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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Augustine's 'Soliloquies.'

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THE period of Retreat between Augustine's Conversion and his Baptism was partly devoted to discussions with his pupils and friends, and partly to his own private reflections. The discussions were taken down in writing and afterwards expanded and published. These discussions throw considerable light on Augustine's religious development. While they instructed his hearers, they also expressed his own outlook, and helped to clear his mind. More intimate, however, than these writings were his private reflections, which are recorded in the treatise called 'Soliloquies.'

The 'Soliloquies' will not compare with the Confessions. That famous masterpiece was not written until after thirteen years of experience of life as a Christian. In richness of thought and human interest, in theological depth and devotional maturity, the Confessions altogether eclipse the earlier reflections. That is what might naturally be expected. The 'Soliloquies' are the utterance of one who is in a state of obvious transition, one who is beginning to realize great ideas but has by no means as yet fully assimilated them. The book reads like the work of a novice, a wonderful novice indeed, but yet a beginner, whose great capacity shows that, if he lives, a marvellous development lies before him. The peculiar value of the 'Soliloquies' lies in the fact that they were not written years after the event like the Confessions, but in the freshness of actual experience, and therefore they fix the precise stage which Augustine's religious and theological progress had achieved in the interval between his Conversion and his Baptism.

The 'Soliloquies' are cast into the form of a Dialogue between Augustine and Reason. It is significant that this is the first historic use of the term 'Soliloquy.' It is probable that Augustine originated the word.

He begins with a long out-pouring in prayer, in which we find the first flight of that devotional spirit afterwards matured in the Confessions. We know that previously to his Conversion he had prayed. He has recorded among other prayers his anomalous petition that the grace of self-control might be postponed. After the Conversion he records that both he and his pupils prayed. Here, however, in the 'Soliloquies' the pent-up spirit of devotion seems released, pours out in a

perfect flood. The name of God is uttered and repeated again and again, like the dominant theme of some mighty fugue; and each repetition develops some fresh aspect, some new idea, some hitherto unmentioned glory of Deity. The Holy Name is reiterated with what would be monotony, but is redeemed from monotony by the inexhaustible abundance of the thoughts which it awakens. God is conceived as Creator of all that is (*universitatis conditor*). Then also, God is Father of Truth, Father of Wisdom, Father of Blessedness, Father of the good and beautiful; so that Fatherhood becomes the ruling idea.

It is a singular fact that, while obvious allusions occur to our Lord's utterances, our Lord Himself is nowhere mentioned by name, still less is any petition directed to Him. At the same time, in this prayer Augustine alludes to the Christian doctrine of distinctions within the Deity. He speaks of a nature 'ubi qui gignit, et quem gignit unum est' (*Soliloq.* i. 4). Here the distinction of the Father and of the Son within the Divine Unity is clearly indicated; but in terms which maturer knowledge corrected. For 'unum est,' he said, read 'unum sunt' (*Retractations*).

The signs are unmistakable that Augustine has now advanced far beyond the god of philosophy to the god of religion. It is no abstract Deity which is now the object of his contemplation, but a personal Being with whom he is in intimate fellowship and communion. The God of the 'Soliloquies' possesses all the characteristics of personality. God is for Augustine at this stage of his religious development the Being whom all love who are capable of loving, whether consciously or unconsciously. To go forth from God is to die, to return is to revive, to dwell in Him is to live.

Already Augustine addresses God as One 'Whom no one loses unless deceived; Whom no one seeks, unless aroused; Whom no one finds unless purified' (i. 3). Already he uplifts his soul in the fervid strains: 'Hear me, hear me, hear me, my God, my Lord, my King, my Father, my Creator, my Hope, my possession, my glory, my home, my country, my salvation, my light, my life.' Already he can say: 'Thee only do I love, Thee only follow, Thee only seek, Thee only I am ready to serve.'

The doctrine of Grace had already been accepted

in a still earlier writing. Augustine had already rejoiced to find his friend Alypius admitting the necessity of Divine help for the discovery of truth (*C. Academ.* iii. 13). But here in the 'Soliloquies' the dependence of the human will on Divine co-operation is made the basis of a very earnest appeal for strength: 'Order, I pray, and command whatever Thou wilt, but heal me and open mine ears, that I may hear Thy call. Heal me, and open mine eyes, that I may see Thy guiding. Drive folly far from me, that I may discern Thee.' Here we have anticipations of the famous language of the Confessions: a profound consciousness of inability apart from Divine enlightenment and support. 'If they who take refuge in Thee find Thee by faith, give me faith.' He prays that God will increase in him both faith and hope and love. For the writer of the 'Soliloquies,' God is the source of strength.

And further, in this prayer there occurs the note of penitence. This has been sometimes denied. Nevertheless, it is distinctly there. Not, of course, uttered with the intense and profound self-reproaching of the Confessions. Twelve years of converted life greatly deepened his sense of sin. The Bishop did not speak like the Neophyte. But, when Augustine calls on God to cast madness out from him, to receive His fugitive; when he sorrowfully acknowledges that he has been the plaything of deceptions, and served God's enemies; surely the note of penitence is unmistakable. And it is important to insist on this. For Neoplatonist Philosophy had no room for penitence. This strain of self-reproach was not derived from philosophy. It is the product of a study of St. Paul.

As has been already said, the 'Soliloquies' are cast into the form of a Dialogue between Reason and Self. But, however dominant the part of Reason may be, Augustine is convinced that Reason alone is not competent to determine spiritual realities. There is a moral qualification required. The eyes of the soul are able to see, when the soul itself is pure from every fleshly stain; that is, when it is purged of every mortal desire. Until that condition is reached faith is indispensable. Faith must come first. On this necessity of faith Augustine lays much stress.

Indeed, in the 'Soliloquies' he has already become familiar with the trio of Christian graces—faith, hope, and love—and has come to appreciate their place in religious progress. All these are needful for the health of the soul.

Augustine subjects himself to a severe self-examination concerning his motives. He is now

aged 33. He asks himself whether his mind is set on money-making. He can say that for the last fourteen years he has ceased to be disturbed by that passion. Cicero's book *Hortensius* had taught him that wealth should not be an object of pursuit, but that if it came it should be administered with the highest caution and prudence. All he wants is such income as a free man requires for his maintenance.

He asks himself next about ambition. He confesses that until quite recently he was dominated by the longing to acquire honours and distinctions. There was a glamour about worldly success which fascinated him. But he is now able to say that this ambitious passion has passed.

Then he asks himself about marriage. He replies that for himself he neither seeks nor desires it. In a characteristic passage he said: 'Whether the procreation of children was part of the function of the wise, which at present he was not able to say, he might concede that any person who entered the married state for this purpose only, was to be admired but not imitated. For its dangers were more plain than its blessedness.' It is only fair to remember that the writer of these words was the son of a mixed marriage, and the witness of a father's disorderly career. While his early experience does by no means altogether account for the austerity of his estimate—for certainly the Monastic ideal had captivated him—yet his home life probably affected his judgment more fully than he was aware. At the same time, Augustine's transparent sincerity compelled him to acknowledge that his ideals did not as yet altogether correspond with his inclinations. He is in a very emotional state in these 'Soliloquies,' and is deeply humiliated by his inconsistencies.

In this merciless self-analysis he owns himself greatly disturbed by three chief apprehensions—the fear of loss, the fear of death, and the fear of pain.

He questions himself about his reasons for fearing the loss of friends. Why does he desire that they should live with him? His answer is in order that they may together seek after God and acquire knowledge of their own souls. He admits that if their friendship proved a hindrance to the attainment of wisdom he would desire to avoid it.

As to the fear of Death, could he rest assured that whether in the body or out of it, here or elsewhere, he could equally well attain to Wisdom, he would have no such fear at all.

As to the fear of pain, he considers that physical pain is the greatest evil. For the greatest good is

the best of the better part, and the greatest evil the worst of the worse part. Now wisdom is the best thing in the soul, and pain the worst in the body.

Augustine reflected in his 'Soliloquies' that, while the certainty of being immortal would indeed be great, yet it would by no means satisfy. It is also essential to know what sort of immortality it would be. What if immortal life was of such a kind that it allowed you to know nothing more than you already knew? To that question Augustine replied that if that were so he would weep his life away. The capacity for progress is essential to man's immortality.

Thereupon follows an inquiry into the nature of Truth. A subtle line of reasoning is propounded. There is such a thing as Truth. That proposition appears to him indisputable. But if there is, Truth must exist somewhere.

It is characteristic of the great writer's deeply religious spirit that before proceeding much further he turns again to prayer, a brief but extraordinarily comprehensive prayer: 'God Who art always the same, let me know myself, let me know Thee.'

Resuming, then, this discussion about Truth, Augustine argues that it is impossible to deny that there is such a thing as Truth. Some things at any rate are true. Either the world will perish or it will not perish, and if it perishes it will be true that it has perished. Truth, then, cannot perish. But this Truth—where does it reside? If the Mind which observes Truth ceases to exist, what has become of the Truth which existed in the mind. Truth is relative to consciousness. The proposition is ventured that the world cannot exist apart from man. Consequently, it dawns upon the thinker that he is making progress toward belief in the soul's immortality, on the ground that mind is required for the preservation of Truth. At the same time Augustine has misgivings. For the world is never without minds who retain the Truth, not because of their immortality, but because of their succession. Still it is boldly reasserted that the objects on which we gaze depend on us for their reality, and when we have gone they must cease to exist if no other human beings remain to contemplate them. That which does not appear to some intelligence or other must be considered not to exist. Nothing can be true unless it appears.

Once more Augustine turns from reasoning to devotion. 'O God our Father Who dost exhort us to pray, and dost grant what we ask, if while we ask we live better and become better: hear

me struggling in this darkness, stretch forth to me Thy right hand. Send out Thy light, recall me from wanderings. Guide me to return to myself and to Thee. Amen.'

After much discussion on dreams and seductive resemblances to reality and deceptions, which are explained as tending towards existence to which they are unable to attain, it is asserted that what is inseparable from its subject cannot survive if the subject dies. And the conclusion is reaffirmed that the reality of Truth requires the permanence of its recipient. Hence it is thought that the nature of Truth becomes an argument for man's immortality. 'If everything which is in the subject persists for ever, the subject itself must, of necessity, persist for ever.'

The imperishable nature of Truth involves the immortality of its recipient. God and the soul remain, because Truth is in them. And, adds Augustine, 'no man doubts concerning the immortality of God.' Truth cannot die. Therefore we shall not doubt the everlasting continuance of the mind. Knowledge is in the mind, and physical death cannot cause the mind to perish. If it could, then Truth could perish, which is impossible.

There are several singular features about these 'Soliloquies.' One certainly is the mingling of metaphysics with devotion: or rather the fact that the whole reasoning is pervaded by a deeply prayerful spirit. Again and again the reasoner pauses and takes refuge in prayer. Augustine has already realized the necessity of grace: the helplessness of the human soul to ascertain the Truth without enlightenment and purification which God alone can give.

Another characteristic of the 'Soliloquies' is the place assigned in reaching Truth to the Christian qualities of faith, hope, and love.

By far the most remarkable feature of these 'Soliloquies' is that Augustine here propounds the theory of idealism. Truth and Thinker are correlative. Truth has no existence apart from mind. The existence of the thing seen depends upon the seer. In propositions of this nature we have the elements of Berkeley's theory already expressed. We find Augustine conscious of the weakness of his inference that the permanence of Truth requires the permanence of the human mind which contemplates it. He raises the difficulty that the permanence of the individual is not thereby established. May not the required condition of the permanence of Truth be satisfied by the succession of human individuals? But the curious thing is that Augustine apparently does

not face the question—Where was Truth before man existed? He speaks distinctly of the immortality of God, which he says no one disputes. But he nowhere suggests that the home of Truth is the eternal mind of God. He is so intent on arguing for human immortality that he does not dwell on the fact that the conditions required for the permanence of Truth are completely fulfilled and satisfied in Deity.

The 'Soliloquies' in their devotional sections are full of Scriptural phrases which reveal how much Augustine has been reading the New Testament, and how familiar he is already growing with its language. Already he speaks of God leading us into all Truth, opening the door to those who knock, giving us the Bread of Life, and the living water which causes us never to thirst again, and of God convincing the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, God through whom we are not in bondage to weak and beggarly elements. All these allusions and quotations are crowded into a narrow space, and instructively show how extensive the range of Augustine's Scripture reading has already been, and also the authority which he

already assigns to them. All this by no means necessarily involves a clear apprehension on the Neophyte's part of the dogmas which lay behind them. But they certainly prove the direction in which Augustine was moving, and the great advance he had made from a purely philosophic position.

If the form in which the 'Soliloquies' are cast seems to assign a very high place to the Reason, yet a careful study of the book makes clear that Augustine realizes that Reason by itself is not adequate to bring the soul to God. He is conscious that much, very much, depends upon the Will. 'I know not,' he says, 'how any rational demonstration of God could satisfy me: for I do not believe that I know anything as I desire to know God.' In other words, the spiritual quest for God demands the entire personality: the Will just as certainly as the intellect. Indeed, Augustine seems to emphasize Will rather than intellect. For he says, 'I have nothing else than my Will.' Thus the great writer rises above the mere intellectualism which was the bane of the previous attitude towards Religion.

Contributions and Comments.

Ephesians iv. 20, 21.

'But ye did not so learn Christ; if so be that ye heard him, and were taught in him, even as a truth is in Jesus.'

JESUS is (rightly deemed) a 'truth' (*i.e.* in common and less exact parlance a 'science': for truth is a correspondence between words and a reality or existence, and the sciences present these existences to our minds and express our conceptions of them); so that St. Paul is fully justified in speaking of learning *Christ* and being taught *in Him*. Yet I would rather say this truth is 'in Jesus' than 'in Christ,' as, though beautiful in the theory and the abstract, it is more beautiful and intelligible in the concrete and the revelation. Even if the above use of ἀλήθεια as a technical term is of the nature of a ἀπ. λεγ., I claim consideration for the above interpretation as best suiting the passage. If it has already been suggested I can only say it suggested itself to me independently.

I should be very glad to learn whether such a use of ἀλήθεια has any parallel in classic or κοινή

literature. Among many 'truths'—history, geography, botany, astronomy, mathematics (including Euclid, called after its leader in thought), and ethics—the leading 'truth' is that which is St. Paul's theme and life. (This is St. Paul's apology for the strong expressions 'learn Christ,' 'be taught in him').

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Proverbs xiv. 23.

'The fear of the Lord (tendeth) to life,
And (he that hath it) shall abide satisfied.
He shall not be visited with evil' (A.V.).

THE kind reception accorded to my 'Textual Discoveries' in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES has encouraged me to add a few subsequent emendations, intended to illustrate the present unsatisfactory condition of the text, and, if possible, to show that this disgrace to scholarship can, in very many instances, be removed, though at the cost of