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The Shivering Beggar

Robert Graves

Near Clapham village, where fields began,
Saint Edward met a beggar man.
It was Christmas morning, the church bells tolled,
The old man trembled for the fierce cold.

Saint Edward cried, "It is monstrous sin
A beggar to lie in rags so thin!
An old gray-beard and the frost so keen:
I shall give him my fur-lined gaberdine."

He stripped off his gaberdine of scarlet
And wrapped it round the aged varlet,
Who clutched at the folds with a muttered curse,
Quaking and chattering seven times worse.

Said Edward, "Sir, it would seem you freeze
Most bitter at your extremities.
Here are gloves and shoes and stockings also,
That warm upon your way you may go."

The man took stocking and shoe and glove,
Blaspheming Christ our Saviour's love,
Yet seemed to find but little relief,
Shaking and shivering like a leaf.

Said the saint again, "I have no great riches,
Yet take this tunic, take these breeches,
My shirt and my vest, take everything,
And give due thanks to Jesus the King."

The saint stood naked upon the snow
Long miles from where he was lodged at Bowe,
Praying, "O God! my faith, it grows faint!
This would try the temper of any saint.

"Make clean my heart, Almighty, I pray,
And drive these sinful thoughts away.
Make clean my heart if it be Thy will,



This damned old rascal's shivering still!"

He stooped, he touched the beggar man's shoulder;

He asked him did the frost nip colder?

"Frost!" said the beggar, "no, stupid lad!

'Tis the palsy makes me shiver so bad."

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