

Charles Kingsley (1819-75)

7 *The Outlaw*

Oh, I wadna be a yeoman, mither, to follow my father's trade,
To bow my back in miry banks, at pleugh and hoe and spade.
Stinting wife, and bairns, and kye, to fat some courtier lord, —
Let them die o' rent wha like, mither, and I'll die by sword.

Nor I wadna be a clerk, mither, to bide aye ben, 5
Scrabbling ower the sheets o' parchment with a weary weary pen;
Looking through the lang stane windows at a narrow strip o' sky,
Like a laverock in a withy cage, until I pine away and die.

Nor I wadna be a merchant, mither, in his lang furred gown,
Trailing strings o' footsore horses through the noisy dusty town; 10
Louting low to knights and ladies, fumbling o'er his wares,
Telling lies, and scraping siller, heaping cares on cares.

Nor I wadna be a soldier, mither, to dice wi' ruffian bands,
Pining weary months in castles, looking over wasted lands.
Smoking byres, and shrieking women, and the grewsome sights o' war — 15
There's blood on my hand eneugh, mither; it's ill to make it mair.

If I had married a wife, mither, I might ha' been douce and still,
And sat at hame by the ingle side to crack and laugh my fill;
Sat at hame wi' the woman I looed, and wi' bairnies at my knee:
But death is bauld, and age is cauld, and luve's no for me. 20

For when first I stirred in your side, mither, ye ken full well
How you lay all night up among the deer out on the open fell;
And so it was that I won the heart to wander far and near,
Caring neither for land nor lassie, but the bonnie dun deer.

Yet I am not a losel and idle, mither, nor a thief that steals; 25
I do but hunt God's cattle, upon God's ain hills;
For no man buys and sells the deer, and the bonnie fells are free
To a belted knight with hawk on hand, and a gangrel loon like me.

So I'm aff and away to the muirs, mither, to hunt the deer,
Ranging far frae frowning faces, and the douce folk here; 30
Crawling up through burn and bracken, louping down the screes,
Looking out frae craig and headland, drinking up the simmer breeze.

Oh, the wafts o' heather honey, and the music o' the brae,
As I watch the great harts feeding, nearer, nearer a' the day.
Oh, to hark the eagle screaming, sweeping, ringing round the sky — 35
That's a bonnier life than stumbling ower the muck to colt and kye.

And when I'm taen and hangit, mither, a brittling o' my deer,
Ye'll no leave your bairn to the corbie craws, to dangle in the air;
But ye'll send up my twa douce brethren, and ye'll steal me frae the tree,
And bury me up on the brown brown muirs, where I aye looded to be. 40

Ye'll bury me 'twixt the brae and the burn, in a glen far away,
Where I may hear the heathcock craw, and the great harts bray;
And gin my ghaist can walk, mither, 'I'll go glowering at the sky,
The livelong night on the black hill sides where the dun deer lie.

1847

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