

THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY OF BOETHIUS.

Translated into English Prose and Verse

BY

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BOOK V. FREE WILL AND GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE.

SUMMARY.

CH. I. Boethius asks if there is really any such thing as chance. Philosophy answers, in conformity with Aristotle's definition (*Phys.*, II. iv.), that chance is merely relative to human purpose, and that what seems fortuitous really depends on a more subtle form of causation.—CH. II. Has man, then, any freedom, if the reign of law is thus absolute? Freedom of choice, replies Philosophy, is a necessary attribute of reason. Man has a measure of freedom, though a less perfect freedom than divine natures.—CH. III. But how can man's freedom be reconciled with God's absolute foreknowledge? If God's foreknowledge be certain, it seems to exclude the possibility of man's free will. But if man has no freedom of choice, it follows that rewards and punishments are unjust as well as useless; that merit and demerit are mere names; that God is the cause of men's wickednesses; that prayer is meaningless.—CH. IV. The explanation is that man's reasoning faculties are not adequate to the apprehension of the ways of God's foreknowledge. If we could know, as He knows, all that is most perplexing in this problem would be made plain. For knowledge depends not on the nature of the thing known, but on the faculty of the knower.—CH. V. Now, where our senses conflict with our reason, we defer the judgment of the lower faculty to the judgment of the higher. Our present perplexity arises from our viewing God's foreknowledge from the standpoint of human reason. We must try and rise to the higher standpoint of God's immediate intuition.—CH. VI. To understand this higher form of cognition, we must consider God's nature. God is eternal. Eternity is more than mere everlasting duration. Accordingly, His knowledge surveys past and future in the timelessness of an eternal present. His foreseeing is seeing. Yet this foreseeing does not in itself impose necessity, any more than our seeing things happen makes

their happening necessary. We may, however, if we please, distinguish two necessities—one absolute, the other conditional on knowledge. In this conditional sense alone do the things which God foresees necessarily come to pass. But this kind of necessity affects not the nature of things. It leaves the reality of free will unimpaired, and the evils feared do not ensue. Our responsibility is great, since all that we do is done in the sight of all-seeing Providence.

BOOK V.

I.

She ceased, and was about to pass on in her discourse to the exposition of other matters, when I break in and say: 'Excellent is thine exhortation, and such as well beseemeth thy high authority; but I am even now experiencing one of the many difficulties which, as thou saidst but now, beset the question of providence. I want to know whether thou deemest that there is any such thing as chance at all, and, if so, what it is.'

Then she made answer: 'I am anxious to fulfil my promise completely, and open to thee a way of return to thy native land. As for these matters, though very useful to know, they are yet a little removed from the path of our design, and I fear lest digressions should fatigue thee, and thou shouldst find thyself unequal to completing the direct journey to our goal.'

'Have no fear for that,' said I. 'It is rest to me to learn, where learning brings delight so exquisite, especially when thy argument has been built up on all sides with undoubted conviction, and no place is left for uncertainty in what follows.'

She made answer: 'I will accede to thy request;' and forthwith she thus began: 'If chance be defined as a result produced by random movement without any link of causal connection, I roundly affirm that there is no such thing as chance at all, and consider the word to be altogether without meaning, except as a symbol of the thing designated. What place can be left for random action, when God constraineth all things to order? For "ex nihilo nihil" is sound doctrine which none of the ancients gainsaid, although they used it of material substance, not of the efficient principle; this they laid down as a kind of basis for all their reasonings concerning nature. Now, if a thing arise without causes, it will appear to have arisen from nothing. But if this cannot be, neither is it possible for there to be chance in accordance with the definition just given.'

'Well,' said I, 'is there, then, nothing which can properly be called chance or accident, or is there something to which these names are appropriate, though its nature is dark to the vulgar?'

'Our good Aristotle,' says she, 'has defined it concisely in his "Physics," and closely in accordance with the truth.'

'How, pray?' said I.

'Thus,' says she: 'Whenever something is done for the sake of a particular end, and for certain reasons some other result than that designed ensues, this is called chance; for instance, if a man is digging the earth for tillage, and finds a mass of buried gold. Now, such a find is regarded as accidental; yet it is not "ex nihilo," for it has its proper causes, the unforeseen and unexpected concurrence of which has brought the chance about. For had not the cultivator been digging, had not the man who hid the money buried it in that precise spot, the gold would not have been found. These, then, are the reasons why the find is a chance one, in that it results from causes which met together and concurred, not from any intention on the part of the discoverer. Since neither he who buried the gold nor he who worked in the field *intended* that the money should be found, but, as I said, it *happened* by coincidence that one dug where the other buried the treasure. We may, then, define chance as being an unexpected result flowing from a concurrence of causes where the several factors had some definite end. But the meeting and concurrence of these causes arises from that inevitable chain of order which, flowing from the fountain-head of Providence, disposes all things in their due time and place.'

SONG I. CHANCE.

In the rugged Persian highlands,
Where the masters of the bow
Skill to feign a flight, and, fleeing,
Hurl their darts and pierce the foe;
There the Tigris and Euphrates
At one source¹
their waters blend,
Soon to draw apart, and plainward

¹ This is not, of course, literally true, though the Tigris and Euphrates rise in the same mountain district.

Each its separate way to wend.
When once more their waters mingle
In a channel deep and wide,
All the flotsam comes together
That is borne upon the tide:
Ships, and trunks of trees, uprooted
In the torrent's wild career,
Meet, as 'mid the swirling waters
Chance their random way may steer.
Yet the shelving of the channel
And the flowing water's force
Guides each movement, and determines
Every floating fragment's course.
Thus, where'er the drift of hazard
Seems most unrestrained to flow,
Chance herself is reined and bitted,
And the curb of law doth know.

II.

'I am following needfully,' said I, 'and I agree that it is as thou sayest. But in this series of linked causes is there any freedom left to our will, or does the chain of fate bind also the very motions of our souls?'

'There is freedom,' said she; 'nor, indeed, can any creature be rational, unless he be endowed with free will. For that which hath the natural use of reason has the faculty of discriminative judgment, and of itself distinguishes what is to be shunned or desired. Now, everyone seeks what he judges desirable, and avoids what he thinks should be shunned. Wherefore, beings endowed with reason possess also the faculty of free choice and refusal. But I suppose this faculty not equal alike in all. The higher Divine essences possess a clear-sighted judgment, an uncorrupt will, and an effective power of accomplishing their wishes. Human souls must needs be comparatively free while they abide in the contemplation of the Divine mind, less free when they pass

into bodily form, and still less, again, when they are enwrapped in earthly members. But when they are given over to vices, and fall from the possession of their proper reason, then indeed their condition is utter slavery. For when they let their gaze fall from the light of highest truth to the lower world where darkness reigns, soon ignorance blinds their vision; they are disturbed by baneful affections, by yielding and assenting to which they help to promote the slavery in which they are involved, and are in a manner led captive by reason of their very liberty. Yet He who seeth all things from eternity beholdeth these things with the eyes of His providence, and assigneth to each what is predestined for it by its merits:

"All things surveying, all things overhearing."

SONG II.
THE TRUE SUN.

Homer with mellifluous tongue
Phœbus' glorious light hath sung,
Hymning high his praise;
Yet his feeble rays
Ocean's hollows may not brighten,
Nor earth's central gloom enlighten.
But the might of Him, who skilled
This great universe to build,
Is not thus confined;
Not earth's solid rind,
Nor night's blackest canopy,
Baffle His all-seeing eye.
All that is, hath been, shall be,
In one glance's compass, He
Limitless descries;
And, save His, no eyes
All the world survey—no, none!

Him, then, truly name the Sun.

III.

Then said I: 'But now I am once more perplexed by a problem yet more difficult.'

'And what is that?' said she; 'yet, in truth, I can guess what it is that troubles you.'

'It seems,' said I, 'too much of a paradox and a contradiction that God should know all things, and yet there should be free will. For if God foresees everything, and can in no wise be deceived, that which providence foresees to be about to happen must necessarily come to pass. Wherefore, if from eternity He foreknows not only what men will do, but also their designs and purposes, there can be no freedom of the will, seeing that nothing can be done, nor can any sort of purpose be entertained, save such as a Divine providence, incapable of being deceived, has perceived beforehand. For if the issues can be turned aside to some other end than that foreseen by providence, there will not then be any sure foreknowledge of the future, but uncertain conjecture instead, and to think this of God I deem impiety.'

'Moreover, I do not approve the reasoning by which some think to solve this puzzle. For they say that it is not because God has foreseen the coming of an event that *therefore* it is sure to come to pass, but, conversely, because something is about to come to pass, it cannot be hidden from Divine providence; and accordingly the necessity passes to the opposite side, and it is not that what is foreseen must necessarily come to pass, but that what is about to come to pass must necessarily be foreseen. But this is just as if the matter in debate were, which is cause and which effect—whether foreknowledge of the future cause of the necessity, or the necessity of the future of the foreknowledge. But we need not be at the pains of demonstrating that, whatsoever be the order of the causal sequence, the occurrence of things foreseen is necessary, even though the foreknowledge of future events does not in itself impose upon them the necessity of their occurrence. For example, if a man be seated, the supposition of his being seated is necessarily true; and, conversely, if the supposition of his being seated is true, because he is really seated, he must necessarily be sitting. So, in either case, there is some necessity involved—in this latter case, the necessity of the fact; in the former, of the truth of the statement. But in both cases the sitter is not therefore seated because the opinion is true, but rather the opinion is true because antecedently he was sitting as a matter of fact. Thus, though the cause of the truth of the opinion comes from the other side,² yet there is a necessity on both sides alike. We can obviously reason similarly in the case of providence and the future. Even if future events are foreseen because they are about to happen, and do not come to pass because they are foreseen, still, all the same, there is a necessity, both that they should

² I.e., the necessity of the truth of the statement from the fact.

be foreseen by God as about to come to pass, and that when they are foreseen they should happen, and this is sufficient for the destruction of free will. However, it is preposterous to speak of the occurrence of events in time as the cause of eternal foreknowledge. And yet if we believe that God foresees future events because they are about to come to pass, what is it but to think that the occurrence of events is the cause of His supreme providence? Further, just as when I *know* that anything is, that thing *necessarily* is, so when I know that anything will be, it will *necessarily* be. It follows, then, that things foreknown come to pass inevitably.

'Lastly, to think of a thing as being in any way other than what it is, is not only not knowledge, but it is false opinion widely different from the truth of knowledge. Consequently, if anything is about to be, and yet its occurrence is not certain and necessary, how can anyone foreknow that it will occur? For just as knowledge itself is free from all admixture of falsity, so any conception drawn from knowledge cannot be other than as it is conceived. For this, indeed, is the cause why knowledge is free from falsehood, because of necessity each thing must correspond exactly with the knowledge which grasps its nature. In what way, then, are we to suppose that God foreknows these uncertainties as about to come to pass? For if He thinks of events which possibly may not happen at all as inevitably destined to come to pass, He is deceived; and this it is not only impious to believe, but even so much as to express in words. If, on the other hand, He sees them in the future as they are in such a sense as to know that they may equally come to pass or not, what sort of foreknowledge is this which comprehends nothing certain nor fixed? What better is this than the absurd vaticination of Teiresias?

"'Whate'er I say

Shall either come to pass—or not."

In that case, too, in what would Divine providence surpass human opinion if it holds for uncertain things the occurrence of which is uncertain, even as men do? But if at that perfectly sure Fountain-head of all things no shadow of uncertainty can possibly be found, then the occurrence of those things which He has surely foreknown as coming is certain. Wherefore there can be no freedom in human actions and designs; but the Divine mind, which foresees all things without possibility of mistake, ties and binds them down to one only issue. But this admission once made, what an upset of human affairs manifestly ensues! Vainly are rewards and punishments proposed for the good and bad, since no free and voluntary motion of the will has deserved either one or the other; nay, the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the righteous, which is now esteemed the perfection of justice, will seem the most flagrant injustice, since men are determined either way not by their own proper volition, but by the necessity of what must surely be. And therefore neither virtue nor vice is anything, but rather good and ill desert are confounded together without distinction. Moreover,

seeing that the whole course of events is deduced from providence, and nothing is left free to human design, it comes to pass that our vices also are referred to the Author of all good—a thought than which none more abominable can possibly be conceived. Again, no ground is left for hope or prayer, since how can we hope for blessings, or pray for mercy, when every object of desire depends upon the links of an unalterable chain of causation? Gone, then, is the one means of intercourse between God and man—the communion of hope and prayer—if it be true that we ever earn the inestimable recompense of the Divine favour at the price of a due humility; for this is the one way whereby men seem able to hold communion with God, and are joined to that unapproachable light by the very act of supplication, even before they obtain their petitions. Then, since these things can scarcely be believed to have any efficacy, if the necessity of future events be admitted, what means will there be whereby we may be brought near and cleave to Him who is the supreme Head of all? Wherefore it needs must be that the human race, even as thou didst erstwhile declare in song, parted and dissevered from its Source, should fall to ruin.'

SONG III.
TRUTH'S PARADOXES.

Why does a strange discordance break
The ordered scheme's fair harmony?
Hath God decreed 'twixt truth and truth
There may such lasting warfare be,
That truths, each severally plain,
We strive to reconcile in vain?
Or is the discord not in truth,
Since truth is self consistent ever?
But, close in fleshly wrappings held,
The blinded mind of man can never
Discern—so faint her taper shines—
The subtle chain that all combines?
Ah! then why burns man's restless mind
Truth's hidden portals to unclose?

Knows he already what he seeks?
Why toil to seek it, if he knows?
Yet, haply if he knoweth not,
Why blindly seek he knows not what?³
Who for a good he knows not sighs?
Who can an unknown end pursue?
How find? How e'en when haply found
Hail that strange form he never knew?
Or is it that man's inmost soul
Once knew each part and knew the whole?
Now, though by fleshly vapours dimmed,
Not all forgot her visions past;
For while the several parts are lost,
To the one whole she cleaveth fast;
Whence he who yearns the truth to find
Is neither sound of sight nor blind.
For neither does he know in full,
Nor is he reft of knowledge quite;
But, holding still to what is left,
He gropes in the uncertain light,
And by the part that still survives
To win back all he bravely strives.

IV.

Then said she: 'This debate about providence is an old one, and is vigorously discussed by Cicero in his "Divination"; thou also hast long and earnestly pondered the problem, yet no one has had diligence and perseverance enough to find a solution.

³ Compare Plato, 'Meno,' 80; Jowett, vol. ii., pp. 39, 40.

And the reason of this obscurity is that the movement of human reasoning cannot cope with the simplicity of the Divine foreknowledge; for if a conception of its nature could in any wise be framed, no shadow of uncertainty would remain. With a view of making this at last clear and plain, I will begin by considering the arguments by which thou art swayed. First, I inquire into the reasons why thou art dissatisfied with the solution proposed, which is to the effect that, seeing the fact of foreknowledge is not thought the cause of the necessity of future events, foreknowledge is not to be deemed any hindrance to the freedom of the will. Now, surely the sole ground on which thou arguest the necessity of the future is that things which are foreknown cannot fail to come to pass. But if, as thou wert ready to acknowledge just now, the fact of foreknowledge imposes no necessity on things future, what reason is there for supposing the results of voluntary action constrained to a fixed issue? Suppose, for the sake of argument, and to see what follows, we assume that there is no foreknowledge. Are willed actions, then, tied down to any necessity in *this* case?'

'Certainly not.'

'Let us assume foreknowledge again, but without its involving any actual necessity; the freedom of the will, I imagine, will remain in complete integrity. But thou wilt say that, even although the foreknowledge is not the necessity of the future event's occurrence, yet it is a sign that it will necessarily happen. Granted; but in this case it is plain that, even if there had been no foreknowledge, the issues would have been inevitably certain. For a sign only indicates something which is, does not bring to pass that of which it is the sign. We require to show beforehand that all things, without exception, happen of necessity in order that a preconception may be a sign of this necessity. Otherwise, if there is no such universal necessity, neither can any preconception be a sign of a necessity which exists not. Manifestly, too, a proof established on firm grounds of reason must be drawn not from signs and loose general arguments, but from suitable and necessary causes. But how can it be that things foreseen should ever fail to come to pass? Why, this is to suppose us to believe that the events which providence foresees to be coming were not about to happen, instead of our supposing that, although they should come to pass, yet there was no necessity involved in their own nature compelling their occurrence. Take an illustration that will help to convey my meaning. There are many things which we see taking place before our eyes—the movements of charioteers, for instance, in guiding and turning their cars, and so on. Now, is any one of these movements compelled by any necessity?'

'No; certainly not. There would be no efficacy in skill if all motions took place perforce.'

'Then, things which in taking place are free from any necessity as to their being in the present must also, before they take place, be about to happen without necessity. Wherefore there are things which will come to pass, the occurrence of which is

perfectly free from necessity. At all events, I imagine that no one will deny that things now taking place were about to come to pass before they were actually happening. Such things, however much foreknown, are in their occurrence *free*. For even as knowledge of things present imports no necessity into things that are taking place, so foreknowledge of the future imports none into things that are about to come. But this, thou wilt say, is the very point in dispute—whether any foreknowing is possible of things whose occurrence is not necessary. For here there seems to thee a contradiction, and, if they are foreseen, their necessity follows; whereas if there is no necessity, they can by no means be foreknown; and thou thinkest that nothing can be grasped as known unless it is certain, but if things whose occurrence is uncertain are foreknown as certain, this is the very mist of opinion, not the truth of knowledge. For to think of things otherwise than as they are, thou believest to be incompatible with the soundness of knowledge.

'Now, the cause of the mistake is this—that men think that all knowledge is cognized purely by the nature and efficacy of the thing known. Whereas the case is the very reverse: all that is known is grasped not conformably to its own efficacy, but rather conformably to the faculty of the knower. An example will make this clear: the roundness of a body is recognised in one way by sight, in another by touch. Sight looks upon it from a distance as a whole by a simultaneous reflection of rays; touch grasps the roundness piecemeal, by contact and attachment to the surface, and by actual movement round the periphery itself. Man himself, likewise, is viewed in one way by Sense, in another by Imagination, in another way, again, by Thought, in another by pure Intelligence. Sense judges figure clothed in material substance, Imagination figure alone without matter. Thought transcends this again, and by its contemplation of universals considers the type itself which is contained in the individual. The eye of Intelligence is yet more exalted; for overpassing the sphere of the universal, it will behold absolute form itself by the pure force of the mind's vision. Wherein the main point to be considered is this: the higher faculty of comprehension embraces the lower, while the lower cannot rise to the higher. For Sense has no efficacy beyond matter, nor can Imagination behold universal ideas, nor Thought embrace pure form; but Intelligence, looking down, as it were, from its higher standpoint in its intuition of form, discriminates also the several elements which underlie it; but it comprehends them in the same way as it comprehends that form itself, which could be cognized by no other than itself. For it cognizes the universal of Thought, the figure of Imagination, and the matter of Sense, without employing Thought, Imagination, or Sense, but surveying all things, so to speak, under the aspect of pure form by a single flash of intuition. Thought also, in considering the universal, embraces images and sense-impressions without resorting to Imagination or Sense. For it is Thought which has thus defined the universal from its conceptual point of view: "Man is a two-legged animal endowed with reason." This is indeed a universal notion, yet no one is ignorant that the *thing* is imaginable and presentable to Sense,

because Thought considers it not by Imagination or Sense, but by means of rational conception. Imagination, too, though its faculty of viewing and forming representations is founded upon the senses, nevertheless surveys sense-impressions without calling in Sense, not in the way of Sense-perception, but of Imagination. See'st thou, then, how all things in cognizing use rather their own faculty than the faculty of the things which they cognize? Nor is this strange; for since every judgment is the act of the judge, it is necessary that each should accomplish its task by its own, not by another's power.'

SONG IV.
A PSYCHOLOGICAL FALLACY.⁴

From the Porch's murky depths
Comes a doctrine sage,
That doth liken living mind
To a written page;
Since all knowledge comes through
Sense,
Graven by Experience.
'As,' say they, 'the pen its marks
Curiously doth trace
On the smooth unsullied white
Of the paper's face,
So do outer things impress
Images on consciousness.'
But if verily the mind
Thus all passive lies;

⁴ A criticism of the doctrine of the mind as a blank sheet of paper on which experience writes, as held by the Stoics in anticipation of Locke. See Zeller, 'Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics,' Reichel's translation, p. 76.

If no living power within
Its own force supplies;
If it but reflect again,
Like a glass, things false and vain—
Whence the wondrous faculty
That perceives and knows,
That in one fair ordered scheme
Doth the world dispose;
Grasps each whole that Sense presents,
Or breaks into elements?
So divides and recombines,
And in changeful wise
Now to low descends, and now
To the height doth rise;
Last in inward swift review
Strictly sifts the false and true?
Of these ample potencies
Fitter cause, I ween,
Were Mind's self than marks impressed
By the outer scene.
Yet the body through the sense
Stirs the soul's intelligence.

When light flashes on the eye,
Or sound strikes the ear,
Mind aroused to due response
Makes the message clear;
And the dumb external signs
With the hidden forms combines.

V.

'Now, although in the case of bodies endowed with sentiency the qualities of external objects affect the sense-organs, and the activity of mind is preceded by a bodily affection which calls forth the mind's action upon itself, and stimulates the forms till that moment lying inactive within, yet, I say, if in these bodies endowed with sentiency the mind is not inscribed by mere passive affection, but of its own efficacy discriminates the impressions furnished to the body, how much more do intelligences free from all bodily affections employ in their discrimination their own mental activities instead of conforming to external objects? So on these principles various modes of cognition belong to distinct and different substances. For to creatures void of motive power—shell-fish and other such creatures which cling to rocks and grow there—belongs Sense alone, void of all other modes of gaining knowledge; to beasts endowed with movement, in whom some capacity of seeking and shunning seems to have arisen, Imagination also. Thought pertains only to the human race, as Intelligence to Divinity alone; hence it follows that that form of knowledge exceeds the rest which of its own nature cognizes not only its proper object, but the objects of the other forms of knowledge also. But what if Sense and Imagination were to gainsay Thought, and declare that universal which Thought deems itself to behold to be nothing? For the object of Sense and Imagination cannot be universal; so that either the judgment of Reason is true and there is no sense-object, or, since they know full well that many objects are presented to Sense and Imagination, the conception of Reason, which looks on that which is perceived by Sense and particular as if it were a something "universal," is empty of content. Suppose, further, that Reason maintains in reply that it does indeed contemplate the object of both Sense and Imagination under the form of universality, while Sense and Imagination cannot aspire to the knowledge of the universal, since their cognizance cannot go beyond bodily figures, and that in the cognition of reality we ought rather to trust the stronger and more perfect faculty of judgment. In a dispute of this sort,

should not we, in whom is planted the faculty of reasoning as well as of imagining and perceiving, espouse the cause of Reason?

'In like manner is it that human reason thinks that Divine Intelligence cannot see the future except after the fashion in which its own knowledge is obtained. For thy contention is, if events do not appear to involve certain and necessary issues, they cannot be foreseen as certainly about to come to pass. There is, then, no foreknowledge of such events; or, if we can ever bring ourselves to believe that there is, there can be nothing which does not happen of necessity. If, however, we could have some part in the judgment of the Divine mind, even as we participate in Reason, we should think it perfectly just that human Reason should submit itself to the Divine mind, no less than we judged that Imagination and Sense ought to yield to Reason. Wherefore let us soar, if we can, to the heights of that Supreme Intelligence; for there Reason will see what in itself it cannot look upon; and that is in what way things whose occurrence is not certain may yet be seen in a sure and definite foreknowledge; and that this foreknowledge is not conjecture, but rather knowledge in its supreme simplicity, free of all limits and restrictions.'

SONG V.
THE UPWARD LOOK.

In what divers shapes and fashions do the creatures great and small
Over wide earth's teeming surface skim, or scud, or walk, or crawl!
Some with elongated body sweep the ground, and, as they move,
Trail perforce with writhing belly in the dust a sinuous groove;
Some, on light wing upward soaring, swiftly do the winds divide,
And through heaven's ample spaces in free motion smoothly glide;
These earth's solid surface pressing, with firm paces onward rove,
Ranging through the verdant meadows, crouching in the woodland grove.
Great and wondrous is their variance! Yet in all the head low-bent
Dulls the soul and blunts the senses, though their forms be different.
Man alone, erect, aspiring, lifts his forehead to the skies,

And in upright posture steadfast seems earth's baseness to despise.
If with earth not all besotted, to this parable give ear,
Thou whose gaze is fixed on heaven, who thy face on high dost rear:
Lift thy soul, too, heavenward; haply lest it stain its heavenly worth,
And thine eyes alone look upward, while thy mind cleaves to the earth!

VI.

'Since, then, as we lately proved, everything that is known is cognized not in accordance with its own nature, but in accordance with the nature of the faculty that comprehends it, let us now contemplate, as far as lawful, the character of the Divine essence, that we may be able to understand also the nature of its knowledge.

'God is eternal; in this judgment all rational beings agree. Let us, then, consider what eternity is. For this word carries with it a revelation alike of the Divine nature and of the Divine knowledge. Now, eternity is the possession of endless life whole and perfect at a single moment. What this is becomes more clear and manifest from a comparison with things temporal. For whatever lives in time is a present proceeding from the past to the future, and there is nothing set in time which can embrace the whole space of its life together. To-morrow's state it grasps not yet, while it has already lost yesterday's; nay, even in the life of to-day ye live no longer than one brief transitory moment. Whatever, therefore, is subject to the condition of time, although, as Aristotle deemed of the world, it never have either beginning or end, and its life be stretched to the whole extent of time's infinity, it yet is not such as rightly to be thought eternal. For it does not include and embrace the whole space of infinite life at once, but has no present hold on things to come, not yet accomplished. Accordingly, that which includes and possesses the whole fulness of unending life at once, from which nothing future is absent, from which nothing past has escaped, this is rightly called eternal; this must of necessity be ever present to itself in full self-possession, and hold the infinity of movable time in an abiding present. Wherefore they deem not rightly who imagine that on Plato's principles the created world is made co-eternal with the Creator, because they are told that he believed the world to have had no beginning in time,⁵ and to be destined never to come to an end. For it is one thing for existence to be endlessly prolonged, which was what Plato ascribed to the world, another for the whole of an endless life to be embraced in the present, which is manifestly a property peculiar to the Divine mind. Nor need God appear earlier in

⁵ Plato expressly states the opposite in the 'Timæus' (28B), though possibly there the account of the beginning of the world in time is to be understood figuratively, not literally. See Jowett, vol. iii., pp. 448, 449 (3rd edit.).

mere duration of time to created things, but only prior in the unique simplicity of His nature. For the infinite progression of things in time copies this immediate existence in the present of the changeless life, and when it cannot succeed in equalling it, declines from movelessness into motion, and falls away from the simplicity of a perpetual present to the infinite duration of the future and the past; and since it cannot possess the whole fulness of its life together, for the very reason that in a manner it never ceases to be, it seems, up to a certain point, to rival that which it cannot complete and express by attaching itself indifferently to any present moment of time, however swift and brief; and since this bears some resemblance to that ever-abiding present, it bestows on everything to which it is assigned the semblance of existence. But since it cannot abide, it hurries along the infinite path of time, and the result has been that it continues by ceaseless movement the life the completeness of which it could not embrace while it stood still. So, if we are minded to give things their right names, we shall follow Plato in saying that God indeed is eternal, but the world everlasting.

'Since, then, every mode of judgment comprehends its objects conformably to its own nature, and since God abides for ever in an eternal present, His knowledge, also transcending all movement of time, dwells in the simplicity of its own changeless present, and, embracing the whole infinite sweep of the past and of the future, contemplates all that falls within its simple cognition as if it were now taking place. And therefore, if thou wilt carefully consider that immediate presentment whereby it discriminates all things, thou wilt more rightly deem it not foreknowledge as of something future, but knowledge of a moment that never passes. For this cause the name chosen to describe it is not prevision, but providence, because, since utterly removed in nature from things mean and trivial, its outlook embraces all things as from some lofty height. Why, then, dost thou insist that the things which are surveyed by the Divine eye are involved in necessity, whereas clearly men impose no necessity on things which they see? Does the act of vision add any necessity to the things which thou seest before thy eyes?'

'Assuredly not.'

'And yet, if we may without unfitness compare God's present and man's, just as ye see certain things in this your temporary present, so does He see all things in His eternal present. Wherefore this Divine anticipation changes not the natures and properties of things, and it beholds things present before it, just as they will hereafter come to pass in time. Nor does it confound things in its judgment, but in the one mental view distinguishes alike what will come necessarily and what without necessity. For even as ye, when at one and the same time ye see a man walking on the earth and the sun rising in the sky, distinguish between the two, though one glance embraces both, and judge the former voluntary, the latter necessary action: so also the Divine vision in its universal range of view does in no wise confuse the characters of

the things which are present to its regard, though future in respect of time. Whence it follows that when it perceives that something will come into existence, and yet is perfectly aware that this is unbound by any necessity, its apprehension is not opinion, but rather knowledge based on truth. And if to this thou sayest that what God sees to be about to come to pass cannot fail to come to pass, and that what cannot fail to come to pass happens of necessity, and wilt tie me down to this word necessity, I will acknowledge that thou affirmest a most solid truth, but one which scarcely anyone can approach to who has not made the Divine his special study. For my answer would be that the same future event is necessary from the standpoint of Divine knowledge, but when considered in its own nature it seems absolutely free and unfettered. So, then, there are two necessities—one simple, as that men are necessarily mortal; the other conditioned, as that, if you know that someone is walking, he must necessarily be walking. For that which is known cannot indeed be otherwise than as it is known to be, and yet this fact by no means carries with it that other simple necessity. For the former necessity is not imposed by the thing's own proper nature, but by the addition of a condition. No necessity compels one who is voluntarily walking to go forward, although it is necessary for him to go forward at the moment of walking. In the same way, then, if Providence sees anything as present, that must necessarily be, though it is bound by no necessity of nature. Now, God views as present those coming events which happen of free will. These, accordingly, from the standpoint of the Divine vision are made necessary conditionally on the Divine cognizance; viewed, however, in themselves, they desist not from the absolute freedom naturally theirs. Accordingly, without doubt, all things will come to pass which God foreknows as about to happen, but of these certain proceed of free will; and though these happen, yet by the fact of their existence they do not lose their proper nature, in virtue of which before they happened it was really possible that they might not have come to pass.

'What difference, then, does the denial of necessity make, since, through their being conditioned by Divine knowledge, they come to pass as if they were in all respects under the compulsion of necessity? This difference, surely, which we saw in the case of the instances I formerly took, the sun's rising and the man's walking; which at the moment of their occurrence could not but be taking place, and yet one of them before it took place was necessarily obliged to be, while the other was not so at all. So likewise the things which to God are present without doubt exist, but some of them come from the necessity of things, others from the power of the agent. Quite rightly, then, have we said that these things are necessary if viewed from the standpoint of the Divine knowledge; but if they are considered in themselves, they are free from the bonds of necessity, even as everything which is accessible to sense, regarded from the standpoint of Thought, is universal, but viewed in its own nature particular. "But," thou wilt say, "if it is in my power to change my purpose, I shall make void providence, since I shall perchance change something which comes within its foreknowledge." My answer is: Thou canst indeed turn aside thy purpose; but since

the truth of providence is ever at hand to see that thou canst, and whether thou dost, and whither thou turnest thyself, thou canst not avoid the Divine foreknowledge, even as thou canst not escape the sight of a present spectator, although of thy free will thou turn thyself to various actions. Wilt thou, then, say: "Shall the Divine knowledge be changed at my discretion, so that, when I will this or that, providence changes its knowledge correspondingly?"

'Surely not.'

'True, for the Divine vision anticipates all that is coming, and transforms and reduces it to the form of its own present knowledge, and varies not, as thou deemest, in its foreknowledge, alternating to this or that, but in a single flash it forestalls and includes thy mutations without altering. And this ever-present comprehension and survey of all things God has received, not from the issue of future events, but from the simplicity of His own nature. Hereby also is resolved the objection which a little while ago gave thee offence—that our doings in the future were spoken of as if supplying the cause of God's knowledge. For this faculty of knowledge, embracing all things in its immediate cognizance, has itself fixed the bounds of all things, yet itself owes nothing to what comes after.

'And all this being so, the freedom of man's will stands unshaken, and laws are not unrighteous, since their rewards and punishments are held forth to wills unbound by any necessity. God, who foreknoweth all things, still looks down from above, and the ever-present eternity of His vision concurs with the future character of all our acts, and dispenseth to the good rewards, to the bad punishments. Our hopes and prayers also are not fixed on God in vain, and when they are rightly directed cannot fail of effect. Therefore, withstand vice, practise virtue, lift up your souls to right hopes, offer humble prayers to Heaven. Great is the necessity of righteousness laid upon you if ye will not hide it from yourselves, seeing that all your actions are done before the eyes of a Judge who seeth all things.'

EPILOGUE.

Within a short time of writing 'The Consolation of Philosophy,' Boethius died by a cruel death. As to the manner of his death there is some uncertainty. According to one account, he was cut down by the swords of the soldiers before the very judgment-seat of Theodoric; according to another, a cord was first fastened round his forehead, and tightened till 'his eyes started'; he was then killed with a club.