

MEDICAL REPORTS IN S. AUGUSTINE'S WRITINGS

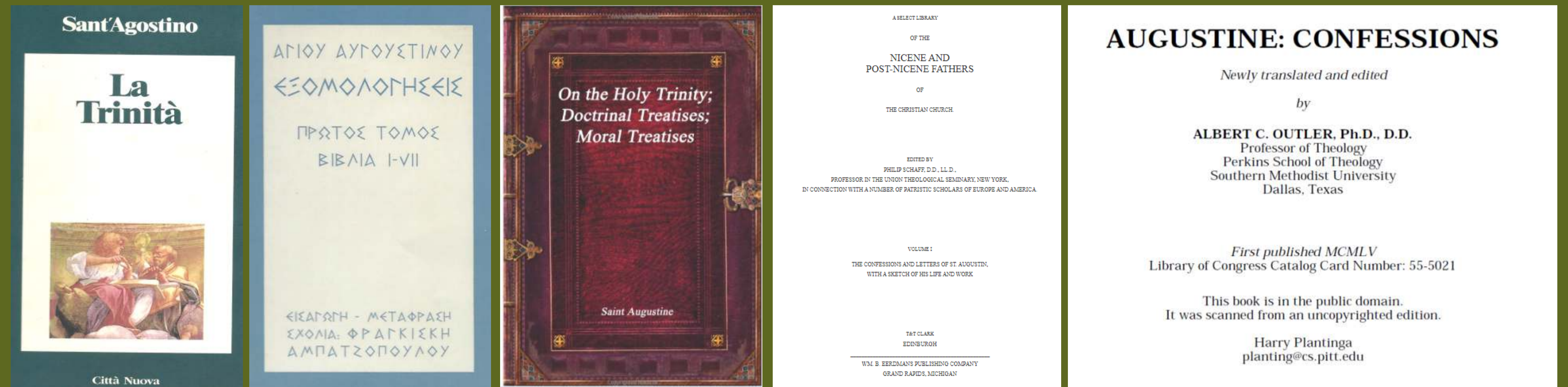
Drizis Theodore J. MD, PhD
Kalamata – Greece

AIM

The aim of this work is to present S. Augustine's (350 – 430 CE.) medical reports from his writings.

MATERIAL

The material are of his writings
"Confessions" and "On the Trinity".



METHOD

The method is the textual criticism in order to validate the research as can be determined from the relative accessible to us bibliography.

RESULTS

1. In his writing "Confessions" S. Augustine mentions the manner of acquisition of an infant's speaking, by himself and not by teaching of his parents, calling it a natural language, using initially cries, broken accents, various motions and then practicing the memory at names of everything, by calling and pointing out them through other persons (Confessions, I.8).

all I wished to say to whomever I wished by means of whimperings and grunts and various gestures of my limbs (which I used to reinforce my demands). I myself repeated the sounds already stored in my memory by the mind which thou, O my God, hadst given me. When they called some thing by name and pointed it out while they spoke, I saw it and realized that the thing they wished to indicate was called by the name they then uttered. And what they meant was made plain by the gestures of their bodies, by a kind of natural language, common to all nations, which expresses itself through changes of countenance, glances of the eye, gestures and intonations which indicate a disposition and attitude--either to seek or to possess, to reject or to avoid. So it was that by frequently hearing words, in different phrases, I gradually identified the objects which the words stood for and, having formed my mouth to repeat these signs, I was thereby able to express my will. Thus I

2. In other part of this work S. Augustine mentions for a wise man, in his homeland, who understanding Hippocrates, he had taken to medicine and became very skilful and renowned therein it (Confessions, IV.3),

5. There was at that time a wise man, very skillful and quite famous in medicine.⁹¹ He was proconsul then, and with his own hand he placed on my distempered head the crown I had won in a rhetorical contest. He did not do this as a physician, however; and for this distemper "only thou canst heal who resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble."⁹² But didst thou fail me in that old man, or forbear from healing my soul? Actually when I became better acquainted with him, I

whom in another chapter assigns the Vindicianus, designating as an acute old man (Confessions VII.6.8).

8. By now I had also repudiated the lying divinations and impious absurdities of the astrologers. Let thy mercies, out of the depth of my soul, confess this to thee also, O my God. For thou, thou only (for who else is it who calls us back from the death of all errors except the Life which does not know how to die and the Wisdom which gives light to minds that need it, although it itself has no need of light--by which the whole universe is governed, even to the fluttering leaves of the trees?)--thou alone providedst also for my obstinacy with which I struggled against Vindicianus, a sagacious old man, and Nebriidius, that remarkably talented young man. The former declared vehemently and the latter frequently--though with some reservation--that no art existed by which we foresee future things. But men's surmises have oftentimes the help of chance, and out of many things which they foretold some came to pass unawares to the predictors, who lighted on the truth by making so many guesses.

3. Besides, in the same writing S. Augustine mentions the critical phase of a disease saying "...pass from sickness unto health, after the access, as it were, of a sharper fit, which physicians call "the crisis"..." (Confessions, VI.1).

man as an angel of God, since she knew that it was by him that I had been brought thus far to that wavering state of agitation I was now in, through which she was fully persuaded I should pass from sickness to health, even though it would be after a still sharper convulsion which physicians call "the crisis."

4. Also, S. Augustine brings an opinion of the people about the physicians, mentioning "...one who has tried a bad physician, fears to trust himself with a good one..." (Confessions, VI.4.6).

If I could have believed, I might have been cured, and, with the sight of my soul cleared up, it might in some way have been directed toward thy truth, which always abides and fails in nothing. But, just as it happens that a man who has tried a bad physician fears to trust himself with a good one, so it was with the health of my soul, which could not be healed except by believing. But lest it should believe falsehoods, it refused to be cured, resisting thy hand, who hast prepared for us the medicines of faith and applied them to the maladies of the whole world, and endowed them with such great efficacy.

5. In S. Augustine's writing, "On the Holy Trinity", the author mentions the theory of the humors, by the physicians of that era, in order to present the cause of a disease (On the Holy Trinity, III.3).

Let us take, then, the case of a wise man, such that his rational soul is already partaker of the unchangeable and eternal truth, so that he consults it about all his actions, nor does anything at all, which he does not by it know ought to be done, in order that by being subject to it and obeying it he may do rightly. Suppose now that this man, upon counsel with the highest reason of the divine righteousness, which he hears with the ear of his heart in secret, and by its bidding, should weary his body by toil in some office of mercy, and should contract an illness; and upon consulting the physicians, were to be told by one that the cause of the disease was overmuch dryness of the body, but by another that it was overmuch moisture; one of the two no doubt would allege the true cause and the other would err, but both would pronounce concerning proximate causes only, that is, corporeal ones. But if the cause of that dryness were to be inquired into, and found to be the self-imposed toil, then we should have come to a yet higher cause, which proceeds from the soul so as to affect the body which the soul governs. Yet neither would this be the first cause, for that doubtless was a higher cause still, and lay in the unchangeable wisdom itself, by serving which in love, and by obeying its ineffable commands, the soul of the wise man had undertaken that self-imposed toil; and so nothing else but the will of God would be found most truly to be the first cause of that illness. But suppose now in that office of pious toil this wise man had employed the help of others to co-operate in the good work, who did not

6. In other part of this writing, he presents his famous theory of the "seminal reasons" which contains primitive elements of the Embryology (On the Holy Trinity III.8,13).

created them. But, in truth, some hidden seeds of all things that are born corporeally and visibly, are concealed in the corporeal elements of this world. For those seeds that are visible now to our eyes from fruits and living things, are quite distinct from the hidden seeds of those former seeds; from which, at the bidding of the Creator, the water produced the first swimming creatures and fowl, and the earth the first buds after their kind, and the first living creatures after their kind. For neither at that time were those seeds so drawn forth into products of their several kinds, as that the power of production was exhausted in those products; but oftentimes, suitable combinations of circumstances are wanting, whereby they may be enabled to burst forth and complete their species. For, consider, the very least shoot is a seed; for, if fitly consigned to the earth, it produces a tree. But of this shoot there is a yet more subtle seed in some grain of the same species, and this is visible even to us. But of this grain also there is further still a seed, which, although we are unable to see it with our eyes, yet we can conjecture its existence from our reason;

7. Also, S. Augustine refers to medical prognosis saying: "...things future are conjectured by experience of things past (as physicians also have committed many things to writing in the way of foresight, which they themselves have noted by experience; ..." (On the Holy Trinity IV. 17,22).

writings. But it makes the greatest possible difference, whether things future are conjectured by experience of things past (as physicians also have committed many things to writing in the way of foresight, which they themselves have noted by experience; or as again husbandmen, or sailors, too, foretell many things; for if such predictions are made a long

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, taking everything into consideration, I would like to say, S. Augustine presents medical knowledge of his era (4th – 5th c. CE), useful for the History of Medicine.