

LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER.

In olden times there was a man named Offerus, of such immense size and strength that men looked upon him almost as a giant, but they loved him greatly for his kindness and good nature. Offerus determined to employ himself in serving others, and while he was very young he set forth on a journey to find the most mighty prince the world contained, to whom he might offer himself. He was directed to the Court of a powerful king, who rejoiced in possessing a servant of such enormous size and strength, and Offerus was well content, until one day he saw his royal master, at the mention of the name of the devil, make the sign of the Cross in evident alarm.

"What is that for?" asked Offerus.

"Because I fear the devil," replied the king.

"Then if you fear him, he is more powerful than you, and I will serve you no more," said Offerus. "I have resolved to give my strength to him who is mightiest, so I must take the devil for my master," and with that he left the Court.

After having travelled far, Offerus came upon a large company of horsemen, whose chief was black, and who spoke to him, asking what he sought.

"Oh, I am seeking the devil. I wish to serve him."

"I am he. If you wish to belong to my servants, I will receive you. Follow me." And thus Offerus was enrolled amongst the servants of Satan.

It happened that in one of their journeys the troop came to a large Cross standing at the corner of a road. The devil ordered them to retreat.

"What is that for?" said Offerus.

"Because I fear the image of Christ."

"Then you are not so mighty as He, so I will serve this Christ." And Offerus passed alone before the Cross, and continued his journey.

After awhile he met a holy hermit, of whom he inquired where he should find Christ.

"Everywhere," was the answer.

"I don't understand that," said Offerus, "but if such is the truth, can a strong man like myself be of use to Him?"

"You can serve Him by prayer, by fasting, by vigils, my son," replied the holy man. But a shadow passed across the face of Offerus.

"Is there no other way in which to please Him?" he asked.

The hermit took him to the edge of a torrent, which came down from the mountains, and said: "The poor pilgrims who wish to cross this stream get wet, and are almost borne away by its force sometimes. Stay here, and bear across all those who come to the bank, and if you do this simple service for the love of Christ, He will one day acknowledge you among His followers."

The plan pleased Offerus, and he began to build a little cabin, in which he dwelt by the water's edge, and by day and by night he carried across the torrent any pilgrim who asked his help.

One night, when he was sleeping, Offerus heard a childish voice calling him by his name three times. It was a dark night, and the stream was very deep and strong, but the great powerful man had no fear, and taking the little child who had called to him upon his shoulders, he stepped into the water.

When he reached the middle of the stream the torrent was unusually strong, and as he struggled through it with difficulty he had never felt before, it seemed as if the child he carried became as heavy as a leaden weight. The thunder rolled overhead, lightning gleamed upon the water, and Offerus felt as if his burden increased every moment.

"How is it, little child, that you appear so heavy?" he said at last. "It seems as if I was carrying the world itself."

"Not only the world, but He who made it," said the little silvery voice. "I am Christ, thy Maker, thy God, thy Master. In return for the service thou hast offered Me, I baptize thee, in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and I name thee 'Christopher,' the bearer of Christ."

They gained the shore, and a sweetness filled the soul of the newly-made Christian. He fell prostrate in adoration before the Divine Child, who thus addressed him:

"Rise, Christopher, and fix thy staff in the earth. To-morrow it shall bloom with white and fragrant roses, as a token that Christ has been thy burden this night," and then the Holy Child disappeared amidst the bright and glowing flame.

The sun's earliest ray fell upon Christopher, still kneeling in silent adoration as he had knelt before his Lord and Master, and by his side was the staff, which had been dry and withered, now covered with fragrant roses such as once bloomed in Eden.