BOETHIUS AND MORE

A PARALLELISM

DURING the Middle Ages no two works were more popular than the *City of God* and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. To the former Charlemagne listened at meals: 'Inter caenandum aut aliquod acroama aut lectorum audiebat . . . . Delectabatur et libris Sancti Augustini praecipueque his qui De Civitate Dei praetitulati sunt.' A generation later Alfred in England translated the *Consolation*, ranking it together with the *Regula Pastoralis* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* as a fitting instrument for the education of his people. Already Boethius had coloured the great Anglo-Saxon secular epic *Beowulf* with the influence of his thought, just **as** in later years Chaucer interpreted Boccaccio with the insight of the *Consolation*, tinting the Italian's realism with the compassion that springs from that bond uniting God and man, *alternus amor*. To Boethius, introducing Aristotle to Western Europe, scholasticism is as much indebted as to the Arab commentators. For if Averroes and Avicenna led Albert the Great and Aquinas to Aristotelian nietaphysics it was Boethius who had provided the basis of scientific thought in translating into Latin the Organon and annotating in the style of Themistius the Isagoge of Porphyry. Through Cassiodorus again he established the *ratio studiorum*, the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, which remained substantially unchanged until the seventeenth century. To Dante he is the eighth light, of the company of St. Thomas and Richard of St. Victor, 'si trovan molte gioie care e belle tanto che non si posson trar del regno!' Boethius has fallen into an obscurity that on all counts is undeserved. There have been half a dozen sketchy prefatory notices to translations or commentaries on his works, but there is no full sized and creditable life of the Poet-Philosopher in modern English.

In these days of expectancy, when the cause of More and Fisher is being investigated for canonization, Boethius should have a special interest for us, since there is a pecu-

liar analogy between his life and that of our great English lay hero. Both were born in the time of the 'breaking of the nations': Boethius during the last feeble phase of the Roman Empire already invaded by barbarians and ruled by a Goth who endeavoured to hold, to a certain extent successfully, an organization built up by Latin absolutism but decayed and nerveless. Catholic and Arian divided the inheritance of the amphitheatre while the official Christianity of East and West was but skin-deep. The epigrams of Martial were still woven into the rituals of the table. Paul was remarkable only as a philosopher preaching an unknown God, while Cybele yet had her worship and men still listened to Juno in her mystery. The death agony of a giant is unconscionably long and while Rome declined there was an age of transition filled with queer anomalies. Spirit and substance were in the melting pot. Antinous was recognized in Sebastian. In the fields the Rogation procession had not as yet been introduced to trample from the hearts of countrymen the cult of Ceres.

More saw the end of the fifteenth and the first thirty years of the sixteenth century. Again it was the age of transition proceeding from the decay of European internationalism, of medieval culture, of philosophic certitude. Once more the inheritance of the amphitheatre, this time strengthened by the traditions of a thousand years, was rent. To Arius had suceeded Luther, to Mani would succeed Calvin. He saw the strangest of eccentricities, a schismatic burning heretics at the stake. So much for the background.

Both Boethius and More were leaders of a cultural revival. The former gathered the fragments of Latin and Greek civilization that had been unminded during the previous fifty years of the Gothic invasion. Theodoric the Goth was a strange but efficient Maecenas. Dazzled by the memorials of Augustan Rome and jealous of Constantinople, he was eager for the help of Cassiodorus, Boethius, and Symmachus to make his court at Ravenna a nucleus of a revived Roman world. The work of More, Colet, Hutten, and Erasmus for humanism in Northern Europe is too well

known to discuss here, but the literary analogy between More and Boethius is made more cogent by the fact that alongside their wide learning, they both attained influential administrative positions. Boethius from his study of Greek and Latin authors and the fathers. More from his retirement at Chelsea, were each urged into an unwelcomed publicity, incidentally proving that the Dominican ideal can be translated successfully into the sphere of statecraft. Boethius as Consul and Senator and lastly as *Magister Officiorum,* a post that entailed constant attendance on the king's person, was the highest official in the world of Rome and Ravenna. More as a Judge and Chancellor of England honoured the supreme judicial office of his country. Both served, and their friendship was cultivated by, similar tyrants. The reign of Theodoric had opened with the ambuscade and murder of Odovacar in 489, and although the usurper administered the provinces with firm and prudent government and, as Gibbon points out, restored Italy to her pristine supremacy, yet the savage heart was untamed. More in answering Roper might have been referring to Theodoric:

> 'I thank our Lord God, I find his grace my verie good lord indeed; and I believe he doth as singularly favour me as anie subject within this realme; howbeit, sonne Rooper, I may tell you I have no cause to be proud therefore: for if my head would winne him a castle in France, it should not faile to go off.'

Before we reach the crowning features of the parallelism, the controversy on Boethius and the Faith must be judged. In 1700 Gottfried Arnold deprived Boethius of the authorship of the tractates on theological subjects, including the famous *de Trinitate* quoted so often by Abelard, and basing his argument on the naturalist character of the *Consolation* and the fact that in its five books not one reference is made to Christ or Christianity, he held that Boethius was a pagan. His lead was quickly followed by a score of German and French writers and was weakly combatted by such sickly effusions as the *Boëce* of Gervase. By the middle of the nineteenth century the Christianity of Boethius was

regarded with complete scepticism, but to-day the tractates are once more assigned to him and Arnold's theory is exploded.

The arguments in favour of the Christian Boethius may be thus reviewed.

The whole sanction of tradition is behind it. Paul the Deacon, a contemporary of Alcuin, speaks of Boethius as *Vir Catholicus;* the schools of Laon use the books *Contra Nestorium et Eutychen* and the *Quomodo Substantiae;* St. Bernard defends the orthodoxy of the treatise *Utrum Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus de Divinitate substantiliter praedicentur* against the commentary of Gilbert de la Porrée; Odo of Vienne states that Boethius was executed *pro Catholica pietate;* Leo XIII issued in the *Acta S. Sedis* in 1888 a defence not only of Boethius's Christianity but also of his claim to martyrdom in favour of the diocese of Pavia. The claims of tradition are to-day rehabilitated thanks to recent Biblical controversy, where nineteenth century theories, once so dogmatically held, are now discredited. The substantial argument against the Christianity of Boethius based on the naturalism of the *Consolation* is countered by the sentence in the fourth book 'Sed quoniam te ad intelligendum promptissimum esse conspicio, crebris coacervabo rationes.' Surely this expresses the assurance that the *validiora remedia* promised in the first book will soon be put before the reader. Two last points clinch the argument. Theodosius a hundred years earlier had laid down stringent regulations against the *official* recognition of paganism, among these the statute that the profession of Christianity was to be an indispensable qualification for candidates for office. Theodoric, though not orthodox, would nevertheless adhere to this code and could not have bestowed the high function of *magister officiorum* on a pagan without imperilling his own position. Lastly the tenth century Carlsruhe MS. of the *Institutiones* of Cassiodiorus found by Holder in 1877, is the most distinguished of the external evidence in favour of the Christianity of Boethius. In it Cassiodorus writing about **520** speaks of

the works of Symmachus and Boethius, and of the latter includes the tractates *De Trinitate, Contra Nestorium* and *quaedam capita dogmatica.*

We must now study the parallelism found in the trial and execution of each.

The trials were conspicuous: in the case of More all Europe held its breath: with Boethius it was a matter of moment to both East and West. Whatever discussion may be raised about the supposed implication of the Senate in a plot against the Amal, the participation of Boethius in it must be disregarded. Like Cyrano, he could not live and write conspicuously, be honoured by all, and die sullied. Boethius was both a political and religious victim. His death was the example to defy the orthodoxy of Justin in Byzantium, his execution the sign that in Italy at least there was to be no divorce between Authority and King. John the Pope shared in the martyrdom as did Symmachus, a like spirit. More, confronted by the ghastly perjury of the Solicitor General—'In truth, Mr. Rich, I am more sorry for your perjury than for my peril'—is paralleled again with Boethius confronted by the forgeries of Cyprian the Referendary: 'Was it likely that I whom thou wast forming to the likeness of God should seek the assistance of the foulest and vilest spirits? Besides my unsullied name and hearth, the honoured friends who frequented it. my wife's father (Symmachus), a man without reproach and winning esteem by deed'as well as name, are my champions against all suspicion of such a charge.' Both were deserted by their peers. Boethius, whose family, the Anicii, had served Ronie for six hundred years, was sacrificed by an effete Senate; More, badgered by servile ecclesiastics and an unsympathetic wife, was forced to remind his successor and judge of the procedure of condemnation. so eager was Cromwell *to* do Henry's bidding. Both suffered the constraint of imprisonment. More was in the Tower €or four months, in which, partly with the help of charcoal, he wrote the *Dialogue of Comfort,* a revelation of deep spiritual feeling. Boethius, condemned at Verona, remained two

years in confinement at Pavia and during that harsh captivity conceived and partly accomplished a tremendous scheme of philosophy of which the five books of the *Consolation* as we have them to-day are but a preamble, manifesting truth and fulfilling the office of the wise man. *Necesse est prius ostendere quis modus possibilis sit ad veritatem propositam manifestandam.*

Each sealed in his blood his life-long testimony to Truth. The prospect of death could not quench the rich humour common to both, for in prison and probably already tortured by the knotted rope, Boethius composed a *Carmen Buccolicum,* while More's last words on the scaffold have become immortal: 'Wait till I put aside my beard, for that never committed treason.' They both 'saw life steadily and saw it whole,' and could afford to fool on the threshold of a certain heaven. But in their common sanctity they are most akin, and in that character nearest us: for the communion of Saints is a constructive force breaking down barriers of time and place and shaping all things to a common end. Centuries, whether sixth or sixteenth, are but relative limits in the light of that eternity which More pictured as a home of merriment and Boethius defined as *interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio.*

GEORGE BANCROFT.