I been confused,  
“And not just with the Prophet Green;  
“I with Perseus and other heroes all fused  
“Into *one* dragon slayer have been.  
“But good night, and may angels watch o’er your dreams.”  
So he went and I thought how quaint  
That an interfaith foreign hero, it seems,  
Had be chosen as England’s saint.

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