

# The Coal Owner and the Pitman's Wife

Words: William Hornsby, collier, Shotton Moor  
Written at the time of the 1844 Durham Coal Strike  
Tune: Mr. J. Denison, Walker (?)

A musical score for the song 'The Coal Owner and the Pitman's Wife'. It consists of three staves of music in 3/4 time, written in treble clef. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff starts with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The second staff begins with a measure rest and the number '8' above it. The third staff begins with a measure rest and the number '15' above it.

A dia - log I'll tell you as true as my life be - tween a coal - own - er and a  
poor pit - man's wife She was a travell - in' a - long the high way she —  
met a coal - own - er and this she did say der - ry down down down der - ry down.

## The Coal Owner and the Pitman's Wife

1. A dialog I'll tell you as true as my life  
Between a coal owner and a poor pitman's wife.  
She was a travellin' along the highway.  
She met a coal owner and this she did say.  
Derry down, down, down derry down.
2. *"Good morning Lord Firedamp", this woman she said.  
"I'll do you no harm, Sir, so don't be afraid.  
If you'd been where I've been for most of my life,  
You wouldn't turn pale at a poor pitman's wife."*  
Derry down, down, down derry down.
3. *"Then where do you come from?" the owner he cried.  
"I come from Hell", the woman replied.  
"If you come from hell, then tell me right plain  
Oh how you contrived it to get out again?"*  
Derry down, down, down derry down.

4. *“Aye, the way I got out, the truth I will tell.  
They're turning the poor folk all out of hell.  
This is to make space for the rich wicked race.  
There is a great number of them in that place.”*  
Derry down, down, down derry down.
5. *“And the coal owners will soon be commanded  
To arrive in hell, as I understand it.  
For the devil did say as I came out:  
“Next all the coal owners will receive their rout.”*  
Derry down, down, down derry down.
6. *“Then how does the devil behave in that place?”  
“Ooh sir, he is cruel to the rich wicked race,  
Crueller by far than you could suppose.  
He's like a mad bull with a ring through his nose.”*  
Derry down, down, down derry down.
7. *“If you be a coal owner, sir, take my advice.  
Agree with your men. Pay them a fair price.  
Perchance if you do not, I know very well,  
You'll be in great danger of going to hell.”*  
Derry down, down, down derry down
8. *“For all you coal owners great fortunes have made  
By those jovial men who work the coal trade.  
Now how can you think to prosper and thrive  
By wanting to starve your poor workmen alive?”*  
Derry down, down, down derry down.

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Sources:

1. *Union Songs, A Selection* by Mark Gregory: <http://unionsong.com/u013.html>
2. A recording by an unknown singer on an mp3 file on Mark Gregory's site.
3. A.L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1967, Granada Publishing, Paladin, 1975.
3. *Songbook and Notes* at: <http://www.mysongbook.de/msb/songs/d/dialogue.html>.

The lyrics were written by William Hornsby, a collier of Shotton Moor at the time of the 1844 Durham Coal Strike. I have combined lyrics from the various sources and made made my own small modifications.

Mr. J. Denison of Walker supplied a tune at the time of the strike. The tune given here was transcribed from the mp3 file on Mark Gregory's site. A.L. Lloyd collected a similar tune in Lancashire in 1952.

Mass dismissal and eviction of workers and their families from company housing were common strategies employed by the coal owners to break the back of organized labour. A.L. Lloyd remarks on the hard hitting humour of this masterpiece. I like the shudder of fear that afflicts the coal owner as the pitman's wife approaches and the grim humour of poor folk being turned out even from hell.