

## English.

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## PUBLIC SCHOOL LEAVING LITERATURE.

## CVIII.—“TO WINTER.”

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS.

## I.—INTRODUCTION.

For teaching this lesson it is well to choose weather which corresponds as nearly as possible to that described by the poet. Ask the class the day before the lesson is taught, to come prepared to write a short essay on the characteristics of winter in Canada, or, at least, to enumerate five or six of the most striking ones. Then from these select the features dealt with by the poet, and compare the pupils' method of describing what they have seen with the poet's. Account for some of the differences, e.g. the poet's use of figures of speech, poetic compounds, etc., by reminding the class in a general way of the difference between the diction of prose and that of poetry. After having the class note the use of the word “To” in the title of this poem and several others in the readers, e.g., “To Daffodils,” “To the North East Wind,” they will realize that this is no mere description of winter, but that the season is here personified and addressed as a great king, who rules over one of the four realms or kingdoms into which the year is divided. When this idea has been grasped there will be little difficulty in getting the class to make an outline of the poem under such headings as might be used in the geographical description of an actual country, position, boundaries, climate, animals, (birds), products, etc.

## II.—NOTES AND QUESTIONS.

ll. 1-18.—A difficult sentence. What is it about? Give the grammatical subject. What is said about winter in this sentence? Rewrite in ordinary prose order.

l. 3. “Plains . . . completeness.” What part of the year is here represented? What does this season complete? Let the class describe the “plains” in a few words. (Note the word “plains” is much more suitable here than it would have been in the next line; it suggests the fields of waving grain, while the realms in the next line will include the nooks where the first violets grow, the woods and thickets with their bursting buds, etc.)

l. 4. “Realms . . . sweetness.” What season is here meant? Explain “budding sweetness.”

l. 5-10. From the key-words “crystal,” throne, “keenness,” (Note the metaphor in this, cf. “a sharp morning,” a cutting wind,) “gleaming air,” (a bright, clear day merely, or one when the fine snow gleams in the sunshine like diamond dust?) “glorious,” (justify the poet in this use of the word,) “barren glare,” “sunlit wildernesses,” (snow-clad fields or stretches of frozen lake and river,) “undazzled level glances” (the rays of the sun, bright but almost horizontal. Why?)—let the class reconstruct the weather and landscape present to the poet's mind.

l. 6. “Thy . . . own” How do poets sometimes avoid the slight difficulty in pronouncing such combinations?

ll. 11-12. “Minion” (Fr. *mignon*, darling) a favorite. Probably the minions represent the pine and other evergreen trees, winter showing its favoritism to them by not depriving them of their foliage as it does the other trees.

“Silver tresses.” The needles, etc., of the evergreens covered with hoar-frost or powdered with snow.

“Icy lances”—The icicles hanging from the evergreen trees—very frequently seen. These are the weapons of the “minions” of winter, who are probably conceived by the poet as a self-constituted guard of the living, in return for the special favors bestowed by him.

ll. 13-14. “Universal breathing.” The hoar-frost represented as the breath of the giant King Winter.

“Radiant swathing.” Give ordinary meaning and use of word. How is this breath a swathing? Why radiant?

ll. 15-18. Give meaning in your own words. What is the force of “to” here?

ll. 19-24. “Skilful artists.” Name some of the artists King Winter employs to make his palace and kingdom beautiful.

“In . . . joyest.” “Takest delight in purest forms of beauty—the snow-crystals and hoar-frost (rare use of joy as a verb.) Give grammatical relation of “forms.”

“Frost-caught star-beams . . . tapestries.” From the star-beams that have fallen directly (sheer, perpendicular) from above, the “artists” have woven the tapestries for the palace of winter, the carpets and curtains which to us seem made of the snow-flakes and the crystals of the hoar-frost.

“Fretted.” Give ordinary meaning and use (literally, eaten away). Explain force here. Compare with these lines the first three stanzas of Lowell's “First Snow-Fall,” where the beauty of snow is brought out in such expressions as these, “ermine too dear for an earl,” “ridged inch-deep with pearl,” “sheds new-roofed with Carrara (marble) etc.; cf. also Mr. Roberts' own beautiful poem, “The Silver Thaw:”—

“The silvered saplings bending,  
Flashed in a rain of gems;  
The statelier trees attending,  
Blazed in their diadems.”  
White fire and amethyst  
All common things had kissed,  
And Chrysolites and sapphires  
Adorned the humble stems.”

ll. 25-40. General. An excellent opportunity to impress on pupils the nature, uses and abuses of digressions. What is a digression? Point out the digressions in this poem. Of what use is this digression? (Serves purpose of contrast) What objection can be made to it? (Too long, distracts attention from real subject).

“Liquid sobbing brooks.” Better liquid-sobbing. Why?

“Brawling.” Give usual meaning. How applicable to a waterfall?

“Responsive-voiced calls.” The sounds of waters echoed and re-echoed from the hills.

Lakelets . . . napping.” Rewrite using the possessive with “of” to show the grammatical relations of the words.

“Molten-throated . . . soft-voiced.” The verb “to melt” has two past participles, melted and molten, the latter applied principally to metal. The poets (Keats, Shelley) often compare the sound of voices to that made by liquids in flowing.

“Flashing.” What causes the passage of the birds through the woods to seem like a flash?

(The “sudden glare of daylight,” the swiftness of their flight, etc.)

“When . . . down.” The sudden change in the direction of the wind (veering) causes the branches of the trees to part and let the light of day enter.

ll. 40-44. “Alone.” What word does it modify? “Minstrelsy.” Here music; often applied to the musicians.

“Nodding their heads before her goes  
The merry minstrelsy.”

—Coleridge.

ll. 44-50. “Weak . . . weaves.” Music does but little in winter to engage the attention and captivate the soul.

“Snared . . . delight.” To delight and ensnare the soul. Prolepsis, (prevision, Stedman), or anticipation, in the use of “snared.”

“Sin . . . unchoked.” Here and in “mortal-cloaked” the poet alludes to the belief that men would have faculties of much greater extent and power were it not for the body that weighs them down on account of sin committed. Cf. Paul's exclamation, “Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death, or this body of death.” Rom. VII, 24.

“High-consulting.” Deliberating together on lofty themes.”

ll. 51-52. “Dim harmonies . . . spheres.” According to the doctrine first enunciated by the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, and often mentioned by the poets, the planets were arranged in such order and at such distance that in their revolutions they produced the music of the spheres, cf. “Milton's Hymn on the morning of Christ's nativity,” and note on “mortal-cloaked” below.

ll. 53-54. “Less . . . burst.” Note the alliteration and onomatopoeia. What effect has the repetition of the letter ‘s’ which is usually avoided in poetry? *Silent sunrise sing.* How possible? To whom is it silent, to whom may it sing? A possible allusion to the statue of Memnon, which was said to give out musical sounds when touched by the first rays of the sun.

l. 56. “But . . . keep.” What word should receive emphasis in reading? Why?

67. “Grosbeak.” A small bird of the finch family, which receives its name from its large bill (Fr. *gros*, large). If the pupils know the bird, let them describe it. What other bird might truthfully be mentioned as the snow-bird's noisy companion during our Canadian winters?

ll. 60-63. “Why have these four lines been separated from the others referring to the music of winter?”

“So.” Show force of the word here.

“Neath.” Note throughout the poem the repeated use of such contractions, rendered necessary by the trochaic metre; such connectives usually begin with an unaccented syllable.

“Mortal-cloaked.”  
There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest,

But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim:  
Such harmony is in immortal souls;  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay,  
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.”

—Merchant of Venice, K. 1.

l. 66.—“fulfilling”—Explain. What word used before has the same force?

ll. 67-79. Have the class describe in their own words the scene here outlined.

“laughter-shaken trees.”—Who laughs? For what reason? (The apple-gatherers pleased at the bountiful harvest, or the trees delighted at being relieved of their burden of fruit?)

“girt”—surrounded.

“shod”—The juniper is so much smaller than the pines that it seems to form a covering for their feet.

“juniper”—A shrub from two to six feet high belonging to the cedar family. It bears small purple berries.

“Cottage climbing vines.” “Cottage-climbing.” What difference in meaning? Which do you prefer? Why?

“Sharp-tongued legates.” (Lat. *legatus*, an ambassador). What are winter's legates? What is their message from the king? What feeling does this message arouse in the maples?

ll. 80-82. A brief return to the subject from which the poet again turns in the last four lines to anticipate the coming of spring.

“More richly ordered.” Characterized by richer and more abundant natural beauties.

“Prisoned brightness.” What is here referred to as being bright? What has imprisoned the brightness?

“Lush”—rich, luxuriant. A favorite word of the poets; of Keats, “as the year grows lush in juicy stalks.”

“A gorgeous legend.” The story of the coming of spring told in the glorious panorama of reviving nature in bud and blossom, shrub and tree.” Give meaning of “gorgeous.” To what season would it be more applicable than to spring? Why?

## III.—BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

Charles George Douglas Roberts, the son of Rev. Geo. G. Roberts, was born at Douglas, N.B., in 1860. He received his early education at Westcock and at the Collegiate School in Fredericton. Entering the University of New Brunswick in 1876, he devoted his attention particularly to classics and political science, and finally took his honor degree in the latter department, after having been successively teacher in Chatham, N.B., and in Fredericton, and editor of the