

The Dragon of Geldern



Long centuries ago, in the country between the Rhine and the Meuse, a horrible dragon is said to have lived.

This animal was the terror of the neighbourhood. Man and beast alike fell victim to its greed, and every living creature fearfully sought a hiding-place whenever the monster, yelling with the pangs of hunger, rushed over fields and meadows. Its terrible cry had some resemblance to the word "Gelre". Many a man had left the land with his family and taken his belongings into safer districts.

At that time a nobleman lived in the Rhenish lowlands, the Lord of Pont, who was renowned as a knight of invincible bravery. Under the great emperor, Charlemagne, he had already in his early boyhood performed heroic deeds with his sword, and since then his weapon had never rested for long in its sheath. With pride, he called himself the father of two sons, as brave and valiant as himself.

When Wichard and Lupold (as these were their names) were grown up, they made up

their minds to rid the country of this terrible monster. The old knight, far from withholding his sons from such a daring enterprise, gave them his blessing, and the youths set out hopefully and with stout hearts to kill the dragon.

Peasants showed them the place where the beast had its den. A huge pear-tree was growing there, covered all over with mistletoe, behind which lay the hole wherein the monster dwelt.

The two knights did not have to wait long, for from the depths of the den a howling cry like "Gelre! Gelre!" was heard, and soon the horrible beast crept forth on its small crooked legs which ended in long ugly feet with sharp claws. Its greenish body, covered with huge impenetrable scales, ended in a long tail like a serpent's. As soon as it perceived the brothers, it darted furiously towards them.

The younger knight grew pale, and involuntarily he stepped backwards, but the elder cried out: "Be of good cheer!" And murmuring to himself a short prayer, he took up his spear. At the very moment the beast was opening its enormous jaws to devour him, he thrust the weapon with such vigour into the gaping cavern that its point came out at the other side of the dragon's head. Reeling and writhing in great pain, the beast drew back. On seeing this, the younger knight took courage again and sent his spear deep into the animal's flanks. With a terrible cry it fell to the ground, and died after a desperate struggle.

Great joy over this glorious victory was felt everywhere in the Rhenish lowlands. In gratitude for what the two valiant brothers had done, the inhabitants of the province chose them as their lords.

At the place that the dragon had been killed, Wichard and Lupold erected a large stronghold they named "Gelre", after the monster's cry. By and by, a town grew out of the small settlement around the castle. It was called Geldern.

In the town-hall at Erkelenz, the old chronicle of Geldern is still preserved. On its title-page you can see the picture of an ugly dragon, and out of its mouth proceed the written words, "Gelre! Gelre!"