

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

BOOK I.

CHAPTERS I-VI.

First comes the Historical Introduction (chap. i). While Boethius is lying in the dungeon lamenting his hard lot and vanished happiness, there appears to him divine PHILOSOPHY, the spirit of WISDOM, who raises him up and bids him look on her. He then recognizes in her his old teacher whom he had known in his happier days. She proceeds to show him that his misfortune arises from his neglect of her precepts, and his trust in the promises of fickle Fortune; and she undertakes to cure him of his melancholy.

BOOK II.

CHAPTERS VII-XXI.

Philosophy tells Boethius that what he once accounted happiness was not really such; that he is not the first to suffer a reverse of fortune; that worldly joys are deceitful. Fortune changes, and men must also change with her. Boethius owes his misfortune to his desire for worldly happiness. In reply, Boethius confesses his wrong and is in despair. Philosophy then points out that he is not really unhappy, for his sorrows will pass away as his riches have done. He has many blessings left—his noble father-in-law Symmachus, his wife, and his two sons. Let him seek happiness within himself, not outside; for he does wrong to set his heart on inferior creatures, over which he has no right of possession. God wishes man to rule all other creatures, but man makes himself their slave. Riches bring enemies; and power, often coming to very bad men, is not in its nature good

good. As for fame, even if it be worldwide it has but a narrow range, this earth being a mere speck in the universe. When Fortune turns her back on a man she does him a real service, in enabling him to find the way to goodness.

BOOK III.

CHAPTERS XXII-XXXV.

Boethius admits that he is greatly comforted by the words of Philosophy, but he would like to hear more of her healing doctrine. In what does true happiness consist? Thereupon Philosophy discusses the nature of the Supreme Good, and shows how all men, even the worst, long to reach it. This Good does not lie in power, nor in wealth, nor in fame, nor in high birth, nor in carnal pleasure; no, it lies in God; and therefore True Happiness lies in Him. Men can participate in happiness, and thereby attain to divinity. Evil has no existence, for God, who can do all things, cannot do evil.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTERS XXXVI-XL.

Boethius says he cannot quite cease to be unhappy until he knows why God suffers evil to exist, or why, suffering it, He does not punish evil-doers, instead of allowing them to flourish, while wisdom and other virtues go dishonoured. Philosophy replies that Boethius is mistaken, for the wicked have no real power, and never reach the Supreme Good, and moreover are punished. Punishment is a real benefit to the wrong-doer. Then the discussion leads to the subject of Fate and Providence. Providence is the supreme Reason that plans and orders all things; Fate is the instrument which links them together, and sets them in motion, under Providence.

BOOK V.

CHAPTERS XL TO END.

Philosophy discusses the coexistence of divine foreknowledge and man's free-will; and finally discourses on the nature of God.