

Riddles Wisely Expounded

Child 1

Notes: This is a combination of Child text A and D, with some changes of my own. The music is an adaptation from D'urfey's, "redacted" to a modern style. All in all quite "modern," but I hope it at least retains the flavor of the older version.



There was a lass of the North Country,
As fair as any lass can be.
There was a knight of noble worth
Which also lived in the North.

The knight, of courage stout and brave,
A wife he did desire to have.
This Knight came to the Lady's door,
He'd traveled far to be her wooer.

The young brave knight to her did say,
My suit, fair maid, shall not be stayed.
If thou canst answer me questions three,
This very day will I marry thee.'

Lo what is longer than the way,
Or what is deeper than the sea'
Or what is louder than the horn,
Or what is sharper than a thorn ?

Or what is greener than the grass,
Or what is worse then the Devil was ?'
These riddles have I given thee,
Pray, prove your love and answer me

O love is longer than the way,
And hell is deeper than the sea.
And thunder is louder than the horn,
And hunger is sharper than a thorn.

And poyson is greener than the grass,
And love lost worse than the Devil was.'
When she these questions answered had,
The knight became exceeding glad.

And having thusly try'd her wit,
He much commended her for it.
And after, as it is verifi'd,
He made of her his lovely bride.

So now, fair maidens all, adieu,
This song I dedicate to you.
I wish that you may constant prove
Unto the man that you do love.

For those familiar with the original from Child: I've altered the text to shorten the song, and -- to be honest -- to match some of my own ideas on what a romantic song should be. Child's original had the youngest daughter "advance her suit" by crawling into the bed with the knight and "entertaining" him -- I guess some things never change. (The oldest version I have seen is "Inter diabolus et virgo", a fifteenth-century dialog between the Devil and a Maid.)