

BOOK II

THEN for a while she held her peace. But when her silence, so discreet, made my thoughts to cease from straying, she thus began to speak: 'If I have thoroughly learned the causes and the manner of your sickness, your former good fortune has so affected you that you are being consumed by longing for it. The change of one of her this alone has overturned your peace of mind through your own imagination. I understand the varied disguises of that unnatural state. I know how Fortune is ever most friendly and alluring to those whom she strives to deceive, until she overwhelms them with grief beyond bearing, by deserting them when least expected. If you recall her nature, her ways, or her deserts, you will see that you never had in her, nor have lost with her, aught that was lovely. Yet, I think, I shall not need great labour to recall this to your memory. For then too, when she was at your side with all her flattery, you were wont to reproach her in strong and manly terms; and to revile her with the opinions that you had gathered in worship of me with my favoured ones. But no sudden change of outward affairs can ever come without some upheaval in the mind. Thus has it followed

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that you, like others, have fallen somewhat away from your calm peace of mind. But it is time now for you to make trial of some gentle and pleasant draught, which by reaching your inmost parts shall prepare the way for yet stronger healing draughts. Try therefore the assuring influence of gentle argument which keeps its straight path only when it holds fast to my instructions. And with this art of orators let my handmaid, the art of song, lend her aid in chanting light or weighty harmonies as we desire.

'What is it, mortal man, that has cast you down into grief and mourning? You have seen something unwonted, it would seem, something strange to you. But if you think that Fortune has changed towards you, you are wrong. These are ever her ways: this is her very nature. She has with you preserved her own constancy by her very change. She was ever changeable at the time when she smiled upon you, when she was mocking you with the allurements of false good fortune. You have discovered both the different faces of the blind goddess. To the eyes of others she is veiled in part: to you she has made herself wholly known. If you find her welcome, make use of her ways, and so make no complaining. If she fills you with horror by her treachery, treat her with despite; thrust her away from you, for she tempts you to your

ruin. For though she is the cause of this great trouble for you, she ought to have been the subject of

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calmness and peace. For no man can ever make himself sure that she will never desert him, and thus has she deserted you. Do you reckon such happiness to be prized, which is sure to pass away? Is good fortune dear to you, which is with you for a time and is not sure to stay, and which is sure to bring you unhappiness when it is gone? But seeing that it cannot be stayed at will, and that when it flees away it leaves misery behind, what is such a fleeting thing but a sign of coming misery? Nor should it ever satisfy any man to look only at that which is placed before his eyes. Prudence takes measure of the results to come from all things. The very changeableness of good and bad makes Fortune's threats no more fearful, nor her smiles to be desired. And lastly, when you have once put your neck beneath the yoke of Fortune, you must with steadfast heart bear whatever comes to pass within her realm. But if you would dictate the law by which she whom you have freely chosen to be your mistress must stay or go, surely you will be acting without justification; and your very impatience will make more bitter a lot which you cannot change. If you set your sails before the wind, will you not move forward whither the wind drives you, not whither your will may choose to go? If you intrust your seed to the furrow, will you not weigh the rich years and the barren against each other? You have given yourself over to Fortune's rule, and you must bow yourself to

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your mistress's ways. Are you trying to stay the force of her turning wheel? Ah! dull-witted mortal, if Fortune begin to stay still, she is no longer Fortune.

'As thus she turns her wheel of chance with haughty hand, and presses on like the surge of Euripus's tides, fortune now tramples fiercely on a fearsome king, and now deceives no less a conquered man by raising from the ground his humbled face. She hears no wretch's cry, she heeds no tears, but wantonly she mocks the sorrow which her cruelty has made. This is her sport: thus she proves her power; if in the selfsame hour one man is raised to happiness, and cast down in despair,' tis thus she shews her might.

' Now would I argue with you by these few words which Fortune herself might use: and do you consider whether her demands are fair "Why, O man," she might say, " do you daily accuse me with your complainings? What injustice have I wrought upon you? Of what good things have I robbed you? Choose your judge whom you will, and before him strive with me for the right to hold your wealth and honours. If you can prove that any one of these does truly belong to any mortal man, readily will I grant that these you seek to regain were yours. When nature brought you forth from your mother's womb, I received you

in my arms naked and bare of all things; I cherished you

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with my gifts, and I brought you up all too kindly with my favouring care, wherefore now you cannot bear with me, and I surrounded you with glory and all the abundance that was mine to give. Now it pleases me to withdraw my hand: be thankful, as though you had lived upon my loans. You have no just cause of complaint, as though you had really lost what was once your own. Why do you rail against me? I have wrought no violence towards you. Wealth, honours, and all such are within my rights. They are my handmaids; they know their mistress; they come with me and go when I depart. Boldly will I say that if these, of whose loss you complain, were ever yours, you would never have lost them at all. Am I alone to be stayed from using my rightful power? The heavens may grant bright sunlit days, and hide the same beneath the shade of night. The year may deck the earth's countenance with flowers and fruits, and again wrap it with chilling clouds. The sea may charm with its smoothed surface, but no less justly it may soon bristle in storms with rough waves. Is the insatiate discontent of man to bind me to a constancy which belongs not to my ways? Herein lies my very strength; this is my unchanging sport. I turn my wheel that spins its circle fairly; I delight to make the lowest turn to the top, the highest to the bottom. Come you to the top if you will, but on this condition, that you think it no unfairness to sink when the rule of my game demands it. Do

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you not know my ways? Have you not heard how Croesus,¹ king of Lydia, who filled even Cyrus with fear but a little earlier, was miserably put upon a pyre of burning faggots, but was saved by rain sent down from heaven? Have you forgotten how Paulus shed tears of respect for the miseries of his captive, King Perses?² For what else is the crying and the weeping in tragedies but for the happiness of kings overturned by the random blow of fortune? Have you never learnt in your youth the ancient allegory that in the threshold of Jove's hall there stand two vessels, one full of evil, and one of good? What if you have received more richly of the good? What if I have not ever withheld myself from you? What if my changing nature is itself a reason that you should-hope for better things? In any way, let not your spirit eat itself away: you are set in the sphere that is common to all, let your desire therefore be to live with your own lot of life, a subject of the kingdom of the world.

"If Plenty with o'erflowing horn scatter her wealth abroad, abundantly, as in the storm-tossed sea the sand is cast around, or so beyond all measure as the stars shine forth upon the studded sky in cloudless nights; though she

30:1 -- The proverbially rich and happy king; defeated and condemned to death by Cyrus, king of Media, in 546 B.C., but spared by him.

30:2 -- The last king of Macedonia, defeated at Pydna, 168.c., by L.Æmilius Paulus.

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never stay her hand, yet will the race of men Met II. still weep and wail. Though God accept their prayers freely and give gold with ungrudging hand, and deck with honours those who deserve them, yet when they are gotten, these gifts seem naught. Wild greed swallows what it has sought, and still gapes wide for more. What bit or bridle will hold within its course this headlong lust, when, whetted by abundance of rich gifts, the thirst for possession burns? Never call we that man rich who is ever trembling in haste and groaning for that he thinks he lack

'If Fortune should thus defend herself to you,' said Philosophy, 'you would have naught, I think, to utter on the other part. But if you have any just defence for your complaining, you must put it forward. We will grant you the opportunity of speaking.'

Then I answered, 'Those arguments have a fair form and are clothed with all the sweetness of speech and of song. When a man listens to them, they delight him; but only so long. The wretched have a deeper feeling of their misfortunes. Wherefore when these pleasing sounds fall no longer upon the ear, this deep-rooted misery again weighs down the spirit.'

'It is so,' she said. 'For these are not the remedies for your sickness, but in some sort are the applications for your grief which chafes against its cure. When the time comes, I will apply those which are to penetrate deeply. with Boethius

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But that you may not be content to think yourself wretched, remember how many and how great have been the occasions of your good fortune. I will not describe how, when you lost your father, men of the highest rank received you into their care: how you were chosen by the chief men in the state to be allied to them by marriage; ¹ and you were dear to them before you were ever closely related; which is the most valuable of all relationships. Who hesitated to pronounce you most fortunate for the greatness of your wives' families, for their virtues, and for your blessings in your sons too? I need not speak of those things that are familiar, so I pass over the honours which are denied to most old men, but were granted to you

when yet young. I choose to come to the unrivalled crown of your good fortune. If the enjoyment of anything mortal can weigh at all in the balance of good fortune, can your memory of one great day ever be extinguished by any mass of accumulated ills? I mean that day when you saw your two sons proceed forth from your house as consuls together, amid the crowding senators, the eager and applauding populace: when they sat down in the seats of honour and you delivered the speech of congratulation to the king, gaining

32:1 -- Boethius's first wife was Elpis, daughter of Festus: his second was Rusticiana, daughter of Symmachus, a senator and consul, A.D. 485. His second wife was the mother of the two sons mentioned below. (See Appendix, p. 169.)

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thereby glory for your talent and your eloquence: when in the circus you sat in the place of honour between the consuls, and by a display of lavishness worthy of a triumphing general, you pleased to the full the multitude who were crowded around in expectation.

'While Fortune then favoured you, it seems you flaunted her, though she cherished you as her own darling. You carried off a bounty which she had never granted to any citizen before. Will you then balance accounts with Fortune? This is the first time that she has looked upon you with a grudging eye. If you think of your happy and unhappy circumstances both in number and in kind, you will not be able to say that you have not been fortunate until now. And if you think that you were not fortunate because these things have passed away which then seemed to bring happiness, these things too are passing away, which you now hold to be miserable, wherefore you cannot think that you are wretched now. Is this your first entrance upon the stage of life? Are you come here unprepared and a stranger to the scene? Think you that there is any certainty in the affairs of mankind, when you know that often one swift hour can utterly destroy a man? For though the chances of life may seldom be depended upon, yet the last day of a lifetime seems to be the end of Fortune's power, though it perhaps would stay. What, think you, should we therefore say; that you desert her by dying, or that she deserts you by leaving you? '

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'When o'er the heaven Phoebus from his rose-red car begins to shed his light abroad, his flames oppress the paling stars and blunt their whitened rays. When the grove grows bright in spring with roses 'neath the west wind's warming breath, let but the cloudy gale once wildly blow, and their beauty is gone, the thorns alone remain. Often the sea is calmly glistening bright with all untroubled waves, but as often

does the north wind stir them up, making the troubling tempest boil. If then the earth's own covering so seldom constant stays, if its changes are so great, shalt thou trust the brittle fortunes of mankind, have faith in fleeting good? For this is sure, and this is fixed by everlasting law, that naught which is brought to birth shall constant here abide.'

Then I answered her,' Cherisher of all the virtues, you tell me but the truth: I cannot deny my rapid successes and my prosperity. But it is such remembrances that torment me more than others. For of all suffering from Fortune, the unhappiest misfortune is to have known a happy fortune.'

'But,' said Philosophy,' you are paying the him penalty for your mistaken expectations, and with this you cannot justly charge your life's circumstances. If you are affected by this empty name of Fortune's gift of happiness, you must listen while I recall how many and how great are your sources of happiness: and thus, if you have possessed that which is the most

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precious among all Fortune's gifts, and if that is still safe and unharmed in your possession, you will never, while you keep these better gifts, be able to justly charge Fortune with unkindness. Firstly, your wife's father, Symmachus, is still living and hale; and what more precious glory has the human race than him? And he, because your worth is undiminished and your life still so valuable, is mourning for the injustice you suffer, this man who is wholly made up of wisdom and virtue. Again, your wife lives, a woman whose character is full of virtue, whose modesty excels its kind; a woman who (to put in a word the gifts she brought you) is like her father. She lives, and, hating this life, for your sake alone she clings to it. Herein only will I yield to allow you unhappiness; she pines with tears and grief through her longing for you. Need I speak of your sons who have both been consuls, and whose lives, as when they were boys, are yet bright with the character of their grandfather and their father? Wherefore, since mortals desire exceedingly to keep a hold on life, how happy you should be, knew you but your blessings, since you have still what none doubts to be dearer than life itself? Wherefore now dry your tears. For-tune's hatred has not yet been so great as to destroy all your holds upon happiness: the tempest that is fallen upon you is not too great for you: your anchors hold yet firm, and they should keep ever nigh to you confidence in the present and hope for future time.

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'And may they continue to hold fast,' said I,' that is my prayer: while they are firm, we will reach the end of our voyage, however things may be. But you see how much my glory has departed.'

And she answered, ' We have made some progress, if you are not now weary entirely of your present lot. But I cannot bear this dallying so softly, so long as you complain that your happiness lacks aught, so long as you are full of sorrow and care. Whose happiness is so firmly established that he has no quarrel from any side with his estate of life? For the condition of our welfare is a matter fraught with care: either its completeness never appears, or it never remains. One man's wealth is abundant, but his birth and breeding put him to shame. Another is famous for his noble birth, but would rather be unknown because he is hampered by his narrow means. A third is blessed with wealth and breeding, but bewails his life because he has no wife. Another is happy in his marriage, but has no children, and saves his wealth only for an heir that is no son of his. Another is blessed with children, but weeps tears of sorrow for the misdeeds of son or daughter. So none is readily at peace with the lot his fortune sends him. For in each case there is that which is unknown to him who has not experienced it, and which brings horror to him who has experienced it. Consider further, that the feelings of the most fortunate men are the most easily affected, wherefore, unless all

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their desires are supplied, such men, being unused to all adversity, are cast down by every little care: so small are the troubles which can rob them of complete happiness.

'How many are they, think you, who would think themselves raised to heaven if the smallest part of the remnants of your good fortune fell to them? This very place, which you call a place of exile, is home to those who live herein. Thus there is nothing wretched unless you think it to be so: and in like manner he who bears all with a calm mind finds his lot wholly blessed. Who is so happy but would wish to change his estate, if he yields to impatience of his lot? With how much bitterness is the sweetness of man's life mingled! For even though its enjoyment seem pleasant, yet it may not be surely kept from departing when it will. It is plain then how wretched is the happiness of mortal life which neither endures for ever with men of calm mind, nor ever wholly delights the care-ridden. Wherefore, then, O mortal men, seek ye that happiness without, which lies within yourselves? Ye are confounded by error and ignorance. I will shew you as shortly as I may, the pole on which turns the highest happiness. Is there aught that you value more highly than your own self? You will answer that there is nothing. If then you are master of yourself, you will be in possession of that which you will never wish to lose, and which Fortune will never be able to take from you. Yet consider this further, that you may

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be assured that happiness cannot be fixed in matters of chance: if happiness is the highest good of a man who lives his life by reason, and if that which can by any means be snatched away, is not the highest good (since that which is best cannot be snatched away), it is plain that Fortune by its own uncertainty can never come near to reaching happiness. Further, the man who is borne along by a happiness which may stumble, either knows that it may change, or knows it not: if he knows it not, what happiness can there be in the blindness of ignorance? If he knows it, he must needs live in fear of losing that which he cannot doubt that he may lose; wherefore an ever-present fear allows not such an one to be happy. Or at any rate, if he lose it without unhappiness, does he not think it worthless? For that, whose loss can be calmly borne, is indeed a small good. You, I know well, are firmly persuaded that men's understandings can never die; this truth is planted deep in you by many proofs: since then it is plain that the happiness of fortune is bounded by the death of the body, you cannot doubt that, if death can carry away happiness, the whole race of mortals is sinking into wretchedness to be found upon the border of death. But we know that many have sought the enjoyment of happiness not only by death, but even by sorrow and sufferings: how then can the presence of this life make us happy, when its end cannot make us unhappy?

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'He that would build on a lasting resting-place; who would be firm to resist the blasts of the storming wind; who seeks, too, safety where he may contemn the surge and threatening of the sea; must leave the lofty mountain's top, and leave the thirsting sands. The hill is swept by all the might of the headstrong gale: the sands dissolve, and will not bear the load upon them. Let him fly the danger in a lot which is pleasant rest unto the eye: let him be mindful to set his house surely upon the lowly rock. Then let the wind bellow, confounding wreckage in the sea, and thou wilt still be founded upon unmoving peace, wilt be blessed in the strength of thy defence: thy life will be spent in calmness, and thou mayest mock the raging passions of the air.

'But now,' she continued, 'the first remedies of reasoning are reaching you more deeply, and I think I should now use those that are somewhat stronger. If the gifts of Fortune fade not nor pass quickly away, even so, what is there in them which could ever be truly yours, or which would not lose its value when examined or thought upon?

'Are riches valuable for their own nature, or on account of your and other men's natures? Which is the more valuable, the gold itself or the power of the stored up-money? Surely wealth shines more brightly when spent than when put away in masses. Avarice ever brings hatred, while generous spending brings honour.

But that cannot remain with one person which is handed over to another: therefore money becomes valuable to its possessor when, by being scattered, it is transferred to others, and ceases to be possessed. And if all that is heaped together among mankind comes to one man, it makes the others all poor. A voice indeed fills equally the ears of all that hear: but your riches cannot pass to others without being lessened: and when they pass, they make poor those whom they leave. How strait then and poor are those riches, which most men may not have, and which can only come to one by making others poor!

'Think again of precious stones: does their gleam attract your eyes? But any excellence they have is their own brilliance, and belongs not to men: wherefore I am amazed that men so strongly admire them. What manner of thing can that be which has no mind to influence, which has no structure of parts, and yet can justly seem to a living, reasoning mind to be beautiful? Though they be works of their creator, and by their own beauty and adornment have a certain low beauty, yet are they in rank lower than your own excellence, and have in no wise deserved your admiration.

'Does the beauty of landscape delight you? '

'Surely, for it is a beautiful part of a beautiful creation: and in like manner we rejoice at times in the appearance of a calm sea, and we admire the sky, the stars, the sun, and the moon.

'Does any one of these,' said she, 'concern you? Dare you boast yourself of the splendid beauty of any one of such things? Are you yourself adorned by the flowers of spring? Is it your richness that swells the fruits of autumn? Why are you carried away by empty rejoicing. Why do you embrace as your own the good things which are outside yourself? Fortune will never make yours what Nature has made to belong to other things. The fruits of the earth should doubtless serve as nourishment for living beings, but if you would satisfy your need as fully as Nature needs, you need not the abundance of Fortune. Nature is content with very little, and if you seek to thrust upon her more than is enough, then what you cast in will become either unpleasing or even harmful

'Again, you think that you appear beautiful in many kinds of clothing. But if their form is pleasant to the eyes, I would admire the nature of the material or the skill of the maker. Or are you made happy by a long line of attendants? Surely if they are vicious, they are but . a burden to the house, and full of injury to their master himself; while if they are honest, how can the honesty of others be counted among your possessions?

'Out of all these possessions, then, which you reckon as your wealth, not one can really be shown to be your own. For if they have no beauty for you to acquire, what have they for which you should grieve if you lose them, or in keeping which you should rejoice? And if

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they are beautiful by their own nature, how are you the richer thereby? For these would have been pleasing of themselves, though cut out from your possessions. They do not become valuable by reason that they have come into your wealth; but you have desired to count them among your wealth, because they seemed valuable. Why then do you long for them with such railing against Fortune? You seek, I believe, to put want to flight by means of plenty. But you find that the opposite results. The more various is the beauty of furniture, the more helps are needed to keep it beautiful; and it is ever true that they who have much, need much; and on the other hand, they need least who measure their wealth by the needs of nature, not by excess of display.

Is there then no good which belongs to you and is implanted within you, that you seek your good things elsewhere, in things without you and separate from you? Have things taken such a turn that the animal, whose reason gives it a claim to divinity, cannot seem beautiful to itself except by the possession of lifeless trappings? Other classes of things are satisfied by their intrinsic possessions; but men, though made like God in understanding, seek to find among the lowest things adornment for their higher nature: and you do not understand that you do a great wrong thereby to your Creator. He intended that the human race should be above all other earthly beings; yet you thrust down your honourable place below the lowest.

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For if every good thing is allowed to be more valuable than that to which it belongs, surely you are putting yourselves lower than them in your estimation, since you think precious the most worthless of things; and this is indeed a just result. Since, then, this is the condition of human nature, that it surpasses other classes only when it realises what is in itself; as soon as it ceases to know itself, it must be reduced to a lower rank than the beasts. To other animals ignorance of themselves is natural; in men it is a fault. How plainly and how widely do you err by thinking that anything can be adorned by ornaments that belong to others! Surely that cannot be. For if anything becomes brilliant by additions thereto, the praise for the brilliance belongs to the additions. But the subject remains in its own vileness, though hidden and covered by these externals.

'Again, I say that naught can be a good thing which does harm to its possessor. Am I wrong? "No," you will say. Yet many a time do riches harm their possessors, since all base men, who are therefore the most covetous, think that they themselves alone are worthy to possess all gold and precious stones. You therefore, who now go in fear of the cudgel and sword of the robber, could laugh in his face if you had entered upon this path with empty pockets. [1](#) How wonderful is the

43:1 -- This is an application of Juvenal's lines (Sat. x. 19) which contrast the terror of the money-laden traveller

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surpassing blessing of mortal wealth! As soon as you have acquired it, your cares begin!

'O happy was that early age of men, contented with their trusted and unfailing fields, nor ruined by the wealth that enervates. Easily was the acorn got that used to satisfy their longwhile fast. They knew not Bacchus' gifts, nor honey mixed therewith. They knew not how to tinge with Tyre's purple dyes the sheen of China's silks. Their sleep kept health on rush and grass; the stream gave them to drink as it flowed by: the lofty pine to them gave shade. Not one of them yet clave the ocean's depths, nor, carrying stores of merchandise, had visited new shores. Then was not heard the battle's trump, nor had blood made red with bitter hate the bristling swords of war. For why should any madness urge to take up first their arms upon an enemy such ones as knew no sight of cruel wounds nor knew rewards that could be reaped in blood? Would that our times could but return to those old ways! but love of gain and greed of holding burn more fiercely far than Ætna's fires. Ah! who was the wretch who first unearthed the mass of hidden gold, the gems that only longed to lie unfound? For full of danger was the prize he found.

'What am I to say of power and of the with the careless happiness of the man who meets highwayman with no purse and empty pockets.

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honours of office, which you raise to heaven because you know not true honoured power? What fires belched forth from Ætna's flames, what overwhelming flood could deal such ruin as these when they fall into the hands of evil men? I am sure you remember how your forefathers wished to do away with the

consular power, which had been the very foundation of liberty, because of the overbearing pride of the consuls, just as your ancestors had too in earlier times expunged from the state the name of king on account of the same pride. But if, as rarely happens, places of honour are granted to honest men, what else is delightful in them but the honesty they practise thereby? Wherefore honour comes not to virtue from holding office, but comes to office from virtues there practised.

'But what is the power which you seek and esteem so highly? O creatures of the earth, can you not think over whom you are set? If you saw in a community of mice, one mouse asserting his rights and his power over the others, with what mirth you would greet the sight! Yet if you consider the body, what can you find weaker than humanity? Cannot a tiny gnat by its bite, or by creeping into the inmost parts, kill that body? How can any exercise right upon any other except upon the body alone, or that which is below the body, whereby I mean the fortunes? Can you ever impose any law upon a free spirit? Can you ever disturb the peculiar restfulness which is the property of a mind that hangs together

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upon the firm basis of its reason? When a certain tyrant thought that by tortures he would compel a free man¹ to betray the conspirators in a plot against his life, the philosopher bit through his tongue and spat it out in the tyrant's face. Thus were the tortures, which the tyrant intended to have cruel results, turned by the philosopher into subjects of high courage. Is there aught that one man can do to another, which he may not suffer from another in his turn? We have heard how Busiris, who used to kill strangers, was killed by Hercules when he came to Egypt. Regulus,² who had cast into chains many a Carthaginian captive, soon yielded himself a prisoner to their chains. Do you think that power to be any power, whose possessor cannot ensure his own escape from suffering at another's hands what he inflicts upon some other?

'Further, if there were any intrinsic good in the nature of honours and powers themselves, they could never crowd upon the basest men. For opposites will not be bound together. Nature refuses to allow contraries to be linked to each other. Wherefore, while it is un-doubted that for the most part offices of honour are enjoyed by bad men, it is also manifest that those things are not by nature good, which

46:1 -- This story is told of Anaxagoras and Nicocreon, king of Cyprus, c. B.C. 323.

46:2 -- Regulus was the Roman general in Sicily in the first Punic War, taken prisoner in 255 B.C., and put to death in 250.

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allow themselves to cling to evil men. And this indeed may worthily be held of all the gifts of fortune which come with the greatest success to the most unscrupulous. And in this matter we must also think on this fact, that no one doubts a man to be brave in whom he has found by examination that bravery is implanted: and whoever has the quality of swiftness is plainly swift. So also music makes men musical, medicine makes men physicians, oratory makes men orators. The nature of each quality acts as is peculiar to itself: it is not confused with the results of contrary qualities, but goes so far as to drive out those qualities which are opposed to it. Wealth cannot quench the insatiable thirst of avarice: nor can power ever make master of himself the man whom vicious passions hold fast in un-breakable chains. Honours, when joined to dishonest men, so far from making them honour-able, betray them rather, and show them to be dishonourable. Why is this so? It is because you rejoice to call things by false names which belong not to them - their names are refuted by the reality of their qualities: wherefore neither riches, nor that kind of power, nor these honours, can justly so be called. Lastly, we may come to the same conclusion concerning all the aspects of Fortune: nothing is to be sought in her, and it is plain she has no innate good, for she is not always joined with good men, nor does she make good those with whom she is joined.'

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'We have heard what ruin Nero wrought when Rome was burnt and senators were slain. We know how savagely he did to death his brother,¹ how he was stained by the spilling of his own mother's blood, and how he looked upon her cold body and yet no tear fell upon his cheek: yet could this man be judge of the morals that were dead. Nay, he was ruler of the peoples whom the sun looks upon from the time he rises in the east until he hides his rays beneath the waves, and those whom the chilling northern Wind o'errules, and those whom the southern gale burns with its dry blast, as it heats the burning sands. Say, could great power chasten Nero's maddened rage? Ah! heavy fate, how often is the sword of high injustice given where is already most poisonous cruelty!'

Then I said, 'You know that the vain-glory of this world has had but little influence over me; but I have desired the means of so managing affairs that virtue might not grow aged in silence.'

'Yes,' said she, 'but there is one thing which can attract minds, which, though by nature excelling, yet are not led by perfection to the furthest bounds of virtue; and that thing is the love of fame and reputation for deserving well of one's country. Think then thus upon it, and see that it is but a slight

48:1 -- Britannicus, son of Nero's father, the Emperor Claudius, put to death A.D. 55.

thing of no weight. As you have learnt from astronomers' shewing, the whole circumference of the earth is but as a point compared with the size of the heavens. That is, if you compare the earth with the circle of the universe, it must be reckoned as of no size at all. And of this tiny portion of the universe there is but a fourth part, as you have learnt from the demonstration of Ptolemæus,¹ which is inhabited by living beings known to us. If from this fourth part you imagine subtracted all that is covered by sea and marsh, and all the vast regions of thirsty desert, you will find but the narrowest space left for human habitation. And do you think of setting forth your fame and publishing your name in this space, which is but as a point within another point so closely circumscribed? And what size or magnificence can fame have which is shut in by such close and narrow bounds? Further, this narrow enclosure of habitation is peopled by many races of men which differ in language, in customs, and in their whole scheme of living; and owing to difficulty of travelling, differences of speech, and rareness of any intercourse, the fame of cities cannot reach them, much less the fame of men. Has not Cicero written somewhere that in his time the fame of Rome had not reached the mountains of the Caucasus, though the Republic was already well grown and

49:1 -- A mathematician, astronomer, and geographer of Alexandria. Fl. 140-160 A.D. Boethius translated one of his works.

striking awe among the Parthians and other nations in those parts? Do you see then how narrow and closely bounded must be that fame which you wish to extend more widely? Can the fame of a Roman ever reach parts to which the name of Rome cannot come?

Further, the manners and customs of different races are so little in agreement, that what is make his name known, because he takes pleasure in a glorious fame. So each man shall be content if his fame travels throughout his own countrymen, and the immortality of his name shall be bounded by the limits of one nation. But how many men, the most famous of their times, are wiped out by oblivion because no man has written of them! 1 And yet what advantage is there in much that is written? For with their authors these writings are overwhelmed in the length and dimness of age. Yet when you think upon your fame in future ages, you seem to think that you are prolonging it to immortality. But if you think upon the unending length of eternity, what enjoyment do you find in the long endurance of Boethius is thinking of Horace, Odes iv. 9. Ere Agamemnon saw the light, There lived brave men: but tearless all Enfolded in eternal night, For lack of sacred minstrels, fall. (Mr.. Gladstone's translation.)

your name? For though one moment bears but the least proportion to ten thousand years, yet there is a definite ratio, because both are limited spaces of time. But even ten thousand years, or the greatest number you will, cannot even be compared with eternity. For there will always be ratio between finite things, but between the finite and the infinite there can never be any comparison. Wherefore, however long drawn out may be the life of your fame, it is not even small, but it is absolutely nothing when compared with eternity. You know not how to act rightly except for the breezes of popular opinion and for the sake of empty rumours; thus the excellence of conscience and of virtue is left behind, and you seek rewards from the tattle of other men. Listen to the witty manner in which one played once upon the shallowness of this pride. A certain man once bitterly attacked another who had taken to himself falsely the name of philosopher, not for the purpose of true virtue, but for pride of fame; he added to his attack that he would know soon whether he was a philosopher, when he saw whether the other bore with meekness and patience the insults he heaped upon him. The other showed patience for a while and took the insults as though he scoffed at them, until he said, " Do you now see that I am a philosopher? " " I should have, had you kept silence," said the other stingingly. But we are speaking of great men: and I ask, what do they gain from fame, though they seek

glory by virtue? what have they after the body is dissolved at death? For if men die utterly, as our reason forbids us to believe, there is no glory left to them at all, since they whose it is said to be, do not exist. If, on the other hand, the mind is still conscious and working when it is freed from its earthly prison, it seeks heaven in its freedom and surely spurns all earthly traffic: it enjoys heaven and rejoices in its release from the of this world.

'The mind that rushes headlong in its search for fame, thinking that is its highest good, should look upon the spreading regions of the air, and then upon the bounded tracts that are this world: then will shame enter it; that, though fame grow, yet can it never fill so small a circle. Proud men! why will ye try in vain to free your necks from the yoke mortality has set thereon? Though fame may be wide scattered and find its way through distant lands, and set the tongues there talking; though a splendid house may draw brilliance from famous names and tales; yet death regards not any glory, howsoever great. Alike he overwhelms the lowly and the lofty head, and levels high with low.

'Where are Fabricius's¹ bones, that honourable man? What now is Brutus?² or

52:1 -- Fabricius -- was the Roman general whom Pyrrhus could neither bribe nor intimidate, B.C. 280.

52:2 -- L. Junius Brutus, who led the Romans to expel the last of the kings, and was elected the first

unbending Cato?¹ Their fame survives in this: it has no more than a few slight letters shewing forth an empty name. We see their noble names engraved, and only know thereby that they are brought to naught. Ye lie then all unknown, and fame can give no knowledge of you. But if you think that life can be prolonged by the breath of mortal fame, yet when the slow time robs you of this too, then there awaits you but a second death.

'But,' she said, 'do not think that I would urge implacable war upon Fortune. There are times when her deception of men has certain merits: I mean when she discovers herself, unveils her face, and proclaims her ways. Perhaps you do not yet understand what I would say. It is a strange thing that I am trying to say, and for that reason I can scarcely explain myself in words. I think that ill fortune is of greater advantage to men than good fortune. Good fortune is ever lying when she seems to favour by an appearance of happiness. Ill fortune is ever true when by her changes she shews herself inconstant. The one deceives; the other edifies. The one by a deceitful appearance of good things enchains the

53:1 -- Probably Cato Major, the great censor, B.C. 184, the rigid champion of the stern old Roman morals; or possibly Cato Minor, who committed suicide at Utica after the battle of Thapsus, B.C. 46, because he considered that Cæsar's victory was fatal to the Republic and the liberty of Rome.

minds of those who enjoy them: the other frees them by a knowledge that happiness is so fragile. You see, then, that the one is blown about by winds, is ever moving and ever ignorant of its own self; the other is sober, ever prepared and ever made provident by the undergoing of its very adversities. Lastly, good fortune draws men from the straight path of true good by her fawning; ill fortune draws most men to the true good, and holds them back by her curved staff.

'And do you think that this should be reckoned among the least benefits of this rough, unkind, and terrible ill fortune, that she has discovered to you the minds of your faithful friends? Fortune has distinguished for you your sure and your doubtful friends; her departure has taken away her friends and left you yours. At what price could you have bought this benefit if you had been untouched and, as you thought, fortunate? Cease then to seek the wealth you have lost. You have found your friends, and they are the most precious of all riches.

'Through Love¹ the universe with constancy makes changes all without discord: earth's elements, though contrary, abide in treaty bound: Phoebus in his golden car leads up the glowing day; his sister rules the night that

54:1 -- Boethius in this passage is probably thinking of Empedocles's doctrine of Love which unites, and Strife which divides, the two primal forces in the universe.

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Hesperus brought: the greedy sea confines its waves in bounds, lest the earth's borders be changed by its beating on them: all these are firmly bound by Love, which rules both earth and sea, and has its empire in the heavens too. If Love should slacken this its hold, all mutual love would change to war; and these would strive to undo the scheme which now their glorious movements carry out with trust and with accord. By Love are peoples too kept bound together by a treaty which they may not break. Love binds with pure affection the sacred tie of wedlock, and speaks its bidding to all trusty friends. O happy race of mortals, if your hearts are ruled as is the universe, by Love!¹

55:1 -- C p. Bk. I. Prose iv, p. 10.

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