

The World's Bliss

Translated by J. L. Symonds Patel

The world's bliss is a quick glimmer.
It gets up to go so swiftly.
The more I know its sweet nectar,
The less worth I find there to be.
For it is all mixed with great care,
In sorrow and evil affair.
And so at the last, poor and bare,
It ditches us, and turns to dust.
All the bliss that is here and there
Will leave you to weep, moan, and rust.

All of what we own here shall go,
As it all shall be brought to nought.
See them that sow no good to grow,
Leaving weeds to deceive those caught.
Think therefore, while you are still strong,
To set aright here all your wrong,
And to do good by day and night,
Before you have your life turn dim.
For you know not when our Lord Christ
Will ask of you what is from Him.

All the bliss you hold in this life
Shall come to a close as you grieve.
Even home, child, husband, and wife.
Be no fool, take heed and perceive!
For you shall leave behind here all
You were entrusted great and small.
When you lie breathless at your end,
And sleep a very dreary sleep,
You shall have there no fellow friend,
But all those deeds of yours piled steep.

So why do you set love and heart
On the world's bliss that cannot last?
Why suffer to be torn apart
For love that is so unsteadfast?
Truly, you lick honey from thorns,
That adore the world's bliss forlorn,
For full of bitterness it is.
In pain sore, you will taste torment,
You that waste here your wealth amiss,
For in hell you will give lament.

Think then, you who is wrought by Christ,
To purge pride and a mind of mud.
How He pierced sin in sacrifice
On the cross with His own sweet blood,
To give Himself to pay the price,
And gift true bliss if you be wise.
Listen now, arise up and stand.
Crush laziness and do your bit,
While there is still time at your hand,
Else truly you have lost your wit.

All day you might with wisdom see,
And keep your eye fixed on the Way.
What you should do right, and should cease,
What you should hold, and should cast away.
For every day you see with your eyes
How the world passes and all die.
You know, that if you are unwise,
You shall meet death, and twice die.
Act dumb, and you will waste your breath.
You cannot cheat your due in death.

For then, good will have its reward,
And no evil shall be forgot.
When you lie under the earth stored,
You shall have just as you have wrought.
So consider it well, I plead,
And cleanse yourself of your misdeeds,
That He may help you at your call,
Who so dearly borne our travails,
And shows heaven's bliss above all,
That ever lasts and never fails.

Translation Notes and the Original With A Literal Translation

On the next page is an original version of the text (13th century), originally a song/poem, with a literal translation both found online¹. Notice that since the following translation is literal, rhyme and basic syllabic metre are sacrificed (due to changes in pronunciation and word forms), which I have tried to preserve in my translation above (in the form of roughly 8-syllable lines, and keeping the rhyming pattern of the Middle English text).

I don't deny that I have been fairly dynamic in my translation. Simply put, I feel that in many places a more formal/literal translation would have lost the sense which the author meant. You can read the literal translation, and hopefully see the places where the sense is fairly lost for readers today. This is because of differences in word usage today compared to in the 13th century, and also differences today in the audience's familiarity with the themes in the original.

As I have chosen to keep the rhyming pattern and the basic syllabic metre, I hope my translation has a similar punch that the original has, but at the sacrifice of matching some of the literal renderings of the original. I believe it was the original author's intention for this text to have a punch, and force the reader to think on their life. And so, I would think it is a greater disservice to the author to simply translate it formally/literally, making it lose its original force, and rendering it still quite incomprehensible. So all the more, if I have translated some places to have quite a different literal meaning than the original, but have kept the same approximate force and sense for a current reader, then I would consider it still a success.

¹<https://lyricstranslate.com/en/worldes-blis-worldly-bliss.html-0>

Middle English

Worldes bliss ne last no throwe.
It wit and wend away anon;
The lenger that ich it iknowe,
The lasse ic finde pris theron.
For all it is imeind wid care,
Mid sorewe and wid evel fare;
And at the laste, pouere and bare
It let mon, when it ginnet gon.
All the blisse this here and there
Bilouketh at ende wop and mon.

All shall gon that here mon owet,
All it shall wenden to nout;
The mon that here no good ne sowet,
When other repen, he worth bikakt.
Thenk, mon, forthy, whil thu havest mikte,
That thu thine gultes here arikte,
And worche good by day and nikte,
Ar then thu be of lisse ilakt.
Thu most wanne Crist ure drikte
Thee asket that he havet bitakt.

All the blisse of thisse life
Thu shalt, mon, enden in wep:
Of huse and home and child and wife.
Sely mon, tak therof kep!
For thu shalt all beleven here
The eykte whereof louerd thu were;
When thu list, mon, upon bere,
And slepest a swithe druye slep,
Ne shaltu haben wit thee no fere
Butte thine werkes on an hep.

Mon, why seestu love and herte
On worldes blisse that nout ne last?
Why tholestu that thee so ofte smerte
For love that is so unstedefast?
Thu lickest huny of thorn, iwis,
That seest thy love on worldes bliss,
For full of bitternis it is.
Sore thu mikt ben ofgast,
That despendes here eykte amiss,
Werthurgh ben into helle itakt.

Thenk, mon, wharof Crist thee wroukte,
And do wey prude and fulthe mood.
Thenk how dere he thee bokte
On rode mit his swete blood;
Himself he gaf for thee in pris,
To buye thee bliss if thu be wis.
Bithenk thee, mon, and up aris
Of slouthe, and gin to worche good,
Whil time to worchen is,
For elles thu art witless and wood.

All day thu mikt understonde

Modern English

Worldly bliss lasts not a moment;
it wanes and goes away anon.
The longer that I know it,
the less I find value thereon;
for all it is mingled with care,
with sorrows and with evil fare,
and at the last poor and bare
it leaves man, when it begins to be gone.
All the bliss that is here and there
encompasses at end weeps and moans.

All shall go that here man has,
all it shall wane to nought;
the man that here sows no good,
when others reap, he will be beguiled.
Think, man, therefore while you have might,
that you your guilts here aright,
and work good by day and night,
ere then you be of life deprived.
You know not when Christ our Dright
asks of you what he has entrusted.

All the bliss of this life
you shall, man, end in weeping -
of house and home and child and wife.
Simple man, take care thereof!
For you shall all relinquish here
the possessions whereof you were lord;
when you lie, man, upon the bier
and sleep a very dreary sleep
you will not have with you any companion
but your works on a heap.

Man, why do you set love and heart
on worldly bliss that doesn't last?
Why do you endure that you often smart
for love that is so unsteadfast?
You lick honey from a thorn indeed,
who set your love on worldly bliss
for full of bitterness it is.
Sorely you might be terrified,
who spend here wealth amiss,
whereby to be into hell cast.

Think, man, whereof Christ wrought you
and do away with pride and filthy mind.
Think how dearly he bought you
on the cross with his sweet blood;
himself he gave for you in price,
to buy the bliss if you be wise.
Bethink you, man, and up arise
from sloth, again to work good
while there is time to work,
for else you are witless and mad.

All day you might understand

And thy mirour bifor thee sen,
What is to don and to wonden,
And what to holden and to flen;
For all day thu siyst wid thin eyen
How this world went and how men deiet.
That wite well, that thu shalt dreyen
Det, also another det.
Ne helpet nout ther non to lien,
Ne may no mon bu det ageyn.

Ne wort ne good ther unforgulde,
Ne non evel ne worth unboukt;
Whanne thu list, mon, under molde
Thu shalt haven as thu havest wrokt.
Bithenk thee well, forthy, ic rede,
And clanse thee of thine misdede,
That he thee helpe at thine nede,
That so dure us havet iboukt,
And to hevене blisse lede
That evere lest and faillet nout.

and the mirror before you see,
what is to do and to undertake,
and what to hold and to flee;
for all day you see with your eyes
how this world wanes and how men die.
That know well, that you shall suffer
death, also another death.
It doesn't help at all there to lie,
no man can be against death.

No good will be there unrequited,
nor any evil will be unrepaid;
when you lie, man, under the mould
you shall have as you have wrought.
Bethink you well therefore, I urge,
and cleanse yourself of your misdeed,
that he may help you at your need,
he that so dearly has bought us,
and to heaven's bliss lead
that ever lasts and fails not.