

Charles Kingsley (1819-75)

5 *The Last Buccaneer*

Oh England is a pleasant place for them that's rich and high,  
But England is a cruel place for such poor folks as I;  
And such a port for mariners I ne'er shall see again  
As the pleasant Isle of Avès, beside the Spanish main.

There were forty craft in Avès that were both swift and stout, 5  
All furnished well with small arms and cannons round about;  
And a thousand men in Avès made laws so fair and free  
To choose their valiant captains and obey them loyally.

Thence we sailed against the Spaniard with his hoards of plate and gold,  
Which he wrung with cruel tortures from Indian folk of old; 10  
Likewise the merchant captains, with hearts as hard as stone,  
Who flog men and keel-haul them, and starve them to the bone.

Oh the palms grew high in Avès, and fruits that shone like gold,  
And the colibris and parrots they were gorgeous to behold;  
And the negro maids to Avès from bondage fast did flee, 15  
To welcome gallant sailors, a-sweeping in from sea.

Oh sweet it was in Avès to hear the landward breeze,  
A-swing with good tobacco in a net between the trees,  
With a negro lass to fan you, while you listened to the roar  
Of the breakers on the reef outside, that never touched the shore. 20

But Scripture saith, an ending to all fine things must be;  
So the King's ships sailed on Avès, and quite put down were we.  
All day we fought like bulldogs, but they burst the booms at night;  
And I fled in a piragua, sore wounded, from the fight.

Nine days I floated starving, and a negro lass beside, 25  
Till for all I tried to cheer her, the poor young thing she died;  
But as I lay a gasping, a Bristol sail came by,  
And brought me home to England here, to beg until I die.

And now I'm old and going — I'm sure I can't tell where;  
One comfort is, this world's so hard, I can't be worse off there:                    30  
If I might but be a sea-dove, I'd fly across the main,  
To the pleasant Isle of Avès, to look at it once again.

1857

(From *Poems*. London: Macmillan, 1889)