"The Vanity of All Worldly Things"

By Anne Bradstreet

Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and markup by Staff and Research Assistants at The University of Virginia, John O'Brien, Sara Brunstetter

SEVERAL POEMS

Compiled with great variety of Wit and
Learning, full of Delight;
Wherein especially is contained a compleat
Discourse, and Description of
The Four { ELEMENTS
CONSTITUTIONS,
AGES of Man,
SEASONS of the Year.
Together with an exact Epitome of
the three first *Monarchyes*
Viz, The { ASSYRIAN,
PERSIAN,
GRECIAN.
And beginning of the Romane Common-wealth
to the end of their last King:
With diverse other pleasant & serious *Poems* ,
By a Gentlewoman in *New-England* .
The second Edition, Corrected by the Author,
and enlarged by an Addition of several other
Poems found amongst her Papers
after her Death.

Boston , Printed by *John Foster* , 1678.

The Vanity of All Wordly Things

As he said vanity, so vain say I
O vanity, O vain all under skie,
Where is the man can say, lo, I have found
On brittle earth, a consolation sound?
What is't in honour, to be set on high?
No, they like beasts, and sonnes of men shall die,
And whilst they live, how oft doth turn their State?
He's now a slave, that was a Prince of late.
What is't in wealth, great treasures for to gain?
No, that's but labour anxious, care and pain.
He heaps up riches, and he heaps us sorrow,
Its his to day, but who's his heire to morrow?
What then? content in pleasures canst thou find?
More vain then all, that's but to grasp the wind
The sensuall senses for a time they please,
Mean while the conscience rage, who shall appease?

What is't in beauty? no, that's but a snare,
They'r foul enough to day, that once was fair,
What, Is't in flowring youth, or manly age?
The first is prone to vice, the last to rage.
Where is it then? in wisdome, learning, arts?
Sure if on earth, it must be in those parts;
Yet these, the wisest man of men did find,
But vanity, vexation of the mind,
And he that knows the most doth still bemoan,
He knows not all, there there is to be known,
What is it then? to do as Stoicks tell,
Nor laugh, nor weep, let things go ill or well:
Such stoicks are but stocks, such teaching vain:
While man is man, he shall have ease or pain.
If not in honour, beauty, age, nor treasure,
Nor yet in learning, wisdome, youth nor pleasure,
Where shall I cimbe, sound, seek, search or find,
That summum Bonum, [summum] which may stay my mind?
There is a path, no vultures eye hath seen.
Where lions fierce, nor lions whelps hath been,
Which leads unto that living Christall fount,
Who drinks thereof, the world doth naught account.

The depth, and sea, hath said its not in me,
With pearl and gold it shall not valued be:
For Saphyre, Onix,Topas, who will change,
Its hid fro meyes of men, they count it strange,
Death and destruction, the fame hath heard,
But where, and what it is, from heaven's declar'd
It brings to honour, which shall not decay,
It steeres with wealth, which time cann't wear away.

- 235 -

It yeeldeth pleasures, farre beyond conceit,
And truly beautifies without deceit.
Nor strength nor widsome, nor fresh youth shall fade,
Nor death shall see, but are immortal made,
This pearl of price, this tree of life, this spring,
Who is possessed of, shall reign a King,
Nor change of state, nor cares shall ever see,
But wear his Crown unto eternitie
This satiates the soul, this stayes the mind,
The rest's but vanity, and vain we find.

Footnotes

summumThis phrase, coined by Cicero, means "the highest good." Source: Oxford English Dictionary