

THE BLESSINGS OF CONTRARY WINDS.

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THAT night-storm on the Lake of Galilee, which is described in the fourteenth chapter of Matthew, pictures many an experience in the Christian life. For weary hours the disciples have been toiling at the oars in the teeth of the tempest. All the strength of the fishermen's brawny arms can scarcely push forward the little boat against the angry waves—for "*the wind was contrary.*"

Yet that fierce head wind proved to be a blessing; and in the experience of many a child of God, it has been found equally true. A career of unbroken prosperity is fraught with danger to a man, to a church, and to a nation. It breeds pride and self-conceit. When we are seeking for what we want, we call upon God; after we have got it, we too often give ourselves the credit. The ten lepers all prayed for relief from their misery. After they were healed, only one of the number returned to give thanks to their Divine Healer. The essence of sin is a determination to have our own way in disregard and defiance of God. Our Heavenly Father will not consent to this; He sees that it would not be best even for a Christian to lay his own plans, choose his own way, and always have a smooth sea over which to carry them into execution. Wherefore He sometimes sends a stiff head-wind into our faces for our own good as well as for His own glory. Let us look at some of the blessings of "contrary winds."

1. It is a familiar fact that the loftiest careers have usually begun from lowly birth and early adversities; our greatest men—like Lincoln—have been cradled on the rocks. "Parts and poverty" has been the recipe for success in life. No greater mischief can befall any young person than to be born in luxury and be fanned with the breath of fulsome flattery. The stern wind of unsparing criticism is often needed to open our eyes to our own follies, and to drive us back from courses that would lead us into certain dangers, and possible destruction. One of the loving obstacles of the Holy Spirit is to reveal to us our sins and to head us off from pursuing a course that seemeth pleasant to ourselves, but "the end thereof is death."

2. Head-winds of adversity strengthen the sinews of the soul. There was pretty severe practice at the oars that night in that Galilee gale. God's great object in the school-life of this world is to develop character. "Count it all joy," said the stalwart Apostle James, "when ye fall into divers trial." Knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience." Afflictions are sent not only to punish the faithless, but to make the faith of the true saint more vigorous. The young minister who is on the lookout only for easy places, dooms himself to be a dwarf.

There are many of us older pastors who, as we look back over our lives, never cease to *thank God for difficulties*. Sometimes when we were tempted into indolent drifting, God smote us with a head-wind that sent us to our knees and to our oars.

3. Another benefit of contrary winds is that they make us more watchful. There was no sleeping on board of that little fishing-smack during that night of tempest; even the three disciples who slumbered in Gethsemane were wide awake then. The very anchor that in the harbor is a mere appendage, becomes, in a tempest, the ship's salvation. We often have what sailors call "the anchor watch," when we must keep feeling of the cable of prayer to see that the "cable is taut" and the anchor is holding stout and strong. It was during such a night storm that grand old Martin Luther shouted his "*Ein feste burg*" above the roar of the hurricane.

4. Adversities awaken us to our dependence upon God. When we are full we are too apt to forget God, just as the foolish Prodigal Son, as long as his money held out, forgot his kind old father. His hungry stomach and his gnawing conscience set him to thinking about the dear old homestead and the loving father whom he had forsaken. The Psalmist tells us that when the Lord "slew the children of Israel, then they inquired after Him and they returned and sought God earnestly." There is more than one church whose present spiritual condition ought to send both pastor and people to their knees. It is a cheering thought that the Master's eye is on every church, as it was that night on the toiling disciples in the boat; His ear is ever listening for the cry of faith.

5. The hour of a Christian's extremity is the hour of Christ's opportunity. At the right moment the Master comes treading over the billows and sends out the startling voice above the roar, "*Be of good cheer! It is I; be ye not afraid!*" As soon as He sets His foot upon the deck, the wind dies out into a peaceful calm. Oh, ye who are breasting a midnight sea of trouble, open the eye of faith and behold the approaching Son of God! He comes a cheering, consoling, and delivering Saviour. Receive Him into the ship. No vessel can founder or sink with Jesus Christ on board. No struggling soul, no struggling church, no struggling work of reform, ever went down when the Son of God had set His Divine foot within it. Let the hours of darkness come, and let the head-winds blow, if Jesus only comes to us through them and we can hear the thrilling notes of His omnipotent voice, "*It is I; be not afraid!*" Our little craft shall yet reach the shining shore, and we shall cast our crowns at the feet of Him who brought us through the tempest.

"If through unruffled seas,
Toward Heaven we calmly sail
With grateful hearts, oh, God, to Thee,
We'll own the favoring gale.

"But should the surges rise,
And rest delay to come,
Blest be the sorrow—kind the storm
Which drives us *nearer home!*"