

Bells of Rhymney

Verses 1,2

Verse 3

1. Oh what will you give me?
Say the sad bells of Rhymney.
Is there hope for the future?
Cry the brown bells of Merthyr.
Who made the mine owner?
Say the black bells of Rhondda.
And who robbed the miner?
Cry the grim bells of Blaina.
2. They will plunder willy-nilly,
Cry the bells of Caerphilly.
They have fangs, they have teeth,
Say the loud bells of Neathe.
Even God is uneasy,
Say the moist bells of Swansea.
And what will you give me?
Say the sad bells of Rhymney.
3. Put the vandals in court,
Say the bells of Newport.
All would be well if, if, if,
Cry the green bells of Cardiff.
Why so worried, sisters, why?
Sang the silver bells of Wye.
And what will you give me?
Say the sad bells of Rhymney.

"The Bells of Rhymney" is a poem by Welsh poet Idris Davies, set to music by Pete Seeger. From the age of 14, Idris Davies had worked as a miner at the Mardy Colliery in Rhondda Fach, south Wales. At the age of 21, he was involved in an accident which resulted in him losing part of a finger. With his injury and the disruptions caused by the 1926 General Strike, he found himself jobless. He qualified for Nottingham University and took a teaching position in London.

He also started to write poetry, in both Welsh and English. His writing was influenced by the bitterness and hurt of the mining communities around him. Davies was given encouragement to continue writing by Dylan Thomas and TS Eliot. It was Eliot, in 1938, who would publish his first collection of poems, *Gwalia Deserta (Wasteland of Wales)*. This included a poem "XV" that was only 123 words long but managed to create a tapestry of the various ways south Wales had been affected by the decline of mining. In 1954, one year after Thomas' death, a collection of Dylan Thomas essays was published in America called **Quite Early One Morning** and this included a reprint of "*Gwalia Deserta* XV". That poem is the lyric to this song. Pete Seeger decided to put the words to music, first recording it in 1957 with blues musician Sonny Terry.

The towns mentioned in the poem are either coastal cities (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea & Neathe) or mining town clustered south of the Brecon Beacons mountains (Rhymney, Merthyr, Rhondda, Blaina and Caerphilly). Some of my ancestors came from Merthyr (in Welsh *Merthyr Tydfil*). The Wye River valley runs along the border with England.

Pete Seeger sang "The Bells of Rhymney" at a Ballads and Blues concert at St. Pancras Town Hall Theatre on October 4, 1959 that was released by Folklore Records in 1963 on the album **Pete Seeger in Concert**.

It was printed in Seeger's **The Bells of Rhymney** (1964).