

## Of Adversity

by Francis Bacon

(1561-1626)

It was a high speech of Seneca (after the manner of the Stoics), that the good things which belong to prosperity are to be wished; but the good things that belong to adversity are to be admired. Certainly if miracles be the command over nature, they appear most in adversity. It is yet a higher speech of his, than the other (much too high for a heathen), It is true greatness, to have in one the frailty of a man, and the security of a God.

This would have done better in poetry, where transcendences are more allowed. And the poets indeed have been busy with it; for it is in effect the thing, which figured in that strange fiction of the ancient poets, which seems not to be without mystery; nay, and to have some approach to the state of a Christian; that Hercules, when he went to unbind Prometheus (by whom human nature is represented), sailed the length of the great ocean, in an earthen pot or pitcher; lively describing Christian resolution, that sails in the frail bark of the flesh, through the waves of the world.

The virtue of prosperity is temperance; the virtue of adversity is fortitude, which in morals is the more heroic virtue. Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New; which carries the greater benediction, and the clearer revelation of God's favor. Yet even in the Old Testament, if you listen to David's harp, you shall hear as many hearse-like airs as carols; and the pencil of the Holy Ghost has labored more in describing the afflictions of Job, than the felicities of Solomon.

Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes; and adversity is not without comforts and hopes. We see in needle-works and embroideries that it is more pleasing to have a lively work upon a sad and solemn ground, than to have a dark and melancholy work, upon a lightsome ground: judge therefore of the pleasure of the heart by the pleasure of the eye.

Certainly virtue is like precious odors, most fragrant when they are incensed, or crushed: for prosperity best discovers vice, but adversity best discovers virtue.