

The Confessions of Saint Augustine

BOOK ONE

In God's searching presence, Augustine undertakes to plumb the depths of his memory to trace the mysterious pilgrimage of grace which his life has been—and to praise God for his constant and omnipotent grace. In a mood of sustained prayer, he recalls what he can of his infancy, his learning to speak, and his childhood experiences in school. He concludes with a paean of grateful praise to God.

CHAPTER I

1. "Great art thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is thy power, and infinite is thy wisdom."¹ And man desires to praise thee, for he is a part of thy creation; he bears his mortality about with him and carries the evidence of his sin and the proof that thou dost resist the proud. Still he desires to praise thee, this man who is only a small part of thy creation. Thou hast prompted him, that he should delight to praise thee, for thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee. Grant me, O Lord, to know and understand whether first to invoke thee or to praise thee; whether first to know thee or call upon thee. But who can invoke thee, knowing thee not? For he who knows thee not may invoke thee as another than thou art. It may be that we should invoke thee in order that we may come to know thee. But "how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe without a preacher?"² Now, "they shall praise the Lord who seek him,"³ for "those who seek shall find him,"⁴ and,

¹ Cf. Ps. 145:3 and Ps. 147:5.

² Rom. 10:14.

³ Ps. 22:26.

⁴ Matt. 7:7.

finding him, shall praise him. I will seek thee, O Lord, and call upon thee. I call upon thee, O Lord, in my faith which thou hast given me, which thou hast inspired in me through the humanity of thy Son, and through the ministry of thy preacher.⁵

CHAPTER II

2. And how shall I call upon my God—my God and my Lord? For when I call on him I ask him to come into me. And what place is there in me into which my God can come? How could God, the God who made both heaven and earth, come into me? Is there anything in me, O Lord my God, that can contain thee? Do even the heaven and the earth, which thou hast made, and in which thou didst make me, contain thee? Is it possible that, since without thee nothing would be which does exist, thou didst make it so that whatever exists has some capacity to receive thee? Why, then, do I ask thee to come into me, since I also am and could not be if thou wert not in me? For I am not, after all, in hell—and yet thou art there too, for “if I go down into hell, thou art there.”⁶ Therefore I would not exist—I would simply not be at all—unless I exist in thee, from whom and by whom and in whom all things are. Even so, Lord; even so. Where do I call thee to, when I am already in thee? Or from whence wouldst thou come into me? Where, beyond heaven and earth, could I go that there my God might come to me—he who hath said, “I fill heaven and earth”?⁷

CHAPTER III

3. Since, then, thou dost fill the heaven and earth, do they contain thee? Or, dost thou fill and overflow them, because they cannot contain thee? And where dost thou pour out what remains of thee after heaven and earth are full? Or, indeed, is there no need that thou, who dost contain all things, shouldst be contained by any, since those things which thou dost fill thou fillest by containing them? For the vessels which thou dost fill do not confine thee, since even if they were broken, thou wouldst not be poured out. And, when thou art poured out on us, thou art not thereby brought down; rather, we are uplifted. Thou art

⁵ A reference to Bishop Ambrose of Milan; see Bk. V, Ch. XIII; Bk. VIII, Ch. II, 3.

⁶ Ps. 139:8.

⁷ Jer. 23:24.

not scattered; rather, thou dost gather us together. But when thou dost fill all things, dost thou fill them with thy whole being? Or, since not even all things together could contain thee altogether, does any one thing contain a single part, and do all things contain that same part at the same time? Do singulars contain thee singly? Do greater things contain more of thee, and smaller things less? Or, is it not rather that thou art wholly present everywhere, yet in such a way that nothing contains thee wholly?

CHAPTER IV

4. What, therefore, is my God? What, I ask, but the Lord God? “For who is Lord but the Lord himself, or who is God besides our God?”⁸ Most high, most excellent, most potent, most omnipotent; most merciful and most just; most secret and most truly present; most beautiful and most strong; stable, yet not supported; unchangeable, yet changing all things; never new, never old; making all things new, yet bringing old age upon the proud, and they know it not; always working, ever at rest; gathering, yet needing nothing; sustaining, pervading, and protecting; creating, nourishing, and developing; seeking, and yet possessing all things. Thou dost love, but without passion; art jealous, yet free from care; dost repent without remorse; art angry, yet remainest serene. Thou changest thy ways, leaving thy plans unchanged; thou recoverest what thou hast never really lost. Thou art never in need but still thou dost rejoice at thy gains; art never greedy, yet demandest dividends. Men pay more than is required so that thou dost become a debtor; yet who can possess anything at all which is not already thine? Thou owest men nothing, yet payest out to them as if in debt to thy creature, and when thou dost cancel debts thou lovest nothing thereby. Yet, O my God, my life, my holy Joy, what is this that I have said? What can any man say when he speaks of thee? But woe to them that keep silence—since even those who say most are dumb.

CHAPTER V

5. Who shall bring me to rest in thee? Who will send thee into my heart so to overwhelm it that my sins shall be blotted out and I may embrace thee, my only good? What art thou to me? Have mercy that I may speak. What am I to thee that thou

⁸ Cf. Ps. 18:31.

shouldst command me to love thee, and if I do it not, art angry and threatenest vast misery? Is it, then, a trifling sorrow not to love thee? It is not so to me. Tell me, by thy mercy, O Lord, my God, what thou art to me. "Say to my soul, I am your salvation."⁹ So speak that I may hear. Behold, the ears of my heart are before thee, O Lord; open them and "say to my soul, I am your salvation." I will hasten after that voice, and I will lay hold upon thee. Hide not thy face from me. Even if I die, let me see thy face lest I die.

6. The house of my soul is too narrow for thee to come in to me; let it be enlarged by thee. It is in ruins; do thou restore it. There is much about it which must offend thy eyes; I confess and know it. But who will cleanse it? Or, to whom shall I cry but to thee? "Cleanse thou me from my secret faults," O Lord, "and keep back thy servant from strange sins."¹⁰ "I believe, and therefore do I speak."¹¹ But thou, O Lord, thou knowest. Have I not confessed my transgressions unto thee, O my God; and hast thou not put away the iniquity of my heart?¹² I do not contend in judgment with thee,¹³ who art Truth itself; and I would not deceive myself, lest my iniquity lie even to itself. I do not, therefore, contend in judgment with thee, for "if thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"¹⁴

CHAPTER VI

7. Still, dust and ashes as I am, allow me to speak before thy mercy. Allow me to speak, for, behold, it is to thy mercy that I speak and not to a man who scorns me. Yet perhaps even thou mightest scorn me; but when thou dost turn and attend to me, thou wilt have mercy upon me. For what do I wish to say, O Lord my God, but that I know not whence I came hither into this life-in-death. Or should I call it death-in-life? I do not know. And yet the consolations of thy mercy have sustained me from the very beginning, as I have heard from my fleshly parents, from whom and in whom thou didst form me in time—for I cannot myself remember. Thus even though they sustained me by the consolation of woman's milk, neither my mother nor my nurses filled their own breasts but thou, through them, didst give me the food of infancy according to thy ordinance and thy bounty which underlie all things. For it was thou who didst

⁹ Ps. 35:3.

¹¹ Ps. 116:10.

¹³ Cf. Job 9:2.

¹⁰ Cf. Ps. 19:12, 13.

¹² Cf. Ps. 32:5.

¹⁴ Ps. 130:3.

cause me not to want more than thou gavest and it was thou who gavest to those who nourished me the will to give me what thou didst give them. And they, by an instinctive affection, were willing to give me what thou hadst supplied abundantly. It was, indeed, good for them that my good should come through them, though, in truth, it was not from them but by them. For it is from thee, O God, that all good things come—and from my God is all my health. This is what I have since learned, as thou hast made it abundantly clear by all that I have seen thee give, both to me and to those around me. For even at the very first I knew how to suck, to lie quiet when I was full, and to cry when in pain—nothing more.

8. Afterward I began to laugh—at first in my sleep, then when waking. For this I have been told about myself and I believe it—though I cannot remember it—for I see the same things in other infants. Then, little by little, I realized where I was and wished to tell my wishes to those who might satisfy them, but I could not! For my wants were inside me, and they were outside, and they could not by any power of theirs come into my soul. And so I would fling my arms and legs about and cry, making the few and feeble gestures that I could, though indeed the signs were not much like what I inwardly desired and when I was not satisfied—either from not being understood or because what I got was not good for me—I grew indignant that my elders were not subject to me and that those on whom I actually had no claim did not wait on me as slaves—and I avenged myself on them by crying. That infants are like this, I have myself been able to learn by watching them; and they, though they knew me not, have shown me better what I was like than my own nurses who knew me.

9. And, behold, my infancy died long ago, but I am still living. But thou, O Lord, whose life is forever and in whom nothing dies—since before the world was, indeed, before all that can be called "before," thou wast, and thou art the God and Lord of all thy creatures; and with thee abide all the stable causes of all unstable things, the unchanging sources of all changeable things, and the eternal reasons of all nonrational and temporal things—tell me, thy suppliant, O God, tell me, O merciful One, in pity tell a pitiful creature whether my infancy followed yet an earlier age of my life that had already passed away before it. Was it such another age which I spent in my mother's womb? For something of that sort has been suggested to me, and I have myself seen pregnant women. But what, O

God, my Joy, preceded *that* period of life? Was I, indeed, anywhere, or anybody? No one can explain these things to me, neither father nor mother, nor the experience of others, nor my own memory. Dost thou laugh at me for asking such things? Or dost thou command me to praise and confess unto thee only what I know?

10. I give thanks to thee, O Lord of heaven and earth, giving praise to thee for that first being and my infancy of which I have no memory. For thou hast granted to man that he should come to self-knowledge through the knowledge of others, and that he should believe many things about himself on the authority of the womenfolk. Now, clearly, I had life and being; and, as my infancy closed, I was already learning signs by which my feelings could be communicated to others.

Whence could such a creature come but from thee, O Lord? Is any man skillful enough to have fashioned himself? Or is there any other source from which being and life could flow into us, save this, that thou, O Lord, hast made us— thou with whom being and life are one, since thou thyself art supreme being and supreme life both together. For thou art infinite and in thee there is no change, nor an end to this present day—although there is a sense in which it ends in thee since all things are in thee and there would be no such thing as days passing away unless thou didst sustain them. And since “thy years shall have no end,”¹⁵ thy years are an ever-present day. And how many of ours and our fathers’ days have passed through this thy day and have received from it what measure and fashion of being they had? And all the days to come shall so receive and so pass away. “But thou art the same”!¹⁶ And all the things of tomorrow and the days yet to come, and all of yesterday and the days that are past, thou wilt gather into this thy day. What is it to me if someone does not understand this? Let him still rejoice and continue to ask, “What is this?” Let him also rejoice and prefer to seek thee, even if he fails to find an answer, rather than to seek an answer and not find thee!

CHAPTER VII

11. “Hear me, O God! Woe to the sins of men!” When a man cries thus, thou showest him mercy, for thou didst create the man but not the sin in him. Who brings to remembrance the

¹⁵ Ps. 102:27.

¹⁶ Ps. 102:27.

sins of my infancy? For in thy sight there is none free from sin, not even the infant who has lived but a day upon this earth. Who brings this to my remembrance? Does not each little one, in whom I now observe what I no longer remember of myself? In what ways, in that time, did I sin? Was it that I cried for the breast? If I should now so cry—not indeed for the breast, but for food suitable to my condition—I should be most justly laughed at and rebuked. What I did then deserved rebuke but, since I could not understand those who rebuked me, neither custom nor common sense permitted me to be rebuked. As we grow we root out and cast away from us such childish habits. Yet I have not seen anyone who is wise who cast away the good when trying to purge the bad. Nor was it good, even in that time, to strive to get by crying what, if it had been given me, would have been hurtful; or to be bitterly indignant at those who, because they were older—not slaves, either, but free—and wiser than I, would not indulge my capricious desires. Was it a good thing for me to try, by struggling as hard as I could, to harm them for not obeying me, even when it would have done me harm to have been obeyed? Thus, the infant’s innocence lies in the weakness of his body and not in the infant mind. I have myself observed a baby to be jealous, though it could not speak; it was livid as it watched another infant at the breast.

Who is ignorant of this? Mothers and nurses tell us that they cure these things by I know not what remedies. But is this innocence, when the fountain of milk is flowing fresh and abundant, that another who needs it should not be allowed to share it, even though he requires such nourishment to sustain his life? Yet we look leniently on such things, not because they are not faults, or even small faults, but because they will vanish as the years pass. For, although we allow for such things in an infant, the same things could not be tolerated patiently in an adult.

12. Therefore, O Lord my God, thou who gavest life to the infant, and a body which, as we see, thou hast furnished with senses, shaped with limbs, beautified with form, and endowed with all vital energies for its well-being and health—thou dost command me to praise thee for these things, to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praise unto his name, O Most High.¹⁷ For thou art God, omnipotent and good, even if thou hadst done no more than these things, which no other but thou canst do—thou alone who madest all things fair and didst order everything according to thy law.

¹⁷ Cf. Ps. 92:1.

I am loath to dwell on this part of my life of which, O Lord, I have no remembrance, about which I must trust the word of others and what I can surmise from observing other infants, even if such guesses are trustworthy. For it lies in the deep murk of my forgetfulness and thus is like the period which I passed in my mother's womb. But if "I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin my mother nourished me in her womb,"¹⁸ where, I pray thee, O my God, where, O Lord, or when was I, thy servant, ever innocent? But see now, I pass over that period, for what have I to do with a time from which I can recall no memories?

CHAPTER VIII

13. Did I not, then, as I grew out of infancy, come next to boyhood, or rather did it not come to me and succeed my infancy? My infancy did not go away (for where would it go?). It was simply no longer present; and I was no longer an infant who could not speak, but now a chattering boy. I remember this, and I have since observed how I learned to speak. My elders did not teach me words by rote, as they taught me my letters afterward. But I myself, when I was unable to communicate 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 exchanged with those about me the verbal signs by which we express our wishes and advanced deeper into the stormy fellowship of human life, depending all the while upon the authority of my parents and the behest of my elders.

¹⁸ Cf. Ps. 51:5.

CHAPTER IX

14. O my God! What miseries and mockeries did I then experience when it was impressed on me that obedience to my teachers was proper to my boyhood estate if I was to flourish in this world and distinguish myself in those tricks of speech which would gain honor for me among men, and deceitful riches! To this end I was sent to school to get learning, the value of which I knew not—wretch that I was. Yet if I was slow to learn, I was flogged. For this was deemed praiseworthy by our forefathers and many had passed before us in the same course, and thus had built up the precedent for the sorrowful road on which we too were compelled to travel, multiplying labor and sorrow upon the sons of Adam. About this time, O Lord, I observed men praying to thee, and I learned from them to conceive thee—after my capacity for understanding as it was then—to be some great Being, who, though not visible to our senses, was able to hear and help us. Thus as a boy I began to pray to thee, my Help and my Refuge, and, in calling on thee, broke the bands of my tongue. Small as I was, I prayed with no slight earnestness that I might not be beaten at school. And when thou didst not heed me—for that would have been giving me over to my folly—my elders and even my parents too, who wished me no ill, treated my stripes as a joke, though they were then a great and grievous ill to me.

15. Is there anyone, O Lord, with a spirit so great, who cleaves to thee with such steadfast affection (or is there even a kind of obtuseness that has the same effect)—is there any man who, by cleaving devoutly to thee, is endowed with so great a courage that he can regard indifferently those racks and hooks and other torture weapons from which men throughout the world pray so fervently to be spared; and can they scorn those who so greatly fear these torments, just as my parents were amused at the torments with which our teachers punished us boys? For we were no less afraid of our pains, nor did we beseech thee less to escape them. Yet, even so, we were sinning by writing or reading or studying less than our assigned lessons.

For I did not, O Lord, lack memory or capacity, for, by thy will, I possessed enough for my age. However, my mind was absorbed only in play, and I was punished for this by those who were doing the same things themselves. But the idling of our elders is called business; the idling of boys, though quite like it,

is punished by those same elders, and no one pities either the boys or the men. For will any common sense observer agree that I was rightly punished as a boy for playing ball—just because this hindered me from learning more quickly those lessons by means of which, as a man, I could play at more shameful games? And did he by whom I was beaten do anything different? When he was worsted in some small controversy with a fellow teacher, he was more tormented by anger and envy than I was when beaten by a playmate in the ball game.

CHAPTER X

16. And yet I sinned, O Lord my God, thou ruler and creator of all natural things—but of sins only the ruler—I sinned, O Lord my God, in acting against the precepts of my parents and of those teachers. For this learning which they wished me to acquire—no matter what their motives were—I might have put to good account afterward. I disobeyed them, not because I had chosen a better way, but from a sheer love of play. I loved the vanity of victory, and I loved to have my ears tickled with lying fables, which made them itch even more ardently, and a similar curiosity glowed more and more in my eyes for the shows and sports of my elders. Yet those who put on such shows are held in such high repute that almost all desire the same for their children. They are therefore willing to have them beaten, if their childhood games keep them from the studies by which their parents desire them to grow up to be able to give such shows. Look down on these things with mercy, O Lord, and deliver us who now call upon thee; deliver those also who do not call upon thee, that they may call upon thee, and thou mayest deliver them.

CHAPTER XI

17. Even as a boy I had heard of eternal life promised to us through the humility of the Lord our God, who came down to visit us in our pride, and I was signed with the sign of his cross, and was seasoned with his salt even from the womb of my mother, who greatly trusted in thee. Thou didst see, O Lord, how, once, while I was still a child, I was suddenly seized with stomach pains and was at the point of death—thou didst see, O my God, for even then thou wast my keeper, with what agitation and with what faith I solicited from the piety of my mother and from thy Church (which is the mother of us all) the baptism of

thy Christ, my Lord and my God. The mother of my flesh was much perplexed, for, with a heart pure in thy faith, she was always in deep travail for my eternal salvation. If I had not quickly recovered, she would have provided forthwith for my initiation and washing by thy life-giving sacraments, confessing thee, O Lord Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins. So my cleansing was deferred, as if it were inevitable that, if I should live, I would be further polluted; and, further, because the guilt contracted by sin after baptism would be still greater and more perilous.

Thus, at that time, I “believed” along with my mother and the whole household, except my father. But he did not overcome the influence of my mother’s piety in me, nor did he prevent my believing in Christ, although he had not yet believed in him. For it was her desire, O my God, that I should acknowledge thee as my Father rather than him. In this thou didst aid her to overcome her husband, to whom, though his superior, she yielded obedience. In this way she also yielded obedience to thee, who dost so command.

18. I ask thee, O my God, for I would gladly know if it be thy will, to what good end my baptism was deferred at that time? Was it indeed for my good that the reins were slackened, as it were, to encourage me in sin? Or, were they not slackened? If not, then why is it still dinned into our ears on all sides, “Let him alone, let him do as he pleases, for he is not yet baptized”? In the matter of bodily health, no one says, “Let him alone; let him be worse wounded; for he is not yet cured”! How much better, then, would it have been for me to have been cured at once—and if thereafter, through the diligent care of friends and myself, my soul’s restored health had been kept safe in thy keeping, who gave it in the first place! This would have been far better, in truth. But how many and great the waves of temptation which appeared to hang over me as I grew out of childhood! These were foreseen by my mother, and she preferred that the unformed clay should be risked to them rather than the clay molded after Christ’s image.¹⁹

CHAPTER XII

19. But in this time of childhood—which was far less dreaded for me than my adolescence—I had no love of learning, and

¹⁹ In baptism which, Augustine believed, established the *effigiem Christi* in the human soul.

hated to be driven to it. Yet I was driven to it just the same, and good was done for me, even though I did not do it well, for I would not have learned if I had not been forced to it. For no man does well against his will, even if what he does is a good thing. Neither did they who forced me do well, but the good that was done me came from thee, my God. For they did not care about the way in which I would use what they forced me to learn, and took it for granted that it was to satisfy the inordinate desires of a rich beggary and a shameful glory. But thou, Lord, by whom the hairs of our head are numbered, didst use for my good the error of all who pushed me on to study: but my error in not being willing to learn thou didst use for my punishment. And I—though so small a boy yet so great a sinner—was not punished without warrant. Thus by the instrumentality of those who did not do well, thou didst well for me; and by my own sin thou didst justly punish me. For it is even as thou hast ordained: that every inordinate affection brings on its own punishment.

CHAPTER XIII

20. But what were the causes for my strong dislike of Greek literature, which I studied from my boyhood? Even to this day I have not fully understood them. For Latin I loved exceedingly—not just the rudiments, but what the grammarians teach. For those beginner's lessons in reading, writing, and reckoning, I considered no less a burden and pain than Greek. Yet whence came this, unless from the sin and vanity of this life? For I was "but flesh, a wind that passeth away and cometh not again."²⁰ Those first lessons were better, assuredly, because they were more certain, and through them I acquired, and still retain, the power of reading what I find written and of writing for myself what I will. In the other subjects, however, I was compelled to learn about the wanderings of a certain Aeneas, oblivious of my own wanderings, and to weep for Dido dead, who slew herself for love. And all this while I bore with dry eyes my own wretched self dying to thee, O God, my life, in the midst of these things.

21. For what can be more wretched than the wretch who has no pity upon himself, who sheds tears over Dido, dead for the love of Aeneas, but who sheds no tears for his own death in not loving thee, O God, light of my heart, and bread of the inner

²⁰ Cf. Ps. 78:39.

mouth of my soul, O power that links together my mind with my inmost thoughts? I did not love thee, and thus committed fornication against thee.²¹ Those around me, also sinning, thus cried out: "Well done! Well done!" The friendship of this world is fornication against thee; and "Well done! Well done!" is cried until one feels ashamed not to show himself a man in this way. For my own condition I shed no tears, though I wept for Dido, who "sought death at the sword's point,"²² while I myself was seeking the lowest rung of thy creation, having forsaken thee; earth sinking back to earth again. And, if I had been forbidden to read these poems, I would have grieved that I was not allowed to read what grieved me. This sort of madness is considered more honorable and more fruitful learning than the beginner's course in which I learned to read and write.

22. But now, O my God, cry unto my soul, and let thy truth say to me: "Not so, not so! That first learning was far better." For, obviously, I would rather forget the wanderings of Aeneas, and all such things, than forget how to write and read. Still, over the entrance of the grammar school there hangs a veil. This is not so much the sign of a covering for a mystery as a curtain for error. Let them exclaim against me—those I no longer fear—while I confess to thee, my God, what my soul desires, and let me find some rest, for in blaming my own evil ways I may come to love thy holy ways. Neither let those cry out against me who buy and sell the baubles of literature. For if I ask them if it is true, as the poet says, that Aeneas once came to Carthage, the unlearned will reply that they do not know and the learned will deny that it is true. But if I ask with what letters the name Aeneas is written, all who have ever learned this will answer correctly, in accordance with the conventional understanding men have agreed upon as to these signs. Again, if I should ask which would cause the greatest inconvenience in our life, if it were forgotten: reading and writing, or these poetical fictions, who does not see what everyone would answer who had not entirely lost his own memory? I erred, then, when as a boy I preferred those vain studies to these more profitable ones, or rather loved the one and hated the other. "One and one are two, two and two are four": this was then a truly hateful song to me. But the wooden horse full of its armed soldiers, and the holocaust of Troy, and the spectral image of Creüsa were all a most delightful—and vain—show!²³

²¹ Cf. Ps. 72:27.

²² Cf. *Aeneid*, II.

²³ *Aeneid*, VI, 457.

CHAPTER XIV

23. But why, then, did I dislike Greek learning, which was full of such tales? For Homer was skillful in inventing such poetic fictions and is most sweetly wanton; yet when I was a boy, he was most disagreeable to me. I believe that Virgil would have the same effect on Greek boys as Homer did on me if they were forced to learn him. For the tedium of learning a foreign language mingled gall into the sweetness of those Grecian myths. For I did not understand a word of the language, and yet I was driven with threats and cruel punishments to learn it. There was also a time when, as an infant, I knew no Latin; but this I acquired without any fear or tormenting, but merely by being alert to the blandishments of my nurses, the jests of those who smiled on me, and the sportiveness of those who toyed with me. I learned all this, indeed, without being urged by any pressure of punishment, for my own heart urged me to bring forth its own fashioning, which I could not do except by learning words: not from those who taught me but those who talked to me, into whose ears I could pour forth whatever I could fashion. From this it is sufficiently clear that a free curiosity is more effective in learning than a discipline based on fear. Yet, by thy ordinance, O God, discipline is given to restrain the excesses of freedom; this ranges from the ferule of the schoolmaster to the trials of the martyr and has the effect of mingling for us a wholesome bitterness, which calls us back to thee from the poisonous pleasures that first drew us from thee.

CHAPTER XV

24. Hear my prayer, O Lord; let not my soul faint under thy discipline, nor let me faint in confessing unto thee thy mercies, whereby thou hast saved me from all my most wicked ways till thou shouldst become sweet to me beyond all the allurements that I used to follow. Let me come to love thee wholly, and grasp thy hand with my whole heart that thou mayest deliver me from every temptation, even unto the last. And thus, O Lord, my King and my God, may all things useful that I learned as a boy now be offered in thy service—let it be that for thy service I now speak and write and reckon. For when I was learning vain things, thou didst impose thy discipline upon

me: and thou hast forgiven me my sin of delighting in those vanities. In those studies I learned many a useful word, but these might have been learned in matters not so vain; and surely that is the safe way for youths to walk in.

CHAPTER XVI

25. But woe unto you, O torrent of human custom! Who shall stay your course? When will you ever run dry? How long will you carry down the sons of Eve into that vast and hideous ocean, which even those who have the Tree (for an ark)²⁴ can scarcely pass over? Do I not read in you the stories of Jove the thunderer—and the adulterer?²⁵ How could he be both? But so it says, and the sham thunder served as a cloak for him to play at real adultery. Yet which of our gowned masters will give a tempered hearing to a man trained in their own schools who cries out and says: "These were Homer's fictions; he transfers things human to the gods. I could have wished that he would transfer divine things to us."²⁶ But it would have been more true if he said, "These are, indeed, his fictions, but he attributed divine attributes to sinful men, that crimes might not be accounted crimes, and that whoever committed such crimes might appear to imitate the celestial gods and not abandoned men."

26. And yet, O torrent of hell, the sons of men are still cast into you, and they pay fees for learning all these things. And much is made of it when this goes on in the forum under the auspices of laws which give a salary over and above the fees. And you beat against your rocky shore and roar: "Here words may be learned; here you can attain the eloquence which is so necessary to persuade people to your way of thinking; so helpful in unfolding your opinions." Verily, they seem to argue that we should never have understood these words, "golden shower," "bosom," "intrigue," "highest heavens," and other such words, if Terence had not introduced a good-for-nothing

²⁴ *Lignum* is a common metaphor for the cross; and it was often joined to the figure of Noah's ark, as the means of safe transport from earth to heaven.

²⁵ This apostrophe to "the torrent of human custom" now switches its focus to the poets who celebrated the philanderings of the gods; see *De civ. Dei*, II, vii-xi; IV, xxvi-xxviii.

²⁶ Probably a contemporary disciple of Cicero (or the Academics) whom Augustine had heard levy a rather common philosopher's complaint against Olympian religion and the poetic myths about it. Cf. De Labriolle, I, 21 (see Bibl.).

youth upon the stage, setting up a picture of Jove as his example of lewdness and telling the tale

“Of Jove’s descending in a golden shower
Into Danae’s bosom . . .
With a woman to intrigue.”

See how he excites himself to lust, as if by a heavenly authority, when he says:

“Great Jove,
Who shakes the highest heavens with his thunder;
Shall I, poor mortal man, not do the same?
I’ve done it, and with all my heart, I’m glad.”²⁷

These words are not learned one whit more easily because of this vileness, but through them the vileness is more boldly perpetrated. I do not blame the words, for they are, as it were, choice and precious vessels, but I do deplore the wine of error which was poured out to us by teachers already drunk. And, unless we also drank we were beaten, without liberty of appeal to a sober judge. And yet, O my God, in whose presence I can now with security recall this, I learned these things willingly and with delight, and for it I was called a boy of good promise.

CHAPTER XVII

27. Bear with me, O my God, while I speak a little of those talents, thy gifts, and of the follies on which I wasted them. For a lesson was given me that sufficiently disturbed my soul, for in it there was both hope of praise and fear of shame or stripes. The assignment was that I should declaim the words of Juno, as she raged and sorrowed that she could not

“Bar off Italy
From all the approaches of the Teucrian king.”²⁸

I had learned that Juno had never uttered these words. Yet we were compelled to stray in the footsteps of these poetic fictions, and to turn into prose what the poet had said in verse. In the declamation, the boy won most applause who most strikingly reproduced the passions of anger and sorrow according to the “character” of the persons presented and who clothed it all in

²⁷ Terence, *Eunuch.*, 584-591; quoted again in *De civ. Dei*, II, vii.

²⁸ *Aeneid*, I, 38.

the most suitable language. What is it now to me, O my true Life, my God, that my declaiming was applauded above that of many of my classmates and fellow students? Actually, was not all that smoke and wind? Besides, was there nothing else on which I could have exercised my wit and tongue? Thy praise, O Lord, thy praises might have propped up the tendrils of my heart by thy Scriptures; and it would not have been dragged away by these empty trifles, a shameful prey to the spirits of the air. For there is more than one way in which men sacrifice to the fallen angels.

CHAPTER XVIII

28. But it was no wonder that I was thus carried toward vanity and was estranged from thee, O my God, when men were held up as models to me who, when relating a deed of theirs—not in itself evil—were covered with confusion if found guilty of a barbarism or a solecism; but who could tell of their own licentiousness and be applauded for it, so long as they did it in a full and ornate oration of well-chosen words. Thou seest all this, O Lord, and dost keep silence—“long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth”²⁹ as thou art. Wilt thou keep silence forever? Even now thou drawest from that vast deep the soul that seeks thee and thirsts after thy delight, whose “heart said unto thee, ‘I have sought thy face; thy face, Lord, will I seek.’ ”³⁰ For I was far from thy face in the dark shadows of passion. For it is not by our feet, nor by change of place, that we either turn from thee or return to thee. That younger son did not charter horses or chariots, or ships, or fly away on visible wings, or journey by walking so that in the far country he might prodigally waste all that thou didst give him when he set out.³¹ A kind Father when thou gavest; and kinder still when he returned destitute! To be wanton, that is to say, to be darkened in heart—this is to be far from thy face.

29. Look down, O Lord God, and see patiently, as thou art wont to do, how diligently the sons of men observe the conventional rules of letters and syllables, taught them by those who learned their letters beforehand, while they neglect the eternal rules of everlasting salvation taught by thee. They carry it so far that if he who practices or teaches the established rules of pronunciation should speak (contrary to grammatical usage)

²⁹ Cf. Ps. 103:8 and Ps. 86:15.

³⁰ Ps. 27:8.

³¹ An interesting mixed reminiscence of *Enneads*, I, 5:8 and Luke 15:13-24.

without aspirating the first syllable of "*hominem*" ["*ominem*," and thus make it "a 'uman being"], he will offend men more than if he, a human being, were to *hate* another human being contrary to thy commandments. It is as if he should feel that there is an enemy who could be more destructive to himself than that hatred which excites him against his fellow man; or that he could destroy him whom he hates more completely than he destroys his own soul by this same hatred. Now, obviously, there is no knowledge of letters more innate than the writing of conscience—against doing unto another what one would not have done to himself.

How mysterious thou art, who "dwestest on high"³² in silence. O thou, the only great God, who by an unwearied law hurlest down the penalty of blindness to unlawful desire! When a man seeking the reputation of eloquence stands before a human judge, while a thronging multitude surrounds him, and inveighs against his enemy with the most fierce hatred, he takes most vigilant heed that his tongue does not slip in a grammatical error, for example, and say *inter hominibus* [instead of *inter homines*], but he takes no heed lest, in the fury of his spirit, he cut off a man from his fellow men [*ex hominibus*].

30. These were the customs in the midst of which I was cast, an unhappy boy. This was the wrestling arena in which I was more fearful of perpetrating a barbarism than, having done so, of envying those who had not. These things I declare and confess to thee, my God. I was applauded by those whom I then thought it my whole duty to please, for I did not perceive the gulf of infamy wherein I was cast away from thy eyes.

For in thy eyes what was more infamous than I was already, since I displeased even my own kind and deceived, with endless lies, my tutor, my masters and parents—all from a love of play, a craving for frivolous spectacles, a stage-struck restlessness to imitate what I saw in these shows? I pilfered from my parents' cellar and table, sometimes driven by gluttony, sometimes just to have something to give to other boys in exchange for their baubles, which they were prepared to sell even though they liked them as well as I. Moreover, in this kind of play, I often sought dishonest victories, being myself conquered by the vain desire for pre-eminence. And what was I so unwilling to endure, and what was it that I censured so violently when I caught anyone, except the very things I did to others? And, when I was myself detected and censured, I preferred to quarrel rather than

³² Ps. 123:1.

to yield. Is this the innocence of childhood? It is not, O Lord, it is not. I entreat thy mercy, O my God, for these same sins as we grow older are transferred from tutors and masters; they pass from nuts and balls and sparrows, to magistrates and kings, to gold and lands and slaves, just as the rod is succeeded by more severe chastisements. It was, then, the fact of humility in childhood that thou, O our King, didst approve as a symbol of humility when thou saidst, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."³³

CHAPTER XIX

31. However, O Lord, to thee most excellent and most good, thou Architect and Governor of the universe, thanks would be due thee, O our God, even if thou hadst not willed that I should survive my boyhood. For I existed even then; I lived and felt and was solicitous about my own well-being—a trace of that most mysterious unity from whence I had my being.³⁴ I kept watch, by my inner sense, over the integrity of my outer senses, and even in these trifles and also in my thoughts about trifles, I learned to take pleasure in truth. I was averse to being deceived; I had a vigorous memory; I was gifted with the power of speech, was softened by friendship, shunned sorrow, meanness, ignorance. Is not such an animated creature as this wonderful and praiseworthy? But all these are gifts of my God; I did not give them to myself. Moreover, they are good, and they all together constitute myself. Good, then, is he that made me, and he is my God; and before him will I rejoice exceedingly for every good gift which, even as a boy, I had. But herein lay my sin, that it was not in him, but in his creatures—myself and the rest—that I sought for pleasures, honors, and truths. And I fell thereby into sorrows, troubles, and errors. Thanks be to thee, my joy, my pride, my confidence, my God—thanks be to thee for thy gifts; but do thou preserve them in me. For thus wilt thou preserve me; and those things which thou hast given me shall be developed and perfected, and I myself shall be with thee, for from thee is my being.

³³ Matt. 19:14.

³⁴ Another Plotinian echo; cf. *Enneads*, III, 8:10.

BOOK TWO

He concentrates here on his sixteenth year, a year of idleness, lust, and adolescent mischief. The memory of stealing some pears prompts a deep probing of the motives and aims of sinful acts. "I became to myself a wasteland."

CHAPTER I

1. I wish now to review in memory my past wickedness and the carnal corruptions of my soul—not because I still love them, but that I may love thee, O my God. For love of thy love I do this, recalling in the bitterness of self-examination my wicked ways, that thou mayest grow sweet to me, thou sweetness without deception! Thou sweetness happy and assured! Thus thou mayest gather me up out of those fragments in which I was torn to pieces, while I turned away from thee, O Unity, and lost myself among "the many."¹ For as I became a youth, I longed to be satisfied with worldly things, and I dared to grow wild in a succession of various and shadowy loves. My form wasted away, and I became corrupt in thy eyes, yet I was still pleasing to my own eyes—and eager to please the eyes of men.

CHAPTER II

2. But what was it that delighted me save to love and to be loved? Still I did not keep the moderate way of the love of mind to mind—the bright path of friendship. Instead, the mists of passion steamed up out of the pudgy concupiscence of the flesh, and the hot imagination of puberty, and they so obscured

¹ Yet another Plotinian phrase; cf. *Enneads*, I, 6, 9:1-2.

and overcast my heart that I was unable to distinguish pure affection from unholy desire. Both boiled confusedly within me, and dragged my unstable youth down over the cliffs of unchaste desires and plunged me into a gulf of infamy. Thy anger had come upon me, and I knew it not. I had been deafened by the clanking of the chains of my mortality, the punishment for my soul's pride, and I wandered farther from thee, and thou didst permit me to do so. I was tossed to and fro, and wasted, and poured out, and I boiled over in my fornications—and yet thou didst hold thy peace, O my tardy Joy! Thou didst still hold thy peace, and I wandered still farther from thee into more and yet more barren fields of sorrow, in proud dejection and restless lassitude.

3. If only there had been someone to regulate my disorder and turn to my profit the fleeting beauties of the things around me, and to fix a bound to their sweetness, so that the tides of my youth might have spent themselves upon the shore of marriage! Then they might have been tranquilized and satisfied with having children, as thy law prescribes, O Lord—O thou who dost form the offspring of our death and art able also with a tender hand to blunt the thorns which were excluded from thy paradise!² For thy omnipotence is not far from us even when we are far from thee. Now, on the other hand, I might have given more vigilant heed to the voice from the clouds: "Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh, but I spare you,"³ and, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman,"⁴ and, "He that is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he that is married cares for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife."⁵ I should have listened more attentively to these words, and, thus having been "made a eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake,"⁶ I would have with greater happiness expected thy embraces.

4. But, fool that I was, I foamed in my wickedness as the sea and, forsaking thee, followed the rushing of my own tide, and burst out of all thy bounds. But I did not escape thy scourges. For what mortal can do so? Thou wast always by me, mercifully angry and flavoring all my unlawful pleasures with bitter discontent, in order that I might seek pleasures free from discontent. But where could I find such pleasure save in thee, O Lord—save in thee, who dost teach us by sorrow, who woundest

² Cf. Gen. 3:18 and *De bono conjugali*, 8-9, 32-35 (*N-PNF*, III, 396-413).

³ I Cor. 7:28.

⁴ I Cor. 7:1.

⁵ I Cor. 7:32, 33.

⁶ Cf. Matt. 19:12.

us to heal us, and dost kill us that we may not die apart from thee. Where was I, and how far was I exiled from the delights of thy house, in that sixteenth year of the age of my flesh, when the madness of lust held full sway in me—that madness which grants indulgence to human shamelessness, even though it is forbidden by thy laws—and I gave myself entirely to it? Meanwhile, my family took no care to save me from ruin by marriage, for their sole care was that I should learn how to make a powerful speech and become a persuasive orator.

CHAPTER III

5. Now, in that year my studies were interrupted. I had come back from Madaura, a neighboring city⁷ where I had gone to study grammar and rhetoric; and the money for a further term at Carthage was being got together for me. This project was more a matter of my father's ambition than of his means, for he was only a poor citizen of Tagaste.

To whom am I narrating all this? Not to thee, O my God, but to my own kind in thy presence—to that small part of the human race who may chance to come upon these writings. And to what end? That I and all who read them may understand what depths there are from which we are to cry unto thee.⁸ For what is more surely heard in thy ear than a confessing heart and a faithful life?

Who did not extol and praise my father, because he went quite beyond his means to supply his son with the necessary expenses for a far journey in the interest of his education? For many far richer citizens did not do so much for their children. Still, this same father troubled himself not at all as to how I was progressing toward thee nor how chaste I was, just so long as I was skillful in speaking—no matter how barren I was to thy tillage, O God, who art the one true and good Lord of my heart, which is thy field.⁹

6. During that sixteenth year of my age, I lived with my parents, having a holiday from school for a time—this idleness imposed upon me by my parents' straitened finances. The thornbushes of lust grew rank about my head, and there was no

⁷ Twenty miles from Tagaste, famed as the birthplace of Apuleius, the only notable classical author produced by the province of Africa.

⁸ Another echo of the *De profundis* (Ps. 130:1)—and the most explicit statement we have from Augustine of his motive and aim in writing these "confessions."

⁹ Cf. I Cor. 3:9.

hand to root them out. Indeed, when my father saw me one day at the baths and perceived that I was becoming a man, and was showing the signs of adolescence, he joyfully told my mother about it as if already looking forward to grandchildren, rejoicing in that sort of inebriation in which the world so often forgets thee, its Creator, and falls in love with thy creature instead of thee—the inebriation of that invisible wine of a perverted will which turns and bows down to infamy. But in my mother's breast thou hadst already begun to build thy temple and the foundation of thy holy habitation—whereas my father was only a catechumen, and that but recently. She was, therefore, startled with a holy fear and trembling: for though I had not yet been baptized, she feared those crooked ways in which they walk who turn their backs to thee and not their faces.

7. Woe is me! Do I dare affirm that thou didst hold thy peace, O my God, while I wandered farther away from thee? Didst thou really then hold thy peace? Then whose words were they but thine which by my mother, thy faithful handmaid, thou didst pour into my ears? None of them, however, sank into my heart to make me do anything. She deplored and, as I remember, warned me privately with great solicitude, "not to commit fornication; but above all things never to defile another man's wife." These appeared to me but womanish counsels, which I would have blushed to obey. Yet they were from thee, and I knew it not. I thought that thou wast silent and that it was only she who spoke. Yet it was through her that thou didst not keep silence toward me; and in rejecting her counsel I was rejecting thee—I, her son, "the son of thy handmaid, thy servant."¹⁰ But I did not realize this, and rushed on headlong with such blindness that, among my friends, I was ashamed to be less shameless than they, when I heard them boasting of their disgraceful exploits—yes, and glorying all the more the worse their baseness was. What is worse, I took pleasure in such exploits, not for the pleasure's sake only but mostly for praise. What is worthy of vituperation except vice itself? Yet I made myself out worse than I was, in order that I might not go lacking for praise. And when in anything I had not sinned as the worst ones in the group, I would still say that I had done what I had not done, in order not to appear contemptible because I was more innocent than they; and not to drop in their esteem because I was more chaste.

8. Behold with what companions I walked the streets of

¹⁰ Ps. 116:16.

Babylon! I rolled in its mire and lolled about on it, as if on a bed of spices and precious ointments. And, drawing me more closely to the very center of that city, my invisible enemy trod me down and seduced me, for I was easy to seduce. My mother had already fled out of the midst of Babylon¹¹ and was progressing, albeit slowly, toward its outskirts. For in counseling me to chastity, she did not bear in mind what her husband had told her about me. And although she knew that my passions were destructive even then and dangerous for the future, she did not think they should be restrained by the bonds of conjugal affection—if, indeed, they could not be cut away to the quick. She took no heed of this, for she was afraid lest a wife should prove a hindrance and a burden to my hopes. These were not her hopes of the world to come, which my mother had in thee, but the hope of learning, which both my parents were too anxious that I should acquire—my father, because he had little or no thought of thee, and only vain thoughts for me; my mother, because she thought that the usual course of study would not only be no hindrance but actually a furtherance toward my eventual return to thee. This much I conjecture, recalling as well as I can the temperaments of my parents. Meantime, the reins of discipline were slackened on me, so that without the restraint of due severity, I might play at whatsoever I fancied, even to the point of dissoluteness. And in all this there was that mist which shut out from my sight the brightness of thy truth, O my God; and my iniquity bulged out, as it were, with fatness!¹²

CHAPTER IV

9. Theft is punished by thy law, O Lord, and by the law written in men's hearts, which not even ingrained wickedness can erase. For what thief will tolerate another thief stealing from him? Even a rich thief will not tolerate a poor thief who is driven to theft by want. Yet I had a desire to commit robbery, and did so, compelled to it by neither hunger nor poverty, but through a contempt for well-doing and a strong impulse to iniquity. For I pilfered something which I already had in sufficient measure, and of much better quality. I did not desire to enjoy what I stole, but only the theft and the sin itself.

There was a pear tree close to our own vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was not tempting either for its color or for its

¹¹ Cf. Jer. 51:6; 50:8.

¹² Cf. Ps. 73:7.

flavor. Late one night—having prolonged our games in the streets until then, as our bad habit was—a group of young scoundrels, and I among them, went to shake and rob this tree. We carried off a huge load of pears, not to eat ourselves, but to dump out to the hogs, after barely tasting some of them ourselves. Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden. Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart—which thou didst pity even in that bottomless pit. Behold, now let my heart confess to thee what it was seeking there, when I was being gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved my own undoing. I loved my error—not that for which I erred but the error itself. A depraved soul, falling away from security in thee to destruction in itself, seeking nothing from the shameful deed but shame itself.

CHAPTER V

10. Now there is a comeliness in all beautiful bodies, and in gold and silver and all things. The sense of touch has its own power to please and the other senses find their proper objects in physical sensation. Worldly honor also has its own glory, and so do the powers to command and to overcome: and from these there springs up the desire for revenge. Yet, in seeking these pleasures, we must not depart from thee, O Lord, nor deviate from thy law. The life which we live here has its own peculiar attractiveness because it has a certain measure of comeliness of its own and a harmony with all these inferior values. The bond of human friendship has a sweetness of its own, binding many souls together as one. Yet because of these values, sin is committed, because we have an inordinate preference for these goods of a lower order and neglect the better and the higher good—neglecting thee, O our Lord God, and thy truth and thy law. For these inferior values have their delights, but not at all equal to my God, who hath made them all. For in him do the righteous delight and he is the sweetness of the upright in heart.

11. When, therefore, we inquire why a crime was committed, we do not accept the explanation unless it appears that there was the desire to obtain some of those values which we designate inferior, or else a fear of losing them. For truly they are beautiful and comely, though in comparison with the superior and celestial goods they are abject and contemptible. A man has murdered another man—what was his motive? Either he desired his wife or his property or else he would steal to support himself; or

else he was afraid of losing something to him; or else, having been injured, he was burning to be revenged. Would a man commit murder without a motive, taking delight simply in the act of murder? Who would believe such a thing? Even for that savage and brutal man [Catiline], of whom it was said that he was gratuitously wicked and cruel, there is still a motive assigned to his deeds. "Lest through idleness," he says, "hand or heart should grow inactive."¹³ And to what purpose? Why, even this: that, having once got possession of the city through his practice of his wicked ways, he might gain honors, empire, and wealth, and thus be exempt from the fear of the laws and from financial difficulties in supplying the needs of his family—and from the consciousness of his own wickedness. So it seems that even Catiline himself loved not his own villainies, but something else, and it was this that gave him the motive for his crimes.

CHAPTER VI

12. What was it in you, O theft of mine, that I, poor wretch, doted on—you deed of darkness—in that sixteenth year of my age? Beautiful you were not, for you were a theft. But are you anything at all, so that I could analyze the case with you? Those pears that we stole were fair to the sight because they were thy creation, O Beauty beyond compare, O Creator of all, O thou good God—God the highest good and my true good.¹⁴ Those pears were truly pleasant to the sight, but it was not for them that my miserable soul lusted, for I had an abundance of better pears. I stole those simply that I might steal, for, having stolen them, I threw them away. My sole gratification in them was my own sin, which I was pleased to enjoy; for, if any one of these pears entered my mouth, the only good flavor it had was my sin in eating it. And now, O Lord my God, I ask what it was in that theft of mine that caused me such delight; for behold it had no beauty of its own—certainly not the sort of beauty that exists in justice and wisdom, nor such as is in the mind, memory senses, and the animal life of man; nor yet the kind that is the glory and beauty of the stars in their courses; nor the beauty of the earth, or the sea—teeming with spawning life, replacing in birth that which dies and decays. Indeed, it did not have that false and shadowy beauty which attends the deceptions of vice.

13. For thus we see pride wearing the mask of high-spiritedness, although only thou, O God, art high above all. Ambition

¹³ Cicero, *De Catiline*, 16.

¹⁴ *Deus summum bonum et bonum verum meum.*

seeks honor and glory, whereas only thou shouldst be honored above all, and glorified forever. The powerful man seeks to be feared, because of his cruelty; but who ought really to be feared but God only? What can be forced away or withdrawn out of his power—when or where or whither or by whom? The enticements of the wanton claim the name of love; and yet nothing is more enticing than thy love, nor is anything loved more healthfully than thy truth, bright and beautiful above all. Curiosity prompts a desire for knowledge, whereas it is only thou who knowest all things supremely. Indeed, ignorance and foolishness themselves go masked under the names of simplicity and innocence; yet there is no being that has true simplicity like thine, and none is innocent as thou art. Thus it is that by a sinner's own deeds he is himself harmed. Human sloth pretends to long for rest, but what sure rest is there save in the Lord? Luxury would fain be called plenty and abundance; but thou art the fullness and unfailing abundance of unfading joy. Prodigality presents a show of liberality; but thou art the most lavish giver of all good things. Covetousness desires to possess much; but thou art already the possessor of all things. Envy contends that its aim is for excellence; but what is so excellent as thou? Anger seeks revenge; but who avenges more justly than thou? Fear recoils at the unfamiliar and the sudden changes which threaten things beloved, and is wary for its own security; but what can happen that is unfamiliar or sudden to thee? Or who can deprive thee of what thou lovest? Where, really, is there unshaken security save with thee? Grief languishes for things lost in which desire had taken delight, because it wills to have nothing taken from it, just as nothing can be taken from thee.

14. Thus the soul commits fornication when she is turned from thee,¹⁵ and seeks apart from thee what she cannot find pure and untainted until she returns to thee. All things thus imitate thee—but pervertedly—when they separate themselves far from thee and raise themselves up against thee. But, even in this act of perverse imitation, they acknowledge thee to be the Creator of all nature, and recognize that there is no place whither they can altogether separate themselves from thee. What was it, then, that I loved in that theft? And wherein was I imitating my Lord, even in a corrupted and perverted way? Did I wish, if only by gesture, to rebel against thy law, even though I had no power to do so actually—so that, even as a

¹⁵ *Avertitur*, the opposite of *convertitur*: the evil will turns the soul away from God; this is sin. By grace it is turned to God; this is *conversion*.

captive, I might produce a sort of counterfeit liberty, by doing with impunity deeds that were forbidden, in a deluded sense of omnipotence? Behold this servant of thine, fleeing from his Lord and following a shadow! O rottenness! O monstrosity of life and abyss of death! Could I find pleasure only in what was unlawful, and only because it was unlawful?

CHAPTER VII

15. "What shall I render unto the Lord"¹⁶ for the fact that while my memory recalls these things my soul no longer fears them? I will love thee, O Lord, and thank thee, and confess to thy name, because thou hast put away from me such wicked and evil deeds. To thy grace I attribute it and to thy mercy, that thou hast melted away my sin as if it were ice. To thy grace also I attribute whatsoever of evil I did *not* commit—for what might I not have done, loving sin as I did, just for the sake of sinning? Yea, all the sins that I confess now to have been forgiven me, both those which I committed willfully and those which, by thy providence, I did not commit. What man is there who, when reflecting upon his own infirmity, dares to ascribe his chastity and innocence to his own powers, so that he should love thee less—as if he were in less need of thy mercy in which thou forgivest the transgressions of those that return to thee? As for that man who, when called by thee, obeyed thy voice and shunned those things which he here reads of me as I recall and confess them of myself, let him not despise me—for I, who was sick, have been healed by the same Physician by whose aid it was that he did not fall sick, or rather was less sick than I. And for this let him love thee just as much—indeed, all the more—since he sees me restored from such a great weakness of sin by the selfsame Saviour by whom he sees himself preserved from such a weakness.

CHAPTER VIII

16. What profit did I, a wretched one, receive from those things which, when I remember them now, cause me shame—above all, from that theft, which I loved only for the theft's sake? And, as the theft itself was nothing, I was all the more wretched in that I loved it so. Yet by myself alone I would not

¹⁶ Ps. 116:12.

have done it—I still recall how I felt about this then—I could not have done it alone. I loved it then because of the companionship of my accomplices with whom I did it. I did not, therefore, love the theft alone—yet, indeed, it was only the theft that I loved, for the companionship was nothing. What is this paradox? Who is it that can explain it to me but God, who illumines my heart and searches out the dark corners thereof? What is it that has prompted my mind to inquire about it, to discuss and to reflect upon all this? For had I at that time loved the pears that I stole and wished to enjoy them, I might have done so alone, if I could have been satisfied with the mere act of theft by which my pleasure was served. Nor did I need to have that itching of my own passions inflamed by the encouragement of my accomplices. But since the pleasure I got was not from the pears, it was in the crime itself, enhanced by the companionship of my fellow sinners.

CHAPTER IX

17. By what passion, then, was I animated? It was undoubtedly depraved and a great misfortune for me to feel it. But still, what was it? "Who can understand his errors?"¹⁷

We laughed because our hearts were tickled at the thought of deceiving the owners, who had no idea of what we were doing and would have strenuously objected. Yet, again, why did I find such delight in doing this which I would not have done alone? Is it that no one readily laughs alone? No one does so readily; but still sometimes, when men are by themselves and no one else is about, a fit of laughter will overcome them when something very droll presents itself to their sense or mind. Yet alone I would not have done it—alone I could not have done it at all.

Behold, my God, the lively review of my soul's career is laid bare before thee. I would not have committed that theft alone. My pleasure in it was not what I stole but, rather, the act of stealing. Nor would I have enjoyed doing it alone—indeed I would not have done it! O friendship all unfriendly! You strange seducer of the soul, who hungers for mischief from impulses of mirth and wantonness, who craves another's loss without any desire for one's own profit or revenge—so that, when they say, "Let's go, let's do it," we are ashamed not to be shameless.

¹⁷ Ps. 19:12.

CHAPTER X

18. Who can unravel such a twisted and tangled knottiness? It is unclean. I hate to reflect upon it. I hate to look on it. But I do long for thee, O Righteousness and Innocence, so beautiful and comely to all virtuous eyes—I long for thee with an insatiable satiety. With thee is perfect rest, and life unchanging. He who enters into thee enters into the joy of his Lord,¹⁸ and shall have no fear and shall achieve excellence in the Excellent. I fell away from thee, O my God, and in my youth I wandered too far from thee, my true support. And I became to myself a wasteland.

¹⁸ Cf. Matt. 25:21.

BOOK THREE

The story of his student days in Carthage, his discovery of Cicero's Hortensius, the enkindling of his philosophical interest, his infatuation with the Manichean heresy, and his mother's dream which foretold his eventual return to the true faith and to God.

CHAPTER I

1. I came to Carthage, where a caldron of unholy loves was seething and bubbling all around me. I was not in love as yet, but I was in love with love; and, from a hidden hunger, I hated myself for not feeling more intensely a sense of hunger. I was looking for something to love, for I was in love with loving, and I hated security and a smooth way, free from snares. Within me I had a dearth of that inner food which is thyself, my God—although that dearth caused me no hunger. And I remained without any appetite for incorruptible food—not because I was already filled with it, but because the emptier I became the more I loathed it. Because of this my soul was unhealthy; and, full of sores, it exuded itself forth, itching to be scratched by scraping on the things of the senses.¹ Yet, had these things no soul, they would certainly not inspire our love.

To love and to be loved was sweet to me, and all the more when I gained the enjoyment of the body of the person I loved. Thus I polluted the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence and I dimmed its luster with the slime of lust. Yet, foul and unclean as I was, I still craved, in excessive vanity, to be thought elegant and urbane. And I did fall precipitately into the love I was longing for. My God, my mercy, with how much

¹ Cf. Job 2:7, 8.

held to heretofore should now be condemned, because both sides were equally defensible. For that way did not appear to me yet vanquished; but neither did it seem yet victorious.

25. But now I earnestly bent my mind to inquire if there was possible any way to prove the Manicheans guilty of falsehood. If I could have conceived of a spiritual substance, all their strongholds would have collapsed and been cast out of my mind. But I could not. Still, concerning the body of this world, nature as a whole—now that I was able to consider and compare such things more and more—I now decided that the majority of the philosophers held the more probable views. So, in what I thought was the method of the Academics—doubting everything and fluctuating between all the options—I came to the conclusion that the Manicheans were to be abandoned. For I judged, even in that period of doubt, that I could not remain in a sect to which I preferred some of the philosophers. But I refused to commit the cure of my fainting soul to the philosophers, because they were without the saving name of Christ. I resolved, therefore, to become a catechumen in the Catholic Church—which my parents had so much urged upon me—until something certain shone forth by which I might guide my course.

BOOK SIX

Turmoil in the twenties. Monica follows Augustine to Milan and finds him a catechumen in the Catholic Church. Both admire Ambrose but Augustine gets no help from him on his personal problems. Ambition spurs and Alypius and Nebridius join him in a confused quest for the happy life. Augustine becomes engaged, dismisses his first mistress, takes another, and continues his fruitless search for truth.

CHAPTER I

1. O Hope from my youth,¹ where wast thou to me and where hadst thou gone away?² For hadst thou not created me and differentiated me from the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, making me wiser than they? And yet I was wandering about in a dark and slippery way, seeking thee outside myself and thus not finding the God of my heart. I had gone down into the depths of the sea and had lost faith, and had despaired of ever finding the truth.

By this time my mother had come to me, having mustered the courage of piety, following over sea and land, secure in thee through all the perils of the journey. For in the dangers of the voyage she comforted the sailors—to whom the inexperienced voyagers, when alarmed, were accustomed to go for comfort—and assured them of a safe arrival because she had been so assured by thee in a vision.

She found me in deadly peril through my despair of ever finding the truth. But when I told her that I was now no longer a Manichean, though not yet a Catholic Christian, she did not leap for joy as if this were unexpected; for she had already been

¹ Cf. Ps. 71:5.
A.C.E.—8

² Cf. Ps. 10:1.

reassured about that part of my misery for which she had mourned me as one dead, but also as one who would be raised to thee. She had carried me out on the bier of her thoughts, that thou mightest say to the widow's son, "Young man, I say unto you, arise!"³ and then he would revive and begin to speak, and thou wouldst deliver him to his mother. Therefore, her heart was not agitated with any violent exultation when she heard that so great a part of what she daily entreated thee to do had actually already been done—that, though I had not yet grasped the truth, I was rescued from falsehood. Instead, she was fully confident that thou who hadst promised the whole would give her the rest, and thus most calmly, and with a fully confident heart, she replied to me that she believed, in Christ, that before she died she would see me a faithful Catholic. And she said no more than this to me. But to thee, O Fountain of mercy, she poured out still more frequent prayers and tears that thou wouldst hasten thy aid and enlighten my darkness, and she hurried all the more zealously to the church and hung upon the words of Ambrose, praying for the fountain of water that springs up into everlasting life.⁴ For she loved that 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."

CHAPTER II

2. So also my mother brought to certain oratories, erected in the memory of the saints, offerings of porridge, bread, and wine—as had been her custom in Africa—and she was forbidden to do so by the doorkeeper [*ostiarius*]. And as soon as she learned that it was the bishop who had forbidden it, she acquiesced so devoutly and obediently that I myself marveled how readily she could bring herself to turn critic of her own customs, rather than question his prohibition. For winebibbing had not taken possession of her spirit, nor did the love of wine stimulate her to hate the truth, as it does too many, both male and female, who turn as sick at a hymn to sobriety as drunkards do at a draught of water. When she had brought her basket with the festive gifts, which she would taste first herself and give the rest away, she would never allow herself more than one

³ Cf. Luke 7:11-17.

⁴ Cf. John 4:14.

little cup of wine, diluted according to her own temperate palate, which she would taste out of courtesy. And, if there were many oratories of departed saints that ought to be honored in the same way, she still carried around with her the same little cup, to be used everywhere. This became not only very much watered but also quite tepid with carrying it about. She would distribute it by small sips to those around, for she sought to stimulate their devotion, not pleasure.

But as soon as she found that this custom was forbidden by that famous preacher and most pious prelate, even to those who would use it in moderation, lest thereby it might be an occasion of gluttony for those who were already drunken (and also because these funeral memorials were very much like some of the superstitious practices of the pagans), she most willingly abstained from it. And, in place of a basket filled with fruits of the earth, she had learned to bring to the oratories of the martyrs a heart full of purer petitions, and to give all that she could to the poor—so that the Communion of the Lord's body might be rightly celebrated in those places where, after the example of his Passion, the martyrs had been sacrificed and crowned. But yet it seems to me, O Lord my God—and my heart thinks of it this way in thy sight—that my mother would probably not have given way so easily to the rejection of this custom if it had been forbidden by another, whom she did not love as she did Ambrose. For, out of her concern for my salvation, she loved him most dearly; and he loved her truly, on account of her faithful religious life, in which she frequented the church with good works, "fervent in spirit."⁵ Thus he would, when he saw me, often burst forth into praise of her, congratulating me that I had such a mother—little knowing what a son she had in me, who was still a skeptic in all these matters and who could not conceive that the way of life could be found out.

CHAPTER III

3. Nor had I come yet to groan in my prayers that thou wouldst help me. My mind was wholly intent on knowledge and eager for disputation. Ambrose himself I esteemed a happy man, as the world counted happiness, because great personages held him in honor. Only his celibacy appeared to me a painful burden. But what hope he cherished, what struggles he had against the temptations that beset his high station, what solace

⁵ Rom. 12:11.

in adversity, and what savory joys thy bread possessed for the hidden mouth of his heart when feeding on it, I could neither conjecture nor experience.

Nor did he know my own frustrations, nor the pit of my danger. For I could not request of him what I wanted as I wanted it, because I was debarred from hearing and speaking to him by crowds of busy people to whose infirmities he devoted himself. And when he was not engaged with them—which was never for long at a time—he was either refreshing his body with necessary food or his mind with reading.

Now, as he read, his eyes glanced over the pages and his heart searched out the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent. Often when we came to his room—for no one was forbidden to enter, nor was it his custom that the arrival of visitors should be announced to him—we would see him thus reading to himself. After we had sat for a long time in silence—for who would dare interrupt one so intent?—we would then depart, realizing that he was unwilling to be distracted in the little time he could gain for the recruiting of his mind, free from the clamor of other men's business. Perhaps he was fearful lest, if the author he was studying should express himself vaguely, some doubtful and attentive hearer would ask him to expound it or discuss some of the more abstruse questions, so that he could not get over as much material as he wished, if his time was occupied with others. And even a truer reason for his reading to himself might have been the care for preserving his voice, which was very easily weakened. Whatever his motive was in so doing, it was doubtless, in such a man, a good one.

4. But actually I could find no opportunity of putting the questions I desired to that holy oracle of thine in his heart, unless it was a matter which could be dealt with briefly. However, those surgings in me required that he should give me his full leisure so that I might pour them out to him; but I never found him so. I heard him, indeed, every Lord's Day, "rightly dividing the word of truth"⁶ among the people. And I became all the more convinced that all those knots of crafty calumnies which those deceivers of ours had knit together against the divine books could be unraveled.

I soon understood that the statement that man was made after the image of Him that created him⁷ was not understood by thy spiritual sons—whom thou hadst regenerated through the Catholic Mother⁸ through grace—as if they believed and

⁶ II Tim. 2:15.

⁷ Cf. Gen. 1:26f.

⁸ The Church.

imagined that thou wert bounded by a human form, although what was the nature of a spiritual substance I had not the faintest or vaguest notion. Still rejoicing, I blushed that for so many years I had bayed, not against the Catholic faith, but against the fables of fleshly imagination. For I had been both impious and rash in this, that I had condemned by pronouncement what I ought to have learned by inquiry. For thou, O Most High, and most near, most secret, yet most present, who dost not have limbs, some of which are larger and some smaller, but who art wholly everywhere and nowhere in space, and art not shaped by some corporeal form: thou didst create man after thy own image and, see, he dwells in space, both head and feet.

CHAPTER IV

5. Since I could not then understand how this image of thine could subsist, I should have knocked on the door and propounded the doubt as to how it was to be believed, and not have insultingly opposed it as if it were actually believed. Therefore, my anxiety as to what I could retain as certain gnawed all the more sharply into my soul, and I felt quite ashamed because during the long time I had been deluded and deceived by the [Manichean] promises of certainties, I had, with childish petulance, prated of so many uncertainties as if they were certain. That they were falsehoods became apparent to me only afterward. However, I was certain that they were uncertain and since I had held them as certainly uncertain I had accused thy Catholic Church with a blind contentiousness. I had not yet discovered that it taught the truth, but I now knew that it did not teach what I had so vehemently accused it of. In this respect, at least, I was confounded and converted; and I rejoiced, O my God, that the one Church, the body of thy only Son—in which the name of Christ had been sealed upon me as an infant—did not relish these childish trifles and did not maintain in its sound doctrine any tenet that would involve pressing thee, the Creator of all, into space, which, however extended and immense, would still be bounded on all sides—like the shape of a human body.

6. I was also glad that the old Scriptures of the Law and the Prophets were laid before me to be read, not now with an eye to what had seemed absurd in them when formerly I censured thy holy ones for thinking thus, when they actually did not think in that way. And I listened with delight to Ambrose, in his sermons

to the people, often recommending this text most diligently as a rule: "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life,"⁹ while at the same time he drew aside the mystic veil and opened to view the spiritual meaning of what seemed to teach perverse doctrine if it were taken according to the letter. I found nothing in his teachings that offended me, though I could not yet know for certain whether what he taught was true. For all this time I restrained my heart from assenting to anything, fearing to fall headlong into error. Instead, by this hanging in suspense, I was being strangled.¹⁰ For my desire was to be as certain of invisible things as I was that seven and three are ten. I was not so deranged as to believe that *this* could not be comprehended, but my desire was to have other things as clear as this, whether they were physical objects, which were not present to my senses, or spiritual objects, which I did not know how to conceive of except in physical terms.

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.

CHAPTER V

7. Still, from this time forward, I began to prefer the Catholic doctrine. I felt that it was with moderation and honesty that it commanded things to be believed that were not demonstrated—whether they could be demonstrated, but not to everyone, or whether they could not be demonstrated at all. This was far better than the method of the Manicheans, in which our credulity was mocked by an audacious promise of knowledge and then many fabulous and absurd things were forced upon believers *because* they were incapable of demonstration. After that, O Lord, little by little, with a gentle and most merciful hand, drawing and calming my heart, thou didst persuade me

⁹ II Cor. 3:6.

¹⁰ Another reference to the Academic doctrine of *suspendium* (ἐπισχῆ); cf. Bk. V, Ch. X, 19, and also *Enchiridion*, VII, 20.

that, if I took into account the multitude of things I had never seen, nor been present when they were enacted—such as many of the events of secular history; and the numerous reports of places and cities which I had not seen; or such as my relations with many friends, or physicians, or with these men and those—that unless we should believe, we should do nothing at all in this life.¹¹ Finally, I was impressed with what an unalterable assurance I believed which two people were my parents, though this was impossible for me to know otherwise than by hearsay. By bringing all this into my consideration, thou didst persuade me that it was not the ones who believed thy books—which with so great authority thou hast established among nearly all nations—but those who did not believe them who were to be blamed. Moreover, those men were not to be listened to who would say to me, "How do you know that those Scriptures were imparted to mankind by the Spirit of the one and most true God?" For this was the point that was most of all to be believed, since no wranglings of blasphemous questions such as I had read in the books of the self-contradicting philosophers could once snatch from me the belief that thou dost exist—although *what* thou art I did not know—and that to thee belongs the governance of human affairs.

8. This much I believed, some times more strongly than other times. But I always believed both that thou art and that thou hast a care for us,¹² although I was ignorant both as to what should be thought about thy substance and as to which way led, or led back, to thee. Thus, since we are too weak by unaided reason to find out truth, and since, because of this, we need the authority of the Holy Writings, I had now begun to believe that thou wouldst not, under any circumstances, have given such eminent authority to those Scriptures throughout all lands if it had not been that through them thy will may be believed in and that thou mightest be sought. For, as to those passages in the Scripture which had heretofore appeared incongruous and offensive to me, now that I had heard several of them expounded reasonably, I could see that they were to be resolved by the mysteries of spiritual interpretation. The authority of Scripture seemed to me all the more revered and

¹¹ *Nisi crederentur, omnino in hac vita nihil ageremus*, which should be set alongside the more famous *nisi crederitis, non intelligetis* (*Enchiridion*, XIII, 14). This is the basic assumption of Augustine's whole epistemology. See Robert E. Cushman, "Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine," in *Church History* (XIX, 4, 1950), pp. 271–294.

¹² Cf. Heb. 11:6.

worthy of devout belief because, although it was visible for all to read, it reserved the full majesty of its secret wisdom within its spiritual profundity. While it stooped to all in the great plainness of its language and simplicity of style, it yet required the closest attention of the most serious-minded—so that it might receive all into its common bosom, and direct some few through its narrow passages toward thee, yet many more than would have been the case had there not been in it such a lofty authority, which nevertheless allured multitudes to its bosom by its holy humility. I continued to reflect upon these things, and thou wast with me. I sighed, and thou didst hear me. I vacillated, and thou guidedst me. I roamed the broad way of the world, and thou didst not desert me.

CHAPTER VI

9. I was still eagerly aspiring to honors, money, and matrimony; and thou didst mock me. In pursuit of these ambitions I endured the most bitter hardships, in which thou wast being the more gracious the less thou wouldst allow anything that was not thee to grow sweet to me. Look into my heart, O Lord, whose prompting it is that I should recall all this, and confess it to thee. Now let my soul cleave to thee, now that thou hast freed her from that fast-sticking glue of death.

How wretched she was! And thou didst irritate her sore wound so that she might forsake all else and turn to thee—who art above all and without whom all things would be nothing at all—so that she should be converted and healed. How wretched I was at that time, and how thou didst deal with me so as to make me aware of my wretchedness, I recall from the incident of the day on which I was preparing to recite a panegyric on the emperor. In it I was to deliver many a lie, and the lying was to be applauded by those who knew I was lying. My heart was agitated with this sense of guilt and it seethed with the fever of my uneasiness. For, while walking along one of the streets of Milan, I saw a poor beggar—with what I believe was a full belly—joking and hilarious. And I sighed and spoke to the friends around me of the many sorrows that flowed from our madness, because in spite of all our exertions—such as those I was then laboring in, dragging the burden of my unhappiness under the spur of ambition, and, by dragging it, increasing it at the same time—still and all we aimed only to attain that very happiness which this beggar had reached before us; and

there was a grim chance that we should *never* attain it! For what he had obtained through a few coins, got by his begging, I was still scheming for by many a wretched and tortuous turning—namely, the joy of a passing felicity. He had not, indeed, gained true joy, but, at the same time, with all my ambitions, I was seeking one still more untrue. Anyhow, he was now joyous and I was anxious. He was free from care, and I was full of alarms. Now, if anyone should inquire of me whether I should prefer to be merry or anxious, I would reply, "Merry." Again, if I had been asked whether I should prefer to be as he was or as I myself then was, I would have chosen to be myself; though I was beset with cares and alarms. But would not this have been a false choice? Was the contrast valid? Actually, I ought not to prefer myself to him because I happened to be more learned than he was; for I got no great pleasure from my learning, but sought, rather, to please men by its exhibition—and this not to instruct, but only to please. Thus thou didst break my bones with the rod of thy correction.

10. Let my soul take its leave of those who say: "It makes a difference as to the object from which a man derives his joy. The beggar rejoiced in drunkenness; you longed to rejoice in glory." What glory, O Lord? The kind that is not in thee, for, just as his was no true joy, so was mine no true glory; but it turned my head all the more. He would get over his drunkenness that same night, but I had slept with mine many a night and risen again with it, and was to sleep again and rise again with it, I know not how many times. It does indeed make a difference as to the object from which a man's joy is gained. I know this is so, and I know that the joy of a faithful hope is incomparably beyond such vanity. Yet, at the same time, this beggar was beyond me, for he truly was the happier man—not only because he was thoroughly steeped in his mirth while I was torn to pieces with my cares, but because he had gotten his wine by giving good wishes to the passers-by while I was following after the ambition of my pride by lying. Much to this effect I said to my good companions, and I saw how readily they reacted pretty much as I did. Thus I found that it went ill with me; and I fretted, and doubled that very ill. And if any prosperity smiled upon me, I loathed to seize it, for almost before I could grasp it, it would fly away.

CHAPTER VII

11. Those of us who were living like friends together used to bemoan our lot in our common talk; but I discussed it with Alypius and Nebridius more especially and in very familiar terms. Alypius had been born in the same town as I; his parents were of the highest rank there, but he was a bit younger than I. He had studied under me when I first taught in our town, and then afterward at Carthage. He esteemed me highly because I appeared to him good and learned, and I esteemed him for his inborn love of virtue, which was uncommonly marked in a man so young. But in the whirlpool of Carthaginian fashion—where frivolous spectacles are hotly followed—he had been inveigled into the madness of the gladiatorial games. While he was miserably tossed about in this fad, I was teaching rhetoric there in a public school. At that time he was not attending my classes because of some ill feeling that had arisen between me and his father. I then came to discover how fatally he doted upon the circus, and I was deeply grieved, for he seemed likely to cast away his very great promise—if, indeed, he had not already done so. Yet I had no means of advising him, or any way of reclaiming him through restraint, either by the kindness of a friend or by the authority of a teacher. For I imagined that his feelings toward me were the same as his father's. But this turned out not to be the case. Indeed, disregarding his father's will in the matter, he began to be friendly and to visit my lecture room, to listen for a while and then depart.

12. But it slipped my memory to try to deal with his problem, to prevent him from ruining his excellent mind in his blind and headstrong passion for frivolous sport. But thou, O Lord, who holdest the helm of all that thou hast created,¹³ thou hadst not forgotten him who was one day to be numbered among thy sons, a chief minister of thy sacrament.¹⁴ And in order that his amendment might plainly be attributed to thee, thou broughtest it about through me while I knew nothing of it.

One day, when I was sitting in my accustomed place with my scholars before me, he came in, greeted me, sat himself

¹³ Cf. Plato, *Politicus*, 273 D.

¹⁴ Alypius was more than Augustine's close friend; he became bishop of Tagaste and was prominent in local Church affairs in the province of Africa.

down, and fixed his attention on the subject I was then discussing. It so happened that I had a passage in hand and, while I was interpreting it, a simile occurred to me, taken from the gladiatorial games. It struck me as relevant to make more pleasant and plain the point I wanted to convey by adding a biting gibe at those whom that madness had enthralled. Thou knowest, O our God, that I had no thought at that time of curing Alypius of that plague. But he took it to himself and thought that I would not have said it but for his sake. And what any other man would have taken as an occasion of offense against me, this worthy young man took as a reason for being offended at himself, and for loving me the more fervently. Thou hast said it long ago and written in thy Book, "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you."¹⁵ Now I had not rebuked him; but thou who canst make use of everything, both witting and unwitting, and in the order which thou thyself knowest to be best—and that order is right—thou madest my heart and tongue into burning coals with which thou mightest cauterize and cure the hopeful mind thus languishing. Let him be silent in thy praise who does not meditate on thy mercy, which rises up in my inmost parts to confess to thee. For after that speech Alypius rushed up out of that deep pit into which he had willfully plunged and in which he had been blinded by its miserable pleasures. And he roused his mind with a resolve to moderation. When he had done this, all the filth of the gladiatorial pleasures dropped away from him, and he went to them no more. Then he also prevailed upon his reluctant father to let him be my pupil. And, at the son's urging, the father at last consented. Thus Alypius began again to hear my lectures and became involved with me in the same superstition, loving in the Manicheans that outward display of ascetic discipline which he believed was true and unfeigned. It was, however, a senseless and seducing continence, which ensnared precious souls who were not able as yet to reach the height of true virtue, and who were easily beguiled with the veneer of what was only a shadowy and feigned virtue.

CHAPTER VIII

13. He had gone on to Rome before me to study law—which was the worldly way which his parents were forever urging him to pursue—and there he was carried away again with an incredible passion for the gladiatorial shows. For, although he

¹⁵ Prov. 9:8.

had been utterly opposed to such spectacles and detested them, one day he met by chance a company of his acquaintances and fellow students returning from dinner; and, with a friendly violence, they drew him, resisting and objecting vehemently, into the amphitheater, on a day of those cruel and murderous shows. He protested to them: "Though you drag my body to that place and set me down there, you cannot force me to give my mind or lend my eyes to these shows. Thus I will be absent while present, and so overcome both you and them." When they heard this, they dragged him on in, probably interested to see whether he could do as he said. When they got to the arena, and had taken what seats they could get, the whole place became a tumult of inhuman frenzy. But Alypius kept his eyes closed and forbade his mind to roam abroad after such wickedness. Would that he had shut his ears also! For when one of the combatants fell in the fight, a mighty cry from the whole audience stirred him so strongly that, overcome by curiosity and still prepared (as he thought) to despise and rise superior to it no matter what it was, he opened his eyes and was struck with a deeper wound in his soul than the victim whom he desired to see had been in his body. Thus he fell more miserably than the one whose fall had raised that mighty clamor which had entered through his ears and unlocked his eyes to make way for the wounding and beating down of his soul, which was more audacious than truly valiant—also it was weaker because it presumed on its own strength when it ought to have depended on Thee. For, as soon as he saw the blood, he drank in with it a savage temper, and he did not turn away, but fixed his eyes on the bloody pastime, unwittingly drinking in the madness—delighted with the wicked contest and drunk with blood lust. He was now no longer the same man who came in, but was one of the mob he came into, a true companion of those who had brought him thither. Why need I say more? He looked, he shouted, he was excited, and he took away with him the madness that would stimulate him to come again: not only with those who first enticed him, but even without them; indeed, dragging in others besides. And yet from all this, with a most powerful and most merciful hand, thou didst pluck him and taught him not to rest his confidence in himself but in thee—but not till long after.

CHAPTER IX

14. But this was all being stored up in his memory as medicine for the future. So also was that other incident when he was still studying under me at Carthage and was meditating at noonday in the market place on what he had to recite—as scholars usually have to do for practice—and thou didst allow him to be arrested by the police officers in the market place as a thief. I believe, O my God, that thou didst allow this for no other reason than that this man who was in the future to prove so great should now begin to learn that, in making just decisions, a man should not readily be condemned by other men with reckless credulity.

For as he was walking up and down alone before the judgment seat with his tablets and pen, lo, a young man—another one of the scholars, who was the real thief—secretly brought a hatchet and, without Alypius seeing him, got in as far as the leaden bars which protected the silversmith shop and began to hack away at the lead gratings. But when the noise of the hatchet was heard the silversmiths below began to call to each other in whispers and sent men to arrest whomsoever they should find. The thief heard their voices and ran away, leaving his hatchet because he was afraid to be caught with it. Now Alypius, who had not seen him come in, got a glimpse of him as he went out and noticed that he went off in great haste. Being curious to know the reasons, he went up to the place, where he found the hatchet, and stood wondering and pondering when, behold, those that were sent caught him alone, holding the hatchet which had made the noise which had startled them and brought them there. They seized him and dragged him away, gathering the tenants of the market place about them and boasting that they had caught a notorious thief. Thereupon he was led away to appear before the judge.

15. But this is as far as his lesson was to go. For immediately, O Lord, thou didst come to the rescue of his innocence, of which thou wast the sole witness. As he was being led off to prison or punishment, they were met by the master builder who had charge of the public buildings. The captors were especially glad to meet him because he had more than once suspected them of stealing the goods that had been lost out of the market place. Now, at last, they thought they could convince him who it was that had committed the thefts. But the custodian had often met

Alypius at the house of a certain senator, whose receptions he used to attend. He recognized him at once and, taking his hand, led him apart from the throng, inquired the cause of all the trouble, and learned what had occurred. He then commanded all the rabble still around—and very uproarious and full of threatenings they were—to come along with him, and they came to the house of the young man who had committed the deed. There, before the door, was a slave boy so young that he was not restrained from telling the whole story by fear of harming his master. And he had followed his master to the market place. Alypius recognized him, and whispered to the architect, who showed the boy the hatchet and asked whose it was. "Ours," he answered directly. And, being further questioned, he disclosed the whole affair. Thus the guilt was shifted to that household and the rabble, who had begun to triumph over Alypius, were shamed. And so he went away home, this man who was to be the future steward of thy Word and judge of so many causes in thy Church—a wiser and more experienced man.

CHAPTER X

16. I found him at Rome, and he was bound to me with the strongest possible ties, and he went with me to Milan, in order that he might not be separated from me, and also that he might obtain some law practice, for which he had qualified with a view to pleasing his parents more than himself. He had already sat three times as assessor, showing an integrity that seemed strange to many others, though he thought them strange who could prefer gold to integrity. His character had also been tested, not only by the bait of covetousness, but by the spur of fear. At Rome he was assessor to the secretary of the Italian Treasury. There was at that time a very powerful senator to whose favors many were indebted, and of whom many stood in fear. In his usual highhanded way he demanded to have a favor granted him that was forbidden by the laws. This Alypius resisted. A bribe was promised, but he scorned it with all his heart. Threats were employed, but he trampled them underfoot—so that all men marveled at so rare a spirit, which neither coveted the friendship nor feared the enmity of a man at once so powerful and so widely known for his great resources of helping his friends and doing harm to his enemies. Even the official whose counselor Alypius was—although he was unwilling that the favor should be granted—would not openly refuse the request, but

passed the responsibility on to Alypius, alleging that he would not permit him to give his assent. And the truth was that even if the judge had agreed, Alypius would have simply left the court.

There was one matter, however, which appealed to his love of learning, in which he was very nearly led astray. He found out that he might have books copied for himself at praetorian rates [i.e., at public expense]. But his sense of justice prevailed, and he changed his mind for the better, thinking that the rule that forbade him was still more profitable than the privilege that his office would have allowed him. These are little things, but "he that is faithful in a little matter is faithful also in a great one."¹⁶ Nor can that possibly be void which was uttered by the mouth of Thy truth: "If, therefore, you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"¹⁷ Such a man was Alypius, who clung to me at that time and who wavered in his purpose, just as I did, as to what course of life to follow.

17. Nebridius also had come to Milan for no other reason than that he might live with me in a most ardent search after truth and wisdom. He had left his native place near Carthage—and Carthage itself, where he usually lived—leaving behind his fine family estate, his house, and his mother, who would not follow him. Like me, he sighed; like me, he wavered; an ardent seeker after the true life and a most acute analyst of the most abstruse questions. So there were three begging mouths, sighing out their wants one to the other, and waiting upon thee, that thou mightest give them their meat in due season.¹⁸ And in all the vexations with which thy mercy followed our worldly pursuits, we sought for the reason why we suffered so—and all was darkness! We turned away groaning and exclaiming, "How long shall these things be?" And this we often asked, yet for all our asking we did not relinquish them; for as yet we had not discovered anything certain which, when we gave those others up, we might grasp in their stead.

CHAPTER XI

18. And I especially puzzled and wondered when I remembered how long a time had passed since my nineteenth year, in

¹⁶ Luke 16:10.

¹⁷ Luke 16:11, 12.

¹⁸ Cf. Ps. 145:15.

which I had first fallen in love with wisdom and had determined as soon as I could find her to abandon the empty hopes and mad delusions of vain desires. Behold, I was now getting close to thirty, still stuck fast in the same mire, still greedy of enjoying present goods which fly away and distract me; and I was still saying, "Tomorrow I shall discover it; behold, it will become plain, and I shall see it; behold, Faustus will come and explain everything." Or I would say¹⁹: "O you mighty Academics, is there no certainty that man can grasp for the guidance of his life? No, let us search the more diligently, and let us not despair. See, the things in the Church's books that appeared so absurd to us before do not appear so now, and may be otherwise and honestly interpreted. I will set my feet upon that step where, as a child, my parents placed me, until the clear truth is discovered. But where and when shall it be sought? Ambrose has no leisure—we have no leisure to read. Where are we to find the books? How or where could I get hold of them? From whom could I borrow them? Let me set a schedule for my days and set apart certain hours for the health of the soul. A great hope has risen up in us, because the Catholic faith does not teach what we thought it did, and vainly accused it of. Its teachers hold it as an abomination to believe that God is limited by the form of a human body. And do I doubt that I should 'knock' in order for the rest also to be 'opened' unto me? My pupils take up the morning hours; what am I doing with the rest of the day? Why not do this? But, then, when am I to visit my influential friends, whose favors I need? When am I to prepare the orations that I sell to the class? When would I get some recreation and relax my mind from the strain of work?"

19. "Perish everything and let us dismiss these idle triflings. Let me devote myself solely to the search for truth. This life is unhappy, death uncertain. If it comes upon me suddenly, in what state shall I go hence and where shall I learn what here I have neglected? Should I not indeed suffer the punishment of my negligence here? But suppose death cuts off and finishes all care and feeling. This too is a question that calls for inquiry. God forbid that it should be so. It is not without reason, it is not in vain, that the stately authority of the Christian faith has spread over the entire world, and God would never have done such great things for us if the life of the soul perished with the death of the body. Why, therefore, do I delay in abandoning

¹⁹ Here begins a long soliloquy which sums up his turmoil over the past decade and his present plight of confusion and indecision.

my hopes of this world and giving myself wholly to seek after God and the blessed life?

"But wait a moment. This life also is pleasant, and it has a sweetness of its own, not at all negligible. We must not abandon it lightly, for it would be shameful to lapse back into it again. See now, it is important to gain some post of honor. And what more should I desire? I have crowds of influential friends, if nothing else; and, if I push my claims, a governorship may be offered me, and a wife with some money, so that she would not be an added expense. This would be the height of my desire. Many men, who are great and worthy of imitation, have combined the pursuit of wisdom with a marriage life."

20. While I talked about these things, and the winds of opinions veered about and tossed my heart hither and thither, time was slipping away. I delayed my conversion to the Lord; I postponed from day to day the life in thee, but I could not postpone the daily death in myself. I was enamored of a happy life, but I still feared to seek it in its own abode, and so I fled from it while I sought it. I thought I should be miserable if I were deprived of the embraces of a woman, and I never gave a thought to the medicine that thy mercy has provided for the healing of that infirmity, for I had never tried it. As for continence, I imagined that it depended on one's own strength, though I found no such strength in myself, for in my folly I knew not what is written, "None can be continent unless thou dost grant it."²⁰ Certainly thou wouldst have given it, if I had beseeched thy ears with heartfelt groaning, and if I had cast my care upon thee with firm faith.

CHAPTER XII

21. Actually, it was Alypius who prevented me from marrying, urging that if I did so it would not be possible for us to live together and to have as much undistracted leisure in the love of wisdom as we had long desired. For he himself was so chaste that it was wonderful, all the more because in his early youth he had entered upon the path of promiscuity, but had not continued in it. Instead, feeling sorrow and disgust at it, he had lived from that time down to the present most continently. I quoted against him the examples of men who had been married and still lovers of wisdom, who had pleased God and had been loyal and affectionate to their friends. I fell far short of them in

²⁰ Cf. Wis. 8:21 (LXX).

greatness of soul, and, enthralled with the disease of my carnality and its deadly sweetness, I dragged my chain along, fearing to be loosed of it. Thus I rejected the words of him who counseled me wisely, as if the hand that would have loosed the chain only hurt my wound. Moreover, the serpent spoke to Alypius himself by me, weaving and lying in his path, by my tongue to catch him with pleasant snares in which his honorable and free feet might be entangled.

22. For he wondered that I, for whom he had such a great esteem, should be stuck so fast in the gluepot of pleasure as to maintain, whenever we discussed the subject, that I could not possibly live a celibate life. And when I urged in my defense against his accusing questions that the hasty and stolen delight, which he had tasted and now hardly remembered, and therefore too easily disparaged, was not to be compared with a settled acquaintance with it; and that, if to this stable acquaintance were added the honorable name of marriage, he would not then be astonished at my inability to give it up—when I spoke thus, then he also began to wish to be married, not because he was overcome by the lust for such pleasures, but out of curiosity. For, he said, he longed to know what that could be without which my life, which he thought was so happy, seemed to me to be no life at all, but a punishment. For he who wore no chain was amazed at my slavery, and his amazement awoke the desire for experience, and from that he would have gone on to the experiment itself, and then perhaps he would have fallen into the very slavery that amazed him in me, since he was ready to enter into “a covenant with death,”²¹ for “he that loves danger shall fall into it.”²²

Now, the question of conjugal honor in the ordering of a good married life and the bringing up of children interested us but slightly. What afflicted me most and what had made me already a slave to it was the habit of satisfying an insatiable lust; but Alypius was about to be enslaved by a merely curious wonder. This is the state we were in until thou, O Most High, who never forsakest our lowliness, didst take pity on our misery and didst come to our rescue in wonderful and secret ways.

CHAPTER XIII

23. Active efforts were made to get me a wife. I wooed; I was engaged; and my mother took the greatest pains in the

²¹ Isa. 28:15.

²² Ecclus. 3:26.

matter. For her hope was that, when I was once married, I might be washed clean in health-giving baptism for which I was being daily prepared, as she joyfully saw, taking note that her desires and promises were being fulfilled in my faith. Yet, when, at my request and her own impulse, she called upon thee daily with strong, heartfelt cries, that thou wouldst, by a vision, disclose unto her a leading about my future marriage, thou wouldst not. She did, indeed, see certain vain and fantastic things, such as are conjured up by the strong preoccupation of the human spirit, and these she supposed had some reference to me. And she told me about them, but not with the confidence she usually had when thou hadst shown her anything. For she always said that she could distinguish, by a certain feeling impossible to describe, between thy revelations and the dreams of her own soul. Yet the matter was pressed forward, and proposals were made for a girl who was as yet some two years too young to marry.²³ And because she pleased me, I agreed to wait for her.

CHAPTER XIV

24. Many in my band of friends, consulting about and abhorring the turbulent vexations of human life, had often considered and were now almost determined to undertake a peaceful life, away from the turmoil of men. This we thought could be obtained by bringing together what we severally owned and thus making of it a common household, so that in the sincerity of our friendship nothing should belong more to one than to the other; but all were to have one purse and the whole was to belong to each and to all. We thought that this group might consist of ten persons, some of whom were very rich—especially Romanianus, my fellow townsman, an intimate friend from childhood days. He had been brought up to the court on grave business matters and he was the most earnest of us all about the project and his voice was of great weight in commending it because his estate was far more ample than that of the others. We had resolved, also, that each year two of us should be managers and provide all that was needful, while the rest were left undisturbed. But when we began to reflect whether this would be permitted by our wives, which some of us had already and others hoped to have, the whole plan, so excellently framed, collapsed in our hands and was utterly wrecked and cast aside.

²³ The normal minimum legal age for marriage was twelve! Cf. Justinian, *Institutiones*, I, 10:22.

From this we fell again into sighs and groans, and our steps followed the broad and beaten ways of the world; for many thoughts were in our hearts, but "Thy counsel standeth fast forever."²⁴ In thy counsel thou didst mock ours, and didst prepare thy own plan, for it was thy purpose "to give us meat in due season, to open thy hand, and to fill our souls with blessing."²⁵

CHAPTER XV

25. Meanwhile my sins were being multiplied. My mistress was torn from my side as an impediment to my marriage, and my heart which clung to her was torn and wounded till it bled. And she went back to Africa, vowing to thee never to know any other man and leaving with me my natural son by her. But I, unhappy as I was, and weaker than a woman, could not bear the delay of the two years that should elapse before I could obtain the bride I sought. And so, since I was not a lover of wedlock so much as a slave of lust, I procured another mistress—not a wife, of course. Thus in bondage to a lasting habit, the disease of my soul might be nursed up and kept in its vigor or even increased until it reached the realm of matrimony. Nor indeed was the wound healed that had been caused by cutting away my former mistress; only it ceased to burn and throb, and began to fester, and was more dangerous because it was less painful.

CHAPTER XVI

26. Thine be the praise; unto thee be the glory, O Fountain of mercies. I became more wretched and thou didst come nearer. Thy right hand was ever ready to pluck me out of the mire and to cleanse me, but I did not know it. Nor did anything call me back from a still deeper plunge into carnal pleasure except the fear of death and of thy future judgment, which, amid all the waverings of my opinions, never faded from my breast. And I discussed with my friends, Alypius and Nebridius, the nature of good and evil, maintaining that, in my judgment, Epicurus would have carried off the palm if I had not believed what Epicurus would not believe: that after death there remains a life for the soul, and places of recompense. And I demanded of them: "Suppose we are immortal and live in the enjoyment of perpetual bodily pleasure, and that without any fear of losing it—why, then, should we not be happy, or why should we

²⁴ Cf. Ps. 33:11.

²⁵ Cf. Ps. 145:15, 16.

search for anything else?" I did not know that this was in fact the root of my misery: that I was so fallen and blinded that I could not discern the light of virtue and of beauty which must be embraced for its own sake, which the eye of flesh cannot see, and only the inner vision can see. Nor did I, alas, consider the reason why I found delight in discussing these very perplexities, shameful as they were, with my friends. For I could not be happy without friends, even according to the notions of happiness I had then, and no matter how rich the store of my carnal pleasures might be. Yet of a truth I loved my friends for their own sakes, and felt that they in turn loved me for my own sake.

O crooked ways! Woe to the audacious soul which hoped that by forsaking thee it would find some better thing! It tossed and turned, upon back and side and belly—but the bed is hard, and thou alone givest it rest.²⁶ And lo, thou art near, and thou deliverest us from our wretched wanderings and establishest us in thy way, and thou comfortest us and sayest, "Run, I will carry you; yea, I will lead you home and then I will set you free."²⁷

²⁶ A variation on "restless is our heart until it comes to find rest in Thee," Bk. 1, Ch. 1, 1.

²⁷ Isa. 46:4.

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 courteously 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 inebriated 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.

THE LIBRARY OF CHRISTIAN CLASSICS

Volume VII

AUGUSTINE:
CONFESSIONS AND
ENCHIRIDION

Newly translated and edited

by

ALBERT C. OUTLER, Ph.D., D.D.

Professor of Theology
Perkins School of Theology
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

PHILADELPHIA

THE WESTMINSTER PRESS