

Then Saint Michael rising up in anger cried, his voice like thunder:

“Before me, you rascal, you!
How dare you? - Before me!”

Satan, in a desperate state fled while the saint grabbing a stick, ran after him. They rushed through the caves, around the pillars, running up the staircases, galloping along the cornices, leaping from gargoyle to gargoyle. The poor demon, who was as sick as a dog, soiled the house of the saint. At last he stopped on the last terrace, at the very top, from where one can see the vast bay, with its distant towns, its sand beaches and pastures. He could no longer escape; the saint kicked violently his backside, shooting him through the air like a cannonball. The devil went through the sky like a javelin and fell heavily in front of the town of Mortain. His forehead horns and limbs' claws penetrating deep into the rock, which, as to this day, keeps for eternity the traces of this fall of Satan. He got up again, limping and crippled for time's end; and looking at the fatal mount, standing out like a peak against the setting sun, he knew that he would always loose the unfair fight. He went away walking lamely to distant lands, forsaking his fields, his hills, his valleys and his marshes to his enemy. And this is how Saint Michael, the patron saint of Normandy, vanquished the devil.

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very village in France lives by the influence of some patron saint, according to the characters of its people. Saint Michael watches over Lower Normandy, Saint Michael,

the beaming and triumphant angel, the sword-carrier, Heaven's hero, the Victorious, Satan's conqueror. But here is how the peasant from Lower Normandy - cunning, deceitful and tricky - understands and narrates the struggle between the great saint and the devil.

To dodge the devil's malice, his neighbour, Saint Michael built himself, in the open seas, this residence worthy of an archangel; and, indeed, only a saint like him could build a house of such magnificence. But as he still feared the attacks of the wicked one, he surrounded his estate with quicksand even more treacherous than the sea.

The devil lived in a humble sea cottage on the beach, but he owned all the salt marshes, the rich lands where the finest crop grows, the rich valleys and all the fertile hills of the country, while the saint only reigned over the sand dunes. Therefore Satan was rich, and Saint Michael was as poor as a church mouse. After a few years of fasting, the saint grew sick of it and thought up of some deal to make with the devil; but it isn't so easy to do, especially as Satan looked well after his harvest. Saint Michael took about six months to come up with an idea; then one morning he walked to the shore.

The demon was eating his soup in front of his door when he saw the saint. Promptly he ran to him, kissing his sleeve's hem, inviting him in and offering refreshments. Saint Michael drank a bowl of milk and said: "I have come here to offer you a good bargain."

Naive and trustful, the devil answered:

"You bet!"

"Here it is. First, you will give me all your land."

Quite perturbed, Satan, tried to speak. But the saint went on:

"You must listen first. If you give me your land, I'll do the entire keeping: the work, the ploughing, the sowing, the manure, that is, everything! and we will share the crop equally. What about it?"

The devil, who is naturally lazy, accepted. He only asked if he could also have a few of those delicious grey mullet, which are fished along the solitary mount. Saint Michael promised the fish.

They shook hands on it and spat on the ground to seal the bargain. Then the saint went on: "Now, I don't want you to have any reason to complain, so, you can choose which part of the crop you like best: that which grows above ground or that which sprout in the ground." Satan cried out: "I will take whatever grows above ground."

"Then, we have a deal!" the saint said.

However, six months later, all over the devil's large estate, one could see nothing but carrots, turnips, onions, salsifis, all plants which tender roots are good and scrumptious but whose useless leaves are only good for animal fodder. Satan got nothing and wanted to break the contract, calling Saint Michael "mischievous". But the saint, had taken a liking to agriculture; he went back to the devil and said: "I can assure you, I didn't plan it to be like that; it just happened that way and it is only an accident. And to make up for you, this year you can have everything that grows under the ground." "Very well," said Satan.

The next spring, all the evil spirit's land was covered with golden wheat, oats as big as flowers, flax, beautiful colza, red clover, peas, cabbage, artichokes, everything that seeds or fruits in the sunlight. Once more Satan got nothing, but this time he really lost his temper. He claimed his fields and ploughable back and was deaf to any new offers by his neighbour. A whole year went by. From the top of his lonely manor Saint Michael looked at the far away and bountiful land, watching the devil conducting work, taking in his crop, threshing the wheat, quite perturbed and, angry at his helplessness. As he could no longer deceive Satan, he decided to revenge, and he went out to invite him to dinner for the following Monday. "You haven't been very fortunate dealing with me," he said; "I know it, and I don't want any hard feelings between you and me. Come to dine with me. I'll give you some good things to eat."



Satan, who was as greedy as he was lazy, accepted eagerly. On the very day he put on his best clothes and set out for the Mount. Saint Michael served him a magnificent meal. First there was a vol-au-vent, with cocks'

crests and kidneys and sausages, then two big grey mullet with cream sauce, and a turkey stuffed with chestnuts stewed in wine, then a salt-marsh lamb, tender as a cake, with vegetables melting in the mouth and lovely hot pancakes whose perfume spread a delicious smell of butter. They drank young sweet and sparkling cider and heady red wine, and after each course they drank old apple brandy to make more room for more food to come. The devil drank and ate like a horse; in fact he ate so much that he started to be sick.