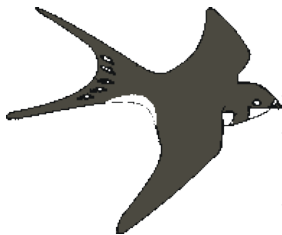


## The Parable of the Sparrow and the Mead-hall

“The Conversion of Northumbria”

[Edwin, the king of Northumbria, urged by his Christian wife Ethelberga, and by the bishop Paulinus,] answered that he was both willing and bound to receive the new faith which the bishop taught, but that he wished, nevertheless, to confer about it with his principal friends and counselors, to the end that, if they also were of his opinion, they might all be cleansed together in Christ, the Fount of Life. Paulinus consenting, the king did as he said; for holding a council with the wise men, he asked of every one in particular what he thought of the new doctrine and the new worship that was preached.

To which the chief of his priests, Coifi, immediately answered: "O king, consider what this is which is now preached to us; for verily I declare to you that the religion which we have hitherto professed has, as far as I can learn, no virtue in it. For none of your people has applied himself more diligently to the worship of our gods than I; and yet there are many who receive greater favors from you, and are more preferred than I, and who are more prosperous in all their undertakings. Now if the gods were good for anything, they would rather forward me who has been more careful to serve them. It follows, therefore, that if upon examination you find those new doctrines which are now preached to us better and more efficacious, we should immediately receive them without any delay'."



Another of the king's chief men, approving of Coifi's words and exhortations, presently added: "The present life of man, O king, seems to me – in comparison with that time which is unknown to us – like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper in winter – amid your officers and ministers, with a good fire in the midst whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad. The sparrow, I say, flying in at one door and immediately out another, whilst he is within is safe from the wintry night. But after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight into the dark winter from which he has emerged. So this life of man appears for a short space -- but of what went before or what is to follow we are ignorant. If, therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed.'

The other elders and king's counselors, by divine inspiration, spoke to the same effect, But Coifi added that he wished more attentively to hear Paulinus' discourse concerning the God whom he preached. So the bishop having spoken by the king's command at greater length, Coifi, hearing his words,- cried out: "I have long since been sensible that there was nothing in that which we worshiped, because the more diligently I sought after truth in that worship the less I found it. But now I freely confess that such evident truth appears in this preaching as can confer on us the gifts of life, of salvation, and of eternal happiness. For which reason I advise, O king, that we instantly abjure and set fire to those temples and altars which we have consecrated without reaping any benefits from them."