

find many in the world. And I will tell you about another Roman woman as further illustration of this argument."

42. SHE SPEAKS OF SEMPRONIA THE ROMAN.

I.42.1 "This Sempronia from Rome was a woman of great beauty. But although the beauty of her body and face surpassed that of practically all other women in her time, even more so did the excellence and subtlety of her mind surpass and exceed those of all others. Her intellect was so remarkable that there was nothing too subtle in word or in deed which she could not recall completely and flawlessly. She could do whatever she wanted because of her body's skill and could repeat everything she had heard, no matter how long a story it was! She knew not only Latin but also Greek perfectly, and she wrote Greek so ingeniously that it was an admirable feat.

I.42.2 "She was also so beautiful, comely, and graceful in speech, in eloquence, and in conduct that she could make everyone do what she wanted. For if she wished to have people play, there was no one too sad whom she could not move to mirth and joy, or if she wanted, to anger or tears or sadness. Likewise, she could make any man act boldly or forcefully or perform any possible task. She could make all those who heard her speak follow her, if she wished. Moreover, the way she spoke and held her body was so full of gentleness and sweetness that no one could look at her or listen to her enough. She sang so melodiously and played all string instruments so skillfully that she won every contest. In short, she was extremely clever and ingenious at doing all those things which the human mind can comprehend."

43. CHRISTINE ASKS REASON WHERE PRUDENCE IS FOUND IN THE NATURAL SENSIBILITY OF WOMEN; AND REASON'S ANSWER TO HER.

I.43.1 Then I, Christine, said to her, "My lady, I can truly and clearly see that God—may He be praised for it—has granted that the mind of an intelligent woman can

conceive, know, and retain all perceptible things. Even though there are so many people who have such subtle minds that they understand and learn everything which they are shown and who are so ingenious and quick to conceptualize everything that every field of learning is open to them, with the result that they have acquired extraordinary knowledge through devotion to study, I am baffled when eminent scholars—including some of the most famous and learned—exhibit so little prudence in their morals and conduct in the world. Certainly scholarship teaches and provides an introduction to morals. If you please, my lady, I would gladly learn from you whether a woman's mind (which, as it seems to me from your proofs as well as from what I myself see, is quite understanding and retentive in subtle questions of scholarship and other subjects) is equally prompt and clever in those matters which prudence teaches, that is, whether women can reflect on what is best to do and what is better to be avoided, and whether they remember past events and become learned from the examples they have seen, and, as a result, are wise in managing current affairs, and whether they have foresight into the future. Prudence, it seems to me, teaches those lessons."

"You speak correctly, my daughter," she replied, "but this prudence of which you speak is bestowed by Nature upon men and women, and some possess more, others less. But Nature does not impart knowledge of everything, as much as it simultaneously perfects in those who are naturally prudent, for you realize that two forces together are stronger and more resistant than one force alone. For this reason I say that the person who, from Nature, possesses prudence (which is called 'natural sense'), as well as acquired knowledge along with this prudence, deserves special praise for remarkable excellence. Yet just as you yourself have said, some who possess the one do not possess the other, for the one is the gift of God thanks to the influence of Nature, and the other is acquired through long study, though both are

good. But some people prefer natural sense without acquired knowledge rather than a great deal of acquired knowledge with little natural sense. All the same, many opinions can be based upon this proposition, from which many questions can arise. For one could say that one achieves more good by choosing what is more useful for the profit and the utility of the general public. Therefore, one person's knowing the different fields of learning is more profitable for everyone than all the natural sense which he might possess which he could demonstrate to all: for this natural sense can only last as long as the lifetime of the person who has it, and when he dies, his sense dies with him. Acquired learning, on the other hand, lasts forever for those who have it, because of their fame, and it is useful for many people insofar as it can be taught to others and recorded in books for the sake of future generations. In this way their learning does not die with them, and therefore I can show you, using the example of Aristotle and others through whom learning has been transmitted to the world, that their acquired knowledge was more useful to the world than all the prudence without acquired knowledge possessed by all men, past and present, although thanks to the prudence of many, several kingdoms and empires have been well-governed and directed. All of these things are transitory, however, and disappear with time, while learning endures forever.

- I.43.2      "Nevertheless, I will leave these questions unanswered and for others to solve, for they do not pertain to the problem of building our City, and I will come back to the question you raised, that is, whether women possess natural prudence. Of course they do. You know this already from what I have said to you before, just as, in general, you can see from women's conduct in those duties assigned to them to perform. But be careful if you find this good, for you will see that all women, or the vast majority, are so very attentive, careful, and diligent in governing their households and in providing everything

for them, according to their capacities, that sometimes some of their negligent husbands are annoyed; they think their wives are pushing and pressuring them too much to do what they are supposed to and they say their wives want to run everything and be smarter than they are. In this way, what many women tell their husbands with good intentions turns out to their disadvantage. The proverbs of Solomon discuss such prudent women and what follows gives you the gist of this book for the purposes of our argument here."

#### 44. THE EPISTLE OF SOLOMON, OR THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

"Who can find a virtuous, a prudent woman? Her husband will never lack anything. She is renowned throughout the whole land, and her husband is proud of her because she always gives him every good and rich thing. She seeks out and buys woolens, which should be understood as work to occupy her household in profitable activity, and she fits out her household and lends a hand to the tasks. She is like the merchant's ship which brings all kinds of goods and which supplies bread. And there is plenty of meat, even for her servants. She considers the value of a manor before buying it, and thanks to her own common sense, she has planted the vineyard which provides for her household. She girds her loins with the strength of her constant solicitude, and her arms are hardened in continual good works. No matter how dark it is, the light from her labor will never go out. She occupies herself even with difficult tasks and does not despise feminine chores but applies herself to them. She stretches out her hand to the poor and needy to help them. Because of her foresight, her house is protected against the cold and snow, and those over whom she rules are clothed in double robes. She makes herself clothes from silk and purple, with honor and fame, and her husband is honored when he sits among the leaders of the world's elders. She makes fabrics and fine linens, which

I.44.1

she sells, and her own clothes are strength and honor, and for this reason, her joy shall be perpetual. Her mouth always speaks words of wisdom and the law of kindness is on her tongue. She takes thought for the provisions of her household everywhere throughout her house, nor does she ever eat the bread of idleness. The behavior of her children shows that she is their mother and their works preach blessedness. The fair adornment of her husband brings her praise. She is the mistress of her daughters in all things, even though they are grown. She despises false glory and vain beauty. Such a woman fears our Lord, she shall be commended, and He will reward her according to her works which praise her everywhere.'"

45. HERE SHE SPEAKS OF GAIA CIRILLA.

- I.45.1 "Regarding what the Epistle of Solomon says about the prudent woman, one might well recall the noble queen Gaia Cirilla. This lady was either from Rome or Tuscany and was married to the king of the Romans named Tarquin. She showed the greatest prudence in governing and was very virtuous, given her sensibility, loyalty, and goodness. She reputedly surpassed all women in her skill at being an excellent housewife with noteworthy foresight. Although she was the queen and could well avoid working with her hands, she was always so inclined to profit from everything and never to be idle that she was always working at some task and, likewise, had her ladies and maidens who attended her, at work. This noble lady was famed, honored, esteemed, and renowned throughout the world for these actions. Because of her fame and in her memory, the Romans, who subsequently became a far greater power than they were in her time, established and maintained the custom at their daughters' marriages of having the bride answer 'Gaia' when she was asked her name upon entering the groom's house for the first time. This indicated her desire to imitate this lady in works and deeds as far as she could."

46. HERE REASON SPEAKS OF THE PRUDENCE AND  
ATTENTIVENESS OF QUEEN DIDO.

“Just as you yourself said before, prudence means I.46.1  
taking pains to be able to finish those tasks which one  
wishes to undertake. I will give more examples of other  
powerful ladies to show you that women are attentive in  
this matter, even in questions of great importance, and  
the first example is Dido, originally called Elissa. In her  
works she clearly demonstrated her prudence and erudi-  
tion, just as I will tell. She founded and built a city called  
Carthage, in the land of Africa, where she was lady and  
queen. The way in which she founded her city and  
acquired and took possession of her land demonstrated  
her exceptional constancy, nobility, and strength, and  
without these graces true prudence is impossible. This  
lady was descended from the Phoenicians, who came  
from the hinterlands of Egypt to the land of Syria where  
they founded and built several noble cities and towns.  
Among these people was a king named Agenor, of whom  
Dido’s father, who was named Belus, was a direct  
descendant, and he was the king of Phoenicia and con-  
quered the kingdom of Cyprus. This king had only one  
son, named Pygmalion, along with this maiden Dido,  
and no other children. As he lay dying, he charged his  
barons to bear love and loyalty to his two children. He  
even made them promise to do so. After the king had  
died, they crowned Pygmalion, his son, and married  
Elissa, who was quite beautiful, to a duke who was the  
most powerful man in the country after the king, whose  
name was Acerbas Sychaeon or Sychaeus. And this  
Sychaeus was a high priest in the temple of Hercules,  
according to their law, and was fantastically rich. Sy-  
chaeus and Elissa loved each other very much, and they  
led a good life. But King Pygmalion was evil, cruel,  
and extraordinarily greedy: he could not have enough  
without coveting even more. Elissa, his sister, well  
acquainted with his greed and realizing that her husband  
had great wealth and that his wealth was quite famous,

counseled and advised her husband to protect himself against the king and to hide his treasure in a secret place so that the king could not take it away from him. Sychaeus believed this advice but neglected to protect his person against the king's ambushes, as she had advised him. One day this king had him killed in order to have his great treasures. Elissa was so grieved at this death that she too nearly died, and for a long time she wept and moaned, piteously lamenting her beloved and her lord while cursing her cruel brother who had had him put to death. But this criminal king, who felt robbed of his expectations because he found little or nothing of Sychaeus' wealth, bore great malice toward his sister, for he thought that she had hidden her husband's treasures. Realizing that her life was in great danger, Elissa's own prudence prompted her to leave her homeland and to go into exile. Having considered this question, she courageously reflected on what she should do and armed herself with strength and constancy to put her intended undertaking into effect. This lady knew very well that the king was not at all loved by the barons nor by the people because of the atrocities and crimes he had perpetrated. Therefore, she took with her several princes and citizens, as well as some common people, and after she had sworn them to secrecy, she began to eloquently explain her plans, as long as they agreed to go with her and swear to her that they would be good and faithful subjects. This lady secretly had her ship readied as quickly as possible and left at night with all her great treasures, accompanied by many people, and she ordered her sailors to hurry to depart. This lady was even more clever, for she knew very well that her brother would have her followed as soon as he knew of her departure, and for this reason she had large trunks, coffers, and bundles secretly filled with heavy, worthless objects, as though these were her treasure, so that by turning these trunks and bundles over to her brother's envoys, they would let her go and not impede her voyage. And so it happened: for they had not

yet traveled very far when a great number of the king's henchmen came rushing in pursuit to stop her. But the lady spoke well and wisely to them and said she was going on a pilgrimage of her own, unless they cared to prevent her. Seeing that this excuse was worthless, she declared that she knew well that her brother the king had no use for her, but that, in fact, if he wanted to have her treasure, she would willingly send it back to him. The king's henchmen, knowing well that he was aiming at nothing else but this, said that she should give the treasure to them immediately, for with this they would try to satisfy the king and reconcile him to her. The lady, therefore, with a sad face as though it pained her, had all of these trunks and chests delivered to them and loaded on their ships. And they left immediately, thinking that they had acted well and were bringing the king good news. The queen, without even slightly seeming to do so, turned her thoughts to her voyage as quickly as she could. They kept on traveling, by day and by night, until they arrived at the island of Cyprus. There they rested a little. Then, after offering sacrifices to the gods, she returned to her ship and brought along with her the priest of Jupiter and his household. This same priest had prophesied that a lady from the lands of Phoenicia would come, on whose behalf he would leave his country in order to accompany her. So, leaving the land of Crete behind them, they proceeded, with Sicily to their right, sailing along the coast of Massylia, until they arrived in Africa, where they landed. The people in that country immediately came to look at the ship and its passengers. After they saw the lady and realized that her followers were men of peace, they brought them many provisions. And the lady spoke to them graciously and told them that, because of the good she had heard recounted about this country, they had come to live there, provided that the natives were agreed, who thereupon indicated their willingness. Pretending that she did not wish to make a very large settlement on foreign land, the lady asked them



to sell her only as much land on the beach which a cowhide would enclose for building a lodging there for herself and her people. This request was granted to her, and, once the conditions of the sale were drawn up and sworn between them, the lady then demonstrated her cleverness and prudence: she took out a cowhide and cut it into the thinnest possible strips and then connected them together in a kind of belt, which she spread out on the ground around the port and which enclosed a marvelously large piece of land. The sellers were very surprised at this and amazed by the ruse and cleverness of this woman, but, nevertheless, they had to keep their part of the bargain.

I.46.2 "In such a manner this lady acquired land in Africa, and within this enclosure a horse's head was found. According to their divinations, they interpreted this horse's head, along with the flight and cry of birds, to mean that a warrior people, exceptionally valorous at arms, would inhabit the city to be founded there. This lady then summoned workers from everywhere and unpacked her treasure. She had a marvelously beautiful, large, and strong city constructed, which she named Carthage; she called the tower and citadel 'Byrsa,' which means 'cowhide.'

I.46.3 "And just as she was beginning to construct her city, she received news that her brother was threatening her and all those who had accompanied her because she had mocked him and duped him of the treasure. But she told all his envoys that the treasure had been perfectly intact when she had given it up to be taken to her brother, and that it could be that those who had received it had stolen it and replaced it with counterfeits, or that, by chance, because of the sin committed by the king in having her husband murdered, the gods had not wanted him to enjoy her husband's treasure and so had transmuted it. As far as his threat was concerned, she thought that with the help of the gods she could defend herself well against her brother. She summoned all those whom she had led and told them that she did not wish them to stay with her

unwillingly or reluctantly nor to endure the slightest trouble on her account. For these reasons, if they wished to return, all or any of them, she would compensate them for their labor and send them away. And they all responded unanimously that they would live and die with her, without leaving her for a single day of their lives. These messengers left, and the lady hurried to complete the city as fast as possible. After it was finished, she instituted statutes and ordinances so that the people would live according to the rule of law and justice. So remarkably and prudently did she govern that her reputation spread to all lands. She was spoken of only in terms of her outstanding strength, courage, and her bold undertaking. Because of her prudent government, they changed her name and called her Dido, which is the equivalent of saying *virago* in Latin, which means 'the woman who has the strength and force of a man.' Thus she lived for a long time in glory and would have lived so the rest of her life if Fortune had not been unfavorable to her, but Fortune, often envious of the prosperous, mixed too harsh a brew for her in the end, just as I will tell you afterward, at the right time and place."

47. HERE SHE SPEAKS OF OPS, QUEEN OF CRETE.

"Ops, or Opis, who was called both goddess and mother of the gods, was considered in the most ancient times to be prudent because, according to what the ancient historians relate, she knew how to conduct herself most prudently and steadfastly among the prosperities and adversities which befell her during her lifetime. This lady was the daughter of Uranus, an extremely powerful man in Greece, and of his wife, Vesta. The world was still quite rough and ignorant. At this time she had Saturn, the king of Crete, as her husband, who was also her brother. Now, this king of Crete dreamt that his wife would bear a son who would kill him, so that, to escape this fate, he ordered that all of the queen's male offspring be killed. Either with her wits or through ruse, she suc- I.47.1

ceeded in saving her three sons, Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto, from death, and for her prudence was greatly honored and praised. During her lifetime she acquired such a great reputation through the knowledge and authority of her children that foolish people called her a goddess and mother of the gods, for her sons were reputed gods even during their lifetimes, because they surpassed other men, who were all bestial, in their learnedness. Therefore, temples and sacrifices to this lady were ordered. Like fools they maintained this belief for a long time, and even at the height of Rome's prosperity, this folly endured and she was held in the highest esteem to be a goddess."

48. CONCERNING LAVINIA, DAUGHTER OF KING LATINUS.

- I.48.1 "Lavinia, queen of the Laurentines, also enjoyed a reputation for prudence. This noble lady was also descended from this king of Crete, Saturn, of whom we have spoken, and was the daughter of King Latinus and afterward married to Aeneas. Before her marriage, Turnus, king of the Rutulians, desired to have her. However, her father had heard in an omen from the gods that she must be given to a duke of Troy and kept postponing her marriage, even though his wife, the queen, pressured him a great deal. After Aeneas had arrived in Italy, he sought permission from King Latinus to land in his country, and not only did Latinus grant him permission but also immediately gave him his daughter Lavinia in marriage. For this reason Turnus waged war against Aeneas, in which he did much killing and was himself killed. Aeneas was victorious and married Lavinia, who later bore his son, with whom she was pregnant when Aeneas died. When her time came to give birth, fearing that Ascanius, Aeneas' son by another woman, would have the child she was about to bear put to death in his desire to rule, she fled to the woods, and she named the child Julius Silvius. This lady did not wish to marry ever again, and during her widowhood she acted most pru-

dently and ruled the kingdom with her considerable intelligence. She knew how to cherish her stepson so that he harbored no evil against her nor against his half-brother; therefore, after building the city of Alba, he went there to live. Lavinia governed very wisely with her son until he was grown. From this child descended Romulus and Remus who founded Rome, as well as the great Roman princes who came later. What more do you want me to tell you, my dear daughter? It seems to me that I have brought sufficient proof of my intention, which was to show you, through reasoning and example, that God has never held, nor now holds, the feminine sex—nor that of men—in reproach, just as you realize, and just as has become evident and will appear even more so in the depositions of my two sisters who are here. For it seems to me that, for now, the walls I have built for you to enclose the City of Ladies must suffice, and they are all finished and plastered. Let my other sisters come forward, and with their aid and counsel may you complete the remainder of the edifice!”

HERE ENDS THE FIRST PART OF THE BOOK OF THE CITY  
OF LADIES.

