

Charles Kingsley (1819-75)

1 *The Bad Squire*

The merry brown hares came leaping
Over the crest of the hill,
Where the clover and corn lay sleeping
Under the moonlight still.

Leaping late and early, 5
Till under their bite and their tread
The swedes and the wheat and the barley
Lay cankered and trampled and dead.

A poacher's widow sat sighing 10
On the side of the white chalk bank,
Where under the gloomy fir-woods
One spot in the ley throve rank.

She watched a long tuft of clover,
Where rabbit or hare never ran;
For its black sour haulm covered over 15
The blood of a murdered man.

She thought of the dark plantation,
And the hares, and her husband's blood,
And the voice of her indignation
Rose up to the throne of God. 20

'I am long past wailing and whining —
I have wept too much in my life:
I've had twenty years of pining
As an English labourer's wife.

'A labourer in Christian England, 25
Where they cant of a Saviour's name,
And yet waste men's lives like the vermin's
For a few more brace of game.

And take to allotments and schools,
But you've run up a debt that will never
Be paid us by penny-club rules.

'In the season of shame and sadness, 65
In the dark and dreary day,
When scrofula, gout, and madness
Are eating your race away;

'When to kennels and liveried varlets 70
You have cast your daughter's bread,
And, worn out with liquor and harlots,
Your heir at your feet lies dead;

'When your youngest, the mealy-mouthed rector,
Lets your soul rot asleep to the grave,
You will find in your God the protector 75
Of the freeman you fancied your slave.'

She looked at the tuft of clover,
And wept till her heart grew light;
And at last, when her passion was over,
Went wandering into the night. 80

But the merry brown hares came leaping
Over the uplands still,
Where the clover and corn lay sleeping
On the side of the white chalk hill.

1847

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