

Thomas Hood (1799-1845)

8 *Jack Hall*

'Tis very hard when men forsake
This melancholy world, and make
A bed of turf, they cannot take
 A quiet doze,
But certain rogues will come and break
 Their 'bone repose.' 5

'Tis hard we can't give up our breath,
And to the earth our earth bequeath,
Without Death Fetches after death,
 Who thus exhume us; 10
And snatch us from our homes beneath
 And hearths posthumous.

The tender lover comes to rear
The mournful urn, and shed his tear —
Her glorious dust, he cries, is here! 15
 Alack! alack!
The while his Sacharissa dear
 Is in a sack!

'Tis hard one cannot lie amid
The mould, beneath a coffin-lid, 20
But thus the Faculty will bid
 Their rogues break thro' it!
If they don't want us there, why did
 They send us to it?

One of these sacrilegious knaves, 25
Who crave as hungry vulture craves,
Behaving as the goul behaves,
 'Neath church-yard wall —
Mayhap because he fed on graves,
 Was nam'd Jack Hall. 30

By day it was his trade to go
Tending the black coach to and fro;
And sometimes at the door of woe,
 With emblems suitable,
He stood with brother Mute, to show 35
 That life is mutable.

But long before they pass'd the ferry,
The dead that he had help'd to bury
He sack'd — (he had a sack to carry
 The bodies off in.) 40
In fact, he let them have a very
 Short fit of coffin.

Night after night, with crow and spade,
He drove this dead but thriving trade,
Meanwhile his conscience never weigh'd 45
 A single horsehair;
On corses of all kinds he prey'd,
 A perfect corsair!

At last — it may be, Death took spite
Or jesting only meant to fright — 50
He sought for Jack night after night
 The churchyards round;
And soon they met, the man and sprite,
 In Pancras' ground.

Jack, by the glimpses of the moon, 55
Perceiv'd the bony knacker soon,
An awful shape to meet at noon
 Of night and lonely;
But Jack's tough courage did but swoon
 A minute only. 60

Anon he gave his spade a swing
Aloft, and kept it brandishing,
Ready for what mishaps might spring
 From this conjunction;
Funking indeed was quite a thing 65
 Beside his function.

I beg you'll say.'

Quoth Jack, 'Your Honour's very kind:
And now I call the thing to mind,
This parish very strict I find; 105
 But in the next 'un
There lives a very well-inclin'd
 Old sort of sexton.'

Death took the hint, and gave a wink
As well as eyelet holes can blink; 110
Then stretching out his arm to link
 The other's arm, —
'Suppose,' says he, 'we have a drink
 Of something warm.'

Jack nothing loth, with friendly ease 115
Spoke up at once: — 'Why, what ye please;
Hard by there is the Cheshire Cheese,
 A famous tap.'
But this suggestion seem'd to tease
 The bony chap. 120

'No, no — your mortal drinks are heady,
And only make my hand unsteady;
I do not even care for Deady,
 And loathe your rum;
But I've some glorious brewage ready, 125
 My drink is — mum!'

And off they set, each right content —
Who knows the dreary way they went?
But Jack felt rather faint and spent,
 And out of breath; 130
At last he saw, quite evident,
 The Door of Death.

All other men had been unmann'd
To see a coffin on each hand,
That served a skeleton to stand 135
 By way of sentry;

In fact, Death has a very grand
And awful entry.

Throughout his dismal sign prevails,
His name is writ in coffin nails, 140
The mortal darts make area rails;
A scull that mocketh,
Grins on the gloomy gate, and quails
Whoever knocketh.

And lo! on either side, arise 145
Two monstrous pillars — bones of thighs;
A monumental slab supplies
The step of stone,
Where waiting for his master lies,
A dog of bone. 150

The dog leapt up, but gave no yell,
The wire was pull'd, but woke no bell,
The ghastly knocker rose and fell,
But caused no riot;
The ways of Death, we all know well 155
Are very quiet.

Old Bones stepped in; Jack stepp'd behind:
Quoth Death, 'I really hope you'll find
The entertainment to your mind,
As I shall treat ye — 160
A friend or two of goblin kind
I've asked to meet ye.'

And lo! a crowd of spectres tall,
Like jack-a-lanterns on a wall,
Were standing — every ghastly ball 165
An eager watcher.
'My friends,' says Death — 'friends, Mr. Hall,
The body-snatcher.'

Lord! what a tumult it produc'd,
When Mr. Hall was introduced! 170
Jack even, who had long been used

To frightful things,
Felt just as if his back was sluic'd
With freezing springs!

Each goblin face began to make 175
Some horrid mouth — ape — gorgon — snake;
And then a spectre-hag would shake
 An airy thigh-bone;
And cried, (or seem'd to cry,) I'll break
 Your bone, with *my* bone! 180

Some ground their teeth — some seem'd to spit —
(Nothing, but nothing came of it,)
A hundred awful brows were knit
 In dreadful spite.
Thought Jack — I'm sure I'd better quit, 185
 Without good-night.

One skip and hop and he was clear,
And running like a hunted deer,
As fleet as people run by fear
 Well spurr'd and whipp'd, 190
Death, ghosts, and all in that career
 Were quite outstripp'd.

But those who live by death must die;
Jack's soul at last prepar'd to fly;
And when his latter end drew nigh, 195
 Oh! what a swarm
Of doctors came, — but not to try
 To keep him warm.

No ravens ever scented prey
So early where a dead horse lay, 200
Nor vultures sniff'd so far away
 A last convulse;
A dozen 'guests' day after day
 Were 'at his pulse.'

'Twas strange, altho' they got no fees, 205
How still they watch'd by twos and threes:

But Jack a very little ease
Obtain'd from them;
In fact, he did not find M. D.'s
Worth one D — M. 210

The passing bell with hollow toll
Was in his thought — the dreary hole!
Jack gave his eyes a horrid roll,
And then a cough.
'There's something weighing on my soul 215
I wish was off;

'All night it roves about my brains,
All day it adds to all my pains,
It is concerning my remains
When I am dead;' 220
Twelve wigs and twelve gold-headed canes
Drew near his bed.

'Alas!' he sighed, 'I'm sore afraid,
A dozen pangs my heart invade;
But when I drove a certain trade 225
In flesh and bone,
There was a little bargain made
About my own.'

Twelve suits of black began to close,
Twelve pair of sleek and sable hose, 230
Twelve flowing cambric frills in rows,
At once drew round;
Twelve noses turn'd against his nose,
Twelve snubs profound.

'Ten guineas did not quite suffice, 235
And so I sold my body twice;
Twice did not do — I sold it thrice,
Forgive my crimes!
In short I have received its price
A dozen times!' 240

Twelve brows got very grim and black,

Twelve wishes stretch'd him on the rack,
Twelve pair of hands for fierce attack
 Took up position,
Ready to share the dying Jack 245
 By long division.

Twelve angry doctors wrangled so,
That twelve had struck an hour ago,
Before they had an eye to throw
 On the departed; 250
Twelve heads turn'd round at once, and lo!
 Twelve doctors started.

Whether some comrade of the dead,
Or Satan took it in his head,
To steal the corpse — the corpse had fled! 255
 'Tis only written,
That '*there was nothing in the bed,*
 But twelve were bitten!'

1827

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