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PETRARCH'S CONFESSIONS

The art of self-revelation is no easy one to acquire and when acquired it must be practiced with circumspection. It is however possible to talk of oneself with good grace and to get others to listen. Indeed a man’s opinion of himself—if only we can come at it—is rarely indifferent to us. We have an almost morbid anxiety to know what others think of themselves, if only they can and will tell us. We all like to take our turn behind the grating of the confessional. Artistic confessing is essentially a very modern accomplishment. While the nineteenth century furnishes us many charming examples, the instances of satisfactory self-exposure before Rousseau’s unblushing success are really rare. Probably Augustine is the first name that will occur to us. Job’s case and that of the far more ancient Egyptian who has left his weary reflection on life are hardly in point. The Greek and Roman writers have left us plenty of comments on the inner life, but no one tells us his own individual intimate story, unless it be Marcus Aurelius. In the Middle Ages Peter Damianus, Abelard and Heloise, and others shed abundant tears over their evil thoughts, without however giving us any complete pictures of their varied emotions and ambitions. Nor does Dante succeed in doing this; although he may be dimly seen through a mist of allegory. While none of us may pretend to be familiar with all the literature which antedates the fourteenth century, I am at present inclined to guess that Petrarch’s Secret is the earliest unmistakable example of cool, fair, honest and comprehensive self-analysis that we possess.

So far as I am aware this extraordinary little work can only be read in the cumbrous and rather uncommon editions of Petrarch’s
Opera published at Basle and Venice in the last years of the fifteenth and in the sixteenth century. It is, I suspect, very rarely read even by scholars and is practically unknown to the intelligent public. Its importance and its inaccessibility may be regarded as a sufficient justification for the combined analysis and running commentary which follows. To those who know only Petrarch's Italian verses the Secretum comes as a revelation. Even one familiar with his numerous letters will find that it greatly deepens and enlarges our notion of this remarkable man.

Among men of letters, few have played so important a rôle in the advancement of culture as Petrarch, and few have suffered more keenly than he from a troublesome form of self-consciousness. He was ever concerned with his conduct, ever fearful lest his high pursuits were vain, if not unequivocally wicked. He was half ashamed of his noblest sentiments; even his popularity disturbed him.

. . . . . . . onde sovente
Di me medesmo meco mi vergogno.

His love for Laura long tormented his conscience: he even doubted whether his craving for literary fame were not a fatal propensity which might endanger his eternal welfare.

Petrarch was confronted by no simple problem, for the old and the new were contending for the supremacy in his breast. His struggle was the struggle, as we shall see, between the Mediaeval and the Modern spirit. Life was to him no longer merely a period of probation for the real life to come, in which each actor humbly plays

1 Malitaine, Annales typographici, reports the earliest edition of Petrarch's Opera Omnia as published at Deventer in 1494. Editions published at Basle by Johannes de Amerbach were issued under the dates 1495, 1496, 1497. Thanks to my good friend Professor V. Gr. Simkhovitch I have that of 1496. It may be suspected that the sheets struck off in 1495 were merely supplied with new colophons in the two following years as there could hardly have been a demand to justify reprinting three times in three successive years. An edition appeared from a Venetian press in 1501, which is in the Columbia Library; another in 1503. In 1541, 1554 and 1581 the works were reprinted in Basle. This last clumsy and inaccurate edition of 1581 (also in the Columbia library) is not uncommonly met with in catalogues and is oftenest cited. Cf. Fracassetti, Fr. Petrarcae Epistolae de Rebus familiaribus (1859), i, vii, sqq. There is need of a new edition of the Secret based on a careful collation of the MSS. In my analysis from the original Latin, use has been made of the editions of 1496, 1501 and 1581. I have discovered no important variations affecting the sense.
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his obscure rôle in the particular group or association to which Providence has assigned him. Petrarck realized to the full the preciousness of life's opportunity. Life was, he knew, a preparation for Heaven,—but was it not something more? Was there no place for high secular ambition? Might not he raise himself above the common herd and like the ancients whom he so much admired erect a monument more enduring than bronze? Petrarck was too medieaval to accept the new gospel unhesitatingly. He did not fully realize the change which he felt within himself. He groped tremulously toward a new ideal of our earthly existence, and never fully enfranchised himself from the ascetic theory of life which had so long been taught by thoughtful men. It was in order to put clearly before himself all the questions which were continually harassing him that he prepared an imaginary dialogue after the models offered by Cicero and Boëthius. In this way it was possible for him to do full justice to the claims of each and all of his conflicting desires and emotions.

One day, he tells us, as he was meditating upon the confused mysteries of life, appeared before him a wondrous Lady, whom, after his eyes had recovered from the dazzling light about her, he recognized as Truth. With her came a venerable person of profoundly religious mien, in whom immediately Petrarck discovered his favorite ghostly comforter, Saint Augustine. The Lady, having perceived the straits in which the poet was, had taken pity on him in his moral illness and had brought with her her cherished devotee, to whom she now commends him.

Having all retired to a secluded spot, they join in a consultation which was prolonged during three days. Much was said of the evils of the age and of mortal perversity in general, but the discussion of his own sins made the deepest impression upon Petrarck. "And lest this friendly conference should fade from my mind," he says, "I resolved to write it down and have filled this little book with it. Not that I would wish it to be reckoned with my other works, nor do I write it for fame's sake (I am now dealing with higher matters), but solely in order that I may revive at will the delight which I then derived from our converse. Therefore, little book, thou wilt avoid the intercourse of men and wilt contentedly abide
with me, not forgetful of thy name: for thou art 'My Secret' and so thou shalt be called."

The Confessions are, as their author tells us, not very voluminous—less than 30,000 words. They consist of the three dialogues that took place upon the three successive days; the conversation is spirited and natural throughout and infinitely superior to the pseudo-dialogues of the better known Remedies for both Good and Evil Fortune by the same author. We have no means of determining exactly when the Confessions were written. As Petrarch was accustomed to revise his work over and over again, it is probable that several years elapsed after the plan was once conceived before the little book received the finishing touches. There is, however, sufficient internal and external evidence to indicate that the work was written between the years 1342 and 1353; that is, at a time when its author's literary powers may be assumed to have been at their height. He must have been about thirty-eight years old when he began it, and had perhaps reached his fiftieth birthday before he laid it aside in the form that it has come down to us. In the printed editions the Confessions are called De Contemptu Mundi, a title that is at once misleading and unsupported by Petrarch's own authority. A much more pertinent heading is found in most of the manuscripts, namely, De secreto Conflictu curarum suarum,—the inward struggle between the monastic and secular ideals of life.

It would be a grave misapprehension to suppose that the dialogue does not reflect a very real contradiction in the soul of the writer. No careful reader can fail to see in it the bitterness of a spirit at odds with itself. Indeed its whole significance lies in the sturdy and heartfelt defense of the intrinsic virtue of the more noble temporal ambitions, especially those of a man of letters, against the deadening suggestions of monasticism. The dialogues were written after Petrarch had outgrown his youthful unquestioning exuberance and before he had reached the philosophic calm of his later years. Even if he gives way, often reluctantly indeed and doubtfully, before Augustine's reasoning, his habitual conduct and his attitude of mind in old age prove that he was not vanquished. In the long run, the modern, or, if you will, the classical spirit was destined to prevail, as we shall later see.
In this three-days conference the first two days are devoted to the nature and cause of man's earthly misery, and its cure. "You remember," Augustine inquires, "that you are mortal?" Francesco replies that he not only remembers it but that the thought never fails to fill him with a certain horror. "If this be so it is well," his confessor rejoins, "it will much lighten my duties; for it is certainly true that nothing is so efficacious against the seductions of this life and so potent to strengthen the soul amid the tempests of the world as the recollection of our own misery and the meditation upon death; but this thought should produce no light and fleeting impression; it must sink into our very bones and marrow. I very much fear that in this respect as in many other ways that I have observed, you deceive yourself." Francesco replies that he does not think the remedy for human misery so simple as that suggested by Augustine, but admits that he does not altogether understand his reasoning. "I thought you had a better-developed mind," Augustine sharply rejoins; "it had not occurred to me that we should have to go back to first principles. Had you committed to memory the truths and salutary injunctions of the philosophers which you have often encountered in my works, and (if you will permit me to say it) had you labored for yourself rather than for others and made the result of so much reading the rule of your life instead of an idle boast to gain the empty plaudits of the common herd, you would not be guilty of such crude and silly utterances."

No one is unhappy or can become so except voluntarily, Augustine continues. Cicero and the other philosophers amply prove that only that which is opposed to virtue can make us truly unhappy. "I remember," Francesco replies, "that these are the doctrines of the Stoics, but they are opposed to popular belief, and are better in theory than in practice (veritati propinquiora quam usui)." All vice begins voluntarily, he admits, yet he has seen many a man, himself included, who would gladly throw off the yoke of sin but who tries to do so in vain. In spite of the Stoics' cold comfort they remain the miserable victims of evil their lives long. He does not deceive himself as to the serious nature of his condition; on the contrary, he sheds many a bitter tear but finds no relief. Augustine replies that he himself experienced the same trials at the time of his own conversion, his account of which is doubtless familiar to Petrarch. The fundamental difficulty lies in our indifference to spiritual liberty. We do not, as Petrarch readily agrees, really desire to be free from our sins. "No one can be dominated absolutely by this desire unless he puts an end to all other desires; for you well know how many and various are the objects of our wishes in life, all of which must come to be reckoned of no value if one would rise
to the true yearning for the highest happiness. ... Who is there indeed who could succeed in extinguishing all his desires,—it would be a long task even to enumerate them, to say nothing of conquering them,—in order that he might some day hope to guide his soul by the reins of reason, and dare to say 'I have nothing in common with the body; all that once seemed pleasing has become vile in my sight: I aspire to higher things.' Such an one is rare enough, Francesco concedes. "But what in your opinion," he asks, "must we do in order that we may cast off our earthly shackles and rise to heaven?"

The problem has now been enunciated. Let us see what the solution is which the "First Modern" accepts in the heyday of his life and success. He admits the inefficacy of Cicero's admonitions. Of the Bible he says little or nothing. Virgil's words, not David's or Paul's, come to his mind in the depths of his perplexity. The dialogue continues as follows:

**Augustine.** We have now reached the point toward which I have been guiding you. It is that form of meditation (on Death) that we mentioned at the beginning, coupled with an ever present consciousness of our mortality, which produces the desired result.

**Francesco.** Unless I am again misled, no one has oftener been preoccupied by these thoughts than I.

**Augustine.** Alas, here is a new task for me.

**Francesco.** What? I am not lying?

**Augustine.** I prefer to express myself more politely.

**Francesco.** But that is your meaning.

**Augustine.** Assuredly.

**Francesco.** Then I do not think of death?

**Augustine.** Very rarely, and then so indolently that the thought cannot penetrate into the depths of your perversity.

**Francesco.** I had thought otherwise.

**Augustine.** You should look not to what you thought but to what you should have thought.

The Confessor explains that he does not refer to the general recognition of the possibility of death as a distant contingency or even of its imminence as illustrated by the death of those who fall about us. We can hope for no advantage except we vividly reproduce its physical and spiritual horrors. He then enters upon a concise description of the physical accompaniments of dissolution in its most distressing forms, with the painful minuteness which we might
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expect in a treatise upon epilepsy. He dwells upon the advantage of exposing the bodies of the dead to the view of those earnestly struggling toward spiritual enfranchisement, and upon the salutary and permanent impressions that come from witnessing the preparation of the corpse for burial. In this way the trite idea of our mortality may become vivid and life-giving.

Francesco readily assents to Augustine's reasoning, for he recognizes in it much that he habitually turns over in his own mind. He asks, however, for some sure sign by which he can determine whether his ascetic meditations are doing their work or whether he is deceiving himself by false appearances instead of walking in the path of virtue. Augustine explains accordingly that so long as we do not become literally pale and rigid with the very thought of death our labors are vain.

"The soul must leave the members and stand before the judgment seat of eternity about to render an exact account of the words and deeds of its whole past life. It places no hope in bodily beauty or the applause of the world, in eloquence, riches, or power; the judge can not be corrupted or deceived. Death may not be placated, nor is it the end of torments but only a step toward worse things." Let the soul sink to Hell itself, *inter mille suppliciorum, mille tortorum genera, et stridor et gemitus averni et sulphurei amnes et tenebras et ultrices furiae." If you can bring all these before your eyes at once, not as mere imaginings, but as necessary, inevitable, nay as already upon you, and yet not yield to despair but abide strong in the faith that God can reach out his hand to snatch you from these horrors, you show yourself curable. Anxious to rise and tenacious of purpose you will go forth with confidence and may know that you have not meditated in vain."

This spiritual exercise appears to have been an habitual one with Petrarch, but, as is not unnatural, he was disappointed in its results.

"When I dispose my body like that of a dying person," he says, "and bring vividly before me the hour of death and all the attendant terrors that the mind can conjure up, so that I seem to be in the very agony of dissolution, I sometimes behold Tartarus and all the terrors you depict and am so afflicted by the vision that I arise terrified and trembling, and to the horror of those about me I break forth in the words, 'Alas how shall I escape these sufferings? What is to be the end of my woes? Jesus, help me!'"
Eripe me invicte his malis,
Da dextram misero, et tecum me tolle per undas,
Sedibus ut saltem placidis in morte quiescam.'

I rave like a madman and talk to myself, as my distracted and terrified intellect is driven this way and that. I address my friends, and my own tears force tears from them. Yet I return to my old ways when my burst of weeping is once past. What holds me back in spite of these experiences? What hidden impediment has rendered these meditations up to the present only a source of pain and terror? I am still exactly what I was before, and what those are to whom nothing of this kind perhaps ever happened in their life. I am indeed more miserable than they in one respect, for whatever may be the outcome, they at least rejoice in the pleasure of the present while I, uncertain of the end, experience no joy that is not embittered by the reflections of which I have spoken." Against such a sentiment Augustine naturally protests, but somewhat weakly; and Petrarch firmly maintains that the worldly man is the better off.

At the close of this first dialogue Petrarch gives a brief analysis of his character that displays his profound self-knowledge. Augustine declares that Francesco's spiritual welfare is threatened by his want of concentration and by the multitude and variety of conflicting purposes which oppress his weak mind. He has not the strength or time to accomplish half of what he lightly undertakes. "So it comes to pass," Augustine continues, "that, as many things brought into a narrow space are sure to interfere with one another, so your mind is too choked up for any thing useful to take root or grow. You have no settled plan, but are turned hither and thither in an amazing whirl; your energies are never concentrated: you are never wholly yourself."

Petrarch speaks elsewhere of this same failing. At the end of his life, in his Letter to Posterity, he writes: "My mind, like my body, was characterized by a certain versatility and alertness rather than by strength, so that many tasks that were easy of conception were given up by reason of the difficulty of their execution." As Gaspary has well said, Petrarch was a master in one respect at least, he understood how to picture himself.

The dialogue on the second day opens with a critical examination by Augustine of the main sources of Francesco's pride and self-complacency. This is, at bottom, as we shall see, a confession of
Petrarch's own misgivings that his literary ambitions were vain and hopeless. Augustine declares that Francesco is distracted by the phantoms and idle anxieties of ambition, which are especially likely to drag down the more noble spirits to their ruin; and that it is high time to endeavor to save him from such a fate. It is easy to prove how trivial are the advantages that have aroused his pride.

"You trust to your intellectual powers and your reading of many books; you glory in the beauty of your language and take delight in the comeliness of your mortal frame. But do you not perceive in how many respects your powers have disappointed you, in how many ways your skill does not equal that of the obscurest of mankind, not to speak of weak and lowly animals whose works no effort on your part could possibly imitate? Exult then if you can in your abilities! And your reading, what does it profit you? From the mass that you have read how much sticks in your mind, how much takes root and brings forth fruit in its season? Examine your mind carefully and you will find that all you know, if compared with your ignorance, would bear to it the same relation as that borne to the ocean by a tiny brook shrunk by the summer heats."

Man may know much of heaven and earth, of the courses of the stars, the virtues of herbs and stones and the secrets of nature, and still be ignorant of himself. He may be familiar with all the deeds of illustrious men in the past, but not heed his own conduct.

"What shall I say of your eloquence," Augustine continues, "except what you yourself confess? Has not your reliance on it often proved vain? Your hearers may perhaps have applauded what you said, but what advantage is that, if you yourself condemn your words? Although the applause of the auditors seems the natural fruit of eloquence, not to be despised, yet if the inward applause of the orator himself be wanting, how little gratification can the cheers of the crowd afford!"

Then follows a very interesting digression upon the poverty of language. Words are often wanting worthily to express the commonest of our daily experiences. How many things about us have no names at all! How many that have names can never be adequately described by human speech! "How often have I heard you bitterly complain and seen you silent and dejected, because thoughts that were perfectly clear and easily understood in the mind, could not be fully expressed by tongue or pen." This leads to a
discussion of the asserted superiority of Greek over Latin in respect to the richness of its vocabulary, and of the opinions of Cicero and Seneca. Augustine concludes with his own conviction that both languages are poor.

Petrarch was far too gifted a scholar not to recognize the limitations of language. In the little guide-book that he once prepared for a friend who was planning to visit the Holy Land, he speaks again of his inability to describe the beauties of nature. He felt the same discouragements that the conscientious student feels today, although his field of knowledge seems to us hopefully limited and well-defined.

Francesco refutes Augustine's accusations with some warmth:

"You say that I rely upon my abilities, although I certainly discover no indication of genius in myself unless it be the fact that I place no faith in possessing it. My reading of books moreover is not a source of pride, since it has brought me little knowledge and new causes of anxiety. I strive, you say, to gain fame by my style, and yet, as you yourself mentioned, nothing so vexes me as that my words are inadequate to reproduce my conceptions. You know, unless you are merely aiming to try me, that I have always been conscious of my insignificance, and if I have sometimes thought otherwise, it was due to a consideration of the ignorance of others. It has happened to me, as I am accustomed often to repeat, that according to the well-known saying of Cicero, we shine rather by the obscurity of others than by our own brightness."

Augustine sees in this the most noxious kind of pride, and says that he would prefer that Francesco should frankly overrate himself rather than that he should assume a haughty humility through despising everyone else.

Augustine charges Petrarch with worldliness and avarice, which will be sure to grow stronger as he gets older. He once delighted in the country and its simplicity, but the life in the city had made him sordid and grasping. Francesco admits that he dreads the thought of poverty during his declining years. His demands are modest and legitimate; his daily bread and a book or two are all he asks. Like Horace, his only object is nec turpem senectam degere, nec cythera carentem. Augustine acquits Francesco at least of any tendency to over-indulgence in food and drink, and approves of his
friends, who, he has observed, are both sober and dignified in their deportment.

Purity is then spoken of. Francesco admits that he has sometimes wished himself a senseless stone. He has made a desperate struggle to free himself from the bonds of sensuality, but he has not been wholly successful.

Augustine now startles Francesco by the abrupt statement that the worst is still to come. The most serious spiritual disease has not yet been mentioned.

"Augustine. You suffer from a certain dismal malady of the mind that the moderns call acedia and which the ancients termed aegritudo.

Francesco. The very name of the disease fills me with horror.

Augustine. No wonder, for you have long been grievously vexed by it.

Francesco. I admit it; and it is because there is after all a certain admixture of sweetness, however false, in almost all the other things that torment me. When I am in this sad state everything is bitter, wretched, terrible, the road to desperation opens before me and I behold all those things which may drive an unhappy soul to destruction. The attacks of my other passions, if frequent, are short and fleeting, but this plague sometimes holds me with such persistence that it binds and tortures me for days and nights together. Light and life are blotted out and I seem plunged in Tartarean gloom and the bitterness of death. But nevertheless, as the culmination of my miseries, I feast upon the very pangs and throes of my anguish with a certain confined pleasure, so that I am reluctant to be torn from them.

Augustine. You seem to know your disease well; we will now look to the cause. Say on; what is it that so saddens you—some adversity in your worldly affairs, bodily pain, or some stroke of ill fortune?

Francesco. Not any one of these. If I were engaged in single combat I should certainly hold my own. But as it is I am overwhelmed by an army."

Affliction after affliction has attacked him in rapid succession. He has finally been forced to take refuge in the stronghold of reason. There his ills lay siege to him and receiving constant reinforcements they set up their battering-rams and mine the walls. The turrets tremble and the scaling ladders are in place, and he sees the glittering swords and the threatening visages of his enemies appear-
ing above the wall. "Who would not be filled with terror and be-
wail his fate, even if the enemy withdrew for the moment? Liberty
is gone, the saddest of losses to the stout-hearted." Augustine finds
this figurative language a little vague and confused but thinks that
he understands Petrarch's case. He accuses him of mourning over
misfortunes long past. "No," Francesco exclaims; "on the con-
trary, none of my wounds are old enough to be forgotten, those that
afflict me are all recent, and lest perchance any one of them might
be healed by time, Fortune takes care to strike me often in the same
spot, so that the gaping wound may never cicatrise. Add to these
troubles a hate and contempt for the human estate itself and I can
not be otherwise than sad and dejected when oppressed by all these
woes. I by no means exaggerate this acedia, or aegritudo, or whatever
you choose to call it; my description exactly corresponds to the
facts."

We must not allow ourselves to be misled by Petrarch's use of
the word acedia, which is really quite inapplicable to his trouble.
The term is a common one among mediaeval writers and appears
in the catalogue of the seven mortal sins. It is sometimes inade-
quately rendered as "sloth," but it appears to have been loosely
applied to all varieties of depression and inertia, whether physical
or moral. In the case of monks it might take the form of a natural
reaction which followed the first enthusiasm of leaving the world
and beginning a religious life; even the most earnest, Saint Jerome
says, were sometimes plunged into melancholy by the dampness
of their cells, the loneliness and excessive fasts that made up their
lives. For such troubles, he dryly adds, the fomentations of Hippo-
crates would be more in place than our admonitions. A twelfth cen-
tury theologian says, "Acedia fears to undertake any thing great,
and soon wearies of what it once begins. Everything seems a
burden and an obstacle to it, and nothing is light or easy." Dante
found those guilty of acedia fixed in the slime of the sixth circle
of hell, and they said to him: "Sullen were we in the sweet air that
by the sun is gladdened, bearing within ourselves the sluggish
fume."

But this surely was not Petrarch's trouble. No one was ever
more prone to conceive new and noble enterprises, or more patient
and conscientious in their execution. He was as far removed from such intellectual apathy as from the vulgar physical laziness which the monkish chroniclers sometimes comprehend under the name *acedia*, and which took the form of a notable reluctance to leave a warm bed for the chilly morning service. We may then assume that Petrarch uses the word in the very general sense of depression, discouragement and spiritual misgiving, without any reference to its usage among theologians and monks.²

The Confessor pronounces the case to be one demanding radical treatment. "What," he asks, "seems to you the worst of all these troubles?"

*Francesco.* What I happen first to see, hear or think of.

*Augustine.* There is then almost nothing which gives you any satisfaction?

*Francesco.* Little or nothing.

*Augustine.* Would that you enjoyed at least the more salutary things of life. But what displeases you most? Tell me, I beg of you.

*Francesco.* I've already answered you.

*Augustine.* This *acedia* then, as I call it, affects everything; everything connected with yourself disgusts you?

*Francesco.* And not less everything that has to do with others.

Fortune has not been simply niggardly in her treatment of him but bitterly unjust, disdainful and cruel. He rejects any comfort which might come from considering the destitution that he sees among the still less fortunate. He claims that he is not unreasonable in his demands.

"I take it hard," he says, "that no one with whom I am acquainted among my contemporaries has been more modest in his claims than I and yet no one has found it more difficult to reach"

²The classical term *aegritudo* is scarcely more to the point than the mediaeval expression. It is often used by Cicero in one of his Tusculan Disputations, but it is not the bitterness of spirit with which Petrarch suffered. Seneca's little work upon "Peace of Mind" may, as Voigt has suggested, have influenced this portion of the Confessions. But while Petrarch resembled Seneca in more than one respect and was drawn to his writings by an obvious spiritual affinity, his personal experiences were far too genuine and spontaneous to require the example of another to bring them to light. No one can compare the Roman's treatise with the Confessions without quickly absolving Petrarch from any attempt consciously or unconsciously to imitate Seneca. Our conception of the nature of the poet's mental disquiet must be sought in the dialogue itself.
his end. I never have longed for the highest place. I call to witness Him who knows my thoughts as He knows all things else, that I have never supposed that the peace and tranquillity of mind which I believe are to be esteemed above all other things, were to be found in acme of fortune. Hence, as I have always abhorred a life filled with care and anxiety, a middle station has, in my sober judgment, ever seemed the best . . . and yet, to my sorrow, I have never been able to gratify so moderate a desire. I am always in doubt as to the future, always in suspense. I find no pleasure in the favors of fortune, for, as you see, up to the present I live dependent on others, which is the worst of all. God grant that it may come about, even in the extreme of old age, that one who has all his life been tossed about on a stormy sea, shall at least die in port."

Petrarch has often been criticised for his subserviency to the princes of his time, upon whom he seems to have depended for support so far as his revenue from several minor preferments in the church failed to satisfy his needs. He loved independence however, and the concessions that were necessary in order to maintain the favor of his patrons evidently galled him, as is shown by the passage just cited. Augustine comforts him with the assurance that it is given to very few indeed to be absolutely independent. Philosophical resignation can alone bring freedom and true wealth.

In answer to Augustine's question whether he suffered from bodily weakness, Francesco admits that his body, if a bit troublesome at times, is very tractable as compared with many of those he sees about him. He refuses with propriety to enumerate his physical disabilities. Elsewhere he says, "In my prime I was blessed with a quick and active body although not exceptionally strong, and while I do not lay claim to remarkable personal beauty, I was comely enough in my best days. I was possessed of a clear complexion, between light and dark, lively eyes, and for long years a keen vision, which, however, deserted me, contrary to my hopes, after I reached my sixtieth birthday, and forced me reluctantly to resort to glasses. Although I had previously enjoyed good health, old age brought with it the usual array of discomforts."

The life in a city was a constant source of irritation to the sensitive man of letters. "Who could adequately express my weariness of life," he exclaims, "and the daily loathing for this sad distracted

*Ep. ad Posteros.
world and for the low, degraded dregs of humanity, given over to all manner of uncleanness, that fill it! Who can find words to describe the sickening disgust aroused by the stinking alleys full of howling curs and filthy hogs, the din of the passing wheels which shake the very walls, the crooked ways blocked by carts, the confused mass of passers-by, the revolting crowd of beggars and cutpurses!" "Add to these distractions," Petrarch characteristically continues, "the conflicting aims, the bewildering variety of occupation, the confused clamor of voices and the bitter rivalry of interests among the people; these combine to wear out a spirit accustomed to happier surroundings, destroy the peace of generous minds and prevent attention to higher things."

His Confessor reminds him, however, that he has chosen of his own free will to live in town and may easily retire to the country if he wishes. On the other hand he may so accustom himself in time to the sounds of the city that, far from distracting him, they may become as grateful to his ears as the roar of a waterfall. "If," Augustine continues, "you could but succeed in quieting the inward tumult of your mind, the uproar about you might indeed strike your senses, but could not affect the soul."

He farther recommends the careful perusal of Seneca, and especially of Cicero's Tusculan Disputations:

"Francesco. You should be aware that I have already read these carefully.
Augustine. And have they not profited you?
Francesco. Nay, when one reads a great deal, no sooner is a book laid down than its effect ceases.
Augustine. The common fate of readers, which produces those accursed monstrosities, able to read indeed, but forming a disgraceful, unstable band who dispute much in the schools on the art of living but put few of their principles to the test."

Petrarch was urged to make notes, as was indeed his invariable habit, at those passages in his reading which were likely to prove most useful for moral support and stimulus. These notes served as hooks by which the memory might cling to thoughts that would otherwise escape it. With such reinforcement he might face with complacency all his ills, even the heaviness of heart that he describes.
Petrarch, it may be added, believed that he derived a double benefit from the classical authors, upon whom he depended for moral strength and solace. There were, of course, the numerous precepts to be found in the writings of Cicero, Horace and Seneca, which might be taken quite literally. In Virgil however, as is well known, he espied a deeper, allegorical, meaning below the surface. In the famous description of a storm in the first book of the Aeneid he sees in Aeolus, for example, reason controlling the unruly passions that are ready to carry away heaven and earth if their master relaxes his vigilance. Petrarch was however a scholar of too great insight not to suspect that Virgil perhaps had no such moral end in view. Augustine, in a passage that ought to be considered in any discussion of Petrarch’s view of allegory, says: “I commend these secrets of poetical narration in which I see you abound, whether Virgil himself thought of them when he wrote, or whether, far removed from such considerations, he simply intended in these verses to describe a storm at sea and nothing more.”

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(To be continued)