



11th January

Life is a Dream with Many Changes of Scene

I am not telling a lie: human life is a dream.

In our dreams we look without seeing, we listen without hearing, we taste and touch without tasting or touching, we speak without saying anything, we walk without moving. We seem to be moving normally even though we stay still and to be making our habitual gestures even though we are not. The mind invents realities that are entirely imaginary.

When we are awake, our thoughts are like these dreams. They come and go. They meet and part. They fly away before we can catch them.

Nor is our body any different from a dream. Is not its beauty likely to go rotten before it is ripe? Is not its health continually being threatened with illness? How little it takes to destroy its strength! How easily its senses deteriorate!

Our careers are no less precarious. Often a single clay is enough to scatter a great work to the winds. Many people who are held in respect and honour with a sudden change of events fall into disgrace. The greatest kingdoms on earth have been destroyed in a short time.

If we have so many changes of scene in life, and so many dark experiences, we ought to learn to distinguish what is virtuous from what is base, what is good from what is bad, what is just from what is unjust.

I give you an example of what I mean. Do you possess a lot of money? If so, give it away because the beauty of riches consists not in money-boxes but in helping the poor. Are you short of money? Be careful not to envy the rich. And don't despair, because human affairs are always changing into their opposites.

Philo of Alexandria cf. C. Cajetanas, *Thesaurus Patrum VII*, pp.4i55ff.