



WINTER

THIS is no weakling pale
Driven before the gale,
A strong one he, as giant Ophero
Who bore the wayfarer upon his shoulder,
His shoulder mighty as a mountain boulder,
And from happy shore to shore

Carried him safely o'er
The turgid torrent, even so
Doth sturdy winter come and go,
Serving feeble things that wait
To cross a strait,
And landing them where they may run
To overtake the sun.

The bridge of his great arm
Rescueth from harm,
His freezing grip
Warmeth the blood,
The kiss of his cold lip
Is good
For stinging vital sparks to fire,
And wholesome in a frail world is his despotic ire.

Winter, with limbs bare and brown,
 A furred skin on his shoulders thrown,
 Driving the gales he hath come swiftly down
 Behind the sea-gulls that have landward flown :
 Music from his mouth
 Blowing, north to south,
 A leash of whirlwinds in each ruthless hand
 To let loose o'er sea and land.
 Good ships, fear ye him
 When days are short and dim,
 Demons of the air,
 All baleful things and grim,
 Of him beware,
 The purifier,
 Of him, the thurifer
 With thurible of frost and fire,
 Scattering the seedlings of a white desire
 As swift he goes
 Amid his frosts and snows,
 Keen of eye and strong of limb,
 Cleansing the world with righteous wrath no poison
 can withstand.

His dark head white starred with frost
 Moves amid the racked and tost
 Boughs of the disgracéd trees,
 Suffering mysterious penalties
 For sins of which the legend is long lost,
 For he hath them in ward
 And doth their secret guard,
 He hath stripped them of the royal cover
 Summer gave
 When each brave
 Tree of the forest was her lover,
 And the gold
 Flung to them by autumn's grace

He will take and hold
 Down in a dark place,
 For he hath got the key
 Of the earth's treasury.

Hid within the deeps
 Of Nature, where she keeps
 In long unconsciousness her darling rose,
 The pear that golden grows
 When the sun hath found it
 With reddening leaves around it,
 Hath with delight caressed it
 And for sweet uses blessed it.
 Far down in the darkness where the seed sleeps,
 And into which the long rain weeps and creeps,
 Doth winter hoard up gems,
 Coronals and diadems
 For beauteous daughters that will yet be born
 On many a radiant morn
 Winter will never see
 When the queen Summer shall
 Hold her high festival,
 Ruling by love a raptured world on flowery hill and lea.

When the ascending sun
 Signalleth his race is run,
 Whither goeth he?
 Folding up his tent of snow,
 Taking the mountain tranquilly?
 Where?
 Lifting his bugle once to fling
 On the air
 A silver call to waken Spring?
 Doth he straightway go
 Out amid the stars from yonder peak,
 Still offering his service to the weak

In spheres we do not know,
Where things faint to death,
Languish for his ice-cold breath
Bringing vigour to their veins?
With his hand upon the reins
Of the storm-wind he will come
Back to us when woods are dumb,
When our summer glory
Is departed, when the story
Of the nightingale is told,
And no more is autumn gold,
In the misty morn
We shall hear his lusty horn
Blowing, and our eyes see fain
Ice-tents glittering in the plain.
Then shall hearts be glad, and say
The roses have another day
To live, for lo, the strong one's at his mighty work again!

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