

## ST. GEORGE'S DAY

by Hamish Hendry

On the back of some old English coins you will find the figure of a warrior on horseback, and in his hand a long spear with which he is slaying a dragon. That figure with the helmet and spear is St. George, the patron saint of England, and the patron saint of all that is chivalrous in Christianity. Regarding this hero and martyr we know very little; and indeed there are two men who have claims to be regarded as St. George. The most noble of these, and probably the true saint, was born of Christian parents in Cappadocia, became a warrior prince, and having testified for the Christian faith, was put to death at Nicomedia on April 23rd, 303 A.D., by the Roman Emperor Diocletian. From this time, and for that reason, he was venerated by all the Christian Churches, until about the year 494 A.D. George of Cappadocia was formally made a saint by Pope Gelasius.

A great many legends have gathered round the name of St. George. The most famous of these, of course, is the story of how this Christian warrior slew a dragon that was about to kill and devour a young girl. With heavy labour, and at great risk to himself St. George is said to have rescued the maiden and destroyed the dragon. It is a very interesting adventure, but unfortunately it cannot be accepted as literally true. In these old days it was quite common to attribute to brave men the slaying of a dragon, and that St. George was the bravest of the brave we need not doubt. There is also no doubt that, as a Christian warrior, he fought against all that was sly, cruel and ravenous—these being the evil characteristics of a dragon.

Several nations adopted St. George as their patron saint, for his bravery was known all over Christendom, and he was specially honoured during the Crusades. It was in England, however, that the saint was held in highest esteem. In 1222 A.D. the 23rd April became a great national festival by order of the Council of Oxford; while in the reign of Edward III. the famous Order of St. George, or the Blue Garter, was instituted. This is an Order of Knighthood, and when it was formed there was a great tournament in which forty of the stoutest and bravest of England's knights held the field against all the foreign knights who had been summoned to enter the contest. This Order of St. George, better known as the Order of the Garter, still exists, and its motto is still the same: *Honi soit qui mal y pense*.

In recent times St. George's Day has not been generously honoured by the English people. This is, indeed, a very great pity, because the saint is closely linked with English history; because his emblem—the red cross on a white ground—is to be seen wherever the British flag flies; and because he represents all that is best and bravest in the English character. "God and St. George"; "Saint George and Merrie England"—these were the stout battle cries which led on to victory when the foundations of the British Empire were laid. He is a good patriot, therefore, who remembers St. George's Day.

Source:

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