

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





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,

