

BISHOP OF AUGUSTINE, ALFRED,
KING ENGLAND

**KING ALFRED'S
OLD ENGLISH
VERSION OF ST.
AUGUSTINE'S
SOLILOQUIES**

Saint Augustine
Alfred, King of England
King Alfred's Old English Version
of St. Augustine's Soliloquies

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Содержание

PREFACE	6
KING ALFRED'S OLD ENGLISH VERSION OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S SOLILOQUIES	7
KING ALFRED'S PREFACE	8
BOOK I	10
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	22

**King Alfred's Old English
Version of St. Augustine's
Soliloquies / Turned
into Modern English**

TO

MY DEAR BROTHER

WARREN PENN HARGROVE

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE

FEBRUARY 8, 1903

AGED 25

PREFACE

Since the publication of my *King Alfred's Old English Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies*, which appeared in 1902, I have been at work on this translation. With the faith that the unique importance of the work justifies its being given this form for the benefit of the general reader, and with the encouragement from scholars that my rendering will be received in the kindly spirit which characterized the reception of my former edition, I now venture this publication.

For those who care to use the two editions together it will be seen (1) that the Alfredian additions to the Latin are set in italics; and (2) that the numbers at the top of each page refer to the page and line of the corresponding text of the Old English.

I must add that Professor Albert S. Cook has been my counsellor and critic throughout the work.

Henry Lee Hargrove.

Baylor University,
July 6, 1904.

**KING ALFRED'S OLD
ENGLISH VERSION OF ST.
AUGUSTINE'S SOLILOQUIES**

TURNED INTO MODERN ENGLISH

KING ALFRED'S PREFACE

I then gathered for myself staves, and stud-shafts, and cross-beams, and helves for each of the tools that I could work with, and bow-timbers and bolt-timbers for every work that I could perform – as many as I could carry of the comeliest trees. Nor came I home with a burden, for it pleased me not to bring all the wood home, even if I could bear it. In each tree I saw something that I needed at home; therefore I exhort every one who is able, and has many wains, to direct his steps to the self-same wood where I cut the stud-shafts. Let him there obtain more for himself, and load his wains with fair twigs, so that he may wind many a neat wall, and erect many a rare house, and build a fair enclosure, and therein dwell in joy and comfort both winter and summer, in such manner as I have not yet done. But He who taught me, and to whom the wood was pleasing, hath power to make me dwell more comfortably both in this transitory cottage by the road while I am on this world-pilgrimage, and also in the everlasting home which He hath promised us through Saint Augustine and Saint Gregory and Saint Jerome, and through many other holy Fathers; as I believe also[1.21 – 2.23] for the merits of all those He will both make this way more convenient than it hitherto was, and especially will enlighten the eyes of my mind so that I may search out the right way to the eternal home, and to everlasting glory, and to eternal rest, which is promised

us through those holy Fathers. So may it be.

It is no wonder that one should labor in timber-work, both in the gathering and also in the building; but every man desireth that, after he hath built a cottage on his lord's lease and by his help, he may sometimes rest himself therein, and go hunting, fowling, and fishing; and use it in every manner according to the lease, both on sea and land, until such time as he shall gain the fee simple of the eternal heritage through his lord's mercy. So may the rich Giver do, who ruleth both these temporary cottages and the homes everlasting. May He, who created both and ruleth both, grant me to be fit for each – both here to be useful and thither to attain.

Augustine, bishop of Carthage, made two books about his own mind. These books are called *Soliloquies*, that is, concerning the meditation and doubts of his mind – how his Reason answered his mind when the mind doubted about anything, or wished to know anything that it could not before clearly understand.

BOOK I

Then said he, his mind often went fearing and searching out various and rare things, and most of all about himself —*what¹ he was; whether his mind and his soul were mortal and perishable, or ever-living and eternal*; and again, about his God, what He was, and of what nature He was; and what good it were best for him to do, and what evil best to forsake. Then answered me something, I know not what, whether myself or another thing; nor know I whether it was within me or without; *but this one thing I most truly know, that it was my Reason*; and it said to me:

Reason. If thou have any good steward that can well hold that which thou gettest and committest unto him, show him to me; *but if thou have none so prudent, search till thou find him; for thou canst not both always keep watch and ward over that which thou hast gained, and also get more.*

Augustine. To what shall I commit what more I get, if not to my memory?

R. Is thy memory powerful enough to hold all things that thou thinkest out and bidst it to hold?

A. Nay, nay; *neither mine nor any man's* is so strong that it can hold everything that is committed to it.

R. Then commit it to words and write it down. Howbeit methinks thou art too feeble to write it all; *and though thou wert*

¹ Passages in italics were added by Alfred to the original Latin.

entirely sound, thou wouldst need to have a place retired and void of everything else, and a few wise and skilful men with thee who would hinder thee in no wise, but give aid to thy ability.

A. I have none of these, *neither the leisure, nor the help of other men, nor a place retired enough to suit me for such work,* therefore I know not what I shall do.

R. I know then nothing better than that thou shouldst pray. Make known thy wish to God, *Saviour of mind and body*, that thou mayst through such salvation obtain what thou wishest. *And when thou hast prayed*, write the prayer, *lest thou forget it*, that thou be the fitter for thy task. And pray sincerely in few words and with full understanding.

A. *I will do even as thou teachest me, saying thus:*

O Lord, Thou who art the Creator of all things, grant me first to know how to pray to Thee aright and acceptably, and that I may merit to be worthy that Thou *for thy mercy* wilt redeem and deliver me. On Thee I call, O Lord, who madest all that could not else have sprung into being, nor without Thee could even abide. I call to Thee, O Lord, who leavest none of thy creatures to become naught. To Him I call who hath made all creatures beautiful without any original substance. To Thee I call, who never wroughtest any evil, but rather every good work. To Him I call who teacheth to a few wise men that evil is naught.

O Lord, thou hast wrought all things perfect, and nothing imperfect; to Thee is no creature untoward; though any thing will, it can not be so, *for Thou hast shapen them all orderly, and*

peaceable, and so harmonious that none of them can altogether destroy another, but the ugly ever adorneth the beautiful. To Thee I call, whom everything loveth that can love, both those which know what they love, and those which know not what they love. Thou who hast shapen all creatures very good, without any evil – Thou who wilt not altogether *show thyself* openly to any but to them that are pure *in heart*, I call to Thee, O Lord, because Thou art the Father of truth and wisdom, of the true and highest life, and of the highest blessedness, and of the highest good, and of the highest brightness, and of the intelligible light; *Thou who art the Father of the Son who hath awakened us, and still arouseth us, from the sleep of our sins,* and warneth us to come to Thee.

To Thee I pray, O Lord, who art the highest truth, and through whom is true all that is true. I pray to Thee, O Lord, who art the true life, and through whom all things live that do live. Thou art the highest blessedness, and through Thee are blessed all that are blessed. Thou art the highest good² ... is and beautiful. Thou art the intelligible light through which man knoweth. I pray to Thee, O Lord, who wieldest all the world; whom we can not know bodily, *neither by eyes, nor by smell, nor by ears, nor by taste, nor by touch*; although such laws as we have, and such virtues as we have, we take *all those that are good* from thy realm, *and from thy realm we draw an example of all the good we perform.* For every one falleth who fleeth from Thee, and every one riseth who turneth to Thee, and every one standeth who abideth in Thee; he

² An omission in the MS.

dieth who wholly forsaketh Thee, he is quickened who turneth to Thee, and he liveth indeed who abideth in Thee. No one that is wise forsaketh Thee, no one seeketh Thee except he be wise, and no one altogether findeth Thee but the pure in heart. That is, he perisheth who forsaketh Thee. *He who loveth Thee seeketh Thee; he who followeth after Thee hath Thee. Thy truths which Thou hast given us awaken us from the sleep of our sins.* Our hope lifteth us to Thee. Our love, which Thou hast given us, bindeth us to Thee. Through Thee we overcome our foes, both *spiritual and carnal*. Thou who forgivest, *draw nigh to me and have mercy upon me*, because Thou hast bestowed upon us great gifts, to wit, that we shall never entirely perish and thus come to naught.

O Lord, who warnest us to watch, *Thou hast given us reason*, wherewith to find out and distinguish good and evil, and to flee the evil. Thou hast given us patience not to despair in any toil nor in any misfortune. Nor is this a wonder, *because Thou dost verily rule well, and makest us to serve Thee well*. Thou hast taught us to understand that *worldly wealth*, which we looked upon as our own, is alien to us, and transitory; and Thou hast also taught us to consider as our own what we looked upon as alien to us, *to*[7.21 – 9.11] *wit, the kingdom of heaven, which we once despised. Thou who hast taught us to do no unlawful thing, and hast also taught us not to mourn even though our riches should wane. Thou who hast taught us to subject our body to our mind.*

Thou who didst overcome death when Thou thyself didst arise, *and also wilt make all men arise. Thou who makest us all worthy*

of Thee, and cleansest us from all our sins, and justifiest us, and hearest our prayers. Thou who madest us of thy household, and who teachest us all righteousness, and always teachest us the good, and always dost us good, and leavest us not to serve an unrighteous lord, as we did aforetime. Thou callest us back to our way, and ledest us to the door, and openest to us, and givest us the bread of eternal life and the drink of life's well. Thou who threatenest men for their sins, and who teachest them to judge righteous judgments, and to do righteousness. Thou strengthenedst us, and yet dost strengthen us, in our belief, in order that unbelievers may not harm us. Thou hast given us, and yet givest us, understanding, that we may overcome the error of those [who teach that]³ men's souls have, after this world, no reward for their deserts, either of good or of evil, whichever they do here. Thou who hast loosed us from the thralldom of other creatures, Thou always preparest eternal life for us, and always preparest us for eternal life.

Come now to my aid, Thou who art the only eternal and true Deity —*Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost*— without any variableness or turning, without any need or impotence, and without death. Thou who always dwellest in the highest brightness and in the highest steadfastness, in the highest unanimity and the highest sufficiency; for to Thee there is no want of good, but Thou always dwellest thus full of every good unto eternity. *Thou art Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost.*

Thee[9.12 – 10.23] serve all the creatures that Thou didst

³ Supplied by translator to complete the sense.

create; to Thee is every good soul subject; at thy command the heavens turn and all stars hold their courses; at thy behest the sun bringeth the bright day, and the moon light by night; *after the image of these* Thou dost govern and wield all this world, so that all creatures change even as day and night. Thou rulest and fixest the year by the alternations of the four seasons – to wit, spring, and summer, autumn, and winter; each of which alternateth and varieth with the other, so that each of them is again exactly what and where it formerly was; and so all stars change and vary in the same manner —*likewise the sea and the rivers; in the same manner all creatures suffer change. Howbeit, some vary in another manner, so that the same come not again where they formerly were, nor become just what they were; but others come in their stead, as leaves on trees; and apples, grass, plants, and trees grow old and sere, and others come, wax green, and grow, and ripen; wherefore they again begin to wither. And likewise all beasts and fowls, in such manner that it is now too long to reckon them all. Yea, even men's bodies wax old, just as other creatures do; but just as they formerly lived more worthily than trees or other animals, so shall they arise more worthily on Doomsday, so that never afterward shall their bodies become naught nor wax old; and though the body had decayed, yet the soul was ever-living since first it was created.*

And all the creatures, about whom we say that they seem to us inharmonious and unsteadfast, have yet somewhat of steadiness, because they are bridled with the bridle of God's commandments.

God gave freedom to men's souls, that they might do either good or evil, whichever they would; and promised good for a reward to them that do good, and evil to them that do evil.

With God is prepared *the well-spring of every good*, and thence is prepared and granted to us every good of those which we have; He shieldeth us against every evil. Nothing is above Him, but all things are under Him, or with Him, or in[11.1 – 12.17] Him. He created man in His own image, and every man who knoweth himself knoweth that all this is true. To that God I cry, and say:

Hear me, hear me, O Lord, for Thou art my God and my Lord, my Father, and my *Creator*, and my *Governor*, and my hope, and my riches, and my honor, and my house, and my inheritance, and my salvation, and my life. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, *Thy servant*. Few understand Thee.

Thee alone I love truly above all other things; Thee I seek, *Thee I follow*, Thee I am ready to serve; under Thy rule I wish to dwell, *for Thou alone reignest*. I pray Thee to command me *what Thou wilt*; but heal and open mine eyes that I may see Thy *wonders*, and drive from me folly and *pride*, and give me wisdom that I may understand Thee, and teach me whither I should look to behold Thee; then shall I, methinks, do gladly that which Thou commandest me.

I beseech Thee, Thou merciful, *benevolent, and beneficent Lord*, to receive me, Thy fugitive; *since once I was formerly Thine, and then fled from Thee to the devil, and fulfilled his will*,

enduring much misery in his service. But if to Thee it seemeth as it doth to me, long enough have I felt the pains which I have now suffered, and longer have I served Thy foes than I should those whom Thou hast [under Thy feet].⁴ Long enough have I been in the reproach and shame which they brought on me; but do Thou receive me now, Thine own servant, for I am fleeing from them. Behold, did they not receive me even before I had fled from Thee to them? Never again restore me to them, now that I have sought Thee, but open to me Thy door, and teach me how to come. I have naught to bring Thee but good will, for I myself have nothing else, nor know I aught better than to love the heavenly and the spiritual above the earthly; and this I do, good Father, since I know naught better than that. But I know not how I shall now come to Thee except Thou teach me; teach it, then, to me, and help[12.17 – 14.5] me. If it is by faith that they find Thee who do find Thee, give me that faith. If by any other power they find Thee who do find Thee, give me that power. If by wisdom they find Thee who find Thee, then give me wisdom. Augment in me the hope of eternal life, and increase Thy love in me.

O, how wonderful is Thy goodness, for it is unlike all other good things. I desire to come to Thee; and all that I have need of on the way I desire from Thee, and chiefly that without which I can not come to Thee. If Thou forsake me, I perish; yet I know that Thou wilt not forsake me *unless I forsake Thee; nor will I forsake Thee*, for Thou art the highest good. There is none who

⁴ Supplied from the Latin.

rightly seeketh Thee that doth not find Thee. He alone seeketh Thee aright whom Thou teachest aright to seek Thee, and how he should seek Thee. O, good Father, free me entirely from the error in which I have hitherto wandered, and yet wander; and teach me the way in which no foe can encounter me before I come to Thee. If I love naught above Thee, I beseech Thee that I may find Thee; and if I desire any thing beyond measure and wrongly, deliver me from it. Make me worthy to behold Thee.

Thou most ancient and most wise Father, I commit to Thee my body, that Thou mayest keep it whole. Yet I know not what I ask – whether I am asking a thing useful or useless to me or *to the friends whom I love and who love me*; nor do I know how long Thou wilt keep it whole. Therefore I commit and commend it to Thee, *for Thou knowest better than I what I need*. Wherefore I pray Thee alway to teach me, while I am in this body and this world, and help me alway to *utter the counsel which is pleasing to Thee, and which is best and most righteous for me in this life*. But above all other things I earnestly pray Thee to convert me wholly to Thee, and let nothing overcome me on this way, to prevent me from coming to Thee; and cleanse Thou me while I am in this world, and make me humble. Give me loftiness of soul. Make me reasonable and [14.5 – 15.15] just and prudent and perfect; and, O God, make me a lover of Thy wisdom and a perceiver of it, and make me worthy to dwell in Thy blessed kingdom. Amen!

Now I have done as thou didst teach me; now I have prayed even as thou badest me. *Then answered me my Reason and said:*

R. *I see that thou hast prayed;* but say now what thou hast merited, or what thou wouldst have.

A. I would understand all, and know what I just now said.

R. Sum up, then, from *all that thou hast just spoken about, that which seemeth to thee that thou most needest and most requirest to know;* then clothe it in few words, and tell it to me.

A. *I will tell it to thee at once:* I would understand God and know mine own soul.

R. Wouldst thou know any thing more?

A. *Many things I fain would know that I know not.* Howbeit there is nothing I wish more to know than this.

R. Then inquire after and seek what thou askest, and tell me first what thou knowest with most certainty, and then say to me: '*Sufficiently known will God and my soul be to me, if they shall be as well known to me as this thing.*'

A. I can name nothing so well known to me as I would that God were.

R. What, then, can we do, if thou knowest not the measure? Thou oughtest to know when it seemed to thee enough, and if thou ever come to that limit, then thou shouldst go no further, but shouldst seek something else, lest thou shouldst desire any thing beyond measure.

A. I know what thou wishest; I should illustrate to thee by some example; but I can not, for I know naught like unto God, so that I can say to thee: '*I should like to know God as well as I know this thing.*'

R. [15.16 – 17.8] *I am astonished at thee*, why thou sayest that thou knowest nothing like unto God, and yet dost not know what He is.

A. If I knew aught like unto Him, I would love that thing exceedingly. Since I know naught like unto Him, I love nothing but Him and mine own soul; howbeit, I know not what either of them is.

R. *Thou sayest that thou lovest naught but God and thy soul; if that is true*, lovest thou then no other friend?

A. Why, if I love a soul, do I not love my friend? Hath not he a soul?

R. *If thou lovest thy friend because he hath a soul, why, then, lovest thou not every thing that hath a soul?* Why dost thou not love mice and fleas?

A. I love them not, because they are carnal animals, not men.

R. Have not thy friends likewise *bodies*, even as beasts have?

A. Yet it is not on this account I love them, but because they are men, and have reason in their minds – that quality I love even in *slaves*. Those that I hate, I hate because they turn the good of reason into evil, *since I am allowed both to love the good and to hate the evil*. Therefore I love all my friends, some less, some more; and him whom I love more than another, I love him so much more than the other as I perceive that he hath a better will than the other, and the desire to make his reason more serviceable.

R. Thou understandest it well enough, and rightly enough. But

if any one should now say to thee that he could teach thee how thou mightest know God as well as thou knowest Alypius thy servant, would that seem enough to thee, or how much wouldst thou thank him for it?

A. I should thank him, but nevertheless I would not answer 'enough.'

R. Why?

A. Alypius is better known to me than God, yet even him I know not so well as I would.

R. [17.9 – 19.2] Look to it now that thy desire be not beyond measure, now that thou *comparest them together*. *Wouldst thou know God just as thou dost Alypius?*

A. Nay; nor do I make them the more alike, albeit I name them together. But I say that one often knoweth more about higher than about lowlier things. I know now about the *moon, how it will move to-morrow and other nights*; but, I know not what I shall eat to-morrow, which is a baser matter.

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