Shelburne Essays

By

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[Studies of Religious Dualism]

"Manichæism may be disavowed in words. It cannot be exiled from the actual belief of mankind."—Sir Leslie Stephen.

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SAINT AUGUSTINE

It seems to be a pretty common experience, among those who have passed through more than one phase of belief, that at the critical moment of hesitation some chance volume, falling in with the time and the mood, should furnish a guiding impulse to the mind in its new course; that in a lesser way we should all of us have our *Tolle, lege*. Naturally we cherish the memory of such a book with a peculiar fondness, though we may never open it again; we even hold it an act of piety one day to make confession of our obligations. And so I may be pardoned for a word of personal reminiscence here in naming the work which inducted me into the reading of Saint Augustine and into the comparative study of religions. Having dropped away from allegiance to the creed of Calvin, I had for a number of years sought a substitute for faith in the increase of knowledge; like many another I thought to conceal from myself the want of intellectual purpose in miscellaneous curiosity. And then, just as the vanity of this pursuit began to grow too insistent, came the unexpected index pointing

to the new way,—no slender oracle, but the ponderous and right German utterance of Baur's *Manichäisches Religionssystem*. It would be impossible to convey to others, I cannot quite recall to myself, the excitement amounting almost to a physical perturbation caused by this first glimpse into the mysteries of independent faith. It was not, I need scarcely say, that I failed even then to see the extravagance and materialistic tendencies of the Manichæan superstition; but its highly elaborate form, not without elements of real sublimity, acted as a powerful stimulus to the imagination. Here, symbolised by the cosmic conflict of light and darkness, was found as in a great epic poem the eternal problem of good and evil, of the thirst for happiness and the reality of suffering, which I knew to lie at the bottom of religious thought and emotion. How shall monotheism account for this discord of the world? On the one hand you may accept the notion of an all-determining Governor, and forthwith you must shudder to behold the guilt of mankind laid at his feet. On the other hand you may assume that man has been created free to choose, and you have the incredible fact (the *monstrum*, as Augustine called it) that he has deliberately elected his own damnation. There is no escape from the dilemma, however artfully the two terms may be juggled

together; and system after system of theology has been shattered against this perplexity. The most dishonest solution is that ascription of supreme jesuitry to God, whereby he is supposed to create evil that good may come, the *velut officiosa mendacia* of the Church; the most stultifying that which complacently shuts its eyes to the existence of evil.

Now Manichæism not only concealed the troublesome problem of the human conscience by transferring the dilemma to a vast spectacular division of nature, but, through its influence on Saint Augustine, serves as a bridge between the Orient and the Occident. It offers a middle term between the dualism of India and that of Europe, and in this way is the key to much that is otherwise obscure in our own religious history. Certainly the first step towards any right understanding of Augustine himself must come from a study of this heresy—as he would call it, though it was in reality an independent religion—from which, as his enemies taunted him, he never entirely shook himself free.

And there is no difficulty in understanding how he became entangled in those fantastic sophistries. It was the purpose of his *Confessions*, and history has commonly followed him in this, to emphasise the difference between his Christian and ante-Christian career; but a deeper, or less partial, reading of his life shows rather

the unchanging temperament of the man through all his variations of creed. His mission was to convict the world of sin; his preaching might be summed up in the exclamation: "You have not yet considered how great is the burden of sin—*Nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum!*" And this cry for regeneration was the voice of faith speaking within him. "Nothing have I but will," he says in the *Soliloquies;* "I know nothing but this, that things fleeting and transitory should be spurned, that things certain and eternal should be sought." Than this, I venture to assert, no better definition of elementary, universal faith has ever been enounced: *Nihil aliud habeo quam voluntatem; nihil aliud scio nisi fluxa et caduca spernenda esse, certa et æterna requirenda.* Or, as he develops the idea in one of the earliest of his letters:

> We are, I suppose, both agreed in maintaining that all things with which our bodily senses acquaint us are incapable of abiding unchanged for a single moment but, on the contrary, are moving and in perpetual transition, and have no present reality, that is, to use the language of Latin philosophy, do not exist—*ut latine loquar, non esse.* Accordingly, the true and divine philosophy admonishes us to check and subdue the love of these things as most dangerous and disastrous, in order that the mind, even while using this body, may be wholly occupied and warmly interested in those things which are ever the same, and which owe their attractive power to no transient charm.

The expression of the idea is here coloured by his newly acquired Platonism, but the dualism that underlies it passes unbroken through his life, making one the Pagan child and the Christian man. He was not reading his present into the past, but only explaining by clearer knowledge the blind uncertainties and searchings of his youth, when, looking back on those days, he wrote: "For this was my sin, that not in God himself, but in his creatures, in myself and others, I sought my pleasures, my exaltations, and my truths, and so fell into sorrows and confusions and errors." This constant preoccupation with the dualism of human experience was the master trait of his mind; but with it must be reckoned another trait almost, if not quite, equally predominant. He was intensely, even morbidly, self-conscious; all the relations of life assumed a vivid personal colour, and from this somewhat unstable union of abstract faith with a hungering personality sprang the poignancy of his emotions. Such a discord in harmony can be seen at work in his passionately cherished friendships; and some of his younger letters may almost bring tears to the reader's eyes for their mingling and conflict of human and divine love. So, writing to Nebridius in his early Christian days, he expresses their mutual longing to be together in the flesh, and then adds this consolation:

"Commune with your own soul, and raise it up, as far as you are able, unto God. For in Him you hold us also by a firmer bond, not by means of bodily images." In the same way, reflecting on the great sorrow of his Pagan youth, when through the death of his friend he walked about in astonishment that any life remained on earth, this was his thought: "Blessed is he who loves Thee, and his friend in Thee, and his enemy because of Thee; for he alone loses no one dear, to whom all are dear in Him who is not lost." He knew that the peculiar bitterness of his grief arose from consciousness of having looked for the beatific life in the region of death—*beatam vitam in regione mortis.*

Such was the temperament of the young man who in his eighteenth year came to Carthage as a student of rhetoric, as it was then called, of the liberal arts, as we should say now. He had been born in the year 354 at Thagaste, a small town of Numidian Africa, some fifty miles inland from the Hippo which he was afterwards to make the centre of the religious world. Africa had been thoroughly Romanised, although the Punic language was still spoken by the lower orders; and indeed Augustine in one of his letters asks about the pronunciation of some of the commonest Latin words, and when in Milan suffered as a teacher of rhetoric from

his provincial accent. But Carthage at least, since its rebuilding, was like a lesser Rome, splendid with temples and palaces and baths, thronged with people whose occupation was to follow the Pagan ceremonies of worship, to watch the spectacle of the streets and theatres, to hear the rhetoricians, and to indulge in the unrestrained vices of the capital. And now at last the prophecy of Dido was to come true; her city was to see the avenger arise who should make good the failure of Hannibal and give laws to Rome.

The ambition of the young Augustine was stirred by the life of Carthage, but it does not appear that its vices offered any strong allurement to him. Rather it was at this time that the eager desire for the truth began to stir within him. He attributes this first conversion to the study of Cicero's lost book, *Hortensius*, but one is inclined to look for the cause in the impression upon his sensitive nature of a flaunting and gorgeous materialism. To one of his temper, coming from the country to the tumult of the city, this would be the natural result. For a brief moment the blood would be heated by the seductions of the senses, and then inevitably the feeling of contrast and conflict would be intensified between his spirit and the world. In his immature state he was a ready victim for a religious sect which should expand

this combat within his mind into a mythological scheme of the universe. Carthage was one of the centres of the Manichæan propaganda, and Augustine was soon a convert. For nine years he called himself a disciple of the Babylonian; he never to the day of his death outlived the effects of this first surrender of his soul to a definite creed.

Several important studies of Manichæism have been published since Baur's work, chief of them being Gustav Flügel's *Mani, seine Lehre und seine Schriften*, which gives the text and translation, with notes, of a portion of the *Fihrist* of Muhammed ben Ishak, an encyclopædia of the sciences written, probably at Bagdad, in the tenth century. A later study is Kessler's *Mani*, which undertakes, with imperfect success, to discover the origin of the myth not in Persian Zoroastrianism but in the ancient nature-worship of Babylonia. Both of these works add to our detailed knowledge of the sect and serve to supplement the views derived by Baur from Western sources; but both tend also to obscure its essential position in history. For it was the Manichæism of the Latin West, as modified by closer contact with Christianity and as presented in the treatises of Saint Augustine, that for a while strove with Neo-Platonism and Catholicism for the mastery of our world, and that left its deep imprint on the civilisation

of Europe. But it is to be noted that neither Baur, who presents the Manichæism of the West, nor the two later writers, who go to the Eastern sources, offer any clear view of the possible relation of this religion to the still further East of India. Now it would be rash to assert positively that Mani borrowed in any substantial way from Buddhism; a very little experience in the comparative study of religions ought to make one cautious in these seductive theories of derivation; but it is at least true that in many of its details the worship instituted by Mani forms a curious parallel to that of Buddha; and it is also true that in its essential doctrine Manichæism offers at once an interesting resemblance and contrast to the common faith of India. In a general study of religious dualism it thus in every way affords an invaluable bridge between the Orient and the Occident.

This strange religion, which was promulgated by Mani, a Persian, in the third century of our era, and which spread rapidly from Babylon as far east as China and westward with the Roman Empire, is an admirable example of the syncretic method of thought of the age. It should appear to be the deliberate attempt of a reformer to fuse into a homogeneous system Zoroastrianism and Christianity, the two religions then struggling for supremacy on the borderland of the Persian Empire. It may be

that the Zoroastrianism which forms the basis of the mixture is tinged with the old Semitic superstitions still prevalent in Assyria; doubtless, the Christian elements adopted are Gnostic rather than orthodox. The influence of India, if present at all, is more obscure; yet even here historic probability is not wanting. It is known from Chinese annals that the Buddhist propaganda was active in Bactria and Parthia in the early Christian centuries. It is further recorded in the *Fihrist* that Mani travelled for forty years, visiting the Hindus, the Chinese, and the inhabitants of Chorasan. Some tradition also of Buddhistic sources seems to have lingered in the memory of the early chroniclers; and, as so often happens, these abstract ideas became personified, and figure with fabulous names among the followers of the prophet.

When we pass from historical to internal evidence, the parallel becomes, if not more convincing, at least more instructive. It has been remarked that Hindu thought moves in cycles. Certainly, during the centuries just before and after our era, we see such a wave of thought sweep over India, changing the whole religious and intellectual life of the people. The Sânkhyan philosophy, Buddhism, Jainism, and the Krishna cult apparently arose and developed side by side, being the various aspects of one great revolution. Their points of contact are numerous and essential; and doubtless, if the complete literature of the time were at our command, their origin and growth would show still more striking phases of resemblance. Now details of belief and worship may be detected in Manichæism which appear to be borrowed from one and another of these cults; but beyond this a yet deeper influence suggests itself, such as might be expected in the mind of a searcher after the truth who was brought into the circle of that tremendous moral and intellectual ferment.

His religion starts with the Zoroastrian myth of two co-eternal and hostile powers, of good and of evil, of light and of darkness. The contest between them comes about in this way: The *regnum lucis* is threatened with invasion by the *principes tenebrarum*, who from the dark abyss behold the upper light and become enamoured of its glory. Thereupon an emanation of God, called the *Primus Homo*, descends into the depths to combat them. The five gross elements of matter belong to the *regnum tenebrarum*, and to prepare himself to meet them he first arms himself with a panoply of the five finer elements representing their psychical counterpart. (Cf. the Hindu *tanmâtras* and *mahâbhûtas*.) For the time he is overwhelmed by Eblis, or Saclas, as the leader of the demons is sometimes called; part of his panoply is rent away from him, and out of the union of these

finer elements, or soul, with the gross matter of the *regnum tenebrarum* arises the existing order of things, the soul being held by restraint in the bonds of matter, and giving to matter its form and life.

The process of redemption is the point of contact with Christianity, and from here on the heresy will be found Christian rather than Persian, although the modifying influence of the Persian Mithra cult shows itself strongly. In other words, speaking broadly, Mani's system may be divided into two great periods,—one of involution, or mingling of spirit and matter, adopted from Zoroastrian sources; and the second of evolution, or the separating of spirit and matter, borrowed chiefly from the Christian faith. But the Christianity followed has the colour rather of the Gnostic sect than of the orthodox confession. The common terminology and ritual are maintained, but the mission of the Christos is extended and, in a way, deepened. The labour of salvation is no longer confined to the action of a man, or god-man, living his life in Palestine, but becomes the cosmic struggle of the world-spirit striving upward toward deliverance. St. Paul hinted at the same idea in his mystical words: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together"; but he showed how far Christian orthodoxy stood from its rival when

he added: "until now . . . waiting for the adoption, *to wit* the redemption of our body."

To be more precise, Mani distinguishes between a Christos and Jesus. The general name of the emanation from the kingdom of light is the *Primus Homo;* but this is regarded in two ways, as a passive principle (δύναμις παθητική) suffering the bondage of the world, and as an active principle (δύναμις δημιουργική) effecting its own deliverance. Now the former is called the *Jesus patibilis*, while the latter is the Christos. When the world was created out of the union of the spiritual *Primus Homo* and the material *regnum tenebrarum*, the purest portion of the mixture, that containing the most light, was placed in the sky as the sun and moon. Their light, together with the atmosphere (which is the Holy Ghost), acting on the earth, produces life; life is the struggle of the imprisoned soul upward toward reabsorption into the kingdom of light. In this process the sun and moon (called also the *Primus Homo*, the Son of God, as containing the purest body of the life-giving light) are the Christos; whereas the spirit dormant in the earth and awakened by their touch is the *Jesus patibilis.* Every tree that expands its leaves in the warm breath of heaven, every flower that paints its blossoms with the colours of the sky, is only an expression of the upward striving of the weary spirit. So

the agony of the crucifixion became symbolical of the universal passion, and Jesus was said to be *omni suspensus ex ligno*. The feeling which inspired this conception of the suffering Jesus is beautifully told in a stanza of Omar Khayyám:

> Now the New Year reviving old Desires,
> The thoughtful Soul to Solitude retires,
> Where the White Hand of Moses on the Bough
> Puts out, and Jesus from the Ground suspires.

When the demons of evil see that the light in their possession is thus gradually withdrawn from them, they are thrown into dismay. They conspire among themselves, and, by a curious process of procreating and then devouring their offspring, produce man, who contains the quintessence of all the spiritual light remaining to them. Adam is begotten by Saclas and Nebrod, their leaders, in the likeness of the *Primus Homo*. To him is given the glory of the world; he is made the microcosm or counterpart of the universe, in order that by the excellence of his nature, as by a bait, the soul may be allured to remain in the body. He is created by the lust of the demons; his own fall, designed by his creators, consists in succumbing to the seductions of the flesh; and through the process of generation the spirit is still held a bond-slave in the world, passing from father to son. But man, though he may be subject for a time to the evil influence

of the flesh, yet must rise in the end by the eternal aspiration of the spirit. As the Christos acting in the sun awakens the inanimate earth, so too he appears as a man among men, as Jesus of Nazareth, teaching the way of salvation. Release comes only with the cessation of desire, and this again is brought about only through the true knowledge, or *gnôsis*, imparted by the Saviour.

In all this we see strong traces of the Zoroastrian sun-worship, as might be expected. The Christos represented as *distentus per solem lunamque* points at once to Mithra, the sun-god and mediator. But the significant modification recalls rather the spirit of India. The whole conception of Christ's mission is changed; and the labour of his life is to proclaim the way of release to the spirit already groping upward, rather than to act as mediator between man and God. His incarnation is only one brief event in the long struggle of the imprisoned Jesus for release. In accordance with this idea, either directly from India or through the earlier Gnostic sects, the doctrine of Docetism was adopted, corresponding to the Mâyâ which plays so large a rôle in later Buddhism and in the Krishna cult. For instance we read in the *Bhâgavata Purâna* of Krishna: "It is through his Mâyâ, by means of Mâyâ, that the Exalted One has taken on himself a body"; and again

of Buddha in *The Lotus of the True Law:* "The Tathâgata, who so long ago was perfectly enlightened, is unlimited in the duration of his life; he is everlasting. Without being extinct, the Tathâgata makes a show of extinction, on behalf of those who have to be educated." Precisely the same words might be used to express the Gnostic and Manichæan doctrine of the Christ.

So too the conception of sin as consisting in desire instead of disobedience, and the resulting system of ethics, point to India. The chief duty of man is to abstain from satisfaction of physical desires of whatever sort, that he may not plunge the soul still deeper in the slough of creation. Marriage was abhorred as evil above all things, in contradiction to Persian and orthodox Christian views. And after chastity the highest virtue was a respect for life in all its forms, carried almost to the absurd extremities of the Jainist rule of *ahinsâ* (from *a* privative and *hins*, to harm, kill).

The followers of Mani were divided into two bodies, the *electi* and the *auditores*, corresponding to the classes of Christians, and the use of the Christian sacraments shows that the Church was organised after Western models; yet here again the duties of the auditors remind us rather of the Buddhist *upâsakas* than of Christian catechumens. Like the *upâsakas* they

were allowed to marry and mingle with the world, and their connection with the elect consisted mainly in providing the latter with food, in order that these vessels of salvation might be spared the awful sin of destroying even vegetable life. At death the souls of the elect were transported up to the kingdom of light, into a state of being not unlike the Nirvâna of the Jainas, and possibly of the Buddhists. The auditors passed through a long series of transmigrations, while the wicked were cast into hell.

It is easy to understand how an immature youth of Augustine's temperament was drawn from the worldly pageantry of Carthage by this religion of Mani. Here was an easy solution of the mystery that weighed upon his mind, the *quanti ponderis sit peccatum;* here was an elaborate interpretation of that conflict between the *fluxa et caduca* and the *certa et æterna* which it was the labour of his life to explain. Nor is it difficult, on the other hand, to understand why the system failed to afford him permanent comfort. With growing intelligence he became more and more repelled by the childish elements in Mani's mythology, and at the same time the mechanical dualism of the creed deceived for a while but could not long satisfy his real spiritual needs. The Hindu attributed the condition of good and evil to the upward or

downward inclination of the whole character of a man, and in that faith if anywhere it might be said: Thou art thyself thy proper heaven and hell. The conflict may have been symbolised by the claims of spirit and matter, but essentially it pertained to the man's own will and intelligence, and upon himself alone lay the duty and responsibility of turning from his own lower desires to his higher liberty. Mani, indeed, had gone half way toward this conception of evil. In the Persian mythology from which he started, Ahriman opposed the god of light at every point, to be sure; yet creation was primarily good, and the evil works of Ahriman are a later corruption. According to the *Bundahish* the original man and woman first believed that the world was created by Ormazd, and afterwards came to believe Ahriman was the creator. From this falsehood Ahriman received his first joy, and for this falsehood their souls shall remain in hell even unto the resurrection. The material world is essentially righteous; and it is the first duty of man to support *asha*, the existing order of things, against the assaults of the demons. Now the struggle between Mani's god of light and Eblis, whether from Hindu influences or not, becomes more intimate and far-reaching than this. The contest is no longer carried on in a neutral region as between two armies in

battle array, but is waged in every particle of creation between the two natures contained within it. But Mani never quite reached the higher meaning of this combat as seen by the Hindus; with him the symbol of spirit and flesh was the reality, and evil thus lost its intrinsic seriousness. Theoretically, and to a certain degree actually, his dualism, like that of the Hindu, was within man, but it took the form of a mechanical mixture of elements rather than of a conflict of tendencies involving the whole being. In effect the man himself was the spiritual element, and his end was merely to free himself, by more or less physical means, from the envelope of the body. It was this slurring over of the true nature of evil, by transferring it from the conscience to the imagination, that in the end repelled Augustine. "For up to this time," he says, speaking of his Manichæan days, "it seemed to me that not we ourselves committed sin, but I know not what alien nature within us; and it gratified my pride to be without blame."

In this state of mind, doubting the veracity of Manichæism, but without any settled belief to take its place, he sailed in his thirtieth year to Italy, for the purpose of bettering himself in his profession. He had with him his friend Alypius and the concubine with whom, almost to his conversion, he lived in good faith, and

who was the mother of his son Adeodatus. He was followed also by his devoted mother. For a while he lived at Rome, and then went as a teacher of rhetoric[1] to Milan, the seat of the great Bishop Ambrose.

Here the first enlightenment came to him from the Neo-Platonic philosophy as it was interpreted in the works of Victorinus and other Latin writers. There is much in the *Enneads* of Plotinus to make the transition from Manichæism easy. In that mystic philosophy the soul of the world is portrayed as bound in the chains of the flesh and aspiring to escape; "our fatherland is there whence we have come, and our

[1] In his profession Augustine seems to have been only moderately successful. As a writer his work is marred by his habit of dictation to a *notarius*, or shorthand secretary, and by the impatience of his nature. His language flows too broadly and is further disfigured by an inveterate taste for verbal quibbles. As a stylist he ranks below his contemporary Jerome, yet at his best he has command of the telling phrase and of a vivid personal eloquence. He knew the allurement of words, *verba quasi vasa electa atque pretiosa;* and such a passage as the opening of chapter ii., book ii., of the *Confessions* is notable in the history of eloquence:

"Et quid erat, quod me delectabat, nisi amare et amari? Sed non tenebatur modus ab animo usque ad animum, quatenus est *luminosus limes amicitiæ;* sed exhalabantur nebulæ de limosa concupiscentia carnis, et scatebra pubertatis, et obnubilabant atque obfus-

father is there," said Plotinus; and virtue is a flight from the death of the world, from the σῶμα-σῆμα. But in place of the crude antinomy of two equal independent powers, the deity now becomes the supreme being and evil is mere distance from him, an ever-lessening participation in his infinite essence. It is Plato's theory of the one and the many, of *noumena* and *phenomena*, brought halfway, but only halfway, to a religious myth. And in what may be called his philosophy of religion Augustine never departed from these views; they may be found developed at length in his *De Civitate Dei*, written when his doctrine had

cabant cor meum, ut non discerneretur serenitas dilectionis a caligine libidinis. Utrumque in confuso æstuabat, et rapiebat imbecillam ætatem per *abrupta cupiditatum*, atque mersabat gurgite flagitiorum. Invaluerat super me ira tua, et nesciebam. Obsurdueram stridore catenæ mortalitatis meæ, pœna superbiæ animæ meæ: et ibam longius a te, et sinebas: et iactabar, et effundebar, et diffluebam, et ebulliebam per fornicationes meas, et tacebas. O tardum gaudium meum! Tacebas tunc, et ego ibam porro longe a te, in plura et plura *sterilia semina dolorum*, superba deiectione et inquieta lassitudine."

In this emotional psychology, at once subtle and intense, Augustine is the father of modern literature, and he has never been surpassed. Nor is it difficult to foresee in the sudden penetrating quality of such phrases as I have marked by underscoring the course of romantic rhetoric.

stiffened into its final form. Since God, he there says, is essential being and immutable, to those things which he created *ex nihilo* he gave being, but not the highest being equal to his own. The dualism of nature is thus reduced to being and not-being, *esse* and *nihil*, and the world is, so to speak, a mixture of these two. Evil is a self-withdrawing from the supreme being toward not-being; the *summum bonum* is eternal life, the *summum malum* eternal death. Almost at times Augustine represents the punishment of the wicked as a gradual annihilation.

But with Augustine intellectual enlightenment was still something far removed from religious conviction. Now, as always throughout his life, substantially, if not temporally, *fides præcedit intellectum;* and faith, having once abandoned him, was slow to return. This, apparently, was his period of greatest mental anguish, while his spirit lay, as it were, groaning for the new birth. And the change came at last, as these changes are wont to come, instantly and miraculously. The story of his conversion is the most famous in christendom after St. Paul's, but his telling of it in the *Confessions* is for ever fresh. He had taken to reading the Scripture earnestly, but still hung back trembling from the abyss of self-surrender: "All my arguments were undone; there remained but a

speechless terror, for my soul dreaded as death itself to be taken from its customary stream which was bearing it to death." In this mood he went one day, with his faithful friend Alypius, out into the garden, determined now or never to silence the cry in his heart [1]:

> Thus was I sick at heart and in torment, accusing myself more bitterly than ever, tossing and turning in the frail bond that still held me, until it should break asunder; frail it was, yet it held me still. . . . But when profound reflection had drawn my whole misery from its secret depths, and heaped it up in the sight of my heart, there came a great storm with mighty shower of tears. And, that I might pour it all forth with fitting words, I rose to depart from Alypius. It seemed to me that solitude was more fitting for my tears. And I went further apart, so that even his presence would no longer be a burden to me. . . . I flung myself beneath a certain fig-tree, and gave the rein to my tears; and the floods burst forth from my eyes, an acceptable sacrifice to Thee. And many things I said to Thee in this sense, though not in these words: "And Thou, Lord, how long wilt Thou delay? Wilt Thou be angry for ever, Lord? Be not mindful of my earlier iniquity." For I felt I was hampered by it. I poured out words of misery: "How long? How long? To-morrow, and to-morrow? Why not now? Why not end my baseness this very hour?"
>
> And, speaking thus, I wept with a most bitter contrition in my heart. And suddenly I heard from

[1] The translation that follows is from Joseph McCabe's brilliant but, psychologically, unsatisfactory *St. Augustine and His Age.*

a neighbouring house the voice, as it were, of a boy or girl singing many times: "Take up and read, take up and read." (*Tolle, lege; tolle, lege.*) I was roused immediately, and began to think intently whether children were wont to sing this in any game of theirs; but I could not recollect ever to have heard it. And, checking the flood of my tears, I arose, thinking no other than that it was a Divine command to me to open the sacred volume and read the first chapter I lighted on. . . . Thus admonished, I returned to the spot where Alypius sat; for I had placed the volume of the Apostle there when I had left. I grasped and opened it, and read in silence the chapter which first met my eyes: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." I neither wished nor needed to read more. For with the close of this sentence the darkness of my doubt melted away, as though a strong light had shone upon my heart. Then, inserting my finger or some other mark, I closed the book, and with a tranquil mind handed it to Alypius.

The first thought on reading this celebrated scene is likely to be a feeling of irrelevancy between the particular message found by Augustine and his moral condition. He was at that time as far removed from rioting and drunkenness as ever in his later days of saintliness; his whole strength was absorbed in spiritual conflict. Yet in a more general way the text did come home to his inmost need. It summoned him from the intellectual consider-

ation of evil as a negation of good to the conviction of sin as something for which he was morally and terribly responsible; while, at the same time, it presented the metaphysical theorem of being and not-being in the form of a concrete dualism, God and his own soul. Thus faith allied itself to the insatiable craving of his heart for a personal relation. God was still the supreme *being*, but being became identified emotionally, if not logically, with personal volition; evil was the deliberate setting apart of the human will from the divine will, the voluntary separation of the soul from the source of life. About this time he wrote his *Soliloquies*, wherein his new conception of the inevitable dualism of life is summed up in the question and answer: "Deum et animam scire cupio.—Nihilne plus?—Nihil omnino." In this chasm between the human and the divine personalities his one hope of reconciliation sprang from the realisation of Christ as the mediator, for as in Christ we see God become man without losing his divinity, so there was hope that man might be lifted up with him to God, yet without losing his humanity. The idea is developed in a notable passage of the *De Civitate:*

But because the mind itself, which naturally possesses reason and intelligence [for comprehending God], has been by certain dark and inveterate vices made incapable of dwelling joyously in the incommutable

light or even of enduring that light, until by daily renewal and healing it becomes equal to so great felicity, therefore it was first to be imbued and purged with faith. And that in this faith it might more confidently journey toward the truth, the truth itself, God, the son of God, becoming man yet not ceasing to be God, constituted and founded this faith, that there might be a way for man to God through the man-God. For such is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. For in this he is the mediator, in that he is man; and in this he is the way. Now if between the one who tends and that to which he tends there be a mediating way (*via media*), there is hope of arriving at the end; but if the way be lacking, or if we are ignorant how to go, what profits it to know whither we are to go? One only way is there entirely guarded against all errors, that the same person be God and man: whither we go, God; how we go, man.

Thus, by another fiction of mythology, the dualism which had been transferred from the soul of man to an external opposition of the soul and God was restored to the union of two natures within the single person of the God-man. By the mystery of the atonement man was to be made one with the mediator and so brought back to union with God. All this Augustine heard implicitly in the oracle that spoke to him through the words of St. Paul in the garden at Milan: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." His philosophy was again made religion.

The period immediately following his conversion was, in appearance at least, the happiest of his life. He had found that peace of God after which his soul panted, and as yet his faith was a pure uplifting of the heart, untroubled by the fierce disputes with heresy that occupied his later years. For a while he retired with his mother and Alypius to the villa of a friend at Cassiciacum, where they passed the days in reading and writing and in discussing endlessly the new-found truth. But already he was aflame "to rehearse the glory of the Psalms throughout the whole world, against the pride of the human race." Home and duty called to Africa, and thither he returned in the year 388. Three years later he was forcibly made a presbyter, and in 395 he became Bishop of Hippo. The remaining thirty-five years of his life fall into three overlapping periods, as he was engaged successively with the three arch-enemies of orthodoxy. His first ambition was to smite the Manichæans, against whom he bore the grudge of a renegade. In the long treatises and letters and debates that he poured out against that religion one perceives how great was the danger escaped, and how the Christian world shook off the foe only by assimilating a good deal of its spirit. Then came the controversy with the Donatists, a dull-seeming question to-day, but important in Augustine's development as forcing him to crystallise his

views in regard to the sacramentarian office of the Church. He learned more clearly the value of that act of faith by which the communicant in the bread and wine of the eucharist was supposed to receive the body and blood of Christ and so to be lifted into a real participation in the eternal life of the God-man. Thus, through the sacraments, there was permitted to enter that saving grace of the imagination, whereby the believer (it was not wholly discarded even by Calvin, cf. *Institutio Christianæ Religionis*, IV. xvii. 5–19) might escape the hard element of rationalism that tends to petrify the definitions of dogma, and might live the pure life of the spirit within the fold of the Church. We must never forget, in dealing with Christianity, the potential nullifying power of this faculty, and it is fair always to remember that the strong distaste of the English mind for logical conclusions enabled, and still enables, the Church of that country at its best to open a door through the walls of superstition and rationalism into the garden of liberty planted and watered by the spiritual imagination. Out of that controversy arose also St. Augustine's magnificent vision of the two contrasted cities of the world and of God. Not many scholars to-day have the time and patience to explore the immense book in which he unfolded that vision; it is, in fact, largely unrewarding to the

reader. Yet its very conception shows how radical the sense of dualism was in Augustine's mind and how the Manichæan conception of two eternally hostile powers was carried over into the contrasted kingdoms of heaven and of earth. The book contains, also, strange hints of modern literature and philosophy, as in the famous anticipation (xi. 26) of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum;* and here and there it rises to a peculiar eloquence, as in book xix., chapter 17, where the earthly peace and the celestial peace are defined, and where it is shown how the celestial city during its peregrination in this world makes use of the earthly peace (*utitur ergo etiam cœlestis civitas in hac sua peregrinatione pace terrena*).

The last contest with heresy is far the most important, for it was the creed of Augustine as defined and hardened by his debate with the Pelagians that formulated Christianity for the Middle Ages and, despite our protests, for us of to-day if we would preserve its force. That debate may seem academic, but in reality it touched the very quick of Augustine's faith. He had reached his present position by a series of steps which led him at last to a belief in harmony with the deepest instincts of his soul. Starting with an intense consciousness of the division of life against itself, he had first fallen under the sway of Mani's imaginative mythology.

Mani had altered the Persian dualism of two external powers into a combat within man himself of two temporarily united but radically distinct natures. Seeing the mechanical insufficiency of this system, Augustine had passed to the Neo-Platonic idea of evil as a partial participation in, or negation of, the supreme infinite good. But still the craving of his heart was not satisfied. Abstract ideas meant little to him; personal relationship was all in all. This was the point on which his conversion turned: God's will became the supreme being; man's will, in so far as it differentiated itself from God's, the voluntary inclination to not-being. He now had a dualism of two personalities, God and man; the tincture of Manichæism that remained with him, or, more exactly, the imperative conviction of sin that had made him a disciple of Manichæism, now came to array these two personalities against each other as completely hostile forces—God infinitely good, man totally depraved by the very definition of his finiteness, nay, rather infinitely evil as tending to absolute death. To be sure his conception of God as all-responsible creator compelled him to believe that man was originally created a free will perfectly good in the image of God, and that the evil of his nature was to be explained by that *monstrum*, his voluntary secession from God. But this was, so to speak, the background of

his creed, a matter of revelation and not of present consciousness. As he saw the actual world, it existed apart from God and lost in depravity; the very assumption of free will meant a division from this infinite will, and consequently sin. The evil of man depends therefore not on particular deeds, but is the essence of his personality; he is totally depraved is so far as his personality is a total indivisible entity. To look upon a man's acts as partly good and partly evil is to disregard Augustine's fundamental conception of a dualism of personalities. Salvation cannot result from a mere predominance of good or from a gradual growth in virtue; but must spring from a total change of a man's nature into conformity to the divine nature. It is a self-surrender which cannot be volitional, because volition is the essence of self and of sin. It must proceed from a miraculous power outside of man, by the outstretched arm of God. Conversion is the result of God's free Grace working miraculously upon the soul, and comes to us with no choice or foresight of our own.

Now just here entered the dispute with Pelagius. That Irish forefather of Jesuitism sought to comfort mankind by slurring over the gulf between the human and the divine. Evil does not pertain to the whole character of man, but to his separate acts, and salvation

lies within the reach of all who choose to practise righteousness. Conversion is chiefly the work of man and not of God, and loses its significance as a total change of character. For nature, he taught, is essentially good as it came from the hand of the Creator, and still so remains. Adam's error affected himself alone and was not transmitted to posterity; the child is therefore born uncorrupted, with natural and ineradicable impulses for good, which can be perverted only by an act of the will deliberately contrary to reason. Amid the temptations of the flesh and the seductions of the world, God's grace and the example of Christ come to fortify the nature of man and assist him in his tenure of inborn righteousness. Pelagianism thus pretends to save for man his freedom, but essentially is a denial of free will, in so far as free will implies a radical separation from a transcendent God. The position of Pelagius is, it must be acknowledged, intrinsically illogical. If the infinite, as with the Hindus, lies within man's own nature, then conversion may be a voluntary, however mysterious, act of the man himself by which his own true being frees itself from finite illusion. But if the division is between an infinite divine will and a finite human will, in what way shall the lower term raise itself to the higher? Augustine perceived that here was a denial of sin as something of vast moment

("hominem posse esse sine peccato et mandata Dei facile custodire, si velit"), a denial, in effect, of that very consciousness of an absolute dualism of infinite and finite upon which the reality of religion rests. In the end it could mean only this, that humanity in its finite nature was to be made all-sufficient and the idea of God was to be lost from the world. Augustine saw this, and he saw the truth.

Such is the religion that St. Augustine, like an avenger of the African queen, forced upon the unwilling Roman world, for Rome of herself inclined always to the Aristotelian and Pelagian compromise which shirked logic for virtuous expediency. In the creation of dogma, indeed, he accomplished but little; this work was pretty well finished before his day. But the intensity of his emotional nature endued with living force what the Greek theologians had left as a somewhat scholastic theory. His dominant personality imposed itself readily on a religion that was so purely personal in its character. Out of that sublime contrast of the soul of man set over against an infinite God arose what has been called the anguish of the Middle Ages, and also their rapture of joy. Neither is there for us, so far as we are Christians, any candid escape from the rigour of his orthodoxy. Grant this dualism of the human and the divine persons, call it, if you will, by the euphemistic title of

the fatherhood of God,—and what else but this is Christianity?—and you identify true religion with the fervid uncompromising faith of the Bishop of Hippo. The last great crisis of Christianity was that revival of Augustine's battle with Pelagius in the contest between the Jansenists and the Jesuits. When the Pelagianism of the Jesuits won the day, it was in reality a fatal blow to the old faith; and the fall of Port-Royal was the fall of the Church as the custodian of the true faith—*actum est.* We are all Pelagians to-day, and our end, unless some incalculable force changes the current, may be foreseen in the present tendency to substitute a so-called Christian sociology for theology. And sociology has no need of the hypothesis of a God; it has no care to go beyond the second commandment: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. We are all Pelagians? Let us rather say, with the late Marquis of Salisbury, we are all Socialists.

Yet a word in conclusion. Though there is a logical correctness in Augustine's main syllogism, one cannot read much in his works without discovering whole tracts of thought and exhortation that refuse to take their place in his dogmatic system; one finds that in his practical doctrine he builds upon what may be called the logic of emotions rather than upon pure reason, and constantly calls upon sinners to

repent, as if salvation were in their own hands. And it is in a line with his personal theology that the appeal to man should be to choose, not between the absence and the presence of desire, but between good and evil desire. "There is will," he says, "in all men: or rather, all men are nothing other than wills. For what is desire and joy, but a will of consent toward the things we wish? and what is fear and sadness but a will of dissent from the things we do not wish?" And as desire is thus the basis of our will and of our nature, so it is the cause of that division into the cities of good and of evil: "*Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo*—thus are the two cities made by two loves; the earthly city by the love of self even to the contempt of God, the celestial by the love of God even to contempt of self." The whole matter is summed up in that most beautiful of his aphorisms: "Unde mihi videtur, quod definitio brevis et vera virtutis, *Ordo est amoris.*"

If there is thus in the paradox of absolute Grace and free will a Kantian failure to harmonise rational and practical theology, we must remember that the insoluble difficulty came to St. Augustine from the very sources of Christianity. The fallacy must lie in his premises, and one seems to put finger upon it in that primary assumption of a God at once personal and infinite, which was accepted

unreservedly by St. Augustine and nominally by Pelagius. For, after all, is there not an irreconcilable contradiction in the very terms of the definition? Is not personality, as the expression of individual desire and choice, a negation of the infinite, whether in God or man? India had acknowledged this difficulty and had made the conversion of man to consist in the renunciation of personality as the last illusion of the mind. Greece, too, had caught glimpses of this truth, and had announced it in her own suaver and more flexible speech; and the Christian Platonists of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,[1] feeling the difficulty, veiled their mysticism in many words.

[1] In the first of Henry More's *Divine Dialogues* Hylobares will be found arguing against the existence of God because of the incomprehensibility of the attributes of eternity, immutability, omnisciency, spirituality, and omnipresency. In the answers of Philotheus all that Christian Platonism can say to reconcile personality with these qualities is developed at length.