

**THE PILGRIM TO COMPOSTELLA**  
**BEING THE**  
**LEGEND OF A COCK AND A HEN,**  
**TO THE HONOR AND GLORY OF SANTIAGO**  
**A CHRISTMAS TALE**



**ROBERT SOUTHEY**

[TRANSCRIBED BY JOHN PRICE]

Res similis fictæ; sed quid mihi fingere prodest Ovid. Met. Xii v 935  
Hear also no lean story of theirs! – Lightfoot

## INTRODUCTION BY JOHN PRICE

Robert Southey (August 12, 1774 – March 21, 1843) was an English poet of the Romantic school, and one of the so-called "Lake Poets", and Poet Laureate. His reputation however has not kept pace with certain of his contemporaries, in particular William Wordsworth; he is perhaps best known today for advising Charlotte Bronte that 'Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life; and it ought not to be'. As well as a poet, he was a literary scholar, writing a number of biographical studies of historical interest, notably on the life and works of John Bunyan and John Wesley.

The poem published here 'The Pilgrim to Compostella' is one his lesser known works. It first appeared in a volume entitled *All for love; And The pilgrim to Compostella* (published by John Murray, 1829). To my knowledge, it has only been reprinted once, in *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey* (published by Phinney, Blakeman & Mason, 1860). This book is available for viewing on the internet as part of the Google Books Library Project.

The poem is written in doggerel-type verse and tells the legend of Santo Domingo de Calzada at some length. It is not known how what Southey's interest in the pilgrimage arose or how he came across this topic, but his notes at the end of the poem (not included here) indicate a significant amount of research.

The picture on the cover of this publication is a detail from a modern Icon called 'St James: Santiago Peregrino' by Sister Petra Clare of the Sancti Angeli Benedictine Skete, Inverness. The icon shows St James and St Domingo holding up the feet of the young man while the two flying chickens and the judge approach from one side, and the pilgrims from the other.

I have transcribed the text directly from the internet copy of *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey* and I apologise for any uncorrected errors that may exist.

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## FOREWORD BY ROBERT SOUTHEY

The Legend (for a genuine legend it is) which has been made the subject of the ensuing ballad is related by Bishop Patrick in his "Preamble of the Pilgrim" (ch xxxv. Pp 460-34). Udal ap Rhys relates it in his "Tour through Spain and Portugal" (pp. 35-38). Both these writers refer to Lucius Marineus Siculus as their authority. And it is told in the "Journal du Voyage d'Espagne" (Paris, 1669), by a *Conseiller* who was attached to the French embassy in that country (p.18).

A story likewise may be found in the "Acta Sanctorum". A duplicate of the principle miracle occurs in the third volume, for the month of May (*die* 12<sup>â</sup>. P.171), and is there ascribed to S Domingo de la Calzada; the author, Luiz de la Vega, contending that both relations are to be received as true, the Bollandist (Henschenius) contrariwise opining that they are distinct miracles, but leaving the reader nevertheless to determine freely for himself "utrum id malit, an vero credere velit, unicum dumtaxet esse quod sub quadam circumstantiarum varietate refertur ut geminum."

In the sixth volume of the same work, for the month of July (*die* 25<sup>â</sup>), the legend of the Pilgrim is told twice, - once (p. 45) as occurring to a native of Utrecht (Cæsarius Heisterbachensis is the authority); once as having befallen a German at Toulouse (p.50). The latter story is from the collection of Santiago's miracles, which Pope Calixtus II is said to have compiled.

## **PRELUDE**

“Tell us a story, old Robin Gray!  
This merry Christmas Time:  
We are all in our glory; so tell us a story,  
Either in prose or in rhyme.

“Open your budget, Old Robin Gray!  
We very well know it is full:  
Come! Out with a murder, a Goblin, a ghost,  
Or a tale of a Cock and a Bull!”

“I have no tale of a Cock and a Bull,  
My good little women and men:  
But ‘twill do as well, perhaps If I tell  
A tale of a Cock and Hen”

## INTRODUCTION

You have all of you heard of St James for Spain,  
As one of the Champions Seven,  
Who, having been good Knights on Earth,  
Became Hermits and Saints in Heaven.

Their History once was in good repute,  
And so it ought to be still:  
Little friends, I dare say you have read it;  
And if not, why I hope you will.

Of this St James that book proclaims  
Great actions manifold;  
But more amazing are the things  
Which of him in Spain are told;-

How a ship of marble made,  
Came sailing o'er the sea,  
Wherein his headless corpse was lain,  
Perfumed with sanctity;-

And how, though then he had no head,  
He afterwards had two,  
Which both worked miracles so well,  
That it was not possible to tell  
The false one from the true;<sup>1</sup>-

And how he used to fight the Moors  
Upon a milk-white charger:  
Large tales of him the Spaniards tell;  
Munchausen tells no larger.

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<sup>1</sup> Southey adds the following footnote:

Whereby, my little friends, we see  
That an original may sometimes be  
No better than its fac-simile:  
A useful truth I trow,  
Which picture-buyers won't believe,  
But which picture-dealers know.

Young Connoisseurs who will be,  
Remember I say this –  
For your benefit hereafter –  
In a Parenthesis.

And not to interrupt  
The order of narration,  
This warning shall be printed  
By way of annotation.

But in their cause of latter years  
He has not been so hearty;  
For that he never struck a stroke is plain,  
When our Duke, in many a hard campaign,  
Beat the French armies out of Spain,  
And conquered Bonaparté.

Yet they still worship him in Spain,  
And believe in him with might and main;  
Santiago there they call him;  
And, if any one there should doubt these tales,  
They've an inquisition to maul him.

At Compostella, in his church  
His body and one head  
Have been for some eight hundred years,  
By Pilgrims visited.  
Old scores might there be clean rubbed off;  
And tickets there were given  
To clear all toll-gates on the way  
Between the Churchyard and Heaven.

Some went for payment of a vow  
In time of trouble made;  
And some, who found that pilgrimage  
Was a pleasant sort of trade; -

And some, I trow, because it was  
Believed, as well as said,  
That all, who in their mortal stag  
Did not perform this pilgrimage,  
Must make it when they were dead;-

Some upon penance for their sins,  
In person, or by attorney;  
And some who were or had been sick;  
And some who thought to cheat Old Nick;  
And some who liked the journey;-

Which well they might when ways were safe;  
And therefore rich or poor  
Went in that age on pilgrimage,  
As folks now make a tour.

The poor with scrip, the rich with purse,  
They took their chance for better, for worse,  
From many a foreign land,  
With a scallop-shell in the hat for badge,  
And a Pilgrim's staff in hand.

Something there is, the which to leave  
Untold would not be well,  
Relating to the Pilgrim's staff,  
And to the scallop-shell.

For the scallop shows, in a coat-of-arms,  
That of a bearer's line  
Some one, in former days, hath been  
To Santiago's shrine.

And the staff was bored and drilled for those  
Who on a flute could play;  
And thus the merry Pilgrim had  
His music on the way.

## THE LEGEND

### PART 1

Once upon a time, three Pilgrims true,  
Being Father and Mother and Son,  
For pure devotion to the Saint,  
This pilgrimage begun.

Their names, little friends, I am sorry to say,  
In none of my books I can find:  
But the son, if you please we'll call Pierre;  
What the parents are called, never mind.

From France they came, in which fair land  
They were people of good renown;  
And they took up their lodging one night on the way  
In La Calzada town.

Now, if poor Pilgrims they had been,  
And had ledged in the Hospice instead of the Inn,  
My good little women and men,  
Why, then you never have heard  
This tale of the Cock and the Hen.

For the Innkeepers they had a daughter,  
Sad to say, who was just such another  
As Potiphar's daughter, I think would have been.,  
If she followed the ways of her mother.

This wicked woman to our Pierre  
Behaved like Potiphar's wife;  
And, because she failed to win his love,  
She resolved to take his life.

So she packed up a silver cup  
In his wallet privily;  
And then, as soon as they were gone,  
She raised a hue and cry.

The Pilgrims were overtaken;  
The people gathered round;  
Their wallets were searched, and in Pierre's  
The silver cup was found.

They dragged him before the Alcade;  
A hasty judge was he:  
“The Theft” he said, “was plain and proved;  
And hanged the thief must be.”  
So to the gallows our poor Pierre  
Was hurried instantly.

If I should now relate  
The piteous lamentation  
Which for their son these parents made,  
My little friends, I am afraid  
You’d weep at the relation.

But Pierre in Santiago still  
His constant faith professed:  
When to the gallows he was led,  
“ ‘Twas a short way to heaven he charged  
His parents not to cease;  
Saying, that, unless they promised this,  
He could not be hanged in peace.

They promised it with heavy hearts:  
Pierre then, therewith content,  
Was hanged; and they upon their way  
To Compostella went.

## **PART II**

Four weeks they travelled painfully:  
They paid their vows and then  
To La Calzada's fatal town  
Did they come back again.

The mother would not be withheld,  
But go she must to see  
Where her poor Pierre was left to hang  
Upon the gallows-tree.

Oh tale most marvellous to hear,  
Most marvellous to tell!  
Eight weeks had he been hanging there,  
And yet was alive and well!

"Mother" said he, "I am glad you returned:  
It is time I should now be released;  
Though I cannot complain that I am tired,  
And my neck does not ache in the least.

"The Sun has not scorched me by day;  
The Moon has not chilled me by night;  
And the winds have but helped me to swing,  
As if in a dream of delight.

"go you to the Alcade,  
That hasty Judge unjust:  
Tell him Santiago has saved me,  
And take me down he must!"

Now you must know the Alcade,  
Not thinking himself a great sinner,  
Just at the table had sate down,  
About to begin his dinner.

His knife was raised to carve  
The dish before him then:  
Two roasted Fowls were laid therein;  
That very morning they had been  
A Cock and his faithful Hen.

In came the mother wild with joy:  
"A miracle!" she cried;  
But that most hasty Judge unjust  
Repelled her in his pride.

“Think not” quoth he, “to tales like this  
That I should give belief!  
Santiago would never bestow  
His miracles, full well I know,  
On a Frenchman and a thief.”

And pointing to the Fowls, o’er which  
He held his ready knife,  
“as easily might I believe  
These birds should come to life!”

The good Saint would not let him thus  
The Mother’s true tale withstand;  
So up rose the Fowls in the dish,  
And down dropped the knife from his hand.

The Cock would have crowed if he could;  
To cackle, the hen had a wish;  
And they both slipped about in the gravy,  
Before they got out of the dish.

And when each would have opened his eyes,  
For the purpose of looking about them,  
They saw they had no eyes to open,  
And that there was no seeing without them.

All this was to them a great wonder;  
They staggered and reeled on the table;  
And either to guess where they were,  
Or what was their plight, or how they came there,  
Alas! They were wholly unable;-

Because, you must know, that that morning –  
A thing they had thought very hard –  
The cook had cut off their heads,  
And thrown them away in the yard.

The Hen would have pranked up her feathers,  
But plucking had sadly deformed her;  
And for want of them she would have shivered with cold,  
If roasting she had had not warmed her.

And the cock felt exceedingly queer:  
He thought it a very odd thing  
That his head and his voice were he did not know where,  
And his gizzard tucked under his wing.

The gizzard got into its place. –  
But how, Santiago knows best;  
And so, by the help of the Saint,  
Did the liver and all the rest.

The heads saw their way to the bodies:  
In they came from the yard, without check;  
And each took its own proper station,  
To the very great joy of the neck.

And in flew the feathers, like snow in a shower,  
For they all became white on the way;  
And the Cock and the hen in a trice we refledged,  
And then who so happy as they?

“Cluck! Cluck!” cried the Hen right merrily then;  
The Cock his clarion blew;  
Full glad was he to hear again  
His own Cock-adoo-del-doo!

### **PART III**

“A miracle! A miracle!”  
The people shouted, as they might well,  
When the news went through the town;  
And every child and woman and man  
Took up the cry, and away they ran  
To see Pierre taken down.

They made a famous procession:  
My good little women and men,  
Such a sight was never seen before,  
And I think will never again.  
Santiago’s image, large as life,  
Went first, with banners and drum and fife;  
And next, as was most meet,  
The twice-born Cock and hen were borne  
Along the thronging street.

Perched on a cross-pole hoisted high,  
They were raised in sight of a crowd;  
And when the people set up a cry,  
The Hen she clucked in sympathy,  
And the Cock he crowed aloud.

And because they very well know for why  
They were carried in such solemnity,  
And saw the Saint and his banners before ‘em  
They behaved with greatest propriety  
And most correct decorum.

The Knife, which had cut off their heads that morn,  
Still red with their innocent blood, was borne,-  
The scullion-boy he carried it;  
And the Skewers also made a part of the show,  
With which they were trussed for the spit.

The Cook in triumph bore that Spit  
As high as he was able;  
And the Dish was displayed, wherein they were laid  
When they had been served at table.

With eager faith the crowd pressed round:  
There was a scramble of women and men  
For who should dip a finger-tip  
In the blessed gravy then.

Next went the Alcade, beating his breast,  
Crying aloud like a man distressed,  
And amazed at the loss of his dinner,-  
“Santiago, Santiago!  
Have mercy on me, a sinner!”

And lifting oftentimes his hands  
Towards the Cock and the Hen,  
“Orate pro nobis!” devoutly he cried;  
And as devoutly the people replied,  
Whenever he said it, “Amen!”

The father and mother were last in the train:  
Rejoicingly they came,  
And extolled, with tears of gratitude,  
Santiago’s glorious name.

So with all honours there might be,  
They gently unhangd Pierre:  
But to make the wonder clear,  
A deep, black halter mark remained  
Just under his left ear.

## PART IV

And now my listening dears,  
With open mouths and open ears,  
Like a rhymer whose art is  
That of telling a plain, unvarnished tale,  
To let you know I must not fail,  
What became of all parties.

Pierre went on to Compostella  
To finish his pilgrimage:  
His parents went back with him joyfully,  
After which they returned to their own country;  
And there I believe, that all the three  
Lived to a good old age.

For the gallows on which Pierre  
So happily had swung,  
It was resolved that never more  
On it should man be hung.

TO the church it was transplanted,  
As ancient books declare;  
And the people in commotion  
With an uproar of devotion,  
Set it up for a relic there.

What became of the halter I know not,  
Because old books show not;  
But we may suppose and hope  
That the city presented Pierre  
With that interesting rope.

For in his family – and this  
The Corporation knew –  
It would rightly be valued more  
Than any *cordons bleus*.

The Innkeepers' wicked daughter  
Confessed what she had done:  
So they put her in a convent,  
And she was made a Nun.

The Alcade had been so frightened,  
That he never ate fowls again;  
And he always pulled of his hat  
When he saw a Cock and Hen.

Whenever he sat a table,  
Not an egg might there be placed;  
And he never even mustered courage for a custard,  
Though garlic tempted him to taste  
Of an omelet now and then.

But always, after such a transgression,  
He hastened away to make a confession;  
Ant not till he had confessed,  
And the Priest had absolved him, did he feel  
His conscience and stomach at rest.

The twice-born Birds, to the Pilgrim's Church,  
As by miracle consecrated,  
Were given: and there unto the Saint  
They were publicly dedicated.

At their dedication, the Corporation  
A fund for their keep supplied;  
And, after following the Saint and his banners,  
This Cock and Hen were so changed in their manners  
That the Priests were edified.

Gentle as any turtle-dove,  
Saint Cock became all meekness and love;  
Most dutiful of wives,  
Saint Hen she never pecked again:  
So they led happy lives.

The ways of ordinary fowls,  
You must know, they have clean forsaken;  
And if every Cock and Hen in Spain  
Had their example taken,  
Why then – the Spaniards would have had  
No eggs to eat with bacon.

These blessed Fowls, at seven years' end,  
In the door of sanctity died:  
They were carefully plucked: and then  
They were buried side by side.

And, lest the fact should be forgotten,  
(Which would have been a pity,)  
'Twas decreed, in honour of their worth,  
That a Cock and Hen should be borne thenceforth  
In the arms of that ancient City.

Two eggs Saint Hen had laid, - no more;  
The chicken were her delight:  
A Cock and Hen they proved;  
And both, like their parents, were virtuous and white.

The last act of the Holy Hen  
Was to rear this precious brood; and, when  
Saint Cock and she were dead,  
This couple, as their lawful heirs,  
Succeeded in their stead.

They also lived for seven years;  
And they laid eggs but two,  
From which two milk-white chicken  
To Cock and Henhood grew;  
And always their posterity  
The self same course pursue.

Not one of these eggs ever addled,  
(With wonder be it spoken!)  
Not one of them was ever lost,  
Not one of them was ever broken.

Sacred they are, - neither magpie nor rat,  
Snake, weasel, nor marten, approaching them;  
And woe to the irreverent wretch  
Who should even dream of poaching them!

Thus, then, is this great miracle  
Continued to this day;  
And to their Church all Pilgrims go,  
When they are on their way;  
And some of the feathers are given them,  
For which they always pay.

No price is set upon them,  
And this leaves all persons at ease:  
The Poor give as much as they can;  
The Rich, as much as they please.

But that the more they give the better,  
Is very well understood;  
Seeing whatever is thus disposed of  
Is for their own souls' good; -  
For Santiago will always  
Befriend his true believers;  
And the money is for him, the Priests  
Being only his receivers.

To make the miracle the more,  
Of these feathers there is always store,  
And all are genuine too;  
All of the original Cock and Hen,  
Which the Priests will swear is true.

Thousands a thousand times told have bought them;  
And, if myriads and tens of myriads sought them,  
They would still find some to buy;  
For, however great were the demand,  
So great would be the supply.

And, if any of you, my small friends,  
Should visit these parts, I dare say  
You will bring back some of the feathers,  
And think of Old Robin Gray.