

The Bitter Withy



Variant, verse 8



1. As I waled out on a bright holiday
Small rains from the skies did fall, did fall
And our Saviour asking leave of his own dear mother
If he should go play at the ball.
2. Go play at the ball, my own dear Son,
It's time that you were gone, were gone,
And don't let me hear of any ill-doings
At night when you come home.
3. Our Saviour walked down into yonder town
As far as the holy, holy well,
And there he met three of the finest children
That ever any tongue could tell.
4. "Good morn, good morn, good morn" said they
"Good morning" then said he, said he
"Now which of you three fine children
Will play at ball with me?"
5. "Now, we are lords' and ladies' sons
Born in a bowery hall,
And you are but a maiden's child
Born in an oxen's stall."
6. Now our Saviour built a bridge
with the beams of the sun
And over it walked he, walked he,
And the three jolly children they followed him
And drowned they were all three.

7. Then up would bawl and down would bawl
Their mothers they did a-wall and squall
Saying "Mary mild, fetch home your child,
For ours they are drowned all"

8. Now Mary mild take a handful of small withy
And laid our dear Saviour across her knee
And with that handful of small withy
She gave him slashes three.

9. "Oh curses be to the bitter withy
That causeth me to smart, to smart,
And that shall be the very first tree
That shall perish right at the heart."

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Source: William Payne, Gloucester, 22nd August 1952, collected by Maud Karpeles and Patrick Shuldham-Shaw