

# The Bitter Withy

Collected by Cecil Sharp 9-Apr-1909

Sung by Mr John Hands (65) of Snowhill, Glos

1. As it fell out on a bright ho-li-day Small hail from the sky did fall. Our\_

6

Sav-iour asked his mo-ther dear If he may go and play at\_\_ ball.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are written below the staff. The second staff starts with a measure rest labeled '6' and continues the melody. The lyrics are also written below this staff.

As it fell out on a bright holiday, small hail from the sky did fall  
Our Saviour asked His mother dear if he may go and play at ball.

‘At ball! at ball! my own dear Son! It is time that you were gone  
And don’t let me hear of any doings at night when you come home.’

So up Lincull and down Lincull our sweetest Saviour ran,  
And there He met three rich young lords ‘Good morning! To you all.’

‘Good morn! good morn! good morn!’ said they; ‘Good morning !’ then said He,  
‘O which of you three rich young men will play at ball with me?’

‘We are all lords’ and ladies’ sons, born in our bower and hall  
And Thou art nothing but a poor maid’s child, born in an ox’s stall.’

‘If you’re all lords’ and ladies’ sons, born in your bower and hall,  
I will make you believe in your latter end; I’m an angel above you all.’

So He made Him a bridge with the beams of the sun, and o’er the water crossed He.  
These rich young lords followed after Him, and drowned they were all three.

Then up Lincull and down Lincull these young lords’ mothers ran,  
Saying: ‘Mary mild, fetch home your child, for ours He has drowned all.’

So Mary mild fetched home her child and laid Him across her knee  
With a handful of green withy twigs she gave Him slashes three.

‘O withy! O withy ! O bitter withy thou hast caused Me to smart  
And the withy shall be the very first tree that shall perish at the heart!’

*Copy for Singing prepared by GlosSongs. Uses the tune from John Hands and not the variants noted by Sharp.  
Source: Sharp manuscript ref FT2153 (tune) with words from Sharp, English Folk Carols (1911) which he attributes to  
‘from Mr. George Gibbs of Evesham, Worcestershire, who communicated them to the "Notes and Queries" column of  
The Evesham Journal, edited by Mr. E. A. B. Barnard.’ Mr. Gibbs, a cobbler by trade, learned the verses from a little  
girl who used to bring him her shoes to be mended, and who, in return for the service rendered, taught him the carol.  
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