

# BRIAN CATLING

FLASH 500

A MYSTERY OF REMNANT

In the south wall of Dorchester Abbey in the Thames Valley is a faded wall painting of St. Christopher. The enormous figure dwells inside a porous layered dimension, between the glory of his intense coloured arrival and the last faded shadow of his departure. The contours and volumes shift each year. In 1969 some of his balance was erased. One day this stained giant will walk clear of his residue and trust us to remember his passing in the dim rings of our own recall.

Before he was called Christopher he was another being.

Old Reprobus was a monster, they say. Over seven feet tall in his studded leather sandals that were dusted in the dry red clay of Canaan's land. Those that remembered him tell of a man whose face was difficult to behold. An open countenance hewn dark. A peasant broadness set agape in a restless misunderstanding of all that passed him by. Eyes fierce and gnawing, so that they might worry at all he questioned. And he questioned everything because he understood little.

Some of the Eastern orthodoxy says that he was of the Cynocephali. A dog-headed man. A cannibal mercenary, flagrantly seeking the ultimate tyranny of power. This abject quest drove him across many cruel kingdoms until he reached the exhausted crossroad of vision. A hermit in a sharp desert instructed him to wash his sins away in penance; a prayer with each pilgrim he ferried across dangerous waters. One day a small radiant child climbed onto his shoulders. Midway across where the stones are uneven the infant gained a prodigious weight, more than lead, denser than granite or iron was he. The giant stumbled and began to buckle under the enormity of it.

'Thou art heavier than a mountain little master.'

'That is because I carry the weight of the world.'

The words made him dig his staff deeper and broaden the muscles of his back and brace his spine like a great oak. Resolute and defiant he strove towards the shore, finally making firmer ground and lifting down the now insubstantial apparition.

'I heard that the Christ was a grown up man, who died nailed to a tree', said the giant.

'That is true, but I have no memory of him yet as a man. Each year of a sacred life is sealed as it grows in and out of the time you live. Like the rings of a tree. The before and after are known by the pressure that keeps the circles formed, still and contained, but it is only the vertical energies of sap and sunshine that feed and shape them as they pass through its core not its contours. It is the same with ghosts and our material presence. How much do you think I weigh?'

'Here without the world, less than a pennyweight more than a wren.'

The child smiled, vanished and said,

'Or the same as a feather understood or ignored in the soul of a stone.'