

Charles Kingsley (1819-75)

6 *A New Forest Ballad*

Oh she tripped over Ocknell plain,  
And down by Bradley Water;  
And the fairest maid on the forest side  
Was Jane, the keeper's daughter.

She went and went through the broad gray lawns 5  
As down the red sun sank,  
And chill as the scent of a new-made grave  
The mist smelt cold and dank.

'A token, a token!' that fair maid cried,  
'A token that bodes me sorrow; 10  
For they that smell the grave by night  
Will see the corpse to-morrow.

'My own true love in Burley Walk  
Does hunt to-night, I fear;  
And if he meet my father stern, 15  
His game may cost him dear.

'Ah, here's a curse on hare and grouse,  
A curse on hart and hind;  
And a health to the squire in all England,  
Leaves never a head behind.' 20

Her true love shot a mighty hart  
Among the standing rye,  
When on him leapt that keeper old

From the fern where he did lie.

The forest laws were sharp and stern, 25  
The forest blood was keen;  
They lashed together for life and death  
Beneath the hollies green.

The metal good and the walnut wood  
Did soon in flinders flee; 30  
They tost the orts to south and north,  
And grappled knee to knee.

They wrestled up, they wrestled down,  
They wrestled still and sore;  
Beneath their feet the myrtle sweet 35  
Was stamped to mud and gore.

Ah, cold pale moon, thou cruel pale moon,  
That starest with never a frown  
On all the grim and the ghastly things  
That are wrought in thorpe and town: 40

And yet, cold pale moon, thou cruel pale moon,  
That night hadst never the grace  
To lighten two dying Christian men  
To see one another's face.

They wrestled up, they wrestled down, 45  
They wrestled sore and still,  
The fiend who blinds the eyes of men  
That night he had his will.

Like stags full spent, among the bent

They dropped a while to rest; 50  
When the young man drove his saying knife  
Deep in the old man's breast.

The old man drove his gunstock down  
Upon the young man's head;  
And side by side, by the water brown, 55  
Those yeomen twain lay dead.

They dug three graves in Lyndhurst yard;  
They dug them side by side;  
Two yeomen lie there, and a maiden fair  
A widow and never a bride. 60

*1847*

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