

Prince George of Ham



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Forward

*The following tale is a rare fragment of the history of the Little Kingdom, **Prince George of Ham**, or as it was originally known, **Georgius Crassus Ægidianus Draconarius Princeps de Hammo**. It is related to the more famous tale, translated for modern readers as **Farmer Giles of Ham**. The two works, despite some similarities of language, are clearly not written by the same author. Rather it appears that the author of **Prince George** was familiar with the seemingly earlier work of **Farmer Giles**, and consciously attempted to imitate, one may even say mimic, the earlier source’s author. The reader may judge for himself or herself how successful this imitation has been.*

*Like **Giles**, the tale of **George** is a later compilation of events occurring sometime after King Coel but before Arthur and the Seven Kingdoms. It records a time of dangers, or as an Arthurian historian remarked, “many a time that betid they troubles aroused.” Though **Prince George** may not be among the very greatest tales of our western world and its tradition, it has its own peculiar character and solemnity.*

Part One

George Worming was a stout young man, good with horses and dogs but not much at figures or at the Book-Latin. This did not matter much since he was a prince: his proper name was in fact Georgius Crassus Ægidianus Draconarius Princeps de Hammo (a courtesy title); but he seldom used all that. The people of the Little Kingdom called him Our Georgie. His father was King (formerly Farmer) Giles whom you may remember, and from whom he had inherited a red beard and a taste for beer. His mother was Queen Agatha, of whom he was greatly in awe - very properly and in common with all the folk of that realm (save perhaps only Giles). From her he had inherited a certain rotundity and a tenacity of purpose.

"Georgius, my lad," said the King one day, finding Georgie in the neighbourhood of the royal stables chewing a straw. "Well now, what's to do to-day?"

"I dunno, Father," said Georgie. "Things seem a bit slow-like."

"I daresay," said Giles. "I like 'em slow. It costs less, and stops accidents. But there is a matter away up north - folks seem to be complaining about these foreigners again. I had thought you might go and see how things lie."

"I might," said Georgie. "Would there be any fighting?"

"Aye, there might," said Giles. "That'll be for you to say."

"Aw well," said Georgie. "As long as I get back for our horse show I don't mind."

"Good lad," said Giles. "Now take that straw out of your mouth, and get the muck off your boots. You'd best look smart and proper, and take a few knights with you, and a banner and a trumpeter or two. Make a good impression."

"Aw well," said Georgie, removing the straw and looking hard at his boots.

"You'd best go get that horse shod before you go, though," said Giles as he left the royal stables.

George sighed, and he led his horse, Sleipnir, out of the stables toward the blacksmith's shop.

"I have to take you north again?" asked the horse. "And that gloomy blacksmith is going to do things to my feet, isn't he?" Many horses then still knew how to talk in the vulgar, although few could speak Latin. Some of the talking horses had not only knowledge of human tongues but also the wisdom not to use it often lest the people would understand a horse's thoughts and thus complain about them. Farmer Giles' old grey mare who played a part in his rise from farmer to king was a horse with such wisdom, among her other admirable traits. But her son, Sleipnir, did not inherit this wisdom and often expressed his views and, more often, his complaints, whatever the people might think.

"Yes, and I don't want any more complaining from you about it," answered George curtly.

"Humph," said the horse as they entered the blacksmith's shop.

"Well, here's Georgie. Why so glum?" asked the blacksmith with a smile. "Is there trouble? Some disaster perhaps?" The blacksmith of Ham was the same blacksmith who had prepared Giles' ring jerkin back when Giles was still a farmer and Ham just a village, not the capital of a kingdom. His proper name was Fabricius Cunctator, but he was always referred to in the vulgar tongue as Sunny Sam. The growth, wealth, and general happiness of the Ham and the Little Kingdom had done nothing to improve Sam's gloomy disposition. Indeed, such success made him all the more gloomy since he was never happy, unless some disaster, such as a May frost, occurred after he had predicted it. As in the past, the blacksmith daily predicted all sorts of disasters so that when one occurred, he generally had predicted it and could enjoy taking credit for it. Giles, tired of the blacksmith's continuous dire predictions, had upon becoming king issued a strong law against unpleasant prophecy, but this only made the blacksmith keep his prophecies to himself until and if they came true. In the end that mattered little since no one ever paid any attention to the blacksmith's prophecies anyway.

“No, Sam, no disaster this time,” answered George, “My father wants me to go and look at the trouble up north. I need you to shoe my horse before I go.”

“The trouble at the border with the Midland Kingdom? It’s very serious trouble up there, I believe.” Sam believed all trouble was serious. “It’s only a matter of time until that King Augustus Bonifacius brings all of his mighty knights to attack us here. And this time, with no dragon, it will be terrible for us.” The blacksmith started putting shoes on the prince’s horse. The horse was silent except for a “humph” each time the blacksmith lifted one of Sleipnir’s feet.

“It’s not that I mind going,” answered George, ignoring, as usual, both the blacksmith’s dire predictions and the horse’s gripping. “I don’t think it is all that bad there, really.” The blacksmith frowned. “I wanted to take a trip north and told my father so. The problem is more the way that father is making me go. I have to go princely like, with knights and trumpeters. I would rather just go with my friend Suet.”

“You are more likely to find trouble if you go with the knights, I think. Especially up there so close to the giants, dragons, and other terrible monsters.” Sam was issuing a negative prophecy against the law of the king, but assumed (correctly) that Georgie would not report such a minor violation to the throne.

“No, Sam, it is not the trouble I fear. I just wanted to do it my way. Go some places I want to go, adventure-like, without knowing the knights would talk about everywhere I went.”

“Sounds like you have some place special in mind to go?” asked the blacksmith.

The horse nodded his head but kept quiet when George gave him a stern stare.

“If I did, I wouldn’t tell you,” answered George with a laugh.

Neither said anything while the blacksmith finished his work. The horse was quiet except for an occasional “humph.”

Georgie prepared to ride north later that day with four knights and two trumpeters. The knights were proud members of the order of knights at Giles’ court, the Wormwardens, named for the order’s first task, guarding the dragon Chrysophylax after Giles had brought him back from the Wild Hills. While the knights were arranging their baggings, armour, and a royal banner, Giles instructed George on where to go and whom to see. It was more direction than the Prince wanted.

Queen Agatha, who arrived to see her son depart, added to the unwanted instructions. “Now be careful and come back as soon as you can.”

“Yes, mother,” answered George, as he got on his horse.

“You may find trouble, but don’t cause any,” Giles instructed his son.

“Here we go again,” whispered Sleipnir.

“I’ll be careful,” George answered his father, and whispered back to Sleipnir, “They may go on like this forever.”

“Make sure you take care of that fine tunic you’re wearing,” said the Queen.

“And remember you are an example to all the people of the Little Kingdom, as well as the knights and the two Henries,” said Giles. Henry was the name of the King’s favorite trumpeter and the only name remembered by Giles for any trumpeter. So all the court’s trumpeters were called Henry.

“Well, I must be going now to reach Islip by nightfall,” said Giles.

“I hope you have enough food,” George’s mother said.

“I do. Goodbye,” interrupted George, as he led the company away as quickly as he could. His parents, shocked at his sudden departure, both started simultaneously giving new and meaningless instructions, but George ignored them both as he rode away. Queen Agatha was so startled that she tried to stop the progress of the expedition by standing in the way of the last of the trumpeters, making him redirect his horse to avoid the queen. Agatha was a queen of great size and majesty, so the Henry was forced to go way out of his way to join the quickly departing company.

It was dangerous to ignore royalty when they are speaking to you, but George could take no more of their bantering. Besides, he was a royal himself, even if he didn’t feel like one, and he figured he would be gone long enough that even his mother’s wrath would be cooled by the time he returned.

That is how Young George came to be ridding north with a banner displayed and a gay troop at his back one fine morning in May. They passed Quercetum (or Oakley in the vulgar) a neighbouring village north of Ham, near the spot where Giles first met the dragon Chrysophylax years ago. The company continued traveling north east without incident, other than having the trumpeters sound their instruments at every hamlet and announce that “Georgius Crassus Ægidianus Draconarius Princeps de Hammo is on his way north to ensure the protection of the Little Kingdom.” They did so on King Giles’ orders, and refused to stop on George’s. The title Princeps de Hammo, or in the vulgar, Prince of Ham, was an impressive and powerful title, but not nearly as impressive and powerful as Rex de Hammo, the title borne by Giles. The complaints of the Prince’s horse were, of course, likewise ineffective at stopping the Henries’ announcements.

George and his companions spent the first night at the inn of Islip. Islip was between Farthingho and Oxenford and was smaller than Ham, even when Giles was still a farmer and Ham merely a village, not a royal seat. But the village was famous in the Little Kingdom for the fine ale served at its inn. Indeed, the fame of the inn’s ale spread even into the Middle Kingdom, but not so far as the court of Augustus Bonifacius Rex, since such a magnificent court as that refused to believe that anything served in the rustic country could actually be so good. Much of the court had visited Ham years before awaiting the dragon’s treasures, and found the servings of the countryside far inferior to that of court, which, in addition to the fine ale, had a splendid Royal Cook. However, the ladies and lords of the Middle Kingdom’s estimable court were wrong on the matter of the ale at Islip.

George and his companions were from a court, of course, but it was a younger and less civilized court than that of the Middle Kingdom and were quite willing to enjoy and fully appreciate the fine ale of the inn at Islip. As a result of their impressive enjoyment of the fine ale, they were not able to depart early the next morning, as they had planned. Indeed they arose so late, they had no real choice but to wait until after lunch, with its accompanying ale, to finally get on the road to Farthingho to the north.

Farthingho was a village near the northern edge of the Little Kingdom. It was only slightly smaller than Ham was back when Giles was still a farmer. Farthingho had three inns, although none with as good of ale as that served in Islip. Since Farthingho was close to the border with the Middle Kingdom, it greatly feared attacks from Augustus Boniface’s knights. The people of Farthingho expressed these fears to Giles as loudly and as often as they dared, although these concerns, despite their loudness, had been noticed by no one (other than the blacksmith). However, the complaints had become more common and vociferous in the last few weeks causing the complaints to be heard by more than just the blacksmith. Even Giles became concerned about a possible raid from the Middle Kingdom, which prompted George’s expedition to the north to investigate the situation (with suitable royal pomp).

Indeed Farthingho had experienced difficulties from the court of Augustus Bonifacius, especially at times when the Exchequer was particularly limited, before the village had sworn loyalty to Giles and become part of the Little Kingdom. Farthingho was close enough to tax, but far enough away that complaints were not easily heard. Indeed it may have been to overcome this latter problem which caused its residents to learn to complain so loudly.

“Here’s Georgie coming,” shouted the folk of Farthingho as the Prince entered the village just before sunset. George’s arrival was announced by the trumpeters with princely pomp. The townsfolk came out of their homes to warmly welcome the visitors. “You’ve come to protect us from attacks from the Middle Kingdom!” they proclaimed. Then they counted and realized that there was only the prince and four knights, not counting the Henries. “Where are the others? Did they go directly to the border?” they asked.

“No,” said George, “we were sent by my father to have a look at things. I’m sure he’ll send more if it’s needed.”

The townsfolk’s spirits were damped by this. “I tell you it’s needed now,” said one person. “We learned last night that you were coming with knights and we were very happy. Finally our just complaints have been heard. But then some of us saw some knights in Farthingho early this morning. Not knights of the Wormwardens, our knights, but knights wearing the sparkling armour like the

Midland knights wear.” Bright, shiny armour was then in fashion at the court of Augustus Bonifacius.

“Oh,” said George, feeling his mission was going to involve some serious work and worrying that it would interfere with his purpose in suggesting this trip to his father. Then he had an idea about how he might be able to combine both tasks. “I think if that’s the case,” he explained, “then the knights and I best have a look around town, to make sure everything is alright.”

The people of Farthingho and the knights were all agreeable to this. Although the knights would have preferred to visit an inn first, they understood that business was business. “Let’s split up,” said George to the knights. “I’ll check out the eastern part of town, which I know pretty well.”

With that the Prince and the knights were off. George did in fact know the eastern part of Farthingho well since he had visited it several times lately. He had a fondness for a young lady, Anna, who lived there and had visited her often in the last several weeks. It was for the purpose of visiting Anna that George wanted to take a trip north, before the politics of the situation made this a working trip under the directions of Giles. Now, he thought he could investigate the situation starting at her house. Anna’s house was the nicest house in the eastern part of town, on a hilltop overlooking Farthingho. As such it was a good spot to learn the happenings of the town and, as was just as important to George, the happenings of Anna.

As he rode up the hill to the house, George saw Anna’s father, Joseph, standing at the front door of the home. Joseph was a farmer, as Giles once was. Joseph was one of the more successful farmers of Farthingho and, therefore, an important local figure. He was respected by many and despised by more than a few (which is not unusual for those with wealth and success).

“Hello, Joseph,” George shouted as he approached the house.

“Well, it’s George,” Joseph happily shouted in reply. “Please come up, Prince.”

George wondered about the farmer’s welcome. Joseph usually didn’t welcome him or refer to George as Prince. Joseph seemed to view George as an unwelcome visitor to his home and an entirely unsuitable visitor for his daughter. Joseph’s problem with George was that he was not a farmer but a royal type who dealt with less honest things such as dragons, giants, and courts. This time, however, Joseph seemed happy to see George and even called him prince. George whispered to Sleipnir “Anna must have finally convinced him to like me.”

“I’m still worried,” replied the horse.

George dismounted and extended his hand to shake Joseph’s hand. Joseph not only shook George’s hand, he grabbed it with force and started to pull George into the house.

As he was approaching the doorway to the home, George heard Anna’s voice from inside the home. “It’s a trap, Georgie! Run away!” George looked up to see several knights running out of the house, clearly knights of Augustus Bonifacius. Joseph held George’s arm tightly as the knights approached.

Sleipnir came up and gave Joseph a kick to the shin. George pulled away from the farmer’s grip and started running away from the house. But after two steps he tripped on a rock and rolled down the hill. The knights ran after him as fast as their armour would allow. Sleipnir followed more slowly, not wanting to trip. Joseph limped after the others, giving the horse a mean look.

George rolled most of the way down the hill before he stopped. He was sore and rose slowly. He rose so slowly that knights of the Middle Kingdom were there before he finished. They restrained him with both their hands and their swords. When George tried to move away, the grips got tighter and the sword points closer.

George knew he could not get away without help. “Sleipnir,” he shouted to the horse, “go tell the Wormwardens that I have been captured.”

Sleipnir replied “I’ll try, but I doubt I’ll be able to find them in time. I doubt I can even get away now. I’m already tired, you know.”

George yelled, “You’ll never make if you don’t start. And if you don’t start now, I’ll give you to a deaf farmer that’ll work you to death and ignore your complaints. Now get!”

Sleipnir did then get, trotting down the hill with a barely audible “Humph.” He walked down many lanes, wide and narrow, and he did not find any knights. The knights had, as George ordered, scattered about the town. Just as the horse was wondering whether he had done all his duty required, Sleipnir saw one of the trumpeters Giles had ordered to accompany George.

“Hello, Henry,” the horse said to the trumpeter, “have you seen any of the Wormwardens?”

“Yes, I ‘ust saw one of ‘em,” he answered, none too clearly.

“Where? Which part of town was he exploring?”

“A ‘ery important part, the inn o’er there.”

“You’d better go get him then.”

“Why don’t you get ‘im, if you want ‘im so bad,” answered the trumpeter.

“Because, if it’s like most inns, it wouldn’t let me enter. Now go get the knight!” commanded the horse.

“Now who you be,” the trumpeter said with an attempt to look important (and sober), “to be givin’ orders to a me, a royal servant of Ægidius Draconarius, King of the Little Kingdom, and you just a horse.”

“Listen here, Henry, the Prince has been kidnapped by Midland knights while you’ve been drinking too much ale, again. So you better go retrieve that Wormwarden from the inn so we can try to save George.”

“He been kidnapped, eh? I guess I’ll go get the knight.” After a minute, the Henry staggered out of the inn with the Wormwarden, Sir Stephen, who followed with an even greater stagger.

“This drunken bunch will never be able to rescue George,” thought Sleipnir.

“Hey, horse, this Henry here says our Prince has been taken . . . away somewhere,” said Stephen with less slur than expected, but not so little as to give the horse much hope.

“Yes, George was kidnapped by knights of Augustus Bonifacius Rex while you were supposed to be searching the town.”

The knight gave Sleipnir a mean look and said, “First this Henry orders me to leave the fine inn where I was searchin’, and now you horse are criticizin’ me, a Wormwarden of Ægidius Draconarius Rex, for the way I search. I already looked at the part of town I was suppose to look at and didn’t see no knights.” That was true, as far as it went; he had looked there, just not very long or hard. “Then I thought,” continued the knight, “where would a knight be most likely found? An inn of course. So I continued my search here at this inn.”

Sleipnir had to admit there was a certain logic to that, based on the horse’s knowledge of knights, but it wouldn’t help rescue George. “How are we going to get Prince George back?” the horse asked.

The Wormwarden said, “Let’s have the Henry blow on his horn to summon our other knights,” showing he had not had so much ale as to dim his wits (at least not completely).

The Henry blew his trumpet, and soon the rest of the Wormwardens (all sober) and many of the townsfolk (mostly sober) had gathered near the inn.

Sir Stephen told what had happened to George. The knight, who had gathered yet more of his wits, divided up the Wormwardens into two groups of two, with one party going with Sleipnir to Joseph’s house to see if George was still there, while the other party dashed toward the border with the Middle Kingdom to prevent Augustus Bonifacius’ knights from leaving the Little Kingdom with George. Many of the townsfolk joined one of the Wormwarden parties, while others marked the occasion by creating a party of their own at the inn. Others of the townsfolk, fearing imminent trouble, went back to their homes, barred their doors, and shuttered their windows.

The Wormwardens were not able to find George at Joseph’s house (which had been deserted), the border, or elsewhere in Farthingho, although they all searched both long and hard this time. They searched all night and much of the next morning until they were forced to conclude that Midland knights had returned to the Middle Kingdom with George as a prisoner, and that Joseph and Anna had accompanied them. Sir Stephen led the Wormwardens, Sleipnir, and the Henries back to Ham to tell the

King that his son had been taken captive by Giles' great enemy, Augustus Bonifacius Rex. The party was so concerned about George's safety (and Giles' reaction) that they did not stop for ale on their return to Ham and only rarely for food.

This was only chapter one; for the complete story, order the chapbook, "Prince George of Ham" (listed under "Special Publications) - now available for the special bargain price of \$5.00 US per copy postpaid (previously listed at \$7500 per copy on our website. . . oops).