

My Lord, What a Mourning

Source:

J.B.T. Marsh

*The Story of the Jubilee Singers,
with their Songs (1880)*

Chorus



My Lord, what a mourn - ing, My Lord, what a mourn - ing,

My Lord, what a mourn - ing, When the stars be - gin to fall.

1.You'll hear the trum - pet sound To wake the na - tions un - der - ground,
2.You'll hear the sin - ner mourn, To wake the na - tions un - der - ground,
3.You'll hear the Christ - ian shout, To wake the na - tions un - der - ground,

Look - ing to my God's right hand, When the stars be - gin to fall.

Background Information

Ex-slaves have been understandably reluctant to speak of these matters, but the fact is that slave uprisings, large and small, were a normal, though carefully hidden aspect of life in the pre-war South.

These abortive rebellions, which on one or two occasions involved thousands of slaves, were always put down with savage violence; the Negroes who participated were beheaded, hung, shot, or beaten to death, for the white South was always fearful that a true slave revolution would take place. Every slave knew that his nervous masters were watching him and that his slightest act, if no more than an angry look or a sullen word, might bring him a merciless lashing. Even the spirituals, as the following slave tale shows, were censored. Thus their symbolism became all the more evocative, cryptic, and intense, communicating to all those who were oppressed the hopeful message that they would one day be free and their oppressors punished.

"We'd sing the old-time hymns then, the ones the children done away with now.

My Lord, he called me, called me by the lightning,

The trumpet sounds within my soul, I ain't got long to stay here.

Steal away, steal away.

And I've heard them pray for freedom. I thought it was foolishness then, but the old-time folks always felt they was to be free. It must have been something revealed to them. Back there, if they'd catch you writing, they'd break you of it if they had to cut your fingers off; and still they knew they would be free." (Quote: Fisk)

Alan Lomax, Folk Songs of North America