

Professor Barleycorn

©1996 by Howard L. Kaplan

Lively (♩=180)



The mo-ther of John Bar-ley-corn, much smal-ler than my



thumb, Was liste-ning for the thun-der that would her-ald rains to



come, Such thun-der being a con-se-quence when bolts of light-ning



pass, And hea-ted air ex - plodes with-in the cold, sur-roun-ding



mass. Stu-dents who ca - rouse by night must con-tem-plate by



morn The wis-dom of their stu-dies with Pro - fes-sor Bar-ley - corn.

The mother of John Barleycorn, much smaller than my thumb,
Was listening for the thunder that would herald rains to come,
Such thunder being a consequence when bolts of lightning pass,
And heated air explodes within the cold, surrounding mass.

Students who carouse by night must contemplate by morn
The wisdom of their studies with Professor Barleycorn.

So, on a springtime morning, beneath the thunder's din,
She lay upon her back and let the rain soak through her skin.
The water swelled the tissues in the desiccated fruit:
The cotyledon, coleoptile, embryonic root.

Much fatter and much softer, on a cool but sunny day,
She gently stuck her toe out to begin her spring ballet.
This radicle would not grow more than several inches down,
But secondary roots one day would sprout beneath the crown.

When by the light of morning she could finally be seen,
Embarrassed by her nakedness, she donned a coat of green.
Of all the coloured wavelengths that are through the spectrum spread,
The chloroplasts reflect the green, absorbing blue and red.

A creature of some elegance, though forced to live in dirt,
She added to her wardrobe a surrounding ring of skirt.
Evolved to cope with herbivores whose front teeth cut and clip,
The growth point of a grass blade is the base, and not the tip.

When she had almost reached the height to which she planned to grow,
She modestly grew gravid; she did not put on a show.
A plant that need not get its pollen from an outside source
Is able to develop more consistent seed, of course.

His mother's head at last bent down. Her beard was long and rough,
And Barleycorn himself, grown fat, had turned from green to buff.
When harvesting for malting barley, combine crews are sent
When moisture in the seed has dropped below fourteen percent.

Just like his mother earlier, he soaked and swelled with pride,
But when he stuck his toe out he was roasted and he died.
The malting process needs the root appropriately short
To optimize the amylase that helps create the wort.

His body crushed and broken, he was soaked again and drained.
His body sent to feed some hogs, his spirit was retained.
The amylase and starch within the seed were gently brewed,
To split the starch to maltose brewers' yeast can use as food.

The resurrected spirit of John Barleycorn enhanced
A vat of yeast and water so it bubbled, frothed, and danced.
The CO₂ and alcohol — the action, not the taste —
Are from the standpoint of the yeast just metabolic waste.

Now, of the tale of Barleycorn, there's not much more to tell.
He went to university, where students loved him well.
Through alcohol consumption, inhibitions are decreased,
And reinforcement follows because dopamine's released.

The cousin of John Barleycorn, a Scotsman known as Will,
Was fortunate to know a higher education still.
The boiling point of ethanol being relatively low,
A fire's warmth can liberate it out of H₂O.

Reprinted with minor corrections in January 2001

A list of references can be found on the other side of the page.

The following references to barley and brewing contributed information that was incorporated into the text of "Professor Barleycorn"

Alberta, Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Development World Wide Web site "Barley", <http://itsd-s3.agric.gov.ab.ca/crops/barley/index.html> (as of July 1996), adapted from Agdex 114/20-2, following these links:

"Malt Barley Production": Maturation of malting barley to 14.0% moisture maximum before combining.

"Harvesting Barley for Malt": Transformation of kernels from green to buff as a stage in maturity.

"Physiology of Barley": Shallowness of the primary root that develops from the radicle, followed by secondary roots developing from the crown.

Asimov, I. Photosynthesis. Basic Books, Inc., 1968, p. 121

Reflection of green light, absorption of red and violet light by chloroplasts.

Bidwell, R.G.S.. Plant Physiology, Second Edition. Macmillan, 1979, pp. 71-73.

Foster, A.S. and Gifford, E.M. Jr. Comparative Morphology of Vascular Plants. W. H. Freeman, 1974, pp. 726-732.

Steward, F.C.. Growth and Organization in Plants. Addison-Wesley, 1968, pp. 54-55

Structure of monocot seeds, illustrated, showing the cotyledon, coleoptile, and radicle (embryonic root); the drawings in Bidwell and in Foster and Gifford are especially clear.

Daiches, D. Scotch Whisky. The Macmillan Company: 1969, pp. 6-8.

Preparation of the wort from malted (sprouted) barley by grinding, soaking, and allowing the enzyme to split the starch to maltose.

Sale of the residual crushed grain as animal feed.

Generation of alcohol and CO₂ as by-products of fermentation.

Distillation of alcohol out of the wash by heat, including (historically) coal fires.

Edlin, H.L.. Man and Plants. Aldes Books, 1967, pp 62-63.

Shallowness of the barley root system.

McDowall, R. J. S. The Whiskies of Scotland. John Murray: 1967, pp. 105-106.

Visibility of "beards" atop growing barley

Preparation of the wort.

The New Encyclopedia Britannica Macropaedia, 15th Edition, 1992, "Angiosperms", pp. 740-741.

Location of the growing points, or meristems, of grasses at the base of each stem between the leaves to facilitate regrowth.

Self-fertilization of most grasses, enhancing the chances of preserving successful gene combinations, or genotypes, that crossing would disrupt.

Schery, R.W.. Plants for Man. Prentice-Hall Inc., 1972, pp. 435-438.

Development of a secondary, adventitious root system and of tillers (secondary leaves surrounding the main stem).

Rarity of cross-pollination.

Termination of malt germination by heating and drying at the stage of maximum enzyme content.

Howard L. Kaplan 172 Howland Avenue
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5R 3B6
howard@thrinberry-frog.com www.thrinberry-frog.com
Performing rights administered by SOCAN

This songsheet was prepared in January 2001