

ST. AUGUSTINE AND HIS AGE.*



NE of the most striking pictures of modern art is that of Ary Scheffer which represents the communings of Augustine and Monica. The son of many prayers, and the saintly mother who had borne him on her heart with sore-tried faith for many years, sit with locked hands side by side. In utter content and a sympathy that feels no need for words, they look out at the western sky, as if they saw in the golden clouds of eventide, that holy "City of God," the theme of the lofty meditations of both mother and son. The memory of the yearning affection and tender piety of that noble mother breathes across the centuries and is fragrant throughout the world to-day. The life and labours of that son, the greatest of the Latin Fathers, are at once the monument and memorial of her faith and zeal.

The great work by Joseph McCabe on "St. Augustine and His Age," as it is the most recent, 's the most thorough and comprehensive study of this great man and his work. It is written in the spirit of modern criticism—higher criticism, if you will. It exhibits that breadth and depth of research which is a special note of modern historical writing, and it possesses in a marked degree that historical insight and exercise of the historical imagination which makes the dead past live again. We are present in the crowded cities of Carthage, Rome, Milan. We note their striking sites and scenes. We breathe the very spirit of those ancient times. We observe the conflicts of the old religious of Greece and Rome, and the recently imported worship of Mithras and Isis and Osiris, with the new Christian faith everywhere coming into prominence and dominance.

The hectic flush of dying Roman society—dying of its own vices—is seen upon its cheek. The vigour of the stalwart races, fresh from the

forests of Dacia and Germany and Gaul, is felt in the march of their conquering legions. Not only are the Goths at the gates of the Eternal City, but the Visigoths have crossed the middle sea, and captured the Greater Rome of northern Africa.

It is the fall of the great Babylon of the West that led St. Augustine to discern the new City of God descending out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. This conflict of Christianity and paganism so often treated, has been seldom so brilliantly treated as in this book. We think, however, that the author is, at times, scarcely just to the great Christian Father. He approaches his subject more in a critical than sympathetic spirit, and, as he claims, with "a saving tincture of Pelagianism." He has thus endeavoured "to exhibit the development of Augustine, as an orderly mental and moral growth, and to present it in harmonious relation to the many other interesting figures and groups on the broad canvas of his age."

The materials for the study of this remarkable life are found in what is—for its subtle soul-searching, its sad self-accusings, its intense sorrow for sin, its keen mental analysis, and its fervent piety—the most wonderful autobiography in any language. The Confessions of Augustine have been for fourteen centuries the moral portraiture of a weary sin-satiated soul, struggling out of the Slough of Despond to the solid ground of assured faith. They record in burning words "the trepidations, the misgivings." The only book with which it can be compared is the confessions of the "self-torturing sophist, Rousseau." "There is," says Professor Shedd, "the same *abandon* and unreserve in each, each withdraws into the secret and silent confessional of his own memories, and pours out his confidences without thought of spectator or listener."

But here the resemblance ends. Rousseau gloats and glories over his sins and the recital is corrupting to both writer and reader. But the Confessions of Augustine are the wail of a stricken conscience before God. Rivers of water run down his eyes because he kept not God's law. He confesses his secret and scarlet sins that he may magnify that unmerited

* "St. Augustine and His Age." By Joseph McCabe. Author of "Peter Abelard," etc. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. Toronto: William Briggs. Pp. vii.-516. Price, \$2.20.