

King John and the Bishop (Child 45A)

- 1 OFF an ancient story Ile tell you anon,
Of a notable prince *that* was called *King* Iohn,
In England was borne, with maine and with might;
Hee did much wrong and mainteined litle right.
- 2 This noble prince was vexed in veretye,
For he was angry with the Bishopp of Canterbury;
Ffor his house-keeping and his good cheere,
Thé rode post for him, as you shall heare.
- 3 They rode post for him verry hastilye;
The *king* sayd the bishopp kept a better house then hee:
A hundred men euen, as I [have heard] say,
The bishopp kept in his house euerye day,
And fifty gold chaines, without any doubt,
In veluett coates waited the bishopp about.
- 4 The bishopp, he came to the court anon,
Before his prince *that* was called *King* Iohn.
As soone as the bishopp the *king* did see,
'O,' *quoth* the *king*, 'bishopp, thow art welcome to mee.
There is noe man soe welcome to towne
As thou *that* workes treason against my crowne'
- 5 'My leege,' *quoth* the bishopp, 'I wold it were knowne
I spend, *your* grace, nothing but *that that* 's my owne;
I trust *your* grace will doe me noe deare
For spending my owne trew gotten geere.'
- 6 'Yes,' *quoth* the *king*, 'bishopp, thou must needs dye,
Except thou can answere mee questions three;
Thy head shalbe smitten quite from thy bodye,
And all thy liuing remayne vnto mee.
- 7 'First,' *quoth* the *king*, 'tell me in this steade,
Wïth this crowne of gold heere vpon my head,
Amongst my nobilitye, with ioy and much mirth,
Lett me know wïthin one pennye what I am worth.
- 8 'Secondlye, tell me wïthout any dowbt
How soone I may goe the whole world about;
And thirdly, tell mee or euer I stinte,
What is the thing, bishopp, *that* I doe thinke.
Twenty dayes pardon thoust haue trulye,
And come againe and answere mee.'

- 9 The bishopp bade the *king* god night att a word;
He rode betwixt Cambridge and Oxenford,
But *neuer* a doctor there was soe wise
Cold shew him these questions or enterprise.
- 10 Wherewith the bishopp was nothing gladd,
But in his hart was heauy and sadd,
And hyed him home to a house in the countrye,
To ease some *part* of his melanchollye.
- 11 His halfe-brother dwelt there, was feirce and fell,
Noe better but a shepard to the bishoppe himsell;
The shepard came to the bishopp anon,
Saying, My Lord, you are welcome home!
- 12 ‘What ayles you,’ *quoth* the shepard, ‘*that* you are soe sadd,
And had wonte to haue beene soe merry and gladd?’
‘Nothing,’ *quoth* the bishopp, ‘I ayle att this time;
Will not thee availe to know, brother mine.’
- 13 ‘Brother,’ *quoth* the shepard, ‘you haue heard itt,
That a foole may teach a wisemane witt;
Say me therfore whatsoeuer you will,
And if I doe you noe good, Ile doe you noe ill.’
- 14 *Quoth* the bishop: I haue beene att the court anon,
Before my prince is called *King* Iohn,
And there he hath charged mee
Against his crowne with traitorye.
- 15 If I cannott answer his misterye,
Three questions hee hath *propounded* to mee,
He will haue my land soe faire and free,
And alsoe the head from my bodye.
- 16 The first question was, to tell him in *that* stead,
With the crowne of gold vpon his head,
Amongst his nobilitye, with ioy and much mirth,
To lett him know within one penye what hee is worth.
- 17 And secondlye, to tell him with-out any doubt
How soone he may goe the whole world about;
And thirdlye, to tell him, or ere I stint,
What is the thinge *that* he does thinke.
- 18 ‘Brother,’ *quoth* the shepard, ‘you are a man of learninge;
What neede you stand in doubt of soe small a thinge?’

Lend me,' *quoth* the shepard, '*your* ministers apparrell,
Ile ryde to the court and answe're *your* quarrell.

- 19 'Lend me *your* serving men, say me not nay,
With all *your* best horsse's *that* ryd on the way;
Ile to the court, this matter to stay;
Ile speake with *King* Iohn and heare what heele say.'
- 20 The bishopp with speed *prepared* then
To sett forth the shepard with horsse and man;
The shepard was liuely without any doubt;
I wott a royall companie came to the court.
- 21 The shepard hee came to the court anon
Before [his] prince *that* was called *King* Iohn.
As soone as the *king* the shepard did see,
'O,' *quoth* the king, 'bishopp, thou art welcome to me.'
The shepard was soe like the bishopp his brother,
The *king* cold not know the one from the other.
- 22 *Quoth* the *king*, Bishopp, thou art welcome to me
If thou can answer me my questions three.
Said the shepard, If it please your grace,
Show mee what the first quest[i]on was.
- 23 'First,' *quoth* the *king*, 'tell mee in this stead,
With the crowne of gold vpon my head,
Amongst my nobilitye, with ioy and much mirth,
Within one penny what I am worth.'
- 24 *Quoth* the shepard, To make *your* grace noe offence,
I thinke you are worth nine and twenty pence;
For our *Lord* Iesus, *that* bought vs all,
For thirty pence was sold into thrall
Amongst the cursed Iewes, as I to you doe shewe;
But I know Christ was one peny better then you.
- 25 Then the *king* laught, and swore by St Andrew
He was not thought to bee of such a small value.
'Secondly, tell mee with-out any doubt
How soone I may goe the world round about.'
- 26 Saies the shepard, It is noe time with *your* grace to scorne,
But rise betime with the sun in the morne,
And follow his course till his vprising,
And then you may know without any leasing.
- 27 And this [to] *your* grace shall proue the same,

You are come to the same place from whence you came;
[In] twenty-four houres, with-out any doubt,
Your grace may the world goe round about;
The world round about, euen as I doe say,
If *with* the sun you can goe the next way.

- 28 'And thirdlye tell me or *euer* I stint,
What is the thing, bishoppe, *that* I doe thinke.'
'*That* shall I doe,' quoth the shepard; 'For veretye,
You thinke I am the bishopp of Canterburye.'
- 29 'Why, art not thou? the truth tell to me;
For I doe thinke soe,' quoth the *king*, 'by St Marye.'
'Not soe,' quoth the shepard; 'the truth shalbe knowne,
I am his poore shepard; my brother is att home.'
- 30 'Why,' quoth the *king*, 'if itt soe bee,
Ile make thee bishopp here to mee.'
'Noe, *Sir*,' quoth the shepard, 'I pray you be still,
For Ile not bee bishop but against my will;
For I am not fitt for any such deede,
For I can neither write nor reede.'
- 31 'Why then,' quoth the *king*, 'Ile giue thee cleere
A pattent of three hundred pound a yeere;
That I will giue thee franke and free;
Take thee *that*, shepard, for coming to me.
- 32 'Free *pardon* Ile giue,' the *kings* grace said,
'To saue the bishopp, his land and his head;
With him nor thee Ile be nothing wrath;
Here is the *pardon* for him and thee both.'
- 33 Then the shepard he had noe more to say,
But tooke the *pardon* and rode his way:
When he came to the bishopps place,
The bishopp asket anon how all things was.
- 34 'Brother,' quoth the shepard, 'I haue well sped,
For I haue saued both *your* land and *your* head;
The *king* *with* you is nothing wrath,
For heere is the *pardon* for you and mee both.'
- 35 Then the bishopes hart was of a merry cheere:
'Brother, thy paines Ile quitt them cleare;
For I will giue thee a patent to thee and to thine
Of fifty pound a yeere, land good and fine.'

- 36
‘I will to thee noe longer croche nor creepe,
Nor Ile serue thee noe more to keepe thy sheepe.’
- 37 Whereeuer wist you shepard before,
That had in his head witt such store
To pleasure a bishopp in such a like case,
To answer three questions to the *kings* grace?
Whereeuer wist you shepard gett cleare
Three hundred and fifty pound a yeere?
- 38 I neuer hard of his fellow before.
Nor I neuer shall: now I need to say noe more.
I neuer knew shepard *that* gott such a liuinge
But David, the shepeard, *that* was a *king*.