

Malt's Come Down



"Malt's Come Down" is an English air in 6/8 time and G Mixolydian. The parts are played AA.

The tune dates back to the 16th century, and appears in a setting by the English composer William Byrd in the **Fitzwilliam Virginal Book** and in Ravenscroft's **Deuteromelia** (1609). Chappell notes: "...it appears that Ravenscroft, in arranging it as a round, has taken only half the tune." Since the latter two lines are always the same, it makes a great convivial song, with the first two lines being made up spontaneously by each participant in turn. Various stanzas begin:

There's never a drunkard in all of the town,
But well he knows the malt's come down.
Malt's come down, malt's come down,
From an old angel to the French crown.

There's never a maiden in all of the town
But sleeps alone now the malt's come down.
Malt's come down, malt's come down,
From an old angel to the French crown.

The 'angel' can either refer to an English gold coin that weighed 23-3/4 carats, minted from 1465 to the time of Charles I and worth approximately 7 shillings, or to a prostitute. 'French crown' refers similarly to a gold coin weighing 23 carats and worth about 5 shillings, or to the pox (Routledge's **Dictionary of Historical Slang**, 1973). It was printed in Chappell's **Popular Music of the Olden Time**, vol. 1 (1859).