



Augustine and Pelagius

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If it was a singular advantage to the Christian Church to have such a man as Augustine at hand to meet the Donatist schism and the Pelagian heresy, it was, nevertheless, a peculiar mischance for Augustine himself that he had to confront those hostile movements in his later years. One is tempted sometimes to wonder how different the structure of Christian theology might have been if Augustine had faced those systems in his earlier sacerdotal years, when his strong human sympathy still found something lovable in the city of men, and the gentle charm of the better Neo-Platonist ideas still lingered about his thoughts. Twenty years of episcopal experience had completed the transfer of his affection and his sympathy to the higher world. He had learned to trample on the consciences of his fellows for the sake of what now seemed to him a higher interest. Donatism had developed in him a crude idea of church-membership and outward conformity which has led to the writing of many pages of church-history that we would gladly suppress. And no sooner had Augustine returned to his spiritual charge after the defeat of the Donatists than a new danger arose. He heard that some monks were spreading the notion that human nature had sufficient nobility to appreciate and sufficient strength to achieve the highest standard of holiness; and forthwith he began to develop a doctrine of the utter degradation of our nature.

It seems unquestionable that some part of what we now call the British Isles gave birth to the author of one of the most amiable heresies that ever vexed the soul of Christendom. Jerome, always more lively than accurate, describes Pelagius in one place as “a big, fat dog from Albion,” and in another as “bloated with the pottage of the Scots” (or Irish). Prosper calls him “the British serpent”; and Augustine, Orosius, and Mercator frequently speak of him as British. Orosius adds that he was born of poor parents, and Jerome affords many brief descriptions of his person; but the whole of the clerical attacks on him — except that of Augustine — are vitiated by a most obvious bitterness of temper and personal hostility. One physical feature does seem to emerge with some clearness from the mass of reckless qualifications; he seems to have been a man of unusually large build. Jerome puts it that “he could make more use of his weight than his tongue.” Jerome had — naturally — not heard of the ascetic St. Thomas Aquinas, who had to have a large slice cut out of the table of his monastery to accommodate the anterior part of his person. But the implication that Pelagius was as deficient in moral weight as he was redundant in physical is one of Jerome’s reckless turns of phrase. Augustine, who studied his works carefully, grants him, in several places, a considerable ability. He was much esteemed by the ex-senator Paulinus of Nola, and Jerome and Augustine had great difficulty in averting from him the admiration of many other cultured and noble Romans. The integrity and elevation of his character were acclaimed on all sides in his earlier years. Augustine spoke highly of his virtue until his obstinacy in heresy made that no longer possible; and even then Augustine did not sanction the charge of sensualism urged by the heated Orosius and Jerome. The hagiographers naturally conclude that he was virtuous until he fell into heresy, and then he contracted the vices his enemies attribute to him. The course of our narrative will probably suggest that the only change was in his antagonists, especially as the heresy is found in his

earliest works.

There is an eagerness shown by ecclesiastical writers to trace the germs of Pelagianism to the Eastern Church. No doubt there is some plausibility in the notion of tracing the theory of the strength of human nature to the energetic Origen, but the Eastern temperament in general would be even less disposed than the Roman to originate so sturdy a heresy. The long reluctance of the East to condemn it is easily understood for other reasons, as we shall see. Even if the Eastern monk Rufinus had influence over Pelagius, as Marius Mercator says, it does not at all follow that he inspired the heretical idea. We know with certainty only that Pelagius won great repute for holiness and asceticism at Rome in the first decade of the fifth century. The monastic idea had travelled swiftly from Rome to Gaul and Britain, and had created a number of fervent monasteries, besides inspiring a number of unattached or itinerant monks.

But we can well imagine the effect of an acquaintance with the low moral quality of the Roman Church on the stalwart ascetic. Probably enough his earnest exhortations were met with an Italian shrug of the shoulders and an appeal to the weakness of human nature. Certainly the moral vigour of the individual was not promoted by the rapidly growing system of external aids to sanctity — the worship of the saints and of relics, and the multiplication of sacraments and sacramentals. Pelagius was not a priest. He had not the sacerdotal bias in favour of ritual and objective sanctification. We need no speculation about Oriental ideas to help us in understanding the growth of his main idea. He would at once insist on that natural strength of which he had so clear a consciousness, especially if we may assume as we seem entitled to do, that he was a man of sober temperament and equable life. And if the scriptural doctrine of original sin were pleaded by more passionate temperaments and moral cowards, as pointing to a primeval corruption of our nature, he would resent it as a pretext or subterfuge, and endeavour to explain away the words of Genesis and St. Paul.

We know enough of the Roman Church to learn without surprise that Pelagius incurred no reproach as long as he remained in the Eternal City. His elevated character and zeal attached many of the best of the Italians to him, such as Paulinus, and a large number of the Roman clergy. In fact, there is an amusing and instructive illustration of the quality of his teaching. He wrote three works during his stay at Rome, one on the Trinity, another comprising a collection of moral maxims from Scripture, and a third which consisted of a commentary on St. Paul's Epistles. In the latter work his characteristic ideas were bound to find expression, and in point of fact Augustine detects many heretical passages in it a few years afterwards. But not only did this work receive nothing but approbation from the Christians of Rome, it was actually attributed at a later date to Pope Gelasius, and then, for several centuries, to Jerome himself, the most bitter opponent and critic of its real author. That is a unique and precious fact in the history of heresy. Further, he wrote a long letter on nature and grace to Paulinus in 405, in which Augustine's practised faculty discovered — ten years afterwards — a complete betrayal of his heresy.

Pelagius was brought into conflict with Augustine's ideas a few years before their first personal encounter. An African bishop who was disputing with him at Rome quoted the well-known passage from *the Confessions*: "Give us that Thou commandest, and then command what Thou wilt." Pelagius "warmly resisted" the sentiment, says Augustine. If we have not already the strength to observe the commandments, the command itself is dishonoured, and moral indolence is perilously encouraged. But it was not until the year 410 that he met the great African bishop. He left Rome in 409, when Alaric was threatening the city, and sailed for Syracuse with his pupil and companion, Coelestius. Coelestius was an advocate of some capacity, who had been converted to an ascetic life by Pelagius. Prosper affirms that he was sexless, from a congenital defect, so that he was providentially equipped with a fine qualification for the defence of Pelagianism. However, the two monks proceeded

with the famous Rufinus to Syracuse, and shortly afterwards sailed for Hippo. Augustine was occupied with the Donatists at Carthage at the time, and they went to see him there. They saw little of each other, however, owing to Augustine's preoccupation, and Pelagius soon departed for the East, leaving Cœlestius to sow the good seed in Africa.

It was, apparently, in 410 that they met at Carthage, but we do not find Augustine speaking of the new heresy until about 412, when the conflict opens. In that year Cœlestius sought ordination at Carthage, and the bishop, Aurelius, directed that the new ideas which were attributed to him should be examined by a synod of his province. A deacon named Paulinus drew up the indictment, and succeeded in fastening the charge of heresy on the candidate for the priesthood. The points of the charge were, that Adam was created mortal, and would have died whether he sinned or not, and that his sin entailed no punishment on his offspring; that infants are born in the condition of Adam before his fall, and that even if they are not baptised they have eternal life; that the race does not die in the sin of Adam, nor rise again in the resurrection of Christ; and that the Law, no less than the Gospel, introduces men into the kingdom of heaven, and there were men living without sin even before the coming of Christ. Thus the simple Pelagian idea had already been confronted with texts from Scripture and points of ritual, and was rapidly growing into a theological system. Augustine was not present at this synod (he belonged to the Numidian, not the Proconsular province), but it is easy to see his inspiration in the arguments of Paulinus, and shortly afterwards he occupies himself openly with the disputed questions.

Cœlestius was excommunicated, and departed for the East; but, as at Rome and in Sicily, he had left a number of disciples behind. Augustine begins to discuss errors about nature and grace in his letters and sermons. Theologians usually observe that Augustine was eminently fitted by his own spiritual experience for combating the new doctrine. The Pelagians, on the other hand, maintained that their doctrine was not new; that it was Augustine's Manichean taint, or a lingering feeling of ubiquitous devilry, that inspired his novel versions of original sin and the primeval corruption of human nature. It will be remembered that Augustine had readily surrendered his Manichean theory of the dual character of human nature for a Christian dualism which seemed to meet the facts of consciousness equally well. Instead of a divine soul and a diabolical soul, he came to believe in an element of corruption warring against a divinely implanted ideal. The compact with Adam and the original sin shifted the responsibility of this corruption from God, so that he felt himself free to exaggerate it as much as he pleased without a shadow of reflection on God's sanctity. And what could be more apparent, both in the memory of his own struggle and in the world about him, than this appalling corruption and resistance to every elevating influence? Paul had been so convincing because he started throughout from this fact of consciousness. And when St. Paul went on to say that only "the grace of God" could lift us above this awful corruption of our nature, he seemed to be pointing an almost equally obvious moral. In this way aboriginal corruption and the necessity for "grace" (vaguely conceived as Divine assistance) were facts both of consciousness and Scripture for Augustine. He felt no disposition whatever to explain away St. Paul's vigorous presentment of that dual fact, nor could he sympathise with, or see any honest reason for such an extenuation. Moreover, he was quite insensible to the force of the ethical considerations that moved Pelagius — that it was unjust to punish the race for the sin of Adam; that it was barbarous to damn an infant that had never known sin; that to deny the power of the will was to deny its responsibility; and that to create a defective nature and then introduce a complementary super-nature was unworthy of Infinite Wisdom. These objections never touched the heart of Augustine, and his subtle mind coldly disposed of them without difficulty. The modern cynic is apt to observe that they were really disputing whether the power for good which both admitted to exist in man (or there would be no question of responsibility and personal sin) was to

be called natural or supernatural, will or grace. However that may be, each had his fact of consciousness — Pelagius his sense of power and liberty, and Augustine his sense of corruption — and his ethical or scriptural superstructure; and in the stress of controversy neither could calmly survey the whole ground. Pelagius entirely believed that Augustine's outlook was vitiated by his long attachment to Manicheism; and Augustine was sincerely unable to see any reason except a criminal pride for his adversary's exaltation of human nature.

This, at least, it is gratifying to discover: Augustine long maintained an attitude of gentle and affectionate forbearance towards the persons of Pelagius and Cœlestius, and he never, even in the most heated stages of the conflict, descended to the vulgarity and bitterness of Jerome and Orosius. In his earlier letters (140, 143, 157, etc.), sermons (170, 174, 175, etc.), and works, he refrained from mentioning Pelagius and his friend. It was not until Pelagius resorted to undeniable equivocation that he began to attack his person.

It was in 412 that Augustine wrote his first work against the new ideas. Marcellinus, the religious-minded official who had presided at the Donatist conference, consulted him on the Pelagian theories which he found prevalent in Carthage, and he was answered in a work *On the Deserts and Remission of Sin*. The practice of baptising infants had become one of the most severe tests of the new ideas, and Augustine at once laid down his well-known belief with regard to them. The unbaptised infant will be punished, he says, but "very lightly"; it cannot be with Christ, so it must be with the Devil (Book 1.). When Marcellinus urges the ethical objection to this, he says (Book in.) that he "cannot refute their arguments" (he affected to do so later), and can only point to the Scriptures. Marcellinus was perplexed by his statement that, although man could, with the Divine assistance, avoid all sin, no human being, except Mary, had succeeded in doing so. This elicited another anti-Pelagian work, *On the Letter and the Spirit*, in which he gives a finely conceived and skillful explanation of the maxim that "the letter kills and the spirit quickens." The light of conscience and of Scripture may only serve to illumine a man's divergence from the moral ideal. In the following year Pelagius wrote a friendly letter to Augustine, and received an equally friendly and respectful answer. In 414, however, the conflict became more pronounced. A certain Hilary wrote to Augustine from Sicily, complaining of the alarming notions which flourished there since the visit of Pelagius and Cœlestius, and Augustine replied at great length. Then he was approached on the subject by two young men of culture whom Pelagius had converted to the monastic life. Timasius and James seem to have heard of Augustine's denunciation of the new ideas, and they send him one of Pelagius's writings. The work confirmed Augustine's opinion of the danger of the heresy, and he replied to it in a book *On Nature and Grace*. In this work he boldly meets the ethical difficulties of Pelagius, affirming that the condemnation of the race to eternal punishment for Adam's sin was perfectly just, and the sentence could with absolute justice have been rigorously carried out on every individual. Shortly afterwards two Sicilian bishops send him a list of Pelagian arguments which is circulating in their province, and he repeats his criticisms in a work *On the Perfection of Human Justice*.

But the chief interest of the struggle passes for a few years from West to East, and we cannot follow Augustine's later activity very well unless we glance for a moment at the course of events in Palestine. Cœlestius had received ordination at Ephesus, and Pelagius was continuing his mission at Jerusalem, untroubled save for the impotent vituperation of the monk of Bethlehem, when a hot-tempered young Spanish priest came upon the scene, straight from the feet of Augustine. I have described how Orosius came to Hippo in 418, chiefly to consult Augustine on the heresies of the Priscillianists and Origenists. Augustine sent him on to Jerome, and it is not unnatural to assume that he recommended an interest in the proceedings of Pelagius at Jerusalem. At all events we learn from Orosius

(our only authority, unfortunately) that when the Bishop of Jerusalem held the customary synod of his clergy in July, 415, he invited both Orosius and Pelagius to attend. Orosius was summoned to speak first, and he told of the condemnation of Cœlestius and the work which Augustine was writing against Pelagius. The monk was then introduced, and informed of the accusation. “What is Augustine to me ?” he coolly asked. And when the young zealot hastened to reply, the Bishop quietly interjected, “I am Augustine here,” and bade them discuss the matter peaceably. In the end Pelagius was acquitted, and the question was referred, at the demand of Orosius, to the decision of the Latin Church. Orosius retired to Jerome’s cell for consolation — the charge of heresy having been shifted to his own shoulders during the synod — and the Latin world was soon acquainted with the situation.

The next move of the orthodox Latins was equally unsuccessful, and hardly more creditable. Towards the end of the year 415, a couple of Gallic bishops, Heros and Lazarus, who had been deposed or driven from their sees, appeared at the court of Eulogius, Bishop of Cassarea, and laid an accusation against Pelagius. Of the character of the accusers it is impossible to judge; Zosimus, Bishop of Rome, speaks very unfavourably of them, though Prosper affirms their innocence. However, these men had drawn up an indictment, consisting of a number of quotations from the writings of Pelagius (many of which were not merely “abbreviated,” as they said, but entirely distorted), the condemnation of Cœlestius, and Augustine’s letter to Hilary. Pelagius complained that they were instigated by the pious and peaceful community at Bethlehem. Eulogius referred the matter to his provincial synod, which met at Diospolis soon afterwards, and Pelagius was once more acquitted. The accusers failed to appear, one of them, Augustine says, being seriously ill. Pelagius was confronted with their *libellus*, and, partly by explaining misrepresentations, partly by disavowing the condemned propositions of his disciple, partly, it must be admitted, by ambiguous answers and equivocation, obtained a certificate of orthodoxy from the fourteen bishops. Shortly afterwards Jerome’s monastery was taken by storm at Bethlehem. Some of the buildings were burned down, and one or two servants killed, but Jerome and his friends, with the Roman ladies who had settled there, found safety in “a fortified tower”; though this outrage was never seriously laid to the charge of Pelagius.

Probably one of the first intimations Augustine received of the result of the synod was a letter from Pelagius, covering a sort of *apologia*, in which he apprised the world of his absolution by the Eastern bishops. Augustine proceeded cautiously, and waited impatiently for the return of Orosius. We have a fragment of a sermon in which he speaks with respect and reserve of the synod: “perhaps Pelagius was corrected,” he says. Even when Orosius arrived with a letter from the ex- bishops and a glowing account of the proceedings in the East, he still maintained a certain reserve about the absolution of Pelagius, and spoke with respect of the synod. But there was clearly a pressing need of action in the Western Church. The new ideas were spreading at Carthage and Syracuse. They already claimed the patronage of important clerics at Rome, such as the priest (afterwards pope) Sixtus. Augustine flew to Carthage, and before the end of the year the full power of the African Church was bent on the destruction of the heresy.

Some time before the end of 416 a provisional synod met at Carthage. Augustine read the letters from the East to the sixty-nine bishops, and it was decided to anathematise Pelagius and Cœlestius, and request the Bishop of Rome to join with them in the anathema. The same decisions were reached at the Numidian synod (at Mileve) of sixty-one bishops. Both the letters sent to Pope Innocent in the name of these synods were written by Augustine, and in a third letter he and Aurelius (of Carthage), Alypius, Evodius, and Possidius made a more personal appeal to the Bishop of Rome. The points of the charge against Pelagius are not new, but there are one or two incidental features of interest. In the first place, Augustine expresses in the third letter an apprehension of certain practical consequences

from the Pelagian ideas. One is tempted to think that the clergy must have perceived, with some anxiety, that the Pelagian idea gravely threatened their ritual and administrative structure. If nature be morally self-sufficient, the complex system of the Church, in so far as it is framed for administering grace rather than for worship, becomes largely superfluous. Augustine indicates this fear in his third letter (Ep. 177), though, it must be admitted, it plays a very small part in the controversy. On the other hand, the appeal to Rome is an event of great interest, and has been invested with no slight importance. Roman theologians do not fail to notice it in proving the supremacy of the Pope. From what I have said in connection with the Donatist controversy, it is clear that the Africans had no notion whatever of Papal supremacy, and certain episodes which will be described in the next chapter will show that Augustine's attitude towards the Roman pretensions never changed. But there were special circumstances for the appeal to Rome in 416, as Augustine clearly indicates in his letters; and the flattering terms in which the Pope is addressed are entirely outweighed by the subsequent action of the Council of Carthage, as we shall see. In the third letter Augustine introduces their appeal in these words: "For we have heard that there are many at Rome, where he lived so long, who favour him for one or other cause." There were, indeed, as we shall see presently; and the Africans felt that the heresy must be crushed out at once in the whole Latin Church. They therefore ask that "the authority of the Apostolic See be added to their own modest statutes," and that Innocent, whom "the Lord, by a special favour of His grace, has placed in the Apostolic See, and given such a character in our days that we should be guilty of negligence if we failed to suggest to thy Holiness what seems good for the Church," should "apply his pastoral diligence to the great dangers of the infirm members of Christ."

Innocent was naturally elated at the honour which this fortunate heresy seemed to have secured for his see. His three replies breathe the dignity of the sovereign pontiff in every line. He takes remarkable pains to point out that they are only following the time-honoured custom of appealing to Rome, whilst his delight at the novelty floods the whole letter. He confirms their decisions with great pomp and severity, pronounces Pelagius's book to be dangerous and blasphemous, and excommunicates the two heresiarchs. This was in January, 417; Augustine's politic letters had obtained a quick and complete victory. The joint spiritual authority of Rome and Africa fell with a heavy weight on the Pelagians, and Augustine trusted to extinguish the last elements of obstinacy by his rhetorical labours. On the 23rd of September he preached at Carthage the celebrated sermon (No. 131), in which he did *not* say: "Rome has spoken." But he spoke with triumph and gladness of the condemnation of the heresy, and trusted soon to hear the last of it.

But alas for the slender threads by which the fortunes of dogmas hang! At that very moment a Roman vessel was speeding across the sea with a letter in which a new bishop of Rome reversed the decision of his predecessor, and gravely rebuked the zeal of Augustine. Innocent had died on the 12th of March, and been succeeded by the Greek Zosimus. Whether or no Cœlestius heard that the new pope had not a keen eye for dogma it is impossible to say, but he soon quitted the East, where he had been less fortunate than Pelagius, came to Rome, and appealed to the Pope. Zosimus assembled his clergy in the basilica of St. Clement for the discussion, but once more the ex-bishops failed to appear in support of their indictment, and Cœlestius averted condemnation. The Bishop reserved his judgment, with an evident leaning towards acquittal, and wrote at once to chide the African bishops for their uncharitable haste in listening to the accusers. The letter contains some pompous remarks about the dignity of the Apostolic See, and concludes with a delightful and innocent comment on Augustine's zeal in the matter: "I admonished Cœlestius and all the clergy who were present that these ensnaring questions and foolish strifes, which destroy rather than build up, proceed from an idle curiosity."

Before the African bishops could recover from this shock, Pelagius had also appealed with success to the tolerant Bishop of Rome, and been pronounced “a good Catholic” and of “unquestionable faith.” Before he heard of the death of Innocent he forwarded a defence and profession of faith to Rome. Luckily his documents found another judge. They were read before a Roman synod, and, as Zosimus reproachfully assured the African bishops, the hearers could hardly restrain their tears when they reflected that so holy and admirable a man had been condemned. Pelagius and Coelestius were acquitted with honour, Heros and Lazarus were excommunicated and denounced, and the African bishops were once more rebuked. Augustine was almost solely responsible for the African condemnations, and to him, therefore, we justly look for an explanation of the subsequent proceedings. Unfortunately, he tells us little of his action, and nothing of his feelings. In later years he spoke with quiet forbearance of the letters of Zosimus, but his reverence for the Bishop of Rome’s “pastoral diligence” was threatened with premature extinction. Prosper tells us that the African bishops held two great councils within the next six months, and that Augustine was “the soul” of the proceedings. The first council or synod is not a little obscure. Probably Aurelius and Augustine hastily summoned the nearest bishops to Carthage and drew up the reply to Zosimus. Their letter has “not been preserved,” and thus the Roman historian has probably been spared a painful task. But Prosper relates that two hundred and fourteen bishops were present at the synod, and has preserved this instructive paragraph of their letter: “We hereby ordain [*constituimus*] that the sentence which Innocent passed on Pelagius and Coelestius from the chair of the Apostle Peter remains in force until they make a clear profession “of the Augustinian view of faith and justification. We do not know the date of this synod. However, Zosimus made no reply until the 21st of March, 418, when he intimated to the African bishops a considerable change in his sentiments. They were quite wrong, he said, in supposing that he had given complete credence to the professions of Coelestius. His decision was still in reserve; in fact, new matter had recently been placed before him, and he broadly hints that he is likely to condemn the heretics. This letter reached Carthage on the 29th of April, and found two hundred and five (Photius says two hundred and twenty-six) bishops assembled there from all parts of Africa for another council. They met in the basilica of Faustus, under the presidency of the two primates (of Carthage and Numidia), on the 1st of May. The letter of Zosimus seems to have relieved the strain of the situation, and they were content to formulate nine canons against the heresy, and forward these to the Bishop of Rome that he might give them the additional weight of his acquiescence.

But it would be wrong to suppose that the defiance of the African bishops had of itself effected the conversion of the Roman See. Zosimus had announced his change of policy at the end of March. At the end of April Honorius issued a decree in which the weight of the Imperial authority was cast on the side of the Augustinians. It seems unquestionable that Augustine and his colleagues had once more appealed to the secular power, in the failure of their rhetorical armament. The document is entitled a “rescript,” and one ancient manuscript even says explicitly that it was a reply to the Carthaginian synod. Augustine apparently confirms this when he says to Julian the Pelagian, “if the reply had been given in your favour”; and in the following year, 419, Honorius sends a letter to Aurelius and Augustine (a remarkable honour for a simple bishop) in which he states that the decree against the heretics was given at their direction. We are forced to conclude that the African bishops appealed to the Emperor when they received Zosimus’s letters (virtually acquitting Pelagius). Count Valerius seems to have been their instrument, and he was supported by the ex-vice-prefect of Rome, Constantius, who had turned monk at Rome, and led the anti-Pelagian party there. On the 30th of April Honorius pronounced sentence of banishment and confiscation on the heresiarchs and their followers. Rome was profoundly distracted by the

controversy. Zosimus and Sixtus (afterwards pope) favoured the Pelagians, and “the heresy was rampant in the city,” as the Imperial rescript said. But the earnestness of Augustine and the successful enlistment of the Imperial interest were political considerations of some gravity. Zosimus was most certainly aware of the intrigue that was proceeding at Court, and the knowledge cannot have been without influence on his letter of the 21st of March. When the rescript appeared and the letter of the second Carthaginian synod arrived, he summoned Cœlestius to appear once more before him and his clergy. The heretic did not like the nature of the new documents in the case, and fled to the East. He and Pelagius were then condemned and ex-communicated, and Zosimus issued a circular letter (*tractatoria*) in which he demanded the submission of the Italian bishops under pain of deprivation of their sees. The execution of the sentence was entrusted to the Imperial forces, and thus the humanists of the fifth century were at length definitively cast out of the Church in the Western Empire.

In the meantime Augustine maintained a vigilant opposition to the heretical ideas wherever they appeared. He wrote a long letter to Paulinus of Nola, the early friend of Pelagius, urging him to confirm the faith of some of his wavering clerics. From this letter it appears that there were ultra-Pelagians who granted the child a power of choice even before it left the womb. He wrote to Sixtus, artfully congratulating him on his conversion. But a more interesting outcrop of the heresy claimed his attention about the end of 417. We have seen how the young Roman heiress, Demetrias, took the veil of virginity in 414, and Pelagius imitated the group of distinguished clerics (Augustine, Jerome, Innocent, etc.) who sent her letters, or treatises, of encouragement. Pelagius was invited to do so by her mother, Juliana, 1 and he was not unwilling to enlarge upon so striking a proof of the power and dignity of human nature.

He sent her an admirable treatise of spiritual direction, encouraging her with an introductory laudation of “nature.” He reminds her that God is the author of our nature and our will, extols the virtue of pre-Christian philosophers and prophets, and describes how much more is required of those who live under the “grace of Christ.” It is evident, however, that he means by grace nothing more than the external advantages — the gospel, the Divine example, etc. — of the Incarnation. The letter was greatly appreciated and much copied, until a copy fell at length under Augustine’s keen eye. It had not the name of the writer, but Augustine probably suspected its authorship, and wrote to ask the name of Juliana, and warn her with extreme anxiety against the errors of the work. Juliana seems to have been none too well disposed for his zealous interference, and he takes great pains to teach her the evils of Pelagianism. But the most virulent passage he has found in the work is, he explains, the observation that “thy beauty of body and thy wealth may be accounted as the gift of others, but spiritual wealth no one can give thee but thyself.”

About the same time other friends of his, whose acquaintance we have made, were nearly seduced by the “dog from Albion.” Albina and Pinianus and Melania, who had by that time settled in Palestine, met Pelagius and attempted to restore him to orthodoxy. As usual, the persuasive monk turned their criticism into admiration, and they then wrote to ask Augustine’s view of the matter. He replied by the composition of a fresh work on the old lines, having the title, *Of the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, in which he again expounded his theory and proved the discrepancy of the Pelagian teaching.

But a new champion of the Pelagian cause, in a slightly modified form, appeared in the West. The exaggerated ideas of original sin and predestination put forward by Augustine provoked a wide and sincere revolt, which was not entirely quelled for more than a century. When the *tractatoria* of Zosimus announced his change of views, or of policy, to the Italian bishops in the summer of 418, no less than eighteen of them refused to submit, in spite of the very material argument of the imperial spears on which it chiefly relied. They were

accordingly driven from their sees. The leader of them, Julian, Bishop of Eclanum in Apulia, was the son of a friend of Augustine's, Memorius, and it was with some regret that Augustine found it necessary to exert his whole power against him. Julian contemptuously described the orthodox theory of original sin as "a mere popular murmur," and declared it had been thrust on the Church by "a rascally conspiracy." He regarded Augustine's system as a revival of Manicheism, and he and his friends familiarly spoke of the orthodox as "the Manicheans." He held that Augustine's view of the Creation and fall was inconsistent with the Divine power and wisdom, that he cast dishonour on marriage, and that his theory of grace left no room for free will and personal responsibility. He wrote two letters in defence of his action: one to the Bishop of Rome, in which he severely censured Zosimus for suddenly abandoning the Roman position under the pressure of the Africans, instead of calling a general council, and denounced the appeal to force; and a second to the Bishop of Thessalonica, in which he pointed out the moral and religious consequences of the Augustinian teaching. These letters were forwarded to Augustine by Boniface, who had succeeded Zosimus in the Roman See, and he answered them in his work *Against the Two Letters of the Pelagians*. A little later, when Count Valerius told him that the Pelagians made much of his apparent depreciation of marriage, he wrote a book *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, in which he developed the views I have already described. His controversy with Julian and the Italians was long and monotonous. In 421 he wrote a work in four books, *Against Julian*, and we have also several books of a large, unfinished work against the same writer, on which he was engaged in his last years. The heresy long resisted both ecclesiastical and imperial pressure in Italy and Gaul. We find traces of it until about the end of the fifth century. Pelagius and Coelestius had retired to the East, where they enjoyed a greater freedom until after the death of their great adversary. But in 431 the Eastern Church embraced the Augustinian ideas at Ephesus, and the champions of human nature sank into obscurity. Pelagius is said to have died in a small town of Palestine at an advanced age, and Coelestius disappears from the chronicles. Julian is said to have opened a school in an obscure Sicilian town, and died there in 454.

In the meantime the ethical protest against the Augustinian ideas assumed the milder form which is known as semi-Pelagianism. Human nature was not disposed to surrender its dignity without a struggle. There is an ecclesiastical tradition that all heresy is born of pride and flourishes only in an atmosphere of disorderly feeling. One might have expected even the boldness of a theologian to shrink from applying this maxim to the Pelagian heresy, but we have seen that neither historical fact nor intrinsic probability has deterred him from making the attempt. However, semi-Pelagianism, like the more pronounced heresy, took root in a soil of exceptional purity. A monk named Cassian, who had learned sanctity in the schools of Bethlehem and Egypt, and had then founded two monasteries at Marseilles, began to expound a compromise between the certainly anti-scriptural opinions of Pelagius and what M. Nourisson ventures to call the "inhuman and revolting" doctrine of Augustine. He acknowledged that we have all died by the death of Adam and lived by the resurrection of Christ, but he protested against the idea of a total corruption of human nature and a predestination to eternal life or death without regard to individual merit; he also held that grace was not usually granted until it had been merited by a motion of good will, that it might be lost, and that perseverance in grace depended on the will. Another compromise was attempted by the monks of Adrumetum, with whom I will deal later. Augustine was not the kind of man to allow purely rational considerations to interfere with the course of his theological reasoning. He sternly denounced the compromise in his works, *On the Predestination of the Saints* and *On the Gift of Perseverance*. The question of perseverance had not been much discussed in the earlier stages of the struggle, and the compromise of Cassian only served to drive Augustine to the bitterest consequences of his principles.

His ideas on this point are too well known for me to enlarge on them. The will is a mere automaton, worked solely by grace. The first movement must come from grace no less surely than the last; we cannot merit that indispensable factor in the moral life, nor can we retain it to the end by our human efforts. Absolutely without regard to the merit of the individual (in the way of co-operation or rejection) God has decreed His distribution of grace, on which eternal life or eternal damnation morally depends, as Cassian saw. The Christians of Gaul long resisted these harsh opinions, but by the middle of the sixth century even their modified vindication of human nature had entirely ceased.

Joseph McCabe. *St. Augustine and His Age*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903.

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