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Helen M. Barrett

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BOETHIUS
SOME ASPECTS OF HIS TIMES
AND WORK

by
HELEN M. BARRETT, M.A.

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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PREFACE

THIS study has been written as an attempt to rescue Boethius from being generally forgotten. It seems to me that because of the circumstances of his life and death he is too interesting and because of the influence of what he wrote too significant to be known only by the few.

Boethius lived in troubled and dangerous days when Graeco-Roman civilization was crumbling to pieces. At a time when his country was occupied by barbarian conquerors he worked steadily to the end of his life at the great task he had laid upon himself, that of making the best of Greek thought intelligible to his Roman fellow-countrymen. While acting as Minister to an illiterate King he caused (as a contemporary bishop remarked) “the torch of ancient learning to shine with doubled fire”. He was, as I believe, unjustly condemned, and between condemnation and execution he wrote a book whose appeal reached far beyond the ranks of the learned and which became one of the most popular books of the Middle Ages. Among the reasons for its popularity was the gallant attempt its author makes to reconcile faith in the righteous government of the Universe with the manifest existence in the world of triumphant wickedness side by side with oppressed innocence and goodness.

In writing about Boethius and his work I have had in mind the general reader who is not equipped with any special knowledge of the Classics or of Philosophy; I have therefore given translations of all passages quoted from

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Greek and Latin authors. Though I am aware that footnotes are a cause of irritation to some readers, I have employed them for the double purpose of acknowledging my own indebtedness where it is due and of indicating the sources of fuller information.

But in addition to the references I make in the course of the book, I wish to express here my special sense of obligation to two writers, Dr H. F. Stewart and Dr E. K. Rand; to Dr Stewart for his valuable *Boethius, An Essay* (1891), a book now out of print, to Dr Rand for the chapter he devotes to Boethius in his *Founders of the Middle Ages* and for his article "On the Composition of Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*" in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. xv, and to Dr Stewart and Dr Rand jointly for giving in that volume of the Loeb Classical Library Series for which they are responsible the text and translation of Boethius's theological writings. This is the only English translation so far as I know of these tractates. My indebtedness to these two writers is great in spite of the fact that on a number of points I have reached conclusions that are different from theirs.

I am very grateful to Prof. A. E. Taylor, Prof. E. R. Dodds and Miss Dorothy Emmet for their kindness in reading my MS. and in making valuable suggestions, Prof. Taylor on the subject of Aristotle's *Protrepticus* as well as on other questions, and Prof. Dodds with regard to the influence of Neoplatonism on the *Consolation of Philosophy*. It will be recognized that those who have been kind enough to read my MS. are not thereby committed to agreement in all respects with my presentation of Boethius.

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I wish to express warmest gratitude to the Rev. J. M. Lloyd Thomas for the encouragement he has given me from the beginning of the book, for reading the MS. and for the helpful suggestions he has made.

I should like to give my best thanks also to my friend Miss M. B. King for the valuable help she has given me in preparing the MS. for the press and to Dr Bonser, Librarian of the University of Birmingham, together with the Library Staff, for the readiness and courtesy with which the resources of the Library were placed at my service.

And lastly, I have pleasure in thanking the publishers who have given me permission to make quotations from works published by them, as indicated below.

Messrs Constable, a poem by Miss Helen Waddell from *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics*; Messrs Routledge and Sons, some passages from H. R. James's translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy* in the New Universal Library; the Princeton University Press and the Oxford University Press, a passage from Paul Elmer More's *Platonism*; the Editors of the Loeb Classical Library, some passages from Boethius's theological tracts; Sir Ernest Debenham, some passages from Stephen MacKenna's translation of Plotinus; Messrs Methuen, a passage from Prof. A. E. Taylor's *Plato: The Man and His Work*; the Oxford University Press, a passage from T. Hodgkin's *Italy and Her Invaders*.

H. M. BARRETT.

Birmingham,
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