









ὅμως δὲ καὶ ἐν τούτοις διαλάμπει τὸ καλόν,  
ἐπειδὴν φέρη τις εὐκόλως πολλὰς καὶ μεγάλας  
ἀτυχίας, μὴ δι' ἀναλγησίαν, ἀλλὰ γεννάδας  
ὄν καὶ μεγαλόψυχος.

[Greek: homô<sup>s</sup> de kai en toutois dialampe<sup>i</sup> to kalon,  
epeidan pherê tis eukolôs pollas kai megalas  
atychias, mê di analgêsian, alla gennadas  
ôn kai megalopsychos.]

Aristotle's 'Ethics,' I, xi. 12.





Diptych representing Narius Manlius Boethius, father of Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius. The inscription in full would run thus: —



## PREFACE.

The book called 'The Consolation of Philosophy' was throughout the Middle Ages, and down to the beginnings of the modern epoch in the sixteenth century, the scholar's familiar companion. Few books have exercised a wider influence in their time. It has been translated into every European tongue, and into English nearly a dozen times, from King Alfred's paraphrase to the translations of Lord Preston, Causton, Ridpath, and Duncan, in the eighteenth century. The belief that what once pleased so widely must still have some charm is my excuse for attempting the present translation. The great work of Boethius, with its alternate prose and verse, skilfully fitted together like dialogue and chorus in a Greek play, is unique in literature, and has a pathetic interest from the time and circumstances of its composition. It ought not to be forgotten. Those who can go to the original will find their reward. There may be room also for a new translation in English after an interval of close on a hundred years.

Some of the editions contain a reproduction of a bust purporting to represent Boethius. Lord Preston's translation, for example, has such a portrait, which it refers to an original in marble at Rome. This I have been unable to trace, and suspect that it is apocryphal. The Hope Collection at Oxford contains a completely different portrait in a print, which gives no authority. I have ventured to use as a frontispiece a reproduction from a plaster-cast in the Ashmolean Museum, taken from an ivory diptych preserved in the Bibliotheca Quiriniana at Brescia, which represents Narius Manlius Boethius, the father of the philosopher. Portraiture of this period is so rare that it seemed that, failing a likeness of the author himself, this authentic representation of his father might have interest, as giving the consular dress and insignia of the time, and also as illustrating the decadence of contemporary art. The consul wears a richly-embroidered cloak; his right hand holds a staff surmounted by the Roman eagle, his left the *mappa circensis*, or napkin used for starting the races in the circus; at his feet are palms and bags of money—prizes for the victors in the games. For permission to use this cast my thanks are due to the authorities of the Ashmolean Museum, as

also to Mr. T.W. Jackson, Curator of the Hope Collection, who first called my attention to its existence.

I have to thank my brother, Mr. L. James, of Radley College, for much valuable help and for correcting the proof-sheets of the translation. The text used is that of Peiper, Leipsic, 1874.

## PROEM.

Anicus Manlius Severinus Boethius lived in the last quarter of the fifth century A.D., and the first quarter of the sixth. He was growing to manhood, when Theodoric, the famous Ostrogoth, crossed the Alps and made himself master of Italy. Boethius belonged to an ancient family, which boasted a connection with the legendary glories of the Republic, and was still among the foremost in wealth and dignity in the days of Rome's abasement. His parents dying early, he was brought up by Symmachus, whom the age agreed to regard as of almost saintly character, and afterwards became his son-in-law. His varied gifts, aided by an excellent education, won for him the reputation of the most accomplished man of his time. He was orator, poet, musician, philosopher. It is his peculiar distinction to have handed on to the Middle Ages the tradition of Greek philosophy by his Latin translations of the works of Aristotle. Called early to a public career, the highest honours of the State came to him unsought. He was sole Consul in 510 A.D., and was ultimately raised by Theodoric to the dignity of *Magister Officiorum*, or head of the whole civil administration. He was no less happy in his domestic life, in the virtues of his wife, Rusticiana, and the fair promise of his two sons, Symmachus and Boethius; happy also in the society of a refined circle of friends. Noble, wealthy, accomplished, universally esteemed for his virtues, high in the favour of the Gothic King, he appeared to all men a signal example of the union of merit and good fortune. His felicity seemed to culminate in the year 522 A.D., when, by special and extraordinary favour, his two sons, young as they were for so exalted an honour, were created joint Consuls and rode to the senate-house attended by a throng of senators, and the acclamations of the multitude. Boethius himself, amid the general applause, delivered the public speech in the King's honour usual on such occasions. Within a year he was a solitary prisoner at Pavia, stripped of honours, wealth, and friends, with death hanging over him, and a terror worse than death, in the fear lest those dearest to him should be involved in the worst results of his downfall. It is in this situation that the opening of the 'Consolation of Philosophy' brings Boethius before us. He represents himself as seated in his prison distraught with grief, indignant at the injustice of his misfortunes, and seeking relief for his melancholy in writing verses de-

scriptive of his condition. Suddenly there appears to him the Divine figure of Philosophy, in the guise of a woman of superhuman dignity and beauty, who by a succession of discourses convinces him of the vanity of regret for the lost gifts of fortune, raises his mind once more to the contemplation of the true good, and makes clear to him the mystery of the world's moral government.

# INDEX

## OF

### VERSE INTERLUDES.

- BOOK I.  
THE SORROWS OF BOETHIUS.
  - SONG PAGE
  - I. BOETHIUS' COMPLAINT
  - II. HIS DESPONDENCY
  - III. THE MISTS DISPELLED
  - IV. NOTHING CAN SUBDUE VIRTUE
  - V. BOETHIUS' PRAYER
  - VI. ALL THINGS HAVE THEIR NEEDFUL ORDER
  - VII. THE PERTURBATIONS OF PASSION
- BOOK II.  
THE VANITY OF FORTUNE'S GIFTS.
  - I. FORTUNE'S MALICE
  - II. MAN'S COVETOUSNESS
  - III. ALL PASSES
  - IV. THE GOLDEN MEAN
  - V. THE FORMER AGE
  - VI. NERO'S INFAMY
  - VII. GLORY MAY NOT LAST
  - VIII. LOVE IS LORD OF ALL
- BOOK III.  
TRUE HAPPINESS AND FALSE.
  - I. THE THORNS OF ERROR
  - II. THE BENT OF NATURE
  - III. THE INSATIABLENESS OF AVARICE
  - IV. DISGRACE OF HONOURS CONFERRED BY A TYRANT
  - V. SELF-MASTERY
  - VI. TRUE NOBILITY

- VII. PLEASURE'S STING
- VIII. HUMAN FOLLY
- IX. INVOCATION
- X. THE TRUE LIGHT
- XI. REMINISCENCE
- XII. ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE
- BOOK IV.  
GOOD AND ILL FORTUNE.
  - I. THE SOUL'S FLIGHT
  - II. THE BONDAGE OF PASSION
  - III. CIRCE'S CU
  - IV. THE UNREASONABLENESS OF HATRED
  - V. WONDER AND IGNORANCE
  - VI. THE UNIVERSAL AIM
  - VII. THE HERO'S PATH
- BOOK V.  
FREE WILL AND GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE.
  - I. CHANCE
  - II. THE TRUE SUN
  - III. TRUTH'S PARADOXES
  - IV. A PSYCHOLOGICAL FALLACY
  - V. THE UPWARD LOOK

## **BOOK I.**

### **THE SORROWS OF BOETHIUS.**

#### SUMMARY.

Boethius' complaint (Song I.).—CH. I. Philosophy appears to Boethius, drives away the Muses of Poetry, and herself laments (Song II.) the disordered condition of his mind.—CH. II. Boethius is speechless with amazement. Philosophy wipes away the tears that have clouded his eyesight.—CH. III. Boethius recognises his mistress Philosophy. To his wondering inquiries she explains her presence, and recalls to his mind the persecutions to which Philosophy has oftentimes from of old been subjected by an ignorant world. CH. IV. Philosophy bids Boethius declare his griefs. He relates the story of his unjust accusation and ruin. He concludes with a prayer (Song V.) that the moral disorder in human affairs may be set right.—CH. V. Philosophy admits the justice of Boethius' self-vindication, but grieves rather for the unhappy change in his mind. She will first tranquillize his spirit by soothing remedies.—CH. VI. Philosophy tests Boethius' mental state by certain questions, and discovers three chief causes of his soul's sickness: (1) He has forgotten his own true nature; (2) he knows not the end towards which the whole universe tends; (3) he knows not the means by which the world is governed.

## **BOOK I.**

### **SONG I.**

#### **Boethius' Complaint.**

Who wrought my studious numbers  
Smoothly once in happier days,  
Now perforce in tears and sadness  
Learn a mournful strain to raise.  
Lo, the Muses, grief-dishevelled,  
Guide my pen and voice my woe;  
Down their cheeks unfeigned the tear drops  
To my sad complainings flow!

These alone in danger's hour  
Faithful found, have dared attend  
On the footsteps of the exile  
To his lonely journey's end.  
These that were the pride and pleasure  
Of my youth and high estate  
Still remain the only solace  
Of the old man's mournful fate.  
Old? Ah yes; swift, ere I knew it,  
By these sorrows on me pressed  
Age hath come; lo, Grief hath bid me  
Wear the garb that fits her best.  
O'er my head untimely sprinkled  
These white hairs my woes proclaim,  
And the skin hangs loose and shrivelled  
On this sorrow-shrunken frame.  
Blest is death that intervenes not  
In the sweet, sweet years of peace,  
But unto the broken-hearted,  
When they call him, brings release!  
Yet Death passes by the wretched,  
Shuts his ear and slumbers deep;  
Will not heed the cry of anguish,  
Will not close the eyes that weep.  
For, while yet inconstant Fortune  
Poured her gifts and all was bright,  
Death's dark hour had all but whelmed me  
In the gloom of endless night.  
Now, because misfortune's shadow  
Hath o'erclouded that false face,  
Cruel Life still halts and lingers,  
Though I loathe his weary race.  
Friends, why did ye once so lightly  
Vaunt me happy among men?  
Surely he who so hath fallen  
Was not firmly founded then.

## I.

While I was thus mutely pondering within myself, and recording my sorrowful complainings with my pen, it seemed to me that there appeared above my head a woman of a countenance exceeding venerable. Her eyes were bright as fire, and of a more than human keenness; her complexion was lively, her vigour showed no trace of enfeeblement; and yet her years were right full, and she plainly seemed not of our age and time. Her stature was difficult to judge. At one moment it exceeded not the common height, at another her forehead seemed to strike the sky; and whenever she raised her head higher, she began to pierce within the very heavens, and to baffle the eyes of them that looked upon her. Her garments were of an imperishable fabric, wrought with the finest threads and of the most delicate workmanship; and these, as her own lips afterwards assured me, she had herself woven with her own hands. The beauty of this vesture had been somewhat tarnished by age and neglect, and wore that dingy look which marble contracts from exposure. On the lower-most edge was inwoven the Greek letter Π [Greek: P], on the topmost the letter θ [Greek: Th], [A] and between the two were to be seen steps, like a staircase, from the lower to the upper letter. This robe, moreover, had been torn by the hands of violent persons, who had each snatched away what he could clutch. [B] Her right hand held a note-book; in her left she bore a staff. And when she saw the Muses of Poesie standing by my bedside, dictating the words of my lamentations, she was moved awhile to wrath, and her eyes flashed sternly. 'Who,' said she, 'has allowed yon play-acting wantons to approach this sick man—these who, so far from giving medicine to heal his malady, even feed it with sweet poison? These it is who kill the rich crop of reason with the barren thorns of passion, who accustom men's minds to disease, instead of setting them free. Now, were it some common man whom your allurements were seducing, as is usually your way, I should be less indignant. On such a one I should not have spent my pains for naught. But this is one nurtured in the Eleatic and Academic philosophies. Nay, get ye gone, ye sirens, whose sweetness lasteth not; leave him for my muses to tend and heal!' At these words of upbraiding, the whole

band, in deepened sadness, with downcast eyes, and blushes that confessed their shame, dolefully left the chamber.

But I, because my sight was dimmed with much weeping, and I could not tell who was this woman of authority so commanding—I was dumfounded, and, with my gaze fastened on the earth, continued silently to await what she might do next. Then she drew near me and sat on the edge of my couch, and, looking into my face all heavy with grief and fixed in sadness on the ground, she bewailed in these words the disorder of my mind:

FOOTNOTES:

[A] Π (P) stands for the Political life, the life of action; θ (Th) for the Theoretical life, the life of thought.

[B] The Stoic, Epicurean, and other philosophical sects, which Boethius regards as heterodox. See also below, ch. iii., p. 14.

## SONG II. His Despondency.

Alas! in what abyss his mind  
Is plunged, how wildly tossed!  
Still, still towards the outer night  
She sinks, her true light lost,  
As oft as, lashed tumultuously  
By earth-born blasts, care's waves rise high.

Yet once he ranged the open heavens,  
The sun's bright pathway tracked;  
Watched how the cold moon waxed and waned;  
Nor rested, till there lacked  
To his wide ken no star that steers  
Amid the maze of circling spheres.

The causes why the blustering winds  
Vex ocean's tranquil face,  
Whose hand doth turn the stable globe,  
Or why his even race  
From out the ruddy east the sun  
Unto the western waves doth run:

What is it tempers cunningly  
The placid hours of spring,  
So that it blossoms with the rose  
For earth's engarlanding:  
Who loads the year's maturer prime  
With clustered grapes in autumn time:

All this he knew – thus ever strove  
Deep Nature's lore to guess.  
Now, reft of reason's light, he lies,  
And bonds his neck oppress;  
While by the heavy load constrained,

His eyes to this dull earth are chained.