

Malbrouk s'en va-t-en guerre

Marlborough Has Left for the War

traditional French, early 1700s

(A)



Mal— brouk s'en va— t-en guer - re, mir-on - ton ton ton mir-on - tain - e, Mal—



brouk s'en va— t-en guer - re, Ne sait quand re - vien - dra. Mal— dra. Ne—

(B)



sait quand re - vien - dra, ne— sait quand re - vien - dra. Mal—



brouk s'en va— t-en guer - re, mir-on - ton ton ton mir-on - tain - e, Mal—



brouk s'en va— t-en guer - re, ne sait quand re - vien - dra. Ne— dra.

This song arose as a rather bawdy lament on the falsely-rumored death of John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough (1650-1722), at the Battle of Malplaquet in 1709 during the 13-year-long War of Spanish Succession. Churchill functioned as commander in chief of the Grand Alliance (Austria, Prussia, Hanover, England, Scotland, Portugal, Dutch Republic, Duchy of Savoy, and Aragon) against the combined strength of France, Bavaria, Castile, and the Council of Italy. Churchill was an accomplished military strategist, courageous soldier, skilled diplomat, and ambitious courtier whose turbulent career served England's James II, William III, Queen Anne, and George I.

While it is not surprising that Churchill was lampooned by the French, the enduring popularity of this song is extraordinary. During the century following its birth, the song became popular throughout France, Spain, England, Russia, Sweden, Germany, Latin America, and North America. In France the song also lent its name to all sorts of other products including fashions, porcelains, soups, carriages, silks, keepsakes, and toys. The first verse (given) says, "Marlborough has left for the war, not knowing when he will return" interspersed with vocables.

The tune appears in classical compositions by Stamitz and Beethoven; the song is mentioned by name in books by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy; a set of English lyrics were written by Longfellow; and of course the tune is also used for the widely known folk songs "For He's/She's A Jolly Good Fellow" and "The Bear Came Over the Mountain."