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### 16. The wings of the wind.

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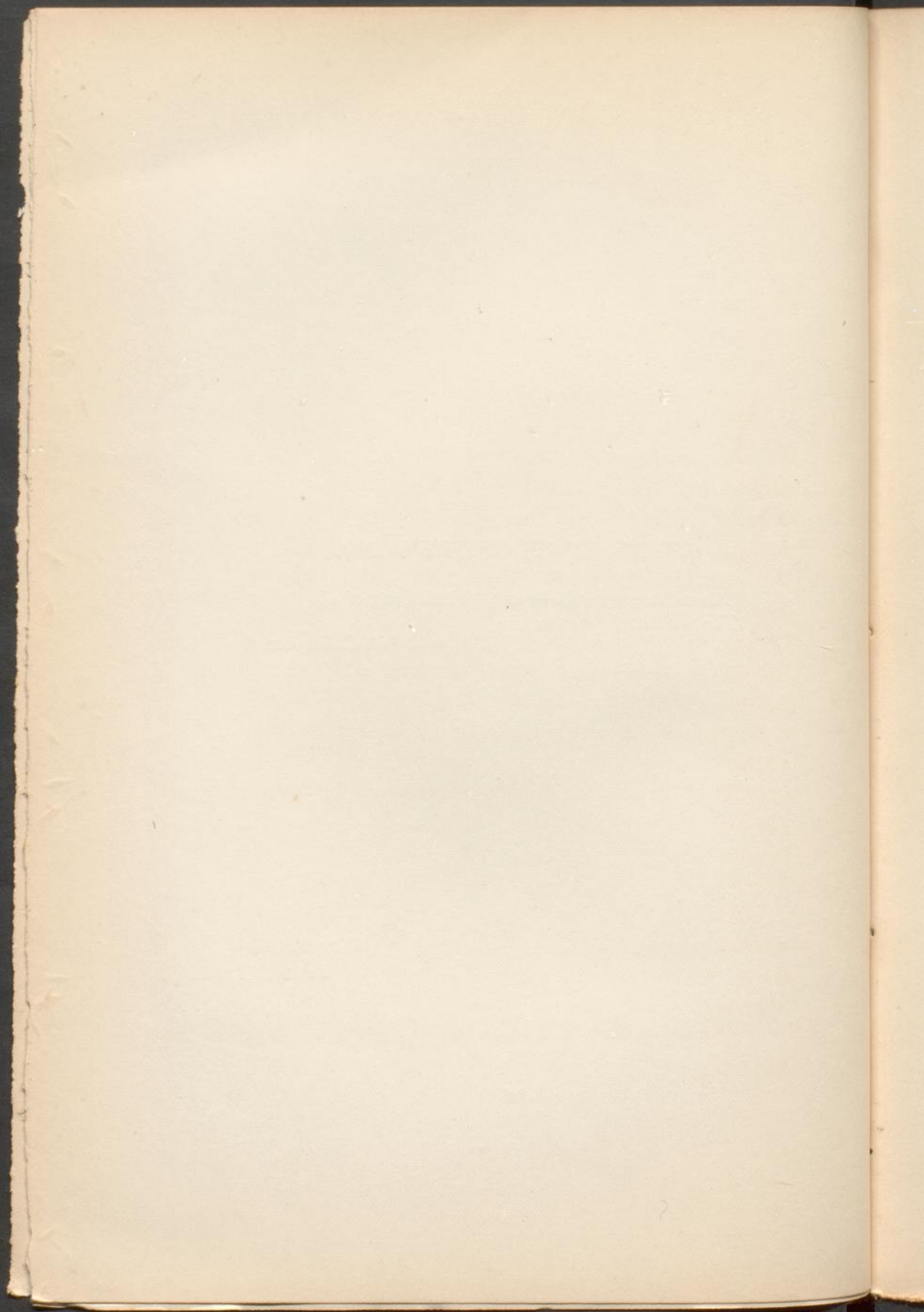
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16. THE WINGS OF THE WIND.

The mountain-wind !—most spiritual thing of all  
The wide earth knows.

W. C. BRYANT.



## THE WINGS OF THE WIND.

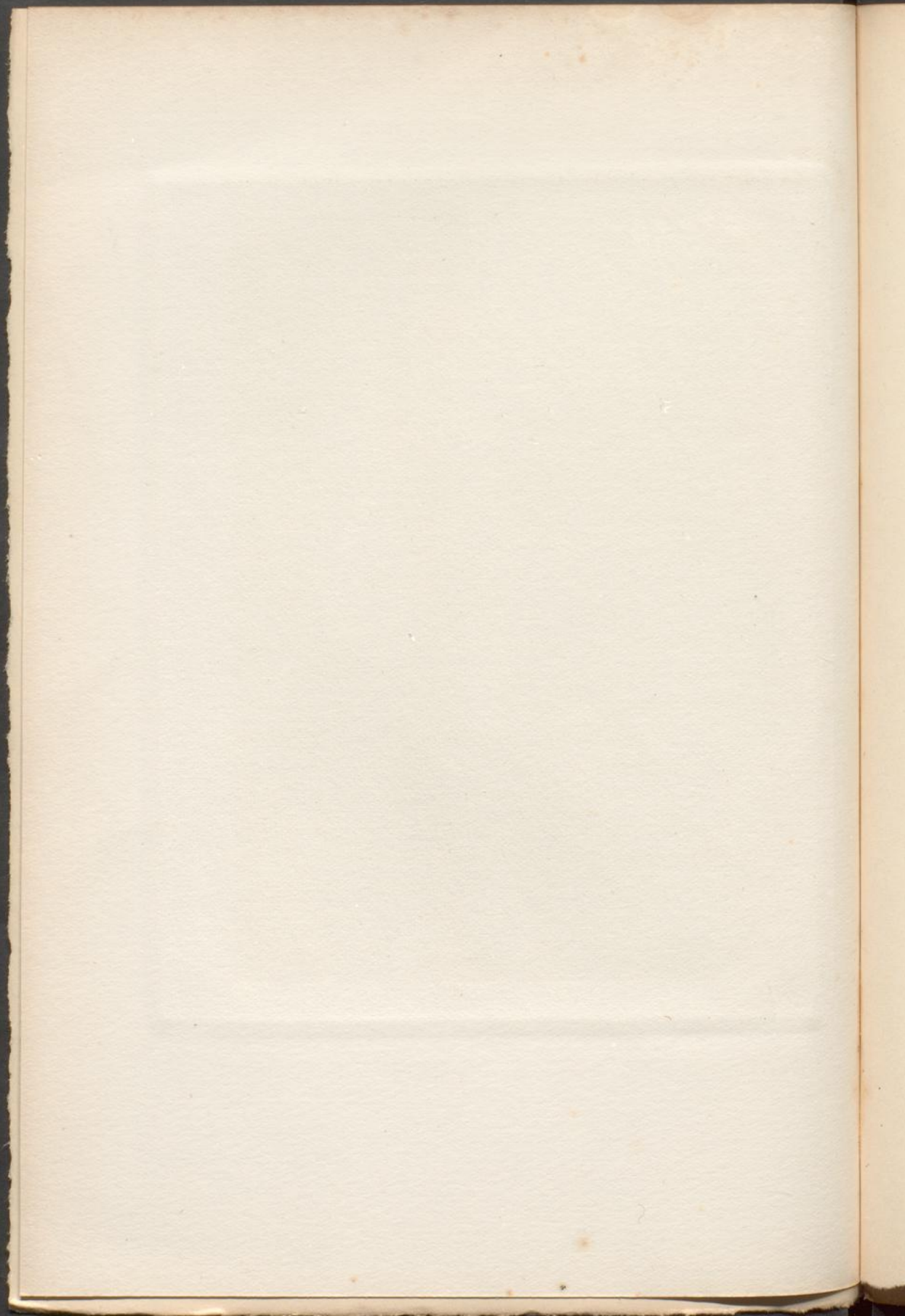
ALL day long the voice of the gale has filled the air with its hoarse call. Last night the sultry clouds of the thunder-storm hung low in the stifling air, and it seemed as if the earth were too exhausted ever to do more than gasp for its poor breath. But when the dawn began to glimmer in the east there came a puff from the northern hills, the leaves began to rustle in a lively dance, the gust became a steady breeze, the breeze grew to a gale, and the gale sometimes got excited and lashed itself into squalls which set all the trees of the wood to tossing and writhing in wild struggles to hold their own against this reckless, riotous, roystering blast. The oatfield at the side of the house has been one weltering sea of green all day. The corn in the field beyond has been a tatter of green streamers fluttering down to leeward. Every wooded hillside has been a billowing mass of shifting greens. And all the while that mighty voice has roared in our ears until they are fairly tired with the strain of enforced listening.

So all these bright hours, bracing the body with the tonic airs of the north, have filled the mind with

thoughts of Him "who walketh upon the wings of the wind," and of this wonderful messenger He sends upon His errands of mercy. Of all the phenomena of nature, that which is sealed the closest to most men and women is the story of the winds. We realise less of the wind's office and function than we do of the work of any other natural agent. It is as true of our day as of the day of Nicodemus, that "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and ye know not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth." This great envelope of air is all the time pressing on us, moving by us, bearing to us the very breath of life, and yet it is probably the least understood, the least appreciated, of any of the great natural forces or facts. The wind which blows across this earth is only the air moving about on its errands and performing its work. But when we search out what that work is, we realise how true is the word, "He maketh the winds His messengers."

Think what this atmosphere of ours is, whose touch we hardly recognise save when it brushes against us in the hurry of its toil. It is the breath of life to man and beast and plant; and by a curious law of economy the waste gases which the man exhales are the food of the plant, and *vice versa*. It is one of the minor services of the winds that they are continually mixing these in their due proportions and maintaining the salubrious equilibrium of the atmosphere. The winds moreover bear the moisture which the air acquires in its wanderings over the sea to the mountain





heights, and sink it into the springs which nestle there. And then, as these dried-out currents pass down over the arid plains, the "wings of the wind" bear them to moister regions to saturate them afresh with the quickening drops of water. The winds set in motion the vast currents which are flowing in the deeps of the sea, and so add another to the great climatic agencies. They do as much for the shallower waters. It is the winds which are carving away the shores of Cape Cod and Coney Island by setting on the waves to do their work of destruction and of change.

The winds may well be likened to the great transportation systems which man has created. What railways, rivers, canals, and the ocean are to human industries and interests, by means of their great trains of cars, their boats, and their steamships, the winds are to the natural world. They are the grand vehicles of exchange. They bear the products of every zone to every other zone. They warm the poles with the airs from the tropics. They cool the tropics with airs from the poles. They transfer the seeds of a thousand grasses and plants to new fields, and sow the desolations with verdure. So also they carry off the superheated airs of the earth's surface on the "up-tracks" and bring them back cooled, cleansed, revitalised, in the winds which blow down from the higher altitudes after the thunder-shower or the storm.

It seems to me that in this law of the winds we are permitted to read a startling lesson of the Divine

Plan to unify all lands. The winds, far more than any work of man, bring the ends of the earth together. They are the great levellers of barriers. They are the democrats of nature. There are no walls they will not overleap. They recognise no distinctions of race or of rank. They carry their boons with unswerving impartiality. They bear their desolations with unsparing vigour. They turn this earth into a very small place. They make neighbours of the most separated coasts.

Before the storm has crossed the Mississippi River, the winds have borne the white plumes of the cirrus clouds, the forerunners of the gale, to the lightship off Sandy Hook ; and the warning signal flutters for the sailors going out to sea. The winds pick up the dust of a volcano in one continent and drop it on another. They bear the airs of the equator to the arctic circle. They waft men's ships from end to end of this globe. They carry the germs of the grippe "around the world in eighty days." But just as willingly they bear great clouds of pollen or the seeds of innumerable plants, to scatter them in new lands, and cause new crops to grow in waste places. They know no east, no west, no north, no south. To them the world is one neighbourhood. The winds are a great natural illustration of a law of God. All nations are as one village. All mankind is one brotherhood. While men are building their Chinese walls of one sort and another,—creeds, political platforms, state boundaries, tariffs, tongues and languages, forts and

navies,—God Almighty is sending out His winds as messengers to proclaim the kinship of races, the neighbourhood of nations. We cannot resist His will. We are destined to see our boundaries wiped out, our narrowness neutralised, our provincialisms annihilated, by Him who hath made of one blood all nations of men.

For He has provided for a circulation of ideas which is just as real, just as free, just as effectual as the circulation of the winds. He takes care that the truth uttered in America shall cross to Russia. The principle of government embodied in an institution in the heart of Asia reappears in the depths of the German forests, in the Parliament Houses at Westminster, in the New England town-meeting. The word John Wyclif uttered in England, Luther hears and passes on to the world. The gospel proclaimed in Judea is echoed to the isles of the sea. The winds of truth blow where they list, and no man knows whence they come and whither they go.

Just as He makes the winds His messengers, He will take anything else that comes to hand to serve His end. It was a little ship which crossed the seas in 1620 and brought to Massachusetts Bay the seed of a new society, a seed ripened on the old soil of Holland and of England. It was a little book by Harriet Beecher Stowe which was the message of enfranchisement to American thought on the subject of slavery and which led to the enfranchisement of the slave himself. The great liberator himself was lowly

of birth and came out of humble station to his great task of national service. Nor does God insist on voluntary service; He makes even rebels and sinners do His bidding and become unconscious and reluctant co-workers with Him. Pharaoh was His unwilling coadjutor. So was George III. So was Jefferson Davis. Doubtless Tammany Hall may yet turn out to be the greatest reform movement this country ever saw, and work out by the rule of contraries that purgation of municipal politics which it is its own chief aim to hinder and to prevent. It must be a very skilful agent which can outwit omniscience and escape carrying God's messages and bringing His will to pass. Says the Concord poet-sage, making God the speaker:

" My will fulfilled shall be,  
 And in daylight or in dark  
 My thunderbolt hath eyes to see  
 Its way home to the mark."

But if the winds illustrate the process of human unification, so they do also of another of the great laws by which the labours of God go on. I know no finer instance than they afford us of that great law of rhythm, which characterises the whole creation, which contains some of our most encouraging hopes, which throws a light on the methods of the Creator, and the plan of creation's unfolding life.

You and I, my reader, have our most frequent interest in the winds in connection with the storms which come down upon our coast. And there is a

peculiarity of these storms which everybody is sure to notice at some time or other. Who has not observed how the stormy day falls week after week upon a Friday, or a Sunday, or a Monday? The weather often rolls along in a succession of rhythmic movements as regular as the surges of the sea. So we have come to talk familiarly of "warm waves" and "cold waves." The rise and fall of the mercury in barometer and thermometer are visible signs of what goes on in the atmosphere. Our storms are literally waves of the air,—disturbances which throb with a rhythm like that of the waves of the sea. The laws of these winds are as fixed as those which govern the ebb and flow of the tides, the revolutions of the seasons. First a wave of clear skies and dry winds; then one of damp breezes and rain and clouds. There is a throb to the atmosphere like that of the sea, the seasons, your heart or mine.

It is a phenomenon which is part of a great universal law,—that all motion, all life, moves in rhythm, in undulations, in throbs, waves, periods. It is shown in every one of our bodies. Beat of heart, inhalation of lungs, stomach-hungers, sleep and work, pains and pleasures, all show the inevitable law of rhythm. Life itself is a succession of periods of joy and sorrow. It moves in waves. Our moral life fluctuates. Bright days follow depressed ones; virtue is now hard, now easy; hope and despair alternate; no man has a "level best." There are revivals of religion. When men sneer be-

cause the moral crusade of Francis Murphy or of Dr. Parkhurst is "only a wave," they forget that "waves" are all that clear our atmospheres, and that all great changes in the world move in just this way. What else but successive, wave-like epochs of heat and cold, upheaval and subsidence, have made the world what it is to-day? How has intellectual life grown but by periodic intensifying of its activities,—now in the decadence of the Egyptians; after a long depression, rising in the philosophy of the Greeks; in the revival of learning in Europe; in the scientific wakening of the eighteenth century?

How else has civilisation advanced? We see the Indians disappearing before the march of an enlightened race. It is an old story. Wave after wave of tribes and races has rolled westward from Asia's heart to the Golden Gate; kingdom after kingdom,—Assyria, Nineveh, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome, the mighty children of the North, the Teutons and the English. Who knows what mightier, better, holier race shall overwhelm our own, and teach a nobler civilisation? Even the kingdom of the Christ is to give place to that other,—when "God shall be all and in all."

So when the wave of storm and rain blows down upon you in the wings of the east wind, or of the wind of the south-west, and then the "cold wave," the great undulation of clear weather follows after, bare your brow reverently. You are witness to a mighty pulse-beat of that endless rhythm which be-

gan when God said, "Let there be light," and the evening and the morning,—the alternating throb of light and dark, the diurnal wave of earth's life,— "were the first day." For the "stormy wind, fulfilling His word," bears the message to all the corners of the world. "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord."



