

WINTER... ..by Herbert Randall,

The barren branches clasp the sky
 Within their cold embrace ;
 I gaze across the dismal stretch
 Of flowerless, songless space.
 O, dear departed summer time,
 Gone through the Never gates !
 Thy song repeats itself to me ;
 Another summer waits.



HOW A WHALE REVENGED THE DEATH OF HER CALF.

A widely known and feared devil-fish has its head-quarters in the Northern Pacific, mostly along the American coast, especially affecting the Gulf of California. This huge creature is a mammal, one of the great whale family, really a rorqual of medium size and moderate yield of oil. Only the *élite* of the Yankee whalers, dexterous and daring as are all the tribe, can hope to get "to windward" of the diabolically cunning giants whom they abuse with such fluent and frequent flow of picturesque profanity. It is a peculiar characteristic of this animal that it seems ever on the alert, scarcely exposing for one moment its broad back above the sea-surface when rising to spout, and generally travelling, unlike all its congeners, not upon, but a few feet below the water. For this reason, and in this fishery alone, the whalers arm themselves with iron-shafted harpoons, in order to strike with greater force and certainty of direction a whale some distance beneath the surface. A standing order, too, among them is never by any chance to injure a calf while the mother lives, since such an act exposes all and sundry near the spot to imminent and violent death. Neglect of this most necessary precaution, or more probably accident, once brought about a calamity that befell a fleet of thirteen American whaleships which had been engaged in the "bowhead" fishery among the ice-floes of the Arctic Pacific. In order to waste no time, they came south when winter set in, and by common consent rendezvoused in Margarita Bay, Lower California, for a month or two's "devil-fishing."

The whales were exceedingly abundant that season, and all the ships were soon busy with as much blubber as they could manage.

The ease with which the whales were being obtained, however, led to considerable carelessness and forgetfulness of the fact that the whale never changes its habits. One bright morning, about three weeks after the opening of the season, the whole flotilla of fifty-two boats, four from each ship, had been lowered were making their way as rapidly as possible to the outlying parts of the great bay, keeping a bright look-out for "fish." Spreading out fan-wise, they were getting more and more scattered, when about near the centre of the fleet some one suddenly "struck" and got fast to a fish. But hardly had the intimation been given when something very like panic seized upon the crowd. In a moment or two the reason was apparent. From some cause, never definitely known, a harpooner had in striking a large cow whale transfixed her calf at her side with his harpoon, killing it immediately. The mother, having quietly satisfied herself that her offspring was really dead, turned upon her aggressors like a veritable demon of destruction, and, while carefully avoiding exposure of her body to attack, simply spread devastation among the flotilla. Whenever she rose to the surface, it was but for a second, to emit an expiration like the hiss of a lifting safety-valve, and almost always to destroy a boat or complete the destruction of one already hopelessly damaged.

Every blow was dealt with an accuracy and appearance of premeditation that filled the superstitious Portuguese, who formed a good half of the crews, with dismay—the more so that many of them could only guess at the original cause of what was really going on. The speed of the monster was so great that her almost simultaneous appearance at points widely separated made her seem ubiquitous ; and as she gave no chance whatever for a blow, it certainly looked as if all the boats would be destroyed *seriatim*. Not content with dealing one tremendous blow at a boat and reducing it at once to a bundle of loose boards, she renewed her attentions again and again to the wreckage, as if determined that the destruction should be complete. Utter demoralisation had seized even the veterans, and escape was the only thought governing all action. But the distance to shore was great, and the persistence and vigour of the furious leviathan, so far from diminishing, seemed to increase as the terrible work went on. At last two boats did succeed in reaching the beach at a point where it sloped very gradually. The crews had hardly leaped overboard, to run their craft up high and dry, when close behind them in the shallows