

THE JACKDAW OF RHEIMS – RICHARD HARRIS BARHAM

The Jackdaw sat on the Cardinal's chair!
Bishop and abbot and prior were there;
Many a monk and many a friar,
Many a knight and many a squire,
With a great many more of lesser degree,
In sooth a goody company;
And they served the Lord Primate on bended knee.
Never, I ween,
Was a prouder seen,
Read of in books, or dreamt of in dreams!
Than the Cardinal Lord Archbishop of Rheims!

In and out
Through the motley rout,
That little Jackdaw kept hopping about;
Here and there
Like a dog in a fair,
Over comfits and cakes
And dishes and plates.
With saucy air
He perched on the chair
Where, in state, the great Lord Cardinal sat
In the great Lord Cardinal's great red hat;
And he peer'd in his face
Of the Lordship's Grace
With a satisfied look, as if he would say,
"We two are the greatest folks here today!"
And the priests, with awe,
As such freaks they saw,
Said, "The devil must be in that little Jackdaw!"

The feast was over, the board was clear'd,
The flawns and the custards had all disappear'd,
And six little singing boys – dear little souls! –
In nice clean faces and nice white stoles,
Came, in order due,
Two by two,
Marching that refectory through!

A nice little boy held a golden ewer,
Emboss'd and filled with water, as pure
As any that flows between Rheims and Namur,
Which a nice little boy stood ready to catch
In a fine golden hand-basin made to match.

Two nice little boys, rather more grown,
Carried lavender water and eau de Cologne;
And a nice little boy had a cake of soap,
Worthy of washing the hands of the Pope.
One little boy more
A napkin bore
Of the best white diaper, fringed with pink,
And a Cardinal's Hat marked in "permanent ink."
The great Lord Cardinal turns at the sight
Of these nice little boys dress'd all in white:
From his finger he draws
His costly turquoise
And, not thinking at all about little Jackdaws,
Deposits it straight
By the side of his plate,
While the nice little boys on his Eminence wait;
Till, when nobody's dreaming of any such thing,
That little Jackdaw hops off with the ring!
There's a cry and a shout,
And a deuce of a rout,
And nobody seems to know what they're about,
But the monks have their pockets all turn'd inside out;
The friars are kneeling,
 And hunting and feeling
The carpet, the floor, and the walls, and the ceiling.
The Cardinal drew
Off each plum-coloured shoe,
And left his red stockings exposed to the view;
He peeps and he feels,
In the toes and the heels;
They turn up the dished – they turn up the plates –
They take up the poker and poke out the grates,
They turn up the rugs,
They examine the mugs:
But no! – no such thing;
They can't find THE RING!
And the Abbott declared that, "When nobody twigg'd it
Some rascal or other had popped in and prigg'd it!"

The Cardinal rose with a dignified look,
He called for his candle, his bell, and his book!
In holy anger and pious grief,
He solemnly cursed that rascally thief!
He cursed him at board,
He cursed him in bed;
From the sole of his foot,

To the crown of his head;
He cursed him in eating,
He cursed him in drinking,
In sneezing, in winking;
He cursed him in sitting,
In standing, in lying;
He cursed him in walking, In riding, in flying,
He cursed him in living,
He cursed him in dying!-
Never was heard such a terrible curse!

But what gave rise,
To no little surprise,
Nobody seem'd one penny the worse!
The day was gone,
The night came on,
The monks and friars they searched till dawn.
When the sacristan saw,
On crumpled claw,
Come limping a poor little lame Jackdaw!
No longer gay,
As on yesterday;
His feathers all seem'd to be turned the wrong;
His pinions droop'd – he could hardly stand-
His head was as bald as the palm of your hand;
His eyes so dim,
So wasted each limb,
That, heedless of grammar, they all cried, "That's him,
That's the scamp that has done this scandalous thing!
That's the thief that has got my Lord Cardinal's ring!"
The poor little Jackdaw,
When the monks he saw,
Feebly gave vent to the ghost of a caw;
And turn'd his bald head, as much as to say,
"Pray be so good as to walked this way!"
Slower and slower;
He limped on before,
Till they came to the back of the belfry door,
When the first thing they saw,
"Midst the sticks and the straw,
Was the ring in the nest of that little Jackdaw.

Then the great Lord Cardinal call'd for his book
And off that terrible curse he took;
When those words were heard,
That poor little bird

Was so changed in a moment, 'twas really absurd.
He grew sleek and fat;
In addition to that,
A fresh crop of feathers came as thick as a mat!

His tail wagged more,
Than ever before;
But no longer it wagg'd with an impudent air,
No longer he perched on the Cardinal's chair.
He hopp'd about
With a gait devout;
At Matins, at Vespers, he never was out;
And, so far from any more pilfering deed,
He always seemed telling the Confessor's beads.
If any one lied – or if any one swore-
Or slumbered in prayer-time and happen'd to snore
That good Jackdaw
Would give a great "Caw,"
As much as to say, "Don't do so any more!"
While many remarked, as his manners they saw,
That they "never had known such a pious Jackdaw!"