

The CONFES-
SIONS OF ST
AUGUSTINE
TRANSLATED
by E.B. PUSEY *D.*



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SAINT AUGUSTINE, *b.* 354; *d.* 430.

Saint Augustine's works include (autobiographical) "Confessions," cir. 397, "Retractations," 427-8, to which may be added "Letters"; (philosophical) "Contra Academicos," 386; "De Vita Beata," 386; "Soliloquia," 387; "De Musica," 387-9; "De Magistro," 389; "De anima et ejus origine," 419; and others, including his works on Grammar, Geometry, Rhetoric, etc.; (critical and polemical) "De Doctrina Christiana," 397; "De Civitate Dei," 413-426; "Enchiridion," or "De Fide," 421; "De Vera Religione," 390, etc. (among these the Anti-Pelagian contain what is known as the Augustinian System of Theology); (exegetical, etc.), "De Genesi ad literam," 401-15; "Enarrationes in Psalmos," Homilies, and a Harmony of the Gospels. Three hundred and ninety-six Sermons and various treatises on moral virtues are still to be added. Works, edited by Pilkington and others, "Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," vols. i.-viii., 1887-92. Dr. Pusey's translation of the "Confessions," based upon an earlier English version, first appeared in 1838 as a volume in his "Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church."

PREFACE

THE "Confessions of St. Augustine" have ever been a favourite Christian study. St. Augustine says of them himself, "The thirteen books of my Confessions praise God, Holy and Good, on occasion of that which has in me been good or evil, and raise up man's understanding and affections to Him: for myself, they did so while they were being written, and now do, when read. Let others think of them, as to them seems right; yet that they have and do much please many brethren, I know."¹ And again, "what of my smaller works could be more widely known or give greater pleasure than my Confessions?"² He further states their object, Ep. ad Darium, Ep. 231. "Accept the books of my Confessions, which you wished for. There see me, and praise me not more than I deserve; there believe, not others about me, but myself; there mark me, and see what I was in myself, by myself; and if aught in me please thee, there praise with me, Whom, and not myself, I wished to be praised for me. For He 'made us, and not we ourselves;' but we had destroyed ourselves; and Who made, re-made us. But when you have then learnt what I am, pray for me, that I fall not away, but be perfected."

In modern times, they have been translated again and again into almost every European language, and in all loved. One may quote two sayings, prefixed to a French edition, and which bear evident marks of sincerity: "O how I wish the Confessions were familiar

¹ *Retract.* l. ii. c. 6.

² *De dono Perseverantiæ*, c. 20.

to all who hear me, that they would read and re-read them unceasingly. For there is no book in the world more capable to take away the human heart from the vain, passing, perishable things, which the world presents, and to cure self-love. I have known it but too late, and cease not to grieve thereat." Another says, "The Confessions of St. Augustine are, of all his works, that which is most filled with the fire of the love of God, and most calculated to kindle it in the heart; the most full of unction, and most capable to impart it; and where one best sees how faithfully and carefully this holy man recorded all the blessings which he had received from the mercy of God."

The Confessions seemed also well calculated to appear in this "Library," as bringing to our acquaintance, through his own reflections on his natural character and former self, one of the most remarkable men, whom God has raised up as a teacher in His Church. And, whatever we might beforehand expect, or whatever some may have imagined to themselves of early "corruptions of Christianity," the Fathers of this period, have more which is akin to the turn of mind of these later ages, than those of the earlier, St. Cyprian, perhaps, alone excepted. As, on the one hand, the remains of this period are larger, so also has the character of subsequent ages been far more influenced and more directly formed by them. Augustine, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Basil, Athanasius, Jerome, have left a much deeper impress, and moulded succeeding periods in their own character, far more than the Apostolic Fathers, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, or Tertullian. These acted upon, and the peculiarities of some were modified in, those who are to us intervening links, as Tertullian in St. Cyprian,

Origen in St. Ambrose. And the later Fathers have in these cases preserved more especially what is Catholic in their predecessors, free from that which belonged to their individual character. The influence of St. Augustine, especially, is very visible in Prosper of Aquitaine, Gregory the Great, and in conjunction with the latter and Jerome in the Schoolmen, and so has, through the Reformers, descended to us and our Church. It is plain, for instance, that our Articles, in some cases, express Catholic truth through the medium of the language of St. Augustine. And it is remarkable, that a favourite work of modern times has borne the title of "Meditations of St. Augustine," and people have mistaken a compilation of an Abbot of Fescam in France at the end of the twelfth century, for that of a great Father of the African Church in the fourth. So long has his light shone, and so many, in after ages, has it kindled. But this being the case, it seemed most natural to begin with those, by whom ourselves had been—if, in these last days, imperceptibly, yet—most directly formed, and through them to ascend to the former ages and the writers, who had guided them in the understanding of the common source of all knowledge, the Holy Scriptures.

The subject of the Confessions would naturally give them a deep interest, presenting, as they do, an account of the way in which God led, perhaps the most powerful mind of Christian antiquity, out of darkness to light, and changed one, who was a chosen vessel unto Himself, from a heretic and a seducer of the brethren, into one of the most energetic defenders of Catholic Truth, both against the strange sect to which he had belonged, and against the Arians, Pelagians, and semi-Pelagians,

Donatists, Priscillianists. Such, not an autobiography, is the object of the Confessions; a praise and confession of God's unmerited goodness, but of himself only so much, as might illustrate out of what depth God's mercy had raised him. His proposed subject apparently was God's protection and guidance through all his infirmities and errors, to Baptism, wherein all his transgressions were blotted out; that so others who were in the same state in which he had been, might "not sleep in despair, and say, 'I cannot;'"¹ and, accordingly, his Confessions would close, according to his own view, at the end of the ninth book; the only events, which he relates, subsequent to his conversion and baptism, being those connected with his mother's death, to whose prayers he had been given. It is evidently not without reluctance, that in the tenth book, in compliance with the importunity of some of the brethren, he enters at all into the subject, "what he then was" at the interval of ten years; nor does he enter upon it, without much previous questioning, and lingers upon an enquiry into the nature of memory, which is only in part connected with his immediate question, "By what faculty he came to know God," and not at all with the subject proposed to him. He seems to have glided into it, on occasion of his praise of God, and then to have dwelt upon it, partly through that habit of exactness of mind, which leads him to examine every question thoroughly, partly, it should seem, as keeping him from a subject upon which he had no inclination to enter. When moreover he does come to it, he confines himself to such temptations as are common to all, and so would lead to remarks which would be

¹ Conf. b. x. sec. 4.

useful to all, specially such as would increase vigilance, and omits altogether such as are peculiar to himself. Thus, of the trials, which beset his Episcopal office, love of praise is the only one which he mentions, and that, incidentally only as connected with that office. Meanwhile, his standard is manifestly (as appears, indeed, throughout) a very high one; in that he felt vividly that account was to be given of all to God, and neither eyes nor ears, the purest of the senses, were to be allowed so to be distracted by temporal objects as to turn the mind from its habitual contemplation of eternal. His observations on "curiosity," here and elsewhere, would probably open to most in modern times, a class of duties and dangers, of which they had little notion. Yet deeply as he had been acquainted with sin, previous to his conversion and baptism, and now with the experience of ten years of purity and duty, he felt it Christianly inexpedient to enter into details. The same reserve is still more observable at the beginning of the eleventh book. The question there had apparently occurred to him, whether he should mention by what means he was brought into Holy Orders: but after just alluding "to the exhortations, terrors, comforts, guidances of God" herein, he peremptorily cuts off the question, alleging that his time was "too precious to him;" and, as is known, occupies the three remaining books of the Confessions, with the exposition of the history of the Creation, (in part with reference to Manichæan cavils,) and enquiries connected therewith. His remaining writings contain very little to supply this, and that little chiefly in an extorted vindication of himself and his clergy.¹

¹ See p. 252, 6. note 1.

The same delicacy which dictated this selection of subjects, is observable also in the previous books of the Confessions; here, indeed, the case was different; for this was the history of a former self, a self which had been washed away by the waters of Baptism, which was not the same self, and with which he had no more to do, except to praise God, that it was no longer he.¹ In speaking of this self, which he was not, there were not the same grounds for reserve, as in the other; yet here also, in one remarkable instance, which may serve as a specimen, he alludes to a heinous act, aggravated by having been committed in the house of God, and on which God entailed punishment, but he does not even give a hint of what nature that act was.² Although his subject is God's mercies to himself, himself is the subject which he least likes to dwell upon; and, most probably, upon analyzing the Confessions, would be surprised to find the comparative paucity of details, which they contain. For his principle being not to convey notices of himself, but to praise God on occasion of what had happened to him or in him, he does not accumulate instances of his own wickedness, but rather singles out particular acts as instances or specimens of a class, and as furnishing occasion to enquire into the nature of, or temptations to, such acts. The "Confessions" then rather contain a general sketch of his unconverted life, illustrated by some particular instances, than a regular biography. The details, on the other hand, which he gives as to his friend Alypius,³ remarkably illustrate this absence of egotism, as does the brief sentence in which he relates his conversion, "Alypius,

¹ See p. 249, note at the end of book x.

² B. iii. c. 3. p. 34, 35.

³ B. vi. c. 7—10.

who always differed much from me for the better, without much turbulent delay, joined me."¹

This perhaps is it (next to the vivid account of his conversion, or the beautiful history of the last days of his mother) which has given such an abiding interest to the Confessions. With extreme naturalness, (as one to whom absence of self had become nature,) he passes at once from the immediate subject or fact to the principles with which it is connected, thus giving instruction as to man, or rising to the reverent, though eloquent, or rather to the eloquent, because reverent, praise of God. Thus his youthful sin in robbing the pear tree gives the occasion of enquiring into the nature of sins, committed without apparent temptation;² the loss of his friend, into the nature and real cure of grief;³ his dedication of an early work to one known by reputation only, into the interest we bear to persons so known;⁴ the effect produced by the jollity of a drunken beggar, into the nature of joy⁵ and the like; yet on all occasions ending not in these inquiries, but naturally rising up to God, who alone can explain what is mysterious, satisfy our longings, restore what is defective, fill up what is void, or rather viewing every thing habitually in God's sight and in His light, and so, from time to time leading the reader more sensibly into His Presence, in which himself unceasingly lived and thought.

The same reference to principles gives interest to his allusions to the Manichæans, whom, as being at that time formidable to the unstable, though now a forgotten heresy, he never notices without furnishing opposite

¹ B. viii. ult.

⁴ B. iv.

² B. ii.

⁵ B. vi.

³ B. iv.

and corrective principles. The value of these remains, as lying at the root of the difficulty or temptation, which then gained proselytes to Manicheism; the inward bane and antidote being the same in different ages, though Satan disguises his temptations differently according to the varying characters of ages, people, and climate. The principles upon which St. Augustine meets the Manichæan cavils against the Old Testament, may be of use in this day to a class, which appears in a form outwardly very different; as may the observations, (founded in part upon his own experience,) on the effect of any one indulged error to prevent the reception of other truth.

The last books are of a different character, being employed upon a subject wholly different, though with the same tacit reference to Manichæan errors and cavils; this being a part of the practical character of St. Augustine's mind, continually to bear in mind the heresies by which his hearers were liable to be entangled, and, not in a formal way, but in a word or the turn of an expression, to convey the corrective. By those who have been chiefly interested in the former part as biography, these have been generally passed over; and to persons unaccustomed to abstract thought, the discussions on the nature of time will be little attractive, nor may it altogether be desirable for one, averse to typical interpretation, and who has read Holy Scripture hitherto with modern eyes only, at once to plunge into an exposition, which necessarily exhibits the system of the ancient Church in so condensed and strong a light. Yet to others, both may be of great use; the abstract discussions, in that they show how St. Augustine's acute and philosophic mind saw things to be difficulties, which

people now-a-days think they understand, because they know certain rules, to which they have been subjected; that, because they can refer them to a certain class of objects, therefore they understand the things themselves, and their common principle, (as, because people can refer the tides or the solar system, &c. to a principle of gravitation, that therefore they understand what is the principle of gravitation, or why bodies should possess this principle of attraction,) or because the things themselves are plain and common things, and open to observation, that therefore the hidden sources are plain and open; or because they are regular and men know the rules, that therefore they know upon what the rule is founded. In this age then of experimental and physical science, these discussions may be eminently useful, because by accumulating facts we are hiding from ourselves our ignorance of principles, and employing our knowledge as food for vanity, instead of a ground of humility; all knowledge having two sides, and each accession of knowledge discovering to us not only something new, which we may know, but something also which we cannot know, just as our chemical analysis as far as it has yet been carried, has at one and the same time shewn that the elements are not elements, and that there are many more elements than before; i.e. the further we carry our researches, and the more we explain, the more are things multiplied upon us which we cannot resolve or explain. Our age, however, has contrived to fix its attention on the one side, the things discovered, and so, practically to persuade itself that it is making progress towards discovering all which is discoverable, whereas these are infinite, and so discoveries, which may be numbered, can bear no ratio

to them, and on the other hand, we are multiplying to ourselves the things undiscoverable. To this habit of mind, it may be beneficial to see how St. Augustine toiled in discovering what to many, and to himself in a popular way, would seem so plain, as "what is time;" nor less interesting are his results, that it has no existence of which we can take account, except in the human mind, and that it has no relation whatever to eternity; eternity being no extension of time, and time being but a creature of God, an incident only in eternity, which once was not, as it shall once cease to be. Not that any thing would be by this explained, but that it would appear that questions, which the human mind is fond of raising, upon the supposition that eternity is but lengthened time, are inexplicable, that it has not the data, upon which even to form them.

But these results are not the only reward of the study; for in the midst of investigations, abstract and to many dry, will occur those golden sayings, which may at once shew how his mind, amid every thing, burst upward towards his God, and may teach how things abstract may be studied devotionally. So also, amid the interpretations of Holy Scripture, even those, to whom the analogy between the spiritual and moral creation is less apparent than it was to the Fathers of the Church, may still find what will be instructive to them, (as the distinction between "fruit" and a "gift,"¹) as may the interpretations themselves be, if, without attempting to force themselves to receive what at first goes against them, they do not yet, on its account, reject what even to them may seem probable or natural, but are content to remain in suspense and undecided, until they become

¹ B. xiii. sec. 39—42.

more acquainted with them, and have seen them presented from different points of view, and associated and harmonizing with others. For these interpretations are but fragments of a gigantic system, with which we have been too little acquainted, and of whose symmetry and mutual harmony we can form no notion from a first view of a detached portion.

A pious mind cannot be wanting in real delicacy, and, on this ground also, as well as from the indications of refinement of mind, above pointed out, it will readily be anticipated, that so devotional a mind as St. Augustine's, would not be wanting in delicacy in alluding to the worst sins of his unregenerate state. And so it in fact is; he specifies only two periods of sin, sin, which, alas! under a softened name, is familiarly spoken of, by those who would be esteemed refined and "delicate women." St. Augustine, on the contrary, uses strong terms; he speaks of his sin in language which will be plain to those, who, in Heathen antiquity, have been accustomed to the like, but which is there made subservient to sin and vanity. But to those, who, themselves pure, have skimmed lightly over these subjects in Heathen antiquity or Christian heathenism, these passages will convey no notion, except that he was guilty of sin, which to himself afterwards was disgusting and revolting. These two periods of sin alluded to he is compelled to speak of, not merely as sources of sorrow and degradation, but as the chief impediments to his conversion, the latter, also, as a proof of his own exceeding weakness and slavery to sin, in that, though separated from his former mistress, and with the prospect of marriage after two years, he still relapsed into his former habits, and took to him a new concubine.

There is then no gratuitous mention of sin; nor will any one here learn any thing of sin; and while modern descriptions of penitence, veiled in language, are calculated to produce an unhealthy excitement, and may rather prepare people to imitate the sin, with the hope that they may afterwards imitate the repentance, St. Augustine in unveiled language, creates the loathing which himself felt at the sin. Moderns have an outward purity of language; the ancient Church, with the Bible, a fearless plainness of speech which belongs to inward purity. This has been here and there modified in the translation, in consequence of our present condition; yet it must be, with the protest, that the purity of modern times is not the purity of the Gospel; it is the purity of those who know and have delighted in evil as well as good; it is often the hypocritical purity, which would willingly dwell upon "things which ought not to be named," so that it does but not name them: it is a veiled impurity; and, what is in itself pure and speaks purely of things impure, it associates with its own impurity and calls impure, because itself thinks impurely. And so the very Bible has become to them, what they call "improper," i.e. "unbefitting them," verifying herein the awful Apostolic saying, "unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled."¹ Thus much must be said, because it is easy to foresee that an age of spurious delicacy, i.e. of real indelicacy, will raise charges of indelicacy against passages in the Fathers, (as it does, though in a lower murmuring tone, against the Bible,) when the fault is in itself. And would that there

¹ Tit. I, 15.

were not occasion for the warnings of St. Augustine, and that many in Christian England did not imitate the unbaptized Carthaginians, or require his earnest language against being ashamed of being innocent.¹

For it must never be lost sight of, in reference to this whole story of St. Augustine, that he himself was, during the whole period, not a Christian, for he was not baptized; his mother had been given in marriage to one, who was altogether a heathen, until long after Augustine's birth, (for in his sixteenth year his father was but recently a Catechumen, b. ii. sec. 6.) and, as a heathen, lived in heathenish sin; and himself, although in infancy made a Catechumen, had fallen into a sect, which could in no way be called Christian. Christianity, as now in India, was then every where surrounded by Heathenism, which it was gradually leavening, and there was consequently a mixed race, born of inter-marriages with the heathen, or of parents who had not made up their minds to become wholly Christians, (like the "mixed multitude," which went up with Israel out of Egypt,²) and who were in a sort of twilight state, seeing Christianity but very imperfectly, although the grossness of their own darkness was much mitigated. This should be borne in mind, lest any should think that St. Augustine's descriptions of himself and his comrades furnish any representation of the then state of the Christian Church, and that consequently it even then partook of the state of degradation, in which it is at this day. It also accounts for St. Augustine's mode of speaking of his past sins in terms of strong condemnation, yet, personally, of unconcern; as shocking and loathsome in themselves, but as what he had no more

¹ See p. 24.

² Ex. 12, 38. Num. 11, 4.

to do with, in that he had condemned them, and they had been washed away by Baptism.¹

It now remains only to add a few words upon this and former translations of the Confessions. Into our own language they have been three times translated in whole or in part. The first by a Romanist, T. M. (Sir Tobias Matthews,) 1624. The object of this was apparently, to make the Confessions subserve the cause of Romanism. It was also very inaccurately done,² and many of the errors were pointed out in the second translation by Rev. W. Watts, D.D. 1650. This, however, also still retained a good many faults; and, with some energy, it had a good many vulgarisms, so that though it was adopted as the basis of the present, the work has in fact been retranslated. The third was a translation of the biographical portions only, with a continuation from Possidius and notices in St. Augustine's own writings by Abr. Woodhead of University College, "a most pious, learned, and retired person."³ The former translation was used as its basis, but it is more diffuse. Copious extracts of the Confessions have also been given in Milner's Church History. The former translations, however, were become scarce; and the work seemed no inappropriate commencement of the translations from St. Augustine, in that it gives the main outlines of the first thirty-four years of his life, until a little after his conversion and baptism

It has been the object of the present translation to

¹ Comp. his frequent reference to his Baptism, B. i. c. 11. B. ii. c. 7. B. v. sec. 15, 16. B. vi. c. 13.

² A saying of the time, indicative of its badness, is given in the Biogr. Brit., with some account of the author.

³ See Ath. Ox. t. ii. p. 455.

leave the Confessions to tell their own tale; a few of the notes of the former edition have been retained, which seemed to convey useful information; most have been omitted, as being employed in censuring the translation or notes of his predecessor, and that often in undesirable language. The present translation has been illustrated with notes, beyond what was contemplated for this undertaking generally, partly on account of the miscellaneous character of the work, in that it contained allusions to many things, which had been spoken of more expressly elsewhere; partly as being the first work of this remarkable man, made accessible to ordinary readers; partly also because this plan of illustrating St. Augustine out of himself, had been already adopted by M. Dubois in his Latin edition, though not in his translation, of the Confessions (Paris 1776); and it seemed a pity not to use valuable materials ready collected to one's hand. The far greater part of these illustrations are taken from that edition. Reference has, of course, been every where made to the context in the original work.

With regard to the principles of translation, the object of all translation must be to present the ideas of the author as clearly as may be, with as little sacrifice as may be of what is peculiar to him; the greatest clearness with the greatest faithfulness. The combination or due adjustment of these two is a work of no slight difficulty, since in that re-production, which is essential to good translation, it is very difficult to avoid introducing some slight shade of meaning, which may not be contained in the original. The very variation in the collocation of words may produce this. In the present work the translator desired both to preserve as