

The Lays of Boethius (Verse)

Boethius

Early Church (pre-Nicene) · Early Medieval · Dialogue

STROMATA 203

Downloaded from The Stromata (thestromata.com). Free for personal, educational, and ministry use.

INTRODUCTION

These thirty-one "Lays" are the versified companion to Alfred's prose Boethius - the meters of the Consolation of Philosophy rendered into Old English alliterative verse, most likely by a poet working within Alfred's circle rather than the king himself, sometime around the 890s. Sedgefield's 1900 modern English keeps the alliterative pulse of the original: stressed, muscular, built for the ear rather than the eye. The sequence opens with Boethius's fall - stripped of office, waiting on a dungeon floor - and moves through meditations on fortune, the created order, and the soul's proper posture toward heaven. Read them as a companion to the prose Consolation, not a substitute: shorter, denser, and closer to song than argument.

Prelude (Not in Boethius.)

Thus the old tale Alfred told us,\ West Saxons' king. He shewed the cunning,\ The craft of songmen.
Keenly he longed\ Unto the people to put forth songs\ Men to make merry, manifold stories,\ Lest a
weariness should ward away\ The man self-filled, that small heed taketh\ Of such in his pride. Again I
must speak,\ Take up my singing, the tale far known\ Weave for mortals; let who will listen.

I: (Not in Boethius.)

'Twas long ago when the eastern Goths\ Sent from Scythia their swarms of shieldmen,\ With multitudes
harried many a nation.\ Two tribes triumphant tramped to the south.\ The Goths in greatness grew year
by year;\ Akin to the clansmen kings were there twain,\ Raedgod and Aleric; they ruled in power.\
O'er Jove's mountain came many a Goth\ Gorged with glory, greedy to wrestle\ In fight with foemen.
The banner flashing\ Fluttered on the staff. Freely the heroes\ All Italy over were eager to roam,\ The
wielders of bucklers, bearing onward\ E'en from Jove's mount on to ocean,\ Where in sea-streams
Sicily heth,\ That mighty island, most famous of lands.\ Rudely the Roman rule was shattered;\ The
shieldmen sacked the glorious city;\ Rome was ravaged; Raedgod and Aleric\ Carried the fortress. Away
fled the Caesar,\ Aye, and his princes, off to the Greeks.\ The luckless left ones, losing the combat,\ To
the Gothic foemen gave up all,\ Unwilling forfeited their fathers' treasures,\ Their holy allegiance; hard
was the loss!\ The hearts of the heroes held with the Greeks,\ If they durst follow the folk's foemen.\

Thus things stood; the folk was stressed\ Many a winter, till Weirð appointed\ That Theodoric the thanes
and nobles\ Should lord it over. This leader of them\ Was claimed by Christ, the king himself\ Brought
to baptism; a blessed day\ For the sons of Rome. They sought right soon\ Help from the high one; he
then vowed\ To give the Romans all rights olden,\ Safe to sojourn in their wealthy city,\ While God him
granted the Goths' dominion\ To own and possess. All this the prince broke,\ Oath after oath; Arian
error\ He loved better than the law of the Lord.\ The good Pope John he judged in his anger,\ Reft of his
head; a heinous deed!\ Countless wrongs were likewise wrought\ By the Gothic leader on each of the
good.\ In those days a leader in Rome was living,\ A high-born chieftain, cherishing his lord,\ While
that the high-seat was held by the Greeks;\ A man most righteous. He was 'mid the Romans\ A giver
of treasure, glorious ever,\ Wise toward this world, wishful of honour,\ Learned in booklore; Boethius
the name was\ That this hero had, that so highly was famed.\ Time after time he turned in his mind\
The evil and insult by alien princes\ Grievously given. To the Greeks he was true,\ Rememb'ring the
honours and ancient rights\ By his fathers aforetime fully enjoyed,\ Their love and kindness. Then with
cunning\ He planned and brooded how he might bring\ The Greeks to his country, that once more the
Caesar\ Might have full power o'er his people.\ Then to their former lords letters of embassy\ He sent
in secret, summoning them by God,\ By their former faith, forthwith to him\ To speed Romewards;
Greek senators\ Should rule the Romans, their rights render\ Free to the folk. When he found this out,\
Theodoric the Amuling, the thane he had seized,\ Charging the braves that did his bidding\ To hold
fast the hero; fierce was his heart,\ The chieftain dreading. Deep in a dungeon\ Bolted and barred he
bade them cast him.\ Then was the man's mood mightily troubled,\ The mind of Boethius. Long had he
borne\ High state worldly; the harder it was\ Bravely to bear this bitter fortune.\ Sad was the hero; he
hoped for no mercy,\ Locked in prison; past all comfort\ On the floor he fell with his face downwards,\
Wofully spread, his sorrow speaking,\ Hopeless utterly, ever weening\ He should linger in fetters. He
called on the Lord\ With cheerless voice, and thus he chaunted.

II: Boethius. I. Metr. 1

Ah! many a lay once so merrily\ I sang in my joy. Now must I sighing,\ Worn with weeping, a woful
outcast,\ Sing words of sorrow. Me hath this sobbing\ And this wailing dazed, so that no more ditties\
Can I turn so featly, though many tales\ Once I wove, when I was happy.\ Oft now I find not the words
familiar,\ I that in old times oft made strange ones.\ Me, wellnigh blind, have these worldly blessings\
Drawn in my folly to this dim cavern,\ And robbed me entirely of reason and comfort\ With their false
faith, when I had fain ever\ To them trusted. To me they have turned\ Their backs, oh! cruelly, and kept
joy from me.\ Ah! why were ye minded, my friends of this world,\ In speech or in song to say I was
happy\ Here in this world? The words are not true ones,\ For worldly blessings abide not always.

III: Boethius. I. Metr. 2

Ah! it is fearful and fathomless deep,\ The mirky pit where the mind toileth,\ When the blasts of tempests
beat against it\ Of worldly afflictions; then in its fighting\ Its own true light it leaveth behind it,\ And in
woe forgetteth the weal eternal.\ It dasheth onward into this world's darkness,\ Weary with sorrows. So

hath it now\ This soul befallen, for now it nought knoweth\ Of good before God, but great grief\ From the world unfriendly; it wanteth comfort.

IV: Boethius. I. Metr. 5

O Thou Creator of bright constellations,\ Of heaven and earth; Thou on the high-seat\ Eternal reignest and the round heaven\ All swiftly movest, and through Thy holy might\ The lights of heaven makest to hear Thee,\ E'en as the sun scattereth darkness\ Of the swart night time through Thy strong power,\ And with her pale beams the bright stars\ The moon doth humble, through Thy might's moving;\ At whiles too she robbeth the radiant sun\ Of his full light, when it befalleth\ That they come together by close compulsion.\ So too the glorious star of morning,\ That we by its other name star of evening\ Oft hear called, Thou constrainest\ To follow the way where the sun wendeth;\ Every year he must ever travel,\ Fare before him. O Father, Thou sendest\ Long days in summer with heat sultry;\ To the winter also wondrous short days\ Hast Thou granted. To the trees Thou givest\ South-west breezes, when the black tempest\ Sprung from the north-east had utterly stript them\ Of every leaf with its loathly wind.\ Behold, all creatures in the earth's compass\ Obey Thy hests; the same do they in heaven\ With mind and main, save man only;\ He oftenest worketh in despite of Thy will.\ Ah! Thou Eternal and Thou Almighty\ Author and Ruler of all creation,\ Pity the offspring of Thy poor world,\ Even this race of men, through Thy mighty power.\ Why, O God Eternal, grantest Thou ever\ That Fate at the will of wicked mortals\ Should turn herself on earth so swiftly?\ Oft to the guiltless great harm she worketh.\ The wicked are seated in worldly kingdoms\ Upon their high-seats, trampling the holy\ Under their feet; no man may find out\ Why Fate falleth so foully awry.\ So also are hidden here in this world\ In many a borough brightest virtues,\ Whereas the sinful in every season\ Treat most evilly all those others\ That are more righteous, to rule more worthy.\ False-faced guile long hath gone\ Wrapt up in wiles. Now here in the world\ Oaths basely broken bring no scathe.\ If Thou, O Chieftain, wilt not check Fate,\ But sufferest her in self-will to remain,\ Then this do I know, that nations will doubt\ Far o'er earth's fields, all but a few.\ O my Sovereign, Thou that seest\ All worldly creatures, with eyes of kindness\ Look on mortals, for they are moiling,\ Battling here in the world's billows,\ Poor folk of the earth; pity them therefore.

V: Boethius. I. Metr. 7

Thou mayst by the sun see most clearly,\ And by each of the other orbs of heaven\ That shine most brightly over the boroughs,\ If a dark cloud cometh before them\ They cannot give forth such a bright gleam\ Till the thick mist grow thinner before them.\ So too the south breeze fiercely stirreth\ The calm grey ocean clear as glass;\ Then mighty billows mingle the waters,\ Stir the whale-sea; fierce waxeth ocean\ That but shortly before was blithe to look on.\ Oft too the well-spring is wont to trickle\ From the hoar cliff, cool and sparkling,\ And onward flowing a straight course followeth,\ To its home fleeteth, till there falleth upon it\ A rock from the mountain, that lieth in its midst\ Rolled from the peak; parted in twain\ The rill is broken, the brook's clear water\ Stirred and clouded; the stream is turned\ Away from its course, cleft into runnels.\ So now the darkness that dimmeth thy heart\ Wisheth to turn back the light of my teaching,\ And sorely trouble thy spirit's thoughts.\ But if thou art willing, as well thou mayst

be,\ The light of the truth clearly to learn,\ The brightness of faith, then shalt thou forsake\ Vain surfeit
of pleasure, profitless joys.\ Thou shalt too forsake the evil fear\ Of worldly afflictions, nor wax ever
for them\ Utterly hopeless; no, nor have thyself\ Weakened with wealth, lest with it thou be\ Brought
to sorrow through the sin of pride,\ And too puffed up by prosperous fortune,\ By joys of the world.
Nor again too feebly\ Lose all thy faith in future good,\ When in this world the weight of afflictions\
Beareth on thee sorely, and thou art beset\ With utter terror; for ever it tideth\ That a man's breast is
bound most firmly\ With dire confusion if either of these dangers\ Here may trouble him, torture his
spirit.\ For both these hardships, hand in hand,\ A mist misleading draw over the mind,\ So that the sun
eternal its light may not send forth\ For the black mists until these be blown away.

VI: Boethius. II. Metr. 3

Then Wisdom again unlocked her word-hoard,\ Her tale of sooth sang in these words:\ 'While the
bright sun most clear is beaming,\ Gleaming in heaven, gloom enwrappeth\ Over the world all other
bodies;\ For their light is nought, nothing at all,\ When set against the sun's great brightness.\ When
softly bloweth from south and west\ The wind 'neath heav'n, then soon wax\ The flowers of the field,
fain to be able.\ But the stiff storm-wind, when it strongly bloweth\ From out of the north-east, how
soon it nippeth\ The rose's beauty! By the northern blast\ The spacious ocean is helpless spurned\ Till
strongly heaving it striketh the beach.\ Alas, that in the world nothing weareth\ Firm and lasting long
on this earth!'

VII: Boethius. II. Metr. 4

Then did Wisdom follow her wont,\ Glee-words chaunted, changed song for speech,\ Of tales of sooth
sang yet another:\ ‘Never on high hill had she ever heard\ That any of men might make to stand\ A
roof-fast hall; nor need any hope\ To have the wit to mingle wisdom,\ To put it together with pride
o’erweening.\ Heardest thou ever that any of mortals\ On hills of sand his house could stablish\ Firm to
last him? Nor can any mortal\ Build up wisdom, where the hill-side\ Is spread with covetise. Quickly
the rain\ Is sucked by the sand; so do the great ones,\ With their bottomless greed of goods and glory.\
They drink to the dregs this dross so fleeting,\ Yet the thirst of their craving is never cooled.\ A man may
not build a house on a mountain\ That may long tarry; soon the tempest\ Swift on it sweepeth. Sand
is useless\ In deluge of rain to him that dwelleth\ In the house as master; it melteth away,\ In the rain
sinketh. So with every man;\ His inmost mind is mightily shaken,\ Stirred from its station, when the
strong winds\ Of earthly troubles toss and tease it,\ Or when the ruthless rain of affliction,\ Boundless
distress, dasheth upon it.\ But he that ever wisheth to own\ True joy eternal must turn and flee\ This
world’s beauty. Then let him build\ The house of his soul so that he find\ The Rock of Humility, hard
and fastest,\ Sure foundation; he shall not slip\ Though that the tempest of worldly troubles\ Or flood
of worries fiercely assail it.\ For in that Vale of the Lowly the Lord Himself\ Ever abideth, owneth
His Home;\ And there too Wisdom in memory waiteth.\ A life without sorrow he always leadeth\ That
chooseth wisdom; it never changeth,\ Since he disdaineth delights of the world,\ From every evil utterly
free;\ He hopeth in eternity hereafter to come.\ Him then everywhere God Almighty\ Keepeth always,
ever unceasing,\ Fast abiding in the blessed joys\ Of his own mind, through the Master’s grace,\ Though
oft the winds of worldly troubles\ Batter and bruise him, or never bating\ Cares be fretting, when the
fierce gusts\ Of worldly blessings blow unkindly,\ Though him ever the endless worry\ Of earthly for-
tune sore confound him.’

VIII: Boethius. II. Metr. 5

After Wisdom these words had spoken,\ Clearly set forth, soon she began\ Sooth words to sing, and
thus she spake:\ ‘Oh! the ancient days for all earth-dwellers\ Throughout the world were ever the best.\
Then was each man ever contented\ With fruits of the earth; ’tis otherwise now.\ Not then in the world
were wealthy homes,\ Nor many kinds of meat and drink;\ Nor aught of raiment recked men then,\ In
these days to men of all things dearest;\ For then such was not seen as yet,\ Never the sea-folk had seen
it at all.\ No, nor anywhere of it had heard.\ Ah! then the sin of lust they longed not to do,\ But in degree
they duly followed\ The call of nature as Christ appointed.\ But one meal daily they always made\ Of
the earth’s increase, at hour of even,\ Of plants of the wood. No wine they drank\ Bright from the bowl;
none could boast\ Skill to mingle drink with his meat,\ Water with honey, nor to fashion by sewing\
Clothing of silk; nor had they cunning\ In costly stuffs; nor stood there halls\ Cleverly planned; but it
was their custom\ In every season to sleep in the open\ In the deep tree-shade. They drank burn-water\
Cool from the spring. Never did chapman\ See o’er the sea-surge the shore of strange land;\ Nor had
men heard of the harrying ship-host;\ No, nor was fighting familiar to mortals.\ Not as yet was the
earth anywhere stained\ With the blood of a man nor the dye of the blade,\ Nor even one wounded
had any man witnessed\ Under the sun. So too none was worthy\ Held in the world if his will seemed\
Evil unto men; by all was he loathed.\ Oh! were it true, or would God but grant\ That here on earth in
our days now,\ O’er the wide world, man’s wont was such\ Under the sun! But now ’tis more sinful,\

For covetous greed so cloggeth the soul\ Of every man that he heedeth not other things,\ And in the mind boiling it burneth ever,\ This curse of covetise, never contented,\ Black and bottomless blazeth smould'ring,\ E'en as the mountain that mortals call\ By name of Etna; this on an island,\ Even Sicily, with sulphur burneth,\ Hell-fire widely hight by mortals,\ For unceasing it smould'reth ever,\ And all around it the rest of the land\ It fiercely blasteth with blaze consuming.\ Ah! who was the first that filled with greed\ Dwelt in the world, and dug the ground\ In quest of gold and curious jewels?\ Wealth did he find, fatal to many,\ In the world hidden in water or earth.

IX: Boethius. II. Metr. 6

We all have heard what hateful deeds\ Far and near Nero wrought,\ King of the Romans, when that his rule\ Was first under heaven, fatal to many.\ The fierce one's madness men widely knew,\ His lawless lust and laches unnumbered,\ His sins and murders, misdeeds many,\ The cursed wiles of that wicked one.\ He bade for his sport with fire destroy\ The city of Rome that was the seat\ Of full dominion, for in his folly\ He fain would try whether the fire,\ Flaming brightly, would burn as long,\ Would rage as red, as the Romans told\ That Troy town was of old o'ertaken\ By the brightest of flames that longest burned\ In homes under heaven. A hideous thing,\ To take his pleasure in such perilous sport,\ Nought else gaining, this only regarding,\ To make his power far over peoples\ Widely renowned, over the nations.\ It likewise betided once on a time\ That this same man sent to murder\ All the rulers of the Senate of Rome,\ And all the best by birth as well\ That he could find among his folk;\ And his own brother besides he bade,\ Yea, and his mother, be murdered with swords,\ Killed with blade-edge. He himself butchered\ His bride with the brand, and ever was blither,\ Gayer of mood, the more of such murder,\ Such hateful wrong, he wrought on mortals.\ Nought did he heed whether hereafter\ The mighty Master would mete out vengeance,\ Wreak on the wicked their wrongful deeds,\ But in his soul was glad of his guile and sins,\ Bloodthirsty ever. But notwithstanding,\ He governed all of this glorious world,\ Where air and sea encircle the land\ And the deep sea enringeth this realm of mortals,\ The seats of men, south, east and west,\ Right to the northmost nesses of earth.\ All bowed to Nero, for need or pleasure;\ None was there of men but must obey him.\ When his pride was highest 'twas a pretty jest\ How the kings of the earth he killed and harried!\ Dost thou gainsay that God Almighty\ Could most readily wrest his power\ From the boastful scourge, and strip him bare\ Of all dominion through the might eternal,\ Or utterly curb the course of his sins?\ Oh, that He would only, as He easily might,\ All such felony fain forbid him!\ Oh, 'twas no light yoke which that lord planted,\ A grievous annoy, on the necks of his thanes,\ Of all his lieges that in his lifetime\ O'er this brittle world were fated to bide!\ He with the gore of guiltless men\ Fouled his sword-blade, full many's the time.\ Thus we see clearly, as we have oft said,\ That dominion can do no good\ If he that hath gained it have no good will.

X: Boethius. II. Metr. 7

If any living man longeth for glory,\ And fame without gain would fain have for his own,\ Then with my words would I beseech him\ On all sides about him far out to spy,\ Clearly to look, south, east, and west,\ And consider how broad with the clouds all about\ Is the vault of the sky. So may the wise man\ Easily deem this earth of ours\ By the side of that other wondrously small,\ Though to the witless

wide it seemeth,\ To straying men strong in its place.\ Yet may the sage deep in his spirit\ Feel great shame for the lust of glory,\ When the thirst for fame fiercely presseth,\ Although he may not make it to spread,\ In no wise whatever, over these narrow\ Quarters of earth. How idle is glory!\ Why ever, O proud ones, take ye pleasure\ To bow your own necks beneath the yoke\ Heavy and grievous, glad that ye may?\ Why do ye labour so long in vain,\ Aim to possess fame in the world,\ Over the nations, more than ye need?\ Though it befell that southward and north\ The uttermost denizens, dwellers of earth,\ In many a tongue intoned your praises;\ Though you were known for noblest birth,\ Worshipped for wealth, waxing in splendour,\ Dear for your valour; Death heedeth these not\ When heaven's Governor giveth him leave.\ But the wealthy man, and the wanting in goods,\ Death maketh equal, in all things alike.\ Where now are the wise one's, Weland's bones,\ The worker in gold, once greatest in glory?\ I ask where the bones of Weland are buried;\ For never any that on earth liveth\ May lose any virtue lent him by Christ;\ Nor may one poor wretch be robbed with more ease\ Of his soul's virtue, than may the sun\ Be swung from his path, or the swift heavens\ Moved from their courses by the might of a man.\ Who now is aware of wise Weland's bones,\ In what barrow lying they litter the ground?\ Where is the senator so mighty of Rome,\ The bold champion of whom we chaunt,\ Head of their army, he that the name\ Amid the burghers of Brutus bore?\ Where is the wise one that wished for fame,\ The people's shepherd, steadfast of purpose,\ That was a sage in each thing several,\ Keen and the cunning, Cato was hight?\ Many long days ago these men departed;\ No man knoweth now where they be.\ What is left of them but their fame alone?\ Too slight is the glory of such teachers.\ For they were worthy, were those heroes,\ Of more in the world. But worse it is now,\ When over the earth, in every quarter,\ They and those like them are little spoken of,\ And some not a few are clean forgotten,\ And their fame cannot keep them longer\ Known to all men, noble heroes.\ Though ye now deem, desire strongly,\ That long in the land your life may last,\ How ever the better can ye be or seem?\ For Death no man leaveth, though long it seem,\ His life-days told, if the Lord it alloweth.\ But what profit doth a mortal possess\ In this world's glory, if he be gripped\ By death everlasting after this life?

XI: Boethius. II. Metr. 8

There is one Creator, we cannot doubt,\ And He controlleth every creature\ Of heaven and of earth, and
of the high seas,\ And all the things that therein dwell,\ Of those unseen, and likewise of such\ As with
our eyes we are able to see,\ Of all creation; Almighty is He.\ Him humbly court all things created\
That of their service have any knowledge,\ And none the less of those that know not\ That they minister
unto the Master.\ In us He created ways and customs,\ And for all His creatures peace unaltered,\ Never
ceasing in its nature,\ When that He wished whatever pleased Him,\ As long as He liked should live
and last.\ So it shall be, and for ever abide;\ For never they may, the moving creatures,\ Cease from
their motion, sink into rest,\ Swerve from the way that the Warden of heaven\ Hath appointed for all
in order unchanging.\ The King of all things hath His creation\ Bound with His bridle; both hath He
done,\ Governed each one and guided them too,\ So that they may not against the Master's will\ Ever
cease moving, nor ever again\ Go any more than the Guarder of glory\ Will grant unto them His reins of
guidance.\ He hath with His bridle bound earth and heaven,\ And the whole circle of deep sea-waters.\
Thus hath He curbed, the King of heaven,\ With His control, all of His creatures,\ So that the one
striveth with other,\ And loth to his fellow fast doth cleave,\ Firm upholdeth, fast enclaspeth,\ Lest they
dash asunder. For ever their duty\ Again to circle on the self-same journey\ That at the first the Father
appointed,\ And ever renewed again to revive.\ So is it fashioned, the framework ancient,\ That warring
in hate the hostile creatures\ Fast and for ever firm peace maintain.\ Thus fire and water, firm land and
ocean,\ And things many more, in just the same manner\ Over the wide world are warring together;\ Yet
can they keep their course of service,\ Fellowship holding firm and abiding.\ Nor is it merely matter
of wonder\ That things full of hate fare together,\ Remaining fellows; more fit for marvel\ That none
of them ever can live without other,\ But every thing made his opposite meeteth\ Under the heavens,
that humbleth his pride\ Ere that it grow too great to be borne.\ He hath, the Almighty, to every crea-
ture\ Appointed its course that it must keep;\ Growth for plants, green for leaves\ That in autumn later
languish and fall.\ Winter bringeth very cold weather;\ Swift are its winds; summer then cometh,\ The
warm weather; Lo! the wan night\ Is lit by the moon, till the morn is brought\ To men by the sun o'er
this spacious world.\ He hath, the same God, to sea and land\ Their boundaries fixed; the flood dareth
not\ Over earth's borders her sway to broaden\ For the tribe of fishes, without the Lord's favour;\ Nor
may she ever the threshold of earth\ Lightly o'ertread; nor may the tides either\ Bear the water over
earth's borders.\ These are the commands that the glorious King,\ The Bright Life-Giver, doth let while
He will\ Keep within bounds His noble creatures;\ But when the Eternal and the Almighty\ Looseth
the reins that rule all creatures,\ Even the bridle wherewith He bound\ All that He fashioned at the first
creation\ (By the bridle we speak of we seek to betoken\ The case where things are all conflicting);\ If
the Lord letteth the bridle loosen,\ Forthwith they all leave love and peace,\ The friendly union of their
fellowship.\ All things whatever their own will follow,\ All world-creatures shall war together,\ Till this
our earth utterly perish,\ And so also other things, in the same fashion,\ By their own nature become as
nought.\ But the same God that governeth all things,\ Bringeth together, many folk bindeth,\ And firmly
uniteth in friendship's bonds;\ He linketh in wedlock the love that is pure\ In peaceful mateship. So too
the Mighty One\ Fellow to fellow firmly joineth,\ So that their friendship forth and for ever\ They hold,
and their faith fast undoubting,\ Their peace unvarying. O God of victory,\ Most happy indeed were
mankind's lot,\ If but their hearts could hold their course\ Steadily steered by Thy strong might,\ And

evenly ordered as the others are also,\ The world's creatures! Yea, it were truly\ Right merry for men,
might it so be!

XII: Boethius. III. Metr. 1

Whoso fertile land fain would till,\ Let him promptly pluck from the field\ Fern and thorn, and
furze-bush also,\ The weeds, in all places eager to injure\ The wheat clean-sprinkled, lest it sproutless\
Should lie on the land. To all folk likewise\ This next example no less suiteth:\ The comb of the honey
cannot but seem\ To each son of men sweeter by half,\ If he have tasted before the honey\ Aught that is
bitter. Even thus also\ To every mortal more welcome by far\ Is gentle weather, when just before\ Storms
have assailed him, and the stiff wind\ Out of the north-east. No man would reckon\ Daylight a blessing
if the dark night\ Had not for mortals mustered terrors.\ So of earth-dwellers to each it seemeth\ That
blessedness true is ever the better,\ More winsome by far, the more he of woe,\ Of cruel hardships, here
endureth.\ So thou the sooner may'st in thy soul\ The truest of blessings trace more clearly,\ And to their
source soonest arrive,\ If first and foremost forth from thy breast,\ Root and branch, thou upwrenchest\
Happiness false, e'en as the farmer\ From his field plucketh ill weeds a plenty.\ Then, I warrant thee,
thou wilt clearly\ Forthwith recognize real blessings,\ And thou wilt never have heed for aught else,\
When all plainly thou dost perceive them.

XIII: Boethius. III. Metr. 2

In song will I again send forth the tidings,\ How the Almighty, all things' Ruler,\ With bridle urgeth,
bendeth at will\ His creatures with might and due measure,\ Marvellous well maketh them hold.\ The
Wielder of heaven hath welded together,\ Wrapt all his creatures round and about,\ Fixed with fetters,
so that they fail ever\ To find any road to wrest themselves free.\ And yet every creature courseth along,\
Onward bending, bound for its goal,\ Seeking the kind that the King of angels,\ The Father at first, firmly
appointed.\ So now all things are thitherward moving,\ The spacious creation, save certain angels,\ Save
man also. Many, too many\ Dwellers in the world war with their nature!\ Though thou a she-lion should
meet in the land,\ A winsome creature wondrously tame,\ Loving her master with lively affection,\ And
yet every day dreading him also,\ If it befall that savour of blood\ She ever tasteth, truly none needeth\
Ever to hope that she will hold fast\ To her tameness after; well do I trow,\ New as it is, no more she
will heed it,\ But her wild wont will soon remember,\ The way of her fathers. Fierce she beginneth\
To rend her fetters, to roar and growl,\ And first she biteth, before all others,\ Her own house-master,
and hastily thereafter\ Each single man that she may meet;\ Naught she leaveth that owneth life,\ Nor
beast nor man, mangling all she findeth.\ Thus too the wood-birds, wondrous gentle,\ Truly tame, if
they come to the trees\ In the heart of the holt, soon they heed not\ Those that taught them, who long
time before\ Trained them and tamed them. Wild in the trees\ Ever thereafter their ancient nature\ They
gladly follow, though fain would their teachers\ With cunning tricks offer them tempting\ Even the food
that in former days\ To tameness enticed; the twigs so pleasant\ Seem to their minds, the meat they heed
not,\ So winsome for them when woodland soundeth,\ When they can hear the piping choir\ Of other
song-birds; then do they send\ Their own notes forth. All together\ The sweet song raise; the wood is
ringing.\ So too with each tree whose nature 'tis\ That in the grove it groweth highest,\ Though that

thou bend a bough to the ground,\ It upward leapeth when thou leavest\ The wood to its will; it wendeth to its kind.\ So too the sun when that it sinketh,\ Noon long past; the shining lamp\ Hasteneth sinking, on his unseen journey\ Ventureth by night; then in the north-east\ To men appeareth, to earth-dwellers bringeth\ Clear-bright morning, and o'er men mounteth,\ Upward ever, until he cometh\ To the topmost station where he highest standeth.\ Thus every creature with all its might,\ Through this wide world, wendeth and hasteneth\ With all endeavour, eager to come\ Once more to its kind as soon as it can.\ On earth there now liveth no single creature\ That craveth not one day to come\ Back to its home whence it once hied.\ Here no care racketh, here rest is eternal;\ 'Tis God Almighty, as all men know.\ Over the earth now there liveth no creature\ That spinneth not round and on itself turneth,\ E'en as a wheel; for it so whirlleth\ That at last it standeth in its ancient station;\ And ever as soon as it hath spun round,\ When all its round is run to the end,\ Then duly again it shall do what it did,\ And be yet again what it was of yore.

XIV: Boethius. III. Metr. 3

What availeth the greedy one in earth's goods wealthy,\ What boot for his mind, though much he owneth\ Of gold and of gems, and every thing good,\ And countless possessions; and though his ploughs till\ Each day for him a thousand acres?\ What though this mid-earth, and this race of men,\ Under the sun, south, west, and east,\ In his dominion are all dependent,\ When none of his trappings can he take away hence\ Out of this world, no, not one more\ Of his hoarded treasures than he brought hither?

XV: Boethius. III. Metr. 4

Though the unrighteous evil monarch,\ Nero the king, decked him anew\ In fairest raiment in wondrous fashion,\ With gold adorned, and goodly jewels,\ Yet through the world by all men of wisdom\ In the days of his life he was loathed and scorned,\ Filled with all sin. This foe of men\ To all his darlings dealt high favours;\ Yet I cannot conceive how they could hold\ Themselves aught the better. Though for a season\ He chose them without virtue, this most witless king,\ Yet no wise man worshipped them the more.\ Though the man of folly make himself king,\ How can he reckon, the man of right reason,\ That he is aught better, or even so seemeth?

XVI: Boethius. III. Metr. 5

He that seeketh power must first strive\ That he may of himself in his mind within\ Lordship compass, lest he may be ever\ To his sinful ways utterly subject.\ From out of his spirit let him speedily pluck\ The manifold cares that carry no profit;\ Let him cease a while his mournful sighing\ For his evil fortune; though all be his,\ This world of ours, where'er begirdled\ By ocean-waters, to him only given,\ As far away as in the west\ Outermost lieth an isle in ocean,\ Where never is night known in summer,\ Nor is the day in winter divided,\ Into times parted, Tile (Thule) men call it—\ Though that a man be sole master\ Of all this island, and from thence onward\ E'en to the Indies out in the east—\ Yea, though all this be his own to govern,\ How is his might any the more,\ If of himself control he hath not,\ Nor of

his thoughts, nor thoroughly strive\ Well to beware in word and in deed\ Of all the sins of which we were speaking?

XVII: Boethius. III. Metr. 6

All earth-dwellers one origin had,\ All men of the land, one like beginning;\ From one pair only all proceeded,\ From a man and woman, within the world;\ And to this day even all men alike,\ The base and the high ones, are born in the world.\ Nor is that a marvel, for all men know\ That there is one God of all world-creatures,\ Lord of mankind, Father and Maker.\ He the sun lendeth, light out of heaven,\ To moon and stars; on earth He made men,\ And brought to the body in the beginning\ The soul in union; under the sky\ Folk He created all fully equal.\ Why are ye therefore yourselves o'er others\ Placing ever, proud without reason,\ When none ye are able to meet not noble?\ Why are ye boasting now of your birth?\ In the mind only of every man lieth\ The real nobility whereof I reason,\ Not in the flesh of the folk of earth.\ But every mortal that is utterly,\ Merely subject to his sinful ways,\ Soonest leaveth life's Creator;\ Nor doth he heed his own high nature,\ No, nor the Father that first him fashioned.\ For this the Almighty removeth his honour,\ So that henceforth here in the world\ He goeth dishonoured, nor cometh to glory.

XVIII: Boethius. III. Metr. 7

Alas! that wrongful unrighteous desire,\ Frenzied lewdness leadeth to this,\ That of all mankind it mazeth the mind,\ Of each and all men, wellnigh utterly.\ Lo! the wild bee is wise of nature,\ Yet must perish all in a moment,\ If in her anger aught she stingeth.\ So too a man's soul soon shall die,\ If that the body becometh baser\ By carnal desire, unless there come first\ Regret to his heart ere he hence wendeth.

XIX: Boethius. iii Metr. 8

Oh! sore is the folly, consider it who will,\ And full of peril for every person,\ That wretched mortals utterly mazeth,\ And far from the right road rapidly leadeth!\ Have ye the will to seek in the woodland\ Bright red gold among green trees?\ Well do I know that no wise man\ Will seek it there, since there it is not,\ Nor look in vineyards for lustrous gems.\ Why do ye not hang nets on the hill-tops\ When ye would fain fishes capture,\ Salmon and herrings? It seemeth likely\ That dwellers on earth, all of them, know,\ Men of sense, that such live not there.\ Will ye go hunting, with hounds follow,\ In the salt sea, when ye would seek\ Harts and hinds? Hast thou not knowledge\ That such as these thou must seek in forests\ More oft by far than out in ocean?\ Marvellous it is that all men know\ That by the sea-shore search must be made,\ And by river-beaches, for brightest jewels,\ White and crimson, and of every colour.\ Yea, they know also where it is needful\ Fishes to seek, and many such things,\ The wealth of the world. Well they do so,\ Men all yearning, year's end to year's end.\ But of all things this is most wretched,\ That fools have become so utterly blind,\ In midst of error, that in mind they cannot\ Readily tell where blessings eternal,\ Happiness true, are hidden away,\ For they will not follow in their footsteps\ Nor seek the blessings; reft of sense,\ In this frail life they think to find it,\ True Happiness, God Himself.\ I know no means whereby I may\ Within my breast blame as severely\ Such men's folly, as fain I would do;\ Nor can I tell thee with full clearness;\ For they are feebler and more foolish,\ More severed from blessing, than I can set forth.\ Wealth and possessions, these they wish for,\ And men's worship they are eager to win.\ When they have compassed what their mind craveth,\ Then do they witless ween in their folly\ That True Happiness they have at last.

XX: Boethius. III. Metr. 9

O my Master, Thou art Almighty,\ Great and noble, in glory famous;\ And Thou art wonderful to all with wisdom!\ O Thou God Eternal of all creation,\ Thou hast wondrously well created\ Unseen creatures, and also those\ That are seen of men! Softly Thou rulest\ The bright creation with Thy craft\ And power of wisdom. Thou to this world\ From first beginning forth to the ending\ Hast dealt out seasons, as it most suited,\ In regular order, such that they ever\ Are faring out, or else returning.\ Thou Thy creatures that cannot move\ Unto Thy will wisely compellest,\ Thyself abiding still and stirless,\ And unchanging for ever and ever.\ None is mightier, none more famous,\ Nor midst all creatures is Thy match to be found.\ And as yet never hast Thou felt need\ Of all the works which Thou hast wrought,\ But by Thy will all Thou hast worked,\ And with the power that Thou possessest\ Thou hast made the world and every wight;\ Yet no need hadst Thou, none whatever,\ Of all this grandeur. 'Tis great, the nature\ Of Thy goodness, regard it who will;\ For they are one only in every wise,\ Thou and Thy goodness. This is Thine own,\ For not from without to Thee hath it come.\ But this I guess surely, that Thy goodness is\ Goodness almighty, Thyself, O God;\ It is unlike ours in nature;\ From outside cometh all we contain\ Of good in the world, from God Himself.\ Thou hast no anger to aught conceived,\ For to Thee nothing knoweth likeness;\ No, nor even is aught more crafty;\ For Thou all goodness by Thy contriving,\ Alone in Thy counsel carried it out.\ Ere Thee there was not any creature\ Either to do or to leave undone;\ But without pattern, Prince of mankind,\ God Almighty, all Thou wroughtest,\ All very good. Thou art Thyself\ The Highest Good. Ah! Thou, holy Father,\ After Thy will the world createdst,\ This earth with Thy might madest to be,\ O Chief of hosts, as Thou didst choose,\ And with Thy will wieldest all things.\ So Thou, true God, Thyself grantest\ All good that is; for long ago\ Thou all Thy creatures first createdst\ Strongly alike; yet some there were\ Not like in nature. One name Thou gavest,\ One name only, to all together,\ World under sky. O God of splendour!\ This single name Thou partedst since,\ Father, into four: first the earth,\ Second water, part of the world,\ Thirdly fire, and fourthly air;\ These four together form the world.\ Yet each of these four hath its own birthplace,\ Each possesseth its proper station,\ Though each of them be with the other\ Much commingled, and with the might also\ Of the Father Almighty firmly united,\ In harmony single, smoothly together,\ By Thy command, O kindly Father,\ So that none of them o'er another's bounds\ Dareth trespass, for dread of the Lord,\ But these servants together suffer union,\ The King's champions, chill with heat,\ Wet with dryness; yet are they warring.\ Water and earth all increase bring,\ Cold in their ways the one and the other;\ Water wet and cold round the land windeth,\ The all-green earth, yet either is cold.\ Air is a mixture in the midst dwelling;\ Nought should we wonder that it is warm and cold,\ The wet cloudbank by the wind blended;\ For midmost it lieth, as men hear tell,\ 'Tween fire and earth. Full many know\ That highest o'er earth of all things created\ Fire liveth, and land is lowest.\ Oh, 'tis wonderful, Chief of war-hosts,\ That with Thy bare thought Thou bringest to pass\ That to every creature with clear distinction\ Thou hast fixed its marches, yet hast not mixed them!\ Lo! for the water wet and cold\ The land as a floor firm hast Thou laid;\ For never quiet, to every quarter\ Far would it flow, feeble and yielding;\ 'Twould never be able, for a truth do I know,\ To stand by itself, but the earth it supporteth.\ And some of it also sucketh adown,\ So that thereafter it may for the soaking\ Be washed with showers. Wherefore leaf and grass\ Broad over Britain are blooming and growing,\ A boon to mortals. The cold earth bringeth\ Countless fruits of marvellous kinds,\ For with the water wet it becometh.\ But if this were not so, then would it certainly\ Dry up to dust, and then be driven\ By the wind afar, as oft it befalleth\ That over the

land ashes are blown.\ On earth nothing were able to live,\ Nor would it any more enjoy the water,\ Nor dwell in it ever by any device,\ For mere coldness, if Thou, King of angels,\ Somewhat with fire the land and sea-stream\ Had not mingled, and meetly measured\ Cold with heat by Thy cunning power,\ So that fire cannot lurid consume\ Earth and sea, though it be seated\ Firmly in either, the Father's old work.\ None the less marvel to me it seemeth\ That earth and ocean are all unable,\ Though both cold creatures, by any contrivance\ Fully to quench the fire within them,\ Therein planted by the Lord's power.\ Now this is a property possessed by waters,\ To live upon earth and in the clouds also,\ And even on high above the heavens.\ Then the rightful region of fire,\ Its native home, is high o'er all creatures\ That we may behold o'er this wide world;\ Though it is mingled with every member\ Of world-creatures, it cannot avail\ To deal to one of them deadly damage,\ Save by the leave of our Life-Giver,\ Even the Eternal Almighty God.\ More heavy is earth than other creatures,\ More stoutly welded; for during a space\ Beneath creation it nethermost lay,\ Save only the firmament that this broad fabric\ Outside and around each day circleteth,\ Yet never toucheth the earth anear,\ Nor may it in one place more than another\ Nearer reach; round it speedeth\ Above and beneath, yet equally near.\ Every creature whereof we recount\ Hath for itself its separate home;\ Yet is it likewise linked with others,\ Nor may one live lonely ever,\ Though dimly seen be their dwelling together.\ Thus earth in fire and water is found;\ The poor of wit have pains to see it,\ But to the wise well it is known.\ So too is fire fixed fast in water,\ And in the stones still it lurketh;\ 'Tis hard to see, 'tis there, however.\ The Father of angels hath bound the fire\ So fast and firmly that it cannot fly\ Again to the region where the rest of the fire\ High o'er this world in its home dwelleth.\ Soon it forsaketh this frail creation,\ O'ercome by cold, if it seeketh its country;\ Yet every creature craveth to go\ Where its kin it findeth most crowded together.\ Thou hast establish'd through Thy strong might,\ King of war-hosts, in wondrous wise\ The earth so firmly that she inclineth\ Nought to one side, nor may she sink\ This way nor that way more than she was wont,\ By nought upheld of earthly nature.\ It is equally easy upward or downward\ For this earth of men to move at will;\ This is most like to an egg, where lieth\ The yolk in the middle, yet the shell moveth\ Around outside; so standeth the world\ Still in its station; with the streams round it,\ The stirring floods, the air and stars,\ While the gleaming shell round all glideth\ Every day, and long hath done so.\ O God of the nations! of threefold nature\ A soul Thou hast given us, that Thou since\ Movest and guidest through Thy strong might,\ So that no less thereof liveth\ In a single finger, even the smallest,\ Than in the whole body. But a little ago\ I clearly sang that the soul was\ In every thane a threefold creature,\ For all sages this do say,\ That three natures are seen in every soul;\ Passion first cometh, second desire;\ The third is by nature nobler than the others,\ Reason we call it; it causeth no shame,\ For the beasts have it not, but to man it belongeth.\ Countless creatures contain the two others;\ Nearly every beast boasteth desire,\ And likewise passion each possesseth;\ Wherefore mankind, over the world,\ Has other creatures all surpassed;\ For what men have the others have not,\ E'en that single virtue of which we have sung.\ This mighty reason in every man\ Shall ever subdue desire to itself,\ And likewise passion hold in its power.\ She with thought the mind of a thane,\ And with reflection shall rule in all things.\ She hath most might in man's spirit,\ And is most perfect of all his powers.\ Lo! Thou the Soul, Sender of triumph,\ High King of nations, thus didst create,\ So that it turneth and turneth about,\ Round itself moving, e'en as all moveth,\ The swift firmament fleetly whirling,\ Every day, by the Lord's great doing,\ This earth encircling. So doth man's soul;\ Like to a wheel she whirlleth round herself,\ Ofttimes thinking

of that which is earthly,\ The Lord's creatures daily and nightly;\ Sometimes in thought she seeketh herself,\ At others giveth heed to God Eternal,\ Her own Creator. In course she goeth\ Most like to a wheel, on herself whirling.\ When deeply she museth on Him who made her,\ Then up she is raised over herself;\ But in her own self she ever abideth,\ When in her fancy she followeth herself.\ Lastly she falleth beneath herself far\ When she admireth these frail things earthly,\ And loveth them all more than law eternal.\ O God of ages, Thou gavest a home\ In heaven to souls; Thou sendest them freely\ Glorious gifts, God Almighty,\ In measure fitting the merits of each!\ These all are beaming bright in the heavens\ In the clear night, but nevertheless\ Not equal in light; lo! we see often,\ When serene is the night, the stars in heaven,\ Not all beaming with equal brightness.\ O God Everlasting! Thou didst also unite\ A thing of heaven to the earthly here,\ Soul to body; ever since they abide,\ Both the eternal and earthly together,\ The soul in the flesh. See, ever to Thee\ They yearn to go hence, for from Thee hither\ They had their source, and shall seek Thee again.\ But the body of man must ever abide\ Here on the earth, for coming from her\ He grew in the world. Together they were\ No longer nor less than to them was allowed\ By the Almighty, who ages aforetime\ Made them comrades; the true King is He.\ He fashion'd the land, and filled it thereafter\ With manifold races, as men have told me,\ And sorts of beasts, mankind's Saviour.\ Then did He sow many a seed\ Of trees and plants in the tracts of earth.\ Grant to our minds, God Eternal,\ That they may to Thee, Master of all things,\ Through these miseries mount to heaven,\ And from these cares, kindly Father,\ Ruler of nations, may rise to Thee;\ That then with eyes open we may be able\ With the eyes of the mind, through Thy aid mighty,\ The fount to gaze on of all goodness,\ Thyself to view, victorious God.\ Grant strong sight to the gaze of our minds,\ That we may on Thyself be able thereafter\ To fix them firmly, Father of angels.\ Scatter the mist that now for a season\ Before the eyes of our understanding\ Thickly hath hung, heavy and darksome.\ Send, we pray Thee, to our spirits' eyes\ Thine own light, Ruler of life;\ For Thou art the brightness, benign Father,\ Of the true Light; likewise Thou art Thyself\ The firm rest, Father Almighty,\ Of all the true ones. Tenderly Thou suff'rest\ That they may behold Thee, Yea, Thyself even.\ Thou art of all things, O nations' Ruler,\ Beginning and end. O angels' Father,\ Of all things Thou bearest the burden lightly,\ Never wearied. Thyself art the Way,\ Aye, and the Guide, of all things living,\ And the goodly Bourne to which the Way bendeth.\ To Thee all mortals are moving ever,\ All men from below, in the bright creation.

XXI: Boethius. III. Metr. 10

O sons of mankind, o'er earth moving,\ Let each that hath freedom find out the way\ To the eternal goodness whereof our speech is,\ And to the blessings that are our song's burden.\ The man that is straitly bound by the sway\ Of the worthless love of this world glorious,\ Let him right soon seek for himself\ Fullness of freedom, that forthwith he may come\ Into the blessings of the Bidder of spirits;\ For this is the rest from all our wrestling,\ The hopeful haven for the high vessels\ Of the minds of us men, mild harbour bright.\ This is the only hithe we ever shall have\ After the tossing of troublous billows,\ After each tempest, truly peaceful.\ This is the sanctuary, the sole comfort\ Of all weary mortals, when they are over,\ Our worldly troubles; 'tis the winsome bourne\ That shall be ours to own after these hardships.\ But well do I trow, no treasure golden,\ No jewel of silver, no gem of cunning,\ No wealth of this world will ever illumine\ The eyes of the mind; nor do they amend\ Their keenness of sight so that they spy\ Bliss unfeigned; but they far more\ The eyes of the mind of every man\ Blind in his breast than make them brighter.\ So each of the things that now on earth\ In this their life is loved by mankind,\ Frail and earthly, fleeteth away.\ But they be wondrous, the Beauty and Brightness\ That give brightness and beauty to each,\ And possess ever after power over all.\ It is not the will nor the wish of the Ruler\ That our souls should perish, but He preferreth\ With light to fill them, life's Controller.\ If any wight therefore with his eyes undimmed,\ The glance of his spirit, may ever gaze on\ The clear brightness of the heavenly beam,\ Then will he say that the sun's shining\ Is merely darkness to the mind of each man,\ If it be measured with the mighty light\ Of God Almighty; for every spirit\ 'Tis ceaseless, eternal, for the souls of the blest.

XXII: Boethius. III. Metr. 11

He that desireth the Right in due measure,\ In its inner nature anxious to track,\ And know it fully so that none be able\ To drive it out, nor anything earthly\ Have power to hinder: first him behoveth\ In his own soul to seek what he earlier\ During a season sought from without.\ Then let him bring it forth from his bosom,\ And leave behind, as long as he may,\ Every sorrow that serveth for nought;\ And let him muster with might and with main\ Each thought within him to that end only.\ Let him say to his mind, that it may find\ Within itself only all that it now\ Oftenest seeketh ever outside,\ Every goodness. Then he getteth to know\ Things evil and idle, all that he had,\ Hid in his bosom so long before,\ Even as clearly as he can the sun\ Behold with the eyes of this present body;\ And he moreover his mind perceiveth\ Lighter and brighter than is the beaming\ Of the sun in summer, when the sky's jewel,\ Sheer orb of heaven, shineth brightest.\ So neither the sins nor sloth of the body,\ Nor its foul vices, are fully able\ To wrest from the mind its righteous nature\ In any mortal. Though that a man\ By the sins of his body, and by its sloth also,\ And by vice be assailed for many a season,\ And though that his mind be grievously marred\ With the foul curse of careless folly,\ And a fog of error float before\ The dreary spirit of the sons of men,\ So that it cannot shine at all so clearly\ As it would do if it were able,\ Yet there remaineth ever retained\ Some seed of the truth in the soul of man,\ So long as united it liveth with body.\ This corn of seed is ever quickened\ By means of inquiry, and afterwards also\ With good teaching, if it is to grow.\ How may any man make out an answer\ To anything asked, by aid of reason,\ Though others ask him after it righteously,\ Closely inquiring, if he containeth\ In his own mind neither much nor little\ Of righteousness in him nor aught of reason?\ Yet no man liveth that is so lacking,\ So utterly reft and void of reason,\ That he is unable the answer to find\ Locked in his breast

if others beg him.\ For this is sooth, the saw that our Plato,\ The ancient sage, once said unto us:\ ‘Each man,’ he said, ‘that is unmindful,\ Of righteousness careless, him I counsel\ Again to turn him towards his thoughts,\ His mind’s fancy; then will he not fail\ In his own bosom, buried deeply,\ To find in his spirit righteousness sealed,\ Amid the turmoil which ever troubleth\ His mind daily most and sorest,\ And the heavy sloth that hampereth his body,\ And the heavy cares that quell a man\ In mind and in spirit at every season.’

XXIII: Boethius. III. Metr. 12

Oh! truly blessed a man would be\ Here in all things, had he the power to see\ The bright and spotless heavenly stream,\ That grand fountain of every good;\ And if from himself he might hurl away\ The swart mist, his spirit’s darkness.\ Yet now it behoveth, God us helping,\ With tales of fancy, fables ancient,\ To amend thy mind, that thou more surely\ May by straight course come to heaven,\ To that spot eternal where our souls have rest.

XXIV: Boethius. IV. Metr. 1

I have feather-wings fleeter than a bird’s,\ With which I may fly far from the earth\ Over the high roof of the heaven above us;\ But oh! that I might thy mind furnish,\ Thy inmost wit, with these my wings,\ Until thou mightest on this world of mortals,\ On all that there liveth, look down easily!\ Then thou mightest mount on pinions\ Straight o’er heaven, soaring upwards\ Wind through the clouds, and then witness\ All from above. Thou couldst also fly\ Over the fire that long hath fared,\ Many a year, mid air and heaven,\ E’en as the Father at first appointed.\ Then couldst thou after the course follow\ That the sun taketh ’tween the lights of heaven,\ And onward speeding reach the sphere\ Far up aloft; then in order\ That star all cold, alone in station,\ Which is the highest of heavenly bodies,\ By sea-dwellers beneath the sky\ Saturn yclept; cold is that star,\ Wholly ice-bound, and highest wand’reth\ Over all others up in heaven.\ Yea, even then, when thou hast passed\ High o’er Saturn, thou mayst still journey,\ And then wilt soon be above the sphere\ That swiftly turneth; and if straight thou goest,\ Leaving behind thee the highest heaven,\ Then may’st thou at last in the true Light\ Have thy portion, whence the sole Prince\ Above the firmament far sway holdeth,\ And also beneath, o’er every creature,\ Guiding the world. A wise King He;\ ’Tis He that controlleth through all countries\ All other kings over the world.\ He with His bridle hath firmly bound\ The whole compass of heaven and earth;\ With His guiding reins well He governeth\ And ever steereth with mighty strength\ The hastening car of earth and heaven.\ He is the only Judge, in justice steadfast,\ God unchanging, fair and glorious.\ If thou shouldst reach by the right way\ Up to that region, that right noble place,\ Though for a time thou hast it forgotten,\ Yet if again ever thou thither arrive,\ Then wilt thou call out and quickly say:\ ‘This, this only is mine own true home,\ My land and country; hence am I come,\ Here was created, by the Craftsman’s might.\ Hence will I never hie me away,\ But pleasantly here it is my purpose,\ The Father willing, firmly to stand.’\ If to thee after it shall ever befall\ That thou wilt, or may’st to this mirky world\ Come once more, thou wilt quickly see\ That all the unrighteous rulers of earth,\ And all the mighty, those men so haughty\ That most oppress this weary people,\ Are ever themselves utterly wretched,\ In all things feeble, failing in might,\ Even these proud ones that this poor folk\ Now for a season so sorely dreadeth.

XXV: Boethius. IV. Metr. 2

Hear now a tale told of the proud ones,\ The kings unrighteous that rule o'er the earth,\ That shine
among us with wondrous sheen\ In many various beautiful vestures,\ On high seats raised e'en to the
roof,\ Decked with gold, adorned with jewels,\ On all side hemmed with a countless host\ Of thanes and
fighters. These too are furnished\ With battle harness of wondrous brightness,\ With gleaming brands
stoutly belted,\ And with high state they serve the other,\ Obedient all; and then, forth bursting\ To every
quarter, crush with force\ All other nations that neighbouring dwell;\ And their lord heedeth, who the
host ruleth,\ Friend nor foeman, life nor fortune,\ But ruthless ever rusheth on all men;\ Unto a mad
hound most hath he likeness,\ Too high uplifted within his heart,\ For the dominion that each of his
darlings,\ His friends so trusty, aideth to found.\ If a man, however, might pluck from the tyrant\ Each
sev'ral garment of the royal garb,\ And from him sever the various servants,\ And likewise the power
that once he possessed,\ Then might'st thou see that he is most like\ To one of the men that now most
busily\ Press about him in painful service;\ He might well be worse, but I ween no better.\ If such an
one ever, all unwitting,\ Happened to lose by lack of fortune\ State and raiment and ready service,\
And the power also which we have pictured:\ If any of such things he seeth no longer,\ I know he
will fancy that he hath fallen\ Deep in a dungeon, or himself he deemeth\ In shackles fastened. This
I may show,\ That from over-measure in any matter,\ In food or in dress, or in wine-drinking,\ Or in
sweetmeats, sorest waxeth\ The mighty frenzy of fierce desire\ That cloudeth sore the inmost spirit\ Of
every mortal. Thence come most often\ Evil pride of heart and profitless strife.\ When rage is burning,
within their bosoms\ Their hearts are whelmed with waves enormous\ Of seething passion, and soon
thereafter\ Are gripped in turn with grievous gloom,\ Firmly caught. Anon there cometh\ Hope deceitful
with hateful lying\ Crying vengeance, for anger craveth\ More and more; then maketh promise\ The
heart so reckless, of all right heedless.\ I told thee before in this same book\ That somewhat of good by
each single member\ Of the wide creation is ever craved,\ By the natural power that it possesseth.\ The
unrighteous Kings that rule the earth\ To no good ever can give an issue,\ By reason of the sin whereof
I have spoken;\ Nor is that a marvel, for they ever are minded\ Themselves to abase, and bow to the
power\ Of each of the evils named already.\ Needs then straitly they must submit\ Unto the bondage
of those masters,\ The chieftains by them already chosen.\ Yet is this worse, that a man will not\ Resist
this mastery e'en for a moment.\ If he were ready to begin to wrestle\ And the war thereafter to wage
for ever,\ Then were he never worthy of blame\ E'en if beaten, bested at last.

XXVI: Boethius. IV. Metr. 3

I can from fables feigned of yore\ Tell thee a story touching nearly\ This same matter whereof we speak.\ In times long past once it betided\ That prince Aulixes had possession\ Under the Caesar of kingdoms twain.\ He was the ruler of the realm of Thracia,\ And Retia also ruled as chieftain;\ And his liege lord's name, known to the nations,\ Was Agamemnon, ruler of all\ The Greekish kingdom. It was common rumour\ That in those times the Trojan war\ Was fought under heaven. That hard fighter,\ The Greekish monarch, marched to the field;\ Aulixes likewise led five-score ships\ Across the sea-stream, and there sat down\ Full ten winters. Then the time came\ When they had won the realm by war,\ And the Greekish prince had dearly purchased\ The town of Troy with his true comrades.\ Then when to Aulixes leave was given,\ The Thracian chieftain, thence to journey,\ He left behind him of his hornèd barks\ Nine and ninety; none of them thence,\ Of these sea-horses, save only one,\ He ferried o'er ocean, a foam-washed galley\ With threefold oar-bank. Then came cold weather,\ Raging storm-wind; the dun waves roaring\ Dashed together, far out driving\ Into the Wendelsea the warrior crew,\ Upon the island where Apollo's daughter\ Had been dwelling for many a day.\ This same Apollo was of princely race,\ Son of Jove. This Jove was a king\ Who to great and little lying feigned,\ To every goodman, that he was a god\ Most high and holy. Thus this hero\ The silly people pleased with error,\ Till countless folk his feigning trusted;\ For he was rightly the realm's protector,\ Of royal birth. 'Tis known abroad\ That in those days each folk deemed\ Its sovereign head the Highest God,\ And gave him honour as King of Glory,\ If to be ruler he was rightly born.\ Jove's father also was further a god,\ And the sea-dwellers Saturn named him,\ The sons of men. Soon folk named\ Each in turn God eternal.\ Men say there was also Apollo's daughter,\ Well descended, to witless mortals\ A goddess seeming, skilled in magic,\ In witchcraft dealing and in the delusions,\ More than all men, of many a nation.\ She was a king's daughter, Circe was called\ Among the multitude, and she ruled men\ Upon the island to which Aulixes\ Chief of Thracia had chanced to come,\ In his ship sailing. Soon was it known\ To all the troop that tarried there with her,\ The prince's coming. Then Circe herself\ Loved beyond measure that lord of seamen,\ And in the same way with all his soul\ Such love for her he felt in his heart\ That to his country no care to return\ Had power in his mind like that of the maiden;\ But he went on dwelling with the woman thereafter,\ So long remained that none of his men,\ His servants sturdy, would stay with him longer,\ But after their hardships for home were longing,\ And purposed to leave their dear lord behind.\ Now folk began to make a fable,\ How that this woman with her witchcraft\ Changed men's bodies, and with baleful arts\ Caused them to take, the king's true servants,\ The bodies of beasts, and bound them afterwards,\ And fastened many in fetters also.\ Some became wolves and no word could utter,\ But from time to time took to howling;\ Some were wild boars, and broke into grunting\ When they their sorrow sought to lament;\ Those that were lions let forth in anger\ A dreadful roar when they desired\ To hail each other. These hapless mortals,\ Both old and young, yea all, were turned\ To some wild beast, such as before\ During his life-days each most was like;\ All save the king, the queen's beloved.\ Nought would they taste, any one of them,\ Of meat of men, but more they longed for\ What beasts supporteth, as was not seemly.\ No more was left them of men's likeness,\ Of the earth-dwellers, save only reason.\ Each of them kept his own mind,\ But this with sorrow was sorely beset\ For the sad troubles that had assailed it.\ Now the foolish ones that in this witchcraft\ So long believed, in lying stories,\ Notwithstanding knew that no one\ The wit of man nor his mind can change\ With magic art, though this be able\ Mortal bodies for many a day\ In form to worsen. Wonderful is it\ And mighty, the power that every mind\

Hath o'er the slight and sluggish body! Thou may'st by such examples see most clearly That every cunning and craft of the body Come from the mind in every man, Each single power. It is easy to see That to every man more harm bringeth Wickedness of mind than weakness of body, Of the frail flesh. Let none of the folk Deem it possible that this poor flesh May ever the mind of any mortal Utterly change to its own estate. Nay, 'tis the faults, each mind's failings, And the inward purpose prompting each man, That bend the body to their bidding.

XXVII: Boethius. IV. Metr. 4

Why should ye harass with wicked hatred Your spirits weary, as the waves of ocean Set a-tossing the ice-cold sea, Urged by the blast? Why do ye blame, Your fate reproach that she hath no power? Why can ye not bide the bitter coming Of common death by God created When he is drawing each day towards you? Can ye not perceive that he is ever pursuing Each thing begotten, of earthly bearing, Beasts and birds? Death also is busy After mankind, all over this earth, The dreadful huntsman, holding the chase, Nor will he truly the trail abandon Ere that he catch at last the quarry That he was pursuing. Oh! it is pitiful That borough-dwellers cannot bide him, But luckless mortals like the race of birds Are flying onward fain to meet him, Or as beasts of the forest that are ever fighting, Each one seeking to slay the other. But it is wicked for any wight That towards another in his inmost temper He should hatred bear, like bird or beast; But most right it were that every mortal To others should render their due reward, To all earth-dwellers, whatever they earn By their life-works. He should love, that is, All true men most tenderly, And spare the wicked, as we have said. The man himself he must love in mind, And all his vices view with hatred, And cut them away as best he can.

XXVIII: Boethius. IV. Metr. 5

What man that learning on earth lacketh Doth marvel not at the moving clouds, The swift heavens, the stars' wheeling, How never ceasing they spin around The mass of earth? Which of mankind No wonder showeth at these shining bodies, How that some of them a lesser space Of course revolve, and others run In longer circle? One of these lights Is by world-men the Waggon Shafts called. This a shorter course and journey keepeth, A smaller circle than other stars, For it turneth about the heavenly axle At the northern end, nigh revolving. On this same axle all is circling, The spacious heavens are swiftly speeding, Southward rushing, swift, untiring. What earthly mortal doth not marvel, Save the wise ones who wist before, That many stars a motion wider Have in the heavens, some, however, Run more straitly round the axle's end, And move more widely when round its middle They urge their race? One of these orbs Is Saturn called; in some thirty winters He girdleth round this globe of earth. Boötes also brightly shineth, Another star that to his station In years as many moveth round, E'en to the place from which he parted. What mortal is there that marvelleth not How that some stars sink in ocean, Under the sea-waves, as men do suppose? Some also deem that the sun doth so; But none the less false is this their fancy, For neither at even nor in early morning Is he nearer the ocean than at high noon. Yet do men deem that he diveth to ocean, Into the sea, when he sinketh to setting. Who in the world wondereth not At the full moon, when in a moment She is robbed of her beauty beneath the clouds, With darkness covered? What mortal cannot See with wonder the ways of all

stars,\ Why in bright weather they beam not forth\ Before the sun, when such is their custom\ In the
middle of night before the moon,\ When clear is heaven? How many a man,\ At all such things sorely
wond'reth,\ But marvelleth not that men and beasts,\ Every creature, keep up anger\ Great and useless,
each against other,\ Never ceasing? It is a strange thing\ That men do not marvel how oft 'mid the
clouds\ The thunder soundeth, then for a space\ Lieth silent; and likewise how\ Waves and sea-shore
are warring ever,\ The wind and billows. Who wondereth at this,\ Or at another thing also, why ice is
able\ To come from water? When the sun shineth\ Hot in splendour, soon it hasteneth,\ The wondrous
ice-pool, once more to its kind,\ Even to water. No wonder seemeth\ To any of mortals what he may
see\ Day by day; but the doited people\ What they see but seldom sooner marvel,\ Though to the minds
of men of wisdom\ It seem much less matter of wonder.\ To unsteadfast men it ever seemeth\ No part of
the ancient early creation,\ What they see seldom; but still they ween,\ World-men hold that by chance
it happeneth,\ Newly befalleth, if to any before\ It hath not appeared; a pity 'tis so!\ But if any of them
ever becometh\ So lusting for knowledge that he beginneth to learn\ Wise ways many, and the Warden
of Life\ From his mind cleareth the mountain of folly\ That hath buried it and abode with it long,\
Then I know well that he will not marvel\ At many a thing that now to mankind\ A sign and a wonder
everywhere seemeth.

XXIX: Boethius. IV. Metr. 6

If thou desirest deeply to learn\ The lofty power of the world's Lord\ With clear understanding, consider diligently\ The stars of heaven, how they ever stand\ In lasting peace; long have they done so,\ Even as the Prince of Glory hath prepared them\ At their first forming, so that the fiery one,\ The sun, may not approach the cold one's path,\ The moon's marches. Lo! the mighty orbs\ Cross not the one the course of the other\ Until it hath fleeted far on its way.\ Nor will that star e'er seek in its journey\ The west of the heavens, to which wise men give\ The name of Ursa. All other stars\ After the sun sink with the heavens\ Below earth's base; alone he bideth.\ It is no wonder; he is wondrously near\ The higher axle-end of the heavenly sphere.\ Then brightly beameth one star beyond others\ That soareth in the east, the sun preceding;\ Him the sons of men star of the morning\ Call under heaven; he heraldeth day\ To men in the boroughs; then he bringeth\ The glorious sun, the same day for all.\ Fair and shining is the forerunner,\ East up-leaping the sun he leadeth;\ And again after the sun to his setting glideth,\ West under world. When night cometh,\ His name the nations change for another,\ And then they style him Star of evening.\ More swift than the sun, once they have set,\ He speedeth past him, that star all noble,\ Until over again in the east he riseth,\ To men appearing, the sun preceding.\ Those noble orbs night from day\ By the Lord's power have fairly parted,\ Sun and moon, in high peace moving\ As from the first the Father appointed.\ Thou needest not fear that these fair ones\ Will ever be sated with this their service\ Ere doomsday come. Therein He dealeth,\ Mankind's Maker, as Him meet seemeth;\ For he suffereth them not, the Sovran God,\ To be at the same time on one side of heaven,\ Lest they ruin the rest of creation.\ But God Eternal all things guideth,\ The broad creation, in bonds of peace.\ Dryness sometimes driveth out wet;\ Whiles they mingle, by the Master's craft,\ Cold and heat. To highest heaven\ The flame all bright sometimes flieth\ Light through the air, behind it leaving\ The weight of the earthly, though for a while\ The cold earth closely within herself kept it\ Held and hidden by the might of the Holy,\ By the King's commandment. Each plant cometh,\ Brought forth by earth every year,\ And the heat of summer for the sons of men.\ Every year yieldeth and drieth\ O'er land's wide surface seed and leaflet.\ Harvest offereth to hands of mortals\ Store of ripeness; then rain and hailstorm\ And snow too cometh, soaking the ground\ In time of winter, when fierce is weather.\ For earth receiveth every seed-grain,\ And maketh it swell every season,\ And in the spring-time leaves are sprouting.\ But the kind Master for mankind's children,\ To all that groweth giveth nurture,\ To fruits in the world; bringeth them forth\ When He chooseth, Chief of heaven,\ And them discovereth to the dwellers on earth,\ And anon removeth, mankind's Saviour.\ The Highest Good on His high-seat\ Sole King sitteth, and this world spacious\ Doth His service; all His subjects\ Thence He ruleth with His reins of leading.\ No marvel is this; He is God of multitudes,\ King and Lord of all that liveth,\ Fount and First Cause of all His creatures,\ Maker and Worker of this our world,\ Law and Wisdom for the livers therein.\ All His creatures upon His errands\ Hence He sendeth and hither biddeth.\ Had He not stablish'd each so steady,\ All His creatures, every one of them,\ Breaking away had burst asunder,\ In deadly hate had come to naught;\ Yea, like foes they had fallen apart,\ Though one love only all things created\ In heaven and earth have in common,\ That such a Leader they serve together,\ All of them fain that the Father ruleth.\ No need for wonder, for no one thing\ Could ever hope to hold its life\ Unless all were serving their common Source,\ With all their might, their glorious Master.

In the East Omerus among the Greeks\ Was in that country in songs most cunning,\ Of Firgilius also
friend and teacher,\ Of that famed maker, best of masters.\ Now this Omerus often and often\ On the
sun's splendour spent high praises,\ His noble powers showed to the people\ In glee and story, again
and again.\ Yet the sun cannot beam, for all his brightness,\ O'er all creation nor anywhere near it;\ And
even those creatures on which he can shine\ He cannot illumine with equal light\ Inside and out. But the
Almighty\ Ruler and Worker of the world's creatures\ His own work overlooketh;\ All creatures alike
He looketh over.\ He is the true Sun, and rightly so;\ Such in His honour we may sing truly.

XXXI: Boethius. V. Metr. 5

Thou may'st know, if thou wilt notice,\ That many creatures of various kinds\ Fare over earth with unlike
motions,\ With gait and colour quite diverse,\ And aspects also of endless kinds,\ Queer and common.
Some creep and crawl\ With all their body bound to the ground;\ No wings them help; on feet they walk
not,\ Nor pace the earth, as was them appointed.\ Some on two feet fare o'er the ground,\ Some are
four-footed; some in flight\ Wing 'neath the clouds. Yet each creature\ Is drooping earthward, stooping
downward,\ On the ground looking, longing for earth,\ Some need-driven, some through greed.\ Man
only goeth of all God's creatures\ With gait upright, gazing upwards.\ This is a token that he shall turn\
His trust and his mind more up than down,\ To the heavens above, lest he bend his thoughts\ Like beasts
earthward. It is not meet\ That the mind of a mortal should remain below\ While his face he holdeth up
to heaven.

Source: Translated by Walter John Sedgefield, in King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius: Done into Modern English, with
an Introduction (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900).

Previously prepared for an earlier version of The Stromata. Accessed July 2026.

Translation: Boethius died 524; the Old English adaptation is attributed to Alfred the Great (d. 899) and his circle. Sedgefield's modern
English translation was published 1900 (Oxford: Clarendon Press) - though Sedgefield himself died 1945 (after the project's usual
translator-death heuristic), the translation is unambiguously public domain in the US on publication-date grounds (published well before
1929). Verified via verbatim phrase match against the Wikisource text of this edition.

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/consolation-of-philosophy-alfred-lays>