

The Jackdaw of Rheims

Thomas Ingoldsby

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[Father John Ingoldsby, to whose papers I am largely indebted for the Saintly records which follow, was brought up by his father, a cadet of the family, in the Romish faith, and was educated at Douai for the Church. Besides the manuscripts now at Tappington, he was the author of two controversial treatises on the connexion between the Papal Hierarchy and the Nine of Diamonds.

From his well-known loyalty, evinced by secret services to the Royal cause during the Protectorate, he was excepted by name out of the Acts against the Papists, became superintendent of the Queen Dowager's chapel at Somoerset House, and enjoyed a small pension until his death, which took place in the third year of Queen Anne (1704), at the mature age of ninety-six. He was an ecclesiastic of great learning and piety, but from the stiff and antiquated phraseology which he adopted, I have thought it necessary to modernize it a little: this will account for certain anachronisms that have unavoidably crept in; the substance of his narrative has, however, throughout been strictly adhered to.

His hair-shirt, almost as good as new, is still preserved at Tappington,--but nobody ever wears it.]

'Tunc miser Corvus adeo conscientiaë stimulis compunctus fuit, et execratio eum tantopere excarneficavit, ut exinde tabescere inciperet, maciem contraheret, omnem cibum aversaretur, nec amplius crocitaret; pennæ præterea ei defluebant, et alis pendulis omnes facetias intermisit, et tam macer apparuit ut omnes ejus miserescerent. * * * *
Tunc abbas sacerdotibus mandavit ut rursus furem absolverent; quo facto, Corvus, omnibus mirantibus, propediem convaluit, et pristinam sanitatem recuperavit.' De Illust. Ord. Cisterc.

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 goodly 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;

The Jackdaw of Rheims

Here and there, Like a dog in a fair,
Over comfits and cakes, And dishes and plates,
Cowl and cope, and rochet and pall,
Mitre and crosier! he hopp'd upon all!
With saucy air, He perch'd 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 the face Of his 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 grand 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 nice 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 mark'd 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

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The carpet, the floor, and the walls, and the ceiling.
The Cardinal drew Off each plum-colour'd 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 dishes, -- 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 Abbot declared that 'when nobody twigg'd it,
Some rascal or other had popp'd in and prigg'd it!'

The Cardinal rose with a dignified look,
He call'd 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 sleeping, that every night
He should dream of the devil, and wake in a fright;
He cursed him in eating, he cursed him in drinking,
He cursed him in coughing, 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 the Friars they search'd till dawn;
When the Sacristan saw, On crumpl'd claw,
Come limping a poor little lame Jackdaw!
No longer gay, As on yesterday;
His feathers all seem'd to be turn'd the wrong way; --
His pinions droop'd -- he could hardly stand, --
His head was as bald as the palm of your hand;
His eye 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 walk this way!'
Slower and slower He limp'd on before,
Till they came to the back of the belfry door,
Where 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;
The mute expression Served in lieu of confession,

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And, being thus coupl'd with full restitution,
The Jackdaw got plenary absolution!

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 thick as a mat!

His tail waggled more Even than before;
But no longer it wagged with an impudent air,
No longer he perch'd on the Cardinal's chair.

He hopp'd now about With a gait devout;
At Matins, at Vespers, he never was out;
And, so far from any more pilfering deeds,
He always seem'd telling the Confessor's beads.
If any one lied, -- or if any one swore, --
Or slumber'd 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 remark'd, as his manners they saw,
That they 'never had known such a pious Jackdaw!'

He long lived the pride Of that country side,
And at last in the odour of sanctity died;
When as words were too faint, His merits to paint,
The Conclave determined to make him a Saint!
And on newly-made Saints and Popes, as you know,
It's the custom, at Rome, new names to bestow,
So they canonised him by the name of Jim Crow!