

The Sparrow

the counsellor's speech before the conversion of King Edwin
in BEDE, *Church History of the English People* 2.13 (8th century)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

Original Old English

Þyslic me is gesewen, þu cyning, þis andwearde lif manna on eorðan to wiðmetenese þære tide þe us uncuð is: swylc swa þu æt swæsendum sitte mid þinum ealdormannum and þegnum on wintertide, and sie fyr onælæd and þin heall gewyrmed, and hit rine and sniwe and styrme ute; cume an spearwa and hrædlice þæt hus þurhfleo, cume þurh oþre duru in, þurh oþre ut gewite. Hwæt, he on þa tid þe he inne bið ne bið hrinen mid þy storme þæs wintres; ac þæt bið an eagan bryhtm and þæt læsste fæc, ac he sona of wintra on þone winter eft cymeð. Swa þonne þis monna lif to medmiclum fæce ætyweð; hwæt þær foregange, oððe hwæt þær æfterfylige, we ne cunnun. For ðon gif þeos niwe lar owiht cuðlicre and gerisenlicre brenge, þæs weorþe is þæt we þære fylgen.

Modern English Translation

I see it this way, my king: This present life of men on earth, in comparison with the time that is unknown to us, is as if you were sitting at a banquet with your noblemen and warriors in wintertime, and a fire were kindled and your hall were warmed, and it rained and snowed and stormed outside; and a sparrow came and swiftly flew through the house, came in through one door, and departed out the other. Consider: in that time that he is inside he is not touched by the winter's storm, but that is a blink of an eye and the smallest span of time, and soon from winter into winter he comes again. Just so, then, this life of men appears as a brief span of time; what might come before then, or what may follow after, we do not know. Therefore if this new teaching (about Christ) would bring anything more certain and more fitting, it is of such worth that we should follow it.