

to be without the sweetness of trifles! And it was now a joy to put away what I formerly feared to lose. For thou didst cast them away from me, O true and highest Sweetness. Thou didst cast them away, and in their place thou didst enter in thyself—sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, but more veiled than all mystery; more exalted than all honor, though not to them that are exalted in their own eyes. Now was my soul free from the gnawing cares of seeking and getting, of wallowing in the mire and scratching the itch of lust. And I prattled like a child to thee, O Lord my God—my light, my riches, and my salvation.

BOOK NINE

The end of the autobiography. Augustine tells of his resigning from his professorship and of the days at Cassiciacum in preparation for baptism. He is baptized together with Adeodatus and Alypius. Shortly thereafter, they start back for Africa. Augustine recalls the ecstasy he and his mother shared in Ostia and then reports her death and burial and his grief. The book closes with a moving prayer for the souls of Monica, Patricius, and all his fellow citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.

CHAPTER I

1. "O Lord, I am thy servant; I am thy servant and the son of thy handmaid. Thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving."¹ Let my heart and my tongue praise thee, and let all my bones say, "Lord, who is like unto thee?" Let them say so, and answer thou me and say unto my soul, "I am your salvation."

Who am I, and what is my nature? What evil is there not in me and my deeds; or if not in my deeds, my words; or if not in my words, my will? But thou, O Lord, art good and merciful, and thy right hand didst reach into the depth of my death and didst empty out the abyss of corruption from the bottom of my heart. And this was the result: now I did not will to do what I willed, and began to will to do what thou didst will.

But where was my free will during all those years and from what deep and secret retreat was it called forth in a single moment, whereby I gave my neck to thy "easy yoke" and my shoulders to thy "light burden," O Christ Jesus, "my Strength and my Redeemer"? How sweet did it suddenly become to me

¹ Ps. 116:16, 17.

CHAPTER II

2. And it seemed right to me, in thy sight, not to snatch my tongue's service abruptly out of the speech market, but to withdraw quietly, so that the young men who were not concerned about thy law or thy peace, but with mendacious follies and forensic strifes, might no longer purchase from my mouth weapons for their frenzy. Fortunately, there were only a few days before the "vintage vacation"²; and I determined to endure them, so that I might resign in due form and, now bought by thee, return for sale no more.

My plan was known to thee, but, save for my own friends, it was not known to other men. For we had agreed that it should not be made public; although, in our ascent from the "valley of tears" and our singing of "the song of degrees," thou hadst given us sharp arrows and hot burning coals to stop that deceitful tongue which opposes under the guise of good counsel, and devours what it loves as though it were food.

3. Thou hadst pierced our heart with thy love, and we carried thy words, as it were, thrust through our vitals. The examples of thy servants whom thou hadst changed from black to shining white, and from death to life, crowded into the bosom of our thoughts and burned and consumed our sluggish temper, that we might not topple back into the abyss. And they fired us exceedingly, so that every breath of the deceitful tongue of our detractors might fan the flame and not blow it out.

Though this vow and purpose of ours should find those who would loudly praise it—for the sake of thy name, which thou hast sanctified throughout the earth—it nevertheless looked like a self-vaunting not to wait until the vacation time now so near.

² An imperial holiday season, from late August to the middle of October.

For if I had left such a public office ahead of time, and had made the break in the eye of the general public, all who took notice of this act of mine and observed how near was the vintage time that I wished to anticipate would have talked about me a great deal, as if I were trying to appear a great person. And what purpose would it serve that people should consider and dispute about my conversion so that my good should be evil spoken of?

4. Furthermore, this same summer my lungs had begun to be weak from too much literary labor. Breathing was difficult; the pains in my chest showed that the lungs were affected and were soon fatigued by too loud or prolonged speaking. This had at first been a trial to me, for it would have compelled me almost of necessity to lay down that burden of teaching; or, if I was to be cured and become strong again, at least to take a leave for a while. But as soon as the full desire to be still that I might know that thou art the Lord³ arose and was confirmed in me, thou knowest, my God, that I began to rejoice that I had this excuse ready—and not a feigned one, either—which might somewhat temper the displeasure of those who for their sons' freedom wished me never to have any freedom of my own.

Full of joy, then, I bore it until my time ran out—it was perhaps some twenty days—yet it was some strain to go through with it, for the greediness which helped to support the drudgery had gone, and I would have been overwhelmed had not its place been taken by patience. Some of thy servants, my brethren, may say that I sinned in this, since having once fully and from my heart enlisted in thy service, I permitted myself to sit a single hour in the chair of falsehood. I will not dispute it. But hast thou not, O most merciful Lord, pardoned and forgiven this sin in the holy water⁴ also, along with all the others, horrible and deadly as they were?

CHAPTER III

5. Verecundus was severely disturbed by this new happiness of mine, since he was still firmly held by his bonds and saw that he would lose my companionship. For he was not yet a Christian, though his wife was; and, indeed, he was more firmly enchained by her than by anything else, and held back from that journey on which we had set out. Furthermore, he declared he did not wish to be a Christian on any terms except those that were impossible. However, he invited us most courtcously to make use

³ Cf. Ps. 46:10.

⁴ His subsequent baptism; see below, Ch. VI.

of his country house so long as we would stay there. O Lord, thou wilt recompense him for this "in the resurrection of the just,"⁵ seeing that thou hast already given him "the lot of the righteous."⁶ For while we were absent at Rome, he was overtaken with bodily sickness, and during it he was made a Christian and departed this life as one of the faithful. Thus thou hadst mercy on him, and not on him only, but on us as well; lest, remembering the exceeding kindness of our friend to us and not able to count him in thy flock, we should be tortured with intolerable grief. Thanks be unto thee, our God; we are thine. Thy exhortations, consolations, and faithful promises assure us that thou wilt repay Verecundus for that country house at Cassiciacum—where we found rest in thee from the fever of the world—with the perpetual freshness of thy paradise in which thou hast forgiven him his earthly sins, in that mountain flowing with milk, that fruitful mountain—thy own.

6. Thus Verecundus was full of grief; but Nebridius was joyous. For he was not yet a Christian, and had fallen into the pit of deadly error, believing that the flesh of thy Son, the Truth, was a phantom.⁷ Yet he had come up out of that pit and now held the same belief that we did. And though he was not as yet initiated in any of the sacraments of thy Church, he was a most earnest inquirer after truth. Not long after our conversion and regeneration by thy baptism, he also became a faithful member of the Catholic Church, serving thee in perfect chastity and continence among his own people in Africa, and bringing his whole household with him to Christianity. Then thou didst release him from the flesh, and now he lives in Abraham's bosom. Whatever is signified by that term "bosom," there lives my Nebridius, my sweet friend, thy son by adoption, O Lord, and not a freedman any longer. There he lives; for what other place could there be for such a soul? There he lives in that abode about which he used to ask me so many questions—poor ignorant one that I was. Now he does not put his ear up to my mouth, but his spiritual mouth to thy fountain, and drinks wisdom as he desires and as he is able—happy without end. But I do not believe that he is so incbricated by that draught as to forget me; since thou, O Lord, who art the draught, art mindful of us.

Thus, then, we were comforting the unhappy Verecundus—

⁵ Luke 14:14.

⁶ Ps. 125:3.

⁷ The heresy of Docetism, one of the earliest and most persistent of all Christological errors.

rejoiced in thy mercy, O Father. And all these feelings showed forth in my eyes and voice when thy good Spirit turned to us and said, "O sons of men, how long will you be slow of heart, how long will you love vanity, and seek after falsehood?" For I had loved vanity and sought after falsehood. And thou, O Lord, had already magnified thy Holy One, raising him from the dead and setting him at thy right hand, that thence he should send forth from on high his promised "Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth." Already he had sent him, and I knew it not. He had sent him because he was now magnified, rising from the dead and ascending into heaven. For till then "the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."¹⁷ And the prophet cried out: "How long will you be slow of heart? How long will you love vanity, and seek after falsehood? Know this, that the Lord hath magnified his Holy One." He cries, "How long?" He cries, "Know this," and I—so long "loving vanity, and seeking after falsehood"—heard and trembled, because these words were spoken to such a one as I remembered that I myself had been. For in those phantoms which I once held for truth there was vanity and falsehood. And I spoke many things loudly and earnestly—in the contrition of my memory—which I wish they had heard, who still "love vanity and seek after falsehood." Perhaps they would have been troubled, and have vomited up their error, and thou wouldst have heard them when they cried to thee; for by a real death in the flesh He died for us who now maketh intercession for us with thee.

10. I read on further, "Be angry, and sin not." And how deeply was I touched, O my God; for I had now learned to be angry with myself for the things past, so that in the future I might not sin. Yes, to be angry with good cause, for it was not another nature out of the race of darkness that had sinned for me—as they affirm who are not angry with themselves, and who store up for themselves dire wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of thy righteous judgment. Nor were the good things I saw now outside me, nor were they to be seen with the eyes of flesh in the light of the earthly sun. For they that have their joys from without sink easily into emptiness and are spilled out on those things that are visible and temporal, and in their starving thoughts they lick their very shadows. If only they would grow weary with their hunger and would say, "Who will show us any good?" And we would answer, and they would hear, "O Lord, the light of thy countenance shines bright upon

¹⁷ John 7:39.

us." For we are not that Light that enlightens every man, but we are enlightened by thee, so that we who were formerly in darkness may now be alight in thee. If only they could behold the inner Light Eternal which, now that I had tasted it, I gnashed my teeth because I could not show it to them unless they brought me their heart in their eyes—their roving eyes—and said, "Who will show us any good?" But even there, in the inner chamber of my soul—where I was angry with myself; where I was inwardly pricked, where I had offered my sacrifice, slaying my old man, and hoping in thee with the new resolve of a new life with my trust laid in thee—even there thou hadst begun to grow sweet to me and to "put gladness in my heart." And thus as I read all this, I cried aloud and felt its inward meaning. Nor did I wish to be increased in worldly goods which are wasted by time, for now I possessed, in thy eternal simplicity, other corn and wine and oil.

11. And with a loud cry from my heart, I read the following verse: "Oh, in peace! Oh, in the Selfsame!"¹⁸ See how he says it: "I will lay me down and take my rest."¹⁹ For who shall withstand us when the truth of this saying that is written is made manifest: "Death is swallowed up in victory"²⁰? For surely thou, who dost not change, art the Selfsame, and in thee is rest and oblivion to all distress. There is none other beside thee, nor are we to toil for those many things which are not thee, for only thou, O Lord, makest me to dwell in hope."

These things I read and was enkindled—but still I could not discover what to do with those deaf and dead Manicheans to whom I myself had belonged; for I had been a bitter and blind reviler against these writings, honeyed with the honey of heaven and luminous with thy light. And I was sorely grieved at these enemies of this Scripture.

12. When shall I call to mind all that happened during those holidays? I have not forgotten them; nor will I be silent about the severity of thy scourge, and the amazing quickness of thy mercy. During that time thou didst torture me with a toothache; and when it had become so acute that I was not able to speak, it came into my heart to urge all my friends who were present to pray for me to thee, the God of all health. And I wrote it down on the tablet and gave it to them to read. Presently, as we bowed our knees in supplication, the pain was gone. But what pain? How did it go? I confess that I was terrified, O Lord

¹⁸ *Idipsum*—the oneness and immutability of God.

¹⁹ Cf. v. 9.

²⁰ I Cor. 15:54.

my God, because from my earliest years I had never experienced such pain. And thy purposes were profoundly impressed upon me; and rejoicing in faith, I praised thy name. But that faith allowed me no rest in respect of my past sins, which were not yet forgiven me through thy baptism.

CHAPTER V

13. Now that the vintage vacation was ended, I gave notice to the citizens of Milan that they might provide their scholars with another word-merchant. I gave as my reasons my determination to serve thee and also my insufficiency for the task, because of the difficulty in breathing and the pain in my chest.

And by letters I notified thy bishop, the holy man Ambrose, of my former errors and my present resolution. And I asked his advice as to which of thy books it was best for me to read so that I might be the more ready and fit for the reception of so great a grace. He recommended Isaiah the prophet; and I believe it was because Isaiah foreshows more clearly than others the gospel, and the calling of the Gentiles. But because I could not understand the first part and because I imagined the rest to be like it, I laid it aside with the intention of taking it up again later, when better practiced in our Lord's words.

CHAPTER VI

14. When the time arrived for me to give in my name, we left the country and returned to Milan. Alypius also resolved to be born again in thee at the same time. He was already clothed with the humility that befits thy sacraments, and was so brave a tamer of his body that he would walk the frozen Italian soil with his naked feet, which called for unusual fortitude. We took with us the boy Adeodatus, my son after the flesh, the offspring of my sin. Thou hadst made of him a noble lad. He was barely fifteen years old, but his intelligence excelled that of many grave and learned men. I confess to thee thy gifts, O Lord my God, creator of all, who hast power to reform our deformities—for there was nothing of me in that boy but the sin. For it was thou who didst inspire us to foster him in thy discipline, and none other—thy gifts I confess to thee. There is a book of mine, entitled *De Magistro*.²¹ It is a dialogue between Adeodatus and me, and thou knowest that all things there put into the mouth of

²¹ Concerning the Teacher; cf. Vol. VI of this series, pp. 64-101.

my interlocutor are his, though he was then only in his sixteenth year. Many other gifts even more wonderful I found in him. His talent was a source of awe to me. And who but thou couldst be the worker of such marvels? And thou didst quickly remove his life from the earth, and even now I recall him to mind with a sense of security, because I fear nothing for his childhood or youth, nor for his whole career. We took him for our companion, as if he were the same age in grace with ourselves, to be trained with ourselves in thy discipline. And so we were baptized and the anxiety about our past life left us.

Nor did I ever have enough in those days of the wondrous sweetness of meditating on the depth of thy counsels concerning the salvation of the human race. How freely did I weep in thy hymns and canticles; how deeply was I moved by the voices of thy sweet-speaking Church! The voices flowed into my ears; and the truth was poured forth into my heart, where the tide of my devotion overflowed, and my tears ran down, and I was happy in all these things.

CHAPTER VII

15. The church of Milan had only recently begun to employ this mode of consolation and exaltation with all the brethren singing together with great earnestness of voice and heart. For it was only about a year—not much more—since Justina, the mother of the boy-emperor Valentinian, had persecuted thy servant Ambrose on behalf of her heresy, in which she had been seduced by the Arians. The devoted people kept guard in the church, prepared to die with their bishop, thy servant. Among them my mother, thy handmaid, taking a leading part in those anxieties and vigils, lived there in prayer. And even though we were still not wholly melted by the heat of thy Spirit, we were nevertheless excited by the alarmed and disturbed city.

This was the time that the custom began, after the manner of the Eastern Church, that hymns and psalms should be sung, so that the people would not be worn out with the tedium of lamentation. This custom, retained from then till now, has been imitated by many, indeed, by almost all thy congregations throughout the rest of the world.²²

16. Then by a vision thou madest known to thy renowned

²² This was apparently the first introduction into the West of antiphonal chanting, which was already widespread in the East. Ambrose brought it in; Gregory brought it to perfection.

bishop the spot where lay the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius, the martyrs, whom thou hadst preserved uncorrupted for so many years in thy secret storehouse, so that thou mightest produce them at a fit time to check a woman's fury—a woman indeed, but also a queen! When they were discovered and dug up and brought with due honor to the basilica of Ambrose, as they were borne along the road many who were troubled by unclean spirits—the devils confessing themselves—were healed. And there was also a certain man, a well-known citizen of the city, blind many years, who, when he had asked and learned the reason for the people's tumultuous joy, rushed out and begged his guide to lead him to the place. When he arrived there, he begged to be permitted to touch with his handkerchief the bier of thy saints, whose death is precious in thy sight. When he had done this, and put it to his eyes, they were immediately opened. The fame of all this spread abroad; from this thy glory shone more brightly. And also from this the mind of that angry woman, though not enlarged to the sanity of a full faith, was nevertheless restrained from the fury of persecution.

Thanks to thee, O my God. Whence and whither hast thou led my memory, that I should confess such things as these to thee—for great as they were, I had forgetfully passed them over? And yet at that time, when the sweet savor of thy ointment was so fragrant, I did not run after thee.²³ Therefore, I wept more bitterly as I listened to thy hymns, having so long panted after thee. And now at length I could breathe as much as the space allows in this our straw house.²⁴

CHAPTER VIII

17. Thou, O Lord, who makest men of one mind to dwell in a single house, also broughtest Evodius to join our company. He was a young man of our city, who, while serving as a secret service agent, was converted to thee and baptized before us. He had relinquished his secular service, and prepared himself for thine. We were together, and we were resolved to live together in our devout purpose.

We cast about for some place where we might be most useful in our service to thee, and had planned on going back together to Africa. And when we had got as far as Ostia on the Tiber, my mother died.

²³ Cf. S. of Sol. 1:3, 4.

²⁴ Cf. Isa. 40:6; I Peter 1:24: "All flesh is grass." See Bk. XI, Ch. II, 3.

I am passing over many things, for I must hasten. Receive, O my God, my confessions and thanksgiving for the unnumbered things about which I am silent. But I will not omit anything my mind has brought back concerning thy handmaid who brought me forth—in her flesh, that I might be born into this world's light, and in her heart, that I might be born to life eternal. I will not speak of her gifts, but of thy gift in her; for she neither made herself nor trained herself. Thou didst create her, and neither her father nor her mother knew what kind of being was to come forth from them. And it was the rod of thy Christ, the discipline of thy only Son, that trained her in thy fear, in the house of one of thy faithful ones who was a sound member of thy Church. Yet my mother did not attribute this good training of hers as much to the diligence of her own mother as to that of a certain elderly maidservant who had nursed her father, carrying him around on her back, as big girls carried babies. Because of her long-time service and also because of her extreme age and excellent character, she was much respected by the heads of that Christian household. The care of her master's daughters was also committed to her, and she performed her task with diligence. She was quite earnest in restraining them with a holy severity when necessary and instructing them with a sober sagacity. Thus, except at mealtimes at their parents' table—when they were fed very temperately—she would not allow them to drink even water, however parched they were with thirst. In this way she took precautions against an evil custom and added the wholesome advice: "You drink water now only because you don't control the wine; but when you are married and mistresses of pantry and cellar, you may not care for water, but the habit of drinking will be fixed." By such a method of instruction, and her authority, she restrained the longing of their tender age, and regulated even the thirst of the girls to such a decorous control that they no longer wanted what they ought not to have.

18. And yet, as thy handmaid related to me, her son, there had stolen upon her a love of wine. For, in the ordinary course of things, when her parents sent her as a sober maiden to draw wine from the cask, she would hold a cup under the tap; and then, before she poured the wine into the bottle, she would wet the tips of her lips with a little of it, for more than this her taste refused. She did not do this out of any craving for drink, but out of the overflowing buoyancy of her time of life, which bubbles up with sportiveness and youthful spirits, but is usually

borne down by the gravity of the old folks. And so, adding daily a little to that little—for “he that contemns small things shall fall by a little here and a little there”²⁵—she slipped into such a habit as to drink off eagerly her little cup nearly full of wine.

Where now was that wise old woman and her strict prohibition? Could anything prevail against our secret disease if thy medicine, O Lord, did not watch over us? Though father and mother and nurturers are absent, thou art present, who dost create, who callest, and who also workest some good for our salvation, through those who are set over us. What didst thou do at that time, O my God? How didst thou heal her? How didst thou make her whole? Didst thou not bring forth from another woman’s soul a hard and bitter insult, like a surgeon’s knife from thy secret store, and with one thrust drain off all that putrefaction? For the slave girl who used to accompany her to the cellar fell to quarreling with her little mistress, as it sometimes happened when she was alone with her, and cast in her teeth this vice of hers, along with a very bitter insult: calling her “a drunkard.” Stung by this taunt, my mother saw her own vileness and immediately condemned and renounced it.

As the flattery of friends corrupts, so often do the taunts of enemies instruct. Yet thou repayest them, not for the good thou workest through their means, but for the malice they intended. That angry slave girl wanted to infuriate her young mistress, not to cure her; and that is why she spoke up when they were alone. Or perhaps it was because their quarrel just happened to break out at that time and place; or perhaps she was afraid of punishment for having told of it so late.

But thou, O Lord, ruler of heaven and earth, who changest to thy purposes the deepest floods and controls the turbulent tide of the ages, thou healest one soul by the unsoundness of another; so that no man, when he hears of such a happening, should attribute it to his own power if another person whom he wishes to reform is reformed through a word of his.

CHAPTER IX

19. Thus modestly and soberly brought up, she was made subject to her parents by thee, rather more than by her parents to thee. She arrived at a marriageable age, and she was given to a husband whom she served as her lord. And she busied herself

²⁵ Ecclus. 19:1.

to gain him to thee, preaching thee to him by her behavior, in which thou madest her fair and reverently amiable, and admirable to her husband. For she endured with patience his infidelity and never had any dissension with her husband on this account. For she waited for thy mercy upon him until, by believing in thee, he might become chaste.

Moreover, even though he was earnest in friendship, he was also violent in anger; but she had learned that an angry husband should not be resisted, either in deed or in word. But as soon as he had grown calm and was tranquil, and she saw a fitting moment, she would give him a reason for her conduct, if he had been excited unreasonably. As a result, while many matrons whose husbands were more gentle than hers bore the marks of blows on their disfigured faces, and would in private talk blame the behavior of their husbands, she would blame their tongues, admonishing them seriously—though in a jesting manner—that from the hour they heard what are called the matrimonial tablets read to them, they should think of them as instruments by which they were made servants. So, always being mindful of their condition, they ought not to set themselves up in opposition to their lords. And, knowing what a furious, bad-tempered husband she endured, they marveled that it had never been rumored, nor was there any mark to show, that Patricius had ever beaten his wife, or that there had been any domestic strife between them, even for a day. And when they asked her confidentially the reason for this, she taught them the rule I have mentioned. Those who observed it confirmed the wisdom of it and rejoiced; those who did not observe it were bullied and vexed.

20. Even her mother-in-law, who was at first prejudiced against her by the whisperings of malicious servants, she conquered by submission, persevering in it with patience and meekness; with the result that the mother-in-law told her son of the tales of the meddling servants which had disturbed the domestic peace between herself and her daughter-in-law and begged him to punish them for it. In conformity with his mother’s wish, and in the interest of family discipline to insure the future harmony of its members, he had those servants beaten who were pointed out by her who had discovered them; and she promised a similar reward to anyone else who, thinking to please her, should say anything evil of her daughter-in-law. After this no one dared to do so, and they lived together with a wonderful sweetness of mutual good will.

21. This other great gift thou also didst bestow, O my God, my Mercy, upon that good handmaid of thine, in whose womb thou didst create me. It was that whenever she could she acted as a peacemaker between any differing and discordant spirits, and when she heard very bitter things on either side of a controversy—the kind of bloated and undigested discord which often belches forth bitter words, when crude malice is breathed out by sharp tongues to a present friend against an absent enemy—she would disclose nothing about the one to the other except what might serve toward their reconciliation. This might seem a small good to me if I did not know to my sorrow countless persons who, through the horrid and far-spreading infection of sin, not only repeat to enemies mutually enraged things said in passion against each other, but also add some things that were never said at all. It ought not to be enough in a truly humane man merely not to incite or increase the enmities of men by evil-speaking; he ought likewise to endeavor by kind words to extinguish them. Such a one was she—and thou, her most intimate instructor, didst teach her in the school of her heart.

22. Finally, her own husband, now toward the end of his earthly existence, she won over to thee. Henceforth, she had no cause to complain of unfaithfulness in him, which she had endured before he became one of the faithful. She was also the servant of thy servants. All those who knew her greatly praised, honored, and loved thee in her because, through the witness of the fruits of a holy life, they recognized thee present in her heart. For she had “been the wife of one man,”²⁶ had honored her parents, had guided her house in piety, was highly reputed for good works, and brought up her children, travailing in labor with them as often as she saw them swerving from thee. Lastly, to all of us, O Lord—since of thy favor thou allowest thy servants to speak—to all of us who lived together in that association before her death in thee she devoted such care as she might have if she had been mother of us all; she served us as if she had been the daughter of us all.

CHAPTER X

23. As the day now approached on which she was to depart this life—a day which thou knewest, but which we did not—it happened (though I believe it was by thy secret ways arranged) that she and I stood alone, leaning in a certain window from

²⁶ 1 Tim. 5:9.

which the garden of the house we occupied at Ostia could be seen. Here in this place, removed from the crowd, we were resting ourselves for the voyage after the fatigues of a long journey.

We were conversing alone very pleasantly and “forgetting those things which are past, and reaching forward toward those things which are future.”²⁷ We were in the present—and in the presence of Truth (which thou art)—discussing together what is the nature of the eternal life of the saints: which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man.²⁸ We opened wide the mouth of our heart, thirsting for those supernal streams of thy fountain, “the fountain of life” which is with thee,²⁹ that we might be sprinkled with its waters according to our capacity and might in some measure weigh the truth of so profound a mystery.

24. And when our conversation had brought us to the point where the very highest of physical sense and the most intense illumination of physical light seemed, in comparison with the sweetness of that life to come, not worthy of comparison, nor even of mention, we lifted ourselves with a more ardent love toward the Selfsame,³⁰ and we gradually passed through all the levels of bodily objects, and even through the heaven itself, where the sun and moon and stars shine on the earth. Indeed, we soared higher yet by an inner musing, speaking and marveling at thy works.

And we came at last to our own minds and went beyond them, that we might climb as high as that region of unailing plenty where thou feedest Israel forever with the food of truth, where life is that Wisdom by whom all things are made, both which have been and which are to be. Wisdom is not made, but is as she has been and forever shall be; for “to have been” and “to be hereafter” do not apply to her, but only “to be,” because she is eternal and “to have been” and “to be hereafter” are not eternal.

And while we were thus speaking and straining after her, we just barely touched her with the whole effort of our hearts. Then with a sigh, leaving the first fruits of the Spirit bound to that ecstasy, we returned to the sounds of our own tongue, where the spoken word had both beginning and end.³¹ But what is like to

²⁷ Phil. 3:13.

²⁹ Ps. 36:9.

²⁸ Cf. 1 Cor. 2:9.

³⁰ *Idipsum*.

³¹ Cf. this report of a “Christian ecstasy” with the Plotinian ecstasy recounted in Bk. VII, Ch. XVII, 23, above.

thy Word, our Lord, who remaineth in himself without becoming old, and "makes all things new"³²?

25. What we said went something like this: "If to any man the tumult of the flesh were silenced; and the phantoms of earth and waters and air were silenced; and the poles were silent as well; indeed, if the very soul grew silent to herself, and went beyond herself by not thinking of herself; if fancies and imaginary revelations were silenced; if every tongue and every sign and every transient thing—for actually if any man could hear them, all these would say, 'We did not create ourselves, but were created by Him who abides forever'—and if, having uttered this, they too should be silent, having stirred our ears to hear him who created them; and if then he alone spoke, not through them but by himself, that we might hear his word, not in fleshly tongue or angelic voice, nor sound of thunder, nor the obscurity of a parable, but might hear him—him for whose sake we love these things—if we could hear him without these, as we two now strained ourselves to do, we then with rapid thought might touch on that Eternal Wisdom which abides over all. And if this could be sustained, and other visions of a far different kind be taken away, and this one should so ravish and absorb and envelop its beholder in these inward joys that his life might be eternally like that one moment of knowledge which we now sighed after—would not *this* be the reality of the saying, 'Enter into the joy of thy Lord'³³? But when shall such a thing be? Shall it not be 'when we all shall rise again,' and shall it not be that 'all things will be changed'³⁴?"

26. Such a thought I was expressing, and if not in this manner and in these words, still, O Lord, thou knowest that on that day we were talking thus and that this world, with all its joys, seemed cheap to us even as we spoke. Then my mother said: "Son, for myself I have no longer any pleasure in anything in this life. Now that my hopes in this world are satisfied, I do not know what more I want here or why I am here. There was indeed one thing for which I wished to tarry a little in this life, and that was that I might see you a Catholic Christian before I died. My God hath answered this more than abundantly, so that I see you now made his servant and spurning all earthly happiness. What more am I to do here?"

³² Cf. Wis. 7:21–30; see especially v. 27: "And being but one, she [Wisdom] can do all things: and remaining in herself the same, she makes all things new."

Matt. 25:21.

³⁴ I Cor. 15:51.

CHAPTER XI

27. I do not well remember what reply I made to her about this. However, it was scarcely five days later—certainly not much more—that she was prostrated by fever. While she was sick, she fainted one day and was for a short time quite unconscious. We hurried to her, and when she soon regained her senses, she looked at me and my brother³⁵ as we stood by her, and said, in inquiry, "Where was I?" Then looking intently at us, dumb in our grief, she said, "Here in this place shall you bury your mother." I was silent and held back my tears; but my brother said something, wishing her the happier lot of dying in her own country and not abroad. When she heard this, she fixed him with her eye and an anxious countenance, because he savored of such earthly concerns, and then gazing at me she said, "See how he speaks." Soon after, she said to us both: "Lay this body anywhere, and do not let the care of it be a trouble to you at all. Only this I ask: that you will remember me at the Lord's altar, wherever you are." And when she had expressed her wish in such words as she could, she fell silent, in heavy pain with her increasing sickness.

28. But as I thought about thy gifts, O invisible God, which thou plantest in the heart of thy faithful ones, from which such marvelous fruits spring up, I rejoiced and gave thanks to thee, remembering what I had known of how she had always been much concerned about her burial place, which she had provided and prepared for herself by the body of her husband. For as they had lived very peacefully together, her desire had always been—so little is the human mind capable of grasping things divine—that this last should be added to all that happiness, and commented on by others: that, after her pilgrimage beyond the sea, it would be granted her that the two of them, so united on earth, should lie in the same grave.

When this vanity, through the bounty of thy goodness, had begun to be no longer in her heart, I do not know; but I joyfully marveled at what she had thus disclosed to me—though indeed in our conversation in the window, when she said, "What is there here for me to do any more?" she appeared not to desire

³⁵ Navigius, who had joined them in Milan, but about whom Augustine is curiously silent save for the brief and unrevealing references in *De beata vita*, I, 6, to II, 7, and *De ordine*, I, 2–3.

to die in her own country. I heard later on that, during our stay in Ostia, she had been talking in maternal confidence to some of my friends about her contempt of this life and the blessing of death. When they were amazed at the courage which was given her, a woman, and had asked her whether she did not dread having her body buried so far from her own city, she replied: "Nothing is far from God. I do not fear that, at the end of time, he should not know the place whence he is to resurrect me." And so on the ninth day of her sickness, in the fifty-sixth year of her life and the thirty-third of mine,³⁶ that religious and devout soul was set loose from the body.

CHAPTER XII

29. I closed her eyes; and there flowed in a great sadness on my heart and it was passing into tears, when at the strong behest of my mind my eyes sucked back the fountain dry, and sorrow was in me like a convulsion. As soon as she breathed her last, the boy Adeodatus burst out wailing; but he was checked by us all, and became quiet. Likewise, my own childish feeling which was, through the youthful voice of my heart, seeking escape in tears, was held back and silenced. For we did not consider it fitting to celebrate that death with tearful wails and groanings. This is the way those who die unhappy or are altogether dead are usually mourned. But she neither died unhappy nor did she altogether die.³⁷ For of this we were assured by the witness of her good life, her "faith unfeigned,"³⁸ and other manifest evidence.

30. What was it, then, that hurt me so grievously in my heart except the newly made wound, caused from having the sweet and dear habit of living together with her suddenly broken? I was full of joy because of her testimony in her last illness, when she praised my dutiful attention and called me kind, and recalled with great affection of love that she had never heard any harsh or reproachful sound from my mouth against her. But yet, O my God who made us, how can that honor I paid her be compared with her service to me? I was then left destitute of a great comfort in her, and my soul was stricken; and that life

³⁶ A.D. 387.

³⁷ *Nec omnino moriebatur*. Is this an echo of Horace's famous memorial ode, *Exegi monumentum aere perennius . . . non omnis moriar*? Cf. *Odes*, Book III, Ode XXX.

³⁸ I Tim. 1:5.

was torn apart, as it were, which had been made but one out of hers and mine together.³⁹

31. When the boy was restrained from weeping, Evodius took up the Psalter and began to sing, with the whole household responding, the psalm, "I will sing of mercy and judgment unto thee, O Lord."⁴⁰ And when they heard what we were doing, many of the brethren and religious women came together. And while those whose office it was to prepare for the funeral went about their task according to custom, I discoursed in another part of the house, with those who thought I should not be left alone, on what was appropriate to the occasion. By this balm of truth, I softened the anguish known to thee. They were unconscious of it and listened intently and thought me free of any sense of sorrow. But in thy ears, where none of them heard, I reproached myself for the mildness of my feelings, and restrained the flow of my grief which bowed a little to my will. The paroxysm returned again, and I knew what I repressed in my heart, even though it did not make me burst forth into tears or even change my countenance; and I was greatly annoyed that these human things had such power over me, which in the due order and destiny of our natural condition must of necessity happen. And so with a new sorrow I sorrowed for my sorrow and was wasted with a twofold sadness.

32. So, when the body was carried forth, we both went and returned without tears. For neither in those prayers which we poured forth to thee, when the sacrifice of our redemption was offered up to thee for her—with the body placed by the side of the grave as the custom is there, before it is lowered down into it—neither in those prayers did I weep. But I was most grievously sad in secret all the day, and with a troubled mind entreated thee, as I could, to heal my sorrow; but thou didst not. I now believe that thou wast fixing in my memory, by this one lesson, the power of the bonds of all habit, even on a mind which now no longer feeds upon deception. It then occurred to me that it would be a good thing to go and bathe, for I had heard that the word for bath [*balneum*] took its name from the Greek *balaneion* [*βαλανεῖον*], because it washes anxiety from the mind. Now see, this also I confess to thy mercy, "O Father of the fatherless"⁴¹: I bathed and felt the same as I had done before.

³⁹ Cf. this passage, as Augustine doubtless intended, with the story of his morbid and immoderate grief at the death of his boyhood friend, above, Bk. IV, Chs. IV, 9, to VII, 12.

⁴⁰ Ps. 101:1.

⁴¹ Ps. 68:5.

For the bitterness of my grief was not sweated from my heart.

Then I slept, and when I awoke I found my grief not a little assuaged. And as I lay there on my bed, those true verses of Ambrose came to my mind, for thou art truly,

“Deus, creator omnium,
Polique rector, vestiens
Diem decoro lumine,
Noctem sopora gratia;
 Artus solutos ut quies
Reddat laboris usui
Mentesque fessas allevet,
Luctusque solvat anxios.”

“O God, Creator of us all,
Guiding the orbs celestial,
Clothing the day with lovely light,
Appointing gracious sleep by night:

Thy grace our wearied limbs restore
To strengthened labor, as before,
And ease the grief of tired minds
From that deep torment which it finds.”⁴²

33. And then, little by little, there came back to me my former memories of thy handmaid: her devout life toward thee, her holy tenderness and attentiveness toward us, which had suddenly been taken away from me—and it was a solace for me to weep in thy sight, for her and for myself, about her and about myself. Thus I set free the tears which before I repressed, that they might flow at will, spreading them out as a pillow beneath my heart. And it rested on them, for thy ears were near me—not those of a man, who would have made a scornful comment about my weeping. But now in writing I confess it to thee, O Lord! Read it who will, and comment how he will, and if he finds me to have sinned in weeping for my mother for part of an hour—that mother who was for a while dead to my eyes, who had for many years wept for me that I might live in thy eyes—let him

⁴² Sir Tobie Matthew (adapted). For Augustine’s own analysis of the scansion and structure of this hymn, see *De musica*, VI, 2:2–3; for a brief commentary on the Latin text, see A. S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 44–49.

not laugh at me; but if he be a man of generous love, let him weep for my sins against thee, the Father of all the brethren of thy Christ.

CHAPTER XIII

34. Now that my heart is healed of that wound—so far as it can be charged against me as a carnal affection—I pour out to thee, O our God, on behalf of thy handmaid, tears of a very different sort: those which flow from a spirit broken by the thoughts of the dangers of every soul that dies in Adam. And while she had been “made alive” in Christ⁴³ even before she was freed from the flesh, and had so lived as to praise thy name both by her faith and by her life, yet I would not dare say that from the time thou didst regenerate her by baptism no word came out of her mouth against thy precepts. But it has been declared by thy Son, the Truth, that “whosoever shall say to his brother, You fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.”⁴⁴ And there would be doom even for the life of a praiseworthy man if thou judgedst it with thy mercy set aside. But since thou dost not so stringently inquire after our sins, we hope with confidence to find some place in thy presence. But whoever recounts his actual and true merits to thee, what is he doing but recounting to thee thy own gifts? Oh, if only men would know themselves as men, then “he that glories” would “glory in the Lord”⁴⁵!

35. Thus now, O my Praise and my Life, O God of my heart, forgetting for a little her good deeds for which I give joyful thanks to thee, I now beseech thee for the sins of my mother. Hearken unto me, through that Medicine of our wounds, who didst hang upon the tree and who sittest at thy right hand “making intercession for us.”⁴⁶ I know that she acted in mercy, and from the heart forgave her debtors their debts.⁴⁷ I beseech thee also to forgive her debts, whatever she contracted during so many years since the water of salvation. Forgive her, O Lord, forgive her, I beseech thee; “enter not into judgment” with her.⁴⁸ Let thy mercy be exalted above thy justice, for thy words are true and thou hast promised mercy to the merciful, that the merciful shall obtain mercy.⁴⁹ This is thy gift, who hast mercy on whom thou wilt and who wilt have compassion on whom thou dost have compassion on.⁵⁰

⁴³ I Cor. 15:22.

⁴⁵ II Cor. 10:17.

⁴⁷ Cf. Matt. 6:12.

⁴⁹ Matt. 5:7.

⁴⁴ Matt. 5:22.

⁴⁶ Rom. 8:34.

⁴⁸ Ps. 143:2.

⁵⁰ Cf. Rom. 9:15.

36. Indeed, I believe thou hast already done what I ask of thee, but "accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord."⁵¹ For when the day of her dissolution was so close, she took no thought to have her body sumptuously wrapped or embalmed with spices. Nor did she covet a handsome monument, or even care to be buried in her own country. About these things she gave no commands at all, but only desired to have her name remembered at thy altar, where she had served without the omission of a single day, and where she knew that the holy sacrifice was dispensed by which that handwriting that was against us is blotted out; and that enemy vanquished who, when he summed up our offenses and searched for something to bring against us, could find nothing in Him, in whom we conquer.

Who will restore to him the innocent blood? Who will repay him the price with which he bought us, so as to take us from him? Thus to the sacrament of our redemption did thy handmaid bind her soul by the bond of faith. Let none separate her from thy protection. Let not the "lion" and "dragon" bar her way by force or fraud. For she will not reply that she owes nothing, lest she be convicted and duped by that cunning deceiver. Rather, she will answer that her sins are forgiven by Him to whom no one is able to repay the price which he, who owed us nothing, laid down for us all.

37. Therefore, let her rest in peace with her husband, before and after whom she was married to no other man; whom she obeyed with patience, bringing fruit to thee that she might also win him for thee. And inspire, O my Lord my God, inspire thy servants, my brothers; thy sons, my masters, who with voice and heart and writings I serve, that as many of them as shall read these confessions may also at thy altar remember Monica, thy handmaid, together with Patricius, once her husband; by whose flesh thou didst bring me into this life, in a manner I know not. May they with pious affection remember my parents in this transitory life, and remember my brothers under thee our Father in our Catholic mother; and remember my fellow citizens in the eternal Jerusalem, for which thy people sigh in their pilgrimage from birth until their return. So be fulfilled what my mother desired of me—more richly in the prayers of so many gained for her through these confessions of mine than by my prayers alone.

⁵¹ Ps. 119:108.

BOOK TEN

From autobiography to self-analysis. Augustine turns from his memories of the past to the inner mysteries of memory itself. In doing so, he reviews his motives for these written "confessions," and seeks to chart the path by which men come to God. But this brings him into the intricate analysis of memory and its relation to the self and its powers. This done, he explores the meaning and mode of true prayer. In conclusion, he undertakes a detailed analysis of appetite and the temptations to which the flesh and the soul are heirs, and comes finally to see how necessary and right it was for the Mediator between God and man to have been the God-Man.

CHAPTER I

1. Let me know thee, O my Knower; let me know thee even as I am known.¹ O Strength of my soul, enter it and prepare it for thyself that thou mayest have and hold it, without "spot or blemish."² This is my hope, therefore have I spoken; and in this hope I rejoice whenever I rejoice aright. But as for the other things of this life, they deserve our lamentations less, the more we lament them; and some should be lamented all the more, the less men care for them. For see, "Thou desirest truth"³ and "he who does the truth comes to the light."⁴ This is what I wish to do through confession in my heart before thee, and in my writings before many witnesses.

CHAPTER II

2. And what is there in me that could be hidden from thee, O Lord, to whose eyes the abysses of man's conscience are

¹ Cf. I Cor. 13:12.

² Eph. 5:27.

³ Ps. 51:6.

⁴ John 3:21.

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Volume VII

AUGUSTINE:
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Newly translated and edited

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