

King John and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Adapted by Mistress Dervila ni Leonon

A version of this story is on pg. 29 of Favorite Folktales from Around the World

Time: About 2:29

The Archbishop of Canterbury was a good man, and beloved by all who knew him. King John was.....not such a good man, and disliked by all who knew him. King John came to hate the Archbishop. So the King summoned the Archbishop before him and said

“In one week I will ask you three questions. If you do not answer them correctly, I will have you beheaded. Now go!”

And so the Archbishop went back to his home, bewailing his fate. He went into the church and prayed. The sexton, who took care of the church, noticed how upset the Archbishop was.

“What is wrong, Your Grace?” And the Archbishop told him, and the sexton said

“Lend me your clothes and I will go instead of you. Better that a humble sexton die than Your Grace.” So one week later the disguised sexton stood before King John.

[evil smile] King John asked,

[draw it out] “So, How long would it take me, mounted on my best horse, to travel around the world?”

“Simply keep pace with the sun and it will only take you one day.”

[upset] “What! *[pause]* How many stars are in the sky?”

“As many as there are grains of sands on the beach. Count the one and you’ll know the other.”

[angry] “Rrrrr....Very well, then! What am I thinking?”

“Why, you’re thinking that I’m the Archbishop of Canterbury, when actually I’m the sexton of the church.”

[flabbergasted] “What....Why...I.... *[recovers, happy]* Well, then, as it seems is as it shall be! You shall be the Archbishop and he shall be the sexton!” And so King John satisfied his hatred of the Archbishop.

Full bibliography of source:

*Yolen, Jane, editor. Favorite Folktales from Around the World. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.
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