

Gertrude's Bird

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
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In those days when our Lord and St Peter wandered upon earth, they came once to an old wife's house, who sat baking. Her name was Gertrude, and she had a red mutch on her head. They had walked a long way, and were both hungry, and our Lord begged hard for a bannock to stay their hunger. Yes, they should have it. So she took a little tiny piece of dough and rolled it out, but as she rolled it, it grew and grew till it covered the whole griddle.

Nay, that was too big; they couldn't have that. So she took a tinier bit still; but when that was rolled out, it covered the whole griddle just the same, and that bannock was too big, she said; they couldn't have that either.

The third time she took a still tinier bit--so tiny you could scarce see it; but it was the same story over again--the bannock was too big.

'Well', said Gertrude, 'I can't give you anything; you must just go without, for all these bannocks are too big.'

Then our Lord waxed wroth, and said:

'Since you loved me so little as to grudge me a morsel of food, you shall have this punishment: you shall become a bird, and seek your food between bark and bole; and never get a drop to drink save when it rains.'

He had scarce said the last word before she was turned into a great black woodpecker, or Gertrude's bird, and flew from her kneading-trough right up the chimney; and till this very day you may see her flying about, with her red mutch on her head, and her body all black, because of the soot in the chimney; and so she hacks and taps away at the trees for her food, and whistles when rain is coming, for she is ever athirst, and then she looks for a drop to cool her tongue.