

Charles Kingsley (1819-75)

8 *The Priest's Heart*

It was Sir John, the fair young Priest,  
He strode up off the strand;  
But seven fisher maidens he left behind  
All dancing hand in hand.

He came unto the wise wife's house: 5  
‘Now, Mother, to prove your art;  
To charm May Carleton's merry blue eyes  
Out of a young man's heart.’

‘My son, you went for a holy man,  
Whose heart was set on high; 10  
Go sing in your psalter, and read in your books;  
Man's love fleets lightly by.’

‘I had liever to talk with May Carleton,  
Than with all the saints in Heaven;  
I had liever to sit by May Carleton 15  
Than climb the spherè seven.

‘I have watched and fasted, early and late,  
I have prayed to all above;  
But I find no cure save churchyard mould,  
For the pain which men call love.’ 20

‘Now Heaven forefend that ill grow worse:  
Enough that ill be ill.  
I know of a spell to draw May Carleton,  
And bend her to your will.’

‘If thou didst that which thou canst not do, 25  
Wise woman though thou be,  
I would run and run till I buried myself  
In the surge of yonder sea.

'Scathless for me are maid and wife,  
And scathless shall they bide. 30  
Yet charm me May Carleton's eyes from the heart  
That aches in my left side.'

She charmed him with the white witchcraft,  
She charmed him with the black,  
But he turned his fair young face to the wall, 35  
Till she heard his heart-strings crack.

*1870*

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