



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Legend of St. Christopher

Unknown writer

There was a mighty man living in the land of Canaan. He was so strong and could carry such heavy loads that he was named Offero, meaning "The Bearer." In those days men born in poverty were wont to join themselves to the rich and noble and serve them; in return, they were cared for all through life by their masters.

Offero was proud of his strength, and said he would serve no one but the greatest king on earth. So he went from one country to another, until he came to one where the king was richer and more powerful than all other kings whom he had seen. Here Offero stayed, and entered the service of this great ruler.

But one day, as he stood by the king in the Palace, a minstrel sang and played. In his song, now and then, he uttered the name of Satan. Every time he did so, the king trembled and made the sign of the cross. Now Offero had never heard of Satan, and he asked the king why he trembled. At first the king made no answer.

"Tell me," said Offero, "or I will leave thee."

"I tremble," said the king, "because I fear Satan. I make the sign of the cross that he may have no power over me, for he is as wicked as he is strong."

"Dost thou fear him?" asked Offero. "Then will I leave thee and seek him, for I can serve no master who is afraid of a greater."

Thus Offero left the king and went off in search of Satan. As he was crossing a great desert, he came upon a mighty being who marched at the head of a vast army. This great one hardly looked at the giant Offero, but as he passed him he asked:—

"Whither goest thou? whom dost thou seek?"

"I seek Satan," said Offero. "I would have him for my master, for he is the mightiest being on earth."

"I am he," said Satan. "Come with me, and thy service shall be easy and pleasant."

Offero joined the army of Satan, and went marching on with it. By and by they came to a place where four roads met, and by the wayside stood a cross. When

Satan saw the cross, he turned in great haste, and led his army quickly away.

"Why is this?" asked Offero. "What is this cross? and why dost thou avoid it?"

Satan gave no answer.

"Tell me," said Offero, "or I will leave thee."

Then Satan said:—

"I fear the cross because upon it Christ hung, and I fly from it, lest he destroy me."

Then Offero left Satan and went in search of Christ. After many days he came upon a holy man, and asked him, as he had asked others, where he should find Christ. The holy man began to teach him, and said to him:—

"Thou art right. Christ is the greatest king on earth and in heaven. But it is no light thing to serve him. He will lay great burdens on thee. And first thou must fast."

"I will not fast," said Offero; "for my strength makes me a good servant, and if I fast I shall be weak."

"Besides, thou must pray."

"I know not how to pray, neither will I learn," said the proud giant. Then the holy man said:—

"Wilt thou use thy strength? Find out some broad, deep river, with a swift current, so swift that men cannot cross it."

"I know such a stream," said Offero.

"Then go to it, and help those who struggle with its waters. Carry across on thy broad shoulders the weak and the little ones. This is a good work, and it may be that Christ will be pleased."

Offero was glad to be given this task. He built a hut on the bank of the river, and there he dwelt. Whenever one tried to cross the stream, Offero gave him aid. Truly, he was The Bearer, for he carried many across on his shoulders, so that not one was lost. For a staff he used a great palm-tree, which he plucked up by the roots.

Long he lived in his hut, and great was the help which he gave to travellers. At last, one night, as he was resting, he heard a voice, like that of a weak child, saying:—

"Offero, wilt thou bear me over?"

He went to the bank of the river, but he could find no one. He went back to his

hut and lay down. Again he heard the same voice. This happened three times. Then he lighted a lantern, and went out to search the country about. Now he came upon a little child, who begged him:—

There was once a mighty man living in the land of Canaan. He was so strong and could carry such heavy loads that he was named Offero, meaning "The Bearer." In those days, men born in poverty would join themselves to the rich and noble and serve them; in return, their masters cared for them all their lives.

Offero was proud of his strength and said he would serve no one but the greatest king on earth. So he traveled from one country to another, until he came to a land where the king was richer and more powerful than any other king he had seen. Here Offero stayed and entered the service of this great ruler.

But one day, as he stood beside the king in the palace, a minstrel sang and played. In his song, now and then, he spoke the name of Satan. Every time he did, the king trembled and made the sign of the cross. Now, Offero had never heard of Satan, and he asked the king why he trembled. At first the king gave no answer.

"Tell me," said Offero, "or I will leave you."

"I tremble," said the king, "because I fear Satan. I make the sign of the cross so that he may have no power over me, for he is as wicked as he is strong."

"You fear him?" asked Offero. "Then I will leave you and go find him, for I cannot serve a master who is afraid of someone greater."

So Offero left the king and set off in search of Satan. As he was crossing a great desert, he came upon a mighty being marching at the head of a vast army. This great one barely looked at the giant Offero, but as he passed him, he asked:

"Where are you going? Who are you looking for?"

"I am looking for Satan," said Offero. "I want him for my master, for he is the mightiest being on earth."

"I am he," said Satan. "Come with me, and your service will be easy and pleasant."

Offero joined Satan's army and went marching on with it. After a while they came to a place where four roads met, and by the roadside stood a cross. When Satan saw the cross, he turned in great haste and quickly led his army away.

"Why is this?" asked Offero. "What is this cross, and why do you avoid it?"

Satan gave no answer.

"Tell me," said Offero, "or I will leave you."

Then Satan said:

"I fear the cross because Christ hung upon it, and I flee from it so that he will not destroy me."

Then Offero left Satan and went in search of Christ. After many days he came upon a holy man and asked him, as he had asked others, where he could find Christ. The holy man began to teach him, and said:

"You are right. Christ is the greatest king on earth and in heaven. But it is no small thing to serve him. He will lay great burdens on you. And first, you must fast."

"I will not fast," said Offero, "for my strength makes me a good servant, and if I fast I will grow weak."

"Then you must pray."

"I don't know how to pray, and I will not learn," said the proud giant. Then the holy man said:

"Will you use your strength? Find a broad, deep river with a current so swift that men cannot cross it."

"I know such a river," said Offero.

"Then go to it, and help those who struggle in its waters. Carry the weak and the little ones across on your broad shoulders. This is good work, and it may be that Christ will be pleased."

Offero was glad to be given this task. He built a hut on the bank of the river, and there he lived. Whenever anyone tried to cross the river, Offero helped them. Truly, he was The Bearer, for he carried many across on his shoulders, so that not one was lost. For a staff he used a great palm tree, which he had pulled up by the roots.

He lived in his hut for a long time, and great was the help he gave to travelers. At last, one night, as he was resting, he heard a voice like that of a small child, saying:

"Offero, will you carry me across?"

He went to the bank of the river, but he could find no one. He went back to his hut and lay down. Again he heard the same voice. This happened three times. Then he lit a lantern and went out to search the land around him. There he came upon a little child, who begged him:

"Offero, Offero, carry me across tonight."

He lifted the child and placed him on his broad shoulders; he took his sturdy staff and began to cross the flood. But all at once the winds blew, the waves rose, and there was a roaring in his ears, as if the great ocean had been let loose. The weight on his shoulders pressed him down more and more, until he feared he would sink. But he held firmly to his sturdy staff, and at last he reached the other bank and set his burden safely on the ground.



"What have I carried?" cried Offero. "It could not have been heavier if it had been the whole world."

Then the child answered:

"You wished to serve me, and I have chosen you as my servant. You have carried not the whole world, but the king of the whole world, on your shoulders. So that you may know who I am, plant your staff in the earth."

Offero did so, and behold — out of the bare palm staff sprang leaves, and among the leaves were rich clusters of dates. Then Offero knew that it was Christ he had carried, and he fell down at his feet.

Offero was now in the service of Christ, and not long after, he went to Samos, where the heathens were killing the Christians. A man struck him, but the giant only said:

"I am a servant of Christ. I cannot strike you back."

He was bound with chains and taken to Dagnus, king of Lycia. So mighty was the giant that Dagnus fainted with fear when he saw him. When Dagnus came to his senses, he asked the giant:

"Who are you?"

"My name," he said, "was Offero, the Bearer, but now I serve Christ. I have carried him on my shoulders. For this I am now called Christ-offero, the Christ-Bearer."

And that is how Christopher won his name, and because he was true to his name, he is called St. Christopher.

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