

BOOK III

When she finished her lay, its soothing tones left me spellbound with my ears alert in my eagerness to listen. So a while afterwards I said, 'Greatest comforter of weary minds, how have you cheered me with your deep thoughts and sweet singing too! No more shall I doubt my power to meet the blows of Fortune. So far am I from terror at the remedies which you did lately tell me were sharper, that I am longing to hear them, and eagerly I beg you for them.'

Then said she, 'I knew it when you laid hold upon my words in silent attention, and I was waiting for that frame of mind in you, or more truly, I brought it about in you. They that remain are indeed bitter to the tongue, but sweet to the inner man. But as you say you are eager to hear, how ardently you would be burning, if you knew whither I am attempting to lead you! '

Whither is that? ' I asked.

'To the true happiness, of which your soul too dreams; but your sight is taken up in imaginary views thereof, so that you cannot look upon itself.'

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Then said I, ' I pray you shew me what that truly is, and quickly.'

'I will do so,' she said, ' for your sake willingly. But first I will try to picture in words and give you the form of the cause, which is already better known to you, that so, when that picture is perfect and you turn your eyes to the other side, you may recognise the form of true happiness.

'When a man would sow in virgin soil, first he clears away the bushes, cuts the brambles and the ferns, that the corn-goddess may go forth laden with her new fruit. The honey, that the bee has toiled to give us, is sweeter when the mouth has tasted bitter things. The stars shine with more pleasing grace when a

storm has ceased to roar and pour down rain. After the morning star has dispersed the shades of night, the day in all its beauty drives its rosy chariot forth. So thou hast looked upon false happiness first; now draw thy neck from under her yoke: so shall true happiness now come into thy soul.'

She lowered her eyes for a little while as though searching the innermost recesses of her mind; and then she continued: -- 'The trouble of the many and various aims of mortal men bring them much care, and herein they go forward by different paths but strive to reach one end, which is happiness. And that good is that, to which if any man attain, he

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can desire nothing further. It is that highest of all good things, and it embraces in itself all good things: if any good is lacking, it cannot be the highest good, since then there is left outside it something which can be desired. Wherefore happiness is a state which is made perfect by the union of all good things. This end all men seek to reach, as I said, though by different paths. For there is implanted by nature in the minds of men a desire for the true good; but error leads them astray towards false goods by wrong paths.

'Some men believe that the highest good is to lack nothing, and so they are at pains to possess abundant riches. Others consider the true good to be that which is most worthy of admiration, and so they strive to attain to places of honour, and to be held by their fellow-citizens in honour thereby. Some determine that the highest good lies in the highest power; and so they either desire to reign themselves, or try to cleave to those who do reign. Others think that renown is the greatest good, and they therefore hasten to make a famous name by the arts of peace or of war. But more than all measure the fruit of good by pleasure and enjoyment, and these think that the happiest man is abandoned to pleasure.

'Further, there are those who confuse the aims and the causes of these good things: as those who desire riches for the sake of power or of pleasure, or those who seek power for the sake of money or celebrity. In these, then, and

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other things like to them, lies the aim of men's actions and prayers, such as renown and popularity, which seem to afford some fame, or wife and children, which are sought for the pleasure they give. On the other hand, the good of friends, which is the most honourable and holy of all, lies not in Fortune's but in Virtue's realm. All others are adopted for the sake of power or enjoyment.

'Again, it is plain that the good things of the body must be accounted to those false causes which we have mentioned; for bodily strength and stature seem to make men more able and strong; beauty and swiftness seem to give renown; health seems to give pleasure. By all these happiness alone is plainly desired. For each man holds that to be the highest good, which he seeks before all others. But we have defined the highest good to be happiness. Wherefore what each man desires above all others, he holds to be a state of happiness.

'Wherefore you have each of these placed before you as the form of human happiness: wealth, honours, power, glory, and pleasure. Epicurus¹ considered these forms alone, and accordingly determined upon pleasure as the highest good, because all the others seemed but

59:1 -- Epicurus (B.C. 342-270) was the famous founder of the Epicurean school of philosophy. His school had a large following of Romans under the Empire. His own teaching was of a higher nature than might be supposed from this bare statement that he thought 'pleasure was the highest good.'

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to join with it in bringing enjoyment to the mind.

'But to return to the aims of men: their minds seem to seek to regain the highest good, and their memories seem to dull their powers. It is as though a drunken man were seeking his home, but could not remember the way thither. Can those people be altogether wrong whose aim it is to lack nothing? No, there is nothing which can make happiness so perfect as an abundant possession of good things, needing naught that belongs to others, but in all ways sufficing for itself. Surely those others too are not mistaken who think that what is best is also most worthy of reverence and respect. It cannot be any cheap or base thing, to attain which almost all men aim and strive. And is power not to be accounted a good thing? Surely it is: can that be a weak thing or forceless, which is allowed in all cases to excel? Is renown of no value? We cannot surrender this; that whatever is most excellent, has also great renown. It is hardly worth saying that happiness has no torturing cares or gloom, and is not subject to grief and trouble; for even in small things, the aim is to find that which it is a delight to have and to enjoy. These, then, are the desires of men: they long for riches, places of honour, kingdoms, glory, and pleasure; and they long for them because they think that thereby they will find satisfaction, veneration, power, renown, and happiness. It is the good then which men seek by their different desires;

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and it is easy to shew how great a force nature has put therein, since in spite of such varying and discordant opinions, they are all agreed in the goal they seek, that of the highest good.

'I would to pliant strings set forth a song of how almighty Nature turns her guiding reins, telling with what laws her providence keeps safe this boundless universe, binding and tying each and all with cords that never shall be loosed. The lions of Carthage, though they bear the gorgeous bonds and trappings of captivity, and eat the food that is given them by hand, and though they fear their harsh master with his lash they know so well; yet if once blood has touched their bristling jaws, their old, their latent wills return; with deep roaring they remember their old selves; they loose their bands and free their necks, and their tamer is the first torn by their cruel teeth, and his blood is poured out by their rage and wrath.

'If the bird who sings so lustily upon the high tree-top, be caught and caged, men may minister to him with dainty care, may give him cups of liquid honey and feed him with all gentleness on plenteous food; yet if he fly to the roof of his cage and see the shady trees he loves, he spurns with his foot the food they have put before him; the woods are all his sorrow calls for, for the woods he sings with his sweet tones.

'The bough which has been downward thrust by force of strength to bend its top to

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earth, so soon as the pressing hand is gone, looks up again straight to the sky above.

'Phoebus sinks into the western waves, but by his unknown track he turns his car once more to his rising in the east.

'All things must find their own peculiar course again, and each rejoices in his own return. Not one can keep the order handed down to it, unless in some way it unites its rising to its end, and so makes firm, immutable, its own encircling course.

'And you too, creatures of the earth, do dream of your first state, though with a dim idea. With whatsoever thinking it may be, you look to that goal of happiness, though never so obscure your thoughts: thither, to true happiness, your natural course does guide you, and from the same your various errors lead you. For I would have you consider whether men can reach the end they have resolved upon, namely happiness, by these ways by which they think to attain thereto. If money and places of honour and such-like do bring anything of that sort to a man who seems to lack no good thing, then let us acknowledge with them that men do become happy by the possession of these things. But if they cannot perform their promises, and there is still lack of further good things, surely it is plain that a false appearance of happiness is there discovered. You, therefore, who had lately abundant riches, shall first

answer me. With all that great wealth, was your mind never

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perturbed by torturing care arising from some sense of injustice? '

'Yes,' I said; 'I cannot remember that my mind was ever free from some such care.'

Was it not because something was lacking, which you missed, or because something was present to you which you did not like to have? '

'Yes,' I answered.

'You desired, then, the presence of the one, and the absence of the other? '

'I acknowledge it.'

'Then,' said she, 'such a man lacks what he desires.'

'He does.'

'But while a man lacks anything, can he possibly satisfy himself? '

'No,' said I.

'Then, while you were bountifully supplied with wealth, you felt that you did not satisfy yourself? '

'I did indeed.'

'Then,' said she, 'wealth cannot prevent a man from lacking or make him satisfied. And this is what it apparently professed to do. And this point too I feel is most important: money has in itself, by its own nature, nothing which can prevent its being carried off from those, who possess it, against their will.'

'It has not,' I said.

'No, you cannot deny that any stronger man may any day snatch it from them. For how come about the quarrels of the law-courts? Is it not because people try to regain money that

has been by force or by fraud taken from them? ' ' Yes,' I answered.

'Then,' said she,' a man will need to seek from the outside help to guard his own money.'

'That cannot be denied,' I said.

'And a man will not need that unless he possesses money which he can lose.'

'Undoubtedly he will not.'

'Then the argument turns round the other way,' she said.' The riches which were thought to make a man all-sufficient for himself, do really put him in need of other people's help. Then how can need be separated from wealth? Do the rich never feel hunger nor thirst? Do the limbs of moneyed men never feel the cold of winter? You will say, " Yes, but the rich have the wherewithal to satisfy hunger and thirst, and drive away cold." But though riches may thus console wants, they cannot entirely take them away. For, though these ever crying wants, these continual requests, are satisfied, yet there must exist that which is to be satisfied. I need not say that nature is satisfied with little, greed is never satisfied. Wherefore, I ask you, if wealth cannot remove want, and even creates its own wants, what reason is there that you should think it affords satisfaction to a man?

' Though the rich man with greed heap up from ever-flowing streams the wealth that cannot satisfy, though he deck himself with pearls from the Red Sea's shore, and plough

his fertile field with oxen by the score, yet gnawing care will never in his lifetime leave him, and at his death his wealth will not go with him, but leave him faithlessly.'

'But,' I urged,' places of honour make the man, to whom they fall, honoured and venerated.'

'Ah! ' she answered,' have those offices their force in truth that they may instil virtues into the minds of those that hold them, and drive out vices therefrom? And yet we are too well accustomed to see them making wickedness conspicuous rather than avoiding it. Wherefore we are displeased to see such places

often falling to the most wicked of men, so that Catullus called Nonius "a diseased growth,"¹ though he sat in the highest chair of office. Do you see how great a disgrace high honours can add to evil men? Their unworthiness is less conspicuous if they are not made famous by honours. Could you yourself have been induced by any dangers to think of being a colleague with Decoratus,² when you saw that he had the mind of an unscrupulous buffoon, and a base informer? We cannot consider men worthy of veneration on account of their high places, when we hold them to be unworthy of those

65:1 -- Probably Boethius makes a mistake in his interpretation of Catullus (Carm. 52), as Nonius's surname was very likely ' Struma ' (which also means a wen); in which case Catullus cannot at most have intended more to be understood than a play upon the man's true name.

65:2 -- Decoratus was a minion of Theodoric.

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high places. But if you see a man endowed with wisdom, you cannot but consider him worthy of veneration, or at least of the wisdom with which he is endowed. For such a man has the worth peculiar to virtue, which it transmits directly to those in whom it is found. But since honours from the vulgar crowd cannot create merit, it is plain that they have not the peculiar beauty of this worth. And here is a particular point to be noticed: if men are the more worthless as they are despised by more people, high position makes them all the worse because it cannot make venerable those whom it shews to so many people to be contemptible. And this brings its penalty with it: wicked people bring a like quality into their positions, and stain them with their infection.

'Now I would have you consider the matter thus, that you may recognise that true veneration cannot be won through these shadowy honours. If a man who had filled the office of consul many times in Rome, came by chance into a country of barbarians, would his high position make him venerated by the barbarians? Yet if this were a natural quality in such dignities, they would never lose their effective function in any land, just as fire is never aught but hot in all countries. But since they do not receive this quality of veneration from any force peculiar to themselves, but only from a connexion in the untrustworthy opinions of men, they become as nothing as soon as they are among those who do not consider these dignities as such.

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'But that is only in the case of foreign peoples. Among the very peoples where they had their beginnings, do these dignities last for ever? Consider how great was the power in Rome of old of the office of Præfect: now it is an empty name and a heavy burden upon the income of any man of Senator's rank.' The præfect then, who was commissioner of the corn-market, was held to be a great man. Now there is no office more despised. For, as I said before, that which has no intrinsic beauty, sometimes receives a certain glory, sometimes loses it, according to the opinion of those who are concerned with it. If then high offices cannot make men venerated, if furthermore they grow vile by the infection of bad men, if changes of time can end their glory, and, lastly, if they are held cheaply in the estimation of whole peoples, I ask you, so far from affording true beauty to men, what beauty have they in themselves which men can desire?

'Though Nero decked himself proudly with purple of Tyre and snow-white gems, none the less that man of rage and luxury lived ever hated of all. Yet would that evil man at times give his dishonoured offices to men who were revered. Who then could count men blessed, who to such a villain owed their high estate?

'Can kingdoms and intimacies with kings make people powerful? " Certainly," some The may answer, " in so far as their happiness is lasting." But antiquity and our times too are

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full of examples of the contrary; examples of men whose happiness as kings has been exchanged for disaster. What wonderful power, which is found to be powerless even for its own preservation! But if this kingly power is really a source of happiness, surely then, if it fail in any way, it lessens the happiness it brings, and equally causes unhappiness. However widely human empires may extend, there must be still more nations left, over whom each king does not reign. And so, in whatever direction this power ceases to make happy, thereby comes in powerlessness, which makes men unhappy; thus therefore there must be a greater part of unhappiness in every king's estate. That tyrant I had learnt well the dangers of his lot, who likened the fear which goes with kingship to the terror inspired by a sword ever hanging overhead. What then is such a power, which cannot drive away the bite of cares, nor escape the stings of fear?

'Yet these all would willingly live without fear, but they cannot, and yet they boast of their power. Think you a man is powerful when you see that he longs for that which he cannot bring to pass? Do you reckon a man powerful who walks abroad with dignity and attended by servants? A man who strikes fear into his subjects, yet fears them more himself? Damocles, what it was to be a tyrant, by setting him in his own seat at a sumptuous banquet,' but hung a sword above him by a hair.

A man who must be at the mercy of those that serve him, in order that he may seem to have power?

'Need I speak of intimacies with kings when kingship itself is shewn to be full of weakness? Not only when kings' powers fall are their friends laid low, but often even when their powers are intact. Nero compelled his friend and tutor, Seneca,¹ to choose how he would die. Papinianus,² for a long while a powerful courtier, was handed over to the soldiers' swords by the Emperor Antoninus. Yet each of these was willing to surrender all his power. Seneca even tried to give up all his wealth to Nero, and to seek retirement. But the very weight of their wealth and power dragged them down to ruin, and neither could do what he wished.

'What then is that power, whose possessors fear it? in desiring to possess which, you are not safe, and from which you cannot escape, even though you try to lay it down? What help are friends, made not by virtue but by fortune? The friend gained by good fortune becomes an enemy in ill-fortune. And what plague can more effectually injure than an intimate enemy?

'The man who would true power gain, must needs subdue his own wild thoughts: never

69:1 -- Seneca, the philosopher and wise counsellor of Nero, was by him compelled to commit suicide, A.D. 65.

69:2 -- Papinianus, the greatest lawyer of his time, was put to death by the Emperor Antoninus Caracalla, A.D. 212.

must he let his passions triumph and yoke his neck by their foul bonds. For though the earth, as far as India's shore, tremble before the laws you give, though Thule bow to your service on earth's farthest bounds, yet if thou canst not drive away black cares, if thou canst not put to flight complaints, then is no true power thine.

'How deceitful is fame often, and how base a thing it is! Justly did the tragic poet cry out,¹ "O Fame, Fame, how many lives of men Of naught hast thou puffed up! " For many men have got a great name from the false opinions of the crowd.-And what could be baser than such a thing? For those who are falsely praised, must blush to hear their praises. And if they are justly won by merits, what can they add

to the pleasure of a wise man's conscience? For he measures his happiness not by popular talk, but by the truth of his conscience. If it attracts a man to make his name widely known, he must equally think it a shame if it be not made known. But I have already said that there must be yet more lands into which the renown of a single man can never come; wherefore it follows that the man, whom you think famous, will seem to have no such fame in the next quarter of the earth.

'Popular favour seems to me to be unworthy even of mention under this head, for it comes not by any judgment, and is never constant.

70:1 -- Euriped, *Andromache*, .319-320.

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'Again, who can but see how empty a name, and how futile, is noble birth? For if its glory is due to renown, it belongs not to the man. For the glory of noble birth seems to be praise for the merits of a man's forefathers. But if praise creates the renown, it is the renowned who are praised. Wherefore, if you have no renown of your own, that of others cannot glorify you. But if there is any good in noble birth, I conceive it to be this, and this alone, that the highborn seem to be bound in honour not to show any degeneracy from their fathers' virtue.

'From like beginning rise all men on earth, for there is one Father of all things; one is the guide of everything. 'Tis He who gave the sun his rays, and horns unto the moon. 'Tis He who set mankind on earth, and in the heavens the stars. He put within our bodies spirits which were born in heaven. And thus a highborn race has He set forth in man. Why do ye men rail on your forefathers? If ye look to your beginning and your author, which is God, is any man degenerate or base but he who by his own vices cherishes base things and leaves that beginning which was his?

'And now what am I to say of the pleasures of the body? The desires of the flesh are full of cares, their fulfilment is full of remorse. What terrible diseases, what unbearable griefs,

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truly the fruits of sin, do they bring upon the bodies of those who enjoy them! I know not what pleasure their impulse affords, but any who cares to recall his indulgences of his passions, will know that the results of such pleasures are indeed gloomy. If any can shew that those results are blest with happiness,

then may the beasts of the field be justly called blessed, for all their aims are urged toward the satisfying of their bodies' wants. The pleasures of wife and children may be most honourable; but nature makes it all too plain that some have found torment in their children. How bitter is any such kind of suffering, I need not tell you now, for you have never known it, nor have any such anxiety now. Yet in this matter I would hold with my philosopher Euripides,¹ that he who has no children is happy in his misfortune.

'All pleasures have this way: those who enjoy them they drive on with stings. Pleasure, like the winged bee, scatters its honey sweet, then flies away, and with a clinging sting it strikes the hearts it touches.

'There is then no doubt that these roads to happiness are no roads, and they cannot lead any man to any end whither they profess to take him. I would shew you shortly with

72:1 -- Referring to lines in the *Andromache* (419-420), where Euripides says: 'The man who complains that he has no children suffers less than he who has them, and is blest in his misfortune.'

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what great evils they are bound up. Would you heap up money? You will need to tear it from its owner. Would you seem brilliant by the glory of great honours? You must kneel before their dispenser, and in your desire to surpass other men in honour, you must debase yourself by setting aside all pride. Do you long for power? You will be subject to the wiles of all over whom you have power, you will be at the mercy of many dangers. You seek fame? You will be drawn to and fro among rough paths, and lose all freedom from care. Would you spend a life of pleasure? Who would not despise and cast off such servitude to so vile and brittle a thing as your body? How petty are all the aims of those who put before themselves the pleasures of the body, how uncertain is the possession of such? In bodily size will you ever surpass the elephant? In strength will you ever lead the bull, or in speed the tiger? Look upon the expanse of heaven, the strength with which it stands, the rapidity with which it moves, and cease for a while to wonder at base things. This heaven is not more wonderful for those things than for the design which guides it. How sweeping is the brightness of outward form, how swift its movement, yet more fleeting than the passing of the flowers of spring. But if, as Aristotle says, many could use the eyes of lynxes to see through that which meets the eye, then if they saw into the organs within, would not that body,

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though it had the most fair outside of Alcibiades,¹ seem most vile within? Wherefore it is not your own nature, but the weakness of the eyes of them that see you, which makes you seem beautiful. But consider

how in excess you desire the pleasures of the body, when you know that howsoever you admire it, it can be reduced to nothing by a three-days' fever. To put all these points then in a word: these things cannot grant the good which they promise; they are not made perfect by the union of all good things in them; they do not lead to happiness as a path thither; they do not make men blessed.²

'Ah! how wretched are they whom ignorance leads astray by her crooked path! Ye seek not gold upon green trees, nor gather precious stones from vines, nor set your nets on mountain tops to catch the fishes for your feast, nor hunt the Umbrian sea in search of goats. Man knows the depths of the sea themselves, hidden though they be beneath its waves; he knows which water best yields him pearls, and which the scarlet dye. But in their blindness men are content, and know not where lies hid the good which they desire. They sink in earthly things, and there they seek that which has soared

74:1 -- Alcibiades was the most handsome and brilliantly fascinating of all the public men of Athens in her most brilliant period.

74:2 -- Compare Philosophy's first words about the highest good, p. 58.

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above the star-lit heavens. What can I call down upon them worthy of their stubborn folly? They go about in search of wealth and honours; and only when they have by labours vast stored up deception for themselves, do they at last know what is their true good.

'So far,' she continued, 'we have been content to set forth the form of false happiness. If you clearly understand that, my next duty is to shew what is true happiness.'

'I do see,' said I, 'that wealth cannot satisfy, that power comes not to kingdoms, nor veneration to high offices; that true renown cannot accompany ambition, nor true enjoyment wait upon the pleasures of the body.'

'Have you grasped the reasons why it is so?' she asked.

'I seem to look at them as through a narrow chink, but I would learn more clearly from you.'

'The reason is to hand,' said she; 'human error takes that which is simple and by nature impossible to divide, tries to divide it, and turns its truth and perfection into falsity and imperfection. Tell me, do you think that anything which lacks nothing, can be without power?'

'Of course not.'

'You are right; for if anything has any weakness in any part, it must lack the help of something else.'

'That is so,' I said.

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'Then perfect satisfaction and power have the same nature?'

'Yes, it seems so.'

'And do you think such a thing contemptible, or the opposite, worthy of all veneration?'

'There can be no doubt that it is worthy.'

'Then let us add veneration to that satisfaction and power, and so consider these three as one.'

'Yes, we must add it if we wish to proclaim the truth.'

'Do you then think that this whole is dull and of no reputation, or renowned with all glory? For consider it thus: we have granted that it lacks nothing, that it has all power and is worthy of all veneration; it must not therefore lack the glory which it cannot supply for itself, and thereby seem to be in any direction contemptible.'

'No,' I said, 'I must allow that it has glory too.'

'Therefore we must rank this glory equally with the other three.'

'Yes, we must.'

'Then that which lacks nothing from outside itself, which is all-powerful by its own might, which has renown and veneration, must surely be allowed to be most happy too?'

'I cannot imagine from what quarter unhappiness would creep into such a thing, wherefore we must grant that it is full of happiness if the other qualities remain existent.'

'Then it follows further, that though perfect

satisfaction, power, glory, veneration, and happiness differ in name, they cannot differ at all in essence?'

'They cannot.'

'This then,' said she, 'is a simple, single thing by nature, only divided by the mistakes of base humanity; and while men try to gain a part of that which has no parts, they fail both to obtain a fraction, which cannot exist, and the whole too after which they do not strive.'

'Tell me how they fail thus,' I said.

'One seeks riches by fleeing from poverty, and takes no thought of power,' she answered, 'and so he prefers to be base and unknown, and even deprives himself of natural pleasures lest he should part with the riches which he has gathered. Thus not even that satisfaction reaches the man who loses all power, who is stabbed by sorrow, lowered by his meanness, hidden by his lack of fame. Another seeks power only: he scatters his wealth, he despises pleasures and honours which have no power, and sets no value upon glory. You see how many things such an one lacks. Sometimes he goes without necessaries even, sometimes he feels the bite and torture of care; and as he cannot rid himself of these, he loses the power too which he sought above all things. The same argument may be applied to offices, glory, and pleasure. For since each one of these is the same as each other, any man who seeks one without the others, gains not even that one which he desires.'

'What then?' I asked.

'If any man desires to obtain all together, he will be seeking the sum of happiness. But will he ever find that in these things which we have shewn cannot supply what they promise?' 'No.'

'Then happiness is not to be sought for among these things which are separately believed to supply each thing so sought.'

'Nothing could be more plainly true,' I said.

'Then you have before you the form of false happiness, and its causes; now turn your attention in the opposite direction, and you will quickly see the true happiness which I have promised to shew you.'

'But surely this is clear even to the blindest, and you shewed it before when you were trying to make clear the causes of false happiness. For if I mistake not, true and perfect happiness is that which makes a man truly satisfied, powerful, venerated, renowned, and happy. And (for I would have you see that I have looked deeply into the matter) I realise without doubt that that which can truly yield any one of these, since they are all one, is perfect happiness.

'Ah! my son,' said she, 'I do see that you are blessed in this opinion, but I would have you add one thing.'

'What is that?' I asked.

'Do you think that there is anything among mortals, and in our perishable lives, which could yield such a state?'

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'I do not think that there is, and I think that you have shewn this beyond the need of further proof.'

'These then seem to yield to mortals certain appearances of the true good, or some such imperfections; but they cannot give true and perfect good.'

'No.'

'Since, then, you have seen what is true happiness, and what are the false imitations thereof, it now remains that you should learn whence this true happiness may be sought.'

'For that,' said I, 'I have been impatiently waiting.'

'But divine help must be sought in small things as well as great (as my pupil Plato says in his *Timoeus*)¹; so what, think you, must we do to deserve to find the place of that highest good?'

'Call,' I said, 'upon the Father of all, for if we do not do so, no undertaking would be rightly or duly

begun.'

'You are right,' said she; and thus she cried aloud: -- [2](#)

'Thou who dost rule the universe with

79:1 -- Plato, *Timoeus*, 27 C. (ch. v.) -- ' All those who have even the least share of moderation, on undertaking any enterprise, small or great, always call upon God at the beginning.

79:2 -- This hymn is replete with the highest development of Plato's theory of ideas, as expressed in the *Timoeus*, and his theory of the ideal good being the moving spirit of the material world. Compare also the speculative portion of Virgil, *Aeneid*, vi.

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everlasting law, founder of earth and heaven alike, who hast bidden time stand forth from out Eternity, for ever firm Thyself, yet giving movement unto all. No causes were without Thee which could thence impel Thee to create this mass of changing matter, but within Thyself exists the very idea of perfect good, which grudges naught, for of what can it have envy? Thou makest all things follow that high pattern. In perfect beauty Thou movest in Thy mind a world of beauty, making all in a like image, and bidding the perfect whole to complete its perfect functions. All the first principles of nature Thou dost bind together by perfect orders as of numbers, so that they may be balanced each with its opposite: cold with heat, and dry with moist together; thus fire may not fly upward too swiftly because too purely, nor may the weight of the solid earth drag it down and overwhelm it. Thou dost make the soul as a third between mind and material bodies: to these the soul gives life and movement, for Thou dost spread it abroad among the members of the universe, now working in accord. Thus is the soul divided as it takes its course, making two circles, as though a binding thread around the world. Thereafter it returns unto itself and passes around the lower earthly mind; and in like manner it gives motion to the heavens to turn their course. Thou it is who dost carry forward with like inspiration these souls and lower lives. Thou dost fill these weak vessels

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with lofty souls, and send them abroad throughout the heavens and earth, and by Thy kindly law dost turn them again to Thyself and bring them to seek, as fire doth, to rise to Thee again.

'Grant then, O Father, that this mind of ours may rise to Thy throne of majesty; grant us to reach that

fount of good. Grant that we may so find light that we may set on Thee unblinded eyes; cast Thou therefrom the heavy clouds of this material world. Shine forth upon us in Thine own true glory. Thou art the bright and peaceful rest of all Thy children that worship Thee. To see Thee clearly is the limit of our aim. Thou art our beginning, our progress, our guide, our way, our end.

'Since then you have seen the form both of the imperfect and the perfect good, I think I should now shew you where lies this perfection of happiness. In this I think our first inquiry must be whether any good of this kind can exist in the very nature of a subject; for we must not let any vain form of thought make us miss the truth of this matter. But there can be no denial of its existence, that it is as the very source of all good. For if anything is said to be imperfect, it is held to be so by some loss of its perfection. Wherefore if in any kind of thing a particular seems imperfect, there must also be a perfect specimen in the same kind. For if you take away the perfection,

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it is impossible even to imagine whence could come the so-called imperfect specimen. For nature does not start from degenerate or imperfect specimens, but starting from the perfect and ideal, it degenerates to these lower and weaker forms. If then, as we have shewn above, there is an uncertain and imperfect happiness to be found in the good, then there must doubtless be also a sure and perfect happiness therein.¹

'Yes,' said I, 'that is quite surely proved to be true.'

'Now consider,' she continued, 'where it lies. The universally accepted notion of men proves that God, the fountain-head of all things, is good. For nothing can be thought of better than God, and surely He, than whom there is nothing better, must without doubt be good. Now reason shews us that God is so good, that we are convinced that in Him lies also the perfect good. For if it is not so, He cannot be the fountain-head; for there must then be something more excellent, possessing that perfect good, which appears to be of older origin than God: for it has been proved that all perfections are of earlier origin than the imperfect specimens of the same: wherefore, unless we are to prolong the series to infinity, we must allow that the highest Deity must be full of the highest, the perfect good. But as we have laid down that true happiness is perfect

82:1 -- This reasoning hangs upon Plato's theory of ideas and so is the opposite of the theory of evolution.

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good, it must be that true happiness is situated in His Divinity.'

'Yes, I accept that; it cannot be in any way contradicted.'

'But,' she said, 'I beg you, be sure that you accept with a sure conscience and determination this fact, that we have said that the highest Deity is filled with the highest good.'

'How should I think of it?' I asked.

'You must not think of God, the Father of all, whom we hold to be filled with the highest good, as having received this good into Himself from without, nor that He has it by nature in such a manner that you might consider Him, its possessor, and the happiness possessed, as having different essential existences. For if you think that good has been received from without, that which gave it must be more excellent than that which received it; but we have most rightly stated that He is the most excellent of all things. And if you think that it is in Him by His nature, but different in kind, then, while we speak of God as the fountain-head of all things, who could imagine by whom these different kinds can have been united? Lastly, that which is different from anything cannot be the thing from which it differs. So anything which is by its nature different from the highest good, cannot be the highest good. And this we must not think of God, than whom there is nothing more excellent, as we have agreed. Nothing in this world can have a nature which is better than

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its origin, wherefore I would conclude that that which is the origin of all things, according to the truest reasoning, is by its essence the highest good.'

'Most truly,' I said.

'You agree that the highest good is happiness?'

'Yes.'

'Then you must allow that God is absolute happiness?'

'I cannot deny what you put forward before, and I see that this follows necessarily from those propositions.'

'Look then,' she said,' whether it is proved more strongly by this too: there cannot be two highest goods which are different. For where two good things are different, the one cannot be the other; wherefore neither can be the perfect good, while each is lacking to the other. And that which is not perfect cannot be the highest, plainly. Therefore if two things are highest good, they cannot be different. Further, we have proved to ourselves that both happiness and God are each the highest good. Therefore the highest Deity must be identical with the highest happiness.'

'No conclusion,' I said,' could be truer in fact, or more surely proved by reason, or more worthy of our God.'

'Besides this let me give you corollary, as geometricians do, when they wish to add a point drawn from the propositions they have proved. Since men become happy by

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acquiring happiness, and happiness is identical with divinity, it is plain that they become happy by acquiring divinity. But just as men become just by acquiring the quality of justice, and wise by wisdom, so by the same reasoning, by acquiring divinity they become divine. Every happy man then is divine. But while nothing prevents as many men as possible from being divine, God is so by His nature, men become so by participation.'

'This corollary,' I said,' or whatever you call it, is indeed beautiful and very precious.'

'Yes, but nothing can be more beautiful than this too which reason would have us add to what we have agreed upon.'

'What is that?' I asked.

'Happiness seems to include many things: do all these join it together as into a whole which is happiness, as though each thing were a different part thereof, or is any one of them a good which fulfils the essence of happiness, and do the others merely bear relations to this one .? '

'I would have you make this plain by the enunciation of these particulars.'

'Do we not,' she asked,' hold that happiness is a good thing? '

'Yes,' I answered,' the highest good.'

'But you may apply this quality of happiness to them all. For the perfect satisfaction is the same, and the highest power, and veneration, and renown, and pleasure; these are all held to be happiness.

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'What then?' I asked.

'Are all these things, satisfaction, power, and the others, as it were, members of the body, happiness, or do they all bear their relation to the good, as members to a head?'

'I understand what you propose to examine, but I am waiting eagerly to hear what you will lay down.'

'I would have you take the following explanation,' she said. 'If these were all members of the one body, happiness, they would differ individually. For this is the nature of particulars, to make up one body of different parts. But all these have been shewn to be one and the same. Therefore they are not as members; and further, this happiness will then appear to be joined together into a whole body out of one member, which is impossible.'

'That is quite certain,' said I, 'but I would hear what is to come.'

'It is plain that the others have some relation to the good. It is for that reason, namely because it is held to be good, that this satisfaction is sought, and power likewise, and the others too; we may suppose the same of veneration, renown, and pleasure. The good then is the cause of the desire for all of these, and their consummation also. Such a thing as has in itself no real or even pretended good, cannot ever be sought. On the other hand, such things as are not by nature good, but seem to be so, are sought as though they were truly good. Wherefore we may justly believe that

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their good quality is the cause of the desire for them, the very hinge on which they turn, and their consummation. The really important object of a desire, is that for the sake of which anything is sought, as a means. For instance, if a man wishes to ride for the sake of his health, he does not so much desire the motion of riding, as the effect, namely health. As, therefore, each of these things is desired for the sake of the good, the absolute good is the aim, rather than themselves. But we have agreed that the other things are desired for the sake of happiness, wherefore in this case too, it is happiness alone which is the object

of the desire. Wherefore it is plain that the essence of the good and of happiness is one and the same.'

'I cannot see how any one can think otherwise.'

'But we have shewn that God and true happiness are one and the same.'

'Yes.'

'Therefore,' said she, 'we may safely conclude that the essence of God also lies in the absolute good and nowhere else.'

'Come hither all who are the prey of passions, bound by their ruthless chains; those deceiving passions which blunt the minds of men. Here shall you find rest from your labours; here a haven lying in tranquil peace; this shall be a resting-place open to receive within itself all the miserable on earth. Not

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all the wealth of Tagus's golden sands, nor Hermus's gleaming strand,¹ nor Indus, nigh earth's hottest zone, mingling its emeralds and pearls, can bring light to the eyes of any soul, but rather plunge the soul more blindly in their shade. In her deepest caverns does earth rear all that pleases the eye and excites the mind. The glory by which the heavens move and have their being, has nought to do with the darkneses which bring ruin to the soul. Whosoever can look on this true light will scarce allow the sun's rays to be clear.'

'I cannot but agree with that,' I said, 'for it all stands woven together by the strongest proofs.' Then she said, 'At what would you value this, namely if you could find out what is the absolute good?'

'I would reckon it,' I said, 'at an infinite value, if I could find out God too, who is the good.'

'And that too I will make plain by most true reasoning, if you will allow to stand the conclusions we have just now arrived at.'

'They shall stand good.'

'Have I not shewn,' she asked, 'that those upon the things which most men seek are for this reason not perfect goods, because they differ between the highest themselves; they are lacking to one another, and so cannot afford full, absolute good? But

when they are gathered together, as it were, into one form and one operation, so that complete satisfaction, power, veneration, renown, and pleasure are all the same, then they become the true good. Unless they are all one and the same, they have no claim to be reckoned among the true objects of men's desires.'

'That has been proved beyond all doubt.'

'Then such things as differ among themselves are not goods, but they become so when they begin to be a single unity. Is it not then the case these become goods by the attainment of unity? '

'Yes,' I said, 'it seems so.'

'But I think you allow that every good is good by participation in good? '

'Yes, I do.'

'Then by reason of this likeness both unity and good must be allowed to be the same thing; for such things as have by nature the same operation, have the same essence.'

'Undeniably.'

'Do you realise that everything remains existent so long as it keeps its unity, but perishes in dissolution as soon as it loses its unity? '

'How so? ' I asked.

'In the case of animals,' she said, 'so long as mind and body remain united, you have what you call an animal. But as soon as this unity is dissolved by the separation of the two, the animal perishes and can plainly be no longer called an animal. In the case of the body, too,

so long as it remains in a single form by the union of its members, the human figure is presented. But if the division or separation of the body's parts drags that union asunder, it at once ceases to be what it was. In this way one may go through every subject, and it will be quite evident that each thing exists individually, so long as it is one, but perishes so soon as it ceases to be one.'

'Yes, I see the same when I think of other cases.'

'Is there anything,' she then asked, 'which, in so far as it acts by nature, ever loses its desire for self-preservation, and would voluntarily seek to come to death and corruption?'

'No,' I said; 'while I think of animals which have volition in their nature, I can find in them no desire to throw away their determination to remain as they are, or to hasten to perish of their own accord, so long as there are no external forces compelling them thereto. Every animal labours for its preservation, shunning death and extinction. But about trees and plants, I have great doubts as to what I should agree to in their case, and in all inanimate objects.'

'But in this case too,' she said, 'you have no reason to be in doubt, when you see how trees and plants grow in places which suit them, and where, so far as nature is able to prevent it, they cannot quickly wither and perish. For some grow in plains, others on mountains; some are nourished by marshes,

others cling to rocks; some are fertilised by otherwise barren sands, and would wither away if one tried to transplant them to better soil. Nature grants to each what suits it, and works against their perishing while they can possibly remain alive. I need hardly remind you that all plants seem to have their mouths buried in the earth, and so they suck up nourishment by their roots and diffuse their strength through their pith and bark: the pith being the softest part is always hidden away at the heart and covered, protected, as it were, by the strength of the wood; while outside, the bark, as being the defender who endures the best, is opposed to the unkindness of the weather. Again, how great is nature's care, that they should all propagate themselves by the reproduction of their seed; they all, as is so well known, are like regular machines not merely for lasting a time, but for reproducing themselves for ever, and that by their own kinds. Things too which are supposed to be inanimate, surely do all seek after their own by a like process. For why is flame carried upward by its lightness, while solid things are carried down by their weight, unless it be that these positions and movements are suitable to each? Further, each thing preserves what is suitable to itself, and what is harmful, it destroys. Hard things, such as stones, cohere with the utmost tenacity of their parts, and resist easy dissolution; while liquids, water, and air, yield easily to division, but quickly slip back to mingle their parts

which have been cut asunder. And fire cannot be cut at all.

'We are not now discussing the voluntary movements of a reasoning mind, but the natural instinct. For instance, we unwittingly digest the food we have eaten, and unconsciously breathe in sleep. Not even in animals does this love of self-preservation come from mental wishes, but from elementary nature. For often the will, under stress of external causes, embraces the idea of death, from which nature revolts in horror.¹ And, on the other hand, the will sometimes restrains what nature always desires, namely the operation of begetting, by which alone the continuance of mortal things becomes enduring. Thus far, then, this love of self-preservation arises not from the reasoning animal's intention, but from natural instinct. Providence has given to its creatures this the greatest cause of permanent existence, the instinctive desire to remain existent so far as possible. Wherefore you have no reason to doubt that all things, which exist, seek a permanent existence by nature, and similarly avoid extinction.'

'Yes,' I said, 'I confess that I see now beyond all doubt what appeared to me just now uncertain.'

'But,' she continued, 'that which seeks to continue its existence, aims at unity; for take

92:1 -- Boethius is possibly thinking here of passages in Plato's *Republic*, Bk. iv. (439-441) where Socrates points out the frequent opposition of reason and instinct.

this away, and none will have any chance of continued existence.'

'That is true.'

'Then all things desire unity,' she said, and I agreed.

'But we have shewn unity to be identical with the good?'

'Yes,' said I.

'Then all things desire the good; and that you may define as being the absolute good which is desired by all.'

'Nothing could be more truthfully reasoned. For either everything is brought back to nothing, and all will flow on at random with no guiding head; or if there is any universal aim, it will be the sum of all good.'

'Great is my rejoicing, my son,' said she, 'for you have set firmly in your mind the mark of the central truth. And hereby is made plain to you that which you a short time ago said that you knew not.'

'What was that? '

'What was the final aim of all things,' she said, 'for that is plainly what is desired by all: since we have agreed that that is the good, we must confess that the good is the end of all things.'

'If any man makes search for truth with all his penetration, and would be led astray by no deceiving paths, let him turn upon himself the light of an inward gaze, let him bend by force the long-drawn wanderings of his thoughts into

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one circle; let him tell surely to his soul, that he has, thrust away within the treasures of his mind, all that he labours to acquire without. Then shall that truth, which now was hid in error's darkening cloud, shine forth more clear than Phoebus's self. For the body, though it brings material mass which breeds forgetfulness, has never driven forth all light from the mind. The seed of truth does surely cling within, and can be roused as a spark by the fanning of philosophy. For if it is not so, how do ye men make answers true of your own instinct when teachers question you? Is it not that the quick spark of truth lies buried in the heart's low depths? And if the Muse of Plato sends through those depths the voice of truth, each man has not forgotten and is but reminding himself of what he learns.¹ When she made an end, I said, 'I agree very strongly with Plato; for this is the second time that you have reminded me of these thoughts. The first time I had lost them through the material influence of the body; the second, when overwhelmed by this weight of trouble.'

'If,' said she, 'you look back upon what we that have agreed upon earlier, you will also soon recall what you just now said you knew not.'

'What is that? ' I asked.

94:1 -- Plato's doctrine of remembrance is chiefly treated of in his *Phædo* and *Meno*.

'The guidance by which the universe is directed.'

'Yes, I remember confessing my ignorance, and though I think I foresee the answer you will offer, I am eager to hear you explain it more fully.'

'This world,' she said, 'you thought a little while ago must without doubt be guided by God.'

'And I think so now,' I said, 'and will never think there is any doubt thereof; and I will shortly explain by what reasoning I arrive at that point. This universe would never have been suitably put together into one form from such various and opposite parts, unless there were some One who joined such different parts together; and when joined, the very variety of their natures, so discordant among themselves, would break their harmony and tear them asunder unless the One held together what it wove into one whole. Such a fixed order of nature could not continue its course, could not develop motions taking such various directions in place, time, operation, space, and attributes, unless there were One who, being immutable, had the disposal of these various changes. And this cause of their remaining fixed and their moving, I call God, according to the name familiar to all.'

Then said she, 'Since these are your feelings, I think there is but little trouble left me before you may revisit your home with happiness in your grasp. But let us look into the matter we

have set before ourselves. Have we not shewn that complete satisfaction exists in true happiness, and we have agreed that God is happiness itself, have we not? '

'We have.'

'Wherefore He needs no external aid in governing the universe, or, if He had any such need, He would not have this complete sufficiency.'

'That of necessity follows,' I said.

'Then He arranges all things by Himself.' Without doubt He does.'

'And God has been shewn to be the absolute good.'

'Yes, I remember.'

'Then He arranges all things by good, if He arranges them by Himself, whom we have agreed to be the absolute good. And so this is the tiller and rudder by which the ship of the universe is kept sure and unbreakable.'

'I feel that most strongly,' I said; 'and I foresaw that you would say so before, though I had a slight uncertainty.'

'I believe you,' she said, 'for now you bring your eyes more watchfully to scan the truth. But what I am going to say is no less plain to the sight.'

'What is that; '

'Since we may reasonably be sure that God steers all things by the helm of goodness, and, as I have shewn you, all things have a natural instinct to hasten towards the good, can there be any doubt that they are guided according to

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their own will: and that of their own accord they turn to the will of the supreme disposer, as though agreeing with, and obedient to, the helmsman? '

'That is so,' I said, 'and the government would not seem happy if it was a yoke upon discontented necks, and not the salvation of the submissive.'

'Then nothing need oppose God's way for its own nature's preservation.'

'No.'

'But if it try to oppose Him, will it ever have any success at all against One whom we have justly allowed to be supremely powerful in matters of happiness? '

'Certainly not.'

'Then there is nothing which could have the will or the power to resist the highest good? ' I think not.'

'Then it is the highest good which is guiding with strength and disposing with gentleness? '

Then said I, 'How great pleasure these things give me! not only those which have been proved by the strongest arguments, but still more the words in which you prove them, which make me ashamed that my folly has bragged so loudly.'

'You have heard in mythology how the giants attacked heaven. It was this kindly strength which overthrew them too, as was their desert. But would you care to put these

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arguments at variance? For perhaps from such a friction, some fair spark of truth may leap forth.'

'As you hold best,' I said.

'Nobody would care to doubt that God is all-powerful? '

'At any rate, no sane man would doubt it.'

'Being, then, all-powerful, nothing is beyond His power? '

'Nothing.'

'Can, then, God do evil? '

'No.'

'Then evil is nothing, since it is beyond His power, and nothing is beyond His power? '

'Are you playing with me,' I asked, 'weaving arguments as a labyrinth out of which I shall find no way? You may enter a labyrinth by the way by which you may come forth: come now forth by the way you have gone in: or are you folding your reason in some wondrous circle of divine simplicity? A little while ago you started from happiness, and said that happiness was the highest good; and you shewed how that rested in the highest Deity. And you reasoned that God too was the highest good, and the fullest happiness; and you allowed, as though granting a slight gift, that none could be happy except such as were similarly divine. Again, you said that the essence of God and of happiness was identical with the very form of good; and that that alone was good which was sought by all nature. And you argued, too, that God guided this universe by the helm of

goodness; and that all creatures with free will obeyed this guidance, and that there was no such thing as natural evil; and all these things you developed by no help from without, but by homely and internal proofs, each gaining its credence from that which went before it.'

Then she answered, 'I was not mocking you. We have worked out the greatest of all matters by the grace of God, to whom we prayed. For the form of the divine essence is such that it is not diffused without, nor receives aught into itself from without. But as Parmenides says of it, "It is a mass well rounded upon all sides."¹ But if you examine it with reasoning, sought for not externally but by lying within the sphere of the very thing we are handling, you will not wonder at what you have learnt on Plato's authority,² that our language must be akin to the subjects of which we speak.

'Happy the man who could reach the crystal fount of good: happy he who could shake off

99:1 -- This is a verse from the poems in which Parmenides embodied his philosophy: this was the doctrine of the unity which must have been in Boethius's mind above. Parmenides, the founder of the Eleatic school (495 B.C.) was perhaps, considering his early date, the greatest and most original of Greek philosophers. Boethius probably did not make a clear distinction between the philosopher's own poems and the views expressed in Plato's Parmenides.

99:2 -- Plato in the Timoeus says, 'The language must also be akin to the subjects of which its words are the interpreters' -- (29 B.).

the chains of matter and of earth. The singer of Thrace in olden time lamented his dead wife: by his tearful strains he made the trees to follow him, and bound the flowing streams to stay: for him the hind would fearlessly go side by side with fiercest lions, and the hare would look upon the hound, nor be afraid, for he was gentle under the song's sway. But when the hotter flame burnt up his inmost soul, even the strains, which had subdued all other things, could not soothe their own lord's mind. Complaining of the hard hearts of the gods above, he dared approach the realms below. There he tuned his songs to soothing tones, and sang the lays he had drawn from his mother's¹ fount of excellence. His unrestrained grief did give him power, his love redoubled his grief's power: his mourning moved the depths of hell. With gentlest prayers he prayed to the lords of the shades for grace. The three-headed porter² was taken

captive with amazement at his fresh songs. The avenging goddesses,³ who haunt with fear the guilty, poured out sad tears. Ixion's⁴ [wheel](#) no longer swiftly turned. Tantalus,⁵ so long abandoned unto thirst, could

100:1 -- Orpheus's mother was the Muse Calliope, mistress of the Castalian fount.

100:2 -- The dog Cerberus.

100:3 -- The Furies.

100:4 -- Ixion for his crimes was bound upon a rolling wheel

100:5 -- Tantalus for his crimes was condemned to perpetual hunger and thirst though surrounded by fruits and water which ever eluded his grasp.

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then despise the flowing stream. The vulture, satisfied by his strains, tore not awhile at Tityos's¹ heart. At last the lord of the shades² in pity cried: "We are conquered; take your bride with you, bought by your song; but one condition binds our gift: till she has left these dark abodes, turn not your eyes upon her." Who shall set a law to lovers? Love is a greater law unto itself. Alack! at the very bounds of darkness Orpheus looked upon his Eurydice; looked, and lost her, and was lost himself.

'To you too this tale refers; you, who seek to lead your thoughts to the light above. For whosoever is overcome of desire, and turns his gaze upon the darkness 'neath the earth, he, while he looks on hell, loses the prize he carried off.'

101:1 -- Tityos for his crimes was for ever fastened to the ground while a vulture devoured his entrails.

101:2 -- Pluto.

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