

# Which Shall It Be - song lyrics

American Old-time song lyrics from [www.traditionalmusic.co.uk](http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk)

WHICH SHALL IT BE?

A popular recitation.

A rich man who had no children proposed to his poor neighbor, who had seven, to take one of them, and promised, if the parents would consent, that he would give them property enough to make themselves and their other other six children comfortable for life.]

Which shall it be! Which shall it be?  
I looked at John, John looked at me,  
(Dear, patient John, who loves me yet  
As well as though my locks were jet),  
And when I found that I must speak,  
My voice seemed strangely low And weak:  
"Tell me again what Robert said;"  
And then I, listening bent my head-  
This is his letter:

"I will give  
A house and land while you shall live,  
If, in return, from out your seven.  
One child to me for aye is giveu."

I looked at John's old garments worn;  
I thought of all that he had borne  
Of poverty, and work, and care,  
Which I, though willing, could not share;  
I thought of seven young mouths to feed,  
Of seven little children's need,  
And then of this.

"Come, John," said I,  
"We'll choose among them as they lie  
Asleep." So, walking hand in hand,  
Dear John and I surveyed our band:  
First to the cradle liirhtly stepped  
Where Lilian, the baby, slept.  
Softly the father stooped to lay  
His rough hand down in a loving way,  
When dream or whisper made her stir,  
And huskily he said: ",Not her! "

We stooped beside the trundle bed,  
And one long ray of twilight shed  
Athwart the boyish faces there,  
In sleep so beautiful and fair;  
I saw on James's rough, red cheek  
A tear undried. E'er John could speak  
"He's but a baby, too," said I,  
And kissed him as we hurried by.  
Pale, patient Robbie's angel face  
Still in sleep bore suffering's trace,  
"No, for a thousand crowns, uot him! "  
He whispered, while our eyes were dim.

Poor Dick! bad Dick! our wayward son-  
Turbulent, restless, idle one-  
Could he be spared? Nay, He who gave

Bade us befriend him to the grave;  
Only a mother's heart could be  
Patient enough for such as lie;  
"And so," said John, "I would not dare  
To take him from her bedside prayer."

Then stole we softly up above.  
And knelt by Mary, child of love;  
"Perhaps for her twould better be,"  
I said to John. Quite silently  
He lifted up a curl that lay  
Across her cheek in a willful way,  
And shook his head: "Nay, love, uot thee,"  
The while my heart beat audibly.

Only one more, our eldest lad,  
Trusty and truthful, good And glad,  
So like his father. "No, John, no!  
I caunot, will not, let him go."  
And so we wrote in courteous way.  
We could not give one child away;  
And afterward toil lighter seemed.  
Thinking of that of which we dreamed,  
Happy in truth that not one face  
Was missed from its accustomed place;  
Thankful to work for all the seven,  
Trusting the rest to One in heaven!