

## *Blackfriars*

A MONUMENT TO SAINT AUGUSTINE: ESSAYS ON SOME ASPECTS OF HIS THOUGHT WRITTEN IN COMMEMORATION OF HIS FIFTEENTH CENTENARY. (Sheed & Ward, 1930; pp. 367; 12/6.)

A collection of essays such as these is always a bugbear to a reviewer because each contributor is necessarily looking at the subject from his own peculiar standpoint. Since it is invidious to single out individual essays for praise or blame we mention no names. The volume is called 'A Monument to St. Augustine,' a title with which some would have quarrelled; perhaps it would have been better to call it a Monument to the Saint's centenary rather than to himself. Yet some of the Essays do really constitute a 'monument' to Augustine himself, notably those on his philosophy, his moral system and the future of his metaphysics; the discussion on Augustine's theory of an 'intuitional' knowledge of God, pp. 175ff., is of real value. Yet it may be possible to exaggerate the importance of the Saint's philosophical teaching. Had he never become a bishop he would presumably have been one of the most voluminous of philosophical writers, for his whole bent was towards philosophical speculation. But the care of souls completely changed his outlook, and the impression we get is of a man who has worked out a system of thought which is sufficient for his needs but which he in no sense regards as final. It enables him to express his theological teaching with clarity—as a rule, but not always: 'I have given you no explanation,' he says in a sermon, 'because I have no intelligible explanation to offer you.'<sup>1</sup>

For this reason we regret the way in which people speak of St. Augustine as a Platonist. He was a Platonist, it is true.<sup>2</sup> But was he a convinced one? He himself has told us how Platonism failed when it was a question of the Incarnation.<sup>3</sup> And when he deals with the Incarnation he is an Aristotelian.<sup>4</sup> We do not know how much of Aristotle he had read, but he certainly had read a great deal and grasped it without the aid of a master, as he explicitly says.<sup>5</sup> Julian of Eclanum was not talking at random when he dubbed Augustine 'Poenus disputator,'<sup>6</sup> 'the Punic Aristotle,' the 'philophaster Poenosus.'<sup>7</sup> Could any but an Aristotelian have written: 'Moveri autem pati est, movere facere'?<sup>8</sup> When Volusianus writes to Augustine for his opinion on a point of doctrine he says: 'Our talk then turned to your personal (familiarem) philosophy which, in Aristotelian fashion, you are wont to cultivate as Isocratic.'<sup>9</sup>

Interest in St. Augustine, in his philosophy, his theology, his value in the present day, has been growing for many years past, and the centenary celebrations have done much to quicken

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this interest, as the enormous volume of Augustinian literature which has appeared during the last two years shews. In England we are behindhand in this department, as the present volume testifies, for only five of the ten essayists are Englishmen.

It is easy to pick holes and to criticise, and it is always ungrateful. But why is Augustine's ecclesiastical life spoken of as 'thirty years,' (p. 56)? Ordained A.D. 391-2, he died in 430. On p. 57 there is an awkwardly phrased note, while some of the references on the following pages are inadequate; it is useless, for instance, to refer simply to the *De Doctrina Christiana* without any indication of book or section. Is it correct, too, to say that Tagaste was 'semi-Donatist' (p. 86)? Certainly Alypius, a native of the place like Augustine, and its bishop, said at the Conference held at Carthage in 411: 'Would that everywhere else people could rejoice in the same unity as that which we at Tagaste have rejoiced in from of old!'<sup>10</sup> When will people cease saying that Augustine's knowledge of Greek was little or none? He did say that he disliked it—when a boy<sup>11</sup>—'much as, I suppose, Greek boys dislike Virgil when forced to read him';<sup>12</sup> but he expressly says: 'I possess it and I can read it . . . and I can write it if I want to.'<sup>13</sup> He has St. Basil in Latin, yet when arguing against Julian he says, 'I have preferred to translate it from the Greek, word for word.'<sup>14</sup> In the course of the same controversy he quotes St. Chrysostom in Greek and proceeds to translate it.<sup>15</sup> These are but blemishes and do not detract from the value of the Essays which, if they do nothing else, will serve to make the glorious 'Doctor gratiae' better known to some of us here in England.

H.P.

<sup>1</sup> *Tract* xix, 1, in *Joann.*

<sup>2</sup> See St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, IIa, IIae, xxiii, 2ad 1m.

<sup>3</sup> *Confess.* vii, 25-27.

<sup>4</sup> See for examples *Sermo*, cxxvi, 15; *Tract* i-v, xi, xviii-xx, in *Joann.*

<sup>5</sup> *Confess.* iv, 28.

<sup>6</sup> *Contra Julianum*, iii, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Given in *A Monument to St. Augustine*, p. 57, note.

<sup>8</sup> *De Genesi ad litt.*, *Opus imperfectum*, 14. See van Hove, *De Miraculo*, p. 112.

<sup>9</sup> *Ep.* cxxxv, 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Collatio* I, 186; P.L. xi, 1316.

<sup>11</sup> *Confess.* i, 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, where, though the text is not clear, he seems certainly to be talking of Greek.

<sup>14</sup> *Contra Julianum*, i, 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 22 and 26.