

The Devil's Nine Questions

Informant/Performer:
Mrs. Texas Gladden
Salem, VA, 1941

Source:
Library of Congress AFS 5231 A1
Collected by Alan Lomax

♩ = 84

Somewhat parlando

The musical score is written on four staves in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as 84 beats per minute (♩ = 84) and the style is 'Somewhat parlando'. The lyrics are: 'Oh, you must answer my ques - tions nine, Sing nine - ty nine and nine - ty, Or you're not God's, you're one of mine. And you are the wea - ver's bon - ny.'

2. What is whiter than the milk?
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And what is softer than the silk?
And you are the weaver's bonny.
3. Snow is whiter than the milk,
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And down is softer than the silk,
And I am the weaver's bonny.
4. Oh, what is higher than a tree?
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And what is deeper than the sea?
And you are the weaver's bonny.
5. Heaven's higher than a tree,
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And Hell is deeper than the sea,
And I am the weaver's bonny.
6. What is louder than a horn?
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And what is sharper than a thorn?
And you are the weaver's bonny.
7. Thunder's louder than a horn,
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And death is sharper than a thorn,
And I am the weaver's bonny.
8. What's more innocent than a lamb?
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And what is meaner than womankind?
And you are the weaver's bonny.
9. A babe's more innocent than a lamb,
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And the devil's meaner than womankind,
And I am the weaver's bonny.
10. Oh you have answered my questions nine,
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And you are God's, you're none of mine.
And you are the weaver's bonny.

Background Information

One of the oldest songs in the language - No. 1 in Professor Francis James Child's great collection of 305 English and Scottish ballads - it is still sung here in America. The most ancient manuscript - "song ballot" of this folk ballad "in a hand of about 1450," is in the Bodleian Library in England.

Richard Chase, *American Folk Tales and Songs*