

FOLLOWING THE TEACHINGS of the blessed Saints, we utterly renounce these corruptible and perishable things of life, wherein may be found nothing stable or constant, or that continueth in one stay; but all things are vanity and vexation of spirit, and many are the changes which they bring in a moment; for they are slighter than dreams and a shadow, or the breeze that bloweth the air. Small and short-lived is their charm, that is after all no charm, but illusion and deception of the wickedness of the world; which world we have been taught to love not at all, but rather to hate with all our heart. Yea, and verily it is worthy of hatred and abhorrence; for whatsoever gifts it giveth to its friends, these in turn with fury it taketh away, and shall hand over its victims, stripped of all good things, clad in the garment of shame, and bound under heavy burdens, to eternal tribulation. And those again whom it exalteth, it quickly abaseth to the utmost wretchedness, making them a foot-stool and a laughing stock for their enemies. Such are its charms, such its bounties. For it is an enemy of its friends, and traitor to such as carry out its wishes, both dashing to dire destruction all them that lean upon it, and enervating those that put their trust therein. It maketh covenants with fools and fair false promises, only that it may allure them to itself. But, as they have dealt treacherously, it proveth itself treacherous and false, in fulfilling none of its pledges.

To-day the world tickleth their gullet with pleasant dainties; to-morrow it maketh them nought but a gobbet for their enemies.

To-day it maketh a man a king; to-morrow it delivereth him into bitter servitude.

To-day its thrall is fattening on a thousand good things; to-morrow he is a beggar, and drudge of drudges.

To-day it placeth on his head a crown of glory; to-morrow it dasheth his face upon the ground.

To-day it adorneth his neck with brilliant badges of dignity; to-morrow it humbleth him with a collar of iron.

For a little while it causeth him to be the desire of all men; but after a time it maketh him their hate and abomination.

To-day it gladdeneth him: but to-morrow it weareth him to a shadow with lamentations and wailings.

What is the end thereof, thou shalt hear. Ruthlessly it bringeth its former lovers to dwell in hell. Such is ever its mind, such its purposes. It lamenteth not its departed, nor pitieth the survivor. For after that it hath cruelly duped and entangled in its meshes the departed, it immediately transferreth the resources of its ingenuity against the survivor, not willing that any should escape its cruel snares.”

The Anchorite Barlaam catechizing Prince Joasaph of India, in
SS Barlaam and Joasaph, by St. John of Damascus,
tr. Woodward & Mattingly,
Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 34,
pp. 185–87

PEARLS FROM THE HOLY FATHERS

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