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SAINT AUGUSTINE—PHILOSOPHER

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FENELON once said that if we were to collect all the passages in which St. Augustine treats of metaphysics we would have an anthology surpassing in depth and richness the whole philosophical output of Descartes. And Eucken dared write that Augustine is the only truly original thinker that has appeared in the Christian era. Yet it is a fact that the serious students of Augustine's philosophy are few. In the manuals he receives about as much attention as Wundt, Reid or Royer-Collard; even learned treatises on the history of thought fail to mention his name, or else they pass him off in a line or two as being, above all, a theologian (though that, in itself would not hinder his being a first-class philosopher); or, finally, their brief mention consists in showing how his ideas can be reduced to those of Plotinus or of Plato (a somewhat summary judgment).

Before we consider why Augustine finds such scant favor as a philosopher, it may be well to observe that a philosopher's reputation depends at times on other things besides his intrinsic worth. It is obvious now that Locke, Condillac and Cousin have been overrated. But that is easily explained. They made easy reading; what they did have to say was easily understood. Not that the converse is always true; the difficulty of grasping an author does not of necessity preclude his popularity. Consider Kant, Hegel, and any number of our contemporaries. But this much is true, when an author is difficult, one must be driven to study him by some strong motive. If, for example, he is the vogue, that is sufficient motive for some.

The study of Augustine is not without its difficulties. And it seems that neither the vogue nor any other special reason at present urges that study in despite of the difficul-