

Charles Kingsley (1819-75)

9 *The Red King*

The King was drinking in Malwood Hall,  
There came in a monk before them all:  
He thrust by squire, he thrust by knight,  
Stood over against the dais aright;  
And, 'The word of the Lord, thou cruel Red King,           5  
The word of the Lord to thee I bring.  
A grimly sweven I dreamt yestreen;  
I saw thee lie under the hollins green,  
And through thine heart an arrow keen;  
And out of thy body a smoke did rise,                   10  
Which smirched the sunshine out of the skies:  
So if thou God's anointed be  
I rede thee unto thy soul thou see.  
For mitre and pall thou hast y-sold,  
False knight to Christ, for gain and gold;               15  
And for this thy forest were digged down all,  
Steading and hamlet and churches tall;  
And Christés poor were ousten forth,  
To beg their bread from south to north.  
So tarry at home, and fast and pray,                   20  
Lest fiends hunt thee in the judgment-day.'

The monk he vanished where he stood;  
King William sterte up wroth and wood;  
Quod he, 'Fools' wits will jump together;  
The Hampshire ale and the thunder weather               25  
Have turned the brains for us both, I think;  
And monks are curst when they fall to drink.  
A lothly sweven I dreamt last night,  
How there hoved anigh me a griesly knight,  
Did smite me down to the pit of hell;                   30  
I shrieked and woke, so fast I fell.  
There's Tyrrel as sour as I, perdie,  
So he of you all shall hunt with me;  
A grimly brace for a hart to see.'

The Red King down from Malwood came; 35  
 His heart with wine was all aflame,  
 His eyne were shotten, red as blood,  
 He rated and swore, wherever he rode.  
 They roused a hart, that grimly brace,  
 A hart of ten, a hart of grease, 40  
 Fled over against the kingés place.  
 The sun it blinded the kingés ee,  
 A fathom behind his hocks shot he:  
 ‘Shoot thou,’ quod he, ‘in the fiendés name,  
 To lose such a quarry were seven years’ shame.’ 45  
 And he hove up his hand to mark the game.  
 Tyrrel he shot full light, God wot;  
 For whether the saints they swerved the shot,  
 Or whether by treason, men knowen not,  
 But under the arm, in a secret part, 50  
 The iron fled through the kingés heart.  
 The turf it squelched where the Red King fell;  
 And the fiends they carried his soul to hell,  
 Quod ‘His master’s name it hath sped him well.’

Tyrrel he smiled full grim that day, 55  
 Quod ‘Shooting of kings is no bairns’ play;’  
 And he smote in the spurs, and fled fast away.  
 As he pricked along by Fritham plain,  
 The green tufts flew behind like rain;  
 The waters were out, and over the sward: 60  
 He swam his horse like a stalwart lord:  
 Men clepen that water Tyrrel’s ford.  
 By Rhinefield and by Osmondsleigh,  
 Through glade and furze brake fast drove he,  
 Until he heard the roaring sea; 65  
 Quod he, ‘Those gay waves they call me.’  
 By Mary’s grace a seely boat  
 On Christchurch bar did lie afloat;  
 He gave the shipmen mark and groat,  
 To ferry him over to Normandie, 70  
 And there he fell to sanctuarie;  
 God send his soul all bliss to see.

And fend our princes every one,  
From foul mishap and trahison;  
But kings that harrow Christian men  
Shall England never bide again.

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1847

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