

SAINT AUGUSTINE.

A Man Who "Moulded the Mind of Europe for 1,500 Years."—By Very Rev. Dr. Prior, Vice-Rector English College, Rome.

New York Freeman's Journal.

PART II. — AUGUSTINE — MANICHEAN AND SCIENTIFIC.

The keen and vigorous mind, that had played with the philosophy of Aristotle, was not likely to rest content with the fables and sophistry of the Manicheans.

MANICHEISM SHALLOW AND FALSE. Augustine applied himself to a deep study of their voluminous writings, and at once his suspicions were aroused. He discovered that, however much they might prate of the independence of reason, they had given small proof of its power in their own volumes.

AUGUSTINE TAUGHT RHETORIC. During these years from nineteen to twenty-eight, Augustine taught rhetoric, first at Tagaste, then at Carthage. His brilliant talents and the charm of his character drew friends around him, over whom he exercised a fascinating influence.

One of these friends, the nearest and dearest of them all, an old school-fellow and playmate, died during the first years of his teaching at Tagaste. The saint has left a record in his confessions of the inconsolable grief of this bereavement.

HIS LAMENT FOR HIS FRIEND. "At this grief my heart was darkened and whatever I beheld was death. My native country was a torment to me, and my father's house a strange unhappiness, and whatever I had shared with him, wanting him, became a distracting torture; mine eyes sought him everywhere, but he was not granted them. I hated all places, for that they had not him; nor could they now tell me 'He is coming,' as when he was alive and absent.

From that moment he began to retrace his steps through the mazes of error, back to a fuller vision of the truth he had learned in childhood at his mother's knee, and upward still through the realms of theology and splendors of grace to that summit of supernatural enlightenment and holiness that has made him the wonder of every succeeding age.

Lord Bacon has remarked that "the True and the Good differ but as the seal and the print; Truth prints Goodness, and they be the clouds of error which descend in the storms of passions and perturbations." Augustine's mind was darkened by pagan and heretical teaching, and the powers of his soul weakened and distorted by her influence. The two years that elapsed between his arrival at Milan and his conversion were fraught with the severest mental and moral struggle in his efforts to throw off the yoke.

St. Monica was again at his side. She had never wished to leave him; but when he departed from Carthage he had deceived her. He left her at night in the Oratory of St. Cyranus by the Seashore, saying that he was going on board a ship that stood at anchor to bid good-bye to a friend. When the morning dawned the ship had sailed and her son was gone. But now she was with him once more, and in answer to her prayers and tears the light of grace came down into his soul, carrying with it the fierce heat of trial and temptation.

But underneath the smooth current of genial companionship and a successful career, there were troubled waters in his soul. He yearned for the higher wisdom of which as yet he had had but faint and intermittent glimpses; for Manicheism, with its gross images, and its masses of light and darkness, oppressed his spirit, and gave no key to the grave problems of his life. With eager anticipation he learnt, when in his twenty-eighth year, that the great Faustus, the renowned leader of the Manicheans, was coming to Carthage; who it had been promised him, would unravel the entanglements of his mind, and open out the pathway of true wisdom.

"To-morrow," he said to himself, "I shall find it; it will appear manifestly, and I shall grasp it as Faustus the Manichee will come and clear everything."

"When at last he came," he writes in the 5th book of his Confessions, "I found him a man of smooth and pleasing words, prating the same things as the others, but more plausibly. But how was my thirst relieved by draining the empty cup set before me by a more elegant waiter? Those who promised him to me were but poor judges when they took him to be wise because his eloquence delighted them. I, too, was at first delighted, and praised him even more than the others did, but I was uneasy that in the midst of so many auditors I could not propose to him my doubts. When at last I obtained an interview, I found him utterly ignorant of liberal sciences save grammar, and of that he had only a moderate knowledge. * * * When it was clear that he was ignorant on those arts in which I thought he excelled, I began to despair of his opening and solving the difficulties which perplexed me. * * * All my efforts, whereby I am purposed to advance in that sect, upon knowledge of that man, came utterly to an end; not that I detached myself from them altogether, but as one finding nothing better I had settled to be content mean while with what I had, in whatever way, fallen upon, unless by chance something more eligible should dawn upon me. Thus that Faustus, to so many a snare of death, had now, neither willing nor writing it, begun to loosen that wherein I was taken."

"For Thy hands, O my God, in the secret purpose of Thy Providence, did not forsake my soul; and out of my mother's heart's blood, through her tears night and day poured out, was a sacrifice offered for me unto Thee; and Thou didst deal with me in wondrous ways."

He could frame no idea of a spirit, and regarded the Catholic Church with contempt, as the teacher of grotesque and absurd doctrines, from which it was hopeless to look for the attainment of truth. He stumbled out of the chaos of Manicheism into the abyss of universal doubt—taught by the Academicians.

This he considered in his twenty-ninth year as the wisest philosophy he knew. He was at that time in Rome, whither he had removed his School of Rhetoric, to escape the annoyance of the Carthaginian rowdies.

In his thirtieth year he went to Milan to take the public chair of eloquence, which he had won in open competition, and there he fell under the influence of St. Ambrose.

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after waiting some time for him to raise his eyes from the book in which he was absorbed, he withdrew again, restrained by delicacy from intruding on the saintly Bishop's time and meditations. But at length he was convinced.

MORAL STRUGGLE. The battle, however, was not yet over. How was he, bound in the fetters of ingrained sinful habit, to rise to that purity and perfection which the Church demanded from her children? Sensual indulgence had fixed its roots deep in his nature—it overpowered his affections, and how could he forego its sweetness?

How could he—steel his melting heart To act the martyr's sternest part. To look with firm, unshrinking eye, On darling visions as they die, Till all bright hopes and hues of day Had faded into twilight gray? —Keeble.

The ardor of his spirit outran the weak purpose of his heart. He was in this irresolute frame of mind, loathing his cowardice, yet longing to be free, when an impetuous flood of divine grace rushed in upon him, and bore him on its tide into the haven he was sighing to reach.

GOOD EXAMPLE. The circumstances were these. A countryman of Augustine's Pontitian by name, in the course of a visit to him, spoke of the marvelous life of St. Anthony, the Egyptian solitary, and his monks in the desert; and told how some officers of the Imperial Court, on reading by chance the life of the holy hermit, had at once abandoned the world and embraced the monastic state. The effect on Augustine was immediate and complete. We shall let him tell the tale in his own words:

"Disturbed in countenance as well as in mind I turn upon Alypius. 'What ails us?' says I. 'What is this story? See, the unlearned rise and take Heaven by violence, while we, with all our learning, all our want of heart, see whither we wallow in flesh and blood! Shall I feel shame to follow their lead and not rather to let alone what alone is left to me?'"

"Something of this kind I said to him, and while he eyed me in silent wonder I rushed from him in the ferment of my feelings. What a view my face and was in a flutter to go! The chaste majesty of Continnence, serene, cheerful, yet without excess; winning me in a holy way to come without doubting, and ready to embrace me with religious hands full stored with honorable patterns! So many boys and young maidens, a multitude of youth of every age grave widows and aged virgins, and Continnence herself in all, not barren but a fruitful mother of children of joys by Thee O Lord, her husband."

"She seemed to mock me into emulation, saying, 'Canst not thou what these have done, youths and maidens? Can they in their own strength, or in the strength of their Lord God? The Lord their God gave me unto them. Why rely on thyself and fall? Cast thyself upon His arm. Be not afraid. He will not let thee slip. Cast thyself in confidence, He will receive thee and heal thee?'"

"Meantime Alypius kept close to my side silent waiting for the end of my unworded agitation. At length burst forth a mighty storm bringing a mighty flood of tears; and to indulge it to the full, even unto cries in solitude, I rose up from Alypius, who perceived from my choked voice how it was with me. He remained where we had been sitting, in deep astonishment."

"I threw myself down under a fig tree, I know not how, and allowing my tears full vent, offered up to Thee the acceptable sacrifice of my streaming eyes, and I cried out to this effect, 'And thou O Lord, how long, O Lord, how long will thou be angry? For ever? Remember not our old sins! For I felt that they were my tyrants. I cried out piteously, 'How long? To-morrow and to-morrow? Why not now? Why not in this very hour put an end to thy vileness?'"

"While I thus spoke with tears in the bitter condition of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice as if from a house near me, of a boy or a girl chanting forth again and again:

"Take up and read, take up and read." "Changing countenance at the words, I began intently to think whether boys used them in any game, but could not recollect that I had ever heard them. I left weeping, and rose up, considering it a divine intimation to open the Scriptures and read what first presented itself.

"I had heard that Anthony had come in during the reading of the Gospel, and had taken to himself the admonition 'Go sell what thou hast,' and had turned to Thee in consequence of that oracle. I had left St. Paul's volume where Alypius was sitting when I rose thence. I returned thither, seized it, opened and read in silence the following passage which first met my eyes.

"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy; but put ye on the Lord Jesus first and make no provision for the flesh in its concupiscences?"

"I had neither desire nor need to read further. As I finished the sentence, as though the light of peace had been poured into my heart, all the shadows of doubt dispersed. Then hadst Thou converted me to Thee: so

no longer to seek either for wife or other hope of this world, standing fast in that rule of Faith in which Thou so many years before hadst revealed me to my mother." (VIII. 28-70).

The lids of his heart were cast out, the citadel of self-enthroned, the ground was cleared, the cross planted, and with it the grace of Christ surpassing all understanding, took possession of his soul.

"We were baptized," he writes, "and all solitude about our past lives fled from us. Nor was I satisfied in those days with the ineffable sweetness I enjoyed in considering the depths of Thy counsel in the salvation of man kind. Oh, how I wept on hearing thy hymns and canticles!"

"Those voices flowed in at my ears and thy truth distilled into my heart, and thence the sweetness of devotion boiled over; my tears flowed abundantly and I was comforted by them."

When I was in that dense obscurity it seemed to me incredible that I could ever lay aside my old habits and feeling it impossible to abandon them I gave myself up to despair. But as soon as my sins were effaced by the waters of regeneration, I found myself a new man by this second birth; that which was difficult became easy; that which was impossible became possible, and I knew that all this was the gift of God."

He was in his thirty-third year at the time of his conversion. The following five years he spent in retirement, and founded the order of hermits that bear his name. St. Possidius, the contemporary of St. Augustine, says he knew as many as ten Bishops who were taken from this retreat. Five years after his conversion Augustine at the earnest demand of clergy and people, in spite of his own reluctances, was ordained priest. Four years later, when forty-one years of age, he was consecrated Coadjutor Bishop, and in the following year succeeded to the See of Hippo.

Before speaking of his work in the episcopate, it will not be out of place to turn for a moment to St. Monica, who died the year after his conversion. It is hard to understand St. Augustine without knowing St. Monica, the model of Christian mothers, whose affection and tender anxieties and persevering prayers gave him to God and the Church.

"Perhaps there was something too earthly in her love for him in his youth. He finds it hard to explain why his baptism was deferred, which was an abuse of the times against which the fathers declaimed, and why he was allowed to leave home and be exposed to the dangers of a Public school. Good and pious as his mother always was, she was not at that time the great saint she afterwards became."

"Although she had escaped," he says, "out of the midst of Babylon, she still walked slowly on the outskirts thereof." And knowing the strong waves of temptation he would have to encounter 'she chose rather to present to them the rude ether than the image already formed. If fault there was she atoned for it nobly.

"Go thy ways," a good Bishop said to her whom she had impudently conversed with her son, "and God bless thee; for it is not possible that the son of those tears should perish."

Her hope was confirmed by an angel. St. Augustine gives the account of it. "She saw herself as if standing on a straight plank and a beautiful, smiling youth coming toward her as she was overwhelmed with grief. He asked her the cause of her sorrow and of her daily tears, and she answered that my perdition was the cause. He bade her be of good cheer, for where she was I should also be and lo she saw me standing beside her on the same plank. I tried to make it mean that she should come over to my sect; she at once and without the slightest hesitation answered: 'no; for it was not said where he is you shall be, but where you are he shall be.'"

This steadfast hope was laid up in her heart as a certainty which nothing could shake. She comforted the weather-beaten mariners on her voyage to Italy when shipwreck threatened, because God had promised her that she should see her son. On her arrival, Augustine thought he had news for her, when he told her that he had abandoned the Manicheans. But she heard it unmoved. That was not the answer to her prayers—the goal to which she was looking—he had still to join her on the same plank of faith on which she herself stood, as the angel had promised.

When at last the news of his entire conversion is brought to her, "she leaps for joy," St. Augustine says, "and blesses Thee who art able to grant more than we can ask or imagine. For she saw that Thou hadst granted her for me far more than she had ever dared to ask for in all her prayers and tears; and that Thou hadst so converted me to Thee, that, standing on the same plank of faith on which she had seen me so many years before, I cared neither for marriage nor anything else in this world."

She lived no more than a year after this work of her life was over. St. Augustine describes the closing scenes of her life in the ninth Book of his Confessions.

"And when after the fatigue of a long journey we were repairing our spirits in that town of Oletta for our voyage by sea, she and I standing alone and

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leaning at a window that looked into the garden, discoursed together very sweetly asking each other what that eternal life of the Saints might be which neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. And we panted with the mouth of our heart after Thy heavenly fountain, the fountain of life, longing for some drop there; that in some small degree and according to our present capacity we might be enabled to form some idea of so great a thing.

"And when we had gone so far as to conclude that no sensible delights, however great so ever they might be, were worthy of being mentioned in comparison, we then rose higher and higher through all material things, even up to the heavens themselves, whence the sun and moon and stars shine upon this earth; and then we ascended still higher speaking of Thee, and of Thy wonderful works."

"And then we entered into our own minds mounting above them to that place of everlasting plenty where Thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of Truth."

"And while we were speaking, and panting after it, lo! we touched it an instant with one whole beat of the heart. And we sighed and left them behind us—those first fruits of the spirit and returned to our discourse."

"At last she said to me: 'Son, for my part, there is nothing in this world that now gives me pleasure. 'What have I to do here any longer, or why I am here at all, I know not, all my hopes in this world being now at an end. 'One thing there was for which I desired to stay a little longer in this life, that was to see you a Catholic Christian before my death. This my God hath granted me more abundantly; for I see you now His servant desiring all earthly felicity. What have I now to do here?'"

Five days after she fell ill; in four days more she was dead. "Lay my body anywhere," she had said. "Let this give you no concern. I only ask you to remember me at the altar wherever you may be."

Augustine says that "though his very soul was rent in two he spoke as calmly as if the floodgates of his tears were not ready to burst open."

"And now behold the body is carried out to be buried and I go and return without tears. Neither in those prayers we poured forth when the sacrifice of our ransom was offered for her while she lay beside the sepulchre—as was the custom there—did I shed any tears. I restrained my grief after the funeral for the whole day. But being alone in bed, I let go my tears and let them flow as much as they would; and if anyone should think it a sin in me to have thus for a small part of an hour

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FIVE-M Second Sur APPROACH THE AN "If any man can forever" (John The great s four speaks it we all know, Eucharist wh the eye of I wherein the host and th the month of if we consider host, how pre sent is, wh mense blessing of that bread who should n gratitude the deemer and as often as po When the p ceal himself b of the cruel hausted by h himself down of a juniper was awakened Heaven, an a heath cake, for thou has And Eneas ar ened by the without hug and forty ni where the I Dear Christi the way of ou trayed. We, constantly see whom our Lo the beginni apostle warn Brethren, yo goeth about, your." (I P messenger of the bread of and eat; fo great way, f way full of tr fore you r Young man, the strong, feel the be glowing still upon you. C and eat, whe misery, and until you arr God, where every cross, dried. Strengthen the first Ch courage, ente stilled into a to be; torn tender mother despising th their childre meet the mos animated at thirteen, with that she has the block, th the nuptial a the answer; cause they at For the first Communion priest. And at his life astonished th their blood. "They were the bread of As in prim angelic food that miracul enses innume three young of Babylon, flames of i that surround ously vary and these fidelity, true perfection. claims the re view of the thy children" (Ps. 137, 3) the most del; so those sou round the t in blossoms allmost vis most beauti the lovely li of heart emi ness, there d, they spre God and the inmates table of the fear of God sanctified, papers will and quarrel is Heaven c dwell amon however, is who are I Jesus in th have a lo manna, as for the terr no longer s fervor is c inspiration are becomi fall into mo do not ris do the cord chains, vic thus like o the dark n until over would like lamps with late! In dreadful n shall seek me" (In (John 7, 3) Fearful for! In ho

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