

King John and the Abbot of Canterbury

I'll tell you a story, a story anon,
Concerning a prince and his name was King John.
He was a prince and a prince of great might
And he held up great wrong and he put down great right.

I'll tell you a story, a story so merry,
Concerning the Abbot of Canterbury,
Of his housekeeping and high renown
Which caused him to go up to fair London town.

"How now, Brother Abbot, it's told unto me
That thou keepest a far better house than I.
For thy housekeeping and high renown
I fear you of treason against my crown."

"Well I hope, My Liege, that you hold me no grudge
For spending of my true gotten goods."
"If you do not answer me questions three
Thy head will be taken from thy body.

"When I am set on my steed so high,
With my crown of gold all on my head,
With my nobility, joy, and much mirth,
You must say to one penny how much I am worth.

"And the next question you must not flout:
How long I'll be riding the world about.
And the third question you must not shrink:
Tell to me truly what I do think."

"Well these are hard questions for my shallow wit
I cannot answer Your Grace as yet.
But if you will give me three days space
I'll do my endeavour to answer Your Grace."

"Three days space to thee I will give,
That is the longest that thou hast to live.
If you do not answer these questions right
Thy head will be taken from thy body quite."

Well as the shepherd was going to his fold
He saw the abbot come riding along,
"How now, Master Abbot, you're welcome home
What news have you brought us from good King John?"

"Sad news, sad news I have thee to give:
I have but three days space for to live.
If I do not answer him questions three
My head will be taken from my body."

"Well, Master, have you never heard it yet
A fool may teach a wise man wit?
Lend me your horse and your apparel
And I'll ride up to London and answer the quarrel."

"When I am set on my steed so high,
With my crown of gold all on my head,
With my nobility, joy, and much mirth,
You must say to one penny how much I am worth."

Refrain: Derry down, down, hey derry down

King John and the Abbot of Canterbury, cont'd.

“For thirty pence our Savior was sold
Amongst the false Jews as we have been told
Twenty-nine is the worth of thee
For I think you are one penny worse than He.”

“And the next question you must not flout:
How long I'll be riding the world about?”
“You must rise with the sun, ride with the same
Till the next morning he rises again.
Then I am sure you will have no doubt
But in twenty-four hours you'll ride it about.”

“And the third question you must not shrink:
Tell to me truly what I do think.”
“Ah, that I can do, it will make your heart merry
You think I'm the Abbot of Canterbury
But I'm his poor servant, as you may see,
And I've come to beg pardon for he and for me.”

Well the King he turned him around and did smile
Saying, “You can be Abbot the other while.”
“Oh no, My Lord, there is no need
For I can neither write nor read.”

“Then tuppence a week, I will give unto thee
For this merry true jest you have told unto me.
Tell the old Abbot when you get home
You brought him a pardon from good King John.”



Refrain: Derry down, down, hey derry down