

King John and the Abbot of Canterbury

1) An ancient story I'll tell you anon,
3) Of a notable prince, that was called

All) King John;

1) He ruled over England with main and might,
3) But he did great wrong,
4) And maintained little right.

1) And I'll tell you a story,
4) A story so merry,
3) Concerning the Abbot of Canterbury;

1) How for his housekeeping and high renown,
3) They rode post to bring him
1) To London town.

2) "How now, Father Abbot? I hear it of thee,
2) Thou keepest a far better house than me;
2) And for thy housekeeping and high renown,
All) I fear thou work'st treason
2) Against my crown."

3) "My liege,"

1) Quoth the Abbot,

3) "I would it were known,

3) I am spending nothing but what is my own;
3) And I trust your grace will not put me in fear,
3) For spending my own true-gotten gear."

2) "Yes, yes, Father Abbot, Thy fault is high,
2) And now for the same thou needst must die;
2) For unless thou canst answer my questions three,
2) Thy head struck off from thy body shall be."

2) "Now first,"

1) Quoth the King,

2) "as I sit here,

2) With my crown of gold on my head so fair,
2) Among all my liegemen of noble birth,

All) Thou must tell to one penny what I am worth."

2) "Secondly, tell me, beyond all doubt,

All) How quickly I may ride the whole world about;

2) And at question the third, thou must not shrink,

2) But tell me, here truly,

All) What do I think?"

3) "O, these are deep questions for my shallow wit,

3) And I cannot answer your grace as yet;

3) But if you will give me a fortnight's space,

3) I'll do my endeavor to answer your Grace."

1) Then home rode the Abbot,

1) With comfort so cold,

1) And he met his shepherd, a-going to fold.

4) "Now, good Lord Abott, you are welcome home;

4) What news do you bring us from great King John?"

3) "Sad news, sad news, Shepherd, I must give;

3) That I have but three days more to live.

3) I must answer the king his questions three,

3) Or my head struck off from my body shall be."

4) "O, cheer up my lord; did you never hear yet,

4) That a fool may teach a wise man wit?

4) Lend me your serving-men, horse, and apparel,

4) And I'll ride to London to answer your quarrel."

2) "Now welcome, Sir Abbot,"

1) The King he did say,

2) "Tis well thou'rt come back to keep the day;

2) For if thou canst answer my questions three,

2) Thy life and thy living both saved shall be."

2) "Now first, as thou seest me sitting here,

2) With my crown of gold on my head so fair,

2) Among all my liegemen of noble birth,

2) Tell to one penny, what I am worth."

4) "For thirty pence, our Savior was sold,

4) Among the Romans as I have been told;

4) So twenty-nine is the worth of thee,

4) For I think thou are one penny worse than he."

All) The king, he laughed,

1) And swore by Saint Bittle,

All) "I did not think I was worth so little!

2) Now secondly tell me, beyond all doubt,

2) How quickly I may ride the whole world about."

4) "You must rise with the sun, and ride with the same,

4) Until the next morning he riseth again;

4) And then your Grace need never doubt

4) But in twenty-four hours you'll ride it about."

All) The King he laughed,

1) And swore by Saint June,

All) "I did not think I could do it so soon!

2) Now from question the third, thou must not shrink,

2) But tell me, here truly, what do I think?

4) Yea, that I shall do, and make your Grace merry:

4) You think I'm the Abbot of Canterbury

4) But I'm his poor shepherd,

4) As plain you may see,

4) That am come to beg pardon for him and for me."

All) The king he laughed,

1) And swore by our Grace;

All) "I'll make thee Lord Abbot this day in his place!"

4) "Now, nay, my liege, be not in such speed;

4) For I can neither write nor read."

All) "For nobles a week, then I'll give to thee,

All) For this merry jest thou has shown to me;

All) And tell the old Abbot, when thou gettest home,

All) Thou hast brought a free pardon from good King John."