

THE DRAGON OF MOSTON



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Egerton Leigh

I

OFT have we heard of that fell fight,
In which old England's patron knight,
By chroniclers St. George who's hight
The scaly dragon slew.

II

But of that combat now I sing,
With which all Cheshire once did ring
A picture of the fight I'll fling,
And of a warrior true.

III

A dragon Cheshire troubled sore,
Insatiate was his horrid maw;
Clotted with blood and poisonous gore,

Wide wasted he the land.

IV

Widows and orphans would turn pale,
Were he but named, men's hearts would fail;
Warriors, ne'er known before to quail,
Durst not before him stand.

V

Moston's curst township rued the day
When in its swamp it wallowing lay;
Like the thick dust uprose the spray,
As thrashed his tail the slime.

VI

Remnant of monsters, that the flood
Retiring left (a deadly brood),
Or sprung from some gaunt giant's blood,
Spawn of some devilish time.

VII

Sharp fangs gaped wide a triple row,
Its bloodshot eyes like flames did glow,
Its body like a serpent low,
And scaled o'er as with mail.

VIII

Six claws on either side appear,
Its prey to seize, its prey to tear:
'Twas said, that e'en a grizzly bear
Had crushed its whelming tail.

IX

Where'er it roamed, its upas breath
On all sides, round, above, beneath,
Like plague-sores, belched a horrid death,
'Gainst which 'twas vain to pray.

X

This gallant Venables did hear
(A man he was to Cheshire dear),
And Moston he resolved to clear,
Or perish in the fray.

XI

He vowed unto his ladye fair
To beard the dragon in his lair,
And offered up to heaven a prayer
To grant him strength in fight.

XII

The dragon's swamp scarce had he won,
The beast had seized a widow's son;

He was his mother's only one.
Loud shouted then the knight.

XIII

The morning mists that challenge cleft;
The dragon heard the shout, and left
The child of sense not life bereft,
And rushed on in his might.

XIV

Bold Venables unflinching drew
With steady hand the sounding yew;
Forth, winged by death, the arrow flew,
And pierced the dragon's eye.

XV

Well 'twas he aimed not at his side:
The sharpest bolt had vainly tried
To pierce elsewhere his scale-armed hide,
Or to the heart come nigh.

XV

Fierce through the reeds the dragon crashed,
The swamp to foam in fury lashed,
Wildly at Venables it dashed
The knight ne'er dreamt to fly.

XVII

On the blind side advanced he then,
And smote the beast once and again
Between the scales: soon in the fen
Black heart blood soaked the ground.

XVIII

Far, far, that dying shriek was heard,
E'en distant Beeston's warders stirred,
And springing up some onslaught feared,
So awful was the sound.

XIX

Who, who, may paint the widow's joy?
Again, again, she hugs her boy.
What can the mother now annoy?
Her lost child breathes again!

XX

Broad lands in Moston for that deed
(Fortune's reward, and Valour's meed),
For Cheshire saved in utmost need,
The Venables did gain.

XI

But what than lands he valued mair,

Was a dark tress of glossy hair
(For this, what would not true knight dare?),
Gift of his ladye fair.

XXII

A dying dragon bathed in gore,
Which e'en in death an infant tore,
In arms he proudly thenceforth bore,
Emblazoned on his shield.

XXIII

Still, children at the dragon quake;
The fight to list they'll play forsake;
Still by the name of 'Dragon's lake'
Is called that Moston field.