

Baucis And Philemon

Jonathan Swift

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IMITATED FROM THE EIGHTH BOOK OF OVID.

IN ancient times, as story tells,
The saints would often leave their cells,
And stroll about, but hide their quality,
To try good people's hospitality.
It happened on a winter night,
As authors of the legend write,
Two brother hermits, saints by trade,
Taking their tour in masquerade,
Disguised in tattered habits, went
To a small village down in Kent;
Where, in the strollers' canting strain,
They begged from door to door in vain;
Tried every tone might pity win,
But not a soul would let them in.
Our wandering saints in woeful state,
Treated at this ungodly rate,
Having through all the village passed,
To a small cottage came at last,
Where dwelt a good honest old yeoman,
Called, in the neighbourhood, Philemon,
Who kindly did these saints invite
In his poor hut to pass the night;
And then the hospitable Sire
Bid goody Baucis mend the fire;
While he from out the chimney took
A flitch of bacon off the hook,
And freely from the fattest side
Cut out large slices to be fried;
Then stepped aside to fetch 'em drink,
Filled a large jug up to the brink,
And saw it fairly twice go round;
Yet (what is wonderful) they found
'Twas still replenished to the top,
As if they ne'er had touched a drop
The good old couple were amazed,
And often on each other gazed;

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For both were frightened to the heart,
And just began to cry, What art!
Then softly turned aside to view,
Whether the lights were burning blue.
The gentle pilgrims soon aware on't,
Told 'em their calling, and their errant;
"Good folks, you need not be afraid,
We are but saints," the hermits said;
"No hurt shall come to you or yours;
But, for that pack of churlish boors,
Not fit to live on Christian ground,
They and their houses shall be drowned;
Whilst you shall see your cottage rise,
And grow a church before your eyes."
They scarce had spoke; when fair and soft,
The roof began to mount aloft;
Aloft rose every beam and rafter,
The heavy wall climbed slowly after.
The chimney widened, and grew higher,
Became a steeple with a spire.
The kettle to the top was hoist,
And there stood fastened to a joist;
But with the upside down, to show
Its inclination for below.
In vain; for a superior force
Applied at bottom, stops its course,
Doomed ever in suspense to dwell,
'Tis now no kettle, but a bell.
A wooden jack, which had almost
Lost, by disuse, the art to roast,
A sudden alteration feels,
Increased by new intestine wheels;
And what exalts the wonder more,
The number made the motion slower.
The flyer, though 't had leaden feet,
Turned round so quick, you scarce could see 't;
But slackened by some secret power,
Now hardly moves an inch an hour.
The jack and chimney near allied,
Had never left each other's side;
The chimney to a steeple grown,
The jack would not be left alone;
But up against the steeple reared,
Became a clock, and still adhered;
And still its love to household cares
By a shrill voice at noon declares,
Warning the cook-maid not to burn
That roast meat which it cannot turn.
The groaning chair began to crawl,
Like a huge snail along the wall;
There stuck aloft in public view;

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And with small change a pulpit grew.
The porringers, that in a row
Hung high, and made a glittering show,
To a less noble substance changed,
Were now but leathern buckets ranged.
The ballads pasted on the wall,
Of Joan of France, and English Moll,
Fair Rosamond, and Robin Hood,
The Little Children in the Wood,
Now seemed to look abundance better,
Improved in picture, size, and letter;
And high in order placed, describe
The heraldry of every tribe.
A bedstead of the antique mode,
Compact of timber, many a load,
Such as our ancestors did use,
Was metamorphosed into pews:
Which still their ancient nature keep,
By lodging folks disposed to sleep.
The cottage, by such feats as these,
Grown to a church by just degrees,
The hermits then desired their host
To ask for what he fancied most.
Philemon having paused a while,
Returned 'em thanks in homely style;
Then said, "My house is grown so fine,
Methinks I still would call it mine:
I'm old, and fain would live at ease,
Make me the Parson, if you please."
He spoke, and presently he feels
His grazier's coat fall down his heels;
He sees, yet hardly can believe,
About each arm a pudding sleeve;
His waistcoat to a cassock grew,
And both assumed a sable hue;
But being old, continued just
As thread-bare, and as full of dust.
His talk was now of tithes and dues;
He smoked his pipe and read the news;
Knew how to preach old sermons next,
Vamped in the preface and the text;
At christenings well could act his part,
And had the service all by heart;
Wished women might have children fast,
And thought whose sow had farrowed last
Against Dissenters would repine,
And stood up firm for Right divine.
Found his head filled with many a system,
But classic authors, he ne'er missed 'em.
Thus having furbished up a parson,
Dame Baucis next they played their farce on.

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Instead of home-spun coifs were seen
Good pinners edg'd with colberteen;
Her petticoat transformed apace,
Became black satin flounced with lace.
Plain Goody would no longer down,
'Twas Madam, in her grogram gown.
Philemon was in great surprise,
And hardly could believe his eyes,
Amazed to see her look so prim;
And she admired as much at him.
Thus, happy in their change of life,
Were several years this man and wife;
When on a day, which proved their last,
Discoursing o'er old stories past,
They went by chance amidst their talk,
To the church yard to take a walk;
When Baucis hastily cried out,
"My dear, I see your forehead sprout!"
"Sprout," quoth the man, "what's this you tell us?
I hope you don't believe me jealous,
But yet, methinks, I feel it true;
And really, yours is budding too –
Nay, now I cannot stir my foot;
It feels as if 'twere taking root."
Description would but tire my Muse;
In short, they both were turned to Yews.
Old Goodman Dobson of the green
Remembers he the trees has seen;
He'll talk of them from noon till night,
And goes with folks to show the sight;
On Sundays, after evening prayer,
He gathers all the parish there,
Points out the place of either Yew:
Here Baucis, there Philemon grew,
Till once a parson of our town,
To mend his barn, cut Baucis down;
At which, 'tis hard to be believed
How much the other tree was grieved,
Grow scrubby, died a-top, was stunted:
So the next parson stubbed and burnt it.