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THE CHRISTIAN TREASURY

A FAMILY MISCELLANY

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THE SNARES OF SOUTH WINDS AND SMOOTH SEAS.

BY THEODORE L. CUYLER, D.D.

THE narrative of Paul's voyage to Rome is fruitful in spiritual lessons. That Alexandrian corn-ship, with its precious freight of the noblest man alive, had cast anchor in the obscure port of

Fair Havens. There the vessel ought to have remained in spite of some disadvantages; and Paul, who was an old mariner, warned the centurion and the captain that, if they ventured to sea at that dangerous season, the voyage would be attended with loss to ship, cargo, and life. But that 'gambling element in human nature,' which stakes everything on a risk, impelled the master and the owner to urge a start; and their advice carried it against the wiser counsels of the veteran Apostle. So, one bright day, when the south wind blew softly, the captain weighed anchor, and swung out upon the blue waters of the Mediterranean, heading for Cape Matala. Ah! that gentle wind was singing a siren song that lured them into the jaws of destruction; for, no sooner had they passed the Cape, than a tremendous typhoon burst upon them, which never loosed its grip for a fortnight until it hurled them in shattered wreck on the beach of Malta.

The contrast between that ship sailing out with a south wind and a smooth sea, and the same vessel rent with a hurricane, affords a vivid parable of human life. Fair appearances are not always to be trusted. We often leave home for an excursion under a golden sky, to be caught in a drenching storm. Is there not many a business man who has been tempted by the promise of great profits into a great spread of canvas, which a sudden gale has swept from the spars and left under the 'bare poles' of bankruptcy? These are the days of rash ventures in business with sanguine hopes of sudden wealth; 'slow, safe, and sure' is the wiser motto. And how many a young pair have I seen float out into wedlock, while the warm wind of fair promise blew softly; nobody foresaw the tempests ahead; nor would their bark have ever foundered if old-fashioned true love and trust in God had 'undergirded the ship.' Married life is not all smooth sailing; the head winds which Providence sends can be weathered out; it is the rough weather of your own making which wrecks home and hearts.

The real danger of every sinful temptation is that it always presents the attractive side and conceals the consequences. It promises a smooth sea and a prosperous voyage. No young man is ever tempted to his first glass by the spectacle of drunkenness in its last horrors. He sees nothing in that glass but a 'good time' and a pleasant excitement; but beyond his 'Cape Matala' is a wrecked life,

and no easy thing does he find it to put back again into the safe harbour of sobriety. The only effectual place to stop drunkenness is to stop before the first glass. What is true of the bottle and of the gaming table is fearfully true in regard to lascivious indulgences. First sins against chastity, whether by a young man or woman, are committed with no other thought than present gratification. 'Just this once only,' whispers the tempter. Sensual lust is vividly pictured in that line of Holy Writ: 'With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield, and with the flattering of her lips she forceth him.' If I could lift the curtain and reveal to the young the remorse and the shame and the slavery that are sure to come, it seems to me that they would cut off their right hand sooner than venture into the first violation of chastity. To put back into that 'fair haven' of purity is no holiday business after you have let the gales of passion loose.

Sin, ever since its first entrance into this world, has owed its chief power to the fact that it presents allurements and conceals consequences. Satan, in the garden of Eden, promised only south winds and smooth seas. 'The serpent said unto the woman, *ye shall not surely die*; ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' So, when the woman saw that the tree was pleasant to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat. So has it ever been from that hour to this; the power of sin lies in its *deceitfulness*. When I was in the Orient, I saw a most attractive tree laden with blossoms of a delicate lilac tint. The beauty of the flowers attracts insects, and bees are drawn to them to gather honey. But from the blossoms the insects extract a fatal poison, and often drop dead under the branches. It is called the Judas tree, and is a vivid emblem of the deceitfulness of sin. For sin always has two aspects; the one is that which she assumes before the deed is done, the other is that which she puts on after she has ensnared her dupe and is administering the retribution. She approaches with her allurements as Jael came to Sisera, bringing 'butter in a lordly dish'; but the hammer and the nails she keeps out of sight until her victim is fast asleep in her power. The wages of sin are paid promptly; they are *death*.

The danger with every unconverted person who reads these lines lies in this very direction. Because you see now only a smooth sea, and hear only the siren song, 'there is no danger,' you feel no alarm. Because God spares you and mercies are around you, and no retribution visible, you shut your eyes to the fact that God is just, and will yet punish sin and the rejection of His grace with a tremendous

penalty. You do not see yet what lies behind and beyond the 'Cape Matala' of the day of Judgment. The captain of that corn-ship would not believe that there was anything ahead but fair winds and a prosperous voyage to Rome. He would not heed Paul's warning. After the tempest had burst forth in its fury, and no sun or stars appeared for many days, Paul reminded him, 'Ye ought to have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gotten this injury and loss.' Then it was too late. And so may you find it if you presume on the smooth seas of God's present forbearance, and shut your eyes to the sure and inevitable punishment that awaits every life of impenitence.

I write in this strain from the promptings of love. There is a temptation which besets both pulpit and pen and tongue to 'prophesy smooth things' and shirk unpopular truths. Paul did not make himself popular on that corn-ship by predicting storm and opposing a venture before a treacherous south wind. (Before the gale was over he was the most trusted and respected man on board.) There is a theology of south wind and smooth sea that is becoming very current, and it 'takes' prodigiously in these days. It suits human nature exceedingly. It sets a low estimate on the exceeding sinfulness of sin and its desert of retribution. It treats very gingerly the primitive justice of God. It hoists no storm-signals in the direction whither so many souls are heading; it practically ignores Hell! Even if the voyage here be with some 'loss of lading,' it holds out the hope of a possible second probation in the unseen world. However seductive or popular this un-Pauline theology may be, I do not discover it in God's charts, or in his weather-tables. If I deceive a soul with any such delusions, may not God hold me to a fearful account? *Love demands fidelity.* However smooth the sea, and however fair the wind before any and every soul yet out of Christ, let such soul be lovingly warned that the voyage will be with terrible loss both to lading and to life! In the penitent acceptance of Jesus Christ is the only absolute, complete, perfect, and everlasting salvation. Run no risks when your soul is at stake.—*Independent.*

RELIGIOUS HOURS.

'Far from my thoughts, vain world, retire,
Let my religious hours alone.'

Is there, dear friends, a sort of unspoken feeling in our minds that certain times and seasons are to be set apart for religion, while others are to be strictly and wholly secular? Well, we are not to neglect daily duty, nor to indulge in meditation as a mere luxury; yet we are told to pray without ceasing. It is not impossible to live in an atmosphere of piety, so that work and play, social intercourse, the chance meeting with a friend, the receipt of a longed-for letter, or the pleasure of a charm-

ing surprise, shall each and all be the dearer and the gladder because hallowed by a spirit of consecration.

Somebody said the other day that religion helped us to bear the trials of life with tranquility. I prefer to put it to myself in this way. Not religion, but Christ, that Divine Person, whose love is unfailing, helps us to endure sorrow, sweetens every joy, strengthens us in the hour of weakness, enables us to resist temptation, and at last opens wide the golden doors and takes us to rest in His presence, where there are pleasures forever more.—*Aunt Marjorie.*

Only in Thee.

Fain would I be strong with the heart of the brave,

All fearless in conflict, all calm in defeat;
Fain would I be patient, Lord, patience I crave,

In pain to be silent, submissive, and sweet.
Oh! where shall I find it, the strength I would win?

As pilgrim I journey through peril and sin;
My Master, my Saviour, my help is in Thee,
In Thee is my help, Lord, 'tis only in Thee.

Fain would I be gentle, whatever betide,

And meek, unresisting, returning no word
In haste or in anger to those at my side
Who may grieve or annoy me. Thy gentleness, Lord,

Bestow on Thy child that her looks may be fair,
And mildness distil from her speech, and her care

Be laid at Thy feet; for whatever it be,
In Thee is my help, Lord, and only in Thee.

Fain would I be faithful, so daily to prove
To those whom I meet that my life has a spring

Abundant in beauty and precious in love,
And that close to the Vine in my earth-life I cling.

Fain would I be faithful, nor follow afar;
Fain would I abide where Thy chosen ones are.

My Master, my Saviour, be gracious to me;
In Thee is my help, Lord, and only in Thee.

Fain would I be cheerful, and sing as I go,
Uplifting Thy praises through darkness and dawn;

Fain wear a white robe, not the garment of woe,

And joyously, blithely, and gaily go on.
Oh! bid me to triumph and smile through my tears,

Oh! crown me a victor o'er trials and fears.
My Master, my Master, my joy is in Thee;
In Thee is my help, Lord, and only in Thee.

Margaret E. Sangster.