

The King's Ring

by Theodore Tilton

I.

Once in Persia reigned a King,
Who upon his signet ring
Graved a maxim true and wise,
Which, if held before his eyes,
Gave him counsel, at a glance,
Fit for every change or chance:
Solemn words, and these are they:
“Even this shall pass away!”

II.

Trains of camels through the sand
Brought him gems from Samarcand;
Fleets of galleys through the seas
Brought him pearls to rival these.
But he counted little gain
Treasures of the mine or main.
“What is wealth?” the King would say;
“Even this shall pass away.”

III.

In the revels of his court,
At the zenith of the sport,
When the palms of all his guests
Burned with clapping at his jests,
He, amid his figs and wine,
Cried, “O loving friends of mine!
Pleasure comes, but not to stay:
Even this shall pass away.”

IV.

Lady fairest ever seen
Was the bride he crowned his queen.
Pillowed on the marriage-bed,
Whispering to his soul, he said,
“Though a bridegroom never pressed
Dearer bosom to his breast,
Mortal flesh must come to clay:
Even this shall pass away.”

V.

Fighting on a furious field,
Once a javelin pierced his shield.

Soldiers with a loud lament
Bore him bleeding to his tent.
Groaning from his tortured side,
“Pain is hard to bear,” he cried,
“But with patience day by day,
Even this shall pass away.”

VI.

Towering in the public square
Twenty cubits in the air,
Rose his statue carved in stone.
Then the King, disguised, unknown,
Gazing at his sculptured name,
Asked himself, “And what is fame?
Fame is but a slow decay:
Even this shall pass away.”

VII.

Struck with palsy, sere and old,
Waiting at the Gates of Gold,
Spake he with his dying breath,
“Life is done, but what is Death?”
Then, in answer to the King,
Fell a sunbeam on his ring,
Showing by a heavenly ray --
Even this shall pass away.