

A Lyke-Wake Dirge

(Anonymous, in Yorkshire dialect)

THIS ae nighte, this ae nighte,
—*Every nighte and alle*,
Fire and fleet and candle-lighte,
And Christe receive thy saule.

When thou from hence away art past, 5
—*Every nighte and alle*,
To Whinny-muir thou com'st at last;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If ever thou gavest hosen and shoon,
—*Every nighte and alle*, 10
Sit thee down and put them on;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If hosen and shoon thou ne'er gav'st nane
—*Every nighte and alle*,
The whinnes sall prick thee to the bare
bane; 15
And Christe receive thy saule.

From Whinny-muir when thou may'st pass,
—*Every nighte and alle*,
To Brig o' Dread thou com'st at last;
And Christe receive thy saule. 20

From Brig o' Dread when thou may'st
pass,
—*Every nighte and alle*,
To Purgatory fire thou com'st at last;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If ever thou gavest meat or drink, 25
—*Every nighte and alle*,
The fire sall never make thee shrink;
And Christe receive thy saule.

If meat or drink thou ne'er gav'st nane,
—*Every nighte and alle*, 30
The fire will burn thee to the bare bane;
And Christe receive thy saule.

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
—*Every nighte and alle*,
Fire and fleet and candle-lighte, 35
And Christe receive thy saule.

The title refers to the watch over the dead between the death and funeral, known as a wake. "Lyke" is an obsolete word meaning a dead body, and is related to the German word *leiche* and the Dutch word *lijk*, which have the same meaning. "Fire and fleet and candle-light" are a summary of the comforts of the house, which the dead person (during the wake) still enjoys for *this ae night*, and then (presumably at the burial) goes out into the dark and cold.

The poem was first collected by John Aubrey in 1686, who also recorded that it was being sung in 1616, but it is believed to be much older.

Richard Blakeborough, in his *Wit, Character, Folklore, and Customs of the North Riding*, fills this apparent gap with verses he says were in use in 1800, and which seem likely to be authentic:

*If ivver thoo gav o' thy siller an' gowd, / At t'
Brig o' Dreed thoo'll finnd foothod,
Bud if siller an' gowd thoo nivver gav nean, /
Thoo'll doan, doon tum'le towards Hell
flames,*

Musical setting by Benjamin Britten, as the 4th mvmt. ("Dirge") from his *Serenade, Op. 31, for Tenor, Horn, and Strings* (1943).