

*Petrarch, Francesco*

# ETRARCH'S SECRET

OR

THE SOUL'S CONFLICT WITH  
PASSION

THREE DIALOGUES BETWEEN HIMSELF  
AND S. AUGUSTINE

TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN BY  
WILLIAM H. DRAPER



WITH TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

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**FRANCIS PETRARCHI**



**EMILIAE AUGUSTAE**

**PER ANNOS XXII**

**COLLABORANTI MECUM, COMPATIENTI, COLLAETANTI**

**PETRARCAE HOC COLLOQUIUM**

**MEMORABILE**

**AMORIS DULCEDINE LACRIMISQUE TINCTUM**

**IAM DEMUM ANGLICE REDDITUM**

**GRATUS DEDICO**

**A. S. MDCCCCKI**

Hist-Med.  
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## INTRODUCTION

Most modern writers on Petrarch agree in stating that of all his works the Dialogues which he calls *Secretum meum* are the one which throws most light upon the man himself.

Yet no English translation has hitherto been published. A French version by M. Victor Develay was issued a few years ago, and received the recognition of the French Academy; and, considering the great importance of Petrarch in the history of the Renaissance, not merely in Italy but in Europe, it is time that a similar opportunity of knowing him more fully was offered to English readers; for there are signs on both sides of the Atlantic that the number of those interested in him is steadily growing. The reason for this is undoubtedly the fact that, as the whole work of Petrarch comes to be better known, interest in him as a man increases. Mr. Sidney Lee has lately reminded us of his wide range and predominating influence in the matter of the sonnet in France and in Elizabethan England, as well as in his own country; and yet that influence was

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very far indeed from revealing all that Petrarch was. It was largely an influence of style, a triumph of the perfection of form, and his imitators did not trouble much about the precise nature of the sentiment and spirit informing the style. When this came to be weighed in the balances of a later day, the tendency of English feeling was to regard his sentiment as a trifle too serious and weak. The love-making of the Cavaliers brought in a robuster tone. When once the question was raised, "Why so pale and wan, fond lover?" there was really no good answer to it on Petrarchan lines, and the consequence was that his name and fame suffered something of eclipse among us. But eclipses are transient events, and when literary England felt once more the attraction of Italy in the end of the eighteenth century it was not only Dante who began to resume his sway and to provoke translation, but Petrarch also. Then attention was turned chiefly to his Italian poetry, but also in some degree to the general body of his Latin works and to his Letters, of which it is reported that Fox was among the first to perceive the high value. In England the pioneers in this direction were Mrs. Susannah Dobson, who published first a *Life of Petrarch* in two volumes in 1775, which had by 1805 reached a sixth edition, and, soon after, another volume called *Petrarch's View of Life*, purporting to be a translation, but

in fact a very loose and attenuated abstract of the treatise *De remediis utriusque Fortunæ*, which nevertheless reached a new edition in 1797. Then came a volume of *Essays on Petrarch* (Murray 1823) by the Italian exile Ugo Foscolo, and a little later a second *Life of the Poet* by no less a person than Thomas Campbell, also in two volumes.

Testifying to the re-awakened interest in Petrarch, numerous translations also of his poetry were published by Lady Dacre, Hugh Boyd, Leigh Hunt, Capel Lofft, and many others, who took up after a long interval the tradition begun by Chaucer and handed on by Surrey, Wyatt, Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser, Drummond of Hawthornden, and George Chapman.

Then for a while there was a pause, and the main drift of such attention in England as could be spared for things Italian in mid-Victorian days was concentrated on the greater luminary of the *Divine Comedy* and the exciting political events of the sixties; though some attention was drawn to things connected with Petrarch by Lytton's novel of *Rienzi*, which was first published in 1835 and had a considerable vogue.

Meanwhile in Italy itself his fame was well served by the excellent collection and reprint of his Latin letters by Fracasetti in three vols. (1859-63), and since that time there have ap-

peared several important works dealing with the larger aspects of his life and work, most notable among them being Koerting's *Petrarka's Leben und Werke* (Leipzig 1878), and in France M. P. de Nolhac's *Pétrarque et l'Humanisme* (two vols., 1907, new edition), with other subsidiary works, and four small volumes by M. Henri Cochin, elucidating what is known of Petrarch's brother Gherardo and some of his many friends. Amongst ourselves in late years, following the labours of J. A. Symonds in his history of the Renaissance, we have Henry Reeve's small but well-planned volume in the "Foreign Classics for English Readers," and, more recently still, Mr. Hollway Calthrop's *Petrarch: his Life, Work and Times* (1907), and Mrs. Maud Jerrold's *Francesco Petrarca: Poet and Humanist* (1909).

It is significant that both the last writers single out the *Secretum* for its psychological interest, the former stating that "to those who feel the charm of Petrarch's nature and the intense humanity of his character, these three Dialogues are the most fascinating of all his writings"; and the latter "that this conflict of the dual self is of quite peculiar interest."

Mrs. Jerrold indeed goes so far as to say that Petrarch "plunges into the most scathing self-examination that any man ever made. Whether the book was intended for the public we may well doubt, both from the words of the preface

and from the fact that it does not appear to have been published till after the author's death. But however this may be, it remains one of the world's great monuments of self-revelation and ranks with the *Confessions of S. Augustine*—a verdict which to some critics will seem to have a touch of overstatement, though hardly beyond the opinion of Petrarch's French students, and not altogether unpardonable in so enthusiastic an admirer of her subject, and a verdict which at least would not have been displeasing to Petrarch himself.

Among the many points of human interest to be found in the Dialogues not the least is the one connected with Accidie, a theme which has of itself attracted special study in the present day, particularly since attention was called to it by the late Bishop of Oxford in his well-known introduction to the *Spirit of Discipline*. Observers of mental life incline to the view that the form of depression denoted by the mediæval word was not confined to those times or met with only in monasteries, and it is curious that he who is sometimes called the "first of the moderns" should take us into his confidence as to his sufferings from this trouble, and exemplify the truth of the observation to which reference has been made. M. P. de Nolhac, in his interesting work entitled *Le Frère de Pétrarque*, calls particular attention to this trait in Petrarch's character, and in an appendix on the subject writes, "Mais il faut surtout lire

l'émouvante discussion que Pétrarque, dans le second dialogue du *Secretum*, suppose entre Saint Augustin et lui-même, les aveux entrecoupés de sanglots qu'il laisse échapper. Cette torture, dit-il, où il passe des jours et des nuits, a pourtant en elle je ne sais quelle atroce volupté tellement que parfois il en coûte de s'y arracher" (p. 220). It is the remarking on this note of self-will, this *voluptas dolendi*, that M. de Nolhac considers is Petrarch's special contribution to the subject and furnishes a new point beyond what is in previous definitions.

The fundamental question raised by these Dialogues is the question of what was the real nature and character of Petrarch, and wherein lay the secret of his extraordinary charm and influence among his contemporaries, and especially among contemporary men? It is difficult to convey in few words how great an impression the study of his Latin works makes in regard to this influence in his own lifetime. Of course, a reader is soon aware of the trait of personal vanity in Petrarch and of certain unconscious littlenesses, as in the matter of his appreciation of Dante; but the strange thing is how little this interfered with the regard and admiration extended to him by many sorts and conditions of men. In the ordinary intercourse of life one is apt to think such a trait fatal to anything like respect, and it must always detract somewhat from the full stature of any mind, but in the case



of Petrarch it seems evident that he was one to whom much was forgiven, and that the reason is to be found in the presence in him of so rich an assemblage of other and better qualities that this one hardly counted at all, or was looked on with kindly amusement by friends large-hearted enough to think it nothing compared with what was good and admirable in his mind. We may take it for granted that, as he hints in his "Letter to Posterity," he started with the advantage of a good presence and a sufficient care of his own person and appearance in younger days; and it is evident that he had by nature a certain engaging frankness and impulsiveness, which nevertheless were not inconsistent with the contrasted qualities of gravity and dignity, learned at first from his father and mother and their friends, and cultivated by his study of the Law and afterwards by his attendance on the Papal court at Avignon. One can discern this in his Letters and see it reflected in those that were written to him or about him. But beyond these introductory qualities, as they may be called, there were other deeper traits, of rarer kind, that must be noted before one can understand the position he attained and has held so long. Studying his work from the cool distance of six centuries, one is inclined to judge that the most fundamental quality of his nature was his love of literature, and that every other trait took a subordinate place to this.

It is perhaps doubtful whether this or the life of personal affection, or even of devotion in a monastery, would have gained the upper hand if the circumstances of his life had been different in the matter of his love for Laura; but taking into consideration that she was separated from him apparently by temperament and circumstance, the one course that remained open to him without let or hindrance was the life of literature in the sense of devotion to the great writers of the Past and the practice of the art of writing for himself. He loved this for its own sake, and at the same time he was quickened by the sense of a new learning, which, since his time and largely by the impetus he gave it, has taken form and outline in a wonderful way, but was then only like the first streak of dawn upon the sky.

Petrarch was not the first man to find a certain contradiction between his desires and the possibilities of life around him, and to pass many years under the pain of contrary attractions that could not all be followed to fulfilment. This conflict is what gives interest to the *Secretum*. Some have thought, and the idea was expressed by one of his correspondents, that his love for Laura was very much of a literary pose. Yet that such a view is an insufficient account of it seems pretty clearly established by the work here translated. It is, indeed, plain that his feelings ran a course, and not a smooth

one, and did not continue in one stay; he came to see the whole matter in a changed light, and yet not wholly changed; his relation was transfigured, not abandoned, and after the death of Laura, which took place when he was forty-four, it continued as a memory from which the pain had faded away and only what was uplifting remained.

That which persisted unchanged all through his life and seems most to have had the colour and substance of a passion was the love of Letters. To this his friendship, his very real patriotism, and (must we not add?) his religion also were in a sense second. But the mention of this last factor in the life of Petrarch leads one to express the opinion that this has not yet been quite sufficiently reckoned with. That it should not have been thought worthy of such reckoning has probably arisen from the one ugly fact in his life which he himself does not conceal, and indeed expressly refers to in his "Letter to Posterity," in the following words:—

"As for the looser indulgences of appetite, would indeed I could say I was a stranger to them altogether; but if I should so say, I should lie. This I can safely affirm that, although I was hurried away to them by the fervour of my age and temperament, their vileness I have always inwardly execrated. As soon as I approached my fortieth year I

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repelled these weaknesses entirely from my thoughts and my remembrance, as if I had never known them. And this I count among my earliest happy recollections, thanking God, who has freed me, while yet my powers were unimpaired and strong, from this so vile and always hateful servitude." <sup>1</sup>

Now, although Petrarch did not, as some other men have done, including his own brother, express his repentance by retiring to a monastery, yet there is evidence enough that the change of will here referred to, and professed in the *Secretum*, was real, and that the older he grew the more he lifted up his heart. Among other signs of this there is the curious little group of what he calls *Penitential Psalms*, which were translated into English by George Chapman, into whose translation of Homer Keats looked and was inspired.

In his Will also there are not a few passages through which one hears a note of genuine penitence. Among other curious points in it is the mention of the exact spot in which he would wish to be laid to rest in some one of seven different places where he might happen to die, the last being the city of Parma, of which he says, "At si Parmæ, in ecclesiâ majori, ubi per multos annos archidiaconus fui inutilis et semper fere absens."

Petrarch must have fully weighed in his

<sup>1</sup> Translation by H. Reeve.

own case the pros and cons for such retirement. His treatise *De Otio Religiosorum* shows that he understood what good side that kind of life has, and his whole attitude towards his brother—generous, and attached, almost to the point of romance—reveals how he could admire it. But in his own case he felt that it would cramp his faculties too much to be endurable, and hinder more than it would help the kind of work to which he had put his hand. There was also another influence that told strongly on this father of Humanism. He whose nature was so full of unsatisfied natural affection had begun in his latter years to find some rest and blessing in the love and tendance of a daughter, the light of whose care and companionship for him shines through his declining days like the rays of the sun in the evening after a dark and troubled day.

But if we are right in judging that the love of Letters was the dominant factor in the life of Petrarch, it was but the main thread in a singularly complex nature. Not much less in substance and strength was his genius for friendship. Indeed, his study of the writers of past ages partook of the nature of friendship, just as his friendship with living men had a deep literary tinge. He loved books and he loved men, and he loved them in the same way. This is by no means a frequent combination in the degree in which it was shown in

Petrarch. More often the book-lover becomes a recluse, and the lover of his fellow-men loses his ardour for study.

But not even the love of books and of men took up all the activities of this rich nature. He was also a keen traveller and among the first to write of natural scenery in the modern spirit. He had that in him which, in spite of his love for reading and writing, sent him forth into other lands and made him eager to see men and cities. Yet the love of the country in him prevailed over the love of cities. His many references to his life at Vacluse, though to readers of to-day they may seem sometimes affected, yet show only a superficial affectation, a mere mode, which does not seriously lessen the impression of his simple taste and his genuine delight in his garden and his fishing, and his talk with the charming old farmer-man and that sun-burnt wife for whom he had such an unbounded respect.

In the two recent lives of Petrarch in English a reader may make closer acquaintance with this side of his character, and will find much that falls in with modern feeling as to simplicity of living and the joys of escaping from "the man-stifled town." But what is still a desideratum is a good English translation of his Letters to his friends, which will add many glimpses of his daily interests and thoughts and fill up the picture of his interior life as

it is disclosed to us in the Dialogues here presented.

What the *Secretum* gives us is the picture of Petrarch as he was in the crisis of his middle years. It was written in or about the year 1342 when he was thirty-eight, and in these Dialogues we find him looking back over his youth and early life—the sap and vigour of his mind as strong as ever, the recollection of many sensations green and still powerful—but finding that the sheer march of time and experience of manhood are forcing him now to see things with more mature vision. Five years later he will be seen suddenly kindled into surprising excitement in that strange Rienzi episode, but in one of his letters to that unhappy politician there is a sentence which might have been penned by Bishop Butler, and has in it the accent of grave experience:<sup>1</sup> “*Itunt res quæ sempiterna lex statuit: mutare ista non possum, fugere possum*” (Things will go as the law eternal has decided: to alter their course is out of our power; what we can do is to get out of their way).

The interest of the *Secretum* is heightened by remembering the time of life in which it was composed.<sup>2</sup> Some will find most pleasure in

<sup>1</sup> *De rebus fam.*, vii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> The profile portrait, reproduced by kind permission of Mr. T. Fisher Unwin, publisher of Mr. E. J. Mills' book on Petrarch, is from Lombardo's copy of the *De viris illustribus*, finished about five years after the death of Petrarch, and is believed to be an authentic picture of him in later life.

reading what men have written *De Senectute*, and others prefer the charm that belongs to youth; but is there not much to be said for the interest of what men write from that high tableland that lies between the two, in the full strength of their mind when they have lived long enough to know what is hidden from the eyes of youth and not long enough to be wearied and broken with the greatness of the way? Such is the tone that seems to pervade the Dialogues between S. Augustine and Petrarch. In the preface he looks forward to cherishing the little book himself in future years, like some flower that keeps alive remembrance of past days and yet is not cherished for memory only, but to guard the resolution which has been taken to go forward and not back, and, as his French translator suggests, "Is it to be wondered at that these pages, written with such *abandon*, in which he has laid bare his whole soul, should have been his own favourite work? It was the book he kept at his bedside, his faithful counsellor and friend, and to which he turned ever and again with pleasure in the hours of remembering the time past."

It is not necessary to tell over again the story of Petrarch's lifelong devotion to the study of S. Augustine's *Confessions*, or to dwell on the obvious reasons for that devotion. Every man loves the book which tells the history of conflicts like his own, and which has helped to give him



courage in his warfare and its sorrows and joys.

“That loss is common would not make  
My own less bitter, rather more;”

sings the poet, but if one reads the experience of those who have suffered and contended and conquered, and is sure that their load was as heavy as his own, then there is a spirit which is breathed over from one life to another, and which even though it tells us how great is the burden of sorrow in the world, yet also tells us that a man is not alone, but that there are companions in patience who a little strengthen each other and give the sense of fellowship from age to age, *donec aspiret dies et inclinentur umbræ*.

Many of the letters of Petrarch's later years show how wistfully he waited for that day. But they also show how gallant a heart he kept, and how faithful to those friends that remained, including the one so lovable and generous and true, Giovanni Boccaccio, who survived him little more than a year.

Petrarch passed the end of his life in a modest house which he built in one of the loveliest parts of Italy, that to English readers will be for ever dear because of the haunting music that Shelley wove around its name.

It was in the Eugean Hills at Arqua where Petrarch chose to wait for the dawn, and, till it

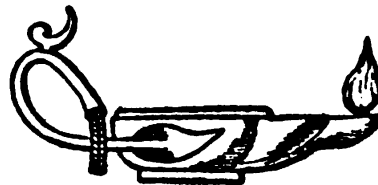
came, to go on working among the books he loved as his own soul.

“Many a green isle needs must be  
In the deep wide sea of misery,”

and to read the story of his last years there is to think of one of those green isles. These were days of calm, and the book of the Secret ends with the expression of hope for a deeper calm still. In due time it came, but, as the English Poet sang, after more than six centuries—

The love from Petrarch's urn  
Yet amid yon hills doth burn,

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*Photo Alinari*

**S. AUGUSTINE GREETING A FRIEND**

*From a picture by Donatello Gozzoli at San Gimignano*

# PETRARCH'S SECRET

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

**OFTEN** have I wondered with much curiosity as to our coming into this world and what will follow our departure. When I was ruminating lately on this matter, not in any dream as one in sickness and slumber, but wide awake and with all my wits about me, I was greatly astonished to behold a very beautiful Lady, shining with an indescribable light about her. She seemed as one whose beauty is not known, as it might be, to mankind. I could not tell how she came there, but from her raiment and appearance I judged her a fair Virgin, and her eyes, like the sun, seemed to send forth rays of such light that they made me lower my own before her, so that I was afraid to look up. When she saw this she said, Fear not; and let not the strangeness of my presence affright you in any wise. I saw your steps had gone astray; and I had compassion on you and have come down from above to bring you timely succour. Hitherto your eyes have been darkened and you have

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looked too much, yes, far too much, upon the things of earth. If these so much delight you, what shall be your rapture when you lift your gaze to things eternal!

When I heard her thus speak, though my fear still clung about me, with trembling voice I made reply in Virgil's words—

“What name to call thee by, O Virgin fair,  
I know not, for thy looks are not of earth  
And more than mortal seems thy countenance.”<sup>1</sup>

I am that Lady, she answered, whom you have depicted in your poem *Africa* with rare art and skill, and for whom, like another Amphion of Thebes, you have with poetic hands built a fair and glorious Palace in the far West on Atlas's lofty peak.

Be not afraid, then, to listen and to look upon the face of her who, as your finely-wrought allegory proves, has been well-known to you from of old.

Scarcely had she uttered these words when, as I pondered all these things in my mind, it occurred to me this could be none other than Truth herself who thus spoke. I remembered how I had described her abode on the heights of Atlas; yet was I ignorant from what region she had come, save only that I felt assured she could have come from none other place than Heaven. Therefore I turned my gaze towards her, eagerly

<sup>1</sup> *Æneid*, i. 327-28.

desiring to look upon her face; but lo, the eye of man is unable to gaze on that ethereal Form, wherefore again was I forced to turn them towards the ground. When she took note of this, after a short silence, she spoke once more; and, questioning me many times, she led me to engage with her in long discourse. From this converse I was sensible of gaining a twofold benefit, for I won knowledge, and the very act of talking with her gave me confidence. I found myself by degrees becoming able to look upon the face which at first dismayed me by its splendour, and as soon as I was able to bear it without dread, and gaze fixedly on her wondrous beauty, I looked to see if she were accompanied with any other, or had come upon the retirement of my solitude alone; and as I did so I discerned at her side the figure of an aged man, of aspect venerable and full of majesty. There was no need to inquire his name. His religious bearing, modest brow, his eyes full of dignity, his measured step, his African look, but Roman speech, plainly declared him to be that most illustrious Father, Augustine. Moreover, he had so gracious a mien, and withal so noble, that one could not possibly imagine it to belong to any other than to him. Even so I was on the point of opening my lips to ask, when at that moment I heard the name so dear to me uttered from the lips of Truth herself. Turning herself to him, as if to intervene upon

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his deep meditation, she addressed him in these words: "Augustine, dear to me above a thousand others, you know how devoted to yourself this man is, and you are aware also with how dangerous and long a malady he is stricken, and that he is so much nearer to Death as he knows not the gravity of his disease. It is needful, then, that one take thought for this man's life forthwith, and who so fit to undertake the pious work as yourself? He has ever been deeply attached to your name and person; and all good doctrine is wont more easily to enter the mind of the disciple when he already starts with loving the Master from whom he is to learn. Unless your present happiness has made you quite forget your former sorrow, you will remember that when you were shut in the prison of the mortal body you also were subject to like temptation as his. And if that were so, most excellent Physician of those passions yourself experienced, even though your silent meditation be full of sweetness to your mind, I beg that your sacred voice, which to me is ever a delight, shall break its silence, and try whether you are able by some means to bring calm to one so deeply distressed."

Augustine answered her: "You are my guide, my Counsellor, my Sovereign, my Ruler; what is it, then, you would have me say in your presence?"

"I would," she replied, "that some human voice



..speak to the ears of this mortal man. He will better bear to hear truth so. But seeing that whatever you shall say to him he will take as *under* said by me, I also will be present in person *advantage* during your discourse."

Augustine answered her, "The love I bear to this sick man, as well as the authority of her who speaks, make it my duty to obey." Then, looking kindly at me and pressing me to his heart in fatherly embrace, he led me away to the most retired corner he could find, and Truth herself went on a few steps in front. There we all three sat down. Then while Truth listened as the silent Judge, none other beside her being present, we held long converse on one side and the other; and because of the greatness of the theme, the discourse between us lasted over three days. Though we talked of many things much against the manners of this age, and on faults and failings common to mankind, in such wise that the reproaches of the Master seemed in a sense more directed against men in general than against myself, yet those which to me came closest home I have graven with more especial vividness on the tablet of my memory. That this discourse, so intimate and deep, might not be lost, I have set it down in writing and made this book; not that I wish to class it with my other works, or desire from it any credit. My thoughts aim higher. What I desire is that I may be able by reading to renew as often as I wish the pleasure

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I felt from the discourse itself. So, little Book, I bid you flee the haunts of men and be content to stay with me, true to the title I have given you of "My Secret": and when I would think upon deep matters, all that you keep in remembrance that was spoken in secret you in secret will tell to me over again.

To avoid the too frequent iteration of the words "said I," "said he," and to bring the personages of the Dialogue, as it were, before one's very eyes, I have acted on Cicero's method and merely placed the name of each interlocutor before each paragraph.<sup>1</sup> My dear Master learned this mode himself from Plato. But to cut short all further digression, this is how Augustine opened the discourse. :

<sup>1</sup> *De Amicitia*, i.

# DIALOGUE THE FIRST

S. AUGUSTINE—PETRARCH

*S. Augustine.* What have you to say, O man of little strength? Of what are you dreaming? For what are you looking? Remember you not you are mortal?

*Petrarch.* Yes, I remember it right well, and a shudder comes upon me every time that remembrance rises in my breast.

*S. Augustine.* May you, indeed, remember as you say, and take heed for yourself. You will spare me much trouble by so doing. For there can be no doubt that to recollect one's misery and to practise frequent meditation on death is the surest aid in scorning the seductions of this world, and in ordering the soul amid its storms and tempests, if only such meditation be not superficial, but sink into the bones and marrow of the heart. Yet am I greatly afraid lest that happen in your case which I have seen in so many others, and you be found deceiving your own self.

*Petrarch.* In what way do you mean? For I do not clearly understand the drift of your remarks.

*S. Augustine.* O race of mortal men, this it is that above all makes me astonished and fearful for you, when I behold you, of your own will, clinging to your miseries; pretending that you do not know the peril hanging over your heads, and if one bring it under your very eyes, you try to thrust it from your sight and put it afar off.

*Petrarch.* In what way are we so mad?

*S. Augustine.* Do you suppose there is any living man so unreasonable that if he found himself stricken with a dangerous ailment he would not anxiously desire to regain the blessing of health?

*Petrarch.* I do not suppose such a case has ever been heard of.

*S. Augustine.* And do you think if one wished for a thing with all one's soul one would be so idle and careless as not to use all possible means to obtain what one desired?

*Petrarch.* No one, I think, would be so foolish.

*S. Augustine.* If we are agreed on these two points, so we ought also to agree on a third.

*Petrarch.* What is this third point?

*S. Augustine.* It is this: that just as he who by deep meditation has discovered he is miserable will ardently wish to be so no more; and as he who has formed this wish will seek to have it realised, so he who seeks will be able to reach what he wishes. It is clear that the third step depends on the second as the second on the first.

And therefore the first should be, as it were, a root of salvation in man's heart. Now you mortal men, and you yourself with all your power of mind, keep doing your best by all the pleasures of the world to pull up this saving root out of your hearts, which, as I said, fills me with horror and wonder. With justice, therefore, you are punished by the loss of this root of salvation and the consequent loss of all the rest.

*Petrarch.* I foresee this complaint you bring is likely to be lengthy, and take many words to develop it. Would you mind, therefore, postponing it to another occasion? And that I may travel more surely to your conclusion, may we spend a little more time over the premisses?

*S. Augustine.* I must concede something to your slowness of mind; so please stop me at any point where you wish.

*Petrarch.* Well, if I must speak for myself, I do not follow your chain of reasoning.

*S. Augustine.* What possible obscurity is there in it? What are you in doubt about now?

*Petrarch.* I believe there is a multitude of things for which we ardently long, which we seek for with all our energy, but which nevertheless, however diligent we are, we never have obtained and never shall.

*S. Augustine.* That may be true of other desires, but in regard to that we have now under discussion the case is wholly different.

*Petrarch.* What makes you say that?

*S. Augustine.* Because every man who desires to be delivered from his misery, provided only he desires sincerely and with all his heart cannot fail to obtain that which he desires.

*Petrarch.* O father, what is this I hear! There are few men indeed who do not feel they lack many things and who would not confess they were so far unhappy. Every one who questions his own heart will acknowledge it is so. By natural consequence if the fulness of blessing makes a man happy, all things he lacks will so far make him unhappy. This burden of unhappiness all men would fain lay down, as every one is aware; but every one is aware also that very few have been able. How many there are who have felt the crushing weight of grief, through bodily disease, or the loss of those they loved, or imprisonment, or exile, or hard poverty, or other misfortunes it would take too long to tell over; and yet they who suffer these things have only too often to lament that it is not permitted them, as you suggest, to be set free. To me, then, it seems quite beyond dispute that a multitude of men are unhappy by compulsion and in spite of themselves.

*S. Augustine.* I must take you a long way back, and as one does with the very young whose wits are slight and slow, I must ask you to follow out the thread of my discourse from its very simplest elements. I thought your

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mind was more advanced, and I had no idea you still needed lessons so childish. Ah, if only you had kept in mind those true and saving maxims of the wise which you have so often read and re-read with me; if, I must take leave to say, you had but wrought for yourself instead of others; if you had but applied your study of so many volumes to the ruling of your own conduct, instead of to vanity and gaining the empty praise of men, you would not want to retail such low and absurd follies.

*Petrarch.* I know not where you want to take me, but already I am aware of the blush mounting to my brow, and I feel like schoolboys in presence of an angry master. Before they know what they are accused of they think of many offences of which they are guilty, and at the very first word from the master's lips they are filled with confusion. In like case I too am conscious of my ignorance and of many other faults, and though I perceive not the drift of your admonition, yet as I know almost everything bad may be brought against me, I blush even before you have done speaking. So pray state more clearly what is this biting accusation that you have made.

*S. Augustine.* I shall have many things to lay to your charge presently. Just now what makes me so indignant is to hear you suppose that any one can become or can be unhappy against his will.

*Petrarch.* I might as well spare my blushes. For what more obvious truth than this can possibly be imagined? What man exists so ignorant or so far removed from all contact with the world as not to know that penury, grief, disgrace, illness, death, and other evils too that are reckoned among the greatest, often befall us in spite of ourselves, and never with our own consent? From which it follows that it is easy enough to know and to detest one's own misery, but not to remove it; so that if the two first steps depend on ourselves, the third is nevertheless in Fortune's hand.

*S. Augustine.* When I saw you ashamed I was ready to give you pardon, but brazen impudence angers me more than error itself. How is it you have forgotten all those wise precepts of Philosophy, which declare that no man can be made unhappy by those things you rattle off by name? Now if it is Virtue only that makes the happiness of man, which is demonstrated by Cicero and a whole multitude of weighty reasons, it follows of necessity that nothing is opposed to true happiness except what is also opposed to Virtue. This truth you can yourself call to mind even without a word from me, at least unless your wits are very dull.

*Petrarch.* I remember it quite well. You would have me bear in mind the precepts of the Stoics, which contradict the opinions of

the crowd and are nearer truth than common custom is.

*S. Augustine.* You would indeed be of all men the most miserable were you to try to arrive at the truth through the absurdities of the crowd, or to suppose that under the leadership of blind guides you would reach the light. You must avoid the common beaten track and set your aspirations higher; take the way marked by the steps of very few who have gone before, if you would be counted worthy to hear the Poet's word—

“On, brave lad, on! your courage leading you,  
So only Heaven is scaled.”

*Petrarch.* Heaven grant I may hear it ere I die! But I pray you to proceed. For I assure you I have by no means become shameless. I do not doubt the Stoics' rules are wiser far than the blunders of the crowd. I await therefore your further counsel.

*S. Augustine.* Since we are agreed on this, that no one can become or be unhappy except through his own fault, what need of more words is there?

*Petrarch.* Just this need, that I think I have seen very many people, and I am one of them, to whom nothing is more distressful than the inability to break the yoke of their faults, though all their life long they make the greatest efforts so to do. Wherefore, even allowing that the

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, ix. 641.

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maxim of the Stoics holds good, one may yet admit that many people are very unhappy in spite of themselves, yes, and although they lament it and wish they were not, with their whole heart.

*S. Augustine.* We have wandered somewhat from our course, but we are slowly working back to our starting-point. Or have you quite forgotten whence we set out?

*Petrarch.* I had begun to lose sight of it, but it is coming back to me now.

*S. Augustine.* What I had set out to do with you was to make clear that the first step in avoiding the distresses of this mortal life and raising the soul to higher things is to practise meditation on death and on man's misery; and that the second is to have a vehement desire and purpose to rise. When these two things were present, I promised a comparatively easy ascent to the goal of our desire. Unless haply to you it seems otherwise?

*Petrarch.* I should certainly never venture to affirm this, for from my youth upwards I have had the increasing conviction that if in any matter I was inclined to think differently from yourself I was certain to be wrong.

*S. Augustine.* We will please waive all compliments. And as I observe you are inclined to admit the truth of my words more out of deference than conviction, pray feel at liberty to say whatever your real judgment suggests.

*Petrarch.* I am still afraid to be found differing, but nevertheless I will make use of the liberty you grant. Not to speak of other men, I call to witness Her who has ever been the ruling spirit of my life; you yourself also I call to witness how many times I have pondered over my own misery and over the subject of Death; with what floods of tears I have sought to wash away my stains, so that I can scarce speak of it without weeping; yet hitherto, as you see, all is in vain. This alone leads me to doubt the truth of that proposition you seek to establish, that no man has ever fallen into misery but of his own free will, or remained miserable except of his own accord; the exact opposite of which I have proved in my own sad experience.

*S. Augustine.* That complaint is an old one and seems likely to prove unending. Though I have already several times stated the truth in vain, I shall not cease to maintain it yet. No man can become or can be unhappy unless he so chooses; but as I said at the beginning, there is in men a certain perverse and dangerous inclination to deceive themselves, which is the most deadly thing in life. For if it is true that we rightly fear being taken in by those with whom we live, because our natural habit of trusting them tends to make us unsuspecting, and the pleasantly familiar sound of their voice is apt to put us off our guard,—how much rather

ought you to fear the deceptions you practise on yourself, where love, influence, familiarity play so large a part, a case wherein every one esteems himself more than he deserves, loves himself more than he ought, and where Deceiver and Deceived are one and the same person?

*Petrarch.* You have said this kind of thing pretty often to-day already. But I do not recollect ever practising such deception on myself; and I hope other people have not deceived me either.

*S. Augustine.* Now at this very moment you are notably deceiving yourself when you boast never to have done such a thing at all; and I have a good enough hope of your own wit and talent to make me think that if you pay close attention you will see for yourself that no man can fall into misery of his own will. For on this point our whole discussion rests. I pray you to think well before answering, and give your closest attention, and be jealous for truth more than for disputation, but then tell me what man in the world was ever forced to sin? For the Seers and Wise Men require that sin must be a voluntary action, and so rigid is their definition that if this voluntariness is absent then the sin also is not there. But without sin no man is made unhappy, as you agreed to admit a few minutes ago.

*Petrarch.* I perceive that by degrees I am getting away from my proposition and am being

compelled to acknowledge that the beginning of my misery did arise from my own will. I feel it is true in myself, and I conjecture the same to be true of others. Now I beg you on your part to acknowledge a certain truth also.

*S. Augustine.* What is it you wish me to acknowledge?

*Petrarch.* That as it is true no man ever fell involuntarily, so this also is true that countless numbers of those who thus are voluntarily fallen, nevertheless do not voluntarily remain so. I affirm this confidently of my own self. And I believe that I have received this for my punishment, as I would not stand when I might, so now I cannot rise when I would.

*S. Augustine.* That is indeed a wise and true view to take. Still as you now confess you were wrong in your first proposition, so I think you should own you are wrong in your second.

*Petrarch.* Then you would say there is no distinction between falling and remaining fallen?

*S. Augustine.* No, they are indeed different things; that is to say, different in time, but in the nature of the action and in the mind of the person concerned they are one and the same.

*Petrarch.* I see in what knots you entangle me. But the wrestler who wins his victory by a trick is not necessarily the stronger man, though he may be the more practised.

*S. Augustine.* It is Truth herself in whose presence we are discoursing. To her, plain

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simplicity is ever dear, and cunning is hateful. That you may see this beyond all doubt I will go forward from this point with all the plainness you can desire.

*Petrarch.* You could give me no more welcome news. Tell me, then, as it is a question concerning myself, by what line of reasoning you mean to prove I am unhappy. I do not deny that I am; but I deny that it is with my own consent I remain so. For, on the contrary, I feel this to be most hateful and the very opposite of what I wish. But yet I can do nothing except wish.

*S. Augustine.* If only the conditions laid down are observed, I will prove to you that you are misusing words.

*Petrarch.* What conditions do you mean, and how would you have me use words differently?

*S. Augustine.* Our conditions were to lay aside all juggling with terms and to seek truth in all plain simplicity, and the words I would have you use are these: instead of saying you *cannot*, you ought to say you *will not*.

*Petrarch.* There will be no end then to our discussion, for that is what I never shall confess. I tell you I know, and you yourself are witness, how often I have wished to and yet could not rise. What floods of tears have I shed, and all to no purpose?

*S. Augustine.* O yes, I have witnessed many tears, but very little will.

*Petrarch.* Heaven is witness (for indeed I



think no man on this earth knows) what I have suffered, and how I have longed earnestly to rise, if only I might.

*S. Augustine.* Hush, hush. Heaven and earth will crash in ruin, the stars themselves will fall to hell, and all harmonious Nature be divided against itself, sooner than Truth, who is our Judge, can be deceived.

*Petrarch.* And what do you mean by that?

*S. Augustine.* I mean that your tears have often stung your conscience but not changed your will. X

*Petrarch.* I wonder how many times I must tell you that it is just this impossibility of change which I bewail.

*S. Augustine.* And I wonder how many times I must reply that it is want of will, not want of power, which is the trouble.

And yet I wonder not that now you find yourself involved in these perplexities; in which in time past I too was tossed about, when I was beginning to contemplate entering upon a new way of life.<sup>1</sup> I tore my hair; I beat my brow; my fingers I twisted nervously; I bent double and held my knees; I filled the air of heaven with most bitter sighs; I poured out tears like water on every side: yet nevertheless I remained what I was and no other, until a deep meditation at last showed me the root of all my misery and made it plain before my

<sup>1</sup> *S. Augustine Confessions*, viii. 8.

eyes. And then my will after that became fully changed, and my weakness also was changed in that same moment to power, and by a marvellous and most blessed alteration I was transformed instantly and made another man, another Augustine altogether. The full history of that transformation is known, if I mistake not, to you already in my *Confessions*.

*Petrarch.* Yes, in truth I know it well, and never can I forget the story of that health-bringing fig-tree, beneath whose shade the miracle took place.<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* Well indeed may you remember it. And no tree to you should be more dear: no, not the myrtle, nor the ivy, nor the laurel beloved of Apollo and ever afterwards favoured by all the band of Poets, favoured too by you, above all, who alone in your age have been counted worthy to be crowned with its leaves; yet dearer than these should be to you the memory of that fig-tree, for it greets you like some mariner coming into haven after many storms; it holds out to you the path of righteousness, and a sure hope which fadeth not away, that presently the divine Forgiveness shall be yours.

*Petrarch.* I would not say one word in contradiction. Go on, I beseech you, with what you have begun.

*S. Augustine.* This is what I undertook and

<sup>1</sup> *S. Augustine Confessions*, viii. 12.

will go on with, to prove to you that so far you are like those many others of whom it may be said in the words of Virgil—

“Unchanged their mind while vainly flow their tears.”<sup>1</sup>

Though I might multiply examples, yet I will rather content myself with this alone, that we might almost reckon as belonging to ourselves, and so all the more likely to come home.

*Petrarch.* How wisely you have made choice; for indeed it were useless to add more, and no other could be so deeply graven in my heart. Great as the gulf which parts us may be—I mean between you in your safe haven and me in peril of shipwreck, you in felicity, me in distress—still amid my winds and tempests I can recognise from time to time the traces of your own storm-tossed passions. So that as often as I read the book of your *Confessions*, and am made partaker of your conflict between two contrary emotions, between hope and fear, (and weep as I read), I seem to be hearing the story of my own self, the story not of another's wandering, but of my own. Therefore, since now I have put away every inclination to mere dispute, go on, I beg, as you desire. For all my heart wishes now is not to hinder but only to follow where you lead.

*S. Augustine.* I make no such demand on you as that. For though a certain very wise

<sup>1</sup> *Æneid*, iv. 449.

man<sup>1</sup> has laid it down that "Through overmuch contention truth is lost," yet often it happens that a well-ordered discussion leads to truth. It is not then expedient to accept everything advanced, which is the token of a slack and sleepy mind, any more than it is expedient to set oneself to oppose a plain and open truth, which indicates only the mind of one who likes fighting for fighting's sake.

*Petrarch.* I understand and agree with you and will act on your advice. Now, pray go on.

*S. Augustine.* You admit, therefore, that the argument is just and the chain of reasoning valid, when we say that a perfect knowledge of one's misery will beget a perfect desire to be rid of it, if only the power to be rid may follow the desire.

*Petrarch.* I have professed that I will believe you in everything.

*S. Augustine.* I feel there is still something you would like to urge, even now. Do, please, confess it, no matter what it may be.

*Petrarch.* Nothing, only that I am much amazed to think I should never yet have wished what I have believed I always wished.

*S. Augustine.* You still stick at that point. O well, to put an end to this kind of talk I will agree that you have wished sometimes.

*Petrarch.* What then?

<sup>1</sup> Publius Cyrus.

*S. Augustine.* Do you not remember the phrase of Ovid—

“To wish for what you want is not enough;  
With ardent longing you must strive for it.”<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* I understand, but thought that was just what I had been doing.

*S. Augustine.* You were mistaken.

*Petrarch.* Well, I will believe so.

*S. Augustine.* To make your belief certain, examine your own conscience. Conscience is the best judge of virtue. It is a guide, true and unerring, that weighs every thought and deed. It will tell you that you have never longed for spiritual health as you ought, but that, considering what great dangers beset you, your wishes were but feeble and ineffective.

*Petrarch.* I have been examining my conscience, as you suggested.

*S. Augustine.* What do you find?

*Petrarch.* That what you say is true.

*S. Augustine.* We have made a little progress, if you are beginning to be awake. It will soon be better with you now you acknowledge it was not well hitherto.

*Petrarch.* If it is enough to acknowledge, I hope to be able to be not only well but quite well, for never have I understood more clearly that my wishes for liberty and for an end to my misery have been too lukewarm. But can it be enough to desire only?

<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *Pontic.*, III. i. 35.

*Defiant*

*S. Augustine.* Why do you ask?

*Petrarch.* I mean, to desire without doing anything.

*S. Augustine.* What you propose is an impossibility. No one desires ardently and goes to sleep.

*Petrarch.* Of what use is desire, then?

*S. Augustine.* Doubtless the path leads through many difficulties, but the desire of virtue is itself a great part of virtue.

*Petrarch.* There you give me ground for good hope.

*S. Augustine.* All my discourse is just to teach you how to hope and to fear.

*Petrarch.* Why to fear?

*S. Augustine.* Then tell me why to hope?

*Petrarch.* Because whereas so far I have striven, and with much tribulation, merely not to become worse, you now open a way to me whereby I may become better and better, even to perfection.

*S. Augustine.* But maybe you do not think how toilsome that way is.

*Petrarch.* Have you some new terror in store for me?

*S. Augustine.* To desire is but one word, but how many things go to make it up!

*Petrarch.* Your words make me tremble.

*S. Augustine.* Not to mention the positive elements in desire, it involves the destruction of many other objects.

*Petrarch.* I do not quite take in your meaning.

*S. Augustine.* The desire of all good cannot exist without thrusting out every lower wish. You know how many different objects one longs for in life. All these you must first learn to count as nothing before you can rise to the desire for the chief good; which a man loves less when along with it he loves something else that does not minister to it.

*Petrarch.* I recognise the thought.

*S. Augustine.* How many men are there who have extinguished all their passions, or, not to speak of extinguishing, tell me how many are there who have subdued their spirit to the control of Reason, and will dare to say, "I have no more in common with my body; all that once seemed so pleasing to me is become poor in my sight. I aspire now to joys of nobler nature"?

*Petrarch.* Such men are rare indeed. And now I understand what those difficulties are with which you threatened me.

*S. Augustine.* When all these passions are extinguished, then, and not till then, will desire be full and free. For when the soul is uplifted on one side to heaven by its own nobility, and on the other dragged down to earth by the weight of the flesh and the seductions of the world, so that it both desires to rise and also to sink at one and the same time, then, drawn contrary ways, you find you arrive nowhither.

*Petrarch.* What, then, would you say a man must do for his soul to break the fetters of the

world, and mount up perfect and entire to the realms above?

*S. Augustine.* What leads to this goal is, as I said in the first instance, the practice of meditation on death and the perpetual recollection of our mortal nature.

*Petrarch.* Unless I am deceived, there is no man alive who is more often revolving this thought in his heart than I.

*S. Augustine.* Ah, here is another delusion, a fresh obstacle in your way!

*Petrarch.* What! Do you mean to say I am once more lying?

*S. Augustine.* I would sooner hear you use more civil language.

*Petrarch.* But to say the same thing?

*S. Augustine.* Yes, to say nothing else.

*Petrarch.* So then you mean I care nothing at all about death?

*S. Augustine.* To tell the truth you think very seldom of it, and in so feeble a way that your thought never touches the root of your trouble.

*Petrarch.* I supposed just the opposite.

*S. Augustine.* I am not concerned with what you suppose, but with what you ought to suppose.

*Petrarch.* Well, I may tell you that in spite of that I will suppose it no more, if you prove to me that my supposition was a false one.

*S. Augustine.* That I will do easily enough, provided you are willing to admit the truth in



good faith. For this end I will call in a witness who is not far away.

*Petrarch.* And who may that be, pray?

*S. Augustine.* Your conscience.

*Petrarch.* She testifies just the contrary.

*S. Augustine.* When you make an obscure, confused demand no witness can give precise or clear answers.

*Petrarch.* What has that to do with the subject, I would like to know?

*S. Augustine.* Much, every way. To see clearly, listen well. No man is so senseless (unless he be altogether out of his mind) as never once to remember his own weak nature, or who, if asked the question whether he were mortal and dwelt in a frail body, would not answer that he was. The pains of the body, the onsets of fever, attest the fact; and whom has the favour of Heaven made exempt? Moreover, your friends are carried out to their burial before your eyes; and this fills the soul with dread. When one goes to the graveside of some friend of one's own age one is forced to tremble at another's fall and to begin feeling uneasy for oneself; just as when you see your neighbour's roof on fire, you cannot feel quite happy for your own, because, as Horace puts it—

“On your own head you see the stroke will fall.”<sup>1</sup>

The impression will be more strong in case you

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Epist.*, l. 18, 83.

see some sudden death carry off one younger, more vigorous, finer looking than yourself. In such an event a man will say, "This one seemed to live secure, and yet he is snatched off. His youth, his beauty, his strength have brought him no help. What God or what magician has promised me any surer warrant of security? Verily, I too am mortal."

When the like fate befalls kings and rulers of the earth, people of great might and such as are regarded with awe, those who see it are struck with more dread, are more shaken with alarm; they are amazed when they behold a sudden terror, or perchance hours of intense agony seize on one who was wont to strike terror into others. From what other cause proceed the doings of people who seem beside themselves upon the death of men in highest place, such as, to take an instance from history, the many things of this kind that, as you have related, were done at the funeral of Julius Cæsar? A public spectacle like this strikes the attention and touches the heart of mortal men; and what then they see in the case of another is brought home as pertaining also to themselves. Beside all these, are there not the rage of savage boasts, and of men, and the furious madness of war? Are there not the falls of those great buildings which, as some one neatly says, are first the safeguards, then the sepulchres of men? Are there not malignant motions of the air beneath some

evil star and pestilential sky? And so many perils on sea and land that, look wheresoever you will, you cannot turn your gaze anywhither but you will meet the visible image and memento of your own mortality.

*Petrarch.* I beg your pardon, but I cannot wait any longer, for, as for having my reason fortified, I do not think any more powerful aid can be brought than the many arguments you have adduced. As I listened I wondered what end you were aiming at, and when your discourse would finish.

*S. Augustine.* As a matter of fact, you have interrupted me, and it has not yet reached its end. However, here is the conclusion—although a host of little pin-pricks play upon the surface of your mind, nothing yet has penetrated the centre. The miserable heart is hardened by long habit, and becomes like some indurated stone; impervious to warnings, however salutary, you will find few people considering with any seriousness the fact that they will die.

*Petrarch.* Then few people are aware of the very definition of man, which nevertheless is so hackneyed in the schools, that it ought not merely to weary the ears of those who hear it, but is now long since scrawled upon the walls and pillars of every room. This prattling of the Dialecticians will never come to an end; it throws up summaries and definitions like bubbles, matter indeed for endless controversies,

but for the most part they know nothing of the real truth of the things they talk about. So, if you ask one of this set of men for a definition of a man or of anything else, they have their answer quite pat, as the saying goes; if you press him further, he will lie low, or if by sheer practice in arguing he has acquired a certain boldness and power of speech, the very tone of the man will tell you he possesses no real knowledge of the thing he sets out to define. The best way of dealing with this brood, with their studied air of carelessness and empty curiosity, is to launch at their head some such invective as this, "You wretched creatures, why this everlasting labour for nothing; this expense of wit on silly subtleties? Why in total oblivion of the real basis of things will you grow old simply conversant with words, and with whitening hair and wrinkled brow, spend all your time in babyish babble? Heaven grant that your foolishness hurt no one but yourselves, and do as little harm as possible to the excellent minds and capacities of the young."

*S. Augustine.* I agree that nothing half severe enough can be said of this monstrous perversion of learning. But let me remind you that your zeal of denunciation has so carried you away that you have omitted to finish your definition of man.

*Petrarch.* I thought I had explained sufficiently, but I will be more explicit still. Man is an animal, or rather the chief of all animals. The

veriest rustic knows that much. Every school-boy could tell you also, if you asked him, that man is, moreover, a rational animal and that he is mortal. This definition, then, is a matter of common knowledge.

*S. Augustine.* No, it is not. Those who are acquainted with it are very few in number.

*Petrarch.* How so?

*S. Augustine.* When you can find a man so governed by Reason that all his conduct is regulated by her, all his appetites subject to her alone, a man who has so mastered every motion of his spirit by Reason's curb that he knows it is she alone who distinguishes him from the savagery of the brute, and that it is only by submission to her guidance that he deserves the name of man at all; when you have found one so convinced of his own mortality as to have that always before his eyes, always to be ruling himself by it, and holding perishable things in such light esteem that he ever sighs after that life, which Reason always foresaw, wherein mortality shall be cast away; when you have found such a man, then you may say that he has some true and fruitful idea of what the definition of man is. This definition, of which we were speaking, I said it was given to few men to know, and to reflect upon as the nature of the truth requires.

*Petrarch.* Hitherto I had believed I was of that number.

*S. Augustine.* I have no doubt that when you turn over in your mind the many things you have learned, whether in the school of experience or in your reading of books, the thought of death has several times entered your head. But still it has not sunk down into your heart as deeply as it ought, nor is it lodged there as firmly as it should be.

*Petrarch.* What do you call sinking down into my heart? Though I think I understand, I would like you to explain more clearly.

*S. Augustine.* This is what I mean. Every one knows, and the greatest philosophers are of the same opinion, that of all tremendous realities Death is the most tremendous. So true is this, that from ever of old its very name is terrible and dreadful to hear. Yet though so it is, it will not do that we hear that name but lightly, or allow the remembrance of it to slip quickly from our mind. No, we must take time to realise it. We must meditate with attention thereon. We must picture to ourselves the effect of death on each several part of our bodily frame, the cold extremities, the breast in the sweat of fever, the side throbbing with pain, the vital spirits running slower and slower as death draws near, the eyes sunken and weeping, every look filled with tears, the forehead pale and drawn, the cheeks hanging and hollow, the teeth staring and discoloured, the nostrils shrunk and sharpened, the lips foaming, the tongue foul and

motionless, the palate parched and dry, the languid head and panting breast, the hoarse murmur and sorrowful sigh, the evil smell of the whole body, the horror of seeing the face utterly unlike itself—all these things will come to mind and, so to speak, be ready to one's hand, if one recalls what one has seen in any close observation of some deathbed where it has fallen to our lot to attend. For things seen cling closer to our remembrance than things heard.

And, moreover, it is not without a profound instinct of wisdom that in certain Religious Orders, of the stricter kind, the custom has survived, even down to our own time (though I do not think it makes for good character altogether), of allowing the members to watch the bodies of the dead being washed and put in shrouds for their burial; while the stern professors of the Rule stand by, in order that this sad and pitiful spectacle, thrust forsooth beneath their very eyes, may admonish their remembrance continually, and affright the minds of those who survive from every hope of this transitory world.

This, then, is what I meant by sinking down deeply into the soul. Perchance you never name the name of Death, that so you may fall in with the custom of the time, although nothing is more certain than the fact or more uncertain than the hour. Yet in daily converse you

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must often speak of things connected with it, only they soon fly out of mind and leave no trace.

*Petrarch.* I follow your counsel the more readily because now I recognise much in your words that I have myself revolved in my own breast. But please, if you think it well, will you impress some mark on my memory which will act as a warning to me and prevent me from this time henceforth from telling lies to myself and fondling my own mistakes. For this, it seems to me, is what turns men from the right way, that they dream they have already reached the goal, and make therefore no effort any more.

*S. Augustine.* I like to hear you speak so. Your words are those of a man alert and watchful, who will not bear to be idle and trust to chance. So here is a test which will never play you false: every time you meditate on death without the least sign of motion, know that you have meditated in vain, as about any ordinary topic. But if in the act of meditation you find yourself suddenly grow stiff, if you tremble, turn pale, and feel as if already you endured its pains; if at the same time you seem to yourself as if you were leaving your body behind, and were forced to render up your account before the bar of eternal judgment, of all the words and deeds of your past life, nothing omitted or passed over; that nothing



any more is to be hoped for from good looks or worldly position, nothing from eloquence, or riches, or power: if you realise that this Judge takes no bribe and that all things are naked and open in His sight; that death itself will not turn aside for any plea; that it is not the end of sufferings, but only a passage: if you picture to yourself a thousand forms of punishment and pain, the noise and wailing of Hell, the sulphurous rivers, the thick darkness, and avenging Furies,—in a word, the fierce malignity everywhere of that dark abode; and, what is the climax of its horror, that the misery knows no end, and despair thereof itself is everlasting, since the time of God's mercy is passed by; if, I say, all these things rise up before your eyes at once, not as fictions but as truth, not as being possible, but inevitable, and of a surety bound to come, yes, and even now at the door; and if you think on these things, not lightly, nor with desperation, but full of hope in God, and that His strong right hand is able and ready to pluck you out of so great calamities; if you but show yourself willing to be healed and wishful to be raised up; if you cleave to your purpose and persist in your endeavour, then you may be assured you have not meditated in vain.

*Petrarch.* I will not deny you have terrified me greatly by putting so huge a mass of suffering before my eyes. But may God give me such

plenteous mercy as that I may steep my thought in meditations like these; not only day by day, but more especially at night, when the mind, with all its daily interests laid aside, relaxes and is wont to return upon itself. When I lay my body down, as those who die, and my shrinking mind imagines the hour itself with all its horrors is at hand: so intently do I conceive it all, as though I were in the very agony of dying, that I shall seem to be already in the place of torment, beholding what you speak of and every kind of anguish. And so stricken shall I be at that sight, so terrified and affrighted, that I shall rise up (I know it) before my horrified household and cry aloud, "What am I doing? What suffering is this? For what miserable destruction is Fate keeping me alive? Jesu, by Thy mercy,

"Thou whom none yet hath conquered, succour me,"<sup>1</sup>

"Give Thy right hand to me in misery  
Through the dark waves, O bear me up with Thee,  
That dying I may rest and be in peace."<sup>2</sup>

Many other things shall I say to myself, as one in a fever whose mind every chance impression carries hither and thither in his fear; and then I go talking strangely to my friends, weeping and making them weep, and then presently after this we shall return to what we were before. And

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, vi. 365.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vi. 370.

since these things are so, what is it, I ask, which holds me back? What little hidden obstacle is there which makes it come to pass that hitherto all these meditations avail nothing but to bring me troubles and terrors: and I continue the same man that I have ever been; the same, it may be, as men to whom no reflections like these have ever come? Yet am I more miserable than they, for they, whatever may be their latter end, enjoy at least the pleasures of the present time; but as for me, I know not either what my end will be, and I taste no pleasure that is not poisoned with these embittering thoughts.

*S. Augustine.* Vex not yourself, I pray you, when you ought rather to rejoice. The more the sinner feels pleasure in his sin, the more unhappy should we think him, and the more in need of pity.

HMMM

*Petrarch.* I suppose you mean that a man whose pleasures are uninterrupted comes to forget himself, and is never led back into virtue's path; but that he who amid his carnal delights is sometime visited with adversity will come to the recollection of his true condition just in proportion as he finds fickle and wayward Pleasure desert him.

If both kinds of life had one and the same end, I do not see why he should not be counted the happier who enjoys the present time and puts off affliction to another day, rather than the man who neither enjoys the present nor looks for any joy hereafter; unless you are perhaps moved

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by this consideration that in the end the laughter of the former will be changed to more bitter tears?

*S. Augustine.* Yes, much more bitter. For I have often noticed that if a man throws away the rein of reason altogether (and in the most excessive pleasure of all this is commonly the case), his fall is more dangerous than that of the man who may come rushing down from the same height, but keeps still some hold, though feebly, on the reins. But before all else I attach importance to what you said before, that in the case of the one there is some hope of his conversion, but in that of the other nothing remains but despair.

*Petrarch.* Yes, that is my view also; in the meanwhile, however, have you not forgotten my first question?

*S. Augustine.* What was it?

*Petrarch.* Concerning what keeps me back. I asked you why I am the only one to whom the profound meditation on Death, that you said was so full of benefit, brings no good whatever.

*S. Augustine.* In the first place it is perhaps because you look on death as something remote, whereas when one thinks how very short life is and how many divers kinds of accidents befall it, you ought not to think death is far away. "What deludes almost all of us," as Cicero says, "is that we regard death from afar off." Some correctors—I would prefer to call them corrup-

tors—of the text have wished to change the reading by inserting a negative before the verb, and have maintained that he ought to have said, "We do NOT regard death from afar off." For the rest, there is no one in his senses who does not see death one way or another, and in reality Cicero's word *prospicere* means to see from afar. The one thing that makes so many people suffer illusion in their ideas on death is that they are wont to forecast for their own life some limit, which is indeed possible according to nature, but at which, nevertheless, very few arrive. Hardly any one, in fact, dies of whom the poet's line might not be quoted—

"Grey hairs and length of years he for himself  
Expected."<sup>1</sup>

The fault may touch you nearly, for your age, your vigorous constitution and temperate way of life perchance have fostered a like hope in your heart.

*Petrarch.* Please do not suspect that of me. God keep me from such madness—

"As in that monster false to put my trust!"<sup>2</sup>

if I may borrow the words Virgil puts in the mouth of his famous pilot Palinurus. For I too am cast upon a wide ocean, cruel and full of storms. I sail across its angry waves and struggle with the wind; and the little boat I steer shivers and seems to be letting in the water

<sup>1</sup> *Æneid*, x. 549.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 849.

in every part. I know well she cannot hold out for long, and I see I have no hope at all of safety unless the Almighty Pity put forth His strong right hand and guide my vessel rightly ere it be too late, and bring me to shore—

“So that I who have lived upon the waters may die in port.”<sup>1</sup>

Of this I think I should have a good hope, because it has never been my lot to put any confidence in those riches and power on which I see so many of my contemporaries, yes, and older men as well, relying. For what folly would it be to pass all one's life in toil and poverty and care, heaping up riches, just to die at last and have no time to enjoy them? So, then, in truth, I regard this dark shadow of death, not as something afar off, but very nigh and ever at the doors. And I have not forgotten a certain little verse I wrote in my youth at the end of a letter to a friend—

“E'en while we speak, along a thousand ways  
With stealthy steps up to our very door  
Death creeps.”

If I could say words like these at that time of life, what shall I say now that I am more advanced in age and more experienced in what life is? For everything I see or hear or feel or think seems, unless I deceive myself, connected in my mind with that last end. And yet

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *Letters*, xix.

the question still remains, what is it that holds me back?

*S. Augustine.* Give humble thanks to God who so regards you and guides you with his merciful rein, and so pricks you with his spur. It is not surely possible that he who thus has the thought of death before him day by day should ever be doomed to death eternal.

But since you feel, and rightly so, that something still is wanting, I will try and unfold to you what it is, and, if God so please, remove it also; to the end that you may arise and with free, uplifted mind shake off that old bondage that so long has kept you down.

*Petrarch.* O would that indeed you may prove able so to help me, and I on my part be capable of receiving such a boon!

*S. Augustine.* It shall be yours if you wish. The thing is not impossible. But in the nature of man's actions two things are required, and if either be wanting, the action will come to nought. There must be will, and that will must be so strong and earnest that it can deserve the name of purpose.

*Petrarch.* So let it be.

*S. Augustine.* Do you know what stands in the way of your purpose of heart?

*Petrarch.* That is what I want to know; what for so long I have earnestly desired to understand.

*S. Augustine.* Then listen. It was from

Heaven your soul came forth: never will I assert a lower origin than that. But in its contact with the flesh, wherein it is imprisoned, it has lost much of its first splendour. Have no doubt of this in your mind. And not only is it so, but by reason of the length of time it has in a manner fallen asleep; and, if one may so express it, forgotten its own beginning and its heavenly Creator.

And these passions that are born in the soul through its connection with the body, and that forgetfulness of its nobler nature, seem to me to have been touched by Virgil with pen almost inspired when he writes—

“The souls of men still shine with heavenly fire,  
That tells from whence they come, save that the flesh  
And limbs of earth breed dullness, hence spring fears,  
Desire, and grief and pleasures of the world,  
And so, in darkness prisoned, they no more  
Look upward to heaven's face.”<sup>1</sup>

Do you not in the poet's words discern that monster with four heads so deadly to the nature of man?

*Petrarch.* I discern very clearly the fourfold passion of our nature, which, first of all, we divide in two as it has respect to past and future, and then subdivide again in respect of good and evil. And so, by these four winds distraught, the rest and quietness of man's soul is perished and gone.

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, vi. 730-34.



*S. Augustine.* You discern rightly, and the words of the Apostle are fulfilled in us, which say, "The corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth upon many things."<sup>1</sup> Of a truth the countless forms and images of things visible, that one by one are brought into the soul by the senses of the body, gather there in the inner centre in a mass, and the soul, not being akin to these or capable of learning them, they weigh it down and overwhelm it with their contrariety. Hence that plague of too many impressions tears apart and wounds the thinking faculty of the soul, and with its fatal, distracting complexity bars the way of clear meditation, whereby it would mount up to the threshold of the One Chief Good.

*Petrarch.* You have spoken admirably of that plague in many places, and especially in your book on *True Religion* (with which it is, indeed, quite incompatible). It was but the other day that I lighted on that work of yours in one of my digressions from the study of philosophy and poetry, and it was with very great eagerness that I began to peruse it. Indeed, I was like a man setting out from his own country to see the world, and coming to the gate of some famous city quite new to him, where, charmed by the novelty of all around, he stops now here, now there, and looks intently on all that meets his gaze.

<sup>1</sup> Book of Wisdom, ix. 15.

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*S. Augustine.* And yet in that book, allowing for a difference of phraseology such as becomes a teacher of catholic truth, you will find a large part of its doctrine is drawn from philosophers, more especially from those of the Platonist and Socratic school. And, to keep nothing from you, I may say that what especially moved me to undertake that work was a word of your favourite Cicero. God blessed that work of mine so that from a few seeds there came an abundant harvest. But let us come back to the matter in hand.

*Petrarch.* As you wish; but, O best of Fathers, do not hide from me what that word was which gave you the starting-point of so excellent a work.

*S. Augustine.* It was the passage where in a certain book Cicero says, by way of expressing his detestation of the errors of his time: "They could look at nothing with their mind, but judged everything by the sight of their eyes; yet a man of any greatness of understanding is known by his detaching his thought from objects of sense, and his meditations from the ordinary track in which others move."<sup>1</sup> This, then, I took as my foundation, and built upon it the work which you say has given you pleasure.

*Petrarch.* I remember the place; it is in the *Tusculan Orations*. I have been delighted to notice what a habit it is of yours to quote those

<sup>1</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, i. 16.

words here and elsewhere in your works; and they deserve it, for they are words that seem to blend in one phrase truth and dignity and grace. Now, since it seems good to you, pray return to our subject.

*S. Augustine.* This, then, is that plague that has hurt you, this is what will quickly drive you to destruction, unless you take care. Overwhelmed with too many divers impressions made on it, and everlastingly fighting with its own cares, your weak spirit is crushed so that it has not strength to judge what it should first attack or to discern what to cherish, what to destroy, what to repel; all its strength and what time the niggard hand of Fate allows are not sufficient for so many demands. So it suffers that same evil which befalls those who sow too many seeds in one small space of ground.

As they spring up they choke each other. So in your overcrowded mind what there is sown can make no root and bear no fruit. With no considered plan, you are tossed now here now there in strange fluctuation, and can never put your whole strength to anything. Hence it happens that whenever the generous mind approaches (if it is allowed) the contemplation of death, or some other meditation that might help it in the path of life, and penetrates by its own acumen to the depths of its own nature, it is unable to stand there, and, driven by hosts of various cares, it starts back. And then the

work, that promised so well and seemed so good, flags and grows unsteady; and there comes to pass that inward discord of which we have said so much, and that worrying torment of a mind angry with itself; when it loathes its own de-filements, yet cleanses them not away; sees the crooked paths, yet does not forsake them; dreads the impending danger, yet stirs not a step to avoid it.

*Petrarch.* Ah, woe is me! Now you have probed my wound to the quick. There is the seat of my pain, from there I fear my death will come.

*S. Augustine.* It is well. You are awakening to life. But as we have now prolonged our discussion enough for to-day, let us, if you will, defer the rest until to-morrow, and let us take a breathing space in silence.

*Petrarch.* Yes, I am tired somewhat, and most gladly shall I welcome quiet and rest.

## DIALOGUE THE SECOND

### S. AUGUSTINE—PETRARCH

*S. Augustine.* Well, have we rested long enough?

*Petrarch.* Certainly, if it so please you.

*S. Augustine.* Let me hear if you feel now in good heart and confidence. For when a man has been ill, a hopeful spirit in him is no small sign of returning health.

*Petrarch.* What hope I have is no whit in myself: God is my hope.

*S. Augustine.* It is wisely spoken. And now I return to our theme. Many things are against you, many temptations assail, but you yourself still seem ignorant both of their numbers and their strength. And what in warfare generally happens to one who, from a distance, sees some closely marshalled battalion, has happened to you. Such a man is often deceived into thinking his foes fewer in number than they are. But when they draw nearer, when they have deployed their serried ranks before his eyes in all their martial pomp, then his fears soon

increase, and he repents him of his boldness. So likewise will it be with you when I shall display before your eyes, on this side and on that, all the evils that are pressing upon you and hemming you in from every quarter. You will be ashamed of your own boldness, you will be sorry you were so light-hearted, and begin to bewail that in its sore straits your soul has been unable to break through the wedged phalanx of your foes. You will discover presently how many foolish fancies of too easy victory you have let come into your mind, excluding that wholesome dread to which I am endeavouring to bring you.

*Petrarch.* Indeed, you make me horribly afraid. That my danger was great I have always been aware; and now, in spite of this, you tell me I have very much under-estimated it, and indeed that, compared with what they should be, my fears have been nothing at all. What hope have I then left?

*S. Augustine.* It is never time to despair. Be sure of that. Despair is the very last and worst of evils, and therefore I would have you make it a first principle to put it away wholly.

*Petrarch.* I knew the truth of the maxim, but in my dread forgot it at the moment.

*S. Augustine.* Now give me all your attention, look and listen while I recall words of your favourite seer.

“Behold what foemen gather round your walls  
 And at your gates make sharp their gleaming sword  
 To murder you and yours.”<sup>1</sup>

Look what snares the world spreads for you; what vanities it dangles before your eyes; what vain cares it has to weigh you down. To begin at the beginning, consider what made those most noble spirits among all creatures fall into the abyss of ruin; and take heed lest in like manner you also fall after them. All your forethought, all your care will be needed to save you from this danger. Think how many temptations urge your mind to perilous and soaring flights. They make you dream of nobleness and forget your frailty; they choke your faculties with fumes of self-esteem, until you think of nothing else; they lead you to wax so proud and confident in your own strength that at length you hate your Creator. So you live for self-pleasing and imagine that great things are what you deserve. Whereas if you had a truer remembrance, great blessings ought to make you not proud but humble, when you realise that they came to you for no merit of your own. What need for me to speak of the Eternal Lord God when even to earthly lords men feel their minds more humbly bound if they experience any bounty of theirs which they are conscious of being undeserved. Do we not see them striving to merit after-

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, viii. 385-86.

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wards what they feel they should have earned before?

Now let your mind realise, as it easily can, on what paltry grounds your pride is set up. You trust in your intellect; you boast of what eloquence much reading has given you; you take pleasure in the beauty of your mortal body. Yet do you not feel that in many things your intellect fails you? Are there not many things in which you cannot rival the skill of the humblest of mankind? Nay, might I not go further and, without mentioning mankind, may I not say that with all your labour and study you will find yourself no match in skill for some of the meanest and smallest of God's creatures? Will you boast, then, of intellect after that? And as for reading, what has it profited you? Of the multitude of things you have perused how many have remained in your mind? How many have struck root and borne fruit in due season? Search well your heart and you will find that the whole of what you know is but like a little shrunken stream dried by the summer heat compared to the mighty ocean.

And of what relevance is it to know a multitude of things? Suppose you shall have learned all the circuits of the heavens and the earth, the spaces of the sea, the courses of the stars, the virtues of herbs and stones, the secrets of nature, and then be ignorant of yourself? Of what profit is it? If by the help of Scripture you



shall have discovered the right and upward path, what use is it if wrath and passion make you swerve aside into the crooked, downward way? Supposing you shall have learned by heart the deeds of illustrious men of all the ages, of what profit will it be if you yourself day by day care not what you do?

What need for me to speak of eloquence? Will not you yourself readily confess how often the putting any confidence in this has proved vain? And, moreover, what boots it that others shall approve what you have said if in the court of your own conscience it stands condemned? For though the applause of those who hear you may seem to yield a certain fruit which is not to be despised, yet of what worth is it after all if in his heart the speaker himself is not able to applaud? How petty is the pleasure that comes from the plaudits of the multitude! And how can a man soothe and flatter others unless he first soothe and flatter himself? Therefore you will easily understand how often you are deluded by that glory you hope for from your eloquence, and how your pride therein rests but upon a foundation of wind. For what can be more childish, nay, might I not say more insane, than to waste time and trouble over matters where all the things themselves are worthless and the words about them vain? What worse folly than to go on blind to one's real defects, and be infatuated with words and the pleasure of hearing

one's own voice, like those little birds they tell of who are so ravished with the sweetness of their own song that they sing themselves to death? And furthermore, in the common affairs of every-day life does it not often happen to you to find yourself put to the blush to discover that in the use of words you are no match even for some whom you think are very inferior men? Consider also how in Nature there are many things for which names are altogether wanting, and many more to which names have indeed been given, but to express the beauty of them—as you know by experience—words are altogether inadequate. How often have I heard you lament, how often seen you dumb and dissatisfied, because neither your tongue nor your pen could sufficiently utter ideas, which nevertheless to your reflecting mind were very clear and intelligible?

What, then, is this Eloquence, so limited and so weak, which is neither able to compass and bring within its scope all the things that it would, nor yet to hold fast even those things that it has compassed?

The Greeks reproach you, and you in turn the Greeks, with having a paucity of words. Seneca, it is true, accounts their vocabulary the richer, but Cicero at the beginning of his treatise *On the Distinctions of Good and Evil* makes the following declaration, "I cannot enough marvel whence should arise that insolent scorn of our national literature. Though this is not the place

to discuss it, yet I will express my conviction, which I have often maintained, not only that the Latin tongue is not poor, as it is the fashion to assert, but that it is, in fact, richer than the Greek;"<sup>1</sup> and as he frequently repeats elsewhere the same opinion, so, especially in the *Tusculan Orations*, he exclaims, "Thou Greek that countest thyself rich in words, how poor art thou in phrases."<sup>2</sup>

This is the saying, mark you, of one who knew quite well that he was the prince of Latin oratory, and had already shown that he was not afraid to challenge Greece for the palm of literary glory. Let me add that Seneca, so notable an admirer of the Greek tongue, says in his *Declamations*, "All that Roman eloquence can bring forward to rival or excel the pride of Greece is connected with the name of Cicero."<sup>3</sup> A magnificent tribute, but unquestionably true!

There is, then, as you see, on the subject of the primacy in Eloquence a very great controversy, not only between you and the Greeks, but among our own most learned writers themselves. There are in our camp those who hold for the Greeks, and it may be among them there are some who hold for us, if at least we may judge from what is reported of the illustrious

<sup>1</sup> *De bonis et malis*, i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, ii. 15. But Cicero's words are more guarded, "*inops interdum*."

<sup>3</sup> *Declamations*, i.

philosopher Plutarch. In a word, Seneca, who is ours, while doing all justice to Cicero, gives his final verdict for the Greeks, notwithstanding that Cicero is of the contrary opinion.

As to my own opinion on the question in debate, I consider that both parties to the controversy have some truth on their side when they accuse both Latin and Greek of poverty of words: and if this judgment be correct in regard to two such famous languages, what hope is there for any other?

Bethink you therefore what sort of confidence you can have in your own simple powers when the whole resources of that people of which you are but a little part are adjudged poor, and how ashamed you should be to have spent so much time in pursuing something which cannot be attained, and which, if it could be, would prove after all but vanity itself.

I will pass on to other points. Are you perhaps inclined to plume yourself on your physical advantages? But think what a thread they hang upon! What is it you are most pleased with in this way? Is it your good health and strength? But truly nothing is more frail. It is proved by the fatigue you suffer from even little things. The various maladies to which the body is liable; the stings of insects; a slight draught of air, and a thousand other such small vexations all tell the same tale. Will you perchance be taken in by your

own good-looking face, and when you behold in the glass your smooth complexion and comely features are you minded to be smitten, entranced, charmed? The story of Narcissus has no warning for you, and, content with gazing only at the outward envelope of the body, you consider not that the eyes of the mind tell you how vile and plain it is within. Moreover, if you had no other warning, the stormy course of life itself, which every day robs you of something, ought to show you how transient and perishing that flower of beauty is. And if, perhaps, which you will hardly dare affirm, you fancy yourself invincible by age, by illness, and whatever else may change the grace of bodily form, you have at least not forgotten that Last Enemy which destroys all, and you will do well to engrave in your inmost heart and mind this word of the satirist—

“’Tis death alone compels us all to see  
What little things we are.”<sup>1</sup>

Here, unless I am mistaken, are the causes that inflate your mind with pride, forbid you to recognise your low estate, and keep you from the recollection of death. But others there still are that I now propose to pass in review.

*Petrarch.* Stop a little, I beg you, lest, overwhelmed by the weight of so many reproaches, I have no strength or spirit to reply.

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, *Sat.*, x. 172-73.

*S. Augustine.* By all means say on. Gladly will I hold my peace.

*Petrarch.* You have astonished me not a little by casting in my teeth a multitude of things of which I am perfectly sure they have never entered my head at all. You allege that I trusted in my own intelligence. But surely the one sign I have given of possessing some little intelligence is that never have I counted on that faculty at all. Shall I pride myself on much reading of books, which with a little wisdom has brought me a thousand anxieties? How can you say I have sought the glory of eloquence, I, who, as you yourself acknowledged a moment ago, am wont above all things to complain that speech is inadequate to my thoughts? Unless you wish to try and prove the contrary, I may say that you know I am always conscious of my own littleness, and that if by chance I have ever thought myself to be anything, such a thought has come but rarely and then only from seeing the ignorance of other men; for, as I often remark, we are reduced to acknowledge, according to Cicero's celebrated phrase, that "what powers we may possess come rather from the feebleness of others than from any merit in ourselves."

But even were I endowed as richly as you imagine with those advantages of which you speak, what is there so magnificent about them that I should be vain? I am surely not so

forgetful of myself nor so feather-brained as to let myself trouble about cares of that sort. For what use in the world are intellect, knowledge, eloquence, if they can bring no healing to a soul diseased? I remember having given expression already in one of my letters to my sad sense of this truth.

As to what you remarked with an air of quasi gravity about my physical advantages, I must confess it makes me smile. That I of all men should be thought to have plumed myself on my mortal and perishing body, when every day of my life I feel in it the ravages of time at work! Heaven save me from such folly!

I will not deny that in the days of my youth I took some care to trim my head and to adorn my face; but the taste for that kind of thing has gone with my early years, and I recognise now the truth of that saying of the Emperor Domitian who, writing of himself in a letter to a lady friend, and complaining of the too swift decay of the goodliness of man, said, "Know you that nothing is so sweet, but nothing also is so fleeting, as the beauty of the body."<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* It would be an easy task to refute all you have advanced, but I prefer that your own conscience should send the shaft of shame to your heart rather than words of mine. I will not labour the point or draw the truth from you by torture; but as those who take revenge

<sup>1</sup> Suetonius Domitian, xviii.

magnanimously, I will merely prefer a simple request that you will continue to avoid what you profess you have hitherto avoided.

If by any chance the fashion of your countenance should at any time have stirred the least motion of conceit, then I beg you to reflect what soon those bodily members must become, though now they please your eye: think how their destiny is to be foul and hideous, and what repulsion they would cause even in yourself were you able to see them then. Then call often to mind this maxim of the Philosopher: "I was born for some higher destiny than to be the slave of my body."<sup>1</sup> Assuredly it is the very climax of folly to see men neglect their real selves in order to cosset the body and limbs in which they dwell. If a man is imprisoned for a little while in some dungeon, dark, damp, and dirty, would he not seem to have lost his senses if he did not shield himself as far as he was able from any contact with the walls and soil? And with the expectation of freedom would he not eagerly listen for the footsteps of his deliverer? But if giving up that expectation, covered with filth and plunged in darkness, he dreads to leave his prison; if he turns all his attention to painting and adorning the walls which shut him in, in a vain endeavour to counteract the nature of his dripping prison-house, will he not rightly be counted a wretched fool?

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *Epist.*, 65.



Well, you yourself know and love your prison-house, wretched that you are! And on the very eve of your issuing or being dragged therefrom you chain yourself more firmly in it, labouring to adorn what you ought to despise, if you would follow the advice you yourself had tendered to the father of the great Scipio in your poem called *Africa*.

“The bonds and fetters known and suffered long,  
The clogs on liberty are hateful to us,  
And the new freedom now attained we love.”<sup>1</sup>

Wonderful is it if you made others give the counsel which you yourself refuse! But I cannot disguise from you one word in your discourse which to you may seem very humble, but to me seems full of pride and arrogance.

*Petrarch*. I am sorry if I have in any way expressed myself arrogantly, but if the spirit is the true rule of one's deeds and words, then my own bears me witness that I intended nothing in that sense.

*S. Augustine*. To depreciate others is a kind of pride more intolerable than to exalt oneself above one's due measure; I would much rather see you exalt others and then put yourself above them than degrade all the world in a heap at your feet, and by a refinement of pride fashion for yourself a shield of humanity out of scorn for your neighbour.

<sup>1</sup> Scipio is speaking of the souls admitted to heaven, freed from the body. *Africa*, i. 329.

*Petrarch.* Take it how you will, I profess but small esteem either for others or myself. I am ashamed to tell you what experience has made me think of the majority of mankind.

*S. Augustine.* It is very prudent to despise oneself; but it is very dangerous and very useless to despise others. However, let us proceed. Are you aware of what still makes you turn from the right way?

*Petrarch.* Pray say anything you like, only do not accuse me of envy.

*S. Augustine.* Please God may pride have done you as little hurt as envy! So far as I judge, you have escaped this sin, but I have others whereof to accuse you.

*Petrarch.* Still you will not vex me whatever reproaches you may bring. Tell me freely everything that leads me astray.

*S. Augustine.* The desire of things temporal.

*Petrarch.* Come, come! I truly have never heard anything so absurd. *S. Augustine.*

*S. Augustine.* There! you see everything vexes you. You have forgotten your promise. This is not, however, any question of envy.

*Petrarch.* No, but of cupidity, and I do not believe there is a man in the world more free of this fault than myself.

*S. Augustine.* You are great at self-justification, but, believe me, you are not so clear of this fault as you think you are.

## DIALOGUE THE SECOND 61

*Petrarch.* What? do you mean to say that I, I am not free from the reproach of cupidity?

*S. Augustine.* I do, and that you are likewise guilty of ambition.

*Petrarch.* Go on, ill-treat me more still, double your reproaches, make full proof of your work of an accuser. I wonder what fresh blow you have in store for me.

*S. Augustine.* What is mere truth and right testimony you call accusation and ill-treatment. The satirist was quite right who wrote—

“To speak the truth to men is to accuse.”<sup>1</sup>

And the saying of the comic poet is equally true—

“’Tis flattery makes friends and candour foes.”<sup>2</sup>

But tell me, pray, what is the use of this irritation and anger that makes you so on edge? Was it necessary in a life so short to weave such long hopes?

“Have no long hopes! life’s shortness cries to man.”<sup>3</sup>

You read that often enough but take no count of it. You will reply, I suppose, that you do this from a tender solicitude for your friends, and so find a fair pretext for your error; but what madness it is, under pretext of friendship to others, to declare war on yourself and treat yourself as an enemy.

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, i. 161 (not correctly quoted).

<sup>2</sup> Terence *L’Audrienne*, 68.

<sup>3</sup> Horace, *Odes*, i. 4, 15.

*Petrarch.* I am neither covetous nor inhuman enough to be without solicitude for my friends, especially for those whose virtue or deserts attach me to them, for it is those whom I admire, revere, love, and compassionate; but, on the other hand, I do not pretend to be generous enough to court my own ruin for the sake of my friends. What I desire is so to manage my affairs as to have a decent subsistence while I live; and as you have delivered a shot at me from Horace, let me also from the same poet put up a shield in self-defence and profess my desire is the same as his,—

“Let me have books and stores for one year hence,  
Nor make my life one flutter of suspense!”<sup>1</sup>

And further how I shape my course so that I may in the same poet's words—

“Pass my old age and not my honour lose,  
And, if I may, still serve the lyric Muse.”<sup>2</sup>

Let me own also that I dread very much the rocks ahead if life should be prolonged, and so would provide beforehand for this double wish of mine to blend with my work for the Muses some simpler occupation in household affairs. But this I do with such indifference that it is plain enough I only descend to such necessities because I am so obliged.

*S. Augustine.* I see clearly how these pre-

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Epist.*, i. 18, 109. Conington's translation.

<sup>2</sup> Horace, *Odes*, I. xxxi. 19, 20.

texts which serve as an excuse for your folly have penetrated deeply into your very spirit. How is it, then, you have not engraved equally deeply in your heart the words of the satirist—

“ Why keep such hoarded gold to vex the mind ?  
 Why should such madness still delude mankind ?  
 To scrape through life on water and dry bread  
 That you may have a fortune when you're dead ?”<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly it is more because you think that it is a fine thing to die in a winding-sheet of purple, and rest in a marble tomb, and leave to your heirs the business of disputing over a great succession, than that you yourself care for the money which wins such advantages. It is a futile trouble, believe me, and quite devoid of good sense. If you will steadily observe human nature, you will discover that in a general way it is content with very little, and, in your case particularly, there is hardly a man who needs less for his satisfaction, unless you had been blinded by prejudices. Doubtless the poet was thinking of the average run of men, or possibly his own actual self, when he said—

“ My sorry fare is dogwood fruit ; I pluck  
 Wild herbs and roots that in the fields do grow,  
 And a few berries.”<sup>1</sup>

But, unlike him, you will acknowledge yourself that such a mode of life is far from sorry, and that in fact nothing would be pleasanter if you

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, *Sat.*, xiv. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Æneid*, iii. 629.

were to consult only, your own taste and not the customs of a deluded world. Why, then, continue to torment yourself? If you order your life as your nature dictates, you were rich long ago, but you never will be able to be rich if you follow the standard of the world; you will always think something wanting, and in rushing after it you will find yourself swept away by your passion.

Do you remember with what delight you used to wander in the depth of the country? Sometimes, laying yourself down on a bed of turf, you would listen to the water of a brook murmuring over the stones; at another time, seated on some open hill, you would let your eye wander freely over the plain stretched at your feet; at others, again, you enjoyed a sweet slumber beneath the shady trees of some valley in the noontide heat, and revelled in the delicious silence. Never idle, in your soul you would ponder over some high meditation, with only the Muses for your friends—you were never less alone than when in their company, and then, like the old man in Virgil who reckoned himself

“As rich as kings, when, at the close of day,  
Home to his cot he took his happy way,  
And on his table spread his simple fare,  
Fresh from the meadow without cost or care,”<sup>1</sup>

you would come at sunset back to your humble roof; and, contented with your good things,

<sup>1</sup> *Georgics*, iv. 132.

did you not find yourself the richest and happiest of mortal men?

*Petrarch.* Ah, well-a-day! I recall it all now, and the remembrance of that time makes me sigh with regret.

*S. Augustine.* Why—why do you speak of sighing? And who, pray, is the author of your woes? It is, indeed, your own spirit and none other which too long has not dared to follow the true law of its nature, and has thought itself a prisoner only because it would not break its chain. Even now it is dragging you along like a runaway horse, and unless you tighten the rein it will rush you to destruction. Ever since you grew tired of your leafy trees, of your simple way of life, and society of country people, egged on by cupidity, you have plunged once more into the midst of the tumultuous life of cities. I read in your face and speech what a happy and peaceful life you lived; for what miseries have you not endured since then? Too rebellious against the teachings of experience, you still hesitate!

It is without a doubt the bonds of your own sins that keep you back, and God allows that, as you passed your childhood under a harsh master, so, though you once became free, you have again fallen into bondage, and there will end your miserable old age. Verily, I was at your side once, when, quite young, unstained by avarice or ambition, you gave promise of

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becoming a great man; now, alas, having quite changed your character, the nearer you get to the end of your journey the more you trouble yourself about provisions for the way. What remains then but that you will be found, when the day comes for you to die—and it may be even now at hand, and certainly cannot be any great way off—you will be found, I say, still hungering after gold, poring half-dead over the calendar?

For those anxious cares, which increase day after day, must by necessity at last have grown to a huge figure and a prodigious amount.

*Petrarch.* Well, after all, if I foresee the poverty of old age, and gather some provision against that time of weariness, what is there so much to find fault with?

*S. Augustine.* Ah! ludicrous anxiety and tragic neglect, to worry and trouble yourself about a time at which you may never arrive and in which you assuredly will not have long to stay, and yet to be quite oblivious of that end at which you cannot help arriving, and of which there is no remedy when you once have reached it. But such is your execrable habit—to care for what's temporal, and be careless for all that's eternal. As for this delusion of providing a shield against old age, no doubt what put it into your head was the verse in Virgil which speaks of

“The ant who dreads a destitute old age.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Georgics*, i. 106.



And so you have made an ant your mentor and you are as excusable as the satiric poet who wrote—

“Some people, like the ant, fear hunger and cold,”<sup>1</sup>

but if you are going to put no limit to the following of ants, you will discover that there is nothing more melancholy and nothing more absurd than to ward off poverty one day by loading yourself with it all your days.

*Petrarch.* What will you say next! Do you counsel me to court Poverty? I have no longing for it, but I will bear it with courage if Fortune, who delights to overturn human affairs, reduces me to it. }

*S. Augustine.* My opinion is that in every condition man should aim at the golden mean. I would not then restrict you to the rules of those who say, “All that is needed for man’s life is bread and water; with these none is poor; whosoever desires no more than these will rival in felicity the Father of the Gods.”<sup>2</sup> No, I do not tie man’s life down to dry bread and water; such maxims are as extreme as they are troublesome and odious to listen to. Also, in regard to your infirmity, what I enjoin is not to over-indulge natural appetite, but to control it. What you already have would be sufficient for your wants if you had known how to be sufficient to yourself. But as it is you are yourself the cause of your own poverty. To heap up riches is to

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, vi. 361.

<sup>2</sup> Seneca, *Epist.*, xxv.

heap up cares and anxieties. This truth has been proved so continually that there is no need to bring more arguments. What a strange delusion, what a melancholy blindness of the soul of man, whose nature is so noble, whose birth is from above, that it will neglect all that is lofty and debase itself to care for the metals of the earth. Every time you have been drawn by these hooks of cupidity you come down from your high meditations to these grovelling thoughts, and do you not feel each time as if hurled from heaven to earth, from the bosom of the stars to a bottomless pit of blackness?

*Petrarch.* Yes; in truth, I feel it, and one knows not how to express what I have suffered in my fall.

*S. Augustine.* Why, then, are you not afraid of a danger you have so often experienced? And when you were raised up to the higher life, why did you not attach yourself to it more firmly?

*Petrarch.* I make all the efforts I can to do so; but inasmuch as the various exigencies of our human lot shake and unsettle me, I am torn away in spite of myself. It is not without reason, I imagine, that the poets of antiquity dedicated the double peaks of Parnassus to two different divinities. They desired to beg from Apollo, whom they called the god of Genius, the interior resources of the mind, and from Bacchus a plentiful supply of external goods. This way of regarding it is suggested to me not

only by the teaching of experience, but by the frequent testimony of wise men whom I need not quote to you. Moreover, although the plurality of deities may be ridiculous, this opinion of the Poets is not devoid of common sense. And in referring a like twofold supplication to the one God from whom all good comes down, I do not think I can be called unreasonable, unless indeed you hold otherwise.

*S. Augustine.* I deny not you are right in your view, but the poor way you divide your time stirs my indignation. You had already devoted your whole life to honourable work; if anything compelled you to spend any of your time on other occupations, you regarded it as lost. But now you only concede to what is Good and Beautiful the moments you can spare from avarice.

Any man in the world would desire to reach old age on such terms as that; but what limit or check would be to such a state of mind? Choose for yourself some defined goal, and when you have attained it, then stay there and breathe awhile. Doubtless you know that the saying I am about to quote is from lips of man, but has all the force of a divine oracle—

“The miser’s voice for ever cries, Give, give;  
Then curb your lusts if you would wisely live.”<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* Neither to want nor to abound, neither to command others or obey them—there you have my heart’s wish.

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Epist.*, i. 2, 56.

*S. Augustine.* Then you must drop your humanity and become God, if you would want nothing. Can you be ignorant that of all the creatures Man is the one that has most wants?

*Petrarch.* Many a time have I heard that said, but I would still like to hear it afresh from your lips and lodge it in my remembrance.

*S. Augustine.* Behold him naked and unformed, born in wailings and tears, comforted with a few drops of milk, trembling and crawling, needing the hand of another, fed and clothed from the beasts of the field, his body feeble, his spirit restless, subject to all kinds of sickness, the prey of passions innumerable, devoid of reason, joyful to-day, to-morrow sorrowful, in both full of agitation, incapable of mastering himself, unable to restrain his appetite, ignorant of what things are useful to him and in what proportion, knowing not how to control himself in meat or drink, forced with great labour to gain the food that other creatures find ready at their need, made dull with sleep, swollen with food, stupefied with drink, emaciated with watching, famished with hunger, parched with thirst, at once greedy and timid, disgusted with what he has, longing after what he has lost, discontented alike with past, present and future, full of pride in his misery, and aware of his frailty, baser than the vilest worms, his life is short, his days uncertain, his fate inevitable, since

Death in a thousand forms is waiting for him at last.

*Petrarch.* You have so piled up his miseries and beggary that I feel it were good if I had never been born.

*S. Augustine.* Yet, in the midst of such wretchedness and such deep destitution of good in man's estate, you go on dreaming of riches and power such as neither emperors nor kings have ever fully enjoyed.

*Petrarch.* Kindly tell me who ever made use of those words? Who spoke either of riches or of power?

*S. Augustine.* You imply both, for what greater riches can there be than to lack nothing? what greater power than to be independent of every one else in the world? Certainly those kings and masters of the earth whom you think so rich have wanted a multitude of things. The generals of great armies depend on those whom they seem to command, and, kept in check by their armed legions, they find the very soldiers who render them invincible also render them in turn helpless. Give up, therefore, your dreams of the impossible, and be content to accept the lot of humanity; learn to live in want and in abundance, to command and to obey, without desiring, with those ideas of yours, to shake off the yoke of fortune that presses even on kings. You will only be free from this yoke when, caring not a straw for human passions, you

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bend your neck wholly to the rule of Virtue.  
 Then you will be free, wanting nothing, then you will be independent; in a word, then you will be a king, truly powerful and perfectly happy.

*Petrarch.* Now I do indeed repent for all that is past, and I desire nothing. But I am still in bondage to one evil habit and am conscious always of a certain need at the bottom of my heart.

*S. Augustine.* Well, to come back to our subject, there is the very thing which keeps you back from the contemplation of death. It is that which makes you harassed with earthly anxieties; you do not lift up your heart at all to higher things. If you will take my counsel you will utterly cast away these anxieties, which are as so many dead weights upon the spirit, and you will find that it is not so hard after all to order your life by your nature, and let that rule and govern you more than the foolish opinions of the crowd.

*Petrarch.* I will do so very willingly, but may I ask you to finish what you were beginning to say about ambition, which I have long desired to hear?

*S. Augustine.* Why ask me to do what you can quite well do for yourself? Examine your own heart; you will see that among its other faults it is not ambition which holds the least place there.

*Petrarch.* It has profited me nothing then to have fled from towns whenever I could, to have thought scorn of the world and public affairs, to have gone into the recesses of the woods and silence of the fields, to have proved my aversion from empty honours, if still I am to be accused of ambition.

*S. Augustine.* You renounce many things well,—all you mortal men; but not so much because you despise them as because you despair of getting them. Hope and desire inflame each other by the mutual stings of those passions, so that when the one grows cold the other dies away, and when one gets warm the other boils over.

*Petrarch.* Why, then, should I not hope? Was I quite destitute of any accomplishment?

*S. Augustine.* I am not now speaking of your accomplishments, but certainly you had not those by help of which, especially in the present day, men mount to high places; I mean the art of ingratiating yourself in the palaces of the great, the trick of flattery, deceit, promising, lying, pretending, dissembling, and putting up with all kinds of slights and indignities. Devoid of these accomplishments and others of the kind, and seeing clearly that you could not overcome nature, you turned your steps elsewhere. And you acted wisely and with prudence, for, as Cicero expresses it, "to contend against the gods as did

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the giants, what is it but to make war with nature itself." <sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* Farewell such honours as these, if they have to be sought by such means!

*S. Augustine.* Your words are golden, but you have not convinced me of your innocence, for you do not assert your indifference to honours so much as to the vexations their pursuit involves, like the man who pretended he did not want to see Rome because he really would not endure the trouble of the journey thither. Observe, you have not yet desisted from the pursuit of honour, as you seem to believe and as you try to persuade me. But leave off trying to hide behind your finger, as the saying goes; all your thoughts, all your actions are plain before my eyes: and when you boast of having fled from cities and become enamoured of the woods, I see no real excuse, but only a shifting of your culpability.

We travel many ways to the same end, and, believe me, though you have left the road worn by feet of the crowd, you still direct your feet by a side-path towards this same ambition that you say you have thought scorn of; it is repose, solitude, a total disregard of human affairs, yes, and your own activities also, which just at present take you along that chosen path, but the end and object is glory.

*Petrarch.* You drive me into a corner whence

<sup>1</sup> *De Senectute*, xi.



I think, however, I could manage to escape; but, as the time is short and we must discriminate between many things, let us proceed, if you have no objection.

*S. Augustine.* Follow me, then, as I go forward. We will say nothing of gourmandising, for which you have no more inclination than a harmless pleasure in an occasional meeting with a few friends at the hospitable board. But I have no fear for you on this score, for when the country has regained its denizen, now snatched away to the towns, these temptations will disappear in a moment; and I have noticed, and have pleasure in acknowledging, that when you are alone you live in such a simple way as to surpass your friends and neighbours in frugality and temperance. I leave on one side anger also, though you often get carried away by it more than is reasonable, yet at the same time, thanks to your sweet natural temperament, you commonly control the motions of your spirit, and recall the advice of Horace—

“ Anger’s a kind of madness, though not long ;  
 Master the passion, since it’s very strong ;  
 And, if you rule it not, it will rule you,  
 So put the curb on quickly.”<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* That saying of the poet, and other words of philosophy like it, have helped me a little, I own; but what has helped me above all

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Epist.*, i. 2, 62–3.

is the thought of the shortness of life. What insensate folly to spend in hating and hurting our fellow-men the few days we pass among them! Soon enough the last day of all will arrive, which will quite extinguish this flame in human breasts and put an end to all our hatred, and if we have desired for any of them nothing worse than death, our evil wish will soon be fulfilled. Why, then, seek to take one's life or that of others? Why let pass unused the better part of a time so short? When the days are hardly long enough for honest joys of this life, and for meditating on that which is to come, no matter what economy of time we practise, what good is there in robbing any of them of their right and needful use, and turning them to instruments of sorrow and death for ourselves and others? This reflection has helped me, when I found myself under any temptation to anger, not to fall utterly under its dominion, or if I fell has helped me quickly to recover; but hitherto I have not been able quite to arm myself at all points from some little gusts of irritation.

*S. Augustine.* As I am not afraid that this wind of anger will cause you to make shipwreck of yourself or others, I agree willingly that without paying attention to the promises of the Stoics, who set out to extirpate root and branch all the maladies of the soul, you content yourself with the milder treatment of the Peri-

patetics. Leaving, then, on one side for the moment these particular failings, I hasten to treat of others more dangerous than these and against which you will need to be on guard with more care.

*Petrarch.* Gracious Heaven, what is yet to come that is more dangerous still?

*S. Augustine.* Well, has the sin of lust never touched you with its flames?

*Petrarch.* Yes, indeed, at times so fiercely as to make me mourn sorely that I was not born without feelings. I would sooner have been a senseless stone than be tormented by so many stings of the flesh.

*S. Augustine.* Ah, there is that which turns you most aside from the thought of things divine. For what does the doctrine of the heavenly Plato show but that the soul, must separate itself far from the passion of the flesh and tread down its imaginings before it can rise pure and free to the contemplation of the mystery of the Divine; for otherwise the thought of its mortality will make it cling to those seducing charms. You know what I mean, and you have learned this truth in Plato's writings, to the study of which you said not long ago you had given yourself up with ardour.

*Petrarch.* Yes, I own I had given myself to studying him with great hopefulness and desire, but the novelty of a strange language and the sudden departure of my teacher cut short my

purpose.<sup>1</sup> For the rest this doctrine of which you speak is very well known to me from your own writings and those of the Platonists.

*S. Augustine.* It matters little from whom you learned the truth, though it is a fact that the authority of a great master will often have a profound influence.

*Petrarch.* Yes, in my own case I must confess I feel profoundly the influence of a man of whom Cicero in his *Tusculan Orations* made this remark, which has remained graven in the bottom of my heart: "When Plato vouchsafes not to bring forward any proof (you see what deference I pay him), his mere authority would make me yield consent."<sup>2</sup> Often in reflecting on this heavenly genius it has appeared to me an injustice when the disciples of Pythagoras dispense their chief from submitting proofs, that Plato should be supposed to have less liberty than he. But, not to be carried away from our subject, authority, reason and experience alike have for a long time so much commended this axiom of Plato to me that I do not believe anything more true or more truly holy could be said by any man. Every time I have raised myself up, thanks to the hand of God stretched out to me, I have recognised with infinite joy, beyond belief, who it was that then preserved me and who had cast

<sup>1</sup> Petrarch refers to a Calabrian monk who had begun giving him lessons in Greek, but left him on being appointed to a bishopric.

<sup>2</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, i. 21.

me down in times of old. Now that I am once more fallen into my old misery, I feel with a keen sense of bitterness that failing which again has undone me. And this I tell you, that you may see nothing strange in my saying I had put Plato's maxim to the proof.

*S. Augustine.* Indeed, I think it not strange, for I have been witness of your conflicts; I have seen you fall and then once again rise up, and now that you are down once more I determined from pity to bring you my succour.

*Petrarch.* I am grateful for your compassionate feeling, but of what avail is any human succour?

*S. Augustine.* It avails nothing, but the succour of God is much every way. None can be chaste except God give him the grace of chastity.<sup>1</sup> You must therefore implore this grace from Him above all, with humbleness, and often it may be with tears. He is wont never to deny him who asks as he should.

*Petrarch.* So often have I done it that I fear I am as one too importunate.

*S. Augustine.* But you have not asked with due humbleness or singleness of heart. You have ever kept a corner for your passions to creep in; you have always asked that your prayers may be granted presently. I speak from experience, for I did likewise in my old life. I said, "Give me chastity, but not now."

<sup>1</sup> Wisdom, viii. 21.

*S. Augustine*

Put it off a little while; the time will soon come. My life is still in all its vigour; let it follow its own course, obey its natural laws; it will feel it more of a shame later, to return to its youthful folly. I will give up this failing when the course of time itself shall have rendered me less inclined that way, and when satiety will have delivered me from the fear of going back."<sup>1</sup> In talking thus do you not perceive that you prayed for one thing but wished another in your heart?

*Petrarch.* How so?

*S. Augustine.* Because to ask for a thing to-morrow is to put it aside for to-day.

*Petrarch.* With tears have I often asked for it to-day. My hope was that after breaking the chain of my passions and casting away the misery of life, I should escape safe and sound, and after so many storms of vain anxieties, I might swim ashore in some haven of safety; but you see, alas, how many shipwrecks I have suffered among the same rocks and shoals, and how I shall still suffer more if I am left to myself.

*S. Augustine.* Trust me, there has always been something wanting in your prayer; otherwise the Supreme Giver would have granted it or, as in the case of the Apostle, would have only denied you to make you more perfect in virtue and convince you entirely of your own frailty.<sup>2</sup>

*Petrarch.* That is my conviction also; and I will go on praying constantly, unwearied, un-

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, viii. 7.                    <sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ashamed, undespairing. The Almighty, taking pity on my sorrows, will perchance lend an ear to my prayer, sent up daily to His throne, and even as He would not have denied His grace if my prayers had been pure, so He will also purify them.

*S. Augustine.* You are quite right, but redouble your efforts; and, as men wounded and fallen in battle raise themselves on their elbow, so do you keep a look out on all sides for the dangers that beset you, for fear that some foe unseen come near and do you hurt yet more, where you lie on the ground. In the mean time, pray instantly for the aid of Him who is able to raise you up again. He will perchance be nearer to you just then when you think Him furthest off. Keep ever in mind that saying of Plato we were speaking of just now, "Nothing so much hinders the knowledge of the Divine as lust and the burning desire of carnal passion." Ponder well, therefore, this doctrine; it is the very basis of our purpose that we have in hand.

*Petrarch.* To let you see how much I welcome this teaching, I have treasured it with earnest care, not only when it dwells in the court of Plato's royal demesne, but also where it lurks hidden in the forests of other writers, and I have kept note in my memory of the very place where it was first perceived by my mind.

*S. Augustine.* I wonder what is your meaning. Do you mind being more explicit?

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*Petrarch.* You know Virgil: you remember through what dangers he makes his hero pass in that last awful night of the sack of Troy?

*S. Augustine.* Yes, it is a topic repeated over and over again in all the schools. He makes him recount his adventures thus—

“What tongue could tell the horrors of that night,  
Paint all the forms of death, or who have tears  
Enough to weep so many wretched wights?  
Hath the great city that so long was queen  
Fallen at last! Behold in all the streets  
The bodies of the dead by thousands strewn,  
And in their homes and on the temple's steps!  
Yet is there other blood than that of Troy,  
What time her vanquished heroes gathering up  
Their quenchless courage smite anon their foes,  
They, though triumphant, fall. Everywhere grief,  
Dread everywhere, and in all places Death!”<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* Now wherever he wandered accompanied by the goddess of Love, through crowding foes, through burning fire, he could not discern, though his eyes were open, the wrath of the angered gods, and so long as Venus was speaking to him he only had understanding for things of earth. But as soon as she left him you remember what happened; he immediately beheld the frowning faces of the deities, and recognised what dangers beset him round about.

“Then I beheld the awe-inspiring form  
Of gods in anger for the fall of Troy.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, ii. 361-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Aeneid*, ii. 622.



From which my conclusion is that commerce with Venus takes away the vision of the Divine.

*S. Augustine.* Among the clouds themselves you have clearly discerned the light of truth. It is in this way that truth abides in the fictions of the poets, and one perceives it shining out through the crevices of their thought. But, as we shall have to return to this question later on, let us reserve what we have to say for the end of our discourse.

*Petrarch.* That I may not get lost in tracks unknown to me, may I ask when you propose to return to this point?

*S. Augustine.* I have not yet probed the deepest wounds of your soul, and I have purposely deferred to do so, in order that, coming at the end, my counsels may be more deeply graven in your remembrance. In another dialogue we will treat more fully of the subject of the desires of the flesh, on which we have just now lightly touched.

*Petrarch.* Go on, then, now as you proposed.

*S. Augustine.* Yes, there need be nothing to hinder me, unless you are obstinately bent on stopping me.

*Petrarch.* Indeed, nothing will please me better than to banish for ever every cause of dispute from the earth. I have never engaged in disputation, even on things perfectly familiar, without regretting it; for the contentions that arise,

even between friends, have a certain character of sharpness and hostility contrary to the laws of friendship.

But pass on to those matters in which you think I shall welcome your good counsel.

*S. Augustine.* You are the victim of a terrible plague of the soul—melancholy; which the moderns call *accidie*, but which in old days used to be called *ægritudo*.

*Petrarch.* The very name of this complaint makes me shudder.

*S. Augustine.* Nor do I wonder, for you have endured its burden long enough.

*Petrarch.* Yes, and though in almost all other diseases which torment me there is mingled a certain false delight, in this wretched state everything is harsh, gloomy, frightful. The way to despair is for ever open, and everything goads one's miserable soul to self-destruction. Moreover, while other passions attack me only in bouts, which, though frequent, are but short and for a moment, this one usually has invested me so closely that it clings to and tortures me for whole days and nights together. In such times I take no pleasure in the light of day, I see nothing, I am as one plunged in the darkness of hell itself, and seem to endure death in its most cruel form. But what one may call the climax of the misery is, that I so feed upon my tears and sufferings with a morbid attraction that I can

only be rescued from it by main force and in despite of myself.

*S. Augustine.* So well do you know your symptoms, so familiar are you become with their cause, that I beg you will tell me what is it that depresses you most at the present hour? Is it the general course of human affairs? Is it some physical trouble, or some disgrace of fortune in men's eyes?

*Petrarch.* It is no one of these separately. Had I only been challenged to single combat, I would certainly have come off victorious; but now, as it is, I am besieged by a whole host of enemies.

*S. Augustine.* I pray you will tell me fully all that torments you.

*Petrarch.* Every time that fortune pushes me back one step, I stand firm and courageous, recalling to myself that often before I have been struck in the same way and yet have come off conqueror; if, after that, she presently deals me a sterner blow, I begin to stagger somewhat; if then she returns to the charge a third and fourth time, driven by force, I retreat, not hurriedly but step by step, to the citadel of Reason.

If fortune still lays siege to me there with all her troops, and if, to reduce me to surrender, she piles up the sorrows of our human lot, the remembrance of my old miseries and the dread of evils yet to come, then, at last, hemmed

in on all sides, seized with terror at these heaped-up calamities, I bemoan my wretched fate, and feel rising in my very soul this bitter disdain of life. Picture to yourself some one beset with countless enemies, with no hope of escape or of pity, with no comfort anywhere, with every one and everything against him; his foes bring up their batteries, they mine the very ground beneath his feet, the towers are already falling, the ladders are at the gates, the grappling-hooks are fastened to the walls, the fire is seen crackling through the roofs, and, at sight of those gleaming swords on every side, those fierce faces of his foes, and that utter ruin that is upon him, how should he not be utterly dismayed and overwhelmed, since, even if life itself should be left, yet to men not quite bereft of every feeling the loss of liberty alone is a mortal stroke?

*S. Augustine.* Although your confession is a little confused, I make out that your misfortunes all proceed from a single false conception which has in the past claimed and in future will still claim innumerable victims. You have a bad conceit of yourself.

*Petrarch.* Yes, truly, a very bad one.

*S. Augustine.* And why?

*Petrarch.* Not for one, but a thousand reasons.

*S. Augustine.* You are like people who on the slightest offence rake up all the old grounds of quarrel they ever had.

*Petrarch.* In my case there is no wound old

enough for it to have been effaced and forgotten: my sufferings are all quite fresh, and if anything by chance were made better through time, Fortune has so soon redoubled her strokes that the open wound has never been perfectly healed over. I cannot, moreover, rid myself of that hate and disdain of our life which I spoke of. Oppressed with that, I cannot but be grieved and sorrowful exceedingly. That you call this grief *accidie* or *ægritudo* makes no difference; in substance we mean one and the same thing.

*S. Augustine.* As from what I can understand the evil is so deep-seated, it will do no good to heal it slightly, for it will soon throw out more shoots. It must be entirely rooted up. Yet I know not where to begin, so many complications alarm me. But to make the task of dividing the matter easier, I will examine each point in detail. Tell me, then, what is it that has hurt you most?

*Petrarch.* Whatever I see, or hear, or feel.

*S. Augustine.* Come, come, does nothing please you?

*Petrarch.* Nothing, or almost nothing.

*S. Augustine.* Would to God that at least the better things in your life might be dear to you. But tell me what is it that is to you the most displeasing of all? I beg you give me an answer.

*Petrarch.* I have already answered.

*S. Augustine.* It is this melancholy I spoke of which is the true cause of all your displeasure with yourself.

*Petrarch.* I am just as displeased with what I see in others as with what I see in myself.

*S. Augustine.* That too comes from the same source. But to get a little order into our discourse, does what you see in yourself truly displease you as much as you say?

*Petrarch.* Stop worrying me with your petty questions, that are more than I know how to reply to.

*S. Augustine.* I see, then, that those things which make many other people envy you are nevertheless in your own eyes of no account at all?

*Petrarch.* Any one who envies a wretch like me must indeed himself be wretched.

*S. Augustine.* But now please tell me what is it that most displeases you?

*Petrarch.* I am sure I do not know.

*S. Augustine.* If I guess right will you acknowledge it?

*Petrarch.* Yes, I will, quite freely.

*S. Augustine.* You are vexed with Fortune.

*Petrarch.* And am I not right to hate her? Proud, violent, blind, she makes a mock of mankind.

*S. Augustine.* It is an idle complaint. Let us look now at your own troubles. If I prove you have complained unjustly, will you consent to retract?

*Petrarch.* You will find it very hard to convince me. If, however, you prove me in the wrong, I will give in.

*S. Augustine.* You find that Fortune is to you too unkind.

*Petrarch.* Not too unkind; too unjust, too proud, too cruel.

*S. Augustine.* The comic poets have more than one comedy called "The Grumbler." There are scores of them. And now you are making yourself one of the crowd. I should rather find you in more select company. But as this subject is so very threadbare that no one can add anything new on it, will you allow me to offer you an old remedy for an old complaint?

*Petrarch.* As you wish.

*S. Augustine.* Well then, has poverty yet made you endure hunger and thirst and cold?

*Petrarch.* No, Fortune has not yet brought me to this pass.

*S. Augustine.* Yet such is the hard lot of a great many people every day of their lives. Is it not?

*Petrarch.* Use some other remedy than this if you can, for this brings me no relief. I am not one of those who in their own misfortunes rejoice to behold the crowd of other wretched ones who sob around them; and not seldom I mourn as much for the griefs of others as for my own.

*S. Augustine.* I wish no man to rejoice in witnessing the misfortunes of others, but they ought at any rate to give him some consolation, and teach him not to complain of his own lot. All the world cannot possibly occupy the first and

best place. How could there be any first unless there was also a second following after? Only be thankful, you mortal men, if you are not reduced to the last of all; and that of so many blows of outrageous Fortune you only bear her milder strokes. For the rest, to those who are doomed to endure the extremes of misery, one must offer more potent remedies than you have need of whom Fortune has wounded but a little. That which casts men down into these doleful moods is that each one, forgetting his own condition, dreams of the highest place, and, like every one else, as I just now pointed out, cannot possibly attain it; then when he fails he is discontented. If they only knew the sorrows that attend on greatness they would recoil from that which they now pursue. Let me call as witnesses those who by dint of toil have reached the pinnacle, and who no sooner have arrived than they forthwith bewail the too easy accomplishment of their wish. This truth should be familiar to every one, and especially to you, to whom long experience has shown that the summit of rank, surrounded as it is with trouble and anxieties, is only deserving of pity. It follows that no earthly lot of man is free from complaint, since those who have attained what they desire and those who have missed it alike show some reason for discontent. The first allege they have been cheated, and the second that they have suffered neglect.



Take Seneca's advice then, "When you see how many people are in front of you, think also how many are behind. If you would be reconciled with Providence and your own lot in life, think of all those you have surpassed;" and as the same wise man says in the same place, "Set a goal to your desires such as you cannot over-leap, even if you wish."

*Petrarch.* I have long ago set such a goal to my desires, and, unless I am mistaken, a very modest one; but in the pushing and shameless manners of my time, what place is left for modesty, which men now call slackness or sloth?

*S. Augustine.* Can your peace of mind be disturbed by the opinion of the crowd, whose judgment is never true, who never call anything by its right name? But unless my recollection is at fault, you used to look down on their opinion.

*Petrarch.* Never, believe me, did I despise it more than I do now. I care as much for what the crowd thinks of me as I care what I am thought of by the beasts of the field.

*S. Augustine.* Well, then?

*Petrarch.* What raises my spleen is that having, of all my contemporaries whom I know, the least exalted ambitions, not one of them has encountered so many difficulties as I have in the accomplishment of my desires. Most assuredly I never aspired to the highest place; I call the

spirit of Truth as witness who judges us, who sees all, and who has always read my most secret thoughts. She knows very well that whenever after the manner of men I have gone over in my mind all the degrees and conditions of our human lot, I have never found in the highest place that tranquillity and serenity of soul which I place above all other goods; and for that matter, having a horror of a life full of disquiet and care, I have ever chosen, in my modest judgment, some middle position, and given, not lip-service, but the homage of my heart to that truth expressed by Horace—

“ Whoso with little wealth will live content,  
Easy and free his days shall all be spent;  
His well-built house keeps out the winter wind,  
Too modest to excite an envious mind.”<sup>1</sup>

And I admire the reasons he gives in the same Ode not less than the sentiment itself.

“ The tallest trees most fear the tempest's might,  
The highest towers come down with most affright,  
The loftiest hills feel first the thunder smite.”

Alas! it is just the middle place that it has never been my lot to enjoy.

*S. Augustine.* And what if that which you think is a middle position is in truth below you? What if as a matter of fact you have for a long while enjoyed a really middle place, enjoyed it

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Odes*, xi. 10, 5-8.

abundantly? Nay, what if you have in truth left the middle far behind, and are become to a great many people a man more to be envied than despised?

*Petrarch.* Well, if they think my lot one to be envied, I think the contrary.

*S. Augustine.* Yes, your false opinion is precisely the cause of all your miseries, and especially of this last. As Cicero puts it, "You must flee Charybdis, with all hands to the oars, and sails as well!"<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* Whither can I flee? where direct my ship? In a word, what am I to think except what I see before my eyes?

*S. Augustine.* You only see from side to side where your view is limited. If you look behind you will discover a countless throng coming after, and that you are somewhat nearer to the front rank than to that in the rear, but pride and stubbornness suffer you not to turn your gaze behind you.

*Petrarch.* Nevertheless from time to time I have done so, and have noticed many people coming along behind. I have no cause to blush at my condition, but I complain of having so many cares. I deplore, if I may yet again make use of a phrase of Horace, that I must live "only from day to day."<sup>2</sup> As to this restlessness of which I have suffered more than enough, I gladly

<sup>1</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, iii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Horace, *Epist.*, i. 18, 110.

subscribe to what the same poet says in the same place.

“What prayers are mine? O may I yet possess  
The goods I have, or, if heaven pleases, less!  
Let the few years that Fate may grant me still  
Be all my own, not held at others' will.”<sup>1</sup>

✓ Always in a state of suspense, always uncertain of the future, Fortune's favours have no attraction for me. [Up to now, as you see, I have lived always in dependence on others; it is the bitterest cup of all. May heaven grant me some peace in what is left of my old age, and that the mariner who has lived so long amid the stormy waves may die in port!

S. Augustine. So then in this great whirlpool of human affairs, amid so many vicissitudes, with the future all dark before you; in a word, placed as you are at the caprice of Fortune, you will be the only one of so many millions of mankind who shall live a life exempt from care! Look what you are asking for, O mortal man! look what you demand! As for that complaint you have brought forward of never having lived a life of your own, what it really amounts to is not that you have lived in poverty, but more or less in subservience. I admit, as you say, that it is a thing very troublesome. However, if you look around you will find very few men who have lived a life of their own. Those whom one counts most happy, and for whom numbers of

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Epist.*, i. 18, 106-8.

others live their lives, bear witness by the constancy of their vigils and their toils that they themselves are living for others. To quote you a striking instance, Julius Cæsar, of whom some one has reported this true but arrogant saying, "The human race only lives for a small number,"<sup>1</sup> Julius Cæsar, after he had subdued the human race to live for himself alone, did himself live for other people. Perhaps you will ask me for whom did he live? and I reply, for those who slew him—for Brutus, Cimber, and other traitorous heads of that conspiracy, for whom his inexhaustible munificence proved too small to satisfy their rapacity.

*Petrarch.* I must admit you have brought me to my senses, and I will never any more complain either of my obligations to others or of my poverty.

*S. Augustine.* Complain rather of your want of wisdom, for it is this alone that can obtain for you liberty and true riches. For the rest, the man who quietly endures to go without the cause of those good effects, and then makes complaint of not having them, cannot truly be said to have any intelligent understanding of either the cause or the effects. But now tell me what is it that makes you suffer, apart from what we have been speaking of? Is it any weakness of health or any secret trouble?

*Petrarch.* I confess that my body has always

<sup>1</sup> Lucian, v. 343.

been a burden every time I think of myself; but when I cast my eyes on the unwieldiness of other people's bodies, I acknowledge that I have a fairly obedient slave. I would to Heaven I could say as much of my soul, but I am afraid that in it there is what is more than a match for me.

*S. Augustine.* May it please God to bring that also under the rule of reason. But to come back to your body, of what do you complain?

*Petrarch.* Of that of which most other people also complain. I charge it with being mortal, with implicating me in its sufferings, loading me with its burdens, asking me to sleep when my soul is awake, and subjecting me to other human necessities which it would be tedious to go through.

*S. Augustine.* Calm yourself, I entreat you, and remember you are a man. Presently your agitation will cease. If any other thing troubles you, tell me.

*Petrarch.* Have you never heard how cruelly Fortune used me? This stepdame, who in a single day with her ruthless hand laid low all my hopes, all my resources, my family and home?<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* I see your tears are running down, and I pass on. The present is not the time for instruction, but only for giving warning; let, then, this simple one suffice. If you

<sup>1</sup> He refers to the fact that his father was banished from Florence, and he himself was born in exile at Arezzo.

consider, in truth, not the disasters of private families only, but the ruins also of empires from the beginning of history, with which you are so well acquainted; and if you call to mind the tragedies you have read, you will not perhaps be so sorely offended when you see your own humble roof brought to nought along with so many palaces of kings. Now pray go on, for these few warning words will open to you a field for long meditation.

*Petrarch.* Who shall find words to utter my daily disgust for this place where I live, in the most melancholy and disorderly of towns,<sup>1</sup> the narrow and obscure sink of the earth, where all the filth of the world is collected? What brush could depict the nauseating spectacle:—streets full of disease and infection, dirty pigs and snarling dogs, the noise of cart-wheels grinding against the walls, four-horse chariots coming dashing down at every cross-road, the motley crew of people, swarms of vile beggars side by side with the flaunting luxury of the wealthy, the one crushed down in sordid misery, the others debauched with pleasure and riot; and then the medley of characters—such diverse rôles in life—the endless clamour of their confused voices, as the passers-by jostle one another in the streets?

All this destroys the soul accustomed to any better kind of life, banishes all serenity from

<sup>1</sup> Avignon.

a generous heart, and quite upsets the student's habit of mind. So my prayers to God are earnest as well as frequent that he would save my barque from imminent wreck, for whenever I look around I seem to myself to be going down alive into the pit.

"Now," I say in mockery, "now betake yourself to noble thoughts"—

"Now go and meditate the tuneful lyre."<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* That line of Horace makes me realise what most afflicts you. You lament having lighted on a place so unfavourable for study, for as the same poet says—

"Bards fly from town, and haunt the wood and glade."<sup>2</sup>

And you yourself have expressed the same truth in other words—

"The leafy forests charm the sacred Muse,  
And bards the noisy life of towns refuse."<sup>3</sup>

If, however, the tumult of your mind within should once learn to calm itself down, believe me this din and bustle around you, though it will strike upon your senses, will not touch your soul. Not to repeat what you have been long well aware of, you have Seneca's letter<sup>4</sup> on this subject, and it is very much to the point.

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Epist.*, ii. 2, 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Epist.*, ii. 2, 77 (Conington).

<sup>3</sup> Petrarch's *Epist.*, ii. 2, 77.

<sup>4</sup> Seneca's *Letters*, lvi.



You have your own work also on "Tranquillity of Soul"; you have beside, for combating this mental malady, an excellent book of Cicero's which sums up the discussions of the third day in his *Tusculan Orations*, and is dedicated to Brutus.<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* You know I have read all that work and with great attention.

*S. Augustine.* And have you got no help from it?

*Petrarch.* Well, yes, at the time of reading, much help; but no sooner is the book from my hands than all my feeling for it vanishes.

*S. Augustine.* This way of reading is become common now; there is such a mob of lettered men, a detestable herd, who have spread themselves everywhere and make long discussions in the schools on the art of life, which they put in practice little enough. But if you would only make notes of the chief points in what you read you would then gather the fruit of your reading.

*Petrarch.* What kind of notes?

*S. Augustine.* Whenever you read a book and meet with any wholesome maxims by which you feel your spirit stirred or enthralled, do not trust merely to the resources of your wits, but make a point of learning them by heart and making them quite familiar by meditating on them, as the doctors do with their experiments,

<sup>1</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, cxi.

so that no matter when or where some urgent case of illness arises, you have the remedy written, so to speak, in your head. For in the maladies of the soul, as in those of the body, there are some in which delay is fatal, so that if you defer the remedy you take away all hope of a cure. Who is not aware, for instance, that certain impulses of the soul are so swift and strong that, unless reason checks the passion from which they arise, they whelm in destruction the soul and body and the whole man, so that a tardy remedy is a useless one? Anger, in my judgment, is a case in point. It is not for nothing that, by those who have divided the soul into three parts, anger has been placed below the seat of reason, and reason set in the head of man, as in a citadel, anger in the heart, and desire lower still in the loins. They wished to show that reason was ever ready to repress instantly the violent outbreaks of the passions beneath her, and was empowered in some way from her lofty estate to sound the retreat. As this check was more necessary in the case of anger, it has been placed directly under reason's control.

*Petrarch.* Yes, and rightly; and to show you I have found this truth not only in the works of Philosophers but also in the Poets, by that fury of winds that Virgil describes hidden in deep caves, by his mountains piled up, and by his King Æolus sitting above, who rules them with his power, I have often thought he may have

meant to denote anger and the other passions of the soul which seethe at the bottom of our heart, and which, unless controlled by the curb of reason, would in their furious haste, as he says, drag us in their train and sweep us over sea and land and the very sky itself.<sup>1</sup> In effect, he has given us to understand he means by the earth our bodily frame; by the sea, the water through which it lives; and by the depths of the sky, the soul that has its dwelling in a place remote, and of which elsewhere he says that its essence is formed out of a divine fire.<sup>2</sup> It is as though he said that these passions will hurl body, soul, and man himself into the abyss. On the other side, these mountains and this King sitting on high—what can they mean but the head placed on high where reason is enthroned? These are Virgil's words—

“There, in a cave profound, King Æolus  
 Holds in the tempests and the noisy wind,  
 Which there he prisons fast. Those angry thralls  
 Rage at their barrier, and the mountain side  
 Roars with their dreadful noise, but he on top  
 Sits high enthroned, his sceptre in his hand.”<sup>3</sup>

So writes the Poet. As I carefully study every word, I have heard with my ears the fury, the rage, the roar of the winds; I have heard the trembling of the mountain and the din. Notice how well it all applies to the tempest of anger.

<sup>1</sup> *Æneid*, i. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vi. 730.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 52-57.

And, on the other hand, I have heard the King, sitting on his high place, his sceptre grasped in his hand, subduing, binding in chains, and imprisoning those rebel blasts,—who can doubt that with equal appropriateness this applies to the Reason? However, lest any one should miss the truth that all this refers to the soul and the wrath that vexes it, you see he adds the line—

“And calms their passion and allays their wrath.”<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* I cannot but applaud that meaning which I understand you find hidden in the poet's story, familiar as it is to you; for whether Virgil had this in mind when writing, or whether without any such idea he only meant to depict a storm at sea and nothing else, what you have said about the rush of anger and the authority of reason seems to me expressed with equal wit and truth.

But to resume the thread of our discourse, take notice in your reading if you find anything dealing with anger or other passions of the soul, and especially with this plague of melancholy, of which we have been speaking at some length. When you come to any passages that seem to you useful, put marks against them, which may serve as hooks to hold them fast in your remembrance, lest otherwise they might be taking wings to flee away.

By this contrivance you will be able to stand

<sup>1</sup> *Æneid*, i. 57.

firm against all the passions, and not least against sorrow of heart, which like some pestilential cloud utterly destroys the seeds of virtue and all the fruits of understanding, and is, in the elegant phrase of Cicero—

“The fount and head of all miseries.”<sup>1</sup>

Assuredly if you look carefully at the lives of others as well as your own, and reflect that there is hardly a man without many causes of grief in his life, and if you except that one just and salutary ground, the recollection of your own sins—always supposing it is not suffered to drive you to despair—then you will come to acknowledge that Heaven has assigned to you many gifts that are for you a ground of consolation and joy, side by side with that multitude of things of which you murmur and complain.

As for your complaint that you have not had any life of your own and the vexation you feel in the tumultuous life of cities, you will find no small consolation in reflecting that the same complaint has been made by greater men than yourself, and that if you have of your own free will fallen into this labyrinth, so you can of your own free will make your escape. If not, yet in time your ears will grow so used to the noise of the crowd that it will seem to you as pleasant as the murmur of a falling stream.

<sup>1</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, iv. 38.

Or, as I have already hinted, you will find the same result easily if you will but first calm down the tumult of your imagination, for a soul serene and tranquil in itself fears not the coming of any shadow from without and is deaf to all the thunder of the world.

And so, like a man on dry land and out of danger, you will look upon the shipwreck of others, and from your quiet haven hear the cries of those wrestling with the waves, and though you will be moved with tender compassion by that sight, yet even that will be the measure also of your own thankfulness and joy at being in safety. And ere long I am sure you will banish and drive away all the melancholy that has oppressed your soul.

*Petrarch.* Although not a few things rather give me a twinge, and especially your notion that it is quite easy and depends only on myself to get away from towns, yet, as you have on many points got the better of me in reasoning, I will here lay down my arms ere I am quite overthrown.

*S. Augustine.* Do you feel able, then, now to cast off your sorrow and be more reconciled to your fortune?

*Petrarch.* Yes, I am able, supposing always that there is any such thing as fortune at all. For I notice the two Greek and Latin Poets are so little of one mind on this point that the one has not deigned to mention the word even once

in all his works, whereas the other mentions the name of fortune often and even reckons her Almighty.<sup>1</sup> And this opinion is shared by a celebrated historian and famous orator. Sallust has said of fortune that "all things are under her dominion."<sup>2</sup> And Cicero has not scrupled to affirm that "she is the mistress of human affairs."<sup>3</sup> For myself, perhaps I will declare what I think on the subject at some other time and place. But so far as concerns the matter of our discussion, your admonitions have been of such service to me, that when I compare my lot with that of most other men it no longer seems so unhappy to me as once it did.

*S. Augustine.* I am glad indeed to have been of any service to you, and my desire is to do everything I can. But as our converse to-day has lasted a long while, are you willing that we should defer the rest for a third day, when we will bring it to a conclusion?

*Petrarch.* With my whole heart I adore the very number three itself, not so much because the three Graces are contained in it, as because it is held to be nearest of kin to the Deity; which is not only the persuasion of yourself and other professors of the true faith, who place all your faith in the Trinity, but also that of Gentile philosophers who have a traditional use of the same number in worshipping their own deities.

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, viii. 334.

<sup>2</sup> *Catilina*, viii.

<sup>3</sup> *Pro Marcello*, ii.

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**And my beloved Virgil seems to have been conversant with this when he wrote—**

**“Uneven number to the gods is dear.”<sup>1</sup>**

**For what goes before makes it clear that three is the number to which he alludes. I will therefore presently await from your hands the third part of this your threefold gift.**

<sup>1</sup> *Eclogue*, vii. 75.



## DIALOGUE THE THIRD

### PETRARCH—S. AUGUSTINE

*S. Augustine.* Supposing that hitherto you have found some good from my words, I beg and implore you in what I have still to say to lend me a ready ear, and to put aside altogether the spirit of dispute and contradiction.

*Petrarch.* You may be sure I will so do, for I feel that, owing to your good counsels, I have been set free from a large part of my distress, and am therefore the better disposed to listen to what you may still have to say.

*S. Augustine.* I have not at all as yet touched upon the deep-seated wounds which are within, and I rather dread the task when I remember what debate and murmuring were caused by even the lightest allusion to them. But, on the other hand, I am not without hope that when you have rallied your strength, your spirit will more firmly bear without flinching a severer handling of the trouble.

*Petrarch.* Have no fear on that score. By this time I am used to hearing the name of my maladies and to bearing the touch of the surgeon's hand.

*S. Augustine.* Well, you are still held in bond-

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age, on your right hand and on your left, by two strong chains which will not suffer you to turn your thoughts to meditate on life or on death. I have always dreaded these might bring you to destruction; and I am not yet at all reassured, and I shall only be so when I have seen you break and cast away your bonds and come forth perfectly free. And this I think possible but difficult enough to achieve, and that until it is accomplished I shall only be moving in a futile round. They say that to break a diamond one must use the blood of a goat, and in the same way to soften the hardness of these kinds of passions, this blood is of strange efficacy. No sooner has it touched even the hardest heart but it breaks and penetrates it. But I will tell you what my fear is. In this matter I must have your own full assent as we proceed, and I am haunted by the fear you will not be able, or perhaps I should say will prove unwilling, to give it. I greatly dread lest the glittering brilliance of your chains may dazzle your eyes and hinder you, and make you like the miser bound in prison with fetters of gold, who wished greatly to be set free but was not willing to break his chains.

Now such are the conditions of your own bondage that you can only gain your freedom by breaking your chains.

*Petrarch.* Alas, alas, I am more wretched than I thought. Do you mean to tell me my soul is

still bound by two chains of which I am unconscious?

*S. Augustine.* All the same they are plain enough to see; but, dazzled by their beauty, you think they are not fetters but treasures; and, to keep to the same figure, you are like some one who, with hands and feet fast bound in shackles of gold, should look at them with delight and not see at all that they are shackles. Yes, you yourself with blinded eyes keep looking at your bonds; but, oh strange delusion! you are charmed with the very chains that are dragging you to your death, and, what is most sad of all, you glory in them!

*Petrarch.* What may these chains be of which you speak?

*S. Augustine.* Love and glory. X

*Petrarch.* Great Heavens! what is this I hear? You call these things chains? And you would break them from me, if I would let you?

*S. Augustine.* Yes, I mean to try, but I doubt if I shall succeed. All the other things that held you back were less strong and also less pleasant to you, so you helped me to break them. These, on the contrary, are pleasant though they injure, and they deceive you by a false show of beauty; so they will demand greater efforts, for you will make resistance as if I were wishing to rob you of some great good. Nevertheless I mean to try.

*Petrarch.* Pray what have I done that you should desire to relieve me of the finest passions

of my nature, and condemn to everlasting darkness the clearest faculties of my soul?

*S. Augustine.* Ah, unhappy man, have you forgotten quite this axiom of philosophy, that the climax of all evils is when a man, rooted in some false opinion, by degrees grows fatally persuaded that such and such a course is right?

*Petrarch.* I have by no means forgotten that axiom, but it has nothing to do with the subject, for why in the world should I not think that the course which I indicated is right? No, I never have thought and I never shall think any truth more indisputable than that these two passions, which you cast at me as a reproach, are the very noblest of all.

*S. Augustine.* Let us take them separately for the present, while I endeavour to find the remedies, so that I may not blunt the edge of my weapon by striking first at one and then the other indiscriminately. Tell me then, since we have first mentioned love, do you or do you not hold it to be the height of all madness?

*Petrarch.* To tell you the whole truth as I conceive it, I judge that love may be either described as the vilest passion or the noblest action of the soul.

*S. Augustine.* Do you mind giving me some example to confirm the view you have put forward?

*Petrarch.* If my passion is for some low woman of ill fame, my love is the height of folly. But if,

fascinated by one who is the image of virtue, I devote myself to love and honour her, what have you to say to that? Do you put no difference between things so entirely opposed? Do you wish to banish all remains of honour from the case? To tell you my real feeling, just as I regard the first kind of love as a heavy and ill-starred burden on the soul, so of the second I think there is hardly any greater blessing to it; if it so happen that you hold an opposite view, let each one follow his own feeling, for, as you are well aware, truth is a large field and every man should have freedom to judge for himself.

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*S. Augustine.* In matters directly contradictory opinions also may be diverse. But truth itself is one and always the same.

*Petrarch.* I admit that is so. But what makes us go wrong is that we bind ourselves obstinately to old opinions, and will not easily part from them.

*S. Augustine.* Heaven grant you may think as wisely on the whole matter of love as you do on this point.

*Petrarch.* To speak briefly, I think I am so certainly right that those who think the opposite I believe to be quite out of their senses.

*S. Augustine.* I should certainly maintain that to take for truth some ancient falsehood, and to take as falsehood some newly-discovered truth, as though all authority for truth were a matter of time, is the very climax of madness.

*Petrarch.* You are wasting your labour. Whoever asserts that view of love I shall never believe him. And I will rest on Cicero's saying, "If I err here I err willingly, and I shall never consent to part with this error as long as I live."<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* When Cicero uses those words he is speaking of the immortality of the soul, and referring to it as the noblest of conceptions, and declaring his own belief in it to be so firm that he would not endure to listen to any one who maintained the contrary. You, however, to urge the ignoblest and most false of all opinions, make use of those same terms. | Unquestionably, even if the soul were mortal, it would be better to think it immortal. For error though it were, yet would it inspire the love of virtue, | and that is a thing to be desired for its own sake alone, even if all hope of future reward were taken away from us; and as to which the desire for it will certainly become weaker, as men come to think the soul a mortal thing; and, on the other hand, | the promise of a life to come, even if it were to turn out a delusion, is none the less a powerful incentive to the soul, human nature being what it is.

But you see what will be the consequences of that error in which you stand; it will precipitate your soul into all manner of folly, when shame, and fear, even reason, that now acts as some

<sup>1</sup> *De Senectute*, xxiii.

check on passion, and the knowledge of truth itself shall all have disappeared.

*Petrarch.* I have already told you you were wasting your time. My own remembrance tells me that I have never loved anything to be ashamed of, and, on the contrary, have ever loved what is most noble.

*S. Augustine.* Even noble things may be loved in a shameful way; it is beyond doubt.

*Petrarch.* Neither in the object of love nor in the manner of loving am I guilty. So you may as well give up tormenting me. ✓

*S. Augustine.* Well, well! Do you wish, like those with fever on the brain, to die laughing and joking? Or will you rather take some remedy for your mind so pitiable and so far from its true health?

*Petrarch.* I will not refuse a remedy if you will prove to me that I am ill, but, when a man is quite well, to begin taking remedies is often fatal. ✓

*S. Augustine.* As soon as you have reached the stage of convalescence you will perceive quickly enough, as men generally do, that you have been seriously ill.

*Petrarch.* After all, I cannot but show deference to one who often in the past, and especially in these last two days, has given me proof how good were his counsels. So please go on.

*S. Augustine.* In the first place I ask you to forgive me if, compelled by the subject, I have

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to deal severely with what has been so delightful to you. For I cannot but foresee that the truth will sound bitterly in your ears.

*Petrarch.* Just one word before you begin. Do you thoroughly know the matter you are to touch upon?

*S. Augustine.* I have gone into it all carefully beforehand. It is about a mortal woman, in admiring and celebrating whom you have, alas! spent a large part of your life. That a mind like yours should have felt such an insensate passion and for so long a time does greatly astonish me.

*Petrarch.* Spare your reproaches, I pray. Thais and Livia were both mortal women; but you should be aware that she of whom you have set out to speak is a mind that has no care for things of earth, and burns only with the love of what is heavenly. In whose face, unless truth is an empty word, a certain divine loveliness shines out; whose character is the image and picture of perfect honour; whose voice and the living expression of whose eyes has nothing mortal in it; whose very form and motion is not as that of others. Consider this again and again, I entreat you, and I trust you may have understanding in what words to speak.

*S. Augustine.* Ah! out of all reason have you grown! Have you then for sixteen long years been feeding with false joys this flame of your



heart?. Of a truth not longer did Italy once suffer the assaults of her most famous enemy, the great Hannibal; nor did she then endure more frequent onsets of her would-be lover, nor was consumed with more furious fires. You to-day carry within you as hot a flame of passion, you endure as fierce stings. Yet was there found one who forced him to retreat and, though late, to take his leave! But who shall expel this invader from your soul if you yourself forbid him to depart; if you of your own will invite him to stay long with you; if you, unhappy as you are, delight in your own calamity? Far other will be your thoughts when the fatal day shall come that will close for ever those eyes that are now so pleasing to you to look upon; when you shall see that face and those pale limbs changed by death; then you will be filled with shame to have so knit your mortal affections to a perishing body such as this, and what now you so obstinately maintain you will then blush to remember.

*Petrarch.* Heaven forbid any such misery. I shall not see your threats fulfilled.

*S. Augustine.* They will inevitably come to pass.

*Petrarch.* I know it. But the stars in their courses will not so fight against me as to prevent the order of Nature by hastening her death like that. First came I into this world and I shall be first to depart.

*S. Augustine.* I think you will not have forgotten that time when you feared the contrary event, and made a song of your beloved as if she were presently to die, a song full of moving sorrow.

*Petrarch.* Certainly I remember very well, but the thought that filled me then with grief, and the memory of which makes me shiver, was a jealous indignation at the bare possibility of my outliving her who is the best part of my life and whose presence makes all its sweetness. For that is the motive of that song; I remember it well, and how I was overcome with tears. Its spirit is still with me, if with you perchance are the words.

*S. Augustine.* I was not complaining how many tears the fear of her death made you shed, nor of how much grief you felt. I was only concerned that you should realise how this fear of yours in the past may certainly return; and more easily, in that every day is a step nearer to death, and that that fair form, worn by sicknesses and the bearing of many children, has already lost much of its first strength.

*Petrarch.* I also am borne down with cares and am worn with age, and in that onward path towards death I have outrun her whom I love.

*S. Augustine.* What folly it is to calculate the order of death by that of birth! For what are those sad lamentations of the old but because of

the early deaths of their young children? What is it that yonder aged nurse is grieving over but that she sees the loss of her little nursling—

“Whom some dark day  
Has stripped of his sweet life; and cruel fate  
Snatched from his mother's breast and covered him  
In a too early grave.”<sup>1</sup>

In your own case the small number of years by which you have preceded her gives you a very uncertain hope that you will be gone before the fire of your passion shall be extinguished; and yet you indulge the fiction that this order of Nature is unchangeable.

*Petrarch.* Not exactly unchangeable, but I pray without ceasing that it may not be changed, and whenever I think of death I remember Ovid's line—

“Late may her time arrive, and after mine.”<sup>2</sup>

*S. Augustine.* I can listen to these trifles no more; but since you now admit that she may possibly die before you, I ask what should you say if she really were dead?

*Petrarch.* What should I say but that such a calamity would be the climax of all my miseries? Yet I should try and comfort myself with what was past. But may the winds bear away the words from our lips and the hurricane scatter such an omen to the ends of the earth!

<sup>1</sup> *Æneid*, vi. 428–29.

<sup>2</sup> “Tarda sit illa dies et nostro serior ævo.”—*Met.*, xv. 868.

*S. Augustine.* Ah, blindfold one! you see not yet what foolishness it is so to subject your soul to things of earth, that kindle in it the flames of desire, that have no power to give it rest, that cannot endure; and, while promising to charm you with their sweetness, torment you with perpetual agitations.

*Petrarch.* If you have any more effectual remedy, I beg you will point it out. You will never frighten me with talk like this; for I am not, as you suppose, infatuated with any creature that is mortal. You might have known that I have loved her physical charm less than her soul, that what has captivated me has been a life above that of ordinary lives, the witnessing of which has shown me how the blessed live above.

Therefore, since you inquire of me (and the mere question is a torture to listen to) what I should do supposing she were to leave me and be the first to die—well, I should try and console myself in sorrow with Lælius, the wisest of the Romans. With him I should say, "It is her goodness that I loved and that is not dead;" and I would say to myself those other words that he pronounced after the death of him for whom he had conceived an affection surpassing all common affection.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the second Scipio Africanus, and the words alluded to are these: "It is his goodness that I loved, and that is not dead; it lives not alone for me, who have had it ever

*S. Augustine.* You retire to Error's inaccessible fastness, and it will not be easy to dislodge you. But as I notice you are inclined to listen much more patiently to the truth about yourself and her, sing the praises of your darling lady as much as you will, and I will gainsay nothing. Were she a queen, a saint—

“ A very goddess, or to Apollo's self  
Own sister, or a mother of the nymphs,”<sup>1</sup>

yet all her excellence will in nowise excuse your error.

*Petrarch.* Let us see what fresh quarrel you seek with me?

*S. Augustine.* It is unquestionably true that oftentimes the loveliest things are loved in a shameful way.

*Petrarch.* I have already met that insinuation on a previous occasion. If any one could see the image of the love that reigns in my heart, he would recognise that there is no difference between it and that face that I have praised indeed much, but less by far than it deserves to be praised. I call to witness the spirit of Truth in whose presence we are speaking when I assert that in my love there has never been

before my eyes, but it will go down in all its beauty to those who come after. Whenever a man is meditating some great undertaking, or shall be nourishing in his breast great hopes, his shall be the memory, and his the image that such a man shall take for a pattern.”—Cicero, *De Amicitia*, xxvii.

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, i. 328-29.

anything dishonourable, never anything of the flesh, never anything that any man could blame unless it were its mere intensity. And if you add that even so it never passed the line of right, I think a fairer thing could never be conceived.

*S. Augustine.* I might reply to you with a word of Cicero and tell you, "You are talking of putting boundary lines in vice itself."<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* Not in vice, but in love.

*S. Augustine.* But in that very passage he was speaking of love. Do you remember where it occurs?

*Petrarch.* Do I remember indeed? Of course I have read it in the *Tusculans*. But he was speaking of men's common love; mine is one by itself.

*S. Augustine.* Other people, I fancy, might say the same of theirs; for true it is that in all the passions, and most of all in this, every man interprets his own case favourably, and there is point in the verse though from a common poet—

"To every man his lady,  
Then one to me assign;  
To every man his love affairs,  
And so let me have mine!"<sup>2</sup>

*Petrarch.* Would you like, if you have time, to hear me tell you a few of those many charms

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Orations*, iv. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Attilius in Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*, xiv.

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of hers that would strike you with astonishment and admiration?

*S. Augustine.* Do you think I am ignorant of all

“Those pleasant dreams that lovers use to weave”?

Every schoolboy knows the line, but I confess I am ashamed to hear such silliness from the lips of one whose words and thoughts should seek a higher range.

*Petrarch.* One thing I will not keep silence on,—call it silliness, call it gratitude, as you please,—namely, that to her I owe whatever I am, and I should never have attained such little renown and glory as I have unless she by the power of this love had quickened into life the feeble germ of virtue that Nature had sown in my heart. It was she who turned my youthful soul away from all that was base, who drew me as it were by a grappling chain, and forced me to look upwards. Why should you not believe it? It is a sure truth that by love we grow like what we love. Now there is no backbiter alive, let his tongue be as sharp as it may, that has ventured to touch her good name, or dared to say he had seen a single fault, I will not say in her conduct, but even in any one of her gestures or words. Moreover, those whisperers who leave no one's reputation untouched if they can help it, have been obliged in her case to utter only reverence and respect.

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It is no wonder, then, if such a glory as hers should have fostered in my heart the longing for more conspicuous glory, and should have sweetened those hard toils which I had to endure if I would attain that which I desired. What were all the wishes of my youth but solely to please her who above all others had pleased me? And you are not ignorant that to gain my end I scorned delights a thousand times, I gave myself before my time to labour and to cares without number; and now you bid me forget or diminish somewhat of my love for her who first taught me how to escape the vulgar crowd, who guided all my steps, spurred on my lagging mind, and wakened into life my drowsy spirit.

*S. Augustine.* Poor man! you would have done better to be silent than to speak, although even if you had been silent I should have discerned what you are within. But such stout words as these stir my indignation and anger.

*Petrarch.* I wonder why?

*S. Augustine.* To have a false opinion shows ignorance, but to keep on boldly proclaiming it shows pride as well as ignorance.

*Petrarch.* Suppose you try and prove that what I think and say is false.

*S. Augustine.* It is all false; and, first, what you say as to owing all you are to her. If you mean that she has made you what you are, there you certainly lie; but if you were to say that it is she who has prevented you being any more than



you are, you would speak the truth. O what long contention would you have been spared if by the charm of her beauty she had not held you back. What you are you owe to the bounty of Nature; what you might have been she has quite cut off, or rather let me say you yourself have cut it off, for she indeed is innocent. That beauty which seemed so charming and so sweet, through the burning flame of your desire, through the continual rain of your tears, has done away all that harvest that should have grown from the seeds of virtue in your soul. It is a false boast of yours that she has held you back from base things; from some perhaps she may, but only to plunge you into evils worse still. For, if one leads you from some miry path to bring you to a precipice, or in lancing some small abscess cuts your throat, he deserves not the name of deliverer but assassin. Likewise she whom you hold up as your guide, though she drew you away from some base courses, has none the less overwhelmed you in a deep gulf of splendid ruin. As for her having taught you to look upwards and separate yourself from the vulgar crowd, what else is it than to say by sitting at her feet you became so infatuated with the charm of her above as to studiously neglect everything else?

And in the common intercourse of human life what can be more injurious than that? when you say she has involved you in toils without number, there indeed you speak truth. But what

great gain is there in that? When there are such varied labours that a man is perforce obliged to engage in, what madness is it of one's own accord to go after fresh ones! As for your boasting that it is she who has made you thirst for glory, I pity your delusion, for I will prove to you that of all the burdens of your soul there is none more fatal than this. But the time for this is not yet come.

*Petrarch.* I believe the readiest of warriors first threatens and then strikes. I seem, however, to find threat and wound together. And already I begin to stagger.

*S. Augustine.* How much more will you stagger when I deliver my sharpest thrust of all? Forsooth that woman to whom you profess you owe everything, she, even she, has been your ruin.

*Petrarch.* Good Heavens! How do you think you will persuade me of that?

*S. Augustine.* She has detached your mind from the love of heavenly things and has inclined your heart to love the creature more than the Creator: and that one path alone leads, sooner than any other, to death.

*Petrarch.* I pray you make no rash judgment. The love which I feel for her has most certainly led me to love God.

*S. Augustine.* But it has inverted the true order.

*Petrarch.* How so?

*S. Augustine.* Because 'every creature' should be dear to us because of our love for the Creator. But in your case, on the contrary, held captive by the charm of the creature, you have not loved the Creator as you ought. You have admired the Divine Artificer as though in all His works He had made nothing fairer than the object of your love, although in truth the beauty of the body should be reckoned last of all.

*Petrarch.* I call Truth to witness as she stands here between us, and I take my conscience to witness also, as I said before, that the body of my lady has been less dear to me than her soul. The proof of it is here, that the further she has advanced in age (which for the beauty of the body is a fatal thunderstroke) the more firm has been my admiration; for albeit the flower of her youth has withered visibly with time, the beauty of her soul has grown with the years, and as it was the beginning of my love for her, even so has it been its sustainer. Otherwise if it had been her bodily form which attracted me, it was, ere this, time to make a change.

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*S. Augustine.* Are you mocking me? Do you mean to assert that if the same soul had been lodged in a body ill-formed and poor to look upon, you would have taken equal delight therein?

*Petrarch.* I dare not say that. For the soul

itself cannot be discerned, and the image of a body like that would have given no indication of such a soul. But were it possible for the soul to be visible to my gaze, I should most certainly have loved its beauty even though its dwelling-place were poor.

*S. Augustine.* You are relying on mere words; for if you are only able to love that which is visible to your gaze, then what you love is the bodily form. However, I deny not that her soul and her character have helped to feed your flame, for (as I will show you before long) her name alone has both little and much kindled your mad passion; for, as in all the affections of the soul, it happens most of all in this one that oftentimes a very little spark will light a great fire.

*Petrarch.* I see where you would drive me. You want to make me say with Ovid—

“I love at once her body and her soul.”<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* Yes, and you ought to confess this also, that neither in one or the other case has your love been temperate or what it should be.

*Petrarch.* You will have to put me to the torture ere I will make any such confession.

*S. Augustine.* And you will allow that this love has also cast you into great miseries.

*Petrarch.* Though you place me on the block itself, I will not acknowledge any such thing.

<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, I. x. 13.

*S. Augustine.* If you do not ignore my questions and conclusions, you will soon make both those confessions. Tell me, then, can you recall the years when you were a little child, or have the crowding cares of your present life blotted all that time out?

*Petrarch.* My childhood and youth are as vividly before my eyes as if they were yesterday.

*S. Augustine.* Do you remember, then, how in those times you had the fear of God, how you thought about Death, what love you had for Religion, how dear goodness and virtue were to you?

*Petrarch.* Yes, I remember it all, and I am sorry when I see that as my years increased these virtues grew less and less in me.

*S. Augustine.* For my part I have ever been afraid lest the wind of Spring should cut that early blossom off, which, if only it might be left whole and unhurt, would have produced a wondrous fruitage.

*Petrarch.* Pray do not wander from the subject; for what has this to do with the question we were discussing?

*S. Augustine.* I will tell you. Recall each step in your life, since your remembrance is so complete and fresh; recall all the course of your life, and recollect at what period this great change you speak of began.

*Petrarch.* I have run over in my mind all the course and number of my years.

*S. Augustine.* And what do you find?

*Petrarch.* I see that the doctrine in the treatise of Pythagoras, of which I have heard tell and have read, is by no means void of truth. For when travelling the right road, still temperate and modest, I had reached the parting of the ways and had been bidden to turn to the right hand, whether from carelessness or perversity I know not, behold I turned to the left; and what I had read in my boyhood was of no profit to me—

“Here the ways part: the right will thee conduct  
To the walled palace of the mighty King  
And to Elysium, but the left will lead  
Where sin is punished and the malefactor  
Goes to his dreaded doom.”<sup>1</sup>

Although I had read of all this before, yet I understood it not until I found it by experience. Afterwards I went wrong, in this foul and crooked pathway, and often in mind went back with tears and sorrow, yet could not keep the right way; and it was when I left that way, yes, that was certainly the time when all this confusion in my life began.

*S. Augustine.* And in what period of your age did this take place?

*Petrarch.* About the middle of my growing youth. But if you give me a minute or two, I think I can recall the exact year when it took place.

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, vi. 540-43.

*S. Augustine.* I do not ask for the precise date, but tell me about when was it that you saw the form and feature of this woman for the first time?

*Petrarch.* Never assuredly shall I forget that day.

*S. Augustine.* Well now, put two and two together; compare the two dates.

*Petrarch.* I must confess in truth they coincide. I first saw her and I turned from my right course at one and the same time.

*S. Augustine.* That is all I wanted. You became infatuated. The unwonted dazzle blinded your eyes, so I believe. For they say the first effect of love is blindness. So one reads in the poet most conversant with Nature—

“ At the first sight was that Sidonian dame  
Blinded,”

and then he adds presently—

“ With love was Dido burning.”<sup>1</sup>

And though, as you well know, the story is but an ancient fable, yet did the Poet in making it follow the order of Nature.

And when you had been struck blind by this meeting, if you chose the left-hand path it was because to you it seemed more broad and easy; for that to the right is steep and narrow, and of its hardship you were afraid. But that woman so renowned, whom you imagine as your most safe guide, wherefore did not she direct

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, i. 613.

you upward, hesitating and trembling as you were? Why did she not take you by the hand, as one does the blind, and set you in the way where you should walk?

*Petrarch.* She certainly did so, as far as it was in her power. What but this was in her heart when, unmoved by my entreaties, unyielding to my caress, she safeguarded her woman's honour, and in spite of her youth and mine, in spite of a thousand circumstances that would have bent a heart of adamant, she stood her ground, resolute and unsubdued? Yes, this womanly soul taught me what should be the honour and duty of a man; and to preserve her chastity she did, as Seneca expresses it—

“What was to me at once an example and a reproach.”<sup>1</sup>

And at last, when she saw the reins of my chariot were broken and that I was rushing to the abyss, she chose rather to part from me than follow where I went.

*S. Augustine.* Base desires, then, sometimes you felt, though not long since you denied it? But it is the common folly of lovers, let me say of mad folk. One may say of them all alike—

“I would not, yet I would; I would, yet would not.”<sup>2</sup>

You know not, any of you, what you want or what you want not.

*Petrarch.* Without seeing, I fell into the snare.

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, vii. 8.      <sup>2</sup> Terence, *Phormio*, 949.



But if in past days my feelings were other than they are now, love and youth were the cause. Now I know what I wish and what I desire, and I have at last made firm my staggering soul. She for her part has ever been firm in her mind and always the same. The more I understand this woman's constancy, the more I admire it; and if sometimes I regretted her resolution, now I rejoice in it and give her thanks.

*S. Augustine.* It is not easy to believe a man who has once taken you in. You may have changed the outside fashion of your life, but have not yet persuaded me that your soul is also changed.

If your flame is calmed and softened somewhat, yet it is not for certain quite put out. But you who set such price on her you love, do you not see how deeply by absolving her you condemn yourself? You delight in seeing in her the model of purity, and you avow yourself to be without any feeling and a criminal; and you protest that she is the most happy of women, while her love has made you the most unhappy of men. If you remember, it is just what I said at the beginning.

*Petrarch.* Yes, I remember. I cannot deny that what you say is true, and I see whither you are gradually leading me.

*S. Augustine.* To see it better still, lend me all your attention. Nothing so much leads a man

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to forget or despise God as the love of things temporal, and most of all this passion that we call love; and to which, by the greatest of all desecrations, we even gave the name of God, without doubt only that we may throw a heavenly veil over our human follies and make a pretext of divine inspiration when we want to commit an enormous transgression. In the case of the other passions, the sight of the object, the hope of enjoying it, and the ardour of the will take us captive. Love also demands all that, but in addition it asks also a reciprocal passion, without which it will be forced to die away. So, whereas in the other cases one loves singly and alone, in this case we must give love for love, and thus man's heart is stung and stung again. Therefore, Cicero was right when he wrote that "Of all the passions of the soul, assuredly the most violent is love,"<sup>1</sup> and he must have been very certain of his ground when he added that "assuredly"—he who in four books shows he was aware how Plato's Academy doubted everything.<sup>2</sup>

*Petrarch.* I have often noticed that reference, and wondered that of the passions he should call this the most violent of all.

*S. Augustine.* Your surprise would have vanished if you had not lost your powers of memory. But I must recall you by a short admonition to a recollection of its many evils.

<sup>1</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, iv. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Academica*.

Think what you were when that plague seized upon your soul; how suddenly you fell to bemoaning, and came to such a pitch of wretchedness that you felt a morbid pleasure in feeding on tears and sighs. Passing sleepless nights, and murmuring ever the name of your beloved, scorning everything, hating life, desiring death, with a melancholy love for being alone, avoiding all your fellow-men, one might well apply to you, for they exactly fit your case, the lines in which Homer describes Bellerophon—

"There in the pleasant fields he wandered sad,  
Eating his heart, far from the ways of men."<sup>1</sup>

What meant that pale face and wasted figure? that flower of your age withering before its time, those heavy eyes, ever bathed in tears, your mind in a state of agitation, your broken rest and troubled moans, even when you were asleep? Why was your voice weak and altered through your sorrow of heart, and the very sound of your words, indistinct and broken, with whatever other token can be imagined, of a heart distressed and in disorder? Do you call these the signs of one in good health? Was it not this lady with whom for you every day, whether feast or fast, began and ended? Was it not at her coming the sun shone forth, and when she left you, night returned? Every change of

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *Tusculan Orations*, iii. 26.

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her countenance brought a change in your heart; and if she were sad, you forthwith were filled with sadness. In a word, your life became wholly dependent upon hers. You know that I say but what is true and what is in every one's mouth.

And what could be more senseless than that, not content with the presence of her living face, the cause of all your woes, you must needs obtain a painted picture by an artist<sup>1</sup> of high repute, that you might carry it everywhere with you, to have an everlasting spring of tears, fearing, I suppose, lest otherwise their fountain might dry up? Of all such things you were only too vigilant, and you neglected everything else. But to come to that which is the very crowning instance of your folly, and of which I gave you warning a little while ago, who could sufficiently utter his indignation and amazement at this sign of a distempered mind, that, infatuated as much by the beauty of her name as of her person, you have with perfectly incredible silliness paid honour to anything that has the remotest connection with that name itself? Had you any liking for the laurel of empire or of poetry, it was forsooth because the name they bore was hers; and from this time onwards there is hardly a verse from your pen but in it you have made mention of the laurel, as

<sup>1</sup> Simone Martini, of Siena.

if indeed you were a denizen of Peneus' stream,<sup>1</sup> or some priest on Cirrha's<sup>2</sup> Mount.

And finally, discovering that the laurel of empire was beyond your reach, you have, with as little self-restraint as you showed in the case of your beloved herself, now coveted the laurel of Poetry of which the merit of your works seemed to give more promise.

Although to gain your reward you were borne up on the wings of genius, yet will you shudder to remember with what trouble you attained it. I clearly divine what excuse you will make, and I see your thought the moment you open your lips. You will allege that you were devoted to these studies some time before you became a lover at all, and that desire for the glory of the poet's crown had kindled your heart from childhood. I neither deny it or forget it; but the fact of the usage being obsolete for centuries, and this being an epoch very unfavourable for studies like yours, the dangers also of long voyages, which would have brought you to the threshold of prison and of death itself, not to mention other obstacles of fortune no less violent than those—all these difficulties, I say, would perhaps have broken your resolve entirely, if the remembrance of a name so sweet, always entwining itself with your inmost soul, had not banished every other care, and

<sup>1</sup> A river in Thessaly.

<sup>2</sup> A town in Phocis, near Delphi.

drawn you over sea, over land, across mountains of difficulty, to Rome and to Naples, where at length you attained what you had longed for with such ardour. If all this seems to you the token of but a moderate passion, then at least I shall be quite certain you are the victim of no moderate delusion.

I purposely leave out what Cicero was not ashamed to imitate from Terence when he wrote, "Wrongs, suspicions, fierce quarrels, jealousies, war, and then again peace—behold the miseries of love." Do you not recognise at once in his words the madness and, above all, the madness of jealousy which, as one knows too well, is the ruling power in love, as love is the ruling passion among all others? Perhaps you may reply: "I admit it is so, but reason will be there to temper such excess." Terence himself had anticipated your answer when he added—

"Such fickle things to settle by sane rule  
Is to be sanely insane."<sup>1</sup>

The phrase, the truth of which you will scarcely question, puts an end, unless I am mistaken, to all those subterfuges of yours.

Such, then, are the miseries of love, the particulars of which it is needless to mention to those who have proved them, and which would not be believed by those who never tried. But the worst of them all, to come back to our subject,

<sup>1</sup> Terence, *Eunuch*, 59-63.

is that it engenders a forgetfulness of God and of man's real state. For how should the soul thus crushed beneath these weights ever arise to that one and only most pure fountain of true Good? And since it is so, you may lay aside your wonder that Cicero should tell us no passion of man's soul seemed to him more violent than love.

*Petrarch.* I must own myself beaten; for it appears all you have said is taken from the very heart of the book of experience. And as you have quoted from the play of Terence, let me please myself by bringing from there also this sad complaint—

“O deed of shame! now am I full of woe.  
Weary I burn with love; with open eyes,  
Brain clear, I am undone; and what to do  
I know not.”<sup>1</sup>

I would also call to mind this counsel from the same poet's words—

“Think, while there's time, again and yet again.”<sup>2</sup>

*S. Augustine.* And I likewise from the lips of Terence will give you my reply—

“What in itself contains no rule or reason,  
By rule or reason you can never hold.”<sup>3</sup>

*Petrarch.* What is to be done, then? Am I to despair?

<sup>1</sup> Terence, *Eunuch*, 70-73.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 57, 58.

*S. Augustine.* That is the last thing in the world to do. However, let me briefly tell you the remedy I propose. You know that on this subject there are not only special treatises compiled by philosophers of eminence, but that some of the most famous poets have written on it whole books.

It would be almost an insult to point out which they are, above all, to you who are a past-master in the whole field, or to offer any advice as to reading them; but perhaps I might say a word without offence to suggest in what way their study might be applied for your own welfare.

First, then, notice what is said by Cicero—

“Some think that an old love can best be driven out by a new, as one nail is by another.”<sup>1</sup>

And Ovid agrees, giving this general rule—

“Old love affairs must always yield to new.”<sup>2</sup>

And without a doubt it is the truth, for the mind thus divided and parcelled out between different objects feels itself moved with less force towards each one. So the river Ganges, they tell us, was divided up by the Persian king into countless channels, and this river, that was so deep and formidable, was cut up into a thousand inconsiderable streamlets. And so an army, broken up and scattered, becomes vulnerable by the enemy; so Fire dispersed dies down; in a

<sup>1</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, iv. 35.      <sup>2</sup> *De Remediis Amoris*, l. 162.



word, every power in the world, if concentrated, increases, but by dispersion is reduced. On the other hand, I think this is not to be overlooked, that there may be great danger when you lay aside a passion and, if one may say so, a passion of the nobler kind; you may, if you are not watchful, fall into dissipation of another sort, run after women and become a loose libertine. In my judgment, then, if one must die for certain, there is some consolation in dying of a nobler rather than a less noble wound. So if you ask my advice, it is this: Take your courage in both hands. Fly, if you possibly can; and I would even say, go from one prison to another; perchance you might escape by the way or else find a milder discipline to be under. Only beware, when your neck is freed from one such yoke as this, that you place it not under the weight of a crowd of more base and vile oppressions.

*Petrarch.* While the doctor is finishing his advice, will he allow the patient, in the throes of his malady, to interrupt him for a minute?

*S. Augustine.* Of course. Why not? Many a doctor, guided by the symptoms of his patient thus declared, has been able to find the very remedy he needed.

*Petrarch.* Then what I want to say is just this: For me to love another is impossible. My mind has grown only to love her; my eyes to look only for her; excepting her, all to them is nothing, or is mere darkness. And so if your remedy is that

in order to be healed of this love I should love another, your condition is an impossible one. In that case all is over, and I am lost.

*S. Augustine.* Your senses are dulled, your appetite is lost; since then you can take no internal remedy, one must have recourse to other treatment and see what can be done by change of scene. Can you bring your mind to think of flight or exile and going right away from the places that you know?

*Petrarch.* Though I feel that her attraction draws me to her with hooks of steel, nevertheless if I have to go, I can.

*S. Augustine.* If you can, you will be safe. What else can I say, then, but this advice of Virgil's, changing only two little words—

“Ah! flee this land beloved, and leave behind  
This shore to thee so dear.”<sup>1</sup>

For how can you continue in safety in these scenes where there are so many memories of your wounds, where things present and the memory of things past cling always to you? So that I say, as Cicero also advises, “Seek change of scene; take care to do as one does who is recovering from some illness.”<sup>2</sup>

*Petrarch.* Think of what you are prescribing. For how often and often, longing to get well, and familiar with advice like this, have I tried this remedy of flight; and though I have feigned

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, iii. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, iv. 35.

various other reasons for it, yet the end and aim of all my peregrinations and all my retirement to the country was this one thing—to become free! For that I have wandered far away to the West, to the North, to the very confines of the ocean. Far and wide have I roamed. You see what good it has done me. And so Virgil's simile has many a time come home to my heart,—

“E'en as the stricken deer, that unaware  
Roaming afar in pleasant groves of Crete,  
The hunter pierces with his weapon keen.  
And she unknowing o'er Mount Dicte's side  
Flees wounded, and the fatal arrow cleaves  
To her poor side.”<sup>1</sup>

I am even as that deer. I have fled, but I bear everywhere my wound with me.

*S. Augustine.* Yourself have given me the answer for which you look.

*Petrarch.* How so?

*S. Augustine.* Why, do you not see that if a man bears his wound with him, change of scene is but an aggravation of his pain and not a means of healing it? One might say your case is just that of the young man who complained to Socrates that he had been a tour and it had done him no good whatever. “You went touring with yourself,”<sup>2</sup> said the Sage.

You must first break off the old load of your passions; you must make your soul ready. *Then*

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, iv. 69–73.

<sup>2</sup> *Seneca, Epist.*, xxviii.

you must fly. For it is proved to demonstration, not only in things physical but in moral also, that unless the patient is well disposed, the doctor's help is in vain. Otherwise were you to go to the far-off Indies, you will find that Horace only spoke truth when he said—

“ Who cross the ocean making peace their goal,  
Change but their sky and cannot change their soul.”

Or thus—

“ We come to this; when o'er the world we range,  
'Tis but our climate, not our mind, we change.”<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* I must say I cannot follow you. You give me a prescription to cure and heal my soul and tell me I must first heal it and then flee. Now, my difficulty is I do not know how to heal it. If it is cured, what more do I need? But if, again, it is not cured, what good will change of scene bring me? The help you offer me is useless. Tell me briefly what are the remedies I must use?

*S. Augustine.* I did not say that you must cure and heal your soul. What I said was you must make it ready. As for the rest, either you will be cured, and the change of scene will then establish your health on a firm footing; or you will not yet be cured, but only made ready, and then the change of scene will have the same ultimate result. But, if your soul is neither

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Epistles*, Book I., *Epist.*, xi. 27 (Conington).

cured nor made ready, this change and frequent moving from place to place will only stir up its grief. I will still advise you to take a leaf out of Horace's book—

“ For if the cure of mental ills is due  
To sense and wisdom, not a fine sea view,”<sup>1</sup>

—what he says is true. You will set out full of the hope and the wish to return, carrying along with you all that has ensnared your soul. In whatever place you are, to whatever side you turn, you will behold the face, you will hear the voice of her whom you have left. By that sad enchantment that belongs to lovers, you will have power to see her though you are absent, and to hear her though she is far away; and do you imagine that love is to be extinguished by subterfuges like this? Believe me, it will rather burn more fiercely. Those who call themselves masters in the art of love enjoin among their other maxims short absences one from another on the part of lovers, for fear they should become tired of seeing each other face to face or from their importunity. Therefore I advise, I recommend, I enjoin upon you that you learn to wholly sever your soul from that which weighs it down and go away without hope of return. You will discover then, but not before, what absence is able to do for the soul's healing. If fate had placed your lot in some unhealthy

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Epist.*, Book I, xi. 25–26 (Conington).

plague-stricken region where you were liable to constant illness, should you not flee from it never to return? And so I counsel you to do now, unless, as I much fear, men care more for their body than their soul.

*Petrarch.* That is their affair. But undoubtedly if I found myself ill on account of the unhealthiness of the place I was in, I should choose for my recovery some place with a healthier climate, and I should act in the same way, and with stronger reasons still, in case of maladies of the soul. Yet, as far as I can see, the cure of these is a more difficult matter.

*S. Augustine.* The united testimony of the greatest philosophers proves the falsity of that assertion. It is evident that all the maladies of the soul can be healed if only the patient puts no obstacle in the way, although many diseases of the body are incurable by any known means. For the rest, and not to go too far from our subject, I stick to my judgment. You must, as I said, make your soul ready, and teach it to renounce the object of its love, never once to turn back, never to see that which it was wont to look for. This is the only sure road for a lover; and if you wish to preserve your soul from ruin, this is what you must do.

*Petrarch.* That you may see how perfectly I have learned all you have said, let me recapitulate that to go for change of scene is useless, unless the soul is first made ready; such journeys will

cure it when made ready, and will establish it when once cured. Is not that the conclusion of your threefold precept?

*S. Augustine.* Yes, it is precisely that, and you sum up very well what I have unfolded.

*Petrarch.* I could have divined your two first truths by myself, without you pointing them out; but as for the third, that the soul, when it is cured and established in health, still needs absence, I do not understand it, unless it is the fear of a relapse that is the motive of what you say.

*S. Augustine.* But you surely do not suppose that to be a slight point even in bodily health? And how much more grave a matter ought one to think it in regard to the soul, where a relapse is so much more rapid and dangerous. So I would say, let us refer once more to what seems one of the soundest remarks of Seneca, where in a letter he writes, "If any man wishes to have done with love he must avoid all recollection of the beloved form," and adds as his reason, "For nothing is so easily rekindled to life again as love."<sup>1</sup> O how true a saying is that, and from what profound experience of life is he speaking! But it is needless to call any other witness of this than your own knowledge will supply.

*Petrarch.* Yes, I agree he speaks truth, but if you notice he is speaking not of one who already has done with love, but of one who wishes to have done with it.

<sup>1</sup> Seneca's *Epist.*, lxiv.

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*S. Augustine.* He speaks of any man who is in danger. Any kind of blow is more dangerous if there is some wound before unhealed, or some disease not yet cured; and even afterwards it is not safe. And since we remember most, instances that have come home to us in our own experience, let me ask how often have you who speak to me not found yourself, as you went about these well-known spots, by their mere look, though no person met you, reminded of your former vanities; standing speechless, full of sighs, as you pace this town that has been, I will not say the cause, but at any rate the scene of all your evils; though before you came back to it you thought you were cured, and would have been to a very great extent if only you had remained away? And then with difficulty restraining your tears, half-wounded to death, you have fled, and cried to your own heart, "Here in these places I see at every turn the ambush of my ancient foe. The signs of death are ever about me!" So, then, were you healed already, if you would take counsel of me, I should say, "Do not stay long in this place. It is not wise for the prisoner who has broken his chains to go wandering round the prison gates, ever ready to take him in again, before which the jailer is ever on guard, laying his traps with special care to recapture those whose escape he regrets.

"The downward path to hell is ever smooth,  
Its dismal gate is open night and day."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, vi. 126-27.



If precautions like these are needful for men in health, how much more are they in the case of those who have not yet shaken off their sickness. It is of the latter that Seneca was thinking when he wrote that maxim. He was giving counsel to those who were most in danger, for it was no use to speak of those whom the flame had already devoured and who were past all care for their safety. He addressed himself to those in another stage, who still felt the heat but tried to come forth of the flame. Many a sick man on the way to recovery has been thrown back by a draught of water which before his illness would have done him no harm; and often has one wearied out, with a long day's work, been knocked down by some trifling shake which when he was in his full strength would not have moved him at all.

It needs but a trifle sometimes, when the soul is emerging from its miseries, to plunge it quite back once more into the abyss. To see the purple on the shoulders of another will rouse again all our sleeping ambition; the sight of a little pile of money sets up our thirst for gold; one look at some fair lady will stir again our desire; the light glance of an eye will awaken sleeping love.

It is no wonder plagues like these take possession of your minds, when you see the madness of the world; and when once they have found their way back to the soul, they come with fatal ease. And since it is so, it is not enough merely to

leave a plague-stricken spot, but you, O man, must keep on in your flight for life, till you have escaped everything that might drag the soul back to its old passions; for fear lest, when you return from the pit with Orpheus and look back, you lose your Eurydice once more.

Such is the sum of my counsel.

*Petrarch.* I accept it heartily and with thankfulness, for I feel that the remedy is suited to my wound. My intention is to fly, but I know not yet where lies the direction I should choose.

*S. Augustine.* A thousand ways are open to you to make choice of on every side; a thousand ports are ready to receive you. I know that, more than to other lands, your heart turns to Italy, and that a love of your native soil is inborn in you; and you are right, for—

“Not Media's forests rich, nor Ganges' stream,  
Though fair it be, nor Hermus rolling gold,  
May vie with Italy; Bactria and Ind,  
And all Pachaia with its odours rare  
Shall not be mentioned.”<sup>1</sup>

I think you have yourself not long ago, in a letter to one of your friends,<sup>2</sup> treated this theme of the famous Poet at fuller length in a Latin poem. Italy then would be my choice for you; because the ways of its people, its climate, the sea washing its shores, the Apennine range coming between them, all promise that a so-

<sup>1</sup> *Georgics*, ii. 136-39.

<sup>2</sup> Ildebrandino di Conte, Bishop of Padua, *Epist.* cxi. 25.

jour there would be better suited to extirpate your troubles than going anywhere else in the world. I would not, however, wish to confine you only to one corner of the land. Go under good auspices wherever inclination may lead; go without fear and with a free mind; take no backward glances, forget the past and step forward to the future. See how long you have been a stranger to your own country and your own self. It is time to return, for—

“O now 'tis evening, and the night  
Is chiefly friend to thieves.”<sup>1</sup>

I warn you in words of your own.

One further counsel I must urge which I had nearly forgotten. You must avoid solitude, until you are quite sure that you have not a trace of your old ailment left. You told me that a country life had done you no good. There is nothing surprising in that. What remedy were you likely to find in a place all lonely and remote? Let me confess that often when you were retreating thither all by yourself, sighing, and turning longing eyes back to the town, I have laughed heartily and said to myself: “What a blindfold fool love has made of this unhappy wight! and led him to quite forget the verse that every schoolboy knows, about flying from his trouble and finding his death.”

<sup>1</sup> Petrarch's *Penitential Psalms*, iii. (translated by George Chapman).

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*Petrarch.* I am afraid you are right, but what are the lines to which you allude?

*S. Augustine.* Ovid, of course.

“ Lover! whos'er you be, dwell not alone;  
In solitude you're sure to be undone.  
You're safer in a crowd; the word is true,  
Lone woods are not the place for such as you.”<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* Yes, I remember them perfectly, and knew them almost by heart from my childhood.

*S. Augustine.* Much good has it done you to know so many things yet not know how to suit them to your need. When you not only know all the testimony of the ancients, but have yourself proved the evils of solitude, it astonishes me that you should commit such a blunder as to seek it. You have, in fact, often complained that there was no good in being alone. You have expressed it in a thousand places, and especially in the fine poem you composed on your own misfortune. The sweet accents of it charmed me while you were writing.<sup>2</sup>

It surprised me to hear a song so harmonious arise from a soul so full of agitation, and come from the lips of a man so far out of his sense; and I asked myself what power of love can stay the offended Muses from abandoning so dire a nest of troubles, and, scared by such aberration of mind in their host, forsaking utterly their

<sup>1</sup> Ovid's *De Remediis Amoris*, 579-80.

<sup>2</sup> Petrarch's *Epistles*, i. 7.

wonted dwelling? I thought of words of Plato, "Let no man wholly sane knock at Poetry's door," and then of Aristotle, who followed him and said, "All great genius has a touch of madness in it,"<sup>1</sup> but I remembered that in these sayings of theirs they were thinking of a frenzy far indeed removed from yours. However, we will return to this subject at some other time.

*Petrarch.* I must fain own what you say is the truth; but I never thought to have made verses so harmonious as to be worth your praise and commendation. They will be all the dearer to me now that I know it.

If you have other remedy to offer me, I beg you withhold it not from him who is in need.

*S. Augustine.* To unfold all one knows is the act of a braggart more than of a wise friend. And remember that men did not invent all the sundry kinds of remedies, internal and external, for diverse kinds of sickness, on purpose that each and every one should be tried on every occasion; but that, as Seneca remarks to Lucilius, "Nothing is so contrary to the work of healing as a frequent change of remedy; and no wound will ever be healed perfectly, to which first one and then another medicine is continually applied. The true way is only to try the new when the old remedy has failed."<sup>2</sup>

So, then, although the remedies for this kind

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Seneca's treatise, *De Animæ tranquillitate*, xv.

<sup>2</sup> Seneca's *Epistles*, ii.

of ailment are many and varied, I will content myself with only pointing out a few, and I will choose those which in my judgment will best suit your need. For indeed, I have no wish merely to show you what is new, but only to tell you, of all those which are known, what remedies, so far as I can judge, are most likely in your case to be efficacious.

There are three things, as Cicero says, that will avert the mind of man from Love,—Satiety, Shamefastness, Reflection.<sup>1</sup>

There may indeed be more; there may be less. But, to follow the steps of so great an authority, let us suppose there are three. It will be useless for me to speak of the first in your case, because you will judge it is impossible you should ever come to satiety of your love. But still if your passion will hear the voice of reason and judge the future from the past, you will readily agree that an object, even the most beloved, can produce, I do not say satiety only, but even weariness and disgust. Now, as I am quite sure I should be entering on a vain quest if I embark on this track, because, even if it were granted that satiety is a possible thing, and that it kills love, you will pretend that by the ardour of your passion you are a thousand leagues removed from any such possibility, and, as I am not at all disposed to deny it, what remains is for me to touch only upon the other two

<sup>1</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, iv. 35.

remedies that are left. You will not wish to dispute my assertion that Nature has endowed you with a certain power of reason, and also with some talent for forming a weighty judgment.

*Petrarch.* Unless I am deceived by acting as judge in my own cause, what you say is so true that I am often inclined to fear I am too wanting in what is due both to my sex and this age; wherein, as you doubtless observe, everything goes to the shameless. Honours, prosperity, wealth—all these hold the field; and to these, virtue itself, nay even fortune, must give way.<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* Do you not see what conflict there is between Love and Shamefastness? While the one urges the soul forward, the other holds it back; the one drives in the spur, the other pulls hard at the bridle; the one looks at nothing, the other watches carefully on every side.

*Petrarch.* This is only too familiar to me, and I feel to my cost how distracted is my life by passions so contrary. They come upon me by turn, so that my poor spirit, tossed hither and thither, knows not which impulse to obey.

*S. Augustine.* Do you mind telling me if you have looked in your glass lately?

*Petrarch.* And, pray, what do you ask that question for? I have only done as usual.

*S. Augustine.* Heaven grant you do it no

<sup>1</sup> The text here is obscure.

## 154      PETRARCH'S SECRET

oftener, neither with more self-complacency, than you should! Well, and have you not noticed that your face is changing from day to day, and that from time to time grey hairs begin to show themselves around your temples?

*Petrarch.* Is that all? I thought you were about to ask me something out of the common; but to grow up, to grow old, to die is the common lot of all that are born. I have observed what befalls almost all my contemporaries; for nowadays men seem to age more quickly than they used to, though I know not why or wherefore.

*S. Augustine.* The growing old of others will not give you back your youth, neither will their dying bring you immortality. So let us leave on one side everything else and return to your own case. Tell me; when you have noticed these signs of change in your body, has it not brought some change also in your soul?

*Petrarch.* It has certainly made some impression on me, but not exactly a change.

*S. Augustine.* What, then, were your thoughts, and what did you say to yourself?

*Petrarch.* What would you have me say, except what was said by Domitian the Emperor, "With even mind I brook the sight of watching, though still young, my hairs grow grey."<sup>1</sup> So illustrious an example has consoled me for what grey hairs I too behold. And if I needed more, I brought to mind a king beside that emperor; I mean

<sup>1</sup> Suetonius Domitian, xviii.



Numa Pompilius the Second, who, as the historian relates, had grey hair even from his youth. And Poetry as well as History comes to my aid, since in his *Bucolics* our own Virgil, writing when he was but five-and-twenty, speaking of himself in the person of a shepherd, exclaims—

“When now my whitening beard the razor knew.”<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* What vast abundance of examples you can command! Pray heaven you have as many recollections of your own death. For I praise not those exemplars that lead one to dissemble grey hairs which are the heralds of old age, and the *avant-couriers* of Death. And good those examples are not, if their effect is to take you off the trouble of remembering how time flies, and to lead you to forget your own last hour; to the recollection of which the whole of my discourse is entirely, and without ceasing directed. When I bid you think on your own whitening forehead, do you quote me a crowd of famous men whose locks were white also? What does it prove? Ah, if you were able to say these were immortal, then you might from their example put away the dread of your changing brow. If instead of mentioning greyness I had ventured to hint that you were getting bald, you would, I suppose, have thrown Julius Cæsar in my teeth!

*Petrarch.* Certainly. What more illustrious

<sup>1</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues*, i. 29.

example could I need? Now, unless I am mistaken, it is in fact a great comfort to find oneself surrounded by companions so famous. Yes, I will freely admit that I am not disposed for a moment to reject such examples, which are, for me, part of the luggage I carry daily in my mind; for it is a pleasure to me not only in such misfortunes as Nature or chance have already allotted me, but also in those which they may still have in store; it is a pleasure, I say, to have ever at hand such matter of comfort and consolation as I can obtain only from some truly cogent reason or outstanding example.

If, then, you meant to reproach me for being afraid of thunder—a charge I could not deny (and one of the chief reasons why I love the laurel is because it is said that thunder will not strike this tree), then I shall reply to you that this was a weakness Cæsar Augustus shared; if you allege that I am getting blind (and there also you would be right), I should quote you Appius Cæcus and also Homer, the Prince of Poets; if you call me one-eyed, I will shield myself behind Hannibal, the Punic leader, or Philip, King of Macedon; call me deaf, and Marcus Crassus shall be my defence; say I cannot stand the heat, and I will say I am but like Alexander, Prince of Macedonia.

It were tedious to go through all the list; but after these you can judge who they would be.

*S. Augustine.* Yes, perfectly. I am nowise

displeased with your wealth of instances, provided it does not make you self-negligent and only serves to disperse the clouds of fear and sadness. I applaud anything that helps a man to face with courage the coming of old age, and keeps him from bewailing its presence when it has arrived. But I loathe and abominate profoundly everything that conceals from him the truth that old age is the port of departure from this life, and blinds him to the need of reflecting on death. To take with equanimity the going grey before one's time is the sign of a good natural disposition; but to try and interpose artificial checks, to cheat time of his years, to raise an outcry and declare grey hairs are come too soon, to begin dyeing or plucking them out, is a piece of folly, which, common as it may be, is none the less egregious for all that.

You perceive not, O blind that you are, how swiftly the stars roll in their course, and how soon the flight of time consumes the space of your short life, and you marvel when you see old age coming on, hastening quickly the despatch of all your days.

Two causes seem to foster this delusion. The first is that even the shortest life is partitioned out by some people into four, by others into six, and by others again into a still larger number of periods; that is to say, the reality is so small, and as you cannot make it longer, you think you will enlarge it by division. But of what

profit is all this dividing? Make as many particles as you like, and they are all gone in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

“Yesterday was born the baby,  
See to-day the lovely boy,  
Then the young man quick as may be,  
Then an end of life and joy.”

You observe with what quick hurrying words the subtle poet has sketched out the swift course of our life. So it is in vain you strive to lengthen out what Nature, the mother of us all, has made so short.

The second cause is that you will persist in letting old age find you still in the midst of games and empty pleasures; like the old Trojans who in their customary ways passed the last night without perceiving.

“The cunning, fatal horse, who bore within  
Those armed bands, had overleapt the wall  
Of Pergamos.”<sup>1</sup>

Yes, even so you perceive not that old age, bringing in his train the armed warrior Death, unpitying and stern, has over-leapt the weakly-guarded rampart of your body; and then you find your foe has already glided by stealth along his rope—

“And now the invader climbs within the gate  
And takes the city in its drunken sleep.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Æneid*, vi. 515-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 265.

For in the gross body and the pleasure of things temporal, not less drunk are you than those old Trojans were, as Virgil saw them, in their slumber and their wine.

Or, looking to another quarter, no less truth is to be found in the neat lines of the Satirist—

“ Our lives unfold in morning air  
 As lilies of a day,  
 ‘Come bring us wine,’ we shout. ‘Ho, there,  
 Fetch garlands, odours, damsels fair.’  
 But ah! before we are aware,  
 Old Age sweeps all away.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, to come back to our subject and to yourself, when this old age comes stealing on and knocks at your door, you make an effort to bar him out. You pretend that by some infraction of the order of Nature he has come too soon. You are delighted when you come across some rather elderly person who declares he knew you when you were a child, especially if, as people generally do, he makes out it was but yesterday or the day before. You find it convenient to forget that one can say as much about any old dotard however decrepit. Who was not a child yesterday, or to-day, as far as that goes?

We can look here and there and find infants of ninety quarrelling about trifles and even now occupied with infantine toys. The days flee away, the body decays, the soul is where it was. Though everything is rotten with age, the soul

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, ix. 126-29.

has never grown up, never come to maturity, and it is a truth, as the proverb says, "One soul uses up many bodies." Infancy passes, but, as Seneca remarks, "childishness remains."<sup>1</sup> And, believe me, perhaps you are not so young as you imagine, for the greater part of mankind have not yet reached the age which you have.

Blush, therefore, to pass for an aged lover; blush to be so long the Public's jest; and if true glory has no charm for you and ridicule no terror, at least let change of heart come to the rescue and save you from disgrace. For, if I see things at all truly, a man should guard his reputation, if only to spare his own friends the shameful necessity of telling lies. All the world owes this to itself, but especially such a man as yourself, who have so great a public to justify, and one which is always talking of you.

"Great is the task to guard a great man's name."<sup>2</sup>

If in your poem of *Africa* you make a truculent enemy tender such good counsel to your beloved Scipio, you may well allow, for your own profit, a father, who loves you tenderly, to utter with his lips the very same monition.

Put away the childish things of infancy; quench the burning desires of youth; think not all the time of what you are going to be and do next; look carefully what you are now; do not imagine

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *Epistles*, iv.

<sup>2</sup> Petrarch's *Africa*, vii. 292.

that the mirror has been put before your eyes for nothing, but remember that which is written in the Book of Questions on Nature :—

“Mirrors were invented that men might know themselves. Much profit comes thereby. First, knowledge of self; second, wise counsel. You are handsome, then beware of what disfigures: plain, then make up by virtue what is wanting in good looks. You are young, then remember youth’s springtime is the time for study and for manly work: old, then lay aside the ugly vices of the flesh and turn your thoughts to what will be the latter end.”<sup>1</sup>

*Petrarch.* It has dwelt in my remembrance always, from the first day that ever I read it; for the thing itself is worth remembering and its warning is wise.

*S. Augustine.* Of what profit has it been to you to read and remember? You had better excused yourself had you pleaded ignorance for your shield. Knowing what you do, are you not ashamed to see that your grey hairs have brought no change in you?

*Petrarch.* I am ashamed, I regret it, I repent of it, but as for doing more, I cannot. Moreover, you know I have this much of consolation, that she too is growing old with me.

*S. Augustine.* The very word of Julia, Cæsar Augustus’ daughter! Doubtless it has lain fixed in your mind, has it not? When her father found

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *De Natura Questiones*, i. 17.

fault because she would not have older people round her, as did Livia, she parried the paternal reproof by the neat rejoinder—"They will be older as soon as I am."<sup>1</sup>

But pray, tell me, do you suppose that at your age it will be more becoming to doat upon an old woman than to love a young one? On the contrary, it is the more unbecoming, as the reason for loving is less. Well may you take shame to yourself never to grow any wiser though you see your body daily growing older. That is all I can say on the subject of shame.

But, as Cicero tells us, it is but a poor thing to make shame do the work of reason; and so to reason, the true source of all remedies, let us now turn for help. You will assuredly find it through using deep Reflection—the third of the things that turn the soul away from love. Remember what you are now called to is that citadel wherein alone you can be quite safe against the incursions of passion and by which alone you will deserve the name of Man. Consider, then, first how noble a thing is the soul, and that so great is it that were I to discourse as I should wish, I must needs make a whole book thereon. Consider, again, the frailty and vileness of the body, which would demand no less full treatment than the other. Think also of the shortness of our life, concerning which many great men have left their books. Think of the flight of time, that no one yet has been able to

<sup>1</sup> *Macrobius Saturnalia*, ii. 5.



express in words. Think of Death, the fact so certain, the hour so uncertain, but everywhere and at all times imminent. Think how men are deceived just in this one point, that they believe they can put off what in fact never can be put off: for no one is really such a fool as, supposing the question is asked him, not to answer that of course some day he will die. And so let not the hope of longer life mock you, as it mocks so many others, but rather lay up in your heart the verse that seems as it were an oracle of heaven—

“Count every day that dawns to be your last.”<sup>1</sup>

For is it not so that to mortal men every day is in truth the last, or all but the last? Consider, moreover, how shameful it is to have men point the finger at you, and to become a public laughing-stock; remember, too, how ill your profession accords with a life like this. Think how this woman has injured your soul, your body, your fortune. Remember what you have borne for her, all to no purpose: how many times you have been mocked, despised, scorned; think what flatteries, what lamentations, and of all the tears you have cast upon the wind; think how again and again she has heaped all this on you with an air of haughty disdain, and how if for a moment she showed herself more kind, it was but for the passing of a breath and then was gone.

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Epistles*, i. 4, 13.

Think, moreover, how much you have added to her fame, and of what she has subtracted from your life: how you have ever been jealous for her good name, but she has been always regardless of your very self and condition. Remember how she has turned you aside from loving God, and into how great miseries you have fallen, known to me, but which I pass in silence lest the birds of the air carry the matter abroad.

Think, moreover, what tasks on all sides are claiming your attention, and by which you may do far more good and deserve far more honour: how many things you have on hand, as yet uncompleted, to which it would be far better for you to return, and devote more time, instead of attempting them so perfunctorily as you have been doing lately.

Finally, ponder well what that thing is for which you have such consuming desire. But think like a man and with your wits about you; for fear lest while you are in the act of flying you be cunningly entangled, as not a few have been when Beauty's fascinating charm steals upon them by some little, unlooked-for channel, and then is fed and strengthened by evil remedies.

For few be there that have once tasted this seductive pleasure and can retain enough manliness, not to say courage, to rate at its true value that poor form of woman of which I speak. Only too easily Man's strength of mind gives

way, and with nature pressing on, he falls soonest on that side to which he has long leaned. Take most earnest heed that this happen not to you. Banish every recollection of those old cares of yours: put far away from you every vision of the past, and, as one has said in a certain place, "dash the little children against the stones,"<sup>1</sup> lest if they grow up you yourself be cast into the mire. And defer not to knock at Heaven's door with prayers; let your supplications weary the ears of the heavenly King; day and night lift up your petition with tears and crying, if perchance the Almighty will take compassion upon you and give an end to your sore trouble and distress.

These are the things that you must do, these the safeguards you must employ; if you will observe them faithfully the Divine Help will be at hand, as I trust; and the right hand of the Deliverer whom none can resist will succour you.

But albeit I have spoken on this one malady what is too short for your needs but too long for the briefness of our time, let us pass now to another matter. One evil still is left, to heal you of which I now will make a last endeavour.

*Petrarch.* Even so do, most gentle Father. For though I be not yet wholly set free from my burdens, yet, nevertheless, from great part of them I do feel in truth a blessed release.

*S. Augustine.* Ambition still has too much hold

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxxvi. 9.

on you. You seek too eagerly the praise of men, and to leave behind you an undying name.

*Petrarch.* I freely confess it. I cannot beat down that passion in my soul. For it, as yet, I have found no cure.

*S. Augustine.* But I greatly fear lest this pursuit of a false immortality of fame may shut for you the way that leads to the true immortality of life.

*Petrarch.* That is one of my fears also, but I await your discovering to me the means to save my life; you, of a truth, will do it, who have furnished me with means for the healing of evils greater still.

*S. Augustine.* Think not that any of your ills is greater than this one, though I deny not that some may be more vile.

But tell me, I pray you, what in your opinion is this thing called glory, that you so ardently covet?

*Petrarch.* I know not if you ask me for a definition. But if so, who so capable to give one as yourself?

*S. Augustine.* The name of glory is well enough known to you; but to the real thing, if one may judge by your actions, you are a stranger. If you had known what it is you would not long for it so eagerly. Suppose you define glory, with Cicero, as being "the illustrious and world-wide renown of good services rendered to one's fellow citizens, to one's country, or to all mankind"; or

as he expresses it elsewhere, "Public opinion uttering its voice about a man in words of praise."<sup>1</sup> You will notice that in both these cases glory is said to be reputation. Now, do you know what this reputation is?

*Petrarch.* I cannot say any good description of it occurs to me at the moment; and I shrink from putting forward things I do not understand. I think, therefore, the truer and better course is for me to keep silence.

*S. Augustine.* You act like a wise and modest man. In every serious question, and especially when the matter is ambiguous, one should pay much less attention to what one will say than to what one will not say, for the credit of having said well is something much less than the discredit of having said ill. Now I submit to you that reputation is nothing but talk about some one, passing from mouth to mouth of many people.

*Petrarch.* I think your definition, or, if you prefer the word, your description, is a good one.

*S. Augustine.* It is, then, but a breath, a changing wind; and, what will disgust you more, it is the breath of a crowd. I know to whom I am speaking. I have observed that no man more than you abhors the manners and behaviour of the common herd. Now see what perversity is this! You let yourself be charmed with the

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Pro Marcello*, viii.

applause of those whose conduct you abominate; and may Heaven grant you are only charmed, and that you put not in their power your own everlasting welfare! Why and wherefore, I ask, this perpetual toil, these ceaseless vigils, and this intense application to study? You will answer, perhaps, that you seek to find out what is profitable for life. But you have long since learned what is needful for life and for death.

What was now required of you was to try and put in practice what you know, instead of plunging deeper and deeper into laborious inquiries, where new problems are always meeting you, and insoluble mysteries, in which you never reach the end. Add to which the fact that you keep toiling and toiling to satisfy the public; wearying yourself to please the very people who, to you, are the most displeasing; gathering now a flower of poesy, now of history—in a word, employing all your genius of words to tickle the ears of the listening throng.

*Petrarch.* I beg your pardon, but I cannot let that pass without saying a word. Never since I was a boy have I pleased myself with elegant extracts and flowerets of literature. For often have I noted what neat and excellent things Cicero has uttered against butchers of books, and especially, also, the phrase of Seneca in which he declares, "It is a disgrace for a man to keep hunting for flowers and prop himself

up on familiar quotations, and only stand on what he knows by heart."<sup>1</sup>

*S. Augustine.* In saying what I did, I neither accuse you of idleness nor scant memory. What I blame you for is that in your reading you have picked out the more flowery passages for the amusement of your cronies, and, as it were, packed up boxes of pretty things out of a great heap, for the benefit of your friends—which is nothing but pandering to a desire of vainglory; and, moreover, I say that, not being contented with your duty of every day (which, in spite of great expense of time, only promised you some celebrity among your contemporaries), you have let your thoughts run on ages of time and given yourself up to dreams of fame among those who come after. And in pursuit of this end, putting your hand to yet greater tasks, you entered on writing a history from the time of King Romulus to that of the Emperor Titus, an enormous undertaking that would swallow up an immensity of time and labour. Then, without waiting till this was finished, goaded by the pricks of your ambition for glory, you sailed off in your poetical barque towards Africa; and now on the aforesaid books of your *Africa* you are hard at work, without relinquishing the other. And in this way you devote your whole life to those two absorbing occupations—for I will not stop to mention the

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *Letters*, xxxiii.

countless others that come in also—and throw utterly away what is of most concern and which, when lost, cannot be recovered. You write books on others, but yourself you quite forget. And who knows but what, before either of your works be finished, Death may snatch the pen from your tired hand, and while in your insatiable hunt for glory you hurry on first by one path, then the other, you may find at last that by neither of them have you reached your goal?

*Petrarch.* Fears of that kind have sometimes come over me, I confess. And knowing I suffered from grave illness, I was afraid death might not be far off. Nothing then was more bitter to me than the thought of leaving my *Africa* half finished. Unwilling that another hand should put the finishing touch, I had determined that with my own I would cast it to the flames, for there was none of my friends whom I could trust to do me this service after I was gone. I knew that a request like that was the only one of our Virgil's which the Emperor Cæsar Augustus declined to grant. To make a long story short, this land of Africa, burnt already by that fierce sun to which it is for ever exposed, already three times by the Roman torches devastated far and wide, had all but yet again, by my hands, been made a prey to the flames.

But of that we will say no more now, for too painful are the recollections that it brings.



*S. Augustine.* What you have said confirms my opinion. The day of reckoning is put off for a short time, but the account remains still to be paid. And what can be more foolish than thus to waste such enormous labour over a thing of uncertain issue? I know what prevents you abandoning the work is simply that you still hope you may complete it. As I see that there will be some difficulty (unless I am mistaken) in getting you to diminish this hope, I propose we try to magnify it and so set it out in words that you will see how disproportionate it is to toils like yours. Suppose, therefore, that you have full abundance of time, leisure, and freedom of mind; let there be no failure of intellect, no languor of body, none of those mischances of fortune which, by checking the first onrush of expression, so often stop the ready writer's pen; let all things go better even than you had dared to wish—still, what considerable work do you expect to achieve?

*Petrarch.* Oh, certainly, one of great excellence, quite out of the common and likely to attract attention.

*S. Augustine.* I have no wish to seem contradictory: let us suppose it may be a work of great excellence. But if you knew of what greater excellence still is the work which this will hinder, you would abhor what you now desire. For I will go so far as to assert that this work of yours is, to begin with, taking off

your attention from cares of a nobler kind; and, greatly excellent as you think it, has no wide scope nor long future before it, circumscribed as it must be by time and space.

*Petrarch.* Well do I know that old story bandied about by the philosophers, how they declare that all the earth is but a tiny point, how the soul alone endures for infinite millions of years, how fame cannot fill either the earth or the soul, and other paltry pleas of this sort, by which they try to turn minds aside from the love of glory. But I beg you will produce some more solid arguments than these, if you know any; for experience has shown me that all this is more specious than convincing. I do not think to become as God, or to inhabit eternity, or embrace heaven and earth. | Such glory as belongs to man is enough for me. That is all I sigh after. Mortal myself, it is but mortal blessings I desire.

*S. Augustine.* Oh, if that is what you truly mean, how wretched are you! If you have no desire for things immortal, if no regard for what is eternal, then you are indeed wholly of the earth earthy: then all is over for you; no hope at all is left.

*Petrarch.* Heaven defend me from such folly! But my conscience is witness, and knows what have been my desires, that never have I ceased to love with burning zeal the things eternal. I said—or if, perchance, I am mistaken, I intended

to say—that my wish was to use mortal things for what they were worth, to do no violence to nature by bringing to its good things a limitless and immoderate desire, and so to follow after human fame as knowing that both myself and it will perish.

*S. Augustine.* There you speak as a wise man. But when you declare you are willing to rob yourself of the riches that will endure merely for the sake of what you own is a perishing breath of applause—then you are a fool indeed.

*Petrarch.* True, I may be postponing those riches, but not relinquishing them altogether.

*S. Augustine.* But how dangerous is such delay, remembering that time flies fast and how uncertain our short life is. Let me ask you a question, and I beg you to answer it. Suppose that He who alone can fix our time of life and death were this day to assign you one whole year, and you had the definite certainty of it—how would you propose to use that year?

*Petrarch.* Assuredly I should use great economy of time, and be extremely careful to employ it on serious things; and I suppose no man alive would be so insolent or foolish as to answer your question in any other way.

*S. Augustine.* You have answered rightly. And yet the folly men display in this case is matter of astonishment, not to me only but to all those who have ever written on this subject.

To set forth what they feel, they have combined every faculty they possess and employed all their eloquence, and even then the truth itself will leave their utmost efforts far behind.

*Petrarch.* I fear I do not understand the motive of so great astonishment.

*S. Augustine.* It is because you are covetous of uncertain riches and altogether wasteful of those which are eternal, doing the very contrary of what you ought to do, if you were not quite devoid of wisdom.

So this space of a year, though short enough indeed, being promised you by Him who deceives not, neither is deceived, you would partition out and dissipate on any kind of folly, provided you could keep the last hour for the care of your salvation! The horrible and hateful madness of you all is just this, that you waste your time on ridiculous vanities, as if there were enough and to spare, and though you do not in the least know if what you have will be long enough for the supreme necessities of the soul in face of death. The man who has one year of life possesses something certain though short; whereas he who has no such promise and lies under the power of death (whose stroke may fall at any moment), which is the common lot of all men—this man, I say, is not sure of a year, a day; no, not even of one hour. He who has a year to live, if six months shall have slipped away, will still have another half-year left to run; but for you,

if you lose the day that now is, who will promise you to-morrow?<sup>1</sup>

It is Cicero who says: "It is certain that we must die: what is uncertain is whether it will be to-day; and there is none so young that he can be sure he will live until the evening."<sup>2</sup> I ask, then, of you, and I ask it likewise of all those who stand gaping after the future and pay no heed to the present, "Who knows if the high gods will add even one morrow to this your little day of life?"<sup>3</sup>

*Petrarch.* If I am to answer for myself and for all: No one knows, of a truth. But let us hope for a year at least; on which, if we are still to follow Cicero, even the most aged reckons!

*S. Augustine.* Yes; and, as he also adds, not old men only but young ones too are fools in that they cherish false hope, and promise themselves uncertain goods as though they were certain.<sup>4</sup>

But let us take for granted (what is quite impossible) that the duration of life will be long and assured: still, do you not find it is the height of madness to squander the best years and the best parts of your existence on pleasing only the eyes of others and tickling other men's ears, and to keep the last and worst—the years that are almost good for nothing—that bring nothing but distaste for life and then its end—to keep these, I say, for God and yourself, as

<sup>1</sup> *De Senectute*, xx.

<sup>2</sup> Horace, *Odes*, iv. 7, 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>4</sup> *De Senectute*, xix.

though the welfare of your soul were the last thing you cared for?

Even supposing the time were certain, is it not reversing the true order to put off the best to the last?

*Petrarch.* I do not think my way of looking at it is so unreasonable as you imagine. My principle is that, as concerning the glory which we may hope for here below, it is right for us to seek while we are here below. One may expect to enjoy that other more radiant glory in heaven, when we shall have there arrived, and when one will have no more care or wish for the glory of earth. Therefore, as I think, it is in the true order that mortal men should first care for mortal things; and that to things transitory things eternal should succeed; because to pass from those to these is to go forward in most certain accordance with what is ordained for us, although no way is open for us to pass back again from eternity to time.

*S. Augustine.* O man, little in yourself, and of little wisdom! Do you, then, dream that you shall enjoy every pleasure in heaven and earth, and everything will turn out fortunate and prosperous for you always and everywhere? But; that delusion has betrayed thousands of men thousands of times, and has sunk into hell a countless host of souls. Thinking to have one foot on earth and one in heaven, they could neither stand here below nor mount on high.

Therefore they fell miserably, and the moving-breeze swept them suddenly away, some in the flower of their age, and some when they were in midst of their years and all their business.

And do you suppose what has befallen so many others may not befall you? Alas! if (which may God forefend!) in the midst of all your plans and projects you should be cut off—what grief, what shame, what remorse (then too late!) that you should have grasped at all and lost all!

*Petrarch.* May the Most High in His mercy save me from that misery!

*S. Augustine.* Though Divine Mercy may deliver a man from his folly, yet it will not excuse it. Presume not upon this mercy overmuch. For if God abhors those who lose hope, He also laughs at those who in false hope put their trust. I was sorry when I heard fall from your lips that phrase about despising what you called the old story of the philosophers on this matter. Is it, then, an old story, pray, by figures of geometry, to show how small is all the earth, and to prove it but an island of little length and width? Is it an old story to divide the earth into five zones, the largest of which, lying in the centre, is burned by the heat of the sun, and the two utmost, to right and left, are a prey to binding frost and eternal snow, which leave not a corner where man can dwell; but those other two, between the middle and two utmost zones,

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are inhabited by man? Is it an old story that this habitable part is divided again into two parts, whereof one is placed under your feet, guarded by a vast sea, and the other is left you to inhabit everywhere, or, according to some authorities, is again in two parts subdivided, with but one part habitable and the other surrounded by the winding intricacies of the Northern Ocean, preventing all access to it? As to that part under your feet, called the antipodes, you are aware that for a long time the most learned men have been of two opinions whether it is inhabited or not: for myself, I have set forth my opinion in the book called *The City of God*, which you have doubtless read. Is it also an old story that your habitable part, already so restricted, is yet further diminished to such an extent by seas, marshes, forests, sand and deserts, that the little corner left you, of which you are so proud, is brought down to almost nothing? And, finally, is it an old story to point out to you that on this narrow strip, where you dwell, there are divers kinds of life, different religions which oppose one another, different languages and customs, which render it impossible to make the fame of your name go far?

But if these things are to you nought but fables, so, to me, all I had promised myself of your future greatness must be a fable also; for I had thought, hitherto, that no man had more knowledge of these things than you yourself



To say nothing of the conceptions of Cicero and Virgil and other systems of knowledge, physical or poetic, of which you seemed to have a competent knowledge, I knew that not long since, in your *Africa*, you had expressed the very same opinions in these pretty lines—

“The Universe itself is but an isle  
 Confined in narrow bounds, small, and begirt  
 By Ocean’s flowing waves.”<sup>1</sup>

You have added other developments later on, and now that I know you think them all fables, I am astonished you have put them forth with such hardihood.

What shall I say now of the brief existence of human fame, the short, short span of time, when you know too well how small and recent even the oldest memory of man is if compared to eternity? I spare to call to your mind those opinions of the men of old, laid up in Plato’s *Timæus* and in the sixth book of Cicero’s *Republic*, where it is foretold what floods and conflagrations shall be coming not seldom on the earth. To many men such things have seemed probable; but they wear a different aspect to those who, like yourself, have come to know the true religion.

And besides these, how many other things there are that militate against, I do not say the eternity, but even the survival of one’s name.

<sup>1</sup> *Africa*, ii. 361, 363.

First there is the death of those with whom one has passed one's life; and that forgetfulness which is the common bane of old age: then there is the rising fame, ever growing greater, of new men; which always, by its freshness, is somewhat derogatory to that of those who went before, and seems to mount up higher just in so far as it can depress this other down. Then you must add, also, that persistent envy which ever dogs the steps of those who embark on any glorious enterprise; and the hatred of Truth itself, and the fact that the very life of men of genius is odious to the crowd. Think, too, how fickle is the judgment of the multitude. And alas for the sepulchres of the dead! to shatter which—

“The wild fig's barren branch is strong enough,”<sup>1</sup>

as Juvenal has told us.

In your own *Africa* you call this, elegantly enough, “a second death”; and if I may here address to you the same words you have put in the mouth of another—

“The animated bust and storied urn  
Shall fall, and with them fall thy memory,  
And thou, my son, thus taste a second death.”<sup>2</sup>

Lo, then, how excellent, how undying that glory must be which the fall of one poor stone can bring to nought!

<sup>1</sup> *Satires*, x. 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Africa*, ii. 481, &c.

And, then, consider the perishing of books wherein your name has been written, either by your own hand or another's. Even though that perishing may appear so much more delayed as books outlast monuments, nevertheless it is sooner or later inevitable; for, as is the case with everything else, there are countless natural or fortuitous calamities to which books are ever exposed. And even if they escape all these, they, like us, grow old and die—

“ For whatsoever mortal hand has made,  
With its vain labour, shall be mortal too,”<sup>1</sup>

if one may be allowed, for choice, to refute your childish error by your own words.

What need to say more? I shall never cease to bring to your recollection lines of your own making which only too truly fit the case.

“ When your books perish you shall perish too;  
This is the third death, still to be endured.”<sup>2</sup>

And now you know what I think about glory.

Perhaps I have used more words in expressing it than was needful for you or me; and yet fewer, I believe, than the importance of the subject demands—unless perchance you still think all these things only an old story?

*Petrarch.* No indeed. What you have been saying—so far from seeming to me like old stories—has stirred in me a new desire to get rid of my

<sup>1</sup> *Africa*, ii. 455-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 464-5.

old delusions. For albeit that these things were known to me long ago, and that I have heard them oftentimes repeated, since, as Terence puts it—

“ Everything that one can say  
Has all been said before,”<sup>1</sup>

nevertheless the stateliness of phrase, the orderly narration, the authority of him who speaks, cannot but move me deeply.

But I have yet a last request to make, which is that you will give me your definite judgment on this point. Is it your wish that I should put all my studies on one side and renounce every ambition, or would you advise some middle course?

*S. Augustine.* I will never advise you to live without ambition; but I would always urge you to put virtue before glory. You know that glory is in a sense the shadow of virtue. And therefore, just as it is impossible that your body should not cast a shadow if the sun is shining, so it is impossible also in the light of God Himself that virtues should exist and not make their glory to appear. Whoever, then, would take true glory away must of necessity take away virtue also; and when that is gone man's life is left bare, and only resembles that of the brute beasts that follow headlong their appetite, which to them is their only law. Here, therefore, is the rule for you to live by—follow after virtue, and

<sup>1</sup> Terence's *Eunuch*, 41.

let glory take care of itself; and as for this, as some one said of Cato, the less you seek it the more you will find it. I must once more allow myself to invoke your own witness—

“Thou shalt do well from Honour’s self to flee,  
For then shall Honour follow after thee.”<sup>1</sup>

Do you not recognise the verse? It is your own. One would surely think that man a fool who at midday should run here and there in the blaze of the sun, wearing himself out to see his shadow and point it out to others; now the man shows no more sense or reason who, amid the anxieties of life, takes huge trouble, first one way, then another, to spread his own glory abroad.

What then? Let a man march steadily to the goal set before him, his shadow will follow him step by step: let him so act that he shall make virtue his prize, and lo! glory also shall be found at his side. I speak of that glory which is virtue’s true companion; as for that which comes by other means, whether from bodily grace or mere cleverness, in the countless ways men have invented, it does not seem to me worthy of the name. And so, in regard to yourself, while you are wearing your strength out by such great labours in writing books, if you will allow me to say so, you are shooting wide of the mark. For you are spending all your efforts on things that concern others, and neglecting those that

<sup>1</sup> *Africa*, ii. 486.

are your own ; and so, through this vain hope of glory, the time, so precious, though you know it not, is passing away.

*Petrarch.* What must I do, then? Abandon my unfinished works? Or would it be better to hasten them on, and, if God gives me grace, put the finishing touch to them? If I were once rid of these cares I would go forward, with a mind more free, to greater things; for hardly could I bear the thought of leaving half completed a work so fine and rich in promise of success.

*S. Augustine.* Which foot you mean to hobble on, I do not know. You seem inclined to leave yourself derelict, rather than your books.

As for me, I shall do my duty, with what success depends on you; but at least I shall have satisfied my conscience. Throw to the winds these great loads of histories; the deeds of the Romans have been celebrated quite enough by others, and are known by their own fame. Get out of Africa and leave it to its possessors. You will add nothing to the glory of your Scipio or to your own. He can be exalted to no higher pinnacle, but you may bring down his reputation, and with it your own. Therefore leave all this on one side, and now at length take possession of yourself; and to come back to our starting-point, let me urge you to enter upon the meditation of your last end, which comes on step by step without your being aware. Tear off the veil; disperse the shadows; look only on that which

is coming; with eyes and mind give all your attention there: let nought else distract you. Heaven, Earth, the Sea—these all suffer change. What can man, the frailest of all creatures, hope for? The seasons fulfil their courses and change; nothing remains as it was. If you think you shall remain, you are deceived. For, as Horace beautifully says—

“The losses of the changing Heaven,  
The changing moons repair;  
But we, when we have gone below,  
And our rich land no longer know,  
And hear no more its rivers flow,  
Are nought but dust and air.”<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, as often as you watch the fruits of summer follow the flowers of spring, and the pleasant cool of autumn succeed the summer heat, and winter's snow come after autumn's vintage, say to yourself: “The seasons pass, yet they will come again; but I am going, never again to return.” As often as you behold at sunset the shadows of the mountains lengthening on the plain, say to yourself: “Now life is sinking fast; the shadow of death begins to overspread the scene; yonder sun to-morrow will again be rising the same, but this day of mine will never come back.”

Who shall count the glories of the midnight sky, which, though it be the time that men of evil

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Odes*, iv. 7, 13-16.

heart choose for their misdoing, yet is it to men of good heart the holiest of all times? Well, take care you be not less watchful than that admiral of the Trojan fleet;<sup>1</sup> for the seas you sail upon are no more safe than his; rise up at the mid hour of night, and

“ All the stars, that in the silent sky  
Roll on their way, observe with careful heed.”<sup>2</sup>

As you see them hasten to their setting in the west, think how you also are moving with them; and that as for your abiding you have no hope, saving only in Him who knows no change and suffers no decline. Moreover, when you meet with those whom you knew but yesterday as children, and see them now growing up in stature to their manhood, stage by stage, remember how you in like manner, in the same lapse of time, are going down the hill, and at greater speed, by that law in nature under which things that are heavy tend to fall.

When your eyes behold some ancient building, let your first thought be, Where are those who wrought it with their hands? and when you see new ones, ask, Where, soon, the builders of them will be also? If you chance to see the trees of some orchard, remember how often it falls out that one plants it and another plucks the fruit; for many a time the saying in the *Georgics* comes to pass—

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<sup>1</sup> Palinurus.

<sup>2</sup> *Æneid*, iii. 515.



**"One plants the tree, but ah, the slow-grown shade  
His grandchild will enjoy." <sup>1</sup>**

And when you look with pleased wonder at  
some swiftly flowing stream, then, that I bring  
no other poet's thought, keep ever in mind this  
one of your own—

**"No river hurries with more rapid flight  
Than Life's swift current." <sup>2</sup>**

Neither let multitude of days or the artificial  
divisions of time deceive your judgment; for  
man's whole existence, let it be never so pro-  
longed, is but as one day, and that not a day  
entire.

Have oftentimes before your eyes one simi-  
litude of Aristotle's, whom I know to be a  
favourite of yours; and his words I am sure  
you never read or hear without feeling them  
deeply. You will find it reported by Cicero in  
the *Tusculan Orations*, and in words possibly  
even more clear and impressive than the original.  
Here is what he says, or very nearly so, for  
at the moment I have not his book at hand:—

**"Aristotle tells us that on the banks of the  
river Hypanis, which on one side of Europe  
empties itself into the Euxine Sea, there exists  
a race of little animals who only live one day.  
Any one of them that dies at sunrise dies  
young; he that dies at noon is middle-aged;**

<sup>1</sup> *Georgics*, ii. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Petrarch's *Epist.*, I. iv. 91-2.

and should one live till sunset, he dies in old age: and especially is this so about the time of the solstice. If you compare the time of man's life with eternity, it will seem no longer than theirs."<sup>1</sup> So far I give you Cicero; but what he says seems to me so beyond all cavil that now for a long time the saying has passed from the tongue of philosophers into common speech. Every day you hear even ignorant and unlearned men, if they chance to see a little child, make use of some expression like this—"Well, well, it's early morning with him yet"; if they see a man they will say, "Oh, it's high noon with him now," or "He's well in the middle of his day"; if they see one old and broken down they will remark, "Ah! he's getting toward evening and the going down of the sun."

Ponder well on these things, my very dear son, and on others akin to them, which will, I doubt not, flock into your thoughts, as these on the spur of the moment have come into mine. And one more thing I beseech you to have in mind: look at the graves of those older, perhaps, than you, but whom nevertheless you have known; look diligently, and then rest assured that the same dwelling-place, the same house, is for you also made ready. Thither are all of us travelling on; that is our last home. You who now, perchance, are proud and think that your springtime has not quite departed,

<sup>1</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, i. 39.

and are for trampling others underfoot, you in turn shall underfoot be trampled. Think over all this; consider it by day and by night; not merely as a man of sober mind and remembering what nature he is of, but as becomes a man of wisdom, and so holding it all fast, as one who remembers it is written

“A wise man's life is all one preparation for death.”<sup>1</sup> ✓

This saying will teach you to think little of what concerns earthly things, and set before your eyes a better path of life on which to enter. You will be asking me what is that kind of life, and by what ways you can approach it? And I shall reply that now you have no need of long advice or counsel. Listen only to that Holy Spirit who is ever calling, and in urgent words saying, “Here is the way to your native country, your true home.”

You know what He would bring to mind; what paths for your feet, what dangers to avoid. If you would be safe and free obey His voice. There is no need for long deliberations. The nature of your danger calls for action, not words. The enemy is pressing you from behind, and hastening to the charge in front; the walls of the citadel, where you are besieged, already tremble. There is no time for hesitation. Of what use is it to make sweet songs for the ears of others, if you listen not to them yourself?

<sup>1</sup> *Tusculan Orations*, i. 30.

I must draw to an end. Shun the rocks ahead, at all costs; drop anchor in a place of safety; follow the lead which the inspirations of your own soul give you. They may, on the side of what is evil, be evil; but towards that which is good they are themselves of the very best.

*Petrarch.* Ah! would that you had told me all this before I had surrendered myself over to these studies!

*S. Augustine.* I have told you, many a time and oft. From the moment when I saw you first take up your pen, I foresaw how short life would be, and how uncertain: how certain, too, and how long the toil. I saw the work would be great and the fruit little, and I warned you of all these things. But your ears were filled with the plaudits of the public, which, to my astonishment, took you captive, although you talked as if you despised them. But as we have now been conferring together long enough, I beg that if any of my counsels have seemed good to you, you will not allow them to come to nothing for want of energy or recollection; and if, on the other hand, I have sometimes been too rough, I pray you take it not amiss.

*Petrarch.* Indeed I owe you a deep debt of gratitude, as for many other things, so, especially, for this three days' colloquy; for you have cleansed my darkened sight and scattered the thick clouds of error in which I was involved. And how shall I express my thankfulness to Her

also, the Spirit of Truth, who, unwearied by our much talking, has waited upon us to the end? Had She turned away her face from us we should have wandered in darkness: your discourse had then contained no sure truth, neither would my understanding have embraced it. And now, as She and you have your dwelling-place in heaven, and I must still abide on earth, and, as you see, am greatly perplexed and troubled, not knowing for how long this must be, I implore you, of your goodness, not to forsake me, in spite of that great distance which separates me from such as you; for without you, O best of fathers, my life would be but one long sadness, and without Her I could not live at all.

*S. Augustine.* You may count your prayer already granted, if you will only to yourself be true: for how shall any one be constant to him who is inconstant to himself?

*Petrarch.* I will be true to myself, so far as in me lies. I will pull myself together and collect my scattered wits, and make a great endeavour to possess my soul in patience. But even while we speak, a crowd of important affairs, though only of the world, is waiting my attention.

*S. Augustine.* For the common herd of men these may be what to them seem more important; but in reality there is nothing of more importance, and nothing ought to be esteemed of so much worth. For, of other trains of thought, you may reckon them to be not essential for the soul, but

the end of life will prove that these we have been engaged in are of eternal necessity.

*Petrarch.* I confess they are so. And I now return to attend to those other concerns only in order that, when they are discharged, I may come back to these.

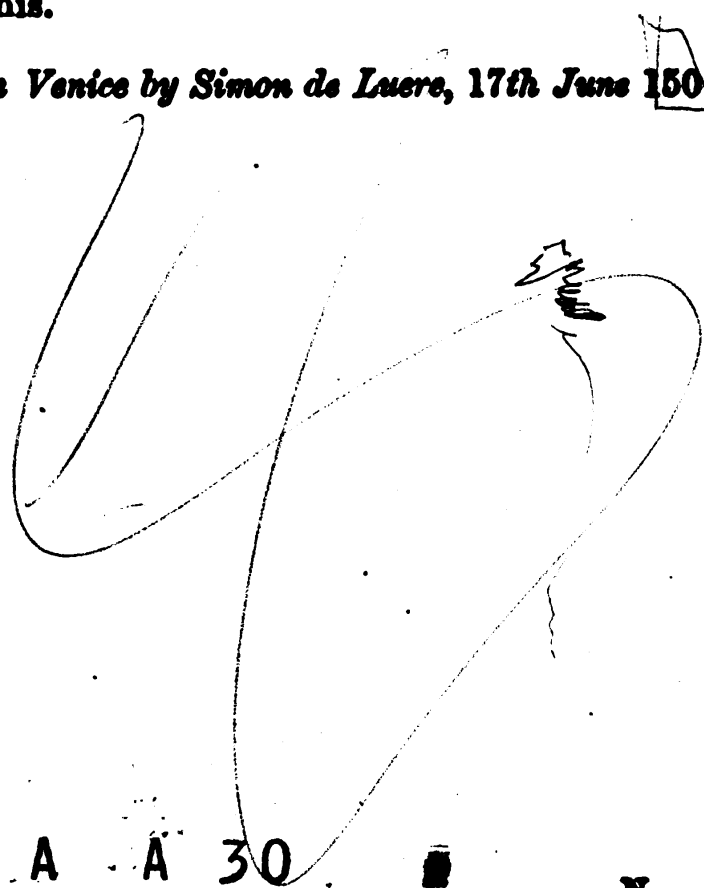
I am not ignorant that, as you said a few minutes before, it would be much safer for me to attend only to the care of my soul, to relinquish altogether every hypath and follow the straight path of the way of salvation. But I have not strength to resist that old bent for study altogether.

*S. Augustine.* We are falling into our old controversy. Want of will you call want of power. Well, so it must be, if it cannot be otherwise. I pray God that He will go with you where you go, and that He will order your steps, even though they wander, into the way of truth.

*Petrarch.* O may it indeed be as you have prayed! May God lead me safe and whole out of so many crooked ways; that I may follow the Voice that calls me; that I may raise up no cloud of dust before my eyes; and, with my mind calmed down and at peace, I may hear the world grow still and silent, and the winds of adversity die away.

***Francis Petrarch, Poet, Most illustrious Orator; his Book,  
which he entitl'd Secretum; in which a Three days'  
Discussion concerning Contempt of the World is carried  
on. Finis.***

***Printed in Venice by Simon de Luere, 17th June 1501.***



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