

JOHN BARLEYCORN

Collected by CECIL J. SHARP

There were three kings came from the West, Their vic - to - ry to try;

And they have tak - en a sol - emn oath, John Bar - ley - corn sould die.

Fol the dol did - i - ay, Fol the dol the did - i - ay - ge - wo.

1 There were three kings came from the West,
Their victory to try;
And they have taken a solemn oath,
John Barleycorn should die.

4 There he remain'd till midsummer,
And look'd both pale and wan;
Then Barleycorn he got a beard,
And so became a man.

Chorus Fol the dol the did-i-ay,
Fol the dol the did-i-ay-ge-wo.

5 Then they sent men with scythes so sharp,
To cut him off at knee;
And then poor Johnny Barleycorn,
They served him barbarously.

2 They took a plough and plough'd him in,
Laid clods upon his head;
And they have taken a solemn oath,
John Barleycorn is dead.

6 O Barleycorn is the choicest grain
That e'er was sown on land;
It will do more than any grain,
By the turning of your hand.

3 So there he lay for a full fortnight,
Till the dew on him did fall:
Then Barleycorn sprang up again,
And that surprised them all.

NOTE

For other versions with tunes of this well-known ballad, see 'Songs of the West' (No. 14 and Note, 2d ed.); Barrett's 'English Folk Songs' (No. 8); 'Journal of the Folk-Song Society' (volume i, p. 81; volume iii, p. 255); and Christie's 'Traditional Ballad Airs of Scotland' (volume i, p. 134).

The earliest printed copy of the ballad is of the time of James I.

Versions with words only are given in Dick's 'Songs of Robert Burns' (p. 314); 'Roxburghe Ballads' (volume ii, p. 327); and Bell's 'Ballads and Songs of the Peasantry of England' (p. 80). Chappell gives "Stingo or Oil of Barley" as the traditional air; while Dick says it is uncertain whether Burns intended his version of the ballad to be sung to that tune or to "Lull me beyond thee."

It is not easy to express in musical notation the exact way in which the singer sang this song. He dwelt, perhaps, rather longer upon the double dotted notes than their written value, although not long enough to warrant their being marked with the formal pause. The singer told me that he heard the song solemnly chanted by some street-singers who passed through his village when he was a child. The song fascinated him and he followed the singers and tried to learn the air. For some time afterward he was unable to recall it, when one day, to his great delight, the tune suddenly came back to him, and since then he has constantly sung it. He gave me the words of the first stanza only. The remaining verses in the text have been taken from Bell's 'Songs of the Peasantry of England.' The tune, which is in the Aeolian mode, is such a fine one that I have been tempted to harmonise it somewhat elaborately. Those who prefer a simpler setting can repeat the harmonies set to the first verse. (NOTE: Here, Sharp's piano accompaniment is omitted - L.J.)