Lady Gay

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There was a lady and a lady gay,
Of children she had three,
She sent them away to the North Countree
To learn their grammaree

They'd not been gone but a very short time,
Scarcely three weeks and a day,
When death, cruel death, came hasting along
And stole those babes away.

"There is a King in Heaven," she cried
"A King of third degree
Send back, send back my three little pages,
This night send them back to me."

She made a bed in the uppermost room,
On it she put a white sheet,
And over the top a golden spread
That they much better might sleep.

"Take it off, take it off," cried the older one,
"Take it off, take it off," cried he,
"For what's to become of this wide wicked world
Since sin has first begun."

She set a table of linen fine,
On it she placed bread and wine,
"Come eat, come drink of mine."

"We want none of your bread, mother,
Neither do we want your wine,
For yonder stands our Savior deer,
To Him we must resign."

"Green grass is over our heads, mother,
Cold clay is over our feet,
And every tear you shed for us,
It wets our winding-sheet."

This is one of the best of the American versions of "The Wife of

Usher's Well," a remarkable ballad on the theme of persistent grief and tears disturbing the sleep of the dead. The children have been sent away to learn magic (grammaree), a point rarely recognized by the folk who sing the ballad. The children's death and their mother's prayer for their return culminates in their ghostly visit to warn her of the effect of her mourning. In most American versions of the Child ballads, supernatural motifs disappear, except where, as in the case of "Lady Gay," there are religious overtones to the ballad tale. From "British Ballads and Folk Songs from the Joan Baez Songbook."
Child #79
recorded by John And Tony Dark Ships
Deller consort, and Hedy West
DC

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