

# Michael According to the Conceptions of Simple Folk

The following stories show that also simple people like peasants and miners thought about Michael.

## **Why the Sole of Man's Foot Is not Even**

When the devils had rebelled against God and fled to earth, they also took the sun with them. The Emperor of the devils had stuck it on a lance, which he carried on his shoulder. But the earth complained that it was being burned up by the sun. Then God sent the Holy Archangel Michael to take the sun away from the devil in some way. The Holy Archangel came down to earth and became a friend of the Emperor of the devils. But the Emperor knew that something was in the wind and was on his guard. Once on a time, when both were strolling around on earth, they came to the ocean. Here they proceeded to take a bath, and the devil thrust the lance with the sun in the ground. After they had bathed for a while, the Holy Archangel said: "Now let us dive and see who goes down deeper."

The devil answered: "Well and good!" Thereupon St. Michael dove down and, between his teeth, brought up sand from the bottom. Now it was the devil's turn. But he was afraid that, while he was gone, the Archangel might steal the sun. He spit on the ground, and out of his spittle a magpie was formed, which was to guard the sun until the devil had brought up sand from the bottom of the ocean. As soon as the devil had disappeared in the water, St. Michael made the sign of the Cross with his hand. And immediately the ocean was covered with ice that was nine ells thick. Then he seized the sun and fled up to Heaven. But the magpie croaked as loud as she could. When the devil heard the magpie's voice, he felt that something was wrong and returned as quickly as possible.

But, when he came to the surface, the ocean was frozen and he could not get out. Hurriedly, he returned to the bottom, picked up a stone, broke the ice therewith, and pursued the astute Archangel. Michael had already one foot in Heaven, when the devil grasped his other foot and, with his claws, tore out a large piece of flesh from the sole. Wounded, St. Michael appeared before the Lord and handed Him the sun. Weeping and lamenting he said: "See, Oh Lord, how disfigured I am!"

Then spake the Lord: "Do not grieve! Henceforth all men shall have an uneven sole!" And thus has it remained.

## Miner's Song

When I come to my place  
St. Michael is standing there.  
He doth teach me and show  
Where I should use  
Mallet and bar.

– From Bohemia

## The Devil's Scythe

In olden times, the people of Hédé mowed the grass with scissors and thus took a long time for their work. Only the devil, who came sometimes to this place to fetch big stones from the building erected on Mont Saint-Michel, owned a tool with which grass could be mowed in a very short time, but he used this tool only at night and refused to lend it to anybody. This tool was undoubtedly magic. It cut the grass in swaths. And as soon as the grass was dry, it could be stacked up in piles.

One day Satan promised one of his friends, who was a good-for-nothing, to mow his grass during the night. St. Michael heard of this and put iron harrow-teeth in the meadow. Then he hid in a hollow oak-tree and awaited the night. His whole body stuck in the tree and only his head was above the leaves.

Around midnight, St. Michael heard someone whistling behind a hedge and saw the devil approaching the meadow. When Satan arrived at its edge, he sharpened his tool with a hammer and then placed it on top of a long stick. Now he began to mow with regular movements of his arms. The grass fell down in long swaths.

When the tool struck the first harrow-tooth, it cracked. Satan cursed like a genuine devil, but continued to work. When striking the second tooth, the tool broke, and the devil said to himself: "Well, my scythe is broken. I must take it to a smith." Still cursing, he betook himself to the village of Dingé.

The next morning, St. Michael went to the smith of Dingé and asked whether someone had left a tool to be mended. "Yes," answered the smith. "It was a tool the likes of which I've never seen."

"Quite right," said St. Michael. "I want thee to make a similar tool. I'll explain to thee later what to do with it."

"All right," answered the smith, and began to hammer out a tool like that left by the devil. And then St. Michael explained to him how a scythe could be used. But, unlike the devil, he loaned the scythe to others and taught everyone how to use it. And so this tool has become generally known.

When Satan noticed scythes in the hands of all the people, he saw at once that his secret had been discovered. And he also guessed that St. Michael had spied on him. Therefore, waxing furious and exceedingly angry, he challenged Michael to a duel. “Why not?” said the Archangel. “But only under one condition. The duel must take place in a baking oven.”

Satan agreed, and both betook themselves to the next village. On the way, St. Michael found a small wooden peg, such as the peasant women use to break their hemp and flax before combing it. He picked up the peg, put it under his arm, and walked on.

Upon arriving at the oven, the devil grasped the shovel at one end and slipped inside. St. Michael followed him. And while the devil pulled up the pole that was much too long to fit in the oven, St. Michael hammered on Satan’s head as hard as he could.

“Mercy, mercy!” howled Satan. “Thou wilt kill me.”

“I will spare thee,” said Michael “under the condition that thou wilt leave the country and return nevermore.” The bargain was agreed on and henceforth the devil has never been seen again in the province of Hédé.

– French Legend

## **What the Peasants of Normandy Tell about Michael**

St. Michael and the Devil lived close to one another. When they sat together one evening in winter, they began to quarrel. Satan said that his power had no limits. But Michael said that God alone was almighty.

“Well, call to God for help and build a castle,” said the Devil. “I’ll build one too and we shall see which is the better.” St. Michael agreed. Soon afterwards Satan sent out a multitude of small devils. These were to fetch huge granite blocks from all the corners of the earth. Then the work was begun. An enormous castle arose on an island that was surrounded by surging waves and visited by tempests. The small devils dragged more and more blocks to this spot, so that a whole granite mountain rose out of the ocean. The Devil was proud of this work. St. Michael took less pains. He erected on the shore, out of ice crystals, transparent walls and dauntless towers adorned with delicate columns. This sparkling castle shining in diamantine splendor outshone the somber granite masses.

The proud devil had to admit that he had been defeated and withdrew. But envy prevented him from sleeping. When he could stand it no longer, he asked St. Michael whether he would be willing to exchange castles. Michael agreed.

But when summer came, the Devil's castle melted under the hot sun, while Michael's castle is still standing. It is the Mont Saint-Michel.

Now the Devil was forced to live in a simple hut near the shore. But he owned fertile fields and well-watered meadows, hills that were planted with high trees, and green valleys. But Michael owned nothing but sand dunes and would have starved without praying. After spending a few years in this poverty-stricken condition, St. Michael got tired of it. He went to the Devil, saying: "Let me have thy land. I will cultivate it in the best possible way and then divide the harvest with thee." The Devil agreed to this offer and Michael went on: "I do not want thee to complain about the bargain later on. Choose what thou wantest: what grows above the earth or what grows underneath it."

The Devil cried: "What grows above!"

"All right," said Michael. Six hours later nothing was planted on the Devil's enormous domains except turnips, carrots, and onions. Satan harvested nothing and wanted to abolish the agreement. But St. Michael, who had begun to enjoy this kind of work, would not hear of it. He said: "To make up for thy loss, I will give thee this year all that grows underneath the earth."

Now the Devil rejoiced very much. But in the following spring all the fields were covered with corn, oats, barley, and cabbage. And so the Devil, for the second time, harvested nothing. Anger made him look as red as a lobster. Just as he set out to strike St. Michael, the Archangel kicked him so violently in the rump that Satan was hurled through space like a ball. Even today, traces of his horns and claws can be seen on the rocks of Mortain, where he fell down on earth. Bruised and flayed for all time, he arose limping and looked at the fateful mountain. There dwelled a being who was stronger than he. And so, giving over all his fields, meadows, and forests to St. Michael, the devil established his domain in another sphere.

– Legend from Normandy