117 Hard (*Durum*)

It is said by those experienced that the traveler walks softly but sits hard and rests. Therefore, God wishing us to set out well in this life arranged hard things for us, Psal. [16:4]: “For the sake of the words of your lips, I have kept hard ways,” Wherefore Augustine, *De verbis Domini*,[[1]](#endnote-1) which hard ways are for those laboring, they make soft the same hard ways themselves for those loving. Therefore Jerome, *Epistola* 50,[[2]](#endnote-2) nothing is hard to those loving. Jer. 30[:15]: “For your hardened sins I have done these things to you,” that is, I have permitted you, Jerusalem, to be captured.

¶ The figure for this, Gen. 42[:7], Joseph “spoke somewhat roughly” to his brother until he might see this that they were penitent. Thus, God made it with us, Psal. [59:5]: “You have shown your people hard things.”

¶ A piece of hard cloth cleans a bowl better than a soft one, so hard penance cleanses better than soft delights. Therefore, the disciples said to Christ, John 6[:61]: “This saying is hard, and who can hear it?” The reason of which is because in Ezech. 3[:7], it is said, “All the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and an obstinate heart.” Therefore, it is necessary through hard penance that the hard be corrected by the hard. A man going out into danger, as in war, does not sleep unless armed and reclining rough, but because a salt cellar makes its contrary, Judic. 4[:18-21], sleeping under his coverlet Sisara was killed. We are in continuous peril. Therefore, it is harder for us to be living, a moth is seldom born in a hard cloth, but rather in a soft place, so corruption is seldom born in a man living hard, but in one living softly. In Job 40[:16], it is said concerning the devil, that “he sleeps under the shadow, in the covert of the reed, and in moist places.” Prov. 18[:9]: “He that is loose and slack in his work.” Again, to the lover soft things are said that the blood may be weakened. And marble that iron does not conquer, lead softly engraves. Wherefore, in soft places trees do not grow, except sterile ones such as willows and elms.

¶ Again, according to Aristotle, *De animalibus,* book 7, c. 19,[[3]](#endnote-3) bees that are killed by coating in oil, revive in sharp vinegar, pungent and hard. Whoever thus wastes away under delights revives under penance.

¶ Iron that grows soft, they protect lest it be consumed by rust, they sharpen it and it grows bright.

¶ The figure for these things is treated in Exod. 26[:7], the whole beauty of the tabernacle was covered and protected by hard, coarse woolen blankets of hair cloth against the rains and tempests, so a little hard penance defends one against temptations.

¶ Example, the boar[[4]](#endnote-4) naturally has one hard side and the other soft, but he puts the hard against the attacker, through the soft side he is sometimes wounded to death. The Philosopher says in the book *De vegetiis*,[[5]](#endnote-5) when there is a hard bark and it is rendered sterile, the remedy is to split the root and place a rock in the fissure. So that the bad humor which makes the tree sterile can flow out, which, on account of the hardness of the bark, is held inside. So, the hard heart is split through contrition and Christ as a rock is placed in the fissure, and the bad humor flows out and the tree is made fruitful.

¶ Again, Boethius narrates in the beginning of *De Musica,[[6]](#endnote-6)* that while a certain young man was driven insane for pleasure on account of a certain harlot, because before the flute player was playing softly upon a string instrument in a Phrygian mode, nor could he be contained by any of his friends. Pythagoras had the flute player change the sound to a suitable spondaic melody which rendered a sharp sound and immediately the passion was calmed.

¶ Again, when the earth is pleasant in riverbanks of water, the water runs now to this part now to that part, and it makes a channel, but within hard banks it holds its course. Thus, if the flesh were delicate the heart suffers passions and now tends to one vice and now to another. But the remedy is in such earth to erect stakes or place hard stones. Thus, we must hedge in our flesh with the stake of the cross and the stones of penance, Psal. [118:120]: “Pierce my flesh with your fear.”

1. Augustine, *Sermones de Scripturis* 70.3.3 (PL 78:444): Sed quae dura sunt laborantibus, eisdem ipsis mitescunt amantibus. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Jerome, *Epistola* 22.40 (PL 22:423): Nihil amantibus DURUM EST, nullus difficilis cupienti labor est. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 8.27, 605b20 (Barnes 1:945): All insects die if they be smeared over with oil; and they die all the more rapidly if you smear their head with the oil and lay them out in the sun. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Bartolomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, book 18.6 (1505, p. 422b): In latere dextro habet os durissimum: latum et spissum quod super opponit venabulo persequentem. Nam osse illo pro clypeo ad se protegendum vtilis sentiens sibi iminere bellum acuendo culmos contra arbores eos fricat....

 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Aristotle, On Plants 1.6, 821a12 (Barnes 2:1259): A tree which has hard bark and has become barren, if its root be split and a stone inserted in the cleft will become fruitful again.. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Boethius, *De Musica* 1.1 (PL 63:1170): Nam cum scortum in rivalis domo esset clausum, atque ille furens domum vellet amburere, cumque Pythagoras stellarum cursus (ut ei mos nocturnus erat) inspiceret, ubi intellexit sono Phrygii modi incitatum, multis amicorum admonitionibus a facinore noluisse desistere, mutari modum praecepit atque ita furentis animum adolescentis ad statum mentis pacatissimae temperavit. Quod scilicet Marcus Tullius commemorat in eo libro quem de consiliis suis composuit, aliter quidem, sed hoc modo. Sed ut aliqua similitudine adductus, maximis minima conferam, ut cum vinolenti adolescentes tibiarum etiam cantu (ut fit) instincti, mulieris pudicae fores frangerent, admonuisse tibicinam ut spondeum caneret Pythagoras dicitur; quod cum illa fecisset, tarditate modorum et gravitate canentis, illorum furentem petulantiam consedasse.

It is common knowledge that song has calmed rages many times and that it has often worked wonders on affections of either the body or the spirit. For who does not know that Pythagoras calmed a drunk adolescent of Taormine who had become incited under the influence of the Phrygian mode, and that Pythagoras further restored this boy to his rightful senses, all by means of a spondaic melody?

For one night this frenzied youth was about to set fire to the house of a rival who had locked himself in the house with a whore. Now that same night Pythagoras was out contemplating the course of the heavens, as was his usual custom. When he learned that this youth under the influence of the Phrygian mode would not be stopped from his crime, even by the admonitions of his friends, he ordered that the mode be changed; and thus Pythagoras restored the frenzied mind of the boy to a state of absolute calm. Marcus Tullius tells this story in somewhat different words in his book, De consiliis suis, but the story is as follows:

But I will compare the ridiculous with the sublime, since there is some similarity between them. The story is told that one time certain youths became aroused by the music of the tibia, as can happen, and they were about to break in the door of a chaste woman. Pythagoras then admonished the tibia player to perform a spondaic melody, When this was done, the slowness of the tempo and the dignity of the performer caused the raging fury of these boys to subside.

<https://cmed.ku.edu/private/boethius.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)